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# Fantasy

READER No.8

QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST

by Robert E. Howard

also stories by

Algernon Blackwood

Ray Bradbury

H. P. Lovecraft

AND OTHERS





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—D.A.W.





# AVON FANTASY READER

No. 8

Edited by  
DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

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|                           |   |                         |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| ROBERT E. HOWARD          | • | FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR. |
| MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN | • | FRANCIS FLAGG           |
| RAY BRADBURY              | • | ALGERNON BLACKWOOD      |
| H. P. LOVECRAFT           | • | JOHN MICHEL             |
| EVERIL WORRELL            | • | AMBROSE BIERCE          |

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*Fantasy Reader*



# Queen of the Black Coast

by Robert E. Howard

## 1. Conan Joins the Pirates

*Probably the most popular series of stories that ever appeared in Weird Tales magazine were the Conan stories of Robert E. Howard. Taking place in a period of time lying just before the last ice age—roughly about 25,000 years ago—Mr. Howard had worked out for his own guidance a history and chronology of these barbarous and mystery-darkened realms he fancied may have existed in that “Hyborian” age. Among those time-lost scenes there roves the figure of his hero, a savage from the North, who fights and romances his restless way among the witchcraft and magic-makers of the shadowy kingdoms that antedated Egypt. “Queen of the Black Coast” is a Conan story of high adventure among pirates in an Africa darker by far than any known to our explorers.*

Believe green buds awaken in the spring,  
That autumn paints the leaves with somber fire;  
Believe I held my heart inviolate  
To lavish on one man my hot desire.  
—The Song of Béliu.



OOFS drummed down the street that sloped to the wharfs. The folk that yelled and scattered had only a fleeting glimpse of a mailed figure on a black stallion, a wide scarlet cloak flowing out on the wind. Far up the street came the shout and clatter of pursuit, but the horseman did not look back. He swept out onto the wharfs and jerked the plunging stallion back on its haunches at the very lip of the pier. Seamen gaped up at him, as they stood to the sweep and striped sail of a high-prowed, broad-waisted galley. The master, sturdy and black-bearded, stood in the bows, easing her away from the piles with a boat-hook. He yelled angrily as the horseman sprang from the saddle and with a long leap landed squarely on the mid-deck.

“Who invited you aboard?”

“Get under way!” roared the intruder with a fierce gesture that spattered red drops from his broadsword.



"But we're bound for the coasts of Cush!" expostulated the master.

"Then I'm for Cush! Push off, I tell you!" The other cast a quick glance up the street, along which a squad of horsemen were galloping; far behind them toiled a group of archers, crossbows on their shoulders.

"Can you pay for your passage?" demanded the master.

"I pay my way with steel!" roared the man in armor, brandishing the great sword that glittered blue in the sun. "By Crom, man, if you don't get under way, I'll drench this galley in the blood of its crew!"

The shipmaster was a good judge of men. One glance at the dark scarred face of the swordsman, hardened with passion, and he shouted a quick order, thrusting strongly against the piles. The galley wallowed out into clear water, the oars began to clack rhythmically; then a puff of wind filled the shimmering sail, the light ship heeled to the gust, then took her course like a swan, gathering headway as she skimmed along.

On the wharfs the riders were shaking their swords and shouting threats and commands that the ship put about, and yelling for the bowmen to hasten before the craft was out of arbalest range.

"Let them rave," grinned the swordsman hardly. "Do you keep her on her course, master steersman."

The master descended from the small deck between the bows, made his way between the rows of oarsmen, and mounted the mid-deck. The stranger stood there with his back to the mast, eyes narrowed alertly, sword ready. The shipman eyed him steadily, careful not to make any move toward the long knife in his belt. He saw a tall powerfully built figure in a black scale-mail hauberk, burnished greaves and a blue-steel helmet from which jutted bull's horns highly polished. From the mailed shoulders fell the scarlet cloak, blowing in the sea-wind. A broad shagreen belt with a golden buckle held the scabbard of the broadsword he bore. Under the horned helmet a square-cut black mane contrasted with smoldering blue eyes.

"If we must travel together," said the master, "we may as well be at peace with each other. My name is Tito, licensed master-shipman of the ports of Argos. I am bound for Cush, to trade beads and silks and sugar and brass-hilted swords to the black kings for ivory, copra, copper ore, slaves and pearls."

The swordsman glanced back at the rapidly receding docks, where the figures still gesticulated helplessly, evidently having trouble in finding a boat swift enough to overhaul the fast-sailing galley.

"I am Conan, a Cimmerian," he answered. "I came into Argos seeking employment, but with no wars forward, there was nothing to which I might turn my hand."

"Why do the guardsmen pursue you?" asked Tito. "Not that it's any of my business, but I thought perhaps——"

"I've nothing to conceal," replied the Cimmerian. "By Crom, though I've



spent considerable time among you civilized peoples, your ways are still beyond my comprehension.

"Well, last night in a tavern, a captain in the king's guard offered violence to the sweetheart of a young soldier, who naturally ran him through. But it seems there is some cursed law against killing guardsmen, and the boy and his girl fled away. It was bruited about that I was seen with them, and so today I was haled into court, and a judge asked me where the lad had gone. I replied that since he was a friend of mine, I could not betray him. Then the court waxed wroth, and the judge talked a great deal about my duty to the state, and society, and other things I did not understand, and bade me tell where my friend had flown. By this time I was becoming wrathful myself, for I had explained my position.

"But I choked my ire and held my peace, and the judge squalled that I had shown contempt for the court, and that I should be hurled into a dungeon to rot until I betrayed my friend. So then, seeing they were all mad, I drew my sword and cleft the judge's skull; then I cut my way out of the court, and seeing the high constable's stallion tied near by, I rode for the wharfs, where I thought to find a ship bound for foreign parts."

"Well," said Tito hardily, "the courts have fleeced me too often in suits with rich merchants for me to owe them any love. I'll have questions to answer if I ever anchor in that port again, but I can prove I acted under compulsion. You may as well put up your sword. We're peaceable sailors, and have nothing against you. Besides, it's as well to have a fighting-man like yourself on board. Come up to the poop-deck and we'll have a tankard of ale."

"Good enough," readily responded the Cimmerian, sheathing his sword.

The *Argus* was a small sturdy ship, typical of those trading-craft which ply between the ports of Zingara and Argos and the southern coasts, hugging the shoreline and seldom venturing far into the open ocean. It was high of stern, with a tall curving prow; broad in the waist, sloping beautifully to stem and stern. It was guided by the long sweep from the poop, and propulsion was furnished mainly by the broad striped silk sail, aided by a jibsail. The oars were for use in tacking out of creeks and bays, and during calms. There were ten to the side, five fore and five aft of the small mid-deck. The most precious part of the cargo was lashed under this deck, and under the fore-deck. The men slept on deck or between the rowers' benches, protected, in bad weather, by canopies. With twenty men at the oars, three at the sweep, and the shipmaster, the crew was complete.

So the *Argus* pushed steadily southward, with consistently fair weather. The sun beat down from day to day with fiercer heat, and the canopies were run up—striped silken cloths that matched the shimmering sail and the shining goldwork on the prow and along the gunwales.

They sighted the coast of Shem—long rolling meadowlands with the white



crowns of the towers of cities in the distance, and horsemen with blue-black beards and hooked noses, who sat their steeds along the shore and eyed the galley with suspicion. She did not put in; there was scant profit in trade with the sons of Shem.

Nor did master Tito pull into the broad bay where the Styx river emptied its gigantic flood into the ocean, and the massive black castles of Khemi loomed over the blue waters. Ships did not put unasked into this port, where dusky sorcerers wove awful spells in the murk of sacrificial smoke mounting eternally from blood-stained altars where naked women screamed, and where Set, the Old Serpent, arch-demon of the Hyborians but god of the Stygians, was said to writhe his shining coils among his worshippers.

Master Tito gave that dreamy glass-floored bay a wide berth, even when a serpent-prowed gondola shot from behind a castellated point of land, and naked dusky women, with great red blossoms in their hair, stood and called to his sailors, and posed and postured brazenly.

Now no more shining towers rose inland. They had passed the southern borders of Stygia and were cruising along the coasts of Cush. The sea and the ways of the sea were never-ending mysteries to Conan, whose homeland was among the high hills of the northern uplands. The wanderer was no less of interest to the sturdy seamen, few of whom had even seen one of his race.

They were characteristic Argosean sailors, short and stockily built. Conan towered above them, and no two of them could match his strength. They were hardy and robust, but his was the endurance and vitality of a wolf, his thews steeled and his nerves whetted by the hardness of his life in the world's wastelands. He was quick to laugh, quick and terrible in his wrath. He was a valiant trencherman, and strong drink was a passion and a weakness with him. Naïve as a child in many ways, unfamiliar with the sophistry of civilization, he was naturally intelligent, jealous of his rights, and dangerous as a hungry tiger. Young in years, he was hardened in warfare and wandering, and his sojourns in many lands were evident in his apparel. His horned helmet was such as was worn by the golden-haired Æsir of Nordheim; his hauberk and greaves were of the finest workmanship of Koth; the fine ring-mail which sheathed his arms and legs was of Nemedia; the blade at his girdle was a great Aquilonian broadsword; and his gorgeous scarlet cloak could have been spun nowhere but in Ophir.

So they beat southward, and master Tito began to look for the high-walled villages of the black people. But they found only smoking ruins on the shore of a bay, littered with naked black bodies. Tito swore.

"I had good trade here, aforetime. This is the work of pirates."

"And if we meet them?" Conan loosened his great blade in its scabbard.

"Mine is no warship. We run, not fight. Yet if it came to a pinch, we



have beaten off reavers before, and might do it again; unless it were Bêlit's *Tigress*."

"Who is Bêlit?"

"The wildest she-devil unhangd. Unless I read the signs a-wrong, it was her butchers who destroyed that village on the bay. May I some day see her dangling from the yard-arm! She is called the queen of the black coast. She is a Shemite woman, who leads black raiders. They harry the shipping and have sent many a good tradesman to the bottom."

From under the poop-deck Tito brought out quilted jerkins, steel caps, bows and arrows.

"Little use to resist if we're run down," he grunted. "But it rasps the soul to give up life without a struggle."

It was just at sunrise when the lookout shouted a warning. Around the long point of an island off the starboard bow glided a long lethal shape, a slender serpentine galley, with a raised deck that ran from stem to stern. Forty oars on each side drove her swiftly through the water, and the low rail swarmed with naked blacks that chanted and clashed spears on oval shields. From the masthead floated a long crimson pennon.

"Bêlit!" yelled Tito, paling. "Yare! Put her about! Into that creek-mouth! If we can beach her before they run us down, we have a chance to escape with our lives!"

So, veering sharply, the *Argus* ran for the line of surf that boomed along the palm-fringed shore, Tito striding back and forth, exhorting the panting rowers to greater efforts. The master's black beard bristled, his eyes glared.

"Give me a bow," requested Conan. "It's not my idea of a manly weapon, but I learned archery among the Hyrkanians, and it will go hard if I can't feather a man or so on yonder deck."

Standing on the poop, he watched the serpent-like ship skimming lightly over the waters, and landsman though he was, it was evident to him that the *Argus* would never win that race. Already arrows, arching from the pirate's deck, were falling with a hiss into the sea, not twenty paces astern.

"We'd best stand to it," growled the Cimmerian; "else we'll all die with shafts in our backs, and not a blow dealt."

"Bend to it, dogs!" roared Tito with a passionate gesture of his brawny fist. The bearded rowers grunted, heaved at the oars, while their muscles coiled and knotted, and sweat started out on their hides. The timbers of the stout little galley creaked and groaned as the men fairly ripped her through the water. The wind had fallen; the sail hung limp. Nearer crept the inexorable raiders, and they were still a good mile from the surf when one of the steersmen fell gagging across the sweep, a long arrow through his neck. Tito sprang to take his place, and Conan, bracing his feet wide on the heaving poop-deck, lifted his bow. He could see the details of the pirate plainly now.



The rowers were protected by a line of raised mantelets along the sides, but the warriors dancing on the narrow deck were in full view. These were painted and plumed, and mostly naked, brandishing spears and spotted shields.

On the raised platform in the bows stood a slim figure whose white skin glistened in dazzling contrast to the glossy ebon hides about it. Bêlit, without a doubt. Conan drew the shaft to his ear—then some whim or qualm stayed his hand and sent the arrow through the body of a tall plumed spearman beside her.

Hand over hand the pirate galley was overhauling the lighter ship. Arrows fell in a rain about the *Argus*, and men cried out. All the steersmen were down, pin-cushioned, and Tito was handling the massive sweep alone, gasping black curses, his braced legs knots of straining thews. Then with a sob he sank down, a long shaft quivering in his sturdy heart. The *Argus* lost headway and rolled in the swell. The men shouted in confusion, and Conan took command in characteristic fashion.

"Up, lads!" he roared, loosing with a vicious twang of cord. "Grab your steel and give these dogs a few knocks before they cut our throats! Useless to bend your backs any more: they'll board us ere we can row another fifty paces!"

In desperation the sailors abandoned their oars and snatched up their weapons. It was valiant, but useless. They had time for one flight of arrows before the pirate was upon them. With no one at the sweep, the *Argus* rolled broadside, and the steel-beaked prow of the raider crashed into her amidships. Grappling-irons crunched into the side. From the lofty gunwales, the black pirates drove down a volley of shafts that tore through the quilted jackets of the doomed sailormen, then sprang down spear in hand to complete the slaughter. On the deck of the pirate lay half a dozen bodies, an earnest of Conan's archery.

The fight on the *Argus* was short and bloody. The stocky sailors, no match for the tall barbarians, were cut down to a man. Elsewhere the battle had taken a peculiar turn. Conan, on the high-pitched poop, was on a level with the pirate's deck. As the steel prow slashed into the *Argus*, he braced himself and kept his feet under the shock, casting away his bow. A tall corsair, bounding over the rail, was met in midair by the Cimmerian's great sword, which sheared him cleanly through the torso, so that his body fell one way and his legs another. Then, with a burst of fury that left a heap of mangled corpses along the gunwales, Conan was over the rail and on the deck of the *Tigress*.

In an instant he was the center of a hurricane of stabbing spears and lashing clubs. But he moved in a blinding blur of steel. Spears bent on his armor or swished empty air, and his sword sang its death-song. The fighting-madness of his race was upon him, and with a red mist of unreasoning fury wavering



before his blazing eyes, he cleft skulls, smashed breasts, severed limbs, ripped out entrails, and littered the deck like a shambles with a ghastly harvest of brains and blood.

Invulnerable in his armor, his back against the mast, he heaped mangled corpses at his feet until his enemies gave back panting in rage and fear. Then as they lifted their spears to cast them, and he tensed himself to leap and die in the midst of them, a shrill cry froze the lifted arms. They stood like statues, the black giants poised for the spear-casts, the mailed swordsman with his dripping blade.

Bêlit sprang before the blacks, beating down their spears. She turned toward Conan, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing. Fierce fingers of wonder caught at his heart. She was slender, yet formed like a goddess; at once lithe and voluptuous. Her only garment was a broad silken girdle. Her white ivory limbs and the ivory globes of her breasts drove a beat of fierce passion through the Cimmerian's pulse, even in the panting fury of battle. Her rich, black hair, black as a Stygian night, fell in rippling burnished clusters down her supple back. Her dark eyes burned on the Cimmerian.

She was untamed as a desert wind, supple and dangerous as a she-panther. She came close to him, heedless of his great blade, dripping with the blood of her warriors. Her supple thigh brushed against it, so close she came to the tall warrior. Her red lips parted as she stared up into his somber menacing eyes.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "By Ishtar, I have never seen your like, though I have ranged the sea from the coasts of Zingara to the fires of the ultimate south. Whence come you?"

"From Argos," he answered shortly, alert for treachery. Let her slim hand move toward the jeweled dagger in her girdle, and a buffet of his open hand would stretch her senseless on the deck. Yet in his heart he did not fear; he had held too many women, civilized or barbaric, in his iron-thewed arms, not to recognize the light that burned in the eyes of this one.

"You are no soft Hyborian!" she exclaimed. "You are fierce and hard as a gray wolf. Those eyes were never dimmed by city lights; those thews were never softened by life amid marble walls."

"I am Conan, a Cimmerian," he answered.

To the people of the exotic climes, the north was a mazy half-mythical realm, peopled with ferocious blue-eyed giants who occasionally descended from their icy fastnesses with torch and sword. Their raids had never taken them as far south as Shem, and this daughter of Shem made no distinction between Æsir, Vanir or Cimmerian. With the unerring instinct of the elemental feminine, she knew she had found her lover, and his race meant naught, save as it invested him with the glamor of far lands.



"And I am Bêlit," she cried, as one might say, "I am queen!"

"Look at me, Conan!" She threw wide her arms. "I am Bêlit, queen of the black coast. Oh, tiger of the North, you are cold as the snowy mountains which bred you. Take me and crush me with your fierce love! Go with me to the ends of the earth and the ends of the sea! I am queen by fire and steel and slaughter—be thou my king!"

His eyes swept the blood-stained ranks, seeking expressions of wrath or jealousy. He saw none. The fury was gone from the ebon faces. He realized that to these men Bêlit was more than a woman: a goddess whose will was unquestioned. He glanced at the *Argus*, wallowing in the crimson sea-wash, heeling far over, her decks awash, held up by the grappling-irons. He glanced at the blue-fringed shore, at the far green hazes of the ocean, at the vibrant figure which stood before him; and his barbaric soul stirred within him. To quest these shining blue realms with that white-skinned young tiger-cat—to love, laugh, wander and pillage—

"I'll sail with you," he grunted, shaking the red drops from his blade.

"Ho, N'Yaga!" her voice twanged like a bowstring. "Fetch herbs and dress your master's wounds! The rest of you bring aboard the plunder and cast off."

As Conan sat with his back against the poop-rail, while the old shaman attended to the cuts on his hands and limbs, the cargo of the ill-fated *Argus* was quickly shifted aboard the *Tigress* and stored in small cabins below deck. Bodies of the crew and fallen pirates were cast overboard to the swarming sharks, while wounded blacks were laid in the waist to be bandaged. Then the grappling-irons were cast off, and as the *Argus* sank silently into the blood-flecked waters, the *Tigress* moved off southward to the rhythmic clack of the oars.

As they moved out over the glassy blue deep, Bêlit came to the poop. Her eyes were burning like those of a she-panther in the dark as she tore off her ornaments, her sandals and her silken girdle and cast them at his feet. Rising on tiptoe, arms stretched upward, a quivering line of naked white, she cried to the desperate horde: "Wolves of the blue sea, behold ye now the dance—the mating-dance of Bêlit, whose fathers were kings of Askalon!"

And she danced, like the spin of a desert whirlwind, like the leaping of a quenchless flame, like the urge of creation and the urge of death. Her white feet spurned the blood-stained deck and dying men forgot death as they gazed frozen at her. Then, as the white stars glimmered through the blue velvet dusk, making her whirling body a blur of ivory fire, with a wild cry she threw herself at Conan's feet, and the blind flood of the Cimmerian's desire swept all else away as he crushed her panting form against the black plates of his corseleted breast.



2. *The Black Lotus*

In that dead citadel of crumbling stone  
Her eyes were snared by that unholy sheen,  
And curious madness took me by the throat,  
As of a rival lover thrust between.  
—*The Song of Bêlit.*

The *Tigress* ranged the sea, and the black villages shuddered. Tom-toms beat in the night, with a tale that the she-devil of the sea had found a mate, an iron man whose wrath was as that of a wounded lion. And survivors of butchered Stygian ships named Bêlit with curse, and a white warrior with fierce blue eyes; so the Stygian princes remembered this man long and long, and their memory was a bitter tree which bore crimson fruit in the years to come.

But heedless as a vagrant wind, the *Tigress* cruised the southern coasts, until she anchored at the mouth of a broad sullen, river, whose banks were jungle-clouded walls of mystery.

"This is the river Zarkheba, which is Death," said Bêlit. "Its waters are poisonous. See how dark and murky they run? Only venomous reptiles live in that river. The black people shun it. Once a Stygian galley, fleeing from me, fled up the river and vanished. I anchored in this very spot, and days later, the galley came floating down the dark waters, its decks blood-stained and deserted. Only one man was on board, and he was mad and died gibbering. The cargo was intact, but the crew had vanished into silence and mystery.

"My lover, I believe there is a city somewhere on that river. I have heard tales of giant towers and walls glimpsed afar off by sailors who dared go part-way up the river. We fear nothing: Conan, let us go and sack that city!"

Conan agreed. He generally agreed to her plans. Hers was the mind that directed their raids, his the arm that carried out her ideas. It mattered little to him where they sailed or whom they fought, so long as they sailed and fought. He found the life good.

Battle and raid had thinned their crew; only some eighty spearmen remained, scarcely enough to work the long galley. But Bêlit would not take the time to make the long cruise southward to the island kingdoms where she recruited her buccaneers. She was afire with eagerness for her latest venture; so the *Tigress* swung into the river-mouth, the oarsmen pulling strongly as she breasted the broad current.

They rounded the mysterious bend that shut out the sight of the sea, and sunset found them forging steadily against the sluggish flow, avoiding sand-bars where strange reptiles coiled. Not even a crocodile did they see, nor any four-legged beast or winged bird coming down to the water's edge to drink. On through the blackness that preceded moonrise they drove, between banks



that were solid palisades of darkness, whence came mysterious rustlings and stealthy footfalls, and the gleam of grim eyes. And once an inhuman voice was lifted in awful mockery—the cry of an ape, Bêlit said, adding that the souls of evil men were imprisoned in these man-like animals as punishment for past crimes. But Conan doubted, for once, in a gold-barred cage in an Hyrkanian city, he had seen an abysmal sad-eyed beast which men told him was an ape, and there had been about it naught of the demoniac malevolence which vibrated in the shrieking laughter that echoed from the black jungle.

Then the moon rose, a splash of blood, ebony-barred, and the jungle awoke in horrific bedlam to greet it. Roars and howls and yells set the black warriors to trembling, but all this noise, Conan noted, came from farther back in the jungle, as if the beasts no less than men shunned the black waters of Zarkheba.

Rising above the black denseness of the trees and above the waving fronds, the moon silvered the river, and their wake became a rippling scintillation of phosphorescent bubbles that widened like a shining road of bursting jewels. The oars dipped into the shining water and came up sheathed in frosty silver. The plumes on the warrior's head-pieces nodded in the wind, and the gems on swordhilts and harness sparkled frostily.

The cold light struck icy fire from the jewels in Bêlit's clustered black locks as she stretched her lithe figure on a leopardskin thrown on the deck. Supported on her elbows, her chin resting on her slim hands, she gazed up into the face of Conan, who lounged beside her, his black mane stirring in the faint breeze. Bêlit's eyes were dark jewels burning in the moonlight.

"Mystery and terror are about us, Conan, and we glide into the realm of horror and death," she said. "Are you afraid?"

A shrug of his mailed shoulders was his only answer.

"I am not afraid either," she said meditatively. "I was never afraid. I have looked into the naked fangs of Death too often. Conan, do you fear the gods?"

"I would not tread on their shadow," answered the barbarian conservatively. "Some gods are strong to harm, others, to aid; at least so say their priests. Mitra of the Hyborians must be a strong god, because his people have builded their cities over the world. But even the Hyborians fear Set. And Bel, god of thieves, is a good god. When I was a thief in Zamora I learned of him."

"What of your own gods? I have never heard you call on them."

"Their chief is Crom. He dwells on a great mountain. What use to call on him? Little he cares if men live or die. Better to be silent than to call his attention to you; he will send you dooms, not fortune! He is grim and loveless, but at birth he breathes power to strive and slay into a man's soul. What else shall men ask of the gods?"

"But what of the worlds beyond the river of death?" she persisted.

"There is no hope here or hereafter in the cult of my people," answered Conan. "In this world men struggle and suffer vainly, finding pleasure only in



the bright madness of battle; dying, their souls enter a gray misty realm of clouds and icy winds, to wander cheerlessly throughout eternity."

Bêlit shuddered. "Life, bad as it is, is better than such a destiny. What do you believe, Conan?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I have known many gods. He who denies them is as blind as he who trusts them too deeply. I seek not beyond death. It may be the blackness averred by the Nemedian skeptics, or Crom's realm of ice and cloud, or the snowy plains and vaulted halls of the Nordheimer's Valhalla. I know not, nor do I care. Let me live deep while I live; let me know the rich juices of red meat and stinging wine on my palate, the hot embrace of white arms, the mad exultation of battle when the blue blades flame and crimson, and I am content. Let teachers and priests and philosophers brood over questions of reality and illusion. I know this: if life is illusion, then I am no less an illusion, and being thus, the illusion is real to me. I live, I burn with life, I love, I slay, and am content."

"But the gods are real," she said, pursuing her own line of thought. "And above all are the gods of the Shemites—Ishtar and Ashtoreth and Derketo and Adonis. Bel, too, is Shemitish, for he was born in ancient Shumir, long, long ago, and went forth laughing, with curled beard and impish wise eyes, to steal the gems of the kings of old times.

"There is life beyond death, I know, and I know this, too, Conan of Cimmeria"—she rose lithely to her knees and caught him in a pantherish embrace—"my love is stronger than any death! I have lain in your arms, panting with the violence of our love; you have held and crushed and conquered me, drawing my soul to your lips with the fierceness of your bruising kisses. My heart is welded to your heart, my soul is part of your soul! Were I still in death and you fighting for life, I would come back from the abyss to aid you—aye, whether my spirit floated with the purple sails on the crystal sea of paradise, or writhed in the molten flames of hell! I am yours, and all the gods and all their eternities shall not sever us!"

A scream rang from the lookout in the bows. Thrusting Bêlit aside, Conan bounded up, his sword a long silver glitter in the moonlight, his hair bristling at what he saw. The black warrior dangled above the deck, supported by what seemed a dark pliant tree trunk arching over the rail. Then he realized that it was a gigantic serpent which had writhed its glistening length up the side of the bow and gripped the luckless warrior in its jaws. Its dripping scales shone leprously in the moonlight as it reared its form high above the deck, while the stricken man screamed and writhed like a mouse in the fangs of a python. Conan rushed into the bows, and swinging his great sword, hewed nearly through the giant trunk, which was thicker than a man's body. Blood drenched the rails as the dying monster swayed far out, still gripping its vic-



tim, and sank into the river, coil by coil, lashing the water to bloody foam, in which man and reptile vanished together.

Thereafter Conan kept the lookout watch himself, but no other horror came crawling up from the murky depths, and as dawn whitened over the jungle, he sighted the black fangs of towers jutting up among the trees. He called Bêlit, who slept on the deck, wrapped in his scarlet cloak; and she sprang to his side, eyes blazing. Her lips were parted to call orders to her warriors to take up bow and spears; then her lovely eyes widened.

It was but the ghost of a city on which they looked when they cleared a jutting jungle-clad point and swung in toward the in-curving shore. Weeds and rank river grass grew between the stones of broken piers and shattered paves that had once been streets and spacious plazas and broad courts. From all sides except that toward the river, the jungle crept in, masking fallen columns and crumbling mounds with poisonous green. Here and there buckling towers reeled drunkenly against the morning sky, and broken pillars jutted up among the decaying walls. In the center space a marble pyramid was spired by a slim column, and on its pinnacle sat or squatted something that Conan supposed to be an image until his keen eyes detected life in it.

"It is a great bird," said one of the warriors, standing in the bows.

"It is a monster bat," insisted another.

"It is an ape," said Bêlit.

Just then the creature spread broad wings and flapped off into the jungle.

"A winged ape," said old N'Yaga uneasily. "Better we had cut our throats than come to this place. It is haunted."

Bêlit mocked at his superstitions and ordered the galley run inshore and tied to the crumbling wharfs. She was the first to spring ashore, closely followed by Conan, and after them trooped the ebon-skinned pirates, white plumes waving in the morning wind, spears ready, eyes rolling dubiously at the surrounding jungle.

Over all brooded a silence as sinister as that of a sleeping serpent. Bêlit posed picturesquely among the ruins, the vibrant life in her lithe figure contrasting strangely with the desolation and decay about her. The sun flamed up slowly, sullenly, above the jungle, flooding the towers with a dull gold that left shadows lurking beneath the tottering walls. Bêlit pointed to a slim round tower that reeled on its rotting base. A broad expanse of cracked, grass-grown slabs led up to it, flanked by fallen columns, and before it stood a massive altar. Bêlit went swiftly along the ancient floor and stood before it.

"This was the temple of the old ones," she said. "Look—you can see the channels for the blood along the sides of the altar, and the rains of ten thousand years have not washed the dark stains from them. The walls have all fallen away, but this stone block defies time and the elements."

"But who were these old ones?" demanded Conan.

She spread her slim hands helplessly. "Not even in legendry is this city men-



tioned. But look at the handholes at either end of the altar! Priests often conceal their treasures beneath their altars. Four of you lay hold and see if you can lift it."

She stepped back to make room for them, glancing up at the tower which loomed drunkenly above them. Three of the strongest blacks had gripped the handholds cut into the stone—curiously unsuited to human hands—when Bêlit sprang back with a sharp cry. They froze in their places, and Conan, bending to aid them, wheeled with a startled curse.

"A snake in the grass," she said, backing away. "Come and slay it; the rest of you bend your backs to the stone."

Conan came quickly toward her, another taking his place. As he impatiently scanned the grass for the reptile, the giant blacks braced their feet, grunted and heaved with their huge muscles coiling and straining under their ebon skin. The altar did not come off the ground, but it revolved suddenly on its side. And simultaneously there was a grinding rumble above and the tower came crashing down, covering the four black men with broken masonry.

A cry of horror rose from their comrades. Bêlit's slim fingers dug into Conan's arm-muscles. "There was no serpent," she whispered. "It was but a ruse to call you away. I feared; the old ones guarded their treasure well. Let us clear away the stones."

With herculean labor they did so, and lifted out the mangled bodies of the four men. And under them, stained with their blood, the pirates found a crypt carved in the solid stone. The altar, hinged curiously with stone rods and sockets on one side, had served as its lid. And at first glance the crypt seemed brimming with liquid fire, catching the early light with a million blazing facets. Undreamable wealth lay before the eyes of the gaping pirates: diamonds, rubies, bloodstones, sapphires, turquoises, moonstones, opals, emeralds, amethysts, unknown gems that shone like the eyes of evil women. The crypt was filled to the brim with bright stones that the morning sun struck into lambent flame.

With a cry Bêlit dropped to her knees among the blood-stained rubble on the brink and thrust her white arms shoulder-deep into that pool of splendor. She withdrew them, clutching something that brought another cry to her lips—a long string of crimson stones that were like clots of frozen blood strung on a thick gold wire. In their glow the golden sunlight changed to bloody haze.

Bêlit's eyes were like a woman's in a trance. The Shemite soul finds a bright drunkenness in riches and material splendor, and the sight of this treasure might have shaken the soul of a sated emperor of Shushan.

"Take up the jewels, dogs!" her voice was shrill with her emotions.

"Look!" A muscular black arm stabbed toward the *Tigress*, and Bêlit wheeled, her crimson lips a-snarl, as if she expected to see a rival corsair



sweeping in to despoil her of her plunder. But from the gunwales of the ship a dark shape rose, soaring away over the jungle.

"The devil-ape has been investigating the ship," muttered the blacks uneasily.

"What matter?" cried Bêlit with a curse, raking back a rebellious lock with an impatient hand. "Make a litter of spears and mantles to bear these jewels—where the devil are you going?"

"To look to the galley," grunted Conan. "That bat-thing might have knocked a hole in the bottom, for all we know."

He ran swiftly down the cracked wharf and sprang aboard. A moment's swift examination below decks, and he swore heartily, casting a clouded glance in the direction the bat-being had vanished. He returned hastily to Bêlit, superintending the plundering of the crypt. She had looped the necklace about her neck, and on her naked white bosom the red clots glimmered darkly. A huge naked black stood crotch-deep in the jewel-brimming crypt, scooping up great handfuls of splendor to pass them to the eager hands above. Strings of frozen iridescence hung between his dusky fingers; drops of red fire dripped from his hands, piled high with starlight and rainbow. It was as if a black titan stood straddle-legged in the bright pits of hell, his lifted hands full of stars.

"That flying devil has staved in the water-casks," said Conan. "If we hadn't been so dazed by these stones we'd have heard the noise. We were fools not to have left a man on guard. We can't drink this river water. I'll take twenty men and search for fresh water in the jungle."

She looked at him vaguely, in her eyes the blank blaze of her strange passion, her fingers working at the gems on her breast.

"Very well," she said absently, hardly heeding him. "I'll get the loot aboard."

The jungle closed quickly about them, changing the light from gold to gray. From the arching green branches creepers dangled like pythons. The warriors fell into single file, creeping through the primordial twilight like black phantoms following a white ghost.

Underbrush was not so thick as Conan had anticipated. The ground was spongy but not slushy. Away from the river, it sloped gradually upward. Deeper and deeper they plunged into the green waving depths, and still there was no sign of water, either running stream or stagnant pool. Conan halted suddenly, his warriors freezing into basaltic statues. In the tense silence that followed, the Cimmerian shook his head irritably.

"Go ahead," he grunted to a sub-chief, N'Gora. "March straight on until you can no longer see me; then stop and wait for me. I believe we're being followed. I heard something."

The blacks shuffled their feet uneasily, but did as they were told. As they swung onward, Conan stepped quickly behind a great tree, glaring back along



the way they had come. From that leafy fastness anything might emerge. Nothing occurred; the faint sounds of the marching spearmen faded in the distance. Conan suddenly realized that the air was impregnated with an alien and exotic scent. Something gently brushed his temple. He turned quickly. From a cluster of green, curiously leafed stalks, great black blossoms nodded at him. One of these had touched him. They seemed to beckon him, to arch their pliant stems toward him. They spread and rustled, though no wind blew.

He recoiled, recognizing the black lotus, whose juice was death, and whose scent brought dream-haunted slumber. But already he felt a subtle lethargy stealing over him. He sought to lift his sword, to hew down the serpentine stalks, but his arm hung lifeless at his side. He opened his mouth to shout to his warriors, but only a faint rattle issued. The next instant, with appalling suddenness, the jungle waved and dimmed out before his eyes; he did not hear the screams that burst out awfully not far away, as his knees collapsed, letting him pitch limply to the earth. Above his prostrate form the great black blossoms nodded in the windless air.

### 3. *The Horror in the Jungle*

Was it a dream the nighted lotus brought?

Then curst the dream that bought my sluggish life;

And curst each laggard hour that does not see

Hot blood drip blackly from the crimsoned knife.

—*The Song of Bélit.*

First there was the blackness of an utter void, with the cold winds of cosmic space blowing through it. Then shapes, vague, monstrous and evanescent, rolled in dim panorama through the expanse of nothingness, as if the darkness were taking material form. The winds blew and a vortex formed, a whirling pyramid of roaring blackness. From it grew Shape and Dimension; then suddenly, like clouds dispersing, the darkness rolled away on either hand and a huge city of dark green stone rose on the bank of a wide river, flowing through an illimitable plain. Through this city moved beings of alien configuration.

Cast in the mold of humanity, they were distinctly not men. They were winged and of heroic proportions; not a branch on the mysterious stalk of evolution that culminated in man, but the ripe blossom on an alien tree, separate and apart from that stalk. Aside from their wings, in physical appearance they resembled man only as man in his highest form resembles the great apes. In spiritual, esthetic and intellectual development they were superior to man as man is superior to the gorilla. But when they reared their colossal city, man's primal ancestors had not yet risen from the slime of the primordial seas.



These beings were mortal, as are all things built of flesh and blood. They lived, loved, and died, though the individual span of life was enormous. Then, after uncounted millions of years, the Change began. The vista shimmered and wavered, like a picture thrown on a wind-blown curtain. Over the city and the land the ages flowed as waves flow over a beach, and each wave brought alterations. Somewhere on the planet the magnetic centers were shifting; the great glaciers and ice-fields were withdrawing toward the new poles.

The littoral of the great river altered. Plains turned into swamps that stank with reptilian life. Where fertile meadows had rolled, forests reared up, growing into dank jungles. The changing ages wrought on the inhabitants of the city as well. They did not migrate to fresher lands. Reasons inexplicable to humanity held them to the ancient city and their doom. And as that once rich and mighty land sank deeper and deeper into the black mire of the sunless jungle, so into the chaos of squalling jungle life sank the people of the city. Terrific convulsions shook the earth; the nights were lurid with spouting volcanoes that fringed the dark horizons with red pillars.

After an earthquake that shook down the outer walls and highest towers of the city, and caused the river to run black for days with some lethal substance spewed up from the subterranean depths, a frightful chemical change became apparent in the waters the folk had drunk for millenniums uncountable.

Many died who drank of it; and in those who lived, the drinking wrought change, subtle, gradual and grisly. In adapting themselves to the changing conditions, they had sunk far below their original level. But the lethal waters altered them even more horribly, from generation to more bestial generation. They who had been winged gods became pinioned demons, with all that remained of their ancestors' vast knowledge distorted and perverted and twisted into ghastly paths. As they had risen higher than mankind might dream, so they sank lower than man's maddest nightmares reach. They died fast, by cannibalism, and horrible feuds fought out in the murk of the midnight jungle. And at last among the lichen-grown ruins of their city only a single shape lurked, a stunted abhorrent perversion of nature.

Then for the first time humans appeared: dark-skinned, hawk-faced men in copper and leather harness, bearing bows—the warriors of pre-historic Stygia. There were only fifty of them, and they were haggard and gaunt with starvation and prolonged effort, stained and scratched with jungle-wandering, with blood-crusted bandages that told of fierce fighting. In their minds was a tale of warfare and defeat, and flight before a stronger tribe which drove them ever southward, until they lost themselves in the green ocean of jungle and river.

Exhausted they lay down among the ruins where red blossoms that bloom but once in a century waved in the full moon, and sleep fell upon them. And as they slept, a hideous shape crept red-eyed from the shadows and performed



weird and awful rites about and above each sleeper. The moon hung in the shadowy sky, painting the jungle red and black; above the sleepers glimmered the crimson blossoms, like splashes of blood. Then the moon went down and the eyes of the necromancer were red jewels set in the ebony of night.

When dawn spread its white veil over the river, there were no men to be seen: only a hairy winged horror that squatted in the center of a ring of fifty great spotted hyenas that pointed quivering muzzles to the ghastly sky and howled like souls in hell.

Then scene followed scene so swiftly that each tripped over the heels of its predecessor. There was a confusion of movement, a writhing and melting of lights and shadows, against a background of black jungle, green stone ruins, and murky river. Black men came up the river in long boats with skulls grinning on the prows, or stole stooping through the trees, spear in hand. They fled screaming through the dark from red eyes and slaving fangs. Howls of dying men shook the shadows; stealthy-feet padded through the gloom, vampire eyes blazed redly. There were grisly feasts beneath the moon, across whose red disk a bat-like shadow incessantly swept.

Then abruptly, etched clearly in contrast to these impressionistic glimpses, around the jungle point in the whitening dawn swept a long galley, thronged with shining ebon figures, and in the bows stood a white-skinned giant in blue steel.

It was at this point that Conan first realized that he was dreaming. Until that instant he had had no consciousness of individual existence. But as he saw himself treading the boards of the *Tigress*, he recognized both the existence and the dream, although he did not awaken.

Even as he wondered, the scene shifted abruptly to a jungle glade where N'Gora and nineteen black spearmen stood, as if awaiting some one. Even as he realized that it was he for whom they waited, a horror swooped down from the skies and their stolidity was broken by yells of fear. Like men maddened by terror, they threw away their weapons and raced wildly through the jungle, pressed close by the slaving monstrosity that flapped its wings above them.

Chaos and confusion followed this vision, during which Conan feebly struggled to awake. Dimly he seemed to see himself lying under a nodding cluster of black blossoms, while from the bushes a hideous shape crept toward him. With a savage effort he broke the unseen bonds which held him to his dreams, and started upright.

Bewilderment was in the glare he cast about him. Near him swayed the dusky lotus, and he hastened to draw away from it.

In the spongy soil near by there was a track as if an animal had put out a foot, preparatory to emerging from the bushes, then had withdrawn it. It looked like the spoor of an unbelievably large hyena.

He yelled for N'Gora. Primordial silence brooded over the jungle, in which



his yells sounded brittle and hollow as mockery. He could not see the sun, but his wilderness-trained instinct told him the day was near its end. A panic rose in him at the thought that he had lain senseless for hours. He hastily followed the tracks of the spearmen, which lay plain in the damp loam before him. They ran in single file, and he soon emerged into a glade—to stop short, the skin crawling between his shoulders as he recognized it as the glade he had seen in his lotus-drugged dream. Shields and spears lay scattered about as if dropped in headlong flight.

And from the tracks which led out of the glade and deeper into the fastnesses, Conan knew that the spearmen had fled, wildly. The footprints overlay one another; they weaved blindly among the trees. And with startling suddenness the hastening Cimmerian came out of the jungle onto a hill-like rock which sloped steeply, to break off abruptly in a sheer precipice forty feet high. And something crouched on the brink.

At first Conan thought it to be a great black gorilla. Then he saw that it was a giant black man that crouched ape-like, long arms dangling, froth dripping from the loose lips. It was not until, with a sobbing cry, the creature lifted huge hands and rushed toward him, that Conan recognized N'Gora. The black man gave no heed to Conan's shout as he charged, eyes rolled up to display the whites, teeth gleaming, face an inhuman mask.

With his skin crawling with the horror that madness always instils in the sane, Conan passed his sword through the black man's body; then, avoiding the hooked hands that clawed at him as N'Gora sank down, he strode to the edge of the cliff.

For an instant he stood looking down into the jagged rocks below, where lay N'Gora's spearmen, in limp, distorted attitudes that told of crushed limbs and splintered bones. Not one moved. A cloud of huge black flies buzzed loudly above the blood-splashed stones; the ants had already begun to gnaw at the corpses. On the trees about sat birds of prey, and a jackal, looking up and seeing the man on the cliff, slunk furtively away.

For a little space Conan stood motionless. Then he wheeled and ran back the way he had come, flinging himself with reckless haste through the tall grass and bushes, hurdling creepers that sprawled snake-like across his path. His sword swung low in his right hand, and an unaccustomed pallor tinged his dark face.

The silence that reigned in the jungle was not broken. The sun had set and great shadows rushed upward from the slime of the black earth. Through the gigantic shades of lurking death and grim desolation Conan was a speeding glimmer of scarlet and blue steel. No sound in all the solitude was heard except his own quick panting as he burst from the shadows into the dim twilight of the river-shore.

He saw the galley shouldering the rotten wharf, the ruins reeling drunkenly in the gray half-light.



And here and there among the stones were spots of raw bright color, as if a careless hand had splashed with a crimson brush.

Again Conan looked on death and destruction. Before him lay his spearmen, nor did they rise to salute him. From the jungle-edge to the river-bank, among the rotting pillars and along the broken piers they lay, torn and mangled and half-devoured, chewed travesties of men.

All about the bodies and pieces of bodies were swarms of huge footprints, like those of hyenas.

Conan came silently upon the pier, approaching the galley above whose deck was suspended something that glimmered ivory-white in the faint twilight. Speechless the Cimmerian looked on the Queen of the Black Coast as she hung from the yard-arm of her own galley. Between the yard and her white throat stretched a line of crimson clots that shone like blood in the gray light.

#### 4. *The Attack from the Air*

The shadows were black around him,  
The dripping jaws gaped wide,  
Thicker than rain the red drops fell;  
But my love was fiercer than Death's black spell,  
Nor all the iron walls of hell  
Could keep me from his side.

—*The Song of Bêlit.*

The jungle was a black colossus that locked the ruin-littered glade in ebon arms. The moon had not risen; the stars were flecks of hot amber in a breathless sky that reeked of death. On the pyramid among the fallen towers sat Conan the Cimmerian like an iron statue, chin propped on massive fists. Out in the black shadows stealthy feet padded and red eyes glimmered. The dead lay as they had fallen. But on the deck of the *Tigress*, on a pyre of broken benches, spear-shafts and leopardskins, lay the Queen of the Black Coast in her last sleep, wrapped in Conan's scarlet cloak. Like a true queen she lay, with her plunder heaped high about her: silks, cloth-of-gold, silver braid, casks of gems and golden coins, silver ingots, jeweled daggers, and teocallis of gold wedges.

But of the plunder of the accursed city, only the sullen waters of Zarkheba could tell, where Conan had thrown it with a heathen curse. Now he sat grimly on the pyramid, waiting for his unseen foes. The black fury in his soul drove out all fear. What shapes would emerge from the blackness he knew not, nor did he care.

He no longer doubted the visions of the black lotus. He understood that while waiting for him in the glade, N'Gora and his comrades had been terror-stricken by the winged monster swooping upon them from the sky, and



fleeing in blind panic, had fallen over the cliff; all except their chief, who had somehow escaped their fate, though not madness. Meanwhile, or immediately after, or perhaps before, the destruction of those on the river-bank had been accomplished. Conan did not doubt that the slaughter along the river had been massacre rather than battle. Already unmanned by their superstitious fears, the blacks might well have died without striking a blow in their own defense when attacked by their inhuman foes.

Why he had been spared so long, he did not understand, unless the malign entity which ruled the river meant to keep him alive to torture him with grief and fear. All pointed to a human or superhuman intelligence—the breaking of the water-casks to divide the forces, the driving of the blacks over the cliff, and last and greatest, the grim jest of the crimson necklace knotted like a hangman's noose about Bêlit's white neck.

Having apparently saved the Cimmerian for the choicest victim, and extracted the last ounce of exquisite mental torture, it was likely that the unknown enemy would conclude the drama by sending him after the other victims. No smile bent Conan's grim lips at the thought, but his eyes were lit with iron laughter.

The moon rose, striking fire from the Cimmerian's horned helmet. No call awoke the echoes; yet suddenly the night grew tense and the jungle held its breath. Instinctively Conan loosened the great sword in its sheath. The pyramid on which he rested was four-sided, one—the side toward the jungle—carved in broad steps. In his hand was a Shemite bow, such as Bêlit had taught her pirates to use. A heap of arrows lay at his feet, feathered ends toward him, as he rested on one knee.

Something moved in the blackness under the trees. Etched abruptly in the rising moon, Conan saw a darkly blocked-out head and shoulders, brutish in outline. And now from the shadows dark shapes came silently, swiftly, running low—twenty great spotted hyenas. Their slavering fangs flashed in the moonlight, their eyes blazed as no true beast's eyes ever blazed.

Twenty: then the spears of the pirates had taken toll of the pack, after all. Even as he thought this, Conan drew nock to ear, and at the twang of the string a flame-eyed shadow bounded high and fell writhing. The rest did not falter; on they came, and like a rain of death among them fell the arrows of the Cimmerian, driven with all the force and accuracy of steely thews backed by a hate hot as the slag-heaps of hell.

In his berserk fury he did not miss; the air was filled with feathered destruction. The havoc wrought among the onrushing pack was breath-taking. Less than half of them reached the foot of the pyramid. Others dropped upon the broad steps. Glaring down into the blazing eyes, Conan knew these creatures were not beasts; it was not merely in their unnatural size that he sensed a blasphemous difference. They exuded an aura tangible as the black mist rising from a corpse-littered swamp. By what godless alchemy these



beings had been brought into existence, he could not guess; but he knew he faced diabolism blacker than the Well of Skelos.

Springing to his feet, he bent his bow powerfully and drove his last shaft point-blank at a great hairy shape that soared up at his throat. The arrow was a flying beam of moonlight that flashed onward with but a blur in its course, but the were-beast plunged convulsively in midair and crashed headlong, shot through and through.

Then the rest were on him, in a nightmare rush of blazing eyes and dripping fangs. His fiercely driven sword shore the first asunder; then the desperate impact of the others bore him down. He crushed a narrow skull with the pommel of his hilt, feeling the bone splinter and blood and brains gush over his hand; then, dropping the sword, useless at such deadly-close quarters, he caught at the throats of the two horrors which were ripping and tearing at him in silent fury. A foul acrid scent almost stifled him, his own sweat blinded him. Only his mail saved him from being ripped to ribbons in an instant. The next, his naked right hand locked on a hairy throat and tore it open. His left hand, missing the throat of the other beast, caught and broke its foreleg. A short yelp, the only cry in that grim battle, and hideously human-like, burst from the maimed beast. At the sick horror of that cry from a bestial throat, Conan involuntarily relaxed his grip.

One, blood gushing from its torn jugular, lunged at him in a last spasm of ferocity, and fastened its fangs on his throat—to fall back dead, even as Conan felt the tearing agony of its grip.

The other, springing forward on three legs, was slashing at his belly as a wolf slashes, actually rending the links of his mail. Flinging aside the dying beast, Conan grappled the crippled horror and with a muscular effort that brought a groan from his blood-flecked lips, he heaved upright, gripping the struggling, tearing fiend in his arms. An instant he reeled off balance, its fetid breath hot on his nostrils, its jaws snapping at his neck; then he hurled it from him, to crash with bone-splintering force down the marble steps.

As he reeled on wide-braced legs, sobbing for breath, the jungle and the moon swimming bloodily to his sight, the thrash of bat-wings was loud in his ears. Stooping, he groped for his sword, and swaying upright, braced his feet drunkenly and heaved the great blade above his head with both hands, shaking the blood from his eyes as he sought the air above him for his foe.

Instead of attack from the air, the pyramid staggered suddenly and awfully beneath his feet. He heard a rumbling crackle and saw the tall column above him wave like a wand. Stung to galvanized life, he bounded far out; his feet hit a step, half-way down, which rocked beneath him, and his next desperate leap carried him clear. But even as his heels hit the earth, with a shattering crash like a breaking mountain the pyramid crumpled, the column came thundering down in bursting fragments. For a blind cataclysmic instant the



sky seemed to rain shards of marble. Then a rubble of shattered stone lay whitely under the moon.

Conan stirred, throwing off the splinters that half covered him. A glancing blow had knocked off his helmet and momentarily stunned him. Across his legs lay a great piece of the column, pinning him down. He was not sure that his legs were unbroken. His black locks were plastered with sweat; blood trickled from the wounds in his throat and hands. He hitched up on one arm, struggling with the debris that prisoned him.

Then something swept down across the stars and struck the sward near him. Twisting about, he saw it—the winged one!

With fearful speed it was rushing upon him, and in that instant Conan had only a confused impression of a gigantic man-like shape hurtling along on bowed and stunted legs; of huge hairy arms outstretching misshapen black-nailed paws; of a malformed head, in whose broad face the only features recognizable as such were a pair of blood-red eyes. It was a thing neither man, beast, nor devil, imbued with characteristics subhuman as well as characteristics superhuman.

But Conan had no time for conscious consecutive thought. He threw himself toward his fallen sword, and his clawing fingers missed it by inches. Desperately he grasped the shard which pinned his legs, and the veins swelled in his temples as he strove to thrust it off him. It gave slowly, but he knew that before he could free himself the monster would be upon him, and he knew that those black-taloned hands were death.

The headlong rush of the winged one had not wavered. It towered over the prostrate Cimmerian like a black shadow, arms thrown wide—a glimmer of white flashed between it and its victim.

In one mad instant she was there—a tense white shape, vibrant with love fierce as a she-panther's. The dazed Cimmerian saw between him and the onrushing death, her lithe figure, shimmering like ivory beneath the moon; he saw the blaze of her dark eyes, the thick cluster of her burnished hair; her bosom heaved, her red lips were parted, she cried out sharp and ringing as the ring of steel as she thrust at the winged monster's breast.

"*Bêlit!*" screamed Conan. She flashed a quick glance toward him, and in her dark eyes he saw her love flaming, a naked elemental thing of raw fire and molten lava. Then she was gone, and the Cimmerian saw only the winged fiend which had staggered back in unwonted fear, arms lifted as if to fend off attack. And he knew that *Bêlit* in truth lay on her pyre on the *Tigress'* deck. In his ears rang her passionate cry: "Were I still in death and you fighting for life I would come back from the abyss——"

With a terrible cry he heaved upward, hurling the stone aside. The winged one came on again, and Conan sprang to meet it, his veins on fire with madness. The thews started out like cords on his forearms as he swung his great sword, pivoting on his heel with the force of the sweeping arc. Just above the



hips it caught the hurtling shape, and the knotted legs fell one way, the torso another as the blade sheared clear through its hairy body.

Conan stood in the moonlit silence, the dripping sword sagging in his hand, staring down at the remnants of his enemy. The red eyes glared up at him with awful life, then glazed and set; the great hands knotted spasmodically and stiffened. And the oldest race in the world was extinct.

Conan lifted his head, mechanically searching for the beast-things that had been its slaves and executioners. None met his gaze. The bodies he saw littering the moon-splashed grass were of men, not beasts: hawk-faced, dark-skinned men, naked, transfixed by arrows or mangled by sword-strokes. And they were crumbling into dust before his eyes.

Why had not the winged master come to the aid of its slaves when he struggled with them? Had it feared to come within reach of fangs that might turn and rend it? Craft and caution had lurked in that misshapen skull, but had not availed in the end.

Turning on his heel, the Cimmerian strode down the rotting wharfs and stepped aboard the galley. A few strokes of his sword cut her adrift, and he went to the sweep-head. The *Tigress* rocked slowly in the sullen water, sliding out sluggishly toward the middle of the river, until the broad current caught her. Conan leaned on the sweep, his somber gaze fixed on the cloak-wrapped shape that lay in state on the pyre the richness of which was equal to the ransom of an empress.

### 5. The Funeral Pyre

Now we are done with roaming, evermore;  
No more the oars, the windy harp's refrain;  
Nor crimson pennon frights the dusky shore;  
Blue girdle of the world, receive again  
Her whom thou gavest me.

—*The Song of Bêlit.*

Again dawn tinged the ocean. A redder glow lit the river-mouth. Conan of Cimmeria leaned on his great sword upon the white beach, watching the *Tigress* swinging out on her last voyage. There was no light in his eyes that contemplated the glassy swells. Out of the rolling blue wastes all glory and wonder had gone. A fierce revulsion shook him as he gazed at the green surges that deepened into purple hazes of mystery.

Bêlit had been of the sea; she had lent it splendor and allure. Without her it rolled a barren, dreary and desolate waste from pole to pole. She belonged to the sea; to its everlasting mystery he returned her. He could do no more. For himself, its glittering blue splendor was more repellent than the leafy



fronds which rustled and whispered behind him of vast mysterious wilds beyond them, and into which he must plunge.

No hand was at the sweep of the *Tigress*, no oars drove her through the green water. But a clean tanging wind bellied her silken sail, and as a wild swan cleaves the sky to her nest, she sped seaward, flames mounting higher and higher from her deck to lick at the mast and envelop the figure that lay lapped in scarlet on the shining pyre.

So passed the Queen of the Black Coast, and leaning on his red-stained sword, Conan stood silently until the red glow had faded far out in the blue hazes and dawn splashed its rose and gold over the ocean.



# *The Machine Man of Ardathia*

*by Francis Flagg*

*The late Francis Flagg acquired fame in the field of writing under two names. Under his birth name of Henry George Weiss he was appreciated in poetry circles as a writer of topical verse—usually brimming over with protest against social iniquities. Under his prose name of Francis Flagg, he gathered a reputation as a writer of dependable science-fiction and weird stories. A writer combining such talents was bound to take H. G. Wells as his guide for entry into literature. And the following story, which gained Flagg his initial triumph, betrays the Wells inspiration quite credibly.*



DO NOT know what to believe. Sometimes I am positive I dreamed it all. But then there is the matter of the heavy rocker. That undeniably did disappear. Perhaps someone played a trick on me. But who would stoop to a deception so bizarre, merely for the purpose of befuddling the wits of an old man? Perhaps someone stole the rocker. But why should anyone steal the rocker? It was, it is true, a sturdy piece of furniture, but hardly valuable enough to excite the cupidity of a thief. Besides the rocker was in its place when I sat down in the easy-chair. Of course, I may be lying.

Peters, to whom I was misguided enough to tell everything on the night of its occurrence, wrote the story for his paper, and the editor of *The Chieftain* says as much in his editorial of the 15th, when he remarks that "Mr. Matthews seems to be the possessor of an imagination equal that of an H. G. Wells." And, considering the nature of my story, I am quite ready to forgive him for doubting my veracity.

However, the few friends who know me better think that I had dined a little too wisely or too well, and had been visited with a nightmare.

Hodge suggested that the Jap who cleans my rooms had, for some reason, removed the rocker from its place, and that I merely took its presence for granted when I sat down. The Jap strenuously denies having done so.

I must pause a minute here to explain that I have two rooms and a bath on the third floor of a modern apartment house fronting the Lake. Since my wife's death three years ago I have lived thus, taking my breakfast and lunch



at a restaurant, generally taking my dinners at the club. I may as well confess that I have a room rented in a down-town office building where I spend a few hours every day to work on my book, which is designed to be a critical analysis of the fallacies inherent in the Marxian theory of economics embracing at the same time a thorough refutation of Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society*. A rather ambitious undertaking, you will admit, and one not apt to engage the interest of a person given to inventing wild yarns for the purpose of amazing his friends. No; I emphatically deny having invented the story. However, the future will talk for itself. I will merely proceed to put the details of my strange experience on paper (justice to myself demands that I should do so, so many garbled accounts have appeared in the press), and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

Contrary to my usual custom I had dined that evening with Hodge at the Hotel Oaks. Let me emphatically state that while it is well known among his intimates that Hodge carries a flask on his hip, I had absolutely nothing of an intoxicating nature to drink. Hodge will verify this. About eight-thirty I refused an invitation to attend the theatre with him and went to my rooms. There I changed into smoking-jacket and slippers and lit a mild Havana. The rocking-chair was occupying its accustomed place near the center of the sitting-room floor. I remember that clearly because, as usual, I had either to push it aside or step around it, wondering for the thousandth time as I did so why that idiotic Jap persisted in placing it in such an inconvenient spot; and resolving, also for the thousandth time, to speak to him about it. With a note-book and pencil placed on the stand beside me, also a copy of Friedrich Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, I turned on the light in my green-shaded reading lamp, switched off all others, and sank with a sigh of relief into the easy-chair. It was my intention to make a few notes from Engels' work relative to plural marriages, showing that he contradicted certain conclusions of Morgan's when he said . . . But there; it is sufficient to state that after a few minutes' work I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes. I did not doze; I am positive of that. My mind was actively engaged in trying to piece together a sentence that would clearly express my thought.

I can best describe what happened then by saying there was an explosion. It wasn't that exactly; but at the time it seemed to me there must have been an explosion. A blinding flash of light registered with appalling vividness through the closed lids on the retina of my eyes. My first thought was that someone had dynamited the building; my second, that the electric fuses had blown out. It was some time before I could see clearly. When I could . . .

"Good Lord," I whispered weakly, "what's that!"

Occupying the space where the rocking-chair had stood (though I did not notice its absence at the time) was a cylinder of what appeared to be glass standing, I should judge, about five feet high. Encased in this cylinder seemed



to be a caricature of a man—or a child. I say caricature because, while the cylinder was all of five feet in height, the being inside of it was hardly three. You can imagine my amazement while I stared at this apparition. After awhile I got up and switched on all the lights to better observe it.

You may be wondering why I did not try to call someone in. I can only say that thought never occurred to me. In spite of my age (I am sixty) my nerves are steady and I am not easily frightened. I walked very carefully around the cylinder and viewed the creature inside from all angles. It was sustained in the center of the cylinder, midway between top and bottom, by what appeared to be an intricate arrangement of glass and metal tubes. These tubes seemed to run at places into the body, and I noticed some sort of dark fluid circulating through the glass tubes. The head was very large and hairless; it had bulging brows, and no ears. The eyes were large, winkless; the nose well defined; but the lower part of the face and mouth ran into the small round body with no sign of a chin. Its legs hung down, skinny, flabby; and the arms were more like short tentacles reaching down from where the head and body came together. The thing was, of course, naked. I drew the easy-chair up to the cylinder and sat down facing it. Several times I stretched out my hand in an effort to touch its surface, but some force prevented my fingers from making the contact; which was very curious. Also, I could detect no movement of the body or limbs of the weird thing inside the glass.

"What I'd like to know," I muttered, "is what you are, where you came from, are you alive, and am I dreaming or am I awake?"

For the first time the creature came to life. One of its tentacle-like hands, holding a metal tube, darted to its mouth. From the tube shot a white streak, which fastened itself to the cylinder.

"Ah," came a clear, metallic voice, "English, Primitive, I perceive; probably of the twentieth century."

The words were uttered with an indescribable intonation; much as if a foreigner were speaking our language. Yet more than that . . . as if he were speaking a language long dead. I don't know why that thought should have occurred to me then. Perhaps . . .

"So you can talk," I exclaimed.

The creature gave a metallic chuckle.

"As you say, I can talk."

"Then tell me what you are."

"I am an Ardathian. A Machine Man of Ardathia. And you . . . Tell me, is that really hair on your head?"

"Yes," I replied.

"And those coverings you wear on your body, are they clothes?"

I answered in the affirmative.

"How odd. Then you really are a Primitive; a Prehistoric Man."

The eyes behind the glass shield regarded me intently.



"A pre-historic man!" I exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are one of that race of early men whose skeletons we have dug up here and there and reconstructed for our schools of biology. Marvelous how our scientists have copied you from some fragments of bone! The small head covered with hair; the beast-like jaw; the abnormally large body and legs; the artificial coverings made of cloth . . . even your language!"

For the first time I began to suspect that I was the victim of a hoax. I got up and walked carefully around the cylinder but could detect no outside agency controlling the contraption. Besides, it was absurd to think that anyone would go to all the trouble of constructing such a complicated apparatus as this appeared to be, merely for the sake of a practical joke. Nevertheless, I looked out on the landing. I came back and resumed my seat in front of the cylinder.

"Pardon me," I said, "but you referred to me as belonging to a period much more remote than yours."

"That is correct. If I am not mistaken in my calculations, you are thirty thousand years in the past. What date is this?"

"June 5th, 1926," I replied feebly.

The creature went through some contortions, sorted a few metal tubes with its hands, and then announced in its metallic voice:

"Computed in terms of your method of reckoning, I have travelled back through time exactly twenty-eight thousand years, nine months, three weeks, two days, seven hours, and a certain number of minutes and seconds which it is useless for me to enumerate exactly."

It was at this point that I endeavored to make sure I was wide awake and in full possession of my faculties. I got up, selected a fresh cigar from the humidor, struck a light and began puffing away. After a few puffs I laid it beside the one I had been smoking earlier in the evening. I found it there later. Incontestable proof . . .

I said that I am a man of steady nerves. I am. I sat down in front of the cylinder again determined this time, to find out what I could about the incredible creature within.

"You say you have traveled back through time thousands of years. How is that possible?"

"By verifying time as a fourth dimension and perfecting devices for traveling in it."

"In what manner?"

"I do not know whether I can explain it exactly, in your language, and you are too primitive and unevolved to understand mine. However I shall try. Know then that space is as much a relative thing as time. In itself, aside from its relation to matter, it has no existence. You can neither see nor touch it, yet you move freely in space. Is that clear?"

"It sounds like Einstein's theory."



"Einstein?"

"One of our great scientists and mathematicians," I explained.

"So you have scientists and mathematicians? Wonderful! That bears out what Hoomi says. I must remember to tell . . . However, to resume my explanation. Time is apprehended in the same manner as is space—that is in its relation to matter. When you measure space, you do so by letting your measuring rod leap from point to point of matter. Or, in the case of spanning the void, let us say, from the earth to Venus, you start and end with matter, remarking that between lies so many miles of space. But it is clear that you see and touch no space, merely spanning the distance between two points of matter with the vision or the measuring rod. You do the same when you compute time with the sun or by means of the clock, which I see hanging on the wall there. Time, then, is no more of an abstraction than is space. If it is possible for man to move freely in space, it is possible for him to move freely in time. We Ardathians are beginning to do so."

"But how?"

"I am afraid your limited intelligence could not grasp what I could tell. You must realize that compared to us you are hardly as much as human. When I look at you, I perceive your body is enormously larger than your head. This means that you are dominated by animal passions and that your mental capacity is not very high."

That this weirdly humorous thing inside a glass cylinder should come to such a conclusion regarding me, made me smile.

"If any of my fellow citizens should see you," I replied, "they would consider you—well, absurd."

"That is because they would judge by the only standard they know—themselves. In Ardathia you would be regarded as bestial. In fact, that is exactly how your reconstructed skeletons are regarded. Tell me, is it true that you nourish your bodies by taking food through your mouths into your stomachs?"

"Yes."

"And are at that stage of bodily evolution when you will eliminate the waste products through the alimentary canal?"

I lowered my head.

"How disgusting."

The unwinking eyes regarded me intently. Then something happened which startled me very much. The creature raised a glass tube to its face. From the end of the tube leaped a purple ray which came through the glass casing and played over the room.

"There is no need to be alarmed," said the metallic voice. "I was merely viewing your habitat and making some deductions. Correct me if I am wrong, please. You are an English-speaking man of the twentieth century. You and



your kind live in cities and houses. You eat, digest, and reproduce your young, much as do the animals from which you have sprung. You use crude machines and have an elementary understanding of physics and chemistry. Correct me if I am wrong, please."

"You are right to a certain extent," I replied. "But I am not interested in having you tell me what I am. I know that. I wish to know what you are. You claim to have come from some thirty thousand years in the future, but you advance no evidence to support the claim. How do I know you are not a trick, a fake, an hallucination of mine. You say you can move freely in time. How is it you have never come this way before? Tell me something about yourself; I am curious."

"Your questions are well put," replied the voice, "and I shall seek to answer them. Know then, that I am a Machine Man of Ardathia. It is true we are beginning to move in time as well as in space; but note that I say 'beginning.' Our Time Machines are very crude as yet, and I am the first Ardathian to penetrate the past beyond a period of six thousand years. You must realize that a time traveler runs certain hazards. At any place on the road, he may materialize inside of a solid of some sort. In that case, he is almost certain to be blown up or otherwise destroyed. Such was the constant danger until I perfected my enveloping ray of—I cannot name or describe it in your tongue, but if you approach me too closely you will feel its resistance. This ray has the effect of disintegrating and dispersing any body of matter inside of which a time traveler may materialize. Perhaps you were aware of a great light when I appeared in your room? I probably took shape within a body of matter and the ray destroyed it."

"The rocking-chair!" I exclaimed. "It was standing on the spot you now occupy."

"Then it has been reduced to its original atoms. This is a wonderful moment for me. My ray has proved an unqualified success for the second time. It not only removes any hindering matter from about the time-traveler but also creates a void within which he is perfectly safe from harm. But to resume.

"It is hard to believe that we Ardathians evolved from such creatures as you. Our written history does not go back to a time when men nourished themselves by taking food into their stomachs through their mouths, digested it, or reproduced their young in the animal-like fashion in which you do. The earliest men of whom we have any written records were the Bi-Chanics. They lived about fifteen thousand years before our era and were already well along the road of mechanical evolution when their civilization fell. The Bi-Chanics vaporized their food substances and breathed them through the nostril, excreting the waste products of the body through the pores of the skin. Their children were brought to the point of birth in ecto-genetic incubators. There is enough authentic evidence existing to prove that the Bi-Chanics had perfected the use of mechanical hearts and were crudely able to make . . . I cannot



find the words to explain just what they made, but it doesn't matter. The point is, that while they had only partly subordinated machinery to their use, they are the earliest race of human beings of whom we possess any real knowledge, and it was their period of time that I was seeking, when I inadvertently came too far and landed in yours."

The metallic voice ceased for a moment and I took advantage of the pause to speak. "I do not know a thing about the Bi-Chanics, or whatever it is you call them," I remarked, "but they were certainly not the first to make mechanical hearts. I remember reading in the paper only several months ago about a Russian scientist who kept a dog alive four hours by means of a gasoline motor which pumped the blood through the dog's body."

"You mean the motor was used as a heart?"

"Exactly."

The Ardathian (for so I will call the creature in the cylinder henceforth) made a quick motion with one of its hands.

"I have made a note of your information; it is very interesting."

"Furthermore," I pursued, "a year or two ago I read an article in one of our current magazines telling how a Vienna surgeon was hatching out rabbits and guinea pigs in ecto-genetic incubators."

The Ardathian made another quick gesture with its hand. I could see that my news excited it.

"Perhaps," I said, not without a feeling of satisfaction (for the casual allusion to myself as hardly human had irked my pride) "perhaps you will find it as interesting to visit the people of five hundred years from now, let us say, as you would to visit the Bi-Chanics."

"I can assure you," replied the metallic voice of the Ardathian, "that if I succeed in returning successfully to Ardathia, those periods will be thoroughly explored. I can only express surprise at your having advanced as far as you have, and wonder why it is you have made no practical use of your knowledge."

"Sometimes I wonder myself," I returned. "But I am very much interested in learning more about yourself and your times. If you would resume your story. . . ."

"With pleasure," replied the Ardathian. "In Ardathia, we do not live in houses or in cities. Neither do we nourish ourselves as do you, or as did the Bi-Chanics. The chemical fluid you see circulating through these tubes which run into and through my body has taken the place of blood. The fluid is produced by the action of a light ray on certain life-giving elements in the air. It is constantly being produced in those tubes under my feet and driven through my body by a mechanism too intricate for me to describe. The same fluid circulates through my body only once, nourishing it and gathering all impurities as it goes. Having completed its revolution, it is dissipated and



cast forth by means of another ray which carries it back into the surrounding air. Have you noticed the transparent substance enclosing me?"

"The cylinder of glass, you mean?"

"Glass! What do you mean by glass?"

"Why, that there," I said, pointing at one of the panes of glass in the window.

The Ardathian directed a metal tube at the spot indicated. A purple streak flashed out, hovered a moment on the pane, and then withdrew.

"No," came the metallic voice, "not that. The cylinder, as you call it, is made of a transparent substance, very strong and practically unbreakable. Nothing can penetrate it but the rays which you see, and the two whose action I have described above, which are invisible. Know then that we Ardathians are not delivered of the flesh; nor are we introduced into incubators as ova taken from female bodies, as were the Bi-Chanics. Among the Ardathians there are no males or females. The cell from which we are to develop is created synthetically. It is fertilized by means of a ray and then put into a cylinder such as you observe surrounding me. As the embryo develops, the various tubes and mechanical devices are introduced into the body by our mechanics and become an integral part of it. When the young Ardathian is born, he does not leave the case in which he has developed. That case—or cylinder, as you call it,—protects him from the action of a hostile environment. If it were to break and expose him to the elements, he would perish miserably. Do you follow me?"

"Not quite," I confessed. "You say that you have evolved from men like us, and then go on to state that you are synthetically conceived and machine made. I do not see how this evolution was possible."

"And you may never understand! Nevertheless, I shall try to explain. Did you not tell me you had wise ones among you who are experimenting with mechanical hearts and ecto-genetic incubators? Tell me, have you not others engaged in tests tending to show that it is the action of environment, and not the passing of time, which accounts for the aging of organisms?"

"Well," I said hesitatingly, "I have heard tell of chicken hearts being kept alive in special containers which protect them from their normal environment."

"Ah," exclaimed the metallic voice, "but Hoomi will be astounded when he learns that such experiments were carried on by pre-historic men fifteen thousand years before the Bi-Chanics! Listen closely, for what you have stated about chicken hearts provides a starting point from which you may be able to follow my explanation of man's evolution from your time to mine. Of the thousands of years separating your day from that of the Bi-Chanics I have no authentic knowledge. My exact knowledge begins with the Bi-Chanics. They were the first among men to realize that man's bodily advancement lay on and through the machine. They perceived that man only became human



when he fashioned tools; that the tools increased the length of his arms, the grip of his hands, the strength of his muscles. They observed that with the aid of the machine, man could circle the earth, speak to the planets, gaze intimately at the stars. We will increase our span of life on earth, said the Bi-Chanics, by throwing the protection of the machine, the things that the machine produces, around and into our bodies. This they did, to the best of their ability, and increased their longevity to an average of about two hundred years. Then came the Tri-Namics. More advanced than the Bi-Chanics, they reasoned that old age was caused, not by the passage of time, but by the action of environment on the matter of which men were composed. It is this reasoning which causes the men of your time to experiment with chicken hearts. The Tri-Namics sought to perfect devices for safe-guarding the flesh against the wear and tear of its environment. They made envelopes—cylinders—in which they attempted to bring embryos to birth and to rear children, but they met with only partial success.”

“You speak of the Bi-Chanics and of the Tri-Namics,” I said, “as if they were two distinct races of people. Yet you imply that the latter evolved from the former. If the Bi-Chanics civilization fell, did any period of time elapse between that fall and the rise of the Tri-Namics? And how did the latter inherit from their predecessors?”

“It is because of your language, which I find very crude and inadequate, that I have not already made that clear,” answered the Ardathian. “The Tri-Namics were really a more progressive part of the Bi-Chanics. When I said the civilization of the latter fell, I did not mean what that implies in your language. You must realize that fifteen thousand years in your future, the race of man was, scientifically speaking, making rapid strides. It was not always possible for backward or conservative minds to adjust themselves to new discoveries. Minority groups, composed mostly of the young, forged ahead, made new deductions from old facts, proposed radical changes, entertained new ideas, and finally culminated in what I have alluded to as the Tri-Namics. Inevitably, in the course of time, the Bi-Chanics died off, and conservative methods with them. That is what I meant when I said their civilization fell. In the same fashion did we follow the Tri-Namics. When the latter succeeded in raising children inside the cylinder, they destroyed themselves. Soon all children were born in this manner. In time the fate of the Tri-Namics became that of the Bi-Chanics, leaving behind them the Machine Men of Ardathia, who differed radically from them in bodily structure—so many human nuclei inside of machines—yet none the less their direct descendants.”

For the first time, I began to get an inkling of what the Ardathian meant when it alluded to itself as a Machine Man. The appalling story of man's final evolution into a controlling center that directed a mechanical body, awoke something akin to fear in my heart. If it were true, what of the soul, spirit, God. . . .



The metallic voice went on.

"You must not imagine that the early Ardathians possessed a cylinder as invulnerable as the one which protects me. The first envelopes of this nature were made of a pliable substance, which the wear and tear of environment wore out within three centuries. The substance composing the envelope has gradually been improved, perfected, until now it is immune for fifteen hundred years to anything save a powerful explosion or some other major catastrophe."

"Fifteen hundred years!" I exclaimed.

"Barring accidents, that is the length of time an Ardathian lives. But to us fifteen hundred years is no longer than a hundred would be to you. Remember, please, that time is relative. Twelve hours of your time is a second of ours, and a year. . . . But suffice it to say that very few Ardathians live out their allotted span. Since we are constantly engaged in hazardous experiments and dangerous expeditions, accidents are many. Thousands of our brave explorers have plunged into the past and never returned. They probably materialized inside solids and were annihilated. But I believe I have finally overcome this danger with my disintegrating ray."

"And how old are you?"

"As you count time, five hundred and seventy years. You must understand that there has been no change in my body since birth. If the cylinder were everlasting, or proof against accident, I should live forever. It is the wearing out, or breaking up of the envelope, which exposes us to the dangerous forces of nature and causes death. Some of our scientists are engaged in trying to perfect means for building up the cylinder as fast as the wear and tear of environment breaks it down; others are seeking to rear embryos to birth with nothing but rays for covering—rays incapable of harming the organism, yet immune to dissipation by environment and incapable of destruction by explosion. So far they have been unsuccessful; but I have every confidence in their ultimate triumph. Then we shall be as immortal as the planet on which we live."

I stared at the cylinder, at the creature inside the cylinder, at the ceiling, the four walls of the room, and then back again at the cylinder. I pinched the soft flesh of my thigh with my fingers. I was awake all right; there could be no doubt about that.

"Are there any questions you would like to ask?" came the metallic voice.

"Yes," I said at last, half fearfully. "What joy can there be in existence for you? You have no sex; you cannot mate. It seems to me," I hesitated, "it seems to me that no hell could be greater than centuries of living caged alive inside that thing you call an envelope. Now I have full command of my limbs and can go where I please. I can love . . ."



I came to a breathless stop, awed by the lurid light which suddenly gleamed in the winkless eyes.

"Poor pre-historic mammal," came the answer, "how could you, groping in the dawn of human existence, comprehend what is beyond your lowly environment! Compared to you, we are as gods. No longer are our loves and hates the reaction of viscera. Our thoughts, our thinking, our emotions are conditioned, molded to the extent we control the immediate environment. There is no such thing as mind—of the . . . But it is impossible to continue. Your vocabulary is too limited. Your mentality—it is not the word I like to use, but as I have repeatedly said, your language is woefully inadequate—has a restricted range of but a few thousand words. Therefore I cannot explain further. Only the same lack—in a different fashion, of course, and with objects instead of words—hinders the free movements of your limbs. You have command of them, you say. Poor primitive, do you realize how shackled you are with nothing but your hands and feet! You augment them, of course, with a few machines; but they are crude and cumbersome. It is you who are caged alive and not I. I have broken through the walls of your cage; have shaken off its shackles; have gone free. Behold the command I have of my limbs!"

From an extended tube shot a streak of white—like a funnel—whose radius was great enough to encircle my seated body. I was conscious of being scooped up and drawn forward with inconceivable speed. For one breathless moment I hung suspended against the cylinder itself, the winkless eyes not an inch from my own. In that moment I had the sensation of being probed, handled. Several times I was revolved, as a man might twirl a stick. Then I was back in the easy-chair again, white, shaken.

"It is true that I never leave the envelope in which I am encased," continued the metallic voice. "But I have at my command rays which can bring me anything I desire. In Ardathia are machines—machines it would be useless for me to describe to you—with which I can walk, fly, move mountains, delve in the earth, investigate the stars, and loose forces of which you have no conception. Those machines are mechanical parts of my body, extensions of my limbs. I take them off and put them on at will. With their help I can view one continent while busily employed in another. With their help I can make time machines, harness rays, and plunge for thirty thousand years into the past. Let me again illustrate."

The tentacle-like hand of the Ardathian waved a tube. The five foot cylinder glowed with an intense light, spun like a top, and so spinning, dissolved into space. Even as I gaped like one petrified—perhaps twenty seconds elapsed—the cylinder reappeared with the same rapidity. The metallic voice announced:

"I have just been five years into your future."

"My future!" I exclaimed. "How can that be when I have not lived it yet?"

"But of course you have lived it."

I stared, bewildered.



"Could I visit my past if you had not lived your future?"

"I do not understand," I said feebly. "It doesn't seem possible that while I am here, actually, in this room, you should be able to travel ahead in time and find out what I shall be doing in a future I haven't reached yet."

"That is because you are unable to grasp intelligently what time is. Think of it as a dimension—a fourth dimension—which stretches like a road ahead and behind you."

"But even then," I protested, "I could only be at one place at a given time on that road, and not where I am and somewhere else at the same second."

"You are never anywhere at any time," replied the metallic voice, "save always in the past or the future. But I see it is useless to try to acquaint you with a simple truth, thirty thousand years ahead of your ability to understand it. As I said, I traveled five years into your future. Men were wrecking this building."

"Tearing down this place? Nonsense, it was only erected two years ago."

"Nevertheless, they were tearing it down. I sent forth my visual ray to locate you. You were . . ."

"Yes, yes," I queried eagerly.

"In a great room with numerous other men. They were all doing a variety of odd things. There was . . ."

At that moment, a heavy knock was heard on the door of my room.

"What's the matter, Matthews?" called a loud voice. "What are you talking about all this time? Are you sick?"

I uttered an exclamation of annoyance because I recognized the voice of John Peters, a newspaper man who occupied the apartment next to mine. My first intention was to tell him I was busy, but the next moment I had a better idea. Here was someone to whom I could show the cylinder, and the creature inside of it! someone to bear witness to having seen it besides myself. I hurried to the door and threw it open.

"Quick," I said, grasping him by the arm and hauling him into the room. "What do you think of that?"

"Think of what?" he demanded.

"Why of that there," I began, pointing with a finger, and then stopping short, with my mouth wide open; for on the spot where a few seconds before the cylinder had stood, there was nothing. The envelope and the Ardathian had disappeared.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The material for this manuscript came into my hands in an odd fashion. About a year after the press had ceased printing garbled versions of Matthews' experience, I made the acquaintance of Hodge. I asked him about Matthews: He said:

"Did you know they've put him in an asylum? You didn't? Well they have. He's batty enough now, poor devil. He was always a little queer, I thought.



I went to see him the other day, and it gave me quite a shock, you know, to see him in a ward with a lot of other men, all doing something queer. By the way, Peters told me the other day that the apartment house was to be torn down. The City is going to remove several houses along the Lake Shore to widen the boulevard. He says they won't wreck them for three or four years yet. Funny eh? Would you like to see what Matthews wrote about the affair himself?"

I would; and did. And like Matthews, I submit the story to the reading public herewith, and leave it to them to draw their own conclusions.



## The Cat-Woman

by Mary Elizabeth Counselman

*Mary Elizabeth Counselman achieved an unexpected fame when a storm of reader applause greeted the publishing of a short "filler" story about three marked pennies and the fates that befell their owners. She has a knack for touching the emotional springs that lie deep in men and women. The tale we now publish is such in question, a tender little account of a curious encounter.*

THE first I heard of the strange Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche (I shall call her this as I can not remember her real name) was that incoherent, absurd tale told me by the landlady.

"She ain't like us," the old lady insisted, glancing fearfully over her shoulder and speaking in a low tone. "A furriner, she is, and a quare one! I don't like the looks of 'er. Them eyes of hers are full of evil!"

I suppressed a smile. "Oh now, Mrs. Bates—not that bad, is she?" I said soothingly. "And you say she lives right across the hall from me, huh? I'm looking forward to meeting the lady."

"You'll come to no good, Mr. Harper, if you have any truck with the likes o' her!" the old lady warned, and waddled off, shaking her head slowly.

It was not until the second night after moving into Bates Boarding House that I really saw the lady. I had come in rather late from a show and was fumbling with my door-key, when a slight noise behind me caused me to turn quickly and straighten up.

A woman, a tall and beautifully formed woman, stood in the half-open doorway across from mine. She was very fair, with a straight ash-blond bob that fitted close to her head. There was something about her—I could not place it, unless it was her perfectly round green eyes—that reminded me immediately of a cat.

I swept off my hat with an unwonted nervousness, and murmured some sort of apology for disturbing her. She did not answer me at all, but merely stood there staring at me in the dimly lighted hall with those large cat-like eyes. I opened my mouth to speak again, closed it foolishly, and turned, red with discomfiture, to fumble again with my lock.

Suddenly behind me I heard a gentle but quite audible "pr-rrr" like the



whir of an electric fan, though not as loud. Glancing over my shoulder I noticed that the strange woman had gone back into her room, although she must have moved very quietly for me not to have heard her.

In her half-open door stood a large white cat, and it was its purring which I had noticed.

"Hello, Kitty!" I murmured, holding out a hand.

The animal seemed very friendly, for it came to me at once and rubbed against my legs, still purring loudly. I petted it a moment, then unlocking my door at last, I stepped inside, closed the door, and switched on my light. Glancing down I found that the cat had slipped in while I was not looking.

Scratching its head in a way cats love, I carried it across the hall and knocked timidly. There was no answer. I knocked again, then twice more, loudly. Still there was no answer. The lady must be out, or perhaps asleep, I told myself; and opening the door slightly I put the cat inside and shut it within. Then I returned to my room and went to bed.

I was wakened some hours later by something heavy on my feet. Sitting up and feeling about the covers, I touched something warm and furry. I switched on the bed lamp quickly, to find the white cat curled up contentedly on my feet. It must have come in through the window. Smiling slightly I went back to sleep, promising myself to return it to my queer neighbor in the morning.

Early the next day I knocked at the door, and receiving no answer put the cat inside as on the previous night. It was not until I was leaving for the office that I noticed with a start that all my windows were closed, as they must have been all night. I was sure, too, that my door had been locked against a chance thief. How, then, had the white cat gained admittance?

I was still wondering about this when I came home from the office. Mrs. Bates was dusting the stairs, and I paused a moment to speak to her. She mentioned again my queer neighbor, warning me to "keep shy" of her.

I smiled. "I saw her last night coming out of her door. Good-looking, isn't she?" The landlady shook her head ominously and cast her eyes toward heaven. "And she has a beautiful white cat," I added.

Mrs. Bates stiffened. "Cat?" she snapped. "I don't allow no pets kept in the boarders' rooms! I'll have to speak to her about that."

The front door opened just at this point and my strange neighbor came in. I was impressed once more with her odd beauty, the *feline* grace in her every motion. The word came inevitably to my mind—she reminded me so much of a sleek, well-fed cat.

"I'm told you keep a cat in your room, miss," began the landlady unpleasantly. "I thought you knew the rule——"

Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche turned her round green eyes upon Mrs. Bates in that disturbing unwinking stare of hers. "I haf no cat," she said.



Her voice was a purring, throaty contralto, very pleasant, with a slight accent—not French, not anything I had ever heard.

The landlady scowled. "But Mr. Harper here just tells me——"

"I'm sorry," I broke in hastily. "It must have been a stray cat. I saw it in your doorway, and naturally I thought——" I floundered helplessly. That fixed green stare made me forget what I was trying to say.

"It iss all r-right," she murmured, and went upstairs to her room without another word. I followed suit in a moment; and there in the open door she stood as if waiting for me, motionless, silent, fixing me with her unwinking eyes.

"I'm terribly sorry," I began again, trying not to meet that disconcerting cat-like gaze. "You see, I put the cat——"

Suddenly she moved toward me, closing her eyes slightly like a pleased cat—and to my utter consternation, rubbed her head gently against my shoulder!

My first thought was that this was merely an amusing trick of a clever street-woman, the advances of a *fille de joie* a little less blatant than those of her boldly dressed, loud-voiced sisters.

Then suddenly the feeling swept over me like a cold draft that she was not a woman at all, that she was not even a mortal—that *she was a cat!*

Moreover, as I drew myself away from her and entered my room queerly shaken, I could have sworn I heard, from the depths of that pale throat, the purring of a cat!

I strode across the room and stood a moment staring out the window, trying to collect my scattered wits, when I felt something rubbing against my ankle. It was the white cat, arching its furry back and purring loudly.

I was in no mood just then for anything resembling a cat, but its gentle wiles won me in spite of myself and I began playing with it. I rolled a ball of cord across the room and the animal bounded after it, tapping it playfully. Soon I had forgotten my upsetting encounter with Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche and was having quite a time with my furry visitor, when our romp was interrupted by a rap on my door and a familiar call, announcing Mrs. Bates.

As she came in, her smile vanished. "Oh, this is your white cat, eh? I never liked the critters. . . . Scat!"

As the animal crouched motionless with fear, the old lady seized it quickly by the scruff of its neck and dropped it from my window into the muddy alley below. "There! Maybe it'll go away now."

She talked for a moment, collected her rent, and was standing in my open door for a parting word, when beyond her in the hall I saw Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche.

She was strangely disheveled and spattered with mud; and she was direct-



ing upon the landlady's back such a look of concentrated hate that I shivered. Only a moment she stood thus; then she had disappeared into her room.

Next morning at breakfast (I ate alone, as I had to leave earlier than the other boarders) I noticed that Mrs. Bates' face was all but hidden behind a network of adhesive plaster, and bright red spots of mercurochrome.

"Why . . . why, what's the matter with your face?" I asked with concern as she served my breakfast.

"A cat got in my room last night," she wailed. "That big white one, it was! It jumped on me in bed and scratched me up terrible afore I could chase it out. I tried to kill it with the broom, but it got away. I never did like a cat . . . mean critters, they are! . . ." She prattled on until I left for the office.

It was two days later that I saw Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche again. I confess I had avoided her in the hall; and as our meal hours were different, we had no occasion to meet. But on this afternoon she was standing in her door as usual, watching me as I came down the hall. Sensing that she was likely to repeat her disconcerting cat-caress, I nodded curtly and went straight into my room, stumbling over something soft as I did so.

There was the white cat again, purring and rubbing against my legs affectionately. Something impelled me to glance back where the woman across the hall had been standing, with an uncanny knowledge that she was there no longer.

She was gone.

I shut my door with a creepy feeling, which the pranks of the white cat soon dispelled, however. We played together for a while, when our romp was again interrupted by the voice and knock of Mrs. Bates.

The cat seemed to know it was she, for it fluffed up its long fur and hissed angrily. Then it turned as if frightened and leaped out of the open window. It was a second-story window—not a pleasant jump, even for a cat. I glanced down to see if the animal had landed safely—just in time to see a huge mongrel dash down the alley and pounce upon my unfortunate pet.

The cat fought furiously, but it had not a chance against the big dog. I saw the mongrel snap twice at my little friend, heard the kitten give an odd cry of anguish—a cry that sounded far more human than feline. A moment later, Mrs. Bates and I saw the limp, blood-spattered form of the white cat lying very still in the muddy alley.

And somehow, it has always seemed to me something more than a mere coincidence that on that very day Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche disappeared mysteriously as smoke, without a word of farewell—and, as Mrs. Bates reiterated plaintively, without even paying her rent. And strangely, she left behind all her personal belongings (from which Mrs. Bates managed to collect slightly more than her rent, though she would never have admitted



it). All her clothes, hats, shoes, toilet articles, every little personal belonging, our lady left behind her . . . and an absurd thing the landlady remarked upon at length curiously; a foolish plaything fond old maids fashion for their cats—a small worsted mouse stuffed with catnip.



# *The Man with a Thousand Legs*

*by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.*

*Although more than twenty years have passed since The Man with a Thousand Legs appeared, we would venture to doubt that the plot has ever been repeated, or that anything quite like it for eeriness of conception will be found often today. In those early days, no formulae for fantasy had been beaten out, and a young writer such as Long could strike out in channels such as simply would not occur to today's authors who generally find it easier to travel the well-worn plot ruts rather than strike out into imagination's more uncharted regions.*

## *1. Statement of Horace Randall, Psychoanalyst.*

SOMEONE rapped loudly on the door of my bedroom. It was past midnight but I had been unable to sleep and I welcomed the disturbance.

"Who's there?" I asked.

"A young man what insists on being admitted, sir," replied the raucous voice of my housekeeper. "A young man—and very thin and pale he is, sir—what says he's business what won't wait. 'He's in bed,' I says, but then he says as how you're the only doctor what can help him now. He says as how he hasn't slept or ate for a week, and he ain't nothing but a boy, sir!"

"Tell him he can come in," I replied as I slid into my dressing gown and reached for a cigar.

The door opened to admit a thin shaft of light and a young man so incredibly emaciated that I stared at him in horror. He was six feet tall and extremely broad-shouldered, but I don't think he weighed one hundred pounds. As he approached me he staggered and leaned against the wall for support. His eyes fairly blazed. It was obvious that some tremendous idea swayed him. I gently indicated a chair and he collapsed into it.

For a moment he sat and surveyed me. When I offered him a cigar he brushed it aside with a gesture of contempt.

"Why should I poison my body with such things?" he snapped. "Tobacco is for weaklings and children."



I studied him curiously. He was apparently an extraordinary young man. His forehead was high and broad, his nose was curved like a scimitar, and his lips were so tightly compressed that only a thin line indicated his mouth.

I waited for him to speak, but silence enveloped him like a rubber jacket. "I shall have to break the ice somehow," I reflected; and then suddenly I heard myself asking: "You have something to tell me—some confession, perhaps, that you wish to make to me?"

My question aroused him. His shoulders jerked, and he leaned forward, gripping both arms of his chair. "I have been robbed of my birthright," he said. "I am a man of genius, and once, for a brief moment, I had power—tremendous power. Once I projected my personality before vast multitudes of people, and every word that I uttered increased my fame and flattered my vanity."

He was trembling and shaking so violently that I was obliged to rise and lay a restraining hand upon his shoulder. "Delusions of magnificence," I murmured, "undoubtedly induced by a malignant inferiority-complex."

"It is not that," he snapped. "I am a poet, an artist, and I have within me a tremendous force that must be expanded. The world has denied me self-expression through legitimate channels and now I am justified in hating the world. Let society beware!"

He threw back his head and laughed. His hilarity seemed to increase the tension that had somehow crept into the room.

"Call me a madman if you will," he exclaimed, "but I crave power. I can not rest until my name is on a million lips."

"A conservative course of treatment——" I began.

"I want no treatment," he shouted, and then, in a less agitated voice, "You would be surprised, perhaps, if I told you my name!"

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Arthur St. Amand," he replied, and stood up.

I was so astonished that I dropped my cigar. I may even add that I was momentarily awed. *Arthur St. Amand!*

"Arthur St. Amand," he repeated. "You are naturally amazed to discover that the pale, harassed and half-insane youth that you see before you was once called the peer of Newton and Leonardo Da Vinci. You are amazed to discover that the starving lad with an inferiority-complex was once feted by kings and praised by men whose lightest words will go thundering down Time. It is all so amazing and so uproariously funny, but the tragedy remains. Like Dr. Faustus I once looked upon the face of God, and now I'm less than any schoolboy."

"You are still very young," I gasped. "You can't be more than twenty-four."

"I am twenty-three," he said. "It was precisely three years ago that I published my brochure on etheric vibrations. For six months I lived in a blaze



of glory. I was the marvelous boy of the scientific world, and then that Frenchman advanced his theory——”

“I suppose you mean Monsieur Paul Rondoli,” I interrupted. “I recall the sensation his startling refutation made at the time. He completely eclipsed you in the popular mind, and later the scientific world declared you a fraud. Your star set very suddenly.”

“But it will rise again,” exclaimed my young visitor. “The world will discuss me again, and this time I shall not be forgotten. I shall prove my theory. I shall demonstrate that the effect of etheric vibration on single cells is to change—to change——.” He hesitated and then suddenly shouted, “But no, I shall not tell you. I shall tell no one. I came here tonight to unburden my mind to you. At first I thought of going to a priest. It is necessary that I should confess to someone.

“When my thoughts are driven in upon themselves they become monstrous. I have an active and terrible brain, and I must speak out occasionally. I chose you because you are a man of intelligence and discrimination and you have heard many confessions. But I shall not discuss etheric vibrations with you. When you see *It* you will understand.”

He turned abruptly and walked out of the room and out of my house without once looking back. I never saw him again.

## 2. *Diary of Thomas Shiel, Novelist and Short-Story Writer*

July 21. This is my fourth day at the beach. I've already gained three pounds, and I'm so sunbaked that I frightened a little girl when I went swimming this morning. She was building sand castles and when she saw me she dropped her shovel and ran shrieking to her mother. “Horrible black man!” she shouted. I suppose she thought I was a genie out of the *Arabian Nights*. It's pleasant here—I've almost got the evil taste of New York out of my mouth. Elsie's coming down for the week-end.

July 22. The little girl I frightened yesterday has disappeared. The police are searching for her and it is generally believed that she has been kidnaped. The unfortunate occurrence has depressed everyone at the beach. All bathing parties have been abandoned, and even the children sit about sad-eyed and dejected. No footprints were found on the sands near the spot where the child was last seen. . . .

July 23. Another child has disappeared, and this time the abductor left a clue. A young man's walking stick and hat were found near the scene of a violent struggle. The sand for yards around was stained with blood. Several mothers left the New Beach Hotel this morning with their children.

July 24. Elsie came this morning. A new crime occurred at the very moment of her arrival, and I scarcely had the heart to explain the situation to



her. My paleness evidently frightened her. "What is the matter?" she asked; "you look ill." "I am ill," I replied. "I saw something dreadful on the beach this morning." "Good heavens!" she exclaimed; "have they found one of the children?" It was a great relief to me that she had read about the children in the New York papers. "No," I said. "They didn't find the children, but they found the body of a man and he didn't have a drop of blood in him. He had been drained dry. And all about his body the investigators found curious little mounds of yellowish slime—of ooze. When the sunlight struck this substance it glittered." "Has it been examined under a microscope?" asked Elsie. "They are examining it now," I explained. "We shall know the results by this evening." "God pity us all," said Elsie, and she staggered and nearly fell. I was obliged to support her as we entered the hotel.

*July 25.* Two curious developments. The chemist who examined the jellyish substance found near the body on the beach declares that it is living protoplasm, and he has sent it to the Department of Health for classification by one of their expert biologists. And a deep pool some eight yards in diameter has been discovered in a rock fissure about a mile from the New Beach Hotel, which evidently harbors some queer denizens. The water in this pool is as black as ink and strongly saline. The pool is eight or ten feet from the ocean, but it is affected by the tides and descends a foot every night and morning. This morning one of the guests of the hotel, a young lady named Clara Phillips, had come upon the pool quite by accident, and being fascinated by its sinister appearance had decided to sketch it. She had seated herself on the rim of the rock fissure and was in the act of sketching in several large boulders and a strip of beach when something made a curious noise beneath her. "Gulp," it said. "Gulp!" She gave a little cry and jumped up just in time to escape a long golden tentacle which slithered toward her over the rocks. The tentacle protruded from the very center of the pool, out of the black water, and it filled her with unutterable loathing. She stepped quickly forward and stamped upon it, and her attack was so sudden that the thing was unable to flip away from her and escape back into the water. And Miss Phillips was an amazingly strong young woman. She ground the end of the tentacle into a bloody pulp with her heel. Then she turned and ran. She ran as she had not run since her "prep" school days. But as she raced across the soft beach she fancied she could hear a monstrous, lumbering something pursuing her. It is to her credit that she did not look back.

And this is the story of little Harry Doty. I offered him a beautiful new dime, but he told it to me gratis. I give it in his own words.

"Yes sir, I've always knowed about that pool. I used to fish for crabs and sea-cucumbers and big, purple anemones in it, sir. But up until last week I allus knowed what I'd bring up. Onct or twice I used to get somethin' a bit out o' the ordinary, such as a bleedin'-tooth shell or a headless worm with



green suckers in its tail and lookin' like the devil on a Sunday outin' or a knowin'-lookin' skate what ud glare and glare at me, sir. But never nothin' like this thing, sir. I caught it on the top o' its head and it had the most human-lookin' eyes I ever saw. They were blue and soulless, sir. It spat at me, and I throws down my line and beats it. I beats it, sir. Then I hears it come lumbering after me over the beach. It made a funny gulpin' noise as if it was a-lickin' its chops."

July 26. Elsie and I are leaving tomorrow. I'm on the verge of a lethal collapse. Elsie stutters whenever she tries to talk. I don't blame her for stuttering but I can't understand why she wants to talk at all after what we've seen. . . . There are some things that can only be expressed by silence.

The local chemist got a report this morning from the Board of Health. The stuff found on the beach consisted of hundreds of cells very much like the cells that compose the human body. And yet they weren't human cells. The biologists were completely mystified by them, and a small culture is now on its way to Washington, and another is being sent to the American Museum of Natural History.

This morning the local authorities investigated the curious black pool in the rocks. Elsie and I and most of the other vacationists were on hand to watch operations. Thomas Wilshire, a member of the New Jersey constabulary, threw a plummet line into the pool and we all watched it eagerly as it paid out. "A hundred feet," murmured Elsie as the police looked at one another in amazement. "It probably went into the sea," someone exclaimed. "I don't think the pool itself is that deep." Thomas Wilshire shook his head. "There's queer things in that pool," he said. "I don't like the looks of it."

The diver was a bristling, brave little man with some obscure nervous affliction that made him tremble violently. "You'll have to go down at once," said Wilshire. The diver shook his head and shuffled his feet.

"Get him into his suit, boys!" ordered Wilshire, and the poor wretch was lifted bodily upon strong shoulders and transformed into a loathsome, goggled-eyed monster.

In a moment he had advanced to the pool and vanished into its sinister black depths. Two men worked valiantly at the pumps, while Wilshire nodded sleepily and scratched his chin. "I wonder what he'll find," he mused. "Personally, I don't think he's got much chance of ever coming up. I wouldn't be in his shoes for all the money in the United States mint."

After several minutes the rubber tubing began to jerk violently. "The poor lad!" muttered Wilshire. "I knew he didn't have a chance. Pull, boys, pull!"

The tubing was rapidly pulled in. There was nothing attached to it, but the lower portion was covered with glittering golden slime. Wilshire picked up the severed end and examined it casually. "Neatly clipped," he said. "The poor devil!"

The rest of us looked at one another in horror. Elsie grew so pale that I



thought she was about to faint. Wilshire was speaking again: "We've made one momentous discovery," he said. We crammed eagerly forward. Wilshire paused for the fraction of a second, and a faint smile of triumph curled his lips. "There's something in that pool," he finished. "Our friend's life has not been given in vain."

I had an absurd desire to punch his fat, triumphant face, and might have done so, but a scream from the others quelled the impulse.

"Look," cried Elsie. She was pointing at the black surface of the pool. It was changing color. Slowly it was assuming a reddish hue; and then a hellish something shot up and bobbed for a moment on its surface. "A human arm!" groaned Elsie and hid her face in her hands. Wilshire whistled softly. Two more objects joined the first and then something round which made Elsie stare and stare through the spaces between her fingers.

"Come away!" I commanded. "Come away at once." I seized her by the arm and was in the act of forcefully leading her from the edge of that dreadful charnel, for charnel it had become, when I was arrested by a shout from Wilshire.

"Look at it! Look at it!" he yelled. "That's the horrid thing. God, it isn't human!"

We both turned back and stared. There are blasphemies of creation that can not be described, and the thing which rose up to claim the escaping fragments of its dismantled prey was of that order. I remember vaguely, as in a nightmare of Tartarus, that it had long golden arms which shone and sparkled in the sunlight, and a monstrous curved beak below two piercing black eyes in which I saw nothing but unutterable malice.

The idea of standing there and watching it munch the fragmentary remains of the poor little diver was intolerable to me, and in spite of the loud protests of Wilshire, who wanted us, I suppose, to try and do something about it, I turned and ran, literally dragging Elsie with me. This was, as it turned out, the wisest thing that I could have done, because the thing later emerged from the pool and nearly got several of the vacationists. Wilshire fired at it twice with a pistol, but the thing flopped back into the water apparently unharmed and submerged triumphantly.

### *3. Statement of Henry Greb, Prescription Druggist*

I usually shut up shop at 10 o'clock, but at closing time that evening I was leaning over the counter reading a ghost story, and it was so extremely interesting that I couldn't walk out on it. My nose was very close to the page and I didn't notice anything that was going on about me when suddenly I happened to look up and there he was standing and watching me.

I've seen some pale people in my time (most people that come with pre-



scriptions are pale) and I've seen some skinny people, but I never have seen anyone as thin and pale as the young man that stood before me.

"Good heavens!" I said, and shut the book.

The young man's lips were twisted into a sickly smile. "Sorry to bother you," he says. "But I'm in a bad way. I'm in desperate need of medical attention!"

"What can I do to help you?" I says.

He looks at me very solemnly, as if he were making up his mind whether he could trust me. "This is really a case for a physician," he says.

"It's against the law for us to handle such cases," I told him.

Suddenly he held out his hand. I gasped. The fingers were smashed into a bloody pulp, and blood was running down his wrist. "Do something to stop the bleeding," he says. "I'll see a physician later."

Well, I got out some gauze and bound the hand up as best I could. "See a doctor at once," I told him. "Blood-poisoning will set in if you're not careful. Luckily, none of the bones are fractured."

He nodded, and for a moment his eyes flashed. "Damn that woman!" he muttered. "Damn her!"

"What's that?" I asked, but he had got himself together again and merely smiled. "I'm all upset," he said. "Didn't know just what I was saying—you must pardon me. By the way, I've got a little gash on my scalp which you might look at."

He removed his cap and I noticed that his hair was dripping wet. He parted it with his hand and revealed a nasty abrasion about an inch wide. I examined it carefully.

"Your friend wasn't very careful when he cast that plug," I says at length. "I never believe in fly-fishing when there's two in the boat. A friend of mine lost an eye that way."

"It *was* made by a fish-hook," he confessed. "You're something of a Sherlock Holmes, aren't you?"

I brushed aside his compliment with a careless gesture and turned for the bottle of carbolic acid which rested on the shelf behind me. It was then that I heard something between a growl and a gulp from the young man.

I wheeled abruptly, and caught him in the act of springing upon me. He was foaming at the mouth and his eyes bulged. I reached forward and seized him by the shoulders and in a moment we were engaged in a desperate struggle upon the floor. He bit and scratched and kicked at me; and I was obliged to silence him by pummeling his face. It was at that moment that I noticed a peculiar fishy odor in the room, as if a breeze from the sea had entered through the open door.

For several moments I struggled and fought and strained and then something seemed to give suddenly beneath me. The young man slipped from



my grasp and made for the door. I endeavored to follow, but I stumbled over something slippery and fell flat upon my face.

When I got up, the young man was gone, and in my hand I held something so weird that I could scarcely believe that it was real, and later I flung it from me with a cry of disgust. It was a reddish, rubbery substance about five inches long, and its under edge was lined with little golden suckers that opened and closed while I stared at them.

I was still laboring under a fearful strain when Harry Morton entered the shop. He was trembling violently, and I noticed that he gazed fearfully behind him as he approached the counter.

"What's the best thing you have for highfalutin-acting nerves?" he asks.

"Bromides," I says. "I can mix you some. But what's the trouble with your nerves, Harry?"

"Hallucinations," he groans. "Them, and other things."

"Tell me about it," I says.

"I was leanin' 'gainst a lamppost," he says, "and I sees a big lumbering yellowish thing walkin' along the street like a man. It wasn't natural, Henry. I'm not superstitious, but that there thing wasn't natural. And then it flops into the gutter and runs like a streak of lightnin'. It made a funny noise, too. It said 'Gulp.'"

I mixed the bromides and handed him the glass over the counter. "I understand, Harry," I says. "But don't go about blowing your head off. No one would believe you."

#### *4. Statement of Helen Bowan*

I was sitting on the porch knitting when a young man with a bag stops in front of the house and looks up at me. "Good morning, madam," he says, "have you a room with bath?"

"Look at the sign, young man," I says to him. "I've a nice light room on the second floor that should just suit you."

Up he comes and smiles at me. But as soon as I saw him close I didn't like him. He was so terribly thin, and his hand was bandaged, and he looked as if he had been in a fight.

"How much do you want for the room?" he asks.

"Twelve dollars," I told him. I wanted to get rid of him and I thought the high rate would scare him off, but his hand goes suddenly into his pocket and he brings out a roll of bills, and begins counting them. I gets up very quickly and bows politely to him and takes his grip away from him, and rushes into the hall with it. I didn't want to lose a prospect like that. Cousin Hiram has a game which he plays with shells, and I knew that the young man would be Cousin Hiram's oyster.



I takes him upstairs and shows him the room and he seems quite pleased with it. But when he sees the bathtub he begins jumping up and down like a schoolboy, and clapping his hands and acting so odd that I begins to suspect that he is going out of his mind. "It's just the right size!" he shouts. "I hope you won't mind my keeping it filled all day. I bathe quite often. But I must have some salt to put into it. I can't bathe in fresh water!"

"He's certainly a queer one," I thought, "but I ain't complaining. It isn't often Hiram and I land a fish as rich as this one."

Finally he calms down and pushes me out of the room. "Everything's all right," he says. "But I don't want to be disturbed. When you get the salt, put it down in the hall and knock on the door. Under no circumstances must anyone enter this room."

He closed the door in my face and I heard the key grate in the lock. I didn't like it, and I didn't like the sounds that began to come from behind that door. First I heard a great sigh as if somehow he had got something disagreeable off his chest, and then I heard a funny gulping sound that I didn't like. He didn't waste any time in turning on the water either. I heard a great splashing and wallowing, and then, after about fifteen minutes, everything became as quiet as death.

We didn't hear anything more from him until that evening, when I sent Lizzie up with the salt. At first she tried the door, but it was locked, and she was obliged to put the bag down in the hall. But she didn't go away. She squeezed up close against the wall and waited. After about ten minutes the door opened slowly and a long, thin arm shot out and took in the bag. Lizzie said that the arm was yellow and dripping wet, and the thinnest arm she had ever seen. "But he's a thin young man, Lizzie," I explains to her. "That may be," she says, "but I never saw a human being with an arm like that before!"

Later, along about 10 o'clock I should say, I was sitting in the parlor sewing when I felt something wet land on my hand. I looked up and the ceiling was dripping red. I mean just what I say. The ceiling was all moist and dripping red.

I jumped up and ran out into the hall. I wanted to scream, but I bit my lips until the blood begins running down my chin and that makes me sober and determined. "That young man must go," I says to myself. "I can't have anything that isn't proper going on in this house."

I climbs the stairs looking as grim as death and pounds on the young man's door. "I won't stand for whatever's going on in there!" I shouted. "Open that door."

I heard something flopping about inside, and then the young man speaking to himself in a very low voice. "Its demands are insatiable. The vile, hungry beast! Why doesn't it think of something besides its stomach? I didn't want it to come then. But it doesn't need the ray now. When its appetite is aroused



it changes without the ray. God, but I had a hard time getting back! Longer and longer between!"

Suddenly he seemed to hear the pounding. His queer chattering stops and I hear the key turn in the lock. The door opens ever so slightly and his face looks out at me. He is horrible to look at. His cheeks are sunken and there are big horrid rings under his eyes. There is a bandage tied about his head.

"I want you to leave at once," I tells him. "There's queer things going on here and I can't stand for queer things. You've got to leave."

He sighed and nodded. "It's just as well perhaps," he says. "I was thinking of going anyway. There are rats here."

"Rats!" I gasped. But I wasn't really surprised. I knew there were rats in the house. They made life miserable for me. I was never able to get rid of them. Even the cats feared them.

"I can't stand rats," he continues. "I'm packing up—clearing out now." He shuts the door in my face and I hears him throwing his things into a bag. Then the door opens again and he comes out on the landing. He is terribly pale, and he leans against the wall to catch himself, and then he starts descending the stairs.

I watches him as he goes down, and when he reaches the first landing he staggers and leans against the wall. Then he seems to grow shorter and he goes down the last flight three steps at a time. Then he makes a running leap toward the door. I never saw anyone get through a door so quick, and I begins to suspect that he's done something that he's ashamed of.

So I turns about and goes into the room. When I looks at the floor I nearly faints. It's all slippery and wet, and seven dead rats are lying on their backs in the center of the room. And they are the palest-looking rats I've ever seen. Their noses and tails are pure white and they looks as if they didn't have a drop of blood in them. And then I goes into the alcove and looks at the bathtub. I won't tell you what I see there. But you remember what I says about the ceiling downstairs? I says it was dripping red, and the alcove wasn't so very different.

I gets out of that room as quick as I can, and I shuts and locks the door; and then I goes downstairs and telephones to Cousin Hiram. "Come right over, Hiram," I says. "Something terrible has been here!"

### 5. *Statement of Walter Noyes, Lighthouse Keeper*

I was pretty well done up. I'd been polishing the lamps all afternoon, and there were calluses on my hands as big as hen's eggs. I went up into the tower and shut myself in and got out a book that I'd been reading off and on for a week. It was a translation of the *Arabian Nights* by a fellow named Lang. Imaginative stuff like that is a great comfort to a chap when he's shut



up by himself away off on the rim of the world, and I always enjoyed reading about Schemselnihar and Deryabar and the young King of the Black Isles.

I was reading the first part of *The King of the Black Isles* and had reached the sentence: "And then the youth drew away his robe and the Sultan perceived with horror that he was a man only to his waist, and from thence to his feet he had been changed into marble," when I happened to look toward the window.

An icy south wind was driving the rain furiously against the panes, and at first I saw nothing but a translucent glitter on the wet glass and vaguely beyond that the gleaming turmoil of dark, enormous waves. Then a dazzling and indescribable shape flattened itself against the window and blotted out the black sea and sky. I gasped and jumped up.

"A monstrous squid!" I muttered. "The storm must have blown it ashore. That tentacle will smash the glass if I don't do something."

I reached for my slicker and hat and in a moment I was descending the spiral stairway three steps at a time. Before emerging into the storm I armed myself with a revolver and the contents of a tumbler of strong Jamaica rum.

I paused for a moment in the doorway and stared about me. But from where I stood I could see nothing but the tall gray boulders fringing the southern extremity of the island and a stretch of heaving and rolling water. The rain beat against my face and nearly blinded me, and a deep murmur arose from the intolerable wash of the waves. Before me lay only a furious and tortured immensity; behind my back was the warmth and security of my miniature castle, a mellow pipe and a book of valiant stories—but I couldn't ignore the menace of the loathsome shape that had pressed itself against the glass.

I descended three short steps to the rocks and made my way rapidly toward the rear of the lighthouse. Drops of rain more acrid than tears ran down my cheeks and into my mouth and dripped from the corners of my mustache. The overpowering darkness clung like a leech to my clothes. I hadn't gone twenty paces before I came upon a motionless figure.

At first I saw nothing but the head and shoulders of a well-shaped man; but as I drew cautiously nearer I collided with something that made me cry out in terror. A hideous tentacle shot out and wound itself about my leg.

With a startled cry I turned and attempted to run. But out of the macrocarpus darkness leaped another slimy arm, and another. My fingers tightened on the revolver in my pocket. I whipped it out and opened fire on the writhing brutes.

The report of my gun echoed from the surrounding boulders. A sudden, shrill scream of agony broke the comparative quiet that followed. Then there came a voluble, passionate pleading. "Don't shoot again! Please don't! I'm done up. I was done up when I came here, and I wanted help! I didn't intend



to harm you. Before God, I didn't intend that *they* should attack you. But I can't control 'em now. They're too much for me. *It's* too much for me. Pity me!"

For a moment I was too dazed to think. I stared stupidly at the smoking revolver in my hand and then my eyes sought the cataclysmic ocean. The enormous waves calmed me. Slowly I brought my eyes to bear on the thing before me.

But even as I stared at it my brain reeled again, and a deadly nausea came upon me.

"And then the youth drew away his robe and the Sultan perceived that he was a man only to his waist . . ."

Several feet from where I stood, a monstrous jelly spread itself loathsomely over the dripping rocks, and from its veined central mass a thousand tentacles depended and writhed like the serpents on the head of Medusa. And growing from the middle of this obscenity was the torso and head of a naked young man. His hair was matted and covered with sea-weed; and there were blood-stains upon his high, white forehead. His nose was so sharp that it reminded me of a sword and I momentarily expected to see it glitter in the dim, mysterious light. His teeth chattered so loudly that I could hear them from where I stood; and as I stared and stared at him he coughed violently and foamed at the lips.

"Whisky!" he muttered. "I'm all done up! I ran into a ship!"

I was unable to speak, but I believe I made some strange noises in my throat. The young man nodded hysterically.

"I knew you'd understand," he muttered. "I'm up against it, but I knew you'd help me pull through. A glass of whisky——"

"How did that thing get you?" I shrieked. I had found my voice at last, and was determined to fight my way back to sanity. "How did that thing get its loathsome coils on you?"

"It didn't get me," groaned the young man. "I'm *It*!"

"You're what?"

"A part of *It*," replied the young man.

"Isn't that thing swallowing you?" I screamed at him. "Aren't you going down into its belly at this moment?"

The young man sadly shook his head. "It's part of me," he said again, and then, more wildly, "I must have something to brace me up! I'm all in. I was swimming on the surface, and a ship came and cut off six of my legs. I'm weak from loss of blood, and I can't stand."

A lean hand went up and brushed the water from battered eyes. "A few of 'em are still lively," he said, "and I can't control 'em. They nearly got you—but the others are all in. I can't walk on 'em."



With as much boldness as I could muster I raised my revolver and advanced upon the thing. "I don't know what you're talking about," I cried. "But I'm going to blow this monster to atoms."

"For heaven's sake don't!" he shrieked. "That would be murder. We're a human being."

A flash of scarlet fire answered him. Almost unconsciously I had pressed upon the trigger, and now my weapon was speaking again. "I'll blow it to tatters!" I muttered between my teeth. "The vile, crawling devil!"

"Don't! don't!" shrieked the young man, and then an unearthly yell made the night obscene. I saw the thing before me quiver in all its folds, and then it suddenly rose up and towered above me. Blood spurted from its huge, bloated body, and a crimson shower descended upon me. High above me, a hundred feet in the air, I saw the pale, agonized face of the young man. He was screaming blasphemies. He appeared to be walking on stilts. "You can't kill me," he yelled. "I'm stronger than I thought. I'll win out yet."

I raised my revolver to fire again, but before I could take aim the thing swept by me and plunged into the sea. It was perhaps fortunate for me that I did not attempt to follow it. My knees gave beneath me and I fell flat upon my face. When I came to so far as to be able to speak I found myself between clean white sheets and staring into the puzzled blue eyes of a government inspector.

"You've had a nasty time of it, lad," he said. "We had to give you stimulants. Didja have a shock of a sort?"

"Of a sort, yes," I replied. "But it came out of the *Arabian Nights*."

## 6. *The Marvelous Boy*

[Curious Manuscript Found in a Bottle]

I was the marvelous boy. My genius amazed the world. A magnificent mind, a sublime destiny! My enemies . . . combined to ruin me. A punctured balloon . . .

A little box, and I put a dog under it. He changed . . . Jelly! Etheric vibrations generate curious changes in living cells . . . Process starts and nothing can stop it. Growth! Enormous growth! Keeps sending out shoots—legs! arms! Marvelous growth! Human being next. Put a little girl under it. She changed. Beautiful jellyfish! It kept getting larger. Fed it mice. Then I destroyed it.

So interesting. Must try it on myself. I know how to get back. Will-power. A child's will is too weak, but a man can get back. No actual change in cell-content.



A tremendous experience! I picked out a deep pool where I could hide. Hunger. Saw man on beach.

The police suspect. I must be more careful. Why didn't I take the body out to sea?

Horrible incident. Young lady artist. I almost caught her, but she stamped on a leg. Smashed it. Horrible pain. I certainly must be more careful.

Great humiliation. Little boy hooked me. But I gave him a scare. The varmint! I glared and glared at him. I tried to catch him, but he ran too fast. I wanted to eat him. He had very red cheeks. I hate women and children.

Of course they suspect. Little boys always babble. I wanted to eat him. But I gave them all a good scare, and I got a man. He came down after me in a diver's suit, but I got him. I took him to pieces. I mean that—literally to pieces. Then I let the fragments float up. I wanted to scare them. I think I did. They ran for their lives. The authorities are fools.

I got back. But it wasn't easy. The thing fought and fought. "I'm master!" I said, and it gulped. It gulped and gulped and gulped; and then I got back. But my hand was smashed and bleeding!

That fool clerk! Why did he take so long? But he didn't know how hungry his red face made me. The thing came back without the ray. I was standing before the counter and it came back. I sprang at him. I was lucky to get away.

Terrible trouble. I can't keep it from coming back. I wake up in the night, and find it spread out on the bed and all over the floor. Its arms writhe and writhe. And its demands are insatiable. Every waking moment it demands food. Sometimes it completely absorbs me. But now as I write the upper portion of my body is human.

This afternoon I moved to furnished room near beach. Salt water has become a necessity. Change comes on more rapidly now. I can't keep it off. My will is powerless. I filled the tub with water and put in some salt. Then I wallowed in it. Great comfort. Great relief. Hunger. Dreadful, insatiable hunger.

I am all beast, all animal. Rats. I have caught six rats. Delicious. Great comfort. But I've messed up the room. What if the old idiot downstairs should suspect?

She does suspect. Wants me to get out. I shall get out. There is only one refuge for me now. The sea! I shall go to the sea. I can't pretend I'm human any longer. I'm all animal, all beast. What a shock I must have given the old hag! I could hear her teeth chattering as she came up the stairs. All I could do to keep from springing at her.

Into the sea at last. Great relief, great joy. Freedom at last!

A ship. I ran head on into it. Six arms gone. Terrible agony. Flopped about for hours.

Land. I climbed over the rocks and collapsed. Then I managed to get back.



Part of me got back. I called for help. A crazy fool came out of the lighthouse and stared at me. Five of my tentacles sprang at him. I couldn't control them. They got him about the leg. He lost his head. Got out a revolver and shot at them.

I got them under control. Tremendous effort. Pleaded with him, tried to explain. He would not listen. Shots—many shots. White-hot fire in my body—in my arms and legs. Strength returned to me. I rose up, and went back into the sea. I hate human beings. I am growing larger, and I shall make myself felt in the world.

ARTHUR ST. AMAND.

### 7. *The Salmon Fishermen*

[Statement of William Gamwell]

There were five of us in the boat: Jimmy Simms, Tom Snodgrass, Harry O'Brien, Bill Samson and myself. "Jimmy," I said, "we may as well open the lunch. I'm not particularly hungry, but the salmon all have their noses stuck in the mud!"

"They sure ain't biting," said Jimmy. "I never seen such a bum run of the lazy critters."

"Don't go complaining," Harry piped up. "We've only been here five hours."

We were drifting toward the east shore and I yelled to Bill to pull on the oars, but he ignored me.

"We'll drift in with the shipping," I warned. "By the way, what's that queer-looking tug with a broken smoke-stack?"

"It came in this morning," said Jim. "It looks like a rum-runner to me."

"They're taking an awful risk," Harry put in. "The revenue cutter's due by here any minute."

"There she is now," said Bill and pointed toward the flats.

Sure enough, there was the government boat, skirting the shore and looking like a lean wasp on the warpath. "She's heading the tug off as sure as you're born," said Bill. "I'll say we're in for a hot time!"

"Back water!" I shouted. "Do you want to get between 'em?"

Tom and Bill pulled sturdily on the oars and our boat swung out in the direction of the west shore; and then the current took us and carried us downstream.

A signal flag flashed for a moment on the deck of the cutter. Jimmy translated it to us. "'Stand to, or we'll fire,'" he exclaimed. "Now let's see what the tug's got to say to that!"

The tug apparently decided to ignore the command. It rose on a tremorless



swell, and plunged doggedly forward. A vast black column ascended from its broken smoke-stack. "They're putting on steam!" cried Bill. "But they haven't a chance in the world."

"Not a chance," confirmed Tom. "One broadside will blow 'em to atoms."

Bill stood up and clapped his hands to his ears. The rest of us were nearly deafened by the thunderous report. "What did I tell you?" shouted Tom.

We looked at the tug. The smoke-stack was gone and she was wallowing in a heavy swell. "That was only a single shot across her bows," said Bill. "But it did a lot of damage. Wait until they open fire with the big guns!"

We waited, expecting to see something interesting. But we saw something that nearly frightened us out of our shoes. Between the cutter and the tug a gigantic, yellowish obscenity shot up from the water and towered thirty feet in the air. It thrashed wildly about and made a horrible gulping noise. We could hear the frenzied shrieks of the men on the tug, and from the deck of the cutter someone yelled. "Look at it! Look at it! Oh, my God!"

"Mercy in heaven!" groaned Bill.

"We're in for it!" sobbed Tom.

For a moment the thing simply towered and vibrated between the two boats and then it made for the cutter. It had at least a thousand legs and they waved loathsomely in the sunlight. It had a hooked beak and a great mouth that opened and closed and gulped, and it was larger than a whale. It was horribly, hideously large. It towered to the mounting zenith, and in its mephitic, blasphemous immensity it dwarfed the two boats and all the tangled shipping in the harbor.

"Are we alive?" shrieked Bill. "And is that there shore really Long Island? I don't believe it. We're in the Indian Ocean, or the Persian Gulf or the middle of the Hyperborean sea . . . That there thing is a Jormungandar!"

"What's a Jormungandar?" yelled Tom. He was at the end of his rope and clutching valiantly at straws.

"Them things what live on the bottom of the arctic seas," groaned Bill. "They comes up for air once in a hundred years. I'll take my oath that there thing's a Jormungandar."

Jormungandar or not, it was apparent to all of us that the monster meant business. It was bearing down upon the cutter with incredible ferocity. The water boiled and bubbled in its wake. On the other boats men rushed hysterically to the rails and stared with wide eyes.

The officers of the cutter had recovered from their momentary astonishment and were gesticulating furiously and running back and forth on the decks. Three guns were lowered into position and directed at the onrushing horror. A little man with gilt braid on his sleeves danced about absurdly on his toes and shouted out commands at the top of his voice.

"Don't fire until you can look into his eyes," he yelled. "We can't afford to miss him. We'll give him a broadside he won't forget."



"It isn't human, sir!" someone yelled. "There never was nothing like it before in this world."

The men aboard the tug were obviously rejoicing. Caps and pipes ascended into the air and loud shouts of triumph issued from a hundred drunken throats.

"Fire!" shouted the blue-coated midget on the cutter.

"It won't do 'em no good!" shouted Bill, as the thunder of the guns smote our ears. "It won't do 'em a bit o' good."

As it turned out, Bill was right. The tremendous discharge failed to arrest the progress of the obscene monster.

It rose like a cloud from the water and flew at the cutter like a flying-fish. Furiously it stretched forth its enormous arms, and embraced the cutter. It wrenched the little vessel from the trough of the wave in which it wallowed and lifted it violently into the air.

Its great golden sides shone like the morning star, but red blood trickled from a gaping hole in its throat. Yet it ignored its wounds. It lifted the small steel ship into the air in its gigantic, weaving arms.

I shall never forget that moment. I have but to shut my eyes and it is before me now. I see again that Brobdingnagian horror from measureless abysses, that twisting, fantastic monstrosity from sinister depths of blackest midnight. And in its colossal arms and legs I see a tiny ship from whose deck a hundred little men fall shrieking and screaming into the black maelstrom beneath its churning maws.

Yards and yards it towered, and its glittering bulk hid the sun. It towered to the zenith and its weaving arms twisted the cutter into a shapeless mass of glistening steel.

"We're next!" muttered Bill. "There ain't nothing can save us now. A man ain't got a chance when he runs head-on against a Jormungandar!"

"That ain't no Jormungandar," piped Tom. "It's a human being what's been out all night. But I ain't saying we're not in for it."

My other companions fell upon their knees and little Harry O'Brien turned yellow under the gills. But the thing did not attack us. Instead with a heart-breaking scream that seemed outrageously human it sank beneath the waves, carrying with it the flattened, absurd remains of the valiant little cutter and the crushed and battered bodies of innumerable men. And as it sank loathsomely from sight the water about it flattened out into a tremorless plateau and turned the color of blood.

Bill was at the oars now, shouting and cursing to encourage the rest of us. "Pull, boys," he commanded. "Let's try to make the south shore before that there fish comes up for breath. There ain't one of us here what wants to live for the rest of his life on the bottom of the sea. There ain't one of us here what ud care to have it out with a Jormungandar."

In a moment we had swung the boat about and were making for the shore.



Men on the other ships were crying and waving to us, but we didn't stop to hand in any reports. We weren't thinking of anything but a huge monstrosity that we would see towering and towering into the sky as long as our brains hung together in our foolish little heads.

#### 8. *News Item in the Long Island Gazette*

The body of a young man, about 25 years old, was found this morning on a deserted beach near Northport. The body was horribly emaciated and the coroner, Mr. E. Thomas Bogart, discovered three small wounds on the young man's thigh. The edges of the wounds were stained as though from gunpowder. The body scarcely weighed one hundred pounds. It is thought that the youth was the victim of foul play and inquiries are being made in the vicinity.

#### 9. *The Box of Horror*

[Statement of Harry Olson]

I hadn't had a thing to eat for three days, and I was driven to the cans. Sometimes you find something valuable in the cans and sometimes you don't; but anyhow, I was working 'em systematically. I had gone up the street and down the street, and hadn't found a thing for my pains except an old pair of suspenders and a tin of salmon. But when I came to the last house I stopped and stared. Then I stretched out a lean arm and picked up the box. It was a funny-looking box, with queer glass sides and little peek-holes in the side of it, and a metal compartment about three inches square in back of it, and a slide underneath large enough to hold a man's hand.

I looked up at the windows of the house, but there wasn't anyone watching me, and so I slipped the box under my coat and made off down the street. "It's something expensive, you can bet your life on that," I thought. "Probably some old doctor's croaked and his widow threw the thing away without consulting anyone. This is a real scientific affair, this is, and I ought to get a week's board out of it."

I wanted to examine the thing better and so I made for a vacant lot where I wouldn't be interrupted. Once there I sat myself down behind a signboard and took the contraption from under my coat and looked at it.

Well, sir, it interested me. There was a little lever on top of it you pressed and the slide fell down and something clicked in the metal box in back of it, and the thing lighted up.

I realized at once that something was meant to go on the slide. I didn't



know just what, but my curiosity was aroused. "That light isn't there for nothing," I thought. "This box means business."

I began to wonder what would happen if something alive were put on the slide. There was a clump of bushes near where I was sitting and I got up and made for it. It took me some time to get what I was after; but when I caught it I held it firmly between my thumb and forefinger so it couldn't escape, and then I talked to it. "Grasshopper," I said. "I haven't any grudge against you personally, but the scientific mind is no respecter of persons."

The infernal varmint wriggled and wriggled and covered my thumb with molasses, but I didn't let up on him. I held him firmly and pushed him onto the slide. Then I turned on the lever and peeped through the holes.

The poor devil squirmed and fluttered for several minutes and then he began to dissolve. He got flabbier and flabbier and soon I could see right through him. When he was nothing but ooze he began to wriggle. I dumped him on the ground and he scurried away faster than a centipede.

"I'm deluding myself," I thought. "I'm seeing things that never happened."

Then I did a very foolish thing. I thrust my hand into the box and turned on the lever. For several moments nothing happened and then my hand began to get cold. I peeped through the holes and what I saw made me scream and scream and draw my hand out and go running about the lot like a madman. My hand was a mass of writhing, twisting snakes! Leastwise, they looked like snakes at first, but later I saw that they were soft and yellow and rubbery and much worse than snakes.

But even then I didn't altogether lose my head. Leastwise, I didn't lose it for long. "This is a sheer hallucination," I said to myself, "and I'm going to argue myself out of it."

I sat down on a big boulder and held my hand up and looked at it. It had a thousand fingers and they dripped, but I made myself look at 'em. I did some tall arguing. "Snap out of it," I said. "You're imagining things!" I thought the fingers began to shorten and stiffen a little. "You're imagining all this," I continued. "It's the sheerest bunk. That box isn't anything out of the ordinary!"

Well sir, you may not believe it, but I argued myself back into sanity. I argued my hand back to normal. The wriggling, twisting things got shorter and fatter and joined together and before very long I had a hand with fingers.

Then I stood up and shouted. Luckily no one heard me, and there wasn't anyone to watch me dancing about on my toes either. When I got out of breath I picked the infernal box up and walked away with it. I made directly for the river. "You've had your day," I said. "You won't turn any more poor critters into jelly-fish!"



Well sir, I threw the vile thing into the river, but first I smashed it against the planks on the wharf until it looked like nothing on earth under the stars. "And that's the end of you!" I shouted as it sank. I ought to have got a medal for that, but I ain't complaining. It isn't every man has the pleasure of calling himself a disinterested benefactor of humanity.



## Zero Hour

by Ray Bradbury

*Unquestionably Ray Bradbury is on his way to becoming one of this nation's leading short story writers. His continuing success in winning recognition among collections of the best stories bears out the promise his initial pulp magazine triumphs held forth. Bradbury has stated that he never writes down for one market or up for another, but always turns out the best he can and thinks of a market afterwards. This is borne out by "Zero Hour" which, though straight science-fiction, compares very favorably with his best "slick" appearances.*



H, IT was to be so jolly! What a game! Such excitement they hadn't known in years. The children catapulted this way and that across the green lawns, shouting at each other, holding hands, flying in circles, climbing trees, laughing . . . Overhead, the rockets flew and beetle-cars whispered by on the streets, but the children played on. Such fun, such tremulous joy, such tumbling and hearty screaming.

Mink ran into the house, all dirt and sweat. For her seven years she was loud and strong and definite. Her mother, Mrs. Morris, hardly saw her as she yanked out drawers and rattled pans and tools into a large sack.

"Heavens, Mink, what's going on?"

"The most exciting game ever!" gasped Mink, pink-faced.

"Stop and get your breath," said the mother.

"No, I'm all right," gasped Mink. "Okay I take these things, Mom?"

"But don't dent them," said Mrs. Morris.

"Thank you, thank you!" cried Mink and boom! she was gone, like a rocket.

Mrs. Morris surveyed the fleeing tot. "What's the name of the game?"

"Invasion!" said Mink. The door slammed.

In every yard on the street children brought out knives and forks and pokers and old stove pipes and can-openers.

It was an interesting fact that this fury and bustle occurred only among the younger children. The older ones, those ten years and more disdained the affair and marched scornfully off on hikes or played a more dignified version of hide-and-seek on their own.



Meanwhile, parents came and went in chromium beetles. Repair men came to repair the vacuum elevators in houses, to fix fluttering television sets or hammer upon stubborn food-delivery tubes. The adult civilization passed and repassed the busy youngsters, jealous of the fierce energy of the wild tots, tolerantly amused at their flourishings, longing to join in themselves.

"This and this and *this*," said Mink, instructing the others with their assorted spoons and wrenches. "Do that, and bring *that* over here. No! *Here*, ninnie! Right. Now, get back while I fix this—" Tongue in teeth, face wrinkled in thought. "Like that. See?"

"Yayyyy!" shouted the kids.

Twelve-year-old Joseph Connors ran up.

"Go away," said Mink straight at him.

"I wanna play," said Joseph.

"Can't!" said Mink.

"Why not?"

"You'd just make fun of us."

"Honest, I wouldn't."

"No. We know *you*. Go away or we'll kick you."

Another twelve-year-old boy whirled by on little motor-skates. "Aye, Joe! Come on! Let them sissies play!"

Joseph showed reluctance and a certain wistfulness. "*I want* to play," he said.

"You're old," said Mink, firmly.

"Not *that* old," said Joe sensibly.

"You'd only laugh and spoil the Invasion."

The boy on the motor-skates made a rude lip noise. "Come on, Joe! Them and their fairies! Nuts!"

Joseph walked off slowly. He kept looking back, all down the block.

Mink was already busy again. She made a kind of apparatus with her gathered equipment. She had appointed another little girl with a pad and pencil to take down notes in painful slow scribbles. Their voices rose and fell in the warm sunlight.

All around them the city hummed. The streets were lined with good green and peaceful trees. Only the wind made a conflict across the city, across the country, across the continent. In a thousand other cities there were trees and children and avenues, business men in their quiet offices taping their voices, or watching televisors. Rockets hovered like darning needles in the blue sky. There was the universal, quiet conceit and easiness of men accustomed to peace, quite certain there would never be trouble again. Arm in arm, men all over earth were a united front. The perfect weapons were held in equal trust by all nations. A situation of incredibly beautiful balance had been brought about. There were no traitors among men, no unhappy ones, no



disgruntled ones; therefore the world was based upon a stable ground. Sunlight illumined half the world and the trees drowsed in a tide of warm air.

Mink's mother, from her upstairs window, gazed down.

The children.

She looked upon them and shook her head. Well, they'd eat well, sleep well, and be in school on Monday. Bless their vigorous little bodies. She listened.

Mink talked earnestly to someone near the rose-bush—though there was no one there.

These odd children. And the little girl, what was her name? Anna? Anna took notes on a pad. First, Mink asked the rose-bush a question, then called the answer to Anna.

"Triangle," said Mink.

"What's a tri," said Anna with difficulty, "angle?"

"Never mind," said Mink.

"How you spell it?" asked Anna.

"T-R-I—" spelled Mink, slowly, then snapped, "Oh, spell it yourself!" She went on to other words. "Beam," she said.

"I haven't got tri," said Anna, "angle down yet!"

"Well, hurry, hurry!" cried Mink.

Mink's mother leaned out the upstairs window. "A-N-G-L-E," she spelled down at Anna.

"Oh, thanks, Mrs. Morris," said Anna.

"Certainly," said Mink's mother and withdrew, laughing, to dust the hall with an electro-duster-magnet.

The voices wavered on the shimmery air. "Beam," said Anna. Fading.

"Four-nine-seven-A-and-B-and-X," said Mink, far away, seriously. "And a fork and a string and a—hex-hex-agony . . . hexagonal!"

At lunch, Mink gulped milk at one toss and was at the door. Her mother slapped the table.

"You sit right back down," commanded Mrs. Morris. "Hot soup in a minute." She poked a red button on the kitchen butler and ten seconds later something landed with a bump in the rubber receiver. Mrs. Morris opened it, took out a can with a pair of aluminum holders, unsealed it with a flick and poured hot soup into a bowl.

During all this, Mink fidgeted. "Hurry, Mom! This is a matter of life and death! Aw—!"

"I was the same way at your age. Always life and death. I know."

Mink banged away at the soup.

"Slow down," said Mom.

"Can't," said Mink. "Drill's waiting for me."

"Who's Drill? What a peculiar name," said Mom.



"You don't know him," said Mink.

"A new boy in the neighborhood?" asked Mom.

"He's new all right," said Mink. She started on her second bowl.

"Which one is Drill?" asked Mom.

"He's around," said Mink, evasively. "You'll make fun. Everybody pokes fun. Gee, darn."

"Is Drill shy?"

"Yes. No. In a way. Gosh, Mom, I got to run if we want to have the Invasion!"

"Who's invading what?"

"Martians invading Earth—well, not exactly Martians. They're—I don't know. From up." She pointed with her spoon.

"And *inside*," said Mom, touching Mink's feverish brow.

Mink rebelled. "You're laughing! You'll kill Drill and *everybody*."

"I didn't mean to," said Mom. "Drill's a Martian?"

"No. He's—well—maybe from Jupiter or Saturn or Venus. Anyway, he's had a hard time."

"I imagine." Mrs. Morris hid her mouth behind her hand.

"They couldn't figure a way to attack Earth."

"We're impregnable," said Mom, in mock-seriousness.

"That's the word Drill used! Impreg—That was the word, Mom."

"My, my. Drill's a brilliant little boy. Two-bit words."

"They couldn't figure a way to attack, Mom. Drill says—he says in order to make a good fight you got to have a new way of surprising people. That way you win. And he says also you got to have help from your enemy."

"A fifth column," said Mom.

"Yeah. That's what Drill said. And they couldn't figure a way to surprise Earth or get help."

"No wonder. We're pretty darn strong," laughed Mom, cleaning up. Mink sat there, staring at the table, seeing what she was talking about.

"Until, one day," whispered Mink, melodramatically, "they thought of children!"

"Well!" said Mrs. Morris brightly.

"And they thought of how grown-ups are so busy they never look under rose-bushes or on lawns!"

"Only for snails and fungus."

"And then there's something about dim-dims."

"Dim-dims?"

"Dimens-shuns."

"Dimensions?"

"Four of 'em! And there's something about kids under-nine and imagination. It's real funny to hear Drill talk."

Mrs. Morris was tired. "Well, it must be funny. You're keeping Drill wait-



ing now. It's getting late in the day and, if you want to have your Invasion before your supper bath, you'd better jump."

"Do I have to take a bath?" growled Mink.

"You do. Why is it children hate water? No matter what age you live in children hate water behind the ears!"

"Drill says I won't have to take baths," said Mink.

"Oh, he does, does he?"

"He told all the kids that. No more baths. And we can stay up till ten o'clock and go to two televisior shows on Saturday 'stead of one!"

"Well, Mr. Drill better mind his p's and q's. I'll call up his mother and—"

Mink went to the door. "We're having trouble with guys like Pete Britz and Dale Jerriek. They're growing up. They make fun. They're worse than parents. They just won't believe in Drill. They're so snooty, cause they're growing up. You'd think they'd know better. They were little only a coupla years ago. I hate them worst. We'll kill them *first*."

"Your father and I, last?"

"Drill says you're dangerous. Know why? 'Cause you don't believe in Martians! They're going to let *us* run the world. Well, not just us, but the kids over in the next block, too. I might be queen." She opened the door. "Mom?"

"Yes?"

"What's—lodge . . . ick?"

"Logic? Why, dear, logic is knowing what things are true and not true."

"He *mentioned* that," said Mink. "And what's im—pres—sion—able?" It took her a minute to say it.

"Why, it means—" Her mother looked at the floor, laughing gently. "It means—to be a child, dear."

"Thanks for lunch!" Mink ran out, then stuck her head back in. "Mom, I'll be sure you won't be hurt, much, really!"

"Well, thanks," said Mom.

*Slam* went the door.

At four o'clock the audio-visor buzzed. Mrs. Morris flipped the tab. "Hello, Helen!" she said, in welcome.

"Hello, Mary. How are things in New York?"

"Fine, how are things in Scranton? You look tired."

"So do you. The children. Underfoot," said Helen.

Mrs. Morris sighed, "My Mink, too. The super Invasion."

Helen laughed. "Are your kids playing that game, too?"

"Lord, yes. Tomorrow it'll be geometrical jacks and motorized hopscotch. Were we this bad when we were kids in '48?"

"Worse. Japs and Nazis. Don't know how my parents put up with me. Tomboy."

"Parents learn to shut their ears."



A silence.

"What's wrong, Mary?" asked Helen.

Mrs. Morris' eyes were half-closed; her tongue slid slowly, thoughtfully over her lower lip. "Eh," she jerked. "Oh, nothing. Just thought about *that*. Shutting ears and such. Never mind. Where were we?"

"My boy Tim's got a crush on some guy named—*Drill*, I think it was."

"Must be a new password. Mink likes him, too."

"Didn't know it got as far as New York. Word of mouth, I imagine. Looks like a scrap drive. I talked to Josephine and she said her kids—that's in Boston—are wild on this new game. It's sweeping the country."

At this moment, Mink trotted into the kitchen to gulp a glass of water. Mrs. Morris turned. "How're things going?"

"Almost finished," said Mink.

"Swell," said Mrs. Morris. "What's *that*?"

"A yo-yo," said Mink. "Watch."

She flung the yo-yo down its string. Reaching the end it—  
It vanished.

"See?" said Mink. "Ope!" Dribbling her finger she made the yo-yo reappear and zip up the string.

"Do that again," said her mother.

"Can't. Zero hour's five o'clock! 'Bye."

Mink exited, zipping her yo-yo.

On the audio-visor, Helen laughed. "Tim brought one of those yo-yo's in this morning, but when I got curious he said he wouldn't show it to me, and when I tried to work it, finally, it wouldn't work."

"You're not *impressionable*," said Mrs. Morris.

"What?"

"Never mind. Something I thought of. Can I help you, Helen?"

"I wanted to get that black-and-white cake recipe—"

The hour drowsed by. The day waned. The sun lowered in the peaceful blue sky. Shadows lengthened on the green lawns. The laughter and excitement continued. One little girl ran away, crying.

Mrs. Morris came out the front door.

"Mink, was that Peggy Ann crying?"

Mink was bent over in the yard, near the rose-bush. "Yeah. She's a scare-baby. We won't let her play, now. She's getting too old to play. I guess she grew up all of a sudden."

"Is that why she cried? Nonsense. Give me a civil answer, young lady, or inside you come!"

Mink whirled in consternation, mixed with irritation. "I can't quit now. It's almost time. I'll be good. I'm sorry."

"Did you hit Peggy Ann?"



"No, honest. You ask her. It was something—well, she's just a scaredy-pants."

The ring of children drew in around Mink where she scowled at her work with spoons and a kind of square shaped arrangement of hammers and pipes.

"There and there," murmured Mink.

"What's wrong?" said Mrs. Morris.

"Drill's stuck. Half way. If we could only get him all the way through, it'll be easier. Then all the others could come through after him."

"Can I help?"

"No'm, thanks. I'll fix it."

"All right. I'll call you for your bath in half an hour. I'm tired of watching you."

She went in and sat in the electric-relaxing chair, sipping a little beer from a half-empty glass. The chair massaged her back. Children, children. Children and love and hate, side by side. Sometimes children loved you, hated you, all in half a second. Strange children, did they ever forget or forgive the whippings and the harsh, strict words of command? She wondered. How can you ever forget or forgive those over and above you, those tall and silly dictators?

Time passed. A curious, waiting silence came upon the street, deepening.

Five o'clock. A clock sang softly somewhere in the house, in a quiet, musical voice, "Five o'clock . . . five o'clock. Time's a-wasting. Five o'clock," and purred away into silence.

Zero hour.

Mrs. Morris chuckled in her throat. Zero hour.

A beetle-car hummed into the driveway. Mr. Morris. Mrs. Morris smiled. Mr. Morris got out of the beetle, locked it and called hello to Mink at her work. Mink ignored him. He laughed and stood for a moment watching the children in their business. Then he walked up the front steps.

"Hello, darling."

"Hello, Henry."

She strained forward on the edge of the chair, listening. The children were silent. Too silent.

He emptied his pipe, refilled it. "Swell day. Makes you glad to be alive."

Buzz.

"What's that?" asked Henry.

"I don't know." She got up, suddenly, her eyes widening. She was going to say something. She stopped it. Ridiculous. Her nerves jumped. "Those children haven't anything dangerous out there, have they?" she said.

"Nothing but pipes and hammers. Why?"

"Nothing electrical?"

"Heck, no," said Henry. "I looked."

She walked to the kitchen. The buzzing continued. "Just the same you'd better go tell them to quit. It's after five. Tell them—" Her eyes widened



and narrowed. "Tell them to put off their Invasion until tomorrow." She laughed, nervously.

The buzzing grew louder.

"What are they up to? I'd better go look, all right."

The explosion!

The house shook with dull sound. There were other explosions in other yards on other streets.

Involuntarily, Mrs. Morris screamed. "Up this way!" she cried, senselessly, knowing no sense, no reason. Perhaps she saw something from the corners of her eyes, perhaps she smelled a new odor or heard a new noise. There was no time to argue with Henry to convince him. Let him think her insane. Yes, insane! Shrieking, she ran upstairs. He ran after her to see what she was up to. "In the attic!" she screamed. "That's where it is!" It was only a poor excuse to get him in the attic in time—oh God, in time!

Another explosion outside. The children screamed with delight, as if at a great fireworks display.

"It's not in the attic!" cried Henry. "It's outside!"

"No, no!" Wheezing, gasping, she fumbled at the attic door. "I'll show you. Hurry! I'll show you!"

They tumbled into the attic. She slammed the door, locked it, took the key, threw it into a far, cluttered corner.

She was babbling wild stuff now. It came out of her. All the subconscious suspicion and fear that had gathered secretly all afternoon and fermented like a wine in her. All the little revelations and knowledges and sense that had bothered her all day and which she had logically and carefully and sensibly rejected and censored. Now it exploded in her and shook her to bits.

"There, there," she said, sobbing against the door. "We're safe until tonight. Maybe we can sneak out, maybe we can escape!"

Henry blew up, too, but for another reason. "Are you crazy? Why'd you throw that key away! Damn it, honey!"

"Yes, yes, I'm crazy, if it helps, but stay here with me!"

"I don't know how in hell I *can* get out!"

"Quiet. They'll hear us. Oh, God, they'll find us soon enough—"

Below them, Mink's voice. The husband stopped. There was a great universal humming and sizzling, a screaming and giggling. Downstairs, the audio-televisor buzzed and buzzed insistently, alarmingly, violently. *Is that Helen calling?* thought Mrs. Morris. *And is she calling about what I think she's calling about?*

Footsteps came into the house. Heavy footsteps.

"Who's coming in my house?" demanded Henry, angrily. "Who's tramping around down there?"

Heavy feet. Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty of them. Fifty persons crowding into



the house. The humming. The giggling of the children. "This way!" cried Mink, below.

"Who's downstairs?" roared Henry. "Who's there!"

"Hush, oh, nonononono!" said his wife, weakly, holding him. "Please, be quiet. They might go away."

"Mom?" called Mink, "Dad?" A pause. "Where are you?"

Heavy footsteps, heavy, heavy, *very* HEAVY footsteps came up the stairs. Mink leading them.

"Mom?" A hesitation. "Dad?" A waiting, a silence.

Humming. Footsteps toward the attic. Mink's first.

They trembled together in silence in the attic, Mr. and Mrs. Morris. For some reason the electric humming, the queer cold light suddenly visible under the door crack, the strange odor and the alien sound of eagerness in Mink's voice, finally got through to Henry Morris, too. He stood, shivering, in the dark silence, his wife beside him.

"Mom! Dad!"

Footsteps. A little humming sound. The attic lock melted. The door opened. Mink peered inside, tall blue shadows behind her.

"Peek-ā-boo," said Mink.



# *The Other Wing*

by Algernon Blackwood

One of the almost legendary figures among ghost story writers, Algernon Blackwood is justly famous for his oft-reprinted classics, "The Willows," and "The Wendigo." He makes his first appearance in the Avon Fantasy Reader series with a story not otherwise to be found in available collections. "The Other Wing" is a strange, haunting tale of an imaginative child in a lonesomely huge mansion. We selected it not only because it is not well known, but also as an interesting and welcome contrast to what we will describe as the comparatively more blatant fantasy of our American writers.

## 1



T USED to puzzle him that, after dark, some one *would* look in around the edge of the bedroom door, and withdraw again too rapidly for him to see the face. When the nurse had gone away with the candle this happened: "Good night, Master Tim," she said usually, shading the light with one hand to protect his eyes; "dream of me and I'll dream of you." She went out slowly. The sharp-edged shadow of the door ran across the ceiling like a train. There came a whispered colloquy in the corridor outside, about himself, of course, and—he was alone. He heard her steps going deeper and deeper into the bosom of the old country house; they were audible for a moment on the stone flooring of the hall; and sometimes the dull thump of the baize door into the servants' quarters just reached him, too—then silence. But it was only when the last sound, as well as the last sign of her had vanished, that the face emerged from its hiding-place and flashed in upon him round the corner. As a rule, too, it came just as he was saying, "Now I'll go to sleep. I won't think any longer. Good night, Master Tim, and happy dreams." He loved to say this to himself; it brought a sense of companionship, as though there were two persons speaking.

The room was on the top of the old house, a big, high-ceilinged room, and his bed against the wall had an iron railing round it; he felt very safe and protected in it. The curtains at the other end of the room were drawn. He lay watching the firelight dancing on the heavy folds, and their pattern, showing a spaniel chasing a long-tailed bird towards a bushy tree, interested and amused him. It was repeated over and over again. He counted the num-



ber of dogs, and the number of birds, and the number of trees, but could never make them agree. There was a plan somewhere in that pattern; if only he could discover it, the dogs and birds and trees would "come out right." Hundreds and hundreds of times he had played this game, for the plan in the pattern made it possible to take sides, and the bird and dog were against him. They always won, however; Tim usually fell asleep just when the advantage was on his own side. The curtains hung steadily enough most of the time, but it seemed to him once or twice that they stirred—hiding a dog or bird on purpose to prevent his winning. For instance, he had eleven birds and eleven trees, and, fixing them in his mind by saying, "that's eleven birds and eleven trees, but only ten dogs," his eyes darted back to find the eleventh dog, when—the curtain moved and threw all his calculations into confusion again. The eleventh dog was hidden. He did not quite like the movement; it gave him questionable feelings, rather, for the curtain did not move of itself. Yet, usually, he was too intent upon counting the dogs to feel positive alarm.

Opposite to him was the fireplace, full of red and yellow coals; and, lying with his head sideways on the pillow, he could see directly in between the bars. When the coals settled with a soft and powdery crash, he turned his eyes from the curtains to the grate, trying to discover exactly which bits had fallen. So long as the glow was there the sound seemed pleasant enough, but sometimes he awoke later in the night, the room huge with darkness, the fire almost out—and the sound was not so pleasant then. It startled him. The coals did not fall of themselves. It seemed that some one poked them cautiously. The shadows were very thick before the bars. As with the curtains, moreover, the morning aspect of the extinguished fire, the ice-cold cinders that made a clinking sound like tin, caused no emotion whatever in his soul.

And it was usually while he lay waiting for sleep, tired both of the curtain and the coal games, on the point, indeed, of saying, "I'll go to sleep now," that the puzzling thing took place. He would be staring drowsily at the dying fire, perhaps counting the stockings and flannel garments that hung along the high fender-rail when, suddenly, a person looked in with lightning swiftness through the door and vanished again before he could possibly turn his head to see. The appearance and disappearance were accomplished with amazing rapidity always.

It was a head and shoulders that looked in, and the movement combined the speed, the lightness and the silence of a shadow. Only it was not a shadow. A hand held the edge of the door. The face shot round, saw him, and withdrew like lightning. It was utterly beyond him to imagine anything more quick and clever. It darted. He heard no sound. It went. But—it had seen him, looked him all over, examined him, noted what he was doing with that lightning glance. It wanted to know if he were awake still, or asleep. And though it went off, it still watched him from a distance; it waited somewhere; it



knew all about him. *Where* it waited no one could ever guess. It came probably, he felt, from beyond the house, possibly from the roof, but most likely from the garden or the sky. Yet, though strange, it was not terrible. It was a kindly and protective figure, he felt. And when it happened he never called for help, because the occurrence simply took his voice away.

"It comes from the Nightmare Passage," he decided; "but it's *not* a nightmare." It puzzled him.

Sometimes, moreover, it came more than once in a single night. He was pretty sure—not *quite* positive—that it occupied his room as soon as he was properly asleep. It took possession, sitting perhaps before the dying fire, standing upright behind the heavy curtains, or even lying down in the empty bed his brother used when he was home from school. Perhaps it played the curtain game, perhaps it poked the coals; it knew, at any rate, where the eleventh dog had lain concealed. It certainly came in and out; certainly, too, it did not wish to be seen. For, more than once, on waking suddenly in the midnight blackness, Tim knew it was standing close beside his bed and bending over him. He felt, rather than heard, its presence. It glided quietly away. It moved with marvellous softness, yet he was positive it moved. He felt the difference, so to speak. It had been near him, now it was gone. It came back, too—just as he was falling into sleep again. Its midnight coming and going, however, stood out sharply different from its first shy, tentative approach. For in the firelight it came alone; whereas in the black and silent hours, it had with it—others.

And it was then he made up his mind that its swift and quiet movements were due to the fact that it had wings. It flew. And the others that came with it in the darkness were "its little ones." He also made up his mind that all were friendly, comforting, protective, and that while positively *not* a Nightmare, it yet came somehow along the Nightmare Passage before it reached him. "You see, it's like this," he explained to the nurse: "The big one comes to visit me alone, but it only brings its little ones when I'm *quite* asleep."

"Then the quicker you get to sleep the better, isn't it, Master Tim?"

He replied: "Rather! I always do. Only I wonder where they come *from*!" He spoke, however, as though he had an inkling.

But the nurse was so dull about it that he gave her up and tried his father. "Of course," replied this busy but affectionate parent, "it's either nobody at all, or else it's Sleep coming to carry you away to the land of dreams." He made the statement kindly but somewhat briskly, for he was worried just then about the extra taxes on his land, and the effort to fix his mind on Tim's fanciful world was beyond him at the moment. He lifted the boy on to his knee, kissed and patted him as though he were a favourite dog, and planted him on the rug again with a flying sweep. "Run and ask your mother," he added; "she knows all that kind of thing. Then come back and tell me all about it—another time."

Tim found his mother in an arm-chair before the fire of another room; she



was knitting and reading at the same time—a wonderful thing the boy could never understand. She raised her head as he came in, pushed her glasses on to her forehead, and held her arms out. He told her everything, ending up with what his father said.

"You see, it's *not* Jackman, or Thompson, or any one like that," he exclaimed. "It's some one real."

"But nice," she assured him, "some one who comes to take care of you and see that you're all safe and cozy."

"Oh, yes, I know that. But——"

"I think your father's right," she added quickly. "It's Sleep, I'm sure, who pops in round the door like that. Sleep *has* got wings, I've always heard."

"Then the other thing—the little ones?" he asked. "Are they just sorts of dozes, you think?"

Mother did not answer for a moment. She turned down the page of her book, closed it slowly, put it on the table beside her. More slowly still she put her knitting away, arranging the wool and needles with some deliberation.

"Perhaps," she said, drawing the boy closer to her and looking into his big eyes of wonder, "they're dreams!"

Tim felt a thrill run through him as she said it. He stepped back a foot or so and clapped his hands softly. "Dreams!" he whispered with enthusiasm and belief; "of course! I never thought of that."

His mother, having proved her sagacity, then made a mistake. She noted her success, but instead of leaving it there, she elaborated and explained. As Tim expressed it she "went on about it." Therefore he did not listen. He followed his train of thought alone. And presently, he interrupted her long sentences with a conclusion of his own:

"Then I know where She hides," he announced with a touch of awe. "Where She lives, I mean." And without waiting to be asked, he imparted the information: "It's in the Other Wing."

"Ah!" said his mother, taken by surprise. "How clever of you, Tim!"—and hus confirmed it.

Thenceforward this was established in his life—that Sleep and her attendant Dreams hid during the daytime in that unused portion of the great Elizabethan mansion called the Other Wing. This other wing was unoccupied, its corridors untrodden, its windows shuttered and its rooms all closed. At various places green baize doors led into it, but no one ever opened them. For many years this part had been shut up; and for the children, properly speaking, it was out of bounds. They never mentioned it as a possible place, at any rate; in hide-and-seek it was not considered, even; there was a hint of the inaccessible about the Other Wing. Shadows, dust, and silence had it to themselves.

But Tim, having ideas of his own about everything, possessed special information about the Other Wing. He believed it *was* inhabited. Who occupied the immense series of empty rooms, who trod the spacious corridors, who



passed to and fro behind the shuttered windows, he had not known exactly. He had called these occupants "they," and the most important among them was "The Ruler." The Ruler of the Other Wing was a kind of deity, powerful, far away, ever present yet never seen.

And about this Ruler he had a wonderful conception for a little boy; he connected her, somehow, with deep thoughts of his own, the deepest of all. When he made up adventures to the moon, to the stars, or to the bottom of the sea, adventures that he lived inside himself, as it were—to reach them he must invariably pass through the chambers of the Other Wing. Those corridors and halls, the Nightmare Passage among them, lay along the route; they were the first stage of the journey. Once the green baize doors swung to behind him and the long dim passage stretched ahead, he was well on his way into the adventure of the moment; the Nightmare Passage once passed, he was safe from capture; but once the shutters of a window had been flung open, he was free of the gigantic world that lay beyond. For then light poured in and he could see his way.

The conception, for a child, was curious. It established a correspondence between the mysterious chambers of the Other Wing and the occupied, but unguessed chambers of his Inner Being. Through these chambers, through these darkened corridors, along a passage, sometimes dangerous, or at least of questionable repute, he must pass to find all adventures that were *real*. The light—when he pierced far enough to take the shutters down—was discovery. Tim did not actually think, much less say, all this. He was aware of it, however. He felt it. The Other Wing was inside himself as well as through the green baize doors. His inner map of wonder included both of them.

But now, for the first time in his life, he knew who lived there and who the Ruler was. A shutter had fallen of its own accord; light poured in; he made a guess, and Mother had confirmed it. Sleep and her Little Ones, the host of dreams, were the daylight occupants. They stole out when the darkness fell. All adventures in life began and ended by a dream—discoverable by first passing through the Other Wing.

## 2

And, having settled this, his one desire now was to travel over the map upon journeys of exploration and discovery. The map inside himself he knew already, but the map of the Other Wing he had not seen. His mind knew it, he had a clear mental picture of rooms and halls and passages, but his feet had never trod the silent floors where dust and shadows hid the flock of dreams by day. The mighty chambers where Sleep ruled he longed to stand in, to see the Ruler face to face. He made up his mind to get into the Other Wing.

To accomplish this was difficult; but Tim was a determined youngster, and



he meant to try; he meant, also, to succeed. He deliberated. At night he could not possibly manage it; in any case, the Ruler and her host all left it after dark, to fly about the world; the Wing would be empty, and the emptiness would frighten him. Therefore he must make a daylight visit; and it was a daylight visit he decided on. He deliberated more. There were rules and risks involved: it meant going out of bounds, the danger of being seen, the certainty of being questioned by some idle and inquisitive grown-up: "Where in the world have you been all this time"—and so forth. These things he thought out carefully, and though he arrived at no solution, he felt satisfied that it would be all right. That is, he recognized the risks. To be prepared was half the battle, for nothing then could take him by surprise.

The notion that he might slip in from the garden was soon abandoned; the red bricks showed no openings; there was no door; from the courtyard, also, entrance was impracticable; even on tiptoe he could barely reach the broad window-sills of stone. When playing alone, or walking with the French governess, he examined every outside possibility. None offered. The shutters, supposing he could reach them, were thick and solid.

Meanwhile, when opportunity offered, he stood against the outside walls and listened, his ear pressed against the tight red bricks; the towers and gables of the Wing rose overhead; he heard the wind go whispering along the eaves; he imagined tiptoe movements and a sound of wings inside. Sleep and her Little Ones were busily preparing for their journeys after dark; they hid, but they did not sleep; in this unused Wing, vaster alone than any other country house he had ever seen, Sleep taught and trained her flock of feathered Dreams. It was very wonderful. They probably supplied the entire county. But more wonderful still was the thought that the Ruler herself should take the trouble to come to his particular room and personally watch over him all night long. That was amazing. And it flashed across his imaginative, inquiring mind: "Perhaps they take me with them! The moment I'm asleep! That's why she comes to see me!"

Yet his chief preoccupation was, how Sleep got out. Through the green baize doors, of course! By a process of elimination he arrived at a conclusion: he, too, must enter through a green baize door and risk detection.

Of late, the lightning visits had ceased. The silent, darting figure had not peeped in and vanished as it used to do. He fell asleep too quickly now, almost before Jackman reached the hall, and long before the fire began to die. Also, the dogs and birds upon the curtains always matched the trees exactly, and he won the curtain game quite easily; there was never a dog or bird too many; the curtain never stirred. It had been thus ever since his talk with Mother and Father. And so he came to make a second discovery: His parents did not really believe in his Figure. She kept away on that account. They doubted her; she hid. Here was still another incentive to go and find her out. He ached for her, she was so kind, she gave herself so much trouble—just for



his little self in the big and lonely bedroom. Yet his parents spoke of her as though she were of no account. He longed to see her, face to face, and tell her that *he* believed in her and loved her. For he was positive she would like to hear it. She cared. Though he had fallen asleep of late too quickly for him to see her flash in at the door, he had known nicer dreams than ever in his life before—travelling dreams. And it was she who sent them. More—he was sure she took him out with her.

One evening, in the dusk of a March day, his opportunity came; and only just in time, for his brother Jack was expected home from school on the morrow, and with Jack in the other bed, no Figure would ever care to show itself. Also it was Easter, and after Easter, though Tim was not aware of it at the time, he was to say good-bye finally to governesses and become a day-boarder at a preparatory school for Wellington. The opportunity offered itself so naturally, moreover, that Tim took it without hesitation. It never occurred to him to question, much less to refuse it. The thing was obviously meant to be. For he found himself unexpectedly in front of a green baize door; and the green baize door was—swinging! Somebody, therefore, had just passed through it.

It had come about in this wise. Father, away in Scotland, at Inglemuir, the shooting place, was expected back next morning; Mother had driven over to the church upon some Easter business or other; and the governess had been allowed her holiday at home in France. Tim, therefore, had the run of the house, and in the hour between tea and bed-time he made good use of it. Fully able to defy such second-rate obstacles as nurses and butlers, he explored all manner of forbidden places with ardent thoroughness, arriving finally in the sacred precincts of his father's study. This wonderful room was the very heart and centre of the whole big house; he had been birched here long ago; here, too, his father had told him with a grave yet smiling face: "You've got a new companion, Tim, a little sister; you must be very kind to her." Also, it was the place where all the money was kept. What he called "father's jolly smell" was strong in it—papers, tobacco, books, flavoured by hunting crops and gunpowder.

At first he felt awed, standing motionless just inside the door; but presently, recovering equilibrium, he moved cautiously on tiptoe towards the gigantic desk where important papers were piled in untidy patches. These he did not touch; but beside them his quick eye noted the jagged piece of iron shell his father brought home from his Crimean campaign and now used as a letter-weight. It was difficult to lift, however. He climbed into the comfortable chair and swung round and round. It was a swivel-chair, and he sank down among the cushions in it, staring at the strange things on the great desk before him, as if fascinated. Next he turned away and saw the stick-rack in the corner—this, he knew, he was allowed to touch. He had played with these sticks before. There were twenty, perhaps, all told, with curious carved handles, brought



from every corner of the world; many of them cut by his father's own hand in queer and distant places. And, among them, Tim fixed his eye upon a cane with an ivory handle, a slender, polished cane that he had always coveted tremendously. It was the kind he meant to use when he was a man. It bent, it quivered, and when he swished it through the air it trembled like a riding-whip, and made a whistling noise. Yet it was very strong in spite of its elastic qualities. A family treasure, it was also an old-fashioned relic; it had been his grandfather's walking stick. Something of another century clung visibly about it still. It had dignity and grace and leisure in its very aspect. And it suddenly occurred to him: "How grandpapa must miss it! Wouldn't he just love to have it back again!"

How it happened exactly, Tim did not know, but a few minutes later he found himself walking about the deserted halls and passages of the house with the air of an elderly gentleman of a hundred years ago, proud as a courtier, flourishing the stick like an Eighteenth Century dandy in the Mall. That the cane reached to his shoulder made no difference; he held it accordingly, swaggering on his way. He was off upon an adventure. He dived down through the byways of the Other Wing, inside himself, as though the stick transported him to the days of the old gentleman who had used it in another century.

It may seem strange to those who dwell in smaller houses, but in this rambling Elizabethan mansion there were whole sections that, even to Tim, were strange and unfamiliar. In his mind the map of the Other Wing was clearer by far than the geography of the part he travelled daily. He came to passages and dim-lit halls, long corridors of stone beyond the Picture Gallery; narrow, wainscoted connecting-channels with four steps down and a little later two steps up; deserted chambers with arches guarding them—all hung with the soft March twilight and all bewilderingly unrecognised. With a sense of adventure born of naughtiness he went carelessly along, farther and farther into the heart of this unfamiliar country, swinging the cane, one thumb stuck into the arm-pit of his blue serge suit, whistling softly to himself, excited yet keenly on the alert—and suddenly found himself opposite a door that checked all further advance. It was a green baize door. And it was swinging.

He stopped abruptly, facing it. He stared, he gripped his cane more tightly, he held his breath. "The Other Wing!" he gasped in a swallowed whisper. It was an entrance, but an entrance he had never seen before. He thought he knew every door by heart; but this one was new. He stood motionless for several minutes, watching it; the door had two halves, but one half only was swinging, each swing shorter than the one before; he heard the little puffs of air it made; it settled finally, the last movements very short and rapid; it stopped. And the boy's heart, after similar rapid strokes, stopped also—for a moment.

"Some one's just gone through," he gulped. And even as he said it he knew who the some one was. The conviction just dropped into him. "It's Grand-



father; he knows I've got his stick. He wants it!" On the heels of this flashed instantly another amazing certainty. "He sleeps in there. He's having dreams. That's what being dead means."

His first impulse, then, took the form of, "I must let Father know; it'll make him burst for joy"; but his second was for himself—to finish his adventure. And it was this, naturally enough, that gained the day. He could tell his father later. His first duty was plainly to go through the door into the Other Wing. He must give the stick back to its owner. He must *hand* it back.

The test of will and character came now. Tim had imagination, and so knew the meaning of fear; but there was nothing craven in him. He could howl and scream and stamp like any other person of his age when the occasion called for such behaviour, but such occasions were due to temper roused by a thwarted will, and the histrionics were half "pretended" to produce a calculated effect. There was no one to thwart his will at present. He also knew how to be afraid of Nothing, to be afraid without ostensible cause, that is—which was merely "nerves." He could have "the shudders" with the best of them.

But, when a real thing faced him, Tim's character emerged to meet it. He would clench his hands, brace his muscles, set his teeth—and wish to heaven he was bigger. But he would not flinch. Being imaginative, he lived the worst a dozen times before it happened, yet in the final crash he stood up like a man. He had that highest pluck—the courage of a sensitive temperament. And at this particular juncture, somewhat ticklish for a boy of eight or nine, it did not fail him. He lifted the cane and pushed the swinging door wide open. Then he walked through it—into the Other Wing.

## 3

The green baize door swung to behind him; he was even sufficiently master of himself to turn and close it with a steady hand, because he did not care to hear the series of muffled thuds its lessening swings would cause. But he realised clearly his position, knew he was doing a tremendous thing.

Holding the cane between fingers very tightly clenched, he advanced bravely along the corridor that stretched before him. And all fear left him from that moment, replaced, it seemed, by a mild and exquisite surprise. His footsteps made no sound, he walked on air; instead of darkness, or the twilight he expected, a diffused and gentle light that seemed like the silver on the lawn when a half-moon sails a cloudless sky, lay everywhere. He knew his way, moreover, knew exactly where he was and whither he was going. The corridor was as familiar to him as the floor of his own bedroom; he recognised the shape and length of it; it agreed exactly with the map he had constructed



long ago. Though he had never, to the best of his knowledge, entered it before, he knew with intimacy its every detail.

And thus the surprise he felt was mild and far from disconcerting. "I'm here again!" was the kind of thought he had. It was *how* he got here that caused the faint surprise, apparently. He no longer swaggered, however, but walked carefully, and half on tiptoe, holding the ivory handle of the cane with a kind of affectionate respect. And as he advanced, the light closed softly up behind him, obliterating the way by which he had come. But this he did not know, because he did not look behind him. He only looked in front, where the corridor stretched its silvery length towards the great chamber where he knew the cane must be surrendered. The person who had preceded him down this ancient corridor, passing through the green baize door just before he reached it, this person, his father's father, now stood in that great chamber, waiting to receive his own. Tim knew it as surely as he knew he breathed. At the far end he even made out the larger patch of silvery light which marked its gaping doorway.

There was another thing he knew as well—that this corridor he moved along between rooms with fast-closed doors, was the Nightmare Corridor; often and often he had traversed it; each room was occupied. "This is the Nightmare Passage," he whispered to himself, "but I know the Ruler—it doesn't matter. None of them can get out or do anything." He heard them, none the less, inside, as he passed by; he heard them scratching to get out. The feeling of security made him reckless; he took unnecessary risks; he brushed the panels as he passed. And the love of keen sensation for its own sake, the desire to feel "an awful thrill," tempted him once so sharply that he raised his stick and poked a fast-shut door with it!

He was not prepared for the result, but he gained the sensation and the thrill. For the door opened with instant swiftness half an inch, a hand emerged, caught the stick and tried to draw it in. Tim sprang back as if he had been struck. He pulled at the ivory handle with all his strength, but his strength was less than nothing. He tried to shout, but his voice was gone. A terror of the moon came over him, for he was unable to loosen his hold of the handle; his fingers had become a part of it. An appalling weakness turned him helpless. He was dragged inch by inch towards the fearful door. The end of the stick was already through the narrow crack. He could not see the hand that pulled, but he knew it was terrific. He understood now why the world was strange, why horses galloped furiously, and why trains whistled as they raced through stations. All the comedy and terror of nightmare gripped his heart with pincers made of ice. The disproportion was abominable. The final collapse rushed over him when, without a sign of warning, the door slammed silently, and between the jamb and the wall the cane was crushed as flat as if it were a bulrush. So irresistible was the force behind the door that the solid stick just went flat as a stalk of a bulrush.



He looked at it. It *was* a bulrush.

He did not laugh; the absurdity was so distressingly unnatural. The horror of finding a bulrush where he had expected a polished cane—this hideous and appalling detail held the nameless horror of the nightmare. It betrayed him utterly. Why had he not always known really that the stick was not a stick, but a thin and hollow reed . . . ?

Then the cane was safely in his hand, unbroken. He stood looking at it. The Nightmare was in full swing. He heard another door opening behind his back, a door he had not touched. There was just time to see a hand thrusting and waving dreadfully, familiarly, at him through the narrow crack—just time to realise that this was another Nightmare acting in atrocious concert with the first, when he saw closely beside him, towering to the ceiling, the protective, kindly Figure that visited his bedroom. In the turning movement he made to meet the attack, he became aware of her. And his terror passed. It was a nightmare terror merely. The infinite horror vanished. Only the comedy remained. He smiled.

He saw her dimly only, she was so vast, but he saw her, the Ruler of the Other Wing at last, and knew that he was safe again. He gazed with a tremendous love and wonder, trying to see her clearly; but the face was hidden far aloft and seemed to melt into the sky beyond the roof. He discerned that she was larger than the Night, only far, far softer, with wings that folded above him more tenderly even than his mother's arms; that there were points of light like stars among the feathers, and that she was vast enough to cover millions and millions of people all at once. Moreover, she did not fade or go, so far as he could see, but spread herself in such a way that he lost sight of her. She spread over the entire Wing . . .

And Tim remembered that this was all quite natural really. He had often and often been down this corridor before; the Nightmare Corridor was no new experience; it had to be faced as usual. Once knowing what hid inside the rooms, he was bound to tempt them out. They drew, enticed, attracted him; this was their power. It was their special strength that they could suck him helplessly towards them, and that he was obliged to go. He understood exactly why he was tempted to tap with the cane upon their awful doors, but, having done so, he had accepted the challenge and could now continue his journey quietly and safely. The Ruler of the Other Wing had taken him in charge.

A delicious sense of carelessness came on him. There was softness as of water in the solid things about him, nothing that could hurt or bruise. Holding the cane firmly by its ivory handle, he went forward along the corridor, walking as on air.

The end was quickly reached: He stood upon the threshold of the mighty chamber where he knew the owner of the cane was waiting; the long corridor lay behind him, in front he saw the spacious dimensions of a lofty hall



that gave him the feeling of being in the Crystal Palace, Euston Station, or St. Paul's. High, narrow windows, cut deeply into the wall, stood in a row upon the other side; an enormous open fireplace of burning logs was on his right; thick tapestries hung from the ceiling to the floor of stone; and in the centre of the chamber was a massive table of dark, shining wood, great chairs with carved stiff backs set here and there beside it. And in the biggest of these throne-like chairs there sat a figure looking at him gravely—the figure of an old, old man.

Yet there was no surprise in the boy's fast-beating heart; there was a thrill of pleasure and excitement only, a feeling of satisfaction. He had known quite well the figure would be there, known also it would look like this exactly. He stepped forward on to the floor of stone without a trace of fear or trembling, holding the precious cane in two hands now before him, as though to present it to its owner. He felt proud and pleased. He had run risks for this.

And the figure rose quietly to meet him, advancing in a stately manner over the hard stone floor. The eyes looked gravely, sweetly down at him, the aquiline nose stood out. Tim knew him perfectly: the knee-breeches of shining satin, the gleaming buckles on the shoes, the neat dark stockings, the lace and ruffles about neck and wrists, the coloured waistcoat opening so widely—all the details of the picture over father's mantelpiece, where, it hung between two Crimean bayonets, were reproduced in life before his eyes at last. Only the polished cane with the ivory handle was not there.

Tim went three steps nearer to the advancing figure and held out both his hands with the cane laid crosswise on them.

"I've brought it, Grandfather," he said, in a faint but clear and steady tone; "here it is."

And the other stooped a little, put out three fingers half concealed by falling lace, and took it by the ivory handle. He made a courtly bow to Tim. He smiled, but though there was pleasure, it was a grave, sad smile. He spoke then: the voice was slow and very deep. There was a delicate softness in it, the suave politeness of an older day.

"Thank you," he said; "I value it. It was given to me by my grandfather. I forgot it when I——" His voice grew indistinct a little.

"Yes?" said Tim.

"When I—left," the old gentleman repeated.

"Oh," said Tim, thinking how beautiful and kind the gracious figure was.

The old man ran his slender fingers carefully along the cane, feeling the polished surface with satisfaction. He lingered specially over the smoothness of the ivory handle. He was evidently very pleased.

"I was not quite myself—er—at the moment," he went on gently; "my memory failed me somewhat." He sighed, as though an immense relief was in him.

"I forget things, too—sometimes," Tim mentioned sympathetically. He



simply loved his grandfather. He hoped—for a moment—he would be lifted up and kissed. "I'm *awfully* glad I brought it," he faltered—"that you've got it again."

The other turned his kind grey eyes upon him; the smile on his face was full of gratitude as he looked down.

"Thank you, my boy. I am truly and deeply indebted to you. You courted danger for my sake. Others have tried before, but the Nightmare Passage—er——" He broke off. He tapped the stick firmly on the stone flooring, as though to test it. Bending a trifle, he put his weight upon it. "Ah!" he exclaimed with a short sigh of relief, "I can now——"

His voice again grew indistinct; Tim did not catch the words.

"Yes?" he asked again, aware for the first time that a touch of awe was in his heart.

"—get about again," the other continued very low. "Without my cane," he added, the voice failing with each word the old lips uttered, "I could not . . . possibly . . . allow myself . . . to be seen. It was indeed . . . deplorable . . . unpardonable of me . . . to forget in such a way. Zounds, sir . . . ! I—I . . ."

His voice sank away suddenly into a sound of wind. He straightened up, tapping the iron ferrule of his cane on the stones in a series of loud knocks. Tim felt a strange sensation creep into his legs. The queer words frightened him a little.

The old man took a step towards him. He still smiled, but there was a new meaning in the smile. A sudden earnestness had replaced the courtly, leisurely manner. The next words seemed to blow down upon the boy from above, as though a cold wind brought them from the sky outside.

Yet the words, he knew, were kindly meant, and very sensible. It was only the abrupt change that startled him. Grandfather, after all, was but a man! The distant sound recalled something in him to that outside world from which the cold wind blew.

"My eternal thanks to you," he heard, while the voice and face and figure seemed to withdraw deeper and deeper into the heart of the mighty chamber. "I shall not forget your kindness and your courage. It is a debt I can, fortunately, one day repay. . . . But now you had best return and with dispatch. For your head and arm lie heavily on the table, the documents are scattered, there is a cushion fallen . . . and my son is in the house. . . . Farewell! You had best leave me quickly. See! *She* stands behind you, waiting. Go with her! Go now . . . !"

The entire scene had vanished even before the final words were uttered. Tim felt empty space about him. A vast, shadowy Figure bore him through it as with mighty wings. He flew, he rushed, he remembered nothing more—until he heard another voice and felt a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Tim, you rascal! What are you doing in my study? And in the dark, like this!"



He looked up into his father's face without a word. He felt dazed. The next minute his father had caught him up and kissed him.

"Ragamuffin! How did you guess I was coming back to-night?" He shook him playfully and kissed his tumbling hair. "And you've been asleep, too, into the bargain. Well—how's everything at home—eh? Jack's coming back from school to-morrow, you know, and . . ."

## 4

Jack came home, indeed, the following day, and when the Easter holidays were over, the governess stayed abroad and Tim went off to adventures of another kind in the preparatory school for Wellington. Life slipped rapidly along with him; he grew into a man; his mother and his father died; Jack followed them within a little space; Tim inherited, married, settled down into his great possessions—and opened up the Other Wing. The dreams of imaginative boyhood all had faded; perhaps he had merely put them away, or perhaps he had forgotten them. At any rate, he never spoke of such things now, and when his Irish wife mentioned her belief that the old country house possessed a family ghost, even declaring that she had met an Eighteenth Century figure of a man in the corridors, "an old, old man who bends down upon a stick"—Tim only laughed and said:

"That's as it ought to be! And if these awful land-taxes force us to sell some day, a respectable ghost will increase the market value."

But one night he woke and heard a tapping on the floor. He sat up in bed and listened. There was a chilly feeling down his back. Belief had long since gone out of him; he felt uncannily afraid. The sound came nearer and nearer; there were light footsteps with it. The door opened—it opened a little wider, that is, for it already stood ajar—and there upon the threshold stood a figure that it seemed he knew. He saw the face as with all the vivid sharpness of reality. There was a smile upon it, but a smile of warning and alarm. The arm was raised. Tim saw the slender hand, lace falling down upon the long, thin fingers, and in them, tightly gripped, a polished cane. Shaking the cane twice to and fro in the air, the face thrust forward, spoke certain words, and—vanished. But the words were inaudible; for, though the lips distinctly moved, no sound, apparently, came from them.

And Tim sprang out of bed. The room was full of darkness. He turned the light on. The door, he saw, was shut as usual. He had, of course, been dreaming. But he noticed a curious odour in the air. He sniffed it once or twice—then grasped the truth. It was a smell of burning!

Fortunately, he awoke just in time: . . .

He was acclaimed a hero for his promptitude. After many days, when the damage was repaired, and nerves had settled down once more into the calm



routine of country life, he told the story to his wife—the entire story. He told the adventure of his imaginative boyhood with it. She asked to see the old family cane. And it was this request of hers that brought back to memory a detail Tim had entirely forgotten all these years. He remembered it suddenly again—the loss of the cane, the hubbub his father kicked up about it, the endless, futile search. For the stick had never been found, and Tim, who was questioned very closely concerning it, swore with all his might that he had not the smallest notion where it was. Which was, of course, the truth.



# The Temple

by H. P. Lovecraft

*The influence of the First World War was strong on H. P. Lovecraft, for in his youth he was an ardent Anglophile and remained almost fanatically so long after the end of that conflict. Thus the portrayal of the "Prussian beast" created by propagandists was accepted by him at face value and utilized in this story of a U-boat that ran afoul of an unearthly foe. Notwithstanding the fact of Nazi horror during the Second World War, we must perforce admit the artificial nature of Lovecraft's protagonist's boasting—yet even so the author's mastery of suspenseful terror carries "The Temple" along to a real climax of ocean-bottom shock.*

*Manuscript found on the coast of Yucatan*

ON AUGUST 20, 1917, I, Karl Heinrich, Graf von Altberg-Ehrenstein, Lieutenant-Commander in the Imperial German Navy and in charge of the submarine U-29, deposit this bottle and record in the Atlantic Ocean at a point to me unknown but probably about N. Latitude 20 degrees, W. Longitude 35 degrees, where my ship lies disabled on the ocean floor. I do so because of my desire to set certain unusual facts before the public; a thing I shall not in all probability survive to accomplish in person, since the circumstances surrounding me are as menacing as they are extraordinary, and involve not only the hopeless crippling of the U-29, but the impairment of my iron German will in a manner most disastrous.

On the afternoon of June 18, as reported by wireless to the U-61, bound for Kiel, we torpedoed the British freighter *Victory*, New York to Liverpool, in N. Latitude 45 degrees 16 minutes, W. Longitude 28 degrees 34 minutes; permitting the crew to leave in boats in order to obtain a good cinema view for the admiralty records. The ship sank quite picturesquely, bow first, the stern rising high out of the water whilst the hull shot down perpendicularly to the bottom of the sea. Our camera missed nothing, and I regret that so fine a reel of film should never reach Berlin. After that we sank the lifeboats with our guns and submerged.

When we rose to the surface about sunset a seaman's body was found on the deck, hands gripping the railing in curious fashion. The poor fellow



was young, rather dark, and very handsome; probably an Italian or Greek, and undoubtedly of the *Victory's* crew. He had evidently sought refuge on the very ship which had been forced to destroy his own—one more victim of the unjust war of aggression which the English pig-dogs are waging upon the Fatherland. Our men searched him for souvenirs, and found in his coat pocket a very odd bit of ivory carved to represent a youth's head crowned with laurel. My fellow officer, Lieutenant Klenze, believed that the thing was of great age and artistic value, so took it from the men for himself. How it had ever come into the possession of a common sailor neither he nor I could imagine.

As the dead man was thrown overboard there occurred two incidents which created much disturbance amongst the crew. The fellow's eyes had been closed; but in the dragging of his body to the rail they were jarred open, and many seemed to entertain a queer delusion that they gazed steadily and mockingly at Schmidt and Zimmer, who were bent over the corpse. Then Boatswain Müller, an elderly man who would have known better had he not been a superstitious Alsatian swine, became so excited by this impression that he watched the body in the water, and swore that after it sank a little it drew its limbs into a swimming position and sped away to the south under the waves. Klenze and I did not like these displays of peasant ignorance, and severely reprimanded the men, particularly Müller.

The next day a very troublesome situation was created by the indisposition of some of the crew. They were evidently suffering from the nervous strain of our long voyage, and had had bad dreams. Several seemed quite dazed and stupid; and after satisfying myself that they were not feigning their weakness, I excused them from their duties. The sea was rather rough, so we descended to a depth where the waves were less troublesome. Here we were comparatively calm, despite a somewhat puzzling southward current which we could not identify from our oceanographic charts. The moans of the sick men were decidedly annoying; but since they did not appear to demoralize the rest of the crew, we did not resort to extreme measures. It was our plan to remain where we were and intercept the liner *Dacia*, mentioned in information from agents in New York.

In the early evening we rose to the surface, and found the sea less heavy. The smoke of a battleship was on the northern horizon, but our distance and ability to submerge made us safe. What worried us more was the talk of Boatswain Müller, which grew wilder as night came on. He was in a detestably childish state, and babbled of some illusion of dead bodies drifting past the undersea portholes; bodies which looked at him intently, and which he recognized in spite of bloating as having seen dying during some of our victorious German exploits. And he said that the young man we had found and tossed overboard was their leader. This was very gruesome and abnormal, so we confined Müller in irons and had him soundly whipped. The men



were not pleased at his punishment, but discipline was necessary. We also denied the request of a delegation headed by Seaman Zimmer, that the curious carved ivory head be cast into the sea.

On June 20, Seamen Bohm and Schmidt, who had been ill the day before, became violently insane. I regretted that no physician was included in our complement of officers, since German lives are precious; but the constant ravings of the two concerning a terrible curse were most subversive of discipline, so drastic steps were taken. The crew accepted the event in a sullen fashion, but it seemed to quiet Müller, who thereafter gave us no trouble. In the evening we released him, and he went about his duties silently.

In the week that followed we were all very nervous, watching for the *Dacia*. The tension was aggravated by the disappearance of Müller and Zimmer, who undoubtedly committed suicide as a result of the fears which had seemed to harass them, though they were not observed in the act of jumping overboard. I was rather glad to be rid of Müller, for even his silence had unfavorably affected the crew. Everyone seemed inclined to be silent now, as though holding a secret fear. Many were ill, but none made a disturbance. Lieutenant Klenze chafed under the strain, and was annoyed by the merest trifles—such as the school of dolphins which gathered about the U-29 in increasing numbers, and the growing intensity of that southward current which was not on our chart.

It at length became apparent that we had missed the *Dacia* altogether. Such failures are not uncommon, and we were more pleased than disappointed; since our return to Wilhelmshaven was now in order. At noon June 28 we turned northeastward, and despite some rather comical entanglements with the unusual masses of dolphins were soon under way.

The explosion in the engine room at two p. m. was wholly a surprise. No defect in the machinery or carelessness in the men had been noticed, yet without warning the ship was racked from end to end with a colossal shock. Lieutenant Klenze hurried to the engine room, finding the fuel-tank and most of the mechanism shattered, and Engineers Raabe and Schneider instantly killed. Our situation had suddenly become grave indeed; for though the chemical air regenerators were intact, and though we could use the devices for raising and submerging the ship and opening the hatches as long as compressed air and storage batteries might hold out, we were powerless to propel or guide the submarine. To seek rescue in the lifeboats would be to deliver ourselves into the hands of enemies unreasonably embittered against our great German nation, and our wireless had failed ever since the *Victory* affair to put us in touch with a fellow U-boat of the Imperial Navy.

From the hour of the accident till July 2 we drifted constantly to the south, almost without plans and encountering no vessel. Dolphins still encircled the U-29, a somewhat remarkable circumstance considering the distance we had covered. On the morning of July 2 we sighted a warship flying American



colors, and the men became very restless in their desire to surrender. Finally Lieutenant Klenze had to shoot a seaman named Traube, who urged this un-German act with especial violence. This quieted the crew for the time, and we submerged unseen.

The next afternoon a dense flock of sea-birds appeared from the south, and the ocean began to heave ominously. Closing our hatches, we awaited developments until we realized that we must either submerge or be swamped in the mounting waves. Our air pressure and electricity were diminishing, and we wished to avoid all unnecessary use of our slender mechanical resources; but in this case there was no choice. We did not descend far, and when after several hours the sea was calmer, we decided to return to the surface. Here, however, a new trouble developed; for the ship failed to respond to our direction in spite of all that the mechanics could do. As the men grew more frightened at this undersea imprisonment, some of them began to mutter again about Lieutenant Klenze's ivory image, but the sight of an automatic pistol calmed them. We kept the poor devils as busy as we could, tinkering at the machinery even when we knew it was useless.

Klenze and I usually slept at different times; and it was during my sleep, about five a. m., July 4, that the general mutiny broke loose. The six remaining pigs of seamen, suspecting that we were lost, had suddenly burst into a mad fury at our refusal to surrender to the Yankee battleship two days before, and were in a delirium of cursing and destruction. They roared like the animals they were, and broke instruments and furniture indiscriminately, screaming about such nonsense as the curse of the ivory image and the dark dead youth who looked at them and swam away. Lieutenant Klenze seemed paralyzed and inefficient, as one might expect of a soft, womanish Rhinelander. I shot all six men, for it was necessary, and made sure that none remained alive.

We expelled the bodies through the double hatches and were alone in the U-29. Klenze seemed very nervous, and drank heavily. It was decided that we remain alive as long as possible, using the large stock of provisions and chemical supply of oxygen, none of which had suffered from the crazy antics of those swinehound seamen. Our compasses, depth gages, and other delicate instruments were ruined; so that henceforth our only reckoning would be guesswork, based on our watches, the calendar, and our apparent drift as judged by any objects we might spy through the portholes or from the conning-tower. Fortunately we had storage batteries still capable of long use, both for interior lighting and for the searchlight. We often cast a beam around the ship, but saw only dolphins, swimming parallel to our own drifting course. I was scientifically interested in those dolphins; for though the ordinary *Delphinus delphis* is a cetacean mammal, unable to subsist without air, I watched one of the swimmers closely for two hours, and did not see him alter his submerged condition.

With the passage of time Klenze and I decided that we were still drifting



south, meanwhile sinking deeper and deeper. We noted the marine fauna and flora, and read much on the subject in the books I had carried with me for spare moments. I could not help observing, however, the inferior scientific knowledge of my companion. His mind was not Prussian, but given to imaginings and speculations which have no value. The fact of our coming death affected him curiously, and he would frequently pray in remorse over the men, women, and children we had sent to the bottom; forgetting that all things are noble which serve the German state. After a time he became noticeably unbalanced, gazing for hours at his ivory image and weaving fanciful stories of the lost and forgotten things under the sea. Sometimes, as a psychological experiment, I would lead him on in these wanderings, and listen to his endless poetical quotations and tales of sunken ships. I was very sorry for him, for I dislike to see a German suffer; but he was not a good man to die with. For myself I was proud, knowing how the Fatherland would revere my memory and how my sons would be taught to be men like me.

On August 9, we espied the ocean floor, and sent a powerful beam from the searchlight over it. It was a vast undulating plain, mostly covered with seaweed, and strown with the shells of small mollusks. Here and there were slimy objects of puzzling contour, draped with weeds and encrusted with barnacles, which Klenze declared must be ancient ships lying in their graves. He was puzzled by one thing, a peak of solid matter, protruding above the ocean bed nearly four feet at its apex; about two feet thick, with flat sides and smooth upper surfaces which met at a very obtuse angle. I called the peak a bit of outcropping rock, but Klenze thought he saw carvings on it. After a while he began to shudder, and turned away from the scene as if frightened; yet could give no explanation save that he was overcome with the vastness, darkness, remoteness, antiquity, and mystery of the oceanic abysses. His mind was tired, but I am always a German, and was quick to notice two things; that the U-29 was standing the deep-sea pressure splendidly, and that the peculiar dolphins were still about us, even at a depth where the existence of high organisms is considered impossible by most naturalists. That I had previously over-estimated our depth, I was sure; but none the less we must still be deep enough to make these phenomena remarkable. Our southward speed, as gaged by the ocean floor, was about as I had estimated from the organisms passed at higher levels.

It was at three-fifteen p. m., August 12, that poor Klenze went wholly mad. He had been in the conning-tower using the searchlight when I saw him bound into the library compartment where I sat reading, and his face at once betrayed him. I will repeat here what he said, underlining the words he emphasized: "*He is calling! He is calling! I hear him! We must go!*" As he spoke he took his ivory image from the table, pocketed it, and seized my arm in an effort to drag me up the companionway to the deck. In a moment I understood that he meant to open the hatch and plunge with me into the water out-



side, a vagary of suicidal and homicidal mania for which I was scarcely prepared. As I hung back and attempted to soothe him he grew more violent, saying: "Come now—do not wait until later; it is better to repent and be forgiven than to defy and be condemned." Then I tried the opposite of the soothing plan, and told him he was mad—pitifully demented. But he was unmoved, and cried: "If I am mad, it is mercy! May the gods pity the man who in his callousness can remain sane to the hideous end! Come and be mad whilst *he* still calls with mercy!"

This outburst seemed to relieve a pressure in his brain; for as he finished he grew much milder, asking me to let him depart alone if I would not accompany him. My course at once became clear. He was a German, but only a Rhinelander, and he was now a potentially dangerous madman. By complying with his suicidal request I could immediately free myself from one who was no longer a companion but a menace. I asked him to give me the ivory image before he went, but this request brought from him such uncanny laughter that I did not repeat it. Then I asked him if he wished to leave any keepsake or lock of hair for his family in Germany in case I should be rescued, but again he gave me that strange laugh. So as he climbed the ladder I went to the levers and allowing proper time-intervals operated the machinery which sent him to his death. After I saw that he was no longer in the boat I threw the searchlight around the water in an effort to obtain a last glimpse of him; since I wished to ascertain whether the water-pressure would flatten him as it theoretically should, or whether the body would be unaffected, like those extraordinary dolphins. I did not, however, succeed in finding my late companion, for the dolphins were massed thickly and obscurely about the conning-tower.

That evening I regretted that I had not taken the ivory image surreptitiously from poor Klenze's pocket as he left, for the memory of it fascinated me. I could not forget the youthful, beautiful head with its leafy crown, though I am not by nature an artist. I was also sorry that I had no one with whom to converse. Klenze, though not my mental equal, was much better than no one. I did not sleep well that night, and wondered exactly when the end would come. Surely, I had little enough chance of rescue.

The next day I ascended to the conning-tower and commenced the customary searchlight explorations. Northward the view was much the same as it had been all the four days since we had sighted the bottom, but I perceived that the drifting of the U-29 was less rapid. As I swung the beam around to the south, I noticed that the ocean floor ahead fell away in a marked declivity, and bore curiously regular blocks of stone in certain places, disposed as if in accordance with definite patterns. The boat did not at once descend to match the greater ocean depth, so I was soon forced to adjust the searchlight to cast a sharply downward beam. Owing to the abruptness of the change a wire was disconnected, which necessitated a delay of many



minutes for repairs; but at length the light streamed on again, flooding the marine valley below me.

I am not given to emotion of any kind, but my amazement was very great when I saw what lay revealed in that electrical glow. And yet as one reared in the best *kultur* of Prussia I should not have been amazed, for geology and tradition alike tell us of great transpositions in oceanic and continental areas. What I saw was an extended and elaborate array of ruined edifices; all of magnificent though unclassified architecture, and in various stages of preservation. Most appeared to be of marble, gleaming whitely in the rays of the searchlight, and the general plan was of a large city at the bottom of a narrow valley, with numerous isolated temples and villas on the steep slopes above. Roofs were fallen and columns were broken, but there still remained an air of immemorably ancient splendor which nothing could efface.

Confronted at last with the Atlantis I had formerly deemed largely a myth, I was the most eager of explorers. At the bottom of that valley a river once had flowed; for as I examined the scene more closely I beheld the remains of stone and marble bridges and sea-walls, and terraces and embankments once verdant and beautiful. In my enthusiasm I became nearly as idiotic and sentimental as poor Klenze, and was very tardy in noticing that the southward current had ceased at last, allowing the U-29 to settle slowly down upon the sunken city as an airplane settled upon a town of the upper earth. I was slow, too, in realizing that the school of unusual dolphins had vanished.

In about two hours the boat rested in a paved plaza close to the rocky wall of the valley. On one side I could view the entire city as it sloped from the plaza down to the old river bank; on the other side, in startling proximity, I was confronted by the richly ornate and perfectly preserved façade of a great building, evidently a temple, hollowed from the solid rock. Of the original workmanship of this titanic thing I can only make conjectures. The façade, of immense magnitude, apparently covers a continuous hollow recess, for its windows are many and widely distributed. In the center yawns a great open door, reached by an impressive flight of steps, and surrounded by exquisite carvings like the figures of bacchanals in relief. Foremost of all are the great columns and frieze, both decorated with sculptures of inexpressible beauty; obviously portraying idealized pastoral scenes and processions of priests and priestesses bearing strange ceremonial devices in adoration of a radiant god. The art is of the most phenomenal perfection, largely Hellenic in idea, yet strangely individual. It imparts an impression of terrible antiquity, as though it were the remotest rather than the immediate ancestor of Greek art. Nor can I doubt that very detail of this massive product was fashioned from the virgin hillside rock of our planet. It is palpably a part of the valley wall, though how the vast interior was ever excavated I can not imagine. Perhaps a cavern or series of caverns furnished the nucleus. Neither age nor submersion has corroded the pristine grandeur of this awful fane—for fane indeed



it must be—and today after thousands of years it rests untarnished and inviolate in the endless night and silence of an ocean chasm.

I can not reckon the number of hours I spent in gazing at the sunken city with its buildings, arches, statues, and bridges, and the colossal temple with its beauty and mystery. Though I knew that death was near, my curiosity was consuming, and I threw the searchlight's beam about in eager quest. The shaft of light permitted me to learn many details, but refused to show anything within the gaping door of the rock-hewn temple; and after a time I turned off the current, conscious of the need of conserving power. The rays were now perceptibly dimmer than they had been during the weeks of drifting. And as if sharpened by the coming of deprivation of light, my desire to explore the watery secrets grew. I, a German, should be the first to tread those con-forgotten ways!

I produced and examined a deep-sea diving-suit of jointed metal, and experimented with the portable light and air regenerator. Though I should have trouble in managing the double hatches alone, I believed I could overcome all obstacles with my scientific skill and actually walk about the dead city in person.

On August 16 I effected an exit from the U-29, and laboriously made my way through the ruined and mud-choked streets to the ancient river. I found no skeletons or other human remains, but gleaned a wealth of archeological lore from sculptures and coins. Of this I can not now speak save to utter my awe at a culture in the full noon of glory when cave-dwellers roamed Europe and the Nile flowed unwatched to the sea. Others, guided by this manuscript if it shall ever be found, must unfold the mysteries at which I can only hint. I returned to the boat as my electric batteries grew feeble, resolved to explore the rock temple on the following day.

On the 17th, as my impulse to search out the mystery of the temple waxed still more insistent, a great disappointment befell me; for I found that the materials needed to replenish the portable light had perished in the mutiny of those pigs in July. My rage was unbounded, yet my German sense forbade me to venture unprepared into an utterly black interior which might prove the lair of some indescribable marine monster or a labyrinth of passages from whose windings I could never extricate myself. All I could do was to turn on the waning searchlight of the U-29, and with its aid walk up the temple steps and study the exterior carvings. The shaft of light entered the door at an upward angle, and I peered in to see if I could glimpse anything, but all in vain. Not even the roof was visible; and though I took a step or two inside after testing the floor with a staff, I dared not go farther. Moreover, for the first time in my life I experienced the emotion of dread. I began to realize how some of poor Klenze's moods had arisen, for as the temple drew me more and more, I feared its aqueous abysses with a blind and mount-



ing terror. Returning to the submarine, I turned off the lights and sat thinking in the dark. Electricity must now be saved for emergencies.

Saturday the 18th I spent in total darkness, tormented by thoughts and memories that threatened to overcome my German will. Klenze had gone mad and perished before reaching this sinister remnant of a past unwholesomely remote, and had advised me to go with him. Was, indeed, Fate preserving my reason only to draw me irresistibly to an end more horrible and unthinkable than any man has dreamed of? Clearly, my nerves were sorely taxed, and I must cast off these impressions of weaker men.

I could not sleep Saturday night, and turned on the lights regardless of the future. It was annoying that the electricity should not last out the air and provisions. I revived my thoughts of euthanasia, and examined my automatic pistol. Toward morning I must have dropped asleep with the lights on, for I awoke in darkness yesterday afternoon to find the batteries dead. I struck several matches in succession, and desperately regretted the improvidence which had caused us long ago to use up the few candles we carried.

After the fading of the last match I dared to waste, I sat very quietly without a light. As I considered the inevitable end my mind ran over preceding events, and developed a hitherto dormant impression which would have caused a weaker and more superstitious man to shudder. *The head of the radiant god in the sculptures on the rock temple is the same as that carved bit of ivory which the dead sailor brought from the sea and which poor Klenze carried back into the sea.*

I was a little dazed by this coincidence, but did not become terrified. It is only the inferior thinker who hastens to explain the singular and the complex by the primitive short cut of supernaturalism. The coincidence was strange, but I was too sound a reasoner to connect circumstances which admit of no logical connection, or to associate in any uncanny fashion the disastrous events which had led from the *Victory* affair to my present plight. Feeling the need of more rest, I took a sedative and secured some more sleep. My nervous condition was reflected in my dreams, for I seemed to hear the cries of drowning persons, and to see dead faces pressing against the portholes of the boat. And among the dead faces was the living, mocking face of the youth with the ivory image.

I must be careful how I record my awakening today, for I am unstrung, and much hallucination is necessarily mixed with fact. Psychologically my case is most interesting, and I regret that it can not be observed scientifically by a competent German authority. Upon opening my eyes my first sensation was an overmastering desire to visit the rock temple; a desire which grew every instant, yet which I automatically sought to resist through some emotion of fear which operated in the reverse direction. Next there came to me the im-



pression of *light* amidst the darkness of dead batteries, and I seemed to see a sort of phosphorescent glow in the water through the porthole which opened toward the temple. This aroused my curiosity, for I knew of no deep-sea organism capable of emitting such luminosity. But before I could investigate there came a third impression which because of its irrationality caused me to doubt the objectivity of anything my senses might record. It was an aural delusion, a sensation of rhythmic, melodic sound as of some wild yet beautiful chant or choral hymn, coming from the outside through the absolutely soundproof hull of the U-29.

Convinced of my psychological and nervous abnormality, I lighted some matches and poured a stiff dose of sodium bromide solution, which seemed to calm me to the extent of dispelling the illusion of sound. But the phosphorescence remained, and I had difficulty in repressing a childish impulse to go to the porthole and seek its source. It was horribly realistic, and I could soon distinguish by its aid the familiar objects around me, as well as the empty sodium bromide glass of which I had had no former visual impression in its present location. This last circumstance made me ponder, and I crossed the room and touched the glass. It was indeed in the place where I had seemed to see it. Now I knew that the light was either real or part of an hallucination so fixed and consistent that I could not hope to dispel it; so abandoning all resistance I ascended to the conning-tower to look for the luminous agency. Might it not actually be another U-boat, offering possibilities of rescue?

It is well that the reader accept nothing which follows as objective truth; for since the events transcend natural law, they are necessarily the subjective and unreal creations of my overtaxed mind. When I attained the conning-tower I found the sea in general far less luminous than I had expected. There was no animal or vegetable phosphorescence about, and the city that sloped down to the river was invisible in blackness. What I did see was not spectacular, not grotesque or terrifying, yet it removed my last vestige of trust in my consciousness. *For the door and windows of the undersea temple hewn from the rocky hill were vividly aglow with a flickering radiance, as from a mighty altar-flame far within.*

Later incidents are chaotic. As I stared at the uncannily lighted door and windows, I became subject to the most extravagant visions—visions so extravagant that I can not even relate them. I fancied that I discerned objects in the temple; objects both stationary and moving; and seemed to hear again the unreal chant that had floated to me when first I awaked. And over all rose thoughts and fears which centered in the youth from the sea and the ivory image whose carving was duplicated in the frieze and columns of the temple before me. I thought of poor Klenze, and wondered where his body rested with the image he had carried back into the sea. He had warned me



of something, and I had not heeded—but he was a soft-headed Rhinelander who went mad at troubles which a Prussian could bear with ease.

The rest is very simple. My impulse to visit and enter the temple has now become an inexplicable and imperious command which ultimately can not be denied. My own German will no longer controls my acts, and volition is henceforward possible only in minor matters. Such madness it was which drove Klenze to his death, bareheaded and unprotected in the ocean; but I am a Prussian and a man of sense, and will use to the last what little will I have. When first I saw that I must go, I prepared my diving-suit, helmet, and air regenerator for instant donning, and immediately commenced to write this hurried chronicle in the hope that it may some day reach the world. I shall seal the manuscript in a bottle and entrust it to the sea as I leave the U-29 forever.

I have no fear, not even from the prophecies of the madman Klenze. What I have seen I can not be sure, and I know that this madness of my own will at most lead only to suffocation when my air is gone. The light in the temple is a sheer delusion, and I shall die calmly, like a German, in the black and forgotten depths. This demoniac laughter which I hear as I write comes only from my own weakening brain. So I will carefully don my diving-suit and walk boldly up the steps into that primal shrine, that silent secret of unfathomed waters and uncounted years.



# *The Goblins Will Get You*

by John Michel

*Here is a story that defies easy classification. A fantasy in the New Yorker manner, refreshingly different from the run of formula, and breezily modern in its approach. The author is indeed a New Yorker, a resident of Greenwich Village no less, and the non-conformity of that famed area has doubtless contributed to the off-trail sparkle that highlights many of this author's pen-name published tales.*



a dog.

IT SHOULDN'T have happened to I woke up one night and saw them grinning over the counterpane at me like a row of painted heads off a Coney Island three-sheet. The time was three o'clock as I could easily see by the luminous hands of my alarm clock. Oddly enough I remained unshocked.

They explained later that a sort of preparatory hypnosis had been worked—involving a lot of ground-up vegetable greens I found under my bed every night for a week before and couldn't up to then account for.

I lay quietly and simply stared and they stared back. I was a bit upset, of course, but none of your "crawling feeling down the spine" stuff. The faces were inhuman, distorted, elongated, squashed, some nauseating, others merely enough to make one squeamish. And the glow which backgrounded the whole scene took away a lot of the mystery. They had hands and feet—plainly seen—and they didn't float.

Finally I opened diplomatic negotiations.

I said, "Hello."

The faces yawned a trifle, grew misty and jagged, then resumed a solid appearance. This I found was due to the impact of physical noises on their nervous systems. Being creatures of an order necessarily "other dimensional," they found it a trifle difficult maintaining what to them was a decent state of appearance.

As soon as the shaking and quaking had stopped and the gargoylish eyes had been popped back into many sockets, a large-headed one goggled fiercely in what was probably intended to be a reassuring smile and said, "Teach us to speak English."



This was the first indication of the peculiar irrelevancy which governed their reactions. Later on it was enough to drive anyone crazy. As a matter of fact it did.

"But you *are* speaking English," I remarked, collecting my thoughts as rapidly as possible and pulling my pajamas away from my legs to which they were glued with cold perspiration.

"That's what you think," three cavernous mouths intoned solemnly in unison and three enormous heads bent toward me. "We want to know the rules."

"You mean the ropes," I answered.

"We mean the rules," snapped the first big head.

"That's what *I* mean." I said and picked up a flashlight. The beam didn't affect them at all. But the case flew back suddenly and crashed through the back of the bed.

"Don't get tough!" warned all the heads wiggling and wagging.

I nursed a wrenched wrist and stuck my tongue out at them.

"So help me Joe, I only wanted to see you better. Though why, I don't know. By the standards of this world you make a hippopotamus look like a raging beauty."

They subsided grumbling. The flashlight was returned, badly dented.

Well, the first few nights were the hardest. I managed to get them past the silly impression that they didn't speak English at the end of the second. By the fourth night I was missing the lost sleep. But I got no reprieve.

They were queer creatures by any standards. At first they were reticent in talking about themselves. What was wanted chiefly was knowledge about other people. From hints they let drop I concluded, finally, that they were certainly not of the tribe of Adam or any branch thereof or doing business at the same stand.

After awhile I stopped feeling sleepy. This was due mainly to the fact that while they read the books they had me bring around from the local libraries, I snatched a couple of thousand winks, interrupted at choice intervals by a twinge as they awakened me by the crude, though simple process of banging the book on my forehead.

What a sight in the odd glow which emanated from all around them! Like a scene out of some Oz book. A row of heads gathered in a semi-circle, beyond the light, pitch blackness and me in bed. Great eyes popping and staring. Occasionally one or another would laugh and the whole bunch would go reeling off into instability for a few seconds and then come to a stand-still like water in a quiet pool.

I stood all this for two weeks. When I ran out of money paying for lending library rentals, they materialized some and gave it to me.

Holy mother! Twenty thousand smackers in good old one dollar bills!



And brand new! Laying quietly a few feet beneath their faces I became suddenly suspicious.

"Is it queer?" I asked and crinkled one of the notes between my fingers.

The one with the biggest head looked up from the copy of "Gone With the Wind."

"It shouldn't be," he said nonchalantly. "We got them out of the U.S. Treasury vaults in—what did you call it?—oh, Washington."

I went through the floor.

Piles of books accumulated. Luckily I had my own apartment, so nosy chambermaids never interfered. The only thing that got interfered with was my private life. They monopolized my time, got me to quit my job and alienated my girl. It was awful. When I came home one night with the ring she threw in my face, I looked the mob squarely in their excuses for faces. They were a bit ashamed.

"But why?" I cried, burying my head in my arms.

They gazed at me stonily then.

"It was necessary. It is all in the rules."

I looked up angrily.

"What rules?"

"*The underlying rules.*"

The heads swayed smugly. I picked up a book and threw it at them. It went past the row harmlessly.

"Underlying *what*?" I asked, dropping helplessly back to the bed.

One of them started to talk in Russian. He was quickly slapped down. The biggest of the heads cocked one of its eyes at me.

"Everything," he said. "*Everything.*"

From the moment they began giving me money I never wanted for comfort. I even moved out of the apartment to a swankier place uptown. The goblins failed to appear for several days after this and I began to feel that the visitation was over. When I woke suddenly the fourth night, I realized immediately that what I had done was O.K. by them. They proved it by coming back. They looked carelessly at the bookcases.

"You have bought us no new books," said one, wagging a finger at me.

I lit a cigarette and put one arm under my neck.

"I have been moving. I apologize. What do you want?"

"Books." A dozen mouths formed the word.

I became irritated.

"I am grateful for everything you have done," I stated, "Yes, even the bad things, like taking my girl away and making a damn slave out of me. I have always wanted comfort and now I've got it. But couldn't you get your books at the public libraries? They have three and a half million at the 42nd St. branch. Think of it! Books on *every* subject, books covering all the phases



of earth life. *Those*," I pointed disdainfully with my cigarette at the stocks of books in their cases along the walls, "are a drop in a vast bucket."

They looked down at me disapprovingly.

"No," they said. "It is not in the rules."

I was happy until they told me why they were going to all the trouble of acquainting themselves with the psychology of earth-men. I blew up.

"You fools!" I cried, screaming with laughter. "What could you do with the planet? Enslave it? The rich have done that already. Dissect a billion bodies? Go to our hospitals. They do it every day. Dig for diamonds? Shall I make you some?" I roared on: "Perhaps you are hungry for green cheese. Go to the moon. I guarantee it to be fresh and untouched by the hand of man."

A dozen heedless fingers turned to page 242 of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* and twenty-four eyes began reading the top of page 243.

"Come with me," I urged, still rocking with mirth. "Let me take you into the homes of the people of the earth and show you life as they live it. You shall hear the screaming of women in labor, the ticking of the feet of roaches on the bare plaster of walls, the scrape of worn-out shoes on patched carpet, a thin gasp in darkness as love is fulfilled and the crest of the wave breaks on the rocks of poverty. Hover with me over the squares of this teeming metropolis and observe the scurrying lines emerging from nowhere and vanishing in obscurity. Feel with me the texture of the skins of a hundred thousand women of the night, listen for the breath in their whispered words which should be happiness but in reality is sandpaper on scalded tongues. My friends, listen. It is madness to want us, insanity to imagine that you harbor the notion. Preserve your reason. Go home. Go home. Surely the earth is but a foot-stool to heaven, a mere step on your ladder of success. My friends. . ."

Calmly the busy fingers turned page 263. They were fast readers.

I shrugged my shoulders, winced at a sudden pain in the small of my back and put out the cigarette by crushing it against the bedspring cross-bar.

I went to sleep.

There was only one direction in which to move—forward. And up I went. First the swankier apartment, then still another and still another. Finally I bought a large residence on Riverside Drive and made it my castle. *Theirs*, too. The stacks of books grew to overwhelming proportions. They flowed out of the cases onto the floors everywhere. The basement was crammed, the attic door was locked. To have unlocked it would have started an avalanche. The only room in the house relatively free was the bathroom.

I advanced socially, culturally, politically. The goblins were vaguely pleased at my rise in the world. Somewhat amusedly they watched my slow advance from businessman to alderman to mayor to state senator. Their mouths took on crinkles when I related my speeches and told of my great successes in beat-



ing down the opposition. The night I was elected to Congress I gave a little party.

They were honest and sentimental. Somehow they understood the reason for the celebration and what lay behind the reason and, in a sense, participated. They engaged in the little fest by keeping decently quiet when I wanted to talk and answering when requested.

In the huge living room of my house, attired in a rich lounging robe, smoking my pipe which I held in one hand and drinking a Tom Collins which I held with the other, I sat in a deep, comfortable armchair and surveyed the scene. The familiar one. A dozen heads, the apex of a dozen spindly bodies, feet resting lightly on the floor, arms akimbo in most cases, folded in others.

I raised my glass.

"To me," I shouted, "and why not?"

"Why not?" remarked the biggest-headed one tonelessly. "It is all in the rules."

I ignored his redundancy.

"Yes, to me, to me because of my success and to you, my dear ones because you made it possible." I drank deeply and set the glass down. I looked up. A grave smile was upon their countenances.

"Ummmmmmmm," I noised. "What's up?"

The group grew mournful. Their glow increased and cast dancing shadows about the room. They elongated and became taller. I felt suddenly a chill blowing through the room.

The tiniest-headed one moved forward and stopped a foot away from my outstretched feet.

"We shall do it soon," he said, working his thin jaws up and down almost comically.

"It?"

"The conquest. We shall take you. All of you."

"Oh." My heart sank. "Is there nothing that can be done about it?"

"Nothing *you* could do about it."

I smoked my pipe silently for awhile.

"I want you to know that I have enjoyed my association with you," I said, looking up and gazing at them sadly.

They all crowded closer.

"So have we," they said mournfully and backed away again.

"And there is nothing that can be done about it?" I asked needlessly. I was aware of their power.

The heads swung back and forth ponderously in the negative.

"When do you plan to begin? How will you do it?"

"Within a week," said the biggest-headed one, "and it will not be pleasant."



"It will be painful?"

"It will be painful, but it will be in the rules."

I left them for a while, went upstairs and fingered my gun. Presently I put it away and shook my head. Then I returned and continued the odd merry-making and finally went to bed and dreamed peacefully.

I had six days to work in, and in three I considered almost a thousand separate plans for circumventing theirs. All were fantastic and impossible. I was clinging to the final silly notion I conjured up, when all of a sudden a practical idea hit me and knocked me utterly sane. Of course!

I got them interested in poker. They were a funny lot as you may have guessed and, suspecting nothing, enjoyed the game. We used real money as stakes, which was somewhat silly because as soon as one of them was cleaned out (which was almost always due to my own cleverness) he would merely materialize a newly printed, freshly wrapped stack of bills and continue playing.

Simultaneously I fed them on Arthurian legend and tales of chivalry until suggestion had strengthened their already strong sense of honor.

The fifth night I began the fatal game.

The game started out very early in the evening and I lost heavily according to plan. The progress of the game left me poorer and poorer. I watched their faces carefully as it went on. Slowly they were becoming enthusiastic, acquiring the instinct of the true poker player which is to continue through dawn and beyond. Their faces became radiant, eagerly each one waited for the next hand to begin. I played them carefully, noting the rise of excitement. When I judged them ready, I reached for the cards.

The fourth goblin to my left opened. He tossed a thousand dollars into the pot. Everyone followed suit except the biggest-headed one and the smallest-headed one who were playing together and dropped.

When they finished drawing I gave myself the other two kings I had carefully placed in position in the deck and settled back in my chair. The opener carefully considered his hand and bet. The other joined and I tossed the required money to the center of the table. Presently everyone dropped out of the game except the opener and myself. He bet a sum equivalent to what I had left. I let this pass and then suddenly raised.

"The earth and its people," I said.

"What's that?" They all looked at me with startled glances, noses wagging.

"I said I raise you the earth and its people. I can do this. I think you will find it in the rules."

The goblins consulted together while I kept my hand carefully.

Finally they turned to me as one.

"We have decided that you are right. It is in the rules," said the tiniest-



headed one and I heaved a concealed sigh of relief because I was almost dead sure it wasn't.

"But how shall we cover this raise?" continued the other and nodded to the opener.

I raised my eye cagily.

"Twenty billions in gold will do it," I stated flatly and held on to my seat as the cellar rocked under the sudden impact of the arrival of twenty billion dollars' worth of pure gold right out of several national mints and treasuries. I pictured the mess of books lying at the bottom of the terrific weight.

"Ummmmmm," I ummmmed, considering my cards. "Will you see me?"

"I will see you," replied the opener and I laid down my cards.

"Four kings," I said grandly. The world looked good.

"I have four aces," remarked the other nonchalantly and laid his own hand down.

You know what that means.



# The Canal

by Everil Worrell

*"The Canal" is a love story of horror, a horror story of love. It is an unforgettable account of a romance of deep midnight, of a strangely charming girl and of the man who sought her hand only to learn of the ungodly price it would cost him to win her. Mrs. Everil Worrell Murphy's story is justly famous for its unusual atmosphere and its combination of ancient evils and modern scenes.*



PAST the sleeping city the river sweeps; along its left bank the old canal creeps.

I did not intend that to be poetry, although the scene is poetic—somerly, gruesomely poetic, like the poems of Poe. Too well I know it—too often have I walked over the grass-grown path beside the reflections of black trees and tumbledown shacks and distant factory chimneys in the sluggish waters that moved so slowly, and ceased to move at all.

I shall be called mad, and I shall be a suicide. I shall take no pains to cover up my trail, or to hide the thing that I shall do. What will it matter, afterward, what they say of me? If they knew the truth—if they could vision, even dimly, the beings with whom I have consorted—if the faintest realization might be theirs of the thing I am becoming, and of the fate from which I am saving their city—then they would call me a great hero. But it does not matter what they call me, as I have said before. Let me write down the things I am about to write down, and let them be taken, as they will be taken, for the last ravings of a madman. The city will be in mourning for the thing I shall have done—but its mourning will be of no consequence beside that other fate from which I shall have saved it.

I have always had a taste for nocturnal prowling. We as a race have grown too intelligent to take seriously any of the old, instinctive fears that preserved us through preceding generations. Our sole remaining salvation, then, has come to be our tendency to travel in herds. We wander at night—but our objective is somewhere on the brightly lighted streets, or still somewhere where men do not go alone. When we travel far afield, it is in company. Few of my acquaintance, few in the whole city here, would care to ramble at



midnight over the grass-grown path I have spoken of; not because they would fear to do so, but because such things are not being done.

Well, it is dangerous to differ individually from one's fellows. It is dangerous to wander from the beaten road. And the fears that guarded the race in the dawn of time and through the centuries were real fears, founded on reality.

A month ago, I was a stranger here. I had just taken my first position—I was graduated from college only three months before, in the spring. I was lonely, and likely to remain so for some time, for I have always been of a solitary nature, making friends slowly.

I had received one invitation out—to visit the camp of a fellow employee in the firm for which I worked, a camp which was located on the farther side of the wide river—the side across from the city and the canal, where the bank was high and steep and heavily wooded, and little tents blossomed all along the water's edge. At night these camps were a string of sparkling lights and tiny, leaping campfires, and the tinkle of music carried faintly far across the calmly flowing water. That far bank of the river was no place for an eccentric, solitary man to rove. But the near bank, which would have been an eyesore to the campers had not the river been so wide—the near bank attracted me from my first glimpse of it.

We embarked in a motor-boat at some distance downstream, and swept up along the near bank, and then out and across the current. I turned my eyes backward. The murk of stagnant water that was the canal, the jumble of low buildings beyond it, the lonely, low-lying waste of the narrow strip of land between canal and river, the dark, scattered trees growing there—I intended to see more of these things.

That week-end bored me, but I repaid myself no later than Monday evening, the first evening when I was back in the city, alone and free. I ate a solitary dinner immediately after leaving the office. I went to my room and slept from seven until nearly midnight. I wakened naturally, then, for my whole heart was set on exploring the alluring solitude I had discovered. I dressed, slipped out of the house and into the street, started the motor in my roadster and drove through the lighted streets.

I left behind that part of town which was thick with vehicles carrying people home from their evening engagements, and began to thread my way through darker and narrower streets. Once I had to back out of a cul-de-sac, and once I had to detour around a closed block. This part of town was not alluring, even to me. It was dismal without being solitary.

But when I had parked my car on a rough, cobbled street that ran directly down into the inky waters of the canal, and crossed a narrow bridge, I was repaid. A few minutes set my feet on the old tow-path where mules had drawn river-boats up and down only a year or so ago. Across the canal now, as I walked upstream at a swinging pace, the miserable shacks where miser-



able people lived seemed to march with me, and then fell behind. They looked like places in which murders might be committed, every one of them.

The bridge I had crossed was near the end of the city going north, as the canal marked its western extremity. Ten minutes of walking, and the dismal shacks were quite a distance behind, the river was farther away and the strip of waste land much wider and more wooded, and tall trees across the canal marched with me as the evil-looking houses had done before. Far and faint, the sound of a bell in the city reached my ears. It was midnight.

I stopped, enjoying the desolation around me. It had the savor I had expected and hoped for. I stood for some time looking up at the sky, watching the low drift of heavy clouds, which were visible in the dull reflected glow from distant lights in the heart of the city, so that they appeared to have a lurid phosphorescence of their own. The ground under my feet, on the contrary, was utterly devoid of light. I had felt my way carefully, knowing the edge of the canal partly by instinct, partly by the even more perfect blackness of the water in it, and even holding fairly well to the path, because it was perceptibly sunken below the ground beside it.

Now as I stood motionless in this spot, my eyes upcast, my mind adrift with strange fancies, suddenly my feelings of satisfaction and well-being gave way to something different. Fear was an emotion unknown to me—for those things which make men fear, I had always loved. A graveyard at night was to me a charming place for a stroll and meditation. But now the roots of my hair seemed to move upright on my head, and along all the length of my spine I was conscious of a prickling, tingling sensation—such as my forefathers may have felt in the jungle when the hair on their backs stood up as the hair of my head was doing now. Also, I was afraid to move; and I knew that there were eyes upon me, and that that was why I was afraid to move. I was afraid of those eyes—afraid to see them, to look into them.

All this while, I stood perfectly still, my face uptilted toward the sky. But after a terrible mental effort, I mastered myself.

Slowly, slowly, with an attempt to propitiate the owner of the unseen eyes by my casual manner, I lowered my own. I looked straight ahead—at the softly swaying silhouette of the tree-tops across the canal as they moved gently in the cool night wind; at the mass of blackness that was those trees, and the opposite shore; at the shiny blackness where the reflections of the clouds glinted vaguely and disappeared, that was the canal. And again I raised my eyes a little, for just across the canal where the shadows massed most heavily, there was that at which I must look more closely. And now, as I grew accustomed to the greater blackness and my pupils expanded, I dimly discerned the contours of an old boat or barge, half sunken in the water. An old abandoned canal-boat. But was I dreaming, or was there a white-clad figure seated on the roof of the low cabin aft, a pale, heart-shaped face gleaming strangely



at me from the darkness, the glow of two eyes seeming to light up the face, and to detach it from the darkness?

Surely, there could be no doubt as to the eyes. They shone as the eyes of animals shine in the dark, with a phosphorescent gleam, and a glimmer of red! Well, I had heard that some human eyes have that quality at night.

But what a place for a human being to be—a girl, too, I was sure. That daintily heart-shaped face was the face of a girl, surely; I was seeing it clearer and clearer, either because my eyes were growing more accustomed to peering into the deeper shadows, or because of that phosphorescence in the eyes that stared back at me.

I raised my voice softly, not to break too much the stillness of the night. "Hello! who's there? Are you lost, or marooned, and can I help?"

There was a little pause. I was conscious of a soft lapping at my feet. A stronger night wind had sprung up, was ruffling the dark waters. I had been overwarm, and where it struck me the perspiration turned cold on my body, so that I shivered uncontrollably.

"You can stay—and talk awhile, if you will. I am lonely, but not lost. I—I live here."

I could hardly believe my ears. The voice was little more than a whisper, but it had carried clearly—a girl's voice, sure enough. And she lived *there*—in an old, abandoned canal-boath, half submerged in the stagnant water.

"You are not *alone* there?"

"No, not alone. My father lives here with me, but he is deaf—and he sleeps soundly."

Did the night wind blow still colder, as though it came to us from some unseen, frozen sea—or was there something in her tone that chilled me, even as a strange attraction drew me toward her? I wanted to draw near to her, to see closely the pale, heart-shaped face, to lose myself in the bright eyes that I had seen shining in the darkness. I wanted—I wanted to hold her in my arms, to find her mouth with mine, to kiss it. . . .

With a start, I realized the nature of my thoughts, and for an instant lost all thought in surprise. Never in my twenty-two years had I felt love before. My fancies had been otherwise directed—a moss-grown, fallen gravestone was a dearer thing to me to contemplate than the fairest face in all the world. Yet, surely, what I felt now was love!

I took a reckless step nearer the edge of the bank.

"Could I come over to you?" I begged. "It's warm, and I don't mind a wetting. It's late, I know—but I would give a great deal to sit beside you and talk, if only for a few minutes before I go back to town. It's a lonely place here for a girl like you to live—your father should not mind if you exchange a few words with someone occasionally."

Was it the unconventionality of my request that made her next words



sound like a long-drawn shudder of protest? There was a strangeness in the tones of her voice that held me wondering, every time she spoke.

"No, no. Oh, no! *You must not swim across.*"

"Then—could I come tomorrow, or some day soon, in the daytime; and would you let me come on board then—or would you come on shore and talk to me, perhaps?"

"Not in the daytime—*never* in the daytime!"

Again the intensity of her low-toned negation held me spellbound.

It was not her sense of the impropriety of the hour, then, that had dictated her manner. For surely, any girl with the slightest sense of the fitness of things would rather have a tryst by daytime than after midnight—yet there was an inference in her last words that if I came again it should be again at night.

Still feeling the spell that had enthralled me, as one does not forget the presence of a drug in the air that is stealing one's senses, even when those senses begin to wander and to busy themselves with other things, I yet spoke shortly.

"Why do you say, 'Never in the daytime'? Do you mean that I may come more than this once at night, though now you won't let me cross the canal to you at the expense of my own clothes, and you won't put down your plank or draw-bridge or whatever you come on shore with, and talk to me here for only a moment? I'll come again, if you'll let me talk to you instead of calling across the water. I'll come again, any time you will let me—day or night, I don't care. I want to come to you. But I only ask you to explain. If I came in the daytime and met your father, wouldn't that be the best thing to do? Then we could be really acquainted—we could be friends."

"In the nighttime, my father sleeps. In the daytime, *I* sleep. How could I talk to you, or introduce you to my father then? If you came on board this boat in the daytime, you would find my father—and you would be sorry. As for me, I would be sleeping. I could never introduce you to my father, do you see?"

"You sleep soundly, you and your father." Again there was pique in my voice.

"Yes, we sleep soundly."

"And always at different times?"

"Always at different times. We are on guard—one of us is always on guard. We have been hardly used, down there in your city. And we have taken refuge here. And we are always—always—on guard."

The resentment vanished from my breast, and I felt my heart go out to her anew. She was so pale, so pitiful in the night. My eyes were learning better and better how to pierce the darkness; they were giving me a more definite picture of my companion—if I could think of her as a companion, between myself and whom stretched the black water.



The sadness of the lonely scene, the perfection of the solitude itself, these things contributed to her pitifulness. Then there was that strangeness of atmosphere of which, even yet, I had only partly taken note. There was the strange, shivering chill, which yet did not seem like the healthful chill of a cool evening. In fact, it did not prevent me from feeling the oppression of the night, which was unusually sultry. It was like a little breath of deadly cold that came and went, and yet did not alter the temperature of the air itself, as the small ripples on the surface of the water do not concern the water even a foot down.

And even that was not all. There was an unwholesome smell about the night—a dank, moldy smell that might have been the very breath of death and decay. Even I, the connoisseur in all things dismal and unwholesome, tried to keep my mind from dwelling overmuch upon that smell. What it must be to live breathing it constantly in, I could not think. But no doubt the girl and her father were used to it; and no doubt it came from the stagnant water of the canal and from the rotting wood of the old, half-sunken boat that was their refuge.

My heart throbbed with pity again. Their refuge—what a place! And my clearer vision of the girl showed me that she was pitifully thin, even though possessed of the strange face that drew me to her. Her clothes hung around her like old rags, but hers was no scarecrow aspect. Although little flesh clothed her bones, her very bones were beautiful. I was sure the little, pale, heart-shaped face would be more beautiful still, if I could only see it closely. I must see it closely—I must establish some claim to consideration as a friend of the strange, lonely crew of the half-sunken wreck.

"This is a poor place to call a refuge," I said finally. "One might have very little money, and yet do somewhat better. Perhaps I might help you—I am sure I could. If your ill-treatment in the city was because of poverty—I am not rich, but I could help that. I could help you a little with money, if you would let me; or, in any case, I could find a position for you. I'm sure I could do that."

The eyes that shone fitfully toward me like two small pools of water intermittently lit by a cloud-swept sky seemed to glow more brightly. She had been half crouching, half sitting on top of the cabin; now she leaped to her feet with one quick, sinuous, abrupt motion, and took a few rapid, restless steps to and fro before she answered.

When she spoke, her voice was little more than a whisper; yet surely rage was in its shrill sibilance.

"Fool! Do you think you would be helping me, to tie me to a desk, to shut me behind doors, away from freedom, away from the delight of doing my own will, of seeking my own way? Never, never would I let you do



that. Rather this old boat, rather a deserted grave under the stars, for my home!"

A boundless surprise swept over me, and a positive feeling of kinship with this strange being, whose face I had hardly seen, possessed me. So I myself might have spoken, so I had often felt, though I had never dreamed of putting my thoughts so definitely, so forcibly. My regularized daytime life was a thing I thought little of; I really lived only in my nocturnal prowlings. Why, this girl was right! All of life should be free, and spent in places that interested and attracted.

How little, how little I knew, that night, that dread forces were tugging at my soul, were finding entrance to it and easy access through the morbid weakness of my nature! How little I knew at what a cost I deviated so radically from my kind, who herd in cities and love well-lit ways and the sight of man, and sweet and wholesome places to be solitary in, when the desire for solitude comes over them!

That night it seemed to me that there was but one important thing in life—to allay the angry passion my unfortunate words had aroused in the breast of my beloved, and to win from her some answering feeling.

"I understand—much better than you think," I whispered tremulously. "What I want is to see you again, to come to know you, and to serve you in any way that I may. Surely, there must be something in which I can be of use to you. All you have to do from tonight on for ever, is to command me. I swear it!"

"You swear *that*—you do swear it?"

Delighted at the eagerness of her words, I lifted my hand toward the dark heavens.

"I swear it. From this night on, for ever—I swear it."

"Then listen. Tonight you may not come to me, nor I to you. I do not want you to board this boat—not tonight, not any night. And most of all, not any day. But do not look so sad. I will come to you. No, not tonight, perhaps not for many nights—yet before very long. I will come to you there, on the bank of the canal, when the water in the canal ceases to flow."

I must have made a gesture of impatience, or of despair. It sounded like a way of saying "never"—for why should the water in the canal cease to flow? She read my thoughts in some way, for she answered them.

"You do not understand. I am speaking seriously—I am promising to meet you there on the bank, and soon. For the water within these banks is moving slower, always slower. Higher up, I have heard that the canal has been drained. Between these lower locks, the water still seeps in and drops slowly, slowly downstream. But there will come a night when it will be quite, quite stagnant—and on that night I will come to you. And when I come, I will ask of you a favor. And you will keep your oath."



It was all the assurance I could get that night. She had come back to the side of the cabin where she had sat crouched before, and she resumed again that posture and sat still and silent, watching me. Sometimes I could see her eyes upon me, and sometimes not. But I felt that their gaze was unwavering. The little cold breeze, which I had finally forgotten while I was talking with her, was blowing again, and the unwholesome smell of decay grew heavier before the dawn.

She would not speak again, nor answer me when I spoke to her, and I grew nervous, and strangely ill at ease.

At last I went away. And in the first faint light of dawn I slipped up the stairs of my rooming-house, and into my own room.

I was deadly tired at the office next day. And day after day slipped away and I grew more and more weary; for a man can not wake day and night without suffering, especially in hot weather, and that was what I was doing. I haunted the old tow-path and waited, night after night, on the bank opposite the sunken boat. Sometimes I saw my lady of the darkness, and sometimes not. When I saw her, she spoke little; but sometimes she sat there on the top of the cabin and let me watch her till the dawn, or until the strange uneasiness that was like fright drove me from her and back to my room, where I tossed restlessly in the heat and dreamed strange dreams, half waking, till the sun shone in on my forehead and I tumbled into my clothes and down to the office again.

Once I asked her why she had made the fanciful condition that she would not come ashore to meet me until the waters of the canal had ceased to run. (How eagerly I studied those waters! How I stole away at noontime more than once, not to approach the old boat, but to watch the almost imperceptible downdrift of bubbles, bits of straw, twigs, rubbish!)

My questioning displeased her, and I asked her that no more. It was enough that she chose to be whimsical. My part was to wait.

It was more than a week later that I questioned her again, this time on a different subject. And after that, I curbed my curiosity relentlessly.

"Never speak to me of things you do not understand about me. Never again, or I will not show myself to you again. And when I walk on the path yonder, it will not be with you."

I had asked her what form of persecution she and her father had suffered in the city, that had driven them out to this lonely place, and where in the city they had lived.

Frightened seriously lest I lose the ground I was sure I had gained with her, I was about to speak of something else. But before I could find the words, her low voice came to me again.

"It was horrible, horrible! Those little houses below the bridge, those houses along the canal—tell me, are they not worse than my boat? Life there was shut in, and furtive. I was not free as I am now—and the freedom I will



soon have will make me forget the things I have not yet forgotten. The screaming, the reviling and cursing! Fear and flight! As you pass back by those houses, think how you would like to be shut in one of them, and in fear of your life. And then think of them no more; for I would forget them, and I will never speak of them again."

I dared not answer her. I was surprised that she had vouchsafed me so much. But surely her words meant this: that before she had come to live on the decaying, water-rotted old boat, she had lived in one of those horrible houses I passed by on my way to her. Those houses, each of which looked like the predestined scene of a murder!

As I left her that night, I felt that I was very daring.

"One or two nights more and you will walk beside me," I called to her. "I have watched the water at noon, and it hardly moves at all. I threw a scrap of paper into the canal, and it whirled and swung a little where a thin skim of oil lay on the water down there—oil from the big, dirty city you are well out of. But though I watched and watched, I could not see it move downward at all. Perhaps tomorrow night, or the night after, you will walk on the bank with me. I hope it will be clear and moonlight, and I will be near enough to see you clearly—as well as you seem always to see me in darkness or moonlight, equally well. And perhaps I will kiss you—but not unless you let me."

And yet, the next day, for the first time my thoughts were definitely troubled. I had been living in a dream—I began to speculate concerning the end of the path on which my feet were set.

I had conceived, from the first, such a horror of those old houses by the canal! They were well enough to walk past, nursing gruesome thoughts for a midnight treat. But, much as I loved all that was weird and eerie about the girl I was wooing so strangely, it was a little too much for my fancy that she had come from them.

By this time, I had become decidedly unpopular in my place of business. Not that I had made enemies, but that my peculiar ways had caused too much adverse comment. It would have taken very little, I think, to have made the entire office force decide that I was mad. After the events of the next twenty-four hours, and after this letter is found and read, they will be sure that they knew it all along! At this time, however, they were punctiliously polite to me, and merely let me alone as much as possible—which suited me perfectly. I dragged wearily through day after day, exhausted from lack of sleep, conscious of their speculative glances, living only for the night to come.

But on this day, I approached the man who had invited me to the camp across the river, who had unknowingly shown me the way that led to my love.

"Have you ever noticed the row of tumble-down houses along the canal on the city side?" I asked him.

He gave me an odd look. I suppose he sensed the significance of my break-



ing silence after so long to speak of *them*—sensed that in some way I had a deep interest in them.

"You have odd tastes, Morton," he said after a moment. "I suppose you wander into strange places sometimes—I've heard you speak of an enthusiasm for graveyards at night. But my advice to you is to keep away from those houses. They're unsavory, and their reputation is unsavory. Positively, I think you'd be in danger of your life, if you go poking around there. They have been the scene of several murders, and a dope den or two has been cleaned out of them. Why in the world you should want to investigate them——"

"I don't expect to investigate them," I said testily. "I was merely interested in them—from the outside. To tell you the truth, I'd heard a story, a rumor—never mind where. But you say there have been murders there—I suppose this rumor I heard may have had to do with an attempted one. There was a girl who lived there with her father once, and they were set upon there, or something of the sort, and had to run away. Did you ever hear *that* story?"

Barrett gave me an odd look such as one gives in speaking of a past horror so dreadful that the mere speaking of it makes it live terribly again.

"What you say reminds me of a horrible thing that was said to have happened down there once," he said. "It was in all the papers. A little child disappeared in one of those houses, and a couple of poor lodgers who lived there, a girl and her father, were accused of having made away with it. They were accused—they were accused—oh, well, I don't like to talk about such things. It was too dreadful. The child's body was found—*part* of it was found. It was mutilated, and the people in the house seemed to believe it had been mutilated in order to conceal the manner of its death; there was an ugly wound in the throat, it finally came out, and it seemed as if the child might have been bled to death. It was found in the girl's room, hidden away. The old man and his daughter escaped, before the police were called. The countryside was scoured, but they were never found. Why, you must have read it in the papers, several years ago."

I nodded, with a heavy heart. I *had* read it in the papers, I remembered now. And again, a terrible questioning came over me. Who was this girl, *what* was this girl, who seemed to have my heart in her keeping?

Why did not a merciful God let me die then?

Befogged with exhaustion, bemused in a dire enchantment, my mind was incapable of thought. And yet, some soul-process akin to that which saves the sleepwalker poised at perilous heights sounded its warning now.

My mind was filled with doleful images. There were women—I had heard and read—who slew to satisfy a blood-lust. There were ghosts, specters—call them what you will, their names have been legion in the dark pages of that lore which dates back to the infancy of the races of the earth—who retained even in death this blood-lust. Vampires—they had been called that. I had read of them. Corpses by day, spirits of evil by night, roaming abroad in their own



forms or in the forms of bats or unclean beasts, killing body and soul of their victims—for whoever dies of the repeated “kiss” of the vampire, which leaves its mark on the throat and draws the blood from the body, becomes a vampire also—of such beings I had read.

And, horror of horrors! In that last cursed day at the office, I remembered reading of these vampires—these undead—that in their nocturnal flights they had one limitation—*they could not cross running water.*

That night I went my usual nightly way with tears of weakness on my face—for my weakness was supreme, and I recognized fully at last the misery of being the victim of an enchantment stronger than my feeble will. But I went.

I approached the neighborhood of the canal-boat as the distant city clock chimed the first stroke of twelve. It was the dark of the moon and the sky was overcast. Heat-lightning flickered low in the sky, seeming to come from every point of the compass and circumscribe the horizon, as if unseen fires burned behind the rim of the world. By its fitful glimmer, I saw a new thing: between the old boat and the canal bank stretched a long, slim, solid-looking shadow—a plank had been let down! In that moment, I realized that I had been playing with powers of evil which had no intent now to let me go, which were indeed about to lay hold upon me with an inexorable grasp. Why had I come tonight? Why, but that the spell of the enchantment laid upon me was a thing more potent, and far more unbreakable, than any wholesome spell of love? The creature I sought out—oh, I remembered now, with the cold perspiration beading my brow, the lore hidden away between the covers of the dark old book which I had read so many years ago and half forgotten!—until dim memories of it stirred within me, this last day and night.

My lady of the night! No woman of wholesome flesh and blood and odd perverted tastes that matched my own, but one of the undead! In that moment, I knew it, and knew that the vampires of old legends polluted still, in these latter days, the fair surface of the earth.

And on the instant, behind me in the darkness there was the crackle of a twig, and something brushed against my arm.

This, then, was the fulfilment of my dream, I knew, without turning my head, that the pale, dainty face with its glowing eyes was near my own—that I had only to stretch out my arm to touch the slender grace of the girl I had so longed to draw near. I knew, and should have felt the rapture I had anticipated. Instead, the roots of my hair prickled coldly, unendurably, as they had on the night when I had first sighted the old boat. The miasmic odors of the night, heavy and oppressive with heat and unrelieved by a breath of air, all but overcame me, and I fought with myself to prevent my teeth clicking in my head. The little waves of coldness I had felt often in this spot were chasing over my body, yet they were not from any breeze; the leaves on the



trees hung down motionless, as though they were actually wilting on their branches.

With an effort, I turned my head.

Two hands caught me around my neck. The pale face was so near that I felt the warm breath from its nostrils fanning my cheek.

And, suddenly, all that was wholesome in my perverted nature rose uppermost. I longed for the touch of the red mouth, like a dark flower opening before me in the night. I longed for it—and yet more I dreaded it. I shrank back, catching in a powerful grip the fragile wrists of the hands that strove to hold me. I must not—I must not yield to the faintness that I felt stealing over me.

I was facing down the path toward the city. A low rumble of thunder—the first—broke the torrid hush of the summer night. A glare of lightning seemed to tear the night asunder, to light up the universe. Overhead, the clouds were careering madly in fantastic shapes, driven by a wind that swept the upper heavens without causing even a trembling in the air lower down. And far down the canal, that baleful glare seemed to play around and hover over the little row of shanties—murder-cursed, and haunted by the ghost of a dead child.

My gaze was fixed on them, while I held away from me the pallid face and fought off the embrace that sought to overcome my resisting will. And so a long moment passed. The glare faded out of the sky, and a greater darkness took the world. But there was a near, more menacing glare fastened upon my face—the glare of two eyes that watched mine, that had watched me as I, unthinking, stared down at the dark houses.

This girl—this woman who had come to me at my own importunate requests, did not love me, since I had shrunk from her. She did not love me—but it was not only that. She had watched me as I gazed down at the houses that held her dark past, and I was sure that she divined my thoughts. She knew my horror of those houses—she knew my new-born horror of *her*. And she hated me for it, hated me more malignantly than I had believed a human being could hate.

And at that point in my thoughts, I felt my skin prickle and my scalp rise again: could a *human being* cherish such hatred as I read, trembling more and more, in those glowing fires lit with what seemed to me more like the fires of hell than any light that ought to shine in a woman's eyes?

And through all this, not a word had passed between us!

So far I have written calmly. I wish that I could write on so, to the end. If I could do that, there might be one or two of those who will regard this as the document of a maniac, who would believe the horrors of which I am about to write.

But I am only flesh and blood. At this point in the happenings of the awful



night, my calmness deserted me—at this point I felt that I had been drawn into the midst of a horrible nightmare from which there was no escape, no waking! As I write, this feeling again overwhelms me, until I can hardly write at all—until, were it not for the thing which I must do, I would rush out into the street and run, screaming, until I was caught and dragged away, to be put behind strong iron bars. Perhaps I would feel safe there—perhaps!

I know that, terrified at the hate I saw confronting me in those redly gleaming eyes, I would have slunk away. The two thin hands that caught my arm again were strong enough to prevent that, however. I had been spared her kiss, but I was not to escape from the oath I had taken to serve her.

"You promised, you swore," she hissed in my ear. "And tonight you are to keep your oath."

I felt my senses reel. My oath—yes, I had an oath to keep. I had lifted my hand toward the dark heavens, and sworn to serve her in any way she chose. Freely, and of my own volition, I had sworn.

I sought to evade her.

"Let me help you back to your boat," I begged. "You have no kindly feeling for me, and—you have seen it—I love you no longer. I will go back to the city—you can go back to your father, and forget that I broke your peace."

The laughter that greeted my speech I shall never forget—not in the depths under the scummy surface of the canal—not in the empty places between the worlds, where my tortured soul may wander.

"So you do not love me, and I hate you! Fool! Have I waited these weary months for the water to stop, only to go back now? After my father and I returned here and found the old boat rotting in the drained canal, and took refuge in it; when the water was turned into the canal while I slept, so that I could never escape until its flow should cease, *because of the thing that I am*—even then I dreamed of tonight.

"When the imprisonment we still shared ceased to matter to my father—come on board the deserted boat tomorrow, and see why, if you dare!—still I dreamed on, of tonight!

"I have been lonely, desolate, starving—now the whole world shall be mine! And by *your* help!"

I asked her, somehow, what she wanted of me, and a madness overcame me so that I hardly heard her reply. Yet somehow, I knew that there was that on the opposite shore of the great river where the pleasure camps were, that she wanted to find. In the madness of my terror, she made me understand and obey her. I must carry her in my arms across the long bridge over the river, deserted in the small hours of the night.

The way back to the city was long tonight—long. She walked behind me, and I turned my eyes neither to right nor left. Only as I passed the tumble-down houses, I saw their reflection in the canal and trembled so that I could have fallen to the ground, at the thoughts of the little child this woman had



been accused of slaying there, and at the certainty I felt that she was reading my thoughts.

And now the horror that engulfed me darkened my brain.

I know that we set our feet upon the long, wide bridge that spanned the river. I know the storm broke there, so that I battled for my footing, almost for my life, it seemed, against the pelting deluge. And the horror I had invoked was in my arms, clinging to me, burying its head upon my shoulder. So increasingly dreadful had my pale-faced companion become to me, that I hardly thought of her now as a woman at all—only as a demon of the night.

The tempest raged still as she leaped down out of my arms on the other shore. And again I walked with her against my will, while the trees lashed their branches around me, showing the pale under-sides of their leaves in the vivid frequent flashes that rent the heavens.

On and on we went, branches flying through the air and missing us by a miracle of ill fortune. Such as she and I are not slain by falling branches. The river was a welter of whitecaps, flattened down into strange shapes by the pounding rain. The clouds as we glimpsed them were like devils flying through the sky.

Past dark tent after dark tent we stole, and past a few where lights burned dimly behind their canvas walls. And at last we came to an old quarry. Into its artificial ravine she led me, and up to a crevice in the rock wall.

"Reach in your hand and pull out the loose stone you will feel," she whispered. "It closes an opening that leads into deep caverns. A human hand must remove that stone—your hand must move it!"

Why did I struggle so to disobey her? Why did I fail? It was as though I *knew*—but my failure was foreordained—I had taken oath!

If you who read have believed that I have set down the truth thus far, the little that is left you will call the ravings of a madman overtaken by his madness. Yet these things happened.

I stretched out my arm, driven by a compulsion I could not resist. At arm's length in the niche in the rock, I felt something move—the loose rock, a long, narrow fragment, much larger than I had expected. Yet it moved easily, seeming to swing on a natural pivot. Outward it swung, toppling toward me—a moment more and there was a swift rush of the ponderous weight I had loosened. I leaped aside and went down, my forehead grazed by the rock.

For a brief moment I must have been unconscious, but only for a moment. My head a stabbing agony of pain, unreal lights flashing before my eyes, I yet knew the reality of the storm that beat me down as I struggled to my feet. I knew the reality of the dark, loathsome shapes that passed me in the dark, crawling out of the orifice in the rock and flapping through the wild night, along the way that led to the pleasure camps.

So the caverns I had laid open to the outer world were infested with bats. I



had been inside unlit caverns, and had heard there the squeaking of the things, felt and heard the flapping of their wings—but *never in all my life before had I seen bats as large as men and women!*

Sick and dizzy from the blow on my head, and from disgust, I crept along the way they were going. If I touched one of them, I felt that I should die of horror.

Now, at last, the storm abated, and a heavy darkness made the whole world seem like the inside of a tomb.

Where the tents stood in a long row, the number of the monster bats seemed to diminish. It was as though—horrible thought!—they were creeping into the tents, with their slumbering occupants.

At last I came to a lighted tent, and paused, crouching so that the dim radiance which shone through the canvas did not touch me in the shadows. And there I waited, but not for long. There was a dark form silhouetted against the tent; a rustle and confusion, and the dark thing was again in silhouette—but with a difference in the quality of the shadow. The dark thing was *inside* the tent now, its bat wings extending across the entrance through which it had crept.

Fear held me spellbound. And as I looked, the shadow changed again, imperceptibly, so that I could not have told *how* it changed. But now it was not the shadow of a bat, but of a woman.

"The storm, the storm! I am lost, exhausted! I crept in here, to beg for refuge until the dawn!"

That low, thrilling, sibilant voice—too well I knew it!

Within the tent I heard a murmur of acquiescent voices. At last I began to understand.

I knew the nature of the woman I had carried over the river in my arms, the woman who would not even cross the canal until the water should have ceased utterly to flow. I remembered books I had read—*Dracula*—other books, and stories. I knew they were true books and stories, now—I knew those horrors existed for me.

I had indeed kept my oath to the creature of darkness—I had brought her to her kind, under her guidance. I had let them loose in hordes upon the pleasure camps. The campers were doomed—and through them, others. . . .

I forgot my fear. I rushed from my hiding-place up to the tent door, and there I screamed and called aloud.

"Don't take her in—don't let her stay—nor the others, that have crept into the other tents! Wake all the campers—they will sleep on to their destruction! Drive out the interlopers—drive them out quickly! *They are not human—no, and they are not bats!* Do you hear me?—do you understand?"

I was fairly howling, in a voice that was strange to me.

"She is a vampire—they are all vampires. *Vampires!*"

Inside the tent I heard a new voice.



"What can be the matter with that poor man?" the voice said. It was a woman's, and gentle.

"Crazy—somebody out of his senses, dear," a man's voice answered. "Don't be frightened."

And then the voice I knew so well—so well: "I saw a falling rock strike a man on the head in the storm. He staggered away, but I suppose it crazed him."

I waited for no more. I ran away, madly, through the night and back across the bridge to the city.

Next day—today—I boarded the sunken canal-boat. It is the abode of death—no woman could have lived there—only such an one as *she*. The old man's corpse was there—he must have died long, long ago. The smell of death and decay on the boat was dreadful.

Again, I felt that I understood. Back in those awful houses, she had committed the crime when first she became the thing she is. And he—her father—less sin-steeped, and less accursed, attempted to destroy the evidence of her crime, and fled with her, but died without becoming like her. She had said that one of those two was always on watch—did he indeed divide her vigil on the boat? What more fitting—the dead standing watch with the undead! And no wonder that she would not let me board the craft of death, even to carry her away.

And still I feel the old compulsion. I have been spared her kiss—but for a little while. Yet I will not let the power of my oath draw me back, till I enter the caverns with her and creep forth in the form of a bat to prey upon mankind. Before that can happen, I too will die.

Today in the city I heard that a horde of strange insects or small animals infested the pleasure camps last night. Some said, with horror-bated breath, that they perhaps were rats. None of them was seen; but in the morning nearly every camper had a strange, deep wound in his throat. I almost laughed aloud. They were so horrified at the idea of an army of rats, creeping into the tents and biting the sleeping occupants on their throats! If they had seen what I saw—if they knew that they are doomed to spread corruption—

So my own death will not be enough. Today I bought supplies for blasting. Tonight I will set my train of dynamite, from the hole I made in the cliff where the vampires creep in and out, along the row of tents, as far as the last one—then I shall light my fuse. It will be done before the dawn. Tomorrow, the city will mourn its dead and execrate my name.


And then, at last, in the slime beneath the unmoving waters of the canal, I shall find peace! But perhaps it will not be peace—for I shall seek it midway between the old boat with its cargo of death and the row of dismal houses where a little child was done to death when first *she* became the thing she is. That is my expiation.



## An Inhabitant of Carcosa

by Ambrose Bierce

*Robert Chambers, Algernon Blackwood, and Ambrose Bierce were the three writers who planted the seeds at the turn of this century for the American weird story type that blossomed so abundantly in the last two decades. The theme which made Lovecraft and his school famous, the conception of a pantheon of "Elder Gods" and a mind-chilling cosmogony depicted in forbidden writings, can be found to have its origins in the works of these three men. The grim, almost occultish, tale told here bears out Bierce's role in this eldritch gardening.*

“

OR THERE be divers sorts of death—some wherein the body remaineth; and in some it vanisheth quite away with the spirit. This commonly occurreth only in solitude (such is God's will) and, none seeing the end, we say the man is lost, or gone on a long journey—which indeed he hath; but sometimes it hath happened in sight of many, as abundant testimony sheweth. In one kind of death the spirit also dieth, and this it hath been known to do while yet the body was in vigor for many years. Sometimes, as is veritably attested, it dieth with the body, but after a season is raised up again in that place where the body did decay.”

Pondering these words of Hali (whom God rest) and questioning their full meaning, as one who, having an intimation, yet doubts if there be not something behind, other than that which he has discerned, I noted not whither I had strayed until a sudden chill wind striking my face revived in me a sense of my surroundings. I observed with astonishment that everything seemed unfamiliar. On every side of me stretched a bleak and desolate expanse of plain, covered with a tall overgrowth of sere grass, which rustled and whistled in the autumn wind with heaven knows what mysterious and disquieting suggestion. Protruded at long intervals above it, stood strangely shaped and somber-colored rocks, which seemed to have an understanding with one another and to exchange looks of uncomfortable significance, as if they had reared their heads to watch the issue of some foreseen event. A few blasted trees here and there appeared as leaders in this malevolent conspiracy of silent expectation.



The day, I thought, must be far advanced, though the sun was invisible; and although sensible that the air was raw and chill my consciousness of that fact was rather mental than physical—I had no feeling of discomfort. Over all the dismal landscape a canopy of low, lead-colored clouds hung like a visible curse. In all this there were a menace and a portent—a hint of evil, an intimation of doom. Bird, beast, or insect there was none. The wind sighed in the bare branches of the dead trees and the gray grass bent to whisper its dread secret to the earth; but no other sound nor motion broke the awful repose of that dismal place.

I observed in the herbage a number of weather-worn stones, evidently shaped with tools. They were broken, covered with moss and half sunken in the earth. Some lay prostrate, some leaned at various angles, none was vertical. They were obviously headstones of graves, though the graves themselves no longer existed as either mounds or depressions; the years had leveled all. Scattered here and there, more massive blocks showed where some pompous tomb or ambitious monument had once flung its feeble defiance at oblivion. So old seemed these relics, these vestiges of vanity and memorials of affection and piety, so battered and worn and stained—so neglected, deserted, forgotten the place, that I could not help thinking myself the discoverer of the burial-ground of a prehistoric race of men whose very name was long extinct.

Filled with these reflections, I was for some time heedless of the sequence of my own experiences, but soon I thought, "How came I hither?" A moment's reflection seemed to make this all clear and explain at the same time, though in a disquieting way, the singular character with which my fancy had invested all that I saw or heard. I was ill. I remembered now that I had been prostrated by a sudden fever, and that my family had told me that in my periods of delirium I had constantly cried out for liberty and air, and had been held in bed to prevent my escape out-of-doors. Now I had eluded the vigilance of my attendants and had wandered hither to—to where? I could not conjecture. Clearly I was at a considerable distance from the city where I dwelt—the ancient and famous city of Carcosa.

No signs of human life were anywhere visible nor audible; no rising smoke, no watchdog's bark, no lowing of cattle, no shouts of children at play—nothing but that dismal burial-place, with its air of mystery and dread, due to my own disordered brain. Was I not becoming again delirious, there beyond human aid? Was it not indeed all an illusion of my madness? I called aloud the names of my wives and sons, reached out my hands in search of theirs, even as I walked among the crumbling stones and in the withered grass.

A noise behind me caused me to turn about. A wild animal—a lynx—was approaching. The thought came to me: If I break down here in the desert—if the fever return and I fail, this beast will be at my throat. I sprang toward it, shouting. It trotted tranquilly by within a hand's breadth of me and disappeared behind a rock.



A moment later a man's head appeared to rise out of the ground a short distance away. He was ascending the farther slope of a low hill whose crest was hardly to be distinguished from the general level. His whole figure soon came into view against the background of gray cloud. He was half naked, half clad in skins. His hair was unkempt, his beard long and ragged. In one hand he carried a bow and arrow; the other held a blazing torch with a long trail of black smoke. He walked slowly and with caution, as if he feared falling into some open grave concealed by the tall grass. This strange apparition surprised but did not alarm, and taking such a course as to intercept him I met him almost face to face, accosting him with the familiar salutation, "God keep you."

He gave no heed, nor did he arrest his pace.

"Good stranger," I continued, "I am ill and lost. Direct me, I beseech you, to Carcosa."

The man broke into a barbarous chant in an unknown tongue, passing on and away.

An owl on the branch of a decayed tree hooted dismally and was answered by another in the distance. Looking upward, I saw through a sudden rift in the clouds Aldebaran and the Hyades! In all this there was a hint of night—the lynx, the man with the torch, the owl. Yet I saw—I saw even the stars in absence of the darkness. I saw, but was apparently not seen nor heard. Under what awful spell did I exist?

I seated myself at the root of a great tree, seriously to consider what it were best to do. That I was mad I could no longer doubt, yet recognized a ground of doubt in the conviction. Of fever I had no trace. I had, withal, a sense of exhilaration and vigor altogether unknown to me—a feeling of mental and physical exaltation. My senses seemed all alert; I could feel the air as a ponderous substance; I could hear the silence.

A great root of the giant tree against whose trunk I leaned as I sat held inclosed in its grasp a slab of stone, a part of which protruded into a recess formed by another root. The stone was thus partly protected from the weather, though greatly decomposed. Its edges were worn round, its corners eaten away, its surface deeply furrowed and scaled. Glittering particles of mica were visible in the earth about it—vestiges of its decomposition. This stone had apparently marked the grave out of which the tree had sprung ages ago. The tree's exacting roots had robbed the grave and made the stone a prisoner.

A sudden wind pushed some dry leaves and twigs from the uppermost face of the stone; I saw the low-relief letters on an inscription and bent to read it. God in Heaven! my name in full!—the date of my birth!—the date of my death!

A level shaft of light illuminated the whole side of the tree as I sprang to my feet in terror. The sun was rising in the rosy east. I stood between the tree and his broad red disk—no shadow darkened the trunk!



A chorus of howling wolves saluted the dawn. I saw them sitting on their haunches, singly and in groups, on the summits of irregular mounds and tumuli filling a half of my desert prospect and extending to the horizon. And then I knew that these were ruins of the ancient and famous city of Carcosa.

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Such are the facts imparted to the medium Bayrolles by the spirit Hoseib Alar Robardin.



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