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THE WITCH FROM HELL'S KITCHEN

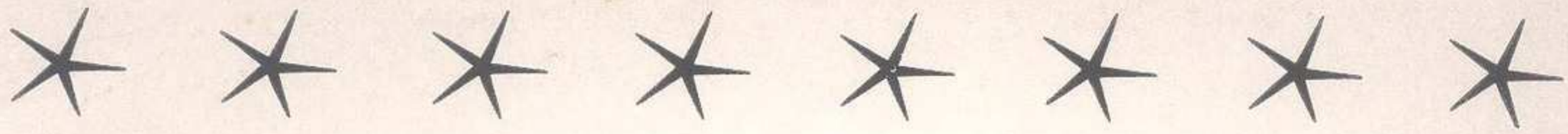
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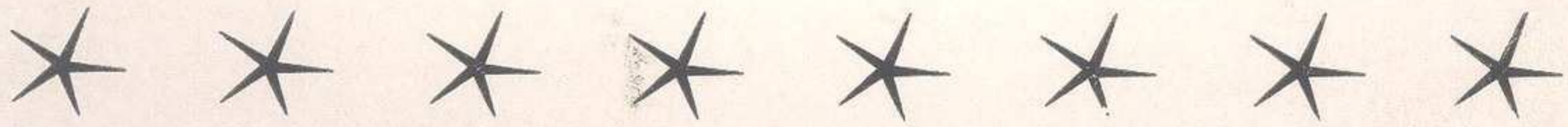
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FANTASY READER

No. 18

Edited by

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Stories by

ROBERT E. HOWARD
DALE CLARK
GELETT BURGESS
W. H. HODGSON
HUGH B. CAVE
JAMES FRANCIS DWYER
HAZEL HEALD
EDWARD LUCAS WHITE
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AVON NOVELS, INC.
575 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

F. F. #18

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The Witch from Hell's Kitchen

by Robert E. Howard

We are pleased to present here a new and never-before published novelette by Robert E. Howard, a manuscript found among his papers but recently, so many years after his untimely death. Readers of Howard's epic adventures of the mist-shrouded past will recognize in this story the basic pattern which matured into the famous Conan tales. Pyrrhas the Argive, hero of this grim and fabulous conflict with the demon-gods of the Mesopotamian era at the very dawn of recorded history, is clearly the prototype of the author's Cimmerian chief. One would feel safe in conjecturing that this story antedated and anticipated the Hyborian Age tales. It would be logical to assume further, that after writing it, the author liked it well enough to determine upon a series . . . but first taking the caution to date it several thousand years further back, before the beginning of historical records, so as to avoid any danger of archeological pitfalls.

"HAS HE seen a night-spirit, is he listening to the whispers of them who dwell in darkness?"

Strange words to be murmured in the feast-hall of Naram-ninub, amid the strain of lutes, the patter of fountains, and the tinkle of women's laughter. The great hall attested the wealth of its owner, not only by its vast dimensions, but by the richness of its adornment. The glazed surface of the walls offered a bewildering variegation of colors—blue, red, and orange enamels set off by squares of hammered gold. The air was heavy with incense, mingled with the fragrance of exotic blossoms from the gardens without. The feasters, silk-robed nobles of Nippur, lounged on satin cushions, drinking wine poured from alabaster vessels, and caressing the painted and bejeweled playthings which Naram-ninub's wealth had brought from all parts of the East.

There were scores of these; their white limbs twinkled as they danced, or shone like ivory among the cushions where they sprawled. A jeweled tiara caught in a burnished mass of night-black hair, a gem-crusted armlet of massive gold, earrings of carven jade—these were their only garments. Their fragrance was dizzying. Shameless in their dancing, feasting and love-making, their light laughter filled the hall in waves of silvery sound.

On a broad cushion-piled dais reclined the giver of the feast, sensuously stroking the glossy locks of a lithe Arabian who had stretched herself on her supple belly beside him. His appearance of sybaritic languor was belied by the vital sparkling of his dark eyes as he surveyed his guests. He was thick-bodied, with a short blue-black beard: a Semite—one of the many drifting yearly into Shumir.

With one exception his guests were Shumirians, shaven of chin and head. Their bodies were padded with rich living, their features smooth and placid. The exception among them stood out in startling contrast. Taller than they, he had none of their soft sleekness. He was made with the economy of relentless Nature. His physique was of the primitive, not of the civilized athlete. He was an incarnation of Power, raw, hard, wolfish—in the sinewy limbs, the corded neck, the great arch of the breast, the broad hard shoulders. Beneath his tousled golden mane his eyes were like blue ice. His strongly chiselled features reflected the wildness his frame suggested. There was about him nothing of the measured leisure of the other guests, but a ruthless directness in his every action. Whereas they sipped, he drank in great gulps. They nibbled at tid-bits, but he seized whole joints in his fingers and tore at the meat with his teeth. Yet his brow was shadowed, his expression moody. His magnetic eyes were introspective. Wherefore Prince Ibi-Engur lisped again in Naram-ninub's ear: "Has the lord Pyrrhas heard the whispering of night-things?"

Naram-ninub eyed his friend in some worriment. "Come, my lord," said he, "you are strangely distraught. Has any here done aught to offend you?"

Pyrrhas roused himself as from some gloomy meditation and shook his head. "Not so, friend; if I seem distracted it is because of a shadow that lies over my own mind." His accent was barbarous, but the timbre of his voice was strong and vibrant.

The others glanced at him in interest. He was Eannatum's general of mercenaries, an Argive whose saga was epic.

"Is it a woman, lord Pyrrhas?" asked Prince Enakalli with a laugh. Pyrrhas fixed him with his gloomy stare and the prince felt a cold wind blowing on his spine.

"Aye, a woman," muttered the Argive. "One who haunts my dreams and floats like a shadow between me and the moon. In my dreams I feel her teeth in my neck, and I wake to hear the flutter of wings and the cry of an owl."

A silence fell over the group on the dais. Only in the great hall below rose the babble of mirth and conversation and the tinkling of lutes, and a girl laughed loudly, with a curious note in her laughter.

"A curse is upon him," whispered the Arabian girl. Naram-ninub silenced her with a gesture, and was about to speak, when Ibi-Engur lisped: "My lord Pyrrhas, this has an uncanny touch, like the vengeance of a god. Have you done aught to offend a deity?"

Naram-ninub bit his lip in annoyance. It was well known that in his recent campaign against Erech, the Argive had cut down a priest of Anu

in his shrine. Pyrrhas' maned head jerked up and he glared at Ibi-Engur as if undecided whether to attribute the remark to malice or lack of tact. The prince began to pale, but the slim Arabian rose to her knees and caught at Naram-ninub's arm.

"Look at Belibna!" She pointed at the girl who had laughed so wildly an instant before.

Her companions were drawing away from this girl apprehensively. She did not speak to them, or seem to see them. She tossed her jeweled head and her shrill laughter rang through the feast-hall. Her slim body swayed back and forth, her bracelets clanged and jangled together as she tossed up her white arms. Her dark eyes gleamed with a wild light, her red lips curled with her unnatural mirth.

"The hand of Arabu is on her," whispered the Arabian uneasily.

"Belibna!" Naram-ninub called sharply. His only answer was another burst of wild laughter, and the girl cried stridently: "To the home of darkness, the dwelling of Irhalla; to the road whence there is no return; oh, Apsu, bitter is thy wine!" Her voice snapped in a terrible scream, and bounding from among her cushions, she leaped up on the dais, a dagger in her hand. Courtesans and guests shrieked and scrambled madly out of her way. But it was at Pyrrhas the girl rushed, her beautiful face a mask of fury. The Argive caught her wrist, and the abnormal strength of madness was futile against the barbarian's iron thews. He tossed her from him, and down the cushion-strewn steps, where she lay in a crumpled heap, her own dagger driven into her heart as she fell.

The hum of conversation which had ceased suddenly, rose again as the guards dragged away the body, and the painted dancers came back to their cushions. But Pyrrhas turned and taking his wide crimson cloak from a slave, threw it about his shoulders.

"Stay, my friend," urged Naram-ninub. "Let us not allow this small matter to interfere with our revels. Madness is common enough."

Pyrrhas shook his head irritably. "Nay, I'm weary of swilling and gorging. I'll go to my own house."

"Then the feasting is at an end," declared the Semite, rising and clapping his hands. "My own litter shall bear you to the house the king has given you —nay, I forgot you scorn to ride on other men's backs. Then I shall myself escort you home. My lords, will you accompany us?"

"Walk, like common men?" stuttered Prince Ur-ilishu. "By Enlil, I will come. It will be a rare novelty. But I must have a slave to bear the train of my robe, lest it trail in the dust of the street. Come, friends, let us see the lord Pyrrhas home, by Ishtar!"

"A strange man," Ibi-Engur lisped to Libit-ishbi, as the party emerged from the spacious palace, and descended the broad tiled stair, guarded by bronze lions. "He walks the streets, unattended, like a very tradesman."

"Be careful," murmured the other. "He is quick to anger, and he stands high in the favor of Eannatum."

"Yet even the favored of the king had best beware of offending the god Anu," replied Ibi-Engur in an equally guarded voice.

The party were proceeding leisurely down the broad white street, gaped at by the common folk who bobbed their shaven heads as they passed. The sun was not long up, but the people of Nippur were well astir. There was much coming and going between the booths where the merchants spread their wares: a shifting panorama, woven of craftsmen, tradesmen, slaves, harlots, and soldiers in copper helmets. There went a merchant from his warehouse, a staid figure in sober woolen robe and white mantle; there hurried a slave in a linen tunic; there minced a painted hoyden whose short slit skirt displayed her sleek flank at every step. Above them the blue of the sky whitened with the heat of the mounting sun. The glazed surfaces of the buildings shimmered. They were flat-roofed, some of them three or four stories high. Nippur was a city of sun-dried brick, but its facings of enamel made it a riot of bright color.

Somewhere a priest was chanting: "Oh, Babbar, righteousness lifteth up to thee its head—"

Pyrrhas swore under his breath. They were passing the great temple of Enlil, towering up three hundred feet in the changeless blue sky.

"The towers stand against the sky like part of it," he swore, raking back a damp lock from his forehead. "The sky is enameled, and this is a world made by man."

"Nay, friend," demurred Naram-ninub. "Ea built the world from the body of Tiamat."

"I say men built Shumir!" exclaimed Pyrrhas, the wine he had drunk shadowing his eyes. "A flat land—a very banquet-board of a land—with rivers and cities painted upon it, and a sky of blue enamel over it. By Ymir, I was born in a land the gods built! There are great blue mountains, with valleys lying like long shadows between, and snow peaks glittering in the sun. Rivers rush foaming down the cliffs in everlasting tumult, and the broad leaves of the trees shake in the strong winds."

"I, too, was born in a broad land, Pyrrhas," answered the Semite. "By night the desert lies white and awful beneath the moon, and by day it stretches in brown infinity beneath the sun. But it is in the swarming cities of men, these hives of bronze and gold and enamel and humanity, that wealth and glory lie."

Pyrrhas was about to speak, when a loud wailing attracted his attention. Down the street came a procession, bearing a carven and painted litter on which lay a figure hidden by flowers. Behind came a train of young women, their scanty garments rent, their black hair flowing wildly. They beat their naked bosoms and cried: "*Ailanu!* Thammuz is dead!" The throngs in the street took up the shout. The litter passed, swaying on the shoulders of the bearers; among the high-piled flowers shone the painted eyes of a carven image. The cry of the worshippers echoed down the street, dwindling in the distance.

Pyrrhas shrugged his mighty shoulders. "Soon they will be leaping and

dancing and shouting, 'Adonis is living!', and the wenches who howl so bitterly now will give themselves to men in the streets for exultation. How many gods are there, in the devil's name?"

Naram-ninub pointed to the great zikkurat of Enlil, brooding over all like the brutish dream of a mad god.

"See ye the seven tiers: the lower black, the next of red enamel, the third blue, the fourth orange, the fifth yellow, while the sixth is faced with silver, and the seventh with pure gold which flames in the sunlight? Each stage in the temple symbolizes a deity: the sun, the moon, and the five planets Enlil and his tribe have set in the skies for their emblems. But Enlil is greater than all, and Nippur is his favored city."

"Greater than Anu?" muttered Pyrrhas, remembering a flaming shrine and a dying priest that gasped an awful threat.

"Which is the greatest leg of a tripod?" parried Naram-ninub.

Pyrrhas opened his mouth to reply, then recoiled with a curse, his sword flashing out. Under his very feet a serpent reared up, its forked tongue flickering like a jet of red lightning.

"What is it, friend?" Naram-ninub and the princes stared at him in surprise.

"What is it?" He swore. "Don't you see that snake under your very feet? Stand aside and give me a clean swing at it—"

His voice broke off and his eyes clouded with doubt.

"It's gone," he muttered.

"I saw nothing," said Naram-ninub, and the others shook their heads, exchanging wondering glances.

The Argive passed his hand across his eyes, shaking his head.

"Perhaps it's the wine," he muttered. "Yet there was an adder, I swear by the heart of Ymir. I am accursed.

The others drew away from him, glancing at him strangely.

There had always been a restlessness in the soul of Pyrrhas the Argive, to haunt his dreams and drive him out on his long wanderings. It had brought him from the blue mountains of his race, southward into the fertile valleys and sea-fringing plains where rose the huts of the Mycenæans; thence into the isle of Crete, where, in a rude town of rough stone and wood, a swart fishing people bartered with the ships of Egypt; by those ships he had gone into Egypt, where men toiled beneath the lash to rear the first pyramids, and where, in the ranks of the white-skinned mercenaries, the Shardana, he learned the arts of war. But his wanderlust drove him again across the sea, to a mud-walled trading village on the coast of Asia, called Troy, whence he drifted southward into the pillage and carnage of Palestine where the original dwellers in the land were trampled under by the barbaric Canaanites out of the East. So by devious ways he came at last to the plains of Shumir, where city fought city, and the priests of a myriad rival gods intrigued and plotted, as they had done since the dawn of Time, and as they did for centuries after, until the rise of an obscure frontier town called Babylon exalted

its city-god Merodach above all others as Bel-Marduk, the conqueror of Tiamat.

The bare outline of the saga of Pyrrhas the Argive is weak and paltry; it can not catch the échoes of the thundering pageantry that rioted through that saga: the feasts, revels, wars, the crash and splintering of ships and the onset of chariots. Let it suffice to say that the honor of kings was given to the Argive, and that in all Mesopotamia there was no man so feared as this golden-haired barbarian whose war-skill and fury broke the hosts of Erech on the field, and the yoke of Erech from the neck of Nippur.

From a mountain hut to a palace of jade and ivory Pyrrhas' saga had led him. Yet the dim half-animal dreams that had filled his slumber when he lay as a youth on a heap of wolfskins in his shaggy-headed father's hut were nothing so strange and monstrous as the dreams that haunted him on the silken couch in the palace of turquoise-towered Nippur.

It was from these dreams that Pyrrhas woke suddenly. No lamp burned in his chamber and the moon was not yet up, but the starlight filtered dimly through the casement. And in this radiance something moved and took form. There was the vague outline of a lithe form, the gleam of an eye. Suddenly the night beat down oppressively hot and still. Pyrrhas heard the pound of his own blood through his veins. Why fear a woman lurking in his chamber? But no woman's form was ever so pantherishly supple; no woman's eyes ever burned so in the darkness. With a gasping snarl he leaped from his couch and his sword hissed as it cut the air—but only the air. Something like a mocking laugh reached his ears, but the figure was gone.

A girl entered hastily with a lamp.

"Amytis! I saw *her!* It was no dream, this time! She laughed at me from the window!"

Amytis trembled as she set the lamp on an ebony table. She was a sleek sensuous creature, with long-lashed, heavy-lidded eyes, passionate lips, and a wealth of lustrous black curly locks. As she stood there naked the voluptuousness of her figure would have stirred the most jaded debauchee. A gift from Eannatum, she hated Pyrrhas, and he knew it, but found an angry gratification in possessing her. But now her hatred was drowned in her terror.

"It was Lilitu!" she stammered. "She has marked you for her own! She is the night-spirit, the mate of Ardat Lili. They dwell in the House of Arabu. You are accursed!"

His hands were bathed with sweat; molten ice seemed to be flowing sluggishly through his veins instead of blood.

"Where shall I turn? The priests hate and fear me since I burned Anu's temple."

"There is a man who is not bound by the priest-craft, and could aid you" she blurted out.

"Then tell me!" He was galvanized, trembling with eager impatience. "His name, girl! His name!"

But at this sign of weakness, her malice returned; she had blurted out

what was in her mind, in her fear of the supernatural. Now all the vindictiveness in her was awake again.

"I have forgotten," she answered insolently, her eyes glowing with spite.

"Slut!" Gasping with the violence of his rage, he dragged her across a couch by her thick locks. Seizing his sword-belt he wielded it with savage force, holding down the writhing naked body with his free hand. Each stroke was like the impact of a drover's whip. So mazed with fury was he, and she so incoherent with pain, that he did not at first realize that she was shrieking a name at the top of her voice. Recognizing this at last, he cast her from him, to fall in a whimpering heap on the mat-covered floor. Trembling and panting from the excess of his passion, he threw aside the belt and glared down at her.

"Gimil-ishbi, eh?"

"Yes!" she sobbed, grovelling on the floor in her excruciating anguish. "He was a priest of Enlil, until he turned diabolist and was banished. Ahhh, I faint! I swoon! Mercy! Mercy!"

"And where shall I find him?" he demanded.

"In the mound of Enzu, to the west of the city. Oh, Enlil, I am flayed alive! I perish!"

Turning from her, Pyrrhas hastily donned his garments and armor, without calling for a slave to aid him. He went forth, passed among his sleeping servitors without waking them, and secured the best of his horses. There were perhaps a score in all in Nippur, the property of the king and his wealthier nobles; they had been bought from the wild tribes far to the north, beyond the Caspian, whom in a later age men called Scythians. Each steed represented an actual fortune. Pyrrhas bridled the great beast and strapped on the saddle—merely a cloth pad, ornamented and richly worked.

The soldiers at the gate gaped at him as he drew rein and ordered them to open the great bronze portals, but they bowed and obeyed without question. His crimson cloak flowed behind him as he galloped through the gate.

"Enlil!" swore a soldier. "The Argive has drunk overmuch of Naram-ninub's Egyptian wine."

"Nay," responded another; "did you see his face that it was pale, and his hand that it shook on the rein? The gods have touched him, and perchance he rides to the House of Arabu."

Shaking their helmeted heads dubiously, they listened to the hoof-beats dwindling away in the west.

North, south and east from Nippur, farm-huts, villages and palm groves clustered the plain, threaded by the net-works of canals that connected the rivers. But westward the land lay bare and silent to the Euphrates, only charred expanses telling of former villages. A few moons ago raiders had swept out of the desert in a wave that engulfed the vineyards and huts and burst against the staggering walls of Nippur. Pyrrhas remembered the fighting along the walls, and the fighting on the plain, when his

sally at the head of his phalanxes had broken the besiegers and driven them in headlong flight back across the Great River. Then the plain had been red with blood and black with smoke. Now it was already veiled in green again as the grain put forth its shoots, uncared for by man. But the toilers who had planted that grain had gone into the land of dusk and darkness.

Already the overflow from more populous districts was seeping back into the man-made waste. A few months, a year at most, and the land would again present the typical aspect of the Mesopotamian plain, swarming with villages, checkered with tiny fields that were more like gardens than farms. Man would cover the scars man had made, and there would be forgetfulness, till the raiders swept again out of the desert. But now the plain lay bare and silent, the canals choked, broken and empty.

Here and there rose the remnants of palm groves, the crumbling ruins of villas and country palaces. Further out, barely visible under the stars, rose the mysterious hillock known as the mound of Enzu—the moon. It was not a natural hill, but whose hands had reared it and for what reason none knew. Before Nippur was built it had risen above the plain, and the nameless fingers that shaped it had vanished in the dust of time. To it Pyrrhas turned his horse's head.

And in the city he had left, Amytis furtively left his palace and took a devious course to a certain secret destination. She walked rather stiffly, limped, and frequently paused to tenderly caress her person and lament over her injuries. But limping, cursing, and weeping, she eventually reached her destination, and stood before a man whose wealth and power was great in Nippur. His glance was an interrogation.

"He has gone to the Mound of the Moon, to speak with Gimil-ishbi," she said.

"Lilitu came to him again tonight," she shuddered, momentarily forgetting her pain and anger. "Truly he is accursed."

"By the priests of Anu?" His eyes narrowed to slits.

"So he suspects."

"And you?"

"What of me? I neither know nor care."

"Have you ever wondered why I pay you to spy upon him?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders. "You pay me well; that is enough for me."

"Why does he go to Gimil-ishbi?"

"I told him the renegade might aid him against Lilitu."

Sudden anger made the man's face darkly sinister.

"I thought you hated him."

She shrank from the menace in the voice. "I spoke of the diabolist before I thought, and then he forced me to speak his name; curse him, I will not sit with ease for weeks!" Her resentment rendered her momentarily speechless.

The man ignored her, intent on his own somber meditations. At last he rose with sudden determination.

"I have waited too long," he muttered, like one speaking his thoughts aloud. "The fiends play with him while I bite my nails, and those who conspire with me grow restless and suspicious. Enlil alone knows what counsel Gimil-ishbi will give. When the moon rises I will ride forth and seek the Argive on the plain. A stab unaware—he will not suspect until my sword is through him. A bronze blade is surer than the powers of Darkness. I was a fool to trust even a devil."

Amytis gasped with horror and caught at the velvet hangings for support. "You? *You?*" Her lips framed a question too terrible to voice.

"Aye!" He accorded her a glance of grim amusement. With a gasp of terror she darted through the curtained door, her smarts forgotten in her fright.

Whether the cavern was hollowed by man or by Nature, none ever knew. At least its walls, floor and ceiling were symmetrical and composed of blocks of greenish stone, found nowhere else in that level land. Whatever its cause and origin, man occupied it now. A lamp hung from the rock roof, casting a weird light over the chamber and the bald pate of the man who sat crouching over a parchment scroll on a stone table before him. He looked up as a quick sure footfall sounded on the stone steps that led down into his abode. The next instant a tall figure stood framed in the doorway.

The man at the stone table scanned this figure with avid interest. Pyrrhas wore a hauberk of black leather and copper scales; his brazen greaves glinted in the lamplight. The wide crimson cloak, flung loosely about him, did not enmesh the long hilt that jutted from its folds. Shadowed by his horned bronze helmet, the Argive's eyes gleamed icily. So the warrior faced the sage.

Gimil-ishbi was very old. There was no leaven of Semitic blood in his withered veins. His bald head was round as a vulture's skull, and from it his great nose jutted like the beak of a vulture. His eyes were oblique, a rarity even in a pure-blooded Shumirian, and they were bright and black as beads. Whereas Pyrrhas' eyes were all depth, blue deeps and changing clouds and shadows, Gimil-ishbi's eyes were opaque as jet, and they never changed. His mouth was a gash whose smile was more terrible than its snarl.

He was clad in a simple black tunic, and his feet, in their cloth sandals, seemed strangely deformed. Pyrrhas felt a curious twitching between his shoulder-blades as he glanced at those feet, and he drew his eyes away, and back to the sinister face.

"Deign to enter my humble abode, warrior," the voice was soft and silky, sounding strange from those harsh thin lips. "I would I could offer you food and drink, but I fear the food I eat and the wine I drink would find little favor in your sight." He laughed softly as at an obscure jest.

"I come not to eat or to drink," answered Pyrrhas abruptly, striding up to the table. "I come to buy a charm against devils."

"To buy?"

The Argive emptied a pouch of gold coins on the stone surface; they glistened dully in the lamplight. Gimil-ishbi's laugh was like the rustle of a serpent through dead grass.

"What is this yellow dirt to me? You speak of devils, and you bring me dust the wind blows away."

"Dust?" Pyrrhas scowled. Gimil-ishbi laid his hand on the shining heap and laughed; somewhere in the night an owl moaned. The priest lifted his hand. Beneath it lay a pile of yellow dust that gleamed dully in the lamplight. A sudden wind rushed down the steps, making the lamp flicker, whirling up the golden heap; for an instant the air was dazzled and spangled with the shining particles. Pyrrhas swore; his armor was sprinkled with yellow dust; it sparkled among the scales of his hauberk.

"Dust that the wind blows away," mumbled the priest. "Sit down, Pyrrhas of Nippur, and let us converse with each other."

Pyrrhas glanced about the narrow chamber; at the even stacks of clay tablets along the walls, and the rolls of papyrus above them. Then he seated himself on the stone bench opposite the priest, hitching his sword-belt so that his hilt was well to the front.

"You are far from the cradle of your race," said Gimil-ishbi. "You are the first golden-haired rover to tread the plains of Shumir."

"I have wandered in many lands," muttered the Argive, "but may the vultures pluck my bones if I ever saw a race so devil-ridden as this, or a land ruled and harried by so many gods and demons."

His gaze was fixed in fascination on Gimil-ishbi's hands; they were long, narrow, white and strong, the hands of youth. Their contrast to the priest's appearance of great age otherwise, was vaguely disquieting.

"To each city its gods and their priests," answered Gimil-ishbi; "and all fools. Of what account are gods whom the fortunes of men lift or lower? Behind all gods of men, behind the primal trinity of Ea, Anu and Enlil, lurk the elder gods, unchanged by the wars or ambitions of men. Men deny what they do not see. The priests of Eridu, which is sacred to Ea and light, are no blinder than them of Nippur, which is consecrated to Enlil, whom they deem the lord of Darkness. But he is only the god of the darkness of which men dream, not the real Darkness that lurks behind all dreams, and veils the real and awful deities. I glimpsed this truth when I was a priest of Enlil, wherefore they cast me forth. Ha! They would stare if they knew how many of their worshippers creep forth to me by night, as you have crept."

"I creep to no man!" the Argive bristled instantly. "I came to buy a charm. Name your price, and be damned to you."

"Be not wroth," smiled the priest. "Tell me why you have come."

"If you are so cursed wise you should know already," growled the Argive, unmollified. Then his gaze clouded as he cast back over his tangled

trail. "Some magician has cursed me," he muttered. "As I rode back from my triumph over Erech, my war-horse screamed and shied at Something none saw but he. Then my dreams grew strange and monstrous. In the darkness of my chamber, wings rustled and feet padded stealthily. Yesterday a woman at a feast went mad and tried to knife me. Later an adder sprang out of empty air and struck at me. Then, this night, she men call Lilitu came to my chamber and mocked me with awful laughter—"

"Lilitu?" the priest's eyes lit with a brooding fire; his skull-face worked in a ghastly smile. "Verily, warrior, they plot thy ruin in the House of Arabu. Your sword can not prevail against her, or against her mate Ardat Lili. In the gloom of midnight her teeth will find your throat. Her laugh will blast your ears, and her burning kisses will wither you like a dead leaf blowing in the hot winds of the desert. Madness and dissolution will be your lot, and you will descend to the House of Arabu whence none returns."

Pyrrhas moved restlessly, cursing incoherently beneath his breath.

"What can I offer you besides gold?" he growled.

"Much!" the black eyes shone; the mouth-gash twisted in inexplicable glee. "But I must name my own price, after I have given you aid."

Pyrrhas acquiesced with an impatient gesture.

"Who are the wisest men in the world?" asked the sage abruptly.

"The priests of Egypt, who scrawled on yonder parchments," answered the Argive.

Gimil-ishbi shook his head; his shadow fell on the wall like that of a great vulture, crouching over a dying victim.

"None so wise as the priests of Tiamat, who fools believe died long ago under the sword of Ea. Tiamat is deathless; she reigns in the shadows; she spreads her dark wings over her worshippers."

"I know them not," muttered Pyrrhas uneasily.

"The cities of men know them not; but the waste-places know them, the reedy marshes, the stony deserts, the hills, and the caverns. To them steal the winged ones from the House of Arabu."

"I thought none came from that House," said the Argive.

"No *human* returns thence. But the servants of Tiamat come and go at their pleasure."

Pyrrhas was silent, reflecting on the place of the dead, as believed in by the Shumirians: a vast cavern, dusty, dark and silent, through which wandered the souls of the dead forever, shorn of all human attributes, cheerless and loveless, remembering their former lives only to hate all living men, their deeds and dreams.

"I will aid you," murmured the priest. Pyrrhas lifted his helmeted head and stared at him. Gimil-ishbi's eyes were no more human than the reflection of firelight on subterranean pools of inky blackness. His lips sucked in as if he gloated over all woes and miseries of mankind. Pyrrhas hated him as a man hates the unseen serpent in the darkness.

"Aid me and name your price," said the Argive.

Gimil-ishbi closed his hands and opened them, and in the palms lay a gold cask, the lid of which fastened with a jeweled catch. He sprung the lid, and Pyrrhas saw the cask was filled with grey dust. He shuddered without knowing why.

"This ground dust was once the skull of the first king of Ur," said Gimil-ishbi. "When he died, as even a necromancer must, he concealed his body with all his art. But I found his crumbling bones, and in the darkness above them, I fought with his soul as a man fights with a python in the night. My spoil was his skull, that held darker secrets than those that lie in the pits of Egypt.

"With this dead dust shall you trap Lilitu. Go quickly to an enclosed place—a cavern or a chamber—nay, that ruined villa which lies between this spot and the city will serve. Strew the dust in thin lines across threshold and window; leave not a spot as large as a man's hand unguarded. Then lie down as if in slumber. When Lilitu enters, as she will, speak the words I shall teach you. Then you are her master, until you free her again by repeating the conjure backwards. You can not slay her, but you can make her swear to leave you in peace. Make her swear by the dugs of Tiamat. Now lean close and I will whisper the words of the spell."

Somewhere in the night a nameless bird cried out harshly; the sound was more human than the whispering of the priest, which was no louder than the gliding of an adder through slimy ooze. He drew back, his gash-mouth twisted in a grisly smile. The Argive sat for an instant like a statue of bronze. Their shadows fell together on the wall with the appearance of a crouching vulture facing a strange horned monster.

Pyrrhas took the cask and rose, wrapping his crimson cloak about his somber figure, his horned helmet lending an illusion of abnormal height.

"And the price?"

Gimil-ishbi's hands became claws, quivering with lust.

"Blood! A life!"

"Whose life?"

"Any life! So blood flows, and there is fear and agony, a spirit ruptured from its quivering flesh! I have one price for all—a human life! Death is my rapture; I would glut my soul on death! Man, maid, or infant. You have sworn. Make good your oath! A life! A human life!"

"Aye, a life!" Pyrrhas' sword cut the air in a flaming arc and Gimil-ishbi's vulture head fell on the stone table. The body reared upright, spouting black blood, then slumped across the stone. The head rolled across the surface and thudded dully on the floor. The features stared up, frozen in a mask of awful surprise.

Outside there sounded a frightful scream as Pyrrhas' stallion broke its halter and raced madly away across the plain.

From the dim chamber with its tablets of cryptic cuneiforms and papyri of dark hieroglyphics, and from the remnants of the mysterious priest, Pyrrhas fled. As he climbed the carven stair and emerged into the starlight he doubted his own reason.

Far across the level plain the moon was rising, dull red, darkly lurid. Tense heat and silence held the land. Pyrrhas felt cold sweat thickly beading his flesh; his blood was a sluggish current of ice in his veins; his tongue clove to his palate. His armor weighted him and his cloak was like a clinging snare. Cursing incoherently he tore it from him; sweating and shaking he ripped off his armor, piece by piece, and cast it away. In the grip of his abysmal fears he had reverted to the primitive. The veneer of civilization vanished. Naked but for loin-cloth and girded sword he strode across the plain, carrying the golden cask under his arm.

No sound disturbed the waiting silence as he came to the ruined villa whose walls reared drunkenly among heaps of rubble. One chamber stood above the general ruin, left practically untouched by some whim of chance. Only the door had been wrenched from its bronze hinges. Pyrrhas entered. Moonlight followed him in and made a dim radiance inside the portal. There were three windows, gold-barred. Sparingly he crossed the threshold with a thin grey line. Each casement he served in like manner. Then tossing aside the empty cask, he stretched himself on a bare dais that stood in deep shadow. His unreasoning horror was under control. He who had been the hunted was now the hunter. The trap was set, and he waited for his prey with the patience of the primitive.

He had not long to wait. Something threshed the air outside and the shadow of great wings crossed the moon-lit portal. There was an instant of tense silence in which Pyrrhas heard the thunderous impact of his own heart against his ribs. Then a shadowy form framed itself in the open door. A fleeting instant it was visible, then it vanished from view. The thing had entered; the night-fiend was in the chamber.

Pyrrhas' hand clenched on his sword as he heaved up suddenly from the dais. His voice crashed in the stillness as he thundered the dark enigmatic conjurement whispered to him by the dead priest. He was answered by a frightful scream; there was a quick stamp of bare feet, then a heavy fall, and something was threshing and writhing in the shadows on the floor. As Pyrrhas cursed the masking darkness, the moon thrust a crimson rim above a casement, like a goblin peering into a window, and a molten flood of light crossed the floor. In the pale glow the Argive saw his victim.

But it was no were-woman that writhed there. It was a thing like a man, lithe, naked, dusky-skinned. It differed not in the attributes of humanity except for the disquieting suppleness of its limbs, the changeless glitter of its eyes. It grovelled as in mortal agony, foaming at the mouth and contorting its body into impossible positions.

With a blood-mad yell Pyrrhas ran at the figure and plunged his sword through the squirming body. The point rang on the tiled floor beneath it, and an awful howl burst from the frothing lips, but that was the only apparent effect of the thrust. The Argive wrenched forth his sword and glared astoundedly to see no stain on the steel, no wound on the dusky body. He wheeled as the cry of the captive was re-echoed from without.

Just outside the enchanted threshold stood a woman, naked, supple,

dusky, with wide eyes blazing in a soulless face. The being on the floor ceased to writhe, and Pyrrhas' blood turned to ice.

"Lilitu!"

She quivered at the threshold, as if held by an invisible boundary. Her eyes were eloquent with hate; they yearned awfully for his blood and his life. She spoke, and the effect of a human voice issuing from that beautiful unhuman mouth was more terrifying than if a wild beast had spoken in human tongue.

"You have trapped my mate! You dare to torture Ardat Lili, before whom the gods tremble! Oh, you shall howl for this! You shall be torn bone from bone, and muscle from muscle, and vein from vein! Loose him! Speak the words and set him free, lest even this doom be denied you!"

"Words!" he answered with bitter savagery. "You have hunted me like a hound. Now you can not cross that line without falling into my hands as your mate has fallen. Come into the chamber, bitch of darkness, and let me caress you as I caress your lover—thus!—and thus!—and thus!"

Ardat Lili foamed and howled at the bite of the keen steel, and Lilitu screamed madly in protest, beating with her hands as at an invisible barrier.

"Cease! Cease! Oh, could I but come at you! How I would leave you a blind, mangled cripple! Have done! Ask what you will, and I will perform it!"

"That is well," grunted the Argive grimly. "I can not take this creature's life, but it seems I can hurt him, and unless you give me satisfaction, I will give him more pain than even he guesses exists in the world."

"Ask! Ask!" urged the were-woman, twisting with impatience.

"Why have you haunted me? What have I done to earn your hate?"

"Hate?" she tossed her head. "What are the sons of men that we of Shuala should hate or love? When the doom is loosed, it strikes blindly."

"Then who, or what, loosed the doom of Lilitu upon me?"

"One who dwells in the House of Arabu."

"Why, in Ymir's name?" swore Pyrrhas. "Why should the dead hate me?" He halted, remembering a priest who died gurgling curses.

"The dead strike at the bidding of the living. Someone who moves in the sunlight spoke in the night to one who dwells in Shuala."

"Who?"

"I do not know."

"You lie, you slut! It is the priests of Anu, and you would shield them. For that lie your lover shall howl to the kiss of the steel—"

"Butcher!" shrieked Lilitu. "Hold your hand! I swear by the dugs of Tiamat my mistress, I do not know what you ask. What are the priests of Anu that I should shield them? I would rip up all their bellies—as I would yours, could I come at you! Free my mate, and I will lead you to the House of Darkness itself, and you may wrest the truth from the awful mouth of the dweller himself, if you dare!"

"I will go," said Pyrrhas, "but I leave Ardat Lili here as hostage. If you

deal falsely with me, he will writhe on this enchanted floor throughout all eternity.

Lilitu wept with fury, crying: "No devil in Shuala is crueller than you. Haste, in the name of Apsu!"

Sheathing his sword, Pyrrhas stepped across the threshold. She caught his wrist with fingers like velvet-padded steel, crying something in a strange inhuman tongue. Instantly the moon-lit sky and plain were blotted out in a rush of icy blackness. There was a sensation of hurtling through a void of intolerable coldness, a roaring in the Argive's ears as of titan winds. Then his feet struck solid ground; stability followed that chaotic instant, that had been like the instant of dissolution that joins or separates two states of being, alike in stability, but in kind more alien than day and night. Pyrrhas knew that in that instant he had crossed an unimaginable gulf, and that he stood on shores never before touched by living human feet.

Lilitu's fingers grasped his wrist, but he could not see her. He stood in darkness of a quality which he had never encountered. It was almost tangibly soft, all-pervading and all-engulfing. Standing amidst it, it was not easy even to imagine sunlight and bright rivers and grass singing in the wind. They belonged to that other world—a world lost and forgotten in the dust of a million centuries. The world of life and light was a whim of chance—a bright spark glowing momentarily in a universe of dust and shadows. Darkness and silence were the natural state of the cosmos, not light and the noises of Life. No wonder the dead hated the living, who disturbed the grey stillness of Infinity with their tinkling laughter.

Lilitu's fingers drew him through abysmal blackness. He had a vague sensation as of being in a titanic cavern, too huge for conception. He sensed walls and roof, though he did not see them and never reached them; they seemed to recede as he advanced, yet there was always the sensation of their presence. Sometimes his feet stirred what he hoped was only dust. There was a dusty scent throughout the darkness; he smelled the odors of decay and mould.

He saw lights moving like glow-worms through the dark. Yet they were not lights, as he knew radiance. They were more like spots of lesser gloom, that seemed to glow only by contrast with the engulfing blackness which they emphasized without illuminating. Slowly, laboriously they crawled through the eternal night. One approached the companions closely and Pyrrhas' hair stood up and he grasped his sword. But Lilitu took no heed as she hurried him on. The dim spot glowed close to him for an instant; it vaguely illumined a shadowy countenance, faintly human, yet strangely birdlike.

Existence became a dim and tangled thing to Pyrrhas, wherein he seemed to journey for a thousand years through the blackness of dust and decay, drawn and guided by the hand of the were-woman. Then he heard her breath hiss through her teeth, and she came to a halt.

Before them shimmered another of those strange globes of light. Pyrrhas could not tell whether it illumined a man or a bird. The creature stood up-

right like a man, but it was clad in grey feathers—at least they were more like feathers than anything else. The features were no more human than they were birdlike.

"This is the dweller in Shuala which put upon you the curse of the dead," whispered Lilitu. "Ask him the name of him who hates you on earth."

"Tell me the name of mine enemy!" demanded Pyrrhas, shuddering at the sound of his own voice, which whispered drearily and uncannily through the unechoing darkness.

The eyes of the dead burned redly and it came at him with a rustle of pinions, a long gleam of light springing into its lifted hand. Pyrrhas recoiled, clutching at his word, but Lilitu hissed: "Nay, use this!" and he felt a hilt thrust into his fingers. He was grasping a scimitar with a blade curved in the shape of the crescent moon, that shone like an arc of white fire.

He parried the bird-thing's stroke, and sparks showered in the gloom, burning him like bits of flame. The darkness clung to him like a black cloak; the glow of the feathered monster bewildered and baffled him. It was like fighting a shadow in the maze of a nightmare. Only by the fiery gleam of his enemy's blade did he keep the touch of it. Thrice it sang death in his ears as he deflected it by the merest fraction, then his own crescent-edge cut the darkness and grated on the other's shoulder-joint. With a strident screech the thing dropped its weapon and slumped down, a milky liquid spurting from the gaping wound. Pyrrhas lifted his scimitar again, when the creature gasped in a voice that was no more human than the grating of wind-blown boughs against one another: "Naram-ninub, the great-grandson of my great-grandson! By black arts he spoke and commanded me across the gulfs!"

"Naram-ninub!" Pyrrhas stood frozen in amazement; the scimitar was torn from his hand. Again Lilitu's fingers locked on his wrist. Again the dark was drowned in deeper blackness and howling winds blowing between the spheres.

He staggered in the moonlight without the ruined villa, reeling with the dizziness of his transmutation. Beside him Lilitu's teeth shone between her curling red lips. Catching the thick locks clustered on her neck, he shook her savagely, as he would have shaken a mortal woman.

"Harlot of Hell! What madness has your sorcery instilled in my brain?"

"No madness!" she laughed, striking his hand aside. "You have journeyed to the House of Arabu, and you have returned. You have spoken with and overcome with the sword of Apsu, the shade of a man dead for long centuries."

"Then it was no dream of madness! But Naram-ninub—" he halted in confused thought. "Why, of all the men of Nippur, he has been my staunchest friend!"

"Friend?" she mocked. "What is friendship but a pleasant pretense to while away an idle hour?"

"But why, in Ymir's name?"

"What are the petty intrigues of men to me?" she exclaimed angrily.

"Yet now I remember that men from Erech, wrapped in cloaks, steal by night to Naram-ninub's palace."

"Ymir!" like a sudden blaze of light Pyrrhas saw reason in merciless clarity. "He would sell Nippur to Erech, and first he must put me out of the way, because the hosts of Nippur cannot stand before me! Oh, dog, let my knife find your heart!"

"Keep faith with me!" Lilitu's importunities drowned his fury. "I have kept faith with you. I have led you where never living man has trod, and brought you forth unharmed. I have betrayed the dwellers in darkness and done that for which Tiamat will bind me naked on a white-hot grid for seven times seven days. Speak the words and free Ardat Lili!"

Still engrossed in Naram-ninub's treachery, Pyrrhas spoke the incantation. With a loud sigh of relief, the were-man rose from the tiled floor and came into the moonlight. The Argive stood with his hand on his sword and his head bent, lost in moody thought. Lilitu's eyes flashed a quick meaning to her mate. Lithely they began to steal toward the abstracted man. Some primitive instinct brought his head up with a jerk. They were closing in on him, their eyes burning in the moonlight, their fingers reaching for him. Instantly he realized his mistake; he had forgotten to make them swear truce with him; no oath bound them from his flesh.

With feline screeches they struck in, but quicker yet he bounded aside and raced toward the distant city. Too hotly eager for his blood to resort to sorcery, they gave chase. Fear winged his feet, but close behind him he heard the swift patter of their feet, their eager panting. A sudden drum of hoofs sounded in front of him, and bursting through a tattered grove of skeleton palms, he almost caromed against a rider, who rode like the wind, a long silvery glitter in his hand. With a startled oath the horseman wrenched his steed back on its haunches. Pyrrhas saw looming over him a powerful body in scale-mail, a pair of blazing eyes that glared at him from under a domed helmet, a short black beard.

"You dog!" he yelled furiously. "Damn you, have you come to complete with your sword what your black magic began?"

The steed reared wildly as he leaped at its head and caught its bridle. Cursing madly and fighting for balance, Naram-ninub slashed at his attacker's head, but Pyrrhas parried the stroke and thrust upward murderously. The sword-point glanced from the corselet and plowed along the Semite's jaw-bone. Naram-ninub screamed and fell from the plunging steed, spouting blood. His leg-bone snapped as he pitched heavily to earth, and his cry was echoed by a gloating howl from the shadowed grove.

Without dragging the rearing horse to earth, Pyrrhas sprang to its back and wrenched it about. Naram-ninub was groaning and writhing on the ground, and as Pyrrhas looked, two shadows darted from the darkened grove and fastened themselves on his prostrate form. A terrible scream burst from his lips, echoed by more awful laugher. Blood on the night air; on it the night-things would feed, wild as mad dogs, making no difference between men.

The Argive wheeled away, toward the city, then hesitated, shaken by a fierce revulsion. The level land lay quiescent beneath the moon, and the brutish pyramid of Enlil stood up in the stars. Behind him lay his enemy, glutting the fangs of the horrors he himself had called up from the Pits. The road was open to Nippur, for his return.

His return?—to a devil-ridden people crawling beneath the heels of priest and king; to a city rotten with intrigue and obscene mysteries; to an alien race that mistrusted him, and a mistress that hated him.

Wheeling his horse again, he rode westward toward the open lands, flinging his arms wide in a gesture of renunciation and the exultation of freedom. The weariness of life dropped from him like a cloak. His mane floated in the wind, and over the plains of Shumir shouted a sound they had never heard before—the gusty, elemental, reasonless laughter of a free barbarian.

The Devil in Hollywood

by Dale Clark

Dale Clark is well known as a writer of excellent fast-moving detective novels, but he is no newcomer to fantasy. Old readers of Weird Tales *may remember seeing the name of Ronal Kayser signed to occasional stories back in the late twenties and early thirties. Dale Clark is the pen-name under which Kayser achieved full literary fruition. A Californian, it was to be expected that a man of his talent would gravitate to the motion picture industry. Whether he writes for the films now, your editor does not know, but certainly the following unusual story of devilish doings in the movie colony would indicate a close acquaintance with that field of endeavor.*

THE picture was never released. Lord, of course not! The public wouldn't have stood for it. The movies are full of location wars and stage murders, and you can get away with showing people a mock Dracula or Frankenstein—because everyone knows that Frankenstein's face is a mask of putty and paint. But you can't show them *real* terror. . . .

The picture in its entirety was shown only once—at a special preview for the Los Angeles homicide squad. And those hard-boiled dicks came out of the projection room with pallid faces and bulging eyes.

We had to seal the film up in tins again, and store it away in a fireproof vault. That's what became of the first picture Coral Gay ever starred in. Her first, and her greatest.

Maybe you can go for Coral Gay, maybe you can't. Most men can. A lot of women—older ones especially— have no more time for her than they've got for the beautiful secretary in hubby's office. They say Coral can't act. They say she dyes her hair, and that she was old enough to go into a Red Cross nursing unit when the World War broke out. They say she pads herself, because no girl could honestly have a figure like hers. . . .

One thing they point out is that Coral is never photographed in a swimsuit. So she must use pads!

I wish they could see the first screen test we ever took of Coral Gay. . . .

It all started down on the C-M-C lot. It started on Stage Three, where Harry Janifer was shooting a Colonial ballroom sequence. I happened to be standing around. I am a cameraman, and it is nice work when you can get

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it. I had not been able to get it for quite some time then, and I was standing around in the hope someone would notice me. They forget awful quick in Hollywood. And because I had never worked on a really big picture I was half-forgotten to begin with.

A voice rumbled, "How would you like to go to work today?"

My heart did the flying trapeze act, and I whirled around like a top. "I'm pretty busy," I said, "but I might—" You know the line.

Then I saw who had spoken to me, and my heart came off the trapeze. It was only the Russian, Kamiliev. He stood there grinning at me through his bluish-black spade of beard.

It wasn't worth the trouble of shooting him the line.

"I'd like it fine," I said. "You and me both!"

Three years before, I'd have crawled on my hands and knees from one end of Wilshire Boulevard to the other to have heard Kamiliev offer me a job. He was a big shot then. A Russian edition of Emil Jannings. C-M-C brought him across the Atlantic, paid him plenty, and gave him a free hand to write and direct and star in his own stuff. But that was three years before. It surprised me now that Kamiliev had got past the gateman onto the C-M-C lot at all.

"I'm producing for myself now," he said. "I can't pay any salary, but I'll give you a percentage. . . ."

There are a lot of small-time producers like that. They make short subjects, sometimes a feature-length horse opera. Once in a while they are lucky, and get something released through a major company. They spend ten or fifteen grand on a picture. I looked at Kamiliev and tried to decide whether he had ten or fifteen grand. I stared into Kamiliev's eyes and wondered whether he had anything left or was just a hollow shell.

I could not read his eyes. The pupils were greenish and opaque. They glittered. The lids, heavy and Slavic, lifted a little at the corners.

They might have been the eyes of a genius, or a crazy man.

The red bulb winked on, for silence. I felt glad I did not have to answer Kamiliev right away. The scene blazed under pitiless lights in front of me. Men in tremendously brilliant uniforms and girls in swirling misty gowns. Two cameras rolled, one at the end of the stage and the other on a crane overhead.

Watching the cameras, I did not see what Kamiliev was doing until he was in the middle of doing it. Until he had pushed his way half across the stage. And then it was too late to stop him.

He looked like a performing bear out there under the lights. A big, shaggy, Russian bear. His huge arms flailed aside the dancers, reached one of the girls. One hand shoved the girl's partner, and the fellow went flat on the seat of his fancy Colonial pants.

"Cut!" screamed Harry Janifer from beside the end camera.

The music stopped in the middle of a note. One horn tooted a last, astonished bleat.

And Kamiliev came plowing through the crowd again. He towered a head

higher than anyone on the set, and the sight of him dragging this girl across the floor made you think of Beauty and the Beast. The girl didn't know what it was all about. Her eyes were wide open blanks of surprise. She merely trailed along at the end of the arm that Kamiliev gripped . . .

"You ape of the Steppes!" That from Harry Janifer, knifing along in the wake of the pair. "You spoiled my take! Don't you know this stuff is costing a thousand bucks an hour? Or do you pick that kind of money off the trees?"

He finally caught up with Kamiliev, at the stage exit. The girl was only an extra, and Janifer sized it up as a personal row.

"Listen to me, Cossack!" he yelled. "I don't care how much you drag your women around by the hair. But not on my set! You try a stunt like this again and I'll take a garden rake and comb out your whiskers! I'll civilize you—"

Kamiliev looked at the other. Looked *down* at him.

"Hollywooder!" he sneered—that being the most insulting thing he could think of. "Why, if you are remembered ten years from now, it will be because today I find this girl under your nose. Ten years from now—when she is a great star!"

It sounded crazy. It stunned Janifer, and it stunned the crowd.

Kamiliev stared over a small sea of heads at me. An almost insane flicker played in his greenish eyes. I didn't know whether he reminded me of a Roman emperor, or of a guy in a padded cell who just thought he was a Roman emperor.

"Come on, Tyler," he barked.

Then he headed through the exit door, dragging the girl after him.

The girl had it easy, compared to me. She didn't have to make up her mind—she couldn't help herself. Mentally I flipped a coin. If I followed Kamiliev, I was washed up with C-M-C. Janifer would see to that; Janifer was burning like a Kleig light. On the other hand, what was C-M-C doing for me anyhow?

If I'd known then what I know now, all the horses in a De Mille spectacle couldn't have dragged me off that nice, warm safe stage; but I didn't.

I followed Kamiliev.

The Russian had a big car outside, a relic of his days of glory. That encouraged me a little, and I climbed in. A man who rides in a Rolls must have some money—even if he drives it himself. We started. Kamiliev drove this one like a fire chief heading for a five-eleven blaze.

I hung onto the seat strap and looked at the girl, huddled in the other corner of the wide back seat. I looked at her, and I could not see what Kamiliev was excited about. She was a red-head, and good-looking—but Hollywood is full of good-looking red-heads. The casting bureau certainly had never given her a tumble. I could imagine what was written on her file card. "Okay walk-on, swim, dance, ride, evening gown and sports."

That's what I thought of Coral Gay the first time I saw her. And while I thought it, Kamiliev's car went tearing out toward the foothills and his house. The Moscow house. . . .

The Moscow house was an eyesore. There was a wire fence, one you couldn't have pushed a silver dollar through; but the gate stood open. We bumped in onto the cobbled, Europeanized driveway. We bumped to a stop beside the frowning old walls that had been transplanted to California, stone by stone. Only a lot of stones had got left behind.

Kamiliev had started to move this house when he was very flush with C-M-C coin; but his job ran out before the moving was completed. So one wing of the building stood roofless, with open, glassless windows peering blindly across the yard. The whole place had a raw, disfigured look. . . .

It was modeled on the Russian style, of course, but I don't imagine even the Russians raved about its beauty much. The place made you think of a conspirator banished into exile. It seemed to resent the hot American sunshine. It threw down a cold, bleak Moscow shadow.

He went in. It seemed worse inside. I couldn't name the mysterious something that beat down on us from the walls, that peered at us from the dusty hangings. There was a big room downstairs, draped with musty curtains . . . seemingly the Russian style was to curtain the walls and leave the windows bare. There was an ikon—St. Stepan—and a samovar and a lot of candlesticks. And a lot of dirt.

Kamiliev waved his hand toward the movie equipment in the room. There was a tripoded camera—one of those portable affairs with a duralumin black-box screwed to the back, and a length of tapestry draped over it for an icer. For light he had two sun-arcs and a pair of spots. Cables crawled like big snakes across the floor.

But otherwise the place kept its Russian atmosphere—old Russia, Holy Russia. . . .

The house had a history—probably a dark and bloody one—and even then it seemed to be full of silent yells and invisible ghosts.

I didn't have time to think much about that. Kamiliev switched up the spotlights onto a pair of wings he had at the end of the room. Black wings, made out of bunting and wire—but they looked realistic. Huge, bat-like affairs with a queer note of menace in them. . . . He had been trying for some photographic effects himself, but he didn't have the camera set right. I tinkered with that while he told Coral Gay what he wanted, while he placed her in front of the black wings.

"Camera!"

It sounded good to hear that, anyway. Even if all I had to do with this job was jab the button.

Film rolled. Coral Gay, out there in front of me, stooped—which is a tough test for any woman. Stooped, and caught the ballooning width of the Colonial skirt in her hands.

There was a hiss of tearing cloth. That skirt ripped easily, revealed the rounded contour of Coral's thighs.

The tear in her gown hesitated when it got as high as the stitched waistline. At last it leaped again, and the tight bodice flared.

I almost broke the rule of silence for the first time while a camera rolled. The thing I almost said was, "God—!"

It wasn't just another strip act, you understand. I'd seen plenty of that sort of thing, and this was different.

Coral's supple, outstretched arms held the torn gown wide, and the shimmer of fabric formed small, dainty, flower-petal white wings inside the big black ones. Coral herself might just as well have been a butterfly instead of a half-nude girl. A radiant, quivering butterfly hovering against blackness that would close and crush her gossamer wings . . . and crush her, too. . . .

I think I sensed it then. And so, I think, did Coral. She stared over one shoulder at the enshrouding cloth. I don't figure that Carol was actress enough then to fake the slither of horror that crowded into her eyes and skinned back her lips in a writhing line of fear. It wasn't acting—the flutter of dry terror in her throat. . . .

"Cut!" Kamiliev shouted. A laugh of triumph sounded in his voice.

My stare switched to his face, and I saw greed there as he watched Coral Gay huddle quickly into her torn garment. But it wasn't normal greed. Kamiliev had seen the butterfly rather than the woman. To him, Coral was plastic flesh that could be moulded into what his picture wanted.

He began to pace up and down the room, throwing words at us. Or maybe he was talking to himself. About the world-beater of a picture he was going to make.

"Maybe he will, at that," I said to Coral, later. Kamiliev had lent me the Rolls, and I was driving the girl home. "He hasn't much money, but then he won't need much if we work on a percentage basis. Eighty per cent of picture cost is salaries, anyway. And overhead."

"That ghastly house!" Coral said. Under the Titian mop of hair, her blue eyes worried straight ahead.

"He'll probably shoot most of the interiors in there," I came back. "That'll save more money. His equipment isn't much—but fellows have gone to the South Seas and come back with tins of feature stuff with no better equipment. We can dub in a lot of the sound later. . . ."

She wasn't listening to me.

"That awful old man! You saw his eyes. I'm afraid—" She broke off without saying what she was afraid of.

"Yeah, he's a little batty." I kept myself from thinking along her lines. "But Kamiliev has been a great director and a great actor. I think he's got one more big picture in him. And it looks to me like our chance to ride to the top."

Coral's knuckles showed white as her balled-up fingers kept the torn gown in place.

"You can pay too high a price for going to the top," she declared.

She was right, but I didn't believe it then.

"Look here," I said, twisting the wheel. "I know this game a lot better

than you do. I'll bet your folks in Missoula or Twin Forks, or wherever you come from, are sending you bread and butter money right now. They'll get tired of that, and you'll go home and marry the home-town boy. And you'll spend the rest of your life saying a girl can't get anywhere in the movies without 'paying the price.' "

We stopped in front of the boarding-house where she lived.

I went on. "But the truth is, getting anywhere in this racket is a million-to-one chance. You've got the chance. And you're passing it up on account of a damn fool notion—"

"That isn't so," she cut in. "I'm not afraid of Kamiliev the way you seem to think. It's something else . . . and worse. There must be some *reason* why he lost out with the big producers. There's something *wrong* with him. No normal person would want to live in a house like that." Her hand fumbled mechanically for the door latch. "I suppose you think I'm a silly fool. Hundreds of girls would jump at the chance—any chance! But I can't help suspecting . . ."

I shrugged. "What if he is all washed up with C-M-C? So're you! You can't go chasing off the lot and tearing up wardrobe costumes—you know that."

"Maybe the test won't turn out, anyway," she sighed. As if she hoped it wouldn't. . . .

The test turned out swell. One of the movie gossip columnists played up the story of what happened on Stage Three, too.

"You've got to go along with Kamiliev now," I told Coral. "Otherwise nobody'll believe the test was any good. They'll say you don't even photograph well."

I had sold myself on the idea. I reasoned it out that I was giving her the best of advice.

And Coral's fears must have looked a little silly to her the next morning. Anyway, after Kamiliev had talked to her a few times, she finally said, "All right. I'll sign."

What brought her around as much as anything else was the change in Kamiliev. We were already trying to push the film along. We put in our nights looking over stock stuff, buying Russian street scene fill-ups by the reel. It is surprising how much of a picture you can buy ready-made. And we put in the days working up some of his first takes.

Kamiliev had cut out for himself the kind of rôle Emil Jannings used to jerk tears with. Throughout the early footage of this picture we were shooting, he played the part of a philosopher—an old man, he was, writing a book and raising flowers in his window. And going for walks in the streets. Patting children on the head. Feeding sugar to horses.

It sounds funny. But Kamiliev could do these things in a way that brought a lump into your throat. He could make you see the loneliness of the old man's life just by the way he fingered a flower blossom. We shot thousands of feet of this stuff, and there was a heart-throb in every flicker of it.

Maybe it was so good because you couldn't tell where the acting left off and his own life began. Many's the time I saw him stop on the street and pat some youngster on the head. Hollywood kids don't go so much for that; but Kamiliev got on swell with the milkman's horse. He fed sugar to it, too. And when the milkman drove down the street, and you saw Kamiliev standing there staring after the wagon—you'd swear he'd lost the best friend in the world.

"My first impression was wrong," Coral Gay admitted.

The girl in the film was supposed to be a ballet dancer. Most directors would have hired a professional for the long shots, using Coral only in the close-ups. But not Kamiliev. "Ballet training is something that must show in your walk," he told her. "Even the way you move your hands."

He sent her to a teacher. It takes years to develop a ballet dancer, yet Coral got the hang of it pretty well in six weeks. That shows you how hard she worked.

And we were shooting film all this time. We rented a stretch of Russian location down on the Fox lot. We rented a droshky and a few other properties. With the camera set up in the Rolls, and using a couple of storage batteries for current, I shoot this take:

Kamiliev is standing on the curb, absent-mindedly feeding his sugar to a horse that is hitched to the droshky. A woman, very beautiful and very fashionably dressed—Coral—comes out to the carriage. She mistakes the philosopher for one of those street tramps that make a living watching the equipages of the rich, and she hands him a tip. Kamiliev stares into her face. He watches her enter the droshky, and watches the droshky rattle away. And he raises the coin to his bearded lips—and kisses it.

From that day the philosopher writes no more. He spends his evenings hanging around the entrance of the theater where the woman dances. He tears down a billboard with her picture on it—and this picture he puts up in the ikon of St. Stepan.

One night the dancer arrives at the theater wearing a gorgeous corsage at her bosom. The bouquet falls from her gown as she steps down from the carriage. And Kamiliev picks the flowers from the mud, buries his face in the blossoms.

And in the bouquet he finds a *billet-doux*. . . .

That is how he learns that the dancer is only a courtesan for sale to the highest bidder.

So he sells all his property. He has his beard trimmed and curled and he begins to shower gifts upon the woman.

The queer thing was the way Coral hit off her rôle. She became just that kind of woman. She'd been—I remembered—an attractive bit of flesh that Kamiliev could model like so much clay . . . and he modeled her. He took that little red-headed extra, and he made her into an alluring, exotic, sophisticated woman of the world.

I hated to shoot some of the scenes between them, though. And I knew

that a lot of this boudoir stuff would be left in the cutting room if any company released this for us. Too much of it was bestial, degrading.

I kept thinking about that as I worked late in the Moscow house one night. We had fixed up a developing room in the cellar, and I was developing some of the takes—cheaper than sending the film out.

Maybe it was the thick gloom of the dark-room in the bowel of that sinister old house, I don't know. But at any rate, dismal shapes began to parade in my mind. I didn't like the direction the picture was taking now. I wondered just what the rest of the script would be like. I'd never seen it in writing, and maybe it existed only in Kamiliev's imagination.

What kind of a picture was he trying to make?

It was getting on toward midnight when I walked down the cobbled driveway. A few street lights sprinkled the darkness ahead of me as I tramped along. I tramped a long ways, turning the thing over and over in my mind.

Abruptly, a scream wailed out down the sidewalk ahead. I heard the splattering tick-tock of high heels drumming on the concrete. Terror sobbed in that scream, and telegraphed through the dot-dash of heels. My muscles bunched, and I started to run toward the sound.

Suddenly then, from out of the darkness, the girl pitched into my arms. She was young, and pretty. I could see that even in the darkness. And I could see that her blouse was torn.

Small fingers knit onto the lapels of my coat. The girl moaned, almost incoherently. "Man—followed me—for blocks and blocks! Then he grabbed—"

Heavier footsteps pounded up the street. A male bulk shaped itself before our eyes.

"That's him!" She said that, and shrieked.

Two things happened. The male bulk faded away, and a house door along the street jarred open. The fellow who came through that door had a gun in his hand—and came darn close to using it when he saw his screaming wife in my arms!

We got it explained. How she had gone with a girl-friend to the movies and decided to walk home alone. How I'd happened along the street just then. . . .

There was one thing I didn't tell them. I had recognized the male bulk there in the dark.

Kamiliev.

I walked away, scared and sober. It wasn't just that the woman had described Kamiliev to us perfectly—would undoubtedly recognize him if she ever set eyes on the man again. What worried me most was the way he had vanished into the night again. . . .

Good Lord! If Kamiliev was going to *live* this part of the picture, too. . . .

I began to read the newspapers, afraid of what I might find in them. Fear worse than the anxiety about the film sickened me. You can always leave

the bad spots in a picture on the cutting-room floor. But in life—! If that young woman hadn't torn herself out of his clutches. . . .

I made up my mind to watch Kamiliev closely.

And I was relieved when the picture took a new twist. When the dancer had wrung the last cent out of the man, had laughed in his face.

Then, in the film, Kamiliev stumbles back to the Moscow house. One idea crazes him. It is the ancient legend of the philosopher's stone, the black magic of transmuting base metal into gold. Gold to buy the woman.

It was the old story of Faust, who sold his soul to the devil.

And Kamiliev played a Russian Faust. He began to read old books. He practiced alchemy. Here some wonderful shots worked into the picture—Though even then I knew that some of them could never be shown on the screen. I could only hope there'd be enough of it that would be usable.

And Kamiliev lived this rôle also. When I photographed the sequence where he knelt before the ikon—burning black, sulphurous candles before the shrine, kissing the inverted Greek Cross, mumbling the Lord's Prayer backwards—I had an uneasy feeling that he wasn't just acting. That he really did pray to the Powers of Hell, there.

Coral refused to watch us take this scene. Refused even to sit through the showing of that take next day.

"It's blasphemous," she said.

I knew myself that the scene would never get past the censors. But the next one was all right. The next scene represented Kamiliev striking a bargain with Satan, selling his soul to him. And that was okay, because anyone could see that Satan was merely an actor named Henry Otters dressed up in trunks and mask and artificial black wings. Otters was a character actor, and a good one. He didn't suit Kamiliev, though.

"Fool!" said Kamiliev. "Can a man be a Devil only six hours a day? No! It is something he must really be—"

He wanted Otters to celebrate the Black Mass with him!

"That man is crazy!" said Otters to me. "A crazy, sacrilegious maniac!"

All of this kept running through my head the last night I drove out to the Moscow house. The night when the terror burst. . . .

My mind kept doing a jigsaw puzzle. I fitted the scenes of the picture together, throwing out the worst ones, and trying to make myself believe that there'd be enough left to click. I told myself that the part about a man selling himself to the Devil was all right. "Faust" had been performed on the stage plenty of times. There'd been an opera about it, hadn't there?

And men going to pieces over a bad woman—that was okay, too. Just so we trimmed out the worst of the pieces!

Only, I wondered how Kamiliev intended to end it all. The picture needed a smash ending.

I drove up the cobbled driveway. In the darkness the house looked like a wild animal crouched on its haunches, with two glaring windows for eyes.

I could not get rid of the idea that there was something menacing and supernally evil about the house itself.

I got out of the car, and Henry Otters walked up to me. He'd been leaning against the side of the house, smoking a cigarette. He wore the Devil costume that Kamiliev had designed for the part. It was black and fitted closely from head to heel, with the huge batwings spread from the shoulders. The wing part was made of varnished silk and whalebone. Otters had the face mask slung over his shoulder so he could smoke the cigarette.

"Let's get this over," Otters said. His voice sounded tight. "I wish to heaven this night's work was done!"

I grinned at him.

"You're not getting camera-shy at your age?"

"No. I just wish the job was done." The corners of his mouth twitched. "I can't stand much more! Kamiliev's crying . . . he's been sitting in there crying for an hour now, and I've been standing out here listening. . . . He scares me. Do you think he's completely crazy?"

"Not the way you mean. He's just rehearsing for a big scene."

Otters shook his head. "It doesn't sound like acting to me. It sounds like the real thing."

"His acting *is* the real thing," I said.

Otters puffed hard on his cigarette, and its glow showed the shine of fear in his eyes.

"That's what I'm afraid of. Maybe it isn't acting. . . . You think he is making up a play and then living up to it. It might be the other way around." He dropped the cigarette, stepped on it. "He might be living all this . . . and making up a play about it at the same time. See what I mean?"

It was true. There might be something in Kamiliev, away down deep, that made him want to be kind to animals and kids at one time—and then again made him follow young women in the streets. There might be a streak of philosophy in him, and a streak of Devil-worship, too. So maybe he invented a motion picture that would let him do all these things. . . .

"I still don't see why you should be scared about it," I told Otters.

He peered at me, very close; now I didn't need the cigarette glow to see the gleam of fear in his eyes.

"Then you *don't* know what I mean," he said, slowly.

I went into the Moscow house. The old feeling of menace and dread hit at me from the cold walls. I looked at Kamiliev, and it was true that he had been crying. His heavy, Slavic eyelids were red and bloated. But he wasn't crying now; he was talking to Coral Gay.

"You know what has happened," he told her. He was talking about the picture, of course. Sometimes he would talk to her three or four hours in order to work her up to the right pitch for a scene. "I have sold myself to the Devil and he has made me rich. I have sent you a banknote, torn in half. One half I have kept. All of this time you have made a fool of me, you have played fast and loose with me, but now the cards have changed hands. You know for what you come to my house?"

"I know," said Coral Gay. And she looked as sickened as if all this were not play-acting.

"You come straight from the ballet," Kamiliev went on. "You hate me, but you are so greedy for the other half of this money that you do not even stop to change your clothes. You come in your ballet slippers, you come running on your toes. And you see me—I am sitting in front of the ikon, and there is the half of the banknote in my hand. You do not look at me. You look only at the money.

He got up and walked up and down the floor. Like a big, shaggy bear in a cage.

"You speak to me. 'Dmitri!' you say. And into this word you must put all your hate and all your greed. You must say it in the false-woman voice. All in one word."

Coral's lips moved. "Yes."

"Then you say, in another voice, 'Dmitri!' you say. 'Look at me!' And you throw down your wrap. You stand before me in your ballet costume. You must make your voice sparkle like the false jewel at your throat and the two false jewels on your bodice."

Kamiliev stared at her through his red and puffed eyes. "Now I raise my head, and I say nothing, I only stare. You cry, 'Dmitri! Why do you look at me like that?' I stare, because behind you is the big window, and coming through this window is the Angel of Hell. It is the Devil with his great black wings."

He swung, and looked at me. "You see what I want. It is the screen test again. Coral standing there, and the gauze wings of her dance costume are patterned against the other, big black wings."

He looked away from both of us. He might have been talking to himself.

"That's how it is. A man sells himself to the Devil, and always the Devil comes to carry him away to Hell before he gets what he sold himself for. That is the kind of bargain Satan loves. . . ." He was only rehearsing his curtain speech. I knew that. But the grim fatality in his tone appalled me.

He had lived this rôle so intensely that the imaginary Dmitri of the film and the real Kamiliev were one and the same—to him. And almost, they were the same to me. The queer thought came that Kamiliev, like Dmitri, had played with Hellfire, and that the Devil would come for Kamiliev as he came in the film for Dmitri. I knew the thought was crazy, but I couldn't push it away from me.

Abruptly, the Russian ordered us to work.

We were building up to the big moment. When Otters came through the window. When Coral cried, "Look at me!" and flung back her cloak.

We came to that moment.

I'd seen it all before, in that screen test. The cloak peeling away and baring the contours of her thighs and bosom. The cloak sliding from her shoulders. And above her supple, outstretched arms, the gauze wings of her dancer's costume shimmering. . . .

I'd seen it all before. The radiant, quivering girl-butterfly hovering in front of the big black wings. The blackness that would close and crush the gossamer wings . . . crush her, too. I saw it clearly now, as the camera ground on.

Coral was an actress now. But again, when she saw the black wings over her shoulder, she didn't fake the slither of horror in her eyes, the skinned grimace of fear. Or her terror-yell.

"Otters!" she screamed. And then:

"That isn't Otters!"

It wasn't. The wings were too big, and too black. The whole figure was too big, and too hideously real. It might have been an illusion caused by staring through the brilliant light focused on Coral—but behind her, the black outline seemed fringed in a seethe of darkly flowing mist. . . .

I saw Coral sway. She screamed again. And then she crumpled toward the floor.

That was when the Shape detached itself from the window and slithered into the room.

It loomed enormously large—larger and taller than Otters by far—and it looked down on the girl through eyes that were like blacker fire in the charnel horror of its face. I could see the smoke-dun of mist play around its wings, now. It looked horribly like an infernal halo, that grim fringe of sulphurous vapor. . . . The limbs were swathed in it, almost hidden.

You could not say whether it walked or floated; but it moved. And it was real. It blotted out one of the spotlights as it came toward Kamiliev.

I didn't do anything. I was stunned. When a man's brain blotches in a smear of horror, he does the instinctive thing. . . . And it is second-nature for a cameraman to stay *behind* his camera.

And maybe I couldn't have done anything then, anyway. My limbs were flaccid, and cold with a supernal dread.

Kamiliev said something. The words croaked harshly, and I'm not sure that I heard them—then. But the sound of them was on the film-track afterwards.

"So you've come?" Kamiliev said. "You're here?"

I did hear what the Shape answered. "You sent for me," it said. And these words were also on the sound-track.

The thing I thought of then was Kamiliev's Black Mass. . . . And Kamiliev may have had the same thought. But he did not have long to think it. For the black wings closed, the black wings wrapped around the Russian. . . .

Kamiliev fought. He was a big man, a great shaggy bear of a man, and he fought now for his life. Deep in the translucent folds of the wings I could see two enormous hands—hands with *hairs sprouting at the fingertips.* These hands vised on Kamiliev's throat.

It seemed to me that for an eternity the Shape and Kamiliev stood locked in the embrace of death. But it was not an eternity. It amounted to eleven seconds. I know, for afterward I measured the footage on the film. It took

the hairy fingers eleven seconds to crush the vertebrae in Kamiliev's neck.

And then with the same slow and inexorable flowing movement the Shape recrossed the room, and it bent over Coral Gay. . . .

Now, for the first time in my life, I stepped in front of a grinding camera.

Stepped? I lurched, crazily. I was sick, with a cold pit of horror where my heart should have been. And I was drawn on by the greater horror of the unspeakable black wings closing on the girl.

They caressed her body, the wings did. They played on her flesh like black fire. And the blacker fire of the Satanic eyes played over her, too.

Horrors churned in my skull then. Age-old horrors, thoughts of the Devil-Incubus coveting the daughters of the earth. . . .

I made the earth-man's age-old, feeble gesture. I balled my fingers into fists, and I drove my fists into that mocking and hellish face.

But the face was like a mucid gummosis into which my knckles squished. I hit the Thing all right; but hitting did not make any difference.

I had the sinking sensation you get in a nightmare when you cannot make your legs run.

And then one of the wings struck me. I seemed to stand still in midair while the room went past me—until finally I banged up against one of the walls and it stopped me.

I lay in a tangle on the floor. My eyes kept on taking pictures but the brain behind them didn't develop the film. I saw the Shape strip the theatrical wings from Coral's shoulders. I saw it lift her from the floor. I saw it move toward the window. But these things did not have any meaning, and there was nothing I could do, anyway.

Coral's scream came like acid, and the pictures started to develop again in my brain. I saw then that I was lying under the ikon of St. Stepan, and my hand went up and found one of the sacred candlesticks. I swung back my arm and flung flaming candle and stick full at the Shape. The holy metal felt tremendously heavy, and it took all the strength in my arm to throw it.

It looked like a cross flying through the air. That was the kind of picture it made on the film—a golden cross tipped with a long thin flame of blessed fire. . . .

Fire burst in front of me. Fire, and a vomit of smoke. . . . And a yell that might have come out of Hell itself! The fire hung there a moment, cross-shaped. . . .

I stared into the sifting swirl of smoke. I saw Coral lying senseless on the floor under the window. And that was all.

The Shape had disappeared. . . .

Those Los Angeles dicks are a tough lot. They did not believe a word of it until they'd sat through the one and only showing Kamiliev's picture ever had. . . .

They couldn't pin it onto Otters, because he was obviously too old and

feeble to have done it. And besides, we found him satisfactorily knocked out beside the house; and *his* Devil costume was intact.

They said it must have been some enemy of Kamiliev, someone who'd dressed up in that rig to murder him. They said that the black vapor only meant the costume had been impregnated with some gaseous liquid—and that the gas must have been inflammable. A kitchen match would have set off the blaze as well as the ikon candle, they said. And the cross-shape was simply the outline of the wing structure.

They didn't explain how a human could have flame all around him, burning his clothes, and still escape alive.

They questioned a lot of people, including the husband of the woman Kamiliev had followed that night. The husband was a big fellow, and under quizzing he admitted that his wife had identified Kamiliev's picture in a movie magazine. But his alibi was water-tight. It would be, of course.

The publicity got Coral a chance to star in a C-M-C picture, after all. And she insisted on taking me along as her cameraman.

Which was good business sense. I know Coral Gay's camera angles. . . .

For one thing, I never did photograph her in a swimsuit. Because, on her thigh and just below her breast—where the Shape clasped her in its hands that night—are two branded, fiery hand-prints. The prints are very clear. You can even see the fine, thread-like *hairs on the fingertips.*

The Watcher in the Green Room

by Hugh B. Cave

Ever have the feeling you're being watched? Ever feel sure, absolutely sure, that other eyes are on you—even though you know you're all alone in the house? Well, then you'll appreciate this story about a man who also had that experience . . . and found that. . . . But let Hugh B. Cave tell you about it. Mr. Cave is a professional writer who has been turning out good adventure and mystery yarns for very many years. We think that the Watcher is one of his most unusual.

THE plump, stumpy man in the double-breasted gray coat was quite obviously drunk. He walked with an exaggerated shuffle which carried him perilously close to the edge of the high curbing, whereupon he stopped short, drew his fat hands from their respective pockets, and gravely regarded the drooling gutter beneath him. Proceeding sluggishly in this manner, he successfully navigated three blocks of gleaming sidewalk, turned left into Peterboro Street, and arrived before a red-brick apartment building whose square front frowned down upon him with disapproving solemnity.

He stood staring, apparently unaware that the hour was midnight and that the rain which had fallen steadily since early evening had made of him a drenched, dishevelled street-walker. Before him, as he stood thus contemplating the wide entrance, the door opened and a man and a woman descended the stone steps. They gazed at him queerly. The man spoke.

"Drunk again, Kolitt?"

"Still," the drunken one replied, grinning.

"You'd better let Frank help you," the woman advised. "You'll be invading the wrong apartment again."

The plump man raised one hand up and out in a clumsy salute.

"A camel," he said, "never forgets."

The man and woman hesitated. In an undertone the man muttered:

"Poor devil! It's too bad. I suppose it's the easiest way to forget."

The drunken one did not hear. He grinned idiotically as the man and woman went their way, leaving him to ascend the steps alone. In the lobby he groped in the pockets of his coat and produced a key-ring. Mechanically he thrust two fingers into the brass mail-box marked ANTHONY KOLITT. Then, opening the heavy inner door with a key proportionately large, he

marched down the corridor, climbed two flights of rubber-carpeted stairs, and let himself into apartment number thirty-one.

"Five days gone," he mumbled, closing the door behind him. "If they haven't found out by now, they never will."

The thought sobered him, but he was still drunk enough to fumble awkwardly for the light-switch. The bright light blinded him. Blinking, he groped down the short hall to the living-room and lowered himself heavily, coat and all, into an overstuffed chair close to the radio. Reaching out, he lit the lamp on the end-table beside him; then he stretched himself, relaxed, and gazed intently at a large gray photograph which stared at him serenely from atop the radio.

The photograph was of a woman—attractive, straight-haired, somber-eyed, perhaps thirty years of age. It stood formally in a square silver frame, bare of ornamentation or inscription. The plump man studied it without emotion, as if he had studied it precisely the same way a great many times before. Presently he rose, removed his wet garments and shoes, and walked near-naked into the adjoining room. When he returned, he held a bottle and glass in his hands. He filled the glass, raised it toward the photograph, and said quietly:

"Pleasant dreams."

Then he turned out the light and paced unsteadily into the bedroom.

The bedroom was small and square, boasting a wooden three-quarter bed, a squat table, a massive old-fashioned bureau, and a single yellow-curtained window. The plump man sat on the bed and removed his socks. He stared at the bureau, grinned cruelly, and said:

"Too big, eh? Old style, is it? Well, it's a good thing it *was* big; otherwise you'd be kind of cramped for room, sweetheart. For once you won't complain, eh?"

The bed was unmade. He climbed into it and shaped the pillow with his fists, then lay on his back and gazed at the ceiling. The room was not quite dark. Its single window was high above the street outside and level with the roof of a building across the way. The wet window-pane exuded a green glow, reflecting the pale glare of a neon sign on the near-by roof. The glow was pleasant; the plump man enjoyed looking at it. It made fantastic, green-edged shapes on the walls of the room and transformed the huge bureau in the corner into a monstrous four-legged beast. He liked the beast. It was something to talk to.

"So you got her at last, eh?" he said drunkenly. "Ate her right up and swallowed her." His laugh was a low gurgle. "Serves her right, that does, for getting silly notions. She'd have found fault with anything, *she* would! I'm glad you got her—glad your insides were big enough to hold her. Yes, sir, that's poetic justice."

The bureau was half in shadow. Even the visible portions of it were shadowed, ill-defined, so that no separate details were distinct. It was more massive than usual tonight, because the green light was dimmed by the drizzling rain. Last night, when there had been no rain, the hulk had been a

huge, staring hound. The night before that it had been a fantastic horse with many malformed heads. Well, there was nothing strange about that. Almost any object of furniture could assume changing shapes in semidarkness. The extent of the shapes depended entirely on the strength of the observer's imagination.

The plump man chuckled to himself. *He* had a good enough imagination. It had come in handy, too, not so very long ago. And right now it was a blessing. It kept him from thinking too much about certain unpleasant things which had occurred recently.

He studied the bureau lazily. It had assumed a different shape tonight, probably because of the rain. It had eyes, several of them—they were the protruding knobs on the drawers. It had thick, misshapen legs, too, and a bloated torso. What would Bellini, the goggled-eyed chap downstairs, say to that? Most likely he'd look with wide eyes, and shudder, and whisper warnings in his thin, womanish voice. Bellini was like a lot of other superstitious fools; he made too much out of nothing. Sentimental idiot! If he *knew* what that bureau contained, he'd run screaming back to his stuffy apartment at the back of the building, and hide himself there!

"Well, he won't know," the plump man said indifferently. "That's our secret, eh, old boy? When we move out of here in a few days more, we'll take it with us. *Then* let 'em learn the truth, if they can!"

Still drunk, he saluted the bulging shape in the corner. Then he dragged the bedclothes around him and hunched his knees into his stomach, and went to sleep.

Pale sunlight was streaking the walls of the room when he woke. He lay motionless many minutes, aware that his mouth was dry and swollen and his head aching. Some day, he reflected wearily, somebody would discover a way to take the hangover out of hard liquor.

He put both hands to his forehead and pressed hard, then rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms. What time was it? About ten o'clock, probably; it was hard to tell, because the sunlight in the room was so feeble.

Stiffly he climbed out of bed and groped for a pair of slippers, then scuffed noisily into the kitchenette and opened the ice-box door. While he was thumbing the cork out of a gin bottle, the door at the end of the hall rattled. Scowling, he paced back along the corridor and fumbled with the knob.

"Who is it?"

"Me. Welks," said the man outside.

The plump man opened the door slowly and stood there with the gin bottle dangling in his fist. The other man—the same who had offered to assist him last night—said hesitantly:

"Thought I'd see if everything was all right, Kolitt. You were in pretty bad shape last night."

"I was drunk, eh?"

"You weren't exactly sober."

The plump one scowled, then stepped aside, grinning.

"Come in. Have a drink," he said. "'Scuse the attire. I just got up."

He closed the door and led his visitor down the hall, then motioned the man to a chair and went into the kitchen for two glasses. Returning, he said:

"I guess your wife was shocked, eh?"

"Not at all." The other man accepted the full glass and turned it idly in his fingers. He seemed unsure of himself. "She knows what you're going through. We all do. Can't blame a chap for hitting the bottle under such circumstances." He hesitated, stared at the plump man's bleary eyes. "But aren't you overdoing it, Kolitt? What'll your wife say when she does come back?"

"She won't come back."

"Why so sure?"

"I'm no fool." He upended the glass in his mouth and swallowed noisily. "When a man's wife walks out on him, Welks, there's a reason. She doesn't just go for a hike."

"You mean there's another man?"

"If there is, good luck to him."

"You're taking it hard, old boy."

"I'm no fool," Anthony Kolitt repeated. "When a man comes home and finds his wife's clothes and her bags gone, and the house empty, and a good-bye note on the bureau . . . You asked me yesterday why I didn't notify the police and have them find her. That's why."

The man named Welks put down his glass and stood erect.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "I didn't know."

He paced into the hall, stopped, turned again.

"Anything I can do——" he mumbled.

He closed the hall door after him.

Anthony Kolitt poured himself another drink. A little while later he put on a lavender dressing-gown and paced to the door. Stooping, he picked up the morning paper, then returned to the living-room, sat in the over-stuffed chair, placed the gin bottle, a glass, and a pack of cigarettes within reach on the smoke-stand, and leisurely began to read the sporting pages.

He was quite drunk again when Mr. Cesare Bellini, from downstairs, called upon him two hours later; so drunk, in fact, that he shook Bellini's hand warmly and said with a large grin:

"Well, well! Come right in!"

Mr. Bellini was not usually welcome. He was a tall, painfully slender young man with ascetic features and untrimmed raven hair. He was a student —though what particular kind of student he was, Anthony Kolitt had never troubled to find out. Mr. Bellini was one of those "queer, artistic" chaps. It was believed that he gave readings, or something of the sort, to people who came professionally to see him.

"I have come to see if there is anything, no matter how insignificant, I can do for you," he said jerkily.

He sat stiffly in a straight-backed chair, leaning forward toward Anthony

Kolitt with his lean hands flat upon his knees. His trousers needed pressing, Mr. Kolitt observed. He also needed instructions on how to knot a necktie. The one acceptable thing about him was the pale blue silk handkerchief protruding from his breast pocket; it gave him an almost feminine air of daintiness.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Kolitt shrugged "You think you can find *her* for me?"

"If I could," Bellini murmured, "I would."

"Well, why can't you? You're a spiritualist or something, aren't you?"

"A spiritualist? No, no. I am not that, Mr. Kolitt."

"Well, what about the people who come to see you? They come to get readings, and that sort of business, don't they?"

"No. You are mistaken. They come for advice. They come with troubles in their hearts. Me, I look in their minds and tell them what they should do."

"Oh. You're a psychologist, eh?" Mr. Kolitt grinned.

"Psychopathist, rather, Mr. Kolitt."

"Well," Mr. Kolitt said drunkenly, "go ahead. Do your stuff. I'm drunk; I ought to be easy."

"It is a strange thing, drink," Bellini murmured, moving his head sideways over its protruding Adam's apple. "Some men, they drink to celebrate. They are happy; they wish to be happier. Others drink like you, to forget a sadness. You are lonely, no?"

"Oh, I got a pal," Mr. Kolitt declared warmly.

"A pal? Here?"

"Right in the next room, young feller. Come along." He stood up, swaying in an attempt to balance himself. "I'll show you."

Bellini did not understand. He frowned, and the frown darkened his already dark eyes and bunched his brows together over his hooked nose. He suspected apparently, that Mr. Kolitt's pal was an ephemeral being born of gin fumes. Silently he followed Mr. Kolitt into the bedroom.

"There," said Mr. Kolitt, pointing.

"But I see nothing."

"Not now you don't. Of course not. It's only there at night."

"At night?" Bellini frowned. "I am afraid I do not——"

"Then le' me explain, and you *will* understand."

Mr. Kolitt sat importantly on the unmade bed and hooked the heels of his slippers on the wooden bed-frame. Folding his arms around his upthrust knees, he grinned into his guest's face and hiccuped noisily. Then, without haste, he slyly proceeded to inform the thin young man of the nightly visitor which, created by a combination of green light, shadow, and applied imagination, emanated from the massive bureau in the corner. And, having finished this prolonged dissertation, he released his knees and sprawled back up on the bed, expecting to be amused no end by Bellini's outburst of horror.

The outburst was not forthcoming. Bellini peered at him thoughtfully a moment, as if wondering how much of the speech could justly be attrib-

uted to a belly full of liquor. He then turned and studied the window, the bureau, and the respective arrangement of each to the other. Finally he said, frowning:

"That is a most dangerous game, my friend."

Mr. Kolitt was disappointed. Obviously so. He sat up, blinking. He said petulantly:

"Eh? Dangerous?"

"You are—how do you say it?—flirting with fire," Bellini declared.

"You mean I'll be scaring myself?"

"Perhaps. But it is not so simple. This thing which you are making out of nothing—this monster which is one night a large dog, and another night a many-headed horse, and another night a horrific portent unlike any named beast—it is, perhaps, only a thing of lights and shadows, as you have told me. But you are playing foolishly with profound metaphysics, my friend. With ontology. With the essence of all being. You are a blind man, walking treacherous ways of darkness."

"Eh?" Mr. Kolitt said again. "I'm what?"

"You are a fool," Bellini said simply. "You do not comprehend. The imagination, it is a powerful force. It is a productive faculty, seeking everywhere for truth. If there is no truth, it creates truth. This thing you are creating for your amusement, it is unreal, perhaps. But if you are too persistent, you will make it real."

"Sure," Mr. Kolitt agreed pleasantly. "Then I could get it drunk, like me, eh? We'd be pals."

"Very well. It is good to joke, my friend. It is good to be unafraid. That is because you do not understand. Yesterday a woman came to me and said: 'I had a dream, and in my dream my son came to me and bent over me and spoke to me. How is that? He is dead. Can the dead return? And I said to her: 'Yes, the dead do sometimes return. But the man who came to you was a real man. You created him by thinking of him. He spoke the words you, yourself, put into his mouth. If you had willed him to kiss you, he would have kissed you.' That is what I told her, and it is true. The same is true with you. When you create this strange portent in your mind, it is a reality. It is what you make it. It does what you will it."

"Suppose I willed it to get me a drink," Mr. Kolitt murmured gently.

"Very well. You are making a fool of me. I will go. But *you* are the fool, my friend. You are toying with the very essence of life. I hope you are not so drunk one night that you mistake life for death."

Apparently it was not difficult to anger Bellini's Latin temperament. His dark eyes burned. He turned deliberately and stared at the huge bureau.

"If I were you," he said bluntly, "I would move that where lights and shadows and your fertile imagination"—he spoke the word with significant emphasis—"would no longer transform it into something other than what it is. Good day, my friend."

Mr. Kolitt swayed forward, protesting.

"Now wait a minute. I didn't mean to poke fun at you. I——"

"Good day," Bellini repeated coldly. "I do not enjoy being made the idiot. To a man so drunk as you, all wisdom is a waste of time. I will come again, perhaps, when you are more sober."

The hall door clicked shut behind him.

Mr. Kolitt sat on the bed, blinked foolishly at the bureau a moment, and said gravely.

"Now see what you've done. You've scared the nice man away."

Mr. Kolitt was neither drunk nor quite sober when he let himself into his apartment that night. He had spent most of the evening at the theater around the corner, and the offering there had been unpleasantly sinister. The silver screen, reflected Mr. Kolitt, was a peril sadly in need of censorship. It should be against the law to show certain pictures to certain people. Tonight's presentation had made him shudder.

He did not recall the name of the picture, but the majority of its scenes had been of a strikingly weird nature. One in particular was so vivid in his mind, even now, that it made him uneasy.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "I can see it yet, that damned thing!"

The thing which bothered him had been a monster; a manufactured monster, to be sure—created by experts out of immense sheets of rubberized cloth and animated by internal gears and levers—but horrible, nevertheless. He had visions of it advancing toward him, as it had advanced upon the unfortunate villain in the picture. Such things, he decided, should be outlawed.

The hour, now, was eleven o'clock. After leaving the theater, he had visited the Business Men's Club and vainly attempted to drive away his morbidity by batting a small white ping-pong ball across a table in the game-room. Tiring of that, he had won seven dollars playing poker, and had spent the seven dollars on a quart of excellent rye whisky. He needed the whisky. It would steady his nerves. For the past several days his nerves had needed constant attention and lubrication.

He took the bottle from his pocket and placed it gently on the radio, beside his wife's photograph. Methodically he removed his tie, shirt, trousers, and shoes, and went to the bedroom for his dressing-gown. Then he turned on the radio and sat in the overstuffed chair, with a book in his lap.

He opened the book. It was a mystery story. He liked mystery stories. This one would take his mind off his own troubles and make him forget himself. He reached for the bottle and looked about for a glass. Finding none, he shrugged his hunched-up shoulders and upended the bottle in his mouth, drinking noisily. Then, grinning, he began to read.

Reading, he became aware presently that the dance music emanating from the radio had become something less pleasant. Voices rasped at him. He listened a moment, scowling, then leaned forward abruptly to turn the dial; but instead of turning it, he listened again. It was one of those things you just had to listen to. There was a sound of wind howling, and rain beating eerily against shut windows. There were voices whispering. The voices

ceased. Into the strange silence came the ominous tread of slow footsteps: clump . . . clump . . . clump. . . .

Mr. Kolitt grunted and turned the radio off. He leaned back in his chair, trembling. For a while he stared with wide eyes at the photograph of his wife; then, with an obvious effort, he focused his attention on the book in his lap. Before he had read half a page more, he snapped the book shut and dropped it on the floor.

"Damnation!" he said. "Everywhere I turn there's murder and horror! There ought to be a law against such things! It's uncivilized!"

He stood up and drank deeply from the bottle. Snarling, he strode into the bedroom and switched on the light. His gaze wandered to the bureau in the corner. He said viciously:

"Blast him and his big talk! It's his fault. He's the one who started this business!"

He was thinking of Bellini. Bellini's smoldering eyes and deliberate words plagued him.

The single window was again wet with rain, and its drooling glass winked with many green eyes, derisively. The glass was pretty, Mr. Kolitt thought. It was like a large, moving tray in a jeweler's store. Each green-edged drop of water was a tiny precious emerald.

"And I suppose if I sat down and imagined 'em to be emeralds," he grunted, "they'd *be* emeralds. Yes they would not!"

He smiled crookedly then, as if relieved at thus finding a flaw in Bellini's reasoning. Quietly he removed the rest of his clothes and went to the bureau. Opening the top drawer, he took out clean pajamas; then he looked down at the lower drawers and tapped the bottom one with his naked foot.

"Comfortable?" he said quietly.

He unfolded the pajamas. They were green, with white stripes. Methodically he got into them and stood idly before the bureau, his elbows angling outward as he buttoned the green jacket-front. The room was warm. Frowning, he walked to the radiator and turned the small handle on the side of it. Then he stood at the window, looking out. Across the way, the green neon sign was like giant handwriting in the drizzle.

"Tonight's the last night I'll be looking at you," he said. "We're moving out of here tomorrow—me and the hope chest here." He turned his head drunkenly to peer at the bureau. "Yep. It's safe enough for us to clear out now. The neighbors won't be suspicious. They'll think I'm just a poor lonely devil trying to forget."

He was aware suddenly that the odor of his own breath, tainted with liquor fumes, was not the only odor in the room. There was another smell, less pleasant and more significant—a sour emanation suggesting decay, as of spoiled meat. Eyes narrowed and lips puckered slightly, he strode quickly to the bureau and stooped to bring his nostrils close to the lower drawers. When he straightened again he stood staring, his hands pressing hard against his hips.

"We'll be leaving tomorrow, all right," he muttered. "It won't be too

soon, at that. I'll have to burn incense in here before the moving-men come."

He went into the living-room, then, and took the bottle he had left there on the smoke-stand. Quietly he turned out the light, and the hall light, too, and paced back to the bedroom. He opened the window six inches at the bottom, to let out that offensive odor. Then he went to bed.

He did not sleep. The room was too warm, and that unpleasant smell of pollution was too much in evidence. He lay with his thoughts, and they were morbid thoughts, parading rapidly across the bed. First marched the memories of that night not so long ago, when he had knelt on the floor of this very room, with a keen-edged kitchen-knife in one hand and a hack-saw . . . but it was better to forget those things. Then came the neighbors, finding him drunk, asking him questions, offering their sympathies. "Oh, but she'll come back, Mr. Kolitt! Women are strange creatures. They do strange things, but they are just women after all. She'll come back." And again: "Don't worry, old boy. She hasn't walked out on you for good. We all have our little family troubles. You and she—well, you've been going it pretty hot and heavy for quite a while. We've all known it. But she'll get over it."

And then Bellini. Damn Bellini!

Mr. Kolitt drained the contents of his bottle and leaned over to place the empty container on the floor. He lay back, enjoying the pleasant sensation of warmth that crept through him as the liquor found its way into his internals. Bellini was a superstitious young idiot, nothing else! His ideas were soap-bubbles filled with hot air. How could you bring something to life just by imagining it?

He turned suddenly on his side and peered at the bureau. The room was darker than usual, because the rain outside was a cold rain, and the combination of cold outside and warmth inside had fogged the window-pane. The huge bureau in the corner was a mastodonic shape of gloom, cloaked at one end in a winding-sheet of changing green light. It was neither hound nor horse tonight, Mr. Kolitt reflected. It was merely a swollen hulk with protruding eyes. What would Bellini say to that?

"Well, I won't look at the damned thing," he thought drunkenly. "I'll pack off to sleep and forget it."

But he looked, because the thing was fixed firmly in his mind, and his eyes refused to remain closed. Again and again he cursed himself for looking; but when he was not looking he was wondering what new shape the thing in the corner had assumed, and then his eyes opened again to find out.

This was foolish, too, because the thing had not changed shape since he had first peered at it. It was still a huge, bloated monstrosity with short, stumpy protuberances for legs, and a balloon-like excrescence for a head. "Like the thing in the movies tonight," he thought suddenly and shuddered.

The thing in the movies had been a gigantic abhorrence supposedly called into being by obscene incantations. In the end, it had deliberately and awfully devoured its creator. Recalling those things, Mr. Kolitt gazed with re-

newed interest at the similar monster in his own room; then he shut his eyes and mumbled aloud:

"Ugh! I'll be giving myself D.T.s!"

For a while, this time, he succeeded in keeping his eyes closed, but he did not sleep. His thoughts were too vivid and his mind too alert to permit sleep. He wanted a drink, but was secretly glad that the bottle was empty. He had already drunk too much. The liquor was keeping him awake instead of making him drowsy. It was keeping alive the unpleasant parade of thoughts which persisted in marching through his mind. Especially was it keeping alive that annoying vision of Bellini, and the words that went with it.

Again Mr. Kolitt looked at the monster, and again shuddered violently.

"My God!" he muttered aloud. "I'd hate to bring *you* to life!"

The thought, expressed thus in blunt syllables, alarmed him infinitely more than when he had kept it to himself. He wanted all at once to recall it, lest the monster should take it seriously and heed the suggestion. He wanted, too, to get out of bed and turn on the light, thereby transforming the monster into its original form. But the light-switch was terrifyingly far away, and to reach it he would have to pass within a yard of the beast's bloated head.

There were several other things he wanted to do, too. He wanted to shriek at the thing to stop glaring at him, and he wanted to go into the next room and look at the clock, to see how long it would be before daylight filtered through the green-glowing window. Fearfully he considered the wisdom of tiptoeing to the window and drawing the shade, to shut out that green glare; but if he did that, the room would be in total darkness, and the horror would still be there even though invisible.

He no longer thought about Bellini, or about the other thing which lay in the bureau's lower drawers. He thought only of himself, and of his increasing terror. It was foolish terror, he knew. It was the result of going to the wrong kind of a movie, and listening to a mystery play on the radio, and reading a weird detective story, and guzzling too much liquor. But those things were done now, and could not be amended. And the monster was here, threatening him.

"But it's only wood," he mumbled. "It's not real."

If he got up and walked toward it, and touched it, his fear would be gone and he would be laughing at himself for being a drunken fool. That would be the end of *that,* and he could turn on the light and go to sleep in security. But if the thing *were* real—if it were not made of wood—and he walked toward it——

Another thought came then, and caused him to cringe back into the wall. *She* had sent it. She had created it, just as the man in the movies had created *his* monster. The thing hated him for what he had done to her. It meant to kill him.

He lay rigid, staring at it. Yes, it was moving, and it was moving of its own accord—not because of the mist on the window-pane. Its hideous head

was swaying from side to side, not much, but enough to be noticeable. Its small eyes were glaring maliciously. It was getting ready to attack him.

The blood ebbed from Mr. Kolitt's face. Slowly, with caution born of the fear which ate voraciously into him, he drew aside, inch by inch, the bedclothes which covered him. Fearfully he wormed his legs toward the edge of the bed, and lowered them until his bare feet touched the floor. Not once did his wide eyes blink or his fixed gaze leave the greenish shape in the corner. If he could reach the threshold and slam the door shut behind him, there might be a possibility of escape. The hall door was but a few strides distant, and once in the hall he could run with all his might, shouting for help.

Warily he rose to a sitting position and put his hands behind him, pushing himself up. An eternity passed while his trembling body straightened and stood erect. Then he hesitated again, stifling the groan that welled to his lips.

The thing was eyeing him malevolently. It was not a creature of his imagination. It was real; he knew it was real. Its horrible head had stopped swaying; its bloated, swollen body was slowly expanding and contracting. It was waiting—waiting for him to make the first move. If he attempted to escape, if he took a single forward step, it would fall upon him.

Frantically he wrenched his gaze away from it and glanced toward the doorway. The door was open. His only chance lay in that direction. If he waited any longer——

He hurled himself forward. Three steps he took, and on the fourth he stood rigid, paralyzed by the sucking, scraping sound which rose behind him. He turned, terrified, and the thing seized him as he recoiled from it. The impact flung him to the floor. For a single horrific instant he stared up into the loathsome, undulating countenance above him. A scream jangled from his throat. Then his eyes and nose and mouth were smothered under an emanation of putrescent vileness, and that cavernous maw engulfed him.

Eight hours later the janitor discovered him there. The janitor, a red-faced, large-stomached Swede of more than middle age, shuffled past Mr. Kolitt's door with a garbage pail in his one hand and a mound of newspapers in his other. He had reached the mid-point in his daily round of collections. He wondered why Mr. Kolitt had failed to put out a wastebasket. Then he became aware of a most unpleasant and nauseating odor which filled the corridor. And, because the stench seemed to emanate from Mr. Kolitt's apartment, he knocked on Mr. Kolitt's door.

A moment later he let himself in with his own key.

He found Mr. Kolitt in the bedroom, midway between bed and doorway. Mr. Kolitt was dead. His legs and torso lay in a pool of dark red blood, and the entire upper portion of his plump body had been devoured. Those parts of him which remained were shapeless and unrecognizable beneath a pall of viscous green slime; and this foul excrescence, whose unbearable stench had first attracted the janitor's attention, extended from Mr. Kolitt's mu-

tilated body to the bedroom window, where the sill was likewise coated with it.

These things the janitor saw and at first failed to assimilate. Unable to comprehend such horror, he merely stood staring. Then, believing his eyes at last, he shouted incoherent words in a guttural voice and leaned back against the wall, retching.

Later, a sober-faced Frenchwoman, who was a modiste, sat in Mr. Kolitt's living-room and said to the policemen who were questioning her:

"I have told you all I know. There I was, sitting in my apartment across the court from this one, and I heard a man screaming. I put down my needle and thread and hurried to the window, and I saw the thing coming out of this man's window. I do not know what it was. There was rain falling, and I saw only what the green light from the advertising sign showed me. It was large and it was greenish; that is all I am sure of. So large was it that it seemed to fold together as it flowed over his window-sill, and then stretched itself out like a big fat slug when it crawled over the edge of the roof up above. That is all I know."

"But what in thunder *was* it?" one of the policemen demanded irritably.

Mr. Bellini, the ascetic-faced young man from downstairs, said quietly: "If you will come again into the bedroom, gentlemen, I will show you what it was." And when they had followed him there, he pointed unemotionally to the huge bureau in the corner, and said: "It was a monster he made out of this. It destroyed him because he learned somehow to fear it, and, fearing it, he willed it to do what it did."

"Huh?" mumbled one policeman. "Feared it? Why?"

"That I do not know."

"Well, we'll damned soon find out," the policeman snapped. "Give me a hand here, Jenkins."

Beginning with the top drawer, the two policemen removed the bureau's contents. They did so carefully, inspecting each item before dropping it to the floor. In the third drawer from the bottom they found, wedged far back and buried beneath heavy articles of wearing-apparel, a woman's arm, wrapped in an oblong of torn sheeting which was caked with congealed blood.

In the next drawer they found four more blood-caked packages, which they unwrapped with increasing horror. In the last drawer of all they found a single large bundle which contained a woman's head.

Mr. Bellini, standing as near them as they would permit, gazed calmly into the woman's rigid features and said without emotion:

"It is his wife."

A Victim of Higher Space

by Algernon Blackwood

John Silence is noted among spook-fiction enthusiasts as a Sherlock Holmes of the supernatural, using his detective talents to thwart apparitions and defy graveyard horrors. Of the tales of Dr. Silence, the late H. P. Lovecraft wrote "these narratives contain some of the author's best work, and produce an illusion at once emphatic and lasting." In the one we have selected here, you will find an odd usage of the terminology of the Fourth Dimension and of a man who was "afflicted" with it.

"THERE'S a hextraordinary gentleman to see you, sir," said the new man.

"Why 'extraordinary'?" asked Dr. Silence, drawing the tips of his thin fingers through his brown beard. His eyes twinkled pleasantly. "Why 'extraordinary,' Barker?" he repeated encouragingly, noticing the perplexed expression in the man's eyes.

"He's so—so thin, sir. I could hardly see 'im at all—at first. He was inside the house before I could ask the name," he added, remembering strict orders.

"And who brought him here?"

"He come alone, sir, in a closed cab. He pushed by me before I could say a word—making no noise not what I could hear. He seemed to move so soft like——"

The man stopped short with obvious embarrassment, as though he had already said enough to jeopardise his new situation, but trying hard to show that he remembered the instructions and warnings he had received with regard to the admission of strangers not properly accredited.

"And where is the gentleman now?" asked Dr. Silence, turning away to conceal his amusement.

"I really couldn't exactly say, sir. I left him standing in the 'all——'

The doctor looked up sharply. "But why in the hall, Barker? Why not in the waiting-room?" He fixed his piercing though kindly eyes on the man's face. "Did he frighten you?" he asked quickly.

"I think he did, sir, if I may say so. I seemed to lose sight of him, as it were——" The man stammered, evidently convinced by now that he had

earned his dismissal. "He come in so funny, just like a cold wind," he added boldly, setting his heels at attention and looking his master full in the face.

The doctor made an internal note of the man's halting description; he was pleased that the slight signs of psychic intuition which had induced him to engage Barker had not entirely failed at the first trial. Dr. Silence sought for this qualification in all his assistants, from secretary to serving man, and if it surrounded him with a somewhat singular crew, the drawbacks were more than compensated for on the whole by their occasional flashes of insight.

"So the gentleman made you feel queer, did he?"

"That was it, I think, sir," repeated the man stolidly.

"And he brings no kind of introduction to me—no letter or anything?" asked the doctor, with feigned surprise, as though he knew what was coming.

The man fumbled, both in mind and pockets, and finally produced an envelope.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said, greatly flustered; "the gentleman handed me this for you."

It was a note from a discerning friend, who had never yet sent him a case that was not vitally interesting from one point or another.

"Please see the bearer of this note," the brief message ran, "though I doubt if even you can do much to help him."

John Silence paused a moment, so as to gather from the mind of the writer all that lay behind the brief words of the letter. Then he looked up at his servant with a graver expression than he had yet worn.

"Go back and find this gentleman," he said, "and show him into the green study. Do not reply to his question, or speak more than actually necessary; but think kind, helpful, sympathetic thoughts as strongly as you can, Barker. You remember what I told you about the importance of *thinking*, when I engaged you. Put curiosity out of your mind, and think gently, sympathetically, affectionately, if you can."

He smiled, and Barker, who had recovered his composure in the doctor's presence, bowed silently and went out.

There were two different reception-rooms in Dr. Silence's house. One (intended for persons who imagined they needed spiritual assistance when really they were only candidates for the asylum) had padded walls, and was well supplied with various concealed contrivances by means of which sudden violence could be instantly met and overcome. It was, however, rarely used. The other, intended for the reception of genuine cases of spiritual distress and out-of-the-way afflictions of a psychic nature, was entirely draped and furnished in a soothing deep green, calculated to induce calmness and repose of mind. And this room was the one in which Dr. Silence interviewed the majority of his "queer" cases, and the one into which he had directed Barker to show his present caller.

To begin with, the arm-chair in which the patient was always directed to sit, was nailed to the floor, since its immovability tended to impart this same excellent characteristic to the occupant. Patients invariably grew excited when

talking about thmselves, and their excitement tended to confuse their thoughts and to exaggerate their language. The inflexibility of the chair helped to counteract this. After repeated endeavours to drag it forward, or push it back, they ended by resigning themselves to sitting quietly. And with the futility of fidgeting there followed a calmer state of mind.

Upon the floor, and at intervals in the wall immediately behind, were certain tiny green buttons, practically unnoticeable, which on being pressed permitted a soothing and persuasive narcotic to rise invisibly about the occupant of the chair. The effect upon the excitable patient was rapid, admirable, and harmless. The green study was further provided with a secret spy-hole; for John Silence liked when possible to observe his patient's face before it had assumed that mask the features of the human countenance invariably wear in the presence of another person. A man sitting alone wears a psychic expression; and this expression is the man himself. It disappears the moment another person joins him. And Dr. Silence often learned more from a few moments' secret observation of a face than from hours of conversation with its owner afterwards.

A very light, almost a dancing, step followed Barker's heavy tread towards the green room, and a moment afterwards the man came in and announced that the gentleman was waiting. He was still pale and his manner nervous.

"Never mind, Barker," the doctor said kindly; "if you were not psychic the man would have had no effect upon you at all. You only need training and development. And when you have learned to interpret these feelings and sensations better, you will feel no fear, but only a great sympathy."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir!" And Barker bowed and made his escape, while Dr. Silence, an amused smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, made his way noiselessly down the passage and put his eye to the spy-hole in the door of the green study.

This spy-hole was so placed that it commanded a view of almost the entire room, and, looking through it, the doctor saw a hat, gloves, and umbrella lying on a chair by the table, but searched at first in vain for their owner.

The windows were both closed and a brisk fire burned in the grate. There were various signs—signs intelligible at least to a keenly intuitive soul—that the room was occupied, yet so far as human beings were concerned, it was empty, utterly empty. No one sat in the chairs; no one stood on the mat before the fire; there was no sign even that a patient was anywhere close against the wall, examining the Böcklin reproductions—as patients so often did when they thought they were alone—and therefore rather difficult to see from the spy-hole. Ordinarily speaking, there was no one in the room. It was undeniable.

Yet Dr. Silence was quite well aware that a human being *was* in the room. His psychic apparatus never failed in letting him know the proximity of an incarnate or discarnate being. Even in the dark he could tell that. And he now knew positively that his patient—the patient who had alarmed Barker, and had then tripped down the corridor with that dancing footstep—was somewhere concealed within the four walls commanded by his spy-hole. He

also realised—and this was most unusual—that this individual whom he desired to watch knew that he was being watched. And, further, that the stranger himself was also watching! In fact, that it was he, the doctor, who was being observed—and by an observer as keen and trained as himself.

An inkling of the true state of the case began to dawn upon him, and he was on the verge of entering—indeed, his hand already touched the door-knob—when his eye, still glued to the spy-hole, detected a slight movement. Directly opposite, between him and the fireplace, something stirred. He watched very attentively and made certain that he was not mistaken. An object on the mantelpiece—it was a blue vase—disappeared from view. It passed out of sight together with the portion of the marble mantelpiece on which it rested. Next; that part of the fire and grate and brass fender immediately below it vanished entirely, as though a slice had been taken clean out of them.

Dr. Silence then understood that something between him and these objects was slowly coming into being, something that concealed them and obstructed his vision by inserting itself in the line of sight between them and himself.

He quietly awaited further results before going in.

First he saw a thin perpendicular line tracing itself from just above the height of the clock and continuing downwards till it reached the woolly fire-mat. This line grew wider, broadened, grew solid. It was no shadow; it was something substantial. It defined itself more and more. Then suddenly, at the top of the line, and about on a level with the face of the clock, he saw a round luminous disc gazing steadily at him. It was a human eye, looking straight into his own, pressed there against the spy-hole. And it was bright with intelligence. Dr. Silence held his breath for a moment—and stared back at it.

Then, like some one moving out of deep shadow into light, he saw the figure of a man come sliding sideways into view, a whitish face following the eye, and the perpendicular line he had first observed broadening out and developing into the complete figure of a human being. It was the patient. He had apparently been standing there in front of the fire all the time. A second eye had followed the first, and both of them stared steadily at the spy-hole, sharply concentrated, yet with a sly twinkle of humour and amusement that made it impossible for the doctor to maintain his position any longer.

He opened the door and went in quickly. As he did so he noticed for the first time the sound of a German band coming in gaily through the open ventilators. In some intuitive, unaccountable fashion the music connected itself with the patient he was about to interview. This sort of prevision was not unfamiliar to him. It always explained itself later.

The man, he saw, was of middle age and of very ordinary appearance; so ordinary, in fact, that he was difficult to describe—his only peculiarity being his extreme thinness. Pleasant—that is, good—vibrations issued from his atmosphere and met Dr. Silence as he advanced to greet him, yet vibrations alive with currents and discharges betraying the perturbed and disordered

condition of his mind and brain. There was evidently something wholly out of the usual in the state of his thoughts. Yet, though strange, it was not altogether distressing; it was not the impression that the broken and violent atmosphere of the insane produces upon the mind. Dr. Silence realised in a flash that here was a case of absorbing interest that might require all his powers to handle properly.

"I was watching you through my little peep-hole—as you saw," he began, with a pleasant smile, advancing to shake hands. "I find it of the greatest assistance sometimes——"

But the patient interrupted him at once. His voice was hurried and had odd, shrill changes in it, breaking from high to low in unexpected fashion. One moment it thundered, the next it almost squeaked.

"I understand without explanation," he broke in rapidly. "You get the true note of a man in this way—when he thinks himself unobserved. I quite agree. Only, in my case, I fear, you saw very little. My case, as you of course grasp, Dr. Silence, is extremely peculiar, uncomfortably peculiar. Indeed, unless Sir William had positively assured me——"

"My friend has sent you to me," the doctor interrupted gravely, with a gentle note of authority, "and that is quite sufficient. Pray, be seated, Mr. ——"

"Mudge—Racine Mudge," returned the other.

"Take this comfortable one, Mr. Mudge," leading him to the fixed chair, "and tell me your condition in your own way and at your own pace. My whole day is at your service if you require it."

Mr. Mudge moved towards the chair in question and then hesitated.

"You will promise me not to use the narcotic buttons," he said, before sitting down. "I do not need them. Also I ought to mention that anything you think of vividly will reach my mind. That is apparently part of my peculiar case." He sat down with a sigh and arranged his thin legs and body into a position of comfort. Evidently he was very sensitive to the thoughts of others, for the picture of the green buttons had only entered the doctor's mind for a second, yet the other had instantly snapped it up. Dr. Silence noticed, too, that Mr. Mudge held on tightly with both hands to the arms of the chair.

"I'm rather glad the chair is nailed to the floor," he remarked, as he settled himself more comfortably. "It suits me admirably. The fact is—and this is my case in a nutshell—which is all that a doctor of your marvellous development requires—the fact is, Dr. Silence, I am a victim of Higher Space. That's what's the matter with me—Higher Space!"

The two looked at each other for a space in silence, the little patient holding tightly to the arms of the chair which "suited him admirably," and looking up with staring eyes, his atmosphere positively trembling with the waves of some unknown activity; while the doctor smiled kindly and sympathetically, and put his whole person as far as possible into the mental condition of the other.

"Higher Space," repeated Mr. Mudge, "that's what it is. Now, do you think you can help me with *that?*"

There was a pause during which the men's eyes steadily searched down below the surface of their respective personalities. Then Dr. Silence spoke.

"I am quite sure I can help," he answered quietly; "sympathy must always help, and suffering always owns my sympathy. I see you have suffered cruelly. You must tell me all about your case, and when I hear the gradual steps by which you reached this strange condition, I have no doubt I can be of assistance to you."

He drew a chair up beside his interlocutor and laid a hand on his shoulder for a moment. His whole being radiated kindness, intelligence, desire to help.

"For instance," he went on, "I feel sure it was the result of no mere chance that you became familiar with the terrors of what you term Higher Space; for Higher Space is no mere external measurement. It is, of course, a spiritual state, a spiritual condition, an inner development, and one that we must recognise as abnormal, since it is beyond the reach of the world at the present stage of evolution. Higher Space is a mythical state."

"Oh!" cried the other, rubbing his birdlike hands with pleasure, "the relief it is to be to talk to some one who can understand! Of course what you say is the utter truth. And you are right that no mere chance led me to my present condition, but, on the other hand, prolonged and deliberate study. Yet chance in a sense now governs it. I mean, my entering the condition of Higher Space seems to depend upon the chance of this and that circumstance. For instance, the mere sound of that German band sent me off. Not that all music will do so, but certain sounds, certain vibrations, at once key me up to the requisite pitch, and off I go. Wagner's music always does it, and that band must have been playing a stray bit of Wagner. But I'll come to all that later. Only, first, I must ask you to send away your man from the spy-hole."

John Silence looked up with a start, for Mr. Mudge's back was to the door, and there was no mirror. He saw the brown eye of Barker glued to the little circle of glass, and he crossed the room without a word and snapped down the black shutter provided for the purpose, and then heard Barker shuffle away along the passage.

"Now," continued the little man in the chair, "I can begin. You have managed to put me completely at my ease, and I feel I may tell you my whole case without shame or reserve. You will understand. But you must be patient with me if I go into details that are already familiar to you—details of Higher Space, I mean—and if I seem stupid when I have to describe things that transcend the power of language and are really therefore indescribable."

"My dear friend," put in the other calmly, "that goes without saying. To know Higher Space is an experience that defies description, and one is obliged to make use of more or less intelligible symbols. But, pray, proceed. Your vivid thoughts will tell me more than your halting words."

An immense sigh of relief proceeded from the little figure half lost in the depths of the chair. Such intelligent sympathy meeting him half-way was a

new experience to him, and it touched his heart at once. He leaned back, relaxing his tight hold of the arms, and began in his thin, scale-like voice.

"My mother was a Frenchwoman, and my father an Essex bargeman," he said abruptly. "Hence my name—Racine and Mudge. My father died before I ever saw him. My mother inherited money from her Bordeaux relations, and when she died soon after, I was left alone with wealth and a strange freedom. I had no guardian, trustees, sisters, brothers, or any connection in the world to look after me. I grew up, therefore, utterly without education. This much was to my advantage; I learned none of that deceitful rubbish taught in schools, and so had nothing to unlearn when I awakened to my true love—mathematics, higher mathematics and higher geometry. These, however, I seemed to know instinctively. It was like the memory of what I had deeply studied before; the principles were in my blood, and I simply raced through the ordinary stages, and beyond, and then did the same with geometry. Afterwards, when I read the books on these subjects, I understood how swift and undeviating the knowledge had come back to me. It was simply memory. It was simply *re-collecting* the memories of what I had known before in a previous existence and required no books to teach me."

In his growing excitement, Mr. Mudge attempted to drag the chair forward a little nearer to his listener, and then smiled faintly as he resigned himself instantly again to its immovability, and plunged anew into the recital of his singular "disease."

"The audacious speculations of Bolyai, the amazing theories of Gauss—that through a point more than one line could be drawn parallel to a given line; the possibility that the angles of a triangle are together *greater* than two right angles, if drawn upon immense curvatures—the breathless intuitions of Beltrami and Lobatchewsky—all these I hurried through, and emerged, panting but unsatisfied, upon the verge of my—my new world, my Higher Space possibilities—in a word, my disease!

"How I got there," he resumed after a brief pause, during which he appeared to be listening intently for an approaching sound, "is more than I can put intelligibly into words. I can only hope to leave your mind with an intuitive comprehension of the possibility of what I say.

"Here, however, came a change. At this point I was no longer absorbing the fruits of studies I had made before; it was the beginning of new efforts to learn for the first time, and I had to go slowly and laboriously through terrible work. Here I sought for the theories and speculations of others. But books were few and far between, and with the exception of one man—a 'dreamer,' the world called him—whose audacity and piercing intuition amazed and delighted me beyond description, I found no one to guide or help.

"You, of course, Dr. Silence, understand something of what I am driving at with these stammering words, though you cannot perhaps yet guess what depths of pain my new knowledge brought me to, nor why an acquaintance with a new development of space should prove a source of misery and terror."

Mr. Racine Mudge, remembering that the chair would not move, did the next best thing he could in his desire to draw nearer to the attentive man facing him, and sat forward upon the very edge of the cushions, crossing his legs and gesticulating with both hands as though he saw into this region of new space he was attempting to describe, and might any moment tumble into it bodily from the edge of the chair and disappear from view. John Silence, separated from him by three paces, sat with his eyes fixed upon the thin white face opposite, noting every word and every gesture with deep attention.

"This room we now sit in, Dr. Silence, has one side open to space—to Higher Space. A closed box only *seems* closed. There is a way in and out of a soap bubble without breaking the skin."

"You tell me no new thing," the doctor interposed gently.

"Hence, if Higher Space exists and our world borders upon it and lies partially in it, it follows necessarily that we see only portions of all objects. We never see their true and complete shape. We see their three measurements, but not their fourth. The new direction is concealed from us, and when I hold this book and move my hand all round it I have not really made a complete circuit. We only perceive those portions of any object which exist in our three dimensions; the rest escapes us. But, once we learn to see in Higher Space, objects will appear as they actually are. Only they will thus be hardly recognisable!

"Now, you may begin to grasp something of what I am coming to."

"I am beginning to understand something of what you must have suffered," observed the doctor soothingly, "for I have made similar experiments myself, and only stopped just in time——"

"You are the one man in all the world who can hear and understand, *and* sympathise," exclaimed Mr. Mudge, grasping his hand and holding it tightly while he spoke. The nailed chair prevented further excitability.

"Well," he resumed, after a moment's pause, "I procured the implements and the coloured blocks for practical experiment, and I followed the instructions carefully till I had arrived at a working conception of four-dimensional space. The tessaract, the figure whose boundaries are cubes, I knew by heart. That is to say, I knew it and saw it mentally, for my eye, of course, could never take in a new measurement, or my hands and feet handle it.

"So, at least, I thought," he added, making a wry face. "I had reached the stage, you see, when I could *imagine* in a new dimension. I was able to conceive the shape of that new figure which is intrinsically different to all we know—the shape of the tessaract. I could perceive in four dimensions. When, therefore, I looked at a cube I could see all its sides at once. Its top was not foreshortened, nor its farther side and base invisible. I saw the whole thing out flat, so to speak. And this Tessaract was bounded by cubes! Moreover, I also saw its content—its insides."

"You were not yourself able to enter this new world," interrupted Dr. Silence.

"Not then. I was only able to conceive intuitively what it was like and

how exactly it must look. Later, when I slipped in there and saw objects in their entirety, unlimited by the paucity of our poor three measurements, I very nearly lost my life. For, you see, space does not stop at a single new dimension, a fourth. It extends in all possible new ones, and we must conceive it as containing any number of new dimensions. In other words, there is no space at all, but only a spiritual condition. But, meanwhile, I had come to grasp the strange fact that the objects in our normal world appear to us only partially."

Mr. Mudge moved farther forward till he was balanced dangerously on the very edge of the chair. "From this starting point," he resumed, "I began my studies and experiments, and continued them for years. I had money, and I was without friends. I lived in solitude and experimented. My intellect, of course, had little part in the work, for intellectually it was all unthinkable. Never was the limitation of mere reason more plainly demonstrated. It was mystically, intuitively, spiritually that I began to advance. And what I learnt, and knew, and did is all impossible to put into language, since it all describes experiences transcending the experiences of men. It is only some of the results—what you would call the symptoms of my disease—that I can give you, and even these must often appear absurd contradictions and impossible paradoxes.

"I can only tell you, Dr. Silence"—his manner became exceedingly impressive—"that I reached sometimes a point of view whence all the great puzzle of the world became plain to me, and I understood what they call in the Yoga books 'The Great Heresy of Separateness'; why all great teachers have urged the necessity of man loving his neighbour as himself; how men are all really *one;* and why the utter loss of self is necessary to salvation and the discovery of the true life of the soul."

He paused a moment and drew breath.

"Your speculations have been my own long ago," the doctor said quietly. "I fully realise the force of your words. Men are doubtless not separate at all —in the sense they imagine——"

"All this about the very much Higher Space I only dimly, very dimly, conceived, of course," the other went on, raising his voice again by jerks; "but what did happen to me was the humbler accident of—the simpler disaster—oh, dear, how shall I put it——?"

He stammered and showed visible signs of distress.

"It was simply this," he resumed with a sudden rush of words, "that, accidentally, as the result of my years of experiment, I one day slipped bodily into the next world, the world of four dimensions, yet without knowing precisely how I got there, or how I could get back again. I discovered, that is, that my ordinary three-dimensional body was but an expression—a projection—of my higher four-dimensional body!

"Now you understand what I meant much earlier in our talk when I spoke of chance. I cannot control my entrance or exit. Certain people, certain human atmospheres, certain wandering forces, thoughts, desires even—the radiations of certain combinations of colour, and above all, the vibrations of

certain kinds of music, will suddenly throw me into a state of what I can only describe as an intense and terrific inner vibration—and behold I am off! Off in the direction at right angles to all our known directions! Off in the direction the cube takes when it begins to trace the outlines of the new figure! Off into my breathless and semi-divine Higher Space! Off, *inside myself,* into the world of four dimensions!"

He gasped and dropped back into the depths of the immovable chair.

"And there," he whispered, his voice issuing from among the cushions, "there I have to stay until these vibrations subside, or until they do something which I cannot find words to describe properly or intelligibly to you —and then, behold, I am back again. First, that is, I disappear. Then I reappear."

"Just so," exclaimed Dr. Silence, "and that is why a few——"

"Why a few moments ago," interrupted Mr. Mudge, taking the words out of his mouth, "you found me gone, and then saw me return. The music of that wretched German band sent me off. Your intense thinking about me brought me back—when the band had stopped its Wagner. I saw you approach the peep-hole and I saw Barker's intention of doing so later. For me no interiors are hidden. I see inside. When in that state the content of your mind, as of your body, is open to me as the day. Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear!"

Mr. Mudge stopped and again mopped his brow. A light trembling ran over the surface of his small body like wind over grass. He still held tightly to the arms of the chair.

"At first," he presently resumed, "my new experiences were so vividly interesting that I felt no alarm. There was no room for it. The alarm came a little later."

"Then you actually penetrated far enough into that state to experience yourself as a normal portion of it?" asked the doctor, leaning forward, deeply interested.

Mr. Mudge nodded a perspiring face in reply.

"I did," he whispered, "undoubtedly I did. I am coming to all that. It began first at night, when I realised that sleep brought no loss of consciousness——"

"The spirit, of course, can never sleep. Only the body becomes unconscious," interposed John Silence.

"Yes, we know that—theoretically. At night, of course, the spirit is active elsewhere, and we have no memory of where and how, simply because the brain stays behind and receives no record. But I found that, while remaining conscious, I also retained memory. I had attained to the state of continuous consciousness, for at night I regularly, with the first approaches of drowsiness, entered *nolens volens* the four-dimensional world.

"For a time this happened regularly, and I could not control it; though later I found a way to regulate it better. Apparently sleep is unnecessary in the higher—the four-dimensional—body. Yes, perhaps. But I should infinitely have preferred dull sleep to the knowledge. For, unable to control my movements, I wandered to and fro, attracted, owing to my partial devel-

opment and premature arrival, to parts of this new world that alarmed me more and more. It was the awful waste and drift of a monstrous world, so utterly different to all we know and see that I cannot even hint at the nature of the sights and objects and beings in it. More than that, I cannot even remember them. I cannot now picture them to myself even, but can recall only the *memory of the impression* they made upon me, the horror and devastating terror of it all. To be in several places at once, for instance——"

"Perfectly," interrupted John Silence, noticing the increase of the other's excitement, "I understand exactly. But now, please, tell me a little more of this alarm you experienced, and how it affected you."

"It's not the disappearing and reappearing *per se* that I mind," continued Mr. Mudge, "so much as certain other things. It's seeing people and objects in their weird entirety, in their true and complete shapes, that is so distressing. It introduces me to a world of monsters. Horses, dogs, cats, all of which I loved; people, trees, children; all that I have considered beautiful in life—everything, from a human face to a cathedral—appear to me in a different shape and aspect to all I have known before. I cannot perhaps convince you why this should be terrible, but I assure you that it is so. To hear the human voice proceeding from this novel appearance which I scarcely recognise as a human body is ghastly, simply ghastly. To see inside everything and everybody is a form of insight peculiarly distressing. To be so confused in geography as to find myself one moment at the North Pole, and the next at Clapham Junction—or possibly at both places simultaneously—is absurdly terrifying. Your imagination will readily furnish other details without my multiplying my experiences now. But you have no idea what it all means, and how I suffer."

Mr. Mudge paused in his panting account and lay back in his chair. He still held tightly to the arms as though they could keep him in the world of sanity and three measurements, and only now and again released his left hand in order to mop his face. He looked very thin and white and oddly unsubstantial, and he stared about him as though he saw into this other space he had been talking about.

John Silence, too, felt warm. He had listened to every word and had made many notes. The presence of this man had an exhilarating effect upon him. It seemed as if Mr. Racine Mudge still carried about with him something of that breathless Higher-Space condition he had been describing. At any rate, Dr. Silence had himself advanced sufficiently far along the legitimate paths of spiritual and psychic transformations to realise that the visions of this extraordinary little person had a basis of truth for their origin.

After a pause that prolonged itself into minutes, he crossed the room and unlocked a drawer in a bookcase, taking out a small book with a red cover. It had a lock to it, and he produced a key out of his pocket and proceeded to open the covers. The bright eyes of Mr, Mudge never left him for a single second.

"It almost seems a pity," he said at length, "to cure you, Mr. Mudge. You are on the way to discovery of great things. Though you may lose your life

in the process—that is, your life here in the world of three dimensions—you would lose thereby nothing of great value—you will pardon my apparent rudeness, I know—and you might gain what is infinitely greater. Your suffering, of course, lies in the fact that you alternate between the two worlds and are never wholly in one or the other. Also, I rather imagine, though I cannot be certain of this from any personal experiments, that you have here and there penetrated even into space of more than four dimensions, and have hence experienced the terror you speak of."

The perspiring son of the Essex bargeman and the woman of Normandy bent his head several times in assent, but uttered no word in reply.

"Some strange psychic predisposition, dating no doubt from one of your former lives, has favoured the development of your 'disease'; and the fact that you had no normal training at school or college, no leading by the poor intellect into the culs-de-sac falsely called knowledge, has further caused your exceedingly rapid movement along the lines of direct inner experience. None of the knowledge you have foreshadowed has come to you through the senses, of course."

Mr. Mudge, sitting in his immovable chair, began to tremble slightly. A wind again seemed to pass over his surface and again to set it curiously in motion like a field of grass.

"You are merely talking to gain time," he said hurriedly, in a shaking voice. "This thinking aloud delays us. I see ahead what you are coming to, only please be quick, for something is going to happen. A band is again coming down the street, and if it plays—if it plays Wagner—I shall be off in a twinkling."

"Precisely. I will be quick. I was leading up to the point of how to effect your cure. The way is this: You must simply learn to *block the entrances.*"

"True, true, utterly true!" exclaimed the little man, dodging about nervously in the depths of the chair. "But how, in the name of space, is that to be done?"

"By concentration. They are all within you, these entrances, although outer cases such as colour, music and other things lead you towards them. These external things you cannot hope to destroy, but once the entrances are blocked, they will lead you only to bricked walls and closed channels. You will no longer be able to find the way."

"Quick, quick!" cried the bobbing figure in the chair. "How is this concentration to be effected?"

"This little book," continued Dr. Silence calmly, "will explain to you the way." He tapped the cover. "Let me now read out to you certain simple instructions, composed, as I see you divine, entirely from my own personal experiences in the same direction. Follow these instructions and you will no longer enter the state of Higher Space. The entrances will be blocked effectively."

Mr. Mudge sat bolt upright in his chair to listen, and John Silence cleared his throat and began to read slowly in a very distinct voice.

But before he had uttered a dozen words, something happened. A sound

of street music entered the room through the open ventilators, for a band had begun to play in the stable mews at the back of the house—the March from *Tannhäuser*. Odd as it may seem that a German band should twice within the space of an hour enter the same mews and play Wagner, it was nevertheless the fact.

Mr. Racine Mudge heard it. He uttered a sharp, squeaking cry and twisted his arms with nervous energy round the chair. A piteous look that was not far from tears spread over his white face. Grey shadows followed it—the grey of fear. He began to struggle convulsively.

"Hold me fast! Catch me! For God's sake, keep me here! I'm on the rush already. Oh, it's frightful!" he cried in tones of anguish, his voice as thin as a reed.

Dr. Silence made a plunge forward to seize him, but in a flash, before he could cover the space between them, Mr. Racine Mudge, screaming and struggling, seemed to shoot past him into invisibility. He disappeared like an arrow from a bow propelled at infinite speed, and his voice no longer sounded in the external air, but seemed in some curious way to make itself heard somewhere within the depths of the doctor's own being. It was almost like a faint singing cry in his head, like a voice of dream, a voice of vision and unreality.

"Alcohol, alcohol!" it cried, "give me alcohol! It's the quickest way. Alcohol, before I'm out of reach!"

The doctor, accustomed to rapid decisions and even more rapid action, remembered that a brandy flask stood upon the mantelpiece, and in less than a second he had seized it and was holding it out towards the space above the chair recently occupied by the visible Mudge. Then, before his very eyes, and long ere he could unscrew the metal stopper, he saw the contents of the closed glass phial sink and lessen as though some one were drinking violently and greedily of the liquor within.

"Thanks! Enough! It deadens the vibrations!" cried the faint voice in his interior, as he withdrew the flask and set it back upon the mantelpiece. He understood that in Mudge's present condition one side of the flask was open to space and he could drink without removing the stopper. He could hardly have had a more interesting proof of what he had been hearing described at such length.

But the next moment—the very same moment it almost seemed—the German band stopped midway in its tune—and there was Mr. Mudge back in his chair again, gasping and panting!

"Quick!" he shrieked, "stop that band! Send it away! Catch hold of me! Block the entrances! Block the entrances! Give me the red book! Oh, oh, oh-h-h-h!!!"

The music had begun again. It was merely a temporary interruption. The *Tannhäuser* March started again, this time at a tremendous pace that made it sound like a rapid two-step as though the instruments played against time.

But the brief interruption gave Dr. Silence a moment in which to collect his scattering thoughts, and before the band had got through half a bar, he

had flung forward upon the chair and held Mr. Racine Mudge, the struggling little victim of Higher Space, in a grip of iron. His arms went all round his diminutive person, taking in a good part of the chair at the same time. He was not a big man, yet he seemed to smother Mudge completely.

Yet, even as he did so, and felt the wriggling form underneath him, it began to melt and slip away like air or water. The wood of the arm-chair somehow disentangled itself from between his own arms and those of Mudge. The phenomenon known as the passage of matter through matter took place. The little man seemed actually to get mixed up in his own being. Dr. Silence could just see his face beneath him. It puckered and grew dark as though from some great internal effort. He heard the thin, reedy voice cry in his ear to "Block the entrances, block the entrances!" and then—but how in the world describe what is indescribable?

John Silence half rose up to watch. Racine Mudge, his face distorted beyond all recognition, was making a marvellous inward movement, as though doubling back upon himself. He turned funnel-wise like water in a whirling vortex, and then appeared to break up somewhat as a reflection breaks up and divides in a distorting convex mirror. He went neither forward nor backwards, neither to the right nor the left, neither up nor down. But he went. He went utterly. He simply flashed away out of sight like a vanishing projectile.

All but one leg! Dr. Silence just had the time and the presence of mind to seize upon the left ankle and boot as it disappeared, and to this he held on for several seconds like grim death. Yet all the time he knew it was a foolish and useless thing to do.

The foot was in his grasp one moment, and the next it seemed—this was the only way he could describe it— inside his own skin and bones, and at the same time outside his hand and all round it. It seemed mixed up in some amazing way with his own flesh and blood. Then it was gone, and he was tightly grasping a draught of heated air.

"Gone! gone! gone!" cried a thick, whispering voice, somewhere deep within his own consciousness. "Lost! lost! lost!" it repeated, growing fainter and fainter till at length it vanished into nothing and the last signs of Mr. Racine Mudge vanished with it.

John Silence locked his red book and replaced it in the cabinet, which he fastened with a click, and when Barker answered the bell he inquired if Mr. Mudge had left a card upon the table. It appeared that he had, and when the servant returned with it, Dr. Silence read the address and made a note of it. It was in North London.

"Mr. Mudge has gone," he said quietly to Barker, noticing his expression of alarm.

"He's not taken his 'at with him, sir."

"Mr. Mudge requires no hat where he is now," continued the doctor, stooping to poke the fire. "But he may return for it——"

"And the humbrella, sir.'

"And the umbrella."

"He didn't go out *my* way, sir, if you please," stuttered the amazed servant, his curiosity overcoming his nervousness.

"Mr. Mudge has his own way of coming and going, and prefers it. If he returns by the door at any time remember to bring him instantly to me, and be kind and gentle with him and ask no questions. Also, remember, Barker, to think pleasantly, sympathetically, affectionately of him while he is away. Mr. Mudge is a very suffering gentleman."

Barker bowed and went out of the room backwards, gasping and feeling round the inside of his collar with three very hot fingers of one hand.

It was two days later when he brought in a telegram to the study. Dr. Silence opened it, and read as follows:

"Bombay, Just slipped out again. All safe. Have blocked entrances. Thousand thanks. Address Cooks, London.—MUDGE."

Dr. Silence looked up and saw Barker staring at him bewilderingly. It occurred to him that somehow he knew the contents of the telegram.

"Make a parcel of Mr. Mudge's things," he said briefly, "and address them Thomas Cook & Sons, Ludgate Circus. And send them there exactly a month from to-day and marked 'To be called for.' "

"Yes, sir," said Barker, leaving the room with a deep sigh and a hurried glance at the waste-paper basket where his master had dropped the pink paper.

Out of the Eons

by Hazel Heald

Mrs. Heald was a protege of H. P. Lovecraft and shared with him the "forbidden" mythology of Cthulhu, the Mad Arab, and the hovering horror-gods of outer space. Her stories are considered part of the true saga of the Lovecraft tales, and it is certain that the hand of the Master was laid quite heavily over these pages. Out of the Eons *is one of the best of Hazel Heald's stories, and readers will find it shudderingly replete with eccentric Bostonians, spine-tingling documents, and relics that had best been left in their unhallowed tombs.*

(Ms. found among the effects of the late Richard H. Johnson, Ph. D., curator of the Cabot Museum of Archeology, Boston, Mass.)

IT IS NOT LIKELY that any one in Boston— or any alert reader elsewhere—will ever forget the strange affair of the Cabot Museum. The newspaper publicity given to that hellish mummy, the antique and terrible rumors vaguely linked with it, the morbid wave of interest and cult activities during 1932, and the frightful fate of the two intruders on December first of that year, all combined to form one of those classic mysteries which go down for generations as folklore and become the nuclei of whole cycles of horrific speculation.

Every one seems to realize, too, that something very vital and unutterably hideous was suppressed in the public accounts of the culminant horrors. Those first disquieting hints as to the *condition* of one of the two bodies were dismissed and ignored too abruptly—nor were the singular *modifications* in the mummy given the following-up which their news value would normally prompt. It also struck people as queer that the mummy was never restored to its case. In these days of expert taxidermy the excuse that its disintegrating condition made exhibition impracticable seemed a peculiarly lame one.

As curator of the museum I am in a position to reveal all the suppressed facts, but this I shall not do during my life-time. There are things about the world and universe which it is better for the majority not to know, and I have not departed from the opinion in which all of us—museum staff, physi-

cians, reporters, and police—concurred at the period of the horror itself. At the same time it seems proper that a matter of such overwhelming scientific and historic importance should not remain wholly unrecorded—hence this account which I have prepared for the benefit of serious students. I shall place it among various papers to be examined after my death, leaving its fate to the discretion of my executors. Certain threats and unusual events during the past weeks have led me to believe that my life—as well as that of other museum officials—is in some peril through the enmity of several widespread secret cults of Asiatics, Polynesians, and heteroge-neous mystical devotees; hence it is possible that the work of the executors may not be long postponed. [Executor's note: Dr. Johnson died suddenly and rather mysteriously of heart-failure on April 22nd, 1933. Wentworth Moore, taxidermist of the museum, disappeared around the middle of the preceding month. On February 18th of the same year Dr. William Minot, who superintended a dissection connected with the case, was stabbed in the back, dying the following day.]

The real beginning of the horror, I suppose, was in 1879—long before my term as curator—when the museum acquired that ghastly, inexplicable mummy from the Orient Shipping Company. Its very discovery was monstrous and menacing, for it came from a crypt of un-known origin and fabulous antiquity on a bit of land suddenly upheaved from the Pacific's floor.

On May 11th, 1878, Capt. Charles Weatherbee of the freighter Eridanus, bound from Wel-lington, New Zealand, to Valparaiso, Chile, had sighted a new island unmarked on any chart and evidently of volcanic origin. It projected quite boldly out of the sea in the form of a trun-cated cone. A landing-party under Capt. Weatherbee noted evidences of long submersion on the rugged slopes which they climbed, while at the summit there were signs of recent destruc-tion, as by an earthquake. Among the scattered rubble were massive stones of manifestly artifi-cial shaping, and a little examination disclosed the presence of some of that prehistoric Cyclo-pean masonry found on certain Pacific islands and forming a perpetual archaeological puzzle.

Finally the sailors entered a massive stone crypt—judged to have been part of a much larger edifice, and to have originally lain far underground—in one corner of which the frightful mummy crouched. After a short period of virtual panic, caused partly by certain carvings on the walls, the men were induced to move the mummy to the ship, though it was only with fear and loathing that they touched it. Close to the body, as if once thrust into its clothes, was a cyl-inder of an unknown metal containing a roll of thin, bluish-white membrane of equally un-known nature, inscribed with peculiar characters in a greyish, indeterminable pigment. In the centre of the vast stone floor was a suggestion of a trap-door, but the party lacked apparatus suf-ficiently powerful to move it.

The Cabot Museum, then newly established; saw the meagre reports of the discovery and at once took steps to acquire the mummy and the cylinder. Curator Pickman made a personal

trip to Valparaiso and outfitted a schooner to search for the crypt where the thing had been found, though meeting with failure in this matter. At the recorded position of the island nothing but the sea's unbroken expanse could be discerned, and the seekers realised that the same seismic forces which had suddenly thrust the island up had carried it down again to the watery darkness where it had brooded for untold aeons. The secret of that immovable trap-door would never be solved. The mummy and the cylinder, however, remained—and the former was placed on exhibition early in November, 1879, in the museum's hall of mummies.

The Cabot Museum of Archaeology, which specialises in such remnants of ancient and unknown civilisations as do not fall within the domain of art, is a small and scarcely famous institution though one of high standing in scientific circles. It stands in the heart of Boston's exclusive Beacon Hill district—in Mt. Vernon Street, near Joy—housed in a former private mansion with an added wing in the rear, and was a source of pride to its austere neighbours until the recent terrible events brought it an undesirable notoriety.

The hall of mummies on the western side of the original mansion (which was designed by Bulfinch and erected in 1819), on the second floor, is justly esteemed by historians and anthropologists a harbouring the greatest collection of its kind in America. Here may be found typical examples of Egyptian embalming from the earliest Sakkarah specimens to the last Coptic attempts of the eighth century; mummies of other cultures, including the prehistoric Indian specimens recently found in the Aleutian Islands; agonised Pompeian figures moulded in plaster from tragic hollows in the ruin-choking ashes; naturally mummified bodies from mines and other excavations in all parts of the earth—some surprised by their terrible entombment in the grotesque postures caused by their last, tearing death-throes—everything, in short, which any collection of the sort could well be expected to contain. In 1879, of course, it was much less ample than it is now; yet even then it was remarkable. But that shocking thing from the primal Cyclopean crypt on an ephemeral sea-spawned island was always its chief attraction and most impenetrable mystery.

The mummy was that of a medium-sized man of unknown race, and was cast in a peculiar crouching posture. The face, half shielded by claw-like hands, had its under jaw thrust far forward, while the shrivelled features bore an expression of fright so hideous that few spectators could view them unmoved. The eyes were closed, with lids clamped down tightly over eyeballs apparently bulging and prominent. Bits of hair and beard remained, and the colour of the whole was a sort of dull neutral grey. In texture the thing was half leathery and half stony, forming an insoluble enigma to those experts who sought to ascertain how it was embalmed. In places bits of its substance were eaten away by time and decay. Rags of some peculiar fabric, with suggestions of unknown designs, still clung to the object.

Just what made it so infinitely horrible and repulsive one could hardly say. For one thing, there was a subtle, indefinable sense of limitless antiquity and utter alienage which affected one like a view from the brink of a monstrous abyss of unplumbed blackness—but mostly it

was the expression of crazed fear on the puckered, prognathous, half-shielded face. Such a symbol of infinite, inhuman, cosmic fright could not help communicating the emotion to the beholder amidst a disquieting cloud of mystery and vain conjecture.

Among the discriminating few who frequented the Cabot Museum this relic of an elder, forgotten world soon acquired an unholy fame, though the institution's seclusion and quiet policy prevented it from becoming a popular sensation of the 'Cardiff Giant' sort. In the last century the art of vulgar ballyhoo had not invaded the field of scholarship to the extent it has now succeeded in doing. Naturally, savants of various kinds tried their best to classify the frightful object, though always without success. Theories of a bygone Pacific civilisation, of which the Easter Island images and the megalithic masonry of Ponape and Nan-Matol are conceivable vestiges, were freely circulated among students, and learned journals carried varied and often conflicting speculations on a possible former continent whose peaks survive as the myriad islands of Melanesia and Polynesia. The diversity in dates assigned to the hypothetical vanished culture—or continent—was at once bewildering and amusing; yet some surprisingly relevant allusions were found in certain myths of Tahiti and other islands.

Meanwhile the strange cylinder and its baffling scroll of unknown hieroglyphs, carefully preserved in the museum library, received their due share of attention. No question could exist as to their association with the mummy; hence all realised that in the unravelling of their mystery the mystery of the shrivelled horror would in all probability be unravelled as well. The cylinder, about four inches long by seven-eighths of an inch in diameter, was of a queerly iridescent metal utterly defying chemical analysis and seemingly impervious to all reagents. It was tightly fitted with a cap of the same substance, and bore engraved figurings of an evidently decorative and possibly symbolic nature—conventional designs which seemed to follow a peculiarly alien, paradoxical, and doubtfully describable system of geometry.

Not less mysterious was the scroll it contained—a neat roll of some thin, bluish-white, unanalysable membrane, coiled round a slim rod of metal like that of the cylinder, and unwinding to a length of some two feet. The large, bold hieroglyphs, extending in a narrow line down the centre of the scroll and penned or painted with a grey pigment defying analysis, resembled nothing known to linguists and palaeographers, and could not be deciphered despite the transmission of photographic copies to every living expert in the given field.

It is true that a few scholars, unusually versed in the literature of occultism and magic, found vague resemblances between some of the hieroglyphs and certain primal symbols described or cited in two or three very ancient, obscure, and esoteric texts such as the Book of Eibon, reputed to descend from forgotten Hyperborea; the Pnakotic fragments, alleged to be pre-human; and the monstrous and forbidden Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. None of these resemblances, however, was beyond dispute; and because of the prevailing low estimation of occult studies, no effort was made to circulate copies of the hieroglyphs among mystical specialists. Had such circulation occurred at this early date, the

later history of the case might have been very different; indeed, a glance at the hieroglyphs by any reader of von Junzt's horrible Nameless Cults would have established a linkage of unmistakable significance. At this period, however, the readers of that monstrous blasphemy were exceedingly few; copies having been incredibly scarce in the interval between the suppression of the original Düsseldorf edition (1839) and of the Bridewell translation (1845) and the publication of the expurgated reprint by the Golden Goblin Press in 1909. Practically speaking, no occultist or student of the primal past's esoteric lore had his attention called to the strange scroll until the recent outburst of sensational journalism which precipitated the horrible climax.

II

Thus matters glided along for a half-century following the installation of the frightful mummy at the museum. The gruesome object had a local celebrity among cultivated Bostonians, but no more than that; while the very existence of the cylinder and scroll—after a decade of futile research—was virtually forgotten. So quiet and conservative was the Cabot Museum that no reporter or feature writer ever thought of invading its uneventful precincts for rabble-tickling material.

The invasion of ballyhoo commenced in the spring of 1931, when a purchase of somewhat spectacular nature—that of the strange objects and inexplicably preserved bodies found in crypts beneath the almost vanished and evilly famous ruins of Château Faussesflammes, in Averoigne, France—brought the museum prominently into the news columns. True to its 'hustling' policy, the Boston Pillar sent a Sunday feature writer to cover the incident and pad it with an exaggerated general account of the institution itself; and this young man—Stuart Reynolds by name—hit upon the nameless mummy as a potential sensation far surpassing the recent acquisitions nominally forming his chief assignment. A smattering of theosophical lore, and a fondness for the speculations of such writers as Colonel Churchward and Lewis Spence concerning lost continents and primal forgotten civilisations, made Reynolds especially alert toward any aeonian relic like the unknown mummy.

At the museum the reporter made himself a nuisance through constant and not always intelligent questionings and endless demands for the movement of encased objects to permit photographs from unusual angles. In the basement library room he pored endlessly over the strange metal cylinder and its membraneous scroll, photographing them from every angle and securing pictures of every bit of the weird hieroglyphed text. He likewise asked to see all books with any bearing whatever on the subject of primal cultures and sunken continents – sitting for three hours taking notes, and leaving only

in order to hasten to Cambridge for a sight (if permission were granted) of the abhorred and forbidden *Necronomicon* at the Widener Library.

On April fifth the article appeared in the Sunday *Pillar,* smothered in photographs of mummy, cylinder, and hieroglyphed scroll, and couched in the peculiarly simpering, infantile style which the *Pillar* affects for the benefit of its vast and mentally immature clientele. Full of inaccuracies, exaggerations, and sensationalism, it was precisely the sort of thing to stir the brainless and fickle interest of the herd—and as a result the once quiet museum began to be swarmed with chattering and vacuously staring throngs such as its stately corridors had never known before.

There were scholarly and intelligent visitors, too, despite the puerility of the article—the pictures had spoken for themselves—and many persons of mature attainments sometimes see the *Pillar* by accident. I recall one very strange character who appeared during November—a dark, turbaned and bushily bearded man with a labored, unnatural voice, curiously expressionless face, clumsy hands covered with absurd white mittens, who gave a squalid West End address and called himself "Swami Chandraputra." This fellow was unbelievably erudite in occult lore and seemed profoundly and solemnly moved by the resemblance of the hieroglyphs on the scroll to certain signs and symbols of a forgotten elder world about which he professed vast intuitive knowledge.

By June, the fame of the mummy and scroll had leaked far beyond Boston, and the museum had inquiries and requests for photographs from occultists and students of arcana all over the world. This was not altogether pleasing to our staff, since we are a scientific institution without sympathy for fantastic dreamers; yet we answered all questions with civility. One result of these catechisms was a highly learned article in *The Occult Review* by the famous New Orleans mystic Etienne-Laurent de Marigny, in which was asserted the complete identity of some of the odd geometrical designs on the iridescent cylinder, and of several of the hieroglyphs on the membranous scroll, with certain ideographs of horrible significance (transcribed from primal monoliths or from the secret rituals of hidden bands of esoteric students and devotees) reproduced in the hellish and suppressed *Black Book* or *Nameless Cults* of von Junzt.

De Marigny recalled the frightful death of von Junzt in 1840, a year after the publication of his terrible volume at Düsseldorf, and commented on his blood-curdling and partly suspected sources of information. Above all, he emphasized the enormous relevance of the tales with which von Junzt linked most of the monstrous ideographs he had reproduced. That these tales, in which a cylinder and scroll were expressly mentioned, held a remarkable suggestion of relationship to the things at the museum, no one could deny; yet they were of such breath-taking extravagance—involving such unbelievable sweeps of time and such fantastic anomalies of a forgotten elder world—that one could much more easily admire than believe them.

Admire them the public certainly did, for copying in the press was universal. Illustrated articles sprang up everywhere, telling or purporting to tell

the legends in the *Black Book,* expatiating on the horror of the mummy, comparing the cylinder's designs and the scroll's hieroglyphs with the figures reproduced by von Junzt, and indulging in the wildest, most sensational and most irrational theories and speculations. Attendance at the museum was trebled, and the widespread nature of the interest was attested by the plethora of mail on the subject—most of it inane and superfluous—received at the museum. Apparently the mummy and its origin formed—for imaginative people—a close rival to the depression as chief topic of 1931 and 1932. For my own part, the principal effect of the furor was to make me read von Junzt's monstrous volume in the Golden Goblin edition—a perusal which left me dizzy and nauseated, yet thankful that I had not seen the utter infamy of the unexpurgated text.

III

The archaic whispers reflected in the *Black Book* and linked with designs and symbols so closely akin to what the mysterious scroll and cylinder bore, were indeed of a character to hold one spellbound and not a little awestruck. Leaping an incredible gulf of time—behind all the civilizations, races, and lands we know—they clustered round a vanished nation and a vanished continent of the misty, fabulous dawn-years . . . that to which legend had given the name of Mu, and which old tablets in the primal Naacal tongue speak of as flourishing 200,000 years ago, when lost Hyperborea knew the nameless worship of black amorphous Tsathoggua.

There was mention of a kingdom or province called K'naa in a very ancient land where the first human people had found monstrous ruins left by those who had dwelt there before—vague waves of unknown entities which had filtered down from the stars and lived out their eons on a forgotten, nascent world. K'naa was a sacred place, since from its midst the bleak basalt cliffs of Mount Yaddith-Gho soared starkly into the sky, topped by a gigantic fortress of cyclopean stone, infinitely older than mankind and built by the alien spawn of the dark planet Yuggoth, which had colonized the earth before the birth of terrestrial life.

The spawn of Yuggoth had perished eons before, but had left behind them one monstrous and terrible living thing which could never die—their hellish god or patron demon Ghatanothoa, which lowered and brooded eternally though unseen in the crypts beneath that fortress on Yaddith-Gho. No human creature had ever climbed Yaddith-Gho or seen that blasphemous fortress except as a distant and geometrically abnormal outline against the sky; yet most agreed that Ghatanothoa was still there, wallowing and burrowing in unsuspected abysses beneath the megalithic walls. There were always those who believed that sacrifices must be made to Ghatanothoa, lest it crawl out of its hidden abysses and waddle horribly through the world of men as it had once waddled through the primal world of the Yuggoth-spawn.

People said that if no victims were offered, Ghatanothoa would ooze up to the light of day and lumber down the basalt cliffs of Yaddith-Gho

bringing doom to all it might encounter. For no living thing could behold Ghatanothoa, or even a perfect graven image of Ghatanothoa, however small, without suffering a change more horrible than death itself. Sight of the god, or its image, as all the legends of Yuggoth-spawn agreed, meant paralysis and petrifaction of a singularly shocking sort, in which the victim was turned to stone and leather on the outside, while the brain within remained perpetually alive—horribly fixed and prisoned through the ages, and maddeningly conscious of the passage of interminable epochs of helpless inaction till chance and time might complete the decay of the petrified shell and leave it exposed to die. Most brains, of course, would go mad long before this eon-deferred release could arrive. No human eyes, it was said, had ever glimpsed Ghatanothoa, though the danger was as great now as it had been for the Yuggoth-spawn.

And so there was a cult in K'naa which worshipped Ghatanothoa and each year sacrificed to it twelve young warriors and twelve young maidens. These victims were offered up on flaming altars in the marble temple near the mountain's base, for none dared climb Yaddith-Gho's basalt cliffs or draw near to the cyclopean pre-human stronghold on its crest. Vast was the power of the priests of Ghatanothoa, since upon them depended the preservation of K'naa and of all the land of Mu from the petrifying emergence of Ghatanothoa out of its unknown burrows.

There were in the land a hundred priests of the Dark God, under Imash-Mo the High Priest, who walked before King Thabou at the Nath-feast, and stood proudly whilst the King knelt at the Dhoric shrine. Each priest had a marble house, a chest of gold, two hundred slaves, and a hundred concubines, besides immunity from civil law and the power of life and death over all in K'naa save the priests of the King. Yet in spite of these defenders there was ever a fear in the land lest Ghatanothoa slither up from the depths and lurch viciously down the mountain to bring horror and petrification to mankind. In the latter years the priests forbade men even to guess or imagine what its frightful aspect might be.

It was in the Year of the Red Moon (estimated as B. C. 173-148 by von Junzt) that a human being first dared to breathe defiance against Ghatanothoa and its nameless menace. This bold heretic was T'yog, High Priest of Shub-Niggurath and guardian of the copper temple of the Goat With a Thousand Young. T'yog had thought long on the powers of the various gods, and had had strange dreams and revelations touching the life of this and earlier worlds. In the end he felt sure that the gods friendly to man could be arrayed against the hostile gods, and believed that Shub-Niggurath, Nug, and Yeb, as well as Yig the Serpent-god, were ready to take sides with man against the tyranny and presumption of Ghatanothoa.

Inspired by the Mother Goddess, T'yog wrote down a strange formula in the hieratic Naacal of his order, which he believed would keep the possessor immune from the Dark God's petrifying power. With this protection, he reflected, it might be possible for a bold man to climb the dreaded basalt cliffs and—first-of all human beings—enter the cyclopean fortress

beneath which Ghatanothoa reputedly brooded. Face to face with the god, and with the power of Shub-Niggurath and her sons on his side, T'yog believed that he might be able to bring it to terms and at last deliver mankind from its brooding menace. With humanity freed through his efforts, there would be no limit to the honors he might claim. All the honors of the priests of Ghatanothoa would perforce be transferred to him; and even kingship or godhood might conceivably be within his reach.

So T'yog wrote his protective formula on a scroll of *pthagon* membrane (according to von Junzt, the inner skin of the extinct yakith-lizard) and enclosed it in a carven cylinder of *lagh* metal—the metal brought by the Elder Ones from Yuggoth, and found in no mine of earth. This charm, carried in his robe, would make him proof against the menace of Ghatanothoa—it would even restore the Dark God's petrified victims if that monstrous entity should ever emerge and begin its devastations. Thus he proposed to go up the shunned and man-untrodden mountain, invade the alien-angled citadel of cyclopean stone, and confront the shocking devil-entity in its lair. Of what would follow, he could not even guess; but the hope of being mankind's savior lent strength to his will.

He had, however, reckoned without the jealousy and self-interest of Ghatanothoa's pampered priests. No sooner did they hear of his plan than —fearful for their prestige and privelege in case the Demon-God should be dethroned—they set up a frantic clamor against the so-called sacrilege, crying that no man might prevail against Ghatanothoa, and that any effort to seek it out would merely provoke it to a hellish onslaught against mankind which no spell or priestcraft could hope to avert. With those cries they hoped to turn the public mind against T'yog; yet such was the people's yearning for freedom from Ghatanothoa, and such their confidence in the skill and zeal of T'yog, that all the protestations came to naught. Even the King, usually a puppet of the priests, refused to forbid T'yog's daring pilgrimage.

It was then that the priests of Ghatanothoa did by stealth what they could not do openly. One night Imash-Mo, the High-Priest, stole to T'yog in his temple chamber and took from his sleeping form the metal cylinder; silently drawing out the potent scroll and putting in its place another scroll of great similitude, yet varied enough to have no power against any god or demon. When the cylinder was slipped back into the sleeper's cloak Imash-Mo was content, for he knew T'yog was little likely to study that cylinder's contents again. Thinking himself protected by the true scroll, the heretic would march up the forbidden mountain and into the Evil Presence—and Ghatanothoa, unchecked by any magic, would take care of the rest.

It would no longer be needful for Ghatanothoa's priests to preach against the defiance. Let T'yog go his way and meet his doom. And secretly, the priests would always cherish the stolen scroll—the true and potent charm—handing it down from one High-Priest to another for use in any dim future when it might be needful to contravene the Devil-God's will. So the rest

of the night Imash-Mo slept in great peace, with the true scroll in a new cylinder fashioned for its harborage.

It was at dawn on the Day of the Sky-Flames (nomenclature undefined by von Junzt) that T'yog, amidst the prayers and chanting of the people and with King Thabou's blessing on his head, started up the dreaded mountain with a staff of tlath-wood in his right hand. Within his robe was the cylinder holding what he thought to be the true charm—for he had indeed failed to find out the imposture. Nor did he see any irony in the prayers which Imash-Mo and the other priests of Ghatanothoa intoned for his safety and success.

All that morning the people stood and watched as T'yog's dwindling form struggled up the shunned basalt slope hitherto alien to men's footsteps, and many stayed watching long after he had vanished where a perilous ledge led round to the mountain's hidden side. That night a few sensitive dreamers thought they heard a faint tremor convulsing the hated peak; though most ridiculed them for the statement. Next day vast crowds watched the mountain and prayed, and wondered how soon T'yog would return. And so the next day, and the next. For weeks they hoped and waited, and then they wept. Nor did any one ever see T'yog, who would have saved mankind from fears, again.

Thereafter men shuddered at T'yog's presumption, and tried not to think of the punishment his impiety had met. And the priests of Ghatanothoa smiled to those who might resent the god's will or challenge its right to the sacrifices. In later years the ruse of Imash-Mo became known to the people; yet the knowledge availed not to change the general feeling that Ghatanothoa were better left alone. None ever dared defy it again. And so the ages rolled on, and King succeeded King, and High-Priest succeeded High-Priest, and nations rose and decayed, and lands rose above the sea and returned into the sea. And with many millennia decay fell upon K'naa—till at last on a hideous day of storm and thunder, terrific rumbling and mountain-high waves, all the land of Mu sank into the sea for ever.

Yet down the later eons thin streams of ancient secrets trickled. In distant lands there met together gray-faced fugitives who had survived the sea-fiend's rage, and strange skies drank the smoke of altars reared to vanished gods and demons. Though none knew to what bottomless deep and sacred peak and cyclopean fortress of dread Ghatanothoa had sunk, there were still those who mumbled its name and offered to it nameless sacrifices lest it bubble up through leagues of ocean and shamble among men spreading horror and petrifaction.

Around the scattered priests grew the rudiments of a dark and secret cult—secret because the people of the new lands had other gods and devils, and thought only evil of elder and alien ones—and within that cult many hideous things were done, and many strange objects cherished. It was whispered that a certain line of elusive priests still harbored the true charm against Ghatanothoa which Imash-Mo stole from the sleeping T'yog; though none remained who could read or understand the cryptic syllables, or who

could even guess in what part of the world the lost K'naa, the dreaded peak of Yaddith-Gho, and the titan fortress of the Devil-God had lain.

Though it flourished chiefly in those Pacific regions around which Mu itself had once stretched, there were rumors of the hidden and detested cult of Ghatanothoa in ill-fated Atlantis, and on the abhorred plateau of Leng. Von Junzt implied its presence in the fabled subterrene kingdom of K'nyan, and gave clear evidence that it had penetrated Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, China, the forgotten Semite empires of Africa, and Mexico and Peru in the New World. That it had a strong connection with the witchcraft movement in Europe, against which the bulls of popes were vainly directed, he more than strongly hinted. The West, however, was never favorable to its growth; and public indignation—aroused by glimpses of hideous rites and nameless sacrifices—wholly stamped out many of its branches. In the end it became a hunted, doubly furtive underground affair—yet never could its nucleus be quite exterminated. It always survived somehow, chiefly in the Far East and on the Pacific Islands, where its teachings became merged into the esoteric lore of the Polynesian *Areoi.*

Von Junzt gave subtle and disquieting hints of actual contact with the cult; so that as I read I shuddered at what was rumored about his death. He spoke of the growth of certain ideas regarding the appearance of the Devil-God—a creature which no human being (unless it were the too-daring T'yog, who had never returned) had ever seen—and contrasted this habit of speculation with the taboo prevailing in ancient Mu against any attempt to imagine what the horror looked like. There was a peculiar fearfulness about the devotees' awed and fascinated whispers on this subject—whispers heavy with morbid curiosity concerning the precise nature of what T'yog might have confronted in that frightful pre-human edifice on the dreaded and now-sunken mountains before the end (if it was an end) finally came—and I felt oddly disturbed by the German scholar's oblique and insidious references to this topic.

Scarcely less disturbing were von Junzt's conjectures on the whereabouts of the stolen scroll of cantrips against Ghatanothoa, and on the ultimate uses to which this scroll might be put. Despite all my assurance that the whole matter was purely mythical, I could not help shivering at the notion of a latter-day emergence of the monstrous god, and at the picture of an humanity turned suddenly to a race of abnormal statues, each encasing a living brain doomed to inert and helpless consciousness for untold eons of futurity. The old Düsseldorf savant had a poisonous way of suggesting more than he stated, and I could understand why his damnable book was suppressed in so many countries as blasphemous, dangerous, and unclean.

I writhed with repulsion, yet the thing exerted an unholy fascination; and I could not lay it down till I had finished it. The alleged reproductions of designs and ideographs from Mu were marvellously and startlingly like the markings on the strange cylinder and the characters on the scroll, and the whole account teemed with details having vague, irritating suggestions of resemblance to things connected with the hideous mummy. The

cylinder and scroll—the Pacific setting—the persistent notion of old Captain Weatherbee that the cyclopean crypt where the mummy was found had once lain under a vast building . . . somehow I was vaguely glad that the volcanic island had sunk before that massive suggestion of a trap-door could be opened.

IV

What I read in the *Black Book* formed a fiendishly apt preparation for the news items and closer events which began to force themselves upon me in the spring of 1932. I can scarcely recall just when the increasingly frequent reports of police action against the odd and fantastical religious cults in the Orient and elsewhere commenced to impress me; but by May or June I realized that there was, all over the world, a surprising and unwonted burst of activity on the part of bizzare, furtive, and esoteric mystical organizations ordinarily quiescent and seldom heard from.

It is not likely that I would have connected these reports with either the hints of von Junzt or the popular furor over the mummy and cylinder in the museum, but for certain significant syllables and persistent resemblances —sensationally dwelt upon by the press—in the rites and speeches of the various secret celebrants brought to public attention. As it was, I could not help remarking with disquiet the frequent recurrence of a name—in various corrupt forms—which seemed to constitute a focal point of all the cult worship, and which was obviously regarded with a singular mixture of reverence and terror. Some of the forms quoted were G'tanta, Tanotah, Than-Tha, Gatan, and Ktan-Tah—and it did not require the suggestions of my now numerous occultist correspondents to make me see in these variants a hideous and suggestive kinship to the monstrous name rendered by von Junzt as Ghatanothoa.

There were other disquieting features, too. Again and again the reports cited vague, awestruck references to a "true scroll"—something on which tremendous consequences seemed to hinge, and which was mentioned as being in the custody of a certain "Nagob," whoever and whatever he might be. Likewise, there was an insistent repetition of a name which sounded like Tog, Tiok, Yog, Zob, or Yob, and which my more and more excited consciousness involuntarily linked with the name of the hapless heretic, T'yog as given in the *Black Book*. This name was usually uttered in connection with such cryptical phrases as "It is none other than he," "He had looked upon its face," "He knows all, though he can neither see nor feel," "He has brought the memory down through the eons," "The true scroll will release him," "He can tell where to find it."

Something very queer was undoubtedly in the air, and I did not wonder when my occultist correspondents, as well as the sensational Sunday papers, began to connect the new abnormal stirrings with the legends of Mu on the one hand, and with the frightful mummy's recent exploitation on the other hand. The widespread articles in the first wave of press publicity, with

their insistent linkage of the mummy, cylinder, and scroll with the tale in the *Black Book,* and their crazily fantastic speculations about the whole matter, might very well have roused the latent fanaticism in hundreds of those furtive groups of exotic devotees with which our complex world abounds. Nor did the papers cease adding fuel to the flames—for the stories on the cult-stirrings were even wilder than the earlier series of yarns.

As the summer drew on, attendants noticed a curious new element among the throngs of visitors which—after a lull following the first burst of publicity—were again drawn to the museum by the second furor. More and more frequently there were persons of strange and exotic aspect—swarthy Asiatics, long-haired nondescripts, and bearded brown men who seemed unused to European clothes—who would invariably inquire for the hall of mummies and would subsequently be found staring at the hideous Pacific specimen in a veritable ecstasy of fascination. Some quiet, sinister undercurrent in this flood of eccentric foreigners seemed to impress all the guards, and I myself was far from undisturbed. I could not help thinking of the prevailing cult-stirrings among just such exotics as these—and the connection of those stirrings with myths all too close to the frightful mummy and its cylinder scroll.

At times I was half tempted to withdraw the mummy from exhibition—especially when an attendant told me that he had several times glimpsed strangers making odd obeisances before it, and had overheard singsong mutterings which sounded like chants or rituals addressed to it at hours when the visiting throngs were somewhat thinned. One of the guards acquired a queer nervous hallucination about the petrified horror in the lone glass case, alleging that he could see from day to day certain vague, subtle, and infinitely slight changes in the frantic flexion of the bony claws, and in the fear-crazed expression of the leathery face. He could not get rid of the loathsome idea that those horrible, bulging eyes were about to pop suddenly open.

It was early in September, when the curious crowds had lessened and the hall of mummies was sometimes vacant, that the attempt to get at the mummy by cutting the glass of its case was made. The culprit, a swarthy Polynesian, was spied in time by a guard, and was overpowered before any damage occurred. Upon investigation the fellow turned out to be a Hawaiian notorious for his activity in certain underground religious cults, and having a considerable police record in connection with abnormal and inhuman rites and sacrifices. Some of the papers found in his room were highly puzzling and disturbing, including many sheets covered with hieroglyphs closely resembling those on the scroll at the museum and in the *Black Book* of von Junzt; but regarding these things he could not be prevailed upon to speak.

Scarcely a week after this incident, another attempt to get at the mummy—this time by tampering with the lock of its case—resulted in a second arrest. The offender, a Cingalese, had as long and unsavory a record of loathsome cult activities as the Hawaiian had possessed, and displayed a kindred unwillingness to talk to the police. What made this case doubly and darkly interesting was that a guard had noticed this man several times before, and had heard

him addressing to the mummy a peculiar chant containing unmistakable repititions of the word "T'yog." As a result of this affair I doubled the guards in the hall of mummies, and ordered them never to leave the now notorious specimen out of sight, even for a moment.

As may well be imagined, the press made much of these two incidents, reviewing its talk of primal and fabulous Mu, and claiming boldly that the hideous mummy was none other than the daring heretic T'yog, petrified by something he had seen in the pre-human citadel he had invaded, and preserved intact through 175,000 years of our planet's turbulent history. That the strange devotees represented cults descended from Mu, and that they were worshipping the mummy—or perhaps even seeking to awaken it to life by spells and incantations—was emphasized and reiterated in the most sensational fashion.

Writers exploited the insistence of the old legends that the *brain* of Ghatanothoa's petrified victims remained conscious and unaffected—a point which served as a basis for the wildest and most improbable speculations. The mention of a "true scroll" also received due attention—it being the prevailing popular theory that T'yog's stolen charm against Ghatanothoa was somewhere in existence, and that cult-members were trying to bring it into contact with T'yog himself for some purpose of their own. One result of this exploitation was that a third wave of gaping visitors began flooding the museum and staring at the hellish mummy which served as a nucleus for the whole strange and disturbing affair.

It was among this wave of spectators—many of whom made repeated visits—that talk of the mummy's vaguely changing aspect first began to be widespread. I suppose—despite the disturbing notion of the nervous guard some months before—the museum's personnel was too well used to the constant sight of odd shapes to pay close attention to details; in any case, it was the excited whispers of visitors which at length aroused the guards to the subtle mutation which was apparently in progress. Almost simultaneously the press got hold of it—with blatant results which can well be imagined.

Naturally, I gave the matter my most careful observation, and by the middle of October decided that a definite disintegration of the mummy was under way. Through some chemical or physical influence in the air, the half-stony, half-leathery fibers seemed to be gradually relaxing, causing distinct variations in the angles of the limbs and in certain details of the fear-twisted facial expression. After a half-century of perfect preservation this was a highly disconcerting development, and I had the museum's taxidermist, Doctor Moore, go carefully over the gruesome object several times. He reported a general relaxation and softening, and gave the thing two or three astringent sprayings, but did not dare to attempt anything drastic lest there be a sudden crumbling and accelerated decay.

The effect of all this upon the gaping crowds was curious. Heretofore each new sensation sprung by the press had brought a fresh wave of staring and whispering visitors, but now—though the papers blathered endlessly about the mummy's changes—the public seemed to have acquired a definite

sense of fear which out-ranked even its morbid curiosity. People seemed to feel that a sinister aura hovered over the museum, and from a high peak the attendance fell to a level distinctly below normal. This lessened attendance gave added prominence to the stream of freakish foreigners who continued to infest the place, and whose numbers seemed in no way diminished.

On November eighteenth a Peruvian of Indian blood suffered a strange hysterical or epileptic seizure in front of the mummy, afterward shrieking from his hospital cot, "It tried to open its eyes!—T'yog tried to open his eyes and stare at me!" I was by this time on the point of removing the object from exhibition, but permitted myself to be overruled at a meeting of our very conservative directors. However, I could see that the museum was beginning to acquire an unholy reputation in its austere and quiet neighborhood. After this incident I gave instructions that no one be allowed to pause before the monstrous Pacific relic for more than a few minutes at a time.

It was on November twenty-fourth, after the museum's five o'clock closing, that one of the guards noticed a minute opening of the mummy's eyes. The phenomenon was very slight—nothing but a thin crescent of cornea being visible in either eye—but it was none the less of the highest interest. Doctor Moore, having been summoned hastily, was about to study the exposed bits of eyeball with a magnifier when his handling of the mummy caused the leathery lids to fall tightly shut again. All gentle efforts to open them failed, and the taxidermist did not dare to apply drastic measures. When he notified me of all this by telephone I felt a sense of mounting dread hard to reconcile with the apparently simple event concerned. For a moment I could share the popular impression that some evil, amorphous blight from unplumbed deeps of time and space hung murkily and menacingly over the museum.

Two nights later a sullen Filipino was trying to secrete himself in the museum at closing time. Arrested and taken to the station, he refused even to give his name, and was detained as a suspicious person. Meanwhile the strict surveillance of the mummy seemed to discourage the odd hordes of foreigners from haunting it. At least, the number of exotic visitors distinctly fell off after the enforcement of the "move along" order.

It was during the early morning hours of Thursday, December first, that a terrible climax developed. At about one o'clock horrible screams of mortal fright and agony were heard issuing from the museum, and a series of frantic telephone calls from neighbors brought to the scene quickly and simultaneously a squad of police and several museum officials, including myself. Some of the policemen surrounded the bulding while others, with the officials, cautiously entered. In the main corridor we found the night watchman strangled to death—a bit of East Indian hemp still knotted around his neck—and realized that despite all precautions some darkly evil intruder or intruders had gained access to the place. Now, however, a tomb-like silence enfolded everything and we almost feared to advance upstairs to the fateful wing where we knew the core of the trouble must lurk. We felt a bit more steadied after flooding the building with light from the central switches in

the corridor, and finally crept reluctantly up the curving staircase and through a lofty archway to the hall of mummies.

V

It is from this point onward that reports of the hideous case have been censored—for we have all agreed that no good can be accomplished by a public knowledge of those terrestrial conditions implied by the further developments. I have said that we flooded the whole building with light before our ascent. Now, beneath the beams that beat down on the glistening cases and their gruesome contents, we saw outspread a mute horror whose baffling details testified to happenings utterly beyond our comprehension. There were two intruders—who we afterward agreed must have hidden in the building before closing time—but they would never be executed for the watchman's murder. They had already paid the penalty.

One was a Burmese and the other a Fiji-Islander—both known to the police for their share in frightful and repulsive cult activities. They were dead, and the more we examined them the more utterly monstrous and unnamable we felt their manner of death to be. On both faces was a more wholly frantic and inhuman look of fright than even the oldest policeman had ever seen before; yet in the state of the two bodies there were vast and significant differences.

The Burmese lay collapsed close to the nameless mummy's case, from which a square of glass had been neatly cut. In his right hand was a scroll of bluish membrane which I at once saw was covered with grayish hieroglyphs—almost a duplicate of the scroll in the strange cylinder in the library downstairs, though later study brought out subtle differences. There was no mark of violence on the body, and in view of the desperate, agonized expression on the twisted face we could only conclude that the man died of sheer fright.

It was the closely adjacent Fijian, though, that gave us the profoundest shock. One of the policemen was the first to feel of him, and the cry of fright he emitted added another shudder to that neighborhood's night of terror. We ought to have known from the lethal grayness of the once-black, fear-twisted face, and of the bony hands—one of which still clutched an electric torch—that something was hideously wrong; yet every one of us was unprepared for what that officer's hesitant touch disclosed. Even now I can think of it only with a paroxysm of dread and repulsion. To be brief—the hapless invader, who less than an hour before had been a sturdy living Melanesian bent on unknown evils, was now a rigid, ash-gray figure of stony, leathery petrification, in every respect identical with the crouching, eon-old blasphemy in the violated glass case.

Yet that was not the worst. Crowning all other horrors, and indeed seizing our shocked attention before we turned to the bodies on the floor, was the state of the frightful mummy. No longer could its changes be called vague and subtle, for it had now made radical shifts of posture. It had sagged and

slumped with a curious loss of rigidity; its bony claws had sunk until they no longer even partly covered its leathery, fear-crazed face; and—God help us! —*its hellish bulging eyes had popped wide open, and seemed to be staring directly at the two intruders who had died of fright or worse.*

That ghastly, dead-fish stare was hideously mesmerizing, and it haunted us all the time we were examining the bodies of the invaders. Its effect on our nerves was damnably queer, for we somehow felt a curious rigidity creeping over us and hampering our simplest motions—a rigidity which later vanished very oddly when we passed the hieroglyphed scroll around for inspection. Every now and then I felt my gaze drawn irresistibly toward those horrible bulging eyes in the case, and when I returned to study them after viewing the bodies I thought I detected something very singular about the glassy surface of the dark and marvellously well-preserved pupils. The more I looked, the more fascinated I became; and at last I went down to the office—despite that strange stiffness in my limbs—and brought up a strong multiple magnifying glass. With this I commenced a very close and careful survey of the fishy pupils, while the others crowded expectantly around.

I had always been rather skeptical of the theory that scenes and objects become photographed on the retina of the eye in cases of death or coma; yet no sooner did I look through the lens than I realized the presence of some sort of image other than the room's reflection in the glassy, bulging optics of this nameless spawn of the eons. Certainly, there was a dimly outlined scene on the age-old retinal surface, and I could not doubt that it formed the last thing on which those eyes had looked in life—countless millennia ago. It seemed to be steadily fading, and I fumbled with the magnifier in order to shift another lens into place. Yet it must have been accurate and clearcut; even if infinitesimally small, when—in response to some evil spell or act connected with their visit—it had confronted those intruders who were frightened to death. With the extra lens I could make out many details formerly invisible, and the awed group around me hung on the flood of words with which I tried to tell what I saw.

For here, in the year 1932, a man in the city of Boston was looking on something which belonged to an unknown and utterly alien world—a world that vanished from existence and normal memory eons ago. There was a vast room—a chamber of cyclopean masonry—and I seemed to be viewing it from one of its corners. On the walls were carvings so hideous that even in this imperfect image their stark blasphemousness and bestiality sickened me. I could not believe that the carvers of these things were human, or that they had ever seen human beings when they shaped the frightful outlines which leered at the beholder. In the center of the chamber was a colossal trapdoor of stone, pushed upward to permit the emergence of some object from below. The object should have been clearly visible—indeed, must have been when the eyes first opened before the fear-stricken intruders—though under my lenses it was merely a monstrous blur.

As it happened, I was studying the right eye only when I brought the extra magnification into play. A moment later I wished fervently that my

search had ended there. As it was, however, the zeal of discovery and revelation was upon me, and I shifted my powerful lenses to the mummy's left eye in the hope of finding the image less faded on that retina. My hands trembling with excitement and unnaturally stiff from some obscure influence, were slow in bringing the magnifier into focus, but a moment later I realized that the image was less faded than in the other eye. I saw in a morbid flash of half-distinctness the insufferable thing which was welling up through the prodigious trap-door in that cyclopean, immemorially archaic crypt of a lost world—and fell fainting with an inarticulate shriek of which I am not even ashamed.

By the time I revived there was no distinct image of anything in either eye of the monstrous mummy. Sergeant Keefe of the police looked with my glass, for I could not bring myself to face that abnormal entity again. And I thanked all the powers of the cosmos that I had not looked earlier than I did. It took all my resolution, and a great deal of solicitation, to make me relate what I had glimpsed in that hideous moment of revelation. Indeed, I could not speak till we had all adjourned to the office below, out of sight of that demoniac thing which could not be. For I had begun to harbor the most terrible notions about the mummy and its glassy, bulging eyes—that it had a kind of hellish consciousness, seeing all that occurred before it and trying vainly to communicate some frightful message from the gulfs of time. That meant madness—but at least I thought I might be better off if I told what I had half-seen.

After all, it was not a long thing to tell. Oozing and surging up out of that yawning trap-door in the cyclopean crypt I had glimpsed such an unbelievable behemothic monstrosity that I could not doubt the power of its original to kill with its mere sight. Even now I can not begin to suggest it with any words at my command. I might call it gigantic—tentacled—proboscidian—octopus-eyed—semi-amorphous—plastic—partly squamous and partly rugose—ugh! But nothing I could say could even adumbrate the loathsome, unholy, non-human, extra galactic horror and hatefulness and unutterable evil of that forbidden spawn of black chaos and illimitable night. As I write these words the associated mental image causes me to lean back faint and nauseated. As I told of the sight to the men around me in the office, I had to fight to preserve the consciousness I had regained.

Nor were my hearers much less moved. Not a man spoke above a whisper for a full quarter-hour, and there were awed, half-furtive references to the frightful lore in the *Black Book,* to the recent newspaper tales of cult-stirrings, and to the sinister events in the museum. Ghatanothoa. . . . Even its smallest perfect image could petrify—T'yog—the false scroll—he never came back—the true scroll which could fully or partly undo the petrification—did it survive?—the hellish cults—the phrases overheard—"It is none other than he"—"He looked upon its face"—"He knows all, though he can neither see nor feel"—"He had brought the memory down through the eons"—"The true scroll will release him"—"Nagob has the true scroll"—"He can tell where to find it."

Only the healing grayness of the dawn brought us back to sanity; a sanity which made of that glimpse of mine a closed topic—something not to be explained or thought of again.

We gave out only partial reports to the press, and later on co-operated with the papers in making other suppressions. For example, when the autopsy showed the brain and several other internal organs of the petrified Fijian to be fresh and unpetrified, though hermetically sealed by the petrification of the exterior flesh—an anomaly about which physicians are still guardedly and bewilderedly debating—we did not wish a furor to be started. We knew too well what the yellow journals, remembering what was said of the intact-brained and still conscious state of Ghatanothoa's stony-leathery victims, would make of this detail.

As matters stood, they pointed out that the man who had held the hieroglyphed scroll—and who had evidently thrust it at the mummy through the opening in the case—was not petrified, while the man who had *not* held it was. When they demanded that we make certain experiments—applying the scroll both to the stony-leathery body of the Fijian and to the mummy itself—we indignantly refused to abet such superstitious notions. Of course, the mummy was withdrawn from public view and transferred to the museum laboratory awaiting a really scientific examination before some suitable medical authority. Remembering past events, we kept it under a strict guard; but even so, an attempt was made to enter the museum at 2:25 A.M. on December fifth. Prompt working of the burglar alarm frustrated the design, though unfortunately the criminal or criminals escaped.

That no hint of anything further ever reached the public, I am profoundly thankful. I wish devoutly that there were nothing more to tell. There will, of course be leaks, and if anything happens to me I do not know what my executors will do with this manuscript; but at least the case will not be painfully fresh in the multitude's memory when the revelation comes. Besides, no one will believe the facts when they are finally told. That is the curious thing about the multitude. When their yellow press makes hints, they are ready to swallow anything; but when a stupendous and abnormal revelation is actually made, they laugh it aside as a lie. For the sake of general sanity it is probably better so.

I have said that a scientific examination of the frightful mummy was planned. This took place on December eighth, exactly a week after the hideous culmination of events, and was conducted by the eminent Doctor William Minot, in conjunction with Wentworth Moore, Sc. D., taxidermist of the museum. Doctor Minot had witnessed the autopsy of the oddly petrified Fijian the week before. There were also present Messrs. Lawrence Cabot and Dudley Saltonstall of the museum's trustees, Doctors Mason, Wells, and Carver of the museum staff, two representatives of the press, and myself. During the week the condition of the hideous specimen had not visibly changed, though some relaxation of its fibers caused the position of the glassy, open eyes to shift slightly from time to time. All of the staff dreaded to look at the thing—for its suggestion of quiet, conscious watch-

ing had become intolerable—and it was only with an effort that I could bring myself to attend the examination.

Doctor Minot arrived shortly after 1:00 P. M., and within a few minutes began his survey of the mummy. Considerable disintegration took place under his hands, and in view of this—and of what we told him concerning the gradual relaxation of the specimen since the first of October—he decided that a thorough dissection ought to be made before the substance was further impaired. The proper instruments being present in the laboratory equipment, he began at once, exclaiming aloud at the odd, fibrous nature of the gray, mummified substance.

But his exclamation was still louder when he made the first deep incision, for out of that cut there slowly trickled a thick crimson stream whose nature—despite the infinite ages dividing this hellish mummy's life-time from the present—was utterly unmistakable. A few more deft strokes revealed various organs in astonishing degrees of non-petrified preservation—all, indeed, being intact except where injuries to the petrified exterior had brought about malformation or destruction. The resemblance of this condition to that found in the fright-killed Fiji-Islander was so strong that the eminent physician gasped in bewilderment. The perfection of those ghastly bulging eyes was uncanny, and their exact state with respect to petrification was very difficult to determine.

At 3.30 P. M. the brain-case was opened—and ten minutes later our stunned group took an oath of secrecy which only such guarded documents as this manuscript will ever modify. Even the two reporters were glad to confirm the silence. *For the opening had revealed a pulsing, living brain.*

Just What Happened

by Gelett Burgess

Just as we were going to press, news arrived of the death on September 18, 1951, of Gelett Burgess, at the ripe age of 85. He had always been associated with fantasy and whimsy since the day he first caught the public eye with his famous quatrain about "The Purple Cow." A prolific writer, he performed the unusual achievement of successfully introducing new words to the language, specifically goop, blurb, and bromide. Though best noted for his whimsy, he occasionally turned out a straight bit of off-trail fiction, such as the following tale about the mysterious art of levitation, which Mr. Burgess himself called to our editorial attention.

I AM TO be executed tomorrow for the murder of Carlo Blune. I didn't murder him; but I admit that I was indirectly and unwittingly the cause of his death.

Hunter, and his girl he called Buttsky, know that I tried only to save Carlo. But to save their own lives, they both swore that I pushed him out of the window.

As soon as he fell, I looked out and I saw him lying down on the sidewalk all crumpled up. It made me sick. People were running toward where he lay. Hunter went to the window too, and looked out. Buttsky stayed on the couch; she seemed afraid to look.

I didn't say a word. I managed to stagger to the door. I was horrified, dazed. Before I could get out, though, Hunter caught hold of me. He said:

"My God, Harry, wait a minute! They may accuse us of throwing him out."

I tried to get away from him, and I said. "I've got to get down there. He may be alive. We must get a doctor at once. They'll want to know how it happened." I tried to jerk away, but Hunter held me.

"You bet they'll want to know," Hunter said. "The police will ask all sorts of questions, and we've got to explain it somehow. We can't possibly tell them what really happened, though. They'd never believe it. We'll have to agree on a story right now quick, and all of us stick to it."

Buttsky had begun to cry. I broke away from Hunter then—I simply couldn't talk about it; and I ran out to the elevator in the hall. I rang and

rang, but it didn't come up, so I ran down seven flights of stairs and out into the street. It was horrible. Carlo was dead, all right; I could see that. He lay in a big pool of blood, and his face was all smashed in on one side.

There were a few people standing around, and a lot more were running up to get a look. The elevator-boy was there, and when he saw me, he pointed me out to a cop who had run up, and told him that I had been up in Carlo Blune's apartment.

"He was there with some other people," the boy said. "They're up there now, I guess, but I don't know who they are. Mr. Maddox, here, he's been up there often to see Mr. Blune."

The cop grabbed me by the elbow and asked what had happened.

I didn't know what to say at first. I knew Hunter was right, and nobody would ever believe the truth of it; but I had no idea what he and Buttsky were going to say. So I just said it was an accident. I said Mr. Blune had been looking out of the window, and was a little drunk, and had somehow lost his balance and fallen out.

Just then a couple of squad-cars came up with bells clanging, and a lot more cops jumped out. They began shoving the crowd back, and someone threw an overcoat over Carlo's body. An ambulance came rushing up, and then I was taken to a police station and was questioned by the sergeant and some others until the Homicide Squad arrived, and they took me upstairs. I had a pretty hard time. I told the same story I had told before, that it was an accident. It seemed to be the only thing I could think of, to explain the tragedy. It *was* an accident, anyway.

Then they brought in Hunter and Buttsky, crying, but I didn't know what they said until the trial, because we were kept separated. But they had just had time, you see, before the police came up to Carlo's studio, to cook up a story. They said that Carlo and I had quarreled about a girl I had brought there, and after she had left, I called Carlo down for the way he treated her, and then I hit Carlo and we had a fight near the open window, and I had pushed Carlo out.

So I was indicted for the murder and the case went on trial. I had no money and an attorney was assigned to defend me. But he was so stupid and so damned conceited that I might just as well have had nobody at all. I tried to tell him the truth, but he simply laughed at me. He said I was plain nuts, but if I wanted to set up a defense of insanity, all right, I could just tell my fairy-tale to the jury. But if I didn't, he couldn't permit me to take the stand. When I protested that I was perfectly sane, he said:

"Well, at that, I'd rather go to an asylum than to the chair."

I told him that I'd rather take a chance of being free in the next world than be caged up with a lot of lunatics and probably end by going crazy myself.

Then he told me that if I'd confess to having thrown Carlo out of the window, but without premeditation, he might get a second-degree murder verdict. But I absolutely refused to lie about it, even to save my life.

"O.K.," he said; "it's your funeral. If my client won't help me, I can't

do anything with the case, and I guess you'll have to burn." He had no feeling at all, and he wouldn't even listen to my explanation.

What could I do? If I had told my story on the witness-stand just as it had really happened, everyone would think I had concocted a fantastic yarn to get an acquittal. Hunter and Buttsky didn't dare tell the truth, either, because they both knew that it would place them also under suspicion, and by accusing me, they played safe. They were two to one against me. They preferred having me go to the chair to going themselves. And so as I had virtually no defense, I was convicted.

But I am going to tell now, before I die, what happened in Carlo Blune's studio in Greenwich Village that night. I came to the United States as an actor and spent some time in Hollywood. But I have been in New York only a few months, and my relatives, what are left of them, are way off in Manitoba, and so I have no intimate friends here to whom I have cared or dared to tell my story. But perhaps there is someone somewhere who has had a similar experience who may believe me.

The whole thing began when, one night, I dropped in at some kind of big public seance. In the Chapter Room of Carnegie Hall, it was. I don't go much for spiritism myself, but I rather enjoy the show and looking around at the queer, credulous types you see there, and listening to their dramatic stories.

I had been watching a red-headed chap beside me because he seemed so intently interested. He had a thin, what I call a "thinking" face, with thin, sharp features. He had a sport shirt on with the collar over his coat, no tie, and I put him down as a typical Greenwich Village intellectual type. While the blindfolded medium up on the platform was reading and answering messages sent up to him from the audience, I whispered to this chap, just to see what he'd say.

"There ought to be a College for Spooks," I said. "They've been sending the same old optimistic hokum—'I'm very happy here,' and 'It'll come out all right,'—ever since the Fox Sisters rapped out their first message."

He nodded, but looked serious. "I can't understand, though," he said, "how that medium up there can read those messages, with his eyes all taped up and bandaged like that. Looks to me like genuine clairvoyance."

We got to talking, and after the show we went out together, still talking. In the Russian tearoom near by, over our beer and sandwiches, I found that he believed—and I did, too, in a way—that although there was undoubtedly a lot of faking in these demonstrations, there still may be psychic powers that we haven't as yet developed on the mortal plane—telepathy, automatic writing, clairaudience, and that sort of thing.

Well, that was the way I first met Carlo Blune. I can't say I ever really cared very much for him personally, but he had a sort of magnetism and enthusiasm that was rather interesting. He was a painter—one of these ultra-modernists who paint freak pictures with parts of female bodies and great big eyes with no bodies and violins and all sorts of incongruous things, letters and numbers all mixed up and daubs of raw color. We're used to that

stuff now and consider the artists merely cranks; but Carlo was in such dead earnest about his "arrangements" as he called them, that we had some hot discussions sometimes about art and his particular brand of "Subjective Impressionism." But we were always friendly enough, and we never came anywhere near any such quarrel as Hunter and Buttsky told about at the trial.

This studio of Carlo's, where the tragedy happened, was a big front room on the seventh floor of one of those old brownstone front apartment houses in Washington Place. It had a dark inside bedroom and a bathroom, and kitchenette between that and the studio. I was a bit amazed when I first saw the place. He must sell his pictures pretty well, I thought, (and he did) to fit up the studio with those big Oriental rugs and couches, and those shelves and shelves of books; and those primitive ebony African idols I happen to know cost real money, nowadays. His weird pictures were all over the walls. But in the candlelight—Carlo loved candlesticks and he had dozens and dozens of old brass ones—it was a very pleasant place to loaf and talk, especially as Carlo would sometimes sit down at his baby grand and fool around over the keys, and often end up with music that would surprise and charm you.

Well, after we'd had a highball or two up there one night, and Carlo had played a Chopin prelude, he came over and took a palette off a Turkish tabourette and sat down near me. He was silent for a while. Then suddenly he ran his hand back through his thick reddish hair and asked me if I had ever dreamed of floating in the air.

I laughed, it came so unexpectedly; but he didn't wait for me to answer. He said: "I do, all the time!" He sat hunched over watching the blue smoke curl up from his pipe. "Some say it's a prehistoric memory of when we were apes and jumped from tree to tree," he said. "But there's a lot more to it than that."

I still didn't say anything. I just watched him. Picturesque chap, I thought, picturesque mind.

His head was in his hands and his elbows on his knees, pondering. "It's a marvelous sensation," he said, thoughtfully, "perfectly marvelous. It makes you feel almost divine." His voice had a far-away sound, as if he were talking in his sleep. "I float along through the streets," he said, dreamily, "over the houses—over the hills and rivers—floating anywhere I want to go, simply by directing my will."

I tried to get in something about Freud's theory of dreams, but he shook his head. "No, he's as far off as the twenty-five-cent dreambooks the servant girls and gamblers consult," Carlo said. "This floating dream is too rational, Harry, it's too realistic to be merely symbolic." Then he turned and looked at me almost fiercely.

"Why, damn it," he said, "to me, these flying dreams are just exactly as real as anything in my waking life."

I don't ordinarily care much about hearing other people's dreams, but, after all, I was drinking Carlo's whiskey, and I liked the intense way he felt about everything. He went into things all over, or not at all.

"This thing of floating," he went on, "seems to have a special technique. Facility, I mean, comes progressively. You learn it a step at a time."

And then he told me he had begun by taking enormous jumps—"Oh, perhaps a hundred feet," he said, and when landing, springing off again exactly on the rebound, like a bouncing ball. It was a question of timing your mental impulse, he said, and he had gradually got the hang of it as you do swimming. And then, he told me, he had become able to take off, so to speak, even while lying flat on his back. It took a tremendous mental effort, though, he said.

"It's done by concentration and will power," Carlo told me seriously. "If you try hard enough, you can rise slowly in the air."

I took care not to smile. "In your dreams, you mean?" I said.

"Yes," Carlo said wistfully, "in my dreams. But the sensation is so vivid, so powerful, that after I've waked up, I've actually tried to do it." Then he added so timidly that you could fancy his blushing almost, "In point of fact I try it in bed every morning when I wake up. It seems impossible that I shouldn't be able to do it the way I do in my dreams. I know exactly just how it's done."

He had got up, and stood rigid with his face set and his fists clenched; and I think he would have tried it for me right then and there if the doorbell hadn't rung just then. We were both annoyed at the interruption. It was like being waked too early in the morning.

It was a reporter named Hunter who had called with his girl, a little black-haired thing he called Buttsky. Carlo told me afterward that she was always with Hunter. After the two had ensconced themselves on the big couch, I could hee how Carlo might like that big, slouchy, curly-haired blond chap with his happy-dog face and bad teeth. He was easy and so facile (too facile, I thought), that he fitted right into any group or discussion. But I couldn't quite understand Carlo's special attention to the girl. She seemed insignificant to me, though she was cute enough in a common sort of way, too, a rather pretty, quiet little number who apparently saw everything and said almost nothing. I was a bit afraid of her, to tell the truth; I don't trust anyone who smiles all the time. Carlo, though, welcomed her as if she were really important; and I wondered at the time whether he mightn't perhaps be chasing her behind Hunter's back, and also, too, whether she wasn't the sort that would lead him on, and then laugh at him.

Carlo gave them drinks and pushed a red lacquer bowl toward Buttsky, and she began chain-smoking cigarettes, one after another. That was why they called her Buttsky, I discovered. She'd smoke them down till they were so small that anyone else would have thrown them away; but she'd stick a pin into them to hold them by; it was horrid.

Well, we talked a little about Carlo's new picture, "Oblique Transaction," he called it; and about poetry, this Dada stuff, you know, and then Carlo played the piano a bit while Hunter dozed on the couch and Buttsky smoked and smiled, and watched me with her little black eyes.

Then Carlo came over and began to tell us about levitation. Hunter went

sound asleep and snored; but Buttsky listened eagerly. I don't remember half what Carlo said that night, but he had evidently been reading up on the subject, and he gave us the Sanskrit word for it, *"laghiman"* or something like that—I remember it sounded like an Irish name—and he cited historic cases of ecstasy when some old chaps had been lifted up into the air while praying. *"Libration,"* he called it, when they hung up there suspended, still praying. I had no idea the thing was so well known; but it seems that in the Middle Ages everybody believed it was a common supernatural power with the devoted, and Carlo mentioned even Cardinal Newman as a believer of it in his *"Apologia."*

Hunter woke up then and entered right into it as if he'd heard the whole thing. "Why, see here, Carlo," he yawned, "wasn't there a medium in England along back in the 1860's—Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a follower of his, I believe. What was his name now—Home, that's it. At his séances, he used to float right out the window and then float back again."

Carlo said impatiently: "Why, that's just what I was talking about. Sir William Crookes was present at several of Home's séances and testified to the truth of the phenomena."

"Yeah," Hunter drawled, "but I believe Home was exposed later."

"That doesn't matter," said Carlo. "I know that crooked mediums have done levitation by trickery. Magicians do it all the time and John Mulholland explains it all in his book. But that doesn't prove that it isn't perhaps possible to overcome the force of gravity genuinely by a sheer effort of the will or by some unknown power. Christ walked on the water, didn't He? And the apostle Peter did too, and he sank only because he hadn't enough faith. You've got to believe in it, or you can never do it."

I ventured to say that miracles didn't take place nowadays.

"Miracles," said Carlo, "are merely the phenomena of scientific laws we don't yet understand." And of course he went on with the analogy of the telephone and radio and cosmic waves, and all that, the way they always do.

Buttsky, still smiling, still smoking cigarettes, said that modern mediums sometimes overcame the laws of gravity when they tipped tables; and Hunter grinned like a dog, and said that if you could acquire the art of levitation, you could put the helicopter out of business.

Carlo didn't answer, and was moody for a while, rolling one of his brushes in his fingers; and his face was so serious that Hunter stopped with his glass halfway up to his lips and looked at him curiously.

"D'you mean to say, Carlo, that you—" And then he stopped.

Carlo said: "The swami Vivekananda says in his *'Raja Yoga'* that it's possible even nowadays."

"Yeah," Hunter said, "but all those miraculous things the yogas do in India, you know, are supposed to be the result of severe ascetic training. You can't drink and smoke and eat beefsteaks and pork chops, Carlo, and expect to develop transcendental powers."

And Buttsky chimed in that she'd never seen a mystic with short hair and a close shave, or one who wore smartly tailored clothes.

Carlo said absent-mindedly that no doubt they were right, and after a while he wandered over to the piano and ran his fingers over the keys improvising softly. He didn't seem to want to discuss the subject further.

And I myself forgot all about the matter when I left New York and went up in Maine to join a summer stock company for two months. To tell the truth, I was rather specializing on a girl in the show. When I got back to the city and went to see Carlo, I hardly recognized him. He looked pale and gaunt, and he had a short, ragged red beard with his hair straggling down, curling over his coat collar. He had nothing on but a pair of old slacks and an undershirt and sandals, and he looked as if he needed a bath.

"I'm afraid I can't offer you a drink, Harry," he said. "I find the smell of alcohol affects me disagreeably, nowadays. And too, if you don't mind, I wish you wouldn't smoke. All my senses seem to have grown more acute lately. I can hear what people are saying down in the street, and I can read when it's almost pitch dark." As I was putting out my cigar, he came over and put his hand on my shoulder. "It's coming, Harry," he said earnestly. "I can feel the power growing in me every day."

I didn't think he looked as though he had much power, and I said so. He sat down on the couch and gazed up at the ceiling. "It's a spiritual power," he said, "or perhaps psychic. I don't know what it is, but it's super-normal. It operates in the unknown—I mean, it isn't subject to physical laws as we know them. It's a new kind of force." Then he looked at me pathetically. "And it does rather take it out of you," he said.

I found that all he was having to eat was a glass of water, with a little salt in it (for the bloodstream) for breakfast, an apple at noon, and some thin lentil soup for dinner.

"You see, this regimen," Carlo explained, "is not so much to 'mortify the body' for religious reasons, as the old hermits thought, as to refine your forces and sort of get rid of the sediment of the physical and sensual life all you can. I intend to give this thing a rigorous trial, Harry," he said, "and do all I can to ensure the optimum conditions."

I couldn't help asking him if he contemplated his navel, like the Eastern mystics.

"I'm simply letting this power guide me intuitively," he said, and he said he'd found that music helped a lot in inducing a mood of abstraction. He said he could sit for two hours now without moving a muscle.

To tell the truth, I was rather worried. I hated to see Carlo go completely haywire; but it was no business of mine, and I couldn't have stopped his experiment anyway. I didn't see him again for a fortnight, and by that time his fasting had made him still thinner. His flesh was falling in against his skull, and his face looked almost translucent, with his dark blue eyes shining in their sockets like a cat's. When he walked, he moved slowly as if he were carrying something that might spill, sliding his feet along so there was no spring; and he spoke in an unaccented, unmodulated, forceless voice so low you could hardly hear him. It was important, he told me, to

avoid the slightest emotion and preserve a perfect serenity in order to deepen his concentration.

"I've lost about eighteen pounds," he said, and then, with that faint smile of his, he added: "But that makes it a little easier. There isn't so much of me to lift." He said it in a queer way.

"D'you mean to say, Carlo, that you've had any success already. That you've actually lifted yourself?"

He told me, in that low, impassive voice as you might talk of the weather, that he had, that very morning, risen a few inches from his bed.

"But the telephone bell rang just then," he said, "wrong number, of course, and it seemed to break my concentration; I suppose I felt irritated, and I dropped down onto the bed." Then he had that queer smile again. "Or else the bell woke me up. You know, it's getting hard to distinguish between my real life and my dreams, now, they're so vivid. You see, after you've got to a certain point in fasting and introspection, there isn't much difference between the inner and the outer activities. And that's why I'm going to ask a favor of you, Harry," he said. "I want you to watch me, and see just what happens. I need a witness in order to know how far I am along."

And that brings me to the part of my story that I hardly expect many people to credit. Up to there, you may think merely that Carlo was a little cracked. But after this, you may think that I am too. Well, anyway, Carlo asked me to concentrate with him and not speak.

And the solemn fact is that, when we had brought his cot into the studio, and after we had both concentrated in silence for some time—ten minutes, perhaps, though it seemed like an hour—I could hardly believe my eyes. Believe it or not, I did indubitably see Carlo Blune rise up in the air. There was no doubt about it whatever. He rose about a foot or so, still stretched out horizontally. He stayed there suspended in the air a while—it was what he called "libration"—and then he spoke in a low voice without moving his lips.

"I'm afraid I'm getting weaker again," he said; "I'm coming down. Relax a little, Harry." And then he sank slowly down on the cot.

Neither could speak for a while. We looked at each other as if each were questioning the other to know if it were really true. You might think Carlo, after a demonstration like that, would be elated by his success; but no, he looked kind of awed, almost frightened. I sat and watched him breathing heavily, as if he were exhausted. Finally he sat up with a strange expression, and his voice trembled.

"You helped a lot, Harry," he said. "I could feel your added power lifting me."

We talked there in his studio for an hour about it, but we didn't try the experiment again. He didn't propose it, and said his head ached, and I saw that it had taken a lot out of him. But before I left, he said:

"Harry, d'you know, with more help—I mean more concentration and more will power or whatever it is, I believe I could float about the room like Home."

I advised him not to try it again; but he insisted that he was going to get Hunter and Buttsky to work with us. A psychic battery, he called it.

I wondered, I said, if it were best to have a woman present.

"You mean on account of the sex angle?" he asked. "Well, mediums always say that the male and female make a better magnetic current. Ordinarily the presence of a woman might distract perfect concentration. But Buttsky, you know, is psychic. Definitely. She can read your thoughts. I've seen her do extraordinary things."

I said I knew there was something queer about her, and that in the Seventeenth Century, she would probably have been burned as a witch.

"I know what you mean," Carlo said; "her eyes! She has what the gypsies call 'the light behind the eyes.' But she's very much interested in this thing, and reinforces my faith."

I said O.K., and if he felt that way obout it, there was a girl I'd like to bring; and I told him about Lydia Gay, who had played *ingénue* parts in the stock company with me that summer. She was a cute blonde twenty-year-old, and she'd been through the theatrical mill and knew her way round. A little plain-spoken at times, perhaps, but I thought she'd fit in. That was as much as I knew about women. If you've been with them awhile alone, you think you know all about them. But when two of them get together, that's another thing again.

I made my fatal mistake, though, when I didn't tell Lydia just what the party was going to be like. If I had, then she could have testified at the trial that I had told her we were going to experiment with levitation. Then I could have come out with my story. But all she said was that I had just asked her to come along to Carlo's and hadn't even told her that there'd be no drinks.

When we got up to Carlo's studio that evening, we found him in a pale blue sport shirt and pale blue slacks and bare feet. He said afterward that pale blue was the lightest color of all, lighter even than white, and it might improve the conditions. As usual he had loads of candles burning, a big bunch of them, all in old brass candlesticks, on a table and a dozen or so more on the mantel.

Carlo couldn't bear to have candles stuck around singly, the way people do, to give that vague, diffused light some women love. Carlo loved sharp shadows.

Buttsky and Hunter were already there, lolling on the couch. After Lydia had shaken hands with Carlo and said how-de-do to the others, she looked around at the pictures. Then she stopped and said: "My God!" Then she walked round looking at one after another. Then she burst out laughing.

"Well, Mr. Blune," she said, "I wouldn't want you to paint my portrait. I wouldn't have but one eye, and probably no legs. You wouldn't miss my bust, though, I expect from what I see here."

How I could ever have expected her to fit in is a mystery. Carlo was taken aback. It did sound rather gross, considering what we had come for. Hunter laughed; Buttsky said dryly:

"I'm afraid you don't know much about modern art, Miss Gay."

Lydia whirled round at her. They clashed at once. "Modern art?" she repeated. "Well, I guess I ought to know something about it. My God, I played *Ophelia* in Hamlet in modern costume and no scenery—in fact, in this very gown."

Buttsky smiled and stuck a pin in the butt of her cigarette. "Do you really call that dress modern?" she said.

"It's as modern as that bang you're wearing on your forehead," said Lydia, and you could hear her very distinctly, too. "Fact is, when I came in here, honest I though you were some eight-year-old kid with that bang. Pretty good guess, at that—only forty or so years off."

There was more of this feline amenity, and Carlo led me aside and said he was afraid Miss Gay had brought in antagonistic vibrations and we'd better call the whole thing off. Lydia Gay had sharp ears as well as a sharp tongue, and she shrugged her shoulders and said in a very stagy voice that she was afraid I'd given her a bum steer, and she had just happened to remember that she had promised to call on a dying aunt tonight, and she walked out with her chin in the air.

There was a moment's shocked silence, then I went out after her and said I'd go along with her and take her home or wherever she wanted to go. But she just looked at me and said she didn't know me, and I'd better go back and play with the cat in there, and more of the same, till the elevator took her downstairs.

You can imagine how ruffled we all were, but there was absolutely no comment at all. They didn't say one word about Lydia. We all tried to ignore the episode and pretend nothing had happened. All except Carlo, of course. He was pretty weak with all his fasting, and he was almost overcome by the scene. But Buttsky finally succeeded in wheedling him into a reluctant consent to go on with the séance.

She and Hunter, however, testified at the trial that after Lydia left Carlo and I immediately began to quarrel. I accused him and Buttsky both of insulting my guest, she said, and that Hunter tried to intervene between Carlo and me. They said that Carlo and I had it back and forth for almost an hour, with mutual recriminations, and finally it developed into an actual fight near the window. The idea of Carlo Blune, who was always peaceful, and was weakened by his fasting—he weighed only 118 when he died—getting into a vulgar brawl like that is absurd. Why, Buttsky even testified that he had called Lydia a vile name.

Well, after Lydia left, it took a long time before we were calmed down to normal. Carlo sat at the piano and played and played. At last he got up and put his finger to his lips for silence. Then I helped him bring in the cot, and he threw a blue Navajo blanket over it. Then Carlo put out all the candles but two, and lay down on his back on the cot.

So there you have the set-up for that hot August night in Carlo Blune's studio, the day he died: Hunter and Buttsky on the couch, and I sitting in

an armchair by one of the open casement windows, the kind that open outward.

Hunter, as a reporter had undoubtedly seen enough strange sights to be able to take it all lightly enough, but Buttsky was so excited, that she apparently didn't realize that she wasn't smoking. She watched Carlo, fascinated. He lay there thin and pale, motionless, with his eyes closed and his hands folded over his breast, looking for all the world like a corpse. It was uncanny.

I confess I could feel my heart beat. I was troubled. I had seen him actually accomplish the thing, you know, and I didn't like the idea very much, and I wished I hadn't consented to come. Perhaps it was a presentiment; perhaps I felt that we were playing with a dangerous, unknown power, and we might not be able to handle it.

It must have been at least half an hour before Carlo moved. Then Buttsky gave a little suppressed gasp, and Hunter leaned forward, staring. None of us spoke. We saw Carlo rise slowly in the air, off the cot, a few inches. He hung there a moment then he went up a foot or more rather quickly. Then, while we held our breaths, he floated slowly out into the room. We heard him say, in a low, strange voice:

"Concentrate! *Concentrate!*"

We concentrated all right. I felt, and Hunter and Buttsky probably did too, that we were just as if holding him up in the air by our combined will power, like holding up a heavy weight, and we were responsible for his safety. We watched him circle round the room, and round again. He was floating about five feet above the floor.

All this time Carlo's eyes had been closed. When he did open them he had a strange, inspired look. He didn't look at us, he looked sort of sidewise, upward, in an ecstasy. Then he stopped moving and hung there while he spoke.

"I've got it!" he said. "It has been revealed, the whole secret of it. I'm sure of it now. It's just as it was in my dreams, there's no difference at all, when you feel the power . . . Faith—will—serenity. You must have all three. I know that I can float out the window into the street."

We were speechless with fear. I was, anyway. But I couldn't move.

"I'm going to do it," Carlo said. "I know I can do it. I am going out, and I am coming back. It has been done, and I can do it."

Slowly his body moved toward the window. The window, you know, was open. But he moved more quickly than he had before, and before I could do anything to stop him, he was halfway out.

Then I shouted: "Carlo! Don't, Carlo! Don't! For God's sake!" And I grabbed his legs at the knee.

Hunter had jumped up, and Buttsky was screaming. Carlo gave an agonized groan, and suddenly his body became heavy in my grasp. It fell, and I couldn't hold him—he slipped through my hands. And then, that sickening thump on the sidewalk, seven stories below. . . .

And that is the truth about the death of Carlo Blune. His concentration,

and ours, was broken by what I did, in my fear and horror and he couldn't then be supported by whatever power had held him up. It was my fault. But I tried only to save him. . . .

I am innocent of the murder of Carlo Blune, but I don't wish to escape the death-penalty. I welcome it. And this is why. Since I have been in jail here, I have eaten very little. I have had no exercise, no diversions whatever. I have had a chance to do a lot of thinking and introspection. And I have, for six weeks, been practicing levitation as Carlo practiced it, concentrating upon a power that I know, now exists. Twice, while the prison attendants were out of sight, I have succeeded in rising a few inches when lying on my back on the cell bed. Once, indeed, I rose at least two feet.

Having accomplished this I want to know more. I want to live the larger, freer life on another plane, where not only levitation and telepathy and clairvoyance, but other greater, finer powers are developed and enjoyed. And so I shall walk my last mile, and go through the little green door, with joy and expectation in my heart. I don't know where the next world is, nor what form of existence I shall have after I die. But I can hardly wait to find out.

I expect to learn much tomorrow.

The Phantom Ship of Dirk Van Tromp

by James Francis Dwyer

James Francis Dwyer is one of those authors who manage to steep their yarns in the heady exotic essence of the Orient and the Southern Seas. Himself an Australian and a world traveler, he knows the lands whereof he speaks and loves their secrets and legendry. This tale is slightly reminiscent of the story of the Flying Dutchman *though Dirk Van Tromp operates his vessel in different waters and with a stranger crew. An interesting editorial note about its story is its use of a German naturalist as narrator. Prior to World War One this seemed reasonable enough. Dwyer used this character as spokesman of a series of such stories. But after the war, the antagonisms aroused caused the author to change the naturalist's nationality to Dutch in a similar series he was to keep up for many years.*

THE TROPIC SUN, looking like a flaming truckwheel, lurched behind the blue smear of jungle that marked the horizon, and the heat-smitten trees waved their tops languidly, as if congratulating each other on the fact that the blazing afternoon had come to an end. A soft purring note came from the underbrush where the panting birds felt the first breath of cool air from the ocean. The purple haze of the dusk filmed the landscape, softening the outline of the distant hills that the rays of the westering sun had made wonderfully distinct.

Ford, the tall American, lifted himself upon one elbow and looked across the clearing. He called Hochdorf, the naturalist, by name, and, receiving no answer, sprang from the hammock and ran to the end of the veranda that extended the full length of the lonely bungalow. Here he stopped with a grunt of astonishment and gazed toward a clump of mohor trees to the right of the little dwelling. Hochdorf was kneeling in front of the clump, his rifle pointed at the shadows beneath the great trunks, and Ford watched him intently. Three times the German naturalist removed the rifle from his shoulder, and three times whipped it sharply back into place. The American was puzzled. He could see nothing, and he muttered to himself as he watched the kneeling marksman.

"It must be a wild boar," he breathed. "There's nothing—Gee! did you get it, Hochdorf?"

Ford had sprung from the veranda as the German fired, and the curiosity with which he had viewed the actions of the naturalist was increased a thousand times as he raced across the clearing. Hochdorf had dropped the rifle on the grass the moment he had fired, and when the American reached his side he was mopping the perspiration from his forehead with a large bandanna. He was pale and sick looking, and his deep-sunken blue eyes were fixed on the spot he had fired at.

"What it is?" cried Ford. "What did you shoot at?"

The German pointed at the underbrush with a shaking forefinger. "See, did I—I get him?" he cried. "Do not show him to me! I cannot look at such a thing!"

Wondering much, Ford approached the bushes, kicked them aside with the point of his shoe and disclosed a huge black rat, vainly attempting to drag its mutilated carcass to safety.

"Why, it's a rat!" he cried. "A rat as big as a prairie dog!"

"*Ja,* I know!" gasped the German. "Do not bring it out! *Himmel!* no! I cannot look at a rat without being sick. I am sick as the devil now!

Ford dispatched the injured rodent and followed the big naturalist to the veranda of the bungalow. Hochdorf called for a glass of gin, and when the Dyak boy had brought a stiff nobbler, he drained it hastily and sank back in the big desk chair as if exhausted by the happening. For a few minutes he did not speak, then he turned to the wondering American.

"A rat is the only thing that I cannot handle," he said slowly. "I would sooner handle a king cobra or one of those little poisonous kraits that can put you in Charon's ferryboat inside three hours. I have been made sick by that rat. *Ach!* yet! Did I ever tell you of the Phantom Ship of Dirk Van Tromp? *Nein?* Well, it is hot indoors, and if you like I will tell it to you now. There is a countryman of yours in that story, and it might interest you."

Ford pulled his chair closer, and the German continued.

"He was a fine fellow was that American. His name was Delnard, and I owe him my life. He thinks I have paid him back, but I am not sure.

"Delnard and I were going from Trengganu to Pathia, and we had a passage on the *Lost Peri,* a schooner owned by a Singapore pearl buyer. The mate of that schooner was as much like me as one mangosteen is like another, and that was unlucky. It was mighty unlucky. The Malay boatswain had a grudge against the mate, and one evening when I was looking over the rail something fell on the back of my head, and before my knees had time to sag I was lifted up and tipped overboard. Before I lost my senses I had come to the conclusion that it was the mast that had fallen on my head. I did so!

"When I got my wits back, I found that the schooner had waddled off into the night, leaving me and the man who had rescued me to look after ourselves. And I knew that it was Delnard, the American, who had rescued me. Fill up your glass and we will drink to him. By the bones of St. Philip of Neri, he was a brave man!

"After awhile we struck a fringe of mangrove trees, and Delnard hauled me ashore.

" 'How are you?' he asked.

" 'My head aches,' I said. 'Did the mast fall on me?'

"Delnard laughed when I asked that question. 'That Malay boatswain thought that you were the mate,' he said. 'He walloped you on the head with a jack-block and hoisted you overboard."

"I started to thank Delnard, but he clapped his hand over my mouth, and I was quiet. I was mighty quiet.

" 'There is someone talking on the other side of this clump of trees,' he whispered. 'Don't make a noise till we see who it is.'

"That American started to climb through the slimy trunks of the mangrove trees, and I followed him. For about ten yards we crawled on our hands and knees, then we peered out through the branches. The moon was full and immediately in front of us was a patch of white sand that glittered like diamond dust.

"It was then that we saw the Green-eyed Woman and the monk. I shall always call her the Green-eyed Woman, *Ja.* I will! As we peered through the bushes her face was turned toward us, and her eyes shone like the two emeralds in the face of the cat-eyed goddess, Pasht, that they worshiped at Bubastis thousands of years ago. *Himmel!* They were wonderful eyes! When I saw them shining like that I thought of the stories that the Shans tell of the Queen of the Leopards who takes the shape of a beautiful woman so that she can torture the men who hunt the leopard folk. For that woman was beautiful. She looked like a naiad taking a rest on that strip of white sand, and Delnard and I stared with all our eyes.

"She wore the most wondrous sarong that we had ever seen. It was the most wonderful sarong that ever was made. It was purple—the peculiar wicked purple that they can make at Srinager and Saharanpur, and it suited that woman. She was wicked-looking. She was so. She was lithe and tigerish, and those green eyes and that mane of gold that fell down over her breasts, made her look unreal. Many a day have I wondered how she came by those green eyes and that golden hair. I have seen nearly every breed of woman between Blair Harbor and Okhotsk, but I never have seen one like her. Never!

" 'Look at the man,' whispered Delnard. 'Look at him!'

"I tore my eyes away from the woman and looked at her companion. He was a monk, a long, lean, bare-polled monk, wrapped in a yellow robe, and he stood in the center of that sand patch with one arm stuck out like the statue of Friedrich Wilhelm in Königstrasse. And he was talking. It was his voice that we heard when we were on the other side of the mangrove clump, but we could not hear him speaking when we were looking at the Green-eyed Woman. Her beauty had made us deaf to noises. It had so.

"But when we had wrenched our eyes away from the purple sarong and the curtain of golden hair, our ears got a chance to listen to what the monk was saying. He had some leaves of the talipot palm in his hand, and he was reading that woman a story. He was reading her a story, my friend, a story

that was more wonderful than any that Scheherezade told to the sultan. He would read a little and then he would explain it to her, and we listened to that story with every fiber of our beings. We could follow him in what he said, and we listened like two hill tigers waiting for the deer to come down to the watering place.

"Have you heard anything of the Phantom Ship? *Ja,* you have heard a little; I know. You have heard the stories that the old maids tell on the veranda of the Minto Mansions Hotel at Rangoon. I heard those stories when I first came to the East. They will tell you of the phantom ship that beats up and down the China Sea from Pulo Tiuman to Koh Pennan, but that bare-polled monk knew more than those old women. He knew why that ship was kept in the South China Sea. Ay, he did so. He knew the history of the whole business, and he was telling it to the Green-eyed Woman when Delnard and I found them on the sand patch. My friend, there are things happening in the Orient today that are just as wonderful as the things that took place in the reigns of Omar and Osman and the gay old Haroun.

"That was a wonderful story that we heard. Dirk Van Tromp, a big-nosed Dutchman from Amsterdam, rocked round the Cape of Good Hope in his old high-pooped ship and came up to the China Sea with his nose sniffing the south wind to get the scent of gold. That was quite a few days ago. It was before Buxar, and before Plassey. The Dutch were great rovers in those days, and Dirk Van Tromp and his bunch were the toughest that ever crept out of the fogs of the Zuyder Zee.

"That Dutchman had a nose for gold that was sharper than the snout of a Colombo Chetty. He could smell a piece of treasure a hundred leagues away, and once he got a whiff of the yellow metal he would circle round like a vulture swinging over carrion till he got his big hands on the stuff.

"Van Tromp heard that there was much treasure in an old gray monastery that was tucked away in the hills above Tahkechi, and he swore on oath on his big flat blade that the treasure would be his in a mighty short time. He was a determined gentleman was Mynheer Van Tromp. Delnard and I lay in the shadow of those mangrove trees, and we listened to the bare-polled monk telling the Green-eyed Woman how the Dutchman went backward and forward in his old high-pooped ship trying to think out a plan to get at that hoard. And the monks in that monastery knew that the big-nosed pirate was waiting to get a chance at the gold and jewels in the vaults. You bet they did. They looked out from their towers and saw that Dutch ship go up and down like a big white-winged bird of prey, and they didn't say any prayers for the Mynheer Van Tromp. Not any prayers that would do him good.

"Now the keeper of the keys of the treasure vault was a young monk who had never seen a woman. Never! Mind you, this is the story that the bare-polled monk read from the leaves of the talipot palm. He told her that the treasure keeper had been found in a paddy-field by the monks of the monastery when he was a little baby, and they had reared him inside the

walls till he grew up and became one of them. He had never seen a woman at a distance even. That place was quite some distance from a village, and that youngster was not allowed to stray. But the monks liked him, and when he grew up they gave him the keys of the vault and made him the guardian of all the wealth that was stored there from the time of Tamerlane.

"For three months that thieving Dutchman rolled up and down the coast, and the monks stayed inside their walls and waited. The head priest gave an order that the big gate should not be opened while Van Tromp was on the coast, and, to make matters more secure, he asked that young monk to stay in his cell and keep the keys with him. They were afraid of the Dutchman, and they had good reason to be. He was a fiend. He waited for an idea to get into his big, round head, and at the end of three months that idea came. And it was a devil of an idea. *Ja,* it was.

"Can you guess what that Dutchman did? He went down to Sebah, and he got a temple dancing girl who was as beautiful as the singing houris in the seventh heaven. She was more beautiful than Mura, whose loveliness killed the Seven Nubians who dared to look upon her. She had eyes that she stole from Helen of Troy, and hair that was of the bronze tint that you see on the wing of the bird of paradise. That was what the monk told the Green-eyed Woman. Her little feet were so small that the children's slippers in the bazaar fell from them, and her hands were like the petals of a flower.

"When the bare-polled monk was telling of her hands and feet, the woman with the green eyes stopped him and put a question.

" 'Was she more lovely than I?' she asked.

" 'I am only reading what is written on the palm leaves,' said the monk.

" 'But was she?' persisted the woman. 'Tell me at once.'

" 'No,' stammered the monk, 'she was lovely, but not as lovely as you!'

"When he said that to the woman she laughed in a way that chilled my blood. She gave Delnard a chill too. It was a devil of a laugh. It was a laugh of scorn, a laugh of contempt. If a man laughed in the same way you would have killed him with the nearest thing you could get your hands on. *Ach!* I have never heard anyone laugh in the way that woman laughed.

"The monk went on with his story, and Delnard and I listened in the shadows. Dirk Van Tromp and his crew took that girl up to the monastery one night when the moon was full, and I choked with temper as I listened. The window of the cell in which the young guardian of the treasure slept looked out over the wall, and when that young monk got up from his prayers on that night he looked out on the moonlit hillside. *Gott in Himmel!* It was a dirty trick to play on that youngster. When he looked through the bars of his cell window he saw that temple dancing girl pirouetting in the middle of that grassy patch, and she looked like a silvered houri!

"That Dutchman was a cunning devil, was he not? He was hiding with his men in the bushes, and that girl was dancing the Dance of the Seven Delights before the eyes of that monk who had never seen a woman till that

moment. He pressed his lean face against the bars and watched with eyes of astonishment. She was the first woman that he had ever seen, and she was one of the loveliest of her kind. It was not a fair trick, my friend. It was not!

"That girl danced and danced. That bare-polled monk described that dance to the Green-eyed Woman, and he described it so well that I could picture everything. I saw that moonlit hillside, and I saw the girl dancing that intoxicating dance to the poor devil in the cell, and I saw Dirk Van Tromp and his crew waiting in the shadows for the climax of that little performance. I never felt like smashing the bones of a dead man as I did on that night when we listened to that yarn.

"And the climax came to that affair. The dancing girl stopped dancing after she had driven that young monk half crazy, and she beckoned to him to come out to her. Beckoned to that poor devil who was wondering if she was a spirit from another world. He forgot all the orders of the head priest when she did that. He forgot everything. He only knew that someone more beautiful than the white orchids of the valley was waiting for him outside the walls, and he rushed madly into the corridor.

"It was then that the Lord Buddha took pity on that poor fool. He performed a miracle by stretching a silver wire across the corridor as the treasure guardian was hurrying along. A silver wire, my friend. But that monk was not in a fit state to see a miracle when it was performed right under his nose. His brain and his blood were aflame with the sight of the vision that he had seen in the moonlight, and he hacked that wire through with his knife. That is how the monk read it from the palm leaves to that witch-woman lying on the sand.

"The treasure guardian dropped his knife in his hurry, and he did not wait to pick it up. He ran on like a madman. But it was clean love that was drawing him to that girl, my friend. Ay, it was! And just because his love was good and sweet, Buddha performed another miracle. The Great one stretched a gold wire that blazed like a flaming thread across that corridor. The treasure guardian had no knife, but he had his two hands. He gripped that thread of gold and snapped it. Then he rushed down the dark passage.

"The blood pounded through my head as I listened to that part of the story. I believed that yarn! If you had heard that bare-polled monk read it to the woman you would have believed it, too. It was one of those stories where the truth shines through the little places between the words.

"The treasure guardian ran across the courtyard toward the big gates that the high priest had ordered to be closed while Dirk Van Tromp was on the coast, and as he raced across the yard, Buddha made another attempt to save him. The Holy One flung a rope in front of that youngster, a rope whose ends went up into the clouds, but that monk could not be stopped by anything just then. *Nein!* He had no knife, and he could not break that rope with his hands, so what do you think he did? He gnawed that rope through with his teeth, then he opened the big gates and rushed out to the

dancing girl who was standing like a silver statue of Aphrodite in the moonlight!

"In the morning the monks of the monastery found the treasure guardian trussed up like a capon, and they also found that the treasure chamber was empty. Dirk Van Tromp and his crew of cutthroats did not leave an ounce of gold behind them, and you can just guess what sort of a temper the head priest was in. The treasure guardian told him of the dancing girl in the moonlight, and the old ancient went crazy with temper. He sentenced that young monk to be buried up to the neck in the sand at the point where the girl stood, and when that was done they left him there, bareheaded, and the sun licked at him like the hot tongue of a dragon.

"Every morning for six mornings the monks paraded past that poor devil who was buried in the sand. His tongue and his lips were black and swollen, but they could see that he was praying for forgiveness. They could see that. He was sorry for what he had done, but he blamed himself. He did not blame the girl that had lured him outside so that the Dutch pirates could pounce on him.

"On the morning of the seventh day the head priest and the rest of the monks got a surprise. Ay, a big surprise. When they went out to look at that poor wretch they found the temple dancing girl lying on the sand close to the spot where he was buried, and she was dead. Dead and cold. She had become sorry for what she had done in bringing him to his ruin and death. She knew that it was love and not lust that had brought him out to her, and she had come back to tell him that she was sorry. But it was too late to tell him that. She found him dying in the sand, and when he would not let her dig him out of that pit she killed herself beside him.

"The young monk was still alive, and as he looked as if he wished to say something they put water on his swollen tongue so that he was able to speak a little. Then he told them something that made their flesh creep. He said that Buddha had appeared to him in the night, and that the Great One had told him that Dirk Van Tromp would never take the treasure out of the China Sea. Never! He said that it was written that the Dutchman's ship would beat up and down between Pulo Tiuman and Koh Pennan for all time. At every full moon it would rock past the monastery, and if there was a monk in that place who was brave enough to swim out to the ship and recover the treasure, the souls of the treasure guardian and the temple dancing girl would find peace. When the young monk told them that he uttered a little prayer to Buddha and died.

"That was a strange story to listen to in the moonlight, was it not? The bare-polled monk looked at the Green-eyed Woman when he had read all that was on the palm leaves, and the woman looked at the big moon that was swinging over the hills. Delnard and I watched her green eyes flash, and we thought things. All the wonder of the East was in those eyes. They were as cold as the icicle eye of a crocodile at times, and then they would soften suddenly so that one felt that he was being dragged toward that witch on the sand.

"'And you believe that the Dutchman's ship goes up and down the coast to this day?' asked the woman.

"'It is written here,' said the monk, tapping the palm leaves. 'They say it goes by on the night of the full moon. The monks of the monastery looked out many times after that happening, and they saw that ship go rocking by, the moonlight flashing on her gilt figurehead.'

"'And now?' she questioned.

"'I have waited for eight nights,' answered the monk, 'and I am certain that she will go by tonight.'

"'And you will swim out?' queried the witch-woman.

"'If you go with me,' muttered the monk. 'My heart would turn to water if you were not near me.'

"She laughed again, that cursed sneering laugh that made one wish she was a man so that one could strike her dead, and just as she laughed I did something that caused a sensation. A mighty big sensation. There were some wild capsicum bushes under those mangrove trees, and those bushes made me sneeze. *Ja!* I sneezed loud enough to wake the dead, and before I stopped sneezing, Delnard was out in the clearing explaining to the woman and the monk how we came to be there.

"That American had a smooth tongue. You bet he had. The monk looked right mad, but the Green-eyed Woman was not disturbed one bit. She listened to Delnard's story with a smile on her face, and when he finished she started to question him.

"'So you heard the story that he read to me?' she said, pointing to the monk as she spoke.

"'Yes, I heard,' said Delnard. 'It was a mighty good story, too.'

"'Do you think the ship will come?' she asked.

"'I do not know,' said Delnard, grinning at her, 'but if it does come along I'd like to go out with you when you board it.'

"She smiled when he said that, but I cursed him for a fool. That was not our business at all, and there was something in the night that I did not like. I had that sort of gooseflesh feeling that makes people say that someone has jumped over their grave. 'You can come with us,' said the woman. 'Sit down and wait.'

"Delnard and I sat down on the white sand, and I kept thinking of that story as I watched the woman with the emerald eyes. I was afraid of her. It was so. She had the appearance of a sphinx, a sphinx that had just come to life, and who would laugh as she crushed one beneath her feet.

"'Why do you want to stay here?' I asked Delnard. 'It is foolishness.'

"'We will stay for the fun of the thing,' he said, and he laughed because he saw that I was nervous of the woman. 'We will have to stay till dawn to find our way from this place, so we might as well stay close to a mystery.'

"'You are a fool,' I said. 'That woman's eyes remind me of the eyes of the hamadryad.'

"The night was a silent night, one of those nights when you feel that the *lieber Gott* has slowed up the wheels of the planet before doing some-

thing that will make you sit up and take notice. The silence came around us like a cloak, and the longer we waited the more annoyed I was with Delnard. I did not believe in phantom ships, but I thought as I sat there on the sand that it was the kind of night that you would expect ghostly things of that class to go wandering around.

"A wispy fog came creeping in from the Gulf of Siam, a creeping, low-lying fog that was wet and cold like the hand of a corpse. It swept over us, touching our faces as if it had a million invisible fingers, and it surged up the estuary. I was shivering then with cold, and suspense, and I cursed under my breath.

" 'This is foolishness,' I said to Delnard. 'It is nonsense to wait here any longer.'

"That woman with the emerald eyes turned her head as if to listen to what I said, and then she gave a little suppressed scream that made my blood run cold. It was not a scream of fear. *Nein!* It was a scream of amazement and wonder.

" 'Look!' she cried. 'Look!'

"She was pointing up the estuary, and we looked. *Ja,* we looked. We stared with our eyes popping out. That fog was thin and broken, and through a break in that curtain we saw something that startled us. The monk and Delnard, the Green-eyed Woman and I saw, my friend. Now you can laugh when I tell you what we saw, but I did not laugh that night. Waddling down through that rent in the fog, her broken masts thrust up like black fingers and her high poop tilted up like the tail of a Muscovy drake, was a ship that was out of fashion a hundred years before!

"*Himmel,* didn't we stare! I rubbed my eyes and I looked and looked, thinking it was a mirage, but it was no mirage. It was an old Dutch ship that was of the same type that Van Edels and Pelsart and Dampier and Van Deiman used when they first stirred the foam of the Eastern seas with bull-snouted craft that were built at Antwerp!

" '*Aie, Aie!*' gurgled the monk, as he climbed to his feet and stared at the old ship that was heading for the open sea. 'It is she! It is she!' he cried.

"That monk was a mighty scared man at that minute. It was all right to read about the phantom ship, but it was a different business to watch that black hulk breaking through the wispy fog. You bet it was. That bare-polled storyteller looked as if he was inclined to sneak away into the mangrove trees, but the Green-eyed Woman looked him up and down, and he seemed to stiffen under her eyes.

" 'Shades of Caesar!' cried Delnard. 'Did you ever see the like of that?'

" 'I did not,' I snapped, and my lips were dry as I spoke to him.

"That woman was the only one of us who did not lose their wits. While we were staring at the apparition that was drifting down toward the point where we were standing, she was calculating the distance and thinking which would be the best place to intercept that ship. The woman had nerves of steel. She was like that jade who was married to Menelaus of Sparta;

she could stand by and see battle and bloody murder without turning a hair. She could do anything.

" 'We'll swim out from here,' she said, pointing to the water. 'Get ready or we will miss her.'

"Delnard looked at me, and I glared back at him. I was mighty mad with him at that moment.

" 'What will we do?' he asked.

" 'Do?' I snapped. 'We will do nothing! What has this fool business to do with us?'

"That woman was standing in front of me when I said that. She was twisting that purple sarong around her hips, and she heard what I said. *Ja,* she heard. She took three steps into the water, and then she turned her head and laughed at Delnard and me. Laughed that cursed sneering laugh that she had turned on the monk when he was telling the story. Holy St. Catherine! I have never heard a laugh in all my life like that! It was like a whip of scorn. It would drive men to their death quicker than anything I know of. She called us curs with that laugh! Do you understand? It was a lash that made us feel like worms, and the next moment we were in the water, swimming beside her and the bare-polled monk.

"We were swimming in a line, the four of us. I guess we were mad, my friend. It is foolish to sit out on the sand on moonlight nights and listen to stories of the kind that we had listened to that night. There is witchery in the air of this Orient, and one does foolish things under its influence.

"The fog closed in on us and blotted out the black shape of the ship, and I stopped swimming. I had what you call cold feet just then, but that laugh was ringing in my ears. I was tired of that business, and my head was aching from the blow that the Malay boatswain of the *Lost Peri* had given me. I could not see Delnard just then, and I shouted out to him.

" 'Where are you, Delnard?' I cried.

" 'Here,' he answered, speaking out of the fog, and just as he spoke, the thick curtain was split apart and I saw the black hulk of the old Dutch ship rolling down on us. *Ach!* I can see her now as I saw her that night. There was a little smother of foam at her forefoot, and she had a coating of barnacles that the Kiel shipyards could not peel off in a week. Then the fog closed in again, and I heard the voice of the Green-eyed Woman calling from above me. That witch-woman had got a grip on the side of that craft and she was calling the three of us to her.

"I made a clutch at the rotten timbers as the ship lurched past me, but my fingers slipped on the slime. I made another grab at her, and this time I caught the rotten timbers of a porthole, and I clawed myself up out of the water. That woman was calling out to us, and I knew by the shouts that came from the fog that Delnard and the monk had got a footing on the old hulk as she slewed by. Driving my toes into those barnacles and scratching with my fingers at the rotten wood I climbed higher, and presently that woman's fingers gripped my shoulder and dragged me over the side.

Delnard and the monk were close behind me, and when we hauled them aboard we stood a moment to get our breath.

"It was just as we stood there near the rotten bulwarks that the old boat drove out of the bank of fog. She lurched out of it suddenly, and the moon washed us in a bath of silver. That was when the monk gave the yell. He gave a yell that you could hear down at Sebah where the temple dancing girl came from, and he pointed to the deck in front of us. For a moment we did not see what he pointed at, then our throats went dry like as if we had been swallowing lime. That deck was alive! It was alive with rats!

"That is the reason why that rat turned me sick a few minutes ago. I think of those rats on the Dutch ship every time I see one. And those rats on that hulk were the biggest rats I have ever seen. The Paris sewer rats, the gray rats of the Orinoco, and the big black rats you see on the canals at Bangkok were small things compared to those devils on the rotten deck of that old craft. They were huge brutes, and there were thousands of them. Thousands! They were crawling up from the hold in armies that moved across the deck so that we could not see an inch of the rotten boards!

" 'Look out!' I cried. 'They are attacking us!'

"I made a movement to drop over the side of the ship, but that woman was too quick for me. She was too quick for me. *Nein,* she did not block me with her hands. She laughed at me. I tried to fight against the feeling that came over me, but I could not. I would not have been a man if I ran when she laughed as she did. It would take a mighty good coward to run away when that sneer came from her red lips. You bet it would. Delnard had turned to the rail when I turned, but she stopped both of us. I do not know how the piece of wood got into my hands, but I guess she gave it to me. She was the only one who could think and act. She thrust that stick into my hands, and then I struck at the army that was circling toward us.

"Have you ever seen rats attack men? Once before I had seen it, but I had never seen anything like the charge I saw on that deck. Those rats were mad with hunger. That old boat had been stranded up that estuary for a century, and she had become a castle for those big rats. I do not know how the tide had shifted her, perhaps she had broken loose from the trunks of the mangrove trees, but that rat army had come with her, and when we boarded her they were hungry. They were mighty hungry. There were thousands of them there, and they were eating each other when that witch-woman brought three fools aboard, *Gott!* The sight of that brute brought it all back this afternoon, and I am sick yet. I will be sick for a week. I know I will.

" 'Fight them!' cried the woman. 'Fight them!'

"It was our only hope, my friend. We had to fight like demons to hold those squeaking things off. The deck was covered with them, yet they were still crawling up through the rotten planks from below. It was a nightmare, and a terror struck into my bones. As I swung that stick I thought that the whole business was some devilish plan to get us on board that hulk, and I fought like a madman. So did Delnard. So did the monk, and the Green-

eyed Woman. As I watched her for a few seconds I knew that I was wrong in thinking that it was a plot against Delnard and myself. She was a crazy woman. She had become possessed with the idea that the old hulk was really the ship that Dirk Van Tromp had sailed in, and that monk was of the same opinion.

" 'Fight them back!' screamed the woman. 'The treasure will be on the lower deck."

" 'We are insane,' I cried to Delnard, but he did not hear me. That laugh had made him lose control of himself, and he was slaughtering rats with a plank that it would take a Samson to lift.

"The rats broke before us, and the woman led us on. Led us on across the rotten deck where the cross beams had crumbled beneath the three-inch planks of oak. You can hardly believe it, can you? I was sweating with fear, but I could not turn and run as I wanted to. There was a squeaking in the bowels of the ship that made me feel sure that anyone that ventured down there would go to his death, yet every time that woman gave one of her steely laughs I swung that lump of wood harder than ever. She was a witch, I am sure she was.

" 'Take a rest!' she cried, and we stopped for a moment to get our breath.

"But those rats were waiting for us to take that rest. They swept over the deck in one thick mass, and we were at it again. I stuck my foot in a hole and fell down, but Delnard lifted me to my feet again. Lifted me to my feet after three score of those things had rushed over me. And she laughed and rushed us forward against the swarms that were pouring out of the holes in the planks.

"It was then that the Almighty heard the prayer that I was making. *Ja,* he heard me then. As I picked my club from the deck after I slipped, my hand clutched some oakum, and when I stumbled on after that mad jade I got an idea. I got an idea that meant salvation to Delnard and me. You cannot guess what that idea was? I stuffed that oakum in my ears, my friend. I stuffed it in with one hand while I fought with the other. *Ja! Ja!* I knew that I could not turn back while that jade was laughing her laugh of scorn, so I made myself so that I could not hear her laugh. I fixed myself in just the same way that old Ulysses fixed his sailors a few thousand years before. I plugged my ears so that I could not hear the squeaking of the rats, or her laugh, and then I dropped my stick and rushed at Delnard. I ran him to the side of the ship, and when he fought with me I hit him a crack on the jaw and toppled him overboard as the Malay boatswain had toppled me some hours before.

"I had luck then. I sprang over and found him in the shadow of the hulk, and, grabbing him by the hair of the head I struck out for shore. Once I looked back, and I saw that old black ship moving towards the open sea and I swam faster. Fear was in my marrow just then. My teeth were chattering together, and I could hardly speak when I pulled Delnard ashore.

" 'Where is she?' he asked.

" 'She has gone to sea with the rats and the mad monk,' I said.

" 'Glory be to God!' he said and then he broke down and cried. And my nerves were that bad that I cried with him. I have been in a thousand tight places, but I was never in one that made me feel so queer as I felt on that night.

"We fell asleep on the sand, and we slept there till the sun climbed out of the sea and pricked our faces and hands. There was not a sign of a hulk. We stared at the sea for ten minutes or more, then Delnard got to his feet and shook himself.

" 'We had better strike toward the south,' he said, and I went with him without making any protest.

"We walked about two miles without speaking, and then we found her. The Green-eyed Woman. *Ja!* We found her on the beach, her mane of gold covering her face as if the sea had tried to hide the staring eyes. In her left hand she had a tiny statue of Siva that had a Mogok ruby in its breast, and I wanted badly to get that little statue. But Delnard would not let me take it from her hand. He would not. We made a grave on the beach and we buried her there."

Amina

by Edward Lucas White

How lightly we speak these blasé days of ghoulies and ghosties! What with vampires and werewolves common fare in Grade B movies, people tend to forget the very real horror that such monsters hold for those who believe in them. Fortunately such actual belief is restricted today to the more backward areas of the world . . . like Arabia and the Near East. Now in this remarkable little story we deal with the ghoul, but by no means with some contrived imaginary monster found about midnight on the scene of the murder. No, these ghouls are the real thing, and we must advise that this story is emphatically not for the squeamish.

WALDO, brought face to face with the actuality of the unbelievable—as he himself would have worded it—was completely dazed. In silence he suffered the consul to lead him from the tepid gloom of the interior, through the ruinous doorway, out into the hot, stunnning brilliance of the desert landscape. Hassan followed, with never a look behind him. Without any word he had taken Waldo's gun from his nerveless hand and carried it, with his own and the consul's.

The consul strode across the gravelly sand, some fifty paces from the southwest corner of the tomb, to a bit of not wholly ruined wall from which there was a clear view of the doorway side of the tomb and of the side with the larger crevice.

"Hassan," he commanded, "watch here."

Hassan said something in Persian.

"How many cubs were there?" the consul asked Waldo.

Waldo stared mute.

"How many young ones did you see?" the consul asked again.

"Twenty or more," Waldo made answer.

"That's impossible," snapped the consul.

"There seemed to be sixteen or eighteen," Waldo asserted. Hassan smiled and grunted. The consul took from him two guns, handed Waldo his, and they walked around the tomb to a point about equally distant from the op-

posite corner. There was another bit of ruin, and in front of it, on the side toward the tomb, was a block of stone mostly in the shadow of the wall.

"Convenient," said the consul. "Sit on that stone and lean against the wall, make yourself comfortable. You are a bit shaken, but you will be all right in a moment. You should have something to eat, but we have nothing. Anyhow, take a good swallow of this."

He stood by him as Waldo gasped over the raw brandy.

"Hassan will bring you his water-bottle before he goes," the consul went on; "drink plenty, for you must stay here for some time. And now, pay attention to me. We must extirpate these vermin. The male, I judge, is absent. If he had been anywhere about, you would not now be alive. The young cannot be as many as you say, but, I take it, we have to deal with ten, a full litter. We must smoke them out. Hassan will go back to camp after fuel and the guard. Meanwhile, you and I must see that none escape."

He took Waldo's gun, opened the breech, shut it, examined the magazine and handed it back to him.

"Now watch me closely," he said. He paced off, looking to his left past the tomb. Presently he stopped and gathered several stones together.

"You see these?" he called.

Waldo shouted an affirmation.

The consul came back, passed on in the same line, looking to his right past the tomb, and presently, at a similar distance, put up another tiny cairn, shouted again and was again answered. Again he returned.

"Now you are sure you cannot mistake those two marks I have made?"

"Very sure indeed," said Waldo.

"It is important," warned the consul. "I am going back to where I left Hassan, to watch there while he is gone. You will watch here. You may pace as often as you like to either of those stone heaps. From either you can see me on my beat. Do not diverge from the line from one to the other. For as soon as Hassan is out of sight I shall shoot any moving thing I see nearer. Sit here till you see me set up similar limits for my sentry-go on the farther side, then shoot any moving thing not on my line of patrol. Keep a lookout all around you. There is one chance in a million that the male might return in daylight—mostly they are nocturnal, but this lair is evidently exceptional. Keep a bright lookout.

"And now listen to me. You must not feel any foolish sentimentalism about any fancied resemblance of these vermin to human beings. Shoot, and shoot to kill. Not only is it our duty, in general, to abolish them, but it will be very dangerous for us if we do not. There is little or no solidarity in Mohammedan communities, but on the comparatively few points upon which public opinion exists it acts with amazing promptitude and vigor. One matter as to which there is no disagreement is that it is incumbent upon every man to assist in eradicating these creatures. The good old Biblical custom of stoning to death is the mode of lynching indigenous hereabouts. These modern Asiatics are quite capable of applying it to anyone believed derelict against any of these inimical monsters. If we let one escape and the rumor

of it gets about, we may precipitate an outburst of racial prejudice difficult to cope with. Shoot, I say, without hesitation or mercy."

"I understand," said Waldo.

"I don't care whether you understand or not," said the consul, "I want you to act. Shoot if needful, and shoot straight." And he tramped off.

Hassan presently appeared, and Waldo drank from his water-bottle as nearly all of its contents as Hassan would permit. After his departure Waldo's first alertness soon gave place to mere endurance of the monotony of watching and the intensity of the heat. His discomfort became suffering, and what with the fury of the dry glare, the pangs of thirst and his bewilderment of mind, Waldo was moving in a waking dream by the time Hassan returned with two donkeys and a mule laden with brushwood. Behind the beasts straggled the guard.

Waldo's trance became a nightmare when the smoke took effect and the battle began. He was, however, not only not required to join in the killing, but was enjoined to keep back. He did keep very much in the background, seeing only so much of the slaughter as his curiosity would not let him refrain from viewing. Yet he felt all a murderer as he gazed at the ten small carcasses laid out arow, and the memory of his vigil and its end, indeed of the whole day, though it was the day of his most marvelous adventure, remains to him as the broken recollections of a phantasmagoria.

On the morning of his memorable peril Waldo had wakened early. The experiences of his sea-voyage, the sights at Gibraltar, at Port Said, in the canal, at Suez, at Aden, at Muscat, and at Basrah, had formed an altogether inadequate transition from the decorous regularity of house and school life in New England to the breathless wonder of the desert immensities.

Everything seemed unreal, and yet the reality of its strangeness so besieged him that he could not feel at home in it, he could not sleep heavily in a tent. After composing himself to sleep, he lay long conscious and awakened early, as on this morning, just at the beginning of the false-dawn.

The consul was fast asleep, snoring loudly. Waldo dressed quietly and went out; mechanically, without any purpose or forethought, taking his gun. Outside he found Hassan, seated, his gun across his knees, his head sunk forward, as fast asleep as the consul. Ali and Ibrahim had left the camp the day before for supplies. Waldo was the only waking creature about; for the guards, camped some little distance off, were but logs about the ashes of their fire. Meaning merely to enjoy, under the white glow of the false-dawn, the magical reappearance of the constellations and the short last glory of the star-laden firmament, that brief coolness which compensated a trifle for the hot morning, the fiery day and the warmish night, he seated himself on a rock, some paces from the tent and twice as far from the guards. Turning his gun in his hands he felt an irresistible temptation to wander off by himself, to stroll alone through the fascinating emptiness of the arid landscape.

When he had begun camp life he had expected to find the consul, that

combination of sportsman, explorer and archaeologist, a particularly easy-going guardian. He had looked forward to absolutely untrammelled liberty in the spacious expanse of the limitless wastes. The reality he had found exactly the reverse of his preconceptions. The consul's first injunction was:

"Never let yourself get out of sight of me or Hassan unless he or I send you off with Ali or Ibrahim. Let nothing tempt you to roam about alone. Even a ramble is dangerous. You might lose sight of the camp before you knew it."

At first Waldo acquiesced, later he protested. "I have a good pocket-compass. I know how to use it. I never lost my way in the Maine woods."

"No Kourds in the Maine woods," said the consul.

Yet before long Waldo noticed that the few Kourds they encountered seemed simple-hearted, peaceful folk. No semblance of danger or even of adventure had appeared. Their armed guard of a dozen greasy tatter-demalions had passed their time in uneasy loafing.

Likewise Waldo noticed that the consul seemed indifferent to the ruins they passed by or encamped among, that his feeling for sites and topography was cooler than lukewarm, that he showed no ardor in the pursuit of the scanty and uninteresting game. He had picked up enough of several dialects to hear repeated conversations about "them." "Have you heard of any about here?" "Has one been killed?" "Any traces of them in this district?" And such queries he could make out in the various talks with the natives they met; as to what "they" were he received no enlightenment.

Then he had questioned Hassan as to why he was so restricted in his movements. Hassan spoke some English and regaled him with tales of Afrits, ghouls, specters and other uncanny legendary presences; of the jinn of the waste, appearing in human shape, talking all languages, ever on the alert to ensnare infidels; of the woman whose feet turned the wrong way at the ankles, luring the unwary to a pool and there drowning her victims; of the malignant ghosts of dead brigands, more terrible than their living fellows; of the spirit in the shape of a wild-ass, or of a gazelle, enticing its pursuers to the brink of a precipice and itself seeming to run ahead upon an expanse of sand, a mere mirage, dissolving as the victim passed the brink and fell to death; of the sprite in the semblance of a hare feigning a limp, or of a ground-bird feigning a broken wing, drawing its pursuer after it till he met death in an unseen pit or well-shaft.

Ali and Ibrahim spoke no English. As far as Waldo could understand their long harangues, they told similar stories or hinted at dangers equally vague and imaginary. These childish bogytales merely whetted Waldo's craving for independence.

Now, as he sat on a rock, longing to enjoy the perfect sky, the clear, early air, the wide, lonely landscape, along with the sense of having it to himself, it seemed to him that the consul was merely innately cautious, over-cautious. There was no danger. He would have a fine leisurely stroll, kill something perhaps and certainly be back in camp before the sun grew hot.

Some hours later he was seated on a fallen coping-stone in the shadow of

a ruined tomb. All the country they had been traversing is full of tombs and remains of tombs, prehistoric, Bactrian, old Persian, Parathian, Sassanian, or Mohammedan, scattered everywhere in groups or solitary. Vanished utterly are the faintest traces of the cities, towns, and villages, ephemeral houses or temporary huts, in which had lived the countless generations of mourners who had reared these tombs.

The tombs, built more durably than mere dwellings of the living, remained. Complete or ruinous, or reduced to mere fragments, they were everywhere. In that district they were all of one type. Each was domed and below was square, its one door facing eastward and opening into a large empty room, behind which were the mortuary chambers.

In the shadow of such a tomb Waldo sat. He had shot nothing, had lost his way, had no idea of the direction of the camp, was tired, warm and thirsty. He had forgotten his water-bottle.

He swept his gaze over the vast, desolate prospect, the unvaried turquoise of the sky arched above the rolling desert. Far reddish hills along the skyline hooped in the less distant brown hillocks which, without diversifying it, hummocked the yellow landscape. Sand and rocks with a lean, starved bush or two made up the nearer view, broken here and there by dazzling white or streaked, grayish, crumbling ruins. The sun had not been long above the horizon, yet the whole surface of the desert was quivering with heat.

As Waldo sat viewing the outlook a woman came round the corner of the tomb. All the village women Waldo had seen had worn yashmaks or some other form of face-covering or veil. This woman was bareheaded and unveiled. She wore some sort of yellowish-brown garment which enveloped her from neck to ankles, showing no waist line. Her feet, in defiance of the blistering sands, were bare.

At sight of Waldo she stopped and stared at him as he at her. He remarked the un-European posture of her feet, not at all turned out, but with the inner lines parallel. She wore no anklets, he observed, no bracelets, no necklace or earrings. Her bare arms he thought the most muscular he had ever seen on a human being. Her nails were pointed and long, both on her hands and feet. Her hair was black, short and tousled, yet she did not look wild or uncomely. Her eyes smiled and her lips had the effect of smiling, though they did not part ever so little, not showing at all the teeth behind them.

"What a pity," said Waldo aloud, "that she does not speak English."

"I do speak English," said the woman, and Waldo noticed that as she spoke, her lips did not perceptibly open. "What does the gentleman want?"

"You speak English!" Waldo exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "What luck! Where did you learn it?"

"At the mission school," she replied, an amused smile playing about the corners of her rather wide, unopening mouth. "What can be done for you?" She spoke with scarcely any foreign accent, but very slowly and with a sort of growl running along from syllable to syllable.

"I am thirsty," said Waldo, "and I have lost my way."

"Is the gentleman living in a brown tent, shaped like half a melon?" she inquired, the queer, rumbling note drawling from one word to the next, her lips barely separated.

"Yes, that is our camp," said Waldo.

"I could guide the gentleman that way," she droned; "but it is far, and there is no water on that side."

"I want water first," said Waldo, "or milk."

"If you mean cow's milk, we have none. But we have goat's milk. There is drink where I dwell," she said, sing-songing the words. "It is not far. It is the other way."

"Show me," said he.

She began to walk, Waldo, his gun under his arm, beside her. She trod noiselessly and fast. Waldo could scarcely keep up with her. As they walked he often fell behind and noted how her swathing garments clung to a lithe, shapely back, neat waist and firm hips. Each time he hurried and caught up with her, he scanned her with intermittent glances, puzzled that her waist, so well-marked at the spine, showed no particular definition in front; that the outline of her from neck to knees, perfectly shapeless under her wrappings, was without any waistline or suggestion of firmness or undulation. Likewise he remarked the amused flicker in her eyes and the compressed line of her red, her too red lips.

"How long were you in the mission school?" he inquired.

"Four years," she replied.

"Are you a Christian?" he asked.

"The Free-folk do not submit to baptism," she stated simply, but with rather more of the droning growl between her words.

He felt a queer shiver as he watched the scarcely moving lips through which the syllables edged their way.

"But you are not veiled," he could not resist saying.

"The Free-folk," she rejoined, "are never veiled."

"Then you are not a Mohammedan?" he ventured.

"The Free-folk are not Moslems."

"Who are the Free-folk?" he blurted out incautiously.

She shot one baleful glance at him. Waldo remembered that he had to do with an Asiatic. He recalled the three permitted questions.

"What is your name?" he inquired.

"Amina," she told him.

"That is a name from the 'Arabian Nights,'" he hazarded.

"From the foolish tales of the believers," she sneered. "The Free-folk know nothing of such follies." The unvarying shutness of her speaking lips, the drawly burr between the syllables, struck him all the more as her lips curled but did not open.

"You utter your words in a strange way," he said.

"Your language is not mine," she replied.

"How is it that you learned my language at the mission school and are not a Christian?"

"They teach all at the mission school," she said, "and the maidens of the Free-folk are like the other maidens they teach, though the Free-folk when grown are not as town-dwellers are. Therefore they taught me as any townbred girl, not knowing me for what I am."

"They taught you well," he commented.

"I have the gift of tongues," she uttered enigmatically, with an odd note of triumph burring the words through her unmoving lips.

Waldo felt a horrid shudder all over him, not only at her uncanny words, but also from mere faintness.

"Is it far to your home?" he breathed.

"It is there," she said, pointing to the doorway of a large tomb just before them.

The wholly open arch admitted them into a fairly spacious interior, cool with the abiding temperature of thick masonry. There was no rubbish on the floor. Waldo, relieved to escape the blistering glare outside, seated himself on a block of stone midway between the door and the inner partition-wall, resting his gun-butt on the floor. For the moment he was blinded by the change from the insistent brilliance of the desert morning to the blurred gray light of the interior.

When his sight cleared he looked about and remarked, opposite the door, the ragged hole which laid open the desecrated mausoleum. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness he was so startled that he stood up. It seemed to him that from its four corners the room swarmed with naked children. To his inexperienced conjecture they seemed about two years old, but they moved with the assurance of boys of eight or ten.

"Whose are these children?" he exclaimed.

"Mine," she said.

"All yours?" he protested.

"All mine," she replied, a curious suppressed boisterousness in her demeanor.

"But there are twenty of them," he cried.

"You count badly in the dark," she told him. "There are fewer."

"There certainly are a dozen," he maintained, spinning round as they danced and scampered about.

"The Free-people have large families," she said.

"But they are all of one age," Waldo exclaimed, his tongue dry against the roof of his mouth.

She laughed, an unpleasant, mocking laugh, clapping her hands. She was between him and the doorway, and as most of the light came from it he could not see her lips.

"Is not that like a man! No woman would have made that mistake."

Waldo was confused and sat down again. The children circulated around him, chattering, laughing, giggling, snickering, making noises indicative of glee.

"Please get me something cool to drink," said Waldo, and his tongue was not only dry but big in his mouth.

"We shall have to drink shortly," she said, "but it will be warm."

Waldo began to feel uneasy. The children pranced around him, jabbering strange, guttural noises, licking their lips, pointing at him, their eyes fixed on him, with now and then a glance at their mother.

"Where is the water?"

The woman stood silent, her arms hanging at her sides, and it seemed to Waldo she was shorter than she had been.

"Where is the water?" he repeated.

"Patience, patience," she growled, and came a step nearer to him.

The sunlight struck upon her back and made a sort of halo about her hips. She seemed still shorter than before. There was a something furtive in her bearing, and the little ones sniggered evilly.

At that instant two rifle shots rang out almost as one. The woman fell face downward on the floor. The babies shrieked in a shrill chorus. Then she leaped up from all fours with an explosive suddenness, staggered in a hurled, lurching rush toward the hole in the wall, and, with a frightful yell, threw up her arms and whirled backward to the ground, doubled and contorted like a dying fish, stiffened, shuddered and was still. Waldo, his horrified eyes fixed on her face, even in his amazement noted that her lips did not open.

The children, squealing faint cries of dismay, scrambled through the hole in the inner wall, vanishing into the inky void beyond. The last had hardly gone when the consul appeared in the doorway, his smoking gun in his hand.

"Not a second too soon, my boy," he ejaculated. "She was just going to spring."

He cocked his gun and prodded the body with the muzzle.

"Good and dead," he commented. "What luck! Generally it takes three or four bullets to finish one. I've known one with two bullets through her lungs to kill a man."

"Did you murder this woman?" Waldo demanded fiercely.

"Murder?" the consul snorted. "Murder! Look at that."

He knelt down and pulled open the full, close lips, disclosing not human teeth, but small incisors, cusped grinders, wide-spaced; and long, keen overlapping canines, like those of a greyhound: a fierce, deadly carnivorous dentition, menacing and combative.

Waldo felt a qualm, yet the face and form still swayed his horrified sympathy for their humanness.

"Do you shoot women because they have long teeth?" Waldo insisted, revolted at the horrid death he had watched.

"You are hard to convince," said the consul sternly. "Do you call that a woman?"

He stripped the clothing from the carcass.

Waldo sickened all over. What he saw was not the front of a woman,

but more like the underside of an old fox-terrier with puppies, or of a white sow, with her second litter; from collarbone to groin ten lolloping udders, two rows, mauled, stringy and flaccid.

"What kind of a creature is it?" he asked faintly.

"A Ghoul, my boy," the consul answered solemnly, almost in a whisper.

"I thought they did not exist," Waldo babbled. "I thought they were mythical; I thought there were none.

"I can very well believe that there are none in Rhode Island," the consul said gravely. "This is in Persia, and Persia is in Asia."

The Haunted "Jarvee"

by William Hope Hodgson

William Hope Hodgson, whose works are notable for the eeriness of their phantoms and the unorthodox nature of his fright-elements, attempted to evolve a whole science of occultism entirely on his own. Years later Lovecraft was to do the same thing with his "Elder Gods" pantheon. Hodgson pioneered that path of pseudo-scientific patter for the development of a special new weird thrill in his stories of Carnacki, the Ghost Finder. Reminiscent of Algernon Blackwood's John Silence, Dr. Carnacki operates in a more coldly matter-of-fact fashion in putting machinery to work ferreting out and eradicating other-wordly disturbances. The case of the haunted sailing ship is an example.

"SEEN anything of Carnacki lately?" I asked Arkright when we met in the City.

"No," he replied. "He's probably off on one of his jaunts. We'll be having a card one of these days inviting us to No. 472, Cheyne Walk, and then we'll hear all about it. Queer chap that."

He nodded, and went on his way. It was some months now since we four —Jessop, Arkright, Taylor and myself—had received the usual summons to drop in at No. 472 and hear Carnacki's story of his latest case. What talks they were! Stories of all kinds and true in every word, yet full of weird and extraordinary incidents that held one silent and awed until he had finished.

Strangely enough, the following morning brought me a curtly worded card telling me to be at No. 472 at seven o'clock promptly. I was the first to arrive, Jessop and Taylor soon followed and just before dinner was announced Arkright came in.

Dinner over, Carnacki as usual passed round his smokes, snuggled himself down luxuriously in his favourite armchair and went straight to the story we knew he had invited us to hear.

"I've been on a trip in one of the real old-time sailing ships," he said without any preliminary remarks. "The *Jarvee,* owned by my old friend Captain Thompson. I went on the voyage primarily for my health, but I picked on the old *Jarvee* because Captain Thompson had often told me

there was something queer about her. I used to ask him up here whenever he came ashore and try to get him to tell me more about it, you know; but the funny thing was he never could tell me anything definite concerning her queerness. He seemed always to *know* but when it came to putting his knowledge into words it was as if he found that the reality melted out of it. He would end up usually by saying that you saw things and then he would wave his hands vaguely, but further than that he never seemed able to pass on the knowledge of something strange which he had noticed about the ship, except odd outside details.

" 'Can't keep men in her no-how,' he often told me. 'They get frightened and they see things and they feel things. An' I've lost a power o' men out of her. Fallen from aloft, you know. She's getting a bad name.' And then he'd shake his head very solemnly.

"Old Thompson was a brick in every way. When I got aboard I found that he had given me the use of a whole empty cabin opening off my own as my laboratory and workshop. He gave the carpenter orders to fit up the empty cabin with shelves and other conveniences according to my directions and in a couple of days I had all the apparatus, both mechanical and electric with which I had conducted my other ghost-hunts, neatly and safely stowed away, for I took a great deal of gear with me as I intended to interest myself by examining thoroughly into the mystery about which the captain was at once so positive and so vague.

"During the first fortnight out I followed my usual methods of making a thorough and exhaustive search. This I did with the most scrupulous care, but found nothing abnormal of any kind in the whole vessel. She was an old wooden ship and I took care to sound and measure every casement and bulkhead, to examine every exit from the holds and to seal all the hatches. These and many other precautions I took, but at the end of a fortnight I had neither seen anything nor found anything.

"The old barque was just, to all seeming, a healthy, average old-timer jogging along comfortably from one port to another. And save for an indefinable sense of what I could now describe as 'abnormal peace' about the ship I could find nothing to justify the old captain's solemn and frequent assurances that I would see soon enough for myself. This he would say often as we walked the poop together; afterwards stopping to take a long, expectant, half-fearful look at the immensity of the sea around.

"Then on the eighteenth day something truly happened. I had been pacing the poop as usual with old Thompson when suddenly he stopped and looked up at the mizzen royal which had just begun to flap against the mast. He glanced at the wind-vane near him, then ruffled his hat back and stared at the sea.

" 'Wind's droppin', mister. There'll be trouble to-night,' he said. 'D'you see yon?' And he pointed away to windward.

" 'What?' I asked, staring with a curious little thrill that was due to more than curiosity. 'Where?'

" 'Right off the beam,' he said. 'Comin' from under the sun.'

" 'I don't see anything,' I explained after a long stare at the wide-spreading silence of the sea that was already glassing into a dead calm surface now that the wind had died.

" 'Yon shadow fixin',' said the old man, reaching for his glasses.

"He focussed them and took a long look, then passed them across to me and pointed with his finger. 'Just under the sun,' he repeated. 'Comin' towards us at the rate o' knots.' He was curiously calm and matter-of-fact and yet I felt that a certain excitement had him in the throat; so that I took the glasses eagerly and stared according to his directions.

"After a minute I saw it—a vague shadow upon the still surface of the sea that seemed to move towards us as I stared. For a moment I gazed fascinated, yet ready every moment to swear that I saw nothing and in the same instant to be assured that there was truly *something* out there upon the water, apparently coming towards the ship.

"It's only a shadow, captain,' I said at length.

" 'Just so, mister,' he replied simply. 'Have a look over the stern to the norrard.' He spoke in the quietest way, as a man speaks who is sure of all his facts and who is facing an experience he has faced before, yet who salts his natural matter-of-factness with a deep and constant excitement.

"At the captain's hint I turned about and directed the glasses to the northward. For a while I searched, sweeping my aided vision to and fro over the greying arc of the sea.

"Then I saw the thing plain in the field of the glass—a vague something, a shadow upon the water and the shadow seemed to be moving towards the ship.

" 'That's queer,' I muttered with a funny little stirring at the back of my throat.

" 'Now to the west'ard, mister,' said the captain, still speaking in his peculiar level way.

"I looked to the westward and in a minute I picked up the thing—a third shadow that seemed to move across the sea as I watched it.

" 'My God, captain,' I exclaimed, 'what does it mean?'

" 'That's just what I want to know, mister,' said the captain. 'I've seen 'em before and thought sometimes I must be going mad. Sometimes they're plain an' sometimes they're scarce to be seen, an' sometimes they're like livin' things, an' sometimes they're like nought at all but silly fancies. D' you wonder I couldn't name 'em proper to you?'

"I did not answer for I was staring now expectantly towards the south along the length of the barque. Afar off on the horizon my glasses picked up something dark and vague upon the surface of the sea, a shadow it seemed which grew plainer.

" 'My God!' I muttered again. 'This is real. This—' I turned again to the eastward.

" 'Comin' in from the four points, ain't they,' said Captain Thompson and he blew his whistle.

" 'Take them three r'yals off her,' he told the mate, 'an tell one of the

boys to shove lanterns up on the sherpoles. Get the men down smart before dark,' he concluded as the mate moved off to see the orders carried out.

" 'I'm sendin' no men aloft to-night,' he said to me. 'I've lost enough that way.'

" 'They may be only shadows, captain, after all,' I said, still looking earnestly at that far-off grey vagueness on the eastward sea. 'Bit of mist or cloud floating low.' Yet though I said this I had no belief that it was so. And as for old Captain Thompson, he never even took the trouble to answer, but reached for his glasses which I passed to him.

" 'Gettin' thin an' disappearin' as they come near,' he said presently. 'I know, I've seen 'em do that oft an' plenty before. They'll be close around the ship soon but you nor me won't see them, nor no one else, but they'll be there. I wish 'twas mornin.' I do that!'

"He had handed the glasses back to me and I had been staring at each of the oncoming shadows in turn. It was as Captain Thompson had said. As they drew nearer they seemed to spread and thin out and presently to become dissipated into the grey of the gloaming so that I could easily have imagined that I watched merely four little portions of grey cloud, expanding naturally into impalpableness and invisibility.

" 'Wish I'd took them t'gallants off her while I was about it,' remarked the old man presently. 'Can't think to send no one off the decks to-night, not unless there's real need.' He slipped away from me and peered at the aneroid in the skylight. 'Glass steady, anyhow,' he muttered as he came away, seeming more satisfied.

"By this time the men had all returned to the decks and the night was down upon us so that I could watch the queer, dissolving shadows which approached the ship.

"Yet as I walked the poop with old Captain Thompson, you can imagine how I grew to feel. Often I found myself looking over my shoulder with quick, jerky glances; for it seemed to me that in the curtains of gloom that hung just beyond the rails there must be a vague, incredible thing looking inboard.

"I questioned the captain in a thousand ways, but could get little out of him beyond what I knew. It was as if he had no power to convey to another the knowledge which he possessed and I could ask no one else, for every other man on the ship was newly signed on, including the mates, which was in itself a significant fact.

" 'You'll see for yourself, mister,' was the refrain with which the captain parried my questions, so that it began to seem as if he almost *feared* to put anything he knew into words. Yet once, when I had jerked round with a nervous feeling that something was at my back he said calmly enough: 'Naught to fear, mister, whilst you're in the light and on the decks.' His attitude was extraordinary in the way in which he *accepted* the situation. He appeared to have no personal fear.

"The night passed quietly until about eleven o'clock when suddenly and without one atom of warning a furious squall burst on the vessel. There

was something monstrous and abnormal in the wind; it was as if some power were using the elements to an infernal purpose. Yet the captain met the situation calmly. The helm was put down and the sails shaken while the three t'gallants were lowered. Then the three upper topsails. Yet still the breeze roared over us, almost drowning the thunder which the sails were making in the night.

" 'Split 'em to ribbons!' the captain yelled in my ear above the noise of the wind. 'Can't help it. I ain't sendin' no men aloft to-night unless she seems like to shake the sticks out of her. That's what bothers me.'

"For nearly an hour after that, until eight bells went at midnight, the wind showed no signs of easing, but breezed up harder than ever. And all the while the skipper and I walked the poop, he ever and again peering up anxiously through the darkness at the banging and thrashing sails.

"For my part I could do nothing except stare round and round at the extraordinarily dark night in which the ship seemed to be embedded solidly. The very feel and sound of the wind gave me a sort of constant horror, for there seemed to be an unnaturalness rampant in the atmosphere. But how much this was the effect of my over-strung nerves and excited imagination, I cannot say. Certainly, in all my experience I had never come across anything just like what I felt and endured through that particular squall.

"At eight bells when the other watch came on deck the captain was forced to send all hands aloft to make the canvas fast, as he had begun to fear that he would actually lose his masts if he delayed longer. This was done and the barque snugged right down.

"Yet, though the work was done successfully, the captain's fears were justified in a sufficiently horrible way, for as the men were beginning to make their way in off the wards there was a loud crying and shouting aloft and immediately afterwards a crash down on the main deck, followed instantly by a second crash.

" 'My God! Two of 'em! shouted the skipper as he snatched a lamp from the forrard binnacle. Then down on to the main deck. It was as he had said. Two of the men had fallen, or—as the thought came to me—been thrown from aloft and were lying silent on the deck. Above us in the darkness I heard a few vague shouts followed by a curious quiet, save for the constant blast of the wind whose whistling and howling in the rigging seemed but to accentuate the complete and frightened silence of the men aloft. Then I was aware that the men were coming down swiftly and presently one after the other came with a quick leap out of the rigging and stood about the two fallen men with odd exclamations and questions which always merged off instantly into new silence.

"And all the time I was conscious of a most extraordinary sense of oppression and frightened distress and fearful expectation, for it seemed to me, standing there near the dead in that unnatural wind that a power of evil filled all the night about the ship and that some fresh horror was imminent.

"The following morning there was a solemn little service, very rough and crude, but undertaken with a nice reverence and the two men who had

fallen were tilted off from a hatch-cover and plunged suddenly out of sight. As I watched them vanish in the deep blue of the water an idea came to me and I spent part of the afternoon talking it over with the captain, after which I passed the rest of the time until sunset was upon us in arranging and fitting up a part of my electrical apparatus. Then I went on deck and had a good look round. The evening was beautifully calm and ideal for the experiment which I had in mind, for the wind had died away with a peculiar suddenness after the death of the two men and all that day the sea had been like glass.

"To a certain extent I believed that I comprehended the primary cause of the vague but peculiar manifestations which I had witnessed the previous evening and which Captain Thompson believed implicitly to be intimately connected with the death of the two sailormen.

"I believed the origin of the happenings to lie in a strange but perfectly understandable cause, *i.e.*, in that phenomenon known technically as 'attractive-vibrations.' Harzam, in his monograph on 'Induced Hauntings,' points out that such are invariably produced by 'induced vibrations,' that is, by temporary vibrations set up by some outside cause.

"This is somewhat abstruse to follow out in a story of this kind, but it was on a long consideration of these points that I had resolved to make experiments to see whether I could not produce a counter or 'repellent' vibration, a thing which Harzam had succeeded in producing on three occasions and in which I have had a partial success once, failing only because of the imperfectness of the apparatus I had aboard.

"As I have said, I can scarcely follow the reasoning further in a brief record such as this, neither do I think it would be of interest to you who are interested only in the startling and weird side of my investigations. Yet I have told you sufficient to show you the germ of my reasonings and to enable you to follow intelligently my hopes and expectations in sending out what I hoped would prove 'repellent' vibrations.

"Therefore it was that when the sun had descended to within ten degrees of the visible horizon the captain and I began to watch for the appearance of the shadows. Presently, under the sun, I discovered the same peculiar appearance of a moving greyness which I had seen on the preceding night and almost immediately Captain Thompson told me that he saw the same to the south.

"To the north and east we perceived the same extraordinary thing and I at once set my electric apparatus at work, sending out the strange repelling force to the dim, far shadows of mystery which moved steadily out of the distance towards the vessel.

"Earlier in the evening the captain had snugged the barque right down to her topsails, for as he said, until the calm went he would risk nothing. According to him it was always during calm weather that the extraordinary manifestations occurred. In this case he was certainly justified, for a most tremendous squall struck the ship in the middle watch, taking the fore upper topsail right out of the ropes.

"At the time when it came I was lying down on a locker in the saloon, but I ran up on to the poop as the vessel canted under the enormous force of the wind. Here I found the air pressure tremendous and the noise of the squall stunning. And over it all and through it all I was conscious of something abnormal and threatening that set my nerves uncomfortably acute. The thing was not natural.

"Yet, despite the carrying away of the topsail, not a man was sent aloft.

" 'Let 'em all go!' said old Captain Thompson. 'I'd have shortened her down to the bare sticks if I'd done all I wanted!'

"About two a.m. the squall passed with astonishing suddenness and the night showed clear above the vessel. From then onward I paced the poop with the skipper, often pausing at the break to look along the lighted main deck. It was on one of these occasions that I saw something peculiar. It was like a vague flitting of an impossible shadow between me and the whiteness of the well-scrubbed decks. Yet, even as I stared, the thing was gone and I could not say with surety that I had seen anything.

" 'Pretty plain to see, mister,' said the captain's voice at my elbow. 'I've only seen that once before an' we lost half of the hands that trip. We'd better be at 'ome, I'm thinkin.' It'll end in scrappin' her, sure.'

"The old man's calmness bewildered me almost as much as the confirmation his remark gave that I had really seen something abnormal floating between me and the deck eight feet below us.

" 'Good lord, Captain Thompson,' I exclaimed, 'this is simply infernal!'

" 'Just that,' he agreed. 'I said, mister, you'd see if you'd wait. And this ain't the half. You wait till you sees 'em looking like little black clouds all over the sea round the ship and movin' steady with the ship. All the same, I ain't seen 'em aboard but the once. Guess we're in for it.'

" 'How do you mean?" I asked. But though I questioned him in every way I could get nothing satisfactory out of him.

" 'You'll see, mister. You wait an' see. She's a queer un.' And that was about the extent of his further efforts and methods of enlightening me.

"From then on through the rest of the watch I leaned over the break of the poop, staring down at the maindeck and odd whiles taking quick glances to the rear. The skipper had resumed his steady pacing of the poop, but now and again he would come to a pause beside me and ask calmly enough whether I had seen any more of 'them there.'

"Several times I saw the vagueness of something drifting in the lights of the lanterns and a sort of wavering in the air in this place and that, as if it might be an attenuated something having movement, that was half-seen for a moment and then gone before my brain could record anything definite.

"Towards the end of the watch, however, both the captain and I saw something very extraordinary. He had just come beside me and was leaning over the rail across the break. 'Another of 'em there,' he remarked in his calm way, giving me a gentle nudge and nodding his head towards the port side of the maindeck, a yard or two to our left.

"In the place he had indicated there was a faint, dull shadowy spot

seeming suspended about a foot above the deck. This grew more visible and there was movement in it and a constant, oily-seeming whirling from the centre outwards. The thing expanded to several feet across, with the lighted planks of the deck showing vaguely through. The movement from the centre outwards was now becoming very distinct, till the whole strange shape blackened and grew more dense, so that the deck below was hidden.

"Then as I stared with the most intense interest there went a thinning movement over the thing and almost directly it had dissolved so that there was nothing more to be seen than a vague rounded shape of shadow, hovering and convoluting dimly between us and the deck below. This gradually thinned out and vanished and we were both of us left staring down at a piece of the decks where the planking and pitched seams showed plain and distinct in the light from the lamps that were now hung nightly on the sherpoles.

"'Mighty queer that, mister,' said the captain meditatively as he fumbled for his pipe. 'Mighty queer.' Then he lit his pipe and began again his pacing of the poop.

"The calm lasted for a week with the sea like glass and every night without warning there was a repetition of the extraordinary squall, so that the captain had everything made fast at dusk and waited patiently for a trade wind.

"Each evening I experimented further with my attempts to set up 'repellent' vibrations, but without result. I am not sure whether I ought to say that my meddling produced *no* result; for the calm gradually assumed a more unnatural permanent aspect whilst the sea looked more than ever like a plain of glass, bulged anon with the low oily roll of some deep swell. For the rest, there was by day a silence so profound as to give a sense of unrealness, for never a sea-bird hove in sight whilst the movement of the vessel was so slight as scarce to keep up the constant creak, creak of spars and gear, which is the ordinary accompaniment of a calm.

"The sea appeared to have become an emblem of desolation and freeness, so that it seemed to me at last that there was no more any known world, but just one great ocean going on for ever into the far distances in every direction. At night the strange squalls assumed a far greater violence so that sometimes it seemed as if the very spars would be ripped and twisted out of the vessel, yet fortunately no harm came in that wise.

"As the days passed I became convinced at last that my experiments were producing very distinct results, though the opposite to those which I hoped to produce, for now at each sunset a sort of gray cloud resembling light smoke would appear far away in every quarter almost immediately upon the commencement of the vibrations, with the effect that I desisted from any prolonged attempt and became more tentative in my experiments.

"At last, however, when we had endured this condition of affairs for a week, I had a long talk with old Captain Thompson and he agreed to let me carry out a bold experiment to its conclusion. It was to keep the vibra-

tions going steadily at full power from a little before sunset until the dawn and to take careful notes of the results.

"With this in view, all was made ready. The royal and t'gallant yards were sent down, all the sails stowed and everything about the decks made fast. A sea anchor was rigged out over the bows and a long line of cable veered away. This was to ensure the vessel coming head to wind should one of those strange squalls strike us from any quarter during the night.

"Late in the afternoon the men were sent into the fo'c'sle and told that they might please themselves and turn in or do anything they liked, but that they were not to come on deck during the night whatever happened. To ensure this the port and starboard doors were padlocked. Afterwards I made the first and the eighth signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual opposite each door-post, connecting them with triple lines crossed at every seventh inch. You've dipped deeper into the science of magic than I have, Arkright, and you will know what that means. Following this I ran a wire entirely around the outside of the fo'c'sle and connected it up with my machinery, which I had erected in the sail-locker aft.

" 'In any case,' I explained to the captain, 'they run practically no risk other than the general risk which we may expect in the form of a terrific storm-burst. The real danger will be to those who are "meddling." The "path of the vibrations" will make a kind of "halo" round the apparatus. I shall have to be there to control and I'm willing to risk it, but you'd better get into your cabin and the three mates must do the same.'

"This the old captain refused to do and the three mates begged to be allowed to stay and 'see the fun.' I warned them very seriously that there might be a very disagreeable and unavoidable danger, but they agreed to risk it and I can tell you I was not sorry to have their companionship.

"I set to work then, making them help where I needed help, and so presently I had all my gear in order. Then I led my wires up through the skylight from the cabin and set the vibrator dial and trembler-box level, screwing them solidly down to the poop-deck, in the clear space that lay between the foreside of the skylight and the lid of the sail locker.

"I got the three mates and the captain to take their places close together and I warned them not to move whatever happened. I set to work then, alone, and chalked a temporary pentacle about the whole lot of us, including the apparatus. Afterwards I made haste to get the tubes of my electric pentacle fitted all about us, for it was getting on to dusk. As soon as this was done I switched on the current into the vacuum tubes and immediately the pale sickly glare shone dull all about us, seeming cold and unreal in the last light of the evening.

"Immediately afterwards I set the vibrations beating out into all space and then I took my seat beside the control board. Here I had a few words with the others, warning them again whatever they might hear or see not to leave the pentacle, as they valued their lives. They nodded to this and I knew that they were fully impressed with the possibility of the unknown danger that we were meddling with.

"Then we settled down to watch. We were all in our oil-skins, for I expected the experiment to include some very peculiar behaviour on the part of the elements and so we were ready to face the night. One other thing I was careful to do and that was to confiscate all matches so that no one should forgetfully light his pipe, for the light rays are 'paths' to certain of the Forces.

"With a pair of marine glasses I was staring round at the horizon. All around, but miles away in the greying of the evening, there seemed to be a strange, vague darkening of the surface of the sea. This became more distinct and it seemed to me presently that it might be a slight, slow-lying mist far away about the ship. I watched it very intently and the captain and the three mates were doing likewise through their glasses.

" 'Coming in on us at the rate o' knots, mister,' said the old man in a low voice. 'This is what I call playin' with 'ell. I only hope it'll all come right.' That was all he said and afterwards there was absolute silence from him and the others through the strange hours that followed.

"As the night stole down upon the sea we lost sight of the peculiar incoming circle of mist and there was a period of the most intense and oppressive silence to the five of us, sitting there watchful and quiet within the pale glow of the electric pentacle.

"A while later there came a sort of strange, noiseless lightning. By noiseless I mean that while the flashes appeared to be near at hand and lit up all the vague sea around, yet there was no thunder; neither, so it appeared to me, did there seem to be any *reality* in the flashes. This is a queer thing to say but it describes my impressions. It was as if I saw a representation of lightning rather than the physical electricity itself. No, of course, I am not pretending to use the word in its technical sense.

"Abruptly a strange quivering went through the vessel from end to end and died away. I looked fore and aft and then glanced at the four men who stared back at me with a sort of dumb and half-frightened wonder, but no one said anything. About five minutes passed with no sound anywhere except the faint buzz of the apparatus and nothing visible anywhere except the noiseless lightning which came down, flash after flash, lighting the sea all around the vessel.

"Then a most extraordinary thing happened. The peculiar quivering passed again through the ship and died away. It was followed immediately by a kind of undulation of the vessel, first fore and aft and then from side to side. I can give you no better illustration of the strangeness of the movement on that glass-like sea than to say that it was just such a movement as might have been given her had an invisible giant hand lifted her and toyed with her, canting her this way and that with a certain curious and rather sickening rhythm of movement. This appeared to last about two minutes, so far as I can guess, and ended with the ship being shaken up and down several times, after which there came again the quivering and then quietness.

"A full hour must have passed during which I observed nothing except

that twice the vessel was faintly shaken and the second time this was followed by a slight repetition of the curious undulations. This, however, lasted but a few seconds and afterwards there was only the abnormal and oppressive silence of the night, punctured time after time by these noiseless flashes of lightning. All the time I did my best to study the appearance of the sea and atmosphere around the ship.

"One thing was apparent, that the surrounding wall of vagueness had drawn in more upon the ship, so that the brightest flashes now showed me no more than about a clear quarter of a mile of ocean around us, after which the sight was just lost in trying to penetrate a kind of shadowy distance that yet had no depth in it, but which still lacked any power to arrest the vision at any particular point so that one could not know definitely whether there was anything there or not, but only that one's sight was limited by some phenomenon which hid all the distant sea. Do I make this clear?

"The strange, noiseless lightning increased in vividness and the flashes began to come more frequently. This went on till they were almost continuous, so that all the near sea could be watched with scarce an intermission. Yet the brightness of the flashes seemed to have no power to dull the pale light of the curious detached glows that circled in silent multitudes about us.

"About this time I became aware of a strange sense of breathlessness. Each breath seemed to be drawn with a difficulty and presently with a sense of positive distress. The three mates and the captain were breathing with curious little gasps and the faint buzz of the vibrator seemed to come from a great distance away. For the rest there was such a silence as made itself known like a dull, numbing ache upon the brain.

"The minutes passed slowly and then, abruptly I saw something new. There were grey things floating in the air about the ship which were so vague and attenuated that at first I could not be sure that I saw anything, but in a while there could be no doubt that they were there.

"They began to show plainer in the constant glare of the quiet lightning and growing darker and darker they increased visibly in size. They appeared to be but a few feet above the level of the sea and they began to assume humped shapes.

For quite half an hour, which seemed indefinitely longer, I watched those strange humps like little hills of blackness floating just above the surface of the water and moving round and round the vessel with a slow, everlasting circling that produced on my eyes the feeling that it was all a dream.

"It was later still that I discovered still another thing. Each of those great vague mounds had begun to oscillate as it circled round about us. I was conscious at the same time that there was communicated to the vessel the beginning of a similar oscillating movement, so very slight at first that I could scarcely be sure she so much as moved.

"The movement of the ship grew with a steady oscillation, the bows lifting first and then the stern, as if she were pivoted amidships. This

ceased and she settled down on to a level keel with a series of queer jerks as if her weight were being slowly lowered again to the buoying of the water.

"Suddenly there came a cessation of the extraordinary lightning and we were in an absolute blackness with only the pale sickly glow of the electric pentacle above us and the faint buzz of the apparatus seeming far away in the night. Can you picture it all? The five of us there, tense and watchful and wondering what was going to happen.

"The thing began gently—a little jerk upward of the starboard side of the vessel, then a second jerk, then a third and the whole ship was canted distinctly to port. It continued in a kind of slow rhythmic tilting with curious timed pauses between the jerks and suddenly, you know, I saw that we were in absolute danger, for the vessel was being capsized by some enormous Force in the utter silence and blackness of that night.

" 'My god, mister, stop it!' came the captain's voice, quick and very hoarse. 'She'll be gone in a moment! She'll be gone!'

"He had got on to his knees and was staring round and gripping at the deck. The three mates were also gripping at the deck with their palms to stop them from sliding down the violent slope. In that moment came a final tilting of the side of the vessel and the deck rose up almost like a wall. I snatched at the lever of the vibrator and switched it over.

"Instantly the angle of the deck decreased as the vessel righted several feet with a jerk. The righting movement continued with little rhythmic jerks until the ship was once more on an even keel.

"And even as she righted I was aware of an alteration in the tenseness of the atmosphere and a great noise far off to starboard. It was the roaring of wind. A huge flash of lightning was followed by others and the thunder crashed continually overhead. The noise of the wind to starboard rose to a loud screaming and drove towards us through the night. Then the lightning ceased and the deep roll of the thunder was lost in the nearer sound of the wind which was now within a mile of us and making a most hideous, bellowing scream. The shrill howling came at us out of the dark and covered every other sound. It was as if all the night on that side were a vast cliff, sending down high and monstrous echoes upon us. This is a queer thing to say, I know, but it may help you to get the feeling of the thing; for that just describes exactly how it felt to me at the time—that queer, echoing, empty sense above us in the night, yet all the emptiness filled with sound on high. Do you get it? It was most extraordinary and there was a grand something about it all as if one had come suddenly upon the steeps of some monstrous lost world.

"Then the wind rushed out at us and stunned us with its sound and force and fury. We were smothered and half-stunned. The vessel went over on to her port side merely from pressure of the wind on her naked spars and side. The whole night seemed one yell and the foam roared and snowed over us in countless tons. I have never known anything like it. We were all splayed about the poop, holding on to anything we could, while the

pentacle was smashed to atoms so that we were in complete darkness. The storm-burst had come down on us.

"Towards morning the storm calmed and by evening we were running before a fine breeze; yet the pumps had to be kept going steadily for we had sprung a pretty bad leak, which proved so serious that we had to take to the boats two days later. However, we were picked up that night so that we had only a short time of it. As for the *Jarvee,* she is now safely at the bottom of the Atlantic, where she had better remain for ever."

Carnacki came to an end and tapped out his pipe.

"But you haven't explained," I remonstrated. "What made her like that? What made her different from other ships? Why did those shadows and things come to her? What's your idea?"

"Well," replied Carnacki, "in my opinion she was a *focus.* That is a technical term which I can best explain by saying that she possessed the 'attractive vibration'—that is the power to draw to her any psychic waves in the vicinity, much in the way of a medium. The way in which the 'vibration' is acquired—to use a technical term again—is, of course, purely a matter for supposition. She may have developed it during the years, owing to a suitability of conditions or it may have been in her ('of her' is a better term) from the very day her keel was laid. I mean the direction in which she lay, the condition of the atmosphere, the state of the 'electric tensions,' the very blows of the hammers and the accidental combining of materials suited to such an end—all might tend to such a thing. And this is only to speak of the *known.* The vast *unknown* it is vain to speculate upon in a brief chatter like this.

"I would like to remind you here of that idea of mine that certain forms of so-called 'hauntings' may have their cause in the 'attractive vibrations.' A building or a ship—just as I have indicated—may develop 'vibrations,' even as certain materials in combination under the proper conditions will certainly develop an electric current.

"To say more in a talk of this scope is useless. I am more inclined to remind you of the glass which will vibrate to a certain note struck upon a piano and to silence all your worrying questions with that simple little unanswered one: What *is* electricity? When we've got that clear it will be time to take the next step in a more dogmatic fashion. We are but speculating on the coasts of a strange country of mystery. In this case, I think the next best step for you all will be home and bed."

And with this terse ending, in the most genial way possible, Carnacki ushered us out presently on to the quiet chill of the Embankment, replying heartily to our various good-nights.

THE END

PARTIAL LIST OF BEST-SELLING TITLES

AVON BOOKS

232 Donald H. Clarke.....*Alabam'*
233 Robin Maugham.....*The Servant*
234 Tiffany Thayer.....*The Old Goat*
240 Willingham.....*End as a Man*
242 Lockridge.....*Untidy Murder*
245 Agatha Christie.....*The Big Four*
250 Robert Briffault.....*Carlotta*
255 Anthology.....*Tropical Passions*
257 Pierre Louys.....*Aphrodite*
258 O'Hara.....*Hope of Heaven*
260 Farrell.....*Yesterday's Love*
269 I. S. Young.....*Jadie Greenway*
271 Emile Zola.....*Nana's Mother*
272 Robert Briffault.....*Europa*
273 Elmer Rice.....*Imperial City*
276 Emily Harvin.....*Madwoman?*
279 Weidman.....*The Price Is Right*
280 J. Woodford.....*Dangerous Love*
290 Farrell.....*Gas-House McGinty*
291 Thayer.....*Call Her Savage*
293 John O'Hara.....*Hellbox*
298 Swados.....*House of Fury*
300 Shulman.....*The Amboy Dukes*
301 Hilton.....*We Are Not Alone*
303 Robert Sylvester.....*Dream Street*
304 Woolf.....*Song Without Sermon*
305 Stuart.....*God Wears a Bow Tie*
306 Thomason.....*Gone to Texas*
308 Hector France
.....*Musk, Hashish and Blood*
309 Caldwell.....*Midsummer Passion*
311 Anthology.....*Saturday Evening Post Western Stories*
213 Agatha Christie
.....*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*
313 Lion Feuchtwanger
.....*The Ugly Duchess*
314 Van Vechten.....*Nigger Heaven*
315 Merritt.....*The Metal Monster*
316 Christie.....*Murder in Three Acts*
318 Juliet Lowell.....*Dear Sir*
320 Dwight Babcock
.....*Gorgeous Ghoul Murder Case*
322 Leslie Charteris
.....*The Saint in New York*
322 Weidman.....*Slipping Beauty*
323 Guy Endore...*The Furies in Her Body*
325 James Hilton.....*Ill Wind*
326 Dortort.....*Burial of the Fruit*
327 Tiffany Thayer.....*One Man Show*
328 Sayers.....*Strong Poison*
329 W. R. Burnett.....*Little Caesar*
330 Horan.....*Desperate Men*
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