COVEN 13

June 1970
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WITCHCRAFT

HORROR

THE SUPERNATURAL

ALAN CAILLOU
Leona!

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The Little People

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Witch Fish

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BOOK

WITCHCRAFT

HORROR

THE SUPERNATURAL

ALL NEW STORIES

Vol. 1, No. 2, Jan. 1970

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EDITDR'S CAULDRON

By ARTHUR H. LANDIS

Having discussed in the first two issues of COVEN 13, the questions of policy and position, it now behooves us to touch upon some of the more mundane problems we have come upon. Among these are: 1. The fact that certain material badly needed by COVEN is exceedingly hard to come by, and 2. That the question of proper distribution of our product can–if we are not given a fair shake–be the proverbial straw that brings the elephant to his knees.

Let's take the first one first. We have, hopefully, described ourselves as a vehicle for the horror, the neo-gothic, and the tale of witchcraft and dark sorcery, right? We have also in each of our first two issues given an indication of our needs by story content and stories used. In this last we refer to our Table of Contents which readily shows that we use one serialized novel per issue one 20,000 word, feature-length novelette; two shorts of between 4,000 and 6,000 words, and four shorts of from 2,000 to 3,500 words. Now! How have our gentle readers who would be writers–pros and otherwise–responded to this quite clear presentation of needs?

In a word: poorly. Of the shorts in the category 2,000 words to 6,000, we have received, literally, a zillion manuscripts–all having to do with rehashed versions––gimmicked up like xmas trees––of vampire stories, pact-with-the-devil stories, werewolf stories, monster stories etc., which would make Stoker, Goethe, Endore, and Shelley turn in their graves. Don't misunderstand me. We do not reject tales in the above categories. But, our gentle writer must remember when he attempts one–*it has already been done in a thousand ways.* Rare indeed is even the exceptional story of this type. How absolutely delightful to our reading department then, is a tale like THE SHADOW TRADER, when it crosses our desk; or WITCH FISH, by an absolutely new writer, like Dennis Quinn. How stimulating indeed to come upon a true ghost story such as a MESSAGE

FOR BROTHER, or the altogether unique ghost story in this present issue, THE STRAWHOUSE PAVILLION.

What I am essentially emphasizing here can be encompassed in two words: originality and uniqueness, and without the tiresome crutch of the use of time-worn themes.

To all those who would write for us, we suggest, we insist—and we demand, that you take a moment to study our book, and that you also keep forever in mind that material for stories for COVEN 13 is all around us, today and now; and the subject matter for plot does not lie in the mouldering pages of the greats of yesterday. To emulate them, yes! To copy them, no! A writer for COVEN should ask himself just why ROSEMARY'S BABY made it; why BELL BOOK AND CANDLE did likewise—and why, if you will, did Robert Bloch's PSYCHO keep millions of people from their showers for as long as the memory of his quite memorable work lasted. The answer, we submit, will be found generally in the 'contemporary' vignette with the occult twist, the horror twist, and the capability to meld the fear of the unknown with the reality of the moment. Still on this particular point, we are somewhat miffed that we have had few true horror stories. We would like a lot of them; in effect the kind of story which, in the hands of a competent writer would scare the hell out of him in the act of writing it. *That, to us, would be a horror story.* As the editor of COVEN 13, I assure one and all that my year would be perfect were I to arrive at my desk one morning to find a second HAUNTING OF HILLHOUSE awaiting me to serialize. How fantastically wonderful it would be to be the discoverer of another THE UNINVITED.

Lastly, in the area of stories; their content and structure. We have mentioned our table of contents in which we list per issue, one serialized novel and one feature novelette of 20,000 words. Of the literally hundreds of manuscripts that have crossed our desk, *not one has been a novel.* Concommitantly, we have had just three stories of a length of 20,000 words. What's with you guys? Are you writers or dilettantes? Would you like us to commission the pros to fill these areas? And thus, by that very act deny you the possibility of competing? Don't forget for a second that once our money is spent, it's *spent!* And the law of 'free enterprise' would then *demand* that *any* of this no-longer needed material be returned posthaste. . .Think about that!

Point two of our mundane problems is in an equally serious category, but thankfully has nothing to do with the format, style, structure, or content of the book.

In a way I wish it did. For I know

that in the long haul problems in these areas will be solved.

Our second problem is in the area of distribution of the book, itself. Therefore the problem is a big one. Ever wonder how books, magazines et al get on your local book or newsstand? The answer is that it ain't easy. At the risk of boring the hell out of you I'll toss out a few particulars.

To begin with: Newsstands and facsimiles are serviced by national distributers who, in turn, are the go-between, as it were, between the publisher and the owner of a newsstand, drug-store, liquor-store, or whatever. Now! Since the distributer is the one to get your magazine placed on the stands, he is the one to convince the stand owner to take it on as a marketable property. Therefore the publisher must first convince the distributor that his magazine is worth handling. Mock-ups of prototype copies are made, meetings are held, decisions arrived at. Fine! Your distributer agrees to take you on. What next? Well, in order for it to be worthwhile for the distributer, the publisher must print a minimum of –80,000 copies or so. At that point an on-sale date is decided upon and the 80,000 copies are sent to from 500 to 700 wholesalers around the country who then distribute directly to the stands. As stated, it is your national distributer's job to see to it that the stands accept your magazine. But this takes time. The distributer cannot force the stand-owner to take the magazine.

Stand owners, being essentially what they are–small business men with minds to match (even when they control chain food and produce markets) recognize only one thing: *profits!* To them a new magazine, in terms of making a buck, is always a loser: 'Life Magazine we'll take, and maybe Newsweek– but The Ornithologist Journal–un-unh–no pornography!'

So there you are. You've had to print 80,000 copies of your magazine, and perhaps but 40,000 are actually given exposure to the reading public. This means that your costs–which you absolutely hadn't counted on–are like about 200% of what you expected. How does that grab you?

In the case of COVEN 13, we can say that we have been *well received by the reader.* COVEN'S on-stand sales average 60% to 100%. . *It's the 40% to 50% of our copies that never reach the stands that we have to worry about.*

Another difficulty in the area of distribution is that due to the very complexity of the set-up: national distributers, seven hundred wholesalers, thousands of stands, large small, and medium–there is one helluva lot of paper work. Why do I throw that tid-bit of information into the kitty? Well, because this means that the average *total* pay-off

for each issue of your mag is from four to five months from the time it goes on sale. Which means that your gentle publisher must stand the fantastic expense of five months of production before ever a *total* payment on *any* issue is made—as per contract with distributer.

Boggles the mind, doesn't it? Now you know why many good 'little' mags never make it; why many spanking new S.F. magazines short story mags, and gems of literary mags, never make it.

COVEN 13 WILL MAKE IT! We intend surviving all the above nonsense. It's true that we don't sell SEX, and we don't sell BOATS, and we don't sell CYCLES, and we don't even cast your daily horoscope so you'll know when it's safe to go out of the house. . .But COVEN 13 does sell entertainment of the kind you simply can't get anywhere else. We stand alone in that respect, and we're damned proud of it.

Now that we've got all that off our chest—a form of badly needed therapy—let me take this opportunity to drive home a point. We are *not* immune to birth-pangs or risks. And though, as stated, COVEN 13 intends surviving all hazards, I would like to personally, strongly, and directly, *solicit your subscription to COVEN 13, as an additional guarantee that we will do this.* Think about it. Winter's coming, and there will be a lot of fireside nights.

Yours in the COVEN for a snowstorm of subs, manuscripts, and fan letters.

Arthur H. Landis/Editor

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LEONA!

By Alan Caillou

Illustrated by
William Stout

For sheer terror in the world of the 'adult' gothic, Alan Caillou has no peer. Let it be understood that he is a master of the very 'arts' of which he writes. SO DIM ALL LIGHTS BUT ONE–IF YOU DARE. . .

The dog was howling, a shaggy great brute with wet and unkempt fur, sitting back on its haunches and howling into the storm. It always howled when the wind blew from the direction of the graveyard. It was as though the wind picked up the scent of death and the dog could smell it.

The creaking was the sound of the old elm trees, bent over by the wind, ready to break and fall; their leaves hissed angrily. Somewhere, a shutter banged noisily against the white stone wall of the house, washed now by the pounding rain.

For one brief instant, the whole sky was lit by a sheet of blue-white lightning, a sudden, startling brightness, against which the outlines of

the dark trees were craggy silhouettes; there was a burst of thunder in the same instant (the storm was directly overhead) that seemed savage enough to shatter the house itself, even though it had stood there for more than four hundred years.

The rain beat down on the house, trying to drive it into the earth, and the dog raced for cover, frightened, its tail between its legs, a nothing dog. It found a disused tunnel that was the old coal-shute that led to the cellar, and crawled inside it, and yapped suddenly when the tin sheets gave way and dropped it to the cellar floor. But it picked itself up and wandered around for a while, from one stone vault to another.

The rooms down here were small, and confining, and leading one into the other through ancient stone archways. Mostly, they bore the smell of damp and grime and of long disuse; but in one of them the air was ripe with the scent of frequent fires, and of strange, interesting odors that the dog could not identify and, somehow, made its hair stand on end. But wandering, it found the scent of human habitation, the friendly feel of silk draped over a table. . .It curled itself up wetly and shivered. And soon, it began to howl again. Even here, the sound of the storm was monstrous.

For a while, it just sat there and howled, and it stopped when the door was opened and the light went on, and it crawled, shivering, to its master.

He was standing in the doorway in his dressing gown, staring at the dog, his eyes red-rimmed with broken sleep, his hair touseled, his chin unshaven. A bath towel served as a scarf under the robe, a towel of red and green and yellow stripes, with his name neatly embroidered on it in one corner: *Christian V. Althing.*

He pointed a finger at the dog, not too steadily; he was still a little drunk, a little heavy with schnapps. He said huskily: "I'm going to fix you, you stupid damn dog." The dog crawled over to him, whining, looking for love. He picked it up in his arms and laid it down on the table there, a long low table made of oak beams that had been taken from the wreck of one of the ships that had raided and looted the city of Visby; that had been in the year 1361, when the Danish King Valdemat Atterdag had swept with his hordes across Gottland, burning, looting, raping. . . He called the table his altar, and lying across it was a long thin strip of black and purple silk, like a table-runner, with a Pentagraph design in blood red at the center, its ends trailing on the stone floor; this was the friendly silk the dog had found.

Now there were strong leather straps bolted to the table, all the way down both sides; a spread-eagled bat had been nailed to each of the heavy legs, dried-out now and faded to a powdery brown, and a bag of soot hung on a rope from the ceiling

directly over it.

He strapped the whimpering, fawning dog down firmly, then slit its throat and collected the flowing blood in a carved wooden bowl; round the bowl, in neat, incised lettering, the legend had been carved, in old English:

The fiend that goeth at night,
Women full oft to beguile,
Incubus is named by right. . ..

He always felt uncomfortable when he used this bowl; but it was one of his most prized possessions. The man who'd carved it, one Matthew Hoskins, had been broken on the wheel, in England, in the year 1639, for casting his spell on the local Magistrate's wife. He felt uncomfortable because he wasn't really entitled to use it; he had searched and searched through the secret book, for hours on end, but had found absolutely no prohibition against it. It was only when he failed—as he nearly always did—that he worried, thinking that he had perhaps broken some unwritten law, some law the scribe had not thought fit to mention, by using it like this; but he was a determined man, and he would say to himself: "No! If it were wrong, the book would tell me so. . ." And once, immediately after he had used it, one of his attempts had succeeded beyond his wildest hopes, a success that had made him delirious—and frightened half out of his mind at the same time. (That was the occasion when he'd dug up the grave, and he'd known then, *known* absolutely, that he was on the right track.)

When the blood had stopped flowing and the bowl was full, he pulled up a chair, made himself comfortable, and began to sip from it slowly. The book was on his knee, and he went on with his studies.

When he was at his best, as he was this day, Christian Althing was a genial and affable man. True, the death of his daughter less than a year ago had turned him to introspection and had taken, sometimes, the edge off his geniality, so that on occasion he would sit for hours just staring at nothing, the thoughts turning over and over in his mind so fast that he could scarcely keep track of them. He liked to sit quietly in the evening, his secret book on his knee, and meditate, listening to the sound of the quiet surf, the waves breaking over the rocks. Even in the cellar he could hear them.

But now, it was bright day, and the sun was shining, and there was a cold breeze blowing up from the beach, bringing with it the sound of the sea. There was the whistle of the train coming into the little station on the mainland—another friendly sound!—and Mr. Althing looked at his watch and said to himself: "In another thirty minutes, they'll be here. . ." There was just time to go and talk to Leona.

He got up and patted his paunch,

drawing in his stomach tightly and holding his shoulders back, not really consciously trying to make an impression but wanting to look his best; at forty-seven he was still straight and strong and sensibly healthy. He walked briskly across the lawn, through the small copse of hazel saplings, over the tiny meadow where the solitary Red Poll cow turned to stare at him uncomprehendingly, and then he vaulted lightly over the low stone wall into the churchyard. Fifty-three graves, he'd counted them.

Leona's was marked by a simple stone cross, not as pretentious as some of the others, a cross of beautifully-carved blue granite that he'd brought over from the mainland. The grass here was neat and well-kept, and there were fresh flowers in a cut-crystal vase as well as the little border of Baby Faurax roses—she'd always loved the Miniatures!—that he'd planted there only last season and were already blooming splendidly; a good sign, he thought, of the life down there that was only interrupted, not gone forever; how did the book put it?

And when the bonnes be gone,
and the soul shall be left in the
grounde,
there shalle be holie purpure
in the flowers that grow there. . .

The amethyst petals of the roses were shining splendidly.

He stood there for a while, his hands at his side, just staring at the grave, listening to the silence. He ran his hands lightly down the sides of his face, dragging his cheeks downwards, his mouth open, and took a deep breath to stop the tears from coming into his eyes. And then he dropped suddenly to his knees, his hands still at his face, and began to cry, quite softly, knowing there was no one there to see his agony. He let the tears come, and when they stopped, he just lay down, stretched out on the damp turf at full length, his head by the gravestone, the mound of earth beside him; he stared up at the blue autumn sky, trying to make his mind a blank and not quite succeeding. He turned, after a little while, and rolled over onto his side, laying a gentle arm across the grave, holding himself tight to it, seeking the life and the warmth he missed so much.

He said: "Did I do wrong, my love? Did I do wrong? It's what the book says, in part, and for the rest, I'm just. . .guessing. But I know so much *more* now, and I'm sure I'm right! And it won't be long now, not very long." He stood up and sighed, and bit his lip, and said: "That stupid damn boy. . ." The tears were there again.

He wiped the wet away from his cheeks, and rearranged the cut flowers while he composed himself, and then he turned and walked smartly back over the little meadow and through the copse to his garden. And when he reached the rose-bed,

he was smiling again. He found the secateurs, and began selecting the roses he would cut. Two or three of the dark red, blood-red Papa Maillands, one or two of the apricot-colored Beautes, a few of the beautiful pink Prima Ballerinas. . .He began to cut, and then he stopped and said to himself suddenly: "No, I can do better than that." He changed his mind, and cut only the Papa Maillands, finding a good dozen of them and interspersing them with fronds of pale green fern. He chuckled to himself at his secret joke.

He glanced at his watch, and walked to the garden gate.

And there they were, just coming up from the beach. The little boat that had brought them was just pulling away, and Mr. Ferry-man and Boatbuilder Hanssen was waving a friendly greeting to *him*. He waved back, and then went down to meet them. He looked at the girl, surprised—but not knowing why he should be—by her delicate, graceful beauty.

And Per was looking better than he'd ever seen him, smiling and looking sideways at his new wife, his dark, neurotic eyes filled with pleasure. "It's good to see you again, Christian, I've been too long away." He laughed quickly and said: "And this, of course, is Greta. Greta, my love, Christian Althing, the best friend a man ever had. My father, my brother, my uncle, all rolled into one."

He clapped Per on the shoulder and said gaily: "A real beauty, Per, and I wish you both the best of marriages ever, the very best." He held out the flowers with an awkward little gesture. "For you, my dear Greta, red roses for love." He paused just the slightest instant and said: "Blood red, the color of flowing blood, aren't they beautiful? The only thing I do well is raise roses. But if a man can shove a piece of stick into the ground, and watch roses like these grow from it, then his place in Heaven is assured, wouldn't you say? A dead stick, that's all it is, and it grows again because it's not *really* dead, and there's a lesson there for us, isn't there?" He took her hand and shook it gravely, bowing very slightly, and said: "And I hope you'll be very, very happy here, both of you."

The stilted manner was contagious. She smiled at him and inclined her head, showing her rather uneven but very white teeth. "Mr. Althing. . .."

"Oh, for God's sake, call me Christian, it's all one family now! And we're the only people in the world, the three of us. No one else on the island except old Willi, and he doesn't count, of course."

She was extraordinarily attractive, with long fair hair and pale blue eyes and a little turned up nose with freckles on it. As tall, as slim, as Leona; only the hair. . .Greta's was a few shades fairer, though just as

long.

She said: "Christian, then. . .Are you sure we won't be upsetting your routine, descending on you like this?"

"Upsetting it? For God's sake! Per upset it when he went away, but he found a wonderful treasure to bring back, and I'm very glad."

He swung the gate to behind them, and as they walked to the old house he saw her looking around curiously, more interested in her surroundings than he'd have expected her to be. Over the tops of the trees, the spire of the abandoned church was visible.

She said: "Per tells me it's not used any more."

Althing nodded. "The village here died a natural death when they opened up the fish-cannery on the mainland, everyone left, why should they stay here? For a while, there was just the parson left, preaching to empty pews. . .And then they stopped ringing the bells, and at last they gave up altogether. Now, there's just one man to. . .."

He broke off, and Greta looked at him steadily and said: "To tend the graves."

"Yes. To tend the graves. Old Willi. He has nowhere to go, so. . . he stays here."

Per had stopped, his dark eyes troubled, and was staring at the church-spire too. Greta looked at him and waited, and then dropped her eyes. He said at last, very quietly: "I'll go over there this evening, just for a little while." His face was pale and drawn, the face of a poet who wrote sonnets to Death. Althing said gently: "Go now, Per, we'll understand, both of us." He was aware that Greta looked at him quickly, almost startled; but then her expression changed, and she said: "Yes, go now, Per. It's best if you go now."

Per looked at her for a long time, the sun casting well-defined shadows under his cheekbones, his black brows drawn. He said, quite roughly: "You're not going to treat me like a child, are you?" He took the sting away by smiling quickly, a wry, deprecating sort of smile. "All right, if you're sure no one's going to mind. . ." He moved briskly away across the lawn, and Althing called after him: "Look out for the Red Poll, she's got a savage temper!" He took Greta's arm and said confidentially: "I think we have to talk a little, no?"

As he guided her to the house, he said: "It's not going to be easy for you, Greta, but I'm sure this is the best way. Otherwise, he'll never get her out of his system. Never."

She nodded a little, unhappily. "Yes, yes, I'm sure you're right. He must have been very much in love with her."

"Very much, a passion bordering on madness. He's always been. . . Well, you know, a little *fierce.*"

She looked at him somberly. "It was your idea in the first place,

wasn't it? For us to come here?"

He didn't try to hide it, why should he? "Yes, it was." He said persuasively: "Greta, I've known Per all my life, ever since he was born, not more than a couple of miles from here, on the other end of the island. His father and I were very close friends, and when the old man. . .died, I promised I'd take good care of Per, and I've always done that. There was no mother, you know, she died when Per was born, and he's spent more time in my house than anywhere else. I watched him and my Leona growing up together, and it just seemed. . .well, the natural thing, that one day they'd get married. They'd have made a fine couple, and I'm not afraid to tell you that this thing has got to come out in the open so that we can fight it together. You and I. The shadow of Leona. . .her *ghost*, if you like, is an obsession with him. Ever since the accident, it's driven him closer and closer to the edge of. . .insanity. But now, you've pulled him up sharp, you've arrested the motion. Now it's up to both of us to turn him away from the direction he was plunging in and get him back to normal."

He opened the front door and stood aside for her to pass. "You know, I take it, about. . .about the suicide attempt?"

"Yes, I know. He showed me his wrists."

"A good sign, at least."

"He said that if you hadn't broken down the door to his room. . .."

"Yes, he'd have been dead. He wanted to. . .to join her."

He frowned. He could feel the tears coming, and he didn't want them now, not at this moment of time. More than anything, he didn't want tears now! He bit his lip hard and said: "And now, you'll take her place, for both of us."

He was thinking: *this inconsequential slip of a girl! How could she ever take Leona's place?* The fury was rising in him, and he forced himself to speak cheerfully. He said: "You've brought him a great love, and that's what he needs."

In the big living-room, a log fire was burning, even though the day was warm. Stone blocks on two sides of the room, and oak panelling on the others, with big French windows that looked out onto the orchard, with the beach beyond it and the sharp curve to the rocks where. . .

He said pointing,: "It was over among those rocks there. A sudden storm came up while they were swimming, and they stayed there in the downpour and laughed at it, and then. . .then a wave just took her out to sea and threw her back under the rocks somewhere. It was the next day before we found her. She was. . . wedged under the Devil's Rock." He was taking the blood-red flowers from her, placing them in a silver bowl and saying: "We'll put these in your room later on."

She did not answer his smile. "And could he have saved her? Possibly?"

Althing shook his head. "The sea was a maelstrom, nothing could have lived in it. Nothing, that is, except Per. He's a marvellously strong swimmer."

"And still, he blames himself."

He said firmly: "It was not his fault." He was thinking: *He should never have let her swim once the storm started. And he should have gone after her faster, in those first few moments. He could have saved her. . ..*

He said again: "The next day, we found her, and then. . ." He broke off, brooding.

Greta said, shuddering: "He told me about. . .about the crabs."

There was a little pause. Althing said at last, very low: "Yes, there are a lot of crabs in the waters here. Perhaps that's what it was that. . ." He sighed. "Not just that she died, but what happened to her afterwards. He was like a madman."

Greta sat down on the leather sofa and stared into the fire. "And you're sure it's the right thing to do? To bring him back here?"

He took her shoulders in his two strong hands. "I am sure! As sure as I've ever been of anything. It was I who advised him to find himself a wife, and I was right. And I'm just as right when I say this: together, you and I, and here in this house, we'll lay that ghost forever. And then. . .then, all the wounds will be healed."

Greta said miserably: "On the first night of our honeymoon, he woke up in the early hours of the morning, and screamed, and thrashed about, and called me. . .Leona. I was terrified when I saw his face."

Althing was peering at her intently: "And in the morning?"

"In the morning, when I told him, he said: 'I can't get her out of my mind, Greta. . .' It was then that he suggested, almost fearfully, that we come back here. I thought at the time that it was really someone else's idea."

"Yes, it was mine. Take my word for it, Greta. It's the best way." He smiled and held her hand—so cold!—and said: "We'll fight it and, we'll lick it. He was as close to madness as a man can be, and we've got to make sure he never crosses that line."

And then Per came back, smiling self-consciously. He said: "The grave's well cared for, Christian. I'm glad." He sat down beside Greta and held her hand and said: "Bear with me for just a little while, can you do that?"

She leaned in and kissed him, and Althing watched them together, beaming.

Per said: "What happened to Wolf, where is he?" He put his arm around Greta and said: "I told you about Wolf, the scraggiest damn dog you ever did see."

Althing said sadly: "He died, Per,

of old age. It comes to all of us in time."

Greta said: "Oh what a shame! I'd heard so much about Wolf."

Althing looked at her strangely, and when she raised her eyebrows, he shook his head and said: "Old age, he'd been around here for a very long time. I was terribly upset about it."

Later that night, after dinner, Althing left the two young lovers to themselves and went for a stroll along the beach. Just far enough to get his shoes all covered with sand, in case anyone noticed them, and then up onto the Devil's Rock. . .The two men had been drinking heavily, celebrating; more than a bottle and a half of schnapps between them, though Greta had drunk only tea.

And then he doubled back quickly to the house, and stood for a long time in the shrubbery outside the French windows, watching them; he seldom drew the curtains at night, and the room was brightly lit. The wind was howling, strengthening. He watched them as they sat together on the sofa, holding hands, sometimes kissing. He saw Per yawn exaggeratedly, and Greta laughed silently and nodded her head, and they got up to go upstairs to their bedroom.

Then Althing came into the house. He was frowning, deep in thought, with a very worried look on his face; he hoped he might even be a little pale. Per, he saw at once, had taken even more of the schnapps, and he was glad. They were just beginning to climb the stairs as he came in through the front door, his feet loud on the stone floor, and Greta turned and smiled at him happily: "It's a shame to go to bed so early on such a splendid night, isn't it? I love the sound of the wind. . ."

He didn't answer her, but stood there with a taut, distracted look on his face. Her expression changed quickly. She said, suddenly alarmed: "What is it, Christian? Is something wrong?"

He still did not answer. He shook his head and half-stumbled away, and from the corner of his eye he saw her throw a quick look at Per and then come running to him.

"Is something wrong, Christian? You look as though you've seen a ghost. . .."

He came to his senses then, recovering admirably. Per, he saw, was staring at him, holding onto the bannister for support. "What is it, Christian?"

He swallowed hard. "No, it's nothing, I was just. . .just miles away." I'm sorry. Go to bed." They were worried, both of them, but they turned and began to climb the stairs again, and he waited till they were at the top and then said: "Were you out there just now, Greta? Did you go out?"

Greta turned back to look at him, her eyes wide, sure that something

was terribly wrong. "No, we were both in the living-room."

"All the time?"

"Yes, why?"

"You didn't go down by the rocks there?"

"No, why?" She insisted: "Why, what is it?"

Althing blinked his eyes rapidly and turned away, and he mumbled to himself: "Oh God, dear God. . ." He stumbled into the living-room and closed the door; and waited.

He only had to wait a moment. The door opened, and Per was there, quite sober suddenly, moving towards him; he was glad it wasn't Greta, but he'd have been ready for her too. Only, like this, it was better, more logical.

Per said steadily: "All right, Christian, what is it? I think you'd better tell me."

Althing said: "Greta was out there by the rocks just now, I saw her. She shouldn't be there at night, Per, it's dangerous, you *know* it's dangerous."

"But she wasn't! She was with me, all the time!"

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure."

Althing collapsed in his chair and ran a hand over his eyes. He said slowly: "I went for a stroll on the beach, and when I looked up at the rocks she was standing there. . .My God, I saw her! Only her hair seemed darker, like. . .like Leona's. . ." He broke off and whimpered, and brushed away a tear and said: "Forget it, Per, it was my imagination."

But Per was already racing for the door. He heard the front door slam, and when he went into the hall, Greta was still standing at the top of the stairs, looking down at him with her hands to her face. He stopped short and turned and ran up to her and gripped her by the shoulders and said almost savagely: "Greta! You must promise me. . .never talk of this to Per, never, do you hear?"

She said: "In God's name, Christian. . ."

He calmed down then, and said urgently: "A crisis, and I know how to handle it, I've had them before. But for Per's sake, never speak of it, you understand? Never mention a word about it, will you promise me?"

"Christian, how can I, I must *know*. . .."

He said: "When the time comes, my dear, *I* will tell you, I promise you. So, will you do as I ask?"

"All right." She didn't sound too certain.

He said: "For his sake, as well as mine."

She nodded. "All right then."

"Then go to bed. When he comes back, he'll be fine. I'll send him up to you, and. . .remember your promise."

She didn't understand at all what was going on, but she thought: *for Per's sake, Christian knows him bet-*

*ter than I do. . .*She went slowly to her room.

When Per came back, his face was white, a terrible thing to see. There was a piece of white lawn in his hand, and he held it out and said, in a ghastly voice: "Leona's handkerchief."

Althing stared at him. "What!"

He said again, holding it out: "A handkerchief, and it's Leona's, her name on it."

Althing took it from him and turned it over and over. He looked steadily at Per and said: "Where, Per? Where did you find it?"

"Up on the Devil's Rock."

Althing said: "Per, I don't know how it got there, I don't think I even *want* to know. But somewhere, there's a logical explanation, there's *got* to be."

"My God, my god. . .."

Althing put the handkerchief away in his own pocket. He said earnestly: "A mystery, and there *must* be an explanation, and somewhere there *is*. . .But now, for the present, we've something else to worry about."

Per looked at him.

Althing said: "Greta. She's afraid. . .afraid that sometimes. . ." He was speaking very carefully now; it was a danger point: "She's afraid that you're not always quite yourself. We mustn't worry her. We mustn't tell her about this. You understand? You must say nothing."

Per burst out angrily: "How can I tell her nothing? She'll be waiting to ask me. . .."

"No. She's a good and wise woman, Per, and she won't ask you anything. Let her forget it. Sooner or later we'll figure out what happened, and then we'll tell her. But meanwhile, you hear me? Not a word."

Per stared at him for a long time, his eyes filled with a kind of terrified anxiety. He turned, then, and went slowly up the stairs to his room. And, just as Christian had said, Greta asked him nothing. How could she? She was already asleep; or was she? She lay on her back with her eyes closed, and did not answer when he spoke to her, and when he moved in beside her she stirred and moved closer to him and held him tight. Soon, he was uneasily asleep; she opened her eyes and looked at him.

Althing unlocked the cellar door, went down and put on the lamp, took out his secret book, and studied it for a while in silence. He found a toad he'd caught that day and had placed in a jar, and now he crushed it with his two strong hands until its bowels were breaking out, then pulled out the entrails and beat them to a pulp in a pestle. He put the pestle away with the jar of the dog's blood, locked the cupboard door, and went up to his room to sleep.

He slept well, a slight smile on his handsome face.

The old man who looked after the graves still wound the clock in the spire of the abandoned church. Every ten days, regularly, he would climb unsteadily up the ricketty wooden staircase and wind the heavy brass handle, using both hands; fifteen turns. Sometimes, on his way down, he would fondle the heavy velvet wrappings of the bell-ropes, and stand there handling them for a little while, dreaming of the days, forty years ago, when he was a bell-ringer himself.

When he'd first started, he remembered, he was a slip of a boy who weighed a scraggy hundred and twenty pounds, and the parson had told him: 'You'll never manage a rope, boy, it'll break your head against the rafters. . ..' But he'd persisted, and at last the parson had given way to his pleas. And the first time he'd taken his place with the others, seasoned bell-ringers all of them, the head ringer—what was his name?—had said, grinning: 'When I nod my head, boy, that's when you bring the rope down. Don't wait for the sound or you'll be a beat behind us. Just watch my head, and when I nod, that's when you pull. And go up with it, let it take you off your feet, just hang on tight and you'll come down again real gentle. . ..Then watch my head again. *Da, da, da, dee-dee, da, dee-dee, da dum.* . .. You're the *dum*, boy, but don't wait for the sound, watch my head. That's a heavy bell for your first try, but don't let it scare you. . .."

He'd watched the old man's white hair, and at the nod he'd bent his body and pulled the velvet rope-bindings down to the floor, just letting it touch the way they'd showed him, and then he'd held on tight while the massive bronze bell's weight, on the rebound, pulled him slowly, gently, up to the rafters, and then had let him just as gently down again to wait for the next white-haired nod.

In time, he'd been able to keep his feet on the ground, and had learned how to let the rope slide through his hands and then find just the right place again, at just the right moment. In time he'd progressed to the *dee-dee*, a lighter bell but much harder to handle. In time, he'd learned to ring all of them. And in time, all the other bell-ringers had died, one by one, till he was the oldest of them all.

And then. . .then, the church had died, like the old men, and he'd been kept on, alone, to look after the grounds, and the building, and the old church clock. One day, they had told him, the church would perhaps be de-sanctified; but till then, it was still a holy place, and a place full of memories too.

His name was Willi, and he was ninety-eight years old, a little unsteady on his feet now. He'd lived on this island all his life, and had passed the last eighty years among the graves here; the bodies buried

there were his wards, his children. And never a day's illness, either.

Except, that is. . ..He sighed. Just a few months ago, he'd been chatting with the fine gentleman over at the house, Mr. Althing, and as they talked, a drowsiness had come over him, and he'd collapsed, and they'd carried him over to the hospital on the mainland, where he'd lain for a week uncommonly close to joining his wards. . ..But he'd recovered at last, and had come back to find his graves just as they'd always been—(he'd worried about them)—with the grass in need of cutting, and a fine new bed of young roses planted over the grave of Leona Althing. Purple roses, Mr. Althing had said; a strange color for a rose!

The church clock, just rewound not twelve hours ago, struck three o'clock in the morning. Per woke with a start; or, rather, he did not wake, but just sat up suddenly and threw the blankets off and stared sightlessly into the darkness, and then screamed out: "Leona!" He screamed the name again: "Leona!"

Beside him, Greta reached out to comfort him. She was quite calm, and competent, and ready, for this was part of the pattern. She drew his head down to her naked breast, with her warm arms round his shoulder, and whispered to him: "It's all right, Per, I'm close beside you, it's all right. . .."

He mumbled, waking now. "Leona? Is that you, Leona?" And then he was wide awake, and he held Greta tight and said: "My God, I heard myself, and I called you Leona. . .."

"It doesn't matter, a nightmare. Sleep, my darling."

But he pulled away from her and sat up, and buried his head in his hands, drawing up his knees. He said, shocked by his own dreams: "My God, I saw. . .I saw Leona, and she was crushing a toad to death, with her bare hands, its insides were. . . were squelching out. It was horrible!" He held her tight, and mumbled: "Be patient with me, my darling. I love you so much. . .."

She lay back and pulled him down to her, and he rested his lips against her breasts; she suckled him, like a baby. And soon, he was asleep. All night long she lay awake, thinking, wondering, and worrying.

And early in the morning, while he was still sleeping, she went down to the kitchen to make some tea, wearing the camel-hair dressing gown that Christian had sent her as a present. She found wood piled near the old-fashioned iron stove, and lit the fire and put the kettle on, and stood there by the window waiting for it to boil. She could see the small boat coming in from the distant mainland, two men and a woman on board, and she looked up at the grandfather-clock that stood against the half-timbered wall; twenty minutes to six. In twenty minutes they'd

be here, on the dot, the gardener and the couple who came over every day to clean the house and straighten up the grounds. Just the one wing of the old house, with its own gardens, that overlooked the beach and the Devil's Rock; the rest had been closed off many years since, when Leona's mother had died; mysteriously, some said, though Christian had told her it was just an inexplicable illness.

Now there was only the kitchen, the library, the dining-room, the great hall, and three of the upstairs bedrooms; and, of course, the cellar, which was kept locked nowadays because one of the walls was threatening to collapse—after all these years! It was a maze of small anterooms and passages down here, some of them dark and dank, some light and airy; it was here that he used to catch the live bats, a cap on his head to stop them fastening their talons in his hair. The rest was a matter of locked rooms and furniture covered over with old sheets, with the gardens on the other side of the house running wild, the ramblers taking over and making a jungle of it all. (Except, of course, that this was where those intriguing little plants grew, the plants the secret book wrote of with such excruciating delight. . .!)

But in front, it was all beautifully kept and neatly ordered. "Just the parts I live in," Christian would say genially, "there's no sense in working on the rest, is there? There's no one around any more."

Christian came into the kitchen now and smiled at Greta; her tea had already become a secret joke between them; everyone else drank coffee. He said: "You should have called me to light the fire, Maria isn't here yet."

She kissed him on the cheek. "Or I could have waited another few minutes, couldn't I? I saw the servants dragging the boat ashore, they'll be here any minute now."

He too glanced at the clock; three minutes to six. He said with a laugh: "You can set the clock by them." He pumped up some water into the barrels, working the black iron handle up and down and watching the water gush out, ice-cold from its depth under the house. He said: "For twenty years I've been telling myself that one day I'll put in a proper plumbing system, but Leona liked the well water, so I never got around to it."

The grandfather-clock struck the hour, and at that precise moment the door opened and the servants came in; the plump and motherly Maria, and her son Karl. Karl took off his cloth cap when he saw Greta, and Maria smiled and waited, and Althing said cheerfully: "Well, Maria, they've arrived at last. Per's still in his bed, of course, you know Per—and this is Greta, they'll be staying with us for a while." He said to Greta, "Maria and Karl look after me well, they keep me out of mischief."

They made little friendly obeisances, and Karl touched his forelock and went about his work, getting out the brooms and the rags and the water-buckets. Althing set cups on a tray—his own coffee brewed now—and said: "Let's sit outside, shall we? Not too cold for you? And I've got to tell Gustav about the roses before he comes in and claims I slaughtered them yesterday."

She drew her dressing-gown tighter about her, and they went and sat on the flagstone square that separated the garden from the house, and looked at the dew shining on the grass and silvering the rose-petals. Gustav was sharpening his shears, and Althing called out: "The Papa Maillands, Gustav! I took rather too many of them yesterday, you'd better re-shape the bushes."

Greta said: "Ah yes, the roses, they filled the room with perfume, all night long."

"And Per? Did he sleep well?"

She hesitated just a trifle. "Yes, he slept like a baby."

He caught the hesitation and knew it was a lie. Good. He began to sip his coffee. In silence, they watched the sun coming up on their left; to the right, there were black streaks on the horizon, and Althing said, worried: "A bad thunderstorm coming up before the day's out." He glanced at her sideways and said: "Did you know Per is scared of thunder?"

She was surprised: "No, I never knew that."

"It was part of his father's. . . sickness, too." She waited for him, a worried look in her eyes. He said: "Surely you knew about his father?" She was shaking her head slowly, and he sighed and said: "He should have told you, I told him to tell you. But if he didn't. . .then perhaps I'd better say no more." He waited for her to beg him, and it wasn't long.

She said: "I think you better had, Christian. What about his father?"

Looking at his cup, avoiding her eyes, he said: "He must have had his reasons for keeping it from you. Perhaps because he thought you wouldn't be able to. . .to take it."

"I must know, Christian, if we're to help him." The fear was rising.

"Yes, I suppose that's true. But you'd better not let him know I told you, a secret between the two of us, agreed?"

"All right." Her heart was pounding fast. "I promise."

He said: "Per's father was mad."

"Oh, my God!"

He sighed deeply. "But it's an old wives' tale that madness is hereditary."

"I'm not really sure about that."

"Sometimes, perhaps, not always. And it wasn't very. . .very frequent, but he'd have. . .spasms of violence. I don't suppose a doctor would ever have called it insanity, but I knew him very well, we were close friends,

and. . ." He broke off, thinking and waiting. When she did not speak, but just watched him, he went on, a touch of sadness in his voice: "He dabbled in witchcraft. Just. . .dabbled in it, nothing serious, but maybe it went to his brain."

She was astonished more than anything else: "Witchcraft! Surely no one believes any more in. . .."

He said swiftly: "Ah, but they do! This island was once a notorious witchcraft center, back in the seventeenth century, and there are still a few around who think there's more than a little truth in the old religions."

"But you?"

He laughed: "Of course not!"

"And Per?" She *had* to know the answer.

Althing shook his head slowly: "No, I don't suppose so." He didn't sound too certain.

She said, her voice strained: "Per's father died of. . .?"

"Poison. There was a book he had, he called it his 'Secret Book,' a very old manuscript with all the foolish charms and curses in it. How to put a hex on an enemy, how. . .." He hesitated. "How to bring a body back to life, all that sort of nonsense. In it, he found a recipe for a sort of witch's brew that would give a man some strange powers, I don't know what, I was never too interested in that sort of thing myself. Anyway, he made some, and drank it, and it killed him." He sighed. "A long time ago, and these things are best forgotten. I was able to hush it up, of course, and the story was that he died of food poisoning. I was the only one who ever knew. Now. . . you know too. Let's keep it a secret, shall we?"

Absently, she nodded. There was a terrible fear clutching at her heart.

When Per came down, in an old pair of corduroy trousers and a heavy sweater, she thought he'd never looked better. She smiled brightly when she saw him, and he kissed and fondled her, and grinned at Christian and said: "If Maria doesn't make me the biggest omelette of her life. . .. I'm starving." He looked to the west, and said: "And there's another damned storm coming up."

Christian said: "Yes, we'd better get the lobster pot in, it should be well loaded by now. Did you say you'd do that for me?"

Per grinned. "Did I? Well, I will, anyway." His hair was tousled, lank, unkempt, the careless touselling of the lonely countryside. He turned and yelled: "Maria? How about one of your omelettes, a big one?"

Maria came out: "It's ready, Master Per." She was very fond of Per and knew what he wanted long before he even thought of it.

He poured himself some coffee, and ate his breakfast, and then jumped up suddenly and took Greta by the hand and said: "Lobsters. . ."

They were running along the beach then, hand in hand like lovers,

and Althing watched them go and smiled a little, and then went up to their room to change the water in the vase of Papa Mailland roses, the blooms that were the color of running blood. While he was there, he opened the bottom drawer of the little antique dresser he'd brought twenty years ago from the mainland, and slipped a heavy iron clamp under the shirts and sweaters he found there; two pieces of iron about eight inches long, well-rusted, and held together by four strong bolts.

Just an old, rusted clamp.

This was the most lovely stretch of the beach. It was also the most dangerous.

The rocks were here permanently splashed by waves, even in the calmest water, the surf swelling up over them, polishing them over the ages, and showing their glorious blues and reds and browns, with unexpected pools of quiet water that would suddenly erupt as the waves poured through the underwater channels and spouted high up to the heavens, in sudden bursts of fury when you were least expecting it.

The cliff rose high here, sloping up from the sands to the top of the granite bluff, seventy, eighty feet high. At the top, where the cliff fell sharply away, down to great jagged boulders and pools of deep water at the bottom, an iron fence had long ago been sunk into the rocks, a fence of ten or fifteen uprights joined by a horizontal bar that ran along the top of them, four feet off the level of the cliff. The fence was strong, well-cemented in to the rocks. It had to be; below, the drop was frightening.

To one side of the fence, a series of stone and concrete steps, eroded with time, led down to the bottom, where the lobster-pot was kept. There were hand-holds here, too, and ropes that ran down alongside the steps; and sometimes, the water would roar almost up to the top and drench anyone who might be moving there. Sometimes, too, the water was calm and peaceful; and on those occasions this was a truly beautiful place, with the ripe scent of seaweed and the gentle sound of the surf.

They climbed hand in hand up the steep slope, and when they reached the top Per said: "Keep well clear of the fence, don't try to cross it. . .wait for me here, and we'll have a fine mess of lobsters in a few minutes." He kissed her quickly, and went down the wet steps to where the waves were breaking. Halfway down, he looked back and waved to her, and she leaned on the rail to watch him, her hair streaming in the wind; with an entirely feminine gesture she brushed it away from her face. Per grabbed at the long rope that disappeared down into the sea, and called up to her gaily: "Lobsters coming up, a whole basketful of them!" He hauled on the wet rope, and she leaned there and

watched him, a young sea-god hauling up the water's bounty, hand over hand, his feet wide-spaced, his heavy sweater drenched with the spray. The basket came into sight and she leaned further over to take a better look, hanging on tight to the rail for added security.

And then, suddenly, she screamed as the fence gave way.

She clutched at it with both hands, feeling her body swing round. She was conscious of Per down there staring up at her, his mouth wide open. . ..The post bent over, and the rail came adrift and swung free as she hung onto it, and then it steadied itself, hanging over the edge of the cliff like a black ribbon, twisting slowly even with her slight weight.

She heard Per yell: "Hang on tight!" and saw him racing up the steps, two at a time, slipping once and recovering his balance quickly, and then the pain in her arms became too acute and she let go, let go and fell. . ..It was sixty feet down here, and she missed the great boulder at the bottom by less than a foot, twisting her body and landing into deep water. Even so, she hit bottom and cut her head, and as she struggled and came to the surface of the water she saw Per's body slicing through the air in a dive towards her.

She saw him hit and go under, and then he was up again and racing towards her; but a wave lifted her up and dropped her onto the rocks, and tore at her to suck her back in again; but she reached out with her arms wide-spread and sunk her fingers into the sharp crevices of the rocks, feeling the searing pain as the barnacles cut her hands, but not leaving go, not leaving go because of the sheer terror. Per was just below her in the water, reaching out to her, and she looked back and saw him half-turn and look at the top of the cliff; at the same moment she heard the shout and Christian was there, at the very edge, looking down with shock on his face. He called out: "Are you all right down there, what happened?"

She saw him step to the very edge, and Per called back: "It's all right, Christian, we're fine. . .." He was climbing out then, taking her in his arms, holding her tight, staring at the gash on her forehead.

He said: "For God's sake, what happened? You could have been killed. . .."

She was shaking violently, half-crying. She shook her head and said: "I don't know, the fence gave way, I was leaning on it."

"I told you to keep away from it." He was speaking to her roughly, badly shaken himself.

The lobster basket lay there; she could see the dark-blue, heaving mass inside it. Savagely, he kicked it back into the water. He held her tighter and said: "My God, you could've been killed. . .." He was kissing her passionately then, and she pulled away from him, recovering her sen-

ses faster than he did, and said quietly: "Let's get back, Per, shall we?"

He held her at arm's length. "Are you all right? There's a nasty gash on your forehead."

"I'm all right, really I am."

"A foot to the side, a couple of inches even, and you'd have hit rock."

"Yes. I know. I saw it coming up at me and twisted over." She laughed, not quite hysterically, a tight little laugh that might almost have been a moan. "I'm a good diver, you didn't know that, did you?"

"No, I didn't. And thank God you are."

She was trembling, but she let him take her arm as they struggled back up the steps, and when they reached the top, Althing was down on his knees looking at the broken part of the fence. He got up when they approached, and dabbed at Greta's forehead with a handkerchief. He said lightly, making a joke of it: "It's not safe to let you two wander around alone, is it?" He saw Greta shudder. "Are you hurt much?" The cut on her forehead was a light one.

She shook her head. "No, not really. Just. . .frightened, more than anything else."

Per said: "How in hell did that fence come apart, it's as strong. . ." He was looking at the broken piece, and Althing said calmly: "Gustav told me he'd repaired it, put a clamp on it, a long time ago. Perhaps he meant to say he was going to do it, and then forgot. An old man, his mind wanders sometimes." He looked at Greta earnestly: "Are you sure you are all right?"

"Yes, quite sure. It's nothing."

"You're a better man than I am. An accident like that and I'd have died of fright."

She shook her head, determined to make light of it. "It's nothing, really." Her voice was taut. "An unexpected high dive, and no damage that won't heal up in a few days. And I think we lost your lobsters."

He smiled. "The least of our worries. I'll go get them."

They watched as he went down the steps, retrieved the rope, and recovered the basket. While they waited for him, Greta touched Per on the arm and smiled at him and said:

"It's all over, my darling, don't frown so."

When Althing came back, he said happily: "Three good lobsters and two small ones we're really supposed to throw back, but we won't."

On the way back to the house, he took her arm and squeezed it gently, telling her that he was close beside her, keeping an eye on her. He whispered: "All right?"

Her voice was touched with impatience now: "I've forgotten it already."

When they got back to the house, Greta said to Per: "I'll go and get you a dry sweater," and Althing said

easily: "Oh, Maria can do that, I think Per might need a small glass of schnapps, it's on the dresser." He called Maria and sent her up for some dry clothes, and when she came back she was holding out the iron clamp to him. He started and looked quickly at Greta, and took it from her. Maria said: "I don't know what it is, but it was in the bottom drawer, I don't know why people always put things where they don't belong."

Per said idly: "What is it?"

But Christian had quickly slipped it into his pocket. He said with a shrug: "Oh, nothing."

Greta was staring at him. Had she seen it, he wondered? Had she seen what it was? But she smiled and said to Christian: "Why don't we have some roses on the table? Shall I get some?"

Althing was already moving towards the garden, but she ran past him and said: "Let me choose them, can I do that?"

He knew precisely what was in her mind. He stopped and said: "Then let Gustav cut them for you. Just tell him which ones."

The old gardener was spreading mulch out over the beds. As he started cutting the flowers for her, she said, quite conversationally: "We had a little accident up on the rocks this morning."

"Aye, a dangerous place, them rocks. Now there's a fine bud, that's a rare good one. . .."

"The fence broke, and I fell."

He stopped in mid-motion, his grizzled old face showing his concern. "The fence broke? But. . .but I fixed it, stronger than it ever was."

Was Christian coming up to them? Was it his steps she could hear? She did not look around.

She said: "You fixed it? You're sure?"

"Aye, I'm sure. I put a great iron clamp on it, strong enough to hold the Devil himself in his place." He frowned at her and said: "Did you hurt yourself? That cut on your head. . .."

"Not badly hurt. Just a small cut."

He was terribly uncomfortable. He put down the secateurs and handed her the roses he'd cut, and said grimly: "I'm going to take a look, that's my responsibility."

She watched him go, and when she turned round, Althing was there. She said steadily: "What was it that Maria found in our room, Christian?"

His face was grave. "Nothing, Greta. Nothing at all. Don't think about it."

She looked at him for a long, long time. She said at last, very quietly: "No, I won't think about it."

He smiled, and patted her arm.

They had the lobsters for supper that night.

Maria prepared them, the meat taken from the shells and braised in oil and butter and onion and tomato and mushrooms. Althing went

into the kitchen to fix the sauce, an amateur cook as good as any of them, after the three servants had rowed the boat back to the mainland as soon as it started getting dark.

The threatened rain had not come—not yet. The sky was dark and forebidding, and the early evening was already damp and oppressive.

He drew the curtains carefully over the kitchen windows, and unlocked the little cupboard where the three special mushrooms were, where they'd lain ever since he collected them that morning in the copse at the back of the house. He tasted the sauce, corrected the seasonings to make it irresistible, and then chopped up the three mushrooms and put them in the bottom of the china sauce-boat; he set out the lobsters on a bed of parsley, and brought them to the table. Greta and Per were already there, waiting.

She said: "It smells delicious," and he said: "Wait till you taste my sauce, I made it especially for you." He didn't take any of the sauce himself, saying it was too rich for his digestion, and they both thought what a nice man he was, going to all that trouble just for them. He personally ladled it onto their plates for them, searching out the little bits of sliced mushrooms in the bottom.

And when, less than fifteen minutes later, they both collapsed, he carefully picked up the wine-glass that Greta had knocked over, and set it straight, (pouring some salt over the spilled wine so as not to stain the table cloth) and then first of all cleared away the plates and washed them carefully, together with the sauce-boat. There was plenty of time, all night, if necessary. And when he had finished, he went back into the dining-room and looked at the two bodies sprawled there, both of them in a deep coma and breathing very, very gently.

He gave Per scarcely more than a cursory glance. But he gave more attention to Greta. She had fallen into a graceful position, her head tilted back and resting against the high back of the chair as though she were asleep. Her hands had fallen into her lap; even her knees were primly together.

On a whim, he touched her breast, then put his hand inside her dress and fondled it, remarking how smooth and firm it was, the small breast of a young bride. The book said: *"And the breaste of the succubus is colde to the touch, that it be like ice. . .."* Hers was warm and soft, and he wondered. . ..

He sighed, picked her up easily, and carried her to the cellar door. He sat her on the chair close beside it while he found the key and used it, and went down the stairs and put on the lights and made sure everything was ready, and then came back and carried her down.

He placed her just so on the long wooden bench; and carefully, very carefully, he undressed her, piling her clothes neatly nearby. When she was quite naked, he sat down close to her for a while, examining her body minutely, enjoying it, a by-product that gave him pleasure; he ran his hands over her, enjoying the touch of her flesh. He got up at last and lit seven black candles that filled the air with the strong smell of verbena. He slipped a long black robe over his clothes, and put on a pair of leather-thonged sandals, and took out the secret book and began to study the legend he'd marked. He read it over again and again, making sure he knew exactly what to do, and then he found the little jar with the toad's intestines in it, a thick, richly-smelling paste now, and he carefully smeared it over her breasts, and sat down to wait, and to read the secret book again, while it dried.

He found the page, and frowned over the old-fashioned language:

"An it be a womyn, wyche be the beste, it sufficeth not for her bloode alone, the wyche for the true lycanthrope be a sore temptation for to drinke, but lett it be that her minde be fulle with fear, for so, wenne that corpse that be gone take on its forme agin, the soul may be more easy persuaded to leave. . . ."

In a little while, he got up again and began to mix the dye he needed. A small can of copper phthalocyanine, a little linseed oil, a few drops of terebine, and finally the scrapings of the wooden bowl which had held the dog's blood. He wondered if he should perhaps add some of the wolfbane roots he'd prepared for later, but he could find no justification for this in the book; he frowned over the problem for a while, and then decided not to; no good overdoing a good thing! But he added a little more terebine to make sure that the paste would dry quickly. He found a quarter-inch paint brush, and began to paint the legend on her body.

Starting at a point between the two lovely breasts, and finishing an inch or so below her navel, he painted the words: *damnum minatum, et sequentes.* He stood back and looked at his work with satisfaction, and then took from its hiding-place the single horn of the goat he had killed a year ago, placed it carefully between her thighs, knelt down in front of her, and began to pray. He prayed for fifteen minutes.

When he had finished, the paint on Greta's body was already coagulated, and he touched it lightly with a finger to make sure it was set, then brushed the dried entrails carefully off her breasts—it wouldn't do to let *that* stay there!—and took her in his arms and carried her up to her room. He went back for the clothes, laid them out neatly on a chair, slipped a night-gown over her

carefully, then went back and carried Per up there too. It took *him* a little time to get Per's limp body, unresisting still, into the pyjamas, but soon, they were both covered over with the blankets and seeming to sleep. He slipped the paint-brush, now tacky and semi-stiff, into the drawer where Greta kept her underclothes, then went to his own room, got undressed and into his bed; and in a few minutes he was fast asleep.

He woke early in the morning, as usual, and waited; nothing.

He went to sleep again, and woke at eight o'clock; still nothing, but he did not worry in the slightest. Sooner or later, he knew. . ..

And at half-past nine, when he lay with his eyes closed, there was a knock on the door. He did not answer it. The knock came again, and then again, and he still kept silent. He heard the door open, heard footsteps on the stone floor. Per's? Yes, and then Greta's behind him. He kept his eyes shut tight.

And then he felt Per's hand on his shoulder, shaking him, heard his voice: "Christian? Wake up, Christian, wake up. . .."

He groaned, and shuddered a little, and the shaking went on. He opened his eyes then, and stared, and looked quickly at his watch and sat up suddenly and said: "Half-past nine? What on earth. . .? I haven't overslept since I was ten years old!" He grinned at them and said cheerfully: "Too much schnapps, what a dreadful night!"

His expression changed quickly when he saw the looks on their faces, and he looked from one to the other of them and said: "Is something wrong? You look. . .." He let it drag. He shook his head from side to side, and frowned, and said: "My God, what on earth did I drink last night? Or was it too much of those lobsters?" He smiled quickly: "How do you feel, Per? That was quite a time you gave me last night."

Per stared at *him*. "*I* gave you. . ?"

"Yes, don't you remember?"

"No. No, I don't remember. What happened?"

Althing put his hands to his head and groaned. He said: "After Greta went to bed. . .."—he saw Greta look at Per, questioning—"we had a few more drinks, and then. . .then you simply fell down and that was that. I carried you up and put you on top of the bed. . .."

"And Greta?"

"Greta? She was already fast asleep, snoring like a child. You can't recall?"

Per stared at him bleakly. He said: "No. Not a thing. We were having dinner. . .the last thing I remember, until I woke up half an hour ago."

Althing grimaced. "Well, a night on the tiles never did anyone any harm. . .."

Per said, his voice hard and frightened at the same time: "Someone painted a legend, in Latin, all down

the front of Greta's body."

Althing stared at him. "Someone . . .what?"

"All down the front of her body, down here. . .." He moved his hand down his own torso. "In Latin."

"But. . .but. . .but. . .." He let his mouth hang open for a while, quite a good performance.

Per said: "In some kind of strange paint, it was the very devil to get off, there's still signs of it."

Althing found his voice and swallowed hard. "A legend, did you say? What was it?"

Per shook his head. "I couldn't understand it. Damned minister, or something, and then *'et sequentes,'*: 'what follows,' isn't that what it means?"

Still staring at him, his eyes wide, Althing said: *"Et sequentes,"* what comes next, a common phrase." His voice was hoarse, and he said, stunned: "On her. . .on her *naked* body? Down here?"

"Yes."

"Oh my God! I can't believe it, I *won't* believe it!"

Greta said, her voice very small, "It's true, Christian. It's true."

He sat there for a long time, wondering how he could make the point he had to make; it didn't seem so easy now. But then Per took it out of his hands. He stood up suddenly and said: "I'm going to get the police, Christian, it's the only thing to do."

He contrived to look aghast: "The police? But whatever for?" He couldn't have been more happy.

Per said: "She could have been killed, that's what for."

"Oh, nonsense!"

Per turned on him savagely—good, good!—and shouted: "There's too much going on that I don't understand, and I want to know! I want to *know,* Christian!"

"Yes, of course, I understand that. But the police. . .! There's no one else on this island except the three of us, and Willi, of course, and you're suggesting that one of us did this. . .this terrible thing?"

Per said quietly: "That's what I want to know. We were all three of us. . .unconscious, if that's the word. Ever since we sat down to dinner, more than twelve hours ago, I've been completely out cold. And you. . .." He spread his hands wide. "You *never* oversleep, up at six thirty every morning of your life. Do you remember going to bed?"

Althing said promptly: "Yes, I do. I was quicker asleep than I usually am, and I. . .I had a dream, but—". He shrugged. "Otherwise, just like any other night, except that I woke up late."

Greta said, her voice very small: "What kind of dream?"

He said deprecatingly: "Frogs, toads, I don't know. . ..A man was bending over me, it's all very vague."

Per said angrily: "You see? I want it cleared up, I want questions asked and. . .and answered."

"And you think the police can do that? Clear it up?"

He said sullenly: "They might. Anyway, that's what I want."

"All right, Per, you know your own mind." It was a good choice of words. He saw that Greta threw him an anguished glance. She said: "No, Per, please don't."

He looked at her. "I'm sorry, Greta." He walked unsteadily to the door and went out without another word. Soon, they heard the roar of the outboard motor starting up.

Althing said: "He's sure there's an evil presence on the island. He's sure it's not you, not me. . ..About himself, he is not so sure. Did he tell you about the handkerchief?"

She stared at him. "What handkerchief?"

"He found. . .or said he'd found– one of Leona's handkerchiefs out on the Devil's Rock the other night."

"So that was it!"

"He didn't tell you?"

"Nothing."

"I wonder why. . .?" He sighed. "He showed it to me. It was one of Leona's all right, but fresh and clean. . .just put there recently. I'm afraid. . .the thing we both dreaded is happening to him." He took a deep breath and said: "You'll have to leave him, Greta."

"No!" She was terribly vehement. "No, not that!"

He took her hand in his and said gravely: "You know what the risks are?"

"I love him, Christian."

"You're a fine girl, Greta. A fine, fine girl."

She sat there for a little while, fighting the tears. She said at last: "It was horrible. When I woke up, I felt. . .not sick, but somehow strange. I went to the bathroom for a shower, and pumped up the water, and when I took off my nightdress, there it was, a horrible purple color, all down my body. It was. . .filthy."

Althing said quietly: *"Damnum minatum, et sequentes."* Her eyes were wide. He said, his voice very low: "That's what it was, wasn't it?"

She whispered: "Something like that. How did you know?" She was genuinely terrified now.

He took his hand away from hers and went over to the window, and stood looking down over the sea for a while. He said: "It means *'a threat of evil and whatever may follow.'* I know the phrase because. . ." He broke off and turned to her, his face haggard. "You remember the dog Wolf? The big shaggy dog Per told you about?"

"Yes, I remember. He was very fond of Wolf."

Althing grimaced. "A few months ago, just before Per went away, I heard the dog whimpering one night, and I went out to see what was wrong with him. I found him tightly bound with rags, blood-

soaked rags, if you please, his feet bound, and a strap round his muzzle. . ..He was still alive, but there was a terrible cut on the side of his throat. And painted on the kennel, in the dog's own blood, was the phrase: *'Damnum minatum et sequentes*, the threat of evil to come. . ..It's an old phrase out of the witchcraft ritual, I'd heard Per's father use it. I stitched up the wound in Wolf's throat, and he recovered, and I cleaned up all the mess. . .. After that, he'd never go near Per, he'd whine and slink away whenever Per came around. A week later, the dog was dead, its throat cut again, more efficiently this time."

Greta was trying not to cry. "And Per?"

Althing shrugged. "He never knew what he'd done. He was terribly upset about it."

"And only the other day he asked where the dog was."

"Yes."

"What are we going to do, Christian? For God's sake, what *can* we do?"

Althing sighed. He came over and sat beside her again and took her hand. "How much do you love him, Greta?"

She said fervently: "Oh so much, so much. . ..And I'm not going to let him destroy himself."

"He won't do that, not if we stand by him."

"But he *will!* This thing with the police, don't you understand? He knows he did this terrible thing to me last night, and he wants them to. . .to take him away."

"And we mustn't let them do that, must we? If you've ever seen the inside of an asylum. . .. They don't cure you, you know. They just surround you with other screaming maniacs and forget about you. If you love him as much as I do. . ."

"Oh I do!"

He patted her hand. "Then we'll take the risks we have to take. And remember, yours is greater than mine. Are you sure you can face it?"

She said steadily: "That's what love is about, Christian."

"Good. So, when the police come. . .." He shrugged. "They've heard talks of witchcraft before, and they'll do what they always do. Throw up their hands and decide we're all a bunch of maniacs." Warming up to the subject, he said: "Why, a few years ago, when there were still other people on the island, there was a rumor that someone was holding Sabbaths here, can you believe that? *They* couldn't, I'm happy to say. They nodded their heads wisely, and said 'Ah, yes. . ..' and that was the end of it."

And when the young policeman came, that was precisely his attitude too.

He was a young and clean-cut sort of man, not very bright, and he listened in stony silence while Greta told him about the marks on her

body. He said at last: "Are they still there, Ma'am?"

She shook her head. "No, I washed them off."

"I see." He turned to Althing. "And can you add anything to this mystery, Sir?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid. I'm as mystified as anybody."

"Uh-huh." He looked at the little piece of plaster on Greta's head and said: "And that plaster, Ma'am? That's part of it too?"

Before Greta could do more than begin to nod her head, Althing said quickly: "An accident, she fell from the Devil's Rock, the fence gave way."

The young policeman looked hard at her. "Oh? I seem to remember your man Gustav, didn't he tell me once he'd spent a couple of days fixing that fence there? Not too long ago, if I remember rightly?"

Althing went to the door and shouted for Maria. When he turned back, he said carelessly: "The fence was broken a long time ago, one of the big storms we had, and I remember telling Gustav to fix it, make it safe again." Maria was coming in to answer his call, and he said: "He was going to put an iron clamp on the broken portion, to hold it in place. He said he'd done it, but perhaps he forgot. He's a very old man now. An iron clamp with a few bolts to hold it in place." He saw Maria's stony face and said affably: "Some schnapps for the constable, Maria, will you?"

The policeman—his name was Krett—sipped his drink and said: "I suppose you had quite a lot to drink with your dinner last night?"

"Er. . .yes, I suppose you could say that."

He turned to Greta. "And the area of the, er, desecration was. . . er, between the breasts and the er. . .er. . .."

Greta said: "Yes, Constable, it was."

He nodded wisely, put down his empty glass, and picked up his cap. "Well, I'll make a report to the Sergeant, but unless something else comes to light, I mean, there's not much to go on, is there? I mean, just the three of you here, and all drinking heavily. . .."

Per stood mute and angry as he listened. All in all, this was a very unhappy moment for him. And when Constable Krett returned to the mainland, the Sergeant was waiting for him, as jocular as ever, a fat, cheerful man with an air of knowing everything and believing nothing. For nearly sixty years, man and boy, he'd lived in these parts.

He said now: "Well? Another of them witchcraft stories, by the sound of it."

Constable Krett nodded. "Only interesting thing about it never happened."

"Oh? How's that?"

"Where she was painted. I kept wanting to take a look at the evi-

dence, but young Per had told me she'd washed it off, and she told me too, so I'd have looked a right fool asking to see it, wouldn't I? With her husband there and all."

The Sergeant laughed. He said with heavy humor: "If that's how you feel, I've got just the right job for you. The widow Johannsen's been cutting up again, a complaint from the neighbors."

"All right, Sergeant, I'll go and see what's to be done."

"Do that, Constable Krett," the Sergeant said. "And I want you back here in double-quick time, with your flies done up and all."

For a week, there was an uneasy tranquillity on the island. And when it seemed that the strange events of these first few days had been—almost—forgotten, Althing judged it was time for the next careful move.

He went over to the mainland to get provisions, and found the occasion to visit the Sergeant and invite him for a glass of schnapps at the cafe that stood on the edge of the one-street village. The day was cold, and they sat close to the wood-burning stove that looked like a sugar cube stuck in the corner of the clap-board room.

He said: "I'm sorry you had all that trouble with young Per the other day, Mr. Sergeant Stolafssen."

"Ah, yes," the Sergeant said. "That witchcraft thing. Legends painted on young girls' bodies. Per said it was witchcraft. Can't say I rightly believed him, though, don't give those things much credit, myself."

"Witchcraft? Is that what he called it? He never told me."

The Sergeant shrugged. "We get them tales, once in a while. What's more serious, though. . .." He hesitated, and looked at Althing sideways, and said: "We was disturbed about the young lady's tale, how she fell from the rocks."

"Yes, a bad accident. Could have been a lot worse. Though I don't see how that should. . .disturb you."

The Sergeant said carefully: "Well, Constable Krett had a word with Gustav, next time he saw him, just as a formality, you know, wanted to give him hell for letting that fence get in such a dangerous state. And Gustav said he'd fixed the fence, and someone had removed the clamp he'd put on it."

Althing frowned. "Oh? I don't like the sound of that, not at all."

"And what's more, Maria said she found what looked like a clamp in young Mr. Per's bedroom. You don't suppose. . .?" He left it hanging, and Althing looked shocked and said: "Good Heavens! I wonder what on earth. . .?" He hesitated, and then said sharply: "No, I don't suppose anything, Mr. Sergeant Stolafssen, and I don't think you ought to either."

The Sergeant said amiably: "Just a passing idea, that's all. Probably

some ordinary explanation there, if we ever had to look for it. Can't think why a man would want to paint slogans all over his wife's naked body, can you, Mr. Althing sir? Or do you suppose he just dreamed it?"

"What, both of them?"

"Yes, that's a point, isn't it? What's your idea; then, sir?"

Althing shrugged. "I took a look at their bathroom. There were signs of paint in the tub, so I presume that he really did paint her body. All I can suggest is that they were both drunk. . ..He, at least, had taken quite a bellyfull."

"And the young lady?" The Sergeant was more interested than he pretended to be.

Althing shrugged: "Maybe one glass is enough to put her quite out of touch with reality, who knows?" He finished off his drink and stood up. It was past Greta's tea-time already, and he was anxious. He shook hands with the Sergeant, and left. The Sergeant watched him go, took the last drink from the bottle, and then went off to find Constable Krett.

And when Althing arrived back on his island, Greta was lying in bed, white and still and silent as death. And the doctor was with her.

Per was sitting there, pale and drawn, and Maria as well, and the doctor was closely examining Greta.

Althing said, the alarm on his face apparent: "For God's sake, what's happened?"

Per said: "We don't know, Christian. In God's name, we don't know."

And Maria said soothingly: "Something she ate, she was sick. I gave her some mustard in water, and called the doctor, I hope that was the right thing to do."

The doctor said: "It was indeed the right thing." He was a tall and lanky man, impossibly skinny, with spectacles in steel frames and a close-cropped head of grey hair. He looked at Althing and said: "She's going to be all right, but if Maria hadn't given her an emetic, I don't think I'd be able to make that statement."

Good for Maria! He'd known, of course, the motherly old servant, with a rapid remedy for everything! Still, his luck had been stretched a bit there! He frowned and said: "But what happened?"

The doctor said: "She must have eaten something that disagreed with her, looks almost like ptomaine poisoning, but I don't think it is. Do you have any very old tinned food in the house?"

Maria said firmly: "I should think not!"

The doctor grunted. He said: "Well, let her rest for a while, she's out of danger now, I gave her some tannic acid in water, she might be sick again, but that's all to the good."

Per said suddenly, desperately:

"But she hasn't eaten anything that I didn't eat too! We had stew for lunch, but I had more than she did!"

The doctor said idly: "Did you by chance put horseradish in it?"

Maria frowned: "Horseradish? What kind of stew would that be? No, I didn't."

The doctor grunted again: "Could I see you alone for a minute, Mr. Althing?"

Christian took him downstairs, and when they were alone together, he said: "It's a mystery, that's aconite poisoning or I'm a Dutchman. I've taken some of the vomit for analysis, but it's only going to confirm what I'm already sure of."

Althing frowned. "Aconite? What's that?"

The doctor sighed. "It happens once in a while. Aconite, monkshood, wolfbane, call it what you like. Grows wild in these parts, and sometimes it gets eaten in error, it looks almost exactly like horseradish. Only thing is, a bite of it will kill you right away, a matter of seconds, the deadliest of all the natural poisons. So she couldn't have taken much more than a mere smidgen of it. And how would that happen, I wonder? Do you have any growing here?"

Althing shook his head. "Not to my knowledge. A lot of wild stuff growing at the back of the house there. But I've never seen anything that looks like horseradish."

Before he left, the doctor went upstairs again to check with Greta, and Althing went with him. She was awake now, and Per was still with her, holding her hand and worrying. The doctor took her pulse and her temperature, and said to her: "You'll be well again in no time at all, you've a fine constitution."

She was looking at Christian. She said: "What was it, Christian? Per says I must have eaten some. . . something poisonous."

Althing smiled: "Did you eat any horseradish? In a salad, perhaps?"

Mystified, she shook her head, and Per said, surprised: "But horseradish won't harm you!"

"No, it won't, will it? Try and get plenty of rest, and we'll ask the doctor if he'll come and take a look at you again tomorrow."

The doctor said, grumbling: "Well, I don't suppose it'll be necessary, but if it'll make you feel any happier. . .."

Althing said: "Good. So that's decided."

The doctor left soon after.

Greta closed her eyes, and Per left her alone and went downstairs, in the depths of misery and despair. For a while, Greta turned and tossed and thought, and found that her nightdress was soaked in perspiration, and went to the drawer, a little unsteady on her feet, to get a clean one.

She found the roots of wolf-

bane there, and looked at them for a long time, turning them over and over in her hands and smelling them and not absolutely sure what they were. She said to herself, puzzled: "Horseradish? What on earth would Per want with horseradish?" She put it back where she'd found it, none the less. It was the same drawer where she'd found the paint-brush with the dreadful blue-green paint on it. She got back into bed and covered herself up, curled up like a foetus.

She started crying, softly, quite to herself.

The threatening storm came at last.

That night, there was a clap of thunder that reverberated down to the island and back up to the skies again, while the whole of the land was lit up with blue-white flashes bright enough to show the silhouettes of the crosses in the graveyard.

Old Willi creaked open the door of the mausoleum he slept in, and slammed it shut behind him, and lit the candle he kept there, and took the sandwiches and the bottle of beer from his pocket and sat down for his supper. He stood the bottle on the coffin that held the remains of old man Heusse, leaned back on the stone seat, and put his feet up on the coffin where all that was left of Mrs. Heusse lay. He listened to the violent pounding of the rain on the roof, and munched away at the bread and sausage and cheese.

In the living-room of the big house, Althing and Per sat in silence, the silence of old friends between whom there has fallen a curtain that is quite impenetrable. The rain was beating against the windows, hard, drumming them implacably; there'd been almost no conversation at all.

Upstairs, in her bed, Greta slept, fitfully.

And then, the magic hour of nine struck, and it was time. . ..

Wasn't that what the book said? *And for all kinds of mischieves of this ilk, it is beste that the hour of nine be tolled. . ..*

He got up and said to Per, very quietly: "Come with me to the cellar, will you, Per? I have something to show you there." It was all that was needed, just a request between friends.

Per got listlessly to his feet, Althing unlocked the door carefully, and they went down the steps together, and at the bottom Althing threw open the heavy door to the ante-room and stood aside for Per to pass, and then hit him hard over the back of the head with the little leather sack of sand that was waiting there, hanging on a nail at just the right, convenient height; he was nothing if not methodical.

Per slumped silently to the floor,

a blow not hard enough to hurt him seriously, and Althing picked him up, and sat him down on the chair that was all ready in position close to the wooden bench, and tied his wrists and his ankles firmly, and checked the knots to make sure they were strong, and then set out all the paraphernalia on the bench. There was so much to remember, so much that could go wrong if it was not done exactly right! It was one of the major rituals, and how often had he tried the really big ones? Four, five times perhaps? And how often had they succeeded? Never!

No, that wasn't right! With old man Willi, the curse that had sent him into the hospital, close to death's door, for precisely seven days—not six, or nine!—just as he'd planned it, surely that could be called one of the majors! Because, if for no other reason, it was all part of the ritual he was working on now!

Per's father had said to him once, making a joke of it—how could he do such a thing!—when they'd been arguing over the interpretation in the book: "Don't even try it, Christian, even your name's against you!" He had seemed to think that this was a very funny remark, and had bellowed out his laughter; he'd always taken the old religion lightly, in spite of his undoubted excellence at it. 'Don't try it,' he'd said, 'you weren't cut out to be a warlock. . ..'

Well, now he would show him!

He was laying out all the little bits and pieces, checking them over carefully, checking again and again to make sure nothing *could* go wrong. . ..

Finally, he unlocked the big cupboard that had once been a small store-room, and gently eased out the object that was stored there. Gently, very gently. . ..

It was an ornate, high-backed chair, beautifully carved, its seat and back splendidly upholstered in blue velvet; it must have been three hundred years old, a precious and satisfying chair that had come from the old Palace at Kalmar. And fastened to it, with strands of gold wire and silver thread, was a skeleton.

It was Leona's skeleton.

It was seventy-two days—the magic nine again!—since he'd taken the body from the grave and carefully disguised the signs of his tampering. . ..All night long he'd toiled, and the next night he'd set out the roses and smoothed over the mound, so that when Willi came back. . ..

That part had been easy. He'd given himself plenty of time.

But then. . ..The book said: *Lette not that the water cease to bubble. . .*" and he had interpreted that as meaning that all the work should be done at once, with no let-up. It had been hard to find a cauldron big enough, but he'd found one at last, in an old junk-yard on the mainland, and had taken it out to

the island with the help of two small boys, telling them he wanted it for a planter. It was a fine old cauldron, of bronze, which delighted him enormously, because bronze is the warlock's metal. He'd built a fire of charcoal under and around it, and there was an hour or two of panic when the fire ate up more charcoal than he'd prepared, but he'd made do with logs of wood.

It had taken him all night and half the day to boil the flesh completely off the bones. It was lightweight and decomposed, and partly eaten away, and it kept rising to the top of the water so that he had to hold it down, almost constantly, with a hazel twig. But at the end of eighteen hours, the bones were white and clean, and then he'd taken the gold wire and silver thread, and fastened the skeleton carefully to its chair—her favorite chair!—and it had taken him the rest of the day and all the following night to do it. The dress he'd draped around it was made of purple silk, an old-fashioned dress that Leona had used when she went to church.

To tell the truth, it was an awful dress, but she'd loved it, and that was all that mattered. He'd chided her once about it, half-jokingly, and she'd laughed and touched the silk to her cheek, and had said: "But it's so wonderfully soft and comforting. . .."

Now, as he smoothed the dress over the thigh-bones, he thought about those wonderful past days. Her bones were so dry to his touch!

And on every ninth day now, in all this time, he'd anointed the white skull with the ungent the book had told him how to prepare—water hemlock, balm, poplar leaves, cinquefoil, soot, and belladonna, all pounded to a paste in the pestle—seven times in all, and now. . .. Now for the last few rites!

He was trembling!

Per was recovering now, shaking his head, his eyes only half-opened, his chin sunk on his chest. He looked up and saw Althing, and stared at him, and struggled against the tight ropes, his face very white. He stopped struggling, and said: "In God's name, Christian, what are you doing to me. . .? Why, in God's name, *why?*"

He saw the skeleton then, and there was horror in his eyes. His voice was a whisper: "Leona. . .." The dress was the one he remembered best because she always laughed when she wore it; some secret joke with her father.

He whispered again: "Leona. . .." And then: "Good God, Christian, what's going on here. . .?" He struggled fiercely and shouted: "God damn you, Christian, set me free!"

But Althing paid him no attention at all. He didn't even look back as he left the room and went upstairs, slowly, taking his time, to fetch Greta.

She was lying under the covers

half asleep when he went into the room, and she stirred lazily, troubled, and opened her eyes. She hadn't heard him knock; had he knocked? Her eyes were still wet with tears. He smiled at her and said gently: "This is the hour, Greta, the hour for all our troubles to end."

She sensed there was something strange about him, and then he walked over to the bed and took her wrist and twisted it up behind her so that she was forced to sit straight, and before she knew what was happening he'd slung her fragile body over his shoulder and was striding with her to the door.

She screamed then, and kicked at him, and went on screaming, and he set her down (still holding tight to her wrist) and said: "I don't like the noise, Greta, but I don't want to hit you. . .."

She was so much stronger than Per, in every possible way. There was even a flash of intelligence showing through the horror in her eyes, a questing, wary intelligence. But it was too late for that now.

He picked her up again and slung her, unresisting now, over his shoulder, and took her down to the cellar. She was quiet now, not even struggling, but as soon as she saw Per bound to the chair there, blood at his wrists where the ropes were cutting him, she screamed again, and Althing said gently: "Well, you may as well tire yourself out by screaming, there's no one to hear you. . .."

He laid her on the bench, and pushed her down as she tried to rise, and held her wrists in a cruel grip while he strapped them there, and she tried to roll over and screamed: "Per! Help me, Per. . .!"

Per was struggling like a madman; the chair had fallen over with his struggles, but the ropes were tight. He was almost frothing at the mouth, and Althing took time out to watch him curiously for a moment, his hands still on Greta. And then he turned back and finished strapping her down, pulling her ankles apart and spread-eagling her; the straps were tight, cutting into her limbs. He put two more straps at her knees, another over narrow waist, and one at her throat.

He went to Per, and stood the chair up, and said: "I want you to see everything, Per."

Per's voice was the croak of a frog. "Why, Christian, in the name of God Almighty, *why?*"

He said mildly: "You know why, Per, you *must* know why! You killed my Leona, and tonight, you and I and your woman, we'll bring her back to life. She'll be back with us again."

A whisper: "You are mad, mad--"

Althing smiled: "No, not mad. If I were, Per, I wouldn't have been able to do all the clever things I've done. When they find Greta dead, it won't even be necessary for me to tell them you killed her, though

I will, of course. And Leona will tell them how you killed her too, how you left her there to drown."

There were tears in his eyes now, and he stepped up to Per and struck him savagely across the face, shouting: "She'll tell them how she screamed for your help, and you weren't there when she needed you! Swine! Devil! She'll tell them. . .!" He broke off, the tears streaming down his face, and stood silent for a while. And then he recovered his composure and said: "They know that you tried to kill Greta, too, at the Devil's Rock, because Maria found that clamp in your room. They'll know that you tried again to poison her, because sooner or later that fat idiot Sergeant Stolafssen is going to look for the wolfbane the doctor will tell him Greta took, and he'll find it, no doubt, in the tea-caddy, just a few shreds, with the rest of the root in a drawer in your room. I was very thorough, Per, far too thorough for a madman."

Per whispered: "You're trying to bring Leona back to life. . .? And you're not mad?"

He sighed. "The book tells me how to do it, Per. I was never a good warlock, not like your father, but. . . I'm learning, and now, now I've learned all I have to know. The blood of a living woman. . .." He said, quoting, to show how well he'd learned it: "'*An it be a womyn, wyche be the beste, it sufficeth not for her bloode alone. . ..*' When her blood begins to flow, Per. . .." He could not control the trembling now. He said, his voice so low that it was almost inaudible: "I will take the blood of your woman for my Leona, and when your woman is dead, I will kill you too, and the debt will be paid, and this house will be a happy house again. . .."

His voice was trailing off, and Per said—anything to gain time now, but time for what, in God's name, *what?*—"If you wanted my death, Christian, why did you save my life? That time when I. . .cut my wrists?"

Althing went back to Greta and bent over her. He began to tear the night-gown down the center, freeing it from under the confining straps. He stroked her breasts and her thighs and said slowly: "If I were an incubus, I would plant my seed in her too, but I don't. . .I don't think I am. Her blood for my Leona, if I gave her my seed. . ..Would that be wrong?" His hands still caressing her, he looked up and said slowly: "Why did I save your life? I needed it, Per. I needed the love you have for this woman, I needed her blood. . .." He sighed heavily: "I need so many things, so very many things. . ..Your father was right, when he said I didn't have the skills or the strength for it." His voice began to rise, and he took away his touching hands and clenched his fists and shouted: "But my need

is greater than my weakness, can you understand that?" He shrieked: "I need my Leona, I *need* her! And my need will overcome everything, everything, *everything!*"

He was trembling violently, and he pulled himself together, and rubbed a hand over his eyes, and waited until his composure returned and he was master of his will again, and then he smiled to show how cool he was. He pulled at Greta's night-dress again, taking away the last shreds of it, till she was as naked as she'd been on that other night.

He looked at her a long time, and said slowly: "I wonder if I really am an incubus? We never really know, do we?"

Per was forcing coherence upon himself. He said, his voice hard: "And what will it profit you, Christian? They'll hang you. You'll make your Leona an orphan. . .."

Althing turned to him. He was smiling now, the pain gone. "Hang me? For what? Because I found you killing your wife, just as they know you've been trying to all this time, and so killed you? A pity I was too late to save her, but they'll sympathise with me for that, won't they? And then, then they'll leave us in peace, Leona and me—"

"You don't really believe that, however mad you are. . .."

"I do believe it." Althing sighed and said: "I *must* believe it. After all this time, this preparation, to fail now. . ..How *can* I fail?" As though seeking comfort, he took the secret book and read the passages he'd marked, and shook his head as he snapped it shut and said vehemently: "It's all here, in the book, I *can't* fail!"

Per was white as a ghost. He forced himself to speak calmly. "You're not a warlock, Christian, and neither was my father. Untie my hands, set Greta free. . .we'll sit down and talk, as we've always talked together. . .." He could not control himself. Suddenly he shrieked: "Madman! Madman! Let her go, damn you. . .damn you!"

Althing bent over Greta—she was silent now, her eyes closed; she might almost have been dead. He laid his cheek on her breast—how soft and warm!—and listened to her heart-beat.

He unwrapped a little cloth-bound bundle that was on the bench and took out five, broken, discolored teeth, and said: "Teeth from a hanged man, it took me years to get hold of those. I bought them in Stockholm, a long time ago. I never did find out his name, but they hanged him a hundred and eighty years ago, a horse-thief." He laughed shortly: "Even a horse-thief serves a purpose. Because without these teeth, it won't work, it just won't work."

He placed the teeth carefully on Greta's belly, in a circle, their points facing inward. He took the goat's horn and set it between her

thighs, and drove it home hard; and now, she screamed. Her body thrashed about, but she was firmly strapped down, and even the teeth did not roll off her. He looked back and scowled at Per's screaming, then turned his attention to Greta again. He touched the skin at her throat, feeling for the artery. There was a gentle pulse to it. He got up and took three live bats from the box where he kept them (feeding them on camphor leaves, making doubly sure of it!) and killed them quickly, one after the other, by driving the point of a needle into their tiny skulls, and then laid them down gently, still fluttering, on her body, one on the forehead and one on each breast; they were still shuddering after death, and he waited for the shuddering of their death throes to die down. He took some of the ointment and smeared it on Leona's gleaming skull—the last time for this rite!—and lit three black candles and placed them just so. He put on his long black robe and sandals, and lit a small fire in an old-fashioned brazier, using hazel sticks and some dried verbena to get it started. He waited till the fire had burned down to ash, and then threw on some powdered bats' wings, covering the ashes with more and more of the powder till the whole room was filled with the sticky, acrid smell.

And then there was a moment of indecision. The time was too near; after all the careful preparation, he suddenly wasn't *sure* any more. It was a terrible feeling. . ..

He remembered that dreadful day with Per's father, the day he'd killed him. The book was very clear about it:

And he that shall kill a warlock, that man shall himself a warlock be, an he studie the pact he shall make with the Lorde Satan. . ..

Oh, there'd been a terrible moment there! The deadly aconite had stuck in his throat, and he'd known he was dying, and yet he'd contrived to draw back his lips in a laugh that was more a snarl than anything else, so fearful that Althing had thought, for one brief moment, that he'd turned him, perhaps, into a wolf, or some other ancient animal. And yet—how could he have done that? He'd spoken the right words, even if he'd spoken them only to himself, and though wolfbane wouldn't kill a warlock without the carefully-enunciated curse. . ..He'd clutched at his throat, and he'd smiled, and he'd said: "Take over my mantle, Christian? That's a thing to be born to, not acquired, like a taste for oysters. . .. You'll never do it, never, and I'll come back to haunt you. . .." He'd begun to mumble the haunting words, and for a moment Althing's heart had stood still. . ..But he was dead before he could finish them, he'd wasted too much time in his mockery!

But all the same, that night he'd burned nine black candles, crushed the entrails of three toads, drawn three pentagrams one inside the other, written out his name on a sheet of blue paper and burned it, and recited the whole of the Lord's Prayer backwards; let him come back to haunt him after all that!

And there was the book:". . . *that man shall himself a warlock be.* . .." It couldn't be more clear.

The doubts, the indecision, were gone.

Trembling, he took the little knife and checked the edge with the tip of his thumb; it was sharp; was it sharp enough?

The book said: *The cut shall be clean and nete, and not so long as the jointe of a man's finger.* . ..He knew just where to make it; he'd studied the diagrams.

But first, just to be quite sure. . .. He found the little honing-stone and sat down near the altar to work on the blade.

Per was still shrieking there by his side, and he scarcely looked at him. And Greta. . .Greta lay still and silent as the dead. It worried him. He went over to her, putting aside the knife and the stone, and touched her face. She opened her eyes, the pupils dilated with fear, and looked at him; there was no sound from her; shock, nothing more; good.

Lette it be that her minde be fulle with fear. . ..

He sat down again and worked on the blade. There was a strong temptation on him to dwell on the thought of her blood, but he knew that this was dangerous, and he fought it; he must not drink it, not this time, it would spoil everything.

He was ready now.

With the blade, he carefully shaved a few hairs on his wrist, and saw that the blade was good. He held it over the thick smoke that still spiralled up from the brazier, turning it over and over so that it should be thoroughly prepared; everything very careful now. . ..

Had the life fully gone from the bats? He stared at them and waited, and there was no more shuddering. He took them off her breasts first, calling aloud their numbers and their names as he did so, his voice loud and strong: "One, Unastes. Two, Docimen. . .." The third and crucial one now; gently, he lifted the dead bat from her forehead: "Three, Trimisteron." (Greta's eyes were open, and she was staring at him. Did he see resignation there? Surely not!)

He threw the dead bats onto the fire, and watched them fearfully. If they squealed as they burned, all his efforts would have been for nothing, and if they flew away. . .! He shuddered; he didn't want to think about it. But they did not move, and when he could smell the singing of their flesh (*'An the singeing of the flesh be stronge. . .'*) he breathed a deep sigh of relief.

He was worried about Per's constant screaming, but while he was wondering what to do about it—the book said nothing about silence in this ritual, though silence, of course, was sometimes part, a necessary part, of other rituals—Per fell silent. He could see him struggling, a look of grim determination on his white face, white as the juice of fresh wolfbane!

And now. . ..

He took the knife again, and crouched over Greta. And then a sudden fright came over him and he shouted: "My God, the salt!" Like a madman he ran from the cellar and up the stairs, and came back in a moment, breathing hard, and threw some rock salt on the floor, and then, in a fit of desperation, turned to the book for help. The breath went out of him in a long, long sigh. *'Let the salt be the last thinge before the knife. . ..*"

God, that was a narrow escape! It was a long time before his hands stopped trembling. How could he have forgotten so essential a precaution, after all this study? To be certain, he quickly read all the items, one by one, and checked them over. The bats, the teeth from the hanged man, the goat's horn in its place, the three sacred names spoken loudly, the ointment, the fire, the powdered wings, the salt, and the knife with the scent of smoke on it.

All ready, then.

He leaned over Greta once more, and put a hand on her left breast, and made a careful incision just below it, half an inch long and a quarter of an inch deep; she whimpered softly. The blood did not flow fast enough, and he cut again, a little deeper. And then it was running down her side onto the altar, and he dipped his finger in it and went to Leona and drew a pentagram carefully on her skull; he was holding his breath; his hand must not tremble now.

Why was the fire smoking so heavily? Great clouds of blue smoke were filling the room. He looked at the clock; the hands pointed to nine forty-seven; *why wasn't it striking, then?* And why was Per so silent? And did it matter that he was?

He carefully tore his long robe down the middle, glad that it ripped so easily, the way it was supposed to, and knelt down in front of the altar and reached out and placed his hands, wide-spread, on Greta's body, his left hand close around the goat's horn, for the life, and his right hand at the incision, to feel that life coursing. *He must not look round now!*

Behind him, he knew, seven sacred paces away, the skeleton was waiting. He could hear a faint moaning; was it Per? He dared not look. . .

The blood, the blood. . ..The craving for the touch of it to his lips, just the merest touch, was almost insuperable, and he fought it;

LEONA!

there were more important things now, the most important moment of all his life. . ..

N Not to look round, not to turn the head, not to take his eyes from her eyes, nor let his mind wander from the sensations in the outstretched hands. . ..They were burning now, on fire. He could feel the trembling in his palms, feel the life coursing hotly through his fingers, up his wrists, his arms, his shoulders. . .. His head was bursting. . ..

The clock. Where was the clock?

Greta was screaming wildly, and he kept his eyes fixed hard on the hanged man's teeth; they barely moved with her writhing. Good!

Where was the clock? There was so much smoke in the air, and now the scent of pitch was mingled with it. *Pitch? Where had the pitch come from?*

The blood began to pump out of Greta's side now, no longer a trickle, and he held his breath, and then. . .. The clock! It was striking! Was it striking more slowly than usual?

Calm now! He counted: Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen.

There it was! He moaned. He took away both his hands and dipped them in the blood and cast it over his left shoulder. And then, then he stumbled to his feet, the fear clutching at his nerves, and slowly turned round and looked; his heart was pounding.

She was there! Oh God, dear God, she was there!

Leona was standing there, young, and straight and lovely, her eyes half-closed, her pale lips parted, her long hair over her shoulder and almost down to the waist. Had it grown in the grave?

She looked straight at him, and it seemed that her body was shimmering with the smoke, clearly defined but nebulous as well. The smoke cleared, and he saw her more clearly, and her eyes opened wide as though this thing had surprised her, as though she had not been waiting, and expecting it, all these long months.

And then, she smiled at him, a lovely, sweet young smile of pure delight. He heard her speak one word: "Father?"

He screamed. He threw up his arms and clutched at his heart, and screamed again and writhed on the floor. His heart was bursting now. He rolled over and forced himself to stand, and he tried to move towards her and could not, and he shouted out "Leona! Leona! Leona! my love. . .!" His voice echoed, ringing through the chambers, a hollow sound. He reached out with one hand, the other at his throat, trying to force out the words. He stumbled and knocked over the brazier, and the flames licked at the altar-cloth and burned it. He pulled the cloth to him, the flames licking his face, and spun round and fell, and could not rise; he was already dead. He kicked out once in the ashes of

the brazier, scattering them, and then lay still.

Per was shrinking into his bonds, small and frail and sinking into some sort of wild oblivion; he could not stop the trembling. He saw Leona move slowly, very slowly, towards the altar; it seemed that she glided along. She looked down at Greta's still body, and then she picked up the knife. . . He stared and shook his head in disbelief, and tried to shout, but the only sound that came from his throat was a croak, the croak of a toad in pain.

He saw Leona slash once, twice, three times, again and again at the straps that lay across the altar, and then she turned and looked at him, looked at him straight in the eye, and smiled, and said gently: "Per? It's all over Per. . ..I must go back now. . .."

A long, low moan came from him; she weaved in the smoke, the smoke was part of her, but her eyes were bright and her skin was shining; her hair seemed to float, to move of its own volition. She began to move towards him, and then. . . then there was only darkness.

He heard the clock strike, and without any conscious thought he knew that it was striking ten.

A voice, sobbing, crying, was calling his name, and there were soft hands at his wrists, pulling away the ropes. He opened his eyes and it was Greta. She was naked, and there was blood all over her body, still coursing from a wound under her breast, and she was trying to staunch it and set him free all at the same time, falling unsteadily onto him and then recovering again.

He was free now. He clutched her tightly to him, and moaned; he could not find the words to use. She fell to her knees, her arms around his thighs, supporting herself with him, her great strength gone. Quickly, he ripped off his shirt and tore it down the middle, and tied it tightly round her, covering the wound, stopping the dreadful flow of blood. She pulled herself to her feet, fighting the terrible weakness, and held her arms round his neck, and he held her too, and looked over his shoulder at the horrible skeleton sitting there. . ..

It was sitting there no longer. The silk and golden wires were gone, and at the foot of the beautiful chair there was just a heap of white bones; the skull was atop them, twisted round in a strange and fearful grimace, and all around them the fire was leaping up, filling the room with heat and flames.

The timbers were catching, the old timbers that held up the floor of the house above them. Crouched among the flames, feeling the scorching of their flesh, they looked for a moment to where Althing lay dead on the floor, his heart forever stopped and all his hopes forever ended.

Slowly, they stumbled together out of the room, through the stone-flagged corridors, falling down and stumbling on again, up the old staircase. The smoke behind them was appalling, and the yellow flames were crackling, reaching out towards them, as they ran together, more dead than alive, out into the cold night air.

The rain was pounding down, but it was not enough to satiate the greed of the fire; the thunder burst down on them, and the sky was lit with the blue-white sheets, and the elms were creaking, bending their limbs away from the wind, their leaves whispering angrily.

And soon, the house surrendered its right to exist; they heard the inner walls collapse, and then the roof gave way, and the sparks were flying and hissing in the rain. The ruin was a furnace, the flames leaping up and defying the storm.

And then, they heard it clearly. There was a long, high-pitched scream, the frightful shriek of a man who is entering hell. It hung on the air for a moment, and then it was gone, and there was only the pounding of the rain and the crackle of the flames to answer the wash of the waves.

They huddled there among the rocks and shivered, naked in the storm, the cold rain on their bodies that shone like wet marble in the lightening. They crouched with their arms around each other, and they waited for the dawn.

Even to the island, sooner or later, the dawn would come and the day would be warm and bright. But now, they could only wait, and shiver. ●

SONG OF THE UNDEAD

Beneath the grassy sward I sleep by day,
Awakened by the onset of the night,
With parted lips that move but cannot pray,
With open eyes that see in dark or light;
I here remain, a corpse that cannot die,
Though years depart and all my loved ones go,
While near my grave the lonesome banshees cry,
And dogs bay out their sadness to the snow.
A thousand weeks above my head have rolled,
When stars were fierce and moons were red as flame,
Yet through it all I sleep, with heart as cold
As frost, until a deed without a name
Recalls me from the earth, and surely then
I venture forth to still my thirst again.

NIGHTMARE

I wandered from the way, and shelter sought
At midnight in an old forsaken house,
Abandoned for a generation, thought
No dwelling for a cricket, fly, or mouse.
The moonlight quivered in the dusty air,
And silence ruled: then somewhere in the gloom
I heard a noise of feet upon the stair,
Like ghosts returning softly to the room.

The moon had freed itself from wisps of cloud,
And suddenly a pearly lunar shaft
Glanced on a walking woman, on a shroud,
On eyes that saw in death, on lips that laughed
In soundless mockery: I gave a scream,
And woke in sweating panic from a dream.

—Wade Wellman

BELL, BOOK AND TAROT

by Jean Cirrito

Ever had the feeling that you were being watched? Ever been given the 'business' with a 'steely glare', a 'hungry look', a 'ravishing glance'? Well, if so, you'd just better watch it the next time around, because any one of them may achieve its particular purpose––and where will that leave you?

Of all the beliefs, ancient and otherwise, to which we 'mod-humans' remain addicted, the evil eye seems to be the most lasting. It has survived through the centuries in both the remote areas of the world and in the most modern of cities. The 'belief,' basically, is that the eye emits malignant rays which can cause a multitude of reactions ranging from mild discomfort to death. Animals, human beings, and inanimate objects are susceptible to this peril. Nothing escapes it.

The evil eye has long been considered a tool of power for witches and their fellow travelers, though there are examples of people possessing this power who are not followers of the magic arts in any form and who otherwise appear to be like anyone else. The power is usually involuntary but it can also be acquired through practice and a few well-chosen words. The effects of the acquired version do not appear to be as powerful as the involuntary "gift."

In Italy, where the belief is still strong, the evil eye is called *mal'occhio*, an expression I, personally, am very familiar with, having been raised in an Italian neighborhood. In Naples there are three distinct forms of the *jettatura*–fascinator, i.e., possessor of the evil eye. The most common form is simply called *jettatura* or *jettatore*, while the fascinator of infants has a special name: *jettatura di bambini*. The

third form is called *sospensiva.* The possessor of this art seems to bring disarrangement and confusion wherever he goes. All carefully laid plans are suspended (hence *sospensiva)* when one meets him on the street. Many comic experiences are related concerning late trains, sudden rainfalls, and the like being blamed on this sad victim of his own eyes. Other than being unpopular, his life is usually normal since he is tolerated rather than dreaded.

The belief in the evil eye was common to most pagan religions, and as such pre-dates Christianity, although it has been attributed to the Devil as a gift to his faithful followers.

The true origins of the belief remain unknown. Its inception is deeply rooted in the concepts of fascination, envy, and praise. In etymological dictionaries the word to fascinate (from the Latin *fascinum* meaning spell) in its obsolete form meant to affect by witchcraft, to enslave the faculties and judgment of a person by enchantment or an envious eye. Now, of course, the word has lost all connection with evil spells and simply denotes being pleasantly bewitched by delightful qualities. The word envy comes from the Latin *invidus* which is akin to *invidere:* to look at askance. It is considered harmful to praise anyone too highly for beauty, especially children. Even today one cannot praise an Italian infant without saying *Si mal'occhio non ci fosse:* let no evil eye have effect, to assure the mother that no harm is intended. For one to brag too much, personally, also invites the curse of the eye—Narcissus was doomed forever under his own spell of fascination. The dread of too much bragging or praise inviting bad luck or destructive influences could possibly explain our present custom of refusing to elaborate on something planned before it actually happens for fear it will not come about.

In ancient Greece and Rome 'fascination' was a common dread mentioned as such by both Theocritus and Virgil. In Rome, for example, a victorious general, parading in his chariot through crowds of people, would avert the effects of envious eyes upon the chariot, by having it adorned with grotesque figures. The idea of grotesque or obscene faces being an ancient protection against the evil eye; the idea being, too, that the eye must be distracted from its main object thereby diverting the evil influence. The power was in the first glance hence ways to divert it were popular. Figures on the chariot became known as facsimiles of the Roman god *fascinus.*

Juno is said to have had the power of the evil eye. It is believed that one of the reasons for the caduceus of Mercury was for protection. This myth is the origin of the belief in

serpents as a powerful countercharm against the evil eye (apologies to Freud and his ideas concerning the serpent).

Juno's sacred bird the peacock, with feathers of eyes, was also a spell-binder. This idea still exists in certain parts of the world where it is thought peacock feathers in one's house are bad luck. There are other well-known instances of this malicious power in mythology such as Medusa's head. Passages from the Bible concerning the evil eye are also too commonly known to bear repeating here.

Protections to avert the evil eye include amulets and manual gestures. For the sake of our dissertation, the difference between amulets and talismans will be explained. An amulet is used to ward off evil while a talisman is used both to ward off evil and to procure love, luck, or special favors from the gods. Many effective amulets are related to the idea of life and creation. The most popular ancient amulet was the phallus, symbol of fertility and stability. The concept of sympathetic magic is important when dealing with similar protections used by different cultures. The association of ideas, such as wearing a phallic amulet to gain its life-creating magic, is what is meant by sympathetic magic. Phallic amulets made of bronze have been found in great numbers among relics from ancient Etruria, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. An interesting account of this amulet is given by F.T. Elworthy in his book *The Evil Eye,* Julian Press, re-issue 1958. Mr. Elworthy's book was originally published in 1895, which perhaps explains his obvious embarrassment when discussing this both ancient and modern amulet. If one can excuse his peculiar references to the subject as "odious" and the object as *das mannliche Glied,* the book is excellent.

It is believed the power of evil can be lessened by manual gestures of defiance and insult which have origins in phallic symbolism. Many areas of the world use a position similar to the Italian *mano fica.* This gesture is made by placing the thumb between the index and middle fingers so that it protrudes when a fist is made. There exist today small curved representations of the *mano fica* as well as amulets pierced for wear around the neck. Both Etruscan and Egyptian amulets of this sort have been found. In Dante's *Inferno,* Canto XXV, Vanni hurls the ultimate obscenity at God: ". . .raised his hands with both fists making figs." The note following the Canto explains that the fig is an ancient symbol for the vulva, and the protruding thumb is an obvious phallic symbol. If this amulet is not available, and it is inopportune to use the manual gesture, an Italian will simply shout obscenities at a suspected *jettutura.*

Another ancient idea that still exists is compound amulets. Any amulet that is powerful alone would be expected to be almost infallible when combined with another powerful amulet. Hence a curious amulet with the phallus *en toto* on one end and the *mano fica* on the other was common until the late 19th century.

The female creator has more than just a fig in amulet lore. Her emblem is the first quarter phase of the moon. The crescent moon is the symbol of Hathor, Artemis, and Diana, the halo of Ishtar, and the headdress of Isis and Maia. In ancient times the moon's orbit was believed to be the boundary between heaven and earth; therefore, the idea of an amulet representing creation and "that which touches heaven" was doubly significant. Moon amulets are as powerful as the phallus amulet. The crescent moon with the horns pointed downwards is found today in many shops selling amulets.

The highly symbolic horn shape, with or without its connection to the moon downwards, is still a favorite amulet against the evil eye. Jung explains the dual nature of horn-symbolism as both masculine and feminine in that it can be viewed as a penetrating force or in the shape of a receptacle. Horns have adorned Asiatic temples as a symbol of strength and power, as well as a protection. Warriors from ancient to modern times have used horns on their helmets both as protection from the evil eye and as a symbol of power. The manual gesture, *mano cornuta* in Italy, is also a protection. The index and little fingers are held straight up in this gesture while the other fingers are held to the palm by the thumb. The horned hand is pointing downwards in amulets I have seen, since the same horned hand gesture pointed up is used to ridicule a man who has been cuckolded. In Italy where the voice is sometimes equal to any gesture, the word *corno* (horn) can be used as a protection. The horn symbol is still seen everywhere today in the form of the mystic sign of the horseshoe. The horseshoe is used as a good luck charm although it was originally used as an amulet against the evil eye.

Animal amulets were also universally used. Geographic location and custom dictated which animal was considered the most effective. There are horse, cow, camel, hare, owl, dolphin, tiger, wolf, and frog amulets still in existence. It seems the ancients used many animals as protection, discarding those that seemed ineffectual.

The crocodile, for example, was never popular as an amulet for personal wear; it was usually hung over the entrance to a house or other building for protection. Until recently, I myself was unable to visualize a crocodile looking natural

hanging over a doorway. While driving through a city new to me, however, I chanced upon a house from a child's fantasy. It was painted tastefully and creatively in a multitude of bright colors and over the second floor balcony was a huge artificial green crocodile placed so that he appeared to be crawling up the house. He was bigger than the tall French windows on the balcony. I was amazed at how comfortable and natural he looked. Many people have probably seen this house *and not been aware of the meaning of the crocodile as an ancient Egyptian protection.*

My favorite amulet is a sprig of rue with three main branches. The rue has always been used for country remedies as well as more sophisticated medicines. This amulet is also used as a base for a compound amulet when each tip ends in a different item representing various other known protective symbols. On one amulet, again pierced for wear around the neck, can be found a crescent moon, a serpent, a heart, a bird, a hand, and a lily. Since the belief in the evil eye was so strong and so much time was spent trying to absorb, avert, or confuse the dreaded power, the idea of piling amulet upon amulet for more protection is understandable. I personally prefer the plain amulet of rue. If my rue fails me in my country surroundings, I can always move to the city of the green crocodile.

The most elaborate composite amulet is a hand in the ancient position of benediction: thumb, index finger, and middle fingers extended while the other two fingers fold into the palm. As far as I know this manual gesture is not used except by the clergy and in pictures of various gods. When used as a manual gesture it is still the position of benediction, but when made into an amulet it is a protective device. Every picture I have seen of this hand causes my own hand to itch since both sides of the hand are covered with figures including serpent, crocodile, beetle, and frog. There is usually a woman with a child at the base of the palm. One interesting amulet has a pine cone on the tip of the extended thumb. The pine tree being sacred to Zeus, as such is a symbolic power. There are several pictures of this amulet called *mano pantea* in Mr. Elworthy's afore-mentioned book.

Of the many amulets in use, I have mentioned but a few. Further information on this subject can be obtained from the books: *The Evil Eye in the Western Highlands*, R.C. Maclagan, 1902; *The Evil Eye, Studies in the Folklore of Vision*, Edward S. Gifford, 1958; and of course that of Mr. Elworthy.

When amulets fail to protect and a spell is cast, there is usually some highly imaginative cure to be used. One modern writer suggests we burn

the offender at the stake, thereby destroying the power. Unless, and until, the Inquisition reappears, we'll settle for other ways. In some parts of the world one still calls upon the Old Woman (euphemism for witch) and she sets about curing the victim.

In England, where the evil eye is called the north eye and the spell referred to as owl-blinked or overlooked, the local old woman would prepare a powder made with spit.

Sacred spittle bring ye hither;
Meale and it now mix together,
And a little oil with either.

She would then scatter this over the victim as she prayed.

Another cure is to procure a new nail, follow the offender and nail any track made by his foot. People also burned salt and repeated the name of the fascinator over and over again.

In Ireland anyone who gazes too long at a fire is suspected of being an "eye-biting" witch. In this case one would choose the largest burning coal and turn it over. If the gazer's eyes burn, the suspicion is valid and his reputation ruined.

In Russia all knots must be loosened immediately on the clothes and shoes of the afflicted person, so that the evil spell has no place to hide. Only then can the spell be properly broken which includes again prayers and powder.

In India a sweeper is called in to cure the curse. He waves his broom of split bamboo, which is considered a powerful agent, up and down in front of the victim.

In Mexico the local old woman is called in when a child is afflicted. She must first ascertain if the offender is male or female. She breaks an egg into a glass receptacle, then she studies the egg yolk. If a long mark appears in it, the offender is a man; if round mark or fat oval a female is responsible. Once this information is clear, the old woman performs a cleansing called *limpia.* The child must change into clean clothing. If the spell was cast by a male, the child must be wiped all over with a shirt; if the bewitcher was a female, an apron is used to wipe the child.

A universal cure is to immediately perform a good deed for the offender and then see to it that he consumes salt.

When I decided to devote this month's column to the evil eye, I wrote to my modernized Sicilian-American mother. She answered: "I know nothing about the evil eye. All I know is that when certain people stare at you for a long time, you get a high fever. Someone calls in an old woman (sic) who says a prayer over you and the fever goes down."

No one knew the prayer she said. "I really can't help you because I don't believe in any of that stuff." Believe it or not, the cures are still known and practiced even by those of us who do not "believe in any of that stuff." ●

STOUT 69

the strawhouse pavillion

By Ron Goulart

Illustrated by
William Stout

A ghost story to end them all: in which Goulart has truly captured a facet of COVEN'S total concept. One could expect, perhaps, a pale, translucent chain-rattler; two murderous shades reliving some ghastly deed––but an entire band?

The second time the kitchen caught on fire Wendy Mayer didn't rise from the living room sofa.

"Bert?" she called toward the distant door the smoke was billowing through.

Her husband appeared in the smoke, a tall slightly stooped young man. "Do you have a five dollar bill, Wendy?"

"Another fire?" asked middle sized Max Kearney, who'd run for the fire extinguisher in the hall closet.

"It's out already. I'm sorry, Max," said Bert Mayer, "to keep you jogging back and forth with that thing. Can I get you a fresh drink, Jillian?"

Max's slim auburn haired wife was on the window seat, her back

to the tree filled acres outside. "I can wait."

"Bert," asked Wendy, a tall, pretty girl with no makeup, "why did you want five dollars?"

Bert blinked. "Excuse me for not mentioning it." He grinned over at Max. "Just smoke now, Max. It was the chafing dish. When I was opening the back door for the delivery boy the chafing dish fell into the salad and the dressing and the denatured alcohol started a fire."

"What delivery boy?" asked Wendy.

"From the Cala market," explained Bert. "The last fire ruined the steaks. I'm sorry. So I ordered some frozen fish. You can't get meat after six o'clock. I hope that's okay with everybody."

"Won't they take a check?" said his wife.

"Not after I knocked him down," said Bert.

"How'd that happen?"

"He drove over the petunia beds out behind the patio and I thought it was the raccoons again come to steal the garbage cans and I ran out," said Bert. "And, I'm sorry, I sort of fell into him. Because the patio lights are on the fritz again. Even after I helped him up the stairs he stayed surly. Max, we sure seem to have trouble with delivery boys. It was the same when we lived near you folks in San Francisco."

Wendy said, "Bert trips a lot."

"I do," agreed Bert. "Can't help it. I'm sorry."

A motor started up outside and they heard a truck driving away. "He didn't wait I guess," said Wendy. "Max and Jillian, I hope you'll forgive us. Here you are, the first time we've had you to dinner at the house we inherited, and the meal is getting all fouled up."

"They're used to that," said Bert. "We gave dinners like this before we moved to Marin County."

"Bert, why don't you make us all fresh drinks and I'll fix up something quick," said his pretty wife. "An omelet or something."

Bert shook his head. "No, Wendy. When we moved in here last month we made up a schedule. Now that I don't have to work any more, I can give a lot more help with the house. And, I'm sorry, but according to the schedule, it's one of my nights to cook. You can understand, Max, our wanting to stick to a schedule and keep ourselves organized."

"It's your mansion and you can run it any way you'd like," Max scratched the very top of his crewcut head. "Though maybe things would go faster if you just sent out for pizza."

"Those pizza places," said Bert. "They never understand my instructions on how to get here. They always send anchovie even if I ask for salami. No, we're always having trouble with pizza people, Max." He grinned at Jillian. "Anyway, here's Jillian who's a food consultant to

your ad agency, Max. She isn't going to eat a pizza in my house. I'm sorry." He noticed that the kitchen had stopped smoking. "I'll whip up something quick. Wendy, come on and get the fresh drinks."

When they were alone in the living room Jillian asked her husband, "Well, is he?"

Max moved to her, rested his forefinger on the nape of her neck. "Haunted? I don't know. Bert's always been sort of a screw up. Sometimes when you approach thirty it starts to accelerate."

"What about that first fire?" asked Jillian. "Could a ghost have done it?"

"His cigarette lighter fell into a pan of cooking oil," said Max. "Maybe something supernatural nudged his hand."

"It's my father," said Wendy, behind them. She put a tray of drinks on a marble top coffee table. "That's who it is. He won't leave Bert alone. He hasn't since we got married sixteen months ago."

"Your father's ghost, you mean," said Jillian.

Wendy returned to the sofa, sat, nodded. "My father was, as I remember him and he died eight years ago when I was seventeen, he was an exceptionally competent man. He had to be. He was, you know, in the music business most of his life. Lead his own dance band from the 1930s to late in the 1950s. King Challens and His Musical Jacks. Not as well known as Benny Goodman or even Anson Weeks, but we always lived well."

Max picked up a scotch and ice. "What makes you think the ghost is him?"

"It plays all his arrangements."

"Oh, so?" said Max. "There's music."

Wendy shrugged slightly. "Since we moved here anyway, Max. My father was a very careful, efficient man and he did all his own arrangements. I know his versions of *Harbor Lights* and *Laura.*"

"Where'd you hear the music?" asked Jillian as Max handed her a glass.

"Well, in the dance pavillion."

"Dance pavillion?"

"Yes, it appears out on the front acre. Where there's mostly grass," said the girl. "It's the Strawhouse Pavillion, where dad played so often in the Forties. I've got photos of it in my scrapbook upstairs."

Max asked, "The whole ballroom shows up to haunt you?"

"And the parking lot. The real Strawhouse Pavillion was torn down, in Sacramento it was, ten years ago," said Wendy. "It's appeared out there some six times now. In fact, the neighbors have begun to complain. We're next door, about three acres from, to the Psycho/Technocratics Foundation, you know. They have all those quiet retreat weekends and I guess hearing *Tuxedo Junction* from a twenty four piece swing

band spoils their mood. Bert and I have both apologized."

"Wait now," said Max. "You told Jillian that you felt Bert's been haunted for much longer than just the month or so you've lived here in Marin."

"Sure," said Wendy. "Really, Max. He wasn't like this before we got married. He maybe wasn't as headsup and efficient as my father, but he wasn't always setting fire to kitchens and falling over delivery boys, either."

"Why is your father supposed to be haunting him?"

Wendy ran her tongue over her upper lip. "It's sort of a joke, I guess. Dad always used to kid me I'd never find a husband like him. Now I think he's exaggerating Bert's clumsiness and forgetfulness, making extra things go wrong, to point up the contrast between Bert and himself. You don't always want to marry somebody just like your father anyway."

"Whatever your father's ghost was doing before," Max said, "he didn't bring his ballroom with him then."

"There wasn't any space," said Wendy. "That third floor flat we had was charming but small. Bert could hardly ever even find a place to park our Volkswagen. Where would you have put a dance pavillion?"

"All the evidence, the real evidence, of a ghost," said Max, "has shown up since you got here."

"The signs my father is haunting us are more obvious now, yes," admitted Wendy. "I'd like you to investigate this, Max, and find out exactly what's going on."

Max turned away from here, watched the dark grounds beyond the high wide windows. "The occult investigating, Wendy, has never been more than a hobby. Jillian and I are on our way up the coast to Wollter's Bay for a week, as you know. For a vacation."

"Max is reluctant about the ghost detective business," said Jillian in her faintly British voice.

"Couldn't you investigate after your vacation? Next weekend maybe," said Wendy.

Max said, "What does Bert feel about this?"

"About what?" asked Bert, coming into the big beam ceilinged room with a bottle of red wine in his hand. "I'm sorry, Max, I didn't catch what you were saying. The ghost stuff, was it?"

"Wendy's told us about the problems you've been having with what might be her father's ghost," said Max. "She asked me to investigate," but I won't unless you agree."

Bert was pumping the wooden handle of the corkscrew which seemed to be stuck in the cork of the wine bottle. "I like to open the wine early, give it time to breathe. Excuse me a second." He twisted the bit of the corkscrew and the cork

plopped down into the wine. "That keeps happening. I have a trick with a fork and a drinking straw that usually gets it out. What were you asking me, Max? Oh yeah, the ghost. I don't know. I think Wendy is making too much of the situation. Still if you want to."

From out in the darkness came the sound of automobiles driving across gravel and parking. Yellow and orange light, throbbing, grew up in the night. "It's him," said Wendy. She hurried to the front door and out onto the elevated sun deck that looked down on the front acre of the estate.

Max and Jillian followed.

The grass and some of the trees were gone and a bright wood and glass building rested on a wide stretch of gravel. The building was white, octagonal in shape, with a great thatched dome and stretches of lattice work all over it. The cars in the parking lot were bright and new, none newer than 1940. The name Strawhouse Pavillion flashed gold and below it were the red neon words Dine & Dance. An oilcloth banner, painted red and gold, stretched across the space above the wide arched door and announced the appearance inside of King Challens, his piano and his orchestra. Laughter and light came from the pavillion.

"That's some ghost," said Jillian, holding Max's hand tight.

The band began to play. *"One O'Clock Jump,"* said Wendy. "That was one of his favorites." Her waist was pressing against the porch railing.

"I'm sorry," said Bert, joining them. He had red wine blotches on the leg of his tan slacks. "There's our mysterious phenomenon, Max. You'd think, since I inherited this place from my uncle, that the ghost would be from my side of the family."

"Be quiet a minute," Wendy said without looking at him. Her head moved gently in tempo with the music. "It's hard to see inside the pavillion. Why is that, Max?"

The windows glowed with light but it was a hazy light and you couldn't see anyone inside the pavillion. "I don't know, Wendy." Max touched his wife's hand and let go, moved down the porch steps toward the yard. The summer night was still warm. Max had walked twenty feet toward the Strawhouse Pavillion when he noticed several people on the grounds. They were staring up at the pavillion.

"We've warned them about this," said a dark-suited man with a shaggy mustache. He was carrying an unplugged mixer. "How can you have a Psycho/Technocratics weekend and play appliance games when this lousy rotten noise is going on." The cord of the electric mixer swung with his angry gestures at the noisy ballroom.

"I take it from your clothes,"

said Max, "you're not a 1940s ghost."

"You bet your lousy dingbat," said the mustached man. "My wife and I are novices second class at the foundation. My suit is from Lew Ritter in Westwood."

"Connie," said his wife, a blonde woman with a blender under her arm, "don't let your anger spoil all your fine progress."

"What kind of lousy progress am I making when a lousy rotten anachronistic honky-tonk can upset me?" He threw his mixer at the ghost pavillion. "As for you, Dr. Wally, I quit. I demand a refund. I want a lousy rotten refund from you. When I pay for silence and beatific solitude I don't want lousy rotten jitterbug music."

Gliding silently across the grass was a tall, slender man of about fifty. He had hair like a Midwest poet and a gap between his front teeth. "The fervency of your reactions, the vehemence of your furor, the sufusion of fervid emotions, Mr. Conners," the tall man said, "add nothing to an already pungent situation."

"Listen, Wally," said Conners. He grabbed the blender from his wife and threw it in Wally's direction.

Dodging the flung appliance, Wally asked Max, "Are you an intimate, a confrere, a compatriot of Mr. and Mrs. Mayer? I am Dr. E. Phillips Wally, founder of the Psycho/Technocratics Foundation and pioneer in appliance therapy."

"Yes, I'm Max Kearny. I'm a guest at the Mayers'," Max told him. "Why are you and your disciples carrying appliances?"

Dr. Wally smiled. "You haven't read, haven't pored over, haven't studiously regarded my book, which is called *If You Like Machines, You'll Like People.*"

A dark woman of forty was at Wally's side now. The pavillion was playing a slow waltz. "Don't waste time, Phil. What would this shmuck understand about establishing rapport with the deep forces of machinery."

"My wife, Charlotte," said Dr. Wally.

"You look to be some kind of public relations simp like your friend Bert Mayer."

"Advertising, art director," said Max. This thin dark haired woman looked vaguely familiar. Max pointed a thumb at the pavillion. "What do you know about this?"

"Only that we want it to stop," Dr. Wally told him. "The noise, the increasing frequency of the noise, Mr. Kearny, is disrupting, desolating, and laying waste to the important silences my work and my therapy call for."

"What's this boob know about tranquillity?" said Charlotte Wally.

The music of King Challens big band, the shuffling of feet on the dance floor, all the sounds of the pa-

villion began to grow dim. The image of the ballroom was becoming less distinct. For a few seconds the sound and look of the place flared full again, then it was gone. There was grass again, trees. Mrs. Wally gave a small grunt and gathered up the two appliances Conners had flung. She and Dr. Wally walked away toward the pines and redwoods at the edge of the estate, up the gradual incline and into the woods. Their disciples left with them. Max went and paced the area where the Strawhouse Pavillion had stood. He found nothing. From the three story Mayer house came a mild explosion. Max ran back to the porch and Jillian met him on the steps. "Bert again?"

Jillian nodded yes. "Looks like we'll all be going into Tiburon for dinner."

"I'll drive," said Max.

Seagulls were walking in single file along the warm sand toward Max. He squinted slightly in the bright noon sun and watched them. On the hillside behind him underbrush rattled and crackled. Max stretched up off his towel and saw Bert Mayer tumbling, fully clothed, from the edge two hundred feet above. When he hit the white sand of the beach Bert rolled over twice more, sat up. He held part of a flowering bush in his right hand.

"I'm sorry," said Bert, getting to his feet as Max approached. "I guess I ruined your flowers."

"You okay?"

"I suppose," said Bert. "I should have tried the stairs but I had a bad experience with old rickety weather beaten stairs like that once and I decided to try the hillside, except I tripped over something."

"What brings you?"

"That's what Jillian asked," said Bert. "I saw her up at the cottage. She's really gotten a tan in the three days you've been here." He started to hand Max the bush, decided to throw it away. "I hate to bother you, Max, but that ghost, well, things are much worse. The ghost of Wendy's father is showing up every night now. The pavillion is really bothering the Wallys. You know, he was trying to buy our place just before my uncle died and left it to me. I suppose Wally'd like us out of there entirely."

"He would, huh? What else is worse about the ballroom?"

"Wendy," Bert said. "Wendy seems to be getting more and more fascinated with the place, with the idea her father's ghost is playing in there. She used to just stand on the sundeck and watch. Last night she started walking up to the place." He shook his head. "Mrs. Wally told me it would be dangerous if Wendy went right in there."

Max said, "Charlotte Wally, Charlotte Wally," and tapped his bare foot three times in the sand. "Of course she'd say that."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand."

"I thought she looked familiar," said Max, grinning. "She wasn't always in the psychoelectric business. Eight or nine years ago, when I was first getting interested in occult detecting, I went to one of her seances."

"Seances? She was connected with ghosts?"

"Right," said Max. "A very good medium and very good at summoning up all kinds of spirits and spectres." His foot tapped the sand again. "I'll have a talk with the Wallys."

"Good. Maybe that'll help. I hate to see you cut your vacation short but this is an emergency."

"It's your emergency," said Max. "Jillian and I will be at your place on Saturday."

"This is Wednesday, Max. Suppose she goes inside the ghost pavillion before Saturday?"

"You'll have to keep her from doing that."

"How?"

"Hold on to her if you can't talk her out of it."

"I don't know. I guess I can." He put his hands in his pockets. "One other favor, Max."

"Which?"

"My car got stuck in the sand off the road up there. Can you help me tow it out?"

Max said, "Okay, Bert," and led him to the stairs.

The branches of the willow tree flicked against the bow window of the study and Dr. Wally turned his head away from the refrigerator. He noticed Max. "I can tell you nothing of consequence, nothing of significance, nothing of great moment about the unfortunate, and much too loud, haunting our neighbors are suffering. If you'd like to sit down and meditate you're welcome."

There was an electric toaster on the only other chair. "No, thanks," said Max. He stepped around a portable dishwasher and a clothes dryer. "Your wife used to be a successful spirit medium. In fact, you used to put on a turban and run the check room. A few days after the Mayers move in next door to you they start having ghosts."

"A coincidence, an accidental synchronism, an innocent concurrence," said Wally. He put his fingers on the smooth sand-colored surface of the refrigerator and closed his eyes. "We gave up the spirit dodge years ago, Kearny, after I got my PhD. When I found how to establish rapport with machinery and how to translate it into the daily conduct of life, there was no more need for the other world."

Max leaned against a water cooler. "I notice you can communicate with machines even when they're not plugged in."

"You're not ready for that concept," said Wally. "You must work

up. My advice to you, Kearny, is to try to understand your electric can opener, then perhaps work up to your power lawn mower."

"We live in a flat."

"If you could even relate to your wristwatch or understand your doorbell," said Wally, "it would be progress."

"I'd like to talk to your wife."

Wally shook his head. "Oh, you are not ready for that yet. Start with your wristwatch. No, Charlotte takes a long preparation." He shut his eyes, turned in his canvas chair and was with the refrigerator again.

Max stepped out into the hall, which was full of appliances and cardboard cartons. Two doors past Dr. Wally's study, someone hissed at him. The doorway was partially blocked by a sewing machine. In the small room it led to was Charlotte Wally. "In here, boob."

Max slid the sewing macihne aside, stepped over a carton of mixers. "I wanted to ask you some questions."

"That's all nitwits like you ever want." She was wearing a dark and narrow ankle length lounging robe and her hair was done into two long braids. "Listen, rube. I need your help. Imagine that, turning to a peabrain for aid."

"You ought to have another talk with that sewing machine and get rid of some of your hostility," said Max. "You're responsible for the ghost of King Challens, aren't you?"

"Shut up and listen." Mrs. Wally crossed to an electric stove and slid out the broiler drawer. "I have to hide my collection from the good doctor. He's a clunk at times himself. Here, coconut, this is the book I used."

Max took the profferred magic book. It was bound in cracked black leather. He read the title aloud. "Familial Ghosts And Various and Divers Ways To Summon Them."

"I'm going to loan that to you, stupe. Don't lose it. It's a first edition, besides being invaluable for the spells in it."

"You used this to summon up the ghost of Wendy's father. What went wrong?"

"I didn't expect the whole pavillion and all the noise," said Charlotte Wally. "My husband, and I was feeling sentimental toward the jerk at the time, had his heart set on acquiring that place of Mayers'. We almost had the old uncle convinced he should sell and then he died. As soon as your chums moved in I paid a courtesy call on the pair of dimwits. I found out all I needed to know." She smiled evenly. "She's got a thing about her father and he's a screwup. I figure the ghost of her father would either break them up or scare them off."

"A common motive in ghost cases," remarked Max. "All the extra ghosts or whatever they are, the big band and the noise are hurting business here."

"I wanted to do this as a surprise for old nuts and bolts, my husband. Now I can't even admit I'm involved. That's where you come in, dodo."

Max asked, "Why can't you call off the ghosts yourself?"

Turn to page 112, dumbell."

Max did and read the spells written there. "That's great. The only way to reverse the spell is to get the nearest kin of the haunted person to go up against the ghost and read a counter spell."

"Kin to kin, a nice old fashioned touch," said Mrs. Wally. "I knew Bert Mayer, the nearest kin as defined by that spell, even if he found out what was going on, wouldn't be able to bring off the counter spell."

Marking the place with his finger, Max said, "He'll have to."

"For a jerk, you've had some pretty good luck as a ghost breaker. You'll have to coach that boob."

"First," said Max, "you'll have to sign an agreement not to hex or spell the Mayers in any way again. Otherwise I don't co-operate."

Mrs. Wally went to a front-loading washing machine and got out writing paper and a rattling little box of steel-tip pens.

Jillian came running into the guest room of the Mayer house. She stopped, hesitated, waiting for her breath, then said, "Max, it's out there and she's gone inside."

Bert Mayer jumped up out of the wicker easy chair. "The pavillion?"

"Yes, it showed up just a minute ago, while Wendy and I were setting the table out on the patio in back," said Jillian, two folded white cloth napkins still in her hand. "Wendy heard it, drifted off. I followed, couldn't stop her. She pushed me away and ran. Right inside the place."

The magic book slid out of Bert's hand. "Max, I figured it wouldn't get here for an hour or two."

Max was still stiting on the edge of the bed. "Bring the book and let's go."

"I'm sorry," said Bert. "What page was it again? I should have taken notes while you explained."

"Page 112." Max stood and walked out of the room.

Bert caught up with him in the hallway. "Are ghosts really that perceptive, Max? Would they absolutely know it wasn't me if you went in?"

"Yes." Max and Bert went out the front door, across the sundeck and down the steps. The Strawhouse Pavillion was sharp and clear, the band was playing *In The Mood.*

"I'll mess it up," said Bert. "Read it backwards."

Max said, "No, you won't. You'll go in and get Wendy out and do what you have to do and end this. Right?"

Bert said, "Okay." He left the real grass, hesitated just onto the gravel, then walked to the flashing

pavillion and up the wide wood staircase and in.

Jillian joined Max, took his hand. "What do you think?"

"Watch," he said.

The band finished the tune and there was applause. They went into *Sophisticated Lady*. The number was almost finished when the Strawhouse Pavillion exploded. It flashed bright, expanded and was suddenly gone. The cars, the parking lot, the sounds, the past. All were gone and Bert and Wendy were in the field of dark grass. The sky was night clear and you noticed stars again.

Bert and Wendy walked to Max and Jillian. "Wasn't too hard," Bert told them. He was shaking his head, half smiling.

Wendy said quietly, "I wonder if my father was always like that. He didn't seem very much like I remember. Just a middle aged man, trying so hard to impress everyone." She waved a hand at where the pavillion had stood, not turning. "He willed all that, he said, kept it coming back. He was the ghost and the rest of it he willed somehow. To impress me, to have me see him at his best. I don't quite know how he did it. He wouldn't talk about that, about himself that way. He told me, 'You wouldn't get it, Wendy.' He always used to say that. Why did I forget he did? He wanted to impress me. He couldn't just come back. He had to bring a ballroom." She stopped, touched Bert. "You handled the situation very well, Bert."

"Wasn't too hard," he said. ●

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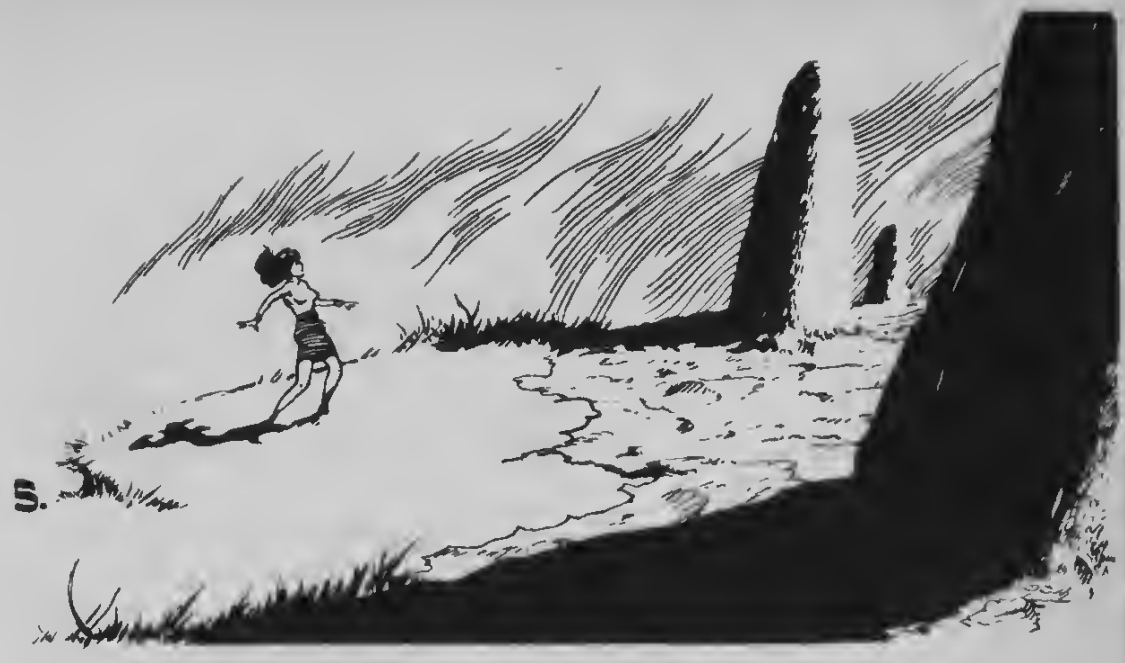

the little people

By Robert E. Howard

Illustrated by William Stout

One of the truly great, heretofore UNPUBLISHED stories, from the estate of the late Robert E. Howard. A touch of fantasy: a touch of myth: a touch of terror!

My sister threw down the book she was reading. To be exact, she threw it at me.

"Foolishness!" said she. "Fairy tales! Hand me that copy of Michael Arlen."

I did so mechanically, glancing at the volume which had incurred her youthful displeasure. The story was *The Shining Pyramid* by Arthur Machen.

"My dear girl," said I, "this is a masterpiece of *outre* literature."

"Yes, but the idea!" she answered. "I outgrew fairy tales when I was ten."

"This tale is not intended to be an exponent of common-day realism," I explained patiently.

"Too far-fetched," she said, with

the finality of seventeen. "I like to read about things that could happen—who were 'The Little People' he speaks of—the same old elf and troll business?"

"All legends have a base of fact," I said. "There is a reason. . .."

"You mean to tell me such things actually existed?" she exclaimed. "Rot!"

"Not so fast, young lady," I admonished, slightly nettled. "I mean that all myths had a concrete beginning which was later changed and twisted so as to take on a supernatural significance. Young people," I continued, bending a brotherly frown on her pouting lips, "have a way of either accepting entirely or rejecting entirely such things as they do not understand. The 'Little People' spoken of by Machen are supposed to be descendants of the prehistoric people who inhabited Europe before the Celts came down out of the north.

"They are known variously as Turanians, Picts, Mediterraneans, and Garlic Eaters. A race of small dark people, traces of their type may be found in primitive sections of Europe and Asia today, among the Basques of Spain, the Scotch of Galloway, and the Lapps.

"They were workers in flint and are known to anthropologists as men of the Neolithic, or polished stone, age. Relics of their age show plainly that they had reached a comparatively high stage of primitive culture by the beginning of the bronze age, which was ushered in by the ancestors of the Celts—our prehistoric tribesmen, young lady.

"These destroyed or enslaved the Mediterranean peoples and were in turn ousted by the Teutonic tribes. All over Europe, and especially in Britain, the legend is that these Picts, whom the Celts looked upon as scarcely human, fled to caverns under the earth and lived there, coming out only at night, when they would burn, murder, and carry off children for their bloody rites of worship. Doubtless there was much in this theory. Descendants of cave people, these fleeing dwarves would no doubt take refuge in caverns and no doubt managed to live undiscovered for generations."

"That was a long time ago," she said with slight interest. "If there were ever any of those people, they are dead now. Why, we're right in the country where they're supposed to perform, and haven't seen any signs of them."

I nodded. My sister Joan did not react to the weird West country as I did. The immense menhirs and cromlechs which rose starkly upon the moors seemed to bring back vague racial memories, stirring my Celtic imagination.

"Maybe," I said, adding unwisely, "You heard what that old villager said: the warning about walking on the fen at night. No one does it. You're very sophisticated, young

lady, but I'll bet you wouldn't spend a night alone in that stone ruin we can see from my window."

Down came her book and her eyes sparkled with interest.

"I'll do it!" she exclaimed. "I'll show you! He did say no one would go near those old rocks at night, didn't he? I will, and stay there the rest of the night!"

She was on her feet instantly, and I saw that I had made a mistake.

"No you won't, either," I vetoed. "What would people think?"

"What do I care what they think?" she retorted in the up-to-date spirit of the Younger Generation.

"You haven't any business out on the moors at night," I answered. "Granting that these old myths are so much empty wind, there are plenty of shady characters who wouldn't hesitate to harm a helpless girl. It's not safe for a girl like you to be out unprotected."

"You mean I'm too pretty?" she asked naively.

"I mean you're too foolish," I answered in my best older brother manner.

She made a face at me and was silent for a moment, and I who could read her agile mind with absurd ease, could tell by her pensive features and sparkling eyes exactly what she was thinking. She was mentally surrounded by a crowd of her cronies back home, and I could guess the exact words which she was already framing: "My dears, I spent a whole night in the most romantic old ruin in West England, which was supposed to be haunted—."

I silently cursed myself for bringing the subject up, when she said abruptly; "I'm going to do it, just the same. Nobody will harm me, and I wouldn't pass up the adventure for anything!"

"Joan," I said, "I forbid you to go out alone tonight or any other night."

Her eyes flashed, and I instantly wished I had couched my command in more tactful language. My sister was willful and high-spirited, used to having her way and very impatient of restraing.

"You can't order me around," she flamed. "You've done nothing but bully me ever since we left America."

"It's been necessary," I sighed. "I can think of a number of pastimes more pleasant than touring Europe with a flapper sister."

Her mouth opened as if to reply angrily; then she shrugged her slim shoulders and settled back down in her chair, taking up a book.

"Alright, I didn't want to go much anyhow," she remarked casually. I eyed her suspiciously; she was not usually subdued so easily. In fact, some of the most harrowing moments of my life have been those in which I was forced to ca-

jole and coax her out of a rebellious mood.

Nor was my suspicion entirely vanquished when, a few moments later, she announced her intention of retiring, and went to her room just across the corridor.

I turned out the light and stepped over to my window, which opened upon a wide view of the barren, undulating wastes of the moor. The moon was just rising, and the land glimmered grisly and stark beneath its cold beams. It was late summer and the air was warm, yet the whole landscape looked cold, bleak and forebidding. Across the fen I saw rise, stark and shadowy, the rough and mighty spires of the ruined cromlech. Gaunt and terrible, they loomed against the night, silent phantoms from the past.

Sleep did not come to me at once, for I was hurt at my sister's evident resentment, and I lay for a long time, brooding and staring at the window, now framed boldly in the molten silver of the moon. At length I dropped into a troubled slumber, through which flitted vague dreams wherein dim, ghostly shapes glided and leered.

I awoke suddenly, sat up and stared about me wildly, striving to orient my muddled senses. An oppressive feeling as of impending evil hovered about me. Fading swiftly as I came to full consciousness, lurked the eery remembrance of a hazy dream wherein a white fog had floated through the window and had assumed the shape of a tall, white-bearded man who had shaken my shoulder as if to arouse me from sleep. All of us are familiar with the curious sensations of waking from a bad dream—the dimming and dwindling of partly remembered thoughts and feelings. But the wider awake I became, the stronger grew the suggestion of evil.

I sprang up, snatched on my clothing, and rushed to my sister's room and flung open the door. The room was unoccupied.

I raced down the stair and accosted the night clerk who was maintained by the small hotel for some obscure reason.

"Miss Costigan, sir? She came down, clad for outdoors, a while after midnight—about half an hour ago, sir, and said she was going to take a stroll on the moor and not to be alarmed if she did not return at once, sir."

I hurled myself out of the hotel, my pulse pounding a devil's tattoo. Far out across the fen I saw the ruins, bold and grim against the moon, and in that direction I hastened. At length—it seemed hours—I saw a slim figure some distance in front of me. The girl was taking her time and in spite of her start on me, I was gaining—soon would be within hearing distance. My breath was already coming in gasps from my exertions, but I quickened my pace.

The aura of the fen was like a

tangible presence, pressing upon me, weighting my limbs—and always that presentiment of evil grew and grew.

Then, far ahead of me, I saw my sister stop suddenly and look about confusedly. The moonlight flung a veil of illusion; I could see her, but I could not see what had caused her sudden terror. I broke into a run, my blood leaping wildly and suddenly freezing as a wild, despairing scream burst out and sent the echoes flying.

The girl was turning first one way and then another, and I screamed for her to run toward me. She heard me and started toward me, running like a frightened antelope—and then I *saw*. Vague shadows darted about her, short, dwarfish shapes; just in front of me rose a solid wall of them, and I saw that they had blocked her from gaining to me. Suddenly, instinctively I believe, she turned and raced for the stone columns, the whole horde after her, save those who remained to bar my path.

I had no weapon, nor did I feel the need of any. A strong, athletic youth, I was in addition an amateur boxer of ability, with a terrific punch in either hand. Now all the primal instincts surged redly in me. I was a cave man bent on vengeance against a tribe which sought to steal a woman of my family. I did not fear; I only wished to close with them. Aye, though the whole spawn of Hell rise up from those caverns which honeycomb the moors. Aye, I recognized these—I knew them of old, and all the old wars rose and roared within the misty caverns of my soul. Hate leaped in me as in the old days when men of my blood came from the North.

Now I was almost upon those who barred my way. I saw plainly the stunted bodies, the gnarled limbs, the beady reptilian eyes that stared unwinkingly, the grotesque, square faces with their inhuman features, and the shimmer of flint daggers in their crooked hands. Then with a tigerish leap I was among them, like a leopard among jackals, and details were blotted out in a whirling red haze. Whatever they were, they were of living substance; features crumpled and bones shattered beneath my flailing fists and blood darkened the moon-silvered stones. A flint dagger sank hilt deep in my thigh. Then the ghastly throng broke each way and fled before me, as their ancestors fled before mine, leaving four silent dwarvish shapes stretched on the moor.

Heedless of my wound, I took up the grim race anew. Joan had reached the druidic ruins now, and she leaned against one of the columns, exhausted, blindly seeking there the protection in obedience to some dim instinct, just as women of her blood had done in bygone ages.

The horrid beings that pursued her were closing in upon her. They would reach her before I. God knows the thing was horrible enough, but back in the recesses of my mind, grimmer horrors were whispering: dream memories wherein stunted creatures pursues white-limbed women across such fens as these. Lurking memories of the ages when dawns were young and men struggled with forces which were not of men.

The girl toppled forward in a faint, and lay at the foot of the towering column in a piteous white heap. And they closed in—closed in. What they would do I knew not, but the ghosts of ancient memory whispered that they would do something of hideous evil, something foul and grim.

From my lips burst a scream, wild and inarticulate, born of sheer elemental horror and despair. I could not reach her before those fiends had worked their frightful will upon her. The centuries, the ages swept back. This was it as it had been in the beginning. And what followed, I know not how to explain, but I think that that wild shriek whispered back down the long reaches of Time to the Beings my ancestors worshipped, and that blood answered blood. Aye, such a shriek as could echo down the dusty corridors of lost ages and bring back from the whispering abyss of Eternity the ghost of the only one who could save a girl of Celtic blood.

The foremost of the beings were almost upon the prostrate girl; their hands were clutching for her, when suddenly beside her a form stood. There was no gradual materializing; the figure leaped suddenly into being, etched bold and clear in the moonlight. A tall, white-bearded man, clad in long robes—the man I had seen in my dream! A druid, answering once more the desperate need of people of his race. His brow was high and noble, his eyes mystic and far-seeing—so much I could see, even from where I ran. His arm rose in an imperious gesture, and the beings shrunk back—back—back—. They broke and fled, vanishing suddenly, and I sank to my knees beside my sister, gathering the child into my arms. A moment I looked up at the man, sword and shield against the powers of darkness, protecting the helpless tribes as in the world's youth. He raised his hand above us as if in benediction; then he too vanished suddenly, and the moor lay bare and silent. ●

READER'S COLUMN

Here we go again with a batch of notes to the EYRIE—as Woody Guthrie has written, "from California to the New York Island."

Dear Editor:

I just recently started reading stories of the occult and supernatural. With the advent of your book, COVEN 13, I am now addicted.

I bought your first and second issues in the PX here on base and have been more than satisfied with both.

The only thing I regret is that when I go to my next base, they may not carry your book. So payday I'll be sending you $6.00 for a subscription.

Although your book seems bent more in the way of witchcraft, which I do love, could you try to print more ghost stories too?

Thank you and your staff,

A1C James A. White
McClellan AFB, Ca. 95652

Dear Editor:

I am truly glad some one has decided to publish a magazine for fans of the macabre and supernatural genre. I am a devout Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft fan and for years have been reading and trying to find the right magazine which carries their type of stories. One good magazine, Magazine of Horror, edited by Robert A.W. Lowndes, though mostly reprints, was by far the best. The others were for the main part combined science fiction-fantasy mags dealing with outer space characters and very rarely had a Howard reprint. More often than not, I threw them away before I'd finished.

While I am too young to remember Weird Tales and Unknown Worlds, introductions to Howards and Lovecraft's books reveal that these are the mags I should have read.

Continued on page 89

The Turn of the Screw

A HAUNTING AND AN EXORCISM

By Arthur Jean Cox

In which we are given a most scholarly dissertation on that FIRST and most controversial of psycho-horror-dramas, Henry James' THE TURN OF THE SCREW. COVEN 13 considers Cox's efforts to be a valuable contribution to the wealth of literature on this most complex and intriguing of subjects.

With this presentation of Arthur Jean Cox's essay, a new horizon is opened to COVEN readers. One in which from time to time, we will deal directly, seriously, and analytically with the published book–fiction or non-fiction; the dissertation in article form, and any 'official' release having to do with our particular area of interest. . . Enjoy!. . .Enjoy!

The world has been haunted for more than 70 years now by Henry James' ghostly short novel, *The Turn of the Screw.* I say 'haunted,' because it is a story not easily put aside. . .even after it is finished. True, most of the interests it arouses–chiefly, narrative suspense–can be satisfied in the reading: but the story excites also a kind of speculative curiosity which is not so easily exorcised. It still hangs in the air like a shadowy question mark after one has closed the volume.

On the surface, the story is simple enough:

A young girl–who tells the story–arrives at a country estate in Essex to act as governess to two orphaned children: a boy, Miles, ten years old, and his younger sister, Flora. She is in effect their sole custodian, as their legal guardian, an uncle, is always absent and the only other person of any authority in the place is the good-natured but illiterate housekeeper, Mrs. Grose. Our heroine, whose name we never learn, is equal to the challenge. Indeed, such are her obvious courage and intelligence, and the note of authority with which she relates the events, that we soon come to think her equal to *any* challenge. Not that the children represent much of a problem, because they are in their way almost as remarkable as she is in hers: beautiful, loveable and good: angelically perfect to a first or even second glance. This shining surface

has a curious little spot on it, though: the boy has been sent home from his boarding school for corrupting the morals of his schoolmates. This is the first touch of that moral uneasiness which, adumbrated and elaborated and connected with the uncanny apparitions, gives *The Turn of the Screw* a flavor unique among ghost stories.

The children's former governess was a Miss Jessel, beautiful but pathetic—pathetic because she was seduced by the sordid Peter Quint, the absent master's valet and the boy's frequent companion. These two, Quint and Miss Jessel, apparently used the children as covers for their guilty relationship: that is, to give their assignations and trysts an innocent look. Neither are now among the living. She died in childbirth (presumably: some think by suicide) and he in what was (presumably) an accidental fall. But now, our heroine discovers, the Bad Dead have come back to life for a second round of badness. She sees them, the sinister and revolting Peter Quint, the horrid Miss Jessel, on several occasions. She gradually makes out that they are interested in the children. They seem to be trying to lure and tempt the children, to call the children to them, as if to get hold of them and possess them. This is horrible enough, but what is more horrible—what gives the situation another turn of the screw—is that she comes to understand that the children *know*. They know, and see, the ghosts, but conceal that awareness from her and Mrs. Grose. They *welcome* them and contrive means to slip out of the house and from under her watchful gaze to go to their old companions. There begins then between these infernal spectres and the governess a struggle for the souls of the children. If she can bring the children to confess, then she can save them.

With the little girl she fails. The child, forcefully pressed at the very moment when the terrible and forlorn figure of Miss Jessel is before the governess' eyes, breaks down and becomes deliriously ill—and is sent away from the house in the care of the housekeeper. The governess is left alone with the boy. . . but not for long. She sees "the white face of damnation"—the face of Peter Quint—peering in through the window from outside. It is the moment of crisis. As always, her courage and resolution are unshaken. If she can bring Miles to break his unhealthy reserve and secrecy, if only to utter that name he has so carefully avoided, she will have saved him. A strange and moving scene follows, in which she finally evokes from the boy the cry of:

"Peter Quint—you devil!"

It is her moment of triumph. The boy is saved. Quint vanishes forever. But "with the stroke of the loss I was so proud of"—the loss of Quint—the buy utters "the cry of a

creature hurled over an abyss" and dies. "His little heart, dispossessed, had stopped."

So the story ends. The narrative suspense has come to a climax and has been resolved. . .but the shadowy question mark is now almost palpable. For that other element, that sense of something left unsaid, of a question unanswered and even unasked, also reaches its climax in this last scene and, it may be, even in those very words she wrings from the boy. Every reader has recognized that that cry of outrage and horror ("you devil!") is hurled not at Peter Quint but at the governess herself, and that, in this moment at least, the boy does not, *can* not, see the apparition. She knows this and thinks that her success in getting him to confess to what it was which had gotten him expelled from school has so removed him from the evil influence as to make him unconscious of the ghostly presence. But there is something which nevertheless surprises her:

"'Is she *here?*' Miles panted as he caught with his sealed eyes the direction of my words. Then as his strange "she" staggered me and, with a gasp, I echoed it, "Miss Jessel, Miss Jessel!" he with sudden fury gave me back."

Now, why should he suppose it to be Miss Jessel, when she has clearly made out that Miss Jessel has appeared only to the girl and Quint only to him? She informs him that it is not Miss Jessel, but:

"It's *there*—the coward horror, there for the last time!"

'. . .'It's he?"

"I was so determined to have all my proof that I flashed into ice to challenge him. 'Who do you mean by 'he'?"

"'Peter Quint—you devil! His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. '*Where?*'"

She attempts to show him, with an outstretched arm and pointing finger, where Quint *had* been—for she has so vanquished Quint spiritually that the spirit vanishes—and the boy shrieks and dies. She thinks he dies of the loss, but it looks very much as if he had been frightened to death. . .and if this is so, if he were that terrified of the mere possibility of seeing Quint, how can it be supposed that he was ever on familiar terms with that visitor from the other side of the grave?

Throughout the story it has been only she who had admitted to seeing the ghosts. Her every effort has been to bring the children to confess that they see them too; but in the scene by the lake with Flora and Mrs. Grose she succeeds only in bringing Flora to the breaking point without getting her to admit that she can see the spectral Miss Jessel standing on the other shore. "I don't know what you mean," the eight year old girl screams. "I see nothing. I see nobody. I never have.

I think you're cruel. I don't like you." The unimpeachable Mrs. Grose is (also?) unable to see the figure, although the dead governess is as plainly visible to the living governess as the substantial bulk of Mrs. Grose herself. That doubt which we can hardly help admitting to consciousness brushes even our heroine with its wing, in passing. In that last scene with Miles, she feels a pity for him and there comes to her out of that pity "the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he *were* innocent what then on earth was I?"

What, indeed?

In his preface to the volume in the New York edition of his works containing this tale, James mentions that someone complained to him that he hadn't sufficiently characterized his young woman, "hadn't, in a word, invited her to deal with her own mystery as well as with that of Peter Quint, Miss Jessel and the hapless children." And he adds that it was a criticism under which one's "artistic, one's ironic, heart almost shook to breaking." It is not a criticism anyone would be likely to make now. On the contrary, to many critics today there is nothing to the story but her character: it has swallowed up almost everything else, for they believe that Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are merely imagined by her and have no objective existence. This idea is widely, though not universally, accepted today. . .although it is curious that during the first 35 years after *The Turn of the Screw* was published, it was generally read as a straight ghost story, pure and simple. It was not until 1934, when Edmund Wilson published his famous essay "The Ambiguity of Henry James," that 'the psychological theory' gained wide currency. It is tempting to conclude that any idea which was not obvious to the first two generations of readers can have little plain evidence to support it, that it reads something into the story. But although they —those first two generations—were able to read the story 'straight,' *you* would not be able to do so. Not now. No modern reader, once put into possession of the notion that the governess is merely imagining the ghosts, can fail to see that there is a good deal to recommend it.

Consider the circumstances in which she first sees an apparition. She is walking in the grounds towards sunset, alone but for her thoughts. One of these, a persistent one, is of that handsome man in Harley Street, the children's uncle, who has hired her for this lonely post. She thinks how charming it would be if "someone would appear there at the turn of the path and would stand before me and smile and approve." She stops short on coming into view of the house, with "the sense that my imagination had,

in a flash, turned real. He did stand there!—but high up. . .at the very top of the tower." It is not, however, the man she so admires. It is someone she has never seen before. It is, in fact, her first introduction to Peter Quint.

What is noticeable here is her state of expectancy prior to seeing this mysterious someone, who, although not the particular someone she was thinking of, has appeared as if in answer to her wishes. This note of expectancy is struck on later occasions, too; and when she sees the man again, at closer range, she feels a more inward recognition, "as if I had known him always." But the chief reasons for suspecting that it is "all in her head" is that only she unmistakably sees the ghosts and that she is able to divine so much about them—chiefly, their intentions—from the smallest and most fleeting of indications; sometimes, as far as the reader can tell, from no indications at all.

The question naturally arises, if she is imagining the ghosts, why does she do so? To this and to that question above which she has asked herself, "What then on earth was I?" there have been those who are, perhaps, only too ready with an answer: 'You are a frustrated Victorian spinster'. . .'You are in love with the absent master of the house and have substituted Quint for him'. . .'You are in love with the boy and want to molest him'. . . 'You want to be ravished by the brutal Quint'. . .and so on. They have grounds for these statements, of course. After all, she is the daughter of an eccentric country parson and has never in her life been allowed to see a play or even to read a novel. In short, she has led what she herself calls "a stifled life," and what today would be considered a life inevitably conducive to the formation of neurosis. There are in her narrative two or three little touches of disembodied eroticism, but what is most suggestive, perhaps, is the identification of the menial Quint with the distinguished and handsome man in Harley Street—Quint wears his master's cast-off clothes—and, similarly, the occasional identitification of herself with the former governess. It's as if the furtive, animal relationship of Quint and Jessel were a sordid parody of our heroine's yearning but self-denying relations with her employer. She loves pure and chaste from afar.

And the point, finally, is this: Surely, James must have intended some connection between this characterization of his heroine and the essential actions of the story.

These are persuasive arguments. Why then do we hesitate to unreservedly accept the theory that the ghosts are merely her diseased imaginings?

First, because there are those remarks dropped by the author which

would seem to hint that the ghosts are to be taken more or less at face value. In the preface already mentioned, he speaks of Quint and Miss Jessel as "agents in fact," as characters in their own right; and in a notebook entry dated August 9, 1900, for another supernatural story left unfinished at his death, he says he intends something "less grossly and merely apparitional" than *The Turn of the Screw.* But, as it happens, we do not have to go outside the story for our evidence. There is an incident in the narrative itself which is decisive.

Shortly after seeing the man on the tower, the governess sees him again: but this time peering intently in through the window of a room she has just entered and but a few feet from her. She afterwards gives a description of this peering man to Mrs. Grose, a most detailed and most particular description, which the housekeeper unhesitatingly recognizes as that of Peter Quint—*deceased!* This last is a detail which staggers our young woman, who until that moment had never heard the name of Peter Quint and had known nothing of him.

This alone breaks the back of the hallucination theory, and those who maintain that theory have either slid over the incident or have tried to explain it away. John Silver, writing in the May 1957 issue of *American Literature,* argues that the governess has gone to the nearby village and has there obtained a description of Quint. But that will not do. If she is not to be trusted at all, if we are to credit her (or debit her) with deliberate suppression and distortion, with outright lying—and what in that case becomes of the theory that the ghosts are personifications of her *unconscious* feelings?—we may as well give up the matter. If we no longer have the text we are left with nothing, or, rather, with everything, for no longer bound by the evidence she presents (the only evidence we have) any theory is licensed. . . .No, we must stick to the story and to the belief that our heroine is acting to the best of her knowledge in good faith.

We can only conclude that Peter Quint is a 'real' ghost—the quint-essence of the once-living man—and if *he* is, then surely *she* is also. But this conclusion doesn't completely untrouble our minds: for what do we do with the arguments already cited, the observations already made, concerning the relevance of our heroine's character and which we have admitted to be persuasive? We are confronted here with an anomaly, with what seems to be a direct contradiction: (1) the ghosts *are* real—they have an objective existence independent of our young lady; (2) her seeing such ghosts *is* somehow expressive or symptomatic of her character and her states of feeling. It is a dilemma upon which more than one writer has foundered, and

which led Edmund Wilson, during one of his revisions of opinion concerning the story, to decide that James was temporarily confused, so shaken by the recent disastrous failure of his career as a dramatist, that he didn't himself know what he was doing when he wrote *The Turn of the Screw.* (But James was apparently satisfied with the story even a decade later, for when he came to include it in the New York edition of his works, he—a chronic reviser—made only the slightest revisions.)

We can resolve the dilemma simply by shifting the emphasis: (1) the ghosts *are* real, yes. . .but (2) her *seeing* them is expressive of her character and states of feeling. It will be noted that she herself believes something of this kind. The boy's eyes are sealed in that last scene: Miles cannot see the ghost after (or so she thinks) he has confessed to his misbehavior at school, because his confession absolves his guilt and so removes from him whatever was in sympathy with Quint. The eyes of Mrs. Grose, as befits her name, are always sealed. In short, Miss Jessel and Mr. Quint are not visible simply because they are present; there must be something in you which is responsive to them. And the question naturally suggests itself: what, then enables *her* to see the ghostly pair?

Our first thought is again of her character, which might be expected to predispose her to seeing phantasmic embodiments of a dark and congealed eroticism, but there may be more involved than a passive predisposition. Francis X. Roellinger, writing in the January 1949 issue of *American Literature*, quotes a phrase, "cognate forms of sensitiveness," from the psychical research of the time, with which James was familiar and which he thinks describes James' general attitude towards such matters. "The governess and the ghosts," he writes, "might be said to have cognate forms of sensitiveness because they have common though opposed interests in the children. Not to endow the housekeeper, who fails to see the ghosts, is characteristic of James." But the ghosts and our young woman have more in common than that.

When she and Quint confront each other a third time, on an upper stair landing of the house, they face each other in what she calls "our common intensity." This intensity would seem to be vital to her communion with the dead. There is a period of a month during which her own eyes seem to be sealed, and if we try to determine why this should be, we observe only that it is a period during which she has relaxed her usual intensity of purpose.

It has been frequently remarked that much of the action of the story takes place on Sunday—or, more accurately, on two fateful Sundays—

and there have been various attempts to explain the meaning of this, usually along the lines of proposing that the story is a religious allegory. They seem to me rather too ingenious and too heavily labored. . .especially, as the text itself is so clear and so suggestive.

The first of these fateful Sundays is the evening she saw the strange man peering in through the window. She tells Mrs. Grose of this, and the housekeeper, her mind reverting perhaps to what is comforting and reassuring, reminds her that "It's time we should be in church." To which our heroine replies:

"Oh, I'm not fit for church!"

"Won't it do you good?"

"It won't do *them–!*"

"The children?"

Yes, of course the children, now asleep in the house. What I call attention to here is her response, "Oh I'm not fit for church!" We shall not bear down heavily upon it as yet, though, but will hold it aside for the moment.

The second Sunday is equally fateful, perhaps more so. It follows that month during which the eyes of the governess are sealed. She cannot see Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, although she has the impression they are about. She cannot see the faces of the Damned, "a consumation," she writes, "for which it seemed blasphemous not to thank God." Nevertheless, she does not thank God, at least not wholeheartedly. Because of the children–always the children: she fears that their eyes are not sealed.

On this second Sunday the household is on its way to church, she walking with young Miles and thinking along the way of the almost spiritual comfort of the hassock. But the boy disturbs her by telling her of his determination to write to his uncle in London and bring him down to the house. This is unwelcome news as she fears it will precipitate the crisis. ("My fear was of having to deal with the intolerable question of the grounds of his dismissal from school, for that was really but the question of the horrors gathered behind.") She sinks down, "as if tired," upon a tomb and sits there while the boy marches off alone into the church. She does not follow him. She feels a reluctance to enter for a variety of reasons: she doesn't want to come in late, she doesn't want him to see how much he has affected her. . .and so on. She walks around the church, listening to the sounds of worship from within, and then, with a resumption of her usual zeal, strikes off for the house–where she promptly finds herself in the presence, after this long time, of Miss Jessel.

What is curious here is the reluctance of the parson's daughter on both occasions to seek that comfort–that traditional sanctuary from evil of all kinds, particularly supernatural evil–that one would think

would be almost irresistibly compelling to someone of her background and character. What can we conclude but that there is in her a strain of something that, at certain times, shuns the church? And that it is this same strain that, at those same times, enables her to hold communion with the Damned? There is something in her, in the midst of her very virtue, that vibrates responsively to evil.

The origin and bearing of the strain would seem to be this: Her resolute consciousness of evil, where others would see nothing, necessarily entails a kind of acceptance of it. And, since only she has seen the ghosts, she fears that she will be thought cruel or mad and this leads her to greet every fresh manifestation of evil as a possible justification of herself. In other words, she finally comes not only to see the ghosts but to welcome them. When Miss Jessel makes her final appearance, with Mrs. Grose and Flora standing by to witness it, (although, as it turns out, they don't), our governess feels, as she says, "a thrill of joy." And she adds, "I consciously threw out to her—with the sesne that, pale and ravenous demon as she was, she would catch and understand it—an inarticulate message of gratitude." She comes, that is, to participate in evil and to do so in the very context of her morality and religion, without any sense of contradiction. When the boy cleverly diverts her attention so that his sister can slip away unnoticed, she refers to his cleverness as "divine"... even though she thinks the girl slipped away to meet Miss Jessel. It is not until Mrs. Grose expresses some astonishment at this adjective that she alters it to "infernal": the two words evidently being, where this subject is concerned, interchangeable in her vocabulary. And still later, when Mrs. Grose tearfully informs her that the little girl has used indescribable language, she bursts out with "Oh thank God!" And then, faced with the good housekeeper's bewilderment at this startling response, explains, "It so justifies me!"

It is my belief that the children do not see, and never have seen, the ghosts. This speculation is licensed not by the unimpeachable evidence of some unambiguous passage in the text, but by what I take to be the general bearing of the story and by something James says in his preface. He writes that he had taken pains to establish "the general proposition of our young woman's keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities—by which," he adds, and please note, "I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter." This implies obviously enough that the phenomena she reports are to be taken pretty much at face value, but her deductions are not. And

this last must have reference mainly to her conception of the children's relations with the ghosts, as it is about that that she mainly theorizes.

They have never seen the ghosts. Miles and Flora have only their memories of their old governess and old companion, of whom they were presumably fond. (We know that Miles, anyway, was somewhat attached to the living Quint.) These memories, this influence from the past, necessarily take the form, under the circumstances, of a tacit agreement between the little boy and girl not to mention that now-infamous couple. And it is this curious, conscious silence about their former guardians that the present governess—who refers to it more than once—is so subtly and shrewdly detecting as awareness on their part of the Presence of the absent pair. (In a sense she is right, but not in the sense she thinks.) And this leads her to awesomely magnify the significance of their every action. Their otherwise perfectly understandable desire to escape from her unremitting supervision acquires a peculiarly horrible meaning.

It might be said that the children actually have been "corrupted" by Quint and Miss Jessel. The boy's expulsion from school for having "said things. . .to those he liked" and the girl's language on her breakdown are due to that influence from the past—that is, they learned that language from their old friends—and our young lady does not recognize in this the dead hand of the past, the perfectly natural operation of the power of influence. It is quite clear in the action of the story that she regards the boy's naughty behaviour at school and his supposed intimacy with Quint's ghost as, in essence and in effect, the same thing. To her inexperience such behavior is so unnatural that it easily approximates to the supernatural; it is so horrifying that it is like a breath from the grave. . .and from the grave also come the horrid Quint and Miss Jessel. It is her innocence, the fanatic intensity of her innocence, which destroys the children—driving the little girl to hysteria, if not to the brink of madness, and the little boy to death.

But we must be on our guard here against an error. Many of those who have discerned that our governess is not quite the heroine she thinks have rushed to the opposite extreme, and to name calling. But they are wrong. She is terrible, yes, but she is not a villainess. To unmask her as a witch would be a vulgarity; to discover suddenly that her manifest virtues are a shallow illusion, even a deception and a fraud, and that she is an evil woman, would be to falsify the large generous moral atmosphere of the story. Her goodness—that is to say, her courage, her budding tenderness to the children and her self-sacrificing devotion to them—are obvious and, I think, incontro-

vertible.

What makes her so terrible is her heroism, her determination to give "to ordinary human virtue another turn of the screw." (Her use of this phrase gives to the title another turn of the screw: it suggests an additional meaning.) She bravely faces up to the ghosts and, with outstretched arm and pointing finger, makes the others face up to them too. She forces the issue; she confronts the problem. One of the most evasive of writers has created one of the least evasive of heroines. There is a scene in which her essential character and her relations with the demon-spirits (as James calls Quint and Jessel in his preface) is revealed with absolute clarity. It is that moment several times referred to, in which she sees the horrible face of Peter Quint looking in through the window of the room she has just entered. She immediately and fearlessly—with a fearlessness based on fear—rushes outside to confront him. He is gone and she stands looking in through the window, in the very spot in which he stood, peering just as he did. . .and when Mrs. Grose comes into the room, frightens the housekeeper with the awfulness of *her* face. This scene is a paradigm for the entire story.

She is wonderful, a true heroine. Every generous impulse prompts us to that judgment. But if they, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, are terrible, then she, in being equal to them, is equally terrible. Years later, she tells us that the boy's cry of "—you devil!" still rings in her ears: she treasures it as a tribute to her devotion. As indeed it is. No wonder she sees the ghosts! Like takes to like, and she is herself a demon-spirit. ●

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I found COVEN 13, Vol. 1, No. 2, while looking over the current S.F. selection. After thumbing through it, I frankly admit I almost hit the ceiling. And after reading the letters from your readers, I know you have (or are going to) started a new popularity in your magazine in the field of macabre fiction.

Let There Be Magick, by James R. Keaveny, is in the best tradition of Michael Moorcock and Fritz Leiber. Your artist, William Stout, surpasses the artificial and diffident paintings and illustrations of any other pulp magazines' artists! In fact, he ranks with Frank Fragetta and Ray Knenkel.

If at all possible, I would like to know if you plan to publish stories and/or articles by such authors as L. Sprague DeCamp, Lin Carter, a newcomer Kenneth Bulmer, and reprint some stories by the old pros, Robert E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft, August Derleth, and Talbot Mundy.

Fan participation in the magazine should be encouraged and a section where fans might like to swap and trade books, magazines, and any criticism that they may have might be appreciated and prove fruitful. But you are the editor.

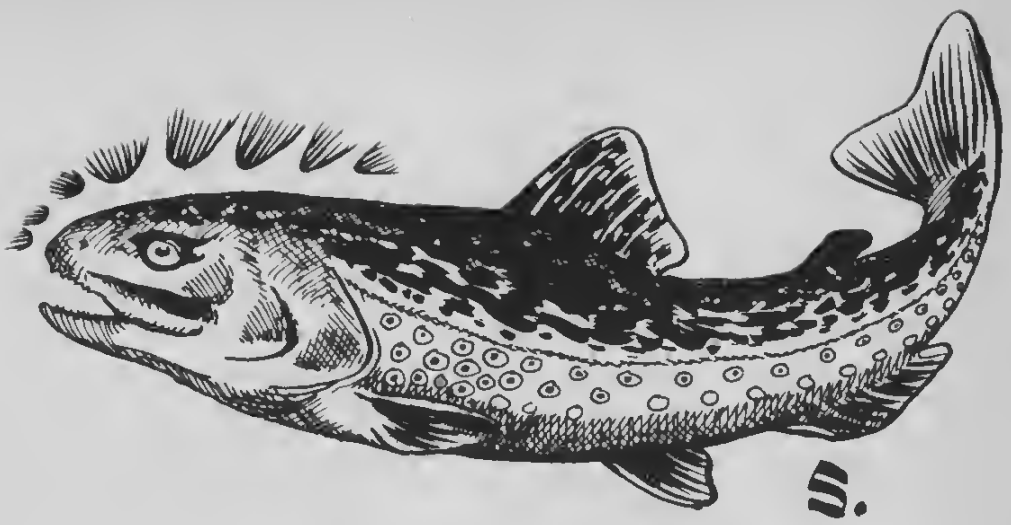
A new and completely converted fan,
Frank Buday, Jr.
Youngstown, Ohio

Dear Editor--

Congratulations on the second issue of COVEN. You've made several improvements over the first issue. The stories in general were better this time around. I especially enjoyed "Shadow Trader" and "A Message for Brother." Stout's interior artwork was much better, but I do wish that you would add other artists to your staff. I was pleased to see Harlan Ellison's name within your pages, and would very much like to see you get work from other "established" writers. The editorial was again interesting, and your large readers' section was more than welcome. I would like to see, however, the full addresses of the people whose letters appear, as this would make it possible for readers to correspond with each other. Overall the issue was great, but here are a few more things that I'd like to see you do.:

1) Have a story rating page like the Eyrie in the old WEIRD TALES. I'm always interested in seeing how my opinions compare with those of the other readers.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 94



Witch Fish

By Dennis Quinn
Illustrated by
William Stout

A unique and altogether delightful story of wild magick, in which vengeance amongst those of the sub-culture of sorcery, takes a bizarre and singular form.

The gills were a pain in the ass, but not something you couldn't get used to. That was Abat's first conscious thought as a fish. A brook trout no less. Not a bad spell if he did say so himself. A good solid transformation. It should have been, what with the cost of ingredients these days, but that was neither here nor there now. The process was complete and that was all that mattered. Abat was a monster of a brook trout. Any fisherman worth his flyrod would be willing to hang up his creel to have the likes of Abat's new form over his mantle. The teleportation was right on the mark, too. Smack dab in the middle of Swasic Inlet.

Swasic was a tributary of the

Beelsibub region and stocked for the pleasure of Kantoc county witches and warlocks. You wouldn't find the words Swasic, Beelsibub, or Kantoc on any map of the sleepy New England countryside that harbored them. They were pseudonyms given to local landmarks and boundaries and known only to the witches and warlocks belonging to the Federation. Many a feline familiarrwas known to grow obese on the fruits of Swasic inlet. True, if you caught a fish in Swasic it would be a beauty, for it was stocked with the best. However, any fish caught in this area would be by natural forces only. No spells were allowed in the area and it was protected by the Federation. Thus, even the most powerful spell cast from ashore would be voided. Abat's spell worked, one: because there had been a complete mass transfer. You see, sitting on the reclining chair in Abat's study was the form of Abat with the awareness of a fish. A brook trout to be exact. The second reason the spell had taken hold was the direction it came from. Short sighted Grand Council Federation members had protected the fish, not the fishermen.

A blood-fatted water mosquito glided too close to the murky surface of Swasic and fell victim to Abat's new tongue. It was now late morning and this was the sixth such morsel. He could get used to the taste of bugs (especially the ones carrying human blood), but not the inactivity necessary before battle. Marag would show up soon enough and Abat couldn't help being nervous. In fact, if his cold-blooded scales would allow it, he'd be sweating now. Abat was familiar with sweating. He'd done his share twenty years ago when Marag had him expelled from the Federation. The now retired ex-ruler of the Federation's Grand Council, fearing Abat's potential, framed him and had him banned from practicing witchcraft for twenty years. That was in September of 1949. Abat had regained his status just last week and was very rusty. If he was to have his revenge it must be with natural forces alone. Soon all the spells in the world would do no good, for a battle of natural forces was what Abat had planned.

Abat sensed movement on the shore and warily exposed a giant witch-fish eye. There was Marag on the shore not looking much like a powerful warlock. He had on the standard battered fishing hat, filled with flies, a corduroy shirt and waders. At his side was Peesal, his familiar, waiting for a juicy morsel to be thrown his way. The battle was about to begin.

Marag plopped his gear down, lit a cigarette and stared at the morning-still surface of Swasic. Not a ripple. Then Abat broke the surface. It was a clumsy leap, for he was not used to his new body, but it served

its purpose. Marag flipped his cigarette and almost before it pfffted in the water he was fastening a fat worm to a three-pronged hook. The cast put it not more than a few feet from Abat. This was going to be the rough part for the witch-fish. In order to carry out his plan he was going to have to take the hook. He cast an anti-pain spell that took about as well as half-hard jell-o. All the protective spells in the area were throwing off too much static. Careful not to swallow the hook (lest it lodge in a vital region) Abat grabbed it. The hook set in the gristley area between the jaws, leaving him with a feeling of pressure, rather than pain. Abat aimed his scaley body towards the opposite shore, swished a powerful tail, and began a 500 yard dash. Marag had to let out most of his line, and this was exactly what Abat had planned. The witch-fish looked for the submerged log he had spotted earlier. It was about 50 feet away. As he headed for it Marag decided to take back some line, but Abat battled for an agonizing hour and gained the extra feet. Exhausted he did a loop-de-loop around the log, then settled back to let Marag fight it for a while.

On shore, a tired and frustrated witch-fisherman cursed. He felt the weight of the log and knew exactly what had happened. Desperate, he tried a spell to free the line. The air took on the smell of brimstone and ozone and a lightning bolt knocked Marag off his feet. He had been warned, this was the protected area. Stunned, he held on to the rod and started thinking. What about that sand bar? Yes, that was it. Offshore there was a sand bar submerged not more than two feet. Wishing he could take advantage of the feline paws of his familiar, Marag began to inch along it, at the same time reeling in precious line.

Abat saw him coming, freed himself, and began another 500 yard dash. Marag began to sweat. He knew this bar ended soon, but he wasn't positive where. He was about to cast a sensor spell when he remembered his warning. This was a protected area and his next warning would be more powerful than the first. Marag's jaws were set hard. All he needed was one small spell and this fish would be his, but only fish spells would be cast today.

Abat was thinking about this too as he slowly maneuvered Marag towards the end of the sand bar. He did it slowly and cleverly, and the fall into deep water took Marag by complete surprise. Had it not been for the rubber waders he was wearing the witch-fisherman might have been able to save himself, but they filled quickly, pulling him to the bottom of twenty feet of water. Marag cast spell after spell trying to save himself. None worked, because he stubbornly clung to his flyrod. Had he dropped it, the greedy

witch, he would no longer be the fisherman and his spell would have worked well enough to get him to land. Marag's last conscious thought, as Abat swam by to give him a parting glance, was ". . .that damn fish is grinning at me." ●

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2) Please, please have a cover that illustrates one of the interior pieces. "Mood" covers such as you've used so far are fine occasionally, but I still prefer a cover that matches one of the interior stories.

3) Try to have a book review column, reviewing not only current works of fantasy and horror, but non-fiction works on witchcraft, demonology, etc. This is very helpful to the reader in helping him determine which books are worth buying.

Thanks for a very enjoyable issue, and you may be sure that I am anxiously awaiting No. 3.

Sincerely,
Bill Wallace
Pasadena, Texas

Gentlemen--

The last ish of COVEN 13 was interesting, but issue No. 2 was superb. If your second ish's EDITORIAL is an omen, and I believe it is, COVEN 13 will render its readers' comparisons of COVEN 13 and WEIRD TALES invalid. Your publication will go beyond WEIRD TALES.

Mr. Stout struck me as a good fan artist first issue, issue 2 has proven him a pro.

Thank you for ROCK GOD by Harlan Ellison. I hope to see more of his work in issues to come.

By all means continue publishing only new stories. The last reprint horror mag to hit our news stands was a bore.

BELL BOOK AND TAROT is interesting, and definitely belongs in COVEN 13. The same should and will be said about POETRY CORNER.

Again, thank you for a good magazine.

Yours,
J. Rubens
Warren, Ohio

Dear Editor:

Shades of "Unknown Worlds"! I've just read your second issue and hope that you will take my advice as we really need a "at least one" magazine in the outre genre.

Dump Joseph Harris, or at least don't accept any more of the likes of "The Transmogrification of Ridgely P. Winters" from him.

Tears of laughter from reading "Once Upon a Werewolf" by Robert L. Davis. More please!

Where did you dig up "Stout the Artist"? The rightful inheritor of the crown, formerly worn by Cartier of "Unknown Worlds". -Terrific!

By the way, what ever happened to Cartier? If I see at least one story in the next issue of the caliber of "Once Upon a Werewolf" I'll subscribe.

Arthur Hines
Clifton, N.J.

Dear Sir:

Was very impressed byt the first issue of COVEN 13. Generally good material by new talent—new to me, that is. Since I'm primarily a sword and sorcery buff. Keaveny's serial delighted me the most. The illos are surprisingly way above average. Trust Stout will be retained to spice up the brew. If your zine continues to please me with Weird-Tales like stories, I will assuredly sub. Wonder where Vol. 1. No. 2. is on the stands?

Sincerely: James R. Goodrich
Middletown, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Landis:

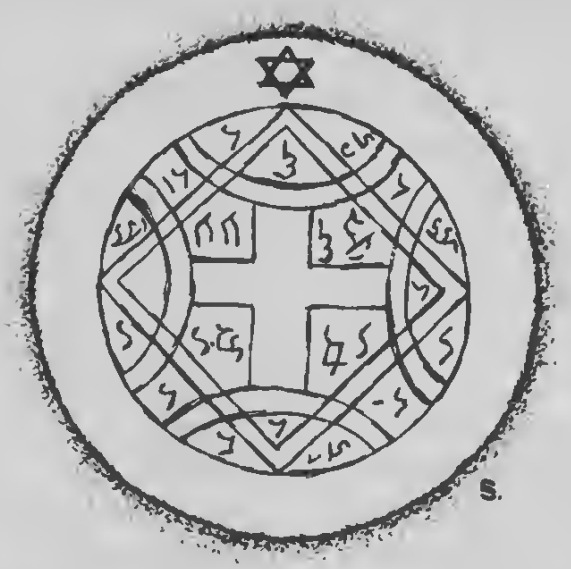
Recently, at my friendly neighborhood magazine store, I saw a copy of COVEN 13, Vol. 1. No. 1. A week later when I decided to purchase it, it was not available. I have, however, purchased the November issue which I very much enjoyed.

A majority of the letters you receive suggest that you are the reincarnation of Weird Tales, a good indication of success. I believe that the key to this magazine's success, however, is originality. Publish new stories by new writers. Help new and talented authors who write the kind of high-caliber fiction we COVEN fans like to read, to receive the recognition they deserve.

That's all! Keep the new stories coming. P.S. William Stout's illustrations and cover paintings are excellent. I have not seen illustrations of this quality since Virgil Finlay.

Scott R. Henderson
El Cajon, Calif.

STEWART 69



LAST RITES

By Pauline Smith
Illustrated by William Stout

A hauntingly eerie tale of something that may have been––or was––or still could be. . .This one will linger.

He must have crashed the party, for after he left, no one seemed to have known him. His name was Joe and the only way the party guests knew *that* was from the dialogue of his story.

He was probably in his thirties–a personable guy, nothing unusual about him, certainly nothing kookie.

He was very articulate.

He had to be or he couldn't have muzzled that crowd.

Ice melted in still half-filled glasses. Urgent gossip remained half-spoken as everyone listened to Joe, the stranger, who began, "Explain this," and told his story.

It seems there had been three of them at first. Then two. Finally one–Joe, this man whom no one had

seen before. He told us all about it. Or did he? Joe was the oldest—seven, eight years older than Robert and Carolyn—a "generalisation gap," he called it. The three were friends, neighbors, they'd pretty much grown up together, with the space of years narrowing in time as it always does with maturity.

They were all bright. Joe said this without self-consciousness, which he could, at least for himself because he works in one of those "Think Factories" where he spends his time bending his brains and writing down in symbols what he comes up with.

He was already settled in the "Think Factory" by the time the two younger ones had made it to Junior College, and they were still a trio, the younger ones looking up to Joe, and why not?

"Then I discovered I was in love with Carolyn," Joe told us. This late discovery did not mean that Joe was sexless, he explained, but that he'd been too busy. "If you're busy enough," he said, "it's like a cold shower," and anyway he'd been content just watching the girl grow up, biding his time you might say. Trouble was, Robert grew along with Carolyn and by the time Joe's gonads telegraphed Joe's desires, the two younger ones were an item.

"That didn't break up the triumvirate," said Joe, "because there was, between us, a deep friendship, the need and ability to communicate and, finally, witchcraft."

A piece of ice in a glass warmed, broke loose and dropped in the drink with a plop. Everybody jumped—everybody, that is, except Joe.

"You may know that witchcraft, with its branches of necromancy and divination, is being taught in some of the colleges now as a non-credited course under various subject titles such as Parapsychology and Cosmic Consciousness. It even enters credited courses such as Classical Literature and Philosophy being a part of the history of civilization and religion—so that now whole student bodies are indulging in goetic diversions and the architectonics of nature.

"So it was with the three of us. Not that I believed in the beginning, beyond the fact that physics itself is a kind of alchemy of change and transformation, less the ritual, of course, and without the litany. I even thought of doing a paper on it, treating the subject as a phenomenon of the times.

"But, instead, it got to me. I heard things, and saw things, I swear I did, through the wizardry of Robert, for it was Robert who had the touch. He was our warlock, our leader."

There wasn't a sound in the room, the one restless ice cube having settled to melt in silence.

"What does a warlock look like?" asked Joe as if he were still wondering, "I don't know. But I do say

that Robert looked like a warlock on those nights he performed his awesome ceremonials under the faint light of the moon, with his dark and peaked cap of hair and the shadows pointing up his ears."

Joe gave himself to memory for a long and agonizing moment. "I saw the cat then," he said, "the cat who was Robert's familiar. I swear I saw it. Now, was that self-hypnosis? Was it the cat he finally gave to Carolyn? A cat that he had conjured up to leap upon his shoulder and glare with eyes of blue fire while the warlock shrieked his invocations and while Carolyn drew the cabalistic circle? Was it? Because I killed the cat finally, and it was gone. There, with my hands around its neck, it was gone, and so was Carolyn.

"But those things happened later."

In the space of time, before Joe spoke again, traffic sounded along the street as if this were an ordinary night with ordinary people going about their ordinary ways.

"Have you ever seen a cabalistic circle?" asked Joe. "Look, I'll show you." He became excited, searching his pockets to find a notebook and pencil. "Here. . ." and he drew rapidly, without hesitation, as if the diagram were deep in his mind. He produced a rude and incomplete drawing, holding it up to show around the audience. "This," he said, "is a Love Pentacle with its mystic symbols. Around the outside border," indicating the space with his finger, "are to be written the Latin words that mean, 'For this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh and they shall be one flesh,' along with a translation of the French legend that compels the Spirits of Venus to obey and to force any woman whatever to come instantly."

It was eerie.

Everyone in the room felt the force of the diagram, as if we too were caught up in self-hypnosis, or there was a diabolical emanation from that simple pencil sketch.

"This is the circle Robert had Carolyn draw on that last night. I mean, the last night we saw him. He was sure then that he was going to die. His mind and his time had been so taken up with witchcraft—so obsessed by it, that he'd flunked out of school so the draft had grabbed him, trained him, and was sending him off to Vietnam. "I'll die, " he told Carolyn.

"No," I said, 'don't be so fatalistic.'

"But he was talking to Carolyn and she seemed to understand and accept. 'So I brought you a pet,' he told her, and gave her the half-grown cat, still young enough so that its points were uneven and indefinite. I remember thinking that this was not the 'discoloured cat of Kalevala, who drew men to the desert where the horse's footstep no long-

er resounds,' nor the 'whyte spotted catte who needed bloude every tyme he attended a Sabbat', nor the 'huge black cat called Sathan,' but a Siamese with an inscrutable mask and eyes as blue as the sky.

"Robert gave Carolyn two gifts that night. The cat and a photograph of himself. 'The cat is to remember me by,' he said, 'and use the picture to come to me. . .'

"I thought," said Joe, "I really thought that what he meant was that the cat was to be a memento and the picture was to keep him close. You know, 'come to me,' meaning 'come to me in your thoughts,' 'come to me in your memory,' that's what I thought, even with the following 'last rites,' as Robert called them. 'We'll have our last rites,' he said, 'It's a full moon, and a very good night.'"

What would you call what passed over the party group that was no longer partying? A shudder? A spasm of waiting? An indrawn sigh? Or only the movement of another melt-ice cube? It was there, though, a minute of infinity holding its breath.

"We went out as we had so often done," said Joe, "into a clearing we called our own. From the *Key of Solomon*, it is said the places best fitted for exercising and accomplishing magical arts are 'those that are concealed, removed and separated from the habitations of men; wherefore desolate and uninhabited regions are most appropriate, such as the borders of lakes, forests, dark and obscure places, old and deserted houses, whither rarely and scarce ever men do come; mountains, caves, caverns, grottos, gardens, orchards; but best of all are crossroads, and where four roads meet, during the depth and silence of the night.'

"Well," said Joe with an apologetic smile, "in this time of automobiles and subdivisions, it is almost impossible to find a concealed place, removed and separated from the habitations of men where there might be a deserted house, or even a cavern or grotto. But we had found this place out in what was left of the woods, a clearing, separated at least from the lights of the surrounding houses, and here was where Robert had Carolyn draw the circle to bind her to him. He stood in the center of it then and read the Sanskrit magic text from *Atharva Veda.*"

Joe rose with his words, not so much as if he were remembering, but as if he were living it over, and recited, in sing-song, with a strange downward inflection of his voice at the end of each pagarraph, or stanza, or verse:

"With the all-powerful arrow of Love do I pierce thy heart, O woman!' he soliloquized. "'Love, love that causes unease, that will overcome thee, love for me!

"That arrow, flying true and straight, will cause in thee burning

desire. It has the point of my love, its shaft is my determination to possess thee!

"'Yea; thy heart is pierced. The arrow has struck home!'"

Joe interrupted himself to say, "It was at that point in Robert's chant that I almost stopped the invocation. I was suddenly fearful. This was no longer a game bounded on the one side by self-hypnosis and on the other by a learned paper. But within that instant of hesitation, I became caught up again, mesmerized. . .I wonder, I wonder now what would have happened had I stopped it? Or what would not have happened?

"I didn't stop it," he went on. "I allowed Robert to continue. 'Thou are completely in my power. O Mitra, O Varuna, strip her of will power! I, I alone, wield power over the heart and mind of my beloved!'

"And it was over. The next day, Robert was gone. And the next month, he was reported missing."

The silence held the rustle of shifting movement—not from restlessness, but as if a page is turned and a chapter begun, with concentration, with obsessive devotion.

"That's when," said Joe, "the picture began to talk to Carolyn. 'He is dead,' she told me.

"You don't know that,' I argued. 'Missing may mean he's lost and will be found, or that he's wounded and not yet accounted for. Or that he is captured and still alive.'

"She shook her head. 'He is dead,' she said with finality. 'He told me so.'

"I considered her condition one of hysteria, in a quiet, still-water way, almost catatonic with waiting, yet lost in deep and boundless grief. This trauma would pass, I told myself, remembering that I, too, felt sorrow at losing a friend. But I was hopeful. Carolyn was not.

"It was a long time before his death was verified."

"The cat grew, its mask as black as night and its eyes as blue as the stormy sky. It hated me with the icy fury of a switching tail, with the cold contempt of an arched back.

"The cat knows he's dead,' said Carolyn, and the cat seemed to know something as it sat before the picture, now and then washing its whiskers not as if it wanted to be ordinarily cat-clean, but as if it were polishing its antenna in order to let a message through.

"He says he wants me," said Carolyn.

"'Who says he wants you?' I asked.

"'Robert. He says, *come to me.*'

"'Carolyn,' I yelled. 'Stop that!' But she didn't hear me because she was listening to the picture. The cat was listening too. The cat, its antennae polished like steel wires, sat before the picture and listened.

"That's when I began to study

the picture. It was Robert all right, Robert as I had known him, not as if it were Robert-in-a-picture, but as if it were Robert himself impaled there upon paper. So lifelike, I expected him to chant, as I'd heard him on that last night, 'With the all powerful arrow of Love do I pierce thy heart. O woman!'

"'Did you hear that?' cried Carolyn.

"'What?' I asked, shaken.

"'Robert spoke,' and the cat's whiskers, those polished antenna wires, trembled.

"The photographer's name was brushed in on the lower right-hand corner of the picture. His name and the town. The little town on the edge of Robert's training camp. It was quite a picture, this picture that was real life against paper. I wanted to see the photographer who made it. I didn't know what I could gain by the knowledge, but I wanted to see him.

"It was only a couple hundred miles away, so I drove one weekend to the dusty little town that was one main street and not much more. There was a single photographer in town, up above the bank. I climbed the stairs and into his studio and asked him about this other photographer whose name I'd written down in my notebook.

"He shook his head. 'No one by that name in this town,' he said.

"'Are you sure?' I asked.

"'Sure?' He was indignant. 'I've lived and worked here for forty years. I'm the only one. There's hardly enough work to keep me busy.'

"'Maybe an amateur,' I suggested. 'Somebody who might have taken pictures of the service boys at the camp.'

"He laughed. 'There's a couple of Brownie buffs in town that take out-of-focus pictures. That's all. Let's hear that name again.'

"I spelled it out for him. 'Cathari,' I said.

"Sounds Italian. No Italians in this town.'

"In a flash, I knew. I knew with sudden shock. Saying the name aloud again I remembered my reading in a medieval treatise, from the *Errores Haereticorum*, all about The Cathari, which means The Cat. And The Cathari, The Cat, was Satan. The treatise had explained it that way. So now I knew that there had been no photographer except Satan, the Cat; and no photograph except Robert himself.

"I whirled and clattered down the stairs, the photographer calling after me was I nuts? I wondered then if I was. And I still wonder now—am I?

"I burned rubber over the 200 miles back and arrived just as twilight deepened to darkness. I burst into Carolyn's house and up the stairs into an empty room. The picture! I whirled toward where the picture always stood. It was gone.

"I took the steps, three at a time, raced out into the cool autumn night, leaned into my car, yanked open the glove compartment and grabbed my flashlight. Then I ran, heading for the clump of trees that was all that was left of the woods, and the clearing in its center.

"The flash bobbed an uneven path of light through the brush as I ran. Suddenly I halted, the circle of light pinpointed upon the mask of the cat, waiting for me at the trees' edge. In the bright beam, its blue eyes glowed as red as stop signals. I took a step forward. Its back arched and ridged in a fawn-colored hedge. Its black tail plumed and raised in defense. In defense of what? I thought I knew. I hurled the flash and tackled in the arc of light it made.

"My hands closed upon the furry neck and I squeezed forth a hoarse harsh cry. Claws dug. The body writhed, became still and was gone!

"I held nothing in my clenched tight fists!

"I reeled with the shock. And so did the dark and moonless night.

"I scooped up the flash, sparking it through the trees and into the clearing.

"I saw her then. I swear I did. I saw the outline of her, the shadow of her in that beacon of light. I heard the mutter of her incantation. I heard too the familiar timbre of Robert's voice, the same sing-song, the same downward inflection.

"I leaped in the light of the flash toward that now dim and kneeling figure—hunched, bowed before the picture.

"I leaped, and before my feet hit the ground, the figure was gone, leaving an empty picture frame and flutter of a telegraph blank that announced the death of Robert."

A warm drink sloshed in its glass. A swallow sounded loud.

"That's all I can tell," said Joe, the stranger. "Now, when I show the empty picture frame to all the people who should know and remember, they say, 'Why no, there has never been a picture of Robert.' And Carolyn? They are sure she will be found some day. She's just gone, they say. She will be back. They are very sure. I wish I were as sure. . . of anything."

Then Joe stood and left the room. . .

Leaving us all to be unsure. Was he a hoaxer, fabricating a giant put-on as a form of mental playfulness? Did he, in love with Carolyn, dispose of them both and confess in the only way his mind would allow him to confess—to strangers and by magic?

The guests who attended the party that night are unsure, but most of them think that somewhere there is an empty picture frame through which a girl named Carolyn stepped to join the dead boy, Robert. ●

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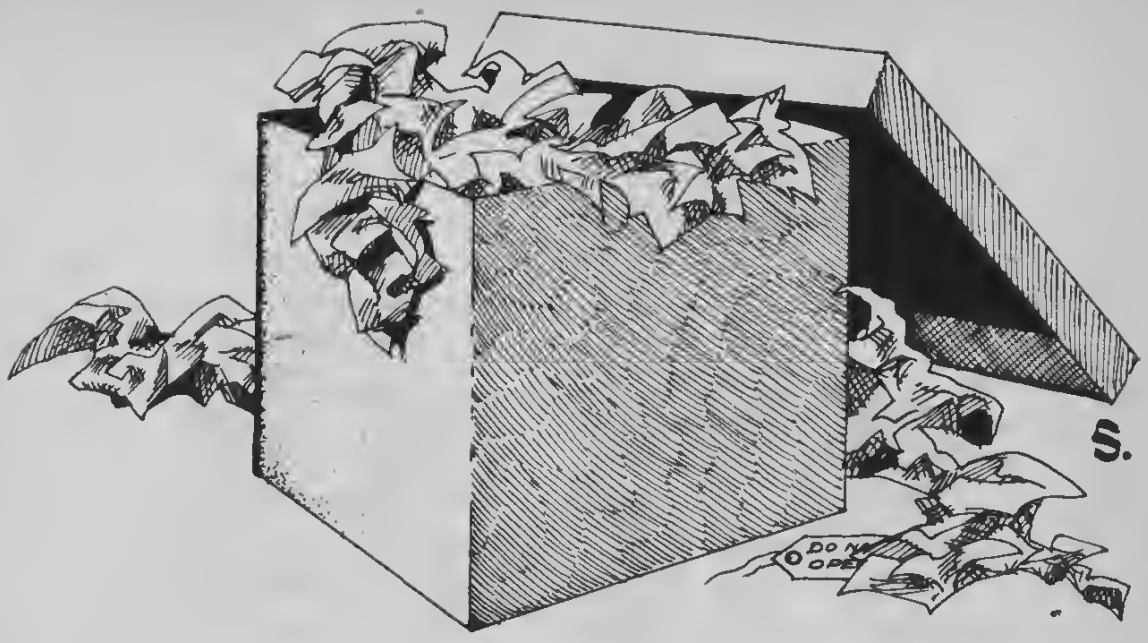

Don't Open 'til X-Mas

James Benton Carr

Illustrated by
William Stout

Black Magick, like gold, is where you find it––a Bantu village––a frozen Icelandic waste––or with the 'beautiful' people, in the glittering heart of Babylon-on-the-Hudson.

M*y God, it hurts! It hurts all the time!*

When the doorbell rang, I was still in bed–hung over from a Christmas party the night before. I remember thinking how disastrous Champagne Punch can be as I plodded to answer it. (Henry had the weekend off to visit his relatives in Minnesota).

The postman seemed pretty annoyed. He made a remark about the security on the apartment building. The way I'd felt then was *that* was his problem–not mine. He shoved the package at me, said, "Merry Christmas," and left to press the button for the elevator that would take him down fourteen floors to the lobby.

The package was a curious thing wrapped in brown paper and tied securely with heavy cord. The postmark was half-smudged from rain or snow; and the ink stains resembled black tear drops.

But all those stamps! There must have been three dollars worth—and some were foreign. Another curiosity was the large tag pasted on its side. It read: Don't open 'til Xmas.

Liza sent it, I'd thought. A smile warmed me. She'd been in Jamaica on a fashion assignment for *Harper's Bazaar:* and as I looked more closely at the postmark, I was sure I'd made out the letters H-A-T. Manhattan, I'd thought. Liza lived there, and it hadn't occured to me to be anything else.

I felt schoolboyish and light-headed as I pulled off the brown paper and put the foil-wrapped package on the coffee table before me. Enclosed was a card addressed to me: Paul Benton. The card was lightly scented. At the bottom of a pretty awful verse, Liza had written: Can't wait to see your face Xmas eve when you open this, my love.

Liza. My thoughts of her were filled with desire. At my age (42) one should feel blessed that a girl half his age would accept his proposal of marriage. Oh, don't get me wrong, we're not married—yet. Helen and have to come to terms.

You see, Helen wants *everything* and I'm pigheaded enough to refuse. Helen would take my blood if I'd let her; consequently we've gone around in circles about this "settlement thing." Three months of circles.

By noon I was busy filling a small suitcase. I felt exhausted from packing the car with provisions, my Christmas present for Liza and the package from her I'd received that morning. Going up and down in the elevator is tedious, and I'm not used to bending and lifting. Not when I have Henry.

By the looks of it, I could see the weather was not going to stay nice as I had hoped: The sky was a gray blanket hovering over the city. I wanted us to be gone before the snow fell.

Liza and I were headed for my cabin at the lake; and it was there we'd planned on spending the holiday. The cabin is isolated, and when I'd had it built, I purposely omitted having the telephone installed. It is my hideaway and even Helen doesn't know of its existence.

As I've said, it was noon; and I was late, rushing, when the telephone rang. In my hurry I thought I'd straightened up too quickly.

Oh, wow! Now it's my back!

I was surprised to hear Helen's voice at the other end wishing me a Merry Christmas.

"That's damned decent of you," I told her, considering what a witch she'd been these last three months.

"Did you get my package? I sent

it special delivery—"

"Package? What package?" Then I remembered. "Was that from you?" I was angry. "Yes, I got it. But I didn't—When were you away?"

"Away?"

"Some of the postage stamps were foreign," I told her.

"Oh, that. Last summer. . . right after the separation, I went to Haiti. You know, change of spirit and all that."

"You've changed your mind?"

"About the settlement? Heavens no. Why should I?"

Silence for a moment while I fumed. Damn her, anyway! What she wanted was me—body and soul! She didn't own me—nobody could own another person, and I told her so.

"You *belong* to *me,*" she said in a familiarly harsh voice I'd almost forgotten. Her voice softened. "Well, you got the package. That's what's important," she said. "I changed my mind about sending it. I wanted you to have it for Christmas so I changed my mind and kept it. That's why all the stamps. I was going to bring it over but I didn't think you'd open the door for me. . ."

"You're right about that!" I interjected.

". . . so I sent it special delivery."

"If I'd known it was from you I'd have tossed it into the fire. We're through, Helen. Do you understand that? Christmas or no Christmas you've got your nerve!"

"That *used* to be the reason we fell so madly in love—"

"I didn't fall. I was pushed."

"That's how it is when you run off and marry your star performer—"

"Was," I corrected. "Up 'til now, that was your best role: Lady Conniver. Too bad I didn't sell tickets."

Helen's voice turned to sweet syrup. I almost gagged. "You've produced quite a few hits since then, sweetie. You may not be as big business as Merrick, but you do have ready cash. And alimony is such a bore."

"You opening a nightclub for that kid or something, Mrs. B?"

"Jarvis?" She laughed. "He won't drop me half as fast as what's-her-name drops you when the money runs out. She can't act worth a damn and you know it."

As yet I hadn't offered Liza a part in a play; but I had been thinking of it. "She's got talent," was my defense.

"All in the right places, I suspect."

That did it. "I've got to go, Helen. I'm in a hurry and I can't play your cat-and-mouse game."

"All right," she said, "but do me this one favor. Don't open that package until Christmas. I've put a specail—well, it's part of a set. . . if you know what I mean—"

"Bitch!" I screamed and hung up.

Right then I wished I hadn't put the package in the car; but since it

was. . . Well, I'd leave it there when we got to the cabin. I hadn't wanted to bring it inside, let alone handle it again. But Liza thought otherwise.

On Christmas eve the fire was cozy with just the two of us. Liza was sitting at my feet, her head resting on my knee. My hand stroked her hair and occasionally she'd look up at me, her dark eyes heavy with dreams. Finally she said, "Let's open the packages now." Her face was pink from the firelight. She got up and went to the tree we'd cut and decorated the day before.

I had thought that's when I'd wrenched my shoulder dragging the tree through knee-deep snow. I felt like an invalid sitting there on the sofa with a wrenched back and a sore shoulder. My age was beginning to make itself known, I thought.

"I'm dying to see what it is you sent me," she said over her shoulder.

"Sent you?" I frowned. Had I forgotten and sent her a present? I was sure I hadn't. I'm not *that* old or forgetful. "When did I do that?"

"Last week," she said returning. "It came special delivery. And all those ten-cent stamps! Really! A person would think you literally ran out of paper money." She shrugged her sweatered shoulders and sat beside me balancing those two identically wrapped packages on her lap.

My heart seemed to skip a beat and my forehead turned clammy. I didn't like what was happening—or what had happened. For one thing, Helen isn't that generous—not without a reason. I always believed her reasons to be selfish. In four years of marriage I'd learned she was secretive and never willing to discuss things with me. She'd disappear for an occasional week and never once tell me the truth about where she'd been or with whom. (From a private detective agency I'd learned she had been with Jarvis.) Always she'd return with a marvelous tan, now that I *think* about it, and I'd accuse her of "going native" just to get away from it all. She'd say I was getting warm and then tell me she'd been on a private witch hunt; and drop the subject. So far as I was concerned, Helen wasn't past giving out poisoned cookies. Anything to get the settlement she wanted: which was me. (All along I'd thought she was holding out for more money because of Jarvis Nielson, a young, unknown actor. But she said, "No. It's you I want. You're mine. You belong to me.")

I pushed the package to one side. "Don't open it," I told Liza. "I didn't send it. Helen did."

"Are you serious?" The corners of her mouth curled slightly.

"Of course I'm serious. I got one too." I nodded to the other present.

"If you *knew* it was from her,

why did you accept it, then?" She was beginning to be angry.

"I didn't know it was from her," I tried to explain. "Besides, your card was enclosed. Who else could have sent it with your card enclosed?"

"I suppose next you're going to say both cards were identical."

"Were they? What does yours say?"

Liza pulled at the white envelope tucked under the red ribbon. "Quote. Can't wait to see your face X-Mas eve when you open this, my love. Unquote. X-Mas! Really!"

She was beginning to sound like Helen. "You needn't be so damned literal. Why would she do this?" I wondered aloud.

"Who knows? She's still your wife."

That cut—deeply. Like it or not, until Helen got what she wanted as a settlement, I'd have to live with barbs like that. Unintended or not. I tried smoothing it over. "An unhappy mistake. Soon to be corrected, I hope." I bent and kissed her.

"Well, let's see what the old witch is up to this time." She began to tug at the ribbon.

Nervously I wiped the perspiration from my forehead. "Don't, Liza. Please."

"For heavens sake, why not?"

"Because she told me not to open until Christmas."

"Told you?" Her dark eyes squinted and her nose wrinkled. "When?"

"Just as I was leaving the apartment. *She* called *me*, so—"

"That's not what the card says. The card says X-Mas eve."

How could I explain that Christmas and Christmas eve were all the same to us? Had been, I mean. I tried changing the subject. "Don't you want to see what I got you? It's black," I hinted. "And full length." I hadn't wanted to hint, but I had to get her mind off that box.

Her face lit up. "Bergdorf's?"

I shook my head. "Nor Saks."

"Neiman Marcus?"

"See for yourself," I told her, feeling pride swell within me. That feeling died quickly.

"After."

Liza was determined; I could see that. I felt sick inside; but what else could I do? "Okay," I told her and watched as she ripped off the wrapping. I tried to understand why it is that a woman's curiosity is always aroused by something mysterious. Even an expert couldn't do that, I'd decided, watching her slender fingers dip into the folds of tissue paper.

Suddenly her face beamed. "What a cute idea!" She held up a child's doll dressed in white satin. "You know, right now I feel guilty for having hated her; for wishing her dead because she thought she owned you or something." Her head tilted to one side and she smiled. "I have a confession to make. It's silly, I

know, but when I was in Jamaica I went to this old colored woman who was supposed to have magic powers. But nothing happened. In a way I'm glad because as it turns out, Helen isn't so bad after all. Not with this gift, anyway. I think its her way of. . . well, saying she's sorry." Squaring her shoulders and sighing heavily, Liza said, "I'm glad that's over with. Now, open your present," she coaxed.

I did, but I didn't take it out of the box. I wasn't going to touch it. My present, also, was a doll. A bridegroom dressed in black. I frowned, thinking how it could have been an overdressed undertaker. All that black had an ominous tone to it.

"Must be a music box," Liza said, turning the doll over looking for the key. But there was none.

The doll was elaborately dressed. The bridal gown, if you could call it that, was decorated with miniature seed pearls and embroidered in fancy lace. The veil was done exquisitely and topped with another peral. This one was much larger than the others. In a way, it looked like a halo in soft, shimmering blue.

Out of curiosity, Liza pulled at the large pearl atop the doll's head. "A hat pin," she said, smiling, and returned her gaze to the doll. That's when it happened.

Suddenly, Liza gasped in horror and tossed the doll away from her. I watched it hit the floor and saw the doll slowly begin to shrivel. The dress turned old and faded. Then Liza screamed, holding her head. Blood slowly filled the spaces between her fingers. She dropped to the floor, rocking in pain, moaning. It was over quickly. Too quickly. Her dark eyes heavy with dreams and always glistening were vacant and lifeless. Her head fell on the carpet and stained it brown.

My breath caught in my throat. My eyes seemed forced out of my head. I felt dizzy and sick. But gradually my eyes wandered back to Liza's withered, shriveled toy. No longer was it old and leathery. It was as it had been—with one exception. It was smiling at me!

Blood gutted my veins quickening my pulse as I searched the box that held the groom—my toy. I undressed the doll feeling a chill cover me. If there were any pins in it, I'd be sure to know before it became too late. But there were none. There was nothing but the soft, rubbery flesh of the doll. I redressed it, and that same cold fear that had throbbed across my shoulders remained, although not as intense. It was as if the doll were me—my alter ego. And alive! I was hallucinating, I reasoned. I had to be. . . because of Liza.

And then I saw the note taped inside the cover of the box. Paul, it said. This doll is not yours as Liza's is. Yours is different—in a special way. It's unfortunate you couldn't see things my way, Paul, dear. This way is best. I still love you despite

your suspicions about Jarvis and me. It's not what you think. Jarvis is not my lover. He's a. . . god. . . a teacher. I'm only a pupil. A post script was added. If it's any consolation to you, you were right about my going native. It was signed "H".

With closed eyes I fell back against the sofa feeling my chest tighten. I wanted to relax—sink into the soft cushions and pretend it had all been a dream—an unbelievable dream; yet the swirling dizziness reminded me of what I'd seen.

After a while, I opened my eyes. I had to. . . be sure.

The ceiling was like a vast platform hovering above me in the darkness, colored by the flickering glow of light and shadow from the dying remains in the fireplace. Yet. . .

My God! I'm on the floor! On my back!

Had I fallen from the sofa? Been unconscious? I allowed my eyes to wander from the ceiling and gaze at the huge flowered print of the sofa—the sofa is enormous, looming beside me large as a house! There, slumped into a corner, a man sits, his head bent forward. It seems he is dead. . . or sleeping.

That man is me!

But I'm not dead!

I try closing my eyes but I cannot. It is as if they are glued open; worse yet, like some doll with button eyes. Fear chokes me with a cold fist because I see that I no longer wear the Norwegian sweater, slippers. Instead, I'm dressed in the toy groom's fancy black suit!

It's been an hour now since that terrible moment—and lying here, I've had time to think. I know what's happening—why I've felt so strange since that morning the special delivery came. Helen has cast a spell on me that is transferring my spirit into that of the doll. That's why I've felt so rotten: it's the compression. . . endless, slow compression. And all I can think of are Helen's words that day I left her: "You'll *never* leave me, Paul. I won't let you."

My God, it hurts! It hurts all the time! ●

SUBSCRIBE—COVEN 13

let there be Magick!

By James R. Keaveny

A serial in FIVE PARTS:Part Three-A tale of magic and dark sorcery; of a clashing of swords and a storming of castles. The Planet, Camelot, and a romance to rival Earth's Tristan and Isolde. . . Camelot, where the "black arts" really work. Camelot, the Galaxy's "Sword at Sunset."

SYNOPSIS:

Kyrie Fern, thirty year old Terran graduate of the Galactic Foundation for Controlled Environmental Development of Plus-10 Sentients, is sent as an ADJUSTER to the planet FLEGIS of the Fomalhaut system. Trouble is a-brewing and he has been assigned to help out.

FLEGIS is listed as CAMELOT in Foundation code: this because of a prevalence of MAGICK, dark sorcery and the like–WHICH ACTUALLY WORKS.

"WATCHERS"–opposite-sexed pairs of Foundation agents who act as observors on sentient planets, have informed the Foundation Center that bloody

planetary war is in the offing. That the situation is perilous in that Camelot's forces for progress as exemplified by the feudal kingdoms of the northern lands, such as Marack, are threatened with total extinction by the dark forces of the southern lands of Om. . . . The problem is that the Galactic Foundation has only the smallest knowledge of the nature of the power of Om. That it exists, yes! That its surface manifestation is simply bloody war between various opposing feudal armies for domination of the planet, yes! But, since the Foundation knows of Camelot's–and Om's–magic, and knows too that the forces of Marack depend not so much upon this power as upon the few existing feudal universities, with rudimentary offerings in the arts and sciences, the Foundation can only conclude that if Marack is destroyed then all of Camelot will likewise go down, and with it such civilization as is now known.

What is Om? Who is Om? And, if magic works on Camelot, what then does this mean for the Science of the Galactic Foundation?

It is planned that Kyrie Fern, in the guise of Harl Lenti, son of an impoverished Earl, or ONUS, will meet the Princess Murie Nigaard, only daughetr of King Caronne, ruler of Marack, on the high-road from Castle Glagmaron. He is to prevent her from being abducted by Om's sorcery. It has been decided too, that since Harl Lenti, whose role Kyrie Fern now plays, is one of those who can claim the blood of Marack's ancient hero, THE COLLIN, allusion to this and to Harl as actually being somewhat of a reincarnation of this semi-mythical figure, might give him the authority to further influence the forces of Marack against Om.

On the highroad Harl meets with the Princess–a cute little dollie with purple eyes and golden fur–two knights of her entourage, a maid, and Dame Malion, a lady-in-waiting. The Princess is also accompanied by one of Camelot's strangest creatures–a Pug-Boo. These small animals–they look like Terran teddy bears–have an odd penchant for attaching themselves to royalty, or to prominent people.

After a brief scuffle with the Princess' two knights, Harl fails in preventing the Princess' abduction. Instead, he is abducted with her to Castle-Gortfin, property of the Lady Elioseen, witch and sorceress. While under the spell of this sorcery, Harl has a strange mental visitation from the Pug-Boo, who queries him as to his origin. He awakens in the bowels of the great stone mass of Gortfin and then, together with Rawl Fergis, cousin to, and a member of the Princess' original entourage; the Dame Malion, and the Princess Murie Nigaard, he escapes; this after a bloody battle.

They flee through the night, having with them a herd of "dottles" as spare mounts. These are six-legged steeds, ruminants like horses, but more like dogs in personality and intelligence.

They make all speed to the city of Glagmaron, since it is apparent to Harl that Om's forces are in motion NOW. He has learned that two countries south of Marack have made peace already with Om, and that other countries are warring with each other at Om's instigation: this, plus the abduction of the Prin-

cess, as a part of the total, but still vaguely seen plan.

The little Pug-Boo, missing along with the second knight and the Princess' maid, appears from nowhere, waiting for them on a stone road-marker. They continue driving toward Glagmaron some two hundred miles distant.

That night, just before twilight, they come to a meadow beyond a small river wherein are camped six people with a number of dottles. Two of these, lords or knights by their armor, challenge the Princess and her group to a test of arms. Harl, as the Princess' champion, rides forth. Considering the while that his challenger, who calls himself the Lord, Breen Hoggle-Fitz, is a pompous, windy, and somewhat fanatical ass, Harl prepares to do battle.

He succeeds with little effort in besting Sir Hoggle-Fitz, upon which Hoggle-Fitz' fiery daughter, a most attractive red-head named Caroween, intercedes and is in turn bested by Rawl. All is finally smoothed over; forgiven. They camp together and Harl Lenti learns that Hoggle-Fitz, Lord of Durst in Great Ortmund, has been driven from his fief by King Feglyn of that country, who is now aligned with Om. Hoggle-Fitz is on his way to Glagmaron to pledge his sword to Murie's father, King Caronne.

That night around the join campfire Harl is surprised to see the Pug-Boo, Hooli, act as minstral, in that he plays an almost hypnotic instrument which tells by music and imagary of a holocaust that destroyed a planet of the Fomalhaut system in some distant past. Harl is satisfied that the Pug-Boo is something definitly other than what he seems.

They are awakened in the night by the passing of many riders—yorns and men of Kelb, accompanied by a monstrous flying creature called a Vuun. The next day, at Glagmaron castle, Harl. Rawl, and Hoggle-Fitz are greeted and thanked by Murie's father. A council is held in-re the developing circumstances of Om in Kelb and Great Ortmund. It is decided that war is in the offing and plans are made accordingly

The Prince of Kelb has arrived with an entourage of 100 riders. At a dinner honoring those who fight in a tournament on the morrow, he asks for Murie's hand in marriage. Harl suspects that this is a part of a plot to link Marack with Om. He successfully challenges the Prince to an 'onset of fifties' in the next day's tournament. On the following afternoon, while Harl, Rawl, and Hoggle-Fitz, with forty-seven student warriors who have been chosen as their stalwarts against the men of Kelb, await their entry to the lists, they are visited by Murie and the Lady, Caroween. Murie informs Harl that it has been decided that she will be sent to sanctuary during the period of the coming war. Harl is to be her escort, and she will go to the Keep of the great sorcerer, Goolbie. in the snow-lands to the north.

Harl—The Collin—as he is now called, Rawl Fergus, and the Lord Breen Hoggle-Fitz, together with their forty-seven students, win out in the tournament—this after much magick on both sides, plus a bit of derring-do. The Prince of Kelb and entourage are banished from the land.

Then, as Harl returns to the castle with his men, he receives the beginnings of 'first contact' with his companions from the Star-ship, DENEB 3.

And I told them everything, including the mental 'picnic' with Hooli the Pug-Boo; about the 'maelstrom, into which we had inadvertantly descended; about Camelot magick, generally—and I gave my summation.

"It seems obvious to me," I said, "that what we assumed to be simple 'growing pains' with a singular twist which we could control or influence accordingly—is nothing of the kind. As a matter of fact the stage is set here for one last dramatic act *sans* the *deus ex machina.* It's ragnarok, children; the curtain's coming down. The imagery the Pug-Boo creates—world destruction and whatever—*really happened* somewhere. I'm guessing it was on one of Fomalhaut II's three planets. I'm guessing that it can happen again.

"The indication is that the holocaust was but one single event in the total strategy of an antagonist who remains unknown—whose ultimate goal, for that very reason, may be something other than just Camelot-Flegis. I saw the destruction of the planet, remember? I saw it through the Pug-Boo's eyes. Only a force equalling, or *superior* to the Foundation could have such power."

Kriloy's voice came softly, soothing, a palliative to my intensity. I mentally pictured him and Ragen in the Deneb 3's 'Foundation Center' as apart from the ship itself: Ragen, tall, greying, with the touch of cynicism to his voice and person that all display who have been with the Foundation for any length of time; Kriloy, dark, slender, ebullient; a facsimile of myself in that he too was alive to the 'wonder of it all.' The Starship would be positioned directly above Glagmaron City, orbiting with Camelot's axial spin. But how long had it been there? Somehow, though long-sought contact had been made, it gave me, no comfort. How many times had they tried *and failed?* And why? It was quite possible that they served no purpose now at all; that that which was now about to happen was beyond their ability to influence; that, essentially, their very presence created a great and unnecessary danger for Camelot—and perhaps themselves.

Kriloy was saying: "We've not found the reason why you've been impossible to contact. We've been in touch with the *Watchers* at Klimpinge, but they have had nothing to add to their previous report. We don't even know why we've been able to reach you now."

"Whatever," I said. "I'm as much in the dark as you."

"Sheee!" Kriloy's exclamation was sarcastic.

"All *right!*" I said. "But now that we've *made* contact, you'll agree that I'm in the soup, and I need some answers, bad. . .. Have you been scanning?"

"Off and on."

"What's happening? What's in the southern hemisphere—the good old Land of Om? How's the traffic on the roads, the seaports, the seas? *What have you seen?*"

"No 'ghost' armies, only real ones. And no hallucinating cloud banks or dark wizardry—at least from 200 miles altitude. . .. To the south of your River-Sea, as you know, it's mostly jungle and savannah until the rise of the highlands. From there on it's early winter—rain, sleet, snow. The 'dark lands' are no longer dark. At the moment they are covered with fog, clouds, snow, the works: across the savannahs, through the jungles, and into all the ports of the River-Sea there is troop movement: Cavalry divisions of between five and ten thousand men. There's double that in infantry—men-at-arms and archers. Your *Yorns*, as you call them—they seem to be some kind of mutants—come from semi-savannah, jungle villages.The The men are simply rounded up, given weapons, drilled in their use for a few days, and sent off to the wars. Other than the elite force, the majority are anything but well-trained.

"We suspect that the port cities are full to bursting now; though many ships have already sailed north, to your area. The total figure is somewhere between 200,000 to 250,000 warriors, which suggests that you are, indeed, 'in the soup.'"

"Good God," I said.

"Sheee! A few hundred thousand, more or less, shouldn't upset the mighty 'Collin,'" Ragen put in. "We watched you," his voice was tinged with humor, "in that little *melee* at the tournament. I won fifty credits on you, baby. . .."

"You mean there was someone to bet against me?"

"We drew straws. The longs got the Prince of Kelb—we know who he is now—and the shorts got you and that senior student crew with the buster-brown hairdos."

"Skip it," I said flatly. Their *savoir faire* attitude concerning *my* bones and *my* future left me a little cold. "To get back to the south. It's my opinion that things are going to get worse before they get better. We badly need someone there."

"Are you suggesting a *Watcher?*"

"Yes."

"From what you've told us it would be much too late to help you."

"Great! So put one there to help *you.*"

"You're rather touchy, you know," Ragen said softly. "You show signs of undue irritability. You sure you don't want to be withdrawn?"

"No!" I said tersely.

"But you sound much too *involved*, and that's not good."

I controlled an instant subjective anger, derived from the fact that he was reaching me because he was right. The last thing I wanted now

was to risk withdrawal—I wasn't about to quit now. "It's rough but I'm on top of it," I said bluntly, in explanation. "And I've no intention of leaving now."

Ragen laughed, dissolving the tension. "We've kept a close eye on you. The 'vibes' from you and the 'pussycat' princess are something to watch. It's like a kaleidescope—colorama."

I cursed them mentally for a couple of double-damned *voyeurs.* Then I said strongly, "Look! I'm still the assigned *Adjuster,* which means *I'm in charge.* That being the case, from this moment on *no scanning! No orbiting!* You'll warp *in* and *out* of the Fomalhaut-Flegis matrix in exactly four days from now. I'll turn full-on at the 6th hour, Greenwich, for exactly two minutes. We'll exchange *bon-mots.* Meanwhile, play games. One of them being that you check out Fomalhaut's binary and its three-planet system. *That's an order.* And you are to handle this 'search and peek' job with discretion—like your next trip to Camelot-Flegis, *in* and *out,* with all detection systems given but two minutes exposure."

"Do you have a reason for such caution?" Ragen's voice held a note of anger now.

"Just a sterling hunch, children. It involves the fact that maybe *we* are being scanned right now."

"And that's all?"

"Considering what happened to the Pug-Boo's planet, that's enough."

"You through?"

"As a matter of fact, yes!" I said. "*Fade now!*"

"Now fade," Ragen echoed mechanically—reluctantly.

And they did. And I was left alone, except for the press of fifty thousand shouting, beaming, *aficionados* from Glagmaron City. These continued to swarm like bees to see their tournament heroes—Rawl, Breen Hoggle-Fitz (who was most pontifically giving his personal benediction to everyone within hailing distance) and myself, *The Collin:* their hero-mythos sprung to life.

I was human enough, and still young enough, so that every square inch of my bruised body was suffused with a warm and pleasant glow of self-satisfaction at this show of mass support.

Our dottles wheeed, whooed, and pranced, delighted to be a part of such downright adulation. My personal charger, who had enabled me to topple the mighty Prince of Kelb, was a castle-mount. And his name—for dottles *were* given names—was Henery.

Henery was a male, bigger than most, heavily muscled and mentally sharp. He was also a bit of a snob. If he were humanoid, he would most definitely be a name-dropper. From time to time he would look back at me possessively, prance, roll his

blue and slightly blood-shot eyes, and wave his huge doggy-dottle tail like a pennant. His fat paws matched his eyes, for they had been painted blue for the occasion.

Lackeys, I had found, were not as profuse in Camelot society as in other feudal orders. Witness the fact that prior to yesterday's dinner Rawl and I had been left alone to take care of ourselves. Such was not the case now, however. We were very shortly being bathed, gently massaged, and various oils and healing salves and unguents were being rubbed into our bodies. This was done in a large common room beneath Castle Glagmaron, complete with apothecary bottles lining the walls, various saws, knives, mallets and whatever—the tools of the chirurgeon—on sundry tables, and the chirurgeons, lackeys, and masseures themselves in attendance.

This atmosphere of T.L.C. was so conducive to relaxation and sleep, that that is exactly what I did. And this time with no disturbing terror-dreams from intruding Pug-Boos.

I awoke in Rawl's apartment. As before, Rawl was beside me snoring lustily. And, as before, the breeze through the stone-laced windows of the three-hundred foot eyrie was fresh, sweet, and soul-serving.

I got up and walked to the balustrade. History was repeating itself. For, as yesterday, in the distance I saw the Prince of Kelb with his entourage, minus the sixteen dead knights. They were departing now, however, in a long line, two abreast, with the Prince and his ambassador to the fore. Even from a distance they seemed a dejected lot. As I watched in the swift-falling twilight, a wash of wind and rain swept the great meadow beyond the castle walls; touching the grass in such a way as to remind me of the beginnings of a squall at sea after a time of calm. . .. The Prince would stop in the first village, I thought, as protection against the night and the dead-alives—or would he?

Rawl and I were ordered to the great room to sup and to take conference. This time there was no formality—some pomp, but no ceremony.

Those present were the king, the queen, the twelve great lords and ladies of the realm; Fairwyn and a young, skinny, almost transparent neophyte sorcerer named Angus, a handful of hardened knights that I had not seen before, the Lady Caroween, the two Pug-Boos—and Murie.

We ate at the king's table. The hall was redolent with the smell of food; of wet flagstones and straw—all cold with the lowered temperature, and with the sweet smell of the rain-washed wind which penetrated the hall to blow gently around our seated persons, pat the tapestries upon the walls, and cause the fires to roar lustily.

Murie sat directly opposite me as

did Caroween to Rawl. Supping being what it was on Camelot—a literal recharging of energies so wantonly spent in brawling, arguing, and in just plain staying alive, I fell into line and began stuffing myself too—lord knows I needed it.

Twice we were interrupted by young, lightly-armored couriers, who burst in, fell to one knee and tendered messages which were forwarded to the king and his lords. The atmosphere, in contrast to the festivity of the preceding night, was absolutely warlike in its tense and abrupt urgency.

The king arose to inform us of the contents of the last note. "My Lords," he said, "I beg to inform you that there has been heavy fighting at Castle-Gortfin. My 'Sister,' the Lady Elioseen, has been driven back to within the castle walls. But this small victory has cost us dearly. Indeed, the commander of our thousand, the young Sir Bricht of Klimpinge, states that they do but contain the enemy under siege. And that since there was little time for burial, they were again attacked at night by dead-alives. The situation is perilous."

There was a stir of alarm at this last: the fact that the dead by some magical power had been used against us. For, though I had noted much fear of supposed 'dead-alives,' I had yet to meet the knight or warrior who had ever seen one. I had reached the point, in fact, where I had my own ideas on the matter.

They fell to meditating on this tid-bit, but that was the extent of it. We continued eating. Through seven courses of salads, soups, and meats, I was totally conscious of the purple eyes of my most undainty (at sup at least) princess. Betimes she gazed at me with the same intensity as she had used upon the first platter of succulent pastries to pass her way. I was flattered. And, since I was now fully imbued with the true Camelot spirit, I understood. I beamed fiercely back at her and she loved it, even to the point of blushing.

But yet another pair of eyes were upon me: The Lord Fon-Tweels. His stare was *not* welcome. I had yet to question him as to how he had arrived at Castle-Glagmaron whilst *we* wound up in Castle-Gortfin.

But time was passing, and I was acutely aware that just as I had sparked the move against Kelb the previous night—so must I force things now. There would either be a unity of purpose between the states of Gheese, Ferlach, and Marack, as opposed to Kelb and Great Ortmund, or Om would certainly prevail—and the sooner a discussion of all of this, the better.

The wind had risen. It keened savagely outside and guttered the candles inside. Lackeys rushed to draw drapes over the slitted windows and to close tight the great wooden doors. I arose, wiped some

kind of antelope grease from my face with a coarse napkin, and without further ado begged leave to speak.

It was granted me, and I said, "Your majesty, as you well know I am new to these parts, and certainly new to court affairs and the ordering of armies. If this were not so, forsooth, I would not be talking now, but would abide by protocol. But since it is true, may I beg leave to ask that we not delay one single second in approaching your neighbors of Gheese and Ferlach with offers of mediation—between the two of them—of support, generally, and of the creation of a unified fighting front to move instantly to the attack against Om in Kelb and Great Ortmund. I would ask too if that Prince of Kelb received proper escort. For, since I have been given a certain task, according to your gracious daughter, I would know all of those who might choose to interfere—though they be Vuuns, Yorns, or princes. . .."

There was a rattle of laughter, the King smiled too and said: "Young Sir, you are right in your concern. The knights of Kelb *are* escorted, even unto the very borders of Kelb; though at a distance. We will know if ought transpires that does not meet our wish."

"And in the night?"

"There are ways, young sir."

"Praise be," I said. I honored them with a crossed Ormon circle—"But," I persisted, "Since there is much magick about these days—of which I have truly had my share—is it not possible, considering the stakes, that dark sorcery will aid the Prince of Kelb again?

A great Lord rose from his striped-skin bedecked chair. He had been introduced to me as Per-Rondin, *Kolb* of Blin. His hand was raised to the king. Caronne nodded and Per-Rondin spoke. His voice was strong, as were his features. His was Hoggle-Fitz's double in height and girth. "Young *Collin,*" he said—and his ready smile was friendly, "You have travelled far from your dour province of Fleege with its moors, its snows, and dark forests. I knew your father, young sir; though I remember him as a 'slower' man than you. You honor him well. But to get to it. The ways of war are such that we oft lose much by panic and too-hurried judgment; likewise, though studied counter-moves are made, we cannot always foretell the movements of our enemies. You speak of *magick;* well so it has been. We cannot negate this phenomenon—*So let there be magick*—magick on all sides. And, if we are so fortunate as to have this magick work for us, we will truly thank our god—as you should thank him for his aid this very day. Conversely, if the magick of the cursed Kaleen prevails over ours, then will we fight him with our blood and with our hearts alone.

And thus shall we still prevail.

"We are entering into bloody war, young sir. Of a scope such as has not been seen since men first formed cities in this great world. All information brought by you, our noble cousin, Sir Rawl Fergis, and the great Lord, Breen Hoggle-Fitz, is substantiated. We shall decide now—with your council, for you have earned it—what we shall do. With my Lord, the King's permission, I bid you welcome to our deliberations."

Per-Rondin bowed deeply. And there was such a smattering of handclaps that, since Rawl and Fitz had both been mentioned, they stood up to too take their bows with me.

And then we talked and talked—and talked. Great quantities of sviss were drunk, and certain wines, but not enough to boggle our brains. Most of the women left. Not so Caroween and my princess; nor the queen and two or three of the wives of the lords, including the Lady Brist, wife to the Lord, Per-Rondin. In the ensuing discussion they proved by their brains and their courage that they were by no means mere chattels of their lordlings. The *Adjuster* in me welcomed this fact as a sign of health in the Flegisian body politic. . ..

The two Pug-Boos, Hooli and Jindil, sat silently watching. And there was such a feeling of well-being around us, of peace, and, yes, of *protection,* that I wondered if, perhaps, it was not their doing; that that was the thing they could provide if one were but within their proximity—a sanctuary against evil. . .. But I remembered Murie's abduction, and knew that it could not be. . .. And yet. . ..

Despite the drapes and the closed shutters we were made aware of the mounting storm without by an absolute crescendo of lashing water, causing a veritable thunder throughout the mains of the castle. And there developed such a howling of wind as to almost prevent the exchange of ideas, and the plans of total mobilization, men-at-arms, footmen, archers. But we *were* heard.

And once, twixt the rise and fall of the wind's howl, a voice—like Hooli's; like my own—seemed to say solely to me: "Go not to the snow-lands, Harl Lenti. For your life, go not there!" I looked instantly to Hooli and Jindil. But there was nothing in Hooli's shoe-button eyes or placid, smiling mouth to tell me that it was he who gave the warning. The voice was gone then, as if it had never been.

I was given command of a wing of the center-army, which was to march immediately upon Kelb. This task I would assume upon my return from having delivered the princess to her place of safety. No one said me nay of this—not even Fon-Tweel, which I thought passing

strange.

There would be three armies. The first, of 20,000 men, was to advance upon Great Ortmund; with the Marackian warlords of the provinces of Keeng, Fleege, and Klimpinge in command. Breen Hoggle-Fitz, Lord of Durst in Ortmund, was appointed to the council of this army, and was to re-enter Ortmund with 5,000 men in advance of the main forces and rouse the countryside against the false king, Feglyn. This he accepted with great gusto. The second army, also of 20,000 men, would advance directly on Kelb. The Lord, Per-Rondin, of Glagmaron would command it. Two other lords, the king, and myself, *The Collin*, would be his war-council. It was expected that I would arrive on the scene long before the crucial battle had been joined. As this army advanced it would settle Castle-Gortfin's hash as an extra bonus.... Lastly, an army of 30,000 was to march in the direction of Gheese. It would be under the direct command of Lord Fon-Tweel, with a staff of three warlords of the southern provinces. Their objective would be to seek an immediate truce between the warring parties of Ferlach and Gheese, and then to direct those forces concurrently upon the flank of Kelb and the hordes of Om.

There were 30,000 men-at-arms, archers, and knights in the proximity of Glagmaron at this moment. Twenty thousand of these would be assigned immediately to the first two armies, who would then complete their muster with border troops and levies gathered along the way. The call for muster had gone out by courier two days ago upon Murie's council with her father. Fon-Tweel was to wait in Glagmaron with the remaining 10,000 until his forces were augmented to full strength by levies from the countryside.

And finally, Sir Rawl Fergis was given the unenviable job of riding on the morrow with an entourage of but 100 knights and students—he had asked especially for some of those who had fought so bravely with us against the knights of Kelb—to Ferlach. He would act as direct emissary of King Caronne, and would petition the highly respected Draslich, king of Ferlach, to also desist in his altercation with Gheese, and to join in the final effort to drive the hordes of Om into the River-Sea.

As the finishing touch to our deliberations, it was decided that the Marackian fleet, smaller than those of Ferlach, Gheese, and Kelb, would sail down the west coast from Klimpinge to Ferlach, to join with that countries ships as a part of the final assault.

And thus did we deliberate.

And it seemed to me suddenly as if there were no Starship; no Foundation—and no influences, malign

or otherwise, to affect our course. When I spoke—and I spoke loud and often—I imagined myself as a lord of the house of Plantagenet, during the Terran feudal wars. It was as if our world depended upon our council, our deliberations, and upon our ability to carry them out. Thus, I imagined too, would those who planned crusades have acted and, conversely, from the Mohammedan point of view, thus would those who sought courageously to defend Islam from the depredations of the heathen, have also done.

Then it was over and we retired to our quarters through corridors wet with the rain's penetration, and cold with the touch of the north-wind.

Once there, Rawl said gruffly, grinning the while like an idiot dubot—"I shall now leave you, Sirrah! You may plague but yourself this night, with your snores."

"How so?"

His grin became almost ridiculous. "Because I seek fairer company than you, great oaf. I would remind you that you are not the daintiest of bedfellows—and," he finished slyly, "Admit it. You serve me no purpose twixt the sheets."

"I wish you well," I said, laughing, thinking, too, that he was off, mayhaps, to pleasure some serving wench with his boots on. . .. "But turn me a jug of milk before you go," I admonished, "so I'll be reminded that you *do* serve a purpose."

He looked at me owlishly. "Well hey, and hey, then! 'Tis, perhaps, for me to tell you, Fair *Collin,* that did I remain in this room you would hate me beyond all reason. I do but leave to guarantee, amongst other things, your undying affection."

"You speak in riddles."

"But not for long. Enough! Good night, Sir Lenti, Sir Collin. I wish you the pleasantest of dreams; tho' I doubt not that that which will happen in your waking moments will be the better."

I shook my head. "Have done," I said. "And since I see the jug holds sviss, I have no need of you at all."

After a quick shower and a change of clothes, he bowed out, grinning. And, I thought, seeing him go, and showering myself with the now freezing water from the castle pipes, it was hard to believe that but ten short hours ago we had battled in the onset of Glagmaron tournament. My skin felt unbruised. The shallow gash upon my forehead was well on its way to healing—a testimonial to the salves of Camelot not derived of magick, but rather from her budding science. All this I pondered, then doused the candles and retired to the great fur-covered bed.

I deliberately left the windows undraped. The keening north-wind in and around this eyrie was of the proportions of a baby hurricane.

I loved it.

I had but clasped my hands behind my head upon the pillow when I sensed the presence of someone else in the great room. My sword hung from its belt by the bed's coping; an awkward position. I instantly flung myself toward it to draw.

"Stay your impetuous hand, M' Lord!"

The voice was softly intimate, as intimate in fact as the complete, instant, and total caress I received from the small body of Murie Nigaard as she dived from wherever she had been hiding into the welter of furs and bedclothing to seize me in an embrace that was truly awesome.

I responded in kind. It was as if all the magick, black, white, and piebald, on all Camelot, had united for one great web of rainbows. I had experienced nothing like it before. I instinctively knew that I would experience nothing like it agian—except, perhaps, with Murie. Humanoid women have the ability, if they but dare to exploit it, to so weld the male of their choice to them, that said male will seek no other. To say that I welcomed this fantastically warm bundle of sweet-smelling female pulchritude would be the understatement of the millenia.

Murie, all ninety-eight pounds of her, was mother-naked. Though, if one be softly furred in the most peculiar places this may come under the heading of quasi-quasi. Whatever. I was 'quasi-quasi' too, and it was the kind of nakedness that dreams are made of if one but has the imagination.

"Hey, my lord?" Murie was finally straddling me between clutches, holding me by the ears and looking down into my eyes. . .. "You look surprised. Dids't not expect me?"

"No, I *dids't* not," I said.

I reached up to pull all that squealing, squirming, sweet-scented, soft-fleshed, soft-furred, feminine mystique down upon me.

There was no moon, or moons, only clouds reflecting strobe flashes of blue lightning to silver the room and our faces. In all the galaxy, I thought, there could hardly be a more romantic setting than this. I was eighteen again, and this was senior prom with the scent of girl flesh and Venusian kablis. . .. I was a number of things; each representative of everything 'great' that had ever happened to me. And then, finally, I was what I now was—Sir Harl Lenti, *The Collin.* I was a knight, a warrior, a swordsman, a feudal lord, a mythos come to life, so that small furry creatures such as the one that I now held in my arms, would continue to people the green vales and wine-dark mountains of this so-fair world of *Camelot.*

I looked down into Murie's purple eyes—she was beneath me now, held strongly against me, and hold-

ing just as strongly. "My Princess," I said, "I know not of palace dalliance, but if you were to repeat but the tenth of this—in thought—with anyone else, I would flay, stuff, and mount you so that you would ride forever on my dottle's rump as Pug-Boos do. For know you well that I am of the possessive type. And she whom I most desire above all women, having come to this bed of her own free will, may not just leave it at her pleasure." I was only half teasing. I gripped her tighter still and buried my face in the soft curve of her neck and shoulder.

"Oh, Sir Collin? You think *you* possessive," her voice came muffled, "I would warn *you,* Sir, that the women of our family love strongly or not at all. They choose not idly either. And when they do, the lord of their choice had best not longer halt for chamber-maids and bar girls, else *he* be flayed, tanned, and worked into a greatcoat for winter outings. You have my love, my lord, and that is that." At this last she reached up and covered my mouth with hers, held for brief seconds, then slipped down the length of my throat to sink her small white teeth into my shoulder.

"And that," she said, above my instant yell and the sound of thunder from without, "*is my mark.* Do you so likewise upon my body, so that I may know that you love me."

I sat up aghast. "Murie. I cannot." I said. "I am not an animal. I would not hurt you."

"Nor am I an animal, stupid oaf. But I do love you. And, if you have forgotten in these brief seconds from the making of my mark, I will forthwith do it again—*until you love me.*"

And so saying she gripped me with arms, legs, *and teeth,* so that I was driven somewhat wild with the absolute sensuousness of it all. Then we became what we truly were. And the great fur-strewn bed was a welter of Murie, the Collin, and sundry remains of various pelts and treated skins. It was like nothing I had ever experienced. And in the end I knew, at least from one point of view, what it was to *love.* I would learn of other ways in the perilous days of our future; but of this night I learned that which few are given to know—and in the end she had her teeth marks. So help me Ormon, but she had them! And we lay back then, her page-boy bobbed curls in the curve of my shoulder; arms and legs thrown across my body, and all around us the screaming of the wind and rain and the blue-white lightning of a primal sky, such as only the *furies* themselves could create. . .. A fitting stage, I thought, for this welding of myself and this elfish princess from a world which now was mine. . ..

We talked. We murmured nonsense. We made love. Caroween, Murie told me, as I worried one of her slightly pointy ears with lips

and teeth, was even now with her cousin, Rawl. And it was because of this that he had suspected that The Collin, too, would be so honored.

"And what of your father?" I murmured against her breast. "That you are my chosen," she said simply.

"He was not opposed?"

"Opposed?" She leaned up on a dainty elbow, her eyes but a lash's distance from my own. . .. "I would think you not of Marack, my lord.... Why oppose? I am his daughter. Were I not so in fact and deed, then twould be otherwise. But I am. And that, too, is that."

"So be it," I said mildly. "But are not marriage vows followed by certain pomp and ceremony? And, in our case, since you have arranged everything else, am I to assume you have arranged that, too?"

"In good time, my lord," she said, and kissed me. "We are at war," she said. "And since all will know that you are to wed me, and I you, it is sufficient for the moment."

"Great Ormon," I said. And she smiled down at me.

I felt just slightly off-balance. Certain prerogatives had been established without my gainsay. I said softly again, "It would appear, my most delicious tid-bit, that though my council is sought in war, it is *not* sought in matters of our personal union."

"Which is as it should be, my lord," she answered pertly. "The question of marriage is the sole province of women, plus the ordering of the household."

"Your 'logic' escapes me totally," I grinned. "But I'll go along." I ran my fingers along the length of her instantly reactivated body—and tried to hold her. "You," I exclaimed, "are like a bucket of eels."

"Eels, my lord?" She wriggled deliciously. "What are eels?"

"Small fish," I stammered. "In the north. In my province of Fleege."

"I know not of them," she said. She looked at me closely and stopped her sexy squirming. 'Which suggests again the matter of the 'mystery' in you—a thing of *The Collin,* that you have hinted. My cousin, Rawl, has said that you are not wholly of this world, though what he meant, I know not. He told this to his love, the Lady Caroween, and she to me."

"In due time," I said gruffly. "Be patient and know one thing, which is that I do love thee, and that all that I do is a part of the love I bear you."

She raised above me again; stared strongly into my eyes, then seized me in an embrace to equal all that had gone before. Finally there were but three brief hours til the pearling of a Flegis dawn, so that I cautioned her, and wrapped in each other's arms we slept.

She was gone when I awoke. Yet, when I met her later in the

gray and storm-lashed courtyard, she was as fresh as a babe. Only the intimate sparkle in her eyes remained to tell me of our night's adventure. We spoke but briefly; though she leaned to kiss me upon the cheek before all that gathered assembly—and thereby established our relationship without further ado. She was with the Lady, Caroween, which was surprising since I had expected the good Dame Malion to be her trip companion. But, as it turned out, the Dame was sore ill, and of a sudden, so that Caroween did take her place. They were both in light armor, dainty surcoats and furred capes against the cold. They looked most appealing upon the quietly kneeling dottles. The skinny sorcerer neophyte named Angus was with them. He too was dressed warmly for the journey, and other than a bag of tricks, herbs and such, he carried a strange musical instrument of small pipes and bellows. I had heard a similar one but yesterday, upon the tournament field. It had a strange, monotonous, and skirling noise.

The great flagstoned courtyard was alive to men, mounts, puddles of rain and the shouts of ostlers and lackeys. I was all 'business' now. I had but three days to deliver Murie to her sanctuary—three days to cover 400 miles, and three more to return, and to make my way to the king's army on the frontiers of Kelb. The ground-eating lope of a dottle was at 20 miles per hour, so this feat was not as impossible as it may seem.

Rawl and Hoggle-Fitz joined me in a brief inspection of our men: Rawl's hundred in one corner of the courtyard; mine in another. I had been granted but ten men-at-arms and ten students. And all were a menacing panoply of leather, steel, and weapons. I matched them in grimness. Even Rawl remarked that in this dawn's light I looked most huge and black and evil. His remark was, I think, molded somewhat by his surprise and consternation at seeing Caroween with Murie. Indeed, since they had spent a similar night I had no doubt that he had planned to keep her with him.

Griswall, a member of the king's own household guard, and a heavily bearded knight of many seasons, commanded my men-at-arms; Charney, a blue-eyed, red-furred scamp of a youth, the students. I learned later that Charney had listed among his ten, three of his brothers. All had participated in the melee. I welcomed them strongly and shook each individual hand in turn. We were twenty-six in all. We had a herd of 100 dottles, five of them burdened with foodstuffs, baggage and the like.

There were no trumpets to hail our departure, only the muffled martial cadence of kettle-drums, echoing hollowly to the padded beat of our prancing dottle's paws. The fulsome clouds lowered still further

so that a most evil and penetrating mist descended upon us. I led the group, with Murie at my side, down the distance between the walls, through the outer gate to the great meadow beyond. The mist was sleet, actually; akin to the cold of my own, supposed, northland. I reached across my dottle's saddle—I was riding Henery—to touch Murie's hand, wondering if the snowland to which we travelled was like the hell of the ice-world of Fen in the Cygnus system where I had spent a most miserable and uncomfortable six months.

Once through the portcullis and across the moat we bid goodbye to Rawl and Fitz. We clasped hands and arms to do this, leather and armor all a'tinkling. I even felt somewhat choked up as I received the 'sainted' Hoggle-Fitz's 'blessing,' and wished him well in return. After all, the chance that I would see them both again soon, considering the events that were about to burst upon us, was questionable. Caroween clung to Rawl for the space of minutes, tearful, feminine; her natural, warlike aplomb now worn to a nub. Hoggle stared fiercely and paternally at the both of them but said never a word. . .. I wondered at that last moment of parting, about Hooli. I had not dared to ask, for I was sufficiently suspect in that area already. But still, as our dottles broke into their first long strides, I remembered the strange voice of last night, and had a premonition of a gathering fate in which a thread of the web had suddenly gone awry. . ..

All that day we thundered north and west, stopping only for the three-hour, mid-day dottle browsing period. We crossed the Cyr three times along its sinuous course until it fell away to south and east. Some miles beyond Glagmaron City the forest began again in earnest, thick, impenetrable. At one point great rock-falls lined the winding road that paralleled a tributary of the Cyr. The middle-aged knight, Griswall, led the way with his group of ten. He, like his men, was familiar with the road, having been born in those great mountains bordering the plateau of the snowlands.

With the steady drizzle the advent of early summer, or 'late spring' as some would call it, seemed premature. The rain-filled clouds were no harbingers of sunshine. Great birds flew overhead, waterfowl and predators of the winged variety, while all around us in the underbrush, outlined on wild promontories, and sometimes in the very road itself, was the fauna indigenous to Camelot-Flegis. Some were sabertoothed, carniverous, and *almost* ready to dispute our passage. Though, at the very last moment, if they were in the road they would stand aside; or if watching us from a close deer-meadow, they would turn and disappear into the brush. One great

animal resembled a Terran grizzly, but six-limbed, as seemingly were most animals of Flegis. The thought caused me to wonder at the dominant humanoids with their *four* limbs; for suddenly it was something to think *about.* The 'grizzly' was larger than the Terran model. He stood at least fourteen feet. He rose from the heavy grass beside a small stream to watch our passage with tiny eyes of a bright and laser red. He made no move to approach our thundering herd, though. And our dottles streamed past him with rolling eyes and bared teeth.

In the late afternoon the road wound between low hills and rocky ravines. It began to climb more steeply. Three times we had passed hard-riding couriers, their dottles wild-eyed, dripping swaths of foam and sweat. Twice we passed great contingents of cavalry, archers, and footmen with heavy hardwood spears and pike-like weapons. There were at least two thousand to each contingent. Their captains saluted us gravely, bowing their heads briefly in obeisance to the princess. On one flat and rocky mesa of crisp short grass and wind-gnarled trees we found a cross-road. It led east to another road that, I knew, would meet one which would lead to my own supposed province of Fleege. To the west it would wind down to Klimpinge province and Klimpinge city on the shores of the western sea. One hour beyond the cross-roads and in the light of the fast-setting sun we made our camp. Again we were ringed round with dottles against the night.

Murie and Caroween slept to themselves, though Murie came to me briefly before retiring. We leaned against the bole of a great tree, Murie and I, and I held her closely and we talked of Marack and of Flegis, and of ourselves and what we would do when the forces of Om were no longer on the northern shores. And once she spoke of strong sons to further our cause in distant battles. And while she talked I thought myself possessed of a veritable *valkyrie.* I wondered too, since my mink pelt—its growth had been artificially stimulated—was what it was, just what she would think of her somewhat 'shorn' progeny. Then I walked her to her tent.

We: Griswall, Charney, and I, set pickets for the fires and as watchers. And in this we included ourselves. During one of my hour-long stints—it was almost the time of the false dawn and the clouds had disappeared and the second moon shown whitely—I dared to walk beyond the kneeling, sleeping dottle ring to a stony outcropping that overlooked the road we would take on the morrow. As I stared out along its length and then up to the fast-hurtling moon, I saw what seemed to be the great bat wings of the Vuun skimming low, away from the mesa. Had it been *here,* I wondered; set-

tled and watching from across that silvery road? Or over there, perhaps, in that great grove; Then a slight breeze stirred and a smell of carrion, *of rotting human flesh*—I knew this because of the sick-sweet stench of it—touched briefly upon my nostrils.

My sword sprang instantly to my hand, and with never a sound, so well-oiled had I made both sheath and metal. A great boulder half again as tall as a man lay on the downslope of the hill. I approached it stealthily and rounded its prominence to come face to face with three creatures. They were as tall as myself, white-furred, muscular; naked except for a leathern harness with sword and dagger. But the resemblance ended there. A single look at the creatures' eyes told me they were what I had not believed to exist. The eyes were white-filmed, the mouths, open, slack. . .. It was from these opened mouths that this foulest of carrion stenches came. *They were dead-alives and they had been named correctly.*

I drew a quick breath, crouched, knees flexed—and waited. Were there others in that far grove, behind those boulders strewn around? Then they advanced toward me, awkwardly, hideously, stumbling, pulling their great swords from their harnesses with stiff and labored movements. I did not wait for their clumsy assault. In as many strokes as it took to do it—and with an indescribable repugnance for the job—I literally slashed them limb from limb. Two final strokes and I had hewn the white arms from the last one's body. Then I cleft the head down through the shoulders to below the waist, from which there poured entrails and sundry putrescent effluvia containing a second life of maggots and yellow filth to drench its knees and lower parts until the whole tottered and toppled. I did the same to the carcasses of the remaining two, so that but for a few still jerky movements, they were reasonably dead a second time.

I stood apart from this moonsplashed scene of horror, to find that my sword and legs were splashed with a reeking, stinking mass of pus and matter. I couldn't stand it. I backed away, retched, and gave the contents of my stomach to the ground. Were I attacked in so defenseless a position I would indeed be easy prey. My mind was dazed. The smell, no longer encapsuled by the walking cadaver containers, had reached the sensitive nostrils of the dottles some three hundred yards away, and they were up and wheeing in horror and fear.

I woodenly retraced my steps toward our circle; saw Griswall, Charney, and the others. They were armed and staring white-faced through the ring.

"Stay your weapons," I cautioned. "There is nought to do now. Those who would walk the night

are slain again. Bring me water. And bring it outside the circle, for I would not subject you to the filth of the things I have destroyed. I stood some fifty feet from the wheeing dottles as I talked. They brought water but hesitated to come beyond the circle—even Griswall—until Murie, who had awakened too, snatched a bucket and said, "I come, my lord," and walked bravely out to me. The others followed.

Of the fact that I truly loved her there was no doubt: that I loved her then, above all else, was as true as the stars of our galaxy. I disrobed before them; threw my clothes to the ground, cleansed my sword, my *belt* and my body, and walked back naked through the circle, with Murie most proudly at my side. . ..

"The dead-alives," I announced, while one of the students fetched fresh clothes, "were brought here by the Vuun; for what purpose, we can only guess—certainly not for spying since the Vuun itself has better eyes for that—Hast seen dead-alives before?" I asked them all.

"No, my lord." Griswall was the first to answer. "They are passing rare. But wherever one appears it is usually to seize upon a captive to be spirited to the dark lands."

"This I know, except for the 'spiriting.' I warrant that those three out there are dead-alives from Marack and not from Om. The Vuun is their transportation. They are brought to life *here*, or wherever else they die, by sorcery of the Kaleen. The Vuun then takes them to a place where one of ours can be captured. It is that simple. It was said last night in council that before the gates of Castle Gortfin, those who had fought and died during the day, *and not buried*, were up to fight again that night. But be not afraid of them," I finished curtly, "for they are mindless, clumsy; so that any man here could most easily carve his way through a thousand. Their stench alone is their greatest weapon."

My arrogance was sufficient to the task. And it was a pleasure indeed to see those, Charney, Griswall, and a half-dozen others who, but moments before, had been terrified of something unspeakable horrible, now look at me in awe and walk out to the spot by the great boulder to examine the ruins.

They returned, gasping for breath. And Charney said, "you were right, most noble sir, in that their 'greatest weapon' is indeed, their stink. Chivalry and courage gains nothing with such opponents."

The true dawn was showing then, with a promise of bright sun. I gave the order to break camp and prepare to march. We would breakfast, I told them—with nose held high—in some other spot; for I had, in sooth, lost all stomach for this one.

We rode out in silence and the rocky mesa changed swiftly to the

lower slopes of a great range of mountains all covered with a dense forest of conifers. At breakfast, on a grassy lea by a fast rushing stream of cold, sweet water we talked of the Vuun and what its presence meant. And it was then that I questioned Angus, the skinny sorcerer, as to his purpose with us.

"The key, my lord," he answered shyly. "The *word key* for the opening of the circle before the keep of the great wizard. Without it we could not enter."

I looked to Murie. "Is not the wizard informed of our coming?"

"Howso, my lord?"

"Has Fairwyn no magick? No crystal balls within which to send and receive thoughts?"

"I know nought, my lord."

"Birds," Angus put in. "We have sent a bird to Goolbie. But we know not if he has successfully flown the distance."

"Enough," I said, and then to Griswall and Charney: "Hast truly never seen a dead-alive before?"

"My Lord," Griswall said, and he looked me squarely in the eye, "In all my forty years I have met *none* who have seen one–let alone fought with one. No one would, of their own accord, leave the confines of a dottle circle."

"But since the dottles also fear them," I suggested evenly and with a straight face, "why cannot these walking bladders of putrescence just walk right through a 'circle' and cut you down?"

"But it is written," said Charney, brimming still with student knowledge, "that no dead-alive will cross a dottle circle."

"No doubt," I said tersely. "But it occurs to me that the reason is something other than mystic. For instance, those who manipulate the dead-alives are aware, even if you are not, that if the creatures entered the circle they would meet their true end; for despite your fear I warrant you would destroy it. You may not go out to seek it, but once met you *would* destroy it. And you would find this passing simple, as those who control the dead-alives know full well. As stated, other than their ability to instill terror, and thus prevail, the single meaningful weapon of the dead-alive is its stink. Now what think you of the Vuun?" (I had briefed them all the previous night as to the coming of the hundred riders.)

"The question then would be," Griswall said: "Are they in pursuit? Do they lie ahead in ambush–or are they upon *this* road at all?"

"Meaning that the Vuun, alone, follows our tracks."

"It would make sense, my lord," Charney said. "The Vuun is their 'eyes.' He has told them of our presence on this road. They–or in this case, the Kaleen, has created dead-alives–as you suggest–for the Vuun to take to us, in the hopes, perhaps, that the creatures could succeed in

their job of abduction."

"Possibly," I said.

"There is the chance, too," Griswall put in, "that the Vuun did not spy us out—that indeed, somewhere there is black betrayal. How else, then, would the hundred riders know our whereabouts or purpose?"

"Dost think they seek to stampede us back to Glagmaron?" I asked softly.

"*Who* would be in Glagmaron tonight? The army and the king has moved in the direction of Kelb—and to Ortmund. Only the Lord, Fon-Tweel, remains in Glagmaron." Griswall's question and answer was rhetorical.

"Then," Murie's voice came strongly above the sound of the rushing stream, "if only Fon-Tweel is at Glagmaron City, *I* am for the snow-land. I would not be forced back upon Glagmaron. . .."

I think she sensed what I now knew. The others sensed it too. Something was rottenly awry in the state of Marack. "Whatever, good sirs," I said. "The sun rises, and we will follow the thinking of our princess." So saying, I arose, took her slight figure in the crook of my arm before all and sundry, and walked her toward the waiting dottles. I was riding Henery again, she a lovely female. We mounted, waited for the somewhat glum Caroween to join us, then followed Griswall's ten up the ascending mountain road.

The wind from the northeast blew strong. After the dottle grazing period, and when we thundered still further over the ever-rising path, it seemed snow-laden; flowing down from the great heights of the snow-lands with the icy touch of glacier and perma-ice. We rode with our great cloaks raised to our eyes, and our furred caps to our ears. The lush deer meadows were few and far between now, and we stopped in one for a period of four hours at noon. In this way, the dottles were allowed to browse, plus one could rest for simple digestive purposes. There would be no stopping tomorrow for the simple reason that there would be nothing to stop for. All would be ice and iron-grey stone; all would be bare and windswept. A reason for the limited size of our party was that, though forage was kept in readiness at the Keep of the great sorcerer, it was enough for just one hundred dottles at a single entry. Other than that they would go without food for one full day, coming and going.

I asked Murie, as we rode, to tell me something of the great sorcerer, Goolbie, and why he had chosen the cruel isolation of the snow-lands as opposed to Court or Collegium. "He is old," she said—"almost two hundred years." (I would point out that a Camelot life-span is well over a hundred—the first eighty years, what with cold steel and all that, being the hardest.) He had asked her

grandfather, King Iblis, Murie explained, to create the 'Keep' of the snow-lands as a place of purification, of meditation; where the great ones of the realm could seek the peace of quiet and tranquillity, if so desired. He, Goolbie, sought the same thing, but for a different reason. According to her father, Goolbie 'looked for the meaning of it all'—why magick worked—especially his own, and from whence came Ormon and the Gods.

"A most noble research," I said, "for a man to question the Gods themselves, and his own abilities." And we left it at that.

The pace was slower now. From twenty miles per hour we fell to ten. At one point, and for the period of two hours or more, we literally clung to the side of a great and precipitous canyon from which the road had been hewn from solid granite. Below us, on the final stretch of this perilous nightmare, was a sheer drop of well over five thousand feet to a roaring, boulder-strewn maelstrom of frothing water—"a freshet," Griswall smiled, 'from the snows above.'

We all were silent in the last hours of the day, laboring mentally with our dottles as they pounded ahead. They would not deliberately slow their pace unless absolutely forced to. To them, it seemed that all ground was a challenge; that the distance between two points was forever to be shortened and conquered by forging dottle paws. Toward twilight I was once again mounted on Henery, and his great, smoothly coordinated muscles had carried me across the 'hump,' as it were, of the crest of the pass. Great snow peaks still rose on all sides. But now, too, there was an endless expanse; a desert of snow and ice before us that seemed to go on forever.

We had brought fuel for the night. We camped and set up our cooking pots. All around us were broad patches of wind-whipped snow, hard black earth, and equally black boulders. Goolbie, I thought, had certainly chosen a most Ghast-forsaken stretch of terrain to call his personal fief and Keep. . .. But, despite the piercing cold, the night was pleasant. We made a wondrous stew of gog-meat and vegetables; its aroma enhanced by our labors of the day. We sat and talked for awhile, cleaned our weapons and prepared for the morrow. I sat with my arm about Murie—Caroween had perked up somewhat; the sudden loss of Rawl put aside. We sat and listened while in the deepening darkness our skinny Angus first played his bellows and pipe assembly, and an absolutely wild and blood-charging bit of music it was, then recited in singsong, poetic, minstral cadence the saga of a great 'court' of knights and ladies who had sacrificed themselves in gigantic battle with sundry ogres, dragons and fiends of Ghast in that

time when the world of Camelot-Flegis was still young. . .. I fell asleep noting mentally that I was reminded of Mallory in the question and sequence of "who smote down who, and when."

Just before I 'bussed' Murie soundly and retired to my heavy saddle-blankets—we had again put out pickets against the night—I was pleased to see one of our first three pickets, a student of Charney's ten, step between the dottles and venture forth a daring hundred yards beyond the dottle ring. I waited until he returned. He was grinning broadly, and I grinned myself and went to sleep.

And Hooli came. It *was* Hooli, I know it now, though at the time, what with my mixed-up imagery of tension, dreams, and irrational, wandering thoughts, I was not sure. . .. Just the voice—that was my own, as before; no Starships, no picnic, and no fat-fannied 'honey-bear' floating in air with a mortar-board on his head. The voice said once or twice, intruding, like a candle's flicker—*"Collin! Collin! Beware again. . .!* You are alone and there is great danger—and I cannot help you—*Collin!* Turn back! Turn back, for your life's sake!"

I awoke again and, as before, in a sweat, trying to string the words together as they had come to me. . .. Had it, indeed, been Hooli? If so, why had he not appeared as strongly? Was it, perhaps, a manifestation, really, of the magick of Om, such as the moon-gibbering hysteria of my previous bout. If so, did they, indeed, wish to drive me back upon Glagmaron and Fon-Tweel? And, conversely, if it was truly the Pug-Boo, did he, indeed, wish me to withdraw; retreat from the protective sanctuary offered Murie by the great wizard. . .? I woke Charney, Griswall, Murie, Angus, and Caroween. I ordered them, and everyone, to sleep with knee-length, chain mail shirt, and with weapons at hand. And I gave them no explanation. I asked, too, that each man, perforce, sleep by one saddled dottle, and that Murie and Caroween sleep next me—I was curt, taciturn in my orders, so that even Murie frowned. We slept fitfully again, rolled tightly in our furs and blankets. This time there were no dreams.

We awoke to a slow-moving wind that was raw and bone-piercing. We were all morose, silently preoccupied with our gear and our saddle cups of sviss. It was as if a spell of 'glumness' had been cast upon us. I finally managed a smile for Murie, and she one for me, and that was the extent of it. We mounted, and once again were off.

And now the road, if one could call it that, was one freezing monotony of bleak ice and rock-hard earth. The dottles set a truly mile-eating pace, as if to make up for the

slight delay in the climbing of the great mountains. Early morning had seen bright sunshine. But clouds gathered by noon. We halted briefly to heat sviss and to mix hot snow-water with honey, as a treat and an instant energy jolt for the dottles. . .. We rested one hour, then went on. I was quite sure by now; and the others concurred in this, that there was neither pursuit, nor ambush in the offing; concomitantly, since there was nothing behind, nor along the way, I reasoned—there was also nothing ahead.

The terrain, as stated, was generally flat, but with great snow-capped peaks always to the right and left and in the rear, on either side of the pass through which we had come. This flatness, however, did not preclude an occasional hill over which the road passed. To either side of the bleak road there were sometimes low-lying hillocks of stone and snow, with here and there an ice-locked gulley.

It was quite late in the afternoon when we mounted the rise of the last lower hills. For on the other side, almost at the epicenter of a miles' square shallow basin, we sighted the 'Keep' of Goolbie, the Great Sorcerer. It was still a few miles distant. But even in this camouflaged stillness of stark whites and blacks, we could see that it was by no means small.

It was a well-made castle of stone and mortar. It had a great wall, a drawbridge, a gate and a portcullis. Above the encompassed masonry two towers arose. Upon one of these flew the blue and white banner—strewn with the abra-cadabra of cabalistic signs—that was the chosen heraldry of Goolbie. A haze of blue smoke hovered above the towers. And we assumed by this that Goolbie and the Pug-Boo, Pawbi, were 'alive and well' on stone mountain.

We drove ahead with the clouds falling lower and random snowflakes twisting cotton-like through the now-still air. The dottles had gone into a running prance again. They sensed rest, warmth and forage, and stretched their six pairs of thumping legs accordingly.

Since we had come over the slight rise precipitously, we could not tell if Goolbie's pennant had been run up to greet us, or whether it had been there all along. Five hundred yards from the raised drawbridge—it too spanned a gulley as did Castle-Glagmaron—we were forced to halt. Griswall had recognized the two large stones, similar to Terran *cromlechs* which stood up-end, facing each other across the road. And beyond these, according to he and Angus, we could not go without the 'words.'

I held up my hand, moved instantly to the fore, and to the utter horror of Angus, stepped deliberately between the two stones, touching a stone of my belt as I did so. I

felt what could be likened to a magnetic field in that the metal of my mailed shirt heated instantly with resistance. The stone registered a plus category. I withdrew and put my arm back into the field, *sans* any metal. I then experienced a mild shock, which I knew would grow more intense with any further penetration. On either side of the cromlechs the results were the same, so, satisfied that Goolbie had created a magnetic field of no mean proportions as a protective device against intruders, I then withdrew. It was notable that though the road led to the castle and beyond, a side road made a perfect half circle to the far side, paralelling, I surmised, the actual area of the field.

I returned to the others. Murie and Caroween were smiling. Murie had long since ceased to wonder at my 'audacity.' My men were grinning too. Only Angus remained somewhat miffed.

I nodded and he stepped forward to the double cromlechs. He clasped his hands, over which were draped a string of square opaline beads, and began to chant. I listened intently, noting that the chant had a most pronounced staccato rhythm. He did it once. He did it twice. He did it three times: though I thought the first time he had cracked the field. He looked awfully young and intense as he stood there muttering. I thought, too, that his 'sorcery'—linked finally with Ormon, as all magick is to some deity or other, gave him a feeling of power; of control, such as his slight body and almost feminine gestures could not gain for him in any other way.

"Praise be!" I said loudly and suddenly, as Angus returned to mount his dottle. "Now let us be to yon friendly shelter. For though we no longer fear *dead-alives*—and any of those would most certainly freeze solid here—yet would I like warm food, rest, and baths for my lady—and for us all. . .." So saying, I leaned smartly across my saddle and kissed Murie's cheek as a sign that the journey was well done. We had only to go those last few hundred feet.

A light swirl of snow swept gently across our path, but quickly subsided to intermittent flakes. I ordered shields to the fore as we cantered and a two-by-two, in cadence, so as to present the usual Marackian military splendor and readiness for battle. For we *were* a military guard. Griswall led out his ten. Then Murie, Caroween and I in the center with myself to the fore. After me, shields hugged tight to furred cloaks, came Charney and his students.

As we approached the walls the bridge across the gulley dropped, snapping icicles with brittle, glass-like 'pops' in the still air; the portcullis raised; the doublegates opened, and we set up a cheer.

We streamed across the bridge and entered upon a courtyard that, though large, was still less than a quarter of the size of that of Glagmaron. We bore to the right keeping close to the wall, moving toward the entrance to the main hall from which the lights of many candles shown, since the doors were half open. Without, it was still daylight, though dusk was fast falling; within, what with the clouds, it would be darksome indeed. Halfway to the entrance—and we riders were all within the courtyard now—the great gates slammed shut and the portcullis rattled down to its teethed position: this with our herd of unmounted dottles still outside.

At that very moment, I, like the others, instinctively halted my forward movement. In our few brief seconds of entry one thing was notable: no single soul was visible within the courtyard, and the slamming of the gates seemed done by unseen hands. . ..

We turned, our backs to the great wall and faced out. I motioned to Griswall and that hoary knight stood high in his stirrups and bellowed: "Ho! Castellan!—Lackeys!—Great Sorcerer, Goolbie!—Is this the manner in which you greet your Princess? Step forth—and *now!* For we are weary and sore in need of sustenance and roof!

His voice echoed hollowly across the flagstones; echoed above the metallic snick-snack of broadswords plucked from their sheaths at my signal. In the immediate and continuing silence I also ordered all to dismount, upon which we sent our dottles with whacking rump pats to the protection of the arch of the gates. A Flegisian custom is not to have gentle dottles slaughtered needlessly. And there we stood, and waited. All shields were to the fore. We drew close in a tight line in that cold and ice-bound courtyard.

Then, like wraiths, beyond the fall of sporadic snowflakes, there appeared a group of warriors to our left and from behind an arch across the yard. Simultaneously a second group moved forward from the protection of a similar arch to our right. Then the great doors of the entrance of the hall were thrown fully open and there ensued a company of heavily armored men. They ranged themselves across the broad steps, facing us. The deep breathing of my twenty-two warriors at this ghostly challenge, was a thing to hear. Our silent adversaries stood quietly. Great Yorns were with them. This I could tell; despite the fact that features and bodies were, at best, indistinct.

Murie and Caroween, swords also drawn, thrust forward on either side of me to join our line. But I instantly thrust them back to stand with Angus who was now fingering his small set of pipes. Sweat stood out upon his pale forehead. I said to

Murie who, almost angrily, pushed back against my restraining arm: "Nay, my Princess. If all this be what I think it is, the battle will eventually come to you, never fear! *For there, finally, are the one hundred riders—and more!*—and we are but twenty-three. So hold you back—and now! And you, my lady Caroween, guard her also, as is your vaunted prowess!"

We, our line of twenty three, shuffled closer. We formed a half-circle around the two maids and the sorcerer. Then, the silent company of warriors before the entrance parted to allow two others through.

Both were resplendent in heavy mail and flashing, jewelled swords. One strode before the other and stopped at twenty paces from me. I was not at all surprised to see that it was the Prince of Kelb and his swart ambassador.

"Greetings, oh mighty *Collin!*" the Prince said loudly and sarcastically. "We meet again. I to collect my bride to be, so that Marack will then join with Kelb; you to pay the price of insolence. . .. If you surrender the Princess now, sir, we, on my honor, will grant you quick death. If not—and remember in battle you risk the Princess too—when taken, you and yours will wish for death a thousand times before you die."

Murie's sibilant whisper came instantly to my ear. "Do not surrender me, my lord, for I would die with you; and if taken I would end my own life. Trust him nought, in any way."

But I sought time and knowledge. And, as his men drew nearer and I could see clearly that a goodly third of them *were* Yorns; each a head taller than true men and possessed of great and muscular shoulders—I called out sharply: "Stay! All! Or you will meet your deaths a few minutes before your appointed time. For I will speak now with your master—this boasting traitor to true men. . .. Hey, now?" I said, and gazed directly upon the black-browed Prince while a smattering of chuckles ran down my line, "I take it Vuun passage brought you here; mayhaps with only remnants of your entourage, since I see that though the original hundred-riders are here, this is not true of yours. . .. Now tell me: Where is the sainted sorcerer, Goolbie, and his familiar, the Pug-Boo, Pawbi? And where, too, are the retainers of this castle? Before I die—if die, I must—I would have knowledge of how the magick of the dark Kaleen did prevail against that of Goolbie."

The slowly encroaching line had halted upon my ringing command. They looked now to their leader. Their numbers were evident. There were one hundred and fifty Yorns and men arrayed against us. The Prince's features, while I talked, grew blacker still, assuming a Ghast-like look. And he seemed suddenly not the same man as had appeared

at the council hall of Glagmaron. *He seemed possessed.*

"The magic of your great sorcerer," he shouted, spittle flying from the corners of his mouth, "was powerless before that of Om and of the Kaleen." He seemed to grow visibly in stature when he said this and his voice held a ring of insanity. His eyes, too, I thought, flashed fire. . .. "Just so were the powers of the wizards of my father of Kelb, and of Feglyn of Great Ortmund also brought to nought. You ask of the Keep retainers—" he half turned to his warriors who joined with him in what I assumed was a mutually shared joke in that they all roared with laughter. . .. "Know now, you sorry oaf, that the three you destroyed the other night were but a part of fifty 'retainers' of the castle who, but for poor timing on our part, would *all* have been upon the spot to do *then* what we do *now*. Our regret is that even the great Vuun, who waits in yonder stable, is not sufficient carry-all to hoist an army. And of the Pug-Boo, Pawbi? Where else do 'sainted' Pug-Boos go, who are but a form of rodent after all? To holes, stupid Sir—to holes and away, and that is that. If he were here, and if you lived, you would no doubt have time to find him. But since you will not, you will not, and that too is that. . .. Enough! Will you surrender the Princess?"

I stared straight into his eyes for the space of seconds; looked quickly then to right and left, and back to him again and said loudly in the crisp air: "I will *not*, Sir!"

I had caught Griswall's and Charney's eyes, plus some of the others. Throughout the shouts and threats, except for a first long sigh, then the deep breathing of a warrior entering battle, they had not flinched. They stood stoutly, legs apart, well-grounded; with room on either side to swing: a solid shield wall indeed. I continued, louder still, baiting them: "So come all, sirs, and 'gentle' Yorns. But know this well: We do not ask for quarter—*nor will we give it!*"

My bold statement had its effect, for some in the now-advancing line hesitated, and some fell back. To face an outnumbered and terrified enemy is one thing; to face potential berserkers who are absolutely not afraid to die, is another. It was then that the Prince of Kelb decided for them. He turned, faced them, whirled his sword around his head just once and screamed: "On them! On them now! Or you shall suffer such a fate at the hands of Om that death itself would be a thousand times more pleasant. On them! On them NOW!"

Only thirty paces separated us. It took but three seconds for them to cross it. Instantly, all was a hellish maelstrom of swords and shields and clanging armor. I clove my first man's shield in half; hacked his sur-

prised head from his squat body. I whirled then, full circle for added sword weight, and caught my first great Yorn square on the shoulder, and cut him to the heart. Not pausing, even for a single breath, I plunged still forward, my sword a glittering sweep of absolute death for anyone within my reach. For I knew full well, that could I but achieve what I sought—an instant and deadly fear of me—my men who fought for their very lives would not only take heart, but might even sense a possibility for victory, farfetched as that may seem.

I killed ten men in as many seconds—and saw the entire Kelbian line fall back before our swords in abject horror. Twenty of theirs in all had been slain, and but two of ours. Their charge had been hysterical; our defense the cold calm of hate. Griswall had slain two men; Charney a Yorn; pulling his sword from the creature's throat even as the others withdrew. My lusty students and warriors had accounted for the other seven—and more, since severed limbs and great gobbets of blood remained upon the flagstone to tell of wounded who would not fight again.

I pursued our advantage.

I stepped ten paces out before my shield line and yelled a personal challenge—knowing that our opponents were still men and Yorns of *Camelot*—and therefore conditioned by their very manhood to respond accordingly. I then killed five more. The first, the ambassador of Kelb himself, when I beat his shield to his knees and with one lightning blow *cut him in half at the waist.* A second knight who charged straight forward blindly was dispatched with a simple iron-hard chop. I severed his sword arm so that he staggered away to bleed to death. My third opponent was a Yorn, of more intelligence and skill than most. It availed him nought. I treated him as I did the second opponent; I shortened him by both legs, so that he toppled over and filled the couryard with his bellows. The last two came at me together, dazed by their own temerity. I killed them both so quickly that I surprised myself. They had not the heart for it. Their arms and legs were leaden with their fear. I took no pleasure in their slaughter. Then no more came forward. The Prince of Kelb stood back to watch me, white-faced, trembling with hate and anger. My men, emboldened, also challenged. One student was answered, as was Griswall and Charney: each killed his man. And the space on the flagstones to our front ran crimson with blood. Only the torches gave us light now, for the sun was almost set.

"Come, my sweet Keilweir, Prince of Kelb," I yelled, thinking to lure him out against his better judgment. "Come taste the magick of the *Collin's* sword, which defies you and calls you coward!" But he

would not come. In fact, at no time did he actually enter battle, but rather stayed behind his line to urge the others on.

At a signal, they doused the torches and charged again. Their onslaught, despite their superior numbers, was one of desperation now. For, psychologically, *we* were superior, and acted so—whereas they were sore afraid. The second assault was a fantastic melee of grunting, sweating, hewing, screaming men and swords, and shields, and armor. Again I killed to right and left in the half light, as did my stalwarts. Once I slipped in a reeking mess of blood and entrails; heard a shout from the enemy who charged over what they thought was my fallen body. But I arose mightily and cut those down who had made it beyond me—all but one who had seized upon Murie, dropping his shield to do so. I need not have feared for her, for simultaneously with Murie's short sword to his heart, my other *Valkyrie*, Rawl's shield-maiden, Caroween, drove her sword, with both hands, straight between his eyes so that it stood out a handsbreadth beyond his skull.

While we fought I heard Angus' pipes. The bellows began suddenly, at first low, then rising to a shrieking skirl, so that the very wildness of the music set our blood to fire, and lent a rhythmic cadence to our blows. We hacked, slashed, and butchered until the bodies around us looked like unto a charnel house. There were so many upon the stone that I gathered my remnant, formed a circle with Murie, Caroween, and Angus in the center, and moved out across the great courtyard.

There then began a thing that passes all imagination and belief. Two of the hardened veterans that followed Griswall—and we were twelve now; with but four of Griswall's men and five of Charney's still standing—began the death chant used only when some great warrior is borne to his grave. They chanted for themselves, I knew. And, considering the circumstances, they had earned the right to do this. We, all of us, picked up the hoarse, soul-smashing beat of the words—*A-la-la-la! A* la-la-la! *A* la-la-la!—and over it all came the wildly shrieking, screaming, skirling, maniacal pipes of Angus.

We cut our way right through them and back again. We killed till our arms and armor and surcoats were literally drenched with blood. Me marched through them again and again, hacking and slaying—we drove full round the inner circle of the courtyard and none stood against us. . .. *A* la-la-la! *A* la-la-la! And the accompanying skirl—always the skirl. We crossed the flagstones, mounted the steps to the very entrance and came down again. And the snow fell and the torches—relighted, dimmed, so that, finding it

more difficult to see, we slaughtered the wounded, re-killed the dead, and destroyed the living, alike. We were no longer human.

They ran from us and we sought them out and killed them. They bore down upon us screaming their fear, and we hacked them to the ground—those Yorns and men of Kelb. Until finally, when there seemed no one left alive within the courtyard, we paused in its very center and leaned upon our bloodied, steaming, weapons.

There was a great stillness then. There had *been* a stillness, really. For our chant had ceased some time ago, and the sound of Angus' pipes had died. The last minutes had seen us kill silently, horribly, with the detachment of cold fury. . .. The snow fell gently, and we gasped and panted until our hearts slowed; until we were once more in possession of ourselves. But four torches placed in niches remained to illuminate that carnage, that *abbatoir* of the courtyard of Goolbie's Keep.

The Prince of Kelb and eight men were all that survived of the 150 who, but a short hour before, had so confidently sought to take our lives. They stood silently now, huddled upon the steps before the great hall.

And we? Though conscious of a thinning of our ranks, I had had no time—or reason—to look before. I did so now. Griswall was alive. So was Charney. But both were sorely wounded. Of Griswall's men, *all were dead;* of Charney's, only one red-headed brother named Hargis was on his feet, plus a troll-like student warrior named Tober. Tober, squat and heavily muscled, now leaned upon an axe. When I looked solemnly at him he winked and whispered hoarsely, *"Now* are we indeed arrived safely, Sir Collin. And I would take that bath and rest we spoke of, and eat my fill."

I nodded, dumbly.

Our piper Angus was no longer with us. He lay across the courtyard, skinny figure in monkish garb. His still white fingers clutched the now silent bellows and pipes. And it, like his heart and body, had been pierced with many sword thrusts. And finally I looked down to see a fierce-eyed Murie Nigaard, whose shield was linked with that of red-head Caroween. Murie's small sword was, and had been, at my left side—and like mine, it too was red with blood. *They had been a part of our 'circle' in our last charge, and I knew it not.* I thanked whatever gods that watched over strong-willed, stubborn females, that they were still alive.

My single mistake was my last mistake. And it was simply that in pausing now instead of dispatching them all, we gave Keilweir, Prince of Kelb, time to do that which he could not do before. . .. Perhaps he could have, on second thought, but there had been this to say him nay:

If he had made a plea to the Kaleen for help while he still had thrice fifty warriors at his call, the shame would have been too much. But now, indeed, when all were dead, it was not so.

And I stood stupidly—yes, *stupidly*—and allowed it to happen.

He said his *words*, screamed them, before my very eyes, and I made no move until it was too late; until there came a thrumming in the air and the first touch of numbness to my body. I instantly knew that all that had been won was lost. And that the magick of the Kaleen, if not opposed, would bring my death. But how oppose? The others, just as I, now knew it too, and they with Murie looked at me with frozen horror.

I had no choice. I pressed the useless stud of emergency contact upon my belt, though I knew full well that unless the Deneb 3 was directly overhead there was no chance—and damned little if it was. I mentally shouted across the void of blank space: Ragen; Kriloy! Ragen; Kriloy! But there was no answer. And I knew with a fast-sinking heart that there would be none. I cursed the fact that the powers that lay within my belt were useless. I could not destroy, for I would first *be* destroyed.

And then, in the very second of the first needles of paralysis, the voice of Hooli, weak but steady, reached me. "Be not afraid, Harl Lenti. You will not die here. You will lose the Princess, for in that I cannot help you. But neither you or those now living will die here—be not afraid."

I closed my eyes, breathed deeply, then opened them again. Then, I echoed the words of Hooli softly, briefly, to the others; not fully believing; not fully disbelieving. It was simply that I had no other recourse. *But they believed me!* And a measure of peace came to the stricken features of Griswall and the students. And, as great thunder rose and blue-white lightning flashed to signal the absolute arrival; the presence—as it were—of the untoward; the unexpected, and I had time to look down into Murie's terror-filled eyes and say with the slowness of near-paralysis: "Whatever happens, be you not afraid, for if I live and I am with you I will win. And if I am not, and live—I shall come to you. *Wherever you are I shall come to you.* Remember that."

Tears sprang to her eyes and her lips moved. And though I could no longer hear, I knew that they formed the words: "I do believe you, my lord—and I will wait." And I was satisfied.

And now all the castle courtyard with its dead and its blood was filled with a strange stark blackness that was not blackness, in that one could still see as before. It was as if an ebony patina lay over all; over the bo-

dies of the dead, the cold stones, and over the living too. Black figures moved toward us; the men of Kelb and Keilweir, the Prince. And through the great arch to the left of the massive Keep came the Vuun, dragging its ponderous, stinking body; great leathern wings held tight to its hairy sides. As it moved across the bodies of the slain, its monstrous head, with reddened eyes like the pits of *Best* itself, turned slowly this way and that. And our craven dottles, hiding within the dubious protection afforded them by the arched passage to portcullis and drawbridge, screamed and moaned their terror.

We lay where we fell, Griswall, Charney, Tober, Hargis, and myself. And the Prince and three others lifted the bodies of Murie and Caroween and carried them to the Vuun. The four remaining Kelbian warriors approached us, swords drawn.

So now, I thought, we shall truly know the proof of this proverbial 'pudding.' For either I hear voices and am insane, or I *hear a voice,* and am sane. And if I am sane, then I most indubitably have a date in time with a certain miserable Pug-Boo. I thought this for at the moment I cared not *who* or *what* the Pug-Boo was—or what his role if any, in the unravelling of the skein of fate of Camelot-Flegis. I knew only that if he did have the power—and *still* allowed my Princess to be taken, *then, indeed, we had a date in time.*

I had noted that when Keilweir and the others carried Murie and Caroween to the Vuun, the very act of contact caused their movements, too, to be somewhat sluggish, as if contaminated by the spell of Om. So it was with those who sought our lives—but more so. . ..

My 'executioner'—who still stared fearfully at me—did thrust his trembling sword toward my throat. But it touched me not. In his very closeness to me his movements became awkward, without control, and totally weak; so that the sword was like a straw in his hand, and could harm nothing. I doubted that he could successfully part my hair with a curry comb. So was it likewise with the others.

They shouted back to the Prince, their voices trembling, that the magic of Om was truly great in that the 'enchantment' reached out to touch them, too.

"Then leave them," the Prince screamed. "For they will be long dead of cold ere ever strength returns. Come! For we shall not tarry longer."

At that the great Vuun slowly spread his leathern wings which, when fully expanded measured two hundred feet or more. Those who would have killed us left and ran to the Vuun then, and climbed the webbed harness around its middle to which the others clung, and to which Murie and Caroween were tied.

And we saw it literally leap into the air, a full hundred feet or more before the first thunderclap of monstrous wings seized upon the leaden air and drove it skyward. . .. And all was quiet.

The snow fell then and the black patina waned. I wondered if the Prince of Kelb had not been right in that we would soon freeze to death in this now bone-biting chill. We could not even whistle for the protective warmth of dottles, who I saw clearly peeking at us from their archway. No doubt they thought us dead. . ..

And then, within the space of the opened doors of Goolbie's Keep, a small figure appeared. The candle, torch, or firelight from within outlined him perfectly where he stood: small, brown-furred, inoffensive. It was the Pug-Boo, Pawbi—a mirror image of Hooli; of Jindil, except for the ring around the eye. And, as he gently walked toward us and the tingling nerve paralysis waned, I thought—'You little bastard. You miserable, fat-fannied, cowardly little bastard.'

And that was the end of it for the moment, for suddenly I, and the others too, were encompassed in a veritable aura of well-being; an encroaching, *lethe,* bringing clouds of relaxed 'goodness.' But before I fell into line and accepted it completely I had time to hear the Pug-Boo's voice inside my head. He said simply "You're not so smart yourself, you know. In fact, you're something of an idiot. . .."

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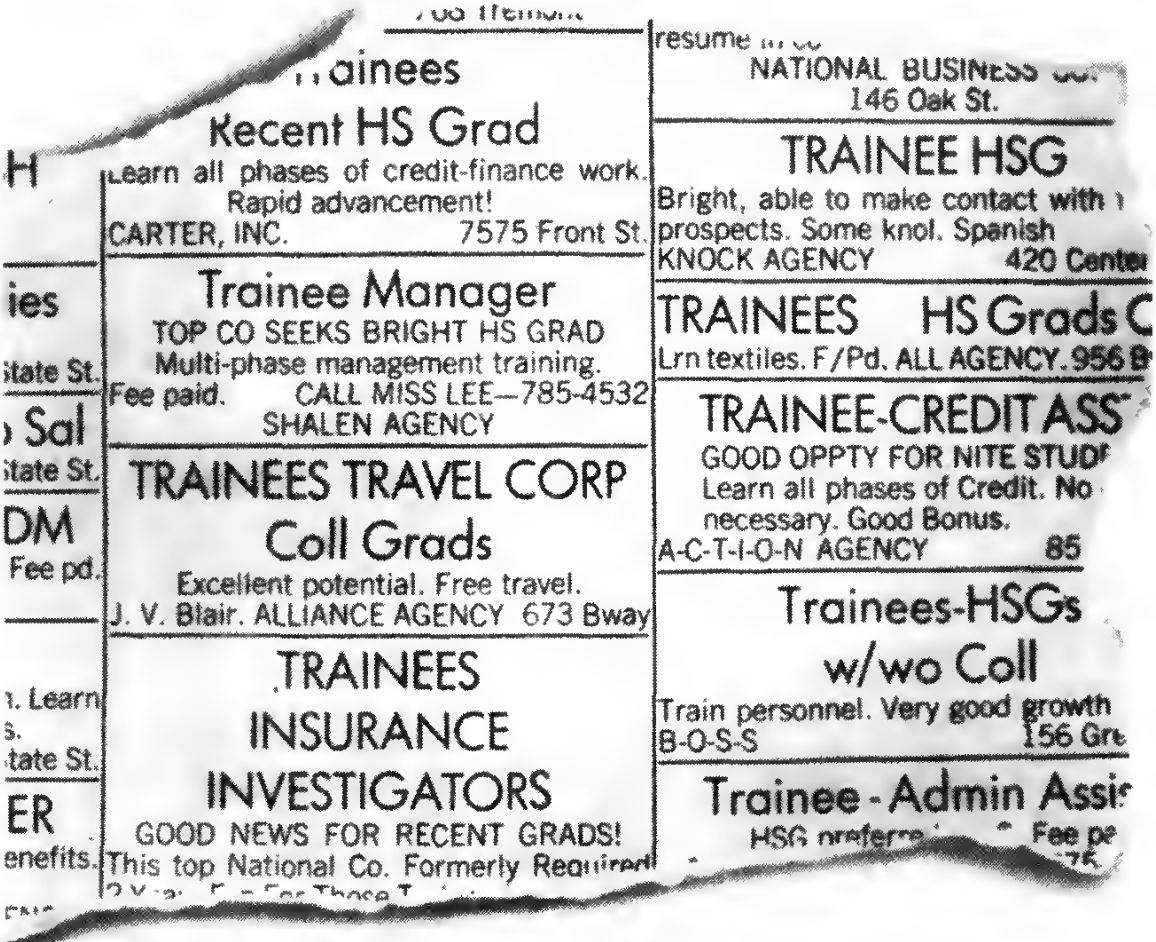

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