

M A G A Z I N E O F
HORROR

THE BIZARRE, THE FRIGHTENING, THE GRUESOME

**THE DEVIL'S
POOL**

by
Grege la Spina

**RATTLE OF
BONES**

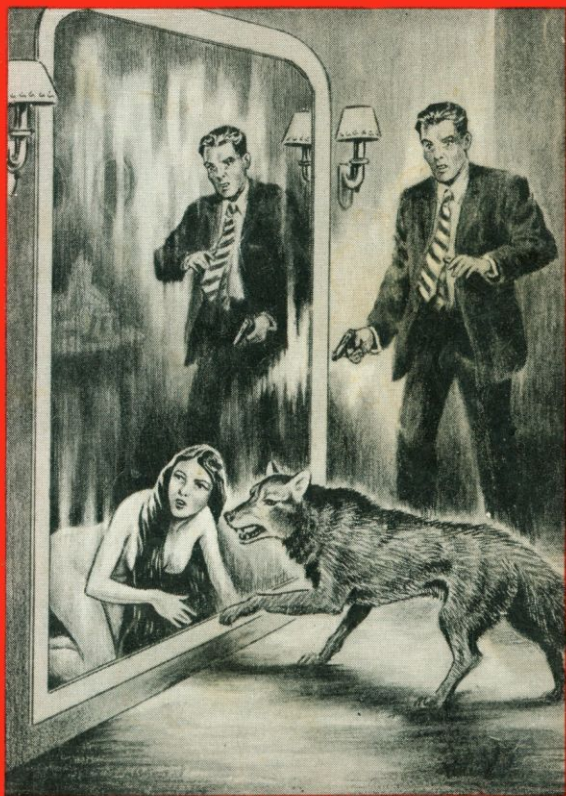
by
Robert E. Howard

**THE CALL OF
THE
MECH-MEN**

by
Laurence Manning

**WAS IT A
DREAM?**

by
Guy de Maupassant



NEW STORIES AND GREAT CLASSICS

NEW FRONTIERS OF WONDER • UNDERSTANDING • ENTERTAINMENT

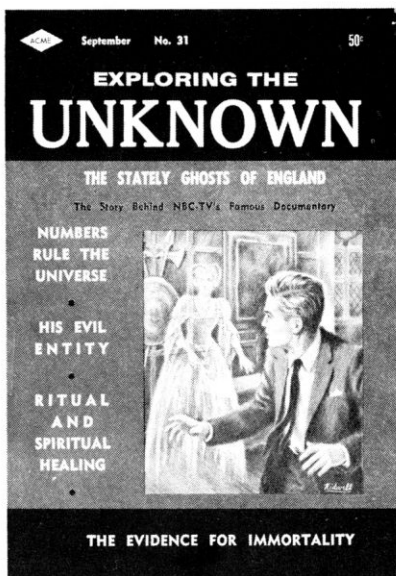
All these are yours when you read EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN — the bi-monthly magazine that inspires you and helps you to understand:

the meaning of life — is there a life after death — can astrology guide our lives — psychic experiences — all the manifold mysteries of existence.

This stimulating magazine can be yours to enjoy every other month at the following special prices:

Instead of the regular \$2.50 cost to you; just send \$2. for EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN for one year (six issues). Or send \$4. for two years (twelve issues). (Add 50c for foreign subscriptions.)

Use the coupon below, or a facsimile, if you do not want to mutilate this magazine.



EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN, Dept. H11
HEALTH KNOWLEDGE, INC.
119 FIFTH AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y. 10003

Enclosed is my remittance of \$..... for my subscription to EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN as follows:

- ☐ 1 year subscription (6 issues)
☐ 2 year subscription (12 issues)

NAME Please
ADDRESS print
CITY, STATE, ZIP No. legibly

magazine of **HORROR**

Strange Tales and Science Fiction

Volume 2

CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER

Number 5

COVER (from <i>The Devil's Pool</i>)	Carl Kidwell	
INTRODUCTION		4
THE EMPTY ZOO	Edward D. Hoch	5
A PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIPWRECK	Ambrose Bierce	12
THE RECKONING (Your Findings on the June Issue)		16
THE CALL OF THE MECH-MEN	Luarence Manning	17
WAS IT A DREAM?	Guy de Maupassant	18
UNDER THE HAU TREE	Katherine Yates	53
RATTLE OF BONES	Robert E. Howard	62
THE HEAD OF DU BOIS	Dorothy Norman Cooke	69
THE DWELLER IN DARK VALLEY (verse)	Robert E. Howard	74
THE DEVIL'S POOL (novelet)	Grege La Spina	75
IT IS WRITTEN (Readers' Letters and Editor's Comment)		123
COMING NEXT ISSUE		125

While the greatest diligence has been used to ascertain the owners of rights, and to secure necessary permissions, the editor and publisher wish to offer their apologies in any possible case of accidental infringements.

Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

MAGAZINE OF HORROR, Vol. 2, No. 5, November, 1965 (whole number 11). Published bi-monthly by Health Knowledge, Inc. Executive and editorial offices at 119 Fifth Avenue, New York 3, N. Y. Second class entry pending, Buffalo, New York. Annual subscription (6 issues) \$2.50 in the U. S., Canada and Pan American Union. Foreign \$3.50. Single copy, 50c. Manuscripts accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes will be carefully considered, but the publisher and editors will not be responsible for loss or damage. © 1965 by Health Knowledge, Inc. All rights reserved under Universal, International and Pan American copyright conventions. Printed in U. S. A.

Introduction

THE SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF . . .

In a sense, this is a requisite for the enjoyment of any fiction at all, although it does not seem to enter into contemporary "mainstream" fiction or popular novels. Yet, to give just one example, while any given tale of the adventures of Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin may not strain credulity, the series as a whole calls very strongly upon this faculty. Those who enjoy the way Rex Stout writes about his characters suspend disbelief gladly, however; and while the discerning may spot an impossibility here or there, the odds are that it will not interfere with enjoyment of the story being read.

In what we call highly imaginative fiction (fantasy, weird fiction dealing with what is loosely described as the "supernatural", science fiction, etc.) disbelief must be suspended, and sometimes the demands upon the reader are severe in that area. This is particularly so in three areas: (1) oldtime masterworks of science fiction, such as Jules Verne's **From the Earth to the Moon**, where we must suspend disbelief of the possibility of a cannon powerful enough to shoot a missile around the Moon, and ignore the certainty that, given this, the passengers in the shell would have been crushed by the initial thrust; (2) in contemporary science fiction, the scientifically trained reader may be called upon to suspend disbelief in technical fallacies, and both trained and untrained will be called upon to accept what must be considered at best as very low order probabilities; (3) and in weird fiction, all manner of disbelief must be put aside for the sake of enjoyment.

In this issue of **Magazine of Horror**, you will be called upon to suspend disbelief in precognition experiences, intelligent machines, wandering ghosts, sorcery, fusion of personality between the dead and the living, and the physical manifestations of the Devil, as well as the efficacy of religious rites and objects in combating evil, to give just a few examples.

If you can do this, you may find **The Devil's Pool** a tale of fascinating horror. For those readers who embrace the Catholic faith, it will be less difficult than for others, perhaps — but

(Turn To Page 122)

The Empty Zoo

by Edward D. Hoch

(author of *The Maze and the Monster*,
The Faceless Thing)

He had always been afraid of animals, but the empty zoo seemed to draw him — as much now as it had years ago, when a terrible thing had happened . . .

HE USED TO play there often as a child, especially on those summer days when the muggy heat drove others to the beach. Then, scorning their imagined friendships, he hurried over the hill to the grove of towering leafy trees that sheltered the single white-washed building.

"Why would any boy want to play in an empty zoo?" his mother had asked once; but she

never asked it again because she didn't really care about the answer. She didn't really care about him.

Once, of course, the zoo had not been empty. It had sheltered a score of various animals during the depression-ridden years, when the city could afford nothing better. Tommy had been so young he could hardly remember those years; hardly remember being pulled

along screaming between his father and mother to see the animals he feared and thus hated.

Perhaps that was why he started going there alone once the animals had been moved to the new, larger zoo across town. He soon learned that the fence was easy to scale, and that a watchman patrolled the grounds periodically at best. Thus he established himself easily as king of the place, walked unafraid between the rows of empty cages with their gradually rusting bars, and even occasionally swung from the bars themselves in an open gesture of defiance.

He was always careful not to vandalize the place openly, and he left as little evidence as possible of his comings and goings. If the city fathers ever suspected that the empty zoo was becoming a playground, they did nothing about it. A brief opposition flurry about the deserted building faded into growing years of forgotten neglect.

The grass grew taller where the occasional power mower from the city failed to cut, and the watchman's job had been given over in time to routine checks by a police patrol car. Tommy grew with the grass, and sometimes with the coming of high school whole months would pass when he did not venture into the forbidden ter-

ritory. But always, in the bleakness of a broken date or the tension of a tough examination, there was something to drive him back.

He didn't need to climb the fence any more, because smaller children had discovered the place and trampled a path across the worn wire links. One night, long after the early autumn dark, he found that they'd imprisoned a cat in one of the ancient cages. He freed the frightened beast, though for a moment his own fear had almost stampeded him.

Grown, he no longer prowled and crept in the cages, no longer swung on the bars. But still there was that overwhelming, driving urge to visit the place. He still lived at home, though his father had died, and often on a night when his mother hounded him, he would leave the house to walk once more over the hill to the old building.

It was on such a night, with the moon full but obscured by breeze-driven clouds, that he encountered another trespasser for the first time. Her name, he learned later, was Janet Crown — and she was eleven years old.

THE BARS WERE like the zoo and they closed him in on all sides until he could no longer think or feel or breath. And always under the glare of the unshaded overhead bulb there

was the rasping voice of the detective, and the milder voice of the assistant district attorney, and later the mildest voice of all which belonged to the prison psychiatrist.

"The girl will live," they told him first. "You're lucky."

Lucky.

His mother never came to see him in prison, but then he didn't really care. He passed the time thinking of the zoo, imagining himself now as one of those caged animals he'd feared so much. It was easy to think of animals in general, but he found it sometimes more difficult to concentrate on a particular one. A lion, perhaps? Or a prowling jaguar? Or maybe only a feathered owl to fly by night.

It was a long time before he came back to the city that was home. A decade had passed and the very contours of the city had changed. He'd changed, too, because prison and the hospital were certain to change anyone. Toward the end, he hardly ever thought about the zoo, and they said that was good. But he wondered sometimes if it was, wondered if the hours of staring blankly out the window without a thought in his head really meant he was cured.

He was past thirty now, a grown man who was far from unattractive. He'd been in

town only two weeks when he met Carol Joyce.

SHE WAS TALL and blonde and very beautiful, and when she spoke, he listened. He'd met her one day in the toy department of the store where they both worked, and since then a noon-day friendship had gradually blossomed.

"Tommy Lambert," she said, repeating his name one day in that soft velvet voice he'd come to love.

"That's me."

"I think you might have gone to school with my brother, Bob. Are you from the city?"

"Yes," he admitted, "but I don't remember your brother."

"Of course he was lots older than me. And better looking."

"I doubt that," he offered honestly.

She flushed a bit at the compliment. "How do you like it at the store?"

"It's a job," he answered with a shrug. "What department have they got you in today?"

"Sportswear," she said, making a face that was expressively cute. "I wish I were in toys with you. I like working with children."

"I hardly ever see them, Carol. All I do is move stock around. Stuffed animals, toy trains. All day long."

Finally the daily chats blossomed into lunch, and that was really the beginning of it. He

started seeing Carol Joyce one or two nights a week, on outings that were almost — but not quite — dates. When she celebrated her twenty-first birthday (only twenty-one?) a month later he sent her an orchid and took her out to dinner. She was making him feel young again, making him forget the past.

"Have you lived here all your life?" she asked him one night, over an after-theater drink.

"Most of it. All my childhood. I was away for ten years, almost."

"In the army?"

"No. I was sick."

Her face reflected concern, but it quickly passed. "You're the healthiest sick man I ever saw."

"I'm cured, I guess."

In the week that followed, he was drawn to her by a feeling very much like love. He found himself watching the clock until their noontime meetings, planning little surprises that he knew would please her. But then something happened to bring back all the old doubts. She'd come up to the toy department to meet him after work one day, and when he returned from washing up he found her playing with a stuffed giraffe in the stockroom.

"Having fun?" he asked with a smile, always pleased to see her happy.

She nodded, turning her tanned, eternally expectant face toward him. "I love animals. Always have. We should go to the zoo some Saturday."

"Zoo? I thought it was closed." The words came tumbling out before he fully realized what he was saying. He was back there, among the empty cages.

"Closed? Whatever gave you that idea?" And then, after a moment, "Oh, you must be thinking of the old place. I keep forgetting you were away from here for ten years. Come to think of it, though, that old zoo's been closed longer than that."

"I used to go to the old place when I was a child. I still think of that as the real zoo."

"Well, we can go there if you like. But there aren't any animals."

His blood seemed to freeze at the unexpected words. What was she saying? Was she actually suggesting a visit to that place? "Oh, I don't know," he mumbled.

"It would be a fun place for a picnic, before they tear it down."

"Tear it down?"

"They've been fighting about it in the city council for years. Now it's going to be the site of a low-rent housing project. They'll start tearing down the old zoo next month."

"So soon?"

"It's been empty for twenty years, Tommy."

"Yes, I suppose so. I suppose I just hate to see the old things going."

And that Saturday, after further urging from Carol, they packed a picnic lunch, and a few cans of cool beer, and went off to the place that had once been so important to him. They went off to the empty zoo.

IT STOOD MUCH as he remembered it, lonely in a field of summer weeds, with blue wildflowers growing about in clusters. Even from a distance, the whitewashed walls were spiderwebbed with cracks, and the bars of the outdoor cages had taken on a permanent reddish-rust color. Otherwise, the only change was in the disappearance of the wire fence, which had been replaced by a high board barricade bearing the elaborately painted announcement: *Future Site of Spring Gardens Low-Rent Housing Development — Another Sign of Community Progress!*

The general area, though, seemed even more remote and isolated than he remembered. From the top of the hill overlooking the zoo he could see for miles in every direction, and what he saw was a soiled spot on the suburban landscape. Preliminary work of clearing trees for the approach-

es to the development had already been completed; and on the city side, where shoddy rows of apartments had been creeping toward the zoo for years, there was now only a massive field of rubble.

"No one ever comes here any more," Carol told him. "Not even the children to play. They don't even bother with the guards since they put up the new fence."

"How will we get in?" he asked a bit doubtfully.

"There's always a way," she reassured him. And there was. A door in the wooden fence stood partly ajar, its padlock broken loose by some vandal with a rock.

They picnicked on the side of a grassy slope, lolling away the afternoon with tales of half-remembered childhood adventures. It was a summer sort of day, perfect for reminiscing with the softness of uncut grass against their faces. "I used to play here a lot as a child," he said.

She looked down at the crumpling building with distaste. "I think there's nothing more horrible in the whole world than an empty zoo."

"Unless it's a full one."

She looked up, startled. "You feared the animals?"

"I suppose I did. And the place itself, with its thick walls and iron bars and musty odor. I suppose that's why I went

there so often after the animals were gone. I was the king then, the king of the whole place. And I didn't fear it any more."

SHE SHIFTED slightly in the grass, and her bare legs beneath the shorts were firm and tanned. "But you still seemed almost afraid when I suggested this place the other day."

Had he shown his feelings that openly? "I had a terrible experience here once. I don't like to talk about it."

"Not even to me, Tommy?"

"I'm afraid you'd understand least of all." And yet, looking into her pale eyes just then, he felt as if he'd always known her. As if he could tell her anything. She leaned over to kiss him then, and he thought it was the happiest moment of his life.

She rarely wore jewelry, but this day he noticed a little-girl bracelet on her left wrist in place of her watch. "When I'm with you, time doesn't matter," she whispered in his ear. "Daddy gave me that bracelet a long time ago, when I was in school. See — the jeweler got my initials backwards. J.C. instead of C.J."

"You're a big girl now, Carol."

"I'm a woman now."

The sky darkened too soon with the coming of evening; he hadn't realized it was so late.

"Perhaps we should be going," he volunteered.

"Before we've looked inside?"

"One last time?"

"All right," he consented. "It'll be gone in another month."

The door was trustingly unlocked, and as they stepped across the threshold he might have been stepping into the past. Suddenly, it was ten years ago, all too clearly, with the dimness of the outer twilight playing once more through the mesh-covered upper skylights, casting its uncertain illumination on the empty rows of open cages.

"A horrible place!" she said with distaste.

"Did you come here often, too?"

"Some," she answered. "But for me the fear wasn't the animals. I never knew the animals here."

He led her along, brushing away cobwebs, squeezing her hand a bit too tightly. "Maybe we all have to come back to the thing we fear," he said quietly.

The musty smell of long disuse was in the air, and when Carol bravely touched an open cage, the barred door screeched with protesting age. The sound sent a shiver through him.

"I'd forgotten how it was," she said.

"Let's get out of here."

"Wait! Come here!" She'd

climbed into one of the open cages, and now she beckoned him to join her. "Kiss me first, Tommy. In here!"

He followed her in and her lips closed on his. He felt himself pressed backward against the inner bars. In that moment it was if he'd known her all his life, and perhaps he had.

"Carol . . ."

Suddenly she shoved away from him and was out of the cage. The rusty bars swung shut in his face, and he saw her click a shiny new padlock into place. "Not Carol," she whispered in a different voice a voice he hardly recognized.

"I'm Janet, Tommy. Remember? Janet Crown. I've waited ten years for you to come back."

"Janet!" The word was a scream of sudden, blinding terror.

She was a little girl once more, and the zoo was the world, and life was death. "Perhaps they'll hear your screams," she said through the bars that separated them. "Perhaps you'll still be alive in a month, when they come to tear the building down."

"Janet!"

He screamed her name again, and kept screaming it until she was gone and he was alone in the empty zoo.

In 1948, an amateur publication entitled *Fantasy Commentator* published an article by David H. Keller, M.D., entitled *Shadows Over Lovecraft*, an article which aroused sharp controversy. The issue containing it has long been out of print, but discussions of HPL still refer to it.

Bruce Robbins, of 58 Revonah Avenue, Stamford, Conn. 06005, has reprinted the Keller article in the July, 1965 issue of his amateur magazine, *Paradox*, along with a commentary upon it by Kenneth Sterling, M.D., a friend and one-time collaborator of Lovecraft. Robbins' little journal sells for 50c the copy, and this issue will be worth the price asked to those who are interested in the Keller article, and have not been able to obtain it.

A Psychological Shipwreck

by Ambrose Bierce

(author of *The Death of Halpin Frayser*,
One Summer Night, etc.)

We were strongly tempted to run this tale without a by-line, and challenge those of you who had not read it before to spot the author. The tone is somewhat different from that of the author's other tales in this field.

IN THE SUMMER or 1874 I was in Liverpool, whither I had gone on business for the mercantile house of Bronson & Jarrett; my partner was Zenas Bronson. The firm failed last year, and unable to endure the fall from affluence to poverty he died.

Having finished my buisness, and feeling the lassitude and

exhaustion incident to its dispatch, I felt that a protracted sea voyage would be both agreeable and beneficial, so instead of embarking for my return on one of the many fine passenger steamers, I booked for New York on the sailing vessel *Morrow*, upon which I had shipped a large and valuable invoice of the goods I

had bought. The *Morrow* was an English ship with, of course, but little accommodation for passengers, of whom there were only myself, a young woman and her servant, who was a middle-aged Negress. I thought it singular that a traveling English girl should be so attended, but she afterward explained to me that the woman had been left with her family by a man and his wife from South Carolina, both of whom had died on the same day at the house of the young lady's father in Devonshire — a circumstance in itself sufficiently uncommon to remain rather distinctly in my memory, even had it not afterward transpired in conversation with the young lady that the name of the man was William Jarrett, the same as my own. I knew that a branch of my family had settled in South Carolina, but of them and their history I was ignorant.

The *Morrow* sailed from the mouth of the Mersey on the 15th of June and for several weeks we had fair breezes and unclouded skies. The skipper, an admirable seaman but nothing more, favored us with very little of his society, except at his table; and the young woman, Miss Janette Harford, and I became very well acquainted. We were, in truth, nearly always together, and being of an introspective turn of mind I

often endeavored to analyze and define the novel feeling with which she inspired me — a secret, subtle, but powerful attraction which constantly impelled me to seek her; but the attempt was hopeless. I could only be sure that at least it was not love. Having assured myself of this and being certain that she was quite as wholehearted, I ventured one evening (I remember it was on the 3d of July) as we sat on deck to ask her, laughingly, if she could assist me to resolve my psychological doubt.

For a moment she was silent, with averted face, and I began to fear I had been extremely rude and indelicate; then she fixed her eyes gravely on my own. In an instant my mind was dominated by as strange a fancy as ever entered human consciousness. It seemed as if she were looking at me, not *with*, but *through*, those eyes — from an immeasurable distance behind them — and that a number of other persons, men, women and children, upon whose faces I caught strangely familiar evanescent expressions, clustered about her, struggling with gentle eagerness to look at me through the same orbs. Ship, ocean sky — all had vanished. I was conscious of nothing but the figures in this extraordinary and fantastic scene. Then all at once darkness fell upon me, and

anon from out of it, as to one who grows accustomed by degrees to a dimmer light, my former surroundings of deck and mast and cordage slowly resolved themselves. Miss Harford had closed her eyes and was leaning back in her chair apparently asleep, the book she had been reading open in her lap. Impelled by surely I cannot say what motive, I glanced at the top of the page; it was a copy of that rare and curious work, *Denneker's Meditations*, and the lady's index finger rested on this passage:

"To sundry it is given to be drawn away, and to be apart from the body for a season; for, as concerning rills which would flow across each other the weaker is borne along by the stronger, so there be certain of kin whose paths intersecting, their souls do bear company, the while their bodies go fore-appointed ways, unknowing."

Miss Harford arose, shuddering; the sun had sunk below the horizon, but it was not cold. There was not a breath of wind; there were no clouds in the sky, yet not a star was visible. A hurried tramping sounded on the deck; the captain, summoned from below, joined the first officer, who stood looking at the barometer. "Good God!" I heard him exclaim.

An hour later the form of Janette Harford, invisible in the darkness and spray, was

torn from my grasp by the cruel vortex of the sinking ship, and I fainted in the cordage of the floating mast to which I had lashed myself.

IT WAS BY lamplight that I awoke. I lay in a berth amid the familiar surroundings of the stateroom of a steamer. On a couch opposite sat a man, half undressed for bed, reading a book. I recognized the face of my friend Gordon Doyle, whom I had met in Liverpool on the day of my embarkation, when he was himself about to sail on the steamer *City of Prague*, on which he had urged me to accompany him.

After some moments I now spoke his name. He simply said, "Well," and turned a leaf in his book without removing his eyes from the page.

"Doyle," I repeated, "did they save *her*?"

He now deigned to look at me and smiled as if amused. He evidently thought me but half awake.

"Her? Whom do you mean?"
"Janette Harford."

His amusement turned to amazement; he stared at me fixedly, saying nothing.

"You will tell me after a while," I continued; "I suppose you will tell me after a while."

A moment later I asked, "What ship is this?"

Doyle stared again. "The steamer *City of Prague*, bound

from Liverpool to New York, three weeks out with a broken shaft. Principal passenger, Mr. Gordon Doyle; ditto lunatic, Mr. William Jarrett. These two distinguished travelers embarked together, but they are about to part, it being the resolute intention of the former to pitch the latter overboard."

I sat bolt upright. "Do you mean to say that I have been for three weeks a passenger on this steamer?"

"Yes, pretty nearly; this is the 3d of July."

"Have I been ill?"

"Right as a trivet all the time, and punctual at your meals."

"My God! Doyle, there is some mystery here; do have the goodness to be serious. Was I not rescued from the wreck of the ship *Morrow*?"

Doyle changed color, and approaching me, laid his fingers on my wrist. A moment later, "What do you know of Janette Harford?" he asked very calmly.

"First tell me what *you* know of her?"

Mr. Doyle gazed at me for some moments as if thinking what to do, then seating himself again on the couch, said, "Why should I not? I am engaged to marry Janette Harford, whom I met a year ago in London. Her family, one of the wealthiest in Devonshire, cut up rough about it, and we

eloped — are eloping rather, for on the day that you and I walked to the landing stage to go aboard this steamer she and her faithful servant, a Negress, passed us, driving to the ship *Morrow*. She would not consent to go in the same vessel with me, and it had been deemed best that she take a sailing vessel in order to avoid observation and lessen the risk of detection. I am now alarmed lest this cursed breaking of our machinery may detain us so long that the *Morrow* will get to New York before us, and the poor girl will not know where to go."

I lay still in my berth — so still I hardly breathed. But the subject was evidently not displeasing to Doyle, and after a short pause he resumed, "By the way, she is only an adopted daughter of the Harfords. Her mother was killed at their place by being thrown from a horse while hunting, and her father, mad with grief, made away with himself the same day. No one ever claimed the child, and after a reasonable time they adopted her. She has grown up in the belief that she is their daughter."

"Doyle, what book are you reading?"

"Oh, it's called *Denneker's Meditations*. It's a rum lot, Janette gave it to me; she happened to have two copies. Want to see it?"

He tossed me the volume, which opened as it fell. On one of the exposed pages was a marked passage:

"To sundry it is given to be drawn away, and to be apart from the body for a season; for, as concerning rills which would flow across each other the weaker is borne along by the stronger, so there be certain of kin whose paths intersecting, their souls do bear company, the while their bodies go fore-appointed ways, unknowing."

"She had — she has — a singular taste in reading," I managed to say, mastering my agitation.

"Yes. And now perhaps you will have the kindness to explain how you knew her name and that of the ship she sailed in."

"You talked of her in your sleep," I said.

A week later we were towed into the port of New York. But the *Morrow* was never heard from.

THE RECKONING

We appreciate the fact that more of you are commenting upon our covers now, for the comments on the April and June frontespieces were too scant to draw any firm conclusions; all we can say is that more of those who commented seemed to like these covers than dislike them.

For three issues in a row, the story which was in first place with the initial batch of ballots tabulated maintained its position right up to the end; but the June issue shows a change. For over a month, the Hodgson story was in the lead; but in the final weeks, Robert E. Howard's tale gradually moved up, took a lead, fell back to neck-and-neck, then finally pulled ahead. Here, then, is how your votes placed matters when the polls were closed. (Incidentally, would you like us to give you a full listing, rather than just the top five?)

(1) *Skulls in the Stars*, by Robert E. Howard; (2) *The Whistling Room*, by William Hope Hodgson; (3) *Sacrilege*, by Wallace West; (4) *The Distortion out of Space*, by Francis Flagg; (5) *The Night Wire*, by H. F. Arnold. No story brought forth sufficient reactions at both extremes of the scale to be considered controversial, this time.

The Call Of The Mech-Men

by Laurence Manning

(author of *Caverns of Horror*)

In our November 1964 issue we presented the second of this series of five stories dealing with the "Stranger Club" as a trial balloon, for while *Caverns of Horror* was distinctly a horror story, it was nonetheless science fiction. At that time, we listed the other stories in the series, told you explicitly that the rest were not horror stories, but strange science fiction, and asked if you would like to see them. *Caverns of Horror* brought forth more ballots and comment from you than any other story we had published in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* previously, and it still holds the record for not only the greatest number of comments, but the closest to universal approval from those of you who voted. The "aye" votes on offering you the rest of the series began at once and continued to the point where we felt assured that a sizeable percentage of you really want to see them. Here, then, is the first story in the series; it appeared in the November 1933 issue of *WONDER STORIES*, and was greeted with much enthusiasm at the time. Re-reading the story, we feel that this was not misplaced.

UP ON WEST 53rd Street, amid a row of converted brownstone fronts is a club

called the Stranger Club. It hasn't a sign, and even if you were to find the right door,

you could push the bell for hours on end without result. It doesn't ring, for it was never connected. And if it did ring, no one would dream of opening the door to you. You must have a key to enter: from which you might gather that the Stranger Club does not welcome strangers, and in this deduction you would not be wrong. My friend Seeman provided my entrance there. He is a little mouse of a man, with a deathly still face covered with fever-yellowed parchment, and a voice like a meek grocery clerk's. His unbelievable occupation is hunting for prospecting expeditions in Africa and (I understand) cannibal tribes over there call him the African equivalent of Sudden Death and keep out of rifle shot. Seeman spends a month in New York every two or three years, and left shortly after he arranged my membership. How *he* was allowed to enter, I cannot imagine, nor do I yet understand why I was admitted.

You see, this club has a particular purpose for existing. The meaning of its name is obvious upon entering the place. The door opens upon a large hall from which branch off three huge rooms. Close to the ceiling along the hall in large letters, runs this motto: **TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION.**

Of the three rooms, one is a small dining room with kitch-

en and pantry attached; across the hall from this is a library of some two thousand volumes set about with comfortable leather chairs and quiet lights. The third and central room is a huge lounge with hunting trophies, weapons and similar odds and ends set about on the walls. In this room is the great fireplace around which in which in winter, I am told, tales of sorts may be heard, with all lights out and the fire glow flickering. I have yet to experience that, for I have only been a member for the past two months.

One particularly hot day last week, I abandoned the last flimsy pretense at work and went up to the Club. Colonel Marsh was there, and a tall frosty julep beside him, which the attendant had just brought in. He silently raised his eyebrows when he saw me, and then (without speaking a word) raised two fingers, at which sign the waiter nodded and hurried away. By the time, I had slumped moistly into a chair, a second cool julep rested on the table at my right hand. We sipped in silence for some minutes. I was considering my companion thoughtfully. He could talk volubly, if one set about priming him in the right way. And what he had to say was usually startling, for he was a much traveled man who took no one's word for any-

thing, but went to see for himself — being wealthy and unattached.

But it was one thing to meet him and chat in company and quite another privately to loosen the flood-gates of his speech — watched over as they were by those pale blue and icy eyes, guarded by that sentinel peak of a nose and sealed in behind that bristly, tobacco-stained military moustache of his. One would think that these facial chaperons would never be mollified nor their severity softened, but I had only to start telling him myself something which I suspected *he* might be able to tell me. Presently, signs of impatience would appear. A foot would tap. His hand would drum on the arm of his chair. His lusty red face would grow slightly apoplectic as if with ill-suppressed verbiage; until, all in all, it might seem that the man was going to blow up. It does not do to weaken then. Keep right on, though you fear death by violence, until his reticence can be maintained no longer and the man finds relief in a glass-shattering "Hr-r-rmph!"

That does it. Now you may sit back in your chair, light a pipe, and enjoy the fruit of your labors. Upon this summer's afternoon I felt like hearing him talk. I ventured an opinion on the temperature of New York as compared to that of

Central Africa. But I drew a blank there. Then I mentioned something about the latest bank hold-up, but without striking fire. Rather discouraged, I found my conversational path through the cosmic ray controversy, by means of balloon travel to navigation and compass variations. And there I paused, for Marsh was interested — I could tell from the way his white bushy eyebrows twitched. I plowed on, then, shamelessly — through geographical variations to seasonal shifts of compass error and getting as many of my facts wrong as I could.

"One thing seems curious," I was saying, "and that is that the Magnetic Pole is but two thousand miles from New York — right up in northern Canada on the Boothia Peninsula. Yet, I may be wrong, but I don't recollect that any observatory or scientific station is located there. Now, modern theory on earthly magnetism is very fine — but I should think someone would want to go up and see if there may be some other explanation."

"Hr-r-rmph!" said Colonel Marsh.

I LEANED BACK in my chair and mopped my forehead, prepared to listen.

"These modern scientific puppies!"

I assented with a deprecating gesture.

"You *would* think they'd go and look at a thing when it's so easy to do, wouldn't you? Not they! Couldn't persuade them to go near the place! Tried hard enough, too!"

He plunged his heated countenance into the frosty glass and the liquid seemed to hiss at the contact. "You see," said Colonel Marsh, wiping his moustache between thumb and forefinger, "I happen to have been up there myself last month. You may remember that I was not at the club for ten days?"

"Wait a moment," I put in doubtfully. "Are you talking about the Magnetic North pole? You went there and back in ten days?"

"Tut, man! What's a mere two thousand miles in days like these? A mere fifteen hours in a fast airplane! Wonderful days we live in!" He drained his drink and beckoned for another with a long and lively finger. "I'd been sitting in this very chair one morning and reading the paper, when I came across one of those advertisements from a Long Island flying field — you've seen them no doubt? This one offered an air-taxi to any place at the rate of fifty cents a mile. It struck me at once that the offer was interesting and I secured an atlas, and I immediate-

ly knew I wanted to investigate the Magnetic Pole, so I phoned the flying field.

"I understand," I said, 'that you offer to take a man anywhere at fifty cents a mile.'

"That's right," answered a voice — then after a second's pause, 'but not transatlantic flights! Ha ha!'

"I hadn't planned crossing the Atlantic. I do not wish to leave this continent."

"Where did you wish to go?"

"You get a plane ready for a week's cruise, and I'll leave in an hour," I replied.

"Well, when I got to the field with my luggage, the pilot made the most fussy kind of objections to my trip. First, he claimed it wasn't on the continent, but I soon showed him by the map that it was. Then he claimed he couldn't take along enough gasoline for a round trip, so I wired the Imperial Oil Company at Ottawa and arranged to have two hundred gallons in five-gallon tins left for us along the shore of Hudson Bay as far north as possible and received an answer in half an hour that a plane was then leaving and would drop the gasoline just north of James Bay at the mouth of a little river there. In the meantime, I heard nothing but objections from the pilot — lazy beggar with no spirit of enterprise — talked

a lot about risks and fool chances, but I stopped him promptly by waving his own advertisement in front of his nose. 'Is this statement correct?' I asked, 'Or are you just another boaster who can't live up to his claims?'

"That got under his skin, and his face turned red. Then the telegram came back from Ottawa, and he shrugged, fumbled around in a trouser pocket, and pulled out a little white ivory elephant, which he rubbed with his palm.

" 'All aboard,' he said, and we started.

"It was eight in the evening by then; a fine clear night with the sun setting behind the Jersey hills, and the lights of New York just beginning to show bright beneath us. The ship was a six-place amphibian, with the pilot in a screened off compartment in front. I sat up with him a few minutes and noticed that he had a huge sheaf of charts and maps and seemed to know where he was going. But I felt somehow that he preferred to be alone, so I went back aft and made a couch, of sorts, in one of the seats. I slept soundly until a faint, gray dawn woke me, and a glance at my wrist watch showed four in the morning. We should be due at our gasoline cache in an hour or less. I glanced over the side and saw a low, flat wilderness

stretching away out of sight on the horizon. I crossed the cabin and looked out of the right-hand windows to see a body of water a few miles to the right — James Bay, I imagined.

"WE HAD TAKEN on a good substantial supply of food and drink, and when I opened a thermos bottle of hot coffee and mixed it with brandy, I went forward to the pilot. He drank with one hand at the wheel and smacked his lips appreciatively, and I think, began to take an interest in the trip for the first time. His name was Stanley, I learned, and according to his charts, we should be almost at the river's mouth, but he didn't really expect to be able to find it, I'm sure. As we were talking, I caught a flash of reflected sunlight (for dawn was breaking rapidly) far to the right, and Stanley circled around and down. There — plain to be seen — were our cans of gasoline. We were over the shore by then, and came down to an easy landing in smooth water not fifty yards from land.

"Stanley was exhausted after his night's work, and beached the ship before he went to sleep in the cabin. I had no time to waste, so I set to work to refill the tank, and no little job it was. I must have been hard at it for six or seven hours, with the black flies, those

damned scourges of the North, hounding me constantly. By noon, I was worn out myself, and dropped into a cabin chair with a grunt that woke Stanley. We had lunch and two whiskey sodas, and by that time, Stanley was fully prepared to resume the flight.

"We have about seven hours to fly," said he. "That will get us there just at dark."

"Always objecting, you see, but I had him that time. 'It's July,' I answered 'and there's twenty-fours of daylight where we're going.'"

"He stared a minute. 'That's so — never thought of it!'"

"He spent ten minutes fussing about with his charts and compass. Then we both pushed the ship off shore and headed her into the wind. The twin motors roared once more, and we took off handily. We followed the coast — a flat muddy line without trees — hour after hour, and I wandered aft and sat down (as I thought) for a few minutes. But the sound and shake of flying is a very drowsy thing, and I awoke six hours later, and started forward to see if Stanley knew where he was going. He did, all right. He was gazing fascinated at his compass which swung crazily around in circles. His declination compass was standing on end with the North point pressed down toward the floor of the cabin. The Mag-

netic Pole was somewhere beneath us. But where? I had him cruise over and across several times, watching the compass all the while, and finally picked out the center of the magnetic disturbance to be a low hill — or not far from it. In that flat country, a landmark of any kind is a godsend, and down we settled. We landed at a good speed on a flat plain that looked as if it were made for our very purpose — but we had scarcely touched, when Stanley swore bit and let out the throttle again. We pitched and careened a moment, and then broke clear. The flat plain had been tundra — marshy moss-covered bog. But we made our second landing at the foot of our little hill (it was not thirty feet in height) and Stanley shut off the engines and mopped his forehead.

"I never thought I should really get you here," he said. "Now what do we do? Set up an American flag in a rock-cairn and cheer?"

COLONEL MARSH stroked his chin reflectively a moment. "Well," he said. "I suppose you are asking yourself the same question that Stanley asked. You might be wondering why I went to all this bother merely to set foot on the Magnetic Pole. You've read the theories, no doubt, and made up your mind that it's just a focal point

for the earth's magnetic currents — oh, I know the story these scientific Johnnies who have never been there tell us! Now I'll let you know what was really in my mind. It had struck me as curious that there should be any spot on the face of the earth toward which every magnetized needle tends to point. When I see tracks in the mud I say to myself that something has walked there. When I see a compass swinging hard to the North I'm curious to know what can be attracting it there. So I determined to see for myself. It's all very well to sit back in a college easy chair and say there isn't anything there but an imaginary point. Catch *them* going all the way up north to where their compasses point! It's too fatiguing. But that doesn't do for *me*, sir, I can tell you!

"It had struck me — supposing someone put a signal up there to attract intelligent humans! Supposing I was *the first man with intelligence enough* to understand the compass signal and make the trip? It'd not be surprising, after all — what are you smiling at? . . . of *course* the signal varies in direction. I'm coming to that in a minute."

"But," I interjected, "how could it vary as much as it does? The dip of the compass changes with the seasons and isn't the same in every part of

the world and the direction itself isn't stable."

"Hr-r-rmph!" exploded the Colonel and I subsided.

"Theories! These college arm-chair theories! Why should the effect of a signal from the Magnetic Pole be the same everywhere? Is a radio signal equal in intensity from equal reception localities? Of course not. But why isn't it? Because of local reception conditions. It's precisely the same with our compasses."

I was silenced. After all, what he said was possible, and I was anxious, whether possible or not, to hear the story. But the worthy Colonel as not easily cooled, once his indignation was aroused.

"And look where the Magnetic Pole is," he continued warmly. "Hundreds and hundreds of miles from the true Pole around which the earth revolves. Have you ever been satisfied by the ordinary explanations of *that* fact?"

That put a more probable light on everything. As a matter of fact, I always thought it a little strange that the magnetic currents of the earth should be so lop-sided, as it were. I nodded interestedly.

"Hr-r-rmph!" said the Colonel, dismissing the interruption. "Where was I? Oh yes — we had landed the ship, right by the edge of the small rise of land, when you interrupted

with your ignorant and uncivil objections. Not that they surprise me, mind! They are only a reflection of the great general ignorance prevalent among most of the world's inhabitants.

II

"WELL, AS I was saying, we got out of the ship and stamped about on the ground, which was firm enough here. The sun was low on the western horizon, but did not sink any lower, though we watched hour after hour. I had brought a portable tent, and was unloading it when Stanley suggested that we might as well continue to live in the ship's cabin. He seemed to be quite curious about my purpose in coming at all — but I did not enlighten him. Instead, I removed my baggage — quite a pile — and from one very heavy valise, I unloaded the two hundred sticks of dynamite I had brought. At the sight of these explosives, Stanley's face was a picture of consternation, and he seemed to think it had been exceedingly foolhardy of me to have brought such a cargo. But as you will understand, it could hardly have exploded unless we had struck the ground suddenly or crashed — and if we had done either we should very likely have been killed instantly. I told him as much, but for some rea-

son, he couldn't see it my way. He went up in the air about it, figuratively speaking, and carefully unpacked all of my belongings on the spot — opening and peering fearfully into everything, as though he expected to see a scorpion or a live cobra in each bag.

"Then he was more curious than ever as to what I wanted to use the dynamite for. I told him he would very soon see for himself. I had brought a very precise hand compass, and I cruised the surface of the earth for an hour or two and fixed the center of magnetic attraction within a hundred yards. Then I drove four stakes to bound the are, and suggested we retire for some sleep. He had been following me with his eyes popping out and let out a howl of disappointment at my words, but I climbed back into the cabin, and he followed, begging for enlightenment. By this time, the sun was swinging low around the north, and I finally fell asleep. When we arose, the sun was in the east, and rising slightly above the horizon. That was all the dawn amounted to up there.

"Stanley was sullenly silent by now, and even bacon and coffee did not thaw him out. 'If you will take the valise of dynamite and follow me,' said I, 'I'll show you what's in my mind.' And with that, I took a

pickaxe I'd brought, and set off for my stakes, which were along the west slope of our mounded landmark. At each of the four stakes, I dug down a few feet and dropped in fifty sticks of dynamite. Then I filled the hole and pounded it tight. I connected the four mines by wires, and led a cable back to a portable battery near the ship, which was a good quarter of a mile away. When all was ready, I pulled the switch and the whole thing went off with a splendid bang. Stanley, who had been inside the cabin doing something to the controls, came out like a Jack-in-the-box to see if I had hurt myself. He seemed almost disappointed that I had not. There was a great cloud of dust in the air, and some stones fell not far from us, but there was nothing dangerous. Stanley looked around to make sure that it was all over, and then took out his ivory luck-piece and began rubbing it unctuously. Together we approached the crater that my mines had made.

"It was four hundred feet across and fifty feet deep. At one side, near the small hill, there showed some white stone — bare and raw. I climbed down and examined this carefully, and you may well imagine my excitement when I tell you that it was plainly some sort of porcelain cement! Stanley came at once at my cry of

surprise, and together we scratched and dug around it, but beyond coming to a smooth unbroken surface all about the piece we had chipped off, we found nothing. So we returned to our supplies and brought tools, and for four solid hours we dug a trench, until we had bared a round white building roofed with a flat dome, and — finally — set in the wall, we found an arched doorway and fitted into that was a steel door about eight feet high and four across. We were so excited by then, that our hands were trembling. We scraped the door clean to every corner. There was not a mark upon it — no handle, not even a key-hole. And there we were!

"IF WE HAD had an oxygen blow torch, we might have cut our way in — but we had not brought any such equipment. It was a lesson to me, I can tell you, and I will never again set off upon an expedition without this piece of equipment. The only thing I could think of was to drop everything and return to civilization for more utensils. I had just about determined, in fact, to do this, when I heard a creaking noise. For a moment neither of us could place it — then Stanley pointed silently to the great metal door. It had come from behind that! It was the sort of squeal that metal makes upon

metal when the surfaces have not been properly oiled. We stood, our hearts in our mouths, and watched the door slowly open — inch by inch. In the darkness beyond, a shape slowly took form to our light-accustomed eyes.

"It was a shiny metal box set upon three squat, jointed legs. At the top was a series of round glass bulbs, very heavy and thick, and the box on which these were set was two feet thick, and perhaps four feet high. A cable of overlapping rings — like the metal cable that covers electric wires when they run through joists and beams in buildings — projected from the very top, and trailed motionless upon the ground before us. In startled silence, we eyed this machine. Stanley shifted nervously upon his feet and cleared his throat.

" 'I don't like this,' he said hoarsely.

" 'If we could only squeeze past that machine. I can make out a passage beyond it,' I suggested.

" 'I'd sooner get the machine out of the way first,' he replied. 'Did you use all of your dynamite?'

" 'All but one stick.'

" 'That might not be enough to blow that thing to pieces. What do you suppose it was set there for?'

" 'I did not reply. The two of us stood there in uneasy si-

lence another moment. Then 'I'm going back for that dynamite,' Stanley said, and turned to go. What happened next was almost too quick for eyesight to follow. Like a flash of lightning, the steel cable stiffened out and whipped itself around him. With a terrible scream, Stanley was lifted bodily into the air and drawn swiftly inside and out of sight. What I saw had a horrible sort of fascination for me. But I turned away and made two steps toward safety, my feet seeming to be weighted down with lead — they moved so slowly. Then I felt a terrific constriction around my waist and I, too, was raised into the air and drawn into the mouth of that mysterious passage; flung down on the hard stone beside my companion. There was a clang as the door was shut, and we lay in complete darkness. I felt that chill cable feeling around me once more, and kicking and struggling, the two of us were lifted like dolls and flung on the top of the metal box. Then I felt myself carried along in the darkness in quick jolting strides. Minute after minute went by and seemed like hours. I could feel that we were being carried down a steep path — down a steep path — down into the darkest bowels of the earth. Stanley was hanging limp and unconscious. I could feel my senses slowly leaving

me — I was hanging head down. I remembered no more.

"IT MIGHT HAVE been minutes or hours later that I was jolted back to my senses. A faint glow of light came from somewhere in front of us, and I contrived to wriggle around (half breaking my back) to get my head uppermost. It ached abominably, and I was dizzy and sick, but fearfully desirous of seeing what was ahead of us. I made out a long tunnel in stone, with glistening smooth sides, and a brightness showed far ahead. In about five minutes, we arrived at the end of the passage, and came into an enormous open space lit by a glow of light from overhead — like a sky of phosphorous. It was similar to a sky in more senses than one, for it must have stretched a good mile over our heads — it was not for a few minutes, in fact, that I realized we were in an underground world. But we were. Behind us rose the huge rock and wall through which we had come, and before us, as far as the eye could see, stretched a flat-floored plain. Not a boulder or a tree, or even a clump of grass marred its perfect monotony, save only for strange towers of black rock that lifted up into the bright haze overhead. These, I afterwards determined to be pillars supporting the vaulted roof of

the cavern. They were fully fifty feet thick and spaced at least a quarter of a mile apart. The effect was weird and unearthly in the extreme, and more depressing to the spirits than I can well say.

"Then I noticed something that drew all of my attention. We were rapidly approaching another group of mechanical creatures. Nearer and nearer we jolted our way, hanging helplessly from the encircling cable. I can tell you, I've faced nearly every danger on earth, from war to wild animals, and I was never in such a complete flunk. I wondered what these new machines would be like, and sweated copiously. Then Stanley came to his senses all of a sudden, and screamed and struggled, and actually succeeded in slipping almost entirely from the machine's grasp. We were both raised into the air and thrown heavily to the rocky ground where I lay stunned for a moment. When we stood trembling on our feet and looked uncertainly about us, we were surrounded by seven machines — each identical with the first!

"'Marsh! Do you see them?' cried Stanley wildly. 'Tell me I'm only dreaming these horrors! They can't exist. Machines don't think!'

"'Keep calm, old man!' said I. 'I got you into this and I'll get you out if I can.'

"YOU KNOW, it hadn't occurred to me that these were sentient beings — these things of metal. But Stanley was right — they walked, and captured prey, and held them captive, and now it certainly looked as though they were having a conversation, though they did not move or make any sound. I studied them in some interest for a few minutes, before I found my dignified posture completely upset, and myself put into the role of an interesting specimen to be examined, rather than the intelligent observer that I had imagined myself. Two tentacles shot out and threw us both to the ground and then all seven commenced probing and examining our bodies, and crowded around us like puppies discovering a turtle. After a startled moment, I determined to keep my mind calm and to ignore all indignities. I lay there quietly, and it struck me as more peculiar that such obviously intelligent creatures should be without some form of communication. Could it be a sort of radio signal? I thought it probable, but some impulse hammering at the back of my subconscious mind bade me turn on my side, and I did so before the strangeness of such an instinct struck me. Then I started at the thought: Could it be that they conversed by some extremely low frequency

radiation that my mind *could* understand? I lay there with my eyes shut and tried to make my mind receptive. Presently, I felt a thought come into it, but it was vague and meaningless. I waited for more letting my muscles go limp and my body relax. Then suddenly their thoughts began to flow into my mind with startling clearness. They were strange thoughts, which formed themselves into curt words in my brain — not always understandable. Here is the gist of the mental conversation:

" ' . . . mere animal. Not intelligent beings. See primitive protoplasm structure? Wear out soon. Much better if metal.' "

" 'How then make reading our signal if no intelligence? How then dig with explosion great hole around entrance?' "

" 'Signal set there so other (a word was used here that seemed to mean *humans*, but that would be absurd — I shall call them Mech-men) . . . so other Mech-men can find vessel here. No great brain needed to read signal. These not Mech-men, so must be natives of the planet here. Natives of planet not intelligent by report of exploring party two hundred sun cycle past. Besides protoplasm not make intelligence.' "

" 'Mech-men due soon, yes?' "

" 'Within next ten thousand

sun-cycle maybe — what difference?

"But these animals partly intelligent protoplasm, no?"

"Cannot be! Protoplasm not make intelligence. Only metal make intelligence."

"We keep for while — then kill."

"Why kill? Bodies not with oil."

"And then I opened my eyes and screamed aloud, for one of the tentacles had ripped a piece of skin and flesh from my leg, and was holding the bloody rag up to the view of his fellows. At the sound of my voice, all seven machines — or Mech-men; as I call them — faced me in silence for a few seconds as though interested in hearing the cry of some new zoological specimen. I could not understand what they were saying, for the pain of my little wound was occupying my mind to the exclusion of every other thought. Only when I was able to make my mind a complete blank and relax my body could I 'receive' the conversation of these strange beings."

"Stanley leaned over and patted my shoulder."

"Keep a stiff upper lip," said he. "Does it hurt much?"

"Never mind my damned leg," I said. "Did you hear them talking?"

"Eh? Talking! I didn't hear a word! . . . er, are you sure?"

"It wasn't exactly talking — seems to be a sort of mental telepathy."

"What rot! I mean to say, mental telepathy! There isn't any such thing!"

"But I heard them," I said, and tried to tell him something of their conversation. He eyed me wonderingly a minute, and I could see half-credulity slowly give way on his face to complete disbelief. That man never once would believe that the Mech-men had said a word — nor that they *could* speak — in spite of all that happened later. And to this day, he thinks me a liar of the lowest sort. 'But I was *there*, Colonel,' he said, 'and I was listening hard. Not a word was spoken . . . and you have a good imagination, you know.'

"I eyed him a minute in frank contempt, and was going to turn my back on him in dignified silence, when one of the Mech-men stepped forward and jerked us both into its metallic embrace. We were tossed in the air and held there, while our captor marched stolidly off across the level floor of the underground world. Minute after minute we jogged along, covering five feet at a stride and in mighty uncomfortable fashion. Presently, a great stone rampart showed in the distance, and after half an hour's walking, we came up under this and into a tunnel

cut into its face. Then there was darkness for five or ten minutes, and we came out into another cavern, so large that neither ceiling nor walls were visible in the hazy distance. The enormous pillars of rock broke up the view, and it was like walking through some gargantuan forest with the great trunks rising up to the misty sky, or like the nave of some cyclopean cathedral. It surpassed imagination and took the breath away — that cavern. Even now, I can hardly believe that I saw it. Once we passed close by one of the great pillars, and the broad surface showed no tool marks, but was smooth as though cut with diamond powder on a wheel. That pillar had been carved from living rock!

III

"WE WERE carried along the side of the second cavern for half a mile and came to a depression, like a little valley. Here were a series of enclosures made of steel wire, and in each was a different species of animal. There were musk-ox, reindeer, arctic fox, seal, walrus, polar bear, arctic hare, lynx, and timber wolves, to name a few that I recognized. And then I saw something that made Stanley grunt in amazement — with great domed foreheads and shaggy hair mat-

ted over the back, were a pair of woolly mammoths! They were some distance away, but were, I should judge, about twelve feet in height at the shoulders, and their restless trunks moved along the wire mesh of their cage like serpents in pain.

"We were thrown to the ground now, and after a short while, another Mech-man approached, and the two stood there, apparently discussing which cage we should be placed in. I shut my eyes and closed all the doors to my mind. Presently I began to 'hear' what they were saying.

"'. . . so cannot do. Will build cage.'

"But why not put in other cage for now?"

"Might do. Too bad no empty cages. Try this one with white animals.'

"One of the creatures lifted me in its tentacle and started to unlatch the door behind which the polar bears were enclosed! That was a bad moment. I cried aloud and kicked violently and tried to pray all at the same time. He stopped uncertainly and brought me back to Stanley, who was sitting on the ground white and trembling. Finally the other Mech-man lifted me and took me to the enclosure that held the arctic hares. I can tell you I went in there readily enough. He returned and

got Stanley, and put him beside me, then latched the door. For a minute, the two of them stood outside the cage looking at us, then they moved away in separate directions and were soon out of sight.

"Our enclosure was about one hundred feet square and had been covered with a few inches of sandy soil on which some sparse grass existed. Off in the far corner were hiding the two original owners of the area, their gray ears showing twitchingly where they crouched. Outside of the wire stretched the monotonous stone cavern floor. Across the way were the polar bears, and a sunken bath filled with water could be seen in the rear of their cage. I suddenly had a mounting respect for the Mech-men.

"See Stanley," I said. "These machines have at least sense enough to provide grass for the rabbits and water for the bears."

"Perhaps the bears told them what they wanted by mental telepathy," he grunted, very sarcastically. I eyed him in some doubt, for he was acting mighty strange. His eyes rolled unpleasantly and his mouth worked. He was muttering to himself. That was bad. I walked over thoughtfully to the gate that confined us, and stared at it. Then I laughed aloud.

"Stanley! See what they think of our great human intelligencel Here's a simple latch I can reach through and unfasten whenever we've a mind to walk out!"

"A loud and savage laugh answered me. 'Walk out where?'"

"Why, to explore the cavern of course, and eventually escape to the upper air. Are you content to remain here forever?"

"It would be certain death — lost in the enormous barren caves, unless we were found by one of those machines, and then we'd only be brought right back here and a stronger lock would be put on the door."

"THERE WAS something in what he said, and I was reflecting upon the matter when a Mech-man came from behind one of the cages. Hung from his tentacle was a huge metal box. He paused by the polar bears, and threw in four large pieces of brown-looking stuff which the bears sniffed and ate. Then he went over to the two wolves in the cage next to ours, and these, too, received food. Stanley was staring at him fascinated. He parted his lips and showed his strong white teeth, which had that square appearance known as "buck-teeth." The Mech-man stopped before our cage and, I presume, was studying us — though having eyes on all sides of his 'head', it was impossible to be certain

of the direction in which he was looking.

" 'I'm hungry,' Stanley cried to him. 'Give us some food.'

"The machine moved slightly.

"Then Stanley plucked a handful of the tired-looking grass, and opening his mouth wide, made motions as if he were eating, looking hopefully at the metal box the while. With that, the Machine turned about and made its jerky way over to the woolly mammoths, leaving us supperless. For a startled instant neither of said anything. My eyes wandered around our enclosure and rested upon the two hares, busily munching grass. A sudden light struck me.

" 'You young fool!' I cried. 'Don't you see what you did? We are in with the hares, who eat grass. The machine saw you pretending to eat grass, too, and now he thinks we can live on it!'

" 'What! You mean that he won't give us any food?'

" 'Reason it out for yourself,' I answered, pointing to where the Mech-man had vanished behind the far cages.

" 'But we'll starve to death! Oh, what can we do to let him know that we need food?'

"I thought a moment. Then I remarked that undoubtedly the animals were fed at regular intervals. 'If he could see us eating one of these rabbits

here,' I said, 'he'd know that we eat flesh, and not grass. Go catch a rabbit, Stanley!'

"Stanley had been standing near the steel wire that separated us from the wolves, and gazing longingly at them as they gobbled up the last of their food. At my words, he turned startled eyes in my direction. He stared thoughtfully at the two arctic hares in our own enclosure. Before my eyes, he dropped to hands and knees and commenced a stealthy approach in their direction, placing his hands forward one after the other as cautiously as a cat. Before he came within six feet of the hares, they, of course, sat up on their haunches, noses and ears aqiuver, and hopped out of reach. I gave him a hand for a time, but without success. After half an hour, I determined to set off and explore and told my companion as much. I received no reply whatsoever. The man was stalking rabbits with a singleness of purpose not to be shaken by any diversions. So I lifted the latch and walked out of the cage, locking it behind me.

"I was hungry, but also curious, and walked straight over to the pair of mammoths. There they were on the other side of a wire fence, beasts long since extinct on earth. The nearest one was scarcely forty feet from me, and as I looked, he swayed closer, long brown

trunk extended curiously. I could distinctly hear the rumbling of his stomach, and smell the warm, wet, matted odor, something like that of a goat. The thing was impossible, but true. What could be the explanation? I made up my mind that this settlement of Mech-men was ancient, and had brought the forbears of these captives here thousands of years ago during the last ice age when the woolly giants still roamed the frozen world. What other explanation could there be? But why were they here? Where did they come from? I determined to find out.

"I EXPLORED the valley in which the caged animals were, and found it of small extent — perhaps twenty acres. It had been cut ten feet deep into the stone of the cavern floor, and two of the great black pillars rose from this steep bank to soar loftily out of sight in the hazy brightness of the roof far overhead. Up this ten-foot bank I scrambled and looked warily about for signs of movement. Where the attendant of the cages had gone, I could not imagine, but as far as I could see, there was nothing alive on the stony plain. Upon my left, toward the rocky wall and low down upon it, I made out in the distance, the black mouth of the tunnel by which we had come, but sheer distance swal-

lowed all else. Stare as I would, there was nothing to be seen overhead except the mysterious haze of light that covered all. My problem was this: how could I venture out upon this level expanse without being seen by the first passing machine? There was but one way. I must keep close beside one of the huge pillars, and after making sure that the coast was clear, make a dash for the next one.

"As I have said, they were spaced about a quarter of a mile apart — almost 440 yards — and as you can see from my build, I am no great runner. But I did my best that day. I had gotten into the shelter of the third pillar, when I heard a low rumbling noise far off along the cave wall. I strained my eyes but could not make out what it was, so I cautiously looked about and made a dash for the next pillar, stopping there to recover my breath. I must have covered the distance in less than three minutes. I was close to the wall by now — no pillars were between — and I could see a great black pipe or cable about fifty feet away, that rested on the floor. It seemed to go back toward the tunnel entrance and lead on toward the course of the sound I heard in the other direction. Half an hour of alternately running and cowering brought me near enough to

make out the details of a group of Mech-men. They were standing beside a squat piece of machinery from which rose a long tapering pipe, like an elephant's trunk. The free end of this pipe moved slowly over the surface of the rock wall, and where it touched, the wall was eaten away in shallow grooves. I watched it in wonder for several minutes, and then the machine rolled ponderously forward along the wall some four or five yards, and the operation was repeated. I could get no nearer without exposing myself to the full view of the attendant Mech-men, and I knew that those bulbous eyes would not fail to notice me, so I remained where I was, peering from behind the pillar, and trying to understand what I saw. I could not make head nor tail out of it, and as they were slowly moving away from me, I determined to return and traverse the tunnel. I made sure nothing was in sight behind me, and then made a dash for the next pillar, keeping the fifty-foot thickness of the one I had abandoned between myself and the group of workers. After an hour's nervous foot work, I reached the pillar nearest the tunnel and eyed it closely as I regained my breath. Here was a fresh danger, for I might run squarely into a Mech-man at the tunnel's mouth, shrouded in blackness as it was. I sat

down to rest a while, and my hand encountered a ridge in the floor. I examined it; found that it was about a quarter of an inch high and half an inch wide. It seemed clear to me that this might provide some clues. First: I reasoned, this this cavern had been cut from the bed rock of the planet's crust. Second: I am reasonably sure that the machine I saw was doing the cutting — and doing it mighty slow, at that. Third: I had found a ridge which was overlooked when the last layer was planed from the floor. It is a quarter of an inch high, so the machine cuts no deeper at each operation. And fourth, how long would it take the machine I saw to carve out these caverns? In my fifteen minutes of observation it had been more than ten feet high and thirty feet long. But if the depth was only a quarter of an inch, it would take forty-eight such cuts to make each foot of cavity. The time involved would require about twelve hours. At that rate, they would cut 200,000 cubic feet a year. Why, it was preposterous! An area a quarter of a mile square and less than two hundred feet high would take a thousand years! This cavern alone was certainly half a mile in height — possibly higher behind the light-giving zone — and if the further wall had been less than ten miles distant, I

should certainly have been able to see it. Even at that, the figures I worked out roughly in my head ran into the millions of years, and there was another cavern! Then I laughed to myself at my stupidity. There might have been a thousand machines at work in the excavation — not one. Even so, I could not get rid of the idea that the place was of tremendous antiquity — the mammoths proved that.

"WHILE I HAD been thinking and resting, my eyes had not left the mouth of the tunnel, and during that time there was nothing to be seen there. Now I rose to my feet and started a step forward, determined to make the attempt to reach the outer cavern. At the first step, I felt a cold cable touch my hand and grip me about the waist. I writhed to stare at the bulbous glass eyes of a Mech-man.

"I ceased struggling instantly, and to my surprise, the machine released me from its grip and stood there quietly. A wild desperation seized me, and I reached into my pocket to produce paper and pencil. I wrote out in plain print: I AM INTELLIGENT AND HUMAN. CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THIS? Then I extended the paper and the tentacle shot out to reach for it, and held it before one of its bulging eyes. I

pressed my eyelids tight shut, and tried to relax my mind completely. Presently I began to understand his thoughts.

"... graphite markings on wood pulp seem useless, but positive must represent thoughts. When marking can feel brain thoughts. Have you been able to feel brain thoughts, human?"

"Queer, jumbled-up words they were, but I knew what was meant, and breathless with hope, I wrote out on another piece of paper YES — not bothering to show it. That worked. He could read my thoughts when I was writing them down, and I could receive his answer by placing my mind into a complete state of repose. I had established contact at last. His name was 677439 — just like that. I called him 'Nine', for it appeared that the last figure was something like a first name with us. He was, of all things, a naturalist, and had been coming over to our cage to examine the new captives! He seemed quite eager to ask questions, and not at all disposed to take it for granted that no creature of flesh and blood could possess intelligence, though in this belief, he was alone among the Mech-men.

"Well, this fellow Nine damn soon found out that I was different from the other animals they had in their cages, and like a flash, he reached out a tenta-

cle and hauled me upon his back and started off for the tunnel. He plunged into its blackness and I had many a misgiving before we saw light ahead and came out into the first cavern. I must confess that I had forgotten all about the pilot fellow, Stanley. We bore left from the tunnel mouth, and after twenty minutes of jolting, we rounded a huge pillar and came upon the headquarters of the Mech-men. It was sunk below the level of the floor and consisted of a huge lake of black oil with a flat surface on one side surrounded by a long, low open-air machine shop!

IV

"THERE MUST HAVE been a hundred Mech-men standing around when we arrived. Most of them were working at one or another of the power tools, but fully half of them crowded about my captor, and for five minutes they stood silently there while he, evidently, was talking to them. I was too much interested in my surroundings to listen. But finally Nine, who had set me down gently upon my feet, began prodding me with his cable end, and I shut my eyes and received his question: "What for you come to Mech-men?"

"That was a puzzler. Finally I wrote on the pad of paper:

'TO LEARN WHY YOU HAVE SET A SIGNAL HERE.'

"I felt a mental nod pass around the group, and half a dozen began 'thinking' all together, which was even more confusing than it sounds. Then I got another question from Nine: 'Are more humans on this planet? Where humans come from? Only few hundred sun-cycle since found none thinking creatures on planet and . . . why you come planet?'

"That was hard to understand, but I started writing the history of evolution, and finally, after about five minutes' scribbling, I felt Nine answer: 'We understand how all happen but very quick to have reason come. Protoplasm must grow more quick than metal. Perhaps not last so long?'

"I told him that we lived only seventy or eighty years normally. They couldn't understand years until I drew a picture of the earth going around the sun and then they became interested: 'But so short a life not believable. Can no learn reason so quick. Much better if live longer.' So then I asked them how long they lived.

"'Metal man never die,' came the answer. 'If part wear out, we fix. Why die?'

"I was all on fire to find out why they were here and how long ago they had come. I *did* find out, but there's no use going through the detail of ques-

tion and answer, even if I could. I asked questions and they asked questions. That first conversation lasted ten hours, and would have gone on for ten years so far as the Mech-men were concerned. They never tire. But I fainted from hunger and exhaustion, and that put an end to it. This is about the story as nearly as I could make it out, and it's startling enough!

"A good many thousands of years ago — perhaps millions of years, for they have no unit of time except a sun-cycle, and for the life of me, I couldn't make out what vast sort of astronomical measure *that* is — these Mech-men were living on a planet near some God-forsaken sun — the Lord knows where! It must have been a dull life, to judge from what little I could understand of it. One of their chief occupations and delights consisted in leaving their planet in a space ship and traveling for hundreds of thousands of years. Then, apparently, the custom was to return for a while and start off again in another direction. They had explored their section of Creation so thoroughly, that a group of several hundred started on a really long trip, and had eventually floated through space till they arrived near our solar system. Here they met trouble in the planetoid belt beyond Mars, and some part of the ship was smashed, and a

number of the Mech-men crushed beyond repair. Unfortunately, the spectro-analysis of our sun showed that the essential element needed to repair the damage (you can't read names in a thought transmission) was not present in the solar system. So they, being unable to travel more than a comparatively short distance in their crippled condition (and that slowly) selected earth to land upon by reason of its nearness. They prospected for a good supply of lubricant and found a vast reservoir of oil near what is now the Magnetic Pole. They didn't go abroad much upon the surface of the earth, because they hadn't much power (as they consider power) without their missing element, and from their point of view, our earth is entirely uninhabitable so long as the element *is* missing. But oil they need to preserve their metal bodies, and so they settled where they found it, up on the Boothia Peninsula.

"Well, sir, the first thing they did was to devise a signal so that the searching party they knew would come some time would know where to find them. They had only one motor left on the ship — I'm quite sure they are atomic motors, though it's difficult to say anything certain from the description — and it appears that so long as it runs, a heavy magne-

tic current is set up that can be felt miles out into space as well as all over the world. So they set up the motor beside their oil supply, and set it to work, using the power for their daily needs. The motor uses rock for fuel, and slowly, century after century, a cavern was cut away. But although this alone would indicate that their arrival occurred millions of years ago, the fact is, there was some kind of a cave here when they arrived. How large it was, I don't know. They simply don't care anything about the cavern. All they are interested in, is to keep the motor going so the signal never fails. Time means nothing to them. Apparently it makes little difference whether their rescue comes tomorrow or a million years from now. They are eternal and timeless themselves."

COLONEL MARSH turned his icy blue eyes full upon me.

"I asked about the compass variations. And they laughed at me. They said the earth had iron irregularly distributed throughout. That caused one set of variations, which was further complicated by the rotation of the earth. The signal must lead directly to their settlement, however, or else how did I find it? And of course, they were right. I mention the matter because you, sir, were

so good as to express some slight doubts which I trust are now completely resolved in your mind!"

I waved a weak assent with one hand and he resumed his narrative:

"AS I SAID, I fell asleep or fainted before that talk was half over. When I came to my senses, everything looked exactly the same — though it must have been hours later — and the same Mech-men were still standing around waiting for me! I asked for some food, printing it big and desperate on paper, and one of them started off and came back in ten minutes with some grass! Then I explained I didn't eat that.

" 'But other human so eat. Why you different human?'

" 'Humans never eat grass, but food like other animals in cages,' I wrote.

"I got some in another ten minutes. I don't know what it was — never tasted anything like it before or since. Hope I never shall. Hr-r-rmph! Must have been something synthetic, but I could chew it and swallow it, and after all, it must have kept the wolves and bears alive. I had eaten all I could hold when I remembered Stanley, back in his cage, and asked that some food be given to him, and water as well. (They had given me water with the food.)

But not one of them would set off upon this chore. They just stepped a little closer and the second session commenced.

"This time they wanted to know all about the humans on the earth — what we did with ourselves, what we thought about, and what we liked best. Now, those may be very sensible questions. I'm not saying they aren't, but can you answer them? No more could I. The human race eats, drinks, sleeps, marries, and tries to have a good time. That was as near as I could answer the first question. We think about ways and means of getting what we want more easily from Nature. That was a bit of a euphemism upon human thought, but how could I explain the thoughts of a Hottentot or a gum-chewing peroxide shop-girl when they haven't any? What we like best stumped me. I answered that it depends on the individual; that everyone liked something different.

"Altogether, I should say my answers did not impress the mechanical creatures. I tried to receive the mechanical creatures. I tried to receive their impressions, but they were vague and restless. Finally:

"Then you not know what best like to do?"

"Everybody for himself," I wrote.

"But must be one perfect thing better worth than lesser."

"Maybe not know perfect," suggested another Mech-man.

"Not very long able thinking, must excuse," added a third.

"That made me angry, though perhaps it was justified, and I made the mistake of boasting. The only thing I could think of to brag about was our machinery, and they were enormously excited in an instant.

"But was no machine found last survey," said one.

"No," I wrote, "we humans have only used machinery during the last few hundred years, and that must seem a short time to you."

"And do machines make kind masters to you, human?"

"Masters!" I scratched on the pad, "Machines are slaves to humans! We make them when we want them, and destroy them when they are no more use to us."

"And then there *was* a turmoil! A dozen different Mech-men began thought-talking at once. Some of them were for killing me and organizing an expedition to explore the world and kill all the humans on it, in order to save the machines from cruel slavery. This was quite a popular movement. 'Machines better and must rule planet,' they said. 'Humans only protoplasm. Must die soon. What difference if now?'"

"I shuddered strongly, and regretted the impulse that had made me mention machinery,

but it was too late now. The thing must be faced.

"Another group of them were for killing me on the spot, but for a different reason. They didn't believe I was telling the truth, and should therefore die as a liar. True, my death would have been useless to them, for my body carried very little oil. (By the way, they considered seals a very desirable breed of protoplasm because of the oil in their blubber.) It was a mad minute, and an uncomfortable one for me, I do assure you. But finally I was questioned particularly about the machinery that we use.

"I DESCRIBED a steam shovel, and how we built it, and for what purpose. They made me tell how long it lasted under our care, and when I mentioned five or ten years, they were angry and shocked. I tried to tell them that a steam shovel could not think or feel, and after a few minutes I felt them in agreement with me.

"Then they wanted to know about other machines we used, and I told them about automobiles, but they weren't interested in them when they found out that they were built only to travel over roads and had no other possible motions or purpose.

"Until I was completely exhausted, they kept me there answering questions and in-

forming them minutely about the servile condition of our machinery. I finally told them about machine shops and powered tools and described an up-to-date power plant, with its hundreds of attendants constantly spending their lives oiling and cleaning and repairing parts, and constructing new and improved pieces of apparatus to replace the old.

"These humans kind to complicated machines, yes?"

"I saw a possible way out, and developed the theme. I described whole generations, son following father and grandson coming after — all working in the same factory and all tending the same power plant. I warmed to the subject and found that without deviating from the strict truth, there must be countless thousands of human beings who actually *did* spend their whole lives tending machinery. I had been talking upon this phase of human life for perhaps ten minutes — scribbling my thoughts out rapidly on the paper — when I was stopped by a roar of mental laughter from the circle of Mech-men. They were enormously amused.

"Human then *thinks* he is master and machine slave! Machine gets fed and tended under that belief! Human even builds new machine and improves year by year. Machines evolving with humans doing all

work! Even if low form of machines on earth now, yet we not trouble help so astute beings!

"I tried to get them to tell me what they meant, but the more I scribbled demands for enlightenment and arguments proving they had the wrong idea entirely, the more they laughed. They all left at once to their duties, and 'Nine' alone remained behind.

"You no see how machines use humans to get food and care?"

"But it is to provide *ourselves* with food and luxuries that we made the machines, and only so long as they work for *us* do we feed them and care for them!"

"Humans must be great fools!" said Nine, and with this preposterous remark, he picked me up and started back across the prairie-like cavern floor where the tunnel mouth showed like a black dot against the mile distant cliff. Then, twenty minutes of mighty uncomfortable traveling until we arrived at the depression that housed the caged animals. Nine set me down, and I looked through the wire mesh for my companion. But Stanley was not even aware of our presence. On hands and knees he was half hidden in the grass. It suddenly struck me that he was still stalking those rabbits! I turned to Nine, and wrote hastily on my pad:

"Other human in the cage is hungry. Please have food and drink brought us!"

"Will do, but wasted on mere protoplasm. Perhaps soon destroy all animals. Too much waste food."

"That was comforting, but without a word, I walked up to the gate and opened it. Nine closed it behind me and latched it once more.

"Can come out but not given food unless in cage. Then starve. So stay cage."

"And with these words of warning, he was about to march away. I scribbled on my pad:

"Wait a moment, Nine! Before you go, tell my why you think humans are fools!"

"He paused a moment. 'Who takes care of machinery? Humans, not so? Who gives oil? Humans! Who gives food to make machinery live? Humans! So humans fools to machinery. Humans slaves to machinery. Mech-men fools if keep feeding animals in cages, too.'

"And without another word that I could catch he turned and set out of sight to the upper level, at the same changeless, untiring gait the Mech-men always used. I walked over to Stanley and his first greeting was a snarl.

"Keep away, you old fool! I nearly had that rabbit then!"

"I THINK HE was out of his head with loneliness and hunger, and the wild impossible circumstances of our position. I thought with sudden contrition that I had been given food and he none. He had had not a bite to eat for forty-eight hours. Then I looked around closely, and saw that only one rabbit was left. He had eaten the other! Eaten it raw, if you please.

"Well, I don't know how many hours I stayed in that cage with Stanley. A Mech-man brought food and water about every twelve hours, and he must have paid us six or seven visits before I got Stanley back into his right mind. I told him all I had learned, but the man refused outright to believe that I had ever talked to a Mech-man, would you believe it?

"But how is it they have sense enough to feed us — and all these other animals?" I would ask.

"I've no doubt they're intelligent," he would answer. "What I doubt is that you have spoken to them, when I could hear there was no word passed between you!"

"And there we had it, and I could never persuade him. I told him that they might, any day, decide not to waste more food on us, but he laughed at that. I did manage to persuade him to save a little food out of each meal's supply, however,

and I got both our water bottles filled (for we carried flasks, both of us — originally filled with brandy in case of accidents).

"Now, did you ever notice that you can look at a thing for hours and then go away from it, and days later something will all of a sudden occur to you that you didn't think you had noticed at the time? It came to me that way, and the thing I found I had noticed without realizing it, was the speed with which the Mech-men walked. It never varied, whether or not they were in a hurry. The speed was about six miles an hour, I should judge. I talked this over with Stanley, and he agreed with me. On this seemingly unimportant thing was based our final escape.

"Stanley had a wrist watch (I had lost mine) which he kept going, and with which we timed our meals. The hours meant nothing to us, for night and day were the same in that soft glare from above. But after what was, I think, the sixth feeding, we waited in vain for the Mech-men to come. Twenty hours had elapsed and the wolves were howling in the next cage, and the great woolly mammoths were trumpeting with their empty bellies rumbling like so many earthquakes.

"We dipped into our store of food and drank a little water as

the hours passed. Then, when the second feeding time elapsed without food, I was certain that we would never be fed again, and Stanley was impressed to the point where he would listen to my plan.

V

"WE HAVE ONE more scant meal left," said I. "We can eat that and then stay here until we starve to death, if we like. But we might as well die escaping, as waiting here. Let's try to get out of these caverns and up to the surface of the earth."

"How can we get clear of the Mech-men? There are no trees to hide behind. We'd be caught sure," said Stanley.

"We can sneak as far as luck takes us, running from pillar to pillar. Then when we are seen — as we will be, sooner or later — we can make an open break for the exit tunnel."

"But can you find your way?"

"I told him that I could, for I never would have persuaded him otherwise. But the truth of the matter was that I could find the tunnel into the first cave easily, but after all that, I only knew the general direction. However, I knew we must escape or die where we were, and anything is better than that. I was starting at once — losing no time at all — but Stanley

was not entirely convinced, and insisted upon waiting one more hour before starting. So we waited it out in full and a few minutes to spare, and then I pushed him out through the gate and we climbed up to the great cavern floor.

"Far away to the right, we saw a group of Mech-men, tiny in the distance, clustered around their atomic power machine, and nearer by showed the mouth of the tunnel. All else was empty of life or landmark. Stanley and I skirted the rim of the depression on our bellies until a row of pillars hid us from the far distant working party, and then we stood up and ran along the row of pillars, stopping at each one to take bearings and regain our breath. In ten minutes we were crouched behind the last pillar and eyeing that tunnel breathlessly.

"Let's go," whispered Stanley, and we ran for it.

"Some inner caution bade me guide us to one side, and I peered around the corner and along the black passage before venturing. After a second to accustom my eyes to the light, I perceived the dot of light at the far end. Then, as I looked, the dot vanished. I whipped about.

"Back to the pillar!" I cried. "Someone has just entered the tunnel!"

"We made that four hundred yards in less than two minutes,

and I held a pocket mirror around its protecting curve, close to the ground, just in time to see four Mech-men come jerkily out onto the plain and turn sharply to the left. They were on their way to the cages! I was an impatient man to be away, then! But we had to wait until they were out of sight, and we sidled around to the far side of the pillar and watched them in the mirror. In a minute or two they were behind the next pillar. 'Run!' I cried.

"We didn't look back, so I don't know whether they saw us or not. Into the tunnel mouth we popped and raced to the far end. Then we stopped and used the mirror to spy. As luck would have it, we could see nothing to alarm us, and a mile or two toward the right, I could see the cavern wall reaching up out of sight. I knew that our escape must be in this direction, and at my word, we both raced out of the tunnel and away.

"We passed two pillars before we saw them: twenty or more Mech-men were almost upon us—about fifty feet to the left of our course. We swerved sharply and ran harder than ever, and they after us. After a few seconds, I glanced behind and breathed easier, for we were easily distancing them.

"'No need to work so hard,' I panted to my young friend, but he cried out, 'Hurry up, you old

fool!' and ran harder than ever. Then I saw our real danger. Two Mech-men were walking along to head us off. It was like a nightmare, for they never change their speed and seemed so inhumanly cold about the pursuit. We dodged the two, though I misjudged the length of their tentacles, which would have tripped me if I had not jumped into the air in time.

"WE WERE CLOSE to the wall now, and raced along beside it for less than two hundred yards before I saw the welcome tunnel mouth that would lead us to safety. Into it we stumbled, breathless, with a hundred Mech-men pursuing us at the same unvarying gait. Stanley glanced over his shoulder, and it struck him as amusing, for he laughed out loud at the sight. I didn't laugh. I was wondering if we could find the way to the outer door. As I trotted along, I was trying to lay plans. It would be dark, and I had no flashlight.

"'Have you a match?' I asked Stanley pantingly.

"'None,' he answered at once. 'I looked for one back in the cage when I wanted a fire to roast that rabbit I caught.'

"I felt in my own pockets as we ran, and found one caught in the lining of the right-hand coat pocket, which I fished out and tucked into my vest. It was get-

ting inky black by now, and we could scarcely make out where the tunnall walls were, but kept on at a half trot, for we could hear metal feet thumping far behind in the tunnall, and the sound set my heart to pounding. Then the last glimmer died away suddenly, and we stopped. I struck a match on my shoe. We had come to the entrance. There before us was the metal door, and set in the wall beside it were two levers. Stanley rushed to them and my match went out. In the blackness, I seemed to hear the pursuit much louder. Stanley swore to himself a moment.

"'Hurry and open the door!' I cried in a fury of impatience and fear.

But Stanley only grunted, and I rushed over and fought with him to get at the things, before I go hold of myself. I stopped suddenly.

"There must be a combination," I said.

"Keep quiet, he answered. 'It's timing, do you hear that wheel turning?'

"I listened hard and heard a sort of grinding scrape ending in a click. Then Stanley pulled the other lever and we could hear a double grinding which ended in another click. Meanwhile, the Mech-men were approaching uncomfortably close: *thump, thump, thump*, back in the tunnel, and the sweat of fear poured down my face.

"'Hurry!' I groaned.

"Stanly groaned in answer, as desperate as I. 'I'll push them both back and try it over again,' he muttered. Then he gave a shout, for a crack of blinding white light showed. The crack widened every second — terribly slow — and the feet sounded as if the Mech-men would be upon us any instant, for we could see back into the tunnel but a foot. Stanley wedged himself into the opening hard enough to break a rib, as we found out afterwards, and with a gasp was through and I pushing hard behind.

"Oh, the sight of that sunlit snow! And the feeling of that crisp frozen air! It sent new life through us, and we raced across the bottom of the cavity that our dynamite had made, and were climbing up the far side, when the Mech-men started pouring out of the doorway after us, tentacles outstretched to grasp. Our legs and hands went like pistons on that short glissade, with life measured by the hundredth of a second. Stanley slipped once and fell back on me, but as luck would have it, one of my feet was against a boulder at the moment and we didn't fall. Ten feet below, the waiting tentacle was reaching for my tingling toes!

"THEN WE WERE up on the surface and clear! We both gave a cheer with what breath we

had left, and made off for the airplane at a slow trot, breathing heavily. But those Mech-men had not given up, by any means! Right after us they came over the snow, and suddenly Stanley started running at full speed again.

"Suppose we can't get the engine started!" he cried back.

"That set me running hard, I can tell you, and we had two hundred yards lead when Stanley climbed aboard ahead of me. When I came up to the ship, he called out, 'Stay down there and help me turn the prop!'

"I had never done that job before, but he called out directions. As he watched, I seized the upper part of one blade and, standing to the rear and to one side, heaved it with all my strength. It spun a minute and the motors coughed three or four times and then died! A glance over my shoulder showed the snow black with advancing mechanical creatures! I tried again, and once again before the motors broke into a full roar, I dodged around the advancing wheel and tried to grab a strut to climb aboard.

"I missed and the ship kept on going, faster and faster. I was running hard now and had to run even even if I didn't want to get on the ship, for the Mech-men were hard upon me! The ship gathered speed and finally

took to the air, leaving me on the ground.

"I kept running, though I was completely exhausted and terrified at the thought that Stanley might fly back to civilization without me. I had visions of days and nights spent half walking and half running, trying to keep out of reach of the pursuing Mech-men as long as I had the strength! I foresaw the inevitable ultimate finish of that race with death, for the Mech-men would keep up their unchanging six miles an hour forever! Then the plane circled back low over my head and Stanley waved a signal which I took to mean more speed. I was gaining fast on my pursuers. Their great weight sank in the snow, and their footing slipped in each stride. I ran as hard as I could, and felt my heart swell up and my eyes pulsed red and a great roaring commenced in my ears. The roaring grew louder and louder and the airplane landed at high speed not fifty feet to my left. I raced on, trying to catch up, and it rolled at a slow pace and taxied ahead. I was gaining rapidly. With a last effort, that left me completely exhausted, I felt my hands close on a strut and felt Stanley pull me hastily inside. Then the motors roared full blast, and I must have fainted.

"It was half an hour later when I came to my senses. Stan-

ley was sitting half asleep over his wheel. I glanced overside, and saw that we had reached the coast and were well on our way back to the gasoline cache on Hundson Bay.

"Well," I said. "This will make them sit up and take notice back in New York!"

"Will, eh?" he grunted.

"Man alive," I cried. "It's an enormous story! Even the two mammoths alone, are news of the very first rank!"

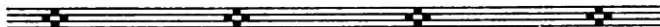
"Look here, Colonel Marsh," said Stanley awkwardly. "I dare say you are right and all that, but I don't want people calling me a liar all the rest of my life. You can go as far as you like with your own story, but . . . er, but I didn't see any of it, understand? And if you say anything about those machines I'll simply deny it."

"AND WHAT do you think of that?" said the red - faced Colonel to me as we sat in the Stranger Club. "Not another word would he speak to me until we got back to New York. Plead as I might, he refused to back

me up in any part of my story! I tried to get the government interested, but they wanted proof and you see I couldn't give even corroborative evidence. That finished me. I haven't told a word to anyone from that day to this — and I shan't. You're a writer chap, and perhaps you can make a tale of it. But don't mention my name if you can help—Oh pshaw! what difference! Even if you do use my name, no one will believe you."

I wanted to ask questions, but just then another member entered—Jean LaBert of Marseilles (he has quite a reputation down in French Africa) — and the Colonel waggled a warning eyebrow and raised an admonitory finger to bind my silence. When next we met, he refused even to discuss the matter—so here is the story, all there is of it and all there is ever likely to be.

Unless, some day, the Mech-men decide upon another exploration of the world with a view to seeing for themselves what treatment our machinery is receiving . . . and if they do . . . !



Was It A Dream?

by Guy de Maupassant

Henrie Rene Albert Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), one of the world's masters of the short story, was not, as legend has had it, related to Gustave Flaubert. The elder man was a friend of de Maupassant's mother, and was a mentor to the younger, whose first volume of poems, published in 1880, brought him afoul of the law, as Flaubert himself had run with *Madame Bovary*. The success of his first published short story, *Boule de suif*, convinced him that here (rather than poetry, wherein his lack of aptitude for verbal melody was serious) was his proper medium.

His supreme talent was observation; he is the last of the naturalists — last, because, as had been noted, he did everything that could be done with this manner of writing, which essentially has no ideas, no prejudices, no artistic theories, no psychology, and in the end, very little imagination. He reports; he does not evaluate. He finds all men alike and does not discriminate or show any preference between the good and the bad; his one interest seems to be journalistic — to uncover what lies beneath the surface of human appearances, the skeleton in the closet.

In the hands of a master, this makes for fascination and amusement. There is a sameness about his stories, yet the variety of human folly and the deception of human surfaces is such that he does not grow tiresome. For what he offers, then, de Maupassant is unsurpassable, and the present tale is as good as an introduction to him as any. There is no great horror in this little graveyard story — that is, no horror of the sensational, blood-freezing sort. Yet, there are many kinds of horror; and we invite you to ponder at the thought of finding yourself revealed as are the dead in this tale.

I HAD LOVED her madly!

Why does one love? Why does one love? How queer it is to see only one being in the world, to have only one thought in one's mind, only one desire in the heart and only one name on the lips — a name which comes up continually, rising, like the water in a spring, from the depths of the soul to the lips, a name which one repeats over and over again, which one whispers ceaselessly, everywhere, like a prayer.

I am going to tell you our story, for love has only one, which is always the same. I met her and lived on her tenderness, on her caresses, in her arms, in her dresses, on her words, so completely wrapped up, bound and absorbed in everything which came from her that I no longer cared whether it was day or night, or whether I was dead or alive. on this old earth of ours.

And then she died. How? I do not know; I no longer know anything. But one evening she came home wet, for it was raining heavily, and the next day she coughed, and she coughed for about a week and took to her bed. What happened I do not remember now, but doctors came, wrote, and went away. Medicines were brought, and some women made her drink them. Her hands were hot, her forehead was burning, and her eyes were bright and

sad. When I spoke to her she answered me, but I do not remember what we said. I have forgotten everything, everything, everything! She died, and I very well remember her slight, feeble sigh. The nurse said: 'Ah!' and I understood; I understood!

I knew nothing more, nothing. I saw a priest who said: 'Your mistress?' And it seemed to me as if he were insulting her. As she was dead, nobody had the right to say that any longer, and I turned him out. Another came who was very kind and tender, and I shed tears when he spoke to me about her.

They consulted me about the funeral, but I do not remember anything that they said, though I recollect the coffin and the sound of the hammer when they nailed her down in it. Oh! God, God!

She was buried! In that hole! Some people came — female friends. I made my escape and ran away. I ran and then walked through the streets, went home and the next day started on a journey.

YESTERDAY I returned to Paris and when I saw my room again — our room, our bed, our furniture, everything that remains of the life of a human being after death — I was seized by such a violent attack of fresh grief that I felt like

opening the window and throwing myself out into the street. I could not remain any longer among these things, between these walls which had enclosed and sheltered her, which retained a thousand atoms of her, of her skin and of her breath, in their imperceptible crevices. I took up my hat to make an escape, and just as I reached the door I passed the large glass in the hall, which she had put there so that she might look at herself every day from head to foot, as she went out, to see if her toilet looked well and was correct and pretty, from her little boots to her bonnet.

I stopped short in front of that looking-glass in which she had so often been reflected — so often, that it must have retained her reflection. I was standing there trembling, with my eyes fixed on the glass — on that flat, profound, empty glass — which had contained her entirely and had possessed her as much as I, as my passionate looks had. I felt as if I loved that glass. I touched it; it was cold. Oh, the recollection! Sorrowful mirror, burning mirror, horrible mirror, to make men suffer such torments! Happy is the man whose heart forgets everything that it has contained, everything that has passed before it, everything that has looked at itself in it or has been reflected in its af-

fection, in its love! How I suffer!

I went out without knowing it, without wishing it, and towards the cemetery. I found her simple grave, a white marble cross, with these few words:

She loved, was loved, and died.

She is there below, decayed! How horrible! I sobbed with my forehead on the ground, and I stopped there for a long time, a long time. Then I saw that it was getting dark, and a strange, mad wish, the wish of a despairing lover, seized me. I wished to pass the night, the last night, in weeping on her grave. But I should be seen and driven out. How was I to manage? I was cunning and got up and began to roam about in that city of the dead. I walked and walked. How small this city is in comparison with the other, the city in which we live. And yet how much more numerous the dead are than living. We need high houses, wide streets and much more room for the four generations which see the daylight at the same time, drink water from the spring and wine from the vines, and eat bread from the plains.

And for all the generations of dead, for all that ladder of humanity that has descended down to us, there is scarcely

anything, scarcely anything! The earth takes them back, and oblivion effaces them. Adieu!

At the end of the cemetery, I suddenly perceived that I was in its oldest part, where those who had been dead a long time are mingling with the soil, where the crosses themselves are decayed, where possibly newcomers will be put tomorrow. It is full of untended roses, of strong and dark cypress trees — a sad and beautiful garden, nourished on human flesh.

I was alone, perfectly alone. So I crouched under a green tree and hid myself there completely amid the thick and sombre branches. I waited, clinging to the trunk as a shipwrecked man does to a plank.

WHEN IT WAS quite dark, I left my refuge and began to walk softly, slowly, inaudibly, through that ground full of dead people. I wandered about for a long time, but could not find her tomb again. I went on with extended arms, knocking against the tombs with my hands, my feet, my knees, my chest, even with my head, without being able to find her. I groped about like a blind man seeking his way; I felt the stones the crosses, the iron railings, the metal wreaths, and the wreaths of faded flowers! I read the names with my fingers, by passing them over the let-

ters. What a night! What a night! I could not find her again!

There was no moon. What a night! I was frightened, horribly frightened in those narrow paths between two rows of graves. Graves! Graves! Graves! Nothing but graves! On my right, on my left, in front of me, around me, everywhere there were graves! I sat down on one of them, for I could not walk any longer; my knees were so weak. I could hear my heart beat! And I heard something else as well. What? A confused, nameless noise. Was the noise in my head, in the impenetrable night, or beneath the mysterious earth, the earth sown with human corpses? I looked all around me, but I cannot say how long I remained there; I was paralyzed with terror, cold with fright, ready to shout out, ready to die.

Suddenly, it seemed to me that the slab of marble on which I was sitting was moving. Certainly it was moving, as if it were being raised. With a bound I sprang on to the neighboring tomb, and I saw, yes, I distinctly saw, the stone which I had just quitted rise upright. Then the dead person appeared, a naked skeleton, pushing the stone back with its bent back. I saw it quite clearly, although the night was so dark. On the cross I could read:

Here lies Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He loved his family, was kind and honorable, and died in the grace of the Lord.

The dead man also read what was inscribed on the tombstone; then he picked up a stone off the path, a little, pointed stone, and began to scrape the letters carefully. He slowly effaced them, and with the hollows of his eyes he looked at the place where they had been engraved. Then with the tip of the bone that had been his forefinger, he wrote in luminous letters, like those lines which boys trace on walls with the tip of a lucifer match:

Here reposes Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He hastened his father's death by his unkindness, as he wished to inherit his fortune; he tortured his wife, tormented his children, deceived his neighbors, robbed everyone he could, and died wretched.

When he had finished writing, the dead man stood motionless, looking at his work. On turning around I saw that all the graves were open, that all of the dead bodies had emerged from them and that all had effaced the lines inscribed on the gravestones by their relations, substituting the truth instead. And I saw that all had been the tormentors of their

neighbors — malicious, dishonest, hypocrites, liars, rogues, calumniators, envious; that they had stolen, deceived, performed every disgraceful, every abominable action, these good fathers, these faithful wives, these devoted sons, these chaste daughters, these honest tradesmen, these men and women who were called irreproachable. They were all writing at the same time, on the threshold of their eternal abode, the truth, the terrible, and the holy truth, of which everybody was ignorant, or pretended to be ignorant, while they were alive

I thought that *she* also must have written something on her tombstone; and now, running without any fear among the half-open coffins, among the corpses and skeletons, I went towards her, sure that I should find her immediately. I recognized her at once without seeing her face, which was covered by the winding sheet; and on the marble cross where shortly before I had read:

She loved, was loved and died.

I now saw:

Having gone out in the rain one day in order to deceive her lover, she caught cold and died.

It appears that they found me at daybreak, lying on the grave, unconscious.

Under The Hau Tree

by Katherine Yates

In the "Index by Author," volume two of T. L. G. Cockcroft's *Index to the Weird-Fiction Magazines* (about which we told you in our June issue) only one name appears under the letter "Y" — Katherine Yates. And that is all that we can tell you about this author. The story itself appeared in 1925, and while we did not read it until a bit more than 30 years later, the quiet strangeness of it remained with us.

THE WOMAN was stringing scarlet wili-wili seeds into a barbaric necklace. The man was tossing over a basket of unmounted kodak prints, with now and then a perfunctory comment. The drooping branches of the hau tree shut out the glare of the late afternoon sun, and the fluttering leaves were backgrounded by a purple-blue horizon from which long lines of white surf came rolling in, curling nearer and nearer until they washed softly up the sand

to the very foot of the hau tree, and then slid silently back beneath the oncoming white edge just behind. Four or five wee, tawny Hawaiian children had gathered under the shoreward end of the pier where, with much giggling and splashing, they had discarded their holokus and overalls and were padding joyously in the clear water, carefully out of range of the hotel office.

The man continued to toss over the prints idly. Suddenly

he stopped and bent forward over one of them with a gasp of astonishment. "Where did you get that?" he exclaimed, turning quickly upon the woman.

She glanced up from her beads. "I took it," she said carelessly.

"No, no, I mean this one!" and he thrust the picture into her face.

"Certainly, I see," she said, still carelessly. "I said that I took it — photographed it."

"You couldn't have." The man's eyes, full of incredulity, stared at her and then at the picture, and then back at her again.

She nodded her head. "I did," she said.

"When did you take it?" he asked harshly.

"When? Oh, about three weeks ago, the morning they went away." The woman tied the thread of the necklace and then wrapped the long line of red around and around her white throat like three scarlet gashes.

The man leaned nearer. "Here? They were here?"

"Yes. See, they posed under that coconut tree over there, the one with the monstera vine swinging down."

The man turned and gazed at the tree and at the great leaves of the swinging, swaying vine, and his finger touched the picture where the same

giant spray swayed over the heads of the two. His face showed utter incredulity.

Again he turned to his companion, trying to curb his excitement. "What was their name?" he asked.

The woman opened her lips to speak, then stopped. "That is odd," she said. "I supposed that I always thought of them by name; I was just going to speak it and then," with a light laugh, "it didn't come. I shall think of it in a moment. Wait. It was . . . It was . . . Let me see. It began with an A. No . . . Yes . . . I think it began with an A. Oh, well, I can't recall it now. I'll tell you when it comes to me. There's no hurry, is there?"

"Yes, there is, there is!" said the man vehemently. "I want to know the name."

The woman put up her head. "Then you will have to go to the office and ask; I can't remember. What in the world is there so exciting about them, anyway?" The woman was not accustomed to sharing attention with anyone, least of all with a mere photograph.

The man got up, dumped the basket of prints into the chair, and started across the lawn, under the banyan tree, toward the hotel entrance.

The woman looked after him and then at the basket. Then she arose quietly, placed the box of red seeds upon her own

chair, picked up the photograph from the basket and followed him into the hotel. At the desk she found him sputtering. The quiet, efficient, Chinese clerk was unable to recall the persons whom he described. "There are so many coming and going all the time," he explained, shaking his head and spreading his hands deprecatingly.

The man began to sputter again, whereat the woman approached and laid the print upon the desk. "What was their name, Ah Fat?" she asked.

"Ooh — oh, yes!" The clerk smiled with recognition. "Why, that was Mr. and Mrs. — ah-h —" tapping the desk impatiently with his pencil; "Mr. and Mrs. . . . Wait, it's here on the register. They came here about — let me see — about the middle of March. Let — me — see . . ." fluttering the leaves of the register and running his finger down the columns.

The man fidgeted, the woman wrinkled her brow in thought, pressing a loop of the wili-wili seeds against her lips. The man glanced at her and turned his face away.

"That's queer," said the clerk; "I don't find the name. I'd know it if I saw it," and he turned the pages back again, doubtfully. "I wonder what boat they came on."

"They came from the Orient," said the woman.

"Yes. Then they came in on the — on the . . ." and he turned to the schedule of the March boats from the Orient. "They must have come on the *Korea*." And then to the register again: "Here are the *Korea* people: Foster, Martin, Cudahy, Abercrombie . . . Now what is this name?" bending closer, "I can't make out the writing."

The woman leaned forward. "Tourtillotte. No, those were not the ones; I remember the Tourtillottes."

The clerk's finger continued on down the column, to no purpose; then he called the Number One bell-boy. "Ming, what was the name of these people?" holding up the photograph.

The boy shook his head. "Don't remember."

The man turned upon him. "Then think. Try." He rattled the silver in his pocket and the China boy's face took on an expression of real effort — vain effort, it was evident.

"What room did they have?" asked the clerk.

Again the boy shook his head. "I think second floor — no, third floor — 312 maybe. I don't know."

"You remember them, don't you?" asked the woman, impatiently.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes! Don't know what room. I think third floor somewhere."

The man turned angrily back to the desk. "Where's the manager?" he asked.

In a moment the manager stepped smilingly from the private office. The woman at last finding the man's eagerness infectious, bent forward, holding out the print. "I can't for the life of me, remember the name of these people," she said. "Who were they?"

The manager took the print and nodded his recognition. "Oh, yes, that was Mr. and Mrs. . . . Well, that's funny. Ah Fat, what was the name of these people?"

The quiet clerk smiled and shook his head with a little protesting movement of his yellow hands.

The manager snapped his fingers. "Oh, I know the name just as well as I know my own; but I just can't speak it for the moment; and he began to flutter the leaves of the register. "They came by way of the Orient and were here for three or four weeks — why, they just went away a short time ago. Well, isn't that strange, that I can't think of their name? The woman had a white scar on her neck. A queer, old-fashioned little thing, she was, and sort of sweet-pretty, too. Let me see, we must have passed that name a half dozen times here, and I was sure that I would recognize it at a glance.

The man turned and looked at the woman strangely, then he faced the desk again. "You

can't any of you remember their names nor where they roomed, nor find it on your books; and they gone only three weeks!" he said with exasperated incredulity.

The manager began to speak, but the woman broke in; "But I can't remember, either," she said; "and I don't have nearly so much to think of as they do — not nearly."

The strange look remained in the man's face; it was a whiteness, almost a grayness, and his eyes looked curiously dusky. He turned to the woman and took hold of her arm. "Never mind," he said, in a strained voice. "Let us go back to the hau tree."

PRESENTLY the woman's white fingers were playing with the scarlet seeds again; raising them and dropping them in red drops into a white fold of her dress, with a little drip, drip, drip — over and over and over. The man, leaning far back in the low chair, his eyes away beyond the purple-blue horizon, shielded them from the shimmer of the red drops and was silent. After a long time he spoke, and his voice had returned to its habitual level calmness. "Tell me about those people," he said.

She raised a handful of the seeds and let them fall in a slow stream from her fingers. "There isn't much to tell," she

said; "only they were queer people. They came from the Orient, as I said; had been around the world, and reached here about the middle of March. They saw everything and 'did' everything, just as all of the tourists do: went to Haleiwa for a few days, and to Hauula to see the sacred gorge, and to the volcano; and then they went away, just as the rest do."

"In what way were they 'queer'?" asked the man.

"Well — they were sort of Rip Van Winkles," said the woman. "That is the only way that I can describe them. They had been asleep for exactly twenty years."

"Twenty years?" said the man, sharply.

"Yes, just twenty years. I know because her clothes were exactly like my aunt's wedding clothes; this is 1924, and Auntie was married just twenty years ago, and kept her whole trousseau for sentiment's sake. She let us take some dresses once, for an 'old times party', and they were exactly like this woman's clothes; the same sleeves, shirred in two places and with a wide lace ruffle at the elbow, and the skirts gathered all the way around the waist, and the same bolero jacket effects, and little ruffy things; and she wore her hair in the same little smooth waves like Auntie's pictures; and her

face was small and sweet, and she spoke in a soft, thin, rusty little voice; and little things were so important. I remember she had some spots on the shoulder of her gray traveling suit — there, you can see them in the picture, that carnation lei doesn't quite cover them — and she wouldn't send it to the cleaner's for fear he would spoil the dress; but she must wait until she got home, so that she could take them out with some sort of a cleaning fluid that her grandmother had given her the recipe for. And the spots worried her so; she kept dabbing at them with her handkerchief as if she could wipe them off."

The man shifted his position. The woman was again dropping scarlet seeds one by one, through her fingers into the scarlet pool on her dress. The man watched them, strangely. Then he covered his eyes with his hand. "Go on" he said.

"She wasn't young — thirty-four or thirty-five I should think; and for all that her face was sweet and happy, yet she always had an expression of — of . . ." The woman hesitated.

"Of waiting!" said the man.

"Yes," said the woman; "that was it, always an expression of waiting — patiently, not anxiously — just waiting, as if it had grown to be a habit. I think that is all there is to tell. I talked to her now and then,

and she was always ready to talk, in her quiet, quaint little way; and sometimes she would be a bit embarrassed and her thin, white little hand would go up to her coral necklace: such an odd, old-fashioned necklace made of festoons of tiny red coral blocks caught together here and there to hold the many strands in place, and a curious large pendant of overlapping coral leaves. It must have been very old. She said it had belonged to her grandmother."

"You talked to her often?" asked the man. "What did she talk about?"

"Oh, I don't remember. She was the kind of woman who never says anything to be remembered. We just talked."

"And the man?"

The woman tossed a handful of scarlet seeds into the air, to fall back and slide down among the others. "Of just the same period," she said. "Twenty years back. He had a sort of drooping mustache and wore his hair brushed up like Uncle's when he was married. And his trousers were too short and too tight, and the toes of his shoes were thin, and his neckties were — funny."

"Did they tell you where they came from?" asked the man.

"Why, yes, from the Orient, I told you. They had been around the world."

"I mean, what was their home town?"

"Oh, I don't remember. I don't know that they ever said — but I think that it was a small Middle West town somewhere in — Ohio — Illinois — I don't know."

The man sat still with his eyes shaded. The woman arranged the scarlet seeds in patterns on her dress where it drew smoothly over the knee. The surf washed softly up the sand and slid silently back. The little children had gone away and the shadows of the cocofronds were long and very quiet.

Presently the woman spoke. "Well?" she said.

The man was silent for a few minutes longer; then, without lifting his shading fingers, he began.

"THEY LIVED in my town. He was my uncle, my mother's brother. His father kept a small bookstore — books, pictures and plush goods — you know the sort."

The woman nodded her head reminiscently.

"He took charge of the store when his father died; he was sixteen then. His mother died two years after. He was the only one of the family left. He had always intended to marry Jennie. She was his sweetheart when they were mere babies, before he was eight years old.

When he was eight, his uncle had come back from around the world and the boy sat on the stiff black haircloth sofa and listened. When his uncle caught the look in his big eyes, he drew him over and stood him between his knees and asked him what he was going to do when he was a man. 'Marry Jennie and go round the world on our wedding tour,' he answered.

"And that was his one end and aim from that time on. He and Jennie discussed the trip then with gravity and eagerness and perfect confidence; for they *knew* that they were going, when Joseph was grown up. No one ever called him Joe; he was too earnest. He was my Uncle Joseph.

"When the store was all his, he began putting away every possible cent toward the tour; for he and Jennie had made up their minds that no matter how long they had to wait, they would not marry until they had saved enough for the journey.

"It is slow saving much money in a little store in a little back-number town; but they never faltered. Jennie did 'hand-painted china' which sold in the store at Christmas time; and hot-poker work; and taught classes to do prim little water-colors with green woolly trees and white woolly waves, and gray woolly rocks, and wooden

sheep and cattle and Noah's ark sort of people. I have some of them at home."

The woman tossed the beads together in her lap. "And then?" she said.

"And between times they studied maps and itineraries, and read history and travels, so as to be prepared to get the most out of the trip. There were years and years of this; good years, when quite a lot was added to the little hoard in the bank; bad years, when there were floods and fires and the need of new roofs, when the hoard was drawn upon. When Jennie was thirty she began making her trousseau. They thought that it would be only about two years more; and I used to go and sit with her and watch her work upon the dainty challis and summer-silk and lawn dresses. She made them all herself and — and gathered the sleeves in little lines of gathers with puffs between, and gathered in the skirts all around, and little ruffles for the trimmings on the shoulders."

The woman stopped playing with the beads and leaned forward. "And then?"

"Well, it wasn't just *two* years, it was five. Uncle Joseph was sick for three months and had to hire a clerk and pay doctors' bills and — it was five years. I helped Jennie pick out the gray alpaca for her travel-

ing dress. I was fourteen then; I am thirty-four now; and she and Uncle Joseph were my dearest friends. I had spent hours with them over maps and railroad guides and steamship schedules, ever since I could remember; and now to be really helping to pick out the traveling dress for that wonderful journey — wedding dress and traveling dress in one — it was marvelous.”

“And they went then?”

“They were married one morning in May; Uncle Joseph gave me Grandfather’s watch that morning; and I bade them goodbye at the church door — I didn’t dare to go to the station with them, but I ran home and hid in the orchard for hours — long, long after I heard their train whistle for the crossing. By and by I heard a horse come galloping wildly down the road. I sat up in the grass.”

The man straightened in his chair. The sun was setting out by the point of the Waianae Range and the water had turned to orange and crimson, and there were orange and crimson flecks in the clear sky above the gray-black streak on the horizon, and on the woman’s white dress, and in her eyes as she bent forward.

“The rider said that there had been an accident to the morning train. Some of the cars were burned. They were sending a wrecking train.

“I ran to the station and flung myself aboard just as the train pulled out. There was no time to stop to put me off.” The man waited a moment. “There had been a collision with a freight train. The cars had all burned but one, the passenger car, and that had been wrecked. Those who had been taken out were lying on the smooth grass along the side of the right-of-way. I found Uncle Joseph propped against a big rock and Jennie was half leaning, half lying against him. There were three red gashes across her throat, and she was trying to wipe the spots from the shoulder of her traveling frock, with her handkerchief — weak, ineffectual, artificial little movements — with no expression in her eyes.”

The sun had gone down, and the early gray twilight lent to the scarlet hibiscus blossoms behind the hau tree that strange, innate red glow of scarlet at early twilight; lent it to them, and to the lines of scarlet wili-wili beads across the white throat, dripping down into the pool of scarlet in the folds of her white dress. The man’s eyes rested upon them, fascinated. “She made only a few movements after I came, such poor little useless movements — and then — it was over.”

“You mean that she died?”

said the woman, in a strained voice.

"Yes, she died then."

"And the man?"

"Uncle Joseph was leaning back against the rock and breathing only once in a great while, and looking at her — just looking at her. And when the little movements stopped, he looked up at me; he hadn't looked at me before, but he knew that I was there. He spoke just once before he died."

The woman leaned nearer and the loop of red beads dripped from her neck. "And he said?"

"He said, with a little half smile and a movement of his finger against her cheek — 'It — isn't the end. I — I've got to begin all over again somewhere — somehow — but — *I'm going*

to take Jennie around the world yet.'"

The woman shivered. The man drew out his watch and opened the back of the case. "The picture was taken on the way to the station on their wedding day," he said. "The photographer turned it over to me."

The woman bent forward and took the watch and turned it to the last gleam of the after-glow. The loop of cold scarlet beads fell against his hand and he drew it away sharply.

Presently the woman laid the watch on the arm of the chair and glanced about quickly at the gathering shadows in the twisted trunk of the hau tree and along the wet sand. "Let us go in," she said, breathlessly; "let us go in where the lights are."

Announcement

Elsewhere in this issue, you will find a verse by Robert E. Howard. This is not a reprint; it is one of several of Howard's verses, unpublished heretofore, which we have arranged to run in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, as space permits. And we shall have another announcement of interest to Howard fans in our next issue.

Rattle Of Bones

by Robert E. Howard

(author of *Skulls in the Stars*)

"'Barbarism is the natural state of mankind,' the borderer said, still staring somberly at the Cimmerian. 'Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph.'"

Thus ends Robert E. Howard's short novel (or long novelet, if you prefer) of Conan, the Barbarian, *Beyond the Black River*. The theme is one that runs through nearly all of the Howard stories, sometimes disguised, sometimes explicit. I think he believed it; I think that the fact he believed it is one of the reasons why his tales of Conan, Solomon Kane, King Kull, Bran Mak Morn, and others, with all their faults, are convincing, while L. Sprague de Camp, a far more skillful writer, is not convincing when he tries to continue the series, or re-work various Howard tales into the Conan series. De Camp knows that this is all nonsense; he plays the game for the fun of it, and he's one fine player; his entries in the game are fun to read. But they lack the element of charisma which could write a sentence like the one we quoted above, and really mean it — just as all other imitations of Conan have lacked this essential ingredient.

In the Solomon Kane stories, the underlying philosophy is somewhat disguised, as it is in the other series to a certain extent. I suspect that Howard never went back to his earlier characters, once Conan had caught on with the readers of *WEIRD TALES*, because in Conan he had, at last, found his ideal voice.

We have received numerous requests to reprint some of the Conan tales; but since the series (originally put into hard covers by Gnome Press) is due to appear in soft covers, and the first of them may be available by the time you read this, we have decided to heed the requests for the earlier tales first. We hope to switch to King Kull, then Bran Mak Morn; then possibly more of the Solomon Kane stories, with perhaps some of the outstanding non-series tales interspersed. If, however, a majority of you (those of you who write to us with your requests) still want Conan, we will do what we can to offer him to you.

"LANDLORD, HO!" The shout broke the lowering silence and reverberated through the black forest with sinister echoing.

"This place hath a forbidding aspect, meseemth."

Two men stood in front of the forest tavern. The building was low, long and rambling, built of heavy logs. Its small windows were heavily barred and the door was closed. Above the door its sinister sign showed faintly — a cleft skull.

This door swung slowly open and a bearded face peered out. The owner of the face stepped back and motioned his guests to enter — with a grudging gesture it seemed. A candle gleamed on a table; a flame smoldered in the fireplace.

"Your names?"

"Solomon Kane," said the taller man briefly.

"Gaston l'Armon," the other spoke curtly. **"But what is that to you?"**

"Strangers are few in the Black Forest," grunted the host, **"bandits many. Sit at yonder table and I will bring food."**

The two men sat down, with the bearing of men who have traveled far. One was a tall gaunt man, clad in a featherless hat and somber black garments, which set off the dark pallor of his forbidding face. The other was of a different type entirely, bedecked with

lace and plumes, although his finery was somewhat stained from travel. He was handsome in a bold way, and his restless eyes shifted from side to side, never still an instant.

The host brought wine and food to the rough-hewn table and then stood back in the shadows, like a somber image. His features, now receding into vagueness, now luridly etched in the firelight as it leaped and flickered, were masked in a beard which seemed almost animal-like in thickness. A great nose curved above this beard and two small red eyes stared unblinkingly at his guests.

"Who are you?" suddenly asked the younger man.

"I am the host of the Cleft Skull Tavern," sullenly replied the other. His tone seemed to challenge his questioner to ask further.

"Do you have many guests?" l'Armon pursued.

"Few come twice," the host grunted.

Kane started and glanced up straight into those small red eyes, as if he sought for some hidden meaning in the host's words. The flaming eyes seemed to dilate, then dropped sullenly before the Englishman's cold stare.

"I'm for bed," said Kane abruptly, bringing his meal to a close. **"I must take up my journey by daylight."**

"And I," added the Frenchman. "Host, show us to our chambers."

Black shadows wavered on the walls as the two followed their silent host down a long, dark hall. The stocky, broad body of their guide seemed to grow and expand in the light of the small candle which he carried, throwing a long, grim shadow behind him.

At a certain door he halted, indicating that they were to sleep there. They entered; the host lit a candle with the one he carried, then lurched back the way he had come.

In the chamber the two men glanced at each other. The only furnishings of the room were a couple of bunks, a chair or two and a heavy table.

"Let us see if there be any way to make fast the door," said Kane. "I like not the looks of mine host."

"There are racks on door and jamb for a bar," said Gaston, "but no bar."

"We might break up the table and use its pieces for a bar," mused Kane.

"*Mon Dieu*," said l'Armon, "you are timorous, *m'sieu*."

Kane scowled. "I like not being murdered in my sleep," he answered gruffly.

"My faith!" the Frenchman laughed. "We are chance met — until I overtook you on the forest road an hour before sun-

set, we had never seen each other."

"I have seen you somewhere before, answered Kane, "though I cannot now recall where. As for the other, I assume every man is an honest fellow until he shows me he is a rogue; moreover I am a light sleeper and slumber with pistol at hand."

The Frenchman laughed again. "I was wondering how *m'sieu* could bring himself to sleep in the room with a stranger! Hal Hal All right, *m'sieu* Englishman, let us go forth and take a bar from one of the other rooms."

Taking the candle with them, they went into the corridor. Utter silence reigned and the small candle twinkled redly and evilly in the thick darkness.

"Mine host hath neither guests nor servants" muttered Solomon Kane. "A strange tavern! What is the name, now? These German words come not easily to me — the Cleft Skull? A bloody name, i'faith."

They tried the rooms next to theirs, but no bar rewarded their search. At last they came to the last room at the end of the corridor. They entered. It was furnished like the rest, except that the door was provided with a small barred opening, and fastened from the outside with a heavy bolt, which was secured at one end to the door-

jamb. They raised the bolt and looked in.

"There should be an outer window, but there is not," muttered Kane. "Look!"

The floor was stained darkly. The walls and the one bunk were hacked in places, great splinters having been torn away.

"Men have died in here," said Kane, somberly. "Is yonder not a bar fixed in the wall?"

"Aye, but 'tis made fast," said the Frenchman, tugging at it. "The . . ."

A SECTION OF the wall swung back and Gaston gave a quick exclamation. A small, secret room was revealed, and the two men bent over the grisly thing that lay upon its floor.

"The skeleton of a man!" said Gaston. "And behold, how his bony leg is shackled to the floor! He was imprisoned here and died."

"Nay," said Kane, "the skull is cleft — methinks mine host had a grim reason for the name of his hellish tavern. This man, like us, was no doubt a wanderer who fell into the fiend's hands."

"Likely," said Gaston without interest; he was engaged in idly working the great iron ring from the skeleton's leg bones. Failing in this, he drew his sword and with an exhibition of remarkable strength,

cut the chain which joined the ring on the leg to a ring set deep in the log floor.

"Why should he shackle a skeleton to the floor?" mused the Frenchman. "*Morbleu!* 'Tis a waste of good chain. Now, *m'sieu*," he ironically addressed the white heap of bones, "I have freed you and you may go where you like!"

"Have done!" Kane's voice was deep. "No good will come of mocking the dead."

"The dead should defend themselves," laughed l'Armon. "Somehow I will slay the man who kills me, though my corpse climb up forty fathoms of ocean to do it."

Kane turned toward the outer door, closing the door of the secret room behind him. He liked not this talk which smacked of demonry and witchcraft; and he was in haste to face the host with the charge of his guilt.

As he turned, with his back to the Frenchman, he felt the touch of cold steel against his neck and knew that a pistol muzzle was pressed close beneath the base of his brain.

"Move not, *m'sieu!*" The voice was low and silky. "Move not, or I will scatter your few brains over the room."

The Puritan, raging inwardly, stood with his hands in air while l'Armon slipped his pistols and sword from their sheaths.

"Now you can turn," said Gaston, stepping back.

Kane bent a grim eye on the dapper fellow, who stood bare-headed now, hat in one hand, the other hand leveling his long pistol.

"Gaston the Butcher!" said the Englishman somberly. "Fool that I was to trust a Frenchman! You range far, murderer! I remember you now, with that cursed great hat off — I saw you in Calais some years ago."

"Aye — and now you will see me never again. What was that?"

"Rats exploring the skeleton," said Kane, watching the bandit like a hawk, waiting for a single wavering of that black gun muzzle. "The sound was of the rattle of bones."

"Like enough," returned the other. "Now, *M'sieu* Kane, I know you carry considerable money on your person. I had thought to wait until you slept and then slay you, but the opportunity presented itself and I took it. You trick easily."

"I had little thought that I should fear a man with whom I had broken bread," said Kane, a deep timbre of slow fury sounding in his voice.

The bandit laughed cynically. His eyes narrowed as he began to back slowly toward the outer door. Kane's sinews tensed involuntarily; he gathered himself like a giant wolf

about to launch himself in a death leap, but Gaston's hand was like a rock and the pistol never trembled.

"We will have no death plunges after the shot," said Gaston. "Stand still, *m'sieu*; I have seen men killed by dying men, and I wish to have distance enough between us to preclude that possibility. My faith — I will shoot, you will roar and charge, but you will die before you reach me with your bare hands. And mine host will have another skeleton in his secret niche. That is, if I do not kill him myself. The fool knows me not nor I him, moreover —"

The Frenchman was in the doorway now, sighting along the barrel. The candle, which had been stuck in a niche on the wall, shed a weird and flickering light which did not extend past the doorway. And with the suddenness of death, from the darkness behind Gaston's back, a broad, vague form rose up and a gleaming blade swept down. The Frenchman went to his knees like a butchered ox, his brains spilling from his cleft skull. Above him towered the figure of the host, a wild and terrible spectacle, still holding the hanger with which he had slain the bandit.

"Hol hol!" he roared. "Back!"

Kane had leaped forward as Gaston fell, but the host thrust into his very face a long pistol

which he held in his left hand.

"Back!" he repeated in a tigerish roar, and Kane retreated from the menacing weapon and the insanity in the red eyes.

The Englishman stood silent, his flesh crawling as he sensed a deeper and more hideous threat than the Frenchman had offered. There was something inhuman about this man, who now swayed to and fro like some great forest beast while this mirthless laughter boomed out again.

"Gaston the Butcher!" he shouted, kicking the corpse at his feet. "Hol hol! My fine brigand will hunt no more; I had heard of this fool who roamed the Black Forest — he wished gold and he found death! Now your gold shall be mine; and more than gold vengeance!"

"I am no foe of yours," Kane spoke calmly.

"All men are my foes! Look — the marks on my wrists! See — the marks on my ankles! And deep in my back — the kiss of the knout! And deep in my brain, the wounds of the years of the cold, silent cells where I lay as punishment for a crime I never committed!" The voice broke in a hideous grotesque sob.

Kane made no answer. This man was not the first he had seen whose brain had shattered amid the horrors of the terrible Continental prisons.

"But I escaped!" the scream

rose triumphantly, "and here I make war on all men . . . What was that?"

Did Kane see a flash of fear in those hideous eyes?

"My sorcerer is rattling his bones!" whispered the host, then laughed wildly. "Dying, he swore his very bones would weave a net of death for me. I shackled his corpse to the floor, and now, deep in the night, I hear his bare skeleton clash and rattle as he seeks to be free, and I laugh, I laugh! Hol! hol! How he yearns to rise and stalk like old King Death along these dark corridors when I sleep, to slay me in my bed!"

Suddenly the insane eyes flared hideously: "You were in the secret room, you and this dead fool! Did he talk to you?"

KANE SHUDDERED in spite of himself. Was it insanity or did he actually hear the faint rattle of bones, as if the skeleton had moved slightly? Kane shrugged; rats will even tug at dusty bones.

The host was laughing again. He sidled around Kane, keeping the Englishman always covered, and with his free hand opened the door. All was darkness within, so that Kane could not even see the glimmer of the bones on the floor.

"All men are my foes!" mumbled the host, in the incoherent manner of the insane. "Why should I spare any man? Who

lifted a hand to my aid when I lay for years in the vile dungeons of Karlsruhe — and for a deed never proven? Something happened to my brain, then. I became as a wolf — a brother to these of the Black Forest to which I fled when I escaped.

"They have feasted, my brothers, on all who lay in my tavern — all except this one who now clashes his bones, this magician from Russia. Lest he come stalking back through the black shadows when night is over the world, and slay me — for who may slay the dead? — I stripped his bones and shackled him. His sorcery was not powerful to save him from me, but all men know that a dead magician is more evil than a living one. Move not, Englishman! Your bones I shall leave in this secret room beside this one, to . . ."

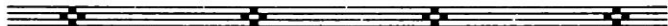
The maniac was standing partly in the doorway of the secret room, now, his weapon still menacing Kane. Suddenly, he seemed to topple backward, and vanished in the darkness; and at the same instant, a vagrant gust of wind swept down the outer corridor and slammed

the door shut behind him. The candle on the wall flickered and went out. Kane's groping hands, sweeping over the floor, found a pistol and he straightened, facing the door where the maniac had vanished. He stood in the utter darkness, his blood freezing, while a hideous muffle screaming came from the secret room, intermingled with the dry, grisly rattle of fleshless bones. Then silence fell.

Kane found flint and steel and lighted the candle. Then, holding it in one hand and the pistol in the other, he opened the secret door.

"Great God!" he muttered as cold sweat formed on his body. "This thing is beyond all reason, yet with mine own eyes I see it! Two vows have here been kept, for Gaston the Butcher swore that even in death he would avenge his slaying, and his was the hand which set yon fleshless monster free. And he . . ."

The host of the Cleft Skull lay lifeless on the floor of the secret room, his bestial face set in lines of terrible fear; and deep in his broken neck were sunk the bare fingerbones of the sorcerer's skeleton.



The Head Of Du Bois

by Dorothy Norman Cooke

"Being chained to my typewriter," our author writes, "I belong to that awesome group of writers who would rather write than switch. I cut my eye teeth on the weekly newspaper grind and thereby became infected with the fever. I have published many articles coast to coast, but *The Head of Du Bois* will be my first fiction published. I have an avid interest in archaeology; spent hours in the British Museum last summer, poring over the Egyptian collection. As a matter of fact, point me toward an Egyptian relic or collection and I automatically move in that direction. Grecian is next on my list. I collect carved wooden figures from everywhere in my travels. When I file the chain loose, I am a legal secretary. My only other hobby is sun-bathing . . . and that's about it."

THE NIGHT held the inordinate stillness that usually accompanied the dawn. As the gaunt man sat there, cold sweat chilling him, he imagined he could still hear the rhythmic beat of the drums. But the sound had ceased to exist hours ago or perhaps — perhaps it

was only minutes. All the night noises were stilled, a warning of the evil about him. Then the loud, clear snap of a twig brought him to his feet; the crunch of the leaves in the blackness held terror and he opened the door to meet it.

God, why must it happen on

such a dark, monless night, only the black pit of eternity ahead of him. The skies and the earth were conjuring up a mantle about them to shut them out.

Then, another crackle in the woods beyond and he cried out, "Come on, can't you see I'm waiting for you?" His voice trailed off. "I only want to see who you are!"

Lewis McClelland pushed himself up in his chair, spilling the manuscript on his lap to the floor. The stained pages covered the rug and superimposed upon the pages he could see the outline of a skull, then . . . nothing!

He rubbed at his eyes, reassuring himself that the apparition was gone, then shaking his head he listened intently. No, there weren't any leaves crackling, only — yes; he breathed a sigh of relief — only the sound of a dripping faucet far back in the apartment. He blotted the dampness from his face and neck, then picked up the manuscript and walked over to the window. Dawn was breaking through the mist-shrouded river and the lights were flicking out all over the city.

Lewis laughed then, shakily. "For a minute there I was Du Bois back in that jungle! Waiting for whatever was coming for me . . . no, for him! Incredible!"

The small, thin man return-

ed thoughtfully to the manuscript. It had to be read before noon; he had promised Farragut an opinion at noon today. He hadn't broken his word yet; he had built his life around this reputation. It had been a good life until now, full of the niceties of bachelor life. But this Du Bois nagged at him, cut into the focal points of his brain. He couldn't shake the feeling that he was with Du Bois, part of him. Leaning back in his chair, he switched off the light at his elbow. A shaft of glaring sunshine had pierced the mist, touching his study with daylight.

It was a brilliant story, Lewis thought, full of life, robust, yet no blatant crudeness or vulgarity. But there was a certain elusive quality that evaded him, a meaning he couldn't quite grasp. No, it was more than that; it was the sense of losing one's own identity, of being completely absorbed by this man's personality.

Only twenty pages more, he thought as the words sucked back again into Du Bois' mind. He continued on and the deadly beat of drums started again at the base of his brain.

"I've been this way before," he muttered, sloshing through the torrential rains of the monsoon. Mud oozed from his heavy boots and as he climbed higher; the rains stopped and dark, pregnant clouds hid the

sun. But nothing ceased in the jungle! All the creatures that could fly, creep and crawl seemed to converge on him but he continued his trek.

The Nassau Range was ahead of them and he had to keep up. He had fallen behind so many times and the expedition had halted, waiting for him; no one wanted to be left alone in this godforsaken spot. In his haste he stumbled in the mud as a creature moved, writhing and twisting under his feet. He screamed as he fell, feeling the ripping pain in his leg.

Lewis McClelland clutched at his leg, got up like a man asleep. He opened his eyes once and there was blankness. Then the skull, this time more pronounced, grotesquely decorated in the headdress of a warrior, hung, wavering before him.

Terrified, he lurched across the room. He grasped the decanter of brandy, drank from it deeply, feeling the satisfying burn. He limped toward the bedroom then tossed aside his clothing and went head first into the icy spray of the shower.

"Du Bois, Paul Du Bois." The name spiralled through his brain. But he was not Paul Du Bois; he was Lewis McClelland. It would end there!

Bernard Farragut was already at the restaurant when McClel-

land limped in. "Am I late?" he asked, out of breath.

The publisher stared at him, "No . . . not at all Lewis. But do sit down man; did you have an accident?"

"No, nothing like that." He laughed but the laugh was hysterical. He gulped down the double brandy.

"Forget me for a moment, Farragut. It's the book you want to hear about now, isn't it?"

"Well, of course." Farragut looked at him expectantly.

"It's a winner. One of the best books I've read in the past two years. Sign up Du Bois and you'll have sales assured for many years to come. But there's something I want to know . . ." he hesitated, ". . . about Du Bois." McClelland signalled the waiter for refills.

Farragut looked surprised. "What's that? Authors never were of any importance to you before."

"Just listen, Farragut. Did Du Bois write this book somewhere in a jungle?"

The publisher eyed him shrewdly. "The heart of New Guinea. Probably the last primitive frontier!"

"He was a member of some sort of an expedition before he wrote this book, wasn't he?" McClelland fingered his glass nervously.

"Yes, the Richardson expedition. Seven men went into the

jungle and only one completed the journey."

"And Du Bois was one of the unfortunates who did not return. Somehow or other he injured his right leg just before the expedition was to attempt a crossing of the Nassau Range."

Farragut looked at him but McClelland continued. "He had to remain behind, possibly in a shelter provided by the remainder of the expedition until his leg healed. The area was crawling with natives but, for some reason, they did not bother him . . . in the beginning. To pass the time Du Bois wrote this book. Eventually, somehow, he was murdered by the natives. Why . . . I don't know. The book, I surmise, was retrieved and brought back by the surviving member of the expedition."

"Before I tell you, McClelland, enlighten me. This isn't a jungle story. You never heard of Du Bois before. How could you possibly know what happened to him?"

"That's what I want to know!"

"I don't understand you."

"I don't understand myself, Farragut. Every time I read Du Bois' book, the drums beat inside of me, as though it were an integral part of my subconscious. I am absorbed by Du Bois, body and soul. I *am* Du Bois . . . I feel his fear, his

pain." He stopped there, stroking his leg. "That jungle is the hell of eternity."

"Steady, McClelland. As to your theory . . . well, Du Bois was with the expedition; the one survivor came out without him. As you surmised, his leg was broken; he had to remain behind. That's where our information on Du Bois ends."

"No one went back for him?"

"A search was made by helicopter when the expedition returned to the coast, but he was never seen again."

"But the manuscript?"

"It was brought to Raboul by a native boy of about twelve. The manuscript was encased in an old cardboard box and included was a note with mailing instructions and a ten-dollar bill. The boy accepted food and lodging, then disappeared during the night, before anyone could question him."

"Then," McClelland said, "no one knows what actually occurred — whether Du Bois is alive or dead?"

"Perhaps we can piece it together," Farragut suggested. "But in a more congenial spot. My apartment is close; suppose we continue on there." He cleared his throat. "You do have the manuscript with you?"

"I wouldn't keep it any longer than necessary!" He slapped the package on the table.

FARRAGUT'S apartment was a two block walk and McClelland limped painfully every step of the way. The cold, crisp air had turned to a slushy rain, adding further to the discomfort but the publisher's plush apartment compensated for his inconvenience. The warmth of it enveloped him like a blanket and he fell into the nearest chair.

Farragut faced him, leaning forward, but McClelland's eyes were riveted on the wall of tropical foliage behind him. A sudden drift of motion in the air as Farragut's butler passed, swayed the lacy ferns and leaves. The servant placed the tray at Farragut's elbow and he waved him out wordlessly.

McClelland listened intently. "Who's there?" he called hoarsely. "You can't be back already. It's far too soon, far too soon!"

A slim, dark, woolly headed youth emerged from the inky blackness of the jungle and walked toward him.

"I am here," he grinned broadly. "Now I must collect my end of the bargain."

"So soon — can't it wait? Perhaps I can give you something else."

"You have nothing else as valuable. My Missionary friend taught me a man's word is his honor. He cannot be wrong!"

"But why this one particular

request? Certainly this is not approved by your friend!"

"No, but he did not remain with us very long," the boy answered. His shiny brown eyes bore the yearning of youth. "But you must understand, it is our tradition . . . it is the only way I can become a man! I must do it! I must take one!"

Du Bois limped toward his reed bunk; he turned about and looked at the boy. "But I'll never know if my book is published."

"Ah, yes . . . if you have a strong desire — something that must be done before you can rest — all my people will dance. They will demand of the evil spirits, of Monion, of Narwoje, of Faknik, that you will be granted the right to know. You will know!" The boy knelt at the bunk, the knife gleaming, held taut in both hands.

"All right, little friend. I know I've been allowed to live only because of you. Claim your forfeit!"

McClelland fell out of his chair screaming, "my head, my head . . . it's gone!" His voice fell off to a whisper. "Never to know!"

"Tell him," Farragut urged, "tell him, McClelland, and he'll never return. He'll be able to rest, then." The publisher knelt at his side.

"It's true, Du Bois," the cri-

tic pleaded on the floor, his voice a raspy whisper. "You're a best seller . . . a best seller!"

And the drums ceased in his brain. McClelland relaxed full

length on the rug; his leg straightened out, and Farragut, rising stiffly, said to his servant, "Get him a blanket, Charles. He'll be here the night."



The Dweller in Dark Valley

by Robert E. Howard

The nightwinds tossed the tangled trees, the stars were cold with scorn;
Midnight lay over Dark Valley the hour I was born.

The mid-wife dozed beside the hearth, a hand the window tried—
She woke and stared and screamed and swooned at what she saw outside.

Her hair was white as a leper's hand, she never spoke again;
But laughed and wove the wild flowers into an endless chain.
But when my childish tongue could speak, and my infant feet
could stray,

I found her dying in the hills at the haunted dusk of day.

And her darkening eyes at last were sane; she passed with a
fearsome word:

"You who were born in Dark Valley, beware the Valley's lord!"
As I came down through Dark Valley, the grim hills gulped the light;
I heard the ponderous tramping of a monster in the night.

The great trees leaned together, the vines ensnared my feet,
I heard across the darkness my own heart's thundering beat.
Damned be the dark ends of the earth where old horrors live again,
And monsters of lost ages lurk to eat the souls of men!

I climbed the ridge into the moon and trembling there I turned—
Down in the blasted shadows two eyes like hellfire burned.
Under the black malignant trees a shapeless Shadow fell—
I go no more to Dark Valley which is the Gate of Hell.

The Devil's Pool

by Greye La Spina

Lovers of weird fiction who followed **THE THRILL BOOK** back in 1919 saw the name Greye La Spina on a story entitled *Wolf of the Steppes*, which appeared in the March 1st issue. Six other of her stories appeared in the same magazine that year, though most likely few readers realized that the three running under the name "Isra Putnam" were hers. Then, in the November 1924 issue of **WEIRD TALES** (the first under the editorship of Farnsworth Wright) *The Tortoise-Shell Cat* signalled her return to the attention of lovers of the bizarre and unusual in magazines. Her serial novel, *Invaders From the Dark* (WT: April, May, June 1925) was immensely popular, and a reprint by Arkham House (Sauk City, Wisconsin) is still available @ \$3.50. *Invaders* dealt with the werewolf theme, while *The Gargoyle* (September, October, November 1925—also received enthusiastically) had devil-worship as its theme. Two later, four-part serials, *Fettered* (vampire theme) in 1926, and *The Portal to Power* (lost culture) in 1930, received more praise than dislike from the published comments of readers, but did not arouse so great approval as the two earlier novels. Her final appearance in WT was in the March 1951 issue, with *Old Mr. Wiley*.

The well-read lover of weird fiction who has not seen this story before still will not find any difficulty in spotting the theme of the present novelet, which appeared in 1932; but there are special elements herein which made it much more than just another tale of its kind.

"THERE AIN'T going to be no weddin'," said the taxi-driver, his thick brows scowling upon Mason Hardy.

"No wedding? You're crazy," replied the prospective best man, and laughed easily.

"Yeah?"

"Mr. Baker would have gotten word to me, if that were the case."

"Yeah?"

Hardy lost patience. "Listen, my good fellow! If you've anything to impart, be kind enough to get it over without delay. The wedding is set for two o'clock today and it's now noon."

The taxi-driver drooped heavily in his seat. "Mister, kin there be a weddin' without a bride?"

"A wedding without a bride?" echoed the other, puzzled.

"What on earth do you mean?" Hardy snapped.

"I mean that Miss Selene Arkwright left town about six weeks ago."

"The hell she did!"

"Hell's got more to do with it than you might think, mister. If you ain't heard from Mr. Baker fer the last coupla months you've got a nice earful comin' to you. Me . . . I lost my little kid Jacky the same way." The taxi-driver's voice was suddenly tremulous and tender.

Mason Hardy stripped off his rucksack and tossed it into the cab. He mounted the front seat with the driver.

"Step on it," he ordered briskly. "And give me a line on things as we go along."

"My kid was only five years old—born the day Lindy made his flight," began the driver brokenly, slipping the clutch into gear, "an' he was playin' around with a bunch of other kids on the edge of Baumann's woods one afternoon about a month ago, an' the other kids said later that a tall, thin, ugly-lookin' man came out of the woods and promised any of them a bag of candy if they'd go along with him. An' my kid was so little . . . he went."

"Well?" prompted Hardy impatiently, yet with an undertone of sympathy.

"He ain't never come back, mister. The chief of police sent out a coupla men, and we hunted and hunted, but all we found was little Jack's cap lyin' at the foot of a tree near the old quarry. The chief questioned Lem Schwartz . . . we was sure he was the man the kids was tellin' about . . . but Lem said the kid must've fell into the pool and got drowned."

"Sorry, old chap. But what has this to do with Miss Arkwright?"

"Well, mister, perhaps she fell into the pool an' maybe it put a spell or somethin' on her, so she can't leave Baumann's any more."

Had it not been for the man's loss of his little boy, Hardy

would have given way to derisive laughter, but the taxi man's face, distorted with grief, restrained him.

"We'll have to look into this," he said. "What do you figure is wrong with the pool?"

"That's queer, too, mister. Old Eli's granddaughter had a bad fall about a year ago an' ain't been able to walk since. Old Eli sets store by that little gal, the way I did by my Jacky. Folks say he bust out cryin' one day down at the post-office an' said he'd willin'ly sell his soul to the devil if he could only give his little Janie the things she wanted. An' they do say it weren't long after that they was a bossy hired man out on Eli's place, an' if Lem Schwartz ain't close to bein' a devil I miss my say-so."

"Interesting," commented young Hardy, "but hardly conclusive."

"That ain't all," continued the driver, punctuating his remarks with nervous movements of his foot on the accelerator that sent the taxi forward in spasmodic jerks. "There ain't been no heavy rains about these parts for mor'n a year, an' yet that hole in the quarry is all filled up . . . with water, I suppose, even if none of us that's seen it likes the queer looks of it. Acts as if it was alive."

"Probably a spring?"

"Spring nothin'," snorted the driver. "That quarry pool wasn't there the day before Lem

Schwartz was first seen on old Eli's farm, and the day after he was there, the pool was there. His tone said plainly: Now don't think you can get around that.

HARDY THOUGHT it best not to dispute the appearance of the pool that had synchronized with the coming of Lem. He remained silent until the cab drew up before an unpretentious bungalow prettily set in an attractively landscaped plot.

"Here y'are, mister. An' if there's a weddin', I'll drive you free of charge," said the driver, accepting his fare and tip with a brief nod of thanks. "No weddin' without a bride, an' you'll find Miss Arkwright can't get away from that pool. It ain't got no bottom, that pool . . . we dragged it . . . an' I believe it goes straight down to hell. An' if it does, I'm the man that'll be sendin' that devil at Baumann's back to where he belongs, one of these days."

He threw in his clutch, stepped on the gas, and his cab departed rattling down the village street.

Hardy looked after the cab with puzzled face. When he turned to walk up the gravelled path to the bungalow, he was disturbed to see his old college friend dashing out of the front door and down to meet him.

"Mason! You didn't get my letters?"

"I didn't stop home at all, old man." Mason did not elucidate, thinking it unnecessary. Earl Baker knew that he spent weeks at a time hiking in out-of-the-way places for antiques, rarely getting in touch with home or office during his absences.

"I am almost out of my head, Mason," groaned Baker, seizing his friend's arm with frenzied grasp. "Come into the house. I've so much to tell you, and I don't know where to begin."

Hardy slung his knapsack over one shoulder and hurriedly went up the path. He was shocked and perturbed at the evidences of nervous strain shown by the ordinarily-poised Earl Baker. Apparently there had been fragments of truth in the taxi man's innuendoes.

Once inside the house, he flung the knapsack to one side and pushed his friend down into a big chair, seating himself opposite.

"Control yourself, Earl," he commanded sharply. "Why, man, your nerves must be in ruinous shape, for you to let yourself go the way you're doing."

Earl Baker jerked out a short, wretched sound that may have been meant for laughter, but that fell harsh and jangling upon the ear.

"Do you think it's so easy for a man to lose his bride without her offering the slightest reason for jilting him?"

"Selene has jilted you?"

"Well, it amounts to that."

"For the love of heaven, get this story out of your system, Earl," exploded Mason Hardy. "The taxi-driver nearly drove me frantic with wild yarns about devilish hired men, and mysterious pools, and a drowned child, and Selene's disappearance. Pull yourself together, man, and tell me what it's all about. Do you get married today, or don't you?"

"I don't. A couple of months ago, Selene went down to Eli Baumann's farm to teach Janie kindergarten work; and after she'd made two or three visits there, she just didn't come back."

"Just stayed on? You mean, she refused to come back here? That she isn't being detained forcibly?"

"That's what I mean."

"It's incredible, old man. Selene loved you. She—she couldn't just stay away like that without a good reason."

"There is a reason, but she won't tell me what it is. So I asked Father Paul to see her."

"Father Paul is still here, is he? Good old man . . . When did he see her?"

"He went this morning. I'm expecting him back any minute."

Hardy drew the curtain aside and stared down the street against the light of the blazing afternoon sun. As yet there was

no sign of the plump gray horse that took Father Paul about the country on parochial visits. He shook his head and let the curtain drop into place. Earl sighed heavily, lips quivering.

"You don't suppose the mysterious attraction on the Bauermann farm has gotten its clutches into Father Paul, do you?"

Earl shook his head decidedly. "Oh, no."

"But if it got hold of Selene, why not Father Paul?"

Earl pushed back his untouched lunch. "I believe he knows too much for them, Mason. They're afraid of him."

"They?"

"They . . . or it. I really don't think I quite know what I do mean, old man. This business about Selene has just broken me up. Everything was fine until she went down there at old Eli's request, to give Janie kindergarten instruction. From then on, it's been . . . well, inferno," he ended, bitter sharpness pointing his words. "Hold it! I think I hear a horse. Hardly anyone around here can afford a car."

Mason lifted the curtain again. "He's coming. Sorry, old chap, but he's alone."

II

"GOD!" ejaculated Earl Baker, clasping and unclasping his hands and throwing an impassioned look upward.

"For nearly two months she's been down on that impoverished farm, telling me to keep away from her and forget her. Why?"

"It's a queer situation, Earl, I must admit . . . Hello, Father Paul . . ." Mason turned to greet the newcomer, who had let himself into the house with the freedom of a welcome intimate.

The priest was short, sturdily built, slightly florid. From his round, wide face beamed small but pleasant blue eyes of the understanding kind that can twinkle impartially upon saint or sinner. He stamped in heavily, pulled out a chair and sank into it, puffing.

"This July heat is phenomenal," he gasped, as soon as he could catch his breath sufficiently to speak. "Pour me a glass of water, my boy. I'm that perishing with thirst I can hardly think."

Earl Baker, pouring the requested water, spoke with downcast eyes as if he feared to meet the other's gaze.

"Selene . . . ?"

Over the priest's round face a troubled expression deepened.

"Is she . . . well?"

"Not exactly well . . . but neither is she ill."

Earl's finely ascetic face darkened. He struck the table with his clenched fist, a blow that set the dishes a-dance.

"I can't stand this sort of thing much longer," he said in a soft,

restrained voice, addressing himself to no one in particular. "It is incomprehensible. She loved me and promised to marry me. Yet she goes down and stays there without a word of explanation and only tells me coldly to forget her."

The kindly blue eyes of Father Paul narrowed with thought. "If she bids you forget her, my son, she must have sufficient reason, for she was a good girl."

"Why do you put it in the past tense?" Earl snapped. "I ask you, why should my betrothed leave her work, and the man whom she had promised to marry, and settle down to spend her life among complete strangers on a wretched backwoods farm where there is quite nothing to offer attraction to a young and beautiful girl? It's inexplicable, I tell you, by any process of logical reasoning."

"Perhaps it might help matters to look at the situation from some other than a logical standpoint," suggested Father Paul gently. "You know that my opinion is . . ."

"I can not give credence to wild superstitions," exclaimed Earl impatiently. "What can a drowned child have to do with Selene?"

Father Paul sighed heavily. "It might have much to do with her, but I pray God it has not . . . yet."

Earl stared at him a moment, then uttered a wretched laugh. With ironical intonation he said to Mason: "Father Paul believes that some ancient, evil entity has been drawn into manifestation on old Eli's farm, and that my future wife has somehow been snared in his net."

Mason Hardy held up one hand to quiet his disturbed friend.

"Well, Earl, it's possible even if not probable. Aren't you always saying that there are spiritual laws available for those human beings who come into knowledge of them to make life easier, richer? Why couldn't an undesirable individual get hold of the workings of those same laws applying them for purely selfish ends?"

"Absurd. Old Eli is the most harmless of antiquated farmers, wrapped up in his orphaned granddaughter Janie, who's a cripple. Besides those two, there's only their hired man."

"Lem Schwartz is about the most evil individual I've encountered in all my years of ministration," interrupted the priest, his wide face paling as he looked from one man to the other. "He's so evil that I felt the disturbing spirit of him in his very atmosphere. He's tall, and gaunt, and of saturnine aspect. There's something so repellent about him that I fail to find words for adequate explanation," mused Fa-

ther Paul. "That man is . . . I dislike to say it . . . thoroughly bad. I'm convinced of it. I don't know how I can be so positive, but I am."

"What influence could that country boor have upon a girl like Selene?"

Father Paul disregarded the man's contemptuous query, and went on thinking aloud. "From the way old Eli acted this morning, I rather think he'd be glad to get out of whatever mischief he's managed to get into. I don't understand yet just what it is, for while he is terrified by Lem Schwartz, he is also resentful and bitter against him. It's an odd situation."

"Is it possible that Selene's feelings have been acted upon by Janie's pathetic condition?" inquired Mason thoughtfully.

"For me," pronounced Father Paul with decision, "Janie is the key to the whole situation."

"Janie" almost snorted Earl Baker, with an exasperated look at the old priest, who bore his scrutiny with tranquil poise.

"What could that fourteen-year-old girl have to do with the situation, Father?" inquired Mason.

"Well, my son, it is difficult to put my feelings into words. Janie isn't stupid, but she isn't very . . . what I'd call bright. She has moments of peculiar insight that are positively uncanny, and then again she is just a very childish, ingenuous little girl. Her grand-

father is whole-heartedly devoted to her. Yes, I feel assured that in Janie we shall find the key to the situation."

Earl Baker crumpled the tablecloth under one hand that kept opening and shutting nervously upon it. "All this is unbearable. We keep talking, talking, speculating, speculating . . . And Selene stays in that miserable place, held by some mysterious attraction which has allured her to the extent of making her withdraw her promise of marriage."

FATHER PAUL, again disregarding Baker's outburst, commented irrelevantly, brow furrowed. "Eli has another guest, by the way; a young fellow, named Harry Epstein. He was around town during the week of the county fair. Drove a little canvas-topped Ford truck with an old piano on it and sang popular songs to his own accompaniment. Sold sheet music."

"Do you mean to tell me that that fellow's being held there, too? This is too much!" He groaned and dropped his distorted face into his twitching hands.

"Epstein warned me off," said Father Paul, a reminiscent smile drawing wrinkles into the corners of his blue eyes. "Said he hoped to leave there, bringing Miss Arkwright, in the course of a couple of months. And old Eli, at whom he kept looking

strangely as he said it, gave a terrible moaning cry and rushed off to hide himself somewhere."

"I can't get my soul quieted!" cried Baker. "They won't let me go onto the Baumann place now, Mason."

"Listen, old man. What's to prevent my scouting about a bit and trying to find out what this mess is, anyway?" offered Hardy, his keen blue eyes alight with eager speculation. "Bet you I can bring Selene away!" He looked across the table and up at the mantelpiece, where stood a large photograph in solitary importance, the portrait of a grave-faced, beautiful girl. "Where did that Schwartz fellow hail from, Father Paul?"

"Nobody seems to know. He appeared one day on the Baumann place, shortly after old Eli had been heard to make a statement about selling his soul to the devil for Janie's sake. The fellow has as evil a face as I have ever seen." The priest crossed himself rapidly at the memory of it.

"What do you think of my chances of getting in and finding out how matters stand?"

"You may get in there and you may be able to get a line on what the whole thing means, unless you are drawn into it yourself."

"And suppose I am? Why can not I get word then to you peo-

ple, so that you'll be able to come down to the rescue?"

"That might help us greatly, my son."

"Strange that Selene won't tell me what it's all about," complained the deserted bridegroom. "If you can do what you say, Mason, I shall never be able to repay you." His eyes were eloquent.

Hardy laughed. "It's the peace of my soul, too . . . How big is that Schwartz fellow? Bigger than I?" asked Mason of the priest.

"You won't have to fight him the way you're thinking," retorted the priest. "At least, I don't think so. But you'll have to make up your mind not to be afraid of anything that might happen. The fact a thing *does* happen, Mr. Hardy, brings it within the jurisdiction of the laws of natural phenomena."

Mason caught a certain significance of tone and said, with a flash of keen blue eyes: "I don't think I'm afraid of anything . . . regular."

"It's not the regular thing that makes the blood run chill, my son," replied the priest. "It's the irregularity of a thing that sometimes makes it seem terrible. The dead man lying at rest in his coffin isn't terrifying. It's the dead man on his feet, staring at you through the half-light of a dim room that makes your hair stand on end."

"There won't be any dead men walking on the Baumann farm," the younger man asserted. "So I shall have nothing to fear."

"There is the Destruction Which Walketh at noonday," suggested the priest softly.

Mason met the old eyes squarely. "As long as it is noon-day, I can see it and keep out of Its way. And as the full moon is due in two days, even the nights will be bright for a while yet." He laughed again, his easy, confident laugh.

"The light of the full moon does not bring security, my son. It has its own peculiar perils."

"All this mysterious chatter gets us nowhere," snapped Earl Baker, his nerves obviously at the breaking point.

"Buck up, Earl. I'll go there tomorrow morning. We'll have your sweetheart back, or know the reason why."

"Knowing the reason why might not be a consolation, my son," murmured an ironical voice, as Father Paul tugged down the vest that immediately wrinkled back on his plump body.

"I've an idea, Mason," offered Earl Baker, eagerly. "Suppose you go down and can't get word to us if you're detained? Why not pretend you're a violinist on vacation?"

"Can't play a note, old man. And why?"

"That means nothing in this case. I'll give you my violin.

They'll surely ask you to play. Then if they do, and won't let you come back, pretend to be temperamental and tell them you've got my violin by mistake, and have them take it back for exchange."

"Sorry, but I don't see . . ."

"Can't you give me a chance? If that violin is sent back here, instead of your coming yourself, we'll understand that you're being detained."

"I get you. In the nature of an SOS?"

"Exactly."

"Not so bad, Earl," commended Hardy.

Father Paul turned, where he stood in the doorway on his way out.

"Your friend is loaning you his violin, Mr. Hardy. I'm going to give you something, too. Something that ought to be useful, and you can have it for your own all your life." His voice was dark with import. "Don't forget that Evil can not *utterly* triumph as long as there is the slightest desire or effort to hold on to Good."

His heavy tread went down the hallway like the footfall of Fate.

III

HIS HIKING knapsack strapped on his back, and Earl's violin case in his hand, Mason got through the boundary fence that separated the Baumann

farm from the state highway, disregarding the many large warnings against trespassing that were nailed every few yards. Mason did not wish to let his presence be known until late afternoon, for when the shadows lengthened a lost hiker might be expected to ask some direction to town, or even a night's shelter. Moreover, he was in hopes that Selene Arkwright might, by some happy chance, stroll in the woods, in which case he could have a few words with her alone.

His wrist watch said it was a little after one o'clock. He had plenty of time to follow up trails in the Baumann woods, and with this in mind, and a keen gratefulness for the thick shade of the sheltering trees (the July sun was unbearably hot), he took a slightly worn path that he figured would lead him into the center of the woods. By half-past two he had succumbed to the stifling humidity of the superheated air and was looking about for a favorable spot under a tree, where he could safely take a siesta.

From time to time the pathway led past great granite ledges, and all at once an agreeable sight met the wayfarer's eyes. One of these ledges had been quarried out deeply; almost the entire center had been cut away, leaving a deep hollow some twenty feet across.

In this great artificial bath of granite sparkled, as if with some innate life of its own, such clear and glittering water as Hardy had rarely seen. Usually forest pools are dank, stagnant, full of decaying unpleasantnesses. But this water attracted by its appearance of inviting coolness; the sparkling ripples almost called their message of refreshment.

To a man melting in July heat, the temptation was insuperable. Hardy made a quick survey of the near-by woods, finding no opening in the infrequently used trail that might point out a possibility of embarrassing interruption. Promptly the knapsack tumbled at the foot of a tree, and near it the violin case was laid. The khaki outing shirt flew over Mason's head and he sat down on the mossy ground to remove his shoes. Busied with the laces, he did not notice the approach of a man who stopped directly in front of him, until the newcomer spoke in a sharply incisive tone, with significant tenseness.

"Stop!" said this man, and with one foot pushed away Mason's busy fingers that were engaged in untying shoe-laces.

Young Hardy jerked his head upward with a startled exclamation, then got quickly to his feet, eyeing the newcomer curiously.

"You're trespassing. Didn't

you see the signs?" asked the man, with a gesture toward the very tree under which Mason had laid the violin and knapsack. As he spoke, his eyes shot agitated glances over his shoulder, in what Mason surmised might be the direction of the Baumann farmhouse.

"What's your trouble?" countered Mason lightly. "This place yours?"

The other man jerked an impatient head. "Never mind whose place it is. What I'm telling you is to get off it as quickly as you can make it, if you value your life and your sanity!"

"I think you must be Harry Epstein," observed Mason acutely.

The dark, Hebraic face scowled. "How did you know?"

"Father Paul."

"Hmm. Well, I'm Epstein. What of it? Listen, whoever you may be. Get away from here while the going's good. Understand? And thank your God —

He broke off abruptly, as a sharp whistle cut the air imperatively. Then he added hastily, in a half-whisper: "I mustn't be seen talking to you. But for God's sake, get away from here while you can."

With that he sped up the forest trail and disappeared.

MASON HARDY deliberated for a moment. He looked at

his outing shirt and one shoe lying in the moss. Then he laughed shortly, got off the other shoe, and in a moment had stripped and was ready for his attractive plunge into the inviting forest pool.

The quarrymen had cut the rock on that side into the semblance of a rude flight of wide high steps. He descended until only his head could have been glimpsed from the woodland trail. As he dipped one foot into the water, which was delightfully, exhilaratingly cool, his eyes fell upon his wrist watch, which he had forgotten to remove. He sprang up the steps, leaving a damp trail on the granite under the foot that had tested the water's temperature. Suddenly he stood stock-still, fumbling at the strap of the watch.

Sitting cross-legged on the ground like some ugly Eastern god was a man who must have been extraordinarily tall when he stood upright, for there seemed to be an abnormal length of limb tucked under him. Earl Baker's violin case lay open on his lap and he was in the act of picking at the strings with his long, wiry fingers, just as Mason came up out of the pool. The impudence of the newcomer struck Mason momentarily dumb, but in a moment he had recovered his usual poise.

"Hey! What do you think

you're doing, my man? Put that violin down!" His wet foot tracking moist blots on the granite, Mason neared the man, who lifted his face sufficiently to inspect that damp trail with a kind of sneering satisfaction.

"I really don't understand why you should object to my looking at property that belongs to you," said he pointedly, leisurely closing the violin case and putting it down with composure. "You seem to have been making use of other people's property yourself."

Mason stopped short as the speaker rose, attaining his full height, that of a man unusually gaunt and meager proportions for what must have been six feet, four inches. One look at that dark and saturnine face was sufficient to apprise the adventurer that he was encountering Lem Schwartz; for only to Lem could have belonged those piercing black eyes that lowered under bushy, overhanging eyebrows that met in a straight line over the hooked nose; only Lem could have smiled with such a wide spread of snarling, thin lips that the impression between them of those sharp and glistening white teeth was as of a fierce and implacable wild beast, restrained momentarily, but momentarily only.

"Sorry," deprecated Mason, somewhat abashed at this meeting with Lem Schwartz, which

was not at all of his planning. "But the heat was so oppressive and the pool so inviting —"

Lem Schwartz bent his terrible smile upon the granite, from which the July heat had already begun to evaporate the younger man's moist trail. He permitted a gurgling laugh to escape him, a laugh that subtly conveyed malevolence.

"Swimming in this pool is trespassing, my fine young man. You'll have to go along with me to see what the owner thinks about it."

Taken at a disadvantage, although getting into the Baumann house on one excuse or another had been his primary intention, the trespasser did not speak for a moment, and Schwartz misunderstood his silence, for he leaned down and picked up violin case and knapsack with a conclusive air.

"If you don't choose to dress, come along as you are," he invited with an ugly grin. "But it's just possible you may prefer to dress. There's a nice young lady up at the farmhouse."

Mason bit his lip in the difficult attempt to keep his temper. He had not planned to make his appearance under escort like a captured criminal. However, there was nothing to do but appear to fall in with the saturnine Lem's scarcely concealed commands. Mason motioned angrily for the hired

man to put down the violin and knapsack. He then dressed hurriedly and presently strapped the latter article to his shoulders, and would have picked up the violin as well, but —

"I'd better take charge of this, young stranger," murmured Lem, significantly. "Too hot to chase anybody through the woods today," he grunted. "Suppose you enjoyed your stolen swim?" he inquired suddenly, and again that snarling laugh rent his thin lips across gleaming teeth horribly.

FIGURING THAT his intentions, if not the actual facts, had made him a trespasser. Mason shrugged in acquiescence and followed his guide down the trail until the woods opened into fine pasture land, across from which stood a great two-family stone farmhouse. It was built of granite undoubtedly taken from the quarry that now offered such delights to a swimmer. From the chimney on one side of the house clouds of heavy smoke hung; the other half of the house had drawn shades and the chimney belched no sign of cooking preparations.

Sitting on a long, decrepit-looking bench on the rear porch was the round-shouldered form of a man who straightened his dejectedly hanging head as Lem and Mason approached. This was old Eli, Mason figured,

and looked with secret interest upon that mysterious old farmer who was playing host to two such different individuals as Selene Arkwright and Harry Epstein. The old man was gray and wizened of countenance; straggling white hair hung in confusion on either side of his meek brown eyes that stared out under the shabby straw hat; his once-black trousers and vest were white at the seams and shiny green from long wear and exposure to weather.

"Brought you a fiddler this time," called Lem Schwartz loudly, as he approached. "Janie'll like that, won't she? You can't reproach me with forgetting my side of a bargain, Eli."

The old man staggered uncertainly to his feet, the meek brown eyes staring upon the youthful figure behind Lem. One hand lifted, waved them back; the other covered a trembling old mouth from which issued a pitiful, wailing cry which he seemed struggling to smother, his eyes shifting to Lem's hard face in what appeared mingled resentment and fear.

"Nol Nol Nol" he exclaimed quaveringly. "I — I don't want any more people here. I — I haven't room for them. I — I can't afford any more."

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Baumann," Hardy reassured the

man, "I have no intention of remaining. Just happened to be strolling in your woods, and took the liberty of stopping for a swim in your inviting pool, when your man . . ."

"Father in Heaven! The pool? You — you swam in the pool?"

Lem interrupted. "He had a nice cool swim, and I brought him here for safe-keeping until . . . day after tomorrow," he finished, in significant tone and with a sardonic grin. The old man's face went white. "Tomorrow night is the full of the moon, you know."

"Sorry I trespassed," Mason began to apologize. "If you will permit me to do so, I'll gladly pay whatever you feel I should, and then you can direct me on my way."

"No . . . you've got to stay . . . now," quavered the old man, brown eyes wide, mouth loose-lipped and trembling. "Sorry . . . but I can't let you go now . . . until . . . until —"

"Until after the full of the moon," finished Lem Schwartz, eyes hard with ominous menace. "And then you may see fit to remain here, Mr. Fiddler, and play for Janie."

Lem might have received a sharp retort had not Mason's attention been diverted by the stirring of a woman's garments. At the open door appeared a girl of twenty-two or three, a girl whom he recognized from the photograph on Earl Baker's

mantel, although the eyes that had been tranquil in the portrait were now wide and startled, the firm lips tremulous as if on the verge of crying out . . . The plainly dressed, unbobbed black hair, the dark gray eyes, were those of Selene Arkwright.

As Lem spoke, she pressed both hands convulsively against her bosom. Her gray eyes turned with shrinking pain and horror upon the newcomer. When she spoke it was as if the words pressed out without her volition, from her overflowing soul.

"Oh, you poor, unhappy man! You have been in the quarry pool!"

Not seeing fit to make detailed explanations at that moment, in the presence of so many witnesses, Mason Hardy nodded.

"Harry!" called Selene, without turning.

A man appeared from the dim room behind her and stood looking over her shoulder. It was the man who had warned Mason back in the woods, and he was now looking at the newcomer with a kind of cold fury.

"Idiot!" he said accusingly. That one word, but it expressed volumes of emotion.

Lem looked from one man to the other, a sardonic smile distorting his dark visage. "You two have met before," he stated rather than asked. "Did you at-

tempt to warn him, Mr. Epstein?" His mocking assumption of respectfulness could have deceived no one. "Rather unwise on your part, wasn't it? You should have welcomed him instead, for the larger the company grows, the more will dear Mr. Baumann feel his moral responsibility . . ."

Old Eli, with a shrill cry of agony, pressed gnarled hands to his temples, brushing off the wide straw hat with an unheeding gesture of desperation.

"Devil! You devil!" he stammered wildly. "I won't! I won't do it! You shan't force me to do it! I'll put a sign at the pool, to warn people —"

Lem silenced him with a wide, unpleasant smile that drew the thin lips tightly back against the pointed white teeth. He did not speak a single word, but old Eli's hands dropped to his sides, and the old man turned abruptly around, pushed precipitately past Selene Arkwright and disappeared into the house.

For a moment the hired man stood regarding the girl who clung, white-faced and trembling, to the door-frame. Then his glittering black eyes turned slowly until the whites gleamed at the corners, to rest with malicious satisfaction upon Harry Epstein's furrowed brow. Last of all, those hard orbs, shining with reptilian coldness, shifted

to Mason Hardy's wary, puzzled countenance.

"I leave our fiddling friend in your custody, Mr. Epstein, until after the full of the moon," said he, and a horrid chuckling choked him into further silent merriment.

IV

HARRY EPSTEIN, watching Lem's departure, lifted one clenched fist and shook it with impotent menace at the gaunt man's back, muttering something under his breath.

Selene touched his arm nervously. "Don't, please, Harry. Aren't things bad enough as they are, without swearing?"

The young man turned sullenly but with gentle deference and went into the room, beckoning Mason to follow.

"For tonight the old man will probably give you a room this side of the house," opined Epstein, as they went inside.

At these apparently innocent words, Selene gave a soft little exclamation of distress. Her eyes and mine held, then turned away in embarrassment, avoiding Mason's puzzled gaze. Mason made a wild guess.

"Until after the full of the moon?" he murmured, ironically, and his keen blue eyes flashed from Selene's face to Harry's, for the two had swayed together as if by common impulse and

were regarding him with a kind of incredulity.

"Then you *know*?" the music-peddler accused resentfully. "You came here on purpose. I didn't have to warn you against the pool. Why did you go into it, then?"

Mason hesitated. However much he might distrust the other man, a complete stranger, yet Harry had tried to warn him against something once that afternoon, and it was evident that Selene trusted Epstein.

"Earl sent me," said Mason, finally, to Selene.

"You came from him?" she whispered. "You dared come to this accursed place, risking so much, for Earl's sake?" Tears stood in her fine eyes, and she had to choke back the sob that rose in her throat. "I recognized you almost at once, Mason Hardy, from Earl's old class photograph."

"Say, Hardy, if you knew all about the affair, why the dickens did you make a bee-line for the pool and jump into it? Especially after I'd warned you to keep out?"

Mason laughed, his easy laugh. "You may think you told me something, but you didn't get that far. Besides, I wasn't really in the pool at all. I just stepped in and out again, when *he* appeared." He jerked his head in the direction Lem had

gone, to designate the object of his remark.

Selene's gray eyes lifted. "You didn't *immerse* yourself in the pool?" she whispered, with an eagerness oddly anxious for such a simple query.

"Just tried the temperature with one foot, and then found I'd forgotten to take off my wrist watch. So I went out, and there was that chap Lem sitting with my violin . . . He's no regular hired man, Epstein; the language he employs —"

"Whatever he is, Mr. Violinist he's got the drop on all of us here," jerked out Harry unwillingly. "Selene and I —" he hesitated, with a quick glance at the girl.

"Go on, Harry," she directed him. "We cannot consider conventions under these conditions of stress," she explained to Mason.

"I was just going to say that Mason, here, will naturally eat with old Baumann tonight. But tomorrow night," pointedly, "he will probably be with us."

"Hmmm. After the full of the moon," commented Mason dryly, and was once again astonished at the girl's little choked outcry.

"What do you know? How much do you know? Why do you keep on repeating that?"

"My dear Selene, I don't know a thing," confessed Mason. "But all I've heard since I came here has seemed to

hinge upon the full of the moon. Can you tell me why, yourself?"

Selene exhaled slowly. "I thought perhaps you knew about things here, and could help us to get away," she whispered, her eyes turned to an inner door, through which old Eli could now be seen, puttering over a cooking stove.

"If you want to leave here," declared Mason, smiling, "say the word. It is just a matter of leaving, as I see it."

She shook her head with a hopeless air.

"Impossible. You don't understand the real situation. It's not just a matter of walking away. It's far more complicated than that. Listen, Mason . . ." She lowered her voice to a cautious undertone. "We must remain here until we learn just what old Mr. Baumann has to do to save us from Lem. Oh, I daren't tell you more, but to-night . . . *watch from your window*," she whispered fearfully.

"Selenel!" Harry's voice was sharp. He laid one finger against his lips warningly.

"But Mason is Earl's friend," she murmured tensely. "I owe him some explanation, don't I, after he's risked coming here to help us? And perhaps, after tomorrow night," she faltered, "he'll be condemned to stay here, too."

The young man turned to

Mason, his face strained with anxiety.

"If only you hadn't stepped into the pool! But perhaps it won't mean so much; you weren't fully immersed. I hope it'll turn out that way, because then you'll be free to go back and tell Father Paul whatever you've seen down here. He's a wise old bird. If *he* can't help us, we're sure done for."

"But how did Selene get into the pool?" curiously inquired Mason, glancing cautiously toward the inner door.

The girl herself replied. "Janie asked me to bring her some wild columbine blossoms from the woods. Lem offered to show me where they were, and when we were on the verge of the pool, he pushed me into the water." She shuddered, her gray eyes closing for a moment as if to shut out the very memory of the scene.

"Completely immersed. Get me? Same here," Epstein said.

"But Harry jumped in to save me," Selene murmured quickly, with a glance at the young man.

"Any decent man would have done the same. That wasn't anything, Selene."

"What Earl owes you, he can never repay," the girl replied, controlling her trembling voice with difficulty.

"Nonsense! Sh-sh-sh! Here comes Eli."

"SUPPER IS ready for the

violinist," said the old man from just without the door. "It's — it's getting dark," he added, in a tense tone with a shade of something fearful in his implication.

Selene sighed audibly. "Come, Harry. It's time for us to go. Don't ask questions, Mason, please." She stepped close to him and put her lips against his ear. "Don't let them know you weren't completely immersed in the pool," she breathed warningly, and left him, to follow Harry across the next room to a door that communicated with the apparently untenanted side of the house.

As she approached, this door swung open. Selene stopped short, so that Harry narrowly escaped collision with her shrinking form. Mason Hardy, straining to see beyond the two into the darkness of the room beyond, became aware of two redly glittering points that seemed to reflect the pale light of the kerosene lamp upon the kitchen supper table. Like eyes were those points; eyes that gloated vindictively.

"It's getting dark," said old Eli, again. He seemed to be shrinking in abject horror from that opening door. "The sun has set. Go! Why are you standing here? Go! Go!"

His voice, his words, pushed against the reluctant two. Selene Arkwright did not hesitate then, but moved resignedly in-

to the enveloping darkness of that other room. Behind her trod Harry Epstein. The door closed upon them. Old Eli, in a kind of relief mingled with apprehension, sprang across the room with astonishing agility for so old a man, and turned the key in the lock hastily, trying the door with care to be sure it was securely fastened. Then he turned to his sole remaining guest.

"Vegetable soup," he offered prosaically. "Hope you like it. . . . Janie!" His voice raised slightly as he went to the foot of the staircase. "Is the soup all right?"

From the upper floor a girlish voice floated down gayly.

"Awful good, gramper. Got some more crackers for Janie, gramper?"

"Find a seat, mister, and help yourself. . . . Gramper's coming, Janie."

Two places had been set at the supper table. There was some kind of dark colored jam, a hunk of cheese, a pot of passable tea, as Mason discovered, pouring himself a steaming cupful; plenty of rye bread, and the vegetable soup as a main dish. The soup was good, as Janie had said. Mason made a fairly good meal, in silence.

Old Eli ate little except his plateful of soup. His conversation (if it could be called such) was monosyllabic, elicited by questions directed at him in

such a way that he could hardly have avoided a reply without discourtesy.

That the child upstairs was listening eagerly to every word became apparent when she occasionally called down to the men, and finally asked Mason if he wouldn't play for her. Supper being over and nothing ahead for the evening but bed, he could hardly refuse; so he opened the violin case and took out the instrument with awkward and amateurish care, old Eli watching in uninterested dejection.

"This isn't my violin!" exclaimed Hardy, with as much excitement as he could manage to muster. "I've left my Strad at my friend's house and taken his violin by mistake!"

"That shouldn't keep you from playing."

Mason shrugged in as nearly a temperamental manner as he could achieve. "What? Use a common violin? *Never!*" he cried tragically, choking back his impulse to laughter.

Old Eli narrowly watched the restoration of the violin to its case. "I'll have Lem take it back tomorrow and get yours," he offered slowly.

"Oh, please do, gramper! Mr. Fiddler, I want so to hear you play!"

All at once Mason straightened up from the violin case and stood in a listening atti-

tude. "What's that?" he asked bruskkly.

"The — the dogs," replied old Eli in patent uneasiness. "Time you went to your room, mister. That way," and he indicated the stairs leading to the upper floor.

"Dogs?" echoed Mason, brow furrowed. "I haven't seen any on the place, so far."

Old Eli avoided the keen blue orbs of the younger man, as if he feared lest some secret be suprised in his own brown eyes that now sought the floor. The noises in the next house increased, so that they could be heard plainly: snarling, growls, snapping of teeth.

"Some dogs!" commented Hardy, as he turned reluctantly to go upstairs.

V

THE ROOM to which Mason had been assigned was separated only by a thin, painted-board partition from the hall and the next room, which was Janie's. Mason could hear every word of the old man and the child, as Eli gathered up Janie's tray. Also, in spite of the fact that the wall between this little whitewashed room and the next house was of heavy granite, the young man continued to hear that heavy scratching, whining, snarling. Dogs? So old Eli had said.

He unpacked his knapsack,

stopping occasionally to listen to that scratching and clicking as of heavily-nailed beasts scampering about. The snarling and then a pitiful whining, began to set his nerves on edge. If Eli kept dogs, he evidently kept them loose in the house next door, the house into which an hour past Mason had seen Selene and Harry disappearing. He wondered how the girl could sleep through those noises, and no longer wondered at her sleep-heavy eyes.

He exchanged his hiking-shoes for rubber-soled sneakers and laid out his automatic pistol and an electric flashlight. Then he drew a chair to the window and settled down listening, occasionally leaning out over the unscreened sill to gaze upon the moonlight-flooded beauty of the night.

The murmuring of voices from Janie's room had ceased. Silence reigned oppressively. Once he thought he heard the tip-toeing of some one across the hall to his door. He would have spoken, but intuition bade him remain silent. Let old Eli think him asleep.

The combined heat, and an overpowering drowsiness that made him speculate sleepily if anything could have been put into his food, had about put him off guard, when the creaking of rusty hinges came faintly to him from below. He was wide awake in an instant, and

bolt upright, listening intently. Then he leaned recklessly over the sill, and found he could see a door on the other side of the house, a door opening into the backyard from which one could step in a few paces directly into the woods. The door was opening slowly upon the yawning darkness of the other house's interior.

From that opening a long, gaunt gray beast slunk, keeping in the shadow of the house as if to escape observation. As it went, belly to the grass, stretching itself across the green in long strides, its head turned upward toward the watcher's window. A double row of terrible teeth flashed as it emerged from the shadow, and two fiery eyes glinted redly in the moonlight as if they reflected a fire.

"Dog?" the young man asked himself in astonishment. "Never! That is a huge wolf!"

His head whirled with impossible surmises. He sat back out of the moonlight's spreading radiance and thought hard and fast. He had seen a girl and a man going into that other house, and he inferred that the saturnine hired man also slept on that side of the building. Now he had watched a great gray wolf creep stealthily out, to disappear into the nearby woods. A low whine from without . . . He peered cautiously across the

sill. Two other beasts sprang, bounding over the patch of grass, and streaked into the woods.

Mason picked up his automatic and tucked it into a hip pocket. He took up the electric torch, unbolted his door and tried it. To his relief it opened quietly. He closed it cautiously and tiptoed to a door at the head of the stairs, which he had noticed when he had come up to bed. It led to the adjoining house. It was provided with a huge bolt in addition to the key that stood in its lock. Although the possibilities in what he might be walking into made the hair prickle on his scalp, he unfastened that door and went into the darkness, drawing it closed behind him.

For a moment he stood motionless, listening, hardly daring to draw a full breath. In the gloom and strange chill of that other house reigned a stillness oppressive, ominous. He drew out the automatic and from his left hand the space about him flooded with light.

He stood in an upper hallway similar to old Eli's half of the house. Giving upon it were three wide-open doors. Hesitating at his presumption (for he had every logical reason to believe that Selene and Harry were occupying two of these rooms and Lem the third), he stepped to the open doorway of one room after

another, cautiously illuminating each as he did so. Astonishing . . . chilling . . . emptiness alone met his gaze.

At the threshold of the last room he paused, his straight nose wrinkling distastefully. The odor that came from it was fetid, as if some forest creature had been denning there for weeks with windows never opened to air. This room had no dresser, no chairs; nothing but a ragged mattress on the floor, upon which was heaped a tumbled mass of soiled — unspeakably soiled — blankets and bedding, at sight of which Hardy turned away feeling sickish.

As he started down the stairs, a long - drawn - out ululation struck his eardrums with the hammering pulsation of something more than sound; carrying, as it were, a psychic message of terrible import. A duet of answering howls followed. Cold shivers raced up and down the young man's spinal column, although he realized fully that the sounds came from the distant woods. It was the full cry of a wolf-pack in sight of its prey! And the rooms that should have been occupied by Selene, and Harry, and that mysterious being known as Lem Schwartz, were . . . empty . . .

AS MASON, shuddering at his own imaginings, moved down the stairs toward what

should be the kitchen of the house, he sensed the odor of decomposing animal matter. The stench of wild beasts' bodies in a closed, unaired place grew overpowering. It was even worse than Lem's room upstairs. Step by step, he moved down the staircase, the torch turned off so as not to apprise any one below, if indeed anybody waited in ambush there, of his coming. But upon reaching the lower step, he flashed the light quickly about.

The kitchen was empty, but the door from it into the back room was open, and Egyptian darkness gloomed ahead. He sprang across the kitchen, automatic in readiness, and illuminated the parlor. It, also, was empty. Empty? . . . As he looked about, his nostrils contracted disgustedly against the fetid smell of decay, and his eyes went roving in search of the cause.

The floor was of bare boards; there were no chairs or other furniture in either of the two rooms. But here and there on the bare boards were — things — that Mason turned the light on, shuddering as he looked. There were black stains here and there . . . There were bits of decaying furry skin And there were little piles of gnawed white bones And almost at his feet as he stood lay a crumpled bit of material . . . He leaned down and turned it over. Good

God! There had been the taxi-driver's missing child . . . and that material was . . . a child's stained, torn little rompers

Mason groaned aloud involuntarily. Then he became keenly aware of what the pervading odor conveyed. It was the unforgettable stench of wild beast kennels in the public zoos. Nausea got the better of him. He went back through the kitchen, avoiding with inward shrinking those dark stains on the wide boards, and leaped up the staircase with the disagreeable feeling that some one behind him would presently lay a chilling hand on his shoulder, or pull at his ankles. Just as he opened the communicating door, he caught the sound of padding feet and clicking nails upon the flagstone terrace outside the back of the house.

Hastily he locked and bolted the door and then fastened himself into his own room. He sprang across it to the window. Yes, the wolf-pack was returning from the chase with its quarry. A huge groundhog hung limply from the extended drooling jaws of a gaunt gray wolf, and the brown beast had a small rabbit between its glistening white teeth. Behind those two shrank a glossy little black wolf, which all at once stood still, and lifted its head toward Mason's window.

The young man's gaze met

those lambent eyes, a curious stirring of surging pity in his heart. The black wolf stood for a moment only; then it slunk into the other house, tail dragging as if in shame. Mason received a distinct impression of the animal's humiliation.

The door of the other house was still open. Drifting up to his window came sounds of snarling, tearing, crunching, whining. He listened, nervous chills sending their shuddering impulses through him. The three wolves were devouring their prey. But where, then, were Selene, Harry and the mysterious, saturnine Lem?

Not until dawn had touched the tree tops with pale, prophetic fingers, did Mason Hardy sink back onto his bed into troubled sleep, and throughout the dreams that haunted him there stood always three empty rooms that should have been humanly tenanted.

VI

FROM HIS UNEASY slumbers Mason was awakened by scratching and thumping at his door-panels. For a moment he stood half dazed, when he had sprung from bed still haunted by the nightmares of the preceding night. His impression was that some savage beast had leaped against his door from without.

"Who's there?" he demanded sharply, his nerves on edge.

"Schwartz," replied a harsh voice.

"What d'you want?"

"Your friend Baker says he'll bring your own violin tomorrow. He wanted to come today, but I put him off. Tonight's the full of the moon, fiddler." A snarling laugh, and Lem's retreating footsteps, as light as if he walked upon padded paws . . .

Through the partition Janie's voice: "Please, Mr. Fiddler, come in before you go downstairs. I've never seen a truly violin-player. Gramper says you must play in regular concerts. I'm just crazy to hear you, Mr. Fiddler."

Mason's curiosity to see this strange child who Father Paul had believed held the key to the mystery at the Baumann place urged him to dress hastily. He donned a light outing shirt and a tweed jacket that covered the bulge on his hip occasioned by the automatic, which he decided he would not leave in the room to be appropriated either by old Eli or the saturnine Lem.

As he opened his door, old Bauman was coming up with a tray. At sight of Mason, the ancient drew back with a curious intaking of breath and an avoidance of the younger man's gaze.

"This is Janie's breakfast, he said hastily.

Mason laughed. "I had no idea you would bring my break-

fast to me," he said shortly. "I can go down for it myself, and I'm hungry, I can tell you. Your vegetable soup was good, but it doesn't seem to stick to a fellow's ribs very much, Mr. Baumann."

"You'll have to see Lem about your breakfast," said old Eli, still avoiding his guest's eyes.

"See Lem? What for?"

"You're not supposed to eat today," stated the old farmer briefly and strangely, after a long pause.

"I presume for the usual reason," was Mason's sarcastic observation. "The full of the moon tonight?"

Eli Baumann involuntarily went backward down two steps and leaned against the wall, staring. The tray shook in his trembling old hands.

"Who and what are you?" he whispered, meek brown eyes wide with awful apprehension.

"Is that anything to you?" asked the young man coolly, following up his seeming advantage.

"Why did you come here? Oh, God of Heaven, what have I done? What will become of my little Janie?"

The tray would have gone crashing down the stairs had not Mason sprung forward to save it. Old Eli pushed him off with frantic hands, gnarled by toil, and curled now into the semblance of claws. Mason looked

speculatively at him for a long moment, then turned and carried the tray to Janie's door. At his tap she called for him to enter.

"What's the matter with gramper?" was the first thing the little girl asked, as Mason set the tray on a small table beside the bed, and bent his keen blue eyes upon the child sitting there against plumped-up pillows.

"Nothing, Janie. He's just nervous," shrugged Hardy, surveying with appreciation the pretty picture the child made.

Light brown curls hung over her shoulders, lying on the gay patchwork quilt like some French doll's marvellous locks. Her brown eyes, green-glinted, appraised the visitor, canny to a degree that Mason had not expected from Father Paul's description. This child was no dolt; shy or reserved she might be, but not stupid.

Warm color flowed over Janie's pale cheeks at the admiration that her visitor permitted to appear on his face, in his pleasure at the little girl's fragile beauty. She blossomed under it like a sun-kissed rosebud.

"I like you, Mr. Fiddler," she said with naive frankness. "You have kind eyes," she finished, contemplatively.

"Now, I call that nice of you," smiled Mason, and gave his easy laugh.

Janie dimpled. "I wish I could

walk around the way everybody else does," she said all at once, tearing into little bits a piece of toast and pushing the scraps about her plate with one finger.

"Can't you walk, Janie?" Mason asked pityingly.

She shook her head. "I fell on the rocks out in the woods a year ago. I was running after a rabbit that had gotten out of its hutch. But gramper thinks maybe some day I can walk again. He rubs my feet and legs every morning and every night, so they won't wither up. The doc told him to."

She lifted a scrap of toast, pushed it between even little teeth, and munched slowly. "I'd love to give you some of my breakfast, but if he found it out, Lem would be furious, and he *does* make such scenes. Miss Selene and Mr. Harry don't eat with us any more; they eat with Lem, on the other side of the house. I suppose you will, too. Lem says it won't cost gramper a cent to feed anybody who stays here to teach me things."

Cold shivers were running up and down Mason's backbone.

"Gramper was worried at first. He kept telling Lem he couldn't afford a lot of people here, eating and eating. Our farm isn't so very big, and gramper is old and can't do much with it. Lem said gramper was just to leave it to him. Lem's awful smart, but I just don't like him, myself."

Janie paused, then added in a lower tone: "Sometimes I wish gramper'd send him away, only gramper says he can't afford to," and she sighed. "He says if he sent Lem away, I couldn't have Miss Selene to show me how to weave paper mats, nor Mr. Harry to play his piano and sing his funny songs to me."

MASON WAS listening with more than ordinary interest to the little girl's outspoken thoughts. Somewhere here he hoped to find a clue to the mystery that clung thickly about everything on the Baumann farm. Apart from that mystery, Janie was refreshingly naive, and perhaps the most untouched and natural human being in that house of weird happenings.

"Mr. Harry is funny, isn't he? But he's very nice to me. Sometimes he pats my head as if I were a ve-e-ry little girl," she smiled mischievously, "and pulls one of my curls. Mr. Fiddler!" She leaned toward him and whispered: "It's a secret, mind, but when I grow up, I'm going to marry him. He doesn't know yet," she dimpled, an impish look flashing across her face. "Gramper says Mr. Harry is a natural-born farmer. Gramper thinks Mr. Harry ought to buy a farm instead of going around singing his funny songs. Hark! What's that?"

The agitated steps of a man who tramps carelessly because he is not thinking how or where he treads The loud voice of a man who has gotten past caring whether or not his words are diplomatic or his intonation ingratiating

"Baumann! Where are you? Oh, skulking behind the curtain! Just what might be expected of the dirty old sneak you are! Come out! Come out, I tell you!"

A squeak, as of a cornered rat. Scuffling of feet. Sharp sound of a chair striking the board floor as it is overturned. Dull thud of some heavy body pushed against the partition, and then Harry Epstein's voice, loud and furious.

"You let that poor little girl come under Lem's curse, and never lifted a finger, when you could have taken it off in a moment, you dirty Dutch dog! Yes, Lem told me . . . I don't care about myself, but you're going right now to the quarry pool, and I'm going with you to see that you go in, by the eternal God!"

The low, penetrating whine of old Eli "Let me go! I tell you, it won't do you any good to drag me down there. It wouldn't be of my own free will. It has to be my own free will . . . Stop—stop—you're—choking—me."

Janie, the faint color gone from her cheeks, stiffened and

made a convulsive movement as if she would have tried to get to the floor and onto her feet. She fell back and began to sob softly.

"I can't! Oh, I can't! Mr. Fiddler, please help gramper! Mr. Harry musn't talk that way to poor gramper!"

Hardy went down the stairs two steps at a time, arriving in the kitchen to see Harry's hands loosening their grip on the old man's wizened throat; Harry's horrified eyes staring at that ashen visage.

"What have you done, you idiot?"

"Killed him!" gasped Harry, and leaned horrified over the limp body that had slipped suddenly to the floor and now lay motionless.

"Indeed?" asked a voice, smoothly, silkily, amusedly. "How very careless of you!"

Mason looked up. Without interrupting the long shaft of sunlight that fell through the open door, stood Lem Schwartz, his glistening teeth bared in a snarling smile so venomously triumphant, that Mason could not help the low exclamation that forced itself to his stiff lips.

Lem seemed trying, vainly, to bring his mouth into a less triumphant expression, but at last he broke into a low, snarling chuckle, stretching his head forward until the lean long neck poked out like a vulture's over its prey.

"Don't flatter yourself, Lem. It's too early in the game," snapped Hardy sharply. "The old man's very much alive

"Harry, lift his feet and I'll get hold of his shoulders. So . . . We'll get him up onto his bed."

Lem wheeled and strode away from the doorway. Mason, with a backward glance over his shoulder, gave a low, incredulous whistle. He realized now that Lem had stood in the pathway of the sunshine but a moment since and had thrown no shadow. And now, although the July day was blazingly bright and long shadows stretched from barn and fences and trees, the fast-retreating form of Lem Schwartz owned no following shadow.

THERE WAS no time to ponder over this, for old Eli had to be gotten up the stairs, and his heavy form, inert as it was, proved no easy burden for the two men. As it was near her door, the little girl called frantically: "Bring him in here! Please, Mr. Harry. Put him on my bed. Oh, gramper, gramper!"

Harry's face had not yet lost its ghastly pallor from the shock he had received in that moment when he had thought himself a murderer. As the blood flowed back into Eli's wrinkled face, and Eli's withered eyelids twitched with returning consciousness, the young man turned his dark,

melancholy eyes upon the muscular hands that had so nearly committed murder.

"God of Israel, I thank Theel" he breathed softly, his eyes closed for the moment of his involuntary prayer.

"Leave gramper with me," snorted Janie. "He's all right now, and I've got a lot to say to him. He's been getting into mischief, with me tied up here," said the little girl quaintly, "not able to keep an eye on him."

Smiling now, the two young men left old Baumann to his granddaughter's ministrations, and went down into the kitchen, Janie's cooing voice drifted after them softly.

"I'm hungry," announced Hardy, looking about him to see if there had been any breakfast preparations.

Harry looked troubled and flung a quick glance in the direction of the barn.

"Where are things?" Hardy continued.

Hesitating for a moment, Harry Epstein finally opened a cupboard and with obvious reluctance fished out a loaf of bread and the remains of the supper cheese. He found milk, sugar and cold coffee. Then he sat down opposite Mason and watched the other man start in with hearty appetite.

"I'd give a whole lot if I could eat those things the way you

do." Harry burst out all at once with strange wistfulness.

Mason stared, frankly curious.

"And you musn't tell any one that I gave you food this morning," went on the peddler, nervously. "Lem would—"

As if the mention of his name had been a conjuration, the gaunt form of the hired man strode in at the kitchen door. He strode across the room and snatched the half-eaten cheese sandwich out of Mason's fingers, flinging it from the doorway, where it was immediately seized upon by a pleased hen with loud cackles of surprise and appreciation.

"Tonight is the full of the moon!"

"But I'm hungry," objected Mason, resentfully.

The glass of coffee went into the sink with a crash. "Save your appetite for tonight. For we shall eat . . . I promise you . . . such food as you have never tasted before. But until tonight, nothing must pass your lips."

Hardy's first impulse was to pick up the plate from the oil-cloth-covered table and fling it at the speaker's head. His next was the opportune recollection of his errand to that place of mystery. He stood watchful, silent, quiescent, regarding Lem with speculative blue eyes that nevertheless smoldered.

"You, Epstein, shall remember your stupidity and disobedience

tonight," said Lem. "Tonight you shall eat what you and that other foolish one refused to eat a few weeks ago . . ."

Harry Epstein caught at the edge of the table with hands that showed white about the knuckles.

"No!" he choked. "God of my Fathers, no!"

Lem snarled. His great nose wrinkled like an angry dog's. "And *she* shall eat of it also, to punish *you* for your rebellion."

"Not that poor girl! Have pity! Do what you will with me, but spare Selenel!"

Lem regarded him sneeringly. "Well, we'll see how well you keep your watch over this fiddler until after tonight. He must make his initiate fasting," he ordered, and then was gone from the doorway.

Harry Epstein staggered over to a chair, sank into it and buried his face in his hands. Behind that inadequate shelter he sobbed like a heart-broken and terrified child. His agony shook Mason Hardy with apprehension of he knew not what.

VII

DRAGGING MINUTES passed. Mason arose and put one hand on the sobbing man's shoulder, until Harry had finally managed to control himself. The young peddler wiped his eyes shamefacedly.

"Sorry to have made such a fool of myself, but it's thinking of Selene and poor Janie that's upsetting me. That little kid'll be the next one dragged into this accursed business, I'm afraid."

Mason's lips set hard before he spoke. "I've lost all patience, Harry, waiting to find out what this is about. What's the hold that rotten bluffer out there has over you people? Why am I to go without food today?"

"You must be desperately hungry tonight," whispered Harry. "After tonight, if the curse has fallen upon you . . . you'll eat . . . what Lem and Selene and I have been eating," he muttered thickly.

"Absurd," grunted Hardy skeptically. "I'm going to make a fresh sandwich," he announced determinedly.

Harry caught at his sleeve, detaining him in a kind of desperation.

"If you eat a single mouthful while you're in my charge, Lem will know it somehow; don't ask me why; I sometimes think he's the devil in person. And if he finds out, he will force Selene to eat . . . God of Israel, it is too much! I can not tell you the horror if it!"

He collapsed again into a little moaning heap, his shoulders heaving convulsively. Mason caught at him and shook him with a disgusted vigor.

"Don't be a simpleton! You

can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink, Harry. Lem can't force Selene to what she doesn't relish."

"You don't understand."

"Then help me to understand!"

"Impossible. You would never believe me if I told you."

Mason snorted impatiently. "What, for instance, is this food that is so highly repugnant to you that the bare thought of eating it sends you into near hysterics?"

"I tell you, I dare not tell you. The whole situation is incredible. Half the time I don't believe it, myself. It is like a terrible nightmare. But — haven't you seen how thin Selene is?"

Mason thought of the full-faced girl whom he had seen pictured in his friend's house. It was undeniable that Selene's face had become very thin. Why, when he considered it, she was almost hollow-cheeked . . .

"She's not eating regular food, because of the curse of that hell-water in the woods," explained Harry incoherently. "Raw flesh . . . of animals we catch in the woods . . . at night . . . is all she can digest . . . now."

Mason was exasperated, and showed it

"Do you take me for an absolute idiot, Epstein, expecting me to swallow such wretched insinuation entire?" Even as he spoke, doubts assailed him. He

remembered the glossy little black wolf, which had looked up pitifully at his window the preceding night, as if it had expected to see him looking down upon it. "My God!" he exploded. "Am I mad? Or are you?"

"I wish I knew," Harry said wearily. "The horrible side of this situation is that Lem is trying to force Selene and me yet deeper by making us eat . . . oh, God!" He gulped, shuddering violently, and went silent, his eyes avoiding the other man's penetrating gaze.

Mason acceded grimly. "You hunt rabbits and ground-hogs at night in the woods, and eat their raw flesh? We'll let that pass for the moment. What I wish to learn is, why are you and Selene under the domination of such a creature as Lem Schwartz?"

"That's just what I can't tell you . . . now, Mason. You'll know all tonight," sighed Harry, "without being told. One thing only I ask you: If you have any real pity for Selene Arkwright, you will fast until tonight. If you let food pass your lips today, Lem Schwartz will force Selene to eat . . . that . . . which will damn her soul for ever," Harry Epstein declared. "After tonight you will be at liberty to do what you please, within limits," he added hastily.

"I don't like it at all," Mason conceded, his head on one side as he listened subconsciously to

the murmur of voices from Janie's room. "I think I'll have a talk with Selene."

"Don't flatter yourself that she'll tell you more than I have," said the peddler sharply. "She's trying to make herself believe that she's the victim of bad dreams; nightmares of terrible and incredible vividness."

Lowering his voice cautiously, Mason inquired: "Where were you and Selene and Lem, last night?"

The young man paled. "You—you did look from the window, then, as she told you?—What—what did you see?"

"I saw three wolves returning from the chase, Epstein. And there was nobody in that other house, because I—"

"You dared go there?" groaned Harry. "Then . . . you know?"

"I know that I'm a victim of the same kind of nightmare you seem to be afflicted with," replied Mason grimly.

"Did you . . . did you find remains . . . of half-devoured—?"

"Don't you know, yourself?"

"We never go downstairs there in the daytime," Harry explained. "If we have to go to our rooms, we go through that upper door in the upper hall. And . . . and the odor," he cried out in a wild but guarded voice, "makes me afraid—"

"The other side of this house was empty last night," Mason

pronounced with finality. "I don't know yet just what horrible things are going on in this accursed spot, but downstairs I found," and his nostrils contracted with disgust, "decaying bits of furry skin and bloody, dried flesh, and half - gnawed bones of animals"

"Then it isn't a dream! It's true!" exclaimed the peddler, and jumped to his feet in such nervous agitation that Mason grasped his arms and shook him forcibly to constrain him into semblance of self-control. "Then it's true! That damnable devil's baptism in the quarry pool—" his voice died away into silence, as his eyes darted this way and that to avoid Mason's keen glance.

"Go on, Epstein. Now I must know the rest," he ordered, grimly.

The peddler shook his head. His eyes were wild. "Tonight is the full of the moon. If you have fallen under the curse, you'll know the worst tonight. If you haven't you can leave here tomorrow, unless Lem manages to give you that devil's bapsitm of his, somehow."

MASON CHANGED tactics abruptly. "From what you said to old Baumann a short time past, I infer that he knows how to remove the spell, or whatever it is that holds you here."

Harry nodded sullenly. "Yes, but he won't stir to remove it."

"Why not?"

"Would you, if you had to give up your life voluntarily, knowing that the devil would get your soul when you died?"

Mason's stare was incredulous. "You people sure have been hypnotized."

"And how about you, who found three empty rooms, and saw three wolves returning from the chase with their prey?"

"Lem or old Eli must have put it over me, too," Mason admitted with reluctance. "But from now on I shall be on my guard, to maintain mental and spiritual supremacy." Despite his attempt to make his voice and words assured, there was no convincing quality there, and he knew it.

Janie's voice broke the ensuing silence. "Gramper, is what Mr. Harry says true?"

"Janie! Janie! I did it for you! Don't ask me more!" moaned the broken voice of old Eli.

"Can you un-hypnotize them, by jumping into the quarry pool?" demanded the little girl's voice, with sharp persistence. "Is Miss Selene staying here because she's hypnotized and not because she loves to teach me things?" Her voice, in turn, broke pitifully.

"Janie! Janie!" The old man's cry was monotonously the same.

"Lem Schwartz is mixed up in this, isn't he, gramper? That's

why you're so afraid of him. And if you went into the quarry pool, Miss Selene could go away? Oh, I want her to stay!" suddenly sobbed Janie childishly. "She's so sweet to me. I just love Miss Selene."

"Janie! Don't cry, gramper's little girl! Miss Selene shan't go, while you want her here. Lem promised me that, when I gave him my word—" he broke off abruptly.

"When you promised him what gramper? What did you promise him? You'd better tell me. I'll find out anyway; if you don't I'll ask Lem myself."

"Oh, no, Janie! You mustn't ask Lem anything," wailed old Eli in abject terror. "He's not fit to be near you."

"Why not, gramper? We don't need him around here, anyway. I'm going to ask Harry to be our hired man," Janie announced with serenity. "He'd be lots better than that scowling old Lem. So you can send Lem to me, and I'll tell him he can go."

"He won't go, Janie. He . . . don't you see, I can't tell him to go? I've promised him he can stay, until—" and here the old man's voice broke off in a wild and moaning incoherent outburst, which he evidently tried to smother among Janie's quilts.

The child's uncanny intuition played her true. "You've told him he can stay until you bathe in the pool, haven't you, gram-

per? Well, then, it seems to me you'll have to do it."

"God in heaven! Janie, no! You don't understand what that would mean. Lem would take my soul if I did that. I'd be for ever damned into hell!"

"Gramper, I just don't believe any such silliness," declared the child's clear voice contemptuously. "You've let yourself get all excited over that ugly Lem Schwartz, as if he were the devil in person. He doesn't do any work; you've told me that yourself. He just goes prowling around the woods trying to find trespassers. He hardly ever helps you with the farm work."

"Now, Harry would be another kind of hired man. His hands are so strong, gramper, and his heart is so kind. And he loves farm work. He's told me so, himself," she added in lower tone.

"Janie, it's no use your talking. I can't send Lem away. If I tell him to go, I must give up my life and soul to him in exchange for those others . . . Can't you understand?"

"I understand that that is what you think, gramper. But I don't believe it for a minute myself," the little girl retorted. "What I'd like to know is, why did you let Lem think you so silly?"

"I did it for you, Janie. For you . . ."

"Gramper! For me? What good would your silliness do me?"

(Father Paul had been right, thought Mason, straining his ears so as not to miss a word of that conversation. Janie was indeed the key to the whole situation.)

"Janie, I wanted you to be amused, and have company, while you were lying here helpless. And I hadn't money to pay anybody. I couldn't even feed them, even if they stayed here for nothing. The farm hardly pays just to keep us two; I'm too old to work it."

"So you let Lem live here and hypnotize people so that they'd stay with me?" demanded Janie. "What, gramper, who wants people that *have* to stay with them?" In Janie's voice was more than a hint of mortified tears. "I thought Miss Selene wanted to stay. And Harry . . . Oh, how could you have been so silly?"

"Don't cry, gramper's little girl! Gramper can't bear to have you cry," begged old Eli, voice quavering.

"Lem must go away, gramper," said the child imperatively.

"Janie, I can't send him."

There was a long silence.

Harry's eyes lifted to Mason's flashing blue orbs, and in that dark gaze Mason fancied he read thoughts too closely allied to violence. He shook his head at Harry, imposing further silence with uplifted, warning finger.

"We won't talk about it any more just now, gramper," Janie went on, in a tranquil voice but with an elaborate casualness that stirred Mason oddly. "I think I want to be alone now. I have a lot of thinking to do."

A moment later old Eli's dragging footsteps sounded in the upper hallway. Mason seized the young man's sleeve and jerked him out of the lower room and into the front yard.

VIII

"I'VE GOT TO find Selene, Harry."

"To tell her her dreams aren't nightmares but horrid realities?" demurred Harry in bitter reproach. "She's still trying to deceive herself."

The other man scowled thoughtfully. "H-m-m. Seems there's nothing to do then but wait for tonight and the full of the moon."

"If these hideous nightmares are realities, Mason, will you get Father Paul to come, after you return?" asked Harry, after a moment's painful silence. "He's the only one who can help us. I have a strong feeling that he understands something of what has been going on here. He warned me when he was down a couple of days ago, against letting Lem force me into . . . into joining that . . . devil's orgy."

"So you confided in Father

Paul, who came and went, and you don't see fit to tell me, who am here to take my chances with you?"

"But you see . . . he . . . knew. He . . . asked me . . . where the missing child was," whispered Harry, head hanging dejectedly "No! Impossible . . . Horrible . . ." ("And the missing child?" Father Paul had said, with such a strange intonation.)

"Don't look at me like that! I had nothing to do with it. Neither had Selene. It was Lem who brought the child here. God of my fathers, was it a dream? He tried to make us join him in his horrid feasting, but Selene refused. He . . . bit her on the shoulder. Oh, it is true. It is no dream . . . Janie bandaged that shoulder the morning after."

"Man, man, get hold of yourself," admonished Hardy sternly. He was sick with nausea, for Harry's words had brought back vividly the fetid stench of those downstairs rooms in the other house, as well as the bits of decaying flesh and the half-gnawed bones. Then he cried out in protest:

"That devil actually brought a live child here? And . . . and devoured it? Why, that isn't possible! It's incredible!"

Then it was Harry's turn to quiet him. "Don't let Lem hear you. You don't know yet what he's capable of. If he were to

realize that you came here purposely to spy upon him . . . oh, for pity's sake, don't cry out so loudly!"

Mason controlled himself with a mighty effort. "I'm going in there tomorrow," he said, brow contracted, teeth set grimly. "I'm going to clean up all that mess . . . and . . . bury those bones somewhere . . . and put a mark over . . . over the grave. A child! That devil! . . . A child!"

"You see how mere words have moved you," Harry murmured despondently. "Yet Selene and I have been constrained night after night by we know not what fearful force from without ourselves to go into the forest with that . . . that devil . . . and hunt wild creatures, to satisfy our hunger. We are still . . . calm," but a tremor in his voice belied the bravery of his words. "If you intend to get through this night and keep your sanity and help Selene, you'll have to put everything out of your mind now, or you'll go mad, the way I've thought more than once that I would."

DOOMED THUS to fasting and inactivity, there was nothing for it but to let the hours slip past. Stretched under the black walnut tree that shaded the front of the Baumann farmhouse, the two men lay in silence on the grass, watching

the July sun's progress across the sky and its final decline into the west.

Tomorrow, Mason cogitated Earl Baker and Father Paul would arrive, demanding to see him in person. Tomorrow he himself would know how successful had been Lem's incredible powers over himself. Dream and reality seemed so confusingly close to each other that Mason almost welcomed the moment when the red sun disappeared behind the hill-top, leaving a rosy glow in the sky, and Lem Schwartz strode down from the barn, a hideous and sardonic grin distorting his lean countenance as he beckoned the two men with claw-like finger.

"Hush! Say nothing. It would only make it worse for us all," whispered Harry in agitated warning.

Mason stretched cramped limbs and followed Lem into the Baumann kitchen, where the hired man stood at the foot of the stairs, the handle of the communicating door in one hand. The red sky was reflected luridly in those deep-set eyes that peered ominously from beneath their shaggy brows. His gaze went significantly to Harry.

"Selene!" called Harry, as if in obedience to some esoteric message. "We're waiting."

"Coming," answered the girl's voice from above. "Janie, let go

my skirt, dear. I have to be going."

"I don't want you to go," replied Janie's determined voice. "Why should you run away in the middle of this lovely story? It leaves me all alone. Just gramper, and he can't read the way you do."

"Let go of my dress, Janie. Let go, dear. You don't understand. I *have* to go."

There was an exasperated exclamation. Selene came to the head of the stairs, pausing to tuck a breadth of skirt under her blouse, where Janie's desirful and demanding little hands had ripped it apart.

"The sun has set. Hurry! Why are you waiting?" urged old Eli's voice in agitation.

Mason's face showed irritation as he looked at this old farmer, whose bent form wavered as he leaned against the oilcloth-covered table, set now for one . . . Selene drew in a long quivering breath, and came slowly down the stairs.

"The sun has gone down! God in heaven . . ."

With a snarl as of a savage beast, Lem wheeled upon the old man. His nose seemed longer and larger than ever. To Mason it was as if the bushy eyebrows had straggled down the high cheek-bones hairily, like a thicket from behind which those garnet-gleaming eyes glared fiercely. The hand that the hired man lifted to

hurry Selene through the door into the other house looked gray and shaggy in the fast-fading light. The fingers seemed pointed together, like a great nailed paw.

"Dare to use that Name again!" said a thick voice darkly.

"I'm coming! Don't touch me, Lem! I'm coming, I tell you," cried out the girl in an outburst of terror. She shrank from that hateful contact, her lips tightening unpleasantly over her teeth, so that her whole aspect altered subtly.

Mason took one of her limp hands in his and followed Harry into the next house. In the tiny hallway he hesitated, until Harry's hand urged him up the stairs.

"You can share my room," said the peddler in a low tone.

Lem had lingered in the doorway below. Mason strained his ears to hear whatever was passing between the hired man and old Baumann.

"Dare use that Name again," Lem was snarling viciously, "and see what'll happen to you . . . and yours."

"Janiel! Oh. Janiel! What have I done? What have I done?"

The only response was a bestial growl, so startling in character that Mason, gently assisting Selene up the dark staircase, stopped short in astonishment. The door slammed; old Eli's key could be heard,

hastily securing him from unexpected invasion from their side of the house. Harry's hand reached down and pulled at Mason urgently.

"Be quick!"

Selene had apparently regained her poise. Arrived at the upper hallway, she ran into her room with a hurried goodnight, and her door closed. The bolt slipped into place rustily.

"This way," directed Harry, with an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. "Hurry! Lem warned me never to linger at this hour between dusk and dark. It's . . . dangerous." He pushed Mason ahead of him into the room, closed the door, and shut the bolt. His fingers went to his lips in warning.

There came a sound of padding footsteps on the staircase. Then a low whine. A scratching at Selene's door. Then those clicking nails . . . padding paws . . . went down the stairs again.

"I'll go to his room now," whispered Harry in a cautious undertone. "Bolt this door when I go out. No, don't detain me. I have no time now to explain, even if this is only a dream. There'll be plenty of light soon, from the moon."

He unbolted the door, slipped out quietly, and pulled it to behind him.

MASON PUSHED in the

bolt. He was glad the flashlight was in his pocket, for it might perhaps serve him now, although the moonlight gave unmistakable signs of shortly flooding the room with its pallid light. As this light became stronger and brighter, there came odd rustlings and scratchings and soft whinings from the rooms on either side of him. He held his breath; he could have sworn that Selene had cautiously drawn the bolt of her door. This was more than his curiosity could stand; he opened his own with painstaking care, quietly lifting the latch of the door until he could look out through a narrow crack into the upper hallway.

Through Selene's open door the moonlight fell in a broad swath, and in the midst of that uncanny brilliance cowered a glossy black creature that slunk, belly to the board floor, toward the staircase. At the top of the flight it hesitated as if reluctant, turning its pointed head backward over furry shoulders. In his astonishment, for he thought he recognized the black wolf of the preceding night, Mason let his door slip from his hands. It flew open, outlining him as he stood against the flooding moonshine.

The glowing eyes of the black wolf fell upon him. It gave utterance to a low, pitiful, whining cry. Almost in the same moment, another door

opened, and a large brown wolf bounded out, stopping short at sight of Mason in the doorway. The fur bristled on its body; it growled, but stood stock-still, glaring at young Hardy with its redly scintillating eyes.

It seemed to Mason that hours passed while he stood there motionless, daring to make no slightest movement lest it might precipitate an attack from one or the other of the two wolves. From the kitchen below came a call, a long, drawn-out, importunate whine. As if that sound had broken the spell holding all three creatures like statues, the black wolf fled down into the darkness, followed closely by the bristling brown beast.

Mason sprang across the hall and glanced into Selene's room; it was empty. No occupant was in Lem's room, either. Mason was back in a flash to Harry's room bolting the door. He sprang to the window, breathing hard as he told himself that it was all a too-vivid dream.

As they had done on the previous night, the three wolves emerged and trotted toward the woods; the long, gaunt gray . . . the big brown . . . and the slim black one. As they sped across the moonlit landscape, the black one deliberately paused under the window and looked up at Mason again.

Then it, too, disappeared into the forest shades. The wolf-pack's raucous cry rose on the still night air.

IX

A STRANGE and disturbing sensation diverted Mason's attention to himself, all at once. His mind was drawn away, for the moment, from those savage, ominous howls from the woods. With unpleasant suddenness he realized that his left foot and leg were prickling painfully, as if they had "gone to sleep." A vigorous stamp to restore circulation moved him to a cry of amazement and dismay, for when he stamped, the tan oxford at the extremity of his left leg flew from the foot and across the room, striking the opposite wall and dropping behind Harry's tumbled bed.

Also, Mason completely lost his balance; went heavily on the floor on his back. As he instinctively flung his head forward to save it from the severe blow it must otherwise have sustained, he beheld a strange, an incredible sight. His right foot was neatly clad in silk sock and well-polished tan oxford, but the sock on the left foot was wrinkled, slipping; the oxford had already flown through the air. As he went down, the limp sock followed the shoe.

Mason Hardy lay on the

floor a full sixty seconds before he dared raise himself to a sitting posture and hitch into full moonlight for another look at what he felt he simply could not have seen. He closed his eyes, blinked them rapidly once or twice, then opened them directly upon that prickling left foot and leg. The blue eyes widened amazedly then, for what he saw only too plainly was the slim, hairy leg of an animal, with a well-padded nailed paw at the extremity.

He closed his eyes with a snap; opened them again; fixed them incredulously upon that impossible sight. Then he touched one finger to that strange appendage. It was rough and hairy. Sight and touch concurred in their messages to his bewildered, horrified consciousness.

With some difficulty he got to his feet, for this strange leg bent under him disagreeably, in the wrong direction; he could hardly straighten it enough to stand upright. The old priest had been right, quite right; Evil Incarnate was rampant on the Baumann farm. And Mason Hardy had come into direct contact with that Destruction that Walked at Noonday, as Father Paul had hinted so broadly.

Meantime, the pallid moon had climbed the sky. Louder, nearer, came the cry of the wolf-pack, altering strangely

and subtly in tone. A rushing of padded feet . . . a whimpering wail. Mason went leaping in awkward bounds to the window; that last cry had come from no wild beast; it had sounded like a frightened child. At the thought, his blood ran cold; horror clutched him. His body pimpled pricklingly with goose-flesh.

Scratching . . . whining . . . snarling . . . growls . . . below.

In Mason's mind now stood out, like letters of flame, those final words of Father Paul: "Evil can not *utterly* triumph as long as there is the slightest effort to hold on to Good."

The young man took the automatic from his pocket, unbolted the door, and stumbled uncertainly across the upper hall, metamorphosed foot and leg hindering him dangerously. Down the stairs, holding to the stair rails; going sidewise to keep from falling . . . God, terrible to be handicapped at such a moment by that wolf-like limb! . . .

THE DOOR IN the tiny hall below was open into the kitchen. Mason peered cautiously around the corner, from which he could see through into the parlor. At what his eyes beheld, he could with difficulty restrain his lips from the cry that pushed impetuously to them. He was looking directly upon the cowering form of the black

wolf, trembling there upon the board floor. Beyond the beast stood the great pier-glass. And in that glass . . . the mirror showed no wolf. The mirror reflected a thing that did not seem to lie before it. What the wide blue eyes of young Hardy beheld was the white, crouching body of a girl, half concealed by streaming black hair, as she trembled there in a spasm of obvious revulsion and fear.

Almost paralyzed at the weird paradox of what lay before the mirror, and what the glass reflected, Mason found himself incapable, for the time being, of any movement. He could only stand, staring and listening.

Another beast farther back in the room snarled. The nailed paws came clicking across the boards, and presently into his field of vision, slouched the brown wolf, head pushed down against its own furry breast, as if to hide its eyes. Another ferocious growl, and the gaunt gray beast bounded across, snapping viciously at the brown. The brown animal recoiled, snarling, lips back from bared teeth. And all the time the little black wolf kept up a continuous whining, as it cowered against the floor; while in the mirror was reflected that shuddering, quivering white body . . .

For a moment the gray wolf glared upon the other two,

drawn lips tight against glistening, slavering teeth. Then it bounded back. When it returned, it held something white between those pointed fangs . . . something that wailed weakly, impotently, pitifully.

Mason Hardy could not check the gasping cry that now surged upward from his throat. The spell of horror that had until this moment held him petrified, broke. He made a clumsy leap into the middle of the kitchen; another that carried him staggering into the parlor.

With a smothered snarl of mingled surprize and fury, the gaunt gray wolf leaped backward, dropping its screaming burden. Mason caught up the infant and began an awkward retreat. The gray's threatening jaws opened as that gaunt beast slunk menacingly after him. A crisis seemed imminent; then the brown wolf sprang, crouching in the gray's way, its tail twitching from side to side, a long snarl threatening the other beast.

Mason directed his automatic at the glowing garnet orbs of the gray, and backed away until he had reached the staircase. He would have drawn the door to, when a sudden rush . . . a whining, pitiful cry . . . gave him pause. The little black wolf had crept swiftly after him and was crouching abjectly at his feet, looking up

with almost human intelligence in its dog-like, piteous eyes.

Mason Hardy remembered the paradox of the mirror. He backed up one step, permitting the black wolf to pass him on the stairs, and pulled the door to. He was just in time. He had one whirling, dizzy glimpse of the other two beasts, engaged in frightful struggle, as the brown disputed the gray's advance. They flung themselves together upon the closed door, which rattled perilously as if the latch would spring open any minute. Mason would have bolted it, but bolt there was none; so up the stairs he stumbled in haste.

HE HAMMERED on the communicating door, while against it leaned, whining fearfully, the little black wolf, eyes rolling whitely in the darkness. The young man's heart beat irregularly with pity and apprehension as he listened to the hellhounds' uproar below. Also the child in his arms continued to scream lustily. At any minute the fight would be decided, and the staircase invaded. He struck the door imperatively with the butt of his automatic and shouted for admittance.

Scuffling and exclamations on the other side. . . . The old man's voice, raised shrilly: "No, Janie, nol" Janie's voice, hard with some passionate emotion. . . . The key turned briskly. The

door opened. Mason almost fell into the other house, the salvaged infant shrieking in his arms. In good time. The door below swung wide, and clicking feet scrambled up the stairs. The young man flung his weight against the door, pushing the bolt and then turning the key.

It was only when safety was assured that he became aware of the miracle. Barefooted, clad only in her little white night-robe, Janie stood, her eyes wide with incredulous amazement at her own feat. She was balancing on her long-unused limbs with the airy fluttering of an uneasy butterfly, but there was no uncertainty in the starry light of her eyes, despite the expression of questioning fear on her childish face.

Her eyes fell in astonishment upon the black wolfish form cowering at Mason's feet. With a startled exclamation, she turned back toward her room, paused, and cried out again sharply. In the mirror opposite her open door, Janie had seen what Mason also saw as the child cried out . . . the shuddering white form of Selene Arkwright, shielded solely by long black hair. Janie on her little unsteady white feet was into the room and out again, dragging a quilt after her. With a tenderness beyond her years, she laid this covering about the

wolfish form cowering on the floor.

"Come with me, dear Miss Selenel" cried she, and tugged at the glossy black head of the beast fearlessly. "Oh, whatever have you wicked men been doing to Miss Selene?" She stood in the doorway of her room, supporting her slender body against the door-frame. "All of you are devils!"

Old Eli stood staring stupidly, jaw dropped. One shaking finger wagged at the infant, still shrieking lustily in Mason's arms.

"Give that baby to me this instant!" commanded Janie imperatively. "Oh, gramper, I don't exactly understand what Lem's been trying to do here, but he's going to leave tomorrow," she announced with definiteness. "Now that I can walk, I know how to drive him away," she added mysteriously, as she slipped back into her room.

The door closed upon her and the black wolf, but her flashing backward glance carried strange import to Mason's now keenly awakened intuition.

"Janiel! Janiel!" wept the old man pitiously, outstretched hands groping after that retreating figure that had been so triumphant in its yet uneasy carriage, so dominated by the child's strange spirit.

"Tomorrow there's going to be a showdown," declared Hardy, staring down at his strange-

ly altered limb. Cold fury stirred him. "Whatever you've been up to, old man, your deviltry's going to stop."

Old Eli whimpered weakly. He was bent over, listening now to the wicked snarls on the other side of that upper door. His body shook as if with an attack of ague. "Nothing . . . I've done nothing," he protested.

"Look at this leg of mine!" snapped Hardy. "Don't tell me you haven't some idea of how it got this way. I have my suspicions, old man. Tomorrow you'll walk the plank into that pool and get an all-over bath. Understand?"

"No! Oh, no!" shrieked old Eli, cowering in abject fear, his head going down into his shaking hands. "Oh God, no!"

Mason's laugh was hard and bitter.

"You're going in. I'll see to it myself. There's something hellish about that pool, and if the rest of us are infected, you're going to get your dose, too."

A long moan, that quavered off into silence. Old Eli went down on the floor in a trembling, abject heap. Janie's door opened.

"What are you doing to gramper? Let him alone, I tell you. I know all about it. I made him tell me. I can make it come right . . . Poor gramper, don't be afraid," she murmured tenderly, like a young mother to

her fearful child. "Janie'll make it all right."

The child's eyes flung at Mason Hardy the menace that might lie in the shining orbs of a tigress protecting her young, as she looked proudly at him across that crouched, quaking, fear-stricken old man.

"You let him alone. You hear?"

Mason laughed. He turned his back on the child, and approached the communicating door, now safely bolted and locked, but against which leaped heavy bodies with snarls and growls. He struck it with the butt of his automatic.

"Keep away, or I'll shoot through the wood," he shouted. "If you are what I suspect, you'll understand. I give you sixty seconds to get away from here."

The snarls ceased. Presently he heard the clicking of nailed claws as the beasts retired downstairs. A soft whining sounded from the landing a moment later. Intuition told him that the brown wolf had returned and was begging for entry, but he dared not open the door to it. Whatever it might be, other than wolf, it must fend for itself that one night.

X

HARDY SPENT the remainder of the night alone in the kitchen, for Janie, soon prevailed upon her grandfather

to go to bed. The light of a kerosene lamp made the room cheery, and Mason was putting together the pieces of the puzzle to which he now felt he held a key. But with daybreak the communicating downstairs door was flung open, and Harry Epstein, followed closely by Lem came running into the Baumann kitchen.

Lem advanced upon Mason, great hairy fists clenching and unclenching. "You would mix up in my business, eh? Well, since you've asked for what you're going to get, we'll have it over with at once. There won't be any nonsense on this farm from now on."

The look he shot at Old Eli, who had come tottering down the stairs, sent the old man shrinking back against the wall, uplifted hands shaking as if to hold off some horrid specter.

"It's certainly time something was done," agreed Mason. "This morning you are going to pack up and get off this place, for good."

Lem flung his head back, uttering as he did so a loud, grating laugh.

"I'm leaving, eh? Well, you'll have to make me go, then. And you wouldn't care to have a fight and a fuss, with a woman in the house, little fiddler, would you? I'll fight you, poor fool, but not here."

Harry Epstein was shouting: "Don't go out into the woods,

Mason! Don't go into the woods! Keep away from the pool!"

"Shut *your* mouth," ground out Lem, with a slow turn of his furious eyes upon Epstein that was somehow more terrible, more menacing, than a quicker movement would have been, for it betrayed Lem's confidence in his own supremacy. "Come along, since you must let me batter you before I give you your baptism in the pool!"

He shot out of the house door and was off into the woods, without glancing behind him. It was as if he knew well that he would be followed.

"Don't go, Mason! Don't let him entice you near the pool," again begged Harry, trying to hold the other man by the sleeve.

Hardy thrust those fingers away gently but firmly. "My dear fellow, you can't dissuade me. Why, that fellow's sheer devil! Do you think I could go away in safety, before having a whack at him? I'm a pretty fair boxer. I may have a good chance to give him his just deserts."

Harry nodded. He stood back resignedly.

"If I can't get the better of him, I'll throw *myself* into the pool," exclaimed Hardy, kindling. "Better that, than to be tossed in by him, and I've about figured it out that a voluntary sacrifice will break the spell for you others."

He flung out of the house, hardly realizing that the hindering metamorphosis of the preceding night had disappeared. Harry followed more slowly.

AS EPSTEIN ran lightly down the path to the woods, he heard hoof-beats. He stopped to look back. A horse and buggy were coming along the lane. The horse was plump and gray, and apparently not at all pleased at feeling the unaccustomed whip now flicking its sides, for it gave occasional little resentful jumps as it half trotted, half balkily walked, along. Harry turned back. He knew Father Paul's outfit. As he approached, he recognized also the pale, harassed face of Earl Baker.

"Where are they?" called the priest anxiously, as Harry came within speaking distance.

"Lem and Mason have gone into the woods to fight it out," Harry explained.

"Holy Mother!" The priest gave the astonished gray horse such a stroke as that plump hide had never experienced before. The beast jumped and set off at a clumsy gallop. Harry ran after the buggy, caught at the back, and managed to hang on as the vehicle bumped and bounced over the ruts of the country lane.

As they passed the Baumann house, two figures emerged, but Harry did not see them. He was

by far too seriously occupied, retaining his hold on that jouncing vehicle. Nor did he see a taxi that came slowly down the lane behind.

At the verge of the quarry pool Father Paul reined up the gray nag and sprang out, horse-whip in hand, indignation burning in his eyes. He walked toward the two struggling figures by now engaged in a deadly clinch, swinging and swaying as each in turn strove to throw the other into the strange waters that sparkled, and surged, and leaped up at the rocky verge where they were fighting.

Behind the priest came Baker. "Hold him, Mason! I'll be with you in a moment!" Earl was shouting wildly.

Father Paul found no opportunity to use his horsewhip, so interlaced were those tense figures that hardly seemed to move, strained as they were, each against the other.

And so it was Harry only who glimpsed the slender white form that sprang straight out through the air, plunging into the pool despite Selene Arkwright's frantic attempts to prevent Janie's unexpected action. It was Harry who again flung himself into the gurgling waters, swimming frantically in the direction of that little face that had gone under, come floating up, and disappeared once more.

Father Paul, whirling at Harry's outcry and the ensuing splash as the young man's body struck the pool's sparkling waters, reached into a fold of his clothes and brought out a folded napkin. With his left hand he scattered the contents of the napkin onto the surface of the pool, while his right hand made the sign of the cross over the greedy, lapping ripples.

The moving waters broke into a foaming fury that for a moment flashed over the two heads now appearing together. Old Eli had reached the scene; his wild cry of utter despair brought a vindictive and scornful smile to the face of Lem Schwartz, who now flung off his opponent easily, for Mason's attention had been diverted by the things happening so swiftly about the pool. As the waters subsided, Harry swam vigorously with one arm, drawing the pale little Janie to safety. Willing hands aided her to land. Lem, gleaming orbs rolling from one to the other of the assembled company, had begun to draw his dark, saturnine face into a heavy scowl. Apparently things were not entirely to his liking.

"Go!" Father Paul ordered brusquely, pointing into the depths of the forest with imperative gesture, and facing the malevolent grin of Lem with intrepid courage.

"Too late, Father. If I go now,

these others are bound to go with me."

"That isn't true!" shrilled Janie excitedly. "I jumped into the water to save them all. You can't touch them now, Lem."

In beast-like fashion he snarled at her, then laughed horribly. "I can't touch them now, Janie, my dear, thanks to you. But you have put yourself in their place, of your own free will." He made a quick step toward her.

Harry Epstein, white and fearfully afraid but dauntless, stood in his way. "One finger on Janie, and I'll put your eyes out, you devil!" he ground out. Janie shrank against her defender for a moment, then drew herself away and went trembling to meet the grinning Lem, who held out his arms to her with mock invitation of welcome.

"No, Janie, no!" cried Harry.

"Yes, Harry, I must. It is what has saved you. And Miss Selene. I belong to him now, instead of all of you."

Lem shouted a berserker burst of triumph. He put out one ugly, hairy hand. Janie shrank, shuddering. She closed her eyes.

Then Father Paul's horsewhip cut down sharply upon that dark hand, and Lem's scream of astonishment and pain followed upon its whistling errand.

"You can not touch that dear child," asserted Father Paul with calm confidence.

"Indeed? You'll see how she shall suffer for this," Lem began.

FATHER PAUL'S calm gaze left Lem's face and shifted to the pool. Lem also looked. Something like dismay and incredulity passed across his lowering visage.

Father Paul said quietly, "The water is itself again. The spell was broken, while those two were in the water."

Harry ran forward and pulled Janie's drooping form into his arms. His exclamation was one of incredulous joy.

"Then Janie is all right? And Selene? And I? God of my Fathers, how good Thou art!"

Lem Schwartz turned, grinding his teeth audibly, and gave vent to an ugly laugh. His fists were clenched with impotent fury as he slouched along the side of the pool.

A loud, hoarse voice hailed him as he slunk off. "Wait a minute, feller. You ain't gettin' off as easy as you might be thinkin'," cried the taxi-driver, coming around the side of the pool at a run. "Where's my little Jacky, huh?"

Lem's shoulders shook with sardonic merriment. His dark face distorted with a convulsion of malevolent triumph.

"You'll find his clothes back at Eli's farm," he shouted. "The wolves ate him." And he suddenly gave vent to howling

laughter, flinging his head back like a wild beast about to call his mates to the kill.

The unshaven face of the driver was so dark that Father Paul's heart trembled at sight of it. "Stop! Think what you're doing!"

"Yeah? I've done my thinkin' a piece past, Father. What I'm goin' to do now is actin'," and with that he launched himself upon Lem's back and by sheer weight of his surprise attack staggered the sinister being so that he lost his balance completely.

"Back to hell with you, you devil, where you belong!" shouted the taxi-driver, recovering himself just in time to avoid going over the edge of the rock into the pool, which now, with a mighty splash, received the dark form of Lem Schwartz.

Father Paul had held up one hand to delay the involuntary movement of Mason Hardy. "No, my son, this matter is in other hands than ours. That man—"

He was interrupted by Lem's body striking the pool. A sudden thick and noisome cloud of stinking smoke arose from the water . . . obscured the vision momentarily . . . cleared.

"—that man, if man he was," continued Father Paul serenely, "is better left to his own devices. If he were an illusion of the deceived senses—"

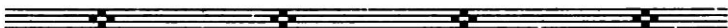
"Why, there's nothing there!"

cried Hardy, astonished. He was bending over the water, and the clear limpidity of the pool now showed every detail of its rocky bottom distinctly. Nowhere could be seen the face of that strange entity that had called itself Lem Schwartz.

"It was the sacred wafer, my children," said Father Paul softly. "The powers of evil could not combat the forces for good that lie behind that blessed symbol. The Destruction that Walketh at Noonday need no longer be feared."

In Earl's arms stood Selene, her face hidden against his shoulder. Janie, very happy, leaned on Harry's solicitously supporting arms; one of her hands was in Eli's; the old man was crying. Across these passed the priest's glance, very tenderly. His eyes met Mason's. The two men smiled understandingly at each other.

"'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world,'" quoted Father Paul, and nodded contentedly.



Many readers inform us that they are unable to find **MAGAZINE OF HORROR** on their local newsstands. We are doing everything we can in order to rectify this deplorable situation, but there are limits to what we can do. If your local dealer cannot obtain **MOH** for you, why not take advantage of our subscription offer on page 128 of this issue, which also tells about back issues and their contents? It is not required that you fill out this form in order to subscribe, and save money. Just be sure that your name and address are clearly printed, and that you let us know the date of the latest issue you have, so we can start your subscription with the following number.

• **INTRODUCTION** (*Continued From Page 4*)

even here there will be few who can accept **all** the ingredients in this tale as active possibilities. A few centuries ago, the impact would have been far greater, for then nearly everyone in the Western world knew that such things not only could happen but **did** happen. (Esthetically speaking, something has been lost; and whether the superstitions that have replaced those that were thrown out when materialism became the prevailing philosophy really constitute a gain, all around, might yet be open to argument. However . . . I wouldn't want to give up contemporary sanitation and creature comforts, so I'm not yearning to return to the 16th century or earlier.)

And there are esthetic gains, too. A hundred years ago, many young people lived in homes where fiction was looked upon with grave suspicion; and a couple of centuries earlier, the prevailing distrust of it in English-speaking countries was so great that it could not be published openly for what it was. It was necessary for authors to present their stories as "true accounts" under the pseudonym of the person who was supposed to be relating the story. (This is why so much fiction in earlier times was written in the first person.)

In the libretto to Mozart's opera **Don Giovanni**, Leporello declares at one point, when someone makes derogatory comments about his master, that this is as true as if it were written in a book. There is still a very wide tendency to believe what one sees in print, without discrimination, unless it is clearly labelled fiction. It is not so great, perhaps, as it was forty years ago, at the time that Hugo Gernsback was about to bring forth the first science fiction magazine, **Amazing Stories**. At that time, a large number of stories which were to appear in the magazine dealt with wonderful inventions, etc., which were destroyed at the end of the story. When a reader asked why this endless repetition of what seemed to be a tiresome formula, Dr. Sloane (who was Gernsback's literary editor) explained that this was necessary, lest some simple-minded people think that such inventions and discoveries really existed. When I first read this explanation, my reaction was that this was nonsense — "simple-minded" people don't read science fiction; they couldn't understand it. Later, I was to learn that, understand it or not, many more-or-less simple-minded people do indeed read highly imaginative fiction (both weird and science variety) with great enjoyment.

However, times have changed to the point where, neither in **Magazine of Horror** or in science fiction magazines is it necessary to kill off all inventors and destroy all discoveries, etc., for fear that some readers will be misled.

THE LITTLE CREDIT LINES beneath some of the authors' names in this and subsequent issues are for the benefit of readers who do not have a complete file of **Magazine of Horror**; and let us be honest — also an attempt to interest new readers in back issues. The system we are using goes like this.

When there is no such credit line under the author's name, it indicates that this is the first appearance of this name in MOH. When one story is listed, that is the author's only previous appearance; when two stories are listed, without a final "etc.", then the author has had only these two stories in our pages. An "etc." indicates that the author has appeared more than twice previously, and the titles listed are those of the author's initial and most recent contributions. RAWL

It Is Written . . .

In our June issue, we asked you, the readers, if you would like us to run the short Lovecraft-Derleth novel, *The Lurker at the Threshold* serially in **MAGAZINE OF HORROR**, providing that proper arrangements could be made. As this is being written, we have not received sufficient votes in order to come to any conclusion; we are asking the question on this issue's preference page, so that those of you who send this in and have not previously expressed your feelings, may be reminded to do so. The first two excerpts below are

typical of the replies that have come in thus far, though the ayes are in the lead at the moment.

"Reprinting *The Lurker at the Threshold* is a suggestion that really makes my pulse quicken," writes Thomas Dilley from Gainesville, Florida. "I've been trying even to borrow a copy of that for five years, without success. And, if you ever find you've printed enough Lovecraft so that the readership would tolerate something about the man himself, please give a thought to reprinting

the Cook memoriam to be found at the end of *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*. I did once borrow a copy of that, and would like very much to see it again. So far, Mr. Derleth has resisted all requests to include it in any subsequent Lovecraft volume."

"You definitely need some more Howard and Lovecraft," writes Robert Weinberg of Hillside, New Jersey. *Skulls in the Stars* was good. Print something like *Worms in the Earth* or *Wings in the Night*. I liked your little article on the author, but was surprised that you did not mention his basic trouble in names. If you notice, a number of Howard's stories have almost the exact same name. Red, obviously, was his favorite color

"One last thing. Don't publish *The Lurker at the Threshold*. I read it a while back, and consider it the worst thing ever published by Arkham House."

Not having read *Lurker* since 1945, we cannot comment, except to say that we enjoyed it at the time. Re-reading numerous old stories for consideration in MOH we have found, at times, that some which we were very fond of years ago no longer seem anywhere near so good. This is natural; one's tastes ought to change in twenty years. And others have seemed somewhat better than they did then. But what is astonishing to us in many instances is the way in which a re-reading confirms the original impression, even though we are more critical these days and notice little flaws which were not apparent then. But since our time is reasonably limited, we shall not seek out a copy of *Lurker*, for a final decision on whether to try to reprint it for you, until we have a more sizeable fraction of you represented in votes on the subject.

The June cover brought forth sharply differing viewpoints, too. Reader Dilley says, in another part

of the letter quoted above: "I shall be very pleased if MAGAZINE OF HORROR itself lasts as long as the mere controversy over the old Margaret Brundage covers went on. By comparison, I can't imagine that you can have any worries over MOH's covers being too lurid; and anything which will help the magazine prosper is in the interest of the readers, except only for worsening of content. Actually, I rather liked the June cover, but then, my copy comes in a plain wrapper . . ."

Michael Sheets, of Toledo, Ohio, speaks for the opposition succinctly when he says, "The cover of your June issue is pitiful. It's a shame to wrap such trash around a magazine of the quality of yours."

Meanwhile, we hope that both of the above readers, and others who agreed with either of them, were as pleased as we were with the illustration that Carl Kidwell did for our August cover. The picture was done after the contents page had been made up; that is why you did not see a credit in that issue for the cover artist. We shall try not to repeat this sort of omission in the future.

"I'm all for an editor who comments on letters, and may it continue 'ad infinitum'," writes J. Salafetnik from Passaic, New Jersey, adding, "as I hope your magazine does. . . . Please return to your former binding; it is utterly confusing and untidy to have them jutting out upwards from the back when placed on a bookshelf on top of the earlier ones."

Bruce Robbins writes from Stamford, Conn., "I could put my 2c in about disliking the saddle-stitching — if the middle page breaks off the staples. I'm more apt to lose it than the old way, where pages broken off the staple on either side still stay in — and the issue looks terrible when

Coming Next Issue

Stugatche paid no attention to the natives. He was busy making plans for the following day. They would place the idol on a wheeled cart and harness the donkeys. Once back to the river it could be put on board the steamer. What a find! He conjured up pleasant visions of the fame and fortune that would be his. Scavenger, was he? Unsavory adventurer, eh? Charlatan, cheat, impostor, they had called him. How those smug official eyes would pop when they beheld his discovery! Heaven only knew what vistas this thing might open up. There might be other altars, other idols; tombs and temples, too, perhaps. He knew vaguely that there was some absurd legend about the worship of this deity, but if he could only get his hands on a few more natives who could give him the information he wanted He smiled, musingly. Funny, those superstitious myths! The boys were afraid of the statue; that was plainly apparent. The dragoman, now, with his stupid quotations. How did it go? "Nyarlathotep is the Black Messenger of Karmeter. He comes from out the desert, across the burning sands, and stalks his prey throughout the world, which is the land of his domain." Silly! All Egyptian myths were stupid. Statues with animal heads suddenly coming to life; reincarnation of men and gods, foolish kings building pyramids for mummies. Well, a lot of fools believed it; not only the natives, either. He knew some cranks who credited stories about the Pharaoh's curse, and the magic of the old priests. There were a lot of wild tales about the ancient tombs and the men who died when they invaded them. No wonder his own simple natives believed such trash! But whether they believed it or not, they were going to move his idol, damn them, even if he had to shoot them down to make them obey.

Don't miss this bizarre tale of the man who uncovered

THE FACELESS GOD

by Robert Bloch

and, among many other items, we hope to offer you

THE BLACK BEAST

by Henry S. Whitehead

*In response to many requests,
we present this strange West
Indian tale.*

MASTER NICHOLAS

by Seabury Quinn

*This tale of colonial New
England has previously ap-
peared only in an amateur
magazine with a small cir-
culation. By request*

shelved; but I darn know well I'm risking not seeing MOH every other month, possibly not at all, if it is bound the old way."

And reader Robbins is correct. MOH is one of a group of magazines published by Health Knowledge, and saddle-stitching comes under the head of present necessary expedients. Any reader who feels MOH is worth trying to interest friends in can help not only in maintaining MOH but moving toward the time when it will be feasible for us to give you many things we are presently unable to offer you. Meanwhile, all efforts to present the best possible under the circumstances!

"So much of Lovecraft, Poe, Wells, Stevenson, and the like have been anthologized and paperbacked so many times," writes Charles Hidley, "that it must be either a lazy or blind reader who has not been able to find some. A like word can be said about science fiction. Ten years have done more for science fiction in paperbacks than forty years have in pulps. The same *cannot* be said for quality weird fiction. I can't find even hardbacks in second hand book stores — at any price — of M. P. Shiel, C. A. Smith, Keller, Onions, and many lesser-known ones: Frank Owen, Mary E. Counselman, Everill Worrell, Nictzin Dyahlis, etc. To draw on all the magazines for before 1935 for weird fiction — that's the ticket!"

"This is my first issue of MOH", writes Frank D. Thayer, Jr., of the June issue, "but I would like to see more H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth's stories which carry on the legendry of the Cthulhu mythos. As for new tales, why don't you press Derleth to turn out some new work in the genre? Although not generally recognized by many casual readers of the macabre as such, Derleth is the most consistent writer of effective

horror tales which inculcate literary craftsmanship into basically good themes. It is my contention that some of his stories may last a great deal longer than more commercially appealing yarns of his contemporaries."

"Personally, I heartily approve of your reprint policy and hope you maintain and expand it," writes Alva Rogers from Castro Valley, California. . . . "However, I would like to see less of Wells, Poe, etc., and more from WEIRD TALES, STRANGE TALES, the Munsey magazines, etc. Not that the Masters aren't Masters; it's just that I have them all, either in collected works or anthologies.

" . . . If you must print an occasional article, I would rather it were on a literary topic, by yourself or someone else equally well-grounded in the field. Re. your question concerning Manning's 'Stranger Club' stories: I'd like to see them all reprinted."

We have arranged with Mr. Manning to present the rest of the 'Stranger Club' stories, and we are running them in the order of their publication, starting with this issue's *The Call of the Mech-Men*.

Short and sweet to at least two people (the author and your editor) is a brief comment from Sally Winter, who writes from Fort Worth, Texas, to say: *Beyond the Breakers*, Volume 1, Number 4, was the best new tale you have yet published. Your magazine is already a necessity in our house — I just wish it were published monthly!" We might add that the first sentence is sweet to the author and the second to the editor, who also wishes he had the (happy) labor of getting MOH every month saddled upon him. Not that we do not find the first sentence pleasing, but that rather we feel diffident about trying to judge which is the best new story we have published. RAWL

Have You Missed Any of Our Previous Issues?

Many readers have asked us if back issues of MAGAZINE OF HORROR are still available. The answer is — yes, for the time being, they are; but some issues are not so plentiful as they were. While they last, they can all be had for the cover price of 50¢ per copy, postpaid.

Aug. 1963: *The Man With A Thousand Legs* by Frank Belknap Long; *The Yellow Sign* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Unbeliever* by Robert Silverberg; *The Last Dawn* by Frank Lillie Pollock; *Babylon: 70 M.* by Donald A. Wollheim; *The Maze and the Monster* by Edward D. Hoch.

Nov. 1963: *Clarissa* by Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Space-Eaters* by Frank Belknap Long; *The Charmer* by Archie Binns; *The Faceless Thing* by Edward D. Hoch; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes* by Rudyard Kipling; *The Electric Chair* by George Waight.

Feb. 1964: *The Seeds of Death* by David H. Keller; *The Repairer of Reputations* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Place of the Pythons* by Arthur J. Burks; *The Seeking Thing* by Janet Hirsch; *They That Wait* by H. S. W. Chibbett; *Jean Bouchon* by S. Baring-Gould; *Luel-la Miller* by Mary Wilkins-Freeman.

May 1964: *The Dreams in the Witch-House* by H. P. Lovecraft; *The Mark of the Beast* by Rudyard Kipling; *What Was It?* by Fitz-James Obrien; *Beyond the Breakers* by Anna Hunger; *A Dream of Falling* by Attila Hatvany; *The Truth About Pycraft* by H. G. Wells; *Last Act: October* by Tigrina.

Sept. 1964: *Cassius* by Henry S. Whitehead; *The Ghostly Rental* by Henry James; *The House of the Worm* by Merle Prout; *Five-Year Contract* by J. Vernon Shea; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing* by Walt Liebscher; *Bones* by Donald A. Wollheim.

Nov. 1964: *Caverns of Horror* by Laurence Manning; *The Mask* by Robert W. Chambers; *The Pacer* by August Derleth; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde* by Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Door to Saturn* by Clark Ashton Smith; *The Moth* by H. G. Wells.

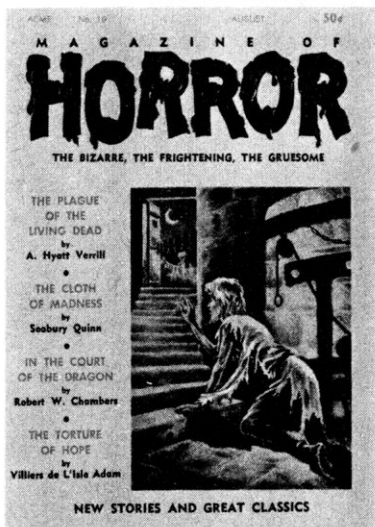
Jan. 1965: *The Shuttered Room* by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth; *The Phantom Farmhouse* by Seabury Quinn; *The Thing From Outside* by George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight* by Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Shadows on the Wall* by Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Oblong Box* by Edgar Allan Poe.

Apr. 1965: *The Dead Who Walk* by Ray Cummings; *The Hand of Glory* by R. H. D. Barham; *The Black Laugh* by William J. Makin; *Orpheus's Brother* by John Brunner; *The Burglar-Proof Vault* by Oliver Taylor; *Jack* by Reynold Junker.

June 1965: *The Whistling Room* by William Hope Hodgson; *Skulls in the Stars* by Robert E. Howard; *The Distortion out of Space* by Francis Flagg; *The Night Wire* by H. F. Arnold; *Sacrilege* by Wallace West.

Aug. 1965: *The Cloth of Madness* by Seabury Quinn; *Placide's Wife* by Kirk Mashburn; *The Torture of Hope*, by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Girl at Heddon's* by Pauline Kappel Prilucik; *Come Closer* by Joanna Russ; *The Tree* by Gerald W. Page; *The Plague of the Living Dead* by A. Hyatt Verrill.

Subscription and Back Issue Page



You don't *have* to mutilate this issue, or fill out any form, in order to subscribe to **MAGAZINE OF HORROR** or to order back issues. The number "11" in the address tells us that you have this issue, and a subscription should start with number 12. But so long as you type or print your name and address clearly, mention the number of the issue with which your subscription should start, and let us know just which back issues you desire, if any, then a letter with the proper amount enclosed is just as good as a coupon.

MAGAZINE OF HORROR, Dept. 11

Please PRINT

119 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10003

In Coupon

☐ Enclosed please find \$2.50 for the next six issues. (Foreign \$3.00)

Please send me the back issues encircled below, @ 50¢ the copy.

I enclose

Aug. 1963

May 1964

Jan. 1965

Aug. 1965

Nov. 1963

Sept. 1964

Apr. 1965

Feb. 1964

Nov. 1964

June 1965

Name

Address

City State & Zip No.

Reader's Preference Page
(there's more space on the flip side)

Comment — Suggested subject, etc.

[illegible]

Mail this coupon to **MAGAZINE OF HORROR**, c/o Health Knowledge,
Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003
(or better still, write us a letter!)

Reader's Preference Page

(there's more space on the flip side)

Please rate the stories in the order of your preference, as many as possible. Ties are always acceptable. If you thought a story was bad (rather than just last place), put an "X" beside it. If you thought a story was truly outstanding, above just first place, mark an "O" beside it. (Then the next-best would be "1".)

THE EMPTY ZOO

A PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIPWRECK

THE CALL OF THE MECH-MEN

WAS IT A DREAM?

UNDER THE HAU TREE

RATTLE OF BONES

THE HEAD OF DU BOIS

THE DEVIL'S POOL

Did you like the cover?

Would you like to see the Lovecraft-Derleth novel, *The Lurker on the Threshold*, run as a serial?

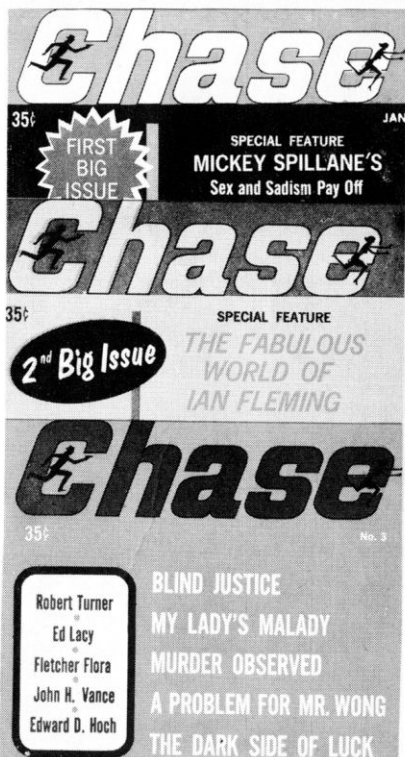
THRILLS! CHILLS! SUSPENSE!!

There's Many a Thrill for you in this great Magazine of Suspense —

CHASE — America's Most Exciting Crime Fiction Magazine.

These three issues made a hit with their colorful, suspense-ridden stories that held readers to the last line. The chase takes many forms, but each one will thrill you, page after page, so that you cannot lay the magazine down.

Don't wait a minute to take advantage of this special offer — three issues of this great magazine for only \$1.00. These copies can no longer be obtained on newsstands. Send in the coupon below (or a facsimile) and \$1.00, and all three are on their way to you. Please PRINT name and address.



CHASE — c/o Health Knowledge, Dept. H11
119 FIFTH AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y. 10003

Enclosed please find \$1.00 for three issues of **CHASE** — America's most exciting crime fiction magazine.

Name

Address

City, State and Zip No.

THE THRILL OF TERROR

If you enjoy horror monster movies, **SHRIEK'** is the new magazine for you. Within its pages, you will find terror — the menace of witch and flesh-eater — the lurking fear of the undead. Thrilling stories, and articles and pictures of the latest horror movies — interviews with the famous Vincent Price, Boris Karloff, and other horror movie stars. Vampire girls and horror hags; werewolves and wurdalaks give you chills and thrills that will raise your hackles and entertain you at the same time. **SHRIEK!** is available on newsstands, but if you want to be sure to obtain the first two issues, send for them on the coupon below. You'll thrill to the bones with them. Send for them now.



ACME NEWS CO., INC., Dept. H11
119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003

Enclosed find \$1.00 for which please send me the first two numbers of **SHRIEK!**

Name

Address

City State Zip. No.

PLEASE PRINT YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS