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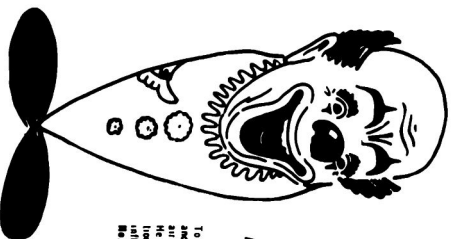
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The Bizarre and The Unusual

Volume 3

CONTENTS FOR SPRING

Number 3

NOVELETS

THE ROOM OF SHADOWS	Arthur J. Burks	6
LILIES	Robert A. W. Lowndes	82

SHORT STORIES

THE FLAW	J. Vernon Shea	27
THE DOOM OF LONDON	Robert Barr	36
(Introduction by Sam Moskowitz)		
THE VALE OF LOST WOMEN	Robert E. Howard	48
THE GHOUL GALLERY	Hugh B. Cave	64

DEPARTMENTS

THE EDITOR'S PAGE	5
COMING NEXT ISSUE	120
READERS' PREFERENCE PAGE (double-barrelled)	129/130

(Cover by Virgil Finlay)

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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The Editor's Page

FROM THE VERY first issue of MAGAZINE OF HORROR, wherein we reprinted Frank Lillie Pollock's powerful story, *The Last Dawn*, there has been a running controversy among you, the readers, as to whether we should or should not include science fiction stories in our pages; and, if we should, what sort of science fiction ought to be considered off-limits. There were 11 stories in that issue; Pollock came out 4th.

Caverns of Horror, by Laurence Manning was clearly science fiction; you wrote in saying, "Don't print science fiction", rated the Manning story outstanding or first place, for the most part, and said "Yes, print the rest of the 'Stranger Club' series", even though we warned you that they were not horror stories.

We tried adding the words "science fiction" to our subtitle: many of you clearly did not like this, and we got the feeling it was more of a liability than an asset. From time to time, we have published other science fiction tales, which we felt were essentially bizarre, gruesome, frightening, or strange — except for one instance where we ran an unpleasant science fiction tale not too dissimilar from the sort you would find in the regular science fiction magazines. This time your ratings corresponded with your general statements of principle: very few actually disliked it, but nearly all put it down low simply because you felt it didn't "belong".

So now, in our efforts to satisfy as large a percentage of you as possible, we're trying something which seems to us to have the virtue of giving you what your votes say you enjoy and avoiding what your comments say you do not want. There are a fair number of very good science fiction stories with a definite horror slant, in one or another of the ways we define horror here, which originally appeared in various magazines published during the nineteenth century, and early twentieth century, and which are very little known, save to a few collectors.

You will find a new story dealing with the same basic theme in the second issue of our new companion magazine, FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION, which is now on sale. (If you cannot find it on your newsstands, \$1.00 sent to Heath Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003, will bring you your selection of either the first and second issues, or the second issue now and the third when it is published, postpaid.) *Dust* by Wallace West is a frightening story because it seems so convincing; and the Barr story certainly reads like something that *might* have happened, even though it didn't. RAWL.

The Room Of Shadows

by Arthur J. Burks

(author of *The Place of the Pythons*)

In looking over the contents for the volume of short stories by ARTHUR J. BURKS which Arkham House has just now published, under the title of *Black Medicine*, I was greatly relieved to find that the present story was not included. Not that I feel it doesn't belong in a collection by Burks — I couldn't imagine myself omitting it — but rather that I'd been thinking about running it here for some time. The ending was a real shocker when I first read this in 1936; since then, the basic elements of that conclusion have been done several times, but Burks' still comes out strongly, nonetheless.

I CAUGHT A peculiar odor in the room as the boy grinned strangely at me, dropped the key on the bureau and went to the outer door. He didn't wait for the usual tip, and I didn't

like the way he licked his lips. Those lips were too red, and the eyes too black, too deeply sunken. And the odor I had smelled! . . . Well, I'd been around a bit and knew the

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odor: in all lands the same, the cheap scents of women lacking in good taste.

But this was in one of New York City's most exclusive hotels. Exclusive, yes, but popular.

"We'll have to give you an inside room, Mr. Clerc," said the man at the desk, "but you won't mind, I'm sure, and in a couple of days you may have your old room back."

I signed the registration slip, *Adam Clerc*, with a flourish. I don't think I'd have been quite so cocky if I had known what faced me.

I felt something distinctly *other* the second I entered the room, and I'm not usually sensitive to impressions, because I don't believe in their original stimuli. I believed only in what I could hear, feel, see or taste.

To begin with, it had been broad daylight outside; here the lights had to be turned on immediately. There was one window, in the corner of the room, which gave on a dark well-court that seemed to be filled with eddying soot. There was a light in the ceiling which appeared to be strangely blurred, to possess some reflecting property that caused shadows, especially my own, to look queerer, more distorted, than even shadows usually did.

The one standing lamp merely threw a circle of light on

the floor below the shade, while the light which went upward to make a circle on the ceiling . . . well, there was something queer about that, too. For there was a little shadow on the ceiling, in the center of that light. I studied the shadow; it looked like the silhouette of a small dog, a sleeve-dog.

I shivered without understanding why. The bellhop had opened the window which gave on the black court, and I closed it hurriedly. Cold seemed to be rising out of that court; which was silly, of course, because the air was really balmy. Yet I felt the cold. I had the feeling that the black soot which seemed to fill the court — nothing but the shadows of high, surrounding buildings — hid something, something that could see without being seen, could see me!

But why worry? This was New York City, less than a block from Times Square, and I had never been afraid of anything.

On a hunch I lifted the receiver from the hook, asked for the desk. "I wish," I told the desk man, "that you'd send that same bellhop back to me."

"Bellhop, Mr. Clerc?" There was surprise in his tone. "I don't understand you. Don't you remember? You have been a guest here so frequently that I simply gave you the key and

you let yourself into your room."

I figured the fellow must be drunk or jesting. But he couldn't be jesting; for nobody, certainly no hotel flunky, had ever been humorous with me, not with Adam Clerc.

A cold chill circulated in the room. The shadows in the corners, as I clicked up the receiver thoughtfully, seemed to move outward. I drew my neck deeper into my shirt collar. I had taken off my tie, opened the buttons on my shirt. Now I buttoned the shirt again, put the tie back on. Small things, you say; yet small things could be so terrifying.

Small things!

I wondered many times, later, why I should have thought of *small things*.

The whole thing is deucedly queer, I thought. I saw that boy distinctly, and I haven't had a drink in two years! There's something peculiar somewhere, no doubt about that.

I was young, resilient, a fighter. I could have demanded a change of rooms, without giving a reason, but I became stubborn. If there were a mystery here I would find out what it was.

THE TELEPHONE rang. There is no personality, no character, about a telephone bell; yet there was a hint of

mockery, of vague laughter, in this one. Of course it would be from the desk, for nobody knew I was at this hotel — the David Crocker. Yet I hesitated to take down the receiver.

It was a man's voice, and it wasn't from the desk. "Is this Adam Clerc? The explorer?"

"Who's calling him?" I asked, irritably.

The man chuckled, and did not answer directly. "Is Carla Miller there?"

"No!"

Again that chuckle, which made my hackles rise somehow. "Is Dee Janey there?"

"No" I almost shouted it. "I've never been in this room before. If it was occupied before now by . . ."

I clicked up the receiver, paused for a moment, then signaled the switchboard. "Listen, sister," I said, "some man is calling here, asking for women. Head off calls after this, unless someone asks for me, understand? Just because this room was occupied by dames before . . ."

"But, Mister Clerc," there was distress in the girl's voice, "no one has telephoned you since you registered. I'm sure of it!"

That certainly got under my skin. The shadows had crept closer. I put my hand against my heart. I felt a little dizzy. My heart was hammering loudly. I took a deep breath.

"For Pete's sake!" I said.

Then I stiffened. I wasn't accustomed to recurrent cold chills. They irritated me; especially when after hanging up the receiver, my attention whirled on the door by which I had entered. A key was being fitted into the lock. Someone was trying to get in.

I hadn't set the night lock. It could, of course, be the maid, though she would ordinarily not come to my room until after nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

I HEARD THE lock click. Whoever it was had the right key and the right room. At that instant, out of the black court, rose a sound that got under my skin. It was the long-drawn howling of a dog. Now, there is ordinarily nothing frightening about a dog's howls. Just the same, this one set my teeth on edge, my skin to crawling, as though there were tiny white worms below the epidermis. I was unaccountably glad that the window was closed, locked. I turned again to the door.

A gorgeously beautiful woman entered. Her hair was as black as a rain cloud, snug above a face that was as arresting as any I had ever seen. Her eyes were as black as her hair and deeply brooding. Little fires seemed to glow far down in them. She entered the room

with the sweeping, silent grace of a pantheress. Her feet, I noted, were sandaled, and white skin showed. Her toenails were as black as her hair or her eyes. Her fingernails, too, were tinted black. Her dress was white, all of it, with a black sash holding it against her body — that would have sent Praxiteles into mute rapture. I caught my breath, started to speak to her.

She looked right through me. She moved ahead as though she believed herself alone. And from the court below the dog howled again.

The woman — girl rather, — was unfastening the knot which held that black sash about her body. Good heavens, didn't she see me?

I didn't know, but I breathed a sigh of relief when she entered the closet and shut the door behind her. I had no aversion to looking upon a woman unclothed, but there was something here I didn't understand, many somethings!

I heard rustling sounds in the closet; then the door opened and the girl came out . . .

This time the black sash was gone, the white garment was gone, the sandals were gone . . .

She went into the bathroom, shut the door. Again the dog howled from the sooty court.

I dashed to the window, swept it open, and the dog's

howling came to me like a bullet, up out of the court, a thrown missile. It crashed my ears. It hammered against my eardrums. There was menace in it.

I had heard dogs bay the moon. I had listened, deep in many nights, to the howling of wolves of all kinds. But I had never been as afraid as I now was, with the mournful howling of that invisible dog from the well-court.

I caught up the first thing I could lay my hands on, which happened to be a telephone book, and hurled it down into the court. I heard it strike something. I had aimed at the spot whence I was sure the howling had come. I heard the book strike flesh. I'd have sworn; but no yelp answered, just a repetition of the strange howling.

I felt the sweat break out all over me suddenly, and had never in my life been so much afraid. I stared at the closed door of the bathroom, out of which came no sound whatever.

Deucedly queer, I thought.

Then, strangely, the latch on the bathroom door loosened, and the door started to swing open inward. No light was on in there, though I had left it on myself. Just a gaping rectangle of utter dark. That darkness seemed to be trying to edge around the door, as

though it had been a monster intent on attacking me.

I licked my lips to find them suddenly dry, almost parched. I rubbed my forehead, just now conscious of a splitting headache. What was going on here, anyhow?

I GOT UP with a greater show of bravery than I felt — feeling the necessity for courage in my own eyes as I passed the full-length mirror — and started for the bathroom door. I saw myself in the mirror strangely. My features were blurred, unnaturally white. My hair was awry.

I passed the mirror quickly, averting my head, wondering what I had eaten to cause me to feel as I did. I went to the bathroom door, which now hung entirely open. I cleared my throat. "Is anything wrong, Miss?" I asked.

No answer. No sound. No movement. The shadow in the bathroom, the inner darkness, was a black wall barring my entrance, even if I had elected to enter. Terror flowed at me from the dark of an ordinary, modern, hotel bathroom. Swearing, I put my left hand in, turned on the electric light.

That bathroom was unoccupied!

Nobody had passed me going out. There was no possible other way out of the bathroom, except, of course, through the

drain in the bottom of the tub, where there were apertures into which, perhaps I might possibly have thrust my little finger. I swore fiercely.

And the dog's howling now, from the black court, made me think of a maniac's laughter at a madman's jest.

I dashed to the closet where the mysterious black-haired woman had disrobed, looked in. Hanging neatly on a hanger, beside my own clothing, was the white garment. Looped over it was the black sash.

If, by some weird necromancy, the girl had left the room when I hadn't been watching, or during some mental hiatus common to absent-minded men, she had gone partly clad into the hallway of a crowded, *exclusive* hotel!

It was little wonder, I fancy, that my brain was in a whirl, as though being churned by maggots.

I took the steps two at a time, down to the desk. There, panting, I waited for the clerk to come to me. I had to regain control of myself, for the lobby was filled with people. After all, this was modern, present-day New York, and I wasn't drunk. Somehow the presence of people was reassuring.

Two men bumped against me at the desk, stared in amazement, as though, the poor fools, they couldn't see me, and went

on, muttering to themselves and shaking their heads. What ailed this place, anyhow?

The clerk finally came, to look at me questioningly. I stared at him, my fear growing. He wasn't the same clerk at all; he was the bellhop who had taken me to the room of the shadows, and his eyes were deep wells of mysterious mockery!

2

"LOOK HERE," I said to the fellow, "what kind of dump is this, anyhow? I've been a guest of this hotel off and on for five years and never ran Dogs barking in the court. Men calling and asking for girls."

There was a shocked look on his face, though his eyes still were mocking, as though he knew something he could tell me if he would.

"Mr. Clercl!" he protested. "This hotel has a reputation.

I interrupted to tell him everything. He shrugged, beckoned me to follow him to a side door off the lobby. I went. He pointed to the well-court, in which there were no shadows whatever. The sun fell into the court and it was like a tropic midday for brilliancy. There was just one thing that made it seem like the court I had seen from my window. The telephone book I had thrown.

"And we don't allow dogs at the David Crocker, sir," the boy — clerk rather — said again. "Are you sure you're all right?"

I'd have taken the hint, blamed it all onto delusions caused by something I had eaten, but for one thing — the hidden, mocking laughter in his eyes.

I whirled, went back in, and to the switchboard. "I called you a while ago, sister," I said, "and told you to refuse to connect people calling my room. You told me nobody had called . . ."

"That's right, Mister Clerc, nobody has called since you cae in!"

"Either," I muttered, "you're drunk or I am, and I haven't had a drink."

There was inexpressible shock on her face. Spinsterish spectacles, drab, black clothing, frizzled hair, didn't somehow go with an accusation of drunkenness. I mumbled a quick apology, went back to my room. But the closer I got to it, along the hallway whose carpet muffled my footfalls, the slower I walked. I didn't know why. I just knew that I looked forward to entering that room with inexplicable dread; I also knew that if I asked to be changed to another room with the riddle unsolved, I'd always hate myself.

I forced myself to enter the room.

Only, now it was utterly dark — and I hadn't turned off the lights. The door slammed behind me, caused by some breeze through the hall, I supposed, and I was alone in the utter dark — *and that dog was howling again from the well-court!*

Nor was that all. Warm, soft arms went around my neck. I was pressed forcibly against a pulsating body, that of a woman, I guessed, almost as tall as I was. Fragrant perfume, heady, overpowering, was in my nostrils. Hot lips that were soft, that called to something primeval, deep down inside me, were pressed against my own. Terror shifted the hair on my scalp, even as the arms went around me. It was still there, and growing, as the kiss seemed to burn into my very soul, as the soft hot lips moved against mine, as the body of the unseen clung to me.

Terror mastered me. I knew that deadly danger was in the arms, in the kiss, in the fragrant, heady perfume. But, knowing, my arms went out, around the woman. I knew without a word being spoken that it was the woman of the black sash.

I heard her whisper against my ear! "Adam! Adam Clerc!"

Her voice was like a cool hand on my body. It caressed

me, kissed me, that voice.
"Adam! Adam Clerc!"

She moved against me. Somehow she had slipped from my arms, however, and was somewhere away from me, there in the dark room, whispering, "Adam! Adam Clerc!"

Her whisper came from somewhere near. I reeled in the direction of the sound. I stumbled against the standing lamp, and inspiration came. I had to see this woman. I had to see her black eyes looking into mine. . . .

I SWITCHED ON the light. There was whirling of black mist in the room, no more. The window giving onto the ebon well-court was partway open at the bottom. The black stuff seemed to be vanishing through the slit under the window.

I raced to the bathroom again, to find it as empty as before. I whirled to the closet, to find that the white garment and the black sash had vanished. The girl had disappeared again, and she couldn't have got through the outer door past me. I'd have seen her when she opened the door.

There was one other way — the open slit of a window, the black mist going out — and, of course, the mysterious exit from the bathroom which she had used once before.

"Who are you?" I shouted. "Where are you? What's going on? Come back! Come back!"

The only answer came in the howls from the well-court, the howls that were like mocking laughter.

But now the light was on. The shadows in the room seemed alive, and out of them the whisper kept coming, "Adam Clerc! Adam Clerc!"

I had to find some semblance of sanity here, or go stark, staring mad. I raced to the mirror past which I had hurried, unaccountably, earlier in the evening, and stared at myself.

My face was white, drawn, the skin taut over the cheekbones. I looked as though I hadn't eaten or slept for days and nights on end. My eyes were deep-sunken.

Then I leaned closer. I had noticed something on my neck, a pair of little red dots. They were oozing blood. They were so situated that they looked like the punctures the fangs of a poisonous reptile might have made. But I had had no sensation of having been bitten by anything. I had, I decided, scratched myself in a sort of frenzy.

I whirled back to that window as a thudding sound broke on my consciousness. The window had dropped shut with a sound of grim finality. The whirling black mist had entirely vanished, unless the shadows in the corner were part of it.

The barking of the dog was

muted now by the closed window. But was it?

I stood there, staring at the window. No, the sound wasn't muted. It was rising . . . actually, rising to my window, as though the dog had taken wings. That was silly, of course, but there it was. No mistaking the howling sound, nor the fact that the sound was approaching. What filled me with terror was this: my room was four stories above the street, and above the level of the well-court . . . and yet . . .

I stared through the window. That black court was black again, and I knew it had always been, always would be, black when viewed from this window — if viewed by Adam Clerc.

There was something on the window-sill — something small, inexpressibly ferocious, savage-eyed! I looked. Blazing eyes looked back. They might have been the eyes of a mad lobo wolf, or a giant Newfoundland with the rabies, but never of the tiny creature that stood out there, on the sill, staring at me, snarling, and emitting the howls I had heard from the courtyard.

For, listen!

The dog's hot nose was against the window-pane. He wasn't standing *along* the sill, but across it — and there was plenty of room for him! I had seen plenty of Chinese sleeve-dogs in my

time, but never one so small as this one.

And he was barking and snarling at me — and the giant sound, coming from a creature so tiny, filled all the well-court with rocketing echoes.

And yet, I heard blaring radios all through the David Crocker, and no one else seemed to be bothered by the snarling, howling dog. I started for the window, feeling myself in the presence of a horror that was utterly incomprehensible.

No canine body so small could possibly hold such gigantic fury, no lungs emit such wolfish howlings. Yet there it was. It was only a small dog, after all. I'd open the window, bring it in. The echoes from the court had fooled me. Some neighbor, perhaps, had allowed his sleeve-dog to go out onto a neighboring sill, from which he had hopped to mine. But that didn't explain the gigantic fury of the beast, nor the might of his howls.

I found, then, that I hadn't the courage to open that window. I couldn't have done it for all the gold in the world. That fury out there could somehow destroy, annihilate me. I knew it, even as I knew it was impossible. . . .

I WAS ALMOST knocked off my feet by a furious, unexpected attack from behind me. I whirled as tiny teeth sank into my back, my thighs.

My room was filled with sleeve-dogs! They had come from somewhere, absolutely in silence, and had attacked me. I stared at them as I kicked out. I grabbed one of the little things in my two hands, which were far too big to hold him, and his savagery was a challenge which drove me mad. I twisted his savage little head from his shoulders, flung him to the floor, where he rolled under the bed, head and all. But even as I slew him, his eyes stared into mine, with mockery in them, as though he laughed at me through his snarls.

Horror nestled against my heart then, enclosing it in cold tentacles that were beyond expression; for the instant I slew that dog, while others attacked and bit me, I had the ghastly impression that it wasn't the eyes of a dog which looked into mine, but the eyes of a human being!

Great God! Just once I had looked into such eyes — just once. And they hadn't looked into mine. They had looked past and through me. They had been the eyes of the woman with the black-sashed white garment. . . .

I dashed to the door and out, slammed it shut behind me, leaned against it, panting, and looked about me, ashamed lest someone see how badly frightened I was. Someone did see: a woman, through the crack in an adjoining door that stood

ajar. I spotted the door, flung myself toward it as it started shut, struck it savagely, sprawled on the floor of a strange room.

"May I ask the meaning of this intrusion?" said a cold voice.

I stared at the woman, who was dressed for the street, and my heart turned a somersault. There was no mistaking her. She was the woman of the black sash. I would have sworn that she was the woman I had just held in my arms. But in her eyes there was no slightest sign of recognition, not even a flicker.

Cold, distant, aloof. Obviously she considered me an intruder. But one thing she couldn't hide, one thing that made us kin in spite of anything that could have happened: abysmal fear, deep down in her black eyes.

I clutched her shoulders.

"Tell me about it! Tell me, do you hear? *What about the dogs in that room?*"

The coldness left her, the fear took possession, ghastly, horrible fear. She would have fallen if I hadn't clutched her, lowered her into a chair.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned. "*The little things are back! The little things are back!*"

3

I CAUGHT HER by the shoulders and shook her until her teeth rattled. Her eyes, big

with terror, never left mine for a moment.

"You know something about it!" I told her. "I've got to know — for my own peace of mind I've got to know, do you understand? What are the 'little things' you keep mentioning? What do you know about that room?"

"Little things? Little things?" she repeated dully. "But of course! The dogs. The sleeve-dogs. The tiniest in the world, lots of them; the kind *he* had raised, trained . . ."

"He? He? Whom are you talking about? One of us, maybe both, are crazy. I've got to know. I never ran into a mystery yet that I didn't solve. Whom do you mean by 'he'?"

"Lun Yurka, the Eurasian! He used to have that room. That's where my sister lived when I last heard from her. I've been here since, wondering if I might not get some hint . . ."

I shook her again.

"Begin from the beginning," I demanded, "and make it snap-py and to the point."

"Lun Yurka, the Eurasian, as white as you or I, used to have that room. He dealt in . . . women. My sister Maida was one of them. My own name is Eda Noonan. When I didn't hear from her I came here, got another room, managed to get a pass-key. Maida was . . . well, maybe you understand. . . ."

"The kind of a girl men call over a telephone?"

"Yes, but not as you think. Strange, *unearthly* men. She *couldn't* be different. A wild streak in her. She didn't even try. She was somehow other-worldly in her mad desire for excitement. But I loved her, the whole family loved her. We didn't even condone her, because it wouldn't have made the slightest difference. In her mind there was nothing to condone. She had to do the things she did. Then she vanished. I've always believed she was murdered. I've sneaked into that room, the horrible, grisly room, and waited for a sign, for the telephone to ring. It was rung, there have been men's voices. . . ."

"I know. I know. And what else?"

"The little things. The barking of dogs in the well-court, when I know there are no dogs there. Lun Yurka had such dogs, ferocious, horrid little creatures. I've even thought . . . you see, Maida hinted in letters, of strange, ghastly things happening to other girls who were pawns of Lun Yurka. Of girls disappearing, of new sleeve-dogs coming . . . sleeve-dogs with the animal ferocity of wolves. I think she must have been taking dope, for she hinted that the vanishing of girls, and the appearance of sleeve-

dogs, were too close together.

I couldn't help it. A cold chill, as from a glacier, caressed my spine. My hair shifted oddly on the back of my neck. Terror was an invisible blanket of many layers, fluttering over this girl, Eda, and me.

"Listen," I said, "while I tell you something. . . ."

I didn't think it would be a surprise to her, and it wasn't; but it frightened her even more, if that were possible. I told her of entering my room, of taking a woman in my arms. I told her everything, of the kiss.

"Oh, my God!" she said. "Oh, my God!"

"Were you in there?" I demanded.

"No!" she moaned. "No! No! And yet . . ."

"Yet what?"

"I was sleeping in this room, with the door locked. I dreamed that I rose, went into *that* room. I didn't seem to open any doors. I seemed merely to go through them. I was in the dark. I felt the presence of a man. I couldn't seem to help myself. I was in a daze, wherein nothing seemed to matter. I dreamed — Mother of God! — exactly what you have told me. And then I came back here."

"Let me see your negligee!" I snapped.

SHE STARTED TO rise, to

go to a closet, but was unable to complete the task. I went to the closet myself, and there hung the white garment with the black sash. I took it down, held it in front of her. She covered her face with her hands.

"That's all I could find," she said brokenly, "that belonged to Maida. I found it in the room."

"But doesn't the maid ever clean up when a guest leaves?"

"That room is always rented," was the surprising answer. "I don't know why you were put into it."

I had an idea. I took my key from my pocket, then gasped. The room in which these queer things had been happening was 426. The key tag said 428! Yet 428 had opened 426. I'd got into the wrong room somehow.

My brain was in a whirl. How had I got into that room? I shook the hysterical girl again.

"This Lun Yurka, what did he look like? Did you ever see him?"

"Yes. He walked up to me when I came into the hotel lobby the first time, called me by name, and told me I'd better leave — or I would die!"

"What did he look like?" I demanded.

She described him carefully, while little ants crawled along my spine, seeming to increase in numbers as she spoke; for the man she was describing was the bellhop who had taken me to that room, the clerk who had

shown me a well-court empty of dogs of any kind.

"And this Lun Yurka," I said, "where is he now?"

"That's the terrible thing," she said. "He was shot to death, right in the hotel lobby, within twenty minutes of his warning to me! Nobody ever knew who did it, but someone said a girl had run from the place, screaming, looking down at something on the floor nobody else could see, and shrieking: *'The little things! The little things! Take them away!'*"

I shook her again.

"We've got to look at this thing calmly," I said. "I don't know what's going on. You've lost a sister. You're trying to find some trace of her. I've got a mystery to solve. Besides, whoever that woman really was, I learned one thing when I kissed her: she's another mystery I have to solve, and I'll solve it if it takes until I die. Whatever you may have dreamed, that girl was flesh and blood, understand."

She stared at me out of her deep black eyes. Her lips were red, red as ripe cherries.

"You're not afraid?" she asked. "I'm sure it means death. I've dreamed of the little things, and always there was death in them. If that girl you mention" — she shuddered, recalling her dream, and I winced because she shuddered at the recollection — "was real, how did it

happen that the window was open? How did it happen that a black mist . . ."

She didn't finish what she had started, for she suddenly remembered something, as I did. *I hadn't told her about that black mist!*"

"And how," I said, "did you know of the black mist? I didn't tell you."

"My dream," she said brokenly. "Oh, what's the use? I dreamed of everything you said!"

But she couldn't say it. Her face went fiery red and snowy white by turns. Here, normally, was a sweet, fine girl who, in dreams, became something else. It was little wonder that she was terrified. And I was terrified, too, when I asked the next question.

"Tell me, Eda, how many times you've had this dream. How many other men . . ."

SHE WAS ON her feet instantly.

"Never another man!" she cried. "Only the empty black room, filled with the barking of sleeve-dogs, and the search."

"The search?"

"Yes, for a man! I can't understand it. Suppose you had been less the man, less . . ."

"Make no mistake," I said grimly; "if you hadn't fled from me I would have *forced* an explanation. I am brutally frank."

"Then so will I be. That black mist . . . well, in this wild

dream of mine I always, on the point of finding whatever it was that filled me with the dreadful, ghastly urge, turned into a black, sooty mist, and flowed out through the window! The window was always opened for me, and always closed behind me, and I never saw what, or who, opened or closed it."

"And how," I asked grimly, "did you escape from the bathroom?"

Her cry sounded like that of a mouse caught in a trap. She hadn't mentioned the bathroom.

"I became black mist," she whispered, "as soon as the door closed behind me, and mingled with the shadows in the room when the door opened, so that my going wasn't noticed."

You can imagine how that made me feel!

"We've got to put our heads together. I'm not superstitious, or have never regarded myself as being so, but I'm beginning to wonder a great deal about all this. You must have some idea."

"Yes. When I dream that dream, I'm not myself, but Maida, seeking something. She is dead, I'm sure of it, and trying to show me something, trying to tell me something. . . ."

"Does this mean anything?" I asked hoarsely.

I pulled down the neck of my collar, showed her the two tiny dots which had bled a little,

and her answer was that sharp cry again.

"Yes," she whispered, "Maida's letters, her mention of other girls who served Lun Yurka! Just before they disappeared they became lethargic, anemic, and had those dots on their necks."

"You don't," I asked, "by any chance believe in vampires?"

But I had no answer to that, for a good and sufficient reason. There was a sudden, nerve-shattering banging on the door. Eda looked at me, startled.

"The house detective," she said. "A girl mustn't have men in her room."

Well, I'd already gone to the door. The hammering, savage, terrific, kept up until I put my hand on the knob. I spun the door open. I was ready to smash the face off any house detective that walked. But — nothing doing! That hallway outside was empty of any living soul. And no human being, between the time I grabbed that door and opened it, could have got even to the nearest door and through it, after his last knocking on the panels!

It was eery, I can tell you. I started to go back, when I saw something else, something that made me squirm. Moving foot-prints! Yes, just that: successive indentations in the carpet, which instantly sprang back into smoothness, as though a tiny invisible dog were walking

along the carpet! Nor was that all. The footprints turned at my door . . . and kept on going. The door didn't move, but I knew that the invisible dog had gone through it or under it. But what sort of dog, in God's name, could crawl under a door? Even the tiniest of sleeve-dogs couldn't have done it.

I went back to the girl.

"There's danger, all right," I said hoarsely. "Plenty of it. I'm in on it by accident; you're in it up to your neck. I think you must be getting close to a solution of the mystery of your sisters' disappearance . . . and the . . . the . . . forces behind it are angry. I don't mind admitting I'm scared. If it were wolves — imagine them in hotel rooms! — I wouldn't be afraid; but those tiny dogs! They're worse than wolves."

"Yes," she whispered, "worse. Much worse, because they, because they . . ."

THE KNOCKING on the door again, loud, insistent. I got the idea that whenever either of us, in talking, came close to a solution, a hint of what was behind it all, that knocking would come to drown out the words, divert our attention.

"It's in my room," I said. "Nothing will happen here. For some reason they don't cross your threshold. I can't figure it out here. I'm afraid to leave you here. Come on to my room."

She went. She was afraid, for herself, for me. I was afraid for both of us, more than I would admit, even to myself. A *crawling* something, horrible, as though slimy with the life-leaven of the ages, menaced us both. We closed the door behind us, and instantly the dog howled from the well-court. I heard, moreover, the scurrying of many feet, there in the dark room. With a cry of abject terror Eda swung against me, clung to me, her face against my neck, her arms around me. "I'm afraid, so horribly afraid!" she murmured.

I tried to comfort her, though my teeth chattered and my voice shook as if I had the ague. She was panting, there against me, panting, her bosom heaving with her terror. I held her tightly, sorry for her, wishing I might give my life to be of service.

The little footfalls didn't come close. They seemed to be circling us, as though thwarted in trying to reach us by some invisible wall.

It was exactly here that I felt the girl begin to *change in my arms*! To change, to become — and she knew it, too, as I did, and both of us were stricken with terror greater than we had ever known before — the woman I had already, here, held in my arms.

"Don't," she was sobbing into my ears, "let me get away. Don't let me go out through

the window. For this time, dear God, I won't ever be able to get back. Do you understand? Before I dreamed it. *This time it's real!* Hold me! Hold me!"

The myriad snarlings in the black room held a jeering note. I couldn't help the impression — born, of course, of what Eda had told me — that the jeering was that of many women.

I stood like a man turned to stone, wondering what in God's name I could do. Eda's clothing had changed, seemed to be getting thinner. I could feel the warmth of her through her waist.

"Oh God," I prayed, "what shall I do? I *can't*, simply *can't* let her get away!"

4

THERE WAS THE feeling of conflict, of the antagonism of abysmal forces, there in the room. I was fighting, uncomprehending, against those forces. I could feel the surge and flow of a mighty will. It somehow expressed itself in understandable terms through the chuckling of the woman I held in my arms.

I stared, during the *change*, at the window which gave on the well-court, and the damned thing was slowly rising. There were no visible hands, just the slow, inexorable lifting of the window.

And the woman in my arms was changing still, into the other creature I had already held in my arms; while from her lips came two sounds: the voice of Eda, begging, beseeching me, to hold her against the forces; the chuckling of something, or someone else, from the same lips, making light of my mundane powers to hold *anything* against the unknown forces which eddied and swirled about me.

That damned window! And the howling from the well-court, and the scurrying here and there of the tiny feet in the room! I felt, strange as it sounds, that in a matter of minutes the ultimate change would come, that Eda would become the black smoke and vanish through the opening window. It couldn't, mustn't happen! I whirled with her to the closet, forced her inside, shut the door. Then, panting, terrified, not believing anything I did, but knowing I must do it, I hurried to the window and forced it shut.

It took all my strength, and I am a powerful man. Then I whirled to face the black room of many shadows, and I was panting like a spent runner.

I heard myself say, in a croaking voice, like that of a raven perhaps, "You shan't have her, understand? She is mine! Mine, do you understand?"

The window started rising again. I could feel it against

my back, and the cold breath of the night wind against me, through my clothing that perspiration had dampened. I turned, forced the window shut.

Then, savagely, forcing my will to perform the tasks, afraid of what I would see when the light came on, but holding my eyes open with all the strength of my body, I switched on the standing light first. As its light struck at the darkness like a lash, a myriad of baleful eyes glared back at me. The room was filled with snarling. It would break into howls in a moment, I knew, unless . . . unless the howling dog in the well-court bade otherwise; for somehow I knew that the dog down there was master of all the others.

Don't ask me how I knew, for I can't tell you. But the glaring eyes, like those of cats reflecting the light, were growing dim, I dashed to the switch which turned on the dim bulbs overhead, and the shadows seemed to coalesce in the corners, outside the range of the lights.

The shadows had swallowed the eyes, the snarling things from Hell . . . or else the snarling things and the shadows were one.

Now I stopped, broke off a chair-leg, smashed one end to a broken mass against the wall, and jammed it in between the two sections of window, so that

no power could lift that window without breaking something. And something — *something*, I say! — immediately tried. The howling down in the sooty dark was ghastly. The dog came back on the sill, flinging himself against the window-pane; but for all his vociferous scolding, which rasped my nerves and shriveled my soul, his body *was* small, and he couldn't break through the glass.

I stared at the dogs. One, I would have sworn, should have been dead, for I had twisted his head off, flung him under the bed. Yet, now I could see the spot where I had flung him, and that it was empty. I got the idea: *You can't slay the dead!*

And as though my own words had been a spell, I became rigid, moveless, and the dogs poured over me as I sat, and over Eda Noonan.

It was right here that I heard a soft chuckle, near the window. I turned my head, which felt heavy and sick, and saw the dog from the well-court. He was just hopping from the window-sill into the room . . . and his eyes which looked into mine were the mocking eyes of the bellhop-clerk! No mistaking them, nor that he was Lun Yurka the Eurasian!

If only, now, I could get to that window! But my body was inert, lifeless.

5

MY MIND SEEMED to be working with lightning-speed, even though my body would not work at all. My eyes swerved from Eda to the sleeve-dog, with the eyes of the Eurasian, there on the floor. The sleeve-dog from the well-court was laughing, and his eyes were as mocking as ever.

There, said my brain, is Lun Yurka, the Eurasian, a vampire out of the high passes of the Far East, ages old. Sleeve-dogs have been the pets of oriental rulers for ages. It is little wonder then . . .

And how did the animal rise from the court?

That was easy, too, when one accepted the premise that Lun Yurka, the undead, and his women — now the dogs which fought over blood from my throat — were vampires. Maybe the howling in the court had been nothing but that — howling. The vampire could have flown to the window-sill as a bat, and there taken the shape of the sleeve-dog.

Foolish, a b s u r d, fantastic, insane! Yes, I used all those words to describe it, though I could find no words to describe my horror and fear. The brutes had imbibed before my eyes of the blood of Eda Noonan; by the ancient hellish creed of the vampires she, when she died, would become as one of them.

Not only that, but her own sister, here among the sleeve-dogs, must have been among her attackers!

It made my flesh crawl, even as I forced my lips to call a name: "Maidal Maidal!"

And one of the dogs on my chest, which now was dyed with my own blood, broke from the mass, looked all around—and would have howled dolefully, nose pointed at the ceiling of the room, had not the dog from the well-court, Lun Yurka the Eurasian, barked softly, a command, I knew, for silence.

Horror gripped me. There seemed no escape. Then my eyes were on Eda, there on the bed, and again a change was taking place in her. The dog from the well-court had hopped to the bed, was squatting on her chest, red tongue lolling out in hellish laughter. Baleful eyes fixed on the sleeping girl.

Eda's eyes slowly opened. Out of her mouth came a strange, unearthly voice, "I hear, Lun Yurka, and I obey!"

Even the last word, "obey" came from her lips with difficulty, for the change was almost too swift to note. But one second there was Eda Noonan, promising abject obedience to Lun Yurka. And next moment . . .

A sleeve-dog, with the eyes of Eda Noonan, jumped blithe-

ly out from under the covers, advanced to rub noses with the dog from the well-court — *and Eda Noonan was nowhere to be seen!*

I think the horror of that gripped me more than anything else could have done. I figured it out this way: the dogs had drunk of Eda's blood until she had died, and her death had made her one with them. In spite of everything I had been able to do, I hadn't been able to keep her on this side of whatever horrible veil separated normal people from the ghastly people who were like Lun Yurka.

And it was all the fault of Lun Yurka.

And I would be like him, too, if I did not do something! But what could I do? Old legends said you cut off their heads, drove stakes through their hearts. But I had nothing with which to sever the brute's head, nor any stake to drive.

But I'd find a way. With all my will I commanded my body to act.

I SWOOPED FROM the chair. The dogs spilled onto the floor, where they instantly attacked my legs. Their sharp teeth struck at me, but I scarcely felt them. I scooped up the sleeve-dog I knew was Eda Noonan, thrust her into my clothing, where she lay warm against my flesh.

My other hand clutched and held the sleeve-dog from the well-court.

What followed then was proof, I think, that I was utterly mad, or that I was not in possession of my own faculties — literally.

I held the dog in my hands, tightly clutched. Its eyes dared me to do anything. Its lolling red tongue laughed at me with the mocking laughter of that bellhop.

I heard myself saying, in a raucous croak, "I know you, Lun Yurka, and you are finished. Never again will you create new horrors to loose upon the world. You are going, now, to die."

He howled in glee, that blasted thing, that horrid *little thing*, out of some oriental Purgatory. He could, then and there, I am sure, have become the bellhop in his full stature. But he did not, which proves, I think, that he didn't wish to; that he wished to happen — what did happen.

How should I destroy him? I had twisted the head off one sleeve-dog, and it hadn't died. But there must be a way. The drinking, the ghastly blood-feast of the sleeve-dogs, actuated me; or maybe, deep down inside me, kin to Lun Yurka because his hell-dogs had tainted my blood with their taint, his will forced me to obey his commands.

But I went mad, with a horrible lust to destroy, and I had nothing but my hands and my teeth. And when my hands had finished, ripping, tearing, while my mouth snarled, the sleeve-dog from the well-court was gone, and my mouth was smeared with blood . . .

How could Lun Yurka return, then, when I had so completely destroyed him? Certainly the oldsters who had kept the legend alive — the legend of decapitation and the stake through the heart for vampires — had never thought of this!

Then I took the little sleeve-dog from my garments, dropped her on the bed, and whispered hoarsely, "I've found the way, Eda, and we shall never again be parted; at least not by Lun Yurka's horrors. Never ask me how I did it, for you would turn from me in mad hysteria."

I dropped her on the bed, said, "Lie quietly and become Eda Noonan again."

The fact that I gave such a command, spontaneously, and that she obeyed so implicitly, should have told me the truth, but it did not. It simply seemed the natural thing to do; so I did it.

And there, while I sat back with a sigh, Eda Noonan reposed on the bed, smiling a secretive smile at me.

"You are a very smart man, Adam," she said . . . and her

voice was so very strange, her lips so very, very red.

I looked, and the window was open. I lighted the electrics and the dogs were gone, shadows were suddenly in the corner; then black mist was going out through the window, and I was alone with Eda Noonan.

It no longer seemed to matter to her about Maida. Why should it have mattered? She had found Maida, and whatever could have been done, I . . . well, I had done it, erasing all vestiges of Lun Yurka.

I FELT VERY strange when morning came and I went down to the desk to check out. Eda had gone. She was to meet me on the corner, in the heart of Times Square. I was eager to meet her there. At any other hotel in town we could be together.

"I'll have my bill, please," I told the clerk.

He started, looked at me. It irritated me. "What the devil's wrong, fellow?"

"Your voice, Mister Clerc," he said. "It reminded me of something!"

"Of what, may I ask?"

"We had a guest here, before your present visit. He had the room next to yours. It was very unfortunate . . . his name was Lun Yurka, and your voice, just now, was his voice!"

Abysmal fear swept over me,

fear greater than any I had ever known. I was, I was sure, Adam Clerc. I looked at myself in a mirror, going out of the hotel, and I *was* Adam Clerc, though my own eyes mocked me from the mirror.

And when, later, Eda and I registered at another hotel, it was with the greatest difficulty that I did the usual, signing my name, Adam Clerc, with my customary flourish. I felt as though I were forging a name, that the name I should have signed was: Lun Yurka!

And on the way to the hotel I had stared at the necks of all beautiful women on the street, and it had been a vast effort of will, on my part, that had kept me from attacking them, ripping at their white necks with savage teeth.

Eda, I noted, stared with a hunger akin to mine, at the necks of men we met — the young, handsome, *blooded* men!

And with us, as we went,

trotted the sleeve-dogs. Eda saw them, I saw them; but none in this hotel, where dogs were positively forbidden, paid them the slightest heed, or sought to sidestep them as they walked . . .

Yes, I am Lun Yurka. Maida and Eda are together again — as all of us will be down the centuries to come, until someone thinks of decapitation and the stake through the heart.

I think, after finding a body that suited me, that of Adam Clerc, I was very clever in obtaining possession of it, for now Adam has his Eda, Eda has her Maida, but I . . . I . . . Lun Yurka, old almost as the Himalayas, am master of them all.

There is a touch of humor in it, too — that, though Adam Clerc will never die, his terror can never end. Even Lun Yurka must have his touch of amusement to make bloody eternity endurable . . .



The Flaw

by J. Vernon Shea

J. VERNON SHEA, who had a very fine article on H. P. Lovecraft in FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION magazine last year, offers us a strange and unusual tale. You will find a thumbnail sketch about him in the September 1964 issue of MOH (#5), which we ran when we published his *Five-Year Contract*.

WE HAD BEEN discussing masks. Father Formicelli had given a dissertation upon the masks of various primitives — pre-Colombian, Polynesian, and African examples — and upon their religious significance. I had attended him politely, though I could have corrected him on a number of details, for it is not often in our Friday night gatherings that Father Formicelli can find among our subjects for discussion one that touches even tangentially upon his calling.

He is perhaps the incongruous member of our quartet — although in the Village almost no grouping will occasion remark.

Even if a stranger might wonder upon what common ground a priest could meet with such representative Village figures as Pavel Proctor, the poet, Arnold Searle, the composer, and myself, Christopher Lord, artist; we realized that our Friday night discussions would be incomplete without him. The good father

is always good company. He was in especially good form that night; the Chianti had loosened his tongue and the play of the long tapering fingers lent emphasis to his remarks. I could see that Pavel, as usual, was regarding his dark good looks intently but regretfully — his reversed collar always imposes upon poor Pavel an impenetrable taboo.

We are so accustomed to the Village attitudes that Father Formicelli's homilies are always welcome; they strike a fresh note and remind us of our roots back home. Father Formicelli is not easily shocked, though none of us goes to him for confession, and he usually makes good sense. Through him we hear in microcosm the voice of America. It is good to be reminded occasionally of the layman's viewpoint.

On this Friday night we were celebrating an occasion. During the week I had sold a painting for \$250 to Knoedler's Gallery, and I was footing the bill, thus relieving the good father of his usual responsibility. The painting was not one of my usual abstractions, but representative art — a portrait of a woman, dressed for a masquerade, carrying a hideous red mask — a woman wearing a mask, gray and sere, that matches exactly the folds and flesh tones of her neck and hands. Thus a discussion of

masks had been inevitable. Pavel had expounded upon the use of masks in O'Neill and Genet, and Arnold had mentioned mirror-images and inverted harmonies before it was Father Formicelli's turn to speak.

We always meet at Angelo's. Mama Angelo has a confirmed Village clientele. The Lasagna there is especially good and the prices are reasonable, and it is a place that is not picturesque enough to attract the tourists, nor dark or grimy enough to appeal to the beatniks. It is in the basement of one of the old brownstone buildings.

I sat facing the entrance, with Father Formicelli opposite me. As he spoke, I happened to glance out, and saw that someone had stopped outside and was peering down at us. In order to see down into Angelo's, one must go out to the sidewalk almost to the curb, and this the man must have done. We are so used to curiosity seekers in the Village that it takes a lot to disturb us; but for some reason, I found this stranger's scrutiny definitely disconcerting. It was dark outside, and I could not see his face. It looked almost as if he didn't have a face. His was a thick and amorphous figure, dressed in some dark material. He kept looking in on us, and when he became

aware that I saw him he raised his arm and waved to me.

The gesture was infinitely chilling, for either he kept his hand hidden in his sleeve or he didn't have a hand.

"Do you see that man out there?" I cried out, but when the others looked they reported that he had gone.

SEVERAL WEEKS later I had occasion to visit Pavel Proctor. As I was climbing the stairs to his apartment, I heard Pavel's door open and I thought I saw the dark shadow of a man emerging, but I heard no step upon the stairs. If there had been a visitor, he would have had to pass me upon the landing. There seemed to be no one there; but I could not be sure, for the landing was quite dark. Somehow I got the impression that someone or something was pressed deep into the shadows of the landing, darker in tone than they were. I felt a strong disinclination to examine the landing carefully.

One is always discreet about Pavel's male visitors, yet this time I could not restrain my curiosity. "Who was that who just left?" I asked Pavel.

"What in the world are you talking about, Chris?" said Pavel. "I've been alone here all evening."

"That's strange. I thought I

passed someone on the landing."

Pavel's brows went up quizzically. It is not an expression that becomes Pavel, for then three deep furrows appear upon his forehead and you are conscious of Pavel's age. Pavel's face is usually ageless, bland and eggshell-smooth, and you place him somewhere in his twenties — but Pavel has been around the Village for a long time. I remember him when he first came, from somewhere out in the Midwest — Akron, possibly, or Madison — before his first name was elongated from Paul to Pavel. ("Paul is such a common name," he had said. "I simply detest the sound of it.")

"I might just as well have had a visitor and enjoyed myself," he said. "I've been struggling with one line all day."

"That bad?" I sympathized.

"It's such a good poem otherwise. It would be one of my best if I could only get the last line right."

"What are you writing?"

"A sonnet. . . . Yes, I'm going back to the old forms. If I'm a poet, I'm going to have to accept discipline. And what poetic form is more of a strait-jacket than the sonnet?"

"How does it go so far? Read it to me."

Pavel's voice is beautiful when he is reading poetry. As he read his incomplete sonnet,

I became aware that it was probably his best effort; I felt that familiar chill, that sense of hackle-raising, I always get when I'm in the presence of a work of art.

His voice dropped away at the end of the thirteenth line. "I wonder, I wonder . . ." he said. There was a withdrawn look in his eyes. He moved slowly toward his desk and seated himself. He started writing, momentarily forget of my presence. He wrote several versions, crossing out a word here and there. The look in his eyes was close to insanity — the demoniac look of the mystic. I didn't want to disturb him, so I stayed where I was, quietly watching him. All of a sudden he wrote down a line, read it over, re-read it. His face relaxed. "How do you like this line?" he asked me.

He read it to me. There is no use quoting it, for everyone knows it: the last line of *Forever Harried*. It's Pavel's one perfect line.

WHEN I WENT up to Arnold Searle's studio in answer to his telephone call he still looked a bit shaken from his experience.

I am aware that I have rather scantied Arnold so far in this chronicle. Arnold is accustomed to neglect. The Villagers were inclined to take him for granted, for nothing new had ap-

peared from him in over twenty years. I was aware that during that period Arnold had not been idle, for you could find pages of the incompleted Symphony in A Major scattered over his entire studio; but Arnold works devilishly slow. The oldest by far of our quartet, he had published only five small compositions; the entire output of his lifetime could be played in less than an hour. His works are not splashy ones, and they have received far more critical attention than popular support; rather eccentric; rather crotchety pieces, they are as little derivative as Webern's.

"I'm so glad you could come, Chris," he greeted me. "You'll have a brandy, won't you?" he said, indicating the decanter upon the coffee table. It was obvious that he had already imbibed heavily from it.

"I don't know," I said. "It's a bit early in the morning for me."

He had neither shaved nor dressed; his robe had been put on hastily, for it was rumpled at the collar and gathered about him by a knot rather than by a bow. Arnold is the despair of portrait painters. He has a white shock of hair and leonine head not unlike Robert Frost's, a high, distinguished forehead, bright, eagle-sharp eyes and delicate nostrils, but from that point down-

ward the face dissolves sharply; the mouth is shapeless and querulous, usually hanging slack, and the chin is weak and puffy. If one were to draw a line from a point directly under his nose or mask out the lower part of his face and then paint the rest from imagination, Arnold could be made to look the eminent composer he is.

"What's this all about, Arnold?" I asked, for he seemed reluctant to begin.

"It's about a dream I had last night," he said. "Wait; I know that sounds trivial. But I almost never dream — or rather, since psychologists say we all have many dreams a night, I never remember my dreams in the morning. But this one I can't forget. It seems that in my dream I was sleeping and was awakened by the sound of music. In my dream — I know this sounds a bit silly, Chris — I got up and came out here to the studio. Someone was bending over the piano here, playing. He was playing my symphony.

"This is the horrible part, Chris. I went over to him in my dream and started to touch him. 'What are you doing here?' I said. And then he turned around on the stool. . . ."

"Why are you shaking so, Arnold?" I asked. "That does-

n't sound so very horrible to me."

Arnold fortified himself with another sip of brandy, and continued: "You should have seen him, Chris. The grossest body imaginable, almost without shape. And his hands, his hands . . . he had only one hand, Chris; he was playing with only his right hand. And where the left hand should have been, there was only a sleeve poised over the keys, and the sleeve was dripping . . . dripping some dark juice all over the keyboard."

"You just had a nightmare, Arnold. Forget it."

"Wait. He turned his face up to me and gibbered something. And I couldn't stand it, Chris, and I ran. For there was no face . . ."

"Whew!" I said. "That *was* a nightmare. But that's all it was, Arnold, a nightmare. Forget it and try to get some rest."

"*Was* it only a nightmare, Chris? That's what I thought, too. But this morning when I got up it seemed to me there were some dark stains on the piano keys; they faded away as I watched. And how do you account for this?" He indicated the sheets of music on the piano.

I picked up the sheets and glanced at them casually at first. "Arnold!" I cried. "You've completed your symphony!"

"Yes, it's finished," he said.

"But did I complete it? Examine it closely. Does the handwriting look like mine? I don't think so."

I scrutinized the sheets again. "You're right. There *does* seem to be a difference. . . . Arnold, I just thought of something. Couldn't you have composed this *in your sleep*, while you thought you were having a dream? I'm sure you've heard of automatic writing."

"It's possible," said Arnold slowly. "I never thought of that. But can't you see the difference in the notes? Mine are always straight up and down; these new one slant to the right."

"Have you played them, Arnold? Do you recognize them?"

"Yes, I've played them, and no. I don't recognize them. What am I to do, Chris? You know how anxious I've been to get the symphony completed. And here, *without any effort upon my part*, it's all finished. And it's salable, Chris: the public would like it. God knows how I need the money."

"Then why don't you have it published? A windfall like this . . ."

"Because it's not really mine, Chris. It wouldn't represent my best work. The new stuff, Chris — it's basically cheap. It has interesting harmonies, it's more melodious than anything I've ever written — and the sym-

phony *does* need a tune once in a while — and there's nothing really wrong with the counterpoint, but it's *cheap*. What am I supposed to do, pull a Shostakoch at my age? This was to be the crowning work of my career."

"What are you going to do then, Arnold?"

"I don't know, Chris, I don't know. . . ." And Arnold looked blankly into space.

MAMA ANGELO had outdone herself for our Friday night meeting. She hung over our table, anxious to see if we approved her spaghetti sauce, if there was too much oil in the salad. We assured her that everything was *prima*, but she must have sensed something of the shadow of our discontent.

For the evening was going wrong. Arnold, our host, despite the unaccustomed splendor of his attire, had little to say; he sat in his chair disconsolate, and when someone came over to our table to congratulate him upon his new symphony, he seemed to shrivel up. He rather avoided my eyes.

For he had submitted the completed symphony, virtually without change, to his music publishers. Already several conductors were interested in giving it its world premiere. He had again become a subject of conversation in the Village. Cherie, a buxom blonde sculp-

tress, had moved in with him.

Still he was glum.

His mood rather matched that of Pavel's. Pavel said he felt doomed.

"Why, Pavel?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know, I just feel as if I'm going to be like the composer who writes his operatic masterpiece when he's twenty-five and then lives on for sixty more years with nothing further to say. I've already written my perfect line. I can't stand being hated."

"Hated, Pavel? Who in the world would hate *you*?"

"Just about everybody. Oh, I've seen the look. Just when someone is congratulating me, I can see the cold hatred in his eyes. They're all conscious that my name will live, while theirs will die."

"You're imagining things, Pavel. Oh, I know the Villagers are inclined to be a bit jealous . . ."

"It's more than that. You know, sometimes I think they've got a hired thug after me. Every once in a while I get the feeling there's someone following me, but every time I turn around he darts out of sight. You'll laugh at this, but I can even imagine what he looks like. He's big, and he's got dark clothes, and he has only one arm."

Arnold and I exchanged glances.

"And I haven't seen his face

yet, but I've a feeling I won't like it."

"Mother of God, you're all giving me the creeps," said Father Formicelli. "What's the matter with everyone tonight? Here Mama Angelo's prepared one of her best meals in years, and you've hardly touched a thing. Don't worry, *Mama mia*. I still love you," he said, and he threw a kiss in her direction. Mama Angelo beamed.

Father Formicelli rose somewhat unsteadily to his feet. He raised his glass of Chianti high. "A toast, everyone! Here's to my oh, so talented friends! To Arnold, upon the completion of his magnificent symphony. I haven't heard it yet, but it can't be less than magnificent. To Pavel, for writing a perfect line. To Pavel, my little friend who would like to love me, to Pavel, a true poet! To Christopher, who will immortalize us all upon canvas some day. To Chris the Lord, true artist! Drink up, everyone!" He gulped down the Chianti.

MRS. REAGAN, her arms akimbo, barred the way to the priest's house.

"Indeed," she said, "it's the likes of you what brought the poor father to this sorry state."

I assured Mrs. Reagan that I hadn't seen Father Formicelli since Friday night. She was still hesitant about admitting me. From a distance there sounded

forth at intervals a singing voice — now muted, now caught up with fervor, a voice thick with melancholy.

Mrs. Reagan winced at the sound. "Oh, if one of the parishioners or the bishop should hear of this! He's been like that for days. Whatever am I going to do?"

"Possibly I could do something," I suggested.

"Oh, do you think you could? He's locked his door to me. If you went out through the garden, there's another door to the study there."

I went through the garden path as the housekeeper had suggested. The singing voice grew louder. It was engaged upon a drinking song and in its entire diapason was coarse and despairing.

It was nearing twilight, and there was a light on in the priest's study. Father Formicelli was not alone. Upon the drawn shades I observed two shadows. They both seemed to be raising their hands, and the hand of one of them, the bulkier of the two, seemed curiously foreshortened.

I beat upon the study door urgently. "Father Formicelli," I shouted. "It's me, Chris. Let me in!"

I had to wait a considerable time before the door was opened. Father Formicelli, dressed only in trousers and T-shirt and with his face black

with stubble, let me in. He sank heavily into a chair by the huge study table upon which was arrayed an assortment of bottles of sacramental wine, and he indicated that I join him in a bottle. I declined. His T-shirt was stained and his armpits were acrid and he stank of garlic and wine.

"Where's your visitor?" I asked.

He opened an eyelid heavily and regarded me quizzically.

"I saw two shadows on the blind as I came up."

He raised an admonishing finger. "Chris, for shame! You've been drinking."

He buried his head upon the table and started to go to sleep.

I shook him. "Father, you look like hell. You've got to get cleaned up. You've got Mrs. Reagan worried sick."

"Mrs. Reagan! Fah! She's just like my mother was. I never wanted to be a priest. She made me. She always got her own way. I wanted to be an artist of some kind like you or Pavel or Arnold. She made me go to the seminary. O God, God!"

"Come, Father, you've got to get dressed."

But he refused to budge. He sat in the chair, staring illimitably into space.

I RETURNED home one evening to find my studio not untenanted. In the pale illumination afforded by the sky-

light someone — or something — was bent over one of my canvasses.

I switched on the light. My visitor turned. I had caught him in the act of wiping his greasy fingers over a painting, which was now one chromatic blob. Deep in his throat he was making uncouth, indistinguishable sounds. The gross, shadowy face held only a semblance of features; the face was disgustingly smooth and barren.

Fear might have held me back, but I knew for a moment only outrage at the ruined painting, and I sprang upon him. He raised his handleless arm to protect his face from my blows. The thick, gross neck was exposed, and I seized it between my hands and began to throttle him.

I had to cease, for I found

that I was choking myself.

I CAN OFFER no explanation: The thing never returned. Out of the night it had sought us, the gifted but flawed quartet, and it had known and exploited our weaknesses. It had visited Pavel and upon its leaving Pavel was enabled to compose the perfect line; but then it had returned and stripped poor Pavel of his humanity. It had tempted Arnold, and Arnold had accepted the facile and venial solution. It had stripped poor Father Formicelli of his pretenses. Naturally, in this chronicle, I have not exposed my own points of vulnerability, but the thing *knew*. Out of the night came the thing, the distillation of the darkness and of the dark places of the soul, and shattered us. It has not returned.

XX



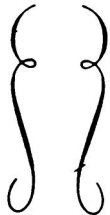
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The Doom Of London

by Robert Barr

Introduction by

Sam Moskowitz

CRITICS OF today's civilization, particularly that facet of it which they regard as American, delight in presenting smog as a manifestation peculiar to our times and way of life. They have already forgotten Pittsburgh, The Smoky City, which actually eliminated most of its smog, and are apparently entirely ignorant of the fact that this atmospheric condition was far worse in London of the 1890's than it is in most cities today.

The chief culprit in London, as in Pittsburgh, was the smoke from the burning of soft coal. In the United States it came from industry, but in England it was the accumulation of hundreds of thousands of home fires discharging black clouds into the damp air of the Thames River Valley. The famous London "fog" is actually London smog. This smog has had conferred upon it an air of literary romance, serving as the sinister back-

drop for the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and the machinations of the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu.

While the London smog well may have been an asset to A. Conan Doyle and Sax Rohmer, there were other literary figures of the period who were less sanguine about it. Among them was Robert Barr, almost forgotten today, but in the 1890's, one of the leading editors, authors, and confidants of literary greats of his time.

Robert Barr was born in Glasgow and for some years taught public school in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. It was probably during his stay on this continent that he formed the connections which eventually got him a post as London representative of **The Detroit Free Press**. His earliest reputation was as a short story writer but he eventually gained acclaim as a novelist, two of his novels being fantasy, **The Face and the Mask** (1895) and **From Whose Bourne** (1896). A high water mark in his career came when he wrote the conclusion to Stephen Crane's unfinished novel **The O'Ruddy** (1903).

His association with the great and near-great of his day was intimate. He roomed with Rudyard Kipling in Villiers Street, Strand, London, and was almost a perpetual

house guest of A. Conan Doyle. A very influential period in his life began with his co-founding and editing **The Idler Magazine** with Jerome K. Jerome (**Three Men in a Boat**, 1889) in February, 1892. This handsomely illustrated publication, followed the vogue set by **The Strand Magazine**, and attracted contributors as distinguished as Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling, A. Conan Doyle, Israel Zangwill, Eden Phillpotts, Bret Harte, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. G. Wells, and Andrew Lang. In its lifetime, through the year 1910, **The Idler** published more than 100 stories of science fiction, fantasy, and the supernatural. Among them was **The Doom of London** by Robert Barr, which appeared in its November, 1892 number. **The Idler** had an exchange agreement with the American publication **McClure's Magazine**, which reprinted **The Doom of London** in its issue for November, 1894 with several illustrations different from the British edition.* In the same issue as **The Doom of London**, **McClure's Magazine** also ran an extensive interview of A.

*It is from *McClure's* that we have the present text; we regret that it was not feasible to obtain clear enough reproductions of the artwork so that some might be used here.

Editor

Conan Doyle by Robert Barr, illustrated with a number of photos of Barr as well as Doyle.

Barr frequently used science fiction or fantasy as a vehicle for social criticism and satire. His story **The Fear of It in The Idler** for May 1893, is a brief "utopia"; it tells of an island civilization, whose young people have never heard of England or the United States, and their philosophical dialogues with an Englishman cast up on their shores. **The Revolt of the — (The Idler, May, 1894)** is subtitled "A Page from the Domestic History of the Twentieth Century" and is a bitter satire on the rise of women in the business world (reminiscent of **The Psychophonic Nurse**, by David H. Keller, M.D. — **Amazing Stories**, November 1928) when they will carry on business, drink, smoke cigars, etc., while their husbands stay

home and take care of the children.

Science fiction and the supernatural evidently had a fascination for Robert Barr, because he returned to the use of such matter for magazines other than his own. One such story, noteworthy because it is not intended to convey a "message", was **The Hour Glass (The Strand Magazine, December, 1898)** where a man from the past appears to the purchaser of an antique hour glass to lay his claim to it. An educational fairy tale for children, **The Lightning Fiend (The Strand Magazine, November 1896)**, anticipates Frank L. Baum's prophetic "children's" story **The Master Key (1901)**.

In its very cleverly worked out scientific background, **The Doom of London** should be read not only as a dead writer's satiric nightmare, but as a possibility even today.



I.

THE SELF-CONCEIT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

I TRUST I am thankful my life has been spared until I have seen that most brilliant epoch

of the world's history — the middle of the twentieth century. It would be useless for any man to disparage the vast achievements of the past fifty years; and if I venture to call attention to the fact, now apparently forgotten, that the people of the

nineteenth century succeeded in accomplishing many notable things, it must not be imagined that I intend thereby to discount in any measure the marvellous inventions of the present age. Men have always been somewhat prone to look with a certain condescension upon those who lived fifty or a hundred years before them. This seems to me the especial weakness of the present age; a feeling of national self-conceit, which, when it exists, should at least be kept as much in the background as possible. It will astonish many to know that such also was a failing of the people of the nineteenth century. They imagined themselves living in an age of progress; and while I am not foolish enough to attempt to prove that they did anything really worth recording, yet it must be admitted by any unprejudiced man of research that their inventions were at least stepping-stones to those of today. Although the telephone and telegraph, and all other electrical appliances, are now to be found only in our national museums, or in the private collections of those few men who take any interest in the doings of the last century, nevertheless, the study of the now obsolete science of electricity led up to the recent discovery of vibratory ether which does the work of the world so satisfactorily. The people of the

nineteenth century were not fools; and although I am well aware that this statement will be received with scorn where it attracts any attention whatever, yet who can say that the progress of the next half-century may not be as great as that of the one now ended, and that the people of the next century may not look upon us with the same contempt which we feel toward those who lived fifty years ago?

Being an old man, I am, perhaps, a laggard who dwells in the past rather than the present; still it seems to me that such an article as that which appeared recently in *Blackwood* from the talented pen of Professor Mowberry, of Oxford University, is utterly unjustifiable. Under the title of "Did the People of London deserve their Fate?" he endeavors to show that the simultaneous blotting out of millions of human beings was a beneficial event, the good results of which we still enjoy. According to him, Londoners were so dull-witted and stupid, so incapable of improvement, so sodden in the vice of mere money-gathering, that nothing but their total extinction would have sufficed, and that, instead of being an appalling catastrophe, the doom of London was an un-mixed blessing. In spite of the unanimous approval with which this article has been received by the press, I still maintain that

such writing is uncalled for, and that there is something to be said for the London of the nineteenth century.

II.

WHY LONDON, WARNED, WAS UNPREPARED.

THE INDIGNATION I felt in first reading the article alluded to still remains with me, and it has caused me to write these words, giving some account of what I must still regard, in spite of the sneers of the present age, as the most terrible disaster that ever overtook a portion of the human race. I shall not endeavor to place before those who read, any record of the achievements pertaining to the time in question. But I would like to say a few words about the alleged stupidity of the people of London in making no preparations for a disaster regarding which they had continual and ever-recurring warning. They have been compared with the inhabitants of Pompeii making merry at the foot of a volcano. In the first place, fogs were so common in London, especially in winter, that no particular attention was paid to them. They were merely looked upon as inconvenient annoyances, interrupting traffic

and prejudicial to health; but I doubt if anyone thought possible for a fog to become one vast smothering mattress pressed down upon a whole metropolis, extinguishing life as if the city suffered from hopeless hydrophobia. I have read that victims bitten by mad dogs were formerly put out of their sufferings in that way, although I doubt much if such things were ever actually done, notwithstanding the charges of savage barbarity now made against the people of the nineteenth century.

Probably the inhabitants of Pompeii were so accustomed to the eruptions of Vesuvius that they gave no thought to the possibility of their city being destroyed by a storm of ashes and an overflow of lava. Rain frequently descended upon London, and if a rainfall continued long enough it would certainly have flooded the metropolis, but no precautions were taken against a flood from the clouds. Why, then should the people have been expected to prepare for a catastrophe from fog, such as there had never been any experience of in the world's history? The people of London were far from being the sluggish dolts present-day writers would have us believe.

Don't Miss **Dust**, by Wallace West, in Issue #2 of
FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION.

III.

THE COINCIDENCE THAT
CAME AT LAST.

AS FOG HAS now been abolished both on sea and land, and as few of the present generation have even seen one, it may not be out of place to give a few lines on the subject of fogs in general, and the London fogs in particular, which through local peculiarities differed from all others. A fog was simply watery vapor rising from the sea, for people then travelled by means of steamships that sailed upon the surface of the ocean.

London at the end of the nineteenth century consumed vast quantities of a soft bituminous coal for the purpose of heating rooms and of preparing food. In the morning and during the day, clouds of black smoke were poured forth from thousands of chimneys. When a mass of white vapor arose in the night, these clouds of smoke fell upon the fog, pressing it down, filtering slowly through it, and adding to its density. The sun would have absorbed the fog but for the layer of smoke that lay thick above the vapor and prevented its rays reaching it. Once this condition of things prevailed, nothing could clear London but a breeze of wind from any direction. L o n d o n frequently

had a seven days' fog, and sometimes a seven days' calm, but these two conditions never coincided until the last year of the last century. The coincidence, as every one knows, meant death — death so wholesale that no war the earth has ever seen left such slaughter behind it. To understand the situation, one has only to imagine the fog as taking the place of the ashes at Pompeii, and the coal-smoke as being the lava that covered it. The result to the inhabitants in both cases was exactly the same.

IV.

THE AMERICAN WHO WANTED
TO SELL.

I WAS at the time confidential clerk to the house of Fulton, Brixton & Co., a firm in Cannon Street, dealing largely in chemicals and chemical apparatus. Fulton I never knew; he died long before my time. Sir John Brixton was my chief — knighted, I believe, for services to his party, or because he was an official in the city during some royal progress through it; I have forgotten which. My small room was next to his large one, and my chief duty was to see that no one had an interview with Sir John unless he was an important man or had important business. Sir John was a diffi-

cult man to see, and a difficult man to deal with when he was seen. He had little respect for most men's feelings, and none at all for mine. If I allowed a man to enter his room who should have been dealt with by one of the minor members of the company, Sir John made no effort to conceal his opinion of me. One day, in the autumn of the last year of the century, an American was shown into my room. Nothing would do but he must have an interview with Sir John Brixton. I told him that it was impossible, as Sir John was extremely busy, but that if he explained his business to me I would lay it before Sir John at the first favorable opportunity. The American demurred at this, but finally accepted the inevitable. He was the inventor, he said, of a machine that would revolutionize life in London, and he wanted Fulton, Brixton & Co. to become agents for it. The machine, which he had in a small handbag with him, was of white metal, and it was so constructed that by turning an index it gave out greater or less volumes of oxygen gas. The gas, I understood, was stored in the interior in liquid form, under great pressure, and would last, if I remember rightly, for six months without recharging. There was also a rubber tube with a mouthpiece attached to it,

and the American said that if a man took a few whiffs a day he would experience beneficial results. Now, I knew there was not the slightest use in showing the machine to Sir John, because we dealt in old-established British apparatus, and never in any of the new-fangled Yankee inventions. Besides, Sir John had a prejudice against Americans, and I felt sure this man would exasperate him, as he was a most cadaverous specimen of the race, with high nasal tones, and a most deplorable pronunciation, much given to phrases savoring of slang; and he exhibited also a certain nervous familiarity of demeanor toward people to whom he was all but a complete stranger. It was impossible for me to allow such a man to enter the presence of Sir John Brixton; and when he returned some days later I explained to him, I hope with courtesy, that the head of the house regretted very much his inability to consider his proposal regarding the machine. The ardor of the American seemed in no way dampened by this rebuff. He said I could not have explained the possibilities of the apparatus properly to Sir John; he characterized it as a great invention, and said it meant a fortune to whomever obtained the agency for it. He hinted that other noted London houses were anxious to secure it,

but for some reason not stated he preferred to deal with us. He left some printed pamphlets referring to the invention, and said he would call again.

V.

THE AMERICAN SEES SIR JOHN.

MANY A TIME I have since thought of that persistent American, and wondered whether he left London before the disaster, or was one of the unidentified thousands who were buried in unmarked graves. Little did Sir John think, when he expelled him with some asperity from his presence, that he was turning away an offer of life, and that the heated words he used were, in reality, a sentence of death upon himself. For my own part, I regret that I lost my temper, and told the American his business methods did not commend themselves to me. Perhaps he did not feel the sting of this; indeed, I feel certain he did not, for, unknowingly, he saved my life. Be that as it may, he showed no resentment, but immediately asked me out to drink wine with him, an offer I was compelled to refuse. But I am getting ahead of my story. indeed, being unaccustomed to writing, it is difficult for me to set down events in their proper sequence. The American called upon me several times

after I told him our house could not deal with him. He got into the habit of dropping in upon me unannounced, which I did not at all like; but I gave no instructions regarding his intrusions, because I had no idea of the extremes to which he was evidently prepared to go. One day, as he sat near my desk reading a paper, I was temporarily called from the room. When I returned I thought he had gone, taking his machine with him; but a moment later I was shocked to hear his high nasal tones in Sir John's room, alternating with the deep notes of my chief's voice, which apparently exercised no such dread upon the American as upon those who were more accustomed to them. I at once entered the room, and was about to explain to Sir John that the American was there through no connivance of mine, when my chief asked me to be silent, and, turning to his visitor, requested him gruffly to proceed with his interesting narration. The inventor needed no second invitation, but went on with his glib talk, while Sir John's frown grew deeper, and his face became redder under his fringe of white hair. When the American had finished, Sir John roughly bade him begone, and take his accursed machine with him. He said it was an insult for a person with one

foot in the grave to bring a so-called health invention to a robust man who never had a day's illness. I do not know why he listened so long to the American, when he had made up his mind from the first not to deal with him, unless it was to punish me for inadvertently allowing the stranger to enter. The interview distressed me exceedingly, as I stood there helpless, knowing Sir John was becoming more and more angry with every word the foreigner uttered; but, at last, I succeeded in drawing the inventor and his work into my own room and closing the door. I sincerely hoped I would never see the American again, and my wish was gratified. He insisted on setting his machine going and placing it on a shelf in my room. He asked me to slip it into Sir John's room some foggy day and note the effect. The man said he would call again, but he never did.

VI.

HOW THE SMOKE HELD DOWN THE FOG.

IT WAS ON a Friday that the fog came down upon us. The weather was very fine up to the middle of November that autumn. The fog did not seem to have anything unusual about it. I have seen many worse fogs than that appeared to me. As day followed day,

however, the atmosphere became denser and darker, caused I suppose, by the increasing volume of coal-smoke poured out upon it. The peculiarity about those seven days was the intense stillness of the air. We were, although we did not know it, under an air-proof canopy, and were slowly but surely exhausting the life-giving oxygen around us, and replacing it by poisonous carbonic acid gas. Scientific men have since shown that a simple mathematical calculation might have told us exactly when the last atom of oxygen would have been consumed; but it is easy to be wise after the event. The body of the greatest mathematician in England was found in the Strand. During a fog there was always a marked increase in the death rate, and on this occasion the increase was no greater than usual until the sixth day. The newspapers on the morning of the seventh day were full of startling statistics, but at the time of going to press the full significance of the alarming figures was not realized. The editorials of the morning papers on the seventh day contained no warning of the calamity that was so speedily to follow their appearance. I lived then at Ealing, a Western suburb of London, and came every morning up to Cannon Street by certain train. I had

up to the sixth day experienced no inconvenience from the fog, and this was largely due, I am convinced, to the unnoticed operations of the American machine. On the fifth and sixth days Sir John did not come to the city, but he was in his office on the seventh. The door between his room and mine was closed. Shortly after ten o'clock I heard a cry in his room, followed by a heavy fall. I opened the door, and saw Sir John lying face downward on the floor. Hastening toward him, I felt for the first time the deadly effect of the deoxygenized atmosphere, and before I reached him I fell first on one knee and then headlong. I realized that my senses were leaving me, and instinctively crawled back to my own room, where the oppression was at once lifted, and I stood again upon my feet, gasping. I closed the door of Sir John's room, thinking it filled with poisonous fumes, as indeed it was. I called loudly for help, but there was no answer. On opening the door to the main office I met again what I thought was the noxious vapor. Speedily as I closed the door, I was impressed by the intense silence of the usually busy office, and saw that some of the clerks were motionless on the floor, and others sat with their heads on their desks as if asleep. Even at this awful mo-

ment I did not realize that what I saw was common to all London, and not, as I imagined, a local disaster, caused by the breaking of some carbons in our cellar. (It was filled with chemicals of every kind, of whose properties I was ignorant, dealing as I did with the accountant, and not the scientific, side of our business.) I opened the only window in my room, and again shouted for help. The street was silent and dark in the ominously still fog, and what now froze me with horror was meeting the same deadly, stifling atmosphere that was in the rooms. In falling, I brought down the window and shut out the poisonous air. Again I revived, and slowly the true state of things began to dawn upon me. I was in an oasis of oxygen. I at once surmised that the machine on my shelf was responsible for the existence of this oasis in a vast desert of deadly gas. I took down the American's machine, fearful in moving it that I might stop its working. Taking the mouthpiece between my lips I again entered Sir John's room, this time without feeling any ill effects. My poor master was long beyond human help. There was evidently no one alive in the building except myself. Out in the street all was silent and dark. The gas was extinguished; but here and there in

shops the incandescent lights were still weirdly burning, depending as they did on accumulators, and not on direct engine power. I turned automatically toward Cannon Street station, knowing my way to it even if blindfolded, stumbling over bodies prone on the pavement, and in crossing the street I ran against a motionless bus spectral in the fog, with dead horses lying in front, and their reins dangling from the nerveless hand of a dead driver. The ghostlike passengers, equally silent, sat bolt upright, or hung over the edge-boards in attitudes horribly grotesque.

VII.

THE TRAIN WITH ITS TRAIL OF THE DEAD

IF A MAN'S reasoning faculties were alert at such a time (I confess mine were dormant), he would have known there could be no trains at Cannon Street station; for if there was not enough oxygen in the air to keep a man alive, or a gas-jet alight, there would certainly not be enough to enable an engine fire to burn, even if the engineer retained sufficient energy to attend to his task. At times instinct is better than reason, and it proved so in this case. The railway, in those days, from Ealing came under the City in a deep tunnel. It

would appear that in this underground passage the carbonic acid gas would first find a resting-place, on account of its weight; but such was not the fact. I imagine that a current through the tunnel brought from the outlying districts a supply of comparatively pure air that, for some minutes after the general disaster, maintained human life. Be this as it may, the long platforms of Cannon Street underground station presented a fearful spectacle. A train stood at the down platform. The electric lights burned fitfully. This platform was crowded with men, who fought each other like demons, apparently for no reason, because the train was already packed as full as it could hold. Hundreds were dead under foot, and every now and then a blast of foul air came along the tunnel, whereupon hundreds more would relax their grips and succumb. Over their bodies the survivors fought, with continually thinning ranks. It seemed to me that most of those in the standing train were dead. Sometimes a desperate body of fighters climbed over those lying in heaps, and, throwing open a carriage door, hauled out passengers already in, and took their places, gasping. Those in the train offered no resistance, and lay motionless where they were flung, or rolled helplessly under the

wheels of the train. I made my way along the wall as well as I could to the engine wondering why the train did not go. The engineer lay on the floor of his cab, and the fires were out.

Custom is a curious thing. The struggling mob, fighting wildly for places in the carriages, were so accustomed to trains arriving and departing that it apparently occurred to none of them that the engineer was human and subject to the same atmospheric conditions as themselves. I placed the mouthpiece between his purple lips, and, holding my own breath like a submerged man, succeeded in reviving him. He said that if I gave him the machine he would take out the train as far as the steam already in the boiler would carry it. I refused to do this, but stepped on the engine with him, saying it would keep life in both of us until we got into better air. In a surly manner he agreed to this and started the train, but he did not play fair. Each time he refused to give up the machine until I was in a fainting condition with holding in my breath, and finally he felled me to the floor of the cab. I imagine that the machine rolled off the train as I fell, and that he jumped after it. The remarkable thing is that neither of us needed the machine, for I remember that just

after we started I noticed through the open iron door that the engine fire suddenly became aglow again, although at the time I was in too great a state of bewilderment and horror to understand what it meant. A western gale had sprung up — an hour too late. Even before we left Cannon Street those who still survived were comparatively safe, for one hundred and sixty-seven persons were rescued from that fearful heap of dead on the platforms, although many died within a day or two after, and others never recovered their reason. When I regained my senses after the blow dealt by the engineer, I found myself alone, and the train speeding across the Thames near Kew. I tried to stop the engine, but did not succeed. However, in experimenting, I managed to turn on the air brake, which in some degree checked the train, and lessened the impact when the crash came at Richmond terminus. I sprang off on the platform before the engine reached the terminal buffers, and saw passing me like a nightmare the ghastly train-load of the dead. Most of the doors were swinging open, and every compartment was jammed full, although, as I afterward learned, at each curve of the permanent way, or extra lurch of the train, bodies had

(Turn to page 121)

The Vale Of Lost Women

by Robert E. Howard

(author of *Skulls in the Stars*, *Valley of the Lost*, etc.)

It was with his third story in *WEIRD TALES*, *Wolfshead* (April 1926), that ROBERT E. HOWARD became a "name" in the minds and affections of the readers. Two years later, in the August 1928 issue, his story *Red Shadows*, introduced the first of several character-series for which he would become famous. This story was the debut of Solomon Kane; in 1929, King Kull was first presented (August) in *The Shadow Kingdom*. But the character to be as closely connected with the name Robert E. Howard as Tarzan is connected with Edgar Rice Burroughs, is that of Conan, whom readers first met in the account of *The Phoenix on the Sword* (December 1932). The following month, *The Scarlet Citadel*, seemed to be a direct sequel; but the third story in the series, *The Tower of the Elephant* (March 1933) clearly took place when Conan was much younger. Thereafter, the sequence of tales about the Cimmerian that appeared in *WEIRD TALES* clearly jumped all around Conan's chronology. Readers will be pleased to hear that the long-awaited soft-covered editions of the Conan tales, placed in chronological order and edited by L. Sprague de Camp, will start to appear soon from Lancer Books. We cannot say that the books themselves will be in chronological order, but our impression is that order will be maintained within each volume. We will see both the stories that were published during the author's lifetime, and those that appeared posthumously, some of them revised by de Camp. Meanwhile, here is a tale of Conan which has never been published before.

THE THUNDER of the drums and the great elephant-tusk horns was deafening, but in Livia's ears the clamor seemed but a confused muttering, dull and far away. As she lay on the *angareb* in the great hut, her state bordered between delirium and semi-unconsciousness. Outward sounds and movements scarcely impinged upon her senses. Her whole mental vision, though dazed and chaotic, was yet centered with hideous certitude on the naked, writhing figure of her brother, blood streaming down his quivering thighs. Against a dim nightmare background of dusky interweaving shapes and shadows, that white form was limed in merciless and awful clarity. The air seemed still to pulsate with an agonized screaming, mingled and interwoven obscenely with a rustle of fiendish laughter.

She was not conscious of sensation as an individual, separate and distinct from the rest of the cosmos. She was drowned in a great gulf of pain — was herself but pain crystallized and manifested in flesh. So she lay without conscious thought or motion, while outside the drums bellowed, the horns clamored, and barbaric voices lifted hideous chants, keeping time to naked feet slapping the hard earth and

open palms smiting one another softly.

But through her frozen mentality individual consciousness at last began to seep. A dull wonder that she was still bodily unharmed first made itself manifest. She accepted the miracle without thanksgiving. The matter seemed meaningless. Acting mechanically, she sat up on the *angareb* and stared dully about her. Her extremities made feeble beginnings of motions, as if responding to blindly awakening nerve centers. Her naked feet scruffed nervously at the hard-beaten dirt floor. Her fingers twitched convulsively at the skirt of the scanty undertunic which constituted her only garment. Impersonally she remembered that once, it seemed long, long ago, rude hands had torn her other garments from her body, and she had wept with fright and shame. It seemed strange, now, that so small a wrong should have caused her so much woe. The magnitude of outrage and indignity was only relative, after all, like everything else.

The hut door opened, and a woman entered — a lithe pantherish creature, whose supple body gleamed like polished ebony, adorned only by a wisp of silk twisted about her strutting loins. The whites of her eyeballs reflected the firelight outside, as she rolled them with wicked meaning.

She bore a bamboo dish of food — smoking meat, roasted yams, mealies, unwieldy ingost of native bread — and a vessel of hammered gold, filled with *yarati* beer. These she set down on the *angareb*, but Livia paid no heed; she sat staring dully at the opposite wall, hung with mats woven of bamboo shoots. The young native woman laughed, with a flash of dark eyes and white teeth, and with a hiss of spiteful obscenity and a mocking caress that was more gross than her language, she turned and swaggered out of the hut, expressing more taunting insolence with the motions of her hips than any civilized woman could with spoken insults.

Neither the wench's words nor her actions had stirred the surface of Livia's consciousness. All her sensations were still turned inward. Still the vividness of her mental pictures made the visible world seem like an unreal panorama of ghosts and shadows. Mechanically she ate the food and drank the liquor without tasting either.

It was still mechanically that at last she rose and walked unsteadily across the hut, to peer out through a crack between the bamboos. It was an abrupt change in the timbre of the drums and horns that reacted upon some obscure part of her mind and made her

seek the cause, without sensible volition.

AT FIRST she could make nothing of what she saw; all was chaotic and shadowy, shapes moving and mingling, writhing and twisting, black formless blocks hewed out starkly against a setting of blood-red that dulled and glowed. Then actions and objects assumed their proper proportions, and she made out men and women moving about the fires. The red light glinted on silver and ivory ornaments; white plumes nodded against the glare; naked figures strutted and posed, silhouettes carved out of darkness and limned in crimson.

On an ivory stool, flanked by giants in plumed headpieces and leopardskin girdles, sat a fat, squat shape, abysmal repulsive, a toad-like chunk, reeking of the dank rotting jungle and the nighted swamps. The creature's pudgy hands rested on the sleek arch of his belly; his nape was a roll of fat that seemed to thrust his bullet-head forward. His eyes gleamed in a dead black stump. Their appalling vitality belied the inert suggestion of the gross body.

As the girl's gaze rested on that figure, her body stiffened and tensed as frantic life surged through her again. From a mindless automaton, she changed

suddenly to a sentient mold of live, quivering flesh, stinging and burning. Pain was drowned in hate, so intense it in turn became pain; she felt hard and brittle, as if her body were turning to steel. She felt her hate flow almost tangibly out along the line of her vision; so it seemed to her that the object of her emotion should fall dead from his carven stool because of its force.

But if Bajujh, king of Bakalah, felt any psychic discomfort because of the concentration of his captive, he did not show it. He continued to cram his frog-like mouth to capacity with handfuls of mealies scooped up from a vessel held up to him by a kneeling woman, and to stare down a broad lane which was being formed by the action of his subjects in pressing back on either hand.

Down this lane, walled with sweaty black humanity, Livia vaguely realized some important personage would come, judging from the strident clamor of drum and horn. And as she watched, one came.

A column of fighting-men, marching three abreast, advanced toward the ivory stool, a thick line of waving plumes and glinting spears meandering through the motley crowd. At the head of the ebon spear-men strode a figure at the sight of which Livia started violently: her heart seemed to stop,

then began to pound again, suffocatingly. Against that dusky background, this man stood out with vivid distinctness. He was clad like his followers in leopard-skin loin-clout and plumed headpiece, but he was a white man.

It was not in the manner of a supplicant or a subordinate that he strode up to the ivory stool, and sudden silence fell over the throng as he halted before the squatting figure. Livia felt the tenseness, though she only dimly knew what it portended. For a moment Bajujh sat, craning his short neck upward, like a great frog; then, as if pulled against his will by the other's steady glare, he shambled up off his stool, and stood grotesquely bobbing his shaven head.

Instantly the tension was broken. A tremendous shout went up from the massed villagers, and at a gesture from the stranger, his warriors lifted their spears and boomed a salute royale for King Bajujh. Whoever he was, Livia knew the man must indeed be powerful in that wild land, if Bajujh of Bakalah rose to greet him. And power meant military prestige — violence was the only thing respected by those ferocious races.

THEREAFTER Livia stood with her eyes glued to the crack in the hut wall, watch-

ing the stranger. His warriors mingled with the Bakalas, dancing, feasting, swigging beer. He himself, with a few of his chiefs, sat with Bajujh and the headmen of Bakalah, cross-legged on mats, gorging and guzzling. She saw his hands dipped deep into the cooking-pots with the others, saw his muzzle thrust into the beer vessel out of which Bajujh also drank. But she noticed, nevertheless, that he was accorded the respect due a king. Since he had no stool, Bajujh renounced his also, and sat on the mats with his guest. When a new pot of beer was brought, the king of Bakalah barely sipped it before he passed it to the white man. Power! All this ceremonial courtesy pointed to power — strength — prestige! Livia trembled in excitement as a breathless plan began to form in her mind.

So she watched the white man with painful intensity, noting every detail of his appearance. He was tall; neither in height nor in massiveness was he exceeded by many of the giant blacks. He moved with the lithe suppleness of a great panther. When the firelight caught his eyes, they burned like blue fire. High-strapped sandals guarded his feet, and from his broad girdle hung a sword in a leather scabbard. His appearance was ali-

en and unfamiliar; Livia had never seen his like, but she made no effort to classify his position among the races of mankind. It was enough that his skin was white.

The hours passed, and gradually the roar of revelry lessened, as men and women sank into drunken sleep. At last Bajujh rose tottering, and lifted his hands, less a sign to end the feast, than a token of surrender in the contest of gorging and guzzling, and stumbling, was caught by his warriors, who bore him to his hut. The white man rose, apparently none the worse for the incredible amount of beer he had quaffed, and was escorted to the guest hut by such of the Bakalah headmen as were able to reel along. He disappeared into the hut, and Livia noticed that a dozen of his own spearmen took their places about the structure, spears ready. Evidently the stranger was taking no chances on Bajujh's friendship.

Livia cast her glance about the village, which faintly resembled a dusky Night of Judgment, what with the straggling streets strewn with drunken shapes. She knew that men in full possession of their faculties guarded the outer boma, but the only wakeful men she saw inside the village were the spearmen about the strang-

er's hut — and some of these were beginning to nod and lean on their spears.

With her heart beating hammer-like, she glided to the back of her prison hut and out the door, passing the snoring guard Bajujh had set over her. Like an ivory shadow she glided across the space between her hut and that occupied by the stranger. On her hands and knees she crawled up to the back of that hut. A black giant squatted here, his plum'd head sunk on his knees. She wriggled past him to the wall of the hut. She had first been imprisoned in that hut, and a narrow aperture in the wall, hidden inside by a hanging mat, represented her weak and pathetic attempt at escape. She found the opening, turned sidewise and wriggled her lithe body through, thrusting the inner mat aside.

Firelight from without faintly illumined the interior of the hut. Even as she thrust back the mat, she heard a muttered curse, felt a vise-like grasp in her hair, and was dragged bodily through the aperture and plumped down on her feet.

STAGGERING with the suddenness of it, she gathered her scattered wits together, and raked her disordered tresses out of her eyes, to stare up into the face of the white man who towered over her, amaze-

ment written on his dark scarred face. His sword was naked in his hand, and his eyes blazed like bale-fire, whether with anger, suspicion or surprize she could not judge. He spoke in a language she could not understand — a tongue which was not a Negro guttural, yet did not have a civilized sound.

"Oh, please!" she begged. "Not so loud. *They* will hear . . ."

"Who are you?" he demanded, speaking Ophirean with a barbarous accent. "By Crom, I never thought to find a white girl in this hellish land!"

"My name is Livia," she answered. "I am Bajujh's captive. Oh, listen, please listen to me! I can not stay here long. I must return before they miss me from my hut."

"My brother . . ." a sob choked her, then she continued: "My brother was Theteles, and we were of the house of Chelkus, scientists and noblemen of Onhir. By special permission of the king of Stvgia, my brother was allowed to go to Kheshatta, the city of magicians, to study their arts, and I accompanied him. He was only a boy — younger than myself . . ." her voice faltered and broke. The stranger said nothing, but stood watching her with burning eyes, his face frowning and unreadable. There was something wild and untamable about

him that frightened her and made her nervous and uncertain.

"The black Kushites raided Kheshatta," she continued hurriedly. "We were approaching the city in a camel caravan. Our guards fled and the raiders carried us away with them. They did us no harm, and let us know that they would parley with the Stygians and accept a ransom for our return. But one of the chiefs desired all the ransom for himself, and he and his followers stole us out of the camp one night, and fled far to the south-east with us, to the very borders of Kush. There they were attacked and cut down by a band of Bakalah raiders. Thetelles and I were dragged into this den of beasts . . ." she sobbed convulsively. ". . . This morning my brother was mutilated and butchered before me . . ." She gagged and went momentarily blind at the memory. "They fed his body to the jackals. How long I lay in a faint I do not know . . ."

Words failing her, she lifted her eyes to the scowling face of the stranger. A mad fury swept over her; she lifted her fists and beat futilely on his mighty breast, which he heeded no more than the buzzing of a fly.

"How can you stand there like a dumb brute?" She screamed in a ghastly whisper.

"Are you but a beast like these others? Ah, Mitra, once I thought there was honor in men. Now I know each has his price. You—what do you know of honor—or of mercy or decency? You are a barbarian like the others—only your skin is white; your soul is black as theirs. You care naught that a man of your race has been foully done to death by these dogs — that I am their slave! Very well."

She fell back from him, passion.

"I will give you a price," she raved, tearing away her tunic from her ivory breasts. "Am I not fair? Am I not more desirable than these native wenches? Am I not a worthy reward for blood-letting? Is not a fair-skinned virgin a price worth slaving for?"

"Kill that black dog Baiuih! Let me see his cursed head roll in the bloody dust! Kill him! Kill him!" She beat her clenched fists together in the agony of her intensity. "Then take me and do as you wish with me. I will be your slave!"

HE DID NOT sneak for an instant, but stood like a giant brooding figure of slaughter and destruction, fingering his hilt.

"You speak as if you were free to give yourself at your pleasure," he said. "as if the gift of your body had power to

swing kingdoms. Why should I kill Bajujh to obtain you? Women are cheap as plantains in this land, and their willingness or unwillingness matters as little. You value yourself too highly. If I wanted you, I wouldn't have to fight Bajujh to take you. He would rather give you to me than to fight me."

Livia gasped. All the fire went out of her, the hut reeled dizzily before her eyes. She staggered and sank in a crumpled heap on an *angareb*. Dazed bitterness crushed her soul as the realization of her utter helplessness was thrust brutally upon her. The human mind clings unconsciously to familiar values and ideas, even among surroundings and conditions alien and unrelated to those environs to which such values and ideas are adapted. In spite of all Livia had experienced, she had still instinctively supposed a woman's consent the pivotal point of such a game as she proposed to play. She was stunned by the realization that nothing hinged upon her at all. She could not move men as pawns in a game; she herself was the helpless pawn.

"I see the absurdity of supposing that any man in this corner of the world would act according to rules and customs existent in another corner of the world," she murmured

weakly, scarcely conscious of what she was saying, which was indeed only the vocal framing of the thought which overcame her. Stunned by that newest twist of fate, she lay motionless, until the white barbarian's iron fingers closed on her shoulder and lifted her again to her feet.

"You said I was a barbarian," he said harshly, "and that is true, Crom be thanked. If you had had men of the outlands guarding you instead of soft-gutted civilized weaklings, you would not be the slave of a pig this night. I am Conan, a Cimmerian, and I live by the sword's edge. But I am not such a dog as to leave a woman in the clutches of a savage; and though your kind call me a robber, I never forced a woman against her consent. Customs differ in various countries, but if a man is strong enough, he can enforce a few of his native customs anywhere. And no man ever called me a weakling!

"If you were old and ugly as the devil's pet vulture, I'd take you away from Bajujh, simply because of your race. But you are young and beautiful, and I have looked at native sluts until I am sick at the guts. I'll play this game your way, simply because some of your instincts correspond with some of mine. Get back to your hut. Bajujh's too drunk to

come to you tonight, and I'll see that he's occupied tomorrow. And tomorrow night it will be Conan's bed you'll warm, not Bajujh's."

"How will it be accomplished?" She was trembling with mingled emotions. "Are these all your warriors?"

"They're enough," he grunted. "Bamulas, every one of them, and suckled at the teats of war. I came here at Bajujh's request. He wants me to join him in an attack on Jihiji. Tonight we feasted. Tomorrow we hold council. When I get through with him, he'll be holding council in Hell."

"You will break the truce?"

"Truces in this land are made to be broken," he answered grimly. "He would break his truce with Jihiji. And after we'd looted the town together, he'd wipe me out the first time he caught me off guard. What would be blackest treachery in another land, is wisdom here. I have not fought my way alone to the position of war-chief of the Bamulas without learning all the lessons the black country teaches. Now go back to your hut and sleep, knowing that it is not for Bajujh but for Conan that you preserve your beauty!"

2

THROUGH THE crack in the bamboo wall, Livia watch-

ed, her nerves taut and trembling. All day, since their late waking, bleary and sodden from their debauch of the night before, the people had prepared the feast for the coming night. All day Conan the Cimmerian had sat in the hut of Bajujh, and what had passed between them, Livia could not know. She had fought to hide her excitement from the only person who entered her hut — the vindictive native girl who brought her food and drink. But that ribald wench had been too groggy from her libations of the previous night to notice the change in her captive's demeanor.

Now night had fallen again, fires lighted the village, and once more the chiefs left the king's hut and squatted down in the open space between the huts to feast and hold a final, ceremonious council. This time there was not so much beer-guzzling. Livia noticed the Bamulas casually converging toward the circle where sat the chief men. She saw Bajujh, and sitting opposite him across the eating-pots, Conan, laughing and conversing with the giant Aia, Bajujh's war-chief.

The Cimmerian was gnawing a great beef-bone, and as she watched, she saw him cast a glance across his shoulder. As if it were a signal for which they had been waiting, the Bamulas all turned their gaze

toward their chief. Conan rose, still smiling, as if to reach into a near-by cooking pot; then quick as a cat he struck Aja a terrible blow with the heavy bone. The Bakalah war-chief slumped over, his skull crushed in, and instantly a frightful yell rent the skies as the Bamulas went into action like blood-mad panthers.

Cooking pots overturned, scalding the squatting women, bamboo walls buckled to the impact of plunging bodies, screams of agony ripped the night, and over all rose the exultant "*Yeel yeel yeel*" of the maddened Mamulas, the flame of spears that crimsoned in the lurid glow.

Bakalah was a madhouse that reddened into a shambles. The action of the invaders paralyzed the luckless villagers by its unexpected suddenness. No thought of attack by their guests had ever entered their heads. Most of the spears were stacked in the huts, many of the warriors already half drunk. The fall of Aja was a signal that plunged the gleaming blades of the Bamulas into a hundred unsuspecting bodies; after that it was massacre.

At her peep-hole Livia stood frozen, white as a statue, her golden locks drawn back and grasped in a knotted cluster with both hands at her temples. Her eyes were dilated, her whole body rigid. The yells

of pain and fury smote her tortured nerves like a physical impact; the writhing, slashing forms blurred before her, then sprang out again with horrifying distinctness. She saw spears sink into writhing black bodies, spilling red. She saw clubs swing and descend with brutal force on heads. Brands were kicked out of the fires, scattering sparks; hut-thatches smoldered and blazed up. A fresh stridency of anguish cut through the cries, as living victims were hurled head-first into the blazing structures. The scent of scorched flesh began to sicken the air, already rank with reeking sweat and fresh blood.

Livia's overwrought nerves gave way. She cried out again, shrill screams of torment, lost in the roar of flames and slaughter. She beat her temples with her clenched fists. Her reason tottered, changing her cries to more awful peals of hysterical laughter. In vain she sought to keep before her the fact that it was her enemies who were dying thus horribly — that this was as she had madly hoped and plotted — that this ghastly sacrifice was a just repayment for the wrongs done her and hers. Frantic terror held her in its unreasoning grasp.

SHE WAS AWARE of no pity for the victims who were

dying wholesale under the dripping spears. Her only emotion was blind, stark, mad, unreasoning fear. She saw Conan, his white form contrasting with the blacks. She saw his sword flash, and men went down around him. Now a struggling knot swept around a fire, and she glimpsed a fat squat shape writhing in its midst. Conan ploughed through and was hidden from view by the twisting black figures. From the midst a thin squealing rose unbearably. The press split for an instant, and she had one awful glimpse of a reeling, desperate squat figure, streaming blood. Then the throng crowded in again, and steel flashed in the mob like a beam of lightning through the dusk.

A beast-like baying rose, terrifying in its primitive exultation. Through the mob Conan's tall form pushed its way. He was striding toward the hut where the girl cowered, and in his hand he bore a relic — the firelight gleamed redly on King Bajujh's severed head. The black eyes, glassy now instead of vital, rolled up, revealing only the whites; the jaw hung slack as if in a grin of idiocy; red drops showered thickly along the ground.

Livia gave back with a moaning cry. Conan had paid the price and was coming to claim her, bearing the awful token of his payment. He

would grasp her with his bloody fingers, crush her lips with mouth still panting from the slaughter. With the thought came delirium.

With a scream Livia ran across the hut, threw herself against the door in the back wall. It fell open, and she darted across the open space, a flitting white ghost in a realm of black shadows and red flame.

Some obscure instinct led her to the pen where the horses were kept. A warrior was just taking down the bars that separated the horse-pen from the main boma, and he yelled in amazement as she darted past him. His hand clutched at her, closed on the neck of her tunic. With a frantic jerk she tore away leaving the garment in his hand. The horses snorted and stampeded past her, rolling the warrior in the dust — lean, wiry steeds of the Kushite breed, already frantic with the fire and the scent of blood.

Blindly she caught at a flying mane, was jerked off her feet, struck the ground again on her toes, sprang high, pulled and scrambled herself upon the horse's straining back. Mad with fear the herd plunged through the fires, their small hoofs knocking sparks in a blinding shower. The startled black people had a wild glimpse of the girl clinging naked to the mane of a beast

that raced like the wind that streamed out his rider's loose yellow hair. Then straight for the boma the steed bolted, soared breathtakingly into the air, and was gone into the night.

3

LIVIA COULD MAKE no attempt to guide her steed, nor did she feel any need of so doing. The yells and the glow of the fires were fading out behind her; the wind tossed her hair and caressed her naked limbs. She was aware only of a dazed need to hold to the flowing mane and ride, ride, over the rim of the world and away from all agony and grief and horror.

And for hours the wiry steed raced, until, topping a starlit crest, he stumbled and hurled his rider headlong.

She struck on soft cushioning sward, and lay for an instant half stunned, dimly hearing her mount trot away. When she staggered up, the first thing that impressed her was the silence. It was an almost tangible thing — soft, darkly velvet — after the incessant blare of barbaric horns and drums which had maddened her for days. She stared up at the great white stars clustered thickly in the dark sky. There was no moon, yet the starlight illuminated the

land, though illusively, with unexpected clusterings of shadow. She stood on a swarded eminence from which the gently molded slopes ran away, soft as velvet under the starlight. Far away in one direction she discerned a dense dark line of trees which marked the distant forest. Here there was only night and trancelike stillness and a faint breeze blowing through the stars.

The land seemed vast and slumbering. The warm caress of the breeze made her aware of her nakedness, and she wriggled uneasily, spreading her hands over her body. Then she felt the loneliness of the night, and the unbrokenness of the solitude. She was alone; she stood on the summit of land and there was none to see; nothing but night and the whispering wind.

She was suddenly glad of the night and the loneliness. There was none to threaten her, or to seize her with rude violent hands. She looked before her and saw the slope falling away into a broad valley; there fronds waved thickly and the starlight reflected whitely on many small objects scattered throughout the vale. She thought they were great white blossoms and the thought gave rise to vague memory; she thought of a valley of which the blacks had spoken with

fear; a valley to which had fled the young women of a strange brown-skinned race which had inhabited the land before the coming of the ancestors of the Bakalahs. There, men said, they had turned into white flowers, had been transformed by the old gods to escape their ravishers. There no native dared to go.

But into that valley Livia dared to go. She would go down those grassy slopes which were like velvet under her tender feet; she would dwell there among the nodding white blossoms, and no man would ever come to lay rude hands on her. Conan had said that pacts were made to be broken; she would break her pact with him. She would go into the vale of the lost women; she would lose herself in solitude and stillness . . . even as these dreamy and disjointed thoughts floated through her consciousness, she was descending the gentle slopes, and the tiers of the valley walls were rising higher on each hand.

But so gentle were their slopes that when she stood on the valley floor she did not have the feeling of being imprisoned by rugged walls. All about her floated seas of shadow, and great white blossoms nodded and whispered to her. She wandered at random, parting the fronds with her small

hands, listening to the whisper of the wind through the leaves finding a childish pleasure in the gurgling of an unseen stream. She moved as in a dream, in the grasp of a strange unreality. One thought reiterated itself continually: there she was safe from the brutality of men. She wept, but the tears were of joy. She lay full-length upon the sward and clutched the soft grass as if she would crush her new-found refuge to her breast and hold it there forever.

SHE PLUCKED the petals of the blossoms and fashioned them into a chaplet for her golden hair. Their perfume was in keeping with all other things in the valley, dreamy, subtle, enchanting.

So she came at last to a glade in the midst of the valley, and saw there a great stone, hewn as if by human hands, and adorned with ferns and blossoms and chains of flowers. She stood staring at it, and then there was movement and life about her. Turning, she saw figures stealing from the denser shadows — slender brown women, lithe, naked, with blossoms in their night-black hair. Like creatures of a dream they came about her, and they did not speak. But suddenly terror seized her as she looked into their eyes. Those eyes were luminous, radiant in the star-

shine; but they were not human eyes. The forms were human but in the souls a strange change had been wrought; a change reflected in their glowing eyes. Fear descended on Livia in a wave. The serpent reared its grisly head in her new-found Paradise.

But she could not flee. The lithe brown women were all about her. One, lovelier than the rest, came silently up to the trembling girl, and enfolded her with supple brown arms. Her breath was scented with the same perfume that stole from the white blossoms that waved in the starshine. Her lips pressed Livia's in a long terrible kiss. The Ophirean felt coldness running through her veins; her limbs turned brittle; like a white statue of marble she lay in the arms of her captress, incapable of speech or movement.

Quick soft hands lifted her and laid her on the altar-stone amidst a bed of flowers. The brown women joined hands in a ring and moved supplely about the altar, dancing a strange dark measure. Never the sun or the moon looked on such a dance, and the great white stars grew whiter and glowed with a more luminous light as if its dark witchery struck response in things cosmic and elemental.

And a low chant arose, that was less human than the gurg-

ing of the distant stream; a rustle of voices like the whispering of the blossoms that waved beneath the stars. Livia lay, conscious but without power of movement. It did not occur to her to doubt her sanity. She sought not to reason or analyze; she *was* and these strange beings dancing about her *were*; a dumb realization of existence and recognition of the actuality of nightmare possessed her as she lay helplessly gazing up at the star clustered sky, whence, she somehow knew with more than mortal knowledge, some *thing* would come to her, as it had come long ago to make these naked brown women the soulless beings they now were.

FIRST, HIGH above her, she saw a black dot among the stars, which grew and expanded; it neared her; it swelled to a bat; and still it grew, though its shape did not alter further to any great extent. It hovered over her in the stars, dropping plummet-like earthward, its great wings spread over her; she lay in its tenebrous shadow. And all about her the chant rose higher, to a soft paeon of soulless joy, a welcome to the god which came to claim a fresh sacrifice, fresh and rose-pink as a flower in the dew of dawn.

Now it hung directly over her, and her soul shriveled and

grew chill and small at the sight. Its wings were bat-like; but its body and the dim face that gazed down upon her were like nothing of sea or earth or earth or air; she knew she looked upon ultimate horror, upon black cosmic foulness born in night-black gulfs beyond the reach of a madman's wildest dreams.

Breaking the unseen bonds that held her dumb, she screamed awfully. Her cry was answered by a deep menacing shout. She heard the pounding of rushing feet; all about her there was a swirl as of swift waters; the white blossoms tossed wildly, and the brown women were gone. Over her hovered the great black shadow, and she saw a tall white figure, with plumes nodding in the stars, rushing toward her.

"Conan!" The cry broke involuntarily from her lips. With a fierce inarticulate yell, the barbarian sprang into the air, lashing upward with his sword that flamed in the starlight.

The great black wings rose and fell. Livia, dumb with horror, saw the Cimmerian enveloped in the black shadow that hung over him. The man's breath came pantingly; his feet stamped the beaten earth, crushing the white blossoms into the dirt. The rending impact of his blows echoed through the night. He was hurled back and forth like a rat in the grip

of a hound; blood splashed thickly on the sward, mingling with the white petals that lay strewn like a carpet.

And then the girl, watching that devilish battle as in a nightmare, saw the black-winged thing waver and stagger in mid-air; there was a threshing beat of crippled wings and the monster had torn clear and was soaring upward to mingle and vanish among the stars. Its conqueror staggered dizzily, sword poised, legs wide-braced, staring upward stupidly, amazed at victory, but ready to take up again the ghastly battle.

An instant later Conan approached the altar, panting, dripping blood at every step. His massive chest heaved, glistening with perspiration. Blood ran down his arms in streams from his neck and shoulders. As he touched her, the spell on the girl was broken and she scrambled up and slid from the altar, recoiling from his hand. He leaned against the stone, looking down at her, where she cowered at his feet.

"Men saw you ride out of the village," he said. I followed as soon as I could, and picked up your track, though it was no easy task following it by torchlight. I tracked you to the place where your horse threw you, and though the

torches were exhausted by then, and I could not find the prints of your bare feet on the sward, I felt sure you had descended into the valley. My men would not follow me, so I came alone on foot. What vale of devils is this? What was that thing?"

"A god," she whispered. "The black people spoke of it — a god from far away and long ago!"

"A devil from the Outer Dark," he grunted. "Oh, they're nothing uncommon. They lurk as thick as fleas outside the belt of light which surrounds this world. I've heard the wise men of Zamora talk of them. Some find their way to Earth, but when they do they have to take on Earthly form and flesh of some sort. A man like myself, with a sword, is a match for any amount of fangs and talons, infernal or terrestrial. Come; my men await me beyond the ridge of the valley."

SHE CROUCHED motionless, unable to find words, while he frowned down at her. Then she spoke: "I ran away from you. I planned to dupe you. I was not going to keep my promise to you; I was yours by the bargain we made but I would have escaped from you if I could. Punish me as you will."

He shook the sweat and

blood from his locks, and sheathed his sword.

"Get up," he grunted. "It was a foul bargain I made. I do not regret that black dog Bajujh, but you are no wench to be bought and sold. The ways of men vary in different lands, but a man need not be a swine, wherever he is. After I thought awhile, I saw that to hold you to your bargain would be the same as if I had forced you. Besides, you are not tough enough for this land. You are a child of cities and books and civilized ways — which isn't your fault, but you'd die quickly following the life I thrive on. A dead woman would be no good to me. I will take you to the Stygian borders. The Stygians will send you home to Ophir"

She stared up at him as if she had not heard aright. "Home?" she repeated mechanically. "Home? Ophir? My people? Cities, towers, peace, my *home*?" Suddenly tears welled into her eyes, and sinking to her knees, she embraced his knees in her arms.

"Crom, girl," grunted Conan, embarrassed. "Don't do that; you'd think I was doing you a favor by kicking you out of this country; haven't I explained that you're not the proper woman for the war-chief of the Bamulas?"

The Ghoul Gallery

by Hugh B. Cave

On the strictly literary level, I'm inclined to agree that this story does not rate so highly as some of the others that HUGH B. CAVE had published in the '30's. But surely a tale with the visceral effectiveness of this one ought not to be forgotten. It's one of those "thrillers" that come to my recollection when I think of collections of eerie and frightening tales.

LET ME convince you, first, that the young man who came to my medical offices that night was not the type of man who gives way, without reason, to abject fear. Yet when I stepped into my outer office and saw him slumped on the divan, I knew that he was in the throes of mortal terror. His face was ghastly white, made hideous by the mop of jet hair that crawled into his eyes. He raised his head sluggishly and glared at me like a trapped animal.

I nodded quietly to the girl who stood beside him. She stepped past me into the inner office, and I drew the door shut silently. I had known this girl for years. For that matter, all London knew her, as a charming, lovely member of the upper set, a sportswoman, and a distinguished lady of one of England's famous old families. She was Lady Sybil Ravenal.

Tonight, half an hour ago, she had telephoned me, seeking permission to bring a pa-

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tient — a patient very dear to her — to my suite. Now she stood before me, her hand resting on my arm, and said suddenly; "You've got to help him, Doctor Briggs! He — he is going mad!"

"Suppose you tell me," I suggested softly, "what he is afraid of."

"I can't, Doctor. There is the family name to consider. He — he is Sir Edward Ramsey."

I started. That name, too, was well known to me and to the rest of London. Sir Edward Ramsey, the noted sportsman, adventurer. I could not believe that such a man would be sitting in my offices, dragged into the depths of fear.

"You must tell me the cause," I said kindly. "Otherwise I can do nothing."

The girl's lips tightened defiantly. "When a man comes to you with a broken leg," she said, "you don't ask him where he got it. Please!"

"A fractured leg is a physical malady. His is mental."

"But he comes to you in the same capacity, Doctor. You must help him!"

I shrugged. "I can only give you the usual advice. Since you refuse to divulge the cause of his terror. I can only suggest that he get away from it."

I could see, from the obvious twist of her mouth, that she was keenly disappointed. She would have argued with me,

perhaps pleaded with me, had not the door opened suddenly behind her.

I say "opened"; in reality it was flung back savagely. Young Ramsey stood on the threshold, reeling, glowering at me out of smoldering eyes. I did not know, then, what made him intrude at that moment. I thought, foolishly, that he was afraid of being left alone in the dimly lighted outer office.

He staggered forward blindly, groping toward me.

"The thing—" he cried. His voice was high-pitched and nasal. "By God, it's following me! It's — it's . . ."

I stared at him in bewilderment. There was no sound in my rooms at that moment — no sound at all except the half inaudible humming of a machine in the adjoining suite — an electro-therapeutic machine used by my associate in the treatment of leucocythemia and similar afflictions.

Yet the boy's hands clawed at the sleeve of my coat. He flung himself against me muttering a jargon of words that had no seeming intelligence. And then, very suddenly, his twitching face became fixed, beyond me. With a strangled sob of abject horror, he stumbled back.

I WAS BESIDE him in an instant, holding his quivering body upright. As I looked at

him, his eyes were wide open and rimmed with white, glued in mute terror upon a small table which stood against the wall on the opposite side of the room.

The table was an insignificant one, placed there merely for ornamental purposes. I had covered it with a black cloth and lined it, along the back, with a small rack of medical volumes. In the center of the black cloth, facing into the room, I had set a human skull.

The thing was neither fantastic nor horrible, merely a very ordinary medical head bleached white. In the shadows, perhaps, the eyeless sockets and grinning mouth, with its usual set of enameled teeth, were a bit unconventional; but certainly there was nothing to excite such uncontrollable horror as gripped the man in my arms.

His eyes were full of sheer madness as he stared at it. His lips had writhed apart and were twitching spasmodically. He clung to me with all his strength; and at length, wrenching his gaze from the thing on the table, he buried his head in my arms and surrendered to fear which overwhelmed him.

"Be merciful, Briggs!" he moaned. "For God's sake, be merciful. Come with me — stay with me for a day or two, before I go utterly mad!"

There was no alternative. I

could not send a man away in such condition; neither could I keep him with me, for my quarters were not fitted with additional rooms for patients.

I forced him into a chair, where he could not see the death's-head on the table. Leaving him with the girl who had brought him, I hurriedly packed a small overnight case and made ready for an all-night siege of it. When I returned, I found the boy slumped wearily in the chair with his head in the girl's comforting arms.

"Come," I said quietly.

He looked up at me. His bloodshot eyes struggled to drag me into focus.

"You — you are coming with me, Briggs?" he asked slowly. "I am."

He pushed himself heavily out of the chair. As he turned, his hand groped for mine. He spoke with a great effort.

"Thanks, Briggs. I'll — try to get back a little courage."

THAT WAS MY introduction to Sir Edward Ramsey. The account of our departure, and of our subsequent arrival at Sir Edward's huge town house, is of little importance. During the entire journey my two companions did not utter a word. The boy seemed to have shrunk into himself, to have fallen into the lowest depths of fearful anticipation.

The girl sat stiff, rigid, staring straight ahead of her.

I remember one thing which struck me as being more or less peculiar, in view of the boy's social position. No servant opened the door to us. For that matter, the boy made no attempt to summon one by ringing the bell. Instead, he groped into his pockets for his own door-key and fumbled nervously with the lock. Turning his head sideways, he spoke to me stiffly, "My man's — deaf, Briggs. Damned nuisance, but it's the only reason he — stays. The others cleared out long ago."

The door swung open. I followed Sir Edward down the carpeted hall, with the girl beside me. The boy was trembling again, glancing about him furtively. I was forced to take his arm and lead him quietly into one of the massive rooms adjoining the corridor.

There he sank into a chair and stared up at me hopelessly. I realized that he had not slept in many hours — that he was on the verge of breakdown.

Opening my case, I administered an opiate to deaden his nerves, although I had little hope that it would have the desired effect. The boy's terror was too acute, too intense. However, the drug quieted him; he slept fitfully for the better part of an hour; long enough for Lady Sybil to draw

me aside, motion me to a chair, and tell me her story.

She came directly to the point, softly and deliberately. They were in love, she and Ramsey. They were betrothed. Six weeks ago his love had changed to fear.

"At first he fought against it," she said evenly. "Then it took possession of him — of his very soul. He — he released me from my promise."

"Why?"

"Because of the curse that hangs over his family."

"And that is why you came to me tonight?"

"I came, Doctor," she said fervently, "because it was a last hope. I love him. I can not give him up. He lives alone here, except for a single servant who is deaf. I have been with him every day since this influence claimed him. At night, of course, I can not be at his side — and it is the night-time he fears!"

"And the cause of his fear?" I prompted.

"I — I can not tell you."

I knew better than to demand an explanation. Without a word I returned to my patient. He was not sleeping, for when I stood over him his eyes opened and he stared at me wearily. I drew a chair close to him and bent forward.

"I want you to tell me," I said simply, "the entire story. Only under those conditions

can I help you. Do you understand?"

"That — is impossible."

"It's necessary."

"I — can't do it, Briggs."

"In that case," I shrugged, getting to my feet, "I shall take you away from here. At once!"

"No, no, Briggs! You — you can't! The thing will — follow me. It trailed me to your offices. It . . ."

It was the girl who cut him short. She stepped closer and took his hands firmly, and looked straight at me.

"He is under oath to say nothing, Doctor," she said evenly.

"Under oath? To whom?"

"His father, Sir Guy."

"Then, of course, I shall see Sir Guy at once . . ."

"He is — dead."

I stood silent, glancing from one to the other. Suddenly the girl straightened up and stood erect, her eyes blazing.

"But I am not under oath!" she cried, almost savagely. "I will tell you . . ."

"By God, no!" The boy groped up, his face livid.

I understood, then, the courage in Lady Sybil's heart. Slim, lovely as she was, she turned on him fiercely, forcing him back into the chair.

"I am going to tell him," she said bitterly. "Do you hear? The oath does not bind me. I am going to tell Doctor Briggs all

I know; it is the only way to help you."

Then, without releasing him, she turned her head toward me.

"This house, Doctor," she said, "is very old and full of musty rooms and corridors. It is made hideous by a terrifying sound that comes, always at night, from the upper galleries. The sound is inexplicable. It is a horrible note which begins with an almost inaudible moan, like the humming of an electric motor. Then it increases in volume to the pitch of a singsong voice, rising and falling tremulously. Finally it becomes a screaming wail, like a human soul in utter torment."

She waited for my questions. I said nothing. The boy had ceased his squirming and sat like a dead man, glaring at me out of lifeless eyes.

"The galleries have been examined many times," Lady Sybil said quietly. "Nothing has ever been discovered to provide an explanation. Four times in the past year the upper recesses of the house have been wired for electric lights; but the lights in that portion of the house never work. No one knows why."

"And that — that is all?" I murmured.

"I think that is all. Except — the history of the House of Ramsev. You will find that in the library, Doctor. I will remain here with Edward."

I hesitated. I did not think

it vital, at that moment, to go rummaging through the library in pursuit of ancient lore. But Lady Sybil looked quietly at me and said, in an even voice, "The library is at the end of the main corridor, Doctor. You will find the necessary books in section twelve."

I DID NOT argue. There was no denying that cool, methodical tone! Before I left the room, however, I examined my patient carefully, to be sure that I was justified in leaving him. He had sunk into complete apathy. His eyes remained wide open, as if he feared to close them. But the opiate had produced an effect of semi-torpor, and I knew that he would not soon become violent again. Thus I turned away and paced silently to the door.

By a singular coincidence the door opened as I reached it. On the threshold I came face to face with the servant, a ferret-faced fellow with deep-set, colorless eyes, who peered at me suspiciously as I went past him into the corridor.

In this manner, after prowling down the dimly illuminated passage, I came to the library, and sought the particular section which the girl had suggested. Section twelve proved to be not in the main library, but in a secluded recess leading into the very farthest corner. The walls before me were lined with

long shelves of books, symmetrically arranged. An ancient claw-footed desk stood in the center, and upon it a gargoyle reading-lamp which I promptly turned on.

The alcove had obviously been unused for some time. A layer of dust hung over it like a funeral shroud. Its musty volumes were sealed with a film of dirt, except — and this is what led me forward eagerly — for a certain shelf which lay almost directly beneath the lamp. The books on this particular shelf had been recently removed, and had been thrown back carelessly.

I took one of the volumes to the desk and bent over it. It contained, in some detail, a history of the house in which I stood, and a lengthy description of its occupants since time immemorial. Allow me to quote from it:

"Sir Guy Ramsey. 1858-1903." [Evidently the father of my patient.] "Eton and Cambridge." [Here followed an account of an adventurous and courageous life.] "In the year 1903, Sir Guy was suddenly stricken with an inexplicable fear of darkness. Despite all efforts to discover the reason of his terror, no cause was revealed, and Sir Guy refused to divulge any. In September of the same year, Sir Guy became utterly mad with fear and spoke continually of a certain 'specter' which had tak-

en possession of him. Physicians were unable to effect a cure, and on the ninth day of the month of September, Sir Guy was found in the upper galleries, where he had, to all appearances, been strangled to death.

"His own hands clutched his throat; but upon his hands were certain marks and bruises which revealed the imprint of another set of fingers. In these imprints, the thumb of the unknown murderer's left hand was singularly missing. No clue has ever been discovered as to the identity of the assailant."

I closed the book slowly. Mechanically I opened a second of those significant volumes, which proved to be an account of the life and death of another of Sir Edward's forebears. From the dates, I judged the gentleman to be Sir Edward's grandfather — the father of the man whose fate I had just learned. His name, peculiarly, was also Sir Edward.

"On the twenty-seventh day of January, in the year 1881. Sir Edward was suddenly noticed to be prowling fearfully in the upper galleries. From that time on he was observed to be very much in the throes of acute terror: but when accused of this, Sir Edward refused to confide the nature of his fear. On February first he was found choked to death in the upper galleries. his own hands twisted into his

throat and the imprint of another set of hands, with the thumb of the left hand missing, still evident on his dead wrists.

"The murderer was not discovered. For three years after Sir Edward's death, the galleries were closed and sealed, after a careful inspection by the police. At the end of that period they were again opened by command of Sir Guy, son of the deceased."

And there was one other passage — a paragraph or two describing the sudden death of some distinguished lady far back in the archives. Her name, according to the book before me, was Lady Carolyn.

"A woman" [the script said] "imbued with the same fearless courage which marked the men of her blood. In the final days of her life she lived alone in the London house. She left a single parting message, found after her death: 'I am becoming insane. The specter has ebbed my last bit of resistance. Madness is, after all, a fitting death — much better than eternal fear and horror.'"

"This note was found on the morning of July third, 1792. Lady Carolyn was murdered, strangled to death by unknown hands, on the night the note was written. Her unfortunate body was discovered in the galleries. her fingers still clutching her dead throat, and the marks of other fingers, with the thumb of the

left hand missing, imprinted on the back of her hands and wrists. For three years following her death, every effort was expended to locate the fiend who had so brutally destroyed her. The attempt was without avail."

I MAKE NO effort to explain these quotations. They are significant in themselves. As for the specter, I could find no further mention of it. Page after page I turned, hoping to discover some clue which might lead to a solution. I found nothing.

I did, however, chance upon something of unusual interest, in the oldest of the heavy volumes. It was an account of a very ancient feud. The names mentioned were those of Sir Godfrey Ramsey (the date was in the century before the French Revolution) and Sir Richard Ravenal. The account gave mention of several brutal killings and disappearances, the majority of these executed by the House of Ravenal. The cause of the feud was not divulged.

The hatred between the two families, however, had come to an end with the death of Sir Richard Ravenal, who was, to quote the withered page before me, "an artist of unusual genius. In the year previous to his death, having formed a truce with the House of Ramsey, he did present to Sir Godfrey Ramsey one or two paintings of great value, executed by himself, as a token

of eternal friendship. These paintings have been carefully preserved."

I sought faithfully for an account of the life of this same Sir Godfrey. Eventually I found it, and read the following:

"Twelve years after the Houses of Ramsey and Ravenal had formed the pact of peace, Sir Godfrey was suddenly stricken with an incomprehensible terror which led to complete madness. He did call his son, Sir James, to him and say the following words: 'A curse has descended upon the House of Ramsey. It is a curse of horror, of torment. It is intended to make gibbering idiots of the men who bear the honored name of Ramsey. For this reason I command you to an oath of silence. The curse has taken possession of me, and I shall die. When you are of age, you, too, will be stricken by the specter. Swear to me that you will not reveal the nature of the curse, lest your sons and their sons after them live in mortal fear.'

"This oath was written into parchment and preserved. On the second day following its execution, Sir Godfrey was found lying in the upper galleries..."

I CLOSED the last volume with the uncomfortable feeling of having delved into a maze of horror and death. In the upper reaches of the very house in

which I stood, countless members of the House of Ramsey had been hurled into madness and cruelly murdered. Even now, the man who occupied these whispering rooms and huge, empty corridors was being slowly forced under the same hellish influence of insanity. I understood now his reason for silence. He was bound by a family oath which had been passed down from father to son. He *could* not speak!

The influence of that mad room still hung over me as I paced across the library and returned to the room where Sir Edward and Lady Sybil awaited me.

The boy was sleeping. As I entered, Lady Sybil came toward me quietly and stood before me.

"You—have found the books?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Then you know why he is bound to silence, Doctor. He is the last of the Ramseys. I — am the last of — the Ravensals."

I stared at her. I had not suspected any connection between the names in those ancient volumes and the name of the girl before me. Peering into her features now, I felt suddenly as if I had been plunged into an affair of death itself. She — the last of the Ravensals!

"He has never broken the oath," she murmured, "not even

to me. I have never remained here at night — never seen the specter. But I have questioned the servants who fled from here, and so I know."

I turned to my patient. He was sleeping peacefully now, and I thanked God that the terror had temporarily left him. Lady Sybil said softly, "I shall stay here the night, so long as you are here, Doctor. I can not leave him now."

She walked quietly to the divan and made it as comfortable as possible. I did not suggest that she go to one of the sleeping-chambers on the floor above. For my part, I could not consider waking my patient; I would have to sit by him through the night. And I knew that she, too, preferred to be close to him. At any rate, I hadn't the cruelty to suggest that she remain alone, in one of those shadowed, deathly silent rooms on the upper corridor, through the long hours of sinister darkness that confronted us.

I think that we slept very soon after she lay down. When I bent over her a moment later, to drape a silken coverlet over her lovely figure, she did not stir.

I realized then that I was the only person awake in this massive, spectral house. I was alone with the unknown being that patrolled the upper galleries. I closed the door of the room and bolted it. Very quietly I returned to my chair and lowered

myself. Then I sat there, staring fearfully into the deepening shadows, until I dozed into a fitful slumber.

IF THE SPECTER of the House of Ramsey crept out of its hidden lair that night, I did not know it. When I awoke, a welcome sunlight was sliding across the floor at my feet, from the opposite window. I was alone in the room. Sir Edward and Lady Sybil had vanished.

I stood up. It was difficult to believe, in this glow of warm sunlight, that anything unusual had occurred during the night.

Evidently nothing had. The door opened behind me and the ferret-faced servant, scuffling forward, said evenly, "Breakfast is waiting, sir."

I followed him to the dining-hall, and there found my two companions. Lady Sybil rose to greet me with a smile. The boy remained seated. His face was extremely haggard and white. He nodded heavily.

"Thought we'd let you sleep, Briggs," he said. "You earned it."

He did not refer again to the previous night. Lady Sybil, too, maintained a discreet silence. When the meal was over, I called her to me.

"I shall stay here," I said, "until I am sure that his terror does not return. I do not feel justified in leaving the house at the present time."

"You wish me to do something, Doctor?"

I gave her a prescription. In substance, the desired medicine was little more than a tonic, though it contained a slight portion of morphine. It would serve to keep the boy's nerves under control; but I realized even then that the cause of his fear must be removed before any medicine would benefit him.

Lady Sybil, however, promised to have the prescription filled. She had other matters to attend to, she said, and would probably return some time in the late afternoon.

When she had gone, I sought out, once again, those significant volumes that I had found the night before. I studied them for a very long time. It must have been well after two o'clock when Sir Edward came into the library.

He slouched into a chair and remained there, without any display of animation or life. When I got quietly to my feet and replaced the last book on the shelf, he looked at me without emotion.

"Where to, Briggs?" he said dully.

"With your permission," I replied, "I should like to have a look at the galleries."

He nodded. I fancied that the slightest cloud of suspicion crossed his face; but he offered no objections.

I had difficulty in finding my way. The route which led to the upper levels was no easy one to follow, winding as it did through a succession of peculiarly dark and unlighted corridors. Eventually, however, I found myself at the bottom of a circular staircase that coiled upward into the gloom of the floor above. I mounted the steps slowly, holding to the great carved bannister for support; and, having reached the second landing, I followed the twistings of the passage by keeping as close to the wall as possible.

At the end of this circular passage, a curtained window revealed the street below. As I peered down and saw the pavement far below me, I could not repress a shudder.

Cautiously I continued along this corridor to the bottom of a second staircase. Once again, with heavy steps, I groped upward.

And here, at the top of the last incline, I found the upper galleries of the House of Ramsey. The room lay directly before me. Its massive door, standing half open, revealed a thread of light from some hidden source — a gleam which penetrated like a livid, groping hand into the blackness of the passage.

I entered timidly, leaving the door open behind me. Before me extended a room of enormous size, more like a huge banquet chamber than an art al-

cove. The illumination was intense, coming as it did from a series of four broad windows set in the farther wall — windows which were uncurtained, and designed to flood the interior with light.

For the rest, the floor was lined with a smooth carpet of dull hue. The walls on opposite sides of me as I moved forward were devoted entirely to framed paintings. The rear wall, which contained the only entrance — through which I had come — was carefully covered with a soft gray drape, cut to outline the wooden panels of the door.

I HAD TAKEN no more than a dozen steps forward into this strange chamber when I came to an abrupt halt. Before me, as I stood motionless, lay evidence that my patient had been here before me — a silk kerchief, embroidered in black with his emblem. I recognized it instantly. He had worn it on the previous evening, tucked in the breast pocket of his jacket. And now it lay here on the carpet, damnable in its significance as I stared down at it. So he had not slept the night through! He had come here — come to this death room, to keep some infernal midnight tryst!

I dropped the thing into my pocket. Having done this, I turned to inspect the magnificent works of art that surround-

ed me. And then, almost immediately after that first startling episode, came a second shock, a thousand times greater than the first!

The thing glared out at me with horrible malice. It hung before me, leering into my face. I recoiled from it with a sudden intake of breath.

It was a skeleton, painted in dull values of gray and white, with a single blur of jet-black background, created by an artist who possessed a fiendish cunning for horrifying the human eye. Every revolting effect of death was incorporated into that ghastly countenance. And yet, in a medical sense, the thing was far from perfect.

Even as I stared at it, I discerned a dozen very evident faults of construction. Hideous it was, but hideous only because the artist had sacrificed accuracy in order to make it so.

The eye-sockets, executed in a fiendish combination of gray pigments, were horribly empty and staring — but they were too close-set to be natural. The frontal bone, a streak of livid white, was terrible in its effect — but far too broad. The two superior maxillary bones, forming the upper jaw and bounding the glaring, vacant nasal cavity, were hideously formed — but were *separated* on the under surface from the row of broken teeth, in order to lend

that maddening grin to the mouth.

There were other defects, easily recognizable. They were less significant. But as a work of horror, the skeleton before me was faultless. Never have I been so completely unnerved by something which I knew could hold no power over me.

I went toward it with irresolute steps, determined to inspect it at close range and then leave the room immediately. The singular glare of its dead features had sapped all my curiosity. I wanted to get away from it.

The painting was very old. Only three colors were evident—white, gray, and that sepulchral black. At the bottom of the heavy gilt frame I found the name of the artist — a name which choked on my lips as I cried it aloud. That name, faint and almost illegible, was *Ravenall*!

Ravenall "In the year previous to his death, having formed a truce with the House of Ramsey, he did present to Sir Godfrey Ramsey one or two paintings of great value, executed by himself . . ."

I left the room with an inexplicable sense of fear. Fascination it might have been, for that hideous thing behind me. Horror it might have been, for the slow realization that here — here in this fiendish picture — lay the secret of innumerable

murders, and a hellish curse of madness!

THERE IS LITTLE more to tell. The concluding event of my stay in the House of Ramsey was not long in forthcoming.

The hour was already late when I returned to the library on the lower floor. Sir Edward had not moved from his position. He greeted me with a nod; and the girl, who had returned during my tour of inspection, came toward me to give me the medicine I had ordered.

I forced the boy to take it. Then, in depressing silence, we sat there, the three of us, as the hour grew later and later. Lady Sybil and I made a feeble attempt to play backgammon; but the boy's glassy eyes haunted us. The game was a mockery.

When ten o'clock came, I rose and took the boy's arm. "A night's sleep," I said sternly, "would be one of your best medicines."

He glanced at me wearily, as if it hurt him to move. "You are turning in, Briggs?"

"I am."

He sank back into his chair with a half-inaudible murmur. I motioned quietly to Lady Sybil, thinking that if she left him he would be certain to come with us, rather than be left alone. The girl had already pre-

pared a room for herself on the upper floor.

But the boy did not move. As I drew the door shut, he looked up suddenly and spoke in a voice that was strangely harsh.

"Leave it open, Briggs. I'll—go to bed in a while. Closed doors are ghastly — just now."

In the corridor outside, I said goodnight to Lady Sybil and climbed the stairs to my room. The room opened on an unlighted passage — a narrow, gloomy tunnel that twisted from darkness into darkness, revealed only by the glow of light from my own chamber.

The hands of my watch, as I laid the timepiece carefully upon the table, stood at thirty-two minutes after ten o'clock. No sound stirred in the great house. Lady Sybil, having climbed the stairs behind me, had gone to her room at the far end of the corridor. Below stairs, the servant of the penetrating eyes had evidently retired.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes later when I heard Sir Edward's step on the stairs. He climbed wearily, inertly. His tread moved along the corridor. I heard the door of his chamber open and close. After that there was nothing but an ominous, depressing, sinister silence.

I left my door open. Most men in my position would, I presume, have closed it and made haste to throw the bolt.

But I found comfort, such as it was, in an open exit. I had no desire to be a rat in a trap.

Nervously I switched off the light and sank wearily to the bed. There I lay, facing the half-open door, striving to get rid of my thoughts. And there I lay when, a long time later, I was dimly conscious that the silence had dissolved into sound.

IT HAD NO definite beginning, no positive substance. Only in the acute stillness of the capacious structure would it have been audible at all. Even then it was no more than a dead hum, like the drone of muted, smothered machinery.

It increased in volume. For fully sixty seconds, perhaps longer, I lay unmoving, as the sound became a throbbing, wavering reality. I twisted about to stare at the door, as if I expected the vibrations to filter into my room and take the form of some ghastly supernatural being.

Then I heard something more — the distinct tread of human feet advancing quietly along the passage outside! And I saw it — saw the hunched form of Sir Edward Ramsey, creeping slowly along the corridor. Visible for a moment only, he passed the open door of my chamber. An unearthly mask of sepulchral light surrounded him — an obscure, bluish vapor that seemed to rise out of the floor

at his feet and hang about him like an ethereal cloak, a Protean winding-sheet. And I shall never forget the fear-haunted glare of the boy's eyes as he moved through the darkness.

He walked as though an inner force guided him forward. His hands hung lifelessly at his sides. His face was tense and ghastly gray, stained to an almost diabolical degree of expectancy. And then, passing out of my range of vision, he vanished.

I sprang from the bed and reached the door in a stride. There I stopped, with both hands clutching the door-frame. The sound of his footsteps had already died; but another form was coming silently out of the darkness and moving past me. The form of Lady Sybil — following him!

I did not hesitate then. I knew, as surely as if the walls themselves were screeching it out to me, that the boy was going to those infernal galleries in the upper recesses of the house. And up there would be that eternal fiend of murder and madness — that unnamed horror which had for centuries preyed on the inhabitants of this dwelling.

Groping into the passage behind those two grim figures, I fell into the mute procession. Far above me, that dirge of hell had risen to a whimpering moan — a human voice in torment —

rising and falling with my steps as I paced forward.

I saw the two figures before me now — the boy still enveloped in that weird mist; the girl silhouetted behind him. His tread was the tread of a man who had repeated this midnight journey many times and knew every creaking board, every turn of the passage, every twist of the long, winding stairways that led into the upper gloom.

He paced on — and on. Behind him crouched the girl, shadowing him as a jungle cat might shadow some unknown, half-dreaded quarry. I saw that shroud of unnatural light ascend the stairs, hovering about him — saw it grope down the second labyrinth — saw it climb again, up, up, into the stygian murk. The girl crept after him, and I trailed behind with the utmost caution, lest he should turn and find me behind him.

Only once — before the door of that chamber at the very roof of the house — did he hesitate. Then, swinging the heavy barrier open, he entered.

Through that open doorway, in tripled intensity, came the voice of the House of Ramsey. It beat upon me in waves — a terrific summons, whining hideously, rising and falling with infuriate vehemence. And I knew, in that frantic moment, why Sir Edward had not fled in terror from this place of pesti-

lence. He *could* not. That spectral voice possessed a spell that would allow no man to leave. It was irresistible in its cunning!

I slunk forward. The girl had already crossed the threshold. As I slipped through the aperture, I saw them directly before me — Lady Sybil pressed flat against the wall; the boy, surrounded by that Protean well of light, standing motionless with both hands uplifted.

THE ROOM was a pit of blackness, except for that bluish cone of light. A chill sensation took possession of me. I knew that we were not alone. I felt a malignant, gloating presence, invisible but sentient. All about me emanated that tenuous thread of sound, high-pitched now and wailing in an almost articulate voice. *Human!*

The boy crept forward. He breathed heavily. His body quivered and trembled like a thing disjointed. I knew instinctively what he wanted. It was that grim thing on the farther wall.

Mechanically my eyes turned to stare at it. Then, overcome by what I saw, I fell back.

A wall of darkness faced me. To right, to left, above and below, not a single detail of its construction was visible — except one. There, in the very space where that gleaming skeleton had hung before, a mad thing leered out at me.

It was no dead rack of bones

— not now. It was a face — a living, twisted, cruel face, set atop a writhing body. Even as I watched, a mist of phosphorescent light, bluish white, began to emanate from it. The rack of bones became a glowing torso, taking on human form.

Young Ramsey stood glued to the floor before it. Behind me I heard a stifled sob come from the girl's lips. I could not advance — could not move.

Slowly the thing changed contour. Slowly it twisted forward, coiling its sinuous way out of the great gilt frame. It was a skeleton no longer. It had become an undead form, indefinite in shape, swelling and contracting to grotesque mockeries of human mold. I saw a misty outline of ancient clothing hanging from its limbs — a garb that was hundreds of years old in style. And the face, lifted in terrible malice, was the face of an English nobleman.

It burned with a frightful glow, vivid and unnatural. The living dead hands writhed up — up to the thing's own throat, with evil suggestiveness.

And then, as if from a great distance, a strangled screech split the silence of that room of death. The specter's lips curled apart, revealing a double row of broken teeth. Words came through them. Vicious, compelling words.

"To strangle one's self is better than to be mad for eternity!

Do you hear, Ramsey? To strangle one's self . . ."

Sir Edward stumbled back, away from it. I saw his hands jerk up to his throat. I saw that fiendish, dead-alive creature lunge toward him.

Then a thin cry rose behind me, from Lady Sybil's lips. I was pushed roughly aside. Sobbing wildly, the girl dashed past me and fell upon the great gilt frame, slashing at it with a knife-like thing which she clutched in her hand. Flat against it, she raked the canvas into ribbons, clawing, ripping at it in sheer madness.

I think it was the sight of her, overcome by the horror of what we had seen, that made me move. I swung about, lurched forward. Against the wall, close to that living monstrosity, reeled Sir Edward. His face was livid with insanity brought on by the damned thing that grappled with him. His mouth was twisted apart, thick with blood and foam. His body twisted convulsively. And his hands — his own hands — were clenched in his throat.

That shapeless thing was all about him, hideously malformed. It had no limits, no bounds. It was a mold of bluish mist, with leering face and groping hands. And the hands — God, I can never forget them! They were huge, hairy, black. They were twined about the boy's wrists,

forcing the boy's fingers into his own throat. Strangling him! Murdering him! And the thumb of the hairy left hand was missing!

With a mighty jerk I wrenched those fingers from their hold. Behind me the girl was still hacking at the contents of the hugh frame, tearing the canvas. The wailing shriek rose to a frenzy — shrilled higher and higher.

Then, all at once, the voice became a sob — a sob of unspeakable anguish, as the girl's knife struck home. It gurgled into silence. The massive shape before me dissolved into a circular, throbbing, writhing wraith of fog, with only hands and face visible. The face lifted upward in agony; the hands clenched on themselves, doubled into knots. Before my eyes the thing became a blurred outline. And then — nothing.

Young Ramsey slid to the floor on hands and knees, in a dead faint. I whirled about, stumbling to Lady Sybil's side.

Neither of us noticed, then, that the room was once more in utter darkness. We were intent upon only one thing. Together we tore at that infernal painting, dragging it out of its frame, raking it to shreds.

The frame fell with a crash, hurtling down upon us. Lady Sybil reeled back with a cry of fear. I held her erect. Together

we stood there, staring — staring into something empty and black and sinister.

PRESENTLY I found courage enough to grope for a match and strike it. I blundered forward, only to stop as if an outflung hand had suddenly thrust me back, while the match dropped from my fingers. I must have screamed.

But I was saturated with horror. I was immune to anything more. Grimly I found a second match and, with the yellow glare preceding me, stepped into the aperture revealed by the falling of the picture.

The space was long, thin, hardly more than three feet deep — a silent, ancient vault. There, lying at my feet, extended an oblong box, black and forbidding, with closed cover. A coffin.

I scratched another match, and lifted the cover slowly. Glowering up at me, made livid by the light of the match, lay a skeletal form, long dead, crumbling in decay.

I stared down at it for an eternity. It was repulsive, even in death. The skull was a grinning mask. The hands were folded on the chest — and the thumb of the left hand was missing.

Beneath those hands lay something else — a rectangular plate of tarnished metal, engraved with minute lettering. I picked it out with nervous fingers.

The legend was hardly visible. I rubbed the metal on the sleeve of my coat, scraping away the film of dust. But the engraving had been scored deep. Holding the match close to it, I made out the words:

Sir Richard Ravenal. Famous artist. Eternal seeker into the secrets of the undead. His body placed here secretly by his son, in accord with a request made before his death. The hatred between Ramsey and Ravenal may never die!

Mechanically I returned the inscription to its resting-place. The girl stood behind me. I stepped past her, out of the vault, and paced across the gallery to where Sir Edward Ramsey lay motionless on the floor.

Lifting him in my arms, I turned to the door. "Come," I said to the girl.

She followed me out of the room. In silence we descended the black staircase to the lower levels. There, in the boy's chamber, I lowered Sir Edward to the bed; and, bringing my medicine kit from my own room, I

worked over him until he regained consciousness.

The boy stared up at me, reaching out to clutch my hand. He was weak, pathetically weak, but the haunted sheen of terror was gone out of his eyes. I moved away, allowing Lady Sybil to take my place.

Then I left them there — those two who loved each other with a love that was more intense than the most utter terror of this gaunt house.

I groped down the main staircase to the servants' level and aroused the ferret-faced deaf man. Together we climbed to the galleries. There we dragged forth that grim coffin with its horrible contents.

Later, in the kitchen of that sinister house, we kindled a great fire. Into it we cast the remains of the shattered picture. Into it we threw the oblong box.

And we stood there side by side, with the scarlet glare of the flames reflected in our faces, until the curse of the House of Ramsey had burned to a handful of dead ashes.



Lilies

by Robert A. W. Lowndes

(author of *Clarissa*, *The Abyss*)

This story was written in 1940, but the editors of what constituted the American market then were unanimous in agreeing that certain elements were just too much. It was something of a surprise to find that the Canadian market, which I thought was more prudish still, did not think so. My thanks to DONALD A. WOLLHEIM for suggesting that there was no reason now why it couldn't be revived for a first U. S. publication. I've taken the opportunity to revise and clarify certain elements, on the basis of studies undertaken since 1942, when the original version appeared in *UNCANNY TALES*.

EVEN TODAY, there is much that cannot be told. You will see from internal evidence that it happened in the U.S.A., some time between the Great War and Pearl Harbor; and from the descriptions of places you will be able to eliminate various parts of the country. That is all.

I had just emerged from a hospital early that week, having been there under observation for possible effects of concussion when I tried to occupy the same space as a taxicab, which had slowed down but not entirely stopped as the traffic light changed — something I'd failed to notice at the

moment. The doctors found no evidence of concussion, but I was experiencing some rather odd effects. There seemed to be an urge — at times, almost a call — to go somewhere. I could not be sure where. All I felt was that I had to leave New York City and go . . . It was annoying, and just upsetting enough to keep me from getting back to work — very often a writer needs no greater excuse.

That was the way it was that summer evening when I was sitting in my little apartment on the East Side, not far from Gramercy Park, sipping vermouth and soda and listening to a Beethoven piano concerto on my table phonograph. My fingers twitched as they always do when I listen to piano music.

The buzzer rang and a man's voice came through the speaker — a voice that I did not not recognize — identifying himself as Harley Dane and saying that he would like to talk to me about an article. I had written about witchcraft. He had his secretary with him, he said, a charming young lady, and he promised that I would not be bored. I pressed the buzzer and invited them up.

I had received a number of letters, some phone calls and visits, before my mishap, in response to that article. For a moment, as I waited for the

sound of footsteps climbing the three flights of stairs, I wondered if Dane would be another crank — fascinating but hard to get rid of. Then a knock came at the door, and I opened it to see a tall, striking-looking gentleman in his forties, I'd say, and a lithe, graceful-looking girl with long dark hair. Dane introduced her as Jeanne Mariani and hearing her voice I knew at once that I would not be bored.

The record side came to a close as I seated my guests, and I moved to turn off the player. Dane demurred. "Please do not let us interrupt the music, Mr. Warren," he said. "Both Jeanne and I love Beethoven and Artur Schnabel." So I put the needle back to the beginning of the second movement, and fixed drinks for them. A phony music lover might urge me to continue what I was playing, but it took more than a phony to distinguish between Giesecking and Schnabel playing Beethoven's fourth piano concerto, coming in about halfway through the second movement.

DANE GOT DOWN to business after the music was finished by taking a magazine out of his pocket. "I was particularly interested in your final paragraph, Mr. Warren." He opened the magazine and read aloud: "*Were there any real*

witches in Salem? Perhaps some of the old women who were brought into court thought they were witches, or were convinced that they must be — under pressure. But I do not think so. There may have been a genuine witch or more in that area, but the investigators' presuppositions and methods could not possibly have uncovered any real witch who did not want to be discovered.'

"I found that very interesting because it doesn't fit."

"Doesn't fit what?"

"The rest of the article is reasonably well done. You did a fair amount of research, though not in any real depth. Any number of competent writers could have written this article, except for the final paragraph. It struck me that there was something more than reading behind it — some knowledge based on experience."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it is entirely correct. . . . Have you ever known a witch?"

I shook my head. "I'm afraid I've misled you then, quite unintentionally. It — it was just a feeling I had after reading the accounts of the Salem Witchcraft. Afterwards, I felt that perhaps I should have rewritten it, but somehow that feeling persisted . . . I felt that this was the right ending, even if it didn't proceed logically out of the article itself. . . . The

editor told me that it didn't, but he said it was such a strong windup that he wouldn't think of cutting it."

"A good editor," Jeanne put in. "He knows when to throw away the rule book."

Harley Dane looked at me for a moment; then he said softly, "Are you sure you've never seen me before?"

"I — I don't think so. Unless . . ."

"Unless . . .?"

I took a swift gulp, then refilled my glass. "This may sound strange to you, sir, but . . . well, I had a serious accident about seven years ago. For a long time, I didn't know who I was. And there's still a gap — a pretty big gap." I lifted my hands and stared at my fingers. "I remember high school in the country to a point. It breaks off somewhere during a winter . . . and then I'm coming out of a hospital here in the city with just enough money to keep me while I look for work."

"I read a lot. I found that I can write. I know how to type, but my fingers don't co-ordinate right. I had to learn to type with two or three fingers of each hand and hardly ever using both hands at once. I find I know a lot of things that I don't remember ever studying. I find a lot of music familiar that I don't remember having heard before I bought

the records or heard a broadcast."

"What kind of music?"

"Some opera, but mostly piano music."

Harley Dane nodded. "Nicholas Warren is not too common a name, but you never liked to be called 'Nicholas', or 'Nick'. You didn't like your middle name, Jefferson, either; you called yourself 'Jay', after the initial. How do you feel about being called 'Jay'?"

"I — I — why, that's queer. It sounds right."

He took his wallet out of his jacket pocket and extracted a photograph. "This may be a shock to you — or it may not. As brutal as it sounds, I hope that it is a shock to you. I want you to look at this photograph very carefully. Don't say anything until or unless you feel something coming through — then say what comes to you."

HE HELD THE picture out to me and my fingers were trembling as I took it. Jeanne reached out and touched me. For a moment our eyes met and I felt something coming from her — something that flowed, a healing flow.

"Jeanne has a talent," Dane said. "She can help very much if you will let her."

I gulped and nodded, then looked at the photograph. It showed a young fellow, in his early twenties I'd say, and a

girl. A blonde girl, quite stunning to look at. There was an expression on her face, something behind the apparent beauty . . . and I felt a turmoil within me. It seemed as if a sudden storm had broken here in this room; winds were howling and centering on the chair where I was sitting. Only . . . the storm was inside me. I heard a voice in the roar, a voice that cried "*Caroline!*"

The next thing I remember, I was lying on the couch and Jeanne was bathing my forehead, her face very close to me. An instant later, things came into focus and I saw Harley Dane standing beside her. I started to get up."

"I — I have to go . . ." I began.

"Where?" Harley asked.

"I — I don't know." I sank back on the couch and Jeanne placed her hands on my temples. There was peace and warmth, and the storm was subsiding now. I told them about the feeling that had been coming to me since my recent entanglement with a taxi.

"The memories are beginning to come back, Jay," Dane said. "That is why she is starting to come through to you."

"Caroline?"

He nodded.

"Caroline? A witch?"

"A very dangerous witch, Jay. The accident that wiped out your memories also broke

her hold over you. She has been trying to find you ever since you disappeared, but her powers are limited — for the very reason that she is so dead-ly. I have been trying to stop her for over five years. Jeanne has only been with me for about a year and Caroline does not know that Jeanne exists.”

“How do you feel about Caroline?” Jeanne asked.

“Why . . . I don’t know. I think I love her, only . . .”

“You did once, Jay,” Dane said. “Until fear drove love out. But she has never forgotten you. She wants you. She wants to possess you again as completely as she did before. Are you willing to fight?”

I looked at Jeanne and said, “Yes.”

“Then you *will* be making a journey — with-me,” Dane said.

“Have you any commitments that cannot be cancelled or postponed?”

“None right now.”

“Jeanne will be going on ahead of us in a day or two. I want you to receive healing from her in the meantime. . . . No magic, but you will receive some strength you need.”

He stood up. “You’ll have about a week to arrange for a trip at my expense. I do not know how long you will be away, but I do not think it will be more than a week if we win.”

“And . . . if we lose . . .”

“None of us will come back

if we lose. You will be alive — and perhaps even happy in the way that a puppet can be considered happy. I don’t mean that you’ll never see this apartment again — but if she wins, then Jay Warren will never come back. She always called you ‘Nickie’, and you always let her.”

2

TO EITHER SIDE of the road stretched fields and small, curving hills. Strange hills they were, set in a pattern which seemed to elude me constantly. I felt that I could recognize the pattern if I knew just one thing, and that one thing would explain why the hills themselves seemed to eerie.

There was a suggestion of brooding about the hills that made me think of fantastic illustrations I had seen in books by Charles Fort. I could picture, mentally, the skyscape set against a midnight sky, and the thought of that scene made me shudder, half-wondering why.

I was about to ask Harley some trivial question when a realization arose and dashed itself between my eyes. “Dane!” I gasped. “Shouldn’t there be a village here — Greylock?”

He turned to me with the wan imitation of a grin flickering on his face. “There was a village here once, Jay.”

“Once! It was here seven

years ago! A village can't disappear like that, leaving no traces. Why the very topography of this entire district has changed; and there's no sign of natural catastrophe . . ."

"Yet," interrupted Dane, "as you can see, the village is gone and these hills are here."

"Could it be a mirage?"

"It could be, theoretically. But it isn't." He eased the car to a stop. "Let's walk around a bit," he said. "I can see that you think that your eyes are betraying you. Very well; you shall have proof."

We slid out of the coupe on to the asphalt, hot and sticky beneath our feet. No cars were coming in either direction; we strode across the black spread of the road, toward the lush green of the field. And, almost at once, I felt an odd tingling, an impression of moist warmth; it was as if something had fallen upon me, completely enveloping me from head to foot. Or, as if I had suddenly plunged over my height into an unknown substance, less tangible than water, denser than air. It penetrated, sifted, through my clothing and lay directly against my flesh. I shuddered in revulsion, stood still, hesitating. Then the sensation had gone.

"Did you feel it?" asked Harley.

"Yes. What was it?"

He shook his head. "I can't tell you now. For a time, after

— it — happened, I used to feel just what you are feeling now. It strikes you as soon as you step off the road; you feel it for an instant, then it goes away. And, after you've come into the fields often enough, you don't feel it any more."

I looked up, gazed at the arches of azure over the field. There was nothing amiss in the sky; the same summer sun beat down upon me, the same downy masses of cloud floated atop the wind-waves. I could see the specks of birds in the distance, and, far away, the crests of trees.

And now sensations of comfort began to steal upon me. Yet they were — different. It was not the ordinary soothing effect of sun-splashes on a verdant hill. Somewhere, deep beneath the caressing of it, lay the faintest trace of that initial revulsion, drowned, weaving vaguely on the ocean-floor of this new contentment; but it was there, nonetheless. Then wave upon wave of pleasure swept over me, buffeting me, until the little eddies of distaste and unease were gone; now there remained only this strange new bliss, an ecstasy of feeling turf beneath my feet, of breathing summer-laden air, of beholding strangely-curved, green hills.

IT WAS THEN that I noticed the flowers. There had

been none of them near the road, and I am sure that I had not noticed any from the car. But as Harley and I wandered farther and farther away from the asphalt, heading for the base of one of the eerie hills, they began to appear, little clusters of them, seemingly rearing themselves up from nowhere.

They were tall, having the general shape and appearance of easter-lilies, but no ordinary lilies were they. Their shape was curving and — exciting. I felt a ripple of delight lance through me when first I saw them, a semi-erotic tingle. It seemed to me that they were swaying, weaving back and forth, deliberately attracting my attention — though no breeze stirred the air at that moment.

Gasping with mingled astonishment and delight, I knelt beside a cluster of the flowers, thinking it not at all strange that I should do so. Gently I ran my fingertips along the stem of the nearest flower, cupped the bell of it in my hands. It was lush, fleshy, and — inviting. I pressed my face close to it, breathing deeply of the fragrance that now issued from it. And, as I did so, my senses reeled, consciousness slipping away from me.

It seemed, now, that twilight had settled about me, and a darkhaired girl, clothed in the

green of the flower's spears, stood swaying before me. The scent of the lily was in her hair and her hands were downy and soft as the stem and bell of the flower. No sound came from her lips, but in my brain trilled the lyrics of the perfume she bore, and her eyes were calling, calling me, promising delights such as no man ever knew before. I could not move; it was as if I had taken root and become myself a plant; only with my eyes could I speak the yearning that welled within me, and plead for her caress.

SOMETHING FELL upon my shoulder. I tried to push it aside but it was firm and unyielding. Then the thing was shaking and mauling me; as in a dream, I tried to resist, but my movements were fruitless. It took all the strength I possessed to raise my hand, let alone use it for defense. Again came the shaking, and, at last daylight leaped up before me. It was Dane.

His face, I saw now, bore a worried look. "Better be careful about those flowers, Jay. They're — they're sort of poisonous. Narcotic. I'll tell you about it later."

I wasn't quite back yet, but things were steady enough to make me want to know more. "How long was I . . ."

"Just a few seconds. As soon as I saw you shoving your face

into that bell, I rushed over and pulled you away. Those things are deadly."

Deadly? No, that couldn't be. A little strange, perhaps — but surely not dangerous.

"What are they?"

He frowned. "Later, Jay. They came with the hills and the turf."

He grasped my shoulder again, as if to impart something particular, then apparently thought better of it. "Let's go," he said. I nodded, and started to follow him back toward the road. But — this lily. I didn't want to leave it behind. How could I ever find her again, one out of so many? With a sudden impulse, I stooped and plucked the flower.

A cry shrilled in my brain as my fingers closed around the stem, broke the slender back of it; a cry half of pain, half of delight. Mechanically I put the flower in my buttonhole and went on, wiping my hands on a handkerchief. The liquid did not feel right for the sap of a flower; I looked closely at the handkerchief, and at my hands.

The substance was unfamiliar; but the general nature of it was recognizable. Even though I knew better, I could not help but crying out as I saw the fluid on my hands.

Blood!

But it wasn't blood; this was silly. I reached for my button-

hole and took out the lily. It had, I noticed, already started to droop and wither. But, as my moist hands touched it, it began to regain strength and freshness. In a moment, it was the fresh, radiant flower I had just plucked, and my palms were dry. A whiff of perfume struck my nostrils . . .

Harley turned around. "Throw it away," he said. Something about the tone of his voice, quiet though it was, made me obey without argument. I realized, almost unconsciously, that here was subtle menace and that Dane knew a great deal more than he had told me as yet. That he would explain everything in due time, I had no doubt. But now — I would have to follow his suggestions and wait.

But, even as we stepped off the verdant turf, on the black asphalt again I was thinking to myself that I must return soon, must return and know these flowers again, more intimately.

"YOU MUST NOT say anything to Caroline about this episode, Jay. So far as she knows, we came by the other route and did not see this section at all. I told her that I found you in New York and explained something about your accident. . . . Your memory is beginning to come back and you wanted to see her again. She's married to Julian Brent

now, but he is away at present."

"And what about Jeanne — Miss Mariani?"

"You'll see her, but you don't know her. She took a position as Caroline's secretary. Caroline asked me if I knew someone who might like to fill in for awhile, so I sent Jeanne out with references."

"Rather fortuitous — an opening just at this time," I said.

"Not so much as you might think, Jay. Caroline does a lot of social work. She has had quite a number of young girls who have been her private secretary for a few months. None have stayed very long. All of them, like Jeanne, have been without families or close connections." He smiled. "That is, Jeanne has been tailored to fit the requirements. I have been unable to find any trace of these other girls once they left The Willows, which has been in the Goodenow family for generations. . . . How well do you remember Caroline now?"

"I remember The Willows — and all the weeping willows around. I — remember being there often with Caroline, and some books in her father's library. They were about magic and occult things. Very old books and many of them in foreign languages."

"What about music?"

"I wanted to become a pianist. I was pretty good, and

Caroline was sure she could help me. It had something to do with some of those books. She could arrange for me to have a concert at Greylock . . ."

"Did she?"

"Yes. . . . I remember playing. It was wonderful . . . but it was all wrong. I couldn't play that well. I could feel that it wasn't me . . . and then . . ."

Dane nodded. "Don't stop, Jay. Let it come through. Don't strain. Just keep talking."

"Then someone in the audience laughed and shouted something. He must have been drunk. I don't know what it was, but I heard someone calling out something, and then everyone was laughing, and . . ."

"And . . .?"

"And I couldn't play any more. I couldn't even read the music in front of me. It was far too difficult. I wasn't up to a work like this. . . . I remember running out of the hall, and people laughing."

"That is exactly what happened, Jay. You were actually capable of performing a moderately simple recital very well. That was what was announced. But what you started to play, after the first two numbers, was Charles Ives' *Concord Sonata* — something very few pianists care to tackle, and where Caroline got the notion that it would impress Greylock . . . Yet, it fits in — it fits in very well."

"And — after that," I continued, "I remember walking along the road, with tears running down my cheeks. And suddenly there were bright lights sweeping around a curve . . ."

"That was when you were hit. It was just a glancing blow, apparently, and it knocked you off into a gully where you lay in the underbrush. The man who hit you wasn't sober and he wasn't sure he *had* hit you. He came back and looked, and couldn't find any trace of you.

"You must have come to and wandered off. You were picked up by a truck driver who took you into New York. You had a little money with you, but no identification. He let you off somewhere and you kept on wandering — until you collapsed and were taken to a hospital. All you could tell them was your name. There were no clues to where you came from."

WE WERE OVER the last of the strange hills now. Up to the right, on an incline that had always been there, rested the estate. I saw no change in it, save for power lines. The great house had been repainted, I knew, but artificial weather-beating had been added, so that the rugged appearance remained. Save for electrification and modern plumbing, I thought, old Nathaniel Good-

enow would not find too much difference here — except for the absence of horses and carriages perhaps. All the furniture added, Harley said, had been built on the old style, built to endure.

"Remember, you have never met Jeanne before," Harley said. "She is not a servant, though she does some things that a maid would do, but she's treated as one of the family. Don't notice anything strange — I mean, notice it, but don't let on that you do."

The sun was dipping behind the strange hills, and I shook my head trying to clear it. "Harley, how could this happen? Greylock is gone and the whole countryside is changed. It's coming back to me now. But how is it that there was no investigation . . . I mean for a village to disappear like this . . . ?"

"This is pretty much back country, Jay. Greylock was always isolated. But there was an investigation of sorts, and there's an official explanation. So far as the records go, Greylock and all its inhabitants were wiped out by a flood."

"A flood! That's ridiculous — why . . ."

"I can't explain now. If I say 'witchcraft', that won't make much sense to you yet — but you'll have to take my word for it at the present moment."

Another road, coming from a different direction, joined the one we were traveling. Harley nodded toward it. "Just in case there's any question, that is the way we came. You were mostly asleep from the time we left Danville, which you do remember going through; you woke up now and then for a moment or two and didn't notice anything unusual."

"Is it all right if I remember The Willows, what it's like inside, and things like that?"

"Fine." He pulled to a stop inside the driveway. "Well . . . we're here."

3

JEANNE MET US alone; she was supposed to have seen Harley before, of course, but he introduced me as if we were strangers. She said that Caroline would be down in a moment or two. We talked for awhile, then I noticed that Harley was staring across the room; I followed his gaze.

"Jeanne," he said, "where did those flowers come from?"

"Caroline picked them this morning. I don't know where she found them — I haven't seen any lilies around here. Lovely, aren't they?"

A glance passed between her and Harvey. He nodded and she arose. "Excuse me — I'll tell Caroline you're here."

I waited until she had left,

then turned to Dane. "What's up?"

"She suspects something. Caroline has never broken a promise to me before, and she promised me after Anne — her most recent secretary — left that she wouldn't bring any more of the lilies into the house.

"You know how they affected you? Well, they have an even more pronounced effect upon ordinary women. That is — there are two kinds of lilies, though they all look alike. Take a good close look at those."

I arose and went over to the large flower bowl. Harley was right. They looked the same as the others, but I could feel a difference. There was a sort of attractiveness about them, but it was an attractiveness that made me want to destroy them. And then . . . suddenly I felt sick and weak, because I knew why these flowers would affect a woman the way the others had affected me. I think something of what was in my mind showed through as I turned and faced Harley.

He nodded, and was about to speak when I saw a woman standing in the doorway. Caroline!

For a long moment time stood still. Caroline! She had not changed, save to become more breath-takingly alluring, more alluring, more lovely — no! Not lovely. Something choked inside me as I realized that, choked

and began to cry like a lost child.

The beauty of her cut across my senses like a scimitar, yet, even if Harley hadn't told me about it, I would have sensed the aura, and begun to remember what I had found before. It enfolded her as a nimbus. It allured, even as fangs appeared to dart in and out of her.

Caroline had power. Power, I remembered, to turn detestation, or even hatred, into helpless adoration. Power which seemed visibly to reach out and surround me. For an instant I stood stock still, striving to beat off the influence; then, the woman before me began to change. The evil halo flicked out; the undertones softened and became gentle, and Caroline was now the lovely, breath-taking girl I had worshipped. What had happened to separate us?

"Nickiel" she whispered happily. "Nickiel!"

Our hands clasped and she brushed her lips against mine. "Do you still love me, Nickiel?" she asked.

A wave of resentment against Julian swept over me; had her husband been present I would have killed him on the spot. "I'll always love you, Caroline," I breathed.

She cupped my face in her hands, looked into my eyes, smiling. "Dear Nickie," she

sighed. Then her arms slipped away and she moved over toward the flower-bowl. "Have you seen my lilies?"

"Yes," I replied. "They are very strange flowers, Caroline. I do not think I have ever seen anything like them. What are they? Where did they come from?"

Her face was shining as with rapture. "I will tell you a story later darling. It is a very strange and wonderful tale, and I'm afraid you won't believe me. but it is true."

Her hands caressed the flowers. "There are several varieties of these lilies. You will like the other kind better, I think." She paused suddenly as if listening. "Excuse me, Nickie. I have to go into town for a little while. *Non ti scordar de mi.*" She turned to go.

"Do you want me to come along?" Jeanne asked.

"No, dear. You can help entertain our guest."

Non ti scordar de mi! Do not forget me! Where had I heard that before? She said it the way a woman says something with a very private meaning to just one person. And once she left the room, it seemed as if a spell had been lifted and she was changing in my impressions . . . changing back to . . .

"Harlevl!" I cried. "Can she be mad?"

"Not in the way you're think-

ing. No delusions, Jay. Her power is very real."

My throat was suddenly dry. "Then . . . the supernatural . . . witchcraft . . ."

"There is no supernatural," said Jeanne. "There is only one universe, and everything is natural. Discoveries have been made and largely forgotten, but that does not make them less real. If civilization were destroyed, perhaps electricity might come to be thought of as supernatural again. Is it?"

"But . . . magic . . ." I protested.

Harley got up. "We need some fresh air," he said. "You can't make sense of it all at once, Jay — and I think we'd better call you 'Nick' now. . . . Unless I'm very much mistaken, Caroline will want to take you for a drive when she comes back and show you the hills, then tell you the story of what happened to Greylock."

4

Under the quiet spell of Caroline's voice, telling the story as we sat out on the porch, overlooking the small lake behind the house, the picture of Greylock came back to me, as I had known it in the past. A small village, remote, set among mountains and a few lakes, like the one on the Goodenow estate, all lying in a basin. Large, sturdy, well built houses, most

of which dated far back. Spreading lawns and gardens. Here and there a garage, and a heavy new car or truck; but many horses and wagons, particularly outside the center of the village.

There were a few stores, a hotel and restaurant, a bar or two, churches, a school — that was where they held the concert — and a hall which was a dancehall, village meeting place, etc.

It was a Saturday night in late summer, one of the last few weekends when the air was warm enough for open cars. Most of the population of Greylock was gathered for the Saturday night dancing, young and old alike — square dances interspersed with the latest modern steps, as well as some older-fashioned steps, music by a pickup orchestra of local instrumentalists who spelled each other so that no one worked all night. A small colony of cars and wagons spread about the hall itself, near the bars and restaurant, while others found more secluded spots near the modest stream they called the river.

The night was calm, peaceful. In the sky, a few clouds drifted lazily across the disc of a full moon, stirred now and then by a breath of air. Grass, trees, and flowers gave off perfume; mossbanks near the water were warm and springy. From the

dance hall, couples would emerge to stroll down the fields out of sight. No slightest indication of disaster was afoot.

Shortly after midnight, a faint glow was discerned on the horizon. It seemed as if, many miles distant, a huge fire were flickering, although no bursts of smoke could be seen. For a time, many of the assembled watched it, fascinated, and members of the volunteer fire department gathered, expecting a summons to duty. But their chief shook his head. This was no business for men of Greylock unless an emergency call came through, which he thought to be unlikely. There were attendants on duty at the fire station; if men were needed, the alarm would boom out. The men went back to their partners and the dancing and love-making continued.

The night grew darker, strangely more dark than was usual for this time of year. In the sky, stars shone more brightly and the moon was gone. No clouds were visible. And on the distant horizon, the glow had died away.

But now, something else was apparent, something which made the music die away as all gathered to watch, half-fearfully. There was a radiance in the heavens far above them, a phenomenon for which there was no precedent.

It looked like threads of silver darting about the sky, or, as some one put it, as if people were drawing fine wires of mercury across the firmament.

While they watched, the bright threads became more numerous, wove themselves into fantastic patterns. The townspeople were somewhat alarmed, yet no one felt any distinct fear. It had a sort of hypnotic quality about it; they felt impelled to leave whatever they were doing and gather together in one great mass, where all could see the show.

LITTLE BY LITTLE, the couples who had strayed away from the revelry returned; the few old folks who had retired, or who had been sitting at home, came down to the center of town. Children were aroused from their beds, dressed and brought, unprotesting along. The entire population of Greylock was gathered in the center of town, craning their necks upward, little aware of each other, waiting. Waiting for they knew not what. Yet, unalarmed.

And the silver threads continued to weave about the sky, now forming a curious script, shaming into definite symbols unlike any with which these people were familiar. Some looked about for old Dr. Bailey, feeling sure that he could explain, but he was in a neighboring town, attending a ma-

ternity case. One of the younger men, who had studied abroad for some years, noted that the script bore a faint resemblance to Arabic symbols, but he could recognize none of them.

Then, as strangely as the glow on the horizon had vanished, the silver threads died away. The townspeople looked at one another blankly; they had not, as yet, had time to recover from the strange experience.

And a wind arose.

It was a wind, bearing a whisper upon its crest; it descended upon them, caressing them with its whispers before any could flee indoors. Each person, man, woman, and child, it touched lightly with its fingers.

And, as if an electric light had suddenly been snapped off, Greylock was no more. It was gone as completely as if it had never been more than someone's dream, to be forgotten upon awakening.

Gone were the houses, the bars, the restaurant, the hotel, the churches, the dance-hall, and the school. In their place were fields, stretching from the asphalt road that had wound through the town, up to the new, weirdly curving hills. And gone were the people of Greylock; on the newly-arisen hills were clusters of flowers, flowers suggestive of

easter-lilies, yet not easter-lilies.

It had happened.

Part of me was listening, believing against belief, and part of me was asking how it was that The Willows was spared, how it was that Caroline and Harley had not disappeared with the rest. Caroline told of the investigation, of various people coming to The Willows and asking about the flood. Who would believe the truth? She told them what they wanted to hear. Harley was away on one of his trips when it happened.

When she finished, she grasped my hand. "Nickie, I'm afraid. There is something terrible happening here. That was five years ago, but it was only a beginning. I need help. I need you."

WE RETIRED shortly after that, but I knew I couldn't sleep. I lay fully dressed on the bed, then gave it up at last and went downstairs. I was not surprised to find Harley out on the porch.

"I thought you'd be down," he said, as he arose. "Come with me. There's something I want you to see."

"What about Caroline?"

"She's occupied — and, besides, she doesn't greatly care what I tell you or show you. Her story tonight was true, by the way — so far as it goes.

"Witchcraft?"

"Something more than that, but it'll do for now."

He wouldn't say more as we went down to the lake and got into a rangeley — a small boat with a broad back like a row-boat, but narrower, like a canoe, light, and propelled by paddles. At first, I thought we were just out for exercise; then, as I followed Harley's directions and steered at the rear paddle, I saw that we were headed for the small island toward the farther end.

I felt I should know something about this island, and the feeling came more strongly when I made out a cabin near the shore. We beached the rangeley, and my heart started to pound as we walked up the path to the cabin. The moon was bright and I could see well enough inside as we stepped in . . .

And I was choking, tears running down my cheek, a voice gasping *Gran Dio, que dolce!* The voice stopped, and I knew it was my own. I made my way to the sofa in front of the fireplace, half-wondering why I knew my way about here so well.

"Harlev," I said weakly, "what did I say?"

"*Gran Dio, que dolce!* Great God, how sweet!"

"But — that's Italian, isn't it? I don't know Italian."

"Are you sure, Nick? Look around here. Remember. What

happened here? Think of a winter night . . .

I closed my eyes, still brimming with tears, and leaned back. The words came haltingly. A winter night. Caroline and I were skating on the lake. We were near the shore, when she cried out something . . .

"What, Nick?"

"*Aital Help!*"

I turned and saw that the ice had broken; she'd fallen through. There wasn't too much danger . . . it was quite shallow here, but we were both soaked before I got her out. We came into the cabin and I made a fire and . . .

"That was when you first became lovers, wasn't it. How old were you then?"

"Seventeen . . . I wasn't finished with high school yet. . . . I was staying here for that weekend. You were away, though I think you came back for Christmas. I remember you on Christmas morning . . . but what was I doing here on Christmas?"

"The same year, Nick?"

"No — it was the next year. But — why, I was living here. Mr. Goodenow treated me as a member of the family — a cousin. . . . My parents . . . killed the winter before in an accident . . ."

"What is my full name, Nick?"

"Harley Dane — Goodenow."

"And yours?"

"Nicholas Jefferson Warren

... "I stared at him. "You said you were trying to stop her. She's a witch. It's in the family. You're a witch. And I . . . am I .. ?"

HE SHOOK his head. "Not in your branch of the family, Nick Goodenow. You are our cousin. It isn't hereditary, although talents which help the study of witchcraft can be inherited." His hand grasped my shoulder as he stood beside the sofa. "There just a little more you have to remember now. Try."

"I loved her. She loved me. But it was so strange. Everything seemed to go right. No one suspected us. We were never surprised in anything compromising. Now and then I wondered . . . and there was something about Caroline, about that night . . ."

"What, Nick?"

"It was so warm suddenly when we came toward the cabin. The ice began to get soft. It was almost comfortable in spite of our wet clothes, the warm air. But when we went back, after our clothes dried, it was clear and cold again and the ice was firm."

"How did you feel?"

"I loved her — but I wondered. I wanted to learn to play the piano and she helped. She loved opera — that's where the Italian came in. We talked to each other in phrases out of librettos; we didn't really know

the language. Her favorite was *La Traviata*; mine was *Il Trovatore*."

"*La Traviata* — The Wayward One, very appropriate, I'd say," Harvey commented. "Just one more thing. What about your progress on the piano?"

"It — it wasn't right. I played music too well for so little practice. My teacher thought I put in five or six hours a day, but I didn't. Caroline said she could help me learn faster . . . she would stroke my brow and sing strange little songs. . . . Harley! Is Jeanne a witch?"

He shook his head. "No, but . . ." He struck his head with his fist. "I've been a fool, Nick! I've done just what she wanted me to do, and Jeanne is in danger. We've got to get back to the house."

WE ENTERED the drawing room, and Harley clutched my arm. "Look!" he whispered.

For a moment, I could discern nothing in the darkness, then my eyes made out a form, over by the window by the great flower-bowl. It was Jeanne.

She sat there motionless, her body taut, then, as we approached, it relaxed, quivered. Lily bells surrounded her and her hands were moving slowly, running up and down the white stems of the flowers, and caressing the cups of them. A low moaning came from her throat, a sobbing of delight.

Jeanne! For a moment I stood transfixed at the horror of it, then I was running across the floor. Jeanne! Something cautioned me against crying out, calling her name. With a swift movement I brushed the flowers away, lifted up her head so that the long, dark hair streamed back and fell upon her shoulders. Jeanne!

Her eyes were vacant, unseeing. The breath between her lips came in little gasps and her full bosom was heaving spasmodically. Her slim hands were clenching and unclenching; now they gripped me and clung, the finely manicured nails biting into me.

I lifted her out of the chair, pressing her to my chest. She remained motionless, she fell back. Quickly I picked her up and started back toward the stairs.

Jeanne! She lay limp and unmoving in my arms, her body still trembling with the unholy delight of the lilies. Not until we had reached the head of the stairs did she seem to recover. Her eyes opened, a puzzled look in them. "Nick," she murmured happily, as a child might murmur the name of a loved one upon awakening. Then, her head fell against my shoulder again, and she was asleep.

We placed her in the bed, drew the clothes over her, and opened the window so that she would get sufficient fresh air.

Then we tiptoed out, closing the door.

Once outside, I turned to Harley fiercely, but he motioned for silence until we had regained his room. He locked the door and turned to me. "It was the same way with the others, Nick," he said.

"Can't her husband do anything?" I demanded. "Is Julian under her spell, too?"

"Nick, Julian Brent hasn't been seen since the night it happened!"

5

FAR AWAY in the dark a voice was calling, calling. The sound of it rustled against my consciousness, stirred the tendrils of my memory. A half-plaintive whisper. The voice of a girl I had known . . . somewhere in the past. Out of the mists came the whisper, and something long buried stirred within me so that I arose to seek out the voice. Yet, it was not I who arose then; it was a boy, newly awakened.

And the voice I heard was the voice of a girl who made me feel glorious. So I arose, groping my way in the blackness, running my hand along the wall for a spot I suddenly knew was there; in a moment I had found it; I pressed gently and a section of the wall slid away revealing an emptiness. Yet, this way was not unknown to me,

and cautiously I found the first step with my foot, then the railing with my hands, and the section of wall slid back into place. But I was not afraid.

The steps were hard beneath my feet, and I knew they had been carved in the stone upon which this house had been built. Down, down, and down I proceeded until at last the stairway had come to an end, and, far ahead, I could see the faint flicker of a dim light. It was from this point that the voice came. Eagerly I hurried toward it, then bore sharply to the right, through an arched doorway, and found myself in a large subterranean room.

And there she awaited me, surrounded by strange, tall flowers that gave off a fragrance that made my senses reel. A young girl she was, young as myself, and the summer stars were in her eyes; the silk of Cathay was in her hair, and the red of pomegranates in her lips.

Caroline.

And now she was here, waiting for me in this strange, secret place. For a second, a shrill of alarm rippled through my brain, a suggestion that all was not as it seemed. But the fragrance of the flowers was in my nostrils and words were welling to my lips that must be spoken now. She was as the queen of an olden land, my Caroline, and I knelt.

Then she held out her hand,

and I rose and sat beside her. Her eyes searched my face for a time, half-eagerly, half sadly, and sorrow arose in me at the thought of her unhappiness. But now my queen was no longer imperious and her golden head was buried against my shoulder as her arms encircled my neck. So we remained long and she whispered of those who were cruel and tyrannical, so that I finally demanded my right to vengeance.

FOR A TIME she protested, then, at last, consented and we arose and went into another room where a man sat in a large chair. A heavy robe was spread over his limbs so that I could see nothing below his waist. His face, I could see, was dark and evil. And she told me of his wickedness and cruelty, told me how she had been imprisoned here many days at a time awaiting his pleasure. His head was bowed in sleep as she spoke; a mad fury stirred in me, and I made as if to awaken him, for I desired to take his life with my own hands. But she demurred, holding me back, for he was a powerful man, one who could easily overcome one younger. Then my eyes fell upon an object lying near the chair and I gasped in horror. She saw it, too, and her face blushed crimson with shame as her eyes brimmed hotly with tears. A whip.

I could contain my rage no longer, so I pushed her aside, and, seizing the whip, I brought it down with mad fury upon the sleeping man, slashing and slashing again in mindless hate. His eyes opened, caught me in the moment of raising the whip, preparing to slash his face . . .

His eyes!

There was no evil in them. They were the eyes of a man tormented beyond endurance, eyes that were glassy and dry because they could weep no more. There was neither pleading nor reproach in them; merely suffering and sadness. The lash fell from my hands; the room wavered before me. With a choking cry I wheeled about, faced this girl.

Then I knew! I knew Caroline!

With a swift movement, I grasped the whip again, but she was too quick for me; her hand fell upon my arm and from the curious ring on her finger, something darted forth and stung. I could not move. Helpless, I stood there as something stirred behind me and I felt myself grasped, lifted.

One thing only I saw before the darkness gathered me in: the form and face of the one who bore me. It was—myself!

THE SLOW drip-drip of water splashing against my face aroused me. I sat up suddenly, trying to remember — what? An

icy drop dashed itself on my neck, trickled down my back. Then I knew.

A gloomy place, this underground suite; light filtered in, somehow, enough light so that I could make out objects in this room.

I sat on a makeshift bunk in one corner; a battered table was in the center of this alcove, and, to one side, a doorway. I made my way toward it, expecting to find a barrier, but none was there. I passed through easily and stood in the large chamber where last I'd seen Caroline.

It was richly furnished; thick, heavy rugs were strewn on the floor; tapestries lined the walls, the sweep of them broken only by bookcases, crammed with dusty volumes. Weirdly carved chairs and tables decorated the chamber, while, in the center rested the massive chair in which the man I had flogged still sat.

As I neared him, he was murmuring "Caroline, Caroline," in deep heavy tones.

He saw me and fell silent, bowing his head. What could I say to him? A long silence then his head came up again, his eyes filled with a look of bewilderment.

"Why do you wait?" he rumbled. "Is it not time!" Then, as I made no answer: "Or is it to be something new today?"

His eyes searched me, fell upon my right hand; then he

glanced over at the table where the whip had lain. It was there, waiting.

My voice returned to me. "Who are you?"

"You speak?" he gasped.

"Of course," I held out my hands to him. "I am your friend," I said simply. "What I did to you last night, I did without knowing. Why should I wish to harm you? I have never seen you before."

"Come closer," he whispered. He drew a cushion from the chair, dropped it on the floor. "Sit here beside me."

"Yes," he said as I obeyed his request. "Yes. You are—the living one. You are Nicholas Goodenow."

"That is my name. But you—who are you? And why has Caroline put you here — what has that fiend done to you?"

He winced visibly. "No," he said. "No. You must not say that. She is not to blame — something has possessed her. I love her." He fell silent, breathing heavily.

"But," I protested, "this is fantastic — it can't be — it . . ."

"Wait! I will tell you."

He paused, trying to collect his thoughts.

"It seems so long since I have talked to anyone. She never speaks to me, now."

"I am Julian Brent. Yes, that is who I am. Sometimes, it is hard to remember. I am Julian

Brent of Greylock — of the town that was once.

"How long ago it was, I cannot be sure. Perhaps I have been here many years. But once, I was as other men. And I loved a beautiful, golden-haired girl named Caroline. Loved her even though I knew she cared little for me."

"One night I asked her to marry me, little thinking that she would accept my proposal. I hoped that, in time, she would come to care for me."

"Caroline was very kind for the first few months of our marriage. Then, strange things began to happen. I could not understand them. It seemed that I would sleep for days at a time; sometimes I would wonder if she were poisoning me, but I was too fogged to care much. And, when I did see her, her gentleness made me forget my suspicions. Can you understand?"

I nodded. "Yes. I loved her too, once."

"That is right. But, what you did not know was that she still desired you. She has some uncanny power . . ."

"What happened?"

"One night, there was a storm — lightning struck my room. I awoke and found myself alone. Caroline was gone: I was afraid for her. I arose and went downstairs, looking for her. Then, I thought I heard sounds beneath the front room. As I looked more

carefully, I saw that a section of the wall had slid aside.

"I went down a long flight of steps, thought of smugglers, dope rings, and the like in my mind. That would account for her keeping me drugged. And I came to a room—this room.

"CAROLINE WAS here — with a man it seemed at first. She was making love to him; I could hear what she was saying and it made me feel old and sick.

"She was telling him in detail how she hated and despised me, how she put some spell upon me to make me sleep while she came down here and gave herself to him."

"Did you see this—man!"

He shook his head. "It was not a man. It was a — thing — she had made with her arts. It looked like a man, moved like a man. But it could not speak. She was trying to complete the spell, to make it really alive. It was a sort of robot; it obeyed her every command, but could do nothing of its own intiating.

"Caroline—oh the vileness of it. She was abasing herself before this thing, pleading with it to speak, to tell her it loved her. She called it by name — your name.

"I think I went a little mad then. Had it been another man, I might have restrained myself, though I most certainly would have divorced her, but — this.

I rushed into the room, seized something — I forget what it was — and set upon the thing. It could not fight; it fell to the floor and lay still. She might have willed it to struggle with me, but I was too quick for her. I damaged it, so that she could do nothing with it at the time. Then I turned and faced her.

"She looked hideous then — I think I forgot that I loved her. She spoke some words — they sounded like a pagan chant. And I became as I am now."

He tore the robes from his limbs. "See!" he cried. "See what the woman I love did to me!"

I reeled back in horror. For, from the waist down, Julian Brent was not a man. Choking, I stretched forth a hand, unable to believe my eyes. But the touch of my fingers confirmed what I had seen.

Stonel

GREAT TEARS rolled down his cheeks. "Seeing you, another living person, has brought me back to myself. I can weep again."

"Does she . . . ?" I asked, looking at the whip.

"No. She never touches me. She makes the thing do it. I could endure pain at her hands —but not that foulness.

"Nicholas," he whispered, "Nicholas Goodenow. Tell me I am not mad. Tell me that it

is as I believe: Caroline is not herself. A demon has possessed her. She is not responsible."

I nodded. "It must be," I said with as much conviction as I could muster. "But why did she marry you?"

"For punishment. . . . You didn't know — I was the one who laughed at you that night at the concert. I broke you up and you couldn't play any more. Then you disappeared. She never let on that she cared greatly about you until . . . Can you forgive me?"

I gripped his shoulder and could not help touching his rigid hip. Stone? It looked like stone and it was very hard to the touch, but now I realized that it wasn't quite that. There was a sort of petrification, as it were. He could no more move the lower part of his body than if he were really stone; but whatever had happened, this wasn't the fairy tale magic of the *Arabian Nights*, even if Caroline's vengeance had come right out of it.

"We must save her, you and I," Julian was saying. "Even if it means my losing her forever, it is better than letting her remain like this. If you had seen her groveling before that thing! She likes to pretend that it is her master and she is its slave—that she would be submissive to you that way if you came back to her — but that is just a pose." He looked at me. "If you come

back to her as she is now, Nick, you will become a robot — like that thing."

"Can you see her from where you sit?"

"I cannot help seeing her. Seeing her is part of my punishment; she knows I suffer more from that than from the whip."

"Where does she keep this—thing?"

"There is a small stud just above the third shelf of the bookcase, to one side. Press it and the case will swing out. It is in a cubby there."

I leaped to my feet, ran over to the bookcase. The stud was not visible, but at length my finger found it. I pressed and stepped to one side as the case dipped out.

Now I could see my image and the perfectness of the copy amazed me. It did not look like a mirror-copy, of course. Rather, it looked like a photograph of me. Not exactly flattering, and a bit disconcerting in spots, but I knew myself nonetheless. The flesh was normal.

"Don't worry," called Julian. "It cannot move until she has chanted the spell. She makes a counterspell when she wants to put it away. I think that is because it responds to mental control and she fears I might be able to command it in her absence were she not to put it out of control."

A PLAN was forming in my mind, a mad plan. "Julian." I said. "If there were some way of killing this thing, I could take its place when Caroline comes again."

He was silent. "How can you kill it?" he asked at length. "How can you kill something that never lived?"

I grasped the creature, dragged it out and laid it on the floor. There must be some way. Imprison it? No, it might have superhuman strength once it were caged. Destroy it? How, I looked back into the aperture, thoughts of damaging the creature's head in mind. Then the golem was forgotten as I saw something else: an archway to the left of the little closet, leading to points unknown.

"Nick," whispered Brent. "Put it back; there's someone coming."

I picked up the creature, propped it back against the wall and closed the door. Quietly I moved toward the passageway. There were footsteps far above; someone had just left the drawing room of the manor, then.

"Caroline!" I muttered. If I could waylay her — I crouched against the wallside, waiting. There was just light enough to discern a person approaching and, if I moved quickly, to attack before she saw me. I must guard against the ring on her finger, and press my hand over her mouth so she couldn't call

upon my image. She might have other means of offense, but that was a chance that had to be taken.

The footsteps approached cautiously. An instant later, a figure appeared in the gloom. Now!

I flung myself forward, grasping the woman around the waist clutching her right wrist in such a manner that she could not use the ring on her third finger, crushed my hand against her mouth, and lifted her off the ground. She struggled in my grasp, trying to bite the hand against her lips, clawing at my neck, her pointed shoes beating a tattoo against my ankles. Half carrying, half dragging her, I re-entered the room.

Julian looked surprised. "Nick," he said, "that's not . . ."

I looked at the woman, now that we were in the light. And released her, astonished.

"Jeanne!" I cried, catching her before she could tumble to the floor. "Jeanne, forgive me! I thought it was Caroline!"

Her hair was badly disarranged, and lipstick was rather badly smeared over her mouth, but she looked very sweet and dear to me at that moment.

"Nick!" she gasped. "Are you all right?"

"Quite. I should ask you. Did I hurt you?"

"You weren't exactly gentle," she replied ruefully. "And there's a run in my stocking."

Julian laughed, for the first time in our acquaintance. "There'll be worse than that before this is over, my dear."

"Jeanne, where is Harley?"

Before she could answer, someone stepped into the room. "Right here, Nick," came his voice. "And we have to move quickly. Caroline went out on the hills a few moments ago, but she's likely to return soon. And, when she does, my guess is that she'll make for these parts without delay. We weren't as careful about closing doors behind us as we might have been."

Before I could answer, Jeanne's arms were around me and her face was buried against my chest as her body choked convulsively. She'd just noticed Julian.

"HARLEY, I exclaimed, "I just found a passage leading down to nowhere at all. Think we'd better take a look?"

He nodded. "Let's go."

"Jeanne," I whispered, "wait for us upstairs. You can head Caroline off."

I was sorry a second later that I'd said that. Because it was a different Jeanne who looked up. "Trying to get rid of me, Mr. Goodenow?" she asked with deadly sweetness. "You're wasting your time; where you go, I go, too." I could see by the look on her face that this was no time either for apology or argument. So I answered

her by beckoning them both to follow me as I went over and pressed that stud again.

We shoved the golem to one side, swung the door shut behind us. Harley took out a pair of flashlights, handed one to me. "And Jeanne has a very wicked little automatic tucked in her belt; you'd have gotten a load of it there in the passage if you hadn't taken her off guard."

"I was trying to shut that damned door upstairs, didn't notice that she wasn't waiting."

More of those weird steps carved in stone. Smooth walls on either side of the tunnel, walls without a break or projection of any kind. Walls that curved upward, arched, like a glass tube. The stairs wound and twisted; for nearly twenty minutes we descended.

Until we came to a blank wall.

We played the flashlight over every inch of that blankness; we tapped and pressed, but there was no slightest indication of a doorway. Jeanne glared at it. "Hey, you," she said. "You, Sesame! Open up!"

"No dice," said Harley.

"Plenty of dice," replied Jeanne. "Look!"

Only it wasn't opening. It was extending; visibly. The passage was lengthening out before us, the floor continuing on a smooth, even level. We started to follow, and the weird extension continued at an even pace. Just

to test it out, we stopped. It stopped.

"Shouldn't have done that," I muttered.

But the moment we started on, it began again.

"This," mused Jeanne, "would be fun under different circumstances."

My thoughts began to tick, then.

"Harley, you've been this way before, haven't you?"

"No, Nick. I've known it was here. All the Goodenows in this branch of the family have known. But only one has come this way too soon, before."

"You mean Caroline."

"Caroline — and myself, and you. Ordinarily, you'd have never come, but now we have to take a chance."

Jeanne turned to him. "Then one of the *places* in various parts of the world is right here, under The Willows."

Harley nodded. "According to family history, Jedadiah Goodenow came here, seeking out the *place*, in the 17th century. He cleared the land and lived in peace with the Indians. The Willows wasn't built until early in the 19th century, but Goodenows were already here when other settlers came in. . . . Somehow, Caroline found the *place* too soon."

"You mean — her power has something to do with what we're seeing down here?"

"And what we're going to see.

Yes, it has everything to do with it. The talent varies from person to person in our family, Nick. Caroline actually has a very little of it; I have a great deal more. She obtained power before she really knew the elements of witchcraft, and she has little idea of how much power she really has. Or rather, what uses she could really put it to. That's why, although I couldn't stop her alone, it was simple for me to keep her from using ordinary witchcraft to locate you when you disappeared. I knew where you were from the day I found out you'd gone."

THE TUNNEL before us stopped its extension. As we played our flashlights on it, a hole appeared in the center of the tubelike end, began to grow, until it was a great opening, large enough for us to go through.

"Well," said Jeanne, "why are we waiting?"

There was no answer to that. We stepped forward into another cavern, entirely unfurnished.

I think I must have been looking at it for some moments before I saw it, and I'm not sure that I saw what the others saw. A gravish-white mass, its form uncertain since we could see so little of it. It made me think of a rock, and a mushroom, and an overgrown amoeba rolled into one. Only it didn't

move. It was there, and it was huge; that was all.

But not all, if you follow me. I heard Jeanne say softly, "The Lord of the Manor."

Then, suddenly, there was a face in the mass before it, as if a venerable old man's face had been carved in it. And it seemed that a voice was saying, "Why you come, humans?"

Harley started to say something, but the voice interrupted. "Wait. Talk too slow. Think answer. Open mind."

That was how the Being's conversation sounded to me. Only, after awhile, I realized I wasn't hearing anything at all. The eyes in the face turned to Harley and there was silence; yet I felt that communication was flowing between them. It turned to Jeanne, and the same thing happened. At length it turned to me.

I felt the eyes boring into me, and felt questions rising up inside me.

"Not supernatural," came the voice. "Not god. Child of Creator like humans. Have job. Humans have own job."

I was asking if the Being granted wishes.

"Humans want, ask, receive. That is Law. Law universal. Law good. Humans free, be good, be bad, be foolish."

I was curious about how this power worked. The answer came, "No words in human head. Beyond words. Human can learn

Law. Not understand much. Foolish."

I wondered about that. "Foolish human not ask price. Can get much power quick. Not earned. Must pay price. Nothing free. All must pay. You buy thing not ask price? Sign contract not read? If earn, you have price. Pay when buy."

Again a silence as the eyes closed. Then I felt them boring into me. "Yes. Harley ask price. Jeanne ask price of desire."

And it seemed to go and on, for my own desires came up and I seemed to see a panorama before me. There are no words in my vocabulary to describe it. I saw that it would be impossible to restore Greylock; to restore Caroline. Only she could pay her own debt, and in time she would, as would everyone.

"Hell not forever. Delusion. Human seek light, find light. Have help but must return to road. Not carried back. No magic."

I reached out and grasped Jeanne's hand; and the voice seemed to say, "You know price. Pay as earn."

Harley said, "We must go now." I turned away, after thinking my gratitude toward the Being.

6

"CAN YOU restore Julian?" I asked as we ascended the stairs.

He nodded. "I can. But it would be better to make Caroline do it."

We were now at the head of the stairway. "Caroline has not returned yet," said Harley. "So there's time."

He turned to Jeanne. "Go upstairs and take pencil and paper, make this sign," and here he whispered in her ear, "and place a slip of paper bearing the sign under the big flower-bowl or vase bearing lilies. Be sure that the paper cannot be seen; it makes no difference how large or small the sign is made."

She nodded and left the subterranean chamber. Harley looked after her. "She will be safe, now," he remarked. "That sign will act as a counter-agent against the lilies; they will not be able to harm her — or anyone else for that matter."

Julian was asleep. "No need to awaken him. Now we'll get that golem out of the way."

We dragged it out, took it into the room where I had found myself some hours before. "No time to destroy it," explained Harley. "But I will keep it from being summoned. You, Nick, will take its place."

"I was planning to do just that when we heard you and Jeanne coming." Then a thought struck me. "But why? What good could that do? She won't be interested in a substitute now, will she?"

Harley nodded. "She thought

you'd succumb to her completely, Nick — but you didn't. She's been infatuated with an imaginary Nick Goodenow for a long time, and the reality—the difference—is a shock. She's frightened and frustrated. Yes . . . she'll go back to her golem while she tries to reshape you to her desires.

"There's a good chance you can deceive her. I can see a little ahead now, just a little. She has completed the spells which will give the golem speech. Stay perfectly still while she's doing that then come to life when she asks you to speak."

"All these spells and chants," said Jeanne. "It's silly. If she got the kind of power from that Being that I think she did, she doesn't need the trappings of magic at all."

"And it all seems so incomplete," I added. "What does it mean?"

Harley sighed and rubbed his brow. "Caroline found the Lord of the Manor. I don't know how—the practice in our branch of the family has been to take members to It when they've shown some indication of being ready. That includes knowledge and a developed sense of responsibility. Anyway . . . she found It on her own, and took It for some sort of god which could grant favors. The Being gave her what she asked for. Did It tell you that there was a price to pay for all knowl-

edge or power you haven't earned?"

"Yes."

"It told Caroline, but she wasn't concerned about that. Reminds me of the legends of a deal with the Devil. The bargainer does not bother to inquire just what the loss of his soul will mean, or *when* he becomes the Devil's property. The Devil is the Father of Lies, as legend goes, so does not volunteer information not asked — or deliberately deceives the poor fool. . . . Well, we're not dealing with some imaginary creature supposed to be equal to God, only Evil. But the fact is that you *can* obtain knowledge or power — through what we call 'occult' means — that you haven't earned. And you do not have to know the price beforehand — but ignorance won't spare you if you're foolish enough to take it without asking."

"Then what has happened to Caroline is part of the price?"

He smiled sadly. "Isn't it obvious? She imagined, just as many people have imagined, that this payment — whatever it was — was something that would come some time in the future. Something which she could get out of at the last moment, somehow. We've all been churchgoers, and she'd heard the nonsense about deathbed conversions which are supposed to jump you smack into heaven

without your reaping anything of what you've sown. A well trained witch knows better — and so does a well trained churchman."

"Then," I said slowly, "you mean that if you get something you haven't earned — something for which you'd have to work hard and a long time for — you pay a much higher price."

"And you start paying *at once*. An ignorant person often pays for a long time before he realizes what has happened." He grasped my shoulder. "You've been paying, too, Nick. You accepted something you hadn't earned—you knew you shouldn't be able to play so well, so easily. . . . But your motives were a little higher — you really loved something outside your own desires — so it wasn't as bad as it might have been."

"And Caroline is fixed in the emotional state of a sixteen-year-old. No older. She'll never be able to get any mature satisfaction from the power — but she'll keep on trying, and frustrating herself more and more." There was pity in Jeanne's voice.

"Which is why she's so dangerous," Harley said. "It's because she's an adolescent — shifting between childishness and the desire to be grown up — that all these things seem like a story that a child makes up after reading books of fairy tales. There's love — a very im-

mature notion of love — and intrigue, vengeance, and a touch of tragedy. She became in her own mind the princess who would attain all her desires after suffering many things. She was sure that she would find a way to bring you back here eventually — and then, everything would come out all right."

"And that business with her private secretaries?"

"Probably an accident the first time. Then . . . Well, I suppose that she found it amusing. With Jeanne — I think she suspected that Jeanne and I were up to something." Suddenly he paused, listening intently. "Get into your place," he whispered. "She's coming."

IT SEEMED hours, though it could only have been a moment or so of waiting in the darkness before the bookcase swung open to reveal Caroline standing before me. She was robed in purest white, her golden hair braided, devoid of makeup. No ornaments graced the simplicity of her vestments; on the index and little fingers of her left hand were rings, one of which bore a serpent.

With downcast eyes, she knelt before me, arms crossed over her breast. Then, in a hushed voice, scarcely more than a whisper, she began a slow, renititious chanting. Slowly her voice rose; her arms un-

crossed, raised themselves in supplication. The chanting ceased and she bowed down, clasping my ankles and touched her lips to the ground before my feet.

I must not move, must not show the slightest indication of life or consciousness.

Now she rose, and, fingering the first ring, chanted again. No more was she the suppliant; she faced me with the dignity of an honored priestess. Then, flinging her arms around my neck, she kissed me full on the mouth. And, standing back, my arms upraised, she shouted a single word.

It was the final command. Now, must I awake, and have power of speech.

Slowly, I opened my eyes, met hers, shining with triumph.

As if another signal had been given, she stepped back and began to dance, first swaying her body in the manner of nautch dancers, then pirouetting, posturing, and beckoning. Now her hands caught the white vestments, tore and rent them, casting them from her and trampling them underfoot. And I saw that, beneath the pure white of the gown, she wore barbaric, metal trappings and strings of jewels.

My blood was racing, my senses aflame with her dance, so that, when at length she sank in a panting heap before

me, I strode forward, unthinkingly, and lifting her in my arms, carried her, quivering with anticipation, to the couch set in full view of Julian's chair.

"Beloved," whispered Caroline, "beloved, speak to me."

I set her down on the couch, remembering. "How can I speak of love," I said in hollow tones, "when my ears are filled with the sounds of one in anguish, and my eyes see naught but suffering?"

Caroline's eyes widened; she flung herself upon me, buried her head against my chest. "What does my lord desire that I do?"

"Restore this unhappy mortal who has done you no harm, whose only crime was that he loved you."

Her eyes, tender now, searched my face. "Does this mean so much to you, light of my life?"

"Even so," I answered. "For with this suffering before me, I cannot see you, or any other thing."

SHE ROSE, and went over to Julian. Placing the ring of the serpent against his forehead, she cried out in strange accents, and the seeming stone that comprised the lower half of him faded before my eyes. Slowly Julian stood up and faced her.

Her nostrils flared. "Go now," she said to him. "Go and never

let me see you again lest I repent of my kindness."

Suddenly she stiffened; her eyes fixed upon the doorway of the cell where the golem had placed me. Harley stood in the doorway facing her. I saw disbelief and terror conmingled on her face. Slowly he advanced toward her, holding something in his hand, the form of which I could not see. In desperate tones, she cried out, pointing both ringed fingers at him.

Harley smiled, and continued to approach. She shrank back, disbelief upon her face. Then, suddenly, there was a whirl of smoke before my eyes, and she was gone. And Jeanne was gone.

"What happened?" I gasped.

He struck his thigh with his fist. "Curse me!" he exclaimed. "It's my own fault; I would try to be dramatic, and hold off the climax. Now she's out of our hands."

"What will she do now?" asked Brent.

"Are you all right, Julian?" I interrupted.

He fingered a scar running down one cheek. "As much so as I'll ever be."

"We'd better be moving," broke in Harley, starting for the door. "Caroline's pieced things together by now; she'll be ready to strike back. And that means we have to find Jeanne in no time flat."

We tore up the stairs, burst into the drawing room, calling



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Jeanne's name. No answer. Julian covered the second floor while Harley started the car and brought it around to the side of the house. No Jeanne.

In the distance, the accursed hills loomed ominously. "Apparently," Harley said, "she took Jeanne then made for her cove."

"It occurs to me," Julian added, "that we were looking at that cloud of smoke considerably longer than it seemed to us."

"Not only possible," replied Harley, slamming the door, "but almost certain." The car leaped forward like a hound, suddenly unleashed. Above us the stars burned with a brightness I did not like. My mind was numb from the long series of shocks to my credulity it

had received in the last few days. One thing, and one alone it seemed, stood out as a barrier of sanity in the mad pattern. Jeanne. And now she was gone, caught up in this vortex of hellishness.

The car stopped. "We go from here on foot."

Again I stepped across the margin of asphalt, again felt the tingling and inner revulsion. But this time, that detestation remained undisturbed.

"Look!" exclaimed Brent.

Before us stretched the lily clusters, but beyond, in a circle of the flowers, I could make out two figures, one standing, one lying upon the ground.

Jeannel I leaped forward, darting ahead of the others. "Nick!" shouted Harley, but I paid him no heed. Madly I ran

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toward the cleared spot, avoiding lily-clusters in my way. At length I was at the rim of it.

"Nick! For God's sake *don't enter that circle!*"

The warning came too late. Before I could halt my mad rush, I had plunged through what felt like a wall of tissue-paper, burst through and fallen.

7

"BOW LILIES, and acknowledge your queen."

Without the small circle where I lay, helpless, at one side of the priestess, the lilies swayed, then inclined their heads forward until they had nearly touched the ground.

Where was Jeanne? I had seen her, but now I could see only Caroline and the prostrate flowers. She placed an object on the ground and from it rose a pillar of light. Bright it was, casting no shadow, and giving off no heat. Yet, the darkness beyond the clusters remained as before.

I tried to close my eyes, to move. What had happened after I entered the circle? Where were Harlev and Brent?

"Thirst lilies, thirst and be ready to receive beneficence."

A sigh seemed to ripple through the ranks of the flowers, a sigh that swelled into a whisper. Now the lilies straightened up, still sighing, and

swayed back and forth in unison.

In the distance, a figure was approaching. It came up to the edge of the circle, came — and passed through. Julian!

But — he was walking woodenly, entrancedly. Puppet-like he approached the pillar of radiance and knelt before the priestess.

"You saw fit to disregard my excellent advice," murmured Caroline with deadly sweetness.

The kneeling figure raised its arms, then prostrated itself before her. "For you, there can be no mercy. Go, now, unto the lilies."

She raised her arm in a gesture of command. "Lilies, receive your sacrifice."

And he who had been Julian Brent arose, striding woodenly, and went out of the circle, into the waiting flower-ranks. Slowly the flowers reached out, touched him with their cups. As one in a dream, he strode, weaving in and out of the clusters, making a gauntlet of the lilies. From all sides, the flowers reached for him, twining and writhing like snakes.

He passed out of my sight, and there was only the pillar of hellish light and the flowers directly before me. Vainly I strove to burst the paralysis that encased me, but it was as if I, too, had been turned to stone.

Now Julian had completed the circle. He appeared dwarfed, shriveled. He came back into the circle, and I could see that his clothes now hung loosely upon him, and that his flesh was withered, and seamed with great wrinkles. Julian was now an aged man. He tottered up to the priestess. She flung out a hand in dismissal. For a moment he stood there, unmoving, then entered the pillar of radiance and was gone.

AGAIN CAME the voice of the priestess. "Rejoice, lilies, for your feast has but begun." She beckoned to someone outside my line of vision. A figure arose . . .

Somewhere in my brain, a voice was calling. It was vague, indistinct, fading just when I thought I could hear it. Then,

abruptly, it became crystal clear.

"Nick! Grasp Jeanne's hand, quickly!"

Jeanne? But who, what was Jeanne? Could it be this other, half-distinct figure that had just arisen, was even now beginning to make its way to the waiting flowers?

"Now! Grasp her hand as she passes you!"

Gritting my teeth, I concentrated on moving, concentrated as never had I done so before. And the paralysis was gone. I saw up, reached out as the woman strode by and caught hold of her hand, clung.

Then I remembered. Jeannel! Holding her hand, I rose to my feet, trembling, and faced the priestess. Her face had gone white. Then her eyes flared . . .

HAVE YOU MISSED OUR PREVIOUS ISSUES?

#1, August 1963: The Man With a Thousand Legs, Frank Belknap Long; A Thing of Beauty, Wallace West; The Yellow Sign, Robert W. Chambers; The Maze and the Monster, Edward D. Hoch; The Death of Halpin Frayser, Ambrose Bierce; Babylon: 70 M., Donald A. Wollheim; The Inexperienced Ghost, H. G. Wells; The Unbeliever, Robert Silverberg; Fidel Bassin, W. J. Stamper; The Last Dawn, Frank Lillie Pollock, The Undying Head Mark Twain.

#2, November 1963: The Space-Eaters, Frank Belknap Long; The Faceless Thing, Edward D. Hoch; The Red Room, H. G. Wells; Hungry's Female Vampire, Dean Lipton; A Tough Tussle, Ambrose Bierce; Doorslammer, Donald A. Wollheim; The Electric Chair, George Waight; The Other One, Jerry L. Keane; The Charmer, Archie Binns; Clarissa, Robert A. W. Lowndes; The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes, Rudyard Kipling.

Order Back Issues From Page 128

And the world reeled before me. Where was I? Something was dragging at me, pulling me down, down. What could it be? Something . . . *clasp*ing my hand. That was it. I clung to something and it was drawing me down into the depths; I must let go, release it . . .

Why was I holding on to a serpent? It lay motionless, but the reptilian feeling of it revolted me. Fling it away, rid my hands of this foulness . . .

"Nick! Hold on; don't let go of her hand!"

And again I was facing Caroline, out on the accursed hills standing hand-in-hand with Jeanne. Her face was a mask of fury and terror mingled. In strident tones, she cried out words and made motions with her hands. But nothing happened.

And now I knew what must we do. Drawing Jeanne close to me, we stepped into the great pillar of light. There was the sound of bursting glass, and it was gone.

And Caroline screamed.

Vainly she tried to beat off an invisible something that was pushing her backward, backward into the ranks of the waiting flowers. Futilely she called upon names and touched her rings.

Then the priestess was gone. There was only a frightened girl.

"Nickie, Nickie," she sobbed. "Nickie, Aita!"

But she was already among the lilies. They reached out for her, eagerly, and — and what was it I saw?

The lilies were rising out of the ground, rising and marching on their tentacle-like roots. The entire mass of flowers swarmed over the woman who had been their queen, enveloped her, hid her from sight when she fell. And, before her body was hidden from sight, I could see the — shriveling!

And the accursed hills burst into flame and melted away, the flowers faded from sight, and there was around us the topography we had known in years before — the little basin set between the distant mountains, and the river, gleaming in the light of the now-disclosed moon.

"Harley's voice came to us through the darkness. "It's done," he said simply.

8

WE SAT ON the porch of The Willows, looking out over the lake. I saw wild geese flying, and there was a lump in my throat. Jeanne's hand crept into mine.

"Harley," she asked, "what were those lilies, really?"

"It is possible to transfer the consciousness of a person into something else. The lilies held

HAVE YOU MISSED ANY OF OUR EARLIER ISSUES?

#3, February 1964: *The Seeds of Death*, David H. Keller; *The Seeking Thing*, Janet Hirsch; *A Vision of Judgment*, H. G. Wells; *The Place of the Pythons*, Arthur J. Burks; *Jean Bouchon*, S. Baring-Gould; *The Door*, Rachel Cosgrove Paves; *One Summer Night*, Ambrose Bierce; *Luella Miller*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *They That Wait*, H. S. W. Chibbett; *The Repairer of Reputations*, Robert W. Chambers.

#4, May 1964: *Out of print*.

#5, September 1964: *Cassius*, Henry S. Whitehead; *Love at First Sight*, J. L. Miller; *Five-Year Contract*, J. Vernon Shea; *The House of the Worm*, Merle Prout; *The Beautiful Suit*, H. G. Wells; *A Stranger Came to Reap*, Stephen Dentinger; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing*, Walt Liebscher; *Bones*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Ghostly Rental*, Henry James.

#6, November 1964: *Caverns of Horror*, Laurence Manning; *Prodigy*, Walt Liebscher; *The Mask*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Feminine Fraction*, David Grinnell; *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, Nathaniel Hawthorne; *The Pacer*, August Derleth; *The Moth*, H. G. Wells; *The Door to Saturn*, Clark Ashton Smith.

Order From Page 128

COMING NEXT ISSUE

LAZARUS

by Leonid Andreyeff

the — let us say, souls — of the people of Greylock. Human consciousness in a flower obviously cannot express more than a fraction of human consciousness in the form designed for it. They did not suffer. Think of them as the souls in the Elysian Fields of Greek legend, who remembered nothing of the past, but had just a trace of awareness."

"Then they are free now?"

"They are free. They will continue according to each one's state of development; life is continuous."

"Then Caroline . . ." I asked.

Harley turned to me. "She has a long, hard road to travel before her account is clear. It will do no harm to pray for her; but remember, no prayers can cancel the debt. That is the law."

"Might they . . . help?"

"Any form of genuine sympathy and love helps."

It seemed then that a faint voice cried, *Non ti scordar de mi*. I whispered, "Addio".

In time, the blanks in my memory filled in. . . . There is no going back. I can type using all my fingers now, but the chance of becoming a concert pianist has gone.

When the war came, Jeanne and I went to England. There was a place for a writer, and her talent was needed. Harley stayed at The Willows, and

when we came back, a new village had arisen — New Greylock. The Goodenow name still has currency in the area, although when Harley dies the witch branch of the family will be gone — at least in this country. It seems strange to me now to think of the Goodenow witches becoming extinct, unless our son, Julian . . . well, that is his decision.

Jeanne and I are not book-burners. We didn't destroy the library that the Goodenows accumulated. The last time Harley was with us, he arranged for the books to be placed where they would be available to those who were ready for them.

And . . . the Lord of the Manor.

It is hard to understand, but I realized at last that I had no right to try to destroy access to this being But I need not do anything to make it easy for anyone to find it.

Harley also said that it would do no harm now to publish a carefully edited version of the account I wrote shortly afterwards — for therapy, I guess. Anyway, I felt better after I had written it out.

The night is cold, and I can see moonlight on the ice. I just went out onto the porch; it is very clear, and the cabin stands out with its crest of snow.

Caroline . . . *Traviata* . . .
pacel

HAVE YOU MISSED ANY OF OUR EARLIER ISSUES?

#7, January 1965: *The Thing From — Outside*, George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Shadows on the Wall*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Phantom Farmhouse*, Seabury Quinn; *The Oblong Box*, Edgar Allan Poe; *A Way With Kids*, Ed M. Clinton; *The Devil of the Marsh*, E. B. Marriott-Watson; *The Shattered Room*, H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.

#8, April 1965: *The Black Laugh*, William J. Makin; *The Hand of Glory*, R. H. D. Barham; *The Garrison*, David Grinnell; *Passeur*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*, Washington Irving; *Jack*, Reynold Junker; *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, Oliver Taylor; *The Dead Who Walk*, Ray Cummings.

#9, June 1965: *The Night Wire*, H. F. Arnold; *Sacrilege*, Wallace West; *All the Stain of Long Delight*, Jerome Clark; *Skulls in the Stars*, Robert E. Howard; *The Photographs*, Richard Marsh; *The Distortion out of Space*, Francis Flagg; *Guarantee Period*, William M. Danner; *The Door in the Wall*, H. G. Wells; *The Three Low Masses*, Alphonse Daudet; *The Whistling Room*, William Hope Hodgson.

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Prilucik; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

Order From Page 128

Coming Next Issue

Faint at first, it gathered slowly, a whirling mist of luminous vapor. In the utter darkness of the cabinet it shone with increasing brilliance, and now, by its light, I could see the body of the dog lying quiet, apparently dead, on the floor. But the vapor . . . !

It was quivering now with a tremulous vibration that told of infinite, finer vibrations within it. And, as I watched, the vapor slowly assumed the form of a *dog*. It was a thing of shimmering light, but, nevertheless, a dog, *the dog*, the very animal I could see upon the floor. A thread of violet light connected the phantom figure with the real body. The luminous thing became firm and substantial, and lost its translucence. It was a dog, a living, breathing animal, and it looked at me with a devilish hatred in its eyes that sent chills of fear to grip and quiver in my spine. Never, in eyes human or animal, have I seen such implacable, ferocious hatred as this thing was directing at my eyes.

I drew back in apprehension, then pressed my face against the glass to stare harder where the other figure was showing. Dim, this one, and hazy, but presently I made out the bent figure of a man. There was no hatred in those eyes that gleamed pale in a pallid face. Only an imploring look; agonized, beseeching! In that instant I recognized the face. And from this form, too, I saw a thread of violet light, that wavered to end in nothingness.

The face vanished, and the hand of Dr. Strogher pulled me away, while he asked, "It formed, did it not? The projected thought image of the dog!" He nodded with satisfaction at what he saw — the other face with its agonized eyes was gone — and the doctor switched off the instrument and motioned me again to my chair. . . .

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by Leonid Andreyeff

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THE DOOM OF LONDON

(Continued from page 47)

fallen out all along the line. The smash at Richmond made no difference to the passengers. Besides myself, only two persons were taken alive from the train, and one of these, his

clothes torn from his back in the struggle, was sent to an asylum, where he was never able to tell who he was; neither, as far as I know, did any one ever claim him.

It Is Written . . .

The final paragraph of *The Reckoning* in our last issue just would not fit in, so we had to postpone the complete breakdown. Here is the way the stories in the Summer issue (#13) finally came out:

(1) *Almost Immortal*, by Austin Hall; (2) *Heredity*, by David H. Keller; (3) *Valley of the Lost*, by Robert E. Howard; (4) *The Thing in the House*, by H. F. Scotten; (5) *Divine Madness*, by Roger Zelazny; (6) *Dwelling of the Righteous*, by Anna Hunger.

No story in this issue failed to draw some first place votes, and "outstanding" designations, and every story was heartily disliked by at least one voter. My score sheet is scattered with blue and red marks — blue for outstanding designation, red for dislike. Carter's cover illustration, which was suggested by, but not intended actually to illustrate, an element in *Valley of the Lost* impressed about

half of the voters favorably. The rest of you either did not comment, or said you did not like it.

Jason Van Hollander writes from 1621 Westend Drive, Philadelphia, Penna. 19151, "On page 47 of Issue #13, at bottom of the left hand column, there is a giveaway about the authenticity of *Valley of the Lost*. It mentions television, which came into being, even as an idea, in the 1940's. Robert E. Howard died in 1936. You have been hoaxed, or have tried to hoax unsuccessfully."

You know, we almost fell into that that trap ourselves! When I read the transcription of the story, which Glen Lord sent to me first, I paused at that word and wondered. When Glenn sent me the faded original ms., still legible, it was there in the same place.

Then I remembered. Television is by no means as recent a thing as it

seems. I recalled that Hugo Gernsback had published a magazine (one-shot or longer lasting I do not now recall) called TELEVISION NEWS, I believe. I'm not sure about the second word in the title, but think I saw ads for it in the old WONDER STORIES.

This sent me to my trusty Moskowitz. (Sam Moskowitz's article on Gernsback, which is a chapter in his book *Explorers of the Infinite*.) Sam may be a little too inclined to take the titles of some stories, or the dates of the issue in which they appeared from the top of his memory; but on things like that he researches and checks thoroughly.

Well, there was no mention of the television magazine — but I find that that it was Hugo Gernsback who introduced the word "television" to this country in 1909 — experiments were being made prior to that date, so it very definitely was an idea before the '40's. And, best yet, Gernsback made television broadcasts daily from his radio station, WRNY in 1928. The sets were crude and very few; this was something either for the very rich, or experimenters, but TV sets existed. The pictures transmitted were nothing spectacular, by today's standards, and it was a long way from being anything which could become a major communications industry — but it was there, right along with the beginnings of movies and radio.

I don't believe that Mr. Lord was trying to hoax me, either, but that he

really believed that this ms., entitled *King of the Forgotten People* (my designation of it earlier as *King of the Lost People* shows what happens when I don't write things down for future reference) was the story that Bates announced as *Valley of the Lost*.

A we told you last time, we have finally located the original, genuine ms. I have also seen the letter that Harry Bates wrote to Robert E. Howard when he returned the ms., announcing the discontinuance of STRANGE TALES. I had Xerox copies made of the letter and the first page of the ms., which shows some of the original editing done, and the original blurb written in pencil on the top. You'll see the story, along with reproductions of the two items above, in a — not the — forthcoming issue of STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES. The transcribed ms. reached me too late for the third issue of SMS, but I'm planning to put it into the fourth.

August Derleth tells me I miscalculated somewhat in my comments upon the probable length of a complete list of his published writings — I'd said in the last issue that to say it would take up as many pages as the story of his that we were introducing was probably to exaggerate, but not give a false impression. Mr. Derleth states, "On the contrary — a complete listing of my published work would take up more pages in MOH than *The Lair of the Star-Spawn*. The listing of just published

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books — 102 of them, and there are now 120 — in *100 Books By August Derleth* takes 63 pages. I made no attempt to list a complete bibliography, for I've had over 5,000 separate items published in over 500 magazines here and abroad. Even now, when I'm not writing so much any more, I have something like 40 to 50 titles published every year, and from 5 to 10 new markets added to the 'over 500.'

All this and the Arkham House material, exclusive of Derleth, too. Just the thought of all that typing makes my arms ache. But then, I've never been able to understand how Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Handel, Beethoven, etc., could possibly have written all those notes let alone making so many of them memorable.

Douglas Menville writes from 823 N. McCadden Place, Los Angeles, Calif 90038 "I have been exceedingly pleased with the progress of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, and now welcome its companion, *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. As Mr. Silverberg says, it's a wonderful anachronism — a wanderer out of time. Keep up the good work, and give us more of the great old tales from *WEIRD TALES*, *STRANGE TALES* and the others. As to the science fiction controversy, I am in favor of any kind of story, as long as it is weird or horrifying — a policy that *WEIRD TALES* used to state often in 'The Eyrie' whenever the same question came up. If you eliminate *all* science fiction, you eliminate an awful lot of fine material. . . . How about a Finlay cover for old times' sake?"

Right now, I cannot say anything about the cover which you have already seen on this issue, because I haven't seen it yet. However, you'll find a Finlay drawing gracing the front of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION* #1, Winter 1966/67, copies of which

Did You Miss These Back Issues Of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*?

#11, November 1965: *The Empty Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was It a Dream?*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Hau Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley*, (verse), Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Grege la Spina.

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But Not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Muncing, Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Destination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memoirs of HPL*, Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Heredit*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

#14, Winter 1966/67: *The Lair of Star-Spawn*, Derleth & Scherer; *The Vacant Lot*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *Proof*, S. Fowler Wright; *Comes Now the Power*, Roger Zelazny; *The Moth Message*, Laurence Manning; *The Friendly Demon*, Daniel DeFoe; *Dark Hollow*, Emil Petaja; *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Monster-God of Mamurth*, Edmond Hamilton.

Order From Page 128

are available @ 50c postpaid from Health Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10003. By the time you read this, the 2nd issue of FSF will be coming out — and presently I know naught about what you'll see on its cover, either.

Ever wonder what happened to the Fortean Society? I have, and I still do not know the answer to that. However, Paul J. Willis, Box 341, Festus, Missouri 63028 is secretary of a new group along these lines — The International Fortean Organization — INFO; and I gather that he'll send you a prospectus if you write him asking for it. It's good manners to include a 5c stamp for postage when you make inquiries like this.

"Thank you for publishing the Robert E. Howard story, *Valley of the Lost*," writes Alan Greene from 735 West 2nd St., Weiser, Idaho 83672. "I'm a great fan of that type of fiction which combines sword-play and the supernatural — commonly called "swords and sorcery" — which Howard always wrote masterfully. Although this tale isn't exactly swords and sorcery, anything of Howard's is always welcome.

"Still on the subject of Howard: I'm sure that many of your younger readers (myself included), who have been introduced to Howard's great yarns through collections like *The Spell of Seven* and your own magazines would appreciate your reprinting some of his earlier, hard-to-find stories. I, for one, have never read King Kull or Bran Mak Morn story, and I'm sure many others along with myself would enjoy them in the pages of MOH.

"Another author I would like to see more of in MOH is Clark Ashton Smith. Smith's tales are eerie jewels of the macabre, especially his yarns of the future world of Zothique. How about it?"

We have some more previously unpublished REH coming up, but I've told Glen Lord to lay off for a while after we use them, because I, too, am eager to bring back the King Kull and Bran Mak Morn stories. I have to choose between new and old (and frequently requested REH): we've had a little of both, but I feel now that it's time to get back to the old ones.

As we've seen, everyone did not think *Valley of the Lost* was the best



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- ★ Sex and love in your later years!

story in our 13th issue, and we'll let Carrington B. Dixon, Jr., of 501 Sylvan Dr., Garland, Texas 75040 speak for this viewpoint. "I have been a fan of the late Robert E. Howard's work ever since I first read *Conan the Conqueror* several years ago, and it pains me somewhat not to be able to give *Valley of the Lost* a higher rating than third place. However, I cannot; indeed, it comes very close to being nudged into fourth place by *The Thing in the House*. I cannot put my finger on the reason why, but the work simply does not impress me as being first rate, or even second rate, Howard. In fact I enjoyed the Solomon Kane story published in Derleth's *Over the Edge* a great deal more than this story, and that one was not even 100% Howard."

The balloting shows that both *Heredity*, by Dr. Keller, and *The Thing In The House*, by H. F. Scotten, gave the Howard story stiff competition through most of the voting period, the latter story moving into top position twice or brief periods. The final stretch showed Keller solidly in 2nd place, Howard 3rd, and Scotten 4th.

In case anyone wonders why some stories by Dr. Keller are signed "David H. Keller, M.D.", while oth-

ers omit the "M.D.": Dr. Keller used his degree in his by-line for science fiction and left it off for weird and fantasy fiction. We have followed the credit line as it appeared in the original magazine versions, etc.

Frederick Shroyer writes from 362 Coral View, Monterey Park, Calif. 91754: "I have an almost complete file of WEIRD TALES (lacking the first few issues and a few scattered ones later) and I also have many, many duplicates. Do you think I might have a note in your magazine asking if those who have duplicates of early issues might be interested in trading with me, or selling them to me?"

John Keating, of 354 Kimball Street, Fitchburg, Mass., answers a question we asked in our 14th issue: "According to the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (V. 2 p. 9508), *The Friendly Demon* by Daniel DeFoe originally appeared as a pamphlet published in 1726, with the title of *The Friendly Daemon, or the Generous Apparition*."

"I have also found this story in a Defoe Collection called *Tales of Piracy, Crime, and Ghosts*, published by Penguin Books in 1945, where it appears under the title of *The Devil Frolics with a Butler*."



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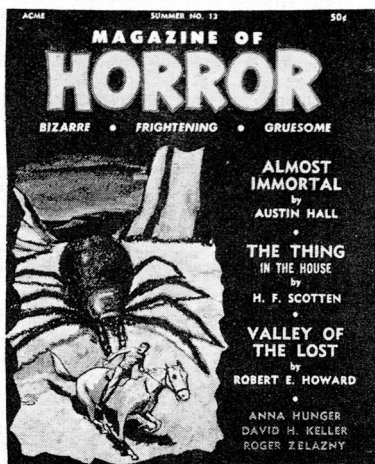
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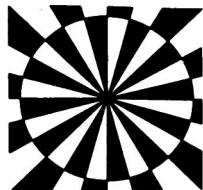
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