

ACME

JULY No. 22

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MAGAZINE OF HORROR

BIZARRE ● FRIGHTENING ● GRUESOME



WORMS OF THE EARTH

A "Bran Mak Morn"

Story

by ROBERT E.
HOWARD

THEY CALLED HIM GHOST

by LAURENCE J.
CAHILL

COME

by ANNA
HUNGER

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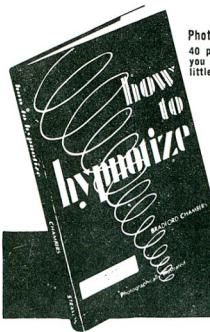
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magazine of **HORROR**

The Bizarre and The Unusual

Volume 4

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

Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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The Editor's Page

A policy, as F. Orlin Tremaine told me many years ago, when I was just starting out as an editor, should not be a fence. You'll see a paragraph in the book review section which explains why a number of items which you might have expected to see discussed in these pages have not been discussed. I see no obligation to talk about a book of which the publisher has not supplied me a copy.

No obligation—which doesn't mean, once in a while, that I might make an exception, simply because here is a book I particularly want to talk about. And in the case below, there was no reason for the publisher to assume that *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* would be interested.

Meaning that I would not expect the publisher to make the sort of inverted twist of reasoning that I did in this case; and since I intend to discuss it at greater length and from a different angle, perhaps, in some future issue of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*, I shan't even make a pretense here of formally reviewing Harlan Ellison's anthology of new speculative fiction (33 original stories; Doubleday & Company, 1967; 520 well-filled pages; \$6.95), except to state:

(a) There is just as good, if not better, reason to look at this as a collection of bizarre, gruesome, and frightening stories as a collection of a certain species of science fiction. Even the title of the volume, *Dangerous Visions*, could well be a sub-head for *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*.

(b) However you look at it, it's

well worth getting and reading. My thanks to Lester del Rey for loaning me his copy. I'm getting one for myself now, after having read it.

Harlan Ellison (as if you didn't know) is a sensitive young fellow with all the modesty and brevity of Richard Wagner, and (like Wagner) may well be pretty nearly as good as he thinks he is. Unlike Wagner, he has a well-developed sense of humor, and can laugh at the object of his deepest affections—namely, Harlan Ellison. Also unlike Wagner, his constant wooing of the wonders that are himself are easy to read—and, for me, highly entertaining at the least; at the most, there's good meat there.

And one of the finest stories in a collection wherein I find nothing positively bad (though much I shan't bother to reread) is by Editor Ellison himself: *The Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World*. I suspect that even had I read a large enough percentage of the nominations for the 1968 Nebula Award for short stories, this still would have been my choice; however I hadn't read enough in any of the categories to vote with any degree of honesty or meaning. Whether I'll enthuse about any other Ellison stories (this is the first published speculative fiction of his that I've gotten around to reading), or whether I'll read any more, I know not; this much I do know: I had not gotten far into the story before I found myself, exclaiming "By God, this reads as if Harlan has made the effort!" Has taken the trouble to do research and get some knowledge of what he's writing about, instead of letting it ooze out of the top of his head, his subconscious,

or that other useful section of human anatomy whence he claims to write. After I finished the story and went on to the Afterward (a splendid notion, and for the most part valuable) I was impressed by the amount of effort—the time spent in research and reading, just to produce a short story—he had actually done. It shows, and it shows in the best way; nothing sounds pedantic ("smells of the lamp", as the old expression goes), but the feeling of authenticity is there. And, with this background, it would not make a particle of difference, if every bit of background lore that got into the story were freshly manufactured; the author has done his homework, and the feeling is right. Which is why I am now on Ellison's side, whatever his many defects may be. If I had a billion in ready capital, I'd found a magazine and turn it over to him *carte blanche* as to contents and a sufficient budget to let him do as he would, asking only half a dozen mint copies of each issue for my files. (One to preserve and five to throw against the wall now and then.) The only string would be that the moment I saw him getting Respectable, he'd be out; and mayhap I'd start looking for another sensitive young genius who wears his guts as a badge.

Oh yes—you may have heard that the editorial comments are generously larded with bad taste. Understatement: the taste is so bad it's fascinating, and I enjoyed it more than some of the lesser stories.

Some of the other stories which I found sufficiently bizarre, gruesome, or frightening to talk about here are:

Riders of the Purple Wage, by Philip Jose Farmer; *The Malley Sys*

Just Published

How 88,648 Heavy Smokers Stopped Smoking

NEW YORK — The Anti-Tobacco Center of America has just published a booklet which explains how 88,648 heavy smokers (of whom many are physicians) have stopped smoking without straining their will power. This booklet is available free of charge to smokers. All you need to do, to obtain it, is to send your name and address to The Anti-Tobacco Center of America, Dept. A-93-S 276 Park Avenue South, New York City, 10010. This offer is open while the supply of these booklets lasts.

tem, by Miriam Allen deFord; *A Toy for Juliette*, by Robert Bloch (more notable for the opportunity it set up; otherwise, a routine RB shocker); *Faith of our Fathers*, by Philip K. Dick; *Gonna Roll the Bones*, by Fritz Leiber; *Lord Randy, My Son*, by Joe L. Hensley; and the Sturgeon story, the title of which I consider to be Editor Ellison's only grievous error. (If he wanted to change the title, but could not get the author to agree, then I'll grant Harlan absolution, and assign but a small penance.) The title is enormously clever, and I can appreciate both the author and the editor loving it; nonetheless, it constitutes one of the great acts of self-sabotage that I've seen in recent years.

The "taboo" gimmick that floats around the volume like an aura is 99.999% sheer flummery, but that is something I want to get into else-

Turn to Page 34

Worms Of The Earth

by Robert E. Howard

(author of *Out of the Deep*, *Kings of the Night*, etc.)

In *Kings of the Night*, which we presented in our last issue, Bran Mak Morn and his allies defeat a Roman sortie into Pictdom, and this victory solidifies Mak Morn's title as King of the Picts. There are, as he has surmised, no further invasions by the legions. But Roman shrewdness takes over where the force of arms faltered, and while insultingly leaving Mak Morn alone, and recognizing him as a barbarian king, Rome continues its expansion into Britain by other means. So now Bran Mak Morn faces a far greater threat to his kingdom than the legions . . . Here is one of the unforgettable tales by ROBERT E. HOWARD that have been continually requested by you, the active readers.

"STRIKE IN THE NAILS, SOLDIERS, and let our guest see the reality of our good Roman justice!"

The speaker wrapped his purple cloak closer about his powerful frame and settled back into his official chair, much as he might have settled back in his seat at the Circus Maximus to enjoy the clash of gladiatorial swords. Realization of power colored his every move. Whetted pride

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"I will name you a price, then, my wolf, and in days to come you will curse the armor that broke Atla's dagger.



(illustration by J. M. Wilcox)

was necessary to Roman satisfaction, and Titus Sulla was justly proud; for he was military governor of Ebbzacum and answerable only to the emperor of Rome. He was a strongly built man of medium height, with the hawk-like features of the pure-bred Roman. Now a mocking smile curved his full lips, increasing the arrogance of his haughty aspect. Distinctly military in appearance, he wore the golden-scaled corselet and chased breastplate of his rank, with the short stabbing sword at his belt, and he held on his knee the silvered helmet with its plumed crest.

Behind him stood a clump of impassive soldiers with shield and spear-blond titans from the Rhineland.

Before him was taking place the scene which apparently gave him so much real gratification—a scene common enough wherever stretched the far-flung boundaries of Rome. A rude crosslay flat upon the barren earth and on it was bound a man—half naked, wild of aspect with his corded limbs, glaring eyes and shock of tangled hair. His executioners were Roman soldiers, and with heavy hammers they prepared to pin the victim's hands and feet to the wood with iron spikes.

Only a small group of men watched this scene, in the place of execution beyond the city walls: the governor and his watchful guards; a few young Roman officers; the man to whom Sulla had referred as "guest" and who stood like a bronze image, unspeaking. Beside the gleaming splendor of the Roman, the quiet garb of this man seemed drab, almost somber.

He was dark, but he did not resemble the Latins around him. There was about him none of the warm, almost Oriental sensuality of the Mediterranean which colored their features. The blond barbarians behind Sulla's chair were less unlike the man in facial outline than were the Romans. Not his were the full curving red lips, nor the rich waving locks suggestive of the Greek. Nor was his dark complexion the rich olive of the south; rather it was the bleak darkness of the north. The whole aspect of the man vaguely suggested the shadowed mists, the gloom, the cold and the icy winds of the naked northern lands. Even his black eyes were savagely cold, like black fires burning through fathoms of ice.

His height was only medium but there was something about him which transcended mere physical bulk—a certain fierce innate vitality, comparable only to that of a wolf or a panther. In every line of his supple, compact body, as well as in his coarse straight hair and thin lips, this was evident—in the hawk-like set of the head on the corded neck, in the broad square shoulders, in the deep chest, the lean loins, the narrow feet. Built with the savage economy of a panther, he was an image of dynamic potentialities, pent in with iron self-control.

At his feet crouched one like him in complexion—but there the resemblance ended. This other was a stunted giant, with gnarly limbs, thick body, a low sloping brow and an expression of dull ferocity, now clearly mixed with fear. If the man on the cross resembled, in a tribal way, the man Titus Sulla called guest, he far more resembled the stunted crouching giant.

"Well, Partha Mac Othna," said the governor with studied effrontery,

"when you return to your tribe, you will have a tale to tell of the justice of Rome, who rules the south."

"I will have a tale," answered the other in a voice which betrayed no emotion, just as his dark face, schooled to immobility, showed no evidence of the maelstrom in his soul.

"Justice to all under the rule of Rome," said Sulla. "Pax Romana! Reward for virtue, punishment for wrong!" He laughed inwardly at his own hypocrisy, then continued: "You see, emissary of Pictland, how swiftly Rome punishes the transgressor."

"I see," answered the Pict in a voice which strongly-curbed anger made deep with menace, "that the subject of a foreign king is dealt with as though he were a Roman slave."

"He has been tried and condemned in an unbiased court," retorted Sulla.

"Aye! and the accuser was a Roman, the witnesses Roman, the judge Roman! He committed murder? In a moment of fury he struck down a Roman merchant who cheated, tricked and robbed him, and to injury added insult—aye, and a blow! Is his king but a dog, that Rome crucifies his subjects at will, condemned by Roman courts? Is his king too weak or foolish to do justice, were he informed and formal charges brought against the offender?"

"Well," said Sulla cynically, "you may inform Bran Mak Morn yourself. Rome, my friend, makes no account of her actions to barbarian kings. When savages come among us, let them act with discretion or suffer the consequences."

The Pict shut his iron jaws with a snap that told Sulla further badgering would elicit no reply. The Roman made a gesture to the executioners. One of them seized a spike and placing it against the thick wrist of the victim, smote heavily. The iron point sank deep through the flesh, crunching against the bones. The lips of the man on the cross writhed, though no moan escaped him. As a trapped wolf fights against his cage, the bound victim instinctively wrenched and struggled. The veins swelled in his temples, sweat beaded his low forehead, the muscles in arms and legs writhed and knotted. The hammers fell in inexorable strokes, driving the cruel points deeper and deeper, through wrists and ankles; blood flowed in a black river over the hands that held the spikes, staining the wood of the cross, and the splintering of bones was distinctly heard. Yet the sufferer made no outcry, though his blackened lips writhed back until the gums were visible, and his shaggy head jerked involuntarily from side to side.

The man called Partha Mac Othna stood like an iron image, eyes burning from an inscrutable face, his whole body hard as iron from the tension of his control. At his feet crouched his misshapen servant, hiding his face from the grim sight, his arms locked about his master's knees. Those arms gripped like steel and under his breath the fellow mumbled ceaselessly as if in invocation.

The last stroke fell; the cords were cut from arm and leg, so that the man would hang supported by the nails alone. He had ceased his struggling that only twisted the spikes in his agonizing wounds. His bright black eyes, unglazed, had not left the face of the man called Partha Mac Othna; in them lingered a desperate shadow of hope. Now the soldiers lifted the cross and set the end of it in the hole prepared, stamped the dirt about it to hold it erect. The Pict hung in midair, suspended by the nails in his flesh, but still no sound escaped his lips. His eyes still hung on the somber face of the emissary, but the shadow of hope was fading.

"He'll live for days!" said Sulla cheerfully. "These Picts are harder than cats to kill! I'll keep a guard of ten soldiers watching night and day to see that no one takes him down before he dies. Ho, there, Valerius, in honor of our esteemed neighbor, King Bran Mak Morn, give him a cup of wine!"

With a laugh the young officer came forward, holding a brimming wine-cup, and rising on his toes, lifted it to the parched lips of the sufferer. In the black eyes flared a red wave of unquenchable hatred; writhing his head aside to avoid even touching the cup, he spat full into the young Roman's eyes. With a curse Valerius dashed the cup to the ground, and before any could halt him, wrenched out his sword and sheathed it in the man's body.

Sulla rose with an imperious exclamation of anger; the man called Partha Mac Othna had started violently, but he bit his lip and said nothing. Valerius seemed somewhat surprized at him, as he sullenly cleaved his sword. The act had been instinctive following the insult to Roman pride, the one thing unbearable.

"Give up your sword, young sir!" exclaimed Sulla. "Centurion Publius, place him under arrest. A few days in a cell with stale bread and water will teach you to curb your patrician pride, in matters dealing with the will of the empire. What, you young fool, do you not realize that you could not have made the dog a more kindly gift? Who would not rather desire a quick death on the sword than the slow agony on the cross? Take him away. And you, centurion, see that guards remain

at the cross so that the body is not cut down until the ravens pick bare the bones. Partha Mac Othna, I go to a banquet at the house of Demetrius—will you not accompany me?"

The emissary shook his head, his eyes fixed on the limp form which sagged on the blood-stained cross. He made no reply. Sulla smiled sardonically, then rose and strode away, followed by his secretary who bore the gilded chair ceremoniously, and by the stolid soldiers, with whom walked Valerius, head sunken.

The man called Partha Mac Othna flung a wide fold of his cloak about his shoulder, halted a moment to gaze at the grim cross with its burden, darkly etched against the crimson sky, where the clouds of night were gathering. Then he stalked away, followed by his silent servant.

2

IN AN INNER CHAMBER OF EBBRACUM, the man called Partha Mac Othna paced tigerishly to and fro. His sandalled feet made no sound on the marble tiles.

"Grom!" he turned to the gnarled servant, "well I know why you held my knees so tightly—why you muttered aid of the Moon-Woman—you feared I would lose my self-control and make a mad attempt to succor that poor wretch. By the gods, I believe that was what the dog Roman wished—his iron-cased watchdogs watched me narrowly, I know, and his baiting was harder to bear than ordinarily.

"Gods black and white, dark and light!" he shook his clenched fists above his head in the black gust of his passion. "That I should stand by and see a man of mine butchered on a Roman cross—without justice and with no more trial than that farce! Black gods of R'lyeh, even you would I invoke to the ruin and destruction of those butchers! I swear by the Nameless Ones, men shall die howling for that deed, and Rome shall cry out as a woman in the dark who treads upon an adder!"

"He knew you, master," said Grom.

The other dropped his head and covered his eyes with a gesture of savage pain. "His eyes will haunt me when I lie dying. Aye, he knew me, and almost until the last, I read in his eyes the hope that I might aid him. Gods and devils, is Rome to butcher my people beneath my very eyes? Then I am not king but dog!"

"Not so loud, in the name of all the gods!" exclaimed Grom in affright. "Did these Romans suspect you were Bran Mak Morn, they would nail you on a cross beside that other."

"They will know it ere long," grimly answered the king. "Too long I have lingered here in the guise of an emissary, spying upon mine enemies. They have thought to play with me, these Romans, masking their contempt and scorn only under polished satire. Rome is courteous to barbarian ambassadors, they give us fine houses to live in, offer us slaves, pander to our lusts with women and gold and wine and games, but all the while they laugh at us; their very courtesy is an insult, and sometimes—as today—their contempt discards all veneer. Bah! I've seen through their baitings—have remained imperturbably serene and swallowed their studied insults. But this—by the fiends of Hell, this is beyond human endurance! My people look to me; if I fail them—if I fail even one—even the lowest of my people, who will aid them? To whom shall they turn? By the gods, I'll answer the gibes of these Roman dogs with black shaft and trenchant steel!"

"And the chief with the plumes?" Grom meant the governor and his gutturals thrummed with the blood-lust. "He dies?" He flicked out a length of steel.

Bran scowled. "Easier said than done. He dies—but how may I reach him? By day his German guards keep at his back; by night they stand at door and window. He has many enemies, Romans as well as barbarians. Many a Briton would gladly slit his throat."

Grom seized Bran's garment, stammering as fierce eagerness broke the bonds of his inarticulate nature. "Let me go, master! My life is worth nothing. I will cut him down in the midst of his warriors!"

Bran smiled fiercely and clapped his hand on the stunted giant's shoulder with a force that would have felled a lesser man. "Nay, old war-dog, I have too much need of thee! You shall not throw your life away uselessly. Sulla would read the intent in your eyes, besides, and the javelins of his Teutons would be through you ere you could reach him. Not by the dagger in the dark will we strike this Roman, not by venom in the cup nor the shaft from the ambush."

The king turned and paced the floor a moment, his head bent in thought. Slowly his eyes grew murky with a thought so fearful he did not speak it aloud to the waiting warrior.

"I have become somewhat familiar with the maze of Roman politics during my stay in this accursed waste of mud and marble," said he. "During a war on the Wall, Titus Sulla, as governor of this province is supposed to hasten thither with his centuries. But this Sulla does not do; he is no coward, but the bravest avoid certain things—to each man, however bold, his own particular fear. So he sends in his place Caius

Camillus, who in times of peace patrols the fens of the west, lest the Britons break over the border. And Sulla takes his place in the Tower of Trajan. Ha!"

He whirled and gripped Grom with steely fingers. "Grom, take the red stallion and ride north! Let no grass grow under the stallion's hoofs! Ride to Cormac na Connacht and tell him to sweep the frontier with sword and torch! Let his wild Gaels feast their fill of slaughter. After a time I will be with him. But for a time I have affairs in the west."

Grom's black eyes gleamed and he made a passionate gesture with his crooked hand—an instinctive move of savagery.

Bran drew a heavy bronze seal from beneath his tunic. "This is my safe-conduct as an emissary to Roman courts," he said grimly. "It will open all gates between this house and Baalador. If any official questions you too closely—here!"

Lifting the lid of an iron-bound chest, Bran took out a small, heavy leather bag which he gave into the hands of the warrior. "When all keys fail at a gate," said he, "try a golden key. Go now!"

There was no ceremonious farewells between the barbarian king and his barbarian vassal. Grom flung up his arm in a gesture of salute; then turning he hurried out.

Bran stepped to a barred window and gazed out into the moonlit streets. "Wait until the moon sets," he muttered grimly. "Then I'll take the road to—Hell! But before I go I have a debt to pay."

The stealthy clink of a hoof on the flags reached him. "With the safe-conduct and gold, not even Rome can hold a Pictish reaver," muttered the king. "Now I'll sleep until the moon sets."

With a snarl at the marble frieze-work and fluted columns, as symbols of Rome, he flung himself down on a couch, from which he had long since impatiently torn the cushions and silk stuffs, as too soft for his hard body. Hate and the black passion of vengeance seethed in him, yet—he went instantly to sleep. The first lesson he had learned in his bitter hard life was to snatch sleep any time he could, like a wolf that snatches sleep on the hunting trail. Generally his slumber was as light and dreamless as a panther's, but tonight it was otherwise.

He sank into fleecy gray fathoms of slumber and in a timeless, misty realm of shadows he met the tall, lean, white-bearded figure of old Gonar, the priest of the Moon, high counsellor to the king. And Bran stood aghast, for Gonar's face was white as driven snow and he shook as with age. Well might Bran stand appalled, for in all the years of his life he had never before seen Gonar the Wise show any sign of fear.

"What now, old one?" asked the king. "Goes all well in Baal-dor?"

"All is well in Baal-dor where my body lies sleeping," answered old Gonar. "Across the void I have come to battle with you for your soul. King, are you mad, this thought you have thought in your brain?"

"Gonar," answered Bran somberly, "this day I stood still and watched a man of mine die on the cross of Rome. What his name or his rank, I do not know. I do not care. He might have been a faithful unknown warrior of mine, he might have been an outlaw. I only know that he was mine; the first scents he knew were the scents of the heather; the first light he saw was the sunrise on the Pictish hills. He belonged to me, not to Rome. If punishment was just then none but I should have dealt it. If he were to be tried, none but I should have been his judge. The same blood flowed in our veins; the same fire maddened our brains; in infancy we listened to the same old tales, and in youth we sang the same old songs. He was bound to my heart-strings, as every man and every woman and every child of Pictland is bound. It was mine to protect him; now it is mine to avenge him."

"But in the name of the gods, Bran," expostulated the wizard, "take your vengeance in another way! Return to the heather—mass your warriors—join with Cormac and his Gaels, and spread a sea of blood and flame the length of the great Wall!"

"All that I will do," grimly answered Bran. "But now—*now*—I will have a vengeance such as no Roman ever dreamed of! Ha, what do they know of the mysteries of this ancient isle, which sheltered strange life long before Rome rose from the marshes of the Tiber?"

"Bran, there are weapons too foul to use, even against Rome!"

Bran barked short and sharp as a jackal. "Ha! There are no weapons I would not use against Rome! My back is at the wall. By the blood of the fiends, has Rome fought me fair? Bah! I am a barbarian king with a wolfskin mantle and an iron crown; fighting with my handful of bows and broken pikes against the queen of the world. What have I? The heather hills, the wattle huts, the spears of my shock-headed tribesmen! And I fight Rome—with her armored legions, her broad fertile plains and rich seas—her mountains and her rivers and her gleaming cities—her wealth, her steel, her gold, her mastery and her wrath. By steel and fire I will fight her—and by subtlety and treachery—by the thorn in the foot, the adder in the path, the venom in the cup, the dagger in the dark; aye," his voice sank somberly, "and by the worms of the earth!"

"But it is madness!" cried Gonar. "You will perish in the attempt you

plan—you will go down to Hell and you will not return! What of your people then?"

"If I can not serve them I had better die," growled the king.

"But you can not even reach the beings you seek," cried Gonar. "For untold centuries they have dwelt *apart*. There is no door by which you can come to them. Long ago they severed the bonds that bound them to the world we know.

"Long ago," answered Bran somberly, "you told me that nothing in the universe was separated from the stream of Life—a saying the truth of which I have often seen evident. No race, no form of life but is close-knit somehow, by some manner, to the rest of Life and the world. Somewhere there is a thin link connecting *those* I seek to the world I know. Somewhere there is a Door. And somewhere among the bleak fens of the west I will find it."

Stark horror flooded Gonar's eyes and he gave back crying, "Wo! Wo! Wo! to Pictdom! Wo to the unborn kingdom! Wo, black wo to the sons of men! Wo, wo, wo, wo!"

Bran awoke to a shadowed room and the starlight on the window-bars. The moon had sunk from sight though its glow was still faint above the house tops. Memory of his dream shook him and he swore beneath his breath.

Rising, he flung off cloak and mantle, donning a light shirt of black mesh-mail, and girding on sword and dirk. Going again to the iron-bound chest he lifted several compact bags and emptied the clinking contents into the leathern pouch at his girdle. Then wrapping his wide cloak about him, he silently left the house. No servants there were to spy on him—he had impatiently refused the offer of slaves which it was Rome's policy to furnish her barbarian emissaries. Gnarled Grom had attended to all Bran's simple needs.

The stables fronted on the courtyard. A moment's groping in the dark and he placed his hand over a great stallion's nose, checking the nicker of recognition. Working without a light he swiftly bridled and saddled the great brute, and went through the courtyard into a shadowy side-street, leading him. The moon was setting, the border of floating shadows widening along the western wall. Silence lay on the marble palaces and mud hovels of Ebbracum under the cold stars.

Bran touched the pouch at his girdle, which was heavy with minted gold that bore the stamp of Rome. He had come to Ebbracum posing as an emissary of Pictdom, to act the spy. But being a barbarian, he had not been able to play his part in aloof formality and sedate dignity.

He retained a crowded memory of wild feasts where wine flowed in fountains; of white-bosomed Roman women, who, sated with civilized lovers, looked with something more than favor on a virile barbarian; of gladiatorial games; and of other games where dice clicked and spun and tall stacks of gold changed hands. He had drunk deeply and gambled recklessly, after the manner of barbarians, and he had a remarkable run of luck, due possibly to the indifference with which he won or lost. Gold to the Pict was so much dust, flowing through his fingers. In his land there was no need of it. But he had learned its power in the boundaries of civilization.

Almost under the shadow of the northwestern wall he saw ahead of him loom the great watch-tower which was connected with and reared above the outer wall. One corner of the castle-like fortress, farthest from the wall, served as a dungeon. Bran left his horse standing in a dark alley, with the reins hanging on the ground, and stole like a prowling wolf into the shadows of the fortress.

The young officer Valerius was awakened from a light, unquiet sleep by a stealthy sound at the barred window. He sat up, cursing softly under his breath as the faint starlight which etched the window-bars fell across the bare stone floor and reminded him of his disgrace. Well, in a few days, he ruminated, he'd be well out of it; Sulla would not be too harsh on a man with such high connections; then let any man or woman gibe at him! Damn that insolent Pict! But wait, he thought suddenly, remembering: what of the sound which had roused him?

"Hssst!" it was a voice from the window.

Why so much secrecy? It could hardly be a foe—yet, why should it be a friend? Valerius rose and crossed his cell, coming close to the window. Outside all was dim in the starlight, and he made out but a shadowy form close to the window.

"Who are you?" he leaned close against the bars, straining his eyes into the gloom.

His answer was a snarl of wolfish laughter, a long flicker of steel in the starlight. Valerius reeled away from the window and crashed to the floor, clutching his throat, gurgling horribly as he tried to scream. Blood gushed through his fingers, forming about his twitching body a pool that reflected the dim starlight dully and redly.

Outside Bran glided away like a shadow, without pausing to peer into the cell. In another minute the guards would round the corner on their regular routine. Even now he heard the measured tramp of their iron-clad feet. Before they came in sight he had vanished and they clumped

stolidly by the cell-windows with no intimation of the corpse that lay on the floor within.

Bran rode to the small gate in the western wall, unchallenged by the sleepy watch. What fear of foreign invasion in Ebbracum?—and certain well organized thieves and women-stealers made it profitable for the watchmen not to be too vigilant. But the single guardsman at the western gate—his fellows lay drunk in a near-by brothel—lifted his spear and bawled for Bran to halt and give an account of himself. Silently the Pict reined closer. Masked in the dark cloak, he seemed dim and indistinct to the Roman, who was only aware of the glitter of his cold eyes in the gloom. But Bran held up his hand against the starlight and the soldier caught the gleam of gold; in the other hand he saw a long sheen of steel. The soldier understood, and he did not hesitate between the choice of a golden bribe or a battle to the death with this unknown rider who was apparently a barbarian of some sort. With a grunt he lowered his spear and swung the gate open. Bran rode through, casting a handful of coins to the Roman. They fell about his feet in a golden shower, clinking against the flags. He bent in greedy haste to retrieve them and Bran Mak Morn rode westward like a flying ghost in the night.

3

INTO THE DIM OF THE WEST came Bran Mak Morn. A cold wind breathed across the gloomy waste and against the gray sky a few herons flapped heavily. The long reeds and marsh-grass waved in broken undulations and out across the desolation of the wastes a few still meres reflected the dull light. Here and there rose curiously regular hillocks above the general levels, and gaunt against the somber sky Bran saw a marching line of upright monoliths—menhirs, reared by what nameless hands?

A faint blue line to the west lay the foothills that beyond the horizon grew to the wild mountains of Wales where dwelt still wild Celtic tribes—fierce blue-eyed men that knew not the yoke of Rome. A row of well-garrisoned watch-towers held them in check. Even now, far away across the moors, Bran glimpsed the unassailable keep men called the Tower of Trajan.

These barren wastes seemed the dreary accomplishment of desolation, yet human life was not utterly lacking. Bran met the silent men of the fen, reticent, dark of eye and hair, speaking a strange mixed tongue whose long-blended elements had forgotten their pristine separate sources. Bran

recognized a certain kinship in these people to himself, but he looked on them with the scorn of a pure-blooded patrician for men of mixed strains.

Not that the common people of Caledonia were altogether pure-blooded; they got their stocky bodies and massive limbs from a primitive Teutonic race which had found its way into the northern tip of the isle even before the Celtic conquest of Britain was completed, and had been absorbed by the Picts. But the chiefs of Bran's folk had kept their blood from foreign taint since the beginnings of time, and he himself was a pure-bred Pict of the Old Race. But these fenmen, overrun repeatedly by British, Gaelic and Roman conquerors, had assimilated blood of each, and in the process almost forgotten their original language and lineage.

For Bran came of a race that was very old, which had spread over western Europe in one vast Dark Empire, before the coming of the Aryans, when the ancestors of the Celts, the Hellenes and the Germans were one primal people, before the days of tribal splitting-off and westward drift.

Only in Caledonia, Bran brooded, had his people resisted the flood of Aryan conquest. He had heard of a Pictish people called Basques, who in the crags of the Pyrenees called themselves an unconquered race; but he knew that they had paid tribute for centuries to the ancestors of the Gaels, before these Celtic conquerors abandoned their mountain-realm and set sail for Ireland. Only the Picts of Caledonia had remained free, and they had been scattered into small feuding tribes—he was the first acknowledged king in five hundred years—the beginning of a new dynasty—no, a revival of an ancient dynasty under a new name. In the very teeth of Rome he dreamed his dreams of empire.

He wandered through the fens, seeking a Door. Of his quest he said nothing to the dark-eyed fenmen. They told him news that drifted from mouth to mouth—a tale of war in the north, the skirl of war-pipes along the winding Wall, of gathering fires in the heather, of flame and smoke and rapine and the glutting of Gaelic swords in the crimson sea of slaughter. The eagles of the legions were moving northward and the ancient road resounded to the measured tramp of the iron-clad feet. And Bran, in the fens of the west, laughed, well pleased.

In Ebbacum Titus Sulla gave secret word to seek out the Pictish emissary with the Gaelic name who had vanished the night young Valerius was found dead in his cell with his throat ripped out. Sulla felt that this sudden bursting flame of war on the Wall was connected closely with his execution of a condemned Pictish criminal, and he set his spy system to work, though he felt sure that Partha Mac Othna was by this time far beyond his reach. He prepared to march from Ebbacum, but

he did not accompany the considerable force of legionaries which he sent north. Sulla was a brave man, but each man has his own dread, and Sulla's was Cormac na Connacht, the black-haired prince of the Gaels, who had sworn to cut out the governor's heart and eat it raw. So Sulla rode with his ever-present bodyguard, westward, where lay the Tower of Trajan with its war-like commander, Caius Camillus, who enjoyed nothing more than taking his superior's place when the red waves of war washed at the foot of the Wall. Devious politics, but the legate of Rome seldom visited this far isle, and what with his wealth and intrigues, Titus Sulla was the highest power in Britain.

And Bran, knowing all this, patiently waited his coming, in the deserted hut in which he had taken up his abode.

One gray evening he strode on foot across the moors, a stark figure, blackly etched against the dim crimson fire of the sunset. He felt the incredible antiquity of the slumbering land, as he walked like the last man on the day after the end of the world. Yet at last he saw a token of human life—a drab hut of wattle and mud, set in the reedy breast of the fen.

A woman greeted him from the open door and Bran's somber eyes narrowed with a dark suspicion. The woman was not old, yet the evil wisdom of ages was in her eyes; her garments were ragged and scanty, her black locks tangled and unkempt, lending her an aspect of wildness well in keeping with her grim surroundings. Her red lips laughed but there was no mirth in her laughter, only a hint of mockery, and under the lips her teeth showed sharp and pointed like fangs.

"Enter, master," said she, "if you do not fear to share the roof of the witch-woman of Dagon-moor!"

Bran entered silently and sat him down on a broken bench while the woman busied herself with the scanty meal cooking over an open fire on the squalid hearth. He studied her lithe, almost serpentine motions, the ears which were almost pointed, the yellow eyes which slanted curiously.

"What do you seek in the fens, my lord?" she asked, turning toward him with a supple twist of her whole body.

"I seek a Door," he answered, chin resting on his fist. "I have a song to sing to the worms of the earth!"

She started upright, a jar falling from her hands to shatter on the hearth. "This is an ill saying, even spoken in chance," she stammered.

"I speak not by chance but by intent," he answered.

She shook her head. "I know not what you mean."

"Well you know," he returned. "Aye, you know well! My race is very old—they reigned in Britain before the nations of the Celts and the Hellenes were born out of the womb of peoples. But my people were not first in Britain. By the mottles on your skin, by the slanting of your eyes, by the taint in your veins. I speak with full knowledge and meaning."

Awhile she stood silent, her lips smiling but her face inscrutable.

"Man, are you mad?" she asked, "that in your madness you come seeking that from which strong men fled screaming in old times?"

"I seek a vengeance," he answered, "that can be accomplished only by Them I seek."

She shook her head. "You have listened to a bird singing; you have dreamed empty dreams."

"I have heard a viper hiss," growled, "and I do not dream. Enough of this weaving of words. I came seeking a link between two worlds; I have found it."

"I need lie to you no more, man of the North," answered the woman. "They you seek still dwell beneath the sleeping hills. They have drawn *apart*, farther and farther from the world you know."

"But they still steal forth in the night to grip women straying on the moors," said he, his gaze on her slanted eyes. She laughed wickedly.

"What would you of me?"

"That you bring me to Them."

She flung back her head with a scornful laugh. His left hand locked like iron in the breast of her scanty garment and his right closed on his hilt. She laughed in his face. "Strike and be damned, my northern wolf! Do you think that such life as mine is so sweet that I would cling to it as a babe to the breast?"

His hand fell away. "You are right. Threats are foolish. I will buy your aid."

"How?" the laugh voice hummed with mockery.

Bran opened his pouch and poured into his cupped palm a stream of gold. "More wealth than the men of the fen ever dreamed of."

Again she laughed. "What is this rusty metal to me? Save it for some white-breasted Roman woman who will play the traitor for you!"

"Name me a price!" he urged. The head of an enemy—

"By the blood in my veins, with its heritage of ancient hate, who is mine enemy but thee?" she laughed and springing, struck cat-like. But her dagger splintered on the mail beneath his cloak and he flung her off

with a loathsome flirt of his wrist which tossed her sprawling across her grass-strewn bunk. Lying there she laughed up at him.

"I will name you a price, then, my wolf, and it may be in days to come you will curse the armor that broke Atla's dagger!" She rose and came close to him, her disquietingly long hands fastened fiercely into his cloak. "I will tell you, Black Bran, king of Caledon! Oh, I knew you when you came into my hut with your black hair and your cold eyes! I will lead you to the doors of Hell if you wish—and the price shall be the kisses of a king!

"What of my blasted and bitter life, I, whom mortal men loathe and fear? I have not known the love of men, the clasp of a strong arm, the sting of human kisses, I, Atla, the were-woman of the moors! What have I known but the lone winds of the fens, the dreary fire of cold sunsets, the whispering of the marsh grasses?—the faces that blink up at me in the waters of the meres, the foot-pad of night—things in the gloom, the glimmer of red eyes, the grisly murmur of nameless beings in the night!

"I am half-human, at least! Have I not known sorrow and yearning and crying wistfulness, and the drear ache of loneliness? Give to me, king—give me your fierce kisses and your hurtful barbarian's embrace. Then in the long drear years to come I shall not utterly eat out my heart in vain envy of the white-bosomed women of men; for I shall have a memory few of them can boast—the kisses of a king! One night of love, oh king, and I will guide you to the gates of Hell!"

Bran eyed her somberly; he reached forth and gripped her arm in his iron fingers. An involuntary shudder shook him at the feel of her sleek skin. He nodded slowly and drawing her close to him, forced his head down to meet her lifted lips.

4

THE COLD GRAY MISTS OF DAWN wrapped King Bran like a dammy cloak. He turned to the woman whose slanted eyes gleamed in the gray gloom

"Make good your part of the contract," he said roughly. "I sought a link between worlds, and in you I found it. I seek the one thing sacred to Them. It shall be the Key opening the Door that lies unseen between me and Them. Tell me how I can reach it."

"I will," The red lips smiled terribly. "Go to the mound men call Dagon's Barrow. Draw aside the stone that blocks the entrance and go under

the dome of the mound. The floor of the chamber is made of seven great stones six grouped about the seventh. Lift out the center stone—and you will see!"

"Will I find the Black Stone?" he asked.

"Dagon's Barrow is the Door to the Black Stone," she answered, "if you dare follow the Road."

"Will the symbol be well guarded?" He unconsciously loosened his blade in its sheath. The red lips curled mockingly.

"If you meet any on the Road you will die as no mortal man has died for long centuries. The Stone is not guarded, as men guard their treasures. Why should They guard what man has never sought? Perhaps They will be near, perhaps not. It is a chance you must take, if you wish the Stone. Beware, king of Pictdom! Remember it was your folk who, so long ago, cut the thread that bound Them to human life. They were almost human then—They overspread the land and knew the sunlight. Now They have drawn *apart*. They know not the sunlight and They shun the light of the moon. Even the starlight They hate. Far, far apart have They drawn, who might have been men in time, but for the spears of your ancestors."

The sky was overcast with misty gray, through which the sun shone coldly yellow when Bran came to Dagon's Barrow, a round hillock overgrown with rank grass of a curious fungoid appearance. On the eastern side of the mound showed the entrance of a crudely built stone tunnel which evidently penetrated the barrow. One great stone blocked the entrance to the tomb. Bran laid hold of the sharp edges and exerted all his strength. It held fast. He drew his sword and worked the blade between the blocking stone and the sill. Using the sword as a lever, he worked carefully, and managed to loosen the great stone and wrench it out. A foul charnel-house scent flowed out of the aperture and the dim sunlight seemed less to illuminate the cavern-like opening than to be fouled by the rank darkness which clung there.

Sword in hand, ready for he knew not what, Bran groped his way into the tunnel, which was long and narrow, built up of heavy joined stones, and was too low for him to stand erect. Either his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the gloom, or the darkness was, after all, somewhat lightened by the sunlight filtering in through the entrance. At any rate he came into a round low chamber and was able to make out its general dome-like outline. Here, no doubt, in old times, had reposed the bones of him for whom the stones of the tomb had been joined and

the earth heaped high above them; but now of those bones no vestige remained on the stone floor. And bending close and straining his eyes. Bran made out the strange, startlingly regular pattern of that floor: six well-cut slabs clustered about a seventh, six-sided stone.

He drove his sword-point into a crack and pried carefully. The edge of the central stone tilted slightly upward. A little work and he lifted it out and leaned it against the curving wall. Straining his eyes downward he saw only the gaping blackness of a dark well, with small, worn steps that led downward and out of sight. He did not hesitate. Though the skin between his shoulders crawled curiously, he swung himself into the abyss and felt the clinging blackness swallow him.

Groping downward, he felt his feet slip and stumble on steps too small for human feet. With one hand pressed hard against the side of the well he steadied himself, fearing a fall into unknown and unlighted depths. The steps were cut into solid rock, yet they were greatly worn away. The farther he progressed, the less steps they became, mere bumps of worn stone. Then the direction of the shaft changed sharply. It still led down, but at a shallow slant down which he could walk, elbows braced against the hollowed sides, head bent low beneath the curved roof. The steps had ceased altogether and the stone felt clammy to the touch, like a serpent's lair. What beings, Bran wondered, had slithered up and down this slanting shaft, for how many centuries?

The tunnel narrowed until Bran found it rather difficult to shove through. He lay on his back and pushed himself along with his hands, feet first. Still he knew he was sinking deeper and deeper into the very guts of the earth; how far below the surface he was he dared not contemplate. Then ahead a faint witch-fire gleam tinged the abysmal blackness. He grinned savagely and with mirth. If They he sought came suddenly upon him, how could he fight in that narrow shaft? But he had put the thought of personal fear behind him when he began this hellish quest. He crawled on, thoughtless of all else but his goal.

And he came at last into a vast space where he could stand upright. He could not see the roof of the place, but he got an impression of dizzying vastness. The blackness pressed in on all sides and behind him he could see the entrance to the shaft from which he had just emerged — a black well in the darkness. But in front of him a strange grisly radiance glowed about a grim altar built of human skulls. The source of that light he could not determine, but on the altar lay a sullen night-black object — the Black Stone!

Bran wasted no time in giving thanks that the guardians of the grim

relic were nowhere near. He caught up the Stone, and gripping it under his left arm, crawled into the shaft. When a man turns his back on peril its clammy menace looms more grisly than when he advances upon it. So Bran, crawling back up the nighted shaft with his grisly prize, felt the darkness turn on him and slink behind him, grinning with dripping fangs. Clammy sweat beaded his flesh and he hastened to the best of his ability, ears strained for some stealthy sound to betray that fell shapes were at his heels. Strong shudders shook him, despite himself, and the short hair on his neck prickled as if a cold wind blew at his back.

When he reached the first of the tiny steps he felt as if he had attained to the outer boundaries of the mortal world. Up them he went, stumbling and slipping, and with a deep gasp of relief, came out into the tomb, whose spectral grayness seemed like the blaze of noon in comparison to the stygian depths he had just traversed. He replaced the central stone and strode into the light of the outer day, and never was the cold yellow light of the sun more grateful, as it dispelled the shadows of black-winged nightmares of fear and madness that seemed to have ridden him up out of the black deeps. He shoved the great blocking stone back into place, and picking up the cloak he had left at the mouth of the tomb, he wrapped it about the Black Stone and hurried away, a strong revulsion and loathing shaking his soul and lending wings to his strides.

A gray silence brooded over the land. It was desolate as the blind side of the moon, yet Bran felt the potentialities of life—under his feet, in the brown earth—sleeping, but how soon to waken, and in what horrific fashion?

He came through the tall masking reeds to the still deep men called Dagon's Mere. No slightest ripple ruffled the cold blue water to give evidence of the grisly monster legend said dwelt beneath. Bran closely scanned the breathless landscape. He saw no hint of life, human or unhuman. He sought the instincts of his savage soul to know if any unseen eyes fixed their lethal gaze upon him, and found no response. He was alone as if he were the last man alive on earth.

Swiftly he unwrapped the Black Stone, and as it lay in his hands like a solid sullen block of darkness, he did not seek to learn the secret of its material nor scan the cryptic characters carved thereon. Weighing it in his hands and calculating the distance, he flung it far out, so that it fell almost exactly in the middle of the lake. A sullen splash and the waters closed over it. There was a moment of shimmering flashes on the bosom of the lake; then the blue surface stretched placid and unrippled again.

THE WERE-WOMAN TURNED SWIFTLY as Bran approached her door. Her slant eyes widened. "You! And sane!"

"I have been into Hell and I have returned," he growled. "What is more, I have that which I sought."

"The Black Stone?" she cried. "You really dared steal it? Where is it?"

"No matter; but last night my stallion screamed in his stall and I heard something crunch beneath his thundering hoofs which was not the wall of the stable—and there was blood on his hoofs when I came to see, and blood on the floor of the stall. And I have heard stealthy sounds in the night and noises beneath my dirt floor, as if worms burrowed deep in the earth. They know I have stolen their Stone. Have you betrayed me?"

She shook her head. "I keep your secret; they do not need my word to know you. The farther they have retreated from the world of men, the greater have grown their powers in other uncanny ways. Some dawn your hut will stand empty and if men dare investigate they will find nothing—except crumbling bits of earth on the dirt floor."

Bran smiled terribly. "I have not planned and toiled thus far to fall prey to the talons of vermin. If They strike me down in the night, They will never know what became of their idol—or whatever it be to Them. I would speak with Them.

"Dare you come with me and meet Them in the night?" she asked.

"Thunder of all gods!" he snarled. "Who are you to ask me if I dare? Lead me to Them and let me bargain for a vengeance this night. The hour of retribution draws nigh. This day I saw silvered helmets and bright shields gleam across the fens—the new commander has arrived at the Tower of Trajan and Caius Camillus has marched to the Wall."

That night the king went across the dark desolation of the moors with the silent were-woman. The night was thick and still as if the land lay in ancient slumber. The stars blinked vaguely, mere points of red struggling through the unbreathing gloom. Their gleam was dimmer than the glitter in the eyes of the woman who glided beside the king. Strange thoughts shook Bran, vague, titanic, primeval. Tonight ancestral linkings with these slumbering fens stirred in his soul and troubled him with the fantasmal, eon-veiled shapes of monstrous dreams. The vast age of his race was borne upon him; where now he walked an outlaw and an alien, dark-eyed kings in whose mold he was cast, had reigned in

old times. The Celtic and Roman invaders were as strangers to this ancient isle beside his people. Yet his race likewise had been invaders, and there was an older race than his—a race whose beginnings lay lost and hidden back beyond the dark oblivion of antiquity.

Ahead of them loomed a low range of hills, which formed the easternmost extremity of those straying chains which far away climbed at last to the mountains of Wales. The woman led the way up what might have been a sheep path, and halted before a wide black gaping cave.

"A door to Those you seek, oh king!" her laughter rang hateful in the gloom. "Dare ye enter?"

His fingers closed in her tangled locks and he shook her viciously. "Ask me but once more if I dare," he grated, "and your head and shoulders part company! Lead on."

Her laughter was like sweet deadly venom. They passed into the cave and Bran struck flint and steel. The flicker of the tinder showed him a wide dusty cavern, on the roof of which hung clusters of bats. Lighting a torch, he lifted it and scanned the shadowy recesses, seeing nothing but dust and emptiness.

"Where are They?" he growled.

She beckoned him to the back of the cave and leaned against the rough wall, as if casually. But the king's keen eyes caught the motion of her hand pressing hard against a projecting ledge. He recoiled as a round black well gaped suddenly at his feet. Again her laughter slashed him like a keen silver knife. He held the torch to the opening and again saw small worn steps leading down.

"They do not need those steps," said Atla. "Once They did, before your people drove Them into the darkness. But you will need them."

She thrust the torch into a niche above the well; it shed a faint red light into the darkness below. She gestured into the well and Bran loosened his sword and stepped into the shaft. As he went down into the mystery of the darkness, the light was blotted out above him, and he thought for an instant Atla had covered the opening again. Then he realized that she was descending after him.

The descent was not a long one. Abruptly Bran felt his feet on a solid floor. Atla swung down beside him and stood in the dim circle of light that drifted down the shaft. Bran could not see the limits of the place into which he had come.

"Many caves in these hills," said Atla, her voice sounding small and strangely brittle in the vastness, "are but doors to greater caves which lie beneath, even as a man's words and deeds are but small indications

of the dark caverns of murky thought lying behind and beneath."

And now Bran was aware of movement in the gloom. The darkness was filled with stealthy noises not like those made by any human foot. Abruptly sparks began to flash and float in the blackness, like flickering fireflies. Closer they came until they girdled him in a wide half-moon. And beyond the ring gleamed other sparks a solid sea of them, fading away in the gloom until the farthest were mere tiny pin-points of light. And Bran knew they were the slanted eyes of the beings who had come upon him in such numbers that his brain reeled at the contemplation — and at the vastness of the cavern.

Now that he faced his ancient foes, Bran knew no fear. He felt the waves of terrible menace emanating from Them, the grisly hate, the inhuman threat to body, mind and soul. More than a member of a less ancient race, he realized the horror of his position, but he did not fear though he confronted the ultimate Horror of the dreams and legends of his race. His blood raced fiercely but it was with the hot excitement of the hazard not the drive of terror.

"The know you have the Stone, oh king," said Atla, and though he knew she feared, though he felt her physical efforts to control her trembling limbs, there was no quiver of fright in her voice. "You are in deadly peril; They know your breed of old — oh, They remember the days when Their ancestors were men! I can not save you; both of us will die as no human has died for ten centuries. Speak to Them, if you will; They can understand your speech, though you may not understand theirs. But it will avail not — you are a human — and a Pict."

Bran laughed and the closing ring of fire shrank back at the savagery in his laughter. Drawing his sword with a soul-chilling rasp of steel, he set his back against what he hoped was a solid stone wall. Facing the glittering eyes with his sword gripped in his right hand and his dirk in his left he laughed as a blood-hungry wolf snarls.

"Aye," he growled, "I am a Pict a son of those warriors who drove your brutish ancestors before them like chaff before the storm! — who flooded the land with your blood and heaped high your skulls for a sacrifice to the Moon-Woman! You who fled of old before my race, dare ye now snarl at your master? Roll on me like a flood, now if ye dare! Before your viper fangs drink my life I will reap your multitudes like ripened barley — of your severed heads will I build a tower and of your mangled corpses will I rear up a wall! Dogs of the dark, vermin of Hell, worms of the earth, rush in and try my steel! When Death finds me in this dark cavern, your living will howl for the scores of your

dead and your Black Stone will be lost to you for ever—for only I know where it is hidden and not all the tortures of all the Hells can wring the secret from my lips!"

Then followed a tense silence; Bran faced the fire-lit darkness, tensed like a wolf at bay, waiting the charge; at his side the woman cowered, her eyes ablaze. Then from the silent ring that hovered beyond the dim torchlight rose a vague abhorrent murmur. Bran, prepared as he was for anything, started. Gods, was *that* the speech of creatures which had once been called men?

Atla straightened, listening intently. From her lips came the same hideous soft sibilances, and Bran, though he had already known the grisly secret of her being, knew that never again could he touch her save with soul-shaken loathing.

She turned to him, a strange smile curving her red lips dimly in the ghostly light.

"They fear you, oh king! By the black secrets of R'lyeh, who are you that Hell itself quails before you? Not your steel, but the stark ferocity of your soul has driven unused fear into Their strange minds. They will buy back the Black Stone at any price."

"Good," Bran sheathed his weapons. "They shall promise not to molest you because of your aid of me. And" his voice hummed like the purr of a hunting tiger, "They shall deliver into my hands Titus Sulla, governor of Ebbacum, now commanding the Tower of Trajan. This They can do—how, I know not. But I know that in the old days, when my people warred with these Children of the Night, babes disappeared from guarded huts and none saw the stealers come or go. Do They understand?"

Again rose the low frightful sounds and Bran, who feared not their wrath, shuddered at their voices.

"They understand," said Atla. "Bring the Black Stone to Dagon's Ring tomorrow night when the earth is veiled with the blackness that foreruns the dawn. Lay the Stone on the altar. There They will bring Titus Sulla to you. Trust Them; They have not interfered in human affairs for many centuries, but They will keep their word."

Bran nodded and turning, climbed up the stair with Atla close behind him. At the top he turned and looked down once more. As far as he could see floated a glittering ocean of slanted, yellow eyes upturned. But the owners of those eyes kept carefully beyond the dim circle of torchlight and of their bodies he could see nothing. Their low hissing speech floated up to him and he shuddered as his imagination visualized, not a throng

of biped creatures, but a swarming, swaying myriad of serpents, gazing up at him with their glittering unwinking eyes.

He swung into the upper cave and Atla thrust the blocking stone back in place. It fitted into the entrance of the well with uncanny precision; Bran was unable to discern any crack in the apparently solid floor of the cavern. Atla made a motion to extinguish the torch, but the king stayed her.

"Keep it so until we are out of the cave," he grunted. "We might tread on an adder in the dark."

Atla's sweetly hateful laughter rose maddeningly in the flickering gloom.

6

IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE SUNSET when Bran came again to the reed-grown marge of Dagon's Mere. Casting cloak and sword-belt on the ground, he stripped himself of his short leathern breeches. Then gripping his naked dirk in his teeth, he went into the water with the smooth ease of a diving seal. Swimming strongly he gained the center of the small lake, and turning, drove himself downward.

The mere was deeper than he had thought. It seemed he would never reach the bottom, and when he did, his groping hands failed to find what he sought. A roaring in his ears warned him and he swam to the surface.

Gulping deep of the refreshing air, he dived again, and again his quest was fruitless. A third time he sought the depth, and this time his groping hands met a familiar object in the silt of the bottom. Grasping it, he swam up to the surface.

The Stone was not particularly bulky, but it was heavy. He swam leisurely, and suddenly was aware of a curious stir in the waters about him which was not caused by his own exertions. Thrusting his face below the surface, he tried to pierce the blue depths with his eyes and thought to see a dim gigantic shadow hovering there.

He swam faster, not frightened, but wary. His feet struck the shallows and he waded up on the shelving shore. Looking back he saw the waters swirl and subside. He shook his head, swearing. He had discounted the ancient legend which made Dagon's Mere the lair of a nameless water-monster, but now he had a feeling as if his escape had been narrow. The time-worn myths of the ancient land were taking form and coming to life before his eyes. What primeval shape lurked below the surface of that

treacherous mere, Bran could not guess, but he felt that the fenmen had good reason for shunning the spot, after all.

Bran donned his garments, mounted the black stallion and rode across the fens in the desolate crimson of the sunset's afterglow, with the Black Stone wrapped in his cloak. He rode, not to his hut, but to the west, in the direction of the Tower of Trajan and the Ring of Dagon. As he covered the miles that lay between, the red stars winked out. Midnight passed him in the moonless night and still Bran rode on. His heart was hot for his meeting with Titus Sulla. Atla had gloated over the anticipation of watching the Roman writhe under torture, but no such thought was in the Pict's mind. The governor should have his chance with weapons—with Bran's own sword he should face the Pictish king's dirk, and live or die according to his prowess. And though Sulla was famed throughout the provinces as a swordsman, Bran felt no doubt as to the outcome.

Dagon's Ring lay some distance from the Tower—a sullen circle of tall gaunt stones planted upright, with a rough-hewn stone altar in the center. The Romans looked on these menhirs with aversion; they thought the Druids had reared them; but the Celts supposed Bran's people, the Picts, had planted them. Bran well knew what hands reared those grim monoliths in lost ages, though for what reasons, he but dimly guessed.

The king did not ride straight to the Ring. He was consumed with curiosity as to how his grim allies intended carrying out Their promise. That They could snatch Titus Sulla from the very midst of his men, he felt sure, and he believed he knew how They would do it. He felt the gnawings of a strange misgiving, as if he had tampered with powers of unknown breadth and depth, and had loosed forces which he could not control. Each time he remembered that reptilian murmur, those slanted eyes of the night before, a cold breath passed over him. They had been abhorrent enough when his people drove Them into the caverns under the hills, ages ago; what had long centuries of retrogression made of Them? In Their nighted, subterranean life, had They retained any of the attributes of humanity at all?

Some instinct prompted him to ride toward the Tower. He knew he was near; but for the thick darkness he could have plainly seen its stark outline tusking the horizon. Even now he should be able to make it out dimly. An obscure, shuddersome premonition shook him and he spurred the stallion into swift canter.

And suddenly Bran staggered in his saddle as from a physical impact, so stunning was the surprize of what met his gaze. The impreg-

nable Tower of Trajan was no more! Bran's astounded gaze rested on a gigantic pile of ruins—of shattered stone and crumbled granite, from which jutted the jagged and splintered ends of broken beams. At one corner of the tumbled heap one tower rose out of the waste of crumpled masonry, and it leaned drunkenly as if its foundations had been half cut away.

Bran dismounted and walked forward dazed by bewilderment. The moat was filled in places by fallen stones and broken pieces of mortared wall. He crossed over and came among the ruins. Where, he knew, only a few hours before the flags had resounded to the martial tramp of iron-clad feet, and the walls had echoed to the clang of shields and the blast of loud-throated trumpets, a horrific silence reigned.

Almost under Bran's feet, a broken shape writhed and groaned. The king bent down to the legionary who lay in a sticky red pool of his own blood. A single glance showed the Pict that the man, horribly crushed and shattered, was dying.

Lifting the bloody head, Bran placed his flask to the pulped lips and the Roman instinctively drank deep, gulping through splintered teeth. In the dim starlight Bran saw his glazed eyes roll.

"The walls fell," muttered the dying man. "They crashed down like the skies falling on the day of doom. Ah Jove, the skies rained shards of granite and hailstones of marble!"

"I have felt no earthquake shock," Bran scowled, puzzled.

"It was no earthquake," muttered the Roman. "Before last dawn it began, the faint dim scratching and clawing far below the earth. We of the guard heard it—like rats burrowing, or like worms hollowing out the earth. Titus laughed at us, but all day long we heard it. Then at midnight the Tower quivered and seemed to settle—as if the foundations were being dug away—"

A shudder shook Bran Mak Morn. The worms of the earth! Thousands of vermin digging like moles far below the castle, burrowing away the foundations—gods, the land must be honeycombed with tunnels and caverns—these creatures were even less human than he had thought—what ghastly shapes of darkness had he invoked to his aid?

"What of Titus Sulla?" he asked, again holding the flask to the legionary's lips; in that moment the dying Roman seemed to him almost like a brother.

"Even as the Tower shuddered we heard a fearful scream from the governor's chamber," muttered the soldier. "We rushed there—as we broke down the door we heard his shrieks—they seemed to recede—into

the bowels of the earth! We rushed in; the chamber was empty. His blood-stained sword lay on the floor; in the stone flags of the floor a black hole gaped. Then—the—towers—reeled—the—roof—broke;—through—a—storm—of—crashing—walls—I—crawled—"

A strong convulsion shook the broken figure. "Lay me down, friend," whispered the Roman. "I die."

He had ceased to breathe before Bran could comply. The Pict rose, mechanically cleansing his hands. He hastened from the spot, and as he galloped over the darkened fens, the weight of the accursed Black Stone under his cloak was as the weight of a foul nightmare on a mortal breast.

As he approached the Ring, he saw an eerie glow within, so that the gaunt stones stood etched like the ribs of a skeleton in which a witch-fire burns. The stallion snorted and reared as Bran tied him to one of the menhirs. Carrying the Stone he strode into the grisly circle and saw Atla standing beside the altar, one hand on her hip, her sinuous body swaying in a serpentine manner. The altar glowed all over with ghastly light and Bran knew someone, probably Atla, had rubbed it with phosphorus from some dank swamp or quagmire.

He strode forward and whipping his cloak from about the Stone, flung the accursed thing on to the altar. "I have fulfilled my part of the contract," he growled.

"And They, Theirs," she retorted. "Look!—They come!"

He wheeled, his hand instinctively dropping to his sword. Outside the Ring the great stallion screamed savagely and reared against his tether. The night wind moaned through the waving grass and an abhorrent soft hissing mingled with it. Between the menhirs flowed a dark tide of shadows, unstable and chaotic. The Ring filled with glittering eyes which hovered beyond the dim illusive circle of illumination cast by the phosphorescent altar. Somewhere in the darkness a human voice tittered and gibbered idiotically. Bran stiffened, the shadows of a horror clawing at his soul.

He strained his eyes, trying to make out the shapes of those who ringed him. But he glimpsed only billowing masses of shadow which heaved and writhed and squirmed with almost fluid consistency.

"Let Them make good Their bargain!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Then see, oh king!" cried Atla in a voice of piercing mockery.

There was a stir, a seething in the writhing shadows, and from the darkness crept, like a four-legged animal, a human shape that fell down and groveled at Bran's feet, and writhed and mowed, and lifting a death's-

head, howled like a dying dog. In the ghastly light, Bran, soul-shaken saw the blank glassy eyes, the bloodless features, the loose, writhing, froth-covered lips of sheer lunacy — gods, was this Titus Sulla, the proud lord of life and death in Ebbracum's proud city?

Bran bared his sword. "I had thought to give this stroke in vengeance," he said somberly. "I give it in mercy — *Vale Caesar!*"

The steel flashed in the eerie light and Sulla's head rolled to the foot of the glowing altar, where it lay staring up at the shadowed sky.

"They harmed him not!" Atla's hateful laugh slashed the sick silence. "It was what he saw and came to know that broke his brain! Like all his heavy-footed race, he knew nothing of the secrets of this ancient land. This night he has been dragged through the deepest pits of Hell, where even you might have blenched!"

"Well for the Romans that they know not the secrets of this accursed land!" Bran roared, maddened, "with its monster-haunted meres, its foul witch-women, and its lost caverns and subterranean realms where spawn in the darkness shapes of Hell!"

"Are They more foul than a mortal who seeks Their aid?" cried Atla with a shriek of fearful mirth. "Give Them their Black Stone!"

A cataclysmic loathing shook Bran's soul with red fury. "Aye, take your cursed Stone!" he roared, snatching it from the altar and dashing it among the shadows with such savagery that bones snapped under its impact. A hurried babel of grisly tongues rose and the shadows heaved in turmoil. One segment of the mass detached itself for an instant and Bran cried out in fierce revulsion, though he caught only a fleeting glimpse of the thing, had only a brief impression of a broad strangely flattened head, pendulous writhing lips that bared curved pointed fangs, and a hideously misshapen, dwarfish body that seemed *mottled* — all set off by those unwinking reptilian eyes. Gods! — the myths had prepared him for horror in human aspect, horror induced by bestial visage and stunted deformity — but this was the horror of nightmare and the night.

"Go back to Hell and take your idol with you!" he yelled, brandishing his clenched fists to the skies, as the thick shadows receded, flowing back and away from him like the foul waters of some black flood. "Your ancestors were men, though strange and monstrous — but gods, ye have become in ghastly fact what my people called ye in scorn! Worms of the earth, back into your holes and burrows! Ye foul the air and leave on the clean earth the slime of the serpents ye have become! Gonar

was right—there are shapes too foul to use even against Rome!"

He sprang from the Ring as a man flees the touch of a coiling snake, and tore the stallion free. At his elbow Atla was shrieking with fearful laughter, all human attributes dropped from her like a cloak in the night.

"King of Picland!" she cried, "King of fools! Do you blench at so small a thing? Stay and let me show you real fruits of the pits! Ha! ha! ha! Run, fool, run! But you are stained with the taint—you have called Them forth and They will remember! And in Their own time They will come to you again!"

He yelled a wordless curse and struck her savagely in the mouth with his open hand. She staggered, blood starting from her lips, but her fiendish laughter only rose higher.

Bran leaped into the saddle, wild for the clean heather and the cold blue hills of the north where he could plunge his sword into clean slaughter and his sickened soul into the red maelstrom of battle, and forget the horror which lurked below the fens of the west. He gave the frantic stallion the rein, and rode through the night like a hunted ghost, until the hellish laughter of the howling were-woman died out in the darkness behind.

The Editor's Page

(continued from page 5)

where, and mention the point here only because you may have seen it overstressed elsewhere and thus obtained the notion that this book isn't worth buying. Nothing could be farther from the truth, however silly the gimmick is—although, again, like the title to the Sturgeon story, it's clever; and neither the ed-

itor nor the publisher are proof against being taken in by their own cleverness. No matter; since the odds against *Dangerous Visions* appearing intact—forewards, afterwards, and stories—in soft covers are on the order of a Congressional Appropriation to one, I urge you to get your copy now! RAWL



Come

by Anna Hunger

(author of *Dwelling of the Righteous*, *Ground Afire*, etc.)

While some of you have regarded ANNA HUNGER's stories somewhere in the middle ground between excellent and awful, a sizeable percentage of readers have been anything but indifferent. The result of extreme reactions has tended to put her in a misleading position in *The Reckoning*, but it is those "outstanding" and "first place" votes which come in every time (and not from the same small group of readers) that encourage us. Our reaction to the Hunger tale tends toward extremes, too; and it goes without saying that we would not continue to run them if we considered them negatively. We'd rather risk being wrong on stories we thought very good than being right on stories we thought very bad.

MANY PERSONS IN THE GREAT CITY that sprawled along the sea, over the hills and into the valley had seen the fleeting gray shape. Small, shining and gray and elusive—through the months they had seen, and dismissed it with a shrug. A few, more curious, had compared notes and questioned authorities. But found no answer . . .

It was the fourth day of a warmish, sticky smog. People trudged sidewalks and streets, somnambulists on their way through a thick dream. Sometimes they peered around nervously: Where was the voice of the siren? In what direction? *Wan ghosts passing like fleeting ideas, quickly rejected*, thought Adam Stark. He coughed. *Throat hurts a little. Eyes smart. All those chemicals in the smog. Excretions of factories and car exhausts. Never noticed it much until this last week.*

Broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, flat-bellied Adam Stark was the romantic handsome man every woman made a secret idol; the great lover from magazine page and movie screen; the ready smile, the throaty voice, the easy charm. Adam smiled. How many women's dreams had he helped to come true during his wanderings? Fulfilled for a short time, anyway; and then slipped away to be free. Free!

Coughing again he leaned farther out the open window, the siren closer, tearing at his eardrums. Cars and buses swerved toward the curb, waited while the big fire trucks thundered by . . . *I should have stayed in Tahiti. Or in Rome. Lucious pickings there. If only I hadn't run out of money! Just when the moment was right, too. And that son-of-a-bitch who loused me up on the deal in Africa. Could have operated there in the big cities. That dumb kid whose old man had so much dough—could have married her. But she was scared of an affair with a real man—after she'd had the affair.*

Adam Stark, global lover, constant guest, international con man, turned back to stare at the emptiness of his two rooms. Three suits of clothes in the closet, a duffel bag, shoes and a pair of boots and his riding clothes. Scattered like lichen on rocks were torn magazines, pipes, and small, ugly idols of wood and stone, souvenirs from countries touched by his itching foot—all he had left. *Move on, keep moving. That's the only way to live, he thought; not grounded, not tied.*

The buzzing began once more. He shook his head angrily as if to shake it off. The strange thing that began with a buzzing in his ears, then became a single, wild tone; harsh, strident; sometimes almost human. He should never have mentioned it to Beatrice. It wasn't like him. And Beatrice, alert, concerned, had said, "You must go to a doctor."

"Never sick but once in my life." Scoffingly. Shrug it off. Treat it light. A man's way.

Later, when it had come again and Beatrice had guessed without his telling, they talked about it. Adam was annoyed, but talked. She had said, reassuringly. "There are so many noises in the city. Even when it seems quiet at night, there's a hundred sounds. Blended. The roar of traffic in the distance. Vibrations from electronic equipment. Humming of telegraph wires . . . maybe . . ."

"Yes. I've picked up a vibration." He had laughed. "Anyway, it's gone now." A lie, but he would not admit any physical weakness in his fine, healthy, handsome body. He was not running down. Not growing older. He would never lack all that was young and alluring; all that

was himself. It would ruin his game, his graceful, swift movement from place to place . . . Keep moving; keep young; nothing should stop him.

Quickly he wrapped a scarf of emerald colored silk about his throat, pulled on a coat and left the accusing room.

Emile's bar, situated in the older part of the city, was filled with traces of nostalgic grandeur. It was an old, high-ceilinged room, once the lobby of what had been a fashionable apartment house, California-Spanish style. The archways remained but had been half-partitioned in glass brick and the long crimson velour drapes did not stir from the bronze spears holding them aloft. Back of the bar was a wall of fine tile, partly concealed by the long mirror fastened over it. And Emile had added a few modern touches with his lamps, his shiny imitation leather bar stools and chairs.

Adam flashed a smile at Emile and the bar waitress. The drinks were always good and the small suppers in which Emile specialized always delicious.

"Over here," called a voice.

Adam joined his one friend, Gordon Lane. Where were the hundreds of acquaintances, the dozens of friends, the circles of wealthy, fashionable people into which, eel-like he had once slipped so easily? Lounging down into the large armed wooden chair at the table, he ordered his drink.

Gordon, short, plump and goodnatured was staring at an ebony chair, very narrow, with an immensely high back. "Nobody ever sits there," he said. "Once in a while a coat is dropped on it. It's haunted. That chair was brought over on a Spanish galleon, I'll bet. Then the Admiral realized he couldn't use it — and left it here."

"Why not? The Admiral had a world to explore. Action. Adventure. Loot."

Gordon raised his glass. "Here's hoping you get out of this sour mood in two minutes flat."

Adam drank and shivered. "Funny — it's been warm for the last few days but tonight it turned cold. I'm still cold."

"Getting old," Gordon laughed. "Not the dashing young fellow you used to be."

Adam's fingers gripped his highball glass in a convulsive spurt of anger. "Don't talk like Beatrice. I don't like it."

"Won't face facts, eh?" Leaning closer in the dim-lighted room Gordon's face now serious, "Something bothering you, pal? No news of your

brother—that the trouble? He was lost about a year ago, as I recall, in a fog off the Louisiana coast. Only his boat was recovered."

"That's right," Adam spoke through tight lips. "Everything was done that could have been done. I was away . . ." He'd gone to a big party of rich, glittering people in the resort town several miles off. He'd hoped to get the job of skipper on one of their yachts; Adam had warned his brother not to go out that morning—had sensed mist and fog to come later in the day. But Pat was stubborn. Laughing, he had said, "You'll come after me if I'm not home by four this afternoon. Come after me when I call for help."

. . . People were always asking him to stay with them. To not leave them. To come to them . . . At noon he'd had the chance to go to the party with a fading beauty with whom he slept in an absent-minded sort of way. She had some good contacts left; he needed the contacts because he needed money—again.

"Too bad, too bad," muttered Gordon. "Have another drink."

"Pat was odd. Didn't stick with our crowd. He'd often go away by himself for a couple of weeks at a time."

Emile, slender and dark as an ebony cane, came over to attend them. "You're not looking well, my friend," he said solicitously to Adam. "I myself have made a special drink for you. A new creation." He set down the drink and left.

Gordon continued to do most of the talking while Adam Stark sipped at the "new creation". It *was* different, and strong.

Suddenly the wild shrieking sound came again, faintly. "Listen!" Adam started up in his chair.

"It's a siren, that's all."

"Exciting!"

Gordon stared at the face straining forward, eager and tense. "The hell it is. It means disaster. Fire, injury, death. Not exciting—just horrible."

But a strange, alluring, fantastic voice was calling through the night, promising . . . promising what? Gordon was asking something. "Beatrice?" replied Adam. "Oh, she's fine. Always is. Well-adjusted, as they say."

"A wonderful girl, Adam. You're lucky. Believe me . . ." Gordon studied him a moment, then, carefully casual, lit a cigarette. His words puffing out of the smoke, "Sometimes I don't think you appreciate her. Then I remember how much in love you were. *Are*, I mean. You talked of nothing but Beatrice."

"Yeah." Moving restlessly, tapping the bowl of his pipe, folding a corner of the paper cocktail napkin.

"Why don't you marry right away? I'll be best man." He chuckled. "That's my vocation."

"Yeah."

"Now look here, Stark. Not going to let her down, are you?" The blue eyes in the round, pleasant face turned hard.

"Of course not," Adam laughed harshly. "She *needs* me. We need each other. It's been said often enough."

A little later when both men stood outside Emile's Adam turned up the collar of his jacket and pulled the silk scarf tighter as he stared into the night. "Cold and white. Thick white—this damned smog." But he saw distorted shapes and figures, giants, dwarfs and hunchbacks, castle towers, fortresses and full-rigged galleons under the blurry neon lights . . . And other things. Giant rockets, missiles—the old and the new crazily jammed in together.

Gordon peered at him strangely. "Got your car?"

"Sure." His voice wavered on the edge of another siren that bore down upon them. A police car, racing.

"Something *is* bothering you, Adam. You seem frightened."

Adam snorted derisively. "Frightened? The war did its best, and my life hasn't been exactly sheltered."

Gordon laughed. "Yes. Crazy thing to say. Well, take care."

Impatient, Adam walked on. Gordon's quiet voice called again, "Take care!"

The airy, golden-walled rooms of Beatrice with their delicate Japanese watercolors, sharp, fragile ornaments and black teakwood closed round Adam. "Hello, doll." He felt her arms press him, he answered with a strong embrace; he felt her lips; he answered.

Pulling off scarf and jacket, tossing them on a chair, "Dinner ready?"

"Of course." Smiling, Beatrice led the way to the small alcove dining area. She loved him, and knew his faults, and still loved him.

She is orderly, but warm, he thought. Neat but not prissy. Confident but without the business woman's sharp-edged arrogance. Her lovely body topped with the flame of red hair—delicious . . .

They had finished dinner and sat cosy by the fire and Beatrice, folding white hands said, "Don't you think it's time we settled something?"

"No rush."

"Now that you have a good job we can make plans." She looked up

from the rug where she sat beside his chair. "We'll be close to each other, Adam. We'll help each other."

"Help about what?"

"Anything. Everything."

The work at the factory loomed up, dull, hideous, impossible. There was a chance for promotion hidden in the gray planes and angles of the place; and the next promotion to bring him to a supervisory position; afterward, something along executive lines. The bigger paycheck, the friends, the better car. How many years of grubbing in a vast cell under diffused fluorescent light? "I hate it," he burst out. "That damned job!"

Beatrice's eyes opened wide. "But you said —"

"I know." She had found the job when he was first in love with her, had persuaded him to take it. He should have known love wouldn't last. He *did* know. Women were all right in small doses; good for bed — good for when you were sick . . . that time in Singapore when he had cholera. Women were good when the first wild burst of blood came flooding your body. Nothing beyond love lust could hold him; *her* fault that he had been trapped, her saying he wasn't a kid any longer. Forty was too old for adventures. He had been weak — and he had nowhere to turn.

"Going every morning to that place. A brassy clock bell ringing. Ordering you to go. Every damn morning."

"I — I didn't know you felt this way." She was shocked to her depths, for she had been sure of him the last few months. Her hands trembled a little. She touched his arm that lay, detached as a piece of driftwood on the chair arm. "Please, Adam. Think. When the day is over you can forget. Go to the theater, parties. On week-ends —"

"Play golf," he jeered. "The last adventure of all. The caballeros of the links. Join them, join, join! And always know that the next morning you must get up and do the very same thing again! Pushed. Driven to go back."

Beatrice quietly rose and turned her back and saw the small cheery fire. Now it seemed only gray ashes stifling her love and her hope. "And driven back to *me* each night."

"That isn't what I meant." Once more out of the thick night came the siren, plaintive, beckoning. It was pulling at him, drawing him out over the land and over the sea. To every port of call. Quickly Adam brushed past Beatrice, jostling her roughly. At the big window he stood staring out, hands pressed flat against glass. What mystery, what phantasmagoria lay out there? Out in the white mist the siren called again, further away. Other calls came to him out of the past. '*Stay with me — I'm*

old; I need you. Stay with me—I love you! Come, come to me—hurry." Office buildings, apartment houses, theaters were blurred; something was between them and himself. Something huge, formless crouched panting over the city.

He jerked open the louvered glass—the damp stuff outside stung his eyes. He wanted to find out what was there. But even as he turned back to the girl with the tremendous tugging of the white night at his vitals Adam stiffened. *There's danger. Can smell it. But where is it and what is it?* Suddenly, for the first time in his life he wanted to stay with someone who needed him. *He wanted to stay!*

"Sorry, darling. Forget what I said. I—I've been mixed up. I want to be with you. Always."

The slight shake of her head said 'no.'

"Beatrice!" His strong arms went round her; his confident smile hovered before her eyes enticingly. "Believe me. You need me—tell me to stay!"

"No," she said quietly.

A ghastly sensation of being repelled and compelled attacked Adam; a terrible tugging almost pulled him bodily away from her, as he clung, begging desperately, "Keep me . . . don't let me go."

"I believed that you loved me." Her brown eyes flickered scornfully. "What a fool I was! I certainly won't tell you to stay so that you can make love to my body again—but not to *me!*"

"Please—please—!"

"I want you to go, Adam Stark."

His numb arms dropped from her cold figure. 'A thirsty evil, and when we drink we die'. The words filtered through his mind as, seizing scarf and jacket, he stumbled to the door and left without another look back.

Outside there were footsteps approaching and he listened. The night sky was yellow gray with light reflected from the city. A dark figure with cowed head, passed close . . .

Adam got into his car.

There was a promise of some ecstatic adventure out here—an unveiling of wonders—a pitch of excitement! The small car lurched forward, went a few blocks, took a freeway entrance ramp. Traveling over the top of the city on the freeway were hundreds of cars, trucks, vans. All wet and gleaming. The great river of metal was flowing fast, cascading down into dips, foaming up over rises of the main freeway . . . He would never reach the siren voice in time. A hot, burning breath was blowing over

lanes and bridges and buildings, concealing objects, transforming some into things grotesque, hideous.

Cars were dragons, breathing fire from their tails. Surrounding him. Man created these dragons but out of them came the breath of the unseen, the unknowable . . . Huge black and white directional signs grimaced at him. Quick—keep in the left lane. Hurry—two lanes merging! Watch it! Signs: 1/2 MILE HAVENHURST TURNOFF . . . 1/4 MILE SAN DIEGO FREEWAY . . . NEXT EXIT INTERSTATE FREEWAY . . . NEXT EXIT GOLDEN STATE FREEWAY . . . So many exits . . . Was there an exit for him?

Foot on accelerator—lift. Press brake lightly—Off. Move to accelerator. Flick left light indicator . . . Getting dizzy. Careful. Be alert. Don't fall half-asleep from the roar, the watching of moving objects . . .

On his left, down through a pass in the Santa Monica range of hills rushed a mass of lights, a wide tributary feeding the main river. On the right more lights poured into an entrance ramp. A quarter mile—another ramp. Two miles—another ramp seething with moving metal. Gorging, choking the concrete lanes.

Automatically his eyes fixed, swerved, shifted, flashed right and left and forward once more. Then he turned his head in the quick turn over his right shoulder to check the blind spot of vision. He went on, the screeching, urging cry hastening him . . . *Right turn, now. Swing left a bit and straighten the wheels. See the rear bumper ahead—skim past it and plunge through those cars to the right lane.*

Ready now—take the turnoff ramp; gauge the distance of the car in front and back. Damn it, the windshield's steamed up—heater's on. Wipe it—there. The siren again—but it's gone past. Fading away. I missed. I missed that . . . that . . . Something was lost. Someone. Rub my smarting eyes. Burning is worse . . .

Once off the freeway he drove along watching crimson, gold and green lights at street corners . . . On-off. On-off. On-off. *There, felt the car slip on oil and wet. Tires worn. Should have bought new ones. Alone . . . alone in the car . . . For blocks and blocks and miles and miles he traveled under the dingy yellow gray sky dome where no stars gleamed. Dark corner . . . somebody walking . . . Slam on brakes! Brakes need tightening . . .*

The siren called and Adam Stark understood the words at last. "You left me—come and help me! Come—come and help! Come and find me!" He had abandoned many, but one he had abandoned to death.

. . . Savage red eyes at every corner. Watch it. Right swerve, brake, swab windshield, look through. Smog's thicker. Get the wiper going. Where is the siren? Should be close . . . gray, bitter. Eyeballs sting. Can't see anything but white burning . . . Cars closing in round me. Thousands closing in. Burning, burning. Must rest . . . rest . . . But I cannot close my eyes!

A week later the ebony-skinned Emile served Beatrice at her table. She had come seeking a familiar ghost in a common meeting place among the crimson-draped spears and the tile. Slipping off her fur jacket she sighed and gazed around the bar. It was very late, almost two in the morning and the place was empty. No—a man had just come in. His collar was turned high and his clothes were well-tailored. What was the matter with him?

"Sir, may I help you?" Emile smiled encouragingly at the stranger. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Brandy and soda, please." The man was breathing hard she could tell, for her table was close to the end bar stool where he stood.

The stranger quickly gulped half of his brandy. Then, seeing Beatrice he smiled a slow, forced smile. The smile of one who is desperately seeking distraction from his thoughts. "What strange places we find when we search," he said. "Although we are not searching for those places, but for somewhere else." He glanced round the room, stiffening his smile so that it would not slip away.

Beatrice said, quickly defensive of her shining hours with Adam at Emile's, "The food and drinks here are very good."

"Oh?" He was distraught once more. And his pale face was damp with perspiration she now realized.

"I've come from another world," the stranger murmured. "Tossed back a century into the past. Inadvertently. Lived in it as though it were natural to me. There's still dark and bloody ground left in this country of ours in spite of highways and helicopters. Isolation in spite of communication networks. There are kindly people, too. Kind to a stranger who could not tell his name. The—unusual—part about it was that I liked it there. As if I'd lived in such a place in another incarnation. As if I had gone back to learn something from it that I'd forgotten."

"So you stayed in the strange place?"

"They were rough people, but kind . . . I—I didn't know who I was." He looked at her across the short space, seated alone at a table, and paused significantly.

Beatrice gestured for him to come and sit with her. He was talking, she believed in order to calm himself. When he had made himself comfortable she spoke out of her pain and ceaseless regret. "I'm searching, too. Looking for someone I sent away. A man I loved who didn't love me; but on one night he needed me, with or without love."

She turned her head for a moment, unable to go on.

"Love . . ." he muttered. "Why must we give every other reason for our actions? There was a girl, too, where I was. I loved her; now she is my wife."

The fragile, smoky topaze glass twisted in her fingers and her lip curled bitterly. "You had better luck, or better sense than I had. I told my lover to go—but I was certain that he would come back. I expected a telephone call. I was sure I'd meet him at the home of a friend. Or here at Emile's. But he's gone off, roaming around the world again."

The man passed a handkerchief over his face to wipe away sweat. *Why does he seem familiar?* she wondered.

"Did you—" he bent closer, eyes piercing with the glint of a sparkling crystal—did you try to hold him too fast?"

Beatrice nodded, tears on her cheeks. "I think that if I had let go soon enough he would have come back to me in a little while . . ."

"The awful truth, the awful . . ." He muttered, back once more in his own dream of horror. "It's worse for me because I've seen the man I'm looking for. But I can't reach him!"

"'Seen'?" She was puzzled. "The police—"

"Can do nothing. Tried. No trace. Now they don't believe me."

"Around the world to every port of call," she murmured, wrapped in sorrow. Then sprang up from the table, staring wildly at the stranger. "He's been gone one week?"

"One week."

"Are—are we talking about Adam Stark!"

"Yes! What do you know?" the stranger gripped her arm.

"What I've told you. He's gone wandering round the world."

The feverish hand still held her and they glared fiercely, despairingly into each other's faces. "Not gone," he said firmly. "I've seen him. That small gray car sliding through the smog. Sliding through the rain. Small, silvery, shining. Once in a traffic jam I tried to touch the car with my hand, reaching far out of the window. Close. Close. But I could not touch anything."

Frightened, Beatrice clutched at her handbag and moved to leave.

"No—please," he begged. "Don't leave me."

And when had she last heard those words?

"Stay with me . . . it's true. I've seen — " he shuddered, " — that face! So gaunt, so haggard and so wild, pressed against the closed driver's window. So near I could tell his scarf was green. I called, but there was no answer. I could not hear the sound of the gray car's motor — but in the roar of so many motors how could it be singled out? The lips of the face moved, but there was no sound . . . I thought I could never suffer anything worse than the amnesia I'd had for almost a year. The vacancy of no memory . . . But this was worse."

From outside came the faint sound of a siren. "And," he whispered, "I know now that each time I've seen him there's been a siren screeching. Drowning his voice. But I could see the words on his lips, 'Oh, I must rest . . . must . . . must rest . . . *But I cannot close my eyes!*'"

Stunned and faint, Beatrice murmured, "You searched for Adam Stark. You saw him. What is he to you?"

. . . High on the concrete bridges went the small gray shape, passing over the city . . . Alone . . . alone in the roaring . . . never stops. *Burning, burning eyes . . . cannot stop . . . moving on . . . so sleepy . . . cannot close my eyes . . . Where is my brother!*

The Reckoning

The first two ballots placed *The Rack* first; the next two shifted Petaja's tale to the number one position; then the winner moved in neck-and-neck before pulling ahead. Later on Petaja tied again, but during the last half of the race, the number one story had a clear lead. Both Ketcham and *The Voice* drew some dislike, but not enough so that we can consider these tales controversial or that the general reaction to both was not favorable, though other items were preferred. Here are the final standings:

(1) *A Cry From Beyond*, Victor Rousseau; (2) *Only Gone Before*, Emil Petaja; (3) *The Monsters*, Murray Leinster; (4) *The Siren of the Snakes*, Arlton Eadie; (5) *The Voice*, Nell Kay; (6) *The Rack*, G. G. Ketcham.

More active readers commented on the cover than ever before, and the approval was nearly unanimous.

They Called Him Ghost

by Laurence J. Cahill

Whence LAURENCE J. CAHILL came, and whither he went, we know not. He appeared in the issue of WEIRD TALES cited, and Editor Farnsworth Wright thought highly of this story, as did a number of the readers. A second story, *Charon*, ran in the January 1935 issue, and this, too, was well appreciated by the more appreciative readers. The rest is silence.

WHAT I DISCOVERED in the fading light of yesterday's sunset is keeping me stunned in nerve and muscle. Tamper with mysteries, ye who dare! and begrudge not what ye find. There is reason for the icy circulation running in my veins this morning.

"And what is there to be afraid of?" argued Hatch—I can hear his silky voice very much as if it were beside me now—"when nighttime is the same as broad daylight only the sun isn't shining?"

I confess I nearly took him at his word. And the Devil himself can witness how nearly fatal that was. I am alive, all that's necessary for the present, and Hatch can't prevent this being written. For the power is at

last on *my* side, and I have more of the true facts now than Hatch or anyone else has. There is a lot of meat in that saying, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." But my conscience urges me to tell something of what I know.

What man since time began has looked on as strange a sight as I saw last night?

All matters proceed from cause and effect. Remember everything has an explanation as sensible as the 2 and 2 that make 4. What I know this morning numbs me with its reality, and I would be a liar to deny it. Yet I don't expect to surrender to fright, and I'm not intending to quit this house.

The secret of the attic is out, and the *thing* that sought to get into that attic lies up in that desolate place now on the unvarnished floor. For the sixth time I've gone up and looked at it lying there, and I'm wondering just what to do. That's a direct challenge, and I was ready enough for challenges when I came here.

I say "ready," but when I boast on that point I am inaccurate. The enemy was clever and without a word almost compelled me to hand him my full-loaded Colt. Had I let him have the gun I would have become another victim in the mystery of Goeste Hall.

I came here with a charred and and crumbled scrap of paper for a guide, an unsigned document on which was written the address of this house and a number of unfinished sentences. In this house something of staggering value was hidden, said the document.

Where that curiously wordy document had been before it reached me I'll never learn. Fire and smoke had given it a black deckle-edge. Sufficient to say that it passed from hand to hand as a "joke" and finally ended its wanderings in my office, where nothing merely puzzling is called a joke until it is looked at twice. The result of it was that I came here to find out where that treasure of staggering value was hidden and what it might be. I found that the house was shunned because of a reputation for grisly danger, and the legend of the house was a riddle that no one guessed the answer of. The house "wasn't natural" and was about to be broken up and removed because it kept the land from being purchasable.

A house that "isn't natural" is a house steeped in a ghost story.

In the nick of time I bought the house before the wreckers arrived, and I settled down to live here until its mystery was solved. The danger would be mine alone; and so would be the victory.

Information which I manufactured and gave to newspapers spread

all over three states the news that Goeste Hall had lately found a buyer not afraid of ghosts. I was sniffing the flavor of this riddle and asking danger to pay a call if it cared to.

I waited for a week.

Then along came a stranger who introduced himself as Hatch, and said, "Interesting place." He paused. "Do you want to sell it?"

Whether upon the wrong track or right on the heels of a hunch, I took in every visible detail of Hatch's appearance before I spoke.

I said, "No."

The face of this fellow Hatch changed slightly at my retort. "Your answer is 'No'?"

I said, "My answer is 'No'."

Things I had heard and things I had been told seemed very close then, and I could smell their warning closer every second. The riddle of this house as explained to me was a legend that stuck up its head every thirty years or so, and according to the signs it was due to repeat soon. There were people who pretended to laugh at it, but they were well-meaning people who not only wouldn't live here on a bet but who would shudder at the idea itself. In the matter of the riddle, there was good indication that there was something real about it somewhere. Evidence doesn't have to be rounded off and complete to be convincing. I had that fire-curved document which had passed uncomprehended through so many hands—and I was holding it for that grim moment when peril ought to be followed by triumph. If I won, I hoped I would carry no grievous scars; if I died trying, I hoped I'd die quickly.

To untangle the rest of the riddle was my job.

In 1813 the man who owned this house was crippled for life by an unknown assailant who tried to break in and get up into the attic. In 1842 someone else owned this property, and in that year a stranger killed a watchdog and nearly strangled a servant in undertaking to enter the house and reach the attic. The year 1875 saw the third attempt take place—a heedless and very bloody effort by someone never identified who fought to get into the attic. By that time the house was locked and barred and pretty well fortified to protect those who lived in it.

All the countryside knew the evidence. What did it mean? What was in the attic to attract dangerous strangers—something of staggering value, so it looked. Yet nobody had ever found it; and although armed with a difficult key to the riddle, I had been unable to find that hidden something myself in the short time since I had bought the house—and I had looked well.

True to the legend, in 1907 a man never seen before in that generation called at the house and made a desperate dash for the attic. A whirlwind battle ended in his running away and escaping just as police arrived.

The legend is exactly the same every time. One hundred and twenty-one years ago someone with the ferocity of a madman had sought to get into that region upstairs, by way of this door. The same thing had happened every thirty years or so since, and with the old typical touch and treatment. Were they different men each time? Thirty years is a long span apart. Most men well into their full-grown years drop off to the grave before another thirty years pass by. Nevertheless, the ghostly flavor of this riddle grows plain in the suspicion that some particular *one*, and not a train of men, wanted to get into the attic of this ancient house. The graybeards in the village believed that someone had clearly been trying over a century, making his eerie attempts to force his way toward some secret no one else had discovered, then lying low for thirty years, and trying again, again and again. The same fellow every time. Not a human being; that's the point. Mortals don't live with that sort of vigor for a hundred and twenty-one years.

Nothing had occurred since 1907 — but the usual thirty-year interval was almost gone by.

Hatch was the only visitor I had had, and I didn't know him from Adam. Why would he want to buy the place?

"Nope," I said to Hatch. "And I guess that's going to be final."

And I stretched my hand out behind the door, into the costumer, and picked up a pistol which I shoved without being seen into my pocket. Pistols and sometimes, so it was said, sawed-off shotguns had been kept in costumers behind this iron-bolted front door for other owners fearful of the thirty-year visitor.

Hatch muttered to himself my answer. "All right, all right," he agreed, and he smiled. He stepped back a couple of paces and cast his glance over the house swiftly. His turned-up chin was like the business edge of a chisel, and I saw that his whole face was sharp. His age would have been around thirty-five, making him a year or two younger than myself.

"I walked all the way from town to see your place, Mr. — Mr. — er —".

I kept a cynical silence, said nothing.

"Mr. Carter," he succeeded at last. That he was here for a purpose I had already taken for granted, and in the course of events there was no question but that he had learned my name somehow.

"Would you object if I asked to look at the inside of this building

called Goeste Hall?" He smiled more brightly than ever but I felt there was a resolute earnestness beneath his features. "I'd be glad to look at an old house as handsome as this."

It's a long walk from town. "Come in," I said.

He thanked me dryly and stepped with an almost cautious tread through the door. It was a little after six in the evening.

Hand still in pocket, I noiselessly slid back the hammer on my pistol and let it down again. "You have been told this is Goeste Hall?" I asked, calling it *Gest* as is the habit with people living near here.

He was sniffing deeply and excitedly. "Yes; it's kind of a show place in this part of the state they tell me."

I nodded.

A strange tingling gripped me. Was this fellow Hatch the newest sign of that extraordinary legend that went with the house? How much of it was really hidden from me? What did I have yet to learn and what stuff was I gambling with?

"Start downstairs," I advised. "And you can look at the top floors later."

It might be to my advantage to see what this soft-spoken fellow named Hatch would do.

He obeyed my suggestion, and I got the notion that his interest in the lower floor was only half genuine, while I watched him closely. His talk was careful, as if he was mindful not to say something different or unusual. But one careless slip he made and I felt the hair on my neck slowly stir and rise. When crossing through this hall he turned toward that tall white door there, that leads to the attic, and then immediately corrected his direction.

For a moment he had been heading for the attic.

As I thought of it, I had to allow that in ninety-nine guesses out of a hundred it wouldn't have meant anything. Between that white door and the attic is part of the second floor. He might have only intended to inspect the first floor and the second floor with no thought in any way of the attic. A casual mistake perhaps, his turning toward that door before seeing the rest of the ground floor—except that his conduct wasn't casual; he turned away from that door too quickly, determined not to let me guess what he really wanted.

Neither of us spoke in that silence. I kept my mouth shut, but my brain seemed to be yelling. My paragraph in the newspapers had worked, had hurried the thirty-year visitor to his task again. This certain party was trying to get into the attic, as he had tried in 1813, and in

1875, and 1842, and 1907. The mysterious and terrible stranger was here just as decidedly as the minute then dragging out its sixty seconds, and he was forcing me, and I was facing him.

He had come for that something of staggering value hidden in the attic.

What did that dilapidated, carelessly scorched document which I possessed really tell me? Nothing but the location of this house and a jumble of fire-bitten sentences. Such writing as "Truth lets itself be seen in one flash and then men forget. They name it the nightmare or a daydream. If they recognized it as the great secret. . . As certain as the circulation of the blood and the beat of the pulse, it comes despite birth and death, in its allotted time."

Cloudy, hazy sentences, meaning nothing, but hinting at something colossal. This house of legends and riddles and secrets. A cheerless bargain. I now owned it. The mystery was mine to leave alone or grapple with.

Who was this Hatch?

Fast as the sun was setting, light remained to permit me to see his features well. "Calls himself Hatch; he's a man like myself," I thought without being immediately convinced. Even though I believed in a sane summing up of everything, I wasn't certain, wasn't too certain.

Never in my life had I had cause to be cold-sure there are matters that are supernatural. The voice of my soul kept saying, "There cannot be anything supernatural about any of this;" but my judgment was jarred and sickened. Common sense struggled hard. By force of reason, looking at Hatch, I couldn't stomach the idea that he was different from me.

A puzzle, but strictly a human puzzle. I was arguing against my own doubts. It helps to talk to yourself, but you've got to talk fast!

I must keep cool. No need was plainer than that. Having made a gesture in the newspaper items about myself buying Goeste Hall, I was positive that some day the ageless, baffling visitor would return. What he would look like I hadn't been able to imagine. In spite of all his knocking on this front door for intervals covering at least a century and a quarter, he must forever hold on to his diabolical strength—for he never weakened with age and he was always likely to attack violently.

What was in the attic that he wanted?

Pretending that he had not gone to the door at the foot of the attic staircase Hatch stood in a quiet attitude with open hands at his sides. Violence, none. Self-controlled. Canny and crafty. In the four times he

had been at this house he had learned something. Hatch-or-whatever-his-name-was was making haste more slowly, not making his bloody effort with the foolish clumsy impatience that ruined him four times before.

A few seconds went by. It must have been like a year to both of us. Tongue silent, I said in my own thoughts, "Hatch, here is one fool who is going to find out what you're after. But if anybody gets hurt it'll be we two fools together, not one."

Pocketed in my coat, the stock of the pistol was slippery with the sweat from my hand.

"Suppose you tell me, Mr. Hatch, why you are in this house?"

Delay I figured would only waste time, and on that assumption I made the first move. His face gave a dull response to my question, as much as to say he didn't begin to understand me, and the hat he held clutched in the tips of his fingers loosened in that clutch and slid to the floor.

As he stooped to pick up his hat I bent forward myself to get every mood revealed in his expression. Papers sprayed out of his coat and at the same time the pistol plunged out of my pocket. They lay between us on the carpet, papers and pistol.

Quicker than I usually act, I recovered the gun and cased it again where it had been. Hatch fumbled and lifted the stuff he had dropped at his feet. He saw me replace the gun, and an effect of some kind crossed his face. But he was smart; his eyes were dull and steady.

"Those papers of yours show diagrams of the plan of a house," I said. "And I've got a notion I saw the name of Goeste Hall, too, written upon them."

"Quite right, Mr. Carter," he replied. His voice was deliberate.

"What about it?" I challenged.

He swallowed. His eyes were still like stone and very steady. "Why are you carrying that gun, Carter?"

I was impressed by the artfulness of this caller Hatch in trying to put me on the defensive instead of answering my question. I didn't allow this strategy to trip me. "What are you here for, Hatch?" I repeated.

In the middle of another swallow he changed expression and grinned suddenly. "Don't tell me, Mr. Carter, that the legend of this house is scaring you?"

Playing up to that cue, I grinned myself. "No part of it, Hatch. Nothing scares me. But I'm living here with the sole purpose of finding out what it is you want. And what you wanted over one hundred years ago."

Hatch chuckled quietly. "I understand." He looked leisurely around

the ceilings and walls. "I don't blame you. A place like this with a ghost tag on it would get anybody uneasy."

Possibly some fifty inches separated us as we stood here talking. And I decided that if Hatch came closer I'd do well to strike him down first and figure it out afterward.

"You know there is a legend of an eternal and inhuman visitor to this house," I said to him. "Are you willing to spill what you know?"

"Why would I refuse?" Hatch smiled indulgently. "I don't have to. There are no ghosts in this house. A misunderstanding, maybe."

"Thank heaven we're getting somewhere," I re-countered in the best of humor. "And what is the misunderstanding?"

"Anything I know about the mystery of this house is yours, gratis, Mr. Carter," he offered. "Mind if I sit down when I say it?"

I nodded to that chair on the other side of this hall. It was still fifty inches away.

"Carter," said Hatch, chuckling, and swinging one foot with an odd lightness, "do you think I'm a ghost?"

The temperature of the hall was forty degrees below blood heat and I shivered at that moment. "You are going to tell me what you're here for," I replied.

Hatch's shoulders hunched casually. "Charles Goeste, the man who built this place," he spoke with an easy acquaintance, "was a pioneer in botany. He lived in 1783 and he was crazy about plants. Not much deviltry to that, eh? He knew more about plants than any other man in his day, and a lot more than any man has learned up to this time. He was selfish, close-mouthed. Except for an assistant of his, named Luke, no one else ever shared his work. Other botanists came to Charles Goeste for information, but they never got any. They knew he made records of what he did in several notebooks, which he probably kept in the attic here where he worked. And when he died they sought to get at those notebooks—and because I'm a botanist myself, Mr. Carter, you see me here this evening hoping to find what they sought."

I didn't take my eyes off Hatch's face.

"Simple, isn't it, Mr. Carter?"

Certainly. Too simple. Even if I had been a total stranger to the case, that kind of plausible story would have reeked with suspicion. What was I to do? Talk and with presence of mind keep on talking. Each of us was trying to throw the other off his guard.

"These men who called at the house and who wanted to rummage the attic in the years 1813, 1842, 1875, and 1907, were botanists?"

After nothing else but Charles Goeste's tame secrets about plant-growing?"

Hatch shrugged. "What else? Isn't that more sensible than a foolish ghost story, Mr. Carter?"

I let that go. "Nevertheless, Hatch," I remarked, "there was a murder committed here in the early days of this house.

"There was," he admitted quietly.

"How do you know?" I parried.

He changed his position and I saw that for the first time he was startled and unprepared. But his voice was bland.

"Nobody can be sure," he evaded with a prankish grin. "Charles Goeste was jealous of his discoveries. Perhaps he murdered his assistant, Luke. A visiting botanist might have been killed by Goeste in a professional argument. An accident might have looked like a murder. I don't believe any of it, myself. You'll have to agree that botanists aren't men of bloodthirsty traits."

Hatch was a liar. Of that I was sure. My right hand didn't shift from the gun warming in the pocket of my coat.

And suddenly Hatch made a light statement that gave me an unexpected jolt. "I have a notion, Mr. Carter, that the reason a legend has been created about this house is that Charles Goeste's name was pronounced differently when he was alive. Today they call this place *Gest* Hall, and when they speak of its builder they call him Charles *Gest*. But in 1783, when he was living, they called him *Ghost*. See?"

At just about that time upon my shoulders approaching evening settled clammily like the pressure of a million fingers.

I knew Hatch missed nothing as he saw me wince with irritation. "A man's name is spelled G-O-E-S-T-E, and it's pronounced *Ghost*. For intelligent adults such as us, Mr. Carter, that's silly. We have no truck with the kind of people who fear the darkness and evil spirits. And what is there to be afraid of," he purred, "when night-time is the same as broad daylight, only the sun isn't shining?"

Sound sensible logic, given with a laugh, is like throwing cold water on a foolishly glowing imagination. It was almost a relief to wriggle out of this with the conclusion that there was no mystery, no riddle, and no secret thing in the attic.

Very vague and useless seemed those sentences: "Truth lets itself be seen in one flash and then men forget. They name it the nightmare or a daydream. If they recognize it as the great secret . . . As certain as the circulation of the blood and the beat of the pulse it comes despite birth and death, in its allotted time."

What was that battered document worth? It had been laid on my desk because others had knit their brows and then laughed at it. The ravings of an untraceable and long-forgotten maniac, they had agreed. Were they right? Was Hatch's story true?

Vigilance slowly being undermined, I began to get disgusted with myself for the dramatic way I was elaborating this visit of a man interested only in plants.

It would have taken little enough time for me to lift the pistol from my pocket, hand it over to Hatch, and say, "I'm ashamed of my superstitious doubts. If you can do so, accept my apology for being a bad host. I'm glad you made it plain I've been an idiot. Go up to the attic if you would like, stay as long as you want and leave when you please. For the rest of this, let's forget it."

On the edge of making all these statements I suddenly noticed that Hatch was staring keenly at my coat where the pocket wrapped the pistol. I would that minute have surrendered to him.

A chill new as frost swept through me. Deadly danger was no farther than those fifty inches from where I watched. My five senses got the flavor all at once. Here was a ghost or a something that lived for ever and whom threats couldn't hurt. Its name was Hatch. It sat immovable, waiting for me to relax my defense.

How firm was my health, how solid were my nerves? Could I protect myself if some demon's prank happened that I never experienced before?

"Carter, you're no coward," I murmured to myself. "Get what information you need to get from this that calls himself Hatch, solve the riddle of this house, and then throw him out or die yourself defeated."

Facing the attic staircase, my chair was nearer to that door than his. From some remote corner of my mind came an idea that was good because there was none other either worse or better.

"Mr. Hatch, I don't say you're wrong, and I'm not sure I'm right. There are questions about this house that aren't answered. But I have a kind of scientific nature myself. You're a botanist, you say. If Charles Goeste left scientific secrets I'm as willing to see them as you are. I'll take you to the attic if you'll tell me what those secrets are you expect to find."

Hatch stood eagerly. He, the thirty-year visitor, was attic-bound. Meanwhile, while forging up those stairs he figured he could content me with any line of talk. Talk was cheap. Talk would pull the wool over my eyes. I wouldn't be able to follow him, whatever he said. My scientific claims had been made in a blustering tone of voice. Evidently I was a

fraud. Hatch's face plainly showed he had no objections to talking to a self-important bluff.

"All right, Mr. Carter," he agreed, "if you'll lead me up those stairs."

"No; you first," I directed politely, and I curled a finger around the trigger of the pocket-heated gun.

"Know anything about plants?" inquired Hatch. I could see that he beat down the temptation to leap to the attic in a wild dash.

"Well—well—that is—" I stammered, giving him further cause to smile at me for a fool.

"Charles Goeste stumbled upon one fact about plants," continued Hatch smoothly. "He found that in five generations of plant life a plant was reproduced exactly in every way. Do you get that? A plant dies, and returns among its own offshoots five generations farther along. It's the same plant."

I gazed up at Hatch stupidly. A hint of what this was all about was beginning to dawn in me, but it wouldn't do to let Hatch know I followed him closely.

"You're a scientist, are you, Mr. Carter?" Hatch looked over his shoulder at me and laughed at my expression. "Well, scientific friend, that was Charles Goeste's secret and I intend to find it among his notebooks tonight. He went farther than plants." Hatch chuckled. "Using that fact about plants being reborn in five generations, cell for cell, he tested it upon animals."

At that moment Hatch laughed again, and his laugh echoed stridently up the stair well.

But I didn't laugh. The hair on my neck had started to bristle a second time. Faster I gripped the pistol, for bit by bit the unholy riddle became as clear as ghostly white light.

Charles Goeste had indeed stumbled upon something. In his deftly groping fingers he had seized the secret of the universe. The whole and entire truth about life was revealed by a grubby plant—a plant that grew and died and left seeds that grew and died so rapidly that these deaths and births were like a moving picture to Goeste's canny eye. At the end of five generations of reproduction a plant, in the words of Hatch, was *the same identical* plant it had been those five generations back—it was *reincarnation*! Without doubt Goeste made good his astounding knowledge by observing insects that bred swiftly and lived and died in rapid cycles. Then small animals. The law of back-to-earth in five generations was as true as the law of gravity. Everything that lives, from the bacteria to the human being, obeyed this law!

A man returns to the human race in his natural flesh and blood about one hundred and fifty years after he dies. He keeps on returning, for thousands of years, millions of years. I was living when the earliest men roamed the world. So were you. I'll live again until Earth crumbles and dissolves. You will also.

"So science is one of your hobbies, Mr. Carter," bubbled Hatch light-heartedly. He pushed open the attic door and I was close to his heels, trembling in my knees and aching with a fierce tension.

No wonder murder had been committed over Goeste's priceless notebooks! Nothing remarkable now about Hatch or others like Hatch coming here ever since Goeste died, rabidly seeking his alleged written records.

If a man knew all that Goeste managed to find out he'd possess Aladdin's lamp of the past, present and future. He might be able to trace his own past lives. He might accumulate all the experience of his earlier existences. What is more important, he might be able to plan in advance what he should do when he lived again. He'd be the only superman ever born.

An upright fellow, with this knowledge at his use, could be an agent for immeasurable good; but if he were vicious he could plan horrible evils.

Where Hatch got the clues he brought with him I didn't yet know; but that he was a powerful and dangerous type to own such clues, I didn't doubt after reading the meaning in his face. The scrap of document that had led me to this house—its queer text began to take a definite shape and outline.

I couldn't be positive how much of a normal man or what part of a reincarnation Hatch was as each moment increased the risk of my problem. To make him divulge whatever he could was my stubborn intention. How far was it safe to go? Was Hatch's knowledge already so superior that he could outtrick me and my loaded Colt when he finally decided to do that? It was a bleak consolation to know that in its very grim way time would settle this conundrum.

I still looked dumb and bewildered when Hatch took the drawn diagrams of the house—diagrams brittle and stained—from his coat and consulted them while standing in the middle of the attic. His birdlike features were sharpened abnormally by suspense. Silence in that place and at that time would have been unbearable but for Hatch's noisy breathing.

The under pitch of the roof engaged his attention, and from his pockets

he produced a steel jimmy with which he pried out a false partition. Into his hands fell Goeste's seven notebooks, and a number of other odd documents.

Hatch nearly went crazy with delight.

And what I thought was the rotting vibrations of the floor was the rattling of my heels as nervous tremors went through my bones.

There might arrive no better moment than this for slashing those notes out of Hatch's fingers and driving him from the house. He had been of service and now he certainly should be halted before the advantage crept into his palm once and for all. Impressed as I was at the significance of the things I had heard in his contemptuous voice, I hadn't been aware how paralyzing these things had grown. My hand felt cold and half dead as it drew the pistol from its place.

I never completed that move. For it became apparent that I wasn't looking at Hatch—I was looking at *Goeste*. Only Goeste, born again five generations later, could handle those papers so naturally. Hatch was Goeste!

My teeth were chattering.

The white flare of truth was more ghastly than ever. It was Goeste who had kept his jealous secrets to himself, who murdered his assistant, Luke; Goeste who had plotted schemes for returning to his house and continuing his work when he was born again. Goeste had returned in 1813. Goeste had returned in 1842. And he had beat vainly on this front door in 1875 and 1907.

Charles Goeste, calling himself Hatch, had said to me at this front door half an hour ago, "Interesting place. Do you want to sell it?"

Hatch was his name now for the common and ordinary reason that names change as generations intermingle.

Clearer now was that document in my possession, probably written by no less than Goeste in person. He had left careful instructions to be passed down through the family and its different generations, so that he himself would see those instructions and recognize them when he was born again. He would recognize them as having been his own instructions, and he'd go and find those note-books he had cunningly packed away before he died. And yet how would he understand those mystifying instructions and recognize them as having been written by himself?

Bit by bit, the explanation naturally emerged into the light as I pondered it. Only a scrap of Charles Goeste's instructions had I seen, and that scrap, carelessly treated had been half destroyed by fire. He must have *left other copies*, more complete, of that document, so that in what-

ever branch of the family he cropped up again, reborn, there would be one or more of those documents near enough to compel his attention. And he'd read, and recognize . . .

"Truth lets itself be seen in one flash, and men forget. They name it the nightmare or a daydream. If they recognize it as the great secret . . ."

There was the key, explained more fully in some other family copy of that document, some copy not half burnt or half obliterated; some copy upon which Goeste had at last got his hungry hands. Goeste, getting around under the name of Hatch, had seized the key at last. For in sleep, "They name it the nightmare or a daydream," and perhaps only once in a lifetime, a man remembers something of his past dead lives. He remembers, wakes and forgets. All of us, I who am writing and you who are reading, remember dreaming perhaps just once of curious events *we never saw in this life*. But Goeste with those precautions would not forget. He had so arranged matters that he *couldn't* forget. He'd be instantly reminded of the musty documents all different members of the family always read and puzzled over. And he'd recognize the absolute link between his dream and particular passages of those mystifying documents. He'd recognize *himself!* The attic! To the attic! . . .

Every thirty years or so? 1813, 1842, 1875, 1907? What explanation to that?

Another cryptic sentence in the smok-blackened copy of that immortal document: "As certain as the circulation of the blood and the beat of the pulse, it comes despite birth and death, in its allotted time."

There was the proof of the thirty-year interval and how it worked. It mattered not that a man died early or late, thirty years from the time he last dreamt that magic glimpse of former lives he'd dream of the past again—even though he died and was reborn meanwhile. In thirty years, a little more, a little less, he'd dream again, and it might possibly be in the same lifetime if he lived to a great old age. But to a great old age Goeste never lived. Four successive times he had died remarkably young. Had he hastened his own deaths to speed a course to the Fifth Generation when he would be Charles Goeste fully and completely again? You could only guess at that. Legend said he was always a grim *young man* knocking on this door. Every thirty years, a shade more or less—as often as he dreamed of his past lives and recognized the connection between the dream and the brittle old documents.

Every thirty years, a shade more or less, the dream aroused him to a realization that he was Charles Goeste or a part of *Charles Goeste* with

strains of other ancestors in him, and he'd be drawn to this house as to a magnet—drawn here just "as certain as the circulation of the blood." It was a clockwork cycle which made one important blood corpuscle travel thirty years through all the cell-structure of the body, transmuted from father to son, before it reached the brain once more and caused the the strange flashing dream again—a dream that was just a glimpse; it never stayed long. And for all his documents even Goeste couldn't keep his hold on that dream more than a brief while. For a short vivid space of time he'd remember the dream, recognize the documents, and understand what was waiting for him in the attic. He would storm at this door, fail, and then lose his grip on the past and forget.

Or perhaps it had not been Goeste at all! Perhaps it was but an atavistic memory. Goeste's great discovery may have so impressed him with its world-shaking significance, that it was imprinted upon the germ-plasm and transmitted to his descendants, one of whom in each generation gained a flash of this inherited memory and came storming into Goeste Hall—in 1813, in 1842, in 1875, and in 1907.

But the thirty-year impulse which had aroused him yesterday was the time of highest opportunity, because, whatever his name now, he was soul and body the Charles Goeste he had been one hundred and fifty years ago. The canny Charles Goeste of 1783. For this was the Fifth Generation!

So I patterned and pieced it to myself as anybody would have done with the facts spilling like water through a broken dam.

Hatch, in my mind Goeste, pawed over his papers. I watched him. Queer cries of satisfaction, of a whining kind more animal than human, escaped his throat.

There were no lights in the attic. The setting sun was slanting almost horizontally through a dormer window. Hatch had resourcefully taken a Colonial beveled mirror off the wall and stood it on a table so that its reflected red sunlight lit up the documents he devoured.

Strange words filed across the Goeste-written manuscripts. Unearthly pictures and unconventional designs. I bent over them myself and for a while—I lost track of how long—forgot the pistol in my pocket as I thumbed those dusty heaps of evidence with both hands.

Gone was my caution and any recollection of the peril I was in.

A steel-engraved portrait turned up in that bundle of stuff, a nearly camera-fine drawing of a man labeled "Charles Goeste." By that time either Hatch's teeth or my own were chattering like knives. Hatch's supreme intake of breath might have fallen on my ear. It might have

been a sidelong sight of his raising arms in the mirror that saved me in that sunset hour. I'm not sure. But he was inches from my throat when in a frenzy of action I drove him to the floor with a whipping left fist that split his ear at the base of his brain and knocked him senseless.

Yet I ignored him and with eyes that must have been red as fire stared at the portrait. There was no sound, and yet thunder seemed to roll through the attic. For here was revelation and there was no mistake about it. What I saw in the mirror and what I saw in the portrait matched as one.

I was Charles Goeste!

Old memories and shadows stirred in my burning consciousness. I was Charles Goeste, and all I had once learned was as new worlds to me. At my feet lay Luke, the crafty assistant who had vainly sought the hidden partition and its note-books when I prepared them both, and who had to pillage the copies of my instructions from different generations of the family—Luke, who had killed me those one hundred and fifty years ago to intercept my secrets.

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WORLD-WIDE ADVENTURE

The Phantom *'Rickshaw*

by Rudyard Kipling

(author of *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, *The Mark of the Beast*)

Whether there is now, or is about to be, a Kipling revival is something we cannot tell; but we can say that there ought to be! The fact that this is one of the "classic" weird tales means that a few of you have read it, and perhaps have it in your collection—but that most of you have only heard of it at best, because . . . well, who bothers to read the classics, these days, when you can pass for learned and literate by reading what someone has written *about* them instead?

ONE OF THE FEW advantages that India has over England is a great Knowability. After five years' service a man is directly or indirectly acquainted with the two or three hundred Civilians in his Province, all the Messes of ten or twelve Regiments and Batteries, and some fifteen hundred other people of the non-official caste. In ten years his knowledge should be doubled, and at the end of twenty he knows, or knows something about, every Englishman in the Empire, and may travel anywhere and everywhere without paying hotel-bills.

Globe-trotters who expect entertainment as a right, have, even within my memory, blunted this openheartedness, but nonetheless today, if you belong to the Inner Circle and are neither a Bear nor a Black Sheep, all houses are open to you, and our small world is very, very kind and helpful.

Rickett of Kamartha stayed with Polder of Kumaon some fifteen years ago. He meant to stay two nights, but was knocked down by rheumatic fever, and for six weeks disorganized Polder's establishment, stopped Polder's work, and nearly died in Polder's bedroom. Polder behaves as though he had been placed under eternal obligation by Rickett, and yearly sends the little Ricketts a box of presents and toys. It is the same everywhere. The men who do not take the trouble to conceal from you their opinion that you are an incompetent ass, and the women who blacken your character and misunderstand your wife's amusements, will work themselves to the bone in your behalf if you fall sick or into serious trouble.

Heatherlegh, the Doctor, kept, in addition to his regular practice, a hospital on his private account—an arrangement of loose boxes for Incurables, his friend called it—but it was really a sort of fitting-up shed for craft that had been damaged by stress of weather. The weather in India is often sultry, and since the tale of bricks is always a fixed quantity, and the only liberty allowed is permission to work overtime and get no thanks, men occasionally break down and become as mixed as the metaphors in this sentence.

Heatherlegh is the dearest doctor that ever was, and his invariable prescription to all his patients is, 'Lie low, go slow, and keep cool.' He says that more men are killed by overwork than the importance of this world justifies. He maintains that overwork slew Pansay, who died under his hands about three years ago. He has, of course, the right to speak authoritatively, and he laughs at my theory that there was a crack in Pansay's head and a little bit of the Dark World came through and pressed him to death. 'Pansay went off the handle,' says Heatherlegh, 'after the stimulus of long leave at Home. He may or he may or he may not have behaved like a blackguard to Mrs. Keith Wessington. My notion is that the work of the Katabundi Settlement ran him off his legs, and that he took to brooding and making much of an ordinary P. & O. flirtation. He certainly was engaged to Miss Mannering, and she certainly broke off the engagement. Then he took a feverish chill and all that nonsense about ghosts developed. Overwork started his

illness, kept it alight, and killed him, poor devil. Write him off to the System that uses one man to do the work of two and a half men.'

I do not believe this. I used to sit up with Pansay sometimes when Heatherlegh was called out to Patients and I happened to be within claim. The man would make me most unhappy by describing in a low, even voice, the procession that was always passing at the bottom of his bed. He had a sick man's command of language. When he recovered I suggested that he should write out the whole affair from beginning to end, knowing that ink might assist him to ease his mind.

He was in a high fever while he was writing, and the blood-and-thunder Magazine diction he adopted did not calm him. Two months afterwards he was reported fit for duty, but, in spite of the fact that he was urgently needed to help an undermanned Commission stagger through a deficit, he preferred to die; vowing at the last that he was hag-ridden. I got his manuscript before he died, and this is his version of the affair, dated 1885, exactly as he wrote it.

MY DOCTOR TELLS ME that I need rest and change of air. It is not improbable that I shall get both ere long—rest that neither the red-coated messenger nor the mid-day gun can break, and change of air far beyond that which any homeward-bound steamer can give me. In the meantime I am resolved to stay where I am; and, in flat defiance of my doctor's orders, to take all the world into my confidence. You shall learn for yourselves the precise nature of my malady, and shall, too, judge for yourselves whether any man born of woman on this weary earth was ever so tormented as I.

Speaking now as a condemned criminal might speak ere the dropbolts are drawn, 'my story, wild and hideously improbable as it may appear, demands at least attention. That it will ever receive credence I utterly disbelieve. Two months ago I should have scouted as mad or drunk the man who had dared tell me the like. Two months ago I was the happiest man in India. Today, from Peshawar to the sea, there is no one more wretched. My doctor and I are the only two who know this. His explanation is, that my brain, digestion, and eyesight are all slightly affected; giving rise to my frequent and persistent 'delusions.' Delusions, indeed! I call him a fool; but he attends me still with the same unwearied smile, the same bland professional manner, the same neatly-trimmed red whiskers, till I begin to suspect that I am an ungrateful, evil-tempered invalid. But you shall judge for yourselves.

Three years ago it was my fortune—my great misfortune—to sail

from Gravesend to Bombay, on return from long leave, with one Agnes Keith-Wessington, wife of an officer on the Bombay side. It does not in the least concern you to know what manner of woman she was. Be content with the knowledge that, ere the voyage had ended, both she and I were desperately and unreasoningly in love with one another. Heaven knows that I can make the admission now without one particle of vanity.

In matters of this sort there is always one who gives and another who accepts. From the first day of our ill-omened attachment, I was conscious that Agnes's passion was a stronger, a more dominant, and—if I may use the expression—a purer sentiment than mine. Whether she recognized the fact then, I do not know. Afterwards it was bitterly plain to both of us.

Arrived at Bombay in the spring of the year, we went our respective ways, to meet no more for the next three or four months, when my leave and her love took us both to Simla. There we spent the season together; and there my fire of straw burnt itself out to a pitiful end with the closing year. I attempt no excuse. I make no apology. Mrs. Wessington had given up much for my sake, and was prepared to give up all. From my own lips, in August 1882, she learnt that I was sick of her presence, tired of her company, and weary of the sound of her voice. Ninety-nine women out of a hundred would have wearied of me as I wearied of them; seventy-five of that number would have promptly avenged themselves by active and obtrusive flirtation with other men. Mrs. Wessington was the hundredth. On her neither my openly-expressed aversion nor the cutting brutalities with which I garnished our interviews had the least effect.

'Jack, darling!' was her one eternal cuckoo cry: 'I'm sure it's all a mistake—a hideous mistake; and we'll be good friends again some day. Please forgive me, Jack, dear.'

I was the offender, and I knew it. That knowledge transformed my pity into passive endurance, and, eventually, into blind hate—the same instinct, I suppose, which prompts a man to savagely stamp on the spider he has but half killed. And with this hate in my bosom the season of 1882 came to an end.

Next year we met again at Simla—she with her monotonous face and timid attempts at reconciliation, and I with loathing of her in every fibre of my frame. Several times I could not avoid meeting her alone; and on each occasion her words were identically the same. Still the unreasoning wail that it was all a 'mistake'; and still the hope of even-

tually 'making friends.' I might have seen, had I cared to look, that that hope only was keeping her alive. She grew more wan and thin month by month. You will agree with me, at least, that such conduct would have driven anyone to despair. It was uncalled for; childish; unwomanly. I maintain that she was much to blame. And again, sometimes, in the black, fever-stricken night-watches, I have begun to think that I might have been a little kinder to her. But that really is a 'delusion.' I could not have continued pretending to love her when I didn't; could I? It would have been unfair to us both.

Last year we met again—on the same terms as before. The same weary appeals, and the same curt answers from my lips. At least I would make her see how wholly wrong and hopeless were her attempts at resuming the old relationship. As the season wore on, we fell apart—that is to say, she found it difficult to meet me, for I had other and more absorbing interests to attend to. When I think it over quietly in my sick room, the season of 1884 seems a confused nightmare wherein light and shade were fantastically intermingled—my courtship of little Kitty Mannering; my hopes, doubts, and fears; our long rides together; my trembling avowal of attachment; her reply; and now and again a vision of a white face flitting by in the 'rickshaw with the black and white liveries I once watched for so earnestly; the wave of Mrs. Wessington's gloved hand; and, when she met me alone, which was but seldom, the irksome monotony of her appeal. I loved Kitty Mannering; honestly, heartily loved her, and with my love for her grew my hatred for Agnes. In August Kitty and I were engaged. The next day I met those accursed 'maggie' *jhampanies* at the back of Jakko, and, moved by some passing sentiment of pity, stopped to tell Mrs. Wessington everything. She knew it already.

'So I hear you're engaged, Jack dear.' Then, without a moment's pause: 'I'm sure it's all a mistake—a hideous mistake. We shall be as good friends some day, Jack, as we ever were.'

My answer might have made even a man wince. It cut the dying woman before me like the blow of a whip. 'Please forgive me, Jack; I didn't mean to make you angry; but it's true, it's true!'

And Mrs. Wessington broke down completely. I turned away and left her to finish her journey in peace, feeling, but only for a moment or two, that I had been an unutterably mean hound. I looked back, and saw that she had turned her 'rickshaw with the idea, I suppose, of overtaking me.

The scene and its surroundings were photographed on my memory.

The rainswept sky (we were at the end of the wet weather), the sodden, dingy pines, the muddy road, and the black powder-riven cliffs formed a gloomy background against which the black and white liveries of the *ghampanies*, the yellow-panelled 'rickshaw and Mrs. Wessington's down-bowed golden head stood out clearly. She was holding her handkerchief in her left hand and was leaning back exhausted against the 'rickshaw cushions. I turned my horse up a bypath near the Sanjowlie Reservoir and literally ran away. Once I fancied I heard a faint call of 'Jack!' This may have been imagination. I never stopped to verify it. Ten minutes later I came across Kitty on horseback; and, in the delight of a long ride with her, forgot all about the interview.

A week later Mrs. Wessington died, and the inexpressible burden of her existence was removed from my life. I went Plainsward perfectly happy. Before three months were over I had forgotten all about her, except that at times the discovery of some of her old letters reminded me unpleasantly of our bygone relationship. By January I had disinterred what was left of our correspondence from among my scattered belongings and had burnt it. At the beginning of April of this year, 1885, I was at Simla—semi-deserted Simla—once more, and was deep in lover's talks and walks with Kitty. It was decided that we should be married at the end of June. You will understand, therefore, that, loving Kitty as I did, I am not saying too much when I pronounce myself to have been, at that time, the happiest man in India.

Fourteen delightful days passed almost before I noticed their flight. Then, aroused to the sense of what was proper among mortals circumstanced as we were, I pointed out to Kitty that an engagement ring was the outward and visible sign of her dignity as an engaged girl; and that she must forthwith come to Hamilton's to be measured for one. Up to that moment, I give you my word, we had completely forgotten so trivial a matter. To Hamilton's we accordingly went on the 15th of April 1885. Remember that—whatever my doctor may say to the contrary—I was then in perfect health, enjoying a well-balanced mind and an *absolutely* tranquil spirit. Kitty and I entered Hamilton's shop together, and there, regardless of the order of affairs, I measured Kitty for the ring in the presence of the amused assistant. The ring was a sapphire with two diamonds. We then rode out down the slope that leads to the Combermere Bridge and Peliti's shop.

While my Waler went cautiously feeling his way over the loose shale, and Kitty was laughing and chattering at my side—while all Simla, that is to say as much of it as had then come from the Plains, was grouped

round the Reading-room and Peliti's veranda — I was aware that some one, apparently at a vast distance, was calling me by my Christian name. It struck me that I had heard the voice before, but when and where I could not at once determine. In the short space it took to cover the road between the path from Hamilton's shop and the first plank of the Combermere Bridge I had thought over half a dozen people who might have committed such a solecism, and had eventually decided that it must have been some singing in my ears. Immediately opposite Peliti's shop my eye was arrested by the sight of four *jhampanies* in 'magpie' livery, pulling a yellow-panelled, cheap, bazar 'rickshaw. In a moment my mind flew back to the previous season and Mrs. Wessington with a sense of irritation and disgust. Was it not enough that the woman was dead and done with, without her black and white servitors reappearing to spoil the day's happiness? Whomever employed them now I thought I would call upon, and ask as a personal favor to change her *jhampanies'* livery. I would hire the men myself, and, if necessary, buy their coats from off their backs. It is impossible to say here what a flood of undesirable memories their presence evoked.

'Kitty,' I cried, 'there are poor Mrs. Wessington's *jhampanies* turned up again! I wonder who has them now.'

Kitty had known Mrs. Wessington slightly last season, and had always been interested in the sickly woman. 'What? Where?' she asked. 'I can't see them anywhere.'

Even as she spoke, her horse, swerving from a laden mule, threw himself directly in front of the advancing 'rickshaw. I had scarcely time to utter a word of warning when to my unutterable horror, horse and rider passed *through* men and carriage as if they had been thin air.

'What's the matter?' cried Kitty; 'what made you call out so foolishly, Jack? If I *am* engaged I don't want all creation to know about it. There was lots of space between the mule and the veranda; and, if you think I can't ride — There!'

Whereupon wilful Kitty set off, her dainty little head in the air, at a hand-gallop in the direction of the Bandstand; fully expecting, as she herself afterwards told me, that I should follow her. What was the matter? Nothing indeed. Either that I was mad or drunk, or that Simla was haunted with devils. I reined in my impatient cob, and turned round. The 'rickshaw had turned too, and now stood immediately facing me, near the left railing of the Combermere Bridge.

'Jack! Jack, darling!' (There was no mistake about the words this time: they rang through my brain as if they had been shouted in my

ear.) 'It's some hideous mistake, I'm sure. *Please* forgive me, Jack, and let's be friends again.'

The 'rickshaw-hood had fallen back, and inside, as I hope and pray daily for the death I dread by night, sat Mrs. Keith-Wessington, handkerchief in hand, and golden head bowed on her breast.

How long I stared motionless I do not know. Finally, I was aroused by my syce taking the Waler's bridle and asking whether I was ill. From the horrible to the commonplace is but a step. I tumbled off my horse and dashed, half fainting, into Peliti's for a glass of cherry-brandy. There two or three couples were gathered round the coffee-tables discussing the gossip of the day. Their trivialities were more comforting to me just then than the consolations of religion could have been. I plunged into the midst of the conversation at once; chatted, laughed, and jested with a face (when I caught a glimpse of it in a mirror) as white and drawn as that of a corpse. Three or four men noticed my condition; and, evidently setting it down to the results of over-many pegs, charitably endeavored, to draw me apart from the rest of the loungers. But I refused to be led away. I wanted the company of my kind—as a child rushes into the midst of the dinner-party after a fright in the dark. I must have talked for about ten minutes or so, though it seemed an eternity to me, when I heard Kitty's clear voice outside enquiring for me. In another minute she had entered the shop, prepared to upbraid me for failing so signally in my duties. Something in my face stopped her.

'Why, Jack,' she cried, 'what *have* you been doing? What *has* happened? Are you ill?' Thus driven into a direct lie, I said that the sun had been a little too much for me. It was close upon five o'clock of a cloudy April afternoon, and the sun had been hidden all day. I saw my mistake as soon as the words were out of my mouth: attempted to recover it; blundered hopelessly and followed Kitty, in a regal rage, out of doors, amid the smiles of my acquaintances. I made some excuse (I have forgotten what) on the score of my feeling faint; and cantered away to my hotel, leaving Kitty to finish the ride by herself.

In my room I sat down and tried calmly to reason out the matter. Here was I, Theobald Jack Pansay, a well-educated Bengal Civilian in the year of grace 1885, presumably sane, certainly healthy, driven in terror from my sweetheart's side by the apparition of a woman who had been dead and buried eight months ago. These were facts that I could not blink. Nothing was further from my thought than any memory of Mrs. Wessington when Kitty and I left Hamilton's shop. Nothing

was more utterly commonplace than the stretch of wall opposite Peliti's. It was broad daylight. The road was full of people; and yet here, look you, in defiance of every law of probability, in direct outrage of Nature's ordinance, there had appeared to me a face from the grave.

Kitty's Arab had gone *through* the 'rickshaw: so that my first hope that some woman marvellously like Mrs. Wessington had hired the carriage and the coolies with their old livery was lost. Again and again I went round this treadmill of thought; and again and again gave up baffled and in despair. The voice was inexplicable as the apparition. I had originally some wild notion of confiding it all to Kitty; of begging her to marry me at once; and in her arms defying the ghostly occupant of the 'rickshaw. 'After all,' I argued, 'the presence of the 'rickshaw is in itself enough to prove the existence of a special illusion. One may see ghosts of men and women, but surely never coolies and carriages. The whole thing is absurd. Fancy the ghost of a hillman!'

Next morning I sent a penitent note to Kitty, imploring her to overlook my strange conduct of the previous afternoon. My Divinity was still very wrath, and a personal apology was necessary. I explained, with a fluency born of night-long pondering over a falsehood, that I had been attacked with a sudden palpitation of the heart—the result of indigestion. This eminently practical solution had its effect: and Kitty and I rode out that afternoon with the shadow of my first lie dividing us.

Nothing would please her save a canter round Jakko. With my nerves still unstrung from the previous night I feebly protested against the notion, suggesting Observatory Hill, Jutogh, the Boileaugungeroad—anything rather than the Jakko round. Kitty was angry and a little hurt; so I yielding from fear of provoking further misunderstanding, and we set out together towards Chota Simla. We walked a greater part of the way, and, according to our custom, cantered from a mile or so below the Convent to the stretch of level road by the Sanjowlie Reservoir. The wretched horses appeared to fly, and my heart beat quicker and quicker as we neared the rest of the ascent. My mind had been full of Mrs. Wessington all the afternoon; and every inch of the Jakko road bore witness to our old time walks and talks. The boulders were full of it; the pines sang it aloud overhead; the rain-fed torrents giggled and chuckled unseen over the shameful story; and the wind in my ears chanted the iniquity aloud.

As a fitting climax, in the middle of the level men call the Ladies' Mile the Horror was awaiting me. No other 'rickshaw was in sight—only the four black and white *jhampanies*, the yellow-panelled carriage,

and the golden head of the woman within — all apparently just as I had left them eight months and one fortnight ago! For an instant I fancied that Kitty *must* see what I saw — we were so marvellously sympathetic in all things. Her next words undeceived me — 'Not a soul in sight! Come along, Jack, and I'll race you to the Reservoir buildings!' Her wiry little Arab was off like a bird, my Waler following close behind, and in this order we dashed under the cliffs. Half a minute brought us within fifty yards of the 'rickshaw. I pulled my Waler and fell back a little. The 'rickshaw was directly in the middle of the road; once more the Arab passed through it, my horse following. 'Jack! Jack dear! *Please* forgive me,' rang with a wail in my ears, and, after an interval: 'It's all a mistake, a hideous mistake!'

I spurred my horse like a man possessed. When I turned my head at the Reservoir works, the black and white liveries were still waiting — patiently waiting — under the gray hillside, and the wind brought me a mocking echo of the words I had just heard. Kitty bantered me a good deal on my silence throughout the remainder of the ride. I had been talking up till then wildly and at random. To save my life I could not speak afterwards naturally, and from Sanjowlie to the Church wisely held my tongue.

I was to dine with the Mannerings that night, and had barely time to canter home to dress. On the road to Elysium Hill I overheard two men talking together in the dusk. — 'It's a curious thing,' said one, 'how completely all trace of it disappeared. You know my wife was insanely fond of the woman (never could see anything in her myself), and wanted me to pick up her old 'rickshaw and coolies if they were to be got for love or money. Morbid sort of fancy I call it; but I've got to do what the *Memsahib* tells me. Would you believe that the man she hired it from tells me that all four of the men — they were brothers — died of cholera on the way to Hardwar, poor devils; and the 'rickshaw has been broken up by the man himself. 'Told me he never used a dead *Memsahib's* rickshaw. 'Spoilt his luck. Queer notion, wasn't it? Fancy poor little Mrs. Wessington spoiling any one's luck except her own!' I laughed aloud at this point; and my laugh jarred on me as I uttered it. So there *were* ghosts of 'rickshaws after all, and ghostly employments in the world! How much did Mrs. Wessington give her men? What were their hours? Where did they go?

And for visible answer to my last question I saw the infernal Thing blocking my path in the twilight. The dead travel fast, and by short

cuts unknown to ordinary coolies. I laughed aloud a second time and checked my laughter suddenly, for I was afraid I was going mad. Mad to a certain extent I must have been, for I recollect that I reined in my horse at the head of the 'rickshaw, and politely wished Mrs. Wessington 'Good-evening.' Her answer was one I knew only too well. I listened to the end; and replied that I had heard it all before, but should be delighted if she had anything further to say. Some malignant devil stronger than I must have entered into me that evening, for I have a dim recollection of talking the commonplaces of the day for five minutes to the Thing in front of me.

'Mad as a hatter, poor devil—or drunk. Max, try and get him to come home.'

Surely *that* was not Mrs. Wessington's voice! The two men had overheard me speaking to the empty air, and had returned to look after me. They were very kind and considerate, and from their words evidently gathered that I was extremely drunk. I thanked them confusedly and cantered away to my hotel, there changed, and arrived at the Mannerings' ten minutes late. I pleaded the darkness of the night as an excuse; was rebuked by Kitty for my unlover-like tardiness; and sat down.

The conversation had already become general; and under cover of it, I was addressing some tender small talk to my sweetheart when I was aware that at the further end of the table a short red-whiskered man was describing, with much broidery, his encounter with a mad unknown that evening.

A few sentences convinced me that he was repeating the incident of half an hour ago. In the middle of the story he looked round for applause, as professional story-tellers do, caught my eye, and straightway collapsed. There was a moment's awkward silence, and the red-whiskered man muttered something to the effect that he had 'forgotten the rest,' thereby sacrificing a reputation as a good story-teller which he had built up for six seasons past. I blessed him from the bottom of my heart, and—went on with my fish.

In the fulness of time that dinner came to an end; and with genuine regret I tore myself away from Kitty—as certain as I was of my own existence that It would be waiting for me outside the door. The red-whiskered man, who had been introduced to me as Dr. Heatherlegh of Simla, volunteered to bear me company as far as our roads lay together. I accepted his offer with gratitude.

My instinct had not deceived me. It lay in readiness in the Mall, and, in what seemed devilish mockery of our ways, with a lighted head-lamp.

The red-whiskered man went to the point at once, in a manner that showed he had been thinking over it all dinner-time.

'I say, Pansay, what the deuce was the matter with you this evening on the Elysium Road?' The suddenness of the question wrenched an answer from me before I was aware.

'That!' said I, pointing to It.

'*That* may be either D. T. or Eyes for aught I know. Now you don't liquor. I saw as much at dinner, so it can't be *D. T.* There's nothing whatever where you're pointing, though you're sweating and trembling with fright, like a scared pony. Therefore, I conclude that it's Eyes. And I ought to understand all about them. Come along home with me. I'm on the Blessington lower road.'

To my intense delight the 'rickshaw instead of waiting for us kept about yards ahead—and this, too, whether we walked, trotted, or cantered. In the course of that long night ride I had told my companion almost as much as I have told you here.

'Well, you've spoilt one of the best tales I've ever laid tongue to,' said he, 'but I'll forgive you for the sake of what you've gone through. Now come home and do what I tell you; and when I've cured you, young man, let this be a lesson to you to steer clear of women and indigestible food till the day of your death.'

The 'rickshaw kept steady in front; and my red-whiskered friend seemed to derive great pleasure from my account of its exact whereabouts.

'Eyes, Pansay—all Eyes, Brain, and Stomach. And the greatest of these three is Stomach. You've too much conceited Brain, too little Stomach, and thoroughly unhealthy Eyes. Get your Stomach straight and the rest follows. And all that's French for a liver pill. I'll take sole medical charge of you from this hour! for you're too interesting a phenomenon to be passed over.'

By this time we were deep in the shadow of the Blessington lower road and the 'rickshaw came to a dead stop under a pine-clad, overhanging shale cliff. Instinctively I halted too, giving my reason. Heather-legh rapped out an oath.

'Now, if you think I'm going to spend a cold night on the hillside for the sake of a Stomach-cum-Brain-cum-Eye illusion—Lord, ha'mercy! What's that?'

There was a muffled report, a blinding smother of dust just in front of us, a crack, the noise of rent boughs, and about ten yards of the cliff-side—pines, undergrowth, and all—slid down into the road below, completely blocking it up. The uprooted trees swayed and tottered for

a moment like drunken giants in the gloom, and then fell prone among their fellows with a thunderous crash. Our two horses stood motionless and sweating with fear. As soon as the rattle of falling earth and stone had subsided, my companion muttered; 'Man, if we'd gone forward we should have been ten feet deep in our graves by now. "There are more things in heaven and earth" . . . Come home, Pansay, and thank God. I want a peg badly.'

We retraced our way over the Church Ridge, and I arrived at Dr. Heatherlegh's house shortly after midnight.

His attempts towards my cure commenced almost immediately, and for a week I never left his sight. Many a time in the course of that week did I bless the good-fortune which had thrown me in contact with Simla's best and kindest doctor. Day by day my spirits grew lighter and more equable. Day by day, too, I became more and more inclined to fall in with Heatherlegh's 'spectral illusion' theory, implicating eyes, brain, and stomach. I wrote to Kitty, telling her that a slight sprain caused by a fall from my horse kept me indoors for a few days; and that I should be recovered before she had time to regret my absence.

Heatherlegh's treatment was simple to a degree. It consisted of liver pills, cold-water baths, and strong exercise, taken in the dusk or at early dawn—for, as he sagely observed: 'A man with a sprained ankle doesn't walk a dozen miles a day, and your young woman might be wondering if she saw you.'

At the end of the week, after much examination of pupil and pulse, and strict injunctions as to diet and pedestrianism, Heatherlegh dismissed me as brusquely as he had taken charge of me. Here is his parting benediction: 'Man, I certify to your mental cure, and that's as much as to say I've cured most of your bodily ailments. Now, get your traps out of this as soon as you can; and be off to make love to Miss Kitty.'

I was endeavoring to express my thanks for his kindness. He cut me short. 'Don't think I did this because I like you. I gather that you've behaved like a blackguard all through. But, all the same, you're a phenomenon, and as queer a phenomenon as you are a blackguard. No!'—checking me a second time—'not a rupee, please. Go out and see if you can find the eyes-brain-and-stomach business again. I'll give you a lakh for each time you see it.'

Half an hour later I was in the Mannerings' drawing-room with Kitty—drunk with the intoxication of present happiness and the fore-knowledge that I should never more be troubled with Its hideous pre-

sence. Strong in the sense of my new-found security, I proposed a ride at once; and, by preference, a canter round Jakko.

Never had I felt so well, so overladen with vitality and mere animal spirits, as I did on the afternoon of the 30th of April. Kitty was delighted at the change in my appearance, and complimented me on it in her delightfully frank and outspoken manner. We left the Mannerings' house together, laughing and talking, and cantered along the Chota Simla road as of old.

I was in haste to reach the Sanjowlie Reservoir and there make my assurance doubly sure. The horses did their best, but seemed all too slow to my impatient mind. Kitty was astonished at my boisterousness.

'Why, Jack!' she cried at last, 'you are behaving like a child. What are you doing?'

We were just below the Convent, and from sheer wantonness I was making my Waler plunge and curvet across the road as I tickled it with the loop of my riding-whip.

'Doing?' I answered; 'nothing, dear. That's just it. If you'd been doing nothing for a week except lie up, you'd be as riotous as I.

*'Singing and murmuring in your feastful mirth,
Joying to feel yourself alive;
Lord over Nature, Lord of the visible Earth,
Lord of the senses five.'*

My quotation was hardly out of my lips before we had rounded the corner above the Convent; and a few yards further on could see across to Sanjowlie. In the centre of the level road stood the black and white liveries, the yellow-panelled 'rickshaw, and Mrs. Keith-Wessington. I pulled up, looked, rubbed my eyes, and, I believe, must have said something. The next thing I knew was that I was lying face downward on the road, with Kitty kneeling above me in tears.

'Has it gone, child!' I gasped. Kitty only wept more bitterly.

'Has what gone, Jack dear? what does it all mean? There must be a mistake somewhere, Jack. A hideous mistake.' Her last words brought me to my feet — mad — raving for the time being.

'Yes, there *is* a mistake somewhere,' I repeated, 'a hideous mistake. Come and look at It.'

I have an indistinct idea that I dragged Kitty by the wrist along the road up to where It stood, and implored her for pity's sake to speak to It; to tell it that we were betrothed; that neither Death nor Hell could

break the tie between us: and Kitty only knows how much more to the same effect. Now and again I appealed passionately to the Terror in the 'rickshaw to bear witness to all I had said, and to release me from a torture that was killing me. As I talked I suppose I must have told Kitty of my old relations with Mrs. Wessington, for I saw her listen intently with white face and blazing eyes.

'Thank you, Mr. Pansay,' she said, 'that's quite enough. *Syce ghora lao.*'

The syces, impassive as Orientals always are, had come up with the recaptured horses; and as Kitty sprang into her saddle I caught hold of her bridle, entreating her to hear me out and forgive. My answer was the cut of her riding-whip across my face from mouth to eye, and a word or two of farewell that even now I cannot write down. So I judged and judged rightly, that Kitty knew all; and I staggered back to the side of the 'rickshaw. My face was cut and bleeding, and the blow of the riding-whip had raised a livid blue wheal on it. I had no self-respect. Just then, Heatherlegh, who must have been following Kitty and me at a distance, cantered up.

'Doctor,' I said, pointing to my face, 'here's Miss Mannering's signature to my order of dismissal and—I'll thank you for that lakh as soon as convenient.'

Heatherlegh's face, even in my abject misery, moved me to laughter. 'I'll stake my professional reputation . . . he began.

'Don't be a fool,' I whispered. 'I've lost my life's happiness and you'd better take me home.'

As I spoke the 'rickshaw was gone. Then I lost all knowledge of what was passing. The crest of Jakko seemed to heave and roll like the crest of a cloud and fall in upon me.

Seven days later (on the 7th of May, that is to say) I was aware that I was lying in Heatherlegh's room as weak as a little child. Heatherlegh was watching me intently from behind the papers on his writing-table. His first words were not encouraging; but I was too far spent to be much moved by them.

'Here's Miss Kitty has sent back your letters. You corresponded a good deal, you young people. Here's a packet that looks like a ring, and a cheerful sort of a note from Mannering Papa, which I've taken the liberty of reading and burning. The old gentleman's not pleased with you.'

'And Kitty?' I asked dully.

'Rather more drawn than her father from what she says. By the same token you must have been letting out any number of queer reminiscences just before I met you. Says that a man who would have behaved to a woman as you did to Mrs. Wessington ought to kill himself out of sheer pity for his kind. She's a hot-headed little virago, your mash. Will have it too that you were suffering from *D. T.* when that row on the Jakko road turned up. Says she'll die before she ever speaks to you again.'

I groaned and turned over on the other side.

'Now you've got your choice, my friend. This engagement has to be broken off, and the Mannerings don't want to be too hard on you. Was it broken through *D. T.* or epileptic fits? Sorry I can't offer you a better exchange unless you'd prefer hereditary insanity. Say the word and I'll tell 'em it's fits. All Simla knows about that scene on 'the Ladies' Mile. Come! I'll give you five minutes to think over it.'

During those five minutes I believe that I explored thoroughly the lowest circles of the Inferno which it is permitted man to tread on earth. And at the same time I myself was watching myself faltering through the dark labyrinths of doubt, misery, and utter despair. I wondered, as Heatherlegh in his chair might have wondered, which dreadful alternative I should adopt. Presently I heard myself answering in a voice that I hardly recognized:

'They're confoundedly particular about morality in these parts. Give 'em fits, Heatherlegh, and my love. Now let me sleep a bit longer.'

Then my two selves joined, and it was only I (half-crazed, devil-driven I) that tossed in my bed tracing step by step the history of the past month.

'But I am in Simla,' I kept repeating to myself. 'I, Jack Pansay, am in Simla, and there are no ghosts here. It's unreasonable of that woman to pretend there are. Why couldn't Agnes have left me alone? I never did her any harm. It might just as well have been me as Agnes. Only I'd never have come back on purpose to kill *her*. Why can't I be left alone—left alone and happy?'

It was high noon when I first awoke: and the sun was low in the sky before I slept—slept as the tortured criminal sleeps on his rack, too worn to feel further pain.

Next day I could not leave my bed. Heatherlegh told me in the morning that he had received an answer from Mr. Mannering, and that, thanks to his (Heatherlegh's) friendly offices, the story of my affliction

had traveled through the length and breadth of Simla, where I was on all sides much pitted.

'And that's rather more than you deserve,' he concluded pleasantly, 'though the Lord knows you've been going through a pretty severe mill. Never mind; we'll cure you yet, you perverse phenomenon.'

I declined firmly to be cured. 'You've been much too good to me already, old man,' said I; 'but I don't think I need trouble you further.'

In my heart I knew that nothing Heatherlegh could do would lighten the burden that had been laid upon me.

With that knowledge came also a sense of hopeless, impotent rebellion against the unreasonableness of it all. There were scores of men no better than I whose punishments had at least been reserved for another world; and I felt that it was bitterly, cruelly unfair that I alone should have been singled out for so hideous a fate. This mood would in time give place to another where it seemed that the 'rickshaw and I were the only realities in a world of shadows; that Kitty was a ghost; that Mannering, Heatherlegh, and all the other men and women I knew were all ghosts; and the great, gray hills themselves but vain shadows devised to torture me. From mood to mood I tossed backwards and forwards for seven weary days; my body growing daily stronger and stronger, until the bedroom looking-glass told me that I had returned to everyday life, and was as other men once more. Curiously enough my face showed no signs of the struggle I had gone through. It was pale indeed, but as expressionless and commonplace as ever. I had expected some permanent alteration—visible evidence of the disease that was eating me away. I found nothing.

On the 15th of May I left Heatherlegh's house at eleven o'clock in the morning; and the instinct of the bachelor drove me to the Club. There I found that every man knew my story as told by Heatherlegh, and was, in clumsy fashion, abnormally kind and attentive. Nevertheless I recognized that for the rest of my natural life I should be among but not of my fellows; and I envied very bitterly indeed the laughing coolies on the Mall below. I lunched at the Club, and at four o'clock wandered aimlessly down the Mall in the vague hope of meeting Kitty. Close to the Bandstand the black and white liveries joined me; and I heard Mrs. Wessington's old appeal at my side. I had been expecting this ever since I came out; and was only surprised at her delay. The phantom 'rickshaw and I went side by side along the Chota Simla road in silence. Close to the bazar, Kitty and a man on horseback overtook and passed us. For any sign she gave I might have been a dog in the road. She

did not even pay me the compliment of quickening her pace; though the rainy afternoon had served for an excuse.

So Kitty and her companion, and I and my ghostly Light-o'-Love, crept round Jakko in couples. The road was streaming with water; the pines dripped like roof-pipes on the rocks below, and the air was full of fine, driving rain. Two or three times I found myself saying to myself almost aloud: 'I'm Jack Pansay on leave at Simla — *at Simla!* Everyday, ordinary Simla. I mustn't forget that—I mustn't forget that.'

Then I would try to recollect some of the gossip I had heard at the Club: the prices of So-and-So's horses—anything, in fact, that related to the workday Anglo-Indian world I knew so well. I even repeated the multiplication-table rapidly to myself, to make quite sure that I was not taking leave of my senses. It gave me much comfort; and must have prevented my hearing Mrs. Wessington for a time.

Once more I wearily climbed the Convent slope and entered the level road. Here Kitty and the man started off at a canter, and I was left alone with Mrs. Wessington. 'Agnes,' said I, 'will you put back your hood and tell me what it all means?' The hood dropped noiselessly, and I was face-to-face with my dead and buried mistress. She was wearing the dress in which I had last seen her alive; carried the same tiny handkerchief in her right hand; and the same card-case in her left. (A woman eight months dead with a card-case!) I had to pin myself down to the multiplication-table, and to set both hands on the stone parapet of the road, to assure myself that that at least was real.

'Agnes,' I repeated, 'for pity's sake tell me what it all means.' Mrs. Wessington leaned forward, with that odd, quick turn of the head I used to know so well, and spoke.

If my story had not already so madly overleaped the bounds of all human belief I should apologise to you now. As I know that no one—no, not even Kitty, for whom it is written as some sort of justification of my conduct—will believe me, I will go on. Mrs. Wessington spoke and I walked with her from the Sanjowlie road to the turning below the Commander-in-Chief's house as I might walk by the side of any living woman's 'rickshaw, deep in conversation. The second and most tormenting of my moods of sickness had suddenly laid hold upon me, and like the Prince in Tennyson's poem, 'I seemed to move amid a world of ghosts.' There had been a garden-party at the Commander-in-Chief's, and we two joined the crowd of homeward-bound fold. As I saw them it seemed that *they* were the shadows—impalpable fantastic shadows—that divided for Mrs. Wessington's 'rickshaw to pass through. What we said

during the course of that weird interview I cannot—indeed, I dare not—tell. Heatherlegh's comment would have been a short laugh and a remark that I had been 'mashing a brain-eye-and-stomach chimera.' It was a ghastly and yet in some indefinable way a marvelously dear experience. Could it be possible, I wondered, that I was in this life to woo a second time the woman I had killed by my own neglect and cruelty?

I met Kitty on the homeward road—a shadow among shadows.

If I were to describe all the incidents of the next fortnight in their order, my story would never come to an end; and your patience would be exhausted. Morning after morning and evening after evening the ghostly 'rickshaw and I used to wander through Simla together. Wherever I went there the four black and white liveries followed me and bore me company to and from my hotel. At the Theater I found them amid the crowd of yelling *jhampanies*; outside the Club veranda, after a long evening of whist; at the Birthday Ball, waiting patiently for my reappearance; and in broad daylight when I went calling. Save that it cast no shadow, the 'rickshaw was in every respect as real to look upon as one of wood and iron. More than once, indeed, I have had to check myself from warning some hard-riding friend against cantering over it. More than once I have walked down the Mall deep in conversation with Mrs. Wessington to the unspeakable amazement of the passers-by.

Before I had been out and about a week I learned that the 'fit' theory had been discarded in favor of insanity. However, I made no change in my mode of life. I called, rode, and dined out as freely as ever. I had a passion for the society of my kind which I had never felt before; I hungered to be among the realities of life; and at the same time I felt vaguely unhappy when I had been separated too long from my ghostly companion. It would be almost impossible to describe my varying moods from the 15th of May up to today.

The presence of the 'rickshaw filled me by turns with horror, blind fear, a dim sort of pleasure, and utter despair. I dared not leave Simla; and I knew that my stay there was killing me. I knew, moreover, that it was my destiny to die slowly and a little every day. My only anxiety was to get the penance over as quietly as might be. Alternately I hungered for a sight of Kitty and watched her outrageous flirtations with my successor—to speak more accurately, my successors—with amused interest. She was as much out of my life as I was out of hers. By day I wandered with Mrs. Wessington almost content. By night I implored Heaven to let me return to the world as I used to know it. Above all these varying moods lay the sensation of dull, numbing wonder that the

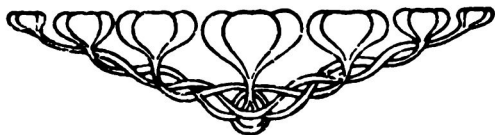
seen and the Unseen should mingle so strangely on this earth to hound one poor soul to its grave.

* * * * *

August 27. — Heatherlegh has been indefatigable in his attendance of me; and only yesterday told me that I ought to send in an application for sick leave. An application to escape the company of a phantom! A request that the Government would graciously permit me to get rid of five ghosts and an airy 'rickshaw by going to England! Heatherlegh's proposition moved me to almost hysterical laughter. I told him that I should await the end quietly at Simla; and I am sure that the end is not far off. Believe me that I dread its advent more than any word can say; and I torture myself nightly with a thousand speculations as to the manner of my death.

Shall I die in my bed decently and as an English gentleman should die; or, in one last walk on the Mall, will my soul be wrenched from me to take its place for ever and ever by the side of that ghastly phantasm? Shall I return to my old lost allegiance in the next world, or shall I meet Agnes, loathing her and bound to her side through all eternity? Shall we two hover over the scene of our lives till the end of Time? As the day of my death draws nearer, the intense horror that all living flesh feels toward escaped spirits from beyond the grave grows more and more powerful. It is an awful thing to go down quick among the dead with scarcely one-half of your life completed. It is a thousand times more awful to wait as I do in your midst, for I know not what unimaginable terror. Pity me, at least on the score of my 'delusion,' for I know you will never believe what I have written here. Yet as surely as ever a man was done to death by the Powers of Darkness, I am that man.

In justice, too, pity her. For as surely as ever woman was killed by man, I killed Mrs. Wessington. And the last portion of my punishment is even now upon me.



The Castle In The Window

by Steffan B. Aletti

While one cannot be sure about such things, we rather feel that H. P. Lovecraft would have had kind words to say about this tale, which employs a twist which we have not seen in this frame before.

OF COURSE, YOU UNDERSTAND, this narrative is absolutely true, and I don't expect you to believe a word of it. I will admit that several points of this business could be explained away by chance, or power of suggestion, but I am, though an artist, a pragmatist; and I assure you, it takes only the strongest of facts to convince me of the necessity of using the supernatural, witchcraft, or fourth dimension, as an explanation. So believe what you will; I have done justice to Colin Black, and to this whole business, by way of this report. And I shall go back to my painting.

It was an unusually pleasant winter day last March, when I decided on a walk to Soho to make the rounds of the little used-book shops that abound there. I had been copying some Turners at the British museum and, as I was up on my work, I decided to spent the evening with a book.

I went into the first one on Quill Street, Dorian's by name; it was exceedingly dusty, an unpleasant little place with books stacked waist level in boxes and bins, and stored way above arm's reach in cases along the walls. I straightaway came upon a copy of Shaw plays, and

settled for it. I was on my way to the register, when I saw in the back of the store, a selection of ragged-looking stuff in a large basket labeled "Old personal diaries, record books, etc."

Since first-hand evidence of the past has always fascinated me, and since my roommate, Colin Black was, in every sense of the word, a true antiquarian, dabbler in past mystiques, and occultist, I wandered over to have a look.

Most of the volumes were falling apart, having been badly bound and written on cheap paper, yet, one, bound in 3/4 buckram caught my eye because of its fresh condition. I opened it and read:

Diary of Dr. Michael Gwynn, being a daily account of his researches.

The "researches" business piqued my interest, and I began to thumb through the dusty thing rather absentmindedly; the first date recorded was September 17, 1806, and I was about to put the book down as being of too recent a date to interest the antiquarian in both me and my roommate, when my eyes struck the title of *Necronomicon*! Farther on, under October 14, I found mention of the *Song of Yste*! I knew the titles of these monstrous books only through my roommate's interest in them, and it was for that reason that I bought the diary; how ironic it is that I thought the thing cheap at a half crown.

I took it home that evening, and presented it with a flourish to my roommate; he was at once thankful and astounded, and immediately fell to reading it. At one point he got up, and, after rifling through his desk drawers for a time, came up with a map of England. He perused it, and, tracing his finger about the surface of the thing, nodded and exclaimed in triumph. I was about to ask what he was up to, when he raced back to his chair and resumed his reading. I heard no more from him other than his occasional puffs at his pipe, and gentle curses as it would go out.

At length I finished *Don Juan in Hell*, and decided to save *Mrs. Warren's Profession* for another time. I arose and was rummaging through the refrigerator for something to eat, when Colin came into the kitchen and stood, looking at me.

"Have you read this book?" he asked in a reasonably sepulchral tone, a manner which he reserved only for moments of the greatest import.

"No," I answered simply, while suspiciously eyeing a piece of cheese that had probably been residing at the back of the refrigerator since the previous spring.

"This is probably the greatest find of the century!" he continued.

"You don't say," I replied with an interest clearly second to my interest in the cheese, which was now residing between two pieces of bread and was about to be eaten. With that irreverent reply, he jerked me away from my cheese and dragged me to the book. He commanded me to read.

January 7, 1807.

Today I have achieved the impossible. I have baptized the glass while still molten and glowing, with the terrible rites of R'lyeh. The glass is cooling now.

January 8, 1807.

The glass is perfect. It is night now, and the glass is cold, yet it still glows. Tomorrow night I shall set it in its place, and I shall be lord of Time. It is alive, and I know it will work.

January 9, 1807.

I have done it. I am now looking out into the past. I see a castle; over the moor I know to be empty, I see, within walking distance, a castle's turrets. Through the mist I can see its ramparts and promenades, its stonework and crenulations. I am fascinated; I can not leave the window."

The following pages relate how the doctor was powerless to move or leave the window. He at length grew ill and was forced by physicians (thinking he was not altogether sane—he refused to show anyone the window) to leave the house. He had the window boarded up in his absence, and, being obscure enough, evidently went somewhere and died, leaving no record there of what had happened to him. The diary breaks off in May of 1807, when he was taken from the house. It was apparently left around for a generation or two, and was then auctioned off to a collector. It had on its first page, two booksellers' names stamped above Dorian's.

"That's all very interesting;" I said putting the book down. "What do you propose to do about it?"

"Go to Cornwall this weekend, find the house, and see if the window is still there," he answered triumphantly.

I registered innumerable complaints and objections, all of them sound and containing impeccable logic. They did not, of course, prevent us from going.

II

I HAD MANAGED TO PUT OFF the adventure until early that Spring. I did not want to go at all, especially since I did not expect to find anything, but Colin was not about to give me a moment's peace until I relented.

We arrived in the South of Cornwall in April; it was a pleasant, but rather dry, dusty day, much hotter than it tends to be in that vicinity. The little town of G---- was just the sort of rural place that one would expect; dismal, and with life conducted on a rather microscopic scale. The only place of interest was the surprisingly large library, devoted mainly to housing the collections of manuscripts from, and dealing with, the medieval castle and monastery of the vicinity, both of which were destroyed during the reign of Henry VIII, and of which no traces remain, other than a few capitols and gargoyles now in the British Museum.

After we settled at the hotel, I went about the surrounding countryside to sketch, and Colin headed for the local historical society to track down the late doctor. He later told me that he had found Dr. Gwynn's house, and that it was at present unoccupied! This depressed me no end, as I had rather expected to make a vacation out of this idiotic search and not be bothered by checking the walls of an old building for a magic window. As for the doctor, as I have stated, he never returned to G---- so, I was forced to agree with Colin that, unless the house had undergone extensive alterations (an unlikely prospect, as the entire town looked shabby enough to have undergone no severe alterations since well before Gwynn's time), the window would still be there, probably imbedded in plaster.

The next morning we visited the house—now known as the Reynolds' house. Somehow Colin had convinced the owner to let us fiddle around with the place; I don't know whether he lied to the owner, or managed to fascinate the man with the diary, but either way, we were soon in the house. We moved the sheet-covered furniture into the center of each room and began, from the attic down, carefully to check each wall with a southern exposure.

I had rather expected to find the window in the attic—the whole affair sounded like attic doings to me—but apparently the doctor's laboratory was in what was now a bedroom. The window had been easy to find, as it had been plastered over very roughly, and was not flush with the rest of the wall; my artist's eye caught the quarter-inch difference immediately.

"You don't propose to break through the plaster, do you?" I asked, not imagining that the landlord had given Colin permission to pull the place apart. "You know that we can be arrested for damaging property."

Colin stood and looked at me. "That doctor, in this very room," he said, gesturing wildly about, "over a century and a half ago, discovered a means of seeing the past—maybe entering it! Do you think that a couple inches of plaster are too valuable to destroy? That can't stop us!"

"Well, it will stop me," I said calmly, and picked up my jacket, slinging it over my shoulder. Colin looked as if he were undecided between being hurt and being furious, so I added "Besides, I want to get back to town to the library; they've got the old castle's chronicles there. After all, if Gwynn looked at them, maybe they looked at him and wrote it up. I'll see you at dinner." I quickly left before Colin could say anything.

The library's records were very full; hundreds of pages of Middle English blather—I'm not good at reading it, as I haven't had any practice since school, when I went through Chaucer and Gower. I could, however, find no mention of anything other than ordinary castle doings, with an occasional holiday for the burning of a sorcerer or witch. In general, castle life appears to have been a bore.

Colin did not come to dinner that evening, and, after waiting in the lobby until about nine o'clock, I decided I'd better wander up to the house to see if he had been arrested for damaging the place. It was a fine, crystal, moonless night, the sky so studded with stars as to almost give the impression of some sort of rolling celestial moor; the air had cleared, and was sweetly cool, with the smell of the spring earth perfuming its way into the brain. I was quite light-headed by the time I reached the path to the house, but my spring reveries were quite shattered when I spied Colin atop a huge ladder, virtually attacking the outside of the old house.

"Colin, you idiot!" I cried, "Get off that ladder and stop this nonsense. The owner will have your head." He did not look at me, but kept on wildly tearing off boards; he continued for about a minute, the boards making a ghastly ripping sound as he tore them off and threw them to the ground.

He finally turned to me, gesturing towards the now-visible, black window. "I've found it, but this face is covered with black paint, too. I've already scraped the other side clean. Come up and help me with this side."

Reluctantly, I climbed up the none-too-steady ladder and began to help him scrape the window.

"Gently," he said, "the glass is quite thin; it wouldn't do to break it." His voice was almost metallic with nervousness, and his hand was unsteady. He was covered hair to shoes with dry plaster, and he looked for all the world like a ghost.

"It's damn lucky for you that this place is out of the town; if there were neighbors around they certainly would have called the police, and I can't say that it wouldn't have served you right." I was vexed, but nevertheless, the excitement of the moment had quite gotten through to me.

The window was quite small, about two feet wide by two-and-a-half feet high, and was now completely clear. From the scraping process, I had perceived that its surface was bubbly and uneven, obviously not the work of the professional glass makers that abounded in Cornwall at the turn of the nineteenth century.

We climbed down the ladder, folded it, and let it rest on the ground by the house, and dashed in and up the stairs. I hesitated at the threshold of the bedroom, very unsure of what I was to find. I still don't know which would have been worse—to find the window truly a window to the past, or find that the whole affair was the raving of a long dead, demented physician.

Colin, of course, sped into the room, and, by the time I had entered it, was leaning on the sill and staring through the window. As I walked up to him, I was made uneasy by the radiance that seemed to be cast upon his face; the night being quite dark, the radiance must have been *from* the window, not through it.

"Come here; look," he said, very quietly. I walked over, and he made way for me to see. You may say it was power of suggestion, but I'm sure it wasn't. I swear to you that that window overlooked quite clearly a castle. It was not translucent, not a phantom likeness, but a true, solid building, stone for stone, step for step, a medieval castle. It was undoubtedly the castle of G----, unseen (except for those few days in 1807) by a human being since the sixteenth century. About the castle loomed a smoky silence that, mist-like, rolled over the gray stonework. It was exactly as the old doctor had described it; every detail, every crenulation and joint stood out in superb relief. Were it not for the rolling fog that lent animation to the scene, it would have looked more like a dull, muted, but very sharp focus color photograph.

"Well," I said, with no small amount of awe, "it looks as if Gwynn

weren't mad after all." I backed away from the window and continued, "But now that we've got it, what do we do with it?"

"There must be a way to get through to them," Colin said quietly. "They are out there, separated from us only by this pane of glass."

I was, I found to my surprise, trembling. I had never before faced anything so palpably unknown and bizarre. I was also confused; now that we had it, what *would* we do with it? A certain mystic—and not wholly pleasant—fascination for the window's view was already growing in me, and I felt that I could tear myself away from it only with the greatest of effort.

I finally pulled myself away from those mist-enshrouded turrets and walks and told Colin to do the same.

"Go to bed if you like," he replied sharply, "but I simply must figure it out. There must be a way through it!"

"If you should get over there, do you think they'll give you a hero's welcome?" I asked acidly. "I can't say that I'd care for being the twentieth century's representative to the middle ages. You'd have a lot of explaining to do. Think about that!" And with that parting shot, I left the house and went back to the hotel.

The next morning I returned to find Colin still staring, unshaven and sloppy, through the window. The day was splendidly bright and sunny, yet the castle still appeared foggy and forbidding. Colin was clearly distracted, and I could see him repeating the doctor's descent into madness. I tried to pull him away from the window, but he pushed me back against the wall and told me to keep my hands off of him.

"I'm not going to move until I can figure out the secret of getting through it!" he shouted, and returned to the window. This time, he leaned heavily on it with his hands.


"Be careful!" I cried. "That window's too thin to lean on!" But barely before my words died on my lips, with the terrible crackling and tinkling sound of glass giving way, Colin fell through the window. For one split second, he balanced halfway over the sill, and then, screaming wildly, he disappeared, headfirst, from my view. I just stood there for a moment, completely paralyzed and cursing myself for the whole adventure. It was only one story down, but Colin did go headfirst, and he could have been badly hurt, either by the impact or the broken glass. It was only after these reflections that I realized that Colin's scream had sounded terribly drawn out, and that I hadn't heard him land.

Once again mobile, I rushed over to the window, where I was stunned to see, on the ground below, pieces of broken glass, but no Colin. I

told myself that he had not been hurt and had run back into the house; but a subsequent search had proven that there was no one in the house. On the ground, below the window, were pieces of the glass which, incidentally, were blackened and smoky, rather like the pieces of a burned-out light bulb; but there was no mark or depression to suggest that anything but a few pieces of glass had fallen there. I had, and still have, no choice but to assume that Colin never hit the ground.

He is now listed as a missing person, and his whereabouts will, I imagine, never be found. However, shortly after that tragic morning, I did find a reference in the castle records that explains the mystery to my very reluctant satisfaction. (In giving it, I shall merely try to convey a light touch of the style, for a faithful transcription would be unreadable save to scholars of Middle English.):

"From some place unknown there hath been visited upon us a servant of Satan who did appear upon the fifth day of Spring in this year of Our Lord 1243. He did wear upon his back garb of an unknown variety, and his speech, though somewhat like unto our own was of a cast and color most curious, so that none but clerks could comprehend much of his saying; and they did find it ill, for he prated of black arts and magickal doings, averring that he did arrive through a window that over-looketh our century from one nigh eight hundred years removed. Examination did prove that he was indeed a man, and he was taken under the protection of the Church in the hope, however, scant, of preserving his soul from hell. He did remain unyielding and our good bishop did finally declare him contumacious, a creature of Satan sent to practice most abominable sorcery and black art amongst us, and did release him to the secular arm, which did duly condemn him to the pyre. He did die unshriven and unrepentant, cursing all about him most foully. May God have mercy on his lost soul."



A Psychological Invasion

by Algernon Blackwood

(Part Two)

The greatest of human joys and the worst of human horrors go beyond the tangible, material level; and dreadful as many of the (often human-afflicted) material horrors are, still worse are those which cannot truly be described at all—only a feeling of them can be conveyed. ALGERNON BLACKWOOD's method, in his finest stories, was always to convey a mood and a feeling, rather than to come to grips almost photographically, with the frightening. We know from twentieth century testimony how gruesome the tortures of Nazi and Soviet, etc., secret police groups were and are; but still worse than what might happen was and is the dread of that "knock in the night". This is psychic terror, closely akin but finally inferior to the horror that can come from unwise expansion of consciousness.

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

It is no laughing matter when a professional humorist loses his sense of humor, and DR. JOHN SILENCE, answering an appeal to investigate the case of FELIX PENDER, to whom this has happened, learns that in addition PENDER behaves as if there is an invisible person living in the house. PENDER tells DR. SILENCE that it is not just a case of writer's block; he is constantly full of ideas, which seem hilariously funny to him at the moment; but when they get written down, he finds that they are nothing but malice and horror of a sort which only a very perverted person would find funny. He confirms his sense of an unseen person's presence in the house, which he characterizes

as a woman of strong character, utterly dedicated to evil.

DR. SILENCE deduces that PENDER has opened himself up to psychic invasion through the use of some drug which expanded his consciousness to the point where there could be communion between himself and this presence, which has been here all the time, but heretofore unable to manifest itself; PENDER confirms this and describes his experiments. PENDER can be released only by moving away, for which DR. SILENCE makes arrangements, but the presence remains and must be overcome. He will return to the house and combat the invader—not alone, he assures the author. He will bring two animals with him: a cat and a dog.

II

A FEW DAYS LATER, the humorist and his wife, with minds greatly relieved, moved into a small furnished house placed at their free disposal in another part of London; and John Silence, intent upon his approaching experiment, made ready to spend a night in the empty house on the top of Putney Hill. Only two rooms were prepared for occupation: the study on the ground floor and the bedroom immediately above it; all other doors were to be locked, and no servant was to be left in the house. The motor had orders to call for him at nine o'clock the following morning.

And, meanwhile, his secretary had instructions to look up the past history and associations of the place, and learn everything he could concerning the character of former occupants, recent or remote.

The animals, by whose sensitiveness he intended to test any unusual conditions in the atmosphere of the building, Dr. Silence selected with care and judgment. He believed (and had already made curious experiments to prove it) that animals were more often and more truly clairvoyant than human beings. Many of them, he felt convinced, possessed

powers of perception far superior to that mere keenness of the senses common to all dwellers in the wild where the senses grow specially alert; they had what he termed "animal clairvoyance", and from his experiments with horses, dogs, cats, and even birds, he had drawn certain deductions, which, however, need not be referred to in detail here.

Cats, in particular, he believed, were almost continuously conscious of a larger field of vision, too detailed even for a photographic camera, and quite beyond the reach of normal human organs. He had, further, observed that while dogs were usually terrified in the presence of such phenomena, cats on the other hand were soothed and satisfied. They welcomed manifestations as something belonging peculiarly to their own region.

He selected his animals, therefore, with wisdom so that they might afford a differing test, each in its own way, and that one should not merely communicate its own excitement to the other. He took a dog and a cat.

The cat he chose, now full grown, had lived with him since kittenhood, a kittenhood of perplexing sweetness and audacious mischief. Wayward it was and fanciful, ever playing its own mysterious games in the corners of the room, jumping at invisible nothings, leaping sideways into the air and falling with tiny mocassined feet on to another part of the carpet, yet with an air of dignified earnestness which showed that the performance was necessary to its own well-being, and not done merely to impress a stupid human audience. In the middle of elaborate washing it would look up, startled, as though to stare at the approach of some Invisible, cocking its little head sideways and putting out a velvet pad to inspect cautiously. Then it would get absent-minded, and stare with equal intentness in another direction (just to confuse the onlookers), and suddenly go on furiously washing its body again, but in quite a new place. Except for a white patch on its breast it was coal black. And its name was—Smoke.

"Smoke" described its temperament as well as its appearance. Its movements, its individuality, its posing as a little furry mass of concealed mysteries, its elfin-like elusiveness, all combined to justify its name; and a subtle painter might have pictured it as a wisp of floating smoke, the fire below betraying itself at two points only—the glowing eyes.

All its forces ran to intelligence—secret intelligence, the wordless, incalculable intuition of the Cat. It was, indeed, *the* cat for the business in hand.

The selection of the dog was not so simple, for the doctor owned many;

but after much deliberation he chose a collie, called Flame from his yellow coat. True, it was a trifle old, and stiff in the joints, and even beginning to grow deaf, but, on the other hand, it was a very particular friend of Smoke's, and had fathered it from kittenhood upwards so that a subtle understanding existed between them. It was this that turned the balance in its favor, this and its courage. Moreover, though good-tempered, it was a terrible fighter, and its anger when provoked by a righteous cause was a fury of fire, and irresistible.

It had come to him quite young, straight from the shepherd, with the air of the hills yet in its nostrils, and was then little more than skin and bones and teeth. For a collie it was sturdily built, its nose blunter than most, its yellow hair stiff rather than silky, and it had full eyes, unlike the slit eyes of its breed. Only its master could touch it, for it ignored strangers, and despised their pattings—when any dared to pat it. There was something patriarchal about the old beast. He was in earnest, and went through life with tremendous energy and big things in view, as though he had the reputation of his whole race to uphold. And to watch him fighting against odds was to understand why he was terrible.

In his relations with Smoke he was always absurdly gentle; also he was fatherly; and at the same time betrayed a certain diffidence or shyness. He recognized that Smoke called for strong yet respectful management. The cat's circuitous methods puzzled him, and his elaborate pretences perhaps shocked the dog's liking for direct, undisguised action. Yet, while he failed to comprehend these tortuous feline mysteries, he was never contemptuous or condescending; and he presided over the safety of his furry black friend somewhat as a father, loving but intuitive, might superintend the vagaries of a wayward and talented child. And, in return, Smoke rewarded him with exhibitions of fascinating and audacious mischief.

And these brief descriptions of their characters are necessary for the proper understanding of what subsequently took place.

With Smoke sleeping in the folds of his fur coat, and the collie lying watchful on the seat opposite, John Silence went down in his motor after dinner on the night of November 15th.

And the fog was so dense that they were obliged to travel at quarter speed the entire way.

It was after ten o'clock when he dismissed the motor and entered the dingy little house with the latchkey provided by Pender. He found the hall gas was turned low, and a fire in the study. Books and food had also been placed ready by the servant according to instructions. Coils of fog

rushed in after him through the opened door and filled the hall and passage with its cold discomfort.

The first thing Dr. Silence did was to lock up Smoke in the study with a saucer of milk before the fire, and then make a search of the house with Flame. The dog ran cheerfully behind him all the way while he tried the doors of the other rooms to make sure they were locked. He nosed about into corners and made little excursions on his own account. His manner was expectant. He knew there must be something unusual about the proceeding, because it was contrary to the habits of his whole life not to be asleep at this hour on the mat in front of the fire! He kept looking up into his master's face, as door after door was tried, with an expression of intelligent sympathy, but at the same time a certain air of disapproval. Yet everything his master did was good in his eyes, and he betrayed as little impatience as possible with all this unnecessary journeying to and fro. If the doctor was pleased to play this sort of game at such an hour of the night, it was surely not for him to object. So he played it too; and was very busy and earnest about it into the bargain.

After an uneventful search they came down again to the study, and here Dr. Silence discovered Smoke washing his face calmly in front of the fire. The saucer of milk was licked dry and clean; the preliminary examination that cats always make in new surroundings had evidently been satisfactorily concluded. He drew an arm-chair up to the fire, stirred the coals into a blaze, arranged the table and lamp to his satisfaction for reading, and then prepared surreptitiously to watch the animals. He wished to observe them carefully without their being aware of it.

Now, in spite of their respective ages, it was the regular custom of these two to play together every night before sleep. Smoke always made the advances, beginning with grave impudence to pat the dog's tail, and Flame played cumbrously, with condescension. It was his duty, rather than pleasure; he was glad when it was over, and sometimes he was very determined and refused to play at all.

And this night was one of the occasions on which he was firm.

The doctor, looking cautiously over the top of his book, watched the cat begin the performance. It started by gazing with an innocent expression at the dog where he lay with nose on paws and eyes wide open in the middle of the floor. Then it got up and made as though it meant to walk to the door, going deliberately and very softly. Flame's eyes followed it until it was beyond the range of sight, and then the cat turned sharply and began patting his tail tentatively with one paw.

The tail moved slightly in reply, and Smoke changed paws and tapped it again. The dog, however, did not rise to play as was his wont, and the cat fell to patting it briskly with both paws. Flame still lay motionless.

This puzzled and bored the cat, and it went round and stared hard into its friend's face to see what was the matter. Perhaps some inarticulate message flashed from the dog's eyes into its own little brain, making it understand that the program for the night had better not begin with play. Perhaps it only realized that its friend was immovable. But, whatever the reason, its usual persistence thenceforward deserted it, and it made no further attempts at persuasion. Smoke yielded at once to the dog's mood, it sat down where it was and began to wash.

But the washing, the doctor noted, was by no means its real purpose; it only used it to mask something else; it stopped at the most busy and furious moments and began to stare about the room. Its thoughts wandered absurdly. It peered intently at the curtains; at the shadowy corners; at empty space above; leaving its body in curiously awkward positions for whole minutes together. Then it turned sharply and stared with a sudden signal of intelligence at the dog, and Flame at once rose somewhat stiffly to his feet and began to wander aimlessly and restlessly to and fro about the floor. Smoke followed him padding quietly at his heels. Between them they made what seemed to be a deliberate search of the room.

And, here, as he watched them, noting carefully every detail of the performance over the top of his book, yet making no effort to interfere, it seemed to the doctor that the first beginnings of a faint distress betrayed themselves in the collie, and in the cat the stirrings of a vague excitement.

He observed them closely. The fog was thick in the air, and the tobacco smoke from his pipe added to its density; the furniture at the far end stood mistily, and where the shadows congregated in hanging clouds under the ceiling, it was difficult to see clearly at all; the lamplight only reached to a level of five feet from the floor, above which came layers of comparative darkness, so that the room appeared twice as lofty as it actually was. By means of the lamp and the fire, however, the carpet was everywhere clearly visible.

The animals made their silent tour of the floor, sometimes the dog leading, sometimes the cat; occasionally they looked at one another as though exchanging signals; and once or twice, in spite of the limited space, he lost sight of one or other among the fog and the shadows. Their curiosity, it appeared to him, was something more than the excite-

ment lurking in the unknown territory of a strange room; yet, so far, it was impossible to test this, and he purposely kept his mind quietly receptive lest the smallest mental excitement on his part should communicate itself to the animals and thus destroy the value of their independent behavior.

They made a very thorough journey, leaving no piece of furniture unexamined, or unsmelt. Flame led the way, walking slowly with lowered head, and Smoke followed demurely at his heels, making a transparent pretence of not being interested, yet missing nothing. And, at length, they returned, the old collie first, and came to rest on the mat before the fire. Flame rested his muzzle on his master's knee, smiling beatifically while he patted the yellow head and spoke his name; and Smoke, coming a little later, pretending he came by chance, looked from the empty saucer to his face, lapped up the milk when it was given him to the last drop, and then sprang upon the doctor's knees and curled round for the sleep it had fully earned and intended to enjoy.

Silence descended upon the room. Only the breathing of the dog upon the mat came through the deep stillness, like the pulse of time marking the minutes; and the steady drip, drip of the fog outside upon the window-ledge dismally testified to the inclemency of the night beyond. And the soft crashings of the coals as the fire settled down into the grate became less audible as the fire sank and the flames resigned their fierceness.

It was now well after eleven o'clock, and Dr. Silence devoted himself again to his book. He read the words on the printed page and took in their meaning superficially, yet without starting into life the correlations of thought and suggestion that should accompany interesting reading. Underneath, all the while, his mental energies were absorbed in watching, listening, waiting for what might come. He was not over sanguine himself, yet he did not wish to be taken by surprise. Moreover, the animals, his sensitive barometers, had incontinently gone to sleep.

After reading a dozen pages, however, he realized that his mind was really occupied in reviewing features of Pender's extraordinary story, and that it was no longer necessary to steady his imagination by studying the dull paragraphs detailed in the pages before him. He laid down his book accordingly, and allowed his thoughts to dwell upon the features of the Case. Speculations as to the meaning, however, he rigorously suppressed, knowing that such thoughts would act upon his imagination like wind upon the glowing embers of a fire.

As the night wore on the silence grew deeper and deeper, and only at rare intervals he heard the sound of wheels on the main road a hundred

yards away, where the horses went at a walking pace owing to the density of the fog. The echo of pedestrian footsteps no longer reached him, the clamor of occasional voices no longer came down the side street. The night, muffled by fog, shrouded by veils of ultimate mystery, hung about the haunted villa like a doom. Nothing in the house stirred. Stillness, in a thick blanket, lay over the upper storeys. Only the mist in the room grew more dense, he thought, and the damp cold more penetrating. Certainly, from time to time, he shivered.

The collie, now deep in slumber, moved occasionally — grunted, sighed, or twitched his legs in dreams. Smoke lay on his knees, a pool of warm, black fur, only the closest observation detecting the movement of his sleek sides. It was difficult to distinguish exactly where his head and body joined in that circle of glistening hair; only a black satin nose and a tiny tip of pink tongue betrayed the secret.

Dr. Silence watched him, and felt comfortable. The collie's breathing was soothing. The fire was well built, and would burn for another two hours without attention. He was not conscious of the least nervousness. He particularly wished to remain in his ordinary and normal state of mind, and to force nothing. If sleep came naturally, he would let it come — and even welcome it. The coldness of the room, when the fire died down later, would be sure to wake him again; and it would then be time enough to carry these sleeping barometers up to bed. From various psychic premonitions he knew quite well that the night would not pass without adventure; but he did not wish to force its arrival; and he wished to remain normal, and let the animals remain normal, so that, when it came, it would be unattended by excitement or by any straining of the attention. Many experiments had made him wise. And, for the rest, he had no fear.

Accordingly, after a time, he did fall asleep as he had expected, and the last thing he remembered, before oblivion slipped up over his eyes like soft wool, was the picture of Flame stretching all four legs at once, and sighing noisily as he sought a more comfortable position for his paws and muzzle upon the mat.

It was a good deal later when he became aware that a weight lay upon his chest, and that something was pencilling over his face and mouth. A soft touch on the cheek woke him. Something was patting him.

He sat up with a jerk, and found himself staring straight into a pair of brilliant eyes, half green, half black. Smoke's face lay level with his own; and the cat had climbed up with its front paws upon his chest.

The lamp had burned low and the fire was nearly out, yet Dr. Silence saw in a moment that the cat was in an excited state. It kneaded with its front paws into his chest, shifting from one to the other. He felt them prodding against him. It lifted a leg very carefully and patted his cheek gingerly. Its fur, he saw, was standing ridgewise upon its back; the ears were flattened back somewhat; the tail was switching sharply. The cat, of course, had wakened him with a purpose, and the instant he realized this, he set it upon the arm of the chair and sprang up with a quick turn to face the empty room behind him. By some curious instinct, his arms of their own accord assumed an attitude of defense in front of him, as though to ward off something that threatened his safety. Yet nothing was visible. Only shapes of fog hung about rather heavily in the air, moving slightly to and fro.

His mind was now fully alert, and the last vestiges of sleep gone. He turned the lamp higher and peered about him. Two things he became aware of at once: one, that Smoke, while excited, was *pleasurably* excited; the other, that the collie was no longer visible upon the mat at his feet. He had crept away to the corner of the wall farthest from the window, and lay watching the room with wide-open eyes, in which lurked plainly something of alarm.

Something in the dog's behavior instantly struck Dr. Silence as unusual, and, calling him by name, he moved across to pat him. Flame got up, wagged his tail, and came over slowly to the rug, uttering a low sound that was half growl, half whine. He was evidently perturbed about something, and his master was proceeding to administer comfort when his attention was suddenly drawn to the antics of his other four-footed companion, the cat.

And what he saw filled him with something like amazement.

Smoke had jumped down from the back of the arm-chair and now occupied the middle of the carpet, where, with tail erect and legs stiff as ramrods, it was steadily pacing backwards and forwards in a narrow space, uttering, as it did so, those curious little guttural sounds of pleasure that only an animal of the feline species knows how to make expressive of supreme happiness. Its stiffened legs and arched back made it appear larger than usual, and the black visage wore a smile of beatific joy. Its eyes blazed magnificently; it was in an ecstasy.

At the end of every few paces it turned sharply and stalked back again along the same line, padding softly, and purring like a roll of little muffled drums. It behaved precisely as though it were rubbing against the ankles of some one who remained invisible. A thrill ran down the

doctor's spine as he stood and stared. His experiment was growing interesting at last.

He called the collie's attention to his friend's performance to see whether he too was aware of anything standing there upon the carpet, and the dog's behavior was significant and corroborative. He came as far as his master's knees and then stopped dead, refusing to investigate closely. In vain Dr. Silence urged him; he wagged his tail, whined a little, and stood in a half-crouching attitude, staring alternately at the cat and at his master's face.

He was, apparently, both puzzled and alarmed, and the whine went deeper and deeper down into his throat till it changed into an ugly snarl of awakening anger.

Then the doctor called to him in a tone of command he had never known to be disregarded; but still the dog, though springing up in response declined to move nearer. He made tentative motions, pranced a little like a dog about to take to water, pretended to bark, and ran to and fro on the carpet. So far there was no actual fear in his manner, but he was uneasy and anxious, and nothing would induce him to go within touching distance of the walking cat. Once he made a complete circuit, but always carefully out of reach; and in the end he returned to his master's legs and rubbed vigorously against him. Flame did not like the performance at all: that much was quite clear.

For several minutes John Silence watched the performance of the cat with profound attention and without interfering. Then he called to the animal by name.

"Smoke, you mysterious beastie, what in the world are you about?" he said, in a coaxing tone.

The cat looked up at him for a moment, smiling in its ecstasy, blinking its eyes but too happy to pause. He spoke to it again. He called to it several times, and each time it turned upon him its blazing eyes, drunk with inner delight, opening and shutting its lips, its body large and rigid with excitement. Yet it never for one instant paused in its short journeys to and fro.

He noted exactly what it did; it walked he saw, the same number of paces each time, some six or seven steps, and then it turned sharply and retraced them. By the pattern of the great roses in the carpet he measured it. It kept to the same direction and the same line. It behaved precisely as though it were rubbing against something solid. Undoubtedly, there was something standing there on that strip of carpet, something invisible

to the doctor, something that alarmed the dog, yet caused the cat unspeakable pleasure.

"Smokie!" he called again, "Smokie, you black mystery, what is it excites you so?"

Again the cat looked up at him for a brief second, and then continued its sentry-walk, blissfully happy, intensely preoccupied. And, for an instant, as he watched it, the doctor was aware that a faint uneasiness stirred in the depths of his own being, focusing itself for the moment upon this curious behavior of the uncanny creature before him.

The rose in him quite a new realization of the mystery connected with the whole feline tribe, but especially with that common member of it, the domestic cat—their hidden lives, their strange aloofness, their incalculable subtlety. How utterly remote from anything that human beings understood lay the sources of their elusive activities. As he watched the indescribable bearing of the little creature mincing along the strip of carpet under his eyes, coquetting with the powers of darkness, welcoming, maybe, some fearsome visitor, there stirred in his heart a feeling strangely akin to awe. Its indifference to human kind, its serene superiority to the obvious, struck him forcibly with fresh meaning; so remote, so inaccessible seemed the secret purposes of its real life, so alien to the blundering honesty of other animals. Its absolute poise of bearing brought into his mind the opium-eater's words that "no dignity is perfect which does not at some point ally itself with the mysterious"; and he became suddenly aware that the presence of the dog in this foggy, haunted room on the top of Putney Hill was uncommonly welcome to him. He was glad to feel that Flame's dependable personality was with him. The savage growling at his heels was a pleasant sound. He was glad to hear it. That marching cat made him uneasy.

Finding that Smoke paid no further attention to his words, the doctor decided upon action. Would it rub against his leg, too? He would take it by surprise and see.

He stepped quickly forward and placed himself upon the exact strip of carpet where it walked.

But no cat is ever taken by surprise! The moment he occupied the space of the intruder, setting his feet on the woven roses midway in the line of travel, Smoke suddenly stopped purring and sat down. It lifted up its face with the most innocent stare imaginable of its green eyes. He could have sworn it laughed. It was a perfect child again. In a single second it had resumed its simple, domestic manner; and it gazed at him in such a way that he almost felt Smoke was the normal being, and

his was the eccentric behavior that was being watched. It was consummate, the manner in which it brought about this change so easily and so quickly.

"Superb little actor!" he laughed in spite of himself, and stooped to stroke the shining black back. But, in a flash, as he touched its fur, the cat turned and spat at him viciously, striking at his hand with one paw. Then, with a hurried scutter of feet, it shot like a shadow across the floor and a moment later was calmly sitting over by the window-curtains washing its face as though nothing interested it in the whole world but the cleanness of its cheeks and whiskers.

John Silence straightened himself up and drew a long breath. He realized that the performance was temporarily at an end. The collie, meanwhile, who had watched the whole proceeding with marked disapproval, had now lain down again upon the mat by the fire, no longer growling. It seemed to the doctor just as though something that had entered the room while he slept, alarming the dog, yet bringing happiness to the cat, had now gone out again, leaving all as it was before. Whatever it was that excited its blissful attentions had retreated for the moment.

He realized this intuitively. Smoke evidently realized it, too, for presently he deigned to march back to the fireplace and jump upon his master's knees. Dr. Silence, patient and determined, settled down once more to his book. The animals soon slept; the fire blazed cheerfully; and the cold fog from outside poured into the room through every available chink and crannie.

For a long time silence and peace reigned in the room and Dr. Silence availed himself of the quietness to make careful notes of what had happened. He entered for future use in other cases an exhaustive analysis of what he had observed, especially with regard to the effect upon the two animals. It is impossible here, nor would it be intelligible to the reader unversed in the knowledge of the region known to a scientifically trained psychic like Dr. Silence, to detail these observations. But to him it was clear, up to a certain point—and for the rest he must still wait and watch. So far, at least, he realized that while he slept in the chair—that is, while his will was dormant—the room had suffered intrusion from what he recognized as an intensely active Force, and might later be forced to acknowledge as something more than merely a blind force, namely, a distinct personality.

So far it had affected himself scarcely at all, but had acted directly upon the simpler organisms of the animals. It stimulated keenly the

centers of the cat's psychic being, inducing a state of instant happiness (intensifying its consciousness probably in the same way a drug or stimulant intensifies that of a human being); whereas it alarmed the less sensitive dog, causing it to feel a vague apprehension and distress.

His own sudden action and exhibition of energy had served to disperse it temporarily, yet he felt convinced—the indications were not lacking even while he sat there making notes—that it still remained near to him, conditionally if not spatially, and was, as it were, gathering force for a second attack.

And, further, he intuitively understood that the relations between the two animals had undergone a subtle change: that the cat had become immeasurably superior, confident, sure of itself in its own peculiar region, whereas Flame had been weakened by an attack he could not comprehend and knew not how to reply to. Though not yet afraid, he was defiant—ready to act against a fear that he felt to be approaching. He was no longer fatherly and protective towards the cat. Smoke held the key to the situation; and both he and the cat knew it.

Thus, as the minutes passed, John Silence sat and waited, keenly on the alert, wondering how soon the attack would be renewed, and at what point it would be diverted from the animals and directed upon himself.

The book lay on the floor beside him, his notes were complete. With one hand on the cat's fur, and the dog's front paws resting against his feet, the three of them dozed comfortably before the hot fire while the night wore on and the silence deepened towards midnight.

It was well after one o'clock in the morning when Dr. Silence turned the lamp out and lighted the candle preparatory to going up to bed. Then Smoke suddenly woke with a loud sharp purr and sat up. It neither stretched, washed nor turned: it listened. And the doctor, watching it, realized that a certain indefinable change had come about that very moment in the room. A swift readjustment of the forces within the four walls had taken place—a new disposition of their personal equations. The balance was destroyed, the former harmony gone. Smoke, most sensitive of barometers, had been the first to feel it, but the dog was not slow to follow suit, for on looking down he noted that Flame was no longer asleep. He was lying with eyes wide open, and that same instant he sat up on his great haunches and began to growl.

Dr. Silence was in the act of taking the matches to re-light the lamp when an audible movement in the room behind made him pause. Smoke leaped down from his knee and moved forward a few paces across the

carpet. Then it stopped and stared fixedly; and the doctor stood up on the rug to watch.

As he rose the sound was repeated, and he discovered that it was not in the room as he first thought, but outside, and that it came from more directions than one. There was a rushing, sweeping noise against the window-panes, and simultaneously a sound of something brushing against the door—out in the hall. Smoke advanced sedately across the carpet, twitching his tail, and sat down within a foot of the door. The influence that had destroyed the harmonious conditions of the room had apparently moved in advance of its cause. Clearly, something was about to happen.

For the first time that night John Silence hesitated; the thought of that dark narrow hall-way, choked with fog, and destitute of human comfort, was unpleasant. He became aware of a faint creeping of his flesh. He knew, of course, that the actual opening of the door was not necessary to the invasion of the room that was about to take place, since neither doors nor windows, nor any other solid barriers could interpose an obstacle to what was seeking entrance. Yet the opening of the door would be significant and symbolic, and he distinctly shrank from it.

But for a moment only. Smoke, turning with a show of impatience, recalled him to his purpose, and he moved past the sitting, watching creature, and deliberately opened the door to its full width.

What subsequently happened, happened in the feeble and flickering light of the solitary candle on the mantelpiece.

Through the opened door he saw the hall, dimly lit and thick with fog. Nothing, of course, was visible—nothing but the hat-stand, the African spears in dark lines upon the wall and the high-backed wooden chair standing grotesquely underneath on the oilcloth floor. For one instant the fog seemed to move and thicken oddly; but he set that down to the score of the imagination. The door had opened upon nothing.

Yet Smoke apparently thought otherwise, and the deep growling of the collie from the mat at the back of the room seemed to confirm his judgment.

For, proud and self-possessed, the cat had again risen to his feet, and having advanced to the door, was now ushering some one slowly into the room. Nothing could have been more evident. He paced from side to side, bowing his little head with great *empressement* and holding his stiffened tail aloft like a flagstaff. He turned this way and that, mincing to and fro, and showing signs of supreme satisfaction. He was in

his element. He welcomed the intrusion, and apparently reckoned that his companions, the doctor and the dog, would welcome it likewise.

The Intruder had returned for a second attack.

Dr. Silence moved slowly backwards and took up his position on the hearthrug, keying himself up to a condition of concentrated attention.

He noted that Flame stood beside him, facing the room, with body motionless, and head moving swiftly from side to side with a curious swaying movement. His eyes were wide open, his back rigid, his neck and jaws thrust forward, his legs tense and ready to leap. Savage, ready for attack or defence, yet dreadfully puzzled and perhaps already a little cowed, he stood and stared, the hair on his spine and sides positively bristling outwards as though a wind played through them. In the dim firelight he looked like a great yellow-haired wolf, silent, eyes shooting dark fire, exceedingly formidable. It was Flame, the terrible.

Smoke, meanwhile, advanced from the door towards the middle of the room, adopting the very slow pace of an invisible companion. A few feet away it stopped and began to smile and blink its eyes. There was something deliberately coaxing in its attitude as it stood there undecided on the carpet, clearly wishing to effect some sort of introduction between the Intruder and its canine friend and ally. It assumed its most winning manners, purring, smiling, looking persuasively from one to the other, and making quick tentative steps first in one direction and then in the other. There had always existed such perfect understanding between them in everything. Surely Flame would appreciate Smoke's intentions now, and acquiesce.

But the old collie made no advances. He bared his teeth, lifting his lips till the gums showed, and stood stockstill with fixed eyes and heaving sides. The doctor moved a little farther back, watching intently the smallest movement, and it was just then he divined suddenly from the cat's behavior and attitude that it was not only a single companion it had ushered into the room, but *several*. It kept crossing over from one to the other, looking up at each in turn. It sought to win over the dog to friendliness with them all. The original Intruder had come back with reinforcements. And at the same time he further realized that the Intruder was something more than a blindly acting force, impersonal though destructive. It was a Personality, and moreover a great personality. And it was accompanied for the purposes of assistance by a host of other personalities, minor in degree, but similar in kind.

He braced himself in the corner against the mantelpiece and waited, his whole being roused to defence, for he was now fully aware that the

attack had spread to include himself as well as the animals, and he must be on the alert. He strained his eyes through the foggy atmosphere, trying in vain to see what the cat and dog saw; but the candlelight threw an uncertain and flickering light across the room and his eyes discerned nothing. On the floor Smoke moved softly in front of him like a black shadow, his eyes gleaming as he turned his head, still trying with many insinuating gestures and much purring to bring about the introductions he desired.

But it was all in vain. Flame stood riveted to one spot, motionless as a figure carved in stone.

Some minutes passed, during which only the cat moved, and then there came a sharp change. Flame began to back towards the wall. He moved his head from side to side as he went, sometimes turning to snap at something almost behind him. *They* were advancing upon him, trying to surround him. His distress became very marked from now onwards, and it seemed to the doctor that his anger merged to genuine terror and became overwhelmed by it. The savage growl sounded perilously like a whine, and more than once he tried to dive past his master's legs, as though hunting for a way of escape. He was trying to avoid something that everywhere blocked the way.

This terror of the indomitable fighter impressed the doctor enormously; yet also painfully; stirring his impatience; for he had never before seen the dog show signs of giving in, and it distressed him to witness it. He knew, however, that he was not giving in easily, and understood that it was really impossible for him to gauge the animal's sensation properly at all. What Flame felt, and saw, must be terrible indeed to turn him all at once into a coward. He faced something that made him afraid of more than his life merely. The doctor spoke a few quick words of encouragement to him, and stroked the bristling hair. But without much success. The collie seemed already beyond the reach of comfort such as that, and the collapse of the old dog followed indeed very speedily after this.

And Smoke, meanwhile, remained behind, watching the advance, but not joining in it; sitting, pleased and expectant, considering that all was going well and as it wished. It was kneading on the carpet with its front paws—slowly, laboriously, as though its feet were dipped in treacle. The sound its claws made as they caught in the threads was distinctly audible. It was still smiling, blinking, purring.

Suddenly the collie uttered a poignant short bark and leaped heavily to one side. His bared teeth traced a line of whiteness through the gloom. The next instant he dashed past his master's legs, almost upsetting his

balance, and shot out into the room, where he went blundering wildly against walls and furniture. But that bark was significant; the doctor had heard it before and knew what it meant; for it was the cry of the fighter against odds and it meant that the old beast had found courage again. Possibly it was only the courage of despair, but at any rate the fighting would be terrific. And Dr. Silence understood, too, that he dared not interfere. Flame must fight his own enemies in his own way.

But the cat, too, had heard that dreadful bark; and it too, had understood. This was more than it had bargained for. Across the dim shadows of that haunted room there must have passed some secret signal of distress between the animals. Smoke stood up and looked swiftly about him. He uttered a piteous meow and trotted smartly away into the greater darkness by the windows. What his object was only those endowed with the spirit-like intelligence of cats might know. But, at any rate, he had at last ranged himself on the side of his friend. And the little beast meant business.

At the same moment the collie managed to gain the door. The doctor saw him rush through into the hall like a flash of yellow light. He shot across the oilcloth, and tore up the stairs, but in another second he appeared again, flying down the steps and landing at the bottom in a tumbling heap, whining, cringing, terrified. The doctor saw him slink back into the room again and crawl round by the wall towards the cat. Was, then, even the staircase occupied? Did *They* stand also in the hall? Was the whole house crowded from floor to ceiling?

The thought came to add to the keen distress he felt at the sight of the collie's discomfiture. And, indeed, his own personal distress had increased in a marked degree during the past minutes, and continued to increase steadily to the climax. He recognized that the drain on his own vitality grew steadily, and that the attack was now directed against himself even more than against the defeated dog, and the too much deceived cat.

It all seemed so rapid and uncalculated after that—the events that took place in this little modern room at the top of Putney Hill between midnight and sunrise—that Dr. Silence was hardly able to follow and remember it all. It came about with such uncanny swiftness and terror; the light was so uncertain; the movements of the black cat so difficult to follow on the dark carpet, and the doctor himself so weary and taken by surprise—that he found it almost impossible to observe accurately, or to recall afterwards precisely what it was he had seen or in what order the incidents had taken place. He never could understand what

defect of vision on his part made it seem as though the cat had duplicated itself at first, and then increased indefinitely, so that there were at least a dozen of them darting silently about the floor, leaping softly on to chairs and tables, passing like shadows from the open door to the end of the room, all black as sin, with brilliant green eyes flashing fire in all directions. It was like the reflections from a score of mirrors placed round the walls at different angles. Nor could he make out at the time why the size of the room seemed to have altered, grown much larger, and why it extended away behind him where ordinarily the wall should have been. The snarling of the enraged and terrified collie sounded sometimes so far away; the ceiling seemed to have raised itself so much higher than before, and much of the furniture had changed in appearance and shifted marvellously.

It was all so confused and confusing, as though the little room he knew had become merged and transformed into the dimensions of quite another chamber, that came to him, with its host of cats and its strange distances, in a sort of vision.

But these changes came about a little later, and at a time when his attention was so concentrated upon the proceedings of Smoke and the collie, that he only observed them, as it were, subconsciously. And the excitement, the flickering candlelight, the distress he felt for the collie, and the distorting atmosphere of fog were the poorest possible allies to careful observation.

At first he was only aware that the dog was repeating his short dangerous bark from time to time, snapping viciously at the empty air, a foot or so from the ground. Once, indeed, he sprang upwards and forwards, working furiously with teeth and paws, and with a noise like wolves fighting, but only to dash back the next minute against the wall behind him. Then, after lying still for a bit, he rose to a crouching position as though to spring again, snarling horribly and making short half-circles with lowered head. And Smoke all the while meowed piteously by the window as though trying to draw the attack upon himself.

Then it was that the rush of the whole dreadful business seemed to turn aside from the dog and direct itself upon his own person. The collie had made another spring and fallen back with a crash into the corner, where he made noise enough in his savage rage to waken the dead before he fell to whining and then finally lay still. And directly afterwards the doctor's own distress became intolerably acute. He had made a half movement forward to come to the rescue when a veil that was denser than mere fog seemed to drop down over the scene, draping room, walls,

animals and fire in a mist of darkness and folding also about his own mind. Other forms moved silently across the field of vision, forms that he recognized from previous experiments, and welcomed not. Unholy thoughts began to crowd into his brain, sinister suggestions of evil presented themselves seductively. Ice seemed to settle about his heart, and his mind trembled. He began to lose memory—memory of his identity, of where he was, of what he ought to do. The very foundations of his strength were shaken. His will seemed paralysed.

And it was then that the room filled with this horde of cats, all dark as the night, all silent, all with lamping eyes of green fire. The dimensions of the place altered and shifted. Hewas in a much larger space. The whining of the dog sounded far away, and all about him the cats flew busily to and fro, silently playing their tearing, rushing game of evil, weaving the pattern of their dark purpose upon the floor. He strove hard to collect himself and remember in the words of power he had made use of in similar dread positions where his dangerous practice had sometimes led; but he could recall nothing consecutively; a mist lay over his mind and memory; he felt dazed and his forces scattered. The deeps within were too troubled for healing power to come out of them.

It was glamor of course, he realized afterwards, the strong glamor thrown upon his imagination by some powerful personality behind the veil; but at the time he was not sufficiently aware of this and, as with all true glamor, was unable to grasp where the true ended and the false began. He was caught momentarily in the same vortex that had sought to lure the cat to destruction through its delight, and threatened utterly to overwhelm the dog through its terror.

There came a sound in the chimney behind him like wind booming and tearing its way down. The windows rattled. The candle flickered and went out. The glacial atmosphere closed round him with the cold of death, and a great rushing sound swept by overhead as though the ceiling had lifted to a great height. He heard the door shut. Far away it sounded. He felt lost, shelterless in the depths of his soul. Yet still he held out and resisted while the climax of the fight came nearer and nearer. He had stepped into the the stream of forces awakened by Pender and he knew that he must withstand them to the end or come to a conclusion that it was not good for a man to come to. Something from the region of utter cold was upon him.

And then quite suddenly, through the confused mists about him, there slowly rose up the Personality that had been all the time directing the battle. Some force entered his being that shook him as the tempest shakes

a leaf, and close against his eyes—clean level with his face—he found himself staring into the wreck of a vast dark Countenance, a countenance that was terrible even in its ruin.

For ruined it was, and terrible it was, and the mark of spiritual evil was branded everywhere upon its broken features. Eyes, face and hair rose level with his own, and for space of time he never could properly measure, or determine, these two, a man and a woman, looked straight into each other's visages and down into each other's hearts.

And John Silence, the soul with the good, unselfish motive, held his own against the dark discarnate woman whose motive was pure evil, and whose soul was on the side of the Dark Powers.

It was the climax that touched the depth of power within him and began to restore him slowly to his own. He was conscious, of course, of effort, and yet it seemed no superhuman one, for he had recognized the character of his opponent's power, and he called upon the good within him to meet and overcome it. The inner forces stirred and trembled in response to his call. They did not at first come readily as was their habit, for under the spell of glamor they had already been diabolically lulled into inactivity, but come they eventually did, rising out of the inner spiritual nature he had learned with so much time and pain to awaken to life. And power and confidence came with them. He began to breathe deeply and regularly, and at the same time to absorb into himself the forces opposed to him, and to *turn them to his own account*. By ceasing to resist, and allowing the deadly stream to pour into him unopposed, he used the very power supplied by his adversary and thus enormously increased his own.

For this spiritual alchemy he had learned. He understood that force ultimately is everywhere one and the same; it is the motive behind it that makes it good or evil; and his motive was entirely unselfish. He knew—provided he was not first robbed of self-control—how vicariously to absorb these evil radiations into himself and change them into his own good purposes. And, since his motive was pure and his soul fearless, they could not work him harm.

Thus he stood in the main stream of evil unwittingly attracted by Pender, deflecting its course upon himself; and after passing through the purifying filter of his own unselfishness these energies could only add to his store of experience, of knowledge, and therefore of power. And, as his self-control returned to him, he gradually accomplished this purpose, even though trembling while he did so.

Yet the struggle was severe, and in spite of the freezing chill of the

air, the perspiration poured down his face. Then, by slow degree, the dark and dreadful countenance faded, the glamor passed from his soul, the normal proportions returned to walls and ceiling, the forms melted back into the fog, and the whirl of rushing shadow-cats disappeared whence they came.

And with the return of the consciousness of his own identity John Silence was restored to the full control of his own will-power. In a deep, modulated voice he began to utter certain rhythmical sounds that slowly rolled through the air like a rising sea, filling the room with powerful vibratory activities that whelmed all irregularities of lesser vibrations in its own swelling tone. He made certain sigils, gestures and movements at the same time. For several minutes he continued to utter these words, until at length the growing volume dominated the whole room and mastered the manifestation of all that opposed it. For just as he understood the spiritual alchemy that can transmute evil forces by raising them into higher channels, so he knew from long study the occult use of sound, and its direct effect upon the plastic region wherein the powers of spiritual evil work their purposes. Harmony was restored first of all to his own soul, and thence to the room and all its occupants.

And, after himself, the first to recognize it was the old dog lying in his corner. Flame began suddenly uttering sounds of pleasure, that "something" between a growl and a grunt that dogs make upon being restored to their master's confidence. Dr. Silence heard the thumping of the collie's tail against the ground. And the grunt and the thumping touched the depth of affection in the man's heart, and gave him some inkling of what agonies the dumb creature had suffered.

Next, from the shadows by the window, a somewhat shrill purring announced the restoration of the cat to its normal state. Smoke was advancing across the carpet. He seemed very pleased with himself, and smiled with an expression of supreme innocence. He was no shadow-cat, but real and full of his usual and perfect self-possession. He marched along, picking his way delicately, but with a stately dignity that suggested his ancestry with the majesty of Egypt. His eyes no longer glared; they shone steadily before him; they radiated, not excitement, but knowledge. Clearly he was anxious to make amends for the mischief to which he had unwittingly lent himself owing to his subtle and electric constitution.

Still uttering his sharp high purrings he marched up to his master and rubbed vigorously against his legs. Then he stood on his hind feet and pawed his knees and stared beseechingly up into his face. He

turned his head towards the corner where the collie still lay, thumping his tail feebly and pathetically.

John Silence understood. He bent down and stroked the creature's living fur, noting the line of bright blue sparks that followed the motion of his hand down its back. And then they advanced together towards the corner where the dog was.

Smoke went first and put his nose gently against his friend's muzzle, purring while he rubbed, and uttering little soft sounds of affection in his throat. The doctor lit the candle and brought it over. He saw the collie lying on its side against the wall; it was utterly exhausted, and foam still hung about its jaws. Its tail and eyes responded to the sound of its name, but it was evidently very weak and overcome. Smoke continued to rub against its cheek and nose and eyes, sometimes even standing on its body and kneading into the thick yellow hair. Flame replied from time to time by little licks of the tongue, most of them curiously misdirected.

But Dr. Silence felt intuitively that something disastrous had happened, and his heart was wrung. He stroked the dear body, feeling it over for bruises or broken bones, but finding none. He fed it with what remained of the sandwiches and milk, but the creature clumsily upset the saucer and lost the sandwiches between its paws, so that the doctor had to feed it with his own hand. And all the while Smoke meowed piteously.

Then John Silence began to understand. He went across to the farther side of the room and called aloud to it.

"Flame, old man! Come!"

At any other time the dog would have been upon him in an instant, barking and leaping to the shoulder. And even now he got up, though heavily and awkwardly, to his feet. He started to run, wagging his tail more briskly. He collided first with a chair, and then ran straight into a table. Smoke trotted close at his side, trying his very best to guide him. But it was useless. Dr. Silence had to lift him up into his own arms and carry him like a baby. For he was blind.

III

IT WAS A WEEK LATER when John Silence called to see the author in his new house, and found him well on the way to recovery and already busy again with his writing. The haunted look had left his eyes, and he seemed cheerful and confident.

"Humor restored?" laughed the doctor, as soon as they were comfortably settled in the room over-looking the Park.

"I've had no trouble since I left that dreadful place," returned Pender gratefully; "and thanks to you —"

The doctor stopped him with a gesture.

"Never mind that," he said, "we'll discuss your new plans afterwards, and my scheme for relieving you of the house and helping you settle elsewhere. Of course it must be pulled down, for it's not fit for any sensitive person to live in, and any other tenant might be afflicted in the same way you were. Although, personally, I think the evil has exhausted itself by now."

He told the astonished author something of his experiences in it with the animals.

"I don't pretend to understand," Pender said, when the account was finished, "but I and my wife are intensely relieved to be free of it all. Only I must say I should like to know something of the former history of the house. When we took it six months ago I heard no word against it."

Dr. Silence drew a typewritten paper from his pocket.

"I can satisfy your curiosity to some extent," he said, running his eye over the sheets, and then replacing them in his coat; "for by my secretary's investigations I have been able to check certain information obtained in the hypnotic trance by a 'sensitive' who helps me in such cases. The former occupant who haunted you appears to have been a woman of singularly atrocious life and character who finally suffered death by hanging, after a series of crimes that appalled the whole of England and only came to light by the merest chance. She came to her end in the year 1798, for it was not this particular house she lived in, but a much larger one that then stood upon the site it now occupies and was then, of course, not in London, but in the country. She was a person of intellect, possessed of a powerful, trained will, and of consummate audacity, and I am convinced availed herself of the resources of the lower magic to attain her ends. This goes far to explain the virulence of the attack upon yourself, and why she is still able to carry on after death the evil practices that formed her main purpose during life."

"You think that after death a soul can still consciously direct —" gasped the author.

"I think, as I told you before, that the forces of a powerful personality may still persist after death in the line of their original momentum," replied the doctor; "and that strong thoughts and purposes can still react upon suitably prepared brains long after their originators have passed away."

"If you knew anything of magic," he pursued, "you would know that

thought is dynamic, and that it may call into existence forms and pictures that may well exist for hundreds of years. For, not far removed from the region of our human life, is another region where floats the waste and drift of all the centuries, the limbo of the shells of the dead; a densely populated region crammed with horror and abomination of all descriptions, and sometimes galvanized into active life again by the will of a trained manipulator, a mind versed in the practices of lower magic. That this woman understood its vile commerce, I am persuaded, and the forces she set going during her life have simply been accumulating ever since, and would have continued to do so had they not been drawn down upon yourself, and afterwards discharged and satisfied through me.

"Anything might have brought down the attack, for, besides drugs, there are certain moods of the soul, certain spiritual fevers, if I may so call them, which directly open the inner being to a cognizance of this astral region I have mentioned. In your case it happened to be a peculiarly potent drug that did it.

"But now, tell me," he added, after a pause, handing to the perplexed author a pencil-drawing he had made of the dark countenance that had appeared to him during the night on Putney Hill—"tell me if you recognize this face?"

Pender looked at the drawing closely, greatly astonished. He shuddered a little as he looked.

"Undoubtedly," he said, "it is the face I kept trying to draw—dark, with the great mouth and jaw, and the drooping eye: That is the woman."

Dr. Silence then produced from his pocket-book an old-fashioned woodcut of the same person which his secretary had unearthed from the records of the Newgate Calendar. The woodcut and the pencil drawing were two different aspects of the same dreadful visage. The men compared them for some moments in silence.

"It makes me thank God for the limitations of our senses," said Pender quietly with sigh; "continuous clairvoyance must be a sore affliction."

"It is indeed," returned John Silence significantly, "and if all the people nowadays who claim to be clairvoyant were really so, the statistics of suicide and lunacy would be considerably higher than they are. It is little wonder," he added, "that your sense of humor was clouded, with the mind-forces of that dead monster trying to use your brain for their dissemination. You have had an interesting adventure, Mr. Felix Pender, and, let me add, a fortunate escape."

The author was about to renew his thanks when there came a sound of scratching at the door, and the doctor sprang up quickly.

"It's time for me to go. I left my dog on the step, but I suppose—"

Before he had time to open the door, it had yielded to the pressure behind it and flew wide open to admit a great yellow-haired collie. The dog, wagging his tail and contorting his whole body with delight, tore across the floor and tried to leap up upon his owner's breast. And there was laughter and happiness in the old eyes; for they were clear again as the day.

Inquisitions

A reader wonders if there is some clandestine agreement between *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and Arkham House: Publishers, since only Arkham House books seem to be reviewed in our pages. There is not. The explanation is absurdly simple: Mr. Derleth sends me copies of Arkham House books for review. And you will see, in various issues of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*, reviews or mentions of various Ace Books; that is because Mr. Wollheim sends me copies of them. I'd be glad to discuss the Lancer Robert E. Howard volumes, etc., but thus far Mr. Shaw has not seen fit to supply me with copies. And the same can be said for all the others who publish weird and horror books.

STRANGE GATEWAYS

by E. Hoffman Price

Arkham House: Publishers, Sauk City, Wisconsin 5358; 1967; 208pp; \$4.00.

The January 1925 issue of *WEIRD TALES* included an ori-

ental story, *The Rajah's Gift*, by a new author, E. Hoffmann Price; I have never heard whether this was either the first story he wrote, or the first story he had published. No matter; this story, included in the present volume, showed the newcomer to WT's pages to be one who had mastered the art of story telling and story construction, and the tale made its mark with the readers, who did not have to wait long for more. You should remember that the subtitle of WT was "a magazine of the bizarre and the unusual", so that editor Farnsworth Wright's working definition of the word "weird" was as broad as conceivable, and did not by any means restrict itself to the "supernatural" or "supernormal" in the sense of materialistically unexplainable phenomena. Oriental stories did not contain any elements that would be thought of offhand by the lover of weird and fantasy fiction as really weird at all. Again, no matter; I cannot remember reading a single tale by EHP in the magazine as being poor, even though there is a difference between the best and the least; to rephrase the old saying, here the

worst is still good reading. And that is the over-all comment to be made upon this long-overdue collection from Arkham House—meaning, it's one fine and enjoyable production, with a few stories which would belong in an anthology of the very best of the bizarre and unusual.

I had to correct myself, originally typing "the very best from *WEIRD TALES*"; the outstanding story in this volume, for me, did not appear in WT, but in *ADVENTURE* magazine in 1944. Since Mr. Derleth and I have not always seen eye to eye on the merit of particular stories he has published, or included in his collections, let me say that I heartily concur with him on *Graven Image*, which he considers tops among the memorable tales by EHP, as well as *Bones For China*, which he mentions next.

The volume contains: *The Fire and the Flesh* (from *FANTASTIC UNIVERSE*); *Graven Image*; *The Stranger from Kurdistan* (WT); *The Rajah's Gift*; *The Girl From Samarcand*; *Tarbis of the Lake*; *Bones For China* (first publication, apparently, and I wonder why this excellent story hasn't been published before); *Well of the Angels* (from *UNKNOWN*); *Strange Gateway* (from *UNKNOWN*); *Apprentice Magician* (from WT, and a welcome sample of EHP's ability to combine humor with weirdness without descending to slapstick in the onetime manner of Robert Bloch); *One More River* (from *STRANGE STORIES*—not *STRANGE TALES*; as I noted in a letter to Derleth, this is almost as delightful, in its inadvertent creation of a non-existent issue as one which

Why Was The Dog Shot In The Night?

Farnsworth swept the searchlight around the mongrel's lifeless body. Then he banged the window shut and sat down again, shaking his head as if amazed that we didn't understand.

"I shot it because it reminded me of something not very pleasant, and to get it out of its misery, for it was slowly starving to death. . . . Did any of you ever have the pleasant experience of building a little fortress out of the bones of your friends?"

He didn't wait for an answer. "I saw a man who had that delightful experience," he went on. "The shock was too much for him. It nearly did me in, too. . . ." His voice grew tragic. "All this happened out in the Mongolian plains. And it wouldn't have happened if the human lust for money didn't exist."

Don't Miss This Strange Novelet

TIBETAN IMAGE

by Herb Lewis

complete in Issue #3 of

WORLD-WIDE ADVENTURE

see page 127

What Lay Behind The Scholar's Fear?

... Probably it was the strange unhealthy look of utter absorption with which my employer listened, more than that damnable passage from the *Necronomicon*, which caused my nervousness and made me start violently when, toward the end of my reading, I heard an indescribable slithering noise in the hall outside. But when I finished the paragraph and looked up at Carnby, I was more than startled by the expression of stark, staring fear which his features had assumed—an expression as of one who is haunted by some hellish phantom. Somehow, I got the feeling that he was listening to that odd noise in the hallway rather than to my translation of Abdul Alhazred.

You Won't Want To Miss

THE RETURN OF THE SORCERER

by Clark Ashton Smith

Complete in the Spring Issue of

STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

see page 127

would have appeared here in MOH had I not caught it in time, as much by accident as anything else; you'd have seen a listing of the contents of the Winter 1966/67 issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. The only reason I decided to correct it was to save our over-worked back issue department from a deluge of orders for this rarest magazine ever heard of!); and *Pale Hands* (from *THE MAGIC CARPET*).

Missing is any representation from the Pierre d'Artois series, but there is a possibility of a later volume devoted to these. I think it was wise not to run any of them this time, for although all are good in their way, their way does not add up to the very top level EHP, as wonderfully weird and exciting as most of them are; The author's interest in the Devil Worshipers (the Bright Angel, Malik Tawus) is well covered by that sardonic little masterpiece, *The Stranger From Kurdistan*, one of the top favorites of WT readers during the Wright period—and proof that sometimes the best could be quite popular, despite the poorer taste often shown both by the editor in the stories he not only purchased but plugged as great, but also the stories which WT's active readers placed first in a particular issue.

Mr. Price is now 69 (though, since his birth date is not mentioned, it may be 70 by the time you read this) and one can hope that even if the pace has slowed down, his well is not yet dry. If it is, then I for one am grateful for the wealth of refreshment that came from it over the years, and this sampling is heartily recommended. RAWL

Coming Next Issue

Hurd laughed bitterly. "Howard never liked the city," he said. "I remember when he first came here and organized his Company. Used to read science fiction. One of the authors delighted in destroying New York and Howard always read his stories. Told me about them. 'Not a bad idea,' he would say. 'The nation would be better off if this monstrosity was wiped out.' That was probably why he financed your research—he wanted to do in life what that science fiction writer did in his stories. Perhaps it was a good idea that he died. Just what was the results of your experiments in Labrador?"

"At least interesting. I determined the dose of XYZ necessary to throw the patient backwards two thousand years. The reaction starts fifteen days after the drug is given and lasts about thirty days. At the end of that period the patient falls into a deep sleep. This lasts for several days and then he wakes, but when he recovers consciousness there is an absolute lack of memory of his conduct during the thirty days of subconscious exploration."

"Your ten men. What did they do?"

"They lived, thought and talked like the Romans, Greeks, Huns and Norsemen did two thousand years ago. Fortunately they talked in English. No doubt their conduct was normal for twenty centuries ago but in our time it resembled a very interesting form of Hell. We were able to control them; no one was killed, but the nurses had a very difficult month."

Hurd lit a fresh cigar. "Are you serious? Do you really want to give this drug to eight million people in New York?"

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by David H. Keller, M.D.

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It Is Written...

For 20 issues now, (it started with #2, November 1963) I've been playing a little game in that each story which I chose to list on the *Coming Next Issue* page was the work of some oldtime author whom I had not previously run in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, but who was worth bringing to you, in my judgment. When we added *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, I realized that trying to withhold stories by authors who had not yet appeared in *MOH*, so that *MOH* could be first, would turn the game into a nightmare, as well as be downright silly. Of course, it could not go on indefinitely, and I knew all along that I'd be ready to stop at any time—meaning I'd repeat an author who'd been on the *Coming Next Issue* page before—it seemed more worth doing than playing the game. I knew it would happen, but truly I had no idea until very recently who the author would be. So in a sense it's coincidental, rather than a matter of long-range planning that the author who appeared first on the *Coming Next Issue* page is also the first to be repeated.

And now, I'll turn the floor over to Robert A. Madle, who wrote me a letter, on my suggestion that he tell us something about the background of the first (and only) publication of *The Abyss*, by David H. Keller.

"*The Abyss* was the second-half of the only book published by New

Era Publishers, *The Solitary Hunters and The Abyss*. New Era Publishers consisted of Robert A. Madle, Jack Agnew, and Albert A. Pepper—all long-time science fiction fans—who, following World War II, were fascinated with the idea of speciality science fiction and fantasy publishing. When Tom Hadley brought out *The Time Stream* by John Taine and *The Skylark Of Space* by E. E. Smith, the impetus for New Era Publishers was generated. David H. Keller (one of Madle's three boyhood idols—the other two being Edmond Hamilton and Jack Williamson) was selected as the first author to be immortalized between New Era hardcovers.

"Dr. Keller was approached with the suggestion that the projected volume contain his two short interplanetary classics, *The Conquerors* and *The Evening Star* from *SCIENCE WONDER STORIES* (1929-30). At this point, a meeting was arranged by Sam Moskowitz, who had a definite interest in the project as he was simultaneously involved in a Keller volume, *Life Everlasting*. The upshot of the meeting was the agreement to publish Dr. Keller's recently-completed novel, *The Abyss* along with his incredibly popular short *WEIRD TALES* novel, *The Solitary Hunters* (January, February, March 1934). *The Solitary Hunters* had been voted first place in all three issues, a remarkable achievement considering that the competition in those issues consisted of such *WEIRD TALES*

Did You Miss Our Very First Issue?

#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.

Still available—but
we can't say how long
this will be true!

Order From Page 128

*Jules de Grandin
solves the riddle of*

THE WHITE LADY OF THE ORPHANAGE

by
Seabury Quinn
in the Spring issue of

**STARTLING
MYSTERY
STORIES**

favorites as Seabury Quinn, Robert E. Howard, Edmond Hamilton, and Nictzin Dyalhis. Combining an extremely popular novel with a brand-new unpublished one sounded like a winning combination.

"After several delays, the book appeared, in September 1948. It featured a dustwrapper and two interior illustrations by J. V. Baltadonis, one of science fiction's all-time great fan artists. Two thousand copies were printed, one thousand of which were bound. A series of unfortunate incidents resulted in only five to six hundred copies being circulated. (Several large shipments to Canada were lost and the one thousand unbound copies were inadvertently discarded when the bindery changed hands.)

"*The Abyss*, so far as can be determined, was written circa 1946-47 and had not been submitted to any of the science fiction magazines. It is doubted that it could have sold to any of the magazines at that time for two reasons: (1) David H. Keller was considered passe and part of a previous generation (2) the extremely unusual plot and treatment did not fit into the requirements of such magazines as *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION*, *THRILLING WONDER STORIES* or *STARTLING STORIES*. Admittedly, a real effort was required for the "willing suspension of disbelief." The story, written in the inimitable fast-moving Keller style, depicts a rather fantastic experiment in which the entire population of New York City live and act as they would have two thousand years ago, uninhibited and with no thought of convention. Reading this story today, in light of the mass use

of LSD and other hallucinatory drugs, makes one admit that the "good Doctor" wasn't so way out after all!

"Keller collectors might be interested to know that a limited number of mint *autographed* copies of *The Solitary Hunters & The Abyss* may be had for \$4.00 per copy from the publisher, Robert A. Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville, Md. 20853.

Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy writes from 688 Prairie Avenue, Providence, Rhode Island, 02905: "I am deeply sorry to tell you and interested readers of your esteemed magazine (which has always been a welcome visitor to our home) that my dear husband, author of several stories published in the now defunct *WEIRD TALES*, etc., such as *The Loved Dead*, *Deaf, Dumb and Blind*, etc., passed away on Tuesday, November 21, 1967, at the Osteopathic Hospital in Providence, R. I., after a long and painful illness. Death came to him as he slept. The doctor attending him telephoned me at quarter past six a. m., saying my husband had expired at about six a. m. Death came peacefully, after months of suffering.

"My husband, Clifford Martin Eddy, was a bosom pal of the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft, as so many people know, as since a letter of mine appeared in these columns a year or so ago, I received and answered much mail concerning our friendship with the late master of the macabre in fiction. Now my dear one lies sleeping in the same cemetery in which Howard P. Lovecraft sleeps, beautiful Swan Point Burial Ground, here on Blackstone Blvd.,

Have You Missed These Issues?

#2, November 1963: *The Space-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *The Faceless Thing*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Red Room*, H.G. Wells; *Hungary's Female Vampire*, Dean Lip-ton; *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.

#3, Feb. 1964: *Out of print.*

#4, Sept. 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.

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Coming Soon

LEAPERS

by Robert A. W. Lowndes

Have You Missed These 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 Shuttered Room, H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.

#8, April 1965: The Black Lough, 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.

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in Providence, R. I., where both Lovecraft and Eddy were born.

"Memories of HPL filled Mr. Eddy's life, and we talked much about the happy times when Lovecraft came to visit us at our humble abode. Now that Mr. Eddy has left this Earth I shall always recall those precious moments. To alleviate the loneliness incurred by my dear husband's demise I shall be glad to answer any letters regarding HPL or my husband's writings. Mr. Eddy and Mr. Lovecraft often discussed plots of their stories before writing them, and I was always an interested listener, although at times I, too, have tried my hand at weird stories. But these two men (I think you will agree) were tops in their field! August Derleth of Sauk City, Wisconsin, has re-published a few of my husband's stories in anthologies, and I hope some of your readers remember the name 'Eddy' as well as that of Lovecraft! My husband was not as prolific a writer as was HPL, but what he *did* write was bloodcurdlingly readable! He was 71 at his death, and on February 10, 1968 we would have observed our Golden Wedding . . . but God saw fit to take him . . . and who we are to question God? Nevertheless, I miss him . . . sorely. Letters will help assuage my loneliness! I visit his grave (and Lovecraft's) very often."

Did not The One who proclaimed that God was real, and a God of "the living, not the dead", also say, "Ask, and you shall receive; knock and it shall be opened to you?" If this be truth, then surely there can be answers for those who ask—but I have found that I cannot hear an

answer if I am already convinced (a) that there is no answer (b) the answer is utterly beyond my comprehension (c) some human doctrines have already given the answer, or the basis of it, and anything further *must* conform to this. It's like a scientist expecting The Universe to confirm the conclusions he has come to in advance of impartially examining all the available evidence. (One of the myths of Western Society is that scientists do not do this! Well, *all* scientists don't; and even some scientists who do, do not behave this way in all subjects; otherwise there would never have been any new answers found at all!) But, painful as it may be—and sometimes is—I have found that I cannot grasp more, at times, unless I'm willing to let go of some of the things I'm holding on to.

Hugo R. Blanco, Jr., of 3446 N. W. 17 Street, Miami, Florida 33125, writes: "I am interested in buying old *WEIRD TALES*, *STRANGE TALES*, or any other pulps magazines before 1950. Please ask your readers to write to me for information or send me their rates."

Marty Ketchum writes from Japlin, Missouri: "I am 16 years old and have been reading Robert E. Howard fantasy for almost two years. In MOH #18, Mr. Patrick Madden stated that if you are over 15, authors such as Howard and Burroughs will be the first to be abandoned. I must be the exception to his rule, because Howard is my favorite author.

"He also said I would probably become interested in best-sellers. This is true. I haven't read Hemingway or

Coming Soon
ONCE IN A
THOUSAND YEARS
by Frances Bragg Middleton

Have You Missed These Issues?

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Priluck; *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.

#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*, Greya 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.

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Have You Missed These Issues?

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Hereditry*, 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.

#15, Spring 1967: *The Room of Shadows*, Arthur J. Burks; *Lillies*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Flaw*, J. Vernon Shea; *The Doom of London*, Robert Barr; *The Vale of Lost Women*, Robert E. Howard; *The Ghoul Gallery*, Hugh B. Cave.

#16, Summer 1967: *Night and Silence*, Maurice Level; *Lazarus*, Leonid Andreyeff; *Mr. Octbur*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Dog That Laughed*, Charles Willard Diffin; *Ah, Sweet Youth*, Pauline Kappel Priluck; *The Man Who Never Was*, R. A. Lafferty; *The Leaden Ring*, S. Baring-Gould; *The Monster of the Prophecy*, Clark Ashton Smith.

Studs Lonigan, though. I have read various works on ancient history so I have a good background to read Howard's fantasy stories.

"As for Burroughs, I just recently read one of his novels in the 'Mars' series and I'm now reading others in this series. I must say that I don't like 'Tarzan' though.

"I do not like to read stories by Lovecraft or Poe, which also goes against Mr. Madden's theory. Mr. Madden quoted Gene D'Orsogna as saying Howard was boring. Well, he's 17 (D'Orsogna) and I'm 16, so when I'm 17 and if Howard begins to bore me I'll let you know. Until then I want to read as much by Howard as possible."

I doubt that Mr. Madden imagined that he was citing any sort of natural law, but rather just propounding what, at best, might be considered a generality. This sort of thing does happen often enough so that there is no reason to be astonished about it, and it doesn't hurt to assume the probability of its happening. But there's no reason why it *has* to happen to *you*, so I shan't be astonished either way.

G. H. Wagner, Jr., writes from Cincinnati, Ohio: "Congratulations on your discovery of G. G. Ketcham's, *The Rack*. I thought that nothing had been more 'written out' than the tale of the torture chamber. I was in error — Ketcham's story, though not supernatural, is an exceedingly fine and adroit piece of grue. It resembles most R. Anthony's *The Witch-Baiter* in style, though Ketcham is the better writer. It may sound trite, but we may have a budding Lovecraft here!

"The date of the story, by the way, is 1501. Tomás (not Thomas) de Torquemada died in 1498, and this tale is apparently set three years later. By inference, Ketcham must believe that the Spanish Inquisition ended its terror about 1491; if so, he is enormously in error. The historian Robbins records that 'the Spanish Inquisition still retained its conviction in the reality of magic into the nineteenth century.'

"Also, Ketcham speaks of 'the Morano Maiden'. This word should be 'Marrano', now a common Spanish and Italian family name. The original bearers of this name were Spanish Jews who converted to Catholicism. Many of Columbus' sailors were Marranos.

"Thanks for a fine story! "

Editor acknowledges error in letting the two misspellings get by, but he wrestled a bit over the poetic license whereby, for the sake of the story, the Inquisition has to close up shop in 1491. (An out could be that this is the opinion of a character in the story, but that won't quite do.) Perhaps I should have warned the reader that there was license being taken at one point. In any event, while there are many (and perhaps most) times when historical errors are not defensible in fiction, I do feel that occasional exception can be made; and this powerful little tale struck me as one of them. In *I, Claudius* Robert Graves has Caligula assassinated in a manner entirely at variance with the records; he knew better, but was using poetic license.

That such license is constantly abused should not result in its absolute repeal, but rather those writers

Have You Missed These Issues?

#17, Fall 1967: *A Sense of Crawling*, Robert Edmond Alter; *The Laughing Duke*, Wallace West; *Dermot's Ban*, Robert E. Howard; *The Spell of the Sword*, Frank Aubrey; "Williamson", Henry S. Whitehead; *The Curse Of Amen-Ra*, Victor Rousseau.

#18, November 1967: *In Amundsen's Tent*, John Martin Leahy; *Transient and Immortal*, Jim Haught; *Out of the Deep*, Robert E. Howard; *The Bibliophile*, Thomas Boyd; *The Ultimate Creature*, R. A. Lafferty; *Wolves of Darkness*, Jack Williamson.

#19, January 1968: *The Red Witch*, Nictzin Dyalhis; *The Last Letter From Norman Underwood*, Larry Eugene Meredith; *The Jewels of Vishnu*, Harriet Bennett; *The Man From Cincinnati*, Holloway Horn; *Ground Afire*, Anna Hunger; *The Wind In The Rose-Bush*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Last of Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashoura; *The Years are as a Knife*, (verse) Robert E. Howard.

#20, March 1968: *The Siren of the Snakes*, Arlton Eadie; *The Rack*, G. G. Ketcham; *A Cry From Beyond*, Victor Rousseau; *Only Gone Before*, Emil Petaja; *The Voice*, Nell Kay; *The Monsters*, Murray Leinster.

#21, May 1968: *Kings of the Night*, Robert E. Howard; *The Cunning of Private Rogoff*, David A. English; *The Brain-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *A Psychical Invasion* (part one), Algernon Blackwood; *Nasturtia*, Col. S. P. Meek; *The Dark Star*, G. G. Pendarves.

Order From Page 128

who take it out of carelessness or laziness should be censured. *The Rack*, I felt was a good story—not an all-time masterpiece, but a good story. And the error was not something thrown in for sensational detail (which could as easily either been omitted or corrected) but was the pivot of the story. Under these circumstances, let history bow to art for the moment, I say—and I say it as one who is frequently indignant over needless historical errors in fiction and films—particularly where sticking to the most reliable historical facts would have made for better art than ignoring them.

Charles Hidley, writes: "I've been meaning to mention, for some time now, that MOH is my favorite of your three publications. I don't quite know why that should be so, but each of them must have a slightly distinctive character (other than the sf-fantasy schism) or I'd not be able to put the focus. For one thing, the editorials seem to interest me more—this one on *GHOST STORIES* was very welcome.

"Since I never even saw a copy of *STRANGE TALES* (gulp!) and few enough of GS, I appreciate *anything* you deem fit to reprint from those pages. And try to get back a little farther into the 20s on WT, if at all feasible . . .

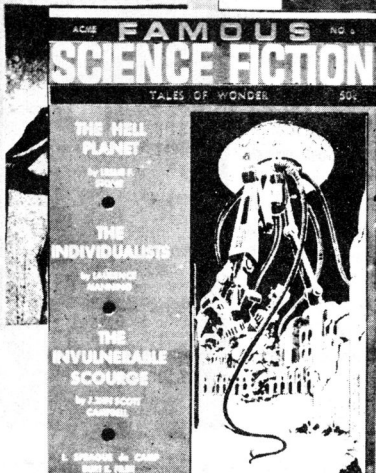
"The Finlay cover for March has long been my nominee for the most horrific illustration in the weird genre—and architectonic monument to nightmare revulsion, a truly pan-ic distillation. And so exquisitely rendered with the triple pyramidal structure and the tenderly crocheted backdrop.

"I have been reading a good bit

of Eadie of late, but his *Siren of the Snakes* is the best written of the lot, even with its semaphoric plot line. Despite everything, I owe him a good deal for making a span of my adolescence a cliff-hanging delight with all those chapters of *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof*.

"Petaja's short was good, with a style and 'period' flavor that belongs in MOH; and *The Rack* was a fair example of a neglected category of the outre that used to be called, I believe, the 'conte cruel'. I think you have a lot more luck with your short stories, both new and reprint, than with the 'novelet' length, and I suppose it's a question of 'no blame, jes fack' to point out that so many of the latter were penny-a-worders written by authors, earning a living, who were hacks with their right hand and imaginative innovators with their left. *The Reckoning* has proven repeatedly and irrevocably that the majority of the readers dig hack—and so be it. Nowadays editors have to eat, and this reader will be happy with all those 4-5-6 items on the tally. Just to know that *The Dark Star* is coming up ropes me right back into the corral."

It's good to hear that you feel a difference of character in each of our three titles, because certainly my aim is to give each one its own distinctive character. Couldn't say which of the three is my own favorite—the one I'm working on now, perhaps, whenever "now" is. But ye editor does take pains to keep "in character" with each of the three titles, so I'm glad to be told that my effort has had some success. RAWL



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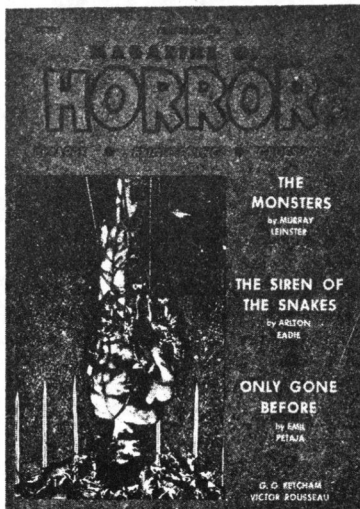
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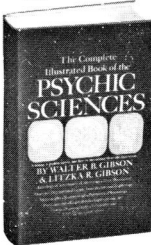
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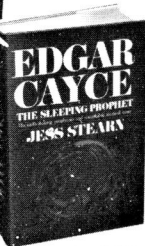
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