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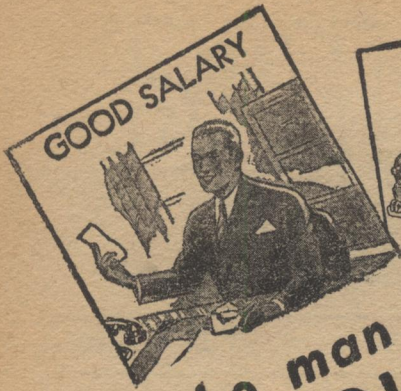
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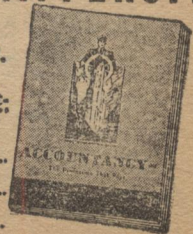
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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 21, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

March, 1950



A Complete Novel **THE LADY IS A WITCH**

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

William Wilson, the descendent of famed Boston surgeons, was a total failure as a doctor until enticing Priscilla arose from the ancient dust! 11

Two Complete Novelets

- MEN MUST DIE**.....Ward Hawkins 88
To save humanity, Seabrook was willing to sacrifice the greatest intellect known to man! A Hall of Fame Classic reprinted by popular demand
- ENCROACHMENT**.....Raymond F. Jones 112
Someone was stealing micro-seconds out of the universe and the oddly super-sensitive clock in Mary Carlson's mind was going mad!

Short Stories

- THE SIGN AND THE MESSAGE**.....Ted Powell 105
Earthmen plunge into the whirling mists of a strange planet, risking the fury of the Mogyars—and their terrible symbol
- APPOINTMENT IN NEW UTRECHT**.....Matt Lee 129
They brought General Woodhull back from the time of the Revolutionary War, but they were unable to avert his strange destiny

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IT gives us great pleasure to announce the birth of a new science fiction baby—duly christened **FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY** and soon to be available at your favorite newsstand.

It is a large and lusty infant—blooming, in fact—whose tri-monthly appearance will continue, we sincerely hope, for a long time to come.

FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY is devoted entirely to revival of the great sf tales of the past, tales whose length has prohibited their appearance in this magazine's Hall of Fame reprint feature. For years now our more mature readers have asked us to bring these stories back into print and—well, we're doing so, not only in **FSQ**—but also in a forthcoming and even larger annual which will be announced shortly.

The feature novel of **FSQ** is **THE HIDDEN WORLD**, one of Edmond Hamilton's early classics, and the remaining stories and novelets are drawn from a tragic list of by-lines that includes Festus Pragnell, John Beynon Harris, J. Harvey Haggard, John Russell Fearn, Will Garth, Stanley G. Weinbaum, Robert Arthur, Anthony Rud, Raymond Z. Gallun, Ray Cummings and many other favorites.

The "Golden Dawn" Era

In short, **FSQ** goes all the way back to the so-called "golden dawn" era of science fiction, to the best of the stories published under the editorial aegis of Hugo Gernsback. Naturally we are curious as to how these unforgotten yarns, culled from a fine and scarcely-tapped collection, will sit with you readers today. Judging from your frankness and quickness in written critical response, we shan't have long to wait.

All we can add is that you have been asking for such a magazine as **FANTASTIC STORY QUARTERLY** for many a long moon. Now you've got one, and we trust you'll get yourself a copy and look it over.

We hope you will like it in fact as well as you have in anticipation.

Plotting the Planets

With the **FSQ** safely announced we turn to a recent newspaper story that caught our eye. It concerned the fact that new and vastly improved machines for plotting the paths and variations of planets and stars in jig-time have been developed by Tom Watson's International Business Machines Corporation.

According to the story, astronomers are already finding the new astro-calculators invaluable for both accuracy and time-saving and an internal paragraph hinted that further developments of the devices would not only be available but would be virtually essential to any forthcoming efforts at actual space navigation.

Shades of all the time-honored dreams of pioneer space travel. No rugged Leif Ericssons hand-sighting in the prow against the buffeting back-wash of an alien atmosphere. No bearded da Gamas or stately Columbus unfurling gold-stitched standards and bowing low to kiss the soil of newly-reached globes.

In all probability we'll have a crew of button-punchers, sitting well-shielded in some interior cabin, checking their radar against the calculations of a battery of glorified adding machines. It's going to be awfully hard on the ham—Smithfield, Prague, Westphalian or whatever—that lurks in most of us.

Space Flight Is Complicated

But space flight, when it comes, is going to be an infinitely complicated affair—perhaps more so in its earlier manifestations than later on, when some of the bugs have been worked out to permit simplification. Anyone who has ever looked at the appalling complexity of a bomber or transport pilot's instrument board must appreciate how much more involved will be the tools and

(Continued on page 8)

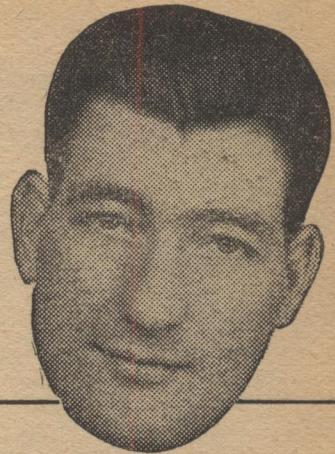
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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

problems faced by the navigators and pilots of the void.

Machines are going to have to do most of the work if not all of it—ham notwithstanding. And if I.B.M. comes up with the best machines, they'll be used.

For some reason, however, the very pro-saicness of this idea sends us thinking back to Frederic Brown's **WHAT MAD UNIVERSE**, which appeared in the September, 1948, issue of **STARTLING STORIES** and is currently being published in book form by Dutton (see the Science Fiction Bookshelf in this issue).

Some of you may remember that in this Brown's hero landed in a parallel time track where Earth had had space flight since early in the present century—thanks to a Harvard professor, who had discovered a sort of reverse gravity while repairing his wife's sewing machine.

From sewing machines to International Business Machines is not, after all, a far cry. It occurs to us that perhaps Mr. Brown was closer to the future truth than he realized. Now if someone would just discover a use for old socks in enabling a manned rocket ship to land safely on its hinder, we'll let out a loud huzzah.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

JOHN D. MacDONALD makes his debut as a full-length science fiction novelist, come May, with a memorable and magnificent story of interspatial relationships entitled **WINE OF THE DREAMERS**. We have a hunch that, thanks to its fine imaginative concepts and brilliantly detailed characterization and development of a frightening conflict, it will take its place in the very first rank of novels we have published in SS.

It concerns in large part the bitter struggle of scientist Bard Lane, abetted by psychiatrist Sharan Inly, to push through the first real government spaceship program. Bard is selflessly ambitious, reasonably young and determined to conquer all obstacles, man-made or otherwise.

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(Continued on page 187)

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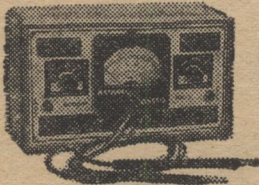


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here. You learn construction, alignment, make receiver tests, and do trouble shooting.

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Mail in envelope or paste on penny postal.

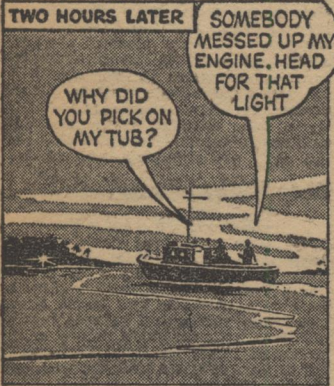
AND THEN JEFF SPRUNG THE TRAP...



WHAT GOES?

NEVER MIND THE QUESTIONS. CAST OFF AND LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

TIED UP TO A LONELY DOCK IN A SMALL SOUTHERN BAY, JEFF BELL, "TROPICAL TRAMP," IS SPENDING A QUIET EVENING ABOARD HIS BATTERED LAUNCH, WHEN...



TWO HOURS LATER

WHY DID YOU PICK ON MY TUB?

SOMEBODY MESSED UP MY ENGINE. HEAD FOR THAT LIGHT



HURRY UP, YOU!

THESE THINGS ARE HEAVY

ONE MORE BOX, PETE



HEAVE TO!

SO! IT WAS A PLANT! DUMP THOSE PLATES!

HOLD IT! I'M TAKING OVER NOW!



LATER

TRAP WORKED. COUNTERFEITERS LED ME TO CACHE. BOTH CAPTURED, ALONG WITH PLATES. BELL

I'LL BE GLAD TO SHED THIS BEACHCOMBER RIG. CAN I CLEAN UP HERE?



HERE'S MY RAZOR AND SOME SHORE CLOTHES



WONDERFUL BLADE YOU'VE GOT HERE! I CAN'T RECALL A SMOOTHER, EASIER SHAVE!

THIN GILLETTES GO OVER BIG ON THIS SHIR. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN



WHO'S THE GOOD-LOOKING CIVILIAN?

JEFF BELL, CLEVEREST AGENT IN THE SERVICE. I HEAR HE'S IN LINE FOR THE CHIEF'S JOB

FOR QUICK, CLEAN, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES... AND MORE OF 'EM PER BLADE ... USE THIN GILLETTES. THESE BLADES ARE BY FAR THE KEENEST AND LONGEST-LASTING IN ALL THE LOW-PRICED FIELD. PRECISION MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY, THIN GILLETTES PROTECT YOUR FACE AGAINST NICKS AND IRRITATION. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE ECONOMICAL 10-BLADE PACKAGE



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NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

Bill Wilson, descendent of famed Boston surgeons, was a total flop as a doctor until enticing Priscilla arose from the dust of centuries!



The LADY is a WITCH

A Novel by **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

CHAPTER I

The Key and the Book

DR. WILLIAM WILSON, M.D., left his prewar sedan parked under the peeling paint of the porte-cochere in the driveway of his Brookline home.

There was a certain thin defiance in the gesture—a refusal to admit that an emergency call might not summon him from the solitary meal he was about to

Ruled by a Siren Voice, an Enchanted Healer

prepare and eat in the vast sprung-floored kitchen of the echoing old house. Bill Wilson would be thirty-five on the Armistice Day that lay months ahead. Although his features were well modeled he was not and had never been considered handsome. In his youth the fear of not living up to a rigidly high ancestral standard had given him an over-intensity which denied him his physical birthright. During the war years he had been too busy to consider the matter of his looks. And since then he had acquired the premature colorlessness of failure.

His failure entered the old house with him, riding his shoulders so heavily that he stooped a trifle. It was always with him. His lack of patients was becoming not only an enduring but an increasing phenomenon in Boston medical circles. Virtually the only work he managed to get was of the hospital charity sort. Even there he was held in scarcely higher regard than the rawest interne.

He could hear their voices—the nurses, the orderlies, his fellow physicians—as he paused in the dimness of what had once been a stately hallway. It was, "Dr. Wilson, I'm sorry but you can't . . ." or it was, "Dr. Wilson, the patient has been transferred to Dr.—" He was beginning to wonder whether he had ability to qualify even as a practical nurse.

SIGHING, he switched on the lights whose fixtures had once piped illuminating gas into the Wilson mansion, and looked around him at the dignified dinginess of his ancestral home. It was like standing alone at dusk in a twenty-two room mausoleum. The air was close and musty and slightly damp and the stained-glass window of the stair landing mocked him dismally with the faint light of the departing April day.

He walked quickly from the hall after tossing his raglan topcoat and rumpled snap-brim over a reed-bottom Hitchcock chair, passed through the little-used dining room and the butler's pan-

try to the huge and idle kitchen. Scorning the stove, he made himself a melted cheese sandwich on an electric hotplate, poured himself a glass of milk from the gleaming refrigerator, the one completely modern gadget in the aging house. Afterward he munched an apple, brought in by Mrs. Fitch, the elderly part-time relic who came in days to do what cleaning for him she could.

His lonely meal finished in a matter of minutes, Bill Wilson retraced his steps through pantry, dining room and on through the hall to the library, carefully turning off lights behind him in his progress. With his small income almost entirely eaten up by taxes, office rent and bare living essentials, an over-large electric bill could be a problem.

Above the bookshelves which lined the library, other Wilsons stared down at him from tarnished gilt frames. Their stern eyes seemed curiously alive and reproachful. They appeared to be asking him why he, alone of them all, had been unable to win prominence as a leading Boston surgeon. After all, they had without exception accomplished this feat for seven generations.

Bill had always wanted to be a doctor, true enough. He had, he suspected, considerable flair for the profession. But surgery was not for him. His talents lay the other way, toward diagnosis and general treatment. And his heritage kept herding him back into surgery as surely as a rat in a maze is herded by the wire portcullises of psychology.

He looked again at the portraits which regarded him with such mournful reproof. Surely, he thought, some one among them must have been faced with the sort of problem that had confronted him since entering Harvard Medical School a dozen years before. His eyes wandered to the bookcase at his left, where each of his known ancestors had placed a private memoir for family perusal. The gold tooling on the costly Florentine leather bindings seemed to issue him an invitation to explore their pages.

He got up from the uneven springs

Cures the Ailing—and Holds Death at Bay!

of the armchair in which he had been pursuing his melancholy thoughts. He had an odd sensation that he was a puppet on strings which dictated his every movement. A faint sense of cold rippled down his cervical vertebrae but he shook it off as nonsense. After all, Mrs. Fitch—bless her—had seen that the furnace was giving heat.

Yet his hand and arm seemed to move without his volition to the oldest



BILL WILSON

of the family memoirs, a volume whose faded gold letters bore the legend EZRA WILSON. He plucked it from the shelf and was surprised by its weight. It fell from his fingers and struck the floor, flying open.

He picked it up and returned to his chair. The title page was intriguingly antique in paper and printing. He turned to page one and the book slipped inexplicably from his lap to the floor, again lying open as it struck—and to the same page as before. He shook his head in exasperation at his own clumsiness, and stooped to retrieve it. He turned again to page one.

This time the book seemed actually to be tugged from his grip. Once more it landed upright and open beneath him—open to the same page. Forcing him-

self to smile, he picked it up and sat down again. If anything within himself or otherwise were forcing him to read this page, he might as well do so. He did.

A hitherto well-buttressed segment of his family pride came tumbling down about his ears. For Ezra Wilson, according to the faded and archaic type, with its *ye's* and *fs's* and tilted page-sets, had been more than a *physickian* and surgeon. He, had, avowed the long-dead author of the memoir, been closely leagued with the powers of darkness then rampant in New England and elsewhere. He had, in short, been a male witch—a wizard.

Bill Wilson read on with what he told himself was rising incredulity—but the record was there and not to be denied. Ezra Wilson had been a one-man hoof-and-mouth disease, causing cattle the countryside around to sicken and die without apparent cause other than the devil's wish.

His talents had been varied and considerable in his capacity as Satan's handyman. When he wasn't putting good beef down for the count he was setting fire to houses and fields, ruining crops with inexplicable hailstorms or—and this was hardest of all for his descendant to take—causing little children to sicken and die mysteriously.

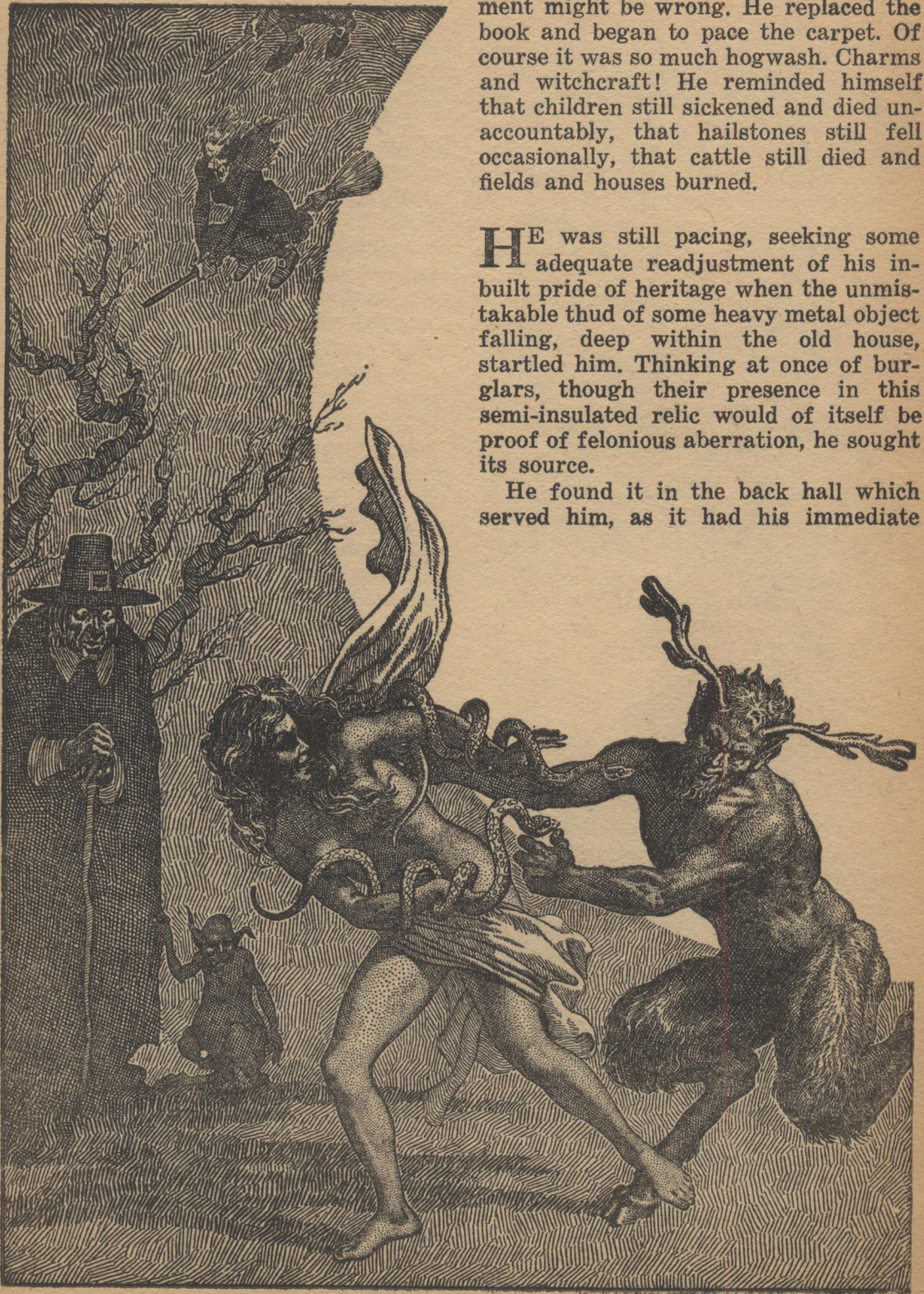
Bill slammed the ancient tome shut with finality at this point. There had been, in the earlier portions of the narrative, a quaint but compelling plausibility that had held his attention. But when it came to charming Puritan tots to death, his practical medical mind dismissed the whole story as hogwash.

It was no wonder he hadn't happened to stumble on this particular volume before. The entire bookshelf was filled with volumes written by and about his family—evidence of that curious if frequently unqualified yearning to write which has been so much a part of upper-case Boston down the centuries. As a boy he had automatically dismissed them as dull stuff and had never had cause to discover that his early judg-

ment might be wrong. He replaced the book and began to pace the carpet. Of course it was so much hogwash. Charms and witchcraft! He reminded himself that children still sickened and died unaccountably, that hailstones still fell occasionally, that cattle still died and fields and houses burned.

HE was still pacing, seeking some adequate readjustment of his in-built pride of heritage when the unmistakable thud of some heavy metal object falling, deep within the old house, startled him. Thinking at once of burglars, though their presence in this semi-insulated relic would of itself be proof of felonious aberration, he sought its source.

He found it in the back hall which served him, as it had his immediate



forbears, as that famed and non-existent closet does Fibber McGee and his spouse. A large, heavy and well-rusted key had fallen from its supporting nail on the wall. He pondered the bizarreness of the episode—for the key had not dropped to the floor directly beneath its nail.

It seemed to have taken wing for a good ten feet, thereby missing the carpet which would have deadened the sound of its fall. Dr. Wilson pondered the oddity, recalled the fact that Ripley was dead and would probably not have been interested anyway, and returned it to its allotted nail, which was driven into the wall at such an angle that any fall appeared impossible.

He studied it and was reminded that this key unlocked the ancient mausoleum which stood in its immovable Vermont granite perhaps a hundred yards behind the house in the gone-to-seed yard which ate up the entire heart of the large and irregular Brookline block. This large crypt was the final resting place of all the Wilsons in the direct line—including Ezra.

Bill Wilson shivered. Then, annoyed at himself for such an infantile reaction, he began to walk back toward the library.

"Witchcraft is a mockery of every virtue, and Walpurgis Night is its unholy celebration"



He had taken no more than five paces when he heard the sharp and heavy sound of metal upon wood behind him. He started, turned quickly—and there was the key again on the bare floor ten feet from the hook. It took considerable will power to return and pick it up this time. He could feel the nape of his neck tingle.

He did not return it directly to the hook. Instead, prompted by some urge he could not understand, he held it, studied it, felt an irrepressible impulse to carry it with him to the mausoleum, there to fulfill its purpose of opening the rusted iron door.

He was walking through the early darkness over the uneven spring-soft surface of the unkempt yard before he knew what he was doing—the big key still clutched in his right hand. Once more he felt as if some unseen Tony Sarg were directing his limbs with puppet strings.

He stood in front of the tomb, whose granite bulk was etched faintly with the light of a distant street lamp. His right hand came up, carrying the key, put it against the hole in the lock. Metal grated against metal with a rasping sound.

Suddenly Bill Wilson snapped out of it. He gave a hoarse cry, which seemed to shatter the spell that had, unaccountably, laid its mantle upon him. Without apology he turned and raced back toward the big house, that loomed, thrice rebuilt, like a Charles Addams cartoon at the far end of a ragged vista of half-budded poplars.

Safely inside, he broke the habit of a lifetime by withdrawing from its cupboard recess a nearly-full bottle of rare Armagnac and pouring himself a stout peg. He chased it with another glass of milk and, his blood again running warmly through his veins, returned to the library and sought to discover what had happened to him that evening.

He considered the genes and hormones and any Mendelian possibility of ancestral memory. Something had certainly been operating within him against his conscious will and interest.

The book with a behavior pattern of its own, the key that defied the force of gravity, the irresistible impulse to visit the tomb—they totalled to something very like possession.

It was nonsense. He glared at the back binding of Ezra Wilson's memoir, now reposing demurely in its proper place in the bookcase. Then, when nothing further occurred, he walked back to the kitchen, took down the brandy bottle, placed it on a tray along with a pitcher of ice-water and a pair of glasses—one large, one small—and returned to the library. There, glancing occasionally at the Ezra Wilson tome, he swallowed the velvet-smooth liquor, drop by drop.

When he went upstairs at last to slumber, Bill Wilson was quite drunk—and he was not a person who believed in or practiced solitary toping.

CHAPTER II

Skeleton in the Family

BILL WILSON'S waiting room—one of many score in a Back Bay building devoted to medical practice—was large, bare and in need of a coat of paint. The furniture was archaic, as were the dog-eared copies of *Esquire* and the *National Geographic Magazine* that reposed in auspiciously good order on the nearby green-oak refectory table. The carpet, once resplendently Persian, was now a faded relic whose basic cordage showed all too clearly in three irregular patches.

But Bill Wilson had long grown accustomed to his surrounding seediness. He passed through the waiting room without a glance, unlocked his consultation room and seated himself behind his desk. There he opened a left-hand drawer, took out a pack of cards and laid out the seven stacks of a hand of Canfield.

Half an hour later the waiting room door opened and closed. Bill lifted his

head, began methodically to put away his cards and to restore what professional appearance his office possessed. There was, he thought, little sense in hurrying. Any patient who came to him would be in sufficiently dire straits not to chance rushing away.

When he opened the door and looked out, he discovered that he knew the elderly couple who waited patiently on the oak-and-horsehair sofa. They were Mr. and Mrs. Pembroke, who had long been tenant farmers on the old Wilson summer home beyond Westwood. They had, thanks to his father's high consideration of their loyalty and industry, long since been able to purchase their own small farm. Now, in evident trouble, they turned instinctively to a Wilson for help.

"It's Martha," Mr. Pembroke told him, nodding toward his wife. He was a little man, oddly reminiscent of a small but honest rodent, with a yellowed mustache and defiant manner. His fingernails were black and broken from the soil he tilled and there was a faint aroma of sweat about him.

"What seems to be the trouble with Martha?" Wilson inquired, looking at the seamed, kindly face of the inarticulate elderly woman.

"That's just it—we don't know," said her husband. "That's why we came to you, doctor." He hesitated, frowning, glanced at his wife, then blurted, "She's got a lump under her arm and it's been getting a lot bigger lately."

Bill Wilson sighed. "How long," he asked quietly, "has she had it?"

Mrs. Pembroke attempted what was meant to be a deprecating smile. She was obviously a woman who hated to cause anyone trouble of any kind. "Maybe two—three years," she said in a tight, unexpectedly high voice. "It never hurt me none so I couldn't see how it was harmful."

Dr. Wilson led her into his consultation room. He had her remove her blouse and let her slip drop to her waist. He studied the growth and his lips compressed. He told her to put her clothes back on and sat down behind his desk.

"You should have come to me when it first appeared," he said with a trace of bitterness, knowing the agony that lay ahead for this kindly old woman. "Two years ago it probably could have been checked through surgical treatment. Now I'm afraid there is little I or anyone else can do."

Mrs. Pembroke glanced almost furtively at her husband, who had been watching the examination from the doorway.

His voice was a trifle unsteady as he said, "You mean—you think it's serious, Dr. Wilson?"

"Cancer is always serious," Wilson said bluntly. "There's a bare possibility that skilled surgery can hold it in check—at least for awhile. I'd suggest you see Dr. Sprague—his office is at the end of the hall. Tell him I sent you and why. He may agree to operate."

Mrs. Pembroke got slowly, shakily to her feet. Her face was deathly white. Her husband sprang forward quickly to put an arm around her. She looked directly at Bill, who had also risen, and there was the appeal of an injured animal in her faded grey eyes.

"But, Dr. Wilson, I came to you because I wanted *you* to take care of me—not Dr. Sprague, however good he is. Your father always treated me until he died. Your grandfather took care of my folks—and my husband's. I wanted you—"

"I'm aware of that," Wilson interrupted, unable to endure longer the unspoken accusations of this faithful family friend and servant. "Believe me, I appreciate the faith in me both you and your husband have expressed. But I'm not enough of a surgeon to give you the treatment you must have."

"For nigh unto two and a half centuries the Wilsons have been big surgeons," said Mr. Pembroke half-angrily. It was evident he didn't believe what Bill had tried to tell them. "Maybe you think we can't afford the fee. . . ."

"It's not that," said Dr. Wilson unhappily. "It's just that some men aren't cut out to be surgeons. Dr. Sprague—well, he is."

"Then you won't handle Martha's case?" Pembroke asked aggressively.

"If anything but surgery could help Martha I'd do everything in my power," Bill told him. "But I am not a good surgeon, despite my lineage. I'm refusing the case because I don't feel myself capable of handling it as well as Dr. Sprague."

PEMBROKE'S face grew ugly. His eyes were hard as he pulled three crumpled dollar bills from a threadbare snap-purse and laid them on the desk with insulting deliberation. Without a word he took his wife by the arm and led her from the office, slamming the door behind him with unnecessary violence.

Wilson poked at the tired money with a forefinger, then sighed and put the bills in his wallet. They would, he thought unhappily, probably represent his take for the morning. Sighing, he opened the left-hand drawer and brought out the deck of cards.

Eating lunch in a modest cafeteria—his income did not go to running up bills at his club or the more expensive hotels and restaurants—Bill tried to put a mental finger on what had gone wrong with his life and career. Certainly his professional existence was slipping from bad to worse.

It had looked promising enough in his school years—at Newton Country Day School, Milton Academy and Harvard. And his marks at Harvard Medical School had been high enough to win him an internship at Massachusetts General Hospital. But from then on it had been a downhill course.

He returned to his office loneliness, still pondering. In the war, relatively unhampered by the stultifying effects of the Wilson reputation for surgical genius in Boston and its environs, he was able to do better. His work on tropical diseases had won him approval and ultimately a lieutenant colonelcy. He had felt, for a little while, that he had found his niche.

Peace, however, had tossed him back into the same old high-walled rut. Un-

able to settle away from Boston because of the tangled unsalability of his inherited property, he had had no opportunity to practice as he wished. Now . . . he wondered what the end would be, how long it could be staved off.

He heard the door of the outer office open and close, heard footsteps approaching briskly across the waiting room carpet. Then his own door was flung open unceremoniously and Dr. Lawrence Sprague stood there. He eyed the cards scornfully, waved Bill back into his chair, took the chair across the desk.

Larry Sprague was three years older than Bill Wilson—he had been a senior in Medical School when Bill was a freshman. He was casually well dressed, radiated an appearance of dashing competence and was rightfully self-assured. He was definitely a young Boston surgeon on his way. He was, in short, everything Bill Wilson was not.

"You could have knocked," Bill told him reproachfully, putting the cards back into their case. "After all, I might have been treating a patient."

"Bosh," said Sprague with a good-humored grin. "You haven't got any patients. Bill, as a doctor you're a bust. Why not admit it before you hurt somebody?"

"And maybe play outfield for the Red Sox?" said Bill. "I'm doing all right, thank you, Larry." Although he could not help feeling resentment at his colleague's cavalier entrance, Bill was equally unable to prevent himself from falling under the other's charm. Larry Sprague made a helpless gesture.

"Doing all right, my foot," he said. "Who's kidding who—or whom? Bill, my office is right down the hall. My nurse keeps tabs on—oh, what's the use? I didn't come here to argue the merits of your career. I dropped in to unload a hunk of my alleged mind. Mrs. Pembroke paid me a visit this morning."

"I sent her to you," said Bill. "Perhaps I should have sent her to Bascom."

"Perhaps," said Sprague. "But that's beside the point. She was your patient. Why unload her on me or anyone else

at this stage? Why didn't you retain the case—call in consultants if you liked—”

“She has tumors beneath the arm,” said Bill with all the patience he could muster. “They may or may not be malignant. But in either case they have to come out, don't they?”

“Well—yes, I suppose so,” Sprague admitted slowly.

“I'm not the man to do it,” Bill told him with painful honesty. “I'm no surgeon—I'm a diagnostician—and that's what's wrong with me. I've got seven generations of surgical Wilsons haunting me. I've tried, Larry—but I'm simply not designed by nature to operate. I loathe using the knife.”

Sprague nodded with sudden sympathy. “And to make things worse you're incredibly honest,” he said. “People expect and want you to be a surgeon and when you refuse their cases they think you incapable of curing a common cold—as if any of us can.”

“That's about it,” said Bill. “Mind you, Larry, I'm a believer in tradition. Belief in family is a great moral stiffener. And I admire my ancestors—all of them. But you can't make a silk-sutured surgeon out of the proverbial sow's left ear. And that, I fear, is Bill Wilson.”

“It's funny,” said Sprague. “I used to envy you—sure, I admit it. I was jealous of the prestige of your name, of your chances. Me—my people were small-time country storekeepers or veterinarians. I've had to sweat my way up every step of the way. But, Bill, I

don't envy you now. You've got troubles and no mistake.”

“Troubles which I fear I must work out for myself,” said Bill, a trifle stiffly. Larry sighed and shook his head.

“There you go again,” he said. “Why don't you rise in your large non-white cravat and slug me. I've earned it just now. Or doesn't the stuffing in your frayed shirt give you leeway enough to swing your arms?”

BILL wondered what he should do. Having it out with Larry Sprague would do no one much good—it could cause a lot of harm. Desperately he tried to think of some way of terminating the distasteful scene. And then, mercifully, he heard the outer door open and close.

“I'm sorry, Larry,” he said quietly. “I seem to have a patient after all. Do you mind leaving by the private door?” He nodded toward the entrance directly into the corridor from his consultation room.

Sprague rose and shook his head. “Always the perfect gent, eh, Bill? I'm sorry as the devil I said all this but you make me so darned mad! I honestly wish I could help you.”

“I don't need help,” said Bill, “and I do have a patient waiting.”

Hand on the doorknob, Larry Sprague took a parting shot. “Bill, if you could simply forget about your famed forefathers and remember that

[Turn page]

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they were just as human as you and I—though perhaps a little luckier—you'd be a lot better off. You ought to look into them—I'll lay you odds you'll find at least one of them deserved a hangman's rope instead of an honored role in his community."

"It's possible, I suppose," said Bill, recalling Ezra and the events of the night before.

"I dare you to check back," said Sprague. "I already have and I've found something extremely interesting. Take a look before the Revolution. You might be surprised. So long."

He closed the door quietly, though Bill thought he could hear a soft chuckle from somewhere. So Larry Sprague knew about Ezra too. He found himself disliking and resenting the fact that Sprague had been snooping around his family tree. Why, he wondered, didn't Larry stick to his own horse doctors and general store folk.

Gathering himself, Bill rose and opened the waiting room door. A thin, ascetic-looking man, whose blue eyes were surprisingly bright and large behind thick lenses, rose from the horse-hair sofa. He wore tweeds and flannels of good cut which revealed themselves to be in fabric middle-age.

"I am not a patient," said the stranger with a precise, rather high-pitched diction that was reminiscent of the pedant. "However, I have come to see you, Dr. Wilson, on a matter of great personal importance."

"I'm sorry," said Bill, as politely as he could under the circumstances. His gaze roved the waiting room for a sample case. "Whatever you're selling, I'm afraid I don't want any. At the moment I am engaged in wrestling with a personal problem of my own. So if you please . . ."

"But, Dr. Wilson," said the little man, looking surprised, "I am not selling anything. My name is Thaddeus Link."

He paused as if he expected the syllables to give Bill Wilson some mollifying reaction. But Thaddeus Link meant nothing to the young doctor. They

stared at each other for a moment, Link expectantly, Bill simply puzzled.

"I'm sorry," Bill said finally, "but I'm afraid you've caught me at rather a bad time. I'm afraid I can't listen to you now. My problem quota is filled."

"Very well," replied Thaddeus Link with unexpected meekness. He turned and walked slowly from the office. Bill promptly forgot about him as he returned to the chair behind his desk and began to mull over Larry Sprague's taunts.

The more he thought about Sprague the angrier he became. He cooked up at least a half dozen replies he should have made to his meddling colleague. But, of course, it was much too late. He glanced at his watch, saw that the afternoon was getting on apace, decided to clear out before he let his growing anger cause him to do something foolish. He could think it over better at home. At any rate, he could dig into the Wilson family history in search of further facts about Ezra.

He got his car out of the parking lot after closing the office and drove directly home, past the Reservoir and Boston College and then over the winding Chestnut Hill roads that led to the old Brookline house and grounds. Another car, even older and more rickety than his own, was parked at one side of the weed-grown driveway, close to the porte-cochere. Thaddeus Link sat behind the wheel.

"Dr. Wilson," he said, emerging from it to join Bill at the foot of the porch steps. "Dr. Wilson, if you will only let me explain. I feel that it is very important to science that you—"

"Listen, Lynx, or whatever your name is," said Bill, regarding his unprepossessing visitor with disfavor. "If you are trying to interest me in some financial venture or the endorsement of some quackish product, you are wasting your time. Please permit me the constitutional freedom of solitude."

He brushed past his visitor, unlocked the front door and entered the gloomy big hall. After shedding topcoat and hat, he went directly to the library, re-

garded his ancestors on the wall with a baleful glance that they balefully returned, then gathered together a half dozen books which he took to the desk.

WITHIN ten minutes he found himself back in the days of a Boston that stretched balloonlike into the Bay from a thin narrow isthmus, a Boston of winding narrow streets, brick and wooden homes and shops, a Boston of Common and Frog Pond and Noddles Island and Cotton Mather and Royal Governor Sir William Phipps, the former blacksmith who won eminence through the discovery of a pirate's treasure.

It was a Boston of narrow beliefs and strictly regulated conduct, a town of superstition and fear of the devil, a town in which commerce flourished only by decree of the King and witchcraft by decree of Old Nick himself.

He read the accounts of theologians and prosecutors, the confessions of witch and wizard, the tales of witnesses and "victims." He read of stocks and pillory, of ducking stool and gibbet, of spells and incantations, of covens and sabbaths, of black masses, of incubi and succubi, of all the strange web of myth and folklore that flourished in an era that feared darkness and the flare of torchlight equally.

The doorbell shrilled through the silence and he came back from the past with a start and a curse. That would be Thaddeus Link, or whatever his name was, again. His frustrations boiling within him, Wilson got up and strode purposefully to the front door.

But it was not the persistent little man with the distorting glasses. It was Natalie Page, long-limbed, honey-blond well-bred Boston at its most charming. She greeted him cheerfully.

"Hello, darling. I was just passing by and I—Bill, what's wrong?" Her dusty-blue eyes expressed concern.

"I don't—oh, a lot of things," Wilson told her, feeling something approaching happiness for the first time since dawn of the day before. Sometimes, in his introspective futility, he wondered

why on earth Natalie had stood by him. After all, she was so lovely, so popular. so—well, it seemed almost a waste that she should cling to a failure like himself.

"All right," he said, deciding to face it. "I'm a twenty-four-carat bust."

"Mine's a thirty-four," said Natalie gravely, although her mouth quirked upward at the corners. Unexpectedly she reached up and ruffled his hair. "Bill, you shmoo, I know all about it. Larry Sprague called me—feeling like the world's biggest heel. He seemed to think he'd thrown you off balance by sniping at you about some family black sheep."

"That isn't what threw me off balance, honey," said Bill. "It's the family, yes. But not old Ezra. It's trying to live up to the rest of them. I keep feeling that they're reproaching me. Kidding aside, it's not a pleasant sensation."

"You could live up to them and more," said Natalie. She sat on the arm of his chair and idly fingered the book on the desk in front of them. "Why not pull up stakes? Get away somewhere—anywhere—and start clean?"

"Leave this house? Leave you?" said Bill in alarm. "Natalie, I couldn't. I've got to fight this thing out right here—even if I don't win."

Natalie nodded at the tomes on the desk. "You've been digging into the family archives, I see." She peered more closely at the open page. "Witchcraft yet!" she mocked. "Bill, don't tell me you've got wizard blood in you."

"Heavens no," said Bill. "At least I hope not." He met her cool dusty-blue eyes and felt himself blush. "You're laughing at me—not that I blame you. I wish my family had been ditchdiggers, taxi dancers, anything!"

"So do I." Natalie slipped off the arm of the chair and adjusted long powder blue gloves. "But I'm afraid you don't really mean it. You see, I'm afraid I know you too well. Happy ancestor worship."

With that she left him. Bill sighed and pushed back into place the forelock she had disarranged and leaned back in

his chair.

Sooner or later he would lose Natalie—if he hadn't already lost her. Inescapably his thoughts roved back to Ezra Wilson, the wizard.

He wondered if the powers of darkness could help him. Certainly nothing else had so far.

His gaze became fixed on the bookcase across the room, on the binding of the book which had behaved so inexplicably the night before. Stifling a sheepish embarrassment he began to intone softly.

"If I am the descendant of witchcraft and wizardry—if there were ever such things and such powers, then I wish the book concerning my evil ancestor to fly over here and be deposited on this desk before me."

He waited tensely but nothing happened.

Then a dry pedantic voice spoke from directly behind him.

"Some people might construe that as insanity, doctor."

He jumped and turned. Thaddeus Link was smiling at him crookedly, his eyes looking larger than ever.

"Don't tell me to get out, doctor," said the stranger. "If you do I'll broadcast the fact that you were attempting to invoke witchcraft to your aid. I know it's blackmail, but necessity must take advantage of circumstances."

"How did you get in here?" Wilson asked finally, feeling his face grow hot.

"The young lady let me in, when she left," Link replied. "She suggested, when I inquired if I could see you, that it was more than she could do. Apparently she left in some sort of a high dudgeon."

For a moment Bill Wilson was furious. Why, he wondered, was everyone butting into his personal affairs at once? First the Pembrokes, then Larry Sprague, then Natalie, now this odd intruder. Then, suddenly, he sensed that such a simultaneous onset formed an irresistible pattern. He waved at a chair.

"Sit down," he said, "and let's hear it. You've talked me into it."

CHAPTER III

Cryptic Radiations

LINK did not sit down. Instead, thumbs going to the armholes of his waistcoat, he rocked on his heels and regarded Bill Wilson with the benign self-interest of the long-time lecturer.

"In the first place," he said, "I am not a salesman. I am Thaddeus Link, Ph.D., professor of parapsychology at M. I. T.—currently on sabbatical leave. I have been pursuing certain experimental lines of my own during the eight months just past that have led me inescapably to you, Dr. Wilson."

"Me?" said Bill, astonished. "Why me?"

"Because of the records and entombment of a certain ancestor of yours."

"*Et tu, Brute?*" said Bill with a groan. "Ezra, I presume."

"Why—yes," said Professor Link. Wilson shook his head and sighed.

"Granting you are what you say you are, sir, and I see no reason to doubt you," he said, "I fail to see the connection between Ezra Wilson, whatever he may have been, and parapsychology."

"The connection is somewhat obscure at first glance," said Thaddeus Link with a trace of pontificality. He smiled and Bill found himself unexpectedly liking the little man, even while the purpose of his visit was baffling.

"However," Link went on, "it is there as you will presently discover. Your great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, Ezra Wilson, won himself a reputation as one of the most particularly evil broadcasters of witchcraft and wizardry of his highly witch-infested era." He spoke slowly, turned his phrases carefully, like a man who had learned to build his speeches with precision.

"But surely there were other witches and wizards as well authenticated," protested Bill. "I never even heard of

Ezra until last night."

"That is probable." Link nodded. "It seems hardly likely that your family would have done much talking about him. But you don't seem to have lost any time since discovering him if your recent incantation means anything."

"I was just fooling," said Bill, feeling inadequate. "But I'm still in a fog as to the purpose of your coming to me."

"Bear with me," said the professor. "I shall endeavor to clarify myself. Ezra Wilson's ill fame was so wide-spread and his alleged evil so feared by the good citizens of the Massachusetts Bay Colony that, when it was decided to execute him, there was considerable worry as to what method should best be employed."

"Gruesome," muttered Wilson. Then, "But how did you learn all this?" He regarded the bookshelf with its family archives, glanced at his visitor.

"I am not guilty of housebreaking," said the professor with a smile. "The Public Library has complete archives on witchcraft in New England. However, witchcraft as such holds neither my credence nor interest. What does interest me is the method of Ezra Wilson's interment."

"I'm still baffled," said Bill.

"That's understandable," Link said, nodding. "But when Ezra Wilson was sentenced to death there was, as I have already said, considerable dispute as to method. It was feared that hanging would not prevent his evil soul from escaping to possess someone else and continue to ravage the countryside."

"For awhile they talked of burning him—but you know that no witches were burned in New England. It was feared that the smoke would spread his evil essence all over the colony. Rhode Island even registered a protest, fearing that the wind might be blowing in the direction of the Providence Plantations."

"Absurd," said Bill, but he had no reason for doubt. His recent reading had been an eye-opener as to the depth of seventeenth century superstition.

"Certainly," Link agreed. "But the

results were not. Ezra Wilson was put into a coffin in irons—sealed in a lead-lined casket, if you please—buried alive in the vault behind this house. As far as is known officially, that coffin has never been disturbed."

"Good Lord!" said Bill, horrified. "You mean they—"

"That's what I have come to discover," said Thaddeus Link. "So far as I have been able to learn, your ancestor is the only person on record around here who was buried alive in an hermetically-sealed casket. This is something for which I have been searching for years."

"May I ask why?" said Bill, leaning forward behind the desk.

"Because"—the professor paused to clear his throat—"I am seeking to discover whether or not human radiations can, under certain conditions, continue to exist after death. Granted that Ezra Wilson's coffin is hermetically sealed, I should be able to obtain conclusive results one way or another."

"Human radiations?" Bill was openly amazed and disbelieving. "What on earth are you talking about, professor?"

THADDEUS LINK rocked on his heels and stared at Bill through his enlarging lenses. "It isn't generally known, doctor, but the human body does give off certain radiations. They emanate chiefly from the eyes, nose and the tips of the digits. I have recorded them with the aid of certain instruments, even measured them. They are definitely electric in quality and form a sort of invisible aura about the body. They disappear instantly at death."

"Where do they go?" Wilson inquired, frowning. In spite of his desire to scoff he found himself unable to sneer at the professor's sincerity.

"Who knows?" Link shrugged narrow shoulders. "They may be an emanation of what used to be called the soul. Perhaps they do not die with the rest of the body. But it may interest you to know that these radiations are powerful. They are capable under some conditions of destroying yeast cells and

other micro-organisms."

"Frankly," said Bill with a faint smile, "I have no especial desire to go around destroying yeast cells. Have you?"

"You joke," said Link in mild reproof. "Remember—at the exact instant a person dies these radiations vanish. I wish to find out whether they are merely dissipated in the atmosphere or not—whether they retain their power after death. That is why I have come to you, Dr. Wilson."

"Why me?" Bill inquired. In spite of himself he was becoming intrigued with the professor's experiment. Radiations after death—he would have been less than human had he not been interested. After all, the possibility of any existence after death has been of universally absorbing interest since man first came out of the caves.

"It is my desire to enter the crypt in which Ezra Wilson's coffin lies," said the visitor. "There I wish to set up my instruments and—with your permission, of course—break open the lead-lined casket."

"It sounds highly irregular," said Bill doubtfully. "There are laws—"

"Of course it's irregular," snapped Thaddeus Link. "The whole concept of the experiment is irregular. That is why I'm indulging it only during my sabbatical year. But the vault is private, on private property. You own both. I hardly think the Brookline police will give us any trouble."

"I'm afraid it's out of the question," said Bill. Instinctively he found himself recoiling at the idea of entering the crypt and despoiling Ezra Wilson's—or anyone else's—coffin.

Thaddeus Link sighed and sat down. "Perhaps," he said, "you'll stand to profit considerably yourself. If I can prove that these radiations are not destroyed by death I may find myself on the track of the riddle of the universe—the very key to life itself. If I discover these radiations I'll find a way to control them. It may well mean a new era for the entire species of man. Surely, even though such success is, to say

the least, improbable, the very possibility, however faint, justifies the experiment."

"You are very persuasive, professor," said Wilson. He poked with a forefinger at the heavy tomes on the desk in front of him, considering. It would be close to sacrilege, a violation of the long dead, but after all, he had little to lose at the moment.

"Then you'll give me permission to try?" asked the professor.

"More than that—I'll help you," said Bill.

"Before we proceed farther," said Thaddeus Link slowly, "I should warn you that the chronicles may not prove to be reliable. I've learned that about plenty of them while tracking down this ancestor of yours. Ezra Wilson may not have been a wizard at all—he may not even have been accused. More than one historian has put down what pleased him rather than the truth. He may not have liked your forebear—have put it down out of sheer spite. It has happened before."

"In that case—" Bill considered briefly. "How can we check?"

"The chronicles say," the professor went on, "that Ezra Wilson was shackled with irons before being placed in the leaden casket. Since it was hermetically sealed those irons should still be in fair shape. Even if the sealing failed to be airtight some trace of iron rust will remain. If we find such irons or traces of them we can accept the historian's account. If not—well, Ezra Wilson in all probability died a natural death."

"I'd give a lot to know the truth," said Bill, rising. "A number of people, or so it seems, are determined to prove that someone among my ancestors was deserving of the hangman's noose. They seem to have picked on old Ezra. Let's get it over with. We can open it up right now. There are plenty of tools in the gardener's shed."

"Just a moment, young man," said Thaddeus Link, "I'm as eager as you to prove this experiment but it would be of little use unless I have my instru-

ments set up. Otherwise we'll never know whether radiations can survive death. After all, proving their existence is a bit more important than merely discovering whether or not your ancestor was smeared by a seventeenth-century penpusher."

"You're right, of course," said Bill. "How soon can you be ready?"

"My equipment is in the back of my car. If you'll give me a hand . . ."

"Gladly," said Bill.

THEY walked out of the house to the old sedan. Bill took a look at the bulky instruments in the rear and whistled.

"This is going to be a bit of a job, sir," he said. "The crypt is way around at the back of the grounds. Perhaps, if we drive your car around and come in the back way . . ."

"Anything you say, doctor," said the professor, pressing the starter. The old car came to raucous life.

"Perhaps," said Bill as the sedan chugged its way down the lumpy driveway, "you could tell me a little more about the nature of these radiations. After all, destroying yeast cells—"

"I have not yet been able to determine their nature fully," said the scientist. "We know that matter produces four basic types of radiation—chemical, fluorescent, electrical and physiological. Very little is known about the last, which is the one we are interested in at present.

"You undoubtedly know that some forms of radiation fade very slowly. With radium it is a matter of centuries; nineteen hundred and sixty years is only the halfway mark. Some vanish instantly, like the radiations that emanate from the human body."

"Turn here—you'll see the tomb right around that bend," said Bill. Then, with a look at the rear seat, "What sort of instruments are they? Will it take long to set them up?"

"Not long," said Link. "They consist of a radiometer for measuring the amount of energy given off by the radiations, a radio-micrometer to deter-

mine the amount of heat they emit, and an invention of my own. Actually it is a device for trapping the radiations themselves. Only for a thousandth of a second, but it does trap them. If they still exist within the casket they will register on my instruments."

"Right around this corner," Bill directed.

The car came to a halt before crossing the footpath that lined the street. A nurse was wheeling a thin-faced boy across the back driveway entrance. He spotted Bill in the front seat of the sedan and twisted in his wheel chair to smile thinly and wave.

"Hello, Dr. Wilson," the boy cried cheerfully. "You haven't come to see me in a long time."

"Hello, Johnny," said Bill with a grin. "I'm afraid I've been neglecting my friends of late. I'll drop in tomorrow. How are those legs of yours?"

The nurse shook her head faintly behind the lad, who replied without a trace of self pity, "About the same, I guess, doctor. I'll be all right again—some day—maybe. See you tomorrow, doctor."

"Right," said Bill heartily. He said, more softly, as they drove on through, "The poor kid hasn't a chance. It's a creeping paralysis. His muscles are wasting away. I'm afraid he hasn't long to live."

"Sorry," said Thaddeus Link sympathetically. "This it?" He pulled to a stop at Bill's nod before an ivy-encrusted granite crypt—the same crypt from which Bill had fled so unceremoniously the night before. As they got out of the car Bill thought of telling his companion about the odd episode but decided against it. What they were doing was queer enough without addenda.

The instruments were bulky but not heavy and they had only to make two trips before depositing them before the ancient iron door of the tomb. Bill had procured the flying key and, although lock and hinges were stiff with rust managed to get the heavy iron door open. It creaked hoarse protest. The fetid odor of mold and airlessness that

emerged made both men wrinkle their noses.

"Phew!" said Thaddeus Link. "Well, the dead don't care." He shed his worn burberry and began setting up his devices, using the battery of his car and a long wire to create current. Dusk was beginning to darken the sky.

His radiometer appeared to consist of four horizontal arms of transparent plastic, linked to a central uncommunicative black box studded with dials and indicators. At the end of each arm was a black cusplike plastic disc. It was not overlarge, fitting easily within a two-foot bell which Link riveted securely over the instrument and attached to a vacuum pump.

His second device was a sensitive thermo-electric couple suspended in a magnetic field for use in measuring minute variations in temperature. When he had them arranged to his satisfaction he stepped back, rubbing his hands.

"These should do it," he said. "They'll tell us the story of the strength and heat of any emanations that try to escape. Now—"

He began to work on the third of his instruments, which appeared to Bill to consist of a complex array of short tubes that could be easily rotated and tilted to face in any desired direction. In their center a tiny fan, battery-powered spun with such rapidity that it became the faintest of blurs.

"All set," said Thaddeus Link. "I'll have a few final adjustments to make immediately before we open the casket. By the way, Wilson, I'm really very grateful for this opportunity. This afternoon I was afraid—"

"That was this afternoon," said Bill quickly. "Shall we go inside?"

HE had already obtained a mallet, a pick and a heavy chisel from the tool house, which was not far from the tomb. Thaddeus Link had an electric lantern, whose rays made the visibility inside the crypt fairly good. But the setting, with its two tiers of coffins lining either side of the dank chamber, was macabre to say the least. Wilson bat-

ted a chill that raced up and down his spine as he led the way to the niche in the far wall which bore the name of Ezra Wilson on a weathered-green bronze plaque.

Well, he thought, this was it. He glanced back at Thaddeus Link, who was crowding close to him impatiently, said, "Stand back, Link. I don't want to bop you with this mallet."

There was little arm room in the crowded crypt but the lead seal over the recess was soft and gave readily under the blows of mallet and chisel. Link emitted a sudden yelp of alarm and Bill paused in his labors.

"Perhaps only the niche is leaded," said the scientist. "Don't pierce it until I give my instruments a final setting." He raced back to the tomb entrance and Bill waited alone in the near-darkness. He was relieved when Link returned, breathing hard, less than two minutes later. The seconds had passed slowly.

"Okay, doctor," said the scientist. "Open her up."

Bill Wilson went to work with a will. He was all at once extremely anxious to get the whole business over with. He pierced the lead seal and Link again raced back to check his instruments. But they had recorded nothing. Bill finished trimming away the leading from the niche, feeling a certain sense of anticlimax. All at once the whole business seemed silly.

But he was not the sort who gives up a project, once begun. He peered at the coffin, which seemed to him to be made of some blackened, indeterminate metal then stepped aside to let Link see it. The scientist scraped it with a pocket knife and exclaimed with delight.

"Copper!" he said gloating. "Solid copper and sealed up tight. We still have a chance. Doctor, let's haul this casket out before we open it. We can run it right beside the instruments. Then, if anything comes out we'll be sure to catch it."

It proved to be a tougher job than moving a pair of concert grand pianos. The casket was heavy as—lead. But after twenty minutes of heaving and

panting they managed to work it sufficiently close to the door-guarding instruments to satisfy Thaddeus Link. Bill went back for his tools wondering hazily how he had ever managed to let himself be talked into such an operation.

WHEN they examined the coffin itself by the light of the hand lantern, they discovered that it bore no identifying nameplate.

The professor grunted his approval of this fact.

"This must be it," he said. "The family probably didn't want Ezra's name on it."

"Let's hope you're right," panted Bill. "I'd hate to have done all this for nothing. How do you want it opened?"

"Break through the cover with the chisel first," said the professor. "Any opening will enable us to test the radiations. Then we can open her up all the way. All right?"

"It's your show," said Bill. He inserted the chisel and began to pound it home. But when it had penetrated about half an inch it hit some obstruction that did not give readily. Letting the chisel stand as it was, Bill stepped back and wound up with both hands on the mallet to drive it on through.

He swung and in the tricky light his aim was not quite accurate. The head of the mallet struck the chisel with terrific force but glanced off, pulling Bill off-balance through his own momentum. He fell forward and his head thudded against the hard metal casket. He slumped to the floor, unconscious.

Thaddeus Link, however, was scarcely aware of Bill's accident. For the chisel had been driven all the way through the lid of the casket—and the penetration was followed instantly by a wild hiss as of compressed air.

It seemed to grow until it filled the entire tomb.

With a cry of alarm the professor leaped to his instruments. The various meters and gauges seemed to go mad, vibrated wildly and with increased reaction.

For a moment the crypt seemed filled with a miniature cyclone. Then, as suddenly as it had arisen, the storm was over and complete silence reigned.

Bill Wilson groaned and Link, forgetting his precious meters, jumped to his aid. He lifted the physician in his arms, fanned him with his hat. To his great relief the young doctor opened his eyes a moment later.

"What happened?" he inquired vaguely. Link told him as well as he could and, after a few minutes, Bill sat up and held his aching head.

"I'm all right," he said and got unsteadily to his feet. "Now let's take a look at the rest of this coffin. You take the pick and rip off the lid. I still want to know if old Ezra was interred alive."

"Very well," said Link, who was anxious to take his machines and get out of there, back to his laboratory, where he could measure the results of the test. "Let's finish it up."

By enlarging the small opening Bill had made with the chisel they were able to use the pick to good advantage. They ripped the lead and copper sheeting back off the coffin as if it were the top of a sardine tin. Bill was feeling dizzy and sore from the neck up but he stuck to his task.

Finally, after the metal sheeting was cleared, they got the wooden coffin lid beneath it open.

Unaccountably Bill Wilson couldn't look.

With face averted he said, "Link, tell me. What's in there anyway?"

"Some dust," the professor said after a few seconds. "Some dust, some bones, a pair of brass shoe buckles and—four sets of fetters. One for each ankle and wrist. It looks as if the chronicles told the truth."

Bill Wilson looked for himself. The fetters gleamed as brightly as the long-ago day they had been first made. Through one of those at the foot of the coffin he could see a piece of bone—a fibula. He turned away again. Old Ezra had undoubtedly been convicted and executed horribly for practicing witchcraft.

CHAPTER IV

Priscilla

HE helped Link restow his apparatus in the battered old sedan, waved him good-by as he backed out of the rear driveway, then turned and walked through the starlit darkness to the old house. His head ached and within him was confusion at the bizarre events of the twenty-four hours past.

He felt too shaken to eat, much less prepare food, so he walked through the kitchen and on to the library, turned on the lights and sat down again behind the desk. He wondered if it was in this room, in an earlier incarnation of the thrice-rebuilt old house, that Ezra had concluded his deal with the devil.

There was, he decided, only one thing to do—which was to make a complete study of Ezra and his times from the books so readily available in the shelves. It was the only way that he would be able to satisfy the logical elements of his mind. Then, perhaps, he could forget the whole grotesque affair.

He eyed the bookcase at the left side of the room and grinned faintly, sheepishly. He was recalling his childish endeavor to conjure the Ezra Wilson volume out of its place on the shelves and onto the desk. He had been an idiot, had acted like a slightly pathological child.

Yet, more than ever, he felt a compulsion to cause that book to come to him in defiance of all natural laws. He sought to dismiss it, to concentrate despite his aching head on one of the tomes already open in front of him. But the urge would not be denied.

He found himself staring at the book, willing it to fly across the library to him. Nothing happened. Then an odd little jingle came uninvited into his mind and he found that his lips were moving, forming strange syllables.

*"The book I wish
From in the case
Come to me now—
Naught time for waste."*

There was a thin scraping sound. The book was emerging of itself from the shelf, leaving the volumes on either side of it undisturbed. It pulled itself clear and, before his incredulous and popping eyes, flew to a perfect four-point landing. The cover swung back and the pages fluttered in front of him.

At last they ceased to move and the volume lay still and open. Bill Wilson found himself staring at a wood engraving of a peruked and gimlet-eyed gentleman of the late seventeenth century, whose name was printed beneath the portrait in letters whose ink had turned brown. It was, of course, Ezra Wilson and it lay opposite a page which began a chapter about his works that Bill had not read the night before.

"Is this what thou dost wish, Master Willy?"

The voice came from nowhere—and everywhere. It was definitely no ordinary voice. It was completely feminine, alluringly low and warm and vibrant with the unmistakable timbre of youth. It was at once submissive, respectful and faintly tinged with inner derision. Willy, whose pulses leaped at sound of it, had never before heard anything quite like it.

"Who said that? Who's here?" he asked, looking around wildly. The room, in the dim light, was as deserted as before.

There was a soft chuckle, then, "'Tis but I, Master Willy. Ye have naught to fear. I am called Priscilla—a name which I pray meets your fancy."

Bill looked around again—fruitlessly—then put a hand to the large bump on his noggin. His fear took on new direction. If he were suffering the delusions of concussion he would be better off in a hospital.

"Thy pate pains thee, Master Willy." The voice spoke again, aglow with sympathy. "Alas, I am no projection of thy fevered brow. I hap to be as real as thou, e'en though thou canst not envision me as yet."

Willy got a grip on himself. Delusion or not, the voice was there. He felt the hair on the back of his neck stiffen,

battled an impulse to get out of the old house in a hurry. Then he reminded himself that a voice—disembodied—could scarcely damage him. He attained control of himself, spoke normally with an effort.

"I hear you, Priscilla, although I cannot see you. Whoever or whatever you are, you are clever. You, or someone I cannot see, caused the book to come to me. Will you explain?"

There was a lilting laugh in answer, a laugh that sent tingles up his spine—tingles that were definitely not of fear. No woman, he sensed, could have such a voice and such a laugh and not be beautiful. Her tones had the friendly assurance given only to girls or women of outstanding charms.

"Ye are in error, Master Willy," said the unseen creature. "It was not I who transported the book. Didst thou not request it to thee?"

"Well, yes—I suppose I did," said Bill. It was oddly unsatisfying to hold conversation with someone he could not see. "That is, I found myself uttering some strange jingle. But hold on—it's obviously impossible."

"Did not the book come to thee none the less?"

"Now hold on—" Bill Wilson began.

"Hold onto what, prithee?" came the response.

BILL was not a young man given to profanity, especially in the presence of ladies, but on this occasion he uttered a round oath of exasperation remembered from his Army Medical days.

"Show yourself and let's get squared off," he demanded.

He got another laugh, a delighted one. "Verily, Master Willy," said his unseen colloquist, "thou art a man of mettle. Yet I cannot obey. The power of visibility is not yet mine. Yet for uncounted years I sought to accomplish this, to be with thee—e'en to be part of thee.

"Only last night did I exert every power at my command. I caused thee to read of Ezra, I drew thy eye to the key of the tomb, I e'en led thee to the very

portal of my granite prison, where have I been incarcerated lo, these many years. It was Ezra that drove thee thence.

"But Ezra knew naught of mine other plotting. He wist not that I would cause a learned man of science to discover thee and cozen thee into unsealing my tomb. I could not vie with Ezra heretofore—but henceforth I can and will, Master Willy. And though, sadly, thou canst not envision me with thine eyes . . ."

"Art thou—*Blast!* I mean, are you a ghost?" Bill asked.

"Nay, Master Willy, for though I came from the tomb—e'en the coffin itself—I am very much alive."

"The coffin of Ezra Wilson? But how in—"

"Nay, curse not, Master Willy." There was another ripple of warming laughter. "We were interred together these many centuries past. Yet both Ezra and I maintained ourselves with the knowledge that some day release must come."

"Where is Ezra now?" Bill asked quickly.

The unseen speaker grew grave in tone. "He has got him thence on affairs of his own concern. I am affrighted, Master Willy. But I have rested here with thee of mine own free will, Master Willy. Long have I wist to join thee."

"Join me?" countered Bill, puzzled.

"Aye—to join thee," said Priscilla, no longer serious. "Thy friend spoke truth though verily he used a strange word—emanations. I fear emanations, whatever they may hap to be, are all that remain of me presently. I have sought these same emanations about thee, Master Willy, and have become a part of them—hence, a part of thee."

"But why?" said Bill. "Can you give me no sort of explanation?"

"Thou art indeed entitled to one," said the voice serenely. "I have joined thee because it is my wish to do good and with thy help good may be done. Hast thou aught opinion of me, Master Willy?"

"Not yet," he replied honestly. "Damned if I know what to think. I just don't believe this—I can't. I'm a

man of science. But what's the use? I do hear your voice—the book *did* float through the air." He paused, blurted, oddly embarrassed, "You have the loveliest voice I've ever heard."

"I give thee thanks, Master Willy. Thou art content that I remain with thee then?"

"Well, sure—if you want to," said the perplexed young doctor. "But really, Priscilla, I should know some things. Who are you, for instance? Will I ever be able to see you?"

"One day, mayhap." The lure of the sirens was in her voice now. "They did say that in my fleshly clothes I was the fairest maid between Portsmouth and Nieu Amsterdam. That is why they did not stretch my pretty neck with rope but entombed me instead."

"You're a witch!" said Wilson, wondering what on earth was happening to him. "That's how you managed to exist so long. You and Ezra. It's true then."

"Aye—quite true. But thou needst not fret thyself, Master Willy. I am no evil witch though folks did say I caused Mistress Deering's only son to catch the pox and die."

"Didst thou not—I mean, did you?" Wilson asked.

"Dost credit me with such evil powers?" reproved the voice. "Nay, Master Willy 'twas another—an evil one who worked for Beelzebub himself."

"And you took the rap—got the blame," reflected Bill Wilson. "I'll believe you, Priscilla. Why not? Sooner or later I'll wake up and find this all a dream. But frankly, Priscilla, I'll seek sleep quickly to hear thy—your voice again."

Her trill of delight warmed him. "If thou couldst see me thou wouldst see my blushes," said Priscilla. "Few compliments have reached me in the tomb."

"Er—when did they—entomb you?" Wilson asked.

"At midnight of an April day in the year sixteen hundred ninety-two," she replied. "I sought to cry my innocence but none would listen. Wilst thou listen, Master Willy?"

"Go ahead, Priscilla. I'll listen. What

wouldst thou—dammit, I mean what do you wish to tell me?"

He blinked as the deep-cushioned arm of his chair seemed to give under a weight—the weight of a body. The plush-velour cover flattened as if someone were sitting on it.

"Be not alarmed," said Priscilla. "I am by thy side. There shall I evermore be, for I am part of thee henceforth. Master Willy, what wouldst thou say were I to promise thee great power—for good, of course. Mindest thou—I'm no evil witch."

"Power—for good? What sort of good?" Master Willy, as he was already beginning to think of himself, felt way beyond his depth.

"Master Willy, I shall be blunt with thee. Thou art a man of medicine—but of small parts in thy profession. I have been of thee but a brief spell yet know I thy very core. Thou wouldst be a great man—one to merit the general respect and admiration. Do thou as I say and folk will worship thy very footsteps."

WILSON thrust out a tentative hand and touched gingerly the arm of his chair. It really was depressed, yet he felt nothing. Slowly, however, in spite of the stubborn resistance of his rational mind, he was growing convinced that this was neither dream nor delirium.

"Priscilla," he said, "apparently I am to have no secrets from thee—you. You are diverting company. You're here. I can't pretend to understand but perhaps understanding will come later. I *am* interested in your offer—extremely interested. What does it actually mean?"

"Thy speech is odd, not easy to comprehend," said Priscilla. "Knew I not thy thoughts, I should be hard put to interpret thy words. But it is as I said. Through thy body—thine and mine now—can I accomplish much against evil. Thus can I at last clear the foulness of my name, in time, regain the fleshly covering that was taken from me unjustly."

"What is my part in this campaign?" said Wilson.

"Merely to do as I bid thee, Master Willy. Feelest thou not my fingers in thy hair, of course not. But the day will come—"

"Th chance it," said Bill. "I've gone along too far to back out now. And after all, all the Wilsons but myself have amounted to a great deal in the eye of their fellows. Except, perhaps, Ezra."

"The fame of Ezra spread from Savannah to Acadia," said Priscilla. "In truth no greater witch nor wizard existed than he this side of the waters. But he was evil and because of his evil was I destroyed by misguided judgment. Thou art bemused at the prospect I offer thee. Thou marvelest at how I shall accomplish my vows. Yet shall I prove their truth to thee and shortly."

"Since I didn't express my doubts, you seem to be able to enter my thoughts," said Wilson with a sort of dry resignation. After all, there was little he could do but go along for the ride. He heard a reproving tsk, tsk.

"Then hast thou forgotten I am part of thee, Master Willy?"

"It sounds a trifle—well, indecent," said Bill, blushing.

"Delightfully so." There was laughter. "There is naught to fret thee in this. But thy doubts must I remove—and quickly too. Nearby lives a small boy—a youth of whose welfare thou hast despaired. Thou didst hold converse with him on thy passage to the tomb. Wouldst have him whole again?"

"You mean Johnny Nolan?" said Bill, startled. "He is beyond medical aid. I may not be a successful doctor, but I'm a good enough one to know that."

"Thou lackest awareness of the extent of my power, Master Willy," said Priscilla calmly. "Verily, medicine can be of no avail to thy Johnny Nolan. Yet with witchcraft can he be made well."

Wilson closed his eyes and let his childhood dream take possession of him. "If I could cure him," he murmured. "If I could continue to cure such incurable cases—I could go far. Far beyond the present limits of medicine."

"Master Willy, thy future holds no limits known to mortal men as long as thy faith in me persists. As must persist my faith in thee, for upon thee must depend mine own salvation."

"It takes a little time to get used to it," said Bill.

"Yet I am good, though buried was I as an evil witch," intoned Priscilla. "My powers are meant to benefit all living things. Now am I compelled to live within thee as an invisible presence. Dost thou help me repair my blighted fame and one day again shall I be visible to thee and others. Having met thee, Master Willy, no more can I rest content unseen."

"Nor can I—with you unseen, that is," said Wilson. He stood up abruptly. "I've never so wanted to see anyone or anything in my life. I'm not afraid, Priscilla—not any more. I'll have faith and do all I can to help thee—you. But if I visit Johnny Nolan and fail I'll look pretty silly."

"Have faith in thy power and thou shalt not fail. We shall not fail. Come with me, Master Willy, and this shall I prove to thy satisfaction."

"Okay—all right, Priscilla," said Bill. He moved to the library door, then paused. "But I'll look and sound pretty silly muttering incantations out loud—or asking you questions if I'm stumped."

"Thou shalt not be—stumped? I know not the word though its meaning is clear. Accept my guidance and all shall be clear to thee. Accept me wholly."

"Very well," said Bill, reaching for his hat and coat. "Here goes nothing."

"Nay, think not so. But it is well. Go thou to the home of this lad. There shalt thou see with thine own eyes what together we may accomplish."

MINUTES later he found himself ringing the doorbell of the sick lad's home—and battling a sickening inner sense of fear and doubt. His mother answered and barred his passage, eyeing him dubiously.

"Good evening, Dr. Wilson," she said. "Is something wrong?"

"Nay—no, Mrs. Nolan. I—well, I was

just wondering about Johnny. I saw him outside this afternoon and frankly didn't like what I saw."

Mrs. Nolan's eyes filled and her voice was unsteady. "The doctors were here yesterday. They made a final examination. Poor Johnny's illness is progressive, as you know. They give him—six months. I'm living on hope now—hope that someone will come forward and perform a miracle. But miracles like that don't happen any more, do they, Dr. Wilson?"

"Not often, I'm afraid," said Bill. "But I'd like to look in on Johnny. I promised him I'd call tomorrow but I fear I'm going to be busy."

"That's very kind of you, doctor," said Johnny's mother. "I don't believe Johnny's asleep yet. He likes you, you know. You've been awfully kind to him—toys, books, records. If only you or someone could give him a chance. . . ."

"I know you've had the best specialists for Johnny," said Bill. "But sometimes specialists fail to see the obvious. I'd like to look at him—please."

MRS. NOLAN stared at him intently for a moment, then stepped back to let him into the house. She led him upstairs to a darkened room, where, in a huge bed that made him seem even smaller and spindlier than he was, lay Johnny. His face was almost as white as the pillow on which it rested.

"Hello, Doctor Wilson," Johnny said, his pinched little face lighting up at the sight of his visitor. "Gosh, I'm glad now that my leg hurt so I couldn't go to sleep. I might have missed you."

"Thy leg shalt not—I mean, Johnny, it won't hurt much longer," said Bill, making an inner resolve to straighten out Priscilla's archaic language at the first opportunity. "Pain is not for thee—for you—nor sickness."

"Hey, Doctor Wilson, you sound awfully funny." Johnny's wan face was warmed with a smile. He giggled a little as Bill reached beneath the covers and began gently to stroke his atrophied limbs. Words came to Bill's lips and the sweat stood out on his forehead. His

voice was dry and emerged in a sort of croak.

*"Thou shalt not waste
Nor pine away
My charm shalt
End thy pain today."*

Johnny looked suddenly frightened. "Mother," he called to Mrs. Nolan, who stood in the doorway. "Dr. Wilson talks funny."

"Thou are not afeared of me?" Bill Johnny asked. Yes, something was going to have to be done.

Johnny looked at Bill and shook his head stoutly.

"No, I'm not afraid. It just sounds—funny. I want you to stay."

"I think perhaps you'd better go, doctor," said Mrs. Nolan, eyeing him suspiciously. "Johnny is not to be excited in any way. You understand. . . ." She looked at him as if she expected him to do a drunken Off-to-Buffalo at any moment.

He sighed.

"Very well," he said. "I wist merely to—that is, I was only trying to instill in Johnny the will to heal himself. Shouldst perchance—sorry, if anything should happen—any change in Johnny's condition, that is—would you call me? I think he's going to get better."

"Yes, I'll phone." She was urging him toward the door. "But if you've hurt him in any way. . . ."

"I haven't," said Bill quietly.

"I'm sorry. Of course you haven't." Mrs. Nolan seemed reassured after sniffing at his breath in the hall. "It's just that I'm so nervous about him and—"

"Call me if any change occurs," said Bill with a confidence he was far from feeling. Outside the chill of the April evening coursed through him. He walked around the block on the way home.

He told himself he needed the air.

He must have been out of his mind. Nothing had happened. Nothing was going to happen.

Dr. William Wilson had made a fool of himself—again.

CHAPTER V

Power of a Witch

BACK within the familiar security of the library Wilson felt better. With a cigarette between his fingers, he gradually began to realize that none of this was nightmare. It was truth—cold and hard and shiny as the gold dome of the State House atop Beacon Hill.

He found his gaze drawn to a marbled pen-and-pencil set in front of him. As he watched the pen was lifted by invisible means from its holder, its point set down upon a sheet of paper which he had intended to use for note-taking in his research. The pen wrote, apparently of its own volition, then set itself carefully back in its place.

Bill leaned forward to see what it had written. There was only a name, written in ornate old-fashioned script—

PRISCILLA

"Dost like my name, Master Willy?" cooed the invisible girl.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bill Wilson, sinking back in his chair. "So you're still around! Incidentally, we've got to do something about your language."

Apparently reading his thoughts, she replied, "'Twill present difficulties, methinks. My mode of speech has remained with me for nigh onto three centuries."

"But it will cause comment—rouse suspicion," said Bill. "This thee-thou stuff went out more than a hundred years ago."

"And much of the grace of the tongue with it," said Priscilla with a trace of defiance. Bill sighed and gave it up for the moment.

"And how about these powers of yours?" asked Wilson, seeking a new point of attack. "All we did over at Johnny Nolan's was to scare him and his mother nearly out of their wits."

"Patience, Master Willy," said the unseen Priscilla. "All things come to he who waits."

"To *him*, not *he*," amended Bill. "I hope you're right. But what about Ezra? They buried the two of you alive."

"Aye, Master Willy," said the girl softly. "That they did."

"Was he really a wizard, Priscilla?"

"Aye—and of the deepest dye. We oft bickered in our unwelcome confinement but Ezra will never alter his nature. Happen events most dire—and there wilt Ezra be toiling. But, Master Willy, thou art not—fretful that I have attached myself to thee? Folks said I was indeed passing fair."

"Of that I have no doubt—voice of the sirens," replied Bill. "I only wish I could see what goes with it."

"Gramercy," came the prompt reply and again he saw the nap on the arm of his chair flatten. "Thy telephone shalt ring anon. There, Master Willy,

[Turn page]

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is witchcraft. That a body may converse with another, who is far from earshot."

"You should see what an A-bomb can do if you think that is magic," said Willy. "Who is going to call me at this hour?"

"Get thee to the telephone," said Priscilla. "Ye wilt hear its ring as thou reachest it. Mistress Nolan shalt thou hear, heralding joyous tidings."

For some reason Bill found himself past doubting his unseen mentor. He was beginning to accept the impossible as routine. He went to the telephone in the huge hall. It shrilled as he extended his fingers toward it.

Mrs. Nolan's voice was high pitched with excitement. "Doctor—come quickly!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Please come! I should not have sent you away like that. It's Johnny. He's—" She paused, unable to go further.

"He's worse?" asked Bill, feeling a little sick with apprehension.

"No—oh, no, doctor!" cried Mrs. Nolan. "Johnny's sitting on the edge of his bed, swinging his legs. It's like a miracle—and remember how I told you that miracles don't happen any more? The specialists are on their way now. They don't believe it. Please hurry over and tell me I'm not dreaming . . ."

"I'm coming right now," said Bill, feeling suddenly weak in knees and diaphragm.

He hung up and ran a hand through his hair.

"Dost believe in me now, Master Willy?" Priscilla whispered softly into his ear. Her voice eased his nerves, gave him a sense of calm triumph. All at once he longed to embrace the fair young body that was not there.

"I believe," he said slowly. "How could I do otherwise? But we must do more than this since we can. There must be other cures, other miracles. So many people are hopelessly in need of your powers."

"Our powers," Priscilla reminded him. "For without thee I could do naught. I am thine to command—to do good, Master Willy. Come, let us depart."

DISDAINING hat and topcoat, Bill raced from the house by the back door and cut through the grounds to the Nolan house. The front door was open and he ran inside and up the stairs. Mrs. Nolan heard the pound of his footsteps and emerged from Johnny's room to greet him joyously. He nodded at her, slipped past her and into Johnny's bedroom.

Johnny's legs, swinging healthily from the edge of his bed, were no longer atrophied and sickly in appearance. They glowed a healthy pink and were well-fleshed and sturdy. He grinned happily at Bill as he entered, though he was obviously too emotionally full for speech.

"It's the answer to a thousand prayers," cried Mrs. Nolan, who had come into the room behind Bill. "It must be. Right after you left—after I ordered you out of here"—her tone was humble, remorseful—"Johnny called out. He said the pain was gone from his legs and that they felt strong again. I thought he was dreaming or being silly.

"I pulled back the covers and—well, you see what I saw. He moved his right leg, then his left. Doctor—what's happened? I don't understand. Is there any explanation?"

"I merely did what was necessary," Bill said equivocally. "I've been thinking about Johnny's case, even though you supplanted me with specialists. I began to believe that the basis of his trouble was psychosomatic—that if he could have faith—or if I could give it to him—he would recover. And he has recovered. Johnny—get up off that bed and stand on your own feet."

"Gosh, sir, you know I can't," said Johnny, alarmed.

"I bid thee stand, Master John," snapped Bill. "Haste to obey."

Johnny's grin returned and he glanced at his mother, his small face alight with merriment. "He's talking funny again, mom," he said.

"On thy feet, wretch of an unbeliever," said Bill with anger that came not from him but from Priscilla. He was almost shouting.

Johnny's grin faded, was replaced by a look almost of fright. Then, with sudden determination, he slid off the bed onto his feet. He stood there, swaying a moment as he adjusted to a long-disused sense of balance. Then, hesitantly, he took a single short step—another—another. He ran to his mother's arms.

Two middle-aged men hurried into the room. Bill recognized them as two of the most eminent neurologists north of Johns Hopkins. Both stopped dead, staring at Johnny Nolan and disbelieving the evidence of their eyes. Both seemed to be incapable of speech or movement.

"This is what Dr. Wilson has done," said Mrs. Nolan proudly. She gazed at Bill, her eyes awash with devotion and gratitude. "My prayers have at last been answered."

The elder of the two neurologists turned toward Bill. "Doctor," he said, "this is absolutely incredible. It simply can't have happened. But it has. If I may be free to ask—how in the world did you restore health to those muscles and nerves? And so quickly! Two days ago—less than that—those legs were atrophied—dead for all practical purposes. Now . . ."

Wilson said, "Thou dost—" He caught himself, or rather Priscilla, just in time. "You gentlemen, I fear, have lost sight of the age-old efficacy of faith and prayer in your preoccupation with scientific techniques. Faith and prayer cured Johnny Nolan where science failed. They can cure others. You might be wise to remember it."

He nodded to Mrs. Nolan, gave Johnny a pat on the head and walked out, barely masking a grin of triumph. No one stopped him. Mrs. Nolan and Johnny were too wrapped up in the miracle that had happened to them and the neurologists were stunned. On his own back doorstep he paused.

"Priscilla, are you with me?"

"Aye—and ever shall be, Master Willy. Art thou content with my works?"

"Content is hardly the word for it,

darling," he said, using the affectionate term without abashment, although he had never dared so address Natalie. "Those two old fogies will broadcast this wonder all over Greater Boston. Tomorrow, thanks to you, I'll be famous. But, Priscilla—"

"Is there then another thou wouldst heal?" she asked softly.

Wilson nodded. "There is another." He was thinking of Mrs. Pembroke and her visit to his office that afternoon. He had been wrong in not taking her case, as Sprague had been at pains to inform him. Perhaps now he could rectify his error. And it would be a conquer. If he—abetted by Priscilla, could actually cure by incantation . . .

"Can we go to see her now?" he asked. "At once?" By the illuminated dial of his wristwatch it was barely ten o'clock.

"I am thine to command, Master Willy."

"You were never a witch, Priscilla," he told her. "You're a saint. There is no limit to what good we can accomplish together."

"None whatsoever," said the invisible girl. "Thou shalt be the most renowned physician and the man of greatest property on the face of the earth—if thou dost so wish. Proud shall I be to bask within the shadow of thy coming eminence, content to rest in thy faith and admiration. Aye, I crave admiration, for a weak female creature am I. But come, let us give further proof to the world."

ALTHOUGH the night was chill and he wore neither hat nor topcoat, Bill Wilson felt warmly alive as he got his car under way. On the way to Westwood and the Pembroke farm he gave the venerable vehicle all the speed she could stand. As the countryside slipped past them he heard Priscilla laugh joyously.

"Ah!" she exclaimed with relish. "Pretty, pretty! Upon speed I dote. The wind and fury and rush of air are my sisters. It is like riding the clouds of night. Faster, Master Willy, faster!"

The speedometer needle trembled at sixty-five—its top speed—as he hit a stretch of straight concrete and he found himself thrilling to the sensation of swift travel as he never had before. Almost before he knew it he was slowing to turn in at the Pembroke driveway, then pulling to a halt in a spurt of gravel before the tiny white house at its end. To his surprise the house was ablaze with lights and there were other cars in front of it.

"Hurry, Master Willy!" said Priscilla. "There is but little time."

He spotted Larry Sprague's sleek convertible in front of his own battered coupe and hastened his steps. Sprague was in the living room, talking to a shattered-looking Mr. Pembroke, who nodded dully to what Sprague was telling him. A few other folk, evidently neighbors, were huddled in the back-ground.

"So—it's you," Sprague snapped at Bill, his eyes hot with anger. "I suppose you've decided to come and tell Mrs. Pembroke you'll take her case."

"You're too late," said Pembroke harshly. His voice broke. "She believed you—she believed she would die slowly and painfully. So believed she would be a burden to me. She—she didn't want that. She took—something. . . ." His anger faded under the impact of his grief.

"Out of my way," said Bill, recovering from his surprise. "Don't try to stop me, Pembroke, if you want Martha back."

He ran up the stairs and into the bedroom at their head. Sprague, looking startled, was at his heels. Bill glanced at the still form under the coverlet, then turned to his colleague. "You'd better leave," he said.

"And let you do more harm," said Larry Sprague. "Not that there's much you or anyone can do either way now. She found a bottle of rat poison and took the whole thing. Not that I blame her—your diagnosis was correct. I confirmed it this evening by laboratory tests."

"Larry," said Wilson, "this is my re-

sponsibility. I was wrong and I admit it. Therefore I intend to cure her—and I want no interference from you."

"Cure her?" cried Sprague. "Bill, you're out of your mind. She has enough poison in her right now to kill a twenty-mule team! Suppose you do manage to offset the poison? She'll only go through it all over again—or face a worse death. I tell you you were right—she has cancer."

"I intend not only to stop the poison but to drive out the cancerous tissue," said Wilson quietly. "Stick around and see for yourself."

"Careful, Master Willy," whispered Priscilla in his ear. "This man is no fool. Charm away her ills, aye—but let not this physician know how 'tis done. Feign use of science upon the poor soul."

Wilson nodded. Priscilla was right, of course. If it became known that he was effecting cures by witchcraft his undoubted powers would be so besmirched scarcely anyone would wish to have them practised upon him. He raced back downstairs to his car, returned with his satchel, removed certain instruments.

He sat down by the bedside, used thermometer and stethoscope in orthodox fashion, though he scarcely heeded their readings. He examined the dying woman, took a hypodermic needle from his kit, faked filling it with an empty ampule. Sprague regarded him warily as if not entirely sure of his sanity.

Wilson inserted the needle harmlessly into Martha Pembroke's arm, bent low over her as if to watch the shot enter her veins. His lips moved faintly, whispering the words that came unsummoned to his lips.

*"Come, my magic—
Hither charm
Rid this woman
Of all harm."*

He straightened, pressed a hand firmly against the dying woman's forehead and glanced at Sprague with lifted brows. "You used a stomach pump, I trust?"

"Certainly," snapped Sprague, thor-

oughly suspicious and on his guard. "But it was much too late. The poison was already in her system. Bill"—his manner became placating—"I don't know what's come over you, but take it easy. Go home and get some sleep—take a barbiturate if you need it. Then, when you wake up, come in and let me check you over. I'm speaking as a friend and a physician."

"Relax, Larry," said Bill with a faint smile. He lifted his hand from Martha Pembroke's forehead. "Take a look at the patient now. You'll find considerable improvement in both pulse and respiration."

SPRAGUE opened his mouth to deny such a possibility, then closed it with a snap of teeth and came over to the bed, thrusting Bill aside. He bent over the patient, using his stethoscope, then straightened slowly. His eyes alight with surprise and puzzlement.

"Holy mackerel, Bill, there is a change!" he said. His eyes rested on Wilson with disbelief. "What was in that shot you gave her, man?"

"Just a little thing I ran up myself," said Bill smugly. Then, "Seriously, Larry, I'm nowhere near ready to reveal the facts about it yet. Larry—look! She's regaining consciousness."

Sprague was shaken. His face turned white as he viewed the miracle and he was forced to struggle for self control. "I can't believe it!" he cried. "This woman was practically on the threshold of death. You've brought her back, Bill." He grabbed his colleague by the shoulders as if he were going to shake the facts out of him. "How, man? How did you do it?"

"Does it matter as long as it works?" Bill countered. "I think she'll be able to talk in a minute or two. My work is finished, Larry. Take over. And drop in for a checkup whenever you need it."

Bill strode from the room, went downstairs and stood over Pembroke, who was hunched in a chair, face in hands. He said, "Better get upstairs, Pembroke. Thy—I mean your wife wants to talk to you."

He drove back to Brookline at high speed. Both Priscilla and he were in exalted mood. She sang an eerie little madrigal whose words conveyed little sense to him. But more than once he laughed out loud at the vocal effects she contrived and the silver of her laughter echoed his own.

Back home, he entered the library and took his usual place in the arm-chair behind the desk. He found another bottle of Armagnac after a bit—a few odds and ends remained of the once well-furnished Wilson cellars—poured himself a highball and sipped it slowly. Developments from their night's work would soon be forthcoming.

"Too bad you can't enjoy this, Priscilla," he said, eyes on his glass.

She chuckled charmingly. "Dost forget mayhap that I am part of thee now?"

"Well, here's to us," he said, lifting the tumbler. "Lord, I wish I could see you and—" He broke off, embarrassed by his own trend of thought. It had been hardly on an astral plane.

"Mayhap thou wilt," she said, embarrassed not a whit. "First must I earn the right to visibility. It is no simple task. There remains much to do."

"So far," said Bill, feeling a comfortable sense of achievement, "we seem to be doing okay."

"So far?" she echoed. "Master Willy, the whole world shall rock in wonder at thy accomplishments. Our work is scarce begun though e'en at this instant the fates assemble. Soon—anon, forsooth, thou shalt have visitors."

"You called that one," he said. "Sprague and the two neurologists from Johnny Nolan's will be coming around. They'll demand to learn how I cured two such varied and hopeless cases. I'd better tell them it's the result of a new type of medication and administration. Yes, that's the only way to avoid doubts."

"Aye, thou art indeed cunning, Master Willy," said Priscilla. "We shall charm away the ills of the sick. But be thou careful—were I to select the folk we charm it might be safer."

"You've been on the beam—I mean, you've done very well so far," said Bill. "Okay, you pick them. After all, without you I'd be sunk."

"And without thee should I be lying in the tomb e'en now," she replied.

"Then we both escape obligation," said Bill, feeling expansively inclined. "Each must depend upon the other—which is as it should be. Then, some day, when you become visible again—Priscilla, what color are your eyes?"

"They have been likened to the shell of the robin's egg."

"And your hair?"

"Like the silk of the cornstalk in August. Thou art making me to blush, Master Willy. And unmaidenly am I thus to vaunt my meager charms."

"I love it," said Bill, all but licking his lips at the prospect ultimately in store for him. "How tall are you?"

"Beside you mine eyes attain barely to your shoulder," she replied softly. Then, with more spirit, "My body is the body of an eighteen-year-old maid. For I am but eighteen, Master Willy. The years within the tomb have aged me not."

Bill closed his eyes, the better to envision this charming picture. All at once it occurred to him that since Priscilla had entered his life some hours earlier he had not so much as thought of Natalie—Natalie, the girl who had so loyally stood by him, the girl he would now be able to marry.

SOMETHING like a tornado seemed to hit the room around him. The books on the desk were slammed shut by invisible hands. Papers were lifted into the air and whirled as by a cyclone. A chair crashed on its side, was followed by a tall stand lamp close to the book-cases. Wind actually began to howl mournfully. Alarmed, Bill leapt to his feet.

"Priscilla!" he shouted "*Priscilla!* Stop it this instant!"

The howling ceased—the turbulence within the room died as if it had been no more than a sigh. Papers floated gently to rest on floor and furniture.

Bill heard the faint rhythmic sound of gentle weeping.

"Priscilla," he said, more softly, "what in the world—"

"Thou lovest me not, Master Willy," she sobbed. "Thy thoughts of love turn to the other damsel. Pray pardon for the fury I have caused. It was indeed my doing. Methinks my actions unseemly for a maiden."

"Good Lord!" said Bill, astonished. "You're jealous of Natalie."

"And if I be? Master Willy, I am a part of thee. I owe thee much—more, perhaps than I can hope to pay. I—alas, 'tis true—I love thee too. Alackaday—to be a maid in love who cannot reveal herself for her swain's adoration."

"Please, take it easy," begged Wilson, feeling both a heel and a Don Juan. "I forgot that you can read my mind. I wish I hadn't thought of Natalie. I'll do my best not to think of her again. Will that do?"

"'Twill have to serve," said Priscilla, only partly mollified. Then, with returning animation, "But how shall I contain myself should your Natalie come to call?"

Wilson smiled and shook his head. "You've got me there," he said. "I'll chase her out with a broomstick if you like."

"Broomstick? Has thou then truly a broomstick?" Her voice was eager.

"Sure—couldn't afford a new vacuum cleaner after the old one wore out. There are a couple of brooms in the kitchen closet. Why?"

"Ne'er mind, Master Willy." Priscilla was positively gloating and Bill found it difficult to keep emotional pace with her volatility. She said, "Much magic holds a broomstick, Master Willy. One shall come to me at once."

Bill, sipping his drink, failed to turn a hair when the broom came floating into the room without visible propulsion. It stood on end in the center of the carpet.

"Wouldst thou be anguished overmuch, Master Willy," she said with entreaty in her tone, "were I to leave thee for a little?"

Bill felt the tug of sudden panic. He put down his glass hurriedly. "But these doctors are coming. You said so yourself. How am I—"

"E'en now are they within sight of this house," she interrupted serenely. "Alas, would that I could stay—but much work lies before me. Thou canst help me not in this, Master Willy. Yet, though I be far from ye, shall there be a fine strong thread betwist us. Fret thee not, Master Willy. Put thy trust in me. Now must I leave thee—I shall return anon. Farewell."

"Hey—" began Bill. But even as he called out the broomstick tilted slightly, then began to rise as it moved with increasing speed across the room. At the far end a window opened of its own accord and the broomstick sailed directly through it. Liltng laughter, freighted with a trace of mockery, came to him as from afar.

Bill sat down slowly. He felt suddenly more alone than he had ever been in his life. Alone and utterly defenseless. What if Priscilla should not come back? What if she had never actually existed? What if . . . ?

He wondered to whom he could turn in his dilemma—without winding up as a patient in the snake pit at Tewkesbury or Worcester. He would have to be careful but he had to talk to some one. Natalie leapt into his mind.

At once the miniature maelstrom returned to the room, knocking over furniture, scattering papers, disarranging everything. Quickly Bill rearranged his thoughts, envisioning instead of Natalie a flaxen, blue-eyed beauty clad in full but simple Puritan garb, whose folds failed to hide the charms of her budding young body.

Once more the whirlwind was abruptly stilled. Bill set to work clearing up the damage. Somehow he was not angry—indeed, a little smile played about his lips as he stooped to gather wind-tossed papers. For he knew that he was not alone. The thread Priscilla had promised was there.

Just as he got the last chair back in its normal position the doorbell pealed.

CHAPTER VI

The Tenuous Thread

FIVE very serious-visaged men entered the old house when Dr. Wilson opened the door. Larry Sprague was one of them, the eminent neurologists two of the others. Fourth among them was Dr. Gaylord, chairman of the Massachusetts Medical Association, the fifth was fussy-mannered, goateed Dr. Sears Meredith, boss man of the Department of Health. They filed into the library and sat down.

"Gentlemen, what can I do for you?" Bill asked them politely. "Perhaps you'd care for a drink?"

Sprague snorted. "You knew darned well we'd be turning up here," he said. "I was literally knocked off my pins—yes, flabbergasted—by what you accomplished with Mrs. Pembroke but I thought it must be some sort of fluke. I went to the hospital to check my laboratory findings on the case. There I met these two gentlemen"—he flicked a hand in the direction of the neurologists—"and they told me about Johnny Nolan. I was acquainted with his case and refused to believe their report of a cure."

"And has anything happened to make you change your mind?" Wilson inquired casually. He was having his in-ning at last, after the years of being scorned or ignored by colleagues of the caliber of his visitors.

"We just left the Nolan house," said Sprague. He shook his head. "I am forced to believe the impossible. Bill, how did you do it—*how?*"

Bill smiled and sat on a corner of the desk. He glanced covertly at the frowning portraits of his ancestors and noted that they no longer seemed to be eyeing him with reproach. He was on a par with them at last. The seventh-generation Wilson had finally made the grade.

"Gentlemen," he said, "how I cured

Johnny Nolan and Mrs. Pembroke is of little importance. The chief thing is that I did cure them—and can cure others in equally hopeless cases.”

“You claim to be able to cure any sort of sickness?” Dr. Meredith’s goatee did a little dance as he spoke.

“I make no promises,” said Bill in reply. “There will almost certainly be occasions when I shall fail. But as a rule—yes, I believe so.”

Dr. Gaylord studied Bill through narrowed eyes, frankly suspicious. “Are you willing and prepared to prove your statement—right now?” he asked. He added, “Frankly, Dr. Wilson, I think you must have used hypnotism. Granted it sounds inane but I can think of no other possible solutions.”

“Then I must have hypnotized you, Dr. Gaylord, when you looked in on Johnny Nolan just now,” said Bill quietly. “And I didn’t even know you were planning to see him. No, Dr. Gaylord, there is no charlatanry in my methods. Bring on your patient and I’ll be delighted to do whatever I can.”

Dr. Meredith rose and went to the door, where he talked briefly to a white-coated interne who had been waiting outside. The interne vanished, to return with another young doctor. Between them they wheeled in a man who huddled listlessly in a portable chair.

This newcomer was the sorriest looking specimen Bill had ever seen. He might have been a zombie in the final stages of dissolution for all the heed he gave to his surroundings. He looked at least a hundred fifty years old. Bill glanced from the patient to Dr. Gaylord, who smiled faintly but grimly.

“This man is a charity patient,” he declaimed in his best lecture room voice. “He can’t or won’t speak and is kept alive through intravenous feeding. We don’t know what is wrong with him. He cannot move of his own volition and responds to no treatment we have been able to devise. If you can do anything for him I shall have to accept the evidence of my senses.”

“And pay you fitting homage,” put in Dr. Meredith.

“I’ll lay odds that you can’t do it,” said Larry Sprague. “Remember, if you’re using some miracle drug the effects may prove to be temporary and the ultimate after-effects disastrous.”

“Larry,” said Bill Wilson sharply, “you doubted my skill at Mrs. Pembroke’s and I provided a cure. Apparently that was not enough to convince you of what I’ve developed. Very well, I’ll show you again. And again and again, if necessary. Please prepare the patient for a hypodermic.”

He walked out to the hall, where his bag sat in its innocence on one of the Hitchcock chairs. He opened it, paused to plan his actions—this time he would actually have to let them see something in the hypo. Quickly he picked up the bag and went to the kitchen.

There he placed a pan over a gas flame and dropped a needle into the water that quickly began to boil. He broke two glass ampules over the sink and emptied them, refilled them with plain water. He was back at the gas range when Larry Sprague flung open the swinging kitchen door.

“Take a look,” said Bill, smiling faintly. “Heap big magic. I’m sterilizing a needle. My abracadabra, as you seem to consider it, still calls for routine antisepsis.”

“What’s in those ampules?” Sprague asked, nodding toward them.

“That’s my secret,” Bill replied. “And it’s going to remain my secret until I get good and ready to give it to the world.”

“So that’s it!” said Larry Sprague with a hint of contempt. “You’re thinking of personal fame and fortune.”

“On the contrary,” said Bill, fishing the needle out of the bubbling water with forceps, “I’m thinking only of the sick who need my services. Your insinuations are almost certainly based on a recurrence of your admitted jealousy of me, Larry.”

He affixed the needle to the syringe and tightened it. Then he filled it with the water from the ampules. He dropped the latter onto the linoleum and pulverized them under a foot. With an

enigmatic smile he led Sprague back to the library, where the hapless patient waited.

Scarcely glancing at the eminent men of medicine who clustered around him, Bill lifted the sick man's arm, swabbed a bit of it with alcohol, inserted the needle and emptied its contents into the patient. He withdrew the needle, bent close to the sick man, then straightened and looked around in annoyance.

"Gentlemen, please!" he begged. "Not so close. You're interfering with my work."

SHEEPISHLY they fell back a few paces. Bill again bent close to the man. He placed his hands on either side of the man's head, covered his ears so that he could not hear. He felt sweat break out on his own forehead. Would the invisible thread that tied him to the distant Priscilla be sufficiently strong to carry her power to him? He felt a moment of deep panic.

Then words tumbled from his mouth—words that came not of his own volition. His panic faded as he realized that the thread had held.

*"Now shall I charm away thy woes
And bring thee health from pate to
toes."*

There was no immediate reaction. But Bill was not worried. He took his hands from the patient's head and stepped back, nodding.

"That should do it," he told the others. "In a few minutes there will be a change for the better. You can count on it, gentlemen."

Dr. Meredith stepped forward and made a hasty examination. He snapped his fingers, beckoned to one of the internes who hovered by the hall door. The patient was wheeled out to the waiting ambulance.

"I detected no change, Wilson," the learned physician said sternly. "You may well be a charlatan—although I must give you the benefit of my very grave doubts because of the other two cases. This one was extremely difficult. Therefore we shall reserve final judgment."

"Relax, doctor," said Bill casually. "These things are not done in an instant. Drugs must be absorbed by the system before they can do their work. Take the poor fellow back to the hospital. Check his condition—say in half an hour. You will find a change has taken place by then. I promise."

They filed slowly out. Only Sprague of the delegation remained. He puffed slowly on a king-sized cigarette.

"Bill," he said, studying its glowing tip, "if it's any comfort to you I believe that man will recover fully—even though medical science denies the possibility. I believe that Meredith will soon be eating his words, letter by letter."

"Thanks, Larry." Wilson mixed a couple of drinks from one of the last few bottles of brandy left to him. He handed one to his guest, said, "Of course, you saw my work actually take effect at Westwood. How *did* it strike you?"

Sprague blew a large smoke ring, sent a smaller ring right through it. "Bill," he said finally, "I don't know what to think. I have a fair idea of the history of faith healing. You've got something—though whether its origin is divine or straight from hades I wouldn't know. Granted, however, that you possess some extra-medical power, what do you intend to do with it?"

Wilson sipped his drink, shook his head. He hoped Priscilla was listening in. "I hope to cure the hopelessly afflicted who deserve to be cured, Larry. Otherwise, I want to carry on as an ordinary G.P."

"Ordinary G.P.!" Larry snorted. "Bill, wake up! People will be flocking to you by the hundreds of thousands once this gets out—and it *will* get out. Too many people know of it already to keep it a secret long. You'll be a one man grotto of Lourdes, a human shrine of St. Anne de Beaupré. They'll be putting up tents and trailer villages in your back yard. They'll get in your hair—drive you out of your mind. No one man could possibly handle what you've got coming to you."

"And therefore you are suggesting . . . ?"

"That you delegate some of your skill to an assistant—no, not me necessarily. Though we are rather closely tied—both by school and by the fact that we are both in love with Natalie Page. Incidentally, I gave her a very comprehensive picture of my views of you this afternoon. She defended you to the hilt—but I'm still in there throwing curves. She needs more man than you'll ever be and I intend to be that man if I possibly can."

"Thanks for leveling, Larry," said Bill. "You may very well be the winner in the Natalie sweepstakes—if I decide to withdraw from the listings." He looked around apprehensively. What if Priscilla—but no miniature cyclone swept through the room. Apparently Priscilla was not dissatisfied with the way in which he was handling this.

Sprague stood up, looking determined. "So you intend to withdraw, Bill," he said. "Well, I suppose it's like you. If this power of yours holds up you'll be the most famous man in history—and the most influential. Thank you for leveling and now, if you don't mind, I'll be leaving." He looked regretfully at his barely touched highball, added, "There's something in this house that doesn't smell good. I have an idea it's Bill Wilson."

He left. Bill stared after him for a moment, then shrugged and closed the door. Alone, he spoke aloud, "Priscilla, can you hear me?"

There was no reply but he was not worried. Priscilla would be back. She had to come back for her dwelling place was in the invisible tints of his own personal aura—nowhere else. He returned to his drink and found himself thinking about Thaddeus Link for the first time since the weird incident within the tomb. He wondered what Link thought about it, what his instruments had told him.

His glass was empty and he wanted a refill but felt too lazily tired and comfortable to trouble getting it. He smiled and said, "I can't put it in verse but I want a drink."

Instantly the decanter of brandy rose

from the table on the far side of the room where it rested. The stopper came out and a generous slug was poured into a glass. A siphon did its stuff without visible means of locomotion. The filled tumbler came across the room to him, deposited itself on the blotter before him, alongside the empty glass, which was returned to the table.

"This," Bill Wilson told himself as he lifted the glass to his lips, "is the life."

The telephone shrilled, bringing him out of his lethargy a few moments later. Dr. Meredith was on the wire.

"Dr. Wilson," he said, his voice revealing that he was laboring under considerable emotional strain, "the patient is responding incredibly to whatever treatment you gave him. I can only apologize for my doubts. And I ask—no, beg—that you come to the hospital in the morning to give help to others. It is your duty as a physician."

"Dr. Meredith," said Wilson, "I have not yet decided what procedure I shall use in the future. It requires considerable thought. All I can ask is that you give this no publicity whatever."

"Naturally," said the goateed doctor. "If this leaked out generally you'd be swamped. We shall gladly cooperate in any way you wish."

Wilson hung up, yawning. It had been a busy day. But if he had not misjudged mankind entirely it would look like a quiet day at a resting home for elderly men in comparison to the days that lay immediately ahead. He went upstairs to bed and fell quickly into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER VII

Oath to Remember

DR. GAYLORD, Board Chairman of the Massachusetts Medical Association, sat in a costly antique chair beside the costly antique four-poster bed of L. Montgomery Price. He studied

the raddled, dissipated and self-indulgent countenance of the patient and weighed a proposition.

"Doctor Gaylord," said Price, his voice a cross between a whine and a whimper, "I demand a direct answer. Am I going to get over this or am I going to spend the rest of my life in bed?"

Gaylord spread his hands in an equivocal gesture. "Mr. Price, I cannot give you the answer you demand. Medical science has done for you everything it can—and your case continues to defy diagnosis." He nodded toward a large bedside table covered with bottles, tins and boxes containing virtually every kind of medicine purchasable. "Those patent panaceas will do you no good."

Price bristled and his face took on a mottled shade of red. "That may be," he replied defiantly, "but some of those 'panaceas' have made me feel better than any of the treatments you and your colleagues have prescribed to date. And I resent your insolent remark that I am a hypochondriac."

"I can promise you'll never be called a hypochondriac again," said Gaylord wearily. "We've given you every test in the medical textbooks—and a lot which aren't—that might be applicable to your condition. I must confess that none of them has given us a clue as to what ails you. No man could be a hypochondriac and suffer as you have suffered."

"I'm a very sick man," said Price. "I feel certain I shall die if no one can help me. See here, doctor, money is no object. I have more than anyone else in Boston. Perhaps I cut a few corners to get it—but it's mine. I can afford to meet any figure you name—if it will cure me. I'll pay a hundred thousand to any man who can do it."

It was Dr. Gaylord's turn to redden angrily. He said, "An offer of a million dollars couldn't make us do more than we have. I'm afraid it's hopeless, Mr. Price. We are unable to diagnose your condition, therefore unable to come up with a cure." He paused, added, "There is just one possibility—"

With a number of grunting sounds

the sick man managed to sit up in bed. His bloated jowls fluttered disgustingly from the effort. His huge, flatulent stomach was reminiscent of a Buddha's.

"Why didn't you say so before?" he snapped peevishly. "I'm willing to take any chance, man! I'll raise the ante if necessary. But *do* something—help me!"

Gaylord hesitated, wet his lips with his tongue. "Only last night," he said finally, "I encountered a physician who is apparently little short of a miracle man. In a matter of hours he cured a boy who has been hopelessly paralyzed for years, brought complete recovery to a woman near death from cancer who had taken poison, and cured the most difficult test case I was able to put before him. This man was unable to speak, move or eat. Today he is doing all three."

"Get him for me," mewed Price, clawing at the physician's sleeve. "Get him for me! He can cure me. I feel it—I know it. Never mind the fee—just get him for me. Do you hear me, doctor? Get him for me."

"I'm not stone deaf," said Dr. Gaylord, withdrawing frigidly from the sick man's onslaught. "You're shouting like a maniac. However, there's a rub. This particular miracle man shuns publicity. And rightly so. You can envisage what would transpire were word of his talent to get about."

"I'll keep his secret to the grave," cried the millionaire shrilly, folding his fat hands across his pajama tops. "I have no concern with other people. I'm interested only in being cured. It shall go no further. Get him for me."

"He may, of course, refuse to come," Gaylord warned. "You are not exactly an obscure personage, Mr. Price. But I'll see if I can get him. I'll promise him a hundred thousand dollars."

"Make it a million—two million if you have to," shouted the sick man. "But get him here quickly."

"I think your first figure is ample," said Gaylord stiffly as he rose. "I'm going to use the phone in your library downstairs and I want no one listening

fn. Perhaps, if I promise to keep his identity a secret even from you, he will be more amenable."

"Make whatever arrangements you have to," shouted L. Montgomery Price. "I'm a sick man—perhaps a dying one. If only this man can help me get my health back I must have him here. Get him as fast as you can."

"Very well." Gaylord walked toward the door. "I shall do my best."

HE went downstairs, locked himself in the library and tested the telephone twice for alien hums and clickings, making certain that no one was listening in. He reached for the dial and hesitated—he realized he didn't know Bill Wilson's number. He smiled faintly, ironically, as it occurred to him that Wilson's number would probably be more widely known than that of Massachusetts General Hospital itself. He looked it up in the book, dialed.

"Good morning, Dr. Wilson," he said smoothly. "This is Gaylord speaking. I wanted to tell you that the patient you treated last night is all but ready for discharge. You did a brilliant job, doctor."

"Thanks," said Bill sincerely. "And I appreciate your muzzling of any leaks to the press. Frankly I'm scared stiff of where this may lead. I'd have every sick man, woman and child in the world on my doorstep."

"I'm fully aware of the possibilities," said Dr. Gaylord. "But none the less we must evolve some technique by which you can practice your—shall we say uncanny skill, Dr. Wilson? You must continue to treat some patients. Right now I should like to ask a great favor of you."

"I'll be glad to do whatever I can," said Bill.

"As it happens I have a patient," began Dr. Gaylord. "In fact, he has been the patient at one time or another of virtually every physician, reputable or otherwise, in the city. His name is L. Montgomery Price and his case so far has utterly defied diagnosis. We thought for a time it was purely a matter of hy-

pochondria but it is now my belief that Price is actually a very sick man."

Bill Wilson emitted a grunt of distaste. "I suppose you mean *the* Monty Price," he said. "I'm not at all certain that I'm anxious to put him out of his misery. He's earned it with the people he's driven to the wall in his financial deals. I'm afraid, doctor, that—"

"Don't make a snap decision," Dr. Gaylord interrupted. "That's the Montgomery Price, all right, but he *is* sick and you are a doctor—perhaps the only man in the world who can cure him. Perhaps he hasn't the best moral record in the world but moral judgment is hardly a feature of the Hippocratic oath."

"I really don't know," said Bill, hesitating.

"They say money talks," said Dr. Gaylord insistently, "and Price is willing to pay enough to the man who cures him to set up a well-equipped free clinic. He'll go as high as a hundred thousand."

Bill gasped. He had a vision of the most recent page of his bankbook and the dwindling figures thereon were scarcely reassuring. A hundred thousand dollars! With that kind of money he could—well, there was little he couldn't get started in the way of helping the deserving poor. If he were going to do much good he'd need money and plenty of it.

"I'll be there within the hour," he said quietly. "You're right. I *can* use that kind of money."

"That's fine," said Gaylord heartily, thinking of what his own fee was going to be. "I've already exacted from our patient a promise that he isn't to permit a word of publicity. In fact, he does not even need to know your identity. How's that?"

"Very good, doctor," said Wilson. "Until we *do* evolve some technique which will enable me to treat people on a fair basis, it might be better if I were to remain in the background. I'm leaving directly. Good-by."

Bill Wilson hung up and sat stunned on one of the hall chairs. A hundred

thousand dollar fee—that would put him among the immortals, along with Harvey, Cushing, Lister, Pasteur and the others. He wondered if even any of them had ever been promised such a sum for providing a cure for a single case.

“Didst thou receive welcome tidings, Master Willy?” Priscilla’s voice was soft and alluring in his ears.

“In a nutshell—yes,” he replied. “While I honestly am not too keen about bestowing the benefits of my—or our powers upon a heel like Monty Price—yet he offers a whopping big fee and he is a sick man.”

“Aye, Master Willy,” advised the dweller in his aura. “’Tis not fitting that thou shouldst pick and choose among thy patients. Many will there be who cannot pay a farthing.”

“Which will make me the groat,” said Bill. He winced at his own horrid pun and changed the subject. “I was more than half-afraid there’d be a horde of sufferers outside my door this morning. But evidently it’s been kept out of the papers—I’m going to check for all that.”

“Thou needst not bestir thyself,” said Priscilla. The paper, neatly folded, was wafted into the room by invisible hands and placed gently in his lap. Billy grinned. He was growing accustomed to such invisible service but he enjoyed it none the less. He opened the gazette.

The headlines were black and ominous—especially for so conservative a journal. During the night, it seemed, New York City had suffered the worst subway accident of recent years. Some forty-three persons were dead and more than two hundred in hospitals with injuries of varying degree.

Authorities, after their immemorial fashion, had launched an immediate investigation once the damage was done. But they were not hopeful. From the first it looked as if this were one of those disasters that would defy logical explanation permanently. There was no apparent reason for the smash-up.

BILL WILSON read it casually until he reached this part of the story. Then he did a double take and read it

again. An unpleasant idea was creeping into his brain. He looked up and said quietly, “Priscilla, are you still here?”

“Aye, and close by thy side as is befitting, Master Willy,” she replied. “Then thou hast seen the news and read it correctly. Would that I could have kept it from thee.”

“Then I’m right,” said Wilson. “That New York wreck was no accident.”

“Alack, nay.” To his ears Priscilla’s lilting tones sounded as close to somber as they had ever been, as somber as was possible for a voice of such mirthful timbre. “’Twas indeed my earnest hope that thou wouldst fail to read betwixt the lines of yon sorry tale. It is, forsooth the work of Ezra, once more roving twixt twilight and dawn.”

“Ezra!” gasped Bill, shocked. He had not foreseen any such quick and violent proof of his black-sheep ancestor’s proclivities for induced disaster. “Look here, Priscilla. Will he be carrying on like this every night?”

“Aye, I fear me so—until I have sought out his place of hiding and put his will toward evil under a spell of beneficence. Thy sorrow is mine own, forsooth, Master Willy. We contend verily with dark and devious forces.”

“It’s got to be stopped,” said Wilson, throwing the paper down on the hall table. “It’s—ghastly! Priscilla, you’ve got to do something.”

“I can but do my paltry best,” replied Priscilla. “Verily Ezra is a powerful wizard and I but a meek, shy maid. My powers, alack, do not encompass such evil as Ezra can provoke. It has been ever thus.”

Bill Wilson mopped a suddenly damp forehead. “But it can’t go on. If it does, where will it end? Forty-three dead last night—and what of tonight? Will the toll be a hundred—two hundred—a thousand?”

“Have faith in me, Master Willy,” begged Priscilla. “I shall do my utmost. Each night will I hie me abroad in search of him and his evil. And when I find him and meet him face to face, then shall I exorcise from him his power for evil. Then shall I doom him to the

lowest depths of Gehenna, where he and his ilk belong."

"Brother—I hope you find him soon then, Priscilla," he exclaimed fervently. "But we've got a few worries of our own to consider."

"Worries, Master Willy?" said the unseen maiden sweetly.

"Aye—I mean, yes, worries. Problems, anyway. Though I have demonstrated the power you have given me thrice, the news has been kept secret so far. Sooner or later, however, it's bound to leak out. Then the world and his brother are going to beat a path to this door. It will be a mess. Do you think we can keep our secret awhile longer—until we are prepared to deal with a mob?"

"Aye indeed, Master Willy. And thou art indeed clever to foresee what the future may hold. Wouldst heed the advice of a maid whose worldly experience is but small?"

"Go ahead—experience or not, Priscilla, you haven't called a wrong turn yet," he replied. "And I need advice if anyone ever did."

"Then must thou select with care those few upon whom thou wouldst bestow the fruits of thy powers," said the invisible girl. "Select only those whose supply of worldly goods is abundant—like this Master Price, who hath offered thee a veritable fortune for a demonstration of thy skill. He offered thee a hundred thousand dollars but thou couldst have bade him pay thee a million." There was regret in her voice as she pondered the larger sum.

"But I'm not looking for dough—for riches," protested Wilson. "There will be enough and to spare without blackmail. Priscilla, you're a good witch and the power you have given me must be used only for doing good. I want to treat only people who are worthy."

PRICILLA sighed deliciously and said, "In all the wide world could no other man have released me from cruel incarceration who does so match my desires as thee, Master Willy."

"Why, thank you, Priscilla," said Wil-

son, pleased. "I'm glad we still agree. Naturally, I'm going to take fees—fat ones too—from those who can afford to pay them. And rest assured, Priscilla, I have no qualms of conscience where Monty Price is concerned. He made his pile by using the law to skin the helpless out of what was rightly theirs. Hey—maybe I won't cure him at all. Maybe—"

"Thou hast given thy oath, Master Willy." Priscilla's voice was stern.

He sighed. "I suppose you're right. But from now on—no more old roués like Monty Price. And get this through your pretty head, Priscilla—I don't want to own the world or any part of it. I have other ambitions. Before you came, Priscilla, I was a complete bust. And, mind you, all my forbears, even back as far as Ezra, were surgeons of renown."

"Aye, that I know full well, Master Willy," said Priscilla. "E'en as far as Gloucester Town and Plymouth Town did their fame extend."

"Then wilt thou—I mean, you'll understand then," said Bill. "You see, I was supposed to become a great surgeon too. But I couldn't. I'm a good doctor, understand. I could probably have done better than all right in diagnosis and general practice if my ancestors' ghosts had let me alone—but with lancet, scalpel and trepan I'm utterly lost,

"At first patients called on me because of my name. They expected me to operate—as my father or his father would probably have done. But I refused—I sent them to men whom I felt were better qualified. And my patients lost faith in me—so much so that ultimately I lost faith in myself."

"Thou hast all the faith thou dost need now, Master Willy," said Priscilla, reassuringly. "These others—these unbelievers—shall have faith in thee too anon. Yet hast thou much distrust of wealth—couldst tell me why?"

"Wealth makes people ugly" said Bill. "When you have a certain amount of money—enough for security and gracious living—it is enough. And that, with thy—your help, will almost cer-

tainly come our way. Beyond that, I want only to be of such service as I can to my deserving fellow men and women."

HE heard the soft trill of her laughter and thrilled to it. She said, "Yea verily, thou art a man as noble as the deeds we shall soon perform. What'er thou wist is my command. But up, Master Willy. Thou hast yet to partake of the breakfast I have prepared for thee."

"Cooks too," said Bill laughing. "But you shouldn't do that."

"And why not when I am indeed part of thee? Forsooth," she added, "closer than ever wife could be. 'Tis but a chore I have self-appointed. Come—hie thee to the dining room. This indeed shall be a day of many doings."

On the antique mahogany table, which had acquired a miraculous sheen overnight, were fresh-cut flowers—exotic blooms whose like Bill had never seen. The food too was exotic—tasty, well spiced hot and savory. He ate with appetite for two and leaned back afterward with a sigh of content.

"Master Willy," said Priscilla, "get thee to the strange talking instrument. And forget thee not that I be jealous where thou art concerned."

He rose obediently and went to the telephone. It rang as he picked it up. Natalie was on the wire and, in spite of all precautionary efforts, he could not avoid a sense of uplift and pleasure at the sound of her voice.

"Bill, dear," she said in mild protest, "you promised to call me. Remember my garden party this afternoon? Don't let me down on this, Bill. I want you there. Please, Bill."

"Of course, darling," he replied warmly. "I'll be delighted to come."

A thick scratch pad lay on the table in the hall beside the telephone. Suddenly its pages were torn off and began to flutter madly in the air. Hurricane sounds began to be audible with rising intensity.

"Bill! What's happening?" cried Natalie, alarmed. "What's that noise?"

"Noise, wench? Art bereft of thy senses?" snapped Bill. He stifled a groan as he realized his tongue was again in Priscilla's possession.

"Bill, Bill—what did you say?" cried the frightened girl over the wire.

"I said," Bill's voice was close to a bellow, "that thou didst hear naught but the gentle sighing of the zephyr. Thou art still asleep and imagining things. Forsooth, thou art a stupid silly damsel."

"That's not funny, Bill." Natalie's voice was tight with anger. "But I'll try to forgive you if you promise to come to my party this afternoon."

"I shall be present if I so desire," he roared, to his horror. "Though thou hast no right to command me, wench!"

He put the telephone back in its cradle though it was not he who ordered his muscles to hang up. He looked around him balefully.

"Cut that out, Priscilla," he ordered. "You're acting like a spoiled child. How can I hope to keep our secret if you persist in making me act the fool? Someone is bound to guess I'm bewitched."

Suddenly his unseen possessor was sobbing bitterly. Suddenly Bill longed to put an arm around this Puritan minx, to hold tighter her loveliness and give it solace. He wanted to stroke her flaxen hair, to kiss the tears from her eyes—But he could see nothing, feel nothing. Priscilla was as exasperating a wraith as she was a tantalizing personality, female gender.

He glanced at his watch, saw that he was going to have to hurry to make his appointment with Monty Price on time. He rose, tight-lipped, got his old coupé out of the garage and drove through Brookline, down Beacon Street, where the first green buds of spring were beginning to appear on the lofty trees that arched above it, along state-ly Commonwealth Avenue, where Monty Price's opulent bay-windowed mansion stood looking its disdain at mere pedestrian passers-by.

He was received with the unction befitting a maharajah and ushered into an ornate elevator which carried him

to the millionaire's third-floor bedroom. There, to Bill's considerable amusement, Dr. Gaylord remained in the background, studying his technique but making no attempt to interfere. There was not even a trace of skepticism on his usually cynical countenance.

"I shall have to see the patient alone," Bill told him pointedly.

But Gaylord merely nodded and moved toward the door, "As you wish, doctor," he replied. "Mr. Price has your fee ready. I shall be waiting downstairs."

Bill stared at his patient with considerable curiosity for Monty Price was a byword in New England financial circles. He found himself more than ever disliking the idea of giving health to such a specimen.

"Doctor," said the great man, eyeing Bill through rheumy, red-rimmed little eyes sunk deep in purple patches on his unhealthy skin, "I knew from the moment you came into this room just now that you were the man who could cure me. The money is in that envelope on the table." He nodded toward it. "My trust is such that you are welcome to payment even before you begin treatment."

Wilson nodded his thanks, picked up the bulky envelope and looked inside. It was there—a hundred thousand dollars in thousands, five-thousand and ten-thousand-dollar bills. He had never seen so much money, or even a fraction of it, before in his life. He stuffed it casually into his breast pocket.

"If you are not entirely cured," he told the millionaire, "I'll return every dollar. Now I want to make a brief examination."

Wilson got to work. Fifteen minutes later he was as puzzled as Dr. Gaylord and all the rest of that coterie of noted men of medicine who had attempted to treat L. Montgomery Price. There were simply no symptoms of any recognized ailment—other than vague pains and general weakness which could have come from the patient's lengthy sojourn in bed. Bill glanced at the array of patent medicines which littered the table.

"I'll order every one of them thrown out," he said. "You won't have need for them again. Just relax now—it will only take a moment."

"Will it hurt?" the millionaire's eyes were suddenly glassy with fright at the prospect of suffering physical pain.

"Not more than the prick of a needle," said Bill, hoping that Priscilla was still on hand to do her stuff. He had no doubt that Price's illness was fundamentally psychosomatic, probably based on a deep psychological sense of guilt over his financial depredations. But it had progressed far beyond the mental—was serious, possibly fatal. He wondered how Priscilla's power would fare in such a case.

BILL prepared a hypodermic needle and once again used water-filled ampules. Then, after administering his innocuous charge, he bent over the patient, covering his ears and murmured an incantation which came to his lips through Priscilla's influence.

*"Sickness brought on thee by sin
Leave thee whole of soul and skin."*

Bill straightened and set about putting the needle back in his bag. The millionaire opened his eyes and sat up erect in bed.

"I'll be—!" he exclaimed. "I believe I feel better already. Yes, sir, doctor, whatever you shot into me did the trick. I'll get up after a bit."

"Thou wilt arise now," snapped Bill. "Thy ailments are washed from thee. Thou art as healthy and robust as one of thy years and condition may be. Thou shalt not suffer illness again for many years. Now rise and get thee hence."

Price swung his feet clear of the covers to the floor. He looked up at Wilson curiously.

"You know," he said, "I believe you're right, even if you do express yourself oddly. Call my nurse. Have her bring my clothes. I'm a new man."

Bill went to the door and summoned the nurse and Dr. Gaylord.

"Mr. Price is all yours now. But next time, doctor, please provide me with a

patient worthy of my poor skills. I don't mind the fee, of course"—Bill patted the pocket containing the well-stuffed envelope—"but I'm a lot more interested in the type of patient I handle than the cash involved."

"I believe you really mean that, doctor," said Gaylord, offering his hand. "I'm afraid I've been misjudging you. But that's small matter now. You are a gentleman and worthy of your license and of your family fame. If I encounter another case that defies solution—a more worthy one, of course—may I call you in to help us out?"

"Of course," said Bill, smiling. "That's what I'm here for—though I reserve the right to reject any case. Now, good day, doctor. I believe you will find Mr. Price entirely cured."

Gaylord darted into the bedroom as Wilson moved past the nurse to the elevator. En route to his car he heard Priscilla's whisper in his ear.

"Thou didst carry thyself modishly, Master Willy. Indeed, the whole world lies at thy feet for the picking. Aye, and more than riches—the great gratification of thy every desire."

"Don't tempt me, honeychild," said Bill, grinning. "But frankly, Priscilla, this wad in my pocket will carry us for a long time. If I wanted—"

He stopped talking abruptly as two pedestrians turned to stare at him. He realized that he had been talking aloud and felt his face grow hot. He hurried to the shelter of his car with Priscilla's delighted giggle sounding in his ears.

"Verily, thou art easily discomfited, Master Willy," she whispered with a mirthful break in her voice. "But thou art indeed good for all that."

"Sometimes I'm beginning to wonder," said Wilson. "After all, Ezra is my direct ancestor. Look at what he did last night. How do I know that some of his evil influence has not come down through the generations to be part of me? Priscilla, the thought is frightening."

He could almost feel the soft touch of her hand on his cheek—it reminded him that he had forgotten to shave that

morning in his excitement. Her voice was soothing and gentle.

"Nay, fear not, for am I not here to guard thee, Master Willy? Should ought of Ezra's evil lie within thee, that shall I exorcise by my incantations. Worry thee not."

Wilson drove as rapidly as traffic lights permitted. He turned the old coupé along the Fenway toward Jamaica, there parked in a secluded spot near the Arnold Arboretum, where he could talk to Priscilla without fear of being overheard by the inquisitive.

"Priscilla," he said, "we've got to get down to cases. You know I can't keep Natalie out of my thoughts at present. Now hold on—don't stir up any typhoons here. Let's see if we can't get this straightened out calmly."

"Thou art still infatuated with the cumbrous damsel, Master Willy?"

"I was until recently—until you became part of me, Priscilla," he said. "Now—well, everything is different. Have I thy—your promise that you will one day become visible, Priscilla?"

"Aye—on the day that I am wholly accepted," she said. "Thou hast doubt of me yet, Master Willy. When all thy doubts do vanish, then will I be so much a part of thee that visibility will return to me."

"That will be the day!" said Bill happily. "Darling, all I know of you is your voice but I have no doubt that you will match it in fresh young beauty and charm of person. I love your voice already—and I shall love the visible you as well. But, dammit, Priscilla, I can't just drop Natalie cold."

"Thou hast still a lurking desire for her then?"

"I can't answer that honestly, Priscilla," said Bill after a painful moment of silence. "I do like her—I always have. And when and if I make a final break with her I would like to do it as decently and painlessly as possible. As you would want to break off with a man you had loved."

"But I have loved no other but thee, Master Willy."

"Priscilla, we've got to go to that gar-

den party. If we don't—if I drop her too abruptly—people will talk. They'll wonder why I gave her up, they'll become suspicious. We can't allow the faintest suspicion of your existence to arise—not until you are visible."

Priscilla sighed painfully. "Alas, thou speakest bitter truth, Master Willy. Very well then, we shall attend the party. Mayhap it will prove amusing."

"And that's another thing, baby," said Bill in warning tone. "No tricks, please. It had better go smoothly. I want your word on it."

"Aye, thou hast it," said Priscilla, disgruntled. "I can but await with yearning the day when thou dost accept me in full. Then shall I be enabled to feel thy strong arms about me, thy hot lips on mine. I have awaited thee for nigh three hundred years—at times almost without hope."

"It won't be long now, baby," he said, stepping on the starter.

CHAPTER VIII

Ezra at Work

FEELING that despite his impending new estate in the minds of men and medicos, some sort of self discipline was still necessary, Bill Wilson spent a prescribed two hours that afternoon in his office. As had become usual of recent months, no patients came to call upon him. He had only Priscilla for company.

Yet for a change Wilson was not disturbed by his lack of patronage. After all, miraculously, his future was now magnificently assured. Once Priscilla, Dr. Gaylord and he had worked out some method by which he could use his new-found power, there would be patients enough and to spare.

He considered plans and possibilities for putting himself into full operation. Possibly, he thought, it would be best if only a few reliable top-notch physicians and surgeons knew of his secret

and sent him only those cases which they were unable to treat. It would be impossible to help all who would seek his help were news of his strange gifts to become general.

At any rate, he was going to need help—physical help, not the mystic support which Priscilla alone could provide. He picked up the telephone and enlisted the service of a veteran nurse, one who had served his father and had worked for him until business became too poor to warrant continuing her salary.

As he hung up he felt a sudden blast of wind across his face. Priscilla said plaintively, "And now, Master Willy, must I vie with another fair damsel?"

He laughed. "Hardly, Priscilla. Miss Hazard is old, built like a left tackle and has only a maternal eye for me."

"'Tis well then," Priscilla replied. "So long as she does not outshine the comeliness that is mine nor seek to mother thee overmuch."

Bill repressed a shudder. "One thing, Priscilla," he said. "If she ever so much as suspected your existence she'll take off faster than you can fly on a broomstick. I need her help and I'm counting on you to behave yourself."

His swivel chair was spun about three times by an invisible agent, making him hang on to the arms to fight dizziness. Priscilla's laughter floated through the air and he had to laugh with her. Minx, he thought—if only she weren't so darned jealous. And then he checked his thoughts, remembering that his personal witch could read his mind like an open book.

At four o'clock he put his desk in order, picked up his black bag—which he carried with him everywhere from force of habit—and headed for the office door. He had just reached it when the telephone rang behind him. He hesitated, his hand on the doorknob.

"'Tis naught," Priscilla murmured lightly. "Let us be going—to thy swift wagon without horses. Mayhap soon thou wilt have one swifter still."

The phone shrilled remorselessly. The sheer novelty of its ringing conquered Bill's desire to be off. He went back and

picked it up. Dr. Gaylord was on the wire.

"Doctor," he said, "I have another case for you. This one demands your immediate attention—if you still intend to consider the worthiness of your patients. I have a dying man who deserves all humanity can give him."

"Who is it?" Wilson inquired suspiciously.

"Jasper MacLean," Gaylord told him.

Bill said nothing for a moment. He knew who Jasper MacLean was—who didn't? The man had made his millions honestly, had used them generously. He had contributed millions to worthwhile charities and welfare agencies, had built a huge hospital in Brighton and maintained it on a basis by which the poor paid nothing for first-class medical treatment.

"You don't have to recommend him," Bill said finally in reply to a question from Gaylord. "I heartily agree with you."

"Then come at once to his apartment," said the older physician. "It's on the top floor of the Gridley Towers in Cambridge. The fee will be—"

"Hang the fee!" cried Bill. "I don't want a dime of Jasper MacLean's money. I'll be there as fast as I can."

"Hurry," Gaylord warned him. "Every second counts now. There's nothing I or any other physician can do. If you aren't here in half an hour you might as well not come at all."

"Have them hold an elevator for me," said Bill. "I'm starting right now."

He hung up and strode back toward the door. Priscilla spoke softly.

"This Jasper MacLean," she said, "is he then a man so noble?"

"None nobler living," Wilson told her. "The man is a veritable saint. His whole life has been spent in the service of others. A few more years for him could mean benefits to thousands now suffering. If I can grant him these few years with your aid I shall be your slave."

"Then hie thee hence, Master Willy," she urged, "for little time remains. He lies gravely ill and I sense evil lurking close—though 'tis scarce likely that—no it cannot be. But hie thee hence swiftly, swiftly."

Wilson paid her small heed as he raced for his car, got it started and headed for the Cottage Farms Bridge and the Gridley Towers, a lush modern apartment building just off Harvard Square. Thanks to the green doctor's cross on the front of his coupé he made it, despite traffic, in less than ten minutes.

DISDAINING no-parking signs, he left his car directly in front of the Towers, streaked across the sidewalk and mentally thanked Priscilla for not permitting traffic tie-ups to cause him delay. An open elevator waited in the softly-lit lobby, guarded jealously by an attendant. Bill raced up to him.

"I'm Dr. Wilson," he said. "Let's go."

"Yes, sir," said the attendant. "I've been waiting for you." He jumped for

[Turn page]



OYSTERMAN FINDS REAL PEARL!

AMAGANSETT, N. Y.—Capt. Ted Lester has discovered a gem among whiskies. "It's Calvert Reserve," he says, "and the day I first tasted it, I switched to Calvert's smoother taste. It's a real find!"

the controls and the door slid closed. "Think you can fix up Mr. MacLean, doctor? We've all been awfully worried about him."

"I'll do my best, never fear," said Bill.

"If you pull him through a million people will thank you, doctor. He's just about tops. Fifty bucks for me every Christmas—and last year, when my kid had to quit school because the missus got sick, what do you think he did?"

"I don't know," said Bill, "but what's wrong with this elevator? It's not moving fast enough."

"Hey! It is kinda sluggish. We been having some trouble with this car lately. Like I was saying, MacLean hears about it and bingo, my wife's gettin' free care—the best—in his hospital and before I know it the kid's got a free scholarship to a better school. I'm telling you, that Mr. MacLean's a—"

The elevator slid slowly to a halt. The operator, growing worried, stopped eulogizing his benefactor and fussed desperately with the controls. He pressed the emergency button. Nothing happened. He began to bang on the door and shout, muttering that it ought to bring the superintendent to get them out of it. But no one came and the lift remained obstinately stuck.

Wilson glanced nervously at his wristwatch. Unless something happened to get the elevator moving within the next few minutes it would be too late to save MacLean if Dr. Gaylord were right. And while Gaylord lacked supernatural aid he was one of the country's top medical men.

Both of them began to yell—kept on yelling until Bill's throat felt dry and hoarse. They banged and kicked on the door whose bland surface was not even scratched by their efforts. Nothing happened—nobody came.

"She never did this before," muttered the operator, pausing to mop a streaming brow. "Must be shorted somewhere. If she is and nobody hears us, we're stuck here, doctor."

"If we don't get out of here right away," said Bill, "Jasper MacLean will be a dead man."

"Then you better start praying," said the liftman miserably. "Pray hard, because there ain't a thing I can do."

Bill put in a silent call to Priscilla. He didn't dare summon her aloud for fear the operator would think him daft. But the invisible maiden answered. Her voice was clear and bell-like to Bill although the operator seemed not to hear it at all.

"Master Willy," she called, "I am doing all I can but 'tis not enough. We contend with Ezra's evil powers—a consummation I have feared since setting forth. When thou didst tell me we were hieing us to save a living saint my powers informed me Ezra might endeavor to snag our progress. But I try, Master Willy."

"Try harder," said Bill silently. "Every second counts. I'd give all of that hundred thousand Monty Price paid us to get my hands around his dirty neck. I'd like to—"

Abruptly he checked his thoughts along such lines. They would do no good to Jasper MacLean or himself. Five more minutes passed, ten—fifteen. Dr. Gaylord's deadline was already gone by. The operator, unashamedly in tears, gave up.

"It's no use, sir," he said, wringing his hands. "I was hoping if it was a short they'd find it in a hurry and take care of it. But I guess nobody is in the basement. If Mr. MacLean dies—"

"You're doing all you can," said Bill. "Keep the control lever down so we'll get going the instant power comes on."

"Sure—you're right, doctor," the attendant said. He set the control as directed and presently the car began to rise. Bill said silent thanks to Priscilla and then prayed that they were still in time.

THE door opened and Bill raced along the corridor, following the operator's directions. The door of Jasper MacLean's apartment was ajar. He burst through it, sprinted down a hallway, came face to face with Dr. Gaylord. One look at Gaylord's face was enough.

"You're too late, doctor," said the older medico. "I appreciate your effort to get here but even I wasn't called in time. He"—with a gesture toward the room behind him, where a sheet was drawn up over a still form on a bed—"refused to risk having me summoned from some needier case." Gaylord's laugh was brief and bitter.

"I've been stuck in an elevator here for nearly half an hour," Bill muttered, feeling sick. "It had to short at a time like this. Are you sure I can do nothing—that he's really dead?"

"I was with him," said Gaylord in a tone which brooked no further argument. "There is nothing to do—unless you can raise the dead, doctor."

"I only wish I could," moaned Bill. He shook his bag in frustration, added; "No—I'm afraid Ezra wins this round."

"Ezra?" said Gaylord, regarding the younger man oddly. "What the devil are you talking about, young man?"

"Devil," said Wilson, "is the right word. But I'll try to make up for this. Call me any time you think I can help and don't worry about the fees." He turned abruptly and went back to the elevator. The operator guessed from his expression what had happened.

"Too late, doctor?" he asked. Then, "I'd have given my right arm to have got you there in time. It was a short all right. I phoned downstairs. Why it had to happen just when it did—" He gave it up.

Wilson said nothing—he didn't feel like talking just then. He walked out of the building and got back into his car. He drove slowly to the Charles River drive, proceeded slowly along it.

"'Twas Ezra and his devil's power," Priscilla whispered sympathetically. "Jasper MacLean was too noble to live by Ezra's way of thinking. Master Willy, I strove mightily with him—but he proved too strong for me. I am ashamed. Yet we shall not surrender hope. Tonight will find me brewing powerful potions with which to abjure his fiend's work. Yet must I find him first to work my magic."

Wilson sighed. There was little he

could do. "You'll find him, Priscilla," he said encouragingly. "Of that I have no doubt whatever. Well, we might as well go to Natalie's party. I only hope Ezra and his evil ways don't pursue us there. And that you keep your impulses in check."

He sensed her laughter and for some reason his spirits rose a notch. In an abstract manner he thought of Natalie—of the clearness of her skin and eyes, the fact that she was very much flesh and blood. Not merely a voice—no, not even a voice with the allure of Siren and Rhine maiden.

Abruptly he saw a small whirlwind begin to spin madly just in front of the coupé. It danced on merrily ahead of him, keeping its distance, although the air on every hand was still. Priscilla was revealing her jealousy again.

"You must not try to dominate me, Priscilla," he told her in gentle reproof. "It worries me. Suppose I come to depend on you entirely—and suppose you leave me of your own free will or, perhaps, through Ezra's doing? Then what happens? I'm no wizard. I can't foresee things, cast curses or weave spells."

Priscilla's response was a peal of laughter. The whirlwind dissolved as if it had never existed. She said, "Nay, fear not, Master Willy. Thou shalt not be lorn of me at my behest—nor through that of Ezra. Whither could I go? I could not change hosts were I so minded. Nay, I shall leave thee never, Master Willy—thou who art so kind and noble and clever."

Bill relaxed, lit a cigarette and gave his car more gas. Despite the setback with Jasper MacLean, his future was sufficiently bright to warrant rose-tinted contemplation. Fame could scarcely pass him by—fame and prestige and the sense of being inordinately useful.

Then too there was Priscilla. He wondered as he crossed the Harvard Bridge and took the cutoff for Brookline and Natalie's home, just what he would do were he ever to lose her. She was his key to happiness—and someday she would regain visibility. He was past seeking logic in her promises—he be-

lieved. Had not she, through him, performed other miracles?

Natalie was a darling—there was no doubt on that point. But Natalie was just Natalie. A near-beautiful, extremely intelligent, well-bred girl whom he had felt was far too good for him and had worshipped until that moment in the tomb of Ezra Wilson.

Now, however, he had Priscilla. She was probably at least as good looking as Natalie and as intelligent—with the added piquancy of having been born centuries before. Her voice was the most fascinating vocal instrument he had ever heard. With it, she was bound to be the most fascinating, the most glamorous—

"Thy thoughts abash me with their beauty," Priscilla whispered. "Allow me to abide with thee, Master Willy, for always. Betimes shall I induct you into the mysteries of wizardry. Mayhap thou shalt one day ride a broomstick with me."

"Oh, no," said Bill, nearly clipping an opulent town limousine going in the other direction. "Not me!"

All at once he realized with increased emphasis that his thoughts were no longer his own. He shivered a little and was a little afraid. Then he told himself he was being silly and put his mind on the road.

CHAPTER IX

The Mad Garden Party

AS befitted her inherited standing in the still-jealously-guarded purlicues of Boston society and her popularity in her own right, Natalie's garden party was among the best-attended of the season. This despite the fact that its early date on the calendar virtually defied the New England April climate to do its worst. But the weather was mercifully bright and balmy. Maids and matrons, youths and Brahmins of the latter-day Athens of America flocked to

nibble at finger-length sandwiches or to partake of the ancestral punchbowl.

Although the party was listed as informal and tweeds and flannels were in evidence among the younger elements present, the more mature guests, especially the ladies, were attired in the best that Jay's and Filene's and the smaller and more exclusive shops of Boylston and Newberry streets could provide. Hired waiters, well-broken to the subdued and unobtrusive efficiency expected of them at affairs of this ilk, scuttled about the carefully groomed garden with their trays of sandwiches and cups of punch.

Bill Wilson was warmly greeted. His professional failure did little to detract from the directed amiability of folk to whom his name was a part of the correct Boston scene—and his status as the favored young man of the hostess added to the acceptance of his presence. Buoyed by his new assurance, he was for the first time in years able to enjoy mingling with folks he had known and who had known him since his toddling days.

But beneath his smiling facade lurked an increasing premonition of disaster. Bits of talk floated around him, half-audible but inescapable. More than one dowager, dewlapped or otherwise, commented as he passed on his expected engagement to "dear Natalie." And if he could hear the whispers, Priscilla inevitably could hear them too.

He tried repeatedly to find some isolated spot where he could plead with Priscilla to keep her jealousy under wraps. But each time he thought he was by himself some one popped up to say hello and chat with him, or a waiter approached with his inevitable tray. Needless to say, he didn't get a chance.

Natalie escaped from a group of admirers and made her way gracefully across the striped tarpaulin which had been stretched over the still-hard ground to greet him. Wilson, who had not yet summoned courage to say hello to his hostess, tried to postpone the issue but was blocked by a group of well-meaning boobs.

Smiling gaily, Natalie bore down on him and said warmly, intimately, "I'm so glad you got here, Bill. Isn't it a lovely party?"

"It's perfect," Wilson told her. Then, pulling her aside, he said, "Natalie, a lot of our mutual friends are wagging their tongues at both ends about an impending engagement between you and me. They're even setting a June date for a wedding."

"Why, Bill, darling—are you finally proposing?" She took both his hands in hers. "Whether you are or not, the answer is yes. Let's put them out of their misery right now." She hesitated, apparently trying to read the expression of horror on his face. "That is—if it isn't rushing things too much for you."

"But, Natalie—" Bill began, floundering desperately. "I wasn't proposing—that is, Heaven knows I should have long ago—but just now it's out of the question. Impossible. Please don't ask me why—I can't explain and if I could you'd think I was crazy. Please, Natalie, I know it's—"

"Very well, Bill, if you wish it." She stepped back, still holding his hands, and frowned her bafflement. "I guess I was taking too much for granted. Bill, you shmoo, you know I adore you." She sighed. "I even love you enough to be a good girl and wait. But when you do propose, I warn you, I'm going to grab you and hold on tight. Oh, Bill—there isn't anyone else, is there?"

"N-no," he stammered. "That is—not exactly. Some day I'll explain the whole thing—even that screwy language I used on the phone. All I'm asking is a chance to straighten things out. Otherwise anything can happen."

She moved close to him again and put her slim hands on his shoulders. He shut his eyes to insulate himself against her desirability but the sweet scent of her seemed to envelope him. He shuddered, wondering what Priscilla was going to unleash.

"It's all right, darling," she said softly. "I know you must have a good reason. Remember, no matter what does happen, I'm yours and yours alone."

Her grip on his shoulders tightened and suddenly he felt the soft sweet pressure of her lips on his. For a moment he was frozen, then found himself responding. But before he could get his arms around her she had slipped away. He opened his eyes, saw her already talking with animation to a nearby group of guests.

Where was Priscilla? He was in a cold sweat. Mopily he wandered around, to be brought up short by the rigidly upheld bosom of stoutish, elderly Mrs. Frothingham Post, one of the most officious and managing of all the elderly ladies of Boston. She fairly absorbed him in her dentured beam.

"I saw you and Natalie just now," she said in a coy whisper that boomed across the crowded garden like a salvo from an Iowa-class battleship. Reaching out a hand she plucked Natalie—a not unwilling Natalie—to her other side and lifted her voice to command the attention of all and sundry.

"As godmother to this dear girl"—she transferred her beam to Natalie—"I think it is a fitting occasion for an announcement we have long felt in the making."

Bill, who was running a finger inside his suddenly tight collar, gulped. Suddenly he staggered forward, had to windmill his arms to keep from sprawling face down the tarpaulin. Someone in back of him had given him a vicious shove. He turned his head and his worst fears were realized. No one was visible behind him. Priscilla had finally gone into action.

Until then it had been an ideal day for a garden party. The sunlight streamed down through the budding poplars that fringed the garden, putting the sculptured evergreen bushes in high relief of light and shade. It lighted up bright crocuses, picked up the silver highlights on the long buffet table, made the white cloth gleam under its load of colorful viands and porcelain and flatware.

SUDDENLY, against his every volition, Bill's arm went up to com-

mand attention. He was, inexplicably, about to say something. The words seemed to come bubbling to his lips. There was no way of stopping them.

*"I wist that rain should smite this
swarm
Along with wind and hail and storm."*

He could hear the loud ring of his own voice and had a fleeting and fugitive wish that the hard earth beneath the tarpaulin might open and mercifully swallow him up. The sunlight faded, then vanished as a dark low cloud seemed to come out of nowhere to conceal sky and sun alike.

Wind smote the assemblage with the howling force of a tropic typhoon. It blew spectacles from august noses, lifted skirts and tablecloth, sent plates and glassware clattering and shattering. Rain, intermingled with stinging hailstones, came down without warning in a veritable cloudburst. Lightning flashed to be followed by the loudest claps of thunder he had ever heard.

For five minutes the elements continued to vent their spleen on Natalie's garden party. The one door which led to the house quickly became a bottleneck as guests of all ages and sexes struggled to reach shelter. Bill, too stunned and horrified to move, was certain he heard wild shrieks of joy which rose above the cries of the discomfited guests. Once something seemed to flit past him through the tempest—something that looked very like a broomstick jet propelled.

Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, the storm was over. The sun once more beamed its warm benevolence on chilled and watersoaked guest and waiter. The stampede to the house continued and only Natalie remained, still standing close to Bill. She was a sodden wreck—her velvet tea gown shoddy, her face wet and wiped of makeup, her hair slick and stringy.

"Bill Wilson," she said, "I don't know what you did or how you did it—but I and everyone here heard you summon that storm. Furthermore, I don't know why—but I'm not licked. This party will

continue indoors unless you make the plumbing explode." Her anger faded and for a moment he thought she was going to burst into tears. "Bill," she pleaded, "Bill, why did you do it?"

"I shall tell thee naught," Wilson heard himself saying. "Get thee hence and mind thy guests. Art thou daft, woman?"

Natalie gasped in anger, and began to walk away. Then she turned and her eyes were no longer throwing sparks. "Bill," she said, putting a hand on his arm, "I'm an idiot. How could you possibly bring on a storm to ruin my party? But, Bill, darling, you did speak strangely. First over the phone and now—"

He broke in, hoping Priscilla was not still in control of his voice. But it emerged normally as he said, "I wish to heaven I could tell you, Natalie. But I can only ask you to bear with me and forgive me. Perhaps some day soon I'll be free to explain. Meanwhile, I'd better take off."

"Don't you dare," said Natalie with something of her normal spirit. "You can take me inside. After all, it was just an April shower. Besides, I was able to lure Madame Rozatti here to sing for us—and she's in town for a concert at Symphony Hall. If you knew what her fee was you wouldn't think of going."

Wilson complied, restraining a shudder that did not result from his damp and chill condition. After all, Priscilla was at hand, watching and waiting. He didn't dare hope that the storm was the end of it—not if he knew his supernatural partner.

After awhile things got organized inside the pleasantly luxurious Page home. A cadaverous young man with carefully brushed long brown hair sat down at the piano, flicking away imaginary coattails. A hush fell over the room as a large and buxom lady of indeterminate middle age and liberally hennaed hair progressed through the crowd to take her place by the Steinway. She surveyed her audience serenely as befitted a famed Metropolitan diva.

The long-haired young man played

the introductory chords of a transcription of a Scarlatti number. The soprano's great lungs filled with air and her voice, under impeccable control, filled the room with its thrillingly high attack. Natalie, who worshipped good music, slipped an arm through Bill's and snuggled against him in ecstasy.

Bill had a sudden sense of impending doom. He tried to jerk clear of her grip, felt someone push him. Again his attacker was unseen. His arms flew out and the back of his hand struck the stick supporting the raised top of the big grand piano. It fell with a crash, just as the accompanist lifted a hand to turn a page of the music laid out in front of him above the keyboard. His shriek of anguish topped Madam Rozatti's C above High C by a full octave.

Wilson turned to flee, hoping to make his escape before he was nailed as the source of this second disaster and collided head on with a caterer's assistant who was slipping quietly toward the pantry with a tray of empty punch cups. Bill, the waiter and the tray went down together to double the uproar. The dregs of the cups sprayed both men liberally.

Bill scrambled to his feet and edged rapidly toward the doorway, with only one thing in mind—flight. He bumped into a small table carrying more glasses and sent it flying. He tried to run but Natalie collared him and halted his progress.

"Bill Wilson," she said, her voice low but stern, "you're drunk. I can smell liquor on you."

"I'm not," Bill said desperately. "I wish I were. I can't explain. I'm—just haunted. Let me out of here—out of your life. I deserve it."

Natalie looked around, saw that they were the focus of everyone's attention. Her head rose proudly and she managed a polite and apologetic little smile.

"I'm sorry," she said to all of them. "I'm afraid Dr. Wilson is unwell. I assure you he is not intoxicated. I can only wish him a swift recovery." She let her eyes roam among her guests. "Furthermore, he is still my favorite

person and anyone who disagrees with my choice had better leave."

"Thanks, honey," muttered Bill, "but it's no use." He pressed her hand and plunged blindly through the crowd for the hall. It was a nightmare progress and the seconds were hours until he at last reached the shelter of his car outside.

NATALIE watched him go, her eyes suddenly full. She turned toward the French windows that led to the terrace, too upset and close to tears to brave her guests just then. But she had barely made her escape outdoors when someone who had hurried after her seized her arm in firm but gentle grip.

"Natalie," said Larry Sprague, "I've got to talk to you."

"Please—not now," begged the girl.

"But it's about Bill," said Larry urgently. "It may be important. You see, I think I know what's happened to him."

That brought her out of it. She regarded him wide-eyed. "What?" she said.

"I wouldn't dare offer my opinion to anyone else," he told her. "But you should know about it. I feel that—well, you alone might understand."

She looked at him for a long moment, weighing him and his motives, but found no deceit in his eyes. Nodding, she led him to a sheltered part of the now deserted garden, where they were unlikely to be disturbed.

"Now," she said quietly. "What is it, Larry?"

"You'll probably think I'm off my rocker, Natalie but here it is—I think Bill's been possessed." He paused, added, "You know—witched."

"Witched? Larry, this is no time to talk in riddles. This is serious—at least to me. So help me I love Bill Wilson. I always have."

"Serious!" exploded Sprague. "You don't know the half of it. The other day I happened to stumble on the fact that one of Bill's ancestors—Ezra Wilson—was executed as a wizard in the seventeenth century. I didn't tell Bill al-

though I ribbed him about it indirectly. You know he has always taken his ancestry seriously. I have a hunch he may have looked into it and somehow—I can't explain it but these things began to happen right after I kidded him."

"Bill—you're being ridiculous!" exclaimed the girl. "It's absurd. No such things could be. There never were real witches or wizards."

"Weren't there?" countered Larry Sprague. "Perhaps not—but we have no concrete evidence to prove they did not at one time exist—and we have plenty of proof that witchcraft does exist today—at this very moment."

"Proof?" countered Natalie incredulously. "Witchcraft existing today? But Larry, from you—a medical man—this is absolutely—"

"Yes, proof," Larry interrupted firmly. "I'm speaking of none other than your friend and mine, Bill Wilson. Do you remember the paralytic kid whose house backs up on Bill's yard? I see you do. An incurable. I checked—I know. As of last night too. Well, today, he's running around as frisky as you please."

"But, Larry," said Natalie quickly—perhaps too quickly, "there are all sorts of instances on record of incredible cures through faith-healing."

"Yes, but this wasn't faith-healing," Larry said. "Bill went to see the boy. He talked that crazy lingo of his and chanted some antique litany over him. Young Nolan can't remember the words—he just giggles and says they sounded square. Minutes later he was cured—completely!"

"Then there's Mrs. Pembroke—you remember her surely. She and her husband used to run the Wilson farm in Westwood." At Natalie's nod he went on to tell what had happened. He then told her about the patient Dr. Gaylord had had taken to Bill's house late the night before.

"I watched him in both of these cases," Larry concluded. "Bill injected something into each patient—something he refused to divulge. Then he covered their ears, bent low and whis-

pered something I couldn't hear. He acted as if he didn't want anyone to overhear what he said."

"But what does it mean?" Natalie asked, obviously growing frightened.

"I'm convinced he gave them the same treatment he gave the Nolan boy—a treatment based on incantation—charms if you will. According to legend witches and wizards could kill or cure by such means. I'm beginning to believe—don't ask me how—that Bill has acquired some of their power."

Natalie stood very straight, her eyes turned rigidly from Larry's. She said, her voice very soft, a trifle unsteady, "And just now Bill stood out here before my guests and recited some doggerel about a storm and a storm came. And then, after we moved the party indoors—but you were there and saw for yourself." She started and looked at him almost furtively. "Larry, what if you're right? What if he *is* possessed?"

"We'll find out," said Sprague grimly. "I don't want you to be so miserable—even over Bill—and I know one other thing. I took some extension courses in M. I. T. years ago. I wasn't sure what branch of science I was going in for. I studied parapsychology under a chap named Thaddeus Link. He isn't much to look at but he's a big man and some of his theories are frightfully unorthodox. Link was trailing Bill around yesterday afternoon. I saw him. He just might know something that would help us unravel this. It's a long chance but it's all we have."

"Let me talk to your Mr. Link," pleaded Natalie. "I've got to help Bill. I think he's in the grip of something he can't control. And, Larry, I'm scared stiff about it. Please don't talk about it to anyone. After all, it's only conjecture and if we're wrong—which we must be—we could do Bill a lot of harm."

"Don't worry, honey," said Larry Sprague. "I'll keep mum—not because of Bill but because of you. I know how much he means to you and you mean just about everything to me."

"Thanks, Larry," she said, her eyes

full again. "And—I'm sorry."

"Okay." Sprague was determined. "But if we *are* right and if Bill is under some supernatural control—then steps will have to be taken. What they will be I don't pretend to know. But Link may have a lead, perhaps even a solution. He's an amazing man. Go to him, Natalie—tell him you're seeing him at my suggestion. Make him listen to your story and make him help you. If he refuses, call on me. I'll come over and add my weight to yours. Good luck, Natalie."

He stood there, watching her as she hurried back to the house.

CHAPTER X

Scientific Approach

FOR a moment, standing on the doorstep of the two-story grey stone dwelling which housed Thaddeus Link, Natalie bit her lip from nervousness. Then, composing her features and squaring her shoulders, she placed a resolute finger on the bell.

Long moments later the door was opened and Link peered out at the girl. His blue eyes, enormous behind the thick-lensed glasses which shielded them, startled her momentarily but not as much as the words he spoke.

"Hello, Miss Page," he said affably, standing aside to let her in.

"You know my name? Larry Sprague called you?" she asked as she entered.

"Yes and no," replied the scientist. "I know you because you're Bill Wilson's girl. I've seen you with him a number of times during the preliminary stages of my investigation of him. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks," said Natalie weakly. She looked around her. The house, for a presumably crusty bachelor who lived alone, looked almost civilized. It was neat, comfortably and unjarringly furnished, pleasantly masculine.

"I presume you're here on Bill's account," said Thaddeus Link, dropping

into a chair opposite hers and fumbling with an unlit pipe. "I hope you're not upset over our little escapade. We really *were* attempting a scientific experiment."

"You were attempting—" she began. "What *did* you do?"

"Why, I supposed he'd told you," said the parapsychologist, mildly surprised. "We disinterred that wizard ancestor of his and opened the coffin. Shivery business at night but necessary to my experiment. I hope you aren't angry, Miss Page."

"Of course not," she said politely, then did a double take. "You opened the casket of Ezra Wilson!" It was an exclamation, not a question. Her eyes went wide and the knuckles of a gloved hand flew to her mouth. Then she said, her voice unsteady, "Mr. Link, I'm afraid I've got to talk to you—in strictest confidence, of course. I'm afraid you may be my only hope."

"I'm sure it can't be as bad as all that," said the scientist soothingly. "Here—let me get you a drink. You seem to be upset. You really shouldn't let a thing like this cause you so much—well, shock."

"Thanks," she said, accepting gratefully the half-filled tumbler he offered her. She drained it at a gulp, coughed briefly, then said after returning the glass, "But you don't know—you can't. Please tell me about it—from the beginning."

Link put her glass down on a table and peered at her briefly as though to reassure himself that his visitor were not insane. Apparently satisfied on this score he sat down again and got his pipe going.

"There really isn't very much to tell, I'm afraid," he said.

"But there must be," Natalie insisted. "Please let me be the judge."

"Very well, judge—pardon, Miss Page—I've been doing some research on my own behalf concerning the—well, the human aura, to put it in simplest possible terms." He went on, in concise, well-planned sentences, to tell her of what had happened the previous day.

"Dr. Wilson went along with me because I believe he was truly upset to have discovered a flaw in his long line of supposedly perfect ancestors," he concluded. "He wanted to have it proved, one way or the other. As for me, I merely wished to test for the possibility of sealed human radiations enduring after death."

Natalie hesitated, then said anxiously, "And what did your instruments tell you when you checked them after this phenomenon in the tomb? Did they show that the radiations survived?"

"Well—" the parapsychologist hesitated, marshalling his thoughts. Then he said, "The instruments picked up something but they didn't respond as well as I had hoped they would. Mind you, there was a regular miniature tornado going there for a few seconds." He paused again and frowned.

"But what was recorded," he went on deliberately and with a trace of dissatisfaction, "was far less strong than would be—say, a recording of your radiations or mine. Of course, I could not check the readings until I got Dr. Wilson revived and the instruments back in my car and had driven here and carried them into my laboratory upstairs. The process took well over an hour. And in that time there might have been some factor operating to lower the gauges."

"But you don't think so," said Natalie, leaning forward.

"No," said Thaddeus Link, shaking his head. "I can only say that, although I got something—heaven only knows what—the experiment came very close to being a failure." He sighed. "And after that tornado in miniature too."

"Mr. Link," said Natalie, gazing at him steadily, "you say the emanations were very weak. Has it occurred to you they may have escaped elsewhere?"

"Of course," said the scientist, shaking his head. "In such an old crypt there may well have been an unseen opening—or more—which would have been, of course, unguarded by my instruments. I'm afraid I shall have to begin the search all over again and not be quite so precipitate."

"I see," said Natalie, drumming on the arm of her chair with her long thin fingers. She was beginning to get an idea—a theory that seemed utterly wild and impossible on the face of it. But it was the only theory which would fit the amazing series of incidents that had followed the opening of the tomb.

"Mr. Link," she went on slowly, feeling her way, "you did prove that the personal emanations of Ezra Wilson did retain some activity after his death—almost three hundred years after."

"I believe so," said the parapsychologist. He shrugged narrow shoulders. "But so weak! Perhaps they gradually lose strength over such a period of time."

"Nonsense!" said Natalie. "You yourself stated just now that they came roaring out of the hole in the lead coffin case like a whirlwind. Hasn't it occurred to you that they may have stayed in the tomb?"

"Impossible!" said the scientist. "The velocity with which they emer—"

"Mr. Link." Natalie's tone was severe. "I have every reason to believe that those missing emanations somehow settled on or in Bill Wilson. At any rate, since it happened, he has become a practising witch or wizard or whatever!"

THE scientist, still mourning his missing emanations, smiled. "It would hardly be possible for—" He stopped, his already magnified eyes growing larger still. "What's that?" he almost shouted. "What did you say?"

"That night—it seems ages ago," she said, "after you left him Bill cured a hopelessly paralyzed boy who lives back of his home. According to the boy and his mother he did it by archaic incantation." She went on to tell him the rest of the miracles Larry Sprague had told her about, wound up with, "He even speaks like someone living three hundred years ago at times."

"Incredible!" said Thaddeus Link but there was unshureness in his face. He smiled. "It appears to me that release from the pressure of trying to live up to inhumanly perfect ancestors has

unlocked some great healing power in him."

"Maybe," said Natalie dubiously, "but what he did to my garden party this afternoon wasn't human." She gave him an unabashed account of the double disaster, leaving out nothing, even personal details she would rather have omitted. She sensed the all-importance of getting the scientist's aid.

"You'll pardon my skepticism," said the parapsychologist gently. "But surely there are natural explanations for all these things. A local shower in April—a slip against the piano. I'm afraid you are overwrought."

"Very well," said Natalie, almost crackling with anger. "If you don't believe me, get Bill down here and find out for yourself. Ask Larry Sprague about the cures he has been making. Other doctors—important ones—have been witnesses and will tell you the same thing."

"Hold it—hold it," said the scientist gently, holding up his hands in token of surrender. "You're really convinced, aren't you?" He paused, frowning, added, "Of course, there is a bare possibility that—"

"Possibility, my foot!" snapped Natalie in scorn. "These things are fact. What I want to know is what you are going to do about Bill? He can't go on like this, no matter what."

"I'm beginning to believe you, young lady," said Thaddeus Link, mopping a high forehead that was suddenly studded with beads of sweat. "But what can I do? It's a situation unprecedented in modern science. I'm afraid I shall need time to investigate it, to acquaint myself with its ramifications. It still doesn't seem possible but if it is true I must remove all doubt from my own mind."

"When you do, Mr. Link"—there was no doubt whatever in Natalie's voice—"do you think you will find some way to destroy these emanations?"

"Frankly, I don't know, Miss Page." He shook his head. "I don't even know yet what the radiations consist of. No one does. All we now know is that they

do exist and under some conditions have the power to destroy certain micro-organisms."

"Then we must find out what will destroy these radiations, emanations or whatever they are," said Natalie with heat. "It's our duty. They are destroying the Bill Wilson I love and I can't just sit by and see that happen." Natalie was not a girl given to showing strong emotion but for the second time that day her eyes were filled with tears.

"I'll do everything I can," said Link, rising and pacing the floor. He stopped, looked down at her, added sympathetically, "Not only for you and Bill but in the name of science. This may unlock the gateway to undreamed of fields of knowledge—it may even lead to the secret of life itself. Who knows?"

"I'll break down those radiations and find their nature," he went on. "And once we have that, we can begin to see if there isn't some way of counteracting whatever alien rays may have merged with your young man's." He shook his head and said further, "It's not going to be easy—nor is it going to be fast."

"Why not?" countered Natalie, both practical and desperate.

"Because, my dear, if I move too rapidly I may destroy not only these alien emanations but Bill Wilson's aura as well. And then the question is—will he die or be altered in his human pattern? It is possible that life and these radiations are interlocked beyond separation—they may even be one and the same."

Natalie, listening intently, closed her eyes and gave vent to a little moan. "We can't kill him," she said fiercely. "Mr. Link, I'd rather have Bill a stranger—in whole or in part—than be without him entirely. I don't care how difficult the problem looks. It's your responsibility—and mine, Mr. Link and we've got to come up with an answer."

Link winced, sighed and ran his fingers through thinning grey hair. "You don't give me much choice," he said. He scowled, added, "But I'm beginning to understand how this could have happened. As I told you, Bill fell and was

knocked unconscious just as the lead was pierced by his chisel and—”

“And he was in no condition to resist whatever radiations emerged from Ezra’s coffin,” interrupted the girl eagerly.

“Exactly,” said Thaddeus Link drily. “That brings up the rather interesting probability that radiations are weakened during periods of unconsciousness. Hmmm, I wonder. I’ll have to get this on paper.”

“But what about Bill? Can’t we forget the keys to human knowledge and go after whatever is possessing him?” Natalie said indignantly.

“I’ll have Bill come over tonight,” said Link. “I don’t think he’ll refuse when I tell him I have some curious results from the experiment to show him. I’ll get him to talk—never fear.” He paused and his eyes gleamed behind their lenses. “I only hope this possessive power of his comes along with him.”

“You may regret that, judging from what happened at my party,” said Natalie, rising. “Ezra—if it is Ezra can be extremely destructive.” She rose, thanked him and added, “Let me know what happens, won’t you? Never mind what time of day or night it is. I have a telephone on my bedside table.”

“Of course,” he assured her. Then his gaze lost direction and he muttered, half to himself, “But what a problem—what a problem!” There was a look almost of gloating anticipation on his face as he ushered her to the door.

CHAPTER XI

Trial by Fire

IN the meantime, Bill Wilson was having it out, hot and heavy, with Priscilla in the library.

“That,” he told her sternly, “was the dirtiest trick I have ever heard of! You know darned well I didn’t ask Natalie to marry me.”

A book was lifted from the desk in

front of him. Its pages were idly fluttered, then it was slammed down on the desk top. Bill could almost see the slim form of the witch as she pirouetted to face him, tense with anger. There was temper in the usually lilting voice of the long-buried maiden.

“Ware my ill humor, Master Willy,” she said ominously. “Mind thee, I will not have thee wed to another—nay, nor will I have another fondle thee, no matter how fair she may be nor how greatly thou dost love her. I will not . . .”

The voice thickened, became engulfed in sobs. Then, brokenly, Priscilla spoke again. “Alas, I cannot still my jealousy when I see another drawn by thy charms,” she told him tearfully. “Mind thee, a maid in love doth not obey the rules. She acts as it best behooves her to win and hold the one she hath chosen. Nay, be not angry, Master Willy, for what I did I did in defense of my heart. Consider thou my situation if thou canst.”

More sobbing followed and, moments later, the cushions of the chair close to the desk sank beneath her invisible weight. Wilson unconsciously put a comforting arm across her shoulders but met only empty air.

“Blast!” he exclaimed helplessly. “How can I argue with someone I cannot see or touch? But, Priscilla, it was a filthy trick—one I am not going to forget or forgive in a hurry. Why, you imperiled our entire plan!”

He felt an almost irrepressible impulse to get his hands on his uninvited house guest and strangle her—or was it an impulse to hold her tight in his arms? If only her voice weren’t so utterly enchanting. Mere thought of it drained him of his justifiable anger. He felt confused, baffled and frustrated, at once angry and joyously elated. If only—

Whatever Priscilla might be—witch or mere ghost maiden, dead or alive, good or evil, she radiated provocative loveliness. Again he closed his eyes, seeking to envision clearly the face and form of this so unprim Puritan miss—and again her outlines remained vague, features a blank. He gave it up.

"Priscilla," he said at last, "perhaps we owe each other an apology. You, for Natalie's kiss—though honestly I could not avoid it—I for losing my temper at the results—though they were abominable.

"After all"—he was trying to be fair-minded—"you are utterly new to this century, this world. Basic instincts may remain the same but human attitudes have changed greatly toward them. Natalie cannot trap me into marriage—actually she is far too proud to attempt such a thing. You, perhaps, have some grounds for jealousy but that doesn't mean you can—well, you overstepped, that's all."

"Master Willy"—Priscilla spoke with the joyous lilt he had come to love—"I vow that my behavior shall not again slip. Nay, 'tis most unlikely I should wish harm to anyone toward whom thou dost entertain amiability—e'en though it signify thy loss to me. But do not overstep thyself. I pray thee understand."

"I'm afraid I don't—quite," said Bill, frowning.

The response was sharp and definitive. "Thou art mine by right of conquest, Master Willy. Consider—I be not one who merely walks by thy side. I am of thee a part. Nor canst thou cast me from thee save by . . ." The voice faded abruptly.

"By what?" said Bill, curious. He caught himself, quickly added, "Not that I would, of course, Priscilla. Although you have been with me but a few hours I'd be truly lost without you. Perhaps the whole world will one day be grateful. But you did start to say—"

"A mere slip of the tongue, Master Willy—induced mayhap by Ezra, who seeks e'er to perplex me," she said lightly. Then, "Aye, there is another reason I must bide with thee. None save I can hope to stem his evil magic."

Wilson rubbed his chin and thought back upon the dire events of the night before and was inclined to agree with her. Certainly a revived Ezra was off on a destructive warpath of his own. Wherever he chose to go disaster fol-

lowed. Ezra had doubly proved himself as evil as Priscilla was good—if mischievous.

"Mayhap—er—perhaps you're right at that," he admitted. "And even if I could eliminate you I wouldn't—not with old Ezra riding the night winds on his broomstick and trailing havoc behind him. Of course you're right. Humanity at present is ill equipped to contain him—all save you, Priscilla. When you have finished him—or can you finish him?"

HE waited but there was no reply. Finally he said, "Well? Aren't you going to answer me? Hey—are you here? Priscilla, where are you?" He felt a sudden swell of panic at the thought that perhaps she had deserted him.

"Fret thee not—I am with thee," she said. "My senses warn me that one not far away plotteth against thee, Master Willy. No good will come of his plotting be we not heedful and alert—for none but Ezra can be behind it. Else will we be destroyed."

There was another pause, then, "Methinks grave danger lieth ahead for us both. I must afford thee protection e'en though it calleth for tempest and fire. Thy talking tool with the bell is soon to ring. Then shall we discover whence cometh this peril."

Without waiting for it to shrill a summons Bill hurried toward the telephone. He was worried. Already he had his share of enemies—Sprague for instance. If the threat were sufficiently dangerous to perturb Priscilla, it must, he thought, be dangerous indeed.

As he reached the hall door the phone rang. He lifted the receiver, listened briefly, sighed with relief.

"Oh, hello Link. . . . No, I'm not busy. . . . As a matter of fact I'm glad to hear from you."

"Dr. Wilson," said Link, "can you get over to my house right away? I've been getting some extremely interesting readings from my instruments."

"Hey—that's swell!" said Bill, feeling excitement rise within him. He was

far removed from parapsychology himself but he had for a good twenty-four hours been undergoing an extremely practical demonstration of the potentialities of Link's human emanations, more so, he suspected, than any or all of the little scientist's delicate machinery could reveal.

"You're really getting places then?" he inquired.

"I'm getting something," said Link noncommittally. "Can you get over here?"

"I'm on my way right now," said Bill. He hung up.

"Master Willy, thou must not go."

"What's got into *you*?" Bill countered, rising and crossing the hall to put on hat and topcoat. "Link is just a harmless old putterer. If you tried to tell him about us he'd simply refuse to believe you—because there is nothing in any textbook to cover the situation. All he wants to tell me is that there were emanations from Ezra's coffin—as if we didn't know."

"Then must I forbid thy going," said Priscilla firmly.

"Lay off that whim of iron stuff, Priscilla," Bill told her, slipping into his coat. "Stick around here if you'd rather—or go hunt Ezra and hex him properly if you can. Do whatever you like but I've got to see Link. He'll wonder if I don't show and we don't want people wondering about us—yet."

"Then shall I go with thee," said Priscilla. Bill felt a small surge of triumph. At any rate this was one argument she hadn't won. Perhaps he wasn't as completely under her invisible thumb as he had begun to fear. He adjusted his snap-brimmed hat in front of the mirror, whistling off-key as he did so, and noted that his A.D. Club band was looking very worn and tired.

"Suit yourself," he told his partner in witchcraft. "I'll be glad to have you along. But promise me, for Pete's sake, that you won't mess this visit up. Remember, Link is a brilliant scientist and if he gets the least whiff of suspicion there's no telling how much he may find out."

"Then go I but to protect thee from all peril," Priscilla stated. "Master Link may well be in Ezra's toils. Be thou on guard."

BILL drove the coupé to Link's combined home and laboratory in Allston and was admitted promptly by the little scientist. Link peered at him oddly through his thick spectacles, then led him upstairs to his laboratory, where they sat down amid a fantastic array of scientific apparatus. There were tubes of all sorts, lengths and shapes, oscillators, a diathermy machine, X-ray apparatus, chemicals of various natures and, of course, Link's machinery for trapping human emanations.

"Tell me, Mr. Link," said Bill curiously, "how did it go? Did your meters or whatever they are show that radiations could exist after death for almost three hundred years?"

"The results are more interesting for what they don't show than what they reveal," said Link, sitting slouched in his chair. "Unquestionably there was much disturbance in the tomb when you opened the coffin. But what my instruments captured was of infinitesimal importance. In other words, the bulk of the radiations seem to have escaped—though where and how remains a mystery."

"I'm afraid I'm scarcely a good subject for such discussion," said Wilson, who had a well-founded hunch that Link was already forcing the conversation onto dangerous ground. "I'm merely a physician, not a parapsychologist. Whatever it was you did in the tomb is Greek to me."

"Seriously, young man," said the scientist, "when you recovered consciousness after that crack on the head, didn't you feel anything unusual? I'm not speaking of pain or contusions—but haven't things been different—let's say in your soul?"

"For heaven's sake," said Bill with a deprecatory laugh. "You sound more like a superstitious old lady than a scientist, Link."

"I'm not joking," said the parapsychologist quietly. "You see, since our ex-

pedition to Ezra Wilson's tomb certain things have been brought to my attention—your cures of the Nolan boy and Mrs. Pembroke, for instance, and the others. The tempest you inflicted on Miss Page's garden party this afternoon and the things that followed it indoors.

"Bill Wilson—these things are typical manifestations of witchcraft." Thaddeus Link was leaning forward now, studying Bill's reactions to his words. "I'm beginning to believe that Ezra's radiations managed in some way to take possession of you while you were unconscious."

Bill's face darkened. All at once he found himself hating the little scientist with a deadly hatred. He had never felt such fear and loathing of anyone in his life. Link was much too close to the truth and he was a brilliant and original man of science who might well find the means of fighting witchcraft. Priscilla had been right again—danger threatened both of them.

"Link," Bill said coldly, "I'm beginning to think you ought to consult a psychiatrist. Your experiment is becoming an obsession."

"Bosh!" said the parapsychologist without anger. "I'll tell you what—I'll rig up my instruments. You sit over in that chair"—he nodded toward a straight wooden chair close to the radiation trapping apparatus—"and I'll study the radiations that compose your aura. I know approximately how strong they should be. If they are above normal I'll be close to having proof."

"I would advise thee not to tamper with things whose purport ye little reckon, Master Link!" Bill's choice of words was suddenly that of the seventeenth century and he knew that Priscilla was again at the controls.

"Listen to the man," said the scientist with gentle mockery. "Bill, there have been no known witches in this part of the world since Colonial times. And the lingo you are speaking died with them. For your information, you have been sitting within range of the instruments ever since you entered this room.

In a moment I'll be able to test the strength of your radiations."

"Movest thou one inch," roared Bill, "and dire destruction will be wreaked upon thee—and upon thy precious instruments, ruin!"

Link colored and stood up angrily. "You can't threaten me, Dr. Wilson," he said. "I like you. I'd infinitely prefer to be your friend but I scarcely feel that you are responsible for your words or actions. No, Bill, I'm going through with it."

There was a sudden sharp explosion at the rear of the lab—then another and another. Link leaped toward the dials and meters of his radiation-trapping machines. But before he could reach them a veritable wall of flame raised a flickering yellow barrier to his path. His hair and eyebrows singed, he whirled on Bill, fists clenched, enlarged eyes almost murderous with rage.

He picked up a heavy retort and moved toward Wilson, raising it to strike. But before he could swing, another wall of fire cut him off from his target. The scientist gave up, letting the retort crash to the floor, where it shattered. He raced toward the doorway, yelling with fear. The door, which had been left open, began to swing shut as he approached it.

The parapsychologist lunged for it and managed to get one arm through the narrow crack. Using this as a lever he painfully pried the stubborn door open by sheer nervous strength. He squeezed through and it slammed shut behind him.

Abruptly Bill gave vent to a shout of terror. He was entirely surrounded by flickering flame. Covering his face with his arms, he plunged through the wall of fire that cut him off from the door. He felt no heat, no pain and no surging smoke clogged his nostrils. Lowering his arms he found himself standing in the very center of the fire, which was busily eating up floor and furniture around him but seemed to have no effect upon himself.

"Priscilla," he shouted. "Priscilla, where are you?"

"With thee, Master Willy," the witch replied. "There is naught to fear. I have willed it that thou canst not be harmed by flames or smoke."

"If Link could only see this!" cried Bill exultantly. "Hold on there—don't try to tell me this blaze is Ezra's work, Priscilla."

"Nay, Master Willy," Priscilla replied. "'Tis I who have invoked the evil powers of witchcraft—for thy salvation. Had I not done so Master Link must needs have learned too much for our safety—yours and mine. Mayhap he must needs have sought my destruction—and thine as well."

Wilson nodded somberly while the flames in which he stood continued to do their work of destruction. "I'm afraid you're right, Priscilla. Right now he knows that either you or I caused this fire. But we're quite safe. He can't go to the police or fire department and file arson charges against me—not without being locked up as a lunatic himself."

Sirens kept their oncoming song in the distance. Bill felt himself pushed toward the door by firm but unseen hands. He passed through other flames without incident and the door, which the parapsychologist had been forced to battle so hard, opened for Bill of its own accord. He was driving away in his coupé when the first fire engines put in their appearance.

CHAPTER XII

Miss Hazard Wonders

WHEN Bill Wilson awoke the following morning he became aware of a violent aching in his skull. It had been nore or less with him since the episode in the tomb but apparently its severity had increased overnight.

A look at the morning papers did nothing to alleviate his discomfort—quite the reverse. Great fires, apparently self-ignited, had spread mysteri-

ously through western wheat fields. The damage was beyond mere monetary calculation. Many persons had died fighting the sudden, inexplicable holocausts. Bill crumpled the newspaper in his clenched fist.

"Hast thou no word of greeting for thy Priscilla this morning, Master Willy?" the invisible maiden asked him with soft reproval.

Bill glanced through the kitchen door, which was open. The broomstick was resting innocently in a corner. So she was back—not that he had for a moment doubted her return. He leaned wearily back in his chair.

"Priscilla," he said, "I'm bone-tired. And I'm afraid of Ezra. I know he created the wheatfield disasters last night. I know you tried to find him. But while you were seeking him I couldn't sleep. I thought of something—"

"Aye, Master Willy," she interrupted, "that I know. Nonetheless, tell me that thy mind may be eased."

Bill's fingers drummed nervously on the arm of his chair. "I did a bit of research myself," he said. "Apparently the habits and powers of witchcraft are hereditary—are passed on from generation to generation. Ezra Wilson was my direct ancestor. Priscilla, what if I become as he was—is?"

"Of that I have thought much, Master Willy," said Priscilla. "Indeed I have in thee detected already certain traits and manners peculiar to Ezra. Mayhap he seeks to dominate thee, to drive my amiable influence from thee."

"But that will put me at his mercy—alone," Wilson exclaimed, frightened. "It must not happen, Priscilla. You mustn't let it happen."

"There is but one way of combatting him," said Priscilla thoughtfully. "Master Willy. I did make thee a vow to become visible betimes. Yet first must thou accept me wholly. Then must thou partake with me of a draught—a draught whose untasted talents will bring us into even closer union. Once this is sipped then can I never depart from thee. Nor canst thou nor all of Ezra's evil charms cast me from thee."

Wilson thought it over, then grinned crookedly. "At least," he said, "it promises to be a pleasant means of self-protection. Priscilla, more and more I am growing impatient to see thee—you. Since you have entered my life and my aura I find myself thinking less and less of Natalie—more and more of you. I'm—well, heck, I'm in love with you, Priscilla."

She responded softly, her voice as gentle as a breeze in May, as musical as a harp song in some moonlit garden. In it was but the slightest hint of triumph.

"Nay, I felt strongly that one day wouldst thou tell me thus. Long have I waited, Master Willy. Together may we find joy e'en while we put our talents to the use of the world."

Wilson slapped the crumpled newspaper with the back of a hand. "But we must stop Ezra! We must drive him back to the innermost rim of his black origin. Whatever benefits we can bestow upon humanity are overweighted by the evil he is already inflicting. How can it be done, Priscilla? For we must find a way."

"Then shall I find one," she said quietly. "Soon now shall I find him. He cannot much longer elude my traps and when he is suitably ensnared, then shall I work upon him the greatest charms known to witchcraft. E'en Ezra cannot withstand such power. So be patient and bear with me a little longer, Master Willy. Ezra is doomed and quickly. This I swear to thee."

"That's swell, Priscilla," said Bill, smiling for the first time that morning. "I feel a lot better with that assurance. What say we get down to the office? Miss Hazard will be there, waiting, and I've got to start working out a technique of handling the cases we decide to accept."

"Pray move with care," warned the witch. "We cannot tell but that Ezra has learned thy plans and has already possessed himself of Mistress Hazard."

"That," said Bill, slipping into his topcoat, "is nonsense. Even Ezra and all his powers could not pit Miss Hazard against me. She is, in her way, a very remarkable woman."

IT brought back pleasant former times to Bill when he saw Miss Hazard in charge of his office. She was a large, square-cut, big-bosomed, white-haired matronly woman, whose very presence, by its practicality, seemed to dispel all thoughts of witchcraft and the occult. Priscilla wisely held herself well in the background. Even a witch with her remarkable powers must have hesitated before entering the lists with such a formidably serene and competent person as Miss Hazard.

"Well, well, Dr. Wilson." She greeted him with amiable acidity. "What has happened to make you recall that you're still a physician?"

Bill grinned at her familiarly. "I've been having some remarkable luck with my cases lately. I'm even beginning to think I'm a good doctor."

"Well, it's about time, Bill Wilson," Miss Hazard declared, folding her massive arms across her more-than-ample bosom. "I always knew you had it in you. It only stands to reason, with all that medical tradition in your blood. All you ever lacked was faith in yourself."

"You may be right," he replied. "At any rate, I have plenty of it now. As a matter of fact, the way things are going we may soon have to enlarge and take on a bigger staff. But that is strictly off the record. Things haven't quite developed that far yet."

"Goodness, you certainly have changed," said Miss Hazard. She looked at him warily. "And I have yet to see hide nor hair of any patients yet this morning."

"Don't worry, they'll come," Bill said confidently. "Wait and see." He paused, added, "And by the way, if Dr. Gaylord calls, I'm in to him. That's highly important. He is assigning some of his most difficult cases to me."

"Gaylord is doing that?" Miss Hazard seemed surprised to the point of shock. "Well, you really *must* be going places. I think it's marvelous, doctor. I've always felt that, given the— Oh, there's the phone now. I hope it's Dr. Gaylord."

She went to the instrument and answered it, then put a hand over the mouthpiece and looked at Bill inquiringly.

"It's Natalie Page, doctor," she said. "She says it is urgent that she talk to you."

"Tell her I'm not in," Bill told his nurse curtly. "Tell her I just left and you don't know when I'll be back. Tell her—"

"But Dr. Wilson—" Miss Hazard protested.

"Tell her, Miss Hazard," Bill snapped. "You can still obey orders, I hope."

"Yes, doctor," said Miss Hazard with such meekness as her personality could muster. She obeyed but, a few minutes later, excused herself from the office, went downstairs and used a public telephone to call Natalie.

"I lied to you a moment ago," she told the girl. "Dr. Wilson was in—but he gave me explicit orders that he was out to you. Miss Natalie, I don't know what this is all about and it isn't my business, but I have a feeling it isn't your fault. Is there anything I can do?"

There was a long silence and when Natalie spoke it was evident that she was struggling to keep control over her voice.

"I—I'm afraid not, Miss Hazard," the girl said brokenly. "Bill is suffering from some sort of obsession. No one understands it completely and I'd rather not discuss it, Miss Hazard. You see, you wouldn't believe me."

"Perhaps I would," said Miss Hazard quietly. "Remember, I've worked for the Wilson family since my seventeenth birthday. I know more than anyone thinks. So what is it, Miss Natalie? What's wrong?"

"I—oh, it's awfully hard to say," said Natalie miserably. "But Bill seems suddenly to be possessed of some—well, some very strange powers. Yesterday, for instance, he ruined my garden merely by calling for a storm."

"I know," Miss Hazard said. "I heard all about it. It's been causing talk. But on what do you base this premise, Miss Natalie?"

"Oh, dear, it's all so vague. But it goes back to an ancestor of Bill's—Ezra Wilson. It seems that, nearly three hundred years ago, he was buried alive as a practitioner of witchcraft. Now Bill seems suddenly to have inherited many of Ezra's worst traits. In fact, we're beginning to wonder if Ezra isn't still on earth in spirit anyway and running Bill's life."

"Ezra Wilson—a wizard?" Miss Hazard was shocked at the thought. "And buried alive? I—but it's utterly incredible, Miss Natalie."

"Oh, I know how fantastic it sounds," said Natalie bitterly. "Witchcraft and wizardry in this day and age—but something unquestionably has possessed Bill—something supernatural. I can't really blame you though, for refusing to believe he has become suddenly endowed with supernatural powers."

"I'm thinking about Ezra Wilson rather than Bill," said the nurse in an almost absent-minded manner. "Why—why, it simply can't be!"

"What can't be?" countered Natalie anxiously. "Miss Hazard, if you know anything—no matter how unimportant or far-fetched it seems—that may help us, please tell me! You'll be helping Bill too, because I can't help feeling that he is in the power of whatever this influence is which has dominated him."

"Oh, dear," sighed Miss Hazard uncertainly. "I'm afraid there simply isn't any way I can help you, Miss Natalie. I'm terribly sorry. I wish I could convince Dr. Wilson how wrong he is to treat you so high-handedly. Perhaps in time he'll realize it. I'll do my best—rest assured. But I've got to get back to the office now." She hung up, murmuring to herself aloud, "Ezra—a wizard? How could it have happened?"

She was still frowning when she got back upstairs to the office. She walked in like some sort of automaton and sat down at her desk, looking straight ahead. She did not work for many minutes, which was highly unusual for her conscientious, industrious self. Under her breath she kept muttering Ezra's name and marvelling.

She stared blankly out the window beyond her desk.

She wondered if she really could do anything to help. After all, she felt tremendous loyalty and obligation to the Wilson clan. But she finally decided that she'd be overstepping her place. She was working for Bill Wilson and whatever he did, no matter how extraordinary, had to be all right with her as long as she accepted a salary. It was, she told herself finally, all nonsense anyway. Witches, wizards, balderdash!

CHAPTER XIII

A Woman's Fury

THADDEUS LINK, with Natalie sitting beside him in the front seat of the battered old sedan, braked to a halt outside the Wilson driveway shortly after eight o'clock that evening. He put his hand on the door handle.

"For some reason," he said, "I have a feeling it's safer when you're not along when Bill is concerned. There's no telling what old Ezra will try."

"I'd prefer to wait out here anyway," she told him. "I don't think I care to face Bill just now. He's changed so toward me. Mr. Link—do you really think there is something you can do to bring him back to normal?"

"I'm making no promises," said the little parapsychologist grimly. "Remember, we're not dealing with anything tangible. What we must exorcise is an aura—that's all—and you can't punch an aura on the nose or shoot it or poison it or stick it with a sword. And remember, Ezra can summon some pretty potent powers himself. I shan't forget in a hurry what he did to my laboratory last night."

"Please try not to take needless chances," pleaded the girl. "If anything should happen to you I'd be alone. I'd be fighting that evil influence by myself and I don't think I'd be much good at it."

Link patted her shoulder encouragingly, then got out of the car and walked resolutely up the gone-to-seed driveway toward the old Wilson house. He had no idea what sort of reception lay in store for him—or even that he would be allowed to emerge intact—but he was determined to see this matter through. His scientific curiosity was stronger than his instinct for self preservation.

Bill Wilson opened the door and stood foursquare in his path.

"I'm afraid I can't see you now," he said without warmth. "You see, Mr. Link, I've so much work—"

"I understand that things have been moving rapidly for you, Bill," said the little scientist. "However, unless you let me in and we discuss this entire affair openly, I fear I shall have to do all in my power to bring the whole business out in the open. My influence may not be great but it should be sufficient."

Bill scowled at him and, for a moment, looked menacing. Then he shrugged wearily and stood aside to let his visitor pass. They went into the library and Link sat down gingerly, making sure the chair stayed beneath him. He was expecting some sort of demonstration from Ezra but all seemed peaceful and serene.

"Well?" Bill didn't take a chair but stood over the parapsychologist aggressively, his legs planted wide apart on the worn carpet.

"Oh, park yourself somewhere and relax," said Link with a smile. "Try to forget what happened to my laboratory. It was my own fault. I had some dangerous chemicals cooking and forgot to turn off the flame."

Bill Wilson sat down and lit a cigarette. "I'm truly sorry about that," he said contritely. "But you know as well as I that it was no accident. You were so utterly set on trapping the radiations of my aura that—well, that—"

"And the radiations of old Ezra simply wouldn't have it," said the parapsychologist. "Isn't that about it?"

"Ezra? Good heavens, no! Oh-oh—I seem to be talking too much," said Bill, looking suddenly panic stricken. "Please,

Mr. Link, I wish you'd leave. You'll simply create another mess for yourself if you don't, I'm afraid."

"Now hold on a moment," said Thaddeus Link, making no move to lift himself from his chair. "You just indicated that it wasn't Ezra Wilson whose radiations were absorbed by your own. If it wasn't old Ezra, then who was it, may I ask?"

"My given name, Master Link, is Priscilla," said the unseen beauty through Bill's voice. "Master Willy has been remiss in manners, methinks, not to have introduced us sooner. And while I mistrust thy motives, Master Link, yet am I confident that, with all thy science, thou canst do us no harm."

"Who said that?" gasped a startled Link. "Was it you, Bill?"

Wilson sighed and gave up. "All right," he said. "Since Priscilla doesn't seem to mind your knowing of her I might as well own up. The impossible did happen, Link. When we opened the coffin the other night Ezra's radiations escaped. All of these recent disasters are of his making—the subway smash in New York, the fires in the wheatfields out west, the—"

"And what about this Priscilla?" said Link, wondering if he were really hearing this or if he would soon wake up in his own undamaged house.

"Priscilla is a truly good witch," Bill told him sincerely. "She could have escaped too. Instead she—well, she preferred to join me. She's been responsible for my so-called miracle cures. She's fighting Ezra's evil powers tooth and nail."

THADDEUS LINK closed his eyes, opened them slowly, found himself still in the Wilson library and wished he had something long and cool and alcoholic in his hands. It wasn't possible, yet—

"I am supposed to be a scientist," he said slowly. "Dammit, man, I'm not supposed to accept facts without proof. You ask me to believe that a woman of supernatural powers inhabits this aura of yours. Certainly you have been talking

in two personalities like a schizophrenic. Why can't I see her? Who is she?"

"Then shall I tell thee, Master Thaddeus," said Priscilla. "Surely it is plain that we fear thee not. Shouldst thou noise this tale abroad, then would folk put thee in chains and convey thee to a madhouse. Yet am I Priscilla—more than two hundred and fifty years old by the clock but still young and—so some would have it—still bearing the semblance of maidenly comeliness."

"Then you—were—buried—in that tomb," said Link, his words almost an accusation, his eyes darting about the room in search of the speaker, who had at last conversed with him in her own lilting accents.

"Aye—in Ezra's company," said Priscilla. "We twain were condemned together but only Ezra is evil. Ne'er have I harmed anyone without cause. You, Master Link, impelled me to destroy thy chamber of glittering glass and unnamable instruments. 'Twas of necessity, to save myself that I destroyed them. Find me maiden who would do aught else."

"I suppose you're right—from your point of view," said the parapsychologist, rubbing his chin in perplexity. Suddenly his darting eyes became fixed. "I also notice that that chair across the room looks pressed down—as if someone were sitting in it. Is this a fact?"

There was a plump hassock at the foot of the chair he indicated. All at once it was kicked by an invisible foot and sailed halfway across the room. The little scientist jumped, then shook his head with a rueful smile.

"Apparently," he said to Bill Wilson, "I'm not dreaming after all. Since this is the truth I no longer blame you—not one bit, Bill. I've been wanting to fight this obsession for you because I believed that it was Ezra who was dominating you. Now I find your aura dweller is a charming young girl. I say charming because no girl who did not carry enchantment with her could possess a voice with such delightful assurance."

"Gramercy, Master Link," said Pris-

cilla. "I thank thee muchly for thy compliment." The unseen maiden spoke with such mellifluent sweetness of tone that the pulses of both men surged. "Alack, had I but known thy true nature, Master Thaddeus, then scarce would I have inflicted flames upon thee."

"Oh, that's quite all right," said Link earnestly. "Truly it is. I'd be perfectly willing to lose a half dozen laboratories for such an experience. If I could only write a treatise on you, Miss Priscilla—but I'm afraid that's out. My so-called fellow scientists would laugh me out of my profession."

Bill Wilson, hostility removed by Link's tactics, smiled at him in friendly fashion, almost as at a co-conspirator. "I'm extremely grateful, Link," he said. "Your understanding means a lot to me. But I suppose I should have known that you would see what had happened in its proper perspective."

"At first I'm afraid even I resented Priscilla," Bill went on. "Frankly I was afraid of her and her powers—but now it is different. We cured the Nolan boy, Mrs. Pembroke and all the others. Together we can do more good than a thousand regular doctors, than ten thousand theoretical scientists like yourself."

"True," confessed the little parapsychologist with a trace of ruefulness. "I suppose you're absolutely right, Bill. But suppose I wanted some rare chemical—could you, Miss Priscilla, procure it for me?"

"Wouldst thou employ it to do harm or to ease the trouble of the world?" the unseen maiden countered. Link smiled faintly.

"For the best available purpose, of course," he replied. Already he was growing so accustomed to the fact of Priscilla's existence that it no longer seemed odd that he was carrying on a conversation with a disembodied voice.

"Then could I show thee where whate'er thou wist may be found, Master Thaddeus," said Priscilla earnestly. "'Tis of great import that thou shouldst believe in me. Verily, against thee I could scarce hold ill will—for without

thy experiment, then should I still be pent in the tomb with Ezra."

"Don't worry about Link, Priscilla," said Bill to the empty chair. Then, to the little scientist, "Look here, Link, there isn't a thing that you can do about this, you nor anyone else. No one would believe you, you know. I intend to work with Priscilla and I won't stand for interference. Is that clear?"

"Oh quite," said Link, getting to his feet. "You could have been a little less blunt about it though. Is there anything I should tell Natalie by the way?"

"Just tell her—" Bill paused, frowning. He looked thoroughly miserable. "Just tell her not to try to see me again. I'm—well, I'm in love with Priscilla."

Link nodded thoughtfully and said, "That's honest enough. Frankly I can't say I blame you, Bill. I'm beginning to think I could easily fall in love with your—er—companion myself. Anyway, this has been an unique experience. You have nothing to fear from me, either of you. Just keep up the good work—and drive Ezra back into that tomb as soon as you can."

LINK walked from the house and strolled slowly down the driveway, giving the appearance of being deep in thought. Perhaps, he feared, Priscilla would sense Natalie's presence in the car parked on the street outside. Perhaps Priscilla was walking silently alongside even now. The little scientist had no desire to have Natalie drawn back into the problem yet—not directly at any rate. She had suffered enough.

He found himself peering over his shoulder, seeking unseen pursuers. He snickered at his own stupidity. As if he would be able to see Priscilla, even were she within arm's reach. He turned out of sight of the old house and reached the car, got in silently and started it.

"Mr. Link," Natalie Page said when minutes had gone by without the scientist speaking. "You look and act as if you were scared."

He hesitated, then told her, "Natalie, I'm paralyzed. It's the blankety-blankest thing I've—Natalie, I talked to her."

"Her!" Natalie's exclamation was explosive. "Do you mean to tell me that Bill Wilson has a woman in his house?"

"Oh yes indeed—very much so," said Thaddeus Link. "It seems that the radiations of old Ezra didn't enter Bill's aura at all. Instead he received the radiations of a very young and apparently very charming young witch named Priscilla. I talked to her—or at her. You see, she's entirely invisible."

"Then how can you vouch for her charm?" asked Natalie practically. Even in the dim light of the dashlamp there was a warlike sparkle in her eyes.

"By golly, you're right," said Thaddeus Link, rubbing his chin in surprise. "I didn't see her, yet here I am talking about her as if she were beautiful. And I'm supposed to be a scientist." He shook his head and pondered briefly.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed finally. "It's that voice of hers. Did you ever listen to a tiny bell that echoes on your eardrums after it has ceased to ring? Silver-toned, amazingly clear and sweet. Well, that's the sort of voice Priscilla has. Certainly the girl must be a hum—must have been—oh, blast it all, how do I know whether she's beautiful or not? I'm as big a sap as Bill Wilson."

"Her voice made you believe in her beauty." Natalie, her face impassive, seemed to talk more to herself than the little scientist. Her hands were attempting to tie knots in the straps of a costly alligator-skin handbag. "It must have had a like effect on Bill. That may explain a great deal—a very great deal."

"Well, if it does, young woman, the explanation must be in Sanscrit, which I never did learn," muttered Link. "What are you driving at, Natalie?"

"Priscilla is a self-confessed witch," said the girl stoutly. "She charmed first Bill and then you. Mr. Link, I have always believed that witches were old hags with long black dresses and fingernails—with pointed caps and broomsticks."

"Come to think of it you're right—I've always had the same idea," said Link. Then he shook his head. "But it

can't be—not with a voice like that!"

"Remember—so far she is only a voice," Natalie reminded him quietly. "She hasn't yet snowed herself bodily." She snook her head. "No—though I'll lay odds she keeps poor Bill tantalized with promises of physical revelations to come. Mr. Link, I intend to fight this—this whatever-she-is—right down the line. I don't care if she does have phenomenal powers or whatever they are. But, Mr. Link, if she is with Bill, what's happened to old Ezra,"

"Apparently he flew the coop," said Link unhappily. He felt things getting out of hand now that Natalie had decided to declare war. "Priscilla claims that Ezra is roaming the country of nights and leaving a trail of disasters. But—if there were two sets of radiations in that casket and only one of them got hold of Bill—why didn't my instruments catch any record of the other? Hold everything for a moment." He closed his eyes. "I think I'm getting an idea."

Link continued to sit there, hunched over the wheel with his distorted eyes shut tight in the darkness, for all of three minutes. Then he opened his lids and looked at Natalie with an unexpected and very charming smile on his face. It was the smile of a little boy who has unexpectedly solved a homework problem.

"Suppose, my dear," he said with an undertone of excitement, "that there wasn't any Ezra. Suppose that this Priscilla is the creature who has been wreaking havoc, all the while hiding behind Ezra's coat tails? Or could she be Ezra posing as a girl? I suppose witches and wizards *can* or could assume various voices."

"No," said Natalie emphatically. "Priscilla is real all right. She showed that by her jealousy of me. I can tell by the way Bill acts under her influence. Ezra, even if he turned into a girl, would never think of such things." She paused and there were starry glints in her large dark eyes. She took hold of the nearer of the scientist's wrists in her excitement.

"Oh, Mr. Link, if we could only *prove* this and show Bill that he is being taken for a ride—a ride on a broomstick!"

"Perhaps we can," Link said softly and with a new note of confidence. "There is an answer to everything if you pry deeply enough—and this time I don't think we are going to have to pry much further. My dear, how would you like to raid a tomb with me?"

CHAPTER XIV

Buckles and Bones

IT took Natalie some little time to recover from the shock of Link's question. By the time she had made up her mind that the order of the day was full speed ahead and damn the torpedoes, the little scientist was already turning his venerable sedan into the back entrance of the Wilson estate.

"I want another look in that coffin," he said, turning off his lights so that they would not be visible from Wilson's house as he negotiated the twisting bumpy lane that led to the mausoleum.

"S-so do I," replied Natalie, who was shivering and not from the cold. "But at long range—very long range."

"Don't lose your nerve now," Link cautioned. "I'm going to need your help. We've got to go through with it. Frankly, I'm a lot more worried about Priscilla than I am about Ezra's ghost or any other Wilson family specters."

Attacked by nameless fears they approached the ivy-covered granite structure cautiously. Link felt Natalie's grip on his arm grow tighter with each step until her long fingernails could be felt through the fabric of his sleeve. He tried to smile reassurance in the darkness and she relaxed her grasp slightly.

"I'm all right," she whispered. "Really I am, Mr. Link. I'm scared witless but I'd take more than this to run that invisible wench out of Bill's aura. We—er—I suppose we'll have to go inside?"

"We've got to do a lot more than

that," said the parapsychologist grimly. He led her into the mausoleum, whose padlock had not been replaced. The opened casket was back in its niche but the wall sheathing that covered it had not been put back. The little scientist surveyed the scene with his flash lantern.

"Here is where the heavy work begins," he told the girl, who stood at his shoulder, poised as if ready for instant flight. "We've got to get that coffin out of there and on the floor. We'll never be able to lift it—it weighs a ton—but if we can work it out and pad the fall somehow . . ."

As he spoke Link began energetically to shed his topcoat, suit-coat, vest, tie and shirt. He felt goose pimples rise as he had only his undershirt to protect him from the rawness of the April night but he managed a grin of encouragement that Natalie echoed wanly. He wadded up his discarded garments and placed them on the floor at the far end of the niche so that the fall of the coffin would not create a neighborhood disturbance.

With great effort they slid the coffin almost clear of the niche, so that it hung on the very edge. Link gave a curt command and both of them pulled the far end out, springing clear as it slid down onto the wadded-up garments. There was very little noise and they managed to get the other end down silently.

"Hold the light steady," Link told the girl as he bent over the opened casket and began to pluck from it various articles Natalie could see but vaguely in the uncertain beam of the lantern. He wrapped his loot—some of it bones—in a large bandanna, which he tied in a knot around it. Then, with her help, he managed to extricate his clothing from beneath the coffin.

Seconds later they were hurrying back to the car, with the little scientist struggling into his garments en route. Link put the heavily-laden handkerchief on the back seat, finished buttoning his shirt and put a foot on the starter. He did not trouble to redon his tie.

"Still scared?" he asked of the girl,

who sat huddled beside him, as he got the sedan turned around and headed back toward the street.

"Petrified," Natalie told him frankly. "I'm not cut out for this sort of thing, I'm afraid. Ten seconds more and I'd have been screaming."

"There's no need to be scared," Link told her. "There is nothing less dangerous than a man who's been dead a couple of centuries. That is, unless he's a wizard whose radiations have lived on after him. I've managed to obtain the use of another laboratory temporarily. That's where we're going now."

THEY drove to a dark building in Brighton, not far from the little scientist's burned-out home, there let themselves in with a key. The place proved to be a former warehouse which had been converted into a surprisingly up-to-date scientist's testing room.

"Belongs to a colleague of mine at M.I.T.," said Link casually. "I managed to salvage some of my own instruments too."

"What do you plan to do?" Natalie asked him.

"Make you sit down first," he replied. "Take that chair over by the wall." He then placed the bandanna on a long table and untied it. From the grisly little pile of moldy mementos it contained, he lifted a pair of brass shoe-buckles.

"Let's study these first of all," he said, switching on a fluorescent lamp above the table. "Both men and women wore them in the seventeenth century. Now these are rather small—extremely small for a man I'd say—and their cut and design are distinctly feminine. We can safely assume they were worn by the glamorous Priscilla. Now—what do you suppose became of Ezra's buckles?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to answer as well as ask them, Mr. Link," said Natalie. "This is all way beyond my depth."

"And look at these," said the little scientist, ignoring her. He placed the fetters on the table with a series of dull clanking sounds. "They secured the wrists and ankles of whoever was

buried in that coffin. Here—take a look."

"They look like handcuffs to me," said Natalie after examining them hesitatingly. Link almost snorted at her.

"That's what they are—but not the size of them. See how small the circlets are? Ezra was a large man—therefore these never encircled his wrists and ankles. These were used on Priscilla—which still leaves Ezra out in the cold."

"You mean," said Natalie, her eyes sparkling with sudden understanding, "that Ezra wasn't buried alive in that coffin after all?"

"We'll soon find out," said the scientist. He began to study the bits of bone he had salvaged, concentrating his attention on the largest of the fragments. "This is a femur—a thigh-bone. Unquestionably it was a woman's. Natalie, there was only one person buried in that casket. And that person was not Ezra Wilson."

"Then Priscilla is lying," said Natalie, rising. "Ezra's radiations didn't escape. They were never there. *She's* the one who's doing all this mischief. Whatever she is, she's evil. And poor Bill doesn't know it." She blazed with frustration, her voice rising a notch. "Why can't he see what she's doing to him?"

"Bill isn't really responsible, Natalie," said Thaddeus Link quietly. "He's in a mental tailspin. In the first place he believes Ezra was a singularly evil wizard. Priscilla is aware of this and she's smart—she has convinced him that it's Ezra who's on the loose. For all I know she may have convinced him that, being descended from a wizard, he has talents that way too."

"I hadn't thought of that," said the girl, paling. "Mr. Link, if we were to show Bill proof of what we now believe—"

"He'd laugh at us," the scientist replied. "He'd tell Priscilla and then we'd have some real fireworks. What we must find and confront him with is proof so absolute that even Priscilla will not be able to deny it. And frankly, young lady, I don't know where we're going to get it."

"We must, Mr. Link," cried Natalie passionately. "For Bill's sake!"

"We'll try," said the little scientist. "Let's see what we've got. We know that Priscilla is lying herself blue in the face—if she has a face. We know that Ezra was never in the coffin with her. But how we are going to convince Bill of these facts is the real problem."

"Somehow we've got to," said Natalie, "before it's too late. If she keeps her influence over him much longer he'll be as evil as she."

"Good heavens," said Link, looking frightened. "You're right. Bill *has* pulled some fast ones lately—tricky stuff that isn't like him at all. He's changing. If we don't kill this thing he'll be in so deep he'll never be able to get himself clear. Then she won't have to worry about how much of the truth he learns. Natalie, we must move fast—and I don't even know how to begin."

"You're a scientist," said the girl quietly but with desperation in her eyes. "Surely there must be some scientific way of taking the fight to her."

Link began to pace the concrete floor of the laboratory, pounding his right fist into the palm of his left hand. "We've got to get evidence," he muttered, more to himself than to her. "We've got to get such a pile of evidence that Bill will not only recognize at once that she is a liar, but that she is the person responsible for all the evil of the last two nights."

He paused and looked at the girl almost apologetically. "I'm afraid we've got a full night's work cut out for us, young lady," he told her.

"I don't care if we have to work for a month without sleep," said the girl defiantly. "We've got to find the answer."

"Good girl," said the little scientist. He glanced at his watch. "We still have an hour before the libraries close. Natalie, you take the Public Library. Beg, steal or borrow every doggone thing you can find about witchcraft in the seventeenth century. And keep your eye out for any mention of Ezra Wilson or our pal Priscilla. We've got to know

everything we can find out about them."

"I'm on my way," said the girl, rising. "What are you going to do?"

"I have a friend who has a membership in the Atheneum," said Link. "I'm going to make him get me admittance there. They have some old manuscripts that are not available to the general public."

They left together and were gone from the temporary laboratory for almost two hours. When Link returned he found Natalie awaiting him in a taxicab whose rear seat was piled high with musty tomes. His own car carried a like cargo.

Armed with nothing more than the volumes and several packs of cigarettes, they divvied up the books between them and got to work under the fluorescent lamps, seeking some weapon that could be dragged out of the past for use against the witch who had come out of the grave to possess Bill Wilson, M.D.

Now and again, when one of them thought he had a lead, they consulted and compared notes. They learned plenty about witchcraft as practised, prosecuted and persecuted in seventeenth century New England—but mention of those they sought occurred at painfully rare intervals.

Daylight came and they turned out the lights but continued to dig. Link went out and got coffee and hamburgers from the dog wagon by the Cottage Farms Bridge and at last they relaxed, looking at one another with fatigued eyes.

"I think we've got something at any rate," the scientist said, yawning.

Natalie yawned back at him and stretched like a large cat, gracefully. "Know what tomorrow night is?" she asked. "Walpurgis Night—the witches' annual international Sabbath. They gather from all over the world. For them it's a time of rejoicing, of the Black Mass, of Christian ritual entered into mockingly in reverse."

"That's it," said the little scientist, munching on a bun. "No witch, dead or alive, wants to miss it. Priscilla, after her long confinement, will be

bound to go, wherever it is being held. That means Bill may not be under her influence for a little while.

"It's our one chance to get to him—to reach him through this possession," he went on. "I'm responsible for this and I've got to do everything I can to release him. If we muff it, heaven help us—and Bill. Once Priscilla realizes we're working actively against her, she'll turn on us and destroy us."

"If she doesn't," said Natalie grimly, "we'll destroy her somehow. Mr. Link, we're going to win. It's you and I fighting against the forces of evil. We've got to win!"

CHAPTER XV

Witches' Sabbath

EARLIER, when Link had left the Wilson house, Bill listened silently to the sound of his receding footsteps on porch and driveway. Finally, shaking his head distrustfully, he said, "Priscilla, I thought we agreed that no one was to know our secret. Yet here you go, telling Link all about it yourself."

"Aye, truly, Master Willy, for I fear him not. 'Struth, the secret must be his as well, for were he to unburden himself none would credit his tale. Aye, and more important, is it not truth that thee and I are betrothed?"

"Of course, Priscilla. I have severed whatever bonds remained between Natalie and myself," he told her, still somewhat peevish. "You know it's you I want. But how much longer must we go on like this? What of that potion you mentioned—that nostrum that will restore visibility to you?"

"Soon shall we drain it dry," replied the maiden. "Hence fear I no man for long. Betimes now shall I resume my fleshly body and be with thee evermore. Aye, once the potion is downed we can never be parted, thee and I. Thus am I honest with thee, Master Willy—for e'en now couldst thou cast me out if

thou didst so elect. Yet in thy love am I unafraid."

"You have no reason for fear," said Bill, somewhat mollified. "I'm just getting a wholly normal male impatience to be with the real you. Must we wait?"

"Aye, but not for long," she said, laughing softly. "For first must I leave thee, Master Willy—leave thee and travel far afield. For now have I traced Ezra to his lair and forth must I go to destroy him. This time I must fail not. Nor shall my charms be effective through thee until my work is done. The morrow is the eve of May Day and thou shalt make a holiday in truth—and on my return anon the potion shall be readied by thee and me. Now rest you upon my going."

"Come to think of it," said Bill, relaxing in the library armchair behind the desk, "I could do with a few hours of peace and quiet. I hate the idea of doing without you, even for such a brief period, but I'm really beat. We've been hitting a pretty fast pace since you escaped from the tomb, Priscilla. But be sure and hurry back, won't you?"

He waited for her soft answer but his question was greeted by silence only. Then there was a faint stirring in the room, a sighing as of the wind on the opening edge of a storm. Steadily it grew louder and louder, wilder and wilder, until Bill leaped to his feet in alarm.

"Priscilla!" he cried. "What is it? Is Ezra here or—"

As if his words were a signal the violence quickly died away. At last he heard the voice of his beloved—but it carried a sense of strain that was disturbing in view of the customary serenity of her speech.

"Aye—indeed he is not far away. And methinks he brews evil for thee and me. Mayhap I erred in giving confidence to Master Link. Forsooth, I should have—" She ceased speaking, laughed with tinkling scorn.

"But of what avail is Master Link against us? What feeble talents hath he to vie with thine and mine? It is time, Master Willy—now must I part from

thee briefly. Forget not that what I do, I do for thee and for thee only."

The broomstick came floating in from the kitchen, halted in mid-air. Then it assumed its familiar tilt and rose from the floor to vanish through the window, which opened to permit its passage, then shut itself gently behind it.

Wilson stood up and looked around him thoughtfully. He considered in turn each of the weird events that had occurred. Despite the cures he had effected he felt no real inner satisfaction. Since the opening of the tomb in the back yard he had won money, fame and power—but there was something out of focus in the picture. Oddly enough, when Priscilla was with him, he felt no such misgivings. He tried to find an answer to this problem, failed. All he knew was that she was away and the fine white glow of his exultation had turned to ashes.

He glanced at the bookcase and recited a little poem—but the verse did not come freely to his lips and no book traveled to him through the air. His lips compressed, he began deliberately to think of Natalie, to wonder if his love for her were really dead. No miniature tornado swept through the room. His contact with Priscilla was broken for the first time since it had been joined.

Strangely, he felt relieved rather than desolate. It was a relief to be able to think again for himself, after being so utterly dominated by the caprice of a feminine mind and personality. He tried to explain away recent events logically. Johnny Nclan should have walked long before, Monty Price was clearly a hypochondriac, and Mrs. Pembroke—but, of course, her cure was inexplicable by medical standards. None the less he wondered if he had cured them by faith alone.

He began to ponder Priscilla and what she would look like when her corporeal body was restored, but visions of Natalie and her warm loveliness kept cropping up to blur his reverie. He began to feel nervous and confused and aware of the continued aching of his head. He turned in early but did not get

to sleep until dawn. All in all, life without Priscilla was nothing to shout about.

IN the morning, when he finally awoke, his head felt worse. Mrs. Fitch, who had come in to do her cleaning stint, took one look at him and insisted he stay in bed. But even her well-meant ministrations did little to improve his spirits and health. He was nagged by a persistent doubt.

It was past the dinner hour when his doorbell sounded and he tottered from the library, where he had been gazing aimlessly at a book, to admit Link and Natalie. Their arrival caused him to feel a mixture of gladness and unexplained fear. There was something grim and determined about both of them.

"We're going to talk to you, Bill," said the little scientist.

"Why not?" said Bill, leading the way to the library. But there was scant enthusiasm in his voice. "Hi, Natalie, I'm glad to see you."

"I'll bet," said the girl. She looked, Bill thought, even tired than he felt as she sat down. Link perched himself upon a corner of the desk and looked at Bill, his distorted eyes owlish in their size and knowledge.

"I presume Priscilla is among the missing this evening," said the little scientist. When Bill started to demur, he added, "Don't try to sell us anything, Bill. Natalie and I know darned well where she is."

Bill groaned and sat down and ran a hand through his hair. "Listen, you two," he said. "Why in heck can't we work on this thing together—instead of at opposite ends of a tug of war? I'm certainly doing no one any harm and with Priscilla's help and your assistance we should be able to do a lot of good."

"Oh, Bill," said Natalie, looking stricken. Then, steeling herself, "It's time you knew the truth about your invisible friend. All right—before I start I'll admit I'm jealous of her. I should like nothing better to have her in full flesh so that I could perform a few visible operations on her. But, visible or not, I'm going to fight her—for you

as well as for myself."

She paused, took a deep breath and added, "Your sweet Priscilla, Bill, dear, is not out doing good tonight. She is attending a session of the witches' Sabbath. Do you know what a Sabbath is?"

BILL nodded and looked uncomfortable but Natalie went on remorselessly. "Witchcraft, as you must know, is a mockery of every virtue known to Christianity. And Walpurgis Night is its unholy celebration. Every witch, modern and ancient, living and dead, who is not under the seal of Solomon or any other leaden barrier, gathers in conclave to ridicule faith and virtue.

"They perform the Black Mass, they plot evil for the year to come, they indulge in what scholars like to call orgiastic rites—some of us have less academic words for that sort of thing. And your Priscilla is there with the rest of them, indulging in their horrid pastimes."

"You're lying!" cried Bill, springing to his feet defiantly. But even as he did so he felt a twinge of doubt. Then his face cleared and he said, "If she is there it is only to find Ezra and destroy him. Why, she told me—"

"But wait," said Thaddeus Link, holding up a hand for attention. "Now we come to the meat of the matter. How, Bill, would you like to see indisputable proof that Ezra was not a wizard at all—that your family tree is as untainted as a breath of spring—that Priscilla was buried alive in that casket alone?"

"You're simply trying to make a fool out of me," said Bill angrily.

"Hardly," said the little scientist, letting the implication sink in without further comment. "I have the proof in my new laboratory. Bill, those shoe-buckles we found in the coffin were a woman's. The fetters were so small that they could not conceivably have encircled Ezra's wrists and ankles. The only bones were female. In short, the coffin did not contain a trace of your ancestor—not even a particle of dust that could be labeled as his."

Bill felt himself turning pale. "There must be some mistake," he said and his voice sounded strange and hoarse. "Priscilla wouldn't lie to me. She has no reason to. Perhaps Ezra *wasn't* buried in that tomb. Perhaps he was in one of the other coffins—and his radiations escaped all the same."

"If they had," said Thaddeus quietly, "my instruments would have trapped them and registered the fact. But they didn't, Bill. Ezra wasn't there. You're being played for a colossal sucker and it's time you woke up to the fact."

"So I'm a sucker?" Bill countered angrily. "In the last two days I have cured four people qualified medical men pronounced incurable. And I'm a sucker."

"Of the all-day giant variety," said Natalie, dripping acid, "for not being smart enough to spot that—that babe's obvious motives."

"You're being unfair," Bill challenged. "Priscilla isn't here to defend herself. You're merely taking advantage of her absence."

"In view of what happened at Natalie's garden party and my laboratory, can you blame us?" countered the little scientist with a wry grin. "Bill, we can't hope to fight her in the open. We had to grab any chance we could take—and this Sabbath is it. You're going to listen until we get tired of trying to convince you of your own block-headedness."

"That's enough," said Bill, turning on them both. "You might as well get this and get it now! I don't believe a word of any of it. Priscilla has supernatural powers even by your own admissions. She knows everything—including the fact, which may not seem important to you—that Ezra is abroad somewhere, really tearing up the pea-patch. Take a look at your morning papers if you don't believe me."

He gathered himself together. "Priscilla is doing everything in her power to stop him permanently. Basically she likes humanity, wants only to help it. She may or may not be a beautiful girl when she is able to reveal herself. Frankly, I don't care. I'm in love with her."

NATALIE got slowly to her feet and tugged at her gloves. "That does it," she said to Thaddeus Link. "Let's get out of here. We're just wasting our time and Bill's. Priscilla has him thrown, hog-tied and down for the count."

Link got up and confronted Bill angrily. "What sort of excuse for a man are you?" he asked bluntly. "Letting an invisible female take you over body and soul without even a fight? She's captured you and you might as well forget you ever existed as an individual. Bill, you couldn't break away now if you tried."

"But you're wrong," Bill protested, shocked by the emotions his speech had aroused. "I can cast her out whenever I wish. She told me so herself—and if you want more proof that she's on the level I don't know what there is. I can do it by means of my own will power whenever I wish to."

"You're kidding," said Link suspiciously. But his eyes suddenly gleamed oddly.

"I am not," said Bill scornfully. "But neither you nor Natalie can make me cast her from me. Not even your lies about Ezra have sufficed to convince me that she isn't in my corner. And if either of you tries anything else to break us up I'll put a stop to it if I have to call on Priscilla's wild talents."

Link shrugged and moved slowly toward the doorway. "It's up to you, Bill," he said quietly. "We could prove easily enough that Priscilla is the liar and that she has utterly selfish reasons for it. Her one aim is to achieve an unbreakable link to this world, so that she can keep on playing her deadly games.

"The witchcraft she feels is too strong for your stomach she blames on Ezra. He makes a very handy whipping boy. He enables her to present herself to you in sweetness and light even while she is fomenting tragedy behind your back and giving Ezra the credit. Actually she is as evil as she would have you believe Ezra is. And my one hope is the fact that you say you can cast her off. Good night!"

The little scientist slammed the door shut behind him and followed Natalie to the sedan. She didn't cry as they drove off although her head was suspiciously high and her lips tight. He took her to her own house in Brookline and parked the battered old car in the driveway.

"Well," he said finally, "it looks as though Priscilla gets the duke."

Natalie accepted a cigarette and inhaled until the tip glowed fiery red. "It's all right, Mr. Link," she said finally. "You've done everything anyone could possibly do. But I'm still in love with him—I can't wash that off like chalk on a blackboard. Furthermore, I still think Bill loves me. That wasn't the real Bill saying those awful things just now."

She paused, shook her head, added, "Mr. Link, how are we going to fight that invisible you-know-what? Bill is sure to tell her about our visit when she gets back. She can easily destroy the evidence we have accumulated to prove that Ezra was not in the coffin. She can probably destroy us as easily."

"You're right—too right for comfort," said Link wretchedly. "And I'm willing to lay odds she tries exactly that. She has to—she can't operate in comfort as long as we are working against her. So we haven't much time. I thought science had the ultimate answer but science is helpless against Priscilla."

Natalie stared at the tip of her cigarette and said thoughtfully, "I wonder why she only keeps promising to show herself. Surely materialization can be no very difficult achievement for a witch as talented as Priscilla. If she is so super-duper why doesn't she get busy and give Bill a look at her?"

Thaddeus Link cast a startled glance at the girl. "That's odd," he told her. "I had something of the same idea awhile back. You see, Priscilla was just a little too insistent upon letting me know how raring, tearing beautiful she is. I wonder why? Is it possible that she's throwing a colossal bluff—that she really isn't pretty but the reverse? You know, it's possible that she has only her voice to

weave spells with. She could be one of those hags you were talking about."

"Oh, if she only were!" sighed Natalie dreamily. "If she only were!"

Suddenly the girl gave a start and uttered a little cry. A large and chunky woman had turned into the driveway of her home, was plodding steadfastly toward them.

"Why—it's Miss Hazard!" Natalie exclaimed and got hurriedly out of the old sedan. She greeted the woman warmly and brought her back to where Link sat.

"It's Bill's office nurse," she said by way of explanation. Then, to the newcomer, "This is a surprise but a pleasant one. What can we do for you?"

Miss Hazard climbed into the back seat, wheezing like an elderly pug. "I—don't—quite—know," she said, regaining her breath. "I came because I simply can't sit back any longer and allow Dr. Wilson to continue as he has been."

She paused for a couple of deep breaths, then said, "What's more, I know what's the matter with him. One of his so-called friends, who shall be nameless, convinced him that he was descended from a wizard. I don't really know why he let it affect him but it has—perhaps because he was brought up to feel such regard for family tradition. Anyone else would have laughed it off and forgotten it."

THADDEUS LINK had turned in the front seat so that he was facing the nurse. "Miss Hazard, do you by any chance have some proof that Ezra wasn't a wizard?"

"I have it with me," said Miss Hazard. She pulled from her immense knitted handbag a thick dog-eared musty old volume which she had wrapped in brown paper. "Ever since Dr. Wilson let me go I've been spending my time compiling research for a history on the Wilson family and Massachusetts medicine. I've even gone back beyond the Mayflower to England. Ezra wasn't a witch—though he *was* a preacher."

"I don't quite follow you," Link began. Then, "Holy smoke—a preacher!

Are you quite sure of this, Miss Hazard?"

"Positive," was her emphatic reply. "Two of the early histories state that he spent much time in the pulpit when he was not practising medicine—or what passed for medicine in those days. He made himself quite a reputation, in fact, and took a prominent part in the witchcraft trials in sixteen ninety-two."

"What sort of part did he play?" Natalie asked Miss Hazard swiftly.

"He was a very tolerant man—too tolerant for his time," said the nurse promptly. "He fought persecution bitterly. In fact, he was so vehement about it that he stirred up plenty of enmity among his more orthodox brethren—Cotton Mather included. One of them, a chronicler, at the behest of Governor Phipps, wrote him into a history of the era and made him a wizard himself. Why, he even had the poor man buried alive! I assure you it was a base libel."

"Good heavens!" gasped Natalie, staring wide-eyed at the little scientist. "That must be the version poor Bill got hold of. Do you suppose—"

Link interrupted. "Miss Hazard," he said, "I'm going to ask you a question which demands a careful answer. It's extremely important to all of us—and especially to Bill. Whether you believe it or not, Bill Wilson is actually suffering from some sort of demoniac possession. I know it sounds fantastic in this day and age—but we must know if your research found mention of a witch named Priscilla."

"Priscilla?" said Miss Hazard vaguely. "Priscilla—it does sound familiar. Of course the name was a common one in those days." She switched on the rear seat light, donned horn-rimmed spectacles and began busily to turn pages in her book.

"I do seem to remember—" she began, then paused to peer at a page. "There was *something* about a woman with that name—oh, yes, of course. Here it is."

Natalie exhaled and went limp with relief. "What does it say?" she asked.

"Why—this Priscilla was buried alive

as a witch. It's right here. She became associated with Ezra Wilson when he tried to defend her. She was an extremely evil woman—or rated so by the ignorant—and the local citizenry all but rose up in arms against both Ezra and herself.

"In punishment for having taken up the cudgels in her behalf it was decided to bury her alive in Ezra's own tomb outside of the city—right where the house is now. They were afraid to execute her in any other way for fear all of her wouldn't die. So they sealed her, manacled, in a lead-lined coffin and interred her in the Wilson crypt. Perhaps they weren't as vengeful as it sounds because it was the only vault available at that time."

Link's eyes were aglow with triumph behind their magnifying lenses. He said to Natalie, "No wonder Bill and I were both fooled! Now, Miss Hazard, have you any more information about Priscilla? Was she an especially evil witch—and have you run across any sort of description of how she looked? This is vital."

The nurse turned a page, then another, holding the book close to her eyes in order to read her own fine handwriting in the dimness of the sedan. "I have something here," she said. "I'll read it to you."

"Please do," said Natalie, who was curled up into a ball of tension.

Miss Hazard nodded and began to read from the page. "The doom of ye aforesaid Priscilla was thereupon pronounced by ye justice, whereupon ye witch Priscilla did shriek and shrill mightily. She possessed rare ugliness of form and feature and indeed, by the latter, might have been nigh onto a century old. She wore a dress of black stuff, without ornament, save that her shoon were brightly buckled in brass. Her eyes were small and black and suffered from a cast and her nose was so thin and hooked that it was difficult for they who attested against her to look upon her because of her lack of any fairness of face or body."

The nurse leaned forward to show

the book to her listeners in the front seat. "What's more," she said, "I stumbled on a woodcut of Priscilla in an old print shop on Park Street. If I look at it more than half a minute my stomach turns. Did you ever see such a dreadful old hag?"

Link gasped and turned away from the page, wrinkling his nose even as he laughed. Natalie followed his example and pleaded, laughing herself, for Miss Hazard to take it away from her range of vision.

"So that's Priscilla!" she gasped, holding her diaphragm with both hands while tears ran down her face. "Wait until Bill sees this! He says he can still cast her from him. If he doesn't now . . ."

"What in heaven's name are you talking about?" Miss Hazard asked oddly.

"It's this Priscilla who has taken over Bill, body and soul," said the girl. "It's she who is making him act so strangely and making his cures possible."

"Are you sure you haven't been drinking?" the nurse inquired suspiciously.

"Incredible as it sounds, Miss Hazard, it's the truth," said Thaddeus Link.

"Don't be absurd!" Miss Hazard snorted her contempt and disbelief. "It's all utter nonsense. A witch—in this day and age! Upon my soul!"

Natalie broke in swiftly. "Mr. Link, suppose she's right? Suppose there weren't really a witch at all? Couldn't Bill have been hurt by that bump on the head he got—and been affected mentally since in some way?"

"As far as I'm concerned anything is possible in this case," said the little scientist. "If this is all an illusion we may have been fooled—but Bill has been convinced. And we've got to shock him out of it somehow before it gets worse. There is a way, Natalie, if you're willing to cooperate."

"You know I will," the girl said simply. "I'll do anything I possibly can."

"Suppose you were to pretend to be deathly ill. Suppose Bill came in to cure you—and you were not cured. You could

let him suffer a bit and then spring the truth on him. Certainly he'll lose some of his faith in witchcraft."

"It *might* work," mused Natalie. "At any rate I'm going to find out."

"Swell," said the little scientist. "And one more thing—I'm going to plant this book in Bill's house where he can hardly miss seeing the picture. I'll call him and tell him about it later, just to make sure. When he reads this description and sees that cut—well, it ought to cut another prop out from under the Priscilla obsession. We've got to hit him hard on several fronts at once."

"But—what if it isn't an illusion," said Natalie, worried. "What if he really *is* possessed? After all, my garden party, the subway accident, the cures—"

"I'm convinced we'll never get at the truth by modern scientific methods," said Thaddeus Link, frowning. "They simply aren't modern enough. So we'll have to get at the truth with common sense and any weapons we can find. Perhaps we have only our wits—and if Priscilla is real we may lose those. But we've got to try, no matter what."

CHAPTER XVI

Witch's Brew

BACK in the old Brookline house Bill Wilson saw the library window open of its own accord and the broomstick come floating in. It stopped in mid-air, tilted, then floated on out toward its usual corner in the kitchen. Priscilla was back from the Sabbath. The cushion of her regular chair flattened beneath her.

"Evil doers have visited this house during my absence," she said flatly.

"Praise Allah, you're back," said Bill with relief. The mere knowledge of her presence made his head feel better. "Priscilla, I'm helpless without you. Of course, you're right—Link and Natalie were here. They tried to talk me into believing that Ezra was never buried

alive with you. They even suggested that he was not a wizard at all and that you were attending a Witches' Sabbath."

"Aye, that I was," said Priscilla, her voice low. "'Twas needful that I hie me thence, for Ezra too attended. He sought to have me barred but to no avail—for no practitioner of the arts can be refused admittance. And from him did I wangle these needed things I place before thee now."

Bill watched curiously as a dirty knotted cloth materialized on his desk, opened itself to reveal a half dozen fingernail clippings and a strand of hair.

"That looks like a woman's hair," said Bill, staring at it.

"Nay, for Ezra is long dead and yet his hair ceases not to grow," the unseen girl explained. "With this can we cook his goose in proper fashion. And this shall be your privilege, Master Willy, for your trust in me."

"Er—I'm afraid I don't quite understand," said Bill, puzzled.

"Get thee to the kitchen," urged Priscilla. "There shall I show thee how a curse is brewed—a curse which will relegate Ezra to regions far from Earth. Hie thee hence, Master Willy. Each passing moment is fraught with greater peril."

Bill reached the kitchen in time to see a large copper cooking pot lift itself from a hook on the wall, float under a sink faucet, which promptly turned itself on to fill the pot with water, then move to a burner, which promptly began to flame. There were some strange and rather gruesome things in the water, which gave off a noxious odor as they boiled.

"Aye, noxious they be, but of high power," said Priscilla, reading his mind. "The heart of a frog, the bowels of a hog, the tongue of a lizard, the warts of a frog—verily they compose a potent brew. Now, Master Willy, wrap thee again the nails and hair of Ezra in the cloth and dip it in the pot. There let it remain for five minutes before removal. Methinks Ezra's time is short."

Blindly, as if hypnotized, Bill obeyed orders. He watched the strange brew

simmer and bubble until Priscilla told him to remove the cloth.

"Get thee now to the garden behind the house," she told him. "Take with thee a spade and bury it as thee would a dead cat. Make haste, Master Willy—time is short."

Wilson obeyed blindly. He was conscious of a great sense of relief at not being on his own. No longer did he feel the doubts and uncertainties which Natalie and Thaddeus Link had so carefully implanted in him. He finished his chore and returned to the library, after washing the dirt from his hands.

"Are you certain this will finish Ezra?" he asked after awhile.

"Aye, verily," said Priscilla confidently. "The potion is infallible. But thou dost seem cast down this night, Master Willy. Hast thou missed me much?"

"Aye verily," said Bill. "Priscilla, without you I don't think I could go on at all. You have enabled me to fulfill every longing, every ambition that has tormented me since adolescence. I can hold up my head in the presence of my ancestors. I have shown myself to be a great healer. I have found the key to wealth, to success. And I owe it all to you."

"Then shouldst thou not be satisfied?" Priscilla asked gently.

WILSON frowned. "Perhaps too much so," said he thoughtfully. "Priscilla, when Ezra is vanished for all time and you are visible, don't you think we should ease up a bit—try to live as ordinary mortals?"

"Whate'er thou dost wish, Master Willy," Priscilla replied demurely. "When thou canst see me, then shall our final desires be fulfilled. Then shall we truly taste the rewards of virtue."

"I'm not certain virtue is just the word I was thinking of," said Bill.

"Master Willy, contain thyself," said Priscilla, fondly scolding.

"Very well." Bill laughed. Priscilla's gaiety was like champagne. Then he grew serious. "Priscilla, Thaddeus Link and Natalie are all wet. They fail to accept the fact that any witch can be

capable of that word you just said—virtue. But when Ezra is removed and we drink the potion that will make you visible—"

Priscilla's voice was soothing as she said, "Thou hast my word upon it—Ezra's mischief-making days are o'er and there is naught now to prevent me from assuming fleshly mantle. Verily I could prepare the potion within the quarter hour and then should all our dreams become reality."

Bill found himself hesitating—and the very fact of his hesitation was disturbing. Hadn't Priscilla proved herself worthy? Hadn't he wholly accepted her? He wondered what underlay the little canker of doubt that gave him pause.

All at once the telephone rang with a strident insistency that seemed to indicate trouble. Bill hauled himself out of his chair and answered it.

"This is Link," said the familiar voice of the little scientist. "Listen, Bill, I've got bad news. Your behavior has Natalie on the ropes. A complete collapse and a raging fever. The doctors we've had can't diagnose it but I believe I can. Did you do this to her, Bill?"

"You're crazy!" cried Bill, feeling unjustly attacked. "I—hurt Natalie intentionally?" Sudden fear gripped him. "Bill, she isn't in danger of—"

"Unless her temperature drops she'll burn to a crisp," said Link and his words were the more deadly because of the quiet conviction with which they were uttered. "She can't last more than twelve hours."

"We've got to do something!" cried Bill. He added, "You don't really think I had anything to do with it?"

"No," said the little scientist. "I believe you're sincere. But that isn't helping Natalie out of the woods. She's unconscious already, drifting into coma."

"I'm coming over," said Bill. "With Priscilla, I can—"

"Leave Priscilla out of this," Link told him firmly, "unless there is no other way left. And stay away from here yourself. The last thing she said was that she didn't want to see you again. You've got a lot to answer for, Bill."

"But I only—" he blurted, then stopped. What was the use? "Very well, Link—but we can't let her die."

"Then stand by for a hurry call," the scientist told him. "See if you can manage to get Priscilla lined up to help Natalie."

"I'll do my best," said Bill grimly if a bit doubtfully.

"Oh, and on your hall table is a book I left for you when I was there before," Link told him, not mentioning the fact that he had paid a furtive second visit that evening. "There is a bookmark in it. I advise you to look at it—and read the indicated print carefully. It concerns you—and Priscilla."

Link hung up and Bill reached for the book, which seemed reluctant to allow him to open it. Suspicious, he barked at Priscilla harshly and her resistance ceased. He opened it, saw the name of Erza Wilson mentioned, read the familiar spidery handwriting of Miss Hazard. He turned the page and saw the woodcut of Priscilla. All at once he felt sick all over.

CHAPTER XVII

Phantasmagoria

BILL walked into the library and laid Miss Hazard's book, still open, on the desk. His head was throbbing and he felt numbed with shock. He took a deep breath against the conflict he knew was coming. The canker of doubt within him was no longer either a canker or doubt. It was roaring certainty which pervaded his whole being.

"Priscilla," he called, "are you here?"

A goblet, containing a steaming greenish liquid was wafted through the doorway from the kitchen.

"Aye, Master Willy," said the witch. "I am with thee and the draught is readied. Thou hast but to drain it and our destiny shalt be no longer a half measure. I am thine indeed and shall be thine in fact."

Bill stepped forward quickly, lifted a hand to the goblet and backhanded it fiercely. It flew across the room to shatter against the fireplace, spattering its noxious contents on the hearth. A wail of shock and anger keened on the air.

"Master Willy, what hast thou done?" cried Priscilla.

"You dirty little—*witch!*" cried Bill, his voice low and thick with rage. "You tricked me—you've tricked me all along. Ezra was no wizard—nor was he in that coffin with thee—with you. And you are evil—the same evil you ascribed to the man who defended you in sixteen ninety-two."

"Master Willy, I beg of thee, cease thy nonsensical prattle!"

"It's neither nonsense nor prattle," snapped Bill, his anger growing with each passing second. "And you're no fair young maiden either. If I drank that potion I'd be living in nightmare alley the rest of my life. If you don't believe me—then look at this." He stepped back, gesturing toward the book.

A shrill little scream rose on the empty air. "But, Master Willy," said Priscilla, "these are indeed lies. For Ezra was as foul a wizard . . ."

"Yes? And what about yourself? Your likeness is too hideous to behold. And you have cursed Natalie Page with your witchcraft, even tricked me into helping you put her on what may be her deathbed. You are lower than—"

"Master Willy, Master Willy," said the witch plaintively, "I am but woman and therefore frail. If it be of such account to thee then shall I cure thy Natalie to maintain thy love."

"*Love!*" Bill exploded. "To that?" He gestured again at the picture. "I'm going to cure Natalie by my own powers! As for you, I'm going to fight you every inch of the way if you try to stop me. I ought to kill you—if I could. I—"

The lilting voice was no longer dulcet. Its syllables were as sharp and jagged as the broken glass of the goblet on the hearth.

"Careful, Master Willy," she said furiously, "for still do I inhabit thee. Much evil can I do thee—thou must ac-

cept me e'en though I be as old and ugly as the picture doth show. Mayhap someday shall I find the potion which shall alter my ugliness to the comeliness I should always have claimed as mine own."

"You'll need more than even a plastic surgeon," said Bill brutally. "If witchcraft could make you beautiful you'd have used it long since for the purpose. I have no faith in your ability in this direction. Include me out!"

"Then shall I feel compelled to exercise upon thee all the blackness of mine arts," Priscilla said ominously. "And as for thee, deceitful male—"

"I can cast you from me!" shouted

"She's taken a turn for the worse," said Thaddeus Link and he sounded frightened. "If you can do anything to save her, get over here quickly."

"I'll save her," said Bill. "And without Priscilla. I'm starting right now." He felt a quiet confidence which had never before been his as he tooled the coupé across Brookline to Natalie's home.

Link was waiting for him with the front door open. Bill brushed past him with a nod and went on upstairs. He didn't even bother to take his bag with him.

Natalie lay on her bed, the flush of raging fever on her cheeks, her breath



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Bill furiously. "You yourself told me so in a weak moment. And I do cast you out—out of my aura forever. With all my soul I would be rid of you. Get out—out!"

He stood there, his fists clenched, his forehead studded with sweat. And the wind that rose suddenly there in the room whirled up cowlicks in his hair. The lights went out and a window shattered and the tornado grew.

Then, suddenly, it was over. The lights flicked on once more and the wailing of the strange wind ceased. All that was left was a broken window and the shattered goblet on the hearth.

Bill dropped into the chair behind the desk and ran his fingertips over his forehead. All at once he realized that the headache was gone, as was the sense of abnormal pressure which had been wearing him down slowly ever since the opening of Ezra Wilson's coffin. The phone rang three times before he heard it.

rasping in her throat as she struggled to fill her lungs.

He put a hand on her forehead and summoned all the power of his will to combat this sudden attack. He felt the room go fuzzy around him and the only things he could feel were his fingers in contact with her hot dry flesh.

"Natalie," he whispered. "Natalie—it's me—Bill! Priscilla is gone—cast out. Her spells cannot harm you. You're going to be all right."

HAVING thus established his presence and purpose in the girl's subconscious, he said nothing more but closed his eyes and fought against the sickness that possessed her. Once he also lost the thread but he renewed his concentration the more sternly and felt the flesh cool beneath his fingers.

"You're all right now, darling," he told her then. "You can wake up."

Her eyes opened slowly and her lips curved in a smile. "Did you cure me?"

she asked him and there was another, unasked question in her eyes.

"I cured you," he said, "by my own power. Priscilla is on her way to some unnamed destination—without a broomstick."

"Oh, Bill, honey, you did it—you really did it!" she exclaimed softly. "I feel like getting up right now. And a little while ago . . ."

"You're going to stay right where you are and get a good night's sleep," said Bill sternly. He looked around for his bag, realized with a shock that he had left it outside. Thaddeus Link, standing in the doorway, came forward, holding it. Bill took it sheepishly and gave Natalie an opiate.

Downstairs in the big room where Bill had met social disaster a few days earlier under Priscilla's nefarious guidance, he and Link lit cigarettes.

"This can't really have happened, can it?" he said to the little scientist.

"I don't know," said the parapsychologist but his eyes were guarded. "You ought to have the answers if anyone has them."

"I've been sick—no doubt about it. Perhaps I came out of that knock on the head with a dash of schizophrenia. But I'm my own man now. Those cures—I've always thought I had talent along those lines. Evidently it was faith and nothing else. What happened with Natalie proves it to my satisfaction."

"If your experience has served to equip you with such a gift the world and I have cause to be grateful," said Link. He added, thoughtfully, "And what about the rest? The storm at the garden party, the fire in my laboratory?"

"The storm must have been an April shower," said Bill with a smile. "Just coincidence, pure and simple. As for the fire—well, faith has carried people through flames untouched. Look at some of the martyrs—and those fire walkers in the South Pacific. No, I'm afraid I was just off my rocker, that's all."

"You look as if you could stand a night's sleep yourself," said the little scientist. "It must have been quite an ordeal."

"Now that it's over I don't mind," said Bill. He crossed to Link, added, "And I'll always be grateful to you for getting me out of my cocoon or whatever it was I was in. If I can ever do anything—"

"Invite me to the wedding," said the little scientist. Drily he went on with, "There have been certain compensations for me in this too."

"I'm glad—and I think we'll make you best man." Bill shook his hand and went on outside to his car. He was humming a popular tune as he drove home through the twisting and half-darkened streets of Brookline. It was great to be free and in love—with a visibly lovely girl.

Link went upstairs to Natalie's bedroom. The opiate had not yet taken effect and the girl greeted him with a happy smile and held out a hand to take his.

"You've been swell," she told him, glowing.

"Apparently I'm to be best man after all," he said, smiling. Then, growing serious. "But you really had me plenty scared. Between my two phone calls to Bill you certainly made it look bad."

"Did you call twice?" said the girl, hesitantly. "I only remember the first one. Then I got dizzy and didn't remember a thing until Bill brought me out of it. You don't suppose . . ." She sat up suddenly frightened.

"You mean—you were really sick?" asked the little scientist.

Looking dazed, he began to pace the carpet. Natalie nodded, her own eyes wide and he stopped to stare at her.

THE telephone rang and a trim maid appeared in the doorway and informed Link that Miss Hazard wished to talk to him or Miss Natalie. Puzzled, he answered it.

The nurse was, for her, in a state of great excitement.

"Mr. Link, I'm afraid I've done a dreadful thing," she said. "You remember that book I loaned you last night? I hope you haven't showed it to Dr. Wilson."

"Why?" asked the puzzled scientist. "Because it wasn't all true!" Miss Hazard was as contrite as her precise New England accents permitted her to sound. "You see, I was so worried about Dr. Bill that I made certain changes. Ezra Wilson wasn't buried alive, actually, but he *was* convicted of witchcraft. When they went to imprison him he had disappeared and they never did learn what became of him. There were all sorts of stories."

"I can imagine," said Link drily. "And what about the picture of Priscilla?"

"Oh, that was accurate enough," said the nurse. "Brrr—wasn't she ugly?"

"That she was," Link concurred heartily.

"The reason I first got interested in the Wilson background," the nurse continued, "was because, in working for Dr. Bill's father, I sometimes thought he had a touch of the supernatural in his work. I mean, he did things that no other surgeon ever tried—and sometimes he seemed to be able to cure patients without surgery. I just won-

dered. I suppose it was silly of me, but when Miss Natalie told me about Dr. Bill's strange behavior, I—"

"Yes, quite," said Thaddeus Link, sinking into a chair by the telephone. "I believe I understand perfectly. Now perhaps you could tell me more about how Bill's father used his . . ."

* * * * *

When Bill reached the old Wilson mansion a shower had started suddenly and the idea of putting the car in the garage was more than he could bear. He decided to leave it out and to heck with the paint. After all, he had a hundred thousand dollars added to his carefully nurtured bank account.

So he left it there but as he went inside he muttered, "All the same I wish it were in out of the rain." He yawned and groped for the light switch and so he did not see the car move silently toward the garage nor the garage door open of its own accord to receive it.

"Tomorrow," he told himself, hand on the newel post of the big main stairway, "will be another day." And he went on upstairs to bed.



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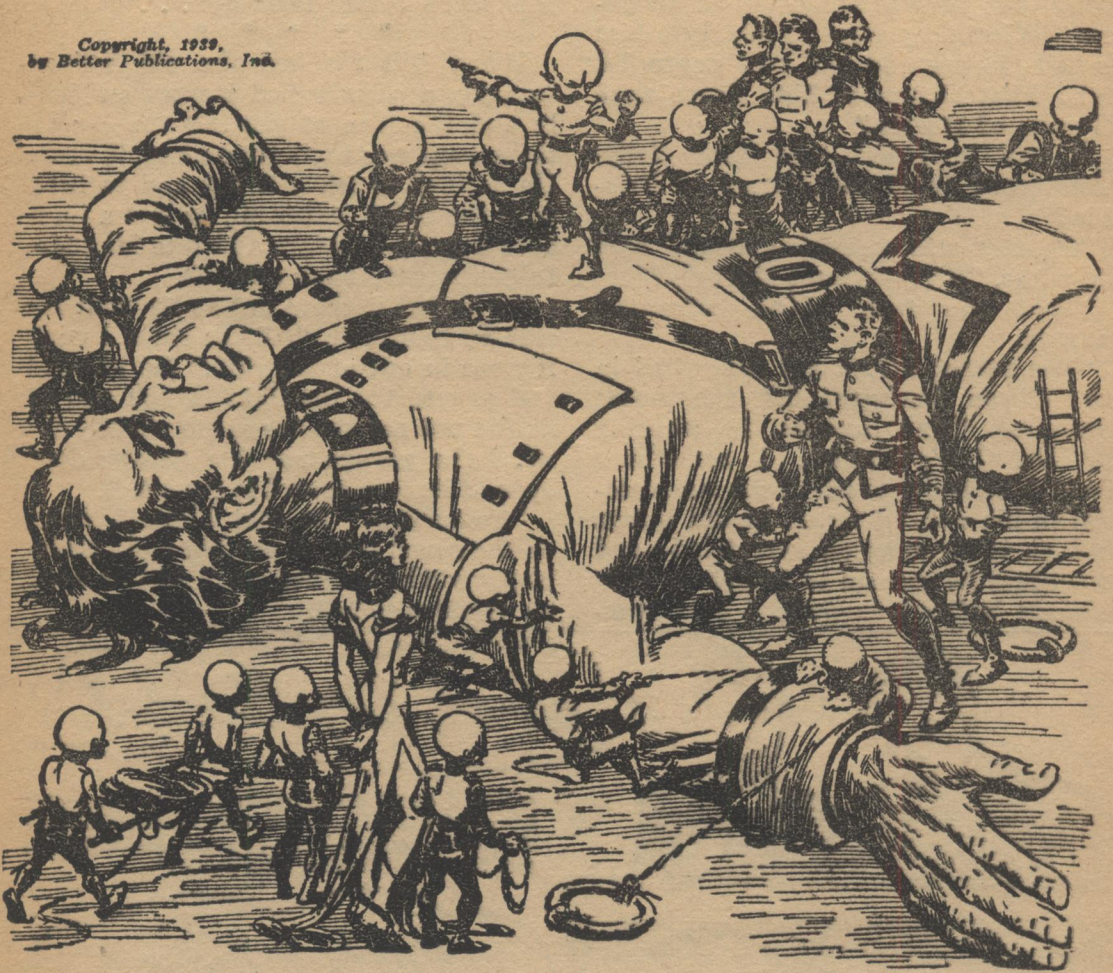
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CHAPTER I

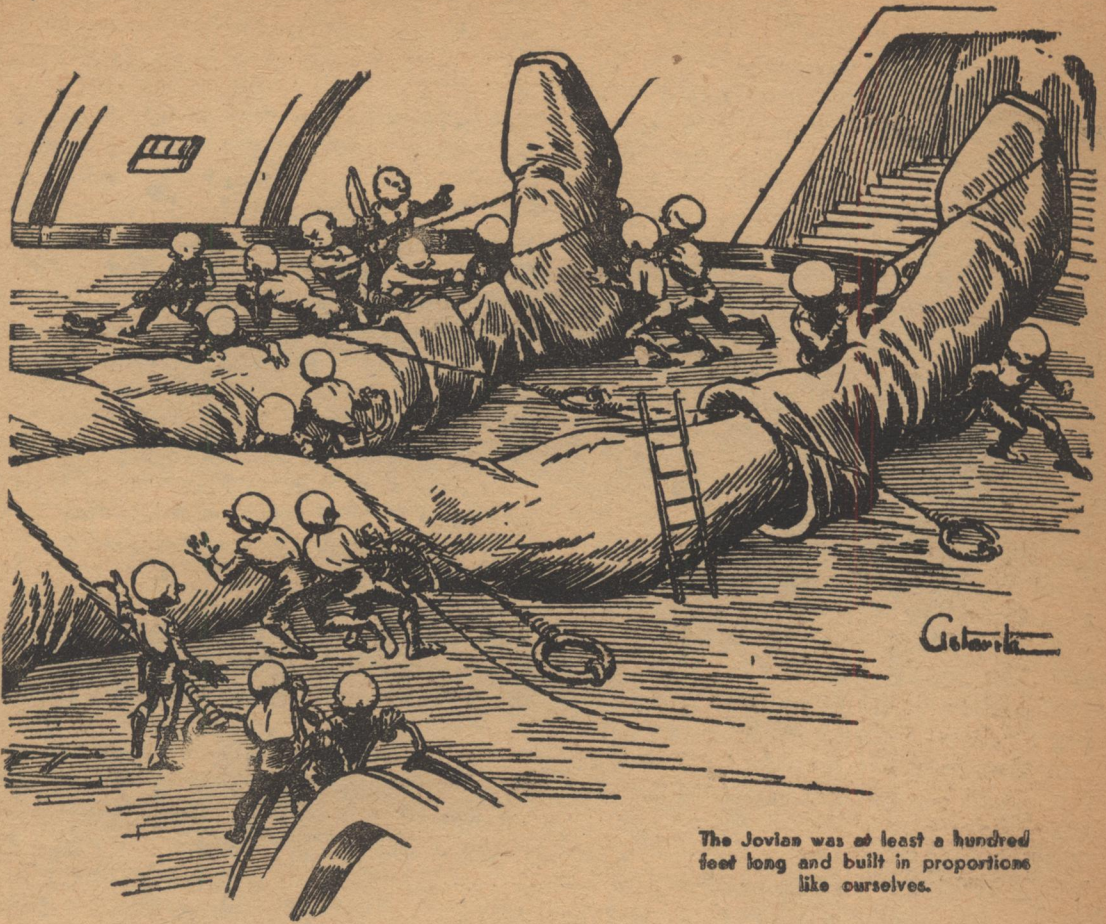
The Seabrook Unit

IT started in the spring of 2039. I had a job hacking an aircab in the Sixth Quadrant of Greater New York and that's how I came to know Martin Seabrook. He always called me when he needed transportation.

For some reason he took a shine to

me. There's no explaining why unless it was because I was big. But one day he offered me a job piloting his private craft and I took it. A year or so later he made me a sort of a bodyguard.

He was a little bit of a man, Seabrook was. He always looked shabby. His clothes were never pressed nor his white



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by WARD HAWKINS

hair combed. But his eyes were bright and brown and they had a way of looking deep inside of you. No one doubted that he had the best scientific mind of the age.

One day he called me into his office and I found him sitting at his desk, staring out across East River. He looked a

century old. His face was thin and tired and his eyes were bloodshot from the hurt he had inside him. You see, he had cancer—the doctors had given him only a month or so to live.

"Mike," he said softly. "I want to ask a favor of you."

He waited a moment, looking at me.

But I couldn't answer. Things were too balled up in my throat. Seeing him there, taking the pain that ate at him because dope to ease it would dull his brain, did something to me. I just couldn't see him like that and not want to cry.

He must have known how I felt for he went on without my answer. "You're not educated, Mike. To most people that means everything. But to me there's more—you're a man who can be trusted. You see, I'm undergoing an experiment tonight that may well mean the end for me. And, well—I want to know that you'll look after Mary."

That finished me. He was asking me, a lout of a kid he'd practically picked out of the gutter, to watch after his daughter Mary—the girl who was to me a sort of a dream.

Sweet, she was, with chestnut hair and deep brown eyes that were good and kind and understanding—the one girl in her circle who accepted me as an equal. But that was her way and I loved her for it—the way a man would love an angel.

IF it had been hard to answer him before it was impossible then. But he didn't need it. He stood up and held out his hand.

"I know you'll look after her, Mike," he said huskily. "This is, perhaps, goodbye. The best of luck to you, son."

I held his hand for a moment, then turned and ran from the room. It is hard to put into words the things I felt—I was so young and things hurt so much. All that night I spent walking and thinking. Morning found me waiting in the office.

There was the closed door to the laboratory—the huge window beneath which the city was just stirring. I tramped back and forth between the two, desperate to know whether the old man lived or had died.

I hadn't the faintest idea what the experiment was about but I could imagine plenty.

Finally, Seabrook's young assistant, Allen Gilbert, poked his head through

the door. His young good-looking face was twisted and strained.

"It'll be an hour or two yet, Mike," he said.

Seeing Gilbert's face didn't help my nerves any nor did it help to pass the time. Usually he was quiet and capable, so I knew if the thing could upset him like that it had to be pretty bad. That "hour or two" stretched to four before Gilbert showed again.

He nodded to me, whispered, "All right. You may see him for a moment."

THE first thing I saw in the laboratory was the operating table. On it was the sheet-covered figure of Seabrook. And there was no mistaking the stillness of that figure—it would never move again.

I must have stopped abruptly for Gilbert bumped me. I must have sobbed a curse for Gilbert caught my arm. But I don't remember any of it—I was thinking that Seabrook was dead.

"Get hold of yourself," Gilbert hissed. "Here, drink this. You've got a shock coming."

With the drink to warm my stomach I found that I could follow Gilbert toward a screened corner. Gilbert moved the screen and revealed a huge mound of apparatus covered with a black cloth.

Something under the cloth hissed and sighed as though breathing and there was the steady sound that might have been the beating of a heart. Gilbert lifted one corner of the cloth, steadied me with his hand, whispered, "Quiet, now. He's sleeping."

The apparatus was of glass and filled with a pale yellow liquid that circulated from a maze of tubing into a central chamber. My stunned senses reeled.

In that central chamber was a human brain!

Gilbert dropped the cloth and led me away. In the office he said, "That was the brain of Dr. Seabrook. His body was doomed by cancer and transplanting his brain was all that could save his life. He trained me for this during the past five years."

"But—but," I asked dazedly, "how

can he live? He can't be alive! He must be dead—you're just not telling me."

"No, he lives. That pump will keep him alive indefinitely. You see, over a century ago the beginning of this instrument was invented by two men, Dr. Alexis Carrel of Rockefeller Institute and Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh."

"In principle, the perfusion pump—that is, a pump which is able to keep the brain suffused or permeated with a nourishing liquid—is Dr. Seabrook's body. Instead of blood we use a fluid which fulfills the same purpose—that of bringing food and removing secretions. The fluid is created not by oxygen as in our bodies but by a serum containing hemocyanin. We hope it will be even more efficient than blood."

"But what good is he? He might as well be dead."

Gilbert shook his head patiently.

"He can think now without pain. Furthermore he will speak, see and hear. Doctor Seabrook always contended that the nerve impulse that actuates the muscular movement is a form of electrical energy. By elaboration of this theory he devised a means of connecting his brain to a photo-electric cell that functions as his eyes—and to microphones that enable him to speak and hear. Now you'd better get some rest. He will sleep for at least twenty-four hours."

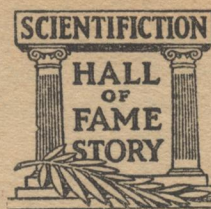
I LEFT, too stunned to think. I didn't realize then that I had been privileged to see the first successfully transplanted brain.

The following day Allen Gilbert and I broke the news to Mary Seabrook. Her courage in the face of it was fine and beautiful. Think of the shock it must have been to her, suddenly to find that her flesh and blood father was now only a brain in a complicated network of tubing.

The three of us went into the laboratory—Gilbert and I on each side of her, ready to help her if the need arose. Gilbert moved the screen.

A quick gasp leaped to Mary's lips—her small body stiffened—but that was all.

There was no hysteria, no tears. She



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just stood there, trembling and almost afraid to look at the brain.

I saw that two microphones and a photo-electric cell has been added to the pump.

"Mary—" one of the microphones said softly, and the voice was strangely like that of Martin Seabrook. "Mary, girl, it's all right."

It was a long moment before Mary spoke and then only with a great effort. "Father—your pain—do you still feel it?"

"No, child. Nothing but a sense of well-being. I had forgotten what it was to be without pain. The lack of it amounts almost to pleasure. So you must be glad for me, not sorry."

"I am glad," Mary said. "Do you think clearly? Can you continue your work?"

Seabrook's answer seemed almost exultant. "Yes, fortunately things have worked out beyond my fondest dreams. My brain is infinitely more efficient than before. There are several reasons for that.

"First, the pain I suffered made it extremely difficult to think. Without it I am exhilarated tremendously. Then the fluid that is my substitute for blood seems to be a hundred percent more efficient in removing waste and bringing nourishment. It has the effect of a powerful mental stimulant. Problems once beyond my power seem childishly simple now."

HIS voice died away and the room was silent for a long moment. Each of us was held in silent awe at the things we were seeing and hearing. Then briskly, he spoke again.

"With this discovery comes the problem of using the new power to the greatest advantage. I have decided finally on space-travel. That science has been at a standstill since the Romaine expedition to the moon.

"It took those men five years to complete the round-trip and they returned hopelessly insane. Space-fever had caused their insanity—they had been cooped up too long alone.

"Their slowness was caused not by the lack of power but by the lack of a metal capable of withstanding the terrific heat of the rocket exhausts. It was go slowly, or not at all. But I think I have found the metal that will do the work.

"Tungsten, as you know, is the most heat-resistant, having a melting point of thirty-three hundred seventy degrees Centigrade. But this is not enough for our purpose. Tungsten is prepared from the trioxide by reduction with carbon or hydrogen or from the chloride.

"In the past year I have been experimenting with a process involving the principle of electrolysis to increase the metal's heat-resisting qualities—without success. Today, in the hour before you came, the correct method became clear to me.

"Here is the task ahead of us. We will build a spacecraft, using this new alloy, and we will travel to one of the more distant planets to prove beyond doubt that space-travel can be an everyday reality."

Again his voice died out but not to silence. Gilbert was muttering, "Splendid! Splendid!" and his face was lighted with a glow of fierce exultation. Mary, too, was trembling with excitement. I—I must confess it—felt misgivings.

However, I held my stupid tongue, possibly through fright, and Seabrook went on.

"We four must work together. Without complete coöperation the thing is not possible. Allen will be my closest assistant. He is fully capable of working out

the problems of design under my direction.

"You, Mike, will be in charge of the construction. You are capable of handling men—no, don't interrupt. Possibly you have some doubts of your ability but I have none. The thing is settled. You will work under the direction of both Allen and myself.

"Mary, your task is to keep these two men fed properly and to see to their rest. They are fools enough to neglect themselves in the heat of the work—I know that, for I would do the same. Now here are your orders—"

He went on then to outline a program of work that was tremendous in its scope. He talked for hours on details of plans, construction methods and materials. I was amazed that one brain could conceive so much in so short a time.

When we left that room I, at least, was staggering under the terrific load of facts and details with which he had weighted us. And I was frightened, afraid that I would not come up to the standard Seabrook had set for me in his plans.

Remember, I had little education. I was young to the point of adolescence. But I did have a good working knowledge of mechanics picked up while hacking the aircab. And I was big enough to back any bluff I cared to make.

With these two things I set out to supervise the construction of the spaceship. These two and one far greater—the confidence Seabrook had in me. I take no credit for the success I had. Seabrook had inspired me to a point infinitely beyond my own ability. And, too, he was constantly foreseeing my problems and directing me to the right path.

The ship was completed on the twenty-first day of September in the year 2039, provisioned and ready for flight. There had been no publicity. Seabrook had wanted none.

Gilbert had constructed a portable unit for Seabrook and I had built a special compartment for it on the ship. The rest of us, Gilbert, Mary and I, walked aboard with only the clothes on our backs. The airlock was sealed, a few

farewells were made and all was ready for the experiment.

What few misgivings I felt as I slid under the controls were lost in a choking sense of pride—pride that I, Mike Harrigan, had been allowed the privilege of piloting this ship. Whether it was to my death or to my everlasting fame was somehow unimportant.

I lifted the ship slowly, thrilling to the perfect ease with which the controls responded, sent it at a gradually increasing speed outward toward the void—toward the infinitely distant planet of Jupiter.

CHAPTER II

The Lubians

YES, Jupiter—nothing less would satisfy Seabrook. He had insisted on it as the test to which he would put the ship. More precisely our destination was the Red Spot of Jupiter.

This spot had first been discovered in the year 1878. There seemed to be no explanation for it and the mystery of its presence had intrigued Seabrook for years. Long ago he had determined that he would be the first to discover its cause. About the journey—I hesitate to give you our impressions. But visualize if you can an attempt to penetrate the complete unknown. The dangers were real. Few of the asteroids had been charted, many of our calculations were problematical. No one had ever gone this way before.

The first days were filled with excitement. But as the days faded into weeks and the weeks into months our senses became dulled to the danger. We were awed by the tremendous distances around us, by the utter aloneness of space.

Earth had dwindled rapidly to a fading green star very little different from the millions of other stars behind it. Jupiter had grown to an amazing brilliance before us.

All my waking hours were spent at the controls. Mary and Gilbert stood watch while I slept. Seabrook devoted his time to the solution of problems of sustaining our lives on the planet ahead.

Too much credit cannot be given him for the development of the space-suits he built during our journey, or rather which Gilbert built under his directions. The suits were equipped with antigravitational units capable of neutralizing a force many times greater than we expected to find on Jupiter. Also they provided a constant temperature and atmospheric pressure.

But perhaps the greatest accomplishment was the development of the *thought interceptor*. Seabrook had elaborated on the known theory that thought-waves are electrical. He had developed a device that would intercept these impulses, translate them into vibrations similar to sound and, with bone-conduction, pass them through our auditory system to the brain. With this we would at least know what the inhabitants of Jupiter were thinking.

As we drew near the planet it became apparent that the red spot was some sort of gas. The atmosphere extended something like ten thousand miles from the surface of the planet. The gas reached this limit and extended horizontally beyond the limits of our vision.

Here then was the answer to our astronomers' question. Just why the gas was confined to this area alone was beyond our knowledge at the time. Samples were taken during our slow descent and Gilbert discovered the gas to approximate N204 or Nitrogen Tetroxide.

Our first impression of the surface of the planet was the incredible height of the vegetation. Towering what seemed to be thousands of feet above the surface were great trees of some unknown species. Beneath the trees the ground was obscured by smaller, more dense foliage.

We cruised along above the tips of the trees on an eastward course for several hours, looking for some sign of moving life, either human or animal. Finally we broke over a tremendous mountain

range and dipped into a valley. Here we discovered an open plain of perhaps a thousand square miles. And on this plain was a great city—but a city of incredibly small buildings!

It was not beautiful—the houses were too small, too squat and square. From some of the larger buildings great quantities of the gas poured upward. That seemed to indicate that through some strange working of nature the gas was the atmosphere these people breathed!

Near the center of the metropolis was an airport. There were ships there that rose in a cloud to meet us. It was impossible to know what sort of creatures guided them. We were much too high to discern anything that approximated human form.

The ships, less than a fifth the size of ours, seemed friendly enough though they fairly bristled with weapons—even as we neared the landing field there was no sign of violence.

Just before landing Mary, who had been at a starboard port, called our attention to something on the eastern horizon. At first we saw an odd blue light flashing intermittently. Later we made out great domes that might have been part of some gigantic metropolis. But there was no time to investigate.

I was the one who made the discovery that the city below was unmistakably in a state of war. The city was walled and along the ramparts of this wall were cannon-like weapons out of which spurts of blue flame flashed from time to time. There was no sign of the enemy other than the domes we had seen in the distance.

Before grounding the ship Seabrook ordered us all into the space-suits—his own unit being similarly equipped. I for one never let my hand stray from the niter-gun at my belt.

A MAZINGLY the airport became crowded with strange people in a matter of seconds. Strange, because we had expected a people built more in the proportions of their planet—giants—but not one of these we saw was over three feet tall!

Their heads, in proportion to the rest of their bodies, were tremendous, encompassing half their weight. Of their features the most prominent were the great obsidian disks that were their eyes. Lidless, expressionless and staring, one became conscious of a sense of evilness, of something ominous and forbidding behind their inscrutable depths. From between these eyes projected a sharp beak of a nose and beneath them a mouth that was small and round and lipless.

Their bodies were considerably broader than they were tall, supported by spindly legs and supporting equally spindly arms. Their clothing was of some shiny black material, metallic in its smoothness. About their waists were belts from which was suspended a glittering array of strange weapons.

We were looking at them when suddenly the ship rocked beneath our feet. The motion was gentle at first, tentative. Then the ship tilted sideward as though subjected to a tremendous force against the hull near the entrance port.

"Mike!" Mary cried suddenly. "They're breaking in!"

The entrance port, built of the finest, toughest metal Seabrook's intelligence could devise, was bulging inward, cracking!

A sudden cold hand of fear twisted deep around my heart. In a sort of wild desperation I drew my niter-gun and prepared to blast whatever showed in that port into eternity. Seabrook's quiet voice stopped me.

"No, Mike. Hold your fire. I think it would only make matters worse."

A moment later the port crashed to the deck. Instead of the tremendous machine I thought would be necessary to break the port there were only two of the strange people, staring at us. They had broken through with their own strength!

Such strength in bodies of that size was incredible. But I had forgotten that they lived on Jupiter—a planet with a force of gravity many times that of our own. To exist they had to be of greater mass and of immensely greater strength.

In spite of my fuddled wits I managed

to put myself between the port and Mary. Gilbert stood watching the creatures, apparently lost in study of their scientific aspects. Suddenly he turned and ducked into the control room. I understood why for one of the creatures had caught the edge of the port and was climbing in. The ship rocked violently beneath his weight—a weight that must have been tons!

The heavy steel of the deck bent as he threw a knee over the edge and pulled himself up. But at that moment, Gilbert threw in the ship's antigravitational field, preventing the stranger from breaking through the deck. This field, the same as the one incorporated in our spacesuits, was another of Seabrook's developments.

Seabrook had discovered the force of gravitation to be a form of electromagnetism. By identifying the force in its true electrical nature it had been comparatively simple for him to create a field of force about the ship that repelled with the same force by which the ship was attracted—as in poles of a magnet—thus nullifying gravitation.

Feeling the loss of weight the creature looked around owlishly, his mouth splitting in what must have been a grin. Suddenly our thought-interceptors began working.

"I am Ikor," the thought-stream said. "Ra of the First Company of the Lubian Expeditionary Forces. You are my prisoners!"

P r i s o n e r s ! Expeditionary forces! Then I had been right. This city was in a state of war. But there was not time for further thought. Ikor was walking ponderously toward Seabrook's unit.

I had seen the port broken by the strength of these people and I understood what would happen if he so much as touched the unit. He raised his hand—and then I shot him.

The effect was amazing. Suddenly his face disappeared behind a mask of flame. The niter-guns were automatic pistols of a very small caliber which fired a shell loaded with an explosive similar to nitroglycerin. The effect on a human head would have been to destroy

it utterly. But upon him it had little effect at all.

He rocked backward a bit from the force of the blast. Queer sounds came from his open mouth. I moved quickly so there would be no danger of Seabrook's unit being damaged by the explosion and fired again. Still he did not fall.

But I kept firing. As he stepped back I followed him with the gun, keeping a constant play of explosives against his face. The cabin roared with the sound of the explosions, solid blasts of air knocked me back. Nothing could stand up under that continued force—not even he. His head split, suddenly, flew into a hundred pieces and he fell heavily to the deck.

Bits of his head ricocheted around the cabin, causing unbelievable damage—they might have been chunks of steel. One of them caught me on the leg and knocked me sprawling. Before I could regain my feet another of the creatures had gained entrance and his thought-stream roared in my ears.

"Hold your fire! No harm will come to you!" Then, more quietly, "Ikor deserved destruction—he was too stupid to exist. A grovonan would know that our touch would destroy the materials of you people of lesser mass."

S EABROOK'S thought-stream answered, "We want peace. The killing of one of you was unfortunate but since you know why, there should be no cause for further trouble."

The creature bobbed his ugly head in agreement. "Excellent. My name is Loogo, and I have been instructed to escort you to the commandants. Will you come?"

At Seabrook's order I adjusted the anti-gravitational field of his unit to zero and guided it to my shoulders. We followed Loogo from the ship. The crowd split in an aisle to let us through to a carrier that was similar to a truck of our time. The driver sent it rocketing through streets lined with these queer houses, few of which reached above my head.

After perhaps ten minutes of driving we drew to a stop in front of a building that was easily five times larger than any of the others. We were ushered into a room of considerable size, apparently an audience chamber.

At one end was a raised dais on which three men were sitting. Their clothing was a yellow material, contrasting to the black the bulk of the Lubians wore and evidently indicating very high rank.

Somehow the thought-stream that came through my microphone from one of the men on the dais was pompous and at the same time sly.

"You are welcome," the thought-stream said, "to the Headquarters of the Lubian Expeditionary Forces. We, the High Command, extend to you our meager hospitality and hope that we are able to make your stay pleasant."

"Drive!" I thought unconsciously, forgetting that it was as clear to them as the spoken word. "You sound like a lying politician. You're after something or I'm a monkey's uncle."

"Mike!" Seabrook's thoughts whispered. "Be careful!"

The sudden concentration of the commandant's eye on me, made me realize what I'd done—I had a lot to learn in the art of telepathic conversation.

"You doubt us?" The Lubian almost purred. "Please understand that we mean you no harm. Our interest in you is purely scientific. Will you step forward and place that queer object—ah, yes, you call it Seabrook—on the floor so that we may inspect it?"

Seabrook told me to do as they said. I did, though as I stepped back I held my hand close to the niter-gun. The three Lubian Commanders waddled down from the dais and crowded around the unit.

My thought-interceptor was silent during their close scrutiny of the unit. Seabrook began a voluntary explanation of himself, told them his body had been a victim of cancer and how the transfer had been made.

"Very clever," the Lubian said. "You must be very efficient. You have accomplished so much in space-travel."

"Quite efficient," Seabrook agreed calmly. "So efficient, in fact, that I understand all your thoughts—even those you suppose are hidden from us."

The three commandants fell back, chattering in amazement at Seabrook's announcement. Loogo and several of his men moved close behind me before the Lubian leader spoke again.

"There is no need then for further pretense," he snapped angrily. "You are prisoners of war. If you conduct yourselves properly we will assure you a quick end. Unfortunately we cannot free you. You are a strange people and it is necessary that we discover the workings of your bodies on our dissecting tables."

Dissection! For a moment I was too stunned to think. Then, as the full impact seeped through my brain, I went suddenly berserk. I clawed frantically for my gun, grasped it, drew it—but Loogo had intercepted my thoughts.

His hand descended on mine, knocked the gun spinning from my hand. The blow could not have been more than a tap in proportion to his strength but I felt a numbing shock. Instantly my right arm hung useless—I could not lift it nor move my fingers. The arm was broken, I knew it.

And with that knowledge what little remaining sanity I had vanished in a red wave of fury. I turned to Loogo, drove my left hand with all my weight into those staring eyes.

Vaguely I heard Mary's scream above my thundering anger and Seabrook's frantic order for me to stop. But they were lost in the shock of the blow, in the numbing flame of pain that shot up my arm. Loogo had made no effort to avoid the blow. Instead he had leaned into it. When my fist struck his face it felt as if I had struck a block of iron.

He did not move afterward though the blow would have knocked a human the full length of the room. He stared at me, amused by my astonishment and pain, then pushed me gently.

I say gently but it drove me crashing into the wall. My head struck the back of my space-helmet with stunning force—and that was all I remembered.

CHAPTER III

The Noble Jovian

WHEN I returned to consciousness it was to find Mary watching me with a deep concern in her eyes.

"Steady, Mike," I heard Gilbert say. "You're all right now."

A sudden memory of all that had happened hit me. I pushed myself to a sitting position. Gilbert forced me back but I had seen enough. We were in a cell of some sort, a small barren room without windows or doors. Then I became conscious of the ache in my right arm, the bulky bandage that was around it, and I was glad to lie still.

Gilbert said, "You've been out a long time. After Loogo knocked you kicking, Mary and I took you back to the ship and set your arm. You've got a couple of ribs cracked besides two knuckles on your left hand."

"Where's Seabrook?" I asked.

"They took him somewhere," said Mary and in spite of her courage there was a tremor of panic in her voice. "They promised not to hurt him—but what are we going to do?"

They both looked at me. Gilbert was a scientist—fighting was not in his line. Mary was a woman. So the two of them looked to me for the answer to her question—and I had just shown how much good I was against these people.

For the lack of something better I said, "What's the dope on this war? Who are they fighting and why?"

"These Lubians are from the first satellite of Jupiter—the biggest," Gilbert said. "The true Jovians live in that domed city we saw just before we landed. The Lubians decided to conquer this planet. They started out in our nineteenth century, trans-shipped all their people here and started fighting. They haven't been able to do much though the Jovians don't seem to fight back."

He let his voice fade out because a section of the wall slid back and one of

the Lubians, a guard it seemed, motioned us to follow him.

He led us to a room that was even larger than the audience chamber we had first seen. It had to be to house the tremendous creature which was lying on the floor. A true Jovian!

He was at least a hundred feet long—or tall if he had been standing—and built more in the same proportions as ourselves. The most striking features about him were his great, luminous eyes. You had but to see them to know that. The rest of his features were ascetic—a high clear forehead, a thin nose and a sensitive mouth.

Some sort of breathing tube had been cut into his throat and led to a filter arrangement that stood close by. That seemed to indicate that the nitrogen tetroxide which the Lubians breathed was not the Jovian's normal atmosphere.

Two of the Lubians had mounted the Jovian giant and were walking on his chest. They were like gnats on a mastodon. The yellow-uniformed commandant, who was standing on a platform near which I could see Seabrook's unit, broke the silence.

"We brought you here to secure the cooperation of the one you call Gilbert," his thought-stream said. "Seabrook has agreed to build the weapon that will win our conquest. He needs Gilbert to accomplish the actual construction.

"This monstrosity"—he indicated the Jovian—"is a typical specimen of the enemy—an inferior race with no ability other than stubbornness. Luckily for them they foresaw our invasion and constructed their cities into impregnable forts.

"If you will assist us we will let you live until the weapon is completed—though we must hold you for our laboratories afterward. If you will not, the female will be subjected to—"

Seabrook's calm thought-stream broke in. "Give your consent, Allen. They intend to torture Mary if you don't."

It was a long time before Gilbert answered. There was deep courage in the man as well as a splendid mind. Had they threatened him he would have told

them to rot in hell first. But torture of Mary was a different matter.

"Just as you say," he answered quietly.

"Excellent!" the commandant said. "We will leave you this specimen for experimental purposes. You will find his reaction to pain most amusing. Loogo will instruct you in the use of the appliances."

Without waiting for our agreement Loogo moved to a queer set of headphones near the Jovian's head. He applied them to the helpless creature's ears, then stepped back and threw a switch. A high-pitched drone filled the room. The Jovian's eyes closed and his facial muscles writhed in unholy pain. The sound was exquisite torture to him.

IT might be compared to the torture a person would suffer who is particularly sensitive to a high-frequency tone—such as a fingernail scratching on glass—if he were subjected to the tone amplified a thousand times. A terrestrial under the same conditions would lose his sanity almost at once.

The commandant was watching the twisting face of the Jovian with evident pleasure. His thoughts were speculative.

"It's too bad we could not contrive a weapon to use that tone—the effect is so pleasing. However, you have a month in which to accomplish your task—a month of *your* time. Let me suggest that you succeed, for if you don't you will have the privilege of watching the female dissected."

The devils! They knew—probably from my mind—how much she meant to us and the limits we would go to to protect her. They seemed to take an unholy delight in our mental torture.

They left us, all of them, trooping out in single file. Gilbert leaped to the switch and cut the power. The scratching sound died away and there was infinite gratitude in the Jovian's eyes when they slowly opened. His thoughts came to us dimly—a dimness caused by pain.

"I am grateful, Earthmen—sometimes I think that tone will become more

than I can stand. These Lubians are ingenious in their way."

I gaped at him, openmouthed—there had not been a single note of bitterness in the Jovian's tired thoughts! How long he had been a prisoner was hard to guess. How long he had suffered torture was beyond imagination. And still he had no desire for vengeance!

"It must seem strange to you," he said in answer to my unspoken question, "our lack of animosity toward these invaders. But the reason is simple. We are the oldest race of the Solar System—older than your race by millions of years. Long ago we realized the futility and the ultimate disaster of fighting. All thought of it has been bred out of our minds.

"We have accomplished much in the plane of pure thought. Telepathically we can project ourselves anywhere in the universe and in that manner have watched your civilization grow with a great deal of interest. We have solved the problems of life, the beginning and the end. The future and the past are as plain to us as the present.

"So far have we advanced from the primitive that the particular phase of our minds which was once devoted to combative reasoning has long been atrophied. We are helpless to do more than protect ourselves. We cannot think of a single weapon to destroy life—even though our own lives are the price of our inability. A pitiful, an unbelievable condition, I grant you. We could but wait your coming in hope that you would save us."

His thoughts faded out in pure exhaustion. He might have fallen asleep. Utter silence gripped us—the three terrestrials whom he had asked to help him.

There was absurdity in the Jovian's predicament. But you can't laugh at a thing so infinitely beautiful and fine that it hurts your throat to think about it. If all the peoples of all the worlds were like this Jovian the universe would be a paradise. He represented all the good of which a race could ever be capable—the ultimate toward which any race could strive.

"I think we can help," Seabrook said softly. "I pray to God that we can. But now, Allen, Mary and Mike, we have much to do. Remember this—choose a scene to visualize so that you may conceal your thoughts from the Lubians. You will find that with practise you will be able to think behind the scene you transmit.

"Allen, come—we have so little time. Mary, you and Mike must remain here. They insisted on it as a guarantee against our escape. You will be permitted to come to the spaceship one at a time every day or so to replenish your space suits. For the moment then, goodbye—have faith in me."

Gilbert shouldered the unit after clasping my hand and Mary's and they left us. Mary stood looking after them for a long moment, her thought-stream suddenly a confusion of emotion. What I was thinking must have reached her for she turned to me, her eyes bright with moisture and her mouth trying to smile.

"Good Mike," she said. "I'm proud that you think that of me. I'll do my best to deserve it." And suddenly she was crying against my shoulder.

I held her clumsily, feeling all the exquisite embarrassment caused by knowing she had intercepted my thoughts. I would no more have told her that I loved her than I would have spat upon an altar. But unconsciously I had thought it and she had understood.

CHAPTER IV

Behind the Ol' Swimming Hole

THOSE first three weeks for Mary and me were spent almost alone. Time hung with the weight of centuries on our hands. It was my self-appointed task to keep her thoughts occupied, for around us was always that certain knowledge that very soon we would die.

We found some amusement in following Seabrook's orders about the mental

pictures to occupy our minds. For mine I had chosen a swimming hole I had known as a boy. In time, it became so real that I could see every detail. The trees, the mud, the water, the sun on my bare hide, the chawbeef and the lickings—they were all there.

Mary told me her thought was of shopping in New York. She said she would go into store after store buying endless new gowns that she would not wear more than once before discarding. She said she spent thousands and filled wardrobe after wardrobe, a thing I think every woman would like to do.

We saw little of Seabrook and Gilbert and then only on our occasional visits to the ship.

Gilbert had become horribly thin and worn in three weeks. Overwork must have caused most of it—though something else bothered him too. Afterward, when I found out what it was, I was amazed that he could work at all.

The weapon they were building was beyond my lay mind. To me it was simply a mass of electrical machinery, tremendous in size. Seabrook told me that it was a disintegrating ray, capable of destroying the Jovian cities.

Knowing that we were to die inevitably I could not understand Seabrook's willingness to destroy the Jovians simply to give us a few more hours of life. "Why," I asked bitterly, "can't we turn the niter-guns on ourselves and put an end to it now?"

Seabrook answered me tiredly and patiently. "That's like you, Mike. But be patient—and please have faith in me."

Yes, there were times when I doubted him. I was too stupid to notice that the ship had been repaired and was ready for flight at a moment's notice.

Mary and I were allowed a certain amount of freedom during those last few weeks. We spent them wandering about the city. Millions of Lubians were pouring in from outlying districts, bringing with them all manner of strange weapons.

They had come to be in on the great conquest!

Soon the death-ray Seabrook was

building would disintegrate those huge domed cities of the Jovians, which had thus far withstood every form of weapon the Lubians had been able to devise. And the Jovians would fall under the ray, letting in the nitrogen tetroxide gas and the hordes of Lubians who would slaughter them like sheep.

And when they died we too would follow!

The morning before the time set for the completion of the weapon, Mary and I were summoned to the audience chamber. The three commandants were there as well as Seabrook and Gilbert and a dozen or more of the Lubian lesser officers.

Gilbert's face was horrible to see. It had grown whiter and thinner with the weeks until now it was little more than a skull. Some desperate knowledge was eating at his brain. But in spite of the thin paleness there was cold desperation in his eyes, firm resolve.

Seabrook's thought-stream said, "The weapon is completed—or rather it lacks but a few moment's work before it will function. The attack is scheduled in three hours."

The weapon completed! Then this was the end.

Mary said, "Father, you can't! You can't kill the Jovians—there's no reason to. We four will die anyway. The least we could do would be save the Jovians—"

"Ah, but your father is more clever than you think." It was the commandant, sly and purring. "He has forced us to agree to let Gilbert, Mike and yourself go free before he will complete the weapon. We have agreed rather than waste time making him change his mind."

"No!" Mary cried. "Father, you can't! Let them torture us—it is only we three against the whole Jovian civilization."

I felt a little sick. Here then was the reason Seabrook had agreed to destroy the Jovians—so that we three could live!

I said, "Nothing doing. We don't go—that ray will rot before it ever fires."

"Please, please," Seabrook cut in. "This is my wish. You three must go back to Earth. The profit of our coming

here will be lost if you don't return."

"Enough of this!" the commandant roared. "The thing is settled. You three have no choice. Go to your ship at once!"

The Lubian officers closed in around Mary, Gilbert and myself in a tight circle. Gilbert stopped them suddenly. "Wait! he cried. "These two may go but not I. You'll never get that weapon to fire without me. I have attended to that!"

"What do you mean?"

"I fixed it so it wouldn't fire. Even Seabrook doesn't know what I have done."

The room was suddenly silent. The Lubians were trying to probe Gilbert's brain to intercept his thoughts. But every moment in which he was not speaking his brain was filled with a monotonous confusion of scientific formulae, visualized by him to prevent them reading his mind and gleaning his secret.

SUDDENLY the commandant exploded. "The female! Take her—show these Earthmen we will not stand for trifling!"

Gilbert choked. "I'll never tell you if you touch her!"

Hell might have erupted in another moment had not Seabrook cut in with his steady thought-stream. "Give me a moment with Mike. I'll guarantee these three will leave and the weapons will fire. Three minutes is all I ask. Torture would take hours."

The Lubians hesitated, looked to the commandant for orders. He was undecided for a long moment. Finally he snapped, "Three minutes then—no longer!"

The Lubians split into an aisle from me to Seabrook. I went to him, wondering what he could want of me. He ordered me to lift him and carry him into a small anteroom. The panel slid shut behind us and then we were alone.

Seabrook's thoughts came to me softly for he was infinitely tired. "Mike, I have only a few things to say. You're the one who can save Gilbert and Mary. You must take them with you by force. Do you understand?"

"But the Jovians—you can't, you mustn't kill them!"

"Mike, I've asked you to believe me. I'm doing what I think best. You promised me to take care of Mary—remember that day in my office? I said then I could trust you and I know I can. You cannot fail me now."

He was right—I had promised. And I remembered how much that promise had meant to me when I gave it. But I hadn't known then it would be so hard.

I lifted the unit and carried it back to the audience chamber.

"Well?" the commandant demanded impatiently. "What is your decision? Will Gilbert stay?"

"Let me talk to him," I said.

They shoved Gilbert toward me and I moved close to him, thinking hard about the swimming hole so he would not know my plan.

There was a question in his eyes, a sudden suspicion. But before he could draw away I drove my left fist hard against his stomach. The space-suit absorbed most of the blow but it was enough to bend him over. Then I brought my fist down on the back of his neck, snapping his head against the back of his helmet. He dropped without a sound.

Mary's frightened scream pounded at my brain. "*Mike! Stop!*"

She dropped beside Gilbert, her face white and twisting. When she looked at me there was a strange, vivid anger flaming in her eyes.

"You beast!" she choked. "Why? Why?"

Seabrook spoke to the commandant. "The machine will fire—Gilbert lied. Let them go."

I caught Mary's shoulder and lifted her up. "We're going to the ship, Mary. Come on."

Suddenly she was transformed into a fighting fury. She leaped up and pounded me with her small fists. "We're not! I won't go—I'd rather die a hundred times."

There was nothing to do but take her by force. This I did, holding her kicking and squirming under my arm, sick because I had to act against the will of

this girl who was sacred to me.

It did not occur to me that it was strange the Lubian who carried Gilbert and escorted us to our ship was not Loogo, who had been detailed to watch us during our stay. I should have noticed for I had grown to hate that ugly face and staring eyes with a burning intensity. But my mind was filled with too many things just then.

I forced Mary down on one of the bunks in the control room and tied her there—never, even for a moment, had she stopped fighting. I put Gilbert's unconscious form on another. The Lubians had not entered the ship but had remained outside, holding their guns on us so I could do nothing but take off.

I slammed the port in their faces, then went to the control room. There was a long moment while I sat at the controls, still undecided, still hating desperately to leave Seabrook.

HE must have been following me in all my movements, for I heard his thought-stream urging me on.

"Take off quickly, Mike. You must hurry or everything I have planned will come to nothing. Goodby, lad—and remember your promise. Good luck to all of you."

There was a haze in front of my eyes. A horrible lump blocked my throat, drew it taut and aching. I cut in the degravitator and started the engines unconsciously. Then I jammed down on the engine feeds, not caring if the rocket blast burned half of the Lubian population, and sent the ship roaring into the sky.

There was one thought I could not shake. Seabrook had sacrificed himself and the Jovians that we three might live!

The more I thought of it the more difficult it became to hold the ship on its course. But I think I would have made it had it not been for Mary's voice, low and shaky, cutting with the intensity of its passion.

"You coward!" she said. "You filthy, rotten coward. You're leaving them all to die so you can live. Mike Harrigan, you're not fit to live!"

CHAPTER V

Thunder Over Jupiter

I COULDN'T go on after that—not after Mary, who meant so much, had called me that. I stopped the ship and let it hang weightless on the degravitators.

Suddenly a course was clear to me—I could fulfill my promise to Seabrook and still save the Jovians. I would bomb the death ray!

I say, I thought this—and that all but finished me.

The ship rocked suddenly with the movement of a great weight. A new thought-stream paralyzed me.

“You will not bomb that weapon. Turn around and you’ll understand why!”

I spun to see the squat figure of Loogo standing in the doorway to the after cabins! Behind him was his lieutenant! Both of them were holding deadly hand-guns trained on my head.

I gaped at them, voiceless and thoughtless in astonishment. Loogo spoke again. “Continue the flight. We must remain aloft until Seabrook shows my countrymen how to fire the weapon. Obey me or die. I am perfectly capable of operating this ship.”

I turned numbly back to the controls, trying desperately to think, and started the ship upward again. Loogo seemed to enjoy the situation. He could not help bragging.

“You must think we are fools if you believed we would let you go free. Your world is the next we will conquer. With this ship as a pattern and the death ray as a weapon we will be invincible. We shall rule the universe.”

What little intelligence I might have had seeped back to me as his voice rattled on. I had sense enough to visualize the swimming hole, to hide my thoughts as a plan took form in my mind—a wild crazy plan that left us but one chance in ten of living—but it was worth a try.

First you must understand that our

field of gravitation was independent of that of Jupiter. The anti-gravitational field in the hull neutralized the planet’s pull. The ship’s own gravitational field, working through the deck plates, gave us our normal weight, to which we were accustomed, but it had to be quite the contrary in the case of the Lubians—they were not accustomed to it.

There was my answer—I cut both fields of gravitation!

It had the same effect as if I had instantly tipped the ship. The two Lubians spilled backward through the door into the stern of the ship!

The danger lay in the tremendous weight of the Lubians suddenly crashing the full length of the ship. Would they break through the hull? Would they damage the engines beyond repair, leave us at the mercy of Jupiter’s tremendous pull?

They struck the after bulkheads with staggering force. The ship lurched to a stop, hung there, her beams fairly screaming under the terrific strain.

The engines stopped and suddenly we were pitching downward!

I jerked the niter subrifle from its boot beside the controls, spun in my bucket seat, hanging from the safety straps. The Lubians were moving sluggishly—but they were moving, pointing their guns at me.

I pressed the trigger of the subrifle. It quivered, sending a stream of highly explosive shells into the Lubians—and none too soon.

A flash of blue light came from the center of their twisting arms and legs. Something exploded against the side of my spacesuit with tremendous force.

Blackness began closing around my eyes. But the subrifle kept spitting even after the strength had left my fingers, blasting those two Lubians into a hundred pieces.

After the gun fell from my hands I forced myself to turn and cut in again the anti-gravitational field of the ship’s hull.

That lever seemed to need the strength of three men to pull. I fought it through sweating eternities while the ship plum-

meted toward the rapidly nearing surface.

Finally it gave and we were free of the terrible sucking force that would have killed us in another moment.

But there was still the tremendous speed. It would carry us on with its own momentum unless I could bring the ship to a plane horizontal to the planet's surface.

SOMEHOW I managed it—though I shall never know how. But I did, for when I regained consciousness some time later it was to see Gilbert at the controls, sending the ship upward again.

He saw that I had come to, said, "Good work, Mike," and his voice was utterly weary. "You got us out of a bad mess."

I realized then that I was lying on a bunk. He had taken my spacesuit off and bandaged my side. That he had repaired the damage done to the stern was evident by the fact that I could hear the motors roaring.

"Yes," he said. "The damage wasn't too bad. I fixed it and dumped your two friends through the airlock. Now you take it easy. I owe you and Doctor Seabrook an apology for not obeying orders—I deserved the slugging you gave me. Knowing from the beginning what Seabrook intended drove me nearly insane. You see, I thought so very much of him—"

The thought of Seabrook brought me back to my senses. It meant the death ray would soon be working—that the Jovians would soon be dying like flies!

"Stop!" I roared, pushing myself to my feet. "We've got to go back—we've got to bomb that death ray!"

"No," Gilbert answered tightly.

Something inside of me snapped. I cursed him. "Get away from those controls. If you haven't the nerve to do it I have."

He paid no attention to me as I crawled toward him. He was intent on the instrument board, watching the moving dials.

In a few moments I would reach him. I would drag him from those controls if I had to kill him to do it. I hitched my-

self across the deck, literally roaring curses at his hunched shoulders.

Just before my hands touched him he moved the controls and brought the ship to a course that was parallel to the planet's surface. He spun to me, standing up, and his face was a stiff white mask.

"We're clear of the atmosphere," he said hoarsely. "Now come to the screen and watch."

Something in his voice made me obey him—something in the utterly tragic cast of his face. The visa-screen came to life as he brought out the image of the death ray in the city so far below us.

The hordes of Lubians were gathered around it in teeming activity. Obviously they were about to fire. Near the gun, I could see Seabrook's unit.

And then the Lubians fell back, leaving a cleared space around the weapon. Only the yellow-uniformed commandant stood near it, his face smug in the strange red light of the nitrogen tetroxide atmosphere.

"Gilbert," I pleaded. "We've got to smash that thing. We can't let them kill the Jovians. We can't—"

The abrupt pressure of his fingers on my arm stopped me. "Wait," he said fiercely. "Watch!"

The commandant of the Lubians waddled over to the great switch, paused there for a moment, evidently enjoying these last few moments before they would launch the attack that would mean victory.

Then his hand dropped—dragged down the switch!

The huge weapon came suddenly to life. As it gathered power a confusion of strange lights flashed back and forth through its intricate workings, growing brighter every second.

A blinding flash leaped along the barrel. Suddenly our screen was nothing but a cloud-obscured chaos!

I stammered, "It—it blew up!"

Gilbert did not answer until he had snapped the switch that cut out the screen and turned away. His face then was strangely quiet—as though a great burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

He walked to the bunk on the far side of the control room to Mary Seabrook's side. Her shoulders were shaking with stifled sobs. Gilbert touched her tenderly.

"It's all over, Mary," he breathed. "Just as he planned. He went out swiftly, cleanly, the way he wanted to go. God will be kind to him, I know."

Mary turned to him, put her head on his shoulder and sobbed. In that moment I understood that these two had been destined for each other from the beginning of time. I had been a blind fool not to have seen it before.

He led her away, back to her cabin. But not before she had turned to me and said, "I'm sorry, Mike—those things I said. I know you did what was right—what father told you to do. Try and forgive me."

Gilbert came back in a few moments and put his hand on my shoulder. "Yes," he said tiredly. "He fixed it so it would explode. But he did more than that—he destroyed the entire Lubian population."

"Not all of them," I corrected. "He couldn't have killed them all. Just a few—those around the machine."

"No. He killed them all. That weapon was never built to disintegrate. Seabrook let them think that so they would

allow him to build it. Rather it performed exactly the opposite function—that of a reducing ray.

"You see, the atmosphere of the Lubians was nitrogen tetroxide. And that gas is what we call unstable. By that I mean that the atoms of nitrogen and oxygen in each molecule of the gas are not closely united. The same condition exists in such explosives as gunpowder and gasoline vapor.

"The reducing ray created an electrical field that split two of the loosely united atoms of oxygen away from each molecule of the gas. The molecular change was instantaneous, causing a terrific explosion of all the gas. And this change is the same in principle as the one that takes place in the explosion of gunpowder and gasoline vapors. Simply put, he exploded the atmosphere of the Lubians—not a single one of them could be left alive by any quirk of fate.

"The Jovians were not harmed for they did not breathe the gas and were protected from the explosion by their domed cities. Seabrook saved them, saved us and probably the universe from the scourge of the Lubians—and he was more than willing to give his life to do it."



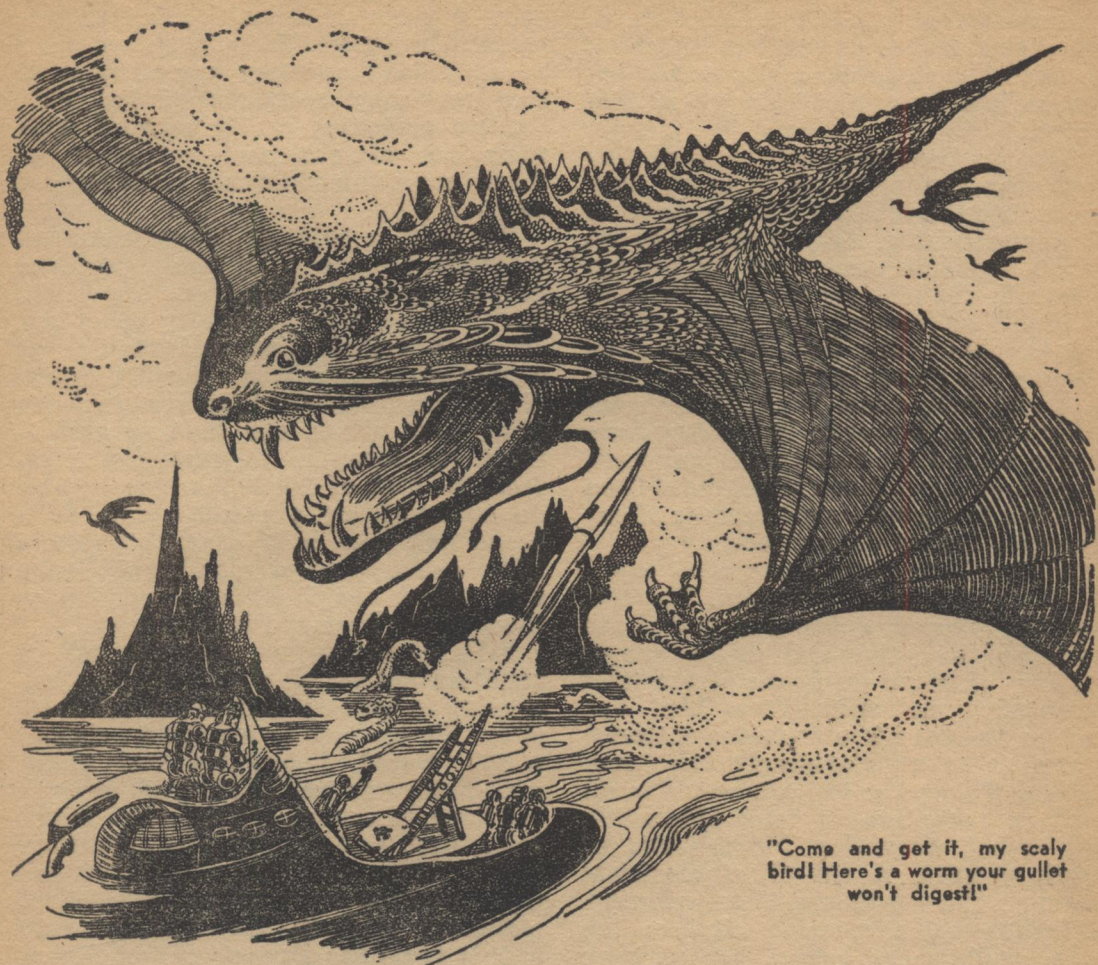
TAKE OFF ON THE FIRST TRIP FROM EARTH TO MARS

in

SIGNBOARD OF SPACE

By FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

NEXT ISSUE'S SURPRISE-PACKED HALL OF FAME SELECTION!



"Come and get it, my scaly bird! Here's a worm your gullet won't digest!"

THE SIGN and THE MESSAGE

By **TED POWELL**

Earthmen plunge into the whirling mists of a strange planet, risking the fury of the Mugyars — and their terrible symbol!

THE *Corsair's* announcing system repeated the landing orders. Brunner and Saranov, on loan from DOER to this expedition, hastened their unsteady way along the metallic corridor, inwardly cursing the rolling and pitching of the space cruiser on the surface of this great bay. Entering the briefing room as quiet-

ly as possible, they took their seats alongside Hasakimura, one of the landing craft pilots.

Up on the lecturer's platform a scar-faced officer, Lieutenant Hastings, was sketching a rough map outline on the blackboard. The tapping of his chalk was the only sound to break the silence

in the crowded room. The officer finished his drawing, dropped the stick of chalk, and wiped his fingers on a handkerchief. He turned to his intent audience and began to talk in a cool, clipped British accent.

"Having been assigned to head this particular landing party, it is my duty to conduct the briefing session prior to our disembarking. As you all know, the reason for this hazardous long-range flight was the historic old *Vigilante* expedition's reference to the rich uranium and beryllium ore deposits found by them on this planet in the year two thousand and forty-nine. What is not generally known, however, is the desperate motive behind the costly and dangerous long-range expeditions which have been launched to the outermost reaches of our planetary system during recent years.

"I have been given permission to divulge this reason now to you. The tremendous power outputs required to maintain the polar and ocean-current heating systems and the terrestrial Degaussing networks have bled our nuclear and corpuscular-fission material stockpiles to an alarmingly low level. Failure of the polar projects would mean a sharp reduction in food production and actual starvation for millions of Earth peoples. A cut-off of electrical power to the ten-thousand amp demagnetization cable systems circling the earth would mean loss of control over meteorological and ionospheric conditions. It would mean complete chaos in all interplanetary communications."

Lieutenant Hastings paused to allow the full significance of his words to take effect upon his stunned listeners. The room had become deathly quiet now. Brunner's eyes followed the restless motions of the speaker, noting the almost imperceptible tremble to his head and hands. He recognized the familiar symptoms of space fatigue, and wondered if any of the others noticed.

AFTER shuffling some papers on the small table beside him, the officer turned to the blackboard and began pointing out markings on his chalk-lined map.

"This particular expedition has drawn the old *Vigilante* assignment. There is no question of the existence of the vitally needed ore deposits. Our main problem is with the semi-intelligent na-

tives of this world. Unlike us, they are evolved from reptilian forebears. Humanoid in general form, they are alien to our culture, our very way of thought. The surviving members of the *Vigilante's* personnel barely escaped with their lives after several months of enforced stay here while they made repairs on their ship.

"Is there a point of common contact whereby we can meet these reptilian people and establish a truce if nothing more? Upon this possibility rests the success or failure of our mission. For we cannot carry on a war against the peoples of this world and mine for ore at the same time. Thus, our landing assignment for today is to move northeast from the head of this bay, where we now lie anchored, up a marshy river to a broad salt lake containing three main islands several miles inland. That is the spot where the *Vigilante* landed back there in the Twenty-First Century.

"We are to observe, photo and psycho reptilian natives at a safe distance, returning to base without detection if possible. We are not to engage in combat which would jeopardize our entire undertaking as well as imperil our lives. We hope, of course, for the usual native orientation and conditioning operations which will admit the citizens of this world into the confederation of civilized planetary projects. Two governmental agents from the Department of Extraterrestrial Relations, Brunner and Saranov, will accompany us to man the photography and psychoscope equipment."

Steadying himself against the ship's pitch and roll, Lieutenant Hastings sketched a simple formation diagram at one corner of the blackboard.

"I must caution you all to keep close together, moving ahead with extreme care and with constant anti-personnel radar checks. Remain at all times within these protective rings of radar and rocket-launcher operators and have your auto-rifles ready for instant action. The perpetual mist and thick vegetation of this world play the devil with visibility. Further, its winged reptiles strike with blinding speed and ferocity. A momentary lapse in alertness is to court disaster."

The officer broke off as a ship's chronometer sounded gongs over the general announcing system. "It's time to be off,"

he resumed swiftly. "Final instructions! Take care not to pierce your air suits, as the atmosphere of this planet contains ammonia and carbon dioxide in large percentages. Be sure you have received your full set of Series E-twelve anti-fungus shots. To fail this is to risk an agonizing death. All usual security and safety regulations are to be strictly observed at all times—exactly as if aboard this vessel under space flight conditions. Set your wrist chronometers at sixteen hundred to synchronize with the master clock here. Assemble all equipment immediately at Air Lock Six-C on the engine-room deck at once. On the double now, gentlemen!"

En route to assemble with the other men, Brunner and Saranov checked their personal equipment in strained silence. Brunner mulled over his disconcerting fit of melancholia and the sickening numbness inside of him. He wondered whether it was the shots or just plain fear again. The ever-chilling yet fascinating dread of the unknown gripped him like this on every mission whenever he was about to set foot for the first time on a strange world.

"My mother once wanted me to become a laboratory technician and stay safely on Earth," he said to Saranov. "So I did, and look where it lands me."

His assistant's only answer was a sickly grin as he pointed a gloved finger at the crudely printed, significantly twisted quotation over the air-lock hatch. It read:

ABANDON YE ALL HOPE WHO EXIT HERE

They pulled on their air masks and stepped into the air-lock chamber. Three sets of metallic rumbles and thuds followed. The outer shell opened before them on a gray world of swirling mist.

Soon they were shuffling across a narrow gangway to the bobbing and rolling landing barge awaiting them. They settled themselves in their assigned positions, their lungs beginning to ache slightly and their ears to sing as they strove to adjust themselves to breathing solely from the air mask cylinders.

THERE was a final check by Lieutenant Hastings as the last members of the landing force took their places. A small gong clanged twice, and the powerful engine of the landing barge

broke out into a steady roar. The two DOER men silently watched as the huge outline of the black space ship slowly shrank away from them into the swirling mist. High up on the *Corsair's* blisters search-radar antennae slowly rotated in a ceaseless vigil like so many robot sentries. Then the mother ship was blotted out behind the wall of ammonia-and-carbon-dioxide fog, and they were alone in a small, bobbing open craft on an uncharted sea of this alien planet.

The landing barge's bow dipped and climbed the great bay's rolling swell with sorrowfully wailing inflections of engine whine. Each rhythmic dip of the bow was followed by a thudding wave and the sleety hiss of briny spray breaking over the gunwale and splattering over the huddled men below.

Brunner's gloved hands unconsciously clasped and unclasped about his psycho equipment. Of the entire landing force he and Saranov were the only members completely unarmed. Because of the nature of their vitally important work and the handling of their special apparatus they must, perforce, depend entirely on the squad of men detailed to cover their activities for protection.

The DOER man's staring eyes slowly took in the ring of grimly silent men crouched down in the craft around him. Big, unbelievably tough, superbly trained space corpsmen — incredible, dieted, serum- and hormone-injected, strain-bred supermen—would even they with their terribly efficient weapons be sufficient against the savage, fantastic monsters of this crazy planetary nightmare?

One hundred and seven of Earth's finest fighting men. Brunner wondered what thoughts were running through their minds. What bloody price was to be paid for the attainment of that desperately needed uranium ore? How many of these expendables were destined to survive for the long flight back home? Would any of them survive? How long did a spaceman keep pushing himself against unknown odds before the laws of chance splattered him against a bulkhead, cracked him wide open in gibbering lunacy, made him stone blind from cosmic radiations, or trapped him in some ghastly hell hole like this, where he would die violently in combat with troglodyte horrors or from some terrible

form of bacterial disease or flesh-blighting fungus rot?

The sighing wail of the craft's laboring engine was the only answer to the technician's jumbled thoughts. Up on the bow and stern of the little vessel alert rocket gunners kept wiping their goggles, scanning the water and immediate sky intently as the landing barge neared the unseen shoreline somewhere ahead of them in the wet mist. The muffled roar of the surf rolling up on the beach was gradually making itself heard above the monotonous drone of the engine.

Abruptly there appeared a rift in the grayish-white, billowing cloud above them. There was nothing to give them perspective or proportion, but they could see several small specks circling in and out of the scattered tendrils of mist high up in the leaden sky. They looked not unlike vultures of Earth, but their slow gyrations gave an impression of huge size and their flight motions made peculiar drumming sounds in the portable doppler radars at once trained upon them.

"Some of the winged horrors of this world," spoke Lieutenant Hastings in his clipped accent as the pilot of the craft cut the engine speed and slowed the barge to feel the way carefully to shore.

As if in response to the sound of his voice, one of the flying monsters made a few tight spirals like a cork caught in a whirlpool and dropped into an almost perpendicular plunging dive. A rising, moaning whine broke out of the radar speaker.

"Cover up!" barked the aft rocket gunner into his microphone. "Hold it steady, pilot!"

The men shielded their goggles or turned their faces toward the hull obediently. Nobody made the slightest panicky attempt to use his own weapon in instinctive defense. The job was left entirely in the hands of the aft rocket gunner, each man realizing that if this lone man failed there would be no time for a second try before disaster struck. Brunner marveled at their almost phlegmatic calm as he heard the gunner growling softly and deliberately training his rocket tube.

"Come and get it, my scaly bird! Here's a fancy worm your gullet won't digest."

EVERYBODY blinked involuntarily under the blinding orange flash and hissing roar as the projectile took off. Shading their goggles, with one accord they all turned and craned their necks to peer up into the hazy sky to follow anxiously the rocket's wavering streak as it climbed swiftly toward the plunging winged reptile.

The two met in a yellow flare and a sudden puff of black smoke. The other circling specks veered away sharply as if caught in the expanding blast, wavered erratically, and disappeared into the mist. The diving horror had vanished completely. The rift closed over as though it never had been. Seconds later a muffled clap of thunder echoed and re-echoed across the vault of the bay.

The craft's engine resumed its roar. The gunner coolly turned up his long rocket tube and methodically proceeded to clean and re-load it. The radio operator was already making his routine report to the mother ship.

"Just like that," Saranov murmured to Brunner.

"It won't be that simple if and when we clash with the dominant, intelligent reptiles of this world," Hastings commented. "That was only a dumb duck to the top race governing this planet."

A few minutes later the landing craft's metal hull rumbled and lurched its way up the shelving beach to a muddy shore. The party sat waiting as a radar man scanned the foggy beach area with his paraboloid dish. Only the slow *whoomph-whoomph* of swaying vegetation came in over the speaker.

Brunner could almost hear the heavy pumping of his heart. His hands felt clammy in their plastic gloves. He knew only too well what must lay beyond that screen of lush, rotting vegetation. The *Vigilante* reports had left little to the imagination.

After considering the deep groans of the radar detector for several minutes, the lieutenant finally clambered over the side and signaled for his expedition party to follow. His voice came over their earphones in a terse whisper.

"Hit the beach! Make formation without unnecessary noise and keep moving. We travel by compass until we reach the river."

The fighting men secured their glistering triple-edged bayonet blades to their auto-rifles and clambered out after

their leader. Brunner and Saranov, laden with their special equipment, followed. Circled by radar and rocket men, the small party slowly worked its way inland to reach, finally, a steaming river bank. This they followed upstream along the sluggish waters in unmolested fashion. Apparently the destruction of the winged reptile had in some mysterious telepathy spread ahead in warning.

HOURS later, whatever the cause, they reached the inland lake unmolested and halted on its swampy shore. Saranov stopped abruptly in his tracks and pointed with almost hypnotic fascination at several monstrous claw prints in the shore mud. Brunner muttered under his breath at the sight. Lieutenant Hastings shook his head slowly as his narrowed eyes probed the steaming jungle about them.

"I don't know whether these are footprints of the leading inhabitants or wild animal marks," he said. "That's one thing the *Vigilante* reports failed to mention—whether the reigning race wore shoes."

Close to the water line of the choppy, roily lake, plastic craft were being unrolled and inflated with gas from chemical cartridges. They were efficiently launched and lined up in a tight row for embarkation. The men covered their eyes again as a pair of rocket gunners sprayed the water gap between the shore and the dimly perceived lake islands.

Several muffled roars reverberated through the lake, sending milky-white geysers mushrooming up to fall back into hissing and bubbling cauldrons. The lake waters seethed and churned as far as eye could see as huge fish and aquatic reptiles thrashed madly to reach the comparative safety of the far side of the islands. Soon all was quiet again save for the lapping of the water and the occasional hisses and screeches of distant reptiles killing or being killed which echoed across the fog-bound inland sea.

"Embark and shove off!" Hastings issued his clipped, hushed orders. "Maintain a tight ring formation and make for the portside isle. No more firing of any kind for this point on save as a matter of life or death."

The small, light craft were quickly loaded and manually paddled toward the fog-screened isles. They reached their island objective without further

incident. On land, such as it was, again, the plastic shells were deflated and re-packed. Now the old *Vigilante* maps were consulted for a last time.

"This is the island where the *Vigilante* lay for months," Hastings explained. "It is also the site of one of the richest ore deposits we need."

"And the home of one of the fiercest tribes of natives," Brunner added as he started unpacking and assembling his psycho paraphernalia, turning the thing on so the tubes and valves could warm up.

"Right," said Hastings. "Atop the plateau we can't even see from this point is presumably the cave city of the *Mugyars*—future citizens of the Allied Nations of the Solar System—should they turn out to be reasonably cooperative. Hah! By *Vigilante* accounts, like inviting a pack of Neptunian black panthers in for tea and crumpets! I trust you can pick up some translatable thought images on the way up, Brunner, if these native monstrosities are capable of mental processes such as our equipment will gather in."

Ready to march once more, the group closed formation and headed inland, following the lead of the radar men and the flanking rocketeers. At the foot of the plateau, Hastings halted and regrouped his command, placing Brunner and Saranov in the front rank and next to himself and the forward rocket gunners. Saranov had assembled his photographic equipment by now, and the little expedition was ready for its final move forward.

They began the ascent of the truncated mountain before them. Halfway up the steep plateau side, Brunner held up his hand in a signal to halt and crouched down over his carrying case. His gloved fingers started dexterously manipulating instrument controls as he whispered into his own throat mike.

"I'm getting something now! These things—whatever they are—can think intelligently. Glimpses of a fire . . . a raised platform . . . huge and shadowy figures—all fragmentary and confused. Too many thought sources and too far away."

The group resumed their climb. Twice more on the way to the top the miniature radar warned them in time to halt and avoid discovery by the dreaded reptilian tribesmen. They finally reached the rim

of the plateau and found themselves looking down on the huge, shallow bowl of the mountain top. They settled themselves quickly in the fringe of dense, slimy vegetation and stared down in awed silence at the weird sight below them.

It was a Mugyar city of low, ugly structures with tall, wide openings for doorways. There was a circular cleared area in the center—the Mugyar idea of a square—where dark-skinned creatures of varying sizes and with elongated heads were thronging. On a raised platform in the very center, a huge triangular fire was blazing fiercely. At the far side of the open area was a more elaborate building with a tapering minaret reaching skyward. It looked for all of space like a swollen toad with a horn growing out of its back.

The distance was too great in the foggy atmosphere for the unaided human eye to see clearly, and one after another of the expedition brought forth his special binoculars and trained them on the gathered throng of natives. Audible gasps arose.

"My gosh, Lieutenant Hastings!" softly ejaculated one man. "These things are—are crocodiles walking around on their hind feet."

"I can see scales on 'em," breathed another. "Look at those awful prognathous jaws! Ghastly!"

"But look at the quality of their garments. The stuff looks like finely woven cloth from here."

"See the discrepancy in sizes! From tiny alligators to giant saurians!"

"You men are mistaken," Lieutenant Hastings set them right. "These creatures are not reptiles walking erect. They are evolved from a sort of saurian ancestry, true, but they are the ruling creatures of this planet. They have only the rudiment of a tail, and they walk erect as humans do as a natural result of evolution. Their buildings and their clothing prove them to have intelligence of some sort. Don't underestimate an enemy."

Brunner, busily tuning in his equipment, had been glancing at the building with the tapering spire. He spoke suddenly now.

"They are even further advanced, Lieutenant," he said. "That big building is a temple of some sort. Look what's coming out onto the balcony above the

entrance, right on a line with us above the sacred fire on that dais."

A MURMUR of amazement rippled through the ranks as one man after another leveled his glasses on the incredible sight. A huge reptilian being, a giant fully eight feet tall, advanced to the front of the balcony and stood with his scaly arms stretched out before him. A jeweled tunic covered most of his wrinkled, horny body. In the center of his massive chest, worked somehow into the cloth, was the design of a bullet-shaped emblem with a long, cometlike tail streaming out from its blunt or truncated end.

Hissing and grunting sounds issued from between his toothed jaws and his huge penthouse-covered eyes rolled hideously as he swung his spike-crested head from side to side. Before him the throng, back to the watching men, began to sway in unison. At regular intervals they hissed or chanted with them to the accompaniment of rhythmic bowing and thumping of claws against the ground.

"Great Gods of Space!" murmured Hastings. "Imagine trying to treat with creatures like that. No chance to civilize them along recognized channels of human thought. If they have any weapons at all in their alien culture, we'll do well to be able to fight against them. Hurry up, Brunner! Get that thought-image jerker working."

Brunner gritted his teeth and worked furiously at his instrument panel while Saranov sighted through a view-finder and set its loop coils into position. All of their companions maintained an uneasy and tensely alert watch, striving to steady themselves against the clammy fear the scaly monsters instilled within them.

The giant reptilian orator bent low and scooped up something from the balcony floor beneath him. It was a thick looking long gray rod which instantly the watching humans identified as a weapon tube of some mysterious and deadly type. He held the tube outstretched as he rose to his full height. The jeweled tunic glittered and shimmered in the flickering light of the blazing fire. He began to speak in a thunderous voice that reached the radar equipment in an ominous unintelligible rumble.

Saranov was now rapidly firing away

with a miniature military camera while part of his three-dimensional motion-picture equipment was chattering away in recording tru-color records of the scene being enacted before them. Brunner's eyes were closed in intense concentration as chaotic thought messages filtered into his brain from the two electrodes clamped to his temples. The messages gradually became clearer as his trembling fingers shifted and adjusted the control knobs. And suddenly the far-away rumble of gibberish leaped into intelligent speech through the magic of the psycho equipment.

"—has told all, for as the Mother Goddess Atabi has promised, so shall it be. Born in the mists at the beginning of all, eternally old and yet eternally young, Atabi has promised her chosen ones deliverance from the age-old curse of Bedumi, the Evil One. His curse shall be shattered forever and he will be banished to the nether world of perpetual darkness until the end of all time.

"As the faithful fear not and the true believers doubt not, so shall their faith be their divine reward. For hath not the all-knowing and all-powerful Atabi sent her messenger as the harbinger of the deliverance to come? Has not this been the mystic sign of our salvation from the retribution for the evil doings of the first tribesmen? Did not the messenger give the sign and the message as he stepped from the all-powerful Atabi's chariot of flame?"

The orator paused in his triumphant climax, fore-paws outstretched as his groveling audience intoned a ritual chant.

"It is so, O divine leader! The messenger gave the sign which is worked upon the sacred scroll. Say on!"

In hushed dramatic tones the orator on the balcony made his final proclamation as he turned his weapon tube to hold it high in both hands.

"Children of Atabi, I give you—the Sign and the Message!"

The long gray tube he upheld suddenly was not a mysterious weapon tube. It was a scroll that swiftly unwound and hung there before the high priest's chest, a scroll that had queer markings upon it.

All sound ceased to be intelligible through the psychoscope. There was nothing but ecstatic sighs. Then Nagurski, a rocket gunner with binoculars glued to his eyes, began to laugh aloud. The mirth spread. Even the grave-faced Lieutenant Hastings began to smile beneath his glasses.

Brunner snatched the electrodes from his head and grabbed up his own binoculars. He clapped them to his eyes and focused them quickly on the banner upheld by the giant reptilian priest. Saranov, his photographic equipment untended and running wild, was laughing hysterically.

"That comet symbol on his tunic—we should have recognized it!"

But Brunner was no longer listening. He was reading—actually deciphering—the odd and crude but perfectly legible markings on the unfurled banner.

BIXBY'S BUBBLE GUM

Made in U.S.A.

Feb. 12, 2049

Canteen Issue—Vigilante

Lieutenant Hastings broke the laughter-shot silence with the first words.

"Come on, men," he said. "Let's get down there and fraternize with the enemy."



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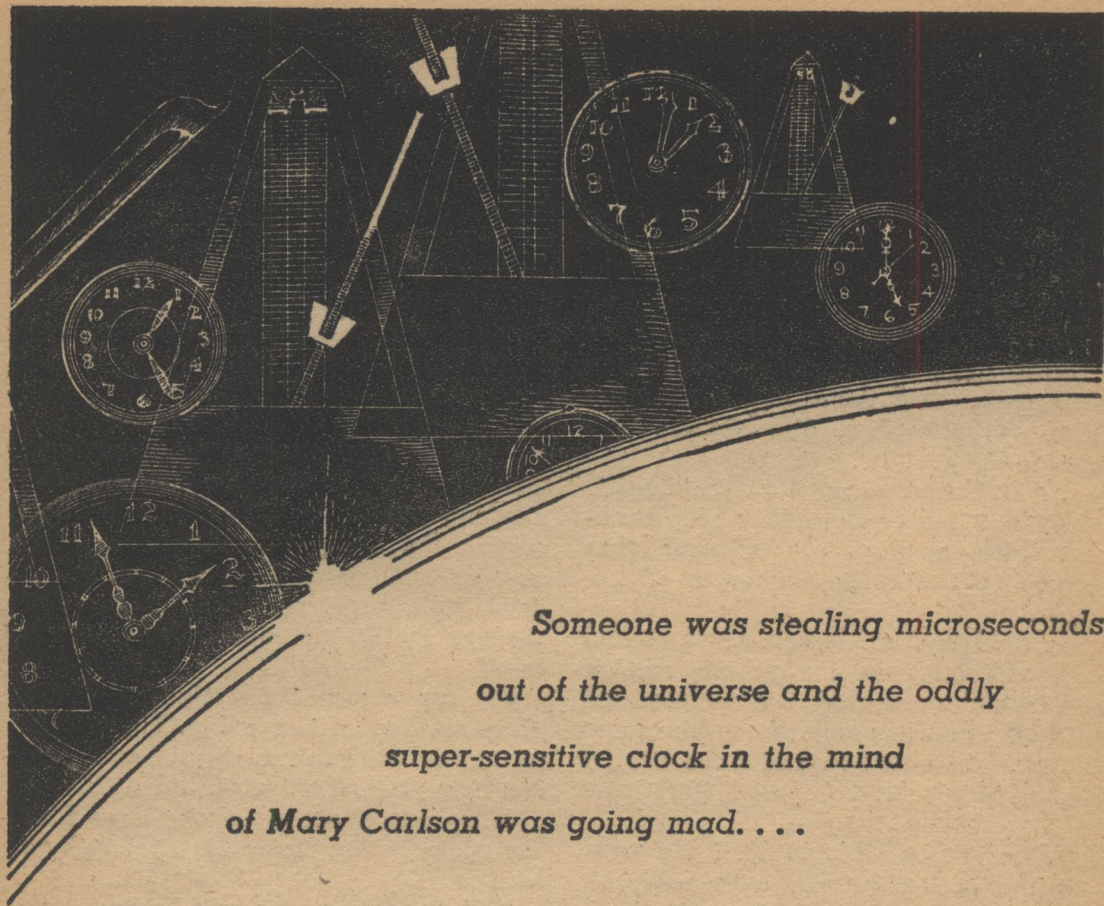
By EDMOND HAMILTON

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Virgil
Finlay

Mary poured out her
gladness with the
voice of her
violin



*Someone was stealing microseconds
out of the universe and the oddly
super-sensitive clock in the mind
of Mary Carlson was going mad. . . .*

ENCROACHMENT

CHAPTER I

The T Factor

SHE was sitting up, crying and whimpering in the night like a child lost in the darkness, an overwhelming darkness in which there would never again be light.

For an hour Dr. James Carlson had lain listening to her, helpless and sick within himself. Night after night it had been the same. The sleeping pills didn't help any more. Nothing he could say

would quiet her fears and desolation. There was only one thing left to him, to send her away perhaps for the rest of her life to a hospital where she would be known and comforted as a child lost in the dark.

"Jim," she whispered out of the darkness.

He crossed to her bed and sat beside her. Her body was rigid as ice as he

a novelet by **RAYMOND F. JONES**

touched her.

"We're dying, Jim," she whispered. "Can't you feel it? All of us dying. Time running out for us. That's dying, isn't it? Today was shorter than yesterday, and yesterday was less than the day before."

"Darling, there are still twenty-four hours in a day. The heavens haven't speeded up."

"But the hours are shorter—and the minutes—and the seconds—and the microseconds—and the things that make *them* up. Oh, Jim, I'm scared. I'm scared—"

It was the same cry that she'd made a hundred times before. Her body trembled with a desperate sobbing that seemed to drain the remnants of her energy.

He held her in his arms and rocked back and forth in a rhythmic motion that somehow muted his senses and left him conscious only of the blackness of the night about him and the aching emptiness within.

HAD he done this to her? He wondered. Before they were married, only six months earlier, Mary had been filled with a springtime gaiety that gave no hint of this dark thing that had overtaken her. With her exquisite violin music she had been able to express all the loveliness and beauty that men might dream of but never find in the world of reality.

Then, a month after their marriage, her skill had vanished. Her playing had become as halting as a reluctant child's forced rehearsals. She gave it up, and slowly the darkness grew. Halting uncertainties of speech and motion appeared. A quizzical, uncomprehending expression took possession of her face. And now—the delusions.

He had kept her with him as long as he could.

He trembled as with a sudden chill, though the room was warm. How had it come about? Had he in some unthinking way shattered the dreams they had dreamed and Mary's brilliant, sensitive mind along with them? He tortured his

mind with these questionings, but he could find no answer.

Somehow, he must have slept finally, for the room seemed suddenly ablaze with sharp sunlight. Carlson looked down at the face of Mary resting against his arm. She was scarcely sleeping. Rather, it was the lassitude of exhaustion from the delusions that writhed within her mind.

Carlson kissed her damp cheek and murmured her name. "Mary—"

She looked up at him, fear shooting through her eyes. "Jim, Jim, what are we to do? I'm going crazy, aren't I? This isn't real, is it—this sense of time slipping away? But it's with me always, and in the night it terrifies me. Even now—" she glanced out at the bright day—"today will not be as long as yesterday, and tomorrow will be shorter—"

Carlson clutched her tightly. "We'll go to see Dr. Jorden today. I want you to stay at his sanitarium and see if he can help you get rid of this thing."

Mary was silent for a long time, then she spoke so low he could scarcely hear her.

"I'll go—because it will be easier on you. But he can't cure this sensing of something that's real. He might as well try to cure me of seeing."

She looked up again and out toward the shimmering garden behind the house. "Today will be shorter—"

It was late afternoon when Dr. James Carlson reached the university campus. The long familiar buildings and grounds where he'd spent his undergraduate years and where he now held the chair of Psychology seemed vaguely blurred and unreal. He felt as if he were possessed of almost the same shifting time sense that had bewildered Mary. Only one thing stood out as real and urgent there—his research by which he hoped to explore the fathomless depths into which she had plunged.

He went up the steps of the Physics building and toward the research lab where he was almost certain of finding his closest friend, Dr. Forest Gardner. He knocked lightly, then opened the door.

Gardner looked up from a panel of trembling indicator needles. He attempted a grin.

"Always encroaching on the time of your betters, but come on in. I'll stop my world-shaking research long enough for a coke with the psych department."

His levity fell flat. Carlson's face remained unchanged. He seemed to be digesting the words as if they were of profound import.

"Encroachment—that's a good word, a good word for what Mary feels."

"Don't mind my ignorant cracks, Jim. I was just trying to be funny. They told me you weren't here earlier. Is it Mary?"

Carlson nodded as he slumped onto a lab stool. "I took her over to Jordan's sanitarium this morning. I couldn't keep her home any longer. She sits huddled in fear all day and cries all night. It's getting worse, this sense of time's slipping away from her. I've never heard of anything like it before. I think Jordan is even puzzled by it, though he won't show it, of course."

"Jordan's pretty much tops in psychiatry, isn't he? Don't you think he can be trusted with her?"

"There's no one better qualified. Just the same, it's hard to look at this with any degree of objectivity. I think I know almost everything that happened to Mary before she met me. She was anxious to tell me all about her childhood and girlhood, but I can't think of a clue in anything she's ever said that would help explain these delusions."

"No organic cause?"

"Nothing the medicos have been able to find. It seems purely functional."

"There has to be a cause—and a cure. Jordan will find it."

"Time—" said Carlson, after a while, his eyes far away. "What is it, Forest? You've been working with it for months now. I've been trying to find out its relationship to the human mind ever since Mary became sick. It's one of the few common denominators of all things in the universe, animate or inanimate. But what is the stuff? Is it only a name, a sensation, a T in our physical equations?"

GARDNER leaned back against his bench and flipped a switch that cut the current from the panel with which he had been working.

"I think your question is quite meaningless. There is nothing that time *is*. As soon as you ask the question: 'What is time?' you are making the common semantic mistake of identity. Time is not identical with anything else in our experience. It cannot be defined in terms of other words. It is at perhaps the lowest level of abstraction next to what Korzybski calls the unspeakable level. When the name-sound, 'time', strikes our senses it arouses its own unique response in my brain and in yours, but I can never communicate to you what that response is and vice versa."

"Time is commonly defined as the interval between two events."

"Which is nothing but a meaningless mouthful of words," Gardner said. "Try to define 'interval', 'event', and so on to make it otherwise."

"But a mathematical definition, perhaps—"

"Not so far, at any rate. Time is represented by a T in our equations. We know it operates in physical processes and we get meaningful results from its representation. But that still does not define time in any valid terms above the unspeakable level."

Carlson nodded slowly. "Then what about a clock? Can you build me a clock that can measure time? If I had such an instrument perhaps I could really check what is going on inside Mary's mind."

"Clock? There's a score of them." Gardner waved a hand to a shelf above Carlson's head. "Since I started this research I've been making a collection. There's a sand glass a thousand years old, a water clock twice that age. I have a Swiss watch mounted inside a ten cent piece. I have—"

"I said a *clock*—an instrument for measuring time."

Gardner's face sobered as he caught Carlson's meaning. "No—such an instrument does not exist and no one

knows how to build one. You might as well ask to catch a neutrino and put a caliper on its tail. These things"—he waved toward the shelf of clocks again—"merely establish a certain parallelism between events and make possible an identification of simultaneity within crude limits of error. That is all the 'measure' of time that science has ever achieved."

"But I need a clock," Carlson persisted. "With a true clock I could know for sure if Mary were deluded or if something physical is affecting her."

"Don't start chasing phantoms yourself," said Gardner kindly. "Tell me to stay in my own bailiwick if you like, but from where I stand I can see that you can't accept the possibility of Mary's functional illness without thrashing around for some outside explanation."

"From what little I know of psychiatry this sort of thing happens all the time. Each case is unique in detail, but there are patterns of similarity that run through them. Jordan will find the one that fits. There's no use of your wearing yourself down chasing fantasies. You've got a good research program—to discover the precision and nature of the time sense of the human mind. You can do a nice piece of work if you carry it through, but don't get lost in a hopeless maze of trying to find out what time 'is', and measuring it. Quite likely it has no perceptible existence in the sense you are trying to treat it."

"It hasn't?" Carlson exploded. "Then will you please tell me what the devil you are fooling around for trying to build a time travel machine?"

Gardner's face took on a pained expression. "For the love of Pete, don't you go calling this a time machine, too. All I'm trying to do is the same thing you are, only from a different angle. I'm investigating the properties of time—I hope. So far I have succeeded in establishing a discontinuity between a previously set simultaneity of events. I *think* it means I've altered the time relationship between them—set one of them a fraction of a second ahead of the other in time, if you will. But I haven't built

a time machine in the H. G. Wells tradition and I hope I never do!"

"Let me see what it does." There was an avid, almost greedy look in Carlson's desperate eyes as he glanced over the panels.

"It won't help Mary in any way," said Gardner pleadingly. "Don't look for something that isn't here."

"I just want to see it work."

Almost reluctantly, Gardner turned to his panel and switched on the power again. He waited through a warm-up period until the score of needles swung over like precision dancers. Gardner indicated two boxlike mesh structures nearby, which were filled with a conglomerate maze of breadboard layout.

"In those meshes I can set up what I call a temporal field. The equations are not much different from the classic Maxwell equations but I discovered that they could be altered to include a T factor. At first I didn't know what it meant any more than Maxwell knew he had written the equations for radio transmission, but I worked out a method of generating the field represented by the equations containing the T factor."

"And the T, then, is time added to an ordinary field?"

"There is nothing that the T is," Gardner emphasized. "The T is only a symbol in a mathematical framework. I have created a field which is structurally similar to that mathematical framework. The distinction is important to any thinking regarding the matter."

"Then you don't know if your field involves time or not?"

"It behaves as if it did."

"How?"

"Inside the meshes I have placed various kinds of clocks, all the way from sand glasses to precision crystal oscillators. Comparisons between no-field conditions and field-on show an alteration in the rate of event sequences." He flipped a pair of switches and adjusted a series of dial controls. Carlson glanced toward the meshes. They seemed to shimmer like a hot pavement on a summer day.

On the face of a cathode ray tube two pips appeared against a scale.

"Six microseconds," said Gardner. "The field in the right mesh is six microseconds ahead of that in the left one. We are in the middle. That is, one is three in our future; the other, three in our past."

Moving the dials spread the pips. "Fifty microseconds. That's the limit of what I've been able to accomplish so far."

"But just what do you do? Do you change the rate of time flow inside the meshes or do you just shift the boxes with respect to their positions in time?"

Gardner smiled wryly. "If you can define those terms perhaps I can answer you. My equations contain no such terms."

Carlson swore in exasperation. "All right then, but how can a dub who knows nothing but psychology get hold of this stuff?"

For answer, Gardner opened a loose leaf notebook filled with a couple of hundred sheets of closely packed equations and computations.

"The structure of those formulae parallels the structure within these fields. For the present that is absolutely all that I can say about what I am doing."

Carlson stared at the scrawls uncomprehendingly. It was a language forever beyond his grasp.

"I'll make my own language, then," he said. "I've got to get hold of this—and I'll find the clock I need, too!"

CHAPTER II

Quest for a Clock

TAKE that light down on 43rd and Chambers," said Mr. McCarthy. "Why I could bring my cab up to a stop as it turned red and sit there with my eyes closed, and then I could start up without ever looking at the light—and I'd never jump the green, either. Always right on the button."

"But that was before they changed the time on the lights, you said."

"That's right, Doc. I can't seem to do it no more. Every time we get a new bunch down in City Hall they tinker with everything from traffic lights to garbage collection. You'd think they could do something useful to earn their money. Well, what was it you wanted me to do here?"

Mr. McCarthy looked uncertainly around the relatively bare room. He didn't see anything that fitted his conception of a place to conduct scientific research. No blistering streaks of static electricity playing over odd-shaped glassware—like in the movies.

"I'm conducting a little research into the ability of people to measure time intervals with their minds," said Carlson.

"Like me knowing when the traffic lights are going to change?"

"That's it exactly. I have a clock here which I can set to give a signal by means of a bell or a light. I will set it for a given time interval. The bell will ring once at the start and again at the end of that interval. In the first part of the test I want you to try to estimate the length of the interval. In the second part I want you to duplicate it as closely as you can by pressing this button in front of you—without naming the time in minutes or seconds. Do you follow me?"

"Sure, Doc. Just like driving a cab down Main."

Carlson pressed a button and a gentle silver chime sounded in the room. Mr. McCarthy sat across the table with his hands folded over his slightly paunchy middle, his eyes forward as if waiting for the red to change to green.

The second chime sounded. "Thirteen seconds," said Mr. McCarthy. "That anywhere near right, Doc?"

"Sixteen. Duplicate this interval."

The chimes sounded twice again. McCarthy listened carefully and then pressed the button in front of him twice.

Carlson looked up with faint astonishment on his face.

"Pretty good, eh, Doc? I can do it

better that way. It's like watching the lights and letting out the clutch at just the right time."

"You were only a quarter of a second off in a twenty second interval. We'll keep going."

He spent longer with McCarthy than with most subjects. Ordinarily, those whose time sense was good in the short intervals became rapidly erratic as the time was increased, but McCarthy was fantastically accurate up to thirty minute intervals which he could duplicate within forty seconds. His naming of intervals, however, was consistently short. Not once did he overestimate.

After McCarthy there was Sunny Dixon, a little six-year-old Negro boy who was a virtuoso of boogie-woogie and commanded a monthly income as great as Carlson's yearly contract.

Sunny thought the whole thing was fun. Like McCarthy, he excelled in duplicating intervals, and was consistently short in naming them.

Four of Carlson's graduate students were assisting in the project, running tests in adjoining labs and rounding up subjects.

Hour by hour, and day by day, the tests amassed data to be graded and weighed and formed into statistical tables and graphs. Steadily, it was beginning to point in a definite direction, a direction that sharpened his pursuit with excitement and expectation, though he was too thorough a scientist to make anything but a cautious advance.

MARY grew steadily worse. Carlson knew that Jorden was at the end of his resources. He had finally resorted to shock treatments with both insulin and electricity, and admitted failure with both so that Carlson forbade their further use. It was necessary to drug Mary to insure her any rest at all. The persistent delusion of time's escape pressed down on her mind like a never-ending nightmare.

Her illness had begun in late fall. By graduation time at the end of the school year, Carlson knew that he'd have to ask for leave during the next

term unless Mary were well. His nervousness and erratic irritability were becoming apparent before his classes to such a degree that he couldn't continue. He planned to carry on his research during the summer to consolidate his hypothesis, but he felt sure of his ground now. Already the data were incontestable.

It was just after graduation that Jorden called him to the sanitarium. Carlson viewed Mary in her drugged and troubled stupor before entering the psychiatrist's office, but she was totally unconscious of his presence.

"I wish there was something I could promise you," said Jorden gently. "But I must admit that all my resources are gone—except one."

Carlson looked up. "There is one hope yet?"

Jorden nodded. "It's new, and it's dangerous. It's similar to lobotomy, but affecting the deeper, more centrally located centers of the brain. I'll show you exactly on the chart in a moment. Masterson, in London, has performed about seventy of the operations. Fifty percent were cured of delusions which I consider similar to those of Mary. The other fifty percent varied from no change to definite setbacks. Masterson is coming to this country next month. I think I could persuade him to operate on Mary if he thinks it would help. Would you want to consider it?"

"Is there no hope at all of reaching her psychoanalytically? Sodium penthal?"

"We've tried everything. She recedes farther and farther all the time. I can offer no hope at all from that viewpoint. Masterson's operation is the last resort, and one which I certainly wouldn't recommend if there were any alternative."

Carlson shook his head. "I can't permit it. We know too little of the human brain. Surgeons of today slashing at brain tissue are little better than the barbers of the middle ages who hacked at legs and arms. Consider the aspects of mind that I am studying, the time sense. I have definite evidence that there

exists a positive function of the brain that responds to time as the eyes do to light. Where it lies, how it functions—are all mysteries, yet it is this sense which has gone defunct in Mary's mind. I don't believe it can be cured with a knife."

Jorden nodded sympathetically. "I wouldn't attempt to persuade you against your will. Most of what you say is true. I only know that Masterson's operation has worked in some instances. At least you can talk to him when he comes here."

"Thanks. I will."

But Carlson knew that he would never consent to the butchery of Mary's brain in a new and uncertain technique. Probably the operation simply removed the time sense centers completely—and no telling what else. He had never approved of lobotomy or any other of the brain-severing operations which removed large masses of tissue permanently from the reach of the patient's mind.

He drove slowly back toward the campus. His problem was still to positively determine whether Mary's illness was organic or functional. If he could be certain that it came from some influence outside her, an actual time distortion—

If he could only develop a clock that would measure absolute time—

A clock!

He slammed on the brakes to keep from absently running a red light. A clock—why he had a clock, had had it all the time!

Reaching the campus, he hurried into the physics building and sought Gardner's lab. The usually placid physicist was ruffled and excited.

"Want to visit your tree climbing ancestors?" Gardner asked.

"You've got time travel!"

GARDNER laughed and brushed a hand nervously through his thick, black hair.

"Not so I could back up my offer to send you back to your ancestors very far, but I believe I've actually succeeded in moving an object freely back and

forth in time—to put it crudely. What I do—I think—is accelerate or decelerate the flow of time through the object. And, incidentally, I've found meaning in the term, 'flow of time.' The fact that time has already passed at a certain rate has no significance. Past, present, and future are terms without meaning when dealing with time itself. Decelerating the time flow has the effect of throwing an object into the past with respect to us."

"It makes absolutely no sense at all in English, so I suppose it is correctly explicable only in mathematical terms?"

"Right. And I'm not even sure I understand my own math. But that's as near as I can figure out what's happening."

"Why aren't you absolutely sure?"

"Because I need that clock you talked about. One that will measure absolute time." He glanced toward the shelf that held his collection of time pieces. "Funny, isn't it? Our science and all our civilization are so dependent upon what we call measurement of time. Yet actually we have never succeeded in measuring it."

"I can supply that clock," said Carlson quietly.

"You what—!"

"Yes. It's been available for a long time, only we didn't recognize it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Mary."

"Mary! You're crazy."

"Look. There is not a thing wrong with her organically or functionally that medical science can detect. Therefore, why not act on the hypothesis that what is stimulating her time senses with such distortions is real?"

"My research has shown the positive existence of such a time sense in the human brain. It is as definite as sight. In most of us it is rudimentary. In others, like Mary, it is highly developed. In fact, I would say that in Mary's case it is so highly developed as to constitute perhaps a mutation, though that is not a necessary part of my hypothesis. You and I lack such advanced development of this sense, but Mary's faculty

responds to a distortion of time as the eye would to irradiation with ultra-violet."

"If that's true, why don't we all have it? Just as we all have eyes?"

"Why aren't we all musicians—or chemists—or nuclear physicists? Aptitudes and attributes of the human brain vary widely, and so do the sensitivities of our sense organs. You'd never realize how widely they vary unless you'd made a broad study of psychology. Consider Sunny Dixon. Hopelessly illiterate and with an IQ of something below 80, he has a development of time and pitch sense that enables him to earn a good many times as much money as you or I—who would be inclined to call ourselves somewhat more useful citizens than Sunny.

"Mary's musical failure would bear out my reasoning. A distortion of time's significance to her senses would make it impossible for her to play as before. And that's exactly the way it sounded—as if her sense of timing had been thrown out of kilter. Her pitch remained perfect; only the timing was gone."

"You might be right," said Gardner slowly. "You might just be right. But what would it mean if it's true—this sense of time's slipping away? Is time really running out?"

"Remember what Sir James Jeans said in one of his speculations?"

"He made so many that nobody could remember them all."

"Granted he did stick his scientific neck out pretty far, he was a first class physicist and astronomer. He suggested once that time itself might be as much an element of creation as matter. That creation had taken place in some realm outside time as we know it.

"We consider that the sum of matter and energy in the universe is constant, but they are constantly interchanging from one form to the other. Perhaps, likewise, time is capable of 'running out' and is swinging into some alternate form so that it is shortening from our viewpoint."

"Expendable . . . Then speaking of

the 'end of time' would have a meaning, after all."

"Conceivably."

Gardner shook his head as if to clear a nightmare. "No—it's impossible. But—I wonder how we can find out?"

"Mary. Put her in the time field. Alter its rate so that it will seem normal to her. I'll bet her delusions will vanish and she'll be well again—as long as she's in the field."

"I—I'm not ready for that, Jim. I don't know what it would do to a human being. I've not even tried it on myself yet."

"Jordan wants to cut out part of her brain. Your device is a lesser gamble than that. I'll give you a clear release of all responsibility in case anything happens. I'll accompany Mary into the field. I'll state that it was part of our joint research and so on. Please, Forest, maybe it's just a kind of crazy hunch, but I think this will do it—and there's nothing else left to try. I'm not going to let them slice up Mary's brain."

"All right," said Gardner, at last. "I'll rig up a chamber large enough to accommodate you. I hope it works—for Mary's sake. But if it does, what does it mean for the rest of us?"

CHAPTER III

Hold Back Time

WITH the help of his staff, Gardner rigged up an eight foot cubic mesh in one corner of the laboratory during the next four days. He spent a solid sixteen hour period testing and retesting to make certain the field was operating according to his equations and to discover as many of its properties as he could. At last he called Carlson when he was ready for the experiment.

Carlson had been wondering how to get Mary away from Jordan's long enough to make the test. He didn't want the psychiatrist to know about Gardner's work.

He called the sanitarium. "Jordan, I'd like to see if bringing Mary back to her old surroundings here at home would relieve her stress. Perhaps I could talk to her again. I have no teaching duties and could give her full attention."

"I wouldn't advise it at all, Jim," said the psychiatrist.

"But Mary has exhibited no violent symptoms. She's not likely to harm herself or anyone else."

"No—but I feel it would be hopeless and only cause greater difficulty later on."

"I'd like to try, nevertheless. Just a two or three day period as a test."

"If you insist I'll give permission. No more than three days without supervision, however. I'll not be responsible, otherwise."

"All right. Take her off the sedatives so that I can talk to her when I come. Will this afternoon be all right?"

Carlson's inner sickness renewed itself when he saw her. For weeks she had been in a drugged stupor. Now, as he entered the room, he saw her huddled in terror in a corner. For a wild moment her eyes seemed not to recognize him as she looked up. Then she leaped toward him with a whimpering cry and threw her arms about him in a grip of desperation and fear.

"I thought you'd died, Jim! This slow dying—I can't stand it. I wish it were over—"

Her sobs were not like any crying he had heard before. It was the cry of a soul utterly without hope.

Jorden looked at him soberly. "I wouldn't advise it."

For a moment Carlson was ready to agree, to abandon his fantastic hope of healing Mary's mind with a shift in time. It seemed so vain. . . .

He said, "Mary—Mary, I want you to come home with me for a few days. We'll spend all our time together, and you'll play for me—"

At the word, "time," Mary uttered a hysterical shriek. "Time! All our time—what time have we? It's draining away. It's—oh, Jim, I'm so scared—"

He put his arm around her and drew her gently toward the door. "There'll be time. You'll see."

She buried her face in her hands during the drive toward the campus. She looked up only as Carlson braked behind the physics building.

"This is not home. What are we doing here?"

"I want you to see a machine that Forest Gardner has built. He says it will keep time from slipping away. I want you to tell us if it does."

Her eyes seemed blank and devoid of understanding, but she followed him, her hands trembling with the insidious fear that was in her.

Gardner was alone in the laboratory when they entered. He turned, the shock of Mary's appearance registering in his eyes. It was only then that Carlson realized how wasted and sick was her appearance. Dark shadows and twisted lines marked her face. She was much thinner than when Gardner had last seen her.

"Hello, Mary," he said. "I'm glad you came."

She bit her lips to hold back hysteria, and made no answer.

Carlson led her at once to the mesh enclosed chamber across the room.

"I'll retard the flow of time in the degree registered on this small dial." Gardner pointed to an indicator on the wall. "When and if I reach the right rate of slowing you set this knob below it to the corresponding reading. That way I'll know where to leave it. That's the only scheme of communication I could figure out since there'll be a time delay through the mesh."

"O.K. I'll watch it."

"And—I hope everything goes all right. If you want it shut off for any reason, waggle the dial back and forth until I cut off."

He reached out and pressed Carlson's hand. "Good luck."

Carlson hesitated, looked about the laboratory, fighting down the taunting doubts and fears of the unknown. He smiled thinly.

"Yes. Good luck—to us all."

THE laboratory, as seen through the mesh, seemed to dissolve in a kind of gray fog. It brought a momentary vertigo.

He held Mary close to him and shielded her eyes from the sight.

A thousand flooding thoughts poured through his consciousness now, and each repeated the question, was he a fool for attempting this? His reason said that time was not a road to be traveled upon, nor a vehicle to be accelerated or slowed at will. If psychiatry couldn't cure Mary, then there was no hope. There could be no reality to the delusions that beset her.

As proof of his fears, she remained huddled and clinging against him, the incessant trembling racking her body.

It seemed now that the milky fog had dispersed somewhat and he could see out into the lab as if through a wet lens that caused the image to twist and flow.

But from what he could see there was someone with Gardner. Two people. Carlson stared and blinked at the flowing scene. The two were himself and Mary!

It was working!

Time had actually slowed for them, and had effectively thrown them into the past, as Carlson had predicted. That much of it was true. Why not the rest?

He held Mary away and turned her face up to his. He watched her eyes. There was bewilderment and fear—but was there hope, a sense of growing peace and release?

"Jim—" her voice trembled querulously. "Jim—it's stopping. I can feel it. What has Forest done? He's changed time."

"Tell me when it's just right," said Carlson quickly. "When it seems just as it should be."

He moved toward the dial on the wall. Mary looked up and away as if she were seeing some new vision long concealed from her, as if breathing fresh, sunlit air after a long night.

"This is the way it should be. I'm alive again. I've stopped dying—"

He twisted the knob to duplicate the

setting on the dial.

Outside, the images of himself and Mary had disappeared and Gardner was alone at the controls.

Mary turned toward Carlson now as if seeing him for the first time. And then she broke into tears again against his shoulder, but it was a cry of joy and relief this time. Within him, Carlson felt such peace as he'd thought he'd never know again.

But after a moment the doubting fears crept back.

"What has Forest done?" said Mary. "Will it be the same as before when we go outside again? I can't stand that any more—you can't understand what it's like—" Remembered terror showed in her eyes.

"It will be the same, I'm afraid. But now that we know what will cure you, maybe Forest can figure out how to make it permanent. We can arrange to stay until he does, perhaps. I'll signal him now to let me out. You stay while I talk to him. There'll be a moment's return to the old sensations, but don't let it get you now that you know what it is."

Mary looked about fearfully, doubtfully, as if the darkness of night were closing in again. "All right. But don't leave me long—not now at first, anyway."

"I'll be back soon." He twisted the dial back and forth. Almost instantly, Mary's face held a look as if she'd seen a forgotten spectre.

Carlson kissed her swiftly. "I'll get it turned back on. Don't be afraid."

He leaped out through the opening in the mesh.

"Turn it on again, Forest! Same setting. It works."

Gardner flipped the switches and reset his dials. Through the mistiness they could see Mary. She was smiling at them.

"Tell me what happened," said Gardner. "Was Mary all right?"

"Completely. We were absolutely right about the acceleration of time and her sensitiveness to it." His enthusiasm dimmed suddenly. "Now—what can

we do about it? She can't live within the field for the rest of her life."

"No. At her present rate, and considering the acceleration of that rate, she would probably outlive us three or four times over if she did stay in there.

"Apart from her tragic situation, however, the significance of this is bewildering. Exactly what does it mean? Will all of us react eventually as Mary has done? From the data I get now there is not only an acceleration of time, but an additional derivative, showing the acceleration is on the increase. That can reach a vanishing point of infinite time at which all eternity is crowded into a single instant."

"Beyond that, what?"

"Jeans was right and this element of time which he postulated is not only creatable but expendable."

AN expression of incredulity came over Carlson's face. "There must be something wrong! This is the end of the universe that we're talking about! If there's no mistake in our hypothesis how long will it take to reach this point of infinite time rate?"

Gardner shook his head. "It would take an unknown amount of work on the math department's new calculator to compute that—even assuming I can work out the correct formulae."

"But you can do it?"

"I think so—with Mary's help as a clock. You were certainly right in that respect. The human brain is the only true clock this world has ever seen. Evidently it is an absolute sense like sight and not merely an acquired training. It gets out of kilter when the time rate is not right, just as the eye does when the frequency is wrong."

"But Mary—she can't live in there—" Gardner interrupted him sharply.

"She'll have to. Get some furnishings. Make an apartment out of the box. You and she can live there while we work this thing out and find either a solution—or prove the world is about to go out in a flash."

"What chance is there of finding a solution?" asked Carlson despairingly.

CHAPTER IV

Finger in the Dyke

THE joy of Mary's release from the time distortions gradually began to melt into the despair of imprisonment for Carlson. Mary, however, seemed oblivious to the confinement of the narrow-walled mesh room in her relief from the strain she'd been under. She occupied her time with music and poured out her gladness with the voice of her violin.

Carlson was torn between his feeling that it was his duty to remain constantly with her, and his desire to lend his inept help in the laboratory. Altogether, he felt quite helpless and useless.

He wandered back and forth between the room within the time field and the laboratory so often that Gardner was forced to rig controls that could be operated by Carlson to let himself in and out. But the shock to Mary each time was so great that he desisted and determined to stay in one place. His determination lasted as much as a day at times.

Gardner, for his part, plunged at once into the vast mathematical unknown of the time equations. He tried to find the point of infinite time flow in absolute terms, and reached the incredible figure of sixteen years and some weeks.

The result seemed to leave a vast blankness in his mind. The equations showed the impossibility of the existence of the universe at that point without indicating *what* would exist or what would become of the vast matter-energy combine that now formed man's universe.

There seemed no more to be done except to wait.

Indications were that the waiting would not be without breakdown. On a Sunday afternoon the three of them sat in the time room listening to a symphony broadcast on the radio that Gard-

ner had modified to work through the field. They tried to wash their minds free of their devastating knowledge with the clean flow of the music.

But something insidious seemed to penetrate even that stimulus. Mary sat straight in her chair, listening critically.

"Something's wrong," she said.

Carlson nodded. "That's about the poorest rendition that Sokolsky has ever given. His orchestra seems completely out of his control."

Suddenly, over the speaker, came a wild, accusing scream of rage.

"Idiots, fools—can you not play a single note the way it is written? You—"

Instantly, the sound was slashed. The placid voice of the announcer said, "Due to sudden circumstances beyond the control of this network we are unable to continue the symphony broadcast this afternoon from—"

Mary switched it off, her face blanched. "It's got Sokolsky. I know how he feels. It was like that when I had to give up my music. The timing seemed to go beyond control. Musicians would naturally be the first."

Gardner nodded swiftly to Carlson. "I'll bet you'll find your little friend, Sunny Dixon, has cracked. I remember reading last week that his illness had caused a concert to be postponed. I'll bet this is the 'illness.'"

"There'll be others, too. Athletes, transportation operators—anyone who works on close time schedules and who also has a well developed time sense. There'll be chaos before a decade is up. Civilization may break up completely."

"Do we have to just wait for it?" Carlson demanded angrily. "Mary and I can't live here indefinitely. There must be something we can do. Let's publish our results to other top physicists, get all the brains possible to work on it."

"And just what could all those brains do? Stop the flow of time?"

"Why not? You can do it inside this mesh."

"We can't build a mesh around all the known universe."

"Then maybe we could find the hole

and plug it," said Carlson with a bitter laugh. "Like the boy who saved Holland with his finger in a hole in the dyke."

"Plug the hole—" mused Gardner. "Sometimes I think your ignorance is inspired, Jim. Plug the hole. . . . If we could actually retard the flow here on Earth it would apply equally to the range of Sirius or the farthest stars. In time alone there is no element of space. It doesn't accomplish that inside the mesh because the field is closed there. If the curl of the field were reduced to zero and the divergence made to assume a certain critical value—"

As if Mary and Carlson weren't even present, Gardner suddenly left them.

"He'll work it out," breathed Mary. "I know he will."

IN THE days that followed, Mary became of greatly more use than Carlson. Gardner began making alterations in his field generator, each alteration being followed by seemingly interminable testing with Mary's aid in calibration and absolute measurement of time intervals.

Most of the work required her outside the mesh, to be bathed in varying time flows, that Gardner might collect his data. Carlson stifled his protests because he knew the importance of it, though both men understood the torture it meant for her. Somehow, an understanding on her part seemed to make it easier for Mary to endure. Because she knew its meaning, there was not the same sense of loss that had devastated her equilibrium in the beginning.

They worked and ate and worked again, snatching fragments of hours for rest. Gardner sent out enormous quantities of the work to adjacent labs where his graduate students were working. But they had no conception of the significance of their work. Gardner never allowed them in his own lab any more.

He began to spend more and more time in the math lab where a vast new calculator had recently been acquired by the college. As his equations began to take shape, he filled them out with reams of calculation.

Then, slowly, he began to fashion an entirely new generator that nearly filled his own laboratory, scarcely leaving them room to move about. He was at this time being financed by a private grant of funds. Swiftly, that ran out. He appealed for more and was put off until the next year. Unhesitatingly, he poured all his own funds into the equipment and called upon Carlson to do likewise. The more expensive mechanical design and fabrication he begged from the mechanical engineering department.

Carlson and Mary had dropped out of the world as far as their friends knew. Carlson wrote Jordan and sent it through a confidential friend in London that he'd taken Mary for a long vacation and that she was getting well.

By Christmas of that year, Gardner thought he was ready for a try.

They celebrated their hoped-for success with a Christmas Eve party. Gardner had become a master in smuggling in the quantities of food they needed in the packing boxes that housed equipment originally.

In spite of attempted gaiety, it was a solemn party they had inside the eight-foot cube that had been Mary's home for half a year. Through the misty curtain they could see the machine they had created.

It was not a pretty sight even without the mist. There was precision where precision mattered. But where it was unimportant there was no attempt at refinement. Streaming cables, hastily tagged where necessary, lay over the mass of panels and shapes.

The broad framework reached to the top of the twelve foot ceiling. Panels bearing electronic units were bolted on in an inefficient array because no prior planning could have arranged for the unexpected requirements of the generator as it took shape.

The whole thing looked more like a heap of junk than a precision machine on which Gardner had poured his genius. Gardner looked out at it and filled his wine glass.

"To the Cork—may it plug the hole!"

He looked down at the red liquid in the glass, then set it back, untouched.

"Going to need all the brain power I can muster tonight. Better not whittle it down any more."

He pushed back the plate on the kitchenette table. "Let's go. Tempus fidgets—in more ways than one. Are you ready, Mary?"

"Yes."

She steeled herself against the now familiar shock as Gardner switched off the field which surrounded them. They went out through the door in the mesh and stood before the mass of the generator. Silently, Gardner handed Mary the heavy headband with the thick cord that connected it to the panels. Through its use, he was able to use Mary's time sense directly without oral questions and response passing between them. It made her an integral part of the complex machine, the calibrator, the clock without which it could not function.

He motioned Carlson back and sat beside Mary, placing his own headband about his skull.

THERE was the faint chatter of a loose transformer core as he turned the main power switch. All the bugs were not out yet. He wondered if that were an omen of failure lying ahead. Panel by panel, he energized the circuits, scrutinizing the meters, checking their readings with scrawled calibrations on the aluminum panels.

Then he turned the power into the field dispenser, an antennalike device that circled the ceiling above like a giant string of beads.

The room seemed to sway and waver and grow dark to their senses. Mary gave a frightened little cry.

"What—?" Carlson began.

"Sit down!" Gardner ordered. "Don't be alarmed by any weird physiological or psychological manifestations. I don't know what to expect. We're being carried towards the time center now where time is being dispensed from our continuum. Your analogy of a hole was even more correct than I had supposed. We're being carried directly into the

vortex that we may call a hole. If our field is strong enough we may be able to break up the flow and reshape it to the equations of our own continuum again. How does it feel, Mary? Are you sick?"

"No—keep going. I'm all right." Her voice came dry and flat as if she were a mere electronic voice of the machine.

Through his own headpiece, Gardner could sense the turmoil in her mind and the pressure on it. It was excruciating even to him.

From where he sat, Carlson could glimpse the pips of rising and falling green blades on the four cathode screens in front of Gardner.

They all seemed caught in a never ending swirl of darkness where unknown forces writhed through their beings, distorting their senses. Gardner's hands moved automatically over the controls, following the equations of the stream through the integrator built into the machine. He set the forces of the field to counteract the outward divergence of the flow. With a swift, decisive motion he closed the switch that sent the power into the field and angling across the gradient of time.

Without warning, an answering surge of energy bolted out of time, crashing through the machine. The indicators danced crazily. A flashing white aura bubbled out of the generator, and Mary cried out at the pain of writhing time hands.

Gardner fought back the near unconsciousness that the assault on his own undeveloped time sense brought. He struggled to comprehend the meaning of that burst. Before his senses recovered fully from the shock a new note flowed through time and sought them out.

And it spoke to their minds.
Enough. Do not pass.

CHAPTER V

Time out of Mind

THE three of them caught it simultaneously. The same sickening realization poured through them, draining hope and filling its place with despair. The realization that the distortion of time had not been an accident of nature, and was not a consequence inherent in time's creation. It had been deliberately caused by intelligence bent on plundering man's continuum of its time element.

They sat immobilized by this devastating knowledge. To fight an accident of nature in the unknown reaches of time was one thing. To fight an intelligence that had already mastered that unknown and turned it upon them was another.

And Gardner knew that it must be fought. His fingers pressed upon the dials to strengthen the forces bending back the stream from its outflowing into that other plenum.

"Wait!" The command came again.

It was Mary who answered, "Why are you destroying us by this encroachment upon our time?"

The dark mist in which they lay gave way to a new, glowing aura in which form took shape. They knew that it was no form that they would ever remember, but for now it served to identify the life with which they dealt.

"I can hardly make your minds comprehend," it said. And then there came a long stream of thought which made no sense. At last it broke into understandable waves again.

"Time is not expendable, but it is dispensable. An accident of creation destroyed the effective infinity of time in our plenum. Our element of time has all but vanished. We searched a thousand dimensions and have borrowed eons before we found this horde of yours. You have enough to spare. You can share with us. Had you not found

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us out, you would never have known."

"We found out because of the destroying effect which your plunder had upon our people. And at the rate you are accelerating, it would have left us only sixteen years until extinction."

"Sixteen of your *former* years," said the alien. "But even in that time your race and your universe would have lived out its destiny."

"As imbeciles!"

"We moved too rapidly at first because of our desperation. We are even now preparing to lessen that rate. Your people will not know of our contact. One microsecond out of every minute—that will be sufficient. No time sense of your people will ever detect that amount."

"No!" Gardner made an adjustment, turning up the power that was slowly drawing back the folds of time, retreating from this alien continuum that lay outside creation.

"Wait! Look upon my people," the voice commanded.

Suddenly there appeared before their mind's understanding an innumerable host of life. But it was such life as they had never conceived. *Benevolent life*. *Progressive life*. They sensed the vast eons of time which had been dispensed in its development. Older than any age that man might hope to attain if he had a dozen solar systems to wear out.

Beside that life they sensed that man was an inconsequential bacterium, like a disease stopping the progress of that greater life whose existence was so much more purposeful.

Gardner fought down the suicidal despair that called him to sacrifice his kind, to retreat before that superior intelligence.

He wondered why they had been permitted to come this far, why the invaders did not simply destroy them and be done with it.

Perhaps it was their benevolence, but then he sensed another more tenable reason. His own plenum was elusive. Despite their great power and unbelievable intelligence, the aliens had made contact and were maintaining it only with great difficulty. Once broken,

there would be no other chance in eons that they would be able to renew it. By then their time would run out.

He had power to break that contact. He held the advantage, not of superior powers, but of position which placed the aliens wholly within his power.

He increased his forces, upsetting further the delicate balance held by them.

"You would destroy us." The voice made calm statement of the thought. But it came as an indictment that chilled the soul of Gardner and the others. He alone would be responsible for the destruction of this race that had existed for eons before the solar system was even a nebulous mass. Was their existence so trivial even to him who had not known until this moment that they lived?

ONE microsecond, the intelligence had said. But could they be trusted? With the rational fraction of his mind, Gardner knew that they could, but doubts and suspicions rose to clog those paths of reason. He could not bargain with the future of his people. He had no right. His hand moved the power setting higher.

There was no response, but he could sense the despair of the watching creatures. It was not only the one that spoke, but the entire mass of inhabitants of that unknown sphere that watched, accusing, silently and irrevocably. Endless millions of god-like beings, an unfathomable number of them.

He turned, his voice a low cry of despair. "Mary, we can't. We haven't the right—"

Her voice showed her torture. "I don't know. Isn't there *something* we can do to help them? Can't we save ourselves without cutting them off? I know we should trust them, but we can't. We're too untrustworthy ourselves to believe they would not take advantage of us. We could never be sure they would not plunder our time utterly. And our race deserves its chance. They've had theirs. Perhaps you'd better cut the contact. And do it quickly—"

before we haven't the strength of decision."

But Gardner's hands made no further move. What was it men said day in and day out? "Time to kill—" He let the careless phrase run through his mind. How many eons had man killed and thrown away unused except for mere living? Is the progress we've made excuse enough for the long ages we've wasted? Two billion years to build the earth, a million to perfect the dinosaur and reject him—

Suddenly, he sat erect. The unused eons! Would we spare a year from the life of a dinosaur? Time is not expendable, only dispensable. We could dispense to them the ages of the past—it would make no difference to them—or to us.

Or would it? His excitement wavered. Even that might give them a hold by which they could destroy—he did not know. He could not be certain without long days at the computers. And there was no time for that. The decision had to be now.

He made it.

"Can you follow the stream into the past?" he inquired.

"No. As you see, our contact is tenuous and only fortuitous. Once broken, we have no hope of renewing."

"You can pass back without losing contact. Do you understand my field?"

"Yes."

He made a calculation with the integrator. "Follow these coordinates. You know my equations. I will not cut contact until you have passed back one billion years. Signal me. I do this on condition of your promise not to destroy us. Whether this puts it in your power

to do so I do not know. I will accept your promise."

"Given!"

Abruptly, the vast presence vanished. The horde of beseeching super-beings were gone. Only the deepening mist of the embattled time field surrounded them.

A moment later, from out of the deepening abyss of time came a single, lucid call—a thanks—the gratitude of a race poured across the billion years of time that separated them.

Gardner increased the power of the field to its limit. He cut the contact with the alien plenum with surgical irrevocability.

Power off, the field surrounding them vanished. Only then did they realize the utter exhaustion that possessed them. Outside the windows was a glistening dawn. It had snowed. They had been in the field the entire night.

Mary took off the headset wearily, then glanced about as if listening for some unheard sound.

"It's gone," she whispered. Tears started in her eyes. "I can live outside the field again. Time is normal."

She ran to Carlson. "Darling, let's go home!"

Gardner watched them. He smiled. He thought of the hot, lifeless sphere that was the Earth a billion years ago. Doubts seeped through him. Had they done the right thing? Would the aliens keep their promise? Would the dinosaurs miss a few microseconds of time?

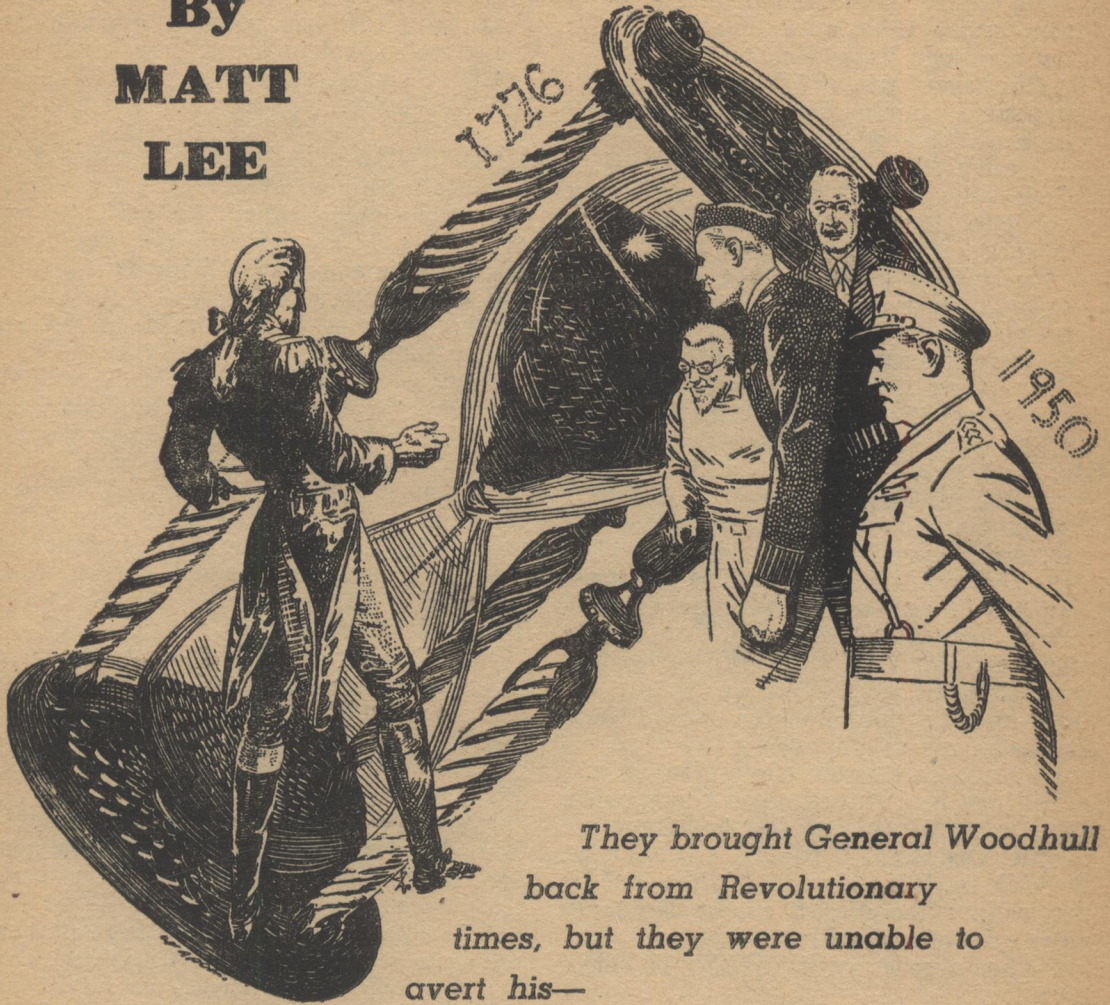
He felt no different. Mary seemed normal. There was no apparent change in their own lives as a result of what he had done. But would there be—ever?

Only time would tell, he thought.



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By
**MATT
LEE**



*They brought General Woodhull
back from Revolutionary
times, but they were unable to
avert his—*

Appointment in New Utrecht

MAJOR ELIOT WILLIAMS looked disgustedly at his cigarette and flicked it into the scrubby underbrush alongside of the jeep. The sweat, which made his lightweight khakis feel like a damp bathing suit, had dampened his smoke until the reassuring spark at the tip had sullenly extinguished itself. It was the seventh one that had behaved in this fashion.

He turned his head to glance at the lanky form of Captain Joe Billings, who had slung his long legs over the side of the little vehicle in an effort to achieve

comfort. With his absurdly young face clearly etched in the moonlight, Billings looked more than ever like a refugee from a college basketball team.

"Whenever we are," said Billings, "they sure went in for Long Island August heat. This is a scorcher."

"It ain't Alaska," Williams agreed.

The very banality of the exchange seemed to sharpen the eeriness of their situation. The call of some night bird in the middle distance, the damp discomfort, the unyielding hardness of the jeep seat provided only partial reassurance that it was not a dream.

Here they were together again four years after the end of their last wartime project. It was, Williams suspected, Dr. Platt who had insisted upon his own reactivation. He had worked closely with the eminent scientist up to and after V-J day, and it was Dr. Platt who had pulled the strings which had got him his post-war job of assistant professor of military history at New Haven. During the war against the Axis Williams had worked with Dr. Platt in Ordnance. Guns and the history which proved them had been his all-absorbing interests almost since he was old enough to walk.

Billings had stayed on in the service, attached, until this project had come up, to the Ordnance Proving Grounds at Bethlehem. His grin was highlighted by the sallow moonlight as he suddenly gave vent to a chuckle.

"What's so funny?" Williams asked him.

"I was just thinking," said Billings, "what would happen if we put this gas-burning cow-pony onto that wagon track they called a road and went roaring through one of these towns—Brookhaven or Mastic."

"They probably wouldn't believe it," said Williams. "Besides, we're here only to check, not to kick history around."

"It would be quite a charge just the same," Billings stated. His face grew serious. "Say, Eliot, did you ever stop to think that we almost certainly aren't the first to come back like this?"

"I've been trying not to think about it," said Williams somberly. There was pure terror, even madness, in following up that line.

"You know all those times you get the feeling that someone is watching you," Billings persisted. "Well, suppose it's someone like us—someone who has come

back and is studying us—someone we can't see. Jeepers, we don't even know that *they* can see us. We don't even know we're real to them."

"That's what we're here to find out," said Williams.

BILLINGS studied the illuminated dial of his wristwatch. "We haven't got much more time," he said. "Why don't we take a quick spin and see if we can't locate somebody? This is like the end of the world."

"Someone is bound to come along pretty soon," Williams told him.

"Better be quick about it," replied Billings. "If the gang hit it right and there is a battle going on, there sure isn't much sign of it around here."

"Even if they are right," Williams said patiently, "the battle is some fifty miles away. You've got to remember this isn't the Long Island we know. I doubt if it has twenty thousand people. That's scattering them pretty thin."

"Okay, so we wait it out and go back like good little boys," said Billings with a trace of mutiny in his tone. He sighed and shifted his position. "This reminds me of that long wait we had north of Florence, remember?"

"Are you kidding, Joe? I also remember what happened when that Nazi patrol finally came along. Brother, were they tough!"

"So what? We got that trick bazooka we were after. It's a good thing that one never worked. If it had, we might as well have built our tanks of cheese."

"Shut up!" snapped Williams, his head cocked on one side. "Hear it?"

"Yeah—a horse," said Billings a few silent seconds later.

It was a horse and it was coming along the road from Mastic at a fast trot. The two officers looked at each other and then, without a word, climbed out of the jeep and moved silently to the edge of the rutted road ten yards away. Williams waved toward the deep night shadow of a tree on the other side, and Billings trotted across to lose himself in its shade.

The horse was rapidly coming closer. Williams ran his tongue nervously over his lips, feeling a tie to reality in the sharp taste of sweat. He had to keep reminding himself that this wasn't a dream, that he and Joe Billings had really gone back in the past to seek con-

firmation of the date that would provide a control check for the fantastic machine which Dr. Platt and his aides had developed from their researches into atomic potentials for the space travel projects emanating secretly from the Brookhaven pile.

The clop-clop of hoofs grew sharper on the night air, and Williams tensed, automatically reaching for the handle of the Colt automatic at his right side. If things went well, there would be no need for violence but all the same . . .

Suddenly horse and rider appeared over the top of a rise in the road some fifty yards away. Prepared as he was, Williams had to restrain a start of astonishment. There was no mistaking the cocked hat atop the rider's bewigged head or the gleam of the moonlight on the gilt and brass of insignia of high rank. He and Billings had a big one all but in the bag.

Hitching his belt, Williams stepped into the road. Sparks flew as the night rider's horse checked frantically and reared in fright at the suddenness of his appearance. At least, Williams thought, the horse could see him.

"Pardon me, sir—" Williams began, then ducked instinctively as the darkness in front of him blossomed into bright light. The crack of the pistol was sharp and loud; the ball whined close to his ear.

"Hey! Cut it out!" he shouted, going for his own weapon.

But the rider was having no more. Pulling his horse high on its hind legs, he broke for the underbrush, close to where Billings lurked in concealment. The crack of crop on the animal's rump was almost as sharp as the pistol shot.

Then there was another flash of flame close by Billings' tree and a more familiar crack, telling that the captain had let go with his carbine. The horse gave a great convulsive leap, sending its rider flying through the air, then crashed to its death in the undergrowth.

"I couldn't let him kill you, Eliot," Billings said defensively as he emerged from his concealment. "I didn't mean to hit him. I was only trying to head him off."

"What's done is done," said Williams. They walked over to the horse, saw that it was dead, then located the rider, sprawled on his face fifteen feet away. They exchanged a tight-lipped glance as

they saw the long blue tail coat, the gilt epaulettes, the hat and pigtailed wig which had rolled clear.

"You don't suppose that's—" Billings began in a low frightened voice.

"Don't worry. George Washington is sixty miles away from here," said Williams. "Here—roll him over and let's see what shape he's in."

"He won't be answering questions for a bit," said Billings a few moments later, on his knees beside the fallen man. "He's colder than an ice cube."

"A whole tray of them," said Williams. He glanced at the dial of his wristwatch and whistled. "Holy mackerel! We've only got ten more minutes."

"What'll we do?" Billings countered anxiously. "He's out for some time."

Williams hesitated. Then he bent over and grasped the fallen man's ankles. "Come on, Joe," he said. "We'll have to take him with us."

The man was heavy and his thick clothing was damp with sweat but somehow they got him to the jeep and stowed him in the back. Then Williams asked Billings to go back for their captive's saddle and saddle bags. The unconscious man was snoring faintly when the tall young captain returned and slung the gear onto the floor of the vehicle and clambered in beside Williams at the wheel.

"Step on it, maestro," he said. As Williams got the little car into gear and swung it sharply around, Billings added a note of warning. "Don't bounce the general out."

They went swiftly and bumpily a few hundred yards across half open country, following their own wheeltracks in the marshy ground. Billings yelled, "Look out for the big one," but the jeep was jolted by a tremendous bump in the ground. Their passenger grunted, Williams braked it to a halt and looked again at his watch.

"Two minutes to go," he said and lit a cigarette. Billings did likewise. Then they sat there and waited, one or the other of them cocking an occasional glance at their unconscious companion.

"Wonder who he is?" the captain said. "He looks like a big shot."

"He's a long way from the firing lines if we're timed right," said Williams. Then, "Oh, oh, here it comes."

The atmosphere directly in front of the jeep was suddenly different. With

startling abruptness a huge cube-shaped structure appeared, its leaden surfaces glowing in the moonlight and looking as if it had always been there. Then the wall in front of them rose slowly to reveal a brightly lit, whitewashed interior. Williams drove the jeep into it and turned off the motor.

"Hold onto your hats, boys, here we go again," said Billings irreverently as the door behind them slid silently back into place to seal them up.

The very nothingness of the process was, to Williams, the most astonishing part of this business of time travel. You simply got into the room, waited until the door opened and then walked, drove or rode out into somewhere else.

DR. PLATT had explained it in his dry, marvelously lucid way, of course. While he was talking it seemed clear and logical, almost easy. In actuality, it was confusing, frightening, incomprehensible. Williams lit another cigarette and reviewed the process, sitting swiveled around in his seat so that he could keep an eye on the captive. There were no gauges or other apparatus in the cell of the machine. Nor was there an emergency exit. They simply had to wait until the door opened.

The greatest of Dr. Platt's discoveries had evolved paradoxically enough from his efforts to develop a sufficiently screened atomic fuel which would enable the space-flight projects to traverse the appalling distances which faced them at a speed which would not result in prohibitively long journeys.

"But we are traveling incredible distances each second in space," Williams had protested when Dr. Platt first sought to explain the idea to him. They had been sitting in the big comfortable living room of the Professor's house, to which he, Billings, and the apparent Continental general were even now returning—if all continued to go as well as it had on the two previous expeditions.

"So the Earth of, say a hundred years ago, must be a hundred or more light years in distance from the Earth of now," Dr. Platt had finished his protest for him. Williams had nodded, said, "Something like that."

"The universe is not that simple, unfortunately or otherwise," the scientist had told him. "It seems to be a sort of

closed corporation for time as well as for space. Needless to say, I stumbled upon this theory quite by accident. We were seeking ultimate propulsive speeds—on a very small scale, of course. Somewhat like the old experiment of measuring the speed of light by means of a long piece of piping and mirrors. But when we applied the full pressures we had at hand, our infinitesimal object of propulsion vanished briefly.

"It went nowhere in space—so it must have vanished into something else. We thought of all sorts of subspaces but none of them was provable. Finally we decided that we had reached a propulsive impetus that passed the temporal barrier. Yes, there is one, as definitely as there is a sonic barrier."

At first it had seemed that whatever vanished under the tremendous impetus must proceed briefly in advance of time present—or into the future. But it had been as impossible to record as if it had gone into the past. Finally, when larger apparatus had been constructed, various objects had been subjected to the propulsion, screened and otherwise. Screened, they reappeared without alteration. Then white mice and other laboratory animals had been used.

They had returned, while screened, apparently unharmed. The steps from then on had been slow but obvious. There was no way of checking where they went unless some animal capable of making records were used. There was only one answer—some human had to go. As the Army had by this time taken over the entire project, a soldier was selected. Joe Billings was the first man known to have indulged in time travel and returned.

His first trips had been brief, but not too brief to establish conclusively the fact that the fantastic machine projected into the past, not the future. It was at this point that Williams had been called into the project under a wrap of total secrecy. General Oren Caldwell, in charge for the Army, was his old wartime C.O. Williams' knowledge of history and weapons had been the overt reason. Actually, Williams suspected, it was because they knew him and knew Billings wanted him that he had been selected.

This was his second trip. On the first, emerging in afternoon daylight, he and Billings had discovered a pair of arti-

facts—an iron pot and, of all things, a weathered copy of the *New York Gazette* for 1774 whose condition had given them a clue to the era to which they had been transported.

They had seen no other humans, though the traces of an earlier period were all about—wagon ruts, horse droppings, considerable chimney smoke on the horizon. It had been decided to try to regulate the instrument to an exact date—that of the invasion of Long Island by the British and Hessians in 1776.

"There should be some sort of activity," General Caldwell had said when the date was selected. "If only we weren't located on such an isolated part of the Island. Confound it, if it weren't for the A-plant at Brookhaven we might as well be on one of the Florida keys."

It was Billings who had suggested the jeep, and Caldwell had given them restrictive orders for its use. "We don't want to go around spilling history until we know the score a lot better," the general had said. "We don't know what you two young hellions cruising around in that thing could do to the present. This thing is too big to play with."

"If history can be changed," Dr. Platt had said quietly.

"What do you mean, sir?" Caldwell had snapped.

"Just that," the scientist had replied quietly, his light blue eyes, surprisingly brilliant in his lined septuagenarian face. "Hasn't it occurred to you that we have not yet been able to find records of any past changes on the charts of any of these experiments?"

The general had cast Dr. Platt a look of scorn but the scientist had contented himself with a faint smile. So the expedition had gone ahead. And now Williams and Billings had bagged someone of importance. They would soon find out, Williams thought, whether history was changeable to suit the needs and whims of present or future. It was a pretty scary business, and all the more so because it was so apparently easy of execution.

A faint sound caused Williams to look from the still recumbent captive to the door. It was slowly beginning to rise. He turned the ignition key and put his foot on the starter, got the jeep going.

"Let's hope we're back when we started from," said Billings softly.

They were. Williams backed the jeep out of the time travel structure and halted it in front of Dr. Platt and General Caldwell, who stood at the foot of the flagged path which led across the clipped terrace to the lighted French windows at the near end of the big house. Beyond, in the darkness, was a steel wire fence, electrified and patrolled by sentries.

"Major Williams and Captain Billings reporting, sir," said Williams, saluting after stepping from the jeep. "And an unidentified passenger."

"Great heavens!" gasped the general, seeing their captive for the first time. "What—How on earth did this happen, Major?"

They told him. Dr. Platt listened without comment until the story was finished. Then he nodded toward the jeep. "Our visitor," he said drily, "seems to be recovering. Perhaps we should get him into the house."

"Of course," said General Caldwell, a hard-bitten man who looked younger than his forty-five years. "Hop to it, men."

THEIR captive was beginning to regain consciousness, and the two younger officers were able to support him through the French windows and get him planted in a huge easy chair. Williams, at Dr. Platt's behest, poured a generous dram of brandy from the sideboard carafe into a glass and managed to get most of it into their involuntary visitor. He coughed, spluttered, sat up, then leaped to his feet and stared around him in bewilderment.

"Where in the name of Obediah's seventeen illegitimate children am I?" he roared in a hoarse voice which was evidently used to command. "Where's my horse?"

"We're sorry about your horse, sir," said Dr. Platt, who automatically took charge of the unique occasion. "You are not far from where you—ah—fell from it. I'm afraid I shall have to explain as well as apologize."

"Am I a prisoner then?" asked the visitor, glaring at them each in turn. "May I ask what that uniform is you are wearing—if indeed it is a uniform?"

"You are not a prisoner," said General Caldwell briefly. "As for the uniform, it is that of the United States Army." He introduced himself and the

others present, then inquired as to the name of their dazed visitor.

"I must be in hell," said the latter, sinking back into the big chair as if his legs would no longer support him. He looked again at his hosts, added with a trace of unexpected humor, "If so, I see no need for concealment. I am Brigadier General Nathaniel Woodhull of the Continental Army. Am I indeed in hell or is this some strange dream resulting from my fall?"

"It is neither," said Dr. Platt. He shot a quick glance at Williams. "Tell me, Eliot, does the name of Nathaniel Woodhull mean anything to you?" He smiled at the visitor. "Major Williams is our historical expert."

"*Historical!*" the visitor exploded. "Then I *am* dead and this is some odd sort of purgatory. Though the brandy I just tasted seemed more celestial than any decoction generally associated with the fiery regions."

It was Billings who brought the brandy this time. Williams was lost in thought as Dr. Platt tried to explain as lucidly as possible to an eighteenth century mind what had happened. Suddenly Williams snapped his fingers.

"You have something, Major?" General Caldwell asked coldly.

"Yes, sir," said Williams. "I wish I had a local Long Island history here." He recited rapidly, "General Nathaniel Woodhull—former chief magistrate of Suffolk County for the Crown, former President of the First Provincial Congress. Appointed a brigadier in the Continental Army. Native of Mastic. Assigned by Washington to collect all cattle in western Long Island and gather them under armed guard in Hempstead Meadows to prevent their falling into the hands of the invading army of Howe, Clinton and Knyphausen. General Woodhull—" he looked at the captive curiously—"what is the date—the date of your recent accident?"

"Confound it, it's August twenty-seventh," said the visitor. "I had the cattle gathered and under guard. Surely, in return for such an onerous task, I had the right to visit my wife. The invasion had not begun when I left. And surely you will not prevent me from seeking to rejoin my men and lead them back to the main body of the Army."

"We'll do what we can for you, General!" said Caldwell courteously. "But

it's my impression—and Major Williams can check me—that you'll find it hard to get through. The British will have occupied Brooklyn to the East River."

"I heard the battle had gone their way," said Woodhull. He shook his ponderous head sadly. He was a man of stout and florid middle age. "But if you can set me back in time where you find me with a horse, I can still get through and gather my men and ride them to the Sound and get them passage across it."

"If we can find you a horse," said Dr. Platt. "I regret to stay that riding is not one of my pleasures. Perhaps, however, we can provide you with faster and more efficient transportation. We'll do the best we can."

"And don't despond over the loss of the battle," said General Caldwell heartily. "You are going to win the war with the aid of the French alliance. If not, none of us would be here."

"What can I believe?" groaned General Woodhull. He rested his head on a hand as if his thoughts were too heavy for him to bear it unsupported. He accepted another glass of brandy but refused all offers to stay on in the twentieth century.

"Blast it!" he said. "It's sufficient poltroonery to be caught absent from my post during battle." He glanced around him at his hosts. "Perhaps I am a seven-dyed fool but I should never be fitted to such an age." He eyed the electric lights for the first time, asked what sort of infernal miracle they were.

They chatted for half an hour more and then, with the talk recorded and the date of the expedition fixed firmly, General Woodhull insisted that he must leave to return to his own time. Williams, who had been checking the few historical reference books the primarily scientific library afforded, uttered a few words of warning before they took off again in the jeep and time machine.

"General Woodhull, sir," he said. "I have a very definite idea that you should avoid New Utrecht. Unless my memory fails me you died—were to die there within a few weeks after an encounter with a band of Tories."

"Ho-ho!" roared General Woodhull, on whom the brandy was taking a certain limited effect. "Thank you, Major. Worry not. My plans will not take me within fifteen miles of New Utrecht. I

shall move north to the Sound."

"Utrecht — New Utrecht — where's that?" said General Caldwell, frowning.

"It's part of Brooklyn now," said Billings.

"What's that?" said the visitor from the past. They told him about the growth of New York and its boroughs and, for the first time, he seemed tempted to stay. Dr. Platt suggested he visit the great city, that they could return him as well in the future as tonight. But General Woodhull was adamant.

"I should not be able to enjoy time so spent," he said regretfully. "Put me down for a great fool if you will, but I sigh only to return to my own time, there if possible to do my appointed task as well as my abilities permit."

"We'll run you up to Hempstead in jigtime," said Major Williams. "But be sure to avoid New Utrecht and any wandering Tories."

"They'll be thick with their battle won," said the visitor. "At least I have assurance that my wife and children are well removed from their forays."

SO, once again, Williams and Billings prepared to travel backward in time. On this occasion, in view of the threat of wandering Tories in their path, they took along a submachine-gun and stowed it in the back with Billings and the general's gear. Woodhull rode in front beside Williams. The primrose yellow of early summer dawn was visible in the east as they drove into the time machine.

"You have aided us immeasurably, General," said Dr. Platt, before the door closed on them. "I only wish you would stay with us longer."

"My thanks to you and General Caldwell," said Woodhull. "But my duty lies all too clearly before me, I fear. And I shall avoid New Utrecht."

The door began to drop then and Billings said, "Remember, Eliot—look out for that bump when you take off. I want to go along on this ride."

By the time the door slid silently upward, however, Williams had forgotten his companion's warning, and he took off as if he were jet assisted. The jeep almost did a back flip, and Billings let out a bleat of protest. General Woodhull, who remembered nothing of his previous trip in the jeep, clutched at the dashboard, his face white with terror.

"It's all right, sir," said Williams. He turned on the lights and drew another gasp from the Continental. Quickly he tooled the car back to the road, where they found the general's horse, lying stiff in death.

"I paid a cool fifteen pounds for that animal," said Woodhull regretfully. He glanced at the two younger men. "I must confess I don't believe I could ever grow accustomed to this"—he nodded at the jeep—"means of locomotion."

"Just hang on, General," said Billings. "We're going to make time to get you back to your post, and the roads don't look too good."

"You'll have to direct me, sir," said Williams. "The topography has been considerably altered in a hundred and seventy-four years."

"Incredible! The whole thing's incredible!" muttered the general.

Save for the bumpiness of the wagon track that passed as a road and the continued wildness of the scenery, in comparison to twentieth century Long Island, the trip was surprisingly uneventful—disappointingly so to Billings.

So early in the morning was it that they failed to see a single individual up and about, even at the occasional farm houses they passed. Once or twice a dog raced after them, barking as is the fashion of dogs unused to cars. But not once were they stopped nor had they other occasion to halt.

Finally, when they neared the top of a low hill an hour and a quarter after leaving the time machine, General Woodhull told Williams to halt. "I have an outpost just beyond," he said. "I think I'd better walk it from here. The good Lord knows what the sight and sound of this chariot would do to my men's horses. If things are as you say, there is little time for panic."

"Just as you say, General," said Williams, obeying. The three of them got out of the jeep and walked to the top of the hill. Three hundred yards beyond them, under a clump of large trees, men and horses were bivouacked.

"They will give me a mount," said the general, accepting his saddle and other gear from Billings. He thanked them, shook hands with both of them, and added, "I shall be far from the British lines within the hour." He paused. "If only I dared to talk of this evening, to give the fine news you have given me to

General Washington when I rejoin him." He shook his head. "But I dare not."

He left them then, a portly but dignified figure as he walked slowly down the road toward the outpost. Using a clump of bushes for concealment, Williams and Billings saw him greeted with an awkward salute by a sentry whose raggedness was apparent even at that distance.

"Well," said Williams, "that seems to be that, Joe. A nice old boy."

"I wish we could go along with him," said Billings with a sigh. Then they went back to the jeep, turned it around and set out on the return trip to their own century. Though a number of farmers saw them and one irate landowner fired a musket in their direction, they got back unscathed and in time. The machine was awaiting them, its door open, and they drove directly in.

"Son of a gun!" said Billings then. "The Tommy gun's gone. You must have bumped it out when we took off. I'd better get it."

"You'd better not," said Williams meaningfully, nodding toward the door which was already in the course of its silent descent. . . .

Once again they were in the big room with the French windows. General Caldwell and Dr. Platt listened to their account in silence. Then the general walked to a refectory table and unfolded an object upon it which had been wrapped in a cloth. It was an incredibly rusted piece of metal.

Williams and Billings exchanged an odd glance after looking at it. There was no doubt as to what it was. It was a Tommy gun, its wooden stock entirely eroded away. Williams gulped.

"Where did you find this, sir?" he asked the general.

"We had some men level the bump you men have complained of," he said. "One of them struck this with his spade. Can you account for it?"

Unquestionably it was the sub-machine-gun they had started out with and which must have been bounced out of the jeep. Williams, backed by Billings, explained what had happened. General Caldwell heard them out with something like relief.

"We feared it might have been left by someone else," he said. He prodded the rust-eaten object and shook his head. In

spite of everything he had seen and heard, he was having a tough time accepting what had taken place that night.

WHILE they waited for breakfast, Williams went to the telephone and woke up a friend in New York, a historian, and asked him to look up General Woodhull. A half hour later he was summoned from bacon and eggs by the return call. When he got back to the table his face was white.

"Something troubling you, Eliot?" Dr. Platt inquired quietly.

"Yes, sir," said Williams. He explained his calls. Then he said slowly, "My friend—he teaches at Columbia—just came up with the dope. According to his records, and they are unimpeachable, General Nathaniel Woodhull was trapped by a band of Tories, which included the notorious Oliver Delancey, two miles west of Jamaica. He was wounded and captured and his arm later had to be amputated. He died, September twentieth, seventeen seventy-six, as a result of his wound—gangrene—in a British prison hospital in New Utrecht."

There was silence, unbroken until Dr. Platt said, "It is like the old fable of the appointment in Samara—the Oriental merchant, whose servant saw Death in a bazaar in Baghdad, remember? He told his master, who decided Death must be seeking him and at once fled to Samara. Returning to the bazaar, the servant sought out Death, and asked him why he had been seeking his master. And Death told him he had not been seeking him but was surprised to see him there as he had an appointment with him on the morrow—in Samara."

"Do you suppose, then," said Williams, "that the past is unalterable?"

"Poppycock," snapped General Caldwell. "The submachine-gun proves otherwise. Certainly such a device was never built in the eighteenth century."

"I am beginning to formulate a theory," said Dr. Platt. "It is far from complete. Frankly, gentlemen, I very much doubt if we shall ever know. For surely, if we have mastered time travel, others must also in the future. And they will have visited us and time behind us. Yet we know nothing of them. Nor are there any records of our own trips on the charts."

"Then how do you explain it, Dr.

Platt?" said the general, almost pleading.

He looked shaken and there was sweat like beads upon his forehead.

"I don't," said the scientist quietly. "Perhaps, in some other time, poor General Woodhull was never kidnaped in a jeep. Perhaps he avoided the saber cut of Delancey's Tory. Perhaps—"

"Poppycock!" muttered the general again. He looked at the rusted sub-

machine-gun for reassurance. Then, suddenly, he rose and crossed to the brandy carafe and poured himself a stiff slug, downed it.

The general swore and said, "We're going back again and again until we have the answer. I *can't* believe in an endless chain of alternates in time."

"You will," said the scientist. "You will, General. You see—there isn't any other way out."

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

man space-flight with devilish ingenuity, relying chiefly upon the psychic attack of key workers.

Actually there is another world involved—or rather the remnants of another world, whose inhabitants have been confined for almost a millenium to a one-building city on their desolate planet, a one-building city whose machines supply their every need and luxury.

To them this huge building is the universe—from which they stray only in induced dreams to take over the lives and bodies of folk inhabiting three other planets with which the city builders left psychic connections.

One of the planets is highly primitive—too much so for the more sophisticated dreamers. Another is inhabited by highly-intelligent telepaths who have learned how to stymie the dreamers. The third is Earth, where the city-folk delight in tasting through dream-possession the thrills of violence, cruelty and immorality as fantastic as it is safe.

It is these dreamers who are endeavoring to stop the building of a spaceship. For were one to land on their planet, outside of their one-building city, it would mean that their "dreams" were real. And this they cannot face.

This is the underlying source of conflict in Mr. MacDonald's novel of four worlds—and it is a conflict whose development and solution are full of surprises and unexpected situations that, coupled with its ever-mounting suspense, should keep the reader short of breath until the final phrase. *WINE OF THE DREAMERS* is a "big" story—yet as closely personal as tomorrow's breakfast. Most of you should get a whale of a belt out of it—intellectual as well as pure thrill.

Edmond Hamilton and *CAPTAIN FUTURE* return in the second of the new

series about the doings of Curt Newton, Simon Wright, Crag, Otho, Joan Randall and all the rest of the Futuremen—entitled *CHILDREN OF THE SUN*.

To date the revival of CF at 10,000 words a lick has been a happy one—and this story, in which, from the interior of Mercury, Newton journeys via transfiguration into an entirely new form of energy existence into the sun itself, is more than up to standard.

It is fast, exciting, well written—just about everything a Captain Future story should be—and packed with danger. We think you'll like it as well as we did.

The Hall of Fame novelet will be *SIGNBOARD OF SPACE* by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., which recalls in thrilling style the perils and difficulties attendant upon the first trip from Earth to Mars. There will be short stories, the finest available by the finest available sf authors, and of course, your usual quota of features and departments. May should be one of the best!

ETHERGRAMS

FOR some reason the postcard lads have been busily coming up with HoF suggestions. Charles Baird of 161 Albemarle Street, Springfield, Massachusetts, suggests we reprint *THE MENTAL OCEAN* by Eando Binder, from the December 1938, TWS. Could be, Charlie, either in SS or in one of the two new mags. The same goes for *THE ASTOUNDING EXODUS* (yipe, that adjective!) by Neil R. Jones, from TWS for April, 1937—offered by John H. Mason, 477 Sherbourne Street, Toronto 5, Ontario, Canada. And Charles Ramsay, 636 University Avenue, Reno, Nevada, wants us to re-

print AROUND THE UNIVERSE by Ray Cummings. We can't seem to locate this one. Perhaps one of you readers may know where to locate it.

Donald V. Allgeier now comes up with a complete set of HoF suggestions, to wit—

MAIN PURPOSE

by Donald V. Allgeier

Dear Editor: The main purpose of this letter is to suggest some yarns for the "Hall of Fame."

I think the H. of F. has been pretty punk in recent years, but the recent change to novelets has helped. "Martian Gesture" really deserved to be reprinted. Probably, so did "Conquest of Life," though it isn't a great story. It is representative of an era of sf writing. "The Ultimate Catalyst" is also worthy of re-reading.

But when you clutter up your pages again with "Hollywood on the Moon" and the "Hothouse Planet" I don't agree at all. Kuttner, as he is today, should be ashamed of his "Hollywood" series. They were just plain hack except for the one novel idea of making movies on the moon. He turns out stories today which are so much better that I think he must have winced to see this blood and thunder re-appear. Barnes' stuff is similar. I challenge the statement that either of these stories has stood the test of time.

Why don't you really go back into your files? Why just stick to recent times? How about giving us an idea of what sf was like in its early struggling days by reprinting yarns from Air Wonder Stories, Science Wonder Stories, Science Wonder Quarterly, and the early Wonder Stories? I've read most of the science-fiction I could lay my hands on since 1926 and I still have many of the grand old stories on hand. But I'd like to see them in print again. Maybe they wouldn't seem as good by today's standards, but judging by some reprints in other publications, many of them still look mighty good.

For example, give us some stories in the Hall of Fame by Hendrik Dahl Juve (I've never seen one of his reprinted), Earl Vincent, Clare Winger Harris, Francis Flagg, Ed Earl Repp and others of that far-gone era. Coming up to the large-size Wonder Stories, how about something by Nat Schachner? (By the way, isn't he writing at all, any more?) His series, "The Revolt of the Scientists," is eminently worth reprinting. So is "The Memory of the Atoms." So are some of the ones he wrote with Arthur L. Zagat.

You started out with some of these older stories. I remember with pleasure such Hall of Fame stories as "The Man Who Awoke" and "City of the Living Dead." You didn't exhaust the supply. I hope you'll leave TWS for awhile and go back to the old Gernsback files to give your readers a treat.

Coming up to new stories, I think your novels recently have been very good. Kuttner's "Time Axis" was fine. However like so many stories these days, there were some unexplained matters. I wish authors wouldn't get in such a hurry to finish that they try to cram all the necessary explanation into one or two pages. "Portal in the Picture" continues Hanks excellent string of fantasies. "Flight from Yesterday," though, was much better than either of Kuttner's recent ones.

Harness is really a comer. He is reminiscent of Van Vogt, but I hope he is really a new author and not just a pen name. This story of his had everything, fantasy, adventure, and science. There was just one thing that bothered me. How in the world did Haze-Gaunt become the tarsier just by going back in time five years? I don't quite get the idea. But I think the story is one of the best you've ever printed and I hope Harness continues to turn them out for you.

LaFoyette-Hubbard's "Conquest of Space" series is fine, though very bitter against officialdom. Apparently the author had some unpleasant wartime experiences. Hope he gets off this particular note soon. (Just one question: "Why does every picture for this series have to show an attractive woman? Symbolism is all very well, but what is being symbolized by her?)

In conclusion, I'd like to ask for long novels by some of the old-time greats who seem to be silent these days. Can't you get novels by Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson, Manly Wade Wellman, C. L. Moore, Ross Rocklynne, Oscar J. Friend, Robert Heinlein, or even Eando Binder if he can be pried loose from the comics. Or how about one by Nat Schachner, L. Ron Hubbard, or A. E. Van Vogt?

I'm looking forward to the return of STARTLING to the top of the list with really long novels and really good ones—not the routine ones ground out by Leinster and others who try to turn out far too much.—1851 Gerrard Avenue, Columbus 12, Ohio.

Your reprint idea is laudable if a trifle late, as you must by this time have discov-

ered, Donald. Many of the stories you mention (you'll be seeing some of them at any rate in FSQ and the annual-to-come) have a real cosmic sweep seldom found in this more prosaic era—witness Richard Vaughn's EXILE OF THE SKY, coming in the next issue of FSQ.

Nat Schachner, along with Wellman, seems to have moved on chiefly to other fields of writing, which is our loss and yours. Pictures of attractive women sell magazines (it says here somewhere) and besides they look kinda purty. Harness, as we already said on several occasions, is no pen name. He is a patent attorney for the American Cyanamid Company and lives in Stamford, Conn. He should be coming in with something new shortly. We hope so.

Williamson hasn't been submitting to us of recent years for some reason known only to him. Hamilton's new Captain Future series is already started in this magazine and his fine new novel, CITY AT WORLD'S END, is to appear in a later issue this year. C. L. Moore has been working on a story for us for some time now but we have yet to see it. Oscar Friend is busy handling the Otis Adelbert Kline Literary Agency. Heinlein is supplying material for Hollywood at the moment and Binder is too deeply immersed in comic continuities.

Ron Hubbard is overdue with a novel and in the meantime we have, beyond the active authors mentioned above, Raymond F. Jones, Henry Kuttner, Leigh Brackett, John D. MacDonald, Murray Leinster and Jack Vance all blazing away in red-hot form. So it doesn't look as if we're due to slip either in SS or in TWS for some time to come. The future work of Jones, MacDonald and Vance will especially bear watching.

A LYING LETTER

by Paul Wright

Dear Editor: I've been lying here in bed—magazines piled all over the bed. It amazes me how the bed holds up under all that weight. I've been quite ill and to relax myself I've been looking through my back issues.

Geel I hope someone will get in touch with me (I'll answer each and every letter received—I promise!) and tell me if they've any extra copies of TWS and SS—back issues they'd like to sell or what-have-you—because I'd sure love to complete my file.

I have only just begun to file away my magazines. I've not been reading TWS-SS very long—but now I sure am one of your more ardent fans. I'm 28, an ex-seaman, who hasn't been well for quite some time. So, seeing I don't get out much, I'd appreciate it if you'd print this. I have need of all issues except the following, which I now have—

March, 1947 SS
April, 1947 TWS
September, 1947 SS
January, 1948 SS
February, 1948 TWS
March, 1948 SS
April, 1948 TWS
May, 1948 SS
June, 1948 TWS

January, 1949 SS
February, 1949 TWS
March, 1949 SS
April, 1949 TWS
May, 1949 SS
June, 1949 TWS

July, 1948 SS
August, 1948 TWS
September, 1948 SS
October, 1948 TWS
November, 1948 SS
December, 1948 TWS

July, 1949 SS
August, 1949 TWS
September, 1949 SS
October, 1949 TWS
November, 1949 SS

Marvie Williams, he's our man. No doubt he has by now made your "lemon" ish into lemonade. Put me down as agreeing with Miss (?) Johns. Mr. Bergery, I like your covers, too. Or at least the November one. More clothes, say the fen. Why? says we. The real unadjusted type is he who is afraid of sex. After all, your covers aren't obscene. It's a poor male specimen who doesn't like to look at a beautiful girl, French bathing suit or not.

And now, I sh'd be a sorry specimen if I didn't oblige you with a poem; so here goes:

I may be dumb for liking it, but still
Each time I see SS I get a thrill;
The stories in it, some are not so good,
Yet I've read every issue that I could.
I send a letter to Ye Edde to say,
"Hello there Ed., I got your mag today,"
I read the stories, all of them, you see
E'en tho I do not like some, Yessirree!

So, each time on the newsstand, I behold
A copy of old SS, dear as gold,
I gaze upon the cover, read the page
Of story-titles, then like wisest sage,
I hurry up, my two-bits for to pay,
Then read SS the rest of that fine day.

So, cheerio, Ed, and you'll hear from me again as soon as the next ish of STARTLING hits the newsstands of old Pgh. Yours for more Magnus Ridolph.—32 Park Place, R.D. 4, Pittsburgh 9, Pa.

Very well, William, and you'll be getting another magnum of Magnus every so often—as long as the prolific Mr. Vance comes up with same. So, to reply in kind (or unkind) let us away as follows—

*Ere he retires to stand more tenable
Let's take a wallop at Bill Venable
He writes to fill an "empty hole,"
Unburdens then an empty soul,
Forsooth, were we not quite amenable,
We'd say, "Oh, fie upon Bill Venable!"*

Which is enow o' that for the nonce as it were. Secondly, Bill, thanks for an interesting missive!

SCIENCE QUIZ by Harold Smolinsky

Dear Sir: In the November issue of STARTLING STORIES, under the heading, The World of Science on page 141, is a paragraph which refers to the incidence of allergic reactions in schizophrenics and manic depressives. The information is of particular interest to me and I would sincerely appreciate having the original source so that I can follow it up.—139-22 85th Drive, Jamaica 3, New York.

The story in question appeared in the SCIENCE NEWS LETTER for July 16, 1949. It was digested from a report in the May issue of the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY by Dr. Robert M. McAllister, of the Coatesville, Pennsylvania, Mental Hospital of the U. S. Veterans Administration, and Dr. Arthur O. Hecker, clinical director of the same institution. We hope the above information proves helpful.

LONG TIME NO SEE by John W. Robertson

Dear Sir: I have just managed to grab an issue of your excellent magazine, dated March, 1949, and, boy, did I devour that mag! Don't ask me how it got to the bookstall, as I just stared at it in amazement, then snatched it up before it disappeared.

American Science Fiction mags haven't been seen here since 1939. I won't comment on the stories as it is a little late and anyhow we are so starved for Science Fiction that any story seems good. I haven't any relatives in the USA,

Looking back, the stories have been remarkably good—and I have enjoyed reading them over and over again. The illustrations have been good too—I especially liked the cover of the November, 1948, issue, also the interior illustrations for AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, also the cover for April, 1948, for September, 1947, for March, May, June, July and August, 1949.

I hope I'll hear from many, many people soon.—R.F.D. No. 2, Lake Road, Le Roy, New York.

We hope so too, Paul. Meanwhile, keep in there pitching and we'll try to give you the best stf entertainment we can round up. Let us know how you come out.

ONE TRACKER by Ann B. Nelson

Honorable Editor: This is by way of being a bouquet for William Fitzgerald after reading his story, CURE FOR A YLITH. He has utilized science fiction to bring out a truth that has been recognized but more or less ignored. Despotism is unintelligent, yet continues to exist and will so continue until that degree of unintelligence is outgrown by the races of men.

I hope William Fitzgerald is a prolific writer and that you will continue to publish him. I'm a one tracker—perhaps too brief—commenting only on W. F.—but if I didn't love you all I wouldn't be buying SS so regularly.—2702 Melbourne Street, Houston 16, Texas.

You'll probably be reading Fitzgerald (and have been for that matter) a lot more often than you'll guess, Ann. We shall leave it to some of our other fans to put you wise. We agree about both CURE FOR A YLITH and despotism. 'Tis in truth a silly business when you come right down to it.

A SADLY EMPTY HOLE by Bill Venable

Dear Ed: This missive is to fill a sadly empty hole in dear old TEV. Have you noticed that ya received not one teeny li'l letter from my hum-town of Pgh Pa? Such a disgraceful condition warrants remedial action—soooo . . . here, you lucky you, is a letter from I.

The cow-milking story (The Udder World) was vurry good; wasn't there another story on the same vein a few mo. ago? JaWohl, 'twas the Portal in the Picture, or sumpin' like that. SO! But both stories were good, just don't overdo a good thing. Next, we look in on the HoF novelet; I had read this before, but it is a story worth reading over twice . . . or three or four times, for that matter. Is John Taine his real name, or is it a pseudonym?

Journey for One—tsk tsk tsk. Honestly, Ed., I didn't think you would stoop to print such a bad example of the fine (?) literature of stf. Seems to me Mr. Sprague has done better than this. The tale is told too fast, there're no nice descriptive paragraphs, and the theme is corny and trite.

So Magnus Ridolph is back. Ah, that is surely a sight for sore ocular orbs. You ought to pay Vance more. This was the kind of story every sfan dreams of. More. Gimme more. Homeward Bound—nice twist, nice style, nice story. Enough said.

Cure for a Ylith—see above.

Limiting Factor—This one got me all worked up in a sweat to see what would happen, and then ended like it did. What a shame! He could have done better with that theme. The idea was lovely, the writing fine. If Mr. Simak ever thinks up another ending to this one, why, print it again. 'Twas almost a classic as it was.

In The Emperor of the Universe, LaFayette is at his usual best. He certainly gets the human interest into stf as no other author can, and weaves a good tale while he's at it.

And now, for a peep into that department above which the heading states that ether doth oscillate. Tsk, Ed, old boy, if you kept up with the latest scientific discoveries and theories, you would know the authorities have decided the ether does not vibrate. Of course, this does not mean that you are expected to change the heading; just put under it a statement in fine print that the above statement is an anachronism; that's all.

so I wonder if any of your readers would care to send me any old mags they have finished with. I can't send the money but if there is any favour they would like, I shall do my utmost to please them. Well, here's hoping some more copies of your mag creep around this way.—2 River View, Bank Top, Bedlington Station, Northumberland, England.

We hope so too, John. Let's see—March was the issue containing **THE BLACK GALAXY** by Murray Leinster. It wasn't bad fun but we had better last year, including the same author's **THE OTHER WORLD** in November, '49. Thanks for dropping us a line. If your letter bears fruit, please let us know.

NAPOLI GO BRAGH!

by **Dorothea M. Faulkner**

Dear Editor: On your own head be it! You told me to write again. So far I've had nothing to say, hence kept quiet. But now I rise to ask why the fans are all so down on Napoli? To my mind he is about the only real artist in the bunch. Finlay is a superb draftsman on the symbolic stained-glass order. But Napoli has action in his drawings, the figures are anatomically correct, the faces have some expression and on top of that you can see that he has carefully read the stories before illustrating them. How'm I doing?

The November SS is pretty good—except that there is no Bradbury! My favorite misanthrope! Only he isn't really, you know. He doesn't hate people—he only hates stupidity, fribleness, grossness and the general moronic insensitivity of the herd mind. Want a little amateur literary review? No? Okay!

THE OTHER WORLD—aha! Here we have the Shaver influence tinted with Fort. Only so much better done!

JOURNEY FOR ONE—interesting variation on the time-travel theme—Fem or Bem?

THE ULTIMATE CATALYST—wonderful then, wonderful now!

HOMeward BOUND—the omnipresent Martian with a darned clever twist at the end.

CURE FOR A YLITH—interesting psychology.

LIMITING FACTOR—Just knew someone would be using cybernetics in a story plot!

THE EMPEROR OF THE UNIVERSE—good! Johnny Appleseed in space.

KING OF THE THIEVES—excuse me. No like M. R. Just a queer fancy of mine.

Question—who is Great Ghu (or Goo)?

I guess there's no use beefing about the covers—only I do get so tired of having people say, "Migawd! What are you reading now?" You like them short and sweet so I stop. Wish I could be really brilliant but I don't keep fifty million monkeys.—164 Geneva Place, Covina, California.

Who does keep fifty million monkeys? Please elucidate, Dorothea. As for Ghu (and it is Ghu rather than Goo), the **FANCY-CLOPEDIA** has the following under the heading of *ghughuism*—

"—a foul and hideous order who worship ghughu as their ghod. According to the researches of FooFoo scien^tists, ghughu is a beetle-bodied monster living on the sunward side of Vulcan, who telepathically controls a zombie named don wollheim, wollheim himself being usually regarded as ghughu by its followers . . . this purple reigion was founded 6 Aug 35, and with this long start gained adherents in numerous places, but a new day and deliverance dawned in 1938 when Pogo proclaimed **The Sacred Order of FooFoo!**"

Yes, it makes exactly zero sense to us too—but for better or worse here it is. Next question and quickly, please.

CRIPPS-LED by **Captain Kenneth F. Slater**

Dear Editor: The announcement made by Sir Stafford Cripps on the British Radio last night (Sunday, September 18th, 1949) shook "Operation Fantast" so badly that our tripewriter bust a spring. Hence this letter in hand, which I am printing in order that it may be legible.

I imagine that the general devaluation of currency may enhance trade, although it makes some prices look pretty screwy—for instance, one of my USA correspondents tells me beefsteak averages 90c per pound in USA—in UK that would, at the new rate of exchange, be about 6s 5d per pound. It actually costs us about 1s 4d per pound. Other things go the other way—but on the whole the result is that your prices, when converted, seem exorbitant.

All that is by the way and the new values are really in respect to raw materials, where the difference is not so noticeable.

The main point is that this conversion has shoved the price of magazines well out of range of the average fan's pocket, in this country, and I am hoping some USA fan may rally round to help. The latest scheme is the exchange of any two British books for subscriptions (12 issues) to USA mags.

I have quite a good selection in stock, including "Bleeding from the Roman," reviewed in November SS, and am willing to send lists and details to anyone who cares to drop me a postcard. As the average fantasy novel in USA cost \$2.50 to \$3.00, this may seem reasonable—two perfectly good books, new, for 3.50 that is your subscription rate).

This offer is not for myself alone—most of my subscriptions are okay for a couple of years, thank goodness—but for UK fandom in general. If you can manage to let me creep into your pages with this plea, many thanks. Observations on recent SS and TWS will follow when the typer is back in action.—13 Gh. R.P.C., BAOR, 23, c/o GPO, England.

It sounds reasonable enough to us, Ken, and we hope the fans see it the same way. Here's hoping you get results along the lines you wish.

HEADED FOR BELLEVUE

by **J. F. Conner**

Dear Ed: Goblins and ghosts I can take, but when I meet something like Leinster's latest (*The Other World*) I head for Bellevue. I don't scare easy but he all but scared the wits out of me. This is the first time I ever heard of the guy and for my money (what there is of it) he can have the prize any time. Anyone who can combine fiction and fact so well deserves it (the prize, not the money). Where does he ever get his ideas from? I'd like to meet that guy sometime. Maybe he can tell me which is fact and which is fiction. The reason I can't tell myself is because after what I've seen I don't know what to believe. I've seen things that would put Ripley's "Believe it or Not" to shame.

Ed: x has a god point. Change is inevitable so it does no good to ignore it or fight it. We might as well accept it. But I doubt if he'll see any moon rocket headlines himself. Our rocket experimenters are faced with a pretty big problem—one that will take decades to get over. You'll see many big science headlines in the latter part of this century but not rockets to the moon—or anywhere else.

This is my first fan letter. I wonder if it would get printed if I said S.S. wasn't my favorite mag?

How about better covers? The scene on the November ish doesn't quite agree with the story.

As for the stories:

1. *The Other World*—like I said he can take first prize.
2. *Limiting Factor*—short and sweet. I like these kind of puzzles and problems.
3. *Emperor of the Universe*—He really was even though people wouldn't believe it. Excellent writing.
4. *Cure for a Ylith*—very good, nice problem, interesting solution.
5. *King of Thieves*—Good story, but wasn't everything just a little too pat?
6. *Journey for One*—Good but the others were better.
7. *Homeward Bound*—Must be a new writer. An old hand couldn't be that bad. Writing fair. Plot lousy.
8. *The Ultimate Catalyst*—it's already HOF. What more can be said? With all good wishes for peace profound.—United States Atlantic Fleet Air Force, Helicopter Utility Squadron Two (HU-2).

Verily, Mr. Conner, you must be a new-comer to stf if the name Murray Leinster is unknown to you. He has been a mainstay of the field for lo, these twenty-five years.

As for the covers, well, heck—no two people ever agree on them! For the rest, an interesting letter. And when are they going to build a rocket that will take up a man—and bring him down safely? That, it seems to us, is the first step that must be successfully taken en route to the wide open spaces.

THE ARMY'S TURN by Private Clarence L. Jacobs

Dear Sarge: Lower the xeno jug and let another man palaver with yuh. I left my disintegrator outside in the CO₂ and I come in friendly spirits.

But—this is the new SS, isn't it? Such semisoph antics as the above are highly frowned upon aren't they? Forgive me but with the republication of good ol' Cap'n Future, I thought maybe Wart Ears and Snaggle Tooth might return also. They're much better off where they are, sir. But, for the sake of your more recent readers, perhaps you should touch up one of the modern columns with some of Saturn's space lingo. 'Twould show them what they were fortunate to miss!

Now there's a suggestion. Yes, I know the plight of an editor is bad without hearing numerous requests, but I'm going to make one anyway. The reaction to this will be decidedly deadly but consider it for at least ten seconds, will you? Why not publish a long, wacky, deCamp novel—the kind that used to be in _____ to these many years ago.

Aha, say you, how can we do that when SS is a stef mag and _____ put out fantasy stuff? Aha, say I (Also without benefit of quotes), SS has published fantasy in the past without the pack's howling too much. Proof? Norm Daniels' "Speak of the Devil."

And if ND's name is misspelled, I'm sorry. If memory serves me correctly you haven't had a humorous novel for quite a spell, and even longer if one doesn't consider the Brown bit a humorous thing. DeCamp has been too long gone from the sort of thing he used to do, and who knows but there might be some that agree with me. Might be, maybe.

But enough of that, we come to the main portion of the mag which is, naturally, TEV.

The best letterists in the collyums for the last year or so have been (though others will decidedly yell) the Coles. Every ish they are both witty and logical, as well as being interesting. Their criticism is explained too—if they don't like the story they tell why, not merely "Stinks!" However, Pattee's little gem was one of the cutest things I've seen in a long time.

As Bob Tucker previously said "The stories in the front of the mag are almost as good as the stories in the back of the mag!" And that statement is quite true, too. All in all, TEV has improved tremendously since the daze (!) of Saturn and the forgotten alphabet wars. Letters have grown more mature and helpful. Instead of merely being written to see their name in print reader's stuff actually is being written to the editor.

But the stories in the front of the mag are an improvement also. This ish fell below par a bit but the "Conquest of Space" is very good, and Simak's short was excellent! Taine's tale, while being rather well written, seemed pointless. He's done better.

"Homeward Bound" was one of the more obvious things where the ending is stock. The ending that a stiffe would have seen innumerable times before, where the possibility that is least is always the correct one.

Ridolph is rapidly becoming more detective stuff than stf, and while Vance puts out some good material the series is getting rather boring. I hope you don't have too many more on hand.

No comment upon Leinster's novel—but I liked it. VV and Captain Future will finally be together in the same magazine according to your preview. I can only think of the contrast—from semantics to space opera. An amusing experiment would be to have VV handle Captain Future himself. I wonder what the outcome would be!—Service Club, United States Army Signal Corps, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

As for fantasy, you misguided son of a purple-tentacled Mercurian twilight zone meat maggot, how about the Daniels **THE LADY IS A WITCH** in this issue? On the whole we agree with you about the Coles—or is it Colesless? Incidentally, this seems to be the Armed Services corner or something—what with Captain Slater in the

Army of Occupation in Western Germany, J. F. Conner with the US Navy Helicopter Unit and you with the Signal Corps. The letters fell together without intention on our part. And now, back to civil life with . . .

SOCIABLE SOCIOLOGY by Thomas E. Voorhees

Dear Editor: It was a surprise to me to see my letter in the November **STARTLING STORIES**. The November issue also brought me a certain amount of enjoyment and a great sense of satisfaction with the magazine. I think that the magazine has improved one hundred per cent over the November, a year ago.

I was particularly taken with the clever use of Fortean phenomena in the story "The Other World" by Murray Leinster. It was highly entertaining and there seemed to me to be a certain amount of intelligence displayed by the writer and his characters in the command of the situation.

Of the other marvelous stories I especially liked "Cure for a Ylith." The writer must certainly be admired for the way he moved around the problem of life after death. The only conclusion from this story is that the writer must certainly be an atheist or an agnostic.

STARTLING STORIES and **THRILLING WONDER** seem to have stories dealing with the sociological side of life. I think that this is a very good sign in that so far the sociological branches of science have been rather neglected while the physical branches have advanced in such a way that the lag between them has been magnified as the years go by.

Korzbycki has explained this by comparing the advance of the physical sciences with a geometric evolution of numbers, while the sociological branches have been held to an arithmetical advance. I can show this more clearly in the diagram below.

Physical—1 - 2 - 4 - 8 - 16 - 32 - etc.

Sociological—1 - 2 - 4 - 6 - 8 - 10 - etc.

Sociological advances are also held up by wars, revolutions, economic instability and like problems. Governmental science, anthropology, psychological sociology, etc., are all lacking in development because of disinterest and the greater speeds of the physical problems in solving.

Society should look at the mistakes of the past and also the great deeds to solve our problems if the problems have some factor that resembles the problem in the past. When a new problem arises the persons in charge should look at all factors involved and draw conclusions as to the solving of the problem.—807 East Pastime, Tucson, Arizona.

A bit on the redundant side in spots, and a bit obvious in conclusion, but none the less sady true for all that, Thomas. People have been conditioned the other way too 'ong to make the change over easy if possible at all. There is nothing brighter and more noble than people—and nothing stupider and more ignoble than—people. It's their variability that makes them fascinating.

HOW CAN YOU TELL by Michael Varady

Dear Editor (I know you aren't an Editress): Guess what Bergey's cover for the November ish of SS was good! (There will be a slight pause while someone tries to revive the editor, who has fainted.)

However, that was only the cover. The insides, or guts (your choice), were slightly disappointing. No Bradbury, no St. Clair, no vV, no etc, etc, etc.

But you made up for most of it! John Taine was in the ish, and his stories, some of them over ten years old, still bear Bradbury and the other geniuses (?) of today. **THE ULTIMATE CATALYST** is the second HoF which I've read which I believe is being reprinted because of popular demand.

Now, I wonder, does HoF reprint stories only published in SS and TWS and the old Wonder Stories of timegone-past? Or do you go to other companies for your reprints too? I hope so. Because I want to nominate Taine's **TOMORROW** for HoF, which was printed in the April-May 1939, Vol. 1, Number 4 issue of the now-defunct Marvel Science Stories. This is one of his best, I think. And meanwhile, keep trying to get Taine to write some new novels.

Needless to say, his **ULTIMATE CATALYST** took first place. Second was Jack Vance's **THE KING OF THIEVES**. Please,

please, don't let Magnus Ridolph go! There's no reason why he can't be pulled for quite a while like Jules de Grandin is in a competitor.

And where is Orig Prem?

Third is William Fitzgerald's CURE FOR A YLITH. 'Twere great.

However, those are the only three good stories in the whole ish. The others range from lousy to lousier to lousiest. They are, in order, JOURNEY FOR ONE, THE EMPEROR OF THE UNIVERSE, HOMEWARD BOUND and last and not least, THE OTHER WORLD.

JOURNEY FOR ONE. One of those time-travel stories again. Oh, Dio! When do the writers of these realize H. G. W. almost completely exhausted the idea, anyway? Further, Albitura couldn't have come from the future into the time before her birth, because this would mean she wasn't born when she was born because she was alive before the time she was born. Get it? I didn't think so. If it's that easy, why doesn't someone go back in time, fall for Cleopatra, bring her into modern times, marry her and change all history? If you don't follow my thoughts you're better off, so don't try. Fourth place.

Now for 8th place. THE OTHER WORLD by Murray Leinster (so you say). I don't think Leinster could write anything this bad. It is a combination of 50 per cent Richard S. Shaver, 25 per cent Abe Merritt, 20 per cent H. P. Lovecraft and 5 per cent Ray Bradbury. I hate Shaver, and can't stand Merritt, which makes only 25 per cent of the story readable. And why did they kill the ruhks? The ruhks had intelligence—just as the ancients bred in the desire to serve that certain scent, the ferociousness of the ruhks could be bred out.

They could have made very nice pets and would invariably love humans because of Nancy's perfume. Just as they were used to protect the ancients from the slaves they could be used to be companions and protectors for the young-uns-to-be, if you get what I mean. The ruhks weren't bad—they were misled and shouldn't have been killed at all.

Recently, dear ed, I was looking through the ishes of my favorite fantascience mag—not you, unfortunately (?)—and wondering why it was my favorite. (This is the mag you reviewed in the CFP department or in TWS, which you weren't sure was a prozine or a fanzine.) The reason they haven't become competitors with you yet is because of distribution trouble.

Anyway, I found that, while they had plenty of good reliable name authors like Bloch, vV, Taine, Coblenz etc, they also had many new writers who were just as good as the old-timers. Here's a list of a few of them; some of them, like Festus Pragnell and F. J. Ackerman have had stories published before but not in any great quantity recently.

Look out for the following, and try to get them, if possible—Andrew North, O. G. Estes, Jr., Gene Hunter, Pragnell, E. Everett Evans, H. S. W. Chibbett, Ackerman, Gene Ellerman, Hal Moore, Edsel Ford and Dale Hart. These guys are really great, eddie, and write some stuff better than you publish.

Does the absence of Oona and Jick mean Maggie has dropped them? I hope not.

How about some serials?

I was going to write some poetry for an ending, but I couldn't think of anything to write (thank Dio), so I'll just say Amen.—210 S. Av. 57, Los Angeles 42, Calif.

Quite a ruhkus, quite a ruhkus you've kicked up, Michael. Answer us just one question, however—isn't Edsel Ford dead? And you can't run serials very well in a bi-monthly magazine. It's asking too much of reader interest to hold up for sixty days, no matter how cliff-hanging the installment finales. Glad you liked the November cover. You may be surprised to discover (immediately below) that you are not unique. Not in this respect anyway.

BERGEYBOO

by Ronald Friedman

Dear Sir: Just who do you think you're pushing around? A man turns out a masterpiece, and you don't even mention his name anywhere in the book. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. The November issue of STARTLING had the best cover illustration I've seen in quite some time. Keep up the good work, but don't keep me in suspense. "Tell me the artist's name, and darnight soon, or else I'll go back to mother, on Mars. Yes, I'll go back to Mars with a report of all the mean unfair people that edit science-fiction magazines."

Speaking of going back to Mars, "Homeward Bound" by Robert Moore Williams, was by far the best story in the

book, even if it was a little short. I look for quality, not quantity. The story was amusing, set you to thinking, and to top it all off, had a surprise ending. What more could you ask for? Wonder if people from other planets are really spying on us. For all you know, your next door neighbor might be from Sirius. Let's hear the opinion of other readers on interplanetary spy systems.

The column called Review of Science Fiction Publications is a fine contribution to the scientifically minded fantasy fan, along with your Science Fiction Bookshelf. No other prozine contains such accurate descriptions of fan publications and books. You have done a fine job and don't think we readers don't appreciate it.

If at all possible, I'd like to plug a fast growing fan club, the World Wide Fiction Fans. What goes on inside the club is somewhat of a mystery, but if you are interested in joining, write Bob Farnham, 1139 East 44th Street, Chicago 15, Ill. Tell him you saw his name mentioned in my letter.—1980 East 8th Street, Brooklyn 23, New York.

Earle J. Bergey is the cover artist in question. Thanks for the other bouquets. We thrive on same.

FOOTSIE

by Les and Es Cole

Dear Old Thing—Our Foot!

A well-known editor doth state
"Good!" when marian and terran mate.
But the result is quite horrid—
Eight arms and no forehead,
And delivered by very slow freight!

Waal, we were going to drop the hull thing there but after reading Meinzer we've decided to hit back. We realize only too well—what with all the rejection slips—that you are the editor. We have never questioned that fact. We also realize that you set the mag's fictional standards. We may disagree with 'em but we can only suggest changes—you put 'em into effect.

But honestly, kiddo, we think you're takin' the wrong stand on extra-terrestrial humanoid forms. We accuse you of sloppy thinking—and don't get paranoid on us by feeling insulted. It wasn't intended that way. How can you be selective about so-called "scientific advances"? Do you pick just a few fields and give them carte blanche, accept what they say with no argument? The statement, "there is virtually no possibility of the humanoid form occurring on our sister planets" is nearly as valid $E=mc^2$. Or mebbe you'd like it in algebraic form?

Which brings up another distressing permt. We don't know why it is, but in Philadelphia—or anywhere else for that matter—nearly everyone is an authority on geology. Geology is like prejudice, you find it in the whole populace ranging from the lunatic fringe to more than one science fiction editor we could name. And each and every blasted one of 'em speaks with the voice of authority! Boy, would we like to get them out in the field with us!

We would like to know why it is that the lay person picks on poor old geology so much. We're gettin' mighty tired of hearing about: underground rivers flowing across the continent, floods which sweep in from the Atlantic and finally stop against the Rockies, "uncontrovertible proof" of Atlantis' existence etc. And the worst of it is, by virtue of his very training, the geologist has to admit that "it's possible". The poor slob may "know" that his friend, who has button-holed him, is dead wrong but what is "proof"? Oh, well—I

As far as that oddball, Davis, is concerned we have only a few things to say. First of all, everyone else to the contrary, notwithstanding, regardless, we find that feuds of a gentle type are most stimulating. Some of the best ideas we ever got grew out of a hot and heavy discussion wherein the participants were forced to think.

Secondly, and we're sure the editor understands this, we criticize only for one reason—to improve the mag. Criticism, per se, is meaningless. And it would be a sorry thing indeed if our ego were so puny as to have to be built up by constant criticism of old anonymous' magazine.

"Look! We frankly don't give a darn whether this sees print or not. We've been writing to science fiction mags too long for that. We also think TWS and SS are not the best on the market—we think they could be, the elements are there, but not until quite a few more changes are made. But we have a certain affection for the mags—the senior author, at least, began reading TWS at the ripe age of nine back in 36—and we feel that we should be allowed to criticize, at least as long as we do it to help.

Finally, Davis may have been trying to be cute with his parody on our name, but he was just as highly unoriginal. For anyone who's interested we've heard all the puns on the name and present a short list as an example—Old King; mined; black as 'a head; slow; anthracitic, bituminous, lignitic and cannal; etc. If you think of any we've left out, you keep

them and chuckle over 'em but under no circumstances should you send 'em to us!

Now that we've slapped you around a bit more, can we pat thee on thy balding pate and kiss thee gently on both cheeks? Limited as you are to fantasy by your own definition, you continue to improve and we like it.

We were surprised—pleasantly surprised—by Leinster. "The Other World" is the best thing he has done since "First Contact". It was a nice bit of fantasy. You might point out to Murray, however, that Eolippus is the name of a beetle or some such insect and not that of a horse.

We've just reread the squib under the HOF. May we quote? ". . . this science fiction classic reprinted by popular demand." Whose popular demand? Are we part of the populace? We can't seem to remember "demanding" any s.f. story for reprint, especially one of Taine's. We're Taine-haters from 'way back! Besides, you always slough and rough our demands! So we come to the crux which you will probably immediately reject, you old conservative, you.

Why not drop the HOF? The only good thing that comes out of it is occasional Weinbaumiana. But why turn to the past? The very existence of the HOF implies a lack of confidence in the future era of s.f. And every story you print in HOF means one less chance for some—heh, heh!—bright young intelligent new pair of authors. Seriously, we think HOF serves about as much function as an appendix (human-type) and is far less interesting. We demand that you banish it!

One last bit here: John Jakes is making Northwestern "Lords of the Rose Bowl" on pretty shaky evidence. Just suppose, John, that the ref's ruling had gone the other way. Suppose that Murakowski's fumble on the goal line had been declared a free ball? Your "lords" then get licked, 14-13. We saw that play, and while we don't debate the ruling we'd hate to have had to call it. It was that close!—1204 Nogales St., Del Paso Heights, California.

We plead not guilty to the geology expertism you deplore so, Coles. In fact, our one brief experience with the structural subject—first term, sophomore year, college—left us with a desire to hear as little as possible about it thereafter. We were frankly bored stiff by the idea of grubbing around in the dirt, then came down with chickenpox, missed our midyear exam and got flunked—thus winding up ineligible for clubs and generally messing up the whole year. Even the pleasure of paleontology in the second term failed to placate us. It was supposed to be a gut course but not for us.

As for the rest—

Les and Es Cole, who have fought any One who'd aver they've been taught any STF rules

By editor fools

Who'd send them back to their rock botany.

Really, is that gneiss? Perhaps you'd better igneus entirely. We're sorry you disagree on extra-terrestrial humanoids—but there are a number of theories that have a certain sfictional credibility to account for the possibility. Until they are demolished the humanoid dream will doubtless remain part and parcel of the larger science fiction ditto. Not that you aren't entitled to your own viewpoint. You are and you tell us. Incidentally, it's a shame Jay Berwanger and Ernie Vick had their official eyes turned in different directions when Art Murakowski made his celebrated touchdown fumble last year. But that, of course, was last year, Dick Hyland notwithstanding. We hope we hear from you again next issue. We like a good squabble too at times.

CURTSEY FROM BETSY by Elizabeth M. "Betsy" Curtis

Dear Editor: This letter just has to be a long one. If you don't like long letters, you should stop jamming SS with so many remarkable items and get back to giving the fans only 25c worth.

THE OTHER WORLD by Leinster is notable first because it is excellent fiction and only secondly because I agree with his basic premises. I too have proof! I must quote, "The thefts are rarely of money or jewels but art objects, wine, drugs . . . are missing out of all proportion to the opportunity of thieves to steal them." (P. 14)

My proof is this: in the last fifteen years I have lost at least eleven fountain pens. The significant feature about these losses is not that no one had an opportunity to steal them, but that they were all full of ink at the time they were taken. Obviously the thief didn't know how to fill a pen.

Then, too, there is the phenomenon known as the "incantation effect." I have some small article on my desk in the middle of the welter of papers, unpaid bills, paper clips, match folders etc. This object may be a typing eraser. I use it. I put it down. I am called out of the room but return quickly. I want the eraser again. It has vanished utterly.

I turn my back on the desk and repeat some such incantation as "Abracadabra tum tum teed, bring back the eraser I sorely need!" Sure enough, when I turn around, there is the eraser right in plain sight where I left it. Obviously, the denizens of The Other World do not want folks to get suspicious about their existence and dark doings.

I trust, however, for the general safety of our civilization, that Mr. Leinster's footnote warning will hold the cult of Leinsterism to an esoteric minimum. Would that certain other authors were so cautious and logical in their statements.

THE KING OF THIEVES finds our boy Ridolph amusing and clever as always but I think I would savor his doings more if they were to appear not more than twice a year. This sounds cruel but so it is.

There is an unusually discerning statement in Williams' HOMEWARD BOUND, which will take considerable expansion in science-fiction to come. It is, "Always, behind every fact, there was somewhere a dreamer." This is profound, as who should know better than I who get some science thrown at me practically every day.

CURE FOR A YLITH also has a few social facts worked out to the point where they become quite visible. Good. Simak's LIMITING FACTOR gave me a long-hoped-for clear picture of the real problems of comprehending a truly alien artifact, even if I didn't get the point of the mood-picture at the end. Science-fiction has been pining for this year, believe it or not.

EMPEROR OF THE UNIVERSE is just plain a great story—a matter-of-fact presentation of a great character. Anthologists please note

WHAT AN ISSUE!

And after all this, I still have just come to the vital item of the November number—the Sid Taylor letter. I just have to cut loose. "Man is a highly intelligent creature . . ." says he, moving me near to tears. I'm afraid I can't claim this distinction for myself nor for many of the beloved circle of my friends.

I know that I am getting older every day and that is probably why I can't go along with him on other points, either. I find a cheery faith in the future as such usually a symptom of Micawberism. I just don't believe, in spite of past good fortune of Micawberism. I just don't believe, in spite of past good fortune to the contrary, that something good is due to turn up every day in every way. But I'm still not particularly pessimistic and cynic.

Nor do I find so-called fatalism in science-fiction essentially depressing or degrading. The process of my reasoning is something like this: Man is a highly emotional creature. You (dear editor) said, "it is a lot easier to stir readers with menace. . . ."

If man were an intelligent creature, he would realize that any story is a parable—that is, it may be analyzed by a sort of "ethical mathematics." If the factors (characters, plot, local color, etc.) are meaningful (that is, not nonsense) and true (that is, possible and probable within the framework of the story), this ethical mathematician can uncover the useful or enlightening formulae that will give him the basis for right (successful, clever, expedient, moral, whatever the story deals with) action in similar circumstances even when those circumstances are apparently different in place, plot, or local color.

However, as I stated bluntly before, most of our minds do not consciously work analytically on such a scale. We are only emotionally moved to applaud and emulate clever or noble actions we read about. And so we are best stirred to face our problems with menace.

But the "fate" of time-travel is only telescoped causality; and the point of every Jeremiaid seems to be, "Repent and be saved." In other words, change your major premises in life to fit the facts and stave off the "atomiggeddon" (a word which seems to scare the . . . off Mr. Taylor).

Which about gives my views on that, except that I want to say that since I believe this heartily, I see the function of

the editor and of my fellow critics of TEV as constant and careful checks on the "truth" and "meaningfulness" and logical consistency of the stories presented to him and to us, as well as to react to the "movingness" of the stories. A "so-what" story is certainly worse than a fatalistic one.—201 Veterans Village, Canton, New York.

Let's just say that the future is always "interesting" in prospect. Why must we demand more either way? It is only the present that is dull (and surely, always excepting extreme physical discomfort, there is nothing so soul-erosive as boredom, whether it comes from within or without). The past is always neatly telescoped (except in cases of extreme neurosis such as battle fatigue and downright melancholia) to keep the unpleasant back out of mind.

Glad you liked the issue, Betsy, and hope you will continue to express yourself our way in epistolary fashion. Also, we wish you freedom from Other World interference in the future matters of fountain pens and ink erasers. But the conspiracy of inanimate objects against humanity is too well known to be gone into here. Better buy a rucksack for luck.

WOBBLE WERSE by Rick Strauss

To the Editor:

Every editor in time
Should learn to rime,
But your riming wobbles and your meter has dents,
And sometimes you don't even make sents.
In future stick to prose, dear Editor!
Your poems are getting worse instead of bettior.
—6811 Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood, California.

*You, yelefted Richard Strauss,
Seem to us to rate a mauss
Over and encircling as well as beneath your
left eye.
And upon this bitter fact we sigh.
We'll thank you not to use an egg-beater
The next time but three you decide to try to
read our meter.*

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT by G. Lopez

Have been reading your mags, SS & TWS, for quite some time. I was thirteen when I first discovered Science fiction, that was seven years ago. In all that time your magazine is the only one that I have written to.

To get down to cases, in all of the Science fiction that I have read during the past seven years, in not one of your stories have I found a place for the dark races of the world. Not only that, there is not one mention of them anywhere.

Tell me something—what happened to them? Or do the writers of science fiction seem to think that—shall we say tolerance—will be so widely accepted by then that different races will have intermarried to the extent that they will be no more? If this letter is printed, I would like to hear some of the comments of the readers.

Incidentally Ed, I think your definition of tolerance is quite accurate, or should I use another word. In the beginning of The Ether Vibrates, in your comment of Mr. Taylor's letter you state, "And how can you, ourselves or anyone stop imaginative folk from speculating on what is to come?" Does this not also apply to what is to happen to the dark races?

I don't imagine that this letter will get in print but I had to write just the same. Owing to the fact that my lunch hour is over I shall leave you to read and destroy this missive. NC (no comment) on the stories as I think this letter is quite long enough. Besides it is obvious (even to you??) that

for a change not one story was really bad enough to pen. We—ll Rene LaFayette was below average.—86 Oak Street, Jersey City 4, N. J.

In your letter and that which follows immediately a very serious point has been brought up. To which we can only plead remissness of the very first water. Frankly, you have hit stf—which in general prides itself on its "advanced" views—in a very tender point.

We have a hunch that, with the authors as with ourselves and other editors, the fault is primarily one of omission. In our particular case this seems more reprehensible than in others—for in the sports magazines in which we also have an editorial hand we have won a number of prizes for tackling racial problems successfully in fictional guise.

Something, as you hint, had better be done about this. We don't believe that a frank development of so-called "race problem" themes should be bothersome to the bulk of stf readers—quite the reverse. Furthermore, it is something that has got to come if science fiction is to progress much further.

In the past—and to some extent in the present, the science fiction story is basically an adventure yarn. And until very lately the adventure yarn as printed in this country, England, France, Germany and elsewhere has been a glorification of the ideas and ideals of empire, colonial exploitation and that old debbil, the "white man's burden."

Thanks for shooting that arrow, Mr. Lopez—it hit. You ask what has "happened to" the dark races of the world in stf. Answer—they simply haven't been born yet. But we have a hunch they soon will be.

NUTMEG by Don Clark

Dear Editor: With the Nov. '49 issue of STARTLING out, and several more issues of it and THRILLING WONDER STORIES in the processes of lay-out, printing and distribution to cover the next few months, I suppose there's little hope that I can stop this trend overnight. There's probably no hope of stopping it at all, in fact—authors simply seem to be writing that way now and editors have to take the best of what they get.

The "trend" I'm speaking of is clearly exemplified by Murray Leinster's THE OTHER WORLD, and I'd definitely like to see it ended before TWS and SS slide back into a decadence not comparable to but as bad as the thud-and-blunder Sarge Saturn days. You, I presume, were the sagacious character who pulled the twins out of that slump with a decree that wild-west and cops-and-robbers stories dressed up with proton-guns and spaceships was not science fiction.

The stories, you said, had to have pseudo-scientific foundation. They must treat upon new concepts, they must attempt to expound unique theories. At least, I suppose you said that—it's the result you've got. But now the authors are straying under what seems to be an unintentional restriction. They're beginning to lose themselves in new concepts and unique theories at the cost of good story quality. They're beginning to write good exposition. The story is beginning to come out second-best in the struggle.

Leinster's THE OTHER WORLD has a good story—but he

didn't write it! He merely wrote about the story in half the space he used. It's strange, perhaps, but that trend to "write about a story" can be seen cropping up everywhere, in the slicks as well as the pulps. It's so much easier to describe a story rather than tell it, I suppose. But it has been the case in so many of your past novels they're all beginning to sound the same. Every time I pick up an issue, I know some author is going to describe a story that would have been outstanding if only he had written it instead.

But let's be specific about this. In Leinster's yarn, we have a description of how Dick Blair found a strange, deteriorated object in an Egyptian tomb. We have a description of how he met and fell in love with Nancy Holt, secretary to Sam Todd the criminologist. Throughout the story, we find descriptive passages outlining Blair's thoughts and actions. It sounds cryptic and vague, more like a synopsis than a story.

Rarely does he display a sense of immediacy, and then only in the more dramatic moments of the story—going into them with his expository transitions and little preparation in the way of establishing immediate sympathy between the reader and his hero, Blair. There's so much description and so little immediate drama to the novel that it becomes a hodgepodge text on the concept and theory involved, rather than a story.

Good exposition is something hard to wrangle into a story. In science fiction it's absolutely necessary—which makes good sf short stories exceptionally hard to write in most instances. But exposition should be introduced in a story to enhance its action, to clarify its hero and his background, to establish the setting and conflict of the story clearly with the reader.

If mere descriptive passages are inflicted on the story-line the hero's background, the setting and the conflict seem established apart from the story itself and the reader is left either with a dry, vaguely comprehensible text describing the story or must take it upon himself to orient description with the action it was supposed to enhance and clarify. This stands true in any fiction. To turn out a good story, the author should take it upon himself to weave description and dramatic action into one continuous flow of cause-and-effect from beginning to end.

The one exception you've run to this trend recently, that I can recall, was Leigh Brackett's *THE MOON THAT VANISHED*, and readers probably remember what a distinctive, clear-cut piece of fiction that was even though they may have resented its approach to pure fantasy. She virtually wrote that story "with her guts" as Ernest Hemingway might put it.

The nearest you've come to the expository narrative type of story has been in LaFayette's *CONQUEST OF SPACE* series. He's done fairly well with a technique that seldom is successful. But any novel-length story crammed with such exposition is simply too weighed down to be outstanding, though the story itself might have great promise. And it seems your concentration on the development of new concepts and unique theories in your stories is driving authors into these descriptive flights rather than goading them to write good stories about such concepts and theories.

Bradbury has done it, so has Kuttner. Bradbury starts reeling off a psycho-neurotic reaction to some concept or theory from the first sentence of any of his tales; Kuttner grabs said concept or theory solidly in his hero's fists and rides it roughshod to the bitter, or happy, end. Such techniques have made these two outstanding in the short story and novelette field. But as for your general run of novels—perhaps I can best express it by saying I'd rather read about a future scientist running naked through a gleaming city, shouting, "Eureka! I've found it!" than have the author describe nicely that said scientist has just discovered the equation for the buoyancy of paragrav units in a space-warp. Let 'm tell it to the judge!

Otherwise the issue wasn't too bad. Leinster's novel could have been an outstanding one—the ending was particularly effective. Magnus Ridolph seems improving with *THE KING OF THIEVES: CURE FOR YLITH* had a neat pseudo-science angle. The theme of *LIMITING FACTOR* was lost somehow at the end. Should've had a clear-cut statement as finish. *THE ULTIMATE CATALYST* was, of course, The Ultimate Catalyst Bergey's rubber-clad damsel had the usual fault, her bosom drawn up like she was malformed from wearing brassieres three sizes too small. Tell Finlay to stop wasting so much ink and let a little light into his illos. They're too good to be murky.

Since Meg Johns brought up the TEV subject of selective breeding, let's toss a few ideas around about it. First, the probable reason most people find the idea objectionable is because they envision a system whereby they're charted like purebred horses at birth and told whom they will mate with upon reaching adulthood. Perhaps some "intellectuals" would have it that way, and since female births are beginning to outnumber male no doubt they would have the better male breeds mating three or four human mares.

But in any consideration of human nature and morals it's a pretty sure thing that compulsory selective breeding wouldn't work. There's enough "selective" prejudices already existing against cross-breeding of humans with different complexions—not just Negro-white prejudice, either. I'd say it was more than bad enough when a boy of Scandinavian descent couldn't marry a dark-eyed girl of Italian descent without rousing the ire of their respective parents, wouldn't you? Not to mention anti-Semitism.

Compulsory selective breeding would only add to that prejudice more fuel for hatred. But suppose the "selective" part were interpreted in the psychiatric sense and the "breeding" part were left entirely to the individual's own choice? Then, I think, it might work. A youth would be taught his own aptitudes and genetic pattern, and be shown what other pattern would best balance his own.

Then he's bound to cater to the girls who have that other pattern and will probably marry one. He does it as a matter of his own choice. And the pervert types who usually turn radical and run against the tide aren't likely to be accepted by girls other than similar pervert types—which, as selective breeding has shown, are inclined to deteriorate rapidly due to their wild cross-breeding of unbalanced genetic pattern; i.e., to die out. Then the balanced patterns of their descendants develop.

But one thing Meg Johns had better forget is the idea of breeding out all the villainous character in humanity. It can't be done, not totally at least. Disease, physical deformity, even certain brain diseases which cause psychopathic reaction can be bred out, but not plain selfishness. Cruelty develops from ignorance and misunderstanding experiences, not from glands, and every one of us is constantly subject to temptation.

That we give way to temptation occasionally is healthful to good mental balance rather than regrettable—not that hell-fire cleanses the soul or anything like that, but that such experiences are a good reminder of the punishment inflicted on our conscience when we do give in to temptation, which is one thing it's neither wise nor mentally healthful to forget.

The strong among us will continue to prove their fitness by resisting temptation to wreak mayhem and help their fellows, while the weak will continue to make the going rough for the rest of us. But without the weak to keep us on our toes, society might cease developing the strong ones. After that—decadence.

Heroism isn't an inbred quality, it results only from man's mental reaction to physical violence. Even with a near-utopian future civilization, there'd still have to be conflict, though perhaps more between man and alien nature on other planets than between man and himself.

One way for the human mind to lapse into neurotic insanity is through the frustration created by violence; another way is through the senility created by inactive boredom. Both are equally dangerous. Combat troops suffer neurotic unbalance from utter exhaustion—millionaires' sons have suffered the very same thing!—612 Johns Avenue, Union City, New Jersey.

We'll take the latter, given a choice. You certainly have everything divvied up between "strong" and "weak"—right, Don? We don't believe it is quite so simple. But you have a point in your beef on over-exposition among current sf authors. This, by the way, is by no means limited to sf. One look at the current flood of historicals will show you a majority of writing practitioners mistaking research for soundness of story-line. And the bulk of the so-called critics abetting them wholeheartedly.

A good fiction writer can tell a story with a minimum of research, if necessary and make it convincing on any topic—because his people, motives and resultant situations will be believable, even absorbing, and he will be adroit enough to keep his heavy-research topics in the background where they belong. Otherwise, he'll be writing simply a dramatized textbook. We don't feel that the trend is as serious as you make it in sf but it is one to watch—and we shall. Writing around the story is a heinous literary offense indeed.

DISMAYED by Tom Moulton

Dear Old Boy: Note with dismay your announcement in the November *STARTLING STORIES* re the impending return of Captain Future. Things have come to a pretty pass when the American fantasy field has to revive the boring ad-

ventures of this juvenile character—in lack, I presume, of something better.

I wish those TEVites who plead for back-issue magazines would at least offer something in exchange. Haven't the long-suffering Americans doled out enough charity to a spineless world?—15 Fordway Avenue, Layton, Blackpool, Lancashire, England.

Perhaps it won't be quite as painful as you think, Tom. We sincerely hope so.

RUBY IN THE ROUGH by Ruby A. Anderson

Dear Ed: The November issue of STARTLING STORIES discovered, purchased and duly read. As usual it was good reading. However, I will comment on two stories only. To wit:

Murray Leinster has an excellent story in THE OTHER WORLD—but, for gosh sakes, Ed, have him leave off those "author's comments" at the bottom of the pages pretending to believe that the "other world" is an actuality and that we all or any of us may be snatched through a doorway at any time.

Maybe it is true or maybe he does believe that it is, but in a fiction magazine, do you think you should, even by suggestion, try to sell a story to the readers on that basis? Frankly, I became very "displeased," shall we say, with one of your competitors for much the same reason, and that magazine is now below the bottom of the list. Take warning, Ed. These are, of course, my personal feelings, but I have a hunch that many others feel as I do.

My second comment—Clifford D. Simak's LIMITING FACTOR. Maybe I'm a bit dense, but I fail to get the point of the entire story—especially the last paragraph—if there is one.

In TEV C. Stewart Metchette brings attention to Hannes Bok's THE BLUE FLAMINGO. Apparently, his only complaint is that it is "unfinished." I agree with him that it was unfinished—but (again my opinion, please note) even Henry Kuttner and Edmond Hamilton have not written anything to surpass it.

At the time it was published, this story received high praise in TEV and practically every letter demanded a sequel. In spite of this, we have waited, lo, these many moons, and still no sequel or any mention of one. What? Hoppen, Ed.? You didn't let Bok get away, did you? If he hasn't yet finished a sequel to BLUE FLAMINGO, why not give us another story by him while we're waiting?

Bergey's covers are still—Bergey. But I realize from past experience that it does no good whatever to comment thereon. I have no quarrel with Bergey's ability as an artist. He has proven—on very rare occasions—that he is up there with the best when you will let him draw something besides the "guy, the gal and the bem."

Hold on there, Ed. Don't throw that ink well. I'm going—but I'll be back?—828 Montrose Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee.

Bok apparently got so involved in finishing the two Merritt jobs (THE FOX WOMAN and THE BLACK WHEEL) as well as in his artistic career that he has submitted nothing since THE BLUE FLAMINGO. And as for Leinster's footnotes—well, he wanted to insert them and we thought they were fun—still think so as a matter of fact. You may throw anything at us but spinach, Ruby—after all, there's iron in that!

OH, LORDI by Nicholas Lordi

Dear Editor: In regard to your editorial on Mr. Taylor's letter in the Nov. S.S., a few comments are in order. Fatalism as defined in Webster's Universal Dictionary is a "doctrine that all things are subject to fate, or take place by inevitable necessity."

The doctrine of fatalism as such is the wrong attitude for anyone to take. To my way of thinking there is no such thing as fate. To believe in fate is to believe in a predetermined destiny or future. As far as I am concerned, there is no such thing as a prearranged future.

There are only two realities: past and present. The past is what already has happened. It cannot be changed. The present is what is happening. The future, however, is a mythical something which has not occurred yet, which may be speculated on, and which might be predicted to some extent in accord with the law of chance. The future is de-

termined by the present and may or may not have some bearing on the past. Our bodies, for instance, exist only in the present, while our minds can dwell in the past or future at will. If this condition becomes permanent, insanity results.

Mr. Taylor objects to the so-called fatalistic attitude science-fiction authors seem to possess. He infers this because of the continued use of the world destruction theme in science fiction. When an author writes on the future he bases his predictions on the present or on past history.

And again, he might just make wild guesses using only his imagination as the basis for these predictions. Authors which have predicted atomic war in the near future have based their assumptions on present occurrences. These predictions might be fulfilled, but they don't necessarily have to be.

When Mr. Taylor says that science fiction should bring out the wonderful possibilities of the future, he is perfectly correct. But he forgets that there might also be a dismal side to the future, and science fiction must not neglect these possibilities in favor of a wonderful future. However, I do admit that it is more preferable to have more stories dealing with the wonderful side rather than the dismal side.

We must remember, too, that man himself makes his own future. It is up to him through his actions in the present to determine whether it shall be destruction or prosperity.

Concerning the stories in this issue of S.S., on the whole they were very good. The novel, THE OTHER WORLD, made good, fast reading. The Hall of Fame choice was excellent. The shorts were all good, especially LIMITING FACTOR and THE EMPEROR OF THE UNIVERSE.—759 Springfield Ave., Irvington 11, N. J.

You may recall, Nicholas, that the late Henry Adams took a pretty dim view of the future that is now our present in his famed "Education." And he has yet to be proved wrong. Stf is perfectly correct, as you suggest, in hinting that the future of mankind may be anything but rose-colored. Certainly he has in him all the seeds needed for ruin. And currently, despite the marvels of his gadgetry, otherwise known as science, he seems to be deteriorating more and more rapidly in the bases of character on which he must rely for his continued existence.

If that sounds gloomy—well, heck, it is.

BROWSER TURNED GROUSER by Peter J. Ridley

Dear Editor: Browsing among the bookstands of Victoria Station my eyes were assaulted by an unmistakable sight, the cover of STARTLING STORIES. Thinking that an American edition had somehow reached our newsstands I bought it. I wish I hadn't. Approximately 80% of the reading matter being given over to the "hairraising" exploits of our CAPTAIN FUTURE.

Perhaps I'm not qualified to criticize the story, since I only read a couple of paragraphs before giving up in disgust, but brother, those sentences were enough to make the hardest fan retire quietly behind the sofa and cut his throat. Did you have to dredge up this fugitive from the children's comics for the British fans? Must you afflict us with space opera at its horrible worst? Why, in the name of Allah, must you use the CAPTAIN FUTURE stories—haven't there been enough decent tales published in STARTLING STORIES?

Figuratively I cut my Science fictional teeth on S.S. and, continuing the analogy, this two-year-old fan hasn't missed an issue since. During those two years I've seen the standard of the literary line-up in S.S. rise steadily until it has reached the present, undoubtedly high standard. Why then, must you insult the intelligence of the British Fan with this ultra heroic superman? You certainly can't plead scarcity of material.

Maybe I've been a little hasty in blaming the Editor of the American Edition for the low standards of the British Edition, maybe you had nothing to do with it, I hope not. But I had to let off steam, somehow, to someone and you were the obvious choice.

If you had nothing to do with "it," I apologize most humbly, in advance. If you are responsible you deserve every word I've said, and more.

I won't comment on the U.S. Edition, since I'm an issue behind all the American fans, except to say, keep up the standard and try to inject some of the American Edition's virility into the puerile British Edition.

Well I've finished moaning, so Adios.—268 Well Hall Road, Eltham, London, S.E.9, England.

As a matter of fact we have nothing whatever to do with the selection of stories for our new English edition. Apparently it was believed over there that one of the last CF epics to run as a novel in SS would be a good opener for the British readers. We only hope you are not a typical reaction and that, come what may, forthcoming editions will please you more.

NEOPHAN

by David Van Jenrette

Dear Editor: I suppose I should start this epistle in true adolescent fashion by saying this is the first time I have written to a magazine, but in order not to appear puerile I will not say it. I haven't been reading science fiction very long—about six months at most. The TWS featuring SEA KINGS OF MARS by Leigh Brackett marked my initial advent into the hallowed halls of sf.

I started reading sf because I joshed a very good friend of mine, Dave Hammond, because he read them. He said the various mags were worth reading and dared me to read one. I accepted the dare and became convinced.

I have missed a bunch of good stories that were printed before I started reading sf but Dave promised to lend me the ones he has (which aren't very many—his SS and TWS only go back to July, '48.) Stories like THE VALLEY OF CREATION, WHAT MAD UNIVERSE, MR. ZITZ GOES TO MARS, THE MOON THAT VANISHED, AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, THE TIME AXIS, I REMEMBER LEMURIA (how did that get in here?) and THE WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER and many others. Dave (Hammond) is a collector of sf mags, all in "mint" condition. I have to practically swear out a bond before he will lend me one of his "precious" copies.

I liked THE OTHER WORLD immensely. I am going to list the stories I liked not by title (that takes too much space), but by author. First place to Murray Leinster (Will F. Jenkins?) then in order of preference comes John Taine, Ray Bradbury, Hank Kuttner, Rene LaFayette, L. Ron Hubbard and Arthur C. Clarke. The rest (I'll be kind and not mention them by name) tie for last.

Do you have any more unpublished stories by Joe Gibson around. Joe, I speak with native pride, hails from the Garden State, New Jersey.

D.H. lent me a bunch of Burroughs' books but I am afraid they don't strike me like they do him. The plots are so similar and so tiresome. When you've read one you've read them all. I find John Carter especially boring. Don't the rest of you readers think so, too?

I like Wells (Herbert George) myself. I have read his WAR OF THE WORLDS, THE INVISIBLE MAN, THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON, THE TIME MACHINE and other stories too humorous to mention, including THE INEXPERIENCED GHOST. I find Poe dull and burdensome. Bram Stoker's DRACULA is a horrible piece of writing.

THE LOST WORLD by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the immortal Sherlock Holmes, is a wonderful book. I borrowed it One Mariene Hildebrandt, a fan who resides in the neighboring town of Gloucester, lent it to me.

Doyle really depicts some vigorous, vibrant, really REAL, characters. I guess I will never forget the rough, brusque personality of Professor Challenger, or the courageous FLAIL OF THE LORD Sir John Roxton. I have read Thomas Kendrick Bangs' screamingly funny HOUSEBOAT ON THE STYX. I see YE ED also enjoyed this liber.

I am seventeen years of age and would like to hear from other fans besides my FANatic friend, Hammond. I would like to hear from fellows (girls too) residing in New Jersey and the nearby metropolis of Filthy-delphia.

I hear there is a Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. PSFS. Is it possible for an out-of-towner to become a member?—Box 49, Runnemed, New Jersey.

Welcome to sf, David—here's hoping you're with us for many, many moons to come. Scallions for the Lemuria mention and for missing JOHN Kendrick Bangs' first name. However, we're glad you liked the November issue.

WHO PULLS OUR STRINGS?

by Joe E. Dean

Dear Sir: The November issue hit the stands just in time to keep me from dying of fictional starvation and my fail-

ing heart was nourished by the sight of the cover, horrid and blatant though it is.

As usual I turned first to "Ethergrams" and, having mentally cursed the Coles for their attack on Margaret St. Clair, whose stories I find entertaining even if they are unscientific, moved on to the Hall of Fame, where I found THE ULTIMATE CATALYST fair but not quite warm enough for the honor that you have bestowed upon it.

I expect the so-called "classics" to have a certain depth of plot and concept that is not to be found in run of the mill stories like, for example, JOURNEY FOR ONE. Frankly, I think HoF would be much better if you could squeeze novel-length stories into it—which you could if you'd use fine print.

Your editorial touched upon something that has been a source of concern to me for some time. I know, as do most long-time readers of science fiction, that most of the stories depicting the destruction and downfall of humanity are written for effect.

That is, the writer employs some frightful social or psychological menace in the stead of the usual hackneyed BEM. But there are many people who read sf only on occasion. It has occurred to me that, for those readers, this endless spate of pessimistic fatalism may be unhealthy.

It doesn't matter, you see, if readers of long standing, readers like myself, acquire a fatalistic attitude, for we are the lunatic fringe, the introverts and dreamers and idealists who accomplish great things only in our minds.

But those others—those disgustingly normal people—are the ones who eventually run things. If they become bitter if they decide that nothing really matters, then we who dance to their tunes will suffer for it.

Perhaps it would be better to feed them pap. After all, they're used to it and it keeps them happy. And I'd rather be bossed by a happy fool than by a soured intellectual. The latter is too difficult to outwit.

On the other hand the lunatics and dreamers, the people who are worth knowing, the honest, kind-hearted maniacs who cannot or will not learn that the only real virtue is to get the upper hand, to hurt and kill and lie and steal, to make wars and suppress beneficial inventions, just so you can stay in control of things, these people need their dreams in ink.

Faced with a lifetime of being left out of things, of being trod upon because they refuse to conform to a way of life that they know to be wrong (and my remarks apply to Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern civilization) they must have something like science fiction to cling to or they will go mad. For them pap will not suffice.

What is to be done, then?

I am not foolish enough to try to answer that question. Instead, like the incompetent coward that I am, I sidestep it and let it fall directly in your lap. After all, you are the editor. But, tell me, who pulls your strings?

I greatly fear that this pseudo-philosophical mood of mine has made this letter unpublishable. However, you may rest assured that it will not appear in a fanzine under the title—"The Letter STARTLING was afraid to print." Gosh, I'd be afraid, too.—315 West 33rd Street, New York City.

You seem to have adopted fear as your bedmate, Joe. If you'll remember from time to time that, in a cosmic sense, neither you nor anyone else is especially important—that the ego is the classic delusion of man—then perhaps you won't be so worried. You and Don Clark, also of New Jersey, should have a fine time together—if you don't drive one another to the brink of a mutual snake-pit.

As for who pulls our strings—we don't wear 'em any more. Long ago we adopted the zipper.

DE WITTICISM

by Moe (Mrs. Paul F.) DeWitt

Dear Editor: Having been numbered among the few for some eighteen months, I shall now break radio silence and attempt to crash the pages of TEV (Destructive character, am I not?)

The November issue—I mean ish—contained a wide range of material, from super to not so very. This is my rating of the stories therein:

THE OTHER WORLD: But good.

JOURNEY FOR ONE: Good.

THE ULTIMATE CATALYST: It smells. Bad, that is. But so do most of the HoF epics. I kept tasting underdone pork for a week after reading this one.

THE KING OF THIEVES: Every Magnus Ridolph yarn is

better than the one before. Keep 'em coming, please.
HOMEWARD BOUND: Wonderful, simply wonderful. Do you suppose it could be true?
CURE FOR A YLITH: Fair.
LIMITING FACTOR: Mediocre. Anybody can sit and philosophize, but it takes a good author to write a story with action r. it.

EMPEROR OF THE UNIVERSE: Up to the standard of this series, which isn't bad a-tall.
And finally, I agree whole-heartedly with Captain Slater in regard to more science and less sex on your covers. Why suit your stories to the intelligentsia (ahem!) and your covers to morons? Make up your mind.—2065 Six and a Half Street Rochester, Minnesota.

Thanks for the kind words, Mae. But if you kept tasting underdone pork, John Taine's story made a real dent. We had the same reaction, which is why we decided to list the story for reissue.

PICKING BOWNE by Sam Bowne

Dear Editor: This letter is inspired by that of Meg Johns in the November issue and with her I wish to take exception or the question of selective breeding. There seems to be two objections—that people won't cooperate and that no one knows what to breed for.

Man has gained his supremacy by being a non-specialized animal who invented specialized tools. No one would suggest that we concentrate on brawn and stamina but such an idea might have seemed quite reasonable as late as the 18th century.

Now it is suggested that we breed for intelligence but that is very general and particularly hard to measure. No one, so far as I know, has proved that the IQ and other tests measure, except in a very general way, anything except formal education and/or adaptation to environment (absence of psychoses). If we could measure intelligence, what kind do we want?

At present two of the most important technical traits are ability to remember and apply the solutions of similar problems—and ability to make successful approximations. With the present improvement in calculating machines, punch-card systems, microfilm etc. these may lose some of their supremacy and be replaced by other traits—what I don't know.

Probably the most intelligent (?) approach to the problem is in Heinlein's BEYOND THIS HORIZON, where such obvious disorders as 'aries and the more obvious types of insanity have been bred out and a few specialized individuals developed more or less experimentally, but the bulk of the population left alone. Unless we want a "Brave New World" I don't see how we can go farther than this, to say nothing of the difficulties of removing recessive traits.

I shall now take a deep breath and compliment you on the continued improvement of your mag, though this issue is a little below par. Of course I maintain my feud with the Hall of Fame but no doubt there are enough Mid-Victorians in your public to support it since you continue in your error.

This is one of the few issues I have seen where the novel was the best. THE OTHER WORLD is very nicely worked out indeed and the author can easily have a sequel, a few generations later, when the other worldites are no longer sick of theft and brutality. That guardianship of this world against war is a little hard to believe lasting.

Incidentally, where does Ed Cox get the idea that pretty soon they'll be telling us what to think. Whatever you think nowadays, somebody's already told you to do so, which takes all the fun out of it. Yours in continual dissatisfaction.—33 Hampton Road, Scarsdale, New York.

Well, Sam, when you come right down to it, an original thought is as hard to dig up as that original egg or hen or whatever. Re your objection to "intelligent" human breeding, we can only repeat once more the classic George Bernard Shaw-Isadore Duncan anecdote.

At one time—so the story goes—the famous dancer suggested by letter that she and GBS team up for the purpose of having a eugenic child, "one which will combine my beauty with your brains."

Shaw, of course, replied, "And what if it

turns out to have my beauty and your brains?" Which settled the issue peremptorily and for all time.

MORE BREEDING BEEFS by Louise Hilliard

Dear Editor: I am not one of your dyed-in-the-wool fans, but I do get your mag once in a while. The first time I read it, I thought the letters were the best part and the stories hardly worth going through. Nowadays it's about half-and-half, I'd say.

One of your readers asks whether we couldn't use selective breeding to improve on man's warlike disposition and give us "brains, not brawn." Intelligence alone is no guarantee of peaceableness, though of course, it helps.

Personally, I think there are too many variables for human selective breeding to be very successful, but maybe I'm wrong. Environment and early training play a very important part in developing the resultant adult, good or bad, though naturally the influence of heredity is considerable too.

Anyway, to conduct such experiments on a grand scale, the government would have to be a dictatorship, in which case they wouldn't want peaceful qualities except in their workers. There have been such attempts in breeding carried on, haven't there, as in the Oneida Community, but as far as I know they didn't pan out too well.

I liked your story Emperor of the Universe, but one point bothered me. How could terrestrial plants grow successfully on alien worlds, especially on those where there was no cellular life to begin with?

The more Bradbury the better, even if he does seem to concentrate on Mars in s-f. His characters really live.—R.F.D. No. 2, Milton, Vermont.

Regarding those plants in EOTU, we must confess ourself stumped. Somehow, however, we think that poison ivy will survive anywhere, with or without air, cellular growth or anything else. We have never been able to avoid it.

RETURN PLAGUE by Dave Hammond

Dear Editor: I return to plague your literary desk as I shall soon plague your slush pile. The November issue of STARTLING STORIES was well assembled with regard to quality. As I said before, I rank the Thrilling twins at the top of the sf hit parade. If you keep having issues like this you are going to stay there for quite awhile. I am not going to subject the November format to the indignity of classification, so everyone should be happy, because they will not have to be bored by my thoughts on your editing abilities.

I would like to give a little advice to the readers—confidential of course. Would you like to have SS and TWS made the way YOU want it? Well, it is simple, easy, and not even illegal! You merely have to sign your letters William E. Stolz! Does that sound surprising? I shall explain.

All you fans enter your hermetically-sealed vaults where are kept your ancient copies of the mags STARTLING STORIES and THRILLING WONDER. Find the September, 1948 STARTLING and look on page 123, where there begins a letter by the afore-mentioned William E. Stolz. I realized after I asked you to search your museum that you might not have the particular, in a readable or any condition, SS I mentioned, thus I will refer to my own and explain as this epistle unfolds.

Stolz asked: "Get L. Ron Hubbard"—gotten. "Van Vogt"—ditto. "Put the first of the Gerry Carlyle stories in the H of F"—accomplished. "Collar de Camp"—collared. "A Story by John Taine"—Did he get it? What do you think? That is what Sir Stolz has done thus far.

Now that we have seen what Stolz (We're friends by now so I will henceforth call him Bill) has done we can predict on this basis what will happen further in the suggestions Bill made that didn't come true. Listen!

TWS and/or SS are going to have a cover by Virgil Finlay or Bergey is going to "de-sensationalize." How do I know? Bill asked for it. Some bright day, suggests Bill, we are going to have an issue with two novels in it, due to the increase in size of your-favorite sf mags. Ye ed's editorials are going to remain wonderful (I already knew THAT). I hope Bill's hope of seeing the name Robert Bloch on the contents page is soon realized.

About Leinster's OTHER WORLD. Don't you think that Leinster got his ideas for that story from the works of Richard Sharpe Shaver? I wonder where Shaver got his. Maybe I know but I don't believe it!

I am repeating my appeal: I want to get together and

organize a teen-age fan club. My address is right below and my name is at the beginning of this. What more do you want? A postage stamp, an envelope, and a secretary? Let me hear from you. Vale.—806 Oak Street, Runnemed, New Jersey.

Well, our mede runneth over, what with you and Dave Van Jenrette both contributing this time out. As for the Stolze suggestions, you have us scratching all three of our heads. Maybe they came true (as much as they have to date) because they were good suggestions. We sincerely hope so.

Luck on your fanorganization hopes.

PATTY CAKE

by Richard R. Smith

Dear Anonymous: Since you choose to remain unknown and anonymous, I might as well address you as such. Anyway, for all we know you might let the office boy answer our crackpot letters. Considering some of the letters we fans write I wouldn't blame you.

THE OTHER WORLD was very good but not perfect. It is more of an incident in a whole story than a complete story itself. The reader is looking forward to the day when the heroes are going to tangle with the masters. But it takes the whole forty thousand words to lick the overseers and the ruhks and the masters are cleared up in a hurry with grenades to wind up the story. It is—some adjective or other.

Murray did a good job. He probably succeeded in arousing some reader emotion now and then. A lot of readers probably found themselves mentally shouting, "Kill the dirty ruhks," "Kill the dirty overseers," "Kill the perfumed masters." That's healthy, y'know. Fiction is a good outlet for overstocked emotions or something corny like that.

TRS: Excuse me, I got the mags mixed: TEV: So you remember the little patty-cake game that Messrs. Hope and Crosby used to play in the early "road" pictures. I remember that game too and that was a long time ago, methinks. At the time, I was having difficulty spelling c-a-t and d-o-g. How old does that make you? How old does that make me? Skip it.

Meg Johns' idea of selective breeding to breed out men like Hitler wouldn't work. It really wouldn't. First, remember how Hitler and his bunch called themselves the aryan race or something like that? They thought they were a "super-race" in every respect although a lot of us would have their doubts.

Selective breeding wouldn't help racial prejudice any. Selective breeding would hardly create more brains than brawn as she suggests. Most certainly it wouldn't wipe out the warmongers, et al. Man, alas, is psychological besides physical and how in the world are you going to breed out inferiority complexes and all kinds of emotional entanglements? In fact, you can't!

I'd write you a poem but I don't know how to write poetry and that is a great handicap. Almost as great a handicap as trying to write science-fiction yarns and not knowing how to write fiction.—6 East 44th Street, Wilmington, Del.

Imagine a man named Smith having the crust to call anyone else nameless! Really! Apparently, judging by some of the letters above, Leinster's Otherworld opus did not arouse quite the reactions you seem to have felt, Dick. The ruhks drew their share of sympathy, bless the little beasties. Our age is thirty-nine until late next April, if you must know. We have no feelings about the fact one way or another. There it is.

OOPS—SORRY!

by Freddie Hershey

Dear Sir: As secretary of the Outlander fans and co-editor of the last issue, which is on its way to you, I want to correct an error in your reporting of our group. We are not outcasts of the LASFS. In fact, the majority of our members also belong to LASFS and the larger group are very friendly to us. Alan Hershey, present director of LASFS, is an Outlander and the only prerequisite for being a member of this small group is that you live in any of the outlying cities or communities of L. A.

Since your review, we have been besieged with questions as to "what happened." And also confused with another group in L. A., which possibly are outcasts of the LASFS. We'd appreciate your attention to this seemingly small detail, but which is important to us.—6335 King Avenue, Bell, California.

Attention given as above—plus apologies for the error. But keeping up with the unions and schisms of Los Angeles fandom can be a trifle taxing over the years. We're only glad it ain't so, Freddie.

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS . . . ?

by Lin Carter

Greeting: "The latest STARTLING underneath the bough, A jug of beer, a Pretzel box and Thou."

Ah well, I'm sure you get the idea. With STARTLING (to paraphrase Omar), Wilderness is Paradise, enow. Now lest this saccharine sentiment for me, who in Days of Yore was wont to slaver vemon through The Vibrating Ether, shouldst shake you from your Editorial Throne, let me hasten to add that very seldom do I find a yarn like "The Other World," that is worthy of such praise. That was one darn good hunk of writing, well plotted, well developed and bearing a thin edge of suspense honed to razor sharpness.

I've read other yarns written along this theme, which is indeed fairly commonly found in stiel, but I can't quite recall one so refreshingly free of cliches. A less sensitive hand at the typer would have probably injected a Mad Scientist into the plot, who discovers the O.W., learns its history, makes a Dastardly Deal with the Grand Panoram and plots to loose the ruhks into New York. After the conquest he and G. P. would rule together. Thank Klono for an old hand like Leinster's at the controls!

And though I'm not a admirer of John Taine I must admit that for once the Hall of Fame printed a story worthy of Fame. Not hindered by the fine Finlay pic, either. I'm glad to see you're running some of the old Pete Manx, Anton York and Guerry Carlyle series once again. I remember them as being among the brighter spots in the old days. Let's have another Anton York story soon. Hmmm?

"The Emperor of the Universe" was probably the best short. I gather this is the end of the series. To be blunt, I didn't care a helluva lot for these LaFayette stories. There was an air of corruption about them that was actually depressing. No, I don't mean corruption—rather degeneration. I had the feeling from the first that in each story, the hero was going to be rebuffed by Society, disgraced, laughed at and then go ahead by himself and reach his goal.

It seems sorta improbable that all the important exploration was to be done in secret, by social outcasts rather than by properly staffed officially sponsored expeditions. This last story was by far the best of the series. It had a touch of pathos and dignity that was somewhat burlesqued in the other Conquest of Space yarns.

"King of Thieves" was the usual Magnus Ridolph thing. Saved by a pat trumped-up gimmick at the end. I'm rather afraid I don't like Magnus, improbable old superman that he is. The dea of such a person, a master of every conceivable science, master detective, master statesman, master this, master that, is just so downright far-fetched that it strains my over-flexible credulity and I occasionally find myself pitying the poor villain.

Rather than comment on the letters, which were dull this time, I shall close, paraphrasing Omar again, as I sink into the shadows.

"The pounding typer writes, and having writ Moves on, nor all your piety nor wit,
May bring it back to change one single line—
Unless Ye Ed's blue pencil cancels it!"

Well, you wanted poetry, didn't you? Till next time.—1734 Newark Street So., St. Petersburg, Fla.

You were wrong on the LaFayette series—as persual of the January issue must have revealed by this time. Incidentally, when hasn't society so-called done its level best to drive out anyone who dared to voice any really important new ideas? A quick glance at the tragic sagas of Christ, Mani, Galileo, Gandhi and even Columbus, to name a few, should suffice to prove Rene's point. To win contemporary favor as a progressive a man must confine himself to

coming up with a new gadget for material comfort—and even then he is apt to get his throat cut by eager fellow-mousetrap manufacturers. People are poison when confronted by any idea which forces them to self-analysis or thought.

*And so, Lin's letter read and understood
Our answer comes in pessimistic mood.
But lest he fear our tendency to brood,
We find his Other World reaction good.*

Sometimes we think the chief trouble with the world is too many Fitzgeralds. Or never do today what can be put off to Omar.

BECK AND CALL by Calvin and Thomas Beck

Dead Editor: We considered over a heap of T.W.S.'es and S.S.'es that if Les and Es Cole can do it, so can we. Therefore using the foul name of Cuthbertus, spirit of stf stories dead and rejected, we have come to the ultimatum that we must be heard. Therefore, harken to our words of wisdom ere we send you a story to review before your already myopic eyes!

Firstly we note that the November ish of S.S. bore somewhat the semblance of having trimmed edges. Can it be that the binders are accepting graft from the trimmed-edge-society-for-good-looking-zines? But what e'er it, let it continue so.

Looking at the Bergeycover (and we looked and drooled) we noticed what appeared to be the Chrysler building, needle top and all, no doubt upon which Ye Edde sticks rejected stories and unpublished letters. But the gal on the cover—something's wrong with the perspective (no, not with gal—slobber)—therefore we walked up and down 42nd Street in front of the Chrysler building the next day but we found no vestige of such a gall!

Re the stories: we think we have a good and simple system to solve the problem of rating stories. For instance, if a tale is thought to be excellent we give it an A-plus rating; if it's good, it would get an A rating, and so on down the line. Thus we modestly commence with our little system: "The Ultimate Catalyst" . . . A plus . . . definitely more of such.

"The Other World" . . . A . . . Too many stories of this ilk have appeared lately.

"Journey For One" . . . A . . . We just dote on time-travel tales—MORE, MORE!!

"Cure For Ylith" and "Limiting Factor" tie for . . . B-plus

"The Emperor of the Universe" . . . B-minus . . . too much of the tear-jerker element in it. It may have been a better story if it were longer with more details on persons, places and events, factors which are too often neglected by some authors some of the time.

"The King of the Thieves" . . . ZZZ-minus . . . alas and alack, we note with no joy that Magnus Ridolph Rides Again the last time we heard of him, he was supposed to be "fighting graft in Scleretto City." It's a shame that Jack Vance didn't leave him there. We know from previous experience with other Vance stories that the author can verily do much better than that. No more Ridolphantasies PLEASE.

All in a coconutshell, not a bad ish of S.S., although we wonder why you do not go monthly, reprint stories from the Gernsback era, have a Quarterly or semi-annual or have more pics per novel? Incidentally, what ever became of that mammoth of fandom, The Science Fiction League?

You see, we have been running a fan club for the past annum and we take interest in such matters and, hoping that we are not being too presumptuous, we extend a cordial invitation to all fans and readers of your august publications to write directly to us for details on our club.

We note with joy and glee that world-saver Edmond Hamilton (husband of Leigh Brackett) is coming back once again with "The Return of Captain Future" and since we cut our first set of teeth on Capt. Future yarns, in honor of this coming event we shouted from the top of our obelisk. Also bemusedly, we see Pete Manx return in H.O.F. in "Roman Holiday" by Kelvin Kent (alias Henry Kuttner), and we wonder if you couldn't perhaps reprint some of the Weinbaum stories, which we consider classics!!—Hotel Flanders, 135 West 47th Street, New York 19, N. Y.

Okay, cutting the fancy verbiage, here are a few remarks anent the Beck epistle.

As for the girl on the November cover, she fell through the mercury pool on Forty-second Street, just west of United Nations headquarters. And you're going to get more Magnus Ridolph, whether you happen to like it or not.

You're late with your Quarterly idea but as you must know by now you're getting it, plus an annual. Hope you like them both. The SFL is in a state of catalepsy at present. And in the Pete Manx yarn in question (ROMAN HOLIDAY) Henry Kuttner and Arthur K. Barnes were co-authors. We've already reprinted many Weinbaum stories in the HoF and are not ready to reprint them again in SS although the new reprint mags are a different matter. Scan then closely for Stanley G.

HARDLY WORTH THE SPACE by Rex Ward

Dear Editor: Again I feel the urge to convey my opinions, comments and ideas to you and the readers of this magazine. People always say I'm doing this for the sake of old times. Actually what we do in the present will in a few years become the "old times"—thus life is actually composed of a series of cycles, no?

Leinster's longer works all seem to bear too much resemblance to each other. This is due to the similar devices manifesting themselves chiefly in characterization, I would say. At any rate, THE OTHER WORLD (same title used for a Doc Savage novel in January, 1940—nothing escapes my memory) was not too entertaining.

Strange thing, but while I feel that length is generally necessary for completeness in a story (you will recall our discussion in THRILLING WONDER STORIES), I would much prefer to see Leinster spend the greatest part of his time writing short stories. His yarn under his pen name of Fitzgerald, however, wasn't up to his usual short-yarn par.

Another strange thing, it has always seemed to me that a writer producing stories under two or more names manages somehow to produce a different type and kind of yarn for each name. I suppose this is chiefly the power of suggestion—the unconscious effect the name itself stimulates in the mind. Of course, there are exceptions. Rog Phillips' stories are the same—are recognizable, that is—under any of his names.

The letter by Taylor which you published in your editorial was interesting, but hardly worth all the space you wasted on it with your comments—not that the comments were uninteresting, merely that the idea propounded by Taylor was not of too much import.

As I said, though, it was interesting but it was easy to see through Taylor's beliefs. The whole thing can be summed up very briefly in this way—Taylor is an optimist. Most readers of science-fiction are pessimists.

I see no reason for deleting fatalism from science fiction stories. For I, like many, am tully convinced that man will blast himself to hell with the atom bomb in the not too far future, and hence there is little gained by suppressing this prophetic fact in fiction form (There's an alliteration to end alliterations—spontaneous, too).

But the point is, idealism in the extreme will do a great deal more to harm science fiction than fatalism.

An interesting point.

Of course, the big news is the return of old Captain Future. This pleases me no end and I cannot wait to read the first story.

Would prefer not to bring back any Pete Manx stories for the Hall of Fame. Keep on resurrecting stories like THE ULTIMATE CATALYST. If I recall correctly this Manx yarn was where Pete became involved with a mess of knights by the hilarious names of Sir Pius, Sir Loin, Sir Name etc. Right? Or was that another one?

As sort of a sidelight on our argument anent music in THRILLING WONDER STORIES, I wonder what your opinions are on atonal music? Personally, I find it a magnificent path leading to our latent emotions. I feel that whereas normal music appeals to the emotions we know, atonal music appeals to emotions lying hidden in our subconscious. I secretly suspect that you will either consider it nothing more than a lot of noise or perhaps "intellectual" more than emotional.

Schonberg is best known in this field, but personally I

prefer Milhaud. Have you ever heard the latter's "Man and His Desires"? That is unspeakable in its magnificence. The layman would probably describe it thusly—

At first we hear sixteen tin cans being thrown against a steel wall; suddenly the strings swoop up and down the scale with a moaning wail; next we hear a strange rhythmic figure somewhat like a group of snaredrums but more subdued, klikity-klakiting like a railroad engine across the ties of a railroad track. Presently a group of voices moan and ohhhhh and moan again and—etc.

But I see a great deal more to it than that. You? I wonder what the opinions of some of your readers might be.

Your covers are as lurid as the days of Saturn, a fact I fail to understand. Oh, I realize that the greatest majority of your readers are drooling maniacs et al—and I suppose a great deal worse than most of the detective magazine covers. In both fields, it is just a matter of patterns.

In the science-fiction field, it is the old you-know-what: gal, bem, etc. In the detective field it is usually a corpse and murder, or murderer threatening woman with perhaps detective nearby prepared to leap upon the beastly killer and save the woman from her fate.

For that matter, there is even a resemblance in the patterns of the two different types. Exchange the bem for the killer, the space-garbed hero for the detective, the scantily-clad heroine for the evening-gowned woman, and what have we?

This discussion that has been going on in one or the other letter departments anent a science-fiction character that would endure as Holmes has endured in the detective field is rather foolish. In the first place, a character that has come as near as any could ever come to anything of that nature has already been created. Surely you remember Captain Future? Yes, the fellow you're bringing back next issue.

Cap Future could be the dashing hero when necessary, or the analyzing scientist. He could travel in time as well as space—good lord, what more can you ask of a character? There is versatility to satisfy anyone. There are no limitations either. I don't see what all this beef is about—the "character of characters" that everybody wants to see created has already been created, the way I see it.

In the second place, and this is looking at the matter from a different viewpoint slightly, science-fiction is not a field in which a character can adapt itself as are the detective and western fields. This is merely because of the nature of things.

Also, a thought—Remember Hawk Carse? And there is a character existing today that seems to me to be no more limited than Holmes. I speak of de Grandin.

Well, that takes care of matters. At least your interior
[Turn page]

Webb Hildreth's future twin plunges him into an appalling shock area in



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illustrations are good—are excellent.—305 East Maple Avenue, El Segundo, California.

Okay, let's go right down the line. The business of handing out a nominal plume to an author who has two stories in the same magazine is usually one handled entirely by the make-up editor. He assigned the by-lines to fit the exigencies and mechanics of the issue. Sometimes the pseudonym may be assigned to the longer of two stories, sometimes the reverse. It has nothing whatsoever to do with style or quality of story either, so your suggestion reader reaction must supply the noted differences are probably correct.

You can have your old views of fatalism. We already put ours down.

As for the Pete Manx yarn in the January issue, by now you must realize it had nothing to do with beefsteaks—only the leonine variety.

We have listened to the Milhaud in question—at a Boston symphony under Koussevitsky, some years ago—and found it on the whole less deadly than some of the efforts of George Antheil and others of that frenetic ilk. On the whole we rather like atonal effects when not used entirely to startle.

Finally, you're partly right on the "super-character" business. Actually the stf field is snowballing into general popularity so much faster and on so much wider a front than expected that the need for such a big show-off has pretty well been by-passed for keeps. He'd be pretty much lost in the shuffle.

RODEO by Ed Cox

Dear Editor: Well, another year is wound up with the November issue of *STARTLING STORIES*. But this year of 1949 has been quite different from about all others except 1948, the year of *The Change*, *SS* (and *TWS* also of course) rode high this year after climbing up and up last year. Not only are we getting better novels but also a full-size slab of novelets and shorts as well. And the darned things are good too!

Currently, *THE OTHER WORLD* was above-par Jenkins. Much better than his *FURY FROM LILLIPUT* effort in *TWS* some time ago. The ruhks (and why must it always be italicized?) were an outstanding feature of the story, to me. But the hero's savageness, blind rage, grim purpose etc., that somebody mentioned in *TWS*, is a bit tiring. It happens in most all Jenkins' stories when the hero's girl (and half the time they've hardly even held hands) has been snatched by the repulsive alien dirty-dog villain etc. But I have no major complaints with this story.

Bell's *HoF* story deserved re-printing all right. It had a punch when I first read it so I didn't re-read it here.

From your six short stories, Cliff Simak zooms to predominance like a comet. I'd sure love to see a novel by him. And I know that he has one, unsold as yet. Then Carter Sprague (and that name doesn't ring true somehow . . .) takes the honors. Liked this yarn somehow. And as usual, I liked the Magnus Ridolph story. I doubt if I'll ever tire of them, not when Vance has his seemingly limitless imagination from which to concoct situations and solutions to same, usually bizarre. More please.

Williams disappointed me. Usually, his name under a title is enough to assure me of something special in the way of science fiction. Try him for a novelet or novel please. Jenkins' short is typical short-story type Jenkins. Although, come

to think of it, it doesn't measure up to a lot I've read. Lastly we have Hubbard's second-rate series. In themselves, the stories are a nice historical-like series on the Conquest of Space. The only trouble is that they also read like history. No fire and pulse of life to them, as is in another Hubbard series or two that I've read.

That covers the fiction this time. And, on the whole, it is about what Sid L. Taylor said. And referring to his letter and your editorial, let's look outside of authors and fans for this fatalism. I don't mean to imply that everybody is getting to be a fatalist but when you read articles in magazines, news items etc., have you noticed that they say "in the next war . . ." instead of "if there is war again . . ."? Have you? Darn foolin'.

The national eye world as a whole is taking it for granted that war once more is inevitable. And by gosh, I'm not going to try to convince myself otherwise either. To all apparent signs, especially to the wifnists who are—"better trained" in this sort of thing, war, atomic or otherwise, is looming closer and closer. The USSR is rushing ahead on all cylinders while at the same time, the USA happens to be squabbling in its high-command.

But back to the main subject of this letter and of all letters to *SS*, *SS*.

This year we've seen some top-flight stories break into scintillating splendor in *STARTLING* and a few not-so-good ones. But the ratio is much different from the past. Jan *SS* gave us Kuttner's controversial *TIME AXIS* (that I couldn't even read!) with good Finlay pix. A very, very good *HoF* in Phillips' *MARTIAN GESTURE* too. Plus the usual run of shorts which were average.

Then the Feb *SS* gave us a Jenkins-novel stemming from a short in the January issue. This was good Leinster-Jenkins along the Kim Rendall, *THINGS PASS BY!* line of Jenkins stories. And once more an extra specially good *HoF* story, Simak's *LOOT OF TIME*. Plus good Robert Moore Williams. The Mar *SS* topped January.

Then in the May *SS* came the super-event of the year for *SS*, Charles L. Harness' *FLIGHT INTO YESTERDAY*, on a par with Clarke's *AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT* the year before. A really super-scientific yarn on a par with some of van Vogt's best. Both novelets were up to par, but a short story by Clarke carried a greater punch. It is significant that all *HoF* stories in 1949 were novelets and all very good if not better. Before the Change came in 1948 they were usually short and panned pretty badly.

July gave us George O. Smith's *FIRE IN THE HEAVENS* which is, I think, fairly average *GOSmith*. It didn't rate too well according to most letters and several glaring errors were uncovered. To make things worse, after the previous issue's novel, this just couldn't stand up. Clarke again turned out a superb short story in *TRANSCIENCE* and St. Clair had a very good novelet.

Came the Sept *SS* and Kuttner's science-fantasy, *THE PORTAL IN THE PICTURE*, which I thought quite good (although not up to some of his earlier efforts in *SS*). Two good novelets, as usual, with one being *HoF*, as usual, and another Arthur Clarke short, less far-future-wistful this time, but surprise ending again.

And finally, Jenkins' *THE OTHER WORLD* which rates quite well. During 1949, Bradbury's popularity fell, even with fanatics like myself. Hubbard's *CoS* series, one in each issue, got no super-raves and Arthur C. Clarke's short stories did. The articles by Willy Ley were accepted happily and Finlay's art-work was not quite the Finlay of yesteryear except for a couple of times.

Astarita seems to be the up-and-coming artist, and despite some improvement and your own support, Napoli still isn't wildly acclaimed. And Stevens (oops) has not the quality he once had. The *Frying Pan* isn't too (yow, wrong mag!) hot either (may as well finish).

Book Reviews accepted with pleasure and the Fanzine Review still thankfully accepted by fans and fan-eds alike. And, not to forget, Bergy has kept up as usual, turning out the same lush dolls as usual (notably on July *SS* cover).

All in all, a very good year for *SS*. Especially the May issue, which this reader rates as best-by-far. No doubt the still-going-strong *TEV* will end up with the same conclusion. Harness is the find-of-the-year, just as Clarke was last year.

Pardon the length of this letter, old man, but I couldn't resist a recap. When you have a pile of six fat *SS*es for the year 1949 sitting in front of you, you just gotta write something! So until January (November really) then, your most faithful Maine reader-and-correspondent is signing off. Keep up the good work!—4 Spring Street; Lubec, Maine.

Altogether, a fitting round-up letter for a 1949 valedictory. We only hope 1950 is better still, where *SS* and its companion, *TWS*, to say nothing of the newcomers to the fold are concerned. At any rate, we'll be in there trying.

Ave atque vale!

—THE EDITOR.

REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

BOB WILSON ARTHUR TUCKER'S BLOOMINGTON NEWS-LETTER, emitted bi-monthly from Post Office Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois, is a truly remarkable fanzine. It is at present an extremely professional six-page folder, containing ads, book and magazine reviews, considerable fananecdote and a certain amount of brisk gossip culled from professional stf and fantasy goings-on.

Its illustrations are selected from book-plates, fanphotographs and just plain gag stuff that appeals to its editor-publisher's somewhat mordant sense of humor. All in



all it is a noble effort, a consistent A-lister in our book, as befits a 'zine put out by the former one-man-gang of LeZOMBIE (now alas defunct), a former first fan and currently distinguished author of ingenious and popular detective novels.

A Bone to Pick

But we have a bone to pick with regular BNL columnist Redd Boggs, whose "opinions are not necessarily those of this publication." Mr. Boggs is young (probably not his fault), an extremely active stfan of recent years (eminently fitting) and has a tendency to hammer away hard at everything which fails to come within the range of his own ideas of who and what make

[Turn page]

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good science fiction (no quarrel with this either).

But when, as in the October issue of BNL, he tees off on books before reading more than the announcements of their impending publication, we wonder if he is being exactly fair. In this instance his target was Merlin Press, a new New York City publishing house. Said Mr. Boggs—

"After the nausea experienced by this writer upon reading the line-ups of Merlin Press' two science fiction anthologies, it is refreshing to receive word of a good s-f anthology—namely, **MEN AGAINST THE STARS**, the Gnome Press Book to be edited by Martin Greenberg."

One of the anthologies that caused Mr. Boggs' *mal de livre* is the just-published **FROM OFF THIS WORLD**, a collection of Hall of Fame stories culled from the back issues of this magazine. Now we know the limitations of these stories. Heck, we should—we've had a hand in their selection for some time. With notable exceptions, they are primitives, showing stf development at the time they were written.

But the book has not been misrepresented in its advertising in any way. It has been offered as a collection of primitives, stories calculated to give the modern reader some idea of how science fiction grew to be what it is today (we aren't quite sure what it is ourselves but we like it).

The other Merlinbook that caused the Boggs cooky-heave is **MY BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORY**. This one is a totally different proposition and, at the time of Boggs' comment, was even further from publication.

It consists of some twenty-five stories, selected by the authors themselves, each as his strongest available short story effort. And this twenty-five is truly an all-star group, including such titanic stf names as Asimov, Heinlein, Taine, van Vogt, Kuttner, Hubbard, Pratt, Bradbury, Brown, Campbell and Williamson. If this book is bad, then the whole field of stf is putrescent.

At any rate, what's nauseating about it? As for Martin Greenberg's job, it will probably be a lulu too—but no one can be sure of that until he reads it. Nor can he

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The A-List

Well, we've got a whopping A-List to tackle and so let's at it, to wit—

THE BLACK SKULL MAGAZINE, 917½ Park Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. Editor, Arthur Tate. Published quarterly. 10c per copy.

The second issue of this fat newcomer continues to emphasize the macabre and fantastic—with Editor Tate coming up in *Night Winds* with a bit of grim whimsy about some London devil-worshippers, R. F. Dikeman contributing a death-dream fantasy in *An Echo from Eternity* and Michael Avallone doing death of a salesman in horrifying fashion in *Black Gloves*. Other contributors of prose and poetry include H. S. Weatherby (former co-editor), Peter Pappas, Hal Shapiro, R. F. Carson and Ronald Bourgea. Jack Cuthbert's poem, *Eldritch Castle*, is the key to the mood of this one. All in all much improved—can still stand toning down.

BLOOMINGTON NEWS LETTER, P. O. Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois. Editor, Bob Tucker. Published bi-monthly. No price listed.

For comment, see introduction to this department.

CANADIAN FANDOM, 1398 Mt. Pleasant Road, Toronto 12, Ontario. Editor, Ned McKeown. Published irregularly. 10c per copy.

It's good to see this one back in the fold as it apparently did a boojum or something after the 1948 Toronto Convention. In good form, too, if cast more seriously than in early incarnations. Outside of a number of features aimed at Can-fans it contains the first installment of an interesting series on Utopias by the editor, a thoughtful essay on atomics by Alastair Cameron and a brief psychiatric Jack the Ripper fantasy by Eric Dorn. All are of excellent fanquality.

THE FANSCIENT, 3435 NE 38th Avenue, Portland 13, Oregon. Editor, Don Day. Published quarterly. 25c per copy.

The king of the pocketzines has blossomed into color, both on the covers and interior spots and done mighty well too. Fall issue features the usual high level fact, fiction, poetry and artwork with the autoprofile and bibliography of Robert A. Heinlein holding top spot. The Higbee-Waible-Day Angelman comic is a slick job of rough satire and Thyrl Ladd, Dr. David H. Keller, Phillip Barker, Darrell C. Richardson, H. T. McAdams, R. Flavie Carson, William Jones Wallrich and Miles Eaton contribute specialties of high order in and out of verse and fiction. Artists Don Day, Ralph Rayburn Phillips, G. Waible, Forrest C. Davis and Jon Arfstrom, among others, help to make this a knockout job for its second anniversary issue.

FANTASY TIMES, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Published twice monthly. 10c per copy.

With amazing alertness and all-encompassing reporting FT virtually blankets the field, not only of fandom but of prodom, not only in the US but abroad. We wonder how Editor Taurasi manages to get so much news with which to pack his every issue. A must for fans who would know what gives in sf.

JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH INTERPLANETARY SOCIETY, 157 Friary Road, London SE 15. Price to non-members, 3s 6d.

More of an experimental scientific forum than a fanzine—but the highest-level scientific publication connected with sf for all that. How could it be otherwise with Arthur C. Clarke, BIS council member, having a hand in it? Articles delve right into the technical aspects of space-flight and current rocket research. Society lecture program for this year includes such provocative speeches as *A Symposium on Medical Problems Associated with Space Travel*, *The Circum-Lunar Rocket and Space Travel*, *Fact and Fiction*, among others of equal interest. The highbrow of the field, no question about it.

[Turn page]

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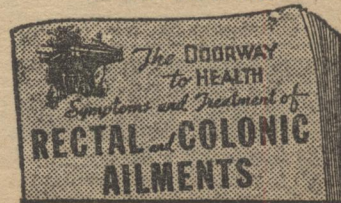
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THE JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT, AND THE ROCKET NEWS LETTER, 10630 South St. Louis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, Editor, Wayne Proell. Published monthly. 15c per copy.

The far-less highbrow but ever-lively Midwestern rival to the BIS Journal. Interesting progress note—it is becoming more and more the journal of Space Flight rather than the Rocket News Letter it was until recently.

THE MUTANT, 22180 Middlebelt Road, Farmington, Michigan, Editor William James. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy.

Somebody sent us the issues for last February and April (1949, that is), which seem a bit far back for even us to review. Are you still in print?

OPERATION FANTAST, 13 G.P. R.P.C., B.A.O.R. 23, GPO England, Editor, Captain Kenneth F. Statur. Published quarterly. 15c per copy.

Slater's mag is getting neater all the time, current issue showing marked improvement over the last few. Ads look healthy and gossip ditto. Laurence Sandfield's Lillith-the-Wisp macabre was chilly and effective but we found Dell Beaker's speculations on coming mutations in humanity more convincing than Ron T. Deacon's defense of Shaver via Charles Fort. A good issue.

ORB, 811 9th Street, Greeley, Colorado. Editors, Bob Johnson & Charles Hames. Published bi-monthly. 15c per copy.

A large pea-green newcomer, which is devoted chiefly to a fantasy in which a broken down vaudeville actor has an eerily pleasant experience in a haunted room in a NYC theatrical hotel, to a half-dozen poetic short takes and a Superstition Quiz. A trifle arty but promising.

THE OUTLANDER, no address listed. Editors, Freddie & Alan Hersey. Published irregularly. No price listed.

An amiable suburban Shangri-La except for she-Editor Freddie Hershey's assault on fanzine nudes. We wish they'd make them better ourselves and get out of the fence-scrawl league. Also that the Hersheys would list a few facts about this one, since they have taken it over from Con Pederson.

PACIFIC ROCKETS, 1130 Fair Oaks Avenue, South Pasadena, California. Published quarterly. One year—\$2.00, three years—\$5.00.

The Journal of the Pacific Rocket Society comes high and comes seldom but it is good. Contains active, well-diagrammed, photographed, cartooned and reported accounts of the society's considerable experimental doings in the California-Nevado-Arizona areas. Recent issues reveal close correspondence and idea interchange with the BIS, which looks healthy.

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST, 2524 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley 4, California. Editor, George Blumenson. Published quarterly. 50c per copy.

Last July's issue of this magazine, among others, takes a healthy roasting from "The Elves, Gnomes and Little Men's Science-Fiction Chowder and Marching Society"—sponsors of this very lively newcomer. In an enlarged way it is a sort of fanzine's own Fryng Pan, dedicated to the strip of inane pet beliefs and credulities indulged in by the lunatic fringe of sfandom. A group of contributing editors that includes Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas sees to it that comment is witty, acid and at times ribald. We like muchly.

SCIENCE, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, #696 Kings Park, L. I., New York. Editor, Franklin M. Dietz, Jr. Published quarterly. 65c per annum.

A pocketzine devoted chiefly to fangab, here and abroad, and very neat withal.

SCIENCE-FANTASY REVIEW, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex. Editor, Walter Gillings. Published quarterly. 25c per copy.

The former Fantasy Review continues as a quarterly under its new title, its sails as trimly set as ever. Willy Ley, with a recounting of the adventures of Captain Mors, a sort of scientific Nick Carter of Pre-World War One Germany, takes

the lead this time. Editor Gillings and Ken Slater handle the fan-gossip departments, A. Reynolds Morse contributes an interesting essay on the late M. P. Shiel and Thomas Sheridan concludes his history of WONDER STORIES. The rest of a fine issue is devoted to comment and reviews on and of books and bookmen.

SCRAP BAG, 321 West 2nd North, St. George, Utah.
 Editor, Mrs. Florence S. Anderson. Published irregularly. 10c per copy (due for a rise).

Reasonably spritely contributions by Bill Calabrese (haunted house), Bob Farnham (humor?), E. E. Evans (allegory), Emily Thompson (poetry) and features by Editor Anderson and Publisher Charles Henderson are marred by Edwin Sigler, who suggests seriously that all American Negroes either be killed or sent back to Africa. Such stuff should not see print in any fanzine. It is vicious crackpot propaganda of the lowest order.

KY HOOK, 2215 Benjamin Street, NE, Minneapolis 18, Minnesota. Editor, Redd Boggs. Published quarterly. 15c per copy.

Dominated for the most part by what used to be the old Los Angeles Shangri-L'Affaires gang—with Messrs. T. Towner Laney and Charles Burbee very much present. In brief a lot of laughs and entertaining irascibility, along with a number of hard pokes to various short ribs.

SHANGRI-LA, 236 1/2 North New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, California. Editor, Forrest J. Ackerman. Published every six weeks. 15c per copy.

The famed 4E Ackerman has this lively one well in hand. Outside of book reviews and LASFS minutes it contains a sound article on Olaf Stapledon in Newark by Sam Moskowitz, a bit of very human space opera by Evans, a near-hilarious dissection of Ray Bradbury by 4E himself, Fredda Hershey on science in sf and Arthur Cox in highly biased form on general semantics. Lots more life than this stand-by has shown of late.

SPACEWARP, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan.
 Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Published monthly. 15c per copy.

If only artwork and printing were a bit better this would be a standout. Departments and reviews are of good caliber and the fiction, as exemplified by L. T. George and Editor Rapp himself in the October and September issues well above fan average. As it is, however, it remains an A-List squeak-in.

SPARX, 75 Sparks Street, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts.
 Editor, Henry M. Spelman III. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy.

Isaac Asimov comes in for thorough dissection by himself and Dave Thomas in this one—an interesting author-feature along Fanscient lines, well handled too. Outside of reviews and departments, Tim Orrok contributes a dictatorship playlet, Vince Williams chews hard on Editor Spelman and Redd Boggs (ouch! We aren't trying to use soft-soap either) comes up with an amusingly ham feature on the tendency of sf authors to lapse into pseudo Poe-ian or Shakespearean verse. Better stick to pseudo science instead, boys.

SPATIUM, 584 East Monroe Street, Little Falls, New York. Editor, Harold M. Cheney, Jr. Published irregularly. 10c per copy.

A slue of short takes, reviews and letters by folk like Ron Stone, Louis Ward, Al Hammer, Jim Goldfrank, Dick Hollister and the like. Nothing very strong, nothing very weak except printing and artwork. Just fair.

STF TRADER, 1028 Third Avenue South, Moorhead, Minnesota. Editor, K. Martin Carlson. Published bi-monthly. 5c per copy.

Despite a toe-stub over the Tucker death hoax this continues to be of great value to all sf collectors, especially since few other magazines of this type remain in the field.

And Now the B's

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gratulations. Even the B's have been busy this time out as the following will reveal—
THE BURROUGHS BULLETIN, 1100 Western Avenue, Peoria, Illinois. Editor, V. Coriell. Published irregularly. No price listed. Tarzan and more Tarzan—this time the issue concerns itself chiefly with an interview with Tarzan himself and with the new movie Tarzan, Lex Barker.

CHANGELING, 1539 18th Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C. Editor, Franklin Kerkhof. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy. Mr. Kerkhof's one-man zine—with the artwork hitting the low. Believe it or not a future A possibility.

FANTASY NEWS, P. O. Box #4, Steinway, Long Island City, New York. Editor, Will Sykora. Published weekly. 10c per copy. A well-printed, well-informed newzine, whose unpretentiousness alone keeps it among the B's.

THE MICHIFAN, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Published irregularly. No price listed. "Official bulletin of the Michigan Science-Fantasy Society—mostly shop and trade stuff.

MAKHZAN, Buckhorn Road, Upper Afton, Pennsylvania. Editor, J. E. Edmiston. Published irregularly. No price listed. Another one-man job which has the likeable nerve to list itself as "The Purposeless Publication." Promise here, too.

ONE FAN'S OPINION, Box #1199, Grand Central Station. Editor, Lee D. Quinn. Published irregularly. No price listed. A newsy letter from Mr. Quinn, neatly put out and enhanced this time by a useful list of pro-author sobriquets.

POSTWARP, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Published monthly. 10c per copy. Letterzine which should be rising soon.

SPFS NEWS-BULLETIN, 1219 N. E. Roselawn, Portland 11, Oregon. Editor, Don Day. Final issue. Soon to be reborn in more pretentious form under new title as yet unselected.

SKETLIOS, 4170 Utah Street, St. Louis, Missouri. Editor, Don Mulcahy. Published irregularly. No price listed. Contains an amusing if rose-colored prophecy as to futures of various well-known fans.

SPACESHIP, 760 Montgomery Street, Brooklyn 13, New York. Editors, Robert Silverberg & Saul Diskin. Published quarterly. 5c per copy. Strictly amateur all the way—but probably fun for the editors.

WEIRD UNSOLVED MYSTERIES, 17 West 32nd Street, New York City. Editor, John York. Published bi-monthly. 25c per copy. Mostly book reviews and one large crude nude—the former in the finest offset type on record, the latter in nothing at all.

WONDER, 8 Burfield Avenue, Loughborough, Leicestershire, England. Editor, Michael Tealby. Three times per annum. Is per annum. Despite fair fiction pieces by Cedric Walker and Peter J. Ridley, both impending pros, and Ron T. Deacon again off on his pet subject, the so-called Shaver mystery, ghostly printing and art work keep this from an otherwise deserved A-Listing.

And that, for the nonce, is that. We'll be cracking our spatula in the **FRYING PAN** in the forthcoming April issue of **TWS**, then back here dealing out more pats than smacks in the May **SS**. We hope you'll be on hand with a fine new crop of 'zines by then.

—THE EDITOR.

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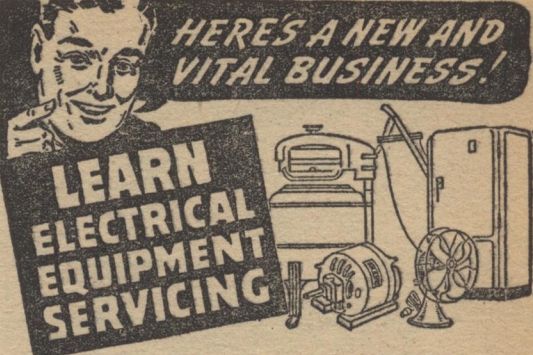
As for the authors—well, alphabetically (as their stories are published) they include Isaac Asimov, Arthur K. Barnes, Eando Binder, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Fredric Brown, John W. Campbell, Jr., Cleve Cartmill, L. Sprague de Camp, Paul Ernst, John Russell Fearn, Edmund Hamilton, Robert A. Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard, Henry Kuttner, Murray Leinster, Frank Belknap Long, Sam Merwin, Jr., Fletcher Pratt, Clark Ashton Smith, Theodore Sturgeon, John Taine, A. E. van Vogt, Manly Wade Wellman and Jack Williamson.

All in all, a brilliant list for our money. As for the stories, you'll find a few which have been previously anthologized, notably Taine's "The Ultimate Catalyst," Ted Sturgeon's "Thunder and Roses," John Campbell's "Blindness" and Robert Heinlein's "The Green Hills of Earth." But for the most part the stories have never before been between boards.

Isaac Asimov's "Robot Al 76 Goes Astray" is new and exciting to most of us—as are Ed Hamilton's "The Inn Outside the World," Fred Brown's original and hilarious "Nothing Sirius" and Frank Long's "The House of Rising Winds." But any study and analysis of the twenty-five stories the book contains would require a lot more space than we currently have at our disposal.

About all we can add—outside of suggesting you get "My Best Science Fiction Story" at the earliest opportunity—is that this is an author's volume and that the authors include such magic syllables as van

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WHAT MAD UNIVERSE by Fredric Brown, E. P. Dutton & Co., New York (\$2.50).

Followers of this magazine will need no introduction to this one—which rates among the cream of the lead novels we have been publishing once per issue since our birth in 1939. The amazing saga of Keith Winton has always been one of our favorites.

Winton, editor of a couple of science fiction magazines, is the sole survivor of the crash of the first moon-rocket, which inopportunately comes down not on the moon but on the country estate of his publisher, where he is spending the weekend.

But when he recovers consciousness he finds no symptoms either of his boss' estate or the crater made by the rocket. Puzzled, he gets a lift into the nearest town in a farmer's Model T jalopy, tries to get in touch with his office and his girl, co-editor Betty Hadley, in New York, gets into a mess of trouble instead.

It seems the force of the blast has put him into a different time track—into a world where space-flight has been common since 1904, where large purple monsters from the moon roam at will, where gangsters roam Manhattan during the nightly "mist-out" and where his money, palpably worthless, gets him listed as a spy from Arcturus, with which star system Earth is waging war to the death.

The story is a gorgeous blend of satire, high-drama, elegant humor and suspense—a blend which adds up to genuine power as it builds to a completely surprising climax. Mr. Brown, who won an "Edgar" last year from the Mystery Writers of America for the best new detective novel of 1947, should get some sort of an STF award for this one.

LORDS OF CREATION by Eando Binder, Prime Press, Philadelphia (\$3.00).

A stalwart job of the old school this—with a time-capsule "sleeper" dozing far

past his deadline to be revived sometime in the fiftieth century. He is awakened from his Catskill catalepsy to find the world reduced to a metal-less agrarianism of the most primitive sort—a world paying bondage and human tribute to the lords of Antarctica, who have managed to salvage all of the science savvy left after a series of atomic wars in a set of underground cities around the South Pole.

Resenting the cowed condition of the helpless folk around him as much as the autocracy of the Antarcticans, Homer Elroy—known as Humrelly to the future-world natives—resolves to take steps. He organizes a hemispheric revolt against the overlords, only to be foiled by the Lady Ermaine of Lillamra, who senses his other-timeness and cannot resist its bizarre appeal.

This is a story of intrigue and uphill struggle on the grand scale—one which drew much comment when it appeared serially some years ago and which thoroughly merits book publication. Solid and exciting stuff all the way.

JOHN CARSTAIRS: SPACE DETECTIVE by Frank Belknap Long, Frederick Fell, New York (\$2.50).

Five novelets and one short novel, relating some of the adventures of Mr. Carstairs, whose Interplanetary Botanical Gardens comprise one of the show-places of third-level Manhattan in the late twenty-first century and whose predilection for solving strange crimes with the aid of his exotic blooms causes his everloving blond secretary, Vera Dorn, considerable anguish.

Miss Dorn, primly Bostonian by nature, resents her boss' preoccupation with crime, which she considers a detriment to his real job as museum curator—but she is helpless against the enticements of Inspector McGuire of the New York Police and the blandishments of the Interplanetary Bureau of Investigation, both of whom find Carstairs and his specialized knowledge amazingly useful when more orthodox sleuthing methods fail.

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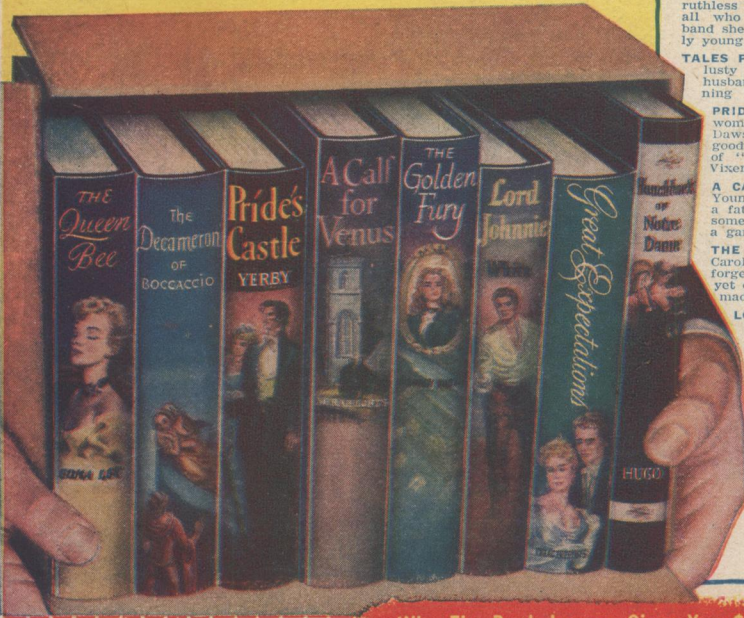
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