

OCTOBER

Strange

STORIES

NOW
10¢



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

FEATURING

THE EVIL ONES

A Complete Weird Novelet
By **AUGUST W. DERLETH**
and **MARK SCHORER**

ROBERT BLOCH SEABURY QUINN,
DON TRACY AND MANY OTHERS

"MY CRIES WERE WHISPERS AS MY LIFE EBBED!"

A true experience of P. S. NICHOLLS, South Bend, Ind.



"MY CAR HAD VEERED off the road and smashed head on into a tree. My throat was gashed and bleeding badly. I was able only to whisper—and seemed doomed to die in the inky darkness. Then . . .



"LATE ONE NIGHT, returning from a fishing trip, I dozed at the wheel of my car while going at a fast clip," writes Mr. Nicholls. "Suddenly there was a blinding crash!



"...I REMEMBERED MY FLASHLIGHT! Somehow I managed to get it from my tackle box and crawl weakly back to the road. Quickly the bright beam of the flashlight, waved in my feeble grasp, stopped a motorist, who took me to a hospital just in time. There is no doubt that I owe my life to dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries!

(Signed)

P. S. Nicholls



SAFETY FIRST! Keep an EMERGENCY LIGHT in your car—for tire changing, roadside repairs, locating lost articles, if lights go out, etc. The "Eveready" Auto Flashlight, shown here, complete with "Eveready" fresh DATED batteries and steering post clamp, only \$1.25.

The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Co., Inc.



FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... Look for the DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation

Why Trained Accountants Command

—and how ambitious men are qualifying
by the LaSalle Problem Method

High Salaries

GET this straight.

By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes* and *interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures where-with he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to use these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

Small wonder that he commands a salary two to ten times as great as that of the bookkeeper. Indeed, as an independent operator (head of his own accounting firm) he may earn as much as the president of the big and influential bank in his community, or the operating manager of a great railroad.

Some Examples

Small wonder that accountancy offers the trained man such fine opportunities—opportunities well illustrated by the success of thousands of

LaSalle accountancy students.* For example—one man was a plumber, 32 years old, with only an eleventh grade education. He became auditor for a large bank with an income 325 per cent larger.

Another was a drug clerk at \$30 a week. Now he heads his own very successful accounting firm with an income several times as large.

A woman bookkeeper—buried in details of a small job—is now auditor of an apartment hotel, and her salary mounted in proportion to her work.

A credit manager—earning \$200 a month—moved up quickly to \$3000, to \$5000, and then to a highly profitable accounting business of his own which netted around \$10,000 a year.

And What It Means to You

Why let the other fellow walk away with the better job, when right in your own home you may equip yourself for a splendid future in this profitable profession?

Are you really *determined* to get ahead? If so, you can start at once to acquire—by the LaSalle Problem Method—a thorough understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of those principles—this without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay.

Preliminary knowledge of bookkeeping is unnecessary. You will be given whatever training, instruction or review on the subject of bookkeeping

you may personally need—and without any extra expense to you.

If you are dissatisfied with your present equipment—if you recognize the opportunities that lie ahead of you through home-study training—you will do well to send at once for full particulars. The coupon will bring them to you without any obligation, also details of LaSalle's convenient plan.

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DEPT. 10329-HR

CHICAGO

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☐ Higher Accountancy:

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- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Credit and Collection | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Accounting |

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

*Names available on request.

« « « GRIPPING TALES IN EVERY ISSUE » » »

Strange STORIES

VOL. IV, NO. 2

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Read How These Men Got Better Jobs

THEN FIND OUT WHAT RADIO OFFERS YOU *Mail Coupon*



BEFORE COMPLETING YOUR COURSE I OBTAINED MY RADIO BROADCAST OPERATOR'S LICENSE AND IMMEDIATELY JOINED STATION WMPC WHERE I AM NOW CHIEF OPERATOR.

HOLLIS F. HAYES
327 MADISON ST., LAPEER, MICH.



I WAS WORKING IN A GARAGE WHEN I ENROLLED WITH N.R.I. I AM NOW RADIO SERVICE MANAGER

FOR M... FURNITURE CO. FOR THEIR 4 STORES.

JAMES E. RYAN
146 SECOND ST. FALL RIVER, MASS.

CLIPPING YOUR COUPON GOT ME STARTED IN RADIO. I AM NOW IN CHARGE OF THE RADIO DEPARTMENT FOR THE AMERICAN AIRLINES AT CLEVELAND.

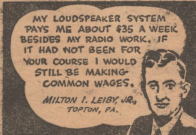


WALTER B. MURRAY
AMERICAN AIRLINE, MUNICIPAL AIRPORT CLEVELAND OHIO.



I OWE MY JOB TO THE N.R.I. COURSE. I AM FOREMAN IN A RADIO FACTORY, MAKE MORE MONEY, AND HAVE TWO N.R.I. MEN HELPING ME.

OTTO CLIFFORD
312 W. SEMINARY ST. CHARLOTTE, N.C.



MY LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM PAYS ME ABOUT \$35 A WEEK BESIDES MY RADIO WORK. IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR YOUR COURSE I WOULD STILL BE MAKING COMMON WAGES.

MILTON I. LEIBY, JR.
TOPTON, PA.

I EARN \$10 TO \$25 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME AND ALWAYS HAVE PLenty TO DO. ONLY TRAINED MEN CAN FIX RADIO SETS NOWADAYS. I OWE MY SUCCESS TO N.R.I.



WILLIAM F. RUPP
611 GREEN ST. BRIDGEPORT, PA.

I will Train You at Home for RADIO and TELEVISION

If you can't see a future in your present job, feel you'll never make much more money, if you're in a seasonal field, subject to lay offs, IT'S TIME NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open many good jobs soon.

Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets

which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

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Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards

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in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

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Dept. OK9, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

MAIL NOW • Get 64 page book FREE



J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OK9
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Age.....

Name

Address

City State

FOR MEN OVER 40

An Opportunity Offered You By a Man Who Built a Nationwide Business After the Age of 55

Starting from scratch, but with a business device that thousands of companies have since installed, the writer of this advertisement has proved that the seasoned, mature man has nothing to fear from life if he works in the right field. So many of our most successful men are well beyond forty, that we are addressing this advertisement to more such men, feeling that they will be a definitely greater asset to us.

Nos A "Get-Rich-Quick" Scheme

Please understand. The only way you can make money with this proposition is by showing results. But take a look at the following: A. O. Davis of New York who made \$110.77 clear in one day (SEVEN were REPEAT orders); E. L. Taylor, Virginia, \$58.35 in a single day; L. F. Strong, Kansas, \$163.38 profit in two days. If a few others interest you, read about these: C. W. Ferrell, who passed 1,000 sale mark, each paying from \$5 to \$60 net profit per sale; I. J. Keuper, Delaware, over \$1,000 clear his first month, and so forth, more than we can mention here.

Not "A Morning Glory"

As a successful business man, you ask, "Is this a flash in the pan that will be here today, gone tomorrow?" The answer is that we have now been a national factor for over ten years, yet have barely scratched the surface because you can't get around to see hundreds of thousands of prospects even in ten years. We have men who have been with us for years, still with us today, busy, making real money, plenty of it, and happy to be with us.

A Proved, Valuable Business Device

First, and briefly (not much space left now)—We tell an invention that does for anywhere from less than 2% to 10% of the former cost a job that must be done in probably 99% of the offices in the country. You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile

dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. It has been put into use by schools, hospitals, newspapers, etc., as well as thousands of large and small businesses in 135 lines. Practically every line is represented by these field reports we furnish you, which hardly any business man can fail to understand. And you make a minimum of 67 cents on every dollar's business — on repeat orders as well as first orders — and as high as \$1,167 on each \$1,500 business done.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation — whatever size the customer says he will accept — at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer — it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer!

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and get a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not over-crowded — a business that is just coming into its own — an upgrade, instead of the downgrade — a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense — a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot — regardless of size — that is a necessity but does not have any price-cutting to contend with as other necessities do — that because you control the sales in exclusive territory in your own business — that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time — if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory — don't delay — because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime — and if it turns out that you were the better man — we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, use the coupon below — but send it right away — or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address

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Dept. 4047-K, Mobile, Ala.

Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

Name

Street or Route

City

State



Step Up Where You Belong

What Is Your Present Level of Preparation?

The **FIRST** proof of personal ability is your capacity to see the need for training and to **GET IT**. The man or woman who doesn't realize that education is **VITAL** to success—or who says he or she "doesn't have time," "hasn't the money" or that study is "too hard"—simply lacks one of the fundamentals of the **ABILITY** to make good. **American School (Chicago)** graduates by the thousands have **PROVED** that anyone who **WANTS** an essential education **CAN HAVE IT**. *You can, too!*

You Are Only HALF a Man Until Training Rounds Out Your Ability and Experience

To make your natural **ABILITY** pay you **profits**, and to get jobs that give you the **kind of EXPERIENCE** that promotes constant progress, you practically **MUST** back that **ability** with **TRAINING**. . . . combine **experience** with **EDUCATION**. Using only a **PART** of your **SPARE** time, you can train **AT HOME** for the good position you want. If it is **WORTH** having, it **DEMANDS** training and is **WORTH** your effort!

Write for Facts No Obligation

Make up your mind to enjoy the **GOOD** things in life. Have **FAITH** in yourself, in your country and in your future. **Expect Success** and get ready for it. Write for **FREE** Bulletin **TODAY**. (See coupon.)



Grade School

Gets Only the "Leavings"

With only grade school education, you are virtually **CONDEMNED** to the low pay, menial jobs that others **DON'T WANT** . . . because **THEY** are trained for better things. Home study can fit **YOU** too for more desirable, better paid positions.



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U. S. Bureau of Education figures prove that the average high school graduate earns \$16 a week more than grade school graduates.

You can complete our simplified High School Course in **SPARE** time at home, as **FAST** as time and ability permit. **MANY FINISH IN 2 YEARS**. Equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college, pre-professional examinations, business, industry. Standard texts. Diploma. Or if you've had some high school, **FINISH** now. Credit for subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. Low tuition, easy terms. American School, Chicago, est. 1937—endorsed by educators.



College or Specialized Training

Pays Up to \$25 a Week EXTRA!

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More than 150 noted educators, engineers and executives helped prepare American School courses. An **Advisory Board** of 30 outstanding authorities—each an active leader in his field—is consulted when our work is prepared or changed. A Staff of competent instructors—homestudy specialists—works closely with the individual student. Why continue in an underpaid, overworked job—subject to periodic layoffs? *Step up where you belong*, into well-paid, pleasant work where you command the admiration and respect of others. For full details, mail coupon **RIGHT NOW!**

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- ☐ Gentlemen: Please send me **FREE** information covering special training in subjects checked below. No obligation on my part.
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- ☐ Accounting and Auditing
 - ☐ Architecture and Building
 - ☐ Automotive Engineering
 - ☐ Business Management
 - ☐ Aviation
 - ☐ Electrical Engineering
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 - ☐ Air Conditioning
 - ☐ Diesel Engineering
 - ☐ Drafting and Design
 - ☐ Liberal Arts
 - ☐ Private Secretary
 - ☐ Mechanical Engineering
 - ☐ Radio and Television
 - ☐ Salesmanship
 - ☐ Home Economics Courses
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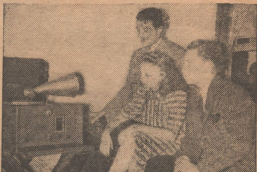
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and other famous orchestra
leaders use

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Everything is included. Nothing else to buy and nothing else to pay. You get complete HOME RECORDING UNIT, which includes special recording needle, playing needles, 6 two-sided unbreakable records. Also spiral feeding attachment and combination recording and playback unit suitable for recording a skit, voice, instrument or radio broadcast. **ADDITIONAL, 2-SIDED BLANK RECORDS COST ONLY 75c per dozen.**



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NEW YORK, N. Y.

HOME RECORDING COMPANY

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Send entire HOME RECORDING OUTFIT (including 6 2-sided records) described above, by return mail. I will pay postman \$2.98, plus postage on arrival. (Send cash or money order now for \$3.00 and save postage.)
Send dozen additional blank records at \$1.75 per dozen.

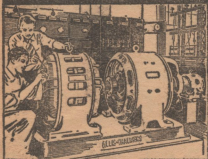
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Address

City and State

Note: Canadian and Foreign \$3.50 cash with order

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First you are told and shown what to do and how to do it. Then you do it yourself.



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"LEARN BY DOING" Not a Correspondence Course

In my shops you "Learn by Doing" on real electrical equipment, wind armatures, do house-wiring, work on real dynamos, generators, etc.

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COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
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A MONTH**

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No Medical Examination**

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Don't send money! Just fill out the coupon and get the details now, without a single penny of expense to you. Learn all about the free 10-day inspection offer.

ACT NOW • SEND COUPON!



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Maximum Indemnity for Natural or Ordinary Death

\$2,000.00

Maximum Indemnity for Auto Accidental Death

\$3,000.00

Maximum Triple Indemnity for Travel Death

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The amount of insurance payable upon the death of any of the persons insured hereunder shall be the amount set out in the following table for the attained age nearest birthday at death of such person divided by the number of persons insured hereunder immediately preceding such death.

Table of amount of insurance purchased by a monthly payment of one dollar.

Attained Age at Death	Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death	Auto Accidental Death	Travel Accidental Death
	Amount	Amount	Amount
1-40	\$1000.00	\$2000.00	\$3000.00
41-50	750.00	1500.00	2250.00
51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
57-62	300.00	600.00	900.00
63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
69-75	100.00	200.00	300.00

ACT NOW—AND RETURN COUPON AT ONCE

BANKERS LIFE AND CASUALTY CO.

Bankers Insurance Bldg., Jefferson Sta., Desk 35, Chicago, Ill.

Please send details and tell me how to get the Family Group Policy for free inspection.

Name

Street or R. F. D.

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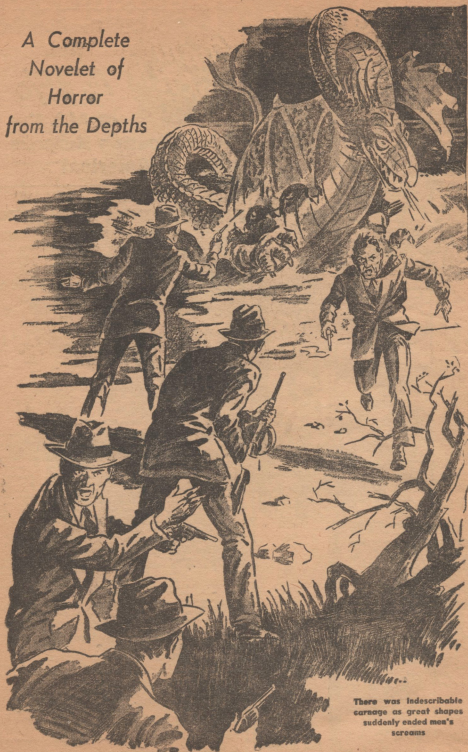
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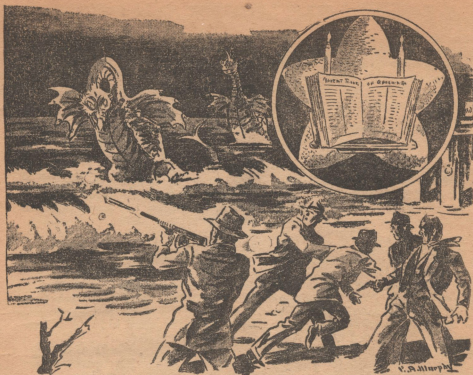
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THE EVIL ONES

By AUGUST W. DERLETH and MARK SCHORER

Authors of "Logada's Head," "Vengeance of Ai," etc.

When Modern Man's Machines Break the Magic Circle of the Elder Gods, Foul Beings Scourge the Earth With Grim Madness!

CHAPTER I

The Living Fossil

PROFESSOR Jordan Holmes is dead, and the story of the incredible horror that threatened Chicago in the spring of 1931 can be told at last.

In that spring, the reclamation of land from Lake Michigan for the coming World's Fair was already well under way, when the first of those inexplicable events took place. It was an occurrence essentially prosaic, yet fraught with untold horror, as all of

us at work on the project on the lake shore were soon to learn.

Late one March afternoon, one of the enormous dredges brought up from the lake bottom what was undoubtedly a portion of some long-dead animal's limb in a remarkable state of preservation. It was a sort of fossil, and yet seemingly not possessed of the consistency of a fossil. John Tennant, the chief engineer, was summoned, his interest aroused, and he in turn called upon Professor Jordan Holmes of the Field Museum for assistance in identifying the curious

discovery from the lake. Confident that Holmes would know to what animal the fragment belonged, Tennant and I anticipated his arrival.

But Holmes' surprise at sight of the fossil was equalled only by his bewilderment.

"The thing's boneless," he said at once, "and doesn't show any sign of ever having had bone formations!" He examined it further. "And you'll notice that the limb is extraordinarily well preserved, hard only on the surface. The end severed by the dredge is strangely resilient, spongy!"

A close scrutiny revealed yet another odd fact. The creature evidently had had no blood at any time in its existence, unless the odd greenish-black veins could be said to have carried something that served as blood. Holmes was utterly unable to venture a guess about the nature of the animal, and departed finally, taking the fossil with him for laboratory examination.

A second piece of this strange fossil was brought from the depths on the following morning. This bore no resemblance to any portion of animal anatomy either Tennant or I had ever seen. It was oddly round, its surface broken by horny ridges and bumps, and at one end there showed the same spongy resilience which had marked the first find. Except for the fact that it had no opening of any kind, it might by its shape have been a head.

ONCE more we called in Professor Holmes, who wished to take this second piece with him. Since it was bulky, Tennant sent me along.

It was in the cab, on the way to the museum, that we noticed the first slight change in our burden. The thing was dripping a dark greenish-black fluid to the floor of the taxi. Holmes at once turned the thing over and peered intently at the spongy severed end from which the fluid dripped.

"Seems to be coming from the veins," he murmured.

I bent closer. Here and there, where the veins had been cut cleanly by the jaws of the dredge, great drops of the liquid formed and trickled down,

leaving repulsive greenish-black traces. There was also a slight malodorous stench.

"Couldn't be water from the lake, dissolving some of the spongy tissues?" I ventured.

"I hardly think so," Holmes replied, shaking his head. "This fluid seems to be the regular content of those veins, and now that they're cut, it's naturally flowing away."

I voiced his own perplexing doubt.

"Then, if even the liquids in the animal are intact, the preservation is even more remarkable!"

He shook his head again, and made an abrupt motion with one hand.

"Very remarkable," he said shortly.

At the museum, I helped Holmes put it under a glass case with the fossil we had discovered the day before. It was easily apparent that both parts came from the same kind of animal, if not the same one.

From that moment on, things began to happen. When I returned to my work from the museum, I had no intimation of the ghastly horror that was to shroud the city. It was on the following morning that the first manifestation of the horror occurred, though at that time there was nothing to suggest the frightful things that were to come. Holmes roused me from my sleep by calling me from the museum and excitedly asking me to come down.

I was astounded at the sight that he had called me to see. During the night, the horny structure, which encased the spongy mass of our fossil, had distinctly cracked. The head, which had been left lying on its side, now stood on its severed end, and at the base a wide crevice, narrowing down to a similar crack, had sprung open.

In the limb, too, a similar crack had appeared, though it was not as large as that on the other fossil. Beneath could now clearly be seen the glistening green body of the creature.

But what was most remarkable was the discovery I made, when, at Holmes' urgent suggestion, I examined the fossils more closely. Then I saw tiny, fingerlike tendrils of flesh which had sprung into being in the base of the

head where the horny outer covering had cracked!

Holmes rapidly explained his astonishment at finding this inexplicable change, murmuring something vague about atmospheric conditions bringing it about. Then he suggested that we watch the thing, to see whether any further change might set in during the day as they had during the night.

Whatever we had expected to see, we were disappointed. Though we sat quietly throughout the morning with our eyes fixed upon those strange fossils, there was nothing to reward our interest. And when we finally went out to lunch, both of us were not only definitely crestfallen, but not a little perplexed.

But our astonishment upon our return from lunch that noon was infinitely greater than our first surprise of the morning, for what we saw brought home to both of us, with unpleasant suddenness, a startling fact. During the previous night, when there was no one to observe them, the fossils had mysteriously changed, but when we watched that morning, nothing had taken place. And yet, during the lunch hour, when there had been no one to watch, the fossils had changed again!

WHERE the fleshlike tendrils had at first been small, thin, undeveloped, and occasional, they now covered the entire base of the head structure. Now they were materially larger and heavier, having assumed now the actual proportions of fingers. But when we approached the case, despite this apparent change, the tendrils hung there limp and still, and the fossils were as immobile as ever. It was only later that we noticed that the green bulge of glistening flesh beneath the fissure was greater, and had taken on a richer color.

I think that what both Holmes and I desired to avoid was the admission, even to ourselves, that this long-buried thing might still have life. So even after our return that noon, we continued to entertain the theory that perhaps atmospheric change was bringing about the phenomena.

At five o'clock, both of us were con-

vinced that our theory of slow development was erroneous, for the fossils were precisely as they had been at our return from lunch. They occupied the same amount of space in the glass, the tendrils hung as limply as ever at the base, and the fissure had not moved beyond the little ridge topping the horny surface where we had noted it that noon.

"It's as if it knows we are watching, and could understand," said Holmes, laughing a little.

His laugh was not reassuring. He had voiced my own thought.

It was as if he said, "The thing has life, intelligence!"

I could not smile with him, for the suggestion carried with it an unaccountably chilling fear.

Holmes gave up at last. Shortly after six o'clock, he looked at me, a ghost of a smile lurking on his lips.

"Hungry?"

I nodded.

"I'm both hungry and tired. I think we'd better give it up for the time being and get food and sleep. Tomorrow I'll call in Jameson of Chicago University and Morrison from Northwestern. They may be able to suggest something."

"And this?" I asked. "Are you leaving it alone all night?"

He looked at me for a moment without replying. "Don't be too surprised at what you see in this building, Sharp," he said. "A good many strange things happen here. As for this—strange and weird, I'll admit, but nothing to worry over. I'll tell one of the guards to come through here occasionally during the night. If anything unusual happens, he'll call me."

That night the horror struck for the first time. I knew, from the moment that I heard Holmes' excited voice over the telephone, shortly after seven the next morning, that something highly out of the ordinary had occurred. Fortunately, I was already dressed and ready to go out when his call came, and was consequently waiting for him to pick me up in his car.

What he told me, as we sped toward the museum, was given to me in such an incoherent manner, that I

cannot even attempt to reproduce it as I heard it from his lips.

Apparently there had been a telephone call from the museum sometime just before dawn. Holmes had been half asleep, had not gathered exactly what some incoherent voice had said over the wire, and had gone back to sleep. Now that he was awake, he could remember someone screaming. But he could not say now whether this had been the fragment of a nightmare or semi-conscious reality. Yes, there had been horrible babbling sounds, and a sucking noise. Someone whistling, too, he thought. Then, at six-thirty, another guard had called him. Something had happened in the laboratories—something serious! Professor Holmes had better come down at once.

The car came to a sudden stop. Holmes and I jumped quickly from it, mounted the steps, and ran down the corridors to the laboratory where the fossil remains were. Together, we burst through the already opened door of the laboratory—then halted abruptly.

THERE, on the floor near the open door, lay the guard, his legs twisted out of all human shape, his arms crushed under his body, his face fixed horribly in an expression of awful fear. It needed no examination to know that he was dead.

Then I saw what I had tried to believe on my way down that I might not see—the broken glass on the floor near the body, and a little way away, dark green pieces of a horny shell.

Holmes saw them, too. He stared at them for a moment, wild-eyed. Then he looked at me.

To myself, I had already admitted the possibility of our fossil's having life, but I had not anticipated malignance. But now, in the awful moments that we stood there in the laboratory, between the dead body of the guard and the fragments of glass and shell on the floor, we knew.

Running footsteps broke the spell of horror that held us. A moment later, another guard burst into the room, coming up short at sight of us.

"I've just called the police," he said.

"Better call the coroner, too," answered Holmes curtly.

As the guard left the room, Holmes turned to me.

"We can't hide it any longer, Sharp. That thing had life, intelligence, small though it was. Light and heat are all it needs to develop. It played dead under observation. With us gone for the night, it swelled to the case's capacity, broke the glass, thrust the shell aside, crept from the case. It expanded rapidly, developing a great, crushing power. When the guard came, it killed him, mangled him. Then this thing, an unknown being with a living intelligence—this thing escaped!"

"Then—"

But Holmes silenced me with a curt gesture. On the threshold of the room stood a policeman.

CHAPTER II

Cosmic Evil

WHEN the body of the unfortunate guard had been removed and the debris of glass and shell cleared away, we went into consultation. Dr. Jameson and Professor Morrison, both noted anthropologists, had arrived, and, as best we could, Holmes and I explained to them precisely what had happened as we understood it.

It was at the conclusion of this explanation, when it had been made apparent that the thing which had escaped must be apprehended at all costs, that we first realized how we were hampered by our lack of knowledge.

What, if anything, did we know of the thing? That must first be determined. We began to set down the little information we had.

Certain salient facts confronted us. Evidently the thing had been at the bottom of the lake for a long time. Even though it was now apparently alive, it had been dead for centuries as far as civilization was concerned.

It was obviously of an amphibian

nature, and structurally resembled the amoeba, for apparently it could expand within itself, although the head fossil may have added to its growing body the limb portion which had been near.

From that evidence, it might be supposed that the creature did not have limbs by nature, but could at will put forth feelerlike appendages by means of which to move on land. The horny outer covering must have been the foreign material which had collected around the body in the lake, serving as a protective covering.

Holmes believed that its real outer skin was that green, glistening coat just under the protective shell. The body tissue was the spongy, boneless fleshlike material through which coursed a dark, ugly green-black fluid which must serve the creature for blood.

But what of those veins? And why had the fluid ceased to flow? If the fluid were the creature's life blood, then it must have had a good amount when it left the museum. And that meant that the veins must have closed where they had been cut!

Yet, most disturbing of the facts that seemed so obvious, was the agreement that was reached by the four of us. Though both pieces of the fossil were alive, only one piece had motivating force. And the peculiar growth habits of the dead fossil were conclusive proof of what none of us wished at first to mention—the thing had an intelligence!

Moreover, it had great strength and an inconceivable capacity for expanding and growing, for it must have been huge when it broke from the glass cage and attacked the guard. And apparently, it could grow with no other stimulation than heat and light.

Holmes looked up at last.

"Gentlemen, have you any scientific explanation?" he asked his colleagues.

"If there's a scientific explanation, Holmes, we're unaware of it," said Jameson.

I made an abrupt protest. "But there must be something!"

Three pairs of eyes settled on me. Holmes spoke.

"It's difficult for a scientist to ad-

mit that he can't explain something like this by his knowledge, Sharp. Yet we must admit that this thing's beyond our knowledge, is perhaps older than the beginning of our knowledge."

Whatever I might have said was broken off by the entrance of a group of reporters. Holmes made short work of them, carefully withholding any suggestion of the uncanny, and promising them any information which would come out at future investigations.

We left the museum shortly before noon, and despite our probings, we had arrived at nothing fundamental in the mystery of the weird lake creature. True, there had been mention of some old, long-forgotten books by Dr. Jameson, and Holmes' consequent agreement to begin a search that afternoon in the museum library.

JAMESON, who was somewhat more steeped in ancient lore than the others, had suggested several titles of works so obscure that I had never heard of them, and some of which Holmes himself did not know. If ancient books, scientific or not, could explain this thing upon which we had stumbled, this thing hitherto unknown to science or to any branch of human knowledge, there still remained some hope that the fear that was beginning to enshroud us might be cleared away.

We had already admitted that perhaps this creature might return!

We were destined to suffer yet another shock, for as we were coming down the museum's outer steps, we were greeted by a newsboy's raucous calling.

"Mysterious Murders Near Field Museum!"

Holmes stopped at the boy's side, his eyebrows drawn in a frown. He took a paper from him and read quickly down the column. I, too, bought a paper and with Jameson and Morrison at my side, read rapidly. There was an account of the guard's mysterious death, together with a brief note about the disappearance of the fossil remains. It was, of course, a somewhat garbled report. But it was

the latter half of the column that drew our attention:

The body of an unidentified man was found at about seven o'clock this morning in Grant Park. The discovery was made by Plainclothesman John Harbinger. The man had apparently been crushed to death, and must have been dead for some time, for the body was extraordinarily cold and rigid.

The victim had evidently been walking in the direction of the Fair Grounds when he was assaulted and killed. The body, which was found under a clump of trees, had, to all appearances, suffered in the same manner as that of the Museum guard. For some distance around the body, the grass had been trampled down, and there was evidence of a struggle, for in places clods of earth had been torn up.

It is believed that some wild animal was loose in the park, for near the spot and leading away from it, were great tracks, similar to the trappings of an elephant, but having no definite outline. They seem more like impressions made by rounded posts. These tracks were followed through the Fair Grounds, and disappeared into the lake.

I looked quickly up at Holmes, crushing the paper in my hand.

"The second!"

Holmes' face had gone white. At my words, he drew a deep breath. "It's gone back to the lake now," he said, "and will probably stay there."

The four of us started for the scene of the second murder, but we had barely left the terraced façade of the museum for the park lawns when we, too, saw the distinct tracks the paper had mentioned.

The marks were clear in the grass and soft ground. They were like great pads, pressed down by a tremendous weight. And apparently there were two limbs. They must have been of such proportion and at the same time such formlessness that I realized more sharply than before that the creature that made them was like no other beast that had walked the earth within the memory of man.

We followed the tracks past the scene of the assault to where they could plainly be seen leading into the water. The thing had returned to the place from whence our great dredge had brought it!

Each of us fervently hoped that it had gone back forever, largely because there had been growing in us

the conviction that the beast from the depths was not fundamentally of earth, despite its earthly home at the bottom of the lake. And this hope dispelled in a measure that terrible sense of immediate and inexplicable danger which had so vividly obsessed us but a short time before.

That afternoon, for the first time in two days, I returned to the work from which I had been called by the mysterious happenings. As first assistant to Tennant, my position was at least one of semi-authority, and it had not been a difficult matter to gain my chief's consent to take a few days' absence. It was a relief to get back to work, a relief to order men about, to work with something tangible, to feel again that one had some authority, some power, some control over a situation.

AND there were times in that bright afternoon when I could hardly believe that what had just happened was reality, when I could only believe that the whole affair was an evil chimera without meaning.

How much better had it been a chimera!

At five o'clock, Holmes came for me as he had promised. We spent some time together. But it was not until dinner that night that I knew, from his attitude, that there was something he wanted to impart. Over our coffee, each with a good cigar, I finally spoke of the matter.

"Something seems to be bothering you," I said. "Why not say it?"

He shrugged his shoulders jerkily. "I don't like to open that business again," he said. "I want it closed—for good."

"The fossils, is it? You might as well tell me."

He needed no urging. In the afternoon, he had followed Jameson's suggestions and looked about in the museum library. That collection is famous for its work on archeology, anthropology, and everything even remotely connected with them. Consequently its shelves on folk lore, ancient and modern, are large. Holmes had no difficulty in finding the books which his colleague had named as pos-

sible sources of information regarding our fossil remains.

He had gone through several of the old volumes without much success. Here and there he had run across vague hints, suggestive sentences, and in some of the volumes, vague paragraphs about a mythology older than the universe, a strange mythology traceable to long, long dead aspects of ancient and elder Gods of Good and Evil.

It was not until he opened the frightful *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, that he discovered the key to the half-hinted mythology in the other books. And thus, he stumbled upon the lost and terrible legend of Hastur, the Un-speakable.

Evil as old as, older than the universe. Those ancient genii of evil—Hastur, Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Lloigor, Zhar, and others. It was then that he had his first vague knowledge



of the Elder Gods, the Ancient Ones, and of those others, mad genii of evil who inhabited outer space before the world was born. It was they who descended to ravage Earth and were vanquished by the Elder Gods, and banished to the bottom of the sea.

The accursed spawn of Cthulhu was sent into the sea, thrust deep into the caverns of a hidden and lost sea kingdom, the sunken land of R'lyeh. And there were other Evil Ones in this strange mythology, banished to the far, forbidden places of the earth, and One, sent back into outer space.

It was in the *Necronomicon* that these long-dead tales were brought together. From this book, Professor Holmes finally drew a consecutive and logical story of the age-long struggle between the forces of cosmic evil and the Elder Gods—the final defeat of the Evil Ones, and their ultimate banishment into the far corners of the earth.

CHAPTER III

The Elder Gods

HOLMES went on for a long time over our table, piecing together those legends, building up for me briefly the whole dead mythology of a time before man roamed the earth. Our coffee grew cold. Our cigars burned down. And still he went on in his quiet, slightly agitated voice. Even then, I was too uncomprehending to see what connection this mythology could have with the facts we had faced.

At last he began the strange story he had read in the unnamed confessions of Clithanus, telling of vague and terrible rumors that had spread across the earth in the time of man. There was a time, the monk told, when the accursed children of one such Evil One had escaped their prison, had been called back to earth by the power of those black souls who still worshipped them, spawn of mad Cthulhu.

Frightful creatures roamed the earth, creatures neither beast nor man, spreading abroad a strange power that bred in the minds of men, making them give way to violence and lust, horrible perversions and sins that had not been known before. Wherever these frightful things appeared, killing and ravaging, crime and horror spread among men, and there was terror throughout the land.

It was as if the creatures threw about them a spell under which all men fell, and there were none able to resist. And yet the things had been vanquished at last, by a power from the Elder Gods wielded in the hands of men.

Not until the things had been sent deep beneath the waters of the earth, did the men who were still left return to the God they had known before. And never since, Clithanus wrote, has the earth been as fair as it was before the night things crept upon it this second time.

Holmes stopped when he had told

me the legend of Clithanous, and looked at me as if he believed he had shown me the secret of life itself. Even then, I did not entirely comprehend, for there was apparently nothing in what he had just revealed that I could tie up with our recent experience. But abruptly it struck me.

"But a mythology so old that even the most learned don't know of it!" I protested. "It can't be! The tale of an ascetic, more like an allegory of some kind—but not based on fact, surely."

"Listen, Sharp," he cut in, "as a scientist, I have nothing to say on the matter. You'll remember that two of the country's most able scholars and scientists directed me to the books of which I've been telling you. There's nothing but this for me to believe—in the light of what we've seen here in Chicago." He shrugged. "It's true, I'm afraid. That thing, brought to life again unwittingly, back once more among men, to work its horror—"

"Then thank God it's gone back!" I breathed, now comprehending what terrifying horror we had so narrowly escaped.

For a moment, Holmes said nothing. Then he looked away, shuddering a little.

"It's time to go," he said.

Holmes left me that night at about nine o'clock before my own door. I stood there a moment and watched his car swing out of sight, a little perplexed at the air of uncertainty about him. Then I went in, and began to tackle the work I'd let slide lately. There was a stack of mail to be looked through, and a good number of blueprints to check. But I had barely settled down at my desk, when the telephone rang at my elbow.

I TOOK the instrument from its cradle.

"Mr. Sharp? This is Jackson, the nightwatch." The man's voice was agitated.

"What's up?"

"I've tried to get Mr. Tennant. He's out. Can you come?"

Damn the man, I thought.

"Something wrong?"

"I don't know exactly. But something's coming up out of the lake."

At that, I jerked up.

"What's that you said? Say that again."

"Something's coming out of the lake. I don't know what they are. Big, shadowy shapes, coming slowly up out of the water—very big things. Can you come over? Should I call the police?"

For a fleeting moment, I felt that I should like to be in London, Vienna—anywhere but in Chicago.

"No, no," I said quickly. "Where are you? Where are you calling from?"

"Administration Building, sir."

"Wait for me!" I said, more agitated than the watchman himself. I ripped off my dressing gown, changed my shoes, slipped into my coat, and ran from my apartment into the street. I saw the lights of a nearby cab, and without pausing, jumped into it.

"To the Fair Grounds. Quick!"

The driver made record time, and we were soon swinging off Michigan Avenue up the still rough, half-finished streets between the buildings under construction. The taxi stopped abruptly before the Administration Building. Without a word to the driver, I jumped out, and ran up the lane toward the lake shore, where the first construction buildings for the House of Art already stood grouped in a little cluster.

Jackson's there, I thought insanely. But he was not. One after the other, I pulled open the doors, looking into the deserted shacks. I ran out on the terrace before the houses, looking wildly from side to side.

Then suddenly, to the north, I saw something. I think I cried out involuntarily. Far away, receding rapidly in the distance, I saw eight, ten, perhaps more giant figures limned grotesquely against the sky over the lake.

In a moment, they were gone, vanishing even as I looked. Then, in the night, from far away, there came suddenly a sharp scream of terror and of horrifying anguish.

Clapping my hands over my ears, I ran forward again—and was sent

sprawling. I had fallen over something. I scrambled to my feet, looking briefly behind me, and came up short. I had fallen over a crumpled body. For a moment, I stood in frozen horror.

Then I dropped to my knees and bent over the body. It was the lifeless form of Jackson, the nightwatch, horribly mangled, crushed in a grip of superhuman power.

I turned him over. His face was awful to see. . . .

I had called a policeman whom I saw near the Administration Building, and paid my cabman. The officer came hurrying up. Somewhat incoherently, I explained what had happened, as far as I could gather from Jackson's telephone call.

What did I think was wrong? I had no idea. Something peculiar, certainly, or what could the man have meant by his babbling about shapes that he saw coming out of the water? Was he a drunkard? I didn't know, but perhaps he had been drinking—that seemed to be the only *logical* explanation for his delusions.

Had I seen anyone about when I arrived? No, no one nearby. I had, however, seen some figures disappear in the direction of Soldiers' Field. What were they like? I didn't know exactly. They were very large—might have been animals, apes, perhaps. The policeman looked at me as if he thought I might have been drinking.

THEN he knelt down beside the body and examined Jackson. His shocked face, looking up at me suddenly, was upsetting.

"He's in awful shape," he said, eyeing me suspiciously.

I agreed and suggested that he call an ambulance from the Administration Building, while I called Holmes at the same time. . . .

Holmes' car swung around the curve and drew up at the foot of the steps behind the ambulance just when the police had finished questioning me. Holmes came running up the steps and along the terrace. By that time, the police were already taking the body down on a stretcher, followed by a fussy coroner. Holmes paused a mo-

ment as they passed him, looked apprehensively at the stretcher.

I answered his breathless questions with a quick account of what had taken place. Holmes looked at me in silence, but in his eyes I read the same thought that crowded horribly through my mind. The horror from the lake was not dead, would not be dead, until the same means which had once subdued it were used again! And now, there was no longer only one of the things. There were many! And these unearthly things had come tramping out of their age-old prison to go ravaging through the world!

"We've got to do something!" Holmes said hoarsely. "If there's a way to fight these creatures, and there must be, we must find it. And there's only one place to look—in those old books."

In a little while, we were seated in the museum library, in a small room whose walls were covered with volumes of great age, the rarer items in the museum collection. Holmes drew down a ponderous volume, bound in old leather, torn in places, and very badly worn, and settled himself in a chair at the table in the corner of the room.

"Know Latin?" he shot at me.

"Fairly well."

"Then read this along with me," he said.

I pulled my chair up next to his and looked at the open book. It was the volume of unnamed confessions by the monk, Clithanus. Words fraught with ghastly suggestion leaped out at me from the faded pages.

I began to read where Holmes indicated I should. It was the story of the return of the Evil Ones to earth, and the ruin they had worked. Luridly, the monk had painted the pictures of unspeakable crime and lust with which the earth had been cursed. Then, more briefly, more vaguely, he told how holy men from the interior of Europe had driven these evil genii back into the waters of the earth. The holy men had used the forces of the Elder Gods, the power of the Ancient Ones, which they had come upon in some manner.

The things had been scattered over the waters of the earth, but the most

wicked of them had been buried in a place Clithanus did not know.

In a far country where I have not been. Here few have journeyed. The Evil Ones were gathered in the deep of night—for it is only in the night that they roam—and driven back down into the dim caverns beneath the seas in that land.

Holmes turned the page quickly, so that I could not finish it. But I started again at the top of the next heavy page:

—held down by the power of the blessed stars laid out over the water in the form of one great star, the five points marking the directions of the earth and the secret place beyond the earth from which the things of Evil had first come, the holy ones meanwhile whispering the secret words, the words known only to them, translated by them into this language from the ancient gibberings in which the Elder Gods had given them the potent words.

HOLMES reached suddenly for a pad of paper that lay nearby and hastily took down something his advancing eye had seen before I had. The secret words, perhaps! Eagerly, I watched his hand.

Negotia perambulantia in tenebris. . . .
Things walking in the darkness, things not of the earth, things belonging to the damned hosts of evil, get you down into the nameless kingdoms under the seas, get you down and remain, by the power of the five-pointed stars, blessed and sacred, made powerful by the Ancient Ones who loathe the evil you work in all being. O, Ancient Ones, from your impenetrable fastnesses, look down and confirm, extend your power once more. Go down, you Evil Ones, and remain forever in eternal darkness. Hosts of mad Cthulhu, spawn of unspeakable Hastur, loathsome brood of Yog-Sothoth, get you down into everlasting sleep. Never again shall you rise upon the fair earth. Go, in the name of those Elder Gods, the Ancient Ones, whom once you sought to displace. Go now, and the power of the five-pointed star shall forever hold you below the face of the earth in the hidden and lost sea kingdoms of the vast unknown!

Holmes looked up suddenly.

"Finished?" he asked.

I nodded. He closed the book and returned it to the shelf.

"That's our one chance," he said. "If it has been done before, it can be done again. We've got to find those stars—whatever they are. And if anyone can help us there, it will be Jameson. I'll see him in the morning."

I agreed, and walked ahead of Holmes from the building, waiting for him on the topmost steps while he bent to lock the outer doors. And suddenly as I stood there, there came suddenly to my ears a sound fraught with horror, a clamor as of a thousand voices in unison, rising abruptly above the noise of traffic on Michigan Avenue and beyond. Holmes swung around.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Those things, you said—went north along the lake shore?"

I nodded, speechless with horror. Holmes took his hand from my arm, pulling himself together.

"That must be from Municipal Pier. We wouldn't hear it otherwise."

Then he shot past me, running toward the car, and I pulled myself from the dark horror enshrouding me, and followed.

CHAPTER IV

Battle of the Beasts

THE guess had correctly fixed the scene from which the terrifying clamor originated. As the machine drew up in a line of parked cars, I saw police cars not far distant, and farther along, Black Marias.

A loud moaning reached our ears as we came away from the car, and then a sudden, sharp snarling sound. From somewhere, rose a fright-ridden whistling and sucking noise. Someone screamed, and another voice, horribly raucous, laughed hysterically in the night.

Holmes and I ran forward, only to meet an impassable line of policemen! Despite our almost frantic efforts, we got no farther than this line of men, and were forced to return home that night with no more satisfaction than the knowledge that perhaps it had been better for us not to have seen the terrible carnage left by the things from the lake.

The newspapers carried the story the next morning. The horror had begun with an assault upon a pedestrian

near the lake shore. It must have occurred almost immediately after the death of the nightwatchman at the Fair Grounds. The papers said that both murders had been committed by the same person or persons, for there were definite tracks between one body and the other—but no paper ventured to guess at what had made the tracks.

Fortunately, the outer pier had been almost deserted because of the cool evening. The pier itself was not yet officially open, yet it had been in use since the first warm March days. There were perhaps fifty people on it.

At about ten o'clock, pedestrians on Michigan Avenue had heard a sudden screaming from the direction of the pier, and the police reached the spot shortly after. The horrible scene upon which they came stopped the whole force for a moment. There were twenty-two newly dead bodies, and the policeman on the pier was one.

But terrible as this scene was, its aftermath was even more awful. It would have been better if all of those on the pier had been killed. But some remaining were strangely mad and bestial. None left on the pier had been granted any longer use of his mind. Intelligence was fled, and in its place had been left only evil, vile bestiality. Men and women, killing each other—the scene was too awful to describe.

Strangest of all was the manner in which the newspapers received the incident. There were news stories, of course, about the horror. But editorial columns treated the incident more loosely, more facetiously, than any sane editor would write. The police, their inability to give consistent ac-

counts of what they had found, were joked about. The mad gibberings of the unfortunates left alive on the pier, the wild tales of great hulking things that had come in from the lake, were openly mocked at.

And while the papers featured the tragedy at the pier, all of them were filled with smaller, less detailed notes, showing terribly that the evil reign of horror, fore-ordained by the appearance of the creatures from the depths, had begun. All night long, evil had reigned.

The files of newspapers for those terrifying days are open to anyone who wishes to see. Wherever one's eye fell on that day's papers, there were stories of vile and rampant madness. But in the morning, I thought that there was a dead stillness lying over all Chicago, an appalling stillness that was greater than the bustle and noise of commercial activity. Three million people waiting for another night!

Was it the horror of those returned now to their senses, horror following quick upon the realization of the evil they had done in the night? Or was it the stillness of crouching evil, waiting for the darkness to cloak its being?

I DID not dress for work. That morning I could not have ordered my men about. I was too shaken. But I went down to the Fair Grounds to explain to Tennant the part that I had played in the death of Jackson.

Tennant was not in a good mood. I think it was because he naturally abhorred notoriety, and reporters had

[Turn Page]



been haunting him since dawn. He eyed me glumly as I told him what I knew of the affair. Perhaps I should not have done so, but his incredulity at my story shocked me.

"It's some damned clever trick, that's all," he said. "It's organized crime gone over the edge, the natural result of our tolerating gang rule for so long."

"But, Tennant—" I began, and then broke off.

I could not explain to him. Tennant was a man of hopeless common sense, and he would never believe what I had come to accept as fact—the legends set down by century-dead scribes.

"The police don't know what to do about it, as usual," he went on. "But I think I do."

I did not guess at his meaning.

"What do you want to do?"

"I'm coming down here tonight," he said, pointing with one extended arm to the spot on the shore where the great, unknown tracks still showed in the moist sand. "I'm coming with about four men and a machine gun. Whatever comes out of that water gets shot down!"

"Look here, Tennant," I cut in, "I don't think you should try anything unless you're sure—"

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "If you don't want to be on the shore with us, come down and stand up here on the terrace before the Administration Building. You can watch the end of this business, even if you don't want to help!"

I shrugged my shoulders. Knowing Tennant as well as I did, I realized the futility of arguing with him.

"What time?" I asked.

"I'll be here by eight. They came about nine last night."

I hesitated. "I'm going to see Holmes," I said finally. "He's in on this with me, Tennant. If he wants to come over, I'll come, too."

"All right, Sharp. I'll get 'em. Wait and see."

I found Holmes in the museum library. Dr. Jameson was with him. Both of them were searching the old volumes for some clue to the mysteriously potent stars mentioned by Clithanus as the only weapon with which to

fight the horror from beneath. I sat down to help them. The anguish of that search was inexpressible—the sudden mad frenzy with which one of us was overcome, thinking he had touched upon the thing for which we sought, the long hours of hopelessness when nothing new came from those pages. But, in the end, our search was utterly futile.

It was five o'clock that afternoon when the last possible source of information had been put back on the shelves. We sat there looking at each other in bitter disappointment. There was nothing we could do without the secret of the stars. The suggestion of world terror soon to follow was horrible.

Tennant came back to my mind suddenly, and I quickly outlined his plan to Holmes and Jameson. As I had expected, both of them protested angrily.

"We've got to stop him," said Holmes with determination. But almost immediately, despair drooped his shoulders. "But we can't! Despite what has happened, no one would believe us—and we can't try to tell them. That would only hamper us more. As to coming down—no, no, we must not go."

BUT at eight o'clock that night, Holmes and I stood on the top-most step of the Administration Building's terrace, watching the figures down at the shore. The fascination in the promise that we might learn something new of the things from the lake had been too strong for Holmes. We had to come! And so we stood in the dim light and watched the figures silhouetted against the flares Tennant had had put up to light the scene of activity.

For half an hour, we stood there watching the men below us, trying to crush down the forebodings that haunted us. Then suddenly, Holmes clutched my arm. I heard him whispering under his breath, hoarsely, frightened.

"Look! My God, look at them—look down there!"

A horrible fear slowly clamped its hand upon me. A great shadow was rising slowly from the lake. Behind

it, another shadow began to grow suddenly out of the lake, farther out, wallowing a little in the water. The first of the creatures gained the shore, splashing about a little.

Then, the first series of shots rang out. The thing did not fall. It paused a moment, its great unshapely bulk limned against the sky, its unnatural leg formations stuck deep into the sand. Then came an abrupt sucking noise, as of a great odious beast drawing water through a tube, and abruptly after, a shrill weird whistling from the shadows still rising out of the lake.

The thing on the shore lumbered slowly forward. Another series of shots spoke sharply in the night. Then a pistol report—the thing lumbered closer.

Behind it came others. Now the machine gun was emptying itself into the shadows, but in a body, with a great sucking and whistling noise, the creatures walked through that steady firing toward the group of men.

Someone screamed suddenly. I felt Holmes' hand clutching my arm so tightly it hurt, but I did not move. One of the men below turned and started to flee. But at that moment, he was overcome by the first shadow, which seemed to collapse suddenly, draping itself over the fleeing man like an abruptly deflated balloon.

There was a sudden death-ridden scream—then another, and another. The shots had stopped.

Below us there was indescribable carnage. Great lumbering floundering shapes on the lake shore where the men had been, suddenly ended screams. The terror-fraught sound of sucking and whistling continued.

Unconscious of what I was doing, I ran forward a few steps, but Holmes dove for my body, quickly drew me back. From down there came the horribly suggestive sound of snapping and breaking—bones! I put up my hands and stopped my ears.

Like a man in a dream, I saw those gigantic shadows draw apart a little, heard the sucking and whistling subside abruptly. The shapes lumbered clumsily but swiftly away along the shore. Somehow, I got to my feet, and

followed Holmes toward the still forms that lay on the sand.

There was no sound. Holmes bent briefly over the body of the first man. The one who had first tried to flee from the horror. He turned away, shuddering. We examined those crushed and mangled bodies, and one thought was uppermost in my mind. Where was Tennant?

Suddenly one of the bodies to my right groaned. I dropped quickly and looked at his face. It was Tennant! I felt of him quickly. By some miracle he was alive—apparently he had suffered no bodily injury!

The police had heard the shots, appeared just as we lifted that single living form from the ground and laid it a little apart. Tennant groaned again. Holmes examined the body, quickly, agitated.

"Badly frightened, but not hurt. Strange," he muttered.

I took the revolver which my chief still held tightly in his fist, and dropped it into my pocket. Holmes was passing his hand rapidly over Tennant's body, to assure himself that Tennant was unhurt.

Abruptly Holmes' expression changed to wonder. His hand stopped at Tennant's coat pocket, fastened around something inside.

Then his hand dived inside Tennant's pocket, and brought out the thing he had felt there. For a moment he held his hand tightly clenched.

"Hope, Sharp!" he whispered.

Then he opened his hand. In his palm lay a piece of stone, not very large, cut in the shape of a five-pointed star!

CHAPTER V

The Avenging Gods

WE FOLLOWED the ambulance that carried the raving Tennant to the hospital, but they would not admit us to the room in which he was immediately confined. A doctor told us presently that his babbling had lessened, but that his mind still wan-

dered. He would be all right, though, when he recovered from the horrible shock. He had a broken leg, the only serious consequence of his struggle with the thing from the lake. We could wait if he wished, but it might take a long time.

We felt we had to wait. It was too important to learn from Tennant where he had gotten the star-shaped stone.

Holmes drew it from his pocket while we sat outside Tennant's door.

"It is certainly one of the 'blessed stars' mentioned by Clithanus," he said. "It was only because he had that in his pocket that Tennant was spared!"

"But where on earth did Tennant, who knew nothing about the real nature of the things, get this?"

Holmes shrugged. "I can't tell you, but he knows, and he must tell us. Where this one was, there must be others, for so Clithanus intimates."

Once more, he gave his attention to that peculiar stone, cut so exactly into the shape of a five-pointed star. It must have been very old. In color, it was a pale green, but it seemed to have been scraped clean of an outer covering, perhaps by Tennant, for in places there were the distinct marks of a knife blade. We could make out little from the stone itself.

But after several hours of waiting a nurse came from the room with the information that we had better return in the morning. So we went to my apartment, where we spent the night in ceaseless conjecture. We went over what had happened again and again, touching especially upon the evil effects caused by the appearance of the horror from the depths.

Through some sort of telepathy, these creatures from the lake sent slithering into the minds of men the desires which had led to the awful crimes and orgies of the preceding night—which must be going on this night, too.

When dawn came at last, we bathed and ate before leaving for the hospital. Holmes bought several morning papers at once, merely glanced at the headlines, which justified our belief that further crimes were committed

during the night, and then put them aside. He remarked angrily upon the lack of any suggested explanation, and the facetious manner of presenting the crime wave.

When we got to the hospital, we were told that Tennant was conscious and feeling better. He had been awake for some time, had been asking for us. His mind was still somewhat clouded, although he spoke quite clearly.

"Good morning," he said in an exhausted voice. "I'm feeling about as bad as I can remember ever having felt." His assumed smile faded abruptly, and he looked up at us with frightened eyes. "My God, Sharp, what happened? Those fellows who were there with me? Where are they? What's become of them? Tell me."

Holmes cut in with a brief account of what had happened the night before, and came quickly to the matter of the stone, which he produced from his pocket.

"Where'd you get that, Tennant?" he asked.

Tennant looked at the stone for a few moments as if not understanding. Then he closed his eyes tightly, forcing his memory back.

"I found that on the lake shore two days ago. The dredge brought up about fifty of them—looked as if they had been laid in a strata or lines along the bottom. At first, I didn't think much about them, but finally I picked one of them up, scraped it, and put it into my pocket. Most of them are still lying near the construction shacks."

HOLMES could hardly contain himself. Before Tennant had finished, Holmes was plucking excitedly at my sleeve. As fast as we could, we left Tennant's room and went at once to the scene of the reclamations, Holmes talking excitedly.

"Do you see it now, Sharp? Those Elder Gods imprisoned the evil ones by the power of the five-pointed stars, and their magic held the things at the bottom of the lake until the dredging operations broke the powerful star design on the lake floor. And the fossil we had—that thing summoned the others after the spell was so unwittingly broken."

That was the crux of the mystery. Now it was clear for the first time. And for the first time, I had a feeling of power, for in the stars lay our success, and already this force had been made manifest, for one of them had saved Tennant by its mere presence!

We found the pile of stones at the place Tennant had described. Fortunately it was still intact. We managed without much trouble to find a large crate, into which we dropped the stones. Then, using Holmes' car, we hauled them to the museum labora-

Jameson and Morrison, no one else."

He turned and looked hard at me. "It's very dangerous, Sharp. I haven't any idea what will happen. We may fail." His eyes were troubled. "Are you ready to do it—knowing what it might mean?"

I nodded. We two alone would fight the evil that had been loosed upon the world.

At dusk, we met on the terrace of the Administration Building. Two hundred feet out on the lake, directly over the spot on which we had been

*Retracing Time, a Girl Lives Again Through the Terror
of Past Ages Where Men Walk
from the Tomb and a Demoniac
Siren Casts Her Evil Spell in*

THE MANCI CURSE

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COMING NEXT ISSUE

tory. There we scraped them clean, examining each for any sign of inscriptions. But there was none. They were all alike, except that some were larger. The carving was precise, symmetrical. We laid them out on a table.

"It must be at dusk tonight," said Holmes softly, "when there are no workmen or loiterers about. We'll want a barge, and it will have to be placed near the spot from which those first remains were drawn forth. And we'll have to do it alone! We couldn't explain to the police, and in an extremity, we can depend only upon

working three days before, a barge was waiting. I had taken charge in Tennant's absence, and it was an easy matter to order workmen to leave it there, instead of pulling it up to the shore with the others. A rowboat was waiting at the water's edge, and into this we put the crate of stones.

We paused for a moment before we stepped into the boat and looked back at the buildings. No one was in sight. Silently, Holmes stepped into the boat and took a pair of oars. I shoved the boat away from the beach and jumped in.

How could I keep my mind from the horror that I knew lurked beneath the waters? Deep, deep down, there were the things we meant to destroy, things that might so easily destroy us instead. I felt myself gripping hard on the oars to keep from reversing the movement and pulling back toward shore in terror and fright, to flee from that scene and never return. But I kept my mind fixed on the determination that showed in every line of Holmes' bent figure.

IN A few moments, the rowboat was scraping at the sides of the barge, and Holmes jumped lightly out and tied it to the heavier craft. Together we lifted out the box with its burden of curious stones and set it on the barge. Then I stepped up.

Feverishly, we went to work, marking out the pattern of a five-pointed star on the barge, a star as great as the surface of the craft would allow. Then we began to place the stones at regular intervals along the chalk lines we had drawn, the five largest stones marking the five points.

It was a mad business, madly done. I was close upon a frenzy when we finished. Now, more than ever, I wished to get into that rowboat and get back to shore.

Together we stepped into the center of that great design, that symbolic thing we had made, outlined by the stars in whose power we had placed our lives. Holmes peered at me.

"Ready?" he asked.

I nodded.

Darkness was falling when Holmes' strong voice rang out over the waters, speaking in Latin the incantation I knew:

"Things walking in the darkness, things not of the earth, things belonging to the damned hosts of evil, get you down into the nameless kingdoms under the seas. Hosts of mad Cthulhu, spawn of unspeakable Hastur, loathsome brood of Yog-Sothoth, get you down into everlasting sleep. Go, in the name of those Elder Gods, the Ancient Ones, whom once you sought madly to displace. Go now, and the power of the five-pointed star shall forever hold you below the face of the

earth in the hidden and lost sea kingdoms of the vast unknown!"

The echoes of the strange and alien words died over the water. Then Holmes began again, more loudly, more clearly. His voice must have gone on, but I was suddenly no longer aware of it. Suddenly there was a great whirling in the air, tremendous whispering sounds not unlike a powerful wind coming at a great distance. And at the same time, the stars on the barge had begun to glow like fire.

What occurred next I don't remember clearly. I remember only that suddenly the entire sky was alight, as if on fire, and then consciousness seemed to be seeping out from me. I struggled to keep my feet, to keep the universe from whirling about the sky. Then blackness fell.

When I opened my eyes again I was still on the barge. Everything was quiet. I crawled over to Holmes, who lay inert near me. Slowly he opened his eyes as I shook him. Then he got up, looking eagerly about him.

The stars were gone—all of them. There was only the barren surface of the barge and the quiet undisturbed lake around us. But something strange covered its surface. We leaned far over the side of the barge and peered at the slime around it—a horrible green slime, from which arose a putrid odor of long-dead things. Silently, Holmes led the way across the barge to the rowboat, and we started back to the city.

Holmes told me later what had happened after I passed out that night—told me why the things had been destroyed utterly, annihilated, rather than buried again. And this explained at the same time the weird stories of the columns of fire seen over the lake, stories that the papers reported the morning after our adventure.

Suddenly, as he chanted the secret words aloud, Holmes heard a great wind come from the north, and in its wake he saw gigantic pillars of fire, writhing and flaming in the night, and from these pillars had come stabbing, blinding rays of annihilation and death!

What they were, Holmes would not

reveal. But in the delirium before his death, he mumbled the secret and I heard it in awe. From the frozen and impenetrable fastnesses in the far and unexplored northlands and from beyond, from the far reaches of the sky, had come a greater power even than our stones to help us in our battle with

the evil spawn that lay in the lake. It had come to help annihilate an age-old enemy that once before had fought against it. It was the Elder Gods, sweeping down with the wind from the north, avenging mankind, destroying forever the brood of Cthulhu, the horror from the depths!

*Roger Sutton, Scientist, Exults in a Divine Power,
but Learns That Death Stands Jealously on Guard
When Man Gambles on Immortality*

IN

THE WINE OF HERA

A Novelet of the Life-Giver

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

NEXT ISSUE

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To Boatl and Back

By HENRY KUTTNER

Author of "The Hunt," "Cursed be the City," etc.



The hideous Thing kept coming toward us

I REALLY do not like to talk about that affair, Senor. Not that I am superstitious, you understand, like the *mestizos*, but there are some things that a man prefers to forget.

I acted as guide; good. I do not think Senor Horgan has complained. I gave him true service—more faithful, in fact, than was advisable or safe under the circumstances. But . . . You have seen Senor Horgan?

Ah, and you are from the police? Well, that is somewhat different. If you will come into the *cantina*, we can talk without dry throats. No, not

*Serpents in a Mayan Jungle
Pursue the Weird Vengeance
of a Man Who Was Their
Blood Brother!*

that one—there is a snakeskin on the wall, and I should prefer . . . You will understand later, when I tell you of the Temple of Boatl in the great swamp.

Salud y pesetas, Senor! Excellent

pulque. I could have stood some of it in the Temple, when—but of course you know nothing of that yet. And now, you ask of Senor Martino. *Si*, the bald man with the look of a snake about him. Senor Martino is quite dead, and anyone who says differently is ignorant and superstitious.

I may look, perhaps, like a *cholo*, a stupid half-breed, but I assure you this is not the truth. There is Spanish blood in my veins. Not a great deal of it, but a few drops of brandy may fortify weak sherry, you know. And I have a reputation here on the coast for honesty. Perhaps that is why Senor Horgan desired my services as guide through the interior. He had a map—

No, that is wrong. It was Senor Martino who had the map. And never did he let his friend see it. There was little love between those two. Picture it! Senor Horgan, a very giant of a man, burly and red-haired, lusty and roaring and with a gullet that could quaff gallons of *aguardiente*. Withal, a dangerous man, and I spoke softly to him. He had knife-scars on his face, and his laughter did not always bespeak humor.

Now Senor Martino. He told me the word for his profession. I remember it—herpetologist. Yes. He collected snakes. He had done so for so long that he had taken on the serpent look. His eyes never blinked, and they had the dull black stare of a reptile. Even his skin was dry and withered, like scales.

IT CAME about that those two found me in a *cantina*—this very one, in fact—and we drank *pulque* together. It is very good here . . . *gracias*, Senor. Again, *saluda*. . . We drank, and the red-haired man asked me if I knew the jungle.

"Every leaf of it," I said. "No trail is secret from me."

"The trail to Boatl, for example?" he asked, and I went cold. For Boatl, you understand, is far away, in the great swamps, and long ago there was a city there.

No one knows much about it now. But I think Boatl was reared before the Toltecs or the Aztecs came into

this land. The people of the swamp were not quite as men of today. They were closer to—ancient things. The blood in their veins was not entirely human, and they worshipped the snake.

I told this to Senor Horgan. He seemed excited.

"There is a temple there?" he asked.

"Not many have seen Boatl, but—no, there is no temple. Merely ruins in the swamp. A trackless wilderness is beyond."

"A trackless wilderness," he repeated, and turned to his companion. "Martino," he said, "that is where the—stuff lies. The temple must be hidden there. And you have the map."

Senor Martino looked at me with his cold unwinking eyes.

"You will guide us to Boatl," he said, and named a fee that made me gasp.

I am a poor man, you see, and could not afford to turn down this golden opportunity, even though the swamp has an unsavory reputation. Also, I guessed that the two were after treasure. There are many such. All go home empty-handed, or with a few cheap trinkets.

I am honest, and told the *Americanos* as much, warning them that they would find nothing of value, but they did not heed my words. Senor Horgan smote me on the back so hard that I spilled my *pulque*.

Thus the affair was arranged. In due time we set forth into the jungle, the three of us. I could not complain. My companions did not shirk their share of the work, even when the heat and the insects became most distressing.

Even I, who am used to the tropical jungle, felt the discomfort at last. The *Americanos* were irritable, and quarreled often. Senor Martino halted often to capture snakes. These he killed and later skinned, around the campfire at night. Senor Horgan was afraid of snakes. I was not, then, though now I do not like the creatures.

We ate lightly, killed a jaguar once, and slept beneath useless mosquito netting. The green walls of the jungle hemmed us in. It seemed as though

we were doomed to struggle on eternally, swinging our machetes through lianas till our arms ached. Days passed, and longer nights.

And Senor Martino continued to kill and skin and keep his snakes. When the red-haired man objected, he laughed and said the odor would frighten away jaguars and other dangerous animals. Then they fell to talking of the map, and again Senor Martino refused to let his friend see it.

"You are too anxious," he said, and his hand started to touch his belt. But he arrested the motion, and perhaps Senor Horgan did not see it.

MOTHs came out of the dark and flew foolishly into the fire. I polished the stock of my rifle, humming an old song. Then a certain sound came out of the jungle from far away, and I crossed myself quickly. Horgan, who was watching me, laughed.

"I thought you were a brave man, Juan," he said. "Afraid of a cougar's yell?"

"But that was not a cougar," I explained. "Not a real one. It was the soul of a man in the beast's body."

"Werewolves." Horgan chuckled. I shook my head.

"No, Senor. Some magician has sent out his soul to inhabit a cougar's form. Why, I do not know. He had some secret deed to do by night, perhaps. To kill an enemy, or avenge a wrong. A real cougar's cry is quite different."

Horgan said something I could not quite understand, but Martino interrupted him.

"Juan follows an old tradition," he said. "In Burma there are were-tigers, and seal-men in the Inuit country, up north. Primitive people generally think a soul can enter various bodies."

I smiled a little. "I am not superstitious, Senor," I said, "until I am in the jungle. But do you remember the madman Pedro who lived in the hut on the beach? His face is that of a cougar. And it is well known that his soul can enter the body of a cougar whenever he wishes."

"He had the stigmata of a leper,

Juan," Martino explained. "His leonine appearance didn't mean—"

Horgan put down the bottle from which he had been drinking and laughed loudly.

Pointing a big sausage of a finger at Martino, he said:

"You're probably tagged as a magician too. Every time the boys see a snake they probably cross themselves and say *buenas días*, Senor Martino."

Martino did not like that—no. His eyes were very ugly, and I felt afraid. But it was true that he looked like a snake.

To change the subject, I said that this was a land where many superstitions grew.

"It is old," I explained, "and few people come here. Yet very long ago there was a race that built Boatl. They died in time, but because they were not entirely human, something of their power remained. It is in the air, perhaps. I do not know. But men say that these swamps are cursed."

We talked for a little while, and soon Senor Horgan gave me a drink which he poured into a tin cup. It was brandy, but had a peculiar taste. Soon after swallowing it I felt remarkably sleepy and rolled up in my blankets and mosquito netting.

It was light when I awoke, with an unpleasant headache. Horgan was shaking me.

"Get up, get up, you lazy beggar," he said. "A snake has bitten Senor Martino and he is dying."

This was true. Only he was dead, and turning black with rather horrible rapidity. His face was not a good sight, and beside his body lay a snake with its head crushed. And on Martino's arm and on his cheek were the holes that fangs make.

It was a sad thing, but death is never far away in the jungle. Only I noticed curious marks on Martino's wrists and ankles and mouth, that might have been made by bonds and a gag. But I said nothing, for the *Americano* had certainly been poisoned by a snake, and I saw the look in Horgan's eye.

We buried Senor Martino hastily, packed our kits, and went on. Quite

often Horgan would look at a map which he had not used before. Our loads were a little lighter, for we had jettisoned Martino's snakes.

We were resting, at mid-day, *siesta*, beside a small stream, and smoking cigarettes, when a rather trivial thing happened. We were sitting in the middle of a clearing. The rivulet was not wide, and it was shallow. I had dipped my hands into it for the sake of coolness.

We do not drink unboiled water in the jungle, naturally, for malaria is an ever-present danger. Horgan was drinking brandy, and his meaty red face was shining with sweat.

"Juan, look there!" he said suddenly.

I looked, and on the opposite bank was a little green snake.

"It is harmless," I said, but Horgan coked the bottle and did not reply.

Then the tiny green snake did a curious thing. It lifted its speck of a head, seemed to see us, and glided down into the water. It swam across, swiftly, came up on the bank, and wriggled toward Horgan. He jumped up hurriedly and stamped on the serpent till it was dead and jelly.

"But there was nothing to fear," I said. "He was harmless."

"I was not afraid," Horgan said loudly. "Let us go on."

So we did. And it grew hotter, and we were presently in the midst of the swamps. The mosquitoes were terrible. I had no *pulque*, remember. Water is good, brandy is better, but *pulque*—eh? You are kind, *Senor*. Once more, your health.

So the big red man and I went on. We fought with quicksand, but we did not need to fear jaguars now. There were none in the swamps. There were, however, snakes.

Whether it was accident or not I cannot say, but after awhile a serpent, slightly larger than the one we had seen at the stream, dropped from a tree and rippled toward Horgan. He did not see it till I cried out, for I saw the snake had death in its mouth.

I slew the reptile with my machete, and almost died for my trouble. Horgan was shooting off his revolver at the carcass. I jumped back just in

time to save my skin. The *Americano* emptied his gun, which was a waste of ammunition.

"Martino!" he said quite softly, in a shaky voice.

"He is dead," I said.

"Eh?" Horgan turned and looked at me. "That's what I meant. Naturally I'm jumpy, after the way he died. Those damn snakes—" He cursed them fluently and interestingly, in several languages.

Well, again we went on. That night Horgan insisted on camping in the open, not under sheltering trees. And he built a circle of fires all around us. I did not object, for I was not asked to help.

CAYMANS—alligators, you know—were in the swamps. They coughed and bellowed all night. I slept nevertheless, but Horgan was red-eyed and evil-tempered at dawn. We drank coffee and brandy, ate a little, and watched the malarial mists float around us. They were white, like shrouds, but when I mentioned the fact Horgan snarled and told me to be silent.

So I was silent. Even when a fat black snake appeared and approached Horgan I said nothing. Because it was harmless, and I thought, perhaps wrongly, that it would be a joke to startle the *Americano*.

But he was more than startled, when the coil wrapped around his leg.

"Martino!" he screamed out, and seemed to go crazy.

He almost chopped off his foot with a machete before I could wrench the snake off. I flung the serpent away, intending to let it escape, for it eats vermin, but Horgan pursued and slew it with his blade. Then he approached me, and the light glittered on the machete.

"Did you see that thing?" he asked, looking at me closely.

"Not until you saw it, *Senor*." I was most polite, for I saw that Horgan was frightened, and therefore dangerous.

"Watch them," he said, and began to pack.

We went on. That day a strange thing happened. We reached Boatl,

and met a native, and he acted oddly. I must tell of it in detail.

Boatl is a place of jagged stones jutting up from swamp. The city sank ages ago. Festering decay hangs like a pall over everything. In the distance is rising ground, and thick, almost impassable jungle.

"There," Horgan said, pointing. "We go there."

It was not easy to cross the Boatl swamp. There was much quicksand, and I did not like the idea of walking above drowned dead men, especially when they were only partly human. Some of the stones that showed above the surface were vaguely disquieting because of the carvings they bore. Many were cut to resemble snakes, and were rather horribly lifelike.

We crossed the swamp and started up the slope toward the jungle. Then a naked man with a gray, mottled skin came from somewhere and stood before us. I do not think he arose from the ground, though I almost thought so at the time.

He was not nice to look upon. His skull was hairless and flattened, and his slanted eyes never blinked. His features were subtly—what shall I say—degraded. The mark of the ape may degrade a man's face. Well, the mark of another creature entirely showed in this native's lipless mouth, nearly non-existent nose, and scaly skin.

He spoke in a language I understood, or at least I imagined he spoke. But I thought he spoke Spanish, and later Horgan said it was English. At least, he told us to go back.

"For this is locked land," he said. "It does not belong to you, and trespassers are not desired. Your coming disturbs those who dwell here." And he looked past us at the swamp.

I WAS exceedingly afraid then, and got behind Horgan. He lifted his gun and said that he was going on.

"That you will not do," the native said. "If you will not be warned, I must trouble the sleep of my people. They will come and destroy you."

"Let them try," Horgan said. "Do you know what this is?" He patted the rifle.

"Let us go back," I pleaded. "Do you not see that this native is not—not wholesome?"

"Tell me," Horgan said, "does the Temple of Boatl lie near here?"

"Yes. Not far away. Will you return as you came, or must I awaken those who slumber?"

At that Horgan fired his rifle at the native, but did not hit him. For some reason this did not surprise me. The naked gray man lifted his arms and cried out a few syllables, and with the surface of my skin I felt movement at my back, in the swamp. I shut my eyes.

A cry of surprise from Horgan made me open them. The native had lowered his arms, and was looking down at a big snake near him. The reptile was hissing.

That was strange enough, but when the native also began to hiss, my stomach became cold as ice. Suddenly the native looked at Horgan and smiled. His teeth were too long.

"Your way is open," he said. "I shall not halt you—now." And he glanced at the snake.

I did, also, and when I turned my head the native was gone. The serpent hissed, and came toward Horgan. He wasted three bullets before he killed it.

"Where's our friend?" he asked. "I didn't see him go."

I shrugged. "One dies but once," I said fatalistically, "so let us go on. There is no escape now, I think."

Horgan cursed me for a fool. We took out our machetes and chopped our way into the jungle. Presently the red-haired man said, perhaps to himself:

"Larger each time. First a little green snake, then a bigger one. Now this. God!" Then he took out the map and his eyes grew greedy. "Not much further, Juan," he said.

This was true. We burst through a barricade of canes and came out into a big clearing. It was quite empty, except for a huge tube of stone carved to resemble a giant snake emerging from the ground. The jaws were wide open, and darkness was heavy in the maw of the stone serpent.

"Well," said Horgan, looking at

the map, "this is the temple, all right. Get the flashlights, Juan." He seemed cheered by arrival at his goal.

I did not like the idea of walking down the stone throat of that great snake, but Horgan made me precede him. There was not room to stand upright; we proceeded in a crouched, cramped position, with our heads tilted painfully. I went on, down at a steep angle, letting the beam of my light pick out my path.

Oh, that snake was long! We went far down into the earth, and it became silent as the tomb. Soon we were winding around in a descending spiral, as though the stone snake was coiled. And far down was the treasure.

SACKS of gold and precious stones—emeralds and rubies and pearls—worth more than I care to guess. Even I was excited, and Horgan was mad. He buried his face in the jewels, till I warned him of scorpions that might be hiding there. Finally we each picked up a sack, wrapping canvas about the moldy cloth, and staggered back up the spiral.

We came out of the snake's mouth, gasping and sweating. We lowered the treasure to the ground. And then, up from the jungle slope and across the clearing, came a very colossus of a snake. A boa, perhaps, and a terrible one indeed. Its hiss was like a boat's siren. The green, mottled body literally poured over the earth toward us.

We dived for the guns. We had no wish to be trapped inside the stone snake, like rabbits in a warren with a ferret after them. And we blew that boa into fragments, but it was not easy, I tell you, Señor! Even now my throat goes dry at the memory. . . .

Gracias! Your health. . . .

Eh, a boa does not die quickly. We jumped around like monkeys for awhile, dodging and yelling and praying. But the big rifles told at last, and the monster lay still, twitching at intervals with muscular reaction. Horgan was white and shaking, and he whispered Martino's name.

"Bigger each time," he said.

"Let us take the treasure and flee,"

I pleaded, but Horgan would not answer. The lust of gold had him by the throat. Cursing, he drove me down the underground path.

Again we ascended, each with a bag of treasure. I went first, for Horgan would not trust me behind him, fearing I would kill him for the gold and jewels. *Por Dios*, such a thought never entered my skull. For one thing, I was too afraid to think of anything but my own terror.

And now, Señor, you must try to believe, as I tried. I reached the stone snake's mouth. I stepped out on the ground, and laid down my bag of treasure. Then I heard a curse from Horgan.

I turned. He was trying to get out of the opening, but the bag he held seemed to have become caught on a projection. I think, even then, some hint of the truth came to me, for I cried out to Horgan to drop the treasure and spring out. He did not listen, and then I saw, unmistakably, that the stone snake's mouth was closing.

Horgan saw it too late. He dropped the bag and flung himself forward, but the great jaws snapped shut with a deafening crash. I almost ran away, Señor, but I did not, for to admit the reason for my fear would have meant madness. You see, I had to prove to myself that my superstitions were groundless.

I looked at the head of that snake. And it was stone. That enabled me to breathe again. I had been afraid it might *not* be stone.

The ancients sometimes set traps in their temples, you know. That thought occurred to me. We might have set off a concealed trigger, and the jaws, being movable, might have closed as a result. That was, of course, what had happened.

NOW we had with us a small amount of dynamite. I did not like to use it, but Señor Horgan was an *Americano*, and had paid me to guide him safely to Boatl and back. So, an hour later, I had the satisfaction of blowing a big hole in the stone head of the snake. When the dust had cleared I ran forward and flashed my light into the gap.

Horgan had not been damaged by the blast, as I had feared. He had, apparently, retreated down the subterranean passage. The bag of treasure he had left where it had fallen, and it was burst and scattered by the explosion.

So, Senor, I took a rifle, and two revolvers, and a good big flashlight with an extra battery, and I climbed through that hole in the stone snake's head. I shouted to Horgan. I listened.

Then I heard him crying, from far below.

Well, I went down after him. I shall not dwell on that descent. I pray to the good God that I may forget it. And finally I found Horgan. He was helpless, and sobbing and crying with pain.

He could not walk. I picked him up, and I carried him on my back, and I carried Senor Horgan for days and days after that. He had paid me to guide him to Boatl and back. He walked to Boatl, but the return trip was made across my shoulders.

The treasure? I left it there, Senor. Horgan was delirious, and could not know or object. Foolish, perhaps, but under the circumstances I could not bring myself to touch a single pearl or emerald. And the thought of that abstinence is a comfort to me now.

So I brought Horgan back here to the coast. If I had not, people would have said I had killed and robbed the

two *Americanos*. For weeks now the red-haired man has been in the hospital, and I hear he is completely insane. That is a sad thing. I have not visited him, no. Even the doctors do not like to listen to his ravings. He speaks of things that cannot be.

You say he will die soon? I am glad. God is merciful, even to such men as Senor Horgan. And— What? You ask how I could have carried such a big man as he across the swamps and through the jungle? Well, he did not weigh much after I found him in the stomach of the stone snake. There was no flesh at all on his legs. The doctors say . . . eh?

Yes. They say his flesh has been eaten by something like digestive fluid. The bone shows through in many places. I killed a boa once in the jungle, and took a goat kid from its belly. It was dead, naturally—and Horgan is alive. I cannot account for that. But, as you say, he will die soon.

I can add nothing to my story. It is all quite impossible, of course. But Senor Horgan does not think so.

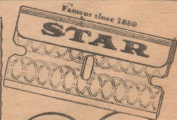
If I can be of any more service . . . No? You have not finished your drink, Senor! Ah, but this is a filthy *cantina*. The heat of the place has made you quite pale. May I suggest a walk in the fresh air, along the beach? And, preferably, not in the direction of the hospital.

Vaya con Dios, Senor!

Next Issue: ITHAQUA, a Weird Story of a Mysterious Snow Phantom, by AUGUST W. DERLETH



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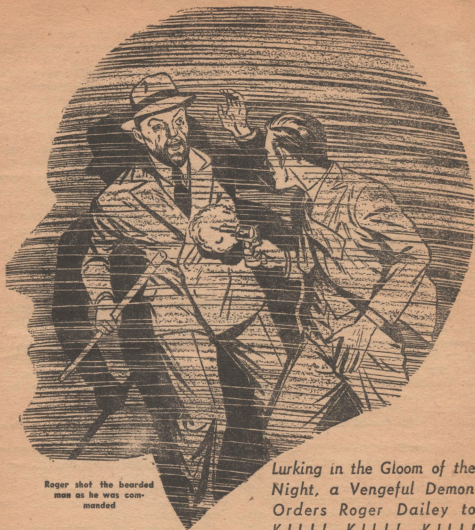


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Roger shot the bearded
man as he was com-
manded

*Lurking in the Gloom of the
Night, a Vengeful Demon
Orders Roger Dailey to
KILL! KILL! KILL!*

The Bald-Headed Man

By DON TRACY

Author of "The Gift of Ure," "Death Speaks Five Words," etc.

IT WAS four days after the Empire City consolidation that Roger Dailey had his first dream about the bald-headed man. His first, but not the last.

The Empire City deal had made Roger Dailey very rich. It had taken a lot of work, long, tiring hours spent around conference tables, persuasive talking and a lot of scheming. But

his plan had succeeded and now Roger Dailey could rest.

He knew he needed to rest. The trembling of his hands, the tastelessness of food when it touched his mouth, the ever-present desire for whiskey—they all told him that he was run down.

Well, he thought, it was January and the Susquehanna flats were dotted with sink-boxes and as soon as he cleared up the few details still unsettled he'd spend a couple of weeks in duck hunting. Old Man Robinson had to be won over and there was that piece of business about the Dayton factories that had to be straightened out, but that wouldn't take long—unless red tape tied his hands. Then for a rest. A good long rest. He really needed it.

Roger was still thinking of that vacation he'd take when he dozed off into a fitful sleep and dreamed the dream of the bald-headed man. Because it must have been a dream!

It was unusual, certainly, because the details of the whole thing were so vividly clear. He was in a high-ceilinged room, alone, and suddenly there was the bald-headed man beside him, whispering:

"Kill him!"

The two of them stood there, with the sibilant whisper piercing the silence and suddenly there was another man present. He was tall, with a sharp-pointed beard jutting from his chin and carried a silver-headed cane in his hand.

"Kill him!" the bald-headed man urged.

Roger walked toward the bearded man, gripping the automatic he found in his hand. He aimed the gun with careful deliberation. The gun jumped as he squeezed the trigger.

The bearded man fell sideways, like a sack of grain, his mouth open and his eyes staring accusingly at Roger. Blood leaked from a black-edged hole over his left eye.

Roger awoke with a start, the eyes of the bearded man still burning at him through the darkness of his bedroom. His pajama jacket was glued to his body, grimy with sweat. The light from the lamp on the bedside

table did little to shut out the gleaming of the eyes that stared at him.

THIS is my bedroom, Roger Dailey thought, and it was just a dream. A bad dream, but only a dream! Nerves. I need a vacation. Next week, I'll be shooting ducks on the Susquehanna.

He drank a glass of water. That was no good. He needed a drink badly. The bourbon warmed him and the eyes faded into nothingness. Then he went back to bed and slept.

He laughed uproariously at his dream the next day. He told his secretary about the curiously vivid details. He described the bald-headed man—spoke about the odd, pointed ears and the pale blue eyes.

"Never had a dream like that before," Roger told the secretary. "Seemed to know the fellow, somehow. Funny."

The bald-headed man came back the next night. Again, Roger was in a high-ceilinged room, and again the bald-headed man was beside him, whispering:

"Kill him!"

The happenings of the previous night repeated themselves. The tall, bearded man was in the room suddenly, clutching his silver-headed cane. This time, there was a knife in Roger's hand. A long dagger with a metal handle that felt cold and clammy in his grip.

The dagger slid easily into the bearded man's chest, and the tall man toppled without a sound. There was only the sagging jaw and the eyes, wide open and accusing.

Roger told his secretary the next day about that, too, but after the third night—the night he killed the bearded man with a hatchet—he kept his dreams to himself. It was silly, he reasoned, to have the identical dream so often.

"Nerves," Roger told himself. "A couple of weeks in the country is what I need."

But the Dayton affair took longer than he had expected. Old Man Robinson proved difficult. Things dragged on and on and the hunting trip was postponed. And postponed again.

The bald-headed man, with his pointed ears and pale blue eyes, came back every night. Always he said: "Kill him!" and always Roger killed the bearded man with the silver-headed cane. Never twice the same way.

One time, he hurled the tall stranger from a cliff. On another occasion, he poisoned the man, jamming a handful of deadly crystals into the gaping, hairy mouth. Another time, he ran the tall man down with his car, while the bald-headed man sat beside him in the front seat, chuckling evilly.

These dreams were tense, horrible affairs. Each time the tall man had been killed, Roger awoke drenched with perspiration and shuddering at the vividness of the thing. His sleeping hours were shadowed by the thought that the next second would take him to a high-ceilinged room, with the bald-headed man standing beside him, whispering:

"Kill him!"

A drink would banish the tall man's accusing eyes — or, sometimes, two drinks. Or three. Roger now kept the decanter of whiskey on the bed table beside him. He always needed it after he had killed the tall, bearded man with the silver-headed cane in his dreams.

IT GREW so bad that Roger dreaded going to sleep. He haunted his club, clinging to late visiting members until they gradually dissolved and he was left alone to wander through the empty rooms, faced with the awful necessity of going back to his apartment.

"Another rubber," he would plead when his bridge partners yawned and looked at their watches.

"Spot you three points," he would tell the man who was playing pool in the billiard room.

"Dailey's working too hard," everyone said at the bar. "No use earning a lot of money if you kill yourself doing it."

He was working hard. Roger found relief in fighting the battles with Old Man Robinson, during the daylight hours when the bald-headed man

stayed away. The Dayton affair was coming along, gradually. There was some trouble in Washington, with Senator Cranway demanding an investigation of the consolidation. Well, that was all right—it was to be expected. But the battle looked about won.

"Next week," Roger promised himself. "Next week I'll get away for a rest."

His hands trembled more. It took four or five drinks, now, after he'd committed his nightly murder in his dreams. He lost weight. He couldn't eat. Inside him, taut wires jangled and twanged.

Then the whole Empire City consolidation deal fell through with a crash. Curiously, Roger wasn't as shocked as he should have been. Senator Cranway pulled a master-stroke and obtained a Federal Trades Commission order that barred the whole transaction. Roger's friends clucked their tongues sympathetically and murmured their condolences. Roger did not hear them. Inwardly, he was elated.

Now he could rest. Now, he could get rid of the bald-headed man!

The night the deal fell through, the bald-headed man sidled close to Roger.

"Kill him!" he whispered.

Before he looked at where the tall, bearded man would be, Roger struggled through the blanket of sleep to find his voice.

"Who are you?" he yelled. "Who is he? Why do I have to kill him?"

The strangled gurgle of his voice awoke him. He lay there in the darkness, feeling lost and uncertain. The tall, bearded man remained alive, but that thought seemed more disturbing than the agony which always followed the kill.

"Good God!" Roger thought. "I'm going insane!"

He went to his doctor. Roger told the story of the bald-headed man and the tall, bearded stranger, but as he told it, it sounded unconvincing, even to himself.

"Um-hum," the doctor said. "I see."

The physician fingered a long yellow pencil, pointing first the lead and

then the eraser at the green blotter on his desk.

"Um-hum," the doctor murmured. "I tell you what let's do. Let's have another doctor give you an examination. A doctor that's better qualified to examine you than I am. A specialist in things like this."

ROGER'S physician called in a very famous psychiatrist, who had Park Avenue offices and a Viennese accent.

"Rest is the thing you need," the noted psychiatrist told Roger. "You have been working too hard. It's a very common case. Repeated dreams are purely elementary. You know the characters do not exist, yes? Certainly. The murder phase, it is nothing to be alarmed about. It is your aboriginal subconscious which takes the advantage over your overworked nerves to come out of the depths of your soul. That is all there is to it. A little rest, and the aboriginal impulses will go back where they belong."

He smiled brightly at Roger. Roger cursed him, silently. He wanted a cure, not silly chatter about aboriginal impulses. That part about needing a vacation wasn't anything new. It didn't require a psychiatrist to tell him that. Of course he needed a rest; but a fellow couldn't just walk off without at least putting up a stiff fight against those Washington sharpshooters—Cranway and his crowd—could he?

"All right, Doctor," he said aloud. "I'm going to take a rest as soon as I finish up the job I'm doing right now."

"Hmm," said the psychiatrist. "Better leave that job to somebody else and take that trip right away."

"Can't be done," Roger said curtly. "I've got to handle this one all by myself."

The doctor was dubious. He polished his *pince nez* glasses as he talked.

"To be frank, Herr Dailey," he said, "I'm prescribing an immediate rest. To tell you the truth, you are dangerously on the brink of a nervous breakdown."

"A few days won't make any difference," Roger protested.

"It would be best to get away from your work now."

Roger left the doctor's office, seething. Two hundred dollars for nothing. Two hundred dollars for mouth-ing platitudes about rest.

The bald-headed man chuckled that night as Roger crushed the tall, bearded man's skull with a paving block.

Days flew by, while Roger fought on, his aim to retire from the field of battle with honor. The Empire City cause was hopelessly lost, but Roger worked to satisfy the men who had hired him; to prove that every possible angle was tried in an effort to circumvent defeat. In the end, Senator Cranway and his bloc won out. Completely and overwhelmingly.

The day that the final word came through, Roger Dailey called his secretary and ordered his things packed. Then he phoned for reservations on a sleeper to Baltimore. After wiring his guide at Havre de Grace, he gave his secretary a month's vacation.

He needed a drink—one drink before he said good-by to the whole damned city and the bald-headed man and his nerves. A drink would steady his hands. He could sip a cocktail and remember that he didn't have to go back to the apartment and hear the bald-headed man demanding that he kill.

His man waited with his bags in the Penn Station. Roger knew there was a bar nearby. A side-car, he decided, would be the drink.

"Side-car," he told the bartender.

SLEET pelted against the windows of the barroom as he drank. Roger looked around him. It was the tap-room of an old hotel. The floor was of inlaid tile, the walls were of carved walnut, and the ceiling hung at least twenty feet above him.

"Cold day," the bartender volunteered. He was obviously bored. Roger was the only customer in the place. The bartender dabbed at an imaginary spot on the bar with his rag.

"Good duck weather," Roger said.

The drink glowed in his stomach. "I'm on my way to a vacation. In Maryland. I'm going after ducks."

"Yeah?" the bartender asked.

"I'm going to freeze and enjoy myself," Roger told him. "I'm going to get a good long rest."

"Gee," the bartender said. "What I could do with a vacation right now!"

Roger drained his glass and ordered another drink. He watched the smoke from his cigarette rise in the still, close air of the barroom. He glanced toward the high ceiling. The place seemed familiar. Roger wondered where he had seen this place before.

He knew, but he was through with all that. Through with the dreams about the high-ceilinged room, the bald-headed man and the tall, bearded stranger. He sipped his cocktail slowly.

When he looked up, he meant to ask the bartender what time it was, but his mouth hung open with the words frozen on his tongue. In the glass, behind the bartender, he saw the reflection of a short man, peering into the mirror.

It was the bald-headed man.

Roger knew that it was. The bald-headed man wore a derby hat and the collar of his coat was pulled up around his neck, but Roger recognized the pallid brilliance of the pale blue eyes. Roger started to tremble.

"Your nerves are shot," he told himself. "The man beside you is probably a shipping clerk or a shoe salesman. There's no such thing as dreaming of people and then meeting them. Listen, you're going duck shooting! You're going to take a rest! You don't have to work again for the rest of your life, if you don't want to."

"Listen, stop looking at him! He isn't the bald-headed man! He's the product of your imagination. Listen, put down your drink and get the hell out of here! Your train leaves in a few minutes. Don't look at him! Get out of here!"

The man beside him took off the derby hat and wiped his glistening forehead with a handkerchief. He was

totally bald and his ears were as pointed as the spires of a cathedral.

The bald-headed man looked into the mirror over the bartender's head, directly at Roger. His lips moved.

"Kill him!" he said.

The whisper rang through the place, but the bartender did not seem to hear. He stood motionlessly, picking his teeth and staring out at the driving sleet.

THE door opened again. Roger did not have to turn to look. He knew who it was. He heard the clatter of the silver-headed cane as it fell from the umbrella rack near the door. Roger heard the tall, bearded man grunt as he stooped to pick up his cane and he heard the rattle of the stick as it was put back into the umbrella rack.

"Listen!" Roger told himself. "You can put your drink down and walk out of here! You'll miss your train if you don't leave now!"

"Evening, Senator," the bartender said. "Cold out."

"Very cold," the bearded man said.

Roger stood there, not daring to look up to meet the bald-headed man's eyes; not daring to look at the tall, bearded man on the other side of him.

Suddenly he was seized by a fit of uncontrollable shaking.

"Whiskey," the senator said. "Soda on the side."

"Kill him!" the bald-headed man demanded.

The bartender placed the quart bottle on the bar and the whiskey joggled as the senator set down the heavy container after pouring his drink.

Roger stood there. He had already missed his train. There never would be any duck hunting in Maryland. There never would be any rest. There never would be anything but the bald-headed man, whispering:

"Kill him!"

Clouds of feverish rage rolled over his brain. He turned toward the tall, bearded man.

"Damn you!" he screamed. "Get out of here!"

The bartender left off picking his teeth.

"Hey," he said. "Wait a minute! That's no way to talk."

"Get out of here!" Roger yelled.

The tall, bearded man stepped back.

"I—I—" he spluttered. "What's the matter?"

"Get out of here!"

The bald-headed man's whisper thundered through the barroom.

"KILL HIM!"

The bartender started for the end of the bar but the deed was done before he reached Roger. The heavy whiskey bottle lay in fragments on the floor and the senator lay lifelessly on the floor, his mouth open and his eyes staring straight at Roger with a familiar, accusing glare.

"God, Mister!" the bartender cried. "You've killed him!"

Roger stood there, looking down at the wide-open eyes of the man he had killed.

There was a maze of confusion after that, and Roger was vaguely conscious of many things. There was the smell of creosote in the police station and the pain of a wrenched arm as detectives questioned him. There was the oppressive weight of bars between him and air. There was a trial, and a parade of witnesses testified that Roger's Empire City consolidation deal had been ruined by the man he had killed—Senator Cranway!

THERE was a jury which came back into the courtroom after a brief deliberation and returned a verdict of murder in the first degree, without a recommendation of mercy.

There were appeals, which were useless.

The clock kept ticking and before long they came to Roger's cell.

"Come, my son," a priest said. "It is time to go."

The death house inmates howled and cursed and shook the bars of their cells because they knew the clock would keep ticking and they'd be making that same walk before long.

Roger was a model condemned man. He didn't faint or struggle. He was stiff and straight as he walked out

into the white chamber that contained the ugly black chair with the straps hanging from its arms and legs.

"I am Roger Dailey and in a few minutes I will be dead," he said to himself. "I will die because a man who never really existed told me to kill another man whom I never had seen before."

In front of him, after they had strapped him in the chair, he saw rows of blank, white faces. He looked at them and the blur of white faces condensed into one face which stared back at him.

It was the bald-headed man, and he was smiling.

Roger looked at the bald-headed man, trying to glean something from his smile that would tell him who his Nemesis really was.

The priest and the warden came up beside him.

"My son," the priest said, "do you want to say anything to me?"

No. There was nothing he— Yes, there was!

"Father," Roger said. "Do this for me. Find out who that man, that bald-headed man in the front row is. Find out who he is! Please, Father!"

"My boy," the priest soothed, "you've been brave up till now. Don't let go now."

"I mean it, Father!" Roger begged. "I've got to know! I didn't ask for anything else. Please, Father! Please! All I want to know is who he is!"

"I'll find out," the warden mumbled, "if that's all the poor devil wants."

"Our Father, Who Art in Heaven."

The priest was praying in a low voice.

"... Hallowed Be Thy Name. ..."

Roger could hear the warden's creaking shoes behind the chair. Some one slipped a black hood over his head.

"I'm going to die," he said, "but I'm going to find out who the bald-headed man really is."

"... Thy Kingdom Come. ..."

The noise of the squeaking shoes stopped. Roger heard the murmur of the warden's voice.

The warden's shoes began squeak-

ing again. The hood was hot and Roger's breath fanned his own face. He felt no fear—only elation over the fact that at last he would know the secret of the mysterious bald-headed man.

AT LAST his soul would free itself of the torment of bewilderment.

"I'll know in a minute," he told himself. "I'll know who he is."

*"... On Earth as It Is in Heaven.
... Give Us This Day..."*

The warden's creaking shoes came nearer.

"In a second, now," Roger said. "In a second, I'll know!"

"... Our Daily Bread..."

The warden creaked up to the side of the chair.

"Now I'll know!" Roger thought.

But the warden did not speak. Roger felt the heavy metal cup on the crown of his head become heavier. Why didn't the warden speak? And suddenly Roger understood. There was nothing for the warden to say.

Roger knew then who the bald-headed man really was—and had been.

"... And Forgive Us Our Trespases..."

Roger Dailey was declared dead, officially, at eighteen minutes past midnight. And with him died the bald-headed man whom the warden had not found,...



A FANTASY OF WEIRD REDEMPTION DOOMED

A Gripping Story

By SEABURY QUINN

NEXT ISSUE

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

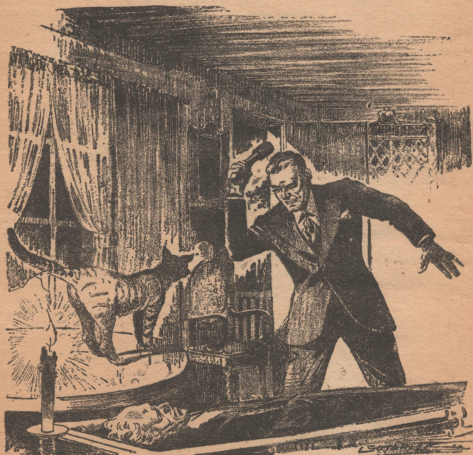
and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 16, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 16, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

The Lesser Brethren Mourn

By SEABURY QUINN

Author of "Roads," "The Phantom Farmhouse," etc.



I drew back my club to let fly

THIS happened back in the days when the other Roosevelt was in the White House and everybody was whistling tunes from "King Dodo" and the "Burgomaster," but I don't often speak about it, for no one but my mother-in-law believes

*In Weird Ceremony, a Dumb
Cortege Bids Farewell to One
Who Passes Into Eternity!*

me, and she comes from County Mayo.

I was serving my apprenticeship with Ambrose McGonigle over at Centerville. Mac had a good practice for a country town, fifty or sixty cases a year, enough to make him a good living and pay me fair wages, but not enough to keep him from his semi-weekly poker session back of McGhee's grocery, or to interfere too seriously with my courting Monica Duffy. Mac was playing poker the night Bert Emmons barged into the office.

It's always seemed to me there are three sorts of drinkers—those who drink for sociability, those who drink to drown their troubles, and those who do it out of sheer perversity and meanness. Bert fitted into the third category. He was mean and quarrelsome cold sober, and got meaner with each drink.

This evening he was three-drinks mean as he stopped in front of my desk and pushed his hat back till its rim rested on his neck. I'd seen him do that before starting a fight in the Biggs House bar, and slid my chair back from the desk so I could be up and out of reach if he made a pass at me.

We eyed each other for a moment, then he grinned. One of those mean grins that twist the corners of the mouth but leave the eyes cold and bleak.

"Where's Mac?" he wanted to know.

"He's out," I told him. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Not me," he answered, with a hic-cough. "You can for Uncle Wash, though. He died this evenin'."

"I'm sorry," I replied, and I was. I used to pass the time of day with Washington Kearney on my way to and from Monica's, and a pleasant-spoken gentleman he was.

His hard grin widened. "You'll be sorrier when you hear this. I want him buried as cheap as you can do it. I'm his only livin' kin, so I got the say, an' I say plant him cheap as possible. I been waitin' long enough for him to croak."

"But his estate will pay the funeral expenses," I began.

That was as far as I got, for he

banged a fist down on the desk and glared at me.

"His estate? Who the hell says it's his? It's all mine now, every red-headed penny, an' I'm goin' to give you buzzards just as little of it as I can. What's your cheapest coffin cost?"

I hadn't worked a year for Ambrose McGonigle for nothing.

"We haven't a coffin in stock," I answered, taking refuge in a technicality, for as I suppose you know a coffin is kite-shaped while a casket is oblong. "I can let you have a casket with everything complete for a nice funeral for a hundred dollars, though."

You'd have thought I'd tried to pick his pocket, but I held out, and finally he tossed a key down on the desk.

"There you are," he grunted. "Doc Abernathy'll sign the death certificate, an' you can bury Uncle Wash in the family plot out on the farm. Don't let me see or hear of you till it's finished. I'll be at the Biggs House."

"Who's going to officiate?" I asked, as I picked up the key.

"If those old Grand Army cripples want to put a show on, let 'em. Don't bother me with it. You just run the funeral and bring me that key when you're done. . . ."

I WAS off at six next evening, and was just getting into my other suit when old Ambrose came back to the little room they'd set aside for me back of the office.

"You'll be droppin' in on Monica tonight, belike?" he asked.

"If Prince doesn't cast a shoe on the way out," I answered.

Prince was the little black horse, too light for hearse or brougham duty, that we kept to pull the sidebar buggy we used on first calls. He was a good little fellow, gentle as a kitten and almost as playful, but he had a habit of shuffling his forefeet when he trotted, and it was seldom a week went by without his dropping a shoe.

"Arrah"—Mac grinned at me—"shoe or no shoe, ye'll be sparkin' Monica widin th' hour, or ye're not th' lad I take ye for. But would ye be after doin' me a favor on th' way out?"

"Of course," I promised, as I fin-

ished tightening the knot of my red four-in-hand. Morticians' assistants generally wore black string bows those days, and getting into a colored necktie was to me what slipping into civvies is to a soldier. "What is it, Mr. McGonigle?"

"Look in on old Wash Kearney. I'd take it kindly if ye'd stop by on yer way to Monica's just to see if everything's all right. It don't seem decent for 'im to be layin' there alone this way, wid his nearest kin down at th' Biggs House bar, a-drinkin' himself pie-eyed. Nobody's there a-mourning Wash."

"Certainly," I told him. I agreed with McGonigle.

The Kearney farm was on the way to Monica's, and she wouldn't be the girl to quarrel if business made me just a little late.

Fall had set in early, and the shadows had already started forming round the trees and bushes by the roadside as I set off for Monica Duffy's. The farmers had been breaking ground for winter wheat and the fields smelled pleasantly of fresh-turned earth. Somehow the quiet restfulness of the evening made me think of old Wash Kearney.

He was a character, old Washington. Except on Decoration Day when he came in to march with the G.A.R., and every other Thursday when he drove in to McGhee's for his two-weeks' supply of groceries, we never saw him in town by daylight, and the only times he came in after dark were when the Zebulon B. Lipschutz Post was meeting in the Odd Fellows Temple. The rest of his time was spent puttering around the little garden patch which was all he tried to cultivate of the hundred and twenty acres his father left him.

There was considerable mystery about old Wash. Except for the farm, which was pretty well worked out when it came to him, his father left him nothing, yet he was the richest man in the county and could have been a lot richer if it hadn't been for his habit of never foreclosing a mortgage. Nearly everyone for miles around had owed him money at one time or other, and though most of them had paid, he

had enough outstanding notes to make a sizeable fortune.

Where his money came from set the gossips nearly wild. According to one story—and from some things he'd let drop in our casual conversations I believed it—he'd been one of that host of reckless youngsters who just couldn't settle down when they were mustered out in '65. Some of them went West to build the railroads, some went to Mexico to help Juarez drive Maximilian from the throne, some went filibustering in Cuba and South America, a few just knocked around anywhere there was excitement and money to be had.

Washington Kearney was one of these. Egyptology was just then on the threshold of its present importance, and desperate characters were organizing expeditions to loot the old tombs systematically. Besides the gold and jewels, they found they had a ready market for the mummies, which were worth anywhere from ten to fifty pounds, according to condition and importance, in London, Paris or Berlin.

NATIVE Egyptians didn't take too kindly to the foreign grave-robbers, but the men who had fought with Grant and Farragut and Sherman made small account of Arabs armed with smooth-bore muzzle-loaders. The expeditions marched and counter-marched across the sands at will, taking what they found and shooting down all opposition.

By the time the newly organized *gendarmarie du désert* became effective, the tomb-looters were ready to retire on their profits. When Washington Kearney came back to Centerville he had two buckskin bags of British sovereigns to deposit in the First National.

Those were the days of greenbacks and "shin-plasters." There was hardly any silver in circulation, and Washington's English gold brought a huge premium. When specie payment was resumed in '79 and his paper money redeemed he was worth almost a hundred thousand dollars. Which was about fifty thousand more than anybody else in the county could count.

You'd never have suspected he was a wealthy man. He wore blue denim in summer and the same old suit of frayed cheviot year after year in winter. One hobby was his flowers, but a bigger one was giving shelter to stray animals. Once he had twenty cats, five dogs, a spavined, spring-halted old mare he'd bought when its owner was about to shoot it, and a blind mule, all boarding with him at the same time.

I'd seen him take a cat that had lost eight of its nine lives and nurse it back to health as if it had been a sick child. He wouldn't have a rat trap on his place. The chipmunks nested in the gables of his house, squirrels came and went at will through a broken window in his attic.

"Someone has to help the lesser brethren in distress," he told me once, when I joked about the size of his menagerie.

"The lesser brethren?" I repeated. I was pretty literal those days, the way most youngsters are.

"That's right. I picked that up from a *mollah* in Egypt. The old boy tried to make a Moslem out of me. Most of what he said went in one ear and out the other, but a little lodged between 'em, especially a verse from the sixth book of the Koran, the one they call 'the Flocks.'"

He rattled off something that sounded like Spanish to me, then translated:

"There is no kind of beast on earth, no fowl that flieth with its wings, but the same is a people like unto you; then unto their Lord shall they return.' Pretty good philosophy, eh, son?"

"Sure," I agreed, not knowing any more what he was driving at than if he hadn't bothered to translate.

But I kept thinking about it, and the more I thought the clearer it seemed. Here was an old man, rich and lonely and with nothing but his memories for company, putting in his time being good to dumb beasts, just as some folks feel a call to work with people in prison or almshouses or insane asylums. There used to be a picture of Saint Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds, on the wall of the third grade room at Saint Dominic's

School. Maybe the blessed Francis and Wash Kearney had the same idea.

Anyway, the old man lived the last years of his long life peacefully. Now he'd slipped away in the calm of early fall, when they gather in the harvest. It seemed appropriate. All but that hellion nephew of his, drinking himself blind at the Biggs House and waiting for the estate to be settled.

I was mulling all this over when something by the roadside caught my eye. At first I thought it was a rabbit, but when I looked again I saw it was a cat. It was walking along leisurely as if it had no place to go and no special time to get there when all of a sudden it seemed to think of something and started running, head down and tail trailed out behind it like a plume.

HALF a mile, perhaps three-quarters down the road, I passed four more. First, an old tom, marching like a regimental sergeant-major on parade, and right behind him a little jennie stepping daintily as if walking on thin ice, with three half-grown kittens stringing out behind her.

"Somebody must have called a cat convention," I muttered, and fell to laughing over the fool notion the way a person sometimes will at something utterly silly.

Then I stopped laughing, for from somewhere in a copse of pine trees by the road I heard a cat's *meow*—you know the sound, a sort of low, deep, growling moan that rises to a shrieking wail and swells into a tortured howl, then sinks into a moan again—and from off across the hills an answer came, the long-drawn, quavering howling of a dog.

It was warm that evening, so warm I'd left my topcoat home, but as I heard those cries I felt as if a breath of January wind had blown on me. Everything inside me seemed to knot together. I've read since that we're instinctively affected by a cat's cry or a dog's howl in the night, because our prehistoric ancestors' worst enemies were wolves and leopards.

I wouldn't know about that, but I remember there was a chilling feeling right between my shoulder blades and my scalp began to itch as if a thousand

small red ants were crawling over it. Prince seemed afraid, too, for he hooked his tail across the lines and threw his head up with a snort and started down the road as if I'd laid the whip to him.

A light breeze sighed among the bare-boughed 'lanthus trees that shaded Kearney's front yard and played with the black crêpe as a kitten might play with a string. It knocked it against the door as if it rapped for admission, fluttered it like a pennant, let it drop till it dangled straight again, then caught it up once more to shake it as a woman shakes a dust rag.

I let the check-rein down and hitched Prince to the picket fence, pushed the front gate open with my foot and felt in one pocket for the key and in another for my matches. We didn't have flashlights those days.

Perhaps I'd gone five yards, maybe a little more, when I heard Prince give a frightened nicker. I swung round and saw him straining at the hitching-strap until nails that held the picket to the string-piece of the fence began to give with a sharp, rasping squeal. That wouldn't do. I went back, patted him and stroked his neck until he quieted, then hitched him to a tree, snubbing the line around the trunk so that he'd have some play if he took fright again, but couldn't possibly pull loose.

I was halfway back to the house when I heard it. At first I thought it was the breeze among the crisp, curled brown leaves that lay all over the lawn, but in a moment I knew better. It was the scampering patter of small feet, feet that moved when I moved, drawing closer every step I took, and stopped when I stopped—waiting.

We didn't know the phrase then, but only it can describe how I felt. My goat was gone. I was running in a panic by the time I reached the porch and began fumbling with the key. Somehow, I couldn't seem to make it fit, but at last the bolt clicked back. I jumped across the threshold and slammed the door behind me, bracing my heel against it as I slipped the key into the lock. Whatever waited outside was going to have to break that door in before it came to me.

Everything seemed normal in the house. Old Washington lay in his casket, his head as comfortably pilloved on the Jap silk cushion as it had ever been in bed. His thin gray hair was parted as he always wore it, and the buttons on his Grand Army blouse made small pools of brightness in the candlelight.

I wanted to stay with him. He represented something I understood, my usual daily work. Outside was something terrifying, vague and formless as a child's fear of the dark, and all the more frightening because I couldn't name it. Maybe I'd better take another look at him, I told myself, but before I could put the candle down I heard a noise at the back door.

IT WASN'T quite a knock nor yet a scratching, but a sort of combination of the two, as if something clawed the panels with a kind of dreadful eagerness. My breath stopped absolutely still for a full second, then I got a grip upon myself.

Bert Emmons! He'd been fuller than a fiddler's tyke all afternoon, boasting how he would splurge with old Washington's money. Maybe he'd drunk his credit up at the Biggs House and come out here to search the place for money.

He would get nothing but a bloody nose if I caught him, I promised myself, as I hurried toward the rear of the house. There was rag carpet on the kitchen floor. My feet made no sound as I crossed it and ripped the back door open.

The moon was shining through the bare trees, making alternate lines of shadow and brightness on the roofless porch. And that was all. If there'd been anything bigger than a mouse on the stoop I couldn't have missed seeing it.

Then I jumped as if a wasp had stung me. This time there was no mistake. A window had been smashed in the front of the house. I heard the shatter of the glass followed by the tinkle of the fragments on the bare floor. Instinctively I reached out for a weapon, and the first thing that my hand touched was a potato masher, one of those old-fashioned things with

a turned handle ending in a heavy knob. It must have weighed three pounds and made a first class shillalah.

I swung it back and forth a time or two, getting the heft of it in my hand, then started up the hall. Curiously, I was more angry than frightened. Whatever had smashed that window, man or devil, ghost or burglar, was going to know it had been in a battle before I finished with it. Old Wash Kearney might be helpless to defend his house, but I wasn't, not by a . . .

My mind was wiped as clear of thought as a child's slate is sponged clean with an eraser as I reached the parlor door.

A big splash of moonlight, white as spilled milk, lay in the center of the room, but the corners were as black as soot. The light shone full on Washington, and his face looked peaked and ghostly in it, colorless and gaunt, with shadows in his eye-sockets and the angles where his nose and cheeks joined, even in the wrinkles that traced little networks on his smooth-shaved upper lip.

Beyond the casket was the sheen of broken glass where the lower light of the French window had been smashed. That didn't make sense. The break was too low for a man to come through unless he went on his hands and knees. Anyway, a burglar should have smashed the glass beside the latch, so he could reach his hand in.

I realized what it was, then. Something was moving in the shadow, and the movement seemed to spread and widen like a ripple spreading from a stone dropped in a quiet pool.

Then, just where the light and darkness joined, a rat came creeping out, an old, gray, whiskered corner-robber, and right beside him, and paying him no more attention than if he weren't there, a cat stepped daintily as if the floor were paved with eggs. Just beyond the cat a squirrel came into sight, moving as squirrels do in a series of short runs, stopping a moment to twitch its nose and flirt its tail, then running forward again with a nervous jerk.

Everywhere I looked I saw the movement of small bodies and the

shine of little eyes. They were almost so close-packed you couldn't lay a hand between them—cats, mice, squirrels, rats, chipmunks, and more cats. I heard a scratching at the window, and a mongrel hound with one ear and no more than half a tail crouched down, crept through the broken window and joined the company that formed about the casket.

A big old tom-cat left the front rank, stopped a moment by the pedestal that held the casket's lower end, then jumped up to the table where we'd put the old man's G.A.R. hat, ready to go on his casket with the flag next morning. He was a monster, that cat. A big gray tiger with a ruff of white fur at his throat and eyes that were all bright black pupils.

I DREW my club back, ready to let fly. The memory of one of Ambrose Bierce's stories flashed across my mind—the one about the pet cat that jumped into its master's casket. If the beast made one more move toward old Wash I was going to smash him to a pulp.

But he didn't. For what seemed like five minutes he just stood there, looking down into the old man's face. Then, dignified as a retired brigadier, he turned and jumped down from the table, stalked across the room and went out through the broken window.

And every creature in the room followed suit. Mice, squirrels, rats, chipmunks—even the mother cat who made three extra trips to lift her kittens in her mouth so they could look down in the casket—mounted that table, took a long farewell of old Washington, and went out through the hole smashed in the window. None of them made a sound. They were as quiet, dignified and ritualistic about it as a delegation of lodge members passing round the casket of a deceased brother.

It must have taken an hour, but finally the last one left and I stepped into the death chamber, found a sheet of newspaper and stuffed the broken window with it. It wasn't afraid any more. I knew that there was nothing outside in the darkness now. And Monica was waiting for me.

BE YOURSELF

A Complete Fantastic Novelet

By ROBERT BLOCH

Author of "The Unheavenly Twin," "Death Has Five Guesses," etc.

CHAPTER I

Fair Exchange Is—

F. THATCHER VAN ARCHER sat before his typewriter feeling more and more like Eddie Thompson. As a matter of fact, F. Thatcher Van Archer was Eddie Thompson, but that was something F. Thatcher Van Archer did not care to think about. It had taken years for F. Thatcher Van Archer to materialize, resplendent in a purple dressing gown. Years of pulp writing, slick writing, ghost-writing, hack writing, newspaper writing, scenario writing, book

writing, and just plain hard slavery before a desk.

Every time a story appeared bearing the byline "F. Thatcher Van Archer," the name of Eddie Thompson grew a little paler behind it. The magic pseudonym acted as a sort of charm, conjuring up a figure beside which the reality gradually faded. And now, on the very pinnacle of the literary heap, wearing his best purple dressing gown, F. Thatcher Van Archer sat in his study and felt just like plain Eddie Thompson again. It was hard.

It was unusual, too. Eddie Thompson had almost forgotten about him-



When Imagination Runs Rampant, Eddie Thompson Is Faced By An Eerie Problem of Scrambled Identity!



"Must you speak so candidly?" said the apparition

self by this time. Ten years of writing, steady work since leaving college, had caused him to identify himself completely with his pseudonym.

Eddie Thompson, on graduation, had been a beardless youth with a pleasant, ordinary face, and a completely self-effacing manner. But in his writing, he was F. Thatcher Van Archer, man of the world, cosmopolitan, raconteur. An adventurer, a swashbuckler, a sophisticated, distinguished-looking fellow. At least, that was the impression his stories would convey. And strangely enough, as his

success grew, Eddie Thompson gradually adopted the outward characteristics of his literary masquerader.

Eddie Thompson grew a short Vandike beard. He brushed his hair back from the temples, and eagerly awaited the time those temples would turn aristocratically gray. Eddie Thompson bought the kind of clothes F. Thatcher Van Archer might conceivably wear—English tweeds, drape models. He used a cigarette holder and smoked a vile pipe.

When he began making money he moved into the type of "diggings" the

worldly Van Archer would naturally live in. By this time he was so wealthy he could carry a cane on the street and get away with it.

And Eddie Thompson learned to talk like F. Thatcher Van Archer, too. After all, he had written like him for ten years. He knew what Van Archer would say and do. He wouldn't act like a timid local boy.

THOMPSON had got away with it, too. His wife, Maizie, had fallen in love with the worldly, bearded author. She probably didn't know that a real Eddie Thompson existed. F. Thatcher Van Archer did all the love-making, and if he plagiarized himself from Eddie Thompson's stories, nobody knew the difference.

F. Thatcher Van Archer was helpful to Eddie Thompson's social life. He made friends a lot easier than the shy ex-college student. Certainly, when he stormed into a publisher's office with his beard bristling, he got better results than a dub author ever could hope for.

Yes, F. Thatcher Van Archer was a great success, and by this time Eddie Thompson had almost forgotten himself, or so he thought. But once in a great while Eddie came back. When F. Thatcher Van Archer sat down at the typewriter and got stuck in the middle of a story, Eddie Thompson came back—to help.

He had come back tonight. Eddie was very much himself as he sat wondering how the devil he ought to finish this confounded mystery. It was scheduled for magazine publication in two months, and he had already pocketed an advance. It was a mess, and Author Van Archer wasn't up to any solution.

So Eddie Thompson had gradually taken shape again, and sweated over the plot difficulties. Eddie Thompson had taken off the necktie that F. Thatcher Van Archer wore, and loosened F. Thatcher Van Archer's belt, and even removed F. Thatcher Van Archer's elegantly polished shoes. In no time at all, Eddie Thompson, by sweating in a most undignified fashion, had worked things out in his crude, blundering way.

And now it was time for F. Thatcher Van Archer to come back, to take over the notes Eddie Thompson had scribbled down, and type them up into the story, using his own familiar, inimitable style. It was time for F. Thatcher Van Archer to snap into existence once more.

But he didn't.

Eddie Thompson just sat there, feeling like Eddie Thompson. A rather foolish feeling, too.

"What the devil is the matter with me?" he muttered. "Heebie-jeebies, I suppose."

His hand went out to the whiskey decanter, then halted. When F. Thatcher Van Archer was nervous, he drank. But Eddie Thompson didn't drink. He ruffled his hair. Eddie Thompson ruffled his hair.

"Maybe it's overwork," he said. "Maybe I need a rest, a vacation." He stared down the dim expanse of his beautifully appointed study and shook his head. "Yes, that's it. Maybe I need a vacation."

"Why don't you take one, Eddie?" said a voice.

Eddie Thompson whirled around in his chair as though a bomb had just exploded behind his back. And then he realized he hadn't heard a bomb explode. He had just heard the ticking. Right now he was staring at the bomb explosion.

The bomb explosion was an image of himself, but the image was not the reflection from any mirror.

It was himself that sat there in the chair across the room; himself complete with beard, cigarette holder, purple dressing gown, and gleaming expensive shoes.

"I've got 'em!" muttered Eddie Thompson hoarsely. "The heebie-jeebies!"

"Must you speak so crudely?" said the apparition, with a slight frown of distaste. "Your choice of words astounds me."

EDDIE THOMPSON was not a little astounded himself. He stared at the hallucination and, still staring, reached for the whiskey decanter. He didn't bother with a glass.

The apparition stared back. Eddie

Thompson took a deep drink that made him blink, but when he opened his eyes the vision had not disappeared.

"Heebie-jeebies," mumbled the stricken man again.

"You haven't got the 'heebie-jeebies', as you so inelegantly put it," said the voice. "I'm quite real, you know."

"I don't know," said Eddie Thompson.

"How about offering me a drink?" continued the manifestation in the purple dressing gown.

"Sure—help yourself," said the author. "I—I'd pour for you, but my hands are shaking." And they were, violently.

The vision poured a drink. Eddie Thompson watched carefully. He saw the whiskey trickle into the glass, saw the glass raised to the lips of the apparition, saw the whiskey disappear with an ever so genteel gulp which moved the Adam's apple. Then he stared at the whiskey decanter and saw that its contents were indeed diminished.

"I am real," repeated the hallucination.

Eddie Thompson's teeth did a tap dance. He had seen the whiskey go down. Now he got up. This—this thing was smoking a cigarette in a holder, the exact duplicate of Eddie Thompson's holder. Cigarettes are real, and cigarette smoke is a palpable thing. Eddie Thompson got up and stuck one trembling finger through a smoke ring. The ring broke. So did Eddie Thompson's nerve.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

The apparition arched its eyebrows.

"So?" came the voice. "We get on. Your question admits that you believe in my reality, that I am actually somebody, and not a figment of your imagination."

Thompson nodded. "Yes," he quavered. "But who are you?"

"I?" said the man in the purple dressing gown. "Why, I am F. Thatcher Van Archer."

Eddie Thompson's natural pride rose to the surface. He bridled.

"Like hell you are!" he grated. "I am F. Thatcher Van Archer."

The apparition smiled.

"You mean you were F. Thatcher Van Archer," the voice corrected. "But I am he now. You are just Eddie Thompson."

"But—but—"

"Look at yourself and see," suggested the bland voice.

Eddie Thompson rose and lurched to the mirror. There the second bomb went off.

Eddie Thompson, the man with the beard in the purple dressing gown, was no more. Instead he stared at a picture from ten years back—a picture of Eddie Thompson, the clean-shaven college graduate. The features, unadorned by chin foliage, were much the same, but they wore a fresher, more youthful look.

"It can't be—"

Eddie Thompson was staring at his clothes. The Kampus Kut clothes of a college boy, *circa* 1930.

"My clothes—where are my clothes?" he muttered.

"I'm wearing them," said the voice. "Why shouldn't I? They're F. Thatcher Van Archer's clothes?"

"Mad as I am, I couldn't have traded clothes with you without knowing it," said Eddie Thompson. "And I couldn't have shaved off my beard."

"Now you're being sensible," said the figure in purple.

Eddie Thompson turned and subjected the speaker to an intent scrutiny.

"Yes, yes—you are me," he sighed.

"I am F. Thatcher Van Archer," corrected the other. "What's up?"

FOR Eddie Thompson, ruffling his hair into a dust-mop thatch, was spluttering incoherently.

"I untied that tie," he gibbered, "and I unlaced those shoes five minutes ago. And now they're tied and laced again."

"Of course," said F. Thatcher Van Archer. "You untied them. But Author Van Archer doesn't do things in that sloppy fashion. So consequently, they are rearranged."

"There is no F. Thatcher Van Archer," Thompson insisted, despairingly. "You're me, and I'm talking to myself."

"I was you five minutes ago," said the stranger. "But I'm not you any longer, my friend. In those five minutes I've been created, just as out there"—and he gestured grandly toward the stars beyond the window—"new worlds have been created in the last five minutes and old worlds have died a flaming death."

Again Thompson blinked. He recognized in these words his own grandiloquently literary style. Van Archer's style, rather.

"But how?" he said weakly.

"How? Who knows? How were those stars created in that time? What is the secret of your own creation? Who understands the life force, the creative urge?"

"But I can't be two people," objected Eddie Thompson.

"My dear boy, of course you can't. That's just why I'm here. You have been trying to be two people for ten years, and it doesn't work. Sooner or later we had to separate. It happened five minutes ago. Now you're what you always were—Eddie Thompson. I am what you created—F. Thatcher Van Archer."

The bearded man smiled.

"Oh, it sounds strange, I admit, but don't take it so hard. After all, you have created me, you know. I suppose you might say I'm a product of your psychic forces. For ten years you've tried in every way to make yourself into a different man. You've lived, breathed, thought in terms of that man. F. Thatcher Van Archer has been on your mind night and day. You even changed your appearance to look like him, changed your habits and personality in accordance with what his tastes would be. To the world you were that person, and not yourself.

"Who wrote all your stories? F. Thatcher Van Archer. Who made your money? Van Archer. Who made your friends? Van Archer. Whom did your wife marry? Author Van Archer. Who worked fourteen hours a day, intensely, who did all your actual living, you might say, for ten years? F. Thatcher Van Archer! Is it a wonder, then, that there is such a person? The real miracle is that there

still exists an Eddie Thompson."

"Oh, now I'm not real?" snapped the baffled man. "Not content with stealing my body and my soul, you've even got to deny me the right of my own existence!"

"No," Van Archer said slowly. "No one can be denied that right. I suppose that's why this happened. You were denying yourself, by pretending to be me. We had to become separate identities, before your true self was lost. Another drink?"

Eddie Thompson poured this drink, and took one himself. F. Thatcher Van Archer drank slowly, with an appreciative smile.

THE creative impulse is a strange thing," he mused. "Who can say exactly what goes on in the mind when it creates? What forces are really invoked when a man makes a picture out of canvas and oils, when he plays music, or writes a novel?"

"That's merely assembling things," Eddie Thompson was forced to say. "You don't really create anything except a picture in the minds of those who are affected by your work."

"What is reality?" snapped Van Archer. "You, yourself, are just a picture, an image in the minds of your friends, your public. You are no more real than a character they read in a book. And in ten years you've made F. Thatcher Van Archer more real than yourself. He is stronger than you are. Look."

He tossed the bankbook on the table. F. Thatcher Van Archer had a bank account in his name.

"Look."

He indicated the row of books by the distinguished author, F. Thatcher Van Archer. He tapped F. Thatcher Van Archer's monogrammed stationery on the table, the calling cards. He pulled out a handkerchief and delicately blew his nose, indicating the lacy initials of "F. T. Van A."

"Oh, I'm real, all right," he concluded.

"Yeah," said Eddie Thompson. "Yeah, I guess you are." He was seized by a sudden thought. "But look here, this whole thing must be

stranger to you than it is to me. Why aren't you excited?"

Van Archer smiled. "Haven't you forgotten that I'm a man of the world?" he reminded. "I'm a sophisticate. Nothing startles me—thanks to you. No, it's you, my boy. You're the callow, unsophisticated one. The college boy. And that's my problem now."

"What problem?"

"Why, what to do with you, of course. Obviously, you can't go on living here, you know."

"What?"

"Well, look, Thompson. From now on, I'm you. I've got your beard, your clothes, your name. I'm the author, am I not? I'm the one your public reads, your publisher consults with, your wife knows, your friends are familiar with. And you're now an ordinary college lad. Why, nobody knows you! This is my house, don't you see? I bought it and paid for it, and I can't have you hanging around."

"Thatcher!"

"Good Lord, my wife!" said Eddie Thompson, and no revue blackout gag line was ever more enthusiastically delivered.

"Your wife?" said Van Archer. "My wife!"

He didn't have time to say more, because Maizie entered the room.

CHAPTER II

—No Robbery

MAIZIE VAN ARCHER was a blonde with brunette eyes and a redhead's temper. She was the kind of woman Eddie Thompson would have liked to marry, but couldn't. The kind of woman who was attracted by a sophisticate like F. Thatcher Van Archer. Eddie Thompson had always been Van Archer to her.

Secretly he was afraid of Maizie. But now, surely she would stand by him when he explained. Surely, after ten years of married life, she would recognize her own husband despite his disguise.

With an imploring look in his eyes, Eddie Thompson watched the pretty woman as she entered the room.

"Oh, Thatcher, I've been so worried about you," she cooed.

And walked straight into the arms of the man in the purple dressing gown!

"Did you work out your story?" she coaxed, snuggling up against the beard cooly.

"Well, not exactly," said F. Thatcher Van Archer. "You see, darling, I've had company."

"Oh!"

Maizie whirled around and stared at Eddie Thompson. Thompson braced himself. Surely she would recognize him. She must!

But there was no comprehension in her eyes. She regarded him quite coolly.

Was this Van Archer creature really going to do it? Was he actually in a position to throw Eddie Thompson out of his own home? That was the question.

Eddie Thompson smiled inwardly. Well, here it was. It would be rather awkward for this impostor to explain who he was, and how he came to be here.

Van Archer was speaking again.

"Yes, I've had company, dear," he repeated. "He sneaked around the back way to surprise me. Darling, I want you to meet my brother Steve, from California."

"Your brother?" Maizie's blue eyes opened.

"Of course. My kid brother. Don't you notice the family resemblance?"

Eddie Thompson winced. What a brain this fellow had! Thought of everything, even a possible resemblance. He himself could not have doped that out, might have concocted a weak story about a "friend." But Van Archer was clever. Of course he was. Hadn't Eddie Thompson made him that way?

"So you're Thatcher's baby brother, are you?" Maizie advanced upon him with a charming smile. "Came up to surprise him, did you? Of course you'll be in town for awhile?"

"As a matter of fact, Thatcher has invited me to stay here," said Eddie

Thompson. "Of course, if it's convenient."

He flashed a covert grin of triumph in the direction of Van Archer, who scowled and turned away. Good! He had played that one right, anyway.

"Certainly we can put you up," Maizie said promptly. "We have lots of guest rooms, haven't we, dear? Where is your luggage?"

"Haven't got any luggage," said Eddie Thompson, desperately. "You see—I'm bumming my way around the country." It was lame, but necessary.

"Oh, like Jim Tully! You write too, I suppose? Thatcher has such interesting friends, I think—and I just knew his family would be that way too!"

Maizie seemed delighted, although Van Archer scowled.

"I'll wear Thatcher's clothes," said Eddie Thompson. "They always used to fit me. Eh, Thatcher?"

"Unless I've outgrown you," said the author, acidly. "They might have, you know." There was pointed irony in his tones.

"We'll see," said Thompson.

"Well, you must be tired," prattled Maizie. "I'll put you up right away. You're tired, too, Thatcher. We'd better turn in early. You have to see your publisher tomorrow, you know."

She led the men down the hall and into a guest bedroom, indicating the conveniences to "brother Steve," who hated that damned guest room, hated to use guest towels, and was more than a little worried about F. Thatcher Van Archer and his wife. If only he could get Maizie off alone somewhere, and explain! Surely he could make her understand.

But Van Archer was too clever for that. He flung a pair of pajamas at his "brother" and herded Maizie out of the room.

"Good night," called the woman, from the doorway. "Hope you sleep well."

"If there's anything I can do for you," said Van Archer, "just let me know."

"Drop dead!" said Eddie Thompson under his breath, but they had closed the door.

He could hear the two sets of foot-

steps receding down the hall, and he heard them all night, even through his troubled dreams. Eddie Thompson did not sleep well that night, but then, as he later remarked, he wasn't feeling quite himself at the time. . . .

Thompson was at the mirror the moment the sun entered his room. It had all been a nightmare, a lobster-and-ice-cream fantasy. Of course it had.

But as the image met his eyes, hope left them. For there was bare-faced Eddie Thompson, the young college graduate, goggling at himself with a look of stupefied resignation.

"It's true, then," he muttered, turning away from the baffling reflection, and ruffling his hair a la Harpo Marx.

AS he bathed and dressed, his mind worked swiftly. Surely there was something he could do about this, strange as the situation was. He had to do something—had to get rid of Van Archer before Van Archer got rid of him. Because that was what it amounted to. The author had as much as told him he was going to stay, and that meant Eddie Thompson was going out on the street very shortly, unless he could manage things otherwise.

There must be a way to expose Van Archer for the fake he was. Thompson scowled. He had built up his outer personality so completely and so cleverly, with so few weaknesses—but he had to discover a weakness somewhere. Van Archer was clever and would lose no time. So it behooved Eddie Thompson to hasten in outsmarting him.

It was with this resolve that he went down to breakfast, entering the dining room to find a smiling Maizie already seated at the table, doing things to toast. She looked up and greeted him, and Thompson half bent down to kiss her before he remembered.

"Hello, Steve," she called.

"What—who—huh?" said Thompson, baffled. "Oh, sure. Hello, hon—I mean, hello, Maizie."

Maizie's blue eyes clouded in sudden concern.

"Aren't you feeling well?" she

asked solicitously. "You're not having one of your spells, are you?"

"My what?" muttered the perplexed man.

Maizie colored. "I'm sorry," she said. "But Thatcher told me last night. You needn't worry about my knowing."

"Knowing?" Thompson dropped his spoon.

"Why, yes. He explained everything. About how you were—were dropped on the head by that awful nurse when you were a boy, and how ever since you get those—"

Maizie paused to pat the man on the back, for he was strangling over his egg.

"He told you I was dropped—*hack-hack*—on my head, did he?" sputtered Thompson. "He did—*hoop-hoop*—ch?"

"Of course," prattled the woman. "It's all in the family, isn't it?" Maizie was not the tactful type. "He said that's why you wander around the country so much by yourself when those spells come on, and sometimes you sign those checks."

"I sign checks, do I?" parroted Eddie Thompson, grimly.

"Oh, I'm not blaming you for it," consoled Maizie. "I'm sure that if I was dropped on my head I might get to thinking I was Admiral Byrd sometimes, myself. Or Major Bowes, or Tyrone Power. You know"—she favored him with a dazzling smile—"you do look something like Tyrone Power at that. I wonder how Thatcher would look with his beard shaved off."

Eddie Thompson tore a piece of toast into forty-six irregular pieces.

"Though how you ever got the notion you were Father Divine I just can't imagine," continued the artless Maizie. "Perhaps your face was grimy at the time. You must tell me all about it when we have more leisure."

"I'm sure my dear—ah—brother will be more than glad to slip you the details," said Thompson, savagely. "Just what else did he speak of?"

"Oh, nothing, really. He was just explaining these things to me in case you did happen to have one of your spells. He said nothing was impos-

sible—that you might even start thinking you were *him*, for example."

"I might start thinking I was him," muttered the man. "I see."

"Of course you needn't worry, now that it's all explained. I wouldn't take you seriously, of course."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," said Eddie Thompson, spilling his coffee.

"My, you're nervous today," Maizie observed. "You aren't having much breakfast."

"I'm having it, all right," sighed "brother Steve." "Having it all over my lap."

Maizie laughed, and favored him with a ravishing glance, under which Thompson colored and turned away.

SO that was it! Thatcher hadn't wasted time. Knowing Thompson might try to convince his wife of the facts, he had concocted the insanity angle quickly and adroitly. Very neat. Damn it, why had he made F. Thatcher Van Archer so clever.

"Now I know how Frankenstein must have felt," he whispered.

"Ooh!" squealed Maizie. "You say you feel like Frankenstein? How thrilling!"

Thompson looked on his wife with something akin to awe. What a woman! Why did she have to be so credulous, so *interested* in everything? Still, that was one of the reasons he had married her. Or rather, one of the reasons F. Thatcher Van Archer had married her.

"Where is my dear brother today?" asked Thompson.

"Oh, he's in his study, I suppose, getting things ready to go in to town. He has to see his publisher today, you know."

"Yes, the new novel contract," said Thompson, absent-mindedly.

"What?" Maizie's eyes opened wide. "But that's a secret! How did you know that?"

Thompson decided to play a long chance. He stared at his wife intently. His lips curled in a knowing smile—the kind of thing F. Thatcher Van Archer would have found beneath his dignity, but which plain Eddie Thompson could do with a certain reckless abandon.

"Because I'm crazy," said Thompson, grinning. "You see, when I was dropped on my head, I became psychic."

"You mean you can read people's minds?"

"Yes, exactly," Thompson allowed himself a burning gaze. "For example, by looking at you I can tell that you like to wear pink lingerie, only that booby brother of mine thinks it's too commonplace, and makes you buy black. I know that you like Benny Goodman, but my brother insists that you listen to Prokofieff and Stravinsky. I know that you have wanted to go out to the beach and ride the roller coaster for the past three years, but my brother makes you stay in town and ride penthouse elevators to stupid parties."

Thompson smiled.

"It's true, isn't it?"

Maizie stared, entranced.

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes, it's true—but you really shouldn't talk about Thatcher that way. He—he's a genius."

"He's a horse's neck," said Eddie Thompson, pressing his advantage. "And you know it."

A look of sudden pain creased the woman's face.

"I don't know," she said, suddenly serious. "I don't know. When I married Thatcher he was a little different. Younger, somehow—more like you. Of course he never showed it, with that beard and dignity and all, but I was hoping—I thought—once we were married, he'd relax, and be human. He is human underneath all that front, I know he is! Only it never came out, that's all. He just got stuffer and stuffer, and he wears that silly cane and prances up and down in a purple dressing gown, and all the while I wish from the bottom of my heart he'd shave off that stupid beard and just be himself."

Maizie leaned forward toward Eddie Thompson.

"I know I'm just a plain, dumb female," she said. "I don't understand geniuses or authors or writers or anything like that. But what I want is a husband, not a—what you might call a screwball!"

CHAPTER III

A Common Need

EDDIE THOMPSON sat aghast. The way this woman talked about him was dreadful. But in another sense, it was just what he wanted. He had never dreamed that Maizie felt that way, but if she did—

"Maizie," he purred sweetly. "Maizie, it's not too late. You're young, beautiful. You have many years of happiness yet. I'd like to share them with you, Maizie. I think we could have fun together."

And casting dignity to the winds, Eddie Thompson crawled up on the dining room table and lay there, putting his arms around the startled woman's neck, and kissing her most violently, without impediment of beard. He hadn't kissed a woman without his beard for ten years, and Maizie had not been kissed by a beardless man in that time. Both of them found it a definitely pleasant experience.

But F. Thatcher Van Archer did not.

"What goes on here?" snapped the eminent author, entering the room.

Eddie Thompson got off the table so quickly he broke three dishes. He stood up with some dignity and wiped a piece of toast from the seat of his pants.

"Maizie got something in her eye," he hurriedly explained. "I was just trying to work it out for her."

"Through her mouth, I should suppose," observed Van Archer. "Maizie, will you please wipe that butter off your elbow and get my briefcase? I'll be late."

"Yes, dear."

Maizie stepped contritely to the floor and, casting Thompson a covert but ardent look, vanished from the room.

Eddie Thompson faced his Nemesis with conflicting emotions. He felt triumphant, yet defeated. He hadn't enjoyed kissing his wife so much in ten years, but he didn't like the idea of

her willingness to deceive him behind his back, even though she was deceiving him with himself. It was a peculiar feeling, but as he observed Van Archer's ill-concealed wrath, he felt amply repaid.

"I'm one up on you," he said.

"So I see."

The cigarette in the author's hand trembled briefly, and for a moment he seemed hard put to control his emotions. Then a look of apprehension came over the bearded face.

"But say now, Eddie, there's something I wanted to ask you."

"Yes?"

"About this contract I'm signing this morning. I rather need your advice, you know."

"Need my advice?" said Thompson, with elaborate astonishment. "But you'd hardly want the opinion of your little kid brother Stevie, now, would you?"

"Quit clowning," said Van Archer. "You know I'm not good at this sort of thing—business, and all. I need your mind, just as you need my appearance, my sophistication. We have to stick together on these matters."

"Do we?"

"You'll come along in case I need help, won't you?" pleaded Van Archer.

"Well, I don't know about that. After all, I'm mildly insane, and if I suddenly got the idea I was Shakespeare, or something, you might have a bad time of it. Why I might even say I was F. Thatcher Van Archer and insist on signing the contract myself. Of course you couldn't blame me. I was dropped on the head when I was a baby."

"Oh, I can explain that," said Van Archer, hastily.

"Never mind," said Eddie Thompson. "I'll go with you. After all, I'm as much interested in the contract as you are."

"Thanks."

TOGETHER the two men left the room. Van Archer received the briefcase and a brief kiss from Maizie. Eddie Thompson winked at her behind the author's back. It hurt him to act against himself that way, but her answering smile sent a flood of in-

explicable warmth through him. Damn it, this wasn't fair—making him fall in love with his own wife!

Thompson thought about that on the way to town in the car. Van Archer babbled complacently beside him on the seat.

"You know, Thompson, I've changed my mind about you. Let's be friends and work together. After all, that's practically what we did when I was you, you know."

He lowered his voice as the chauffeur blinked.

"We've got to get a contract for the novel out of old Grovel today. Grovel's a pretty tough customer, and it's up to both of us to handle him properly. Now you've always relied on yourself—on me, rather, that is—to put up the kind of sophisticated front that impresses him. I'll work that all right—the cane, the beard stroking, the erudite conversation. Don't worry, I'll do my part, just as I always have."

"But when he starts talking figures and royalties, that's where you come in. Remember? You—I—we used to sit back and think, then. Eddie Thompson has the brain for those matters, and Van Archer relies on that. We need each other. Let's stick together."

Thompson nodded. But there was a secret smile on his face. He had a hunch. Perhaps there was a way out of this after all. Perhaps. . .

Petronius Grovel was a solid man. He had a solid body, a solid face, a solid opinion of himself, and plenty of good solid cash in the bank. Also, he was a bit solid behind the ears, but this didn't bother Petronious Grovel very much. He was a publisher, and it was his business to buy brains, not use them. He handled brains, publicized brains, exploited brains. To him brains were much the same as kidneys to a butcher. You sold them to other people and never stopped to think about your own.

Petronius Grovel's office, therefore, was something like a stockyard. A place where brains were herded in, roped and hogtied by the adroit Mr. Grovel, and then sent forth branded by the seal of his publishing house. A place where brains were bought at

so much the square inch of cortex; where gray matter was spattered on paper at so much an ounce.

Today head butcher Grovel stood ready, axe in hand. F. Thatcher Van Archer was a pretty big steer in any publisher's corral, a prize bull who would yield many fat beefsteaks of profit. Petronius Grovel was ready to slice one off the rump once he could tie Van Archer down with a contract.

He therefore opened the door to the luxurious abattoir of his private office, and his teeth gleamed in a dazzling yellow smile as the author entered, followed by a younger man. "Good morning, my dear sir," said F. Thatcher Van Archer, with a courtly inclination of his distinguished head. "How fares the Pharaoh of all scriveners?"

"Pretty fair," answered Grovel, blinking rapidly.

"My brother Stephen," said the author, with a nod toward Eddie Thompson. "Dauphin to the literary throne."

"Yeah—yeah, pleased to meet you." Grovel seemed ill at ease. "Won't you come in."

"Certainly, certainly. Ah, wait here if you will, Stephen?"

He disappeared into the inner sanctum with Publisher Grovel, and Eddie Thompson sat down on a bench in the outer office.

FOR the first time, he began to think determinedly. He was on the spot. He'd had a hunch when he had come down in the car, an inkling that there was a way out of this baffling mess, but now it refused to come to him. His pseudo personality was in there, signing a contract in his name. His pseudo personality would then go home to his wife, live in his house, and that seemed to be that. Eddie Thompson cursed the fate which had prompted him to obliterate his true self so completely. There was no one in the wide world to whom he could turn. His own wife accepted this *poseur* as his real self; his publisher, of course, was too stupid to detect any change. What a situation!

Thompson's musing were interrupted as a figure entered the outer

office. It was Arthur Keel, Thompson's best friend. Keel, like Van Archer, was a prominent writer, and as such they had much in common. They met frequently—at least twice a week—and Thompson entertained a keen affection for the man.

"Hey, Art!" said Eddie Thompson.

The bespectacled author turned around with a start. As he did so, Thompson realized just who and what he was, and quickly buried his face.

"Somebody call me?" asked Keel of the office stenographer.

"I didn't hear anything," answered the girl.

"Oh, sorry. Must have been my imagination. Say, how's chances of seeing Mr. Grovel?"

"Not right now, Mr. Keel. He's in conference with the Mad Genius."

Eddie Thompson perked up his ears.

"Not old Van Archer, the beard king?"

The girl laughed. "Oh, Mr. Keel!"

"I suppose he's signing the elder Smith Brother to another contract. Well, I'll wait. One mustn't intrude upon the presence of genius."

Keel sat down next to Thompson.

"I thought Mr. Van Archer was your friend?" said the girl.

"He is, he is," Keel said, hastily. "I like Thatcher a lot. He's a good fellow when you get to know him. But that's just the trouble—it's hard getting to know him. He hides under that spinach and behind his ridiculous clothes, and whenever you get near him you think he's liable to snick at you with his cane. I wish he'd cut out those affectations, for his own good."

"You know, confidentially, I think you're right," confessed the girl. "Mr. Van Archer frightens people. He's always so serious, and he talks so highbrow. I see a lot of authors come in here, and there's some pretty quaint sketches, begging your pardon, but Mr. Van Archer takes the prize."

Eddie Thompson's ears burned. Then they pricked. For the inner door had opened and Van Archer's beard wagged through the crack.

"Oh, Steve, won't you come in here a minute," he called. "I'd like you to speak to Mr. Grovel." He caught sight

of Arthur Keel. "Oh, greetings, fellow philologist! A word with you, Sir Oracle." He popped out to meet his friend, and as he passed Thompson he whispered, "For heaven's sake, talk to Grovel. He's got me worried."

Eddie Thompson entered the inner office and closed the door, then turned to face Petronius Grovel. The publisher crouched behind his desk, sweating foolishly.

"Sit down, young man," he boomed. "Van Archer tells me you've just become his business manager."

"Oh—yes," Thompson answered. "I have."

"Well, he certainly needs one," Grovel rejoined. "He certainly needs one. Needs an interpreter, too, if you'll pardon my frankness."

"Go right ahead."

"Now I'm a fair man, my boy. I've been doing business with Van Archer for years, and let me tell you it's been no picnic. He's a good writer, and a smart one, but there's just no talking to him. I can't seem to understand his line, that's all. Comes in here and pulls at his beard, and spouts out a lot of high-faluting phrases until I get all confused."

A GAIN Eddie Thompson blinked. Then his resolve strengthened.

"Of course you don't understand Van Archer, you ignorant baboon!" he said. "In order for that to come about he'd have to come in here and talk baby talk."

"What—what's that?" spluttered Petronius Grovel.

"You heard me, Petel!" declared Thompson. "Why should you understand Van Archer? You don't know anything about the man. You've never even read his books."

"I have, certainly I have," insisted the publisher, indignantly.

"You lie through your teeth, which are false!" thundered Eddie Thompson. "You read nothing but the reports on his book sales. The sales are good, so Van Archer is good. That's your duck-brain idea. Why don't you read what the man writes and find out something about him? He's a genius! No wonder you can't understand what he's talking about. Do you

expect him to waste his valuable mind in conversation with a money-grabbing, skin-flinted moron like you who can't read a comic paper without moving his lips?"

Petronius Grovel had a face which would have pleased the composer of "Deep Purple." He made wild sounds in his neck.

"But never mind that, Grovel. I don't care what you think of Van Archer, and I don't care what you think of me, either. All I care about is what you think of the way he sells his books, and I know that pleases you. So will you sign that contract, or won't you? That's all. Will you sign, or won't you? There's plain, understandable talk for you. That's what you want, isn't it?"

Publisher Grovel stood up and took a deep breath. For a moment he looked as though he were about to huff and to puff and blow the house in. Then his pudgy face relaxed into a broad grin. He held out his pudgy hand.

"You know, Steve," he said, "I like you. You have guts. Yes, sir, I wish that old Van Archer would climb down off his high horse and talk to me like that, man to man. I guess you're right—I am pretty thick, and I got no business dealing with geniuses. But I can recognize guts when I see them, and by George you've got 'em! Sure, I'll sign that contract. Call him in!"

Eddie Thompson stepped to the door and in response to his wink, F. Thatcher Van Archer stalked into the room, tapping his cane along the floor.

"Sign here," said Petronius Grovel, genially. "I've changed my mind. You know, I never did quite understand you, Thatcher, and I don't mind admitting it. But your brother, here, put me wise. If you're anything like him underneath all your—your—your genius—then I'm a fool. By the way, I'd like to read the manuscript of this new book of yours before we go to press on the first edition. The readers tell me it's pretty good, and I think I'll take a whack at it."

F. Thatcher Van Archer allowed his eyebrows to meet in a delicate arch. Eddie Thompson nudged him as he

signed, and then led him from the room.

CHAPTER IV

Dissolve into Clinch

IUTSIDE, in the car, Van Archer was voluble.

"I don't know how you did it," he confessed. "I talked and talked until I was blue in the face, but the old ogre just stared at me and mumbled that he wasn't sure about the contract."

"I'll handle my affairs and you handle yours," said Eddie Thompson, wisely. "Right now I'm anxious to get home to our wife."

Van Archer smiled.

"Our wife is a charming girl, isn't she?" he remarked.

"She certainly is," Thompson answered.

"You know"—Van Archer coughed delicately—"I've been meaning to speak to you about that. Now that the contract is signed and settled, I was thinking that perhaps it might be well if you were to—go away."

"Go away?" muttered Eddie Thompson.

"Why, yes. You see, I don't really need you any more, and it might be rather embarrassing, both of us in the same house with Maizie, and all that."

The car rounded the drive of the Van Archer home, but it wasn't the curve that jerked Eddie Thompson bolt upright.

"Listen, you blackhearted scoundrel, you can't take my wife away from me!" he shouted.

"Your wife? Why, my dear boy, you have no wife. She's my wife."

Van Archer was equable, but there was an evil glitter in his eyes as they stepped from the car.

"And come to think of it, what I said last night was true, you know. This is my house, and my home, not yours. They're my friends, and my readers, not yours. And that contract you just assisted in getting is my contract—I signed it. Certainly, I do all the writing. So I think, really, that

the decent thing for you to do is to clear out. I—I don't like spongers."

"You're going to kick me out of my own house?" Thompson demanded.

There was a sudden sinking feeling in his heart. He knew it would come to this sooner or later; of course, it had to. He might have suspected Van Archer's overtures of friendship. Van Archer had needed him to get that contract. Now everything was settled, and Van Archer could throw him into the street. He dragged his feet leadenly after the strutting author as they entered the house and mounted the stairs to the bedroom.

"But listen, pal—" he quavered. "What'll I do, where will I go?"

"That's of no concern to me," snapped Van Archer. He sensed his advantage, and pressed it. "You're my younger brother Stevie, and you just wander off, understand?"

Van Archer changed into his familiar purple dressing gown, lit a cigarette and slid it into the elaborate holder.

"But suppose I won't go," whispered Thompson, desperately.

"Then they'll take you," the bearded man replied.

"Take me?"

"Of course. To the asylum. You're a little crazy, you know. You've even admitted it yourself, to Maizie."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"I'd dare anything. And after all, it's no risk. You did this thing yourself, you know. You created F. Thatcher Van Archer, and now he's real. He owns your house, and your body, and your writing, your career, your wife."

"Not Maizie!" yelled Thompson. "I don't care about the writing, and the money. It can go to hell, do you hear me? It can go to hell, you can have it. In a way this has been a good experience for me. It's taught me how little all that silly elegance really means, how stupid I was to make a jackass out of myself in order to get it. Take the name and the career if you want. But I want Maizie!"

"So do I," said F. Thatcher Van Archer. "And I'm going to keep her."

Eddie Thompson lunged forward threateningly.

"You touch my wife again and I'll kill you."

"She's my wife, not yours."

"Well, she married me!"

"She married me, you mean."

"All right, but it's me she loves. I found that out today."

"It won't happen again, I assure you," said Van Archer. "I don't care if she married both of us or not."

"You can't accuse my wife of bigamy," snarled Thompson. "Don't you dare call Maizie a bigamist, you—you pseudo-nobody!"

"What's that?" gasped Van Archer.

"The hunch!" Thompson muttered to himself. "Yes, that was it! The hunch!"

"What hunch?"

"Listen, Van Archer." Eddie Thompson pushed the author back on the bed. "Listen, and listen well. You're pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?"

"Why not?" said the bearded man defiantly. "I know where I stand."

"You stand with one foot in the grave," said Thompson, savagely. "And you don't know a thing. You think you have money, career, friends, a loving wife, don't you? Well, you haven't. They're mine—all mine."

"What do you mean?"

"Your wife doesn't love you. She loves me. I found that out this morning. She hates your silly beard and your stupid, outlandish clothes, and your posing all over the house. It's me she loves—the little of me I've ever shown her. I thought I was winning her with that senseless masquerade, but I was wrong. Maizie hates you and all you stand for."

"And your friends. You know what your friends think of you behind your back? They call you the 'Mad Genius'. Why the very office girls laugh at your absurd posings. Somewhere, deep down, buried under that chin foliage and those polysyllables, they can sense me, and that's why they manage to tolerate you. But at heart they despise all the melodramatic professional author hokus-pokus that you stand for."

"I—I—"

"Shut up and listen. You think you can get along without me, do you?"

Why, you wouldn't last ten minutes. You can't write without me. Whenever you get in a tough spot I have to help you out of the jam. And if it wasn't for my brain you couldn't even get a contract writing Silly Symphonies."

Eddie Thompson drew himself up to his full height.

"I've found out something," he declared. "You can't get along without me, F. Thatcher Van Archer, but I can get along without you! I was a fool not to know it—to deceive myself, and the world, all these years, trying to be something I'm not. I can be myself and get along very well. I know that now. Because you're the helpless one—you're the creation of my own brain, and by yourself there's no personality, no initiative, nothing. Just a big cardboard front, a fake. A lot of clothes, a beard, and windy talk. You haven't any guts! Throw me out? Why you poor stupid piece of make-believe, I'm going to throw you out!"

Was it fancy, or did Thompson see Van Archer turn pale? The bearded author seemed thinner, almost transparent.

"Why you're just a figment of my imagination," Eddie said. "When I forget about you, you ceased to exist. You admit I created you—very well, I can destroy you, too. Tear you up as I would a bad manuscript!"

"Yes?" The voice was thin, but it held a terrible intensity. "Perhaps so. But you'll never have the chance. I'll kill you first!"

THE pale figure on the bed moved swiftly. Thin hands locked around Eddie Thompson's neck, and the two went down in a tangle on the floor. Thompson clawed at the purple bathrobe, pulled at the beard. He was fighting for his life, for his sanity—for Maizie. The thought gave him courage.

An overwhelming hatred of this thing overcame him. He hated the mincing body, the pointed beard, the exotic costume; hated it with a clean, healthy disgust. For the first time he saw clearly what an incubus this artificial creation had become—and he put all his thought behind the muscle

that smashed at the thin jaw of the apparition before him.

"I'll tear you up like a bad manuscript," he grunted. "Take that, Mr. F. Thatcher Van Archer, and—ugh—that!"

"Thatcher!"

The voice cut through his consciousness and stabbed him to his senses.

He looked up, panting. Maizie stood in the doorway, blue eyes filled with wonder.

"Thatcher, what are you doing, groveling on the floor like that?"

Thompson blinked. She was addressing not the author, but himself!

He looked down at the figure in the purple dressing gown.

There was no figure.

The purple dressing gown lay on the floor and it was quite empty. There was no man with a beard, nothing but the rumpled gown he still wrestled with.

"Thatcher, what's come over you?" Maizie stepped into the room. "What are you doing with your clothes?"

Eddie Thompson rose to his feet with a slow grin.

"Just throwing this damned thing away, honey," he said. "Want to get rid of some of these old clothes."

"And—Thatcher, you've shaved off your beard!"

Thompson wheeled toward the mirror. Yes, he was still beardless, still young-looking. He smiled as he remembered Maizie's remark of the morning, that he resembled Tyrone Power. Well, he was rather good-looking at that! He turned back toward the woman.

"Just a celebration," he said, and

smiled. "I'm starting life over, darling. Because I've just signed a new contract."

"You got it?" Maizie exclaimed happily.

"Of course I did," said Eddie Thompson, drawing her close. "Now, how about a kiss?"

"Why—"

Eddie Thompson smothered her remark most efficiently. It was a long time before she spoke again.

"You remind me of Steve," she giggled, at last. "You know, Thatcher, you look like him. . . . Say, where is he?"

"Oh, he just wandered off again, in town," Eddie said, adding reassuringly, "He'll be all right. I don't think he'll be back, but he'll be all right."

"He was nice," sighed Maizie. "But then, you're nice, too." She smiled. "I'm so glad you're getting rid of those awful clothes, darling. I've always wanted you to. And now I can buy you an electric razor, and everything."

"Sure. But come on. We're going out and celebrate tonight. Get on your beach pajamas."

"Beach pajamas?"

"Of course. We're going down and ride the roller coaster."

"Thatcher! You mean that?"

"Sure I do, honey."

"I like you this way," confided Maizie, happily. "I—I wish you were like this all the time."

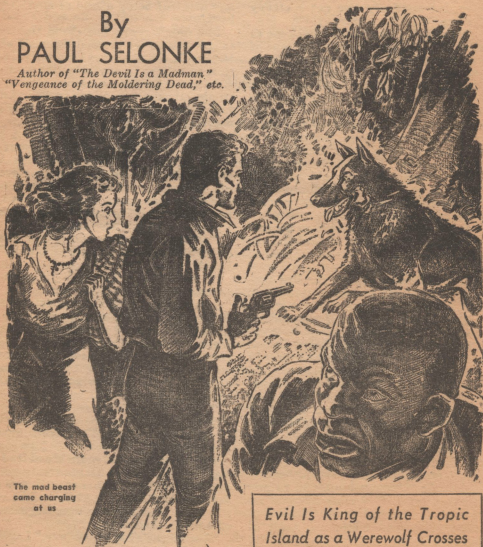
"I will be," said Eddie Thompson, a faraway look in his eyes. "Yes, honey—from now on I'll always be myself!"



BEAST OF THE ISLAND

By
PAUL SELONKE

Author of "The Devil Is a Madman"
"Vengeance of the Moldering Dead," etc.



The mad beast
came charging
at us

JUDY and I had been counting the stars as they came out to hang like blue-white little moons over the Caribbean, bright and twinkling. Now we were both silent as I steered my twenty-footer across Pillsbury Sound.

*Evil Is King of the Tropic
Island as a Werewolf Crosses
Tony Vincent's Path With
a Trail of Blood!*

The only sounds were the water gurgling under the keel and the

flapping of a vagrant sail-end in the gentle breeze on our quarter.

And suddenly Judy shivered.

"Cold, honey?" I asked.

She looked up, her eyes oddly solemn.

"Tony, it's something else, something I don't understand. I don't know why, but suddenly I've got a creepy feeling—like I'm scared."

"Scared?" Her remark struck me as silly. "There wasn't one shiver out of you during the storms and accidents that happened in this cruise so far. Now, with everything going smooth—"

"I don't know what it is, Tony." She drew in a deep breath and her hand crept to mine. "It's—it's just as though something's warning me that we shouldn't go to St. John Island."

"Gosh sakes," I said, "be yourself. We're going to see my old pal Jack Vyverburg. I don't want him to think I've been sap enough to marry some jittery, spineless female."

She smiled and kissed me on the ear.

"Maybe, sweet, you shouldn't have made me drink that second cocktail at dinner."

Her smile was forced, the lips that caressed my ear had been trembling, and it made me wonder and worry a little. For a moment, I thought of turning around and going back to Charlotte Amalie. Then I knew it was too late to go back. We had already traversed the distance between St. Thomas and St. John and were sailing into the gloomy mouth of Cruz Bay.

Few lights glowed from the black mass of island vegetation. It made me remember what Vyverburg had written me about this smallest of the Virgin Islands—how this was a place without civilization, without roads, and without wheeled vehicles of any kind. Some half-dozen mishapen native sloops bobbed at the bleak concrete jetty, and I slid our craft in between them.

There was no sign of anyone at the jetty, no sign that our arrival had been seen. Nor were there any noises, save the endless tumbling of the breakers at the reef. When we stepped to the jetty, Judy gasped and grasped my arm.

"Tony, look!"

She pointed at a peculiar shape that huddled at the foot of the jetty. However, the beam of my flashlight showed us nothing more harmful than a rusty old cannon, its muzzle buried in the sand.

"You've got to get rid of those jitters, honey," I told her. "There isn't any sense of being afraid of anything here."

She didn't reply, but clung tightly to my arm as we crossed the sand of the beach. I had always been too practical to believe in anything like intuition, and it struck me, rather, that the tropic climate was affecting her. I'd heard that it does that to some people's nerves.

WE PASSED along a grass-grown trail that had been a road during the old days of the slave plantations. It led us through an avenue of banana trees, tall coco palms, ending at that tamarind tree Jack Vyverburg had written me about.

"We turn left here and follow this other trail about a quarter of a mile," I said.

"I hope you're right," Judy answered, her voice a little taut.

I put my arm around her waist as we followed the trail, pointed my flashlight to the ground so we could watch where we walked. And before we had gone any distance, we reached a place where the sand was marked by prints of naked feet, and the paw-marks of some huge dog.

"Tony! Great heavens, Tony!"

Judy was pointing to the very edge of my circle of light. Then I, too, saw the red pool of fresh blood. I swung my light and noticed more blood leading to the right, as if somebody had crawled or had been dragged away from the trail. On one of the spikes of a bayonet bush was the torn fragment of a man's shirt.

"Something's happened here," I said in a hoarse whisper.

"Perhaps we ought to return to the bay. The dispatching secretary who governs this island must have a house there somewhere."

A change came over Judy in that instant. Her voice lost that frantic quality. It was as if she had been afraid of

some unknown thing, some fantasy of her mind. This blood in front of us was horribly real, and, facing reality, the bravery Judy had shown at sea, came back.

"Heaven knows I don't want to, but we've got to follow that trail of blood," she said grimly. "Some poor man must have hurt himself, perhaps shot himself. He may need help."

It was the Judy I had always known that was speaking now. I grabbed her hand eagerly, and we crept along that gruesome trail.

It led us to the edge of a clearing of pure white sand. Not a shrub or blade of grass grew there.

We saw something in the center of that clearing. We made out that it was a dog, a black, shaggy dog even larger than an Irish wolfhound. His huge paws were shoving sand into a heap, as though he had just buried something.

All at once, the brute raised his muzzle to the sky, emitting a banshee wail that brought Judy clutching me in horror. We stood there transfixed and watched the shaggy animal trot out of the clearing on the opposite side. Finally I laughed and looked into Judy's face.

"We've been a pair of fools," I said. "That blood was from some animal that the dog caught. He buried the remains in the sand. Dogs often do that."

Judy didn't seem convinced. "And that piece of shirt?"

We returned to where that fragment was impaled on the bayonet bush. I fingered it and told her we had been using our imaginations too much.

"There isn't any blood on this," I said. "It must have been here for days or weeks."

Yet, after we resumed our way along the trail, I noticed that frightened attitude had returned to Judy.

"It was only some animal that the dog caught," I insisted.

"I'm not thinking of that," she answered, her voice pitched low. "It's that feeling of impending evil. It's in the air, in the quiet, in the very smell of vegetation. Tony, something inside me is telling me something dreadful is going to happen. When I saw that

blood, I thought that was it. But now—"

"Come on," I interrupted brutally. "Vyverburg's cottage can't be far from here."

And it wasn't. After passing through a grove of grotesque kopoc trees, we came upon a lighted cottage. Judy seemed to ease up at the sight of it. It cheered me because I had been worried about her.

We ascended the veranda and knocked. After a moment, a man came to the door. The oil lamp in his hand threw fantastic shadows on his shaggy-bearded face.

"Tony!" he said, unsmiling. "Tony Vincent! I was afraid you weren't coming. I thought—" He broke off with a sibilant gasp, twisted about angrily.

"Aba! Aba!" he yelled. "Confound it, come here!"

FIRST a regular creaking sound, and then a one-legged native on worn crutches came out of the black shadows in the rear of the corridor.

"Yaas, baas?" he grunted.

He was a strange looking houseboy. Prayer beads and a crucifix hung around his skinny neck.

Vyverburg pointed a grimy finger down to the doorsill.

"Aba, is this some of your infernal work?"

I stared down to see a mound of dirt running from one side of the sill to the other. Looking up again, I saw how Aba's eyes were distended. His trembling fingers made the sign of the cross.

"Ah doan do *Obeah* work, baas," he quavered. "Dose darkies fom de bay—"

"Well, clean it off before my guests come in!"

"Aba will wash yer house, will cook yer eats—but he doan t'ink he do dis. N-no, baas!"

Vyverburg didn't argue. Muttering, he brought a broom out of a corner and with a one-handed stroke swept the dry mud away. He looked at us then, shaking his shaggy head.

"Sorry you had to see this, Tony," he said. "And you too, Mrs. Vincent. It just goes to show what a white man

has to contend with around here. Won't you come in?"

The cottage, though plain, was livable and a lot cleaner than one would think by looking at Aba. The living room had been converted into an art studio, filled with easels and art paraphernalia, and paintings covered every inch of the walls.

"We went to law school together," I told Judy when I introduced Vyverburg to her. "He turned to painting instead of becoming a lawyer like I did."

"An uncle left me a legacy," Vyverburg added. "So I came out here to paint Nature where it is undisturbed by civilization."

He had once been a smiling, ruddy-visaged man. I was shocked, seeing how he had changed into this scowling, straggle-bearded wretch with the look of fear etched in his eyes. Had I known what he had become, I doubt whether I would have brought Judy here.

"You must have done great things here, Mr. Vyverburg," Judy said in her diplomatic way. "I'd love to see your paintings."

It brought a smile to his face, hardly more than a fleeting grimace. He lit two more wall lamps, bringing the room to brightness. Then he took us from painting to painting.

His early work, I remembered, had been beautiful. That, perhaps, was why these violently-hued, symbolic pictures filled me with repugnance. And oddly, whether landscape or portrait, two small figures were always present in each picture—one, a togaed seraph of ethereal beauty, the other a fat, voluptuous nude that had the teeth and slaving mouth of a wolf.

"That is life," he told us. "No matter what beauty we see, what places we go, both Good and Evil follow us until death takes us away from it all. I have tried to put it into my work, into—"

His voice trailed off as he kept staring at Judy. I saw that he was staring, in a queer sort of way, at the tiny silver crucifix that hung at my wife's throat.

Then, with sudden desperation, he turned on me. His face, distorted in

terror, was a horrible thing to look upon.

"Tony!" he cried. "Tony, you've got to leave this island right away—and I'm going with you!"

The outburst made me stare. From the moment we had come here, I'd had a growing suspicion of what this self-enforced solitude had done to him. Now the unholy blaze of his eyes seemed to assure me that he was mad.

"Last week you wrote me, begging that we visit you," I said quietly. "Now you say we must leave this island. Why?"

"Why?" he repeated fiercely. "You ask why when I see the *Obeah* doctors burning effigies of me in their shacks? When I see the mud of a fresh grave sprinkled on my door sill? I'm doomed to die, as surely as I have seen other men die. Don't you see?"

I TRIED to turn away in disgust, but he grabbed my arm.

"I tell you these island natives can curse anyone to his death," he hissed. "Oh, yes, I see it in your eyes, that skepticism of a white man. Tony, I didn't believe at first, either. Since I've lived here, I've seen healthy people cursed. I've seen them die of no disease. They call it *Obeah* here. I call it plain, vicious devilcraft!"

"Why," I asked, "would they want to put a curse on you?"

"When I saved Aba from the surf, from the barracuda that took most of his leg, he swore to be my faithful houseboy forever. Yet he wears beads and crucifix, day and night. Why?"

He paused, staring at me as if I should suspect the answer.

"It is because he, like the others, believes that the devil bargains with the lonely men of these islands. They believe that the devil came to me, one night, and I was trapped by his magic. They believe that, at night, I slink on all fours, that my face turns to that of a wolf, and that fangs magically grow in my mouth. The silly idiots!"

My eyes flew to Judy's horrified face. Still, I knew it was insanity to believe that big shaggy dog had been anything but that!

"Vyverburg," I told him, "there are no such things as werewolves!"

"They say," he went on as if I hadn't spoken, "that wolf-men, recalling none of their nocturnal viciousness, know that something dreadful is going on within themselves. They strive but cannot free themselves from this damnation." His voice turned desperate. "Tony, I've none of that feeling. I swear I haven't!"

"Of course not!" I said. "Why should they even suspect you?"

"I am no government official. I do not fight the bush or try to raise crops. They look upon my easel and my paints as things of sorcery, and believe I'm that big black dog that prowls this island at night." He laughed unpleasantly. "As if I would sell myself to that fool below!"

My skin prickled to the sound of that laugh. My heart suddenly raced when I, too, was filled with the same fear of impending evil that Judy had talked about. I found myself realizing that we were in a place of contamination, that the very air we were breathing was foul with contamination. I stepped over to Judy.

"Come, honey," I said. "We're getting out of here, fast."

Vyverburg's long fingers clawed my arm. His moist, glinting eyes shone desperately into my face.

"What about me? Tony, you're not going to leave me here?"

"Funny you haven't left in one of those native sloops before this."

"They won't deal with me!" he shouted. "They're afraid—just as if I really were that werewolf that's terrorizing them. Yours is the first boat—"

I looked at Judy when her hand crept to mine. Then I looked back at this fear-crazed man who had once been my friend.

"The decision will rest entirely with my wife," I told him.

"Mrs. Vincent," he pleaded with her, "I beg this one favor."

She didn't answer at once, but stared at him, eye to eye, her cleanliness so in contrast to the repulsive thing he had become.

"Tony has always had good to say of you, Mr. Vyverburg," she said at last. "In view of that, I think you may go with us."

"Thank God!" Hope rose up on his gaunt face, and he strode to the door. "I'll get Aba to go to the bay for a donkey to carry my paintings and equipment to the jetty."

He disappeared into the corridor, shouting for the houseboy.

"Tony," Judy whispered to me, "did I do right?"

"He's white and entitled to a break," I replied. "But we're not going to wait for Aba to bring that donkey. I think it'll be better all around if we wait for Vyverburg on our boat."

We told Vyverburg that, but he seemed too busy, too excited with this chance to escape this *Obeah* persecution even to listen to us. So, five minutes later, we left with Aba for Cruz Bay.

AFTER we had gotten into that grove of kopoc trees just beyond the gate, the crippled houseboy handed me a loaded revolver he must have stolen from somewhere in Vyverburg's cottage.

"What's this for?" I asked him curiously.

"Ah hab mah pertection 'round mah neck," he said. "Ah see dat de purty lady hab a little cross too. But you hab nuthin'. De gun needs silver bullets if you want bullets to kill de Thing. Mebbe de noise, though, scare it away."

He saw the way I stared at him.

"The marster," he added simply. "Mebbe he follow. See?"

It didn't do our nerves any good, hearing him talk like this, but I was glad he had stolen the revolver. It gave me a feeling of security—yet a security that could not drown the unnatural feeling of evil that hovered over this little island.

With Aba leading the way, his crutches creaking, I found no need to use my flashlight. I followed close behind him, gun in hand. Judy walked close beside me, in the circle of my left arm.

We were halfway to the bay when an eerie wail came from somewhere in the distance. Aba stopped short, fingering his crucifix, his voice coming out in a quaver.

"Ah knowed it, baas. The marster!"

"Shut up, will you?" I retorted. "That's only that big dog."

"You hab not-been here long 'nough to know de sound of de werewolf of St. John. Ah know—" And Aba's crutches creaked dismally as we went forward again.

Time and again, that eerie wailing came to our ears, first from one side of our trail, then from the other. Judy was clinging so close to me now, I could feel the warm trembling of her body against mine.

"He's going to s-strike at us," she whispered apprehensively.

"Nonsense, honey," I scoffed. "Vyverburg just got you worked up with his crazy notion."

I was lying. My fingers were damp and stiff as they clung to the revolver, for I had the same feeling. I couldn't remember anything but the blood we had seen on the trail, and the shirt fragment we had found on that bayonet bush.

Menace hung in the heavy quiet, foretelling of the unspeakable something that impended—and all we could hear was the surge of our racing hearts, and the monotonous creak of Aba's crutches.

A whining snarl rose from the shrubbery ahead of us. We saw the huge, shaggy thing leering there, slaving mouth, its eyes glowering at us like twin fires from hell. The leering face of the voluptuous nude, that creature of evil which Vyverburg had painted into each of his ugly pictures, flashed through my mind.

Judy fell back, screaming as the beast came charging out at Aba. My arm was leaden when I strove to bring the revolver up. Yet the beast never touched the houseboy. It stopped dead in the face of Aba's quivering upraised crucifix, and by the time the brutish animal turned on me, I had my weapon finally upraised.

My gun thundered as it leaped, the bullet smashed into its wolfish head. The animal rolled over and over from the impact of the bullet, and lay still.

"You can't kill it dat way!" screamed Aba. "You need silver bullets—silver bullets! Run, baas, run for yer life!"

"Will you shut up?" I snapped. "I

shot this mad dog through the head. It couldn't possibly—"

The words dried in my throat when I heard the dangerous growl rumble from the crouching beast. And as it rose up to its feet again, I saw a third eye leering from its head—the hole my bullet had smashed there.

IT WAS incredible! No living thing could survive a wound like that, and all at once I found myself believing in werewolves. In sudden terror, I knew that lead could not end this beast's existence. It had to be a silver bullet through its vile heart!

Aba stood transfixed, making inarticulate noises in his throat as we watched the rage-inflamed animal tensing for another spring. I stared helplessly at Judy. In desperation, she had ripped the tiny cross from her neck, raising it in front of her.

A silver crucifix! I snatched the tiny cross from her trembling fingers and rammed it down the barrel of my revolver, swinging the gun up again as the beast launched its shaggy bulk straight at my throat.

I saw the unholy leer of those hellish eyes. White, dripping fangs gleamed against the blood-red of the brute's huge jaws. I aimed for the heart this time, and the beast was almost upon me when I fired. The discharge stopped the brute in mid-air. It twisted backward, thumping heavily to the ground.

In frozen horror, I saw the beast stagger up again. My desperate trick, it seemed, had failed. But, thank God, the monster did not attack again. In a crawling, half-dead walk, it dragged itself into the bushes that bordered the lonely trail.

"It worked!" I cried in sudden joy, and made a move to follow the stricken beast.

Judy restrained me. "No!" she whispered. "Good heavens, no!"

The sound of her voice brought back my sanity. I felt a little foolish, having thrust that little silver crucifix into my revolver. Lucky, too, considering that the obstruction hadn't exploded the barrel.

"It was only a mad dog," I said to
(Concluded on page 81)

ASTRAL NEWSPAPER

By WILL GARTH

Author of "Dr. Cyclops," "Passing of Eric Holm," etc.



Cold sweat broke out over Rind. Crofort stood there—but he had died years ago

SO THEY wouldn't renew his contract. After twenty-five years of earnest effort in directing the destiny of the Cocoplum News-Gazette all the reward he got for crusading for right and justice was a summary dismissal.

*An Eerie Hand Guides the
Presses As Editor Rind Achieves
Victory Over Sin and Corruption*

There were no bones made about it. Henry Bleeker, mayor of Cocoplum, and the powerful force behind all the contemptible crime of the town, had been brutally frank about it.

"See here, Rind," he had said in his private office, shoving that morning's copy of the *News-Gazette* under the editor's nose, "I warned you repeatedly to soft-pedal your editorials. This article is the last straw. It is a veiled but pointed attack on the whole municipal administration. A little pap is good to feed the public—makes them think things are being handled nicely. But this is too much. Perhaps you've forgotten who owns the *News-Gazette*?"

"No," Alexander Rind bit out tersely. "I've never forgotten that you practically control everything hereabouts, but I told you a year ago that you'd have to clean up the dope and marijuana rackets, or I'd fight you tooth and nail. I can overlook your petty gambling rackets and minor criminalities—but I'm not going to let you exploit and debauch the youth of this community. Why, just yesterday I caught a twelve-year-old newsboy smoking a reefer. You're a fool, Bleeker! You'll have the federal government down on you before you know it, and where will you be then?"

"Can you prove anything against me?" sneered the red-nosed mayor to the editor's remarks.

"Not yet," admitted Rind hotly, "but with a little cooperation—"

"And neither can anybody else," Bleeker interrupted coldly. "You're a good editor, Rind, but you have no judgment. And so, you're through. There will be no new contract for you. It expires this week, I believe. In lieu of the customary notice you are being paid a month's salary. In short, you're fired! Get out!"

And that, very definitely, was that.

FOR a week Alexander Rind puttered aimlessly about his bachelor bungalow, working with his mushroom bed in the cellar, tending his little hydroponic garden, caring for Blue Boy, his faithful whippet. But life had lost all impetus for the white-haired little man. At fifty-five he had

been junked, thrown on the scrap heap—broken, because he dared to fight for cleanliness and decency.

He had known he was sticking his neck out incautiously, but he had only been trying to clean up the more vicious aspects of Cocoplum's crime sore. He was really doing Bleeker and his crowd a big favor. You'd have thought the red-nosed fool would have had sense enough to see it.

Even a big New York paper had printed an editorial on the Florida resort.

Cocoplum is the most corrupt city in the United States. It is wide open. The racing track there is a mire. Dope is sold openly to children. Gambling rackets are rife. Why don't the authorities do something about it?

There was more to the article, but no names were mentioned. Nobody had any proof to tie up with names. Not even Alexander Rind, and he had lived intimately, with, and in, Cocoplum for twenty-five years. He knew what he knew—but in a court of law it would be hearsay evidence. And now, because he had been mildly insistent in his attacks and warnings, Bleeker had thrown him out. It was enough to make a gentler soul than even little Alexander Rind bitter.

So he puttered around his little home aimlessly for a week, wishing he had done more while he had the power and the opportunity. But he couldn't have done more without definite proof. His errors had been those of omission. He should have organized a private little group of his own to compile that necessary proof. Now, it was too late. And, now that it was, he began to burn with the ardent desire to fight with all his heart against the ugly tentacles of crime which choked Cocoplum in stifling embrace while Bleeker, the head of the slimy octopus, batted on the very souls of his victims.

Angry and restless, Alexander Rind blindly gathered a batch of mushrooms for lunch without noticing the queer little frilly edge of one specimen which had got mixed up somehow with the other fungus growths in his mushroom bed. After a lunch of creamed mushrooms on toast, he

clapped his hat on his head and set out alone for a long walk.

"The walk will do me good," he thought mournfully, marching along the palm-lined main street of Cocoplum.

It must have been two hours later when he heard shrill, insistent barking, and saw a small fox terrier edging toward him. He was surprised. Dogs generally liked him.

"Come here, pup! Stop your racket!" He attempted to pat the dog.

THE terrier was now barking with increasing menace. Rind bent his fragile old body, and picked up a piece of coral rock. For a while he held it in his thin, veined hand, aiming at the yapping terrier, just to frighten it away. Alexander Rind hated to hurt any living creature. Then, when the threat failed, he threw the rock, making sure that it missed.

The strategy did not work. The terrier moved closer, still barking furiously.

"That's a strange dog," Rind thought, retreating toward the imposing edifice of Plymouth Church. "I know all the dogs in this vicinity, and they all know me. I wonder who owns that nuisance?"

He had no time for reflection. The dog was close at his heels. Instinctively, he took refuge in the nearest shelter available, the basement of the church, and closed the massive door behind him.

It was more of a crypt than a basement. Alexander Rind looked around. Greenish light filtered through the vines shading the basement window. In that green gloom, he saw the bulk of a hand press.

Rind approached it with interest. Being a newspaper man, he knew something about presses.

"Must be the former minister's abandoned toy," he thought, trying the dusty handle.

To his surprise, it swung easily, as if recently oiled. Printing was the minister's hobby. He used to publish his own sermons. But when transferred from Cocoplum, he left the old press behind.

In the gloom, its shape resembled a

hunchback spun over with cobwebs. It loomed sinister, a weird piece of machinery. Weird, that is, to an uninitiated eye. To Alexander Rind, it was like seeing an old friend.

With a reminiscent smile, he sat on the packing case supporting a slanted top on which the amateur printer set his type. Wearing by his long walk, Rind laid his white-haired head on his hands resting against the improvised printer's setting board, and continued his bitter reflections.

Suddenly a violent pain gripped his vitals. He groaned and went rigid.

"What was it I ate last?" he tried in vain to remember. Food was of no importance to him. He seldom remembered what he ate.

But now he recalled the mushrooms. He had grown them himself out of a mixed spawn. Evidently they did not agree with him.

"I'd better get out of here and see a doctor," he decided, and tried the door.

But although the knob turned easily the door would not open.

Rind pondered this over for a while. He took out his watch. It was nearly nine o'clock. Just as he thought! The watchman must have bolted the door from the outside. They always closed that basement at night. He would have to spend the night there.

He was not alarmed. Physical discomforts seldom bothered him. He would sleep on the floor, with his coat under his head. The night was warm. If only those terrible cramps would go.

But they increased instead. The pain was sharper now. He tried to forget it, thinking about all the corruption in Cocoplum, using it as a counter-irritant, because mental pain was to him as strong as physical.

Even this did not help. The pain was now tearing, unbearable.

Beads of perspiration appeared at the white roots of his curly hair. His hands shook, as he tried to pry the door open, knowing that he was doomed to stay here, away from medical help.

Perhaps it would be easier in the dark. He hoped, perhaps he could sleep the pain off. He turned the

light off again, and fell to the floor—unconscious.

Suddenly he heard a whirr of machinery. He raised his head, listening. The methodical *thump-thump* was like a sound out of his childhood. Rind glanced around and jumped up, startled. The light was burning, and the hand press was moving!

The old platen clicked against the chase with amazing regularity as if operated by a practised hand. It was fast, too. Rind could almost count his pulse by the feeble tinkle of—what was the name of that part striking against the whirring ink disk? It was so long since Rind had actually printed anything that he had forgotten.

"Must be turning out about five hundred copies an hour," he thought. "Hm, lots of life still in the old press. But who the heck is working it?"

He peered closer at the moving machine. There, towering over it like a shadowy rock, stood a man whose movements were familiar.

Cold sweat broke out all over the old man's body, as he recognized that figure. Why, it was Crofort, the old printer of the defunct *Globe*. But Crofort was dead—

Before he had time to be thoroughly frightened, Rind felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Well, if it isn't old Alex Rind!" a hearty voice was saying. It was undoubtedly the voice of printer Crofort. But it lacked its former booming quality. Crofort, as Rind remembered him, was given to heavy back-slapping. The hand which now rested on the editor's back was laid there lightly.

YOU'RE losing your grip, old boy," Rind said, forgetting his fear.

"I've more strength than ever," the printer said enigmatically. "Only it isn't sheer brute strength."

"The fellow must have been reading some of that stuff about inner power—most failures do." Rind reflected, remembering that the old printer was discharged when the *Globe* merged with the *News-Gazette*. They had reported him dead some time ago, but here he was, fat as ever, only a bit

weaker; his back-slapping no longer made Rind wince with pain.

"I know what you're thinking!" Crofort said with child-like triumph. "They gave me a swell obituary, eh? Well, it fooled my creditors, didn't it?"

"So he played 'possum," Rind thought. Well, feigning suicide and then running away was a tried way out of trouble.

"What—what were you doing with that press?" he asked, again feeling uneasy. For various shadowy forms began filling the basement, now perceptibly darker.

"Why, trying how it works," was the natural answer. "How would you like to edit a small newspaper?"

"Just what I was thinking about!" Rind exclaimed, forgetting the unusual surroundings.

"Well, here they are, your old pals." Crofort waved his broad hand, permanently stained with ink. "Ramos, the proofreader—remember Ramos? He could spell better than any native-born American. And Jock, our printer's devil, he's with us, too. And two typesetters—they were out of the *Globe* before your time, so you can't remember them."

Rind felt amazed. He must be unbalanced, he thought. Well, unbalanced or not, here was his opportunity to edit a newspaper, and fight Cocoplum's corruption. But would they let him do that? He had to make sure.

"Gentlemen," he spoke cautiously, "this hand press is good enough for making proofs and handbills. But surely, you're not contemplating..."

They seemed to know what was on his mind.

"Of course, not. You just compose your editorials here. Aren't you still able to compose them directly on the composing stick?" asked Crofort.

Rind nodded.

"I think I could—if they were to denounce Mayor Bleeker," he said.

"Suits us perfectly! You do your galley proofs here. The paper will be printed out of town."

They looked at each other strangely when Crofort said that. Rind was about to ask the reason, when he saw the ex-minister of Plymouth Church

nod approvingly from the far corner of the basement.

"I'm glad you found use for my old press," he whispered.

Only then Rind noticed that they were all sitting in the dark, like conspirators. Anyone who wanted to denounce corruption should work in the light. Funny, he no longer felt ill.

It was a pleasant stop here, like a rest after a long journey. He could still breathe—a fragrant, rarified air. The church basement ceased to smell musty. Only the dear familiar odor of printer's ink remained, stronger than ever. But that was, for Rind, perfume. Almost passively he wondered about his cramps.

"You understand now why I had to sic my dog at you," explained Crofort. "Yes, your supposition is right—a poisonous mushroom got mixed up with those you ate. One has to be very careful raising them. But that is immaterial now!" he laughed, a ghost of a laugh. "The main thing is, the pup chased you here, and you can have your newspaper."

EVEN as he said so, the small, once belligerent terrier, appeared from under the slit in the door—a vaporous form which grew again to dog's proportions—and began licking Rind's hands in a friendly manner. Rind smiled and patted its head.

"I still don't quite understand," he said, his mind open for the inevitable explanation which, he felt, would clear up everything to his everlasting satisfaction.

Now all the staff of the would-be newspaper spoke in unison. Their voices blended in one urgent whisper.

"You were helpless in your other state. You couldn't fight that corrupt political machine. Now, you can thumb your nose at them from beyond. We'll help you to run a first-class fearless newspaper."

A man who looked like old Doctor Motherwell, Rind's childhood physician, appeared, opened his bag, and took out several indelible pencils.

"Our chief proofreader," Crofort said proudly. "He corrects mistakes made on the other side."

"I never knew Death could read

proofs," Rind remarked with mild surprise. "But now that I come to think of it, what can be more natural?"

Rind composed his first scathing editorial with almost automatic ease.

"The rest of the paper will be printed beyond this basement," Crofort said. "Give me that proof! All right, now sit in front of this."

His shadowy finger pointed to a strange machine in a black case, resembling a teletype, but with a screen attached.

"You may watch your paper's progress right here."

"What is it?" Rind asked, but inwardly he already heard the answer. He was getting used to his associates' thoughts which entered his brain like the singing of a chorus. He knew that in front of him stood Univision.

It was like subscribing to a pictorial clipping bureau. Everything pertaining to the particular subject in which the watcher of Univision was interested was flashed on the small screen in vivid colors.

And so Rind saw, reclining comfortably in front of the Univision apparatus, the small, four-page newspaper being left on the stoop of every house of Cocoplum, and shoved under the door of every apartment. He liked the format, it was not cumbersome like the *News-Gazette*. He especially liked the title page which bore the name:

THE DENOUNCER ALEXANDER RIND, EDITOR

He saw people picking it up and turning the pages which cried about the marijuana factory, about child labor, about all the poisonous mire of Cocoplum.

He saw the citizens read and shake their heads. He saw what they thought; it was dangerous to be so outspoken about the powerful mayor.

"The paper won't last," said one. "Too bad Rind lent it his name." There was real regret behind the words.

"It looks like a one-shot," he heard a cub reporter say, comparing it to the *News-Gazette*. He fancied there was vague regret in the youngster's words, too.

He was so anxious about their opinion that he impatiently turned the dial of the Univision, searching for his readers. The Univision was silent, but it showed people's thoughts.

After switching to different levels of Cocoplum's inhabitants' mentality, he got a pretty uniform record of their reactions. His heart began to glow with non-emotional, abstract joy. Most of Cocoplum's citizens were on his side.

"The town's corruption is only a crust, hardened on the surface!"

A FAINT sigh of relief escaped his soul and blew through the rarefied atmosphere he now occupied. So his beautiful city was pure at heart. Its honest civic soul hated corruption.

Yet people bent their necks under the mayor's foot. Well, Rind thought with fatalistic assurance, The *Denouncer* will remedy that!

For the next few issues, his deft fingers, made still more assured by his present nebulous state, worked unerringly, composing those indignant editorials, picking the type from the old-fashioned cases, setting it upside down, never misspelling a word. Chases, lock keys, and the double front lever were all miraculously easy to handle. The ink spread as if by magic, and there were no offsets.

During the intervals of sweet, dreamless rest, finished copies were handed to Rind for his inspection, and he flicked the pages with pride. Those beyond knew their jobs. The grim proofreader had hardly any work to do on the astral newspaper.

It was printed on opaque, snow-white paper. The cloudy quality of that paper contrasted with the huge, soot-black type.

"It's the blackest black I ever saw," remarked the new editor of the *News-Gazette* as Rind turned the Univision dial on him and his cluttered office. "A new barrel of ink, I guess. It must be that new liquid proof-ink. Sure that's what it is—it makes offsets. Darn, it smeared my hand! It's so damp, it blurs the type!"

"What are you talking about!" remonstrated Rind, forgetting that his successor could not hear him. "This

paper never gives offsets. It's perfect!"

The Chief Proofreader, peering at Univision's screen over Rind's shoulder, whispered in gentle correction: "It's perfect *here*. It's also perfect over there, but it was meant to stain their guilty fingers. Look closer."

Rind looked at the rapidly flickering Univision. It changed from place to place, and from one group to another, like a badly constructed scenario. But—was it badly constructed? In all those places, guilty men were reading the *Denouncer*, and the astral paper's pages invariably left sooty marks on their hands.

Rind understood now the purpose of those offsets—symbols of guilty conscience. Once again he saw his rival editor passing one pudgy hand over the *Denouncer's* freshly printed page. The letters blurred, almost ran together. Only one name stood out in bold type: ALEXANDER RIND.

"Let's see how the mayor takes it," said Rind, his pale, cloudy hand turning the dial.

Mayor Bleeker was pacing his office situated on the eleventh floor of Cocoplum's only skyscraper. How well Rind remembered that office! The mayor was furious, having read his name in the current copy of the *Denouncer* seventeen times. He scowled heavily, smoothed again the crumpled copy, retrieved from his wastebasket, and re-read what Rind had to say about filth, corruption and bribery, the lawful tortures and murders of Chief of Police Reilly, about all the rottenness of Cocoplum's political machinery, exposed in no uncertain terms.

"An A-one case of libel in every copy!" Bleeker shouted to his lawyer, who now came into Rind's angle of Univision. "While you're working on those libel cases, I want Reilly!"

Reilly dutifully appeared.

"What do you want me to do, boss?" asked the chief of police.

But Reilly knew. Behind that poker face of his, Rind saw the thought:

"He read that nasty paper. This is the payoff!"

"I don't care what you do! But put that editor in jail! Beat the daylight

out of him! Silence him! Silence him if you have to use your gun!"

RIND laughed. To kill him, Alexander Rind, already dead!—it was a ghastly joke! Nevertheless, he followed the police chief to his little bungalow by use of the Univision.

"Where can he be?" Reilly muttered, jingling his useless handcuffs. "Never mind, I'll find him!"

Now Rind speeded his vision, skipping details to see what would happen next. Before Reilly got back to his office a new element had intruded. Federal men had come to Cocoplum, attracted by the outspoken editorials which the fearless editor threatened to substantiate with facts.

And so there were now two searching parties bent on finding Rind and his associates—the local police headed by Reilly, and the federals headed by a young ambitious man called Glover. Rind grew interested in the chase to the extent of watching its details.

Glover went to the office of the *News Gazette*. To Rind's surprise, he found little Charlie Mills, the newsie Rind had caught smoking reefer.

"I saw Mr. Rind bein' chased by a small dog near the Plymouth Church," the boy admitted. "I thought he went into the basement."

"That's the last anyone saw of me," Rind reflected.

"Why didn't you tell us before?" Glover questioned. "When was that?"

"Nobody asked me," the boy grinned. "It was last Tuesday."

His questioning over, the boy scampered toward the elevator. Glover looked after his retreating figure and noticed a curious paper bag protruding from his ragged pocket.

"Hey, call that kid back!" he ordered. His assistant reached the boy in two hopping strides and jerked him back by the seat of his trousers just as the child was about to step into the elevator. The pocket ripped, the bag fell out, and a few crudely rolled cigarettes spilled to the floor.

"Just as I thought," Glover muttered.

"Just as I made you think!" Rind's spirit corrected, palely glowing with satisfaction.

The boy, trembling and defiant, stood before Glover once more.

"Where did you get them?" the Federal man asked gently.

"They give 'em to me," said young Mills defensively.

"Who did?" asked Glover, crumbling one of the crude cigarettes and examining its contents.

"At the factory," answered the boy sullenly. "They make me and other kids work there all night. If I didn't smoke them reefer, where would I be—tryin' to sell papers next day? We gotta eat at home, Mom and me, and sellin' papers ain't enough."

"I see," said Glover gently, but a grim look came into his eyes. "So Alexander Rind is right." He snapped his fingers. "We've got to find Rind's hideout, Monroe. You take the boy to the Federal Building, Donovan, and guard him with your life."

One of the Federal men saluted and put his arm around the lad's shoulders.

"We'll have a game of checkers—or something, son," he said as he went out.

"Sure," said Charlie Mills drowsily. "I can beat yuh, too."

Alexander Rind watched Glover and Monroe rush madly from the newspaper office. He saw the present editor of the *News-Gazette* grab his telephone and hastily get in touch with Mayor Bleeker. Rind wondered how Glover had got hold of little Charlie Mills—until he remembered that he had mentioned the boy in his editorial yesterday. So that was it!

Well, from now on it would just be a question of time before the Federal authorities cleaned up Cocoplum. His work was done. Perhaps it would be just as well that they find his body now and give it a decent burial. Curiously, he turned the dial of his Univision set and followed the government men in their search.

To his unbounded astonishment, when they drove up to the Plymouth Church, he saw Blue Boy whining and scratching at the locked basement door.

"Look!" cried Monroe, pointing. "That's Rind's dog."

Glover was a man of action. The sexton was quickly located at the rec-

tory next door and he produced a key to the basement.

"Sure, I locked the basement up Tuesday night," he admitted. "The new minister don't use the basement like Reverend Dodd used to. There's nothing down there but old tools and that old printing outfit Brother Dodd used."

Glover and Monroe glanced at each other. At his screen, Rind chuckled to himself.

SOON the basement door was unlocked, and the three men trooped into the quarters. Glover produced a flashlight and started poking around the gloomy corners. The sexton hurriedly switched on the dim electric bulb. And Rind—from his spectral vantage point—was treated to the unique spectacle of seeing himself discovered, doubled up in a sort of agonized condition upon the cold, concrete floor.

"Good God!" exclaimed Monroe. "Look, Glover—there he is. The dope gang beat us to him and bumped him."

Glover knelt beside the crumpled little figure with the snow-white hair. He made a swift examination.

"No," he announced in terse accents. "He hasn't been touched. Looks like he died from starvation. Good Lord—he's been locked in here since Tuesday, and today is Saturday! No wonder. Call an ambulance, quick!"

The sexton ran out on shaky legs to obey. Monroe turned to examine the old printing press.

"Look at this, Glover!" he exclaimed, bringing over a copy of the *Denouncer* which he had peeled off the press. "This is the place where Rind's been printing his little newspaper."

Glover whistled softly in astonishment. "If he's been locked in here," he said in perplexity, "how did he get out to distribute his paper the last four days?"

Monroe paled. He couldn't find a logical answer to that question himself. But Alexander Rind only chuckled again. He knew that an astral newspaper doesn't have to be logical.

And then, as Glover gently gathered up the pathetic little shell which had

once contained the editor's spirit, and as the mad wailing of an ambulance siren sounded down the street, Rind's Univision screen unaccountably went black.

Alexander Rind came hazily to consciousness again. Everything was so white and beautiful and peaceful—and restful. There slowly emerged faces and figures, also in white, about him. This must be heaven, he thought, and that was the voice of the Great Publisher speaking. Gradually the words made sense to him.

"—second blood transfusion was satisfactory—I'm sure he will, when he wakes up. Not secondary anemia, as we feared. Malnutrition—starvation, rather, following that mushroom poisoning. Sure, he's going to be all right—"

Rind drifted away on the sea of unconsciousness again, his only thought one of intense sorrow. So he wasn't dead after all. His courageous crusading had only been a dream.

He awoke, hours later, to find himself in a hospital bed. A cheery looking nurse was instantly at his side.

"Are you feeling better, Mr. Rind?" she asked.

He nodded feebly.

"You had a tough time of it," she went on, "but you're all right now. Mr. Glover and Mr. Monroe found you in that basement just in time."

"Wh—what—who did you say?" he asked hoarsely.

"Those government men," she told him, smiling. "You're quite a hero, Mr. Rind. The *Denouncer* brought full investigation of conditions here in Cocoplum. Mayor Bleeker blew his brains out last night, and the Federal men have been making dozens of arrests. Mr. Glover is waiting to see you now."

Weakly Alexander Rind signified that he would see the caller. His eyes widened in amazement as Glover came in, and he recognized the man he had seen only in a weird hallucination.

"Mr. Rind," said the Federal investigator, "this town and the national government are deeply indebted to you. And I want to thank you personally for what you have done. I understand there's a stockholders' meet-

ing being held today for the purpose of reinstating you as managing editor of the *News-Gazette*. The doctors tell me you will be strong enough to accept the post within a week."

"Then, then—it's all true?" faltered Alexander Rind. "The *Denouncer*—Charlie Mills—everything?"

"Of course," said Glover heartily. "There's just one question I want to ask you. How in the world did you manage to get distribution four days

running on your paper when you were locked up in that church basement?"

Rind thought of his astral associates, of all he had gone through, and he would have been afraid, suddenly, if he hadn't been such a staunch little man. It wasn't a mystery to him, but how could he explain it to a material world?

"I'm sorry," he said, smiling slightly, "but I can't tell you. It's—an astral secret."

BEAST OF THE ISLAND

(Concluded from page 72)

Judy. "Now I think I'm going back to the cottage and tell Vyverburg that this dog—this animal the natives thought a werewolf—is dead. Perhaps, then, he won't have reason to leave with us."

Judy kept staring at me as if she were gripped with bewilderment.

"That horror—that fear of evil is suddenly gone from me," she said, almost in a whisper. "Tony—Tony, I think I'm going with you."

"Now I doan feel scared either." Aba spoke up. "Not now dat you hab killed de marster."

"Bunk," I growled, and began leading the way back.

Yet I couldn't completely figure out how my sanity had returned to me so quickly.

It seemed, somehow, that it had been more than the sound of Judy's voice that had done that.

The cottage seemed deserted when we returned there. All the ugly pictures still hung on the walls of the living room. None of the painting equipment had been packed. And as we stood there, wondering where Vyverburg could be, Judy uttered a gasp and clutched my arm.

"Tony, look!" She was pointing at the little trail of fresh blood that led from the hall door, across the living room, and through the open door of his bedroom. "Tony, do you think that the dog crawled in here—"

I didn't like to hear her say that. It made me think the wrong sort of

thoughts. I saw the tense horror on my wife's face, an equally tense expression on Aba's face as his grimy fingers made the sign of the cross.

Tightening my grip on the revolver, I tiptoed to that bedroom door.

"Vyverburg!" I choked out as I stared wide-eyed into that silent room.

The revolver dropped forgotten from my fingers as I hurried to his side.

Vyverburg lay across his bed, the feeble lamplight glistening in the blood that stained his chest crimson. He was dead—dead from the bloody hole that gaped over his heart. And he lay with one bloody hand tight-clenched beside the horrible wound.

Strangely, though, his face was changed. No madness lay in his features, nor was there any expression of fear. Instead, a satisfied smile curled his thin lips.

Mad things raced through my brain in that instant. I was remembering how legend has it that a killed werewolf turns back into its proper form at the moment of death. I was remembering how wolf-men strive to free themselves from their damnation, and how the devil thwarts them.

On impulse, I reached down to that bloody fist that lay next to the wound. And when I pried those gory fingers open, I fell back, staring.

Vyverburg was gripping that which he had clawed out of that gaping hole in his chest—Judy's tiny silver crucifix!

Next Issue: THE MISSING MIRAGE, by DON ALVISO

I'VE GOT TO BELIEVE IT

By BRUCE WALKER

Author of "Victory Supper," "Doublecrossed," etc.

*Out of the Eerie Confinement of a House of Fear, a
Mortal's Ghost Arises from a Thirty Year's Sleep!*

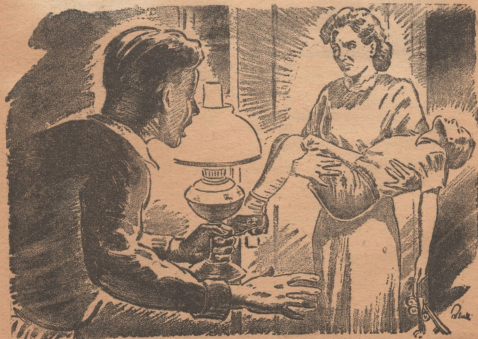
EVEN when I was a kid in Emerson Junior High, Mrs. Trudell was Westport's greatest mystery. No one had seen her in twenty years. It was said that she never left the attic apartment of the huge red-brick house which stood, walled in by holly trees, next to the schoolgrounds.

I don't know how true that was, but I know that I had never talked

to any kids or older people in the neighborhood who had even caught a glimpse of her.

The only link of reality between the curious mansion and the rest of Westport was Mr. Trudell.

Mr. Trudell was a tall, sturdy fellow with bushy black brows, like those of John L. Lewis. Promptly at four-fifteen each afternoon, he emerged from the great oak doors,



She walked toward me holding the limp boy

wearing a black derby and a chesterfield evening coat and carrying a gold-headed cane.

Thus dressed and equipped, he walked at a military gait for eight blocks to Hendry's Grocery, bought a sack of meat and vegetables, and returned to the house by five o'clock. At night, if you passed by, you could see a kerosene lamp glimmering through the holly trees from his study window—and a dim glow at an attic window. Those two lights and Mr. Trudell's daily expedition to Hendry's were the only signs of life about the gloomy place, year in and year out, as long as anyone could remember.

It was in connection with these daily trips to Hendry's that I got mixed up in this horrible affair that haunts me night and day. . . .

Due to my finances I had to quit Whitman University after my sophomore year and go to work. I was lucky, or unlucky, enough to get a job at Hendry's. Almost immediately old man Trudell took a fancy to me, and asked me to fill his order each afternoon.

As a kid, I had been scared stiff of his grim frowns, just as all the other Westport kids were. But brought in contact with him at the store, I soon discovered that he was just a lonely old man, gruff in some ways, but a soft-hearted, self-conscious fellow under his stern exterior.

Each afternoon, when I placed the groceries in his arms, he would nod and say brusquely:

"You must come out some evening, lad, and we'll have a round of checkers."

"Thank you, I will, sir!" I was ready enough to promise this, but deep inside I felt I'd never be brave enough to venture into the Trudell house, which was still nothing less than a gloomy, haunted house to me.

One afternoon, however, shortly after I had waited on him, Mr. Trudell was struck by a car within a block of his home. The first I knew of the accident was when I got a call from General Hospital, saying that the old man had been injured and

wanted to see me. It was most urgent, they said. And I went.

"It's kind of you to come, son," he said, when we were alone in his hospital room. His left arm was in a sling, his face was badly lacerated, and heavy bandages were on his head. "You see, I knew no one else to turn to at a time like this. Most of my friends have passed on. . . ."

I SAT down beside his bed. "I'll do anything I can, sir," I consoled him.

Tears came to his eyes and he choked up so he couldn't talk for a time. Then he cleared his throat.

"It's my wife, lad. She has no one but me to take care of her."

"Perhaps I can find a nurse to stay with her for a few days," I suggested.

"No, no. She doesn't need a nurse, lad. Not that. It's just that she's timid about meeting new people. Her contacts have been so few since our little boy was killed . . . some thirty years ago."

"Little boy? You had a son, sir?"

"Yes," Trudell said, sorrowfully. "A handsome little fellow. On his sixth birthday, his mother gave him a pair of roller skates. At an intersection near the house, a car—one of the earliest automobiles—struck him. He was carried home, still clasping his precious skates. My wife stopped living when she stood with the dying boy in her arms. Since then she's only been existing. . . ."

I stared in pity at the old man's quivering lips. I bent forward to straighten the covers on his chest.

"I'll do whatever I can for you, sir," I promised.

He told me what to do. And at twilight, carrying a sack of groceries, I strode up the walk among the holly trees to the grim old house that I had dreaded for as long as I could remember. My hand trembled as I unlocked the massive front door and shut myself in the dark, musty hall that was a tomb of silence. I groped about in the blackness, my heels sinking into a rug that smothered all sounds. I found the candle Mr. Trudell had told me would be on the hall table.

I lighted the candle and held it aloft, gazing curiously about at the huge, high-ceilinged rooms, elegantly furnished with bric-a-brac and old-fashioned furniture. Beyond the swinging door at the end of the hall I found the narrow kitchen, which smelled heavily of orange peel and grease.

Following Mr. Trudell's directions, I prepared a simple tray with two pork chops, toast, orange juice, butter, jelly. I stuck the candle on a saucer and started the ascent, up two flights of richly carpeted stairs to the attic. My hands trembled so that I joggled the dishes about and spilled hot tallow on my wrist.

In a moment I would be face-to-face with the woman no one else in Westport, except Mr. Trudell, had seen in thirty years. I found the attic doorway blocked by a closed door. I set the tray on the top step and knocked timidly. An eerie, stealthy silence followed. I know it wasn't the heat of the flickering candle that caused sweat to break out on my face and forehead.

However, there was no response to my knock. I tried a second time, fighting an impulse to turn and flee down the stairway.

"Mrs. Trudell! Mrs. Trudell!" I called out, but realized I was only whispering the words.

I tried the knob. It turned easily and the door swung inward as though inviting me into the shadowy darkness beyond. I picked up the tray with such unsteady hands that I upset the orange juice. I stepped into the room, looking about fearfully in the guttering candle light.

Except for a huge, flat-top desk, and a chair, in the center of a dark rug, the room was unfurnished. On the desk a great yellow scrap-book lay open, and beside this ponderous collection of newspaper clippings stood a white paste pot and a kerosene lamp with a white, hand-painted chimney.

DIRECTLY in front of the scrap-book stood a large picture of a little boy. I went up closer to the desk, holding the candle near the pic-

ture. He was the most handsome youngster I had ever seen. He was smiling up at me with large, friendly eyes, prideful of his dapper new brown suit. On the lower left hand corner of the picture was the single word, "Jackie."

Waves of silence washed against my ears, pressing at my eardrums.

"Mrs. Trudell!" I cried out. "Don't be afraid. I'm just a friend your husband sent. I have your supper here."

I heard no answering movement in that room or from the bedroom beyond an open door to the right. She's afraid, I thought. As afraid as I am, and she won't come out until I've gone. I set the tray on the writing desk, and examined the scrap-book more closely.

Every newspaper clipping told of accidents to children, caused by motor cars. The clippings were from many different papers, ranging from the Westport *Morning Star* to the Baltimore *Sun* and the San Francisco *Herald-Examiner*. The name of each paper and the date was noted, carefully printed in ink beside each clipping.

In that moment of revelation, my heart went out to the poor, lonely, heart-broken mother. So this was how she had spent many hours of the long years of seclusion, keeping a record of the daily toll of accidents which grieved mothers throughout America. This was dipping into a privacy too intimate for such a casual acquaintance as I. I took the candle and hurried down the stairs and out of the house.

But I knew no peace on my walk homeward, disturbed about the strange old lady I had been unable to find. What would she think when Mr. Trudell did not return all night? To whom could she turn in her worry? Where had she hidden while I was in the attic apartment?

I took a taxi to the hospital, instead of going directly home, because I wanted to report to Mr. Trudell and ask what I should do. But he had become unconscious, and remained so up until the time I felt that I had to go home to get some sleep.

But I couldn't sleep a wink and

went to work the next morning so weary I could scarcely do my routine duties at the store. I called the hospital frequently during the day, checking on the old man's condition. I became more and more alarmed as he remained in a coma.

After the store closed that afternoon, I wandered about the streets, trying to figure out what to do. Someone *had* to look after Mrs. Trudell. As I had promised the old man I would permit no one else to enter the house until he returned, I had no choice except to go back to the eerie house among the mysterious holly trees.

I stopped at my house to get some food from our own ice box and then sneaked it out while Mom was talking to visitors in the living room. Again I found the Trudell house pitch dark and quiet from top to bottom. By candlelight, I prepared another tray in the kitchen and then forced myself up the two long flights of stairs to the attic door.

The panic which I had known the night before returned. But I set the tray down and knocked and waited, chilled to the marrow of my innermost bones. Again silence answered my knock. Too frightened to knock again, I pushed into the room, carrying the tray and candle, expecting to find, I don't know what.

THE tray I had brought up the previous night lay there, untouched. Grease had formed on the pork chops. The butter had melted and the toast had dried out. I set the second tray beside the first, and then lighted the lamp, determined to find Mrs. Trudell and stem the curiosity that was driving me mad.

In the bedroom, everything was in order. It was a neat, clean room with a pink spread on the bed, white curtains at the attic windows. But the silence of the place haunted me, and I turned back to the writing room and stopped stock still, the lamp poised in my hands.

Just inside the door from the stairway stood a tall, stately woman with dark hair. She wore a high-necked white dress that touched the floor. In

her arms she carried a child, a little boy, clasping a pair of skates and moaning with pain. His left leg hung limp, covered with blood, and a crimson streak was spreading across his forehead. His great dark eyes, bleak with pain, stared at me; and for a moment he ceased moaning.

I felt so weak I nearly dropped the lamp. But the woman came slowly toward me as I stared back at her and the boy.

"Please," she said in the softest voice I ever heard, "Jackie's been hurt by a car. We need a doctor, quickly. Won't you call one?"

"Yes," I cried hoarsely. "Of course, I'll go right away. Put him on the bed. I'll be back as soon as I call a doctor."

I started around them to the doorway. The little boy clutched the skates more tightly in his small white hands, and one of the loose wheels fell to the floor. I stooped, picked it up and held it out to the child, but the woman cried:

"Please, hurry!"

I thrust the wheel into my pocket, set the lamp on the table and raced down the stairs through the dark. Across the street, a light was burning in the Henderson residence. A maid let me in and showed me to the telephone.

I called Dr. Simmons, our family doctor, and he promised to hurry over to Trudell's immediately.

In a few minutes I was back at the attic door. "The doctor is on the way," I announced, stepping into the lamplight. I looked about, a prickly feeling at my neck. The room was quiet again and bare as the first time I had ever seen it. Holding my breath, I took the lamp and went into the bedroom. The woman and boy were not there!

"Mrs. Trudell!" I shouted. The silence mocked me. I backed away to the writing desk and set the lamp down so I wouldn't drop it in my nervous search. A bell exploded in the depths of the house and my throbbing heart nearly burst. Then I realized it was Dr. Simmons at the door.

"Where's the little boy you told me about, Bill?" he asked, as I showed

him in, holding the candle for him to see by.

I sat down on the bottom step, exhausted. My body shook as though gripped by fever.

"I don't know, Doctor," I choked out. "He and Mrs. Trudell were in the attic when I called you. She asked me to call!"

Dr. Simmons, a stubby, bald-headed man, stared at me curiously. "Let's go up and look around, Bill," he said, taking the candle from me.

But I couldn't move. I sat in the darkness, listening to him searching the attic rooms. He came back down to me.

"There's no one up there, Bill!" He bent down, felt my forehead with his hot hand. "Better let me take you home, son."

"No," I cried. "I've got to go out to the hospital. Mr. Trudell asked me to look after things here. I've got to go talk to him!"

DR. SIMMONS shook his head. "I'm afraid you can't do that, Bill. The old man died about an hour ago."

I got up and wandered alone out into the night. I walked around the school grounds in the moonlight, try-

ing to get a grip on myself. I had to fight for sanity. Surely I hadn't imagined the whole thing, or had I? I stared back up at the attic windows, now shining in the moonlight above the dark holly trees.

Of course, I had imagined it. I pieced it together. The excitement of going into the house I had feared since childhood, coupled with the old man's story of the little boy, had reacted to produce the illusion of the woman and the child. Of course! I started back to the house, when I saw Dr. Simmons coming toward me across the lawn.

"I just found Mrs. Trudell, Bill," he called out. "She was lying across a bed on the second floor. My guess is that she saw her husband's accident yesterday from the windows and the shock killed her. She's been dead for at least thirty hours!"

I felt relieved in a strange, exhilarating way. Of course, I had imagined everything in the attic then. Perspiration bathed my forehead. I drew out my handkerchief to wipe it away, when a heavy object fell out upon the ground in the moonlight. I picked it up.

It was the wheel from the boy's skate.

FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE



THE MANCI CURSE

COMPLETE NOVELET—

SEQUEL TO "A BAG OF SKIN"

By **DOROTHY QUICK**

THE WINE OF HERA

A Complete Novelet of the Life-Giver

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

*Plus Stories by SEABURY QUINN, AUGUST W. DERLETH,
DON ALVISO and Others*

JESSAMIN'S DEATH

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

Author of "Roar of the Rocket," "Experiment with Destiny," etc.



IT WAS a queer, beautifully queer world on which Jessamin found himself. In fact, you might say it was a queer planet all around. But it was one of the nine recognized planets of the Solar System, and thus, wasn't as far

afield and strange as you might think.

Several years previous, Dr. Guberwald had established this experimental station. Jessamin, one of the colony, had his post in the botanical garden.

Without being a traveler, Jessamin had acquired a working knowledge of this odd world. A globe of vast continents and sweeping seas, it had spawned a bewildering variety of flora and fauna. Of all the confusing and conflicting forms of life, the dominant species was a giant biped carnivore, pilose, and raucous of voice.

Of course, Jessamin knew of the giants before hand. But danger from this source he had never seriously considered, what with the scientific principles of weather control, electrical gadgets and other equipment with which Dr. Guberwald had surrounded the colony. So he wasn't prepared for the catastrophe.

He was talking with Rose in the garden, that morning of the ruthless invasion of giants. Fair of skin, without a blemish, Jessamin was a sturdy blond whose forebears had come from Texas. In spite of his hardy ances-

try, Jessamin was not a warrior. Neither was he a hot-house flower, and no one made the mistake of calling him that to his face.

With all his gentle nature, he was romantically inclined. He had the distinct impression that he was falling in love with Rose. She had a delicate olive complexion, which rivaled the magnolia of the sunny South from which she had been brought. But he had never spoken to her of love before the frightful invasion.

Perhaps he would have, for the surroundings were conducive to love and happiness. All of the cruel and barbaric savagery of this terrible planet were locked safely outside the station walls.

The soft morning breeze was artificially produced by efficient giant air conditioners. The contented hum of bees was making a drowsy *obligato* to the warbling of brilliant-plumaged birds, which darted and flitted beneath the huge glassite dome that protected the colony from the arctic blasts outside. With a cheery sun shining high overhead, who knows what sweet nothings Jessamin might have whispered to lovely Rose?

Then, like the crack of doom, the Gargantuan barbarians were upon them. They were armed with sharp and glittering steel weapons, which reminded Jessamin of the hideous mandibles of the voracious insects of this world — but a thousand times larger and more deadly. The giants overran the experimental station, slaughtering right and left. Gross

The Good Must Die On a Savage World!

creatures, strident of voice and red of face, they struck terror to the heart. Had Gulliver appeared so frightful and so coarse to the tiny men of Lilliput?

Caught flat-footed, without weapon for defense of any kind, Jessamin could only shiver there beside Rose. Bitterly he bemoaned the fact that he was powerless to protect her. He saw one male colossus with shaggy black hair cut down two of his fellows with one stroke of his terrible, flashing blade. Trampling carelessly, he destroyed a third as he did so.

THEN came the most ghastly horror of all. Smirking and gurgling like an idiot, the shaggy giant offered the two dying victims to a simpering female giant as a sort of bloody trophy! And the giantess accepted them and actually placed them under her carnivorous throat as ornaments. . . .

"How gastly! How horrible!" Jessamin protested to his quivering companion. "Primitive and brutal beasts!"

"Hush, oh, hush," pleaded Rose in spite of her trembling. "They don't know any better. Such is the custom of these huge savages. My father has told me of their repulsive ritual. Why should we stand appalled at their cruelty, after all? Think of the head hunters of South America. And remember how the ancient Romans treated the early Christian martyrs—binding them to great timbers, dipping them in pitch, and setting them ablaze to light the streets of Rome."

"But—but that was different," replied Jessamin. "Why should we suffer for the sins of ancient mankind? We have come far since then. Man's goal is magnificent even if his road has been sordid and bloody. And why do you taunt me with it now?"

"Oh, my dear," whispered Rose, instantly contrite. "I am sorry. But man has not yet won free from his ruthless barbarities. Doesn't he still trap fur-bearing animals for their skins, to embellish the beauty of empty-headed women? Why should we think *this* sort of vandalism is so revolting?"

Rose was certainly well informed

on the history of man. But her reasoning was like a knife in Jessamin's side.

"We weren't meant for such a fate," he protested bitterly. "We are people with souls. We were meant to grow and expand onward and upward. Our work is to make life more beautiful, to cheer the sick, comfort the bereaved. None of us was ever a warrior. Where can Dr. Guberwald be? Why doesn't he sound the alarm? Why—"

He broke off in dismay as the shaggy giant sighted him and uttered a raucous howl of triumph. With a single great bound that made the earth tremble, the Cyclops was upon him. One huge, grimy, gory paw encircled Jessamin's waist as easily as a man's hand could grasp a weed.

Struggle and fight and shout for mercy though he did, Jessamin was helpless. This terrible giant was deaf to the sound of his voice. And then came the sharp pain below his middle, and Jessamin knew he had been cut in two.

Howling with glee, the giant bore his tiny captive away in triumph, careless of the severed, bleeding stump.

"This is death," Jessamin whispered resignedly to himself. "I shall bleed to death, and no one can help me."

He cast a despairing glance back as the giant held his slender body aloft. He saw Rose nodding bravely after him.

"Farewell, Cap," she cried, using his first name for the first time. "Die like a hero, even though you are not a warrior!"

Jessamin found the courage to go to his death valiantly, like a soldier, with his head held high in courage. It took more courage than he dreamed he possessed. Never again would he be with Rose in the garden. Never again would he feel the soft breeze against his face. Never again would he hear the soft songs of the birds and bees, nor go on with his work of making life beautiful among men.

He died late that afternoon, bleeding to death on the chest of a giant male in somber black. His pale face was a forlorn little splotch of white

(Concluded on page 97)



By LUCIFER

Famous Authority on Witchcraft and Superstition

HEX, Pow-wow, American voodoo, White Magic, The Evil Eye . . . such have been called the strange superstitions and weird goings on in the so-called hex country of Pennsylvania.

Hex-doctors close up like clams when a stranger comes to investigate. Still, there are those outsiders who have found their way into the mysteries and rituals of hex cults, and who have, years later, dared to reveal what they heard and saw.

Is hexing a milder form of Black Magic? Is a pow-wow specialist a more refined member of the witch-doctor fraternity? True, the rituals of White Magic are not as savage as those of the Black—but the methods bespeak a common origin and tradition.

Some investigators claim that hex was adopted and modified by certain white natives of the Pennsylvania hills who gave protection and refuge to escaping black slaves of the South in the early days of America—the slaves revealing the secrets of African Black Magic as a token of gratitude.

A Hybrid

But students of the Black Arts consider hexing a hybrid—not a true member of the Black Arts family. There are no facts to substantiate the possession of any occult power by hex doctors. Some of their cures based on knowledge of herbs and chemicals have been reported; but on the whole, hexing is rather a cult built on superstition and fear psychology.

Altogether too many crimes have been committed in the name of hexing. Evil-doers, when apprehended, endeavor to use "Hex" in their pleas of defense as one would cry "insanity." And weak-minded persons have turned to it as an excuse to camouflage their temptations.

Superstition alone is not entitled to Black Arts consideration. But while we consider hexing a hybrid, some readers have requested information concerning it. We reserve the right however to urge the discouragement of hex activities. In this department we will present the most interesting case we can, based on information obtainable from reliable sources. There is no proof of the curse of the Black Hex working—we will merely present an eyewitness account for the record.

Hex Superstitions

There are standard superstitions among

the hex people. Here are some of them:

A person born with a veil or caul possesses hex power which can include healing, cursing, hypnotic control or other psychic influences.

Hexing can be done only by a man to a woman or a woman to a man, or, as it were, between negative and positive currents—the man being positive, the woman, negative. Thus, a female cannot hex a female nor a male, another male.

The White Hex is that which heals a body or a soul—the Black Hex is that which curses it.

A stronger hex doctor can remove the hex of a weaker one. And the power to hex may be lost to one, by improper use.

Hexing can be applied to pre-natal influence, and thus affect an unborn child provided that child is the opposite sex of the hexer.

A hex seance is called a pow-wow and in order to have fuller power must consist of both men and women, especially those who have been healed by a hex.

A person who has a cast to his eye has been hexed and also possesses the power of hexing others.

A person with an evil eye (the highest power of the Black Hex) can cause another to become a werewolf. An evil eye is that which can be seen in the dark—really an animal eye or the mark of the beast.

Certain emblems or symbols painted on houses, barns, or on the body, are psychic "lightning rods" preventing the "electricity" of the hex doing damage. For instance, the drawing of the evil eye can short-circuit the power of the evil eye. The idea being that like will not attack like. Thus, if a person fears a certain thing, by painting an image of that thing on his house or barn or body, he is protected from that thing.

If one prepares a doll or image of a certain man or woman, and that image contains some part of the person's body, such as a piece of fingernail, a lock of hair, etc., or even a piece of clothing which that person has worn—then the image carries hex power over that person; and damage to the image will cause damage to the individual. This superstition is quite similar to Black Voodoo.

A Voodoo Pow-Wow

Let us attend an American voodoo pow-wow, reported by a man now residing in New York. It is the year 1933, the same year that Hitler began his rise to power in Germany and took the swastika as his emblem.

Howard Schneider, a salesman, was cov-

ering the hex country of Pennsylvania. He made his headquarters for several weeks at a certain country homestead which was a central location in the territory assigned to him by his employer.

One day, while repairing a broken window of his car, he jabbed a tiny splinter of glass under his fingernail. He thought he had taken it out, but the next day his finger was badly infected. He went to a registered physician in the nearest city, who probed under the nail, and lanced the wound, but could find no cause for the infection. The doctor applied some salve and bandaged the finger, telling Schneider to return if the infection showed no improvement.

The finger grew worse, so several days later the salesman visited the doctor again.

The doctor examined it carefully, then exclaimed: "I am afraid you will have to have the finger amputated! Or it may spread to your entire hand."

Such was the horrible revelation. But upon Schneider's hesitancy, the doctor gave the salesman twenty-four hours to make up his mind. "After that, it will be too late. I will lance it once more."

Schneider went back to his homestead in pain of mind as well as body. He hated to lose his finger—but better a finger than a hand or arm. He told the sympathetic housekeeper of his predicament. She shook her head. Then she reluctantly whispered: "There may be a way to save your finger. Others have been helped."

"How?" asked Schneider.

An Offer of Help

She hesitated, as if wondering what the young man's reaction would be. Then she ventured: "Frau Lauter can hex it."

Schneider had met Frau Lauter and her husband farmer who lived close by. They were pleasant people, and Schneider knew something about hex superstitions. "Is Mrs. Lauter a hex-doctor?" he asked.

The housekeeper raised her finger to her lips. "Hush—not so loud," she cautioned. "Walls have ears."

The salesman knew what she meant. The hex-god is silent. "Will she help me?" he whispered. "I'm a stranger, you know."

"She will help you if I send you," smiled the housekeeper.

The pow-wow was arranged for late that night. Schneider's anxiety over his finger offset any skepticism on his part. If anyone could save his finger, which was paining him almost beyond endurance, he was ready to accept anything.

Weird Ceremony

There were three people in the Lauter parlor that night in addition to Schneider and Frau Lauter—the hired man, Herr Lauter and Schneider's housekeeper.

The salesman exposed his throbbing, infected finger and laid his hand on a small table in the center of the room. In spite of the pain, he observed what was going on. Light came from three candles on a

stand near the table and a fire in the hearth where water was boiling in a kettle.

Frau Lauter, the hex-doctor, lifted a shoe box from the mantelpiece, and opened it. She took out a rabbit, a spider and a mouse—all dead.

Slowly, with the precision of a surgeon, she removed the heart from the rabbit. Then she cut off the head of the mouse. She placed the rabbit's heart, the mouse's head and the dead spider into a small bowl in which she added boiling water and some red liquid from a small bottle beneath the table. It resembled blood.

She stirred the strange brew slowly. When the magic stew was cool enough she ordered Schneider to hold his infected finger in the unholy concoction and to keep it there until told to remove it.

The candles were then extinguished and Frau Lauter began an eerie chant. The others joined in with weird incantations—a mumbled symphony of creepy discord which stirred Schneider with bewildering sensation.

Soon he felt sleepy. It was all he could do to keep his eyes open, for the pain in his finger felt relieved by the warmth of the fluid surrounding it.

How long the ritual continued, Schneider was not sure, but the fire in the hearth had been long burned out before he felt Frau Lauter lift his finger out of the magic broth and wrap a rag around it. When the finger was completely covered, the room was lighted again.

The salesman was then ordered to go home to bed and not remove the smelly bandage till morning. He followed instructions, fully aware that under the bandage was a nauseating poultice consisting of blood-soaked ingredients he had seen put in the bowl of mystery.

A Cure

It was long after daybreak when Schneider awoke from the soundest sleep he had enjoyed for many days. The housekeeper was knocking at his door. She entered the room and helped him remove the crude bandage from the fatal finger.

Schneider's eyes almost shot from their sockets as he gazed at the finger which the day before he had resigned himself to lose. The swelling was entirely gone—there was no sign of the ugly purple-red inflammation—the flesh was normal in color, and the only mark was the scar where the medical doctor had lanced the infection.

He was so overjoyed that he kissed his elderly housekeeper with gratitude. He wanted to rush over and thank Frau Lauter and her husband, but the housekeeper advised against it. Later he begged her to tell him more of hex magic to which he was now firmly converted.

A Secret Gathering

Knowing that she could now trust him with more secrets of White Magic, she promised to take him to a secret gathering

of the higher cult members scheduled to meet the following Thursday at midnight.

She pledged him to secrecy by holding his cured finger over a metal emblem which she withdrew from her blouse. It resembled a swastika more than an iron cross although it seemed to be a combination of both, and in the center was designed a small eye. Upon her insistence, he then kissed the emblem. She inferred that if he was unfaithful to his pledge, his finger would again become infected and kill him.

The following Thursday brought a black night. Schneider and his housekeeper left in his car for the rendezvous. They traveled a lonely road that he had never taken before. Half an hour later, high in the hills, they came upon a side lane exceedingly rough, and turned into it. About a mile in, they parked the car and proceeded on foot with the aid of a flashlight.

Soon they came upon a barn. Schneider could see no house. There was a light in the barn and he could hear voices. He was surprised to find at least twenty-five men and women inside who paid no attention to him. The Lauters were there. He sat down beside the housekeeper when the chairman pounded a gavel. Chairs were placed in a semi-circle around a crude altar. Several lanterns burned overhead.

An Eye-Witness Account

Here are Schneider's own words as he reported his experiences recently:

"The master was a huge man with a deep voice. Beside him sat a middle-aged woman powerful in body and face. She held an emblem of some kind in her left hand. The master began talking. 'As you know, the woman on Wood Road has refused to obey. She must be punished.'

"The spectators mumbled some words which I could not make out, but they seemed to convey an expression of Amen. I turned to my housekeeper questioningly. She whispered: 'Hold your other hand over your finger which was healed and when they hold the image in front of you, touch it on the same finger.'

"I was trying to understand what she meant when the master ordered: 'Bring in the image.'

"A man and woman left the barn and soon returned carrying what seemed like a large doll but it resembled a woman—not a child. They placed it on the table in front of the master and waited. He held his left hand on his chest, coughed several times and then touched the doll on the breast. Then he ordered all men in the audience to stand up. My housekeeper nudged me, so I rose to my feet.

"I realized now what the housekeeper meant about passing the image in front of me, for I saw the assistant pick up the doll and hold it before the first man. The woman assistant stood behind the male assistant and did not touch the doll herself.

"Then I saw the first man reach out and

(Continued on page 92)

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(Continued from page 91)

touch the doll on the head. Nothing was said. The doll was then held before the second man. He touched it on the throat. Finally it came to me. As though experienced in such mad practice I reached over and touched the doll on the finger matching the one which I nearly lost.

"When all men had applied the apparent curse, the doll was returned to the master who put it in a box. I knew without being told that that doll was made in the image of the unfortunate woman on Wood Road who had not obeyed some command of this mystic cult and had now been hexed. I shuddered as I visioned that poor woman with an infected finger like mine. Mentally I willed against it.

Mysterious Words

"After a long pause of silence, the master muttered some words still beyond my comprehension. The audience likewise responded. As near as I can remember, there was a sound similar to 'Ya-dam-hein-sex.' Fearing that it was some kind of a curse, I did not ask my housekeeper, for I did not want to know and thereby perhaps subconsciously aid in the black hex.

"For a while I was convinced that these people possessed some magic power—but gradually logic began to creep into my mind. 'Suppose the woman does die. That won't prove she was killed by any hex! What is to prevent a certain man or woman actually murdering the woman, perhaps by poison or some disease germ? All but the murderer would think she was killed by the hex. Perhaps that is the basis of hex deaths I had read about. A means of performing a perfect crime where no investigation would be made because everyone believed the death was caused by a curse.'

"For the next half hour the meeting consisted of discussions of various problems concerning illnesses of certain members and what had been done about them. There was also a report on finances such as one would hear at any club meeting. Then suddenly when I was becoming bored, having lost my first uncanny feeling of mystification, the master rose to his feet in salute. Then everyone stood up and waited.

The Beast!

"The master began talking: 'The beast has once more come upon the earth.' This was 1933, remember.

"There was a pause, then the master continued: 'For ten years the power will prevail. For your own protection—here is the mark of the beast.'

"With that he walked to the side of the barn and with chalk drew a swastika on the board. He turned and added: 'Take heed.'

"The meeting was over. The housekeeper took my arm and escorted me out as though she didn't want me to speak to anyone. She evidently knew I was curious.

"On the drive home I waited for her to

give me some explanation, but she was strangely silent. Finally I asked: 'Who is the woman on Wood Road?'

"The answer was: 'Do not be curious. She will not be alive very long.'

"The next morning the housekeeper was no longer the smiling woman I had known. I was glad to get to work. Another week and my job would be finished in this territory.

"I knew I would be glad to get away. I was, although I thanked the woman again for what she had done for me and promised to return sometime on a visit. But as I drove off, she thought suddenly struck me. Had that woman wished that infected finger on me in the beginning—perhaps by poison? Had I been a victim of a 'hex' so that she might use my unknown power during that black night of Black Hex? I had been told that new converts are sought to spread the belief.

"I never found out what happened to the woman on Wood Road. In fact, I didn't want to know.

Was it a Coincidence?

"Years passed. Frequently when I read of Hitler and his swastika I remembered what that Hex master had said back in 1933 about the swastika. 'Just a coincidence,' I said to myself—or perhaps the master had read of Hitler. But last spring when Hitler plunged into Holland on his mad conquest, bringing fear to the entire world, I grew curious. So one Sunday I drove back to that hex spot of strange experience. I wanted to visit the old housekeeper. Maybe I could pick up some startling information concerning the 'mark of the beast.' Was Hitler the beast?

"But the housekeeper was gone. No one knew what had become of her. Even Frau Lauter was dead, but Herr Lauter was still alive. I tried to get him to open up. He didn't seem to remember me.

"Finally I must have bothered him so much, that he replied: 'Dumkopf'—read the Book of Revelations!—and he mentioned several verses as he went in the house and slammed the door.

"When I got back to New York I took out my Bible and turned to the Book of Revelations, to the chapter and verses mentioned by Lauter. Here is what I read in Chapter 13:

"Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war on him? . . . Power was given unto him to continue forty and two months."

(Continued on page 94)

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AT ALL STANDS

(Continued from page 93)

"And then when I started to read Chapter 20 I recalled what Hitler said when he entered Holland: 'This will decide the fate of Germany for a thousand years.' Why had he said a thousand years? Doesn't it seem strange when one reads this in Chapter 20: 'And I saw an angel come down from heaven having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon and bound him a THOUSAND YEARS into the bottomless pit that he should deceive the nations no more.'

Forty and Two Months

"Then I recalled what that Hex master had said back in 1933—that the beast would stay in power for ten years. That would make his defeat occur in 1943. Hadn't I just read that 'power was given him to continue forty and two months.' Hitler began the Second World War September 1, 1939. Forty and two months would bring it to March 1, 1943.

"But what had the hex to do with the Swastika? I remembered—the master had told the people to use that mark as a protection against the beast, based on the hex superstition that like will not attack its kind. And why had he guessed ten years? Because I have since learned that a hex curse lasts ten years!"

—LUCIFER.

LETTERS FROM READERS

THE hot weather doesn't seem to keep people from demonstrating their interest in the Black Arts, or in STRANGE STORIES, as we've had abundantly proved by our stacks of mail! Keep up the good work!

There are a number of interesting letters on hand for this issue, and since we try to print the letters in full as much as possible, we'll have to select just a few representative ones from the pile.

Here's a letter about the Black Arts in Tibet which warrants a membership in the Black Arts Club as a Master:

In Tibet, the most mysterious country on the face of our globe, the Black Arts, or magic, have been perfected to a high degree. Not sleight-of-hand, mind you, but feats unexplainable by modern science. Because of their secluded, unburied lives, so unlike ours, they have meditated, and have been perfecting these practices. For instance we have authenticated reports of monks projecting their inner selves or souls, or minds (the Tibetan is not exactly translatable) to a distant place and upon the return of this entity to the parent body, the projector describes events that took place in that particular locality. They have been verified to have happened at an unpredictable time, when the person could not possibly have been there.

By practicing certain jumping and breathing exercises the initiate is able to master partial lev-

tation, that is to say, they cannot lift themselves entirely from the ground, but they are said to be able to sit on a blade of grass without bending it.

Mental telepathy has been more or less perfected there also. Witness this incident: An explorer—Mrs. Alexandra David-Neel—and her party were on the way to visit a celebrated duchen (magician) and were about two hundred miles from their destination when they unexpectedly came upon a traps (monk) known to be a disciple of the said magician. After learning their destination, the monk stated that his master did not want to be disturbed, because he was very absorbed in the construction of a complicated *kyliker* (magic diagram) and the attendant incantations. However, the party continued on its way, the monk with them being constantly watched so that he could not send a message.

On arriving at the entrance of the valley in which the magician made his home, a group of servants came out to meet them, bearing presents, and said that the magician would be glad to see the "reverend lady" (Mrs. David-Neel was highly respected, being very well learned in their esoteric lore, and having the degree of *goumchenma*) but he was busy constructing the magic diagram and could not be disturbed under any circumstances. The only explanation for this is highly developed mental telepathy.

Then there is the *phurba*, or sacred dagger, that kills whenever the possessor wishes. The killing is done when the person to be killed happens to hold the dagger in his hand and seems to stab himself. It can be called auto-suggestion, or...

I could go on for hours and pages, but I believe this would be enough to show my competence for the degree of Master in the Black Arts Club.

Morris A. Wolf.

Bronx, N. Y.

And here's another bid for Mastership in the BLACK ARTS Club by a member of the feminine sex:

I apply for membership as a Master since I have had some very funny (?) experiences. Take, for instance what happened on Saturday night, June 1, 1940:

I finished my work around 12:30 A. M., and went across the street to the filling station where I park my car. The manager wanted me to go to a tavern north of town with him. I had to wait about fifteen minutes for him to check in his day's receipts. While waiting, I sat down in a lawn chair outside the station and closed my eyes for a second's rest. All at once I saw a picture. It seemed as real as though I were looking at a movie. I saw two cars crash and I experienced a sort of sinking feeling as if I were about to faint. I opened my eyes at once.

In a few minutes, he was ready to go but insisted we go in his Ford coupe.

We were coming home about 3 A. M., and as we

(Continued on page 96)

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(Continued from page 95)

came down a hill and started up another, we hit a car parked in the lane of traffic, without lights. I was rendered unconscious. On regaining my senses, I found I wasn't badly hurt, but immediately the image I had seen at the filling station came back to me. . . .

I like your magazine—from cover to cover—and never miss it. Everything is great as it is.
C. M. Chatterton.

Milaca, Minn.

Now for a couple of general letters from **STRANGE STORIES** readers. Here's one from a new reader:

I have just purchased my first copy of your publication. I thoroughly enjoyed every story, but **SATAN'S SIDESHOW** and **DESIGN FOR DOOM** moved me most. I thought **SATAN'S SIDESHOW** was outstanding because the author dares to conclude his story with an unpleasant ending.
Ed England.

Minneapolis, Minn.

Here's a boost for a frequent contributor to **STRANGE STORIES**:

I have just finished reading your August copy of **STRANGE STORIES**. I particularly liked I AM GOING TO CRACOW, by Maria Moravsky, for its unusually serious elements in stories of this kind. Here's hoping we have more and more stories of the type of Maria Moravsky's.
Paul Voehringer.

San Francisco, Cal.

And here's a letter from an enthusiastic fan:

Please send me a membership card and enroll me in the lists of the Black Arts Club. I am very much interested in the Black Arts and find your magazine extremely interesting. Your stories are weird, yes, and to many they would sound impossible. But stranger things have happened and who can say what goes on in the afterworld beyond death? Your stories are well written and carry with them that tang of reality that makes them a pleasure to read. I look forward with much interest to the next issue.

Phil Davis.

Columbus, Ohio.

Well, that's all for now. Those of you who haven't as yet joined our Black Arts

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We welcome all letters from you, the reader, and we like criticism because it helps us make this a better magazine for you. So sit down and write us what you think about **STRANGE STORIES**. Address The Editor, **STRANGE STORIES**, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. Remember a post card is as welcome as a letter. Keep them rolling in! Thank you.

I'll be seeing you in the next issue when we'll have a fine roster of gripping tales by such authors as Dorothy Quick, Norman A. Daniels, Seabury Quinn, August W. Derleth, Don Alvino and others.

If you like **STRANGE STORIES**, tell your friends—I'm sure many of them would be interested in making the acquaintance of this magazine!

Be seeing you.

—THE EDITOR.

JESSAMIN'S DEATH

(Concluded from page 88)

where he drooped—a trophy on the coat of the careless giant who had already forgotten him. He was the poor little victim of a ghastly, barbaric custom. . . .

* * * * *

"Jack," said a companion in true drunken wisdom, "your flower has wilted."

"So it has," replied the man in the tuxedo. Carelessly he removed the corpse of Jessamin from his button-hole and tossed it into a cuspidor. "I got it this morning from Dr. Guberswald's botanical garden. These cape jasmines are fragile things, aren't they? Don't last long at all."

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