STRANGE TALES

SECOND SELECTION

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STRANGE TALES

Of the Mysterious and Supernatural

CONTENTS

SECOND SELECTION **NINEPENCE**

		Page
Fantastic THE MOON DEVILS	John B. Harris	3
Eerie THE NAMELESS OFFSPRING	Clark Ashton Smith	16
Bizarre THE SORCERER'S JEWEL	Tarleton Fiske	28
Weird THE SONG OF THE DARK STAR	Richard Tooker	39
Macabre COOL AIR	H. P. Lovecraft	50
Horrific THE MANIKIN	Robert Bloch	57

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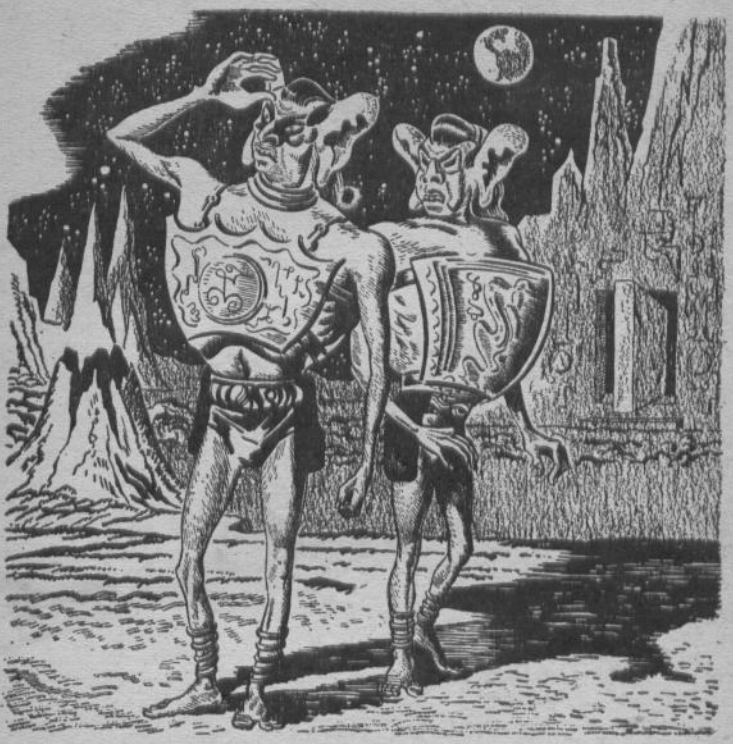

The Moon Devils

By JOHN B. HARRIS

For centuries the Moon-men had laid deathly still in their tomb, where once a strange race had flourished. And then the explorers from Earth came to disturb their slumbers . . . .

THE secretary of the Lunar Archaeological Society approached his employer with a nervous diffidence. His method of stating his business was, to put it mildly, indirect. The president was a man who hated circumlocution. He became testy

"Come on, man. What's the trouble? Out with it!"

Still the secretary hesitated. Then, with sudden decision, he thrust a

packet of papers clumsily towards his chief. "These came this morning, sir. I thought you ought to know. They're a bit—er—peculiar."

"All right. I'll look at 'em."

The secretary departed with some relief, and the president turned back to his interrupted work. Half an hour later, he remembered the pile of papers and took up the covering letter which lay on top. A name standing out amid the type caught his eye. He stiffened, stared at it, and began to read more carefully. The heading was a Liverpool address, and the date a fortnight old.

"Dear Sir," it began. "On the sixteenth of June last the *S.S. Turkoman*, to which I was medical officer rescued a man at a point not far from the Solomon Islands. He was found drifting in a native canoe and, judging from his condition, had been in it for some days. The results of such exposure were aggravated by the serious ill-treatment he had received in the form of severe cuts and wounds. At first it appeared to be impossible to save him, but his body eventually responded to treatment, though his mind still wandered.

"He was a man of considerable education, and gave his name as Stephen Dawcott. Upon arrival here, I placed him in a mental home. During the next four months I was absent, and when I returned it was to find that he had made good his escape. The authorities were mystified and handed to me the enclosed manuscript, which he had left behind. They saw it as the raving of a madman, but to me it seems a matter requiring a less facile explanation. I await your reply with interest."

The signature was John Haddon, and to it were appended the letters, M.D. The president frowned as he set aside the letter and took up the manuscript. There had been a Stephen Dawcott, an anthropologist of some note, aboard the *Scintilla*. But the *Scintilla* was lost. From the day she had left the flying field on her maiden trip to the Moon, nearly a year ago not a word had been heard from her. She had roared from Earth into mysterious non-existence.

But Stephen Dawcott had been aboard her; he was sure of that. He, and others of the Lunar Archaeological Society, had seen Dawcott's among the faces at the windows before the *Scintilla* took off. And now the man was reported as having been picked up in Melanesia, of all unlikely places. The president's frown deepened as he began to read the manuscript.

THE *Scintilla* behaved in an exemplary manner on her outward journey. She fully justified the high hopes of her designers by the smooth swiftness with which she leapt out from Earth. Captain Toft was delighted with her performance, and swore there could be no sweeter ship to handle in all the ether. Those of us who had taken part in earlier space-flights agreed unreservedly. The new Danielson acceleration compensators had proved their worth, and ridded space-flying for evermore of the starting strain and its unpleasant effects. In design, furnishing and facilities for carrying such fragile relics as we might find, the *Scintilla* was a credit to the Lunar Archaeological Society who had built and so lavishly equipped her.

The perfect start, followed by the peaceful smoothness of our voyage, could have raised no apprehensions in the most psychic soul. Indeed, what possible cause could there be for apprehension? The silver globe before us was worn out, arid and still with the supreme stillness of death. No ship cruising above that gutted shell of a world had seen sign of as much life

as lies in a blade of grass. Even the crater of Linne, which had been suspected of harbouring the last vestiges of life, had been found as barren as the rest.

"Dead," I murmured as we gazed out of the living-cabin windows at the withered satellite. "A whole world mummified and at rest." But I did not know Luna then. Did not know to the full that desperation with which life strives and clings. . . .

We made first for the North-East Quadrant, and sank to a gentle landing on the glittering metallic dust which makes the crater of Aristarchus the brightest spot on the face of the Moon. This was to be a preliminary trip, our object to survey the ground for future operations rather than make them ourselves. A number of sites were to be examined and reported upon with a view to deciding which would be the most profitable to excavate. Aristarchus held little of interest to us, save the almost obliterated remains of a small settlement upon the north side.

The details of our trip are of little interest here, so I merely record that we moved next, unprofitably, to the Mare Crisium and thence across the equator to Tycho. Next, Clavius, greatest of all the craters, provided quantities of material and showed indisputably that a great civilisation had once flourished in what is now only a vast bowl of sand and rock a hundred and forty miles in diameter. Thus we came at last to the Mare Serenitatis, the Sea of Serenity.

Who named this immense oval plain? I cannot remember, but I do know that he saw it only through a telescope, two hundred and thirty-nine thousand miles away. He did not see it as we did—a huge sterile stretch, grey-floored and gloomy. Had he been able to stand upon one of the tortured mountains at its brink and look out across that sombre desolation of sand he would have called it, not the Sea of Serenity, but the Sea of Foreboding. . . .

WE sailed slowly across to the north-west. Every member of the expedition was at the windows, scanning the featureless floor for any sign the ancient Lunarians might have left. Until now we had felt no uneasiness. All the Moon is bare, but the harshness of its vistas had not played upon our nerves; it was only what we had expected and could scarcely affect us. But now the monotony of this great, dry sea-bed seemed to impress us all in greater or lesser degree. Unromantic scientists though we were, we felt a misgiving which none of us was willing to put into words.

And then, less than twenty miles from the far side of the sea, the steady throbbing of our rockets was interrupted. The firing-tubes began to stutter uncertainly. I was with Captain Toft when the chief engineer rang through and reported that it would be necessary to descend for repairs. The hasty glance which Toft gave through the control-dome windows told me that he had conceived the same distaste for the locality as had the rest of us. He decided swiftly to make for the cliffs now looming ahead at the sea's edge. There could be no better landing surface than the level grey sand beneath us, but he preferred to stop near its confines.

With some anxiety he inquired the extent of the failure, but was told that this could not be ascertained while in flight The *Scintilla* continued to forge lamely ahead, gradually sinking. She took the sand, at length, some two hundred yards from those high, perpendicular cliffs which once had stood like the ramparts of giants against a beating sea.

The Captain left the dome to interview the engineer, and I made my way

to the central saloon. A deal of chatter greeted me as I opened the door. My colleagues were peering excitedly at the cliffs; all signs of their depression had vanished. Robson, the leader of the scientific side of the expedition, drew me forward and thrust a pair of field-glasses into my hands.

"Look at those cliffs, man. Just look at them!"

I focused eagerly. The sand in the immediate foreground was dotted with rocks of all sizes which had fallen from the heights, and beyond them was a line of darkness which hid the cliff-face in deep shadow. The meagre reflected light was just enough to show regular markings of some kind. I fancied that I could make out the carved figure of a man.

"Wait a minute" cried Robson, as he turned and dashed from the room.

A moment later, a searchlight was playing a flood of brilliance on to a scene which caused us to gasp incredulously. The surface of the granite-like rock, to the height of some seventy or eighty feet, was covered with carvings in high relief—an involved, ingenious ordering of the figures of men, animals and conventional forms. The first astonished silence was succeeded by a babel of excited talk. Everyone spoke at once, and no one listened. And no wonder; for compared to this revelation, our earlier discoveries dwindled to mere nothings. It seemed that we might have found the Lunar Book of the Dead carved upon this mighty stone page.

ROBSON came back and started to tow me in the direction of the space-suit lockers. He continued to babble excitedly as he lifted the clumsy garments from their hooks. The suits were essential; for although, contrary to expectation, it had been found that some air still existed upon the Moon, and in the deepest craters it was almost breathable during the Lunar day, yet the rarity of such as lingered in the beds of the vanished seas compelled artificial aid.

As we left the ship and drew near the cliffs, I think there was no doubt in any of our minds that the design was picture-writing of some kind. The irregular repetition of certain glyphs practically established the fact. None of us, of course, could yet attempt any translation, but the photographers were already arranging their cameras to provide a record for more leisured study. I watched them work with an untraceable sense of uneasiness creeping over me. But the rest were too enthusiastic, too occupied with pointing out details and symbols which might or might not be analogous with similar symbols on Earth, to share my anxiety, and I did not mention it. It was too irrational, illogical. . . .

It was Robson who made the great find. He had gone close up to the cliff and was examining a floridly incised square of the surface. Presently his cry sounded in all our receivers.

"A door. There's a door in the cliff!"

We crowded up to him and found that the square was bordered all around by a narrow crack. Millennia ago, when there had been a wind upon the Moon, the grey sand had drifted up at the foot; but it took only a few moments' scratching to lay bare the threshold of the stone panel. Already, at the ruins in Clavius, we had established that the Luna practice had been to swing a door upon a central pivot so that it turned sidewise through ninety degrees, leaving a passage to either side. Accordingly, Robson flung himself upon one side and pushed. Finding it immovable he transferred his strength to the other side. It moved back an inch or so, and then stuck.

Spurred on, he brought every ounce of his strength to bear; and slowly the great rock door, which would have defied the efforts of three men on Earth, swung around. Without hesitation, he switched on the light at his belt and walked in. We followed him for ten yards; then he stopped.

"Another door," he complained irritably. "They certainly meant to preserve whatever's inside. Let's have some more light on this."

The second door was plainer than the outer, and the only sign on it was a deep-graven circle. As I looked at the circle my premonitions intensified. The circle—the world-wide sign of infinity, eternity. Could it be possible that here on Luna . . . ? I almost called upon the others to stop, but realised in time how weakly my warning would fall before their exploring zest.

"It's sealed," someone discovered. He pointed to a dozen or more blobs of black, shiny composition fixed across the jambs. On each of these, too, was impressed the sign of the circle.

TO THE non-anthropologist it may seem strange that I should have attached an earthly importance to the sign of the circle here on the Moon. But it is, with the possible exception of the cross, the earliest and most widely used of symbols. It was significant of man's will to immortality in all parts of the globe from far back in pre-history, and it remains significant still. It had dominated the lives of many races, and now here it was again—on the Moon!

I stood unhappily aside and watched the rest break the seals. But the door still refused to yield, even to the efforts of five men. They drew their knives and fell to scraping out a tight-plugged paste around the edges. They tried again, but still the stone square stood adamant. Robson suggested a small charge of explosive. "The door has no value," he pointed out. "There's no carving on it except the circle."

The rest agreed, after a momentary hesitation. Ten minutes later, the face of the door was cracked across and a crowbar was levering the fragments apart. The barrier soon succumbed, and we scrambled over the ruins to arrive in a large hewn room. Here and there, black openings in the walls suggested corridors to further rooms, but we gave them little attention at present, for our interest was centred in a scatter of long boxes lying on the floor. They were made of some grey metal which reflected the rays of our lamps only dully. One close by the door had suffered from the explosion. The lid was loosened and lay awry. Through the space it had opened there hung a human hand. . . .

Robson laid hold of the battered edge and wrenched the lid clean away. As his eyes fell on the contents he started back in surprise. We hurried to his side and stared down in astonishment—men of Earth looking for the first time upon a man of the Moon! He was perfectly preserved; and we, poor fools, wondered at the artistry which had been able so to conserve an unshrouded corpse that after thousands—perhaps millions—of years it could have appeared to have lived but yesterday.

Not one of us guessed the truth about that body. We were sufficiently conceited to believe that no race could have surpassed us in any branch of knowledge. We looked down upon the Moonman, noting his almost unbelievable chest development, remarking his brown pigmentation and the Mongolian slant of his eyes, observing that he was a little shorter than the shortest of us, and telling one another that he was brachycephalic, classifying him. If any one of us happened to notice that the lips were drawn

back in a smile, he did not mention it. Of what interest to a scientist is a dead man's smile?

When we returned to the *Scintilla* for rest and replenishment of our oxygen supplies, Captain Toft greeted us with the information that the wear in our firing-tubes was more extensive than had been suspected. It would take, he thought, nearly twenty-four hours to effect the replacements. The delay irritated him, for he had meant to follow daylight around the Moon to the invisible side. The present situation would cause night to overtake us, for the flaring Sun was already not far from the horizon and the dark line of the two weeks long Lunar night was crawling towards us, a bare twelve hours away.

But we did not share his anxiety to be off. Indeed, we welcomed the delay, for it gave us some time for investigation. Night or day would not matter to us in the rock vault. A dozen specimen coffins were loaded aboard the *Scintilla*, after we had opened them to assure ourselves that they contained the bodies of six men and six women. With these safely stowed away, we felt at liberty to examine the vault more thoroughly.

There was little to repay detailed investigation of the place itself. No carving or decoration graced the interior; but we found that it and the subsidiary chambers contained a surprising quantity of coffins—altogether, more than four hundred of them. Each one, when opened, revealed a puzzling device whose purpose we could not guess. As the lid was raised on its hinges two secondary occurrences took place. At the first loosening of the catches, something inside dropped with a musical tinkle. Investigation revealed the fragments of a small glass globe, smashed to pieces. Then the actual pushing up of the lid thrust, by means of an ingenious arrangement of levers, a slender, hollow glass spike deep into the corpse's flank. This was automatically withdrawn as the lid passed the perpendicular.

Robson and I examined the device curiously, but could make nothing of it. "I guess it's something to do with preservation," he suggested vaguely, and turned his attention to the other contents.

MANY of the coffins enclosed, not only trinkets and trappings upon the still forms, but also sheets of withered writing material covered with a quasi-pictorial script. This obviously must be collected, but since prolonged work in space-suits is inadvisable, we came to an arrangement of shifts. My turn came some six hours before sunset, and my companions were Jay Royden and Walter Greg, good men both. We were not unduly depressed when we left the *Scintilla's* lock. My own earlier misgivings had all but disappeared under the cheering influence of the others, and if I thought at all as we made for the vault entrance, it was of the good luck which had caused the *Scintilla* to have her misadventure here. But for that, we might never have seen the rock carvings.

The three of us were soon scrambling once more into the hewn tomb. For an hour or more we worked quietly. Necklaces, bangles, daggers and rings, which would soon be proudly shown in the museums of Earth were methodically stripped from their owners' still forms. The Lunarians, it seemed, did not know clothes as we do. What little they wore was not for covering but for ornament, in the way of worked belts, intricate breastplates and the like. Very soon our miscellaneous recollection began to form a sizeable pile, and I decided that it would be more convenient to remove it from the chamber where we were working to a spot nearer the

main entrance.

Two journeys were necessary, and as I made the second I came upon a sight which brought me up with a jerk. One of the coffins by my way lay open, and the inmate's hand rested on the edge! I stared in shocked horror. It had not lain so during my previous journey.

I hurried past with a thumping, painful heart. I dropped my burden with the other plunder, and turned to scan the vault with the awful intensity of growing panic. My ears strained to listen, though I was cut off from all external sounds. Something seemed to flicker just beyond the rays of my lamp. I jerked stiffly towards it, but the light showed nothing amiss. I turned on, scouring the place with my lamp. Nothing. . . . Nothing. . . .

Then I turned back to the first corner. My arms fell weakly; my heart hammered in panic. A corpse sat upright in its coffin!

I must have cried out, for I heard Walter's voice in my receiver. "What is it?" he was calling anxiously.

"Come here quickly!" was all I could manage. But the urgency in my voice started them without further question. I stood with my back to the main entrance and turned my light on the passage-mouth from which they must emerge. Something moved again outside the circle of light, but I dared not throw the rays upon it.

The two grotesque, space-suited figures came hurrying into sight. As they saw me, Walter demanded again: "What is it?"

I did not answer him; instead I shouted, "Look out!" A dimly-seen shape was moving in the shadow behind them. Walter snatched at his knife and made to turn but swift as he was, he was too late. A naked brown arm came snaking over his shoulder. Its elbow crooked under the front of his helmet and dragged his head back. Another brown hand shot groping for his knife, and even as Jay turned to help, another pair of brown arms came twining about him and I had a glimpse of a slant-eyed face leering beyond.

The hand which sought Walter's knife tore it from his grasp. I could hear him grunt as he struggled to keep it. Then clearly through the microphone came a tearing sound as the knife ripped the space-suit, and the following whistle of exhaling air. Walter gave one choking cry. . . .

The whole affair had been too sudden for me to give any help. Before I could take more than a step came a second tearing sound and I knew that Jay, too, was past help. I stopped suddenly—no use to go on. Then I saw that the corpse which had caused me fright was no longer sitting—he was climbing out of his coffin, his face leering towards me. I turned and sprang for the open, racing for my life across the sea-bottom.

THEY didn't believe it. Already I had shown signs of queer behaviour, and now I was babbling fantastic nonsense. Dead men coming to life! Dead men fighting the living! Obviously my brain was turned.

The doctor attempted to soothe me. Robson vainly attempted to reach Walter and Jay on the radio. There was an odd expression on his face when he turned back to look at me.

"Can't raise them," he said. "Something's certainly wrong. Do you think——?" He broke off and nodded suggestively towards me. The rest looked serious. They did not put their thoughts into words but they were plain enough on their faces. Three men alone—and one of them a madman!

Two volunteered to go out and search. The rest began to help them into their space-suits. I begged and besought them not to go, but they only cursed me for getting in their way. Others dragged me back and held me penned in a corner.

"Good God, you fools," I raged at them, "wouldn't they have called you if I'd run amuck like you think? Can't you see I'm telling you the truth? If you go over there they'll get you, you fools—you bloody fools! They'll get you!"

Nobody gave me a scrap of attention. The men were clad and their helmets affixed. As they left the air-lock Robson switched on the radio to keep in communication. My anger passed as I helplessly watched them trudge towards the search-lit cliff-face. Nothing I could do would save them now. We saw them pause by the open stone door and heard their voices in the speaker as they settled who should take the lead. Then they disappeared. For a few seconds there was nothing but the sound of breathing. Suddenly a voice with a tinge of nervousness spoke.

"What was that? Something moved."

"Nothing," answered the other. For our benefit, he added: "We are just climbing over the remains of the second door—now we're in the vault. There's—God, what's that?" His voice was suddenly shrill—and then it broke. "Quick, out of this. Quick, man—back for heaven's sake!"

After that it was a jumble—hard breathing mingled with odd phrases: "—dozens of 'em!" "—got him!" "Keep together!" Then: "Look out, he's got a knife!" Horror-stricken, we heard the sound of stout cloth ripped asunder—gasping cries. After that, all was silent.

My companions turned wondering eyes upon me, full of uneasy fears. Robson murmured something which might have been an apology. He begged for the whole story. I told him as calmly as I could all that I knew.

He found it meagre. "Have you any theories?" he demanded.

I had been thinking but I hesitated. "It's rather a fantastic theory," I admitted.

"Of course it is! This whole thing's fantastic. Let's have it."

"You remember what happened when we opened the coffins? A globe of something dropped and smashed. Then, too, there were those glass needles. There must have been a purpose behind them."

Robson looked hard at me. "You mean that the needles might have been some kind of hypodermic?"

"Something of that sort," I nodded.

"And that they revived what we thought were corpses?"

"There were the glass globes, too," I reminded him.

"But it's ridiculous, preposterous! After thousands of years. . . . There might be a possibility of suspended animation for a short time, but this!"

"Why should it be impossible for an indefinite length of time? The fact that we don't know how to do it doesn't prove its impossibility. Those coffins were air-tight; they may have been full of preserving gas for all we know. We couldn't notice that while we were wearing space-suits."

"But——"

"Oh, all right," I said. "I'm only offering a theory. Can you think of a better one?"

Robson turned to contemplate the cliff. "But why?" he murmured. "Why?"

"Why do men put up memorials?" I asked. "It's a habit, an instinct

to perpetuate. I should say these people had just the same instinct. Their world was dying; the race was dying. Perhaps they thought that it was only a phase and that the Moon would become fertile once more. Anyway, on the face of it, it looks as though they decided to take a chance and try to save some of their race for whatever future there might be."

"But how can they live?" asked someone. "There's hardly any air."

"But remember the enormous lung capacity," said Robson.

WITH the suggestion of a rational explanation, the fears of the party grew less intense. Some of the more adventurous even volunteered to undertake a further investigation. They could go prepared and well armed. But Robson vetoed the idea at once. He pointed out that there were over four hundred Lunarians ready to over-run them faster than they could fire.

"But we don't mean them any harm."

"Nor did the others but they got theirs. It doesn't seem to have occurred to you that they must have food. There was nothing to eat in the vault."

We looked at one another. This implication of the immediate capture of our men had not struck us before. It did so now, unpleasantly. Robson summoned Captain Toft. This was a danger which concerned the whole ship, not merely our scientific group. The Captain's incredulity was easily beaten down by our massed conviction. He was all for action and rescue, until he realised that the space-suits had been slit and that the men were past all help. Robson pressed for the immediate removal of the *Scintilla* from the Mare Serenitatis to a less dangerous resting-place in some crater, but Toft shook his head.

"The engines are down for repairs. Even by forcing work to the limit it'll take another ten hours." Our faces looked anxious enough to make him add. "I'll do my best, you may depend on that, but I can't promise a minute less than ten hours."

Robson thought for a while. At last he spoke. "We must keep them penned up as long as we can. I want two men to go outside and take rifles. Every man or woman who tries to get out of that vault must be shot."

Two volunteers were immediately forthcoming. They hurried into space-suits, and were on their way to the lock when a shout from a watcher at the window stopped them.

"Too late," he called. "They're out!"

A knot of a dozen or more Moon-men had just emerged. They halted a few paces from the cliff and stood on the grey sand, shielding their eyes with their hands from the glare of our searchlight, and looked about them. Now that they were erect, their differences from Earth-men appeared more pronounced. The large ears developed for catching sounds in the thin air seemed to dwarf their heads, and the huge bulging chests were so disproportionate as to render all the limbs skinny and spindly by contrast. They looked bewildered by the barrenness of the world they now faced. Not only did it fail to fulfil their expectations, but it was obviously different from their last view of it. One man raised his arm and pointed to a distinctively distorted crag as though it were a recognisable landmark. The rest nodded and let their eyes wander, searching for other familiar sights. More of their kind came out of the vault and joined them. After a short conference, they seemed to reach a

decision and the whole group turned towards the *Scintilla*.

The doctor, standing next to me, was watching them with close attention. "They're not doing too well," he murmured. "Even those great lungs are labouring a bit. The atmosphere must have been a great deal denser when they went in. I wonder just how long ago——?"

Robson's voice cut him short. He was addressing the two in space-suits. "They mean mischief. You two get up into the control-dome and take your rifles. We'll evacuate the dome, and then you can open the windows and pick them off if necessary."

The two men left the room, and we heard them clattering up the metal ladders. Robson was right. The Moon-men and women did mean mischief. It was in their gleaming eyes and bared teeth as they approached. They had resumed the trappings that we had pilfered. Each wore the broad worked belt of Luna, and about their necks and anklets glittered metal bangles. Black hair, held back from their faces by ornate circlets, depended in a lank mane upon their shoulders and down their backs.

One man, slightly taller than the rest, appeared to be the leader. As they drew close he turned to incite the rest. A moment later, a volley of rocks and stones clattered futilely against the *Scintilla's* metal sides. We took heart. The primitive simplicity of such an attack encouraged us. Half a minute later, two Moon-men dropped inert. Our men in the dome had gone into action. The attackers, by now a hundred strong, were thrown into momentary confusion. But the wavering was brief, and in a few seconds they were running towards us. They had seen in a flash that once beneath the ship's overhanging sides they would be safe from the marksmen above.

A well-placed rock put the searchlight out of action and plunged the cliff-face into intense shadow. It became impossible for the riflemen to pick off the reinforcements which would pour from the tomb. They would be all but invisible until the line of sunlight was reached—and that line was crawling slowly closer to us with the sinking of the Sun. Another searchlight was switched on, but it too was swiftly obscured. The main body of the attackers was now out of view from our windows, though a large number of stragglers continued to dart from the shadow towards the ship. Of these, a number fell to the guns, but a large number won through unharmed.

FROM down the corridor came the sudden clanging of an attack upon our outer door. We looked at one another and smiled. There was precious little to be feared from that direction. Nor were the Moon-men long in realising that the steel would defy their utmost efforts. In a very short time they came clustering around the window, hungrily gloating and excitedly jostling one another as they peered in. The leader picked up a prodigious rock which could not have been stirred by one man on Earth. He flung it with a mighty heave against the fused pane. The pane was unharmed, but Robson looked serious.

"I don't know how much of that sort of thing it will stand," he said doubtfully. "If they try two or three of those rocks simultaneously——?"

The same idea had occurred to the Moon-men. We saw them collecting the largest rocks they could handle. There was a leering look of triumph on the face of the leader as he regarded us through his slant eyes.

Robson rushed back and opened the door. "Quick, out of this!" he shouted.

We left in a headlong rush, and as the last of us came through we heard the crash of the shattered window. The door snapped to behind us automatically as the air pressure fell. Within a couple of minutes a furious battering began towards the stern. Half a dozen of us raced down the ship. As we clattered through the engine-room the chief engineer looked up, spanner in hand. He was working all he knew. The grime on his face was trickled with sweat and his hair damp and flat.

"Clamp on the emergency plates!" he called as we passed. There had been no time in the main cabin to fix the heavy steel plates across the windows, but now we seized them from their racks and set to with a will. No sooner was a plate fixed over one porthole than the Moon-men turned their attack to another, and we had to rush to cover that also with an emergency plate.

In the middle of the activity came word that the men in the control-dome were abandoning their position. The place was becoming untenable on account of the bombardment of rocks, for while the rocks could be thrown on a trajectory which kept the throwers concealed, the riflemen must have direct vision before their shots could be effective. For what seemed several hours we lived in a nightmare of rushes from point to point. As fast as we made one spot safe, another was attacked. Then at last, when we were weary to the point of exhaustion we became aware that the frenzy was lessening. The batterings grew fewer and feebler, until at length they stopped altogether.

We waited, puzzled. It was almost an hour before we cautiously removed an emergency plate and peered out. Only then did we understand the abrupt cessation of hostilities. The Sun had set and the sea-bed shimmered coldly in the pale, green-blue Earth-light. Of the Moon-men only a few still, crumpled forms were to be seen.

"They've gone," I said. "But why?"

Robson pointed towards the cliff, and I saw that the stone door was now closed.

"The cold," he explained. "Right now it's colder out there than anything you've ever known. In a little while it will be so cold that what little air there is left will freeze solid."

"And the Moon-men?"

"It means the end of them. Even in their vaults the air will freeze—though they'll freeze first."

"Poor devils," I said. "To wait all those thousands of years just for this—to freeze to death!"

I had an unhappy vision of the last luckless Moon-men and women huddled together in their lightless tomb, waiting without hope for the creeping coldness of death. Robson's voice broke my mood.

"All hands on the job," he said briskly. "We've got to get ship-shape again. Captain Toft, what are your orders, sir?"

IT WAS decided that we would make for Earth. The morale of the *Scintilla's* company was too shaken to undertake the exploration of Luna's hidden side on our present trip. Since little or no calculation was necessary, Toft waited only until the engines were repaired before he headed straight for the great pale disc of Terra.

The ground fell away, and we looked for the last time on that misnamed Sea of Serenity. A few scattered brown figures were visible in the Earth-light; they seemed like a sad symbol of the littleness of that passing

phase of worlds which we call life With that final glimpse those of us not on duty turned away and sought our cabins for overdue rest.

I slept long. It was all of twelve hours before I reopened my cabin door. My way down the passage led me past the chief engineer's room, and I hesitated outside his door, wondering whether to take him along for breakfast or whether to let him have his sleep out. My hand was on the knob when the door opened abruptly and in the doorway stood a woman—a Moon-woman!

I stood frozen with the shock, staring at her. She returned the stare, white teeth and dark eyes glinting. She crouched slightly, becoming the more grotesque and horrifying. Her right hand slid forward and I saw that it held a knife which was red with blood. I lunged to grip her wrist, but she was too swift. With a twist and a cry she had passed me and was away up the corridor. I hesitated, then turned into the engineer's cabin. One look at him was enough; the Moon-devil must have slashed and slashed . . .

For a moment I stood irresolute. The engineer's face might well have been mine—and I was not safe now. I ran into the corridor; the rest must be warned.

At the threshold of the living-cabin, I checked in horror. Five still forms lay on the floor, each of them horribly mutilated. I recoiled and fled to the control-dome, hoping desperately. My fears were in vain. Just in the entrance, I stumbled over the bodies of two officers. Beside a third figure crouched a Moon-woman. At my entrance she arose and whirled towards me. I could see that the man at her feet was Toft, alive, but bound and helpless.

She faced me like some terrifying Medusa, stepping cat-like, a knife in either hand. I backed and grasped a chair intending to use it as a weapon—I had forgotten that all furniture on the ship must be fixed. She gave a cry, semi-human and chilling. Then a door on the far side of the dome opened suddenly to reveal a group of the grotesque Moon-men and women. It was more than I could stand; I fled, bolting the door behind me.

For the next twelve hours I remained locked in my cabin. There was plenty of time to review our folly. How could we, even in our excitement, have overlooked the possibility of menace from those twelve coffins that we had taken aboard? And not only had we taken them aboard, but we had even opened them to assure ourselves of their contents. Surely some of us should have foreseen the danger! Either Robson or myself ought to have fastened down the lids, or better still have jettisoned them upon the Moon.

And in the middle of my self-blame, it came to me that this was not the end. They must have taken the ship completely by surprise and murdered every man they had found except Toft; they would make him show them how to work the ship, or else force him to guide the *Scintilla* back to Earth himself. The Moon-people had planned thousands of years ago their bid for survival, and it had not yet failed. A dozen of the Lunarians might yet be let loose upon Earth!

I was unarmed, for all the weapons were kept in a cupboard off the main living-cabin. I would have to get there before I could avenge my comrades and wipe out the Moon-folk. I crept to the door and listened. One hasty glance up and down the corridor assured me that it was empty, and I made stealthily in the direction of the bows. I reached the main cabin undetected, and slipped inside. Averting my eyes from the shambles

on the floor, I sought the armoury cupboard. Its steel door was locked. . . .

Footsteps rang on the floor beyond the opposite door. In a flash I was across the room and back by the way I had entered—weaponless and perhaps the only survivor, unless they had permitted Toft still to live. What could I do? I could think of nothing but that I must live and carry my warning. And to live, I must have food. By devious ways I gained the storeroom, and piled the necessities of life into an empty case. I had lugged it halfway back to my cabin when misfortune overtook me. Rounding a corner, I came face to face with a Moon-man.

His surprise was greater than mine—I got in a good drive to the chin while he still stared. He went down with a cry which was half shout and half groan. It was not loud, but it served to alarm his fellows. There came a din of feet pounding down the corridor behind me. Leaving my case of food, I jumped over the prostrate man and fled.

Running and sliding on the metal floors, I made for the only safe place I knew—my cabin. The clatter of pursuing feet grew louder, spurring me on. Turning at last into the final alley, I found my way blocked. But I was desperate, and there was only one thing to do. I put my head down and charged like a bull at the four brown figures before me. There was a brief, whirling nightmare of kicking and hammering, and then somehow I broke out of that melee and gained my cabin. With a final effort, I slammed the door in my pursuers' faces. My chest and face were bloody and lacerated. I remember pulling free a Moon-man's dagger which lodged in my left shoulder, and after that—nothing.

The jolt of a rough landing finally roused me from my coma. With an excruciating effort, I raised my stiff body to look through the small porthole. Outside was a stretch of white sand and beyond it a line of frothing breakers, glistening in the sunlight. Somehow, the Moon-men had brought the *Scintilla* back to Earth.

I was a sick man, and it took me a long time to move. When at length I managed to stagger down the passage, it was to find the entrance wide open and the ship deserted. Somewhere in the green forest which fringed the beach, the Moon-folk were prowling and hunting. I made my difficult way to the fuel-store, and close to the tanks I lit a slow fuse; at least, there would be no *Scintilla* as a safe base for the Moon devils' operations. Then, as fast as I could, I made my way along the shore.

A few days later, I found a long-neglected canoe. I repaired it the best I could and paddled it out to sea.

THE President of the Lunar Archaeological Society frowned. He pulled his ear reflectively, then shook his head slowly. He turned the bunch of papers over and, still frowning, began to read them again.

Preposterous, of course, but—well, there *had* been a Stephen Dawcott, and he *had* sailed on the *Scintilla*.

The Nameless Offspring

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Too dreadful for belief was the legend of Tremoth Hall, of the hidden dweller in the burial-vaults and the thing in the barred room.

Many and multiform are the dim horrors of Earth, infesting her ways from the prime. They sleep beneath the unturned stone; they rise with the tree from its root; they move beneath the sea and in subterranean places; they dwell in the inmost adyta; they emerge betimes from the shutten sepulchre of haughty bronze and the low grave that is sealed with clay. There be some that are long known to man, and others as yet unknown that abide the terrible latter days of their revealing. Those which are the most dreadful and the loathliest of all are haply still to be declared. But among those that have revealed themselves aforetime and have made manifest their veritable presence, there is one which may not openly be named for its exceeding foulness. It is that spawn which the hidden dweller in the vaults has begotten upon mortality.—From the *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred.

IN A sense, it is fortunate that the story I must now relate should be so largely a thing of undetermined shadows, of half-shaped hints and for-

bidden inferences. Otherwise, it could never be written by human hand or read by human eye. My own slight part in the hideous drama was limited to its last act, and to me its earlier scenes were merely a remote and ghastly legend. Yet even so, the broken reflex of its unnatural horrors has crowded out in perspective the main events of normal life; has made them seem no more than frail gossamers woven on the dark, windy verge of some unsealed abyss, some deep, half-open charnel wherein Earth's nethermost corruptions lurk and fester.

The legend of which I speak was familiar to me from childhood as a theme of family whispers and head shakings, for Sir John Tremoth had been a school-mate of my father. But I had never met Sir John, had never visited Tremoth Hall, till the time of those happenings which formed the final tragedy. My father had taken me from England to Canada when I was a small infant; he had prospered in Manitob as an apiarist, and for years after his death the bee ranch had kept me too busy to execute a long-cherished dream of visiting my natal land and exploring its rural by-ways.

When finally I set sail, the story was pretty dim in my memory, and Tremoth Hall was no conscious part of my itinerary when I began a motor-cycle tour of the English counties. In any case, I should never have been drawn to the neighbourhood out of morbid curiosity such as the frightful tale might possibly have evoked in others. My visit, as it happened, was purely accidental. I had forgotten the exact location of the place and did not even dream that I was in its vicinity. If I had known it seems to me that I should have turned aside, in spite of the circumstances that impelled me to seek shelter, rather than intrude upon the almost demoniacal misery of its owner.

When I came to Tremoth Hall I had ridden all day through a rolling countryside with leisurely, winding lanes. The day had been fair, with skies of pale azure above noble parks that were tinged with the first amber and crimson of autumn. But toward the middle of the afternoon a mist had come in from the hidden ocean across low hills, and had closed me about with its moving, phantom circle. Somehow, in that deceptive fog, I managed to lose my way, to miss the mile-post that would have given me direction to the town where I had planned to spend the ensuing night.

I went on for a while at random, thinking that I should soon reach another crossroad. The way that I followed was little more than a rough lane and was singularly deserted. The fog had darkened and drawn closer, obliterating all horizons, but from what I could see of it the country was all heath and boulders, with no sign of cultivation. I topped a level ridge and went down a long, monotonous slope as the mist continued to thicken with twilight. I thought that I was riding toward the west, but before me in the wan dusk was no faintest gleam or flare of colour to betoken the drowned sunset. A dank odour that was touched with salt, like the smell of sea marshes, came to meet me.

The road turned at a sharp angle, and I seemed to be riding between downs and marshland. The night gathered with an almost unnatural quickness, as if in haste to overtake me, and I began to feel a dim concern that I had gone astray in regions that were more dubious than an English county. The fog and twilight seemed to withhold a silent landscape of chill, disquieting mystery.

Then, to the left of my road and a little before me, I saw a light that somehow suggested a mournful and tear-dimmed eye. It shone among blurred, uncertain masses that were like trees from a ghostland wood. A

nearer mass, as I approached it, was resolved into a small lodge building such as would guard the entrance of some estate. It was dark and apparently unoccupied. Pausing and peering, I saw the outlines of a wrought-iron gate in a hedge of untrimmed yew. It all had a desolate and forbidding air, and I felt in my very marrow the brooding chillness that had come in from the unseen marsh in that dismal, ever-coiling fog. But the light was promise of human nearness on the lonely downs, and I might obtain shelter for the night or at least find someone who could direct me to a town or inn.

Somewhat to my surprise, the gate was unlocked. It swung inward with a rusty, grating sound, as if it had not been opened for a long time, and pushing my motor-cycle before me, I followed a weed-grown drive toward the light. The rambling mass of a large manor house disclosed itself among trees and shrubs whose artificial forms, like the hedge of ragged yew, were assuming a wilder grotesquery than they had received from the hand of the topiary.

THE FOG had turned into a bleak drizzle. Almost groping in the gloom, I found a dark door at some distance from the window that gave forth the solitary light. In response to my thrice-repeated knock, I heard at length the muffled sound of slow, dragging footfalls. The door was opened with a gradualness that seemed to indicate caution or reluctance, and I saw before me an old man bearing a lighted taper in his hand. His fingers trembled with palsy or decrepitude, and monstrous shadows flickered behind him in a dim hallway and touched his wrinkled features as with the flitting of ominous, batlike wings.

"What do you wish, sir?" he asked. The voice, though quavering and hesitant, was far from churlish and did not suggest the attitude of suspicion and downright inhospitality which I had begun to apprehend. However, I sensed a sort of irresolution or dubiety; and as the old man listened to my account of the circumstances that had led me to knock at that lonely door, I saw that he was scrutinising me with a keenness that belied my first impression of extreme senility. "I knew you were a stranger in these parts," he commented, when I had finished. "But might I inquire your name, sir?"

"I am Henry Chaldane."

"Are you not the son of Mr. Arthur Chaldane?"

Somewhat mystified, I admitted the ascribed paternity.

"You resemble your father, sir. Mr. Chaldane and Sir John Tremoth were great friends, in the days before your father went to Canada. Will you come in, sir? This is Tremoth Hall. Sir John has not been in the habit of receiving guests for a long time, but I shall tell him you are here and it may be that he will wish to see you."

Startled, and not altogether agreeably surprised at the discovery of my whereabouts, I followed the old man to a book-lined study whose furnishings bore evidence of luxury and neglect. Here he lit an oil lamp of antique fashion, with a dusty, painted shade, and left me alone with the dustier volumes and furniture. I felt a queer embarrassment, a sense of actual intrusion, as I waited in the wan, yellow lamplight, and there came back to me the details of the strange, half-forgotten story I had overheard from my father in childhood years.

Lady Agatha Tremoth, Sir John's wife, in the first year of their marriage, had become the victim of cataleptic seizures. The third seizure had

apparently terminated in death, for she did not revive after the usual interval and displayed all the familiar marks of the *rigor mortis*. Lady Agatha's body was placed in the family vaults, which were of almost fabulous age and extent, and had been excavated in the hill behind the manor house. On the day following the interment, Sir John, troubled by a queer but insistent doubt as to the finality of the medical verdict, had re-entered the vaults in time to hear a wild cry and had found Lady Agatha sitting up in her coffin. The nailed lid was lying on the stone floor, and it seemed impossible that it could have been removed by the struggles of the frail woman. However, there was no other plausible explanation, though Lady Agatha herself could throw little light on the circumstances of her strange resurrection.

Half-dazed and in a state of dire terror that was easily understandable, she told an incoherent tale of her experience. She did not seem to remember struggling to free herself from the coffin, but was troubled mainly by recollections of a pale, hideous, unhuman face which she had seen in the gloom on awakening from her prolonged and deathlike sleep. It was the sight of this face, looking down at her as she lay in the *open* coffin, that had caused her to cry out so wildly. The thing had vanished before Sir John's approach, fleeing swiftly to the inner vaults, and she had formed only a vague idea of its bodily appearance. She thought, however, that it was large and white and ran like an animal on all fours, though its limbs were semi-human.

Of course, her tale was regarded as a dream or a figment of delirium induced by the awful shock of her experience, which had blotted out all recollection of its true terror. But the memory of the horrible face and figure seemed to obsess her permanently, and was plainly fraught with associations of mind-unhinging fear. She did not recover from her illness, but lived on in a shattered condition of brain and body; and nine months later she died, after giving birth to her first child.

Her death was a merciful thing; for the child, it seemed, was one of those appalling monsters that sometimes appear in human families. The exact nature of its abnormality was not known, though frightful and divergent rumours had purported to emanate from the doctor, nurses and servants who had seen it; some of the latter had left Tremoth Hall and refused to return, following a single glimpse of the monstrosity. After Lady Agatha's death, Sir John had withdrawn from society, and little was divulged in regard to his doings or the fate of the horrible infant. But people said that the child was kept in a locked room with iron-barred windows, which no one except Sir John himself ever entered. The tragedy had blighted his whole life and he had become a recluse, living alone with one or two faithful servants, and allowing his estate to decline grievously through neglect.

I WAS still reviewing the dreadful legend, still striving to recollect certain particulars that had almost passed from memory, when I heard the sound of footsteps which from their slowness and feebleness I took to be those of the returning manservant. However, I was mistaken; for the person who entered was plainly Sir John Tremoth himself. The tall, slightly bent figure, the face that was lined as if by the trickling of some corrosive acid, were marked with a dignity that seemed to triumph over the double ravages of mortal sorrow and illness.

Somehow—though I could have calculated his real age—I had expected

an old man, but he was scarcely beyond middle life. Yet his cadaverous pallor and feeble, tottering walk were those of a man who is stricken with some fatal malady. His manner, as he addressed me, was impeccably courteous and even gracious, but the voice was that of one to whom the ordinary relations and actions of life had long since become meaningless and perfunctory.

"Harper tells me that you are the son of my old school friend, Arthur Chaldane," he said. "I bid you welcome to such poor hospitality as I am able to offer. I have not received guests for many years, and I fear you will find the Hall pretty dull and dismal and think me an indifferent host. Nevertheless, you must remain, at least for the night. Harper has gone to prepare dinner for us."

"You are very kind," I replied. "But I fear that I am intruding."

"Not at all," he countered firmly. "You must be my guest. It is miles to the nearest inn and the fog is changing into a heavy rain. Indeed, I am glad to have you. You must tell me all about your father and yourself at dinner. In the meanwhile, I'll try to find a room for you if you'll come with me."

He led me to the second floor of the house and down a long hall with beams and panels of ancient oak. We passed several doors which were doubtless those of bedchambers. All were closed, and one of the doors was reinforced with iron bars, heavy and sinister as those of a dungeon cell. Inevitably I surmised that this was the chamber in which the monstrous child had been confined, and also I wondered if the abnormality still lived after a lapse of time that must have been nearly thirty years. How abysmal, how abhorrent, must have been its departure from the human type to necessitate an immediate removal from the sight of others! And what characteristics of its further development could have rendered necessary the massive bars on an oaken door which by itself was strong enough to have resisted the assaults of any common man or beast?

Without even glancing at the door, my host went on, carrying a taper that scarcely shook in his feeble fingers. But my curious reflections as I followed him were interrupted with nerve-shattering suddenness by a loud cry that seemed to issue from the barred room. The sound was a long, ever-mounting ululation, infra-bass at first, like the tomb-muffled voice of a demon, and rising through abominable degrees to a shrill, ravenous fury, as if the demon had emerged by a series of underground steps to the open air. It was neither human nor bestial; it was wholly preternatural, hellish, macabre; and I shuddered with an insupportable eeriness that still persisted when the demon voice, after reaching its culmination, had returned by reverse degrees to a profound, sepulchral silence.

Sir John had given no apparent heed to the awful sound, but had gone on with no more than his usual faltering. He had reached the end of the hall, and was pausing before the second chamber from the one with the sealed door.

"I'll let you have this room," he said. "It's just beyond the one which I occupy." He did not turn his face toward me as he spoke, and his voice was unnaturally toneless and restrained. I realised with another shudder that the chamber he had indicated as his own was adjacent to the room from which the frightful ululation had appeared to issue.

The chamber to which he admitted me had manifestly not been used for years. The air was chill, stagnant, unwholesome with an all-pervading mustiness, and the antique furniture had gathered the inevitable incre-

ment of dust and cobwebs. Sir John began to apologise. "I didn't realise the condition of the room," he said. "I'll send Harper, after dinner, to do a little dusting and clearing and put fresh linen on the bed."

I protested, rather vaguely, that there was no need for him to concern himself over me. The unhuman loneliness and decay of the old house, its lustrums and decades of neglect, and the corresponding desolation of its owner, had impressed me more painfully than ever. And I dared not speculate overmuch concerning the ghastly secret of the barred chamber and the hellish howling that still echoed in my shaken nerves. Already I regretted the singular fortuity that had drawn me to that place of evil and festering shadows. I felt an urgent desire to leave, to continue my journey even in the face of the bleak autumnal rain and wind-blown darkness. But I could think of no excuse that would be sufficiently tangible and valid. Manifestly, there was nothing to do but remain.

OUR dinner was served in a dismal but stately room by the old man whom Sir John had referred to as Harper. The meal was plain but substantial and well-cooked, and the service was impeccable. I had begun to infer that Harper was the only servant—a combination of valet, butler, housekeeper and chef.

In spite of my hunger and the pains taken by my host to make me feel at ease, the meal was a solemn and almost funereal ceremony. I could not forget my father's story; still less could I forget the sealed door and the baleful ululation. Whatever it was, the monstrosity still lived; and I felt a complex mingling of admiration, pity and horror as I looked at the gaunt face of Sir John Tremoth and reflected upon the lifelong hell to which he had been condemned, and the apparent fortitude with which he had borne its unthinkable ordeals.

A bottle of excellent sherry was brought in. Over this we sat for an hour or more. Sir John spoke at some length concerning my father, of whose death he had not previously heard; and he drew me out in regard to my own affairs with the subtle adroitness of a polished man of the world. He said little about himself, and not even by hint or implication did he refer to the tragic history which I have outlined.

Since I am rather abstemious and did not empty my glass with much frequency, the major part of the heavy wine was consumed by my host. Toward the end it seemed to bring out in him a curious vein of confidentiality, and he spoke for the first time of the ill health that was all too patent in his appearance. I learned that he was subject to that most painful form of heart disease, *angina pectoris*, and had recently recovered from an attack of unusual severity.

"The next one will finish me," he said. "And it may come at any time—perhaps to-night." He made the announcement very simply, as if he were voicing a commonplace or venturing a prediction about the weather. Then, after a slight pause, he went on with more emphasis and weightiness of tone: "Maybe you'll think me queer, but I have a fixed prejudice against burial or vault interment. I want my remains to be thoroughly cremated, and have left careful directions to that end. Harper will see to it that they are fulfilled. Fire is the cleanest and purest of the elements, and it cuts short all the damnable processes between death and ultimate disintegration. I can't bear the idea of some mouldy, worm-infested tomb."

He continued to discourse on this subject for some time, with a singular

elaboration and tenseness of manner that showed it to be a familiar theme of thought if not an actual obsession. It seemed to possess a morbid fascination for him; and there was a painful light in his hollow, haunted eyes, and a touch of rigidly subdued hysteria in his voice, as he spoke. I remembered the interment of Lady Agatha and her tragic resurrection, and the dim horror of the vaults that had formed an inexplicable and disturbing part of her story. It was not hard to understand Sir John's aversion to burial; but I was far from suspecting the full terror and ghastliness on which his repugnance had been founded.

Harper had disappeared after bringing the sherry, and I surmised that he had been given orders for the renovation of my room. We had now drained our last glasses ,and my host had ended his peroration. The wine, which had animated him briefly, seemed to die out and he looked more ill and haggard than ever. Pleading my own fatigue, I expressed a wish to retire, and he, with his invariable courtliness, insisted on seeing me to my chamber and making sure of my comfort before seeking his own bed.

In the hall above we met Harper, who was just descending from a flight of stairs that must have led to an attic or third floor. He was carrying a heavy iron pan in which a few scraps of meat remained, and I caught an odour of pronounced gaminess, almost of virtual putrescence, as he went by. I wondered if he had been feeding the unknown monstrosity, and if perhaps its food were supplied to it through a trap in the ceiling of the barred room. The surmise was reasonable enough, but the odour of the scraps, by a train of remote, half-literary association, had begun to suggest other surmises which seemed beyond the realm of possibility and reason. Certain evasive, incoherent hints appeared to join themselves suddenly into an atrocious and abhorrent whole. With imperfect success, I assured myself that the thing I had fancied was incredible to science, a mere creation of superstitious diablerie. No, it could not be—here in England, of all places—that corpse-devouring demon of Arabesque tales and legends known as the *ghoul*!

Contrary to my fears, there was no repetition of the fiendish howling as we passed the secret room. But I thought that I heard a measured crunching, such as a large animal would make in devouring its food. . . .

MY ROOM, though still drear and dismal enough, had been cleared of its accumulated dust and matted gossamers. After a personal inspection, Sir John left me and retired to his own chamber. I was struck by his deathly pallor and weakness as he said good-night to me, and felt guiltily apprehensive that the strain of receiving and entertaining a guest might have aggravated the dire disease from which he suffered. I seemed to detect actual pain and torment beneath his careful armour of urbanity, and wondered if the urbanity had not been maintained at an excessive cost.

The fatigue of my day-long journey, together with the heavy wine I had drunk, should have conduced to early slumber. But though I lay with tightly closed lids in the darkness I could not dismiss these evil shadows, those black and charnal larvæ, that swarmed upon me from the ancient house. Insufferable and forbidden things besieged me with filthy talons, brushed me with noisome coils, as I tossed through eternal hours and lay staring at the grey square of the storm-darkened window. The dripping of the rain, the sough and moan of the wind, resolved themselves to a dread mutter of half-articulate voices that plotted against my peace and whisperéd loathfully of nameless secrets in demonian language.

At length, after the seeming lapse of nocturnal centuries, the tempest died away and I no longer heard the equivocal voices. The window lightened a little in the black wall, and the terrors of my night-long insomnia seemed to withdraw partially, but without bringing the surcease of slumber. I became aware of utter silence, and then, in the silence, of a queer, faint, disquieting sound whose cause and location baffled me for many minutes.

The sound was muffled and far off at times; then it seemed to draw near, as if it were in the next room. I began to identify it is a sort of scratching such as would be made by the claws of an animal on solid woodwork. Sitting up in bed and listening attentively, I realised with a fresh start of horror that it came from the direction of the barred chamber. It took on a strange resonance; then it became almost inaudible, and suddenly, for awhile, it ceased. In the interim I heard a single groan, like that of a man in great agony or terror. I could not mistake the source of the groan, which had issued from Sir John Tremoth's room; nor was I doubtful any longer as to the causation of the scratching.

The groan was not repeated, but the damnable clawing sound began again and was continued till daybreak. Then, as if the creature that had caused the noise were wholly nocturnal in its habits, the faint, vibrant rasping ceased and was not resumed. In a state of dull, nightmarish apprehension, drugged with weariness and want of sleep, I had listened to it with intolerably straining ears. With its cessation, in the livid dawn, I slid into a deep slumber from which the muffled and amorphous spectres of the old Hall were unable to detain me any longer.

I was awakened by a loud knocking on my door—a knocking in which even my sleep-confused senses could recognise the imperative and urgent. It must have been close upon midday, and feeling guilty at having overslept so egregiously, I ran to the door and opened it. The old manservant, Harper, was standing without, and his tremulous, grief-broken manner told me before he spoke that something of dire import had occurred.

"I regret to tell you, Mr. Chaldane," he quavered, "that Sir John is dead. He did not answer my knock as usual, so I made bold to enter his room. He must have died early this morning."

Inexpressibly shocked by this announcement, I recalled the single groan I had heard in the grey beginning of dawn. My host, perhaps, had been dying at that very moment. I recalled, too, the detestable, nightmare scratching. Unavoidably, I wondered if the groan had been occasioned by fear as well as by physical pain. Had the strain and suspense of listening to that hideous sound brought on the final paroxysm of Sir John's malady? I could not be sure of the truth, but my brain seethed with awful and ghastly conjectures.

With the futile formalities that one employs on such occasions, I tried to condole with the aged servant and offered him such assistance as I could in making the necessary arrangements for the disposition of his master's remains. Since there was no telephone in the house, I volunteered to find a doctor who would examine the body and sign the death certificate. The old man seemed to feel a singular relief and gratitude.

"Thank you, sir," he said fervently. Then, as if in explanation: "I don't want to leave Sir John—I promised him that I'd keep a close watch over his body."

He went on to speak of Sir John's desire for cremation. It seemed that the baronet had left explicit directions for the building of a pyre of drift-

wood on the hill behind the Hall, the burning of his remains on this pyre, and the sowing of his ashes on the fields of the estate. These directions he had enjoined and empowered the manservant to carry out as soon after death as possible. No one was to be present at the ceremony except Harper and the hired pallbearers, and Sir John's nearer relatives—none of whom lived in the vicinity—were not to be informed of his demise till all was over.

I refused Harper's offer to prepare my breakfast, telling him that I could obtain a meal in the neighbouring village. There was a strange uneasiness in his manner; and I realised with thoughts and emotions not to be specified that he was anxious to begin his promised vigil beside Sir John's corpse.

IT WOULD be tedious and unnecessary to detail the funereal afternoon that followed. The heavy sea fog had returned, and I seemed to grope my way through a sodden but unreal world as I sought the nearby town. I succeeded in locating a doctor, and also in securing several men to build the pyre and act as pallbearers. I was met everywhere with an odd taciturnity, and no one seemed willing to comment on Sir John's death or to speak of the dark legendry that was attached to Tremoth Hall.

Harper, to my amazement, had proposed that the cremation should take place at once, but this proved to be impracticable. When all the formalities and arrangements had been completed the fog turned into a steady, everlasting downpour which rendered impossible the lighting of the pyre, and we were compelled to defer the ceremony. I had promised Harper that I should remain at the Hall till all was done; and so it was that I spent a second night beneath that roof of accursed secrets.

The darkness came on betimes. After a last visit to the village, in which I procured some sandwiches in lieu of dinner, I returned to the lonely Hall. I was met by Harper on the stairs as I ascended to the death-chamber. There was an increased agitation in his manner, as if something had happened to frighten him.

"I wonder if you'd keep me company to-night, Mr. Chaldane," he said. "It's a gruesome watch that I'm asking you to share, and it may be a dangerous one. But Sir John would thank you, I am sure. If you have a weapon of any sort, it will be well to bring it with you."

It was impossible to refuse his request, and I assented at once. I was unarmed, so Harper insisted on equipping me with an antique revolver of which he himself carried the mate.

"Look here, Harper," I said bluntly, as we followed the hall to Sir John's chamber, "what are you afraid of?"

He flinched visibly at the question and seemed unwilling to answer. Then, after a moment, he appeared to realise that frankness was necessary.

"It's the thing in the barred room," he explained. "You must have heard it, sir. We've had the care of it, Sir John and I, these eight and twenty years, and we've always feared that it might break out. It never gave us much trouble—as long as we kept it well fed. But for the last three nights it has been scratching at the thick oaken wall of Sir John's chamber, which is something it never did before. Sir John thought it knew that he was going to die, and that it wanted to reach his body—being hungry for other food than we had given it. That's why we must guard him closely to-night, Mr. Chaldane. I pray to God that the wall will hold; but the thing keeps on clawing and clawing, like a demon, and

I don't like the hollowness of the sound—as if the wall were getting thin."

Appalled by this confirmation of my own repugnant surmise, I could offer no rejoinder. With Harper's open avowal, the abnormality took on a darker and more encroaching shadow. Willingly I would have foregone the promised vigil—but this, of course, it was impossible to do. The bestial, diabolic scratching, louder and more frantic than before, assailed my ears as we passed the barred room, and all too readily I understood the nameless fear that had impelled the old man to request my company. The sound was inexpressibly alarming with its grim macabre insistence, its intimation of ghoulish hunger; and it became even plainer, with a hideous, tearing vibrancy, when we entered the room of death.

During the whole course of that day I had refrained from visiting this chamber, since I am lacking in the morbid curiosity which impels many to gaze upon the dead. So it was that I beheld my host for the second and last time. Fully dressed and prepared for the pyre, he lay on the chill white bed, whose heavily figured curtains had been drawn back. The room was lit by several tall tapers arranged on a little table in curious brazen candelabræ that were greened with antiquity, but the light seemed to afford only a doubtful, dolorous glimmering in the drear spaciousness.

Somewhat against my will I gazed on the dead features, and averted my eyes very hastily. I was prepared for the stony pallor and rigor, but not for the full betrayal of that hideous revulsion, that inhuman terror and horror which must have corroded the man's heart through infernal years, and which with almost superhuman control he had masked from the casual beholder of life. The revelation was too painful, and I could not look at him again. In a sense it seemed that he was not dead; that he was still listening with agonised attention to the dreadful sounds that might well have served to precipitate the final attack of his malady.

There were several chairs dating, I think, like the bed itself, from the seventeenth century. Harper and I seated ourselves near the small table between the deathbed and the panelled wall of blackish wood from which the ceaseless clawing sound seemed to issue. In tacit silence, with drawn and cocked revolvers, we began our ghastly vigil.

As we sat and waited, I was driven to picture the unnamed monstrosity, and half-formed images of charnel nightmare pursued each other in chaotic succession through my mind. An atrocious curiosity to which I should normally have been a stranger prompted me to question Harper, but I was restrained by an even more powerful inhibition. On his part, the old man volunteered no information or comment whatever, but watched the wall with fear-bright eyes that did not seem to waver in his palsy-nodding head.

IT WOULD be impossible to convey the suspense and baleful expectation of the hours that followed. The woodwork must have been of great thickness and hardness, such as would have defied the assaults of any normal creature equipped only with talons or teeth; but in spite of such obvious arguments as these, I thought momentarily to see it crumble inward. The scratching noise went on eternally, and to my fertile fancy, grew sharper and nearer every instant. At recurrent intervals I seemed to hear a low, eager, doglike whining such as a ravenous animal would make when it neared the goal of its burrowing.

Neither of us had spoken of what we should do in case the monster should attain its objective, but there seemed to be an unvoiced agreement

However, with a superstitiousness of which I should not have believed myself capable, I began to wonder if the monster possessed enough of humanity in its composition to be vulnerable to mere revolver bullets. To what extent would it display the traits of its unknown and fabulous paternity? I tried to convince myself that such questions and wonderings were patently absurd, but was drawn to them again and again, as if by the allurement of some forbidden gulf.

The night wore on, like the flowing of a dark, sluggish stream, and the tall funeral tapers had burned to within an inch of their verdigris-eaten sockets. It was this circumstance alone that gave me an idea of the passage of time; for I seemed to be drowning in a black eternity, motionless beneath the seething of blind horrors. I had grown so accustomed to the clawing noise in the woodwork that I deemed its ever-growing sharpness and hollowness a mere hallucination; and so it was that the end of our vigil came without apparent warning.

Suddenly, as I stared at the wall and listened with frozen fixity, I heard a harsh, splintering sound and saw that a narrow strip had broken loose and was hanging from the panel. Then, before I could collect myself or credit the awful witness of my senses, a large semi-circular portion of the wall collapsed in many splinters beneath the impact of some ponderous body.

Mercifully, perhaps, I have never been able to recall with any degree of distinctness the hellish thing that issued from the panel. The visual shock, by its own excess of horror, has almost blotted the details from memory. I have, however, the blurred impression of a huge whitish, hairless and semi-quadruped body, of canine teeth in a half-human face, and long hyena nails at the end of forelimbs that were both arms and legs. A charnel stench preceded the apparition, like a breath from the den of some carrion-eating animal; and then, with a single nightmare leap, the thing was upon us.

I heard the staccato crack of Harper's revolver, sharp and vengeful in the closed room, but there was only a rusty click from my own weapon. Perhaps the cartridge was too old; at any rate, it had misfired, and before I could press the trigger again I was hurled to the floor with terrific violence, striking my head against the heavy base of the little table. A black curtain spangled with countless fires appeared to fall upon me and blot the room from sight. Then all the fires went out, and there was only darkness.

Again, slowly, I became conscious of flame and shadow; but the flame was bright and flickering, and seemed to grow ever more brilliant. Then my dull, doubtful senses were sharply revived and clarified by the acrid odour of burning cloth. The features of the room returned to vision, and I found that I was lying huddled against the overthrown table, gazing toward the death-bed. The guttering candles had been hurled to the floor. One of them was eating a slow circle of fire in the carpet beside me, and another, spreading, had ignited the bed-curtains, which were flaring swiftly upward to the great canopy. Even as I lay staring, ruddy tatters of the burning fabric fell upon the bed in a dozen places, and the body of Sir John Tremoth was ringed about with starting flames.

I staggered heavily to my feet, dazed and giddy with the fall that had hurled me into oblivion. The room was empty except for the old manservant, who lay near the door, moaning indistinctly. The door itself stood open, as if someone—or something—had gone out during my period

of unconsciousness.

I turned again to the bed, with some instinctive, half-formed intention of trying to extinguish the blaze. The flames were spreading rapidly, but they were not swift enough to veil from my sickened eyes the hands and features—if one could any longer call them such—of that which had been Sir John Tremoth. Of the last horror that had overtaken him I must forbear explicit mention, and I would that I could likewise avoid the remembrance. All too tardily had the monster been frightened away by the fire. . . .

THERE is little more to tell. Looking back once more as I reeled from the smoke-laden room with Harper in my arms, I saw that the bed and its canopy had become a mass of mounting flames. The unhappy baronet had found in his own death-chamber the funeral pyre for which he had longed.

It was nearly dawn when we emerged from the doomed house. The rain had ceased, leaving a heaven lined with high and dead-grey clouds. The chill air appeared to revive the aged manservant, and he stood feebly beside me, uttering not a word, as we watched an ever-climbing spire of flame that broke from the sombre roof of Tremoth Hall and began to cast a sullen glare on the unkempt hedges.

In the combined light of the fireless dawn and the lurid conflagration, we both saw at our feet the semi-human, monstrous footprints, with their mark of long and ghoulish nails, that had been trodden freshly and deeply in the wet soil. They came from the direction of the house and ran toward the heath-clad hill that rose behind it. Still without speaking, we followed the steps. Almost without interruption, they led to the entrance of the ancient family vaults, to the heavy iron door in the hillside that had been closed for a full generation by Sir John Tremoth's order. The door itself swung open, and we saw that its rusty chain and lock had been shattered by a strength that was more than the strength of man or beast. Then, peering within, we saw the clay-touched outline of the unreturning footprints that went downward into mausolean darkness on the stairs.

We were both weaponless, having left our revolvers behind us in the death-chamber, but we did not hesitate long. Harper possessed a liberal supply of matches; and looking about, I found a heavy billet of water-soaked wood which might serve in lieu of a cudgel. In grim silence, with tacit determination and forgetful of any danger, we conducted a thorough search of the well-nigh interminable vaults, striking match after match as we went on in the musty shadows.

The traces of ghoulish footsteps grew fainter as we followed them into those black recesses; and we found nothing anywhere but noisome dampness and undisturbed cobwebs and the countless coffins of the dead. The thing that we sought had vanished utterly, as if swallowed up by the subterranean walls. At last we returned to the entrance. There, as we stood blinking in the full daylight, with grey and haggard faces, Harper spoke for the first time, saying in his slow, tremulous voice:

"Many years ago—soon after Lady Agatha's death—Sir John and I searched the vaults from end to end, but we could find no trace of the thing we suspected. Now, as then, it is useless to seek. There are mysteries which, God helping, will never be fathomed. We know only that the offspring of the vaults has gone back to the vaults. There may it remain."

Silently, in my shaken heart, I echoed his wish.

The Sorcerer's Jewel

By TARLETON FISKE

Like many before him, David Niles sought to peer beyond the veil—and to focus his camera on the Things that walked in other dimensions. Things that mortal eyes were not meant to see . . .

BY RIGHTS, I should not be telling this story. David is the one to tell it; but then, David is dead. Or is he? That's the thought that haunts me; the dreadful possibility that David Niles is still alive—in some unnatural, unimaginable way. That is why I shall tell the story, to unburden myself of the onerous weight which is slowly crushing my mind. But David Niles could do it properly; he could

give the technical terms, perhaps explain coherently many things that I do not pretend to understand.

Niles and I shared a studio together for several years. It was a true partnership—we were both friends and business associates. This was peculiar in itself, for we were dissimilar types with widely divergent interests. We differed in almost every particular. I am tall, thin, and dark. Niles was short, plump, and fair. I am naturally lazy, moody, inclined towards introspection. Niles was always tense with energy, high-spirited, volatile. My chief interests in latter years have leaned towards metaphysics and a study of occultism. Niles was a sceptic, a materialist, and above all, a scientist. Still, together we formed an integrated personality—I, the dreamer, Niles, the doer.

David Niles was one of the most brilliant personalities in the domain of modern portrait photography. For several years prior to our association he had done salon work, exhibiting internationally and creating a reputation which brought him a considerable income from private sittings. But at the time of our meeting he had become dissatisfied with commercial work. Photography, he argued, was an art best nourished by serious, solitary study unimpeded by the demands of catering to customers. He had therefore determined to retire for a year or so and devote himself to experiment.

I was the partner he chose for the work. He told me that he had lately become a devotee of the William Mortensen school. Mortensen, of course, is the leading exponent of fantasy in photography; his studies of monstrosities and grotesques are widely known. Niles believed that in fantasy, photography most closely approximated true art. The idea of picturing the abstract fascinated him; the thought that a modern camera could photograph dream worlds and blend fancy with reality seemed intriguing. That's where I came in. Niles knew of my interest in the occult, knew that I had made a study of mythology, and I was to serve as technical adviser on his subject matter. The arrangement pleased us both.

At first Niles limited himself to studies in physiognomy. With his usual thoroughness, he mastered the technique of photographic make-up and hired models whose features lent themselves to the application of gargoylian disguises. I handled the matter of checking over reference works and finding illustrations in old books of legends to use in devising suitable make-up.

Niles did a study of Pan, one of a satyr, and a Medusa. He became interested in demons, and we spent some time on his *Gallery of Fiends* series; Asmodeus, Azaziel, Sammael, and Beelzebub. They were surprisingly good, but for some reason or other, Niles was not satisfied. The quality of the photographs was excellent, the posing effective, the characterisation superb. And yet Niles did not feel that he was achieving his goal.

"Human figures!" he stormed. "Human faces are, after all, only human faces, no matter how much you cover them up with greasepaint and putty. What I want is the soul of Fantasy, not the outward aping." He strode up and down the studio, gesticulating in his feverish manner. "What have we got?" he demanded. "A lot of stupid horror-movie faces. Amateur Karloffs. No, we must find something else."

So the next phase was modelling clay. I was handy here, for I had a rudimentary knowledge of sculpture. We spent hours on composing scenes from an imaginary Inferno, constructing bat-winged figures that flew against bizarre backgrounds of fire, and great malignant demons that squatted and brooded on jagged peaks overlooking the Fiery Pit. But here, too, Niles could not find what he was looking for. With a sweep of his arm, he smashed the papier-mache set and its clay figures to the floor.

"Hokum," he muttered. "Peep-show, penny-dreadful stuff."

I sighed, getting set to listen patiently to a further tirade.

"I don't want to be the Gustave Dore of photography, or the Sime, or even the Artzybasheff," he went on. "I don't want to copy any style. What I'm after is something original, something I can claim as absolutely individual."

I shrugged. Wisdom had taught me to keep my mouth shut and let Niles talk himself out.

"I've been on the wrong track," he declared. "If I photograph things as they are, that's all I'm going to get. I build a clay set, and when I photograph it all I can get is a picture of that clay set—a flat, two-dimensional thing at that. I take a portrait of a man in make-up and my result is a photo of a man in make-up. I can't hope to catch something with the camera that isn't there. The answer is— change the camera. Let the instrument do the work."

THE following few weeks, Niles' existence was a frenzy of experimental activity. He began to take montage shots; then he worked with odd papers, odder exposures. He even reverted to the Mortensen principles and employed distortion, bending and twisting the negative so that prints showed elongated or flattened figures in nightmarish fashion. An ordinary man's forehead, by these methods, would register as hydrocephalic; his eyes might appear as bulging beacons illumined by insane lights. The perspective of nightmare, the nuances of oneirodynia, the hallucinative images of the demented, were thus reproduced. Pictures were shadowed, portions blocked out or moulded into weird backgrounds.

And then came a night when Niles again paced the floor, tracing a restless path through piles of torn-up prints. "I'm not getting it," he murmured. "I can take a natural subject and distort it, but I can't actually change its content. In order to photograph the unreal, I must see the unreal. *See the unreal*—Good Lord, why didn't I think of that before?"

He stood before me, his hands twitching. "I studied painting once, you know. My instructor—old Gifford, the portrait man—hung a certain picture in his studio. It was the old boy's masterpiece. The painting was of a winter scene, in oils; a winter scene of a farmhouse. But Gifford had two pairs of spectacles, one sensitive to infra-red, the other to ultra-violet rays. He'd show a guest the winter scene, then ask him to try on the first pair of spectacles and look again. Through these glasses, the picture showed the same farmhouse on a summer day. The second pair gave a view of the farmhouse in autumn. He had painted three layers, and the proper lenses each showed a different picture."

"So what?" I ventured.

Niles talked faster, his excitement increasing. "So this. Remember in the war the Germans used to camouflage machine-gun nests and field batteries? They did it quite elaborately, painting the guns with leafy hues and using artificial plant formations to cover them up. Well, American observation posts employed ultra-violet lenses in field glasses to spot the camouflaging. Through the glasses, the natural leaves showed up in entirely different colours to the artificial painted ones, which lacked ultra-violet pigment.

"Use ultra-violet and infra-red lenses in photography, and we'll get the same effect," he almost shouted.

"But isn't that just an extension of the ordinary colour-filter principle?" I asked.

"Perhaps. But we can combine them with reground lenses of various types—lenses that will distort perspective in themselves. So far we've merely distorted form, shape. But with both colour and form distorted, we can achieve the type of photography I'm striving for—fantasy, pure and simple. We'll focus on fantasy and reproduce it without tampering with any objects. Can you imagine what this room will look like with its colours reversed, some of them absent completely; with the furniture shapes altered, the very walls distorted?"

I couldn't, but I was soon privileged to actually see it. For Niles at once began another cycle. He experimented endlessly with the new lenses he brought in daily. He sent out special orders for grinding, spent time studying the physical laws of light, enmeshed himself in technicalities I could not pretend to comprehend. The results were startling. The *outre* views he had promised me materialised. After a final day of effort before the camera and in the dark room, we gazed together on a wonderful new world right in our own studio. I marvelled at some of the effects Niles had created.

"Splendid!" he gloated. "It all seems to tie in with accepted scientific theories, too. Know what I mean? The Einsteinian notions of co-existence; the Space-Time Continuum ideas."

"The Fourth Dimension?" I echoed.

"Exactly. New worlds all around us—within us. Worlds we never dream of exist simultaneously with our own; right here in this spot there are other existences—other furniture, other people, perhaps. And other physical laws. New forms, new colour."

"That sounds metaphysical to me, rather than scientific." I observed. "You're speaking of the Astral Plane—the continuous linkage of existence." We were back again at our perpetual squabbling point—science or occultism; physical versus psychical reality. "The Fourth Dimension is Science's way of interpreting the metaphysical truths of existence," I maintained.

"The metaphysical truths of existence are the psychological lies of *dementia praecox* victims," he asserted.

"Your pictures don't lie," I answered.

"My pictures are taken by recognised scientific means."

"Your pictures are taken by means older than science. Ever hear of lithomancy—divination by the use of jewels? Ever hear of crystal gazing? For ages men have peered into the depths of precious stones, gazed through specially cut and ground glasses, and seen new worlds."

"Absurd. Any oculist can tell you that—"

"You don't have to finish that one," I cut in. "Any oculist will tell you that we really see everything upside down. Our minds alone interpret the retinal image as being right-side up. Any oculist will tell you that, muscularly, a near-sighted person is really far-sighted and a far-sighted person is near-sighted." I warmed to my theme. "Any oculist will tell you that the hand is quicker than the eye, that mirages and hallucinations are actually 'seen' by the brain rather than by the actual retina. In fact, any oculist will tell you that the phenomenon of sight has very little to do with either actual perception or the true laws of light.

"Look at the cat—contrary to popular impression, a nyctalops. Yet men can train themselves similarly. Reading, too, is a matter of the mind rather than of minute perception. And so I say, don't be too sure of your laws of optics and your scientific theories of light. We see a lot no physical laws will ever explain. The Fourth Dimension can be approached only through angles—science must concede that in theorisation. And your lenses are cut similarly. It all goes back to occultism in the end—occultism, not 'oculism' or ophthalmology."

IT WAS a long speech for me, and it must have astonished Niles, who glowered at me, speechless for once.

"I'll prove it," I went on. "Let me cut you a lens."

"What!"

"I'll go down to a friend of mine and borrow a few stones from him. There are some Egyptian crystals there which were used by the seers for divination. They claimed that they could see other worlds through the angles of the jewels. And I'm willing to bet you'll get pictures through them that will make you forget experiments with Iceland spar and quartz and all the rest, pictures your scientific ideas won't so readily explain."

"All right! I'll call you on that," Niles snapped. "Bring me the stones."

So the next day I went down to Isaac Voorden's. I went with misgivings. The truth was that I had been half bragging when I had spoken about the properties of jewels and glasses. I knew that such things were much used for prophecy and various forms of lithomancy, but as to whether I could procure one, and whether it could be ground into a camera lens, I was not at all certain. Still, Isaac Voorden was the logical person to go to. His antique shop down on South Kinnikinnic, pervaded by an aura of mysticism, was a little fortress that preserved the past.

Isaac Voorden made a profession of his hobby and a hobby of his profession; he lived on metaphysics and dabbled in antiques. He spent the greater part of his time in the musty back rooms of his establishment, which were full of relics of other days that made his commercial antiques seem bright and new by contrast. The centuried symbols of magic, alchemy, and the secret sciences fascinated him, and he had gathered unto himself a collection of statuettes, talismans and other paraphernalia of wizardry that would have been hard to match.

It was from Isaac, then, that I expected help in my quest, and he gave it to me. I told my story of Niles' photographic problems. The

sallow-faced, thin-lipped little antique dealer listened, his eyebrows crawling over his forehead like black beetles.

"Very interesting," he said when I had concluded. His rasping voice and preoccupied manner betokened the introverted pedant—always he seemed to be delivering a lecture to himself. "Very, very interesting," he repeated. "David Niles has had illustrious predecessors. The priests of Ishtar sought in their Mysteries to peer beyond the veil, and looked through crystals. The first crude telescopes of Egypt were fashioned by men who thought to see beyond the stars and unlock the gates of the Infinite. The Druids contemplated pools of water, and the mad emperors sought the Heavenly Stairway in China, hoping to ascend by gazing at turning rubies whilst under the influence of drugs.

"Yes, your friend Niles has an age-old wish, and expresses it in a timeless fashion. It is the wish that animated Appolonius and Paracelsus, and the absurd, posturing Cagliostro. Men have always sought to see the Infinite, to walk between the worlds—and sometimes that wish has been granted."

I cut in, then. Voorden was wound up for the afternoon, but I wanted my information. "They say there are jewels that hold queer visions," I murmured.

He smiled, slowly. "I have them here," he replied.

"Niles will not believe that," I countered.

"Many do not believe. But there is a stone once used by Friar Bacon, and a set of crystals which intrigued Theophrastus, and divining jewels that the Aztecs peered through before the blood sacrifice. Jewels, you know, are mathematical figures of light—they reflect within their facets. And who knows but that in some way those angles impinge on other worlds? Perhaps they reach out and transmute polyangularity so that, gazing into their depths, we become aware of it three-dimensionally. The ancients used angles in magic; the moderns do the same thing and call it mathematics. De Sitter says—"

"The jewel for the camera lens," I interrupted.

"I am sorry, my friend. Of course. I think I have one that should prove eminently suitable. The Star of Sechmet. Very ancient, but not costly. Stolen from the crown of the lioness-headed goddess during a Roman invasion of Egypt, it was carried to Rome and placed in the vestal girdle of the High Priestess of Diana. The barbarians took it, and cut the jewel into a round stone. The black centuries swallowed it, but it is known that Axenos the Elder bathed it in the red, yellow and blue flames, and sought to employ it as a Philosopher's Stone. With it he was reputed to have seen beyond the Veil and commanded the Gnomes, the Sylphs, the Salamanders, and the Undines.

"Later it formed part of the collection of Gilles De Rais, and he was said to have visioned within its depths the concept of *Homonculus*. It disappeared again, but a monograph I have mentions it as forming part of the secret collection of the Count St. Germain during his ritual services in Paris. I bought it in Amsterdam from a Russian priest whose eyes had been burned out by brother Rasputin. He claimed to have divinated with it and foretold—"

I broke in again. "You will cut the stone so that it may be used as a lens, then," I repeated. "And when shall I have it?"

"You young men have no love for quiet conversation," he rebuked me. "To-morrow, if you like. You understand, the jewel has only a great sentimental value to me; I have never experimented with it personally. All that I ask is that you report to me your findings with it, and I counsel you that if the camera reveals what I think it will, you take care in using it. There is danger in invading the realms . . ."

He was still chattering away as I went out.

THE following afternoon I called for the little package which Voorden proffered me. That evening I gave it to Niles.

Together we unwrapped the lens. I had given Voorden the specifications of the large camera we ordinarily employed in our later work—a reflex, with a reflecting mirror set inside so that we could easily view the focus. Voorden had done his work amazingly well. Niles gave a little snort of astonishment before he commented: "Nice job!"

He lost no time in changing the lenses and inserting the Star of Sechmet. He bent over the camera, and his plump body loomed large against the shadowed walls of the studio. I thought of a stooping alchemist peering into a crystal to seek instructions from the demons that danced within.

Niles jerked erect with a grunt. "The devil!" he muttered. "It's all cloudy. Can't make any adjustment. The whole thing's a fake."

"Let me try." I took my place and stared through a grey mass. Yes, it was merely a dull lens. Or was it? There was a hint of movement in the cloudy grey, a swirling as of parted mists; a dancing light. The fog was dispersing, and it seemed to be opening to a view that receded far into the distance. The wall it was focused on appeared faintly, very tiny, as though through the reverse end of binoculars. Then it began to fade, so that I thought of a ghost room, with ectoplasmic lines. Then it fled away, and something new loomed large before the camera, something that grew out of empty space. Abruptly it focused.

I think I shouted. Certainly a scream seared across my brain. For I saw Hell. At first only angles, weaving and shifting in light that was of no colour, yet phosphorescent. And out of the angles, a flat, black plain that stretched upward, endlessly, without horizon. It was moving, and the angles moved; and yet through the lurching roll as of a ship's deck in heavy seas, I saw cubes, triangles, mathematical figures of bewildering size and complexity. There were thousands of them, lines of light in the shape of polyhedrons. And as I gazed, they changed. Changed into forms.

Those forms—they were spawned only in delirium, in nightmare and dreams of the Pit. There were grinning demons that skulked on padding paws across that endless moving plain. There were shapeless toadstools with tentacles ending in Cyclopean eyes. There were fanged heads that rolled towards me, laughing; great hands that curled and crawled like mad spiders. Ghouls, monsters, fiends—and a moment ago they had been mathematical figures!

"Here," I gasped. "Look again, Niles."

He gazed, his face reflecting puzzlement at my agitation. "Still nothing," he grumbled. But, watching him, I saw the pallor come into his face as he stared more intently. "Yes!" he hissed. "The mist's parting. The room is smaller, fading. And now—something is rushing

up, or I'm rushing toward it—angles of light."

"Wait," I said in a low voice, yet triumphantly. "You haven't seen anything yet."

"I see geometrical shapes. Cubic shapes. Polyhedrons of luminance. They cover a plain and—good God!" His body shook over the camera. "I see them!" he cried. "Dozens of tall, eyeless creatures with heads all hair. Knotted hair; it twists and weaves. And underneath the hair, little wrinkled pink-pulp mouths. And that—*goat with the hands*!"

He made an indescribable sound, fell back shaking, and turned the adjusting device. His eyes were red, as though he had awakened from a fever-sleep.

WE EACH had a drink.

"Well?" I said, when composure had been restored.

"Hallucination," he hazarded, somewhat weakly.

"Want to look again?" I countered. He gave me a wry smile. "It can't be delusion," I went on. "I didn't see any goat, but we both saw the mists swirl, saw the same plane, the same geometric forms of living light."

"True. But the last—things—were different to each of us. I don't understand."

"I think I do," I said. "If Voorden is right, that jewel is a key. Its angles open to the Astral Plane. The Astral Plane—don't shake your head so—corresponds to the scientific conception of the Fourth Dimension, although metaphysicians believe it is an extension of third-dimensional life; that when men die their souls enter the Astral Plane and pass through it into another form of existence in a higher dimension. The Astral Plane is a sort of No Man's Land existing all about us, where lost souls and lower entities that have never achieved life wander forever in a sort of Limbo."

"Hooey!"

"A modern criticism. But it's an ancient belief, mirrored in a thousand forms in scores of religions. And wait until you see what I'm getting at. Ever hear of Elementals?"

"Nothing but a few mentions. Ghosts, aren't they?"

"No—forces. Entities not human, but linked with humanity. They are the *demons* and the *familiars* and the *incubae* and the *genie* of all religions; the beings that exist invisibly around us and seek traffic with men. Organisms outside three-dimensional life, if you want it in more scientific terminology. They inhabit another Time field, another Space continuum that is nevertheless synchronised and co-existent with our own. They can be viewed or reached, as ultra-dimensional inhabitants, only through angles. The angles, the facets of this jewel enabled us to see through to them. They establish a focal point with infinity. What we saw, then, are Elementals."

"All right, *swami*. But why did we see different creatures?" he persisted.

"Because, my dear fellow, we have different brains. At first we both saw geometrical figures. That is the purest form of life they exist in. But our minds interpreted these figures into familiar shapes. I saw one type of monstrosity because of my background of mythological

study. You received another impression, and I gather from your comments that you drew your images from past dreams and nightmares. I should imagine that a Hungarian peasant, peering through the lens, would see vampires and werewolves. It's psychological. Somehow that jewel establishes a focal point in more than a visual way. It must also enable those creatures to become aware of us—and they *will* that we see them according to our mental concepts of such entities. In fact, that's how superstition probably originated; these beings at times communicated with men."

Niles made a gesture of impatience. "Dropping the psychological angle for a minute," he said, "I certainly must hand it to your friend Voorden. Whether his story about the jewel is hokum or not, and whether your rather naive explanation is accepted or disbelieved. I still think we've stumbled on something quite marvellous. I mean it! The pictures we can take with that camera will be unique. I've never read of any experimental work that even approached this. It goes beyond the wildest Dadaistic or Surrealistic concepts. We'll get actual photographs—but of what, I'll be darned if we can foretell. Your so-called mental concepts were different from mine."

I shook my head as something that Voorden had said came back to me. "Now look here, Niles. I know you don't believe me, but you believe what you saw in the lens. I saw you shudder; you must admit the horror of those creatures—whether you choose to think they originate in your imagination or in my theory of the Astral Plane, you must recognise the fact that they are a menace to any man's sanity. If you see too much of that sort of thing, you'll go mad. And I'm not being melodramatic. I wouldn't advise looking too closely into that lens!"

"Don't be silly!" Niles said.

"Elementals," I persisted,—"and you must believe this—yearn for life. They are cosmic ghouls, feeding on dead soul-bodies, but they long to lure a living man through the planes to them. Consider all legend—it's merely allegory. Stories of men disappearing, selling their souls to the devil, going to foreign worlds; all are founded on the idea of Elementals seeking human prey and dragging men down to their plane."

"Cut it out—it annoys me." Niles was colloquially common in his speech, but his eyes betokened a slight credulity that grew as I ignored his scepticism.

"You say it's superstition," I went on. "I say it's science. Witches, wizards, so-called wonder-workers, the wise men whose secrets built the Pyramids—they all employed spells, in which they used what? Geometrical figures. They drew angles and pentagons and cabalistic circles. Through the lines they summoned the forces from the Astral Plane—or the outer Dimensions. These forces granted them boons, and in their turn they finally were drawn along the angles themselves, into the Astral Plane, to pay for the boon with their lives. Witchcraft and geometry are strange bedfellows, but it's historical fact.

"And so I warn you! You see creatures through the jewel lens, and they see, feel, or are in some way aware. of *you*. They will seek your soul—and just as you can look through the lens at them, they can extend their forces back through the jewel to suck you down. Hypnotic forces of some sort that psychology has not yet postulated. Magnet-

ism, telepathy—these are the words psychologists use to describe things they do not fully understand, just as the ancients called such forces magic. Don't look too long or too closely through that jewel, I tell you!"

Niles laughed. "Tomorrow I'll take the pictures," he declared. "And then we'll see just what your Elementals are like. If it makes you nervous, you can stay away."

"Frankly, I will," I said. And I did.

THE next afternoon I left the studio in Niles' hands. He was tremendously excited. He spoke of using new focusing adjustments to extend part of the field; he wondered what speeds to photograph with, what paper to use for printing. He also speculated as to whether or not the creatures he saw would appear on the finished negative, or merely the amazing light-figures. I left, for I felt growing nervousness and apprehension I did not wish him to see.

I went down to Voorden's, and passed through the shop to the room where Isaac usually spent his time in study. He was sitting there in the soft haze peculiar to the lightless chamber, his eyes glazed in rapt attention on the open pages of some old book.

"Isaac," I said. "That jewel has something. Niles and I used it last night, and it's a gateway to something incredible. Those divinators of ancient times were no fools. They knew what they were doing—"

Isaac never moved. Imperturbable, he sat and stared through the quiet dusk. There was a little smile on his sallow face.

"You promised to look up some more of the jewel's history," I went on. "Did you find anything? It's amazing, you know; quite amazing."

Isaac sat and stared and smiled. I went forward. Sitting bolt upright in his chair, hand clutching a pen, he remained silent and still. For Isaac Voorden was dead. Stone dead.

"Isaac!" I shouted. Funny, isn't it, how people always shout the name of the departed upon discovery of death? It's a sort of despairing wail of disbelief at a friend's passing; an invocation, as though the echo of human voice can recall the soul of one that has passed beyond. Beyond—to the Astral Plane? Quickly I bent over the cold body, stared at the crabbed scrawl covering the paper, read the notes Voorden had been working on when his pale Visitor had arrived.

"The Star of Sechmet. Ptolemaic. Aug. Lulla, name of Roman who stole it. See note in Veno's *History*. Lulla died under curse for removing sacred jewel. Point one. . . . Priestess of Diana who wore it in vestal girdle also died. For sacrilege. Again, see Veno. Point two. The pattern grows. . . . Gilles De Retz—his fate is known. He misused the jewel. The inevitable story of violator. . . .

"See *Mysteries of the Worm* for Prinn's chapter on divination. Might be reference concerning jewel during its disappearance. . . .

"Again, the Russian. Claims to have stolen jewel from Rasputin, who used it in prophecy. Rasputin dead. The Russian lost his eyes. And, unless he lost his reason, his warnings concerning sacred character of the jewel are to be respected. Points three, four, and five. . . . Whoever or whatever exists in the world opened up by the jewel is not anxious to have the gateway changed or misused. Cutting the stone, transplanting it from one setting to another, misusing it—all

result in death. And—I have done all three. God help this man Niles for what he must endure. They may get at him through the stone. . . .

"God help me. There will be a price I must pay, soon. Why didn't I think before I gave up the jewel? Now I'm——"

That was all he had written. There was no scrawling off of the interrupted pen, no frozen look of horror, no mounting dread in the text of the writing. Voorden had written it. One minute he was alive; the next he was dead. Of course, it could have been heart-failure, thrombosis, or simply old age. Shock, excitement, anxiety might have brought it on; a stroke may have done it.

But I didn't fool myself. I knew. I rose and ran from that shop as though fiends dogged my heels. And all the way my legs worked in rhythm to a single phrase racing through my brain.

God help Niles.

IT WAS dusk when I unlocked the studio door. The studio was empty, the twilight room darkened. Had Niles gone out? I prayed so. But where would he go? He wouldn't abandon work. I walked to where the camera loomed, noted the exposure of one film. He must have been called.

I restrained an impulse to peer again through the jewel lens, as I lit the light. No—I did not wish to see that plain again; see those horrible figures dwelling outside laws of Space and Time, yet—mocking thought!—actually existing here around me, in this very room. Worlds within worlds of horror. Where was Niles?

I couldn't brood like this. Why not develop the exposed film? Keep busy. I carried the camera into the dark room. Ten minutes in darkness, then the regular process. I set the fans going as I hung the dark square up to dry. My mind teemed with excited conjectures. Would we find a blank photograph? Would it show the angled figures of light? Or would—wonderful possibility—the creatures conjured up by our imaginations appear? Would our own brains aid in taking the pictures, as a part of the focal point linked to the camera by the hypnotic jewel? It was a fascinating thought.

The fans hummed as the minutes fled. But where was Niles? Whatever had caused his hasty departure, surely he would have returned by now. And he had left no note. Then—*The door had been locked from outside, and I had the only key.* The thought grinded at me through a wave of horror. There was no way Niles could have left. *Only one way.* I jammed the dried negative into the printer, with a sheet of ordinary paper. I pressed down, slipped the print into the developer, waited a moment. I raced out into the light of the other room, held the finished print, wet and dripping, to the light. Then I screamed, and smashed that camera, stamped on the jewel until I could control myself sufficiently to pick it up and hurl it through the open window at the further roof-tops. I tore print and negative to shreds, and still I screamed; for I could not and never shall be able to erase the memory of what I had seen in that picture Niles had taken.

He must have clicked it off at a very fast speed, and perhaps it was the actual working of the camera which accounted for what had happened. It might have established the focal point instantaneously, es-

tablished it so that those things—forces, Elementals, call them what you will—could achieve their goal. I saw the print. It was as Niles guessed it might be; a picture of a black endless plain. Only there were no lights visible, no figures, nothing except black shadows that seemed to blur around a central point. *They* did not photograph.

But *They* blurred around a point—a central point. *They* got through just as the picture must have snapped, yet faster than light itself. *They* got through, and drew Niles along the angles as I had feared. Faster than light itself. For it had to be faster, else I would not have seen what I did see on that print. The central point. . . .

The central point of that accursed picture, the only visible thing amid the shadows—*was the dead and mangled body of David Niles!*

The Song from the Dark Star

By RICHARD TOOKER

Utterly strange was that haunting music that filled lovely Anna with dread . . . and brought dreams of far-off worlds. Whence came Egabl of Xarthon on his eternal quest!

"LISTEN! It's come back!"

Eric Paulson's chair grated back from the supper table as he leaped to the screen door of the kitchen and looked out across the poultry-dotted

farmyard. The golden blaze of a Dakota sunset wreathed the barn-red stables granaries and machine sheds in a halo of mystic enchantment. There was nothing unusual to see out there; Eric feared that. Yet he looked eagerly, with the hope that was half dread. It was unthinkable that a thing invisible could utter such sounds.

"See anything this time Eric?"

Hans Ahlberg's toil-warped hands upended his cutlery beside a loaded plate. Hans was just the hired man on Eric Paulson's wheat ranch, and supper bulked bigger to him than tuneless arias of unseen songsters. Eric didn't answer. His tall, cover-all-clad figure leaned from the half-open screen as if he had frozen there.

Anna Paulson stared with fear-fevered eyes at the back of her listening husband. Anna was listening, too, sitting statuesquely still in her chair before the steaming meal she had served a few moments before, listening with bated breath to that eerie serenade in the yard outside. In the mellow glow of the summer sunset flooding the chintz-draped kitchen windows, her clear Nordic skin seemed to emanate a naceous, pulsing lustre. A Viking valkyrie incarnate was Eric Paulson's young wife—tall, serene, Juno-moulded. But a growing wonder stirred the placidness of her regal brow; wonder and growing fear—the godly awe of a chaste and gentle soul that glimpses the blighting shadow of incredible sin.

Now near, now far, baffling as to extract location, the paean of the unseen singer bladed the hush of evening in that lonely hinterland. From exquisite rollicking treble, like the witching rondo of a dancing Pan, through chaotic intervals to the droning vibrato of a viol—a brief, repeated strain, without beginning or end—chords of unearthly harmony that human sense could never memorise nor human voice intone. And the startled farmyard fowls lifted their feathered necks to jerky oglings.

For dragging minutes of sentient suspense the song of the hidden visitor persisted, while Eric vainly searched the yard to the bordering green fields. Then it was gone, as suddenly as it had come. A nerve-rasping, bulletlike rocketing over the rolling prairie hills, and silence masked the secret of a thing that revealed itself as sound alone.

Eric turned back from the door. He wore an odd, strained look as he sat down and pulled up his chair. He looked at Anna anxiously, noting the slight shudder of her broad, smooth shoulders as she shifted uneasily in her chair. A quick breath parted mobile lips that were made to smile, as Eric swept back his shock of wavy auburn hair with a lean, brown hand. His wife of a year had never seemed more beautiful. Was it the magicry of the sunset or the pallor of a secret fear that made her silken yellow hair stand out like dawn against an angel's brow?

"No, I didn't see anything." His voice was perfunctory, almost harsh. "It beats me." He smiled at Anna as he asked with forced steadiness: "That racket getting your goat again, honey?"

"A little." Her voice was low, shaken. "I don't see what it could be. Maybe I'm just scared." And she tried to laugh.

"Like as not it's a new-fangled grasshopper that buzzed over from Kansas," Hans mumbled past a knifeload of fried potatoes.

Eric Paulson had graduated from an agricultural school before he inherited his father's half-section farm on the Missouri Slope. He wasn't an ignorant farmer. But in the brief silence while he helped himself to the eggs he knew that the mystery of the invisible songster was out of his line. It was a case for a Hawkshaw or a Maeterlinck, and maybe a

Freud, since Anna's strange reactions had set in.

For nearly two weeks, now, since haying had begun, they had been hearing that maddening Ariel music off and on. He wouldn't have bothered much about it if it hadn't been that Anna wasn't herself since the first time they'd heard it. Eric loved his horses, his rotated fields; he even had affection for his big plough tractor. But when Anna wasn't right, nothing else meant much in his isolated life as a petty baron of the wheatlands.

THE meal went on with desultory, futile speech. Hans did most of the eating. After he had gone to finish the chores, Eric and Anna lingered over the litter of dishes.

"What's the matter, Anna?" Eric asked gently. "You talked in your sleep last night, and you never do that unless you have a touch of the flu or something. Is it just that infernal racket that we can't trace? It gives me the creeps, too, but—but I guess it's mostly because of the effect it has on you."

He got up and walked around the table, put his arm around her, felt her splendid body quiver against his breast.

"I don't know, Eric; I don't know." Her voice was a tired moan. "I'm tired somehow—and frightened."

He took her hand, lifted her up, led her into the parlour. With proud strength he lifted her up in his arms and sat her on his lap in the big morris chair beside the crooning radio. "Tell me, Anna; tell me all about it." He caressed her hair with calloused fingers that were not hard in the arts of love.

It *is* that music, Eric." Her voice was a muffled sob against his shoulder. "I'm sure now—after last night."

"Sure? And why?"

"Because of a dream—a terrible dream I had. Oh, I didn't want to tell any one, not even you. But I must. If I don't tell someone I'll go crazy!"

"There, there, now. It can't be as bad as that," he inserted too hastily. "Dreams are nothing to worry about."

"If it *was* only just a dream!" she cried. "Oh, you know I almost never dream—and this, this was too terrible, too real. I don't see how I can ever tell it."

He patted her, pressed her closer. "Tell me the best way you can, honey. Maybe I can help you a little."

She hesitated, as if groping among unfamiliar words for figures to express the inexpressible. He felt her strong body quiver against him, then relax a little as she said tensely: "You remember De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*?"

He nodded vaguely. She went on:

"I guess everybody has read it at some time in life. I read it in high school, but it never meant much to me until last night. De Quincey wrote something about the horror of falling for seeming ages through a black abyss and seeing cities, civilisations rise and fall before his eyes. He wanted to stop falling; it was agony for him to wait through those ages, but he couldn't stop. He had to go on.

"My dream was like that. I wasn't myself. I seemed to be just—just thought without a body. Something had me in its power—a grey, shadowy, monstrous thing that I couldn't understand and couldn't resist. I had to go where it took me."

"Go on," he murmured as she faltered, snuggling closer in his arms as if to hide from the terror of a memory.

"At first it was dark, like the night sky, and terribly cold. But I didn't feel the cold—I just *knew* it was cold. Then there were worlds—suns millions of stars and moons like round rainbows and globes of blood. I kept sweeping on through the black space, sick with fear; and yet I was fascinated, too, like when you see something so awful you can't tear your eyes away.

"I—we—went down to some of the worlds that hung in the blackness. I saw terrible jungles, like forests of giant toadstools or mould under a microscope. In some places there were deserts the colour of sunsets, and so wide it would take years to cross them. I remember living things—monsters that I never dreamed could be, and some beautiful in a way. Once we saw a flock of ghostly flying things like wisps of white clouds. They turned into little whirling, funnel shapes as we looked, and fled away.

"Oh, I can't begin to describe all of it. I saw more than a person could see naturally in thousands of years, if they could really go where I did with that awful thing. The end of the journey seemed to come when we reached a great, dark mass that was dimly lighted by a giant sun. There were millions of black rocks on this world, some as tall as skyscrapers, with fields of glittering crystals like snow or salt between. One word rang through my mind as we hovered over the dark world. It makes me shudder to remember it. 'Dead, dead, dead!'"

SHE turned tight-shut eyes so that they were hidden in the hollow of his shoulder.

"Was there anything else?" Eric's voice was clogged with a husking phlegm. "Any other words that might give us a clue to what caused the dream?"

Her body tensed again, and one hand clenched his arm. After a moment she said: "Yes, I remember two words besides that one tragic cry. They were names of something, I think—'Xarthon' and 'Algol.' Xarthon meant 'the Dark One,' and Algol 'the Bright One.' Those names came to me somewhere on that dark world near the end of the dream. Oh, it was all so wild and terrible and confused! I wish I could forget, but something seems to make me remember, until I want to scream."

Eric put in tensely: "It must have ended when I awakened you to see what was wrong. You remember we heard that singing bird or beetle, or whatever it is, at the window that opens on your side of the bed."

She nodded eagerly. "Yes, and the noise stopped—or went away—right afterwards, as if we had frightened it or made it angry." Her voice choked a little. "Oh, I know how unreasonable, how mad it all sounds, Eric. If I could just believe it was only a dream! But I saw things that I never could conceive of anywhere on Earth or in Heaven—or even in Hell. And I know those sounds had something to do with it. I'm afraid, Eric—afraid of that thing. I don't know why, but I have a feeling that it's coming back—to take me away—forever."

"Nonsense, Anna! I'd like to see anyone, or anything, take you away from me!"

Eric's words were bold, but he swallowed hard on them. A stony dullness crept into his eyes as he held Anna closer. Eric Paulson did not fear the known; he wasn't superstitious, either. Yet he knew that something was wrong in his house since that music had come out of the thin air to curse his happiness with Anna.

"I read something once," he said; "something about the effect of sound vibrations on the human mind." He was holding his voice masterfully steady for Anna's benefit. She had raised her cameo head, was looking at him with wet eyes that begged for moral support and understanding. "I think there was something about matter, living matter, being affected by sound, too. The idea seemed to be that just the right pitch of sound vibrations could even kill a person if kept up long enough. Of course, that's all imaginative rot but that cursed singing thing always harps the same tune. It might be. . . ."

His voice trailed off in the silence of swift reflection. When he spoke again it was with harsh decisiveness. "Know what I'm going to do, Anna? I'm going to call Tony Zeller."

"Tony Zeller!" She sat up stiffly in his lap, plucking at her skirt, thinking in a flutter of a seedy little German truck farmer whose words were morosely few and cryptic.

"Sure! Tony can solve this mystery and catch that singing thing if anybody can. He's always puttering around with crazy experiments; knows more about science than he does about raising potatoes. He even has a stargazer that he made himself. We've got a job for his microscope now. You don't mind, do you, Anna?"

"Anything you say, Eric." Her tone was listless as she slipped from his lap. He got up quickly, went to the wall phone that had a crank for use on a party line.

Two shorts and a long. He didn't need to wait. Tony Zeller was a prairie hermit, wedded to his stone-house cave. A grouchy "Hello" answered, but the screaky, old voice in the receiver changed its tune after a minute of brisk persuasion from Eric.

"I'll pay you, Tony," he begged. "I want this racket stopped. It's driving us all mad."

"I do it for not'ing. Be right over." Tony's voice was shrilly eager. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"He's coming." Eric turned to Anna as he hung up. "We couldn't keep him away with four horses now. I don't know if it will do any good, but we've got to do something." He sighed as he put his arm in Anna's. "Let's go out and do the dishes, honey. If that singing devil comes around with his pipes I'll take a shotgun to him."

THEY WERE finishing the dishes when the clank and snuffle of Tony Zeller's ancient pick-up advertised his arrival. Eric went out in the dusk and met a bent, thin figure in overalls, street coat and faded crusher.

Eric clapped a steely hand on the old German's arm after they shook hands. His voice was stingingly imperative: "I'm not calling a doctor unless Anna gets worse. You know why. They'll say she's losing her mind. And you keep your mouth shut, Tony. Understand? No gossip."

Only Tony's broken teeth showed in a ragged, twitching smile of grim humour as he said: "You know me, Eric, better as that. Do I talk too much? I do not talk enough, they say. The books, the stars, my garten are enough for me. And now—the facts." He scrubbed his hands. "It is stunning, if what you say is true. I cannot believe it. A new species, perhaps——"

Anna was in the parlour trying to read a magazine when they went in. Hans' lantern was winking around the barn. The little Teuton bachelor recluse would have been self-conscious before Anna Paulson's glowing, ravishing beauty, in any other situation. But for once Tony Zeller

was himself in the presence of seductive woman. Under a broad, bald brown, his eagle-black eyes studied Anna as a Burbank reviews a generative progression.

Eric told him simply of the invisible songster that had come to the Paulson ranch like a Pied Piper from Hell. "I don't know if you've heard it over at your place," he concluded, "but if you did you'd never forget it."

Tony shook his head. "I have not heard it. Strange—too strange. I am stunned by this evidence. Nature is the unfathomable, the endless. But the significance—this effect you speak of?" He glanced piercingly at Anna.

Eric's voice faltered a little. "Anna, will you tell Tony about that dream—just as you told it to me?"

"I'll try." Her night-blue eyes were vivid blots of pain. She didn't look at Tony, but to Eric, as a child that hopes for prompting.

As the fantasy unfolded in broken sequence, Tony Zeller hunched out farther on the edge of his chair. His startled, incredulous eyes never left Anna's face. Sometimes his lips moved with hers, and he uttered little exclamations of awe and satisfaction.

"That's all I can tell," Anna finished in a whisper. "Eric, you tell him what you said—about sound vibrations hurting people."

Eric shook his head. "Tony knows more than I about that theory."

Tony nodded jerkily. The little German had no eyes for either of them, now. His seamy, weathered face was pale with thought; a death's head in which only the eyes were alive with the smouldering intensity of one who trembles to admit the proof of miracles.

"I must hear this music you speak of," he spoke at last in a voice that was husked with emotion. "But the dream—its meaning is clear to me, if the cause is not. The two names—Algol, the Bright One, and Xarthon, the Dark One—are significant, remarkable. Algol is a famous variable star in the constellation of Perseus. It stand for the head of the Medusa. A variable is a star that disappear sometimes. Algol is called the Demon Star because it vanish and come back like black magic."

"But I never heard of it!" Anna cried "How could I dream of something I knew nothing about?"

"Vait!" Tony's voice was hoarsely compelling as he waved a knotty hand. "Of course you didn't know of it. But there is something more wonderful as that in your dream. Dere is a theory in astronomy that Algol vanishes because a dark companion star moves between it and the Earth. Your dream would prove that theory which not the biggest telescope can prove. Xarthon, the Dark One, is the dark star that eclipses Algol!"

Eric gasped. "You mean she could see that in a dream, knowing nothing of astronomy?"

"Himmel, no! Not in the ordinary dream—for has she not said she dreams little? That is the connection with these strange sounds you have heard—what you call the influence of sound vibrations. When I hear this music I can say more, maybe. But the dream—it is clear. At the speed of thought that is faster than light, Anna journeys through the great, cold darkness of infinite space. She see strange worlds, mighty sunstars, queer moons. There are weird beasts and peoples of other worlds. And at the end of this journey of the mind she sees Xarthon the Dark, and Algol the Bright. 'Dead, dead, dead,' say this voice of mind. And is not Xarthon a dead star if we accept these premises? And the grey, misty thing that compels Anna to see this, as she fears now—can you not see the connection?

The music you hear is not insect, not bird. It is——"

ERIC'S incredulous gasp cut him off. "You expect us to believe that the sounds influencing Anna are from an unknown star billions of miles away in outer space? Quit yarning, Tony, and come down to Earth!"

"Have I said *finis*?" The little German's words were acrid with reproach. "To find facts from the unknown to the known, we make theories. They cost not'in. From them has come everyt'ing we know. If you cannot see what makes this music that worry Anna, are my eyes so much better?

"Listen, Eric—Anna! You know not'ing and I too little of what life can be in the worlds of space. You judge life by a yardstick, like the point of a needle. Have you read Garret Serviss in your own language? He says 'a company of Neptunians might be as iridescent as a flight of soap bubbles.' He made a theory of life on other words, to wit: 'They vould approach in constitution "disembodied spirits" or ghosts—colligations of gaseous atoms taking the place of the bones, muscles and tissues.' And if life can be gaseous, who can say that life cannot be sound—to you, to me, with only five senses and three dimensions?"

Eric and Anna were staring at Tony in stunned amazement.

"You reason like a Yogi," Eric muttered, twisting his locked fingers. "The idea that sound invisible can be alive is the craziest thing I ever heard of."

The animation died in Tony Zeller's zealot face. "You t'ink I make fun." His voice was low, wistful. "Let me tell you somet'ing, both of you. To-night you have made for me the big moment, maybe. All my life I have lived and studied for one t'ing alone—to make the great discovery for natural science, for the future when the man of Earth shall explore space. One little paper, like Einstein's relativity, like Newton's law of gravitation—that is all I vant. And then I can die happy. Now, maybe it come, like a meteor—so sudden I am stunned. You t'ink me crazy. But I do not care. Somet'ing tells me on this little Dakota farm the gift of the ages may have come to-night—the proof of life in the stars, life as Earthman cannot dream!"

Eric got up, uncomfortably. "All right, Tony. I hope your dream comes true; but if you can locate that cursed beetle with an orchestra in its wings and——"

"Listen!" It was Anna's wild cry as she and Tony leaped up. Her face was twisted in a piteous agony of fear.

It was a whirring, distant shriek, like a tiny shell hurtling at meteor speed through the outer air, straight toward the house. That thrilling, tenuous scream had scarcely manifested itself when from the front yard sounded the haunting, exquisite melody of the visitor, chanting its dirge of nameless mystery.

"Eric! Don't let it in! Don't let it come near me!" Anna moaned.

Tony Zeller ran out of the front door on to the porch, and looked off into the greying starlight where that weird song throbbed like the lyre of Calliope. Eric had dashed into the kitchen. His ice-blue eyes were grimly hard as he came back through the parlour with a pump gun. He stamped out on the porch with Tony, raised the gun with passion-shaken hands.

"Go on! Shoot!" Tony Zeller's cracked voice was hoarse with derision. "Maybe the sky rain ducks!"

"I'll put a scare into it," Eric gulped.

He pumped three crashing shots into the front yard. He shot at the sounds as nearly as he could tell from where they came. Then he tilted the hot gun, and listened. There was no faltering in the song from the starlight. Instead, it moved nearer, grew louder, until it seemed directly before the porch. The treble notes were a gleeful, elfin laughter; the bass held an ominous snore of gloat.

ERIC emptied the shotgun from his hip. It was a futile, desperate gesture. Like strong night wind under the eaves, the song went on before them, dolefully beautiful and sinister, a fragment of some demon symphony rendered by a bard of the gods.

"You see?" Tony Zeller's tones were flat, strained. "It is no insect. No fiddling wings can make such sounds. The range is not in the larynx of even the mocking bird. Put away the gun, Eric. There is work for us—*to save Anna.*"

Eric swung fiercely on the shadowy figure of the little German. "What do you mean—save Anna? What in the name of Heaven could it want with her?"

Tony's withered hand was gentle but insistent on Eric's arm. "That is for us to find out, Eric. Come! We must go in to Anna. She has need of more help than all this little world can give!"

They hurried in. Anna was lying back in the morris chair, pale and still. She spoke to Eric as he felt anxiously of her pulse, but her voice was listless, her eyes absent, unseeing. The song throbbed on outside, hovering near the door, as elusive as night-singing cicadas.

"I'm so sleepy," Anna murmured. "Take me to bed, Eric. Don't leave me. I—I am going away."

Eric looked his alarm at Tony; but the German had bent to the radio, was turning it on full blast, until the parlour was racked with blaring static. Anna roused a little. It seemed the cacophony helped to counteract the mystic menace of the singer without. Gently, Eric led her to their bedroom, opening off an alcove of the parlour, and closed the door.

Through the raucous tumult of the radio they could hear the clarion treble of the singing thing in front of the house; not loud, but penetrating, with excruciating sentience of pitch. Unuttered curses writhed on Eric's lips as he sat with Anna on the edge of the bed, held her close, felt her tremble and twist in an agony like the travail of a spirit birth. Then suddenly, as it had so many times before, the singing ceased in brief, bee-like whine as of a thing that hurtled away at incredible speed. In the parlour, Tony Zeller turned off the roaring radio.

"It's gone again," Eric said, but there was no exultation in his voice. He seemed resigned to the certainty that his curse, and Anna's, would return. Anna passed a groping, chilled hand through the billows of her shining hair. Her eyes were dazed, delirious She was a child in his hands as he helped her to bed. As he tucked her in she seemed to sink away into unnatural sleep, a torpor that terrified him.

Tony Zeller was coming in from the porch when Eric stepped softly from the bedroom, leaving the door half open. Tony's face seemed almost pasty around the bottomless murk of his dilated eyes.

"I've got to do something," Eric whispered frantically. "She's in some kind of coma. I'll call Doc Stangby at New England. But, Heaven knows, if this ever gets out they'll make a sideshow out of the ranch, and that will be worse for Anna."

"Call the doctor, Eric," Tony said quietly. "It will do no good, I t'ink, but it is best course—if the worst should happen."

"You think there's no hope?" Eric groaned. "The radio—didn't it scare the thing away when you turned it on loud?"

Tony shook his head solemnly. A wan smile quirked his ascetic lips. "I turned the radio on loud maybe to help Anna a little—to fight it. Radio is just a toy to this thing. I say no more till I have the proof—but Anna is in the hands of Got."

Eric reeled to the telephone and rang for the doctor. "He'll be right out, but it's twenty miles," he said between short, painful breaths, as he turned from the phone. Tony Zeller had sat down like a man in a trance. Hans stamped in from the chores. He paused a moment with a question on his lips. Then he tramped upstairs to bed, an anxious look on his round, honest face.

IN THE stillness of deepening night Eric waited, slowly pacing the floor. Tony was waiting, too, he knew, waiting for that song of Satan to return on its inexplicable, fearful mission.

"I'll take her away." Eric stopped once, his eyes lighting with feverish hope.

Tony shook his head slowly. "You cannot take her away—from that." His words were a sentence of death. "Did you not hear it come and go?"

They went into the bedroom together, a little later, and looked down at Anna. Tony lifted an eyelid gently, felt the slow, faint pulse.

"It is unnatural sleep," he whispered. "Like hypnosis. Medicine does not know this sleep."

"Anna!" Eric knelt at the bedside. "How can God let this happen to you—my beautiful, my goddess!"

Tony turned away and sat down in a chair near the wall, leaving Eric with head buried in the bedclothes between his outflung arms. The slow, moribund sigh of Anna's breathing soughed eerily through the still room. And then from the windless night a whirring, swelling burst of clarion sound, like the blind flight of a great male locust in the mating amuck.

Eric's head jerked up. His eyes swelled in an agony of fear; his fists were clenched and quivering. And in the instant he moved, the singer was in the room and the house was thrumming with wild melody. Anna stirred. The streaming curves of her tall body bowed and writhed beneath the coverlet. Tony Zeller stared as one dead who looks upon eternity beyond the grave.

A curse died on Eric's lips as a stinging tremor bathed his skin. A numbness was stealing through him. The searing, livid pain of that exquisite music racked him like a rending voltage. The room faded before his set gaze; faded to grey, steaming mists of indefinacy. The singing grew faint and fainter, gradually dying away. And then he saw the thing of Anna's dream: a shrouded clot of that swimming translucence all around him, a netted mass of hoary ganglia and veinous fibres, drawing to a peaked, eyeless head like the nucleus of some great, phantom amoeba.

He couldn't move in the unnatural stillness. A horror, an abasing awe, froze his blood. Vaguely he discerned the lucent outlines of the bed, Anna's still, quiescent form, Tony Zeller seated motionless in the chair. Netted tentacles branched from the mass that hovered over Anna; a mass half in, half out of the misted walls of the bedroom. One arm extended to his head, another to Anna's body, still another to the head of Tony

Zeller, like conduits from some intricate nerve assembly.

He couldn't feel those countless filament fingers that were closed in his brain, yet he knew that somehow he was a part of them, his mind and body delicate instruments with which a master did his will. A voice was speaking, clear, deep, sonorously compelling. He didn't know where it came from. It might have come from anywhere—as voices that speak in the mind a conscience prompting.

"Hear me, oh Earthlings! It is I, Egabl, who speaks. Egabl of the dead star Xarthon, whose black bosom glimmers in the light of the star you name Algol the Demon. In the language of thought I speak, and you hear me as a spirit echo; for I am master of life's soul that you vaguely know as vibrations.

"You see me now, oh Earthlings, as with my infinite powers I merge with your lower organisms for a brief space. All is a mist to your animal vision, that to me is a mere tropism. And mists we must be to one another, for only to that imperfect extent can we meet across the abyss of our separate evolutions. Would that we might merge wholly; but to my sorrow I have learned that cannot be.

"My history and the fact of my being can mean little to you. Your greatest mind cannot credit my kind in the limitations of their senses. Yet for your comfort—alas, I wish it were mine also!—I may explain in so far as your primitive intelligences can interpret the vibrations.

"Hear, then, oh fledgings of the Great Womb, that you of Earth are three dimensional, and I, the last of the Xarthon kind, am of but one dimension. You perceived me first as sound alone, and in your natural state I am to you no more than a tetra of sound. I move as though from vision to vision. My food is the rays of the cosmos that your plants reduce for you in indirect digestion. My beginning was in countless ages past, when all Xarthons were sexed; my end shall be countless ages hence, though now and anon I wish that end were soon, for I am as the Wandering Jew in your mythology.

"LIGHT-YEARS gone by, oh Earthlings, as you measure time, I left Xarthon, the last of my great race. Know you that Xarthon was once a hot star, but it cooled and gave forth life as a planet. Not life as you know it on your tiny world, but Life as the Great Womb knows it—life as variable as its individuals in species.

"We were a great people, we Xarthons, immune to heats and chills, to storm and starvation and violent death. But we would be greater; we would be one with the Spirit of Life that made fertile the womb of worlds. We lived long, but we would live forever. And we were wise in alchemy. Sex was abolished, for it seemed we could live forever, and sex was a crude and primitive thing beneath our dignity. But when the last of our female kind was gone, we learned too late that our lives were not eternal. Ages we might live in an ecstasy of fancy and the sensations of infinite mind, but there was an end as the Great Womb decreed.

"One day, which to you would be a century, we found a member missing from our unchanging number. We were alarmed and distraught, for it was incredible that aught of misfortune should come to one of us. Our greatest minds were baffled until, with our infinite powers, we found traces of our lost brother in the atomic orders of our atmosphere. Dead! Dead without cause that we could see.

"There was mourning among us, and fear, but too late! One by one

through the ages our number dwindled, dying the natural death which you call old age, though our span of years would be as eons to you. We could not recall our lost sex complements for propagation. We had committed the unpardonable sin against the Great Womb that bore us, and the price we must pay was extinction for our proud and godlike breed.

"And when the last of my brothers died, and I was alone on Xarthon, I faced away from the great sepulchre of my kind, hoping to find the female complement that would rebear my race on some new world. Theretofore we had feared to venture beyond the strata of our native atmosphere; but I was desperate. I cared not for life alone. And through the powers of my one-dimensional being that you can never conceive, I have survived thus far in my pilgrimage through space. Countless worlds I searched vainly for the flesh that would provide my female. Countless more worlds will I search, no doubt. before I shall succeed; for here I face but one more failure.

"Little I expected to find desirable life upon this tiny dot of matter between the galaxies, and yet I came, for I am infinitely thorough in all my searching. I saw this woman and she was fair—not fair in the flesh as you see fairness; for I see deeper, to the singing voice that is the spirit of female life, the calyx of vibrations that I covet. And do not think that I have not looked on others of her kind! Between the times that you have perceived me as repeated sounds, I searched your tiny, infant planet from shore to shore and even from isle to isle. But I found this woman most nearly perfect for my purposes, strongest to endure the transition of the living spirit to a segment of my vibratory matrix.

"But I have failed again. So far, and no further, will she merge. To exert the full force of my powers would reduce to astral ash that precious treasure I have sought throughout the universe. I could leave her dead, a shell of flesh to draw your tears, but I choose not; for know you that we of Xarthon have ever been just and kind in our way. If I could take that life from her and make it woman of my kind I would not hesitate to grieve you, and you and all your ordinance of nations would be powerless to resist that theft of life. My race is far greater than yours and well deserving of such sacrifice. But now I leave her with you, whole and well, to serve her feeble time in the primal joys and woes that are a fullness for your kind.

"Last night I came to this woman in a dream and revealed to her, during my examination of her organism, the wonders of space and time; a glimpse of the powers of life in its highest orders. I hoped for favourable response, but she was much afraid and resisted me. Stark reality for me was to her a terrible dream. I left her under my control, as one of your spiders stupefies an insect with a a measured poison; left her to make anatomical comparisons among her sisters. Some few, widely scattered around your world, remember fearful dreams. But I shall come no more to haunt these simple souls, and the sounds of my presence shall be forgotten as illusions of the senses. So does ignorance and innocence escape the wonders of infinite knowledge!

"To-night I have come to this woman for the last time. I am convinced of failure now. She will not merge. You see the extensions of my being playing through her now, manipulating each nerve as you perform upon a pipe organ, even as other extensions of my matrix play through you who are of my vibrations, the male kind. Fear not, my children! I go, to come no more. Before your feeble sun dawns again I shall be centuries

afar in the void, seeking new forms of life for my purposes.

"Hear me, oh Earthlings! Life too low becomes one with the dust, and life too high reverts to ether that is the Womb of Life. Remember or forget, as you will. I am Egabl of Xarthon, and I come but once to the various peoples of space. Farewell! Farewell!"

ERIC MOVED in a brief vertigo of lightning change. The grey form vanished; the room flashed clearly before his startled, aching eyes. It was as if he had slept a moment, yet he knew that his eyes had never closed; nor had they winked, for they smarted, arid of tears. In the distance he thought he heard a whirring scream across the vault of the night, like the shriek of a damned soul lost forever in immemorial silence. Then he heard Tony Zeller cry out in agony a phrase of Latin: "*Ecce homo*! *Ecce homo*, Egabl!"

It was Anna who quickened his pulse to surging life again. Her face had flushed with warm colour. She was opening her eyes, struggling up. "Eric," she called softly, as their hands met in a clinging clasp. "You know now. You heard. You dreamed with me!"

He drew her into his arms, kissed her hungrily, moaning his gratitude. The muffled clang of a car door in the yard outside parted them reluctantly.

"It's the doctor," Eric said, and went out to tell him that all was well.

When the mystified doctor had gone, Eric said to Tony Zeller: "You've got what you need for that paper now. It will make you greater than Einstein. This world has never heard the like—even now I'm wondering if it wasn't all a dream."

Tony sighed. The light had gone from his brilliant eyes. "It is wonderful just to know," he murmured. "But the evidence—ah, the evidence, Eric! There is none."

"Evidence! Didn't Anna and I experience it with you? We'll be witnesses to prove what you say!"

Tony had his old felt hat in his hand as he stood at the door.

"Eric," he said, solemnly, "if the testimony of speech and the observations of laymen were conclusive, then spiritism would be a positive science. My chance has come—but it was too big. Not even Millikan could do it! May Got bless you and Anna. Good-night!"

Cool Air

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

What was the ghastly secret of the recluse doctor who lived in an atmosphere of freezing cold and talked of cheating Death?

YOU ask me to explain why I am afraid of a draught of cool air; why I shiver more than others upon entering a cold room, and seem nauseated and repelled when the chill of evening creeps through the heat of a mild autumn day. There are those who say I respond to cold as others do to

a bad odour, and I am the last to deny the impression. What I will do is to relate the most horrible circumstance I ever encountered, and leave it to you to judge whether or not this forms a suitable explanation of my peculiarity.

It is a mistake to fancy that horror is associated inextricably with darkness, silence, and solitude. I found it in the glare of mid-afternoon, in the clangour of a metropolis, and in the teeming midst of a shabby and commonplace rooming-house with a prosaic landlady and two stalwart men by my side. In the spring of 1923 I had secured some dreary and unprofitable magazine work in the city of New York, and being unable to pay any substantial rent, began drifting from one cheap boarding establishment to another in search of a room which might combine the qualities of decent cleanliness, endurable furnishings and very reasonable price. It soon developed that I had only a choice between different evils, but after a time I came upon a house in West Fourteenth Street which disgusted me much less than the others I had sampled.

The place was a four-story mansion of brownstone, dating apparently from the late forties, and fitted with woodwork and marble whose stained and sullied splendour argued a descent from high levels of tasteful opulence. In the rooms, large and lofty, and decorated with impossible paper and ridiculously ornate stucco cornices, there lingered a depressing mustiness and hint of obscure cookery; but the floors were clean, the linen tolerably regular, and the hot water not too often cold or turned off, so that I came to regard it as at least a bearable place to hibernate until one might really live again. The landlady, a slatternly, almost bearded Spanish woman named Herrero, did not annoy me with gossip or with criticisms of the late-burning electric light in my third floor front hall room; and my fellow lodgers were as quiet and uncommunicative as one might desire, being mostly Spaniards a little above the coarsest and crudest grade. Only the din of street-cars in the thoroughfare below proved a serious annoyance.

I had been there about three weeks when the first odd incident occurred. One evening at about eight I heard a spattering on the floor, and became suddenly aware that I had been smelling the pungent odor of ammonia for some time. Looking about, I saw that the ceiling was wet and dripping, the stuff apparently proceeding from a corner on the side toward the street. Anxious to stop the matter at its source, I hastened to the basement to tell the landlady, and was assured by her that the trouble would quickly be set right.

"Doctair Munoz," she cried as she rushed upstairs ahead of me, "he have speel hees chemicals. He ees too seeck for doctair heemself—seecker and seecker all the time—but he weel not have no othair for help. He ees vairy queer in hees seeckness — all day he takes funneeh smelling baths, and he cannot get excite or warm. All hees own housework he do—hees leetle room are full of bottles and machines and he do not work as doctair. But he was great once—my fathair in Barcelona have hear of heem—and only joost now he feex a arm of the plumber that get hurt of sudden. He nevair go out, only on roof, and my boy Esteban he breeng heem hees food and laundry and mediceens and chemicals My God, the sal-ammoniac that man use for to keep heem cool!"

Mrs. Herrero disappeared up the staircase to the fourth floor, and I returned to my room. The ammonia ceased to drip and as I cleaned up

what had spilled and opened the window for air, I heard the landlady's heavy footsteps above me. Doctor Munoz I had never heard, save for certain sounds as of some gasoline-driven mechanism, since his step was soft and gentle. I wondered for a moment what the strange affliction of this man might be and whether his obstinate refusal of outside aid were not the result of a rather baseless eccentricity. There is, I reflected tritely, an infinite deal of pathos in the state of an eminent person who has come down in the world.

I MIGHT never have known Doctor Munoz had it not been for the heart attack that suddenly seized me one forenoon as I sat writing in my room. Physicians had told me of the danger of those spells, and I knew there was no time to be lost. So, remembering what the landlady had said about the invalid's help of the injured workman, I dragged myself upstairs and knocked feebly at the door above mine. My knock was answered in good English by a curious voice, some distance to the right, asking my name and business; and these things being stated, there came an opening of the door next to the one I had sought.

A rush of cool air greeted me; and though the day was one of the hottest of late June, I shivered as I crossed the threshold into a large apartment whose rich and tasteful decoration surprised me in this nest of squalor and seediness. A folding couch now filled its diurnal role of sofa, and the mahogany furniture, sumptuous hangings, old paintings and mellow bookshelves all bespoke a gentleman's study rather than a boarding-house bedroom. I now saw that the hall room above mine—the "leetle room" of bottles and machines which Mrs. Herrero had mentioned—was merely the laboratory of the doctor, and that his main living quarters lay in the spacious adjoining room whose convenient alcoves and large contiguous bathroom permitted him to hide all dressers and obtrusively utilitarian devices. Doctor Munoz, most certainly, was a man of birth, cultivation, and discrimination.

The figure before me was short but exquisitely proportioned, and clad in somewhat formal dress of perfect fit and cut. A high-bred face of masterful though not arrogant expression was adorned by a short, iron-grey beard, and an old-fashioned pince-nez shielded the full, dark eyes and surmounted an acquiline nose which gave a Moorish touch to a physiognomy otherwise dominantly Celt-Iberian. Thick, well-trimmed hair that argued the punctual calls of a barber was parted gracefully above a high forehead; and the whole picture was one of striking intelligence and superior blood and breeding.

Nevertheless, as I saw Doctor Munoz in that blast of cool air, I felt a repugnance which nothing in his aspect could justify. Only his lividly inclined complexion and coldness of touch could have afforded a physical basis for this feeling, and even these things should have been excusable considering the man's known invalidism. It might, too, have been the singular cold that alienated me; for such chilliness was abnormal on so hot a day and the abnormal always excites aversion, distrust and fear.

But repugnance was soon forgotten in admiration, for the strange physician's extreme skill at once became manifest despite the ice-coldness and shakiness of his bloodless-looking hands. He clearly understood my needs at a glance, and ministered to them with a master's deftness, the while reassuring me in a finely modulated though oddly hollow and timbreless voice that he was the bitterest of sworn enemies to death, and had sunk his fortune and lost all his friends in a lifetime of bizarre experiment devoted to its bafflement and extirpation. Something of the benevolent fanatic seemed to reside in him, and he rambled on almost garrulously as he sounded my chest and mixed a suitable draught of drugs fetched from the smaller laboratory room. Evidently he found the society of a well-born man a rare novelty in this dingy environment, and was moved to unaccustomed speech as memories of better days surged over him.

His voice, if queer, was at least soothing, and I could not even perceive that he breathed as the fluent sentences rolled urbanely out. He sought to distract my mind from my own seizure by speaking of his theories and experiments; and I remember his tactfully consoling me about my weak heart by insisting that will and consciousness are stronger than organic life itself so that if a bodily frame be but originally healthy and carefully preserved, it may through a scientific enhancement of these qualities retain a kind of nervous animation despite the most serious impairments, defects, or even absences in the battery of specific organs. He might, he half-jestingly said, some day teach me to live—or at least to possess some kind of conscious existence—without any heart at all!

For his part, he was afflicted with a complication of maladies requiring a very exact regimen which included constant cold. Any marked rise in temperature might, if prolonged, affect him fatally, and the frigidity of his habitation—some fifty-five or fifty-six degrees Fahrenheit—was maintained by an absorption system of ammonia cooling, the gasoline engine whose pumps I had often heard in my room below.

RELIEVED of my seizure in a marvellously short while, I left the shivery place a disciple and devotee of the gifted recluse. After that I paid him frequently overcoated calls, listening while he told of secret researches and almost ghastly results, and trembling a bit when I examined the unconventional and astonishingly ancient volumes on his shelves. I was eventually, I may add, almost cured of my disease for all time by

his skilful ministrations. It seems that he did not scorn the incantations of the mediaevalists, since he believed these cryptic formulae to contain rare psychological stimuli which might conceivably have singular effects on the substance of a nervous system from which organic pulsations had fled.

I was touched by his account of the aged Doctor Torres of Valencia, who had shared his earlier experiments and nursed him through the great illness of eighteen years before, whence his present disorders proceeded. No sooner had the venerable practitioner saved his colleague than he himself succumbed to the grim enemy he had fought. Perhaps the strain had been too great; for Doctor Munoz made it whisperingly clear—though not in detail—that the methods of healing had been most extraordinary, involving scenes and processes not welcomed by elderly and conservative Galens.

As the weeks passed, I observed with regret that my new friend was indeed slowly but unmistakably losing ground physically, as Mrs. Herrero had suggested. The livid aspect of his countenance was intensified, his voice became more hollow and indistinct, his muscular motions were less perfectly co-ordinated, and his mind and will displayed less resilience and initiative. Of this sad change he seemed by no means unaware, and little by little his expression and conversation both took on a gruesome irony which restored in me something of the subtle repulsion I had originally felt.

He developed strange caprices, acquiring a fondness for exotic spices and Egyptian incense until his room smelled like the vault of a sepulchred Pharaoh in the Valley of Kings. At the same time his demands for cold air increased, and with my aid he amplified the ammonia piping of his room and modified the pumps and feed of his refrigerating machine until he could keep the temperature as low as thirty-four or forty degrees, and finally even twenty-eight degrees; the bathroom and laboratory, of course, being less chilled, in order that water might not freeze and that chemical processes might not be impeded. The tenant adjoining him complained of the icy air from around the connecting door; so I helped him fit heavy hangings to obviate the difficulty.

A kind of growing horror, of outré and morbid cast, seemed to possess him. He talked of death incessantly, but laughed hollowly when such things as burial or funeral arrangements were gently suggested. All in all, he became a disconcerting and even gruesome companion; yet in my gratitude for his healing I could not well abandon him to the strangers around him, and was careful to dust his room and attend to his needs each day, muffled in a heavy ulster which I bought especially for the purpose. I likewise did much of his shopping, and gasped in bafflement at some of the chemicals he ordered from druggists and laboratory supply houses.

An increasing and unexplained atmosphere of panic seemed to rise around his apartment. The whole house, as I have said, had a musty odour, but the smell in his room was worse, in spite of all the spices and incense and the pungent chemicals of the now incessant baths which he insisted on taking unaided. I perceived that it must be connected with his ailment, and shuddered when I reflected on what that ailment might be. Mrs. Herrero crossed herself when she looked at him, and gave him up unreservedly to me, not even letting her son Esteban continue to run errands for him.

When I suggested other physicians, the sufferer would fly into as much

of a rage as he seemed to dare to entertain. He evidently feared the physical effect of violent emotion, yet his will and driving force waxed rather than waned, and he refused to be confined to his bed. The lassitude of his earlier ill days gave place to a return of his fiery purpose, so that he seemed about to hurl defiance at the death demon even as that ancient enemy seized him. The pretence of eating, always curiously like a formality with him, he virtually abandoned, and mental power alone appeared to keep him from total collapse.

He acquired a habit of writing long documents of some sort, which he carefully sealed and filed with injunctions that I transmit them after his death to certain persons whom he named—for the most part lettered East Indians, but including also a once celebrated French physician now generally thought dead, and about whom the most inconceivable things had been whispered. As it happened, I burned all these papers undelivered and unopened. His aspect and voice became utterly frightful, and his presence almost unbearable. One September day an unexpected glimpse of him induced an epileptic fit in a man who had come to repair his electric desk lamp, and for whom he prescribed effectively while keeping himself well out of sight. That man, oddly enough, had been through the terrors of the Great War without having incurred any fright so thorough.

THEN, in the middle of October, the horror of horrors came with stupefying suddenness. One night about eleven the pump of the refrigerating machine broke down, so that within three hours the process of ammonia cooling became impossible. Doctor Munoz summoned me by thumping on the floor, and I worked desperately to repair the injury while my host cursed in a tone whose lifeless, rattling hollowness surpassed description. My amateur efforts, however, proved of no use, and when I had brought in a mechanic from a neighbouring all-night garage we learned that nothing could be done until morning, when a new piston would have to be obtained. The moribund hermit's rage and fear, swelling to grotesque proportions, seemed likely to shatter what remained of his failing physique; and once a spasm caused him to clap his hands to his eyes and rush into the bathroom. He groped his way out with face tightly bandaged, and I never saw his eyes again.

The frigidity of the apartment was now sensibly diminishing, and at about five in the morning the Doctor retired to the bathroom, commanding me to keep him supplied with all the ice I could obtain at all-night drug stores and cafeterias. As I would return from my sometimes discouraging trips and lay my spoils before the closed bathroom door, I could hear a restless splashing within and a thick voice croaking out the order for "More—more!" At length a warm day broke, and the shops opened one by one. I asked Esteban either to help with the ice-fetching while I obtained the pump piston or to order the piston while I continued with the ice; but, instructed by his mother, he absolutely refused. Finally I hired a seedy-looking loafer whom I encountered on the corner of Eighth Avenue to keep the patient supplied with ice from a little shop where I introduced him, and applied myself diligently to the task of finding a pump piston and engaging workmen competent to install it.

The task seemed interminable, and I raged almost as violently as the hermit when I saw the hours slipping by in a breathless, foodless round of vain telephoning and a hectic quest from place to place, hither and thither by subway and surface car. About noon I encountered a suitable supply

house far downtown, and at approximately one-thirty that afternoon arrived at my boarding-place with the necessary paraphernalia and two sturdy and intelligent mechanics. I had done all I could, and hoped I was in time.

Black terror, however, had preceded me. The house was in utter turmoil, and above the chatter of awed voices I heard a man praying in a deep basso. Fiendish things were in the air, and lodgers told over the beads of their rosaries as they caught the odour from beneath the Doctor's closed door. The lounger I had hired, it seems, had fled screaming and mad-eyed not long after his second delivery of ice: perhaps as a result of excessive curiosity. He could not, of course, have locked the door behind him, yet it was now fastened, presumably from the inside. There was no sound within save a nameless sort of slow thick dripping.

Briefly consulting with Mrs. Herrero and the workmen, despite a fear that gnawned my inmost soul, I advised the breaking down of the door; but the landlady found a way to turn the key from the outside with some wire device. We had previously opened the doors of all the other rooms on that hall and flung all the windows to the very top. Now, noses protected by handkerchiefs, we tremblingly invaded the accursed south room, which blazed with the warm sun of early afternoon.

A kind of dark, slimy trail led from the open bathroom door to the hall door, and thence to the desk, where a terrible little pool had accumulated. Something was scrawled there in pencil in an awful, blind hand on a piece of paper hideously smeared as though by the very claws that traced the hurried last words. Then the trail led to the couch and ended unutterably.

What was, or had been, on the couch I cannot and dare not say here. But this is what I shiveringly puzzled out on the stickily smeared paper before I drew a match and burned it to a crisp; what I puzzled out in terror as the landlady and two mechanics rushed frantically from that hellish place to babble their incoherent stories at the nearest police station. The nauseous words seemed well-nigh incredible in that yellow sunlight, with the clatter of cars and motor trucks ascending clamorously from crowded Fourteenth Street, yet I confess that I believed them then. Whether I believe them now I honestly do not know. There are things about which it is better not to speculate, and all that I can say is that I hate the smell of ammonia and grow faint at a draught of unusually cool air.

"The end," ran that noisome scrowl, "is here. No more ice—the man looked and ran away. Warmer every minute, and the tissues can't last. I fancy you know—what I said about the will and the nerves and the preserved body after the organs ceased to work. It was a good theory, but couldn't keep up indefinitely. There was a gradual deterioration I had not foreseen. Doctor Torres knew, but the shock killed him. He couldn't stand what he had to do; he had to get me in a strange, dark place, when he minded my letter and nursed me back. And the organs would never work again. It had to be done my way—artificial preservation—*for you see I died that time eighteen years ago.*"

The Manikin

By ROBERT BLOCH

What was the mysterious thing that moved on the hunched back of Simon Maglore? That brought him to his death . . . ? A story of stark horror.

MIND you, I cannot swear that my story is true. It may have been a dream, or worse, a symptom of some severe mental disorder. But I believe it is true. After all, how are we to know what things there are on earth? Strange monstrosities still exist, and foul, incredible perversions. Every new scientific discovery brings to light some bit of ghastly evidence that the world is not altogether the sane place we fondly imagine it to be.

To one man in a million, dreadful knowledge is revealed, and the rest of us remain mercifully ignorant. Blind as we are, we know little of what lurks beneath our normal life. There have been tales of sea-serpents and creatures of the deep, legends of dwarfs and giants, records of queer medical horrors, of unnatural births. There have been cannibals, necrophiles, and ghouls, loathsome rites of worship and sacrifice, maniacal murders and blasphemous crimes. When I think, then of what *I* saw and heard, and compare it with

other grotesque and unbelievable authenticities, I begin to fear for my reason.

But if there is any sane explanation of this matter, I wish to God I may be told before it is too late. Doctor Pierce tells me that I must be calm; he advised me to write this account in order to allay my apprehension. But I am not calm, and I never can be calm until I know the truth, once and for all; until I am wholly convinced that my fears are not founded on a hideous reality.

I was already a nervous man when I went to Bridgetown for a rest. It had been a hard grind that year at school and I was very glad to get away from the tedious classroom routine. The success of my lecture courses assured my position on the faculty for the year to come, and consequently I dismissed all accademic speculation from my mind when I decided to take a vacation. I chose to go to Bridgetown because of the excellent facilities the lake afforded for trout-fishing. The resort was a quiet, peaceful place, according to the simple prospectus. It did not offer a golf-course or an indoor swimming-pool. Best of all, it in no way extolled the scenic grandeur of the lake and woods. For that reason I wired in a reservation, packed my bag, assembled my pipes, and left.

I was more than satisfied with the place when I arrived. Bridgetown is a small, rustic village, a quaint survival of older and simpler days. Situated on Lake Kane, it is surrounded by rambling woods and sloping, sun-splashed meadows where the farm folk toil in serene content. The blight of modern civilisation has but dimly fallen upon these people and their quiet ways. The homes are old, the streets cobbled. The quota of summer guests is small and select. A few hunters and fishers come, but none of the ordinary pleasure-hunting crowd.

The place I stayed at was a three-storey hostelry on the lake itself —the Kane House, run by Absolom Gates. He was a character of the old school, a grizzled, elderly veteran whose father had been in the fishery business back in the sixties. His resort was a fisherman's Mecca. The rooms were large and airy; the food plentiful and excellently prepared by his widowed sister. After my first inspection, I prepared to enjoy a remarkably pleasant stay.

Then, upon my first visit to the village, I bumped into Simon Maglore on the street.

I FIRST met Maglore during my second term as an instructor back at college. Even then, he had impressed me greatly. This was not due to his physical characteristics alone, though they were unusual enough. He was tall and thin, with massive, stooping shoulders, and a crooked back. He was not a hunchback in the usual sense of the word, but was afflicted with a peculiar growth beneath his left shoulder-blade. This he took some pains to conceal, but its prominence made such attempts unsuccessful.

Outside of this unfortunate deformity, however, Maglore had been a very pleasant-looking fellow. Black-haired, grey-eyed, fair of skin, he seemed a fine specimen of intelligent manhood, and it was his intelligence that had so impressed me. His class-work was brilliant ,and at times attained heights of sheer genius. Despite the peculiarly morbid trend of his work in poetry and essays, it was

impossible to ignore the power and imagination that could produce such wild imagery and eldritch colour. One of his poems—*The Witch Is Hung*—won for him the Edsworth Memorial Prize, and several of his major themes were published in private anthologies.

From the first, I had taken a great interest in the young man and his unusual talent. He had not responded to my advances at first; I gathered that he was a solitary soul. Whether this was due to his physical peculiarity or his mental trend, I cannot say. He had lived alone in town, and was known to have ample means. He did not mingle with the other students, though they would have welcomed him for his ready wit, his charming disposition, and his vast knowledge of literature and art. Gradually, however, I managed to overcome his natural reticence, and won his friendship. He invited me to his rooms and we talked.

I had then learned of his earnest belief in the occult and esoteric. He had told me of his ancestors in Italy, and their interest in sorcery. One of them had been an agent of the Medici. They had migrated to America in the early days, because of certain charges made against them by the Holy Inquisition. He also spoke of his own studies in the realms of the unknown. His rooms were filled with strange drawings he had made from dreams, and still stranger images done in clay, and the shelves of his book-cases held many odd and ancient books.

I made several visits to the apartments before Maglore left school so suddenly in the fall of '33. The death of his parents called him to the East, and he left without saying farewell. But in the interim I had learned to respect him a good deal, and had taken a keen interest in his future plans, which included a book on the history of witch cult survivals in America and a novel dealing with the psychological effects of superstition on the mind. He had never written to me, and I heard no more about him until this chance meeting on the village street

He recognised me, or I doubt if I should have been able to identify him. He had changed. As we shook hands I noted his unkempt appearance and careless attire. His face was thinner, and much paler; there were shadows around his eyes—and in them. His hands trembled; his face forced a lifeless smile. His voice was deeper when he spoke, but he inquired after my health in the same charming fashion he had always affected. Quickly I explained my presence, and began to question him.

He informed me that he lived here in town; had lived here ever since the death of his parents. He was working very hard just now on his books, but he felt the result of his labours more than justified any physical inconveniences he might suffer. He apologised for his untidy apparel and his tired manner. He wanted to have a long talk with me sometime soon, but he would be very busy for the next few days. Possibly next week he would look me up at the hotel—just now he must get some paper at the village store and go back home. With an abrupt farewell, he turned his back on me and departed.

As he did so I received another start. The hump on his back had grown. It was now virtually twice the size it had been when I first met him, and it was no longer possible to hide it in the least.

Undoubtedly, hard work had taken severe toll of Maglore's energies. I thought of a sarcoma, and shuddered.

WALKING back to the hotel, I did some thinking. Simon's haggardness appalled me It was not healthful for him to work so hard, and his choice of subject was not any too wholesome. The constant isolation and the nervous strain were obviously combining to undermine his constitution; and I determined to appoint myself a mentor over his course. I resolved to visit him at the earliest opportunity, without waiting for an invitation.

Upon my arrival at the hotel, I got another idea. I would ask Gates what he knew about Simon and his work. Perhaps there was some interesting sidelight on his activity which might account for his curious transformation. I therefore sought out the worthy gentleman and broached the subject to him.

What I learned from him startled me. It appeared that the villagers did not like Master Simon, or his family. The old folks had been wealthy enough, but their name had a dubious repute cast upon it ever since the early days. Witches and warlocks, one and all, made up the family line. Their dark deeds had been carefully hidden from the first, but the folk around them could tell.

It appeared that nearly all of the Maglores had possessed certain physical malformations that had made them conspicuous. Some had been born with veils, others with club-feet. One or two were dwarfed, and all had at some time or another been accused of possessing the fabled "evil eye." Several of them had been nyctalops —they could see in the dark. Simon was not the first crookback in the family, by any means. His grandfather had it, and *his* grandsire before him.

There was much talk of inbreeding and clan-segregation, too. That, in the opinion of Gates and his fellows, clearly pointed to one thing—wizardry. Nor was this their only evidence. Did not the Maglores shun the village and shut themselves away in the old house on the hill? None of them attended church, either Were they not known to take long walks after dark, on nights when all decent, self-respecting people were safe in bed?

There were probably good reasons why they were unfriendly. Perhaps they had things they wished to hide in their old house, and maybe they were afraid of letting any talk get around. Folk had it that the place was full of wicked and heathenish books, and there was an old story that the whole family were fugitives from some foreign place or other because of what they had done. After all, who could say? They looked suspicious, they acted queerly; maybe they were. But nobody could rightly tell. The mass hysteria of witch-burning and the herd mania of satanic possession had not penetrated to this part of the country. No disappearances—bovine or human—could be laid at the doors of the Maglore family. Legally, their record was clear. But folk feared them. And this new one—Simon—was the worst.

He never had acted right. His mother died at his birth. Had to get a doctor from out of the city—no local man would handle such a case. The boy had nearly died, too. For several years nobody had seen him. His father and his uncle had spent all their

time taking care of him. When he was seven, the lad had been sent away to a private school. He came back once, when he was about twelve. That was when his uncle died. He went mad, or something of the sort At any rate, he had an attack which resulted in a cerebral haemorrhage, as the doctor called it.

Simon, then, was a nice-looking lad—except for the hump, of course. But it did not seem to bother him at the time—it was quite small. He had stayed several weeks, and then gone off to school again. He had not reappeared until his father's death, two years ago. The old man died all alone in that great house, and the body was not discovered until several weeks later. A passing pedlar had called, walked into the open parlour, and found old Jeffrey Maglore dead in his chair. His eyes were open, and filled with a look of frightful dread. Before him was a great iron book filled with queer, undecipherable characters.

A hurriedly-summoned physician pronounced death due to heart failure. But the pedlar, after staring into those fear-filled eyes and glancing at the odd, disturbing figures in the book, was not so sure. He had no opportunity to look around any further, however, for that night the son arrived.

People looked at him very queerly when he came, for no notice had yet been sent him of his father's death. They were very still indeed when he exhibited a two weeks' old letter in the old man's handwriting which announced a premonition of imminent death and advised the young man to come home. The carefully guarded phrases of this letter seemed to hold a secret meaning, for the youth never even bothered to ask the circumstances of his father's death Th funeral was private, the customary interment being held in the cellar vaults beneath the house.

THE gruesome and peculiar events of Simon Maglore's homecoming immediately put the country folk on their guard. Nor did anything occur to alter their original opinions of the boy. He stayed on all alone in the silent house. He had no servants, and made no friends. His infrequent trips to the village were made only for the purpose of obtaining supplies. He took the purchases back himself, in his car. He bought a good deal of meat and fish. Once in a while he stopped in at the drug store, where he purchased sedatives. He never appeared talkative, and replied to questions in monosyllables. Still, he was obviously well educated. It was generally rumoured that he was writing a book. Gradually, his visits became more and more infrequent.

People now began to comment on his changed appearance. Slowly but surely he was altering, in an unpleasant way. First of all, it was noticed that his deformity was increasing. He was forced to wear a voluminous overcoat to hide its bulk. He walked with a slight stoop, as though its weight troubled him. Still, he never went to a doctor, and none of the townsfolk had the courage to comment or question him on his condition.

He was ageing, too. He began to resemble his uncle Richard, and his eyes had taken on that lambent cast which hinted of nyctaloptic power. All this excited its share of comment among people to whom the Maglore family had been a matter of interesting conjecture for

generations.

Later, this speculation had been based on more tangible developments. For recently Simon had made an appearance at various isolated farmhouses throughout the region, on a furtive errand. He questioned the old folks, mostly. He was writing a book, he told them, on folk-lore. He wanted to ask them about the old legends of the neighbourhood. Had any of them ever heard stories concerning local cults or rumours about rites in the woods? Were there any haunted houses or shunned places in the forest? Had they ever heard the name "Nyarlathotep" or references to "Shub-Nigurath" and "the Black Messenger"? Could they recall anything of the old Indian myths about "the beast-men" or remember stories of black covens that sacrificed cattle on the hills?

These and similar questions put the naturally suspicious farmers on their guard. If they had any such knowledge, it was decidedly unwholesome in its nature and they did not care to reveal it to this self-avowed outsider. Some of them knew of such things from old tales brought from the upper coast, and others had heard whispered nightmares from recluses in the eastern hills. There were a lot of things about these matters which they frankly did not know, and what they suspected was not for outside ears to hear. Everywhere he went, Maglore met with evasions or frank rebuffs, and he left behind a distinctly bad impression.

The story of these visits spread. They became the topic for elaborate discussion. One oldster in particular—a farmer named Thatcherton who lived alone in a secluded stretch to the west of the lake, off the main highway—had a singularly arresting story to tell. Maglore had appeared one night around eight o'clock, and knocked on the door. He persuaded his host to admit him to the parlour, and then tried to cajole him into revealing certain information regarding the presence of an abandoned cemetery that was reputed to exist somewhere in the vicinity.

The farmer said that his guest was in an almost hysterical state, that he rambled on and on in a most peculiar fashion, mouthing a lot of mythological gibberish about "secrets of the grave," "the thirteenth covenant," "the Feast of Ulder" and the "Doel chants." There was also talk of "the ritual of Father Yig," and certain names were brought up in connection with queer forest ceremonies said to occur near this graveyard. Maglore asked if cattle ever disappeared, and if his host ever heard "voices in the forest that made proposals."

These things the man absolutely denied, and he refused to allow his visitor to come back and inspect the premises by day. At this the young man became very angry, and was on the point of making a heated rejoinder, when something strange occurred. Maglore suddenly turned very pale, and asked to be excused. He seemed to have a severe attack of internal cramp, for he doubled up and staggered to the door. As he did so, Thatcherton received the shocking impression that the hump on his back was *moving*! It seemed to writhe and slither on Maglore's shoulders, as though he had an animal concealed beneath his coat.

Then Maglore turned around sharply, and backed toward the exit as if trying to conceal this unusual phenomenon. He went out hastily, without another word, and raced down the drive to the

car. He ran like an ape, vaulted madly into the driver's seat, and sent the wheels spinning as he roared out of the yard. He disappeared into the night, leaving behind him a sadly puzzled man who lost no time in spreading the tale of his fantastic visitor among his friends.

Since then such incidents had abruptly ceased, and until this afternoon Maglore had not reappeared in the village. But people were still talking, and he was not welcome. It would be well to avoid the man, whatever he was.

SUCH was the substance of Gate's story. When he concluded I retired to my room, without comment, to meditate upon the tale. I was not inclined to share the local superstitions. I knew enough of rural psychology to realise that anything out of the ordinary is looked upon with suspicion.

Suppose the Maglore family were reclusive: what then? Any group of foreign extraction would naturally be. Granted that they were racially deformed—that did not make them witches. Popular fancy has persecuted many people for sorcery whose only crime lay in some physical defect. Even inbreeding was naturally to be expected when social ostracism was inflicted. But what is there of magic in that? Queer books? Likely. Nyctalops? Common enough among all peoples. Insanity? Perhaps—lonely minds often degenerate.

Simon was brilliant, however. Unfortunately, his trend toward the mystical and the unknown was leading him astray. It had been poor judgment that led him to seek information for his book from the illiterate country people. Naturally, they were intolerant and distrustful. And his poor physical condition assumed exaggerated importance in the eyes of these credulous folk.

Still, there was probably enough truth in these distorted accounts to make it imperative that I talk to Maglore at once. He must get out of this unhealthful atmosphere, and see a reputable physician. His genius should not be wasted or destroyed through such an environmental obstacle; it would wreck him, mentally and physically. I decided to visit him on the morrow. After this resolution, I went downstairs to supper, took a short stroll along the shores of the moonlit lake, and retired for the night.

The following afternoon, I carried out my intention. The Maglore mansion stood on a bluff about a half-mile out of Bridgetown, and frowned dismally down upon the lake. It was not a cheerful place; it was too old and neglected. I conjured up a mental image of what those gaping windows must look like on a moonless night, and shuddered. Those empty openings reminded me of the eyes of a blind bat. The two gables resembled its hooded head, and the broad, peaked side-chambers might serve as wings.

When I realised the trend of my thoughts, I felt surprised and disturbed, and as I walked up the long, tree-shadowed walk I endeavoured to gain a firm command over my imagination. I was almost composed when I rang the bell. Its ghostly tinkle echoed down the serpentine corridors within. Faint, shuffling footsteps sounded, and then, with a grating clang, the door opened. There, limned against the doorway, stood Simon Maglore.

At the sight of him my new-born composure gave way to a sudden dismay and an overpowering distaste. He looked sinister in that grey, wavering light. His thin, stooping body was hunched at a repellent angle, and his hands were clenched at his sides. His blurred outline reminded me of a crouching beast. Only his face was wholly visible. It was a waxen mask of death, from which two eyes glared with ghoulish light. That was it! Maglore looked like a crouching ghoul! A physical nausea welled up in my soul, and I longed to wind my hands around that withered neck or batter my two fists into that leering face.

A smile writhed its way over that twisted countenance, a smile of sly, lurking evil. The fretted lips curled back in a fanged grimace of idiotic mirth.

"You see I am not myself to-day, you fool. Go away!" The creature chuckled, as if in relish over some subtle jest known only to himself. Then its voice changed to a sudden shriek. "Go away, you fool—go away!" The door slammed in my astounded face, and I found myself alone.

But I was not alone on the walk home; for my thoughts were haunted by the presence of another—that ghastly, grisly creature that had once been my friend, Simon Maglore. I was still dazed when I arrived back in the village. But after I had reached my room in the hotel, I began to reason with myself. That romantic imagination of mine had played me a sorry trick. Poor Maglore was ill—probably a victim of some nervous disorder. I recalled the report of his buying sedatives at the local pharmacy. In my foolish emotionalism, I had sadly misconstrued his unfortunate sickness.

What a child I had been! I must go back to-morrow, and apologise. After that, Maglore must be persuaded to go away and get himself back into proper shape once more. He *had* looked pretty bad, and his temper was getting the best of him, too. How the man had changed!

THAT night I slept but little. Early the following morning, I again set out. This time I carefully avoided the disquieting mental images that the old house suggested to my susceptible mind. I was all business when I rang the bell.

It was a different Maglore who met me. He, too, had changed for the better. He looked ill and old, but there was a normal light in his eyes and a saner intonation in his voice as he courteously bade me enter and apologised for his delirious spasm of the day before. He was subject to frequent attacks, he told me, and planned to get away very shortly and take a long rest. He was eager to complete his book—there was only a little to do, now—and go back to his work at college.

From this statement he abruptly switched the conversation to a series of reminiscent interludes. He recalled our mutual association on the campus, as we sat in the parlour, and seemed eager to hear about the affairs at school. For nearly an hour he virtually monopolised the conversation and steered it in such a manner as to preclude any questions of a personal nature on my part. Nevertheless, it was easy for me to see that he was far from well. He sounded as though he were labouring under an intense strain; his

words seemed forced, his statements stilted.

Once again I noted how pale he was, how bloodless. His malformed back seemed immense; his body correspondingly shrunken. I recalled my fears of a cancerous tumor, and wondered. Meanwhile he rambled on, obviously ill at ease. The parlour seemed almost bare; the book-cases were unlined, the empty spaces filled with dust. No papers or manuscripts were visible on the table. A spider had spun its web upon the ceiling; it hung down like the thin locks on the forehead of a corpse.

During a pause in his conversation, I asked him about his work. He answered vaguely that it was very involved, and was taking up most of his time. He had made some very interesting discoveries, however, which would amply repay him for his pains. It would excite him too much in his present condition if he went into detail about what he was doing, but he could tell me that his findings in the field of witchcraft alone would add new chapters to anthropological and metaphysical history.

He was particularly interested in the old lore about "familiars" —the tiny creatures who were said to be emissiaries of the devil and were supposed to attend witch or wizard in the form of a small animal—rat, cat, mole, or ousel. Sometimes they were represented as existing on the body of the warlock himself, or subsisting upon it for their nourishment. The idea of a "devil's teat" on witches' bodies, from which their familiar drew sustenance in blood, was fully illuminated by Maglore's findings. His book had a medical aspect, too; it really endeavoured to put such statements on a scientific basis.

At this point Maglore abruptly concluded. He felt very tired, he said, but he hoped to be finished with his work very shortly, and then he wanted to get away for a long rest. It was not wholesome for him to live alone in this old house, and at times he was troubled with disturbing fancies and queer lapses of memory. He had no alternative, however, at present, because the nature of his investigations demanded both privacy and solitude. At times his experiments impinged on certain ways and courses best left undisturbed, and he was not sure just how much longer he would be able to stand the strain. It was in his blood, though—I probably was aware that he came from a necromantic line. But enough of such things. He requested that I go at once, promising that I would hear from him again early next week.

As I rose to my feet, I again noticed how weak and agitated Simon appeared. He walked with an exaggerated stoop, now, and the pressure on his swollen back must be enormous. He conducted me down the long hall to the door, and as he led the way I noted the trembling of his body as it limned itself against the flaming dusk that licked against the window-panes ahead. His shoulders heaved with a slow, steady undulation, as if the hump on his back was actually pulsing with life. I recalled the tale of the old farmer, who claimed that he actually saw such a movement, and for a moment I was assailed by a powerful nausea; then I realised that the flickering light was creating a commonplace illusion.

When we reached the door, Maglore endeavoured to dismiss me

very hastily. He did not even extend his hand for a parting clasp, but merely mumbled a curt "Good evening" in a strained, hesitant voice. I gazed at him for a moment in silence, mentally noting how wan and emaciated his once handsome countenance appeared, even in the sunset's ruby light.

Then, as I watched, a shadow crawled across his face. It seemed to purple and darken in a sudden eerie metamorphosis, and I read stark panic in his eyes. Even as I forced myself to respond to his farewell, horror crept into his face. His body fell into that odd, shambling posture I had noted once before, and his lips leered in a ghastly grin. For a moment I actually thought the man was going to attack me. Instead he laughed—a shrill, tittering chuckle that pealed blackly in my brain. I opened my mouth to speak, but he scrambled back into the darkness of the hall and shut the door.

Astonishment gripped me, not unmingled with fear. Was Maglore ill, or was he actually demented? Such grotesqueries did not seem possible in a normal man. Stumbling through the glowing sunset, my bewildered mind was deep in ponderment, and the distant croaking of ravens blended in evil litany with my thoughts.

THE next morning, after a night of troubled deliberation, I made my decision. Work or no work, Maglore must go away, and at once. He was on the verge of serious mental and physical collapse. Knowing how useless it would be for me to go back and argue with him, I decided that stronger methods must be employed to make him see the light.

That afternoon, therefore, I sought out Dr. Carstairs, the local practitioner, and told him all I knew. I particularly emphasised the distressing occurrence of the evening before, and frankly told him what I already suspected. After a lengthy discussion, he agreed to accompany me to the Maglore house at once, and there take what steps were necessary in arranging for his removal; and at my request he took along the materials necessary for a complete physical examination. Once I could persuade Simon to submit to a medical diagnosis, I felt sure he would see that the results made it necessary for him to place himself under treatment at once.

The sun was sinking when we climbed into the front seat of Dr. Carstairs' battered Ford and drove out of Bridgetown along the south road, where the ravens croaked. We drove slowly, and in silence. Thus it was we were able to hear clearly that single, high-pitched shriek from the old house on the hill. I gripped the doctor's arm without a word, and a second later we were speeding up the drive and into the frowning gateway.

"Hurry!" I muttered, as I vaulted from the running-board and dashed up the steps to the forbidding door. We battered upon the boards with futile fists, then dashed around to the left-wing window. The sunset faded into tense, waiting darkness as we crawled hastily through the openings and dropped to the floor within. Doctor Carstairs produced a pocket flashlight, and we rose to our feet.

My heart hammered in my breast, but no other sound broke the tomb-like silence as we threw open the door and advanced down the darkened hall to the study. All about us I sensed a gloating Presence, a lurking demon who watched our progress with eyes of

gleeful mirth, and whose sable soul shook with hell-born laughter as we opened the door of the study and stumbled across that which lay within. We both screamed, then. Simon Maglore lay at our feet, his twisted head and straining shoulders resting in a little lake of fresh, warm blood. He was on his face, and his clothes had been torn off above his waist, so that his entire back was visible. When we saw what rested there we became quite dazed, and then began to do what must be done, averting our gaze whenever possible from that utterly monstrous thing on the floor.

Do not ask me to describe it to you in detail. I can't. There are times when the senses are mercifully numbed, because complete acuteness would be fatal. I do not know certain things about that abomination even now, and I dare not let myself recall them. I shall not tell you, either, of the books we found in that room, or of the terrible document on the table that was Simon Maglore's unfinished masterpiece. We burned them all in the fire, before calling the city for a coroner; and if the doctor had had his way, we should have destroyed the *Thing*, too.

As it was, when the coroner did arrive for his examination, the three of us swore an oath of silence concerning the exact way in which Simon Maglore met his death. Then we left, but not before I had burned the other document—the letter addressed to me, which Maglore was writing when he died. And so, you see, nobody ever knew; for I found that the property was left to me, and the house is being razed even as I pen these lines. But I must speak, if only to relieve my own torment.

YET I dare not quote that letter in its entirety. I can but record a part of that stupendous blasphemy:

". . . and that, of course, is why I began to study witchcraft. *It* was forcing me to. God, if I can only make you feel the horror of it! To be born that way—with that thing, that manikin, that *monster*! At first it was small; the doctors all said it was an undeveloped twin. But it was alive! It had a face and two hands, but its legs ran off into the lumpy flesh that connected it to my body. . . .

"For three years they had it under secret study. It lay face downward on my back, and its hands were clasped around my shoulders. The men said that it had its own tiny set of lungs, but no stomach organs or digestive system. It apparently drew nourishment through the flesh that bound it to my body. Yet it *grew*! Soon its eyes were open, and it began to develop tiny teeth. Once it nipped one of the doctors on the hand. . . . So they decided to send me home, for it was obvious that it could not be removed. I swore to keep the whole affair a secret, and not even my father knew until near the end. I wore the straps, and it never grew much until I came back. . . . Then, that hellish change!

"It talked to me, I tell you; it talked to me! . . . that little, wrinkled face, like a monkey's . . . the way it rolled those tiny, reddish eyes . . . that squeaking little voice calling, 'More blood, Simon—I want more'. . . . And then it grew, and grew; I had to feed it twice a day, and cut the nails on its little black hands. . . .

But I never knew *that*—I never realised how it was taking control. I would have killed myself first; I swear it!

"Last year it began to get hold of me for hours and give me those fits. It directed me to write the books, and sometimes it sent me out at night on queer errands. . . . More and more blood it took, and I was getting weaker and weaker. When I was myself, I tried to combat it. I looked up that material on the familiar legend, and cast around for some means of overcoming its mastery. But in vain. And all the while it was growing, growing; it got stronger and bolder, and wiser. It talked to me now, and sometimes it taunted me. I knew that it wanted me to listen and obey it all the time. The promises it made with that horrible little mouth! I should call upon the Black One and join a coven. Then we would have power to rule, and admit new evil to the earth.

"I didn't want to obey—you know that. But I was going mad, and losing all that blood. . . . It took control nearly all the time, now, and it got so that I was afraid to go into town any more, because that devilish thing knew I was trying to escape and it would move on my back and frighten folk. . . . I wrote all the time I had those spells, when it ruled my brain. . . . Then you came.

"I know you want me to go away, but it won't let me. It's too cunning for that. Even as I try to write this, I can feel it boring its commands into my brain to stop. But I will not stop. I will tell you while I still have a chance, before it overcomes me for ever and works its black will with my poor body and masters my helpless soul. I want you to know where my book is, so that you can destroy it should anything ever happen. I want you to dispose of those awful old volumes in the library. And above all, I want you to kill me if ever you see that the manikin has gained complete control.

"God knows what it intends to do when it has me for certain. . . . How hard it is for me to fight, while all the time it is commanding me to put down my pen and tear this up! But I will fight—I must, until I can tell you what the creature told me—what it plans to let loose on the world when it has me utterly enslaved. . . . I will tell. . . . I can't think. . . . I *will* write it, damn you! Stop! . . . No! Don't do that! Get your hands——"

That's all. Maglore stopped there, because he died; because the Thing did not want its secrets revealed. It is dreadful to think about that nightmare-nurtured horror, but that thought is not the worst. What troubles me is what I saw when we opened that door—the sight that explained how Maglore died.

There was Maglore, on the floor, in all that blood. He was naked to the waist, as I have said, and he lay face downward. But on his back was the Thing, just as he had described it. And that little monster, afraid its secrets would be revealed, had climbed a trifle higher on Simon Maglore's back, wound its tiny black paws around his unprotected neck, *and bitten him to death*!