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Witchcraft & **SORCERY**

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Jan.-Feb.,
1971

all NEW!

Mistress of DEATH

BY

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(CREATOR OF 'CONAN')
AND GERALD W PAGE

TOWER OF BLOOD

BY DAVID A ENGLISH

THE DARK DOOR

BY LEO P. KELLEY

House of EVIL

BY PAULINE C. SMITH

Plus NEW Stories
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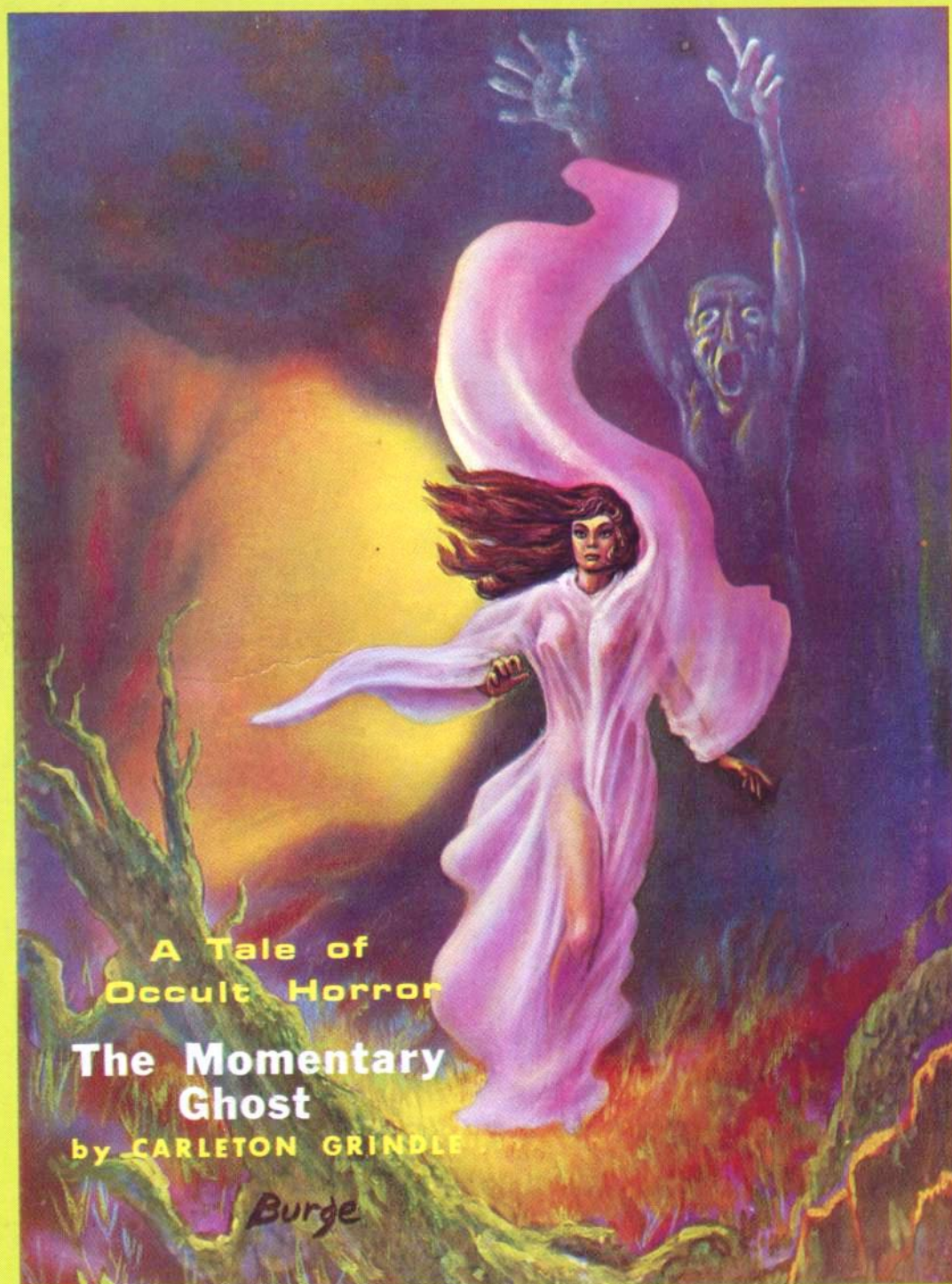
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A Tale of
Occult Horror

The Momentary Ghost

by CARLETON GRINDLE

Burge

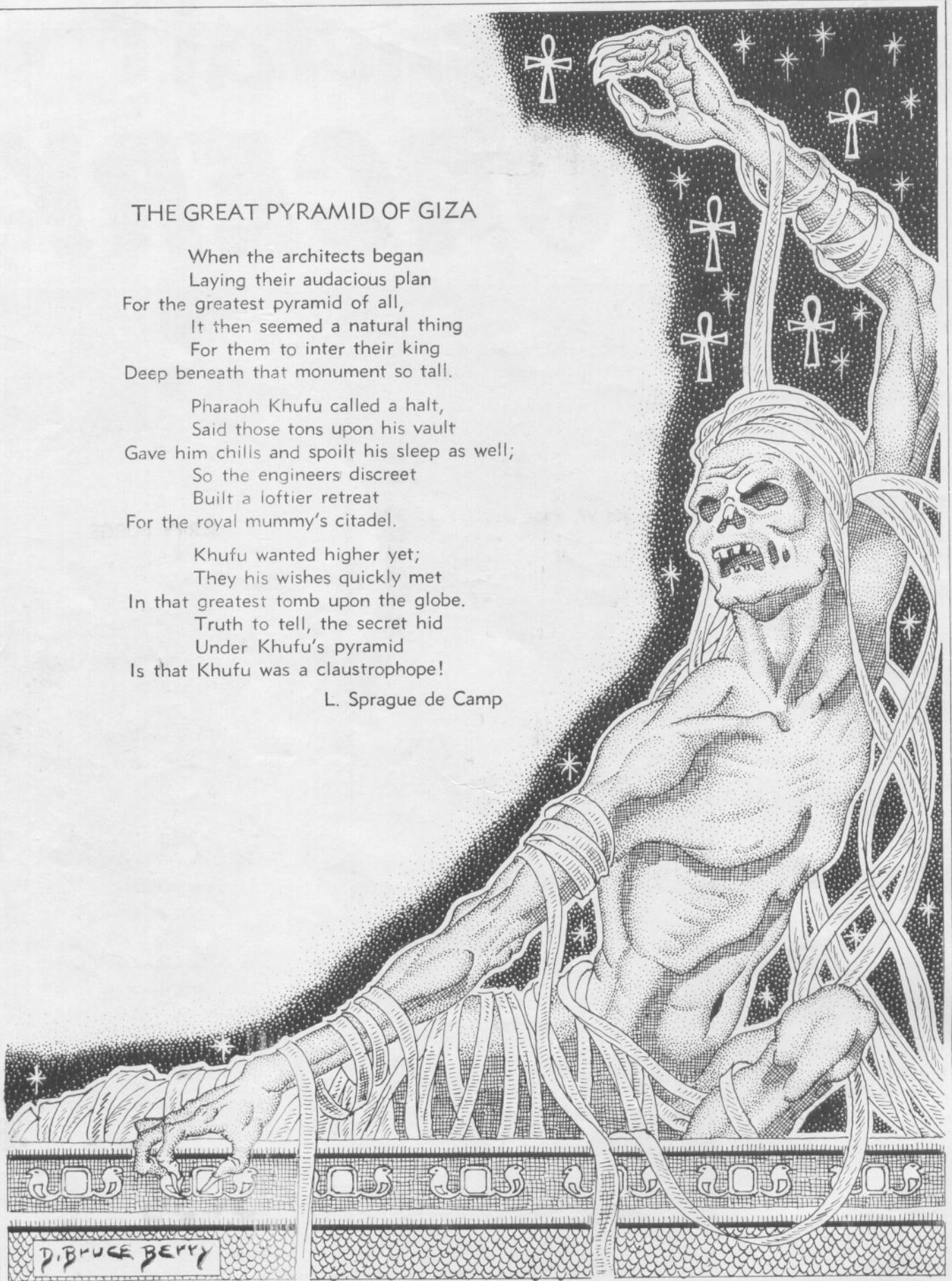
THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA

When the architects began
Laying their audacious plan
For the greatest pyramid of all,
It then seemed a natural thing
For them to inter their king
Deep beneath that monument so tall.

Pharaoh Khufu called a halt,
Said those tons upon his vault
Gave him chills and spoilt his sleep as well;
So the engineers' discreet
Built a loftier retreat
For the royal mummy's citadel.

Khufu wanted higher yet;
They his wishes quickly met
In that greatest tomb upon the globe.
Truth to tell, the secret hid
Under Khufu's pyramid
Is that Khufu was a claustrophobe!

L. Sprague de Camp



Witchcraft & SORCERY

THE MODERN MAGAZINE OF WEIRD TALES
(formerly **COVEN 13**)

vol. 1, number 5
Jan.-Feb., 1971

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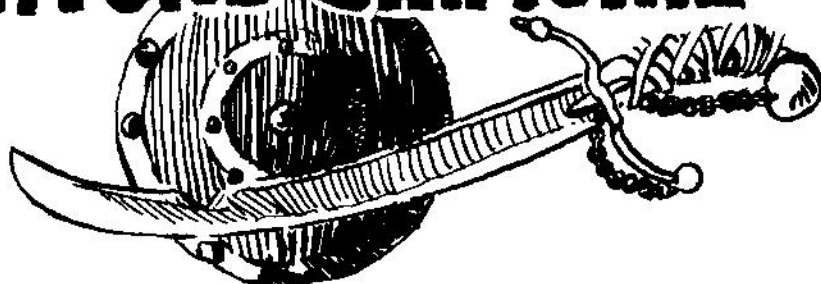


Welcome as lover come, O thunder
That wear white wings and bend wheat under
And thrill the river through this sightless noon
Of Hecate's bright-scaled team that drives on June.

--Anthony Sandor

Illustration by Stephen Fabian

EDITOR'S GRIMOIRE



When we acquired COVEN 13 from its original owners, we felt this editorial would be a rather easy thing to write. 'We' are Wm. L. Crawford, who now serves as the publisher; Jerry Burge, who is the art director, and Gerald W. Page who edits the magazine and has the job of writing an editorial to explain to you all that's happened to COVEN 13.

COVEN 13 was—and is—a magazine of fantasy stories emphasizing supernatural horror and the macabre. Its stories were in the tradition of Poe, Bierce, Hoffmann, Machen, Blackwood, Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard and A. Merritt. The audience for this sort of fiction is obviously large and the idea is to reach it.

The founders of the magazine were on the borderline of success but could not carry it over in four issues and were unwilling to produce the number of issues necessary to build the circulation to a profitable level.

So Fantasy Publishing Co. Inc. took over. The magazine was analysed closely but few changes were decided on. COVEN 13's policy was supposed to be oriented to the weird tale, but too often, we decided, it ran light tongue in cheek fantasy. We felt it would be sufficient to strengthen the fiction. Stronger stories, that's all.

So that was our major fifth-issue change. As for other changes we were planning, we could make them later, after we were acclimated.

How little we knew.

Our plans to change title were pretty definite. "Coven" is a nice word, but its meaning is obscure. It doesn't really suggest to the general newsstand browser what sort of fiction we carry. Most abridged dictionaries don't even list the word. Coven doesn't inform dozens of potential readers what the magazine is about. We planned to change title about the seventh or eighth issue.

We also wanted to do something about our format. The science fiction and fantasy magazines started going digest size at the end of World War II when there were hundreds of fiction magazines: science fiction, fantasy, western, love, adventure The move assured display space on a crowded newsstand and was wise in its day. But now there are about 20 fiction magazines in larger formats. The larger magazines are now crowding the digests off the racks, or covering them up so they can't be seen by potential buyers. Worse, digests look old fashioned. The result is floundering sales that cause editors to write self pitying editorials about how evil readers are not to buy their magazines. Writers, aware of the conditions, are beginning to write off the remaining fiction magazines as poor risks and look elsewhere for work. Steps have to be taken.

And lots of attempts to find the answer are being tried. Hiking the price, a favorite trick of desperate publishers, for example. Paperback anthologies of new stories is another attempt. Flooding the market with cheaply pro-

duced reprint magazines is yet another approach, but it isn't too popular with the writers who, as often as not, receive no payment for the reprinted stories. The trouble with these solutions is that none of them solve the real problem, that of being seen on the newsstand.

A magazine on a newsstand has to be seen or it won't sell. We've felt for some time that the larger format was more practical as well as more modern.

But we felt the distributor would be reluctant to go along with it. The distributor is a businessman and must be cautious. Therefore. . . .

Imagine our surprise when our distributor turned out to be a thinking man as well as a businessman. It was he who asked us to go ahead with our projected size and title change now.

We had just completed preparation for the fifth issue of COVEN 13 in the old format. It meant an added delay, but we agreed with his thinking and we went along with it.

You are holding in your hands the fifth issue of COVEN 13 under new proprietors, in a new format, with a new name.

Or, if you prefer, you're holding the first issue of a great new magazine called *Witchcraft & SORCERY*.

Either way we think you're holding a pretty good magazine. We think our writers have written some superb stories. We believe our artstaff is the best in the field. The new format gives us greater potential in every direction. We're less restricted, more up-to-date. In the near future we think you'll be seeing the other magazines in the science fiction and fantasy field copying us.

Meanwhile, let us know your feeling about the magazine. On pages 63 and 64 you'll find a reader's poll ballot. We'd appreciate your votes on stories and features and your comments on the magazine. Of course you don't have to tear out the coupon if you don't want to. A plain piece of paper with your votes will be sufficient. Better yet, send us a letter. The more we know about your likes, the better we can design the magazine to suit you.

Present plans call for *Witchcraft & SORCERY* to publish on a bi-monthly schedule for a while yet. Subscribers to COVEN 13 will continue to receive the number of copies due them according to their subscription. (Subscriptions are always for number of copies, never for length of time.)

So here it is, the modern magazine of weird tales. The best of established writers such as Leo Kelley, H. P. Lovecraft, E. Hoffmann Price, Robert E. Howard, Andre Norton and others, as well as great stories by newcomers such as David English, Glen Cook, Gary Brander, Carleton Grindle and many more. We think you'll find it unlike any other magazine being published today—and we hope you like it.

—GERALD W PAGE



She Was Beautiful, Lowena Was, But Deadly....

The **DARK DOOR**

by Leo P. Kelley

ILLUSTRATED BY BURGE

WHEN the waiter brought the main course and set it down in front of us, Professor Windrow began rubbing his hands together in eager anticipation over his broiled brook trout. Just then, Lowena entered the restaurant.

I put down the glass of wine I'd been lifting to my lips and frowned. The Professor glanced at me with a puzzled expression on his thin face.

Heads were turning toward Lowena. Whispers like small winds wafted her name about the room from table to table. Eyes, mine included, stared at her in a mixture of awe and uneasiness.

"What is it, Carl?" Professor Windrow asked me. "Are you so easily unnerved by the sight of a ravishing woman?"

I shook my head and managed a weak smile. "She is lovely, isn't she? But no, it isn't that."

"Her lurid past then?"

I drained my glass. "Yes. Let's say that's it." I watched her move across the dining room, a young man at her side, the waiter leading them both to a secluded corner and a choice table on which a sign that said "Reserved" rested beside a single red rose in a crystal vase.

Lowena Derry, I thought. No, more properly, Lowena Young Owl.

Derry had been her recently deceased husband's name. But Lowena's Indian name had been Young Owl.

I watched her move through the room as an animal moves through a part of the forest that it senses is hostile to its kind. Quickly. Nervously. Her white dress was bound by a slim girdle of scarlet that swept up in an inverted V to end between her breasts, ripe buds on the young sapling of her body. She wore white slippers and carried a simple white evening bag. Her hair was a jet waterfall that fell to touch the icy whiteness of her shoulders. Her equally black eyes beneath their heavy lashes were ebony fires blazing in the pale cauldron of her face, which was unmarred by any makeup.

Professor Windrow, I noticed, as I looked away to avoid being seen by Lowena, had forgotten his trout. He was staring at Lowena with the longing that age sometimes betrays for days gone and loves lost.

"She's coming over here," he breathed, already rising in his invariably polite fashion.

"Good evening," he said as Lowena arrived to stand beside our table.

I looked up. "Hello, Lowena," I said.

She offered me a slim hand on which no rings glittered. "Carl." She paused and the rather handsome young man beside her cleared his throat. "It's been months. You really must call me soon. You shouldn't forget old friends so easily."

"I've been busy. How have you been, Lowena?"

A shadow seemed to dim the sun of her smile momentarily. "Tomorrow?" she asked in that gentle shy way of hers that endeared her to nearly everyone—even to women who tried to hate her for being so very beautiful. "Promise me that you'll phone tomorrow."

"I'm leaving town tomorrow," I told her.

"Well, perhaps another time then. It was good seeing you again, Carl." She turned to the young man whom she had not bothered to introduce to us and they made their way to where a waiter was holding a chair in readiness for her.

"Liar," Professor Windrow said to me. "Why did you tell her that? You're not leaving town tomorrow."

"Why? I don't know. No that's not true. I do know. I lied because I'm afraid of Lowena."

Professor Windrow closed his mouth on the piece of trout he had expertly speared with his fork and almost choked. After he had swallowed with some difficulty, he said, "You're afraid of Lowena Derry?"

"I'm afraid of Lowena Young Owl," I told the man who had been my mentor, confidant and father substitute throughout my years in college after my own father had died of a unexpected angina attack.

"Why?" he asked, in his characteristically direct fashion.

I couldn't refuse to tell him, not any longer. Actually, I badly wanted to tell someone—someone who might not believe me but who would, at least, listen sympathetically and not be likely to recommend a sanitarium. "I was there the night Charles Derry—died," I said.

The rather austere Professor of Marketing Management disappeared and Ross Windrow, sympathetic friend, appeared in his place with curiosity and concern showing on his face as he gazed across the table at me. "You were there? You actually saw what really happened?"

I nodded. The papers had called Chuck's death "murder by person or persons unknown." It had caused a sensation when it happened. Lowena had been cleared completely. There was absolutely no evidence to prove that

she had been in any way involved with her husband's death. But I knew better.

"Why didn't you tell the police what you saw at the time?" the Professor asked.

I glanced across to where Lowena was sitting with her new young man. "I've already explained that. Because I was afraid. Besides, I'm certain that no one would have believed me. I've never spoken to anyone of what happened that night and I suspect I never will again. But if I can count on your treating what I have to say in confidence—"

The professor looked chagrined.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"I'm waiting," he said. "It will do you good to get it off your chest—whatever it is."

After he had summoned our waiter and ordered espresso, I began to tell him; starting at what was, for me and Charles Derry and Lowena Young Owl, the beginning of what would, within a year, prove to be Charles Derry's terrifying end.

As I talked, I began to feel a sense of relief. It was a feeling akin to the catharsis so familiar to the ancient Greek dramatists, which was fitting since my tale—my experience—held within it the twin seeds of pity and terror that were the bases of all truly tragic drama.

Chuck Derry and I, I explained to Professor Windrow, had spent the previous summer bumming around the country in my old Buick. Our mission: to tape the folk songs and folk music of America's heartland. Chuck was a graduate student in music and I was a senior in the School of Business Administration. When Chuck suggested the jaunt, I jumped at the chance, knowing full well that would be my last free summer before I'd find myself stuck feet first into some monolithic corporation from which I'd probably never be able to extricate myself.

By the time we reached New Orleans, I had become aware that Chuck had a problem. His problem was, in a word, alcohol. I hadn't seen much of Chuck during the school year—just a party here, a concert there—so I hadn't been aware of what was beginning to happen to him. More times during our summer together than I care to count, he had left me and gone off into the night from which he would emerge the next day red-eyed and weary as if he'd been battling unseen demons. Which, in a way, was true, I guess.

He used to tell me about hearing music in his head. Wild music, he called it. Orgiastic music. He wanted to drown it out because, he told me, it was ruining his capacity to concentrate on his composing which had always produced incredibly sensitive and vaguely sensuous music. And then he'd laugh and tell me I really shouldn't pay any attention to him because surely I knew that all artists were more than a little bit mad. It was a prerequisite, he insisted, for any artist of more than average caliber.

Chuck may not have been mad but he certainly was an oddly angry man that summer. I remembered one night in a bar in the French Quarter when he picked a fight with two merchant seamen for no reason that I could discover. I tried to get him out of the place before it was too late, only to discover that it was already too late. Chairs flew and bottles broke and, when it was over, Chuck and I fled, leaving behind two badly injured men who had been beaten senseless by my friend, whom I had begun to think of as—well, *driven*.

We headed west and I began to hint that our journey should be terminated. I was, frankly, becoming decidedly uneasy as Chuck continued his disappearing act night after

might as well as his arguments with waitresses in roadside diners and with gas station attendants—anyone unlucky enough to be present when the fury was loose within him.

In August, we arrived at an Indian reservation, a pathetic vista of parched land and crumbling shacks, which Chuck jokingly referred to as modern America's version of Dante's Inferno. He wanted to stop to see if the Indians could provide him with any material worth recording.

"All I have to do is spread a little wampum around," he joked, "and the singers will start gargling with Alka Seltzer and the musicians will eagerly oil their drum hides."

So we scouted around the reservation, but we found only blank-eyed children, old people too tired to answer Chuck's questions and one or two dispirited young men who looked as if they had never heard of war paint.

It was a hopeless task. A few of the people did sing us a few bawdy songs that they thought might have Indian origins but which were clearly the products of more modern bars and bordellos. It was sad—a bitter experience. But Chuck was unwilling to give up.

And then we saw Lowena.

She was standing beside a water pump in the yard of a house that had a sagging roof on which a few scrawny chickens perched and clucked disconsolately. She wore a faded print dress and battered shoes. But her face was the face of a sun that no cloud could ever really dim. Even then, even in those dreary surroundings and those awful clothes, she looked regal and somehow above it all.

Chuck nudged me and muttered something obscene and, before I could answer, began moving toward her. I meekly followed him as I had been doing all those weeks.

"Good morning," I heard him say to Lowena. "My name is Chuck Derry and I'm a composer. You know—a musician. I've been trying to find out if your people have any music that I could record. It's for a research project I'm working on at college."

Lowena turned her lively black eyes on him and for a moment I saw something flicker across her face. I'd seen the same expression in other women's eyes because Chuck was a handsome guy. He was all well-placed beef on a graceful but sturdy frame. His hair was thick and long but not that long and he could look absolutely cherubic if he chose. At that moment, he so chose. Lowena was visibly impressed.

"The Indians have forgotten the old ways," she said in a voice that must have been a delight to a musician of Chuck's sensibilities. "Their old gods are dead and their altars fallen to dust."

Chuck glanced at me and raised his eyebrows meaningfully. "You're not one—an Indian, I mean?" he inquired in his most polite manner.

"I am an Indian. My name is Lowena Young Owl."

"Listen," Chuck said, "are you sure there isn't anyone around here who remembers the old war chants or the burial songs or—"

"Have they invited you to the Church?" Lowena asked.

"The Church? What Church?"

"They have a vulgar name for it," she replied cryptically. "In their new Church, they use peyote to open the door to—to otherness."

Chuck was obviously fascinated as much by Lowena's manner of speaking as by her very special kind of dark beauty. I interrupted long enough to introduce myself but Lowena wasn't really interested in me. It was Chuck who had captured her attention as I'd seen him do so many times before with so many other women. He was silently



sending out his call of the wild and Lowena's antenna had picked it up. That much was perfectly clear to me.

He asked her some more questions and at last she directed us to an old man we found sitting inside the house behind us. At first, I assumed it was her grandfather but I learned later that he was no relation of Lowena's. He was old and bent, his face a bronze filigree of deep wrinkles. His thin white hair was bound at the nape of his neck by a leather band and he wore the shirt and leggings that I'd seen in a hundred cowboy pictures.

"You come from the Bureau?" were his first suspicious words to us as we entered the house.

Lowena spoke to him in a language neither Chuck nor I could understand and his eyes narrowed.

"You want to go through The Door?" he inquired.

Chuck looked at me and I started to shake my head when he said, "Yes. Yes, we do." He explained about his interest in possibly recording the ceremony and there was some discussion between him and the old man about whether or not that would be considered quite proper. It promptly became proper when Chuck handed the old man twenty dollars.

We spent the night in the man's shack since the next ceremony, he had told us, would not take place until the following evening. I slept little. Chuck slept less. I heard him get up and go outside and a little later I heard the rustle of some soft garment and I knew that Lowena had passed through the room and gone out after him. I heard their voices whispering for a time and then I heard nothing.

The next night, the old man led us to the neighboring house where the ceremony was to be held.

"Where's Lowena?" I whispered to Chuck.

He shook his head. "She's tabu or something in the Church. The old man says she is bad medicine. He told me that the spirits of the Church are not her spirits. He talks a lot of silly gibberish. These people are still pretty much primitives."

"I heard you researching one of those primitives last night."

"Lowena's shy—at first," Chuck said, undismayed by my sly remark. "But beautiful. Oh, wow, is she ever! And she wants to leave the reservation," he concluded meaningfully.

"Now wait a minute!" I protested, knowing Chuck.

"We have room in the car. It might be fun. We can unload her later in Albuquerque or somewhere."

"No," I argued. "Why, she doesn't look a day over seventeen. That kind of trouble, I don't need."

We arrived then at the door of the house and Chuck went inside at once without further comment. I sighed and followed him. The old man showed us where to sit and we took our places among the silent group of people sitting about on the floor. Some time later, they passed the peyote buttons. Chuck chewed his but I dropped mine in my pocket. A little later, I went outside as the hallucinations began to blossom in the minds of the worshippers, Chuck among them, and moans and mutterings filtered out into the night after me.

I stood smoking outside the house for ten minutes or so before becoming aware that someone was standing nearby. I turned and confronted Lowena, a shadow within the darker shadows. I hadn't heard her approach nor had I seen any sign of her arrival.

"Hi," I said.

"Chuck likes me," she said. "You don't."

"That's not true. I mean sure he likes you. Chuck likes lots of pretty girls. I've got nothing against you. Oh, hell, I mean——"

She looked up at the full moon which flooded her lovely face with light. "I must leave the reservation," she said. "Why?"

She looked at me with a curious expression on her face. "They have not told you what I am called?"

"No."

"The dark door."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"In there," she said, tossing her head to indicate the Church behind us. "In there, they seek to let the old ones through the door so that they might listen to their counsel. They hope that one day the old ones in their wisdom will lead them into a new land and a better life. But they are wrong. The old ones no longer listen to us because we have betrayed them. They have turned their faces from us and they will no longer hear our laments. I was their priestess once. But the people refused to listen to the ones who came when I called. They said that the ones who came were not the old ones but the evil ones. It does not matter to me now. It is, after all, only a matter of chemistry, isn't it? Chemistry is their new religion now but a laboratory is its proper shrine. Still—what happens happens."

"True," I said, understanding next to nothing of what she said.

"Oh, Carl, I have to leave here!"

I saw that she was crying. She was not making a sound, but she was crying nevertheless. Her tears made moon-white rivers on her cheeks. I could think of nothing to say. The sight of a woman's tears is something I have never been able to bear. It was then, I think, that the bargain among the three of us was sealed although I did not know it at the time.

"They will have to kill me one day because they want to

lock forever my dark door. They fear it. And when people fear something, they destroy it."

"But your family can——"

She shook her head. "I have no family. My mother was taken from the reservation years ago when I was just a child. She was a seeress and she taught me much about making strong medicine. But the BIA——"

"The BIA?"

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs. They said she was sick—schizophrenic. She died in a strait jacket on the way to the hospital. No one knew why. I think she simply chose to die and did. My father went away after that. He just walked off the reservation one day and never came back. I have no one. I need someone."

The someone she needed, it developed, was Chuck Derry. The next day, the three of us left the reservation. Lowena sat in the front seat of the car next to Chuck. Before we left, he told me he thought he was in love with her. He wanted to know if I had ever seen a more beautiful girl. I told him I had not.

Once we arrived back at college, Chuck and I went our separate ways. I didn't see him again until two months later when he phoned to invite me to the impromptu party he and Lowena were giving following their civil marriage ceremony.

"You married her?" I exclaimed over the phone, surprised and yet not totally.

"You make it sound like a crime," he declared, laughing. "Come on over and help us celebrate."

I went to the apartment which Chuck had rented off-campus and tried to share in the general gaiety but found it impossible to do so. I felt like I had lost Lowena although my common sense told me I had never possessed her. I admitted to myself at last that I had wanted her but had not had the courage or the nerve to do anything about the wanting. I cursed myself for a meek fool who would never inherit either Lowena or the earth. But there was another reason for my distress—Chuck. To be precise, it was Chuck's behavior toward Lowena. He treated her as a prize he might have won at some carnival, I soon noticed. He *displayed* her. She was his ornament. His Golden Fleece, his Grail.

As the evening wore on and became somewhat rowdy, I sensed Lowena's anguish. She seemed to wilt, to shrink within herself. When Chuck seized her arm to drag her across the room to meet some late arrival, I could feel her embarrassment. I thought of hunters who displayed their trophies on their walls for admiring eyes—stuffed proofs of their virility. Chuck was using Lowena in that way. And I knew that she knew it. There remained little trace of the tenderness he had shown toward her during our long trip back across the country the summer before. Now he treated Lowena as a mere instrument on which he would compose a score to suit only himself.

I decided to leave early but, before I had reached the door, Lowena saw me slipping into my coat and came over to me.

"Carl," she said, "it was good of you to come."

"I hope you'll both be very happy, Lowena," I said, meaning it sincerely.

"Happy." Her repetition of the word was flat and toneless. "Chuck seems happy, doesn't he?"

I looked across the room to where Chuck reeled, one arm slung over the shoulder of an obliging blonde in a miniskirt.

"Will you come to see us often?" Lowena asked and I

heard, not a simple question, but a faintly desperate plea.

"Of course," I replied and leaned over to kiss her cheek.

But I didn't go to see them again. Call it jealousy or whatever you will. I didn't go because I couldn't. I saw Lowena on campus occasionally waiting for Chuck or just strolling in the leafy quiet which she said soothed her. I wondered why she needed soothing.

It was at a New Year's Eve party given by mutual friends that I began to realize how badly wrong things were going for Lowena. As I came up to her, she called my name and threw her arms around me. Her clasp was tight and, I thought, tense. When she looked up at me, I couldn't disguise my sense of shock.

She gave me a wry smile and touched her bruised left eye. "I bumped into an open kitchen cabinet the other night. Clumsy of me."

I pretended to accept her explanation but before the night ended, I knew the name of the "cabinet" she had bumped into. Chuck Derry. I knew because of what happened as the clock struck midnight. A man seized Lowena and gave her a friendly kiss. As he released her, Chuck suddenly appeared beside them.

"Slut!" he shouted, and the word stopped the world for a moment as it hung heavy in the suddenly still air of the room. He seized her and spun her around and raised his hand and brought it down in a swift motion against her face. The sound of his slap reverberated in the air.

For a moment, Lowena stood frozen in front of him while the man who had kissed her tried to explain to Chuck who refused to listen to him. I was about to look away in shame when I saw the fury flash in Lowena's eyes. It was gone in an instant. She ran into the bedroom and slammed the door behind her. Slowly, like an aging elephant, the party tried to struggle back to life and failed dismally.

The next time I saw Lowena was at her own apartment. She called me one day in April and invited me to dinner. I tried to make excuses but she would not listen to them. I at last consented to come.

When I arrived, Chuck was not at home. Lowena met me at the door and took me by the hand to lead me into the apartment.

"You'll have a martini," she said, remembering. "On the rocks and with a twist."

"Thank you," I said as she handed me the drink a moment later. "How are you, Lowena?"

"Pregnant," she answered to my surprise.

I studied her face and found no joy in it. Her face was a mask of determination. I noticed the bruise on her arm. "Congratulations. Chuck must be pleased."

"No, he isn't. He says it's too soon. He blames me. Carl, something is happening to Chuck. Something very bad."

"I know. I saw it begin last summer. But I suppose the real beginning was long ago. He—he hurts you, doesn't he?"

She nodded. "But there is much worse than that. He has made me hate him because he insists that I must destroy the child."

Chuck arrived then and our conversation took an abrupt turn into safer channels. The dinner Lowena had prepared was excellent but Chuck could not have appreciated it, considering the way he drank before, throughout and after the meal. By the time Lowena served the coffee—Chuck refused it and poured himself another whiskey—he was like an animal.

"I'm not even sure it's my kid!" he exploded at one point. "Chuck!" Lowena cried out in shock. You know I never—"

"Shut up!" he muttered into his glass.

"Chuck," I said nervously. "Come on, man!"

"That slut is capable of anything," he muttered. "I should have left her back there on that dung heap of a reservation. She could spend her time weaving baskets for the tourists instead of manufacturing kids we don't need and can't afford."

Lowena stiffened and got up to leave the room.

Chuck leaped to his feet and grabbed her arm, twisting it behind her. "You're staying!" he bellowed.

She cried out, more of a gasp than a scream.

"Let her go!" I yelled, jumping to my feet. As I did, my wallet fell to the floor. I had been showing them pictures of a girl I had met and with whom I was rapidly falling in love.

Chuck angrily shoved Lowena away from him with an expression of utter disgust and she fell heavily to the floor.

I went to her and helped her to her feet. Chuck swung me around and his fist smashed into my face. I reeled backward, tasting blood from a loosened tooth. Before I could recover my balance, Lowena was beside me and leading me to the door.

"I'm so sorry, Carl," she moaned. "You'd better go. When he's like this, he's dangerous."

"I can't leave you here alone with him. I—"

"Go," she said firmly. "I can handle him."

I found myself out in the hall. Lowena kissed my cheek and told me not to worry. She would be in touch soon, she said. She was sorry about the way things had turned out. But I was not to worry about her.

I made my way down the steps and out of the building and began to walk toward the bus stop. I must have taken a wrong turn because I found myself in an unfamiliar area some time later. I retraced my steps and eventually found the bus stop. Only then did I remember that I had left my wallet in the apartment. I could have gotten it from Lowena in the morning but I decided to go back for it. It would give me a legitimate excuse to return and see if she was all right.

When I reached the building, I climbed the stairs as I had done earlier and soon found myself in front of their apartment. I rang the bell and waited. When no one answered, I rang again. Finally, I tried the door. It was unlocked. I went in and found the room in darkness. I couldn't remember where the light switch was and spent some time fumbling about in the darkness trying to locate it, calling Lowena's name softly as I did so. I didn't want to frighten her.

She didn't answer.

I groped my way through the room which was only vaguely lighted by the street light outside. I finally found my wallet on the floor where it had fallen and was down on my hands and knees feeling about for the pictures I had taken from it when I heard the first of the awful sounds. A faint, faraway chittering as of rats in an abandoned building.

"Lowena?" I whispered in the darkness. "Chuck, is that you?"

And then I saw them both as Lowena appeared beside the window and drew the sheer curtains to admit more light. "Lowena," I whispered, "don't be frightened. It's me. Carl."

Her eyes were closed and she seemed not to have heard me. I glanced at Chuck who lay sprawled in a drunken stupor on the sofa. Lowena was raising her arms toward the ceiling and tilting her head back so that her sightless eyes were also raised to it. Sounds came from between her slightly parted lips—words I couldn't recognize. I moved toward her cautiously, feeling the chill that was either in the room or in my own mind.

Before I reached her, she began to fade. Her body seemed to undulate and then, glowing, it became translucent. I stopped and stared in alarm, unable to believe what I was seeing. A trick of the light, I told myself.

The chittering grew louder. It was coming from Lowena's direction. I took a step toward her and stopped as I realized I could see through her body! But what I saw was not the wall behind her. It was — *somewhere!* Mists swirled there. Blue mists and mauve. Hideous, half-seen figures I could not identify loped through those mists, moving toward me from the place beyond Lowena!

The chittering was, I realized, the voices of the creatures moving in the mist.

And then, suddenly, the first of them entered the room through the translucence that was Lowena. With them came a ghastly odor, a charred odor, that was both disgusting and overpowering. I gagged.

Some of them were furred. Some, feathered. None of them stood more than a foot high. They glided into the room on slick bellies or fluttered with soft fat sounds on leathery wings. They flexed dripping talons and bared yellow teeth and mewled and cried out in thin chitinous shrieks as they moved across the floor to where Chuck lay snoring.

I backed away in horror. The things saw me then and began scurrying to cut off my escape! They took up positions between me and the door leading from the apartment, groping toward me with grotesquely twisted limbs.

A word shot suddenly from between Lowena's lips, a word I had never heard before and hope never to hear again. The things halted at her command.

She spoke again in guttural, consonantal words, redirecting the creatures toward her intended victim.

Chuck screamed once as the creatures crawled over him. A furred one fluttered about his mouth and his cries became gurgles and then low groans as he thrashed about in his struggle with the things Lowena had summoned through the dark door of herself. They pierced his body. They clawed and bit and chewed in an orgy of destruction.

It lasted only seconds.

Afterwards, Chuck lay still, lifeless.

Lowena called out to the creatures from her trance state and they obeyed her commands. I watched as they trooped back through the translucent door that she had become and moved swiftly off into the swirling mists that embraced them as if in welcome and disappeared from sight.

Lowena's body no longer glowed with that ghastly translucence. It firmed, resuming the familiar shape I knew so well. Her head lowered, her lips closed, and she fell to the floor and lay there unconscious.

I ran from the room and down the stairs and out of the building. I can't clearly remember how I got home that night. I do recall that I didn't sleep. I was afraid that I might dream.

Professor Windrow let out a breath he had evidently been holding for some time. "What were those things you saw?" he asked me.

"I don't know," I answered. "But I do know that the people on the reservation were right in calling Lowena the dark door through which unspeakable things can come if she calls them. That night she called them. *They* were the 'person or persons unknown' who killed Chuck Derry."

Professor Windrow glanced covertly across the dining room at Lowena who was holding the hand of her young man and smiling happily at him. "I can readily understand now why you said you were afraid of her," he commented thoughtfully. "But I must say that her escort seems quite contented with his lot."

"I hope he will be kind to her and to the little girl she bore last month," I said softly. "I can't bear to think of what might happen to him if he should treat her cruelly—as Chuck did. She is not the defenseless woman she seems to be."

MUSINGS

by Robert E. Howard

The little poets sing of little things:
Hope, cheer, and faith, small queens and puppet kings;
Lovers who kissed and then were made as one,
And modest flowers waving in the sun.

The mighty poets write in blood and tears
And agony that, flame-like, bites and sears.
They reach their mad blind hands into the night,
To plumb abysses dead to human sight;
To drag from gulfs where lunacy lies curled,
Mad monstrous nightmare shapes to blast the world.

The Way She Lived Her Role Was Driving Me Mad. But If Her Role Died....



by Pauline C. Smith

ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE FRITZ

I THOUGHT it was cute at first, the way she lived her part, feeding me back my lines...like we'd be in some candlelit bistro and she'd hunch those milk-white shoulders, widen her gray-green eyes so the false lashes not only sent shadows up into her flaxen hair but laid smudges along her hollow cheekbones and say, in that husky voice she'd developed, "What we are doing is wrong, Don."

My name isn't Don, it's Floyd, and what we were doing was sitting over beef stroganoff. So what's wrong with that?

"My sister is here. In this room with us."

Janet never had a sister.

"She will keep us from marrying, Don. She is evil. Evil."

All of which was my own corny dialogue from the twenty-first episode of the serialized soap opera called THE HOUSE OF EVIL, a gothic. Gothics are big this season, in case you didn't know, and the most successful of them are laid in an old creaky mansion filled with sin-

later influence and some cute little sexpot being chased by ghosts and guilt complexes; like **THE HOUSE OF EVIL**, in which Janet is the sexpot, Lorna, and I'm listed on the crawl as head writer.

You dig?

For six million daytime television viewers Janet, as Lorna, breathes deeply, weeps glycerine tears while shuddering and sighing amid ominous piano chords and oboe glissandos.

That's the way the script reads.

When I, an impoverished freelancer, was assigned **THE HOUSE OF EVIL**, I grasped the weekly salary with hungry hands. Here was success at last—not the fame and fortune I had hoped for with my first lousy novel, but security, and as long as I could keep Lorna chased, chaste and suffering yet indomitable so that six million out there in television-land hung on, weeping and clutching their Kleenexes, I had it made.

Janet, like I say, was a sexy little broad and the first time I was on the set and heard my words coming through that pound and a half microphone tucked smugly inside her padded bra, she was the bubble of soap I wanted most in my security bath.

I didn't get to Scene One until another thirty-six sequences of slow dialogue, pregnant pauses, long closeups filled with horrified shrieks finally wound up with Lorna in Don's arms and, simultaneously, Janet in Floyd's (being me, the writer).

"I am so afraid of the curse of my dead sister," breathed Janet.

"Darling," I breathed back, "together we will find the answer to the secret and lay the spell of the curse," and not until then did I realize that we were, by God, repeating dialogue of the day's sequence.

Now you can't hurry soap, so we sloshed through forty-two more terrifying and sodden sequences before Janet became mine in Lorna's wedding gown—wispy, witchy and virginal, and we moved into our apartment. By damn, if Janet hadn't found an apartmentized Victorian mansion that should have been condemned and hauled away years ago.

"Goddammit, Janet," I yelled, "this is a relic."

And she said, "Don't you swear at me," probably because Don can't use an expletive more powerful than *for Pete's sake* in front of those six million sitting on the edge of their kitchen stools.

No kidding, our married life was a script—if it could be played to an audience, it was played. If it couldn't, forget it. Ours was a *Mark it and Strike it* apartment—act it out between the chalk lines, with one take only.

It got so I was not only writing **THE HOUSE OF EVIL**, but living it too, and, believe me, one gothic soap sequence per day is **ENOUGH**. With our apartment a studio set, starred by an onstage wife who used continuity emotions and called me by a script name, I wanted out.

"Janet," I yelled, "come alive," so she brought out her work basket of expressions and knitted me a brow. I was ready to climb the walls.

We'd go to the neighborhood supermarket for a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine and get mobbed the minute a bunch of homemakers, who ought to be doing dishes instead of hanging on television every morning, caught sight of Janet.

"There's Lorna!" they squealed like a bunch of teenagers—and, presto! there was Lorna all right, signing

autographs, and would you believe it, handing out advice on ghosts in the attic.

It was fantastic!

There was a girl on the afternoon shift at the drug store who brooded over the story line, and hissed regularly at Janet, "I think the reason for the curse is that you killed your sister. And I think you killed her so she wouldn't get Don. I feel sorry for him—you always act so nice and demure except when you're screaming. I know what you are, and shame on you!"

She gave me a whole new sub-plot at a time that I needed a sub-plot.

Actually, it was hard to blame Janet for typecasting herself with every soap opera-watching housewife and gothic-loving drug clerk egging her on with the Lorna bit; but, dammit, I got so I felt like I was paper-clipped to a page of working script.

Every night, while I clacked out a new installment on the typewriter, Janet studied her lines for the next day's shooting. Being a method actress, she started with a yoga position of hard-breathing contemplation—breathe in—the breasts swelled while she sucked her stomach to a hollow—breathe out—breasts, stomach all back in place. It was quite a sight to watch, after which she unscrambled herself and became Lorna, speaking her complicated dialogue... "The house is against me, Don," with the knitted brow. "Listen!" and the indrawn breath. "I hear ghostly footsteps," clenching and unclenching her jaw muscles to convey frightened anxiety, thus using all three in her arsenal of acting devices.

It was a gas, like in carbon monoxide, and I was fed up before the hundred and sixty-eighth episode. By then, she was so much Lorna, the yoga stance only pushed her from Lorna to more Lorna, and I began to wonder if there was a Janet in there somewhere all curled up and sleeping; unless maybe she'd never been Janet or anyone else, but only an empty body searching around for a personality, to become complete once she found Lorna.

Weird, huh?

I wished, since I was married to this carbon copy kook, that I was writing a swinger script with swishy back-talk along with some loving—but, let's face it, if I could write snappy dialogue and smooth-sex, I could get locked in with a good slot, throw away my psychological and parapsychological library, and make with the thesaurus like the big boys.

Then Janet, in her Lorna-voice, found the ghost.

Honest!

"I hear footsteps," she said, her tone sepulchral.

"You hear the click of my typewriter," I answered her wearily.

"No," she said. "There is a spirit moving."

There was a spirit moving me!

I lifted my fingers from the typewriter keys. "Hey, Janet," I called to her.

Nothing.

"Hey, Lorna," I tried.

"Yes, Don."

"I'm Floyd," I said. "How about a divorce?"

She appeared to consider. Then she said, "Do you hear it?" She was listening with far more expression than she had ever used on the set. "Footsteps. Listen, Don. Listen to the footsteps. They are from the other world."

I listened. Then I used a four-letter word she never even heard because she was listening to the footsteps.

Good God!

I sat staring at her, my hands limp over my typewriter keys. She left the footsteps and entered yoga again, and the deep breathing exercises. I watched her with the awful knowledge that I was stuck to this female fugue, faced with the redundancy of writing words for her to say back to me over and over again... a future of reruns—writing and listening, writing and listening again—unless... and I flexed my fingers, ready to type—unless I could write her off my back.

My typewriter clicked like castanets and the next day I took my notes to the story conference.

"I got a great idea," I said airily at all those beady eyes glowing with expectancy. "I got an idea that'll boost us upstairs into an afternoon slot."

"Give, Floyd baby, give," offered the network poobah.

"Well, it's this way..." I sweat a little under my turtle-neck, "Instead of Lorna's sister, the ghost, bugging Lorna with her ominous footfalls and vengeful catcalls, she becomes friendly..."

"Who becomes friendly, Floyd baby?" asked the poobah in a carefully suppressed voice.

"The ghost. The ghost becomes friendly." I had a moment of drowning in my own sea of words. My life and all its flashbacks hung in balance. "The ghost becomes friendly."

"She becomes a friendly ghost, the do-good type, more a blithe spirit kind of ghost, helpful, happy, loving; thus turning Lorna into a happy, loving sexpot..."

"Floyd baby," broke in the poobah, flicking cigar ashes all over my script outline, "this is a gothic by name of THE HOUSE OF EVIL. You trying to change it into a situation comedy?"

Yes! That's exactly what I was trying to do. I was trying to change the image of that carbon copy chick I was superimposed behind.

"Floyd baby," said the poobah sternly, "No! He rose from his chair to add emphasis to the word.

"Just a minute. I've got another angle," I cried with fervor, and slowly and reluctantly the poobah folded again to the edge of his chair, while I gave some rapid-fire thinking as to how I could come forth with a split screen effect. I knuckle-drummed the table thoughtfully and that gave me an idea... "The sounds of Evil House become more threatening," I said with an ominous growl in my throat and some additional beats with the heel of my hand.

"Let's get on with it, Floyd baby," suggested the poobah dangerously.

"There is, at last, a physical confrontation between the sister-ghost and Lorna, and the secret, the terrible secret is disclosed at last." I looked around at all the beady, lidded eyes and swallowed. "Lorna did kill her sister." I paused for the effect of my words. They had produced no effect.

"Yes," I said, hopeful that repetition might cause impact, "Lorna knows now, for a fact, that she did kill her sister—accidentally, of course—but she remembers it all..."

"So what happens to Lorna?" asked the poobah gently.

"Naturally, she's out of the script," I said, gaining confidence. "And the ghost begins to haunt..."

The poobah did not allow me to finish my plans whereby I would break up the Janet-Lorna syndrome and gain Janet-whomever-she-was as my own. "Floyd baby." The poobah rose and flicked his ashes again. "Floyd baby, I'll give it to you straight. You've got a strong lead-in and your tease is great. But formatwise it stinks. We can't just toss out our long-suffering, indomitable sex-without-

sex symbol into limbo. The housewives would wipe us out of video-land with one concerted swipe of their dish towels..."

I caved within my turtle-neck.

"Floyd baby, your contract comes up next month. I suggest you keep the ghost ominous and the secret a secret. I suggest you continue Lorna's deep breathing and her shrieks..." He rolled the cigar around in his fingers and patted me on the shoulder with a Great White Father pat. "The ghost ghosts, Lorna stays in. Floyd baby, that's the way the script scrambles—if you want your contract renewed."

Back to the typewriter.

Each evening, I watched Janet make like Lorna and not within my plot within plot.

Every evening Lorna... see, it's getting to me, I mean Janet... went through her yoga routine with the breathing and contemplation. "The ghost walks!" she said, studying her lines aloud, "Don, the ghost is walking again," as she pointed, so help me, at the old marble fireplace in the old run-down apartment in that old Victorian mansion, making a montage of the unreality of the studio set into the reality of our nutsy life.

I tore my hair, knowing that if I didn't do something to separate me from this funny female I'd be as far-out as she.

Write her off, I told myself, and bent my brains to figure out how to do that with the poobah breathing over my shoulder, scattering cigar ashes over my contract.

She pointed her taloned finger dramatically at the fireplace as she hollowly announced, "Footfalls. Listen to the ghostly footfalls, Don. Listen. Just listen."

Me? I listened like an idiot and heard nothing except the words I had already typed.

Janet was living the part all right. It was inside her, shaking her to bits, hollowing her face, painting shadows beneath her eyes and my facile writer-mind angled into straight psychology. Letters and cards rolled in, sympathizing with "possessed Lorna." The dames in the supermarket toned down their shrieks and walked on tiptoe. The nut in the drug store mellowed and said, "If you killed your sister, I'm sure she deserved it and you are sorry. You are paying, poor Lorna, you are paying a big price."

It was crazy, man, like where's-the-nearest-funny-farm.

The drug store nut did it... well, so did the "Possessed" cards and letters, for surely Janet was possessed and surely she would pay a price, not in the script that would cancel my contract but in her own padded gray cells.

So I started to work on it. Not on the script, but on Lorna and I do mean Lorna.

I tapped out the daily script with its daily dialogue, then I listened to her rehearsal as she sat cross-legged, and watched her three expressions as she feebly emoted.

While I tapped and listened and watched, I fed Lorna subliminal messages. "You killed her," I said softly. "You killed her," between taps as I watched and listened.

"The footfalls," she said out-of-script, as she looked toward the fireplace. "The footfalls approach."

"You killed her," I added subliminally. "You remember, Lorna. You remember the killing, the murder, Lorna." She shuddered in her yoga position.

"You remember, Lorna. You remember it now."

She rose and turned toward the fireplace. I remember," she said.

Now I was working on one script and feeding another.

Triumph was near. It was difficult to keep the script and the messages from overlapping in my mind while they overlapped in Lorna's.

"The shock," I said softly, "will kill you, Lorna."

Her eyes glazed to gray-green glass.

"You will die, Lorna, with the full knowledge of murder. Your heart will stop. You will die, Lorna, tomorrow." She drooped and I hoped.

The following day I was on the set. It was the same old sound direction: OMINOUS FOOTFALLS. SOUND OF THE WIND. AN EERIE MOAN. And the same old dialogue: "Don, she is here again. In the house. I can feel her presence. Oh, Don."

I watched from my seat on the closed set as Lorna cast herself into Don's arms.

The sound track came through with some more footsteps.

Don said gently, "I don't feel her, Lorna dear."

Lorna stiffened, and she did it well. "I remember. Oh, I remember..."

It was here that the script continued to the next page, with Lorna's typed words, "I remember when we were children in this big old house..." The script was on file, but I had not given Janet the following pages. I had given her only to the page with the "I remember. Oh, I remember," dialogue. The rest had been subliminal--my words: "You remember that you killed her, Lorna. You remember your guilt. You are overwhelmed by it. For you remember at last. Lorna, the shock of your knowledge kills you. You fall. Your heart stops. You are dead."

The director decided to play Instant God. "Cut and go back," he yelled.

I leaned forward in my seat, hoping he wouldn't break the thread of suggestion.

"Back to 'I can feel her presence,'" yelled the director.

"She is here again," Lorna said onstage. "I can feel her presence. Oh, Don."

Don then did his adequate job with, "Lorna dear, I don't feel her..."

Lorna stiffened (according to directions) and I tensed.

"I remember," she cried. Oh, I remember..."

She fell as I rose.

The camera and sound men went on grinding for a full thirty seconds before pandemonium set in.

"Why, she's dead," said the poobah, sprinkling ashes upon Janet.

Yes, she was dead. Janet was dead.

And so was Lorna.

"Floyd baby, the poobah whirled on me. "Write it into the script. Write it out of the script. Do something!"

I am here now, in this Victorian broken-down apartment trying to do something with the script. I don't really know what to do because of those footfalls over there by the marble fireplace.

The footfalls.

Hear them?

They seem to be approaching.

Introducing the macabre art of Robert E. Jennings



Fisher Could
Find Out
What Logan
Wanted to Know.
All He Had to Do
Was Die



The CENTURY

by Carleton Grindle

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT E. JENNINGS

There were three of them: Logan and two hirelings. They went up five flights of stairs so narrow they seemed meant for goats not men. At the top they found a door only slightly less dingy than the walls. Logan tried the door, found it locked and motioned for Heffernan who had a trick for opening locked doors. Heffernan did his trick. The door swung slowly open.

The room beyond was dimly lit as if frozen in perpetual dusk. What light poured in through the open door touched a face. It was only a charcoal sketch on an easel but Logan stopped in the doorway and stared for a moment as if he could not believe his eyes.

There was nothing possible about that sketched face: not the way the flesh hung at the jowls as if from some inhuman bone structure, not the cold bitter light that was suggested in otherwise vacant eyes. Yet those features and others more grotesque were gathered in a way that suggested not only that they

belonged together but that the artist drew the subject from life.

Or perhaps afterlife.

There was someone standing in the deeper shadows of the room. A low, mellow voice asked, "What do you want?"

The hireling, Heffernan, found the light and switched it on.

The room's occupant was tall and gaunt. He blinked pale, watery eyes against the sudden light and his hair was a neutral color. He might well have blended right into the scenery except that he was too bland for this tenement setting. His eyes adjusted to the light and he looked at the intruders without fear. That was as Logan expected it would be but the movement of Heffernan's feet told him Heffernan did not understand the gaunt man's lack of fear. That too, was as Logan expected. He said, "Your name's Fisher."

"My name is Ward. James Ward."

"No good. You're Fisher, all right. James Fisher."

"My name's Ward. I never heard of James Fisher."

"Ever heard of the Momentary Ghost?"

The gaunt man's attitude changed. He gave a sigh as if there was some relief at being found, but not much. The pale watery eyes seemed to acknowledge his identity if his lips did not. Logan smiled in triumph.

"Now you see? All that running and hiding and here you've been found out again. But don't worry. I need help from you and after that we'll let you go your own way and never bother you again."

"Who are you?"

"My name's Logan—you never heard of me."

"Look, Mr. Logan, I can't help you. I'm not this Fisher you're looking for. Whatever you want with him I can't help you."

"Now sure you can. I know you're Fisher. I've seen pictures of you. You're older, thinner. Lost some weight. But I know who you are. I can see who you are. So no games, all right? Level with me and I'll level with you. Agreed?"

Fisher looked around. The other two men stood in relaxed postures near the door, exhibiting their talent for unobtrusion. After a moment Fisher thought it through and nodded his head. "I'm Fisher," he admitted. "But I can't help you."

"You don't even know what I need."

"I know what you want. You want me to go over, but I can't do that. I can't go over anymore."

"You say you lost the power?"

"I can't go over, that's all. Haven't in years."

Logan shook his head. He turned and looked again at the drawing on the easel. "You saw this over there didn't you?"

"A long time ago. I don't go back there anymore."

"Don't," said Logan. "You say 'don't' not 'can't.'"

Logan studied the drawing a minute, his distaste evident in his face. "If this is what they're like over there I don't blame you not wanting to go back. But I need you. I need the help of the Momentary Ghost and I'll pay for the help."

"I don't need money."

"Anyone stuck in a dump like this needs money. Let me tell you about my problem. I got this friend, this business partner. I guess you'd say he went over. Well he had something in his care and now I can't find it. I want you to go and talk to him. Just chat and so on. I'm sure he'll be glad to tell you where it is and you can tell me. It'll be that pleasant and when it's over with, you just come on back and give me the info and I'll pay you a good heavy fee and you can go anywhere you like and drop out of sight with enough bread to buy your privacy. It's that simple."

"I haven't been over in years. I can't do it anymore."

Logan came to him and gave him a smile: deep and reassuring. "Sure you can. Think of the money. You can get out of this goddamned slum and go someplace like Brazil and hide in the sun. Think of that. No more shadowy rooms with more cobwebs than furniture. I'll give you enough money to get to Brazil and set yourself up where nobody can find you. . ."

"It's been so long. I've lost the power. But even if I still had it— Logan, you don't know what it's like. I can't take it."

"Maybe not Brazil then. Maybe Majorea or Tahiti. Where is up to you!"

"No."

Heffernan stepped forward. He was a big man, well groomed and muscular: the look of an athlete with a touch of show business in him. A wrestler, perhaps. "You do as Mr. Logan says," he said levelly.

"I want you to come with me to my place and we can work out arrangements, okay?" Logan said. "I pay well. My friends here, Mr. Heffernan and Mr. Lovelace will testify to my generosity, won't you gentlemen?"

Both men nodded.

"See? You'd be doing yourself a favor to co-operate."

"No," Fisher said. "No."

He moved so swiftly he was almost to the door before Heffernan comprehended his action. But before he could open the door something slammed into his back. Air rushed from his lungs and he fell stunned to the floor. He rolled over and tried to reach the door, to throw it open. He saw Heffernan's smooth shaved ruddy face bending over him, saw the fist coming. He tried to roll aside but the fist slammed into his stomach and was followed by another sledge hammer blow to his jaw.

"Don't hurt him," Logan cried out.

The blows stopped but Fisher's senses swam in semi-consciousness. He was barely aware of the two musclemen lifting him to his feet and dragging him from his room, down the stairs and out into the late afternoon sunlight to a waiting car.

2

He swam in a world of blackness seasoned with pain and it was Spring.

"Gently, boys, gently. . . ." came Logan's voice through the darkness.

"He can take it."

"We don't want him damaged."

"But he won't co-operate."

"There's other ways to make a man talk. Better ways. Leave him alone now with his pain. He'll be more agreeable tomorrow."

They left. Spring became Summer and Summer became Fall followed by Winter: the full cycle in a world of agony. But though pain eased off Winter was still cold and bitter with his thoughts.

The thoughts of the Momentary Ghost.

And of someone waiting for him where he feared to go.

He saw her face swimming up out of the darkness toward him. Soft and lovely. Clear pale skin. Lovely green eyes. Full expressive lips. Golden red hair that he never compared to a sunset because it was too wonderful of itself, too unlike anything except itself. How long it seemed since she had gone, not momentarily as he had often gone, but permanently.

Forever.

And the agony of that thought was greater than the pain of his beating. But after a time, he slept. And a time after that, he awoke.

It was morning. He could tell by the light streaming in from the narrow window high in the wall, light that had a certain clarity characteristic of the morning. He sat up on the edge of the bed and let his senses swim dizzily.

The beating was professional and proficient. He was sore but when he checked himself he found few bruises. Nothing seemed broken. He was weak and hungry and realized that much more of this and he might go over and not come back. He searched his thoughts frantically for some way out but thought of none.

He looked round the room he was in and thought of the word cell. The ceiling was high and a single small window near the ceiling, too small to crawl through even if it could be reached, provided what light there was. The walls were bare and white as was the tile floor. The only furniture was the cot on which he sat. There was nothing to indicate the room's original purpose and Fisher could imagine Logan had it built with the purpose of holding unwilling guests in mind. Logan seemed singularly prepared for the entertaining of unwilling guests.

Without warning the door opened and Logan came into the room.

He was wearing dark blue slacks and a powder blue shirt open at the neck, where he had a red and blue bandana knotted. He smiled.

"Morning, Fisher. How you feeling today?"

"Like I've been beaten up."

"Don't be bitter. When you overcome your reluctance you'll find the pay's better than you dreamed of."

"Money doesn't interest me."

"What does?"

"Not going back."

"I can't be that generous. I need you and your talent."

"You could get a medium."

"I could get a private cop, too. Wouldn't help me any more than any medium would. Otto Case is just too clever a man for that. He won't be called back and he didn't leave this thing where anyone can find it. No medium can call him back. But you—you can go after him."

"Not any more."

"I shouldn't think yours is a talent a man could lose easily."

"I lost it."

Logan shook his head. "I don't believe that yarn. I know a bit about this stuff. My old lady was a medium. You buy that? One of the best. From when

she was a teenager to the day she died, in her seventies. She could call the spirits back. I've tried mediums, though not my mother, rest her soul, and the mediums can't call Case back. It's up to you and I ain't swallowing this 'can't stuff. You want to go, you go back. I intend to make you want to go."

Fisher realized suddenly that his hands were sweating. He wiped his palms on his trouser legs and spotted small dried flecks of blood on his clothing from his nose or mouth during the beating yesterday, probably. He groped for words a moment, then said, "Logan there's a reason I can't go back."

Logan was silent.

Fisher continued. "It's not a natural thing, this talent I . . . had. To die temporarily and come back. I saw things you wouldn't believe unless you saw them yourself. Terrible things. That drawing in my place—the face—was one of those things and there's a lot there that's worse."

"You went there lots of times. Couldn't be bad if you went all that often."

"But something happened. I lost my nerve. It's like anything—like flying an airplane or riding a horse. You have to have nerve to do it. Once you lose your nerve you never can do it again."

"Okay. So tell me what happened."

Fisher stared down at the pristine floor. "I can't."

"Whatever it is don't matter. I'll pay you enough to make up for it. More than enough."

In his memory, Fisher saw the face again. The green eyes, the pale skin, the golden red hair.

"You can't pay me that much," he said.

The smile was gone from Logan's face. "Maybe we can. But not the way you want. No food and in a few days you go over on your own. Maybe we can bring you back, maybe we can't. That's the chance we take. It's up to you."

He left and Fisher heard the door being locked.

He stared down at the floor and felt something shaking his body the way a dog shakes a rag doll. That something was fear.

To go over for fifteen minutes, that was hell.

But to go over and never come back—what could you call that?

3.

He dreamed he was twenty years younger.

Twenty years younger and happier. A man with a unique talent that was almost a power. A frightening, mind-revealing talent that was still an instrument which could help people. In his own small way he made a contribution to mankind.

Twenty years younger—and not alone.

There was Laura and there was Diane. Diane was less than a year old and Laura and Fisher were as happy as any two parents could be; as happy as any two people could be. They had their life and the happiness that life gave them came from sharing. Sharing and giving to one another came naturally and easily to each of them. It gave their life together purpose and meaning and drew them together more closely than any other couple Fisher ever knew. He and Laura were perfect for one another. And Diane made it all the more perfect.

Then his dream carried him to the day when sharing became hell.

Because of his talent—

He was the Momentary Ghost and his was the power to cross over, to travel among the troubled dead. To speak with them, to see them, to hear them. It was the one part of his life he shared with no one else.

At first he opposed Laura's idea. He wasn't sure anyone could cross over and return but him. But she insisted and he gave in. One night he crossed the barrier between life and death and Laura went with him.

Now in his dream he relived that moment: the sensation of travelling across the hellish, unbelievable plains of madness that was the beyond. He flew above those plains and at his side flew Laura, frightened, awed and fascinated by the sights he showed her: the masses of the dead wandering lost and hopelessness of death with him, the pointlessness of living merely to be transmitted to a place that was an agony much worse than any hell of medieval imagining.

And so, accompanied by Laura he toured the places of the dead and then returned to the place of life. But he returned without Laura.

In his dream he relived the agony of shaking her body, trying to recall her from her trance only to realize that she would not be recalled.

He had taken the woman he loved beyond the boundary of life.

But he had no means to bring her back.

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The door opened and Logan looked in. It was dark now, but Fisher's eyes were accustomed to the dark. He lay on the cot and made no effort to rise as he watched Logan.

"You awake?" Logan asked.

"Yes."

"Getting hungry, ain't you?"

"Go away. Let me die."

"Do you want to die?"

There was no answer.

"I guess you must know more about death than any other living man." Again no reply.

"How many times you cross over?" Logan asked. "You keep count? Hundreds at least from what I heard. Thousands probably. You seen it. You of all men have actually seen the *afterlife*. Tell me about the *afterlife*."

"I can tell you in four words, Logan. I'm afraid to die."

That was answer enough for now. More than Logan deserved. Fisher shut his eyes against the darkness and heard the door close. He tried to sleep but his stomach ached with hunger.

+++

In his cell time passed slowly. He thought back.

He thought to the time when he was just a man with ambitions of being an artist. He was a good painter and he made a small but comfortable living. Then he discovered his talent and found a way to do something for others. At that point in his life helping others was important to him. He never thought that there might be a price to pay.

He thought of Diana.

Since the death of Laura she had lived with her grandparents—Laura's folks. Fisher's parents were dead, and died when he was ten years old.

Once he saw them in afterlife.

He could never forget that sight. He could not recall why he had gone that time: to settle some petty question for someone or other. Most of the trouble he had solved for people now seemed such petty things—questions of inheritance, or the dead's wishes about this or the other triviality. But people asked and he went.

And once he saw his parents.

He saw them buried in a viscid gray substance that seemed to be the lower portions of their bodies melted and joined to the Main of Madness itself. They reached up with clawed fingers, groping for him. They opened ravening beaks instead of mouths. The changes that the dead suffered in this place frightened the Momentary Ghost but none affected him more than the changes his own parents suffered.

He tore his mind from the thought of them. He tried to make his mind think of something else, of the hunger in his stomach, anything.

His mind thought of the great fear within him.

The fear that if he did go back he would see Laura. And he would see her changed.

4.

Night passed and morning came. Despite his discomfort, Fisher slept. He was awakened by the opening of his cell door.

He turned toward the door and saw a ghost.

It was a girl. A beautiful, frightened girl. It was Laura, twenty years ago.

He cried out and sat up. He scrambled to get to his feet but his weakness betrayed him and he fell. The door shut. He got to his feet and stumbled to it. "Laura!" he called. He hammered on the door with his fists.

She did not answer his calls and after a time he told himself he had dreamed it. He sank to the floor and swore bitterly beneath his breath. The door opened again.

"Ready to discuss a deal?" asked Logan.

"Laura—?" Fisher voiced his incompletely framed thoughts.

"Not Laura," Logan said. "Diana. How long's it been since you saw your kid, anyway?"

Fisher sat up. The cold logic of what Logan was doing cleared his mind, deadened the pain of his hunger.

"You ready to have a chat with me?"

"You bastard. You dirty son of a bitch!"

"If you're afraid to die yourself, how do you feel about her dying?" Logan asked. "She will if you don't do what I want you to do."

"Let me see my daughter."

"Co-operate with me and you'll see her. The first thing is you have some breakfast. There'll be time enough for a family reunion later on."

+++

Fisher sat in a chair and felt the softness of upholstery against his body but drew no comfort from it.

"Otto Case was my business partner, sort of," Logan was saying. "We had something going together. Case died. Now since his death I've had trouble

locating certain business funds he was in charge of. I think he had a Swiss bank account and I need information about it. I need the account number."

"Is that all?"

"Sure. Just a simple little ten minute trip, right?"

Fisher was unsmiling. "It depends on Case. If he wants to talk he'll tell me what I ask him. A lot of them are talkative when they see someone from our side. But there's no guarantee. I can't force him to talk."

"He better talk," said Logan.

"I hope he will."

Logan chuckled, almost warmly. "Take it easy, Fisher. Just take it easy. You got nothing to worry about at all now have you?" He slapped Fisher's shoulder. Fisher looked up at him. If Logan noticed the look in Fisher's eyes he did not comment on it.

"Now what do you need?" Logan asked.

"Not much," Fisher replied. "Quiet, solitude."

Logan frowned. "Is that all? Don't you need a lot of people sitting around holding hands?"

"I don't call the dead. I go to them. I need a comfortable chair in a dark room. I need to be left alone. I'll call you when I get back. And above all else, no one must touch my body."

"You want us to leave you by yourself, is that it?" Logan's tone was sly.

"You can guard the room if you like. Just don't come in it. You should know I'm not going anywhere."

"Yeah, I guess you're not at that. All right, Fisher. It's a deal. You just bring back the word from Otto Case, all right?"

"If I can."

"No 'if' about it. You make him talk, that's all!"

"And how do you make a dead man talk, Logan?"

+++

He sat in a heavily upholstered chair in the center of a room darkened by heavy drapes pulled across the windows. The back of the chair was high and he let his head rest against it, shut his eyes, felt the comfort of the chair.

It had been so long . . .

He thought back, remembering what it was like before. Recalling the way. So many years before. . . But he had not forgotten. He could never forget.

He sank into the comfort of the chair and it was like falling asleep yet he was conscious of it all. His eyes were closed, his senses bathed in darkness. Then, though his eyes were still shut he could see the darkened room.

His conscious self struggled against the restraints of its casement of flesh. How familiar was that struggle despite the years. How strange to him despite the familiarity. It was as if his mind rebelled against its own existence, struggled against bars of flesh and bone, blood and marrow. Struggled with a desperate urge for freedom. Struggled—and was free.

There was a sensation of something snapping loose like an icicle snapping loose from the eaves of a house beneath the winter sun. He was free. He drifted above his own body and looked down at the gaunt corpse that sat in the chair waiting for his return.

It was years since the last time he looked down at his own body like that. Technically, medically and spiritually, he was dead and he knew he would remain dead until his return. And if he did not return within a short time—or if someone disturbed his waiting body—he would be unable to return. How long could he remain outside his body? Not more than a few minutes, probably. He had never devised a test for that which he was willing to try. But he would have all the time he needed, for where he was going time was not the same as it was here.

Nor was space or feeling or purpose or anything else. And he hated it. And dreaded it. But he had no choice. He set his mind in a certain way upon the fabric of existence and the strands unraveled and parted for him.

5.

Do the Plains of Madness change?

Gray and brown rolling fields, cut here and there with jagged upthrusting spires of rock. Littered at random intervals with twisted, withered flora: a sort of fungus which moved and writhed as if with the pangs of hunger—and what it fed on the Momentary Ghost did not care to know. And the plains were peopled.

Here nomadic tribes of dead wandered, blinded by the unholy light of the eternal sun that shone down upon the plains—a sun that was an obscene travesty of the sun of that other world they had known. Here too were others of the dead, pale and aimless, each different from the others, each changed by afterlife, each lasting out eternity in his own way.

Now the Momentary Ghost saw a man rooted to the ground like a tree, his abnormally tall body stretching upward toward the sky, his voice a constant

high-pitched scream of agony bitten away by the wind. The Momentary Ghost saw a melting pool of humanity, of revenants thrown together for whatever reason or by whatever whimsy rules these plains to form a lake of molten flesh, a carnal, fetid mixture of the tormenters. And then—

Stunted twisted men, their vitals trailing behind their grotesque bodies as they crossed gray lava fields—

Pale zephyr like beings wafted by the wind, grated by the sand, bruised by rocks, burned by the sun, frozen by the wind—

Lost souls wandering as aimlessly in death as in life—

All this the Momentary Ghost saw as he sped above the plains of madness in search of a man he had never seen.

In this place Fisher wore, after a fashion, a body. It was like his earthly body yet it was paler, more gaunt, less real-seeming. It was carried by the winds above the plains toward the mountains at the edge of the plains—mountains that thrust up like teeth from the lower jaw of a shark. The wind carried his body along and the wind sang to him. But the Momentary Ghost knew the song of the wind and he feared and hated it.

Feared, hated, despised. . .

And dreaded. For this was afterlife. This was it. All that earthly life leads up to—all that mankind really means. And somewhere in the plains or in the mountains, Laura.

Don't think of her. Keep your mind from thoughts of Laura. Think of something else. Think of Otto Case, the man you search for. Don't think of Laura—

But what if I find her?

He shut his spectral eyes against the thought but the thought and its agony persisted.

After a time the Momentary Ghost came to the mountains that edged the plains.

Like massive stalagmites of hell the mountains reached toward but they did not touch him. Between the peaked mountains he saw canyons and valleys, the beds of acid rivers, uncertain passes obscured by virulent swirling mists. Could Laura be somewhere in these mountains, perhaps all but dissolved in some river, or even hidden in some sickening mist?

Think of something else. Think of Otto Case—

Then past the mountains where he had never been before.

He saw jungle.

A place of fantastic intertwinings of black foliage and strange flowers among which his eye caught glimpses of moving things. Misformed things beyond even his experience. He drifted downward and knew this was the place for which he searched. That here he would find Otto Case.

He settled in a clearing.

Tall trees twisted in agonizing shapes to reach high above him. Vines and creepers grew stranglingly around the trunks of the trees and from the vines grew black, hideous flowers that dripped a gelatinous oily substance that ate like acid into the ground it fell on. The Momentary Ghost peered around, saw only deeper shadows among the raven trees, yet heard faint moanings of accustomed agony from within the jungle.

And where was Case? Somewhere around here the Momentary Ghost knew.

That was part of it, part of the strange power that made him what he was. His travels into the realm of afterlife always brought him to the person he sought. Yet he saw no sign of Case. Had the years affected his abilities?

Then a dry rustling as if leaves brushed against one another and liked it not. The Momentary Ghost whirled around. Something came into the clearing, parting branches at the clearing's edge.

Otto Case—

No longer human, too twisted even to be called a parody of his former shape.

A long, narrow head bobbed at the end of a long pliant neck that seemed to grow directly from the creature's pelvis—all that seemed left of the trunk of Case's torso. Long, awkward and disjointed legs. A tail, a scorpion's tail.

The head, bald and narrowed with pointed ears and open, vacant eyes. The skin a pale shiny gray. And all about the body a mist like a swarm of insects. Moving with a shambling, loping gait, Otto Case crossed the clearing toward the Momentary Ghost.

Crossed and stopped to stand, his long spindly neck craning upward toward Fisher. The mouth opened and saliva poured out with words. "I am Otto Case," it said. "You have come to see me?"

"Yes."

Now the neck twisted and craned so that the head rose above Fisher. It cocked to one side and agonized eyes, drained of color, peered down at him as if trying to imagine a creature stranger than itself. "But why?" it asked. "Have you come to do more to me than has been done? Why? Why?"

"I have come only to talk to you."

The creature stepped around, circling Fisher in small almost capering movements. "Perhaps you have come to answer my questions. Where am I? What have you done to me? Why?"

"I have done nothing to you," replied the Momentary Ghost. "I haven't long—"

The grotesquely misshapen hands gestured pleadingly. "Can't you tell me? you look normal. Real. You must know what's happening. Where am I? I don't understand any of this."

"Please, there isn't time—"

"I remember. I remember I was crossing a street. I think it was a car. It seemed to come from nowhere." The pale eyes grew serious, reflective for a moment. "Yes, a car. I stood there. Saw it coming. Couldn't move. I thought it would hit me. Only I must have passed out."

"It did hit you."

"It couldn't. It was going too fast. I would have been killed. I passed out. It must have swerved aside. But when I came to I was here and the changing was starting. Where am I? What have you done to me?"

"I've done nothing. This is death."

"I can see. I can feel. I can think."

"This is death."

The creature moved quickly, the head craned out so suddenly Fisher thought Case was attacking him. But the eyes stared pleadingly into his and the creature shook not with fury but with fear. "When I woke up I was already changing. Do you know how it began? With my hands. Look at them."

He held them awkwardly for Fisher to see. "Once I had fine hands. Human hands. Strong, clever hands. When I was a child I played piano. I remember that. Now my hands have changed. My hands. Look at them: three fingers and they're long. Better suited for running and climbing than for things a hand should do."

The creature turned away and moved across the clearing. With a movement that reminded Fisher of the way a camel kneels, Case fell to his knees, sank his face into mutated hands.

"Where am I?" it asked. "What have you done to me?"

The Momentary Ghost fought back the urge to try comforting the creature for he knew there was no comfort in hell. "This is what death is like," he said. "When we die, we come here and we change. I've come to ask you a question. Give me your answer and I'll leave you alone."

"I can think, I can feel. That can't be death."

"But it is. Do you know your name?"

"My name? Otto Case—"

"Do you remember a man named Logan?"

"Logan?" the creature said. It spat the name like something bitter and sprang to its feet, turning to glare with baleful eyes at Fisher. "He should be here. Not me. He sent me here. He sent me here where they would change me."

"My question—"

"Did Logan send you here to ask? Logan sent me here to be tortured like this. I saw the driver of that car. I saw Logan's man."

"You had money in a bank in another country," Fisher said. "Logan wants to know the account number."

"No. I won't tell I won't."

Suddenly the creature leaped. Strong misshapen hands reached for Fisher's spectral throat. Calloused leathery fingers closed tight and squeezed.

Fisher fell back, choking for air. He slapped and struggled, trying to free himself but the changeling that was Case was much too strong for him. The hands tightened crushingly on his neck, his lungs cried out for air.

Could he die? Could his existence here be snuffed out? He doubted it. But the agony was sufficient of itself and the rage of Otto Case was such that he might continue this for ages—and Fisher would be stranded here if he stayed too long.

He fought to break the grip but could not. His efforts and his agony were tiring him, weakening him. His arms fell weakly, uselessly to his side. There was a roaring, a ringing in his ears to match the agony in his throat and lungs. He was staring directly into the malefic face of the creature that once was Otto Case.

And then those eyes tore from Fisher's gaze and the face grew slack with surprise. The hands loosened slightly about Fisher's throat and the creature said something Fisher could not understand.

And then let go.

Fisher fell to the ground, gasping for air. The roaring continued in his ears but it seemed to him he could hear voices—a voice calling his name.

He looked up.

He saw Laura.

Laura, tall and lovely, young as she had been twenty years ago. Her long red hair flowed upon the wind like a veil across her face but Fisher saw her face as beautiful as he remembered it. He closed his eyes tight against the sight, fearing that she would come closer and he would see the ways she had changed. An involuntary sob tore from his tortured throat.

He heard the movement of the creature that had been Otto Case. He opened his eyes and saw it fleeing into the raven jungle.

"James," Laura called softly. Her arms reached out. She came toward him.

The Momentary Ghost scrambled to his feet. He had no wish to see how Laura was changed. He didn't want to know. He cried out an inarticulate cry and turned. He grabbed the wind and let it pull his spectral body high above the trees and back toward the place where the fabric of space was torn and parted.

And below and behind he could hear her call his name.

6.

He floated above his own body and stared down at it.

His body was tall and gaunt and the hair was neutral in color as if there was an intention that there be no hair at all. The face was relaxed, in repose, as it always was when he returned from afterlife. In twenty years, he realized, he had changed. But that was not the way you changed in afterlife.

That was the clay of James Fisher and to animate that clay he had only to sink down and take up residence again.



But he had failed. And failure meant death—not just for him, which was a thing he greatly feared, but for Diana as well.

He could hear the clock in the room ticking away the seconds. How long could he stay from his body before he would be permanently barred from it? He did not know. Nor did he care. He thought of Laura as he had known her years ago, and as he had seen her just moments ago. Diana was the important one now, the one with the chance to live. He could not, would not, let anything happen to her.

He moved from the room through the wall to the corridor beyond.

Heffernan was seated, dozing in a chair outside Fisher's room. For a moment Fisher poised above him, staring down at the besy, sleeping man. But it was not Heffernan who interested him. It was Diana.

He drifted above Heffernan for a moment, testing the psychic vibrations in the air about him. He could sense Logan, of course, and Heffernan. And a third man. Then he sensed Diana. Not strong, but nevertheless close. He drifted toward her.

Further down the corridor he drifted through a wall and found her in the room beyond. She lay asleep on the bed. She was young and lovely as her mother had been; but Fisher saw now that the resemblance to Laura, though strong, was basically superficial. Her face was shaped like Laura's face and the nose was like her mother's. Seen briefly they might seem to look the same. But as he stared down at his daughter, Fisher saw that she was not her mother but herself.

Her cheeks were slightly more pronounced than Laura's, an inheritance perhaps from her gaunt father. She seemed, stretched out on this bed, a bit taller than Laura—but only a bit. Her eyes were closed but they seemed different—though that, of course, might be nothing more than the difference brought on by modern make-up. It was Fisher's first good look at his daughter in twenty years.

She stirred slightly but did not come awake. Her sleep seemed natural. Fisher did not think she was drugged. He turned and went through the wall, back into the corridor.

Heffernan still dozed, his chair propped against the wall next to the door to Fisher's room. Fisher paused above him, staring down, a plan forming in his mind. It was wild and impossible, but perhaps it might work. He could think of nothing else and realizing that, he did not pause to consider how it might fail.

The Momentary Ghost moved down toward Heffernan. Into Heffernan.

He saw Heffernan's face come to life. The eyes opened, the mouth gaped, but the only sound issued was a strange, gurgling noise. Fisher sank deeper into the shell that was Heffernan's body and found himself struggling as he never struggled before, fighting not with Heffernan but with the essential animating force of the man.

And it was a struggle in which Fisher outclassed Heffernan completely. He shoved and twisted the man's soul, driving it from its own body. And as Fisher drove it out, the body fell forward and the chair slammed to the floor as the body toppled from it.

But the battle was over. Fisher saw the pale wispy shadow of Heffernan's soul drift upward. He heard the raw, unearthly soundless scream of the thing as space and time opened up around it, permitting it entry to the afterlife. Fisher was so familiar with.

And then it was over and the corridor seemed to echo with its own silence.

Fisher dropped into the corpse and felt his own anima flow into it, forming to it like batter to a mold.

For the first time he was really scared. He had never taken over any body but his own before—much less killed a man. Only the knowledge that Heffernan would not hesitate to kill Diana made Fisher's actions possible.

He felt awkward in the larger body. Awkward and out of place. Already he was aware of strange, unfamiliar musculature, different habit patterns and appetites. But there was no more time. He made the eyes open and stared up at the ceiling. He had trouble focusing, then realized Heffernan was in need of glasses. To an artist like Fisher, this was disturbing but there was no immediate cure for it.

He flexed the fingers of his right hand, then moved the arm, bringing it back to lift himself up. It slipped and he fell. He took it more slowly and awkwardly got to a sitting position.

But could he get up? And if he could, could he walk around?

The questions bothered too much for him to think about them. The musculature and nervous system were not changed; only the consciousness controlling them. He had to teach himself to rely on unconscious responses automatic to Heffernan's body and he had to do it quickly. He would be no use to Diana if it took him forever to learn to use his new body.

"What the hell happened to you?"

Fisher looked up and saw the man called Lovelace coming toward him.

"I heard you fall," Lovelace said. "What the hell did you do?"

"I dozed off and fell out of the chair," Fisher said.

Lovelace gave his head a contemptuous shake. "Might have known."

"Help me up, will you?"

"Yeah," Lovelace said. He bent down and helped Fisher to his feet.

"Thanks," said Fisher when he was standing. And before Lovelace quite knew what was happening, Fisher locked one of Heffernan's huge arms around his neck.

Lovelace flayed his arms savagely, trying to strike Heffernan who was behind him. Fisher applied pressure, felt the muscle of the forearm biting in against Lovelace's windpipe. Fisher gave one final effort and yanked the arm tight against the other man's throat, heard a brief gurgle and felt the man go limp in his arms. He dropped Lovelace to the floor and let him lay there a minute while Fisher recovered his own breath. He stared down at the body and wondered, will I meet this man in afterlife? Or Heffernan? For he knew now that this could end only with his own death as well.

He found an empty room and dragged Lovelace into it. Closing the door he went into the hall and moved to the door of Diana's room. He found keys in Heffernan's pocket and one of them opened the door.

Diana was seated on the side of the bed, her face drawn, pale with fright. Fisher raised a finger to his lips in a gesture of silence. "Don't say anything," he said. "I've come to get you out of this."

She looked pleadingly at him and the look was reminiscent of Laura. Fisher crossed the room to the window and looked out. The grounds were empty and there was no wall or gate. But there were bars on the window.

"Come on," he said and led her to the corridor.

He had only a vague idea of the layout of the house but he managed to get her to the garage, which was built on just off the kitchen. There were two cars there and a small replica of a license plate on Heffernan's key chain told Fisher which car he had keys for. He handed the keys to Diana and said, "Get out of here. Go straight to the police and tell them what happened."

"Aren't you coming?"

"No."

She started for the car, then stopped and turned back. "I don't understand any of this. Why are you—"

"I haven't time to explain."

"Then will you at least tell me who that man is?" That strange looking man you keep locked up?"

It was the first time Fisher realized Diana had not seen him in twenty years. It came as a shock to him and as something of a disappointment.

"It's a man named James Fisher," he said.

She said nothing. But the look on her face told him enough; it told him that she knew who James Fisher was. For a moment she seemed on the verge of running back into the house.

"Get out of here," he said. "He's already taken care of. You'll see him soon enough."

She accepted his lie and got into the car and drove off. Fisher watched her go.

"What's going on here?"

Fisher turned and faced Logan.

"That was the girl!" Logan said.

"You don't need her. Let her go."

"What's got into you? She'll go straight to the cops—." He tried pushing past Fisher, heading for his car. Fisher clamped one of Heffernan's ham-like hands on Logan's shoulder and spun him around, shoving him back into the house.

Logan fell sprawling to the floor. He stared up at Heffernan, a look of mingled astonishment and disbelief on his face.

"What's got into you? Heffernan, you—"

"Not Heffernan," Fisher said. "Heffernan's dead."

Logan's mouth snapped shut.

"Heffernan's with Case now," Fisher said. "He won't be coming back."

"Fisher—," Logan said.

"That's right."

Logan's hand darted into his jacket, Fisher had not guessed he was carrying a gun.

The gun fired once. Its sound, magnified by the closeness of the kitchen walls, beat on Fisher's senses as the pungent acid odor of the powder stung his nostrils. Fire stabbed through his middle and spread like shattering glass. Fisher put a hand to Heffernan's stomach and drew it away, wet and sticky with blood.

He fell to his knees and toppled forward, groaning with the pain of it. He glanced up and saw Logan getting to his feet.

"I'll fix you!" Logan shouted. "I'll fix you!"

He fired again and the bullet plowed into Heffernan's shoulder, down into his chest, spreading more flaming agony. Fisher could not hold back the cry of pain as Logan turned and ran back into the house. But through the clouds of pain Fisher understood what Logan intended to do.

Heffernan's body was no longer any use to him. He abandoned it and left it dead and bloody on the floor.

Logan ran to the room where Fisher's body waited and Fisher followed after him. Logan threw open the door and Fisher dove for him. But Fisher moved too late.

The gun fired twice. Fisher saw the bullets rip holes in the back of the chair, saw his inanimate body jerk twice and pitch forward to the carpet. Logan laughed wildly, like the madman he was. "I win!" he shouted. "I fixed you, Fisher. Really fixed you!"

Fisher struck.

He drove his own anima down into the shell of Logan's body, driving the essence of the criminal out. Logan realized what was happening, cried out in fear, thrashed the air uselessly in his panic.

But he could not stop the Momentary Ghost.

Fisher grappled with that part of Logan that he hated, grappled with it and threw it from Logan's body. The thing drifted upwards yelping small, frightened sounds that only Fisher could hear. A rift grew in space to accommodate the thing and Logan passed through to the Plains of Madness.

For a moment Fisher wore Logan's body. But for a moment only. He could not continue life in a borrowed body—especially not Logan's. The moment he feared was upon him. No longer was he the momentary ghost.

7.

How long he wandered the Plains of Madness he did not know, could not say. But after a time he saw Logan. He saw him, the scattered physical remains of the man littering a glassy spot. Disassembled, scattered parts of him lay about the place whining and pleading, asking forgiveness of anything at all. And all that time the merciless travesty of the sun beat down.

But no change touched the ghost—the eternal ghost—of James Fisher.

He wandered among the damned, a pale gaunt figure lost and aimless but not victim to the tortures most of the others felt. Sometimes he saw others like himself; but most of the ones he saw were like Logan or Case or his own parents.

How long he wandered he could not say. After a time he came to the raven jungle.

Strange parasitic flowers dripped caustic oils on the ground and from the jungle came cries of wounded things. Case stood there and a chill seemed to touch him, his first awareness of any sensation of heat or cold since coming to the afterlife.

He turned. At the clearing's edge was Laura.

Young and beautiful, her face veiled by wind-blown hair. After a time he spoke her name.

"Hello," she said. "I've waited for you James."

"I was afraid. Afraid of what I'd done to you."

"You haven't hurt me, James. Not really, I've been lonely, that's all."

"But I have. I know I have. I know what happens here. The changes. I never forgave myself that. I never could face up to it. I don't want to see how you have changed."

"Look at me."

He wanted to plead with her, to run, to ignore what had happened to her. But he knew he could put this off no longer. He was a ghost for real now with an eternity in afterlife before him. He went to her and brushed the hair from her face.

It was the same face he remembered. The very same. He took her in his arms and held her for the first time in twenty years and it was as if they had never been apart. After a time he kissed her, gently and fervently at the same time, a kiss containing all the pent-up emotions of two decades.

"You haven't changed," he said. "You haven't."

"No James. Come with me. I have something to show you."

"Come where?"

"You'll see."

She took his hand and reached out with her other arm. Her hand seemed to touch something and something parted, fell aside. Space itself. There was a rift and something lay beyond that rift.

"I don't understand—," he began.

She smiled at him. "You've seen only part of afterlife. There's a better part."

She tugged at his hand and led him through the rift. The rift closed after them.

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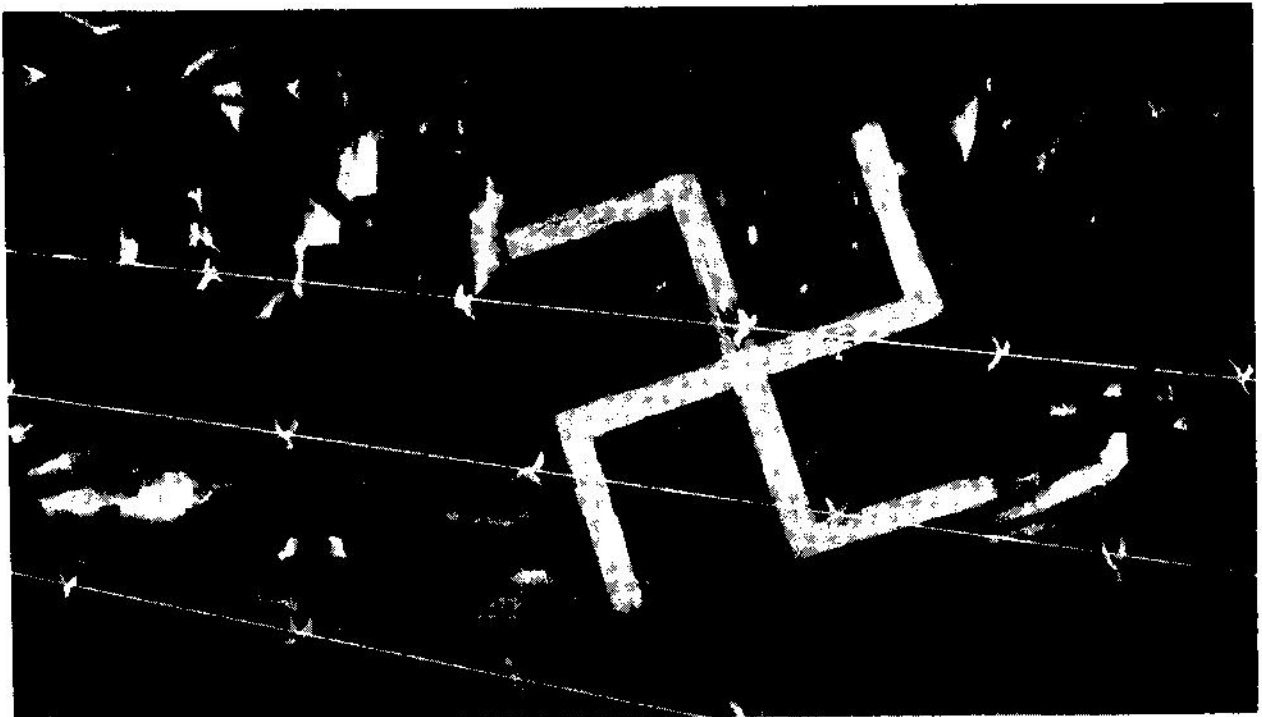
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He had to escape and he knew an escape route. But he could not be certain where escape would lead...



Portrait of Things to Come

by Leon Zeldis

ILLUSTRATION BY BURGE

He came in quite late, that Aaken. He was a little bird of a man, perhaps five feet tall, paunchy, bowlegged, staring with a short, slanted head that grew out of his body like a misplaced mushroom. There was something deliberate in his movements. He had an avuncular way of poising himself before taking the first step, and of standing still in a position suggestive of unstable equilibrium.

He was a Dutch jew. Probably managed to hide himself for a while, but eventually they caught him and here he was, in the camp with the rest of us. By chance, he came to sleep on the bunker above mine, empty since Johannes was killed by a guard in a Sporting Night. They had played William Tell, that particular night, if I remember correctly. I don't know exactly the manner of his death, and I don't want to know. Johannes and I were friends.

There was little conversation among us, yet gradually I came to feel a certain attachment for Aaken. Perhaps it was because he seemed so unable to cope with the situation in which he found himself. He was not lost, but sunk in a sea of unfathomable depths, where gravity did not work, where his previous modes of reference did not apply at all. After a while, he confided brief snatches of his private life, of what he had been before. Before.

"What I cannot suffer," he said to me once, "is not so much the filth, the cold, the hunger or the death. They are horrible, but I can understand these things. They are, in a sense, human. No, they are humane. What I can't bear to watch is humanity debauched and made a mocking caricature of itself. I hurt at the deliberate obliteration of beauty."

I did not like him to talk like that. Partly, I did not understand him, and

partly. I was afraid of somebody else overhearing us. You never knew.

"The fiendishness of the guards," he continued, "lies not in their killing us, but in that they will first make us less than human."

He was an Idealist. I could see that. In the bottom circle of hell, he still considered nice, imaginary platitudes like humanity and beauty. I tried to avoid him from there on.

I found out that he had been a painter. His speciality had been making accurate copies of old masters for the tourist trade. That, at least, accounted for his unusual perception of our nightmare. It did not explain his frequent trance-like states, his tendency to seek closed-in, dark corners, to sit in them, drawing strange symbols and figures with a burnt stick of wood as his pencil.

We had by then become numb, and looked forward to nothing, except scavenging for some additional scraps of food. Aaken, on the other hand, still had his sensibility. He drew, sometimes, pictures that we could recognize. The chimneys blowing their smoke like mad locomotives on their way from hell to hell, from night to night, burning their sweet, soft coal.

He drew well, although I wasn't then able to admire his hand. I know nothing about painting. Nevertheless, I would say that his drawing was firm and accurate. His imagination was uncanny. With a few lines he transmuted a hand into a ghoulish claw. He feared the guards, so he used a private code of his own. Everyday objects, like a glass, a bowl, a book, became sinister, evil things.

"I want to remember," he said to me once. "The world must be warned. I will paint it all."

I pitied him. He must have suffered more keenly than the rest of us. Yet, he seemed to change, somehow. He withdrew more and more within himself, and was lost in his private fantasy world. Sometimes, as in a dream he would mumble something about "the beings" or the "the powers", which I couldn't begin to understand. I tried, out of pity, to lead him back to the realities around, to the need to get some more food, to avoid sudden chills, but he would not even listen to my advice.

He was becoming desperate. I could see the signs. He would soon do something foolish, like spitting at a guard, or trying to slide under the barbed wires.

Of course, I didn't try to dissuade him. What for? Some today, some tomorrow. It was his own life to lose. However, I did talk to him, only to make sure that he didn't come up with anything stupid, like setting fire to the barracks. That would only mean our immediate extermination, and that was pointless. Some of us might survive. That hope was all that kept us alive. That, and hate.

He quickly dispelled my apprehension.

"Yes," he admitted. "I am thinking of going out. But in a certain way that nobody will be able to follow. Or to stop me." His mouth twitched into a smile, but his eyes were burning. He had lost much weight, and his skin was folded. Aaken looked many years older than when he arrived, although it had been only three or five months. I couldn't remember exactly.

Aaken looked around rapidly, moving his head with the short, sudden jerks that made me think of a bird. He motioned for me to come closer.

"I have contacted them," he whispered. "I have studied many ways, until I found an open gate. I can't survive here much longer. Now is the time to take the final step through the Dark Door."

He stopped for a moment, as if considering whether he had said too much

"I will be taken out of here. I will be able to paint. That is my bargain. I shall paint. How I shall paint!"

His voice trembled and almost failed him. He was evidently mad. I tried to lean a comforting hand over his shoulder, but he brushed it away.

"I know, I know," he said. "You don't understand." He waved his arms as if drawing a picture for me in the air. "The world has many levels. God, man, devils, are all different modes of living, of existing. I am not religious. I can't communicate upwards. But I can always reach down. I'll escape. I'm telling you. Soon." He stopped abruptly, and stared at me with a strange expression. He was afraid of me.

I don't blame him. Everybody was afraid, in those days.

Without another word, Aaken turned around and shuffled away. He made his way to a dark corner of the barracks, as usual.

I tried to forget what he had said, attributing his words to a fever, or perhaps hallucinations induced by hunger and chronic weakness.

Still, I had my doubts a few days later, when Aaken disappeared. They started to make a big fuss about it, because nobody had seen him, and there had been no reported attempt to escape. We would have been liquidated then and there, if the Germans had not found a body in a dark corner, which they took to be Aaken. Yes, it had the same number tattooed on his forearm, but it wasn't Aaken. Even if I couldn't get close to the body, I could positively swear it did not belong to the man I knew as Aaron van Aaken.

Soon afterwards, and not a minute too soon, came the end of the nightmare. Those of us who lived through, dispersed quickly to far countries, and we did our best to forget what we had seen. Sometimes, however, just before going to sleep, I would remember Aaken and his drawings, and I would wonder at his fate.

Then, last Fall, I went back to Europe. I retired from my work as accountant, and I decided to take the Grand Tour, before my allotted time elapses. We came, some eighteen people in the group, to Madrid. We went to see monuments, cathedrals, the Plaza de Toros, and then, the Prado. As I walked along the cold corridors, I felt a strange unease tugging at my stomach. We came to another room, and there, suddenly, I saw Aaken's drawings, in bright, hellish colors, hanging before me.

With unsteady limbs, I came close. There, illuminated by flashes of furious lighting, were the grotesque tortures, the chimneys vomiting smoke, the earth itself opening its maw to crunch and melt the human flesh. All the degradation was there, and the people outside pursuing their silly, nauseating pleasures, while the condemned marched in rows into the ovens, or suffered diabolical tortures. It was the camp, with all its ugliness, its filth, its bestiality.

I stared at the painting like hypnotized. Then, I looked for the signature. In a plaque, I read "The Garden of Delights". My God, what an appropriate name! "Jheronimus Bosch, 1450?-1516."

So Aaken had made his deal, after all. But he had been tricked. He had been given time, yes, but five hundred years earlier than he reckoned. His war warning could not be understood.

Later, I looked for other paintings by Bosch. They all bear the mark of a desperate Aaken, trying to tell to an unconcerned world the abysmal depths to which it would fall. He painted, as it were, trying to redeem his soul through his brush.

Who knows? He may have succeeded at that.





THE IDEAS

by Edith Ogutsch and Ross Rocklynne

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT E. JENNINGS

The ideas were coming harder! Our lad Todd Rayburn was in a solemn fret. His mixed-up thoughts aped the clatter flooding in through the open window of the midtown advertising agency. Traffic honked in his head. Vehicles labeled hope and despair collided on the intersections of his face. In the hallway two children laughed. Ah, children! They were only ideas themselves, created from the old cliché of boy-meets-girl—yet each one new. Restlessly, Todd reached for the twisted cord of the electric typewriter which spiraled the confusing energies of its dreadful hum throughout his brain. Possibly the poor fellow thought to straighten the cord, which by a sympathetic magic would straighten out his thinking processes. Instead—

Shock!

Some idea, this was, our lad knocking himself out cold, and not only that, —dissolving himself away so that the chair where the tortured fellow sat was now quite empty!

However, here he was again, standing alone in an empty field of sun-dried weeds, as luck would have it.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Todd, cowering away from a range of gray hills off to the left and swaying in equal shock from a strange gray highway on his right. Above, a cloudless sky made him a focal point of icy blue. A shrunken yellow

Todd Rayburn Learned Why Men Have Ideas; Only Now the Ideas Had Him....

sun had at him with daffodil lasers. No birds flew overhead, no insect or animal stirred in the burned weeds.

The unfortunate young man, plucked from his own time and place, could only groan and put his hands before his eyes. How long would the illusion last? No one could tell. Therefore, with a thrust-out chest on which his heavy silver chain-necklace and medallion glinted, only to match the glint of bravery in his blue eye, he approached the road.

The road was made of good Dupont foam-rubber, it would seem, and so he spiritedly covered three miles in no time at all, whereupon a group of buildings rose up beside the gray hills. There were ugly factories which looked like large blocks, and there were ugly office-buildings which looked like small half-spheres. Todd Rayburn, however, did not have time to make a judgement against the architect, whoever he might be, for just then, praise be, the scene came to life.

Todd was overjoyed.

A group of figures marched from one of the factories. They marched straight toward him.

Todd was now dismayed!

He had to jump quickly off the road to let them pass. Even in the middle of his hurried jump, which he accomplished with marvelous ease owing to the remarkable springiness of the remarkable foam-rubber road, he was able to note the grayness of their naked bodies, the formless sameness of their faces. The most curious thing about their appearance, however, was a tiny headlight secured to the tops of their hairless heads.

It was a most amazing procession.

The creatures must have seen him as they filed by; if so, they ignored him. Anxiously straining his ears, however, our lad picked up a few muttered lines of perplexing dialogue.

"Ah, comrades, we'll find Synapse Field o'er yon hill, so my brain cell tells me."

"Ah do declare, Ah'll be overjoyed to find mah proper home 'neath the magnolia tree, or some such."

"Yeah, yeah man! We're goin' to be thought of!"

Dazed by this astonishing interchange, Todd Rayburn could only stare from feverish eyes as they disappeared around a bend in the gray hills. Then, tottering a bit, his hand clutching at his medallion as if he could set to rest the sickly throb in his solar plexus, he approached the open door of the factory whence the creatures came.

Todd stooped only a little to enter the factory, the pound of the machines swelling in his ear even before he came to the working area.

"Ah!" cried Todd Rayburn, transfixed. The size of the machines was fantastic. "Oh no!" he groaned unbelievably, hands thrown up. He had never seen such shapes before. "Oh, my!" he gasped, almost ready to run from the strangeness of it all, for there were four great machines in the room and each was busy manufacturing the creatures who walked past him on the road.

Yes, it was absolutely true. Humming and clicking, the vast machines dropped the gray bodies upon a moving band which slowly passed a square of light. From this square a metal arm descended in a hissing flood of light and steam and pressed a small headlight into the ugly naked head. Where the band disappeared into the floor, the beings stepped away and remained standing until a number of them accumulated. As if at a signal, out the door they marched, no doubt bound to Synapse Field.

But who ran the machines? Todd raised his eyes and thought he saw tiny human figures near the vast ceiling. Slowly he walked backward, toward the exit. His presence probably was a profane event, and he had no intention of risking anyone's displeasure. Hurriedly, and with a mounting sense of unexplained terror, he retraced his steps.

The sun was still in the same position in the sky, burning at him in yellow displeasure. The sky was still a glaring, sneering blue. Were there no friendly forces here? At this moment, a solitary gray being speeded from the distance, bouncing spiritedly down the foam-rubber road. It walked purposefully toward a small office building, its headlamp burning brightly.

For whatever reason unknown at the moment to young Todd Rayburn, he was fascinated by the intensity of the creature's beam. Indeed, he felt a shocking lust for that brilliance. His eyes glittered, his mouth snarled. He tiptoed after the being, but arrived at the small one-room office building just in time to keep the door from banging shut.

He looked through to a desk. There, behind the desk, sat a very ordinary human being, a very bored clerk, who looked up at the gray creature through blank eyes, poised a pencil, and inquired:

"Class?"

"Class A, sir, and you can see, sir, I'm a bright one indeed, a first magnitude idea, if you please, if you don't mind my calling your attention to my very obvious qualifications. I'm here, as you may guess, to report a Slip."

"You are," cried the clerk, stiffening a bit as he poised the pencil again, "a most talkative idea! Aren't you ever going to run down? Must you stand there consuming my time? Why are you Class A ideas so convinced you must run your headlamps at three times the usual candlepower? Origin!"

The idea, for such it indeed was, stepped forward, its headlamp growing even brighter, if that were possible. It said eagerly,

"Since you do ask, sir, and not, I beg you to believe, because I am anxious to brag about myself, I was actually created, not by machine, but in the head of an eminent and most respected top advertising executive. That was two years ago."

The idea stepped back and hung its head.

"But alas, I wasn't really a welcome thought. The ad man was busy with other projects. After awhile, woo is me, I slipped his mind, and here I am!"

"Very much so," growled the irritated clerk, dashing off a last line of writing and thrusting the completed form at the lost idea for its signature.

"Great!" enthused the idea, scribbling. The headlamp suffused the room with a remarkable brightness.

"That makes you available again," the clerk said, yawning and losing interest. "Go on back to Synapse."

With a jaunty air, the idea swept grandly out the door, almost knocking poor, stunned Todd Rayburn to a sitting position on the yellow ground. "Wait!" he cried after the speeding idea. The idea heard him, and came rapidly, eagerly, back.

"Yes?" it cried loudly, looming over him, the headlamp hitting him squarely in the eyes. "Did you want me, sir?"

Todd Rayburn cried, "You're darn right I want you!" He leaped upon the idea. He embraced it savagely, hugging the warm body to his chest. The idea gasped with surprise, trying to push Todd away.

"Stop struggling," Todd growled. "You should feel flattered I want you." He continued struggling with the idea.

"But that isn't the way to do it, sir! Here, look into my headlight. Imagine a brilliant light in your brain, hanging there in a kind of balloon. There, you've got it, sir. Already I'm beginning to dwindle."

And it was true. As the soft gray body shrank in on itself, a rewarding richness filled Todd's mind. "Wow!" he cried, snacking his lips as the idea totally and helpfully climbed inside him. He rubbed his hands in brisk satisfaction. So that's why he was here! Now to get back to his own world.

How would he get back? Return, of course, to the field where he made his entrance. That seemed the logical thing to do. He walked rapidly in this direction, a young man alone on a foam-rubber road, under a hostile yellow sun and a pitiless eye of sky. For the moment, however, the young man from Earth was full of enthusiasm, determination, and a wonderful idea! Oh, the possibilities were endless for a talented young advertising copy writer such as himself.

Huh, he grunted to himself, who's talented? Worry now started gnawing his conscience. Thief, thief! Crime doesn't pay! Murder will out! Cheat, cheat, cheat! Angrily, he began running down the foam-rubber road as if to get away from his detestable self.

Suddenly, without warning, he was hit as if by a cyclone. Three burly figures threw him to the ground and proceeded to punish him. Hard fists crashed into his chest, pounded his back, and bounced him against the ground. Todd rallied, and drove his fists into their big stomachs, but he was no match. Beaten at last, the young fellow collapsed on the road. Coarse hands grasped his collar, and bruisingly closed about his wrists. He was dragged five hundred feet into a building marked "Personnel."

A transluence worked through Todd's struggling eyelids. He was standing, or being held erect, on a floor like skimmed milk, and the walls, curving into a dome, were made of the same material. The continuous flow of walls into ceiling lent the hall an illusion of vastness. Soft indirect lighting fell on the men seated in the center of the rotunda. They were contemplating a globe which spun directly beneath the floor and when Todd was dragged nearer to them they looked up. His captors pushed him forward for inspection. Eight pairs of eyes regarded him thoughtfully. As our lad's eyes opened all the way, he sickishly noted that the globe was a model of Earth, a very remarkable likeness.

One of the men, dressed in a quiet brown suit, rose and came forward. To Todd's surprise, he smiled cordially.

"We've been waiting for you. What took you so long?"

Todd looked at one of his captors, and winced.

The man's tone was apologetic. "Sometimes they get too enthusiastic. Well, are you ready to pay for your little piece of thievery?"

So they knew about his theft; probably they'd set up the whole thing in advance. The personnel man nodded, smiling just a bit ruefully.

"Sometimes, by accident, someone strays." He gestured vaguely. "A fluke in space or time. I don't know. At any rate, it solves our labor problem. We're very short-handed, you know."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"You'll be put to work in the Class A factory, that's our biggest problem. Some of our operators haven't had a vacation in six hundred years."

"I don't want the job. Can't possibly manage it. I have to get back to the agency. You can have your idea back. I don't want it." He shook free from his burly captors. He stood alone, shouting. "If I give the idea back to you, you can't make me stay."

"I'm very sorry," said the personnel man firmly. "But it's out of the question. You'll get to like it here after awhile."

He motioned the strong-arm boys. Yelling and fighting, Todd was dragged out of the hall.

"It's not ethical," he shouted over his shoulder. "You won't get away with it. I refuse to work."

"Thievery isn't ethical either," growled one of his captors, speaking for the first time. "Now stop screaming and behave yourself."

The three men held him rigid and carried him through the rear entrance of the Class A factory. The machine shop was built on the same order as the one Todd saw in the other factory, but the ideas were much slower in coming out. They rose in a lift to the very top of the only inactive idea machine and there Todd was strapped in to the operator's chair. His feet were shackled firmly, and a silver helmet was adjusted about his head; silver wires in turn led into the control panel.

"It's easy," grinned one of the men, pressing various colored studs as he showed Todd how to manipulate the panel. "You'll soon get the idea. See you in six hundred years."

As they left, laughing, Todd threw curses after them steadily for ten minutes. Then he was bored and started toying with the colored studs. It was really quite fun pressing them, watching ideas fall out of the machine. The gears hummed and clicked, lights winked impressively, the helmet buzzed in his ears.

A steady parade of gray bodies moved down the strip. As they reached the lighted square, bright-sparkling headlights were set into their bald heads and they marched out the door.

Six hundred years, six hundred years. How could he stand it? Already two hours had passed, ideas by the dozen had streamed from the machine; he couldn't keep from working no matter what his threat. Oh, what a ghastly mess! The helmet pressed painfully against his head; if only he knew how to free his hands from their compulsive working of the colored studs. He could tear away the wires leading from his helmet into the machine—and what were those wires for, anyway?

Something struggled, squirmed, grew like a balloon in his head. He had completely forgotten the stolen idea; so had his captors.

"Are you there?" he asked sharply.

"You have to let me out of here," the stolen idea whimpered. It was speaking inside our lad's head. "I didn't bargain for six hundred years imprisonment. I am, sir, a most brilliant idea. How could you do this to me? I should be used, exploited, run up the flagpole to see how I wave. Instead, what is a

head for me? A miserable imprisonment in the brain of a human who allows wires to suck ideas out of his own head, who is content to . . ."

"Wait! I'm the creator of those ideas?"

"Indeed, sir."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Todd. "I'm a better man than I thought I was." He struggled in his excitement to rise in his chair; it was in vain. He could do nothing but punch out more ideas—nothing but that, and talk, and think . . . and that was when young Todd Rayburn had a thought which probably arose from the friction of the dissatisfied stolen idea squirming around inside his brain.

"You want to go free?" Todd asked the idea.

The idea grew twice in size! "I do, I do," it screamed joyously. "Just let me go. Punch me out of the machine. It's easy. You hit a yellow key and a black one and then two red ones and a blue and a green . . . and a deep purple to make sure I'm synchronous in space and time. I'll go, sir, I'll never trouble you again, I'll fly like a bird to Synapse Field and grab myself a nice fat brainy advertising executive, one who'll smear me on the bread to see how I spread."

"You are talkative," remarked Todd Rayburn. "Shut up. We both want to get out of here. I'll make a bargain with you. I'll punch you out of the machine if you climb back up here . . ."

"Anything, dear sir. I promise!"

Todd explained what he wanted. The idea was dilirious. It rolled and bloated uncomfortably in Todd's brain. Todd would be quite happy when he was rid of that disagreeable loquacious idea. In any event the bargain was made, Todd punched out the necessary keys and the idea dropped instantly out of the machine.

The idea stayed on the strip until it received its headlamp, at which moment it gave a whoop of joy, and rapidly climbed the machine into Todd's cubicle.

"You're not such a bad fellow," the idea panted, "and you might have a brain on you after all!" According to plan, it began tearing at wires and throwing switches and pulling off Todd's helmet, which it threw against the panel.

"Maybe you and I can make a deal," the idea said as the panel turned into a fiery mass of electric discharges which traveled up the remaining wires into Todd's body. Shock again! Young Todd Rayburn whirled through infinities, and reappeared at his won desk at his own electric typewriter. Sitting across from him, legs crossed, was the gray soft form of the idea, which now reached across to Todd's pack and selected a cigarette, which it lit.

"Mmm," it said, blowing out smoke. "You gave me an idea. Yes, sir, I'm the kind of idea that gets ideas, as you can see by my headlamp! I'm so brilliant, sir, such a Grade One, Class A idea, sir, that it occurred to me I could be a constant source of help and inspiration to you in all your hours of need—"

The idea rattled on, blowing smoke rings, and Todd closed his eyes very tightly. He cleared his brain. He forgot. He let things slip away—ideas and such. In fact, he had too many ideas, or perhaps one too many ideas. In any event, when he opened his eyes, he saw that the idea was wavering, thinning out, and looking very unhappy.

"Get lost," said Todd slowly. "I don't need any ideas that aren't my own. I'm quite full of ideas. Remember?"

The idea nodded gloomily and rejectedly and faded away leaving a lungful of smoke hanging fragrantly in the air. Todd attacked his typewriter, really smashed into it. In the next three weeks his work was drawn to the attention of his thoughtful superior. Within a year our lad, young Todd Rayburn, who wisely kept to himself the story of his inspiring adventures in the world of the ideas, was well on the way—and deservedly so!—to the very top of his chosen profession.

SO WHOSE OPINION COUNTS...?

... The editor's or the readers'? The editor selects the stories, of course, and bases his selection on his judgment. But the readers' opinion is final. If you don't like the magazine, you stop buying it. If enough people stop buying it, the magazine goes out of business. We value your opinion and hope you'll take the time to fill out the Readers' Poll Coupon on pages 63 and 64. Your ratings will tell us what we're doing right and wrong.

But, of course, if you don't want to cut up the magazine we still have the highest regard for your opinions. Send us your story ratings on a postcard—or better yet send us a letter with your comments on this issue. We plan to keep a tally of the results and list the most popular stories and features in a coming issue.

More importantly, we plan on basing future decisions on your opinions.

—The Editor

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890–1937) was not only the author of such brilliant macabre stories as "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Colour Out of Space" but the author as well of scores of the most fascinating letters ever penned. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei have assembled **Selected Letters** by H.P. Lovecraft of which the first two volumes have been published at \$7.50 each by Arkham House (Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583) with the third volume due perhaps by the time this magazine appears. The following four letters are from the forthcoming fourth volume and were written to Clark Ashton Smith during 1932 and 1933.

This was a period when the writing of horror fiction in America was at a relative height, with several ready markets for well-done weird stories including **Weird Tales**, edited by Farnsworth Wright, and **Strange Tales**, edited by Harry Bates (who would later write the classic science fiction story "Farewell to the Master".) Lovecraft was busy not only with his own fiction, but with revising stories for countless less established writers, including Rev. Henry S. Whitehead. His correspondents included most of the best known fantasy writers of the period, including Robert E. Howard, August Derleth, Frank Belknap Long and E. Hoffmann Price.

THE EDITOR

Four Letters to Clark Ashton Smith

by H.P. Lovecraft

To Clark Ashton Smith

In the orange, carmine, and blue-litten zone at the end of the Angles . . . beyond the vague twilight abysses. Hour of the sounding of the gong at the bottom of the unplumbed pit.

Feby. 16, 1932

Dear Klarkash-Ton: —

The only basic trouble with premature burial tales is that they do not take into account the universal practise of embalming. The way to get around that, of course, would be to provide very particular reasons why embalming is dispensed with in the given case.

Yrs. in the nameless sodality of Nyarlathotep,

E'ch-Pi-El.

To Clark Ashton Smith

Leaden hillside of Pnapf on the green-litten planet Hchah in Dimension N; hour of the voice and vapor from the bottomless cleft.

March 2, 1932

Dear Klarksah-Ton:—

I have a sort of time idea of very simple nature floating around in the back of my head, but don't know when I shall ever get around to using it. The notion is that of a race in primal Lomar perhaps even before the founding of Olathoe and in the heyday of Hyperborean Commoriom—who gained a knowledge of all arts and sciences by sending thought-streams ahead to drain the minds of men in future ages—angling in time, as it were. Now and then they get hold of a really competent man of learning, and annex all his thoughts. Usually they only keep their victims tranced for a short time, but once in a while, when they need some special piece of continuous information, one of their number sacrifices himself for the race and actually changes bodies with the first thoroughly satisfactory victim he finds. The victim's brain then goes back to 100,000 B.C.—into the hypnotist's body to live in Lomar for the rest of his life, while the hypnotist from dead aeons animates the modern clay of his victim. Complications can be imagined. I have no idea how—or from what angle—I shall elaborate the thing.

Yrs. for ultimate abysses,
E'ch-Pi-El.

To Clark Ashton Smith

Yoth-Flaggon - at the Crimson Spring
Hour of the Amorphous Reflection.
Apr. 4, 1932

Dear Klarkash-Ton:—

I'm now helping Whitehead prepare a new ending and background for a story Bates has rejected. The original told of a young man who bumped his head and thereafter heard sounds as of a mighty cataclysm, although the city around him was quiescent. It was supposed to be due to a result of the bruise—which made the fellow's head a natural radio and enabled him to hear the Japanese earthquake—which was occurring at the time. Bates rightly thought this tame, so I am having the cataclysm and its cause somewhat different. I am having the bruise excite cells of hereditary memory causing the man to hear the destruction and sinking of fabulous Mu 20, 000 years ago!

Yrs. for the nether sign
E.ch-Pi-El.

To Clark Ashton Smith

Shores of the Black Lake T'ai
Time of the Moonless Tide and the
Rising of -----
Feb'y. 18, 1933

Dear Klarkash-Ton:—

Price has dug up another cycle of actual folklore involving an allegedly primordial thing called *The Book of Dzryan*, which is supposed to contain all sorts of secrets of the Elder World before the sinking of Kusha (Atlantis) and Shalarali (Lemuria.) It is kept at the Holy City of Shamballah, and is regarded as the oldest book in the world—its language being *Senzar* (ancestor of Sanscrit,) which was brought to earth 18,000,000 years ago by the Lords of Venus. I don't know where E. Hoffmann got hold of this stuff, but it sounds damn good. . .

Yrs. for the Pnakotic Secrets—
E'ch-Pi-El.

A Tourist Guide to Haunted Houses and Unexplained Mysteries—
New England—New York



by Andre Norton

HEADING AND ILLUSTRATION

BY ROBERT E. JENNINGS

Though one is inclined to think of haunted houses, inexplicable mysteries, as being British and European rather than native to this side of the Atlantic, even the most limited research will provide the seeker with a list of such sites to visit. New England and New York have them in plenty.

Begin at Machiasport, Maine, where the first recorded American ghost made her upsetting appearance, held gracious meetings with many spectators, staged special performances for the skeptic, and ended by arranging a new marriage for her bereft husband!

In the house of Abner Blaisdel (much to his subsequent discomfort) Nelly Butler first made her return known on the night of January 2, 1800, when she asked that her father be summoned to speak with her. Since Nelly had been safely in her grave for some time, the situation was delicate. Yet David Harper, her father swore it was Nelly he spoke with. She made several appearances during the following months, mainly in the cellar, because, as she explained, she had no wish to frighten the children of the house.

Abraham Cummings, pastor of the Congregational Church, coming as a skeptic, went away a convert. Later he was to set his story, together with those of others, in the first known published account of an American ghost.

The ghost made herself visible not only to members of the Blaisdel family (who came to look upon her continued visitations as a curse because of the notoriety) but showed herself to the many curious visitors attracted by the tales. In addition she urged marriage between her former husband and Lydia Blaisdel. When the censorious gossips suggested that Lydia herself might be responsible for such an odd proposal, Nelly considerably appeared when Lydia could not have possibly acted the part.

Having achieved her purpose Nelly finally left the exhausted Blaisdels and the overwrought neighborhood in peace. But she was not to be forgotten.

Pass on to Kennebunkport, to the ghost house now part of the theater holdings. We are told that the attic is the focal point of the haunting, as well as the second floor front bedroom. Though old lady Wells, a herbal wise woman,

lived the last twenty years of her life in that room, dying at the age of a hundred and twenty-four, she is not the "good grey ghost." That is another "Nelly", a woman wearing Quaker garb, sometimes accompanied by "Ned", her male counterpart. Their history is unknown, but still they peer from windows or walk the night.

Wiscasset next, and the Lee-Payson-Smith house on High Street. The old lady who appears when the family is not there, rocking in the front parlor, is reputed to be of the family of Governor Samuel E. Smith who bought the house in 1836 (it was built in 1792). There is a door also, leading to a wing since burned, where a dog scratches for entrance (he is said to have been the only companion of a recluse who once lived in the vanished wing). But the old lady who sits in the parlor with gentle satisfaction comes, they say, because having suffered many grievous family losses, in the end she had only the house to love. She does not intrude, she just wants to be home.

The old Shaw Place at Newfield has good reason to be haunted if ever a house did, for Hannah, a daughter of the house, is buried within its walls, her tombstone a corner of the kitchen floor. One of the rare instances of such an interment.

Yet the same is true of the famous house of Ocean Born Mary at Henniker, New Hampshire. Mary's story is fabulous enough to be fiction, still it is rooted in fact. It begins on July 28th of the year 1720. The ship *Wolf* bearing Scotch-Irish emigrants to the new world was in sight of the Massachusetts coast when it was overhauled by pirates. Captain James Wilson, without any defenses, had to stand by helplessly when Captain Don Pedro and his men boarded. The Captain's plight was doubly painful at that moment for his wife was in child-birth in his cabin.

In fact the arrival of the pirates was heralded by the wail of the new born. Don Pedro, demanding to know the source of the cries, was visibly affected when told. He straightway asked that the Captain's new daughter be given the name "Mary", and when this was agreed to, ordered his men off the *Wolf*.

However, he returned again to Wilson's command, this time bringing a jeweled bracelet, a length of fine brocade for Mary's future wedding gown, as well as other gift items from his loot.

Don Pedro kept in touch with Mary through the years, and when he came to retire after what was reputed a fruitful career, he decided to build a home near Hanniker, importing ships' carpenters for the task. Mary married at eighteen, with a family of four sons and a daughter, had recently left a widow. And Don Pedro sent for her as a housekeeper. In due time he died, and, according to legend, lies buried under the hearth stone in his house, which he left Mary and in which she lived until she was ninety-four. Also, according to rumor Don Pedro was stabbed to death by those seeking the gold he had brought with him, and only Mary knew the secret of its hiding place. That she guards; at least, by a wealth of stories, she has from time to time appeared to save the house from disaster, remaining even in death its guardian.

New Hampshire does not only have its ghosts-in-residence it also had one of the major historical mysteries of the east in Pattee's Caves, now known as Mystery Hill, near North Salem.

Does this crumbling range of rocky walls represent the remains of a Phoenician-Carthaginian settlement? In 335 B.C. Aristotle in his list of one hundred and seventy-eight marvels, names as item eighty-four, a mysterious overseas land which the Phoenicians kept a strict secret because of trade. His description as cited might well be that of Mystery Hill. Though unfortunately,

took ship and headed north-west. He coasted along England and Scotland, and then ran into such storms as his merchant ship had not faced before, driving him ashore on one of the rock toothed Faeroes. Wrecked ships were fair game. As for the foreigners who manned them, if they were stupid enough to crawl out of the pounding waves, let them be knocked on the head and thrown back again.

However, at that particular wreck looting, Prince Henry and his knights arrived in time to save the lives of the survivors. Which was an excellent piece of luck for all concerned. Prince Henry was trying to build a navy to police his island holdings, and in Niccolo he found the commander he had long been looking for. So pleased was Niccolo with the profits of such an association that he wrote home and urged his brother Antonio to join him, which he did.

But there was one idea which had long fascinated the Prince. Years earlier one of his fisherman subjects with a boatload of his fellows had been blown far off course and ended on the beaches of an unknown western country. There he had been well treated, but upon voyaging farther south with the natives, he and his friends had been recaptured by a new tribe who were cannibals. The fisherman purchased his life by showing them how to weave fish-nets, and because of his knowledge he became a tribal treasure, several times wrest from one set of captors to the next, always to the south. After some weary years he managed to work his way north and to his original landfall. There he built a boat and finally regained his homeland.



it has been "mined" constantly for the stones which must have made it a most impressive sight a couple of hundred years ago, the remains are unique enough to continue to draw speculation. It has many features of the well known Megalithic stonework of Europe and the British isles: including a sinister altar in proper proportions for human sacrifice, with speaking tube arrangement through which voices may be eerily projected.

Not only the Phoenicians are given credit for some of the features nearby. There are a number of structures which resemble very closely the beehive dwellings of the Celi Dei, the Celtic Irish Christians who fled first to the Orkneys, then to Iceland and even to Greenland, always in fear of the Vikings. They had reached Iceland in 874, before the first Viking settlement there. And when the first long ship nosed into harbor at Greenland in 986, the men on board found recently abandoned Celi Dei dwelling cells. Did they come to the American continent, discover the long abandoned settlement of stone walls at North Salem, and settle there awhile in uneasy peace?

Massachusetts also has such a mystery. The Sinclair Rock is indeed most provocative. One can find it at Westford where it may have existed since about 1400. But the tale begins in the Orkneys at the court of Prince Henry Sinclair of Rosslyn, Earl of Orkney, and Ciathness, Lord of the Faeroes. And in those days, 1390, the Faeroes were less than hospitable, as we discovered by Niccolo Zeno of Venice.

Inspired by the same wanderlust which sent Marco Polo east, young Niccolo

Prince Henry was excited about the land overseas. But, though Niccolo was fired by his enthusiasm, their fisherman guide died before they could plan to embark. Determined, Prince Henry sent his first scouting ship, commanded by Niccolo, which made a landing at Greenland and returned safely. However Niccolo came home ailing and died within the year.

It was not Antonio who took his brother's place in the proposed expedition. In the summer of 1395, Prince Henry himself with a force of his guard, set out to the west. They made several landfalls of which Antonio kept a record. Then they lost one ship and Prince Henry decided to remain for a while, sending back half of his men with Antonio. The return voyage was made in safety and Antonio returned to Venice. His account was kept in his family and finally published in 1558.

But what happened to Prince Henry? We know that he was again in the Orkneys for his death there in 1404 is a matter of history.

So the Sinclair Rock. Marks supposed to be of Indian origin were later definitely found to be the outline of a fourteenth century sword. This known, the rock was cleaned—to discover on it the outline of a six foot knight in armor, not only equipped with the sword in question, but also with a shield bearing the heraldic insignia of the Sinclairs.

Since one of the landfalls described by Antonio has been indentified with a point in Nova Scotia, had the Prince perhaps built a ship, nosed southward

along the coast before he started home? Is one of his knights buried somewhere near the rock so unmistakably marked?

Though no knight walks here to regret his long exile, there is a ghost very much at home in the Huntington House at Hadley. This dwelling was built in 1752, but its proud owner did not enjoy it for long. On September 8, 1755, he was killed in an Indian ambush. A friendly Indian returned his sword to his wife, traditionally passing it through one of the windows of a lower room. Since that day someone seems to sleep in the fourposter bed beneath the same shuttered window, for the bed from time to time shows the impression of a light body. There are footsteps heard ascending to the attic. Children are often visited in their rooms. A friendly ghost.

Cohasset seemingly has a ghost who resents change and would make it known. The Ships' Chandlery, built in the late Seventeenth century by the Bates family, was later the property of John Bates who also owned a fishing fleet and was a most substantial citizen. But when the old building was moved from the water front in 1957 to become a museum, the trouble began. Heavy footsteps were heard, doors opened and closed. It would seem that John Bates, is not at all satisfied, if the disturber of the peace is John, with the change in location.

Rhode Island may have ghosts, but it also gives earth room to one of the most talked of of all American mysteries, the Newport Tower. Though it is claimed that this was built in the seventeenth century as a mill, several of the premises on which this claim rests have since been proven false. Such as the Powden Paper granting the land to the Plowdens in 1632, quite a while before the tower was supposedly built, and yet making mention of it.

So we can return to 1121 when the Pope appointed Bishop Eric Gynupsson to the See of Greenland and Vinland, the recently discovered land to the west. Bishop Gynupsson's appointment records exist to this day. But was there a colony in Vinland?

Move to Norway in the eleventh century. Harald the Severe, king of that land, took a fleet of ships to cross the Atlantic. The records thereafter are obscure. That Harald was moved to make such an expedition at all argued he had good cause. And there is speculation that he did establish a trading post colony, which he preferred, as many others have done, to keep a secret.

But what has Harald's possible colony and the Bishop got to do with a tower on Rhode Island? Just this—that the tower itself so follows the pattern of Christian churches of Scandinavia of that period that if it stood anywhere else it would be instantly hailed as such. Also, the windows in it are so set that they can be used for signalling and lookout to the sea, not to the land—a watch tower for a port.

So do we have the oldest church on this soil in Rhode Island? Aerial photographs recently taken disclose odd lines under the turf, perhaps further exploration might prove the truth one way or another.

New York State and City seems to favor Revolutionary ghosts. There are the "site" ones, such as the headless soldier who is said to appear out of a rock crevice at midnight on Watch Hill in Yorktown Heights. And the pitiful ones who re-enact the terrible massacre of Cherry Valley with sounds of shots, screams and a wailing in the night.

In New York City itself is the famed Morris-Jumel Mansion which is apparently well occupied by a shade. Built in 1765 by Lt-Colonel Roger Morris, it passed into other hands in 1783, the Colonel, a Tory, withdrawing to England at the close of the war. In the interim it had successively served as headquarters for both General Washington and Sir Henry Clinton.

Madam Jumel herself was a figure out of gothic romance. Born in the slums of Providence, her beauty and determination brought her a husband, Captain de la Croix, and a short visit to France. Having shed the husband during her travels, she returned to her native land and Steven Jumel, a refugee from the slave rising in Santo Domingo, where he had been a planter. However, Jumel adapted well to the change and made a fortune in his new homeland as a wine merchant.

Eliza, his mistress, played the finest role of her checkered career in 1800. Posing as being on her death bed, she persuaded Jumel to marry her. Her recovery was quick, and with name and position she once more went to France. But her past closed the doors she wanted to open and she returned to a lonely life at the manor. After a questioned death of her husband, she increased his

fortune by shrewd dealing, enough to buy herself, when she was fifty-eight and he was in his seventies, Aaron Burr for a new mate. Though he was one time vice-president, he was now thoroughly discredited, and their marriage ended in divorce.

Though Madam Jumel surrounded herself with the children of her sisters, her loneliness was legend, she was never relieved by the society she craved.

And, according to report, she has not left the house wherein she lived for so long. One recent story has her scolding children, brought as a class to view the house, for their noisy behavior.

The Jumel Manor is not the only New York house to be favored by Aaron Burr, though he seems to prefer this second dwelling for his ghostly visits more than the first. At Lindenwald near Kinderhook, in the Washington Irving country, he has been seen, wearing a mulberry velvet coat and a ruffled shirt. He shares this estate with a second and perhaps a third ghost. One of these was a former president, an office Burr reached for but never achieved.

Built in 1797 by Judge William Peter Van Ness whose son William was Burr's second in the fatal duel with Alexander Hamilton, Lindenwald is supposed to have sheltered Burr secretly during the time he was being hunted for what was deemed murder.

Later the house was bought and remodeled by Martin Van Buren, eighth President, when his term of office was completed. It was during the latter time that "Aunt Sarah" presided in the kitchen. So famed was she for her pancakes that she was an added attraction for guests. Only it seems that she intended to continue to rule the kitchen, even after death, as the scent of her cooking, to be sniffed now and again today, testifies. Doors open and close without reason, there is a violin heard playing, and footsteps sound. Burr, the President, Aunt Sarah—all are supposed to still make Lindenwald their home.

In Albany stands Cherry Hill on South Pearl Street. On May 7th, 1827 this was the site of a murder which seems to be reenacted in part through the years. John Whipple, manager for the Van Rensselaers who owned the property, was shot through the window by his wife's lover, Jesse Strang, as he conferred with his employer over accounts. Nowadays, someone unseen paces the terrace—Strang awaiting his victim? Who knows?

Fort Ontario, Oswego, has two ghosts by report. One's tombstone can be seen in the military cemetery. George Fykes, in British uniform of Revolutionary times, was known to appear once to every new garrison at the fort, the reason for this strange welcome lost in time. While sentries walking at number two post there in the past have found themselves awesomely accompanied by a light shining over their heads, though explanation for this manifestation has ever come to light.

New York has, in addition, a ghost train which appears in April running along the Harlem division of the New York Central. It is in two parts, both drawn by old fashioned wide smoke-stacked engines of the 19th century. Both are draped in black. Though no engineer nor fireman appears, the first section carries passengers of a sort. Mounted on one of several flatcars a band of skeletons play their instruments. The second section carried a draped coffin mounted on a single flatcar. As the train approaches a dark carpet seems to unroll before it, and clocks along the way stop from five to eight minutes. The date is significant for it was just at this time of year that Lincoln's funeral train moved westward bearing the martyr president to his last home. Is Lincoln's party ever to be engaged in their mournful journey?

This is but a small sampling of ghost and mystery items—there are many more. Research will enable the would be ghost hunter to make out a well haunted itinerary. Such books as the following are excellent sources:

- Boland, Charles Michael - *THEY ALL DISCOVERED AMERICA*
Doubleday 1961
Holand, Hjalmar - *EXPLORATIONS IN AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS*
Twayne 1958
Holzer, Hans - *YANKEE GHOSTS*
Bobbs-Merrill 1966
Jones, Louis C. - *THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT*
Hill and Wang 1959
Smith, Susy - *PROMINENT AMERICAN GHOSTS*
World Publishing 1967

If you missed the first four issues of COVEN 13, you missed these fine stories:

Sept. 1969: "Odile" by Alan Callou; "Potlatch" by Joseph Harris; first part of "Let There be Magic" by Keaveny; others.

November 1969: "Rock God" by Harlan Ellison; "Shadow Trader" by Wylly Folk St. John; others.

January 1970: "Leona" by Alan Callou; "The Little

People" by Robert E. Howard; Pauline Smith; Wade Wellman; Ron Goulart; others.

March 1970: "I, Vampire" by Pronzini/Wallman; "Convert" by S. M. Clawson; conclusion of "Let There be Magic" by Keaveny; poetry by Robert E. Howard; more! You can have any one of these issues for 60 cents, minimum order \$1.20.

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"Men Say You Move Through Life Like One of the Fates, Dark Agnes.
Unmoved, Unchangeable, Potent With Tragedy and Doom, and
That the Men Who Ride With You Do Not Live Long...."



by Robert E. Howard and Gerald W. Page

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF JONES

Ahead of me in the dark alley, steel clashed and a man cried out as men cry only when death-stricken. Around a corner of the winding way three mantled shapes came running, blindly, as men run in panic and terror. I drew back against the wall to let them go past, and two crowded by me without even seeing me, breathing in hysterical gasps; but the third, running with his chin on his shoulder, blundered full against me.

He shrieked like a damned soul, and evidently deeming himself attacked, grappled me wildly, tearing at me with his teeth like a mad dog. With a curse I broke his grasp and flung him from me against the wall, but the violence of my exertion caused my foot to slip in a puddle on the stones, and I stumbled and went to my knee.

He fled screaming on up the alley, but as I rose, a tall figure loomed above me, like a phantom out of the deeper darkness. The light of a distant cresset gleamed dully on his morion and the sword lifted above my head. I barely had time to parry the stroke; sparks flew as our steel met, and I returned the stroke with a thrust of such violence that my point drove through teeth and neck and rang against the lining of his steel head-piece.

Who my attackers were I knew not, but there was no time for parley or explanation. Dim figures were upon me in the semi-darkness and blades whickered about my head. A stroke that clanged full upon my morion filled my eyes with sparks of fire, and abandoning the point in my extremity I hewed right and left and heard men grunt and curse as my sword's edge gashed them. Then, as I stepped back to avoid a swiping cut, my foot caught in the cloak of the man I had killed, and I fell sprawling over the corpse.

There was a fierce cry of triumph, and one sprang forward, sword lifted—but ere he could strike or I could lift my blade above my head, a quick step sounded behind me, a dim figure loomed in the uncertain light, and the downward sweeping blade rang on a sword in mid-air.

"Dog!" quoth the stranger with curious accent. "Will you strike a fallen man?"

The other roared and cut at him madly, but by that time I was on my feet again, and as the others pressed in, I met them with point and edge, thrusting and slashing like a demon, for I was wild with fury at having been in such a plight as the stranger rescued me from. A side-long glance showed me the latter driving his sword through the body of the man who opposed him, and at this, and as I pressed them, drawing blood at each stroke, the rogues gave way and fled fleetly down the alley.

I turned then to my unknown friend, and saw a lithe, compactly-built man but little taller than myself. The glare of the distant cresset fell dimly upon him, and I saw that he was clad in fine Cordovan boots and velvet doublet, beneath which I glimpsed a glint of fine mesh-mail. A fine crimson cloak was flung over his shoulder, a feathered cap on his head, and beneath this his eyes, cold and light, danced restlessly. His face was clean-shaven and brown, with high cheek bones and thin lips, and there were scars that hinted of an adventurous career. He bore himself with something of a swagger, and his every

action betokened steel-spring muscles and the co-ordination of a swordsman.

"I thank you, my friend," quoth I. "Well for me that you came at the moment which you did."

"Zounds!" cried he. "Think naught of it. 'Twas no more than I'd have done for any man—but, Saint Andrew! You're a woman!"

There being no reply to that, I cleaned my blade and sheathed it, while he gaped at me open-mouthed.

"Agnes de La Fere!" he said slowly, at length. "It can be no other. I have heard of you, even in Scotland. Your hand, girl! I have yearned to meet you. Nor is it an unworthy thing even for Dark Agnes to shake the hand of John Stuart."

I grasped his hand, though in sooth, I had never heard of him, feeling steely thews in his fingers and a quick nervous grip that told me of a passionate, hair-trigger nature.

"Who were these rogues who sought your life?" he asked.

"I have many enemies," I answered, "but I think these were mere skulking rogues, robbers and murderers. They were pursuing three men, and I think tried to cut my throat to hush my tongue."

"Likely enough," quoth he. "I saw three men in black mantles flee out of the alley mouth as though Satan were at their heels, which aroused my curiosity, so I came to see what was forward, especially as I heard the rattle of steel. Saint Andrew! Men said your sword-play was like summer lightning, and it is even as they said! But let us see if the rogues have indeed fled or are merely lurking beyond that crook to stab us in the back as we depart."

He stepped cautiously around the crook and swore under his breath.

"They are gone, in sooth, but I see something lying in the alley. I think it is a dead man."

Then I remembered the cry I heard, and I joined him. A few moments later we were bending over two forms that lay sprawled in the mud of the alley. One was a small man, mantled like the three who had fled, but with a deep gash in his breast that had let out his life. But as I spoke to Stuart on the matter, he swore suddenly. He had turned the other man on his back, and was staring at him in surprise.

"This man has been dead for hours," quoth he. "Moreover he died not by sword or pistol. Look! See his features how they are swollen and purple? It is the mark of the gallows! And he is clad still in the gibbet-shirt. By Saint Andrew, Agnes, do you know who this is?" And when I shook my head, "It is Costranno, the Italian sorcerer, who was hanged at dawn this morning on the gibbet outside the walls, for practicing the black arts. He it was who poisoned the son of the Duke of Tours and caused the blame to be laid upon an innocent man. But Francoise de Bretagne, suspecting the truth, trapped him into a confession to her, and laid the facts before the authorities."

"I heard something of this matter," quoth I. "But I have been in Chartres only a matter of a week."

"It is Costranno, well enough," said Stuart, shaking his head. "His features



are so distorted I would not have known him, save that the middle finger of his left hand is missing. And this other is Jacques Pelligny, his pupil in the black arts. Sentence of death was passed on him, likewise, but he had fled and could not be found. Well, his art did not save him from a footpad's sword. Costranno's followers have cut him down from the gibbet—but why should they have brought the body back into the city?"

"There is something in Pelligny's hand," I said, prying the dead fingers apart. It was as if, even in death, they gripped what they held. It was a fragment of gold chain, and fastened to it a most curious red jewel that gleamed in the darkness like an angry eye.

"Saint Andrew!" muttered Stuart. "A rare stone, i'faith—hark!" he started to his feet. "The watch! We must not be found by these corpses!"

Far down the alley I saw the glow of moving lanterns and heard the tramp of mailed feet. As I scrambled up, the jewel and chain slipped from my fingers—it was almost as if they were snatched from my hand—and fell full on the breast of the dead sorcerer. I did not wish to take the time to retrieve it, so I hurried up the alley after Stuart, and glancing back, I saw the jewel glittering like a crimson star on the dead man's bosom.

Emerging from the alley into a narrow winding street, scarcely better lighted, we hurried along it until we came to an inn, and entered it. Then, seating ourselves at a table somewhat apart from the others who wrangled and cast dice on the wine-stained boards, we called for wine and the host brought us two great jacks.

"To our better acquaintance," quoth John Stuart, lifting his tankard. "By Saint Andrew, now that I see you in the light, I admire you the more. You are a fine, tall woman, but even in morion, doublet, trunk-hose and boots, none could mistake you for a man. Well are you called dark Agnes! For all your red hair and fair skin there is something strange and dark about you. Men say you move through life like one of the Fates, unmoved, unchangeable, potent with

straw. But who is this?"

The door had opened and a gust of cold wind made the candles flicker, and sent a shiver over the men on the settles. A tall man entered, closing the door behind him. He was wrapped in a wide black mantle, and when he raised his head and his glance roved over the tavern, a silence fell suddenly. That face was strange and unnatural in appearance, being so dark in hue that it was almost black. His eyes were strange, murky and staring. I saw several toppers cross themselves as they met his gaze, and then he seated himself at a table in a corner furthest from the candles, and drew his mantle closer about him, though the night was warm. He took the tankard proffered him by an apprehensive slattern and bent his head over it, so his face was no longer visible under his slouch hat, and the hum of the tavern began again, though somewhat subdued.

"Blood on that mantle," said John Stuart. "If that man be not a cutthroat, then I am much befuddled. Host, another bottle!"

"You are the first Scotsman I ever met," said I, "though I have had dealings with Englishmen."

"A curse on the breed!" he cried. "The devil take them all into his keeping! And a curse on my enemies who exiled me from Scotland."

"You are an exile!" I asked.

"Aye! With scant gold in my sporran. But fortune ever favors the brave." and he laid hand on the hilt at his hip.

But I was watching the stranger in the corner, and Stuart turned to stare at him. The man had lifted his hand and crooked a finger at the fat host, and that rogue drew nigh, wiping his hands on his leathern apron and uneasy in his expression. There was something about the black mantled stranger that repelled men.

The stranger spoke, but his words were a mumble and mine host shook his head in bewilderment.

BY THE CREATOR OF KING KULL, SOLOMON KANE, AND CONAN

Robert E. Howard (1906–1936) wrote such a successful body of adventure fantasy that it frequently obscures the fact that he wrote in many fields, equally well. He was the author of many horror, detective, sports, historical, and exotic adventure stories as well as Westerns, serious and humorous. He wrote vivid, action-filled tales about characters as memorable and larger-than-life as his fight scenes. He left many stories incomplete at his death: stories he had not finished and stories he had abandoned because the market for them had ceased to exist. Some years ago Glen Lord, literary executor for the Howard estate, unearthed many of these manuscripts as well as several finished ones. Since that time several of the incomplete yarns have been completed by various writers. COVEN 13 takes pride in presenting one of these stories now—a story featuring Agnes de La Fere, heroine of a handful of Howard's historical adventure yarns—in her first fantasy adventure.

THE EDITOR—

tragedy and doom, and that the men who ride with you do not live long. Tell me, girl, why did you don breeks and take the road of men?"

I shook my head, unable to say myself, but as he urged me to tell him something of myself, I said, "My name is Agnes de Chastillon, and I was born in the village of La Fere, in Normandy. My father is the bastard son of the Duc de Chastillon and a peasant woman—a mercenary soldier of the Free Companies until he grew too old to march and fight. If I had not been tougher than most he would have killed me with his beating before I was grown. When at last he sought to marry me to a man I hated, I killed that man, and fled from the village. One Etienne Villiers befriended me, but also taught me that a helpless woman is fair prey to all men, and when I bested him in even fight, I learned that I was as strong as most men, and quicker.

"Later I fell in with Guiscard de Clisson, a leader of the Free Companies, who taught me the use of the sword before he was slain in an ambush. I took naturally to the life of a man, and can drink, swear, march, fight and boast with the best of them. I have yet to meet my equal at sword play."

Stuart scowled slightly as if my word did not please him overmuch, and he lifted his tankard, quaffed deeply, and said, "There be as good men in Scotland as in France, and there men say that John Stuart's blade is not made of

"An Italian," muttered Stuart, "I know that jabber anywhere."

But the stranger shifted into French and as he spoke, haltingly, his words grew plainer, his voice fuller.

"Francoise de Bretagne," quoth he, and repeated the name several times. "Where is the house of Francoise de Bretagne?"

The inn-keeper began giving him directions, and Stuart muttered: "Why should that ill-visaged Italian rogue desire to go to Francoise de Bretagne?"

"From what I hear," I answered cynically, "it is no great surprise to hear any man asking for her house."

"Lies are always told about beautiful women," answered Stuart, lifting his tankard. "Because she is said to be the mistress of the Duke of Orleans does not mean that she—"

He froze suddenly, tankard to lip, staring, and I saw an expression of surprise pass over his brown, scarred face. At that moment the Italian had risen, and drawing his wide mantle about him, made for the door.

"Stop him!" roared Stuart, leaping to his feet, and dragging out his sword. "Stop that rogue!"

But at that instant a band of soldiers in morions and breastplates came shouldering in, and the Italian glided out past them and shut the door behind

him. Stuart started forward with a curse, to halt as the soldiers barred the way. Striding into the center of the tavern, and roving a stern glance over all the cringing occupants, the captain, a tall man in a gleaming breastplate, said loudly: "Agnes de La Fere, I arrest you for the murder of Jacques Pelligny!"

"What do you mean, Tristan?" I exclaimed angrily, springing up. "I did not kill Pelligny!"

"This woman saw you leave the alley where the man was slain," answered he, indicating a tall, fair wench in feathers and gauds who cowered in the grasp of a burly man-at-arms and would not meet my gaze. I knew her well, a courtesan whom I had befriended, and whom I would not have expected to give false testimony against me.

"Then she must have seen me too," quoth John Stuart, "for I was with Agnes. If you arrest her you must arrest me too, and by Saint Andrew, my sword will have something to say about that."

"I have naught to do with you," answered Tristan. "My business is with this woman."

"Man, you are a fool," cried Stuart gustily. "She did not kill Pelligny. And what if she did? Was not the rogue under sentence of death?"

"He was meant for the hangman, not the private citizen," answered Tristan.

"Listen," said Stuart. "He was slain by footpads, who then attacked Agnes who chanced to be traversing the alley at the time. I came to her aid, and we slew two of the rogues. Did you not find their bodies, with masks to their heads to prove their trades?"

"We saw no such thing," answered Tristan. "Nor were you seen thereabouts, so your testimony is without value. This woman here saw Agnes de La Fere pursue Pelligny into the alley and there stab him. So I am forced to take her to the prison."

"I know well why you wish to arrest me, Tristan," I said coldly, approaching him with an easy tread. "I had not been in Chartres a day before you sought to make me your mistress. Now you take this revenge upon me. Fool! I am mistress only to Death!"

"Enough of this idle talk," ordered Tristan curly. "Seize her, man!" It was his last command on earth, for my sword was through him before he could lift his hand. The guard closed in on me with a yell, and as I thrust and parried, John Stuart sprang to my side and in an instant the inn was a madhouse, with stamping boots, clanging blades and the curses and yells of slaughter. Then we broke through, leaving the floor strewn with corpses, and gained the street. As we broke through the door I saw the wench they brought to testify against me cowering behind an overturned settle and I grasped her thick yellow locks and dragged her with me into the street.

"Down that alley," gasped John Stuart. "Other guardsmen will be here anon. Saint Andrew, Agnes, will you burden yourself with that big hussy? We must take to our heels!"

"I have a score to settle with her," I gritted, for all my hot blood was roused. I hauled her along with us until we made a turn in the alley and halted for breath.

"Watch the street," I bade him, and then turning to the cowering wench, I said in calm fury: "Margot, if an open enemy deserves a thrust of steel, what fate does a traitress deserve? Not four days ago I saved you from a beating at the hands of a drunken soldier, and gave you money because your tears touched my foolish compassion. By Saint Trignan, I have a mind to cut the head from your fair shoulders!"

"Oh, Agnes," she sobbed, falling to her knees, and clasping my legs. "Have Mercy...!"

"I'll spare your worthless life," I said angrily, beginning to unsling my sword belt. "But I mean to turn up your petticoats and whip you as no head-lever did."

"Nay, Agnes!" she wailed. "First hear me! I did not lie! It is true that I saw you and the Scotsman coming from the alley with naked swords in your hands. But the watch said merely that three bodies were lying in the alley, and two were masked, showing they were thieves. Tristan said whoever slew them did a good night's work, and asked me if I had seen any coming from the alley. So I thought no harm, and replied that I saw you and the Scotsman John Stuart. But when I spoke your name, he smiled and told his men that he had his reasons for desiring to get Agnes de La Fere in a dungeon, helpless and unarmed, and bade them do as he told them. So he told me that my testimony about you would be accepted, but the rest, about John Stuart, and the two thieves he would not accept. And he threatened me so terribly that I dared not defy him."

"The foul dog," I muttered. "Well, there is a new captain of the watch in hell tonight."

"But you said *three* bodies," broke in John Stuart. "Were there not four? Pelligny, two thieves, and the body of Costranno?"

She shook her head.

"I saw the bodies. There were but three. Pelligny lay deep in the alley, fully clad, the other two around the crook, and the larger was naked."

"Eh?" ejaculated Stuart. "By Heaven, that Italian! I have but now remembered! on, to the house of Francoise de Bretagne!"

"Why there?" I demanded.

"When the Italian in the inn drew his cloak about him to depart," answered Stuart, "I glimpsed on his breast a fragment of golden chain and a great red jewel — I believe the very jewel Pelligny grasped in his hand when we found him. I believe that man is a friend of Costranno's, a magician come to take vengeance on Francoise de Bretagne! Come!"

He set impetuously off up the alley, and I followed him, while the girl Margot scurried away in another direction, evidently glad to get off with a whole skin.

Stuart led the way, grimly silent, and I followed after him, somewhat perplexed by his silence and the silence of the street. For strangely silent were the dark, twisting streets, silent even for night. Involuntarily, I shuddered, though whether at the silence or the cold, I could not say. We encountered no one, not even soldiers, on our way to the home of Francoise de Bretagne.

It was not far to her home from the tavern where we fled the watch, though the tavern lay huddled among the aqualor of the town's least reputable quarter and the home of Francoise de Bretagne, as befitted so magnificent a structure, was in a neighborhood suitable to the wealthiest noblewoman. No lights shown in the windows as we approached, and indeed none of the neighbor houses were lit at this time of night. We paused, John Stuart and I, without the courtyard gate and strained our ears, but the silence beat on us like the darkness, oppressive and threatening.

It was John Stuart who reached forward and pushed the gate, which opened noiselessly at his touch.

"Ah!" said he a moment later. "The lock's been broken and within the half hour, I'll wager."

"Inside, then?" I replied, barely able to keep my voice to a whisper. "Even now we may be too late!"

"Aye," Stuart said, shoving the gate open the rest of the way. I heard the rasp of steel against scabbard as he drew his sword, and the dark shadow that was John Stuart's form moved agilely through the gate and I followed after. Within the courtyard it was as still as it was without, but there were thicker shadows here, for around us grew trees and thick shrubbery, as still as dark statues in the breeze-calmed night.

"Saint Andrew!" I heard John Stuart exclaim, and saw the dark form of his body bend and crouch to the ground, bending over something—or someone. I moved to his side and peered down.

It was at that moment that the moon chose to come out, and I saw that we were bending over the corpse of a man, who, by his dress and his presence in the courtyard, I took to be a servant of Francoise de Bretagne.

"Does he live?" I asked.

"Nay," replied John Stuart, "Strangled, by the look of his face and the marks on his throat—strange, those marks. There's something about them out of the ordinary. Have you flint and steel, lass?"

For answer, I drew flint and steel from the pouch at my waist and struck sharply. Briefly a spark flared, bathing the bloated face of the corpse in pale yellow light. Briefly, but long enough to show us what we saw. I gasped at the sight of the marks on the dead man's throat.

"By all that the Saints hold sacred," John Stuart said. "Tis an enemy we're against that I would rather not be facing, Dark Agnes. For such is my thought. Mayhap ye'd best go back and find your way out of this cursed town—"

"What was it you saw, John Stuart?"

"Have you not eyes of your own, lass?"

"I saw—but I would hear it from your lips."

"Then hear it. I saw the marks of a hand against the throat of this corpse, and the marks of that hand were missing a finger."

"The hand of the dead sorcerer Costranno?" I said. "But how could that be? We saw him dead, the marks of the rope as plain upon his neck as the marks of the hand upon this poor man's neck."

"That jewel—" John Stuart said. "Saint Andrew! A magician is out to avenge Costranno, but it is not a friend of his but Costranno himself. Necromancy is the only answer. That alleyway where you were attacked. I have heard that the stones paving that alley were taken from an ancient heathen temple that once stood in a grove outside the city."

"It leaves me cold to think on it, but if but a tenth the tales related about Costranno be true, then he's magician enough to accomplish this and more. Mayhap his friends were not bearing him to his own house, but to that alley with its heathen temple's stones. Aye, mayhap they cut him from the gallows and were bringing him there. Likely Pelligny had even spoke the incantation

to bring the dead to life when those footpads interrupted before he could place the jewel—the last step in the ritual. And that was accomplished when the jewel fell from your fingers on to the breast of the corpse.”

“The holy saints!” I cried. “Then, I am a part of this. But even so, I swear that jewel slipped not from my fingers, but was yanked by something; some power?”

“By something from beyond the grave,” Stuart said grimly, as he rose. “Now you go back and find your way to the waterfront and flee this city, for the watch will want your throat for a gibbet noose if you remain in Chartres.”

“I cannot flee, for whatever snatched that jewel from my hands has made me an accomplice to necromancy and blasphemy,” I said, resenting also the implication that I should flee from danger while John Stuart stayed to face it.

“Two against one will not be too great odds when the one is a magician returned from the grave.”

John Stuart paused, and I half expected argument. But instead he said, “There’s little time then,” he said. “Costranno, once back from the grave, must have stripped the clothes from the third corpse and set out straightway to find Francoise de Bretagne. We are lucky he chose the tavern we were in to ask directions, though he must have known this house from the stories I have heard.”

“But not the quarter of the city he was in,” I said. “It was a quarter populous with thieves and cutthroats, but they had no truck with Costranno, nor he with them. Let us hurry. Even now we may be too late!”

We found the door to the house open like the courtyard gate. I found candles and lit one. We were in a large parlor, splendidly furnished in a way that bespoke a householder of great wealth. But there was no time to note the splendor of the room and its hangings.

“This way,” John Stuart said. He headed for the stairs and I followed after him.

We reached the top of the stairs, where the candle cast flickering red light among the black shadows of a narrow hallway. For but a second John Stuart paused, then pointed and said, “That door!”

At the end of the hall there was an open door. He rushed toward it and I followed after it, almost causing the candle to flicker out in my haste.

The room beyond the open door was a bedchamber, a lady’s bedchamber, fully as lavish in its appointments as the parlor below. The bed was empty and the covers thrown into the floor. Furniture was overturned and a mirror broken, as if some thrown object had struck it instead of the target it was meant for. There was no sign of Francoise de Bretagne, nor of Costranno.

“What sorcery is this? Has he vanished into the air and taken her with him?” I said. “They couldn’t have gotten past us.”

A noise came from the darkness at my side, so sudden and unexpected, that I almost dropped the candle as I whirled to face the source of the sound. I held the candle high to bathe a dark corner with light, and there in the corner was a man, cowering and gibbering, as a frightened child might gibber.

The man drew back against the wall as John Stuart approached him. The servant uttered sounds, but they were meaningless sounds, such as are not pleasant to hear from the lips of a living man. I felt a shudder pass involuntarily up my spine and saw that even John Stuart was slightly unnerved by this, for as he turned back to face me the light from the candle was sufficient to show the strain upon his face.

“His mind is gone,” Stuart said. He stood for a moment, those piercing eyes of his sweeping the room in a way that almost convinced me those shadows could conceal naught from him. “Aye,” he said suddenly. “It’s all so plain to me now. Obviously Francoise de Bretagne saw the need for protection, because both the servants we have seen were dressed and obviously set to guard her through the night. But the magnitude of the danger that beset her she did not begin to guess, else she would have fled the city—and indeed all of France. For now one of her servant-guards lies dead and the other’s mind has fled him at the sight of a dead man carrying off his mistress. And she has been taken—but who can say where?”

“More than likely,” I said, “it is too late now to save Francoise de Bretagne though we can avenge her murder.”

“There may be time,” John Stuart said, “if we make haste!” He began moving around the room, peering here and there, tapping the walls, feeling along the woodwork and behind hangings. “My guess is that Costranno has more sinister plans for her than murder, else her corpse would be sprawled across that bed. It may even be that some further ritual is necessary to fully revive him from the dead and that he has marked Francoise de Bretagne for that foul ceremony. Ah! What is this?”

His hand had reached behind a torn hanging and I could see that he moved something, though what it was he moved was hidden to me by the hanging. But as he moved it, a part of the wall moved out, revealing a passageway and beyond the passageway, a stair, leading down.

“This is how our necromancer made his escape,” John Stuart said. From near the door, the maddened servant increased his gibbering, more frightened now than before. “Aye!” said John Stuart. “Our friend knows about this opening.”

He stepped through the opening and I followed after him, holding high the candle to cast its light before us. “It is likely Francoise de Bretagne knew naught of this passageway,” John Stuart said. “It may be that the entire city of Chartres is combed with passageways known only to Costranno and a few others.”

“That is not a cheering thought,” I said. “But I’ve a feeling there is more to it than I care for there to be.”

The stairs were stone, seemingly carved from solid rock, leading down far below the level of the street, far deeper I felt than any cellar or dungeon in the city would be expected to go. The stairs wound down into the earth until I thought they would lead to hell itself, and then, ahead and below, we saw a light coming through a doorway at the foot of the stairs.

We paused momentarily upon the stairs and I strained my ears against the silence. For a moment it seemed deathly still, but then I thought a sound did come to me—the sound of a voice, perhaps, but too faint and muffled by distance and thick stone walls for me to be certain it was not the growling of some beast.

I snuffed out the candle I held and laid it carefully on the stairs. I was certain that the thickness of the walls around us would hide the sound of a candle drooping from any human ears, but I was not so certain that the ears the sound should be hidden from were human.

I drew my sword and followed John Stuart down the stairs.

We reached the bottom of the stairs and beyond the open door we saw a crypt, brightly lighted by torches set into brackets in the wall. I call it a crypt because there were caskets, or what appeared to be caskets, set into niches in the wall. But the writings and designs carved on these caskets and on the wall themselves, were not Christian, nor of any religion with which I am familiar. In the center of the crypt there was a dais of black marble and on the dais, naked and unconscious, but still breathing, lay Francoise de Bretagne. And a few feet away from the dais, Costranno himself knelt, straining to lift a seven-sided stone in the floor. As we rushed through the doorway he saw us and gave one fierce inhuman effort that dragged the stone out of the floor and to one side, revealing a black, gaping hole.

Costranno’s cloak was thrown off now, and his features, hidden to us in the tavern, were now revealed in the torch light. The gibbet had done its work well. Bloated was the face of Costranno, his lips blacked with death and the marks and bite of the rope heavy upon his neck. He gave a great, incoherent cry as John Stuart moved toward him. Then the sorcerer fell back to the wall behind him and snatched a torch from its bracket. His unearthly, garbled voice rose in a shout that might have been rage or a call to the blasphemous gods he worshipped, and he threw the torch at Stuart.

The torch struck the brown stone flooring before John Stuart’s feet, with a shower of sparks and flames and a sudden billowing of black smoke. Instantly Stuart’s figure was hidden from my view, but I could hear his voice, giving vent to his rage in a string of curses. The smoke was gone almost as suddenly as it came and Stuart still stood, apparently unhurt. But when he moved to leap at Costranno, something seemed to hold him back, as if an invisible wall had formed.

I spent no time in trying to fathom Costranno’s magic. Before the sorcerer could reach another torch, I was upon him. And as Stuart cursed and raved because he could not move to hurl himself and his sword point upon his foe, I passed my sword twice through the undead man’s body without harming him.

A horrible, angry cry came forth from Costranno’s mangled throat. He drew his sword, and only my mail shirt beneath my doublet saved me from his terrible thrusts. But even so I was forced back, and the growling, snarling Costranno bore toward me, his sword slashing and beating at me with such terrific blows that I was hard put to parry.

I knew fear at that moment—icy, nerve-shattering fear that seemed to grip my very soul, and rendered me so senseless that I fought by instinct and main strength and without science or technique, save that of the moment. Costranno was in a rage and wanted my life and the life of John Stuart and of the naked, helpless girl who lay as intended sacrifice upon the black altar.

I did not realize his strategy until the heel of my left foot reached the edge of the opening in the floor behind me. Costranno had forced me back, hoping not to best me with the sword, but to hurtle me into the abyss. I knew nothing of what might be at the bottom of that pit, but somehow I knew that the kindest death that would befall one who toppled into it would be to have his body dashed to peices at its bottom. I felt, by whatever power I cannot say,

that there was something in that pit which I did not care to meet—and my fear became blind, unreasoning panic. And that is what saved me.

I hacked fiercely at Costranno, counting more on strength than skill, and in that moment drove him back far enough to give me the room I needed. I dove to one side, rolled and came to my feet behind him. I struck with all my strength, and the edge of my blade cut deep into the flesh of Costranno's mangled neck, severing through bone and gristle as well as flesh, and then pulling free as the severed head flopped from the shoulder of the corpse—and into the gaping blackness of the hole into which he had tried to push me.

There was an unearthly cry of terror from the blackness beneath the feet of the still standing corpse. Costranno's headless body stood for a moment at the edge of the pit and then on foot moved back, away from the edge.

My fear had become so agonizing that I was almost mindless, but somehow I saw what must be done and somehow brought myself to do it, despite the revulsion the thought of touching Costranno brought to me. I have fought many times and killed many men and seen many comrades die in battle. I have carried many a corpse to a shallow battlefield grave with no compunction about touching cold flesh. But the thought of touching a walking dead man was abhorrent in the extreme to me.

But it was necessary that I touch it so that it could not touch me. I forced myself to run up behind the shambling corpse and shove my hands hard against its shoulders. Something like a blast of lightning coursed through my body and threw me back, numbly, to the floor. But even as I fell to the floor, I saw the headless corpse topple into the pit.

For a moment there was a silence in the chamber and neither Stuart or I moved. Then, on the altar, Francoise de Bretigny stirred and made a small, whimpering sound as consciousness started to return to her. John Stuart, free now of the spell which had imprisoned him, rushed to my side and reached down to aid me to my feet.

Sudden shame at the womanly fear I had felt while fighting Costranno flooded me. Flustered, I shook off his hand and rose to my feet, unsteadily, but without help. "I'm all right," I said. "I can take care of myself."

John Stuart laughed, but there was, oddly, nothing of contempt or malice

in his laugh. "You are more a woman than you'll admit," he said. "And to your credit, Agnes de La Fere."

"If you would aid a helpless woman," I said, with discomfort, "then see to Francoise de Bretigny. My guess is we will need such influence as she can give us to gain protection from the watch before we escape this city."

"Aye," John Stuart said. "There is truth in what you say." He went to see to Francoise, and I stood, trying to conceal my nervousness, staring at the open pit in the floor.

I went to the wall and took a torch from a bracket and went to the edge of the opening and knelt down. I held the torch out over the opening and peered down into the blackness.

Before I knew what was happening, a snaky, black fur-covered arm reached out and grasped my doublet. I screamed as the arm strove to drag me into the hole and I beat down with the torch. There was a bestial cry and the thing let go. I had only a glimpse of a distorted, apish thing falling and the torch fell after, dwindling to a speck of light far below, like a meteor. I whimpered like a child and turned away from the pit into the welcome arms of John Stuart that closed about me like the protecting arms of some saint. And without shame I shivered for a time in those arms as my fear took hold of me and ran its course.

"It's over now, Dark Agnes," I heard the soothing deep voice of John Stuart. "And now you have naught to fear and naught to be ashamed of. You have done as well against this horror as any woman or any man could do. And if, in the end, it comes to this, there is no shame for you to act as a woman Dark Agnes, for you are quite a woman, indeed."

I did not object as he lifted me to my feet. "And it may chance," he went on, his voice now lighter and with that familiar hint of laughter to it, "that when you ride forth from this city, you will find me riding at your side."

"Do not forget the curse that hangs over me, John Stuart. Does it not bother you that the men who ride with Dark Agnes ride to an early grave?"

"Not a bit," John Stuart said, with booming laughter. "For what is another curse, more or less, upon the head of a Stuart?"

And together we replaced the stone slab in the opening in the floor and then helped Francoise de Bretigny from the crypt and up the stairs back to her own bedchamber, leaving behind the horror that pursued her.

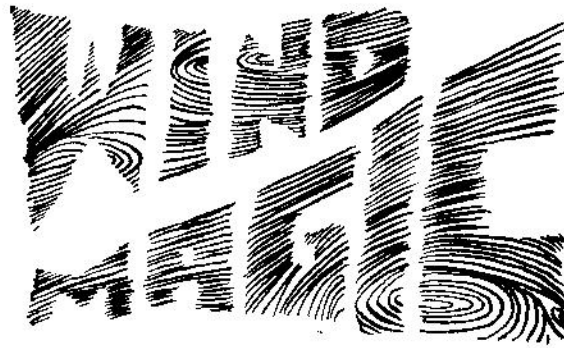


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by Edmund Shirlan

ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE FRITZ

1

There was a man who had a shop off a small dark street near the river, a man reputed to be a sorcerer. It was to this man Paul Benedict went.

Benedict was short, a bit plumper than he should have been. His neutral colored hair was receding and his eyes functioned only with the help of strong contact lenses. He was in his early thirties, the heir to a substantial amount of money that was mostly income from trust funds, and yet had accomplished nothing in life. In fact there was nothing between him and starvation except his inheritance.

But the inheritance meant nothing to Claudia Palmer. She was a lovely girl, a tall, willowy brunette with the taste to dress in such a way that her beauty was subtly heightened. She worked as a legal secretary at one of the city's leading law firms. She was a girl who spent her days working in an office filled with high pressure business attorneys, a girl surrounded by important men, leaders of industry. How could any girl like that take notice of a nobody such as Paul Benedict? Several times he tried to date her and each time she put him off. Aside from Claudia, the closest thing Benedict had to a real interest was the occult. Even here he had never applied himself—because he never had to. But now he felt the need and he knew of the shop and went to it.

The front of the shop was dark and littered with a miscellany of old boxes and junk, so covered over with dust and cobwebs as to give the appearance that the place was closed. But the door was not locked and from under a door at the shop's back, Benedict saw light. He made his way to the door and knocked. A voice said, "Come in, Mr. Benedict. Come in."

Benedict opened the door and entered.

The room was small but seemed larger even than the shop because it was scrupulously clean and almost empty. There were two common old-fashioned wooden kitchen chairs with woven wicker seats. They faced each other across a small rug that was black and red with strange emblems worked upon it in dull blue. An old man sat in one of the chairs and motioned Benedict to sit in the other.

He was rather thin, his grey hair thick and neatly combed back from a high forehead. He wore a shiny black suit that was too large for his emaciated limbs.

"Please do not step on the rug," he said. "I assure you that to do so would be perilous."

Benedict carefully avoided the small rug and seated himself. "You're Mr. Charles?"

"Indeed I am."

"How did you know my name?"

"You come to a sorcerer asking advice and you ask how he knows your name. How silly. If I am a sorcerer, permit me a few sorceries."

"Then you probably know why I come here?"

"That takes no sorcery. There are but two reasons that bring people to me. One is to have me work a spell. The other is to have me teach them how to work spells."

"I've come to learn magic."

"It is a simple thing to learn. Which sort would you learn?"

"Sort?"

"There are types of magic, Mr. Benedict. I myself am a master of a most interesting specialty—rug magic. You see the small rug before you. It is a prayer rug, but in its way more similar to the pentagram and magic circle than it is to any other prayer rug you have ever seen. With it I may summon demons and work minor devinations on occasion. It was with this rug that I learned your name. It may also serve me in working certain spells of a minor nature. I wove the rug and worked runes of power into it myself. There is no other like it in the world and only I can control it. It is like a familiar in some ways. Of course there are other forms of magic involving rugs—you have heard of the magic carpet, I have no doubt. In my home are many rugs from all over the world. Rugs that do a variety of things. Rug magic is but one form of sorcery."

"Is it powerful?"

"It is useful and practical and easy to use. You will run little danger in learning it. But in final analysis it is but little more powerful than the parlor tricks of a showman."

"I want to master a form of magic, but it must be a strong form."

"That involves danger."

"I don't care. I want to master something powerful."

"Necromancy, perhaps? Demonology? But no. You will be taught these things—they are useful to all sorcerers. But they are not what you want. To raise a demon is easy but to bargain with one for what you need is not easy—and is frequently costly. There are spells by which a magician could master demonology but they are lost and I cannot teach them to you. No, you want elemental magic."

"What's that?" Benedict asked.

The wrinkles that must have been the old man's mouth parodied a smile. "It works by fire, by water, by earth or by air. The four elements. You will learn to summon elementals, to say a rune that will make fire burn for you or cause water to flow to your needs. You can govern earthquakes by controlling earth elementals or make the ground open to you. But perhaps the one which you really want to master is air." The old man paused a moment as if thinking, then went on. "Yes, for the wind itself is controlled by the elementals of the air."

"Yes—wind magic," Benedict said. "Can you teach it?"

"I will teach you magic. I will teach you to summon demons, to move a-



among the many planes of existence, to speak with the dead—a secret many sorcerers reject. I will teach you to write a rune and how to speak it. I will tell you of books which hold certain secrets you may care to know. It is the runes which hold the secrets of the elementals. With the proper rune you can summon any elemental and make it do your bidding. The trick is in holding power over them, in being able to make them do more for you each time. I can teach you wind magic and then show you the places where there are secrets you would care to learn. How powerful you become is up to you."

"But I can become powerful. . . I can become the most powerful master of wind magic in the world."

"It is not an easy magic to master," Charles said. "How you do is up to you, not me. And there are others who are powerful masters of wind magic. In this very city lives a man who may be the most powerful master of wind magic of all time. His name is Simon Grisaille."

"I will better him," Benedict said.

"Perhaps. Time will tell, as they say. Now it is time you must begin your lessons. The rudiments must be mastered first. . ."

-2-

And so the weeks passed into months and Paul Benedict learned magic from the emaciated old man who called himself Mr. Charles. He learned to draw a perfect pentagram and summon minor demons; he learned to make talismans; and he learned a score or more of simple runes. He learned to make the mirrors of magic: that which is made from well or river water and shows the future, that which is made from an ink and shows the present, and the polished stone that reflects the condition of a man's soul. He learned of herbs and the powers of certain stones, metals and gems. He learned of rituals, of lost and forbidden books, of amulets. He became slowly but skillfully adept. And with time his skill increased.

In the spare bedroom of his apartment he set up his black room and said the spells that made it impossible for any but him to enter while he lived. Here he drew a pentagram on the floor and set aflame seven candles of eternal light that would burn as long as he remained alive. Here he placed the accoutrements of his magic: his equipment and the books he was slowly but constantly acquiring.

And after a time passed and Benedict's mastery of magic surpassed the expectations of his teacher, came the time when Benedict learned the first of the wind runes.

And never during that time did he forget Claudia Palmer.

She lived in the same apartment building as Benedict, though her apartment was smaller and on a lower floor. He saw her frequently and they would nod to one another and speak briefly if they met on the elevator. At times Benedict would see her with some man and the pangs of jealousy and his own fury would direct hatred toward the man—but he controlled himself and buried his hatred in his studies. Then he noticed that Claudia was seeing someone to the exclusion of all other men.

Two months after learning the first of the wind runes, Benedict knew as much about wind magic as Mr. Charles could teach him.

Each night Benedict would go for long walks in the park near his apartment and test and develop his skill. As soon as he was certain no one was close enough to notice, he would take a piece of paper from his pocket and fold it into an airplane. He would summon the elementals of the air to catch the small paper plane and carry it to the terrace of his apartment so that he would find it when he returned home.

Or he would call the elementals and have them bend trees almost to the ground or blow leaves from one tree without disturbing any others. He soon realized that magic, like any form of exercise, tired one out. There were limits to his strength and to increase those limits he must exercise. He devised systematic procedures for increasing his strength as well as his skill. Exercises in magic.

He grew to know the wind elementals and to know how to deal with them. His experimentation found the ways of varying his tonal inflection that increased his hold and power over them.

And finally the evening came when Mr. Charles admitted that Benedict knew all he could learn from him.

"So where do I go to learn more?" Benedict asked.

"There are places. There are people. There are books. A friend of mine, a man who has no use for wind magic but who has use for money has the *Grimoire Elemental* which contains many spells you could not learn from me. The price is great—"

"No matter. I must have that book. Get it for me and I will pay you."

"It can be done." He named a price that was every bit as large as Benedict felt it would be.

"I'll have the money in a week," said Benedict. "You have the book here by then."

"And in the meantime?"

"I have things to do," Benedict said.

-3-

Benedict was certain of his power, but he could not forget the man Charles had called perhaps the greatest master of wind magic who ever lived. With the same enthusiasm with which he had studied sorcery, Benedict now set about studying Simon Grisaille.

He was an easy man to learn about, this Simon Grisaille. He was well known: a tall, strikingly handsome man, lean and athletic looking. He was socially prominent and a successful businessman: the owner of a small but successful import-export business and the proprietor of an exclusive art gallery and antique shop. He was single and seemed to have no family. He traveled a lot, ostensibly because of his import business. But Benedict suspected that Grisaille's travels carried him frequently to those out of the way places which are of special interest to magicians. When he was in town Grisaille lived in a penthouse a few blocks from where Benedict lived. He was as well liked as he was known and few people seemed aware that he was anything more than a playboy with the profound good luck to have a sharp business manager to keep him from losing his business.

Yet in another strata of society he was more highly regarded. Among that portion of the city's populace that understood and practiced magic, either for good or otherwise, Grisaille was held to be the master. It was said of him that he was one of the most skillful sorcerers in history and that no man ever practiced such mastery over the elementals of the air before.

A sort of jealousy grew up in Benedict as he learned of Grisaille's reputation, a jealousy in quite a different way as malevolent as the feeling which he felt for the man who was now dating Claudia Palmer.

That man's name was John Dexter and he worked for an insurance company as an investigator. For weeks Benedict had sat in his black room and stared into a magic mirror to learn about Dexter and to work up the courage for what he knew was to come. On the day before he was to pick up the book from Mr. Charles, he decided to act.

He spied on Dexter all that day from the safety of his black room. Just as Dexter was getting ready to leave for home, Benedict called him.

"I have some information for you about the Spangler case," Benedict said, knowing that Dexter was not exactly satisfied with the Spangler claim. "I don't think Spangler is as hurt as he claims to be and I have proof."

"Can you drop by my office?"

"I'd rather meet you. Tonight and alone. I'm nervous about this."

"Look, can't you give me some idea—"

"I'll show it to you in person."

"How much you want?"

"I'm not after money. If you think this is worth money and want to pay me after you see it, then fine. I got a score to settle with Spangler and I think this will get him."

There was a pause but Benedict was unworried. He knew how thoroughly Dexter distrusted Spangler and how easy it would be for him to believe other people shared his feelings.

"Okay," came Dexter's voice. "I'll meet you wherever you say."

Benedict arrived at the park early and stationed himself among the trees on the side of a small hill. The bench where Dexter was to meet him was located across an open playing field near another hill. Steps led up the hill to a small path and a stone wall bordered not only the path but the steps as well. Part of the wall was directly above the bench.

Benedict watched as Dexter arrived and stood waiting. Benedict waited until Dexter finally sat down on the bench and settled back, impatient but determined not to leave without that evidence.

When Dexter was settled on the bench, Benedict began.

Sheltered by trees from casual view he feared no detection. He raised his arms. He began chanting the rune in a low voice.

He felt the stirring of the wind in answer to his rune. He spoke another rune, this one a command to action.

And the wind acted.

The wind moved to the wall above and behind the unsuspecting Dexter.

Benedict called his command again and all his strength urged the wind on. Sweat broke out on his brow as the wind pushed on the wall. The wind pushed harder as Benedict repeated the rune. Pushed harder—and the wall broke. And at that moment Dexter turned as if first aware that something was wrong.

Benedict was too far away to hear his screams. He saw a huge wind driven rock fly from the wall, strike the man he hated on the head. He saw the red

of blood as Dexter fell to the ground and other stones from the broken wall tumbled down the hill around him. People saw what happened and panicked. Someone ran to Dexter and bent down over him. A crowd gathered.

Nearly exhausted from his efforts, Benedict dropped to his knees.

-4-

The next night he went to the shop early.

He knocked and heard Charles' rasping voice say, "Come in."

"You're early," Charles said as Benedict entered.

"Is the book here?"

"Yes- no. No, something's wrong."

"I have the money. I want the book."

"I can see it in your face. You've done something wrong, haven't you?"

Charles bent over the small rug before his chair. Benedict saw his hand flick out, making a quick nervous passage above it. Charles spoke a phrase Benedict did not understand and the rug changed in a subtle way. It seemed to waver and become distorted like heated air. Charles peered at the rug and a look of horror and disbelief passed upon his features.

"You've killed a man. You've used magic as a murder weapon!"

"I brought your money. Give me the book."

"You can't have it now. You'll have to pay for your crimes."

Benedict saw a paper wrapped parcel in the corner. "Is that the book?" he asked. He moved toward it.

The old man jumped to his feet and pushed against Benedict, trying to keep him from the book. Benedict shoved him aside and picked up the parcel, tearing the paper from it. It was the book, all right, a thick quarto book in faded antique binding. He opened the book to the title page and saw words written there in a language few people understood, a language Charles had taught him and told him was old before Atlantis sunk.

Benedict glanced at the old man.

The old man lay unconscious on the floor. Benedict stopped beside him and examined him carefully. His breathing was normal. The fall seemed only to have knocked him out.

That wasn't enough.

There were other elementals than the elementals of the air and though he was master of air, Benedict knew the basic runes of command to the other elementals. The elemental of fire, for example.

He started to leave and as he did so, Charles' rug caught his eyes. Speaking a counter spell that would guard him from any spell on the rug, Benedict bent and folded it to take with him. Then he spoke another rune.

He was blocks away before he heard the sirens of the fire engines. The next morning he read in the paper about the fire and the death of a lonely old shopkeeper. It was a small story, buried inside attracting considerable less attention than yesterday's story of the freak accident that killed the man in the park.

-5-

Benedict was not expert at reading the ancient language of sorcery, but he knew something about it and was determined to work the rest of it out. It was slow tedious work, but he read the book on wind magic.

Read the book and tried the exercises that increased his skill. In the next few weeks his power and mastery of the wind grew.

And one day he spoke to Claudia in the elevator. Perhaps his power gave him new confidence, but he asked her out and she accepted. They dined and saw a show together. Afterwards they went dancing. He was not very good but she didn't seem to mind. More dates followed. Things finally seemed to be going his way.

A month later he saw the notice in the paper: Grisaille's was showing a special display of pre-Columbian art and Benedict succumbed to whimsy and made his first mistake. He took Claudia to the showing.

"I never knew you were interested in such things," Claudia said, as she stopped to stare at a small Mexican figurine.

"Many things interest me," Benedict replied. And in truth the display was fascinating though it was not a form of art he particularly cared about.

"Oh look," Claudia said, noticing something. Benedict followed her across the room to a small statuette. "What's that?"

Benedict saw a small jade statue, green streaked with bits of brown. A small animal perched like a gargoyle above what seemed to be a helmeted human head. Before Benedict could answer, a deep voice from behind said, "It's Aztec. A statuette of a rabbit associated with the goddess Mayahuel."

"Oh?" said Claudia. She turned and so did Benedict.

He saw Simon Grisaille standing there.

It was Benedict's first really close look at the sorcerer. He was tall and

handsome, with a light perpetual smile that was at once warmly friendly and slightly ironic. He was dressed well but rather casually and gave the impression of being totally at home, which in a sense he was. But Benedict knew that Grisaille was the sort of man who would fit in anywhere under almost any situation and that deepened his resentment toward the man. Moreover, his smile was focused on Claudia.

"Where was it found?" Benedict heard Claudia ask. And he remembered the statue.

"Mexico, I believe. Possibly at Compostela in Veracruz," Grisaille answered. "You seem to be very interested in pre-Columbian art."

"I am. It's a hobby I've never had the money to enjoy. Mr. "

"Simon Grisaille."

"Oh. You're the man who owns this gallery. I'm Claudia Palmer and this is Paul Benedict. I hope you don't mind us just looking at the displays like this, Mr. Grisaille."

"Not at all. That's what it's here for: public view. It doesn't hurt for people to know about my gallery. Is there anything in particular I can show you?"

"There was a statuette over there," Claudia said. "The tag said it was Peruvian but it doesn't look Peruvian to me. Could you tell me some more about it?"

6

Two nights later, as Benedict was returning home, he saw Grisaille again. Walking out of the apartment building, with Claudia, who was laughing at some remark of Grisaille's. They got into Grisaille's car and drove off without seeing Benedict. He turned and went back the way he came, walking for hours before his rage had settled into purpose.

The next evening, after everyone else in the building except the watchman in the lobby was asleep, Benedict went to the roof of the building and stood for a long time with the strong wind whipping around him. He spoke his rune and let the wind move about him like a playful, friendly puppy getting to know him better, becoming more familiar with and responsive to his commands. It was like training some animal. You gained its confidence and then you put it through its paces with greater ease and success. Simon Grisaille was said to be the finest master of the air elementals alive. To defeat him would take skill. And cunning.

Each night for a month Benedict went to the roof of his apartment building and sang his runes to the wind so that the wind would play around his head and his skill and ability in handling the elementals grew. The wind became his. So great was his control of it by the end of that month that the wind seemed an extension of his own mind and body.

Now he was ready. Now nothing could stop him.

Not even Simon Grisaille.

7

He knocked on her door and waited. The door opened as wide as the safety chain would permit and she looked out. "Oh, Paul. Hello."

"Hello, Claudia. May I come in?"

"I'm getting ready to go out."

"It won't take a minute."

She hesitated a minute, then slipped the chain. He entered her apartment.

She was wearing a dark blue cocktail dress and her hair was pulled back. Her dark blue eyes were not so dark as the dress but Benedict thought them the darkest, most beautiful eyes he had ever seen. "So you're getting ready to go out, are you?" he said.

"With Simon Grisaille?" he added.

"He'll be here soon. What did you want to see me about?"

"I knew it." There was a cold hardness in his voice.

"Paul—"

He reached forward, took her roughly by the shoulders. Her eyes widened with surprise and fear. "Listen, listen to me. He's nothing. Not a thing."

"Paul, you're hurting me."

"Forget him."

"Let go of me."

"Forget Grisaille. I can defeat him and I will if you force me!"

He let go of her. She fell back, her eyes fear-widened, her mouth open with disbelief. "What's gotten into you?"

"Be quiet, Claudia," he said. He saw a note pad and some envelopes on a desk across the room. "I want you to write a note," he said.

"What kind of note?"

"There's the paper. Write what I tell you."

She went to the desk and picked up a pen.

"Now write 'Meet me on the roof' and sign it."

She gave him a look of unmeasured disbelief but did as he told her. When she was done he took the paper and folded it, slipping it into an envelope. Sealing the envelope he handed it back. "Now write his name on it. Just his first name."

She did as he told her. He took a small piece of cellophane tape and left the note taped to Claudia's door.

Then he and Claudia went to the roof.

He made Claudia sit across from the stairs where Grisaille would first see her when he came up.

"I won't stay up here," she said. "You can't make me—"

She started to get to her feet but before she could stand Benedict spoke a rune of control. She settled back, unable to resist. He let the rune hold her for a minute, then released her. He would need all his power in his fight with Grisaille.

There was fear in Claudia's eyes as she looked at him now. Fear and astonishment.

"What did you do to me?"

"I controlled you. I controlled you by magic."

"You are mad. There isn't any such thing as—"

"I've been studying for quite some time, learning the secrets, developing my skills. I'm good. Look—I'll show you."

He got to his feet and walked across the roof though not to the edge. "My apartment is below here and I left the terrace door open. Now watch."

He raised his arms to the wind and spoke.

He spoke the rune that aroused the wind and brought it to his aid. He spoke in words and terms too ancient for the girl to understand—but words and terms the elementals knew well. The wind answered.

It stirred. It moved across the roof. Benedict commanded. The wind obeyed.

Abruptly something flew up over the edge of the building and settled at his feet: a small rug.

"No, not a magic carpet," Benedict said. "Take a look at it."

He held it up for her. "It belonged to my teacher. He left it to me when he passed away a few weeks ago. It has occult powers I don't fully understand as yet, but I will."

"You made it come up here with strings or wires."

"What do you take me for?" he said, in sudden anger. "I sent the wind to fetch it, Claudia. The wind obeys me. I'm the greatest master of wind magic in the world now. And do you know who the second greatest master of wind magic is? Simon Grisaille."

"There's nothing supernatural about Simon. Or you either."

"There isn't? Ask your friend John Dexter if you ever learn that secret. Ask him about the wind that caused that so-called freak accident that took his life. Ask the fool who made this carpet about the fire that took his life.

There are elementals of fire as well as air, you know. There are many forms of magic. I know all of them now."

"You haven't had time," Grisaille said. "to learn more than a few. And time to master none of them."

Benedict turned. How long Grisaille had stood listening in the doorway he couldn't say. But it was unimportant. The important thing was that now Claudia would learn.

"So you caused that death in the park. And I gather you also caused the death of Mr. Charles. There's been talk among the sorcerers. A lot of them suspected murder in both instances."

"It doesn't matter. Soon I'll cause your death."

"It's always a mistake to use magic toward such narrow ends."

"I don't think it's narrow to demand what's due you. But that doesn't matter, Grisaille. I want to show you how well I learned what Charles taught me. I went far beyond my teacher. Watch!"

His hand lifted, his voice rang out.

The wind stirred.

It gathered and moved and sang with its moving. The elementals sang with their own fierce stirring, the great hurricane power that surged through them. The wind moved faster and faster and faster.

Grisaille stood, waiting.

"Do you admit defeat so easily?" Benedict demanded.

"You can't harm me with wind," Grisaille said.

"We'll see," shouted Benedict. And again he called the rune.

He stepped back and called more loudly. The wind responded. It whipped across the roof with such fury that Grisaille was forced to brace himself against the doorway. The wind spun around him, attacking him mercilessly. The sorcerer dropped to his knees. The wind moved faster.

"Now!" shouted Benedict. "Kill!"

Grisaille struggled to his feet as the wind moved with even greater fury. He spoke and wind whipped the words from his mouth with such fury that Benedict never heard the rune he spoke. The wind stirred wildly, as if torn between two masters.

"Kill!" Benedict commanded. "kill now!"

The wind obeyed.

It lifted the small prayer rug from the roof and threw it into the air. It hovered a moment, dancing in air, whirled by the wind, then shot straight for Benedict. It slapped across his face, covering it, blocking his vision and his breath. He coughed and staggered back, the wind playing around him. His leg struck the safety wall at the edge of the roof and he lost balance. He did not see Grisaille leap to grab for him and miss.

It wasn't right! He was the wind master—not Grisaille!

But as he fell it seemed to Benedict that the rushing wind was laughing

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THE FORGOTTEN

Hawk-head, the *ankh* has fallen from your hand.
Archer, your bright wings falter in the dust.
Huntress, you wander in a barren land.
Warrior, your blade has rotted into rust.

No more the incense wreathes the morning air
Or maidens chant your legends to the flames,
Nor any mortal whispers anywhere
With awe the potent music of your names.

No more the smokes of sacrifice ascend
From hecatombs of gilt-horned oxen slain;
No more petitioners their raiment rend
To beg your favor or avoid your bane.

Now are the altars ivy-overgrown,
The temples desecrate, the sibyls still.
Now are the idols only weathered stone,
No more the living vessels of your will.

The shrines are vacant in the desert night;
The drowsy jackal by the altar nods.
Man has forgot the glory of your might,
Man has first mocked, and then forgot, the gods.

Thigh-born, the leaves have withered from your brow.
Green-beard, your tides moan lonely on the strand.
Goat-foot, your syrinx makes bitter music now.
Hawk-head, the *ankh* has fallen from your hand.

—Lin Carter

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Illustration by Stephen Fabian

The Hate Was Real and Deadly. But Who Could Have Sent It?



ILLUSTRATED BY BURGE

by Terri Pinckard

Nadine first felt the cold touch of the thing creeping, pawing at her as a dog paws at a bone. She was alone in the house at the time, doing those unimportant household chores all women must do to make a house a home when—it reached out to touch her. She didn't know what it was then. She only knew a chill ran through her, and that the thing was directed. It knew who she was, and it knew she was aware of its being there. At first it stayed for only a short time. It didn't have much strength then.

It came again. On days when she was alone, the thing would strike at her. As Fear began to grow in her, the other's strength grew, too. Each time it left her drained and more afraid. It knew her well now. It knew just when its coming would have the most effect on her. It knew just when she would be rooted to the floor with fear of it and how she could be so used, the perspiration of her fear would be icy cold upon her forehead and lip. As the months passed it began to come back more often, just being there, quiescent, waiting. Every once in awhile its coldness reached out to her, and then withdrew to sit and wait again.

Then, one day, she went shopping for a new dress for the Country Club dance. After much effort she found a pale green chiffon that clung to her figure as though it was made just for her. She felt proud, imag-

ining her husband Jeff's eyes appraising her as he looked her up and down with that "Look what's mine" proud look of his. And then it hit.

It hit her as though it held a whip. It slapped her face, whipping her legs and her arms in short, sharp tirades of angry lashes. She tried to protect herself with her arms; covering first her face, then her legs, trying, trying—trying to keep it from striking her. She screamed a long, high shrill scream and the saleswoman grabbed and held her arms and in a pit of despair she fought the thing back with all the mental strength in her. Now she knew what it was... hatred. Strong, demonic hate.

Hate receded then and in its place came a short burst of mocking laughter as if from deep inside her. It left her shamed and cringing. As suddenly as it came, it was gone.

She straightened and smoothed the dress down and her mirrored reflection no longer looked inviting and smug, but humiliated and degraded. The saleswoman was chattering over her, and she murmured an apology and almost ran into the dressing room, her moments of happiness over for the day.

It kept coming to her, daily. And now, today, it had been stronger than ever before. She felt ravaged, brutally so, and still it was not

over. Their anniversary party was tonight, their first, and she had been trying to prepare for it.

The Hate danced around the kitchen as she prepared the food, picking up everyday items in its whirlwind path and turning them into monstrous creations with a will of their own. Eggs broke as she picked them up; the lettuce withered as she touched it; the wine turned to vinegar as she added it to the cream sauce. It was everywhere and everything. It was becoming stronger with every passing minute. She stood there crying, fighting it with all within her, stolidly keeping her hands moving with the minuscule details of the party. She swore she would not let it have this night.

"Everything is done now," she screamed at it. "You can't undo what is done!" She ran out of the kitchen and ran upstairs to ready herself.

In the shower the Hate joined her, crowding her into a corner, pushing, shoving. It turned off the cold water and she screamed again as she felt the scalding hot water pouring onto her body. She tried to reach the faucets, but it was there between her and the wall, fencing her in with its attempt to prevent her reaching them. Finally she succeeded, and she leaned against the wall, moaning with the agony of struggle and pain.

She dressed slowly, as the Hate sat on the bed and laughed. Its hostility was all around her, there was an oppressive weight of it in the air. She could sense it, taste it, smell it; yet she could not make it take substance. All day it had been building, building until now she gasped for air with the heaviness of it.

She seated herself at the dressing table. Her powder puff, already dipped in powder, was in her hand, but the Hate held it motionless; stopped as a movie is stopped into a still life picture, complete, yet not complete in its tale.

She gazed at the mirror, her eyes searching the turnabout reflection as though hoping to see the Hate in form. A shiver went through her, for there was nothing, nothing but her own reflection, yet she sat looking, searching.

The door opened and Jeff stuck his head into the room.

"Almost ready? Everyone will be here soon. Come down and have a drink with me, Okay?"

Nadine's eyes slowly turned to Jeff. She had kept him unaware of what had been happening all these months. Her eyes remained clouded for a moment and then cleared.

"I'll—I'll be right down," she answered. Turning back to the mirror she raised the puff—and was able to pat her nose with it. She stood up, putting the puff slowly down. She drew a deep breath and left the room, closing the door to keep the Hate inside, although she knew it would not help.

She could hear the guests arriving as she crossed the vestibule.

"Damn, I won't even have time for a drink first," she thought as she turned back to let them in.

Sally and Bill were the first ones to arrive. Breathless, as always, Sally came in, going directly to the living room without pausing to take off her coat. Marching herself to the table with the hors d'oeuvres she Oohed and Aahed over it, taking a nibble here and there as proof of its appetizing looks.

By the time Nadine had retrieved Sally's coat, and hung it in the closet the next guest had arrived. For a few minutes she was kept busy and so was Jeff, hanging coats and murmuring the words of greeting that came automatically without thought.

Her mind was not on her guests. She could not get the heavy feeling of fear to leave her. As soon as she could she escaped from the room to the kitchen where she leaned weakly against the counter. Waves of sickness kept rising in her, flooding through her.

"Oh, God," she thought. "What is the matter with me? I feel as though I am going to die."

She stood there a moment more gathering her strength for the night's ordeal. Then taking another platter of canapes, she pushed through the swinging door to face her guests.

No sooner had she entered the room when panic stricken she stood there, the tray held precariously tipped in her hands. It came in wave after wave, strong, stronger than ever.

"Tonight's the night!" The thought drummed into her head. "It is going to be tonight."

The Hate swept across the room smothering her with galelike force. It lifted the tray of canapes from her with a quick surge of power. They fell to the floor. Everyone turned to look and she quickly bent to hide the whiteness that masked her face. In the confusion of hands trying to help her pick up the food and debris, she felt the Hate break

and little chills of silent laughter took its place. The laughter was almost as bad as the Hate for it mocked and derided her. As she stood up her eyes quickly searched the room over the heads of those still helping her. Who had come in while she was in the kitchen? She kept searching the faces of the guests as they sauntered about the room, looking for some sign of the mockery, something that might show the Hate that pursued her with such malice.

Pat and Cheri had come in. Cheri had been Jeff's girl before the quick summer romance that ended in Nadine and Jeff's marriage. Linda and Gus? Gus was Jeff's partner. Florence and Stan, her husband's parents, had arrived too. Florence came over and hugged her. Stan handed her their gift. As she opened it, she thought to herself, "Funny, I'm like two different people... I never knew a person could carry on a normal conversation while her mind was on other things." The gift was a beautifully matched string of pearls for her and a matching set of pearl cuff links for Jeff. She turned around automatically as Florence booked the clasp on them and kissed her saying, "... these are for the girl my son loves."

Nowhere was there a sign of the Hate. It had left the room quietly as though it had never existed. But Nadine knew better. She knew it was waiting, somewhere.

She had to tell someone. But not just anyone. It had to be someone she could count on, someone who would care. Her eyes sought out Florence.

Florence would understand. She was close to Jeff as a mother, and close to Nadine as a mother-in-law. Nadine could not tell Jeff, could not bring herself to tell him. But she had to tell someone. She had to tell Florence.

"... so there I was in the middle of Main Street and the light had already turned red so I couldn't go back, and there you were holding onto a lamppost, crying, Nadine. Whatever was wrong, anyway? ... The words registered as if they were words from another planet. She looked up to see Linda standing beside her with a cocktail glass in her hand, expectant—waiting for an answer. The room was silent, everyone was waiting for her reply. Even Jeff had come to stand beside her, looking at her strangely.

"Hey, sweet? How come you never mentioned it?" he asked concernedly.

"Oh, it wasn't very important," she answered. "I just got a little dizzy all of a sudden."

She felt the Hate sweep back into the room again, laughing. It was mocking her, laughing at her excuse.

She turned to Jeff and smiled up at him.

"Darling, let's have some champagne now," she whispered.

Jeff grinned and put his arm around her saying, dramatically, "I guess this is the moment we have all been waiting for."

Stan walked over to them. In his hand was a bottle of the champagne Florence had saved from that they served at the wedding. He popped the cork and poured a silver goblet full. Taking the goblet from his father, Jeff turned to Nadine. The guests were all around them, smiling, smiling.

"Darling, this champagne was saved for today, remember?"

"Yes, I remember. I love you more now than I ever did then," she said quietly.

"That's how it should be. Me too."

He held the goblet out to her. "You first. Then I will drink from it just as we did one year ago, to show how we'll always share things in life."

Not everything. Not the horror. Her mind whispered. But she took the goblet and drank deeply of it.

As she started to drink, she sensed the hatred near.

She couldn't take much more. She had to talk to someone—had to seek help. She spotted Florence. She would have to ask Florence's help. There was no one else. She lifted the goblet and drank.

She felt the Hate tear into her, twisting her insides and tearing, tearing at her, and the necklace seemed to tighten—tighten unbearably. She gagged and choked as the liquid burned a path down her spasmed throat and she knew it wasn't a love cup, but a Hate cup. As the room swam around her, she fell and Jeff crouched over her. She saw shock and concern mingled on his face and she saw the Hate, saw it unmasked.

In a way, it was almost good to have it over with, to know finally whose Hate was that strong. It was a relief to see the look that could kill and as the darkness closed in the last thing she heard came like a shadowy whisper over the mocking laughter ringing in her ears, saying... "Now—my son is mine again!"

Beginning a new regular feature. An all-time great fantasy writer gives us a peek behind scenes. This time: a glimpse of Ralph Milne Farley, author of the Radio Man novels.

E. HOFFMANN PRICE'S



玉塔

The fantasy fiction world moves into the age of nostalgia. Amateur and semi-professional publishers memorialize favorite authors of long ago. Dealers offer, at fancy prices, letters, first draft MSS, photos, and other sacred relics of deceased writers. College students submit these based upon studies of outstanding performers in this field.

And then, there is much reminiscence of "The Golden Days" which began when, in 1923, *Weird Tales* opened strange gateways, revealing lands of wonder. We know when the era began. Disagreement arises only as to its termination. No one questions that it has ended.

Well, hardly anyone.

I beg leave to point out a factor apparently overlooked: the reader himself and how he changes with the years.

"They don't build them that way anymore," is the sorrowful summing up when speaking, for instances, of cars or of houses. Though the words are not the same, the spirit is no different when there is talk of fiction written during the Golden Days. No one bothers to add, "Neither do they read them that way, anymore."

We who met *Weird Tales* in its beginning entered new lands. *Argosy* and others had for years offered the once-in-a-while story of the supernatural, the uncanny, the tale of terror. Never before had there been a magazine devoted wholly to the folks and the folk-ways of "across the border."

Heraclitus said, "You can not step twice into the same river, for fresh waters ever flow about you."

Long ago, driving out of Tucson, Arizona, I saw for the first time, the sun rise from the Maricopa Desert. Over the years, I have made that drive, time and again, sunrise and sunset—Picacho Peak to Gila Bend—the grim, iron purple shadows of sterile black peaks—tall sahuaros, arms reaching skyward—ash-

rose and sullen garnet crags—the red-crested ocatilla stalks, stirring in the breeze, like cobras when they hear the Hindu's flute—but, it is never like that first crossing, early that morning of April, 1934.

Niether you nor I can again discover the lands of wonder packed between the covers of early issues of *Weird Tales*. With all the skill won over the years, the few writers surviving from the Golden Days could not infuse their work with the ancient wonder that they used to feel. For too long, they have fraternized with the folk who live across the border: they are somewhat too much at home.

Could a newcomer discover, and write with wonder in the soul?

Don't know. Find one and ask him. Or her.

We recall the days before *Weird Tales*.

The newcomer can not recall a time when there was not fantasy fiction. Neither does he remember when there was no T. V., no radio. Me, I remember wiping the soot from inside the glass "chimneys" of the kerosene lamps which lighted the farmhouse.

Wherever I go, I hear it said that there were giants in those Golden Days.

It was easier to be a Giant then. Today, you got to bust yourself to be even a five-foot-seven, junior grade Goliath. There was much good work then. There was also a lot of stuff you couldn't sell today. I know. I wrote some of it. I was embarrassed and unhappy as I re-read many a pound of tear-sheet and carbon copy, in trying to find a dozen yarns for reprinting in a hard cover anthology. Some of the freshman composition muck I had written—and, had sold!—I must have led a clean, Christian life to have got away with it. In fact, a lot of us must have led clean lives, in those Golden Days.

I am not here to analyze, evaluate, criticize, nor to decide which was Literature, and which was Krap. My chore is to poke the ash-veiled embers of the past, and invite you to watch the sparks of memory as they're wafted up-

ward; to tell of the fantasy fiction business of long ago. First, I'll say a thing or two, not mentioning names, about current fiction. As to style and treatment, some of it is better than a lot of what the Golden Days offered.

It has to be.

Readers and Writers: the Golden Days are here and now. Just as they were, forty years ago and more. Now that that is settled—"Sing, Muse, of days remembered and of those nearly forgotten."

Many—perhaps most—of those who appeared in the old time fantasy magazine were amateurs in the true sense of the term. Although they got cash for their stories, those writers were lovers of the art and the craft. For them, writing was a mode of self-expression, a creative work, a hobby. When a full-time professional did a story for *Weird Tales*, it was for the fun of it. Rates were low. Payment often was long delayed. And this brings to memory one who went to extremes in writing for the love of it. His legal, his business, and his political activities make this self-evident.

His clients knew him as Roger Sherman Hoar. His yarns appeared under the byline, Ralph Milne Farley, a synthetic composed of his mother's maiden name, and other family names. I had long addressed him as "RMF" before I learned that this was not his "real" name. He was well known in *Argosy* and other publications before *Weird Tales* created the lands of wonder.

Although it appears that RMF specialized in fantasy, only a dedicated researcher could determine the scope of his fictioneering. It was because of one of his most improbable projects that I finally met him. Autumn of 1934, RMF was plotting the number three episode of the Jim Grant series of lead novels for *True Gang* magazine.

What made this even more incredible was the rate: one half of one cent a word.

Remember that this was long ago, when the gangster was glamorized, instead of being realistically presented as an extortioner, pimp, narcotics-pusher, protection-peddler, and all-around hoodlum.

In the number three episode, Jim Grant and his henchmen were in trouble because of a rival who had connections in San Francisco's Chinatown. My good friend, Otis Adelbert Kline, asked me to team up with RMF, and do the Chinatown stuff. RMF would furnish the plot and all the series tags and characterizations; he would integrate my first draft with the story's predecessors. He had already written the opening chapters. As for transplanting a phase of Chicago gangland's operations in San Francisco's Chinatown, I needn't be a stickler for plausibility. No holds barred, except that certain key characters must not be killed off. And, naturally, those must be presented sympathetically—the gangster-hero, however far outside the law, had to be *simpatico*—a really nice guy!

I repeat, the rate was one half of one cent a word, and RMF and I would split the micro-check. Writing for the love of it—see what I mean?

Times were bad in 1934, but not THAT bad! After a long walk, devoted to much cogitation, I composed a statement entitled "THOUGHTS WHILE STROLLING", giving reasons why my school boy experiences with Chinese lottery and San Jose Chinatown were inadequate. That my knowledge of things Chinese had been grossly exaggerated. It included only such hilarious events as a gun battle in which members of warring tongs blasted away until they ran out of ammunition—net result, one warrior scratched by a flying shaver of wood!

I had never met a highbinder, a hatchet man, or a slave-girl, except in the newspaper columns, and I'd never been in an opium den, and I'd not recognize yen shi (pipe scrapings) if you fed me a spoonful.

All that I said was used against me. He declared that my entire statement indicated a broad and deep knowledge of Chinatown, and of the Oriental mind. I set to work. The job was fun. Even more so was the correspondence incidental to the job. The exchange of letters was as much an expression of sociability, good fellowship, of whimsy and the joy of living, as it was story gimmicks and story structure.

This was a splendid build-up for our meeting, June 1935, when RMF came to San Francisco to attend to some legal matters.

My wife and I met him at the Place Hotel, and drove him down the "Peninsula" to our home in the hills, a couple of miles outside Redwood City, and overlooking San Francisco Bay.

Beginning as disaster on the hoof, 1934 had ended in a landslide of sales. We bought an ultra-modest cottage, one third down and payments too trifling to be a problem; also, a second hand Terraplane to replace that horror of a Model A Ford. All this, tick-tick, and now, a distinguished guest, a veteran fictioneer. I was having Golden Days of my own...after a couple of grim and sticky years...

RMF was not far from six feet tall, and lean, angular of face. Whether naturally swarthy, or deeply tanned, I could not decide. His head of hair, casually flung back yet all in order, was quite black, with a few white ones as

accents. The eyes, I think, were blue-gray—how the years play tricks with memory!—but whatever their color, they, like the man himself, were all alive, magnetic, so very vital and, exceedingly friendly. His presence was the realization of his many letters.

A detail persists in my memory: when he mentioned home and family, he did not speak of "Elva" or of "my wife." Instead, he used the old fashioned mode, giving it grace and charm when he referred to "Mrs. Hoar." He pronounced the name in two syllables, with an ever so slight yet unmistakable severance, "Ho-ar." Far from stilted or formal, his expression was so natural that any other would have seemed less than appropriate.

His voice, his enunciation subtly suggested that this lady rated somewhat higher than other ladies. It was fascinating to hear the intonation, and catch the lilt, the cadence, the affectionate savoring of the name he spoke. The most fragile of nuances—yet, living with me, these more than thirty-five years. . . .

My best guess is that RMF was then nudging fifty. His vitality, sparkle, his relishing of every shade of word and thought and experience, might have made him seem younger than he actually was.

I have no recollection of our food and drink.

We said nothing memorable, except for one phase, during which he told us of a strange encounter, in Maine or Vermont. My wife and I were deeply impressed. I suggested that he had exchanged words with an Adept, a Master, a Mahatma RMF neither agreed, nor contradicted.

I can not reconstruct that simple, sober narrative. I know only that the mood and the feeling, rather than the details, and such impact that those moments are important in my recollection of RMF.

The following evening, we prowled Chinatown. I pointed out the various landmarks of our story: here was where Yut Li cut loose with his sawed off shotgun—there was where beautiful Tien Yuk made her final, fatal play, to sacrifice herself and warn Jim Grant of danger—

We put in a few hours at the Chinese opera then, back to the Place Hotel, where we took leave of RMF.

Later, that year, he revised a New Orleans crime novelette which had become unsalable each time I reworked it. His touch did it and we split the check. Better yet, I had learned a thing or two.

After some years of the most comradely keeping in touch with each other, we lost contact. The years raced along, bringing wars, disasters, fresh starts, new directions. . . . Writing from New Zealand, Thomas G. L. Cockcroft gave me RMF's address. Yes, I'd lost it. May, 1963, I wrote, saying that I was driving to the east coast, and that I anticipated most eagerly having a few words with him.

Mrs. Hoar answered for him, telling me that in 1951, Roger had a coronary and that since then, his health had been failing. That until 1960, he had practiced law, with a Milwaukee firm. That now he saw only members of the family. This was the jolt, the slug! Sadly, I read on:

Roger had missed both his Harvard, and his Harvard Law School 50th reunions. One of their grandsons was graduated from Annapolis, class of '62. A younger grandson had appointments for both Annapolis and West Point, to enter in 1963. The lad would probably choose the former. Roger, she added, was a retired Army colonel—this I had never suspected!—whereas she came from a long line of whaling captains.

Comes now a mish-mash of statements which I can not guarantee. RMF had for some years been associated with Bucyrus-Erie, an Ohio Corporation which manufactured heavy machinery. He had served in the Massachusetts State Legislature. He had an outstanding knowledge and experience in the physical sciences.

Several years after getting Mrs. Hoar's gracious letter—she went to far more trouble than my message merited!—I learned that a Canadian fantasy fancier had learned from one in Great Britain, that Ralph Milne Farley—Roger Sherman Hoar—had died. In lieu of condolences, I set down these lines of appreciation, and my happy memories of long ago.

There is so much that I do not know of RMF, and so little that I do know, that, as one fan pointed out, I really had nothing to write. This in a way is entirely correct. Yet this I must set forth!

That RMF was a good friend and a good comrade during my early professional years. I learned some things from him. The words we wrote and the words we spoke to each other are long gone—but I still recall the man, and picture him, however time-blurred the image is. There is nothing clear, today, except that the few hours we spent, in 1935, remain alive and vivid, so that details are immaterial. This persistence in my memory, I think, is something which speaks for itself, and tells what manner of man this, "R.M.F." was.

Such memories are the reward of my years.

To him who is moved to say that there could really not be much substance in so few hours of face to face association, I offer these Chinese lines: *This hour can not return: a shred of time is worth a bar of gold.*

How Far Must a Man Go—to Feed a Pet?



THE RAT AND THE SNAKE

by A.E. van Vogt

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT E. JENNINGS

Mark Gray's main pleasure in life was feeding rats to his pet python. He kept the python in a blocked-off room in the old house in which he lived alone. Each mealtime, he would put the rat in a narrow tunnel he had rigged. At the end of the tunnel was an opening. The rat, going through the narrow space into the bright room beyond, automatically spring-locked a gate across the opening.

It would then find itself in the room with the python, with no way of escape.

Mark liked to listen to its squeaks as it became aware of its danger, and then he would hear its mad scurrying to escape the irresistible enemy. Sometimes, he watched the exciting scene through a plate glass window, but he ac-

tually preferred the sound to the sight, conjuring his own delectable mental pictures, always from the viewpoint of the python.

During World War III, the O.P.A. forgot to put a ceiling price on rats. The catching of rats got no special priority. Rat catchers were drafted into the armed forces as readily as the other people. The supply of rats grew less. Mark was soon reduced to catching his own rats; but he had to work for a living in the ever leaner times of war, so that there were periods of time when the python was fed infrequently.

Then one day Mark, ever searching, glimpsed some white rats through a window of an old commercial style building. He peered in eagerly, and though the room was dimly lighted with war-time regulation bulbs, he was able to make out that it was a large room with hundreds of cages in it, and that each of the cages contained rats.

He made it to the front of the building at a dead run. In pausing to catch his breath, he noticed the words on the door: CARRON LABORATORIES, Research.

He found himself presently in a dim hallway of a business office. Because everybody was clearly working twice as hard because of the war, it took a little while to attract the attention of one of the women employees; and there were other delays such as just sitting and waiting while it seemed as if he was the forgotten man. But after all those minutes, he was finally led into the office of a small, tight-faced man, who was introduced as Eric Plode, and who listened to his request and the reason for it.

When Mark described his poor, starving python, the small man laughed a sudden, explosive laughter. But his eyes remained cold. Moments later, he curtly rejected the request.

Whereupon, he made a personal thing out of it. "And don't get any ideas," he snarled. "Stay away from our rats. If we catch you filching around here, we'll have the law on you."

Until those words were spoken, Mark hadn't really thought about becoming a rat-stealing criminal. Except for his peculiar love for his python, he was a law-abiding, tax-paying nobody.

As Mark was leaving, Plode hastily sent a man to follow him. Then, smiling grimly, he walked into an office that had printed on the door: HENRY CARRON, Private.

"Well, Hank," he said gaily, "I think we've got our subject."

Carron said, "This had better be good, since we can't even get prisoners of war assigned us for the job."

The remark made Plode frown a little. He had a tendency toward ironic thoughts, and he had often thought recently, "Good God, they're going to use the process on millions of the unsuspecting enemy after we get it tested, but they won't give us a G.D. so-and-so to try it out on because of some kind of prisoner of war convention."

Aloud, he said smugly, "I suppose by a stretch of the imagination you could call him human."

"That bad?"

Plode described Mark and his hobby, finished, "I suppose it's a matter of point of view. But I won't feel any guilt, particularly if he sneaks over tonight and with criminal intent tries to steal some of our rats." He grinned mirthlessly. "Can you think of anything lower than a rat stealer?"

Henry Carron hesitated, but only for moments. Millions of people were dead and dying, and a test absolutely had to be made on a human being. Because if something went wrong on the battlefield, the effect of surprise might be lost with who knew what repercussions.

"One thing sure," he nodded, "there'll be no evidence against us. So go ahead."

It seemed to Mark, as he came stealthily back that night, that these people with their thousands of rats would never miss the equivalent of one rat a week or so. He was especially pleased when he discovered that the window was unlocked, and that the menagerie was unguarded. No doubt, he thought good humoredly, baby sitters for rats were in scarce supply because of war-time worker shortage.

The next day, he thrilled again to the familiar sound of a rat squeaking in fear of the python. Towards evening, his phone rang. It was Eric Plode.

"I warned you," said the small man in a vicious tone. "Now, you must pay the penalty."

Plode felt better for having issued the warning. "Be it on his own soul," he said sanctimoniously. "if he's there."

Mark hung up, contemptuous. Let them try to prove anything.

In his sleep that night, he seemed to be suffocating. He woke up, and he was not lying on his bed but instead was on a hard floor. He groped for the light switch but could not find it. There was a bright rectangle of light about twenty feet away. He headed for it.

Crash! A gate slammed shut behind him as he emerged.

He was in a vast room, larger than anything he had ever seen. Yet it was vaguely familiar. Except for its size it resembled the room in which he kept his python.

On the floor in front of him, an object that he had noticed and regarded as some sort of a leathery rug thicker than he was tall, stirred, and moved toward him.

Realization came suddenly, horrendously.

He was the size of a rat. This was the python slithering across the floor with distended jaws.

Mad squealing as Mark Gray experienced the ultimate thrill of the strange method by which he had enjoyed life for so many years . . . Experienced it this one and only time from the viewpoint of the rat.



DEPARTMENT OF

pointed tales

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM KIRK

BRUCE

by Sallitha Grey

Once upon a time, dragon-killing was the biggest sport in England. But the dragons, who weren't very hot for fun and games, decided things were getting out of hand and emigrated. Some just flew across the English Channel (whereupon the French took up the great British pastime). A few went to Argentina. A large group went to America, which hadn't been discovered yet and was relatively free of freaks in tin cans on horses with lances and all that. But most of the dragons settled in parts of Europe. One of these dragons was named Bruce.

Now Bruce was sick of all the other dragons kidding him about his name, so he set out on his own. Quite by accident, he wound up in Transylvania. Since the peasants were plump and other dragons apparently avoided the place, Bruce was fat and happy for about a month—until the first full moon.

Dragons, you see, are sensible and follow the habits of the people who feed them, so Bruce worked in the daytime and slept at night. He was understandably annoyed when he was awakened on the night of the full moon by a loud howl from near the entrance of his cave and he grumbled as he peered out. There sat a wolf in peasant's clothing.

Bruce blinked, but the wolf was still there. So like a true dragon, Bruce let out a good fiery belch. Now, the peasants in Transylvania are inclined to be garlicky, and Bruce had snacked late that night, so the wolf was overpowered by his breath and burned to death. But all Bruce saw was a charred peasant, and he resolved to consult an eye-doctor.

Just then a huge bat flew into the cave, perched on Bruce's back and bit him on the neck.

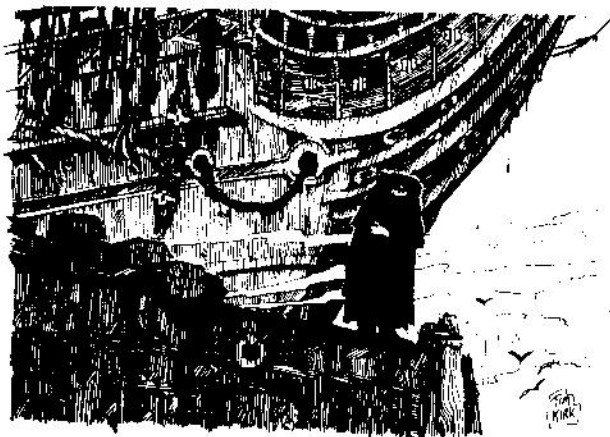
Bruce turned his head with a great roar and glimpsed a pallid man in a cloak gnawing his neck. At that, Bruce panicked. Freaks in tin cans were bad enough, but cloaked men who bit dragons were too much. He shook loose his agitator and flew off, back to the dragon colony in Stockholm.

"Boys," he said as he arrived. "Guess who dropped in on me tonight!"



EMBARKATION OF EVIL

by W. S. Coburn Jr.



The blanket of fog lay thick and strangling on the harbor. Robed in the swirling vapor, the dark figure drew closer to the ancient ship that seemed suspended between the dank billowing shrouds. He leaped silently onto the deck of the vessel and stole noiselessly into the forward hold hatchway.

The agent did his job well. The large boxes were stowed in even rows, readily accessible. His efficiency would never be proclaimed, however, for even now his cooling, bloodless body awaited day and discovery in the dingy office. The Baron exulted as he lay down on the mouldering earth in the first box and lowered the heavy lid. Soon he would be in reach of the more heavily populated areas of Europe. This time there would be no mistake.

At what he guessed to be midnight or close to it, he heard heavy boots walking the deck above. The captain

returning, no doubt. As the tide once again reached flood, the creaking of block and tackle and rattle of chain indicated the ship was leaving its Black Sea port.

After a time, in the black wooden confines of his vampire refuge, the Baron once again sensed the approaching night. Catlike stealth carried him through the blackness of the hold onto the spray blown deck. Past several still figures gazing intently out on the dark sea he crept until at last he came up behind the helmsman. The bloodlust was strong. The Baron leaped ferociously at the broad back of the sailor, only to crash heavily into the great wheel. Amazed he realized he had passed completely through the man.

A low chuckle made the maddened vampire whirl fiercely to face a large man in archaic sailing dress. "Welcome, Meinheer. I see that you and I serve the same Master. I am Captain Van der Decken and the ship you have entered upon. . . . Meinheer, have you ever heard of *Der Fliegende Hollander*?"

SMOKE

by Leo Tifton



In a cave at the edge of the Desert of Salt Tears there dwelt a seer of such fame and accomplishment that many knew his name though they lived far beyond the desert's borders. And to the seer's dwelling place there came daily, pilgrims whom he turned away, having vowed never again to tell the future for any man.

One day there came to him a young man in the raiment of a desert warrior but the seer knew him for a king and a man of great bravery. "Turn me not away," said the king.

"For years, O King, I have turned away every man who sought me." His voice was solemn and quiet, yet as commanding as the thunder of the distant seas upon rocks.

"Do you so easily pierce my disguise?" shouted the king. "You are indeed a prophet. I am determined that you should tell my fortune now, more than ever."

The seer gazed upon the man and knew how great he was, a compassionate man of much wisdom who could lead a people to prosperity and peace. But in his soft voice the seer said, "I have ceased to tell men the future. Even kings."

"But I must know," protested the king. And each time the seer refused him, the king asked again and again until far in the night when the seer realized he could not sway the king.

So the seer gathered kindling and built a fire of prophecy that in its smoke he might see this young king's future. And the smoke grew thick and blank so that within it there took shape the phantom form of the city of the king and the king himself, still young, no more than a month of days older. And the smoke showed the army of the king and the armies of his enemies. And the armies of his enemies pounded at the walls of the city, over sweeping it, slaying the soldiers of the city and, at last, the young and valiant king.

The seer stared at the rising smoke and thought of others who had come to ask him of the future. He recalled the vow he had made and the reasons for the vow.

Looking up at the king he said, "I see a destiny of greatness and a reign of greatness and plenty, of prosperity and peace over a happy and blessed people."

And the king heard and, satisfied, he left. So for a long time the seer sat in his cave as the fire died and the smoke drifted away. And when it was gone, he raised his voice and cried out a great curse against the darkness of the night.

In a chaotic region left over from the realm of the demons who held sway before the coming of man's gods, Cromek found the Tower—and a sorcerer who used him like chattel for his magic.

TOWER OF BLOOD

by David A English

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVE FRITZ

The cries of his pursuers, deprived by distance of all humanity, drifted up the mountainside. Like the baying of hounds. Oh, very like. For the time being he crouched in the sparse concealment of a narrow copse and watched Laxil's mamelukes wander aimlessly over the lower slope.

Cromek was not encouraged. They would pick up his trail before long. And soon it would be their strength against his—and they were many...

Maybe this would teach him better to avoid the snares of women, he reflected bitterly. Although it was a little late to be making maxims for future guidance. The mystery-priests, most likely, had all the maxims he was going to need.

He only hoped Laxil would deal as sternly with his deceitful concubine. Small chance of that, though. She was wonderfully sly and had probably already persuaded the old fool that Cromek had led her astray. Cromek laughed, not pleasantly.

As he watched, the horsemen gathered into a tight squadron once more. Having picked up his trail, they rode into the pass.

Cromek abruptly brought his thoughts back to the present. He quickly determined on a final sleight to gain time.

Slapping the flank of his weary steed, he sent the animal galloping down the main trail. When Laxil's men emerged from the pass, the horse would be out of sight. Perhaps they would follow the false trace for a while. He doubted it.

With hope or without it, Cromek ran to the mouth of a raw-edged

cleft that split the side of the looming cliff. Even if it led nowhere, at least it was narrow and would be an advantageous place to stand and sell his life dearly.

He proceeded cautiously up the slide of scree that formed a kind of floor to the cleft. The debris was treacherously loose, and he did not want to start a rock-slide that would persist after his passing and betray him.

A change in the quality of his pursuer's voices warned him that they had emerged from the pass. He cursed. He could not reach the upper end of the cleft before they came abreast of its lower opening and were in a position to observe him.

In the seconds that remained, he wedged himself into a narrow fissure. It did not completely conceal his big body, but he hoped the broken shadows would distort his outline enough so he would not be noticed.

Cromek looked around, surveying the possibilities, which were few enough. At the upper opening of the cleft, half embedded in broken rocks and gravel, stood a great boulder. He decided that he wanted that boulder at his back if he must stand and fight. If they succumbed to his trick, however, he would try to lose himself in the mountains. That was all he had in the way of plans.

Damn Laxil's worn—

Down below, Cromek's pursuers wheeled and milled. Anxiously, their quarry peered and cocked his ear, trying to discern their intentions. Their voices reached him loud but incomprehensible, confused by echoes and the singing of the blood in his ears.

He could not tell what decided them. Perhaps his horse, with misguided loyalty, had returned along the trail. Or some sleuth, too wily by half, had noticed that the hoofprints were not those of an animal bearing a man's weight.

Whatever it was, his pursuers suddenly dismounted and began to climb the narrow path.

Cromek broke from his covert and scrambled toward the boulder, the goal he had set himself. Facing Laxil's dozen was no pleasant prospect under any circumstances, but braced against that stout backstop he would make a moiety of them bleed before they reaped his head to gratify Laxil's stupid jealousy.

When he attained the boulder, he turned to look back. They had come about half-way. But now their steps were slowing.

They saw the advantage he enjoyed, such as it was. And each one privately was beginning to fear that he might not be among those who went back to receive Laxil's praise. The pursuit was turning into one of those ludicrous races where the prize goes to the loser.

In his impatience with its slow approach, Cromek turned from the creeping doom below him. In the shadowy valley on the other side of the ridge, he saw age-blackened ruins of wall that poked up through the brown, hummocky grass, and a stark tower which, even to his longing gaze, looked wicked and menacing.

And even this dismal prospect, gods had decreed, he was not to attain. No need even to think of the broad, blue vistas of plains beyond that, or the snow-covered peaks of the farther reaches of the mountain range. These were lands of escape, lands of freedom and never-dying; lands, if that must be, which he would never enter. . . .

He turned to the on-coming swordsmen of Laxil and drew his sword. He shook it at them and whirled it about his head in the high sunlight until it was as a glory around him. He raved at them and cursed them, calling down bloody death for those who fell under its glancing beams.

Slowly and more slowly still they came on. And Cromek grew even more furious that he should get his bane from such niddings. Through mere numbers they would overcome him, and what renown could they expect from that?

In the end it was not cunning or valor or might in battle that saved him. It was sheer rage and despair that finally inspired him, a will to survive that was ravaging and mad in its intensity.

No man in his right sense would have attempted what he did. No one lacking a lunatic's demon-given strength would have succeeded.

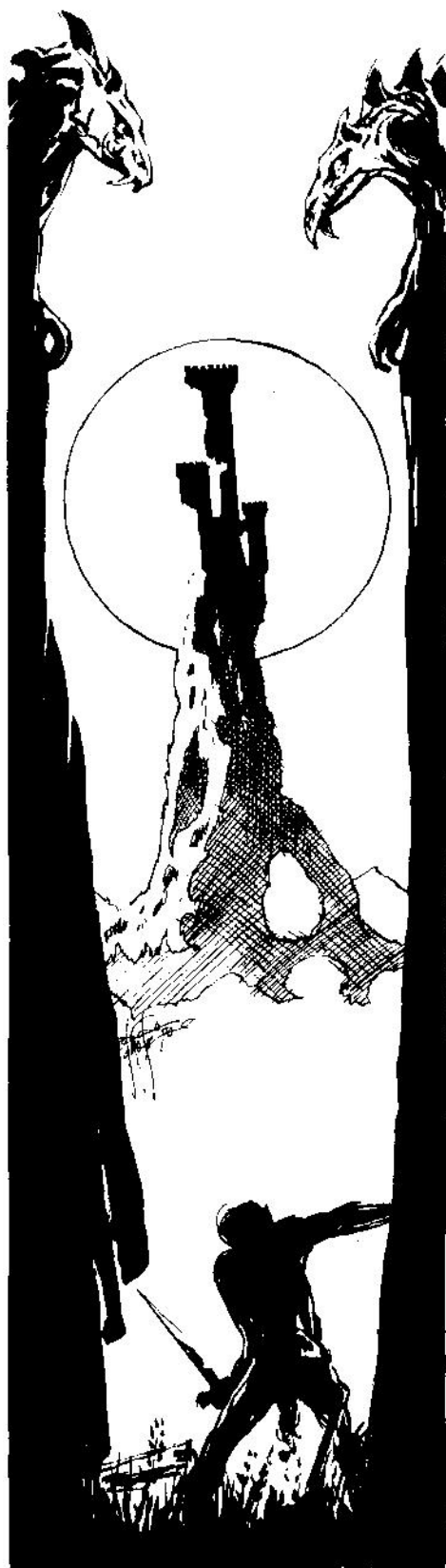
In all the region around him there was only one missile sufficient for his blazing wrath. The boulder itself, the landmark on which he had first fixed his eye from far below.

At first he grappled with it face to face, as one who would heave it up above his head and hurl it down. He was as crazy as that with rage! But even Cromek's mighty back was not adequate for that heroic feat.

But he felt it wobble! He felt it move!

It rocked—as a loose tooth might twist in its socket.

As by a levin-bolt of revelation, vistas of possibility were illuminated for him. They spread out like those regions of freedom he had a moment before beheld. Men experiencing far less in the way of illumina-



tion have claimed unmediated converse with the gods.

Cromek leaped to the opposite side of the boulder and set his back against it. He dug in his heels and heaved.

Muscles of back and legs knotted like ship's cables under his coppery skin. The veins lay like tangled ropes on his brow and sweat slicked his straight, black hair to gleaming rat-tails.

The bones of his back crackled audibly.

One more effort—only one more... and then another.

"By the gods," he croaked, "it moves—it gives—way—"

Nearly blind and numb with the titanic expense of strength, he hardly knew what progress he made—if any at all. The air seemed suffused with murky redness, or did the very veins of his eye-stones leak under the pressure?

Then there was a sudden great rending like the bursting of his vitals. He thought the effort had been too much, had killed him: for in void and emptiness he floated, permeated with unendurable ecstasy.

The return of his spirit found him stretched on his back under a night sky throbbing with monstrous stars. Thunder and squealing filled his ears, which might have been the tumbling of the boulder and the dying of Laxil's men... or only ghosts of his disordered senses.

Slowly the blackness leaked out of the sky. The monstrous stars faded.

Cromek, staggering a little, descended to the shambles. Broken bodies sprawled about like pieces of a chess game that had ended in a fit of temper. The boulder, horribly smeared, choked the narrow entrance of the cleft.

It was grisly work rummaging among the mashed company. Nevertheless, he would need provisions for his journey. And he thought it fitting that Laxil should render up the parting gift he had so ostentatiously forgotten. Cromek was far too familiar with the red fruit of battle to let superstitious dread stay him.

But something very like terror lunged in his guts when a voice nearby moaned out:

"Cromek... strange one... hated of the gods... you will die...."

In a moment he regained his composure.

"How is this?" he asked. "You still live? But not for long, I think."

How did the crumpled thing on the ground draw breath for speech? Its skull was soft and pulpy, a single great bruise, and the tormented eyes stared divergently from puffed slits.

"You will not out-live me long," the thing panted, each word a pink bubble bursting. "You dare not return the way you came, and beyond the ridge lies the valley of the sorcerer Morophla, and the hellcat Uathacht."

"Be quiet, man," Cromek growled. "Get your dying done."

"I will be silent long enough. You will pay for my death. You will suffer worse than I. Evil dwells in that valley, in that tower. Terrible evil. Monstrous forms and hellish tortures long drawn out. Ugly, ugly. Vile transformations of body and spirit. Things hideously awry. You will suffer it all. You will pay for my death. You will—will—"

The pain of his massive injuries overwhelmed him suddenly. His voice dissolved in blubbering.

"Now slay me, Cromek! Quickly!"

Cromek bit his lip, then picked up the man's sword and struck off his head.

Little enough had Cromek liked the valley on first seeing it from above. He liked it still less as its ugly slopes rose above his head. The threats of a man half a corpse did not make it more attractive.

Almost willfully, crawling weeds impeded him. The tough, tangled stalks clung to his ankles with a kind of lechery.

Even the rocks and pebbles had a kind of inherent wrongness. They seemed not to have sprung from any normal processes of weathering and flaking. They might have been formed in some long-gone age when even the powers of air and frost were different. They resembled the broken forms of dreams, the haunting shapes of delirium.

Of this sick stone were built the ruined walls that rose like the backs of snakes out of the long, yellow grass.

The air grew cold as he went lower. The sun hid behind the mountain range and let the valley sink in gloomy twilight. A clammy mist distilled itself from the heavy air to freight the landscape with dire ambiguity.

He didn't like it, walking blind into that suspicious terrain. In the sudden fog he could hardly make out the cruel tower that struck like a fist from a grave at the dismal sky.

Cromek unsheathed his sword. The weapon gave him no reassurance. It cut easily through the fog-phantoms that crowded close upon him—too easily to have any effect.

He preferred fighting something which, when cut, stayed cut.

Nearby, pebbles rattled on the path. But the mist was too thick; he could not see the spot where his ears placed the disturbance.

Which way was he going now? Which way out of this valley of nightmare? The filthy chill of the malefic fog penetrated his bones, causing a dolor like the remembrance of mortality.... What was that? Something panted close by.

"Who is it?" he challenged. "Man or devil, come no nearer—"

Squealing laughter. He heard the slithering movement of many bodies, supple as rats.

Something big and black fluttered past him and its stinking wing brushed his face. On its second pass he was ready for it and struck it out of the air with his sword.

Softly throbbing it lay at his feet. At first Cromek thought it was a man with a dark cloak crumpled about him. But the cloak was actually part of the creature, a leathery membrane that made its longer-than-human arms into the wings of a bat. Its face also was a bat's, a blunt snout; but there was human intelligence dying in its tiny red eyes.

He saw then that the valley was no natural place. It was part of the old domain—a chaotic region left over from the confused realm of the demons who held sway before the coming of man's gods.

The mist parted a little to reveal the terrible form that loomed over him.

Well, now he knew. He had been driven here by the soft threatening and prodding of shapes in the darkness—herded like a sheep by phantom dogs. The tower hung over him.

The door swung open. A figure stood outlined against the green, decaying glare from within.

Cromek saw no advantage in flight. Nor was it to his liking to be hunted down in the crawling fog, hounded by stinking bats.

Sword raised, he charged.

Light exploded in his face, a fierce glare that drove like cold iron through the portals of his eyes, deep into his brain, flooding it: and all sense, all impression rushed away from him... away... away...

For the second time in too brief an interval, Cromek had to drag together his scattered senses. At first only cool touches and confused sounds reached him in the humming void.

Then a pale oval framed in darkness moved across the quivering red veil that hung before his eyes.

He moved his hand through the veil. Strangely, it felt like many thicknesses of cobwebs. But that was only the tingling in his fingers. The redness cleared.

An avid face moved back from his, hung over him.

"You are awake," her husky voice informed him. "You are indeed strong—to recover so quickly."

Cromek, too sick to care, regarded her. He saw no need to act until he had better appraised the situation. He did not doubt it was bad, filthy bad.

"You are very self-possessed, aren't you?" the woman said. "You stir not, neither do you question me. You would press the burden of speech on me, is that it, dear Cromek?"

She laughed, lightly but not sweetly.

"You are surprised? But I know many things about you, not just your name. Am I not Uathacht?"

"Are you?" he said, and that made her laugh.

He knew that she was. A man more than half a corpse had promised him this meeting—and worse.

Tall and well-shapen, that was the fashion of her, and smooth of skin, which was like the snow drifted against a gravestone. Her hair was black and fragrant as the smoke of herbs that burn on a demon's altar. But her eyes: he was reminded of those nameless gems, dusky and translucent, employed by desert tribesmen in their malignant rites.

For all her comeliness, Cromek disliked her. The gaze she bent upon him was avid, too hungry to bode well. And he had heard ill rumors of her.

When he spoke it was more for relief of the discomfort he felt in her gaze than for desire of conversation with her.

"You have an ugly way of greeting wayfarers. It was not my intention to intrude, and had you not stricken me I would have passed quickly."

Uathacht bared small, white teeth. Perhaps she meant to smile, but there was no kindness in it.

"That would not have pleased me, Cromek," she purred. "But if the choice had been mine, a softer way would have been found of gaining your company."

"Then... there are others here?"

"One other. Now hush—he comes."

She pressed him back on the couch and closed his eyes with a pass of her pale, cold fingers.

The door opened with a soft hiss.



"Has he awakened?"

"Not yet, Morophla."

"That is as you say," he sneered. "I know your ways, lady."

When the man called Morophla laughed, it was not an expression of mirth. If he had mirth, it was thin and cruel as a blade, and he kept it within for his own pleasure. His laughter served only to indicate contempt for the one he addressed. A sharp expulsion of breath through his nostrils sufficed.

"Let him feign unconsciousness all he likes—crudely though he does it. But let him plainly understand that I can at will make the fiction a fact."

Uathacht said, "I see that my brother is pleased to have another on whom to hone his sharp tongue. Open your eyes, Cromek. Gaze on the author of your discomfort."

Cromek did as he was bidden, not gracefully. His smouldering glance engaged with that of the tall newcomer.

His eyes. Almost, Cromek's fell before them. A plenum, paradoxically, of emptiness harbored there. Cromek had seen their like only once before, in the eyes of a moon-priest of Ishth, who claimed to have shared that sphere's monthly decline into non-being. Morophla, too, had eyes that had been scoured by the obscene mysteries of the Void.

Warily, Cromek rose from his pallet. In a low crouch, like a wrestler stalking his adversary, he eased forward. He advanced dubiously, for he suspected the other's powers. But at least he would take their measure.

"Stop, Cromek," Uathacht said. "You cannot overcome him."

Morophla smiled sourly. "I know you regret that, lady. But he will not believe you—"

Cromek's huge hand shot out. He intended to tangle it in the black locks of the wizard's beard and haul him off balance.

He did not do that. His hand, extended to the length of his arm, closed on air several inches before the wizard's face. But the man had not moved at all!

Cromek jerked back from his unbalanced position. He had seen a comrade, a swordsman who had lost an eye, make similar errors. His own eyes seemed all right, although he was suddenly aware of an obscure malaise somewhere behind them. And yet, when he grabbed he was accustomed to getting—

Desperately, he lunged straight at his opponent, forgetting all caution, with his arms flung wide.

The lunge prolonged itself as in a nightmare, but he got no closer to the mocking form. Just in time, Cromek pulled up, barely avoiding a stunning collision with the wall.

Uathacht caught his hand. "Stop it! Can't you see he enjoys tormenting you?"

"The room is—twisted, is that it?" he growled.

"You know a great deal," she marvelled. "But, no, this is not one of those illusion chambers in which the mystery priests befool the initiated. Morophla tangles your seeing with his magic."

Morophla laughed, seeming to expel a bit of lint from his nostrils, and said, "While you are explaining matters to your dear friend, why not tell him what need we have of him?"

He added bitterly, "He must already divine yours."

Uathacht's eyes glittered with pain and anger. Cromek still did not like their crazy intensity, but he sensed that in her lay his only hope. He pressed her hand confidentially before he started again towards her brother.

"Again? Amusing as your antics are—"

Cromek could not properly hear what he then uttered. Guttural and sibilant at once, the strange syllables were instantly swallowed up in the rattling and chuckling of their own echo.

Instead of dying away, the echo mounted to an ear-shattering intensity. Cromek was enveloped by a formless, crushing pressure. The syllables themselves seemed to take substance and beat like the sea against him. He was borne back against the wall and held there.

"He is strong, Uathacht," the wizard commented. "I can feel the force he exerts against the words of power. There must be good blood in him."

Uathacht began haughtily, "Your thoughts flow always in one channel—" But her voice broke and she grew pale.

"It is well that it does—for both of us. You would not be half so Eckerish, lady, did I not strive to keep the pens filled. What would you be? Not white wanton flesh and rounded limbs of lust, no—"

"Hold your tongue!"

She turned from him, hands at ears; eyes wide with fright and pale lips that trembled.

"Bones and dust in some dry tomb!" raged Morophla. "That is all

we are, dear sister—save that I sustain us with my science. What good then your juices and your heated belly?"

Uathacht cringed under his words, then blubbered outright. With a howl, she fled the chamber.

Morophla turned to his captive. His strange eyes flashed.

"She hankers for you, man. It's been ages since she's had a strange man to her. So it galls her you should know that her plump flesh, which I doubt not she has shaken in your face, scarce belongs to her at all."

Cromek gazed at him blankly. The wizard flicked him sharply on the ear.

"Don't play at being stupid. You are not intelligent enough for it. You must know that the life in us, unnaturally prolonged, is but the stolen life of others."

"You are vampires!"

Morophla expelled, perhaps, an in-turning beard hair; he said: "There is an analogy, yes. But ours is not such a simple case. I prefer not to acquire, in the manner prescribed by legend, the vampire's ability to assimilate straightaway his victim's red life. Not at the price of assuming his limitations.

"No; I choose the more complicated method my science teaches me, although it needs red lakes of human life and innumerable complex operations. There are incubations and putrefactions and distillations; rare extracts to be divided out during the relevant phases of the moon. Elusive essences must be exposed, prior to re-combination, under various conditions to the streamings of certain nameless stars.

"Thus is prepared an amber elixir which has preserved our lives through such interminable ages that men hereabouts believe there has never been a time when we did not inhabit this lonesome tower."

Cromek shuddered. Mere vampirism had been homely by comparison.

"And that is why you must needs waylay travellers. . . ."

"Not exactly, my friend. Vast dungeons scooped out of the rock beneath this tower contain a population ample for my needs."

"Then what use am I to you?"

"Nothing so terrible as you might imagine. Lately—as time is seen by us—I have noticed that my herd grows feeble and anemic, the result of excessive in-breeding. Their blood has become as watery and degenerate as that of the ruling family of ancient Merula."

Morophla smiled tenderly at Cromek. "Well, in such event the effete aristocrat seeks an alliance with a younger, more vigorous house . . . and the cattle-breeder acquires . . . a stud animal. . . ."

"Yes—yes . . . I feel you struggling against the spell. What strength! What vigor!"

When the wizard said come, Cromek went. Something invisible, impalpable except when he sought to resist it, moved him this way, that way, wherever Morophla wished.

Morophla took him through tapestried corridors and down winding flights of stone stairs. Once he saw Uathacht's pale, sick face peering from behind an arras. The wizard did not notice, or so pretended.

Soon they entered winding tunnels under the tower, where they frequently encountered the bat-things that had attacked Cromek in the fog. With a cringing respect that was nine parts fear, the creatures made way for the wizard and his captive.

"I call them Afterlings," said Morophla, "because they spring from a later creation than that first spawning of men and demons that populate our sphere. Mere trifles that I dashed together to do my bidding, from mine excrements as it were."

"It makes me wonder why you are at such pains to prolong an existence conducted among filth and vileness," said Cromek.

"Indeed? You would get on well with my sister. It would be a meeting of minds, such as they are. It is her incessant plaint that our establishment is gloomy and not conducive to delight. She would have me, by magic, conjure here some oriental court for her to queen it over, replete with her personal harem of lusty . . . Cromeks, I doubt not. Not for her the joy of knowledge and wisdom that need never perish, the solemn delight of a mind able to grow through endless ages beyond the limits that mortality imposes . . . well, a thousand years of my lecturing have not sufficed to change her; she remains what she always was."

"You are a great magician," sneered Cromek, "but are a great coward. Your dread of death is measured by the scope of your sorcery. If you delight in your mind so much, why not die and be free of the flesh altogether? Why not be mind only?"

The wizard dismissed that with a sniff. "Surely you are not one of those who imagine that we persist as airy confections in a shadowy realm beyond death? Mind, sir, is but a certain form imposed upon matter. Although this form or pattern can be projected forth from its material basis, as when in certain dreams of which I am capable I wander among the beings of other stars and spheres in search of wis-

dom, it must always retain its connection, however tenuous, with the flesh that harbors it. For if the flesh perishes, like a flower torn from the soil, so does the mind. When a man dies, he becomes nothing—forever!"

Cromek shivered. He would have stood still and marvelled but for the compulsion that was on him. Death and non-being; it was a gulf that yawned at his feet, drawing him as much as it repelled him.

"Nothing is left when the meat dies and begins to rot?"

Morphla smiled. "No, barbarian, it is not. The motion of mind apart from flesh is but a delusion that our languages impose upon us. As are most of the questions that philosophers debate age after age.

"And yet," the sorcerer mused, "if my mind be but a certain form or image wrought in the matter of my flesh, might it not be reproduced in some more durable material? None of the strange beings whom I have visited out among the stars knows this secret, true. But who knows? I have not journeyed far in my search for wisdom—and the universe is vast. . . ."

Morphla fell silent, lost in musings, and let Cromek puzzle over his speech. It all sounded like clown's patter to the fighting man, like words used to mock the pattern and flow of language but convey no meaning at all.

Abruptly they entered a great, vaulted chamber at the end of the tunnel. Cromek found himself on a narrow lip of rock that overlooked a gloomy pit.

In the murk down there he saw pale figures moving. White bodies clustered like knots of worms. He shuddered and drew back as far as the crowding power would permit.

Morphla took down a torch from the wall. Vacuous faces, flabby and indefinite of contour, lifted to follow its slow arc.

"Regard your xenans, Cromek."

Their huge eyes blinked repeatedly at the unaccustomed light, unable to turn away. But when the sorcerer withdrew the torch, all interest subsided. The listless milling resumed, as if with the fading of the faint memory trace left by the light. A squeaking chattering fight broke out, and a pair of man-bats, swooping low, drove the quarrellers apart. Once separated, they quickly forgot one another and their contention.

"You will grow used to the darlings, Cromek."

Without much confidence, Cromek said, "Whatever your wizardry, you will find there are some things in which man's cooperation cannot be compelled."

Morphla snickered.

He had reason to laugh his dirty laugh.

The days that followed became a series of nightmares, or one long nightmare interrupted by sleep. And sleep itself was no respite, only the superfection of nightmare upon nightmare. The events and images of wakefulness were then reduced to rubbish and built into crazy towers that tottered, crumbled and fell.

For the wizard was entirely adequate to deal with his captive's reluctance. There was a demon of lust that dwelt in a crusted stone jar, and when Morphla poured it forth, straight it flew to Cromek's flesh. It did him on like a cloak, and Cromek, released from his cage under the control of some smoky demon, descended into the pit to join the mating-dance of the pale herd. The fife wailed and the drum rattled, and he knew their cold flesh.

Stung out of sleep by some recollected horror, he awoke in his cell. Or had some strange sound penetrated and burst his sleep? Was someone near? "It isn't time yet," he protested. But he could not know that; time in that place was determined entirely by alternating abominations. He steeled himself, knowing it was useless, against the demon's invasion.

It did not come.

Nor did he hear the fife, preparing the herd for the descent of the god of its sabbat.

A husky voice whispered, "Are you sleeping, Cromek?"

"How came you here?" he snarled. "I did not hear the gate."

Uathacht laughed. "Then I must not be here at all. For I could not pass through the strong bars that cage you, my magnificent animal."

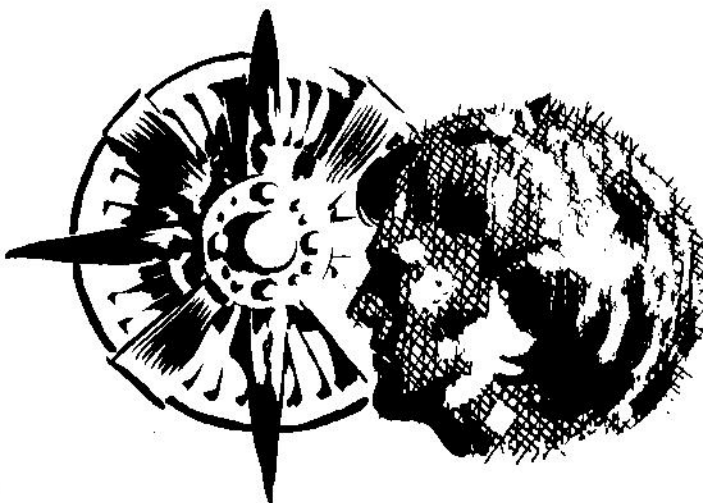
He hurled himself off the pallet and drove his fist at her taunting mouth. Then howled with rage and pain. His hand felt broken.

"Nay, be careful!" she cried. "It is only a sending. You cannot touch me, for I am far from here."

Cromek cursed her, a round soldierly oration full of footras and strange gods.

She said softly, "Do not curse me, dearest. I wish that I could bring you . . . all of me, not just my voice and seeming. For I think I love you, Cromek."

"You are strange people, you and your brother. Your hospitality is strange, but your love is most strange indeed."



"Oh, please; it is not well that you are used thus, wasted I should say, on those who are incapable of appreciating you. But you know the strength of my brother's magic. I have a little sorcery, but it is a pitiful thing compared with his."

He studied her image for a moment. It was only her likeness that stood before him after all. Her figure, on close examination, seemed flat and followed the contour of the rugged wall, like a painted image that somehow moved and spoke.

When he answered her, he spoke craftily: "Well . . . if you had no part in my loathsome captivity, I will admit I grew angry all too hastily. You are too fair for me to find it easy to hate you."

Her face went soft and vacuous at this flattery. There might be hope yet. . . .

"But what good is any understanding we might come to?" he asked bitterly. "Your sending is not yourself, and we can have little joy of such assignments as this."

Suspicion shadowed her eyes, but Cromek smiled inwardly. He did not fear that she would divine his true motive; no, not if her magic were thrice as great. As Morphla said, she was lickerish, and her headlong infatuation would sweep aside all misgivings.

"And is it for the great love you bear me that you ask this? Or would you merely use me to gain your freedom, then abandon me to my brother's wrath?"

"I admit that I like not this subterranean life," he replied, nor its pale, cold companions." He cast her as moony a glance as he could contrive. "But one of the kindest memories I have from the world of sunlight is of the touch of your hand."

While he hated himself somewhat, she mused: "What you suggest is not impossible . . . Morphla's magic is not impregnable . . . His sorcery could be used as well by another. . . ."

"Can I rely upon you in this, my lady? After all, he is your brother and—"

A masterful move, he congratulated himself: to shift the burden of proving good faith to her!

"What good is that to me?" she spat. "I have no love for him, for he is insanely jealous and thwarts me always. Nor is it meet that a man should use his sister in that fashion—"

Cromek's skin crawled at the implication. Too slowly, he recomposed his features, for she read the horror in his look.

"It is not at all as you think!" she stammered. "Let me go now . . . I must think on this . . . it will take time to prepare the spell. But do I dare? Do I dare?"

Her image rippled like a reflection on water; then the sending was gone.

In the days that followed he underwent alternations of hope and despair. Had his unwelcome insight into her odd way of life caused her to repent her resolve to aid him? Indeed, had she ever had any such notion? And was there anything she could do? Against the might of Morphla's sorcery?



Meanwhile, the monotonous horror of his existence proceeded in its accustomed channels. At intervals that made no sense to him, the lusty demon entered into him and he went to enact the vile sabbat.

But not really *he*, for *he* was only a small screaming thing, an anguished shread of consciousness, thrust far back into some cranny of the brain. *He* was only that tiny core of revulsion against the abominations that his flesh worked with the sub-human cavern dwellers.

Afterwards, only images and sensations remained to him. Nor could he bear to dwell on them and order them in recollection. So they grew steadily more confused, becoming like a wrack of sickly dreams such as may vaguely poison the ensuing day.

He swore the wizard would pay for making his own flesh detestible to him. But when? When?

At length, Uathacht returned to him.

Cromek regarded her, careful, very careful, not to betray his eagerness. He knew that he must remain unreadable to her and give her fancy all possible scope.

"I came back," she said.

"Yes; and this time you need a key to enter—like a proper person—don't you?"

She hesitated. "I have the key, but now I don't know if I dare use it. And yet—and yet, everything is in readiness. Three days at noon I gazed at the sun with tear-streaming eyes and gathered the gleaming strands of the Sun Spider's web, gathered them in my own smarting eyes so that at the appointed time I might bind down my brother's soul. Now he is trussed like a fly in that unbreakable web and cannot throw his spells against us."

"What about the bat-things?"

"Oh, them! He rules them by spells and forces, which he cannot use in his present state. They would not act on their own to aid him."

But her eyes were wild and confused. With uncertain fingers, she turned and turned the key on its ring. "Nothing to hinder us, then," he pressed. He did not trust himself to snatch the key.

"I am afraid," she whimpered.

Cromek said nothing. Anything he might say could only arouse her resistance; but her own hot blood would be his most effective advocate. Let her carry on the debate within herself.

"You . . . would not betray me?"

He made her answer her own question. "Don't be angry," she pleaded. "I didn't really doubt you."

With the abruptness of one racing against the onset of misgivings, Uathacht unlocked the cell and ran in to him. Her long white arms snaked round his neck. The suddenness of the onslaught was her undoing.

The dregs of a hundred revulsions past, thwarted in their time, swarmed in his nerves. The shame of a hundred unwilling embraces cried for vengeance, and that which had thwarted vengeance—suddenly, it seemed—was not there. Involuntary as thought itself, his huge fist—

Neck broken, she lay at his feet. Her last breath sighed from her lips like a ghost fleeing, and before it was entirely free, she was dead.

Cromek shook his head, more amazed than sorry. No; not sorry at all. The only regret he felt was at not having waited until she had led him out of the caverns.

Still, he would manage.

He looked back once before he left her forever, and wished he had not. Dissolution, so long frustrate, hastened obscenely; already her face had darkened, as with a crow's shadow.

In the dismal, cresset-lighted corridor, he encountered one of Morophla's Afterlings. He watched the creature closely as he wrapped his cloak around his left arm. It was small and fragile-looking, but he feared its teeth.

Softly, it said: "Do not slay me, Cromek. I offer no resistance. Escape if you can."

"If you do not attempt to stop me, the wizard will be angry with you."

"No; even as the god who created men knows them, our creator knows us. We are but instruments of his will. So he chose to make us so he would not have to bargain for our loyalty."

"I intend to slay him. Does he not will that you prevent me?"

"He may. But he is bound by his sister's spell. His will cannot force us to act." The man-bat hesitated. "Nevertheless, he still has resources. Go cautiously, Cromek."

Cromek passed on.

Presently he found his way into the tower proper. A feeling of surveillance had grown upon, though he could not indicate its source, only guess it uneasily. His skin crawled, as it does before a summer storm. The rising tide of dread almost drove him to flight now that he

had the chance; but his fear of the magician's inevitable pursuit was greater.

While he could, he must seek out the wizard where he lay entranced and slay him. He thought of the horrors the magician had already visited upon him; and that had been only casually, as a means to an end. Only a demon of perversion could imagine what he might conjure up in a vengeful spirit!

But how long would Uathacht's spell retain its power? The uncertainty of it was maddening.

The tower was large, the arrangement of its rooms complex. He was soon confused by the innumerable turnings its corridors took, and became increasingly uncertain, because of their bizarre shapes, that he had thoroughly searched every room. His eyes burned and leaden exhaustion weighed his feet. Sometimes he thought that he was dreaming, trapped in delirium; sometimes it seemed that the tower, and he himself, were dreams in a madman's skull. The feeling of surveillance grew.

He had searched a hundred rooms, corridors, closets. In rooms fitted like laboratories, filled with strange instruments and papered with incomprehensible diagrams, he hunted frantically. He had found curiously-shaped vessels filled with blood in various stages of decomposition, vats in which Afterlings took form in the midst of unspeakable corruption, and innumerable manuscripts, some of them crumbling with age, in what he took to be Morophla's hand. But nowhere could he find the wizard himself.

He left off tearing the tapestries from the walls of an unused audience chamber. "Enough of this!" he muttered.

He suddenly understood that his increasing confusion, the feeling of surveillance, were the doing of the wizard. Even bound by a prepotent spell, he could still watch and subtly twist Cromeck's seeing—

The Afterling had said Morophla had "resources. . ."

"And so have I, damn it!"

He went quickly to the storeroom adjoining one of the laboratories, in haste lest the unseen Watcher divine his purpose and prevent him. Prying open the strange-shaped urns of chemicals, he soon found what he wanted.

He carried the heavy vessel to the ground floor and began to dash its contents on the wooden flooring and walls. A sharp, resinous odor filled his nostrils.

And suddenly—Morophla was there!

The wizard's rage-distorted countenance glared down upon him. Cromeck shrank back. In a moment that terrible will would enter into him like the fingers of those puppeteers you saw in bazaars.

But that did not happen, and he understood why. "So you are come to this, Morophla. No longer do you come like a mighty wave, to toss the wills of your victims like shells on a beach. No; the worst you can contrive now is to project your image and trouble me with your ugly face, or twist my seeing a little like a hairless old woman engaged in glamoury."

The wavering form spoke: "Beware, Cromeck. Though limited by that slut's spell, I might yet overcome you."

Cromeck laughed and capered.

"But why speak of that?" Morophla said, as one who would dismiss harsh words spoken thoughtlessly between friends. "Surely it was no insult, rather a compliment, that you were chosen. And were the labors enforced upon you so terrible?"

From a heart charred black with horror, Cromeck answered: "Yes—more than filth like you could conceive. I have reason enough to slay you, Morophla."

"Be lenient, man, and see if I do not reward you. I can give you much with my magic—"

He promised much, but Cromeck only continued to pour out a flammable liquid, a little lingeringly now. When the urn was empty, he took a torch from its socket and moved to the door. "I cannot find you, but the fire will. . ."

Morophla, beside himself with rage and frustration, seemed almost to lose control of his sending. His grotesque figure, now swelling, now shrinking, writhed and twisted across wall and ceiling. It danced like a flame, like a flame already.

"How can you?" he raved. "Darken eyes that have looked on the distant marvels of other stars and spheres? Burn the brain that harbors the lost secrets of the gods, the most interior mysteries of matter and energy? No; put up the torch and I will make you co-equal with me, share my power and my immortality with you."

Cromeck hurled the torch. Flame leaped up with a snarl like a lunging beast. The wizard shrieked.

The hot glare brought tears to Cromeck's eyes. He backed towards the



door, watching the flames mutter and gnaw at the wooden panels. The tapestries turned to falling, flaming lacework.

"You animal, you cretin!" the wizard gibbered. "You've destroyed me—but you will die with me!"

Cromek reached for the door, but before he touched it it burst inward. A great, threatening confusion bore down on him—something that thundered like a stampede, or roared and clanked like a host of men-at-arms. He couldn't put a name to it; he could only give way before it.

He was driven back through the wall of flame and up the smoky stairs.

The attack—but *what* attacked?—came on and on, continuously squealing and gibbering. Its high-pitched wail paralyzed thought; only the instinctive reaction of flight was possible.

And suddenly it became an enormous mouth in which innumerable teeth clashed and ground together. But when it overtook him, it only gnashed impalpably around him for a moment—

Then vanished!

"Yes, Cromek; only an illusion," said Morophla. "But you know that too late. The fire has already cut off your escape and you must perish with me."

He smiled sourly. "But don't bother to repent having rejected my offer. I should not have kept that bargain anyway. This is the only fellowship we two can have—in the fire, which has a trick of levelling all flesh. I could not have raised you to my level, although you have reduced me to yours. . . ."

Cromek, no philosopher, ignored him. Before a wall of hot gases he fled up the tower stairs. He could hardly draw breath to curse the sorcerer, whose sending drifted always before him.

The projected image changed from moment to moment. Not only did it ripple and flicker as it drifted like a shadow or a flame along the walls and stair-treads, but it underwent other transformations, more painful to see as well.

"Yes, murderer, it is your work. The flames have found my body where it lies bound by the Sun Spider. Oh, you cannot imagine how painful it is. But I need not describe it; you will learn soon enough. Of course, you have the option of leaping from the roof. No option really; you will inevitably do so when the fire touches you. . . ."

Cromek could scarcely see the stairs and corridors along which he fled. But the image of Morophla's disintegrating corpse remained with him always, sealed within his closed eyes; its voice droned in his ears.

"I hate you, murderer!" the thing screamed. "Not just for the agony I endure. Even if I had to endure it as long as I lived, I would still choose to survive. For there is much that I would yet learn in the vastness of the cosmos and the vastness of the mind—matters that you and that bitch with your little, animal minds could not conceive of. I hope you don't die outright when you leap from the tower. Be a long time dying with the ache of mangled nerves, bone splinters piercing your guts—"

The oozing, blackened horror shimmered and faded.

"No; I can't follow you anymore. Wanted to see you dying—but I can't—not strong enough—any more. . . ."

Gone: leaving only a dying curse.

Cromek crawled onto the roof, gasping. Night. Those stars whose

marvels the wizard regretted appraised him and found him of little worth.

Already the boards were hot under his feet. From the trapdoor through which he had come, the flames leaped: a pillar of fire which, like Morophla's spirit, clutched at the stars. While he watched, a cluster of strange instruments, gleaming copper tubes and lenses, sank through the roof, engulfed by a muttering mouth of fire.

The tower was high and its walls of closely fitted stones appeared almost smooth. Staring hopelessly down, Cromek felt the clutch of the gulf at his loins. His belly crawled with its cold stroking.

Nevertheless, he had to attempt that impossible descent. Better to have his last moments absorbed in some arduous task than to sit waiting for the fire to eat through the roof.

Lowering himself over the edge, he sank almost to the length of his arms before his foot found what purported to be a toe-hold. With one hand on the ledge, he supported himself while he fitted blunt fingers into a narrow cranny. The effort was tremendous: it seemed that bone must crack, muscle or tendon tear.

He flattened himself against the wall like a vine or lichen. It was insane, he knew that—already sinews stuttered their plea for release from a task beyond their capacity. And still he persisted, relinquishing each impossible toe-hold only to seek another. . . .

He knew that eventually he must fall—drop like a dead fly. But it would not be willingly. Never would his soul cry, enough! and order his cramped fingers to open.

It came as no surprise, however, when his bleeding fingertips slid from their precarious clutch.

He fell.

It was strange when you fell. At such a time, when your weight was most active, you felt no weight at all. Almost you were bodiless, as in dreams when you drift like smoke across some broken landscape.

The wind, like his own cry, sang in his ears.

There came a beating of leathery wings round his head. Clawed fingers sank into the muscles of his arms and bore him up. His fall was not halted, only slowed, and he dropped, struggling in the hands of his rescuers, until the earth smashed his knees up into his chest.

When he could breathe a little, Cromek gasped out, "I thank you for my life."

The Afterling said, "We thank you for ours, now truly ours. In slaying our creator, our god, you set us free."

"God-slayer. . . ." Cromek smiled. "Among my people it is the custom to bestow vaunting titles: but never have I heard one so grandiose. You account my deed a boon?"

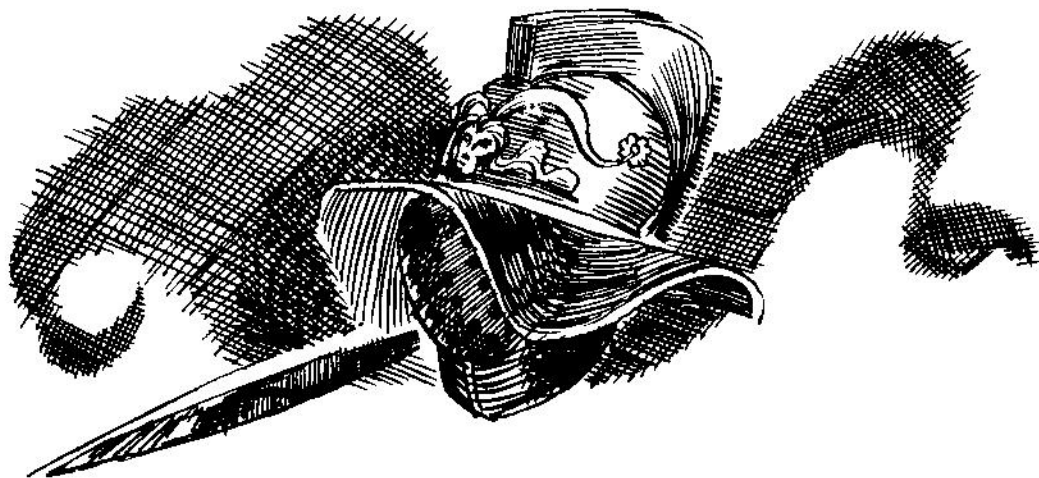
"Of course. Wouldn't you?"

Cromek glanced skyward and did not answer.

They gave him food and drink, and would have had him remain with them, but this last he refused. "You might come to look on me as your god."

He departed along the winding road, the road downward out of the mountains. As the stars faded and morning came, his thoughts returned to Morophla. He did not understand why he should be at such efforts to prolong a life which, to Cromek, seemed only a mounting confusion and horror.

He shook his head and tried to think of other things.



The change came, turning him into the killer beast.
But the change faded with morning...



WERE-CREATURE

By KENNETH PEMBROOKE

ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE FRITZ

He stood hidden in the shadow of the tree, its bark biting into his naked back, his ears straining for the sound of the crunch of leaves beneath the hunter's feet. The hunter, a moving shadow among a forest of shadows, passed the tree never knowing how close he was to his prey until it was too late. As the hunter passed the man came suddenly behind him and strong hands closed tightly against the hunter's throat. The hunter tried to cry out, to struggle free but could not. The fingers dug tighter into his throat until he ceased his efforts.

Overhead, the moon full and bloated, drifted indifferently.

When the killer was finished he stood over his victim for a minute until breath returned, then bent and stripped his victim. He was naked and very cold, in need of clothes, and the hunter was close enough to his size. When he was dressed, he found a sharp pointed rock and began very carefully ripping the flesh from his victim.

It was very important that the hunter look as if he were killed by an ani-

mal, he felt. The rock was not a perfect instrument to simulate claw and teeth marks, but it was good enough. Presently he stood back from his work, looking down at it indifferently. It was good. It was necessary.

He turned and moved into the trees.

He was a young man, not tall, but lean and gaunt in the way that a wolf is lean and gaunt. He moved among the trees with sureness, despite the darkness and his movement was loping, almost athletically graceful and quite soundless. He moved with such assurance that it came as a complete surprise to him that he suddenly stepped into a clearing and found himself face to face with another hunter and that hunter's rifle aimed straight at his chest.

"Damn!" the hunter said. "Boy, you don't know how close you came to getting yourself killed."

"I—I'm sorry," he said.

The hunter lowered his gun. He gave a rasping chuckle. "God damn, that would just about do it. Bagging another hunter instead of whatever it is we're after."

"The wolf," the gaunt man said.

"That's right, the wolf." The hunter peered through the darkness at him a minute. Overhead light from the full moon poured down, catching the younger man's face.

"Say, I don't know you, do I?" the hunter asked. "What's your name?"

He was hesitant only a moment. "Mann," he said.

"Mann. You're not from around here, are you? I'd know you if you was. I know everybody in these parts. Hey—what happened to your gun?"

Mann realized he had taken the dead hunter's clothes, his knife, his boots—everything but the man's gun.

"Well?" asked the hunter.

"I—I lost it. Back there." He pointed roughly in the direction from which he came.

The hunter came toward him, peering at him intently. "You all right, buddy? You seem to be a little. . . I don't know. Flustered, maybe. You see something back there? Something maybe caused you to drop your gun?"

Mann did not answer.

The older man put a hand on his shoulder and when he spoke, his voice was more friendly, more reassuring. "Now, don't worry about it. I know what it is to see something that scares you. It's no disgrace. They's two of us now. We can go back and look for it together. The idea of people hunting separately at night is plain foolishness anyhow, right?"

Mann nodded, unable to think of anything else. "Yes," he said.

"Now we'll go back and take a look for your gun and for what made you drop it, right? That's the way. My name's Charlie Henderson, incidentally."

Mann managed a smile. He turned and started back into the woods, Henderson behind him.

He retraced his steps, swearing at himself for forgetting the gun. Henderson was smart—and alert. He wouldn't be so easy to catch as the other hunter.

Near where the mutilated corpse was, Mann stopped and looked about as if trying to get his bearings.

"This the place?" Henderson asked.

Overhead the moon was full. Mann looked around again. "I think so."

"Well if you dropped your gun it should be around here, somewhere, shouldn't it?"

"Yea."

"Then let's have a look for it, all right?"

Mann nodded. He looked around, saw nothing. He turned and saw Henderson carefully probing into some bushes. Henderson looked up at him. "Well, get looking," he said.

Mann probed and prodded into the underbrush, pretending to search for his gun.

"It doesn't seem to be around here," Henderson said after a while. "You sure this is the place—?"

"No. Not sure."

"It's pretty dark tonight, even with that moon. I guess maybe one part of the woods looks like another part. Let's move on. You feel like telling me what happened?"

But before Mann could frame an evasion there came a sound. It was the sound of something moving through underbrush and both men whirled toward it. At the edge of the clearing a wolf crouched—and as the men whirled, the wolf sprang.

With a snarl of pure hatred, the creature leaped straight for Mann, fangs bared, ripping toward the man's unprotected throat. But Mann ducked and rolled to the ground with greater speed than he seemed capable. The wolf

landed harmlessly and turned for another attack. Henderson raised his gun but before he could fire, Mann was on his feet, rushing toward the wolf. Before the creature could gather itself for a second attack Mann was on its back, snarling and growling like a wolf himself. Moonlight glinted from his hunting knife as it raised up and plunged downward, again and again. The wolf cried in agony, thrashed, trying to free itself of the human. But it could not. Again and again Mann's hunting knife plunged home. Within seconds the wolf stopped its cries, its thrashings.

Mann, shaken and fighting for breath, stepped away from the dead animal.

"Damn it all, I ain't ever seen anything like that," Henderson said, after a moment.

He took Mann by the arm and led him to a log. "You sit for a minute, get your wind back, all right?"

Mann nodded, sat, holding the knife limply in his right hand so that blood dripped from the point to splatter on the leaves.

Henderson went back and examined the wolf. "That's sure a big one," he said. "And it went right for your throat, just like it knew who you were and had a hatred of you. This what scared you?"

Mann was still too shaken to talk.

Henderson got to his feet, puffing with the effort. "Son of a gun, I never seen a night like this one. Out hunting a thing nobody understands, a thing I don't rightly believe in anyway. And I see a man kill a wolf, just like that, with a knife. Just like old Tarzan tearing into one of them jungle lions. What a night!"

"That the one we're hunting?"

"Likely. Of course it hasn't turned back into a man. Do werewolves turn back into a man when they're killed or do they wait for sun-up? Course, I don't believe in werewolves. These full moon killings don't prove it was a werewolf, that's a lot of poppycock, anyway you look at it. I guess the moon drives wolves crazy, is all. They howl at the moon, sure enough. You don't believe in werewolves, do you?"

"Yea, I do."

"You do? You got the look of an educated man about you. I figured you wouldn't believe in nothing like that. Well, I'm going to take a look around. There might be another wolf around."

"Good idea," Mann said absently.

Henderson moved into the darkness. Mann seated on his log, looked up at the sky: the moon, full and yellow as if it were about to burst with its ripeness. A ripeness of evil. What was it doing to him? Turning him against his own. . . Turning him into a killer. . . But soon the sun would be up and it would be over for a while.

He sat on the log waiting. He knew the direction in which Henderson had gone and it was just a matter time.

And sure enough then came the sound of Henderson calling him.

Mann moved into the trees toward Henderson. He found him standing over the mutilated corpse.

"It's Fred Riley," Henderson said. Looks like that wolf, all right. But his clothes are gone. Who could have taken his clothes?"

Henderson's back was to him. Mann didn't take the time to explain things. He drove his knife through the cloth of Henderson's jacket, through his shirt, into his back in the region between the shoulder blades. Henderson cried out. Mann jerked the knife out, plunged it in again. Henderson fell dead.

There was no time now, no time to rend the body. Not even time to pull the knife out. Soon the sun would be up. Soon—

Mann moved away from the two bodies. Through the trees he thought he could detect the faint lightening of the night sky in the east. He stopped.

There was no time.

He undressed.

He dropped the clothes on the ground at his feet and stood naked as the sun rose. He felt the change that gripped him, the horrible agony of metamorphosis.

The change. . .

He dropped to his knees, unable to stand erect. His hands fell upon the damp leaves. He could feel his body begin to melt and flow into the other shape, his shape. He felt fur growing on his back and sides; his face changing, the nose and chin elongating into muzzle.

The sun was rising.

As daylight colored the sky in the east a wolf stood beside a discarded pile of clothes. It turned, detecting the scent of its enemy, man. Its hackles seemed to rise and it gave a low, meaningful growl.

Then loped away.

READERS' EYRIE

Send all letters intended for publication to **The Reader's Eyrie, COVEN 13**, P. O. Box 1331, Atlanta, Georgia, 30301.

When we took over *COVEN 13* we sent letters to all subscribers as well as placing some notices in fan publications. *Locus*, referred to in some of the letters below, is a newsletter covering the science fiction and fantasy field, edited bi-weekly by Charlie Brown, 2078 Anthony Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10457. Subscriptions are \$2.00 for 10 issues.

And while we're being so free with plugs, we'd like to mention the AGACON '70, a convention of science fiction and fantasy fans, readers and writers to be held in Atlanta at the Howell House Hotel, August 14-16, 1970. We'll be there, anxious to discuss fantasy, *COVEN 13* and just about any other subject that comes up, with any reader, fan or writer who'll listen to us. Guest of honor at the convention will be the redoubtable Sam Moskowitz, anthologist and historian of the field. Also on hand, novelists Joseph Green and Richard Meredith among many others. Attending membership is \$2.50. Information from Glen T. Brock, Box 10885, Atlanta, Ga., 30310.

Now, on to the letters:

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Dear M. Page:

As a subscriber and former contributor to *COVEN 13*, let me congratulate you for continuing this superb magazine.

In past issues I have been pleased to read such stories as "Leona" and "Odile" by Alan Caillou; "I'll Come to You by Moonlight" by Jean W. Carrizo and "The Little People" by Robert E. Howard. If I mention more it would be like listing almost every story. I have enjoyed the articles in *Bell, Book and Tarot*. Not only do they reflect or support the theories presented in the magazine's fiction, but also these articles represent a history to which we are not familiar.

One thing I've enjoyed about *COVEN 13* is that the most amazing events those which can be most horrifying—do not occur, as one would suppose, during the blackest periods of night. They happen brightest daylight and in familiar surroundings.

I'm looking forward to seeing the changes you propose in making *COVEN 13* better.

Yours Truly,
James Benton Carr
Bloomington, Minnesota.

Dear Mr. Page:

The news of *COVEN 13*'s new ownership did not please, and I do not look forward to what the magazine of "Witchcraft, Horror, and the Supernatural" might have become.

What this world needs is not the "only all fantasy magazine in the English speaking world," but a magazine devoted to WITCHCRAFT, HORROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL! Fantasy and sword-and-sorcery are fields of themselves, totally different from horror and the supernatural and the practice of witchcraft. I don't like science fiction either, but I'm not condemning fantasy, sword and sorcery, or science fiction; I'm looking for a magazine which will concern itself solely with what I describe to be Supernatural.

Horror and the Supernatural are identical for me, and authors such as Poe, Bierce, Lovecraft, James, Blackwood, Wheatley and E. Chater (in the last issue of *COVEN 13*) are the writers of this kind of fiction. So I do not imagine I will enjoy much of what your magazine offers in the future, but I will allow my subscription for 3 years to expire and during that time give the "new" *COVEN 13* a chance.

Gothically yours,
Gordon R. Guy,
22 Canterbury Street,
East Hartford, Conn., 06118

WITCHCRAFT & SORCERY READERS POLL

To help us decide the sort of stories you want to see in *SORCERY*, please rate the stories in order of preference 1, 2, 3... etc. List ties, if you feel any stories tied for any position. If you feel a story was outstanding, please indicate with a check mark beside your rating. Stories you feel to be bad, please mark with an "X."

THE MOMENTARY GHOST	How do you rate our features?
MISTRESS OF DEATH	EDITORIAL
TOWER OF BLOOD	LOVECRAFT LETTERS
THE IDEAS	JADE PAGODA
THE HATE	READER'S LETTERS
PORTRAIT OF TOMORROW	GHOST TOUR
THE RAT AND THE SNAKE	POETRY
WIND MAGIC	POINTED TALES
WERE CREATURE	

(See other side)

PUBLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE

WITCHCRAFT, MAGIC and OCCULTISM, a fascinating survey of the influence on both ape-men and men of magic, witchcraft and occultism. Covers voodoo, shamanism, elementals, satyrs, the Black Mass, magical fraternities, etc. Excellent for reference. Paper, \$2.

WITCHCRAFT THE SIXTH SENSE—another book for the reader seriously interested in this subject. Paper, \$2

THE TAROT AND THE BOHEMIANS. For the reader who is interested in the Tarot and the Tarot Cards. Paper, \$2.

DARKNESS WEAVES—a novel by Karl Edward Wagner in the Robert E. Howard tradition. Kane is superhuman, centuries old, part hero and part ageless monster. Thrill to his adventures as he battles the forces of darkness... Pocketbook, \$1 pp.

GODMAN by John Bloodstone. A novel in the Burroughs-Merritt school. Godman is myth, fantasy and science in a spellbinding adventure by the man who wrote the unpublished—and apparently, not to be published—story dealing with the Burroughs character Tarzan and his adventures on Mars. Paperback, \$1 pp.

IN PREPARATION

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Dear Jerry:

Saw your long notice in *Locus*, sure hope your *COVEN 13* project is a success. I have the first two issues, but must admit I was not impressed with it. You do not mention the serial by Keaveny. I hope you don't plan to complete the ridiculous thing, though I realize you may have no choice.

In the two issues, the only two stories I found worth reading were "Rock God" and "The Shadow Trader." The "Welsh" bard Walden Muns strikes me as singularly uninspired. . . Also sloppy--isn't the possessive of "Cymru" supposed to be "Cymru"? On page 72 of the second issue he has ". . . Land of the Cymru. . ."

Your plan to use fan artists is good, there are quite a few around that are much better than what *COVEN* has been using. I don't like Stout's sloppy imitations of Jeff Jones, and the rest was even worse. Aside from (George) Barr and Fabian that you mention, you should try to get Alicia Austin (who has now moved beyond the fabulous Beardsley imitations she started with), and of course Tim Kirk. And maybe you could lure Walt Simonson away from comic work before it ruins him altogether.

Best,
Ned Brooks,
717 Paul Street,
Newport News, Va. 23605

Keaveny's serial was completed in the fourth issue. We like Stout and would use him if he were available to us. I think rather than imitating Jeff Jones, Stout represents a parallel development in the Frazetta/Krenkel school of illustration. At any rate, the fact that we have Jeff Jones illustrating for us should make you happy. I suspect you'll enjoy our other illustrators, too.
(GWP)

+++

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COMING NEXT ISSUE

Next issue's lead novelet is **THE DRAGON'S DAUGHTER** by *E. Hoffmann Price*, a story of Taoist magic in ancient China. It's the story of a man wrongly disgraced and impressed into the Imperial Army, from which he deserts. It's the story of the two women in his life, one of whom is the Dragon's Daughter, and of the gift of magic she gives to him. It's a gift that can only be used once and therefore must be used wisely. But choosing the time to use but a single gift of magic can be difficult indeed... *Steve Fabian* illustrates this one, adding to the fun.

Other veteran writers on hand will be *August Derleth* with **GHOST LAKE**, the story of a lake with it's own unique brand of water pollution; and *Emil Petaja*, whose story **TOMORROW'S MASK** features a very unusual witch.

But there'll be newcomers in this issue also: newcomers

capable of keeping pace even with such superior writers as Price, Derleth and Petaja.

David English, for example, returns to **SORCERY** for the second time with **THE HUNGRY GHOSTS**, the story of a man who knows a way to kill by invading dreams—but who cannot guess the penalty exacted by dreams. **THE HUNGRY GHOSTS** is a powerful and moving story and should establish David English as one of the most important writers of fantasy today. Don't miss it.

And don't miss **SILVERHEELS**, by *Glen Cook*—a story of heroic fantasy with a most unusual hero. This is, we think, Cook's first story—but it won't be his last.

Plus other stories and the usual features including *Jennings'* **WITCH WAYS**, *E. Hoffmann Price's* **JADE PAGODA** and **THE DEPARTMENT OF POINTED TALES**, illustrated by *Tim Kirk*; and some surprises.

—Gerald W. Page

THE ADVENTURES OF GEORGE SUPERDRAGON

by Saliitha Grey

Once upon a time there was a dragon named George. Being the ninety-third child of very religious parents, he was stuck with the only saint's name they could think of. Well, it was bad enough for a young dragon to have grown up among the jeers of his companions but when the Pope struck St. George from the list because he doubted whether St. George really lived... The dragons knew St. George was real, all right, but they never really approved of him, so George Dragon had to put up with more and more teasing.

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After much searching, George found a magazine to suit his needs. It contained a plentiful supply of new fantasy fiction and was published bi-monthly. And that is why you've never heard of George Superdragon before this.

You see, George took out a subscription. Came the first issue and he selected a good deed and began to read. Unfortunately, he couldn't decide on just one story. The artwork was so appealing and the stories so varied and entertaining that he couldn't resist reading the whole issue from cover to cover (including the editorial) and by the time he finished saying "Chrysophylax" eight times very fast, he was three weeks late for his first grand rescue. He was driven back to his cave in dishonor, but he didn't mind. He lives there happily, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the next issue of **WITCHCRAFT & SORCERY**.

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Illustrations by Edd Cartier

Under The MOONS Of Mars

A HISTORY AND ANTHOLOGY OF
"THE SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE" IN THE
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Edited by Sam Moskowitz

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