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DEATHBIRD STORIES

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18 BEST STORIES OF EDGAR ALLAN POE Edited by Vincent Price and Chandler Brossard

THE SUPERNATURAL SHORT STORIES OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Edited by Michael Hayes



DARK IMAGININGS

A Collection of Gothic Fantasy

Edited by

Robert H. Boyer

and

Kenneth J. Zahorski

With illustrations by James Cagle

A DELTA BOOK

TO:

Twila and Alison; Beth, Tim, Annette, and Heather

A DELTA BOOK
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Preface

We wish to acknowledge with gratitude the generous assistance we received from many sources in the preparation of this anthology. Sincere thanks must be extended, first of all, to two very capable student assistants, both of whom have graduated and are now pursuing advanced degrees, Mr. Mark Allen and Ms. Aimee Harrer. Mark, a knowledgeable and enthusiastic fantasy buff, has helped us with nearly every major fantasy project we have undertaken. His careful and diligent research, and constructive criticism, were instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. Although Aimee worked with us a shorter time, she quickly proved her worth as critic and researcher. Further thanks are extended to: Ms. Peggy Schlapman, whose secretarial expertise and gracious cooperation lightened our editorial burden considerably; the staffs of the St. Norbert College and Brown County libraries, in particular Ms. Fran Richter, Ms. Linda Pearson, and Ms. Terry Waraksa—all of whom spent considerable time assisting us in gathering information and materials, and always with a smile; and Dr. Donald B. King, Dean of St. Norbert College, who has consistently provided the encouragement and support needed to complete this and similar projects.



Ther saugh I first the derke ymaginyng
Of Felonye, and al the compassyng;
The crueel Ire, reed as any gleede;
The pykepurs, and eek the pale Drede;
The smylere with the knyf under the cloke;
The shepne brennyng with the blake smoke;
The tresoun of the mordryng in the bed;
The open werre, with woundes al bibled;
Contek, with blody knyf and sharp manace.
Al ful of Chirkyng was that sory place.

Chaucer, The Knight's Tale, ll. 1995-2004.



Introduction

Dark Imaginings contains sixteen fantasy stories that feature Gothic elements. While there exist numerous collections of Gothic tales, and a few of fantasy, the present volume is unique in consisting solely of stories that are of both types. Dark Imaginings is also unique in bringing together two distinct types of fantasy under one cover: High Fantasy with its imaginary, secondary worlds, and Low Fantasy with its realistic, primary world settings. The fascinating combination of Gothicism and fantasy exists, as we shall see, in both worlds. And it is a venerable partnership, indeed, predating even those grisly scenes of "derke ymaginying" depicted on the Temple of Mars in Chaucer's Knight's Tale.

Readers may find their enjoyment of the stories enhanced by the following brief discussion of fantasy and the Gothic. If not, we invite them, as Chaucer did his readers, to "turn over the page" and get to the stories. Discussions of the nature of fantasy in particular, however, are relatively few, and so we offer the following.

The defining characteristic of fantasy is the presence of nonrational elements that do not conform to our norms of reality and that cannot be explained by reason or science. In short, fantasy deals with the impossible, and this holds true for both High and Low Fantasy. This nonrational causality, however, functions differently in each. The world of High Fantasy possesses a consistent order that is explainable in terms of the supernatural (i.e., deities), or in terms of the less definable, but still recognizable, magical powers of faërie (e.g., wizards and enchantresses). But fantasies that fall into the Low category usually offer no such explanations; in fact they cannot, precisely because they are set in the real world. In Gothic Low Fantasy, there are no supernatural or magical agents to account for such phenomena as specters or shape changes (e.g., werewolves), nor does reason or genetics supply the answer. Note that we reserve the term "supernatural" for gods and goddesses; when referring to ghosts and their kin,

we prefer the term "inhuman." While we realize that good precedent exists for using supernatural in the much broader sense to include all nonrational phenomena, we feel that it has become too much of a blanket term and thus choose to limit its meaning.

Although type of causality can help the reader distinguish between High and Low Fantasy, setting most definitively subdivides the two. High Fantasy derives its uniqueness or "arresting strangeness," as C. S. Lewis calls it, from its imaginary-world milieu. On the other hand, Low Fantasy is set in the recognizable history and geography of the primary world. Gothic Low Fantasy stories thus conform to realistic norms in all respects, except for the inhuman beings that intrude upon the rational order.

The majority of stories in this volume clearly illustrate the difference in setting that distinguishes the two major categories of fantasy. Tuzun Thune's wondrous House of a Thousand Mirrors built upon the shores of the Lake of Visions with its "swanwinged pleasure boats" bears little resemblance to Middle Islet with its sequestered cove in the South Atlantic. But, as might be expected, boundaries between the primary and secondary worlds sometimes become blurred, as is the case in at least two of our selections. For example, when, in H. Rider Haggard's "Smith and the Pharaohs," the Cairo Museum becomes a meeting place of gods and the spirits of the rulers of the past, the real world fades for a time. And when McKay, the protagonist of "The Woman of the Wood," crosses the lake and steps into the "singularly beautiful coppice of silver birches and firs," it is as though he has entered a different world. Since the Merritt story evokes a stronger sense of otherworldliness, we have placed it in the High Fantasy category and Haggard's in Low, but the basis for judgment is a matter of degree rather than kind in this instance.

While causality and setting form the major distinctions between the two types of fantasy, the reader will readily perceive other differences. For example, the characters in High Fantasy are usually of noble stature (kings and elfin princesses), or, if they are more like us, they typically discover in themselves some heroic quality hitherto untried. Thus Richard discovers an unusual courage, and Alice an unselfish love in "Cross Purposes." Characters in Low Fantasy, however, are average types, such as Farrell, who lunches in a New York automat in "Lila the Werewolf." There are also marked contrasts in styles. A more elegant manner of speech and a more poetic style of description characterize High Fantasy, as opposed to a more prosaic and everyday language in Low Fantasy. Finally, setting, character, language,

and theme are likely to have more universal significance in High than in Low Fantasy.

Such distinctions as these just offered are, of course, descriptive rather than prescriptive. Readers will find exceptions. Nor are such comparisons intended to champion one type of fantasy over another. The terms High and Low describe generic rather than qualitative categories. Each type casts its particular spell, both as fantasy and, in this anthology, as Gothic literature. The Gothic elements are similar in both High and Low Fantasy, but the way they are used and their effects differ from one type to the other. Before exploring these differences, however, it is important to define the term "Gothic" as we use it in this anthology.

To begin with, our concern has not been so much with the particular literary characteristics of a formal genre, such as the Gothic novel, as with what we felt to be the very essence of Gothicism—that is, with humankind's archetypal fascination with, and fear of, the unknown and the unnatural. It is this profound sense of dread that is at the very heart of the authentic Gothic tale. Only if the author can imbue the reader with the same feelings of dread and apprehension that are felt by the

characters themselves, has he passed the test.

But how does an author convey this sense of dread? The key word here is ambience. As H. P. Lovecraft states in his classic essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature," an appropriate atmosphere is essential to the Gothic mode. If the author hopes to produce the desired sensations, he must create a convincing milieu of mystery, or dread, or evil foreboding, or some combination thereof. Our selections nicely display the wide range of techniques writers use to create a genuine Gothic ambience, including highly connotational words, mysterious settings that evoke feelings of awe and wonder, and carefully structured plots that produce strong suspense and tension. In addition, the authors use many of the more specific Gothic devices and paraphernalia, such as forbidden books of black magic, evil potions and spells, moldering skeletons, dark and forbidding castles replete with torture chambers and gloomy subterranean chambers, and a fascinating assortment of inhuman agents, including ghosts, demons, gryphons, vampires, sylphs, trolls, and werewolves.

In summary, then, it is this Gothic ambience with its resultant suspense and emotional impact which delineates the Gothic tale. And it is this primary element, along with the secondary ones described above, that we sought in our stories of Gothic fantasy. We

should point out, however, that some stories were chosen because they displayed unusual, or downright atypical, treatments of the Gothic mode. Blackwood's "The Dance of Death" was included, for instance, because of its uniquely delicate and winsome treatment of a traditionally horrific Gothic motif. And Beagle's "Lila the Werewolf," although containing some moments of real fear and horror, was chosen primarily because of its whimsical and essentially comic treatment of the werewolf motif.

The stories in Dark Imaginings all exhibit the distinctly Gothic ambience with its consequent effects of fear or dread, but with two notable differences. In the first place, the effect of the Gothic is more startling in Low Fantasy. This is due, of course, to the fact that the nonrational element occurs in an otherwise realistic context. To encounter a troll in a Lapland hotel in an age of electric trains, as in T. H. White's "The Troll," is far more bizarre than to encounter a similar creature in a subterranean cavern in faërie, as we do in the excerpt from Anderson's Three Hearts and Three Lions. When the reader follows the author into a magical realm, such encounters are to be expected, and the reader can be content with the assurance that they cannot happen here. The reader of White's story, however, is much more likely to decide not to visit such outposts of civilization as the Arctic Circle. By placing nonrational events or creatures in a secondary world, the author gives them a distance which they lack in the primary world.

A second major difference of the Gothic in the two types of fantasy is its function in relation to theme. In High Fantasy, the Gothic motif more often plays a role subordinate to a theme that it reinforces. Thus, in MacDonald's "Cross Purposes," the themes of mutual trust and courage emerge when the two children overcome their fear in passing through the maze of darkness, a journey that is also a rite of passage through the uncertainties of adolescence into adulthood. On the other hand, in Low Fantasy, largely because of the immediacy of effect of the Gothic elements, the fear is itself dominant and the theme, if one appears at all, secondary. This is certainly the case with Hodgson's "The Habitants of Middle Islet"; one would be hard pressed to state its theme, but at the same time, it would take considerable effort to eradicate the chilling effect of its concluding ghastly image. We hope the readers enjoy the rich diversity of both themes and effects that they will encounter in these pages.

While each story in this volume has had to meet the basic genre requirement described above, this has not been the sole criterion for selection. A number of other criteria that were used in the selection process also deserve comment.

First of all, we have tried to select a wide range of representative authors covering a broad span of time. The earliest work included here, "Cross Purposes" (1867), is, appropriately enough, a creation of the English author many consider to be the father of modern fantasy, George MacDonald. The most recent piece, "Lila the Werewolf" (1974), is the happy invention of Peter Beagle, one of the youngest and most promising of contemporary American fantasists. The time span, then, is indeed a broadly inclusive one, representing nearly a century of English and American endeavor in the realm of fantasy.

As might be expected, authors commonly associated with the Gothic mode, such as H. P. Lovecraft, William Hope Hodgson, and Algernon Blackwood, are represented here, but we have also included a few surprises. Perhaps the most remarkable and satisfying "find" has been T. H. White's "The Troll." Although White did not win his literary reputation as a writer of Gothic fiction, "The Troll" provides convincing evidence that, had he wished to, he might have excelled in this area. Indeed, if any story in our anthology is capable of giving the reader nightmares, it is this one.

In addition to seeking a representative sampling of fantasists, we have tried to find selections that display a wide variety of subjects, settings, styles, characters, and motifs. Happily, the very structure of our book has helped us achieve this diversity. With regard to settings, for instance, the High and Low Fantasy distinction has produced a fascinating study in contrasts. The stories of Gothic High Fantasy take the reader into exotic secondary worlds, such as Howard's pre-Atlantean kingdom of Valusia, Leiber's swashbuckling world of Nehwon, and Smith's mythic land of druidic enchantment, Sylaire. The Low Fantasy stories, on the other hand, maintain a strong connection with the primary world through more familiar settings such as Los Angeles, London, and Providence. Even these rather recognizable backgrounds, however, take on an aura of mystery through the subtle craftsmanship of writers like Bradbury, Blackwood, and Lovecraft.

Perhaps the most unique and memorable of all the settings is the imaginary kingdom of Le Guin's "Darkness Box." Enter this magical realm and you will find a "bright," but sunless sky; a saltless ocean inhabited by whale-hunting sea serpents; a splendidly horrific gryphon; and a four-legged hut that skips about and rubs "its front legs together like a lawyer or a fly." And besides all this, you will be in a land where all time has stopped at ten minutes of ten. A brave new world, indeed.

Equally memorable are many of the characters of *Dark Imaginings*. It will be difficult, perhaps, to single out a favorite, but Toadstool, of "Cross Purposes," will surely end up high on most readers' lists. Mischievous, delightfully capricious, amazingly acrobatic, and uniquely molelike, this goblin con artist of faërie is one of MacDonald's most imaginative creations. Another character not soon to be forgotten is Haggard's James Ebenezer Smith, London bank clerk and amateur Egyptologist, who carries on an incredible love affair with Ma-Mee, a beautiful, but long dead, Egyptian queen. Then, too, there is Beagle's Lila Braun, a rather ordinary New York working girl, except for the fact that one night a month she turns into a werewolf.

It is always pleasant to discover that an entertaining story also possesses thematic depth and substance. So it is with many of the stories in this volume. The reader will encounter a wide range of significant and thought-provoking themes. Moore's "Werewoman," for example, vividly dramatizes the motif of our innate primitivism. A fascinating study of illusion versus reality forms the thematic backbone of both Smith's "The Enchantress of Sylaire" and Howard's "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune." And A. Merritt's "The Woman of the Wood" explores, in a vividly dramatic fashion, humankind's primeval conflict with nature. The reader, of course, will also find many of the themes typical of High Fantasy. Ursula Le Guin's "Darkness Box" for instance, reminds one of Tolkien's insistence that without darkness there can be no light, while Leiber's "The Unholy Grail" depicts the destructive powers of fear and black magic.

The above criteria have all been important in the selection process, but perhaps the most important overall consideration has been that of literary quality. All the stories in *Dark Imaginings* have had to meet acceptable literary standards. The result, we hope, is a collection of stories that will fulfill the expectations of the casual, but discerning, reader, and meet the needs of the classroom instructor as well. For both, the background material presented in this introduction and in the headnotes that follow should serve a useful function.

In our quest for quality selections, we have examined several hundred anthologies and collections of short stories, as well as a substantial number of novels, novelettes, and magazines featuring short fiction. Some of these sources were readily found in local libraries, but many were of such rare vintage that they had to be ordered from libraries with special collections of fantasy fiction. Merritt's "The Woman of the Wood" is a case in point. Only through the generous assistance of Hal W. Hall, serials librarian at Texas A.&M., and Robert A. Tibbetts, curator of special collections at Ohio State University, was it located and photocopied. The final copy of the story was taken from *The Avon Fantasy Reader*, a reprint periodical that we found to be a gold mine of fantasy short fiction. The many Arkham House publications featuring Gothic fantasy were also extremely valuable. All told, we read well over a thousand stories before selecting the sixteen fantasies included in this volume.

J. R. R. Tolkien, in his important essay "On Fairy-Stories," eloquently argues that one of the great benefits of fantasy literature is that it provides the reader with a healthy, and desperately needed, escape from the ugliness and pressures of everyday existence. Since Professor Tolkien first wrote that essay nearly forty years ago, the societal pressures he spoke of have increased tremendously. Now, more than ever, we have regular need of the therapeutic respite the well-wrought tale of fantasy can provide. The editors hope that the selections in *Dark Imaginings* will help serve this valuable function, that they will bring light to the reader, as the gift of darkness brought it to Rikard in "Darkness Box."

Robert H. Boyer Kenneth J. Zahorski St. Norbert College



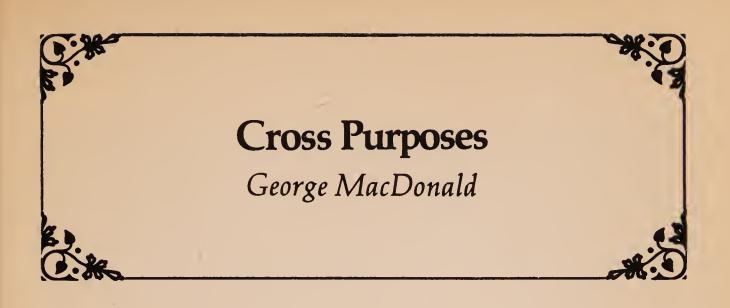
George MacDonald's biographers corroborate what is pretty clear from his writings, especially those for and about children, that he had a happy childhood and that he was later a devoted father. He was born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire, and remained closely attached to his heritage, although he spent a good deal of his life in England struggling to support his large family. He married Louisa Powell in 1853, and they had eleven children. The difficulties he had in supporting his large family stemmed from his uncompromising and unorthodox theology, which made it impossible for him to make a living in his chosen vocation as a Congregationalist minister. His unworldliness and his attachment to home also prompted him in 1873 to turn down an offer of a pastorate in New York, which offered twenty thousand dollars a year. Instead, he continued to support himself by writing and lecturing, his lecturing being mostly on literary and theological topics, which is what brought him to America in 1873-74 for a highly successful series of talks on Robert Burns. He also held a professorship in English Literature at Bedford College, London, but this apparently paid little, and despite his voluminous writings and his lecturing, he remained relatively poor most of his life. He was also plagued by poor health and suffered from the deaths of four of his children. Yet he remained faithful to his religious convictions and derived a great deal of pleasure from his happy family life.

His published work first appeared in 1855, and for the next forty-three years he produced over fifty titles, many of them lengthy novels about Scottish life. But his most lasting work was set in fairyland. He greatly influenced Lewis Carroll, criticizing his Alice books when they were in progress. C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien have both acknowledged MacDonald's influence on their lives and works. His two adult fantasies are *Phantastes* (1858)—C. S. Lewis remarks that reading this work was his intellectual baptism into Christianity—and *Lilith* (1895). His most memorable juvenile fantasies include *At the Back of the North*

Wind (1871), The Princess and the Goblin (1872), and The Princess and Curdie (1883)—this last was one of W. H. Auden's favorite books as a youth. MacDonald's short fantasies, except perhaps for "The Golden Key" (in Dealings with Faeries, 1867), are less well-known, but deserve better recognition. Many of these stories have recently been published in The Gifts of the Christ Child (1973). While MacDonald wrote volumes of essays, the most important one for our purposes is "The Fantastic Imagination" (in A Dish of Orts, 1893), an examination of the inner

consistency that must govern the happenings in fairy tales.

"Cross Purposes" is a fine example of MacDonald's principle that certain laws do obtain in fairyland and that once an author discovers these in his writings, he must remain within their jurisdiction. The awareness that such laws govern fairyland, in fact, enables the young hero of the story to find his way through its apparent, nightmarish chaos. The dreamlike and sometimes grotesque aspects of this fairyland are reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's works, and perhaps it is no coincidence that MacDonald's heroine is named Alice. Much of the fear that the story elicits derives from these distortions, but it also flows from the archetypes that are found throughout MacDonald's fantasies. Thus, the children must pass through numerous doors and a subterranean cavern of absolute darkness inhabited by amorphous, slithery beings. Despite such fear-inspiring elements, however, MacDonald's humor glimmers through the dark, as does his sparkling style, like "diamond rain upon the still surface of the lake." Though the moral of the story is quite clear, it is not imposed on it, but rather grows from the fearful atmosphere and the actions of the two children.





Once upon a time, the Queen of Fairyland, finding her own subjects far too well-behaved to be amusing, took a sudden longing to have a mortal or two at her court. So, after looking about her for some time, she fixed upon two to bring to Fairyland.

But how were they to be brought?

"Please your majesty," said at last the daughter of the prime

minister, "I will bring the girl."

The speaker, whose name was Peaseblossom, after her great-great-grandmother, looked so graceful, and hung her head so apologetically, that the Queen said at once, "How will you manage it, Peaseblossom?"

"I will open the road before her, and close it behind her."

"I have heard that you have pretty ways of doing things, so

you may try."

The court happened to be held in an open forest glade of smooth turf, upon which there was just one mole-heap. As soon as the Queen had given her permission to Peaseblossom, up through the mole-heap came the head of a goblin, which cried out, "Please your majesty, I will bring the boy."

"You!" exclaimed the Queen. "How will you do it?"

The goblin began to wriggle himself out of the earth, as if he had been a snake, and the whole world his skin, till the court was convulsed with laughter. As soon as he got free, he began to roll over and over, in every possible manner, rotatory and cylindrical, all at once, until he reached the wood. The courtiers followed, holding their sides, so that the Queen was left sitting upon her throne in solitary state. When they reached the wood, the goblin, whose name was Toadstool, was nowhere to be seen. While they were looking for him, out popped his head from the mole-heap again, with the words, "So, your majesty."

"You have taken your own time to answer," said the Queen,

laughing.

"And my own way too, eh, your majesty?" rejoined Toadstool, grinning.

"No doubt. Well, you may try."

And the goblin, making as much of a bow as he could with only half his neck aboveground, disappeared under it.

No mortal, or fairy either, can tell where Fairyland begins and where it ends. But somewhere on the borders of Fairyland there was a nice country village in which lived some nice country

people.

Alice was the daughter of the squire, a pretty, good-natured girl, whom her friends called fairylike, and others called silly. One rosy summer evening, when the wall opposite her window was flaked all over with rosiness, she threw herself on her bed, and lay gazing at the wall. The rose color sank through her eyes and eyed her brain, and she began to feel as if she were reading a storybook. She thought she was looking at a western sea, with the waves all red with sunset. But when the color died out, Alice gave a sigh to see how commonplace the wall grew. "I wish it was always sunset!" she said, half aloud. "I don't like gray things."

"I will take you where the sun is always setting, if you like, Alice," said a sweet, tiny voice near her. She looked down on the coverlet of the bed, and there, looking up at her, stood a lovely little creature. It seemed quite natural that the little lady should be there; for many things we never could believe have only to happen, and then there is nothing strange about them. She was dressed in white, with a cloak of sunset-red—the colors of the sweetest of sweet peas. On her head was a crown of twisted tendrils, with a little gold beetle in front.

"Are you a fairy?" said Alice.

"Yes. Will you go with me to the sunset?"

"Yes, I will."

When Alice proceeded to rise, she found that she was no bigger than the fairy; and when she stood up on the counterpane, the bed looked like a great hall with a painted ceiling. As she walked toward Peaseblossom, she stumbled several times over the tufts that made the pattern. But the fairy took her by the hand and led her toward the foot of the bed. Long before they reached it, however, Alice saw that the fairy was a tall, slender lady, and that she herself was quite her own size. What she had taken for tufts on the counterpane were really bushes of furze, and broom, and heather, on the side of a slope.

"Where are we?" asked Alice.

"Going on," answered the fairy.

Alice, not liking the reply, said, "I want to go home."

"Good-bye, then," answered the fairy.

Alice looked round. A wide, hilly country lay all about them. She could not even tell from what quarter they had come.

"I must go with you, I see," she said.

Before they reached the bottom, they were walking over the loveliest meadow grass. A little stream went cantering down beside them, without channel or bank, sometimes running between the blades, sometimes sweeping the grass all one way under it. And it made a great babbling for such a little stream and such a smooth course.

Gradually the slope grew gentler, and the stream flowed more softly and spread out wider. At length they came to a wood of long, straight poplars growing out of the water, for the stream ran into the wood, and there stretched out into a lake. Alice thought they could go no farther, but Peaseblossom led her straight on, and they walked through.

It was now dark, but everything under the water gave out a pale, quiet light. There were deep pools here and there, but there was no mud, or frogs, or water lizards, or eels. All the bottom was pure, lovely grass, brilliantly green. Down the banks of the pools she saw, all under water, primroses and violets and pimpernels. Any flower she wished to see she had only to look for, and she was sure to find it. When a pool came in their way, the fairy swam, and Alice swam by her; and when they got out they were quite dry, though the water was as delightfully wet as water should be. Besides the trees, tall, splendid lilies grew out of it, and hollyhocks and irises and sword plants, and many other longstemmed flowers. From every leaf and petal of these, from every branch tip and tendril, dropped bright water. It gathered slowly at each point, but the points were so many that there was a constant musical plashing of diamond rain upon the still surface of the lake. As they went on, the moon rose and threw a pale mist of light over the whole, and the diamond drops turned to half-liquid pearls, and round every treetop was a halo of moonlight, and the water went to sleep, and the flowers began to dream.

"Look," said the fairy, "those lilies are just dreaming themselves into a child's sleep. I can see them smiling. This is the place out of which go the things that appear to children every night."

"Is this dreamland, then?" asked Alice.

"If you like," answered the fairy.

"How far am I from home?"

"The farther you go, the nearer home you are."

Then the fairy lady gathered a bundle of poppies and gave it to Alice. The next deep pool that they came to, she told her to throw it in. Alice did so, and following it, laid her head upon it. That

moment she began to sink. Down and down she went, till at last she felt herself lying on the long, thick grass at the bottom of the pool, with the poppies under her head and the clear water high over it. Up through it she saw the moon, whose bright face looked sleepy too, disturbed only by the little ripples of the rain from the tall flowers on the edges of the pool.

She fell fast asleep, and all night dreamed about home.

Richard—which is name enough for a fairy story—was the son of a widow in Alice's village. He was so poor that he did not find himself generally welcome; so he hardly went anywhere, but read books at home, and waited upon his mother. His manners, therefore, were shy and sufficiently awkward to give an unfavorable impression to those who looked at outsides. Alice would have despised him, but he never came near enough for that.

Now Richard had been saving up his few pence in order to buy an umbrella for his mother; for the winter would come, and the one she had was almost torn to ribands. One bright summer evening, when he thought umbrellas must be cheap, he was walking across the market place to buy one; there, in the middle of it, stood an odd-looking little man, actually selling umbrellas. Here was a chance for him! When he drew nearer, he found that the little man, while vaunting his umbrellas to the skies, was asking such absurdly small prices for them that no one would venture to buy one. He had opened and laid them all out at full stretch on the market place—about five-and-twenty of them, stick downward, like little tents—and he stood beside, haranguing the people. But he would not allow one of the crowd to touch his umbrellas. As soon as his eye fell upon Richard, he changed his tone and said, "Well, as nobody seems inclined to buy, I think, my dear umbrellas, we had better be going home." Whereupon the umbrellas got up, with some difficulty, and began hobbling away. The people stared at each other with open mouths, for they saw that what they had taken for a lot of umbrellas was in reality a flock of black geese. A great turkey cock went gobbling behind them, driving them all down a lane toward the forest. Richard thought to himself, "There is more in this than I can account for. But an umbrella that could lay eggs would be a very jolly umbrella." So by the time the people were beginning to laugh at each other, Richard was halfway down the lane at the heels of the geese. There he stooped and caught one of them, but instead of a goose he had a huge hedgehog in his hands, which he dropped in dismay; whereupon it waddled away a goose as before, and the whole of them began cackling and hissing in a way that he could not mistake. For the turkey cock, he gobbled and gabbled and choked himself and got right again in the most ridiculous manner. In fact, he seemed sometimes to forget that he was a turkey, and laughed like a fool. All at once, with a simultaneous long-necked hiss, they flew into the wood, and the turkey after them. But Richard soon got up with them again, and found them all hanging by their feet from the trees, in two rows, one on each side of the path, while the turkey was walking on. Him Richard followed; but the moment he reached the middle of the suspended geese, from every side arose the most frightful hisses, and their necks grew longer and longer, till there were nearly thirty broad bills close to his head, blowing in his face, in his ears, and at the back of his neck. But the turkey, looking round and seeing what was going on, turned and walked back. When he reached the place, he looked up at the first and gobbled at him in the wildest manner. That goose grew silent and dropped from the tree. Then he went to the next, and the next, and so on, till he had gobbled them all off the trees, one after another. But when Richard expected to see them go after the turkey, there was nothing there but a flock of huge mushrooms and puffballs.

"I have had enough of this," thought Richard. "I will go home

again."

"Go home, Richard," said a voice close to him.

Looking down, he saw, instead of the turkey, the most comicallooking little man he had ever seen.

"Go home, Master Richard," repeated he, grinning.

"Not for your bidding," answered Richard.

"Come on then, Master Richard."

"Nor that either, without a good reason."

"I will give you such an umbrella for your mother."

"I don't take presents from strangers."

"Bless you, I'm no stranger here! Oh no! not at all." And he set

off in the manner usual with him, rolling every way at once.

Richard could not help laughing and following. At length Toadstool plumped into a great hole full of water. "Served him right!" thought Richard. "Served him right!" bawled the goblin, crawling out again, and shaking the water from him like a spaniel. "This is the very place I wanted, only I rolled too fast." However, he went on rolling again faster than before, though it was now uphill, till he came to the top of a considerable height, on which grew a number of palm trees.

"Have you a knife, Richard?" said the goblin, stopping all at once, as if he had been walking quietly along, just like other

people.

Richard pulled out a pocketknife and gave it to the creature, who instantly cut a deep gash in one of the trees. Then he bounded to another and did the same, and so on till he had gashed them all. Richard, following him, saw that a little stream, clearer than the clearest water, began to flow from each, increasing in size the longer it flowed. Before he had reached the last there was quite a tinkling and rustling of little rills that ran down the stems of the palms. This grew and grew, till Richard saw that a full rivulet was flowing down the side of the hill.

"Here is your knife, Richard," said the goblin, but by the time he had put it in his pocket, the rivulet had grown to a small

torrent.

"Now, Richard, come along," said Toadstool, and threw himself into the torrent.

"I would rather have a boat," returned Richard.

"Oh, you stupid!" cried Toadstool, crawling up the side of the hill, down which the stream had already carried him some distance.

With every contortion that labor and difficulty could suggest, yet with incredible rapidity, he crawled to the very top of one of the trees, and tore down a huge leaf, which he threw on the ground, and himself after it, rebounding like a ball. He then laid the leaf on the water, held it by the stem, and told Richard to get upon it. He did so. It went down deep in the middle with his weight. Toadstool let it go, and it shot down the stream like an arrow. Thus began the strangest and most delightful voyage. The stream rushed careering and curveting down the hillside, bright as a diamond, and soon reached a meadow plain. The goblin rolled alongside of the boat like a bundle of weeds, but Richard rode in triumph through the low grassy country upon the back of his watery steed. It went straight as an arrow, and, strange to tell, was heaped up on the ground, like a ridge of water or a wave, only rushing on endways. It needed no channel, and turned aside for no opposition. It flowed over everything that crossed its path, like a great serpent of water, with folds fitting into all the ups and downs of the way. If a wall came in its course it flowed against it, heaping itself up on itself till it reached the top, whence it plunged to the foot on the other side, and flowed on. Soon he found that it was running gently up a grassy hill. The waves kept curling back as if the wind blew them, or as if they could hardly keep from running down again. But still the stream mounted and flowed, and the waves with it. It found it difficult, but it could do it. When they reached the top, it bore them across a heathy country, rolling over purple heather, and blue

harebells, and delicate ferns, and tall foxgloves crowded with bells purple and white. All the time, the palm leaf curled its edges away from the water, and made a delightful boat for Richard, while Toadstool tumbled along in the stream like a porpoise. At length the water began to run very fast, and went faster and faster, till suddenly it plunged them into a deep lake, with a great splash, and stopped there. Toadstool went out of sight, and came up gasping and grinning, while Richard's boat tossed and heaved like a vessel in a storm at sea, but not a drop of water came in. Then the goblin began to swim, and pushed and tugged the boat along. But the lake was so still, and the motion so pleasant, that Richard fell fast asleep.

When he woke, he found himself still afloat upon the broad palm leaf. He was alone in the middle of a lake, with flowers and trees growing in and out of it everywhere. The sun was just over the treetops. A drip of water from the flowers greeted him with music; the mists were dissolving away; and where the sunlight fell on the lake, the water was clear as glass. Casting his eyes downward, he saw, just beneath him, far down at the bottom, Alice—drowned, as he thought. He was in the act of plunging in, when he saw her open her eyes, and at the same moment begin to float up. He held out his hand, but she repelled it with disdain, and swimming to a tree, sat down on a low branch, wondering how ever the poor widow's son could have found his way into Fairyland. She did not like it. It was an invasion of privilege.

"How did you come here, young Richard?" she asked, from

six yards off.

"A goblin brought me."

"Ah, I thought so. A fairy brought me."

"Where is your fairy?"

"Here I am," said Peaseblossom, rising slowly to the surface, just by the tree on which Alice was seated.

"Where is your goblin?" retorted Alice.

"Here I am," bawled Toadstool, rushing out of the water like a salmon, and casting a somersault in the air before he fell in again with a tremendous splash. His head rose again close beside Peaseblossom, who being used to such creatures only laughed.

"Isn't he handsome?" he grinned.

"Yes, very. He wants polishing though."

"You could do that for yourself, you know. Shall we change?"

"I don't mind. You'll find her rather silly."

"That's nothing. The boy's too sensible for me."

He dived, and rose at Alice's feet. She shrieked with terror.

The fairy floated away like a water lily toward Richard. "What a lovely creature!" thought he, but hearing Alice shriek again, he said, "Don't leave Alice; she's frightened at that queer creature. I don't think there's any harm in him, though, Alice."

"Oh, no. He won't hurt her," said Peaseblossom. "I'm tired of

her. He's going to take her to the court, and I will take you."

"I don't want to go."

"But you must. You can't go home again. You don't know the way."

"Richard! Richard!" cried Alice, in an agony.

Richard sprang from his boat, and was by her side in a moment.

"He pinched me," cried Alice.

Richard hit the goblin a terrible blow on the head, but it took no more effect upon him than if his head had been a round ball of India rubber. He gave Richard a furious look, however, and bawling out, "You'll repent that, Dick!" vanished under the water.

"Come along, Richard, make haste; he will murder you," cried the fairy.

"It is all your fault," said Richard. "I won't leave Alice."

Then the fairy saw it was all over with her and Toadstool, for they can do nothing with mortals against their will. So she floated away across the water in Richard's boat, holding her robe for a sail, and vanished, leaving the two alone in the lake.

"You have driven away my fairy!" cried Alice. "I shall never

get home now. It is all your fault, you naughty young man."

"I drove away the goblin," remonstrated Richard.

"Will you please to sit on the other side of the tree. I wonder what my papa would say if he saw me talking to you!"

"Will you come to the next tree, Alice?" said Richard, after a

pause.

Alice, who had been crying all the time that Richard was thinking, said, "I won't." Richard, therefore, plunged into the water without her, and swam for the tree. Before he had got halfway, however, he heard Alice crying, "Richard! Richard!" This was just what he wanted. So he turned back, and Alice threw herself into the water. With Richard's help she swam pretty well, and they reached the tree. "Now for the next!" said Richard; and they swam to the next, and then to the third. Every tree they reached was larger than the last, and every tree before them was larger still. So they swam from tree to tree, till they came to one that was so large that they could not see round it. What was to be done? Clearly, to climb this tree. It was a dreadful prospect for Alice, but Richard proceeded to climb; and by put-

ting her feet where he put his, and now and then getting hold of his ankle, she managed to make her way up. There were a great many stumps where branches had withered off, and the bark was nearly as rough as a hillside, so there was plenty of foothold for them. When they had climbed a long time, and were getting very tired indeed, Alice cried out, "Richard, I shall drop, I shall. Why did you come this way?" And she began once more to cry. But at that moment Richard caught hold of a branch above his head, and reaching down his other hand got hold of Alice, and held her till she had recovered a little. In a few moments they reached the fork of the tree, and there they sat and rested. "This is capital!" said Richard, cheerily.

"What is?" asked Alice, sulkily.

"Why, we have room to rest, and there's no hurrry for a minute or two. I'm tired."

"You selfish creature!" said Alice. "If you are tired, what must I be?"

"Tired too," answered Richard. "But we've got on bravely. And look! What's that?"

By this time the day was gone, and the night so near that in the shadows of the tree all was dusky and dim. But there was still light enough to discover that in a niche of the tree sat a huge horned owl, with green spectacles on his beak, and a book in one foot. He took no heed of the intruders, but kept muttering to himself. And what do you think the owl was saying? I will tell you. He was talking about the book that he held upside down in his foot.

"Stupid book this-s-s-s! Nothing in it at all! Everything upside down! Stupid ass-s-s! Says owls can't read! I can read backward!"

"I think that is the goblin again," said Richard, in a whisper. "However, if you ask a plain question, he must give you a plain answer, for they are not allowed to tell downright lies in Fairyland."

"Don't ask him, Richard; you know you gave him a dreadful blow."

"I gave him what he deserved, and he owes me the same. Hallo! Which is the way out?"

He wouldn't say if you please, because then it would not have

been a plain question.

"Downstairs," hissed the owl, without ever lifting his eyes from the book, which all the time he read upside down, so learned was he.

"On your honor, as a respectable old owl?" asked Richard.

"No," hissed the owl, and Richard was almost sure that he was not really an owl. So he stood staring at him for a few moments, when all at once, without lifting his eyes from the book, the owl said, "I will sing a song," and began:

"Nobody knows the world but me.
When they're all in bed, I sit up to see.
I'm a better student than students all,
For I never read till the darkness falls;
And I never read without my glasses,
And that is how my wisdom passes.
Howlowlwhoolhoolwoolool.

"I can see the wind. Now who can do that?
I see the dreams that he has in his hat;
I see him snorting them out as he goes—
Out at his stupid old trumpet nose.
Ten thousand things that you couldn't think
I write them down with pen and ink.
Howlowlwhooloolwhitit that's wit.

"You may call it learning—'tis mother wit.
No one else sees the lady moon sit
On the sea, her nest, all night, but the owl,
Hatching the boats and the long-legged fowl.
When the oysters gape to sing by rote,
She crams a pearl down each stupid throat.
Howlowlwhitit that's wit, there's a fowl!"

And so singing, he threw the book in Richard's face, spread out his great, silent, soft wings, and sped away into the depths of the tree. When the book struck Richard, he found that it was only a lump of wet moss.

While talking to the owl he had spied a hollow behind one of the branches. Judging this to be the way the owl meant, he went to see, and found a rude, ill-defined staircase going down into the very heart of the trunk. But so large was the tree that this could not have hurt it in the least. Down this stair, then, Richard scrambled as best he could, followed by Alice—not of her own will, she gave him clearly to understand, but because she could do no better. Down, down they went, slipping and falling sometimes, but never very far, because the stair went round and round. It caught Richard when he slipped, and he caught Alice when she did. They had begun to fear that there was no end to

the stair, it went round and round so steadily, when, creeping through a crack, they found themselves in a great hall, supported by thousands of pillars of gray stone. Where the little light came from they could not tell. This hall they began to cross in a straight line, hoping to reach one side, and intending to walk along it till they came to some opening. They kept straight by going from pillar to pillar, as they had done before by the trees. Any honest plan will do in Fairyland, if you only stick to it. And no plan will do if you do not stick to it.

It was very silent, and Alice disliked the silence more than the dimness, so much, indeed, that she longed to hear Richard's voice. But she had always been so cross to him when he had spoken, that he thought it better to let her speak first, and she was too proud to do that. She would not even let him walk alongside of her, but always went slower when he wanted to wait for her, so that at last he strode on alone. And Alice followed. But by degrees the horror of silence grew upon her, and she felt at last as if there was no one in the universe but herself. The hall went on widening around her; their footsteps made no noise; the silence grew so intense that it seemed on the point of taking shape. At last she could bear it no longer. She ran after Richard, got up with him, and laid hold of his arm.

He had been thinking for some time what an obstinate, disagreeable girl Alice was, and wishing he had her safe home to be rid of her, when, feeling a hand and looking round, he saw that it was the disagreeable girl. She soon began to be companionable after a fashion, for she began to think, putting everything together, that Richard must have been several times in Fairyland before now. "It is very strange," she said to herself, "for he is quite a poor boy, I am sure of that. His arms stick out beyond his jacket like the ribs of his mother's umbrella. And to think of me wandering about Fairyland with him!"

The moment she touched his arm, they saw an arch of blackness before them. They had walked straight to a door—not a very inviting one, for it opened upon an utterly dark passage. Where there was only one door, however, there was no difficulty about choosing. Richard walked straight through it, and from the greater fear of being left behind, Alice faced the lesser fear of going on. In a moment they were in total darkness. Alice clung to Richard's arm, and murmured, almost against her will, "Dear Richard!" It was strange that fear should speak like love, but it was in Fairyland. It was strange, too, that as soon as she spoke thus, Richard should fall in love with her all at once. But what was more curious still was, that, at the same moment, Richard

saw her face. In spite of her fear, which had made her pale, she looked very lovely.

"Dear Alice!" said Richard. "How pale you look!"

"How can you tell that, Richard, when all is as black as pitch?"

"I can see your face. It gives out light. Now I see your hands. Now I can see your feet. Yes, I can see every spot where you are going to. No, don't put your foot there. There is an ugly toad just there."

The fact was, that the moment he began to love Alice, his eyes began to send forth light. What he thought came from Alice's face, really came from his eyes. All about her and her path he could see, and every minute saw better, but to his own path he was blind. He could not see his hand when he held it straight before his face, so dark was it. But he could see Alice, and that was better than seeing the way—ever so much.

At length Alice too began to see a face dawning through the darkness. It was Richard's face, but it was far handsomer than when she saw it last. Her eyes had begun to give light too. And she said to herself, "Can it be that I love the poor widow's son?" "I suppose that must be it," she answered herself, with a smile, for she was not disgusted with herself at all. Richard saw the smile, and was glad. Her paleness had gone, and a sweet rosiness had taken its place. And now she saw Richard's path as he saw hers, and between the two sights they got on well.

They were now walking on a path betwixt two deep waters, which never moved, shining as black as ebony where the eyelight fell. But they saw ere long that this path kept growing narrower and narrower. At last, to Alice's dismay, the black waters met in front of them.

"What is to be done now, Richard?" she said.

When they fixed their eyes on the water before them, they saw that it was swarming with lizards, and frogs, and black snakes, and all kinds of strange and ugly creatures, especially some that had neither heads, nor tails, nor legs, nor fins, nor feelers, being, in fact, only living lumps. These kept jumping out and in, and sprawling upon the path. Richard thought for a few moments before replying to Alice's question, as, indeed, well he might. But he came to the conclusion that the path could not have gone on for the sake of stopping there, and that it must be a kind of finger that pointed on where it was not allowed to go itself. So he caught up Alice in his strong arms, and jumped into the middle of the horrid swarm. And just as minnows vanish if you throw anything amongst them, just so these wretched creatures vanished, right and left and every way.

He found the water broader than he had expected, and before he got over, he found Alice heavier than he could have believed; but upon a firm, rocky bottom, Richard waded through in safety. When he reached the other side, he found that the bank was a lofty, smooth, perpendicular rock, with some rough steps cut in it. By and by the steps led them right into the rock, and they were in a narrow passage once more, but, this time, leading up. It wound round and round, like the thread of a great screw. At last, Richard knocked his head against something, and could go no farther. The place was close and hot. He put up his hands, and pushed what felt like a warm stone: it moved a little.

"Go down, you brutes!" growled a voice above, quivering with anger. "You'll upset my pot, and my cat, and my temper,

too, if you push that way. Go down!"

Richard knocked very gently, and said, "Please let us out."

"O yes, I dare say! Very fine and soft-spoken! Go down, you goblin brutes! I've had enough of you. I'll scald the hair off your

ugly heads if you do that again. Go down, I say!"

Seeing fair speech was of no avail, Richard told Alice to go down a little, out of the way; and, setting his shoulders to one end of the stone, heaved it up; whereupon down came the other end, with a pot, and a fire, and a cat which had been asleep beside it. She frightened Alice dreadfully as she rushed past her, show-

ing nothing but her green lamping eyes.

Richard, peeping up, found that he had turned a hearthstone upside down. On the edge of the hole stood a little crooked old man, brandishing a mop stick in a tremendous rage, and hesitating only where to strike him. But Richard put him out of his difficulty by springing up and taking the stick from him. Then, having lifted Alice out, he returned it with a bow, and, heedless of the maledictions of the old man, proceeded to get the stone and the pot up again. For puss, she got out of herself.

Then the old man became a little more friendly, and said, "I beg your pardon, I thought you were goblins. They never will let me alone. But you must allow, it was rather an unusual way of paying a morning call." And the creature bowed conciliatingly.

"It was, indeed," answered Richard. "I wish you had turned the door to us instead of the hearthstone." For he did not trust

the old man. "But," he added, "I hope you will forgive us."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, my dear young people. Use your freedom. But such young people have no business to be out alone. It is against the rules."

"But what is one to do-I mean two to do-when they can't

help it?"

"Yes, yes, of course, but now, you know, I must take charge of you. So you sit there, young gentleman, and you sit there, young lady."

He put a chair for one at one side of the hearth, and for the other at the other side, and then drew his chair between them. The cat got upon his hump, and then set up her own. So here was a wall that would let through no moonshine. But although both Richard and Alice were very much amused, they did not like to be parted in this peremptory manner. Still they thought it better not to anger the old man any more—in his own house, too.

But he had been once angered, and that was once too often, for he had made it a rule never to forgive without taking it out in humiliation.

It was so disagreeable to have him sitting there between them that they felt as if they were far asunder. In order to get the better of the fancy, they wanted to hold each other's hand behind the dwarf's back. But the moment their hands began to approach, the back of the cat began to grow long, and its hump to grow high, and, in a moment more, Richard found himself crawling wearily up a steep hill, whose ridge rose against the stars, while a cold wind blew drearily over it. Not a habitation was in sight, and Alice had vanished from his eyes. He felt, however, that she must be somewhere on the other side, and so climbed and climbed, to get over the brow of the hill and down to where he thought she must be. But the longer he climbed, the farther off the top of the hill seemed, till at last he sank quite exhausted, and—must I confess it?—very nearly began to cry. To think of being separated from Alice, all at once, and in such a disagreeable way! But he fell athinking instead, and soon said to himself, "This must be some trick of that wretched old man. Either this mountain is a cat or it is not. If it is a mountain, this won't hurt it; if it is a cat, I hope it will." With that, he pulled out his pocketknife, and feeling for a soft place, drove it at one blow up to the handle in the side of the mountain.

A terrific shriek was the first result, and the second that Alice and he sat looking at each other across the old man's hump, from which the cat-a-mountain had vanished. Their host sat staring at the blank fireplace, without ever turning round, pretending to know nothing of what had taken place.

"Come along, Alice," said Richard, rising. "This won't do. We won't stop here."

Alice rose at once, and put her hand in his. They walked toward the door. The old man took no notice of them. The moon was shining brightly through the window, but instead of stepping

out into the moonlight when they opened the door, they stepped into a great beautiful hall, through the high Gothic windows of which the same moon was shining. Out of this hall they could find no way, except by a staircase of stone which led upward. They ascended it together. At the top Alice let go Richard's hand to peep into a little room, which looked all the colors of the rainbow, just like the inside of a diamond. Richard went a step or two along a corridor, but finding she had left him, turned and looked into the chamber. He could see her nowhere. The room was full of doors, and she must have mistaken the door. He heard her voice calling him, and hurried in the direction of the sound. But he could see nothing of her. "More tricks," he said to himself. "It is of no use to stab this one. I must wait till I see what can be done." Still he heard Alice calling him, and still he followed, as well as he could. At length he came to a doorway, open to the air, through which the moonlight fell. But when he reached it, he found that it was high up in the side of a tower, the wall of which went straight down from his feet, without stair or descent of any kind. Again he heard Alice call him, and lifting his eyes, saw her, across a wide castle court, standing at another door just like the one he was at, with the moon shining full upon her.

"All right, Alice!" he cried. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes," answered she.

"Then listen. This is all a trick. It is all a lie of that old wretch in the kitchen. Just reach out your hand, Alice dear."

Alice did as Richard asked her, and, although they saw each

other many yards off across the court, their hands met.

"Now, Alice, I don't believe it is more than a foot or two down to the court below, though it looks like a hundred feet. Keep fast hold of my hand, and jump when I count three." But Alice drew her hand from him in sudden dismay; whereupon Richard said, "Well, I will try first," and jumped. The same moment, his cheery laugh came to Alice's ears, and she saw him standing safe on the ground, far below.

"Jump, dear Alice, and I will catch you," said he.

"I can't; I am afraid," answered she.

"The old man is somewhere near you. You had better jump," said Richard.

Alice jumped from the wall in terror, and only fell a foot or two into Richard's arms. The moment she touched the ground, they found themselves outside the door of a little cottage which they knew very well, for it was only just within the wood that bordered on their village. Hand in hand they ran home as fast as they could. When they reached a little gate that led into her father's grounds, Richard bade Alice good-bye. The tears came in her eyes. Richard and she seemed to have grown quite man and woman in Fairyland, and they did not want to part now. But they felt that they must. So Alice ran in the back way, and reached her own room before anyone had missed her. Indeed, the last of the red had not quite faded from the west.

As Richard crossed the market place on his way home, he saw an umbrella man just selling the last of his umbrellas. He thought the man gave him a queer look as he passed, and felt very much inclined to punch his head. But remembering how useless it had been to punch the goblin's head, he thought it better not.

In reward of their courage, the Fairy Queen sent them permission to visit Fairyland as often as they pleased, and no goblin or

fairy was allowed to interfere with them.

For Peaseblossom and Toadstool, they were both banished from court, and compelled to live together, for seven years, in an old tree that had just one green leaf upon it.

Toadstool did not mind it much, but Peaseblossom did.

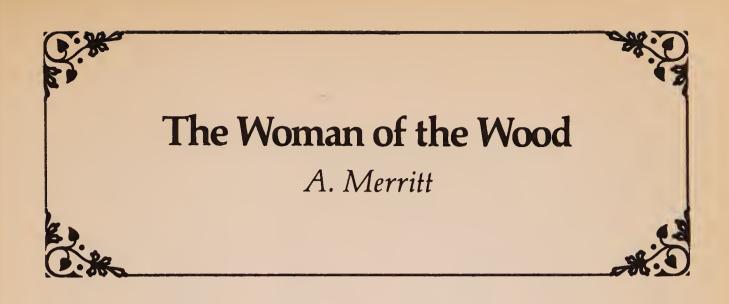
A. Merritt, noted American journalist and fantasy writer, was born in Beverly, New Jersey, the son of Quaker parents. Largely self-educated, Merritt began his career in journalism at the age of nineteen when he landed a job as cub reporter with the *Philadel-phia Inquirer*. He rapidly advanced to the position of night editor with the *Inquirer*, and then, in 1912, moved on to New York City when offered the position of assistant editor of *The American Weekly*. In 1937, he became editor-in-chief of that prestigious publication, a position he held, with distinction, until his

sudden death from a heart attack on August 30, 1943.

Merritt's career as fantasist began in 1917 when one of his fantasy stories, "Through the Dragon Glass," was published in the November 24 issue of All-Story. Over the next three decades, Merritt managed to squeeze out enough time from his demanding editorial duties to write nine novels, a few short stories, and some fascinating studies of witchcraft and cultism. Some of his most enduring novels are The Moon Pool (1919), The Face in the Abyss (1923), Seven Footprints to Satan (1927), The Snake Mother (1930), Dwellers in the Mirage (1932), and Burn Witch Burn (1932). But perhaps his most popular work is The Ship of Ishtar (1924), a fine adventure fantasy that was acclaimed by Argosy, after polling its readers in 1938, as the most popular story it had ever published. This was, indeed, a singular honor for Merritt since Argosy had been publishing fiction for over a half-century before the 1938 poll was conducted.

First published in the August 26, 1926, issue of Weird Tales, "The Woman of the Wood" was one of Merritt's most popular stories, and, as Sam Moskowitz points out in Explorers of the Infinite (Hyperion Press, 1974, p. 202), it was "the only story [Merritt] was completely satisfied with upon completion." Indeed, it is not difficult to understand Merritt's sentiments. No better example of his consummate literary craftsmanship can be found than in this hauntingly beautiful story about the primeval conflict between humankind and nature. All of the

requisite ingredients of a quality story are abundantly displayed here: a tightly woven narrative thread, visual imagery, evocative descriptions, subtle characterization, believable dialogue, appropriate setting and atmosphere, and strong thematic import. Nothing is forced or strained in this poignant and well-wrought tale. Even the elfin creatures of the forest become believable through the magic of Merritt's poetic style.





McKay sat on the balcony of the little inn that squatted like a brown gnome among the pines that clothed the eastern shore of the lake.

It was a small and lonely lake high up on the Vosges; and yet the word "lonely" is not just the one to tag its spirit; rather was it aloof, withdrawn. The mountains came down on every side, making a vast tree-lined bowl that seemed filled, when McKay first

saw it, with a still wine of peace.

McKay had worn the wings with honor in the World War. And as a bird loves the trees, so did McKay love them. They were to him not merely trunks and roots, branches and leaves; they were personalities. He was acutely aware of character differences even among the same species—that pine was jolly and benevolent; that one austere, monkish; there stood a swaggering bravo and there a sage wrapped in green meditation; that birch was a wanton; the one beside her virginal, still adream.

The war had sapped McKay, nerve, brain, and soul. Through all the years that had passed the wound had kept open. But now, as he slid his car down the side of the great green bowl, he felt its peace reach out to him, caress and quiet him, promise him healing. He seemed to drift like a falling leaf through the cathedraled

woods, to be cradled by the hands of the trees.

McKay had stopped at the little gnome of an inn, and there he

had lingered, day after day, week after week.

The trees had nursed him; soft whisperings of the leaves, slow chant of the needled pines, had first deadened, then driven from him the re-echoing clamor of the war and its sorrow. The open wound of his spirit had closed under their healing, had closed and become scars; and then even the scars had been covered and buried, as the scars on Earth's breast are covered and buried beneath the falling leaves of autumn. The trees had laid healing hands upon his eyes. He had sucked strength from the green breasts of the hills.

As that strength flowed back to him, McKay grew aware that

the place was—troubled, that there was ferment of fear within it.

It was as though the trees had waited until he himself had become whole before they made their own unrest known to him. But now they were trying to tell him something; there was a shrillness as of apprehension, of anger, in the whispering of the leaves, the needled chanting of the pines.

And it was this that had kept McKay at the inn—a definite consciousness of appeal. He strained his ears to catch words in the rustling branches, words that trembled on the brink of his

human understanding. Never did they cross that brink.

Gradually he had focused himself, so he believed, to the point of the valley's unease.

On all the shores of the lake there were but two dwellings. One was the inn, and around the inn the trees clustered protectively, confidingly, friendly. It was as though they had not only ac-

cepted it, but had made it part of themselves.

Not so was it of the other habitation. Once it had been the hunting lodge of long-dead lords; now it was half ruined, forlorn. It lay across the lake almost exactly opposite the inn and back upon the slope a half mile from the shore. Once there had been fat fields around it and a fair orchard.

The forest had marched down upon fields and lodge. Here and there scattered pines and poplars stood like soldiers guarding some outpost; scouting parties of saplings lurked among the gaunt, broken fruit trees. But the forest had not had its way unchecked; ragged stumps showed where those who dwelt in the old house had cut down the invaders; blackened patches showed where they had fired the woods.

Here was the center of the conflict. Here the green folk of the

forest were both menaced and menacing, at war.

The lodge was a fortress beleaguered by the trees, a fortress whose garrison sallied forth with ax and torch to take their toll of their besiegers.

Yet McKay sensed a slow, inexorable pressing on of the forest; he saw it as an army ever filling the gaps in its enclosing ranks, shooting its seeds into the cleared places, sending its roots out to sap them, and armed always with a crushing patience. He had the impression of constant regard, of watchfulness, as though night and day the forest kept myriads of eyes upon the lodge, inexorably, not to be swerved from its purpose. He had spoken of this impression to the innkeeper and his wife, and they had looked at him, oddly.

"Old Polleau does not love the trees, no," the old man had said,

"No, nor do his two sons. They do not love the trees—and very certainly the trees do not love them."

Between the lodge and the shore, marching down to the verge of the lake was a singularly beautiful little coppice of silver birches and firs. This coppice stretched for perhaps a quarter of a mile; it was not more than a hundred feet or two in depth, and not alone the beauty of its trees but also their curious grouping vividly aroused McKay's interest. At each end were a dozen or more of the glistening, needled firs, not clustered but spread out as though in open marching order; at widely spaced intervals along its other two sides paced single firs. The birches, slender and delicate, grew within the guard of these sturdier trees, yet not so thickly as to crowd one another.

To McKay the silver birches were for all the world like some gay caravan of lovely demoiselles under the protection of debonair knights. With that odd other sense of his he saw the birches as delectable damsels, merry and laughing—the pines as lovers, troubadours in green-needled mail. And when the winds blew and the crests of the trees bent under them, it was as though dainty demoiselles picked up fluttering, leafy skirts, bent leafy hoods, and danced while the knights of the firs drew closer round them, locked arms and danced with them to the roaring horns of the winds. At such times he almost heard sweet laughter from the birches, shoutings from the firs.

Of all the trees in that place McKay loved best this little wood. He had rowed across and rested in its shade, had dreamed there and, dreaming, had heard mysterious whisperings and the sound of dancing feet light as falling leaves, had taken dream

draft of that gaiety which was the soul of the little wood.

Two days ago he had seen Polleau and his two sons. McKay had lain dreaming in the coppice all that afternoon. As dusk began to fall he had reluctantly arisen and begun to row back to the inn. When he had been a few hundred feet from shore three men had come out from the trees and had stood watching himthree grim, powerful men taller than the average French peasant.

He had called a friendly greeting to them, but they had not answered it; had stood there, scowling. Then as he bent again to his oars, one of the sons had raised a hatchet and driven it savagely into the trunk of a slim birch. McKay thought he heard a thin, wailing cry from the stricken tree, a sigh from all the little wood.

He had felt as though the keen edge had bitten into his own

flesh.

"Stop that!" he had cried. "Stop it, damn you!"

For answer Polleau's son had struck again, and never had McKay seen hate etched so deep as on his face as he struck. Cursing, a killing rage in his heart, McKay had swung the boat around, raced back to shore. He had heard the hatchet strike again and again and, close now to shore, had heard a crackling and over it once more the thin, high wailing. He had turned to look.

The birch was tottering, was falling. Close beside it grew one of the firs, and, as the smaller tree crashed over, it dropped upon this fir like a fainting maid into the arms of her lover. And as it lay and trembled there, one of the branches of the other tree slipped from under it, whipped out, and smote the hatchet wielder a crushing blow upon the head, sending him to earth.

It had been, of course, only the chance blow of a bough, bent by pressure of the fallen trunk and then released as that had slipped down. Of course—yet there had been such suggestion of conscious action in the branch's recoil, so much of bitter anger in it, so much, in truth, had it been like a purposeful blow that McKay felt an eerie prickling of his scalp; his heart had missed its beat.

For a moment Polleau and the standing son had stared at the sturdy fir with the silvery birch lying upon its green breast, folded in and shielded by its needled boughs as though—again the swift impression came to McKay—as though it were a wounded maid stretched on breast, in arms, of knightly lover. For a long moment father and son had stared.

Then, still wordless but with that same bitter hatred in both their faces, they had stooped and picked up the other and, with his arms around the neck of each, had borne him limply away.

McKay, sitting on the balcony of the inn that morning, went over and over that scene, realized more and more clearly the human aspect of fallen birch and clasping fir, and the conscious deliberateness of the latter's blow. During the two days that had elapsed since then, he had felt the unease of the trees increase, their whispering appeal become more urgent.

What were they trying to tell him? What did they want him to do?

Troubled, he stared across the lake, trying to pierce the mists that hung over it and hid the opposite shore. And suddenly it seemed that he heard the coppice calling him, felt it pull the point of his attention toward it irresistibly, as the lodestone swings and holds the compass needle. The coppice called him; it bade him come.

McKay obeyed the command; he arose and walked down to the boat landing; he stepped into his skiff and began to row across the lake. As his oars touched the water his trouble fell from him. In its place flowed peace and a curious exaltation.

The mists were thick upon the lake. There was no breath of wind, yet the mists billowed and drifted, shook and curtained

under the touch of unfelt airy hands.

They were alive—the mists; they formed themselves into fantastic palaces past whose opalescent façades he flew; they built themselves into hills and valleys and circled plains whose floors were rippling silk. Tiny rainbows gleamed out among them, and upon the water prismatic patches shone and spread like spilled wine of opals. He had the illusion of vast distances—the hillocks of mist were real mountains, the valleys between them were not illusory. He was a colossus cleaving through some elfin world. A trout broke, and it was like Leviathan leaping from the fathomless deep. Around the arc of the fish's body rainbows interlaced and then dissolved into rain of softly gleaming gems—diamonds in dance with sapphires, flame-hearted rubies, pearls with shimmering souls of rose. The fish vanished, diving cleanly without sound; the jeweled bows vanished with it; a tiny irised whirlpool swirled for an instant where trout and flashing arcs had been.

Nowhere was there sound. He let his oars drop and leaned forward, drifting. In the silence, before him and around him, he

felt opening the gateways of an unknown world.

And suddenly he heard the sound of voices, many voices, faint at first and murmurous. Louder they became, swiftly; women's voices sweet and lilting, and mingled with them the deeper tones of men; voices that lifted and fell in a wild, gay chanting through whose *joyesse* ran undertones both of sorrow and of anger—as though faery weavers threaded through silk spun of sunbeams, somber strands dipped in the black of graves, and crimson strands stained in the red of wrathful sunsets.

He drifted on, scarce daring to breathe lest even that faint sound break the elfin song. Closer it rang and clearer, and now he became aware that the speed of his boat was increasing, that it was no longer drifting, as though the little waves on each side were pushing him ahead with soft and noiseless palms. His boat grounded, and as its keel rustled along over the smooth pebbles of the beach the song ceased.

McKay half arose and peered before him. The mists were thicker here, but he could see the outlines of the coppice. It was like looking at it through many curtains of fine gauze, and its trees seemed shifting, ethereal, unreal. And moving among the trees were figures that threaded among the boles and flitted round them in rhythmic measures, like the shadows of leafy boughs swaying to some cadenced wind.

He stepped ashore. The mists dropped behind him, shutting off all sight of the lake, and as they dropped, McKay lost all sense of strangeness, all feeling of having entered some unfamiliar world. Rather it was as though he had returned to one he had once known well and that had been long lost to him.

The rhythmic flitting had ceased; there was now no movement as there was no sound among the trees—yet he felt the little wood full of watchful life. McKay tried to speak; there was a spell of silence on his mouth.

"You called me. I have come to listen to you—to help you if I can."

The words formed within his mind, but utter them he could not. Over and over he tried, desperately; the words seemed to die on his lips.

A pillar of mist whirled forward and halted, eddying half an arm's length away. Suddenly out of it peered a woman's face, eyes level with his own. A woman's face—yes; but McKay, staring into those strange eyes probing his, knew that, woman's though it seemed, it was that of no woman of human breed. They were without pupils, the irises deer-large and of the soft green of deep forest dells; within them sparkled tiny star points of light like motes in a moonbeam. The eyes were wide and set far apart beneath a broad, low brow over which was piled braid upon braid of hair of palest gold, braids that seemed spun of shining ashes of gold. The nose was small and straight, the mouth scarlet and exquisite. The face was oval, tapering to a delicately pointed chin.

Beautiful was that face, but its beauty was an alien one, unearthly. For long moments the strange eyes thrust their gaze deep into his. Then out of the mist were thrust two slender white arms, the hands long, the fingers tapering.

The tapering fingers touched his ears. "He shall hear," whispered the red lips.

Immediately from all about him a cry arose; in it were the whispering and rustling of the leaves beneath the breath of the winds; the shrilling of the harp strings of the boughs; the laughter of hidden brooks; the shoutings of waters flinging themselves down into deep and rocky pools—the voices of the forest made articulate.

"He shall hear!" they cried.

The long white fingers rested on his lips, and their touch was cool as bark of birch on cheek after some long upward climb through forest, cool and subtly sweet.

"He shall speak," whispered the scarlet lips of the wood

woman.

"He shall speak!" answered the wood voices again, as though in litany.

"He shall see," whispered the woman, and the cold fingers touched his eyes.

"He shall see!" echoed the wood voices.

The mists that had hidden the coppice from McKay wavered, thinned, and were gone. In their place was a limpid, translucent, palely green aether, faintly luminous, as though he stood within some clear wan emerald. His feet pressed a golden moss spangled with tiny starry bluets. Fully revealed before him was the woman of the strange eyes and the face of unearthly beauty. He dwelt for a moment upon the slender shoulders, the firm, small, tiptilted breasts, the willow litheness of her body. From neck to knees a smock covered her, sheer and silken and delicate as spun cobwebs; through it her body gleamed as though fire of the young spring moon ran in her veins.

He looked beyond her. There upon the golden moss were other women like her, many of them; they stared at him with the same wide-set green eyes in which danced the sparkling moon-beam motes; like her they were crowned with glistening, pallidly golden hair; like hers, too, were their oval faces with the pointed chins and perilous alien beauty. Only where she stared at him gravely, measuring him, weighing him, there were those of her sisters whose eyes were mocking; and those whose eyes called to him with a weirdly tingling allure, their mouths athirst; those whose eyes looked upon him with curiosity alone; those whose great eyes pleaded with him, prayed to him.

Within that pellucid, greenly luminous aether McKay was abruptly aware that the trees of the coppice still had a place. Only now they were spectral indeed. They were like white shadows cast athwart a glaucous screen; trunk and bough, twig and leaf, they arose around him and they were as though etched in air by phantom craftsmen—thin and unsubstantial; they were ghost

trees rooted in another space.

He was aware that there were men among the women; men whose eyes were set wide apart as were theirs, as strange and pupilless as were theirs, but with irises of brown and blue; men with pointed chins and oval faces, broad shouldered and clad in kirtles of darkest green; swarthy-skinned men, muscular and strong, with that same lithe grace of the women—and like them of a beauty that was alien and elfin.

McKay heard a little wailing cry. He turned. Close beside him lay a girl clasped in the arms of one of the swarthy, green-clad men. She lay upon his breast. His eyes were filled with a black flame of wrath, and hers were misted, anguished. For an instant McKay had a glimpse of the birch that old Polleau's son had sent crashing down into the boughs of the fir. He saw birch and fir as immaterial oùtlines around this man and this girl. For an instant girl and man and birch and fir seemed to be one and the same.

The scarlet-lipped woman touched his shoulder.

"She withers," sighed the woman, and in her voice McKay heard a faint rustling as of mournful leaves. "Now is it not pitiful that she withers—our sister who was so young, so slender, and so lovely?"

McKay looked again at the girl. The white skin seemed shrunken; the moon radiance that gleamed through the bodies of the others was still in hers, but dim and pallid; her slim arms hung listlessly; her body drooped. Her mouth was wan and parched, her long and misted green eyes dull. The palely golden hair was lusterless and dry. He looked on a slow death—a withering death.

"May the arm that struck her down wither!" said the greenclad man who held her, and in his voice McKay heard a savage strumming as of winter winds through bleak boughs: "May his heart wither and the sun blast him! May the rain and the waters deny him and the winds scourge him!"

"I thirst," whispered the girl.

There was a stirring among the watching women. One came forward holding a chalice that was like thin leaves turned to green crystal. She paused beside the trunk of one of the spectral trees, reached up, and drew down to her a branch. A slim girl with half-frightened, half-resentful eyes glided to her side and threw her arms around the ghostly bole. The woman cut the branch deep with what seemed an arrow-shaped flake of jade and held her chalice under it. From the cut a faintly opalescent liquid dripped into the cup. When it was filled, the woman beside McKay stepped forward and pressed her own long hands around the bleeding branch. She stepped away and McKay saw that the stream had ceased to flow. She touched the trembling girl and unclasped her arms.

"It is healed," said the woman gently. "And it was your turn, little sister. The wound is healed. Soon you will have forgotten."

The woman with the chalice knelt and set it to the wan, dry

lips of her who was—withering. She drank of it, thirstily, to the last drop. The misty eyes cleared, they sparkled; the lips that had been so parched and pale grew red, the white body gleamed as though the waning light within it had been fed with new.

"Sing, sisters," the girl cried shrilly. "Dance for me, sisters!"

Again burst out that chant McKay had heard as he had floated through the mists upon the lake. Now, as then, despite his open ears, he could distinguish no words, but clearly he understood its mingled themes—the joy of spring's awakening, rebirth, with green life streaming, singing up through every bough, swelling the buds, burgeoning with tender leaves the branches; the dance of the trees in the scented winds of spring; the drums of the jubilant rain on leafy hoods; passion of summer sun pouring its golden flood down upon the trees; the moon passing with stately steps and slow, and green hands reaching up to her and drawing from her breast milk of silver fire; riot of wild gay winds with their mad pipings and strummings; soft interlacing of boughs; the kiss of amorous leaves—all these and more, much more that McKay could not understand since they dealt with hidden, secret things for which man has no images, were in that chanting.

And all these and more were in the rhythms of the dancing of those strange, green-eyed women and brown-skinned men; something incredibly ancient, yet young as the speeding moment;

something of a world before and beyond man.

McKay listened; he watched, lost in wonder, his own world more than half forgotten.

The woman beside him touched his arm. She pointed to the girl.

"Yet she withers," she said. "And not all our life, if we poured

it through her lips, could save her."

He saw that the red was draining slowly from the girl's lips, that the luminous life tides were waning. The eyes that had been so bright were misting and growing dull once more. Suddenly a great pity and a great rage shook him. He knelt beside her, took her hands in his.

"Take them away! Take away your hands! They burn me!" she moaned.

"He tries to help you," whispered the green-clad man, gently. But he reached over and drew McKay's hands away.

"Not so can you help her or us," said the woman.

"What can I do?" McKay arose, looked helplessly from one to the other. "What can I do to help you?"

The chanting died, the dance stopped. A silence fell, and he

felt upon him the eyes of all these strange people. They were tense, waiting. The woman took his hands. Her touch was cool and sent a strange sweetness sweeping through his veins.

"There are three men yonder," she said. "They hate us. Soon we shall all be as she is there—withering! They have sworn it,

and as they have sworn so will they do. Unless-"

She paused. The moonbeam-dancing motes in her eyes changed

to tiny sparklings of red that terrified him.

"Three men?" In his clouded mind was dim memory of Polleau and his two strong sons. "Three men?" he repeated, stupidly. "But what are three men to you who are so many? What could three men do against those stalwart gallants of yours?"

"No," she shook her head. "No—there is nothing our—men—can do; nothing that we can do. Once, night and day, we were gay. Now we fear—night and day. They mean to destroy us. Our kin have warned us. And our kin cannot help us. Those three are masters of blade and flame. Against blade and flame we are helpless.

"Surely will they destroy us," murmured the woman. "We

shall wither—all of us. Like her there, or burn—unless—"

Suddenly she threw white arms around McKay's neck. She pressed her body close to him. Her scarlet mouth sought and found his lips and clung to them. Through all McKay's body ran swift, sweet flames, green fire of desire. His own arms went around her, crushed her to him.

"You shall not die!" he cried. "No-by God, you shall not!"

She drew back her head, looked deep into his eyes.

"They have sworn to destroy us," she said, "and soon. With blade and flame they will destroy us—those three—unless—"

"Unless?" he asked, fiercely.

"Unless you—slay them first!" she answered.

A cold shock ran through McKay, chilling the fires of his desire. He dropped his arm from around the woman, thrust her from him. For an instant she trembled before him.

"Slay!" he heard her whisper—and she was gone.

The spectral trees wavered; their outlines thickened out of immateriality into substance. The green translucence darkened. He had a swift vertiginous moment as though he swung between two worlds. He closed his eyes. The dizziness passed and he opened them, looked around him.

He stood on the lakeward skirts of the little coppice. There were no shadows flitting, no sign of white women nor of swarthy, green-clad men. His feet were on green moss. Gone was

the soft golden carpet with its bluets. Birches and firs clustered solidly before him.

At his left was a sturdy fir in whose needled arms a broken birch tree lay withering. It was the birch that Polleau's son had so wantonly slashed down. For an instant he saw within the fir and birch the immaterial outlines of the green-clad man and the slim girl who withered. For that instant birch and fir and girl and man seemed one and the same. He stepped back, and his hands touched the smooth, cool bark of another birch that rose close at his right.

Upon his hands the touch of that bark was like—was like what? Curiously was it like the touch of the long slim hands of the woman of the scarlet lips!

McKay stood there, staring, wondering, like a man who has but half awakened from dream. And suddenly a little wind stirred the leaves of the rounded birch beside him. The leaves murmured, sighed. The wind grew stronger and the leaves whispered.

"Slay!" he heard them whisper—and again: "Slay! Help us! Slay!"

And the whisper was the voice of the woman of the scarlet lips!

Rage, swift and unreasoning, sprang up in McKay. He began to run up through the coppice, up to where he knew was the old lodge in which dwelt Polleau and his sons. And as he ran the wind blew stronger about him, and louder and louder grew the whispering of the trees.

"Slay!" they whispered. "Slay them! Save us! Slay!"

"I will slay! I will save you!" McKay, panting, hammer pulse beating in his ears, heard himself answering that ever more insistent command. And in his mind was but one desire—to clutch the throats of Polleau and his sons, to crack their necks, to stand by them then and watch them wither—wither like that slim girl in the arms of the green-clad man.

He came to the edge of the coppice and burst from it out into a flood of sunshine. For a hundred feet he ran, and then he was aware that the whispering command was stilled, that he heard no more that maddening rustling of wrathful leaves. A spell seemed to have been loosed from him; it was as though he had broken through some web of sorcery. McKay stopped, dropped upon the ground, buried his face in the grasses.

He lay there marshaling his thoughts into some order of sanity. What had he been about to do? To rush upon those three men who lived in the old lodge and—slay them! And for what? Be-

cause that unearthly, scarlet-lipped woman whose kisses he still could feel upon his mouth had bade him! Because the whispering trees of the little wood had maddened him with that same command! For this he had been about to kill three men!

What were that woman and her sister and the green-clad swarthy gallants of theirs? Illusions of some waking dream—phantoms born of the hypnosis of the swirling mists through which he had rowed and floated across the lake? Such things were not uncommon. McKay knew of those who by watching the shifting clouds could create and dwell for a time with wide-open eyes within some similar land of fantasy; knew others who needed but to stare at smoothly falling water to set themselves within a world of waking dreams; there were those who could summon dreams by gazing into a ball of crystal; others who found dream life in saucers of shining ink.

Might not the moving mists have laid those same fingers of hypnosis upon his own mind? And his love for the trees, the sense of appeal that he had felt so long, his memory of the wanton slaughter of the slim birch have all combined to paint upon his drugged consciousness the fantasms he had beheld?

McKay arose to his feet, shakily enough. He looked back at the coppice. There was no wind now; the leaves were silent, motionless. Reason with himself as he might, something deep within him stubbornly asserted the reality of his experience. At any rate, he told himself, the little wood was far too beautiful to be despoiled.

The old lodge was about a quarter of a mile away. A path led up to it through the ragged fields. McKay walked up the path, climbed rickety steps, and paused, listening. He heard voices and knocked. The door was flung open and old Polleau stood there, peering at him through half-shut, suspicious eyes. One of the sons stood close behind him. They stared at McKay with grim, hostile faces.

He thought he heard a faint, far-off despairing whisper from the distant wood. And it was as though the pair in the doorway heard it too, for their gaze shifted from him to the coppice, and he saw hatred flicker swiftly across their grim faces. Their gaze swept back to him.

"What do you want?" demanded Polleau, curtly.

"I am a neighbor of yours, stopping at the inn—" began McKay, courteously.

"I know who you are," Polleau interrupted, brusquely, "but what is it that you want?"

"I find the air of this place good for me." McKay stifled a rising anger. "I am thinking of staying for a year or more until my health is fully recovered. I would like to buy some of your land and build me a lodge upon it."

"Yes, M'sieu?" There was acid politeness now in the old man's voice. "But is it permitted to ask why you do not remain at the inn? Its fare is excellent and you are well-liked there."

"I have desire to be alone," replied McKay. "I do not like people too close to me. I would have my own land, and sleep

under my own roof."

"But why come to me" asked Polleau. "There are many places upon the far side of the lake that you could secure. It is happy there, and this side is not happy, M'sieu. But tell me, what part of my land is it that you desire?"

"That little wood yonder," answered McKay, and pointed to

the coppice.

"Ah! I thought so!" whispered Polleau, and between him and his son passed a look of somber understanding.

"That wood is not for sale, M'sieu," he said.

"I can afford to pay well for what I want," said McKay. "Name your price."

"It is not for sale," repeated Polleau, stolidly, "at any price."

"Oh, come," urged McKay, although his heart sank at the finality in that answer. "You have many acres and what is it but a few trees? I can afford to gratify my fancies. I will give you all

the worth of your other land for it."

"You have asked what that place that you so desire is, and you have answered that it is but a few trees," said Polleau, slowly, and the tall son behind him laughed, abruptly, maliciously. "But it is more than that, M'sieu—oh, much more than that. And you know it, else why should you pay such a price as you offer? Yes, you know it—since you know also that we are ready to destroy it, and you would save it. And who told you all that, M'sieu?" he snarled.

There was such malignance, such black hatred in the face thrust suddenly close to McKay's, eyes blazing, teeth bared by uplifted lip, that involuntarily he recoiled.

"Only a few trees!" snarled old Polleau. "Then who told him

what we mean to do-eh, Pierre?"

Again the son laughed. And at that laughter McKay felt within him resurgence of his own blind hatred as he had fled through the whispering wood. He mastered himself, turned away; there was nothing he could do-now. Polleau halted him.

"M'sieu," he said, "enter. There is something I would tell you; something, too, I would show you."

He stood aside, bowing with a rough courtesy. McKay walked through the doorway. Polleau with his son followed him. He entered a large, dim room whose ceiling was spanned with smokeblackened beams. From these beams hung onion strings and herbs and smoke-cured meats. On one side was a wide fireplace. Huddled beside it sat Polleau's other son. He glanced up as they entered, and McKay saw that a bandage covered one side of his head, hiding his left eye. McKay recognized him as the one who had cut down the slim birch. The blow of the fir, he reflected with a certain satisfaction, had been no futile one.

Old Polleau strode over to that son.

"Look, M'sieu," he said, and lifted the bandage.

McKay saw, with a tremor of horror, a gaping blackened socket, red-rimmed and eyeless.

"Good God, Polleau!" he cried. "But this man needs medical attention. I know something of wounds. Let me go across the lake and bring back my kit. I will attend him."

Old Polleau shook his head, although his grim face for the first

time softened. He drew the bandages back in place.

"It heals," he said. "We have some skill in such things. You saw what did it. You watched from your boat as the cursed tree struck him. The eye was crushed and lay upon his cheek. I cut it away. Now he heals. We do not need your aid, *M'sieu*."

"Yet he ought not have cut the birch," muttered McKay, more

to himself than to be heard.

"Why not?" asked old Polleau, fiercely, "since it hated him."

McKay stared at him. What did this old peasant know? The words strengthened his stubborn conviction that what he had seen and heard in the coppice had been actuality—no dream. And still more did Polleau's next words strengthen that conviction.

"M'sieu," he said, "you come here as ambassador—of a sort. The wood has spoken to you. Well, as ambassador I shall speak to you. Four centuries my people have lived in this place. A century we have owned this land. M'Sieu, in all those years there has been no moment that the trees have not hated us—nor we the trees.

"For all those hundred years there have been hatred and battle between us and the forest. My father, M'sieu, was crushed by a tree, my elder brother crippled by another. My father's father, woodsman that he was, was lost in the forest; he came back to us with mind gone, raving of wood women who had bewitched and mocked him, lured him into swamp and fen and tangled thicket,

tormenting him. In every generation the trees have taken their toll of us-women as well as men-maiming or killing us."

"Accidents," interrupted McKay. "This is childish, Polleau. You cannot blame the trees."

"In your heart you do not believe so," said Polleau. "Listen, the feud is an ancient one. Centuries ago it began when we were serfs, slaves of the nobles. To cook, to keep us warm in winter, they let us pick up the fagots, the dead branches and twigs that dropped from the trees. But if we cut down a tree to keep us warm, to keep our women and our children warm, yes, if we but tore down a branch, they hanged us, or threw us into dungeons to rot, or whipped us till our backs were red lattices.

"They had their broad fields, the nobles, but we must raise our food in the patches where the trees disdained to grow. And if they did thrust themselves into our poor patches, then, M'sieu, we must let them have their way—or be flogged, or be thrown

into the dungeons, or be hanged.

"They pressed us in-the trees," the old man's voice grew sharp with fanatic hatred. "They stole our fields and they took the food from the mouths of our children; they dropped their fagots to us like dole to beggars; they tempted us to warmth when the cold struck to our bones—and they bore us as fruit aswing at the end of the foresters' ropes if we yielded to their tempting.

"Yes, M'sieu, we died of cold that they might live! Our children died of hunger that their young might find root space! They despised us—the trees! We died that they might live—and

we were men!

"Then, M'sieu, came the Revolution and the freedom. Ah, M'sieu, then we took our toll! Great logs roaring in the winter cold—no more huddling over the alms of fagots. Fields where the trees had been-no more starving of our children that theirs might live. Now the trees were the slaves and we the masters.

"And the trees knew, and they hated us!

"But blow for blow, a hundred of their lives for each life of ours—we have returned their hatred. With ax and torch we have

fought them-

"The trees!" shrieked Polleau suddenly, eyes blazing red rage, face writhing, foam at the corners of his mouth, and gray hair clutched in rigid hands. "The cursed trees! Armies of the trees creeping—creeping—closer, ever closer—crushing us in! Stealing our fields as they did of old! Building their dungeon round us as they built of old the dungeons of stone! Creeping-creeping!

Armies of trees! Legions of trees! The trees! The cursed trees!"

McKay listened, appalled. Here was crimson heart of hate. Madness! But what was at the root of it? Some deep inherited instinct, coming down from forefathers who had hated the forest as the symbol of their masters—forefathers whose tides of hatred had overflowed to the green life on which the nobles had laid their taboo, as one neglected child will hate the favorite on whom love and gifts are lavished? In such warped minds the crushing fall of a tree; the maiming sweep of a branch, might appear as deliberate; the natural growth of the forest seem the implacable advance of an enemy.

And yet—the blow of the fir as the cut birch fell had been deliberate! And there had been those women of the wood—

"Patience," the standing son touched the old man's shoulder. "Patience! Soon we strike our blow."

Some of the frenzy died out of Polleau's face.

"Though we cut down a hundred," he whispered, "by the hundred they return! But one of us, when they strike, he does not return, no! They have numbers and they have—time. We are now but three, and we have little time. They watch us as we go through the forest, alert to trip, to strike, to crush!

"But, M'sieu," he turned bloodshot eyes to McKay, "we strike our blow, even as Pierre has said. We strike at that coppice that you so desire. We strike there because it is the very heart of the forest. There the secret life of the forest runs at full tide. We know—and you know! Something that, destroyed, will take the heart out of the forest—will make it know us for its masters."

"The women!" The standing son's eyes glittered, malignantly. "I have seen the women there! The fair women with the shining skins who invite—and mock and vanish before hands can seize them."

"The fair women who peer into our windows in the night—and mock us!" muttered the eyeless son.

"They shall mock no more!" shouted old Polleau. "Soon they shall lie, dying! All of them—all of them! They die!"

He caught McKay by the shoulders and shook him like a child. "Go tell them that!" he shouted. "Say to them that this very day we destroy them. Say to them it is we who will laugh when winter comes and we watch their bodies blaze in this hearth of

ours and warm us! Go—tell them that!"

He spun McKay around, pushed him to the door, opened it, and flung him staggering down the steps. He heard the tall son laugh, the door close. Blind with rage he rushed up the steps and hurled himself against the door. Again the tall son laughed.

McKay beat at the door with clenched fists, cursing. The three within paid no heed. Despair began to dull his rage. Could the trees help him—counsel him? He turned and walked slowly down the field path to the little wood.

Slowly and ever more slowly he went as he neared it. He had failed. He was a messenger bearing a warrant of death. The birches were motionless, their leaves hung listlessly. It was as though they knew he had failed. He paused at the edge of the coppice. He looked at his watch, noted with faint surprise that already it was high noon. Short shrift enough had the little wood. The work of destruction would not be long delayed.

McKay squared his shoulders and passed in between the trees. It was strangely silent in the coppice. And it was mournful. He had a sense of life brooding around him, withdrawn into itself, sorrowing. He passed through the silent, mournful wood until he reached the spot where the rounded, gleaming-barked tree stood close to the fir that held the withering birch. Still there was no sound, no movement. He laid his hands upon the cool bark of the rounded tree.

"Let me see again!" he whispered. "Let me hear! Speak to me!"

There was no answer. Again and again he called. The coppice was silent. He wandered through it, whispering, calling. The slim birches stood, passive, with limbs and leaves adroop like listless arms and hands of captive maids awaiting in dull woe the will of conquerors. The firs seemed to crouch like hopeless men with heads in hands. His heart ached to the woe that filled the little wood, this hopeless submission of the trees.

When, he wondered, would Polleau strike? He looked at his watch again; an hour had gone by. How long would Polleau wait? He dropped to the moss against a smooth bole.

And suddenly it seemed to McKay that he was a madman—as mad as Polleau and his sons. Calmly, he went over the old peasant's indictment of the forest, recalled the face and eyes filled with fanatic hate. They were all mad. After all, the trees were—only trees. Polleau and his sons—so he reasoned—had transferred to them the bitter hatred their forefathers had felt for those old lords who had enslaved them, had laid upon them too all the bitterness of their own struggle to exist in this high forest land. When they struck at the trees, it was the ghosts of those forefathers striking at the nobles who had oppressed them; it was themselves striking against their own destiny. The trees were but symbols. It was the warped minds of Polleau and his sons that

clothed them in false semblance of conscious life, blindly striving to wreak vengeance against the ancient masters and the destiny that had made their lives one hard and unceasing battle against nature. The nobles were long dead, for destiny can be brought to grips by no man. But the trees were here and alive. Clothed in mirage, through them the driving lust for vengeance could be sated. So much for Polleau and his sons.

And he, McKay: was it not his own deep love and sympathy for the trees that similarly had clothed them in that false semblance of conscious life? Had he not built his own mirage? The trees did not really mourn, could not suffer, could not—know. It was his own sorrow that he had transferred to them, only his sorrow that he felt echoing back to him from them. The trees were—only trees.

Instantly, upon the heels of that thought, as though it were an answer, he was aware that the trunk against which he leaned was trembling; that the whole coppice was trembling; that all the little leaves were shaking, tremulously.

McKay, bewildered, leaped to his feet. Reason told him that it was the wind—yet there was no wind!

And as he stood there, a sighing arose as though a mournful breeze were blowing through the trees—and again there was no wind!

Louder grew the sighing and within it now faint wailings.

"They come! They come! Farewell, sisters! Sisters—farewell!" Clearly he heard the mournful whispers.

McKay began to run through the trees to the trail that led out to the fields of the old lodge. And as he ran the wood darkened as though clear shadows gathered in it, as though vast unseen wings hovered over it. The trembling of the coppice increased; bough touched bough, clung to each other; and louder became the sorrowful crying: "Farewell, sister! Sister—farewell!"

McKay burst out into the open. Halfway between him and the lodge were Polleau and his sons. They saw him; they pointed and lifted mockingly to him their bright axes. He crouched, waiting for them to come close, all fine-spun theories gone, and rising within him that same rage which hours before had sent him out to slay.

So crouching, he heard from the forested hills a roaring clamor. From every quarter it came, wrathful, menacing, like the voices of legions of great trees bellowing through the horns of tempest. The clamor maddened McKay, fanned the flame of rage to white heat.

If the three men heard it, they gave no sign. They came on steadily, jeering at him, waving their blades. He ran to meet them.

"Go back!" he shouted. "Go back, Polleau! I warn you!"

"He warns us!" jeered Polleau. "He—Pierre, Jean—he warns us!"

The old peasant's arm shot out and his hand caught McKay's shoulder with a grip that pinched to the bone. The arm flexed and hurled him against the unmaimed son. The son caught him, twisted him about, and whirled him headlong a dozen yards, crashing through the brush at the skirt of the wood.

McKay sprang to his feet howling like a wolf. The clamor of

the forest had grown stronger.

"Kill!" it roared. "Kill!"

The unmaimed son had raised his ax. He brought it down upon the trunk of a birch, half splitting it with one blow. McKay heard a wail go up from the little wood. Before the ax could be withdrawn he had crashed a fist in the ax wielder's face. The head of Polleau's son rocked back; he yelped, and before McKay could strike again had wrapped strong arms around him, crushing breath from him. McKay relaxed, went limp, and the son loosened his grip. Instantly McKay slipped out of it and struck again, springing aside to avoid the rib-breaking clasp. Polleau's son was quicker than he, the long arm caught him. But as the arms tightened there was the sound of sharp splintering, and the birch into which the ax had bitten toppled. It struck the ground directly behind the wrestling men. Its branches seemed to reach out and clutch at the feet of Polleau's son.

He tripped and fell backward, McKay upon him. The shock of the fall broke his grip and again McKay writhed free. Again he was upon his feet, and again Polleau's strong son, quick as he, faced him. Twice McKay's blows found their mark beneath his heart before once more the long arms trapped him. But the grip was weaker; McKay felt that now their strength was equal.

Round and round they rocked, McKay straining to break away. They fell, and over they rolled and over, arms and legs locked, each striving to free a hand to grip the other's throat. Around them ran Polleau and the one-eyed son, shouting encouragement to Pierre, yet neither daring to strike at McKay lest the blow miss and be taken by the other.

And all that time McKay heard the little wood shouting. Gone from it now was all mournfulness, all passive resignation. The wood was alive and raging. He saw the trees shake and bend as though torn by a tempest. Dimly he realized that the others could

hear none of this, see none of it; as dimly wondered why this should be.

"Kill!" shouted the coppice, and ever over its tumult he was aware of the roar of the great forest. "Kill! Kill!"

He saw two shadowy shapes—shadowy shapes of swarthy green-clad men that pressed close to him as he rolled and fought.

"Kill!" they whispered. "Let his blood flow! Kill!"

He tore a wrist free. Instantly he felt within his hand the hilt of a knife.

"Kill!" whispered the shadowy men.

"Kill!" shrieked the coppice.

"Kill!" roared the forest.

McKay's arm swept up and plunged the knife into the throat of Polleau's son! He heard a choking sob; heard Polleau shriek; felt the hot blood spurt in face and over hand; smelt its salt and faintly acrid odor. The encircling arms dropped from him; he reeled to his feet.

As though the blood had been a bridge, the shadowy men leaped into materiality. One threw himself upon the man McKay had stabbed; the other hurled upon old Polleau. The maimed son turned and fled, howling with terror. A white woman sprang out from the shadow, threw herself at his feet, clutched them, and brought him down. Another woman and another dropped upon him. The note of his shrieking changed from fear to agony, then died abruptly into silence.

And now McKay could see none of the trees, neither old Polleau nor his sons, for green-clad men and white women covered them!

He stood stupidly, staring at his red hands. The roar of the forest had changed to a deep triumphal chanting. The coppice was mad with joy. The trees had become thin phantoms etched in emerald translucent air as they had been when first the green sorcery had meshed him. And all around him wove and danced the slim, gleaming women of the wood.

They ringed him, their song bird sweet and shrill, jubilant. Beyond them he saw gliding toward him the woman of the misty pillar whose kisses had poured the sweet green fire into his veins. Her arms were outstretched to him, her strange wide eyes were rapt on his, her white body gleamed with the moon radiance, her red lips were parted and smiling, a scarlet chalice filled with the promise of undreamed ecstasies. The dancing circle, chanting, broke to let her through.

Abruptly, a horror filled McKay—not of this fair woman, not of her jubilant sister, but of himself.

He had killed! And the wound the war had left in his soul, the wound he thought had healed, had opened.

He rushed through the broken circle, thrust the shining woman aside with his blood-stained hands, and ran, weeping, toward the lake shore. The singing ceased. He heard little cries, tender, appealing little cries of pity, soft voices calling on him to stop, to return. Behind him was the sound of little racing feet, light as the fall of leaves upon the moss.

McKay ran on. The coppice lightened, the beach was before him. He heard the fair woman call him, felt the touch of her hand upon his shoulder. He did not heed her. He ran across the narrow strip of beach, thrust his boat out into the water, and wading through the shallows threw himself into it.

He lay there for a moment, sobbing, then drew himself up and caught at the oars. He looked back at the shore now a score of feet away. At the edge of the coppice stood the woman, staring at him with pitying, wise eyes. Behind her clustered the white faces of her sisters, the swarthy faces of the green-clad men.

"Come back!" the woman whispered, and held out to him slender arms.

McKay hesitated, his horror lessening in that clear, wise gaze. He half swung the boat around. But his eyes fell again upon his blood-stained hands and again the hysteria gripped him. One thought only was in his mind now—to get far away from where Polleau's son lay with his throat ripped open, to put the lake between him and that haunted shore. He dipped his oars deep, flung the boat forward. Once more the woman called to him and once again. He paid no heed. She threw out her arms in a gesture of passionate farewell. Then a mist dropped like a swift curtain between him and her and all the folk of the little wood.

McKay rowed on, desperately. After a while he shipped oars, and leaning over the boat's side he washed away the red on his hands and arms. His coat was torn and bloodstained, his shirt too. The latter he took off, wrapped it around the stone that was the boat's rude anchor, and dropped it into the depths. His coat he dipped into the water, rubbing at the accusing marks. When he had lightened them all he could, he took up his oars.

His panic had gone from him. Upon its ebb came a rising tide of regret; clear before his eyes arose the vision of the shining woman, beckoning him, calling him . . . he swung the boat around to return. And instantly as he did so the mists between him and the farther shore thickened; around him they lightened as though they had withdrawn to make of themselves a barrier to him, and something deep within him whispered that it was too late.

He saw that he was close to the landing of the little inn. There was no one about, and none saw him as he fastened the skiff and slipped to his room. He locked the door, started to undress. Sudden sleep swept over him like a wave, drew him helplessly down into ocean depths of sleep.

A knocking at his door awakened McKay, and the innkeeper's voice summoning him to dinner. Sleepily he answered, and as the old man's footsteps died away he roused himself. His eyes fell upon his coat, dry now, and the ill-erased bloodstains splotching it. Puzzled, he stared at them for a moment; then full memory clicked back into place.

He walked to the window. It was dusk. A wind was blowing and the trees were singing, all the little leaves dancing; the forest hummed its cheerful vespers. Gone was all the unease, all the inarticulate trouble and the fear. The woods were tranquil and

happy.

He sought the coppice through the gathering twilight. Its demoiselles were dancing lightly in the wind, leafy hoods dipping, leafy skirts ablow. Beside them marched their green troubadours, carefree, waving their needled arms. Gay was the little wood, gay as when its beauty had first lured him to it.

McKay hid the stained coat in his traveling trunk, bathed and put on a fresh outfit, and sauntered down to dinner. He ate excellently. Wonder now and then crossed his mind that he felt no regret, no sorrow even for the man he had killed. He was half inclined to believe it had all been only a dream—so little of any emotion did he feel. He had even ceased to think of what discovery might mean.

His mind was quiet; he heard the forest chanting to him that there was nothing he need fear; and when he sat for a time that night upon the balcony a peace that was half an ecstasy stole in upon him from the murmuring woods and enfolded him. Cradled by it he slept dreamlessly.

McKay did not go far from the inn that day. The little wood danced gayly and beckoned him, but he paid no heed. Something whispered to wait, to keep the lake between him and it until word came of what lay or had lain there. And the peace still was on him.

Only the old innkeeper seemed to grow uneasy as the hours went by. He went often to the landing, scanning the farther shore.

"It is strange," he said at last to McKay as the sun was dipping

behind the summits. "Polleau was to see me here today. If he could not come he would have sent one of his sons."

McKay nodded, carelessly.

"There is another thing I do not understand," went on the old man. "I have seen no smoke from the lodge all day. It is as though they were not there."

"Where could they be?" asked McKay indifferently.

"I do not know," the voice was more perturbed. "It all troubles me, M'sieu. Polleau is hard, yes, but he is my neighbor. Perhaps an accident—"

"They would let you know soon enough if there was anything wrong," McKav said.

"Perhaps, but—" the old man hesitated. "If he does not come tomorrow and again I see no smoke, I will go to him," he ended.

McKay felt a little shock run through him; tomorrow, then, he would know, definitely, what it was that had happened in the little wood.

"I would if I were you," he said. "I'd not wait too long, either."

"Will you go with me, M'sieu?" asked the old man.

"No!" whispered the warning voice within McKay. "No! Do not go!"

"Sorry," he said, aloud. "But I've some writing to do. If you should need me, send back your man; I'll come."

And all that night he slept, again dreamlessly, while the crooning forest cradled him.

The morning passed without sign from the opposite shore. An hour after noon he watched the old innkeeper and his man row across the lake. And suddenly McKay's composure was shaken, his serene certainty wavered. He unstrapped his field glasses and kept them on the pair until they had beached the boat and entered the coppice. His heart was beating uncomfortably, his hands felt hot and his lips dry. How long had they been in the wood? It must have been an hour! What were they doing there? What had they found? He looked at his watch, incredulously. Less than five minutes had passed.

Slowly the seconds ticked by. And it was all of an hour indeed before he saw them come out upon the shore and drag their boat into the water. McKay, throat curiously dry, deafening pulse within his ears, steadied himself, forced himself to stroll leisurely down to the landing.

"Everything all right?" he called as they were near. They did

not answer, but as the skiff warped against the landing they looked up at him, and on their faces were stamped horror and a great wonder.

"They are dead, M'sieu," whispered the innkeeper. "Polleau

and his two sons-all dead!"

McKay's heart gave a great leap, a swift faintness took him.

"Dead!" he cried. "What killed them?"

"What but the trees, M'sieu?" answered the old man, and McKay thought that his gaze dwelt upon him strangely. "The trees killed them. See—we went up the little path through the wood, and close to its end we found it blocked by fallen trees. The flies buzzed round those trees, M'sieu, so we searched there. They were under them, Polleau and his sons. A fir had fallen upon Polleau and had crushed in his chest. Another son we found beneath a fir and upturned birches. They had broken his back, and an eye had been torn out—but that was no new wound, the latter."

He paused.

"It must have been a sudden wind," said his man. "Yet I never knew of a wind such as that must have been. There were no trees down except those that lay upon them. And of those it was as though they had leaped out of the ground! Yes, as though they had leaped out of the ground upon them. Or it was as though giants had torn them out for clubs. They were not broken—their roots were bare—"

"But the other son—Polleau had two?" Try as he might,

McKay could not keep the tremor out of his voice.

"Pierre," said the old man, and again McKay felt that strange quality in his gaze. "He lay beneath a fir. His throat was torn out!"

"His throat torn out!" whispered McKay. His knife! His knife! The knife that had been slipped into his hand by the

shadowy shapes!

"His throat was torn out," repeated the innkeeper. "And in it still was the broken branch that had done it. A broken branch, M'sieu, pointed like a knife. It must have caught Pierre as the fir fell and, ripping through his throat, been broken off as the tree crashed."

McKay stood, mind whirling in wild conjecture. "You said—

a broken branch?" he asked through lips gone white.

"A broken branch, M'sieu." The innkeeper's eyes searched him. "It was very plain—what it was that happened. Jacques," he turned to his man, "go up to the house."

He watched until the man shuffled out of sight.

"Yet not all is so plain, M'sieu," he spoke low to McKay, "since in Pierre's hand I found—this."

He reached into a pocket and drew out a button from which hung a strip of cloth. They had once been part of that stained coat which McKay had hidden in his trunk. And as McKay strove to speak, the old man raised his hand. Button and cloth dropped from it, into the water. A wave took it and floated it away; another and another snatched it and passed it on. They watched it, silently, until it had vanished.

"Tell me nothing," said the keeper of the inn. "Polleau was a hard man, and hard men were his sons. The trees hated them. The trees killed them. The—souvenir—is gone. Only M'sieu would better also—go."

That night McKay packed. When dawn had broken he stood at his window, looking long at the little wood. It too was awakening, stirring sleepily—like drowsy, delicate demoiselles. He thought he could see that one slim birch that was—what? Tree or woman? Or both?

Silently, the old landlord and his wife watched him as he swung out his car—a touch of awe, a half fear, in their eyes. Without a word they let him go.

And as McKay swept up the road that led over the lip of the green bowl, he seemed to hear from all the forest a deep-toned, mournful chanting. It arose around him as he topped the rise in one vast whispering cloud—of farewell—and died.

Never, he knew, would that green door of enchantment be opened to him again. His fear had closed it—forever. Something had been offered to him beyond mortal experience—something that might have raised him to the level of the gods of earth's youth. He had rejected it. And nevermore, he knew, would he cease to regret.



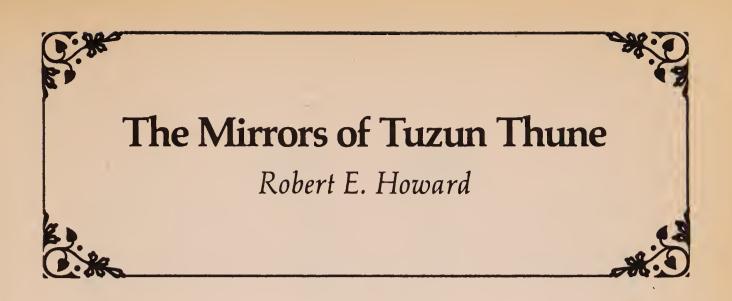
The mention of Robert E. Howard's name immediately conjures up the name and muscle-bound figure of Conan the Conqueror. There was much of Howard in his typical heroes. Howard was born in Peaster, Texas, the son of two pioneer parents, and lived most of his life in the small isolated town of Cross Plains in the middle of Texas. He inherited the rugged pioneer spirit; he loved football and strenuously exercised his six-foot frame into a firm two hundred pounds to avoid being bullied. Yet, once more like his heroes, Howard was a gentle person with those who knew him. E. Hoffmann Price offers touching testimony of this in his memorial tribute to Howard; he recalls Howard's almost embarrassingly grateful and admiring behavior toward him when he drove five hundred miles out of his way, on his way to Los Angeles, to visit Howard whose writings he much admired. Howard, in fact, met few other writers, rarely leaving Cross Plains, although he corresponded with a number of them, including H. P. Lovecraft. Price's tribute is included in Skull Face (1946), a selective collection of the various types of stories written by Howard. Howard was able to support himself modestly well from his writings, saving more than any of his small-town neighbors. Apparently depressed by the death of his mother, Howard committed suicide at the age of thirty in 1936.

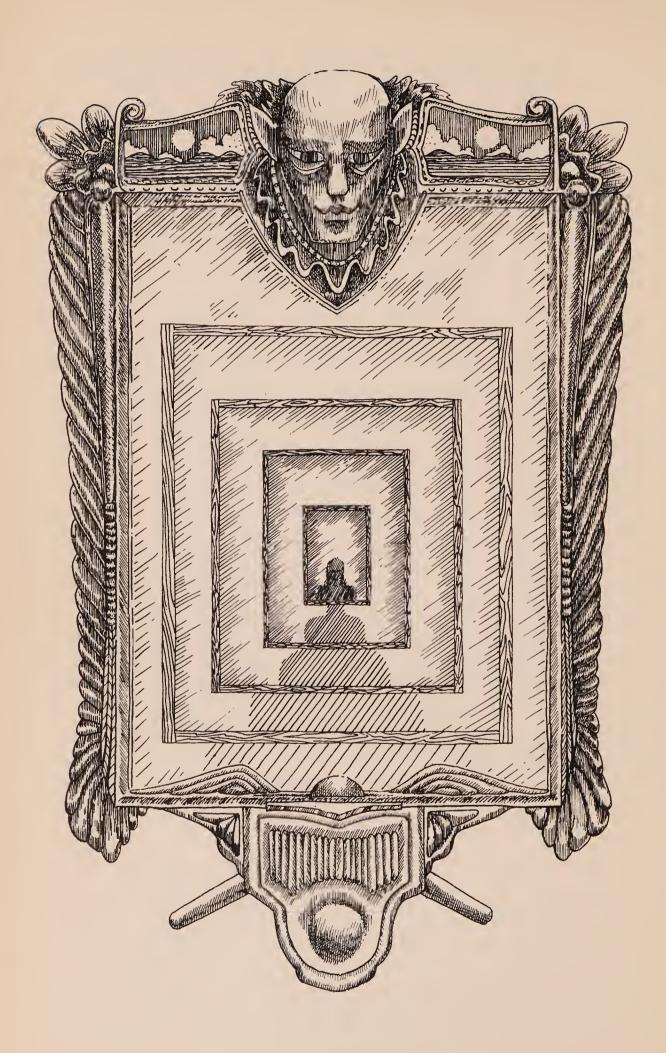
Despite the brevity of his career, Howard's output was prodigious, and it included westerns in a realistic vein that drew on his personal knowledge, as well as the fantasies for which he is better known. In 1925, when he was eighteen, his first story was accepted for publication by Weird Tales. For the next eleven years, his stories appeared regularly in this same magazine, featuring his brawny heroes: Soloman Kane, the English Puritan; King Kull of Atlantis; Brian Mak Morn, the Celt; and, most famous of all, Conan the Cimmerian. Howard wrote the Hyborian Age a year or so before his death; in this work he details at length the history, geography, and customs of the Hyborian Age in which Conan lived. His two dozen or more Conan stories offer a fairly

complete biography of the hero from age seventeen to age forty-five.

Howard's fame and popularity have increased since his death, particularly since the fifties. Many of his stories have reappeared, or unpublished ones have appeared posthumously, through the efforts of numerous editors, most prominently L. Sprague de Camp, Lin Carter, and Bjorn Nyberg, who have also completed several unfinished Conan tales and have written new ones to fill in gaps in the series. More than ten volumes of Conan have been published in this period. Recently, an agent paid in the vicinity of \$300,000 for rights to reprint fifteen Howard books, according to Locus, a science-fiction newsletter (October 30, 1976). The Hyborian League, fans of "sword and sorcery" and of Howard in particular, was formed in 1955 and began publishing Amra, a magazine devoted to the genre. In 1961, The Howard Collector began publishing materials by and about Howard. Both publications continue to keep Howard and his heroes very much alive.

King Kull, the hero of "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune," is the predecessor of Conan, living in the age of Atlantis, several thousand years before the Hyborian era. He is certainly Conan's blood ancestor, a figure of Herculean strength, and a man of instinct and impulse, as opposed to intellect and reason, a distinction clearly established in the present story. While Howard's heroes sometimes speak in an exaggerated or melodramatic fashion, Kull's speech in this tale is tempered and suits the mood of the story. This story, like most of Howard's work, is told for the entertainment derived from unusual and startling effects. One of Howard's achievements in fantasy is his blend of eeriness and swashbuckling pageantry. "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune," however, plays down the latter in favor of eeriness and illustrates why so many of the author's stories were so appropriate for Weird Tales.





"A wild, weird clime that lieth sublime Out of Space, out of Time."

---EDGAR ALLAN POE

There comes, even to kings, the time of great weariness. Then the gold of the throne is brass, the silk of the palace becomes drab. The gems in the diadem and upon the fingers of the women sparkle drearily like the ice of the white seas; the speech of men is as the empty rattle of a jester's bell and the feel comes of things unreal; even the sun is copper in the sky and the breath of the green ocean is no longer fresh.

Kull sat upon the throne of Valusia and the hour of weariness was upon him. They moved before him in an endless, meaningless panorama—men, women, priests, events, and shadows of events; things seen and things to be attained. But like shadows they came and went, leaving no trace upon his consciousness, save that of a great mental fatigue. Yet Kull was not tired. There was a longing in him for things beyond himself and beyond the Valusian court. An unrest stirred in him and strange, luminous dreams roamed his soul. At his bidding there came to him Brule the Spear-slayer, warrior of Pictland, from the islands beyond the West.

"Lord king, you are tired of the life of the court. Come with

me upon my galley and let us roam the tides for a space."

"Nay." Kull rested his chin moodily upon his mighty hand. "I am weary beyond all these things. The cities hold no lure for me—and the borders are quiet. I hear no more the sea songs I heard when I lay as a boy on the booming crags of Atlantis, and the night was alive with blazing stars. No more do the green woodlands beckon me as of old. There is a strangeness upon me and a longing beyond life's longings. Go!"

Brule went forth in a doubtful mood, leaving the king brooding upon his throne. Then to Kull stole a girl of the court and whispered:

"Great king, seek Tuzun Thune, the wizard. The secrets of life and death are his, and the stars in the sky and the lands beneath the seas."

Kull looked at the girl. Fine gold was her hair and her violet eyes were slanted strangely; she was beautiful, but her beauty meant little to Kull.

"Tuzun Thune," he repeated. "Who is he?"

"A wizard of the Elder Race. He lives here, in Valusia, by the Lake of Visions in the House of a Thousand Mirrors. All things are known to him, lord king; he speaks with the dead and holds converse with the demons of the Lost Lands."

Kull arose.

"I will seek out this mummer; but no word of my going, do you hear?"

"I am your slave, my lord." And she sank to her knees meekly, but the smile of her scarlet mouth was cunning behind Kull's back and the gleam of her narrow eyes was crafty.

Kull came to the house of Tuzun Thune, beside the Lake of Visions. Wide and blue stretched the waters of the lake and many a fine palace rose upon its banks; many swan-winged pleasure boats drifted lazily upon its hazy surface and evermore there came the sound of soft music.

Tall and spacious, but unpretentious, rose the House of a Thousand Mirrors. The great doors stood open and Kull ascended the broad stair and entered, unannounced. There in a great chamber, whose walls were of mirrors, he came upon Tuzun Thune, the wizard. The man was ancient as the hills of Zalgara; like wrinkled leather was his skin, but his cold gray eyes were like sparks of sword steel.

"Kull of Valusia, my house is yours," said he, bowing with oldtime courtliness and motioning Kull to a thronelike chair.

"You are a wizard, I have heard," said Kull bluntly, resting his chin upon his hand and fixing his somber eyes upon the man's face. "Can you do wonders?"

The wizard stretched forth his hand; his fingers opened and closed like a bird's claws.

"Is that not a wonder—that this blind flesh obeys the thoughts of my mind? I walk, I breathe, I speak—are they all not wonders?"

Kull meditated awhile, then spoke. "Can you summon up demons?"

"Aye. I can summon up a demon more savage than any in ghostland—by smiting you in the face."

Kull started, then nodded. "But the dead, can you talk to the dead?"

"I talk with the dead always—as I am talking now. Death begins with birth and each man begins to die when he is born; even now you are dead, King Kull, because you were born."

"But you, you are older than men become; do wizards never

die?"

"Men die when their time comes. No later, no sooner. Mine has not come."

Kull turned these answers over in his mind.

"Then it would seem that the greatest wizard of Valusia is no more than an ordinary man, and I have been duped in coming here."

Tuzun Thune shook his head. "Men are but men, and the greatest men are they who soonest learn the simpler things. Nay, look into my mirrors, Kull."

The ceiling was a great many mirrors, and the walls were mirrors, perfectly jointed, yet many mirrors of many sizes and shapes.

"Mirrors are the world, Kull," droned the wizard. "Gaze into

my mirrors and be wise."

Kull chose one at random and looked into it intently. The mirrors upon the opposite wall were reflected there, reflecting others, so that he seemed to be gazing down a long, luminous corridor, formed by mirror behind mirror; and far down this corridor moved a tiny figure. Kull looked long ere he saw that the figure was the reflection of himself. He gazed and a queer feeling of pettiness came over him; it seemed that that tiny figure was the true Kull, representing the real proportions of himself. So he moved away and stood before another.

"Look closely, Kull. That is the mirror of the past," he heard

the wizard say.

Gray fogs obscured the vision, great billows of mist, ever heaving and changing like the ghost of a great river; through these fogs Kull caught swift fleeting visions of horror and strangeness; beasts and men moved there and shapes neither men nor beasts; great exotic blossoms glowed through the grayness; tall tropic trees towered high over reeking swamps, where reptilian monsters wallowed and bellowed; the sky was ghastly with flying dragons and the restless seas rocked and roared and beat endlessly along the muddy beaches. Man was not, yet man was the dream of the gods and strange were the nightmare forms that glided through the noisome jungles. Battle and onslaught were there,

and frightful love. Death was there, for life and death go hand in hand. Across the slimy beaches of the world sounded the bellowing of the monsters, and incredible shapes loomed through the steaming curtain of the incessant rain.

"This is of the future."

Kull looked in silence.

"See you—what?"

"A strange world," said Kull heavily. "The Seven Empires are crumbled to dust and are forgotten. The restless green waves roar for many a fathom above the eternal hills of Atlantis; the mountains of Lemuria of the West are the islands of an unknown sea. Strange savages roam the elder lands and new lands flung strangely from the deeps, defiling the elder shrines. Valusia is vanished and all the nations of today; they of tomorrow are

strangers. They know us not."

"Time strides onward," said Tuzun Thune calmly. "We live today; what care we for tomorrow—or yesterday? The Wheel turns and nations rise and fall; the world changes, and times return to savagery to rise again through the long ages. Ere Atlantis was, Valusia was, and ere Valusia was, the Elder Nations were. Aye, we, too, trampled the shoulders of lost tribes in our advance. You, who have come from the green sea hills of Atlantis to seize the ancient crown of Valusia, you think my tribe is old, we who held these lands ere the Valusians came out of the East, in the days before there were men in the sea lands. But men were here when the Elder Tribes rode out of the waste lands, and men before men, tribe before tribe. The nations pass and are forgotten, for that is the destiny of man."

"Yes," said Kull. "Yet is it not a pity that the beauty and glory

of men should fade like smoke on a summer sea?"

"For what reason, since that is their destiny? I brood not over the lost glories of my race, nor do I labor for races to come. Live now, Kull, live now. The dead are dead; the unborn are not. What matters men's forgetfulness of you when you have forgotten yourself in the silent worlds of death? Gaze in my mirrors and be wise."

Kull chose another mirror and gazed into it.

"That is the mirror of the deepest magic; what see ye, Kull?"

"Naught but myself."

"Look closely, Kull; is it in truth you?"

Kull stared into the great mirror, and the image that was his reflection returned his gaze.

"I come before this mirror," mused Kull, chin on fist, "and I bring this man to life. This is beyond my understanding, since

first I saw him in the still waters of the lakes of Atlantis, till I saw him again in the gold-rimmed mirrors of Valusia. He is I, a shadow of myself, part of myself—I can bring him into being or slay him at my will, yet"—he halted, strange thoughts whispering through the vast dim recesses of his mind like shadowy bats flying through a great cavern—"yet where is he when I stand not in front of a mirror? May it be in man's power thus lightly to form and destroy a shadow of life and existence? How do I know that when I step back from the mirror he vanishes into the void of naught?

"Nay, by Valka, am I the man or is he? Which of us is the ghost of the other? Mayhap these mirrors are but windows through which we look into another world. Does he think the same of me? Am I no more than a shadow, a reflection of himself—to him, as he to me? And if I am the ghost, what sort of a world lives upon the other side of this mirror? What armies ride there and what kings rule? This world is all I know. Knowing naught of any other, how can I judge? Surely there are green hills there and booming seas and wide plains where men ride to battle. Tell me, wizard, who are wiser than most men, tell me, are there worlds beyond our worlds?"

"A man has eyes, let him see," answered the wizard. "Who would see must first believe."

The hours drifted by and Kull still sat before the mirrors of Tuzun Thune, gazing into that which depicted himself. Sometimes it seemed that he gazed upon hard shallowness; at other times gigantic depths seemed to loom before him. Like the surface of the sea was the mirror of Tuzun Thune; hard as the sea in the sun's slanting beams, in the darkness of the stars, when no eye can pierce her deeps; vast and mystic as the sea when the sun smites her in such way that the watcher's breath is caught at the glimpse of tremendous abysses. So was the mirror in which Kull gazed.

At last the king rose with a sigh and took his departure still wondering. And Kull came again to the House of a Thousand Mirrors; day after day he came and sat for hours before the mirror. The eyes looked out at him, identical with his, yet Kull seemed to sense a difference—a reality that was not of him. Hour upon hour he would stare with strange intensity into the mirror; hour after hour the image gave back his gaze.

The business of the palace and of the council went neglected. The people murmured; Kull's stallion stamped restlessly in his stable and Kull's warriors diced and argued aimlessly with one another. Kull heeded not. At times he seemed on the point of discovering some vast, unthinkable secret. He no longer thought

of the image in the mirror as a shadow of himself; the thing, to him, was an entity, similar in outer appearance, yet basically as far from Kull himself as the poles are far apart. The image, it seemed to Kull, had an individuality apart from Kull's; he was no more dependent on Kull than Kull was dependent on him. And day by day Kull doubted in which world he really lived; was he the shadow, summoned at will by the other? Did he, instead of the other, live in a world of delusion, the shadow of the real world?

Kull began to wish that he might enter the personality beyond the mirror for a space, to see what might be seen; yet should he manage to go beyond that door could he ever return? Would he find a world identical with the one in which he moved? A world of which his was but a ghostly reflection? Which was reality and which illusion?

At times Kull halted to wonder how such thoughts and dreams had come to enter his mind and at times he wondered if they came of his own volition or—here his thoughts would become mazed. His meditations were his own; no man ruled his thoughts and he would summon them at his pleasure; yet could he? Were they not as bats, coming and going, not at his pleasure but at the bidding or ruling of—of whom? The gods? The Women who wove the webs of Fate? Kull could come to no conclusion, for at each mental step he became more and more bewildered in a hazy gray fog of illusory assertions and refutations. This much he knew: that strange visions entered his mind, like bats flying unbidden from the whispering void of nonexistence; never had he thought these thoughts, but now they ruled his mind, sleeping and waking, so that he seemed to walk in a daze at times; and his sleep was fraught with strange, monstrous dreams.

"Tell me, wizard," he said, sitting before the mirror, eyes fixed intently upon his image, "how can I pass yon door? For of a truth, I am not sure that that is the real world and this the

shadow; at least, that which I see must exist in some form."

"See and believe," droned the wizard. "Man must believe to accomplish. Form is shadow, substance is illusion, materiality is dream; man is because he believes he is; what is man but a dream of the gods? Yet man can be that which he wishes to be; form and substance, they are but shadows. The mind, the ego, the essence of the god-dream—that is real, that is immortal. See and believe, if you would accomplish, Kull."

The king did not fully understand; he never fully understood the enigmatical utterances of the wizard, yet they struck somewhere in his being a dim responsive chord. So day after day he sat before the mirrors of Tuzun Thune. Ever the wizard lurked behind him like a shadow.

Then came a day when Kull seemed to catch glimpses of strange lands; there flitted across his consciousness dim thoughts and recognitions. Day by day he had seemed to lose touch with the world; all things had seemed each succeeding day more ghostly and unreal; only the man in the mirror seemed like reality. Now Kull seemed to be close to the doors of some mightier worlds; giant vistas gleamed fleetingly; the fogs of unreality thinned, "form is shadow, substance is illusion; they are but shadows" sounded as if from some far country of his consciousness. He remembered the wizard's words and it seemed to him that now he almost understood—form and substance, could not he change himself at will, if he knew the master key that opened this door? What worlds within what worlds awaited the bold explorer?

The man in the mirror seemed smiling at him—closer, closer—a fog enwrapped all and the reflection dimmed suddenly—Kull

knew a sensation of fading, of change, of merging-

"Kull!" The yell split the silence into a million vibratory fragments!

Mountains crashed and worlds tottered as Kull, hurled back by that frantic shout, made a superhuman effort, how or why he did not know.

A crash, and Kull stood in the room of Tuzun Thune before a shattered mirror, mazed and half blind with bewilderment. There before him lay the body of Tuzun Thune, whose time had come at last, and above him stood Brule the Spear-slayer, sword dripping red and eyes wide with a kind of horror.

"Valka!" swore the warrior. "Kull, it was time I came!" "Aye, yet what happened?" The king groped for words.

"Ask this traitress," answered the Spear-slayer, indicating a girl who crouched in terror before the king; Kull saw that it was she who first sent him to Tuzun Thune. "As I came in I saw you fading into you mirror as smoke fades into the sky, by Valka! Had I not seen I would not have believed—you had almost vanished when my shout brought you back."

"Aye," muttered Kull, "I had almost gone beyond the door

that time."

"This fiend wrought most craftily," said Brule. "Kull, do you not now see how he spun and flung over you a web of magic? Kaanuub of Blaal plotted with this wizard to do away with you, and this wench, a girl of Elder Race, put the thought in your mind so that you would come here. Kananu of the council

learned of the plot today; I know not what you saw in that mirror, but with it Tuzun Thune enthralled your soul and almost by his witchery he changed your body to mist—"

"Aye," Kull was still mazed. "But being a wizard, having knowledge of all the ages and despising gold, glory, and position, what could Kaanuub offer Tuzun Thune that would make of him a foul traitor?"

"Gold, power, and position," grunted Brule. "The sooner you learn that men are men whether wizard, king, or thrall, the better you will rule, Kull. Now what of her?"

"Naught, Brule," as the girl whimpered and groveled at Kull's feet. "She was but a tool. Rise, child, and go your ways; none shall harm you."

Alone with Brule, Kull looked for the last time on the mirrors of Tuzun Thune.

"Mayhap he plotted and conjured, Brule; nay, I doubt you not, yet—was it his witchery that was changing me to thin mist, or had I stumbled on a secret? Had you not brought me back, had I faded in dissolution or had I found worlds beyond this?"

Brule stole a glance at the mirrors, and twitched his shoulders as if he shuddered. "Aye. Tuzun Thune stored the wisdom of all the hells here. Let us begone, Kull, ere they bewitch me, too."

"Let us go, then," answered Kull, and side by side they went forth from the House of a Thousand Mirrors—where, mayhap, are prisoned the souls of men.

None look now in the mirrors of Tuzun Thune. The pleasure boats shun the shore where stands the wizard's house and no one goes in the house or to the room where Tuzun Thune's dried and withered carcass lies before the mirrors of illusion. The place is shunned as a place accursed, and though it stands for a thousand years to come, no footsteps shall echo there. Yet Kull upon his throne meditates often upon the strange wisdom and untold secrets hidden there and wonders. . . .

For there are worlds beyond worlds, as Kull knows, and whether the wizard bewitched him by words or by mesmerism, vistas did open to the king's gaze beyond that strange door, and Kull is less sure of reality since he gazed into the mirrors of Tuzun Thune.

C. L. Moore occupies an important position in the history of speculative fiction. Her successful professional debut as a writer of science fiction in the early 1930s helped to prove that a woman could not only effectually compete in this male-oriented and male-dominated literary genre, but, indeed, could excel. Furthermore, her stories demonstrated that love and emotion do have a place in science fiction and fantasy.

Born in the Midwestern city of Indianapolis, Indiana, C. L. Moore became an avid reader of fantasy at a very early age. Not satisfied, however, with simply reading such works as the Oz books of L. Frank Baum and the heady adventure stories of E. R. Burroughs, she regularly wrote her own stories in imitation of these fantasy classics. After an early education periodically interrupted by illness, Moore attended Indiana University for a year and a half but had to leave her studies because of financial pressures brought on by the Great Depression. She then took a job as a secretary in an Indianapolis bank, still continuing to write for her own pleasure.

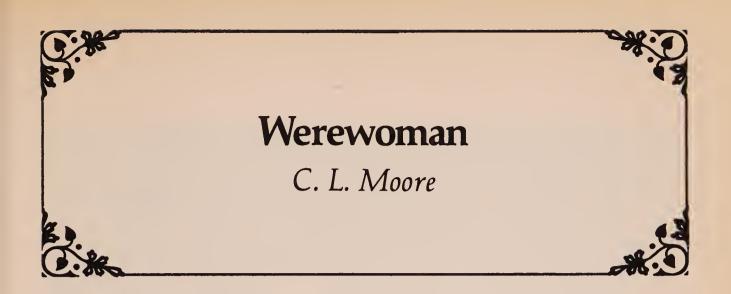
In 1933, she submitted a story called "Shambleau" to Farnsworth Wright, the influential editor of Weird Tales. The story was accepted and proved to be a sensational success. This eerie tale describing Northwest Smith's near-fatal relationship with a Medusa-like creature called Shambleau, was evidently what the readers of Weird Tales were looking for. Moore's career was launched in grand fashion, although it is interesting to note that few readers knew that a woman had written this popular story. After publishing a few other Northwest Smith adventures, Moore introduced another series featuring the warrior maiden Jirel of Joiry. Jirel, a fifteenth-century queen as skilled in weaponry as the best of her male opponents, was as well received as Northwest Smith.

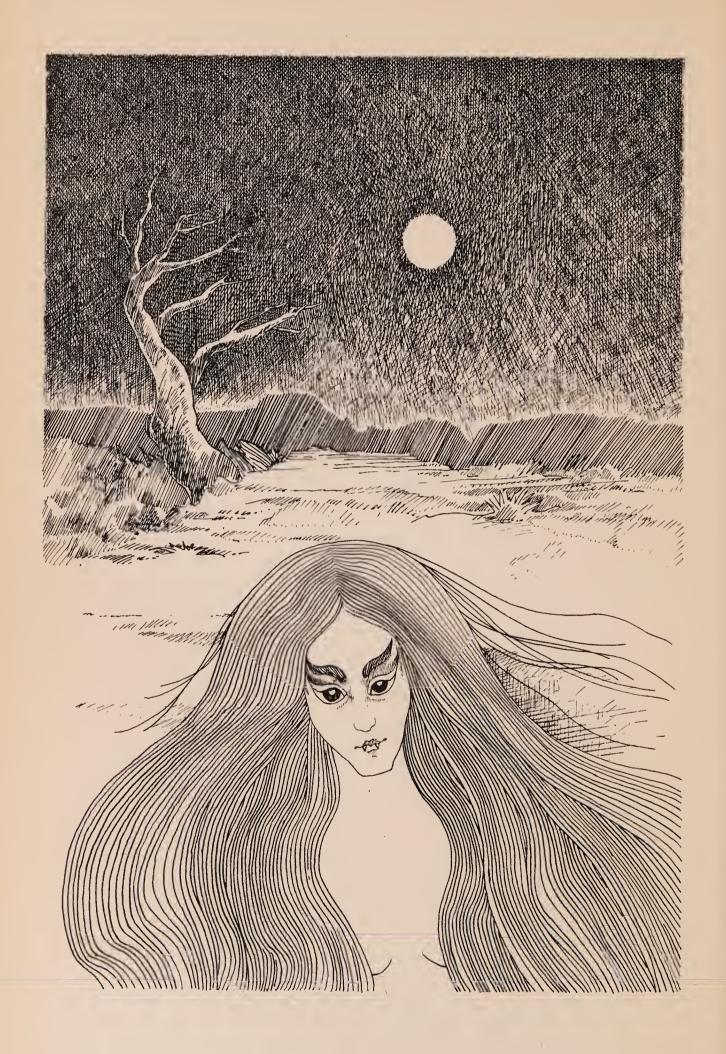
This first highly successful stage in Moore's writing career came to an end in 1940, when she married Henry Kuttner, also a writer of science fiction. For the next eighteen years, until her

husband's death in 1958, most of Moore's literary output took the form of collaborations with Kuttner. The few single-authorship stories that can be credited to Moore during this collaborative period were of extremely high quality. Indeed, "No Woman Born" (1944) and "Vintage Season" (1946) are considered by many to be her most impressive literary creations. Since 1958, Moore has devoted most of her time to television scriptwriting. The unfortunate result is that for nearly two decades we have not been treated to any new C. L. Moore science-fiction and

fantasy stories. It has been a profound loss.

Because of its rather curious publishing history, "The Werewoman" has faded into undeserved obscurity. Sam Moskowitz, in his essay on Moore in Seekers of Tomorrow (Hyperion Press, 1974, p. 308), points out that "Werewoman" has "never appeared in a professional magazine." According to Moskowitz, it was first published in a mimeographed fan magazine called Leaves (Winter 1938–39), and only sixty copies of that issue were run off. Copies were so rare that even C. L. Moore did not own one. As a result of this very limited distribution, the story was not reprinted until 1971 when Moskowitz included it in his Horrors Unknown. "The Werewoman" is truly a fine exercise in ambience. Through the use of extraordinarily rich imagery and a fine poetic style, Moore creates a setting and atmosphere distinctly surrealistic in nature. It is a literary portrait nightmarish enough to rival the canvases of a Bosch or Dali.





With the noise of battle fading behind him down the wind, Northwest Smith staggered into the west and the twilight, stumbling as he went. Blood spattered brightly behind him on the rocks, leaving a clear trail to track him by, but he knew he would not be followed far. He was headed into the salt wastelands to the westward, and they would not follow him there.

He urged his reluctant feet faster, for he knew that he must be out of sight in the gray waste before the first of the scavengers came to loot the dead. They would follow—that trail of blood and staggering footsteps would draw them like wolves on his track, hot in the hope of further spoils—but they would not come far. He grinned a little wryly at the thought, for he was going into no safety here, though he left certain death behind. He was stumbling, slow step by step, into almost as certain a death, of fever and thirst and hunger in the wastelands, if no worse death caught him first. They told tales of this gray salt desert . . .

He had never before come even this far into the cold waste during all the weeks of their encampment. He was too old an adventurer not to know that when people shun a place completely and talk of it in whispers and tell little half-finished, fearful stories of it over campfires, that place is better left alone. Some might have been spurred by that very reticence into investigation, but Northwest Smith had seen too many strange things in his checkered career to doubt the basis of fact behind folk tales or care to rush in heedlessly where others had learned by experience not to tread.

The sound of battle had dwindled to a faint murmur on the evening breeze. He lifted his head painfully and stared into the gathering dark ahead with narrowed eyes the no-color of pale steel. The wind touched his keen, scarred face with a breath of utter loneliness and desolation. No man-smell of smoke or byre or farmstead tainted it, blowing clear across miles beyond miles of wastelands. Smith's nostrils quivered to that scent of unhumanity. He saw the grayness stretching before him, flat and fea-

tureless, melting into the dark. There was a sparse grass growing, and low shrub, and a few stunted trees, and brackish water in deep, still pools dotted the place at far intervals. He found himself listening . . .

Once in very long-ago ages, so campfire whispers had told him, a forgotten city stood here. Who dwelt in it, or what, no man knew. It was a great city spreading over miles of land, rich and powerful enough to wake enmity, for a mighty foe had come at last out of the lowlands and in a series of tremendous battles razed it to the ground. What grievance they had against the dwellers in the city no one will ever know now, but it must have been dreadful, for when the last tower was laid to earth and the last stone toppled from its foundation they had sown the land with salt, so that for generations no living thing grew in all the miles of desolation. And not content with this, they had laid a curse upon the very earth wherein the city had its roots, so that even today men shun the place without understanding why.

It was very long past, that battle, and history forgot the very name of the city, and victor and vanquished alike sank together into the limbo of the forgotten. In time the salt-sown lands gained a measure of life again and the sparse vegetation that now clothed it struggled up through the barren soil. But men still

shunned the place.

They said, in whispers, that there were dwellers yet in the saltlands. Wolves came out by night sometimes and carried off children straying late; sometimes a new-made grave was found open and empty in the morning, and people breathed of ghouls... late travelers had heard voices wailing from the wastes by night, and those daring hunters who ventured in search of the wild game that ran through the underbrush spoke fearfully of naked werewomen that howled in the distances. No one knew what became of the adventurous souls who traveled too far alone into the desolation of the place. It was accursed for human feet to travel, and those who dwelt there, said the legends, must be less than human.

Smith discounted much of this when he turned from the bloody shambles of that battle into the wastelands beyond. Legends grow, he knew. But a basis for the tales he did not doubt, and he glanced ruefully down at the empty holsters hanging low on his legs. He was completely unarmed, perhaps for the first time in more years than he liked to remember; for his path had run for the most part well outside the law, and such men do not go unarmed anywhere—even to bed.

Well, no help for it now. He shrugged a little, and then grim-

aced and caught his breath painfully, for that slash in the shoulder was deep, and blood still dripped to the ground, though not so freely as before. The wound was closing. He had lost much blood—the whole side of his leather garment was stiff with it, and the bright stain spattering behind him told of still greater losses. The pain of his shoulder stabbed at him yet, but it was being swallowed up now in a vast, heaving grayness...

He drove his feet on stubbornly over the uneven ground, though the whole dimming landscape was wavering before him like a sea—swelling monstrously—receding into the vague distances . . . The ground floated up to meet him with surprising gentleness.

He opened his eyes presently to a gray twilight, and after a while staggered up and went on. No more blood flowed, but the shoulder was stiff and throbbing, and the wasteland heaved still like a rolling sea about him. The singing in his ears grew loud, and he was not sure whether the faint echoes of sound he heard came over gray distances or rang in his own head—long, faint howls, like wolves wailing their hunger to the stars. When he fell the second time he did not know it, and was surprised to open his eyes upon full dark with stars looking down on him and the grass tickling his cheek.

He went on. There was no great need of it now—he was well beyond pursuit, but the dim urge to keep moving dinned in his weary brain. He was sure now that the long howls were coming to him over the waste stretches, coming nearer. By instinct his hand dropped to clutch futilely at the empty holster.

There were queer little voices going by overhead in the wind. Thin, shrill. With immense effort he slanted a glance upward and thought he could see, with the clarity of exhaustion, the long, clean lines of the wind streaming across the sky. He saw no more than that, but the small voices shrilled thinly in his ears.

Presently he was aware of motion beside him—life of some nebulous sort moving parallel to his course, invisible in the starlight. He was aware of it through the thrill of evil that prickled at the roots of his hair, pulsing from the dimness at his side—though he could see nothing. But with that clarity of inner vision he felt the vast and shadowy shape lurching formlessly through the grass at his side. He did not turn his head again, but the hackles of his neck bristled. The howls were nearing, too. He set his teeth and drove on, unevenly.

He fell for the third time by a clump of stunted trees, and lay for a while breathing heavily while long, slow waves of oblivion washed over him and receded like waves over sand. In the intervals of lucidity he knew that those howls were coming closer over the grayness of saltlands.

He went on. The illusion of that formless walker in the dark still haunted him through the grass, but he was scarcely heeding it now. The howls had changed to short, sharp yaps, crisp in the starlight, and he knew that the wolves had struck his trail. Again, instinctively, his hand flashed downward toward his gun, and a spasm of pain crossed his face. Death he did not mind—he had kept pace with it too many years to fear that familiar visage—but death under fangs, unarmed . . . He staggered on a little faster, and the breath whistled through his clenched teeth.

Dark forms were circling his, slipping shadowily through the grass. They were wary, these beasts of the outlands. They did not draw near enough for him to see them save as shadows gliding among the shadows, patient and watching. He cursed them futilely with his failing breath, for he knew now that he dared not fall again. The gray waves washed upward, and he shouted something hoarse in his throat and called upon a last reservoir of strength to bear him up. The dark forms started at his voice.

So he went on, wading through oblivion that rose waist-high, shoulder-high, chin-high—and receded again before the indomitable onward drive that dared not let him rest. Something was wrong with his eyes now—the pale-steel eyes that had never failed him before—for among the dark forms he was thinking he saw white ones, slipping and gliding wraithlike in the shadow . . .

For an endless while he stumbled on under the chilly stars while the earth heaved gently beneath his feet and the grayness was a sea that rose and fell in blind waves, and white figures weaved about his through the hollow dark.

Quite suddenly he knew that the end of his strength had come. He knew it surely, and in the last moment of lucidity left to him he saw a low tree outlined against the stars and staggered to it—setting his broad back against the trunk, fronting the dark watchers with lowered head and pale eyes that glared defiance. For that one moment he faced them resolutely—then the tree-trunk was sliding upward past him—the ground was rising—he gripped the sparse grass with both hands, and swore as he fell.

When he opened his eyes again he stared into a face straight out of hell. A woman's face, twisted into a diabolical smile, stooped over him—glare-eyed in the dark. White fangs slavered as she bent to his throat.

Smith choked back a strangled sound that was half oath, half prayer, and struggled to his feet. She started back with a soundless leap that set her wild hair flying, and stood staring him in the face with wide slant eyes that glared greenly from the pallor of her face. Through dark hair, her body was white as a sickle moon, half-veiled in the long, wild hair.

She glared with hungry fangs adrip. Beyond her he sensed other forms, dark and white, circling restlessly through the shadows—and he began to understand dimly, and knew that there was no hope in life for him, but he spread his long legs wide and

gave back glare for glare, pale-eyed and savage.

The pack circled him, dim blurs in the dark, the green glare of eyes shining alike from white shapes and black. And to his dizzied eyes it seemed that the forms were not stable, shifting from dark to light and back again with only the green-glowing eyes holding the same glare through all the changing. They were closing in now, the soft snarls rising and sharp yaps impatiently breaking through the guttural undernotes, and he saw the gleam of teeth, white under the stars.

He had no weapon, and the wasteland reeled about him and the earth heaved underfoot, but he squared his shoulders savagely and fronted them in hopeless defiance, waiting for the wave of darkness and hunger to come breaking over him in an overwhelming tide. He met the green desire of the woman's wild eyes as she stooped forward, gathering herself for the lunge, and suddenly something about the fierceness of her struck a savage chord within him, and—facing death as he was—he barked a short, wild laugh at her, and yelled into the rising wind, "Come on, werewoman! Call your pack!"

She stared for the briefest instant, half-poised for leaping—while something like a spark seemed to flash between them, savageness calling to savageness across the barriers of everything alive—and suddenly she flung up her arms, the black hair whirling, and tossed back her head and bayed to the stars, a wild, long ululating yell and tossed it from voice to voice across the saltlands

until the very stars shivered at the wild, exultant baying.

And as the long yell trembled into silence something inexplicable happened to Smith. Something quivered in answer within him, agonizingly, the gray oblivion he had been fighting so long swallowed him up at a gulp—and then he leaped within himself in a sudden, ecstatic rush; and while one part of him slumped to its knees and then to its face in the grass, the living vital being that was Smith sprang free into the cold air that stung like sharp wine.

The wolf pack rushed clamorously about him, the wild, high yells shivered delightfully along every nerve of his suddenly awakened body. And it was as if a muffling darkness had lifted from his senses, for the night opened up in all directions to his new eyes, and his nostrils caught fresh, exciting odors on the streaming wind, and in his ears a thousand tiny sounds took on sudden new clarity and meaning.

The pack that had surged so clamorously about him was a swirl of dark bodies for an instant—then in a blur and a flash they were dark no longer—rose on hind legs and cast off the darkness as they rose—and slim, white, naked werewomen swirled around him in a tangle of flashing limbs and streaming hair.

He stood half-dazed at the transition, for even the wide salt-moor was no longer dark and empty, but pale gray under the stars and peopled with nebulous, unstable beings that wavered away from the white wolf pack which ringed him, and above the clamor of wild voices that thin, shrill chattering went streaming

down the wind overhead.

Out of the circling pack a white figure broke suddenly, and he felt cold arms about his neck and a cold, thin body pressing his. Then the white whirl parted violently and another figure thrust through—the fierce-eyed woman who had called him across the barriers of flesh into this half land of her own. Her green-glaring eyes stabbed at the sister wolf whose arms twined Smith's neck, and the growl that broke from her lips was a wolf's guttural. The woman fell away from Smith's embrace, crouching at bay, as the other, with a toss of wild hair, bared her fangs and launched herself straight at the throat of the interloper. They went down in a tangle of white and tossing dark, and the pack fell still so that the only sound was the heavy breathing of the fighters and the low, choked snarls that rippled from their throats. Then over the struggle of white and black burst a sudden torrent of scarlet. Smith's nostrils flared to the odor that had a new, fascinating sweetness now-and the werewoman rose, bloody-mouthed, from the body of her rival. The green-glowing eyes met his, and a savage exultation flowing from them met as savage a delight wakening in his, and her keen, moon-white face broke into a smile of hellish joy.

She flung up her head again and bayed a long, triumphant cry to the stars, and the pack about her took up the yell, and Smith found his own face turned to the sky and his own throat shouting a fierce challenge to the dark.

Then they were running—jostling one another in savage play, flying over the coarse grass on feet that scarcely brushed the ground. It was like the rush of the wind, that effortless racing, as the earth flowed backward under their spurning feet and the wind streamed in their nostrils with a thousand tingling odors.

The white werewoman raced at his side, her long hair flying behind her like a banner, her shoulder brushing his.

They ran through strange places. The trees and the grass had taken on new shapes and meanings, and in a vague, half-realized way he was aware of curious forms looming round him—buildings, towers, walls, high turrets shining in the starlight, yet so nebulous that they did not impede their flight. He could see these shadows of a city very clearly sometimes—sometimes he ran down marble streets, and it seemed to him that his feet rang in golden sandals on the pavement and rich garments whipped behind him in the wind of his speed and a sword clanked at his side. He thought the woman beside him fled in bright-colored sandals too, and her long skirts rippled away from her flying limbs and the streaming hair was twined with jewels—yet he knew he ran naked beside a moon-bare wolf-woman over coarse grass that rustled to his tread.

And sometimes, too, it seemed to him that he fled on four legs, not two—fleetly as the wind, thrusting a pointed muzzle into the breeze and lolling a red tongue over dripping fangs...

Dim shapes fled from their sweeping onward rush—great, blurred, formless things; dark beings with eyes; thin wraiths wavering backward from their path. The great moor teemed with these half-seen monstrosities; fierce-eyed, some of them, breathing out menace, and evil, angry shapes that gave way reluctantly before the werepack's sweep. But they gave way. There were terrible things in that wasteland, but the most terrible of all were the werewomen, and all the dreadful, unreal beings made way at the bay of those savage voices. All this he knew intuitively. Only the thin chattering that streamed down the wind did not hush when the werevoices howled.

There were many odors on the wind that night, sharp and sweet and acrid, wild odors of wild, desolate lands and the dwellers therein. And then, quite suddenly on a vagrant breeze, lashing their nostrils like a whip—the harsh, rich, blood-tingling scent of man. Smith flung up his head to the cold stars and bayed long and shudderingly, and the wild wolf yell rang from throat to throat through the pack until the whole band of them was shaking the very air to that savage chorus. They loped down the wind stream, nostrils flaring to that full, rich scent.

Smith ran at the forefront, shoulder to shoulder with the wild white creature who had fought for him. The man smell was sweet in his nostrils, and hunger wrenched at him as the smell grew stronger and faint atavistic stirrings of anticipation rose in his memory . . . Then they saw them.

A little band of hunters was crossing the moorland, crashing through the underbrush, guns on their shoulders. Blindly they walked, stumbling over hummocks that were clear to Smith's new eyes. And all about them the vague denizens of the place were gathering unseen. Great, nebulous, cloudy shapes dogged their footsteps through the grass, lurching along formlessly. Dark things with eyes flitted by, turning a hungry glare unseen upon the hunters. White shapes wavered from their path and closed in behind. The men did not see them. They must have sensed the presence of inimical beings, for now and then one would glance over his shoulder nervously, or hitch a gun forward as if he had almost seen—then lower it sheepishly and go on.

The very sight of them fired that strange hunger in Smith's new being, and again he flung back his head and yelled fiercely the long wolf cry toward the frosty stars. At the sound of it a ripple of alarm went through the unclean, nebulous crowd that dogged the hunters' footsteps. Eyes turned toward the approaching pack, glaring angrily from bodies as unreal as smoke. But as they drew nearer the press began to melt away, the misty shapes wavering off reluctantly into the pallor of the night before the sweep of the wolves.

They skimmed over the grass, flying feet spurning the ground, and with a rush and a shout they swooped down around the hunters yelling their hunger. The men had huddled into a little knot, backs together and guns bristling outward as the werepack eddied round them. Three or four men fired at random into the circling pack, the flash and sound of it sending a wavering shudder through the pale things that had drawn back to a safe distance, watching. But the wolf-women paid no heed.

Then the leader—a tall man in a white fur cap—shouted suddenly in a voice of panic terror. "No use to fire! No use-don't

you see? These aren't real wolves . . ."

Smith had a fleeting realization that to human eyes they must, then, seem wolf-formed, though all about him in the pale night he saw clearly only white, naked women with flying hair circling the hunters and baying hungrily with wolf voices as they ran.

The dark hunger was ravaging him as he paced the narrowing circle with short, nervous steps—the human bodies so near, smelling so richly of blood and flesh. Vaguely memories of that blood running sweetly eddied through his mind, and the feel of teeth meeting solidly to flesh; and beyond that a deeper hunger, inexplicably, for something he could not name. Only he felt he would never have peace again until he had sunk his teeth into the throat of that man in the white fur cap; felt blood gushing over his face . . .

"Look!" shouted the man, pointing as his eyes met Smith's ravenous glare. "See—the big one with white eyes, running with the she-wolf . . ." He fumbled for something inside his coat. "The Devil himself—all the rest are green-eyed, but—white eyes—see!"

Something in the sound of his voice lashed that hunger in Smith to the breaking point. It was unbearable. A snarl choked up in his throat and he gathered himself to spring. The man must have seen the flare of it in the pale eyes meeting his, for he shouted, "God in heaven! . . ." and clawed desperately at his collar. And just as Smith's feet left the ground in a great, steel-muscled spring straight for that tempting throat, the man ripped out what he had been groping for and the starlight caught the glint of it exposed—a silver cross dangling from a broken chain.

glint of it exposed—a silver cross dangling from a broken chain. Something blinding exploded in Smith's innermost brain. Something compounded of thunder and lightning smote him in midair. An agonized howl ripped itself from his throat as he fell back, blinded and deafened and dazed, while his brain rocked to its foundations and long shivers of dazzling force shuddered through the air about him.

Dimly, from a great distance, he heard the agonized howls of the werewomen, the shouts of men, the trample of shod feet on the ground. Behind his closed eyes he could still see that cross upheld, a blinding symbol from which streamers of forked lightning blazed away and the air crackled all around.

When the tumult had faded in his ears and the blaze died away and the shocked air shuddered into stillness again, he felt the touch of cold, gentle hands upon him and opened his eyes to the green glare of other eyes bending over him. He pushed her away and struggled to his feet, swaying a little as he stared round the plain. All the white werewomen were gone, save the one at his side. The huntsmen were gone. Even the misty denizens of the place were gone. Empty in the gray dimness the wasteland stretched away. Even the thin piping overhead had fallen into shocked silence. All about them the plain lay still, shuddering a little and gathering its forces again after the ordeal.

The werewoman had trotted off a little way and was beckoning to him impatiently over her shoulder. He followed, instinctively anxious to leave the spot of the disaster. Presently they were running again, shoulder to shoulder across the grass, the plain spinning away under their flying feet. The scene of that

conflict fell behind them, and strength was flowing again through Smith's light-footed body, and overhead, faintly, the thin, shrill chattering began anew.

With renewed strength the old hunger flooded again through him, compellingly. He tossed up his head to test the wind, and a little whimper of eagerness rippled from his throat. An answering whine from the running woman replied to it. She tossed back her hair and sniffed the wind, hunger flaming in her eyes. So they ran through the pale night, hunter and huntress, while dim shapes wavered from their path and the earth reeled backward under their spurning feet.

It was pleasant to run so, in perfect unison, striding effortlessly with the speed of the wind, arrogantly in the knowledge of their strength, as the dreadful dwellers of the aeon-cursed moor fled from their approach and the very air shuddered when they bayed.

Again the illusion of misty towers and walls wavered in the dimness before Smith's eyes. He seemed to run down marble-paved streets, and felt again the clank of a belted sword and the ripple of rich garments, and saw the skirts of the woman beside him moulded to her limbs as she fled along with streaming, jewel-twined hair. He thought that the buildings rising so nebulously all around were growing higher as they advanced. He caught vague glimpses of arches and columns and great domed temples, and began, somehow uneasily, to sense presences in the streets, unseen but thronging.

Then simultaneously his feet seemed to strike a yielding resistance, as if he had plunged at a stride knee-deep into heavy water, and the woman beside him threw up her arms wildly in a swirl of hair and tossed back her head and screamed hideously, humanly, despairingly—the first human sound he had heard from her lips—and stumbled to her knees on the grass that was somehow a marble pavement.

Smith bent to catch her as she fell, plunging his arms into unseen resistance as he did so. He felt it suck at her as he wrenched the limp body out of those amazing, invisible wavelets that were lapping higher and higher up his legs with incredible swiftness. He swung her up clear of them, feeling the uncontrollable terror that rippled out from her body course in unbroken wavelets through his own, so he shook with nameless panic, not understanding why. The thick tide had risen mufflingly about his thighs when he turned back the way he had come and began to fight his way out of the clinging horror he could not see, the woman a weight of terror in his arms.

It seemed to be a sort of thickness in the air, indescribable, flowing about him in deepening waves that lapped up and up as if some half-solidified jelly were swiftly and relentlessly engulfing him. Yet he could see nothing but the grass underfoot, the dim, dreamlike marble pavement, the night about, the cold stars overhead. He struggled forward through the invisible thickness. It was worse than trying to run through water, with the retarded motion of nightmares. It sucked at him, draggingly, as he struggled forward through the deeps of it, stumbling, not daring to fall, the woman a dead weight in his arms.

And very slowly he won free. Very slowly he forced his way out of the clinging horror. The little lapping waves of it ceased to mount. He felt the thickness receding downward, past his knees, down about his ankles, until only his feet sucked and stumbled in invisibility, the nameless mass shuddering and quaking. And at long last he broke again, and as his feet touched the clear ground, he leaped forward wildly, like an arrow from a bow, into the delightful freedom of the open air. It felt like pure flying after that dreadful struggle through the unseen. Muscles exulting at the release, he fled over the grass like a winged thing while the dim building reeled away behind him and the woman stirred a little in his arms, an unconsidered weight in the joy of freedom.

Presently she whimpered a little, and he paused by a stunted tree to set her down again. She glanced round wildly. He saw from the look on her bone-white face that the danger was not yet past, and glanced round himself, seeing nothing but the dim moor with wraithlike figures wavering here and there and the stars shining down coldly. Overhead the thin shrilling went by changelessly in the wind. All this was familiar. Yet the werewoman stood poised for instant flight, seeming unsure in just what direction danger lay, and her eyes glared panic into the dimness. He knew then that dreadful though the werepack was, a more terrible thing haunted the wasteland—invisibly, frightfully indeed to wake in the wolf-woman's eyes that staring horror. Then something touched his foot.

He leaped like the wild thing he was, for he knew that feel—even in so short a time he knew that feel. It was flowing round his foot, sucking at his ankle even as he poised for flight. He seized the woman's wrist and twisted round, wrenching his foot from the invisible grip, leaping forward arrow-swift into the pale darkness. He heard her catch her breath in a sobbing gasp, eloquent of terror, as she fell into stride beside him.

So they fled, invisibility ravening at their heels. He knew, somehow, that it followed. The thick, clutching waves of it were

lapping faster and faster just short of his flying feet, and he strained to the utmost, skimming over the grass like something winged and terror-stricken, the sobbing breath of the woman keeping time to his stride. What he fled he could not even guess. It had no form in any image he could conjure up. Yet he felt dimly that it was nothing alien, but rather something too horribly akin to him . . . and the deadly danger he did not understand spurred on his flying feet.

The plain whirled by blurrily in their speed. Dim things with eyes fluttered away in panic as they neared, clearing a terror-stricken way for the dreadful werepeople who fled in such blind

horror of something more dreadful yet.

For eternities they ran. Misty towers and walls fell away behind them. In his terror-dimmed mind it seemed to him in flashes that he was the other runner clad in rich garments and belted with the sword, running beside that other fleeing woman from another horror whose nature he did not know. He scarcely felt the ground underfoot. He ran blindly, knowing only that he must run and run until he dropped, that something far more dreadful than any death he could die was lapping hungrily at his heels, threatening him with an unnamable, incomprehensible horror—that he must run and run and run...

And so, very slowly, the panic cleared. Very gradually sanity returned to him. He ran still, not daring to stop, for he knew the invisible hunger lapped yet not far behind—knew it surely without understanding how—but his mind had cleared enough for him to think, and his thoughts told curious things, half-realized things that formed images in his brain unbidden, drawn from some far source beyond his understanding. He knew, for instance, that the thing at their heels was unescapable. He knew that it would never cease its relentless pursuit, silent, invisible, remorseless, until the thick waves of it had swallowed up its quarry, and what followed that—what unimaginable horror—he somehow knew, but could not form even into thought pictures. It was something too far outside any experience for the mind to grasp it.

The horror he felt instinctively was entirely within himself. He could see nothing pursuing him, feel nothing, hear nothing. No tremor of menace reached toward him from the following nothingness. But within him horror swelled and swelled ballonlike, a curious horror akin to something that was part of him, so it was as if he fled in terror of himself, and with no more hope of

ever escaping than if indeed he fled his own shadow.

The panic had passed. He no longer ran blindly, but he knew

now that he must run and run forever, hopelessly . . . but his mind refused to picture the end. He thought the woman's panic had abated, too. Her breathing was evener, not the frantic gasping of that first frenzy, and he no longer felt the shaking waves of pure terror beating out from her against the ephemeral substance that was himself.

And now, as the gray landscape slid past changelessly and the thin shapes still wavered from their path and the piping went by overhead, he became conscious as he ran of a changing in the revulsion that spurred him on. There were little moments when the horror behind drew him curiously, tightening its hold on that part of his being so strangely akin to it. As a man might stare over a precipice edge and feel the mounting urge to fling himself over, even in the face of his horror of falling, so Smith felt the strong pull of the thing that followed, if thing it might be called. Without abatement in his horror the curious desire grew to turn and face it, let it come lapping over him, steep himself in the thick invisibility—even though his whole being shuddered violently from the very thought.

Without realizing it, his pace slackened. But the woman knew, and gripped his hand fiercely, a frantic appeal rippling through him from the contact. At her touch, the pull abated for a while and he ran on in an access of revulsion, very conscious of the invisibility lapping at their heels.

While the access was at its height he felt the grip of her hand loosen a little and knew that the strange tugging at something within was reaching out for her. His hand tightened over hers and he felt the little shake she gave to free herself of that blind pull.

So they fled, the strength in each bearing the other up. Behind them relentlessly the something followed. Twice a forward lapping wave of it brushed Smith's heel. And stronger and stronger grew the blind urge within him to turn, to plunge into the heavy flow of what followed, to steep himself in invisibility until—until— He could form no picture of that ultimate, but each time he reached the point of picturing it a shudder went over him and blankness clouded his mind.

And ever within him that thing akin to the follower strengthened and grew, a blind urge from his innermost being. It grew so strong that only the grip of the werewoman's hand held him from turning, and the plain faded from about him like a gray dream and he ran through a curving void—a void that he somehow knew was bending back upon itself so that he must eventually, if he ran on, come round behind his pursuer and overtake it, wade head-on into the thick deeps of invisibility . . . yet he dared not slacken his running, for then it would catch him from behind. So he spun in the treadmill, terror ahead, terror behind, with no choice but to run and no hope for all his running.

When he saw the plain at all it was in dim flashes, unaccountably blurred and not always at the correct angles. It tilted without reason. Once he saw a dark pool of water slanting before him like a door, and once a whole section of landscape hung mirage-like above his head. Sometimes he panted up steep inclines, sometimes he skimmed fleetly down steeper slopes—yet he knew the plain in reality lay flat and featureless from edge to edge.

And now, though he had long ago left those misty towers and walls far behind, he began to be aware that his flight had somehow twisted and they loomed once more, shadowily, overhead. With a sickening sense of futility he fled again down the dream-

vague marble pavements between rows of cloudy palaces.

Through all these dizzy metamorphoses the pursuer flowed relentlessly behind, lapping at his heels when he slowed. He began to realize, very dimly, that it might have overtaken him with ease, but that he was being spurred on thus for some vast, cloudy purpose—perhaps so that he might complete the circle he was so vaguely aware of and plunge of his own effort headlong into the very thing from which he fled. But he was not fleeing now, he was being driven.

The dim shapes of buildings reeled past. The woman running at his side had become something cloudy and vague too, a panting presence flying from the same peril—into the same peril—but unreal as a dream. He felt himself unreal too, a phantom fleeing hand in hand with another phantom through the streets of a phantom city. And all reality was melting away save the unreal, invisible thing that pursued him, and only it had reality while everything else faded to shapes of nothingness. Like driven ghosts they fled.

And as reality melted about them, the shadowy city took firmer shape. In the reversal everything real became cloudy, grass and trees and pools dimming like some forgotten dream, while the unstable outlines of the towers loomed up more and more clearly in the pale dark, colors flushing them as if reviving blood ran through the stones. Now the city stood firm and actual around them, and vague trees thrust themselves mistily through unbroken masonry, shadows of grass waved over firm marble pavements. Superimposed upon the unreal, the real world seemed vague as a mirage.

It was a curious architecture that rose around them now, so old and so forgotten that the very shapes of it were fantastic to Smith's eyes. Men in silk and steel moved down the streets, wading to their greave-clad knees in shadowy grass they did not seem to see. Women, too, brushed by in mail as fine-linked and shining as gowns of silver tissue, belted with swords like the men. Their faces were set in a strained stare, and though they hurried they gave an impression of aimlessness, as if moved by some outer compulsion they did not understand.

And through the hurrying crowd, past the strange-colored towers, over the grass-shadowed streets, werewoman and wolfman fled like the shadows they had become, pale wraiths blowing through the crowds unseen, the invisible follower lapping at their feet when they faltered. That force within which had urged them to turn and meet the pursuer now commanded them irresistibly to flee—to flee toward that same ending, for they knew now that they ran toward what they fled, roundaboutly, yet dared not stop running for deadly fear of what flowed along behind.

Yet in the end they did turn. The werewoman ran now in blind submission, all the strength dissolved that at first had carried her on. She was like a ghost blowing along on a gale, unresisting, unquestioning, hopeless. But in Smith a stouter spirit dwelt. And something strong and insistent was urging him to turn—an insistence that had no relation to the other urge to wait. It may have been a very human revolt against being driven; it may have been a deeply ingrained dislike of running from anything, or of allowing death to overtake him from behind. It had been bred in him to face danger when he could not escape it, and the old urge that every fighting thing knows—even a cornered rat will turn—drove him at last to face what followed him and die resisting—not in flight. For he felt that the end must be very near now. Some instinct stronger than the force that harried them told that.

And so, ignoring the armored crowd that eddied round them, he gripped the werewoman's wrist hard and slackened his speed, fighting against the urge that would have driven him on, choking down the panic that rose involuntarily as he waited for the thick waves to begin their surging round his feet. Presently he saw the shadow of a tree leaning through the smooth stone of a building, and instinctively he chose that misty thing he knew to be real for a bulwark to set his back against, rather than the unreal wall that looked so solid to his eyes. He braced his shoulders, holding a firm

grip on the woman's wrist as she struggled and whimpered and moaned in her wolf voice, straining to break the hold and run on. About, the mail-clad crowd hurried by heedlessly.

And very soon he felt it—the lapping wavelets touching his toes. He shuddered through all his unreal body at the feel, but he stood steady, gripping the struggling wolf-woman in a resolute hold, feeling the thick waves flowing around his feet, creeping up

to his ankles, lapping higher and higher round his legs.

For a while he stood at bay, feeling terror choke up and up in his throat as the waves rose round him, scarcely heeding the woman's struggles to be free. And then a further rebellion began to stir. If die he must, let it be neither in headlong flight nor in dazed and terrified quiescence, but violently, fighting against it, taking some toll, if he could, to pay for the life he was to lose. He gasped a deep breath and plunged forward into the quaking, unseen mass that had risen almost to his waist. Behind him at arm's length the werewoman stumbled unwillingly.

He lurched forward. Very swiftly the unseen rose about him, until arms and shoulders were muffled in thickness, until the heavy invisibility brushed his chin, his closed mouth, sealed his nostrils...closed over his head.

Through the clear deeps he forged on, moving like a man in a nightmare of retarded motion. Every step was an immense effort against that flow, dragged through resisting depths of jellylike nothingness. He had all but forgotten the woman he dragged along behind. He had wholly forgotten the colored city and the shining, armored people hurrying past. Blinded to everything but the deep-rooted instinct to keep moving, he forced his slow way onward against the flow. And indescribably he felt it begin to permeate him, seeping in slowly through the atoms of his ephemeral being. He felt it, and felt a curious change coming over him by degrees, yet could not define it or understand what was happening. Something urged him fiercely to go on, to struggle ahead, not to surrender—and so he fought, his mind whirling and the strange stuff of the thing that engulfed him soaking slowly through his being.

Presently the invisibility took on a faint body, a sort of clear opaqueness, so that the things outside were streaked and blurred a little and the splendid dream city with its steel-robed throngs wavered through the walls of what had swallowed him up. Everything was shaking and blurring and somehow changing. Even his body no longer obeyed him completely, as if it trembled on the verge of transition into something different and unknown.

Only the driving instinct to fight on held clear in his dazed mind. He struggled forward.

And now the towered city was fading again, its mailed people losing their outlines and melting into the grayness. But the fading was not a reversal—the shadow grass and trees grew more shadowy still. It was as if by successive steps he was leaving all matter behind. Reality had faded almost to nothing, even the cloudy unreality of the city was going now, and nothing but a gray blankness remained, a blankness through which he forged stubbornly against the all-engulfing flow that steeped him in nothingness.

Sometimes in flashes he ceased to exist—joined the gray nothing as part of it. The sensation was not that of unconsciousness. Somehow utter nirvana swallowed him up and freed him again, and between the moments of blank he fought on, feeling the transition of his body taking place very slowly, very surely, into something that even now he could not understand.

For gray eternities he struggled ahead through the clogging resistance, through darknesses of nonexistence, through flashes of near normality, feeling somehow that the path led in wild loops and whorls through spaces without name. His time sense had stopped. He could hear and see nothing, he could feel nothing but the immense effort of dragging his limbs through the stuff that enfolded him, and the effort was so great that he welcomed

sciousness. Yet stubbornly, unceasingly, the blind instinct drove him on.

those spaces of blankness when he did not exist even as an uncon-

There was a while when the flashes of nonexistence crowded closer and closer, and the metamorphosis of his body was all but complete, and only during brief winks of consciousness did he realize himself as an independent being. Then in some unaccountable way the tension slackened. For a long moment without interludes he knew himself a real being struggling upstream through invisibility and dragging a half-fainting woman by the wrist. The clarity of it startled him. For a while he could not understand—then it dawned upon him that his head and shoulders were free—free! What had happened he could not imagine, but he was free of it.

The hideous gray nothingness had gone—he looked out over a plain dotted with low trees and low, white, columned villas like no architecture he had ever seen before. A little way ahead a stone slab no higher than himself leaned against a great boulder in a hollow fringed with trees. Upon the slab an indescribable symbol was incised. It was like no symbol of any writing he had ever seen before. It was so different from all the written characters men make that it scarcely seemed akin to writing at all, nor traced by any human hand. Yet there was a curious familiarity about it that did not even puzzle him. He accepted it without question. He was somehow akin to it.

And between him and the engraved slab the air writhed and undulated. Streamers of invisibility flowed toward him, mounting as they flowed. He struggled forward, exultation surging within him. For—he knew, now. And as he advanced the thick resistance fell away from him, sliding down his shoulders, ebbing lower and lower about his struggling body. He knew that whatever the invisibility was, its origin lay in that symbol on the stone. From that it flowed. Half-visibly, he could see it. And toward that stone he made his way, a dim purpose forming in his brain.

He heard a little gasp and quickened breathing behind him, and turned his head to see the werewoman, moon-white in the undulating, almost-visible flow, staring about with wakened eyes and incomprehension clouding her face. He saw that she did not remember anything of what had happened. Her green-glowing eyes were empty as if they had just opened from deep slumber.

He forged on swiftly now through the waves that lapped futilely around his waist. He had won. Against what he did not yet know, nor from what cloudy terror he had saved himself and her, but he was not afraid now. He knew what he must do, and he struggled on eagerly toward the slab.

He was still waist-deep in the resisting flow when he reached it, and for a dizzy instant he thought he could not stop, that he must wade on into the very substance of that unnamable carving out of which came the engulfing nothingness. But with an effort he wrenched round and waded cross-stream, and after a while of desperate struggle he broke free into the open air.

It was like a cessation of gravity. In the release from that dragging weight he felt he must scarcely be touching the ground, but there was no time now to exult in his freedom. He turned

purposefully toward the slab.

The werewoman was just floundering clear of the stream when she saw what he intended, and she flung up her hands with a shriek of protest that startled Smith into a sidewise leap, as if some new terror were coming upon him. Then he saw what it was and gave her an amazed stare as he turned again to the stone, lifting his arms to grapple with it. She reeled forward and seized him in a cold, desperate embrace, dragging backward with all her might. Smith glared at her and shook his shoulders impatiently. He had felt the rock give a little. But when she saw that, she screamed again piercingly, and her arms twined like snakes as she struggled to drag him away.

She was very strong. He paused to unwind the fierce clasp and she fought savagely to prevent it. He needed all his strength to break her grip, and he pushed her from him then with a heavy shove that sent her reeling. The pale eyes followed her, puzzling why, though she had fled in such a frenzy of terror from what flowed out of the stone, she still strove to prevent him from destroying it. For he was quite sure that if the slab were broken and the symbol destroyed that stream would cease to flow. He could not understand her. He shook his shoulders impatiently and turned again to the stone.

This time she was on him with an animal spring, snarling low in her throat and clawing with frantic hands. Her fangs snapped just clear of his throat. Smith wrenched free with a great effort, for she was steel-strong and very desperate, and gripped her by the shoulder, swinging her away. Then he set his teeth and drove a heavy fist into her face, smashing against the fangs. She yelped, short and sharply, and collapsed under his hand, sinking to the grass in a huddle of whiteness and wild black hair.

He turned to the stone again. This time he got a firm grip on it, braced his legs wide, heaved. And he felt it give. He heaved again. And very slowly, very painfully, he uprooted its base from the bed where for ages it must have lain. Rock ground protestingly against rock. One edge rose a little, then settled. And the slab tilted. He heaved again, and very deliberately he felt it slipping from his hands. He stood back, breathing heavily, and watched.

Majestically, the great slab tottered. The stream flowing invisibly from its incised symbol twisted in a streaked path through the air, long whorls of opacity blurring the landscape beyond. Smith thought he felt a stirring in the air, a shiver as of warning. All the white villas dimly seen through the dark wavered a little before his eyes, and something hummed through the air like a thin, high wailing too sharp to be heard save as a pain to the ears. The chattering overhead quickened suddenly. All this in the slow instant while the slab tottered.

Then it fell. Deliberately slow, it leaned outward and down. It struck the ground with a rush and a splintering crash. He saw the long cracks appear miraculously upon its surface as the great fantastic symbol broke into fragments. The opacity that had flowed outward from it writhed like a dragon in pain, flung itself

high-arching into the shivering air—and ceased. In that moment of cessation the world collapsed around him. A mighty wind swooped down in a deafening roar, blurring the landscape. He thought he saw the white villas melting like dreams, and he knew the werewoman of the grass must have recovered consciousness, for he heard a wolf yell of utter agony from behind him. Then the great wind blotted out all other things, and he was whirling through space in a dizzy flight.

In that flight understanding overtook him. In a burst of illumination he knew quite suddenly what had happened and what would happen now—realized without surprise, as if he had always known it, that the denizens of this wasteland had dwelt here under the protection of that mighty curse laid upon the land in the long-past century when the city fell. And he realized that it must have been a very powerful curse, laid down by skill and knowledge that has long since vanished even from the legends of man, for in all the ages since, this accursed moor had been safe haven for all the half-real beings that haunt mankind, akin to the evil that lay like a blanket over the moor.

And he knew that the curse had its origin in the nameless symbol which some sorcerer of forgotten times had inscribed upon the stone, a writing from some language which can have no faintest kinship with man. He knew that the force flowing out from it was a force of utter evil, spreading like a river over the whole salt waste. The stream of it lapped to and fro in changing courses over the land, and when it neared some dweller of the place the evil that burnt for a life force in that dweller acted as a magnet to the pure evil which was the stream. So, evil answering to evil, the two fused into one, the unfortunate dweller swallowed up into a nirvana of nonexistence in the heart of that slow-flowing stream.

It must have worked strange changes in them. That city whose shapes of shadow still haunted the place assumed reality, taking on substance and becoming more and more actual as the reality of the captive waned and melted into the power of the stream.

He thought, remembering those hurrying throngs with their strained, pale faces, that the spirits of the people who had died in the lost city must be bound tenuously to the spot of their death. He remembered that young, richly garmented warrior he had been one with in fleeting moments, running golden-sandaled through the streets of the forgotten city in a panic of terror from something too long past to be remembered—the jeweled woman in her colored sandals and rippling robes running at his side—and wondered in the space of a second what their story had been so

many ages ago. He thought that curse must somehow have included the dwellers in the city, chaining them in earthbound misery for centuries. But of this he was not sure.

Much of all this was not clear to him, and more he realized without understanding, but he knew that the instinct which guided him to turn upstream had not been a false one—that something human and alien in him had been a talisman to lead his staggering feet back toward the source of his destroyer. And he knew that with the breaking up of the symbol that was a curse, the curse ceased to be, and the warm, sweet, life-giving air that humanity breathes swept in a flood across the barrens, blowing away all the shadowy, unclean creatures to whom it had been haven for so long. He knew—he knew...

Grayness swooped round him and all knowledge faded from his mind and the wind roared mightily in his ears. Somewhere in that roaring flight oblivion overtook him.

When he opened his eyes again he could not for an instant imagine where he lay or what had happened. Weight pressed upon his entire body suffocatingly, pain shot through it in jagged flashes. His shoulder ached deeply. And the night was dark, dark about him. Something muffling and heavy had closed over his senses, for no longer could he hear the tiny, sharp sounds of the plain or scent those tingling odors that once blew along the wind. Even the chattering overhead had fallen still. The place did not even smell the same. He thought he could catch from afar the odor of smoke, and somehow the air, as nearly as he could tell with his deadened senses, no longer breathed of desolation and loneliness. The smell of life was in the wind, very faintly. Little pleasant odors of flower scent and kitchen smoke seemed to tinge it.

"—wolves must have gone," someone was saying above him. "They stopped howling a few minutes ago. Notice? First time since we came into this damned place. Listen."

With a painful effort Smith rolled his head sideways and stared. A little group of men was gathered around him, their eyes lifted just now to the dark horizon. In the new density of the night he could not see them clearly, and he blinked in irritation, striving to regain that old, keen clarity he had lost. But they looked familiar. One wore a white fur cap on his head. Someone said, indicating something beyond Smith's limited range of vision, "Fellow here must have had quite a tussle. See the dead she-wolf with her throat torn out? And look—all the wolf tracks everywhere in the dust. Hundreds of them. I wonder . . ."

"Bad luck to talk about them," broke in the fur-capped leader.

"Werewolves, I tell you—I've been in this place before, and I know. But I never saw or heard tell of a thing like what we saw tonight—that big white-eyed one running with the she-wolves. God! I'll never forget those eyes."

Smith moved his head and groaned. The men turned quickly.

"Look, he's coming to," said someone, and Smith was vaguely conscious of an arm under his head and some liquid, hot and strong, forced between his lips. He opened his eyes and looked up. The fur-capped man was bending over him. Their eyes met. In the starlight, Smith's were colorless as pale steel.

The man choked something inarticulate and leaped back so suddenly that the flask spilled its contents half over Smith's chest.

He crossed himself frankly with a hand that shook.

"Who—who are you?" he demanded unsteadily.

Smith grinned wearily and closed his eyes.

C. A. Smith, poet, sculptor, painter, translator, and author of fantasy literature, was born near Auburn, California, a quiet little town a few miles north of Sacramento. Rather reclusive in nature, Smith spent most of his life in this rural setting, receiving his formal education at a neighboring country schoolhouse. He dropped out of school in the eighth grade, only to begin an ambitious program of self-education, which, according to Lin Carter in *Imaginary Worlds* (Ballantine, 1973, p. 59), involved reading in their entirety the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the

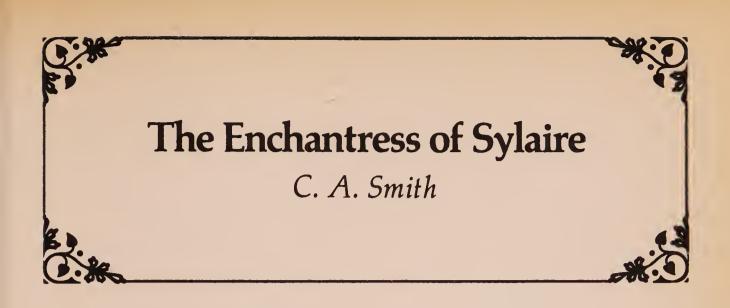
unabridged Oxford English Dictionary.

Smith's interest in writing began early in life. At the age of eleven, he tried his hand at fairy tales and imitations of The Arabian Nights, continued with some amateurish verse and oriental adventure novels in his early teens, and succeeded at the age of seventeen in selling a number of stories to The Black Cat, a magazine featuring weird fiction. It would only be natural to presume that this latter success marked the beginning of Smith's career in fiction writing. This, however, was not the case. For reasons as complex and enigmatic as the creative process itself, Smith now turned all his attention to the writing of verse, and he spent most of the next two decades working in this genre. Maintaining a close relationship with his fellow poet, friend, and mentor, George Sterling, Smith brought out a number of volumes of verse including The Star-Treader and Other Poems (1912), Odes and Sonnets (1918), Ebony and Crystal (1922), and Sandalwood (1925). Although not regarded as an important poet today, in the twenties Smith was considered by many to be one of America's leading writers of verse. It is noteworthy that Smith always considered himself a poet first and a writer of fantasy second.

In 1929, Smith once again began submitting stories to the pulp magazines, most notably Weird Tales. The next half-dozen years were the most productive of his writing career. During this remarkably creative period, he wrote more than a hundred short

stories and novelettes, almost all of which were either science fiction or fantasy. But then the stories stopped as abruptly as they had begun. From about 1935 until his death on August 14, 1961, Smith produced only a small number of stories, devoting most of his time to verse, sculpting, and painting. Most of his fiction has been published by Arkham House in collections such as Lost Worlds (1944) and The Abominations of Yondo (1960).

Even though Smith's career as fantasist was brief, he managed to create a number of unique other-world settings, including the mythical continents of Poseidonis, Hyperborea, and Zothique, the enchanted planet of Xiccarph, and the imaginary French province of Averoigne. "The Enchantress of Sylaire," which is a part of the Averoigne cycle, is an almost perfect example of High Gothic Fantasy. All of the requisite ingredients are here: the elevated prose style, the nonrational causality, the emphasis upon magic, the archetypal elements, and the secondary world. As a matter of fact, Smith guides the reader through not one, but two, secondary worlds: the imaginary medieval province of Averoigne, which provides the general setting of the story, and the magical realm of Sylaire, which can be entered by passing through the imposing cromlech fashioned from druidic monoliths. Thus, Smith has given us a secondary world within a secondary world—a noteworthy accomplishment indeed. As for the Gothic elements, what more could one ask for than moldering castle ruins, evil potions, vampires, a werewolf, and a wicked enchantress? Add to this already successful formula a smooth blend of sly satire and delightful wit, plus some of the most exotic and sensually-evocative descriptive passages in contemporary fantasy literature, and you have the essence of "The Enchantress of Sylaire"—one of C. A. Smith's most charming and droll fantasy tales.





"Why, you big ninny! I could never marry you," declared the demoiselle Dorothée, only daughter of the Sieur des Flèches. Her lips pouted at Anselme like two ripe berries. Her voice was honey—but honey filled with bee stings.

"You are not so ill-looking. And your manners are fair. But I wish I had a mirror that could show you to yourself for the fool

that you really are."

"Why?" queried Anselme, hurt and puzzled.

"Because you are just an addle-headed dreamer, poring over books like a monk. You care for nothing but silly old romances and legends. People say that you even write verses. It is lucky that you are at least the second son of the Comte du Framboisier —for you will never be anything more than that."

"But you loved me a little yesterday," said Anselme, bitterly. A

woman finds nothing good in the man she has ceased to love.

"Dolt! Donkey!" cried Dorothée, tossing her blonde ringlets in pettish arrogance. "If you were not all that I have said, you would never remind me of yesterday. Go, idiot—and do not return."

Anselme, the hermit, had slept little, tossing distractedly on his hard, narrow pallet. His blood, it seemed, had been fevered by

the sultriness of the summer night.

Then, too, the natural heat of youth had contributed to his unease. He had not wanted to think of women—a certain woman in particular. But, after thirteen months of solitude, in the heart of the wild woodland of Averoigne, he was still far from forgetting. Crueler even than her taunts was the remembered beauty of Dorothée des Flèches: the full-ripened mouth, the round arms and slender waist, the breast and hips that had not yet acquired their amplest curves.

Dreams had thronged the few short intervals of slumber, bring-

ing other visitants, fair but nameless, about his couch.

He rose at sundawn, weary but restless. Perhaps he would find refreshment by bathing, as he had often done, in a pool fed from the river Isoile and hidden among alder and willow thickets. The water, deliciously cool at that hour, would assuage his feverishness.

His eyes burned and smarted in the morning's gold glare when he emerged from the hut of wattled osier withes. His thoughts wandered, still full of the night's disorder. Had he been wise, after all, to quit the world, to leave his friends and family, and seclude himself because of a girl's unkindness? He could not deceive himself into thinking that he had become a hermit through any aspiration toward sainthood, such as had sustained the old anchorites. By dwelling so much alone, was he not merely aggravating the malady he had sought to cure?

Perhaps, it occurred to him belatedly, he was proving himself the ineffectual dreamer, the idle fool that Dorothée had accused him of being. It was weakness to let himself be soured by a

disappointment.

Walking with downcast eyes, he came unaware to the thickets that fringed the pool. He parted the young willows without lifting his gaze, and was about to cast off his garments. But at that instant the nearby sound of splashing water startled him from his abstraction.

With some dismay, Anselme realized that the pool was already occupied. To his further consternation, the occupant was a woman. Standing near to the center, where the pool deepened, she stirred the water with her hands till it rose and rippled against the base of her bosom. Her pale wet skin glistened like white rose petals dipped in dew.

Anselme's dismay turned to curiosity and then to unwilling delight. He told himself that he wanted to withdraw but feared to frighten the bather by a sudden movement. Stooping with her clear profile and her shapely left shoulder toward him, she had

not perceived his presence.

A woman, young and beautiful, was the last sight he had wished to see. Nevertheless, he could not turn his eyes away. The woman was a stranger to him, and he felt that she was no girl of the village or countryside. She was lovely as any chatelaine of the great castles of Averoigne. And yet surely no lady or demoiselle would bathe unattended in a forest pool.

Thick-curling chestnut hair, bound by a light silver fillet, billowed over her shoulders and burned to red, living gold where the sunrays searched it out through the foliage. Hung about her neck, a light golden chain seemed to reflect the lusters of her hair,

dancing between her breasts as she played with the ripples.

The hermit stood watching her like a man caught in webs of

sudden sorcery. His youth mounted within him, in response to her beauty's evocation.

Seeming to tire of her play, she turned her back and began to move toward the opposite shore, where, as Anselme now noticed, a pile of feminine garments lay in charming disorder on the grass. Step by step she rose up from the shoaling water, revealing hips and thighs like those of an antique Venus.

Then, beyond her, he saw that a huge wolf, appearing furtively as a shadow from the thicket, had stationed itself beside the heap of clothing. Anselme had never seen such a wolf before. He remembered the tales of werewolves that were believed to infest that ancient wood, and his alarm was touched instantly with the fear which only preternatural things can arouse. The beast was strangely colored, its fur being a glossy bluish-black. It was far larger than the common gray wolves of the forest. Crouching inscrutably, half hidden in the sedges, it seemed to await the woman as she waded shoreward.

Another moment, thought Anselme, and she would perceive her danger, would scream and turn in terror. But still she went on, her head bent forward as if in serene meditation.

"Beware the wolf!" he shouted, his voice strangely loud and seeming to break a magic stillness. Even as the words left his lips, the wolf trotted away and disappeared behind the thickets toward the great elder forest of oaks and beeches. The woman smiled over her shoulder at Anselme, turning a short oval face with slightly slanted eyes and lips red as pomegranate flowers. Apparently she was neither frightened by the wolf nor embarrassed by Anselme's presence.

"There is nothing to fear," she said, in a voice like the pouring

of warm honey. "One wolf, or two, will hardly attack me."

"But perhaps there are others lurking about," persisted Anselme. "And there are worse dangers than wolves for one who wanders alone and unattended through the forest of Averoigne. When you have dressed, with your permission I shall attend you safely to your home, whether it be near or far."

"My home lies near enough in one sense, and far enough in another," returned the lady, cryptically. "But you may accom-

pany me there if you wish."

She turned to the pile of garments, and Anselme went a few paces away among the alders and busied himself by cutting a stout cudgel for weapon against wild beasts or other adversaries. A strange but delightful agitation possessed him, and he nearly nicked his fingers several times with the knife. The misogyny that had driven him to a woodland hermitage began to appear

slightly immature, even juvenile. He had let himself be wounded

too deeply and too long by the injustice of a pert child.

By the time Anselme finished cutting his cudgel, the lady had completed her toilet. She came to meet him, swaying like a lamia. A bodice of vernal green velvet, baring the upper slopes of her breasts, clung tightly about her as a lover's embrace. A purple velvet gown, flowered with pale azure and crimson, molded itself to the sinuous outlines of her hips and legs. Her slender feet were enclosed in fine soft leather buskins, scarlet-dyed, with tips curling pertly upward. The fashion of her garments, though oddly antique, confirmed Anselme in his belief that she was a person of no common rank.

Her raiment revealed, rather than concealed, the attributes of her femininity. Her manner yielded—but it also withheld.

Anselme bowed before her with a courtly grace that belied his

rough country garb.

"Ah! I can see that you have not always been a hermit," she said, with soft mockery in her voice.

"You know me, then," said Anselme.

"I know many things. I am Sephora, the enchantress. It is unlikely that you have heard of me, for I dwelt apart, in a place that none can find—unless I permit them to find it."

"I know little of enchantment," admitted Anselme. "But I can

believe that you are an enchantress."

For some minutes they had followed a little-used path that serpentined through the antique wood. It was a path the hermit had never come upon before in all his wanderings. Lithe saplings and low-grown boughs of huge beeches pressed closely upon it. Anselme, holding them aside for his companion, came often in thrilling contact with her shoulder and arm. Often she swayed against him, as if losing her balance on the rough ground. Her weight was a delightful burden, too soon relinquished. His pulses coursed tumultuously and would not quiet themselves again.

Anselme had quite forgotten his eremitic resolves. His blood and his curiosity were excited more and more. He ventured various gallantries, to which Sephora gave provocative replies. His questions, however, she answered with elusive vagueness. He could learn nothing, could decide nothing, about her. Even her age puzzled him: at one moment he thought her a young girl, the

next, a mature woman.

Several times, as they went on, he caught glimpses of black fur beneath the low, shadow foliage. He felt sure that the strange black wolf he had seen by the pool was accompanying them with a furtive surveillance. But somehow his sense of alarm was dulled

by the enchantment that had fallen upon him.

Now the path steepened, climbing a densely wooded hill. The trees thinned to straggly, stunted pines, encircling a brown, open moorland as the tonsure encircles a monk's crown. The moor was studded with druidic monoliths, dating from ages prior to the Roman occupation of Averoigne. Almost at its center, there towered a massive cromlech, consisting of two upright slabs that supported a third like the lintel of a door. The path ran straight to the cromlech.

"This is the portal of my domain," said Sephora, as they neared it. "I grow faint with fatigue. You must take me in your arms and

carry me through the ancient doorway."

Anselme obeyed very willingly. Her cheeks paled, her eyelids fluttered and fell as he lifted her. For a moment he thought that she had fainted; but her arms crept warm and clinging around his neck.

Dizzy with the sudden vehemence of his emotion, he carried her through the cromlech. As he went, his lips wandered across her eyelids and passed deliriously to the soft red flame of her lips and the rose pallor of her throat. Once more she seemed to faint, beneath his fervor.

His limbs melted and a fiery blindness filled his eyes. The earth seemed to yield beneath them like an elastic couch as he and

Sephora sank down.

Lifting his head, Anselme looked about him with swiftly growing bewilderment. He had carried Sephora only a few paces—and yet the grass on which they lay was not the sparse and sun-dried grass of the moor, but was deep, verdant, and filled with tiny vernal blossoms! Oaks and beeches, huger even than those of the familiar forest, loomed umbrageously on every hand with masses of new, golden-green leafage, where he had thought to see the open upland. Looking back, he saw that the gray, lichened slabs of the cromlech itself alone remained of that former landscape.

Even the sun had changed its position. It had hung at Anselme's left, still fairly low in the east, when he and Sephora had reached the moorland. But now, shining with amber rays through a rift in

the forest, it had almost touched the horizon on his right.

He recalled that Sephora had told him she was an enchantress. Here, indeed, was proof of sorcery! He eyed her with curious doubts and misgivings.

"Be not alarmed," said Sephora, with a honeyed smile of reassurance. "I told you that the cromlech was the doorway to my

domain. We are now in a land lying outside of time and space as you have hitherto known them. The very seasons are different here. But there is no sorcery involved, except that of the great ancient druids, who knew the secret of this hidden realm and reared those mighty slabs for a portal between the worlds. If you should weary of me, you can pass back at any time through the doorway. But I hope that you have not tired of me so soon—"

Anselme, though still bewildered, was relieved by this information. He proceeded to prove that the hope expressed by Sephora was well-founded. Indeed, he proved it so lengthily and in such detail that the sun had fallen below the horizon before Sephora

could draw a full breath and speak again.

"The air grows chill," she said, pressing against him and shivering lightly. "But my home is close at hand."

They came in the twilight to a high round tower among trees

and grass-grown mounds.

"Ages ago," announced Sephora, "there was a great castle here. Now the tower alone remains, and I am its chatelaine, the last of my family. The tower and the lands about it are named Sylaire."

Tall dim tapers lit the interior, which was hung with rich arrases, vaguely and strangely pictured. Aged, corpse-pale servants in antique garb went to and fro with the furtiveness of specters, setting wines and foods before the enchantress and her guest in a broad hall. The wines were of rare flavor and immense age, the foods were curiously spiced. Anselme ate and drank copiously. It was all like some fantastic dream, and he accepted his surroundings as a dreamer does, untroubled by their strangeness.

The wines were potent, drugging his senses into warm oblivion. Even stronger was the inebriation of Sephora's nearness.

However, Anselme was a little startled when the huge black wolf he had seen that morning entered the hall and fawned like a dog at the feet of his hostess.

"You see, he is quite tame," she said, tossing the wolf bits of meat from her plate. "Often I let him come and go in the tower; and sometimes he attends me when I go forth from Sylaire."

"He is a fierce-looking beast," Anselme observed doubtfully.

It seemed that the wolf understood the words, for he bared his teeth at Anselme, with a hoarse, preternaturally deep growl. Spots of red fire glowed in his somber eyes, like coals fanned by devils in dark pits.

"Go away, Malachie," commanded the enchantress, sharply. The wolf obeyed her, slinking from the hall with a malign backward glance at Anselme.

"He does not like you," said Sephora. "That, however, is perhaps not surprising."

Anselme, bemused with wine and love, forgot to inquire the

meaning of her last words.

Morning came too soon, with upward-slanting beams that fired the treetops around the tower.

"You must leave me for a while," said Sephora, after they had breakfasted. "I have neglected my magic of late—and there are

matters into which I should inquire."

Bending prettily, she kissed the palms of his hands. Then, with backward glances and smiles, she retired to a room at the tower's top beside her bedchamber. Here, she had told Anselme, her grimoires and potions and other appurtenances of magic were kept.

During her absence, Anselme decided to go out and explore the woodland about the tower. Mindful of the black wolf, whose tameness he did not trust despite Sephora's reassurances, he took with him the cudgel he had cut that previous day in the thickets near the Isoile.

There were paths everywhere, all leading to fresh loveliness. Truly, Sylaire was a region of enchantment. Drawn by the dreamy golden light, and the breeze laden with the freshness of

spring flowers, Anselme wandered on from glade to glade.

He came to a grassy hollow, where a tiny spring bubbled from beneath mossed boulders. He seated himself on one of the boulders, musing on the strange happiness that had entered his life so unexpectedly. It was like one of the old romances, the tales of glamor and fantasy, that he had loved to read. Smiling, he remembered the gibes with which Dorothée des Flèches had expressed her disapproval of his taste for such reading matter. What, he wondered, would Dorothée think now? At any rate, she would hardly care—

His reflections were interrupted. There was a rustling of leaves, and the black wolf emerged from the boscage in front of him, whining as if to attract his attention. The beast had some-

how lost his appearance of fierceness.

Curious, and a little alarmed, Anselme watched in wonder while the wolf began to uproot with his paws certain plants that somewhat resembled wild garlic. These he devoured with palpable eagerness.

Anselme's mouth gaped at the thing which ensued. One moment the wolf was before him. Then, where the wolf had been, there rose up the figure of a man, lean, powerful, with blue-black

hair and beard, and darkly flaming eyes. The hair grew almost to his brows, the beard nearly to his lower eyelashes. His arms, legs, shoulders, and chest were matted with bristles.

"Be assured that I mean you no harm," said the man. "I am Malachie du Marais, a sorcerer, and the one-time lover of Sephora. Tiring of me, and fearing my wizardry, she turned me into a werewolf by giving me secretly the waters of a certain pool that lies amid this enchanted domain of Sylaire. The pool is cursed from old time with the infection of lycanthropy—and Sephora has added her spells to its power. I can throw off the wolf shape for a little while during the dark of the moon. At other times I can regain my human form, though only for a few minutes, by eating the root that you saw me dig and devour. The root is very scarce."

Anselme felt that the sorceries of Sylaire were more complicated than he had hitherto imagined. But amid his bewilderment he was unable to trust the weird being before him. He had heard many tales of werewolves, who were reputedly common in medieval France. Their ferocity, people said, was that of demons rather than of mere brutes.

"Allow me to warn you of the grave danger in which you stand," continued Malachie du Marais. "You were rash to let yourself be enticed by Sephora. If you are wise, you will leave the purlieus of Sylaire with all possible dispatch. The land is old in evil and sorcery, and all who dwell within it are ancient as the land, and are equally accursed. The servants of Sephora, who waited upon you yestereve, are vampires that sleep by day in the tower vaults and come forth only by night. They go out through the druid portal to prey on the people of Averoigne."

He paused as if to emphasize the words that followed. His eyes glittered balefully, and his deep voice assumed a hissing undertone. "Sephora herself is an ancient lamia, well-nigh immortal, who feeds on the vital forces of young men. She has had many lovers throughout the ages—and I must deplore, even though I cannot specify, their ultimate fate. The youth and beauty that she retains are illusions. If you could see Sephora as she really is, you would recoil in revulsion, cured of your perilous love. You would see her—unthinkably old, and hideous with infamies."

"But how can such things be?" queried Anselme. "Truly, I cannot believe you."

Malachie shrugged his hairy shoulders. "At least I have warned you. But the wolf-change approaches, and I must go. If you will come to me later, in my abode which lies a mile to the westward

of Sephora's tower, perhaps I can convince you that my statements are the truth. In the meanwhile, ask yourself if you have seen any mirrors, such as a beautiful young woman would use, in Sephora's chamber. Vampires and lamias are afraid of mirrors—for a good reason."

Anselme went back to the tower with a troubled mind. What Malachie had told him was incredible. Yet there was the matter of Sephora's servants. He had hardly noticed their absence that morning—and yet he had not seen them since the previous eve. And he could not remember any mirrors among Sephora's various feminine belongings.

He found Sephora awaiting him in the tower's lower hall. One glance at the utter sweetness of her womanhood, and he felt ashamed of the doubts with which Malachie had inspired him.

Sephora's blue-gray eyes questioned him, deep and tender as those of some pagan goddess of love. Reserving no detail, he told

her of his meeting with the werewolf.

"Ah! I did well to trust my intuitions," she said. "Last night, when the black wolf growled and glowered at you, it occurred to me that he was perhaps becoming more dangerous than I had realized. This morning, in my chamber of magic, I made use of my clairvoyant powers—and I learned much. Indeed, I have been careless. Malachie has become a menace to my security. Also, he hates you, and would destroy our happiness."

"Is it true, then," questioned Anselme, "that he was your lover,

and that you turned him into a werewolf?"

"He was my lover—long, long ago. But the werewolf form was his own choice, assumed out of evil curiosity by drinking from the pool of which he told you. He has regretted it since, for the wolf shape, while giving him certain powers of harm, in reality limits his actions and his sorceries. He wishes to return to human shape, and if he succeeds, will become doubly dangerous to us both.

"I should have watched him well—for I now find that he has stolen from me the recipe of antidote to the werewolf waters. My clairvoyance tells me that he has already brewed the antidote, in the brief intervals of humanity regained by chewing a certain root. When he drinks the potion, as I think that he means to do before long, he will regain human form—permanently. He waits only for the dark of the moon, when the werewolf spell is at its weakest."

"But why should Malachie hate me?" asked Anselme. "And how can I help you against him?"

"That first question is slightly stupid, my dear. Of course, he is jealous of you. As for helping me—well, I thought of a good trick to play on Malachie."

She produced a small purple glass vial, triangular in shape, from

the folds of her bodice.

"This vial," she told him, "is filled with the water of the were-wolf pool. Through my clairvoyant vision, I learned that Malachie keeps his newly brewed potion in a vial of similar size, shape, and color. If you can go to his den and substitute one vial for the other without detection, I believe that the results will be quite amusing."

"Indeed, I will go," Anselme assured her.

"The present should be a favorable time," said Sephora. "It is now within an hour of noon; and Malachie often hunts at this time. If you should find him in his den, or he should return while you are there, you can say that you came in response to his invitation."

She gave Anselme careful instructions that would enable him to find the werewolf's den without delay. Also, she gave him a sword, saying that the blade had been tempered to the chanting of magic spells that made it effective against such beings as Malachie. "The wolf's temper has grown uncertain," she warned. "If he should attack you, your alder stick would prove a poor weapon."

It was easy to locate the den, for well-used paths ran toward it with little deviation. The place was the mounded remnant of a tower that had crumbled down into grassy earth and mossy blocks. The entrance had once been a loftly doorway; now it was only a hole, such as a large animal would make in leaving and returning to its burrow.

Anselme hesitated before the hole. "Are you there, Malachie du Marais?" he shouted. There was no answer, no sound of movement from within. Anselme shouted once more. At last, stooping on hands and knees, he entered the den.

Light poured through several apertures, latticed with wandering treeroots, where the mound had fallen in from above. The place was a cavern rather than a room. It stank with carrion remnants into whose nature Anselme did not inquire too closely. The ground was littered with bones, broken stems and leaves of plants, and shattered or rusted vessels of alchemic use. A verdigriseaten kettle hung from a tripod above ashes and ends of charred fagots. Rain-sodden grimoires lay moldering in rusty metal covers. The three-legged ruin of a table was propped against the wall. It was covered with a medley of oddments, among which

Anselme discerned a purple vial resembling the one given him by Sephora.

In one corner was a litter of dead grass. The strong, rank odor of a wild beast mingled with the carrion stench.

Anselme looked about and listened cautiously. Then, without delay, he substituted Sephora's vial for the one on Malachie's table. The stolen vial he placed under his jerkin.

There was a padding of feet at the cavern's entrance. Anselme turned—to confront the black wolf. The beast came toward him, crouching tensely as if about to spring, with eyes glaring like crimson coals of Avernus. Anselme's fingers dropped to the hilt of the enchanted sword that Sephora had given him.

The wolf's eyes followed his fingers. It seemed that he recognized the sword. He turned from Anselme, and began to chew some roots of the garliclike plant, which he had doubtless collected to make possible these operations which he could hardly have carried on in wolfish form.

This time, the transformation was not complete. The head, arms, and body of Malachie du Marais rose up again before Anselme; but the legs were the hind legs of a monstrous wolf. He was like some bestial hybrid of antique legend.

"Your visit honors me," he said, half snarling, with suspicion in his eyes and voice. "Few have cared to enter my poor abode, and I am grateful to you. In recognition of your kindness, I shall make you a present."

With the padding movements of a wolf, he went over to the ruinous table and groped amid the confused oddments with which it was covered. He drew out an oblong silver mirror, brightly burnished, with jeweled handle, such as a great lady or damsel might own. This he offered to Anselme.

"I give you the mirror of Reality," he announced. "In it, all things are reflected according to their true nature. The illusions of enchantment cannot deceive it. You disbelieve me when I warned you against Sephora. But if you hold this mirror to her face and observe the reflection, you will see that her beauty, like everything else in Sylaire, is a hollow lie—the mask of ancient horror and corruption. If you doubt me, hold the mirror to my face—now, for I, too, am part of the land's immemorial evil."

Anselme took the silver oblong and obeyed Malachie's injunction. A moment, and his nerveless fingers almost dropped the mirror. He had seen reflected within it a face that the sepulcher should have hidden long ago—

The horror of that sight had shaken him so deeply that he could not afterward recall the circumstances of his departure

from the werewolf's lair. He had kept the werewolf's gift; but more than once he had been prompted to throw it away. He tried to tell himself that what he had seen was merely the result of some wizard trick. He refused to believe that any mirror would reveal Sephora as anything but the young and lovely sweetheart whose kisses were still warm on his lips.

All such matters, however, were driven from Anselme's mind by the situation that he found when he re-entered the tower hall. Three visitors had arrived during his absence. They stood fronting Sephora, who, with a tranquil smile on her lips, was apparently trying to explain something to them. Anselme recognized the visitors with much amazement, not untouched with consternation.

One of them was Dorothée des Flèches, clad in a trim traveling habit. The others were two serving men of her father, armed with longbows, quivers of arrows, broadswords, and daggers. In spite of this array of weapons, they did not look any too comfortable or at home. But Dorothée seemed to have retained her usual matter-of-fact assurance.

"What are you doing in this queer place, Anselme?" she cried. "And who is this woman, this chatelaine of Sylaire, as she calls herself?"

Anselme felt that she would hardly understand any answer that he could give to either query. He looked at Sephora, then back at Dorothée. Sephora was the essence of all the beauty and romance that he had ever craved. How could he have fancied himself in love with Dorothée, how could he have spent thirteen months in a hermitage because of her coldness and changeability? She was pretty enough, with the common bodily charms of youth. But she was stupid, wanting in imagination—prosy already in the flush of her girlhood as a middle-aged housewife. Small wonder that she had failed to understand him.

"What brings you here?" he countered. "I had not thought to see you again."

"I missed you, Anselme," she sighed. "People said that you had left the world because of your love for me, and had become a hermit. At last I came to seek you. But you had disappeared. Some hunters had seen you pass yesterday with a strange woman, across the moor of druid stones. They said you had both vanished beyond the cromlech, fading as if in air. Today I followed you with my father's serving men. We found ourselves in this strange region, of which no one has ever heard. And now this woman—"

The sentence was interrupted by a mad howling that filled the room with eldritch echoes. The black wolf, with jaws foaming

and slavering, broke in through the door that had been opened to admit Sephora's visitors. Dorothée des Flèches began to scream as he dashed straight toward her, seeming to single her out for the first victim of his rabid fury.

Something, it was plain, had maddened him. Perhaps the water of the werewolf pool, substituted for the antidote, had served to

redouble the original curse of lycanthropy.

The two serving men, bristling with their arsenal of weapons, stood like effigies. Anselme drew the sword given him by the enchantress, and leaped forward between Dorothée and the wolf. He raised his weapon, which was straight-bladed, and suitable for stabbing. The mad werewolf sprang as if hurled from a catapult, and his red, open gorge was spitted on the out-thrust point. Anselme's hand was jarred on the sword hilt, and the shock drove him backward. The wolf fell threshing at Anselme's feet. His jaws had clenched on the blade. The point protruded beyond the stiff bristles of his neck.

Anselme tugged vainly at the sword. Then the black-furred body ceased to thresh—and the blade came easily. It had been withdrawn from the sagging mouth of the dead ancient sorcerer, Malachie du Marais, which lay before Anselme on the flagstones. The sorcerer's face was now the face that Anselme had seen in the mirror, when he held it up at Malachie's injunction.

"You have saved me! How wonderful!" cried Dorothée. Anselme saw that she had started toward him with out-thrust arms. A moment more, and the situation would become embar-

rassing.

He recalled the mirror, which he had kept under his jerkin, together with the vial stolen from Malachie du Marais. What, he

wondered, would Dorothée see in its burnished depths?

He drew the mirror forth swiftly and held it to her face as she advanced upon him. What she beheld in the mirror he never knew but the effect was startling. Dorothée gasped, and her eyes dilated in manifest horror. Then, covering her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some ghastly vision, she ran shrieking from the hall. The serving men followed her. The celerity of their movements made it plain that they were not sorry to leave this dubious lair of wizards and witches.

Sephora began to laugh softly. Anselme found himself chuckling. For awhile they abandoned themselves to uproarious mirth. Then Sephora sobered.

"I know why Malachie gave you the mirror," she said. "Do

you not wish to see my reflection in it?"

Anselme realized that he still held the mirror in his hand.

Without answering Sephora, he went over to the nearest window, which looked down on a deep pit lined with bushes that had been part of an ancient, half-filled moat. He hurled the silver oblong into the pit.

"I am content with what my eyes tell me, without the aid of any mirror," he declared. "Now let us pass to other matters,

which have been interrupted too long."

Again the clinging deliciousness of Sephora was in his arms, and her fruit-soft mouth was crushed beneath his hungry lips.

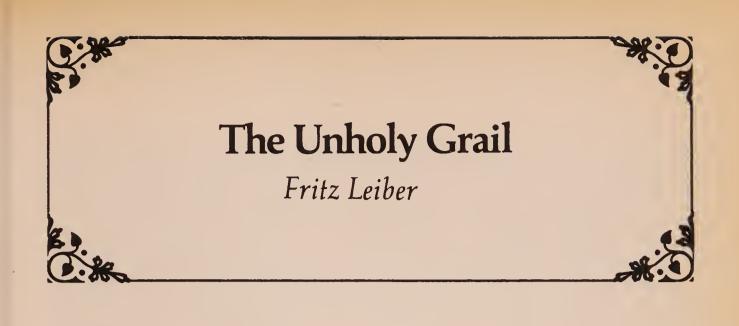
The strongest of all enchantments held them in its golden circle.

Fritz Leiber is a remarkably gifted man of diverse talents. He is an accomplished actor and orator, a skillful fencer, an expert chess player, a successful editor, a knowledgeable student of many sciences, and a popular author of fantasy and science fiction. Born in Chicago, the son of a distinguished Shakespearean actor, Leiber spent his early years on the road with his father's acting company. Responding to his rich cultural environment, the young boy quickly became a devotee of literature and the theater. His particular interest in fantasy and science fiction was generated by reading Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, a pulp periodical which profoundly influenced many young, would-be writers of the period. With an additional interest in psychology, Leiber majored in this field at the University of Chicago, where he received his Bachelor of Philosophy degree, with honors, in 1932.

Although some of his children's stories were published as early as the mid-thirties, Leiber's real writing career began in 1939 with the appearance of "Two Sought Adventure" in the August issue of Unknown. This was the first published tale in the now famous Saga of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. Since this successful professional debut, Leiber has established himself as one of America's foremost writers of heroic fantasy and science fiction. Convincing evidence of his remarkable achievement comes in the form of the coveted awards he has received during the past two decades. He won the Hugo Award for his novels The Big Time (1958) and The Wanderer (1965), and for his novelettes Gonna Roll the Bones (1968), Ship of Shadows (1970), and Ill Met in Lankhmar (1971). In addition, he received the Nebula Award for Gonna Roll the Bones and Ill Met in Lankhmar. Equally wellknown and popular are two earlier novels published in 1943, Gather, Darkness! and Conjure Wife. Now in his late sixties, and living in San Francisco, Leiber continues to write fantasy and science fiction with undiminished vigor.

"The Unholy Grail," first published in the November 1962

issue of Fantastic, is part of the "Gray Mouser" series. Like most of the stories in this popular saga, it is characterized by a fastpaced, dramatic narrative, vivid description, and subtle characterization. Of particular interest, however, is the wealth of information it supplies about the diminutive hero's early background, even explaining how the "Mouse" came to be called the "Gray Mouser." Set in Leiber's secondary world of Nehwon, this richly atmospheric work displays most of the stock Gothic trappings: dark, mysterious forests; clandestine grottoes; grim, shadowy castles; grisly torture chambers; a brooding villain and courageous hero; and, of course, inhuman elements aplenty. But this is not simply a Gothic adventure story; it provides both entertainment and instruction. Although not excessively didactic, it does succeed in vividly illustrating the destructive power of fear and black magic. All in all, "The Unholy Grail" is a good representative example of Leiber's unique brand of high-quality heroic fantasy.





Three things warned the wizard's apprentice that something was wrong: first, the deep-trodden prints of iron-shod hooves along the forest path—he sensed them through his boots before stooping to feel them out in the dark; next, the eerie drone of a bee unnaturally abroad by night; and finally, a faint aromatic odor of burning. Mouse raced ahead, dodging treetrunks and skipping over twisted roots by memory and by a bat's feeling for rebounding whispers of sound. Gray leggings, tunic, peaked hood, and streaming cloak made the slight youth, skinny with asceticism, seem like a rushing shadow.

The exaltation Mouse had felt at the successful completion of his long quest and his triumphal return to this sorcerous master, Glavas Rho, now vanished from his mind and gave way to a fear he hardly dared put into thoughts. Harm to the great wizard, whose mere apprentice he was?—"My Gray Mouse, still midway in his allegiance between white magic and black," Glavas Rho had once put it-no, it was unthinkable that that great figure of wisdom and spiritual might should come to harm. The great magician . . . (There was something hysterical about the way Mouse insisted on that "great," for to the world Glavas Rho was but a hedge-wizard, no better than a Mingol necromancer with his second-sighted spotted dog or a conjurer beggar of Quarmall) ... the great magician and his dwelling were alike protected by strong enchantments no impious outsider could breach—not even (the heart of Mouse skipped a beat) the lord paramount of these forests, Duke Janarrl, who hated all magic, but white worse than black.

And yet the smell of burning was stronger now and Glavas Rho's low cottage was built of resinous wood.

There also vanished from Mouse's mind the vision of a girl's face, perpetually frightened yet sweet—that of Duke Janarrl's daughter Ivrian, who came secretly to study under Glavas Rho, figuratively sipping the milk of his white wisdom side by side with Mouse. Indeed, they had privately come to call each other

Mouse and Misling, while under his tunic Mouse carried a plain green glove he had teased from Ivrian when he set forth on his quest, as if he were her armored and beweaponed knight and not a swordless wizardling.

By the time Mouse reached the hilltop clearing he was breath-

ing hard, not from exertion.

There the gathering light showed him at a glance the hoof-hacked garden of magic herbs, the overturned straw beehive, the great flare of soot sweeping up the smooth surface of the vast granite boulder that sheltered the wizard's tiny house.

But even without the dawn light he would have seen the fireshrunken beams and fire-gnawed posts acreep with red ember worms and the wraithlike green flame where some stubborn sorcerous ointment still burned. He would have smelled the confusion of precious odors of burned drugs and balms and the horribly appetizing kitchen odor of burned flesh.

His whole lean body winced. Then, like a hound getting the

scent, he darted forward.

The wizard lay just inside the buckled door. And he had fared as his house: the beams of his body bared and blackened; the priceless juices and subtle substances boiled, burned, destroyed forever or streamed upward to some cold hell beyond the moon.

From all around came very faintly a low sad hum, as the un-

housed bees mourned.

Memories fled horror-stricken through Mouse's mind: these shriveled lips softly chanting incantations, those charred fingers

pointing at the star or stroking a small woodland animal.

Trembling, Mouse drew from the leather pouch at his belt a flat green stone, engraved on the one side with deep-cut alien hieroglyphs, on the other with an armored, many-jointed monster, like a giant ant, that trod among tiny fleeing human figures. That stone had been the object of the quest on which Glavas Rho had sent him. For sake of it, he had rafted across the Lakes of Pleea, tramped the foothills of the Mountains of Hunger, hidden from a raiding party of red-bearded pirates, tricked lumpish peasant fishermen, flattered and flirted with an elderly odorous witch, robbed a tribal shrine, and eluded hounds set on his trail. His winning the green stone without shedding blood meant that he had advanced another grade in his apprenticeship. Now he gazed dully at its ancient surface and then, his trembling controlled, laid it carefully on his master's blackened palm. As he stooped he realized that the soles of his feet were painfully hot, his boots smoking a little at the edges, yet he did not hurry his steps as he moved away.

It was lighter now and he noticed little things, such as the anthill by the threshold. The master had studied the black-armored creatures as intently as he had their cousin bees. Now it was deeply dented by a great heelmark showing a semicircle of pits made by spikes—yet something was moving. Peering closely he saw a tiny heat-maimed warrior struggling over the sand grains. He remembered the monster on the green stone and shrugged at a thought that led nowhere.

He crossed the clearing through the mourning bees to where pale light showed between the treetrunks and soon was standing, hand resting on a gnarly bole, at a point where the hillside sloped sharply away. In the wooded valley below was a serpent of milky mist, indicating the course of the stream that wound through it. The air was heavy with the dissipating smoke of darkness. The horizon was edged to the right with red from the coming sun. Beyond it, Mouse knew, lay more forest and then the interminable grain fields and marshes of Lankhmar and beyond even those the ancient world-center of Lankhmar city, which Mouse had never seen, yet whose overlord ruled in theory even this far.

But near at hand, outlined by the sunrise red, was a bundle of jagged-topped towers—the stronghold of Duke Janarrl. A wary animation came into Mouse's masklike face. He thought of the spiked heelmark, the hacked turf, the trail of hoofmarks leading down this slope. Everything pointed to the wizard-hating Janarrl as the author of the atrocity behind him, except that, still revering his master's skills as matchless, Mouse did not understand how the Duke had broken through the enchantments, strong enough to dizzy the keenest woodsman, which had protected Glavas Rho's abode for many a year.

He bowed his head . . . and saw, lying lightly on the springing grass-blades, a plain green glove. He snatched it up and digging in his tunic drew forth another glove, darkly mottled and streakily bleached by sweat, and held them side by side. They were mates.

His lips writhed back from his teeth and his gaze went again to the distant stronghold. Then he unseated a thick round of scraggy bark from the treetrunk he'd been touching and delved shoulder-deep in the black cavity revealed. As he did these things with a slow tense automatism, the word came back to him of a reading Glavas Rho had smilingly given him over a meal of milkless gruel.

"Mouse," the mage had said, firelight dancing on his short white beard, "when you stare your eyes like that and flare your nostrils, you are too much like a cat for me to credit you will ever be a sheepdog of the truth. You are a middling dutiful scholar, but secretly you favor swords over wands. You are more tempted by the hot lips of black magic than the chaste slim fingers of white, no matter to how pretty a misling the latter belong—no, do not deny it! You are more drawn to the beguiling sinuosities of the left-hand path than the straight steep road of the right. I fear me you will never be mouse in the end but mouser. And never white but gray—oh well, that's better than black. Now, wash up these bowls and go breathe an hour on the newborn ague plant, for 'tis a chill night, and remember to talk kindly to the thorn bush."

The remembered words grew faint, but did not fade, as Mouse drew from the hole a leather belt furred green with mold and dangling from it a moldy scabbard. From the latter he drew, seizing it by the thong-wrapped grip, a tapering bronze sword showing more verdigris than metal. His eyes grew wide, but pinpoint-pupiled, and his face yet more masklike, as he held the pale-green, brown-edged blade against the red hump of the rising

sun.

From across the valley came faintly the high, clear, ringing note of a hunting horn, calling men to the chase.

Abruptly Mouse strode off down the slope, cutting over to the trail of the hooves, moving with long hasty strides and a little stiff-leggedly, as if drunk, and buckling around his waist as he went the mold-furred sword belt.

A dark four-footed shape rushed across the sun-specked forest glade, bearing down the underbrush with its broad low chest and trampling it with its narrow cloven hooves. From behind sounded the notes of a horn and the harsh shouts of men. At the far edge of the glade, the boar turned. Breath whistled through its nostrils and it swayed. Then its half-glazed little eyes fixed on the figure of a man on horseback. It turned toward him and some trick of the sunlight made its pelt grow blacker. Then it charged. But before the terrible upturning tusks could find flesh to slash, a heavy-bladed spear bent like a bow against the knob of its shoulder and it went crashing over half backward, its blood spattering the greenery.

Huntsmen clad in brown and green appeared in the glade, some surrounding the fallen boar with a wall of spear points, others hurrying up to the man on the horse. He was clad in rich garments of yellow and brown. He laughed, tossed one of his huntsmen the bloodied spear, and accepted a silver-worked leather wine flask from another.

A second rider appeared in the glade and the Duke's small yellow eyes clouded under the tangled brows. He drank deep and wiped his lips with the back of his sleeve. The huntsmen were warily closing their spear-wall on the boar, which lay rigid but with head lifted a finger's breadth off the turf, its only movements the darting of its gaze from side to side and the pulse of bright blood from its shoulder. The spear-wall was about to close when Janarrl waved the huntsmen to a halt.

"Ivrian!" he called harshly to the newcomer. "You had two chances at the beast, but you flinched. Your cursed dead mother would already have sliced thin and tasted the beast's raw heart."

His daughter stared at him miserably. She was dressed as the huntsmen and rode astride with a sword at her side and a spear in her hand, but it only made her seem more the thin-faced, spindle-armed girl.

"You are a milksop, a wizard-loving coward," Janarrl continued. "Your abominable mother would have faced the boar afoot and laughed when its blood gushed in her face. Look here, this boar is scotched. It cannot harm you. Drive your spear into it now! I command you!"

The huntsmen broke their spear-wall and drew back to either side, making a path between the boar and the girl. They sniggered openly at her and the Duke smiled at them approvingly. The girl hesitated, sucking at her underlip, staring with fear and fascination too at the beast which eyed her, head still just a lift.

"Drive in your spear!" Janarrl repeated, sucking quickly at the flask. "Do so, or I will whip you here and now."

Then she touched her heels to the horse's flanks and cantered down the glade, her body bent low, the spear trained at its target. But at the last instant its point swerved aside and gouged the dirt. The boar had not moved. The huntsmen laughed raucously.

Janarrl's wide face reddened with anger as he whipped out suddenly and trapped her wrist, tightened on it. "Your damned mother could cut men's throats and not change color. I'll see you flesh your spear in that carcass, or I'll make you dance, here and now, as I did last night, when you told me the wizard's spells and the place of his den."

He leaned closer and his voice sank to a whisper. "Know, chit, that I've long suspected that your mother, fierce as she could be, was—perhaps ensorcled against her will—a wizard-lover like yourself . . . and you the whelp of that burned charmer."

Her eyes widened and she started to pull away from him, but he drew her closer. "Have no fear, chit, I'll work the taint out of your flesh one way or another. For a beginning, prick me that boar!"

She did not move. Her face was a cream-colored mask of fear. He raised his hand. But at that moment there was an interruption.

A figure appeared at the edge of the glade at the point where the boar had turned to make its last charge. It was that of a slim youth, dressed all in gray. Like one drugged or in a trance, he walked straight toward Janarrl. The three huntsmen who had been attending the Duke drew swords and moved leisurely toward him.

The youth's face was white and tensed, his forehead beaded with sweat under the gray hood half thrown back. Jaw muscles made ivory knobs. His eyes, fixed on the Duke, squinted as if they looked at the blinding sun.

His lips parted wide, showing his teeth. "Slayer of Glavas Rho!

Wizard killer!"

Then his bronze sword was out of its moldy scabbard. Two of the huntsmen moved in his way, one of them crying, "Beware poison!" at the green of the newcomer's blade. The youth aimed a terrific blow at him, handling his sword as if it were a sledge. The huntsman parried it with ease, so that it whistled over his head, and the youth almost fell with the force of his own blow. The huntsman stepped forward and with a happy stroke rapped the youth's sword near the hilt to disarm him, and the fight was done before begun—almost. For the glazed look left the youth's eyes and his features twitched like those of a cat and, recovering his grip on his sword, he lunged forward with a twisting motion at the wrist that captured the huntsman's blade in his own green one and whipped it out of its startled owner's grasp. Then he continued his lunge straight toward the heart of the second huntsman, who escaped only by collapsing backward to the turf.

Janarrl leaned forward tensely in his saddle, muttering, "The whelp has fangs," but at that instant the third huntsman, who had circled past, struck the youth with sword pommel on the back of his neck. The youth dropped his sword, swayed, and started to fall, but the first huntsman grabbed him by the neck of his tunic and hurled him toward his companions. They received him in their own jocular fashion with cuffs and slaps, slashing his head and ribs with sheathed daggers, eventually letting him fall to the

ground, kicking him, worrying him like a pack of hounds.

Janarrl sat motionless, watching his daughter. He had not missed her frightened start of recognition when the youth appeared. Now he saw her lean forward, lips twitching. Twice he started to speak. Her horse moved uneasily and whinnied. Finally she hung her head and cowered back while low retching sobs came from her throat. Then Janarrl gave a satisfied grunt and called out, "Enough for the present! Bring him here!"

Two huntsmen dragged between them the half-fainting youth

clad now in red-spattered gray.

"Coward," said the Duke. "This sport will not kill you. They were only gentling you in preparation for other sports. But I forget you are a pawky wizardling, an effeminate creature who babbles spells in the dark and curses behind the back, a craven who fondles animals and would make the forests mawkish places. Faught! My teeth are on edge. And yet you sought to corrupt my daughter and—hearken to me, wizardling, I say!" And leaning low from his saddle he caught the youth's sagging head by the hair, tangling in his fingers. The youth's eyes rolled wildly and he gave a convulsive jerk that took the huntsmen by surprise and almost tumbled Janarrl out of the saddle.

Just then there was an ominous crackling of underbrush and the rapid thud of hooves. Someone cried, "Have a care, master!

Oh gods, guard the Duke!"

The wounded boar had lurched to its feet and was charging the group by Janarrl's horse.

The huntsmen scattered back, snatching for their weapons.

Janarrl's horse shied, further overbalancing its rider. The boar thundered past, like red-smeared midnight. Janarrl almost fell atop it. The boar swung sharply around for a return charge, evading three thrown spears that thudded into the earth just beside it. Janarrl tried to stand, but one of his feet was snagged in a stirrup and his horse, jerking clear, tumbled him again.

The boar came on, but other hooves were thudding now. Another horse swept past Janarrl and a firmly held spear entered near the boar's shoulder and buried itself deep. The black beast, jarred backward, slashed once at the spear with its tusk, fell

heavily on its side and was still.

Then Ivrian let go the spear. The arm with which she had been holding it dangled unnaturally. She slumped in her saddle, catching its pommel with her other hand.

Janarrl scrambled to his feet, eyed his daughter and the boar.

Then his gaze traveled slowly around the glade, full circle.

Glavas Rho's apprentice was gone.

"North be south, east be west. Copse be glade and gully crest. Dizziness all paths invest. Leaves and grasses, do the rest."

Mouse mumbled the chant through swollen lips almost as though he were talking into the ground on which he lay. His

fingers arranging themselves into cabalistic symbols, he thumbed a pinch of green powder from a tiny pouch and tossed it into the air with a wrist flick that made him wince. "Know it, hound, you are wolf-born, enemy to whip and horn. Horse, think of the unicorn, uncaught since the primal morn. Weave off from me, by the Norn!"

The charm completed, he lay still and the pains in his bruised flesh and bones became more bearable. He listened to the sounds of the hunt trail off in the distance.

His face was pushed close to a patch of grass. He saw an ant laboriously climb a blade, fall to the ground, and then continue on its way. For a moment he felt a bond of kinship between himself and the tiny insect. He remembered the black boar whose unexpected charge had given him a chance to escape and for a strange moment his mind linked it with the ant.

Vaguely he thought of the pirates who had threatened his life in the west. But their gay ruthlessness had been a different thing from the premeditated and presavored brutality of Janarri's huntsmen.

Gradually anger and hate began to swirl in him. He saw the gods of Glavas Rho, their formerly serene faces white and sneering. He heard the words of the old incantations, but they twanged with a new meaning. Then these visions receded, and he saw only a whirl of grinning faces and cruel hands. Somewhere in it the white, guilt-stricken face of a girl. Swords, sticks, whips. All spinning. And at the center, like the hub of a wheel on which men are broken, the thick strong form of the Duke.

What was the teaching of Glavas Rho to that wheel? It had rolled over him and crushed him. What was white magic to Janarrl and his henchmen? Only a priceless parchment to be besmirched. Magic gems to be trampled in filth. Thoughts of deep wisdom to be pulped with their encasing brain.

But there was the other magic. The magic Glavas Rho had forbidden, sometimes smilingly but always with an underlying seriousness. The magic Mouse had learned of only by hints and warnings. The magic which stemmed from death and hate and pain and decay, which dealt in poisons and night shrieks, which trickled down from the black spaces between the stars, which, as Janarrl himself had said, cursed in the dark behind the back.

It was as if all Mouse's former knowledge—of small creatures and stars and beneficial sorceries and Nature's codes of courtesy—burned in one swift sudden holocaust. And the black ashes took life and began to stir, and from them crept a host of night shapes, resembling those which had been burned, but all dis-

torted. Creeping, skulking, scurrying shapes. Heartless, all hate and terror, but as lovely to look on as black spiders swinging along their geometrical webs.

To sound a hunting horn for that pack! To set them on the

track of Janarrl!

Deep in his brain an evil voice began to whisper, "The Duke must die. The Duke must die." And he knew that he would

always hear that voice, until its purpose was fulfilled.

Laboriously he pushed himself up, feeling a stabbing pain that told of broken ribs; he wondered how he had managed to flee this far. Grinding his teeth, he stumbled across a clearing. By the time he had gotten into the shelter of the trees again, the pain had forced him to his hands and knees. He crawled on a little way, then collapsed.

Near evening of the third day after the hunt, Ivrian stole down from her tower room, ordered the smirking groom to fetch her horse, and rode through the valley and across the stream and up the opposite hill until she reached the rock-sheltered house of Glavas Rho. The destruction she saw brought new misery to her white taut face. She dismounted and went close to the fire-gutted ruin, trembling lest she come upon the body of Glavas Rho. But it was not there. She could see that the ashes had been disturbed, as though someone had been searching through them and sifting them for any objects that might have escaped the flames. Everything was very quiet.

An inequality in the ground off toward the side of the clearing caught her eye and she walked in that direction. It was a new-made grave, and in place of a headstone was, set around with gray pebbles, a small flat greenish stone with strange carvings on its

surface.

A sudden little sound from the forest set her trembling and made her realize that she was very much afraid, only that up to this point her misery had outweighed her terror. She looked up and gave a gasping cry, for a face was peering at her through a hole in the leaves. It was a wild face, smeared with dirt and grass stains, smirched here and there with old patches of dried blood, shadowed by a stubble of beard. Then she recognized it.

"Mouse," she called haltingly.

She hardly knew the answering voice.

"So you have returned to gloat over the wreckage caused by your treachery."

"No, Mouse, no!" she cried. "I did not intend this. You must

believe me."

"Liar! It was your father's men who killed him and burned his house."

"But I never thought they would!"

"Never thought they would! As if that's any excuse. You are so afraid of your father that you would tell him anything. You live by fear."

"Not always, Mouse. In the end I killed the boar."

"So much the worse—killing the beast the gods had sent to kill your father."

"But truly I never killed the boar. I was only boasting when I said so—I thought you liked me brave. I have no memory of that killing. My mind went black. I think my dead mother entered me and drove the spear."

"Liar and changer of lies! But I'll amend my judgment: you live by fear except when your father whips you to courage. I should have realized that and warned Glavas Rho against you. But I had dreams about you."

"You called me Misling," she said faintly.

"Aye, we played at being nice, forgetting cats are real. And then while I was away, you were frightened by mere whippings into betraying Glavas Rho to your father!"

"Mouse, do not condemn me." Ivrian was sobbing. "I know that my life has been nothing but fear. Ever since I was a child my father has tried to force me to believe that cruelty and hate are the laws of the universe. He has tortured and tormented me. There was no one to whom I could turn, until I found Glavas Rho and learned that the universe has laws of sympathy and love that shape even death and the seeming hates. But now Glavas Rho is dead and I am more frightened and alone than ever. I need your help, Mouse. You studied under Glavas Rho. You know his teachings. Come and help me."

His laughter mocked her. "Come out and be betrayed? Be whipped again while you look on? Listen to your sweet lying voice, while your father's huntsmen creep closer? No, I have other plans."

"Plans?" she questioned. Her voice was apprehensive. "Mouse, your life is in danger so long as you lurk here. My father's men are sworn to slay you on sight. I would die, I tell you, if they caught you. Don't delay, get away. Only tell me first that you do not hate me." And she moved toward him.

Again his laughter mocked her.

"You are beneath my hate," came the stinging words. "I feel only contempt for your cowardly weakness. Glavas Rho talked too much of love. There are laws of hate in the universe, shaping

even its loves, and it is time I made them work for me. Come no closer! I do not intend to betray my plans to you, or my new hidey holes. But this much I will tell you, and listen well. In seven days your father's torment begins."

"My father's torments? Mouse, Mouse, listen to me. I want to question you about more than Glavas Rho's teachings. I want to question you about Glavas Rho. My father hinted to me that he

knew my mother, that he was perchance my very father."

This time there was a pause before the mocking laughter, but when it came, it was doubled. "Good, good, good! It pleasures me to think that Old Whitebeard enjoyed life a little before he became so wise, wise, wise. I dearly hope he did tumble your mother. That would explain his nobility. Where so much love was—love for each creature ever born—there must have been lust and guilt before. Out of that encounter—and all your mother's evil—his white magic grew. It is true! Guilt and white magic side by side—and the gods never lied! Which leaves you the daughter of Glavas Rho, betraying your true father to his sooty death."

And then his face was gone and the leaves framed only a dark hole. She blundered into the forest after him, calling out "Mouse! Mouse!" and trying to follow the receding laughter. But it died away, and she found herself in a gloomy hollow, and she began to realize how evil the apprentice's laughter had sounded, as if he laughed at the death of all love, or even its unbirth. Then panic seized her, and she fled back through the undergrowth, brambles catching at her clothes and twigs stinging her cheeks, until she had regained the clearing and was galloping back through the dusk, a thousand fears besetting her and her heart sick with the thought there was now no one in the wide world who did not hate and despise her.

When she reached the stronghold, it seemed to crouch above her like an ugly jag-crested monster, and when she passed through the great gateway, it seemed to her that the monster had gobbled her up forever.

Come nightfall on the seventh day, when dinner was being served in the great banquet hall, with much loud talk and crunching of rushes and clashing of silver plates, Janarrl stifled a cry of pain and clapped his hand to his heart.

"It is nothing," he said a moment later to the thin-faced henchman sitting at his side. "Give me a cup of wine! That will stop it

twinging."

But he continued to look pale and ill at ease, and he ate little of

the meat that was served up in great smoking slices. His eyes kept

roving about the table, finally settling on his daughter.

"Stop staring at me in that gloomy way, girl!" he called. "One would think that you had poisoned my wine and were watching to see green spots come out on me. Or red ones edged with black, belike."

This brought a general guffaw of laughter which seemed to please the Duke, for he tore off the wing of a fowl and gnawed at it hungrily, but the next moment he gave another sudden cry of pain, louder than the first, staggered to his feet, clawed convulsively at his chest, and then pitched over on the table, where he lay groaning and writhing in his pain.

"The Duke is stricken," the thin-faced henchman announced quite unnecessarily and yet most portentously after bending over him. "Carry him to bed. One of you loosen his shirt. He gasps for

air."

A flurry of whispering went up and down the table. As the great door to his private apartments was opened for the Duke, a heavy gust of chill air made the torches flicker and turn blue, so that shadows crowded into the hall. Then one torch flared white-bright as a star, showing the face of a girl. Ivrian felt the others draw-away from her with suspicious glances and mutterings, as if they were certain there had been truth in the Duke's jest. She did not look up. After a while someone came and told her that the Duke commanded her presence. Without a word she rose and followed.

The Duke's face was gray and furrowed with pain, but he had control of himself, though with each breath his hand tightened convulsively on the edge of the bed until his knuckles were like knobs of rock. He was propped up with pillows and a furred robe had been tucked closely about his shoulders and long-legged braziers glowed around the bed. In spite of all he was shivering convulsively.

"Come here, girl," he ordered in a low, labored voice that hissed against his drawn lips. "You know what has happened. My heart pains as though there were a fire under it and yet my skin is cased in ice. There is a stabbing in my joints as if long needles

pierced clear through the marrow. It is wizard's work."

"Wizard's work, beyond doubt," confirmed Giscorl, the thinfaced henchman, who stood at the head of the bed. "And there is no need to guess who. That young serpent whom you did not kill quickly enough ten days ago! He's been reported skulking in the woods, aye, and talking to . . . certain ones," he added, eyeing Ivrian narrowly, suspiciously. A spasm of agony shook the Duke. "I should have stamped out whelp with sire," he groaned. Then his eyes shifted back to Ivrian. "Look, girl, you've been seen poking about in the forest where the old wizard was killed. It's believed you talked with his cub."

Ivrian wet her lips, tried to speak, shook her head. She could feel her father's eyes probing into her. Then his fingers reached out and twisted themselves in her hair.

"I believe you're in league with him!" His whisper was like a rusty knife. "You're helping him do this to me. Admit it! Admit!" And he thrust her cheek against the nearest brazier so that her hair smoked and her "No!" became a shuddering scream. The brazier swayed and Giscorl steadied it. Through Ivrian's scream the Duke snarled, "Your mother once held red coals to prove her honor."

A ghostly blue flame ran up Ivrian's hair. The Duke jerked her from the brazier and fell back against the pillows.

"Send her away," he finally whispered faintly, each word an effort. "She's a coward and wouldn't dare to hurt even me. Meantime, Giscorl, send out more men to hunt through the woods. They must find his lair before dawn, or I'll rupture my heart withstanding the pain."

Curtly Giscorl motioned Ivrian toward the door. She cringed, and slunk from the room, fighting down tears. Her cheek pulsed with pain. She was not aware of the strangely speculative smile with which the hawk-faced henchman watched her out.

Ivrian stood at the narrow window of her room watching the little bands of horsemen come and go, their torches glowing like will-o'-the-wisps in the woods. The stronghold was full of mysterious movement. The very stones seemed restlessly alive, as if they shared the torment of their master.

She felt herself drawn toward a certain point out there in the darkness. A memory kept recurring to her of how one day Glavas Rho had showed her a small cavern in the hillside and had warned her that it was an evil place, where much baneful sorcery had been done in the past. Her fingertips moved around the crescent-shaped blister on her cheek and over the rough streak in her hair.

Finally her uneasiness and the pull from the night became too strong for her. She dressed in the dark and edged open the door of her chamber. The corridor seemed for the moment deserted. She hurried along it, keeping close to the wall, and darted down the worn rounded hummocks of the stone stair. The tramp of

footsteps sent her hurrying into a niche, where she cowered while two huntsmen strode glum-faced toward the Duke's chamber. They were dust-stained and stiff from riding.

"No one'll find him in all that dark," one of them muttered.

"It's like hunting an ant in a cellar."

The other nodded. "And wizards can change landmarks and make forest paths turn on themselves, so that all searchers are befuddled."

As soon as they were past Ivrian hastened into the banquet hall, now dark and empty, and through the kitchen with its high brick ovens and its huge copper kettles glinting in the shadows.

Outside in the courtyard torches were flaring and there was a bustle of activity as grooms brought fresh horses or led off spent ones, but she trusted to her huntsman's costume to let her pass unrecognized. Keeping to the shadows, she worked her way around to the stables. Her horse moved restlessly and neighed when she slipped into the stall but quieted at her low whisper. A few moments and it was saddled, and she was leading it around to the open fields at the back. No searching parties seemed to be near, so she mounted and rode swiftly toward the wood.

Her mind was a storm of anxieties. She could not explain to herself how she had dared come this far, except that the attraction toward that point in the night—the cavern against which Glavas Rho had warned her—possessed a sorcerous insistence not

to be denied.

Then, when the forest engulfed her, she suddenly felt that she was committing herself to the arms of darkness and putting behind forever the grim stronghold and its cruel occupants. The ceiling of leaves blotted out most of the stars. She trusted to a light rein on her horse to guide her straight. And in this she was successful, for within a half hour she reached a shallow ravine which led past the cavern she sought.

Now, for the first time, her horse became uneasy. It balked and uttered little whinnying cries of fear and tried repeatedly to turn off as she urged it along the ravine. Its pace slowed to a walk. Finally it refused to move further. Its ears were laid back and it

was trembling all over.

Ivrian dismounted and moved on. The forest was portentously quiet, as if all animals and birds—even the insects—had gone. The darkness ahead was almost tangible, as if built of black bricks just beyond her hand.

Then Ivrian became aware of the green glow, vague and faint at first as the ghosts of an aurora. Gradually it grew brighter and acquired a flickering quality, as the leafy curtains between her and it became fewer. Suddenly she found herself staring directly at it—a thick, heavy, soot-edge flame that writhed instead of danced. If green slime could be transmuted to fire, it would have that look. It burned in the mouth of a shallow cavern.

Then, beside the flame, she saw the face of the apprentice of Glavas Rho, and in that instant an agony of horror and sympathy tore at her mind.

The face seemed inhuman—more a green mask of torment than anything alive. The cheeks were drawn in; the eyes were unnaturally wild; it was very pale, and dripping with cold sweat induced by intense inward effort. There was much suffering in it, but also much power—power to control the thick twisting shadows that seemed to crowd around the green flame, power to master the forces of hate that were being marshaled. At regular intervals the cracked lips moved and the arms and hands made set gestures.

It seemed to Ivrian that she heard the mellow voice of Glavas Rho repeating a statement he had once made to Mouse and to her. "None can use black magic without straining the soul to the uttermost—and staining it into the bargain. None can inflict suffering without enduring the same. None can send death by spells and sorcery without walking on the brink of death's own abyss, aye, and dripping his own blood into it. The forces black magic evokes are like two-edged swords with grips studded with scorpion stings. Only a strong man, leather handed, in whom hate and evil are very powerful, can wield them, and he only for a space."

In Mouse's face Ivrian saw the living example of those words. Step by step she moved toward him, feeling no more power to control her movements than if she were in a nightmare. She became aware of shadowy presences, as if she were pushing her way through cobweb veils. She came so near that she could have reached out her hand and touched him, and still he did not notice her, as if his spirit were out beyond the stars, grappling the blackness there.

Then a twig snapped under her foot and Mouse sprang up with terrifying swiftness, the energy of every taut muscle released. He snatched up his sword and lunged at the intruder. But when the green blade was within a hand's breadth of Ivrian's throat, he checked it with an effort. He glared, lips drawn back from his teeth. Although he had checked his sword, he seemed only half to recognize her.

At that instant Ivrian was buffeted by a mighty gust of wind, which came from the mouth of the cavern, a strange wind, carry-

ing shadows. The green fire burned low, running rapidly along the sticks that were its fuel, and almost snuffing out.

Then the wind ceased and the thick darkness lifted, to be replaced by a wan gray light heralding the dawn. The fire turned from green to yellow. The wizard's apprentice staggered, and the sword dropped from his fingers.

"Why did you come here?" he questioned thickly.

She saw how his face was wasted with hunger and hate, how his clothing bore the signs of many nights spent in the forest like an animal, under no roof. Then suddenly she realized that she knew the answer to his question.

"Oh, Mouse," she whispered, "let us go away from this place. Here is only horror." He swayed, and she caught hold of him.

"Take me with you, Mouse," she said.

He stared frowningly into her eyes. "You do not hate me then, for what I have done to your father? Or what I have done to the teachings of Glavas Rho?" he questioned puzzledly. "You are not afraid of me?"

"I am afraid of everything," she whispered, clinging to him. "I am afraid of you, yes, a great deal afraid. But that fear can be unlearned. Oh, Mouse, will you take me away—to Lankhmar or to Earth's End?"

He took her by the shoulders. "I have dreamed of that," he said slowly. "But you? . . ."

"Apprentice of Glavas Rho!" thundered a stern, triumphant voice. "I apprehend you in the name of Duke Janarrl for sor-

ceries practiced on the Duke's body!"

Four huntsmen were springing forward from the undergrowth with swords drawn and Giscorl three paces behind them. Mouse met them halfway. They soon found that this time they were not dealing with a youth blinded by anger, but with a cold and cunning swordsman. There was a kind of magic in his primitive blade. He ripped up the arm of his first assailant with a well-judged thrust, disarmed the second with an unexpected twist, then coolly warded off the blows of the other two, retreating slowly. But other huntsmen followed the first four and circled around. Still fighting with terrible intensity and giving blow for blow, Mouse went down under the sheer weight of their attack. They pinioned his arms and dragged him to his feet. He was bleeding from a cut in the cheek, but he carried his head high, though it was beast-shaggy. His bloodshot eyes sought out Ivrian.

"I should have known," he said evenly, "that having betrayed Glavas Rho you would not rest until you had betrayed me. You

did your work well, girl. I trust you take much pleasure in my death."

Giscorl laughed. Like a whip, the words of Mouse stung Ivrian. She could not meet his eyes. Then she became aware that there was a man on horseback behind Giscorl and, looking up, she saw that it was her father. His wide body was bent by pain. His face was a death's mask. It seemed a miracle that he managed to cling to the saddle.

"Quick, Giscorl!" he hissed.

But the thin-faced henchman was already sniffing around in the cavern's mouth like a well-trained ferret. He gave a cry of satisfaction and lifted down a little figure from a ledge above the fire, which he next stamped out. He carried the figure as gingerly as if it were made of cobweb. As he passed by her, Ivrian saw that it was a clay doll wide as it was tall and dressed in brown and yellow leaves, and that its features were a grotesque copy of her father's. It was pierced in several places by long bone needles.

"This is the thing, oh Master," said Giscorl, holding it up, but the Duke only repeated, "Quick, Giscorl!" The henchman started to withdraw the largest needle which pierced the doll's middle, but the Duke gasped in agony and cried, "Forget not the balm!" Whereupon Giscorl uncorked with his teeth and poured a large vial of syrupy liquid over the doll's body and the Duke sighed a little with relief. Then Giscorl very carefully withdrew the needles, one by one, and as each needle was withdrawn the Duke's breath whistled and he clapped his hand to his shoulder or thigh, as if it were from his own body that the needles were being drawn. After the last one was out, he sat slumped in his saddle for a long time. When he finally looked up the transformation that had taken place was astonishing. There was color in his face, and the lines of pain had vanished, and his voice was loud and ringing.

"Take the prisoner back to our stronghold to await our judgment," he cried. "Let this be a warning to all who would practice wizardry in our domain. Giscorl, you have proved yourself a faithful servant." His eyes rested on Ivrian. "You have played with witchcraft too often, girl, and need other instruction. As a beginning you will witness the punishment I shall visit on this

foul wizardling."

"A small boon, oh Duke!" Mouse cried. He had been hoisted onto a saddle and his legs tied under the horse's belly. "Keep your foul, spying daughter out of my sight. And let her not look at me in my pain."

"Strike him in the lips, one of you," the Duke ordered. "Ivrian, ride close behind him—I command it."

Slowly the little cavalcade rode off toward the stronghold through the brightening dawn. Ivrian's horse had been brought to her and she took her place as bidden, sunk in a nightmare of misery and defeat. She seemed to see the pattern of her whole life laid out before her—past, present, and future—and it consisted of nothing but fear, loneliness, and pain. Even the memory of her mother, who had died when she was a little girl, was something that still brought a palpitation of panic to her heart: a bold, handsome woman, who always had a whip in her hand, and whom even her father had feared. Ivrian remembered how when the servants had brought word that her mother had broken her neck in a fall from a horse, her only emotion had been fear that they were lying to her, and that this was some new trick of her mother's to put her off guard, and that some new punishment would follow.

Then, from the day of her mother's death, her father had shown her nothing but a strangely perverse cruelty. Perhaps it was his disgust at not having a son that made him treat her like a cowardly boy instead of a girl and encourage his lowliest followers to maltreat her—from the maids who played at ghosts around her bed to the kitchen wenches who put frogs in her milk and nettles in her salad.

Sometimes it seemed to her that anger at not having a son was too weak an explanation for her father's cruelties, and that he was revenging himself through Ivrian on his dead wife, whom he had certainly feared and who still influenced his actions, since he had never married again or openly taken mistresses. Or perhaps there was truth in what he had said of her mother and Glavas Rho—no, surely that must be a wild imagining of his anger. Or perhaps, as he sometimes told her, he was trying to make her live up to her mother's vicious and bloodthirsty example, trying to recreate his hated and adored wife in the person of her daughter, and finding a queer pleasure in the refractoriness of the material on which he worked and the grotesquerie of the whole endeavor.

Then in Glavas Rho, Ivrian had found a refuge. When she had first chanced upon the white-bearded old man in her lonely wanderings through the forest, he had been mending the broken leg of a fawn and he had spoken to her softly of the ways of kindness and of the brotherhood of all life, human and animal. And she had come back day after day to hear her own vague intuitions revealed to her as deep truths and to take refuge in his wide sympathy . . . and to explore her timid friendship with his

clever little apprentice. But now Glavas Rho was dead and Mouse had taken the spider's way, or the snake's track, or the cat's path, as the old wizard had sometimes referred to bale magic.

She looked up and saw Mouse riding a little ahead and to one side of her, his hands bound behind him, his head and body bowed forward. Conscience smote her, for she knew she had been responsible for his capture. But worse than conscience was the pang of lost opportunity, for there ahead of her rode, doomed, the one man who might have saved her from her life.

A narrowing of the path brought her close beside him. She said hurriedly, ashamedly, "If there is anything I can do so that you will forgive me a little . . ."

The glance he bent on her, looking sidewise up, was sharp,

appraising, and surprisingly alive.
"Perhaps you can," he murmured softly, so the huntsmen ahead might not hear. "As you must know, your father will have me tortured to death. You will be asked to watch it. Do just that. Keep your eyes riveted on mine the whole time. Sit close beside your father. Keep your hand on his arm. Aye, kiss him too. Above all, show no sign of fright or revulsion. Be like a statue carved of marble. Watch to the end. One other thing-wear, if you can, a gown of your mother's, or if not a gown, then some article of her clothing." He smiled at her thinly. "Do this and I will at least have the consolation of watching you flinch—and flinch—and flinch!"

"No mumbling charms now!" cried the huntsman suddenly, jerking Mouse's horse ahead.

Ivrian reeled as if she had been struck in the face. She had thought her misery could go no deeper, but Mouse's words had beaten it down a final notch. At that instant the cavalcade came into the open, and the stronghold loomed up ahead-a great horned and jag-crested blot on the sunrise. Never before had it seemed so much like a hideous monster. Ivrian felt that its high gates were the iron jaws of death.

Janarrl, striding into the torture chamber deep below his stronghold, experienced a hot wave of exultation, as when he and his huntsmen closed in around an animal for the kill. But atop the wave was a very faint foam of fear. His feelings were a little like those of a ravenously hungry man invited to a sumptuous banquet, but who has been warned by a fortune-teller to fear death by poison. He was haunted by the feverish frightened face of the man arm-wounded by the wizardling's corroded bronze sword.

His eyes met those of Glavas Rho's apprentice, whose half-naked body was stretched—though not yet painfully so—upon the rack, and the Duke's sense of fear sharpened. They were too searching, those eyes, too cold and menacing, too suggestive of magical

powers.

He told himself angrily that a little pain would soon change their look to one of trapped panic. He told himself that it was natural that he should still be on edge from last night's horrors, when his life had almost been pried from him by dirty sorceries. But deep in his heart he knew that fear was always with him—fear of anything or anyone that someday might be stronger than he and hurt him as he had hurt others, fear of the dead he had harmed and could hurt no longer, fear of his dead wife, who had indeed been stronger and crueler than he and who had humiliated him in a thousand ways that no one but he remembered.

But he also knew that his daughter would soon be here and that he could then shift off his fear on her; by forcing her to fear, he would be able to heal his own courage, as he had done innumerable times in the past

able times in the past.

So he confidently took his place and gave order that the torture begin.

As the great wheel creaked and the leathern wristlets and anklets began to tighten a little, Mouse felt a qualm of helpless panic run over his body. It centered in his joints—those little deep-set hinges of bone normally exempt from danger. There was yet no pain. His body was merely stretched a little, as if he were

yawning.

The low ceiling was close to his face. The flickering light of the torches revealed the mortices in the stone and the dusty cobwebs. Toward his feet he could see the upper portion of the wheel, and the two large hands that gripped its spokes, dragging them down effortlessly, very slowly, stopping for twenty heartbeats at a time. By turning his head and eyes to the side he could see the big figure of the Duke—not as wide as his doll of him, but wide—sitting in a carven wooden chair, two armed men standing behind him. The Duke's brown hands, their jeweled rings flashing fire, were closed over the knobs on the chair arms. His feet were firmly planted. His jaw was set. Only his eyes showed any uneasiness or vulnerability. They kept shifting from side to side—rapidly, regularly, like the pivoted ones of a doll.

"My daughter should be here," he heard the Duke say abruptly

"My daughter should be here," he heard the Duke say abruptly in a flat voice. "Hasten her. She is not to be permitted to delay."

One of the men hurried away.

Then the twinges of pain commenced, striking at random in

the forearm, the back, the knee, the shoulder. With an effort Mouse composed his features. He fixed his attention on the faces around him, surveying them in detail as if they formed a picture, noting the highlights on the cheeks and eyes and beards and the shadows, wavering with the torch flames, that their figures cast upon the low walls.

Then those low walls melted and, as if distance were no longer real, he saw the whole wide world he'd never visited beyond them: great reaches of forest, bright amber desert, and turquoise sea; the Lake of Monsters, the City of Ghouls, magnificent Lankhmar, the Land of the Eight Cities, the Trollstep Mountains, the fabulous Cold Waste; and by some chance striding there an open-faced, hulking red-haired youth he'd glimpsed among the pirates and later spoken with—all places and persons he'd never now encounter, but showing in wondrous fine detail, as if carved and tinted by a master miniaturist.

With startling suddenness the pain returned and increased. The twinges became needle stabs—a cunning prying at his insides, fingers of force crawling up his arms and legs toward his spine, an unsettling at the hips. He desperately tensed his muscles against them.

Then he heard the Duke's voice, "Not so fast. Stop a while." Mouse thought he recognized the overtones of panic in the voice. He twisted his head despite the pangs it cost him and watched the uneasy eyes. They swung to and fro, like little pendulums.

Suddenly then, as if time were no longer real, Mouse saw another scene in this chamber. The Duke was there and his eyes swinging from side to side, but he was younger and there was open panic and horror in his face. Close beside him was a boldly handsome woman in a dark red dress cut low in the bosom and with slashes inset with yellow silk. Stretched upon the rack itself in Mouse's place was a strappingly beautiful but now pitifully whimpering maid, whom the woman in red was questioning, with great coldness and insistence on detail, about her amorous encounters with the Duke and her attempt on the life of herself, the Duke's wife, by poison.

Footsteps broke that scene, as stones destroy a reflection in water, and brought the present back. Then a voice: "Your

daughter comes, O Duke."

Mouse steeled himself. He had not realized how much he dreaded this meeting, even in his pain. He felt bitterly certain that Ivrian would not have heeded his words. She was not evil, he knew, and she had not meant to betray him, but by the same token she was without courage. She would come whimpering,

and her anguish would eat at what little self-control he could muster and doom his last wild wishful schemings.

Lighter footsteps were approaching now—hers. There was

something curiously measured about them.

It meant added pain for him to turn his head so he could see the doorway; yet he did so, watching her figure define itself as it entered the region of ruddy light cast by the torches.

Then he saw the eyes. They were wide and staring. They were fixed straight on him. And they did not turn away. The face was

pale, calm with a deadly serenity.

He saw she was dressed in a gown of dark red, cut low in the

bosom and with slashes inset with yellow silk.

And then the soul of Mouse exulted, for he knew that she had done what he had bidden her. Glavas Rho had said, "The sufferer can hurl his suffering back upon his oppressor, if only his oppressor can be tempted to open a channel for his hate." Now there was a channel open for him, leading to Janarri's inmost being.

Hungrily, Mouse fastened his gaze on Ivrian's unblinking eyes, as if they were pools of black magic in a cold moon. Those eyes,

he knew, could receive what he could give.

He saw her seat herself by the Duke. He saw the Duke peer sidewise at his daughter and start up as if she were a ghost. But Ivrian did not look toward him, only her hand stole out and fastened on his wrist, and the Duke sank shuddering back into his chair.

"Proceed!" he heard the Duke call out to the torturers, and this time the panic in the Duke's voice was very close to the surface.

The wheel turned. Mouse heard himself groan piteously. But there was something in him now that could ride on top of the pain and that had no part in the groan. He felt that there was a path between his eyes and Ivrian's—a rock-walled channel through which the forces of human spirit and of more than human spirit could be sent roaring like a mountain torrent. And still she did not turn away. No expression crossed her face when he groaned, only her eyes seemed to darken as she grew still more pale. Mouse sensed a shifting of feelings in his body. Through the scalding waters of pain, his hate rose to the surface, rode atop too. He pushed his hate down the rock-walled channel, saw Ivrian's face grow more deathlike as it struck her, saw her tighten her grip on her father's wrist, sensed the trembling that her father no longer could master.

The wheel turned. From far off Mouse heard a steady, heart-

tearing whimpering. But a part of him was outside the room now—high, he felt, in the frosty emptiness above the world. He saw spread out below him a nighted panorama of wooded hills and valleys. Near the summit of one hill was a tight clump of tiny stone towers. But as if he were endowed with a magical vulture's eye, he could see through the walls and roofs of those towers into the very foundations beneath, into a tiny murky room in which men tinier than insects clustered and cowered together. Some were working at a mechanism which inflicted pain on a creature that might have been a bleached and writhing ant. And the pain of that creature, whose tiny thin cries he could faintly hear, had a strange effect on him at this height, strengthening his inward powers and tearing away a veil from his eyes—a veil that had hitherto hidden a whole black universe.

For he began to hear about him a mighty murmuring. The frigid darkness was beaten by wings of stone. The steely light of the stars cut into his brain like painless knives. He felt a wild black whirlpool of evil, like a torrent of black tigers, blast down upon him from above, and he knew that it was his to control. He let it surge through his body and then hurled it down the unbroken path that led to two points of darkness in the tiny room below—the two staring eyes of Ivrian, daughter of Duke Janarrl. He saw the black of the whirlwind's heart spread on her face like an inkblot, seep down her white arms, and dye her fingers. He saw her hand tighten convulsively on her father's arm. He saw her reach her other hand toward the Duke and lift her open lips to his cheek.

Then, for one moment while the torch flames whipped low-and blue in a physical wind that seemed to blow through the morticed stones of the buried chamber . . . for one moment while the torturers and guards dropped the tools of their trades . . . for one indelible moment of hate fulfilled and revenge accomplished, Mouse saw the strong, square face of Duke Janarrl shake in the agitation of ultimate terror, the features twisted like heavy cloth wrung between invisible hands, then crumple in defeat and death.

The strand supporting Mouse snapped. His spirit dropped like a plummet toward the buried room.

An agonizing pain filled him, but it promised life, not death. Above him was the low stone ceiling. The hands on the wheel were white and slender. Then he knew that the pain was that of release from the rack.

Slowly Ivrian loosened the rings of leather from his wrists and ankles. Slowly she helped him down, supporting him with all her

strength as they dragged their way across the room, from which everyone else had fled in terror save for one crumpled jeweled figure in a carven chair. They paused by that and he surveyed the dead thing with the cool, satisfied, masklike gaze of a cat. Then on and up they went, Ivrian and the Gray Mouser, through corridors emptied by panic, and out into the night.

Poul (pronounced *Pobwl*) Anderson was born in Bristol, Pennsylvania, but as a youth lived in a number of different localities. He attended the University of Minnesota, receiving his degree in physics, with honors, in 1948. He later did graduate work in mathematics and philosophy. He now lives with his wife and daughter in California, near Berkeley. Perhaps the most important aspect of his family background is that he is of Scandinavian descent; like so many other writers from similar ancestry, including W. H. Auden and J. R. R. Tolkien, he is steeped in what Auden refers to as "the Northern Thing," that is, the literature and mythology of northern Europe. He knows Old Norse and, in fact, has translated passages from Nordic and Icelandic sagas and the Eddas.

Although he studied physics and mathematics, he has never worked in these areas professionally. He helped support himself in his later college years by writing stories, the first of which, a science-fiction work, appeared in 1947. He has subsequently continued as a successful and versatile writer, producing detective stories, historical fiction, children's books, science fiction, fantasy, and at least two nonfiction books in the area of popular science. His two main interests, however, are science fiction and fantasy, stemming from his interest in physics and Nordic myth, respectively. He is best known for his science fiction, an area in which he has won several awards, including two Hugos. One suspects, however, that his first love is fantasy. He is an active member of an organization known as the Society for the Preservation of Creative Anachronisms, a group of people who regularly meet to recreate or reenact various aspects of medieval art and pageantry. Within this organization, he is known as Sir Béla of Eastmarch.

It is interesting that one of his earliest books, *The Broken Sword* (1954), which is pure fantasy steeped in the Nordic tradition, was published the same year as Tolkien's first volume of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It shares many of the faërie elements

with Tolkien's work, not as a result of imitation, but because Anderson obviously used the same Icelandic sources. His two other works of High Fantasy are *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, which was serialized in 1953, but did not appear in book form until 1961, and *A Midsummer Tempest* (1975), which, while the bulk of the work is fantasy, uses a science-fiction framework.

The selection that appears here is chapter twenty-two of *Three Hearts and Three Lions*. The hero, Holger Carleson, is actually Holger Danske or Ogier le Danois, a legendary Danish hero who very much resembles King Arthur. He appears on the scene as "The Defender" in times of great need. The novel's principal setting is the Middle Ages, to which Holger returns to oppose the powers of chaos led by Morgan le Fay, the same ambivalent, human–faërie figure who appears in the Arthurian cycle. In the excerpt that appears here, Holger is nearing the end of his quest for his enchanted sword, Cortana (made of the same steel as Excalibur), which has been hidden by Morgan in the isolated church of St. Grimmin's.

To get to St. Grimmin's, Holger and his companions must pass through a subterranean passage inhabited by a fearsome troll. The scene is typical of Anderson's fantasy in numerous ways. It exhibits traces of the author's characteristic humor, which is present even in the midst of the most serious or perilous of undertakings. One is reminded of the very grim humor of understatement found throughout early Icelandic literature. Anderson's superb range of style is also manifest in the handling of dialects; he juxtaposes Middle English to twentieth-century speech (Holger had been enchanted by Morgan into the twentieth century). Anderson's descriptive abilities also produce a most palpable and repulsive troll. And, finally, this excerpt reveals Anderson's inclination to dwell on those aspects of faërie that are soulless and inimical to humans, an inclination that his later writing modifies, but that here gives shape to the nightmarish figure of a troll with "ice-green blood."

from Three Hearts and Three Lions

Poul Anderson



Carahue led the way, with Hugi for guide. The mare took off in a clatter. For a moment Holger was aware of the red and blue ribbons twined into her flowing tail. Then Papillon's muscles surged between his knees.

Headed east along the scarp, they must pass the enemy. A howl arose. Holger saw a spear fly from the left. As its head caught what firelight there was, he saw it turn in the air and arch downward. He raised his shield. The spear rebounded. An instant later, three arrows thunked solidly into the wooden frame.

He rushed on into the gloom beyond. The white mare and the loose white clothes of her rider were a blob, scarcely to be told from shadows. Papillon stumbled. Sparks showered where horse-shoes chipped flint. Perforce, the animals slowed to an uneven trot. On both sides and overhead Holger was blind. He didn't know if his imagination or his senses told him of the cliffs to the left. He felt their weight loom above him, crushingly, as if he were already buried beneath.

A glance behind etched the heathen leader on his vision. The gaunt man in the badger mantle had snatched a brand from the campfire. He whirled it over his head till flames blossomed and he stood forth startling red and yellow. With a cry to his warriors he raised his ax and bounded in chase.

Swiftly he overtook the horses. Holger glimpsed others following, not quite so eager. But his attention was on this man. The chief approached on the left side, where the knight's sword couldn't reach. He darted in and chopped at Papillon's fetlock. The stallion skittered away, nearly throwing his riders. Holger whirled him about to face the next attack.

If I'm delayed here longer than a minute, the bunch of 'em will surround me, the Dane realized. "Hang on, Alianora!" He leaned far over and slashed at his opponent. His blow was parried by the ax. Nimbler than any charger, the cannibal moved back. The painted face with the braided beard mocked at Holger.

But the torch in his left hand remained in sword range. Holger

swatted it against the hillman's breast. The savage barked with pain. Before he could recover, Holger was close enough to chop once more. This time the steel met flesh. The chief went down.

You poor, brave bastard, Holger thought. He spurred Papillon

after Carahue. The encounter had only taken seconds.

They moved on through endlessness. The enemy trailed them, not venturing to rush. Arrows zipped through the dark. Whoops ululated. "They'll rally themselves soon enough and close in on us," Carahue said over his shoulder.

"I think no," said Alianora. "Canna ye whiff?"

Holger strained his nostrils. The wind was more or less in his face. He heard it go whoo-oo and shake his plume and cloak; he felt how chill it was. Nothing more.

"Ugh!" said Carahue a minute later. "Is that what I smell?"

Someone wailed in the night behind. Holger's tobacco-dulled nose was the last to catch the odor. But that time the cannibals had given up the pursuit. They'd doubtless stick around to make sure next morning that their foes had not doubled back downhill; but they were going no farther in this direction.

If a smell could be called thick and cold, such might describe

the troll's. When Holger reached the cave mouth, he gagged.

He drew rein. Alianora leaped to the ground. "We must gather stuff for fagots, to licht our way," she explained. "I feel dry twigs lying about, belike dropped from armfuls the beast carried hither to make his nest." Presently she had a bundle to which Hugi set flint and steel. As the flames grew, Holger saw a tenfoot hole in the cliff wall. Lightlessness gaped beyond.

He and Carahue had dismounted. They gave Alianora their horses to lead at the rear. They themselves went in the forefront, with Hugi for torchbearer. "Well," said the Dane uselessly, "here

we go." His tongue was dry.

"I would we might see the stars once more," Alianora said. The wind blew her words away. Hugi squeezed her hand.

"Oh, come now," said Carahue. "Suppose we do meet the troll? Our swords will cut him to flitches. Me thinks we're funking at an old wives' tale." He strode briskly to the cave entrance, and through.

Holger went along. The sword in his right fist, the shield on his left arm, were heavy. He felt sweat trickling under his mail, itches he couldn't scratch, dull aches where blows had landed. The air in the cave was full of troll and carrion smells. The fagot flames danced, sank low, flickered high again, so that shadows bobbed across the rough walls. Holger could have sworn some of

the formations were faces that mouthed at him. Underfoot were stones on which he stubbed his toes. Alianora foresightedly continued to pick up bits of wood and straw, among the animal bones scattered along the way. The loudest noise was of horseshoes, a sharp clopping followed by hollow echoes. More and more, Holger had a sense of walls that pressed inward.

At the end of the cave a tunnel had been dug, nine feet high and not much wider, so that Holger and Carahue were crowded close. Holger tried not to wonder if the troll had dug it out barehanded. Once or twice he kicked recognizable pieces of human skulls. After the tunnel had dipped a few times his sense of balance quit and he *knew* they were headed downward, endlessly downward, into the guts of the earth. He strangled a wish to scream.

The passage debouched in a slightly larger cavern. Three other holes opened on the far side. Hugi waved his companions back and stumped around. The torchlight threw his face into craggy prominences but painted his shadow behind, like a black grotesque thing about to eat him.

He studied the flame, which had turned yellow and smoky; he wet his thumb and held it this way and that; he stopped to smell the ground. Finally he looked at the left-hand exit. "This ane," he grunted.

"No," Holger said. "Can't you see the floor slants down in that direction?"

"Nay, it doesna. Mak' no so muckle noise."

"You're nuts, I tell you!" Holger protested. "Any fool-"

Hugi stared through his brows at the man. "Any fool can follow his ain fancy," the dwarf said. "Mayhap ye're richt. I canna say for certain. But 'tis ma opinion that yon tunnel's wha' we want, and I ken a bit more to burrowing than ye do. So, are ye man eneugh to heed?"

Holger swallowed. "Okay," he said. "I'm sorry. Lead on."

A ghost of a smile lifted Hugi's whiskers. "Guid lad." He trotted into the passage he had chosen. The rest followed.

Before long the way bent unmistakably upward. Holger said nothing when Hugi passed several holes without a glance. But when he came to another triple choice, the dwarf cast about for minutes.

In the end, troubled, he said. "By every token, we maun tak the middle o' those. Yet meseems the troll stink is strongest thither."

"You can tell a difference?" said Carahue wryly.

"Mayhap his next lies in yon direction," Alianora whispered. A horse blew out its lips; in that narrow, resonant space, a gunshot noise. "Could ye no find us a roundabout way?"

"Mayhap," said Hugi doubtfully. "'Twould tak' a lang whiles."

"And we've got to reach the church soon," Holger said.

"Why?" asked Carahue.

"Never mind now," said Holger. "Will you believe me on my word?"

This was no place to stop and explain the complicated truth, however trustworthy the Saracen had proven himself. But the obvious fact was, the sword Cortana was crucial. The enemy wouldn't have striven so hard to block this quest, were it a wild goose chase.

Morgan could get to the church ahead of him without trouble. However, then she couldn't shift the weapon elsewhere. Doubtless it was too heavy for her natural strength and too holy for her spells. She would need human assistance, as she had had when Cortana was first stolen. But by all accounts, the heathen were too frightened of St. Grimmin's church to go near, even at her command and her men elsewhere in the world were too busy preparing to march on the Empire.

Still, given time she could certainly find someone. Or . . . more likely . . . she could summon Powers that would intercept Holger on his route. He'd been luckier so far than he deserved; he knew damn well he couldn't fight his way through her ultimate allies. Only a saint could do that, and he was a long way from saint-hood.

Q.E.D.: he had to make haste.

Carahue's gaze rested gravely on him before the Moor said, "As you wish, my friend. Let us take the straightest path, then."

Hugi shrugged and led on. The burrow twisted, rose, dipped, rose again, cornered, writhed, widened, and narrowed. Their footfalls sounded like drumbeats. Here, here, here we are, troll. Here, here, here we are.

When the rock walls closed in so they almost brushed each shoulder Holger found himself behind Hugi, with Carahue at his back and Alianora guiding the horses in line to the Saracen's rear. Before his eyes were only red-shot glooms as the torch sputtered. He heard Carahue murmur:

"The heaviest of my sins is that ever I let so sweet a maiden enter so foul a place. God will not forgive me this."

"But I will," she breathed.

He chuckled. "Heh! That suffices! And after all, my lady, who needs sun or moon or stars when you are present?"

"Nay, I beg ye, we must no talk."

"So I shall think instead. Thoughts of beauty, grace, gentleness, and charm: In a word, thoughts of Alianora."

"Och, Carahue—"

Holger bit his lip till the pain stabbed him.

"Quiet back there," Hugi rapped. "We've come to his very nest."

The tunnel ended. Torchlight would not reach far into the cavern beyond. Holger had confused glimpses of walls curving upward to lose themselves in a moving darkness. The floor was piled deep with branches, leaves, moldering straw, and bones: everywhere the gnawed bones. A stink of death overwhelmed him. He retched.

"Still, I say!" Hugi ordered. "Think ye I like this place? Noo, soft across you space. There'll be exits aplenty on t' other side."

The carpeting crackled underfoot, louder for each step. Holger swayed in its thick unevenness. He tripped over a log. A branch scratched his cheek, as if trying for his eyes. A human chine fell apart when he trod on it. He heard the horses sink under their weight, wallow about, and whicker indignantly.

The torch brightened. At the same moment Holger felt a cold

draft. "Ho, we're na so far from the top!" Hugi exclaimed.

"Ho," went the echo. "Ho-o-o."

The troll crawled from beneath dead leaves.

Alianora screamed. Even then Holger thought he had never before heard real fear in her voice. "God have mercy," Carahue choked. Hugi crouched and snarled. Holger dropped his sword, stooped to get it, dropped it again as sweat spurted out of him.

The troll shambled closer. He was perhaps eight feet tall, perhaps more. His forward stoop, with arms dangling past thick claw-footed legs to the ground, made it hard to tell. The hairless green skin moved upon his body. His head was a gash of a mouth, a yard-long nose, and two eyes which were black pools, without pupil or white, eyes which drank the feeble torchlight and never gave back a gleam.

"Ho-o-o," he grinned, and reached out his hand.

Carahue shouted. The saber flared. It struck with a butcher sound. Smoke rose from the wound. The troll's smirk did not change. He reached the other hand toward Carahue. Holger got his sword and attacked that arm.

The troll batted at him. Holger caught the blow on his shield. The wood cracked. He tumbled into the rotten heap on the floor. A moment he lay struggling for breath. Carahue's mare shrieked in panic and plunged about. Alianora hung from the reins. That

much Holger saw before he got back to his feet. Then his gaze focused on Carahue.

The Saracen danced over the nest. Incredibly, he kept his balance in that tangle. Each clumsy lunge he dodged, ducked, and never did his sword rest. It whistled and clamored, a blur, behind which he smiled. Each blow went far into green flesh. The troll only grunted. But Carahue continued to seek the right wrist, coldly and carefully.

Until with a final blow he lopped off that hand.

"Next!" he laughed aloud. "Give us some light, Hugi!" The dwarf had stuck the fagot upright between two branches and now tried to help Alianora control the mare. Papillon circled about looking for a chance to help.

The stallion got his chance as the troll made a left-handed swipe at Carahue. He rushed from behind. His front hoofs smote the broad back with a drumbeat fury. The troll went on his face; Papillon reared to his full terrifying height and came down again. The troll's head shattered.

"Merciful heaven," gasped Carahue. He crossed himself. Turning to Holger, he called gaily, "That wasn't too bad, though, was it?"

Holger looked at his own caved-in shield. "No," he said in a rueful mood. "Except for my own performance."

The mare still shivered, but had calmed enough for Alianora to stroke her neck. "Come, let's gang on oot," said Hugi. "The fetor here's like to melt ma nase."

Holger nodded. "Shouldn't be far-Jesu Kriste!"

Like a huge green spider, the troll's severed hand ran on its fingers. Across the mounded floor, up onto a log with one taloned forefinger to hook it over the bark, down again it scrambled, until it found the cut wrist. And there it grew fast. The troll's smashed head seethed and knit together. He clambered back on his feet and grinned at them. The waning fagot cast red light over his fangs.

He lumbered toward Holger. The Dane knew a moment's blind wish to bolt. But there was no place to go. He spat on the ground and lifted his sword. As the troll reached for him, he swung with all the might he had.

Through and through that oak-branch arm the blade went. Iron belled in the dark. Ice-green blood spurted, turning black in the smoke of unnatural flesh. The sword seemed to glow. The arm sprang off at the shoulder. It rolled into a pile of leaves, flopped about, and began hunching its way back.

Carahue smote from the right side. His saber carved a slab off

the troll's ribs. Greasily, with a sucking noise, that chunk crawled toward its master. Papillon reared and smote with his forefeet. Half the troll's face was torn off. The jaws landed under the stallion and clenched about his ankle. He neighed and bucked. The troll raked his haunches with the remaining hand. Blood welled forth. Carahue got in the way of another buffet, took it in the armored belly, went down with a clatter, and did not rise.

Unkillable indeed! Holger thought. What a place to die. "Get

out, Alianora!"

"Nay." She grabbed the torch and neared Papillon, who was going mad with the grip on his leg. "I'll get it from ye," she

shouted. "Hold still and I'll free ye."

The troll scooped up his left arm and put it in place. His half a face seemed still to laugh. Holger struck again and again, he opened deep wounds, but they closed at once. Back he stumbled. Over the troll's shoulder he saw Alianora duck under Papillon's flailing hoofs, seize the stallion's bridle, and somehow bring him to a halt. She knelt to try and pry the jaws loose.

As her torch came near, they let go. Startled, she flinched aside. "Ho-o-o," said the troll. Turning from Holger, he scuttled toward the bones, picked them up and put them in his head.

Teeth clashed as he went back to meet the Dane.

Alianora cried aloud. She struck his back with the torch. He hooted and went on all fours. A charred welt across his skin did not heal.

The knowledge burst open in Holger. "Fire!" he roared. "Light a fire! Burn the beast!"

Alianora plunged the fagot into a heap of straw. It flared up. Smoke stung Holger's nose . . . clean smoke, he thought crazily, clean flames, burning out the tomb stench around him. He braced himself and hewed.

A hand flew off its wrist, halfway across the cavern. Alianora pounced on it. The thing writhed in her grasp. Fingers like green worms sought to claw free. She hurled it into the fire. For a moment the hand twisted about, even crawled from the flames. But it was already blackened. As it sank down dead, the fire moved out to engulf it.

The troll yammered. He swung the mutilated arm like a club. The sword was knocked from Holger's grasp. He scrambled after it. The troll overfell him. A moment he lay under that mass and could not breathe. Papillon attacked. The monster retreated.

Carahue staggered erect and went to battle. Papillon had the troll down. Carahue chopped at a leg, again and yet again. When he got it off, Alianora seized it in both arms. The fire was catch-

ing in wood now. Its crackle had become a bellow; it filled the cave with light. She needed her entire strength, but she pushed the kicking leg in among the coals.

Holger came back. A hand closed on his ankle . . . the other hand cut off by Carahue. He tore it loose and threw it at the fire. Somehow it landed in the clear and pulled itself toward safety under a log. Hugi dove upon it. They rolled over together, dwarf and hand.

The troll's head was off. It snapped and slobbered as Holger spitted it on his sword. He tossed it into the blaze. It rolled back, burning, spreading the flames toward Alianora. Holger stabbed it again. Heedless of what would happen to the temper of his blade, he pinned the troll's head in the fire till it was consumed.

The torso remained. Worst was that task, when Holger and Carahue rolled a thing as heavy as the world toward the furnace heart of the cave, while it fought them with snakes of gut. Afterward he could not remember clearly what had happened. But

they burned it.

A last glimmer caught his eye. Red and ragged as the flames themselves, Hugi cast the troll's hand into destruction. Then he sank to the floor and lay still.

Alianora flung herself above him. "He's bad hurt," she cried. Holger could scarcely hear her through the conflagration. Heat

and fumes made him too dizzy to think. "Hugi, Hugi!"

"We'd best escape before this whole place becomes a cauldron," Carahue panted in Holger's ear. "See how the smoke rushes out yonder tunnel. That must be our way. Let her carry the dwarf. Help me with this idiot horse of mine!"

Somehow they quieted the animal. Somehow they groped their way down a passage where each breath was pain. And they came into the open air.

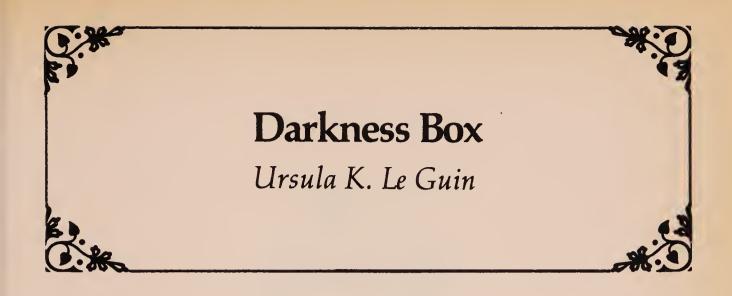
In *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (1975), a collection of her short stories, each of which has an introduction by the author, Ursula Le Guin indicates her almost lifelong commitment to writing: "I had been writing poetry and fiction ever since my brother Ted, tired of having an illiterate five-year-old sister around, taught me to read. . . . At age twelve I was very pleased to get a genuine printed rejection slip, but by age thirty-two I was very pleased to get a check" (p. 25). Since she received that first acceptance in 1961, Le Guin has gained recognition as one of the finest contemporary writers of both science fiction and fantasy. She did not, of course, spend all of those years waiting for an acceptance slip. She received a B.A. from Radcliffe in 1951, an M.A. from Columbia in 1952, and spent 1953–54 in France as a Fulbright Fellow. She married Charles A. Le Guin, an historian, in 1953, and they have three children.

Le Guin's excellence in both science fiction and fantasy has received justifiably high praise. In 1969, she won the two highest awards for science fiction, the Hugo and the Nebula, for *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which, at last count, has been translated into French, Italian, Dutch, Japanese, and Spanish. A more recent science-fiction novel, *The Dispossessed* (1974), brought her several fresh laurels, including both the Nebula and Hugo Awards. Her fantasy, principally her Earthsea trilogy, has done equally well: *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) won the *Boston Globe*–Horn Book Award for juvenile fiction; *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971) was a Newbery Honor Book; *The Farthest Shore* (1972) brought her the National Book Award in Children's Literature. Though the books of the Earthsea trilogy have been classified as juvenile literature, one suspects they belong more appropriately in the same category as Tolkien's trilogy—for young adults and up.

While the field of High Fantasy has been blessed by a number of novelists, relatively few of these authors have also written short stories in the same vein. MacDonald is one, as is Tolkien, and Le Guin is, fortunately, another. She has collected a number of her short stories in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, including science-fiction and fantasy stories and what Le Guin calls "psychomyths," which are perhaps best explained as parables or allegories of the mind. Le Guin has also written what amounts to a handbook of style for the fantasy writer, a superb essay entitled

"From Elfland to Poughkeepsie" (1973).

"Darkness Box" was first published in Fantastic Magazine in 1963 and is also included in The Wind's Twelve Quarters. The first aspect of this story that arrests the reader's attention is the classical simplicity of style. Yet despite the absence of flowery embellishment, when Prince Rikard speaks, one hears the unmistakable accent of a nobleman. After noticing the economy of style, the reader soon becomes aware of the importance of every detail in this story, which adheres to Poe's dictum that every word should contribute to a single dominant effect. Finally, as the story builds to its climax, one begins to recognize the full significance of the imagery of the sea and of light and darkness, which plays a crucial part in animating one of the most universal themes in literature.





On soft sand by the sea's edge a little boy walked leaving no footprints. Gulls cried in the bright sunless sky, trout leaped from the saltless ocean. Far off on the horizon the sea serpent raised himself a moment in seven enormous arches and then, bellowing, sank. The child whistled but the sea serpent, busy hunting whales, did not surface again. The child walked on casting no shadow, leaving no tracks on the sand between the cliffs and the sea. Ahead of him rose a grassy headland on which stood a four-legged hut. As he climbed a path up the cliff the hut skipped about and rubbed its front legs together like a lawyer or a fly; but the hands of the clock inside, which said ten minutes of ten, never moved.

"What's that you've got there, Dicky?" asked his mother as she added parsley and a pinch of pepper to the rabbit stew simmering in an alembic.

"A box, Mummy."

"Where did you find it?"

Mummy's familiar leaped down from the onion-festooned rafters and, draping itself like a foxfur round her neck, said, "By the sea."

Dicky nodded. "That's right. The sea washed it up."

"And what's inside it?"

The familiar said nothing, but purred. The witch turned round to look into her son's round face. "What's in it?" she repeated.

"Darkness."

"Oh? Let's see."

As she bent down to look, the familiar, still purring, shut its eyes. Holding the box against his chest, the little boy very care-

fully lifted the lid a scant inch.

"So it is," said his mother. "Now put it away, don't let it get knocked about. I wonder where the key got to. Run wash your hands now. Table, lay!" And while the child worked the heavy pump handle in the yard and splashed his face and hands, the hut resounded with the clatter of plates and forks materializing.

After the meal, while his mother was having her morning nap, Dicky took down the water-bleached, sand-encrusted box from his treasure shelf and set out with it across the dunes, away from the sea. Close at his heels the black familiar followed him, trotting patiently over the sand through the coarse grass, the only shadow he had.

At the summit of the pass Prince Rikard turned in the saddle to look back over the plumes and pennants of his army, over the long falling road, to the towered walls of his father's city. Under the sunless sky it shimmered there on the plain, fragile and shadowless as a pearl. Seeing it so he knew it could never be taken, and his heart sang with pride. He gave his captains the signal for quick march and set spurs to his horse. It reared and broke into a gallop, while his gryphon swooped and screamed overhead. She teased the white horse, diving straight down at it clashing her beak, swerving aside just in time; the horse, bridleless, would snap furiously at her snaky tail or rear to strike out with silver hoofs. The gryphon would cackle and roar, circle back over the dunes, and with a screech and swoop play the trick all over. Afraid she might wear herself out before the battle, Rikard finally leashed her, after which she flew along steadily, purring and chirping, by his side.

The sea lay before him; somewhere beneath the cliffs the enemy force his brother led was hidden. The road wound down growing sandier, the sea appearing to right or left always nearer. Abruptly the road fell away; the white horse leaped the ten-foot drop and galloped out over the beach. As he came out from between the dunes Rikard saw a long line of men strung out on the sand, and behind them three black-prowed ships. His own men were scrambling down the drop, swarming over the dunes, blue flags snapping in the sea wind, voices faint against the sound of the sea. Without warning or parley the two forces met, sword to sword and man to man. With a great shrilling scream the gryphon soared up, jerking the leash from Rikard's hand, then dropped like a falcon, beak and claws extended, down on a tall man in gray, the enemy leader. But the tall man's sword was drawn. As the iron beak snapped on his shoulder, trying to get the throat, the iron sword jabbed out and up, slashing the gryphon's belly. She doubled up in air and fell, knocking the man down with the sweep of her great wing, screaming, blackening the sand with blood. The tall man staggered up and slashed off her head and wings, turning half blinded with sand and blood only when Rikard was almost on him. Without a word he turned, lifting his steaming sword to parry Rikard's blow. He tried to strike at the horse's legs, but got no chance, for the beast would back and rear and run at him, Rikard's sword slashing down from above. The tall man's arms began to grow heavy, his breath came in gasps. Rikard gave no quarter. Once more the tall man raised his sword, lunged, and took the whizzing slash of his brother's sword straight across his uplifted face. He fell without a word. Brown sand fell over his body in a little shower from the white stallion's hoofs as Rikard spurred back to the thick of the fight.

The attackers fought on doggedly, always fewer of them, and those few being pushed back step by step toward the sea. When only a knot of twenty or so remained they broke, sprinting desperately for the ships, pushing them off chest-deep in the breakers, clambering aboard. Rikard shouted to his men. They came to him across the sand, picking their way among hacked corpses. The badly wounded tried to crawl to him on hands and knees. All that could walk gathered in ranks in a hollow behind the dune on which Rikard stood. Behind him, out on deep water, the three black ships lay motionless, balanced on their oars.

Rikard sat down, alone on the dunc top among the rank grass. He bowed his head and put his hands over his face. Near him the white horse stood still as a horse of stone. Below him his men stood silent. Behind him on the beach the tall man, his face obliterated in blood, lay near the body of the gryphon, and the other dead lay staring at the sky where no sun shone.

A little gust of wind blew by. Rikard raised his face, which though young was very grim. He signaled his captains, swung up into the saddle, and set off round the dunes and back toward the city at a trot, not waiting to see the black ships steer in to shore where their soldiers could board them, or his own army fill up its ranks and come marching behind him. When the gryphon swooped screaming overhead he raised his arm, grinning at the great creature as she tried to perch on his gloved wrist, flapping her wings and screeching like a tomcat. "You no-good gryphon," he said, "you hen, go home to your chicken coop!" Insulted, the monster yawped and sailed off eastward toward the city. Behind him his army wound upward through the hills, leaving no track. Behind them the brown sand lay smooth as silk, stainless. The black ships, sails set, already stood out well to sea. In the prow of the first stood a tall, grim-faced man in gray.

Taking an easier road homeward, Rikard passed not far from the four-legged hut on the headland. The witch stood in the doorway, hailing him. He galloped over, and, drawing rein right at the gate of the little yard, he looked at the young witch. She was bright and dark as coals, her black hair whipped in the sea wind. She looked at him, white-armored on a white horse.

"Prince," she said, "you'll go to battle once too often."

He laughed. "What should I do-let my brother lay siege to the city?"

"Yes, let him. No man can take the city."

"I know. But my father the king exiled him, he must not set foot even on our shore. I'm my father's soldier, I fight as he commands."

The witch looked out to sea, then back at the young man. Her dark face sharpened, nose and chin peaking cronelike, eyes flashing. "Serve and be served," she said, "rule and be ruled. Your brother chose neither to serve nor rule. . . . Listen, prince, take care." Her face warmed again to beauty. "The sea brings presents this morning, the wind blows, the crystals break. Take care."

Gravely he bowed his thanks, then wheeled his horse and was

gone, white as a gull over the long curve of the dunes.

The witch went back into the hut, glancing about its one room to see that everything was in place: bats, onions, cauldrons, carpets, broom, toad-stones, crystal balls (cracked through), the thin crescent moon hung up on the chimney, the Books, the familiar— She looked again, then hurried out and called, "Dicky!"

The wind from the west was cold now, bending the coarse grass down.

"Dicky! ... Kitty, kitty kitty!"

The wind caught the voice from her lips, tore it into bits, and blew it away.

She snapped her fingers. The broom came zooming out the door, horizontal and about two feet off the ground, while the hut shivered and hopped about in excitement. "Shut up!" the witch snapped, and the door obediently slammed. Mounting the broom she took off in a long gliding swoop southward down the beach, now and then crying out, "Dicky! . . . Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!"

The young prince, rejoining his men, had dismounted to walk with them. As they reached the pass and saw the city below them

on the plain, he felt a tug at his cloak.

"Prince—"

A little boy, so little he was still fat and round-cheeked, stood with a scared look, holding up a battered, sandy box. Beside him a black cat sat smiling broadly. "The sea brought this—it's for the prince of the land, I know it is—please take it!"

"What's in it?"

"Darkness, sir."

Rikard took the box and after a slight hesitation opened it a little, just a crack. "It's painted black inside," he said with a hard grin.

"No, prince, truly it's not. Open it wider!"

Cautiously Rikard lifted the lid higher, an inch or two, and peered in. Then he shut it quickly, even as the child said, "Don't let the wind blow it out, prince!"

"I shall take this to the king."

"But it's for you, sir—"

"All seagifts are the king's. But thank you for it, boy." They looked at each other for a moment, the little round boy and the hard splendid youth; then Rikard turned and strode on, while Dicky wandered back down the hills, silent and disconsolate. He heard his mother's voice from far away to the south, and tried to answer; but the wind blew his call landward, and the familiar had disappeared.

The bronze gates of the city swung open as the troop approached. Watchdogs bayed, guards stood rigid, the people of the city bowed down as Rikard on his horse clattered at full gallop up the marble streets to the palace. Entering, he glanced up at the great bronze clock on the bell tower, the highest of the nine white towers of the palace. The moveless hands said ten minutes of ten.

In the Hall of Audience his father awaited him: a fierce gray-haired man crowned with iron, his hands clenched on the heads of iron chimaeras that formed the arms of the throne. Rikard knelt and with bowed head, never looking up, reported the success of his foray. "The Exile was killed, with the greater part of his men; the rest fled in their ships."

A voice answered like an iron door moving on unused hinges:

"Well done, prince."

"I bring you a seagift, Lord." Still with head bowed, Rikard held up the wooden box.

A low snarl came from the throat of one of the carven mon-

sters of the throne.

"That is mine," said the old king so harshly that Rikard glanced up for a second, seeing the teeth of the chimaeras bared and the king's eyes glittering.

"Therefore I bring it to you, Lord."

"That is mine—I gave it to the sea, I myself! And the sea spits back my gift." A long silence, then the king spoke more softly. "Well, keep it, prince. The sea doesn't want it, nor do I. It's in your hands. Keep it—locked. Keep it locked, prince!"

Rikard, on his knees, bowed lower in thanks and consent, then rose and backed down the long hall, never looking up. As he came out into the glittering anteroom, officers and noblemen gathered round him, ready as usual to ask about the battle, laugh, drink, and chatter. He passed among them without a word or glance and went to his own quarters, alone, carrying the box carefully in both hands.

His bright, shadowless, windowless room was decorated on every wall with patterns of gold inset with topazes, opals, crystals, and, most vivid of all jewels, candle flames moveless on golden sconces. He set the box down on a glass table, threw off his cloak, unbuckled his swordbelt, and sat down sighing. The gryphon loped in from his bedroom, talons rasping on the mosaic floor, stuck her great head onto his knees, and waited for him to scratch her feathery mane. There was also a cat prowling around the room, a sleek black one; Rikard took no notice. The palace was full of animals, cats, hounds, apes, squirrels, young hippogriffs, white mice, tigers. Every lady had her unicorn, every courtier had a dozen pets. The prince had only one, the gryphon which always fought for him, his one unquestioning friend. He scratched the gryphon's mane, often glancing down to meet the loving golden gaze of her round eyes, now and then glancing too at the box on the table. There was no key to lock it.

Music played softly in a distant room, a ceaseless interweaving of notes like the sound of a fountain.

He turned to look at the clock on the mantel, an ornate square of gold and blue enamel. It was ten minutes of ten: time to rise and buckle on his sword, call up his men, and go to battle. The Exile was returning, determined to take the city and reclaim his right to the throne, his inheritance. His black ships must be driven back to sea. The brothers must fight, and one must die, and the city be saved. Rikard rose, and at once the gryphon jumped up lashing her tail, eager for the fight. "All right, come along!" Rikard told her, but his voice was cold. He took up his sword in the pearl-encrusted sheath and buckled it on, and the gryphon whined with excitement and rubbed her beak on his hand. He did not respond. He was tired and sad, he longed for something—for what? To hear music that ceased, to speak to his brother once before they fought . . . he did not know. Heir and defender, he must obey. He set the silver helmet on his head and turned to pick up his cloak, flung over a chair. The pearly sheath slung from his belt clattered against something behind him; he turned and saw the box, lying on the floor, open. As he stood looking at it with the same cold, absent look, a little blackness like

smoke gathered about it on the floor. He stooped and picked it up, and darkness ran out over his hands.

The gryphon backed away, whining.

Tall and white-armored, fair-haired, silver-capped in the glittering shadowless room, Rikard stood holding the open box, watching the thick dusk that dripped slowly from it. All around his body now, below his hands, was twilight. He stood still. Then slowly he raised the box up, clear up over his head, and turned it upside down.

Darkness flowed over his face. He looked about him, for the distant music had stopped and things were very silent. Candles burned, dots of light picking out flecks of gold and flashes of violet from walls and ceiling. But all the corners were dark, behind each chair lay darkness, and as Rikard turned his head his shadow leapt along the wall. He moved then, quickly, dropping the box, for in one of the black corners he had glimpsed the reddish glow of two great eyes. The gryphon, of course. He held out his hand and spoke to her. She did not move, but gave a queer metallic cry.

"Come on! Are you afraid of the dark?" he said, and then all at once was afraid himself. He drew his sword. Nothing moved. He took a step backward toward the door, and the monster jumped. He saw the black wings spread across the ceiling, the iron beak, the talons; her bulk was on him before he could stab upward. He wrestled, the great beak snapping at his throat and the talons tearing at his arms and chest, till he got his sword arm free and could slash down, pull away, and slash again. The second blow half severed the gryphon's neck. She dropped off, lay writhing in the shadows among splinters of glass, then lay still.

Rikard's sword dropped clattering on the floor. His hands were sticky with his own blood, and he could hardly see; the beating of the gryphon's wings had blown out or knocked over every candle but one. He groped his way to a chair and sat down. After a minute, though he still gasped for breath, he did as he had done on the dune top after battle: bowed his head and hid his face in his hands. It was completely silent. The one candle flickered in its sconce, mirrored feebly in a cluster of topazes on the wall behind

it. Rikard raised his head.

The gryphon lay still. Its blood had spread out in a pool, black as the first spilt darkness from the box. Its iron beak was open, its

eyes open, like two red stones.

"It's dead," said a small soft voice, as the witch's cat came picking its way delicately among the fragments of the smashed table. "Once and for all. Listen, prince!" The cat sat down curling its tail neatly round its paws. Rikard stood motionless, blank-faced, till a sudden sound made him start: a little ting nearby! Then from the tower overhead a huge dull bell stroke reverberated in the stone of the floor, in his ears, in his blood. The clocks were striking ten.

There was a pounding at his door, and shouts echoed down the palace corridors mixed with the last booming strokes of the bell, screams of scared animals, calls, commands.

"You'll be late for the battle, prince," said the cat.

Rikard groped among blood and shadow for his sword, sheathed it, flung on his cloak, and went to the door.

"There'll be an afternoon today," the cat said, "and a twilight, and night will fall. At nightfall one of you will come home to the city, you or your brother. But only one of you, prince."

Rikard stood still a moment. "Is the sun shining now, outside?"

"Yes, it is-now."

"Well, then, it's worth it," the young man said, and opened the door and strode on out into the hubbub and panic of the sunlit halls, his shadow falling black behind him.

Arthur Conan Doyle, physician, spiritualist, war corrrespondent, politician, poet, and one of the world's best-known writers of detective fiction, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, the son of Anglo-Irish parents. His mother, a devout Roman Catholic, made sure that her son received his early education at schools with strong religious affiliations. After attending Hodder, Stonyhurst, and other Jesuit schools in both Germany and France, Doyle spent five hard years of study as a medical student at Edinburgh University, where he received his Bachelor of Medicine degree in 1881.

Doyle practiced medicine from 1882 to 1890, but without much success. His first years of practice were especially slow, and while waiting for patients who never appeared, he began writing short stories. His first work to elicit good reader response was A Study in Scarlet (1887). Although this initial Sherlock Holmes novel marked the true beginning of his writing career, his real fame as an author came in 1892 when he published The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes in Strand Magazine. All told, fifty-six stories and four novels featuring the hawk-faced sleuth found their way into print. Holmes became such a popular fictional character that when Doyle had him killed in a short story he wrote in 1893, he was forced to resurrect him in a subsequent story because of popular demand.

Although his Sherlock Holmes stories brought him fame and financial success, Doyle did not like to be thought of as primarily a writer of detective fiction. Instead, he wanted his literary reputation to rest upon historical romances such as *Micah Clarke* (1888), *The White Company* (1890), and *Sir Nigel* (1906). In addition to his detective fiction and romances, Doyle wrote some good science fiction. The protagonist of most of his science-fiction novels, the belligerent but brilliant Professor George Edward Challenger, has often been referred to as "The Sherlock Holmes of Science Fiction." Two of the Professor Challenger books, *The Lost World* (1912) and *The Poison Belt* (1913), are

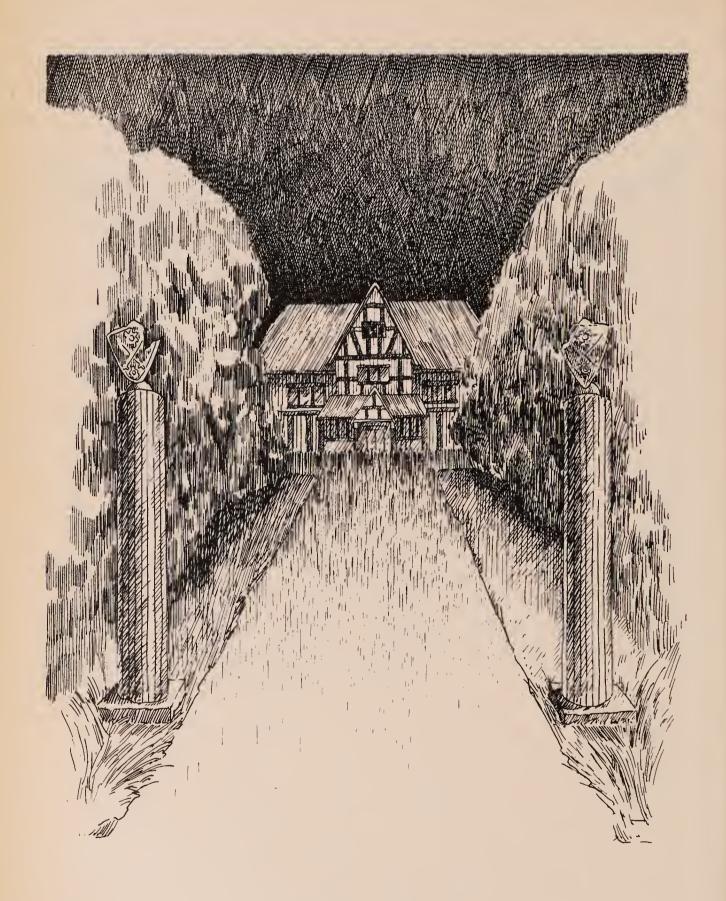
widely regarded as science-fiction classics and are still popular

Most of Doyle's later writings, however, were nonfiction, with the primary emphasis upon spiritualism. Although Doyle had been reared and educated in a strongly Catholic environment, he became an agnostic later in life and developed a strong interest in the occult. This interest was greatly intensified during World War I with all of its attendant deaths and suffering. From this point on, he spent most of his time studying about, and lecturing on, the subject of spiritualism. Perhaps his best-known work in this area is a *History of Spiritualism* (1926). Sir Arthur (he was knighted in 1902) died at his home in Crowborough, Sussex, on

July 7, 1930.

Considering his strong belief in the occult, it is not surprising that Doyle should have written a story like "The Brown Hand." It is significant that there is no attempt made here to explain, through natural causes, the apparition that makes its regular nocturnal visits to the bedside of Sir Dominick Holden. What appears to be a ghost is a ghost, pure and simple. It is this inexplicable inhuman agency that places "The Brown Hand" squarely in the category of Low Gothic Fantasy. True to Low Gothic form, too, is the eerie ambience that permeates the story. Although many fine passages could be cited, the vivid description of Dr. Hardacre's first glimpse of the Holden estate is an especially fine example of Doyle's skill in creating an atmosphere of mystery and desolation. In this passage, reminiscent of the initial description of the House of Usher, Doyle clearly shows the influence of Poe, one of his favorite authors.





Everyone knows that Sir Dominick Holden, the famous Indian surgeon, made me his heir, and that his death changed me in an hour from a hard-working and impecunious medical man to a well-to-do landed proprietor. Many know also that there were at least five people between the inheritance and me, and that Sir Dominick's selection appeared to be altogether arbitrary and whimsical. I can assure them, however, that they are quite mistaken, and that, although I only knew Sir Dominick in the closing years of his life, there were none the less very real reasons why he should show his goodwill toward me. As a matter of fact, though I say it myself, no man ever did more for another than I did for my Indian uncle. I cannot expect the story to be believed, but it is so singular that I should feel that it was a breach of duty if I did not put it upon record—so here it is, and your belief or

incredulity is your own affair.

Sir Dominick Holden, C.B., K.C.S.I.,* and I don't know what besides, was the most distinguished Indian surgeon of his day. In the Army originally, he afterward settled down into civil practice in Bombay, and visited as a consultant every part of India. His name is best remembered in connection with the Oriental Hospital, which he founded and supported. The time came, however, when his iron constitution began to show signs of the long strain to which he had subjected it, and his brother practitioners (who were not, perhaps, entirely disinterested upon the point) were unanimous in recommending him to return to England. He held on so long as he could, but at last he developed nervous symptoms of a very pronounced character, and so came back, a broken man, to his native county of Wiltshire. He bought a considerable estate with an ancient manor house upon the edge of Salisbury Plain, and devoted his old age to the study of Comparative Pathology, which had been his learned hobby all his life, and in which he was a foremost authority.

^{*} C.B.: Chirurgiae Baccalaureus (Bachelor of Medicine); K.C.S.I.: Knight Commander of the Star of India.

We of the family were, as may be imagined, much excited by the news of the return of this rich and childless uncle to England. On his part, although by no means exuberant in his hospitality, he showed some sense of his duty to his relations, and each of us in turn had an invitation to visit him. From the accounts of my cousins it appeared to be a melancholy business, and it was with mixed feelings that I at last received my own summons to appear at Rodenhurst. My wife was so carefully excluded in the invitation that my first impulse was to refuse it, but the interests of the children had to be considered, and so, with her consent, I set out one October 'afternoon upon my visit to Wiltshire, with little thought of what that visit was to entail.

My uncle's estate was situated where the arable land of the plains begins to swell upward into the rounded chalk hills which are characteristic of the county. As I drove from Dinton Station in the waning light of that autumn day, I was impressed by the weird nature of the scenery. The few scattered cottages of the peasants were so dwarfed by the huge evidences of prehistoric life, that the present appeared to be a dream and the past to be the obtrusive and masterful reality. The road wound through the valleys, formed by a succession of grassy hills, and the summit of each was cut and carved into the most elaborate fortifications, some circular and some square, but all on a scale which has defied the winds and the rains of many centuries. Some call them Roman and some British, but their true origin and the reasons for this particular tract of country being so interlaced with entrenchments have never been finally made clear. Here and there on the long, smooth, olive-colored slopes there rose small rounded barrows or tumuli. Beneath them lie the cremated ashes of the race which cut so deeply into the hills, but their graves tell us nothing save that a jar full of dust represented the man who once labored under the sun.

It was through this weird country that I approached my uncle's residence of Rodenhurst, and the house was, as I found, in due keeping with its surroundings. Two broken and weatherstained pillars, each surmounted by a mutilated heraldic emblem, flanked the entrance to a neglected drive. A cold wind whistled through the elms which lined it, and the air was full of the drifting leaves. At the far end, under the gloomy arch of trees, a single yellow lamp burned steadily. In the dim half-light of the coming night I saw a long, low building stretching out two irregular wings, with deep eaves, a sloping gambrel roof, and walls which were crisscrossed with timber balks in the fashion of the Tudors. The cheery light of a fire flickered in the broad, latticed

window to the left of the low-porched door, and this, as it proved, marked the study of my uncle, for it was thither that I was led by his butler in order to make my host's acquaintance.

He was cowering over his fire, for the moist chill of an English autumn had set him shivering. His lamp was unlit, and I only saw the red glow of the embers beating upon a huge, craggy face, with a Red Indian nose and cheek, and deep furrows and seams from eye to chin, the sinister marks of hidden volcanic fires. He sprang up at my entrance with something of an old-world courtesy and welcomed me warmly to Rodenhurst. At the same time I was conscious, as the lamp was carried in, that it was a very critical pair of light-blue eyes which looked out at me from under shaggy eyebrows, like scouts beneath a bush, and that this outlandish uncle of mine was carefully reading off my character with all the ease of a practiced observer and an experienced man of the world.

For my part I looked at him, and looked again, for I had never seen a man whose appearance was more fitted to hold one's attention. His figure was the framework of a giant, but he had fallen away until his coat dangled straight down in a shocking fashion from a pair of broad and bony shoulders. All his limbs were huge and yet emaciated, and I could not take my gaze from his knobby wrists, and long, gnarled hands. But his eyes-those peering light-blue eyes—they were the most arrestive of any of his peculiarities. It was not their color alone, nor was it the ambush of hair in which they lurked; but it was the expression which I read in them. For the appearance and bearing of the man were masterful, and one expected a certain corresponding arrogance in his eyes, but instead of that I read the look which tells of a spirit cowed and crushed, the furtive, expectant look of the dog whose master has taken the whip from the rack. I formed my own medical diagnosis upon one glance at those critical and yet appealing eyes. I believed that he was stricken with some mortal ailment, that he knew himself to be exposed by sudden death, and that he lived in terror of it. Such was my judgment—a false one, as the event showed; but I mention it that it may help you to realize the look which I read in his eyes.

My uncle's welcome was, as I have said, a courteous one, and in an hour or so I found myself seated between him and his wife at a comfortable dinner, with curious pungent delicacies upon the table, and a stealthy, quick-eyed Oriental waiter behind his chair. The old couple had come round to that tragic imitation of the dawn of life when husband and wife, having lost or scattered all those who were their intimates, find themselves face to face and alone once more, their work done, and the end nearing fast. Those who have reached that stage in sweetness and love, who can change their winter into a gentle Indian summer, have come as victors through the ordeal of life. Lady Holden was a small, alert woman, with a kindly eye, and her expression as she glanced at him was a certificate of character to her husband. And yet, though I read a mutual love in their glances, I read also a mutual horror, and recognized in her face some reflection of that stealthy fear which I detected in his. Their talk was sometimes merry and sometimes sad, but there was a forced note in their merriment and a naturalness in their sadness which told me that a heavy heart beat upon either side of me.

We were sitting over our first glass of wine, and the servants had left the room, when the conversation took a turn which produced a remarkable effect upon my host and hostess. I cannot recall what it was which started the topic of the supernatural, but it ended in my showing them that the abnormal in psychical experiences was a subject to which I had, like many neurologists, devoted a great deal of attention. I concluded by narrating my experiences when, as a member of the Psychical Research Society, I had formed one of a committee of three who spent the night in a haunted house. Our adventures were neither exciting nor convincing, but, such as it was, the story appeared to interest my auditors in a remarkable degree. They listened with an eager silence, and I caught a look of intelligence between them which I could not understand. Lady Holden immediately afterward rose and left the room.

Sir Dominick pushed the cigar box over to me, and we smoked for some little time in silence. That huge bony hand of his was twitching as he raised it with his cheroot to his lips, and I felt that the man's nerves were vibrating like fiddle strings. My instincts told me that he was on the verge of some intimate confidence, and I feared to speak lest I should interrupt it. At last he turned toward me with a spasmodic gesture like a man who throws his last scruple to the winds.

"From the little that I have seen of you it appears to me, Dr. Hardacre," said he, "that you are the very man I have wanted to meet."

"I am delighted to hear it, sir."

"Your head seems to be cool and steady. You will acquit me of any desire to flatter you, for the circumstances are too serious to permit of insincerities. You have some special knowledge upon these subjects, and you evidently view them from that philosophical standpoint which robs them of all vulgar terror. I presume that the sight of an apparition would not seriously discompose you?"

"I think not, sir."

"Would even interest you, perhaps?"

"Most intensely."

"As a physical observer, you would probably investigate it in as impersonal a fashion as an astronomer investigates a wandering comet?"

"Precisely."

He gave a heavy sigh.

"Believe me, Dr. Hardacre, there was a time when I could have spoken as you do now. My nerve was a byword in India. Even the Mutiny never shook it for an instant. And yet you see what I am reduced to—the most timorous man, perhaps, in all this county of Wiltshire. Do not speak too bravely upon this subject, or you may find yourself subjected to as long-drawn a test as I am—a test which can only end in the madhouse or the grave."

I waited patiently until he should see fit to go farther in his confidence. His preamble had, I need not say, filled me with

interest and expectation.

"For some years, Dr. Hardacre," he continued, "my life and that of my wife have been made miserable by a cause which is so grotesque that it borders upon the ludicrous. And yet familiarity has never made it more easy to bear—on the contrary, as time passes my nerves become more worn and shattered by the constant attrition. If you have no physical fears, Dr. Hardacre, I should very much value your opinion upon this phenomenon which troubles us so."

"For what it is worth my opinion is entirely at your service.

May I ask the nature of the phenomenon?"

"I think that your experiences will have a higher evidential value if you are not told in advance what you may expect to encounter. You are yourself aware of the quibbles of unconscious cerebration and subjective impressions with which a scientific skeptic may throw a doubt upon your statement. It would be as well to guard against them in advance."

"What shall I do, then?"

"I will tell you. Would you mind following me this way?" He led me out of the dining room and down a long passage until we came to a terminal door. Inside there was a large bare room fitted as a laboratory, with numerous scientific instruments and bottles. A shelf ran along one side, upon which there stood a long line of glass jars containing pathological and anatomical specimens.

"You see that I still dabble in some of my old studies," said Sir

Dominick. "These jars are the remains of what was once a most excellent collection, but unfortunately I lost the greater part of them when my house was burned down in Bombay in '92. It was a most unfortunate affair for me-in more ways than one. I had examples of many rare conditions, and my splenic collection was probably unique. These are the survivors."

I glanced over them, and saw that they really were of a very great value and rarity from a pathological point of view: bloated organs, gaping cysts, distorted bones, odious parasites—a singular

exhibition of the products of India.

"There is, as you see, a small settee here," said my host. "It was far from our intention to offer a guest so meager an accommodation, but since affairs have taken this turn, it would be a great kindness upon your part if you would consent to spend the night in this apartment. I beg that you will not hesitate to let me know if the idea should be at all repugnant to you."

"On the contrary," I said, "it is most acceptable."
"My own room is the second on the left, so that if you should feel that you are in need of company a call would always bring me to your side."

"I trust that I shall not be compelled to disturb you."

"It is unlikely that I shall be asleep. I do not sleep much. Do not hesitate to summon me."

And so with this agreement we joined Lady Holden in the drawing room and talked of lighter things.

It was no affectation upon my part to say that the prospect of my night's adventure was an agreeable one. I have no pretense to greater physical courage than my neighbors, but familiarity with a subject robs it of those vague and undefined terrors which are the most appalling to the imaginative mind. The human brain is capable of only one strong emotion at a time, and if it be filled with curiosity or scientific enthusiasm, there is no room for fear. It is true that I had my uncle's assurance that he had himself originally taken this point of view, but I reflected that the breakdown of his nervous system might be due to his forty years in India as much as to any psychical experiences which had befallen him. I at least was sound in nerve and brain, and it was with something of the pleasurable thrill of anticipation with which the sportsman takes his position beside the haunt of his game that I shut the laboratory door behind me and, partially undressing, lay down upon the rug-covered settee.

It was not an ideal atmosphere for a bedroom. The air was heavy with many chemical odors, that of methylated spirits predominating. Nor were the decorations of my chamber very sedative. The odious line of glass jars with their relics of disease and suffering stretched in front of my very eyes. There was no blind to the window, and a three-quarter moon streamed its white light into the room, tracing a silver square with filigree lattices upon the opposite wall. When I had extinguished my candle this one bright patch in the midst of the general gloom had certainly an eerie and discomposing aspect. A rigid and absolute silence reigned throughout the old house, so that the low swish of the branches in the garden came softly and soothingly to my ears. It may have been the hypnotic lullaby of this gentle susurrus, or it may have been the result of my tiring day, but after many dozings and many efforts to regain my clearness of perception, I fell

at last into a deep and dreamless sleep.

I was awakened by some sound in the room, and I instantly raised myself upon my elbow on the couch. Some hours had passed, for the square patch upon the wall had slid downward and sideways until it lay obliquely at the end of my bed. The rest of the room was in deep shadow. At first I could see nothing; presently, as my eyes became accustomed to the faint light, I was aware, with a thrill which all my scientific absorption could not entirely prevent, that something was moving slowly along the line of the wall. A gentle, shuffling sound, as of soft slippers, came to my ears, and I dimly discerned a human figure walking stealthily from the direction of the door. As it emerged into the patch of moonlight I saw very clearly what it was and how it was employed. It was a man, short and squat, dressed in some sort of dark-gray gown, which hung straight from his shoulders to his feet. The moon shone upon the side of his face, and I saw that it was chocolate brown in color, with a ball of black hair like a woman's at the back of his head. He walked slowly, and his eyes were cast upward toward the line of bottles which contained those gruesome remnants of humanity. He seemed to examine each jar with attention, and then to pass on to the next. When he had come to the end of the line, immediately opposite my bed, he stopped, faced me, threw up his hands with a gesture of despair, and vanished from my sight.

I have said that he threw up his hands, but I should have said his arms, for as he assumed that attitude of despair I observed a singular peculiarity about his appearance. He had only one hand! As the sleeves drooped down from the upflung arms I saw the left plainly, but the right ended in a knobby and unsightly stump. In every other way his appearance was so natural, and I had both seen and heard him so clearly, that I could easily have believed that he was an Indian servant of Sir Dominick's who had come

into my room in search of something. It was only his sudden disappearance which suggested anything more sinister to me. As it was I sprang from my couch, lit a candle, and examined the whole room carefully. There were no signs of my visitor, and I was forced to conclude that there had really been something outside the normal laws of Nature in his appearance. I lay awake for the remainder of the night, but nothing else occurred to disturb me.

I am an early riser, but my uncle was an even earlier one, for I found him pacing up and down the lawn at the side of the house. He ran toward me in his eagerness when he saw me come out from the door.

"Well, well!" he cried. "Did you see him?"

"An Indian with one hand?"

"Precisely."

"Yes, I saw him." And I told him all that occurred. When I had

finished, he led the way into his study.

"We have a little time before breakfast," said he. "It will suffice to give you an explanation of this extraordinary affair—so far as I can explain that which is essentially inexplicable. In the first place, when I tell you that for four years I have never passed one single night, either in Bombay, aboard ship, or here in England without my sleep being broken by this fellow, you will understand why it is that I am a wreck of my former self. His program is always the same. He appears by my bedside, shakes me roughly by the shoulder, passes from my room into the laboratory, walks slowly along the line of my bottles, and then vanishes. For more than a thousand times he has gone through the same routine."

"What does he want?"

"He wants his hand."

"His hand?"

"Yes, it came about in this way. I was summoned to Peshawar for a consultation some ten years ago, and while there I was asked to look at the hand of a native who was passing through with an Afghan caravan. The fellow came from some mountain tribe living away at the back of beyond somewhere on the other side of Kaffiristan. He talked a bastard Pushtoo, and it was all I could do to understand him. He was suffering from a soft sarcomatous swelling of one of the metacarpal joints, and I made him realize that it was only by losing his hand that he could hope to save his life. After much persuasion he consented to the operation, and he asked me, when it was over, what fee I demanded. The poor fellow was almost a beggar, so that the idea of a fee was absurd,

but I answered in jest that my fee should be his hand, and that I

proposed to add it to my pathological collection.

"To my surprise he demurred very much to the suggestion, and he explained that according to his religion it was an all-important matter that the body should be reunited after death, and so make a perfect dwelling for the spirit. The belief is, of course, an old one, and the mummies of the Egyptians arose from an analogous superstition. I answered him that his hand was already off, and asked him how he intended to preserve it. He replied that he would pickle it in salt and carry it about with him. I suggested that it might be safer in my keeping than in his, and that I had better means than salt for preserving it. On realizing that I really intended to keep it carefully, his opposition vanished instantly. 'But remember, sahib,' said he, 'I shall want it back when I am dead.' I laughed at the remark, and so the matter ended. I returned to my practice, and he no doubt in the course of time was able to continue his journey to Afghanistan.

"Well, as I told you last night, I had a bad fire in my house at Bombay. Half of it was burned down, and, among other things, my pathological collection was largely destroyed. What you see are the poor remains of it. The hand of the hillman went with the rest, but I gave the matter no particular thought at the time.

That was six years ago.

"Four years ago—two years after the fire—I was awakened one night by a furious tugging at my sleeve. I sat up under the impression that my favorite mastiff was trying to arouse me. Instead of this, I saw my Indian patient of long ago, dressed in the long gray gown which was the badge of his people. He was holding up his stump and looking reproachfully at me. He then went over to my bottles, which at that time I kept in my room, and he examined them carefully, after which he gave a gesture of anger and vanished. I realized that he had just died, and that he had come to claim my promise that I should keep his limb in safety for him.

"Well, there you have it all, Dr. Hardacre. Every night at the same hour for four years this performance has been repeated. It is a simple thing in itself, but it has worn me out like water dropping on a stone. It has brought a vile insomnia with it, for I cannot sleep now for the expectation of his coming. It has poisoned my old age and that of my wife, who has been the sharer in this great trouble. But there is the breakfast gong, and she will be waiting impatiently to know how it fared with you last night. We are both much indebted to you for your gallantry, for it takes something from the weight of our misfortune when we share it, even for a single night, with a friend, and it reassures

us as to our sanity, which we are sometimes driven to question."

This was the curious narrative which Sir Dominick confided to me—a story which to many would have appeared to be a grotesque impossibility, but which, after my experience of the night before, and my previous knowledge of such things, I was prepared to accept as an absolute fact. I thought deeply over the matter, and brought the whole range of my reading and experience to bear upon it. After breakfast, I surprised my host and hostess by announcing that I was returning to London by the next train.

"My dear doctor," cried Sir Dominick in great distress, "you make me feel that I have been guilty of a gross breach of hospitality in intruding this unfortunate matter upon you. I should have borne my own burden."

"It is, indeed, that matter which is taking me to London," I answered, "but you are mistaken, I assure you, if you think that my experience of last night was an unpleasant one to me. On the contrary, I am about to ask your permission to return in the evening and spend one more night in your laboratory. I am very eager to see this visitor once again."

My uncle was exceedingly anxious to know what I was about to do, but my fears of raising false hopes prevented me from telling him. I was back in my own consulting room a little after luncheon, and was confirming my memory of a passage in a recent book upon occultism which had arrested my attention when I read it.

"In the case of earth-bound spirits," said my authority, "some one dominant idea obsessing them at the hour of death is sufficient to hold them to this material world. They are the amphibia of this life and of the next, capable of passing from one to the other as the turtle passes from land to water. The causes which may bind a soul so strongly to a life which its body has abandoned are any violent emotion. Avarice, revenge, anxiety, love, and pity have all been known to have this effect. As a rule it springs from some unfulfilled wish, and when the wish has been fulfilled the material bond relaxes. There are many cases upon record which show the singular persistence of these visitors, and also their disappearance when their wishes have been fulfilled, or in some cases when a reasonable compromise has been effected."

"A reasonable compromise effected"—those were the words which I had brooded over all the morning, and which I now verified in the original. No actual atonement could be made here—but a reasonable compromise! I made my way as fast as a train could take me to the Shadwell Seamen's Hospital, where my old

friend Jack Hewett was house surgeon. Without explaining the situation I made him understand exactly what it was that I wanted.

"A brown man's hand!" said he, in amazement. "What in the world do you want that for?"

"Never mind. I'll tell you some day. I know that your wards are full of Indians."

"I should think so. But a hand—" He thought a little and then struck a bell.

"Travers," said he to a student dresser, "what became of the hands of the Lascar which we took off yesterday? I mean the fellow from the East India Dock who got caught in the steam winch.

"They are in the postmortem room, sir."

"Just pack one of them in antiseptics and give it to Dr. Hardacre."

And so I found myself back at Rodenhurst before dinner with this curious outcome of my day in town. I still said nothing to Sir Dominick, but I slept that night in the laboratory, and I placed the Lascar's hand in one of the glass jars at the end of my couch.

So interested was I in the result of my experiment that sleep was out of the question. I sat with a shaded lamp beside me and waited patiently for my visitor. This time I saw him clearly from the first. He appeared beside the door, nebulous for an instant, and then hardening into as distinct an outline as any living man. The slippers beneath his gray gown were red and heelless, which accounted for the low, shuffling sound which he made as he walked. As on the previous night he passed slowly along the line of bottles until he paused before that which contained the hand. He reached up to it, his whole figure quivering with expectation, took it down, examined it eagerly, and then, with a face which was convulsed with fury and disappointment, he hurled it down on the floor. There was a crash which resounded through the house, and when I looked up the mutilated Indian had disappeared. A moment later my door flew open and Sir Dominick rushed in.

"You are not hurt?" he cried.

"No-but deeply disappointed."

He looked in astonishment at the splinters of glass and the brown hand lying upon the floor.

"Good God!" he cried. "What is this?"

I told him my idea and its wretched sequel. He listened intently, but shook his head.

"It was well thought of," said he, "but I fear that there is no

such easy end to my sufferings. But one thing I now insist upon. It is that you shall never again upon any pretext occupy this room. My fears that something might have happened to you—when I heard that crash—have been the most acute of all the agonies which I have undergone. I will not expose myself to a repetition of it."

He allowed me, however, to spend the remainder of that night where I was, and I lay there worrying over the problem and lamenting my own failure. With the first light of morning there was the Lascar's hand still lying upon the floor to remind me of my fiasco. I lay looking at it—and as I lay suddenly an idea flew like a bullet through my head and brought me quivering with excitement out of my couch. I raised the grim relic from where it had fallen. Yes, it was indeed so. The hand was the *left* hand of the Lascar.

By the first train I was on my way to town, and hurried at once to the Seamen's Hospital. I remembered that both hands of the Lascar had been amputated, but I was terrified lest the precious organ which I was in search of might have been already consumed in the crematory. My suspense was soon ended. It had still been preserved in the postmortem room. And so I returned to Rodenhurst in the evening with my mission accomplished and the material for a fresh experiment.

But Sir Dominick Holden would not hear of my occupying the laboratory again. To all my entreaties he turned a deaf ear. It offended his sense of hospitality, and he could no longer permit it. I left the hand, therefore, as I had done its fellow the night before, and I occupied a comfortable bedroom in another portion of the house, some distance from the scene of my adventures.

But in spite of that my sleep was not destined to be uninterrupted. In the dead of night my host burst into my room, a lamp in his hand. His huge gaunt figure was enveloped in a loose dressing gown, and his whole appearance might certainly have seemed more formidable to a weak-nerved man than that of the Indian of the night before. But it was not his entrance so much as his expression which amazed me. He had turned suddenly younger by twenty years at the least. His eyes were shining, his features radiant, and he waved one hand in triumph over his head. I sat up astounded, staring sleepily at this extraordinary visitor. But his words soon drove the sleep from my eyes.

"We have done it! We have succeeded!" he shouted. "My dear

Hardacre, how can I ever in this world repay you?"

"You don't mean to say that it is all right?"

"Indeed I do. I was sure that you would not mind being awakened to hear such blessed news."

"Mind! I should think not indeed. But is it really certain?"

"I have no doubt whatever upon the point. I owe you such a debt, my dear nephew, as I have never owed a man before, and never expected to. What can I possibly do for you that is commensurate? Providence must have sent you to my rescue. You have saved both my reason and my life, for another six months of this must have seen me either in a cell or a coffin. And my wife—it was wearing her out before my eyes. Never could I have believed that any human being could have lifted this burden off me." He seized my hand and wrung it in his bony grip.

"It was only an experiment—a forlorn hope—but I am delighted from my heart that it has succeeded. But how do you know that it is all right? Have you seen something?"

He seated himself at the foot of my bed.

"I have seen enough," said he. "It satisfies me that I shall be troubled no more. What has passed is easily told. You know that at a certain hour this creature always comes to me. Tonight he arrived at the usual time, and aroused me with even more violence than is his custom. I can only surmise that his disappointment of last night increased the bitterness of his anger against me. He looked angrily at me, and then went on his usual round. But in a few minutes I saw him, for the first time since this persecution began, return to my chamber. He was smiling. I saw the gleam of his white teeth through the dim light. He stood facing me at the end of my bed, and three times he made the low Eastern salaam which is their solemn leave-taking. And the third time that he bowed he raised his arms over his head, and I saw his two hands outstretched in the air. So he vanished, and, as I believe, forever."

So that is the curious experience which won me the affection and the gratitude of my celebrated uncle, the famous Indian surgeon. His anticipations were realized, and never again was he disturbed by the visits of the restless hillman in search of his lost member. Sir Dominick and Lady Holden spent a very happy old age, unclouded, so far as I know, by any trouble, and they finally died during the great influenza epidemic within a few weeks of each other. In his lifetime he always turned to me for advice in everything which concerned that English life of which he knew so little; and I aided him also in the purchase and development of his estates. It was no great surprise to me, therefore, that I found myself eventually promoted over the heads of five exasperated

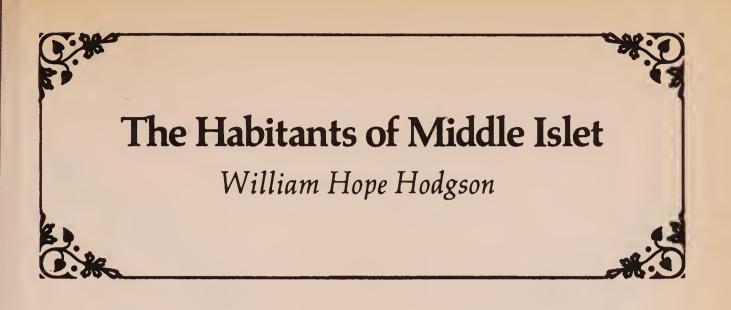
cousins, and changed in a single day from a hard-working country doctor into the head of an important Wiltshire family. I at least have reason to bless the memory of the man with the brown hand, and the day when I was fortunate enough to relieve Rodenhurst of his unwelcome presence.

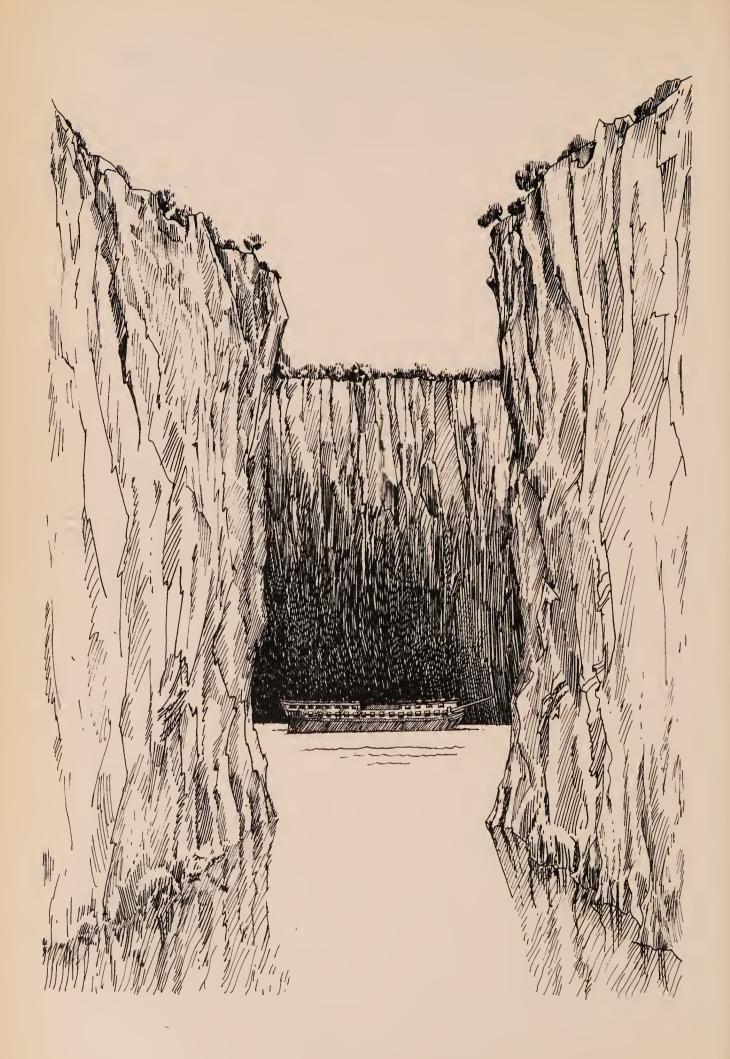
The little that has been written on the life of William Hope Hodgson paints an intriguingly gallant portrait. Born in Essex, the son of a clergyman, at an early age Hodgson went to sea, where he spent eight years traveling around the world three times. He received a medal from the Royal Humane Society for saving a life at sea. Shortly after the outbreak of World War I, at the age of forty, he obtained a commission in the army and fought with distinction in France until his death in 1918. He had volunteered to be observation officer, a most dangerous duty, and was killed when a shell exploded near his post.

For such an active and relatively short life, Hodgson managed to write a fair number of poems, some short stories, and four novels. It is interesting to note that while Hodgson's fantasies are unrelieved in their portrayal of the unnatural and the malevolent, his nonfantasy writings, primarily sea stories, present an interesting contrast in portraying the goodness of man and nature. Still, his popularity stems from his fantasies. Most critics agree that his best novel is The House on the Borderland (1908). Another novel of note is the unusually long (nearly six hundred pages) and rather unique The Night Land (1912), a novel set in a future in which the sun has burned out and left most of the earth uninhabited except for a menagerie of roaming monsters. Hodgson's short stories appeared in various magazines and later in collections in England, and they received consistently good reviews. Several critics considered him the equal of Algernon Blackwood as a writer of ghost stories—high praise in England at the turn of the century. Unlike Blackwood, however, Hodgson received scant attention in the United States until more than a decade after his death. His introduction in this country began in the 1930s, but it has been very gradual. Arkham House, which published most of Lovecraft and other ghost story writers, produced a collection of Hodgson's stories in 1967 entitled Deep Waters—the volume that contains "The Habitants of Middle Islet."

While Hodgson at times is given to a variety of excesses both

in style and invention, most critics agree that he is a master at suggesting unknown horrors. "The Habitants of Middle Islet" bears out this opinion. The action of the story moves only gradually into the mysterious cove and the abandoned, but unnaturally orderly, ship. Before he arrives there, the reader perceives, along with the narrator, various signs that evoke uneasiness. This note of uneasiness builds to a climactic crescendo, a combination of terror and seductive beauty.





"That's 'er," exclaimed the old whaler to my friend Trenhern, as the yacht coasted slowly around Nightingale Island. The old fellow was pointing with the stump of a blackened clay pipe to a small islet on our starboard bow.

"That's 'er, Sir," he repeated. "Middle Islet, an' we'll open out ther cove in er bit. Mind you, Sir, I don't say as ther ship is still there, an' if she is, you'll bear in mind as I told you all erlong as there weren't no one in 'er when we went aboard." He replaced his pipe, and took a couple of slow draws, while Trenhern and I scrutinized the little island through our glasses.

We were in the South Atlantic. Far away to the north showed dimly the grim, weather-beaten peak of the Island of Tristan, the largest of the Da Cunha group; while on the horizon to the westward we could make out indistinctly Inaccessible Island. Both of these, however, held little interest for us. It was on Middle Islet off the coast of Nightingale Island that our attention was fixed.

There was little wind, and the yacht forged but slowly through the deep-tinted water. My friend, I could see, was tortured by impatience to know whether the cove still held the wreck of the vessel that had carried his sweetheart. On my part, though greatly curious, my mind was not sufficiently occupied to exclude a half-conscious wonder at the strange coincidence that had led to our present search. For six long months my friend had waited in vain for news of the Happy Return in which his sweetheart had sailed for Australia on a voyage in search of health. Yet nothing had been heard, and she was given up for lost; but Trenhern, desperate, had made a last effort. He had sent advertisements to all the largest papers of the world, and this measure had brought a certain degree of success in the shape of the old whaler alongside of him. This man, attracted by the reward offered, had volunteered information regarding a dismasted hulk, bearing the name of the Happy Return on her bows and stern, which he had come across during his last voyage, in a queer cove

on the south side of Middle Islet. Yet he had been able to give no hope of my friend finding his lost love, or indeed anything living in her; for he had gone aboard with a boat's crew, only to find her utterly deserted, and—as he told us—had stayed no time at all. I am inclined now to think that he must unconsciously have been impressed by the unutterable desolation, and atmosphere of the unknown, by which she was pervaded, and of which we ourselves were so soon to be aware. Indeed, his very next remark went to prove that I am right in the above supposition.

"We none on us wanted to 'ave much truck with 'er. She 'adn't a comfertable 'feelin' 'bout 'er. An' she were too dam clean an'

tidy for my likin'."

"How do you mean, too clean and tidy?" I inquired, puzzled at

his way of putting it.

"Well," he replied, "so she were. She sort of gave you ther feelin' as 'er crowd 'ad only just left 'er, an' might be back any bloomin' minnit. You'll savvy wot I mean, Sir, when you gets aboard of 'er." He wagged his head wisely, and recommenced

drawing at his pipe.

I looked at him a moment doubtfully; then I turned and glanced at Trenhern; but it was evident that he had not noticed these last remarks of the old seaman. He was far too busily engaged in staring through his telescope at the little island to notice what was going on about him. Suddenly he gave a low cry, and turned to the old whaler.

"Quick, Williams!" he said, "is that the place?" He pointed with the telescope. Williams shaded his eyes and stared.

"That's it, Sir," he replied after a moment's pause.

"But—but where's the ship?" inquired my friend in a trembling voice. "I see no sign of her." He caught Williams by the arm, and shook it in sudden fright.

"It's all right, Sir," exclaimed Williams. "We ain't far enuff to the Sutherd yet ter open out ther cove. It's narrer at ther mouth,

an' she were right away up inside. You'll see in er minnit."

At that, Trenhern dropped his hand from the old fellow's arm, his face clearing somewhat, yet greatly anxious. For a minute he held on to the rail as though for support; then he turned to me.

"Henshaw," he said, "I feel all of a shake—I—I—"

"There, there, old chap," I replied, and slipped my arm through his. Then, thinking to occupy his attention somewhat, I suggested to him that he should order one of the boats to be got ready for lowering. This he did, and then for a little while further we scanned that narrow opening among the rocks. Gradually, as we drew more abreast of it, I realized that it ran a con-

siderable depth into the islet, and then at last something came into sight away up among the shadows within the cove. It was like the stern of a vessel projecting from behind the high walls of the rocky recess, and as I grasped the fact, I gave a little shout, pointing it out to Trenhern with some considerable excitement.

The boat had been lowered, and Trenhern and I with the boat's crew, and the old whaler steering, were heading direct for that opening in the coast of Middle Islet.

Presently we were amongst the broad belt of kelp with which the islet was surrounded, and a few minutes later we slid into the clear, dark waters of the cove, with the rocks rising up in stark, inaccessible walls on each side of us until they seemed almost to meet in the heights far overhead.

A few seconds swept us through the passage and into a small circular sea enclosed by gaunt cliffs that shot up on all sides to a height of some hundred odd feet. It was as though we looked up from the bottom of a gigantic pit. Yet at the moment we noted little of this, for we were passing under the stern of a vessel, and looking upward, I read in white letters *Happy Return*.

I turned to Trenhern. His face was white, and his fingers fumbled with the buttons of his jacket, while his breath came irregularly. The next instant, Williams had laid us alongside, and Trenhern and I were scrambling aboard. Williams followed, carrying up the painter; he made it fast to a cleat, and then turned to lead the way.

Upon the deck, as we walked, our feet beat with an empty sound that spelt out desolation; while our voices, when we spoke, seemed to echo back from the surrounding cliffs with a strange hollow ring that caused us at once to speak in whispers. And so I began to understand what Williams had meant when he said "She 'adn't a comfertable feelin' 'bout 'er."

"See," he said, stopping after a few paces, "'ow bloomin' clean an' tidy she is. It aren't nat'ral." He waved his hand toward the surrounding deck furniture. "Everythin' as if she was just goin' inter port, an' 'er a bloomin' wreck."

He resumed his walk aft, still keeping the lead. It was as he had said. Though the vessel's masts and boats had gone, she was extraordinarily tidy and clean, the ropes—such as were left—being coiled up neatly upon the pins, and in no part of her decks could I discern any signs of disorder. Trenhern had grasped all this simultaneously with myself, and now he caught my shoulder with a quick nervous grasp.

"See her, Henshaw," he said in an excited whisper, "this shows

some of them were alive when she drove in here—" He paused as though seeking for breath. "They may be—they may be—" He stopped once more, and pointed mutely to the deck. He had gone past words.

"Down below?" I said, trying to speak brightly.

He nodded, his eyes searching my face as though he would seek in it fuel for the sudden hope that had sprung up within him. Then came Williams' voice; he was standing in the companionway.

"Come along, Sir. I aren't goin' below 'ere by myself."
"Yes, come along, Trenhern," I cried. "We can't tell."

We reached the companionway together, and he motioned me to go before him. He was all aquiver. At the foot of the stairs, Williams paused a moment, then turned to the left and entered the saloon. As we came in through the doorway, I was again struck by the exceeding tidiness of the place. No signs of hurry or confusion, but everything in its place as though the steward had but the moment before tidied out the apartment and dusted the table and fittings. Yet to our knowledge she had lain here a dismasted hulk for at least five months.

"They must be here! They must be here!" I heard my friend mutter under his breath, and I—though bearing in mind that Williams had found her thus all those months gone—could scarcely but join in his belief.

Williams had gone across to the starboard side of the saloon, and I saw that he was fumbling at one of the doors. It opened under his hand, and he turned and beckoned to Trenhern.

"See 'ere, Sir," he said. "This might be your young leddy's cabin; there's feemayles' things 'ung up, an' their sort of fixins on ther table—"

He did not finish, for Trenhern had made one spring across the saloon, and caught him by the neck and arm.

"How dare you—desecrate—" he almost shrieked, and forthwith hauled him out from the little room. "How—how—" he gasped, and stooped to pick up a silver-backed brush which Williams had drapped at his upperpented analought.

liams had dropped at his unexpected onslaught.

"No offense, Mister," replied the old whaler in a surprised voice, in which there was also some righteous anger. "No offense. I wern't goin' ter steal ther bloomin' thing." He gave the sleeve of his jacket a brush with the palm of his hand, and glanced across at me, as though he would have me witness to the truth of his statement. Yet I scarcely noticed what it was that he said; for I heard my friend cry out from the interior of his sweetheart's cabin, and in his voice there was blent a marvelous

depth of hope and fear and bewilderment. An instant later he burst out into the saloon; in his hand he held something white. It was a calendar. He twisted it right way up to show the date at which it was set.

"See," he cried, "read the date! Read the date!"

As my eyes gathered the import of the few visible figures, I drew my breath swiftly and bent forward, staring. The calendar had been set for the date of that very day.

"God God!" I muttered, and then, "It's a mistake! It's just a

chance!" And still I stared.

"It's not," answered Trenhern vehemently. "It's been set this very day—" He broke off short for a moment. Then after a queer little pause he cried out "O, my God! Grant I find her!"

He turned sharply to Williams.

"What was the date at which this was set? Quick!" he almost shouted.

Williams stared at him blankly.

"Damnation!" shouted my friend, almost in a frenzy. "When you came aboard here before?"

"I never even seen ther blessed thing before, Sir," he answered.

"We didn't stay no time aboard of 'er."

"My goodness, man!" cried Trenhern. "What a pity! O what a pity!" Then he turned and ran toward the saloon door.

In the doorway he looked back over his shoulder.

"Come on! Come on!" he called. "They're somewhere about. They're hiding—search!"

And so we did; but though we went through the whole ship from stern to bow, there was nowhere any sign of life. Yet everywhere that extraordinary clean orderliness prevailed, instead of the wild disorder of an abandoned wreck; and always, as we went from place to place and cabin to cabin, there was upon me the feeling that they had but just been inhabited.

Presently, we had made an end to our search, and having found nothing of that for which we looked, were facing one another bewilderedly, though saying but little. It was Williams who first

said anything intelligible.

"It's as I said, Sir; there weren't anythin' livin' aboard of 'er."
To this Trenhern replied nothing, and in a minute Williams spoke again.

"It aren't far off dark, Sir, an' we'll 'ave ter be gettin' out of

this place while there's a bit of daylight."

Instead of replying to this, Trenhern asked if any of the boats were there when he was aboard before, and on his answering in the negative, fell once more into his silent abstraction.

After a little, I ventured to draw his attention to what Williams had said about getting aboard the yacht before the light had all gone. At that, he gave an absent nod of assent, and walked toward the side, followed by Williams and myself. A minute later we were in the boat and heading out for the open sea.

During the night, there being no safe anchorage, the yacht was kept off and on, it being Trenhern's intention to land upon Middle Islet and search for any trace of the lost crew of the *Happy Return*. If that produced nothing, he was going to make a thorough exploration of Nightingale Island and the Islet of Stoltenkoff before abandoning all hopes.

The first portion of this plan he commenced to put into execution as soon as it was dawn, for his impatience was too great to

allow of his waiting longer.

Yet before we landed on the Islet, he bade Williams take the boat into the cove. He had a belief, which affected me somewhat, that he might find the crew and his sweetheart returned to the vessel. He suggested to me—searching my face all the while for mutual hope—that they had been absent on the preceding day, perhaps on an expedition to the island in search of vegetable food. And I (remembering the date of the calendar) was able to look at him encouragingly; though had it not been for that, I should have been helpless to aid his belief.

We entered through the passage into that great pit among the cliffs. The ship, as we ranged alongside of her, showed wan and unreal in the gray light of the mist-shrouded dawn; yet this we noticed little then, for Trenhern's visible excitement and hope was becoming infectious. It was he who now led the way down into the twilight of the saloon. Once there, Williams and I hesitated with a certain natural awe, whilst Trenhern walked across to the door of his sweetheart's room. He raised his hand and knocked, and in the succeeding stillness, I heard my heart beat loud and fast. There was no reply, and he again rapped with his knuckles on the panels, the sounds echoing hollowly through the empty saloon and cabins. I felt almost sick with the suspense of waiting, then abruptly, he seized the handle, turned it, and threw the door wide. I heard him give a sort of groan. The little cabin was empty. The next instant, he gave out a shout, and reappeared in the saloon holding the same little calendar. He ran to me and pushed it into my hands with an inarticulate cry. I looked at it. When Trenhern had shown it to me the preceding day it had been showing the date 27th; now it had been altered to the 28th.

"What's it mean, Henshaw? What's it mean?" he asked help-lessly.

I shook my head. "Sure you didn't alter it yesterday—by acci-

dent?"

"I'm quite sure!" he said.

"What are they playing at?" he went on. "There's no sense in it—" He paused a moment; then again, "What's it mean?"

"God knows," I muttered. "I'm stumped."

"You mean sumone's been in 'ere since yesterday?" inquired Williams at this point.

I nodded.

"Be gum then, Sir," he said, "it's ghostses!"

"Hold your tongue, Williams!" cried my friend, turning savagely upon him.

Williams said nothing, but walked toward the door.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"On deck, Sir," he replied. "I didn't sign on for this 'ere trip to 'ave no truck with sperrets!" and he stumbled up the companion stairway.

Trenhern seemed to have taken no notice of these last remarks, for when next he spoke he appeared to be following out a train of

thought.

"See here," he said. "They're not living aboard here at all. That's plain. They've some reason for keeping away. They're hiding somewhere—perhaps in a cave."

"What about the calendar then. You think-?"

"Yes, I've an idea that they may come aboard here at night. There may be something that keeps them away during the day-light. Perhaps some wild beast, or something; and they would be seen in the daytime."

I shook my head. It was all so improbable. If there was something that could get at them aboard the ship, lying as it did surrounded by the sea, at the bottom of the great pit among the cliffs, then it seemed to me that they would nowhere be safe; besides, they could stay below decks during the day, and I could conceive of nothing that could reach them there. A multitude of other objections rose in my mind. And then I knew perfectly well that there were no wild beasts of any description on the islands. No! Obviously it could not be explained in that manner. And yet—there was the unaccountable altering of the calendar. I ended my line of reasoning in a fog. It seemed useless to apply any ordinary sense to the problem, and I turned once more to Trenhern.

"Well," I said, "there's nothing here, and there may be something, after all, in what you say; though I'm hanged if I can make

head or tail of anything."

We left the saloon and went on deck. Here we walked forward and glanced into the fo'cas'le; but, as I had expected, found nothing. After that we bundled down into the boat and proceeded to search Middle Islet. To do this, we had to pull out of the cove and round the coast a bit to find a suitable landing place.

As soon as we had landed, we pulled the boat up into a safe place and arranged the order of the search. Williams and I were to take a couple of the men apiece, and go right round the coast in opposite directions until we met, examining on the way all the caves that we came across. Trenhern was to make a journey to

the summit and survey the Islet from there.

Williams and I accomplished our part, and met close to where we had hauled up the boat. He reported nothing, and so did I. Of Trenhern we could see no trace, and presently, as he did not appear, I told Williams to stay by the boat while I went up the height to look for him. Soon I reached the top and found that I was standing upon the brink of the great pit in which lay the wreck. I glanced round and there away to the left, I saw my friend lying on his stomach with his head over the edge of the chasm, evidently staring down at the hulk.

"Trenhern," I called softly, not wanting to startle him.

He raised his head and looked in my direction; seeing me, he beckoned, and I hurried to his side.

"Bend down," he said in a low voice. "I want you to look at something."

As I got down beside him, I gave a quick glance at his face; it was very pale; then I had my face over the brink and was staring into the gloomy depth below.

"See what I mean?" he asked, still speaking scarcely above a whisper.

"No," I said. "Where?"

"There," he answered, pointing. "In the water on the starboard side of the Happy Return."

Looking in the direction indicated, I now made out in the water close alongside the wreck several pale, oval-shaped objects.

"Fish," I said. "What queer ones!"

"No!" he replied. "Faces!"

"What?"

"Faces!"

I got up onto my knees and looked at him.

"My dear Trenhern, you're letting this matter affect you too

deeply—You know you have my deepest sympathy. But—"

"See," he interrupted, "they're moving, they're watching us!"

He spoke quietly, utterly ignoring my protest.

I bent forward again and looked. As he had said, they were moving, and as I peered, a sudden idea came to me. I stood up abruptly.

"I have it!" I cried excitedly. "If I'm right it may account for their leaving the ship. I wonder we never thought of it before!"

"What?" he asked in a weary voice, and without raising his face.

"Well, in the first place, old man, those are not faces, as you very well know; but I'll tell you what they very likely are, they're the tentacles of some sort of sea monster, kraken, or devil fish—something of that sort. I can quite imagine a creature of the kind haunting that place down there, and I can equally well understand that if your sweetheart and the crew of the *Happy Return* are alive, they'll be inclined to give their old packet a pretty wide berth if I am right—eh?"

By the time I had finished explaining my solution of the mystery, Trenhern was upon his feet. The sanity had returned to his eyes, and there was a flush of half-suppressed excitement on his hitherto pale cheeks.

"But—but—the calendar?" he breathed.

"Well, they may venture aboard at night, or in certain states of the tides, when perhaps they have found there is little danger. Of course, I can't say; but it seems probable, and what more natural than that they should keep count of the days, or it may have just been put forward thoughtlessly in passing. It may even be your sweetheart counting the days since she was parted from you."

I turned and peered once more over the edge of the cliff; the floating shapes had vanished. Then Trenhern was pulling at my arm.

"Come along, Henshaw, come along. We'll go right back to the yacht and get some weapons. I'm going to slaughter that brute if he shows up."

An hour later we were back with a couple of the yacht's boats and their crews, the men being armed with cutlasses, harpoons, pistols, and axes. Trenhern and I had each chosen a heavy shell-gun.

The boats were left alongside, and the men ordered aboard the wreck, and there, having brought sufficient food, they picnicked for the rest of the day, keeping a keen watch for signs of anything.

Yet when the night drew near, they manifested considerable

uneasiness, finally sending the old whaler aft to tell Trenhern that they would not stay aboard the *Happy Return* after dark; they would obey any order he chose to give in the yacht, but they had not signed on to stay aboard of a ghost-ridden craft at night.

Having heard Williams out, my friend told him to take the men off to the yacht; but to come back in one of the boats with some bedding, as he and I were going to stay the night aboard the hulk. This was the first I had heard on the matter; but when I remonstrated with him, he told me I was at perfect liberty to return to the yacht. For his part he had determined to stay and see if anyone came.

Of course, after that, I had to stay. Presently they returned with the bedding, and having received orders from my friend to come for us at daybreak, they left us there alone for the night.

We carried down our bedding and made it up on the saloon table; then we went on deck and paced the poop, smoking and talking earnestly—anon listening; but nothing came to our ears save the low voice of the sea beyond the kelp belts. We carried our guns, for we had no knowledge but that they might be needed. Yet the time passed quietly, except once when Trenhern dropped the butt of his weapon upon the deck somewhat heavily. Then indeed, from all the cliffs around us, there came back a low hollow boom that was frightening. It was like the growl of a great beast. At the bottom of that tremendous pit it presently became exceedingly dark. So far as I could judge, a mist had come down upon the Islet and formed a sort of huge lid to the pit. It was about twelve o'clock that we went below. I think by that time even Trenhern had begun to realize that there was a certain rashness in our having stayed; and below, at least, if we were attacked, we would be better able to hold our own. Somehow such vague fear as I had was not induced by the thought of the great monster I believed I had seen close to the vessel during the day, but rather by an unnamable something in the very air, as though the atmosphere of the place were a medium of terror. Yet—calming myself with an effort—I put down this feeling to my nerves being at tension; so that presently, Trenhern offering to take the first watch, I fell asleep on the saloon table, leaving him sitting beside me with his gun across his knees.

Then as I slept, a dream came to me—so extraordinarily vivid was it that it seemed almost I was awake. I dreamt that all of a sudden Trenhern gave a little gasp and leapt to his feet. In the same moment, I heard a soft voice call "Tren!" It came from the direction of the saloon doorway, and—in my dream—I turned and saw a most beautiful face, containing great wondrous

eyes. "An angel!" I whispered to myself; then I knew that I was mistaken and that it was the face of Trenhern's sweetheart. I had seen her once just before she sailed. From her, my gaze wandered to Trenhern. He had laid his gun upon the table, and now his arms were extended toward her. I heard her whisper "Come!" and then he was beside her. Her arms went about him, and then, together, they passed out through the doorway. I heard his feet upon the stairs, and after that my sleep became a blank, dreamless rest.

I was aroused by a terrible scream, so dreadful that I seemed to wake rather to death than life. For perhaps the half of a minute I sat up upon my bedding, motionless in a very frost of fear; but no further sound came to me, and so my blood ran warm once more, and I reached out my hand for my gun. I grasped it, shook the clothes from me, and sprang to the floor. The saloon was filled with a faint gray light which filtered in through the skylight overhead. It was just sufficient to show me that Trenhern was not present, and that his gun was upon the table, just where I had seen him place it in my dream. At that, I called his name quickly, but the only answer I received was a hollow, ghostly echo from the surrounding empty cabins. Then I ran for the door, and so up the stairs onto the deck. Here, in the gloomy twilight, I glanced along the bare decks, but he was nowhere visible. I raised my voice and shouted. The grim, circling cliffs caught up the name and echoed it a thousand times, until it seemed that a multitude of demons shouted "Trenhern! Trenhern!" from the surrounding gloom. I ran to the port side and glanced overnothing! I flew to starboard; my eyes caught something-many things that floated apparently just below the surface of the water. I stared, and my heart seemed suddenly quiet in my bosom. I was looking at a score of pale, unearthly faces that stared back at me with sad eyes. They appeared to sway and quiver in the water, but otherwise there was no movement. I must have stood thus for many minutes; for, abruptly, I heard the sound of oars, and then round the quarter of the vessel swept the boat from the yacht.

"In bow, there," I heard Williams shout. "Ere we are, Sir!"

The boat grated against the side.

"Ow 'ave—" Williams began; but it seemed to me that I had seen something coming to me along the deck, and I gave out one scream and leapt for the boat. I landed on a thwart.

"Push off! Push off!" I yelled, and seized an oar to help.

"Mr. Tren'ern, Sir?" interjected Williams.

"He's dead!" I shouted. "Push her off! Push her off!" and the men, infected by my fear, pushed and rowed until, in a few

moments we were a score of yards distant from her. Here there was an instant's pause.

"Take her out, Williams!" I called, crazy with the thing upon which I had stumbled. "Take her out!" And at that, he steered for the passage into the open sea. This took us close past the stern of the wreck, and as we passed beneath, I looked up at the overhanging mass. As I did so, a dim, beauteous face came over the taffrail, and looked at me with great sorrowful eyes. She stretched out her arms to me, and I screamed aloud, for her hands were like unto the talons of a wild beast.

As I fell fainting, Williams' voice came to me in a hoarse bellow of sheer terror. He was shouting to the men:

"Pull! Pull! Pull!"

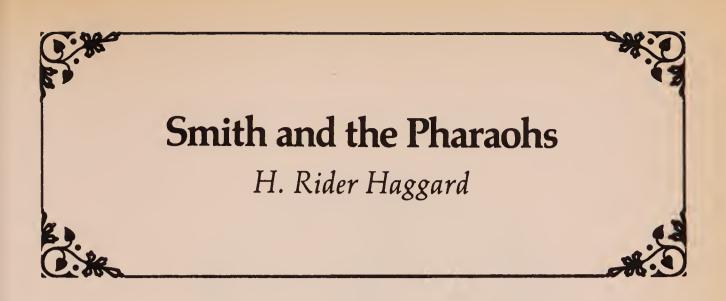
H. Rider Haggard fits the description of an English gentlemanadventurer of the Victorian period. He was born the eighth of ten children into a family descended from the Danish knight Sir Andrew Haggard, who settled in England in the fifteenth century. He was not academically inclined as a youth, and in 1875, at the age of nineteen, he joined the staff of Sir Henry Buliver, Governor of Natal, Africa. In 1877 Haggard personally raised the British flag over Pretoria when England annexed the Transvaal. He served as Master of the High Court there from 1877 to 1879. During this time, he became acquainted with several Zulu chieftains and acquired from them insights and information that he later used in his African adventure stories and historical romances. In 1879 Haggard returned to England to marry Louisa Margitson, but went back to South Africa shortly afterward to farm. The Boer War, however, made this impossible, so he once again returned to England, settled down on his wife's estate at Ditchingham in Norfolk, and began reading for the Bar, to which he was called in 1884.

His law career was permanently interrupted, however, in 1885, when he bet his brother that he could write an adventure story that was superior to *Treasure Island*, which had just made its sensational appearance. In six weeks' time he completed his project and, with the help of Andrew Lang and William Earnest Henley, got Cassell's to publish his *King Solomon's Mines*. The novel, which capitalized on the current English fascination with the "Dark Continent," was a huge success. Haggard became a professional writer and amateur gardener and farmer on his estate (he wrote a book on agriculture) and remained so for the next forty years. He was knighted in 1911 and made a Knight Commander of the British Empire in 1925, just a month before he died.

Haggard wrote such a large number of popular adventure stories that Alan Quatermain, who first appeared in King Solomon's Mines, was as familiar to English youth as Tom Sawyer to

American. As a writer of adventure stories of far-off places, he joined in popularity the ranks of Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling, both of whom admired him greatly. He was also popular for his historical romances, set in such varied and exotic places as Africa, Mexico, Iceland, and Egypt. He also developed the lost-race story, later imitated by Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Rice Burroughs. His inventive imagination ranged well beyond pure adventure or history into the mysterious realm of fantasy. A number of his works merely hint at the workings of magic or the supernatural. Another, The World's Desire (1890), which brings together Helen of Troy and Ulysses in Egypt at the time of the exodus, is pure fantasy in its use of supernatural causality. While it takes place in this world and at a definite time in history, the setting is so exotic and time of so little importance that it functions as a secondary world. It is noteworthy that Haggard wrote this work in collaboration with Andrew Lang, the noted writer and collector of fairy tales. She (1886), probably Haggard's most famous novel after King Solomon's Mines, and its several sequels also contain a strong element of the supernatural.

"Smith and the Pharaohs" neatly blends Haggard's uses of adventure, history, and the supernatural, as the reader will see. It is one of his numerous Egyptian stories. Roger Lancelyn Green comments that Haggard was so absorbed in Egyptology that "he sometimes wondered whether he was the reincarnation" of an ancient Egyptian. According to Green, a famous Egyptologist said of Haggard's stories that "he could not conceive how it was possible for modern man to have written a work so full of the true and inner thought and spirit of ancient Egypt." While the theme of immortality is important, "Smith and the Pharaohs," like most of Haggard's works, succeeds primarily because of story and atmosphere. The narrative is fast paced and absorbing, attesting to the extraordinary inventiveness of the author. The atmosphere is even more effective. C. S. Lewis refers to King Solomon's Mines as having a quality in the story more important than the events themselves, a quality that elicits wonder or shudders—or both—from the reader. The atmosphere of "Smith and the Pharaohs," created by the setting and the hero's reflections, admirably produces this quality.





Scientists, or some scientists—for occasionally one learned person differs from other learned persons—tell us they know all that is worth knowing about man, which statement, of course, includes woman. They trace him from his remotest origin; they show us how his bones changed and his shape modified, also how, under the influence of his needs and passions, his intelligence developed from something very humble. They demonstrate conclusively that there is nothing in man which the dissecting table will not explain; that his aspirations toward another life have their root in the fear of death, or, say others of them, in that of earthquake or thunder; that his affinities with the past are merely inherited from remote ancestors who lived in that past, perhaps a million years ago; and that everything noble about him is but the fruit of expediency or of a veneer of civilization, while everything base must be attributed to the instincts of his dominant and primeval nature. Man, in short, is an animal who, like every other animal, is finally subdued by his environment and takes his color from his surroundings, as cattle do from the red soil of Devon. Such are the facts, they (or some of them) declare; all the rest is rubbish.

At times we are inclined to agree with these sages, especially after it has been our privilege to attend a course of lectures by one of them. Then perhaps something comes within the range of our experience which gives us pause and causes doubts, the old divine doubts, to arise again deep in our hearts, and with them a

yet diviner hope.

Perchance when all is said, so we think to ourselves, man is something more than an animal. Perchance he has known the past, the far past, and will know the future, the far, far future. Perchance the dream is true, and he does indeed possess what for convenience is called an immortal soul, that may manifest itself in one shape or another; that may sleep for ages, but, waking or

sleeping, still remains itself, indestructible as the matter of the Universe.

An incident in the career of Mr. James Ebenezer Smith might well occasion such reflections, were any acquainted with its details, which until this, its setting forth, was not the case. Mr. Smith is a person who knows when to be silent. Still, undoubtedly it gave cause for thought to one individual—namely, to him to whom it happened. Indeed, James Ebenezer Smith is still think-

ing over it, thinking very hard indeed.

J. E. Smith was well-born and well-educated. When he was a good-looking and able young man at college, but before he had taken his degree, trouble came to him, the particulars of which do not matter, and he was thrown penniless, also friendless, upon the rocky bosom of the world. No, not quite friendless, for he had a godfather, a gentleman connected with business whose Christian name was Ebenezer. To him, as a last resource, Smith went, feeling that Ebenezer owed him something in return for the awful appellation wherewith he had been endowed in baptism.

To a certain extent Ebenezer recognized the obligation. He did nothing heroic, but he found his godson a clerkship in a bank of which he was one of the directors—a modest clerkship, no more. Also, when he died a year later, he left him a hundred pounds to be spent upon some souvenir.

Smith, being of a practical turn of mind, instead of adorning himself with memorial jewelery for which he had no use, invested the hundred pounds in an exceedingly promising speculation. As it happened, he was not misinformed, and his talent returned to him multiplied by ten. He repeated the experiment, and, being in a position to know what he was doing, with considerable success. By the time that he was thirty he found himself possessed of a fortune of something over twenty-five thousand pounds. Then (and this shows the wise and practical nature of the man) he stopped speculating and put out his money in such a fashion that it brought him a safe and clear four percent.

By this time Smith, being an excellent man of business, was well up in the service of his bank—as yet only a clerk, it is true, but one who drew his four hundred pounds a year, with prospects. In short, he was in a position to marry had he wished to do so. As it happened, he did not wish—perhaps because, being very friendless, no lady who attracted him crossed his path, perhaps for other reasons.

Shy and reserved in temperament, he confided only in himself. None, not even his superiors at the bank or the Board of Management, knew how well off he had become. No one visited him at the flat which he was understood to occupy somewhere in the neighborhood of Putney; he belonged to no club, and possessed not a single intimate. The blow which the world had dealt him in his early days, the harsh repulses and the rough treatment he had then experienced, sank so deep into his sensitive soul that never again did he seek close converse with his kind. In fact, while still young, he fell into a condition of old bachelorhood of a refined type.

Soon, however, Smith discovered—it was after he had given up speculating—that a man must have something to occupy his mind. He tried philanthropy, but found himself too sensitive for a business which so often resolves itself into rude inquiry as to the affairs of other people. After a struggle, therefore, he compromised with his conscience by setting aside a liberal portion of his income for anonymous distribution among deserving persons

and objects.

While still in this vacant frame of mind Smith chanced one day, when the bank was closed, to drift into the British Museum, more to escape the vile weather that prevailed without than for any other reason. Wandering hither and thither at hazard, he found himself in the great gallery devoted to Egyptian stone objects and sculpture. The place bewildered him somewhat, for he knew nothing of Egyptology; indeed, there remained upon his mind only a sense of wonderment not unmixed with awe. It must have been a great people, he thought to himself, that executed these works, and with the thought came a desire to know more about them. Yet he was going away when suddenly his eye fell on the sculptured head of a woman which hung upon the wall.

Smith looked at it once, twice, thrice, and at the third look he fell in love. Needless to say, he was not aware that such was his condition. He knew only that a change had come over him, and never, never could he forget the face which that carven mask portrayed. Perhaps it was not really beautiful save for its wondrous and mystic smile; perhaps the lips were too thick and the nostrils too broad. Yet to him that face was Beauty itself, beauty which drew him as with a cart rope, and awoke within him all kinds of wonderful imaginings, some of them so strange and tender that almost they partook of the nature of memories. He stared at the image, and the image smiled back sweetly at him, as doubtless it, or rather its original—for this was but a plaster

cast—had smiled at nothingness in some tomb or hiding-hole for over thirty centuries, and as the woman whose likeness it was had once smiled upon the world.

A short, stout gentleman bustled up and, in tones of authority, addressed some workmen who were arranging a base for a neighboring statue. It occurred to Smith that he must be someone who knew about these objects. Overcoming his natural diffidence with an effort, he raised his hat and asked the gentleman if he could tell him who was the original of the mask.

The official—who, in fact, was a very great man, in the Museum—glanced at Smith shrewdly, and, seeing that his interest

was genuine, answered:

"I don't know. Nobody knows. She has been given several names, but none of them have authority. Perhaps one day the rest of the statue may be found, and then we shall learn—that is, if it is inscribed. Most likely, however, it has been burnt for lime long ago."

"Then you can't tell me anything about her?" said Smith.

"Well, only a little. To begin with, that's a cast. The original is in the Cairo Museum. Mariette found it, I believe at Karnac, and gave it a name after his fashion. Probably she was a queen—of the eighteenth dynasty, by the work. But you can see her rank for yourself from the broken *uræus*." (Smith did not stop him to explain that he had not the faintest idea what a *uræus* might be, seeing that he was utterly unfamiliar with the snake-headed crest of Egyptian royalty.) "You should go to Egypt and study the head for yourself. It is one of the most beautiful things that ever was found. Well, I must be off. Good day."

And he bustled down the long gallery.

Smith found his way upstairs and looked at mummies and other things. Somehow it hurt him to reflect that the owner of yonder sweet, alluring face must have become a mummy long, long before the Christian era. Mummies did not strike him as attractive.

He returned to the statuary and stared at his plaster cast till one of the workmen remarked to his fellow that if he were the gent he'd go and look at "a live 'un" for a change.

Then Smith retired abashed.

On his way home he called at his bookseller's and ordered "all the best works on Egyptology." When, a day or two later, they arrived in a packingcase, together with a bill for thirty-eight pounds, he was somewhat dismayed. Still, he tackled those books like a man, and, being clever and industrious, within three months had a fair working knowledge of the subject, and had even picked up a smattering of hieroglyphics.

In January—that was, at the end of those three months—Smith astonished his Board of Directors by applying for ten weeks' leave, he who had hitherto been content with a fortnight in the year. When questioned he explained that he had been suffering from bronchitis, and was advised to take a change in Egypt.

"A very good idea," said the manager, "but I'm afraid you'll find it expensive. They fleece one in Egypt."

"I know," answered Smith, "but I've saved a little, and have

only myself to spend it upon."

So Smith went to Egypt and saw the original of the beauteous head and a thousand other fascinating things. Indeed, he did more. Attaching himself to some excavators who were glad of his intelligent assistance, he actually dug for a month in the neighborhood of ancient Thebes, but without finding anything in particular.

It was not till two years later that he made his great discovery, that which is known as Smith's Tomb. Here it may be explained that the state of his health had become such as to necessitate an

annual visit to Egypt, or so his superiors understood.

However, as he asked for no summer holiday, and was always ready to do another man's work or to stop overtime, he found it

easy to arrange for these winter excursions.

On this, his third visit to Egypt, Smith obtained from the Director-General of Antiquities at Cairo a license to dig upon his own account. Being already well-known in the country as a skilled Egyptologist, this was granted upon the usual terms—namely, that the Department of Antiquities should have a right to take any of the objects which might be found, or all of them, if it so desired.

Such preliminary matters having been arranged by correspondence, Smith, after a few days spent in the Museum at Cairo, took the night train to Luxor, where he found his head man, an ex-dragoman named Mahomet, waiting for him and his fellaheen laborers already hired. There were but forty of them, for his was a comparatively small venture. Three hundred pounds was the amount that he had made up his mind to expend, and such a sum does not go far in excavations.

During his visit of the previous year Smith had marked the place where he meant to dig. It was in the cemetery of old Thebes, at the wild spot not far from the temple of Medinet Habu, that is known as the Valley of the Queens. Here, separated from the resting places of their royal lords by the bold mass of the intervening hill, some of the greatest ladies of Egypt have been laid to rest, and it was their tombs that Smith desired to investigate. As he knew well, some of these must yet remain to be discovered. Who could say? Fortune favors the bold. It might be that he would find the holy grave of that beauteous, unknown

Royalty whose face had haunted him for three long years!

For a whole month he dug without the slightest success. The spot that he selected had proved, indeed, to be the mouth of a tomb. After twenty-five days of laborious exploration it was at length cleared out, and he stood in a rude unfinished cave. The queen for whom it had been designed must have died quite young and been buried elsewhere, or she had chosen herself another sepulcher, or mayhap the rock had proved unsuitable for sculpture.

Smith shrugged his shoulders and moved on, sinking trial pits and trenches here and there, but still finding nothing. Two thirds of his time and money had been spent when at last the luck turned. One day, toward evening, with some half dozen of his best men he was returning after a fruitless morning of labor, when something seemed to attract him toward a little wadi, or bay, in the hillside that was filled with tumbled rocks and sand. There were scores of such places, and this one looked no more promising than any of the others had proved to be. Yet it attracted him. Thoroughly dispirited, he walked past it twenty paces or more, then turned.

"Where go you, sah?" asked his head man, Mahomet.

He pointed to the recess in the cliff.

"No good, sah," said Mahomet. "No tomb there. Bedrock too near top. Too much water run in there; dead queen like keep dry!"

But Smith went on, and the others followed obediently.

He walked down the little slope of sand and boulders and examined the cliff. It was virgin rock; never a tool mark was to be seen. Already the men were going, when the same strange instinct which had drawn him to the spot caused him to take a spade from one of them and begin to shovel away the sand from the face of the cliff—for here, for some unexplained reason, were no boulders or debris. Seeing their master, to whom they were attached, at work, they began to work too, and for twenty minutes or more dug on cheerfully enough, just to humor him, since all were sure that here there was no tomb. At length Smith ordered them to desist, for, although now they were six feet down, the rock remained of the same virgin character.

With an exclamation of disgust he threw out a last shovelful of sand. The edge of his spade struck on something that projected.

He cleared away a little more sand, and there appeared a rounded ledge which seemed to be a cornice. Calling back the men, he pointed to it, and without a word all of them began to dig again. Five minutes more of work made it clear that it was a cornice, and half an hour later there appeared the top of the doorway of a tomb.

"Old people wall him up," said Mahomet, pointing to the flat stones set in mud for mortar with which the doorway had been closed, and to the undecipherable impress upon the mud of the scarab seals of the officials whose duty it had been to close the last resting place of the royal dead for ever.

"Perhaps queen all right inside," he went on, receiving no an-

swer to his remark.

"Perhaps," replied Smith, briefly. "Dig, man, dig! Don't waste time in talking."

So they dug on furiously till at length Smith saw something which caused him to groan aloud. There was a hole in the masonry—the tomb had been broken into. Mahomet saw it too, and examined the top of the aperture with his skilled eye.

"Very old thief," he said. "Look, he try build up wall again, but ran away before he have time finish." And he pointed to certain flat stones which had been roughly and hurriedly re-

placed.

"Dig-dig!" said Smith.

Ten minutes more and the aperture was cleared. It was only

just big enough to admit the body of a man.

By now the sun was setting. Swiftly, swiftly it seemed to tumble down the sky. One minute it was above the rough crests of the western hills behind them; the next, a great ball of glowing fire, it rested on their topmost ridge. Then it was gone. For an instant a kind of green spark shone where it had been. This too went out, and the sudden Egyptian night was upon them.

The fellaheen muttered among themselves, and one or two of them wandered off on some pretext. The rest threw down their tools and looked at Smith. "Men say they no like stop here. They afraid of ghost! Too many afreet live in these tomb. That what they say. Come back finish tomorrow morning when it light. Very foolish people, these common fellaheen," remarked Ma-

homet, in a superior tone.

"Quite so," replied Smith, who knew well that nothing that he could offer would tempt his men to go on with the opening of a tomb after sunset. "Let them go away. You and I will stop and watch the place till morning."

"Sorry, sah," said Mahomet, "but I not feel quite well inside; I think I got fever. I go to camp and lie down and pray under plenty blanket."

"All right, go," said Smith, "but if there is anyone who is not a coward, let him bring me my big coat, something to eat and drink, and the lantern that hangs in my tent. I will meet him

there in the valley."

Mahomet, though rather doubtfully, promised that this should be done, and, after begging Smith to accompany them, lest the spirit of whoever slept in the tomb should work him a mischief during the night, they departed quickly enough.

Smith lit his pipe, sat down on the sand, and waited. Half an hour later he heard a sound of singing, and through the darkness,

which was dense, saw lights coming up the valley.

"My brave men," he thought to himself, and scrambled up the

slope to meet them.

He was right. These were his men, no less than twenty of them, for with a fewer number they did not dare to face the ghosts which they believed haunted the valley after nightfall. Presently the light from the lantern which one of them carried (not Mahomet, whose sickness had increased too suddenly to enable him to come) fell upon the tall form of Smith, who, dressed in his white working clothes, was leaning against a rock. Down went the lantern, and with a howl of terror the brave company turned and fled.

"Sons of cowards!" roared Smith after them, in his most vig-

orous Arabic. "It is I, your master, not an afreet."

They heard, and by degrees crept back again. Then he perceived that in order to account for their number each of them carried some article. Thus one had the bread, another the lantern, another a tin of sardines, another the sardine opener, another a box of matches, another a bottle of beer, and so on. As even thus there were not enough things to go round, two of them bore his big coat between them, the first holding it by the sleeves and the second by the tail as though it were a stretcher.

"Put them down," said Smith, and they obeyed. "Now," he added, "run for your lives; I thought I heard two afreets talking up there just now of what they would do to any followers of the Prophet who mocked their gods, if perchance they should meet

them in their holy place at night."

This kindly counsel was accepted with much eagerness. In another minute Smith was alone with the stars and the dying desert wind.

Collecting his goods, or as many of them as he wanted, he

thrust them into the pockets of the greatcoat and returned to the mouth of the tomb. Here he made his simple meal by the light of the lantern, and afterward tried to go to sleep. But sleep he could not. Something always woke him. First it was a jackal howling amongst the rocks; next a sand-fly bit him on the ankle so sharply that he thought he must have been stung by a scorpion. Then, notwithstanding his warm coat, the cold got hold of him, for the clothes beneath were wet through with perspiration, and it occurred to him that unless he did something he would probably contract an internal chill or perhaps fever. He rose and walked about.

By now the moon was up, revealing all the sad, wild scene in its every detail. The mystery of Egypt entered his soul and oppressed him. How much dead majesty lay in the hill upon which he stood? Were they all really dead, he wondered, or were those fellaheen right? Did their spirits still come forth at night and wander through the land where once they ruled? Of course that was the Egyptian faith according to which the Ka, or Double, eternally haunted the place where its earthly counterpart had been laid to rest. When one came to think of it, beneath a mass of unintelligible symbolism there was much in the Egyptian faith which it was hard for a Christian to disbelieve. Salvation through a Redeemer, for instance, and the resurrection of the body. Had he, Smith, not already written a treatise upon these points of similarity which he proposed to publish one day, not under his own name? Well, he would not think of them now; the occasion seemed scarcely fitting—they came home too pointedly to one who was engaged in violating a tomb.

His mind, or rather his imagination—of which he had plenty—went off at a tangent. What sights had this place seen thousands of years ago! Once, thousands of years ago, a procession had wound up along the roadway, which was doubtless buried beneath the sand whereon he stood, toward the dark door of this sepulcher. He could see it as it passed in and out between the rocks. The priests, shaven-headed and robed in leopards' skins, or some of them in pure white, bearing the mystic symbols of their office. The funeral sledge drawn by oxen, and on it the great rectangular case that contained the outer and the inner coffins, and within them the mummy of some departed Majesty; in the Egyptian formula, "the hawk that had spread its wings and flown into the bosom of Osiris," God of Death. Behind, the mourners, rending the air with their lamentations. Then those who bore the funeral furniture and offerings. Then the high officers of State and the first priests of Amen and of the other gods. Then the

sister queens, leading by the hand a wondering child or two. Then the sons of Pharaoh, young men carrying the emblems of their rank.

Lastly, walking alone, Pharaoh himself in his ceremonial robes, his apron, his double crown of linen surmounted by the golden snake, his inlaid bracelets, and his heavy, tinkling earrings. Pharaoh, his head bowed, his feet traveling wearily, and in his heart—what thoughts? Sorrow, perhaps, for her who had departed. Yet he had other queens and fair women without count. Doubtless she was sweet and beautiful, but sweetness and beauty were not given to her alone. Moreover, was she not wont to cross his will and to question his divinity? No, surely it is not only of her that he thinks, her for whom he had prepared this splendid tomb with all things needful to unite her with the gods. Surely he thinks also of himself and that other tomb on the farther side of the hill whereat the artists labor day by day-yes, and have labored these many years; that tomb to which before so very long he too must travel in just this fashion, to seek his place beyond the doors of Death, who lays his equal hand on king and queen and slave.

The vision passed. It was so real that Smith thought he must have been dreaming. Well, he was awake now, and colder than ever. Moreover, the jackals had multiplied. There were a whole pack of them, and not far away. Look! One crossed in the ring of the lamplight, a slinking, yellow beast that smelt the remains of dinner. Or perhaps it smelt himself. Moreover, there were bad characters who haunted these mountains, and he was alone and quite unarmed. Perhaps he ought to put out the light which advertised his whereabouts. It would be wise, and yet in this particular he rejected wisdom. After all, the light was some company.

Since sleep seemed to be out of the question, he fell back upon poor humanity's other anodyne, work, which has the incidental advantage of generating warmth. Seizing a shovel, he began to dig at the doorway of the tomb, whilst the jackals howled louder than ever in astonishment. They were not used to such a sight. For thousands of years, as the old moon above could have told, no man, or at least no solitary man, had dared to rob tombs at such an unnatural hour.

When Smith had been digging for about twenty minutes something tinkled on his shovel with a noise which sounded loud in that silence.

"A stone which may come in handy for the jackals," he thought to himself, shaking the sand slowly off the spade until it

appeared. There it was, and not large enough to be of much service. Still, he picked it up, and rubbed it in his hands to clear off the encrusting dirt. When he opened them he saw that it was no stone, but a bronze.

"Osiris," reflected Smith, "buried in front of the tomb to hallow the ground. No, an Isis. No, the head of a statuette, and a jolly good one, too—at any rate, in moonlight. Seems to have been gilded." And, reaching out for the lamp, he held it over the object.

Another minute, and he found himself sitting at the bottom of the hole, lamp in one hand and statuette, or rather head, in the other.

"The Queen of the Mask!" he gasped. "The same—the same! By heavens, the very same!"

Oh, he could not be mistaken. There were the identical lips, a little thick and pouted; the identical nostrils, curved and quivering, but a little wide; the identical arched eyebrows and dreamy eyes set somewhat far apart. Above all, there was the identical alluring and mysterious smile. Only on this masterpiece of ancient art was set a whole crown of *uræi* surrounding the entire head. Beneath the crown and pressed back behind the ears was a full-bottomed wig or royal headdress, of which the ends descended to the breasts. The statuette, that, having been gilt, remained quite perfect and uncorroded, was broken just above the middle, apparently by a single violent blow, for the fracture was very clean.

At once it occurred to Smith that it had been stolen from the tomb by a thief who thought it to be gold; that outside of the tomb doubt had overtaken him and caused him to break it upon a stone or otherwise. The rest was clear. Finding that it was but gold-washed bronze he had thrown away the fragments, rather than be at the pains of carrying them. This was his theory, prob-

ably not a correct one, as the sequel seems to show.

Smith's first idea was to recover the other portion. He searched quite a long while, but without success. Neither then nor afterward could it be found. He reflected that perhaps this lower half had remained in the thief's hand, who, in his vexation, had thrown it far away, leaving the head to lie where it fell. Again Smith examined this head, and more closely. Now he saw that just beneath the breasts was a delicately cut cartouche.

Being by this time a master of hieroglyphics, he read it without trouble. It ran: "Ma-Mee, Great Royal Lady. Beloved of—"

Here the cartouche was broken away.

"Ma-Mé, or it might be Ma-Mi," he reflected. "I never heard

of a queen called Ma-Mé, or Ma-Mi, or Ma-Mu. She must be quite new to history. I wonder of whom she was beloved? Amen, or Horus, or Isis, probably. Of some god, I have no doubt, at least I hope so!"

He stared at the beautiful portrait in his hand, as once he had stared at the cast on the Museum wall, and the beautiful portrait, emerging from the dust of ages, smiled back at him there in the solemn moonlight as once the cast had smiled from the Museum wall.

Only that had been but a cast, whereas this was real. This had slept with the dead from whose features it had been fashioned, the dead who lay, or who had lain, within.

A sudden resolution took hold of Smith. He would explore that tomb, at once and alone. No one should accompany him on this his first visit; it would be a sacrilege that anyone save himself should set foot there until he had looked on what it might contain.

Why should he not enter? His lamp, of what is called the "hurricane" brand, was very good and bright, and would burn for many hours. Moreover, there had been time for the foul air to escape through the hole that they had cleared. Lastly, something seemed to call on him to come and see. He placed the bronze head in his breast pocket over his heart, and, thrusting the lamp through the hole, looked down. Here there was no difficulty, since sand had drifted in to the level of the bottom of the aperture. Through it he struggled, to find himself upon a bed of sand that only just left him room to push himself along between it and the roof. A little farther on the passage was almost filled with mud.

Mahomet had been right when, from his knowledge of the bedrock, he said that any tomb made in this place must be flooded. It had been flooded by some ancient rain storm, and Smith began to fear that he would find it quite filled with soil caked as hard as iron. So, indeed, it was to a certain depth, a result that apparently had been anticipated by those who hollowed it, for this entrance shaft was left quite undecorated. Indeed, as Smith found afterward, a hole had been dug beneath the doorway to allow the mud to enter after the burial was completed. Only a miscalculation had been made. The natural level of the mud did not quite reach the roof of the tomb, and therefore still left it open.

After crawling for forty feet or so over this caked mud, Smith suddenly found himself on a rising stair. Then he understood the plan; the tomb itself was on a higher level.

Here began the paintings. Here the Queen Ma-Mee, wearing

her crowns and dressed in diaphanous garments, was presented to god after god. Between her figure and those of the divinities the wall was covered with hieroglyphs as fresh today as on that when the artist had limned them. A glance told him that they were extracts from the Book of the Dead. When the thief of bygone ages had broken into the tomb, probably not very long after the interment, the mud over which Smith had just crawled was still wet. This he could tell, since the clay from the rascal's feet remained upon the stairs, and that upon his fingers had stained the paintings on the wall against which he had supported himself; indeed, in one place was an exact impression of his hand, showing its shape and even the lines of the skin.

At the top of the flight of steps ran another passage at a higher level, which the water had never reached, and to right and left were the beginnings of unfinished chambers. It was clear to him that this queen had died young. Her tomb, as she or the king had designed it, was never finished. A few more paces, and the passage enlarged itself into a hall about thirty feet square. The ceiling was decorated with vultures, their wings outspread, the looped Cross of Life hanging from their talons. On one wall her Majesty Ma-Mee stood expectant while Anubis weighed her heart against the feather of truth, and Thoth, the Recorder, wrote down the verdict upon his tablets. All her titles were given to her here, such as "Great Royal Heiress, Royal Sister, Royal Wife, Royal Mother, Lady of the Two Lands, Palm-branch of Love, Beautiful-exceedingly."

Smith read them hurriedly and noted that nowhere could he see the name of the king who had been her husband. It would almost seem as though this had been purposely omitted. On the other walls Ma-Mee, accompanied by her Ka, or Double, made offerings to the various gods, or uttered propitiatory speeches to the hideous demons of the underworld, declaring their names to them and forcing them to say: "Pass on. Thou art pure!"

Lastly, on the end wall, triumphant, all her trials done, she, the justified Osiris, or Spirit, was received by the god Osiris, Savior of Spirits.

All these things Smith noted hurriedly as he swung the lamp to and fro in that hallowed place. Then he saw something else which filled him with dismay. On the floor of the chamber where the coffins had been—for this was the burial chamber—lay a heap of black fragments charred with fire. Instantly he understood. After the thief had done his work he had burned the mummy cases, and with them the body of the queen. There could be no doubt that this was so, for look, among the ashes lay some calcined human

bones, while the roof above was blackened with the smoke and cracked by the heat of the conflagration. There was nothing left for him to find!

Oppressed with the closeness of the atmosphere, he sat down upon a little bench or table cut in the rock that evidently had been meant to receive offerings to the dead. Indeed, on it still lay the scorched remains of some votive flowers. Here, his lamp between his feet, he rested a while, staring at those calcined bones. See, yonder was the lower jaw, and in it some teeth, small, white, regular, and but little worn. Yes, she had died young. Then he turned to go, for disappointment and the holiness of the place

overcame him; he could endure no more of it that night.

Leaving the burial hall, he walked along the painted passage, the lamp swinging and his eyes fixed upon the floor. He was disheartened, and the paintings could wait till the morrow. He descended the steps and came to the foot of the mud slope. Here suddenly he perceived, projecting from some sand that had drifted down over the mud, what seemed to be the corner of a reed box or basket. To clear away the sand was easy, and—yes, it was a basket, a foot or so in length, such a basket as the old Egyptians used to contain the funeral figures which are called ushaptis, or other objects connected with the dead. It looked as though it had been dropped, for it lay upon its side. Smith opened it—not very hopefully, for surely nothing of value would have been abandoned thus.

The first thing that met his eyes was a mummied hand, broken off at the wrist, a woman's little hand, most delicately shaped. It was withered and paper-white, but the contours still remained; the long fingers were perfect, and the almond-shaped nails had been stained with henna, as was the embalmers' fashion. On the hand were two gold rings, and for those rings it had been stolen. Smith looked at it for a long while, and his heart swelled within him, for here was the hand of that royal lady of his dreams.

Indeed, he did more than look; he kissed it, and as his lips touched the holy relic it seemed to him as though a wind, cold but scented, blew upon his brow. Then, growing fearful of the thoughts that arose within him, he hurried his mind back to the

world, or rather to the examination of the basket.

Here he found other objects roughly wrapped in fragments of mummy cloth that had been torn from the body of the queen. These it is needless to describe, for are they not to be seen in the gold room of the Museum, labeled "Bijouterie de la Reine Ma-Mé, XVIIIème Dynastie. Thèbes (Smith's Tomb)"? It may be

mentioned, however, that the set was incomplete. For instance, there was but one of the great gold ceremonial earrings fashioned like a group of pomegranate blooms, and the most beautiful of the necklaces had been torn in two—half of it was missing.

It was clear to Smith that only a portion of the precious objects which were buried with the mummy had been placed in this basket. Why had these been left where he found them? A little reflection made that clear also. Something had prompted the thief to destroy the desecrated body and its coffin with fire, probably in the hope of hiding his evil handiwork. Then he fled with his spoil. But he had forgotten how fiercely mummies and their trappings can burn. Or perhaps the thing was an accident. He must have had a lamp, and if its flame chanced to touch this bituminous tinder!

At any rate, the smoke overtook the man in that narrow place as he began to climb the slippery slope of clay. In his haste he dropped the basket, and dared not return to search for it. It could wait till the morrow, when the fire would be out and the air pure. Only for this desecrator of the royal dead that morrow never came, as was discovered afterward.

When at length Smith struggled into the open air the stars were paling before the dawn. An hour later, after the sky was well up, Mahomet (recovered from his sickness) and his myrmidons arrived.

"I have been busy while you slept," said Smith, showing them the mummied hand (but not the rings which he had removed from the shrunk fingers), and the broken bronze, but not the priceless jewelery which was hidden in his pockets.

For the next ten days they dug till the tomb and its approach were quite clear. In the sand, at the head of a flight of steps which led down to the doorway, they found the skeleton of a man, who evidently had been buried there in a hurried fashion. His skull was shattered by the blow of an ax, and the shaven scalp that still clung to it suggested that he might have been a priest.

Mahomet thought, and Smith agreed with him, that this was the person who had violated the tomb. As he was escaping from it the guards of the holy place surprised him after he had covered up the hole by which he had entered and purposed to return. There they executed him without trial and divided up the plunder, thinking that no more was to be found. Or perhaps his confederates killed him.

Such at least were the theories advanced by Mahomet.

Whether they were right or wrong none will ever know. For instance, the skeleton may not have been that of the thief, though probability appears to point the other way.

Nothing more was found in the tomb, not even a scarab or a mummy bead. Smith spent the remainder of his time in photographing the pictures and copying the inscriptions, which for various reasons proved to be of extraordinary interest. Then, having reverently buried the charred bones of the queen in a secret place of the sepulcher, he handed it over to the care of the local Guardian of Antiquities, paid off Mahomet and the fellaheen, and departed for Cairo. With him went the wonderful jewels of which he had breathed no word, and another relic to him yet more precious—the hand of her Majesty Ma-Mee, Palmbranch of Love.

And now follows the strange sequel of this story of Smith and the Queen Ma-Mee.

II

Smith was seated in the sanctum of the distinguished Director-General of Antiquities at the new Cairo Museum. It was a very interesting room. Books piled upon the floor; objects from tombs awaiting examination, lying here and there; a hoard of Ptolemaic silver coins, just dug up at Alexandria, standing on the table in the pot that had hidden them for two thousand years; in the corner the mummy of a royal child, aged six or seven, not long ago discovered, with some inscription scrawled upon the wrappings (brought here to be deciphered by the Master), and the withered lotus bloom, love's last offering, thrust beneath one of the pink retaining bands.

"A touching object," thought Smith to himself. "Really, they

might have left the dear little girl in peace."

Smith had a tender heart, but even as he reflected he became aware that some of the jewellery hidden in an inner pocket of his waistcoat (designed for bank notes) was fretting his skin. He had a tender conscience also.

Just then the Director, a French savant, bustled in, alert, vigorous, full of interest.

"Ah, my dear Mr. Smith!" he said, in his excellent English. "I am indeed glad to see you back again, especially as I understand that you are come rejoicing and bringing your sheaves with you. They tell me you have been extraordinarily successful. What do you say is the name of this queen whose tomb you have found—Ma-Mee? A very unusual name. How do you get the extra

vowel? Is it for euphony, eh? Did I not know how good a scholar you are, I should be tempted to believe that you had misread it. Me-Mee, Ma-Mee! That would be pretty in French, would it not? Ma mie—my darling! Well, I dare say she was somebody's mie in her time. But tell me the story."

Smith told him shortly and clearly; also he produced his pho-

tographs and copies of inscriptions.

"This is interesting—interesting truly," said the Director, when he had glanced through them. "You must leave them with me to study. Also you will publish them, is it not so? Perhaps one of the Societies would help you with the cost, for it should be done in facsimile. Look at this vignette! Most unusual. Oh, what a pity that scoundrelly priest got off with the jewelery and burnt her Majesty's body!"

"He didn't get off with all of it."

"What, Mr. Smith? Our inspector reported to me that you found nothing."

"I dare say, sir, but your inspector did not know what I found."

"Ah, you are a discreet man! Well, let us see."

Slowly Smith unbuttoned his waistcoat. From its inner pocket and elsewhere about his person he extracted the jewels wrapped in mummy cloth as he had found them. First he produced a scepter head of gold, in the shape of a pomegranate fruit and engraved with the throne name and titles of Ma-Mee.

"What a beautiful object!" said the Director. "Look! The handle was of ivory, and that sacré thief of a priest smashed it out at the socket. It was fresh ivory then; the robbery must have taken place not long after the burial. See, this magnifying glass shows it.

Is that all?"

Smith handed him the surviving half of the marvelous necklace that had been torn in two.

"I have rethreaded it," he muttered, "but every bead is in its

place."

"Oh, heavens! How lovely! Note the cutting of those carnelian heads of Hathor and the gold lotus blooms between-yes, and the enameled flies beneath. We have nothing like it in the Museum."

So it went on.

"Is that all?" gasped the Director at last, when every object from the basket glittered before them on the table.

"Yes," said Smith. "That is—no. I found a broken statuette hidden in the sand outside the tomb. It is of the queen, but I thought perhaps you would allow me to keep this."

"But certainly, Mr. Smith; it is yours indeed. We are not niggards here. Still, if I might see it—"

From yet another pocket Smith produced the head. The Direc-

tor gazed at it, then he spoke with feeling.

"I said just now that you were discreet, Mr. Smith, and I have been reflecting that you are honest. But now I must add that you are very clever. If you had not made me promise that this bronze should be yours before you showed it to me—well, it would never have gone into that pocket again. And, in the public interest, won't you release me from the promise?"

"No," said Smith.

"You are perhaps not aware," went on the Director, with a groan, "that this is a portrait of Mariette's unknown queen whom we are thus able to identify. It seems a pity that the two should be separated; a replica we could let you have."

"I am quite aware," said Smith, "and I will be sure to send you a replica, with photographs. Also I promise to leave the original

to some museum by will."

The Director clasped the image tenderly, and, holding it to the

light, read the broken cartouche beneath the breasts.

"'Ma-Mé, Great Royal Lady. Beloved of—' Beloved of whom? Well, of Smith, for one. Take it, monsieur, and hide it away at once, lest soon there should be another mummy in this collection, a modern mummy called Smith; and, in the name of Justice, let the museum which inherits it be not the British, but that of Cairo, for this queen belongs to Egypt. By the way, I have been told that you are delicate in the lungs. How is your health now? Our cold winds are very trying. Quite good? Ah, that is excellent! I suppose that you have no more articles that you can show me?"

"I have nothing more except a mummied hand, which I found in the basket with the jewels. The two rings off it lie there. Doubtless it was removed to get at that bracelet. I suppose you

will not mind my keeping the hand—"

"No, I suppose not, though for my part I should prefer one that was not quite so old. Still, perhaps *you* will not mind my seeing it. That pocket of yours still looks a little bulky; I thought that it contained books!"

Smith produced a cigar box; in it was the hand wrapped in cotton wool.

"Ah," said the Director, "a pretty, well-bred hand. No doubt this Ma-Mee was the real heiress to the throne, as she describes herself. The Pharaoh was somebody of inferior birth, half-brother—she is called 'Royal Sister,' you remember—son of one of the Pharaoh's slave women, perhaps. Odd that she never mentioned him in the tomb. It looks as though they didn't get on in life, and that she was determined to have done with him in death. Those were the rings upon that hand, were they not?"

He replaced them on the fingers, then took off one, a royal signet in a cartouche, and read the inscription on the other: "Bes Ank, Ank Bes.' Bes the Living, the Living Bes.'

"Your Ma-Mee had some human vanity about her," he added. "Bes, among other things, as you know, was the god of beauty and of the adornments of women. She wore that ring that she might remain beautiful, and that her dresses might always fit, and her rouge never cake when she was dancing before the gods. Also it fixes her period pretty closely, but then so do other things. It seems a pity to rob Ma-Mee of her pet ring, does it not? The royal signet will be enough for us."

With a little bow he gave the hand back to Smith, leaving the Bes ring on the finger that had worn it for more than three thousand years. At least, Smith was so sure it was the Bes ring

that at the time he did not look at it again.

Then they parted, Smith promising to return upon the mor-

row, which, owing to events to be described, he did not do.

"Ah!" said the Master to himself, as the door closed behind his visitor. "He's in a hurry to be gone. He has fear lest I should change my mind about that ring. Also there is the bronze. Monsieur Smith was *rusé* there. It is worth a thousand pounds, that bronze. Yet I do not believe he was thinking of the money. I believe he is in love with that Ma-Mee and wants to keep her picture. Mon Dieu! A well-established affection. At least he is what the English call an odd fish, one whom I could never make out, and of whom no one seems to know anything. Still, honest, I am sure—quite honest. Why, he might have kept every one of those jewels and no one have been the wiser. And what things! What a find! Ciel! what a find! There has been nothing like it for years. Benedictions on the head of Odd-fish Smith!"

Then he collected the precious objects, thrust them into an inner compartment of his safe, which he locked and doublelocked, and, as it was nearly five o'clock, departed from the Museum to his private residence in the grounds, there to study Smith's copies and photographs, and to tell some friends of the

great things that had happened.

When Smith found himself outside the sacred door, and had presented its venerable guardian with a baksheesh of five piastres, he walked a few paces to the right and paused a while to watch some native laborers who were dragging a huge sarcophagus upon an improvised tramway. As they dragged they sang an echoing rhythmic song, whereof each line ended with an invocation to Allah.

Just so, reflected Smith, had their forefathers sung when, millenniums ago, they dragged that very sarcophagus from the quarries to the Nile, and from the Nile to the tomb whence it reappeared today, or when they slid the casing blocks of the pyramids up the great causeway and smooth slope of sand, and laid them in their dizzy resting places. Only then each line of the immemorial chant of toil ended with an invocation to Amen, now transformed to Allah.

The East may change its masters and its gods, but its customs never change, and if today Allah wore the feathers of Amen one wonders whether the worshippers would find the difference so very great.

Thus thought Smith as he hurried away from the sarcophagus and those blue-robed, dark-skinned fellaheen, down the long gallery that is filled with a thousand sculptures. For a moment he paused before the wonderful white statue of Queen Amenartas, then, remembering that his time was short, hastened on to a certain room, one of those which opened out of the gallery.

In a corner of this room, upon the wall, amongst many other beautiful objects, stood that head which Mariette had found, whereof in past years the cast had fascinated him in London. Now he knew whose head it was; to him it had been given to find the tomb of her who had sat for that statue. Her very hand was in his pocket — yes, the hand that had touched yonder marble, pointing out its defects to the sculptor, or perhaps swearing that he flattered her. Smith wondered who that sculptor was; surely he must have been a happy man. Also he wondered whether the statuette was also this master's work. He thought so, but he wished to make sure.

Near to the end of the room he stopped and looked about him like a thief. He was alone in the place; not a single student or tourist could be seen, and its guardian was somewhere else. He drew out the box that contained the hand. From the hand he slipped the ring which the Director-General had left there as a gift to himself. He would much have preferred the other with the signet, but how could he say so, especially after the episode of the statuette.

Replacing the hand in his pocket without looking at the ring—for his eyes were watching to see whether he was observed—he set it upon his little finger, which it exactly fitted. (Ma-Mee had worn both of them upon the third finger of her left hand, the Bes

ring as a guard to the signet.) He had the fancy to approach the effigy of Ma-Mee wearing a ring which she had worn and that came straight from her finger to his own.

Smith found the head in its accustomed place. Weeks had gone by since he looked upon it, and now, to his eyes, it had grown more beautiful than ever, and its smile was more mystical and loving. He drew out the statuette and began to compare them point by point. Oh, no doubt was possible! Both were likenesses of the same woman, though the statuette might have been executed two or three years later than the statue. To him the face of it looked a little older and more spiritual. Perhaps illness, or some premonition of her end, had then thrown its shadow on the queen. He compared and compared. He made some rough measurements and sketches in his pocketbook and set himself to work out a canon of proportions.

So hard and earnestly did he work, so lost was his mind that he never heard the accustomed warning sound which announces that the Museum is about to close. Hidden behind an altar as he was, in his distant, shadowed corner, the guardian of the room never saw him as he cast a last perfunctory glance about the place before departing till the Saturday morning; for the morrow was Friday, the Mohammedan Sabbath, on which the Museum remains shut, and he would not be called upon to attend. So he went. Everybody went. The great doors clanged, were locked and bolted, and, save for a watchman outside, no one was left in all that vast place except Smith in his corner, engaged in sketching and in measurements.

The difficulty of seeing, owing to the increase of shadow, first called his attention to the fact that time was slipping away. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was ten minutes to the hour.

"Soon be time to go," he thought to himself, and resumed his work.

How strangely silent the place seemed! Not a footstep to be heard or the sound of a human voice. He looked at his watch again, and saw that it was six o'clock, not five, or so the thing said. But that was impossible, for the Museum shut at five; evidently the desert sand had got into the works. The room in which he stood was that known as Room I, and he had noticed that its Arab custodian often frequented Room K or the gallery outside. He would find him and ask what was the real time.

Passing round the effigy of the wonderful Hathor cow, perhaps the finest example of an ancient sculpture of a beast in the whole world, Smith came to the doorway and looked up and down the gallery. Not a soul to be seen. He ran to Room K, to Room H, and others. Still not a soul to be seen. Then he made his way as fast as he could go to the great entrance. The doors were locked and bolted.

"Watch must be right after all. I'm shut in," he said to himself. "However, there's sure to be someone about somewhere. Probably the *salle des ventes* is still open. Shops don't shut till they are obliged."

Thither he went, to find its door as firmly closed as a door can be. He knocked on it, but a sepulchral echo was the only answer.

"I know," he reflected. "The Director must still be in his room. It will take him a long while to examine all that jewelery and put it away."

So for the room he headed, and, after losing his path twice, found it by help of the sarcophagus that the Arabs had been dragging, which now stood as deserted as it had done in the tomb, a lonesome and impressive object in the gathering shadows. The Director's door was shut, and again his knockings produced nothing but an echo. He started on a tour round the Museum, and, having searched the ground floors, ascended to the upper

galleries by the great stairway.

Presently he found himself in that devoted to the royal mummies and, being tired, rested there a while. Opposite to him, in a glass case in the middle of the gallery, reposed Rameses II. Near to, on shelves in a side case, were Rameses' son, Meneptah, and above, his son, Seti II, while in other cases were the mortal remains of many more of the royalties of Egypt. He looked at the proud face of Rameses and at the little fringe of white locks turned yellow by the embalmer's spices, also at the raised left arm. He remembered how the Director had told him that when they were unrolling this mighty monarch they went away to lunch, and that presently the man who had been left in charge of the body rushed into the room with his hair on end, and said that the dead king had lifted his arm and pointed at him.

Back they went, and there, true enough, was the arm lifted, nor were they ever able to get it quite into its place again. The explanation given was that the warmth of the sun had contracted the withered muscles, a very natural and correct explanation.

Still, Smith wished that he had not recollected the story just at this moment, especially as the arm seemed to move while he contemplated it—a very little, but still to move.

He turned round and gazed at Meneptah, whose hollow eyes stared at him from between the wrappings carelessly thrown across the parchmentlike and ashen face. There, probably, lay the countenance that had frowned on Moses. There was the heart which God had hardened. Well, it was hard enough now, for the doctors said he died of ossification of the arteries, and that the vessels of the heart were full of lime!

Smith stood upon a chair and peeped at Seti II above. His weaker countenance was very peaceful, but it seemed to wear an air of reproach. In getting down Smith managed to upset the heavy chair. The noise it made was terrific. He would not have thought it possible that the fall of such an article could produce so much sound. Satisfied with his inspection of these particular kings, who somehow looked quite different now from what they had ever done before—more real and imminent, so to speak—he renewed his search for a living man.

On he went, mummies to his right, mummies to his left, of every style and period, till he began to feel as though he never wished to see another dried remnant of mortality. He peeped into the room where lay the relics of Iouiya and Touiyou, the father and mother of the great Queen Taia. Cloths had been drawn over these, and really they looked worse and more suggestive thus draped than in their frigid and unadorned blackness. He came to the coffins of the priest-kings of the twentieth dynasty, formidable painted coffins with human faces. There seemed to be a vast number of these priest-kings, but perhaps they were better than the gold masks of the great Ptolemaic ladies which glinted at him through the gathering gloom.

Really, he had seen enough of the upper floors. The statues downstairs were better than all these dead, although it was true that, according to the Egyptian faith, every one of those statues was haunted eternally by the Ka, or Double, of the person whom it represented. He descended the great stairway. Was it fancy, or did something run across the bottom step in front of him-an animal of some kind, followed by a swift-moving and indefinite shadow? If so, it must have been the Museum cat hunting a Museum mouse. Only then what on earth was that very peculiar

and unpleasant shadow?

He called, "Puss! puss!" for he would have been quite glad of its company; but there came no friendly "miau" in response. Perhaps it was only the Ka of a cat and the shadow was-oh! never mind what. The Egyptians worshipped cats, and there were plenty of their mummies about on the shelves. But the shadow!

Once he shouted in the hope of attracting attention, for there were no windows to which he could climb. He did not repeat the experiment, for it seemed as though a thousand voices were answering him from every corner and roof of the gigantic edifice.

Well, he must face the thing out. He was shut in a museum, and the question was in what part of it he should camp for the night. Moreover, as it was growing rapidly dark, the problem must be solved at once. He thought with affection of the lavatory, where, before going to see the Director, only that afternoon he had washed his hands with the assistance of a kindly Arab who watched the door and gracefully accepted a piastre. But there was no Arab there now, and the door, like every other in this confounded place, was locked. He marched on to the entrance.

Here, opposite to each other, stood the red sarcophagi of the great Queen Hatshepu and her brother and husband, Thotmes III. He looked at them. Why should not one of these afford him a night's lodging? They were deep and quiet, and would fit the human frame very nicely. For a while Smith wondered which of these monarchs would be the more likely to take offense at such a use of a private sarcophagus, and, acting on general principles, concluded that he would rather throw himself on the mercy of the lady.

Already one of his legs was over the edge of that solemn coffer, and he was squeezing his body beneath the massive lid that was propped above it on blocks of wood, when he remembered a little, naked, withered thing with long hair that he had seen in a side chamber of the tomb of Amenhotep II in the Valley of Kings at Thebes. This caricature of humanity many thought, and he agreed with them, to be the actual body of the mighty Hatshepu as it appeared after the robbers had done with it.

Supposing now, that when he was lying at the bottom of that sarcophagus, sleeping the sleep of the just, this little personage should peep over its edge and ask him what he was doing there! Of course the idea was absurd; he was tired, and his nerves were a little shaken. Still, the fact remained that for centuries the hallowed dust of Queen Hatshepu had slept where he, a modern

man, was proposing to sleep.

He scrambled down from the sarcophagus and looked round him in despair. Opposite to the main entrance was the huge central hall of the Museum. Now the cement roof of this hall had, he knew, gone wrong, with the result that very extensive repairs had become necessary. So extensive were they, indeed, that the Director-General had informed him that they would take several years to complete. Therefore this hall was boarded up, only a little doorway being left by which the workmen could enter. Certain statues, of Seti II and others, too large to be moved, were

also roughly boarded over, as were some great funeral boats on either side of the entrance. The rest of the place, which might be two hundred feet long with a proportionate breadth, was empty save for the colossi of Amenhotep III and his queen Taia that stood beneath the gallery at its farther end.

It was an appalling place in which to sleep, but better, reflected Smith, than a sarcophagus or those mummy chambers. If, for instance, he could creep behind the deal boards that enclosed one of the funeral boats he would be quite comfortable there. Lifting the curtain, he slipped into the hall, where the gloom of evening had already settled. Only the skylights and the outline of the towering colossi at the far end remained visible. Close to him were the two funeral boats which he had noted when he looked into the hall earlier on that day, standing at the head of a flight of steps which led to the sunk floor of the center. He groped his way to that on the right. As he expected, the projecting planks were not quite joined at the bow. He crept in between them and the boat and laid himself down.

Presumably, being altogether tired out, Smith did ultimately fall asleep, for how long he never knew. At any rate, it is certain that, if so, he woke up again. He could not tell the time, because his watch was not a repeater, and the place was as black as the pit. He had some matches in his pocket, and might have struck one and even have lit his pipe. To his credit be it said, however, he remembered that he was the sole tenant of one of the most valuable museums in the world, and his responsibilities with reference to fire. So he refrained from striking that match under the keel of a boat which had become very dry in the course of five thousand years.

Smith found himself very wide awake indeed. Never in all his life did he remember being more so, not even in the hour of its great catastrophe, or when his godfather, Ebenezer, after much hesitation, had promised him a clerkship in the bank of which he was a director. His nerves seemed strung tight as harp strings, and his every sense was painfully acute. Thus he could even smell the odor of mummies that floated down from the upper galleries and the earthy scent of the boat which had been buried for thousands of years in sand at the foot of the pyramid of one of the fifth dynasty kings.

Moreover, he could hear all sorts of strange sounds, faint and far-away sounds which at first he thought must emanate from Cairo without. Soon, however, he grew sure that their origin was more local. Doubtless the cement work and the cases in the gal-

leries were cracking audibly, as is the unpleasant habit of such things at night.

Yet why should these common manifestations be so universal and affect him so strangely? Really, it seemed as though people were stirring all about him. More, he could have sworn that the great funeral boat beneath which he lay had become repeopled with the crew that once it bore.

He heard them at their business above him. There were trampings and a sound as though something heavy were being laid on the deck, such, for instance, as must have been made when the mummy of Pharaoh was set there for its last journey to the western bank of the Nile. Yes, and now he could have sworn again that the priestly crew were getting out the oars.

Smith began to meditate flight from the neighborhood of that place when something occurred which determined him to stop

where he was.

The huge hall was growing light, but not, as at first he hoped, with the rays of dawn. This light was pale and ghostly, though very penetrating. Also it had a blue tinge, unlike any other he had ever seen. At first it arose in a kind of fan or fountain at the far end of the hall, illumining the steps there and the two noble colossi which sat above.

But what was this that stood at the head of the steps, radiating glory? By heavens! It was Osiris himself or the image of Osiris, God of the Dead, the Egyptian savior of the world!

There he stood, in his mummy cloths, wearing the feathered crown, and holding in his hands, which projected from an opening in the wrappings, the crook and the scourge of power. Was he alive, or was he dead? Smith could not tell, since he never moved, only stood there, splendid and fearful, his calm, benignant face staring into nothingness.

Smith became aware that the darkness between him and the vision of this god was peopled; that a great congregation was gathering, or had gathered there. The blue light began to grow; long tongues of it shot forward, which joined themselves to-

gether, illumining all that huge hall.

Now, too, he saw the congregation. Before him, rank upon rank of them, stood the kings and queens of Egypt. As though at a given signal, they bowed themselves to the Osiris, and ere the tinkling of their ornaments had died away, lo! Osiris was gone. But in his place stood another, Isis, the Mother of Mystery, her deep eyes looking forth from beneath the jeweled vulture-cap. Again the congregation bowed, and lo! she was gone. But in her place stood yet another, a radiant, lovely being, who held in her

hand the Sign of Life, and wore upon her head the symbol of the shining disc-Hathor, Goddess of Love. A third time the congregation bowed, and she, too, was gone; nor did any other appear in her place.

The Pharaohs and their queens began to move about and speak to each other; their voices came to his ears in one low, sweet murmur.

In his amaze Smith had forgotten fear. From his hiding place he watched them intently. Some of them he knew by their faces. There, for instance, was the long-necked Khu-en-aten, talking somewhat angrily to the imperial Rameses II. Smith could understand what he said, for this power seemed to have been given to him. He was complaining in a high, weak voice that on this, the one night of the year when they might meet, the gods, or the magic images of the gods who were put up for them to worship, should not include his god, symbolized by the "Aten," or the sun's disc.

"I have heard of your Majesty's god," replied Rameses. "The priests used to tell me of him, also that he did not last long after your Majesty flew to heaven. The Fathers of Amen gave you a bad name; they called you 'the heretic' and hammered out your cartouches. They were quite rare in my time. Oh, do not let your Majesty be angry! So many of us have been heretics. My grandson, Seti, there"—and he pointed to a mild, thoughtful-faced man—"for example. I am told that he really worshipped the god of those Hebrew slaves whom I used to press to build my cities. Look at that lady with him. Beautiful, isn't she? Observe her large violet eyes! Well, she was the one who did the mischief, a Hebrew herself. At least, they tell me so."

"I will talk with him," answered Khu-en-aten. "It is more than possible that we may agree on certain points. Meanwhile, let me explain to your Majesty—"

"Oh, I pray you, not now. There is my wife."

"Your wife?" said Khu-en-aten, drawing himself up. "Which wife? I am told that your Majesty had many and left a large family; indeed, I see some hundreds of them here tonight. Now, I-but let me introduce Nefertiti to your Majesty. I may explain

that she was my only wife."

"So I have understood. Your Majesty was rather an invalid, were you not? Of course, in those circumstances, one prefers the nurse whom one can trust. Oh, pray, no offense! Nefertari, my love—oh, I beg pardon!—Astnefert—Nefertari has gone to speak to some of her children-let me introduce you to your predecessor, the Queen Nefertiti, wife of Amenhotep IV-I mean Khuen-aten (he changed his name, you know, because half of it was that of the father of the gods). She is interested in the question of plural marriage. Good-bye! I wish to have a word with my

grandfather, Rameses I. He was fond of me as a little boy."

At this moment Smith's interest in that queer conversation died away, for of a sudden he beheld none other than the queen of his dreams, Ma-Mee. Oh! there she stood, without a doubt, only ten times more beautiful than he had ever pictured her. She was tall and somewhat fair-complexioned, with slumbrous dark eyes, and on her face gleamed the mystic smile he loved. She wore a robe of simple white and a purple-broidered apron, a crown of golden *uræi* with turquoise eyes was set upon her dark hair as in her statue, and on her breast and arms were the very necklace and bracelets that he had taken from her tomb. She appeared to be somewhat moody, or rather thoughtful, for she leaned by herself against a balustrade, watching the throng without much interest.

Presently a Pharaoh, a black-browed, vigorous man with thick

lips, drew near.

"I greet your Majesty," he said.

She started, and answered, "Oh, it is you! I make my obeisance to your Majesty," and she curtsied to him, humbly enough, but with a suggestion of mockery in her movements.

"Well, you do not seem to have been very anxious to find me,

Ma-Mee, which, considering that we meet so seldom—"

"I saw that your Majesty was engaged with my sister queens," she interrupted, in a rich, low voice, "and with some other ladies in the gallery there, whose faces I seem to remember, but who I think were *not* queens. Unless, indeed, you married them after I was drawn away."

"One must talk to one's relations," replied the Pharaoh.

"Quite so. But, you see, I have no relations—at least, none whom I know well. My parents, you will remember, died when I was young, leaving me Egypt's heiress, and they are still vexed at the marriage which I made on the advice of my counselors. But, is it not annoying? I have lost one of my rings, that which had the god Bes on it. Some dweller on the earth must be wearing it today, and that is why I cannot get it back from him."

"Him! Why 'him'? Hush, the business is about to begin."

"What business, my lord?"

"Oh, the question of the violation of our tombs, I believe."

"Indeed! That is a large subject, and not a very profitable one, I should say. Tell me, who is that?" And she pointed to a lady who had stepped forward, a very splendid person, magnificently arrayed.

"Cleopatra the Greek," he answered, "the last of Egypt's Sovereigns, one of the Ptolemys. You can always know her by that Roman who walks about after her."

"Which?" asked Ma-Mee. "I see several—also other men. She was the wretch who rolled Egypt in the dirt and betrayed her. Oh, if it were not for the law of peace by which we must abide when we meet thus!"

"You mean that she would be torn to shreds, Ma-Mee, and her very soul scattered like the limbs of Osiris? Well, if it were not for that law of peace, so perhaps would many of us, for never have I heard a single king among these hundreds speak altogether well of those who went before or followed after him."

"Especially of those who went before if they happen to have hammered out their cartouches and usurped their monuments," said the queen, dryly, and looking him in the eyes.

At this home thrust the Pharaoh seemed to wince. Making no answer, he pointed to the royal woman who had mounted the steps at the end of the hall.

Queen Cleopatra lifted her hand and stood thus for a while. Very splendid she was, and Smith, on his hands and knees behind the boarding of the boat, thanked his stars that alone among modern men it had been his lot to look upon her rich and living loveliness. There she shone, she who had changed the fortunes of the world, she who, whatever she did amiss, at least had known how to die.

Silence fell upon that glittering galaxy of kings and queens and upon all the hundreds of their offspring, their women, and their great officers who crowded the double tier of galleries around the hall.

"Royalties of Egypt," she began, in a sweet, clear voice which penetrated to the farthest recesses of the place, "I, Cleopatra, the sixth of that name and the last monarch who ruled over the Upper and the Lower Lands before Egypt became a home of slaves, have a word to say to your Majesties, who, in your mortal days, all of you more worthily filled the throne on which once I sat. I do not speak of Egypt and its fate, or of our sins—whereof mine were not the least—that brought her to the dust. Those sins I and others expiate elsewhere, and of them, from age to age, we hear enough. But on this one night of the year, that of the feast of him whom we call Osiris, but whom other nations have known and know by different names, it is given to us once more to be mortal for an hour, and, though we be but shadows, to renew the loves and hates of our long-perished flesh. Here for an hour we strut in our forgotten pomp; the crowns that were ours still

adorn our brows, and once more we seem to listen to our people's praise. Our hopes are the hopes of mortal life, our foes are the foes we feared, our gods grow real again, and our lovers whisper in our ears. Moreover, this joy is given to us—to see each other as we are, to know as the gods know, and therefore to forgive, even where we despise and hate. Now I have done, and I, the youngest of the rulers of ancient Egypt, call upon him who was the first of her kings to take my place."

She bowed, and the audience bowed back to her. Then she descended the steps and was lost in the throng. Where she had been appeared an old man, simply clad, long-bearded, wise-faced, and wearing on his gray hair no crown save a plain band of gold, from the center of which rose the snake-headed *uræus* crest.

"Your Majesties who came after me," said the old man, "I am Menes, the first of the accepted Pharaohs of Egypt, although many of those who went before me were more truly kings than I. Yet as the first who joined the Upper and the Lower Lands, and took the royal style and titles, and ruled as well as I could rule, it is given to me to talk with you for a while this night whereon our spirits are permitted to gather from the uttermost parts of the uttermost worlds and see each other face to face. First, in darkness and in secret, let us speak of the mystery of the gods and of its meanings. Next, in darkness and in secret, let us speak of the mystery of our lives, of whence they come, of where they tarry by the road, and whither they go at last. And afterward, let us speak of other matters face to face in light and openness, as we were wont to do when we were men. Then hence to Thebes, there to celebrate our yearly festival. Is such your will?"

"Such is our will," they answered.

It seemed to Smith that dense darkness fell upon the place, and with it a silence that was awful. For a time that he could not reckon, that might have been years or might have been moments, he sat there in the utter darkness and the utter silence.

At length the light came again, first as a blue spark, then in upward pouring rays, and lastly pervading all. There stood Menes on the steps, and there in front of him was gathered the same royal throng.

"The mysteries are finished," said the old king. "Now, if any

have aught to say, let it be said openly."

A young man dressed in the robes and ornaments of an early dynasty came forward and stood upon the steps between the Pharaoh Menes and all those who had reigned after him. His face seemed familiar to Smith, as was the side lock that hung down

behind his right ear in token of his youth. Where had he seen him? Ah, he remembered. Only a few hours ago lying in one of the cases of the Museum, together with the bones of the Pharaoh Unas.

"Your Majesties," he began, "I am the King Metesuphis. The matter that I wish to lay before you is that of the violation of our sepulchers by those men who now live upon the earth. The mortal bodies of many who are gathered here tonight lie in this place to be stared at and mocked by the curious. I myself am one of them, jawless, broken, hideous to behold. Yonder, day by day, must my Ka sit watching my desecrated flesh, torn from the pyramid that, with cost and labor, I raised up to be an eternal house wherein I might hide till the hour of resurrection. Others of us lie in far lands. Thus, as he can tell you, my predecessor, Man-kau-ra, he who built the third of the great pyramids, the Pyramid of Her, sleeps, or rather wakes in a dark city, called London, across the seas, a place of murk where no sun shines. Others have been burnt with fire, others are scattered in small dust. The ornaments that were ours are stole away and sold to the greedy; our sacred writings and our symbols are their jest. Soon there will not be one holy grave in Egypt that remains undefiled."

"That is so," said a voice from the company. "But four months gone the deep, deep pit was opened that I had dug in the shadow of the Pyramid of Cephren, who begat me in the world. There in my chamber I slept alone, two handfuls of white bones, since when I died they did not preserve the body with wrappings and with spices. Now I see those bones of mine, beside which my Double has watched for these five thousand years, hid in the blackness of a great ship and tossing on a sea that is strewn with ice."

"It is so," echoed a hundred other voices.

"Then," went on the young king, turning to Menes, "I ask of your Majesty whether there is no means whereby we may be avenged on those who do us this foul wrong."

"Let him who has wisdom speak," said the old Pharaoh.

A man of middle age, short in stature and of a thoughtful brow, who held in his hand a wand and wore the feathers and insignia of the heir to the throne of Egypt and of a high priest of Amen, moved to the steps. Smith knew him at once from his statues. He was Khaemuas, son of Rameses the Great, the mightiest magician that ever was in Egypt, who of his own will withdrew himself from earth before the time came that he should sit upon the throne.

"I have wisdom, your Majesties, and I will answer," he said. "The time draws on when, in the land of Death which is Life, the land that we call Amenti, it will be given to us to lay our wrongs as to this matter before Those who judge, knowing that they will be avenged. On this night of the year also, when we resume the shapes we were, we have certain powers of vengeance, or rather of executing justice. But our time is short, and there is much to say and do before the sun god Ra arises and we depart each to his place. Therefore it seems best that we should leave these wicked ones in their wickedness till we meet them face to face beyond the world."

Smith, who had been following the words of Khaemuas with the closest attention and considerable anxiety, breathed again, thanking heaven that the engagements of these departed monarchs were so numerous and pressing. Still, as a matter of precaution, he drew the cigar box which contained Ma-Mee's hand from his pocket, and pushed it as far away from him as he could. It was a most unlucky act. Perhaps the cigar box grated on the floor, or perhaps the fact of his touching the relic put him into psychic communication with all these spirits. At any rate, he became aware that the eyes of that dreadful magician were fixed upon him, and that a bone had a better chance of escaping the search of a Röntgen ray than he of hiding himself from their baleful glare.

"As it happens, however," went on Khaemuas, in a cold voice, "I now perceive that there is hidden in this place, and spying on us, one of the worst of these vile thieves. I say to your Majesties that I see him crouched beneath your funeral barge, and that he has with him at this moment the hand of one of your Majesties, stolen by him from her tomb at Thebes."

Now every queen in the company became visibly agitated (Smith, who was watching Ma-Mee, saw her hold up her hands and look at them), while all the Pharaohs pointed with their fingers and exclaimed together, in a voice that rolled round the hall like thunder:

"Let him be brought forth to judgment!"

Khaemuas raised his wand and, holding it toward the boat where Smith was hidden, said, "Draw near, Vile One, bringing with thee that thou hast stolen."

Smith tried hard to remain where he was. He sat himself down and set his heels against the floor. As the reader knows, he was always shy and retiring by disposition, and never had these weaknesses oppressed him more than they did just then. When a child his favorite nightmare had been that the foreman of a jury was in the act of proclaiming him guilty of some dreadful but unstated crime. Now he understood what that nightmare foreshadowed. He was about to be convicted in a court of which all the kings and queens of Egypt were the jury, Menes was Chief Justice, and the magician Khaemuas played the role of Attorney General.

In vain did he sit down and hold fast. Some power took possession of him which forced him first to stretch out his arm and pick up the cigar box containing the hand of Ma-Mee, and next drew him from the friendly shelter of the deal boards that were about the boat.

Now he was on his feet and walking down the flight of steps opposite to those on which Memes stood far away. Now he was among all that throng of ghosts, which parted to let him pass, looking at him as he went with cold and wondering eyes. They were very majestic ghosts; the ages that had gone by since they laid down their scepters had taken nothing from their royal dignity. Moreover, save one, none of them seemed to have any pity for his plight. She was a little princess who stood by her mother, that same little princess whose mummy he had seen and pitied in the Director's room with a lotus flower thrust beneath her bandages. As he passed Smith heard her say:

"This Vile One is frightened. Be brave, Vile One!"

Smith understood, and pride came to his aid. He, a gentleman of the modern world, would not show the white feather before a crowd of ancient Egyptian ghosts. Turning to the child, he smiled at her, then drew himself to his full height and walked on quietly. Here it may be stated that Smith was a tall man, still comparatively young, and very good-looking, straight and spare in frame, with dark, pleasant eyes and a little black beard.

"At least he is a well-favored thief," said one of the queens to another.

"Yes," answered she who had been addressed. "I wonder that a man with such a noble air should find pleasure in disturbing graves and stealing the offerings of the dead," words that gave Smith much cause for thought. He had never considered the matter in this light.

Now he came to the place where Ma-Mee stood, the black-browed Pharaoh who had been her husband at her side. On his left hand which held the cigar box was the gold Bes ring, and that box he felt constrained to carry pressed against him just over his heart.

As he went by he turned his head, and his eyes met those of Ma-Mee. She started violently. Then she saw the ring upon his hand and again started still more violently.

"What ails your Majesty?" asked the Pharaoh.

"Oh, naught," she answered. "Yet does this earth dweller remind you of anyone?"

"Yes, he does," answered the Pharaoh. "He reminds me very

much of that accursed sculptor about whom we had words."

"Do you mean a certain Horu, the Court artist; he who worked the image that was buried with me, and whom you sent to carve your statues in the deserts of Kush, until he died of fevers—or was it poison?"

"Aye, Horu and no other, may Set take and keep him!"

growled the Pharaoh.

Then Smith passed on and heard no more. Now he stood before the venerable Menes. Some instinct caused him to bow to this Pharaoh, who bowed back to him. Then he turned and bowed to the royal company, and they also bowed back to him,

coldly, but very gravely and courteously.

"Dweller on the world where once we had our place, and therefore brother of us, the dead," began Menes, "this divine priest and magician"—and he pointed to Khaemuas—"declares that you are one of those who foully violate our sepulchers and desecrate our ashes. He declares, moreover, that at this very moment you have with you a portion of the mortal flesh of a certain Majesty whose spirit is present here. Say, now, are these things true?"

To his astonishment Smith found that he had not the slightest

difficulty in answering in the same sweet tongue.

"O King, they are true, and not true. Hear me, rulers of Egypt. It is true that I have searched in your graves, because my heart has been drawn toward you, and I would learn all that I could concerning you, for it comes to me *now* that once I was one of you—no king, indeed, yet perchance of the blood of kings. Also—for I would hide nothing even if I could—I searched for one tomb above all others."

"Why, O man?" asked the Judge.

"Because a face drew me, a lovely face that was cut in stone."
Now all that great audience turned their eyes toward him and listened as though his words moved them.

"Did you find that holy tomb?" asked Menes. "If so, what did

you find therein?"

"Aye, Pharaoh, and in it I found these," and he took from the box the withered hand, from his pocket the broken bronze, and from his finger the ring.

"Also I found other things which I delivered to the keeper of this place, articles of jewelery that I seem to see tonight upon one who is present here among you." "Is the face of this figure the face you sought?" asked the Judge.

"It is the lovely face," he answered.

Menes took the effigy in his hand and read the cartouche that

was engraved beneath its breast.

"If there be here among us," he said, presently, "one who long after my day ruled as queen in Egypt, one who was named Ma-Mé, let her draw near."

Now from where she stood glided Ma-Mee and took her place opposite to Smith.

"Say, O Queen," asked Menes, "do you know aught of this

matter?"

"I know that hand; it was my own hand," she answered. "I know that ring; it was my ring. I know that image in bronze; it was my image. Look on me and judge for yourselves whether this be so. A certain sculptor fashioned it, the son of a king's son, who was named Horu, the first of sculptors and the head artist of my Court. There, clad in strange garments, he stands before you. Horu, or the Double of Horu, he who cut the image when I ruled in Egypt is he who found the image and the man who stands before you, or, mayhap, his Double cast in the same mould."

The Pharaoh Menes turned to the magician Khaemuas and said,

"Are these things so, O Seer?"

"They are so," answered Khaemuas. "This dweller on the earth is he who, long ago, was the sculptor Horu. But what shall that avail? He, once more a living man, is a violator of the hallowed dead. I say, therefore, that judgment should be executed on his flesh, so that when the light comes here tomorrow he himself will

again be gathered to the dead."

Menes bent his head upon his breast and pondered. Smith said nothing. To him the whole play was so curious that he had no wish to interfere with its development. If these ghosts wished to make him of their number, let them do so. He had no ties on earth, and now when he knew full surely that there was a life beyond this of earth he was quite prepared to explore its mysteries. So he folded his arms upon his breast and awaited the sentence.

But Ma-Mee did not wait. She raised her hand so swiftly that the bracelets jingled on her wrists, and spoke out with boldness.

"Royal Khaemuas, prince and magician," she said, "hearken to one who, like you, was Egypt's heir centuries before you were born, one also who ruled over the Two Lands, and not so ill—which, Prince, never was your lot. Answer me! Is all wisdom

centered in your breast? Answer me! Do you alone know the mysteries of Life and Death? Answer me! Did your god Amen teach you that vengeance went before mercy? Answer me! Did he teach you that men should be judged unheard? That they should be hurried by violence to Osiris ere their time, and thereby separated from the dead ones whom they loved and forced to return to live again upon this evil Earth?

"Listen: when the last moon was near her full my spirit sat in my tomb in the burying place of queens. My spirit saw this man enter into my tomb, and what he did there. With bowed head he looked upon my bones that a thief of the priesthood of Amen had robbed and burnt within twenty years of their burial, in which he himself had taken part. And what did this man with those bones, he who was once Horu? I tell you that he hid them away there in the tomb where he thought they could not be found again. Who, then, was the thief and the violator? He who robbed and burnt my bones, or he who buried them with reverence? Again, he found the jewels that the priest of your brotherhood had dropped in his flight, when the smoke of the burning flesh and spices overpowered him, and with them the hand which that wicked one had broken off from the body of my Majesty. What did this man then? He took the jewels. Would you have had him leave them to be stolen by some peasant? And the hand? I tell you that he kissed that poor dead hand which once had been part of the body of my Majesty, and that now he treasures it as a holy relic. My spirit saw him do these things and made report thereof to me. I ask you, therefore, Prince, I ask you all, Royalties of Egypt, whether for such deeds this man should die?"

Now Khaemuas, the advocate of vengeance, shrugged his shoulders and smiled meaningly, but the congregation of kings

and queens thundered an answer, and it was:

"No!"

Ma-Mee looked to Menes to give judgment. Before he could speak the dark-browed Pharaoh who had named her wife strode forward and addressed them.

"Her Majesty, Heiress of Egypt, Royal Wife, Lady of the Two Lands, has spoken," he cried. "Now let me speak who was the husband of her Majesty. Whether this man was once Horu the sculptor I know not. If so he was also an evil doer who, by my decree, died in banishment in the land of Kush. Whatever be the truth as to that matter, he admits that he violated the tomb of her Majesty and stole what the old thieves had left. Her Majesty says also—and he does not deny it—that he dared to kiss her hand, and for a man to kiss the hand of a wedded Queen of Egypt the

punishment is death. I claim that this man should die to the World before his time, that in a day to come again he may live and suffer in the World. Judge, O Menes."

Menes lifted his head and spoke, saying:

"Repeat to me the law, O Pharaoh, under which a living man must die for the kissing of a dead hand. In my day and in that of those who went before me there was no such law in Egypt. If a living man, who was not her husband, or of her kin, kissed the living hand of a wedded Queen of Egypt, save in ceremony, then perchance he might be called upon to die. Perchance for such a reason a certain Horu once was called upon to die. But in the grave there is no marriage, and therefore even if he had found her alive within the tomb and kissed her hand, or even her lips, why should he die for the crime of love?

"Hear me, all; this is my judgment in the matter. Let the soul of that priest who first violated the tomb of the royal Ma-Mee be hunted down and given to the jaws of the Destroyer, that he may know the last depths of Death, if so the gods declare. But let this man go from among us unharmed, since what he did he did in reverent ignorance and because Hathor, Goddess of Love, guided him from of old. Love rules this world wherein we meet tonight, with all the worlds whence we have gathered or whither we still must go. Who can defy its power? Who can refuse its rites? Now hence to Thebes!"

There was a rushing sound as of the thousand wings, and all were gone.

No, not all, since Smith yet stood before the draped colossi and the empty steps, and beside him, glorious, unearthly, gleamed the vision of Ma-Mee.

"I, too, must away," she whispered. "Yet ere I go a word with you who once were a sculptor in Egypt. You loved me then, and that love cost you your life, you who once dared to kiss this hand of mine that again you kissed in yonder tomb. For I was Pharaoh's wife in name only; understand me well, in name only, since that title of Royal Mother, which they gave me, is but a graven lie. Horu, I never was a wife, and when you died, swiftly I followed you to the grave. Oh, you forget, but I remember! I remember many things. You think that the priestly thief broke this figure of me which you found in the sand outside my tomb. Not so. I broke it, because, daring greatly, you had written thereon, 'Beloved,' not 'of Horus the God,' as you should have done, but of 'HORU the Man.' So when I came to be buried, Pharaoh, knowing all, took the image from my wrappings and hurled it away. I

remember, too, the casting of that image, and how you threw a gold chain I had given you into the crucible with the bronze, saying that gold alone was fit to fashion me. And this signet that I bear—it was you who cut it. Take it, take it, Horu, and in its place give me back that which is on your hand, the Bes ring that I also wore. Take it and wear it ever till you die again, and let it go to the grave with you as once it went to the grave with me.

"Now hearken. When Ra the great sun arises again and you awake you will think that you have dreamed a dream. You will think that in this dream you saw and spoke with a lady of Egypt who died more than three thousand years ago, but whose beauty, carved in stone and bronze, has charmed your heart today. So let it be, yet know, O man, who once was named Horu, that such dreams are ofttimes a shadow of the truth. Know that this Glory which shines before you is mine indeed in the land that is both far and near, the land wherein I dwell eternally, and that what is mine has been, is, and shall be yours forever. Gods may change their kingdoms and their names; men may live and die, and live again once more to die; empires may fall and those who ruled them be turned to forgotten dust. Yet true love endures immortal as the souls in which it was conceived, and from it for you and me, the night of woe and separation done, at the daybreak which draws on, there shall be born the splendor and the peace of union. Till that hour foredoomed seek me no more, though I be ever near you, as I have ever been. Till that most blessed hour, Horu, farewell."

She bent toward him; her sweet lips touched his brow; the perfume from her breath and hair beat upon him; the light of her wondrous eyes searched out his very soul, reading the answer that was written there.

He stretched out his arms to clasp her, and lo! she was gone.

It was a very cold and a very stiff Smith who awoke on the following morning, to find himself exactly where he had lain down—namely, on a cement floor beneath the keel of a funeral boat in the central hall of the Cairo Museum. He crept from his shelter shivering, and looked at this hall, to find it quite as empty as it had been on the previous evening. Not a sign or a token was there of Pharaoh Menes and all those kings and queens of whom he had dreamed so vividly.

Reflecting on the strange phantasies that weariness and excited nerves can summon to the mind in sleep, Smith made his way to the great doors and waited in the shadow, praying earnestly that, although it was the Mohammedan Sabbath, someone might visit the Museum to see that all was well.

As a matter of fact, someone did, and before he had been there a minute—a watchman going about his business. He unlocked the place carelessly, looking over his shoulder at a kite fighting with two nesting crows. In an instant Smith, who was not minded to stop and answer questions, had slipped past him and was gliding down the portico, from monument to monument, like a snake between boulders, still keeping in the shadow as he headed for the gates.

The attendant caught sight of him and uttered a yell of fear; then, since it is not good to look upon an afreet, appearing from whence no mortal man could be, he turned his head away. When he looked again Smith was through those gates and had mingled with the crowd in the street beyond.

The sunshine was very pleasant to one who was conscious of having contracted a chill of the worst Egyptian order from long contact with a damp stone floor. Smith walked on through it toward his hotel—it was Shepheard's, and more than a mile away—making up a story as he went to tell the hall porter of how he had gone to dine at Mena House by the Pyramids, missed the last tram, and stopped the night there.

Whilst he was thus engaged his left hand struck somewhat sharply against the corner of the cigar box in his pocket, that which contained the relic of the Queen Ma-Mee. The pain caused him to glance at his fingers to see if they were injured, and to perceive on one of them the ring he wore. Surely, surely it was not the same that the Director-General had given him! *That* ring was engraved with the image of the god Bes. On *this* was cut the cartouche of her Majesty Ma-Mee! And he had dreamed—oh, he had dreamed—!

To this day Smith is wondering whether, in the hurry of the moment, he made a mistake as to which of those rings the Director-General had given him as part of his share of the spoil of the royal tomb he discovered in the Valley of Queens. Afterward Smith wrote to ask, but the Director-General could only remember that he gave him one of the two rings, and assured him that that inscribed "Bes Ank, Ank Bes," was with Ma-Mee's other jewels in the Gold Room of the Museum.

Also Smith is wondering whether any other bronze figure of an old Egyptian royalty shows so high a percentage of gold as, on analysis, the broken image of Ma-Mee was proved to do. For had she not seemed to tell him a tale of the melting of a golden chain when that effigy was cast?

Was it all only a dream, or was it something more, by day and

by night he asks of Nothingness?

But, be she near or far, no answer comes from the Queen Ma-Mee, whose proud titles were: "Her Majesty the Good God, the Justified Dweller in Osiris; Daughter of Amen, Royal Heiress, Royal Sister, Royal Wife, Royal Mother; Lady of the Two Lands; Wearer of the Double Crown, of the White Crown, of the Red Crown; Sweet Flower of Love, Beautiful Eternally."

So, like the rest of us, Smith must wait to learn the truth concerning many things, and more particularly as to which of those two circles of ancient gold the Director-General gave him

yonder at Cairo.

It seems but a little matter, yet it is more than all the worlds to him!

To the astonishment of his colleagues in antiquarian research, Smith has never returned to Egypt. He explains to them that his health is quite restored, and that he no longer needs this annual change to a more temperate clime.

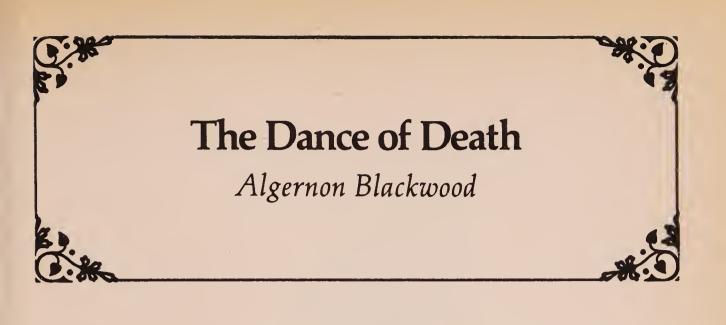
Now, which of the two royal rings did the Director-General return to Smith on the mummied hand of her late Majesty Ma-Mee?

Algernon Blackwood, English mystic and author of supernatural fiction par excellence, was born in Kent, England, the son of devoutly religious aristocratic parents. His education consisted of both private tutorial instruction and formal programs of study at Wellington College, Edinburgh University, and a Moravian school in Germany. Emigrating to Canada at the age of twenty, Blackwood served short stints there as journalist, dairy farmer, and hotel proprietor, with little personal satisfaction and even less financial success. His capital depleted, he moved on to New York City, where he found a job as reporter for the Evening Sun. The position was neither glamorous nor well-paying, and it did not hold Blackwood for long. Hearing about a gold strike on the Rainy River, he hurriedly packed his bags and headed west to try his luck at prospecting. Unsuccessful in this adventurous endeavor, he returned to New York, where he took a job with The New York Times. Although he did well with the Times, Blackwood decided to leave when he was offered an even more attractive position as the private secretary of James Speyer, a wealthy banker. Blackwood enjoyed working for Speyer, but when the banker married, he left his secretarial post and returned to England. He was thirty years old.

Blackwood's career as writer began in a rather curious fashion. In 1905, when he was thirty-six, one of his friends discovered a small cache of stories he had hidden away in a cupboard; without consulting Blackwood, he sent them off to a publisher, and they were accepted. From that rather accidental professional debut until his death in London at the age of eighty-two, Blackwood published a steady stream of stories, novels, and children's books. Some of his best-known short story collections are The Empty House (1906), The Listener and Other Stories (1907), The Lost Valley and Other Stories (1910), Pan's Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories (1912), Incredible Adventures (1914), Tongues of Fire and Other Sketches (1924), The Dance of Death and Other Tales (1927), Strange Stories (1929), and Tales of the

Uncanny and Supernatural (1949). Perhaps his most popular collection, however, is John Silence (1908), which features the occult investigator of the same name. Although Blackwood concentrated primarily on the short story, he did write some fine novels, including The Human Chord (1910), The Wave (1916), and Dudley and Gilderoy (1929). Individual fantasy stories that have achieved classic status are "The Wendigo," "The Willows," and "The Listener."

Affectionately referred to as "The Ghost Man" by his many readers, Blackwood helped the ghost story become a respected literary form. Thus, it is only fitting that one of his well-wrought tales should grace the pages of this anthology. Many of Blackwood's Gothic fantasies focus upon humankind's remarkable psychic powers; "The Dance of Death," however, goes well beyond these psychic phenomena into the realm of pure fantasy. Issidy is not simply a figment of the protagonist's imagination. Her presence at the dance is real enough, even though Browne alone notices her. The others in attendance are simply not yet ready to see the mysterious "sylph in green." Blackwood's treatment of Browne's encounter with this gossamer belle of the ball is subtle, convincing, and unique. In most Gothic works, Browne's rendezvous would be treated as a horrific affair, but here it is described as a pleasant release from anxiety, depression, and frustration. Noteworthy, too, is the ingenious manner in which Blackwood transforms a contemporary London auditorium, with its shadowy recesses and its "foils and helmets hung round the walls," into something remarkably akin to a mysterious castle hall. All of these subtle descriptive touches create an atmosphere highly appropriate for this poignant tale of the supernatural.





Browne went to the dance feeling genuinely depressed, for the doctor had just warned him that his heart was weak and that he must be exceedingly careful in the matter of exertion.

"Dancing?" he asked, with that assumed lightness some natures affect in the face of a severe shock—the plucky instinct to con-

ceal pain.

"Well—in moderation, perhaps," hummed the doctor. "Not wildly!" he added, with a smile that betrayed something more

than mere professional sympathy.

At any other time Browne would probably have laughed, but the doctor's serious manner put a touch of ice on the springs of laughter. At the age of twenty-six one hardly realizes death; life is still endless; and it is only old people who have "hearts" and suchlike afflictions. So it was that the professional dictum came as a real shock; and with it too, as a sudden revelation, came that little widening of sympathy for others that is part of every deep experience as the years roll up and pass.

At first he thought of sending an excuse. He went about carefully, making the 'buses stop dead before he got out, and going very slowly up steps. Then gradually he grew more accustomed to the burden of his dread secret: the commonplace events of the day; the hated drudgery of the office, where he was an underpaid clerk; the contact with other men who bore similar afflictions with assumed indifference; the fault-finding of the manager, making him fearful of his position—all this helped to reduce the sense of first alarm, and, instead of sending an excuse, he went to the dance, as we have seen, feeling deeply depressed, and moving all the time as if he carried in his side a brittle glass globe that the least jarring might break into a thousand pieces.

The spontaneous jollity natural to a boy and girl dance served, however, to emphasize vividly the contrast of his own mood, and to make him very conscious again of his little hidden source of pain. But, though he would gladly have availed himself of a sympathetic ear among the many there whom he knew inti-

mately, he nevertheless exercised the restraint natural to his character, and avoided any reference to the matter that bulked so largely in his consciousness. Once or twice he was tempted, but a prevision of the probable conversation that would ensue stopped him always in time: "Oh, I am so sorry, Mr. Browne, and you mustn't dance too hard, you know," and then his careless laugh as he remarked that it didn't matter a bit, and his little joke as he whirled his partner off for another spin.

He knew, of course, that there was nothing very sensational about being told that one's heart was weak. Even the doctor had smiled a little; and he now recalled more than one acquaintance who had the same trouble and made light of it. Yet it sounded in Browne's life a note of profound and sinister gloom. It snatched beyond his reach at one fell swoop all that he most loved and enjoyed, destroying a thousand dreams, and painting the future a dull drab color without hope. He was an idealist at heart, hating the sordid routine of the life he led as a business underling. His dreams were of the open air, of mountains, forests, and great plains, of the sea, and of the lonely places of the world. Wind and rain spoke intimately to his soul, and the storms of heaven, as he heard them raging at night round his high room in Bloomsbury, stirred savage yearnings that haunted him for days afterward with the voices of the desert. Sometimes during the lunch hour, when he escaped temporarily from the artificial light and close air of his high office stool, to see the white clouds sailing by overhead, and to hear the wind singing in the wires, it set such a fever in his blood that for the remainder of the afternoon he found it impossible to concentrate on his work, and thus exasperated the loud-voiced manager almost to madness.

Having no expectations, and absolutely no practical business ability, he was fortunate, however, in having a "place" at all, and the hard fact that promotion was unlikely made him all the more careful to keep his dreams in their place, to do his work as well as possible, and to save what little he could.

His holidays were the only points of light in an otherwise dreary existence. And one day, when he should have saved enough, he looked forward vaguely to a life close to Nature, perhaps a shepherd on a hundred hills, a dweller in the woods, within sound of his beloved trees and waters, where the smell of the earth and campfire would be ever in his nostrils, and the running stream always ready to bear his boat swiftly away into happiness.

And now the knowledge that he had a weak heart came to spoil everything. It shook his dream to the very foundations. It de-

pressed him utterly. Any moment the blow might fall. It might catch him in the water, swimming, or halfway up the mountain, or midway in one of his lonely tramps, just when his enjoyment depended most upon his being reckless and forgetful of bodily limitations—that freedom of the spirit in the wilderness he so loved. He might even be forced to spend his holiday, to say nothing of the dream of the far future, in some farmhouse "quietly," instead of gloriously in the untrodden wilds. The thought made him angry with pain. All day he was haunted and dismayed, and all day he heard the wind whispering among branches and the water lapping somewhere against sandy banks in the sun.

The dance was a small subscription affair, hastily arranged and happily informal. It took place in a large hall that was used in the daytime as a gymnasium, but the floor was good and the music more than good. Foils and helmets hung round the walls, and high up under the brown rafters were ropes, rings, and trapezes coiled away out of reach, their unsightliness further concealed by an array of brightly colored flags. Only the light was not of the best, for the hall was very long, and the gallery at the far end loomed in a sort of twilight that was further deepened by the shadows of the flags overhead. But its benches afforded excellent sitting-out places, where strong light was not always an essential

to happiness, and no one dreamed of finding fault.

At first he danced cautiously, but by degrees the spirit of the time and place relieved his depression and helped him to forget. He had probably exaggerated the importance of his malady. Lots of other fellows, even as young as he was, had weak hearts and thought nothing of it. All the time, however, there was an undercurrent of sadness and disappointment not to be denied. Something had gone out of life. A note of darkness had crept in. He found his partners dull, and they no doubt found him still duller.

Yet this dance, with nothing apparently to distinguish it from a hundred others, stood out in all his experience with an indelible red mark against it. It is a common trick of Nature—and a profoundly significant one—that, just when despair is deepest, she waves a wand before the weary eyes and does her best to waken an impossible hope. Her idea, presumably, being to keep her victim going actively to the very end of the chapter, lest through indifference he should lose something of the lesson she wishes to teach.

Thus it was that, midway in the dance, Browne's listless glance fell upon a certain girl whose appearance instantly galvanized him into a state of keenest possible desire. A flash of white light entered his heart and set him all on fire to know her. She at-

tracted him tremendously. She was dressed in pale green, and always danced with the same man-a man about his own height and coloring, whose face, however, he never could properly see. They sat out together much of the time—always in the gallery where the shadows were deepest. The girl's face he saw clearly, and there was something about her that simply lifted him bodily out of himself and sent strange thrills of delight coursing over him like shocks of electricity. Several times their eyes met, and when this happened he could not tear his glance away. She fascinated him, and all the forces in his being merged into a single desire to be with her, to dance with her, speak with her, and to know her name. Especially he wondered who the man was she so favored; he reminded him so oddly of himself. No one knows precisely what he himself looks like, but this tall, dark figure, whose face he never could contrive to see, started the strange thought in him that it was his own double.

In vain he sought to compass an introduction to this girl. No one seemed to know her. Her dress, her hair, and a certain wondrous slim grace made him think of a young tree waving in the wind; of ivy leaves; of something that belonged to the life of the woods rather than to ordinary humanity. She possessed him, filling his thoughts with wild woodland dreams. Once, too, he was certain when their eyes met that she smiled at him, and the call was so well-nigh irresistible that he almost dropped his partner's arm to run after her.

But it seemed impossible to obtain an introduction from anyone.

"Do you know who that girl is over there?" he asked one of his partners while sitting out a square dance, half exhausted with his exertions. "The one up there in the gallery?"

"In pink?"

"No, the one in green, I mean."

"Oh, next the wall-flower lady in red!"

"In the gallery, not under it," he explained impatiently.

"I can't see up there. It's so dark," returned the girl after a careful survey through glasses. "I don't think I see anyone at all."

"It is rather dark," he remarked.

"Why? Do you know who she is?" she asked foolishly.

He did not like to insist. It seemed so rude to his partner. But this sort of thing happened once or twice. Evidently no one knew this girl in green, or else he described her so inaccurately that the people he asked looked at someone else instead.

"In that green sort of ivy-looking dress," he tried another.

"With the rose in her hair and the red nose? Or the one sitting out?"

After that he gave it up finally. His partners seemed to sniff a little when he asked. Evidently la désirée was not a popular maiden. Soon after, too, she disappeared and he lost sight of her. Yet the thought that she might have gone home made his heart sink into a sort of horrible blackness.

He lingered on much later than he intended in the hope of getting an introduction, but at last, when he had filled all his engagements, or nearly all, he made up his mind to slip out and go home. It was already late, and he had to be in the office—that hateful office—punctually at nine o'clock. He felt tired, awfully tired, more so than ever before at a dance. It was, of course, his weak heart. He still dawdled a little while, however, hoping for another glimpse of the sylph in green, hungering for a last look that he could carry home with him and perhaps mingle with his dreams. The mere thought of her filled him with pain and joy, and a sort of rarefied delight he had never known before. But he could not wait for ever, and it was already close upon two o'clock in the morning. His rooms were only a short distance down the street; he would light a cigarette and stroll home. No, he had forgotten for a moment; without a cigarette: the doctor had been very stern on that point.

He was in the act of turning his back on the whirl of dancing figures, when the flags at the far end of the room parted for an instant in the moving air, and his eye rested upon the gallery just

visible among the shadows.

A great pain ran swiftly through his heart as he looked.

There were only two figures seated there: the tall dark man, who was his double, and the ivy girl in green. She was looking straight at him down the length of the room, and even at that

distance he could see that she smiled.

He stopped short. The flags waved back again and hid the picture, but on the instant he made up his mind to act. There, among all this dreary crowd of dancing dolls, was someone he really wanted to know, to speak with, to touch—someone who drew him beyond all he had ever known, and made his soul cry aloud. The room was filled with automatic lay figures, but here was someone *alive*. He must know her. It was impossible to go home without speech, utterly impossible.

A fresh stab of pain, worse than the first, gave him momentary pause. He leant against the wall for an instant just under the clock, where the hands pointed to two, waiting for the swooning blackness to go. Then he passed on, disregarding it utterly. It

supplied him, in truth, with the extra little impetus he needed to set the will into vigorous action, for it reminded him forcibly of what *might* happen. His time might be short; he had known few enough of the good things of life; he would seize what he could. He had no introduction, but—to the devil with the conventions. The risk was nothing. To meet her eyes at close quarters, to hear her voice, to know something of the perfume of that hair and dress—what was the risk of a snub compared to that?

He slid down the side of the long room, dodging the dancers as best he could. The tall man, he noted, had left the gallery, but the girl sat on alone. He made his way quickly up the wooden steps, light as air, trembling with anticipation. His heart beat like a quick padded hammer, and the blood played a tambourine in his ears. It was odd he did not meet the tall man on the stairs, but doubtless there was another exit from the gallery that he had not observed. He topped the stairs and turned the corner. By Jove, she was still there, a few feet in front of him, sitting with her arms upon the railing, peering down upon the dancers below. His eyes swam for a moment, and something clutched at the very roots of his being.

But he did not hesitate. He went up quite close past the empty seats, meaning to ask naturally and simply if he might beg for the pleasure of a dance. Then, when he was within a few feet of her side, the girl suddenly turned and faced him, and the words died away on his lips. They seemed absolutely foolish and inadequate.

"Yes, I am ready," she said quietly, looking straight into his eyes, "but what a long time you were in coming. Was it such a

great effort to leave?"

The form of the question struck him as odd, but he was too happy to pause. He became transfigured with joy. The sound of her voice instantly drowned all the clatter of the ballroom, and seemed to him the only thing in the whole world. It did not break on the consonants like most human speech. It flowed smoothly; it was the sound of wind among branches, of water running over pebbles. It swept into him and caught him away, so that for a moment he saw his beloved woods and hills and seas. The stars were somewhere in it too, and the murmur of the plains.

By the gods! Here was a girl he could speak with in the words of silence; she stretched every string in his soul and then played on them. His spirit expanded with life and happiness. She would listen gladly to all that concerned him. To her he could talk openly about his poor broken heart, for she would sympathize. Indeed, it was all he could do to prevent himself running forward

at once with his arms outstretched to take her. There was a perfume of earth and woods about her.

"Oh, I am so awfully glad—" he began lamely, his eyes on her face. Then, remembering something of earthly manners, he added. "My name—er—is—"

Something unusual—something indescribable—in her gesture

stopped him. She had moved to give him space at her side.

"Your name!" she laughed, drawing her green skirts with a soft rustle like leaves along the bench to make room, "but you need no name now, you know!"

Oh, the wonder of it! She understood him. He sat down with a feeling that he had been flying in a free wind and was resting among the tops of trees. The room faded out temporarily.

"But my name, if you like to know, is Issidy," she said, still

smiling.

"Miss Issidy," he stammered, making another attempt at the

forms of worldly politeness.

"Not Miss Issidy," she laughed aloud merrily. It surely was the sound of wind in poplars. "Issidy is my first name; so if you call me anything, you must call me that."

The name was pure music in his ears, but though he blundered about in his memory to find his own, it had utterly vanished; for the life of him he could not recollect what his friends called him. He stared a moment, vaguely wondering, almost beside himself with delight. No other girls he had known—ye heavens above, there were no longer any other girls! He had never known any other girl than this one. Here was his universe, framed in a green dress, with a voice of sea and wind, eyes like the sun, and movements of bending grasses. All else was mere shadow and fantasy. For the first time in his existence he was alive, and knew that he was alive.

"I was sure you would come to me," she was saying. "You couldn't help yourself." Her eyes were always on his face.

"I was afraid at first—"

"But your thoughts," she interrupted softly, "your thoughts were up here with me all the time."

"You knew that!" he cried, delighted.

"I felt them," she replied simply. "They—you kept me company, for I have been alone here all the evening. I know no one else here—yet."

Her words amazed him. He was just going to ask who the tall dark man was, when he saw that she was rising to her feet and

that she wanted to dance.

"But my heart—" he stammered.

"It won't hurt your poor heart to dance with me, you know," she laughed. "You may trust me. I shall know how to take care of it."

Browne felt simply ecstatic; it was too wonderful to be true; it was impossible—this meeting in London, at an ordinary dull dance, in the twentieth century. He would wake up presently from a dream of silver and gold. Yet he felt even then that she was drawing his arm about her waist for the dance, and with that first magical touch he almost lost consciousness and passed with her into a state of pure spirit.

It puzzled him for a moment how they reached the floor so quickly and found themselves among the whirling couples. He had no recollection of coming down the stairs. But meanwhile he was dancing on wings, and the girl in green beside him seemed to fly too, and as he pressed her to his heart he found it impossible to think of anything else in the world but that—that and his astounding happiness.

And the music was within them, rather than without; indeed they seemed to make their own music out of their swift whirling movements, for it never ceased and he never grew tired. His heart had ceased to pain him. Other curious things happened, too, but he hardly noticed them; or, rather, they no longer seemed strange. In that crowded ballroom they never once touched other people. His partner required no steering. She made no sound. Then suddenly he realized that his own feet made no sound either. They skimmed the floor with noiseless feet like spirits dancing. No one else appeared to take the least notice of them. Most of the faces seemed, indeed, strange to him now, as though he had not seen them before, but once or twice he could have sworn that he passed couples who were dancing almost as happily and lightly as themselves, couples he had known in past years, couples who were dead.

Gradually the room emptied of its original comers, and others filled their places, silently, with airy graceful movements and happy faces, till the whole floor at length was covered with the soundless feet and whirling forms of those who had already left the world. And, as the artificial light faded away, there came in its place a soft white light that filled the room with beauty and made all the faces look radiant. And, once, as they skimmed past a mirror, he saw that the girl beside him was not there—that he seemed to be dancing alone, clasping no one; yet when he glanced down, there was her magical face at his shoulder, and he felt her little form pressing up against him.

Such dancing, too, he had never even dreamed about, for it was

like swinging with the treetops in the winds.

Then they danced farther out, ever swifter and swifter, past the shadows beneath the gallery, under the motionless hanging flags—and out into the night. The walls were behind them. They were off their feet and the wind was in their hair. They were rising, rising, rising toward the stars.

He felt the cool air of the open sky on his cheeks, and when he looked down, as they cleared the summit of the dark-lying hills, he saw that Issidy had melted away into himself and they had become one being. And he knew then that his heart would never pain him again on earth, or cause him to fear for any of his beloved dreams.

But the manager of the "hateful office" only knew two days later why Browne had not turned up to his desk, nor sent any word to explain his absence. He read it in the paper—how he had dropped down dead at a dance, suddenly stricken by heart disease. It happened just before two o'clock in the morning.

"Well," thought the manager, "He's no loss to us, anyhow. He had no real business instincts. Smith will do his work much better

-and for less money, too."



H. P. Lovecraft, American author of Gothic horror stories and science fiction, was born in Providence, Rhode Island. Frail and shy, but remarkably precocious, Lovecraft mastered the alphabet at the tender age of two and was able to read with ease at four. He took an early interest in the sciences and, in 1906, when he was only sixteen, he began contributing monthly articles on astronomy to *The Providence Tribune*. Because of poor health and a naturally reclusive nature, he rarely ventured far from his native Providence, living first with his mother and then his aunts. He did move to Brooklyn in 1924 shortly after his marriage to Sonia Greene, but two years later he was back in Providence, having tired of both Brooklyn and marriage.

Although he had written and published a few stories in pulp periodicals before 1923, his real writing debut occurred in that year with the publication of the short story "Dagon" in the October issue of Weird Tales. That magazine published the bulk of Lovecraft's eldritch tales. Some of his best-known works include "The Rats in the Walls" (1924), "The Outsider" (1926), "Pickman's Model" (1927), "The Colour Out of Space" (1927), "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928), "The Dunwich Horror" (1929), "The Whisperer in Darkness" (1931), and "The Haunter of the

Dark" (1936).

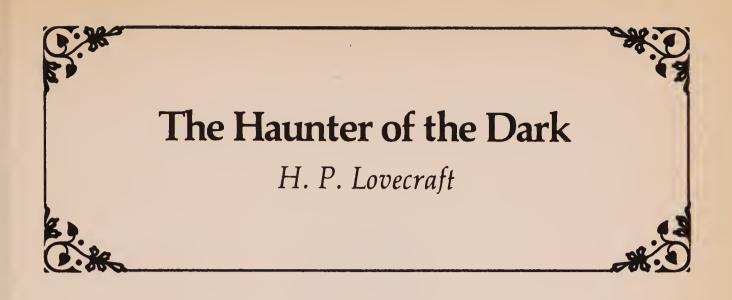
It is sad, but true, that most writers cannot earn a decent living through their trade. So it was with Lovecraft. Even though he had over fifty stories published during his lifetime and worked as a revisionist and ghost-writer as well, Lovecraft was almost always in dire financial straits. But poverty was not his only problem. He seemed constantly to suffer from poor health, was probably more at home in the past (he adored the eighteenth century) than in the present, and was terribly shy and withdrawn, preferring to communicate by letter (he wrote close to a hundred thousand) rather than in face-to-face conversation. Although Lovecraft probably never really found true happiness and contentment in the life he led, he did manage to influence the

lives of many others through his writings and voluminous correspondence. He died of cancer and Bright's disease at the age of forty-seven in his beloved Providence.

When Lovecraft died, he did leave behind a solid core of enthusiastic admirers, but in general his popularity had waned to such a degree that there was a very real danger that his fiction would gradually fade into obscurity. But August Derleth, a devoted follower of Lovecraft, was determined not to let this happen. Shortly after Lovecraft's death, Derleth and his close friend Donald Wandrei attempted to find a publisher for a collection of Lovecraft's stories, without success. Not to be defeated, however, Derleth and Wandrei published the collection themselves, calling their newly formed company Arkham House, in honor of the fictitious New England town Lovecraft had used so often in his tales. Since that first collection, The Outsider and Others (1939), Arkham House has published in hardback almost everything Lovecraft wrote, including his classic essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature." Although Lovecraft's talent would probably have been recognized sooner or later, we owe a great deal to August Derleth for keeping Lovecraft in print.

"The Haunter of the Dark" is unquestionably one of Love-craft's finest creative efforts. The narrative structure is nearly flawless, the characterization is solid, and the atmosphere is appropriately heavy with evil foreboding. Of all the stories included in this volume, none displays a better handling of Gothic paraphernalia: the crumbling church on the "spectral hump" of Federal Hill, the ancient books of black magic, the moldering skeleton, the haunter of the dark, itself—all combine to create a Gothic ambience of the first order. In sum, "The Haunter of the Dark" is not only one of Lovecraft's most horrific and suspenseful tales of terror, but one of his best stories involving the unique

Cthulhu Mythos.





(DEDICATED TO ROBERT BLOCH)

I have seen the dark universe yawning
Where the black planets roll without aim—
Where they roll in their horror unheeded,
Without knowledge or luster or name.

---NEMESIS

Cautious investigators will hesitate to challenge the common belief that Robert Blake was killed by lightning, or by some profound nervous shock derived from an electrical discharge. It is true that the window he faced was unbroken, but nature has shown herself capable of many freakish performances. The expression on his face may easily have arisen from some obscure muscular source unrelated to anything he saw, while the entries in his diary are clearly the result of a fantastic imagination aroused by certain local superstitions and by certain old matters he had uncovered. As for the anomalous conditions at the deserted church of Federal Hill—the shrewd analyst is not slow in attributing them to some charlatanry, conscious or unconscious, with at least some of which Blake was secretly connected.

For after all, the victim was a writer and painter wholly devoted to the field of myth, dream, terror, and superstition, and avid in his quest for scenes and effects of a bizarre, spectral sort. His earlier stay in the city—a visit to a strange old man as deeply given to occult and forbidden lore as he—had ended amidst death and flame, and it must have been some morbid instinct which drew him back from his home in Milwaukee. He may have known of the old stories despite his statements to the contrary in the diary, and his death may have nipped in the bud some stu-

pendous hoax destined to have a literary reflection.

Among those, however, who have examined and correlated all this evidence, there remain several who cling to less rational and commonplace theories. They are inclined to take much of Blake's diary at its face value, and point significantly to certain facts such as the undoubted genuineness of the old church record, the verified existence of the disliked and unorthodox Starry Wisdom sect prior to 1877, the recorded disappearance of an inquisitive re-

porter named Edwin M. Lillibridge in 1893, and, above all, the look of monstrous, transfiguring fear on the face of the young writer when he died. It was one of these believers who, moved to fanatical extremes, threw into the bay the curiously angled stone and its strangely adorned metal box found in the old church steeple—the black windowless steeple, and not the tower where Blake's diary said those things originally were. Though widely censured both officially and unofficially, this man—a reputable physician with a taste for odd folklore—averred that he had rid the earth of something too dangerous to rest upon it.

Between these two schools of opinion the reader must judge for himself. The papers have given the tangible details from a skeptical angle, leaving for others the drawing of the picture as Robert Blake saw it—or thought he saw it—or pretended to see it. Now, studying the diary closely, dispassionately, and at leisure, let us summarize the dark chain of events from the expressed

point of view of their chief actor.

Young Blake returned to Providence in the winter of 1934–5, taking the upper floor of a venerable dwelling in a grassy court off College Street—on the crest of the great eastward hill near the Brown University campus and behind the marble John Hay Library. It was a cozy and fascinating place, in a little garden oasis of villagelike antiquity where huge, friendly cats sunned themselves atop a convenient shed. The square Georgian house had a monitor roof, classic doorway with fan carving, small-paned windows, and all the other earmarks of early nineteenth-century workmanship. Inside were six-paneled doors, wide floor-boards, a curving colonial staircase, white Aram-period mantels, and a rear set of rooms three steps below the general level.

Blake's study, a large southwest chamber, overlooked the front garden on one side, while its west windows—before one of which he had his desk—faced off from the brow of the hill and commanded a splendid view of the lower town's outspread roofs and of the mystical sunsets that flamed behind them. On the far horizon were the open countryside's purple slopes. Against these, some two miles away, rose the spectral hump of Federal Hill, bristling with huddled roofs and steeples whose remote outlines wavered mysteriously, taking fantastic forms as the smoke of the city swirled up and enmeshed them. Blake had a curious sense that he was looking upon some unknown, ethereal world which might or might not vanish in dream if ever he tried to seek it out and enter it in person.

Having sent home for most of his books, Blake bought some antique furniture suitable to his quarters and settled down to write and paint—living alone, and attending to the simple house-work himself. His studio was in a north attic room, where the panes of the monitor roof furnished admirable lighting. During that first winter he produced five of his best-known short stories—The Burrower Beneath, The Stairs in the Crypt, Shaggai, In the Vale of Pnath, and The Feaster from the Stars—and painted seven canvases, studies of nameless, unhuman monsters, and profoundly alien, nonterrestrial landscapes.

At sunset he would often sit at his desk and gaze dreamily off at the outspread west—the dark towers of Memorial Hall just below, the Georgian courthouse belfry, the lofty pinnacles of the downtown section, and that shimmering, spire-crowned mound in the distance whose unknown streets and labyrinthine gables so potently provoked his fancy. From his few local acquaintances he learned that the far-off slope was a vast Italian quarter, though most of the houses were remnants of older Yankee and Irish days. Now and then he would train his field glasses on that spectral, unreachable world beyond the curling smoke, picking out individual roofs and chimneys and steeples, and speculating upon the bizarre and curious mysteries they might house. Even with optical aid Federal Hill seemed somehow alien, half-fabulous, and linked to the unreal, intangible marvels of Blake's own tales and pictures. The feeling would persist long after the hill had faded into the violet, lamp-starred twilight, and the courthouse floodlights and the red Industrial Trust beacon had blazed up to make the night grotesque.

Of all the distant objects on Federal Hill, a certain huge, dark church most fascinated Blake. It stood out with especial distinctness at certain hours of the day, and at sunset the great tower and tapering steeple loomed blackly against the flaming sky. It seemed to rest on especially high ground; for the grimy façade, and the obliquely seen north side with sloping roof and the tops of great pointed windows, rose boldly above the tangle of surrounding ridgepoles and chimney pots. Peculiarly grim and austere, it appeared to be built of stone, stained and weathered with the smoke and storms of a century and more. The style, so far as the glass could show, was that earliest experimental form of Gothic revival which preceded the stately Upjohn period and held over some of the outlines and proportions of the Georgian age. Perhaps it was reared around 1810 or 1815.

As months passed, Blake watched the far-off forbidding structure with an oddly mounting interest. Since the vast windows were never lighted, he knew that it must be vacant. The longer he watched, the more his imagination worked, till at length he

began to fancy curious things. He believed that a vague, singular aura of desolation hovered over the place, so that even the pigeons and swallows shunned its smoky eaves. Around other towers and belfries his glass would reveal great flocks of birds, but here they never rested. At least, that is what he thought and set down in his diary. He pointed the place out to several friends, but none of them had even been on Federal Hill or possessed the faintest notion of what the church was or had been.

In the spring a deep restlessness gripped Blake. He had begun his long-planned novel—based on a supposed survival of the witch cult in Maine—but was strangely unable to make progress with it. More and more he would sit at his westward window and gaze at the distant hill and the black, frowning steeple shunned by the birds. When the delicate leaves came out on the garden boughs the world was filled with a new beauty, but Blake's restlessness was merely increased. It was then that he first thought of crossing the city and climbing bodily up that fabulous slope into the smoke-wreathed world of dream.

Late in April, just before the eon-shadowed Walpurgis time, Blake made his first trip into the unknown. Plodding through the endless downtown streets and the bleak, decayed squares beyond, he came finally upon the ascending avenue of century-worn steps, sagging Doric porches, and blear-paned cupolas which he felt must lead up to the long-known, unreachable world beyond the mists. There were dingy blue-and-white street signs which meant nothing to him, and presently he noted the strange, dark faces of the drifting crowds, and the foreign signs over curious shops in brown, decade-weathered buildings. Nowhere could he find any of the objects he had seen from afar; so that once more he half fancied that the Federal Hill of that distant view was a dreamworld never to be trod by living human feet.

Now and then a battered church façade or crumbling spire came in sight, but never the blackened pile that he sought. When he asked a shopkeeper about a great stone church the man smiled and shook his head, though he spoke English freely. As Blake climbed higher, the region seemed stranger and stranger, with bewildering mazes of brooding brown alleys leading eternally off to the south. He crossed two or three broad avenues, and once thought he glimpsed a familiar tower. Again he asked a merchant about the massive church of stone, and this time he could have sworn that the plea of ignorance was feigned. The dark man's face had a look of fear which he tried to hide, and Blake saw him make a curious sign with his right hand.

Then suddenly a black spire stood out against the cloudy sky

on his left, above the tiers of brown roofs lining the tangled southerly alleys. Blake knew at once what it was, and plunged toward it through the squalid, unpaved lanes that climbed from the avenue. Twice he lost his way, but he somehow dared not ask any of the patriarchs or housewives who sat on their doorsteps, or any of the children who shouted and played in the mud of the shadowy lanes.

At last he saw the tower plain against the southwest, and a huge stone bulk rose darkly at the end of an alley. Presently he stood in a wind-swept open square, quaintly cobblestoned, with a high bank wall on the farther side. This was the end of his quest; for upon the wide, iron-railed, weed-grown plateau which the wall supported—a separate, lesser world raised fully six feet above the surrounding streets—there stood a grim, titan bulk whose identity, despite Blake's new perspective, was beyond dis-

pute.

The vacant church was in a state of great decrepitude. Some of the high stone buttresses had fallen, and several delicate finials lay half-lost among the brown, neglected weeds and grasses. The sooty Gothic windows were largely unbroken, though many of the stone mullions were missing. Blake wondered how the obscurely painted panes could have survived so well, in view of the known habits of small boys the world over. The massive doors were intact and tightly closed. Around the top of the bank wall, fully enclosing the grounds, was a rusty iron fence whose gate—at the head of a flight of steps from the square—was visibly padlocked. The path from the gate to the building was completely overgrown. Desolation and decay hung like a pall above the place, and in the birdless eaves and black, ivyless walls Blake felt a touch of the dimly sinister beyond his power to define.

There were very few people in the square, but Blake saw a policeman at the northerly end and approached him with questions about the church. He was a great wholesome Irishman, and it seemed odd that he would do little more than make the sign of the cross and mutter that people never spoke of that building. When Blake pressed him he said very hurriedly that the Italian priests warned everybody against it, vowing that a monstrous evil had once dwelt there and left its mark. He himself had heard dark whispers of it from his father, who recalled certain sounds

and rumors from his boyhood.

There had been a bad sect there in the old days—an outlaw sect that called up awful things from some unknown gulf of night. It had taken a good priest to exorcise what had come, though there did be those who said that merely the light could do

it. If Father O'Malley were alive there would be many the thing he could tell. But now there was nothing to do but let it alone. It hurt nobody now, and those that owned it were dead or far away. They had run away like rats after the threatening talk in '77, when people began to mind the way folks vanished now and then in the neighborhood. Some day the city would step in and take the property for lack of heirs, but little good would come of anybody's touching it. Better it be left alone for the years to topple, lest things be stirred that ought to rest for ever in their black abyss.

After the policeman had gone Blake stood staring at the sullen steepled pile. It excited him to find that the structure seemed as sinister to others as to him, and he wondered what grain of truth might lie behind the old tales the bluecoat had repeated. Probably they were mere legends evoked by the evil look of the place, but even so, they were like a strange coming to life of one of his own stories.

The afternoon sun came out from behind dispersing clouds, but seemed unable to light up the stained, sooty walls of the old temple that towered on its high plateau. It was odd that the green of spring had not touched the brown, withered growths in the raised, iron-fenced yard. Blake found himself edging nearer the raised area and examining the bank wall and rusted fence for possible avenues of ingress. There was a terrible lure about the blackened fane which was not to be resisted. The fence had no opening near the steps, but around on the north side were some missing bars. He could go up the steps and walk around on the narrow coping outside the fence till he came to the gap. If the people feared the place so wildly, he would encounter no interference.

He was on the embankment and almost inside the fence before anyone noticed him. Then, looking down, he saw the few people in the square edging away and making the same sign with their right hands that the shopkeeper in the avenue had made. Several windows were slammed down, and a fat woman darted into the street and pulled some small children inside a rickety, unpainted house. The gap in the fence was very easy to pass through, and before long Blake found himself wading amidst the rotting, tangled growths of the deserted yard. Here and there the worn stump of a headstone told him that there had once been burials in this field; but that, he saw, must have been very long ago. The sheer bulk of the church was oppressive now that he was close to it, but he conquered his mood and approached to try the three great doors in the façade. All were securely locked, so he began a

circuit of the Cyclopean building in quest of some minor and more penetrable opening. Even then he could not be sure that he wished to enter that haunt of desertion and shadow, yet the pull

of its strangeness dragged him on automatically.

A yawning and unprotected cellar window in the rear furnished the needed aperture. Peering in, Blake saw a subterrane gulf of cobwebs and dust faintly litten by the western sun's filtered rays. Debris, old barrels, and ruined boxes and furniture of numerous sorts met his eye, though over everything lay a shroud of dust which softened all sharp outlines. The rusted remains of a hot-air furnace showed that the building had been used and kept in shape as late as mid-Victorian times.

Acting almost without conscious initiative, Blake crawled through the window and let himself down to the dust-carpeted and debris-strewn concrete floor. The vaulted cellar was a vast one, without partitions; and in a corner far to the right, amid dense shadows, he saw a black archway evidently leading upstairs. He felt a peculiar sense of oppression at being actually within the great spectral building, but kept it in check as he cautiously scouted about—finding a still-intact barrel amid the dust, and rolling it over to the open window to provide for his exit. Then, bracing himself, he crossed the wide, cobwebfestooned space toward the arch. Half-choked with the omnipresent dust, and covered with ghostly gossamer fibers, he reached and began to climb the worn stone steps which rose into the darkness. He had no light, but groped carefully with his hands. After a sharp turn he felt a closed door ahead, and a little fumbling revealed its ancient latch. It opened inward, and beyond it he saw a dimly illumined corridor lined with worm-eaten paneling.

Once on the ground floor, Blake began exploring in a rapid fashion. All the inner doors were unlocked, so that he freely passed from room to room. The colossal nave was an almost eldritch place with its drifts and mountains of dust over box pews, altar, hourglass pulpit, and sounding board, and its titanic ropes of cobweb stretching among the pointed arches of the gallery and entwining the clustered Gothic columns. Over all this hushed desolation played a hideous leaden light as the declining afternoon sun sent its rays through the strange, half-blackened

panes of the great apsidal windows.

The paintings on those windows were so obscured by soot that Blake could scarcely decipher what they had represented, but from the little he could make out he did not like them. The designs were largely conventional, and his knowledge of obscure symbolism told him much concerning some of the ancient patterns. The few saints depicted bore expressions distinctly open to criticism, while one of the windows seemed to show merely a dark space with spirals of curious luminosity scattered about in it. Turning away from the windows, Blake noticed that the cobwebbed cross above the altar was not of the ordinary kind, but resembled the primordial ankh or crux ansata of shadowy Egypt.

In a rear vestry room beside the apse Blake found a rotting desk and ceiling-high shelves of mildewed, disintegrating books. Here for the first time he received a positive shock of objective horror, for the titles of those books told him much. They were the black, forbidden things which most sane people have never even heard of, or have heard of only in furtive, timorous whispers: the banned and dreaded repositories of equivocal secrets and immemorial formulae which have trickled down the stream of time from the days of man's youth, and the dim, fabulous days before man was. He had himself read many of them-a Latin version of the abhorred Necronomicon, the sinister Liber Ivonis, the infamous Cultes des Goules of Comte d'Erlette, the Unaussprechlichen Kulten of von Junzt, and old Ludvig Prinn's hellish De Vermis Mysteriis. But there were others he had known merely by reputation or not at all—the Pnakotic Manuscripts, the Book of Dzyan, and a crumbling volume in wholly unidentifiable characters yet with certain symbols and diagrams shudderingly recognizable to the occult student. Clearly, the lingering local rumors had not lied. This place had once been the seat of an evil older than mankind and wider than the known universe.

In the ruined desk was a small leatherbound record book filled with entries in some odd cryptographic medium. The manuscript writing consisted of the common traditional symbols used today in astronomy and anciently in alchemy, astrology, and other dubious arts—the devices of the sun, moon, planets, aspects, and zodiacal signs—here massed in solid pages of text, with divisions and paragraphings suggesting that each symbol answered to some alphabetical letter.

In the hope of later solving the cryptogram, Blake bore off this volume in his coat pocket. Many of the great tomes on the shelves fascinated him unutterably, and he felt tempted to borrow them at some later time. He wondered how they could have remained undisturbed so long. Was he the first to conquer the clutching, pervasive fear which had for nearly sixty years protected this deserted place from visitors?

Having now thoroughly explored the ground floor, Blake plowed again through the dust of the spectral nave to the front

vestibule, where he had seen a door and staircase presumably leading up to the blackened tower and steeple—objects so long familiar to him at a distance. The ascent was a choking experience, for dust lay thick, while the spiders had done their worst in this constricted place. The staircase was a spiral with high, narrow wooden treads, and now and then Blake passed a clouded window looking dizzily out over the city. Though he had seen no ropes below, he expected to find a bell or peal of bells in the tower whose narrow, louver-boarded lancet windows his field glass had studied so often. Here he was doomed to disappointment; for when he attained the top of the stairs he found the tower chamber vacant of chimes, and clearly devoted to vastly different purposes.

The room, about fifteen feet square, was faintly lighted by four lancet windows, one on each side, which were glazed within their screening of decayed louver boards. These had been further fitted with tight, opaque screens, but the latter were now largely rotted away. In the center of the dust-laden floor rose a curiously angled stone pillar some four feet in height and two in average diameter, covered on each side with bizarre, crudely incised and wholly unrecognizable hieroglyphs. On this pillar rested a metal box of peculiarly asymmetrical form, its hinged lid thrown back, and its interior holding what looked beneath the decade-deep dust to be an egg-shaped or irregularly spherical object some four inches through. Around the pillar in a rough circle were seven high-backed Gothic chairs still largely intact, while behind them, ranging along the dark-paneled walls, were seven colossal images of crumbling, black-painted plaster, resembling more than anything else the cryptic carven megaliths of mysterious Easter Island. In one corner of the cobwebbed chamber a ladder was built into the wall, leading up to the closed trap door of the windowless steeple above.

As Blake grew accustomed to the feeble light he noticed odd bas-reliefs on the strange open box of yellowish metal. Approaching, he tried to clear the dust away with his hands and handkerchief, and saw that the figurings were of a monstrous and utterly alien kind, depicting entities which, though seemingly alive, resembled no known life form ever evolved on this planet. The four-inch seeming sphere turned out to be a nearly black, redstriated polyhedron with many irregular flat surfaces, either a very remarkable crystal of some sort, or an artificial object of carved and highly polished mineral matter. It did not touch the bottom of the box, but was held suspended by means of a metal band around its center, with seven queerly designed supports

extending horizontally to angles of the box's inner wall near the top. This stone, once exposed, exerted upon Blake an almost alarming fascination. He could scarcely tear his eyes from it, and as he looked at its glistening surfaces he almost fancied it was transparent, with half-formed worlds of wonder within. Into his mind floated pictures of alien orbs with great stone towers, and other orbs with titan mountains and no mark of life, and still remoter spaces where only a stirring in vague blacknesses told of the presence of consciousness and will.

When he did look away, it was to notice a somewhat singular mound of dust in the far corner near the ladder to the steeple. Just why it took his attention he could not tell, but something in its contours carried a message to his unconscious mind. Plowing toward it, and brushing aside the hanging cobwebs as he went, he began to discern something grim about it. Hand and handkerchief soon revealed the truth, and Blake gasped with a baffling mixture of emotions. It was a human skeleton, and it must have been there for a very long time. The clothing was in shreds, but some buttons and fragments of cloth bespoke a man's gray suit. There were other bits of evidence—shoes, metal clasps, huge buttons for round cuffs, a stickpin of bygone pattern, a reporter's badge with the name of the old Providence Telegram, and a crumbling leather pocketbook. Blake examined the latter with care, finding within it several bills of antiquated issue, a celluloid advertising calendar for 1893, some cards with the name "Edwin M. Lillibridge," and a paper covered with penciled memoranda.

This paper held much of a puzzling nature, and Blake read it carefully at the dim westward window. Its disjointed text in-

cluded such phrases as the following:

"Prof. Enoch Bowen home from Egypt May 1844—buys old Free-Will Church in July—his archaeological work & studies in occult well known."

"Dr. Drowne of 4th Baptist warns against Starry Wisdom in sermon Dec. 29, 1844."

"Congregation 97 by end of '45."

"1846—3 disappearances—first mention of Shining Trapezohedron."

"7 disappearances 1848—stories of blood sacrifice begin." "Investigation 1853 comes to nothing—stories of sounds."

"Fr. O'Malley tells of devil-worship with box found in great Egyptian ruins—says they call up something that can't exist in light. Flees a little light, and banished by strong light. Then has to be summoned again. Probably got this from deathbed confession of Francis X. Feeney, who had joined Starry Wisdom in '49.

These people say the Shining Trapezohedron shows them heaven & other worlds, & that the Haunter of the Dark tells them secrets in some way."

"Story of Orrin B. Eddy 1857. They call it up by gazing at the crystal, & have a secret language of their own."

"200 or more in cong. 1863, exclusive of men at front."

"Irish boys mob church in 1869 after Patrick Regan's disappearance."

"Veiled article in J. March 14, '72, but people don't talk about

"6 disappearances 1876—secret committee calls on Mayor Doyle."

"Action promised Feb. 1877—church closes in April."

"Gang—Federal Hill Boys—threaten Dr. —— and vestrymen in May."

"181 persons leave city before end of '77—mention no names."

"Ghost stories begin around 1880—try to ascertain truth of report that no human being has entered church since 1877."

"Ask Lanigan for photograph of place taken 1851."...

Restoring the paper to the pocketbook and placing the latter in his coat, Blake turned to look down at the skeleton in the dust. The implications of the notes were clear, and there could be no doubt but that this man had come to the deserted edifice fortytwo years before in quest of a newspaper sensation which no one else had been bold enough to attempt. Perhaps no one else had known of his plan—who could tell? But he had never returned to his paper. Had some bravely suppressed fear risen to overcome him and bring on sudden heart failure? Blake stooped over the gleaming bones and noted their peculiar state. Some of them were badly scattered, and a few seemed oddly dissolved at the ends. Others were strangely yellowed, with vague suggestions of charring. This charring extended to some of the fragments of clothing. The skull was in a very peculiar state—stained yellow, and with a charred aperture in the top as if some powerful acid had eaten through the solid bone. What had happened to the skeleton during its four decades of silent entombment here Blake could not imagine.

Before he realized it, he was looking at the stone again, and letting its curious influence call up a nebulous pageantry in his mind. He saw processions of robed, hooded figures whose outlines were not human, and looked on endless leagues of desert lined with carved, sky-reaching monoliths. He saw towers and walls in nighted depths under the sea, and vortices of space where wisps of black mist floated before thin shimmerings of cold purple haze.

And beyond all else he glimpsed an infinite gulf of darkness, where solid and semisolid forms were known only by their windy stirrings, and cloudy patterns of force seemed to superimpose order on chaos and hold forth a key to all the paradoxes and arcana of the worlds we know.

Then all at once the spell was broken by an access of gnawing, indeterminate panic fear. Blake choked and turned away from the stone, conscious of some formless alien presence close to him and watching him with horrible intentness. He felt entangled with something—something which was not in the stone, but which had looked through it at him—something which would ceaselessly follow him with a cognition that was not physical sight. Plainly, the place was getting on his nerves—as well it might in view of his gruesome find. The light was waning, too, and since he had no illuminant with him he knew he would have to be leaving soon.

It was then, in the gathering twilight, that he thought he saw a faint trace of luminosity in the crazily angled stone. He had tried to look away from it, but some obscure compulsion drew his eyes back. Was there a subtle phosphorescence of radioactivity about the thing? What was it that the dead man's notes had said concerning a *Shining Trapezohedron?* What, anyway, was his abandoned lair of cosmic evil? What had been done here, and what might still be lurking in the bird-shunned shadows? It seemed now as if an elusive touch of fetor had arisen somewhere close by, though its source was not apparent. Blake seized the cover of the long-open box and snapped it down. It moved easily on its alien hinges, and closed completely over the unmistakably glowing stone.

At the sharp click of that closing a soft stirring sound seemed to come from the steeple's eternal blackness overhead, beyond the trapdoor. Rats, without question—the only living things to reveal their presence in this accursed pile since he had entered it. And yet that stirring in the steeple frightened him horribly, so that he plunged almost wildly down the spiral stairs, across the ghoulish nave, into the vaulted basement, out amidst the gathering dusk of the deserted square, and down through the teeming, fear-haunted alleys and avenues of Federal Hill toward the sane central streets and the homelike brick sidewalks of the college district.

During the days which followed, Blake told no one of his expedition. Instead, he read much in certain books, examined long years of newspaper files downtown, and worked feverishly at the cryptogram in that leather volume from the cobwebbed vestry

room. The cipher, he soon saw, was no simple one; and after a long period of endeavor he felt sure that its language could not be English, Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, or German. Evidently he would have to draw upon the deepest wells of his strange erudition.

Every evening the old impulse to gaze westward returned, and he saw the black steeple as of yore amongst the bristling roofs of a distant and half-fabulous world. But now it held a fresh note of terror for him. He knew the heritage of evil lore it masked, and with the knowledge his vision ran riot in queer new ways. The birds of spring were returning, and as he watched their sunset flights he fancied they avoided the gaunt, lone spire as never before. When a flock of them approached it, he thought, they would wheel and scatter in panic confusion—and he could guess at the wild twitterings which failed to reach him across the intervening miles.

It was in June that Blake's diary told of his victory over the cryptogram. The text was, he found, in the dark Aklo language used by certain cults of evil antiquity, and known to him in a halting way through previous researches. The diary is strangely reticent about what Blake deciphered, but he was patently awed and disconcerted by his results. There are references to a Haunter of the Dark awaked by gazing into the Shining Trapezohedron, and insane conjectures about the black gulfs of chaos from which it was called. The being is spoken of as holding all knowledge, and demanding monstrous sacrifices. Some of Blake's entries show fear lest the thing, which he seemed to regard as summoned, stalk abroad, though he adds that the streetlights form a bulwark which cannot be crossed.

Of the Shining Trapezohedron he speaks often, calling it a window on all time and space, and tracing its history from the days it was fashioned on dark Yuggoth, before ever the Old Ones brought it to earth. It was treasured and placed in its curious box by the crinoid things of Antarctica, salvaged from their ruins by the serpent-men of Valusia, and peered at eons later in Lemuria by the first human beings. It crossed strange lands and stranger seas, and sank with Atlantis before a Minoan fisher meshed it in his net and sold it to swarthy merchants from nighted Khem. The Pharaoh Nephren-Ka built around it a temple with a windowless crypt, and did that which caused his name to be stricken from all monuments and records. Then it slept in the ruins of that evil fane which the priests and the new Pharaoh destroyed, till the delver's spade once more brought it forth to curse mankind.

Early in July the newspapers oddly supplement Blake's entries, though in so brief and casual a way that only the diary has called general attention to their contribution. It appears that a new fear had been growing on Federal Hill since a stranger had entered the dreaded church. The Italians whispered of unaccustomed stirrings and bumpings and scrapings in the dark windowless steeple, and called on their priests to banish an entity which haunted their dreams. Something, they said, was constantly watching at a door to see if it were dark enough to venture forth. Press items mentioned the long-standing local superstitions, but failed to shed much light on the earlier background of the horror. It was obvious that the young reporters of today are no antiquarians. In writing of these things in his diary, Blake expresses a curious kind of remorse, and talks of the duty of burying the Shining Trapezohedron and of banishing what he had evoked by letting daylight into the hideous jutting spire. At the same time, however, he displays the dangerous extent of his fascination, and admits a morbid longing—pervading even his dreams—to visit the accursed tower and gaze again into the cosmic secrets of the glowing stone.

Then something in the *Journal* on the morning of July 17 threw the diarist into a veritable fever of horror. It was only a variant of the other half-humorous items about the Federal Hill restlessness, but to Blake it was somehow very terrible indeed. In the night a thunderstorm had put the city's lighting system out of commission for a full hour, and in that black interval the Italians had nearly gone mad with fright. Those living near the dreaded church had sworn that the thing in the steeple had taken advantage of the street lamps' absence and gone down into the body of the church, flopping and bumping around in a viscous, altogether dreadful way. Toward the last it had bumped up to the tower, where there were sounds of the shattering of glass. It could go wherever the darkness reached, but light would always send it fleeing.

When the current blazed on again there had been a shocking commotion in the tower, for even the feeble light trickling through the grime-blackened, louver-boarded windows was too much for the thing. It had bumped and slithered up into its tenebrous steeple just in time—for a long dose of light would have sent it back into the abyss whence the crazy stranger had called it. During the dark hour praying crowds had clustered round the church in the rain with lighted candles and lamps somehow shielded with folded paper and umbrellas—a guard of light to save the city from the nightmare that stalks in darkness.

Once, those nearest the church declared, the outer door had rattled hideously.

But even this was not the worst. That evening in the Bulletin Blake read of what the reporters had found. Aroused at last to the whimsical news value of the scare, a pair of them had defied the frantic crowds of Italians and crawled into the church through the cellar window after trying the doors in vain. They found the dust of the vestibule and of the spectral nave plowed up in a singular way, with pits of rotted cushions and satin pew linings scattered curiously around. There was a bad odor everywhere, and here and there were bits of yellow stain and patches of what looked like charring. Opening the door to the tower, and pausing a moment at the suspicion of a scraping sound above, they found

the narrow spiral stairs wiped roughly clean.

In the tower itself a similarly half-swept condition existed. They spoke of the heptagonal stone pillar, the overturned Gothic chairs, and the bizarre plaster images; though strangely enough the metal box and the old mutilated skeleton were not mentioned. What disturbed Blake the most—except for the hints of stains and charring and bad odors—was the final detail that explained the crashing glass. Every one of the tower's lancet windows was broken, and two of them had been darkened in a crude and hurried way by the stuffing of satin pew linings and cushion horsehair into the spaces between the slanting exterior louver boards. More satin fragments and bunches of horsehair lay scattered around the newly swept floor, as if someone had been interrupted in the act of restoring the tower to the absolute blackness of its tightly curtained days.

Yellowish stains and charred patches were found on the ladder to the windowless spire, but when a reporter climbed up, opened the horizontally-sliding trapdoor, and shot a feeble flashlight beam into the black and strangely fetid space, he saw nothing but darkness, and an heterogenous litter of shapeless fragments near the aperture. The verdict, of course, was charlatanry. Somebody had played a joke on the superstitious hill dwellers, or else some fanatic had striven to bolster up their fears for their own supposed good. Or perhaps some of the younger and more sophisticated dwellers had staged an elaborate hoax on the outside world. There was an amusing aftermath when the police sent an officer to verify the reports. Three men in succession found ways of evading the assignment, and the fourth went very reluctantly and returned very soon without adding to the account given by the reporters.

From this point onward Blake's diary shows a mounting tide of

insidious horror and nervous apprehension. He upbraids himself for not doing something, and speculates wildly on the consequences of another electrical breakdown. It has been verified that on three occasions—during thunderstorms—he telephoned the electric light company in a frantic vein and asked that desperate precautions against a lapse of power be taken. Now and then his entries show concern over the failure of the reporters to find the metal box and stone, and the strangely marred old skeleton, when they explored the shadowy tower room. He assumed that these things had been removed—whither, and by whom or what, he could only guess. But his worst fears concerned himself, and the kind of unholy rapport he felt to exist between his mind and that lurking horror in the distant steeple—that monstrous thing of night which his rashness had called out of the ultimate black spaces. He seemed to feel a constant tugging at his will, and callers of that period remember how he would sit abstractedly at his desk and stare out of the west window at that far-off spirebristling mound beyond the swirling smoke of the city. His entries dwell monotonously on certain terrible dreams, and of a strengthening of the unholy rapport in his sleep. There is mention of a night when he awakened to find himself fully dressed, outdoors, and headed automatically down College Hill toward the west. Again and again he dwells on the fact that the thing in the steeple knows where to find him.

The week following July 30 is recalled as the time of Blake's partial breakdown. He did not dress, and ordered all his food by telephone. Visitors remarked the cords he kept near his bed, and he said that sleepwalking had forced him to bind his ankles every night with knots which would probably hold or else waken him with the labor of untying.

In his diary he told of the hideous experience which had brought the collapse. After retiring on the night of the 30th he had suddenly found himself groping about in an almost black space. All he could see were short, faint, horizontal streaks of bluish light, but he could smell an overpowering fetor and hear a curious jumble of soft, furtive sounds above him. Whenever he moved he stumbled over something, and at each noise there would come a sort of answering sound from above—a vague stirring, mixed with the cautious sliding of wood on wood.

Once his groping hands encountered a pillar of stone with a vacant top, whilst later he found himself clutching the rungs of a ladder built into the wall, and fumbling his uncertain way upward toward some region of intenser stench where a hot, searing blast beat down against him. Before his eyes a kaleidoscopic range

of phantasmal images played, all of them dissolving at intervals into the picture of a vast, unplumbed abyss of night wherein whirled suns and worlds of an even profounder blackness. He thought of the ancient legends of Ultimate Chaos, at whose center sprawls the blind idiot god Azathoth, Lord of All Things, encircled by his flopping horde of mindless and amorphous dancers, and lulled by the thin monotonous piping of a demoniac flute held in nameless paws.

Then a sharp report from the outer world broke through his stupor and roused him to the unutterable horror of his position. What it was, he never knew—perhaps it was some belated peal from the fireworks heard all summer on Federal Hill as the dwellers hail their various patron saints, or the saints of their native villages in Italy. In any event he shrieked aloud, dropped frantically from the ladder, and stumbled blindly across the obstructed floor of the almost lightless chamber that encompassed him.

He knew instantly where he was, and plunged recklessly down the narrow spiral staircase, tripping and bruising himself at every turn. There was a nightmare flight through a vast cobwebbed nave whose ghostly arches reached up to realms of leering shadow, a sightless scramble through a littered basement, a climb to regions of air and street lights outside, and a mad racing down a spectral hill of gibbering gables, across a grim, silent city of tall black towers, and up the steep eastward precipice to his own ancient door.

On regaining consciousness in the morning he found himself lying on his study floor fully dressed. Dirt and cobwebs covered him, and every inch of his body seemed sore and bruised. When he faced the mirror he saw that his hair was badly scorched, while a trace of strange, evil odor seemed to cling to his upper outer clothing. It was then that his nerves broke down. Thereafter, lounging exhaustedly about in a dressing gown, he did little but stare from his west window, shiver at the threat of thunder, and make wild entries in his diary.

The great storm broke just before midnight on August 8th. Lightning struck repeatedly in all parts of the city, and two remarkable fireballs were reported. The rain was torrential, while a constant fusillade of thunder brought sleeplessness to thousands. Blake was utterly frantic in his fear for the lighting system, and tried to telephone the company around one A.M., though by that time service had been temporarily cut off in the interest of safety. He recorded everything in his diary—the large, nervous, and often undecipherable hieroglyphs telling their own story of

growing frenzy and despair, and of entries scrawled blindly in the dark.

He had to keep the house dark in order to see out the window, and it appears that most of his time was spent at his desk, peering anxiously through the rain across the glistening miles of downtown roofs at the constellation of distant lights marking Federal Hill. Now and then he would fumblingly make an entry in his diary, so that detached phrases such as "The lights must not go," "It knows where I am," "I must destroy it," and "It is calling to me, but perhaps it means no injury this time," are found scattered down two of the pages.

Then the lights went out all over the city. It happened at 2:12 A.M. according to power-house records, but Blake's diary gives no indication of the time. The entry is merely "Lights out-God help me." On Federal Hill there were watchers as anxious as he, and rain-soaked knots of men paraded the square and alleys around the evil church with umbrella-shaded candles, electric flashlights, oil lanterns, crucifixes, and obscure charms of the many sorts common to southern Italy. They blessed each flash of lightning, and made cryptical signs of fear with their right hands when a turn in the storm caused the flashes to lessen and finally to cease altogether. A rising wind blew out most of the candles, so that the scene grew threatening dark. Someone roused Father Merluzzo of Spirito Santo Church, and he hastened to the dismal square to pronounce whatever helpful syllables he could. Of the restless and curious sounds in the blackened tower, there could be no doubt whatever.

For what happened at 2:35 we have the testimony of the priest, a young, intelligent, and well-educated person; of Patrolman William J. Monohan of the Central Station, an officer of the highest reliability who had paused at that part of his beat to inspect the crowd; and of most of the seventy-eight men who had gathered around the church's high bank wall-especially those in the square where the eastward façade was visible. Of course there was nothing which can be proved as being outside the order of nature. The possible causes of such an event are many. No one can speak with certainty of the obscure chemical processes arising in a vast, ancient, ill-aired, and long-deserted building of heterogenous contents. Mephitic vapors, spontaneous combustion, pressure of gases born of long decay—any one of numberless phenomena might be responsible. And then, of course, the factor of conscious charlatanry can by no means be excluded. The thing was really quite simple in itself, and covered less than

three minutes of actual time. Father Merluzzo, always a precise man, looked at his watch repeatedly.

It started with a definite swelling of the dull fumbling sounds inside the black tower. There had for some time been a vague exhalation of strange, evil odors from the church, and this had now become emphatic and offensive. Then at last there was a sound of splintering wood, and a large, heavy object crashed down in the yard beneath the frowning easterly façade. The tower was invisible now that the candles would not burn, but as the object neared the ground the people knew that it was the smoke-grimed louver boarding of that tower's east window.

Immediately afterward an utterly unbearable fetor welled forth from the unseen heights, choking and sickening the trembling watchers, and almost prostrating those in the square. At the same time the air trembled with a vibration as of flapping wings, and a sudden east-blowing wind more violent than any previous blast snatched off the hats and wrenched the dripping umbrellas of the crowd. Nothing definite could be seen in the candleless night, though some upward-looking spectators thought they glimpsed a great spreading blur of denser blackness against the inky sky—something like a formless cloud of smoke that shot with meteorlike speed toward the east.

That was all. The watchers were half-numbed with fright, awe, and discomfort, and scarcely knew what to do, or whether to do anything at all. Not knowing what had happened, they did not relax their vigil; and a moment later they sent up a prayer as a sharp flash of belated lightning, followed by an earsplitting crash of sound, rent the flooded heavens. Half an hour later the rain stopped, and in fifteen minutes more the street lights sprang on again, sending the weary, bedraggled watchers relievedly back to their homes.

The next day's papers gave these matters minor mention in connection with the general storm reports. It seems that the great lightning flash and deafening explosion which followed the Federal Hill occurrence were even more tremendous farther east, where a burst of the singular fetor was likewise noticed. The phenomenon was most marked over College Hill, where the crash awaked all the sleeping inhabitants and led to a bewildered round of speculations. Of those who were already awake only a few saw the anomalous blaze of light near the top of the hill, or noticed the inexplicable upward rush of air which almost stripped the leaves from the trees and blasted the plants in the gardens. It was agreed that the lone, sudden lightning bolt must have struck

somewhere in this neighborhood, though no trace of its striking could afterward be found. A youth in the Tau Omega fraternity house thought he saw a grotesque and hideous mass of smoke in the air just as the preliminary flash burst, but his observation has not been verified. All of the few observers, however, agree as to the violent gust from the west and the flood of intolerable stench which preceded the belated stroke; whilst evidence concerning the momentary burned odor after the stroke is equally general.

These points were discussed very carefully because of their probable connection with the death of Robert Blake. Students in the Psi Delta house, whose upper rear windows looked into Blake's study, noticed the blurred white face at the westward window on the morning of the ninth, and wondered what was wrong with the expression. When they saw the same face in the same position that evening, they felt worried, and watched for the lights to come up in his apartment. Later they rang the bell of the darkened flat, and finally had a policeman force the door.

The rigid body sat bolt upright at the desk by the window, and when the intruders saw the glassy, bulging eyes, and the marks of stark, convulsive fright on the twisted features, they turned away in sickened dismay. Shortly afterward the coroner's physician made an examination, and despite the unbroken window reported electrical shock, or nervous tension induced by electrical discharge, as the cause of death. The hideous expression he ignored altogether, deeming it a not improbable result of the profound shock as experienced by a person of such abnormal imagination and unbalanced emotions. He deduced these latter qualities from the books, paintings, and manuscripts found in the apartment, and from the blindly scrawled entries in the diary on the desk. Blake had prolonged his frenzied jottings to the last, and the broken-pointed pencil was found clutched in his spasmodically contracted right hand.

The entries after the failure of the lights were highly disjointed, and legible only in part. From them certain investigators have drawn conclusions differing greatly from the materialistic official verdict, but such speculations have little chance for belief among the conservative. The case of these imaginative theorists has not been helped by the action of superstitious Doctor Dexter, who threw the curious box and angled stone—an object certainly self-luminous as seen in the black windowless steeple where it was found—into the deepest channel of Narragansett Bay. Excessive imagination and neurotic unbalance on Blake's part, aggravated by knowledge of the evil bygone cult whose startling traces he had uncovered, form the dominant interpretation given those

final frenzied jottings. These are the entries—or all that can be made of them.

"Lights still out—must be five minutes now. Everything depends on lightning. Yaddith grant it will keep up! . . . Some influence seems beating through it. . . . Rain and thunder and wind deafen. . . . The thing is taking hold of my mind. . . .

"Trouble with memory. I see things I never knew before. Other worlds and other galaxies . . . Dark . . . The lightning seems

dark and the darkness seems light....

"It cannot be the real hill and church that I see in the pitch darkness. Must be retinal impression left by flashes. Heaven grant the Italians are out with their candles if the lightning stops!

"What am I afraid of? Is it not an avatar of Nyarlathotep, who in antique and shadowy Khem even took the form of man? I remember Yuggoth, and more distant Shaggai, and the ultimate void of the black planets. . . .

"The long, winging flight through the void . . . cannot cross the universe of light . . . recreated by the thoughts caught in the Shining Trapezohedron . . . send it through the horrible abysses

of radiance....

"My name is Blake—Robert Harrison Blake of 620 East Knapp Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. . . . I am on this planet. . . .

"Azathoth have mercy!—the lightning no longer flashes—horrible—I can see everything with a monstrous sense that is no sight—light is dark and dark is light . . . those people on the hill

... guard ... candles and charms ... their priests....

"Sense of distance gone—far is near and near is far. No light—no glass—see that steeple—that tower—window—can hear—Roderick Usher—am mad or going mad—the thing is stirring and fumbling in the tower—I am it and it is I—I want to get out . . . must get out and unify the forces. . . . It knows where I am

"I am Robert Blake, but I see the tower in the dark. There is a monstrous odor . . . senses transfigured . . . boarding at that tower window cracking and giving way. . . . Iä . . . ngai . . . ygg . . .

"I see it—coming here—hell wind—titan blur—black wings—Yog Sothoth save me—the three-lobed burning eye..."



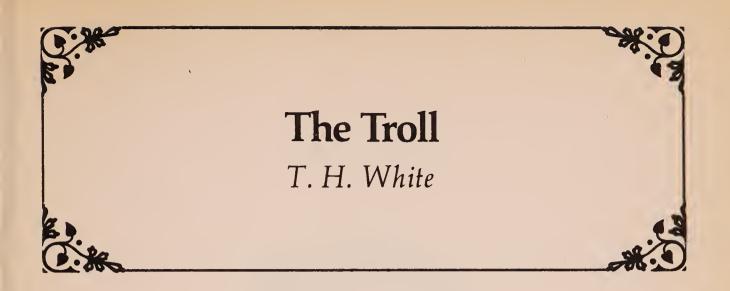
Terence Hanbury White spent most of his life in a tortured quest for the happiness and stability that were totally lacking in his early years. He was born in Bombay, India, where his father was the District Superintendent of Police. His parents' marriage was a singularly unhappy one. White recalls in his diary (recounted by Sylvia Townsend Warner in her biography of White) his parents quarreling over his crib, pistols in hand, threatening to shoot each other and himself as well. Fortunately, White had to be brought to England in 1911 for health reasons, and there he was raised by grandparents for several years. He compensated for the lack of attention from his parents by excelling in everything to which he turned his attention, whether racing cars, flying planes, or studying. He took a first in the English Honours School at Cambridge in 1929, where he studied under some of the finest scholars of the time, such as E. M. W. Tillyard and I. A. Richards. To gain his first, he wrote an essay on Malory. He taught literature for several years at Stowe Preparatory School and became head of the English Department.

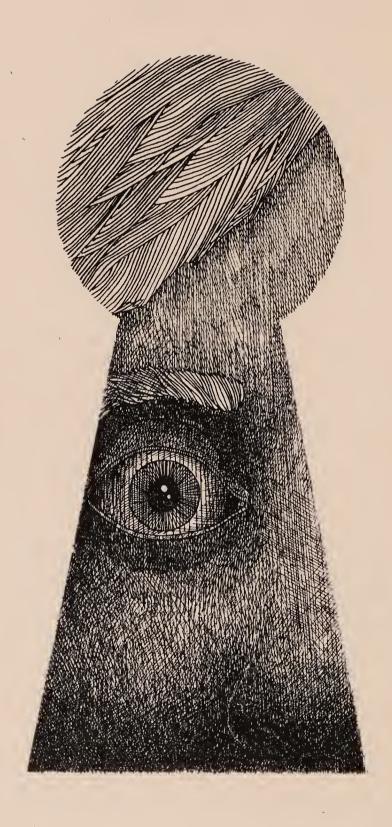
White quit teaching, however, to pursue the more hazardous occupation of a professional writer; he had been writing since the age of twenty. In 1939, he went to Ireland for a holiday and remained there for six highly productive years. His father, Garrick White, had been born in Ireland, and White was perhaps attempting to regain a lost heritage. He flirted with Roman Catholicism but never became a Catholic. For the first several years of World War II, White remained a troubled pacifist, but finally decided that Hitler must be defeated and volunteered for service in the Royal Air Force. He was turned down, however, because of poor health. After the war, he resided in the Channel Islands, wrote, and lectured. He made a highly successful and gratifying lecture tour of the United States in 1963, but weakened himself considerably traveling around the country. He died shortly after leaving the United States in 1964. But perhaps he had attained his quest, or a portion of it anyway; regarding his time in the United States, he noted in his diary that he had never been

happier in his life.

T. H. White is best known for his retelling of Malory's Morte d'Arthur, or perhaps even more so for Camelot, the play and movie adaptation of his book, The Once and Future King. This work, which appeared in 1958, consists of four books, three of which had been published earlier: The Sword in the Stone (1938)—Walt Disney bought the film rights and later filmed it in cartoon form; The Witch in the Wood (1939), which White later revised and retitled The Queen of Air and Darkness; The Ill-Made Knight (1940); The Candle in the Wind, completing the final 1958 version of the tetralogy. Three other works of importance are Mistress Masham's Repose (1946), The Goshawk (1951), and The Book of the Beasts (1954). These command a considerably smaller reading audience, but a very discerning one.

"The Troll" first appeared in Gone to Ground (1935), a collection of stories told by two men who are 112 years old. The story probably stems from White's walking tour of Lapland in 1926. At the end of his first year at Cambridge, he and a friend picked what they considered to be the least populous area they could reach for their holiday. The fact that, according to White's diary, the trip was made miserable by bad weather and mosquitoes perhaps explains the presence of the Troll, one of the author's most repulsive creations. The Troll stands out in hideous relief, framed by the background of commonplace railroad trains and modern guest houses on the one hand, and the beautiful landscapes on the other. In this regard, the story is carefully constructed to accent the reality and the repulsiveness of the Troll. White's style, which already promises the master strokes of his Once and Future King, is aptly suited to depicting both the tangible reality and the majesty of the setting. The descriptions, along with the humor and the understatement, further reinforce the grotesqueness of what happens.





"My father," said Mr. Marx, "used to say that an experience like the one I am about to relate was apt to shake one's interest in mundane matters. Naturally he did not expect to be believed, and he did not mind whether he was or not. He did not himself believe in the supernatural, but the thing happened, and he proposed to tell it as simply as possible. It was stupid of him to say that it shook his faith in mundane affairs, for it was just as mundane as anything else. Indeed the really frightening part about it was the horribly tangible atmosphere in which it took place. None of the outlines wavered in the least. The creature would have been less remarkable if it had been less natural. It seemed to overcome the usual laws without being immune to them.

"My father was a keen fisherman, and used to go to all sorts of places for his fish. On one occasion he made Abisko his Lapland base, a comfortable railway hotel, one hundred and fifty miles within the Arctic Circle. He traveled the prodigious length of Sweden (I believe it is as far from the south of Sweden to the north, as it is from the south of Sweden to the south of Italy) in the electric railway, and arrived tired out. He went to bed early, sleeping almost immediately, although it was bright daylight outside, as it is in those parts throughout the night at that time of the year. Not the least shaking part of his experience was that it

should all have happened under the sun.

"He went to bed early, and slept, and dreamt. I may as well make it clear at once, as clear as the outlines of that creature in the northern sun, that his story did not turn out to be a dream in the last paragraph. The division between sleeping and waking was abrupt, although the feeling of both was the same. They were both in the same sphere of horrible absurdity, though in the former he was asleep and in the latter almost terribly awake. He tried to be asleep several times.

"My father always used to tell one of his dreams, because it somehow seemed of a piece with what was to follow. He believed

that it was a consequence of the thing's presence in the next room. My father dreamed of blood.

"It was the vividness of the dreams that was impressive, their minute detail and horrible reality. The blood came through the keyhole of a locked door which communicated with the next room. I suppose the two rooms had originally been designed *en suite*. It ran down the door panel with a viscous ripple, like the artificial one created in the conduit of Trumpingdon Street. But it was heavy, and smelled. The slow welling of it sopped the carpet and reached the bed. It was warm and sticky. My father woke up with the impression that it was all over his hands. He was rubbing his first two fingers together, trying to rid them of the greasy adhesion where the fingers joined.

"My father knew what he had got to do. Let me make it clear that he was now perfectly wide awake, but he knew what he had got to do. He got out of bed, under this irresistible knowledge,

and looked through the keyhole into the next room.

"I suppose the best way to tell the story is simply to narrate it, without an effort to carry belief. The thing did not require belief. It was not a feeling of horror in one's bones, or a misty outline, or anything that needed to be given actuality by an act of faith. It was as solid as a wardrobe. You don't have to believe in wardrobes. They are there, with corners.

"What my father saw through the keyhole in the next room was a Troll. It was eminently solid, about eight feet high, and dressed in brightly ornamental skins. It had a blue face, with yellow eyes, and on its head there was a woolly sort of nightcap with a red bobble on top. The features were Mongolian. Its body was long and sturdy, like the trunk of a tree. Its legs were short and thick, like the elephant's feet that used to be cut off for umbrella stands, and its arms were wasted: little rudimentary members like the forelegs of a kangaroo. Its head and neck were very thick and massive. On the whole, it looked like a grotesque doll.

"That was the horror of it. Imagine a perfectly normal golliwog (but without the association of a Christie minstrel) standing in the corner of a room, eight feet high. The creature was as ordinary as that, as tangible, as stuffed, and as ungainly at the joints, but it could move itself about.

"The Troll was eating a lady. Poor girl, she was tightly clutched to its breast by those rudimentary arms, with her head on a level with its mouth. She was dressed in a nightdress which had crumpled up under her armpits, so that she was a pitiful

naked offering, like a classical picture of Andromeda. Mercifully, she appeared to have fainted.

"Just as my father applied his eye to the keyhole, the Troll opened its mouth and bit off her head. Then, holding the neck between the bright blue lips, he sucked the bare meat dry. She shriveled, like a squeezed orange, and her heels kicked. The creature had a look of thoughtful ecstasy. When the girl seemed to have lost succulence as an orange she was lifted into the air. She vanished in two bites. The Troll remained leaning against the wall, munching patiently and casting its eyes about it with a vague benevolence. Then it leaned forward from the low hips, like a jackknife folding in half, and opened its mouth to lick the blood up from the carpet. The mouth was incandescent inside, like a gas fire, and the blood evaporated before its tongue, like dust before a vacuum cleaner. It straightened itself, the arms dangling before it in patent uselessness, and fixed its eyes upon the keyhole.

"My father crawled back to bed, like a hunted fox after fifteen miles. At first it was because he was afraid that the creature had seen him through the hole, but afterward it was because of his reason. A man can attribute many nighttime appearances to the imagination, and can ultimately persuade himself that creatures of the dark did not exist. But this was an appearance in a sunlit room, with all the solidity of a wardrobe and unfortunately almost none of its possibility. He spent the first ten minutes making sure that he was awake, and the rest of the night trying to hope that he was asleep. It was either that, or else he was mad.

"It is not pleasant to doubt one's sanity. There are no satisfactory tests. One can pinch oneself to see if one is asleep, but there are no means of determining the other problem. He spent some time opening and shutting his eyes, but the room seemed normal and remained unaltered. He also soused his head in a basin of cold water, without result. Then he lay on his back, for hours, watching the masquitoes on the sailing

ing the mosquitoes on the ceiling.

"He was tired when he was called. A bright Scandinavian maid admitted the full sunlight for him and told him that it was a fine day. He spoke to her several times, and watched her carefully, but she seemed to have no doubts about his behavior. Evidently, then, he was not badly mad; and by now he had been thinking about the matter for so many hours that it had begun to get obscure. The outlines were blurring again, and he determined that the whole thing must have been a dream or a temporary delusion, something temporary, anyway, and finished with, so

that there was no good in thinking about it longer. He got up, dressed himself fairly cheerfully, and went down to breakfast.

"These hotels used to be run extraordinarily well. There was a hostess always handy in a little office off the hall, who was delighted to answer any questions, spoke every conceivable language, and generally made it her business to make the guests feel at home. The particular hostess at Abisko was a lovely creature into the bargain. My father used to speak to her a good deal. He had an idea that when you had a bath in Sweden one of the maids was sent to wash you. As a matter of fact this sometimes used to be the case, but it was always an old maid and highly trusted. You had to keep yourself underwater and this was supposed to confer a cloak of invisibility. If you popped your knee out she was shocked. My father had a dim sort of hope that the hostess would be sent to bath him one day, and I daresay he would have shocked her a good deal. However, this is beside the point. As he passed through the hall something prompted him to ask about the room next to his. Had anybody, he inquired, taken number 23?

"'But, yes,' said the lady manager with a bright smile, '23 is taken by a doctor professor from Upsala and his wife, such a

charming couple!'

"My father wondered what the charming couple had been doing, whilst the Troll was eating the lady in the nightdress. However, he decided to think no more about it. He pulled himself together, and went in to breakfast. The Professor was sitting in an opposite corner (the manageress had kindly pointed him out), looking mild and shortsighted, by himself. My father thought he would go out for a long climb on the mountains, since exercise was evidently what his constitution needed.

"He had a lovely day. Lake Torne blazed a deep blue below him, for all its thirty miles, and the melting snow made a lacework of filigree round the tops of the surrounding mountain basin. He got away from the stunted birch trees, and the mossy bogs with the reindeer in them, and the mosquitoes, too. He forded something that might have been a temporary tributary of the Abiskojokk, having to take off his trousers to do so and tucking his shirt up round his neck. He wanted to shout, bracing himself against the glorious tug of the snow water, with his legs crossing each other involuntarily as they passed, and the boulders turning under his feet. His body made a bow wave in the water, which climbed and feathered on his stomach, on the upstream side. When he was under the opposite bank a stone turned in earnest, and he went in. He came up, shouting with laughter, and made out loud a remark which has since become a classic in my

family. 'Thank God,' he said, 'I rolled up my sleeves.' He wrung out everything as best he could, and dressed again in the wet clothes, and set off up the shoulder of Niakatjavelk. He was dry and warm again in half a mile. Less than a thousand feet took him over the snow line, and there, crawling on hands and knees, he came face to face with what seemed to be the summit of ambition. He met an ermine. They were both on all fours, so that there was a sort of equality about the encounter, especially as the ermine was higher up than he was. They looked at each other for a fifth of a second, without saying anything, and then the ermine vanished. He searched for it everywhere in vain, for the snow was only patchy. My father sat down on a dry rock, to eat his well-soaked luncheon of chocolate and rye bread.

"Life is such unutterable hell, solely because it is sometimes beautiful. If we could only be miserable all the time, if there could be no such things as love or beauty or faith or hope, if I could be absolutely certain that my love would never be returned, how much more simple life would be. One could plod through the Siberian salt mines of existence without being bothered about happiness. Unfortunately the happiness is there. There is always the chance (about eight hundred and fifty to one) that another heart will come to mine. I can't help hoping, and keeping faith, and loving beauty. Quite frèquently I am not so miserable as it would be wise to be. And there, for my poor father sitting on his boulder above the snow, was stark happiness beating at the

"The boulder on which he was sitting had probably never been sat upon before. It was a hundred and fifty miles within the Arctic Circle, on a mountain five thousand feet high, looking down on a blue lake. The lake was so long that he could have sworn it sloped away at the ends, proving to the naked eye that the sweet earth was round. The railway line and the half-dozen houses of Abisko were hidden in the trees. The sun was warm on the boulder, blue on the snow, and his body tingled smooth from the spate water. His mouth watered for the chocolate, just behind the tip of his tongue.

"And yet, when he had eaten the chocolate—perhaps it was heavy on his stomach—there was the memory of the Troll. My father fell suddenly into a black mood, and began to think about the supernatural. Lapland was beautiful in the summer, with the sun sweeping round the horizon day and night, and the small tree leaves twinkling. It was not the sort of place for wicked things. But what about the winter? A picture of the Arctic night came before him, with the silence and the snow. Then the legendary

wolves and bears snuffled at the far encampments, and the nameless winter spirits moved on their darkling courses. Lapland had always been associated with sorcery, even by Shakespeare. It was at the outskirts of the world that the Old Things accumulated, like driftwood round the edges of the sea. If one wanted to find a wise woman, one went to the rims of the Hebrides; on the coast of Brittany, one sought the mass of St. Secaire. And what an outskirt Lapland was! It was an outskirt not only of Europe, but of civilization. It had no boundaries. The Lapps went with the reindeer, and where the reindeer were was Lapland. Curiously indefinite region, suitable to the indefinite things. The Lapps were not Christians. What a fund of power they must have had behind them, to resist the march of mind. All through the missionary centuries they had held to something; something had stood behind them, a power against Christ. My father realized with a shock that he was living in the age of the reindeer, a period contiguous to the mammoth and the fossil.

"Well, this was not what he had come out to do. He dismissed the nightmares with an effort, got up from his boulder, and began the scramble back to his hotel. It was impossible that a professor

from Abisko could become a troll.

"As my father was going in to dinner that evening the mana-

geress stopped him in the hall.

"'We have had a day so sad,' she said. 'The poor Dr. Professor has disappeared his wife. She has been missing since last night. The Dr. Professor is inconsolable.'

"My father then knew for certain that he had lost his reason.

"He went blindly to dinner, without making any answer, and began to eat a thick sour-cream soup that was taken cold with pepper and sugar. The Professor was still sitting in his corner, a sandy-headed man with thick spectacles and a desolate expression. He was looking at my father, and my father, with the soup spoon halfway to his mouth, looked at him. You know that eye-to-eye recognition, when two people look deeply into each other's pupils, and burrow to the soul? It usually comes before love. I mean the clear, deep, milk-eyed recognition expressed by the poet Donne. Their eyebeams twisted and did thread their eyes upon a double string. My father recognized that the Professor was a troll, and the Professor recognized my father's recognition. Both of them knew that the Professor had eaten his wife.

"My father put down his soup spoon, and the Professor began to grow. The top of his head lifted and expanded, like a great loaf rising in an oven; his face went red and purple, and finally blue; the whole ungainly upper works began to sway and topple toward the ceiling. My father looked about him. The other diners were eating unconcernedly. Nobody else could see it, and he was definitely mad at last. When he looked at the Troll again, the creature bowed. The enormous superstructure inclined itself toward him from the hips, and grinned seductively.

"My father got up from his table experimentally, and advanced toward the Troll, arranging his feet on the carpet with excessive care. He did not find it easy to walk, or to approach the monster, but it was a question of his reason. If he was mad, he was mad; and it was essential that he should come to grips with the thing, in order to make certain.

"He stood before it like a small boy, and held out his hand, saying, 'Good evening.'

"'Ho! Ho!' said the Troll, 'little mannikin. And what shall I

have for my supper tonight?'

"Then it held out its wizened furry paw and took my father

by the hand.

"My father went straight out of the dining room, walking on air. He found the manageress in the passage and held out his hand to her.

"'I am afraid I have burnt my hand,' he said. 'Do you think

you could tie it up?'

"The manageress said, 'But it is a very bad burn. There are

blisters all over the back. Of course, I will bind it up at once.'

"He explained that he had burnt it one one of the spirit lamps at the sideboard. He could scarecely conceal his delight. One cannot burn oneself by being insane.

"'I saw you talking to the Dr. Professor,' said the manageress, as she was putting on the bandage. 'He is a sympathetic gentle-

man, is he not?'

"The relief about his sanity soon gave place to other troubles. The Troll had eaten its wife and given him a blister, but it had also made an unpleasant remark about its supper that evening. It proposed to eat my father. Now very few people can have been in a position to decide what to do when a troll earmarks them for its next meal. To begin with, although it was a tangible troll in two ways, it had been invisible to the other diners. This put my father in a difficult position. He could not, for instance, ask for protection. He could scarcely go to the manageress and say, 'Professor Skål is an odd kind of werewolf; he ate his wife last night, and hopes to eat me this evening.' He would have found himself in a loony bin at once. Besides, he was too proud to do this, and still too confused. Whatever the proofs and blisters, he did not find it easy to believe in professors that turned into trolls. He had lived in the normal world all his life, and, at his age, it was difficult to start learning afresh. It would have been quite easy for a baby, who was still coordinating the world, to cope with the troll situation: for my father, not. He kept trying to fit it in somewhere, without disturbing the universe. He kept telling himself that it was nonsense: one did not get eaten by professors. It was like having a fever, and telling oneself that it was all right, really, only a delirium, only something that would pass.

"There was that feeling on the one side, the desperate assertion of all the truths that he had learned so far, the tussle to keep the world from drifting, the brave but intimidated refusal to give in

or to make a fool of himself.

"On the other side there was stark terror. However much one struggled to be merely deluded, or hitched up momentarily in an odd pocket of space-time, there was panic. There was the urge to go away as quickly as possible, to flee the dreadful Troll. Unfortunately the last train had left Abisko, and there was nowhere else to go.

"My father was not able to distinguish these trends of thought. For him they were at the time intricately muddled together. He was in a whirl. A proud man, and an agnostic, he stuck to his muddled guns alone. He was terribly afraid of the Troll, but he could not afford to admit its existence. All his mental processes remained hung up, whilst he talked on the terrace, in a state of suspended animation, with an American tourist who had come to Abisko to photograph the midnight sun.

"The American told my father that the Abisko railway was the northernmost electric railway in the world, that twelve trains passed through it every day traveling between Upsala and Narvik, that the population of Abo was 12,000 in 1862, and that Gustavus Adolphus ascended the throne of Sweden in 1611. He

also gave some facts about Greta Garbo.

"My father told the American that a dead baby was required for the mass of St. Secaire, that an elemental was a kind of mouth in space that sucked at you and tried to gulp you down, that homeopathic magic was practiced by the aborigines of Australia, and that a Lapland woman was careful at her confinement to have no knots or loops about her person, lest these should make the delivery difficult.

"The American, who had been looking at my father in a strange way for some time, took offense at this and walked away;

so that there was nothing for it but to go to bed.

"My father walked upstairs on will power alone. His faculties

seemed to have shrunk and confused themselves. He had to help himself with the banister. He seemed to be navigating himself by wireless, from a spot about a foot above his forehead. The issues that were involved had ceased to have any meaning, but he went on doggedly up the stairs, moved forward by pride and contrariety. It was physical fear that alienated him from his body, the same fear that he had felt as a boy, walking down long corridors to be beaten. He walked firmly up the stairs.

"Oddly enough, he went to sleep at once. He had climbed all day and been awake all night and suffered emotional extremes. Like a condemned man, who was to be hanged in the morning,

my father gave the whole business up and went to sleep.

"He was woken at midnight exactly. He heard the American on the terrace below his window, explaining excitedly that there had been a cloud on the last two nights at 11:58, thus making it impossible to photograph the midnight sun. He heard the camera click.

"There seemed to be a sudden storm of hail and wind. It roared at his window sill, and the window curtains lifted themselves taut, pointing horizontally into the room. The shriek and rattle of the tempest framed the window in a crescendo of growing sound, and increasing blizzard directed toward himself. A blue paw came over the sill.

"My father turned over and hid his head in the pillow. He could feel the domed head dawning at the window and the eyes fixing themselves upon the small of his back. He could feel the places physically, about four inches apart. They itched. Or else the rest of his body itched, except those places. He could feel the creature growing into the room, glowing like ice, and giving off a storm. His mosquito curtains rose in its afflatus, uncovering him, leaving him defenseless. He was in such an ecstasy of terror that he almost enjoyed it. He was like a bather plunging for the first time into freezing water and unable to articulate. He was trying to yell, but all he could do was to throw a series of hooting noises from his paralyzed lungs. He became a part of the blizzard. The bedclothes were gone. He felt the Troll put out its hands.

"My father was an agnostic, but, like most idle men, he was not above having a bee in his bonnet. His favorite bee was the psychology of the Catholic church. He was ready to talk for hours about psychoanalysis and the confession. His greatest discovery

had been the rosary.

"The rosary, my father used to say, was intended solely as a factual occupation which calmed the lower centers of the mind. The automatic telling of the beads liberated the higher centers to

meditate upon the mysteries. They were a sedative, like knitting or counting sheep. There was no better cure for insomnia than a rosary. For several years he had given up deep breathing or regular counting. When he was sleepless he lay on his back and told his beads, and there was a small rosary in the pocket of his pajama coat.

"The Troll put out its hands, to take him round the waist. He became completely paralyzed, as if he had been winded. The Troll put its hand upon the beads

Troll put its hand upon the beads.

"They met, the occult forces, in a clash above my father's heart. There was an explosion, he said, a quick creation of power. Positive and negative. A flash, a beam. Something like the splutter with which the antenna of a tram meets its overhead wires again, when it is being changed about.

"The Troll made a high squealing noise, like a crab being boiled, and began rapidly to dwindle in size. It dropped my father and turned about, and ran wailing, as if it had been terribly burnt, for the window. Its color waned as its size decreased. It was one of those air toys now, that expire with a piercing whistle. It scrambled over the window sill, scarcely larger than a little child, and sagging visibly.

"My father leaped out of bed and followed it to the window. He saw it drop on the terrace like a toad, gather itself together, stumble off, staggering and whistling like a bat, down the valley

of the Abiskojokk.

"My father fainted.

"In the morning the manageress said, 'There has been such a terrible tragedy. The poor Dr. Professor was found this morning in the lake. The worry about his wife had certainly unhinged his mind.'

"A subscription for a wreath was started by the American, to which my father subscribed five shillings; and the body was shipped off next morning, on one of the twelve trains that travel between Upsala and Narvik every day."

Ray Bradbury, one of America's most popular and prolific writers of fantasy and science fiction, was born in Waukegan, Illinois. Although Bradbury spent only the first twelve years of his life in this quiet Midwestern city, they were important formative years. Here, he began his regular visits to the library, developing his deep love for books; here he was first introduced to fairy tales, Edgar Allan Poe, E. R. Burroughs, Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, the Oz books, and *Amazing Stories*; and here he became interested in magic and the occult. These interests profoundly influenced his later fiction.

In 1932, his family moved to Arizona and then on to California two years later. In Los Angeles, Bradbury became actively involved in the craft of writing and in the world of fantasy and science fiction. In 1935, while still a student at Los Angeles High School, he began sending his stories to major magazines, such as Collier's and Esquire (without success), and two years later, at the age of seventeen, he joined the Los Angeles Science Fiction League. Shortly after high school graduation, Bradbury founded and edited his own mimeographed quarterly of science fiction, Futuria Fantasia. Four issues were printed, all illustrated by Hannes Bok, then unknown, but destined to become one of the most celebrated fantasy illustrators of the century.

Bradbury made his first story sale at the age of twenty. "The Pendulum," written in collaboration with Henry Hasse, was purchased by the editor of Super Science Stories in July 1941 and appeared in the November issue. Sparked by this success, Bradbury continued to pump out stories, but recognition did not come easily. By the late 1940s, however, Bradbury's reputation was solid enough for Arkham House to publish his first hard-cover book, Dark Carnival (1947), a collection of his early tales

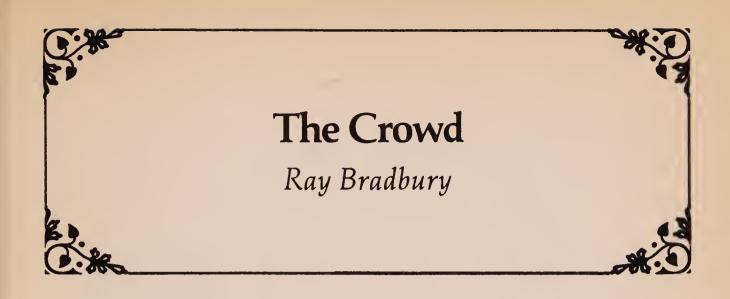
of the outré.

By his own admission a compulsive writer, Bradbury has written more than a thousand short stories, which have appeared not only in magazines and anthologies devoted to science fiction and fantasy, but in general circulation magazines such as The New Yorker, Esquire, Playboy, Mademoiselle, and Collier's. Perhaps his best-known short story collections are: The Martian Chronicles (1950), The Illustrated Man (1951), The Golden Apples of the Sun (1953), The October Country (1955), and The Machineries of Joy (1964). He has also written novels, of which Fahrenheit 451 (1953) and Dandelion Wine (1957) are his most popular; verse, When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed (1973); and stage, screen, television, and radio plays.

Drama has been a special interest of Bradbury's for the past decade or so. He has not only written several fine fantasy plays, but has also directed and produced some of them. Probably his most famous screenplay was for John Huston's movie version of Moby Dick, and two of his best-known collections of plays are The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit and Other Plays (1972) and

Pillar of Fire and Other Plays (1975).

An active member of the Count Dracula Society, Bradbury has always been interested in the occult. As a matter of fact, most of his early fiction consisted of tales of the supernatural and outré. It is highly appropriate, therefore, that Bradbury's "The Crowd" should find a place in this anthology. First published in the May 1943 issue of Weird Tales, this vintage story proves that an eerie and horrific atmosphere can be effectively combined with as prosaic and contemporary a setting as twentieth-century Los Angeles. Noteworthy, too, is the exercise in literary economy that Bradbury gives us. In just a few pages, he manages to create a remarkably strong feeling of tension and suspense. "The Crowd" is a good story, but a disturbing one. Few readers will be able to view those who quickly gather about an accident victim in quite the same way after reading this carefully crafted tale.





Mr. Spallner put his hands over his face.

There was the feeling of movement in space, the beautifully tortured scream, the impact and tumbling of the car with wall, through wall, over and down like a toy, and him hurled out of it. Then—silence.

The crowd came running. Faintly, where he lay, he heard them running. He could tell their ages and their sizes by the sound of their numerous feet over the summer grass and on the lined sidewalk, and over the asphalt street, and picking through the cluttered bricks to where his car hung half into the night sky,

still spinning its wheels with a senseless centrifuge.

Where the crowd came from he didn't know. He struggled to remain aware and then the crowd faces hemmed in upon him, hung over him like the large glowing leaves of down-bent trees. They were a ring of shifting, compressing, changing faces over him, looking down, looking down, reading the time of his life or death by his face, making his face into a moondial, where the moon cast a shadow from his nose out upon his cheek to tell the time of breathing or not breathing any more ever.

How swiftly a crowd comes, he thought, like the iris of an eye

compressing in out of nowhere.

A siren. A police voice. Movement. Blood trickled from his lips and he was being moved into an ambulance. Someone said, "Is he dead?" And someone else said, "No, he's not dead." And a third person said, "He won't die, he's not going to die." And he saw the faces of the crowd beyond him in the night, and he knew by their expressions that he wouldn't die. And that was strange. He saw a man's face, thin, bright, pale; the man swallowed and bit his lips, very sick. There was a small woman, too, with red hair and too much red on her cheeks and lips. And a little boy with a freckled face. Others' faces. An old man with a wrinkled upper lip, an old woman, with a mole upon her chin. They had all come from—where? Houses, cars, alleys, from the immediate and the accident-shocked world. Out of alleys and out of hotels and out of streetcars and seemingly out of nothing they came.

The crowd looked at him and he looked back at them and did not like them at all. There was a vast wrongness to them. He couldn't put his finger on it. They were far worse than this machine-made thing that happened to him now.

The ambulance doors slammed. Through the windows he saw the crowd looking in, looking in. That crowd that always came so fast, so strangely fast, to form a circle, to peer down, to probe, to gawk, to question, to point, to disturb, to spoil the privacy of a man's agony by their frank curiosity.

The ambulance drove off. He sank back and their faces still

stared into his face, even with his eyes shut.

The car wheels spun in his mind for days. One wheel, four wheels, spinning, spinning, and whirring, around and around.

He knew it was wrong. Something wrong with the wheels and the whole accident and the running of feet and the curiosity. The crowd faces mixed and spun into the wild rotation of the wheels.

He awoke.

Sunlight, a hospital room, a hand taking his pulse.

"How do you feel?" asked the doctor.

The wheels faded away. Mr. Spallner looked around.

"Fine—I guess."

He tried to find words. About the accident. "Doctor?"

"Yes?"

"That crowd—was it last night?"

"Two days ago. You've been here since Thursday. You're all right, though. You're doing fine. Don't try and get up."

"That crowd. Something about wheels, too. Do accidents make

people, well, a-little off?"

"Temporarily, sometimes. It wears off."

He lay staring up at the doctor. "Does it hurt your time sense?"

"Panic sometimes does."

"Makes a minute seem like an hour, or maybe an hour seem like a minute?"

"Yes."

"Let me tell you then." He felt the bed under him, the sunlight on his face. "You'll think I'm crazy. I was driving too fast, I know. I'm sorry now. I jumped the curb and hit that wall. I was hurt and numb, I know, but I still remember things. Mostly—the crowd." He waited a moment and then decided to go on, for he suddenly knew what it was that bothered him. "The crowd got there too quickly. Thirty seconds after the smash they were all standing over me and staring at me . . . it's not right they should run that fast, so late at night. . . ."

"You only think it was thirty seconds," said the doctor. "It was

probably three or four minutes. Your senses—"

"Yeah, I know—my senses, the accident. But I was conscious! I remember one thing that puts it all together and makes it funny, God, so damned funny. The wheels of my car, upside down. The wheels were still spinning when the crowd got there!"

The doctor smiled.

The man in bed went on. "I'm positive! The wheels were spinning and spinning fast—the front wheels! Wheels don't spin very long, friction cuts them down. And these were really spinning!"

"You're confused," said the doctor.

"I'm not confused. That street was empty. Not a soul in sight. And then the accident and the wheels still spinning and all those faces over me, quick, in no time. And the way they looked down at me, I knew I wouldn't die. . . ."

"Simple shock," said the doctor, walking away into the sun-

light.

They released him from the hospital two weeks later. He rode home in a taxi. People had come to visit him during his two weeks on his back, and to all of them he had told his story, the accident, the spinning wheels, the crowd. They had all laughed with him concerning it, and passed it off.

He leaned forward and tapped on the taxi window.

"What's wrong?"

The cabbie looked back. "Sorry, boss. This is one helluva town to drive in. Got an accident up ahead. Want me to detour?"

"Yes. No, no! Wait. Go ahead. Let's-let's take a look."

The cab moved forward, honking.

"Funny damn thing," said the cabbie. "Hey, you! Get that fleatrap out the way!" Quieter. "Funny thing—more damn people. Nosy people."

Mr. Spallner looked down and watched his fingers tremble on

his knee. "You noticed that, too?"

"Sure," said the cabbie. "All the time. There's always a crowd. You'd think it was their own mother got killed."

"They come running awfully fast," said the man in the back of

the cab.

"Same way with a fire or an explosion. Nobody around. Boom. Lotsa people around. I dunno."

"Ever seen an accident—at night?"

The cabbie nodded. "Sure. Don't make no difference. There's always a crowd."

The wreck came in view. A body lay on the sidewalk. You

knew there was a body even if you couldn't see it. Because of the crowd. The crowd with its back toward him as he sat in the rear of the cab. With its back toward him. He opened the window and almost started to yell. But he didn't have the nerve. If he yelled they might turn around.

And he was afraid to see their faces.

"I seem to have a penchant for accidents," he said, in his office. It was late afternoon. His friend sat across the desk from him, listening. "I got out of the hospital this morning and first thing on the way home; we detoured around a wreck."

"Things run in cycles," said Morgan.

"Let me tell you about my accident."

"I've heard it. Heard it all."

"But it was funny, you must admit."

"I must admit. Now how about a drink?"

They talked on for half an hour or more. All the while they talked, at the back of Spallner's brain a small watch ticked, a watch that never needed winding. It was the memory of a few little things. Wheels and faces.

At about five thirty there was a hard metal noise in the street. Morgan nodded and looked out and down. "What'd I tell you? Cycles. A truck and a cream-colored Cadillac. Yes, yes."

Spallner walked to the window. He was very cold and as he stood there, he looked at his watch, at the small minute hand. One two three four five seconds—people running—eight nine ten eleven twelve—from all over, people came running—fifteen sixteen seventeen eighteen seconds—more people, more cars, more horns blowing. Curiously distant, Spallner looked upon the scene as an explosion in reverse, the fragments of the detonation sucked back to the point of impulsion. Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one seconds and the crowd was there. Spallner made a gesture down at them, wordless.

The crowd had gathered so fast.

He saw a woman's body a moment before the crowd swallowed it up.

Morgan said. "You look lousy. Here. Finish your drink."

"I'm all right, I'm all right. Let me alone. I'm all right. Can you see those people? Can you see any of them? I wish we could see them closer."

Morgan cried out, "Where in hell are you going?"

Spallner was out the door, Morgan after him, and down the stairs, as rapidly as possible. "Come along, and hurry."

"Take it easy, you're not a well man!"

They walked out onto the street. Spallner pushed his way forward. He thought he saw a red-haired woman with too much red color on her cheeks and lips.

"There!" He turned wildly to Morgan. "Did you see her?"

"See who?"

"Damn it, she's gone. The crowd closed in!"

The crowd was all around, breathing and looking and shuffling and mixing and mumbling and getting in the way when he tried to shove through. Evidently the red-haired woman had seen him coming and run off.

He saw another familiar face! A little freckled boy. But there are many freckled boys in the world. And, anyway, it was no use, before Spallner reached him, this little boy ran away and vanished among the people.

"Is she dead?" a voice asked. "Is she dead?"

"She's dying," someone else replied. "She'll be dead before the ambulance arrives. They shouldn't have moved her. They shouldn't have moved her."

All the crowd faces—familiar, yet unfamiliar, bending over, looking down, looking down.

"Hey, mister, stop pushing."
"Who you shovin', buddy?"

Spallner came back out, and Morgan caught hold of him before he fell. "You damned fool. You're still sick. Why in hell'd you have to come down here?" Morgan demanded.

"I don't know, I really don't. They moved her, Morgan, someone moved her. You should never move a traffic victim. It kills them. It kills them."

"Yeah. That's the way with people. The dumb saps."

Spallner arranged the newspaper clippings carefully.

Morgan looked at them. "What's the idea? Ever since your wreck you think every traffic scramble is part of you. What are these?"

"Clippings of motorcar crack-ups, and photos. Look at them. Not at the cars," said Spallner, "but at the crowds around the cars." He pointed. "Here. Compare this photo of a wreck in the Wilshire district with one in Westwood. No resemblance. But now take this Westwood picture and align it with one taken in the Westwood district ten years ago." Again he motioned. "This woman is in both pictures."

"Coincidence. The woman happened to be there once in 1936,

again in 1946."

"A coincidence once, maybe. But twelve times over a period of

ten years, when the accidents occurred as much as three miles from one another, no. Here." He dealt out a dozen photographs. "She's in *all* of these!"

"Maybe she's perverted."

"She's more than that. How does she *happen* to be there so quickly after each accident? And why does she wear the same clothes in pictures taken over a period of a decade?"

"I'll be damned, so she is."

"And, last of all, why was she standing over me the night of my accident, two weeks ago!"

They had a drink. Morgan went over the files. "What'd you do, hire a clipping service while you were in the hospital to go back through the newspapers for you?" Spallner nodded. Morgan sipped his drink. It was getting late. The streetlights were coming on in the streets below the office. "What does all this add up to?"

"I don't know," said Spallner, "except that there's a universal law about accidents. Crowds gather. They always gather. And people, like you and I, have wondered from year after year, why they gathered so quickly, and how. I know the answer. Here it is!"

He flung the clippings down. "It frightens me."

"These people—mightn't they be thrill hunters, perverted sensationalists with a carnal lust for blood and morbidity?"

Spallner shrugged. "Does that explain their being at *all* the accidents? Notice, they stick to certain territories. A Brentwood accident will bring out one group. A Huntington Park another. But there's a norm for faces, a certain percentage appear at each wreck."

Morgan said, "They're not all the same faces, are they?"

"Naturally not. Accidents draw normal people, too, in the course of time. But these, I find, are always the *first* ones there."

"Who are they? What do they want? You keep hinting and never telling. Good Lord, you must have some idea. You've scared yourself and now you've got me jumping."

"I've tried getting to them, but someone always trips me up, I'm always too late. They slip into the crowd and vanish. The crowd seems to offer protection to some of its members. They see me coming."

"Sounds like some sort of clique."

"They have one thing in common, they always show up together. At a fire or an explosion or on the sidelines of a war, at any public demonstration of this thing called death. Vultures, hyenas, or saints, I don't know which they are, I just don't know. But I'm going to the police with it, this evening. It's gone on long enough. One of them shifted that woman's body today. They shouldn't have touched her. It killed her."

He placed the clippings in a briefcase. Morgan got up and slipped into his coat. Spallner clicked the briefcase shut. "Or, I just happened to think of it...."

"What?"

"Maybe they wanted her dead."

"Why?"

"Who knows. Come along?"

"Sorry. It's late. See you tomorrow. Luck." They went out together. "Give my regards to the cops. Think they'll believe you?"

"Oh, they'll believe me all right. Good night."

Spallner took it slow driving downtown.

"I want to get there," he told himself, "alive."

He was rathered shocked, but not surprised, somehow, when the truck came rolling out of an alley straight at him. He was just congratulating himself on his keen sense of observation and talking out what he would say to the police department in his mind when the truck smashed into his car. It wasn't really his car, that was the disheartening thing about it. In a preoccupied mood he was tossed first this way and then that way, while he thought, what a shame, Morgan has gone and lent me his extra car for a few days until my other car is fixed, and now here I go again. The windshield hammered back into his face. He was forced back and forth in several lightning jerks. Then all motion stopped and all noise stopped and only pain filled him up.

He heard their feet running and running and running. He fumbled with the car door. It clicked. He fell out upon the pavement drunkenly and lay, ear to the asphalt, listening to them coming. It was like a great rainstorm, with many drops, heavy and light and medium, touching the earth. He waited a few seconds and listened to their coming and their arrival. Then, weakly,

expectantly, he rolled his head up and looked.

The crowd was there.

He could smell their breaths, the mingled odors of many people sucking and sucking on the air a man needs to live by. They crowded and jostled and sucked and sucked all the air up from around his gasping face until he tried to tell them to move back, they were making him live in a vacuum. His head was bleeding very badly. He tried to move, and he realized something was wrong with his spine. He hadn't felt much at the impact, but his spine was hurt. He didn't dare move.

He couldn't speak. Opening his mouth, nothing came out but a

gagging.

Someone said, "Give me a hand. We'll roll him over and life him into a more comfortable position."

Spallner's brain burst apart.

"No! Don't move me!"

"We'll move him," said the voice, casually.

"You idiots, you'll kill me, don't!"

But he could not say any of this out loud. He could only think it.

Hands took hold of him. They started to lift him. He cried out and nausea choked him up. They straightened him out into a ramrod of agony. Two men did it. One of them was thin, bright, pale, alert—a young man. The other man was very old and had a wrinkled upper lip.

He had seen their faces before.

A familiar voice said, "Is—is he dead?"

Another voice, a memorable voice, responded, "No. Not yet. But he will be dead before the ambulance arrives."

It was all a very silly, mad plot. Like every accident. He squealed hysterically at the solid wall of faces. They were all around him, these judges and jurors with the faces he had seen before. Through his pain he counted their faces.

The freckled boy. The old man with the wrinkled upper lip.

The red-haired, red-cheeked woman. An old woman with a mole on her chin.

"I know what you're here for," he thought. "You're here just as you're at all accidents. To make certain the right ones live and the right ones die. That's why you lifted me. You knew it would kill. You knew I'd live if you left me alone.

"And that's the way it's been since time began, when crowds gather. You murder much easier, this way. Your alibi is very simple; you didn't know it was dangerous to move a hurt man. You didn't mean to hurt him."

He looked at them, above him, and he was curious as a man under deep water looking up at people on a bridge. "Who are you? Where do you come from and how do you get here so soon? You're the crowd that's always in the way, using up good air that a dying man's lungs are in need of, using up space he should be using to lie in, alone. Tramping on people to make sure they die, that's you. I know all of you."

It was like a polite monologue. They said nothing. Faces. The old man. The red-haired woman.

Someone picked up his briefcase. "Whose is this?" they asked. "It's mine! It's evidence against all of you!"

Eyes, inverted over him. Shiny eyes under tousled hair or under hats.

Faces.

Somewhere—a siren. The ambulance was coming.

But, looking at the faces, the construction, the cast, the form of the faces, Spallner knew it was too late. He read it in their faces. They *knew*.

He tried to speak. A little bit got out:

"It—looks like I'll—be joining up with you. I—guess I'll be a member of your—group—now."

He closed his eyes then, and waited for the coroner.



Peter Beagle, one of the younger American writers of fantasy, supports himself by writing, in addition to fiction, book reviews and essays on a wide variety of topics ranging from cockfighting to love. His essays provide the best insights available into his background. He was born of a middle-class Jewish family in the Bronx and remained quite attached to both his family and the Bronx until he decided that he had to break away to gain a different perspective. He received his B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh in 1959 and spent a year on a writing fellowship at Stanford (1960–1961). After living and traveling for some time in Europe, he returned to the United States and settled in Santa Cruz, California. He has been chairman of the local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union—one of his pet peeves is censorship; he likes music, plays the guitar, and composes ballads. He now resides in Watsonville, California.

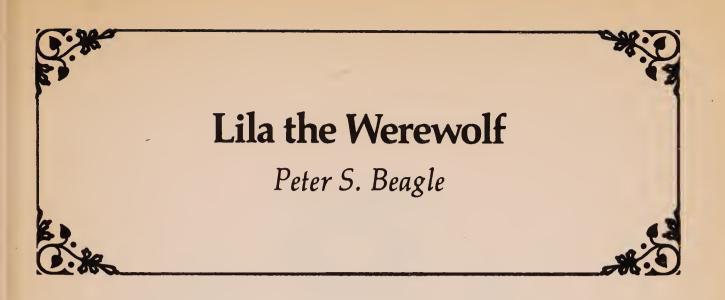
His review essay of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy (Holiday, June 1966), later incorporated in part into his introduction to The Tolkien Reader, is of particular interest to readers of Tolkien and of fantasy in general. Beagle comments that the reason people, the young in particular, find Tolkien so appealing is that they recognize that Tolkien believes in what he is writing, that is, in the ethical standards and humanistic attitudes expressed in his books. Two examples of such standards and attitudes are: safeness or complacency corrupts, and every individual is a vital part of the whole of humankind and is responsible for its wellbeing. Both of these principles underlie much of Beagle's own fiction.

Beagle's output of fiction has been steady, but not at all prolific. One suspects the reasons for this are the demands the author places upon himself for quality writing. His first book, still in print, is A Fine and Private Place (1960), published when he was just twenty-one. It is a highly unusual ghost story that blends fine characterization and a good measure of delightful humor with the themes of love and responsibility. The New York City graveyard

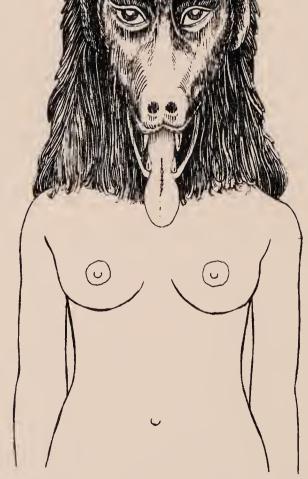
setting of this book, however, hardly prepares the reader for the elegance of his next full-length novel, The Last Unicorn (1968), a medieval fantasy set entirely in a secondary world inhabited by kings, wizards, and unicorns. The humor, however, is there, as are the fine character delineations and the powerful themes. In between these two novels, Beagle wrote "Come Lady Death," a fantasy short story that was nominated for an O'Henry Award in 1963. His most recent fantasy work is "Lila the Werewolf" (1974), which returns to the style and setting of his first book. In addition to his fiction, Beagle has written two entertaining works of nonfiction: I See by My Outfit (1965) and The California Feeling (1969). Beagle is currently writing for movies and television. He is working on the script for Bakshi's film version of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. He has notified us that he is also preparing a script of the film version of "Lila the Werewolf," the story which appears in this collection.

The tone of ironic humor pervades "Lila the Werewolf." As the narrator states in the story, "you could have either werewolves or Pyrex nine-cup percolators in the world, but not both, surely." Yet in this fantasy both do exist; although one could interpret the story as a psychological allegory, there is no doubt about the reality of both werewolf and percolator. It is one of Peter Beagle's greatest talents that here, as elsewhere, he combines the flippant with the serious, the comical with the ghastly. His unexpected images and comparisons are the tools with which he creates his humor, makes real the smell and feel of the

werewolf's breath, and yokes the impossible with the real.







Lila Braun had been living with Farrell for three weeks before he found out she was a werewolf. They had met at a party when the moon was a few nights past the full, and by the time it had withered to the shape of a lemon Lila had moved her suitcase, her guitar, and her Ewan MacColl records two blocks north and four blocks west to Farrell's apartment on Ninety-eighth Street. Girls sometimes happened to Farrell like that.

One evening Lila wasn't in when Farrell came home from work at the bookstore. She had left a note on the table, under a can of tunafish. The note said that she had gone up to the Bronx to have dinner with her mother, and would probably be spending the night there. The coleslaw in the refrigerator should be fin-

ished up before it went bad.

Farrell ate the tunafish and gave the coleslaw to Grunewald. Grunewald was a half-grown Russian wolfhound, the color of sour milk. He looked like a goat, and had no outside interests except shoes. Farrell was taking care of him for a girl who was away in Europe for the summer. She sent Grunewald a tape

recording of her voice every week.

Farrell went to a movie with a friend, and to the West End afterward for beer. Then he walked home alone under the full moon, which was red and yellow. He reheated the morning coffee, played a record, read through a week-old "News of the Week in Review" section of the Sunday Times, and finally took Grunewald up to the roof for the night, as he always did. The dog had been accustomed to sleep in the same bed with his mistress, and the point was not negotiable. Grunewald mooed and scrabbled and butted all the way, but Farrell pushed him out among the looming chimneys and ventilators and slammed the door. Then he came back downstairs and went to bed.

He slept very badly. Grunewald's baying woke him twice; and there was something else that brought him half out of bed, thirsty and lonely, with his sinuses full and the night swaying like a curtain as the figures of his dream scurried offstage. Grunewald seemed to have gone off the air—perhaps it was the silence that had awakened him. Whatever the reason, he never really got back to sleep.

He was lying on his back, watching a chair with his clothes on it becoming a chair again, when the wolf came in through the open window. It landed lightly in the middle of the room and stood there for a moment, breathing quickly, with its ears back. There was blood on the wolf's teeth and tongue, and blood on its chest.

Farrell, whose true gift was for acceptance, especially in the morning, accepted the idea that there was a wolf in his bedroom and lay quite still, closing his eyes as the grim, black-lipped head swung toward him. Having once worked at a zoo, he was able to recognize the beast as a Central European subspecies—smaller and lighter-boned than the northern timber wolf variety, lacking the thick, ruffy mane at the shoulders, and having a more pointed nose and ears. His own pedantry always delighted him, even at the worst moments.

Blunt claws clicking on the linoleum, then silent on the throw rug by the bed. Something warm and slow splashed down on his shoulder, but he never moved. The wild smell of the wolf was over him, and that did frighten him at last—to be in the same room with that smell and the Miró prints on the walls. Then he felt the sunlight on his eyelids, and at the same moment he heard the wolf moan softly and deeply. The sound was not repeated, but the breath on his face was suddenly sweet and smoky, dizzyingly familiar after the other. He opened his eyes and saw Lila. She was sitting naked on the edge of the bed, smiling, with her hair down.

"Hello, baby," she said. "Move over, baby. I came home."

Farrell's gift was for acceptance. He was perfectly willing to believe that he had dreamed the wolf; to believe Lila's story of boiled chicken and bitter arguments and sleeplessness on Tremont Avenue; and to forget that her first caress had been to bite him on the shoulder, hard enough so that the blood crusting there as he got up and made breakfast might very well be his own. But then he left the coffee perking and went up to the roof to get Grunewald. He found the dog sprawled in a grove of TV antennas, looking more like a goat than ever, with his throat torn out. Farrell had never actually seen an animal with its throat torn out.

The coffeepot was still chuckling when he came back into the apartment, which struck him as very odd. You could have either werewolves or Pyrex nine-cup percolators in the world, but not

both, surely. He told Lila, watching her face. She was a small girl, not really pretty, but with good eyes and a lovely mouth, and with a curious sullen gracefulness that had been the first thing to speak to Farrell at the party. When he told her how Grunewald had looked, she shivered all over, once.

"Ugh!" she said, wrinkling her lips back from her neat white teeth. "Oh baby, how awful. Poor Grunewald. Oh, poor Bar-

bara." Barbara was Grunewald's owner.

"Yeah," Farrell said. "Poor Barbara, making her little tapes in

Saint-Tropez." He could not look away from Lila's face.

She said, "Wild dogs. Not really wild, I mean, but with owners. You hear about it sometimes, how a pack of them get together and attack children and things, running through the streets. Then they go home and eat their Dog Yummies. The scary thing is that they probably live right around here. Everybody on the block seems to have a dog. God, that's scary. Poor Grunewald."

"They didn't tear him up much," Farrell said. "It must have been just for the fun of it. And the blood. I didn't know dogs

killed for the blood. He didn't have any blood left."

The tip of Lila's tongue appeared between her lips, in the unknowing reflex of a fondled cat. As evidence, it wouldn't have stood up even in old Salem; but Farrell knew the truth then, beyond laziness or rationalization, and went on buttering toast for Lila. Farrell had nothing against werewolves, and he had never like Grunewald.

He told his friend Ben Kassoy about Lila when they met in the Automat for lunch. He had to shout it over the clicking and rattling all around them, but the people sitting six inches away on either hand never looked up. New Yorkers never eavesdrop. They hear only what they simply cannot help hearing.

Ben said, "I told you about Bronx girls. You better come stay

at my place for a few days."

Farrell shook his head. "No, that's silly. I mean, it's only Lila. If she were going to hurt me, she could have done it last night. Besides, it won't happen again for a month. There has to be a full moon."

His friend stared at him. "So what? What's that got to do with anything? You going to go on home as though nothing had hap-

pened?"

"Not as though nothing had happened," Farrell said lamely. "The thing is, it's still only Lila, not Lon Chaney or somebody. Look, she goes to her psychiatrist three afternoons a week, and she's got her guitar lesson one night a week, and her pottery class

one night, and she cooks eggplant maybe twice a week. She calls her mother every Friday night, and one night a month she turns into a wolf. You see what I'm getting at? It's still Lila, whatever she does, and I just can't get terribly shook about it. A little bit, sure, because what the hell. But I don't know. Anyway, there's no mad rush about it. I'll talk to her when the thing comes up in the conversation, just naturally. It's okay."

Ben said, "God damn. You see why nobody has any respect for liberals anymore? Farrell, I know you. You're just scared of hurt-

ing her feelings."

"Well, it's that too," Farrell agreed, a little embarrassed. "I hate confrontations. If I break up with her now, she'll think I'm doing it because she's a werewolf. It's awkward, it feels nasty and middle-class. I should have broken up with her the first time I met her mother, or the second time she served the eggplant. Her mother, boy, there's the real werewolf, there's somebody I'd wear wolfbane against, that woman. Damn, I wish I hadn't found out. I don't think I've ever found out anything about people that I was the better for knowing."

Ben walked all the way back to the bookstore with him, arguing. It touched Farrell, because Ben hated to walk. Before they parted, Ben suggested, "At least you could try some of that stuff you were talking about, the wolfbane. There's garlic, too—you put some in a little bag and wear it around your neck. Don't laugh, man. If there's such a thing as werewolves, the other stuff

must be real too. Cold iron, silver, oak, running water—"

"I'm not laughing at you," Farrell said, but he was still grinning. "Lila's shrink says she has a rejection thing, very deep-seated, take us years to break through all that scar tissue. Now if I start walking around wearing amulets and mumbling in Latin every time she looks at me, who knows how far it'll set her back? Listen, I've done some things I'm not proud of, but I don't want to mess up anyone's analysis. That's the sin against God." He sighed and slapped Ben lightly on the arm. "Don't worry about it. We'll work it out, I'll talk to her."

But between that night and the next full moon, he found no good, casual way of bringing the subject up. Admittedly, he did not try as hard as he might have: it was true that he feared confrontations more than he feared werewolves, and he would have found it almost as difficult to talk to Lila about her guitar playing, or her pots, or the political arguments she got into at parties. "The thing is," he said to Ben, "it's sort of one more little weakness not to take advantage of. In a way."

They made love often that month. The smell of Lila flowered

in the bedroom, where the smell of the wolf still lingered almost visibly, and both of them were wild, heavy zoo smells, warm and raw and fearful, the sweeter for being savage. Farrell held Lila in his arms and knew what she was, and he was always frightened; but he would not have let her go if she had turned into a wolf again as he held her. It was a relief to peer at her while she slept and see how stubby and childish her fingernails were, or that the skin around her mouth was rashy because she had been snacking on chocolate. She loved secret sweets, but they always betrayed her.

It's only Lila after all, he would think as he drowsed off. Her mother used to hide the candy, but Lila always found it. Now she's a big girl, neither married nor in a graduate school, but living in sin with an Irish musician, and she can have all the candy she wants. What kind of a werewolf is that. Poor Lila, practicing Who killed Davey Moore? Why did he die? ...

The note said that she would be working late at the magazine, on layout, and might have to be there all night. Farrell put on about four feet of Telemann laced with Django Reinhardt, took down The Golden Bough, and settled into a chair by the window. The moon shone in at him, bright and thin and sharp as the lid of a tin can, and it did not seem to move at all as he dozed and woke.

Lila's mother called several times during the night, which was interesting. Lila still picked up her mail and most messages at her old apartment, and her two roommates covered for her when necessary, but Farrell was absolutely certain that her mother knew she was living with him. Farrell was an expert on mothers. Mrs. Braun called him Joe each time she called and that made him wonder, for he knew she hated him. Does she suspect that we share a secret? Ah, poor Lila.

The last time the telephone woke him, it was still dark in the room, but the traffic lights no longer glittered through rings of mist, and the cars made a different sound on the warming pavement A man was saying clearly in the street, "Well, I'd shoot'm. I'd shoot'm." Farrell let the telephone ring ten times before he picked it up.

"Let me talk to Lila," Mrs. Braun said.

"She isn't here." What if the sun catches her, what if she turns back to herself in front of a cop, or a bus driver, or a couple of nuns going to early Mass? "Lila isn't here, Mrs. Braun."

"I have reason to believe that's not true." The fretful, muscular voice had dropped all pretense of warmth. "I want to talk to Lila."

Farrell was suddenly dry-mouthed and shivering with fury. It was her choice of words that did it. "Well, I have reason to believe you're a suffocating old bitch and a bourgeois Stalinist. How do you like them apples, Mrs. B?" As though his anger had summoned her, the wolf was standing two feet away from him. Her coat was dark and lank with sweat, and yellow saliva was mixed with the blood that strung from her jaws. She looked at Farrell and growled far away in her throat.

"Just a minute," he said. He covered the receiver with his

palm. "It's for you," he said to the wolf. "It's your mother."

The wolf made a pitiful sound, almost inaudible, and scuffed at the floor. She was plainly exhausted. Mrs. Braun pinged in Farrell's ear like a bug against a lighted window. "What, what? Hello, what is this? Listen, you put Lila on the phone right now. Hello? I want to talk to Lila. I know she's there."

Farrell hung up just as the sun touched a corner of the window. The wolf became Lila. As before, she only made one sound. The phone rang again, and she picked it up without a glance at Farrell. "Bernice?" Lila always called her mother by her first name. "Yes—no, no—yeah, I'm fine. I'm all right, I just forgot to call. No, I'm all right, will you listen? Bernice, there's no law that says you have to get hysterical. Yes, you are." She dropped down on the bed, groping under her pillow for cigarettes. Farrell got

up and began to make coffee.

"Well, there was a little trouble," Lila was saying. "See, I went to the zoo, because I couldn't find—Bernice, I know, I know, but that was, what, three months ago. The thing is, I didn't think they'd have their horns so soon. Bernice, I had to, that's all. There'd only been a couple of cats and a—well, sure they chased me, but I—well, Momma, Bernice, what did you want me to do? Just what did you want me to do? You're always so dramatic—why do I shout? I shout because I can't get you to listen to me any other way. You remember what Dr. Schechtman said—what? No, I told you, I just forgot to call. No, that is the reason, that's the real and only reason. Well, whose fault is that? What? Oh, Bernice. Jesus Christ, Bernice. All right, how is it Dad's fault?"

She didn't want the coffee, or any breakfast, but she sat at the table in his bathrobe and drank milk greedily. It was the first time he had ever seen her drink milk. Her face was sandy pale, and her eyes were red. Talking to her mother left her looking as though she had actually gone ten rounds with the woman. Farrell asked, "How long has it been happening?"

"Nine years," Lila said. "Since I hit puberty. First day, cramps;

the second day, this. My introduction to womanhood." She snickered and spilled her milk. "I want some more," she said. "Got to get rid of that taste."

"Who knows about it?" he asked. "Pat and Janet?" They were

the two girls she had been rooming with.

"God, no. I'd never tell them. I've never told a girl. Bernice knows, of course, and Dr. Schechtman—he's my head doctor. And you now. That's all." Farrell waited. She was a bad liar, and only did it to heighten the effect of the truth. "Well, there was Mickey," she said. "The guy I told you about the first night, you remember? It doesn't matter. He's an acidhead in Vancouver, of

all the places. He'll never tell anybody."

He thought: I wonder if any girl has ever talked about me in that sort of voice. I doubt it, offhand. Lila said, "It wasn't too hard to keep it secret. I missed a lot of things. Like I never could go to the riding camp, and I still want to. And the senior play, when I was in high school. They picked me to play the girl in *Liliom*, but then they changed the evening, and I had to say I was sick. And the winter's bad, because the sun sets so early. But actually, it's been a lot less trouble than my goddamn allergies." She made a laugh, but Farrell did not respond.

"Dr. Schechtman says it's a sex thing," she offered. "He says it'll take years and years to cure it. Bernice thinks I should go to someone else, but I don't want to be one of those women who runs around changing shrinks like hair colors. Pat went through five of them in a month one time. Joe, I wish you'd say some-

thing. Or just go away."

"Is it only dogs?" he asked. Lila's face did not change, but her chair rattled, and the milk went over again. Farrell said, "Answer

me. Do you only kill dogs, and cats, and zoo animals?"

The tears began to come, heavy and slow, bright as knives in the morning sunlight. She could not look at him, and when she tried to speak she could only make creaking, cartilaginous sounds in her throat. "You don't know," she whispered at last. "You don't have any idea what it's like."

"That's true," he answered. He was always very fair about that

particular point.

He took her hand, and then she really began to cry. Her sobs were horrible to hear, much more frightening to Farrell than any wolf noises. When he held her, she rolled in his arms like a stranded ship with the waves slamming into her. I always get the criers, he thought sadly. My girls always cry, sooner or later. But never for me.

"Don't leave me!" she wept. "I don't know why I came to live

with you—I knew it wouldn't work—but don't leave me! There's just Bernice and Dr. Schechtman, and it's so lonely. I want somebody else, I get so lonely. Don't leave me, Joe. I love you, Joe. I love you."

She was patting his face as though she were blind. Farrell stroked her hair and kneaded the back of her neck, wishing that her mother would call again. He felt skilled and weary, and with-

out desire. I'm doing it again, he thought.

"I love you," Lila said. And he answered her, thinking, I'm doing it again. That's the great advantage of making the same mistake a lot of times. You come to know it, and you can study it and get inside it, really make it yours. It's the same good old mistake, except this time the girl's hang-up is different. But it's the same thing. I'm doing it again.

The building superintendent was thirty or fifty: dark, thin, quick, and shivering. A Lithuanian or a Latvian, he spoke very little English. He smelled of black friction tape and stale water, and he was strong in the twisting way that a small, lean animal is strong. His eyes were almost purple, and they bulged a little, straining out—the terrible eyes of a herald angel stricken dumb. He roamed in the basement all day, banging on pipes and taking the elevator apart.

The superintendent met Lila only a few hours after Farrell did: on that first night, when she came home with him. At the sight of her the little man jumped back, dropping the two-legged chair he was carrying. He promptly fell over it, and did not try to get up, but cowered there, clucking and gulping, trying to cross himself and make the sign of the horns at the same time. Farrell started to help him up, but he screamed. They could hardly hear the sound.

It would have been merely funny and embarrassing, except for the fact that Lila was equally as frightened of the superintendent from that moment. She would not go down to the basement for any reason, nor would she enter or leave the house until she was satisfied that he was nowhere near. Farrell had thought then that she took the superintendent for a lunatic.

"I don't know how he knows," he said to Ben. "I guess if you believe in werewolves and vampires, you probably recognize them right away. I don't believe in them at all, and I live with one."

He lived with Lila all through the autumn and the winter. They went out together and came home, and her cooking improved slightly, and she gave up the guitar and got a kitten named Theodora. Sometimes she wept, but not often. She turned out not to be a real crier.

She told Dr. Schechtman about Farrell, and he said that it would probably be a very beneficial relationship for her. It wasn't, but it wasn't a particularly bad one either. Their lovemaking was usually good, though it bothered Farrell to suspect that it was the sense and smell of the Other that excited him. For the rest, they came near being friends. Farrell had known that he did not love Lila before he found out that she was a werewolf, and this made him feel a great deal easier about being bored with her.

"It'll break up by itself in the spring," he said, "like ice."

Ben asked, "What if it doesn't?" They were having lunch in

the Automat again. "What'll you do if it just goes on?"

"It's not that easy." Farrell looked away from his friend and began to explore the mysterious, swampy innards of his beef pie. He said, "The trouble is that I know her. That was the real mistake. You shouldn't get to know people if you know you're not going to stay with them, one way or another. It's all right if you come and go in ignorance, but you shouldn't know them."

A week or so before the full moon, she would start to become nervous and strident, and this would continue until the day preceding her transformation. On that day, she was invariably loving, in the tender, desperate manner of someone who is going away; but the next day would see her silent, speaking only when she had to. She always had a cold on the last day, and looked gray and patchy and sick, but she usually went to work anyway.

Farrell was sure, though she never talked about it, that the change into wolf shape was actually peaceful for her, though the returning hurt. Just before moonrise she would take off her clothes and take the pins out of her hair and stand waiting. Farrell never managed not to close his eyes when she dropped heavily down on all fours; but there was a moment before that when her face would grow a look that he never saw at any other time, except when they were making love. Each time he saw it, it struck him as a look of wondrous joy at not being Lila any more.

"See, I know her," he tried to explain to Ben. "She only likes to go to color movies, because wolves can't see color. She can't stand the Modern Jazz Quartet, but that's all she plays the first couple of days afterward. Stupid things like that. Never gets high at parties, because she's afraid she'll start talking. It's hard to walk away, that's all. Taking what I know with me."

Ben asked, "Is she still scared of the super?"

"Oh, God," Farrell said. "She got his dog last time. It was a Dalmatian—good-looking animal. She didn't know it was his. He doesn't hide when he sees her now, he just gives her a look like a stake through the heart. That man is a really classy hater, a natural. I'm scared of him myself." He stood up and began to pull on his overcoat. "I wish he'd get turned on to her mother. Get some practical use out of him. Did I tell you she wants me to call her Bernice?"

Ben said, "Farrell, if I were you, I'd leave the country. I would."

They went out into the February drizzle that sniffled back and forth between snow and rain. Farrell did not speak until they reached the corner where he turned toward the bookstore. Then he said very softly, "Damn, you have to be so careful. Who wants to know what people turn into?"

May came, and a night when Lila once again stood naked at the window, waiting for the moon. Farrell fussed with dishes and garbage bags and fed the cat. These moments were always awkward. He had just asked her, "You want to save what's left of the rice?" when the telephone rang.

It was Lila's mother. She called two and three times a week

now. "This is Bernice. How's my Irisher this evening?"

"I'm fine, Bernice," Farrell said. Lila suddenly threw back her head and drew a heavy, whining breath. The cat hissed silently and ran into the bathroom.

"I called to inveigle you two uptown this Friday," Mrs. Braun said. "A couple of old friends are coming over, and I know if I don't get some young people in we'll just sit around and talk about what went wrong with the Progressive Party. The Old Left. So if you could sort of sweet-talk our girl into spending an evening in Squaresville—"

"I'll have to check with Lila." She's doing it, he thought, that terrible woman. Every time I talk to her, I sound married. I see what she's doing, but she goes right ahead anyway. He said, "I'll talk to her in the morning." Lila struggled in the moonlight, between dancing and drowning.

"Oh," Mrs. Braun said. "Yes, of course. Have her call me back." She sighed. "It's such a comfort to me to know you're

there. Ask her if I should fix a fondue."

Lila made a handsome wolf: tall and broad-chested for a female, moving as easily as water sliding over stone. Her coat was dark brown, showing red in the proper light, and there were white places on her breast. She had pale green eyes, the color of the sky when a hurricane is coming.

Usually she was gone as soon as the changing was over, for she never cared for him to see her in her wolf form. But tonight she came slowly toward him, walking in a strange way, with her hindquarters almost dragging. She was making a high, soft sound, and her eyes were not focusing on him.

"What is it?" he asked foolishly. The wolf whined and skulked under the table, rubbing against the leg. Then she lay on her belly and rolled, and as she did so the sound grew in her throat until it became an odd, sad, thin cry, not a hunting howl, but a

shiver of longing turned into breath.

"Jesus, don't do that!" Farrell gasped. But she sat up and howled again, and a dog answered her from somewhere near the

river. She wagged her tail and whimpered.

Farrell said, "The super'll be up here in two minutes flat. What's the matter with you?" He heard footsteps and low frightened voices in the apartment above them. Another dog howled, this one nearby, and the wolf wriggled a little way toward the window on her haunches, like a baby, scooting. She looked at him over her shoulder, shuddering violently. On an impulse, he picked up the phone and called her mother.

Watching the wolf as she rocked and slithered and moaned, he described her actions to Mrs. Braun. "I've never seen her like

this," he said. "I don't know what's the matter with her."

"Oh, my God," Mrs. Braun whispered. She told him.

When he was silent, she began to speak very rapidly. "It hasn't happened for such a long time. Schechtman gives her pills, but she must have run out and forgotten—she's always been like that, since she was little. All the thermos bottles she used to leave on the school bus, and every week her piano music—"

"I wish you'd told me before," he said. He was edging very cautiously toward the open window. The pupils of the wolf's

eyes were pulsing with her quick breaths.

"It isn't a thing you tell people!" Lila's mother wailed in his ears. "How do you think it was for me when she brought her first little boyfriend—" Farrell dropped the phone and sprang for the window. He had the inside track, and he might have made it, but she turned her head and snarled so wildly that he fell back. When he reached the window, she was already two fire escape landings below, and there was eager yelping waiting for her in the street.

Dangling and turning just above the floor, Mrs. Braun heard Farrell's distant yell, followed immediately by a heavy thumping on the door. A strange, tattered voice was shouting unintelligibly

beyond the knocking. Footsteps crashed by the receiver and the door opened.

"My dog, my dog!" the strange voice mourned. "My dog, my

dog, my dog!"

"I'm sorry about your dog," Farrell said. "Look, please go

away. I've got work to do."

"I got work," the voice said. "I know my work." It climbed and spilled into another language, out of which English words jutted like broken bones. "Where is she? Where is she? She kill my dog."

"She's not here." Farrell's own voice changed on the last word. It seemed a long time before he said, "You'd better put that

away."

Mrs. Braun heard the howl as clearly as though the wolf were running beneath her own window—lonely and insatiable, with a kind of gasping laughter in it. The other voice began to scream. Mrs. Braun caught the phrase silver bullet several times. The door slammed, then opened and slammed again.

Farrell was the only man of his own acquaintance who was able to play back his dreams while he was having them: to stop them in mid-flight, no matter how fearful they might be—or how lovely—and run them over and over studying them in his sleep, until the most terrifying reel became at once utterly harmless and unbearably familiar. This night that he spent running after Lila was like that.

He would find them congregated under the marquee of an apartment house, or romping around the moonscape of a construction site: ten or fifteen males of all races, creeds, colors, and previous conditions of servitude; whining and yapping, pissing against tires, inhaling indiscriminately each other and the lean, grinning bitch they surrounded. She frightened them, for she growled more wickedly than coyness demanded, and where she snapped, even in play, bone showed. Still they tumbled on her and over her, biting her neck and ears in their turn; and she snarled but she did not run away.

Never, at least, until Farrell came charging upon them, shrieking like any cuckold, kicking at the snuffling lovers. Then she would turn and race off into the spring dark, with her thin, dreamy howl floating behind her like the train of a smoky gown. The dogs followed, and so did Farrell, calling and cursing. They always lost him quickly, that jubilant marriage procession, leaving him stumbling down rusty iron ladders into places where he fell over garbage cans. Yet he would come upon them as inevitably in time, loping along Broadway or trotting across Columbus

Avenue toward the park; he would hear them in the tennis courts near the river, breaking down the nets over Lila and her moment's Ares. There were dozens of them now, coming from all directions. They stank of their joy, and he threw stones at them and shouted, and they ran.

And the wolf ran at their head, on sidewalks and on wet grass, her tail waving contentedly, but her eyes still hungry, and her howl growing ever more warning than wistful. Farrell knew that she must have blood before sunrise, and that it was both useless and dangerous to follow her. But the night wound and unwound itself, and he knew the same things over and over, and ran down the same streets, and saw the same couples walk wide of him, thinking he was drunk.

Mrs. Braun kept leaping out of a taxi that pulled up next to him, usually at corners where the dogs had just piled by, knocking over the crates stacked in market doorways and spilling the newspapers at the subway kiosks. Standing in broccoli, in black taffeta, with a front like a ferryboat—yet as lean in the hips as her wolf-daughter—with her plum-colored hair all loose, one arm lifted, and her orange mouth pursed in a bellow, she was no longer Bernice but a wronged fertility goddess getting set to blast the harvest. "We've got to split up!" she would roar at Farrell, and each time it sounded like a sound idea. Yet he looked for her whenever he lost Lila's trail, because she never did.

The superintendent kept turning up too, darting after Farrell out of alleys or cellar entrances, or popping from the freight elevators that load through the sidewalk. Farrell would hear his numberless passkeys clicking on the flat piece of wood tucked into his belt.

"You see her? You see her, the wolf, kill my dog?" Under the fat, ugly moon, the army .45 glittered and trembled like his own mad eyes.

"Mark with a cross." He would pat the barrel of the gun and shake it under Farrell's nose like a maraca. "Mark with a cross,

bless by a priest. Three silver bullets. She kill my dog."

Lila's voice would come sailing to them then, from up in Harlem or away near Lincoln Center, and the little man would whirl and dash down into the earth, disappearing into the crack between two slabs of sidewalk. Farrell understood quite clearly that the superintendent was hunting Lila underground, using the keys that only superintendents have to take elevators down to the black sub-sub-basements, far below the bicycle rooms and the wet, shaking laundry rooms, and below the furnace rooms, below the passages walled with electricity meters and roofed with burly

steam pipes; down to the realms where the great dim water mains roll like whales, and the gas lines hump and preen, down where the roots of the apartment houses fade together; and so along under the city, scrabbling through secret ways with silver bullets, and his keys rapping against the piece of wood. He never saw Lila, but he was never very far behind her.

Cutting across parking lots, pole-vaulting between locked bumpers, edging and dancing his way through fluorescent gaggles of haughty children; leaping uptown like a salmon against the current of the theater crowds; walking quickly past the random killing faces that floated down the night tide like unexploded mines, and especially avoiding the crazy faces that wanted to tell him what it was like to be crazy—so Farrell pursued Lila Braun, of Tremont Avenue and CCNY, in the city all night long. Nobody offered to help him, or tried to head off the dangerous-looking bitch bounding along with the delirious raggle of admirers streaming after her; but then, the dogs had to fight through the same clenched legs and vengeful bodies that Farrell did. The crowds slowed Lila down, but he felt relieved whenever she turned toward the emptier streets. She must have blood soon, somewhere.

Farrell's dreams eventually lost their clear edge after he played them back a certain number of times, and so it was with the night. The full moon skidded down the sky, thinning like a tatter of butter in a skillet, and remembered scenes began to fold sloppily into each other. The sound of Lila and the dogs grew fainter whichever way he followed. Mrs. Braun blinked on and off at longer intervals; and in dark doorways and under subway gratings, the superintendent burned like a corposant, making the barrel of his pistol run rainbow. At last he lost Lila for good, and with that it seemed that he woke.

It was still night, but not dark, and he was walking slowly home on Riverside Drive through a cool, grainy fog. The moon had set, but the river was strangely bright—glittering gray as far up as the bridge, where headlights left shiny, wet paths like snails. There was no one else on the street.

"Dumb broad," he said aloud. "The hell with it. She wants to mess around, let her mess around." He wondered whether were-wolves could have cubs, and what sort of cubs they might be. Lila must have turned on the dogs by now, for the blood. Poor dogs, he thought. They were all so dirty and innocent and happy with her.

"A moral lesson for all of us," he announced sententiously. "Don't fool with strange, eager ladies, they'll kill you." He was a

little hysterical. Then, two blocks ahead of him, he saw the gaunt shape in the gray light of the river, alone now, and hurrying. Farrell did not call to her, but as soon as he began to run, the wolf wheeled and faced him. Even at that distance, her eyes were stained and streaked and wild. She showed all the teeth on one side of her mouth, and she growled like fire.

Farrell trotted steadily toward her, crying, "Go home, go home! Lila, you dummy, get on home, it's morning!" She growled terribly, but when Farrell was less than a block away she turned again and dashed across the street, heading for West End Avenue. Farrell said, "Good girl, that's it," and limped after her.

In the hours before sunrise on West End Avenue, many people came out to walk their dogs. Farrell had done it often enough with poor Grunewald to know many of the dawn walkers by sight, and some to talk to. A fair number of them were whores and homosexuals, both of whom always seem to have dogs in New York. Quietly, almost always alone, they drifted up and down the Nineties, piloted by their small, fussy beasts, but moving in a kind of fugitive truce with the city and the night that was ending. Farrell sometimes fancied that they were all asleep, and that this hour was the only true rest they ever got.

He recognized Robie by his two dogs, Scone and Crumpet. Robie lived in the apartment directly below Farrell's, usually unhappily. The dogs were horrifying little homebrews of Chihua-

hua and Yorkshire terrier, but Robie loved them.

Crumpet, the male, saw Lila first. He gave a delighted yap of welcome and proposition (according to Robie, Scone bored him, and he liked big girls anyway) and sprang to meet her, yanking his leash through Robie's slack hand. The wolf was almost upon him before he realized his fatal misunderstanding and scuttled desperately in retreat, meowing with utter terror.

Robie wailed, and Farrell ran as fast as he could, but Lila knocked Crumpet off his feet and slashed his throat while he was still in the air. Then she crouched on the body, nuzzling it in a

dreadful way.

Robie actually came within a step of leaping upon Lila and trying to drag her away from his dead dog. Instead, he turned on Farrell as he came panting up, and began hitting him with a good deal of strength and accuracy. "Damn you, damn you!" he sobbed. Little Scone ran away around the corner, screaming like a mandrake.

Farrell put up his arms and went with the punches, all the while yelling at Lila until his voice ripped. But the blood frenzy had her, and Farrell had never imagined what she must be like at

those times. Somehow she had spared the dogs who had loved her all night, but she was nothing but thirst now. She pushed and kneaded Crumpet's body as though she were nursing.

All along the avenue, the morning dogs were barking like trumpets. Farrell ducked away from Robie's soft fists and saw them coming, tripping over their trailing leashes, running too fast for their stubby legs. They were small, spoiled beasts, most of them, overweight and short-winded, and many were not young. Their owners cried unmanly pet names after them, but they waddled gallantly toward their deaths, barking promises far bigger than themselves, and none of them looked back.

She looked up with her muzzle red to the eyes. The dogs did falter then, for they knew murder when they smelled it, and even their silly, nearsighted eyes understood vaguely what creature faced them. But they knew the smell of love too, and they were

all gentlemen.

She killed the first two to reach her—a spitz and a cocker spaniel—with two snaps of her jaws. But before she could settle down to her meal, three Pekes were scrambling up to her, though they would have had to stand on each others' shoulders. Lila whirled without a sound, and they fell away, rolling and yelling but unhurt. As soon as she turned, the Pekes were at her again, joined now by a couple of valiant poodles. Lila got one of the poodles when she turned again.

Robie had stopped beating on Farrell, and was leaning against a traffic light, being sick. But other people were running up now: a middle-aged black man, crying; a plump youth in a plastic car coat and bedroom slippers, who kept whimpering, "Oh God, she's eating them, look at her, she's really eating them!"; two lean, ageless girls in slacks, both with foamy beige hair. They all called wildly to their unheeding dogs, and they all grabbed at

Farrell and shouted in his face. Cars began to stop.

The sky was thin and cool, rising pale gold, but Lila paid no attention to it. She was ramping under the swarm of little dogs, rearing and spinning in circles, snarling blood. The dogs were terrified and bewildered, but they never swerved from their labor. The smell of love told them that they were welcome, however ungraciously she seemed to receive them. Lila shook herself, and a pair of squealing dachshunds, hobbled in a double harness, tumbled across the sidewalk to end at Farrell's feet. They scrambled up and immediately towed themselves back into the maelstrom. Lila bit one of them almost in half, but the other dachshund went on trying to climb her hindquarters, dragging his ripped comrade with him. Farrell began to laugh.

The black man said, "You think it's funny?" and hit him. Farrell sat down, still laughing. The man stood over him, embarrassed, offering Farrell his handkerchief. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that" he said "Put your done billed may done?"

have done that," he said. "But your dog killed my dog."

"She isn't my dog," Farrell said. He moved to let a man pass between them, and then saw that it was the superintendent, holding his pistol with both hands. Nobody noticed him until he fired; but Farrell pushed one of the foamy-haired girls, and she stumbled against the superintendent as the gun went off. The

silver bullet broke a window in a parked car.

The superintendent fired again while the echoes of the first shot were still clapping back and forth between the houses. A Pomeranian screamed that time, and a woman cried out, "Oh, my God, he shot Borgy!" But the crowd was crumbling away, breaking into its individual components like pills on television. The watching cars had sped off at the sight of the gun, and the faces that had been peering down from windows disappeared. Except for Farrell, the few people who remained were scattered halfway down the block. The sky was brightening swiftly now.

"For God's sake, don't let him!" the same woman called from the shelter of a doorway. But two men made shushing gestures at her, saying, "It's all right, he knows how to use that thing. Go

ahead, buddy."

The shots had at last frightened the little dogs away from Lila. She crouched among the twitching splotches of fur, with her muzzle wrinkled back and her eyes more black than green. Farrell saw a plaid rag that had been a dog jacket protruding from under her body. The superintendent stooped and squinted over the gun barrel, aiming with grotesque care, while the men cried to him to shoot. He was too far from the werewolf for her to reach him before he fired the last silver bullet, though he would surely die before she died. His lips were moving as he took aim.

Two long steps would have brought Farrell up behind the superintendent. Later he told himself that he had been afraid of the pistol, because that was easier than remembering how he had felt when he looked at Lila. Her tongue never stopped lapping around her dark jaws, and even as she set herself to spring, she lifted a bloody paw to her mouth. Farrell thought of her padding in the bedroom, breathing on his face. The superintendent grunted and Farrell closed his eyes. Yet even then he expected to find himself doing something.

Then he heard Mrs. Braun's unmistakable voice. "Don't you dare!" She was standing between Lila and the superintendent—one shoe gone, and the heel off the other one; her knit dress torn

at the shoulder, and her face tired and smudgy. But she pointed a finger at the startled superintendent, and he stepped quickly back, as though she had a pistol too.

"Lady, that's a wolf," he protested nervously. "Lady, you please get, get out of the way. That's a wolf, I go shoot her

now."

"I want to see your license for that gun." Mrs. Braun held out her hand. The superintendent blinked at her, muttering in despair. She said, "Do you know that you can be sent to prison for twenty years for carrying a concealed weapon in this state? Do you know what the fine is for having a gun without a license? The fine is Five. Thousand. Dollars." The men down the street were shouting at her, but she swung around to face the creature

snarling among the little dead dogs.

"Come on, Lila," she said. "Come on home with Bernice. I'll make tea and we'll talk. It's been a long time since we've really talked, you know? We used to have nice long talks when you were little, but we don't anymore." The wolf had stopped growling, but she was crouching even lower, and her ears were still flat against her head. Mrs. Braun said, "Come on, baby. Listen, I know what—you'll call in sick at the office and stay for a few days. You'll get a good rest, and maybe we'll even look around a little for a new doctor, what do you say? Schechtman hasn't done a thing for you, I never liked him. Come on home, honey. Momma's here, Bernice knows." She took a step toward the silent wolf, holding out her hand.

The superintendent gave a desperate, wordless cry and pumped forward, clumsily shoving Mrs. Braun to one side. He leveled the pistol point-blank, wailing, "My dog, my dog!" Lila was in the air when the gun went off, and her shadow sprang after her, for the sun had risen. She crumpled down across a couple of dead

Pekes. Their blood dabbled her breasts and her pale throat.

Mrs. Braun screamed like a lunch whistle. She knocked the superintendent into the street and sprawled over Lila, hiding her completely from Farrell's sight. "Lila, Lila," she keened her daughter, "poor baby, you never had a chance. He killed you because you were different, the way they kill everything different." Farrell approached her and stooped down, but she pushed him against a wall without looking up. "Lila, Lila, poor baby, poor darling, maybe it's better, maybe you're happy now. You never had a chance, poor Lila."

The dog owners were edging slowly back, and the surviving dogs were running to them. The superintendent squatted on the

curb with his head in his arms. A weary, muffled voice said, "For God's sake, Bernice, would you get up off me? You don't have to stop yelling, just get off."

When she stood up, the cars began to stop in the street again. It

made it very difficult for the police to get through.

Nobody pressed charges, because there was no one to lodge them against. The killer dog-or wolf, as some insisted-was gone, and if she had an owner, he could not be found. As for the people who had actually seen the wolf turn into a young girl when the sunlight touched her; most of them managed not to have seen it, though they never really forgot. There were a few who knew quite well what they had seen, and never forgot it either, but they never said anything. They did, however, chip in to pay the superintendent's fine for possessing an unlicensed handgun. Farrell gave what he could.

Lila vanished out of Farrell's life before sunset. She did not go uptown with her mother, but packed her things and went to stay with friends in the village. Later he heard that she was living on Christopher Street, and later still, that she had moved to Berkeley

and gone back to school. He never saw her again.

"It had to be like that," he told Ben once. "We got to know too much about each other. See, there's another side to knowing. She couldn't look at me."

"You mean because you saw her with all those dogs? Or because she knew you'd have let that little nut shoot her?" Farrell shook his head.

"It was that, I guess, but it was more something else, something I know. When she sprang, just as he shot at her that last time, she wasn't leaping at him. She was going straight for her mother. She'd have got her too, if it hadn't been sunrise."

Ben whistled softly. "I wonder if her old lady knows."

"Bernice knows everything about Lila," Farrell said.

Mrs. Braun called him nearly two years later to tell him that Lila was getting married. It must have cost her a good deal of money and ingenuity to find him (where Farrell was living then, the telephone line was open for four hours a day), but he knew by the spitefulness in the static that she considered it money well spent.

"He's at Stanford," she crackled. "A research psychologist.

They're going to Japan for their honeymoon."

"That's fine," Farrell said. "I'm really happy for her, Bernice." He hesitated before he asked, "Does he know about Lila? I mean, about what happens?—"

"Does he know?" she cried. "He's proud of it—he thinks it's wonderful! It's his field!"

"That's great. That's fine. Good-bye, Bernice. I really am glad."
And he was glad, and a little wistful, thinking about it. The girl
he was living with here had a really strange hang-up.













TALES OF GOTHIC FANTASY

Illustrated with 17 original pen-and-ink drawings by James Cagle

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