

THE COMPLEAT WEREWOLF

BY ANTHONY BOUCHER

It would, of course, take a famous
detective story author to appreciate
the full possibilities of lycanthropy —

Author's note: In my criminological researches, I have occasionally come across references to an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation who bids fair to become as great a figure of American legend as Paul Bunyan or John Henry. This man is invulnerable to bullets. He strikes such terror into criminals as to drive them to suicide or madness. He sometimes vanishes from human ken entirely, and at other times he is reported to have appeared with equal suddenness stark naked. And perhaps the most curious touch of all, he engages in a never-ceasing quest, of Arthurian intensity, for someone who can perform the Indian rope trick.

Only recently, after intensive probings in Berkeley, where I have certain fortunate connections particularly with the department of German, and a few grudging confidences from my old friend Fergus O'Breen, have I been able to piece together the facts behind this legend.

Here, then, is the story, with only one important detail suppressed, and that, I assure you, strictly for your own good.

The professor glanced at the note:

Don't be silly—Gloria.

Wolfe Wolf crumpled the sheet of paper into a yellow ball and hurled it out the window into the sunshine of the bright campus spring. He made several choice and profane remarks in fluent Middle High German.

Emily looked up from typing the proposed budget for the departmental library. "I'm afraid I didn't understand that, Professor Wolf. I'm weak on Middle High."

"Just improvising," said Wolf, and sent a copy of the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* to follow the telegram.

Emily rose from the typewriter. "There's something

the matter. Did the committee reject your monograph on Hager?"

"That monumental contribution to human knowledge? Oh, no. Nothing so important as that."

"But you're so upset—"

"The office wife!" Wolf snorted. "And pretty polyandrous at that, with the whole department on your hands. Go 'way."

Emily's dark little face lit up with a flame of righteous anger that removed any trace of plainness. "Don't talk to me like that, Mr. Wolf. I'm simply trying to help you. And it isn't the whole department. It's—"

Professor Wolf picked up an inkwell, looked after the telegram and the "Journal," then set the glass pot down again. "No. There are better ways of going to pieces. Sorrows drown easier than they smash— Get Herbrecht to take my two o'clock, will you?"

"Where are you going?"

"To hell in sectors. So long."

"Wait. Maybe I can help you. Remember when the dean jumped you for serving drinks to students? Maybe I can—"

Wolf stood in the doorway and extended one arm impressively, pointing with that curious index which was as long as the middle finger. "Madam, academically you are indispensable. You are the prop and stay of the existence of this department. But at the moment this department can go to hell, where it will doubtless continue to need your invaluable services."

"But don't you see—" Emily's voice shook. "No. Of course not: You wouldn't see. You're just a man—no, not even a man. You're just Professor Wolf. You're Woof-woof."

Wolf staggered. "I'm what?"

"Woof-woof. That's what everybody calls you because your name's Wolfe Wolf. All your students, everybody. But you wouldn't notice a thing like that. Oh, no. Woof-woof, that's what you are."

"This," said Wolfe Wolf, "is the crowning blow. My heart is breaking, my world is shattered, I've got to walk a mile from the campus to find a bar; but all this isn't enough. I've got to be called Woof-woof. Good-by!"

He turned, and in the doorway caromed into a vast and yielding bulk, which gave out with a noise that might have been either a greeting of "Wolf!" or more probably an inevitable grunt of "Oof!"

Wolf backed into the room and admitted Professor Fearing, paunch, pince-nez, cane and all. The older man waddled over to his desk, plumped himself down, and exhaled a long breath. "My dear boy," he gasped. "Such impetuosity."

"Sorry, Oscar."

"Ah, youth—" Professor Fearing fumbled about for a handkerchief, found none, and proceeded to polish his pince-nez on his somewhat stringy necktie. "But why such haste to depart? And why is Emily crying?"

"Is she?"

"You see?" said Emily hopelessly, and muttered "Woof-woof" into her damp handkerchief.

"And why do copies of the JEGP fly about my head

as I harmlessly cross the campus? Do we have teleportation on our hands?"

"Sorry," Wolf repeated curtly. "Temper. Couldn't stand that ridiculous argument of Glocke's. Good-by."

"One moment." Professor Fearing fished into one of his unnumbered handkerchiefless pockets and produced a sheet of yellow paper. "I believe this is yours?"

Wolf snatched at it and quickly converted it into confetti.

Fearing chuckled. "How well I remember when Gloria was a student here! I was thinking of it only last night when I saw her in 'Moonbeams and Melody.' How she did upset this whole department! Heavens, my boy, if I'd been a younger man myself—"

"I'm going. You'll see about Herbrecht, Emily?"

Emily sniffled and nodded.

"Come, Wolfe." Fearing's voice had grown more serious. "I didn't mean to plague you. But you mustn't take these things too hard. There are better ways of finding consolation than in losing your temper or getting drunk."

"Who said anything about—"

"Did you need to say it? No, my boy, if you were to— You're not a religious man, are you?"

"Good God, no," said Wolf contradictorily.

"If only you were— If I might make a suggestion, Wolf, why don't you come over to the Temple tonight? We're having very special services. They might take your mind off Glo—off your troubles."

"Thanks, no. I've always meant to visit your Temple—I've heard rumors about it—but not tonight. Some other time."

"Tonight would be especially interesting."

"Why? What's so special about April 30th?"

Fearing shook his gray head. "It is shocking how ignorant a scholar can be outside of his chosen field— But you know the place, Wolfe; I'll hope to see you there tonight."

"Thanks. But my troubles don't need any supernatural solutions. A couple of zombies will do nicely, and I do *not* mean serviceable stiffs. Good-by, Oscar." He was halfway through the door before he added as an afterthought, "'By, Emily."

"Such rashness," Fearing murmured. "Such impetuosity. Youth is a wonderful thing to enjoy, is it not, Emily?"

Emily said nothing, but plunged into typing the proposed budget as though all the fiends of hell were after her, as indeed many of them were.

The sun was setting, and Wolfe's tragic account of his troubles had laid an egg, too. The bartender had polished every glass in the joint and still the repetitive tale kept pouring forth. He was torn between a boredom new even in his experience and a professional admiration for a customer who could consume zombies indefinitely.

"Did I tell you about the time she flunked the mid term?" Wolf demanded truculently.

"Only three times," said the bartender.

"All right, then; I'll tell you. Yunnerstand, I don't do things like this. Profeshical ethons, that's what's I've got. But this was different. This wasn't like somebody that doesn't know just because she doesn't know; this was a girl that didn't know because she wasn't the kind of girl that has to know the kind of things a girl has to know if she's the kind of girl that ought to know that kind of things. Yunnerstand?"

The bartender cast a calculating glance at the plump little man who sat alone at the end of the deserted bar, carefully nursing his gin-and-tonic.

"She made me see that. She made me see lossa things and I can still see the things she made me see the things. It wasn't just like a professor falls for a coed, yunnerstand? This was different. This was wunnaful. This was like a whole new life like."

The bartender sidled down to the end of the bar. "Brother," he whispered softly.

The little man with the odd beard looked up from his gin-and-tonic. "Yes, colleague?"

"If I listen to that potted professor another five minutes, I'm going to start smashing up the joint. How's about slipping down there and standing in for me, huh?"

The little man looked Wolf over and fixed his gaze especially on the hand that clenched the tall zombie glass. "Gladly, colleague," he nodded.

The bartender sighed a gust of relief.

"She was Youth," Wolf was saying intently to where the bartender had stood. "But it wasn't just that. This was different. She was Life and Excitement and Joy and Ecstasy and Stuff. Yunner—" He broke off and stared at the empty space. "Uh-mazing!" he observed. "Right before my very eyes. Uh-mazing!"

"You were saying, colleague?" the plump little man prompted from the adjacent stool.

Wolf turned. "So there you are. Did I tell you about the time I went to her house to check her term paper?"

"No. But I have a feeling you will."

"Howja know? Well, this night—"

The little man drank slowly; but his glass was empty by the time Wolf had finished the account of an evening of pointlessly tentative flirtation. Other customers were drifting in, and the bar was now about a third full.

"—and ever since then—" Wolf broke off sharply. "That isn't you," he objected.

"I think it is, colleague."

"But you're a bartender and you aren't a bartender."

"No. I'm a magician."

"Oh. That explains it. Now like I was telling you— Hey! Your bald is beard."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Your bald is beard. Just like your head. It's all jussa fringe running around."

"I like it that way."

"And your glass is empty."

"That's all right, too."

"Oh, no, it isn't. It isn't every night you get to drink with a man that proposed to Gloria Garton and got

turned down. This is an occasion for celebration." Wolf thumped loudly on the bar and held up his first two fingers.

The little man regarded their equal length. "No," he said softly. "I think I'd better not. I know my capacity. If I have another—well, things might start happening."

"Lettemappen!"

"No. Please, colleague. I'd rather—"

The bartender brought the drinks. "Go on, brother," he whispered. "Keep him quiet. I'll do you a favor sometime."

Reluctantly the little man sipped at his fresh gin-and-tonic.

The professor took a gulp of his nth zombie. "My name's Woof-woof," he proclaimed. "Lots of people call me Wolfe Wolf. They think that's funny. But it's really Woof-woof. Wazoors?"

The other paused a moment to decipher that Arabic-sounding word, then said, "Mine's Ozymandias the Great."

"That's a funny name."

"I told you I'm a magician. Only I haven't worked for a long time. Theatrical managers are peculiar, colleague. They don't want a real magician. They won't even let me show 'em my best stuff. Why. I remember one night in Darjeeling—"

"Glad to meet you, Mr. . . . Mr.—"

"You can call me Ozzy. Most people do."

"Glad to meet you, Ozzy. Now about this girl. This Gloria. Yunnerstand, donya?"

"Sure, colleague."

"She thinks being a professor of German is nothing. She wants something glamorous. She says if I was an actor now or a G-man— Yunnerstand?"

Ozymandias the Great nodded.

"Awright, then! So yunnerstand. Fine. But whatddayou want to keep talking about it for? Yunnerstand. That's that. To hell with it."

Ozymandias' round and fringed face brightened. "Sure," he said, and added recklessly, "Let's drink to that."

They clinked glasses and drank. Wolf carelessly tossed off a toast in Old Low Frankish, with an unpardonable error in the use of the genitive.

The two men next to them began singing "My Wild Irish Rose," but trailed off disconsolately. "What we need," said the one with the derby, "is a tenor."

"What I need," Wolf muttered, "is a cigarette."

"Sure," said Ozymandias the Great. The bartender was drawing beer directly in front of them. Ozymandias reached across the bar, removed a lighted cigarette from the barkeep's ear, and handed it to his companion.

"Where'd that come from?"

"I don't quite know. All I know is how to get them. I told you I was a magician."

"Oh. I see. Pressajijijation."

"No. Not a prestidigitator; I said a magician. Oh, blast it! I've done it again. More than one gin-and-tonic and I start showing off."

"I don't believe you," said Wolf flatly. "No such thing as magicians. That's just as silly as Oscar Fearing and his Temple and what's so special about April 30th, anyway?"

The bearded man frowned. "Please, colleague. Let's forget it."

"No. I don't believe you. You pressajijigated that cigarette. You didn't magic it." His voice began to rise. "You're a fake."

"Please, brother," the barkeep whispered. "Keep him quiet."

"All right," said Ozymandias wearily. "I'll show you something that can't be prestidigitation." The couple adjoining had begun to sing again. "They need a tenor. All right; listen!"

And the sweetest, most ineffably Irish tenor ever heard joined in on the duet. The singers didn't worry about the source; they simply accepted the new voice gladly and were spurred on to their very best, with the result that the bar knew the finest harmony it had heard since the night the Glee Club was suspended en masse.

Wolf looked impressed, but shook his head. "That's not magic, either. That's ventriloquism."

"As a matter of strict fact, that was a street singer who was killed in the Easter Rebellion. Fine fellow, too; never heard a better voice unless it was that night in Darjeeling when—"

"Fake!" said Wolfe Wolf loudly and belligerently.

Ozymandias once more contemplated that long index finger. He looked at the professor's dark brows that met in a straight line over his nose. He picked his companion's limpish hand off the bar and scrutinized the palm. The growth of hair was not marked, but it was perceptible.

The magician chortled. "And you sneer at magic!"

"Whasso funny about me sneering at magic?"

Ozymandias lowered his voice. "Because, my fine furry friend, you are a werewolf."

The Irish martyr had begun "Rose of Tralee" and the two mortals were joining in valiantly.

"I'm what?"

"A werewolf."

"But there isn't any such thing. Any fool knows that."

"Fools," said Ozymandias, "know a great deal which the wise do not. There are werewolves. There always have been, and quite probably always will be." He spoke as calmly and assuredly as though he were mentioning that the earth was round. "And there are three infallible physical signs; the meeting eyebrows, the long index finger, the hairy palms. You have all three. And even your name is an indication. Family names do not come from nowhere. Every Smith has an ancestor somewhere who was a Smith. Every Fisher comes from a family that once fished. And your name is Wolf."

The statement was so quiet, so plausible, that Wolf faltered. "But a werewolf is a man that changes into a wolf. I've never done that. Honest I haven't."

"A mammal," said Ozymandias, "is an animal that bears its young alive and suckles them. A virgin is none-

theless a mammal. Because you have never changed does not make you any the less a werewolf."

"But a werewolf—" Suddenly Wolf's eyes lit up. "A werewolf! But that's even better than a G-man! Now I can show Gloria!"

"What on earth do you mean, colleague?"

Wolf was climbing down from his stool. The intense excitement of this brilliant new idea seemed to have sobered him. He grabbed the little man by the sleeve. "Come on. We're going to find a nice quiet place. And you're going to prove you're a magician."

"But how?"

"You're going to show me how to change!"

Ozymandias finished his gin-and-tonic, and with it drowned his last regretful hesitation. "Colleague," he announced, "you're on!"

Professor Oscar Fearing, standing behind the curiously carved lectern of the Temple of the Dark Truth, concluded the reading of the prayer with mumbling sonority. "And on this night of all nights, in the name of the black light that glows in the darkness, we give thanks!" He closed the parchment-bound book and faced the small congregation, calling out with fierce intensity, "Who wishes to give his thanks to the Lower Lord?"

A cushioned dowager rose. "I give thanks!" she shrilled excitedly. "My Ming Choy was sick, even unto death. I took of her blood and offered it to the Lower Lord, and he had mercy and restored her to me!"

Behind the altar an electrician checked his switches and spat disgustedly. "Bugs! Every last one of 'em!"

The man who was struggling into a grotesque and horrible costume paused and shrugged. "They pay good money. What's it to us if they're bugs?"

A tall, thin, old man had risen uncertainly to his feet. "I give thanks!" he cried. "I give thanks to the Lower Lord that I have finished my great work. My protective screen against magnetic bombs is a tried and proven success, to the glory of our country and science and the Lord."

"Crackpot," the electrician muttered.

The man in costume peered around the altar. "Crackpot, hell! That's Chiswick from the physics department. Think of a man like that falling for this stuff! And listen to him: He's even telling about the government's plans for installation. You know, I'll bet you one of these fifth columnists could pick up something around here."

There was silence in the Temple when the congregation had finished its Thanksgiving. Professor Fearing leaned over the lectern and spoke quietly and impressively. "As you know, brothers in Darkness, tonight is May Eve, the 30th of April, the night consecrated by the Church to that martyr missionary St. Walpurgis, and by us to other and deeper purposes. It is on this night, and this night only, that we may directly give our thanks to the Lower Lord himself. Not in wanton orgy and obscenity, as the Middle Ages misconceived his desires,

but in praise and in deep, dark joy that issues forth from Blackness."

"Hold your hats, boys," said the man in the costume. "Here I go again."

"Eka!" Fearing thundered. "*Dva tri chatur! Pancha! Shas sapta! Ashta nava dasa ekadasha!*" He paused. There was always the danger that at this moment some scholar in this university town might recognize that the invocation, though perfect Sanskrit, consisted solely of the numbers from one to eleven. But no one stirred, and he launched forth in more apposite Latin: "*Per vota nostra ispe nunc surgat nobis dicatus Baal Zebub!*"

"Baal Zebub!" the congregation chorused.

"Cue," said the electrician, and pulled a switch.

The lights flickered and went out. Lightning played across the sanctuary. Suddenly out of the darkness came a sharp bark, a yelp of pain, and a long-drawn howl of triumph.

A blue light now began to glow dimly. In the faint reflection of this, the electrician was amazed to see his costumed friend at his side, nursing his bleeding hand.

"What the—" the electrician whispered.

"Hanged if I know. I go out there on cue, all ready to make my terrifying appearance, and what happens? Great big dog up and nips my hand. Why didn't they tell me they'd switched the script?"

In the glow of the blue light the congregation reverently contemplated the plump little man with the fringe of beard and the splendid gray wolf that stood beside him. "Hail, O Lower Lord!" resounded the chorus, drowning out one spinster's murmur of "But my dear, I swear he was *much* handsomer last year."

"Colleagues!" said Ozymandias the Great, and there was utter silence, a dread hush awaiting the momentous words of the Lower Lord. Ozymandias took one step forward, placed his tongue carefully between his lips, uttered the ripest, juiciest raspberry of his career, and vanished, wolf and all.

Wolfe Wolf opened his eyes and shut them again hastily. He had never expected the quiet and sedate Berkeley Inn to install centrifugal rooms. It wasn't fair. He lay in darkness, waiting for the whirling to stop and trying to reconstruct the past night.

He remembered the bar all right, and the zombies. And the bartender. Very sympathetic chap that, up until he suddenly changed into a little man with a fringe of beard. That was where things began getting strange. There was something about a cigarette and an Irish tenor and a werewolf. Fantastic idea, that. Any fool knows—

Wolf sat up suddenly. He *was* the werewolf. He threw back the bedclothes and stared down at his legs. Then he sighed relief. They were long legs. They were hairy enough. They were brown from much tennis. But they were indisputably human.

He got up, resolutely stifling his qualms, and began to pick up the clothing that was scattered nonchalantly about the floor. A crew of gnomes was excavating his

skull, but he hoped they might go away if he didn't pay too much attention to them. One thing was certain; he was going to be good from now on. Gloria or no Gloria, heartbreak or no heartbreak, drowning your sorrows wasn't good enough. If you felt like this and could imagine you'd been a werewolf—

But why should he have imagined it in such detail? So many fragmentary memories seemed to come back as he dressed. Going up Strawberry Canyon with the fringed beard, finding a desolate and isolated spot for magic, learning the words—He could even remember the words. The word that changed you and the one that changed you back.

Had he made up those words, too, in his drunken imaginings? And had he made up what he could only barely recall—the wonderful, magical freedom of changing, the single, sharp pang of alteration and then the boundless happiness of being lithe and fleet and free?

He surveyed himself in the mirror. He looked exactly what he was, save for the unwonted wrinkles in his conservative single-breasted gray suit: a quiet academician, a little better built, a little more impulsive, a little more romantic than most, perhaps, but still just that—Professor Wolf.

The rest was nonsense. But there was, that impulsive side of him suggested, only one way of proving the fact. And that was to say The Word.

"All right," said Wolfe Wolf to his reflection. "I'll show you." And he said it.

The pang was sharper and stronger than he'd remembered. Alcohol numbs you to pain. It tore him for a moment with an anguish like the descriptions of childbirth. Then it was gone, and he flexed his limbs in happy amazement. But he was not a lithe, fleet, free beast. He was a helplessly trapped wolf, irrevocably entangled in a conservative, single-breasted gray suit.

He tried to rise and walk, but the long sleeves and legs tripped him over flat on his muzzle. He kicked with his paws, trying to tear his way out, and then stopped. Werewolf or no werewolf, he was likewise still Professor Wolf, and this suit had cost thirty-five dollars. There must be some cheaper way of securing freedom than tearing the suit to shreds.

He used several good, round, Low German expletives. This was a complication that wasn't in any of the werewolf legends he'd ever read. There, people just—boom!—became wolves or—bang!—became men again. When they were men, they wore clothes; when they were wolves, they wore fur. Just like Hyperman becoming Bark Lent again on top of the Empire State Building and finding his street clothes right there. Most misleading. He began to remember now how Ozymandias the Great had made him strip before teaching him the words—

The words! That was it. All he had to do was say the word that changed you back—*Absarka!*—and he'd be a man again, comfortably fitted inside his suit. Then he could strip and start all over again. You see? Reason solves all. "*Absarka!*" he said.

Or thought he said. He went through all the proper

mental processes for saying *Absarka!* but all that came out of his muzzle was a sort of clicking whine. And he was still a conservatively dressed and helpless wolf.

This was worse than the clothes problem. If he could be released only by saying *Absarka!* and if, being a wolf, he could say nothing, why, there he was. Indefinitely. He could go find Ozzy and ask—but how could a wolf wrapped up in a gray suit get safely out of a hotel and set out hunting for an unknown address?

He was trapped. He was lost. He was—
“*Absarka!*”

Professor Wolfe Wolf stood up in his grievously rumpled gray suit and beamed on the beard-fringed face of Ozymandias the Great.

“You see, colleague,” the little magician explained, “I figured you’d want to try it again as soon as you got up, and I knew darned well you’d have your troubles. Thought I’d come over and straighten things out for you.”

Wolf lit a cigarette in silence and handed the pack to Ozymandias. “When you came in just now,” he said at last, “what did you see?”

“You as a wolf.”

“Then it really— I actually—”

“Sure. You’re a full-fledged werewolf, all right.”

Wolf sat down on the rumpled bed. “I guess,” he ventured slowly, “I’ve got to believe it. And if I believe that— But it means I’ve got to believe everything I’ve always scorned. I’ve got to believe in gods and devils and hells and—”

“You needn’t be so pluralistic. But there is a God.” Ozymandias said this as calmly and convincingly as he had stated last night that there were werewolves.

“And if there’s a God, then I’ve got a soul?”

“Sure.”

“And if I’m a werewolf— Hey!”

“What’s the trouble, colleague?”

“All right, Ozzy. You know everything. Tell me this: Am I damned?”

“For what? Just for being a werewolf? Shucks, no; let me explain. There’s two kinds of werewolves. There’s the cursed kind that can’t help themselves, that just go turning into wolves without any say in the matter; and there’s the voluntary kind like you. Now most of the voluntary kind are damned, sure, because they’re wicked men who lust for blood and eat innocent people. But they aren’t damnably wicked because they’re werewolves; they became werewolves because they are damnably wicked. Now you changed yourself just for the fun of it and because it looked like a good way to impress a gal; that’s an innocent-enough motive, and being a werewolf doesn’t make it any less so. Werewolves don’t have to be monsters; it’s just that we only hear about the ones that are.”

“But how can I be voluntary when you told me I was a werewolf before ever I changed?”

“Not everybody can change. It’s like being able to roll your tongue or wiggle your ears. You can, or you can’t; and that’s that. And, like those abilities, there’s

probably a genetic factor involved, though nobody’s done any serious research on it. You were a werewolf *in posse*; now you’re one *in esse*.”

“Then it’s all right? I can be a werewolf just for having fun, and it’s safe?”

“Absolutely.”

Wolf chortled. “Will I show Gloria! Dull and unglamorous, indeed! Anybody can marry an actor or a G-man; but a werewolf—”

“Your children probably will be, too,” said Ozymandias cheerfully.

Wolf shut his eyes dreamily, then opened them with a start. “You know what?”

“What?”

“I haven’t got a hangover any more! This is marvelous. This is— Why, this is practical. At last the perfect hangover cure. Shuffle yourself into a wolf and back and— Oh, that reminds me. How do I get back?”

“*Absarka.*”

“I know. But when I’m a wolf I can’t say it.”

“That,” said Ozymandias sadly, “is the curse of being a white magician. You keep having to use the second-best form of spells, because the best would be black. Sure, a black-magic werebeast can turn himself back whenever he wants to. I remember in Darjeeling—”

“But how about me?”

“That’s the trouble. You have to have somebody to say *Absarka!* for you. That’s what I did last night, or do you remember? After we broke up the party at your friend’s Temple— Tell you what: I’m retired now, and I’ve got enough to live on modestly because I can always magic up a little— Are you going to take up werewolfing seriously?”

“For a while, anyway. Till I get Gloria.”

“Then why shouldn’t I come and live here in your hotel? Then I’ll always be handy to *Absarka* you. After you get the girl, you can teach her.”

Wolf extended his hand. “Noble of you. Shake.” And then his eye caught his wrist watch. “I’ve missed two classes this morning. Werewolfing’s all very well, but a man’s got to work for his living.”

“Most men.” Ozymandias calmly reached his hand into the air and plucked a coin. He looked at it ruefully; it was a gold moldore. “Hang these spivits; I simply cannot explain to them about gold being illegal.”

“From Los Angeles,” Wolf thought, with the habitual contempt of the northern Californian, as he surveyed the careless sport coat and the bright-yellow shirt of his visitor.

This young man rose politely as the professor entered the office. His green eyes gleamed cordially and his red hair glowed in the spring sunlight. “Professor Wolf?” he asked.

Wolf glanced impatiently at his desk. “Yes.”

“O’Brien’s the name. I’d like to talk to you a minute.”

“My office hours are from three to four Tuesdays and Thursdays. I’m afraid I’m rather busy now.”

“This isn’t faculty business. And it’s important.” The young man’s attitude was affable and casual, but he

managed none the less to convey a sense of urgency that piqued Wolf's curiosity. The all-important letter to Gloria had waited while he took two classes; it could wait another five minutes.

"Very well, Mr. O'Brien."

"And alone, if you please."

Wolf himself hadn't noticed that Emily was in the room. He now turned to the secretary and said, "All right. If you don't mind, Emily—"

Emily shrugged and went out.

"Now, sir. What is this important and secret business?"

"Just a question or two. To start with, how well do you know Gloria Garton?"

Wolf paused. You could hardly say, "Young man, I am about to repropose to her in view of my becoming a werewolf." Instead he simply said—the truth if not the whole truth—"She was a pupil of mine a few years ago."

"I said *do*, not *did*. How well do you know her now?"

"And why should I bother to answer such a question?"

The young man handed over a card. Wolf read:

FERGUS O'BREEN

Private Inquiry Agent

Licensed by the State of California

Wolf smiled. "And what does this mean? Divorce evidence? Isn't that the usual field of private inquiry agents?"

"Miss Garton isn't married, as you probably know very well. I'm just asking you if you've been in touch with her much lately?"

"And I'm simply asking why you should want to know?"

O'Brien rose and began to pace around the office. "We don't seem to be getting very far, do we? I'm to take it that you refuse to state the nature of your relations with Gloria Garton?"

"I see no reason why I should do otherwise." Wolf was beginning to be annoyed.

To his surprise, the detective relaxed into a broad grin. "O. K. Let it ride. Tell me about your department: How long have the various faculty members been here?"

"Instructors and all?"

"Just the professor."

"I've been here for seven years. All the others at least a good ten, probably more. If you want exact figures, you can probably get them from the dean, unless, as I hope"—Wolf smiled cordially—"he throws you out flat on your red pate."

O'Brien laughed. "Professor, I think we could get on. One more question, and you can do some pate-tossing yourself. Are you an American citizen?"

"Of course."

"And the rest of the department?"

"All of them. And now would you have the common

decency to give me some explanation of this fantastic farrago of questions?"

"No," said O'Brien casually. "Good-by, professor." His alert, green eyes had been roaming about the room, sharply noticing everything. Now, as he left, they rested on Wolf's long index finger, moved up to his heavy meeting eyebrows, and returned to the finger. There was a suspicion of a startled realization in those eyes as he left the office.

But that was nonsense, Wolf told himself. A private detective, no matter how shrewd his eyes, no matter how apparently meaningless his inquiries, would surely be the last man on earth to notice the signs of lycanthropy.

Funny. Werewolf was a word you could accept. You could say, "I am a werewolf," and it was all right. But say "I am a lycanthrope," and your flesh crawled. Odd. Possibly material for a paper on the influence of etymology on connotation for one of the learned periodicals.

But, hell! Wolfe Wolf was no longer primarily a scholar. He was a werewolf now, a white-magic werewolf, a werewolf-for-fun; and fun he was going to have. He lit his pipe, stared at the blank paper on his desk, and tried desperately to draft a letter to Gloria. It should hint at just enough to fascinate her and hold her interest until he could go south when the term ended and reveal to her the whole wonderful new truth. It—

Professor Oscar Fearing grunted his ponderous way into the office. "Good afternoon, Wolf. Hard at it, my boy?"

"Afternoon," Wolf replied distractedly, and continued to stare at the paper.

"Great events coming, eh? Are you looking forward to seeing the glorious Gloria?"

Wolf started. "How— What do you mean?"

Fearing handed him a folded newspaper. "You hadn't heard?"

Wolf read with growing amazement and delight:

GLORIA GARTON TO ARRIVE FRIDAY

Local Girl Returns to Berkeley

As part of the most spectacular talent hunt since the search for Scarlett O'Hara, Gloria Garton, glamorous Metropolis starlet, will visit Berkeley Friday.

Friday afternoon at the Campus Theater, Berkeley canines will have their chance to compete in the nation-wide quest for a dog to play Tookah the wolf dog in the great Metropolis epic, "Fangs of the Forest," and Gloria Garton herself will be present at the auditions.

"I owe so much to Berkeley," Miss Garton said. "It will mean as much to me to see the campus and the city again." Miss Garton has the starring human role in "Fangs of the Forest."

Miss Garton was a student at the University of California when she received her first chance in films. She is a member of Mask and Dagger, honorary dramatic society, and Rho Rho Rho Sorority.

Wolfe Wolf glowed. This was perfect. No need now to wait till term was over. He could see Gloria now and claim her in all his wolfish vigor. Friday—to-day was Wednesday—that gave him two nights to prac-

tice and perfect the technique of werewolfry. And then—

He noticed the dejected look on the older professor's face, and a small remorse smote him. "How did things go last night, Oscar?" he asked sympathetically. "How was your big Walpurgis night services?"

Fearing regarded him oddly. "You know that now? Yesterday April 30th meant nothing to you."

"I got curious and looked it up. But how did it go?"

"Well enough," Fearing lied feebly. "Do you know, Wolf," he demanded after a moment's silence, "what is the real curse of every man interested in the occult?"

"No. What?"

"That true power is never enough. Enough for yourself, perhaps, but never enough for others. So that no matter what your true abilities, you must forge on beyond them into charlatanry to convince the others. Look at St. Germain. Look at Francis Stuart. Look at Cagliostro. But the worst tragedy is the next stage; when you realize that your powers were greater than you supposed and that the charlatanry was needless. When you realize that you have no notion of the extent of your powers. Then—"

"Then, Oscar?"

"Then, my boy, you are a badly frightened man."

Wolf wanted to say something consoling. He wanted to say, "Look, Oscar. It was just me. Go back to your half-hearted charlatanry and be happy." But he couldn't do that. Only Ozzy could know the truth of that splendid gray wolf. Only Ozzy and Gloria.

The moon was bright on that hidden spot in the canyon. The night was still. And Wolfe Wolf had a severe case of stage fright. Now that it came to the real thing—for this morning's clothes-complicated fiasco hardly counted and last night he could not truly remember—he was afraid to plunge cleanly into wolfdom and anxious to stall and talk as long as possible.

"Do you think," he asked the magician nervously, "that I could teach Gloria to change, too?"

Ozymandias pondered. "Maybe, colleague. It'd depend. She might have the natural ability, and she might not. And, of course, there's no telling what she might change into."

"You mean she wouldn't necessarily be a wolf?"

"Of course not. The people who can change, change into all sorts of things. And every folk knows best the kind that most interests it. We've got an English and Central European tradition; so we know mostly about werewolves. But take Scandinavia, and you'll hear chiefly about werebears, only they call 'em berserkers. And Orientals, now, they're apt to know about weretigers. Trouble is, we've thought so much about werewolves that that's all we know the signs for; I wouldn't know how to spot a weretiger just offhand."

"Then there's no telling what might happen if I taught her The Word?"

"Not the least. Of course, there's some werethings that just aren't much use being. Take like being a were-ant. You change and somebody steps on you and that's



that. Or like a fella I knew once in Madagascar. Taught him The Word, and know what? Hanged if he wasn't a werediplodocus. Shattered the whole house into little pieces when he changed and almost trampled me under hoof before I could say *Absarka!* He decided not to make a career of it. Or then there was that time in Darjeeling— But, look, colleague, are you going to stand around here naked all night?"

"No," said Wolf. "I'm going to change now. You'll take my clothes back to the hotel?"

"Sure. They'll be there for you. And I've put a very small spell on the night clerk, just enough for him not to notice wolves wandering in. Oh, and by the way—anything missing from your room?"

"Not that I noticed. Why?"

"Because I thought I saw somebody come out of it this afternoon. Couldn't be sure, but I think he came from there. Young fella with red hair and Hollywood clothes."

Wolfe Wolf frowned. That didn't make sense. Pointless questions from a detective were bad enough, but searching your hotel room— But what were detectives to a full-fledged werewolf? He grinned, nodded a friendly good-by to Ozymandias the Great, and said The Word.

The pain wasn't so sharp as this morning, though still quite bad enough. But it passed almost at once, and his whole body filled with a sense of limitless freedom. He lifted his snout and sniffed deep at the keen freshness of this night air. A whole new realm of pleasure opened up for him through this acute new nose alone. He wagged his tail amicably at Ozzy and set up off the canyon on a long, easy lope.

For hours loping was enough—simply and purely enjoying one's wolfiness was the finest pleasure one could

ask. Wolf left the canyon and turned up into the hills, past the Big C and on into noble wildness that seemed far remote from all campus civilization. His brave new legs were stanch and tireless, his wind seemingly inexhaustible. Every turning brought fresh and vivid scents of soil and leaves and air, and life was shimmering and beautiful.

But a few hours of this, and Wolf realized that he was lonely. All this grand exhilaration was very well, but if his mate Gloria were loping by his side— And what fun was it to be something as splendid as a wolf if no one admired you? He began to want people, and he turned back to the city.

Berkeley goes to bed early. The streets were deserted. Here and there a light burned in a rooming house where some solid grind was plodding on his almost-due term paper. Wolf had done that himself. He couldn't laugh in this shape, but his tail twitched with amusement at the thought.

He paused along the tree-lined street. There was a fresh human scent here, though the street seemed empty. Then he heard a soft whimpering, and trotted off toward the noise.

Behind the shrubbery fronting an apartment house sat a disconsolate two-year-old, shivering in his sunsuit and obviously lost for hours on hours. Wolf put a paw on the child's shoulder and shook him gently.

The boy looked around and was not in the least afraid. "He'o," he said, brightening up.

Wolf growled a cordial greeting, and wagged his tail and pawed at the ground to indicate that he'd take the lost infant wherever it wanted to go.

The child stood up and wiped away its tears with a dirty fist which left wide, black smudges. "Tootootootoo!" he said.

Games, thought Wolf. He wants to play choo-choo. He took the child by the sleeve and tugged gently.

"Tootootootoo!" the boy repeated firmly. "Die way."

The sound of a railway whistle, to be sure, does die away; but this seemed a poetic expression for such a toddler, Wolf thought, and then abruptly would have snapped his fingers if he'd had them. The child was saying "2222 Dwight Way," having been carefully brought up to tell its address when lost. Wolf glanced up at the street sign. Bowditch and Hillegas—2222 Dwight would be just a couple of blocks.

Wolf tried to nod his head, but the muscles didn't seem to work that way. Instead he wagged his tail in what he hoped indicated comprehension, and started off leading the child.

The infant beamed and said, "Nice woof-woof."

For an instant Wolf felt like a spy suddenly addressed by his right name, then realized that if some say "bow-wow" others might well say "woof-woof."

He led the child for two blocks without event. It felt good, having an innocent human being put his whole life and trust in your charge like this. There was something about children; he hoped Gloria felt the same. He wondered what would happen if he could teach this con-

fiding infant The Word. It would be swell to have a pup that would—

He paused. His nose twitched and the hair on the back of his neck rose. Ahead of them stood a dog, a huge mongrel, seemingly a mixture of St. Bernard and Husky. But the growl that issued from his throat indicated that carrying brandy kegs or rushing serum was not for him. He was a bandit, an outlaw, an enemy of man and dog. And they had to pass him.

Wolf had no desire to fight. He was as big as this monster and certainly, with his human brain, much cleverer; but scars from a dog fight would not look well on the human body of Professor Wolf, and there was, moreover, the danger of hurting the toddler in the fracas. It would be wiser to cross the street. But before he could steer the child that way, the mongrel brute had charged at them, yapping and snarling.

Wolf placed himself in front of the boy, poised and ready to leap in defense. The scar problem was secondary to the fact that this baby had trusted him. He was ready to face this cur and teach him a lesson, at whatever cost to his own human body. But halfway to him the huge dog stopped. His growls died away to a piteous whimper. His great flanks trembled in the moonlight. His tail curled craven between his legs. And abruptly he turned and fled.

The child crowed delightedly. "Bad woof-woof go way." He put his little arms around Wolf's neck. "Nice woof-woof." Then he straightened up and said insistently, "Tootootootoo. Die way," and Wolf led on, his strong wolf's heart pounding as it had never pounded at the embrace of a woman.

"Tootootootoo" was a small, frame house set back from the street in a large yard. The lights were still on, and even from the sidewalk Wolf could hear a woman's shrill voice.

"—since five o'clock this afternoon, and you've got to find him, officer. You simply must. We've hunted all over the neighborhood and—"

Wolf stood up against the wall on his hindlegs and rang the doorbell with his front right paw.

"Oh! Maybe that's somebody now. The neighbors said they'd— Come, officer, and let's see— Oh!"

At the same moment Wolf barked politely, the toddler yelled "Mamma!" and his thin and worn-looking young mother let out a scream half delight at finding her child and half terror of this large, gray canine shape that loomed behind him. She snatched up the infant protectively and turned to the large man in uniform. "Officer! Look! That big dreadful thing! It stole my Robby!"

"No," Robby protested firmly. "Nice woof-woof."

The officer laughed. "The lad's probably right, ma'am. It is a nice woof-woof. Found your boy wandering around and helped him home. You haven't maybe got a bone for him?"

"Let that big nasty brute into my home? Never! Come on, Robby."

"Want my nice woof-woof."

"I'll woof-woof you, staying out till all hours and giving your father and me the fright of our lives. Just wait till your father sees you, young man; he'll— Oh, good night, officer!" And she shut the door on the yowls of Robby.

The policeman patted Wolf's head. "Never mind about the bone, Rover. She didn't so much as offer me a glass of beer, either. My, you're a husky specimen, aren't you, boy? Look almost like a wolf. Who do you belong to, and what are you doing wandering about alone? Huh?" He turned on his flash and bent over to look at the nonexistent collar.

He straightened up and whistled. "No license. Rover, that's bad. You know what I ought to do? I ought to turn you in. If you weren't a hero that just got cheated out of his bone, I'd— I ought to do it, anyway. Laws are laws, even for heroes. Come on, Rover. We're going for a walk."

Wolf thought quickly. The pound was the last place on earth he wanted to wind up. Even Ozzy would never think of looking for him there. Nobody'd claim him, nobody'd say *Absarka!* and in the end a dose of chloroform— He wrenched loose from the officer's grasp on his hair, and with one prodigious leap cleared the yard, landed on the sidewalk, and started up the street. But the instant he was out of the officer's sight he stopped dead and slipped behind a hedge.

He scented the policeman's approach even before he heard it. The man was running with the lumbering haste of two hundred pounds. But opposite the hedge he, too, stopped. For a moment Wolf wondered if his ruse had failed; but the officer had paused only to scratch his head and mutter, "Say! There's something screwy here. *Who rang that doorbell?* The kid couldn't reach it, and the dog— Oh, well," he concluded. "Nuts," and seemed to find in that monosyllabic summation the solution to all his problems.

As his footsteps and smell died away, Wolf became aware of another scent. He had only just identified it as cat when someone said, "You're were, aren't you?"

Wolf started up, lips drawn back and muscles tense. There was nothing human in sight; but someone had spoken to him. Unthinkingly, he tried to say "Where are you?" but all that came out was a growl.

"Right behind you. Here in the shadows. You can scent me, can't you?"

"But you're a cat," Wolf thought in his snarl. "And you're talking."

"Of course. But I'm not talking human language. It's just your brain that takes it that way. If you had your human body, you'd just think I was going *meowrr*. But you are were, aren't you?"

"How do you . . . why do you think so?"

"Because you didn't try to jump me, as any normal dog would have. And besides, unless Confucius taught me all wrong, you're a wolf, not a dog; and we don't have wolves around here unless they're were."

"How do you know all this? Are you—"

"Oh, no. I'm just a cat. But I used to live next

door to a werechow named Confucius. He taught me things."

Wolf was amazed. "You mean he was a man who changed to chow and stayed that way? Lived as a pet?"

"Certainly. This was back at the worst of the depression. He said a dog was more apt to be fed and looked after than a man. I thought it was a smart idea."

"But how terrible! Could a man so debase himself as—"

"Men don't debase themselves. They debase each other. That's the way of most weres. Some change to keep from being debased, others to do a little more effective debasing. Which are you?"

"Why, you see, I—"

"Sh! Look. This is going to be fun. Holdup."

Wolf peered around the hedge. A well-dressed, middle-aged man was walking along briskly, apparently enjoying a night constitutional. Behind him moved a thin, silent figure. Even as Wolf watched, the figure caught up with him and whispered harshly, "Up with 'em, buddy!"

The quiet pomposity of the stroller melted away. He was ashen and aspen, as the figure slipped a hand around into his breast pocket and removed an impressive wallet.

And what, thought Wolf, was the good of his fine, vigorous body if it merely crouched behind hedges as a spectator? In one fine bound, to the shocked amazement of the were-wise cat, he had crossed the hedge and landed with his forepaws full in the figure's face. It went over backward with him on top and then there was a loud noise, a flash of light, and a frightful sharp smell. For a moment Wolf felt an acute pang in his shoulder, like the jab of a long needle, and then the pain was gone.

But his momentary recoil had been enough to let the figure get to its feet. "Missed you, huh?" it muttered. "Let's see how you like a slug in the belly, you interfering—" and he applied an epithet which would have been purely literal description if Wolf had not been were.

There were three quick shots in succession even as Wolf sprang. For a second he experienced the most acute stomach-ache of his life. Then he landed again. The figure's head hit the concrete sidewalk and he was still.

Lights were leaping into brightness everywhere. Among all the confused noises, Wolf could hear the shrill complaints of Robby's mother, and among all the compounded smells, he could distinguish scent of the policeman who wanted to impound him. That meant getting out, and quick.

The city meant trouble, Wolf decided as he loped off. He could endure loneliness while he practiced his wolfry, until he had Gloria. Though just as a precaution he must arrange with Ozzy about a plausible-looking collar, and—

The most astounding realization yet suddenly struck him! He had received four bullets, three of them square in the stomach, and he hadn't a wound to show for it! Being a werewolf certainly offered its practical advantages. Think what a criminal could do with such bullet-

proofing. Or— But no. He was a werewolf for fun, and that was that.

But even for a werewolf, being shot, though relatively painless, is tiring. A great deal of nervous energy is absorbed in the magical and instantaneous knitting of those wounds. And when Wolfe Wolf reached the peace and calm of the uncivilized hills, he no longer felt like reveling in freedom. Instead he stretched out to his full length, nuzzled his head down between his forepaws, and slept.

"Now the essence of magic," said Heliophagus of Smyrna, "is deceit; and that deceit is of two kinds. By magic, the magician deceives others; but magic deceives the magician himself."

So far the lycanthropic magic of Wolfe Wolf had worked smoothly and pleasantly, but now it was to show him the second trickery that lurks behind every magic trick. And the first step was that he slept.

He woke in confusion. His dreams had been human—and of Gloria—despite the body in which he dreamed them, and it took several full minutes for him to reconstruct just how he happened to be in that body. For a moment the dream, even that episode in which he and Gloria had been eating blueberry waffles on a roller coaster, seemed more sanely plausible than the reality.

But he readjusted quickly, and glanced up at the sky. The sun looked as though it had been up at least an hour, which meant that the time was somewhere between six and seven. Today was Thursday, which meant that he was saddled with an eight-o'clock class. That left plenty of time to change back, shave, dress, breakfast and resume the normal life of Professor Wolf, which was, after all, important if he intended to support a wife.

He tried, as he trotted through the streets, to look as tame and unwolflike as possible, and apparently succeeded. No one paid him any mind save children, who wanted to play, and dogs, who began by snarling and ended by cowering away terrified. His friend the cat might be curiously tolerant of weren, but not so dogs.

He trotted up the steps of the Berkeley Inn confidently. The clerk was under a slight spell and would not notice wolves. There was nothing to do but rouse Ozzy, he *absarka'd*, and—

"Hey! Where you going? Get out of here! Shoo!"

It was the clerk, a stanch and brawny young man, who straddled the stairway and vigorously waved him off.

"No dogs in here! Go on now. Scoot!"

Quite obviously this man was under no spell, and equally obviously there was no way of getting up that staircase short of using a wolf's strength to tear the clerk apart. For a second Wolf hesitated. He had to get changed back. It would be a pity to use his powers to injure another human being—if only he had not slept and arrived before this unmagicked day clerk came on duty—but necessity knows no—

Then the solution hit him. Wolf turned and loped off just as the clerk hurled an ash tray at him. Bullets may

be relatively painless, but even a werewolf's rump, he learned promptly, is sensitive to flying glass.

The solution was foolproof. The only trouble was that it meant an hour's wait, and he was hungry. He found himself even displaying a certain shocking interest in the plump occupant of a baby carriage. You do get different appetites with a different body. He could understand how some originally well-intentioned werewolves might in time become monsters. But he was stronger in will, and much smarter. His stomach could hold out until this plan worked.

The janitor had already opened the front door of Wheeler Hall, but the building was deserted. Wolf had no trouble reaching the second floor unnoticed or finding his classroom. He had a little more trouble holding the chalk between his teeth and a slight tendency to gag on the dust; but by balancing his forepaws on the eraser trough, he could manage quite nicely. It took three springs to catch the ring of the chart in his teeth, but once that was pulled down there was nothing to do but crouch under the desk and pray that he would not starve quite to death.

The students of German 31B, as they assembled reluctantly for their eight o'clock, were a little puzzled at being confronted by a chart dealing with the influence of the gold standard on world economy, but they decided simply that the janitor had been forgetful.

The wolf under the desk listened unseen to their gathering murmurs, overheard that cute blonde in the front row makes dates with three different men for that same night, and finally decided that enough had assembled to make his chances plausible. He slipped out from under the desk far enough to reach the ring of the chart, tugged at it, and let go.

The chart flew up with a rolling crash. The students broke off their chatter, looked up at the blackboard, and beheld in a huge and shaky scrawl the mysterious letters

A B S A R K A

It worked. With enough people, it was an almost mathematical certainty that one of them in his puzzlement—for the race of subtitle readers, though handicapped by the talkies, still exists—would read the mysterious word aloud. It was the much-bedated blonde who did it.

"*Absarka*," she said wonderingly.

And there was Professor Wolfe Wolf, beaming cordially at his class.

The only flaw was this: He had forgotten that he was only a werewolf, and not Hyperman. His clothes were still at the Berkeley Inn, and here on the lecture platform he was stark naked.

Two of his best pupils screamed and one fainted. The blonde only giggled appreciatively.

Emily was incredulous but pitying.

Professor Fearing was sympathetic but reserved.

The chairman of the department was cool.

The dean of letters was chilly.

The president of the university was frigid.
Wolfe Wolf was unemployed.
And Heliophagus of Smyrna was right. "The essence of magic is deceit."

"But what can I do?" Wolf moaned into his zombie glass. "I'm stuck. I'm stymied. Gloria arrives in Berkeley tomorrow, and here I am—nothing. Nothing but a futile, worthless werewolf. You can't support a wife on that. You can't raise a family. You can't . . . you can't even propose— I want another. Sure you won't have one?"

Ozymandias the Great shook his round, fringed head. "The last time I took two drinks I started all this. I've got to behave if I want to stop it. But you're an able-bodied, strapping, young man; surely, colleague, you can get work?"

"Where? All I'm trained for is academic work, and this scandal has put the kibosh on that forever. What university is going to hire a man who showed up naked in front of his class without even the excuse of being drunk? And supposing I try something else, I'd have to give references, say something about what I'd been doing with my thirty-odd years. And once these references were checked— Ozzy, I'm a lost man."

"Never despair, colleague. I've learned that magic gets you into some tight squeezes, but there's always a way of getting out. Now take that time in Darjeeling—"

"But what can I do? I'll wind up like Confucius the wretchow and live off charity, if you'll find me somebody who wants a pet wolf."

"You know," Ozymandias reflected, "you may have something there, colleague."

"Nuts! That was a gag. I can at least retain my self-respect, even if I go on relief doing it. And I'll bet they don't like naked men on relief, either."

"No. I don't mean just being a pet wolf. But look at it this way: What are your assets? You have only two outstanding abilities. One of them is to teach German, and that is now completely out."

"Check."

"And the other is to change yourself into a wolf. All right, colleague. There must be some commercial possibilities in that. Let's look into them."

"Nonsense."

"Not quite. For every merchandise there's a market. The trick is to find it. And you, colleague, are going to be the first practical commercial werewolf on record."

"I could— They say Ripley's Odditorium pays good money. Supposing I changed six times a day regular for delighted audiences?"

Ozymandias shook his head sorrowfully. "It's no good. People don't want to see real magic. It makes 'em uncomfortable—starts 'em wondering what else might be loose in the world. They've got to feel sure it's all done with mirrors. I know. I had to quit vaudeville because I wasn't smart enough at faking it; all I could do was the real thing."

"I could be a Seeing Eye dog, maybe?"

"They have to be female."

"When I'm changed. I can understand animal language. Maybe I could be a dog trainer and— No, that's out. I forgot; they're scared to death of me."

But Ozymandias' pale-blue eyes had lit up at the suggestion. "Colleague, you're warm. Oh, are you warm! Tell me: Why did you say your fabulous Gloria was coming to Berkeley?"

"Publicity for a talent hunt."

"For what?"

"A dog to star in 'Fangs of the Forest.'"

"And what kind of a dog?"

"A—" Wolf's eyes widened and his jaw sagged. "A wolf dog," he said softly.

And the two men looked at each other with a wild surmise—silent, beside a bar in Berkeley.

"It's all the fault of that Disney dog," the trainer complained. "Pluto does anything. Everything. So our poor mutts are expected to do likewise. Listen to that dope! 'The dog should come into the room, give one paw to the baby, indicate that he recognizes the hero in his Eskimo disguise, go over to the table, find the bone, and clap his paws gleefully!' Now who's got a set of signals to cover stuff like that? Pluto!" he snorted.

Gloria Garton said, "Oh." By that one sound she managed to convey that she sympathized deeply, that the trainer was a nice-looking young man whom she'd just as soon see again, and that no dog star was going to steal "Fangs of the Forest" from her. She adjusted her skirt slightly, leaned back, and made the plain wooden chair on the bare theater stage seem more than ever like a throne.

"All right." The man in the violet beret waved away the last unsuccessful applicant and read from a card: "Dog: Wopsy. Owner: Mrs. Channing Galbraith. Trainer: Luther Newby. Bring it in."

An assistant scurried offstage, and there was a sound of whines and whimpers as a door opened.

"What's got into those dogs today?" the man in the violet beret demanded. "They all seem scared to death and beyond."

"I think," said Fergus O'Brien, "that it's that big, gray wolf dog. Somehow, the others just don't like him."

Gloria Garton lowered her bepurpled lids and cast a queenly stare of suspicion on the young detective. There was nothing wrong with his being there. His sister was head of publicity for Metropolis, and he'd handled several confidential cases for the studio, even one for her, that time her chauffeur had decided to try his hand at blackmail. Fergus O'Brien was a Metropolis fixture; but still it bothered her.

The assistant brought in Mrs. Galbraith's Wopsy. The man in the violet beret took one look and screamed. The scream bounced back from every wall of the theater in the ensuing minute of silence. At last he found words. "A wolf dog! Tookah is the greatest role ever written for a wolf dog! And what do they bring us! A terrier yet! So if we wanted a terrier we could cast Asta!"

"But if you'd only let us show you—" Wopsy's tall, young trainer started to protest.

"Get out!" the man in the violet beret shrieked. "Get out before I lose my temper!"

Wopsy and her trainer slunk off.

"In El Paso," the casting director lamented, "they bring me a Mexican hairless. In St. Louis it's a Pekinese yet! And if I do find a wolf dog, it sits in a corner and waits for somebody to bring in a sled to pull."

"Maybe," said Fergus, "you should try a real wolf."

"Wolf, *schmolf*!" He picked up the next card. "Dog: Yoggoth. Owner and trainer: Mr. O. Z. Manders. Bring it in."

The whining noise offstage ceased as Yoggoth was brought out to be tested. The man in the violet beret hardly glanced at the fringe-bearded owner and trainer. He had eyes only for that splendid gray wolf. "If you can only act—" he prayed, with the same fervor with which many a man has thought, "If you could only cook—"

He pulled the beret to an even more unlikely angle and snapped, "All right, Mr. Manders. The dog should come into the room, give one paw to the baby, indicate that he recognizes the hero in his Eskimo disguise, go over to the table, find the bone, and clap his paws joyfully. Baby here, here, here, table here. Got that?"

Mr. Manders looked at his wolf dog and repeated, "Got that?"

Yoggoth wagged his tail.

"Very well, colleague," said Mr. Manders. "Do it." Yoggoth did it.

The violet beret sailed into the flies, on the wings of its owner's triumphal scream of joy. "He did it!" he kept burbling. "He did it!"

"Of course, colleague," said Mr. Manders calmly.

The trainer who hated Pluto had a face as blank as a vampire's mirror. Fergus O'Brien was speechless with wonderment. Even Gloria Garton permitted surprise and interest to cross her regal mask.

"You mean he can do anything?" gurgled the man who used to have a violet beret.

"Anything," said Mr. Manders.

"Can he— Let's see, in the dance-hall sequence— can he knock a man down, roll him over, and frisk his back pocket?"

Even before Mr. Manders could say "Of course," Yoggoth had demonstrated, using Fergus O'Brien as a convenient dummy.

"Peace!" the casting director sighed. "Peace— Charley!" he yelled to his assistant. "Send 'em all away. No more try-outs. We've found Tookah! It's wonderful."

The trainer stepped up to Mr. Manders. "It's more than that, sir. It's positively superhuman. I'll swear I couldn't detect the slightest signal, and for such complicated operations, too. Tell me, Mr. Manders, what system do you use?"

Mr. Manders made a Moopleish *kaff-kaff* noise. "Professional secret, you understand, young man. I'm plan-

ning on opening a school when I retire, but obviously until then—"

"Of course, sir. I understand. But I've never seen anything like it in all my born days."

"I wonder," Fergus O'Brien observed from the floor, "if your marvel dog can get off of people, too?"

Mr. Manders stifled a grin. "Of course! Yoggoth!"

Fergus picked himself up and dusted from his clothes the grime of the stage, which is the most clinging grime on earth. "I'd swear," he muttered, "that beast of yours enjoyed that."

"No hard feelings, I trust, Mr.—"

"O'Brien. None at all. In fact, I'd suggest a little celebration in honor of this great event. I know you can't buy a drink this near the campus, so I brought along a bottle just in case."

"Oh," said Gloria Garton, implying that carousals were ordinarily beneath her, that this, however, was a special occasion, and that possibly there was something to be said for the green-eyed detective, after all.

This was all too easy, Wolfe Wolf-Yoggoth kept thinking. There was a catch to it somewhere. This was certainly the ideal solution to the problem of how to earn money as a werewolf. Bring an understanding of human speech and instructions into a fine animal body, and you are the answer to a director's prayer. It was perfect as long as it lasted; and if "Fangs of the Forest" was a smash hit, there were bound to be other Yoggoth pictures. Look at Rin-tin-tin. But it was too easy—

His ears caught a familiar "Oh" and his attention reverted to Gloria. This "Oh" had meant that she really shouldn't have another drink, but since liquor didn't affect her any way and this was a special occasion, she might as well.

She was even more beautiful than he had remembered. Her golden hair was shoulder-length now, and flowed with such rippling perfection that it was all he could do to keep from reaching out a paw to it. Her body had ripened, too, was even more warm and promising than his memories of her. And in his new shape he found her greatest charm in something he had not been able to appreciate fully as a human being, the deep, heady scent of her flesh.

"To 'Fangs of the Forest'!" Fergus O'Brien was toasting. "And may that pretty-boy hero of yours get a worse mauling than I did."

Wolf-Yoggoth grinned to himself. That had been fun. That'd teach the detective to go crawling around hotel rooms.

"And while we're celebrating, colleagues," said Ozymandias the Great, "why should we neglect our star? Here, Yoggoth." And he held out the bottle.

"He drinks yet!" the casting director exclaimed delightedly.

"Sure. He was weaned on it."

Wolf took a sizable gulp. It felt good. Warm and rich—almost the way Gloria smelled.

"But how about you, Mr. Manders?" the detective insisted for the fifth time. "It's your celebration really.

The poor beast won't get the four-figure checks from Metropolis. And you've taken only one drink."

"Never take two, colleague. I know my danger point. Two drinks in me and things start happening."

"More should happen yet than training miracle dogs? Go on, O'Brien. Make him drink. We should see what happens."

Fergus took another long drink himself. "Go on. There's another bottle in the car, and I've gone far enough to be resolved not to leave here sober. And I don't want sober companions, either." His green eyes were already beginning to glow with a new wildness.

"No, thank you, colleague."

Gloria Garton left her throne, walked over to the plump man, and stood close, her soft hand resting on his arm. "Oh," she said, implying that dogs were dogs, but still that the party was inevitably in her honor and his refusal to drink was a personal insult.

Ozymandias the Great looked at Gloria, sighed, shrugged, resigned himself to fate, and drank.

"Have you trained many dogs?" the casting director asked.

"Sorry, colleague. This is my first."

"All the more wonderful! But what's your profession otherwise?"

"Well, you see, I'm a magician."

"Oh," said Gloria Garton, implying delight, and went as far as to add, "I have a friend who does black magic."

"I'm afraid, ma'am, mine's simply white. That's tricky enough. With the black you're in for some real dangers."

"Hold on!" Fergus interposed. "You mean really a magician? Not just prest . . . sleight of hand?"

"Of course, colleague."

"Good theater," said the casting director. "Never let 'em see the mirrors."

"Uh-huh," Fergus nodded. "But look, Mr. Manders. What can you do, for instance?"

"Well, I can change—"

Yoggoth barked loudly.

"Oh, no," Ozymandias covered hastily, "that's really a little beyond me. But I can—"

"Can you do the Indian rope trick?" Gloria asked languidly. "My friend says that's terribly hard."

"Hard? Why, ma'am, there's nothing to it. I can remember that time in Darjeeling—"

Fergus took another long drink. "I," he announced defiantly, "want to see the Indian rope trick. I have met people who've met people who've met people who've seen it, but that's as close as I ever get. And I don't believe it."

"But, colleague, it's so-simple."

"I don't believe it."

Ozymandias the Great drew himself up to his full lack of height. "Colleague, you are about to see it!" Yoggoth tugged warningly at his coat tails. "Leave me alone, Wolf. An aspersion has been cast!"

Fergus returned from the wings dragging a soiled length of rope. "This do?"

"Admirably."

"What goes?" the casting director demanded.

"Shh!" said Gloria. "Oh—"

She beamed worshipfully on Ozymandias, whose chest swelled to the point of threatening the security of his buttons. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he announced, in the manner of one prepared to fill a vast amphitheater with his voice. "You are about to behold Ozymandias the Great in—The Indian Rope Trick! Of course," he added conversationally, "I haven't got a small boy to chop into mincemeat, unless perhaps one of you— No? Well, we'll try it without. Not quite so impressive, though. And will you stop yapping, Wolf?"

"I thought his name was Yogi," said Fergus.

"Yoggoth. But since he's part wolf on his mother's side— Now quiet, all of you!"

He had been coiling the rope as he spoke. Now he placed the coil in the center of the stage, where it lurked like a threatening rattler. He stood beside it and deftly, professionally, went through a series of passes and mumbings so rapidly that even the superhumanly sharp eyes and ears of Wolf-Yoggoth could not follow them.

The end of the rope detached itself from the coil, reared in the air, turned for a moment like a head uncertain where to strike, then shot straight up until all the rope was uncoiled. The lower end rested a good inch above the stage.

Gloria gasped. The casting director drank hurriedly. Fergus, for some reason, stared curiously at the wolf.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen—oh, hang it, I do wish I had a boy to carve—Ozymandias the Great will ascend this rope into that land which only the users of the rope may know. Onward and upward! Be right back," he added reassuringly to Wolf.

His plump hands grasped the rope above his head and gave a little jerk. His knees swung up and clasped about the hempen pillar. And up he went, like a monkey on a stick, up and up and up—

—until suddenly he was gone.

Just gone. That was all there was to it. Gloria was beyond even saying "Oh." The casting director sat his beautiful flannels down on the filthy floor and gaped. Fergus swore softly and melodiously. And Wolf felt a premonitory prickling in his spine.

The stage door opened, admitting two men in denim pants and work shirts. "Hey!" said the first. "Where do you think you are?"

"We're from Metropolis Pictures," the casting director started to explain, scrambling to his feet.

"I don't care if you're from Washington, we gotta clear this stage. There's movies here tonight. Come on, Joe, help me get 'em out. And that pooch, too."

"You can't, Fred," said Joe reverently, and pointed. His voice sank to an awed whisper. "That's Gloria Garton—"

"So it is. Hi, Miss Garton, wasn't that last one of yours a stinkeroo!"

"Your public, darling," Fergus murmured.

"Come on!" Fred shouted. "Out of here. We gotta clean up. And you, Joe! Strike that rope!"

Before Fergus could move, before Wolf could leap to the rescue, the efficient stage hand had struck the rope and was coiling it up.

Wolf stared up into the flies. There was nothing up there. Nothing at all. Some place beyond the end of that rope was the only man on earth he could trust to say *Absarke!* for him; and the way down was cut off forever.

Wolfe Wolf sprawled on the floor of Gloria Garton's boudoir and watched that vision of voluptu change into her most fetching negligee.

The situation was perfect. It was the fulfillment of all his dearest dreams. The only flaw was that he was still in a wolf's body.

Gloria turned, leaned over, and chucked him under the snout. "Wuzzum a cute wolf dog, wuzzum?"

Wolf could not restrain a snarl.

"Doesn't um like Gloria to talk baby talk? Um was a naughty wolf, yes, um was."

It was torture. Here you are in your best beloved's hotel room, all her beauty revealed to your hungry eyes, and she talks baby talk to you! Wolf had been happy at first when Gloria suggested that she might take over the care of her co-star pending the reappearance of his trainer—for none of them was quite willing to admit that "Mr. O. Z. Manders" might truly and definitely have vanished—but he was beginning to realize that the situation might bring on more torment than pleasure.

"Wolves are funny," Gloria observed. She was more

talkative when alone, with no need to be cryptically fascinating. "I knew a Wolf once, only that was his name. He was a man. And he was a funny one."

Wolf felt his heart beating fast under his gray fur. To hear his own name on Gloria's warm lips— But before she could go on to tell her pet how funny Wolf was, her maid rapped on the door.

"A Mr. O'Brien to see you, madam."

"Tell him to go 'way."

"He says it's important, and he does look, madam, as though he might make trouble."

"Oh, all right." Gloria rose and wrapped her negligee more respectably about her. "Come on, Yog— No, that's a silly name. I'm going to call you Wolfie. That's cute. Come on, Wolfie, and protect me from the big, bad detective."

Fergus O'Brien was pacing the sitting room with a certain vicious deliberateness in his strides. He broke off and stood still as Gloria and the wolf entered.

"So?" he observed tersely. "Reinforcements?"

"Will I need them?" Gloria cooed.

"Look, light of my love life." The glint in the green eyes was cold and deadly. "You've been playing games, and whatever their nature, there's one thing they're not. And that's cricket."

Gloria gave him her slow, languid smile. "You're amusing, Fergus."

"Thanks. I doubt, however, if your activities are."

"You're still a little boy playing cops and robbers. And what boogymen are you after now?"

"Ha-ha," said Fergus politely. "And you know the answer to that question better than I do. That's why I'm here."

Wolf was puzzled. This conversation meant nothing to him. And yet he sensed a tension of danger in the air as clearly as though he could smell it.

"Go on," Gloria snapped impatiently. "And remember how dearly Metropolis Pictures will thank you for annoying one of its best box-office attractions."

"Some things, my sweet, are more important than pictures, though you mightn't think it where you come from. One of them is a certain federation of forty-eight units. Another is an abstract concept called democracy."

"And so?"

"And so I want to ask you one question: Why did you come to Berkeley?"

"For publicity on 'Fangs,' of course. It was your sister's idea."

"You've gone temperamental and turned down better ones. Why leap at this?"

"You don't haunt publicity stunts yourself, Fergus. Why are you here?"

Fergus was pacing again. "And why was your first act in Berkeley a visit to the office of the German department?"

"Isn't that natural enough? I used to be a student here."

"Majoring in dramatics, and you didn't go near the Little Theater. Why the German department?" He



paused and stood straight in front of her, fixing her with his green gaze.

Gloria assumed the attitude of a captured queen defying the barbarian conqueror. "Very well. If you must know—I went to the German department to see the man I love."

Wolf held his breath, and tried to keep his tail from thrashing.

"Yes," she went on impassionedly, "you strip the last veil from me, and force me to confess to you what he alone should have heard first. This man proposed to me by mail. I foolishly rejected his proposal. But I thought and thought—and at last I knew. When I came to Berkeley I had to see him—"

"And did you?"

"The little mouse of a secretary told me he wasn't there. But I shall see him yet. And when I do—"

Fergus bowed stiffly. "My congratulations to you both, my sweet. And the name of this more than fortunate gentleman?"

"Professor Wolfe Wolf."

"Who is doubtless the individual referred to in this?" He whipped a piece of paper from his sport coat and thrust it at Gloria. She paled and was silent. But Wolfe Wolf did not wait for her reply. He did not care. He knew the solution to his problem now, and he was streaking unobserved for her boudoir.

Gloria Garton entered the boudoir a minute later, a shaken and wretched woman. She unstoppered one of the delicate perfume bottles on her dresser and poured herself a stiff drink of whiskey. Then her eyebrows lifted in surprise as she stared at her mirror. Scrawlingly lettered across the glass in her own deep-crimson lipstick was the mysterious word

A B S A R K A

Frowning, she said it aloud. "*Absarka*—"

From behind a screen stepped Professor Wolfe Wolf, incongruously wrapped in one of Gloria's lushest dressing robes. "Gloria dearest—" he cried.

"Wolf!" she exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here in my room?"

"I love you. I've always loved you since you couldn't tell a strong from a weak verb. And now that I know that you love me—"

"This is terrible. Please get out of here!"

"Gloria—"

"Get out of here, or I'll sick my dog on you. Wolfie— Here, nice Wolfie!"

"I'm sorry, Gloria. But Wolfie won't answer you."

"Oh, you beast! Have you hurt Wolfie? Have you—"

"I wouldn't touch a hair on his pelt. Because, you see, Gloria darling, I am Wolfie."

"What on earth do you—" Gloria stared around the room. It was undeniable that there was no trace of the presence of a wolf dog. And here was a man dressed only in one of her robes and no sign of his own clothes. And after that funny little man and the rope—

"You thought I was drab and dull," Wolf went on.

"You thought I'd sunk into an academic rut. You'd sooner have an actor or a G-man. But I, Gloria, am something more exciting than you've ever dreamed of. There's not another soul on earth I'd tell this to; but I, Gloria, am a werewolf."

Gloria gasped. "That isn't possible! But it all fits in. What I heard about you on campus, and your friend with the funny beard and how he vanished, and, of course, it explains how you did tricks that any real dog couldn't possibly do—"

"Don't you believe me, darling?"

Gloria rose from the dresser chair and went into his arms. "I believe you, dear. And it's wonderful! I'll bet there's not another woman in all Hollywood that was ever married to a werewolf!"

"Then you will—"

"But of course, dear. We can work it out beautifully. We'll hire a stooge to be your trainer on the lot. You can work daytimes, and come home at night and I'll say *Absarka!* for you. It'll be perfect."

"Gloria—" Wolf murmured with tender reverence.

"One thing, dear. Just a little thing. Would you do Gloria a favor?"

"Anything!"

"Show me how you change. Change for me now. Then I'll *Absarka* you back right away."

Wolf said The Word. He was in such ecstatic bliss that he hardly felt the pang this time. He capered about the room with all the liveness of his fine wolfish legs, and ended up before Gloria, wagging his tail and looking for approval.

Gloria patted his head. "Good boy, Wolfie. And now, darling, you can just stay that way."

Wolf let out a yelp of amazement.

"You heard me, Wolfie. You're staying that way. You didn't happen to believe any of that guff I was feeding the detective, did you? Love you? I should waste my time! But this way you can be very useful to me. With your trainer gone, I can take charge of you and pick up an extra thousand a week or so. I won't mind that. And Professor Wolfe Wolf will have vanished forever, which fits right in with my plans."

Wolf snarled.

"Now don't try to get nasty, Wolfie darling. Um wouldn't threaten ums, darling Gloria, would ums? Remember what I can do for you. I'm the only person who can turn you into a man again. You wouldn't dare teach anyone else that. You wouldn't dare let people know what you really are. An ignorant person would kill you. A smart one would have you locked up as a lunatic."

Wolf still advanced threateningly.

"Oh, no. You can't hurt me. Because all I'd have to do would be to say the word on the mirror. Then you wouldn't be a dangerous wolf any more. You'd just be a man here in my room, and I'd scream. And after what happened on the campus yesterday, how long do you think you'd stay out of the madhouse?"

Wolf backed away and let his tail droop.

"You see, Wolfie darling? Gloria has ums just where she wants ums. And ums is going to be a good boy."

There was a rap on the boudoir door, and Gloria called, "Come in."

"A gentleman to see you, madam," the maid announced. "A Professor Fearing."

Gloria smiled her best cruel and queenly smile. "Come along, Wolfie. This may interest you."

Professor Oscar Fearing, overflowing one of the graceful chairs of the sitting room, beamed benevolently as Gloria and the wolf entered. "Ah, my dear! A new pet. Touching."

"And what a pet, Oscar. Wait till you hear."

Professor Fearing buffed his pince-nez against his sleeve. "And wait, my dear, until you hear all that I have learned. Chiswick has perfected his protective screen against magnetic bombs, and the official trial is set for next week. And Farnsworth has all but completed his researches on a new process for obtaining osmium. Gas warfare may start any day, and the power that can command a plentiful supply of—"

"Fine, Oscar," Gloria broke in. "But we can go over all this later. We've got other worries right now."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"Have you run onto a red-headed young Irishman in a yellow shirt?"

"No, I— Why, yes. I did see such an individual leaving the office yesterday. I believe he had been to see Wolf."

"He's on to us. He's a detective from Los Angeles, and he's tracking us down. Some place he got hold of a scrap of record that should have been destroyed. He knows I'm in it, and he knows I'm tied up with somebody here in the German department."

Professor Fearing scrutinized his pince-nez, approved of their cleanness, and set them on his nose. "Not so much excitement, my dear. No hysteria. Let us approach this calmly. Does he know about the Temple of the Dark Truth?"

"Not yet. Nor about you. He just knows it's somebody in the department."

"Then what could be simpler? You have heard of the strange conduct of Wolfe Wolf?"

"Have I?" Gloria laughed harshly.

"Everyone knows of Wolf's infatuation with you. Throw the blame onto him. It should be easy to clear yourself and make you appear an innocent tool. Direct all attention to him and the organization will be safe. The Temple of the Dark Truth can go its mystic way and extract even more invaluable information from weary scientists who need the emotional release of a false religion."

"That's what I've tried to do. I gave O'Brien a long song and dance about my devotion to Wolf, so obviously phony he'd be bound to think it was a cover-up for something else. And I think he bit. But the situation is trickier than you guess. Do you know where Wolfe Wolf is?"

"No one knows. After the president . . . ah . . . rebuked him, he seems to have vanished."

Gloria laughed again. "He's right here. In this room."

"My dear! Secret panels and such? You take your espionage too seriously. Where?"

"There!"

Professor Fearing gaped. "Are you serious?"

"As serious as you are about the future of Fascism. That is Wolfe Wolf."

Fearing approached the wolf incredulously and extended his hand.

"He might bite," Gloria warned him a second too late.

Fearing stared at his bleeding hand. "That, at least," he observed, "is undeniably true." And he raised his foot to deliver a sharp kick.

"No, Oscar! Don't! Leave him alone. And you'll have to take my word for it—it's way too complicated. But the wolf is Wolfe Wolf, and I've got him completely under control. He's absolutely in our hands. We'll switch suspicion to him, and I'll keep him this way while Fergus and his friends the G-men go off hotfoot on his trail."

"My dear!" Fearing ejaculated. "You're mad. You're more hopelessly mad than the devout members of the Temple." He took off his pince-nez and stared again at the wolf. "And yet Tuesday night— Tell me one thing: From whom did you get this . . . this wolf dog?"

"From a funny plump little man with a fringy beard."

Fearing gasped. Obviously he remembered the furor in the Temple, and the wolf and the fringe-beard. "Very well, my dear. I believe you. Don't ask me why, but I believe you. And now—"

"Now it's all set, isn't it? We keep him here helpless, and we use him to—"

"The wolf as scapegoat. Yes. Very pretty."

"Oh! One thing—" She was suddenly frightened.

Wolfe Wolf was considering the possibilities of a sudden attack on Fearing. He could probably get out of the room before Gloria could say *Absarka!* But after that? Whom could he trust to restore him? Especially if G-men were to be set on his trail—

"What is it?" Fearing asked

"That secretary. That little mouse in the department office. She knows it was you I asked for, not Wolf. Fergus can't have talked to her yet, because he swallowed my story; but he will. He's thorough."

"Hm-m-m. Then, in that case—"

"Yes, Oscar?"

"She must be attended to." Professor Oscar Fearing beamed genially and reached for the phone.

Wolf acted instantly, on inspiration and impulse. His teeth were strong, quite strong enough to jerk the phone cord from the wall. That took only a second, and in the next second he was out of the room and into the hall before Gloria could open her mouth to speak that word that would convert him from a powerful and dangerous wolf to a futile man.

There were shrill screams and a shout or two of "Mad dog!" as he dashed through the lobby, but he paid no heed to them. The main thing was to reach Emily's house before she could be "attended to." Her evidence was essential. That could swing the balance, show Ferguson and his G-men where the true guilt lay. And, besides, he admitted to himself, Emily was a nice kid—

His rate of collision was about one point six six per block, and the curses heaped upon him, if theologically valid, would have been more than enough to damn him forever. But he was making time, and that was all that counted. He dashed through traffic signals, cut into the path of trucks, swerved from under street cars, and once even leaped over a stalled car which obstructed him. Everything was going fine, he was halfway there, when two hundred pounds of human flesh landed on him in a flying tackle.

He looked up through the brilliant lighting effects of smashing his head on the sidewalk and saw his old Nemesis, the policeman who had been cheated of his beer.

"So Rover!" said that officer. "Got you at last, did I? Now we'll see if you'll wear a proper license tag. Didn't know I used to play football, did you?"

The officer's grip on his hair was painfully tight. A gleeful crowd was gathering and heckling the policeman with fantastic advice.

"Get along, boys," he admonished. "This is a private matter between me and Rover here. Come on," and he tugged even harder.

Wolf left a large tuft of fur and skin in the officer's grasp and felt the blood ooze out of the bare patch on his neck. He heard an oath and a pistol shot simultaneously, and felt the needlelike sting drive through his shoulder. The awestruck crowd thawed before him. Two more bullets hied after him, but he was gone, leaving the most dazed policeman in Berkeley.

"I hit him," the officer kept muttering blankly. "I hit the—"

Wolfe Wolf coursed along Dwight Way. Two more blocks and he'd be at the little bungalow that Emily shared with a teaching assistant in something or other. That telephone gag had stopped Fearing only momentarily; the orders would have been given by now, the henchmen would be on their way. But he was almost there—

"He'o!" a child's light voice called to him. "Nice woof-woof came back!"

Across the street was the modest frame dwelling of Robby and his shrewish mother. The child had been playing on the sidewalk. Now he saw his idol and deliverer and started across the street at a lurching toddle. "Nice woof-woof!" he kept calling. "Wait for Robby!"

Wolf kept on. This was no time for playing games with even the most delightful of cubs. And then he saw the car. It was an ancient jellopy, plastered with wise-cracks even older than itself; and the high-school youth driving was obviously showing his girl friend how it could make time on this deserted residential street. The

girl was a cute dish, and who could be bothered watching out for children?

Robby was directly in front of the car. Wolf leaped straight as a bullet. His trajectory carried him so close to the car that he could feel the heat of the radiator on his flank. His forepaws struck Robby and thrust him out of danger. They fell to the ground together, just as the car ground over the last of Wolf's caudal vertebrae.

The cute dish screamed. "Homer! Did we hit them?"

Homer said nothing, and the jellopy zoomed on.

Robby's screams were louder. "You hurt me! You hurt me! Baaaaad woof-woof!"

His mother appeared on the porch and joined in with her own howls of rage. The cacophony was terrific. Wolf let out one wailing yelp of his own, to make it perfect and to lament his crushed tail, and dashed on. This was no time to clear-up misunderstandings.

But the two delays had been enough. Robby and the policeman had proved the perfect unwitting tools of Oscar Fearing. As Wolf approached Emily's little bungalow, he saw a gray sedan drive off. In the rear was a small, slim girl, and she was struggling.

Even a werewolf's lithe speed cannot equal a motor car. After a block of pursuit, Wolf gave up and sat back in his haunches panting. It felt funny, he thought even in that tense moment, not to be able to sweat, to have to open your mouth and stick out your tongue and—

"Trouble?" inquired a solicitous voice.

This time Wolf recognized the cat. "Heavens, yes," he assented wholeheartedly. "More than you ever dreamed of."

"Food shortage?" the cat asked. "But that toddler back there is nice and plump."

"Shut up," Wolf snarled.

"Sorry; I was just judging from what Confucius told me about werewolves. You don't mean to tell me that you're an altruistic were?"

"I guess I am. I know werewolves are supposed to go around slaughtering, but right now I've got to save a life."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth."

"Ah," the cat reflected philosophically. "Truth is a dark and deceitful thing."

Wolfe Wolf was on his feet. "Thanks," he barked. "You've done it."

"Done what?"

"See you later." And Wolf was off at top speed for the Temple of the Dark Truth.

That was the best chance. That was Fearing's headquarters. The odds were at least even that when it wasn't being used for services it was the hang-out of his ring, especially since the consulate had been closed in San Francisco. Again the wild running and leaping, the narrow escapes; and where Wolf had not taken these too seriously before, he knew now that he might be immune to bullets, but certainly not to being run over. His tail still stung and ached tormentingly. But he had to

get there. He had to clear his own reputation, he kept reminding himself; but what he really thought was, *I have to save Emily.*

A block from the Temple he heard the crackle of gunfire. Pistol shots and, he'd swear, machine guns, too. He couldn't figure what it meant, but he pressed on. Then a bright-yellow roadster passed him and a vivid flash came from its window. Instinctively he ducked. You might be immune to bullets, but you still didn't just stand still for them.

The roadster was gone and he was about to follow when a glint of bright metal caught his eye. The bullet which had missed him had hit a brick wall and ricocheted back onto the sidewalk. It glittered there in front of him—pure silver.

This, he realized abruptly, meant the end of his immunity. Fearing had believed Gloria's story, and with his smattering of occult lore he had known the successful counter weapon. A bullet, from now on, might mean no more needle sting, but instant death.

And so Wolfe Wolf went straight on.

He approached the Temple cautiously, lurking behind shrubbery. And he was not the only lurker. Before the Temple, crouching in the shelter of a car every window of which was shattered, were Fergus O'Brien and a moonfaced giant. Each held an automatic, and they were taking pot shots at the steeple.

Wolf's keen, lupine hearing could catch their words even above the firing. "Gabe's around back," Moonface was explaining. "But it's no use. Know what that steeple is? It's a revolving machine-gun turret. They've been ready for something like this. Only two men in there, far as we can tell, but that turret covers all the approaches."

"Only two?" Fergus muttered.

"And the girl. They brought a girl here with them. If she's still alive."

Fergus took careful aim at the steeple, fired, and ducked back behind the car as a bullet missed him by millimeters. "Missed him again! By all the kings that ever ruled Tara, Moon, there's got to be a way in there. How about tear gas?"

Moon snorted. "Think you can reach the firing gap in that armored turret at this angle?"

"That girl—" said Fergus.

Wolf waited no longer. As he sprang forward, the gunner noticed him and shifted his fire. It was like a needle shower in which all the spray is solid steel. Wolf's nerves ached with the pain of reknitting. But at least machine guns apparently didn't fire silver.

The front door was locked, but the force of his drive carried him through and added a throbbing ache in his shoulder to his other discomforts. The lower-floor guard, a pasty-faced individual with a jutting Adam's apple, sprang up, pistol in hand. Behind him, in the midst of the litter of the cult, ceremonial robes, incense burners, curious books, even a Ouija board, lay Emily.

Pasty-face fired. The bullets struck Wolf full in the chest and for an instant he expected death. But this, too, was lead, and he jumped forward. It was not his

usual powerful leap. His strength was almost spent by now. He needed to lie on cool earth and let his nerves knit. And this spring was only enough to grapple with his foe, not to throw him.

The man reversed his useless automatic and brought its butt thudding down on the beast's skull. Wolf reeled back, lost his balance, and fell to the floor. For a moment he could not rise. The temptation was so strong just to lie there and—

The girl moved. Her bound hands grasped a corner of the Ouija board. Somehow, she stumbled to her rope-tied feet and raised her arms. Just as Pasty-face rushed for the prostrate wolf, she brought the heavy board down.

Wolf was on his feet now. There was an instant of temptation. His eyes fixed themselves to the jut of that Adam's apple, and his long tongue licked his jowls. Then he heard the machine-gun fire from the turret, and tore himself from Pasty-face's unconscious form.

Ladders are hard on a wolf, almost impossible. But if you use your jaws to grasp the rung above you and pull up, it can be done. He was halfway up the ladder when the gunner heard him. The firing stopped, and Wolf heard a rich German oath in what he automatically recognized as an East Prussian dialect with possible Lithuanian influences. Then he saw the man himself, a broken-nosed blond, staring down the ladder well.

The other man's bullets had been lead. So this must be the one with the silver. But it was too late to turn back now. Wolf bit the next rung and hauled up as the bullet struck his snout and stung through. The blond's eyes widened as he fired again and Wolf climbed another round. After the third shot he withdrew precipitately from the opening.

Shots still sounded from below, but the gunner did not return them. He stood frozen against the wall of the turret watching in horror as the wolf emerged from the well. Wolf halted and tried to get his breath. He was dead with fatigue and stress, but this man must be vanquished.

The blond raised his pistol, sighted carefully, and fired once more. He stood for one terrible instant, gazing at this deathless wolf and knowing from his grandmother's stories what it must be. Then deliberately he clamped his teeth on the muzzle of the automatic and fired again.

Wolf had not yet eaten in his wolf's body, but food must have been transferred from the human stomach to the lupine. There was at least enough for him to be extensively sick.

Getting down the ladder was impossible. He jumped. He had never heard anything about a wolf's landing on his feet, but it seemed to work. He dragged his weary and bruised body along to where Emily sat by the still unconscious Pasty-face, his discarded pistol in her hand. She wavered as the wolf approached her, as though uncertain yet as to whether he was friend or foe.

Time was short. With the machine gun dead, Fergus and his companions would be invading the Temple at any minute. Wolf hurriedly nosed about and found the planchette of the Ouija board. He pushed the heart-

shaped bit of wood onto the board and began to shove it around with his paw.

Emily watched, intent and puzzled. "A," she said aloud. "B—S—"

Wolf finished the word and edged around so that he stood directly beside one of the ceremonial robes. "Are you trying to say something?" Emily frowned.

Wolf wagged his tail in vehement affirmation and began again.

"A—" Emily repeated. "B—S—A—R—"

He could already hear approaching footsteps.

"—K—A— What on earth does that mean? *Ab-sarka—*"

Ex-professor Wolfe Wolf hastily wrapped his naked human body in the cloak of the Dark Truth. Before either he or Emily knew quite what was happening, he had folded her in his arms, kissed her in a most thorough expression of gratitude, and fainted.

Even Wolf's human nose could tell, when he awakened, that he was in a hospital. His body was still limp and exhausted. The bare patch on his neck, where the policeman had pulled out the hair, still stung, and there was a lump where the butt of the automatic had connected. His tail, or where his tail had been, sent twinges through him if he moved. But the sheets were cool and he was at rest and Emily was safe.

"I don't know how you got in there, Mr. Wolf, or what you did; but I want you to know you've done your country a signal service." It was the moonfaced giant speaking.

Fergus O'Brien was sitting beside the bed, too. "Congratulations, Wolf. And I don't know if the doctor would approve, but here."

Wolfe Wolf drank the whiskey gratefully and looked a question at the huge man.

"This is Moon Lafferty," said Fergus. "F. B. I. man. He's been helping me track down this ring of spies ever since I first got wind of them."

"You got them—all?" Wolf asked.

"Picked up Fearing and Garton at the hotel," Lafferty rumbled.

"But how—I thought—"

"You thought we were out for you?" Fergus answered. "That was Garton's idea, but I didn't quite tumble. You see, I'd already talked to your secretary. I knew it was Fearing she'd wanted to see. And when I asked around about Fearing, and learned of the Temple and the defense researches of some of its members, the whole picture cleared up."

"Wonderful work, Mr. Wolf," said Lafferty. "Any time we can do anything for you— And how you got into that machine-gun turret— Well, O'Brien, I'll see you later. Got to check up on the rest of this round-up. Pleasant convalescence to you, Wolf."

Fergus waited until the G-man had left the room. Then he leaned over the bed and asked confidentially, "How about it, Wolf? Going back to your acting career?"

Wolf gasped. "What acting career?"

"Still going to play Tookah? If Metropolis makes 'Fangs' with Miss Garton in a Federal prison."

Wolf fumbled for words. "What sort of nonsense—"

"Come on, Wolf. It's pretty clear I know that much. Might as well tell me the whole story."

Still dazed, Wolf told it. "But how did you know it?" he concluded.

Fergus grinned. "Look, Dorothy Sayers said some place that in a detective story the supernatural may be introduced only to be dispelled. Sure, that's swell. Only in real life there come times when it won't be dispelled. And this was one. There was too much. There were your eyebrows and fingers, there were the obviously real magical powers of your friend, there were the tricks which no dog could possibly do without signals, there was the way the other dogs whimpered and cringed— I'm pretty hard-headed, Wolf, but I'm Irish. I'll string along only so far with the materialistic, but too much coincidence is too much."

"Fearing believed it, too," Wolf reflected. "But one thing that worries me—if they used a silver bullet on me once, why were all the rest of them lead? Why was I safe from then on?"

"Well," said Fergus, "I'll tell you. Because it wasn't 'they' who fired the silver bullet. You see, Wolf, up till the last minute I thought you were on 'their' side. I, somehow, didn't associate good will with a werewolf. So I got a mold from a gunsmith and paid a visit to a jeweler and— I'm glad I missed," he added sincerely.

"You're glad!"

"But look. Previous question stands. Are you going back to acting? Because if not, I've got a suggestion."

"Which is?"

"You say you fretted about how to be practical, commercial werewolf. All right. You're strong and fast. You can terrify people even to committing suicide. You can overhear conversations that no human being could get in on. You're invulnerable to bullets. Can you tell me better qualifications for a G-man?"

Wolf goggled. "Me? A G-man?"

"Moon's been telling me how badly they need new men. They've changed the qualifications lately so that your language knowledge'll do instead of the law or accounting they used to require. And, after what you did today, there won't be any trouble about a little academic scandal in your past. Moon's pretty sold on you."

Wolf was speechless. Only three days ago he had been in torment because he was not an actor or a G-man. Now—

"Think it over," said Fergus.

"I will. Indeed I will. Oh, and one other thing. Has there been any trace of Ozzy?"

"Nary a sign."

"I like that man. I've got to try to find him and—"

"If he's the magician I think he is, he's staying up there only because he decided he likes it."

"I don't know. Magic's tricky. Heaven knows I've learned that. I'm going to do all I can for that fringe-bearded old colleague."

"Wish you luck. Shall I send in your other guest?"

"Who's that?"

"Your secretary. Here on business, no doubt."

Pergus disappeared discreetly as he admitted Emily. She walked over to the bed and took Wolf's hand. His eyes drank in her quiet, charming simplicity, and his mind wondered what freak of belated adolescence had made him succumb to the blatant glamour of Gloria.

They were silent for a long time. Then at once they both said, "How can I thank you? You saved my life."

Wolf laughed. "Let's not argue. Let's say we saved our life."

"You mean that?" Emily asked gravely.

Wolf pressed her hand. "Aren't you tired of being an office wife?"

In the bazaar of Darjeeling, Chulundra Lingasuta stared at his rope in numb amazement. Young Ali had climbed up only five minutes ago, but now as he descended he was a hundred pounds heavier and wore a curious fringe of beard.

THE END.

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THE DAWN OF REASON

BY JAMES H. BEARD

Donald is sick and the fire won't burn,
And Dirk is cringing behind the churn.
A hapless baby, a cold, damp floor,
And a dog that never showed dread before
Why does Dirk tremble behind the churn?
What of a fire that will not burn?

I heard her stick as she tapped the road,
I saw her stoop as she caught the toad.
I could cut such a stick in any hedge,
I could catch such a toad on Deston's ledge.
What harm to a child if she catch a toad,
To fire, or Dirk if she tap the road?

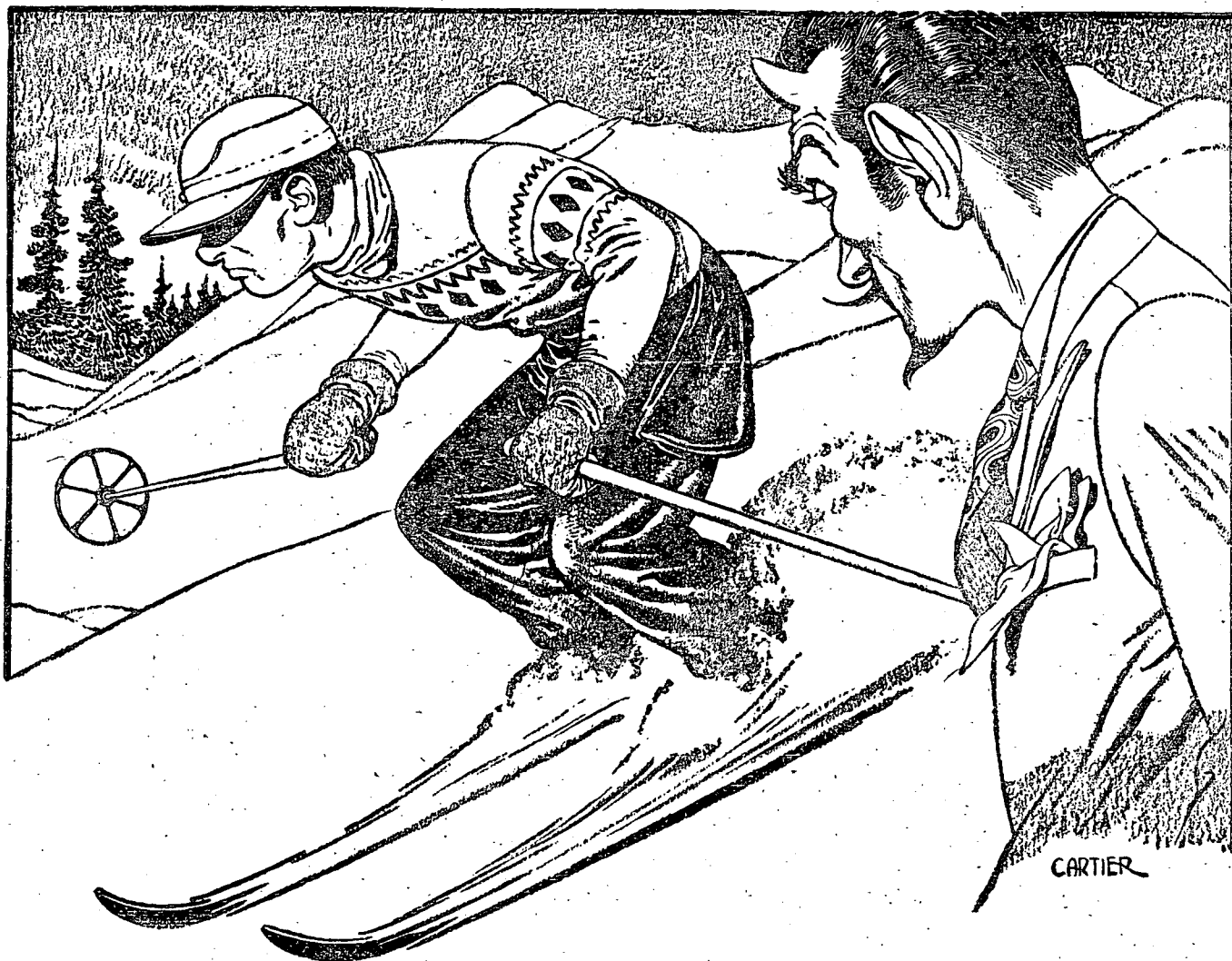
What of a charm and what of a spell?
Are the ways of witches the way of Hell?
A senseless jumble of sticks and bones,
A foolish mumble of sighs and groans—
Why should such nonsense make for Hell?
What good, what bad, in charm or spell?

If I were sure that she meant no ill,
She could sit inside when the wind is chill;
A cup of milk and a bit of bread,
And a rag to cover her poor old head.
It's hard on the old when the wind is chill,
I pity the old when they mean no ill.

If I were sure she caused Don's woe,
I'd feather a shaft and string Hal's bow.
I'd wait near the door till she passed again,
And laugh in her face when she screamed with pain.
If I were sure, I'd bend Hal's bow
And a singing shaft would bring her woe.

Is she really a witch or a lonely hag,
With a crooked stick and a dirty bag,
A crazy woman who does no harm,
Or a child of Hell with her spell and charm?
What does she hide in her dirty bag?
Shall I pity or hate the lonely hag?

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ONE MAN'S HARP

BY BABETTE ROSMOND

A professional gambler will take a chance on anything — even a chance at winning another man's place in Heaven. But it might be that what he won wasn't Heaven — to him.

Harry Jordan put down his magazine and listened politely to the man in the next chair who'd been talking to him on and off for the last hour. The man seemed to be aware of one subject only: skiing. Harry Jordan knew what a ski was, he knew where Sun Valley was—his neighbor's destination—and he knew he hated snow. Outside of that, he knew nothing and cared less. He was bored; it was time to be getting to work on this tanned, tall and patently ingenuous stranger.

"These trains certainly are slow," sighed his neighbor. He yawned extensively. "Wish there was something exciting to do."

"Well," suggested Jordan carefully, "I don't know how much excitement I can promise you with my brand of card playing—never touch the stuff except when I'm driven to it—but, to help pass the time, how about a friendly little game?"

"Well! That sounds fine," said his neighbor with

enthusiasm. "My name's Taft, by the way. Gene Taft. Olympics. Skiing team."

"Oh, yes," said Jordan. "I'm Harry Jordan. Pleased to meet you." His hands were beginning to itch. "Gim rummy O. K.?" he asked. "It's about the only game I know. Two cents a point suit you?"

Taft nodded and showed fine white teeth in a big smile.

"Boy, this is going to be a cinch," he said. "Hate to take your money."

Jordan grinned and rang for the porter, who returned with two new decks. Jordan slid the cards out on the table that the porter rigged up between their seats and picked the jokers out of the decks. Then he shuffled the cards clumsily. They cut for deal, and the high card fell to Jordan. He dealt ten cards to each, picked up his own and expertly separated two aces from the others. As he placed them at one end of his hand he lightly ran his fingernail over a corner of each, cutting a ridge perceptible only to his trained fingertips. He stifled a yawn and settled down to the game. It was such routine stuff that his air of disinterest was completely real.

They played for a half hour. Taft was winning. When he was thirty-five dollars ahead, Jordan had marked the deck to his own satisfaction and good-naturedly proposed that they raise the stakes to five cents a point. In another hour the stakes were raised to twenty-five cents a point. Languidly, Jordan came in for the kill. Taft found himself unable to fill a single sequence. Every card he dropped was picked up by Jordan. The score rose higher and higher and all the scoring was on Jordan's side of the sheet. Finally Jordan added up an astounding column of figures.

"My, my," he said, with a look of amazement that would have registered as pure corn with anyone else but Taft. "I seem to be winning. Imagine. That's forty-seven hundred you owe me."

Taft looked a little pale under his magnificent tan, but his tone was quiet. "That happens to be just four hundred dollars more than I have or could raise. He reached into his pocket and drew out a bank book. "There's forty-three hundred dollars in this account, and it was supposed to keep me until the end of the year. Which means I owe you four hundred I don't have, and that I'm short another four hundred for this"—and here his voice broke a little—"for this skiing trip."

He raised his eyes to Jordan. "Tell you what. I'll cut you for eight hundred dollars, high card takes all. If I win, you'll give me back the four hundred I need and we'll be even on what I owe you. If I lose—"

"Yes," interrupted Jordan, smiling benignly. "If you lose?"

"If I lose," said Taft, evenly, "I'll transfer you—my share of Paradise!"

Jordan stared at Taft. *Out of all the suckers on this train, I have to pick this whack,* he thought. *Paradise he wants to give me. Could I get a liquor license in Paradise, could I get a floor show going there, could I as deals with The Boys there? Well, I'll be off this train in about ten minutes. I might as well take what I can get. At least the cops won't ever nail me with it.*

"Ha, ha," he said aloud, showing very bad, jagged, little, dirty teeth. "Eight hundred dollars. Against your share of Paradise."

Taft extended his hand toward the stack of cards. He hesitated for a fraction of a second and then pulled out a card. It was the ten of diamonds. He flipped it face up on the table and watched Jordan's hand move toward the deck. Jordan cut the cards. The card facing Taft was the jack of hearts.

Taft looked solemn.

"That's it," he said. "O. K. With all due respects to Those who arrange such affairs, I hereby confer upon you my share of Paradise as of this moment. All the good that was to befall me is now yours."

He had just about finished his sentence when there was a nerve-chilling screech of steel against steel. Jordan rushed to the window. Headed toward them, at a miraculous, terrifying and inevitable speed, was the blinding headlight of another engine. How the tracks had branched Jordan never had time to figure out. In another moment the trains had thundered together and Jordan was smashed with sickening force against the floor of the Pullman car.

Jordan picked himself up from the snow-covered ground and brushed some flakes off his right leg. He felt cold, and more important, he felt lonely—unutterably lonely. He was not at all reassured to find that at the end of his right leg there was a ski. Beyond the ski, his leg seemed to be clothed with a close-fitting silky green trouser tucked into a woolen sock. His foot was covered by a bulky shoe which, in turn, was thrust into the metal and leather strips which bound it to the ski.

He looked around him. He was alone on a vast snow-covered mountain. Stretching down at a thirty-degree angle from where he stood was an icy slope studded with tree stumps and scattered boulders. He tried to find tracks on the thick snow, but couldn't. He realized he must have arrived somewhat unconventionally.

He removed his skis, with difficulty, and trudged up the hill, slipping frequently. Several hundred feet higher he found the trail of skis, which disappeared and then reappeared at the very spot where he had been a few moments before. He saw in his mind the picture of an intrepid skier, hurtling down the mountain—like in the movies—coming to earth on the rim of disaster on a tiny shelf overhanging the valley. A bitter wind chilled him to the core, as he started to climb the hill; then, suddenly he stopped. There was no one else about. It was he who had been standing on the landing marks of the skis.

That intrepid skier, that defier of death, had been himself.

Shivering with fright and cold, he continued his climb. In about half an hour he saw a curl of smoke. His feet, by then, felt as if he had left them off that morning; his ski boots were saturated with icy water. Through the tattered folds of his pants his blue knees poked, lacerated and bleeding from frequent contact with the sharp snow crust.

The smoke was coming from the chimney of a long, low house. Jordan swung open the door without knocking. His heart leaped at the beautiful sight before him. A great fire was crackling in a massive fireplace. Several assorted ski suits, with people in them, were sitting around the fire, drinking hot rum. Jordan staggered to a fine, big leather couch and collapsed.

A servant in a white jacket unlaced Jordan's boots and drew them from his feet, which had returned but were not yet really feet—just clumps of ice. He thrust a mug into Jordan's hand and waited until Jordan had drained it before he spoke:

"My, you're late. We expected you at least an hour ago."

Jordan looked at him. "How did you know I was coming? I'm sure I didn't."

The servant looked scornful.

"Now, now, stop with the Here-Comes-Mr.-Jordan stuff. We're all very tired of being whimsied up in the movies. However, you are most welcome here. Everyone respects and admires Gene Taft."

"Taft, Taft?" Jordan rubbed his head. "Where is this? Sun Valley?"

"No, sir. This is Paradise."

And then, of course, Jordan remembered. This was Gene Taft's share of Paradise. This was what he had won in a gin-rummy game.

Jordan looked around him. No one seemed particularly ethereal. Everyone wore old shirts, worn slippers, slacks, jackets and other things which he had known about, dimly, but had never worn. The women were husky but beautiful. Six of them were staring at him, invitingly. Jordan felt better.

One of the women sat next to him. As she bounced reassuringly against him he noticed a trace of perfume. He felt lots better. This was familiar stuff.

"That's nice perfume, sister," he said in his best Humphrey Bogart manner.

The woman smiled and moved closer to him.

"I'm glad you like it," she said. "I've been waiting for you. I've admired you for years. I remember you in the Olympics. My name is Sally Ransome."

Jordan would have liked to continue the conversation, but he felt unreasonably tired. Murmuring excuses, he allowed himself to be led upstairs by the servant. He sank into a bed, and knew nothing until, hours later, a hand tapped his shoulder.

He opened his eyes. He was conscious of pain. Every muscle ached. His face felt like stretched leather; his lips were cracked and bleeding.

The white-coated servant was standing at his bedside. Beyond him, the open window looked out upon the valley. The first rays of light were rising from a sun which had not yet come up.

"It's five thirty, sir," whispered the servant. "I let you sleep longer this morning."

Then the servant pulled him from his bed and led him across the cold floor to a bathroom. Half asleep, he felt himself being stripped of his pajamas and placed under

a shower. Then the icicles hit him. Sharp and frigid, they drove into his back and face and limbs. He leaped into the air in agony as the cold, cold deluge met his blistered legs. He was almost unconscious by the time the servant started rubbing him with a rough towel. Jordan broke away and ran back into bed.

"Say, look, bub," he said to the servant. "I don't know who told you to call me, but don't. Don't wake me at five, don't wake me at six. And don't wake me at eleven unless I tell you that I want to get up very, very early in the morning."

"And I don't bathe in the morning. I bathe at night. I do not bathe in ice; I bathe in warm water. If there is anything that I do not like, that is cold water. Now go away. I am a sick man. I am a cold and sick man."

The servant stood there, smiling.

"Oh, you skiers. You will have your little joke. Why, Mr. Taft, you know as well as I do that you'll be getting up every morning at five and taking your nice cold shower. You'll do it all the time, if you'll pardon a colloquialism. Time really means eternity, you know. And now your massage, sir."

There followed an unspeakable half hour of torture, during which Jordan felt as though he were a professional demonstrator of Iron Marys.

Finally, somehow, Jordan dressed. He went down into the dining room, where only Sally Ransome was left.

She smiled a welcome. "I thought you were never coming. I'd have been out an hour ago but I didn't want you to eat alone. Isn't this a honey of a day?"

"I," said Jordan, "have known better."

"Yes," she went on, "it's glorious here. Every day is colder than the one before it. After you're here ten years or so, you'll find that it will seem like fifty degrees below zero! Imagine how grand the snow is then."

Jordan frowned at Sally, and ordered some orange juice. The servant brought it in a pint-sized glass, and asked if he would have oatmeal or farina, and did he prefer ham or sausages with his eggs?

"I will have one cup of black coffee," said Jordan. "Black."

The servant tittered.

"You're a one, sir. First joking about your shower and now— Why, first thing we know you'll be asking for a cigar!"

Sally giggled.

"You are funny, Mr. Taft. Why, the oatmeal is wonderful this morning. I had two bowls. Lots of brown sugar and I think the cook has mixed in some raw eggs. Jensen, bring Mr. Taft the works!"

She laughed again. Beautiful as she was, Jordan felt slightly revolted at that laughter. Then Jensen brought breakfast. The oatmeal looked as if it were prepared for a hungry family of twelve; the hot milk had skin floating on it.

Jordan swallowed his nausea and said quickly:

"You'll think this is foolish, I know, but isn't there something else we could do today besides ski?"

"Silly boy! As if we could do anything here *but* ski! Just try to do anything else, and you'll see what happens. Why, you could *not* ski if you wanted to—which you don't, of course!

"You know," Sally chattered on and on as he ate, "the funniest thing happened the other day. I was out with Mr. James and we stopped for lunch. It was really hot—only ten below—so we took off our jackets to cool off and found some nice lumps of ice to curl up on. Well, by the time we'd finished, I looked around and our jackets just weren't there any more. Then I realized we'd been sitting on a glacier and it had just moved us along with it. Well, Mr. James had to carry me up because the snow was too deep to walk—and he was *puffing* when we got there. Imagine a man not able to carry me up a hill for a couple of miles on skis without puffing? I only weigh a hundred and forty. Do you think that's too light for cross-country runs?"

"Er, you say we don't come back for lunch?" asked Jordan.

"Oh, no. The lodge simply isn't here in the daytime. It disappears. Comes back about five o'clock. Oh, do hurry! I want you to show me so many things today."

"I suppose," said Jordan, cleverly, "this being Paradise, no one ever gets in . . . well, any skiing accidents?"

"Oh, you!" Sally laughed. And now Jordan hated her and wished she and her laugh were inside a glacier with oatmeal and brown sugar. "Of course we can't die. But if any of us are stupid enough to blunder in the snow, we get hurt. Not that many of us do, but occasionally some fool breaks his leg and has to wait weeks before another one grows. But we're all professionals here, so there's not much danger—even though there's a punishment for those who try to take it easy."

"Punishment," mumbled Jordan. Then he looked around. He was sitting in the snow.

"See," laughed Sally. "I told you the lodge disappeared during the day. Come on, let's ski!"

"Excuse me just a moment," said Jordan. "Got to see a man. Be right back."

He dashed behind a tree stump out of Sally's sight and sat down, panting. What manner of game was this, what doom had he bargained for? Was this icy mess Paradise? Was this the land of milk and honey? No, this was the land of oatmeal and ice—and he would have none of it. Better hell than this. Better nice warm hell fires than fifty below zero. This might be heaven for Gene Taft, wherever he was now—probably enjoying

himself in some celestial burlesque house, smoking cigars and drinking gin—but for him it was—

Why not? The thought hit him full in the stomach, or at least in the cold region where a stomach had once functioned. Perhaps he could arrange something with . . . well, call him Satan. People did it. They made bargains. And Jordan knew that whatever happened to him now, he'd be getting the best of the bargain. But how did one summon Satan?

Remembering dimly something he had once read, he drew a crude circle in the snow. Then he started mumbling to himself, "Please, Satan, honey, come up here just a minute. Please, Satan, just this once, be a good guy. You don't know what I'd do to leave this heaven-hole, honey, please."

The man standing before him was tall and slim and dressed in a snappy white linen suit.

"I'm delighted to see you, sir," said Jordan sincerely.

"Well, what's this?" asked Satan. "Want to trade heaven for hell, do you? Crazy. But that's your affair."

"Pardon me," said Jordan, beginning to feel like a new man, "but aren't you supposed to wear black? Or red?"

"Quit reading dime magazines," said Satan. "Don't you wear white suits in the summer? Well, it's plenty hot where I live. So I wear them."

"That reminds me," said Jordan. "If I come to you . . . if I trade this no-good heaven for a nice, personal hell—I'd like to have you promise me that it won't get too hot. Say, nothing over ninety degrees."

"Done," said Satan. "You won't find it too hot. It'll be a nice, personal hell, that's all. After all, Jordan, I've had my eye on you for years. You crossed me up in that gin-rummy game, all right. I thought sure I'd get you for some of the things you've done. Hiring killers, driving people to suicide on account of gambling debts. Oh, you certainly fooled me with the Taft switch. But I'm a good sport. I don't hold grudges. Come on, let's get out of here. You'll get your own hell—at your own request."

Jordan's head began to ache. He grew dizzy. The snow melted around him and swirled in pretty patterns over his head. Then there was a period of blackness. Then a great light. Then—

Jordan picked himself up from the snow-covered ground. He looked around him. He was quite alone on a vast snow-covered mountain. He looked down. There was a ski at the end of his leg. He began to sob.

THE END.

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THE DEVIL WE KNOW

BY HENRY KUTTNER

An ingenious little spine-crawler about a demon who accepted slavery to a man in return for a soul — which he said didn't exist anyway. So — what was his true motive — ?

For days the thin, imperative summons had been whispering deep in Carnevan's brain. It was voiceless and urgent, and he likened his mind to a compass needle that would swing, inevitably, toward the nearest magnetic point. It was fairly easy to focus his attention on the business of the moment, but it was, as he had found, somewhat dangerous to relax. The needle wavered and

swung imperceptibly, while the soundless cry grew stronger, beating at the citadel of his consciousness. Yet the meaning of the message remained unknown to him.

There was not the slightest question of insanity. Gerald Carnevan was as neurotic as most, and knew it. He held several degrees, and was junior partner in a

nourishing New York advertising concern, contributing most of the ideas. He golfed, swam, and played a fair hand of bridge. He was thirty-seven years old, with the thin, hard face of a Puritan—which he was not—and was being blackmailed, in a mild degree, by his mistress. This he did not especially resent, for his logical mind had summed up the possibilities, arrived at a definite conclusion, and then had forgotten.

And yet he had not forgotten. In the depths of his subconscious the thought remained, and it came to Carnevan now. That, of course, might be the explanation of the—the “voice.” A suppressed desire to solve the problem completely. It seemed to fit fairly well, considering Carnevan’s recent engagement to Phyllis Mardrake. Phyllis, of Boston stock, would not overlook her fiancé’s amours—if they were dragged out into the open. Diana, who was shameless as well as lovely, would not hesitate to do that if matters came to a head.

The compass needle quivered again, swung, and came to a straining halt. Carnevan, who was working late in his office that night, grunted angrily. On an impulse, he leaned back in his chair, tossed his cigarette out the open window, and waited.

Suppressed desires, according to the teachings of psychology, should be brought out into the open, where they could be rendered harmless. With this in mind, Carnevan smoothed all expression from his thin, harsh face and waited. He closed his eyes.

Through the window came the roaring murmur of a New York street. It faded and dimmed almost imperceptibly. Carnevan tried to analyze his sensations. His consciousness seemed inclosed in a sealed box, straining all in one direction. Light patterns faded on his closed lids as the retina adjusted itself.

Voiceless a message came into his brain. He could not understand. It was too alien—incomprehensible.

But at last words formed. A name. A name that hovered on the edge of the darkness, nebulous, inchoate. *Nefert. Nefert.*

He recognized it now. He remembered the seance last week, which he had attended with Phyllis at her request. It had been cheap, ordinary claptrap—trumpets and lights, and voices whispering. The medium held seances thrice a week, in an old brownstone near Columbus Circle. Her name was Madame Nefert—or so she claimed, though she looked Irish rather than Egyptian.

Now Carnevan knew what the voiceless command was. *Go to Madame Nefert*, it told him.

Carnevan opened his eyes. The room was quite unchanged. This was as he had expected. Already some vague theory had formed within his mind, germinating an annoyed anger that someone had been tampering with his most exclusive possession—his *self*. It was, he thought, hypnotism. Somehow, during the seance, Madame Nefert had managed to hypnotize him, and his curious reactions of the past week were due to post-hypnotic suggestion. It was somewhat farfetched, but certainly not impossible.

Carnevan, as an advertising man, inevitably followed certain lines of thought. Madame Nefert would hypnotize a client. That client would return to her, worried and not understanding what had happened, and the medium would probably announce that the spirits were taking a hand. When the client had been properly convinced—the first step in advertising campaigns—Madame Nefert would show her hand, whatever she had to sell.

It was the first tenet of the game. Make the customer believe he needs something. Then sell it to him.

Fair enough. Carnevan rose, lit a cigarette, and pulled on his coat. Adjusting his tie before the mirror, he examined his face closely. He seemed in perfect health, his reactions normal, and his eyes well under control.

The telephone rang sharply. Carnevan picked up the receiver.

“Hello. . . . Diana? How are you, dear?” Despite Diana’s blackmailing activities, Carnevan preferred to keep matters running along smoothly, lest they grow more complicated. So he substituted “dear” for another epithet that came to his mind.

“I can’t,” he said at last. “I’ve an important call to make tonight. Now wait—I’m not turning you down! I’ll put a check in the mail tonight.”

This seemed satisfactory, and Carnevan hung up. Diana did not yet know of his forthcoming marriage to Phyllis. He was a little worried about how she would take the news. Phyllis, for all her glorious body, was quite stupid. At first Carnevan had found this attribute relaxing, giving him an illusory feeling of power in the moments when they were together. Now, however, Phyllis’ stupidity might prove a handicap.

He’d cross that bridge later. First of all, there was Nefert. *Madame Nefert*. A wry smile touched his lips. By all means, the title. Always look for the trade-mark. It impresses the consumer.

He got his car from the garage of the office building and drove uptown on the parkway, turning off into Columbus Circle. Madame Nefert had a front parlor and a few tawdry rooms which no one ever saw, since they probably contained her equipment. A placard on the window proclaimed the woman’s profession.

Carnevan mounted the steps and rang. He entered at the sound of a buzzer, turned right, and pushed through a half-open door which he closed behind him. Drapes had been drawn over the windows. The room was illuminated by a dim, reddish glow from lamps in the corners.

It was bare. The carpet had been pushed aside. Signs had been made on the floor with luminous chalk. A blackened pot stood in the center of a pentagram. That was all, and Carnevan shook his head disgustedly. Such a stage setting would impress only the most credulous. Yet he decided to play along till he got to the bottom of this most peculiar advertising stunt.

A curtain was twitched aside, revealing an alcove in which Madame Nefert sat on a hard, plain chair. The woman had not even troubled to don her customary masquerade, Carnevan saw. With her beefy, red face

and her stringy hair, she resembled a charwoman out of some Shavian comedy. She wore a flowered wrapper, hanging open to reveal a dirty white slip at her capacious bosom.

The red light flickered on her face.

She looked at Carnevan with glassy, expressionless eyes. "The spirits are—" she began, and fell suddenly silent, a choking rattle deep in her throat. Her whole body twitched convulsively.

Suppressing a smile, Carnevan said, "Madame Nefert, I'd like to ask you a few questions."

She didn't answer. There was a long, heavy silence. After a time Carnevan made a tentative movement toward the door, but still the woman did not rouse.

She was playing the game to the hilt. He glanced around, saw something white in the blackened pot, and stepped closer to peer down into the interior. Then he retched violently, clawed out a handkerchief and, holding it over his mouth, whirled to confront Madame Nefert.

But he could not find words. Sanity came back. He breathed deeply, realized that a clever papier-maché image had almost destroyed his emotional balance.

Madame Nefert had not moved. She was leaning forward, breathing in stertorous, rasping gasps. A faint, insidious odor crept into Carnevan's nostrils.

Someone said sharply, "Now!"

The woman's hand moved in a fumbling, uncertain gesture. Simultaneously Carnevan was conscious of a newcomer in the room. He whirled, to see, seated in the middle of the pentagram, a small huddled figure that was regarding him steadily.

The red light was dim. All Carnevan could see was a head, and a shapeless body concealed by a dark cloak as the man—or boy—squatted. Yet the sight of that head was enough to make his heart jump excitedly.

For it was not entirely human. At first Carnevan had thought it was a skull. The face was thin, with pale, translucent skin of finest ivory laid lightly over the bone, and it was completely hairless. It was triangular, delicately wedge-shaped, without the ugly protruding knobs of the cheekbones which make human skulls so often hideous. The eyes were certainly inhuman. They slanted up almost to where the hairline would have been had the being possessed hair, and they were like cloudy, gray-green stone, flecked with opalescent dancing lights, red-tinted now by the light.

It was a singularly beautiful face, with the clear, passionless perfection of polished bone. The body Carnevan could not see, hidden as it was by the cloak.

Was that strange face a mask? Carnevan knew it was not. By the subtle, unmistakable revolt of his whole physical being, he knew that he looked upon a horror.

With an automatic reflex, he took out a cigarette and lighted it. The being had made no move meanwhile, and Carnevan abruptly realized that the compass needle in his brain had vanished.

Smoke coiled up from his cigarette. He, Gerald Carnevan, was standing in this dim, red-lit room, with a fake medium in, presumably, a fake trance behind him, and—something—crouching only a few feet away. Out-

side, a block distant, was Columbus Circle, with electric signs and traffic.

Electric lights meant advertising. A key clicked in Carnevan's brain. *Get the customer wondering.* In this case he seemed to be the customer. The direct approach was hell on salesmen and their foreplanned tactics. Carnevan began to walk directly toward the being.

The soft, pink, childish lips parted. "Wait," a singularly gentle voice commanded. "Don't cross the pentagram, Carnevan. You can't anyway, but you might start a fire."

"That tears it," the man remarked, almost laughing. "Spirits don't speak colloquial English. What's the idea?"

"Well," said the other, not moving, "to begin with, you may call me Azazel. I'm not a spirit. I'm rather more of a demon. As for colloquial English, when I enter your world I naturally adjust myself to it—or am adjusted. My own tongue cannot be heard here. I'm speaking it, but you hear the Earthly equivalent. It's automatically adjusted to your capabilities."

"All right," Carnevan said. "Now what?" He blew smoke through his nostrils.

"You're skeptical," Azazel said, still motionless. "I could convince you in a moment by leaving the pentagram, but I can't do that without your help. At present, the space I'm occupying exists in both our worlds, coincidentally. I *am* a demon, Carnevan, and I want to strike a bargain with you."

"I expect flashlight bulbs to go off in a moment. But you can fake all the photos you want, if that's the game. I won't pay blackmail," Carnevan said, thinking of Diana and making a mental reservation.

"You do," Azazel remarked, and gave a brief, pithy history of the man's relations with Diana Bellamy.

Carnevan felt himself flushing. "That's enough," he said curtly. "It is blackmail, eh?"

"Please let me explain—from the beginning. I got in touch with you first at the seance last week. It's incredibly difficult for inhabitants of my . . . my dimension to establish contact with human beings. But in this case I managed it. I implanted certain thoughts in your subconscious mind and held you by those."

"What sort of thoughts?"

"Gratifications," Azazel said. "The death of your senior partner. The removal of Diana Bellamy. Wealth. Power. Triumph. Secretly you treasured those thoughts, and so a link was established between us. Not enough, however, for I couldn't really communicate with you till I'd worked on Madame Nefert."

"Go on," Carnevan said quietly. "She's a charlatan, of course."

"So she is." Azazel smiled. "But she is a Celt. A violin is useless without a violinist. I managed to control her somewhat, and induced her to make the necessary preparations so I could materialize. Then I drew you here."

"Do you expect me to believe you?"

The other's shoulders stirred restlessly. "That is the

difficulty. If you accept me, I can serve you well—very well indeed. But you will not do that until you believe.”

“I’m not Faust,” Carnevan said. “Even if I did believe you, why do you think I’d want to—” He stopped. “You are human,” Azazel said.

For a second there was silence. Carnevan angrily dropped his cigarette and crushed it out. “All the legends of history,” he muttered. “Folklore—all full of it. Bargains with demons. And always at a price. But I’m an atheist, or an agnostic. Not sure which. A soul—I can’t believe I have one. When I die, it’s a blackout.”

Azazel studied him thoughtfully. “There must be a fee, of course.” A curious expression crossed the being’s face. There was mockery in it, and fear, too. When he spoke again his voice was hurried.

“I can serve you, Carnevan. I can give you anything you desire—everything, I believe.”

“Why did you choose me?”

“The seance drew me. You were the only one present I could touch.”

Scarcely flattered, Carnevan frowned. It was impossible for him to believe. He said, at last, “I wouldn’t mind—if I thought this wasn’t merely some trick. Tell me more about it. Just what you could do for me.”

Azazel spoke further. When he had finished, Carnevan’s eyes were glistening.

“Even a little of that—”

“It is easy enough,” Azazel urged. “All is ready. The ceremony does not take long, and I’ll guide you step by step.”

Carnevan clicked his tongue, smiling. “There it is. I can’t believe. I tell myself that you’re real—but deep inside my brain I’m trying to find a logical explanation. And that’s all too easy. If I were convinced you are what you say and can—”

Azazel interrupted. “Do you know anything about teratology?”

“Eh? Why—just the layman’s knowledge.”

The being stood up slowly. He was wearing, Carnevan saw, a voluminous cloak of some dark, opaque, shimmering material.

He said, “If there is no other way of convincing you—and since I cannot leave the pentagram—I must take this means.”

A sickening premonition shot through Carnevan as he saw delicate, slim hands fumbling at the fastenings of the cloak. Azazel cast it aside.

Almost instantly he wrapped the garment around him. Carnevan had not moved. But there was blood trickling down his chin.

Then silence, till the man tried to speak, a hoarse, croaking noise that rasped through the room. Carnevan found his voice.

Unexpectedly his words came out in a half shriek. Abruptly he whirled and went to a corner, where he stood with his forehead pressed hard against the wall.

When he returned, his face was more composed, though sweat gleamed on it.

“Yes,” he said. “Yes?”

“This is the way—” Azazel began.

The next morning Carnevan sat at his desk and talked quietly to the demon, who lounged in a chair, invisible to all but one man, and his voice equally masked. Sunlight slanted in through the windows, and a cool breeze brought in the muffled clamor of traffic. Azazel seemed incredibly real sitting there, his body muffled by the cloak, his skull-like, beautiful head whitened by the sunlight.

“Speak softly,” the demon cautioned. “No one can hear me, but they can hear you. Whisper—or just think. It will be clear to me.”

“Fair enough.” Carnevan rubbed his freshly shaven cheek. “We’d better lay out a plan of campaign. You’ll have to earn my soul, you know.”

“Eh?” For a second the demon looked puzzled; then he laughed softly. “I’m at your service.”

“First—we must arouse no suspicion. Nobody would believe the truth, but I don’t want them thinking I’m insane—as I may be,” Carnevan continued logically. “But we’ll not consider that point just now. What about Madame Nefert? How much does she know?”

“Nothing at all,” Azazel said. “She was in a trance while under my control. She remembered nothing when she woke. Still, if you prefer, I can kill her.”

Carnevan held up his hand. “Steady now! That’s just where people like Faust made their mistakes. They went hogwild, got drunk on power, and wrapped themselves up till they couldn’t even move. Any murders we may commit must be necessary. Here! Just how much control have I over you?”

“A good deal,” Azazel admitted.

“Suppose I asked you to kill yourself—told you to do so?”

For answer, the demon picked up a paper knife from the desk and thrust it deeply into his cloak. Remembering what lay under that garment, Carnevan glanced away hurriedly.

Smiling, Azazel replaced the knife. “Suicide is impossible to a demon, by any means.”

“Can’t you be killed at all?”

There was a little silence. Then— “Not by you,” Azazel said.

Carnevan shrugged. “I’m checking up all the angles. I want to know just where I stand. You must obey me, though. Is that right?”

Azazel nodded.

“So. Now I don’t want a million dollars in gold dumped into my lap. Gold’s illegal, anyway, and people would ask questions. Any advantages I get must come naturally, without arousing the slightest suspicion. If Eli Dale died, the firm would be without a senior partner. I’d get the job. It carries enough money for my purposes.”

"I can get you the largest fortune in the world," the demon suggested.

Carnevan laughed a little. "And then? Everything would be far too easy for me. I want to feel the thrill of achieving things myself—with some help from you. If you cheat once at solitaire, it's different from cheating all through the game. I have a good deal of faith in myself, and want to justify that—build up my ego. People like Faust grew jaded. King Solomon must have been bored to death. Then, too, he never used his brain, and I'll bet it atrophied. Look at Merlin!" Carnevan smiled. "He got so used to calling up devils to do what he wanted that a young snip got the best of him without any trouble. No, Azazel—I want Eli Dale to die, but naturally."

The demon looked at his slim, pale hands.

Carnevan shrugged. "Can you change your form?"

"Of course."

"Into anything?"

For answer, Azazel became, in rapid succession, a large black dog, a lizard, a rattlesnake, and Carnevan himself. Finally he resumed his own form and relaxed again in the chair.

"None of those disguises would help you kill Dale," Carnevan grunted. "We want something that won't be suspected. Do you know what disease germs are, Azazel?"

"I know, from your mind," the other nodded.

"Could you transform yourself into toxins?"

"Why not? If I knew which one you wished, I'd locate a specimen, duplicate its atomic structure, and enter it with my own life force."

"Spinal meningitis," Carnevan said thoughtfully. "That's fatal enough. It'd knock over a man in Dale's senile condition. But I forgot whether it's a germ or a virus."

"That doesn't matter," Azazel said. "I'll locate a slide or specimen of the stuff—some hospital should do—and then materialize inside Dale's body as the disease."

"Will it be the same thing?"

"Yes."

"Good enough. The toxin will propagate, I suppose, and that'll be the end of Dale. If it isn't, we'll try something else."

He turned back to his work, and Azazel vanished. The morning dragged past slowly. Carnevan ate at a nearby restaurant, wondering what his familiar demon was doing, and was rather surprised to find that he had a hearty appetite. During the afternoon, Diana phoned. She had, apparently, found out about Carnevan's engagement to Phyllis. She had already telephoned Phyllis.

Carnevan hung up, rigidly repressing his violent rage. After a brief moment he dialed Phyllis' number. She was not at home, he was told.

"Tell her I'll be out to see her tonight," he growled, and slammed the receiver down in its cradle. It was rather a relief to look up and see the shrouded form of Azazel in the chair.

"It's done," the demon said. "Dale has spinal meningitis."

He doesn't know it yet, but the toxin propagated very rapidly. A curious experiment. But it worked."

Carnevan tried to focus his mind. It was Phyllis he was thinking of now. He was in love with her, of course—but she was so rigid, so incredibly Puritanical. He had made one slip in the past. In her eyes, that might be enough. Would she break the engagement? Surely not! In this day and age, amorous peccadilloes were more or less taken for granted, even by a girl who had been reared in Boston. Carnevan considered his fingernails.

After a time he made an excuse to see Eli Dale, asking his advice on some unimportant business problem, and scrutinized carefully the old man's face. Dale was flushed and bright-eyed, but otherwise seemed normal. Yet the mark of death was on him, Carnevan knew. He would die, the senior partnership would devolve on someone else—and the first step in Carnevan's plan was taken.

As for Phyllis and Diana—why, after all, he owned a familiar demon! With the powers at his control, he could solve this problem, too. Just how he would do that, Carnevan did not know as yet; ordinary methods, he thought, should be used first in every case. He must not grow too dependent on magic.

He dismissed Azazel for the time and drove that night to Phyllis' home. But before that, he made a stop at Diana's apartment. The scene was brief and stormy while it lasted.

Dark, slim, furious and lovely, Diana said she wouldn't let him marry.

"Why not?" Carnevan wanted to know. "After all, my dear, if you want money, I can arrange that."

Diana said unpleasant things about Phyllis. She hurled an ash tray down and stamped on it. "So I'm not good enough to marry! But she is!"

"Sit down and be quiet," Carnevan suggested. "Try and analyze your feelings—"

"You cold-blooded fish!"

"—and see just where you stand. You're not in love with me. Dangling me on a string gives you a feeling of power and possession. You don't want any other woman to have me."

"I pity any woman who does," Diana remarked, selecting another ash tray. She looked remarkably pretty, but Carnevan was in no mood to appreciate beauty.

"All right," he said. "Listen to me. If you string along, you won't lack for money—or anything. But if you try to cause trouble again, you'll certainly regret it."

"I don't scare easily," Diana snapped. "Where are you going? Off to see that yellow-haired wench, I suppose?"

Carnevan favored her with an imperturbable smile, donned his topcoat, and vanished. He drove to the home of the yellow-haired wench, where he encountered unforeseen difficulties. But finally he out-argued the maid and was ushered in to face an icicle sitting silently on a couch. It was Mrs. Mardrake.

"Phyllis does not wish to see you, Gerald," she said, her prim mouth biting off the words.

Carnevan girded his loins and began to talk. He talked well. So convincing was his story that he almost persuaded himself that Diana was a myth—that the whole affair had been cooked up by some personal enemy. Mrs. Mardrake finally capitulated, after an internal struggle of some length.

"There must be no scandal," she said at last. "If I thought there was a word of truth in what that woman said to Phyllis—"

"A man in my position has enemies," Carnevan said, thus reminding his hostess that, maritally speaking, he was a fish worth hooking. She sighed.

"Very well, Gerald. I'll ask Phyllis to see you. Wait here."

She swept out of the room, and Carnevan suppressed a smile. Yet he knew it would not be this easy to convince Phyllis.

She did not appear immediately. Carnevan guessed that Mrs. Mardrake was having difficulty in persuading her daughter of his bona fides. He wandered about the room, taking out his cigarette case and then, with a glance at the surroundings, putting it back. What a Victorian house!

A heavy family bible on its stand caught his eye. For want of anything else to do, he went toward it, opening the book at random. A passage leaped up at him.

"If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God."

It was, perhaps, an instinctive reaction that made Carnevan reach up to touch his forehead. He smiled at the conceit. Superstition! Yes—but so were demons.

At that moment Phyllis came in, looking like Evangeline in Acadia, with much the same martyred expression Longfellow's heroine might have worn. Suppressing an ungallant impulse to kick her, Carnevan reached for her hands, failed to capture them, and followed her to a couch.

Puritanism and a pious upbringing has its drawbacks, he thought. This became more evident when, after ten minutes, Phyllis still remained unconvinced of Carnevan's innocence.

"I didn't tell mother everything," she said quietly. "That woman said some things— Well, I could see she was telling the truth."

"I love you," Carnevan said inconsequentially.

"You don't. Or you'd never have taken up with this woman."

"Even if it happened before I knew you?"

"I could forgive many things, Gerald," she said, "but not that."

"You," Carnevan remarked, "don't want a husband. You want a graven image."

It was impossible to break through her calm self-righteousness. Carnevan lost his self-possession. He argued and pleaded, despising himself as he did so. Of all the women in the world, he had to fall in love with the most hide-bound and Puritanical of them all. Her silence had the quality of enraging him almost to hysteria.

He had an impulse to shout obscenities into the room's quiet, religious atmosphere. Phyllis, he knew, was humiliating him horribly, and deep within him something cowered rawly under the lashing he could not stop himself from giving it.

"I love you, Gerald," was all she would say. "But you don't love me. I can't forgive you this. Please go before you make it worse."

He flung out of the house, seething with fury, hot and sick with the realization that he had failed to maintain his poise. Phyllis, Phyllis, Phyllis! An imperturbable iceberg. She knew nothing of humanity. Emotions had never existed in her breast unless they were well-schooled, dainty as an antimacassar of lace. A china doll, expecting the rest of the world to be of china. Carnevan stood by his car, shaking with rage, wishing more than anything else on earth to hurt Phyllis as he himself had been hurt.

Something stirred inside the car. It was Azazel, the cloak shrouding his dark body, the bone-white face expressionless.

Carnevan flung out an arm behind him, pointing. "The girl!" he said hoarsely. "She . . . she—"

"You need not speak," Azazel murmured. "I read your thoughts. I shall—do as you wish."

He was gone. Carnevan sprang into the car, inserted the key, savagely started the motor. As the vehicle began to move he heard a thin, knife-edged scream lancing out from the house he had left.

He stopped the car and raced back, chewing his lip.

As the hastily summoned physician said, Phyllis Mardrake had suffered a severe nervous shock. The reason was unknown, but; presumably, it might have been the ordeal of her interview with Carnevan, who said nothing to dispel that illusion. Phyllis simply lay and twitched, her eyes staring glassily. Sometimes her lips formed words.

"The cloak— Under the cloak—"

And then she would alternately laugh and scream until exhaustion claimed her.

She would recover, but it would take some time. In the meanwhile, Phyllis was sent to a private sanitarium, where she fell into hysterics whenever she saw Dr. Joss, who happened to be bald-headed. Her jabbering about cloaks grew less frequent, and occasionally Carnevan was permitted to visit her. She asked for him. The quarrel had been patched up, and Phyllis almost half admitted that she had been wrong in her stand.

When she had completely recovered she would marry Carnevan. But there must be no more slips.

The horror she had seen was buried deep in her mind, emerging only during delirium, and in her frequent nightmares. Carnevan was thankful that she did not remember Azazel. Yet he saw much of the demon these days—for he was fulfilling a malicious, cruel little scheme of his own.

It had started soon after Phyllis's breakdown, when Diana kept telephoning him at the office. At first Car-

nevan spoke shortly to her. Then he realized that she, actually, was responsible for Phyllis's near-madness.

It was, of course, right that she should suffer. Not death. Anyone might die. Eli Dale, for example, was already fatally ill with spinal meningitis. But a more subtle form of punishment—a torture such as Phyllis had undergone.

Carnevan's face wore an expression that was not pleasant to see as he summoned the demon and issued instructions.

"Slowly, gradually, she will be driven insane," he said. "She will be given time to realize what is happening. Give her—glimpses, so to speak. A cumulative series of inexplicable happenings. I'll give you the detailed directions when I work them out. She told me that she isn't easily frightened," Carnevan finished, and rose to pour himself a drink. He offered one to the demon, but it was refused.

Azazel sat motionless in a dark corner of the apartment, occasionally glancing out of the window to where Central Park lay far below.

Carnevan was struck by a sudden thought. "How do you react to this? Demons are supposed to be evil. Does it give you pleasure to . . . hurt people?"

The beautiful skull face was turned toward him. "Do you know what evil is, Carnevan?"

The man splashed soda into his rye. "I see. A matter of semantics. Of course, it's an arbitrary term. Humanity has set up its own standards—"

Azazel's slanted, opalescent eyes glittered. "That is moral anthropomorphism. And egotism. You haven't considered environment. The physical properties of this world of yours caused good and evil, as you know it."

It was Carnevan's sixth drink, and he felt argumentative. "That I don't quite understand. Morality comes from the mind and the emotions."

"A river has its source," Azazel countered. "But there's a difference between the Mississippi and the Colorado. If human beings had evolved in—well, my world, for example—the whole pattern of good and evil would have been entirely different. Ants have a social structure. But it isn't like yours. The environment is different."

"There's a difference between insects and men, too."

The demon shrugged. "We are not alike. Less alike than you and an ant. For both of you have, basically, two common instincts. Self-preservation and propagation of the species. Demons can't propagate."

"Most authorities agree on that," Carnevan granted. "Possibly it explains the reason for changelings, too. How is it that there are so many kinds of demons?"

Azazel questioned him with his eyes.

"Oh—you know. Gnomes and kobolds and trolls and jinn and werewolves and vampires and—"

"There are more kinds of demons than humanity knows," Azazel explained. "The reason is pretty obvious. Your world tends toward a fixed pattern—a state of stasis. You know what entropy is. The ultimate aim of your universe is a unity, changeless and eternal. Your branches of evolution will finally meet and remain

at one fixed type. Such offshoots as the moa and the auk will die out, as dinosaurs and mammoths have died. In the end there will be stasis. My universe tends toward physical anarchy. In the beginning there was only one type. In the end it will be ultimate chaos."

"Your universe is like a negative of mine," Carnevan pondered. "But—wait! You said demons can't die. And they can't propagate. How can there be any progress at all?"

"I said demons can't commit suicide," Azazel pointed out. "Death may come to them, but from an outside source. That applies to procreation, too."

It was too confused for Carnevan. "You must have emotions. Self-preservation implies fear of death."

"Our emotions are not yours. Clinically, I can analyze and understand Phyllis' reactions. She was reared very rigidly, and subconsciously she has resented that oppression. She never admitted, even to herself, her desire to break free. But you were a symbol to her. Secretly she admired and envied you, because you were a man and, as she thought, able to do whatever you wanted. Love is a false synonym for propagation, as the soul is a wish fulfillment creation growing out of self-preservation. Neither exists. Phyllis's mind is a maze of inhibitions, fears, and hopes. Puritanism, to her, represents security. That was why she couldn't forgive you for your affair with Diana. It was an excuse for retreating to the security of her former life pattern."

Carnevan listened interestedly. "Go on."

"When I appeared to her, the psychic shock was violent. Her subconscious ruled for a time. That was why she became reconciled to you. She is an escapist; her previous security seemed to have failed, so she fulfills both her escape wish and her desire for protection by agreeing to marry you."

Carnevan mixed himself another drink. He remembered something.

"You just said the soul is nonexistent—eh?"

Azazel's body stirred under the shrouding cloak. "You misunderstood me."

"I don't think so," Carnevan said, feeling a cold, deadly horror under the warm numbness of liquor. "Our bargain was that you serve me in exchange for my soul. Now you imply that I have no soul. What was your real motive?"

"You're trying to frighten yourself," the demon murmured, his strange eyes alert. "All through history, religion has been founded on the hypothesis that souls exist."

"Do they?"

"Why not?"

"What is a soul like?" Carnevan asked.

"You couldn't imagine," Azazel said. "There'd be no standard of comparison. By the way, Eli Dale died two minutes ago. You're now the senior partner of the firm. May I congratulate you?"

"Thank you," Carnevan nodded. "We'll change the subject, if you like. But I intend to find out the truth

booner or later. If I have no soul, you're up to something else. However—let's get back to Diana."

"You wish to drive her mad."

"I wish *you* to drive her mad. She is the schizophrenic type—slim and long boned. She has a stupid sort of self-confidence. She has built her life on a foundation of things she knows to be real. Those things must be removed."

"Well?"

"She is afraid of the dark," Carnevan said, and his smile was quite unpleasant. "Be subtle, Azazel. She will hear voices. She will see people following her. Delusions of persecution. One by one her senses will begin to fail her. Or, rather, deceive her. She'll smell things no one else does. She'll hear voices. She'll taste poison in her food. She'll begin to feel things—unpleasant things. If necessary, she may, at the last—see things."

"This is evil, I suppose," Azazel observed, rising from his chair. "My interest is purely clinical. I can reason that such matters are important to you, but that's as far as it goes."

The telephone rang. Carnevan learned that Eli Dale was dead—spinal meningitis.

To celebrate the occasion, he poured another drink and toasted Azazel, who had vanished to visit Diana. Carnevan's thin, hard face was only slightly flushed by the liquor he had consumed. He stood in the center of the apartment and revolved slowly, eying the furnishings, the books, the bric-a-brac. It would be well to find another place—something a bit more swanky. A place suitable for a married couple. He wondered how long it would be before Phyllis was completely recovered.

Azazel— Just what was the demon after?—he wondered. Certainly not his soul. What, then?

One night two weeks later, he rang the bell of Diana's apartment. The girl's voice asked who was there, and she opened the door a slight crack before admitting Carnevan. He was shocked at the change in her.

There was little tangible alteration. Diana was holding herself under iron control, but her make-up was too heavy. That in itself was revealing. It was a symbol of the mental shield she was trying to erect against the psychical invasion. Carnevan said solicitously, "Diana, what's wrong? You sounded hysterical over the phone. I told you last night you should see a doctor."

She fumbled for a cigarette, which trembled slightly in her hands as Carnevan lit it. "I have. He . . . he wasn't much help, Jerry. I'm so glad you're not angry at me any more."

"Angry? Here, sit down. That's it. I'll mix a drink. No, I got over being angry; we get along together, and Phyllis—well, we couldn't very well have a *ménage à trois*. She's in a sanitarium, you know, and it'll be a long while before she gets out. Even then she may be a lunatic—" Carnevan sucked in his breath. "Sorry."

Diana pushed back her dark hair and turned to face him on the couch. "Jerry, do you think I'm going crazy?"

"No, I don't," he said. "I think you need a rest, or a change."

She didn't hear. Her head was tilted to one side, as though she listened to a soundless voice. Glancing up, Carnevan saw Azazel standing across the room—invisible to the girl, but apparently not inaudible.

"Diana!" he said sharply.

Her lips parted. Her voice was unsteady as she looked at him. "Sorry. You were saying?"

"What did the doctor tell you?"

"Nothing much." She did not wish to follow up the line of discussion. Instead, she took the drink Carnevan had mixed, eyed it, and sipped the highball. Then she put down the glass.

"Anything wrong?" the man asked.

"No. How does it taste to you?"

"All right."

Carnevan wondered just what Diana had tasted in her drink. Bitter almonds, perhaps. Another of Azazel's deft illusions. He ran his fingers through the girl's hair, feeling a thrill of power as he did so. A nasty sort of revenge, he thought. Odd that Diana's distress did not touch him in the slightest degree. Yet he was not basically evil, Carnevan knew. The old, old problem of arbitrary standards—right and wrong.

Azazel said—and his words were heard by Carnevan alone: "Her control cannot last much longer. I think she'll break tomorrow. A manic-depressive may commit suicide, so I'll guard against that. Every dangerous weapon she touches will seem red-hot to her."

Abruptly, without warning, the demon vanished. Carnevan grunted and finished his drink. From the corner of his eye he saw something move.

Slowly he turned his head, but it was gone. What had it been? Like a black shadow. Formless, inchoate. Without reason, Carnevan's hands were shaking. Utterly amazed, he put down his drink and surveyed the apartment.

Azazel's presence had never affected him thus before. It was probably a reaction—no doubt he had been keeping a tight control over his nerves, without noticing it. After all, demons *are* supernatural.

From the corner of his eye he again saw the cloudy blackness. This time he did not move as he tried to analyze it. The thing hovered just on the edge of his range of vision. Imperceptibly, his eyes moved slightly, and it was gone.

A formless black cloud. Formless? No, it was, he thought, spindle-shaped, motionless and upright on its axis. His hands were shaking more than ever.

Diana was eying him. "What's the matter, Jerry? Am I making you nervous?"

"Too much work at the office," he said. "I'm the new senior partner, you know. I'll push off now. You'd better see that doctor again tomorrow."

She did not reply, only watched him as he let himself out of the apartment. Driving home, Carnevan again caught a brief glimpse of the black, foggy spindle. Not once could he get a clear view of it. It hovered just on

the border of his vision. He sensed, though he could not see, certain features cloudily discerned in it. What they were he could not guess. But his hands trembled.

Coldly, furiously, his intellect fought against the unreasonable terror of his physical structure. He faced the alien. Or— No—he did not face it. It slid away and vanished. Azazel?

He called the demon's name, but there was no response. Hurtling toward his apartment, Carnevan sucked at his lower lip and thought hard. How— Why—

What was so unreasonably, subtly horrifying about this—this apparition?

He did not know, unless it was, perhaps, that vague hint of features in the blackness which he could never face directly. He sensed that those features were unspeakable, and yet he had a perverse curiosity to behold them directly. Once safe in his apartment, he again glimpsed the black spindle, at the edge of his vision, near the window. He swung swiftly to face it; it vanished. But at that moment a shock of unreasoning horror gripped Carnevan, a deadly, sickening feeling that he might see that against which his whole physical being revolted.

"Azazel," he called softly.

Nothing.

"Azazel!"

Carnevan poured a drink, lit a cigarette and found a magazine. He was untroubled until bedtime and during the night, but in the morning, when first he opened his eyes, something black and spindle-shaped skittered away as he looked toward it.

He telephoned Diana. She seemed much better, she said. Apparently Azazel wasn't on the job. Unless the black thing *was* Azazel. Carnevan hurriedly drove to his office, had black coffee sent up, and then drank milk instead. His nerves needed soothing rather than stimulating.

Twice that morning the black spindle appeared in the office. Each time there was that horrifying knowledge that if Carnevan looked at it directly, the features would be clear to him. And in spite of himself, he tried to look. Vainly, of course.

His work suffered. Presently he knocked off and drove to the sanitarium to see Phyllis. She was much better, and spoke of the forthcoming marriage. Carnevan's palms were clammy as a black spindle retreated hurriedly across the sunny, pleasant room.

Worst of all, perhaps, was the realization that if he *did* succeed in looking squarely at the phantasm, he would not go mad. But he would want to. That he realized quite well. His instinctive physical reaction told him as much. Nothing belonging to this universe or any remotely kindred one could bring about the empty hollowness within his body, the shocking feeling that his cellular structure was trying to shrink away from the— the spindle.

He drove to Manhattan, narrowly avoiding an accident on the George Washington Bridge as he closed his eyes

to avoid seeing what wasn't there when he opened them again. It was past sundown. The jeweled towers of New York rose against a purple sky. Their geometrical neatness looked devoid of warmth, inhospitable and unhelpful. Carnevan stopped at a bar, drank two whiskeys, and left when a black spindle ran across the mirror.

Back in his apartment, he sat with his head in his hands for perhaps five minutes. When he stood up, his face was hard and vicious. His eyes flickered slightly; then he caught himself.

"Azazel," he said—and, more loudly: "Azazel! I am your master! Appear to me!"

His thought probed out, forceful, hard as iron. Behind it lay unformed terror. Was Azazel the black spindle? Would he appear—completely?

"Azazel! I am your master! Obey me! I summon you!"

The demon stood before Carnevan, materializing from empty air. The beautiful face of pale bone was expressionless; the slanted, opalescent, pupilless eyes were impassive. Under the dark cloak, Azazel's body shivered once and was still.

With a sigh, Carnevan sank down in his chair. "All right," he said. "Now what's up? What's the idea?"

Azazel said quietly, "I went back to my own world. I would have remained there had you not summoned me."

"What is this—spindle thing?"

"It is not of your world," the demon said. "It is not of mine. It pursues me."

"Why?"

"You have your stories of men who have been haunted. Sometimes by demons. In my world—I have been haunted."

Carnevan licked his lips. "By this thing?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Azazel's shoulders seemed to hunch together. "I do not know. Except that it is very horrible, and it pursues me."

Carnevan lifted his hands and pushed hard at his eyes. "No. No. It's too crazy. *Something* haunting a demon. Where did it come from?"

"I know of my universe and yours. That is all. This thing came from outside both our time sectors, I think."

With a sudden flash of insight, Carnevan said, "That was why you offered to serve me."

Azazel's face did not change. "Yes. The thing was getting closer and closer to me. I thought if I entered your universe, I might escape it. But it followed."

"And you couldn't enter this world without my help. All that talk about my soul was so much guff."

"Yes. The thing followed me. I fled back to my universe, and it did not pursue. Perhaps it could not. It may be able to move in only one direction—from its world to mine, and then to yours, but not the other way. It remained here, I know."

"It remained," Carnevan said, very white, "to haunt me."

"You feel the same horror toward it? I wondered. We are so unlike physically—"

"I never see it directly. It has—features?"

Azazel did not answer. Silence hung in the room.

At last Carnevan bent forward in his chair. "The thing haunts you—unless you go back to your own world. Then it haunts me. Why?"

"I don't know. It's alien to me, Carnevan."

"But you're a demon! You have supernatural powers—"

"Supernatural to you. There are powers supernatural to demons."

Carnevan poured himself a drink. His eyes were narrowed.

"Very well. I have enough power over you to keep you in this world, or you wouldn't have returned when I summoned you. So it's a deadlock. As long as you stay here, that thing will haunt you. I won't let you go to *your* world, for then it would haunt me—as it has been doing. Though it seems to be gone now."

"It has not gone," Azazel said tonelessly.

Carnevan's body shook uncontrollably. "Mentally I can tell myself not to be frightened. Physically the thing is . . . is—"

"It is horrible even to me," Azazel said. "Remember, I have seen it directly. Eventually it will destroy me, if you keep me in this world of yours."

"Humans have exorcised demons," Carnevan pointed out. "Isn't there any way you can exorcise that thing?"

"No."

"A blood sacrifice?" Carnevan suggested nervously. "Holy water? Bell, book and candle?" He sensed the foolishness of the proposals as he made them.

But Azazel looked thoughtful. "None of those. But perhaps—life force." The dark cloak quivered.

Carnevan said, "Elementals have been exorcised, according to folklore. But first it's necessary to make them visible and tangible. Giving them ectoplasm—blood—I don't know."

The demon nodded slowly. "In other words, translating the equation to its lowest common denominator. Humans cannot fight a disembodied spirit. But if that spirit is drawn into a vessel of flesh, it is subject to earthly physical laws. I think that is the way, Carnevan."

"You mean—"

"The thing that pursues me is entirely alien. But if I can reduce it to its lowest common denominator, I can destroy it. As I could destroy you, had I not promised to serve you. And, of course, if your destruction would help me. Suppose I give that thing a sacrifice. It must, for a time, partake of the nature of the thing it assimilates. Human life force should do."

Carnevan listened eagerly. "Will it work?"

"I think it will. I will give the thing a human sacrifice. It will become, briefly and partially, human, and a demon can easily destroy a human being."

"A sacrifice—"

"Diana. It will be easiest, since I already have weakened the fortress of her consciousness. I must break down all the barriers of her brain—a psychical substitute for the sacrificial knife of pagan religions."

Carnevan gulped the last of his drink. "Then you can destroy the thing?"

Azazel nodded. "That is my belief. But what will be left of Diana will be in no way human. You will be asked questions by the authorities. However, I shall try to protect you."

And with that he vanished before Carnevan could raise an objection. The apartment was deadly still. Carnevan looked around, half expecting to see the black spindle flashing away as he glanced toward it. But there was no trace of anything supernatural.

He was still sitting in the chair, half an hour later, when the telephone rang. Carnevan answered it.

"Yes. . . . Who? . . . What? Murdered? . . . No, I . . . I'll be right over."

He replaced the receiver and straightened, eyes aglow. Diana was—was dead. Murdered, quite horribly, and there were certain factors that puzzled the police. Well, he was safe. Suspicion might point at him, but nothing could ever be proved. He had not gone near Diana all that day.

"Congratulations, Azazel," Carnevan said softly. He crushed out his cigarette and turned to get his topcoat from the closet.

The black spindle had been waiting behind him. This time it did not flash away as he looked at it.

It did not flash away. Carnevan saw it. He saw it distinctly. He saw every feature of what he had mistakenly imagined to be a spindle of black fog.

The worst part of it was that Carnevan didn't go mad.

THE END.

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THE PSYCHOMORPH

BY E. A. GROSSER

**A very pleasing personality, the Psychomorph.
Always the person you most wanted to see —**

Two men sat in front of the entirely useless fireplace, watching the flames. They were roughing it in a centrally heated mountain lodge. Suddenly two words quavered on the crisp spring evening air:

"I'm co-ol!"

Baker, a few years older and heavier of build, mumbled at him around the stem of his pipe, "Well,

move closer to the fire then, Manning. But don't cry about it."

Manning looked up. "What's the matter with you?" he asked resentfully. "I didn't say anything."

Baker sucked noisily at his pipe, got a drink, and made a wry face.

"Imagination, maybe," he said doubtfully after a mo-

ment. "I thought I heard someone say, 'I'm cold!'—almost crying."

"I was thinking," Manning replied indifferently; intimating that he hadn't said anything, hadn't heard anything.

Baker grinned. "Thinking of Elaine?"

"Huh? Oh, yes. Peggy shouldn't have insisted. Elaine didn't want to go to town."

"And you didn't want her to go," Baker completed with a laugh. "It'll be different in a few years. Peggy was glad to get away from me for a while, and I was just as glad to have her go."

"Don't you . . . uh . . . love her?"

"Sure! Don't be silly. But a change is good for anyone. She wouldn't look at another man—I hope!"

"I'm so cold. Let me in."

Both men tensed. The sound seemed to have come from outside.

Baker exploded. "I didn't imagine that! Did you hear it, too?"

Manning nodded. Baker laid his pipe on the table and went to the door. Hand on the latch, he waited, listening.

"I'm so-o-o-o—" There was the sound of something falling.

Baker snatched open the door. Then he knelt beside the crumpled figure on the doorstep.

"You little fool! Don't you know enough to knock on a door?"

Smooth, silken blond hair had cascaded forward, hiding the face but exposing a, satin-skinned neck. The unconscious girl wasn't wearing a coat—just a light jacket over a colorful frock. Something about them struck Baker as familiar.

He grasped the soft shoulders and half lifted her, then brushed her hair from her face. The flesh was cold and puttylike beneath his hand, and the hair tangled his fingers as though alive. But he hardly noticed. His eyes were fastened on the quiet face.

"Peggy! Oh, God! They must have had an accident with the car!" He lifted the still form in his arms and started toward the bedroom. "Manning! You go down the mountain and find Elaine."

But Mannig was staring at the figure in his arms like a man hypnotized. "Pat . . . Patricia," he mumbled. "You shouldn't have followed." He stepped forward with arms out, as though to take Baker's burden.

"Manning! You fool! Can't you hear? I'll take care of Peggy. You go down and find Elaine!"

The telephone started to ring, one or two short, sharp yelps and then a continuous strident alarm, as though the girl at central had grown tired and were resting on the switch.

Baker shouldered Manning aside. "Then answer that phone, and I'll get Elaine myself after I've taken care of Peggy."

He looked back as he went through the door and saw Manning moving toward the phone like an automaton. He kicked open the bedroom door and gently laid Peggy

on the bed. Then hurried out to get the electric blanket. The coldness of her flesh frightened him.

Manning was standing at the table, telephone receiver dangling in his fingers. His face was pale as he looked up at Baker's entrance.

Baker started across the room toward the closet. Manning held out the telephone to him.

"Here," he said tonelessly.

Baker brushed him aside again. His lips curled as he looked at the younger man. "Aren't you a little curious about Elaine?"

Manning looked toward the door leading to the bedroom, then back at Baker. "Here," he said again.

"Hang up!" Baker said. "I haven't got time to talk to anyone now. Do you think it's within your capabilities to phone for a doctor?"

"Here," Manning insisted, offering the phone again. "It's Peggy. She wants to talk to you."

"Huh!" Baker ceased burrowing in the closet and faced Manning with questioning eyes.

"You're crazy," he said, but nevertheless he took the telephone from the younger man's hand.

"Hello!" he barked.

"O-o-oh! What a nasty voice you have!"

"The better to—" he started from habit, then halted. "Is that you, Peggy?"

"Uh-hm-m-m," she replied. "Who were you expecting?"

Baker ignored her question, though he couldn't doubt her words. Her voice was too familiar. But Peggy was in the bedroom!

"Are you sure?" he asked inanely.

"Yes, certain!" Peggy snapped. "And you leave the liquor alone for the rest of the evening." She stopped then, seeming to regret her words. "Listen, darling," she continued, "Drew Pierce's new picture, 'Sands of Flame,' is playing here tonight and Elaine and I want to see it. Do you mind?"

"Put it off! Will you, Peg? Somebody just wandered in and fainted on our doorstep."

He waited for her to speak, but she hesitated doubtfully. He knew what she was thinking. He hurried on: "She looks just like—" He stopped short. He had intended to tell her that the stranger looked just like her, but under the circumstances he knew that to be inadvisable. "She looks just like a queen—a beauty!"

"And you want me to come home?" Peggy teased.

"Yes! This is straight goods, Peg. Come on and give me a hand. There's something wrong. It's pleasantly cool to-night; yet she's as cold as an iceberg."

"Oh," Peggy said understandingly. Then she was serious. "I'll come, and bring a doctor."

"Thanks, baby. 'By."

He started to hang up, but a call from the phone made him put it back to his ear.

"George, darling," Peggy said.

"Yes?"

"If you're tight, I'll help him use a stomach pump on you."

"And I'll let you. It's a deal! Now, hurry!"

He put the phone back in its cradle and turned to face Manning. Manning was gone! Baker listened and thought he heard a voice from the bedroom. He cursed and dug hurriedly in the closet until he located the electric blanket, then started back to the bedroom.

Manning was on his knees at the side of the bed. He held one of the strange girl's nearly frozen hands in his, pressing it to his lips.

"Patricia! Don't die! You must live! We have so much to live for—so much to do! We were silly to quarrel, and I was a beast to marry Elaine. I don't know why I did. I was mad! I wanted to hurt you!"

Baker stepped into the room. Manning looked up, flushed guiltily, but didn't leave the bedside.

"There's more to you, kid, than I thought," Baker grumbled, then smiled bitterly. "And to think I was giving you advice. Come on! Give me a hand!"

Together they wrapped the strange girl in the heating blanket, then watched. Gradually color came back to her face. Baker had to admit she was pretty; as pretty as Peggy had been on their wedding day. And so much like her that they might have been twin sisters.

"How is it you never mentioned knowing a girl who looks so much like Peggy?" he asked.

Manning looked at him oddly. "What do you mean—so much like Peggy? Patricia doesn't look anything like your wife."

Baker stared at him. "One of us is nuts," he said at last, and the stare left no doubt as to who, in his opinion, was the one.

Manning shrugged, and his eyes went back to the girl as though drawn by a magnet. Baker looked, too. Her cheeks, counterparts of Peggy's, were flushing with returning life. The tightness had left the mouth and it appeared soft and inviting.

"It's going to be rough on Elaine," he said.

"Don't say anything," Manning pleaded. "I'm the one to tell her."

"O. K., but see that you do. Don't be a bigger heel than you are already."

It was as though Manning hadn't heard him. Baker stared at a spot a trifle to one side of the point of the younger man's chin. He considered how nice it would feel to hit that spot with a bunch of knuckles. It was a raw deal he was handing to a young kid like Elaine!

He turned abruptly on his heel and went out the door, growling, "I guess you can keep an eye on her until the girls and the doctor get here."

He went back to his seat in front of the fire and waited. He tried not to think. He listened. From the bedroom came Manning's pleading monotone. The young fool had no sense of shame! Baker gritted his teeth.

Then, for something to do, he cleaned and filled his pipe. Manning's pleas had ceased. The house was as silent as a mine, except for the crackling of the fire. He scratched a match to light his pipe.

A door creaked protestingly. Baker leaped to his feet and faced the direction from which the sound had come. Then the tenseness left his muscles.

The stranger was standing in the doorway of the bedroom, smiling, holding onto the door which he had left open as though to support herself. Her smile was infectious. Baker smiled. He looked past her, into the bedroom, expecting to see Manning directly behind her. But he wasn't to be seen.

"You should stay in bed," he reproved. He felt that it was like scolding Peggy. "Where's Manning?"

The strange girl smiled and stepped into the hall. She pulled the door shut and it creaked protestingly again. She walked toward him slowly, glidingly—smiling.

"The poor boy was tired," she said with a queerness in her voice that Baker hesitated to label an accent. "He was so tired that he fell asleep on his knees at the side of the bed with my hand at his lips. Oh, what a nice fire—so warm!"

She tugged at one of the chairs to draw it closer. Baker stooped to help her. His hands touched hers, and he tensed. Her flesh was as cold as a reptile's.

He looked up, and into eyes that were identical with Peggy's. He shook his head and shoved the chair nearer the fire. It was too much for him.

He sat down again in the other chair and struck another match to light his pipe. He puffed contentedly, waiting to see what she would say. He wished he had the nerve to ask how much she cared for Manning—wished he could persuade her to throw him down hard—leave him for Elaine. Elaine—who had been almost pitifully happy for two months.

"You are a strange man," the girl said at last.

"Yes," Baker returned.

"Yes," she agreed with a dimpling smile. "The other—Manning—talks all the time. You talk not at all—just puff-puff-puff. And you look so comfortable."

It seemed to Baker that she moved imperceptibly closer to the fire. He watched her through narrowed eyes. "You speak as though you don't know Manning very well," he sparred.

She ignored his remark and stared at his pipe. "You look so comfortable," she repeated. "May I try it?"

"What? My pipe?"

She nodded, and Baker laughed.

"Anybody'd think you'd never seen a pipe before," he chuckled.

She was silent, so silent that Baker felt that he must have hurt her feelings. He held out the pipe to her. "Here, take a puff if you want to. But look out—it's strong."

He had to lean toward her to give her the pipe. She took it with a smile, looked at it strangely, then placed the stem between her lips. She breathed deeply.

Baker grinned, expecting her to cough. But she blew the smoke from her throat with an expression of disgust and returned the pipe. He took it, staring at her, and it was a moment before he became aware that their hands were still in contact.

An aura of power seemed to emanate from her, surround him, sap his will. Anyway, what was the difference? It would be like making love to Peggy, this stranger was so much like her. And he knew from the

blue eyes so near his that she was willing. He leaned forward—and seemed to catapult into a mist-filled pit.

Cold fingers of fog curled around him, searching for—life. And sucking away all his warmth. It seemed hours that he shivered and trembled, then a voice reached him.

"No. Not all—now! Come back!"

He lifted his head. He had fallen sideward over the arm of his chair. He shook his head to clear his sight. He looked at the other chair. It was empty!

He heard feet on the stairs and a moment later the door opened to admit Peggy, Elaine, and a wizened doctor. Baker lumbered to his feet, staggered to meet them. Peggy watched him critically, then slipped her jacket off and laid it over the back of the chair.

"All right, doctor," she said, "the stomach pump."

"Wait! Peggy, I haven't been drinking."

"I didn't say you had. I just know you're higher than a kite."

"But she was here a minute ago," Baker said. He cursed the thickness of this tongue and the dullness of his mind. He couldn't seem to think.

Then he saw that they were staring past him. He turned. Peggy's replica was standing in the hall, watching them.

"Drew Pierce," Peggy breathed. "How did he get here?"

"Martha!" the doctor exclaimed. "Why didn't you stay home?"

Elaine ran across the room and threw herself into the strange girl's arms—kissed her. "It's been six hours since I left you, Fred, but it seems like a century."

"That's her!" Baker shouted, thinking of the stomach pump. "That's the patient."

"Her?" repeated Peggy. "Now I know you're drunk. Calling Drew Pierce 'she,' or, rather, 'her'!"

She looked at him disgustedly, then started toward the hall, carefully going aside for Elaine and the strange girl. "It's a neat trick, Elaine. I never knew you had the nerve. Get ready Mr. Pierce. I'll be back in a moment like a flash."

She opened the bedroom door. The hinges squealed, then she screamed.

"George! George! Is he dead?"

Baker staggered toward her. He put his arm around her shoulder and guided her back into the hall. The doctor knelt beside the sprawled body on the floor.

Baker halted at the door of another bedroom and looked back to see Elaine huddling fearfully in the arms of the stranger. The stranger was walking slowly, almost gliding, toward the door of the room where the body lay. He waited to see what would happen.

The strange smile was still curving the unknown's lips. And there was no change when she looked into the room and saw the wizened doctor working over Manning.

But Elaine looked, started violently. She looked up into the face of the stranger, peered closely as though searching for something, then pressed closer.

Baker turned away and helped Peggy into the extra bedroom.

When they were inside, Peggy's hands gripped the lapels of his coat. "George," she whispered hoarsely, "did you kill him?"

He stared at her.

"Tell me! Tell me!" she insisted, still in a low voice and trying to shake him. "Did you kill Fred? Quick! Maybe we can get away! We'll rip out the phones and disable all the cars but ours. Maybe we could make it to an airport and get out of the country."

His lips twitched as he held her away from him. "Listen, baby! I didn't kill anybody. I think your 'Drew Pierce' did! But don't you say a thing. There's something queer about 'him,' or 'her,' and they might pin it on me. You keep quiet, see?"

Peggy was quieter and looking at him with penetrating eyes. Then she said: "You needn't be afraid to tell me, if you did. I hated the dirty little stinker. I knew Patricia and why he married Elaine."

"Does Elaine know?"

"Certainly. 'Friends' saw to it that she found out. But she didn't care."

Baker hesitated. It was as though he were afraid to ask a question, but at last he forced it out: "What did she look like?"

"Pretty—red hair, very fair skin with just enough freckles on her nose to make her pert. Oh, *she* was all right! And she had sense enough to see that Fred was a heel."

She stopped speaking and stared at Baker.

"What's the matter, George? You look sick!"

"I am! God! I wonder what it is."

"Wonder what what is?"

"That . . . that thing! To you it looks like Drew Pierce, the actor; to me it looks like you; to Elaine it is Fred; and the doctor thinks it is someone by the name of Martha."

"George! Haven't you been drinking?" There was an hysterical note in Peggy's voice as though she hoped he would say "Yes."

"No! I haven't had a drop since three o'clock this afternoon."

She believed; she had to. There was no reason for him to lie, and she knew he hadn't. Something very like an unconscious whimper came from deep within her throat.

Baker looked down at her. Her rouge showed like two bloody spots on her bloodless cheeks. There was a whiteness around her mouth that was only accented by the vividness of her lips. He drew her closer.

"Let's get out of here," she begged. "Let's go back to town."

"We can't, honey," he said, and kissed her. "That thing, whatever it is, is deadly. It killed Manning!"

"What do we care?" she demanded. "He was a dirty little rat. It served him right!"

"Peggy! He's dead!"

"What difference does that make? It doesn't make

him a better man. I hope he roasts in hell!"

"Peggy! You're hysterical! You need rest."

"I do not! I want to leave here!"

He forced her toward the bed. "You lie down and rest for a while. I'll figure out some way to fix Peggy-Pierce-Fred-Martha, and then we'll leave."

She fought him, silently, determinedly. But in the end his superior strength prevailed. She was on the bed. He held her hands so she couldn't scratch. In a moment she ceased struggling and lay still, glaring up at him.

"Listen, baby," he pleaded. "We can't let that thing loose on the world. It isn't human! I know it—feel it!"

He waited, searching her face to see if he had made any impression. Her lips trembled and she caught the lower one between her white teeth. Her eyes filled with tears. She turned her head away.

"I want to go away."

He watched her. He knew the depths of her fear. Only the memory of those cold, searching mists made him resolve to stay and kill the thing. But that was no reason why Peggy should have to stay!

"The doctor will be going back before long. You can go with him."

"I want you to come"

"I have to stay," he burst out.

"I won't go unless you do."

He released her hands and stood up. "We'll see," he said. "Anyway, you must rest for a while."

She said nothing as he went out the door and closed it silently behind him. Then he stopped short. Peggy was standing in the hall.

It took a moment for him to realize that he wasn't seeing Peggy, but the stranger. Then he smiled bitterly and let his hand fall from the doorknob. The stranger smiled, too. And moved toward him.

It pressed close to his side and attempted to lift his arm over its shoulders. He shuddered and pushed it away. It staggered across the hall and brought up against the wall with a thump, and regarded him with sorrowful eyes.

Baker felt conscience-stricken. That bump must have hurt. The eyes were still on him, gentle and reproachful. He went to its side and helped it to its feet. Together they started down the hall toward the living room. His arm was around the stranger.

They came to the door of the room he had occupied with Peggy before the stranger had come, the room to which he had carried the stranger and in which it had killed Manning. He looked inside. Manning's body was gone. There was nothing unusual about its being gone; the doctor had probably moved it. But the fact seemed for a moment to thrust back the mists that were surrounding his mind.

With sudden determination he shoved the stranger from him and into the empty room. Then he slammed the door shut and tried to lock it. Futilely he cursed the maker of the lock. There was no key! It could only be locked from the inside!

He held the door tight while the stranger wailed, "Let me out! Please!"

After a moment he wondered why the thing didn't try the lock, try to pull the door open. It never touched the door; it only pleaded to be freed.

He released the doorknob and stepped back, waiting. Still the stranger didn't open the door. Baker grinned. Was it possible that it didn't know anything about doors; had never seen one before? Not if it were a creature of this Earth, he decided. But was there any proof, or even indication, that the stranger was of this planet? Might it not be a wanderer from some other hellish sphere?

He shivered and hurried to the living room, through it to the library, and opened the table drawer. A small caliber automatic lay atop some papers. He took it out, checked to see that it was loaded, then shoved it into his pocket.

When he went back to the living room the doctor had returned and was bending over a body on the floor near the fireplace that he hadn't noticed when he had passed through the room a moment ago. The doctor heard him and looked up. His wrinkled face and scrawny neck seemed to personify disapproval.

"See here!" he commanded. "What's going on here? I no sooner get one stiff into the car than I come back and find another one waiting for me. Why?"

He scrambled to his feet and stalked over to Baker like a bantam rooster. Baker tried to go around him, but the little dried-up fellow quickly blocked him. Baker looked down into the wizened doctor's eyes.

"Think it over for a while," he invited. "Maybe you'll come to the conclusion that they died."

"I think they were poisoned, and in my capacity as coroner I intend to hold post-mortems. I'm gonna warn the sheriff to keep an eye on you to see that you don't try to pull a sneak."

"O. K., go to it," Baker agreed. "But if you'll wait a while, we'll go to town with you."

The little doctor peered at him intently, then turned away to maneuver the additional body out to his car. It was characteristic of his insolent independence that he asked no help of anyone.

Baker watched him lift Elaine in his skinny arms and go out the door. Then his hand closed over the pistol in his pocket. He started forward again, then halted when Peggy came to meet him.

She was quieter, more self-composed. She smiled up at him wanly.

"Well?" she asked.

He pulled the pistol from his pocket. She looked at it curiously. He waited for her to speak, but she said nothing.

"That ought to take care of it," he offered grimly.

She hesitated, still staring at the pistol. "But it's so small," she objected at last.

"It'll blow her insides right out her back. That is, if it has any insides," he amended doubtfully. "We've never seen it as it really is, and I'm glad we haven't. We see only what we want to see—our ideal!" Then he

grinned. "And you don't see me, do you? I ought to take you to court for that. It's incompatibility. Any judge would agree."

He waited for the answering smile he was trying to arouse, but none came.

"But, don't you think you ought to make sure?" she asked, seriously. "If you don't kill her, she'll follow us. Why don't you use fire? Fire is clean, and hot."

He considered. "Peggy, that's a good idea! There are some five-gallon tins of gasoline in the garage. I'll get one. You keep an eye on that cocky little doctor while I go out the side door and bring one back."

He shoved the gun back into his pocket and ran to the garage. Then returned at a slower pace with a five-gallon can of the inflammable fluid under his arm. At the door he halted, listening. He could hear nothing, so he went in.

Peggy was at the front window, watching the doctor. "O. K.?" he asked.

She nodded and stayed at the window while he went to the kitchen for a can opener. It took a few minutes to cut the top away and expose the liquid. He looked up anxious about the doctor.

Peggy was looking at him, and she nodded reassuringly. He looked back at the gasoline and at his arms where it had slopped.

"Peggy!" he called. "You'll have to help. Do you think you can?"

She came to him immediately, and he felt a surge of admiration for her courage. Then he outlined his plan:

"I can't touch it off because I got it all over me. I'll carry it to the door and set it on the floor. You carry a lighted candle and stay a couple of feet away from me. I'll swing the door open and take a couple of shots at it for luck, then I'll kick the gasoline over so it'll go into the room, and jump back out of the way. Then you throw the candle into the room to touch it off."

"All right," Peggy said, and Baker admired her calm determination.

He lifted the can and started down the hall. Again the mists were swirling around him. The stranger must realize her peril and was trying to kill him before he

could injure her. He staggered and the can of gasoline almost slipped from his hands. It splashed over his clothes.

Then he straightened and grasped the can tighter. He had to! He must! That horrible thing must not be turned loose on the world.

He set the can down in front of the door and put his left hand on the knob. In his right he held the pistol. He hoped that the thing hadn't discovered how to open doors. If it had—well, their scheme was wrecked.

He twisted the knob and opened the door, silently. He looked in. It was on the bed. He flung the door open—fired two shots at it.

And he hit it, he knew. For it reared upward in the bed, arched its body stiffly with pain.

Baker leaped back out of the way and the candle flew through the doorway and into the room. There was an explosive puff, then the room was a mass of flames. One scream came from the room and froze him with its anguish.

Then he and Peggy were stumbling down the hall and out of the house. The doctor had just finished his task and was coming toward the door. When he saw them he halted and turned back. Baker knew that he hadn't heard the shots and was glad that the pistol was of small caliber.

Baker stood at the side of the car, looking back at the house. Flames were beginning to flicker at the windows. He was eager to get going.

"Come on, come on. Let's go!" he said impatiently.

"Keep your shirt on," the wizened doctor advised. "Is your wife staying here? Here, Martha, you sit in the middle. It will be warmer." He slapped the seat beside him.

Baker stared as Peggy got in.

"That will be nice," she said. "Warmer! And I've been so cold."

The pistol was still in Baker's pocket. He wanted to snatch it out and shoot—he willed himself to. But he climbed meekly into the car and sat down. He was enthralled by the stranger!

His face was serene—expressionless. But inside was a boiling mess of fear, hate, and grief. He knew now that he had been deluded into opening the wrong door.

THE END.

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* * * * *

THE HEXER

BY H. W. GUERNSEY

CARTIER 78



He had a highly developed sense of humor, which might have been all right. But his highly developed magic — I

Oxboro Enquirer, June 2. —at the departmental hearing on the Kramer case, Patrolman Brian Daugherty insisted stubbornly on his original version of the odd affair. Off duty and in plain clothes, he was walking home. He was nearing the deserted intersection of Dale Avenue and Fourth Street shortly after ten o'clock last Monday evening when a man "come helling around the corner." Asked what he meant by "helling," Daugherty explained, "Like mad, like a banshee. He was traveling like a bat out of— I mean he was really traveling."

Commissioner Hopkins asked: "Are you familiar with banshees, Daugherty?"

Without cracking a smile, Daugherty said: "My old lady told me about a couple of them she saw in Ireland, but I never saw one myself."

Mayor Anderson said impatiently: "Let's get ahead."

Daugherty recited, "Another man busts around the corner almost as fast as the first one who I was shagging."

"Got eyes in the back of your head?"

"I heard him. The first guy was running light; the second guy was running heavy."

"The second guy. That would be Heinrich Kramer?"

"Yessir; only I didn't know who he was then, though. He come boiling around the corner hanging onto his head. Like this." Daugherty demonstrated, grabbing his head like a basketball and making a face. "He looked nuts, with his eyes glaring that way. I had my gun out, and when he saw it he stopped. I asked him what was his hurry, and he said his head. 'My head,' he says, just like that. The guy he was chasing was gone already, so I went for Kramer, just walking easy toward him.

Right away he ducked back around the corner, and when I got there, he was halfway down the block already and picking up speed all the time."

Jan Kupra, representing the *Enquirer*, asked: "Aren't you pretty handy with your gun, Daugherty?"

"I'm a good shot," Daugherty admitted modestly. "I got him when he was over a block away."

"You just took aim and shot him. If you'd killed him, it would have been murder."

Daugherty got red in the face, and said: "He'll tell you so himself. First I yelled him to halt and he—"

"You yelled him to halt?" Kupra mimicked.

"Get along with this," the mayor ordered.

"I yelled him to halt, and he kept on going. Then I fired over his head, and he still kept on going, so I brung the aim down a little bit."

"And you got him," said Kupra. "And he skinned his nose and his knees, and might have cracked his skull and died, and it would still be murder. Do you like to shoot men in the back, Daugherty?"

"Shut up!" Mayor Anderson shouted, "or I'll throw you right out of here myself!"

"I was shooting for his legs," Daugherty said, "but the way he was running, I had to aim higher. He ain't hurt much, except he ain't comfortable sitting down. I thought he was trying to hold up that other guy, and I had to stop him."

"When I got to him, chief, he was cussing around like I'd have to throw him in the klink if there was anybody listening to him but me. He was calling me names that—"

"Never mind. Mr. Kramer is noted for his vocabulary outside of Oxboro."

"Yessir. Then he started talking wild about his head again. He said that guy he was chasing done something to his head. I asked him what, and he clammed up. I took him to the hospital on account of that little puncture, and that's all, sir."

Heinrich Kramer, of course, is the bard of Oxboro. He is as well known for his several great novels as for his own almighty opinion of them classing himself with Hardy, Maugham and others. He has long been considered the leader of Oxboro's café society. It was ascertained by police that on Monday evening Kramer the Great was drinking in the exclusive Number 400 and holding forth to companions, when he was annoyed by a stranger staring at him and chuckling. Kramer made a comment to his friends about the stranger, abruptly clapped his hands to his head and knocked over a table on his way to reach the man who was staring at him. The man got up hurriedly and left, with Kramer in chase.

Mr. Kramer has confined himself to his home, refusing to be interviewed, refusing in fact to bring charges against Patrolman Daugherty.

"There's no sense in it; it's whacky," Kupra said. "What's all this business about his head? There was nothing wrong with his head except for its size. You can't go around shooting prominent citizens indiscriminately, Daugherty."

Mayor Anderson said: "I warned you, Kupra; you're only here to listen. Now GET OUT!"

The mayor screamed the way he does whenever he gets the chance, and everybody in Oxboro knows how he gets grape-fruit-purple in the face and sticks his hammy ears out, and hikes his shoulders up so that it looks as though he hasn't got any neck.

The mayor then told Daugherty, "You, too, patrolman. Get out, and take your banshees along with you. Get back to your post, and next time don't be too handy with your gun."

Why the famous Heinrich Kramer acted as he did, is a mystery. But he chose to run when arrested, and he didn't stop when Daugherty fired a warning shot.

The only description of the man whom Kramer was chasing is that he was slight, elderly but athletic, and well-dressed in a dark suit, black topcoat, hat and shoes. As yet no clue to this individual's identity has been found—

A few days later in his column, "The Banana Stem," Jan Kupra wrote:

There is something funny going on in Oxboro. The secret won't last long, because the mortality among secrets shaves one hundred per cent pretty close. For the time being, certain people are acting with suspicious furtiveness; they jump up and beat it out of restaurants while you're talking to them, snub old friends on the street, and some of them stick inside their houses as though there's a plague on the loose. Maybe it's a secret society, and maybe it's political, huh? If you don't think strange habits and unnatural actions and secret plots are dangerous, remember what happened to Heinrich Kramer. According to the way they're behaving, we could name a few names who belong in the bughouse down the river. Names you've seen in print before, too—

The streetcars in Oxboro are way longer and wider and more powerful than the trolleys in New York. They are painted bright canary-yellow, and the seating accommodations consist of lengthwise seats in front and rear, cross-wise seats in the middle. In the cross-wise seats passengers look at the backs of heads and study dandruff, coiffures, and types of ears. In the lengthwise seats passengers sneak looks at pretty legs, succumb to the hypnotic interest of blemishes and deformities, and shorten the ride with successive mental sneers at all those

hopeless, idiotic specimens of humanity lined up across the aisle.

Kupra owned an expensive sedan which he used for pleasure; he took the streetcar to the shop and elsewhere during the day, because it looked democratic; besides, being a born snoop, he never tired of studying faces, strange or familiar. He liked to analyze, to sift all the fascinating details which make up a countenance, to take a face apart and put it back together again like God. An old hand at the game, he was able to say, "That man has the eyes of a murderer"; or "Well-dressed as he is, the man's ears are more animal than human." On the 7th of June, Kupra was riding in the rear section of a streetcar on the Hill Park line, and practicing industriously his refined, private brand of cannibalism.

The sky was all blue, and the sun was shining particularly on Oxboro. Some of the green lawns and boulevards were splashed with dandelions in beds, like microspores of pollen each expanded to giant size. Having finished his covert inspection of Passengers Number 1 and 2, Kupra went to work with his eyes and mind on the third individual from the left. Kupra read from left to right.

This person was an old man of perhaps seventy winters. Whatever his stature was in its prime, he had diminished to gnomelike proportions. Height: five-feet-four; weight: a hundred to a hundred and ten pounds; white hair, fashionably barbered. He was a neat person, and sat with his knees close together, his spine straight, his slim, girlish hands folded quite composedly in his lap. His necktie was correct with his shirt, whose collar encircled his slender throat with accurate, soft dimensions. He wore a dark-gray hat, a suit of hard gray worsted that was immaculately pressed and tailored, sheer socks that were snug around his ankles, shapely shoes which were narrow and short and pointed, painstakingly carved out of solid ebony and polished with oil. His lips were compressed to a thin line, and he was so smoothly shaven that his face was a girlishly fresh cameo. His ears were Puckish, close to his head. Kupra observed the observant stillness of the stranger's eyes, and afterward he could never remember what color they were. All told, the dear little old man who was riding on the seat across the aisle was a diminutive aristocrat whose lips smiled subtly about something.

Kupra looked along his nose with great dubiety, then slowly raised his face to the varnished, hooded architecture of the ceiling, just to make sure; his nose was a yard long, or longer. He sighted long it, after the manner of a hunter centering on a deer with a .351 rifle.

None of the other passengers observed the casual lifting of his eyebrows.

Kupra brought his attention down again and the attenuated schnozzle wobbled elastically. When he turned his head too suddenly, his newly acquired deformity wagged obscenely, like the tail of a hairless dog. He lifted his hand to his face with a careless gesture, and made sure that the long, nude proboscis was there. It was there, all right, equal in length to four or five frankfurters joined end to end, about a pound in weight since it was boneless. It was

his own secret, obviously invisible to all the other passengers. Save perhaps one. He stared hard at the beautifully tailored old pixie across the aisle.

He was shaking with some private mirth. When Kupra's eyes returned to him, he rang the bell abruptly and reached the back platform as the car arrived at an intersection. The back gates opened and he got off, and was gone at a brisk, catfooting walk after a glance through the windows at the stricken Kupra.

The broomstick of nose was the old man's doing. It was he who had escaped from Heinrich Kramer, and Kramer had been chasing him because he had made the Oxboro bard's big head a private actuality. And now he had hexed Kupra, hanging a pole of snout on his face, giving the keyhole-peeper a branch of anatomy which he could really snoop with.

Appalled by the indecency of the fate that had overtaken him, Kupra turned his head to look out the window at the green lawns riding by and sort of get rid of the whole idea. There was a man sitting beside him, and the gun barrel of nose batted him across the Adam's apple.

"Glob!" exclaimed the man, and took hold of his throat. He glared suspiciously at the columnist, who sat with hands folded, staring innocently across the way. Frowning with puzzlement and worry, the man kept swallowing experimentally and gently massaging his gozle.

As for Kupra, he refrained from stroking the pain out of the marvelous beak where its architecture had bent across his fellow-passenger's neck.

For the duration of the ride he kept the phantom schnozzle gently clamped between his knees, anchoring it out of harm's way and pondering the immaculately dressed old Hexer's malicious talent.

He got off at Ashland, his street. Big elms were spaced along the boulevard, and the warm shadow under their canopy of foliage was conducive to thought and experimentation. With no citizens in sight, he explored the ghostly sniffer from end to end as though playing a dirge on a flute, and there was not the least doubt about its authenticity. It was quite a quandary to be in.

A housewife interrupted the chore of sweeping off her porch to watch the rapt, sleepwalking exercises which Kupra was doing with his arms.

"Hello, Mr. Kupra," she called, in the tone of a person addressing a drunk. "Is something the matter?"

"Just exercising, Mrs. Jefferson," he lied resignedly. "You know how your arms get stiff."

He continued on his way with his hands in his pockets, shaking his head slowly with dull disbelief. His nose wagged; it had the same flexibility as its length in garden hose. He was the proprietor of a phenomenon which would baffle surgery. No wonder Kramer had run from Daugherty; if he had divulged what the Hexer had done to his head, the authorities might have consigned him to the nuthouse down the river. On Kupra it was a terrible punishment to visit for his crimes of reporting. With a stroke of his eye the old man had done it, the mischievous devil.

When he reached his number, he observed two cars parked at the curb, empty. He had guests as usual. He had loaned his keys a couple of times, and the girls had had duplicates made; he hadn't got around to having the locks changed; the girls were sources of information as to who was having babies, when, what guy or gal was breaking up whose home, and so on.

There were five people sitting in his living room, drinking Collinses made out of his fancy gin. Morosely he looked around at Johnny Pollet, Jeannette Shires, Dave Martinson, Anne Pryor and Betty Turner.

"Want a drink?" Anne asked.

"Yeah, will you mix me one?" he asked. "I'll be taking a shower; I'm all sticky."

Perspiring and shaken because of what the Hexer had done to him, he closed his bedroom door, stripped and stepped under the shower for a quick one. He forgot about the nose until the last, soaped it then and wagged it under the spray to rinse it. The magnitude of the unmerciful disaster which had overtaken him numbed his wits; he moved like an automaton, stepping out of the tub and toweling himself. He made a complete change of clothing even to shoes. As he selected a new shirt from a bureau drawer and got into it, he hung a new necktie temporarily on his bugaboo of nose, about midway along. In the mirror, the necktie looked as though it were suspended in midair. In spite of its stick-out reality, the nose didn't reflect.

He closed the drawer, fortunately not hard because his nose got caught in the crack. He clawed the drawer open. Pain streamed up the schnozzle into his skull and nearly blew off the top of his head. Shuddering, he screwed his eyes up; tears trickled, tickling, down his olfactory extension.

Dabbing at his eyes, he gained control of himself and joined the chattering party in the living room. A drink had been made for him.

When Anne tendered the glass she performed in a most peculiar manner. Instead of turning around and going back to her chair in a normal way, she backed warily with a very odd smile, passing a hand behind her and making a gesture as though catching something up. Kupra, who had held his head aside with an absent-minded expression to keep his nose out of the way, stared speculatively at her while she smoothed her dress with singular extravagance and drew her legs up onto a window seat. Anne was a brunette, choicely rounded and graceful; she had the right height and heft and resiliency of anatomy, and cultivated a pronounced ability to pose. She was feline in her exact graduations of movement, and her voluptuousness was contained this afternoon in a handkerchief-linen dress opaqued with a satin slip. The wrinkling across the hips and in the skirt behind did not diminish her attractiveness, and she didn't need to worry about showing an amount of knee and a moongleam of thigh, because she was among friends.

Wondering why she acted as though she thought he would give her a kick if she turned her back on him.

Kupra went to a chair and sat on its arm, keeping the lengthy quiver of his nose away from his drink so that he wouldn't knock it out of his hand himself.

"Well, what's the important word?" he asked at large.

Around the room he got serial answers, "Nothing happens," "Mh-mh. Hm-m-m," "I don't know a thing," "What have *you* got?" and "There's nobody in town, but us."

"Oh, you just dropped in," Kupra commented. He tried his drink, and it was pretty good for a girl's work. No taste of gin. He arrived at the conclusion that there was no gin in the drink, and repaired to the kitchen, returning to hear a lot of conversation about nothing going on. Anne was highly decorative and posey, and was strolling about for effect as usual. Kupra observed that now and then she gave her hips an inexplicable galvanic twist as though she were muscling an appendage, like a cat. A cat she was, of course, and eventually someone stepped on her tail. She let out an agonized caterwaul, grabbed behind her and snatched to her breast the injured member, which, of course, was just as invisible as Kupra's nose.

Everyone jumped, and Kupra asked: "What was that for?"

"Why, nothing," she said breathlessly. She forced a laugh. "I just wanted to see you all jump."

"A fine sense of humor you've got," Kupra remarked. "Don't do that again; it's too hot to jump."

He let the party go on as it would, just listening. Being host was never any exertion to him, because if anyone wanted a drink the person made it himself. He kept an eye on Anne, remembering the torment in the screech she had let out. When he had a chance he told her: "I want to talk to you."

She agreed, and they drifted unobserved into the bedroom of the bungalow. When he had closed the door he asked: "What's on your mind, Anne? Come on, what's the matter?"

"I don't know what you mean. Honestly, I haven't got anything for you. Please." She was out of breath.

He stared at her, and there was fright in her eyes. "Maybe nothing I can print," he suggested, "but something else?"

"Always the snoop," she bantered. "It might be something very personal, none of your business at all, you know."

"I can almost guess what it is," he hinted.

"You couldn't possibly."

"Listen, Anne," he urged. "Haven't I always been a mommie and poppie to you? Have I ever done you dirty? Gimme."

"All right; it's just this. 'Well,' she groped, 'I . . . I think I'm going crazy. Really bughouse, I mean.'"

"What makes you think you're going bughouse?"

"I've got a tail," she said shakily.

"What kind of a tail?"

"A cat's tail. I mean I really have," she said in a rush of words. "It was trailing on the rug, and Dave Martinson sank his heel into it."

"Well, I'll be—" Kupra began, but Anne looked as though she were going to cry. He saw her wet eyes and said hastily: "Don't worry, Anne; you're no battier than I am. Just a minute, though. If you've got a tail, how do you get a dress on over it?"

"I don't know," she said, with a shrug of despair. "It just works that way."

"Line of cleavage," he muttered.

She turned, and he made a pass at the supposedly empty air. She said: "There."

Rooted to the base of her spine was indubitably the tail of a cat, its proportions proper for her size. It was covered with fur, and flexible, and she could twitch it, having full muscular control over it. He let it slip through his fingers to the end, ascertaining that it was a generous five feet long. Experimentally he tugged, and she was compelled to back up protestingly.

"It's there beyond a doubt," he said. "Now guess what I've got. A nose." He had her stand just so, and gave her a gentle bat across the side of the head.

With awe, after feeling along its length, Anne said: "For heaven's sake." She laughed uncertainly.

"I guess," he said sardonically, "that he wanted to bring home the idea that I was sticking my nose into other people's business, like the feline streak in your case."

"I'm not feline."

"You've given me some pretty catty gossip."

"But how can such a thing happen? It's utterly wild!"

"Very utterly. When did this tail grow on you?"

"Just a couple of days ago. I was having cocktails with a couple of the girls down at the Casino, and we were chatting—"

"Cutting each other's throats, and snickering at your friends, maybe telling a nasty story about some Hollywood actress because you're not in Hollywood."

"Gee, you've got a mean tongue," she said. "Anyhow, all at once it happened. Umph. As quick as that. I left right away, of course, as soon as I was sure. I'm positive the girls didn't suspect anything, because they had engagements and were in a hurry, too."

"I wonder what he did to them."

"What did who do?"

"Hoodoo is right," Kupra cracked. "Did you happen to notice a pink-faced shrimp of an old man anywhere in the Casino? A skinny old geezer all barbered and manicured and tailored up."

"Oh! He was all alone at the next table, and he bought all our drinks for us. He looked charming, but I wondered if he wasn't senile and thinking he was going to get something out of it."

"Rest your mind. That old monkey is the one responsible for this. He got me on the streetcar only a little while ago on the way uptown."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes!"

"Why, that devilish little mummy!"

"Sure. He gave Henry Kramer a head the size of a

beer barrel; Kramer was quick on the trigger and chased the buzzard who hexed him up like that. Henny almost caught the old guy's coat tails."

"Kramer was a fool to run."

"Sure he was. But are you going to go around advertising the fur job he did on you?"

"You won't tell on me, will you?" she begged. "It's so devastatingly ridiculous."

"As long as you don't give me away about my nozzle."

They regarded each other strickenly, and with the baffled compassion of companions in misery.

"I wonder if the condition is permanent," she hazarded. There was a wail in her inflection. "People are beginning to think I'm queer. I have to positively sprint into a room so that I don't get a door closed on my tail. And I get tired of keeping it curled in the air all the time so that it doesn't get stepped on. Besides, it's nervous; it's got a tic in it that's driving me out of my mind. And it gets matted the way fur does and feels terrifically uncomfortable. I'm combing it all the time. And even with an electric drier, after I give it a bath, it's ages before it's all fluffy again."

"I just closed a drawer on my beak when I changed my shirt," Kupra chimed in somberly. "When I go to bed tonight I guess I'll have to lie on my back and do a juggling act. And I never was able to sleep on my back."

"You know," said Anne, "I think there's something wrong with Jeannette and Betty, too. They've been acting as though they've eaten a goblin apiece."

"There's something screwy about Martinson, too."

After kissing Anne, just to see whether it could be done with the handicap of his nasal equipment, Kupra eased open the latch of the bedroom door and looked through the crack. They rejoined the party which had formed through the usual happenstance. People who had nothing important to do in hot weather, collecting in comfortable surroundings in which someone had snatched a key—Betty or Anne or both.

The drinking went on through the afternoon past twilight. Kupra found things out. Across the room, Dave Martinson was getting himself soused. He was a lawyer, somber in appearance, dark and devious in the ways of his mind. His forehead was smooth, white, as unblemished as a boy's. Absently, he was tracing with a forefinger an invisible mark, a certain letter which the Hexer had branded there above his eyes. The habit of tracing the letter revealed it in pinkish outline. Martinson caught Kupra staring, and the lanky lawyer jerked his hat on, sat staring morosely at the rug, inevitably to raise his finger to his forehead again.

Jeannette Shires spent a couple of hours a day on her marvelous complexion; she had gardenia-petal skin, its purity accented by magnificent black hair in a carved

coiffure of gleaming curls. During the evening she got Kupra aside and asked to borrow his razor.

The Hexer had got her. He had given her a heavy black beard, and she had to shave twice a day.

That made it five out of six. If this group was representative of the town, the Hexer had already distributed his wares among five-sixths of the citizens of Oxboro.

Keeping his eyes skinned for the next few days, Kupra found plenty of evidence that such was the case, that the Hexer had spared very few in squeegeeing the town. Some of the deeds were good; most appeared to have been committed with the most greedy malice.

There was a certain loud-mouthed cop, notorious for his insolence of manner in writing out tickets, who had mule's ears. From the length of the stroke, for he was continually feeling them to see if they were still there, it could be determined that they were a full eighteen inches of botheration.

The best-dressed man in town started growing flowers back of his ears. The narcissus scent was unmistakable. A listener could detect the snap of stems when he picked them daily.

The meanest man in town had a face like a saint. Overnight a caprice of paralysis struck his benign countenance into an iron mask of virulent detestation of the whole human race.

And so on down the line.

Mostly, the Hexer avoided repetition in his works, indicating interest in his profession, or hobby. Not everyone was affected by the potent gleam of that gray eye, but his goal was not necessarily a hundred per cent. Too, it was presumable that only he could take back his gifts; widely as he plied his mischief, however, none of his victims saw him more than once; he returned no more, deaf in his mad glee to prayers in whatever humility or rage pronounced. What he did he would not undo.

All Kupra found to do was hope futilely that his particular curse would wear off; while the phantom schnozzle might yield to surgery, he had the dark conviction that another one would spontaneously sprout. At the typewriter, when he knocked off his daily column for the *Enquirer*, he kept on printing capital letters, quotation marks and the like on his beak. Sometimes he wondered whether mass insanity had hit town. Otherwise he wondered where the little old man had come from, and where the little old man had gone.

He certainly did his cussedest in Oxboro.

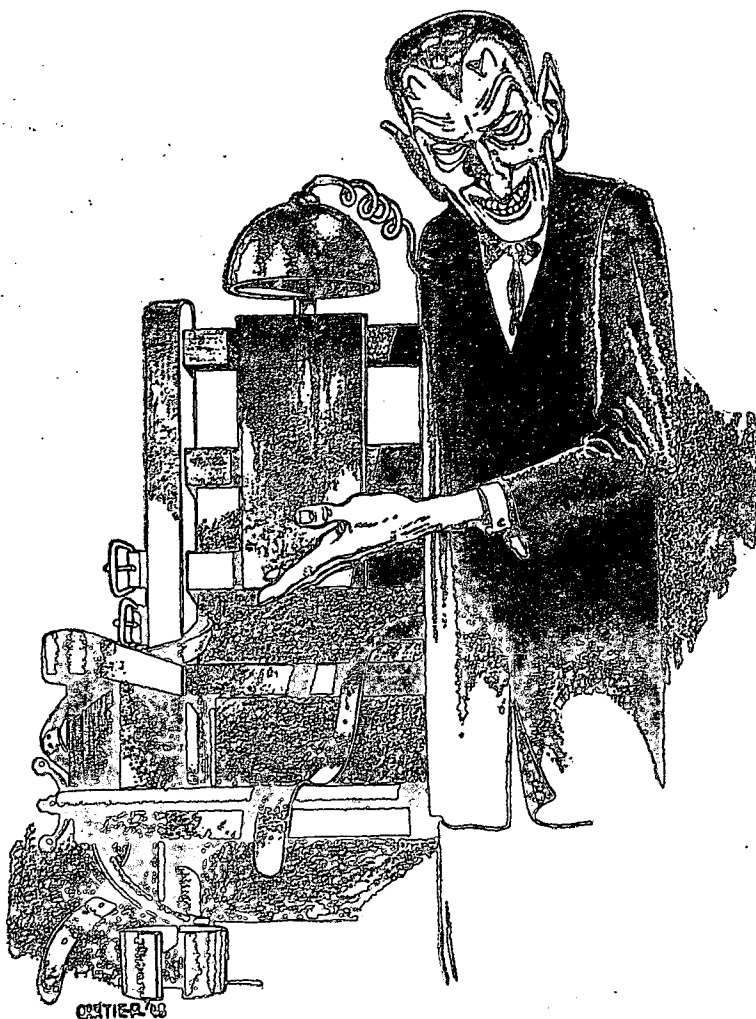
Oxboro Enquirer, June 25; Public Notices. WANTED: Works on black magic secret doctrines, hypnotism, Tibetan mysteries, ancient lore, occult and mystic sciences, and the evil eye, with emphasis on lifting spells. Premium prices paid. Phone Jan Kupra, *Enquirer*, or Oxboro 2748.

THE END

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THE SUMMONS

BY DON EVANS



A uniquely fine piece of sheer writing.

Dunstan Raynor paused just before reaching the heavy oak door at the end of the small passage. For a moment he thought someone had called him. It was almost as though a restraining hand had been laid upon his shoulder. He peered earnestly about him in the half-light of the narrow space. Then he thought there was something he had forgotten to do. But it was not quite like that, either.

It was more like something he had had to do at the urge of some forgotten memory, and had started to do, when other events had intruded, leaving a sense of unfinished but urgent business. It was the sort of thing he had known he would forget and might have tied a string about his finger in order to remember. But there was no string on his finger any more than there was a hand on his shoulder.

He looked back the way he had come in some puzzlement, his dark eyes lost in doubt. He passed a well-kept hand over his glossy black hair and his long face, of almost satanic beauty, frowned in utter mystification. It was not the first time he had experienced the strange feeling. It was just like an inaudible voice coaxing him, begging him, pleading with him to do something, or go somewhere. Or, as though he had unwittingly fallen within the power of some hypnotic mind, some superior will, that was trying to bend him to its dictates.

There was a distinct feeling that he was being summoned. It was weak, however, like the voice on a badly tuned radio. It was not quite clear and distinguishable, yet, but growing more so at each occurrence.

After a moment, the feeling passed. He was just about to go on, when vague words came to him. Glancing up, he saw the black square of a ventilator in the ceiling. Somewhere in the rooms above, people were talking. Men's voices were audible but muted strangely by the acoustics of the shaft.

"Come on, now; you might as well tell us. You gave him the poison, didn't you? The druggist identifies you. The doctor says there was no such prescription. *You wanted him out of the way, because you love his wife!*"

Staring up at the dark hole, Dunstan Raynor could have sworn that someone was up there looking down, speaking the words directly at him. He wondered if it had been some strange trick of sound that had brought him vague words of command from up there—words which he had heard, without conscious attention, and which he had applied to himself while thinking of other matters. But these words were quite different in effect. He felt no compulsion about answering.

He wondered what was going on up there.

The heavy oak door swung open as he approached and closed behind him. Regarding the great marble hall with

pleasure, he crossed the smooth flagstones on noiseless feet, his slender, athletic figure moving with poise and assurance. There was a light of glad anticipation on his face.

A fountain was playing in the center of the hall. A circle of white pillars rose high about him. Beyond the gurgling fountain, with its thread of water persistently forcing its futile way upward, began the enormous stairs that curved upward on either hand to meet above, before the tall stained-glass windows.

There was a tame lion wandering by the fountain in majestic solitude. It glanced at him and came over to lick his hand. He rubbed the hairy muzzle. Tame as a kitten. No doubt a great pet of the fellow who owned this place. And by the way, who does own it?—he asked himself.

There were vines moving in the breeze outside the stained-glass windows. They dappled the marble stairs and balustrade with a moving kaleidoscope of color born of the hot afternoon sun. About halfway up the right-hand stairs a statue of Minerva rested in a niche. The play of light and shadow across the grave stone face made her blush and wink as he passed. He mounted the stairs with a skipping grace and light heart.

In the broad corridor above, he was just about to enter a bronze door when there came a sudden patter of high heels.

Annabelle came from somewhere.

She was pulling on little white gloves and her face lit up with pleasure. His heart almost stopped as he turned toward her. She was glorious, so radiant, so vitally alive. Chestnut hair escaped in curls about her piquant face beneath the tight little red hat. Her eyes were soft and violet, like pansies. Her nose was too small, but all the more fascinating. Red lips were full and the lower one curled over; passionate little lips and selfish sometimes when she pouted, but adorable when she smiled. It was infectious, alluring, and disturbing. He wanted his arms about her. It hurt to know that he could not.

"Darling," she said in that silvery voice that gurgled with happiness and sometimes mischief, "it's been ages since I've seen you! Why don't you come oftener?"

He was suddenly diffident and ill at ease. "You know why," he said.

She looked at him levelly as though a challenge lay at the back of those wide violet orbs. Then her arms were around his neck, warm soft little arms that clung with surprising strength. He felt himself swaying as she looked deep into his soul and saw the manhood ebb from him like water from a leaky vessel. Little waves of intoxicating perfume enveloped him. He could not force his eyes from hers. His head seemed to whirl in delirium.

"Kiss me," she said coolly. It was not coaxing, it was not commanding. It was said in a matter-of-fact voice as if she knew that no power on earth could stop him.

He was troubled. "Annabelle, you know we must not," he objected, trembling.

Her small hands forced his head down. When his

arms had gone around her hungrily, in spite of himself, and when his lips had found hers crushingly, while his heart pumped flames instead of blood and they seemed to be wafted aloft to some gay fiery realm of ecstasy, she broke away from him suddenly with a hard little laugh. She started off with a little skip, sending a smile of triumph over her shoulder.

He suddenly felt cheap. The same old Annabelle, lovely as a flower, always wanting to know if she could arouse those emotions in him and twist him about her finger. There was a profound conviction that she was like that with every desirable man, calling the devil to life, in perfect safety to herself, for mere sport. He had the dim feeling of harpies fluttering in the air of the hall as she departed swiftly.

He had a brief glimpse of a man waiting by the balustrade on the landing, looking toward them with a smirk. The man was short, a little paunchy and dressed in a tuxedo. He had diamonds in his shirtfront, was polished, cultivated, but gross and vulgar somehow. A golden toad. His eyes were too wide apart and inclined to pop. There were bags under them. There was a loose mouth, a double chin and lines of dissipation—but rich, filthy rich. His five-thousand-dollar speedster was probably waiting outside in the bright summer sun.

Dunstan turned toward the door again with a frown. The feeling of pleasant anticipation he had experienced while mounting the stairs was gone. He felt guilty. Bitter. He opened the door and paused on the threshold.

The tall, blond man in the invalid chair was still looking at him fondly. Dunstan's thoughts were in such a whirl that he had not been conscious of the interview. He must have uttered the few banalities that came unconsciously to his lips and got the brief meeting over. He was already leaving instead of entering.

"And say, old man, drop by the drugstore and get me some sleeping tablets like a good fellow, will you?" queried Alan with his pleasant smile. "Haven't slept a wink in four nights. It's demolishing, you know."

"Yes, yes," agreed Dunstan absently and went out, closing the door behind him.

Annabelle's kisses still burned his lips. It was unfair. And Alan so helpless. He frowned in ill-humor and went on, shaking his head.

"No. I must never tell them, must never tell anyone that her husband committed suicide because she was unfaithful."

He hurried down the short, gloomy corridor and took a narrow stairway that wound and twisted down, down, between cold stone walls. He came to a landing with a door on his left. Pausing at the sound of voices from beyond the door, he thought he recognized a deep voice speaking quietly, forcefully. The door was locked so he placed his ear furtively to the thin boards.

"Alienists for the State quite agree with those for the defense. We ask that the case be dropped on the grounds of obvious and hopeless insanity, and that the defendant be confined to a suitable institution for the remainder of his life."

"You can't do that!"

Dunstan Raynor whirled and peered into the darkness behind him at the answering remark, which had seemed to come from directly over his own shoulder.

"Who said that?" he demanded fiercely.

There was no reply, and he could see no one in the blackness. The voices from beyond the door had ceased. He went on down the remaining steps, much puzzled. The words were vaguely familiar as if it was something he had read somewhere a long time ago, but they had no particular significance at present.

A door gave out onto a dark alley, where naught was visible in the velvety gloom of midnight save a single electric globe beneath an arch some distance away. He made progress with difficulty. The alley was muddy and piled with boxes and rubbish. Beyond the arch was a narrow street, paved with cobblestones, where queer old buildings leaned drunkenly. He saw a gas lamp a block away throwing a feeble radiance over a faded front. He turned into a small door with leaded panes in the upper half.

The apothecary was a little man with round, red face and gray whiskers. He beamed as he turned to the laden shelves. There were bottles in all shapes and sizes—bottles of amber, red and green liquids, bottles with powders, and bottles with tablets.

"Nice day," observed the little man genially, like some Santa Claus in civilian dress, as he wrapped the small package.

But, as he handed it over the counter, he suddenly paused and drew back his hand. His eyes became surprised, alarmed, and then stern. He pointed an accusing finger at Dunstan and said excitedly:

"That's the man. He purchased the tablets."

"No. No," responded Dunstan in fright. "It wasn't that way at all."

He turned and ran for the door as the little man hopped over the counter like a flea. Outside, in cold darkness, he ran down first one narrow corridor and then another. Passageway and tunnels seemed endless. There were doors everywhere. After a while, he paused exhausted. The corridor he was in went on and on. It was painted a deadly dull gray, loathsome and horrible. Tired of wandering down strange passageways, he opened a door. The boards echoed hollowly under his feet as he passed through. It was another corridor of the same oppressive gray. There were more doors, but these doors were barred with iron.

An old woman came to the nearest door and stretched forth beseeching hands toward him. She had on some sort of coarse gray gown. Her matted hair fell in strings over her eyes. They stared and rolled, goggling at him wildly.

"It's better that way," she croaked. "Green, you know. Everybody does. Continue the going dreadfully. It's not often quite frequently, isn't it?"

With a start of horror, he recognized the place. There was a door farther down with the number fifteen over it. It was there they had put him. But not without a fight

over it. He remembered the struggle he had had with three white-coated attendants.

Another door at the end of the passage opened, and a white-gowned figure came through. It was the blond German doctor he hated. The latter caught sight of him and raised an imperious finger.

"Here, you! What are you doing outside?"

"I'm not outside," he responded sullenly. "I'm in here."

"Of course, you're in here," said the doctor.

As the man started forward menacingly, Dunstan Raynor turned and ran blindly, stumblingly, in a panic, while footsteps echoed behind.

Turning the corner of a dingy, brick building, he saw steps leading downward. Stone steps. There was a sort of tunnel below. It was black as pitch but it offered sanctuary, and he hurried down. Anything to escape the strait jacket he knew he would be in again if the doctor caught him.

He bumped into a door. Opening it, he came out in the great hall with the fountain. Music was playing, and a great many people were laughing. It must be a fancy-dress ball. Here was a knight in armor dancing stiffly with a graceful ballet girl. There was a pirate with a Columbine on his arm. There was a short man with a hideous mask. A figure was a frog's head. A skeleton.

But something unusual was going on. A platform had been built between the two curving stairs. He saw Annabelle there all in white, and Benny Westcott, the golden toad, in formal dress. Confetti was raining down upon them. They were being married.

He slouched forward bitterly and looked on. She would, he thought. And upstairs, poor twisted Alan was waiting to take those tablets. Not the one that would produce peaceful sleep, but the dozen or more that would put him out of all this. If these people only knew what was going to happen they would not laugh and be so gay. Or would they? But he knew what was going to happen! God! If he had only known in time.

The couple were married now and being congratulated. They looked over and saw him. Dunstan started and flushed red. A white-hot anger shook him.

The golden toad was *grinning*.

Westcott simpered like the cat that ate the canary. There was even a smile lurking in Annabelle's eyes as she regarded him. Then she came hurrying toward him.

"Darling!" she cooed. "I think it was perfectly marvelous, what you did. Oh! It was taking horrible chances. And all for me! I love you, Dunsy."

She would have kissed him, but he turned and fled. So, she thought she had driven him to do it for love of her! And the grinning toad was enjoying the joke. They were laughing at him. That's what hurt.

Making his way down a long hallway, he came to a black door. There was a thin man all in sober black beside the door. The man's face was cadaverous and gloomy, but that might be a mask, too. He seemed

kindly and opened the door politely for Dunstan to pass through.

The walls were all in plain black. There was a small platform by the farther wall and on it a huge square chair with heavy wires connected to it. There was a copper helmet, armbands, and legbands. There were heavy switches on the wall to one side.

The man was standing by the chair. He smiled politely and motioned for Dunstan to have a seat.

"Get in," he said. "It only takes a minute."

His smile seemed to grow evil, wolfish.

"Now look here," replied Dunstan severely. "This has gone far enough. I tell you I didn't do it. He took the tablets himself. How was I to know he wanted them for that purpose?"

Alan was there, too, standing quietly in one corner. He was no longer in the wheel chair but was standing straight and strong as before the accident.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "If I'd known they would blame you, I never would have done it that way."

The other man leered at Dunstan. "But it's too late to tell them," he pointed out. "No one would believe you, now. You're stark, raving mad, you see. Your testimony is worthless."

"You should have told them why I did it," added Alan quietly. "It wasn't worth it, old man."

"I wouldn't change it if I could," said Dunstan fervently. "And they're trying to get me back. I've felt it a dozen times, lately. Each time it is stronger. But I won't go back. Do you think I'd stand for that slimy little toad, Westcott, thinking I killed you so that I could marry Annabelle, when she married *him* instead? I tell you, he *grinned* at me."

"Get in," interrupted the other man impatiently.

"No," shouted Dunstan. "Not that!"

The man took a step forward, mouthing horribly. For the first time, Dunstan noticed little horns on the man's head. His mouth was full of ugly teeth, and he had the slaverling jaws of a wolf.

Dunstan started back. The man swooped through the air toward him. He had great black wings, like a bat.

Screaming, Dunstan turned and ran at top speed while the sound of flapping wings and running feet came from behind. Doubling and dodging down narrow, twisting corridors, he finally outdistanced pursuit. He stopped suddenly, that strange feeling seizing hold as though it were a powerful hand throttling him.

"No. I won't go back," he said stubbornly.

When he reached the end of the corridor, he saw light coming through a thick glass window. He peered in furtively. The room was glaring white under a cluster of powerful lights—cases of glittering instruments, sterilizers. Four white-robed men were gathered about a swathed figure on an operating table beneath the lights. Nurses flitted about soberly and efficiently. There was an atmosphere of suspense.

The doctors' voices came plainly.

"It would be interesting to know what goes on in a mind like this as it hears the call of returning sanity."

"But, have you ever stopped to think that some of these people may not thank us? They may regret recovering."

"Why?"

"Well, take this case, for instance. It is a sad case. He poisoned his best friend in order to marry the wife, and she immediately married another man. If he recovers completely, will he not find himself again in the situation that drove him mad? If he could not stand it fourteen years ago, will he be able to stand it tomorrow, or the next day?"

"I see. That's a good point. You fear a brief period of sanity and a relapse?"

"Yes."

"On the other hand, time works wonders in such cases. When you wake in the morning you are conscious of considerable time having elapsed since you went to sleep. I'm counting on the long period of fourteen years to exercise some curative effect."

"Well, we shall know more when the shock wears off."

The people were gone and still Dunstan stared at the white-shrouded figure on the table. It wasn't possible they were talking about him. Fourteen years! Yet the poor devil in there had an almost identical case.

Of a sudden the strange feeling came again. It was overpowering. He fought against it, trembling and perspiring. Then the white-swathed figure turned its head toward him. It raised a hand and mutely beckoned, imperiously.

With a sigh, he gave up. What was the use of fighting it? At least there would be no more hurrying aimlessly down unending corridors, opening countless doors, or listening when they were locked. He had been down hundreds of miles of corridors and hallways and passages. There had been thousands of doors that he had tried only to find them locked against him or leading nowhere.

Silently he went in and crawled up on the empty operating table. It was good to stretch out, and he felt at peace again. He thought he would go to sleep. But his serenity was disturbed by the sound of hurrying feet. For an agonized moment he thought that the man, or the wolf, or the bat—whatever it had been—*was* still hunting him and had caught up.

Annabelle burst in.

"Oh, darling!" she gasped, throwing herself upon him and kissing him madly. "Just think what it means to us. I'm free! Pudgy hit a bridge abutment, doing ninety in his racer, and I have all his money. Now, if the operation is a success, you will be free, too! Darling, think of you and me together."

He tried to raise a hand to push her away. In horror, he discovered that someone had strapped him down. His feet were similarly tied. Great, broad straps fastened him to the table. He struggled futilely as she kissed him again and again. He groaned in anguish.

His mouth felt cold and wet and slimy, like a dead oyster. It was like being attacked by an octopus.

"Take her away, somebody!" he shouted.

She raised up and studied him gravely. He shut his eyes tight for a moment, loathing the face that had once driven him mad. When he opened his eyes again, he examined her in astonishment. He had never noticed that her eyes were brown before. And there were freckles on her nose. Her hair was red, and what was that dinky-looking cap thing doing on top of it? She looked like a nurse. She was a nurse.

In consternation, he stared about the room. It was like most hospital rooms, very plain, with a bed, a dresser, a chair. The windows were open, and a bright hot sun was shining in. There was a cool breeze billowing the white curtain.

He saw that the nurse had not been kissing him at all. She had a pad of wet gauze in her hand and had been wiping his mouth. On closer inspection, he saw that she was not anything like Annabelle.

"Where are all those people who had me strapped down?" he queried.

"Oh, that was hours ago, in the operating room," she replied. "I shall have to tell Dr. Pembroke that the shock of the insulin has worn off and that you seem quite normal."

"Wait a moment," he said quickly, as she turned to go. "Are you familiar with my case?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Mrs. Benjamin Westcott, who was Mrs. Alan Dunbar?"

"She's a Mrs. Somebody Else now," the nurse replied. "I can't recollect the name. She's married again and lives in Europe. Mr. Westcott was killed some years ago in an auto accident."

Her eyes were a little cold, aloof and impersonal.

"But I didn't do it, you know," he insisted.

"Yes, we know."

He studied her gloomily. People would always be like that. If he were cured, after all these years, he might

be freed, but other people would never be cured. To them he would always be the murderer of Alan because he loved Alan's wife.

But what of it? Alan knew.

Pembroke had been right. Time had worked changes whether he had been aware of the process or not.

"Have you a mirror?" he asked.

She went to the dresser and fetched one. He studied his reflection a long time, critically. His hair was white, his face deep-lined. Fourteen years since he had seen that face. Amazing changes. But, on the whole, not bad.

"What are you worrying about now?" the nurse asked.

"I'm considering the relapse," he replied, briefly. And then, at her questioning look. "One of the other fellows down there said I might have one."

"Were you conscious at that time?" she queried sharply, a worried look making a little crease between her brows.

He didn't answer immediately for he was still looking into the glass and thinking deeply. Imagine Annabelle after three husbands, a fortune to squander, and fourteen years. He tried to picture her with gray hair and wrinkled skin. He suddenly found he was not interested in picturing her in any fashion.

"Were you conscious?" she repeated.

"You'd be surprised," he grinned.

"I'm more than surprised; I'm dumfounded. I've never heard of such a thing. I shall have to tell Dr. Pembroke at once."

But, as she reached the door, he raised his head again to look after her. "However," he said gravely, "you might tell the other fellow something."

She cast an inquiring glance back over her shoulder, her hand on the knob.

Dunstan Raynor chuckled. "Tell him there will be no relapse," he said.

THE END

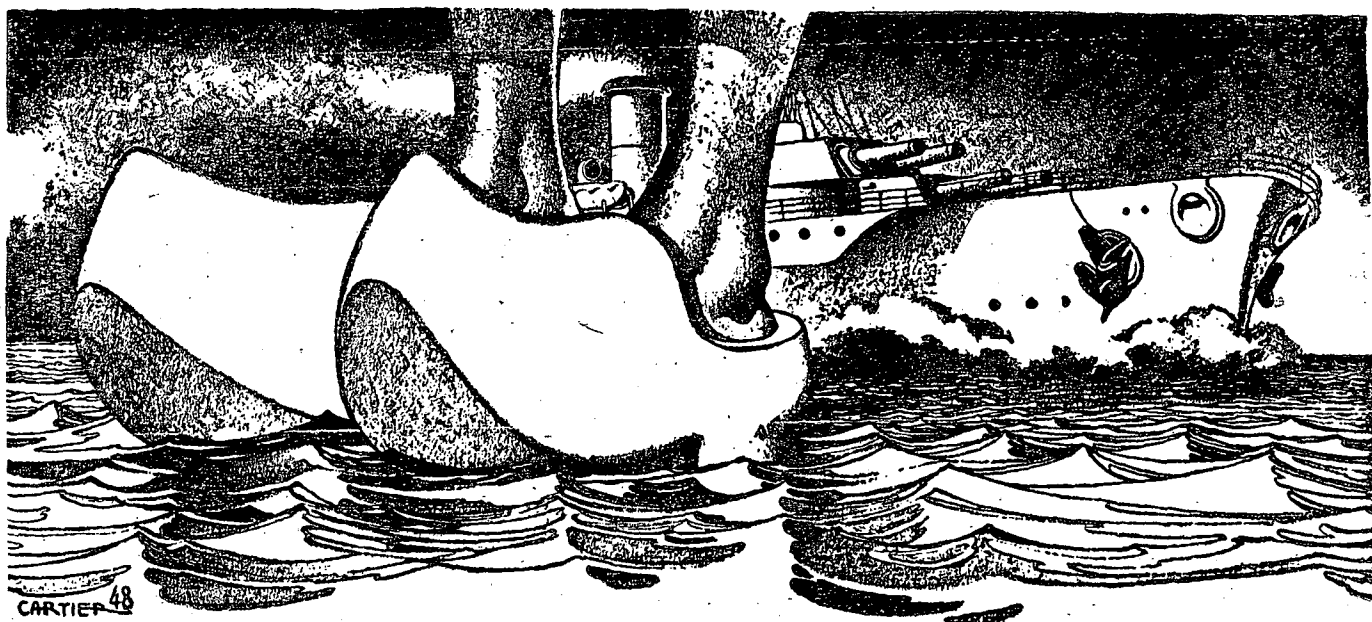
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DISBELIEF

Around 1800, there was a considerable fall of meteorites in France, and the mayor and other officials of the little town near which the fall occurred sent to the French Academy of Sciences a witnessed, sworn statement of the actuality of the fall. At that date, science had not accepted the fact of the fall of meteorites from the heavens, as there was no theory which would make such an occurrence reasonable. The French Academy ignored the statement officially, and unofficially referred to it as an outstanding example of mass credulity.

Shortly thereafter, the curator of the Museum of Natural History of Vienna officially warned museum

societies against the display of so-called aërolites, because the display of these mythical things, of the same order of credibility as a piece of unicorn horn would be, would detract from the value of the rest of the collection. It was not until 1829 that a book appeared—printed in Vienna, incidentally—containing such an abundance of evidence as to convince skeptics of the existence of meteorites, and leading to an explanation of the puzzle. Meteorites became pieces of the jig-saw puzzle pattern of science when it was realized they were tiny planetoids, revolving about the Sun in vast numbers in eccentric orbits which Earth's movements intersected.



JESUS SHOES

BY ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

Concerning a man who had absolute
faith in what he had been told —
absolute and undoubting faith —

This letter I got a couple or days ago was a long time in the mails. It was addressed to "Dr. Carl Seers, Battleship *Vermont*, United States Navy." There isn't a battleship *Vermont* any more; there never was a Dr. Carl Seers, so far as I know. The letter went to the Navy Department, and somebody figured out that it was meant for Chief Pharmacist's Mate Carl Seers. You see, most everybody calls a pharmacist's mate "Doc."

Then the letter followed me through two transfers from shore duty in Eleventh Naval District to my present billet in a ship which is helping survey and build our new bases in the Caribbean. The odd thing is that it caught up with me at its starting point—it had been postmarked Port au Prince in the first place. It said:

Dear Sir:

Please communicate with the undersigned relative to a request made by a navy man you may remember from long ago—one Petit Jean, deceased.

Very truly yours,

Rev. Milton Lane.

I've been in the navy nearly thirty years, and I was on my first cruise then. But I remembered, after pronouncing the name a few times. Petit Jean—Pettijohn! Parson John Pettijohn, wardroom mess attendant. Back in 1916, and aboard the old *Vermont*, sure enough. I read the letter again.

"—relative to a request . . . one Petit Jean, deceased—"

Then I was a little frightened, thinking that somebody who served with me in the sick bay of the *Vermont* must have told what happened that night nearly twenty-five years ago. I remembered the Parson's last request. I granted it because I was kidding him, like everybody else on the *Vermont* kidded him. It was his last request because it killed him—

I was remembering it all, and worrying about it, when I went ashore yesterday to look up the Rev. Mr. Lane.

The Parson shipped in New Orleans, sometime in 1915, and the *Vermont* was his first and last ship. He was only medium height, but no wider than a deck plank,

and that made him look tall. He was blacker than the coal the old *Vermont* burned. And dumb! He couldn't write his own name—maybe that's how it became Pettijohn on the records.

He was a crazy sort of shine. You could see it in his eyes, especially in the way he rolled them, showing their whites, when he talked about religion. They called him "Parson" when he revealed that he'd heard "the call of the Lawd" and had joined the navy to save enough money to study for the ministry.

Right away, he became the butt of all the jokes. I guess it was because he took the joking in such a funny way—good-naturedly enough, but with a wistful, hurt sort of look. Like a child who's trusted in something that turns out to be false. That was the Parson all over—a child and trusting. If he liked you, he trusted you; if he believed in a thing, you couldn't shake his belief. He was just a simple, dumb black boy who was sure he'd "heard the call."

They sent him for buckets of steam. He stood lookout watches for mythical mail buoys. He ran all over the ship looking for cans of striped paint, plank stretchers, hammock ladders and left-handed monkey wrenches. The last time he stood a mail-buoy watch, something came floating past the bow, and the Parson fell over the side trying to reach it with his eight-foot boat hook.

That stopped the practical joking—by executive order. Because the Parson couldn't swim a stroke, and he should have been dead, by rights, before the lifeboat crew picked him up.

But he wasn't. We gave him artificial respiration in the sick bay, and he choked, and rolled the whites of his eyes and said: "Ah jes' prayed! Ah prayed, and the Lawd heah me even undah all that watah—"

We laid off, after that. We didn't see much of him for a time, except at church services. When the chaplain preached on deck, Sundays, the Parson was always listening, rolling his eyes and looking as if he were about to start shouting any minute. What was more, he could remember every word of the sermon—he couldn't read, but he could quote Scriptures for an hour.

Then he killed a man.

It was during maneuvers off Guantánamo Bay. A Filipino steward got tanked up on rum smuggled aboard from a bumboat, and pulled a knife on the Parson. If the Parson had gone to trial, I'm sure the court-martial would have acquitted him, because it was pretty plainly a case of self-defense.

But the trial never was held. The Parson's cheek was laid open—it was that close—and I had to go down to the brig every day for a week, dressing the cut. Then he got an infection, ran a temperature, and had to be brought up to the sick bay and turned in with a marine guard standing by twenty-four hours of the day.

I remember how he lay there in delirium, tossing and rolling his eyes; he babbled about the "curse of Cain" and wailed wordlessly in a queer, minor key that was enough to make anybody break out with goose pimples every time he heard it. Then he got better, but the doc-

tor wasn't taking any chances. He ordered the Parson kept on the sick list for a while.

I was cleaning out my locker, that evening—we were en route to Puerto Rico, and I planned to make a liberty in San Juan. The Parson saw me pull out a pair of huge wooden shoes, Dutch *sabots* I had bought for a souvenir when the *Vermont* took in Amsterdam on a midshipmen's cruise.

He said, "Whut's them, Doc?"

I winked at another pharmacist's mate. "Them?" I said. "Why, they're Jesus shoes. Surely you've heard of Jesus shoes, haven't you, Parson?"

This is an old gag in the navy, and it's still used today. But the Parson was new in the outfit; he never had heard it. I explained that if a man had a pair of Jesus shoes, he could walk on water. He didn't have to wait for a shore boat when he wanted to hit the beach for a liberty.

I said: "You know, Parson. It tells in the Bible how Christ walked across the River Jordan—"

"You hadn't ought to talk like that, Doc!" he told me. "It wasn't the River Jordan. It was the Sea of Galilee. You hadn't ought to talk that way."

I winked at the marine sentry. "Well, wherever it was," I said, "these are the kind. See, they're made out of wood. You want to get yourself a pair of Jesus shoes some day, Parson."

The Parson rolled his eyes. He said, "Could I sho' enough walk on the watah with them shoes, Doc?"

"It's been done, hasn't it?" I asked him.

He nodded. And he watched me awhile, as I straightened my gear in the locker, then said: "Could I borrow them shoes sometime, Doc?"

I thought it would be fun if the Parson really took them ashore and tried walking out in the surf with them. He'd have done it, too. He liked me, and he believed anything I told him. And there wasn't room in the locker for all the gadgets I'd been accumulating.

"Tell you what, Parson," I said. "It'll give you this pair of Jesus shoes, if they'll fit you. Try 'em on!"

He did. His feet were big and flat; the *sabots* fitted him perfectly. And he was as tickled as only a darky can be.

That request to borrow those shoes was the Parson's last. Later that night, the marine went into the passageway to smoke a cigarette, and a yell from another patient brought him back on the jump. The Parson had crawled through a porthole—wearing the Jesus shoes.

The marine sounded the alarm. They dropped flares and put over two boats. They searched for an hour, without finding even one of the shoes. I kept quiet about that part of it, and so did everybody else—telling wouldn't bring the Parson back. We were twenty-odd miles from land at the time—

I remembered all this, going up a crooked, sun-blazed street toward the house where the Rev. Milton Lane lived. After nearly twenty-five years somebody *had* told. Not the marine, because he died in Belleau Wood. And that other pharmacist's mate left the service after one

cruise. I thought it must have been the patient who sat up and yelled; I have forgotten his name.

I thought, "*Well, it's caught up with me!*" and I knocked on the door.

The Rev. Milton Lane was a big man in a white linen suit. He didn't look like a preacher. And he was young—he couldn't have been much over twenty-five. He showed me to a cool terrace that overlooked the sea, and I introduced myself and told him I'd come about Pettijohn.

"Oh, Petit Jean!" he said. "I didn't connect the name. You're Dr. Seers—you took care of him when he had that cut on his cheek!"

I explained that I wasn't a doctor, but he didn't seem to hear. He stepped to the door and said something to a servant. I thought maybe he was sending for the police.

Then he came back and said: "His last request was very strange. I didn't explain it in my letter, because—"

"I know," I said. "It's been a long time. But I remember. The trouble was, the Parson—Pettijohn. I

mean—believed anything you told him. He didn't know he was being kidded. He actually thought he could walk on water!"

"Say that again," Rev. Lane said.

I told him. I told him everything that happened after the Parson came to the *Vermont*, so he'd be more likely to understand what happened that night.

He shook his head. "And I never really believed him!" he said, as if he were talking to himself. "I didn't understand the request he made before he died, last year. I—"

"Last year?"

The servant came out before he spoke. Rev. Lane said: "Yes—Petit Jean died last year. For more than twenty years he was a preacher here in Haiti—he was more than that to the superstitious natives. He told them he had walked across the sea to bring them the word of God. And his last request was that I find you and send you these."

He was unwrapping the package the servant brought. I knew, even before I looked, that the package held a pair of wooden shoes.

THE END.

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FICTION

BY ALLAN GRANT

I have met my fate in an icy hate
And drunk a toast to death;
And I've seen quite well of the gates of hell,
And felt the devil's breath;

I have seen the sign in a glass of wine,
And heard the call to love;
I have rid the land of a despot's hand,
And climbed the skies above.

I have known as much of a fairy's touch
And the spell that called her there
As I have of gods and the magic swords
Of death and life they bear.

I have known the stars and the mystic Mars
As well as local lanes;
I have known the sport of King Arthur's Court
And tasted jungle rains:

For I listen long to the siren song
That leads I know not where;
And I sail a sea where my soul is free—
And never leave my chair.

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FROM

UNKNOWN WORLDS

1948 EDITION :

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