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A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL



Weird Tales

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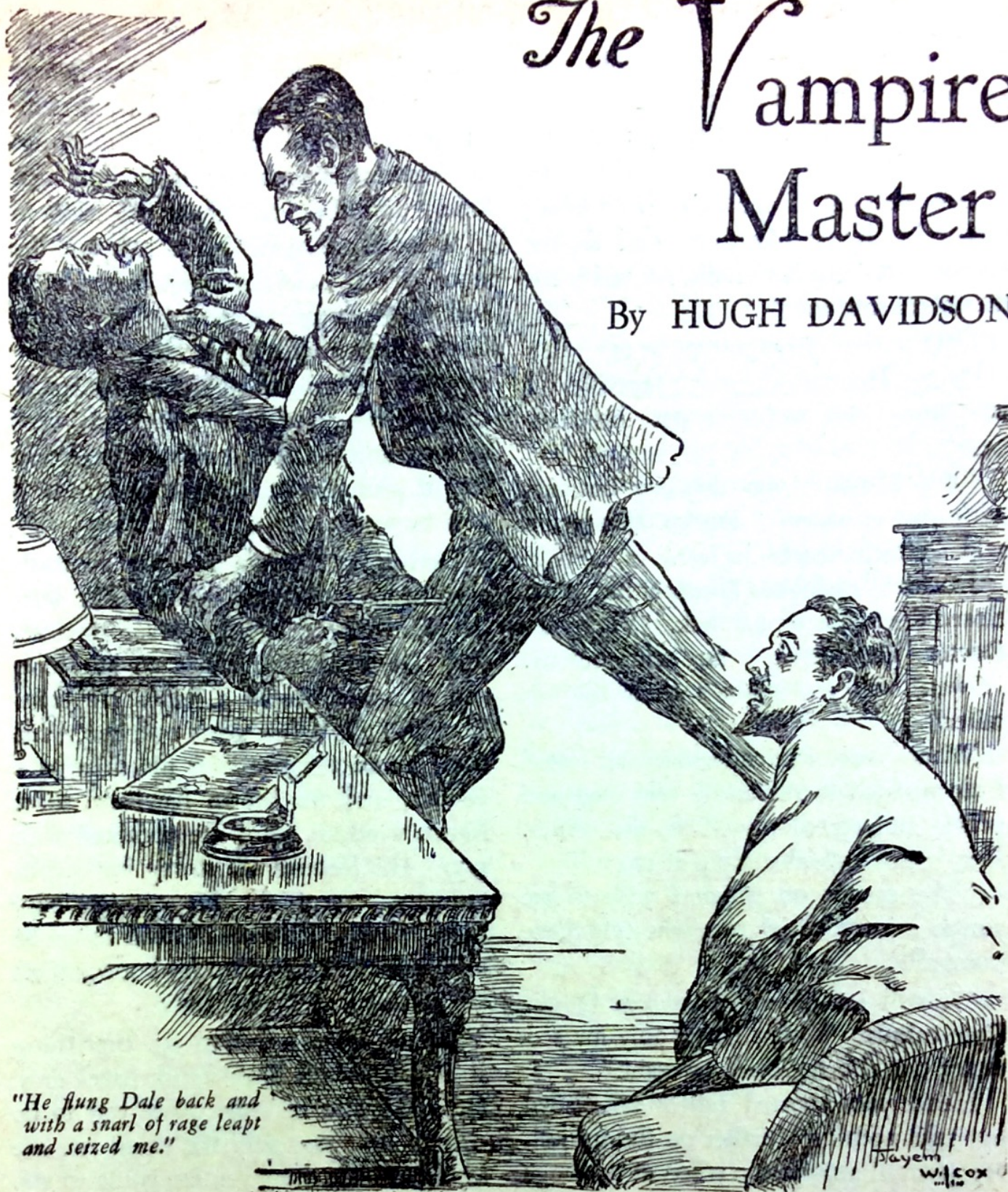
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Vampire Master

By HUGH DAVIDSON



"He flung Dale back and with a snarl of rage leapt and seized me."

A thrilling novel of corpses that would not stay dead, and a gruesome horror in the hills of New York

"**I** TELL you I must see Doctor Dale at once! I don't care what his rules about appointments are—what I have to see him about is vital!"

"But he never sees any one except by appointment," I told our caller, whose card read "Dr. William Henderson, Maysville, New York."

"I'm Doctor Dale's secretary, Harley

Owen," I added. "Couldn't you tell me your business with him?"

Doctor Henderson shook his head impatiently. "I came here to see Doctor John Dale himself and not any secretary," he said. "And I'm going to see him!"

Before I could stop him he had pushed past me and was entering Doctor Dale's inner office. Doctor Dale was at his black

desk, bent over a mass of open books. He looked up in surprize as Doctor Henderson made his hasty entrance, with me close at his heels.

"Doctor Dale, I apologize for forcing myself in on you like this," said Doctor Henderson, "but it's vitally necessary for me to consult you."

Dale looked questioningly at me. "It's a Doctor Henderson from Maysville," I told him. "He wouldn't state his business."

"But I assure you that my business with you is urgent," Doctor Henderson said, "utterly urgent, in fact."

Doctor Dale looked keenly at him, then closed the books on his desk. "Very well, Doctor Henderson," he said quietly. "Owen, will you place a chair for our caller?"

When Doctor Henderson was seated Dale nodded to me and I took pad and pencil and seated myself in the corner. Henderson looked sharply at me.

"The matter on which I wish to see you is a confidential one," he told Dale pointedly.

"It will remain so," answered Doctor Dale calmly. "Owen is not only my secretary but also my chief assistant."

Henderson seemed rather unsatisfied but said nothing further on the subject. He glanced around the office, at the huge window in its southern wall looking out across the clustered skyscrapers of lower New York, at the locked mahogany wall-cabinets that lined the western wall, and at the crowded book-shelves on the eastern side, with their multitude of volumes in calf, vellum, cloth, boards, and paper, books of every age and in every language, and all of them works on witchcraft, sorcery, diabolism, demonology and a hundred other phases of the supernatural.

As Henderson turned his gaze back to Doctor Dale, I could not help mentally

contrasting the two. Doctor Henderson was a perfect type of the elderly provincial physician who rather looks down on the business-like manner of medical men today. His thin, tall figure was clothed in a loosely-hanging black suit and he wore a stiff, old-fashioned wing-collar and nose-glasses secured by a narrow black ribbon to his lapel. His thin, gray-ing hair was brushed stiffly back, his spare, clean-shaven face and blue eyes were austere, and the impression he gave was one of primness and preciseness troubled now by worry.

Doctor Dale was a complete contrast, even to his tweed suit and soft silk shirt the antithesis of Henderson's formal attire. Doctor John Dale is an attractive and to some people a handsome man. Though he is a few years over forty, his trim, compact figure is as muscular as a youth's, and his brown hair and short brown vandyke beard are unmixed with gray. His features are strong but rather ordinary, except for his extraordinary hazel eyes, which can at some times be cold and bleak as brown ice but at others can seem hot as brown flame.

Doctor Dale seems to see everything at a glance with those quick hazel eyes. He seems also in some queer way to be able to hear not only the thing you are saying but the thing you are going to say. This is no doubt due to the quickness with which his mind works, for few men can think and act more quickly.

"**D**OCTOR DALE," began Henderson, "I've come to you for consultation and help on an extraordinary matter. I come to you because a former colleague of mine once told me that among medical men of New York, Doctor John Dale had a reputation as a specialist of a unique kind."

"Just what kind of a specialist did this

former colleague of yours tell you that I was?" asked Dale.

"He said," Doctor Henderson answered slowly, "that you were a specialist in evil; in other words, a specialist in cases where tangible forces of evil were encountered against which medical science was powerless, and to fight which occult science had to be used."

"That is the nature of my work," Doctor Dale acknowledged. "I take it, then, that you've come to consult me on some matter that has need of occult as well as medical science?"

"I have, yes," said Henderson still more slowly. "Doctor Dale, in your work against the forces of evil have you ever met with the phenomenon called vampirism?"

Dale's eyes flickered with quick interest but he showed no other sign of surprise at the question. "Vampirism? Yes, I have come in contact with it, though that was a number of years ago."

"But you know then that vampirism is a reality?" Doctor Henderson pressed anxiously. "You don't doubt that it exists?"

"Of course not," Doctor Dale replied promptly. "Vampirism is only too dreadfully real, as real as diabolism and voodooism and lycanthropy are real, as real as the benign forces that help humanity and the malign forces that prey on humanity are real. Vampirism is simply one of the ways used by those malign forces to prey upon mankind."

"But just what is vampirism—or a vampire—really?" Doctor Henderson asked tensely. "I am asking you, Doctor Dale, because I wish to make sure we are not dealing in misunderstandings when I put before you the matter that brought me here."

Doctor Dale leaned back, stroking his short beard thoughtfully. "A vampire,"

he said finally, "is simply a dead person who can move and act as though alive. He can do this because through the malign forces of evil his dead body has been reanimated with life, not with real life but with a pseudo-life. Therefore, though the vampire is a dead person he is not of the truly dead and his body can exist indefinitely without dissolution while that pseudo-life imbues it.

"Because the vampire gets his pseudo-life through the malign forces of evil, he is himself essentially and unchangeably evil. He can think and act as in life, has immensely greater bodily strength than even he had in life, but his thoughts and actions are all evil. And like almost all things and forces of evil, the vampire is strongest by night and weakest by day. So weak is his pseudo-life during the day that from sunrise until sunset the vampire must lie stiff and unmoving as though really dead, in his coffin.

"But with night's coming the vampire's pseudo-life is strong and he can go forth during the night on his hideous quest. The vampire must have, to sustain the pseudo-life that activates his dead body, the blood of people still living. So by night he visits the living, usually at first those closest to him in life, and with his teeth punctures their throats and sucks their blood. And the vampire visits his victim again and again until that victim dies.

"Once dead, the victim becomes himself a vampire and his dead body is animated by the same evil pseudo-life! That is so because the taking of the victim's life-blood into the vampire's veins has formed a tie of evil between them that makes the victim also a vampire when he dies, unless he that vampirized him has been destroyed before then. The former victim, now a vampire himself, will go forth to find his own victims, who will

in turn become vampires when they die. So widens outward the hideous circle of the vampire evil if it is not stamped out."

"But there are ways of stamping it out, surely?" exclaimed Doctor Henderson. "There are ways—if not in ordinary science, in occult science—of combating this vampire evil?"

"There are ways," Doctor Dale admitted, "by which the malign forces behind the vampire can be overcome by benign ones, but they are not easy ways to use. To destroy the vampire for good the pseudo-life of its dead body must be ended, and there is but one way to do that. That way is to find the body by day while it lies stiff and helpless, to drive a wooden stake through its heart and to cut off its head. That done, its pseudo-life departs and it becomes one of the true dead, a dead body and nothing more.

"That is the only way in which a vampire can be destroyed, though there are ways by which vampires can be kept from their victims. The cross, for instance, paralyzes and repels the vampire as it does every other thing of evil, since the cross is no mere token of a religious sect but is an age-old symbol that has been used by the peoples of the earth in all times to combat evil forces. It is a symbol through which the benign forces of the universe can convey themselves to oppress the malign ones, and it is powerful for that reason.

"Branches of garlic are utterly repellent to the pseudo-living vampire, and so too are branches of the wild-rose. In some parts of the world, sprays of mayflower or of rowan are used instead of these. In still others, red peas and iron are held to form a barrier that the vampire can not pass. But there are many methods that have been used to repel the dreaded vampire in various sections of the earth and some of them are of no real value,

just as there are many ideas concerning vampires and their powers which have no real truth in them. The final truth is that the vampire is a dead body reanimated by evil pseudo-life, and that the only conclusive weapon against it is the use of the stake and steel upon it which alone can make it truly dead."

Doctor Henderson had listened intently. "And you say then that vampirism is one of the rarest of the evils that prey upon humanity?" he asked.

Dale nodded. "Yes, and that is well, since it is perhaps the most terrible of all and the hardest of all to fight. As I told you, it has been long since I have had contact with any case of real vampirism."

Henderson's hands trembled slightly as he asked, "What would you say, then, if I told you that vampirism had broken out in Maysville?—that a vampire or vampires were at their hideous work in my village?"

"I would say that it was surprising, at least," Doctor Dale answered slowly. "Is that the matter on which you came to consult me?"

Doctor Henderson nodded tensely. "It is. Doctor Dale, I know how incredible it sounds, but I am certain in my own mind that vampirism is going on up in my village, and I must have your help to combat it!"

2. Henderson's Story

DOCTOR DALE showed no surprise at Henderson's astonishing statement, though his hazel eyes were alert.

"Suppose you tell me all about it," Dale suggested to the overwrought physician. "Remember that I know nothing of Maysville or its people, and any information you can include may be helpful."

He turned momentarily to where I sat in the corner of the office. "Take notes on Doctor Henderson's information as

usual, Owen," he said, and I nodded, my pencil poised.

Doctor Henderson, still in the grip of strong emotion, sat back in his chair. "There's so little to tell that sounds sane," he said. "Yet what there is——"

"You say you don't know Maysville? Well, it's a village of seven or eight thousand people up north of here in New York state, lying west of the Hudson River and close to one of the northeastern spurs of the Catskill Mountains. It was one of the earliest-settled places in that region and there still live there some fairly wealthy families who descend from the early settlers, and who have estates between Maysville and the hills west of it.

"Those hills are the outer hills of the Catskill Mountain spur and lie about eight miles west of Maysville in a range extending north and south. They and the valleys between them are so thickly wooded as to be almost impenetrable. There are in these hills a good number of old Colonial manor-houses that go back to the early Eighteenth Century, but they've been long abandoned and only one of these old manors, the old Geisert place in which Gerritt Geisert is now living, is inhabited.

"But in the rolling country between the hills and the village are the estates of the wealthier families I mentioned. The biggest of these estates belongs to James Ralton, whose family is one of the most important in the region. Of course I know almost all the people in the other estates, the Harmons and Moores and Wilseys and the rest, but know the Raltons best; for I tended James Ralton when he was a boy, brought his daughters Olivia and Virginia into the world, and attended Allene, his wife, in her recent last illness.

"It was about four weeks ago that Allene Ralton first sickened. Her health had always been good, but she began sudden-

ly to lose weight and to exhibit a marked paleness and weakness. Soon her weakness was so pronounced that she was forced to stay in her bed. I diagnosed her case as secondary anemia but was rather puzzled by it; for secondary anemia, as you know, results from a direct loss of blood and I could not understand how Allene Ralton could be losing blood so suddenly.

"But it was clear that Allene was actually losing blood, and strength with it, with the passing of each day. Her blood supply was steadily failing. To correct this condition I gave her injections of the Klein-Lorentz solution, the new improved form of the iron-arsenic compounds used in treating secondary anemia. While the Klein-Lorentz solution can not replace blood that has been lost, it aids the body to produce more blood to replace that lost, if the body has enough time to do so.

"In this case it had not enough time, for Allene Ralton grew more bloodless and weak with amazing quickness. Within ten days after her first sickening she was in a critical state, and sinking lower and lower before our eyes. James Ralton, of course, was nearly frantic about it and I was almost as bad. For here was Allene Ralton dying before my eyes and I could do nothing to save her!

"It is true that I had noticed on her neck two small red punctures, located above the junction of the internal jugular and subclavian veins, but these punctures showed no sign of bleeding and of course I didn't give them a second thought. Neither did I, at the time, attach any significance to the strange things that Allene kept saying in her deliriums of weakness; for I didn't dream then what was the dreadful truth.

"Two weeks after she had first sickened, Allene Ralton died, having despite

my injections of Klein-Lorentz solution into her, become so lacking in real blood and consequently so weak that her heart simply stopped beating. James Ralton was like a dazed person during the funeral, while the two daughters, Olivia and Virginia, were absolutely grief-stricken.

"In fact when Olivia, the eldest daughter, became ill and weak a few days after her mother's funeral, I thought at first that her grief was responsible. I did what I could to cheer her up, and so did her father and young Edward Harmon, her fiancé. But it had little or no effect, for in a few days Olivia Ralton was so weak that she stayed in her bed. And then I saw for the first time that she was showing all the symptoms of the same condition of secondary anemia which had been responsible for her mother's death.

"I was profoundly shocked. Here was the strange illness that had baffled me and killed Allene Ralton, now attacking Olivia! In my alarm I wondered if this could not be some hitherto unknown contagious form of blood-disease that was attacking her as it had her mother. The same thing was suggested by James Ralton, who naturally was terribly worried by this illness of Olivia's coming after her mother's sudden death, as was young Harmon, her fiancé.

"In a few more days Olivia was visibly worse from loss of blood, her pulse irregular and her breath short; in fact, all the symptoms that her mother had exhibited. Again I used injections of Klein-Lorentz solution to try to build up new blood in her body, but it seemed useless; for Olivia was losing blood faster than her body could replace it, even aided as it was by my injections.

"IT WAS while making one of these injections yesterday that I noticed two small marks on Olivia's neck, two punc-

tures exactly like those I had seen on her mother's neck. I examined them carefully, for I had begun to suspect that even though they showed no sign of bleeding these marks were connected in some way with the loss of blood by Allene Ralton and now by Olivia. Could it be, I asked myself, that some poisonous creature or insect had bitten first Allene Ralton and now Olivia? Something that had sucked blood from the mother and now from the daughter?

"Then as I asked myself that question, long-forgotten and half-learned knowledge rose in my mind. I remembered all the features of Allene's strange illness, her progressive bloodlessness, the lack of any sign of real disease, and as I reviewed mentally the things I had heard Allene babble unknowingly in her deliriums of weakness, I knew the answer to all that had happened in a blinding and terrible flood of light.

"The thing that had made those marks, the thing that was preying upon Olivia Ralton as it had preyed upon Allene Ralton, could only be a vampire! I had heard of such cases, of dead men and women who had come to take the blood of the living; but because I had not had any direct contact with them, I had not taken much stock in them. Yet here was the dreadful evidence of their reality before my eyes! A vampire was draining away Olivia's life-blood as her mother's had been drained, and unless it was stopped she would die as Allene had died!

"My mind was in turmoil after I made this dreadful discovery. I was certain it was actually vampirism that had killed Allene Ralton and now was killing her daughter. But who was the vampire or vampires responsible for it, the dead who were coming back to take the blood of the living? And how could I, a medical

man with only orthodox medical training, combat this dark horror?

"It was then I remembered how a colleague of mine had once told me of a specialist in evil, a Doctor John Dale of New York City, who had made his life-work the fighting of the forces of evil which many physicians encounter in their practise. I determined to go down to New York to get the aid of this Doctor Dale to fight the vampire horror that seemed to have come into being in Maysville.

"So I told James Ralton and Edward Harmon that, told them that it was my belief Olivia and Allene were victims of vampirism and that I meant to get aid that could stop the vampire's hideous work. Of course Ralton and Harmon were astounded and horrified. Like myself they had heard of the dreaded vampire evil without ever dreaming they might themselves come into contact with it.

"I told them to say nothing of it to Olivia Ralton, or to any one else, for that matter, but to make sure that nothing visited Olivia during the night. Her father said he would watch with her through the night each night; so I felt she was safe for the time being. This morning James Ralton told me on the telephone that she had not been disturbed during the night; so I took the first train to New York.

"When I arrived here I came straight to your office, Doctor Dale, and forced myself in despite your secretary, Mr. Owen. For I believe that this thing is terribly important, that unless the vampire menace up in Maysville can somehow be stopped, Olivia Ralton will die a victim as did Allene Ralton. And that is why I have come here to beg you to come up to Maysville and combat this terrible thing!"

DOCTOR HENDERSON'S brow was damp and he was leaning forward tensely in his chair as he finished, his voice hoarse with emotion. Doctor Dale had listened to him with silent but intent interest, while my pencil had been flying over my pad as I recorded what the physician told. "Doctor Henderson, I admit that what you have told does point directly toward vampirism," Dale said. "Yet, as I have told you, vampirism is not frequent, and there may be another explanation."

"But you'll come up to Maysville and see for yourself whether or not it's vampirism?" Henderson asked him quickly. "I assure you that any fee you might ask James Ralton for your services——"

"Let us first go further into the matter," Doctor Dale interrupted. "You say, Henderson, that besides the marks on the throats of Allene and Olivia Ralton, it was the delirious wanderings of Allene Ralton that led you to suspect the presence of vampirism. Just what was the nature of those wanderings?"

"They were fearful," Doctor Henderson told him. "They occurred mostly during the last days of Allene's illness, when she was so weak as to be delirious most of the time. She would toss restlessly to and fro in bed, muttering inaudibly, and sometimes her mutterings were loud enough to hear.

"Most of them were about a face she seemed to feel watching her. She would whisper fearfully of red eyes looking in at her, of gleaming teeth. She would mutter also of dogs howling, and moan as though in terror. And once as I sat beside her bed I saw Allene in her delirium shrink as though from something terrible, and utter in a hissing whisper, 'My throat—my throat—he again——'

"At the time, as I told you, I made nothing of all this, for as you will know from experience, patients in delirium ut-

ter the most weird and unlikely sort of things, stuff that floats up from their subconscious minds. But later on, when I had seen the marks on Olivia's throat and remembered those on Allene's, I remembered her ravings too and they made me suspect vampirism."

Doctor Dale nodded thoughtfully. "But during Allene Ralton's conscious period?" he asked. "Did she tell you then of any night-visitant such as her wanderings would indicate?"

Doctor Henderson shook his head. "No, she didn't. She wasn't conscious much in those last days, you know. She did tell me that she had been having terrible dreams and felt a dread of night's coming. She also said that the howling of the dogs down at the lodge, which they had been doing a good bit lately, by night, somehow oppressed her."

"What about your present patient, Olivia Ralton?" Doctor Dale continued. "Have you heard anything of the same nature from her?"

"Well, of course Olivia hasn't been delirious," Henderson said. "She's told me also that she has oppressive nightmares and that she dislikes the way the dogs at the lodge howl at night, but that's all."

Doctor Dale seemed to consider that, his brow wrinkled in thought. Then he asked Doctor Henderson, "You say Allene Ralton's decline in blood and health was first noticed a month ago?"

"Yes, about four weeks ago," answered the Maysville physician. "It was the first week in September that I noticed it."

"Just who, can you tell me, had died in or around Maysville just previous to that?" Dale asked.

Henderson drew in his breath, looked fixedly at Dale. "I see what you mean, Doctor Dale. You are trying to find out whether some one who died about then

became the vampire in question, are you not? Let me think—the first week in September."

Henderson thought a few moments, then looked up. "The only persons to die in Maysville in the days directly before that were three, an old lady of ninety who died of sheer senility, a young farmer killed in a tractor accident, and an infant that died in birth. Surely it's inconceivable that any of them became vampire after death."

"Well, did any strangers come to Maysville about that time?" Doctor Dale asked. "I mean any one who came then to stay."

"No one but a new telegraph operator at the Maysville railroad station, named Fellowes. And of course Gerritt Geisert came to Maysville about then, but one would hardly call him a stranger."

"Gerritt Geisert?" repeated Doctor Dale. "Isn't that the person you mentioned as living in the only one of the old manors back in the hills now inhabited?"

Doctor Henderson nodded. "Yes, the Geisert manor is one of the oldest of the old places back in the hills, goes back to the early Eighteenth Century. I understand the original Geisert, whose first name also was Gerritt, left the whole region about the middle of the Eighteenth Century when for some reason nearly all of those manors in the hills were abandoned.

"But a month or more ago one of his descendants, also named Gerritt Geisert, came back to the region, arriving one night in Maysville. He notified authorities he was taking possession of the old manor in the hills, showing them the old family deeds. I understand he's engaged in studies of some sort out there, for he comes into the village only now and then in the evening."

"Geisert—Gerritt Geisert," murmured

Doctor Dale, frowning in thought. "I suppose this Gerritt Geisert is acquainted with you and the Raltons and the others?"

"Gerritt's become acquainted with most of the older families, the Raltons and Moores and others, yes," Henderson said. "He only comes in on infrequent evenings, as I said, but all of us like to have him call, for he's a courteous and highly interesting fellow."

"What about this Fellowes who came to Maysville about the same time?" Dale asked. "What's he like?"

"Why, I've only seen him occasionally around the station where he has the night shift," Doctor Henderson said. "He seems rather an ordinary young fellow."

Doctor Dale nodded, sat back in his chair for a time in thought, while Henderson watched him anxiously.

Finally Dale looked up. "You say you told no one but James Ralton and Edward Harmon that you suspected vampirism and were coming to get me to fight it?" he asked.

Doctor Henderson nodded. "Yes, and as I said, I asked them to tell it to no one else. I was afraid that if Olivia Ralton heard what I feared about her case it would make her much worse."

"It's well you did so," Dale told him. "It would be the worst of handicaps if I went up there with every one in the village knowing what my mission was."

"Then you're coming up to Maysville?" Doctor Henderson said quickly. "You're going to take the case?"

Doctor Dale nodded decisively. "You can expect Owen and me on the first train in the morning. For if it is actually vampirism that is going on in your village, the sooner it is stopped the better for all there."

The Maysville physician paled. "I know," he said. "I've been almost out

of my wits about this thing. But now that you're coming to work on it, I feel immeasurably more confident."

"Yes, but remember," Doctor Dale told him gravely, "that if this is really vampirism I can not guarantee that I can overcome it. For vampirism, as I said, is one of the most terrible of all the forms of evil and one of the hardest to fight.

"It will help us in that fight, if fight it is that lies ahead," he added, "if none in Maysville save those who must, knows what purpose brings Owen and me there. I rely on your silence therefore."

"You may to the utmost," Doctor Henderson assured him quickly. "Then I can expect you tomorrow?"

"On the first train tomorrow morning," Dale told him. "That will give Owen and me time to assemble the equipment we'll need. If James Ralton watches over Olivia as you say he means to, she should be safe tonight, and tomorrow we'll be with her."

Doctor Henderson nodded, and with a clasp of Dale's hand and a bow to me, he walked out of the office.

DOCTOR DALE quickly rose then and selected from the crowded bookshelves on the office's eastern wall a battered calf-bound quarto. He ran through its pages, read intently when he found what he sought.

He put the book thoughtfully down on his desk, then, and turned to me.

"You got all he told, Owen?" he asked. "Well, what do you think of it all?"

I shook my head. "Looks like as strange a case as we've taken yet. We've had some queer ones, but this is the first time that we've ever come up against vampirism."

"The first time since you've been with me, Owen," Doctor Dale corrected me. "I've had some experience myself in the

past with the vampire evil, as I told Henderson. And I confess that of all the forces of evil I've met so far, I'd least rather have to fight this dreadful one of vampirism."

"It may not be really vampirism at all," I suggested. "This Doctor Henderson may simply have mistaken the indications and become fearful."

Dale shook his head. "No, Owen, from what he told me I am certain that, terrible as it seems, vampirism of the most dreaded sort is going on up in Maysville. For he told me, Owen, more than he knew himself. I mean when he told of this Gerritt Geisert who so recently reached Maysville."

"I thought you'd struck on something there," I said, and Dale nodded, picked up the old calf-bound quarto he had been looking at.

"This is David Newell's *Remarkable Cases of Wizardry*, published here in New York in 1767. It's a plain account of some of the outbreaks of evil forces experienced in Colonial days, and here's the passage from it that I remembered when Henderson mentioned the name Gerritt Geisert.

"Also it has been told that a man dwelling in New York province near the northern Kaatskill Mounts, Gerritt Geissart by name, did plague and afflict many of his neighbors by taking by night their blood and life in a most dreadful way. Some said this Geissart was really dead, and finally went many with weapons and clerics to slay the wizard. But they found him not, dead or alive, since he had fled. And since then has none lived in his house or in those houses near to it whose occupants he had afflicted.

"That's what I remembered when Henderson mentioned the name Gerritt Geisert," Doctor Dale said, closing the book. "And that, Owen, is how a Gerritt Geisert lived a hundred and fifty years ago and how he left the region. And now a Gerritt Geisert has returned!"

I stared at him. "Dale, you can't mean to say that you think this Gerritt Geisert

who has come back to Maysville is——"

"I think nothing, yet," Doctor Dale interrupted, "save that as I told Henderson, the sooner we get to Maysville the better. For terrible as vampirism is, I think it is more than ordinary vampirism going on there, and that somehow, by us or by others, it must be stopped!"

3. *A Vigil for a Vampire*

"MAYSVILLE!" called the conductor as the train slowed.

"Our stop, Owen," said Doctor Dale. We grasped our cases, Dale taking the black case that held the occult equipment he had brought; and as the train stopped, we stepped down in the bright October sunlight onto the platform of Maysville's small frame station.

"There's Henderson," said Doctor Dale, and I saw the tall, thin figure of the Maysville physician hastening toward us.

Henderson greeted us and led the way to his car. As we drove away from the station he told us, "You'll stay with me while here, of course."

"Thank you, doctor," Dale answered. "I'm anxious to get out to see these Raltons as soon as possible."

Doctor Henderson nodded. "After lunch we'll drive out there."

Maysville seemed a typical New York village, the main street that held its business blocks extending northward and southward into an avenue of old houses, mostly of stone. On the short side streets were smaller frame houses painted white.

West of Maysville we could glimpse rolling country that extended to the Catskills' dark wooded foot-hills. These ran north and south in a range some miles west of the village and had a forbidding wildness of appearance, but the rolling countryside between them and the village

was one of sleek fields dotted with the pretentious homes of large estates.

Doctor Henderson's own home proved a stone one of some size, presided over by a stout housekeeper. After we had lunched there and stowed our personal effects in the room Henderson designated, we set out with him and drove westward.

The countryside was even more idyllic at close range, with its well-kept fields, hedges bordering the roads, and stone gateways and lodges at the entrance of estates. The mellow October sunlight fell warmly on all. Henderson, though, was patently too nervous to appreciate the scene's beauty, and Dale was not observing it but looking thoughtfully toward the dark hills westward.

Henderson soon turned in from the road through an entrance beside which a stone lodge squatted. A winding driveway led through stately grounds with great trees toward the half-glimpsed gray-stone mass of a large building. This, the residence of James Ralton, was a stone mansion of semi-Gothic style impressive in its massiveness and size.

A few moments later, inside the luxuriously furnished mansion, Henderson was introducing us to James Ralton himself. He was a middle-aged man with gray-sprinkled dark hair and cultivated face, and with fine gray eyes that held a mixture of anxiety and relief as he shook hands with Doctor Dale and me.

"Doctor Dale, you can't know how glad I am that you and Mr. Owen are here," he said. "Henderson has told me enough about you to make me sure that if any one can stop this ghastly business you can."

"What is your own opinion of the business?" Dale asked him. "Doctor Henderson believes it a case of vampirism—do you also believe that?"

Ralton whitened. "Doctor Dale, I don't

know what to believe! Vampirism going on here seems so incredible, yet it does seem that my wife and now my daughter have been victims of such a hideous thing. Whether or not it is really vampirism that killed my poor wife and has now attacked Olivia, I am sure it is something of terrible nature. And I'll be eternally grateful if you can check it in my daughter's case."

Doctor Dale nodded. "I suppose we can see Miss Ralton now?"

"Of course," Ralton said. "This way. Virginia, my other daughter, has been staying today with Olivia."

He led the way up a broad formal stair with Doctor Dale, carrying his black case, and Henderson and I following. We passed along a wide-panelled hall on the second floor and into a spacious corner room quite evidently a girl's room.

A GIRL who had been sitting by the bed in the corner rose as we entered. She was under twenty and very pretty, with dark brown hair and the gray eyes of James Ralton. Ralton introduced her to us as his younger daughter, Virginia, and then went over with us to the bed in which lay another girl.

"My daughter Olivia," he said, looking down at her with a sort of anxious pride. "Doctor Dale and Mr. Owen, dear, who I told you were coming."

"The doctor that Hendy went to see in New York?" asked Olivia Ralton weakly. "I am so glad to see them."

I was shocked by Olivia Ralton's appearance. She was beautiful, her hair dark, eyes large and dark also, with semi-oval face. But it was a wasted beauty, her unnaturally white skin drawn too tightly over her bones, her eyes too tired and listless in expression.

There was on the dressing-table near her bed a large framed photograph of a

woman of middle age, sweet-faced and with dark hair and dark eyes like those of this girl. It was not hard to guess that the picture was of her dead mother, Al-lene Ralton.

Doctor Dale took a chair beside the bed. "Miss Ralton, I and Owen are here to help you," he told her, "to combat your illness."

"It doesn't seem really like an illness at all," she told him. "I just feel terribly weak lately, and without any real energy."

"When did you begin to feel this way?" Doctor Dale asked her.

Olivia's brow wrinkled. "About two or three days after mother's funeral, I think."

"Just what do you feel? Can't you describe it more fully?"

"Well," said Olivia Ralton hesitatingly, "when I wake some mornings I seem to feel weaker, as though part of my strength had gone somehow during the night."

Doctor Dale glanced significantly at Doctor Henderson and me, then turned back to the girl in the bed.

"Doctor Henderson has told me of certain marks on your throat," he said. "You'll not mind if I examine them a moment?"

Without waiting for her permission Dale deftly pulled back the silk coverlet, exposing Olivia Ralton's white neck. Upon it near the left side of the throat were two tiny red punctures, about two inches apart. Dale touched them gently, and we saw Olivia wince as he did so.

"When did you get these marks?" he asked. She shook her head.

"I don't know, doctor. I didn't even know I had them until Doctor Henderson saw them. Some insect must have bitten me."

"Tell me," said Doctor Dale, "have

you ever felt at night that something was fastening upon your throat, upon these marks?"

Olivia Ralton hesitated. "I've dreamed of something like that."

"What did you dream?" asked Dale.

"Why, it was just silly like most dreams. But I seemed to hear the dogs down at the lodge howling—they howl a good bit now at night for some reason. And perhaps hearing the dogs in my sleep made me dream of teeth, long sharp white ones. For I seemed to see such teeth coming down toward me, teeth and a bright red mouth from which came hot, bitter breath. I think there were red eyes somewhere there too, like those of an animal, and a sort of pain in my throat that hurt and yet was at the same time delightful."

"You've dreamed of that more than once?" Doctor Dale asked.

"Yes, isn't it silly? But somehow it made me feel bad—I know the mornings I felt worse were after I'd had nightmares like that."

Doctor Dale rose calmly, but with a gleam in his hazel eyes that I knew from experience to denote interior excitement.

"I think we can stop the nightmares for tonight," he told Olivia. "I've a sleeping-powder here that will stop them."

Dale placed a powder beside the water-carafe and glass on the night-table. Then with a few cheery words to Olivia, he terminated his visit, James Ralton and Henderson and I leaving the room with him, Virginia Ralton remaining with her sister.

We four passed downstairs, unspeaking. It was not until we had reached the library, a splendid room with tall book-rows and massive stone fireplace and mul-tioned windows, that James Ralton broke

the silence with an anxious question to Doctor Dale.

"WELL, doctor, what did you learn? Is it——"

"It is vampirism, yes," said Dale. "Ralton, beyond doubt your daughter's life and blood are being drained from her by a vampire, and it is certain that your dead wife died from the same thing."

"Allene victim of a vampire!" exclaimed James Ralton. "Good God, Dale, what are we to do? How can we protect Olivia from this horror?"

"We must know first what dead person is vampirizing her," Dale said. "Once we know that we can act. All vampires, though they can roam abroad at night in their hideous work, must lie from sunrise until sunset stiff and helpless in their coffins. When we have found who this vampire is we can go by day to its coffin and end its activities in the one way in which vampires can be destroyed, by driving through its heart a wooden stake and severing its head from its body. Then it will be truly dead and not one of the terrible dead-alive."

"But we don't know who this vampire may be that preyed on my wife and now on my daughter!" Ralton said. "And how can we find out?"

"We can find out," Doctor Dale said, "by lying hidden in Olivia's room tonight and waiting for the vampire to appear. Olivia will be unconscious from my sleeping-powder and will know nothing. If the vampire does visit Olivia again tonight we will be there and may be able to overcome it. But even if we can not, we will learn its identity and go by day to where its body lies and destroy it."

"Doctor Dale, I'll do it—I'll watch with you!" said James Ralton, his face pale but determined. "I rely on your ad-

vice, for in this terrible matter I'm entirely helpless."

"I'll watch with you too," Doctor Henderson said. "And we'll probably have a fifth, young Edward Harmon, who will be here."

"Olivia's fiancé?" Doctor Dale said. "That should make enough."

"Then you'll be staying for dinner here," Ralton said. "Of course we'll say nothing to Olivia or Virginia or the servants."

DINNER that evening was not very cheerful in the big and somewhat gloomy Ralton dining-room. All of us but Virginia Ralton were oppressed by the dreadful vigil ahead of us, and even she seemed rather subdued, no doubt by her mother's recent death.

Doctor Dale managed to carry on with her and James Ralton a certain amount of conversation, relative to Maysville and its people. I pricked up my ears when I heard the conversation touch on Gerritt Geisert, whom James Ralton knew and seemed to like.

He told Dale in answer to a question that he could not imagine why Gerritt Geisert lived out at his old place, the roads into the hills being long unused and almost forgotten, and he having no car. I gathered that Gerritt Geisert had been a caller welcomed by both Ralton and his dead wife.

Night had fallen when we left the dining-room. Virginia was upstairs with Olivia and we were in the library when Edward Harmon arrived.

Harmon was a tall, serious young fellow of thirty, his anxiety concerning Olivia Ralton very evident. He seemed more than a little disappointed when Virginia came down with word that Olivia was already sleeping under the influence of Doctor Dale's powder.

We carried on a desultory and somewhat nervous conversation until Virginia Ralton retired. When she had done so Edward Harmon turned to Doctor Dale at once with the question uppermost in his mind.

"Doctor Henderson told me what he suspected, doctor. Was he right?"

"You mean, is Olivia's case one of vampirism?" Dale asked. "It is, and we are going to begin fighting the vampire tonight."

Harmon listened intently as Doctor Dale explained our plan. "Then we're going to wait up there for this vampire? What if it doesn't come?"

"Then we'll wait tomorrow night and every night after until it does come," Dale said. "It's our best method of fighting it."

Harmon shook his head. "It's a ghastly business. But I'm with you in anything that will save Olivia from this hideous thing."

Dale looked at his watch. "I think we'd better get up and take our places in Olivia's room now," he said. "It's after ten, and Miss Virginia and most of the servants seem to have retired."

Doctor Dale, still carrying the black case he had brought from New York, led our silent little group as we started upstairs. The lights we snapped out behind us save for a few hall lamps, leaving most of the big house's first floor dark. The second floor also was dark and there was only dim moonlight in Olivia Ralton's room when we softly entered.

Doctor Dale looked quickly around. There were broad French windows in the room's northern and western sides, the northern window having a balcony outside. The bed on which Olivia Ralton lay in deep slumber was in the northwest corner, with its head against the western wall, there being a few yards of space between it and the northern window.

The darkness was deepest around the windowless south and east walls, and it was in the shadows there, at Doctor Dale's whispered directions, that we took our places. I was in the southeast corner with Dale at my right and James Ralton, Edward Harmon and Doctor Henderson at my left. Before crouching down in the shadows Doctor Dale took from his case two small crosses, one of which he handed me without comment.

In a whisper he impressed us with the necessity of making no move or sound until he gave the word. Then, crouching down in the shadows, we began our strange vigil. The only thing plainly visible in the room beside the moonlit windows in the north and western walls was the blur of white that was the bed in which Olivia Ralton lay sleeping.

Darkness and silence. I could just make out Doctor Dale's form as a deeper shade in the shadows to my right, and my other companions were as dimly visible at my left. The occasional scraping of a shoe showed me they were moving nervously, and I could hear the rapid breathing of James Ralton beside me, and of Henderson and Harmon beyond him. Somewhere downstairs a clock struck eleven with long, slow notes.

I found my thoughts on the girl sleeping in the bed, on Olivia Ralton and on her mother and all these Raltons stricken so suddenly by a visitation of evil. In the darkness that evil, that had taken the life of Allene Ralton and now was preying on Olivia, assumed darker, stronger proportions. What had Doctor Dale told me—that vampirism was terrible enough but that he feared here was vampirism more terrible?

RALTON started a little beside me as there came from below the long notes of the clock striking midnight. Silence was again descending upon the big

darkened house when it was broken again by a sound which startled all of us but Doctor Dale into betraying movements.

The sound was the howl of a dog, a long, quavering cry that came through the night half in anger and half in fear. At once two or three other dogs howled in the same way, a long, barking chorus that came strangely to our ears as we crouched in the sleeping girl's room. The howls changed rapidly into short barks, a furious barking that grew louder and louder.

"The dogs are barking at someone—something——" whispered James Ralton beside me.

Dale whispered swift warning: "Quiet now, above all!"

The dogs' barking reached a veritable frenzy, and then suddenly with a few panicky yelps they were silent. Their tumult was broken off as sharply as though by a blow, and the silence that followed seemed ten times more intense than before.

We had not long to wait. There was a soft sound from the balcony outside the north window, and my heart leapt uncontrollably as I saw out on that balcony an erect figure dimly visible in the moonlight. From Ralton's convulsive clutch on my wrist I knew he and the others had seen also.

The figure moved closer to the window and we could see that it was white-clad. It pressed its face against the window, peering into the dark room in whose shadows we crouched. We saw that face against the window clearly, and it was a woman's face—a face that would have been beautiful in a mature way had it not been distorted by a diabolic expression of cold cruelty. The face seemed somehow familiar to me, with its well-formed features and dark hair hanging loose around the shoulders. Against that dark hair this woman's face was deathly white.

W. T.—2

Her dark eyes as she peered in seemed filled with crimson light. Her lips were brilliant red in her dead-white face, parted enough to disclose the white teeth. She wore a single flowing white garment that I recognized with an unconscious shock as a shroud. She seemed not to see us in the dark room as she gazed in with crimson-lit eyes.

There came a choking whisper from James Ralton. "Good God, it's Allene! It's my wife!"

"Allene Ralton—Olivia's mother!" Doctor Henderson murmured dazedly. "And I pronounced her dead—she is dead!"

4. Gerritt Geisert

"**Q**UIET!" whispered Doctor Dale. "For God's sake make no sound!"

My brain seemed whirling as I clutched tighter the cross in my hand. This weird visitant of the night was, then, the dead mother of the girl sleeping here, the dead Allene Ralton! She who had died herself as a victim of vampirism, coming back from the dead by night to her daughter!

Allene Ralton's eyes had made out the sleeping girl on the bed and her face lit with unholy pleasure, a smile of gloating cruelty illumining her features as though flames of hell had suddenly flared high behind the alabaster mask of her face. With that gloating smile unchanged she reached up toward the outside window-handle.

The handle clicked and the window swung open. Allene Ralton stood in its opening clearly visible to our eyes, a white-shrouded shape as solid and real as any of us. Her eyes still red-lit, she glided from the window toward the head of the bed and bent over Olivia.

She seemed deliberately gloating over her daughter's sleeping form, bending

slowly down. Slowly Allene Ralton's red mouth approached the white uncovered neck of the girl, the brilliant lips forming a round red circle. I felt unbearable tension. Would Dale never act?

James Ralton, his self-control snapping, leapt to his feet beside me. "Allene!" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing?—why have you come back from the dead?"

With an unhuman screech of fear and anger Allene Ralton bounded back from the bed to the window-opening as Dale and I reached our feet.

"So you waited here to trap me?" she cried, her voice stabbingly shrill. "You fools! Fools, all of you!"

Ralton made as to leap toward her, but Doctor Dale grasped him, held him back. "Allene, it's I—it's James!" Ralton was crying madly. "What has made you come back? Let me go, Dale!"

"No, Ralton!" Dale cried. "Stay back—help hold him, Owen!"

Allene Ralton's laughter rang diabolically. "You need not hold him, I do not want *him!*" she mocked. "I and he whom I serve have better victims—see!"

She stretched her hand toward the bed, and Olivia Ralton, without waking, emerged from the bed and moved toward Allene as though called by irresistible forces.

Allene Ralton's eyes flared red in triumph. "She comes at my call! Come, dearest—it is your mother, Olivia—come with me——"

Doctor Dale sprang toward her, the cross extended in his hand. Allene Ralton's mocking smile vanished and she recoiled out onto the balcony as though struck by terrific forces.

"Allene!" screamed Ralton. "Don't go—Dale, don't——" He tumbled in a dead faint.

"She will be ours yet—will be one of

us yet!" screeched the thing that wore Allene Ralton's shape, in hellish fury. "One of us yet!"

With the words, as Doctor Dale advanced with his cross upon her, she whipped back out over the balcony. Dale and I rushed out after her, Henderson and Harmon lifting up Ralton.

Allene Ralton was gone from the balcony and we saw her white shape gliding off through the trees of the dark grounds. She looked back to see Dale and me on the balcony, her white face moved as though in devilish mirth, and then she was gone into the darkness.

DOCTOR DALE spun round and hastened back into the room, snapped on its lights. Olivia Ralton still stood sleeping by the side of her bed. Doctor Henderson and young Harmon were bringing James Ralton out of his faint, his horror-widened eyes gazing dazedly about.

He clutched Doctor Dale's arm. "It was Allene! What happened?—where did she go?"

"She has gone back for tonight, I think, to her coffin," said Doctor Dale grimly.

"To her coffin? Dale, she can't really be dead! She must have been living—yet she wasn't like Allene at all!"

A sudden thought struck him. "Dale, you don't think that Allene is the dead person you say has been vampirizing Olivia?"

"I know that she is!" Doctor Dale said. "Ralton, the vampire that has been sucking Olivia's blood is undoubtedly her own dead mother!"

"It can't be so!" cried James Ralton. "Dale, Allene was a saint on earth and she couldn't have become such a thing of evil as a vampire!"

"It is so!" Doctor Dale told him. "Ral-

ton, your wife died as the victim of a vampire. Now it is one thing known to be terrible truth that whoever dies from the sucking of his blood by a vampire, becomes by reason of that horrible transfusion, when he dies, a vampire himself.

"He may have been the most saintly of people while living, yet if he dies as a vampire's victim he will inevitably become a vampire himself when dead—will have in his coffin a horrible kind of corpse-life and will go forth by night for blood to sustain that life. Always, too, a vampire chooses its first victims from its own family. And that is what Allene Ralton, become a vampire after death, is doing."

"It's impossible!" cried James Ralton again. "Allene couldn't do such a thing! She'd have died gladly for Olivia and Virginia!"

"I do not doubt it," said Dale, "but that was while she was living, Ralton. Dead, she has become vampire and like all vampires is cruel and evil as a fiend. She will remain so until we end her vampire activities and make her one of the truly dead.

"And we must do that for Olivia's sake as well as for her own. For there is a tie now between her and her daughter whose blood she has sucked. You saw how she could command Olivia even in sleep. And if Olivia should die before Allene Ralton's vampire-life is brought to an end, Olivia too will become vampire!"

Dale turned from the stunned Ralton to Olivia, whom Henderson was helping back into bed, still sleeping. "She's all right for the present," he said after examining her, "and will know nothing of all this when she wakes in the morning. I think that you, Harmon, had best watch here with her for the rest of this night, however. And I will put protections here

for her that Allene Ralton can not pass if she dares come back again tonight."

Doctor Dale took from his black case a number of sprays of dirty-looking white blossoms with withered leaves, garlic flowers that he had procured before leaving New York. These he arranged over the door and window-frames, first locking the latter securely.

Dale even crushed some of the blossoms and rubbed them along the cracks of the window and door openings, and placed others around the head of Olivia Ralton's bed. Then leaving Edward Harmon seated beside the sleeping girl, with but one lamp glowing, we went downstairs.

WHEN we reached the library, James Ralton sank into a chair as though still stunned by what had taken place. Henderson stood with white face by the cheery blaze in the stone fireplace, while Doctor Dale faced us with features grave and determination in his hazel eyes.

"We have discovered the identity of the vampire preying on Olivia," he said, "and our next step is clear. That vampire must be destroyed—we must go tomorrow to Allene Ralton's tomb and do that."

James Ralton paled. "You mean to use what you said was the only way to destroy vampires, to——"

"To open the coffin and drive a wooden stake through the vampire's heart and cut off its head—yes!" said Dale.

"But to do that to Allene's body!" exclaimed Ralton. "I can't bear to think of her being mangled so."

"Would you rather her dead body retained the horrible corpse-life it has at present?" Doctor Dale asked him sternly. "Would you rather that she went forth from her coffin each night imbued with that life, preying upon her own daughter

and later perhaps on others? No, Ralton, your dead wife must be so treated, for only when we have done that to Allene Ralton's corpse will her vampirism cease. Then we will be free to attack the one behind this, the master vampire who first vampirized and killed Allene and who still is spreading evil here if——"

He froze suddenly, all four of us motionless as from outside came a heart-chilling sound. It was a sudden barking chorus from the dogs at the lodge, howls rising in a crescendo of fear and fury.

"The dogs!" exclaimed Henderson. "They're howling as when——"

"Upstairs, quick!" cried Doctor Dale. "Allene Ralton was here once tonight and may have come back!" We were hastening to the door, Ralton with us, when Smart, the butler, entered.

"A caller has just arrived, sir," he told James Ralton. "It is Mr. Gerritt Geisert."

"Gerritt Geisert!" Doctor Dale's exclamation was unconscious.

Relief showed on James Ralton's face. "Oh, Gerritt," he said. "It must have been he who stirred up the dogs coming in. Show him in."

Doctor Dale's eyes were narrowed, and my heart beat faster as we waited for Smart to bring in the caller. When he did so, James Ralton greeted him with outstretched hand.

"You're rather a late caller, Gerritt. And you gave us rather a scare just now."

"A scare?" repeated Gerritt Geisert softly. "How could I?—but I am very sorry if I did."

Gerritt Geisert, whom Doctor Dale and I were watching closely, was tall and almost bony, a commanding figure in dark clothes. His age would have been hard to guess. From his straight black hair and brows, his pallid white unwrinkled face and erect bearing, one might place him as not much over thirty. But

something in his commanding black eyes and in the expression of his features would have given pause.

There was about him, indeed, an atmosphere of immense experience and self-control and self-confidence. They were hinted in the high forehead, written plain in the long straight nose and pointed, saturnine chin, and almost too plain in the straight red line of the lips, straight almost to cruelty. His white skin was drawn tightly as though stretched over the bones of his face. The longer one watched, the less certain one became of his age but the more aware of his overmastering personality.

"I'm sorry if I gave any one a fright," he was saying in a soft, almost silky voice. "I was returning home late from the village, saw your place still lit up and thought I might drop in——"

"Oh, it's no fault of yours—it was just that you set the dogs at the lodge howling as you came in," said James Ralton nervously. "Let me introduce Doctor John Dale of New York, and Mr. Harley Owen, his assistant. They've come up to help Henderson in Olivia's case."

Gerritt Geisert bowed and it seemed to me that as he faced Dale his black eyes crossed and clashed Dale's hazel ones in sudden question and challenge. "How is Olivia?" he asked Ralton with the right touch of courteous solicitude. "Not worse, I trust?"

Ralton hesitated. "Not exactly," he said, "but her case has taken a strange turn and Henderson thought it advisable to have the help of Doctor Dale and Mr. Owen."

He turned to us. "I think I'll go up for a moment to make sure she's all right—I'd feel easier after what just happened. You won't mind for a moment, Gerritt? Or you, Doctor Dale?"

"Of course not," said Dale, Gerritt Geisert bowing agreement.

Ralton went out and we heard him ascending the stairs.

ATENSENESS seemed somehow to drop upon the library as he left. Gerritt Geisert was standing near the fireplace, regarding Doctor Dale and Henderson and me with a smile that had hidden mockery in it.

"I shouldn't think," said Doctor Henderson to Geisert, "that you'd care much about walking back out through those lonely hills this late."

"I do not mind," Gerritt Geisert smiled, "though it is true that my ancestral mansion is rather isolated."

"I've heard quite a bit about it," Dale told him, "and about you."

"What could you have heard about me?" Geisert asked smilingly. "I'm just a rather indolent student leading a half-hermit existence."

"I've been told that," Doctor Dale said. "But part of what I heard or rather read was about a different Gerritt Geisert than yourself."

"A different Gerritt Geisert?" repeated Geisert, his black brows drawing together. "Whom do you mean?"

"I mean the Gerritt Geisert who almost two hundred years ago had to flee this region as a wizard of a particularly diabolical kind," Dale told him. "When Doctor Henderson mentioned your name I remembered that."

Geisert's black eyes were not smiling now, but deadly. "So you know about that?" he said ominously. "Well, what of it? I am not proud of having that wizard Gerritt Geisert as my ancestor and namesake, but one can not choose one's ancestors."

"Then he was your ancestor and namesake?" Doctor Dale said. "But how is it

there is no mention of that Gerritt Geisert having descendants?"

"Dale, what are you getting at?" asked Henderson bewilderedly. "You're surely not questioning Mr. Geisert's identity, are you?"

"It does not matter—I have no objection to answering him," said Gerritt Geisert contemptuously. "My remote ancestor Gerritt Geisert, who left this region two centuries ago under charges of wizardry, went to another part of the country, married and left descendants, of whom I am the last. The deeds of the old Geisert estate here were passed down in the family and I came back here with them and took possession."

"That explains everything nicely, of course," said Doctor Dale. "Yet there is another explanation that would fit as well."

"And what is that?" asked Geisert with sinister softness.

"It is that you are not the descendant of that ancient Gerritt Geisert at all, but are that same Gerritt Geisert yourself!"

Geisert's eyes flared momentarily redder and then he laughed softly. "Doctor Dale," he said, "you do not flatter my appearance when you accuse me of living two hundred years."

"I did not mean," said Doctor Dale softly in turn, "that you have been *living* for those two hundred years."

The shaft of bitter meaning in his words went home through Gerritt Geisert's mocking mirth, and his eyes flamed hell-crimson again.

"So *that* is what you think?" he snarled. "I know now—you're no mere medical specialist Henderson brought here!"

"I am a specialist," said Doctor Dale, slowly, biting. "A specialist in combating and in destroying evil!"

Gerritt Geisert retreated a step. His white face was diabolical, twisted in in-

fernal wrath, his eyes blazing scarlet with fury as he and Doctor Dale faced each other. And Doctor Dale's own hazel eyes were flaming with purpose.

I had risen to my feet and Doctor Henderson was staring amazedly at the two, but Geisert and Dale ignored both of us. Geisert had stepped back into shadow, and the shadow seemed somehow thickening about him.

"And what have you, the specialist in evil, discovered since you came here?" he asked Dale sneeringly.

"I've discovered that Olivia Ralton is the victim of a vampire," Doctor Dale told him steadily, "as was her mother, Allene Ralton."

Gerritt Geisert shook his head mockingly. "Victims of vampirism? It sounds too mediæval, doctor, really."

"It is only too real," said Dale, "but I am going to stop it by destroying the vampire master who has loosed that black evil here."

"And who can that vampire master be?" asked Gerritt Geisert, moving almost imperceptibly sidewise. "I take it that you know?"

"Yes, I know, and what is more you know too!" Doctor Dale exclaimed; "know that the dead-alive master vampire who has come back from the past to wreak hideous evil here again is—*help, Owen!*"

Gerritt Geisert had sprung toward Doctor Dale in a flashing leap that took him across the room with flying shadows about him that seemed in the firelight like monstrous wings! His eyes were flaming crimson, his sharp teeth gleaming, as Dale went down beneath his rush. He seemed seeking Dale's throat with his teeth.

But at Dale's warning cry I had leapt forward, jerking my pistol from my coat-pocket and levelling it at Geisert. It

roared twice as I pulled trigger, but though its muzzle was but a few feet from Gerritt Geisert's side he seemed unaffected by the shots. He flung Dale back with terrific force, and with a snarling cry of rage leapt and seized me.

His grip was rib-crushing, his eyes gleaming red like those of a mad animal, his bitter offensive breath almost overpowering me as his teeth swiftly sought my throat. I felt sudden giddiness as the sharp teeth touched my throat, heard amazed cries from James Ralton and Edward Harmon as they dashed into the room, then glimpsed Doctor Dale staggering up and extending toward us the cross from his pocket.

Gerritt Geisert was knocked loose from me as though by a terrific blow from the cross. He was hurled back against the library windows, that jarred open from the impact. For a moment he stood thus against the outer darkness, a diabolical rage on his face, his eyes blazing hell-red in that white mask, dark cloak wide like great black wings behind him.

"So you have found out so much!" he cried furiously to Doctor Dale. "Then find out this also, that you creatures of a day can match me neither in strength nor in craft! Allene Ralton was mine and is mine, do you hear? So shall Olivia be mine and hers, and so shall you all one by one, and others after you, come beneath my mastery!"

In a flash he was gone into the darkness outside. There was a mad tumult of frenzied barking from the dogs at the lodge.

"After him!" I cried, leapt to the window and Edward Harmon with me, but Doctor Dale grasped and held us back.

"No, Owen!" he exclaimed. "We'd be helpless out there against him—he was too strong for us even here!"

"Geisert—Gerritt Geisert!" James Ralton was exclaiming. "Then he is the——"

"He is the vampire master who has loosed this curse of vampirism here, yes!" Doctor Dale said. "He is the Gerritt Geisert who plagued this region as a vampire two hundred years ago, who fled then to escape destruction and who now has come back to begin his unholy work again!"

"Gerritt Geisert the vampire master!" cried the white-faced Henderson. "Then he was the one who preyed on Allene?"

"You heard him boast it," Doctor Dale said. "After being forced to flee from here two hundred years ago, Geisert must have lived in many parts of the world, lying by day in his coffin, which he could transport from place to place at night, and going forth by night to suck the blood of his victims. Now he has come back here, to vampirize this region again!"

"His coffin he probably placed in the old Geisert house you told me of, or in one of the other old untenanted houses back in those hills. There he has lain by day in death-like state but by night has been free to move, coming openly into the village or visiting his victims by stealth. Allene Ralton was first of those victims, and when she died as a vampire's victim and became vampire herself she came back to prey on Olivia, the circle of evil thus expanding endlessly outward from the vampire master, Gerritt Geisert!"

"But now that we know he's the master vampire we can go out by day and search for his body to destroy it!" cried Edward Harmon.

Doctor Dale shook his head. "Not yet! Our first task must be to end Allene Ralton's vampire activities by using stake and steel upon her body. That will release her from the dead-alive and halt her preying upon Olivia. Once that is done we can attack Gerritt Geisert himself."

He turned to Ralton. "Have you still any objections to us using the methods I described on your dead wife's body?"

"No, I can't have any objections now," groaned James Ralton. "Anything that will release Allene from that terrible state and save Olivia——"

"Very well," said Doctor Dale swiftly. "Tomorrow morning, then, we'll go to the cemetery and use the stake and knife on Allene Ralton's body. Once she is truly dead we can attack Gerritt Geisert and destroy or try to destroy him."

"Until then, say nothing of the truth to any one. The law can not help us in this, nor can mere numbers, and the fewer who know, the better. It is on our own knowledge and powers we must rely to defeat Geisert's two-centuries experience of evil and his powers, and——"

He was interrupted by the sudden hurried entrance of Virginia Ralton in hastily donned negligee.

"Dad, what happened?" she cried. "I heard shots and cries—and the dogs all barking——"

"There, Virginia, it's all right," James Ralton told her, his arm about her. "A gun was fired accidentally and we had some excitement, but nothing to worry about. Run back up to bed."

When she was gone, Ralton turned to Doctor Dale, his white face tragic. "Dale, we can stop this horror can't we? We can overcome Geisert before he makes more innocent people into hell-fiends like himself?"

Doctor Dale's face was grave. "I do not know," he said. "We face here an embodiment of evil stronger and more terrible than any I have ever before faced. Whether that evil may prove too strong for me and for all of us—I do not know."

Don't miss next month's thrilling installment, about bodies that walked and carried their coffins with them.

HAVANA failed to restore me. Haiti was a black horror, a repellent quagmire of menacing shadows and alien deso-

lation, and in Martinique I did not get a single hour of undisturbed sleep in my room at the hotel.

The Cat-Woman

By M. E. COUNSELMAN

A brief and unusual tale of anthropomorphism

THE first I heard of the strange Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche (I shall call her this as I can not remember her real name) was that incoherent, absurd tale told me by the landlady.

"She ain't like us," the old lady insisted, glancing fearfully over her shoulder and speaking in a low tone. "A furriner, she is, and a quare one! I don't like the looks of 'er. Them eyes of hers are full of evil!"

I suppressed a smile. "Oh now, Mrs. Bates—not that bad, is she?" I said soothingly. "And you say she lives right across the hall from me, huh? I'm looking forward to meeting the lady."

"You'll come to no good, Mr. Harper, if you have any truck with the likes o' her!" the old lady warned, and waddled off, shaking her head slowly.

It was not until the second night after moving into Bates Boarding House that I really saw the lady. I had come in rather late from a show and was fumbling with my door-key, when a slight noise behind me caused me to turn quickly and straighten up.

A woman, a tall and beautifully formed woman, stood in the half-open doorway

across from mine. She was very fair, with a straight ash-blond bob that fitted close to her head. There was something about her—I could not place it, unless it was her perfectly round green eyes—that reminded me immediately of a cat.

I swept off my hat with an unwonted nervousness, and murmured some sort of apology for disturbing her. She did not answer me at all, but merely stood there staring at me in the dimly lighted hall with those large cat-like eyes. I opened my mouth to speak again, closed it foolishly, and turned, red with discomfiture, to fumble again with my lock.

Suddenly behind me I heard a gentle but quite audible "pr-rrr" like the whir of an electric fan, though not as loud. Glancing over my shoulder I noticed that the strange woman had gone back into her room, although she must have moved very quietly for me not to have heard her.

In her half-open door stood a large white cat, and it was its purring which I had noticed.

"Hello, kitty!" I murmured, holding out a hand.

The animal seemed very friendly, for it came to me at once and rubbed against

my legs, still purring loudly. I petted it a moment, then unlocking my door at last, I stepped inside, closed the door, and switched on my light. Glancing down I found that the cat had slipped in while I was not looking.

Scratching its head in a way cats love, I carried it across the hall and knocked timidly. There was no answer. I knocked again, then twice more, loudly. Still there was no answer. The lady must be out, or perhaps asleep, I told myself; and opening the door slightly I put the cat inside and shut it within. Then I returned to my room and went to bed.

I was wakened some hours later by something heavy on my feet. Sitting up and feeling about the covers, I touched something warm and furry. I switched on the bed lamp quickly, to find the white cat curled up contentedly on my feet. It must have come in through the window. Smiling slightly I went back to sleep, promising myself to return it to my queer neighbor in the morning.

EARLY the next day I knocked at the door, and receiving no answer put the cat inside as on the previous night. It was not until I was leaving for the office that I noticed with a start that all my windows were closed, as they must have been all night. I was sure, too, that my door had been locked against a chance thief. How, then, had the white cat gained admittance?

I was still wondering about this when I came home from the office. Mrs. Bates was dusting the stairs, and I paused a moment to speak to her. She mentioned again my queer neighbor, warning me to "keep shy" of her.

I smiled. "I saw her last night coming out of her door. Good-looking, isn't she?" The landlady shook her head ominously and cast her eyes toward heaven. "And she has a beautiful white cat," I added.

Mrs. Bates stiffened. "Cat?" she snapped. "I don't allow no pets kept in the boarders' rooms! I'll have to speak to her about that."

The front door opened just at this point and my strange neighbor came in. I was impressed once more with her odd beauty, the *feline* grace in her every motion. The word came inevitably to my mind—she reminded me so much of a sleek, well-fed cat.

"I'm told you keep a cat in your room, miss," began the landlady unpleasantly. "I thought you knew the rule——"

Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche turned her round green eyes upon Mrs. Bates in that disturbing unwinking stare of hers. "I haf no cat," she said.

Her voice was a purring, throaty contralto, very pleasant, with a slight accent—not French, not anything I had ever heard.

The landlady scowled. "But Mr. Harper here just tells me——"

"I'm sorry," I broke in hastily. "It must have been a stray cat. I saw it in your doorway, and naturally I thought——" I floundered helplessly. That fixed green stare made me forget what I was trying to say.

"It iss all r-right," she murmured, and went upstairs to her room without another word. I followed suit in a moment; and there in the open door she stood as if waiting for me, motionless, silent, fixing me with her unwinking eyes.

"I'm terribly sorry," I began again, trying not to meet that disconcerting cat-like gaze. "You see, I put the cat——"

Suddenly she moved toward me, closing her eyes slightly like a pleased cat—and to my utter consternation, rubbed her head gently against my shoulder!

My first thought was that this was merely an amusing trick of a clever street-

woman, the advances of a *fille de joie* a little less blatant than those of her boldly dressed, loud-voiced sisters.

Then suddenly the feeling swept over me like a cold draft that she was not a woman at all, that she was not even a mortal—*that she was a cat!*

Moreover, as I drew myself away from her and entered my room queerly shaken, I could have sworn I heard, from the depths of that pale throat, the purring of a cat!

I strode across the room and stood a moment staring out the window, trying to collect my scattered wits, when I felt something rubbing against my ankle. It was the white cat, arching its furry back and purring loudly.

I was in no mood just then for anything resembling a cat, but its gentle wiles won me in spite of myself and I began playing with it. I rolled a ball of cord across the room and the animal bounded after it, tapping it playfully. Soon I had forgotten my upsetting encounter with Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche and was having quite a time with my furry visitor, when our romp was interrupted by a rap on my door and a familiar call, announcing Mrs. Bates.

As she came in, her smile vanished. "Oh, this is your white cat, eh? I never liked the critters. . . . Scat!"

As the animal crouched motionless with fear, the old lady seized it quickly by the scruff of its neck and dropped it from my window into the muddy alley below. "There! Maybe it'll go away now."

She talked for a moment, collected her rent, and was standing in my open door for a parting word, when beyond her in the hall I saw Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche.

She was strangely disheveled and spattered with mud; and she was directing

upon the landlady's back such a look of concentrated hate that I shivered. Only a moment she stood thus; then she had disappeared into her room.

Next morning at breakfast (I ate alone, as I had to leave earlier than the other boarders) I noticed that Mrs. Bates' face was all but hidden behind a network of adhesive plaster, and bright red spots of mercurochrome.

"Why . . . why, what's the matter with your face?" I asked with concern as she served my breakfast.

"A cat got in my room last night," she wailed. "That big white one, it was! It jumped on me in bed and scratched me up terrible afore I could chase it out. I tried to kill it with the broom, but it got away. I never did like a cat . . . mean critters, they are! . . ." She prattled on until I left for the office.

IT WAS two days later that I saw Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche again. I confess I had avoided her in the hall; and as our meal hours were different, we had no occasion to meet. But on this afternoon she was standing in her door as usual, watching me as I came down the hall. Sensing that she was likely to repeat her disconcerting cat-caress, I nodded curtly and went straight into my room, stumbling over something soft as I did so.

There was the white cat again, purring and rubbing against my legs affectionately. Something impelled me to glance back where the woman across the hall had been standing, with an uncanny knowledge that she was there no longer.

She was gone.

I shut my door with a creepy feeling, which the pranks of the white cat soon dispelled, however. We played together for a while, when our romp was again interrupted by the voice and knock of Mrs. Bates.

The cat seemed to know it was she, for it fluffed up its long fur and hissed angrily. Then it turned as if frightened and leaped out of the open window. It was a second-story window—not a pleasant jump, even for a cat. I glanced down to see if the animal had landed safely—just in time to see a huge mongrel dash down the alley and pounce upon my unfortunate pet.

The cat fought furiously, but it had not a chance against the big dog. I saw the mongrel snap twice at my little friend, heard the kitten give an odd cry of anguish—a cry that sounded far more human than feline. A moment later, Mrs. Bates and I saw the limp, blood-spattered form of the white cat lying very still in the muddy alley.

And somehow, it has always seemed to me something more than a mere coincidence that on that very day Mademoiselle Chatte-Blanche disappeared mysteriously as smoke, without a word of farewell—and, as Mrs. Bates reiterated plaintively, without even paying her rent. And strangely, she left behind all her personal belongings (from which Mrs. Bates managed to collect slightly more than her rent, though she would never have admitted it). All her clothes, hats, shoes, toilet articles, every little personal belonging, our lady left behind her . . . and an absurd thing the landlady remarked upon at length curiously: a foolish plaything fond old maids fashion for their cats—a small worsted mouse stuffed with catnip.

The Ultimate Word

By MARION DOYLE

Always there has been something not quite said:
 Something that sunlight sifted down through leaves,
 Starlight on water, and the echoes shed
 From slow rain's whisper in deserted eaves
 Tried to interpret in my slower tongue. . . .

Once, long ago—oh, very long ago—
 Before the world was old, and I was young,
 I *almost* grasped the Word in flakes of snow,
 In fireflies like golden spangles flung
 Across a dancer's twilight-colored hair,
 In spider-webs miraculously strung
 With a gnome-king's ransom in the morning air. . . .

But that was long ago—oh, long ago—
 Before the world was old, and I was young.



THAT weird novel of the hidden land beyond the Arabian desert, *Golden Blood* by Jack Williamson, continues to score heavily in the letters that flow to the editor's desk.

Writes E. Irvine Haines, from Long Island, New York: "In Jack Williamson you have discovered an author of great promise. His *Golden Blood* is one of the best stories of its kind that I have ever read, bar none. He is graphic in his descriptions, vivid in narrative, and writes with a dash and vigor that is certainly entertaining. I do not agree with many of your readers as to the attractiveness of your covers at present. The appearance of nude females gives the impression that WEIRD TALES is sexy and trashy, in my opinion, whereas its stories are anything but that. As to interplanetary stories: one now and then is well enough, but too many, like the old proverb about the cooks, spoil the broth. I never get tired of reading Seabury Quinn's fine stories. He has made personalities out of Jules de Grandin and Doctor Trowbridge, just as Conan Doyle did with Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson. A real good ghost story, of which there have been very few of late, would be welcome. Variety, after all, is the spice of life. Having read WEIRD TALES since its early days, I want to congratulate you on the splendid progress this fascinating magazine has made during the past two years—this in a period of depression when many magazines have fallen by the wayside. To read WEIRD TALES is as refreshing as a glass of cold, sparkling spring water to a thirsty traveler. I only wish the magazine were a weekly."

Here is a word about our covers, from Lionel Dilbeck, of Wichita, Kansas: "I intend to read WEIRD TALES as long as I live or as long as the magazine is published, if you keep up the kind of stories you have always published," he writes in a letter to the Eyrie. "But whatever you do, do not continue to disgrace the magazine with naked women as you did in the June and July issues. If you think that the readers want them, have them vote on it. Personally I prefer any kind of monster that it is possible to think of rather than the sexy covers you have been having. And I really hate to tear the covers off the magazine, as that also spoils the looks of them."

"I have been reading WEIRD TALES for as long as I can remember," writes Mascal K. Perkins, of Chicago. "It certainly has improved in recent years. I like Brundage's cover on the August issue very much. As to the stories, first place should go to Seabury Quinn for *The Chosen of Vishnu*; second place to *The Supe-*

rior Judge by J. Paul Suter. Third place I give to *A Pair of Swords* by Carl Jacobi, which, though short, was one of the finest little stories you have ever printed."

A letter from T. J. Tucker, of Lindale, Georgia, says: "Your August issue was splendid. Especially good were *Dead Men Walk*, *The Vampire Airplane*, and *The Chosen of Vishnu*. Some readers do not like scientific stories in your magazine. Well, here's one that does. Give us more of them. The scientific stories and weird tales can be combined and still be imaginative. Keep publishing stories as good as those in the August issue, and keep up the serials. *Golden Blood* is especially good. There is one thing that I do not like your magazine for, and that is: it is not published often enough. I can hardly wait for my copy every month."

Alexander Ostrow, of New York City, gives us a sidelight on H. P. Lovecraft. "I have just finished reading your August number," he writes to the Eyrie. "All the stories were so equally excellent that I hesitate to cast my favorite stories ballot. In all the time that I have been reading WEIRD TALES I have never cast a ballot for the same reason, although when Howard Philip Lovecraft appears in any issue, there is no question as to which story is *the* best. Your readers might be interested in knowing that not only is Lovecraft a master of weird fiction, but that he is also an authority on Shakespeare. I have in my possession and have seen elsewhere a variety of essays on the works of Shakespeare written by Mr. Lovecraft when he was active in the affairs of the National Amateur Press Association."

"Please reprint in your reprint department only stories from back issues of WEIRD TALES," writes Charles Bert, of Philadelphia. "I would like to see the reprint question definitely settled for ever."

Here is another comment on our covers. This one comes from Duane W. Rimel, of Asotin, Washington.: "I have just read about the praise bestowed upon M. Brundage for his cover designs. I would like to add my vote in favor of them also. But why not laud J. Allen St. John? His illustrations seem to just fit fantastic literature, especially those of *Buccaneers of Venus*. His crayon sketches now appearing at the first of each installment of *Golden Blood* strike me as being singularly impressive. I am still a great fan of your magazine and I intend to continue being so. With the 'swell' stories one can't help being a bit enthusiastic."

"My business keeps me traveling continually from one side of the country to the other but I always find time to buy a copy of WEIRD TALES," writes E. R. Davey to the Eyrie. "I have read your magazine in California and Iowa and in many other states. On several occasions I have been tempted to drive to the next town when I find it impossible to obtain a copy in the burg I'm in. My favorite authors are Clark Ashton Smith, Hugh B. Cave, Robert E. Howard and Carl Jacobi. Jacobi's *Revelations in Black* is the greatest story of its kind since *Dracula*. The author shows his versatility in the little 'short-short' story in the August issue. *A Pair of Swords* was a mighty clever little weird tale and was beautifully written. As for the science type of story: I vote for one story of this kind in each issue. I suggest you use for your reprint department the Russian story, *The Red Laugh* by Leonid Andreyev."

Carl Belknap of Corpus Christi, Texas, writes to the Eyrie: "Ever since 1924 I have read every issue of WEIRD TALES, and as do most constant readers of any magazine, found and followed my favorite authors. Two men made the greatest impression on my mind in those days: Whitehead and Lovecraft. Today I find Robert E. Howard's type of yarn has an almost irresistible appeal. There is a quality about

his style or his approach that lifts something dead out of the reader's mind and replaces it with an exhilarating alcohol."

"Robert E. Howard gets better and better," writes H. J. Ervine, of Coleman, Texas. "Let's have a story by him in every issue of WEIRD TALES."

Robert E. Howard's stories have become so popular with the readers of WEIRD TALES and the MAGIC CARPET Magazine that a brickbat aimed at his stories is an extreme rarity. But here is a whole truckload of brickbats, flung by Sylvia Bennett, of Detroit, who writes to the Eyrie: "Will Robert E. Howard ever cease writing his infernal stories of 'red battles' and 'fierce warfare'? I am becoming weary of his continuous butchery and slaughter. After I finish reading one of his gory stories I feel as if I am soaked with blood. The first few of these kind of tales were mighty fine and truly exciting, well written and slightly weird. But apparently the 'hits' they proved to be gave Mr. Howard the mistaken idea that the readers would be weirdly thrilled month after month by his excessive slaughter. This last Howard concoction, *Black Colossus*, I dozed all through while reading it, and when I finished, it was with a feeling of 'at last the darned thing ends.' Now if Mr. Howard would write more stories like his *Red Shadows*, *Skulls in the Stars*, *Skull-Face*, *The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune*, and *Wings in the Night*, he would restore his old-time prestige which he has lost by turning out such bunk as *Black Colossus* and *The Tower of the Elephant*. Solomon Kane, next to Jules de Grandin, is my favorite character in WEIRD TALES. If Mr. Howard would incorporate Solomon Kane into his stories, instead of using this lousy, heroic Conan stuff, he would again find himself perched near the top of WEIRD TALES' outstanding authors instead of slipping swiftly away into oblivion as he surely is doing by turning out his present type of work. So all I dislike about WEIRD TALES is Howard's Conan, and Hamilton's *Interstellar Patrol*."

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes to the Eyrie: "I found the August issue of WEIRD TALES a mighty good one. *Golden Blood* can not be given too much praise. Page after absorbing page the reader is carried through what is Jack Williamson's greatest piece of work. It certainly is good news that you have more stories by him on hand. *Dead Men Walk*, although not as good as *The House of the Living Dead*, is an excellent tale. Harold Ward surely knows his stuff when it comes to writing weird and weird-science stories. I like the soft tone of M. Brundage's covers. They are as real-looking as photographs. Jayem Wilcox probably didn't do it intentionally, when he drew the illustrations for the August issue: but did you notice the position of the hero's right hand in *The Owl*?"

A letter from M. P. Tuteur, of Toronto, Canada, says: "I have taken your magazine since the first number, and have often wished to write you a letter of thanks, because it is really the only magazine which, since the war, I have been able to obtain any pleasure from; as ordinary magazines, after having seen war service, are pretty tame. I take this opportunity of thanking you for the many hours of pleasure that your publication has given me, and would say in particular that your number of last July was the finest issue I have yet read."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? In our August issue, Seabury Quinn's *The Chosen of Vishnu* was tied with the August installment of Jack Williamson's serial, *Golden Blood*, for first place in your affections, as shown by your votes and letters.

My favorite stories in the October WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1) -----	-----
(2) -----	-----
(3) -----	-----

I do not like the following stories:

(1) -----	Why? -----
(2) -----	-----

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:



The Festival*

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

"Efficiunt daemones, ut quae non sunt, sic tamen quasi sint, conspicienda hominibus exhibeant."—Lactantius.

I WAS far from home, and the spell of the eastern sea was upon me. In the twilight I heard it pounding on the rocks, and I knew it lay just over the hill where the twisting willows writhed against the clearing sky and the first stars

of evening. And because my fathers had called me to the old town beyond, I pushed on through the shallow, new-fallen snow along the road that soared lonely up to where Aldebaran twinkled among the trees; on toward the very ancient town I had never seen but often dreamed of.

It was the Yuletide, which men call

* From WEIRD TALES for January, 1925.

Christmas, though they know in their hearts it is older than Bethlehem and Babylon, older than Memphis and mankind. It was the Yuletide, and I had come at last to the ancient sea town where my people had dwelt and kept festival in the elder time when festival was forbidden; where also they had commanded their sons to keep festival once every century, that the memory of primal secrets might not be forgotten. Mine were an old people, old even when this land was settled three hundred years before. And they were strange, because they had come as dark, furtive folk from opiate southern gardens of orchids, and spoken another tongue before they learnt the tongue of the blue-eyed fishers. And now they were scattered, and shared only the rituals of mysteries that none living could understand. I was the only one who came back that night to the old fishing town as legend bade, for only the poor and the lonely remember.

Then beyond the hill's crest I saw Kingsport outspread frostily in the gloaming; snowy Kingsport with its ancient vanes and steeples, ridgepoles and chimneypots, wharves and small bridges, willow trees and graveyards; endless labyrinths of steep, narrow, crooked streets, and dizzy church-crowned central peak that time durst not touch; ceaseless mazes of colonial houses piled and scattered at all angles and levels like a child's disordered blocks; antiquity hovering on gray wings over winter-whitened gables and gambrel roofs; fanlights and small-paned windows one by one gleaming out in the cold dusk to join Orion and the archaic stars. And against the rotting wharves the sea pounded; the secretive, immemorial sea out of which the people had come in the elder time.

Beside the road at its crest a still higher summit rose, bleak and wind-swept, and I

saw that it was a burying-ground where black gravestones stuck ghoulishly through the snow like the decayed fingernails of a gigantic corpse. The printless road was very lonely, and sometimes I thought I heard a distant horrible creaking as of a gibbet in the wind. They had hanged four kinsmen of mine for witchcraft in 1692, but I did not know just where.

As the road wound down the seaward slope I listened for the merry sounds of a village at evening, but did not hear them. Then I thought of the season, and felt that these old Puritan folk might well have Christmas customs strange to me, and full of silent hearthside prayer. So after that I did not listen for merriment or look for wayfarers, but kept on down past the hushed, lighted farmhouses and shadowy stone walls to where the signs of ancient shops and sea taverns creaked in the salt breeze, and the grotesque knockers of pillared doorways glistened along deserted, unpaved lanes in the light of little, curtained windows.

I had seen maps of the town, and knew where to find the home of my people. It was told that I should be known and welcomed, for village legend lives long; so I hastened through Back Street to Circle Court, and across the fresh snow on the one full flagstone pavement in the town, to where Green Lane leads off behind the Market House. The old maps still held good, and I had no trouble; though at Arkham they must have lied when they said the trolleys ran to this place, since I saw not a wire overhead. Snow would have hid the rails in any case. I was glad I had chosen to walk, for the white village had seemed very beautiful from the hill; and now I was eager to knock at the door of my people, the seventh house on the left in Green

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Coming Next Month

THE priest's high forehead was beaded with sweat. Pierre's lean dark features were drawn. He muttered to himself as he calculated. The tension was heightening. At first I thought that it was the suppressed excitement of realizing that victory was around the corner. I sat clutching the arms of my chair, just as one watching men heaving at a heavy weight will contract his muscles in sympathy. Then I saw my error, and realized that it was not impending victory but the redoubled efforts of the Master that made the room vibrant with energy.

A mist was gathering and thickening the air. It swirled in eddies, and wraiths like wisps emerged from the corners. They were closing slowly in on the table. The lights were dimming. I could now look at the hundred-watt bulb and see its filament very clearly, so much was its incandescence obscured by the density of the air. Along the walls and in the shadows were shapes of spectral gray: vague blots whose quivering and twitching suggested monstrous forms seeking to assume substance.

We were walled in. The table was now an island in a fog-shrouded sea. The forms that lurked in the shadows were becoming more distinct. I could distinguish tall, bearded men with solemn faces. They regarded us menacingly, and rhythmically gestured toward us.

D'Artois, despairing but grim, thrust his chair aside as he rose.

"Look at them!" he cried as with a sweep of his arm he indicated the ever-shifting, weaving fog wisps and the silent presences that they but half obscured. "They have projected their *selves* into space to seek us, and their thought-force to beat us! We know all but the ultimate secret. And that we can not get. We are lost, unless——"

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Lane, with an ancient peaked roof and jutting second story, all built before 1650.

There were lights inside the house when I came upon it, and I saw from the diamond window-panes that it must have been kept very close to its antique state. The upper part overhung the narrow, grass-grown street and nearly met the overhanging part of the house opposite, so that I was almost in a tunnel, with the low stone doorstep wholly free from snow. There was no sidewalk, but many houses had high doors reached by double flights of steps with iron railings. It was an odd scene, and because I was strange to New England I had never known its like before. Though it pleased me, I would have relished it better if there had been footprints in the snow, and people in the streets, and a few windows without drawn curtains.

WHEN I sounded the archaic iron knocker I was half afraid. Some fear had been gathering in me, perhaps because of the strangeness of my heritage, and the bleakness of the evening, and the queerness of the silence in that aged town of curious customs. And when my knock was answered I was fully afraid, because I had not heard any footsteps before the door creaked open. But I was not afraid long, for the gowned, slippers old man in the doorway had a bland face that reassured me; and though he made signs that he was dumb, he wrote a quaint and ancient welcome with the stylus and wax tablet he carried.

He beckoned me into a low, candle-lit room with massive exposed rafters and dark, stiff, sparse furniture of the Seventeenth Century. The past was vivid there, for not an attribute was missing. There was a cavernous fireplace and a spinning-wheel at which a bent old woman in loose wrapper and deep poke-bonnet sat

back toward me, silently spinning despite the festive season. An infinite dampness seemed upon the place, and I marveled that no fire should be blazing. The high-backed settle faced the row of curtained windows at the left, and seemed to be occupied, though I was not sure. I did not like everything about what I saw, and felt again the fear I had had. This fear grew stronger from what had before lessened it, for the more I looked at the old man's bland face, the more its very blandness terrified me. The eyes never moved, and the skin was too like wax. Finally I was sure it was not a face at all, but a fiendishly cunning mask. But the flabby hands, curiously gloved, wrote genially on the tablet and told me I must wait a while before I could be led to the place of festival.

Pointing to a chair, table, and pile of books, the old man now left the room; and when I sat down to read I saw that the books were hoary and moldy, and that they included old Morryster's wild *Marvells of Science*, the terrible *Saducismus Triumphatus* of Joseph Glanvil, published in 1681, the shocking *Dæmonolatrea* of Remigius, printed in 1595 at Lyons, and worst of all, the unmentionable *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, in Olaus Wormius' forbidden Latin translation: a book which I had never seen, but of which I had heard monstrous things whispered. No one spoke to me, but I could hear the creaking of signs in the wind outside, and the whir of the wheel as the bonneted old woman continued her silent spinning, spinning.

I thought the room and the books and the people very morbid and disquieting, but because an old tradition of my father's had summoned me to strange feastings, I resolved to expect queer things. So I tried to read, and soon became trembling-

ly absorbed by something I found in that accursed *Necronomicon*; a thought and a legend too hideous for sanity or consciousness. But I disliked it when I fancied I heard the closing of one of the windows that the settle faced, as if it had been stealthily opened. It had seemed to follow a whirring that was not of the old woman's spinning-wheel. This was not much, though, for the old woman was spinning very hard, and the aged clock had been striking. After that I lost the feeling that there were persons on the settle, and was reading intently and shudderingly when the old man came back booted and dressed in a loose antique costume, and sat down on that very bench, so that I could not see him. It was certainly nervous waiting, and the blasphemous book in my hands made it doubly so. When eleven struck, however, the old man stood up, glided to a massive carved chest in a corner, and got two hooded cloaks, one of which he donned, and the other of which he draped round the old woman, who was ceasing her monotonous spinning. Then they both started for the outer door; the woman lamely creeping, and the old man, after picking up the very book I had been reading, beckoning me as he drew his hood over that unmoving face or mask.

WE WENT out into the moonless and tortuous network of that incredibly ancient town; went out as the lights in the curtained windows disappeared one by one, and the Dog Star leered at the throng of cowed, cloaked figures that poured silently from every doorway and formed monstrous processions up this street and that, past the creaking signs and antediluvian gables, the thatched roofs and the diamond-paned windows; threading precipitous lanes where decaying houses overlapped and crumbled

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together, gliding across open courts and churchyards where the bobbing lanthorns made eldritch drunken constellations.

Amid these hushed throngs I followed my voiceless guides; jostled by elbows that seemed preternaturally soft, and pressed by chests and stomachs that seemed abnormally pulpy; but seeing never a face and hearing never a word. Up, up, up, the eery columns slithered, and I saw that all the travelers were converging as they flowed near a sort of focus of crazy alleys at the top of a high hill in the center of the town, where perched a great white church. I had seen it from the road's crest when I looked at Kingsport in the new dusk, and it had made me shiver because Aldebaran had seemed to balance itself a moment on the ghostly spire.

There was an open space around the church; partly a churchyard with spectral shafts, and partly a half-paved square swept nearly bare of snow by the wind, and lined with unwholesomely archaic houses having peaked roofs and overhanging gables. Death-fires danced over the tombs, revealing gruesome vistas, though queerly failing to cast any shadows. Past the churchyard, where there were no houses, I could see over the hill's summit and watch the glimmer of stars on the harbor, though the town was invisible in the dark. Only once in a while a lanthorn bobbed horribly through serpentine alleys on its way to overtake the throng that was now slipping speechlessly into the church.

I waited till the crowd had oozed into the black doorway, and till all the stragglers had followed. The old man was pulling at my sleeve, but I was determined to be the last. Then finally I went, the sinister man and the old spinning woman before me. Crossing the threshold

into that swarming temple of unknown darkness, I turned once to look at the outside world as the churchyard phosphorescence cast a sickly glow on the hilltop pavement. And as I did so I shuddered. For though the wind had not left much snow, a few patches did remain on the path near the door; and in that fleeting backward look it seemed to my troubled eye that they bore no mark of passing feet, not even mine.

The church was scarce lighted by all the lanthorns that had entered it, for most of the throng had already vanished. They had streamed up the aisle between the high white pews to the trap-door of the vaults which yawned loathsomely open just before the pulpit, and were now squirming noiselessly in. I followed dumbly down the footworn steps and into the dank, suffocating crypt. The tail of that sinuous line of night-marchers seemed very horrible, and as I saw them wriggling into a venerable tomb they seemed more horrible still. Then I noticed that the tomb's floor had an aperture down which the throng was sliding, and in a moment we were all descending an ominous staircase of rough-hewn stone; a narrow spiral staircase damp and peculiarly odorous, that wound endlessly down into the bowels of the hill, past monotonous walls of dripping stone blocks and crumbling mortar. It was a silent, shocking descent, and I observed after a horrible interval that the walls and steps were changing in nature, as if chiseled out of the solid rock. What mainly troubled me was that the myriad footfalls made no sound and set up no echoes.

After more eons of descent I saw some side passages or burrows leading from unknown recesses of blackness to this shaft of nighted mystery. Soon they became excessively numerous, like impious cata-

combs of nameless menace; and their pungent odor of decay grew quite unbearable. I knew we must have passed down through the mountain and beneath the earth of Kingsport itself, and I shivered that a town should be so aged and maggoty with subterranean evil.

Then I saw the lurid shimmering of pale light, and heard the insidious lapping of sunless waters. Again I shivered, for I did not like the things that the night had brought, and wished bitterly that no forefather had summoned me to this primal rite. As the steps and the passage grew broader, I heard another sound, the thin, whining mockery of a feeble flute; and suddenly there spread out before me the boundless vista of an inner world—a vast fungous shore litten by a belching column of sick greenish flame and washed by a wide oily river that flowed from abysses frightful and unsuspected to join the blackest gulfs of immemorial ocean.

FAINTING and gasping, I looked at that unhallowed Erebus of titan toadstools, leprous fire and slimy water, and saw the cloaked throngs forming a semicircle around the blazing pillar. It was the Yule-rite, older than man and fated to survive him; the primal rite of the solstice and of spring's promise beyond the snows; the rite of fire and evergreen, light and music. And in that Stygian grotto I saw them do the rite, and adore the sick pillar of flame, and throw into the water handfuls gouged out of the viscous vegetation which glittered green in the chlorotic glare. I saw this, and I saw something amorously squatted far away from the light, piping noisomely on a flute; and as the thing piped I thought I heard noxious muffled flutterings in the fetid darkness where I could not see. But what frightened me most was that flam-

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ing column; spouting volcanically from depths profound and inconceivable, casting no shadows as healthy flame should, and coating the nitrous stone above with a nasty, venomous verdigris. For in all that seething combustion no warmth lay, but only the clamminess of death and corruption.

The man who had brought me now squirmed to a point directly beside the hideous flame, and made stiff ceremonial motions to the semicircle he faced. At certain stages of the ritual they did groveling obeisance, especially when he held above his head that abhorrent *Necronomicon* he had taken with him; and I shared all the obeisances because I had been summoned to this festival by the writings of my forefathers. Then the old man made a signal to the half-seen flute-player in the darkness, which player thereupon changed its feeble drone to a scarce louder drone in another key; precipitating as it did so a horror unthinkable and unexpected. At this horror I sank nearly to the lichened earth, transfixed with a dread not of this nor any world, but only of the mad spaces between the stars.

Out of the unimaginable blackness beyond the gangrenous glare of that cold flame, out of the tartarean leagues through which that oily river rolled uncanny, unheard, and unsuspected, there flopped rhythmically a horde of tame, trained, hybrid winged things that no sound eye could ever wholly grasp, or sound brain ever wholly remember. They were not altogether crows, nor moles, nor buzzards, nor ants, nor vampire bats, nor decomposed human beings, but something I can not and must not recall. They flopped limply along, half with their webbed feet and half with their membranous wings; and as they reached the throng of celebrants the cowed figures

seized and mounted them, and rode off one by one along the reaches of that unlighted river, into pits and galleries of panic where poison springs feed frightful and undiscoverable cataracts.

The old spinning woman had gone with the throng, and the old man remained only because I had refused when he motioned me to seize an animal and ride like the rest. I saw when I staggered to my feet that the amorphous flute-player had rolled out of sight, but that two of the beasts were patiently standing by. As I hung back, the old man produced his stylus and tablet and wrote that he was the true deputy of my fathers' who had founded the Yule worship in this ancient place; that it had been decreed I should come back; and that the most secret mysteries were yet to be performed. He wrote this in a very ancient hand, and when I still hesitated he pulled from his loose robe a seal ring and a watch, both with my family arms, to prove that he was what he said. But it was a hideous proof, because I knew from old papers that that watch had been buried with my great-great-great-grandfather in 1698.

Presently the old man drew back his hood and pointed to the family resemblance in his face, but I only shuddered, because I was sure that the face was merely a devilish waxen mask. The flopping animals were now scratching restlessly at the lichens, and I saw that the old man was nearly as restless himself. When one of the things began to waddle and edge away, he turned quickly to stop it; so that the suddenness of his motion dislodged the waxen mask from what should have been his head. And then, because that nightmare's position barred me from the stone staircase down which we had come, I flung myself into the oily underground river that bubbled somewhere to the caves of the sea; flung myself into that putres-

cent juice of earth's inner horrors before the madness of my screams could bring down upon me all the charnel legions these pest-gulfs might conceal.

AT THE hospital they told me I had been found half-frozen in Kingsport Harbor at dawn, clinging to the drifting spar that accident sent to save me. They told me I had taken the wrong fork of the hill road the night before, and fallen over the cliffs at Orange Point—a thing they deduced from prints found in the snow. There was nothing I could say, because everything was wrong. Everything was wrong, with the broad window showing a sea of roofs in which only about one in five was ancient, and the sound of trolleys and motors in the streets below. They insisted that this was Kingsport, and I could not deny it.

When I went delirious at hearing that the hospital stood near the old churchyard on Central Hill, they sent me to St. Mary's Hospital in Arkham, where I could have better care. I liked it there, for the doctors were broad-minded, and even lent me their influence in obtaining the carefully sheltered copy of Alhazred's objectionable *Necronomicon* from the library of Miskatonic University. They said something about a "psychosis", and agreed that I had better get any harassing obsessions off my mind.

So I read again that hideous chapter, and shuddered doubly because it was indeed not new to me. I had seen it before, let footprints tell what they might; and where it was I had seen it were best forgotten. There was no one—in waking hours—who could remind me of it; but my dreams are filled with terror, because of phrases I dare not quote. I dare quote only one paragraph, put into such English

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as I can make from the awkward Low Latin.

"The nethermost caverns," wrote the mad Arab, "are not for the fathoming of eyes that see; for their marvels are strange and terrific. Cursed the ground where dead thoughts live new and oddly bodied, and evil the mind that is held by no head. Wisely did Ibn Schacabac say, that happy is the tomb where no wizard hath lain, and happy the town at night whose wizards are all in ashes. For it is of old rumor that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but fats and instructs *the very worm that gnaws*; till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are dugged where earth's pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl."

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