

THE BEST WEBZINE FOR SCI-FI, FANTASY, AND HORROR!

Schlock!

WEBZINE

VOL. 14, ISSUE 2
9TH DECEMBER 2018

DONOVAN STREET

BY A TOREN
*A DOOR
SLAMMED...*

I WANT TO GO HOME!!!

BY
CHRISTOPHER
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SCREAMIES...

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REVIEW
BY JOHN C
ADAMS

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SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Edited by
Gavin Chappell

PUBLISHED BY:
Schlock! Publications
(www.schlock.co.uk)

Schlock! Webzine

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Christopher T Dabrowski, Gregory KH Bryant, Rob Bliss, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, A Merritt*

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Welcome to Schlock! the webzine for science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

Vol. 14, Issue 2
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Schlock! is a weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels, and novellas, within the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of new pulp fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

For details of previous editions, please go to the [website](#).

Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to editor@schlock.co.uk. We will also review published and self-published novels. Please contact the editor at the above email address for further details.

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This Edition

This week's cover illustration is *Screenshot of the trailer for Godzilla: The Game (2014)* by [Bandai Namco Entertainment America](#). Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

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EDITORIAL

This week, three men make a classic mistake. Katie goes for a walk to get away from her argumentative parents, and succeeds beyond her wildest dreams. And Lou is followed by a strange gentleman.

John C Adams returns with a review of two horror anthologies. Spanky the Gay Vampire is having a ball. Turhan Mot presents a prisoner to Horst Dal. A prehistoric monster rampages across a terrified city in our last instalment of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. And Yolará tempts Larry.

—Gavin Chappell

Now out from Rogue Planet Press: [*Schlock Quarterly Volume 3, Issue 6.*](#)



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IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

By Vincent Davis



"IN A WORD, I FEEL ABSOLUTELY ROTTEN DOC."

Vincent is an artist who has consistently been on assignment in the art world for over twenty years. Throughout his career he has acquired a toolbox of diverse skills (from freehand drawing to digital design, t-shirt designer to muralist). His styles range from the wildly abstract to pulp style comics.

In 2013, his work in END TIMES won an award in the Best Horror Anthology category for that year. When Vincent is not at his drawing board he can be found in the classroom teaching cartooning and illustration to his students at Westchester Community College in Valhalla NY.

He lives in Mamaroneck NY with his wife Jennie and dog Skip.

<https://www.freelanced.com/vincentdavis>

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DONOVAN STREET by A Toren

Donovan Street was like most streets except for number 17, the three floor town house and the secrets within. The three men stood on the street on looked across the overgrown garden towards the dilapidated house.

“Remember when we nearly did this as kids?” said Mark.

Jake looked at his two friends with a frown, “Yeah, you two ran pissed yourselves and ran. I tripped and you left me!”

Iain laughed. “We went to get help.”

“Which never came.”

“We have to go in,” Iain said.

Jack knew Iain was right. They had all made the bet, but still, it seemed the best thing to do would be to walk back up the street and forget it. Iain slapped his hand on Jack’s shoulder. “Come on, it’s only a house. Nothing will happen.”

Jack’s mind raced as he looked to Mark. If nothing was going to happen, he would rather nothing would happen in the comfort of his own house; not in this poor excuse for a building with its overgrown garden and half boarded up windows. So they agreed that they would stay here tonight. What difference would it make?

“Fine,” Jack moved towards the front door, “let’s just get it over with.”

Iain and Mark followed Jack through the undergrowth. The door would be locked anyway. They would not be able to get in, and they could go home and Jack was happy with that. It was a stupid bet. Jack didn’t know the truth about this place, maybe no one did anymore. The three men stood at the front door with the street obscured by foliage behind them.

“Go on Jack.” Iain nudged him towards the door.

Jack gripped the handle and turned it, scarred it would break, afraid it would be locked but terrified that it would open, which it did. Jack almost lost his grip on the handle as it swung open into the empty hallway. The passageway extended to the back of the house where Jack saw the kitchen. The stairway stood to the left of the door. There was another door to the right which must have led to the front room. Further down the hallway two other doors lead to other rooms. Jack had stepped into the house; Mark and Iain were only a few steps behind.

“We need to go to the top floor.” Iain pointed to the darkness up the stairwell.

“Why?” Jack turned as he spoke.

“Because that’s where the ghost lives.” Mark made a pathetic attempt at a scary noise.

Jack thought the first floor was unremarkable. At the far end of the first floor landing stood the second set of stairs to the so-called haunted room.

“Can you believe that there have been ten deaths in the last sixty years?” Iain’s voice began to grate on Jack, he didn’t even think it was true. Yet none of them wanted to venture much further into the darkness, even Jack felt his legs begin to solidify.

“It’s supposed to be a woman. The ghost I mean,” Iain said.

“Why does she kill people here?” Mark lit the way with his flash-light phone app. Iain continued as they walked, “She was killed here by a jealous lover for marrying.”

Jack chuckled; *it’s never just a jerk. Why did there always have to be a story?*

“You know I grew up not far from here, I never heard about anything ever happening here.” Jack couldn’t believe that he was still involved.

They were in the top room. It was unremarkable with chipped paint walls and an exposed wooden floor. The ceiling was sloped at both sides matching the descent of the roof. A single window stood in the centre of the wall overlooking Donovan Street. Orange streetlight flooded the room through what must have been the only intact window in the house. Jack leaned against the banister, he thought better of it when it creaked.

“So,” Jack looked around, “we sleep here tonight then?”

Mark and Iain nodded.

Jack couldn’t figure how Iain was snoring already, at least there was still rustles of movement from Mark. It was no good; Jack sat up and looked round the orange dim room. Jack got up and walked towards the window. He heard Mark stir again. Jack saw in the street stood three figures huddled together, frozen in the light. Jack watched them for a few seconds in silence.

“You okay, Jack?” Mark’s voice shattered the frosty silence. Jack jumped from the window and spun round crashing into Mark. He reached out to steady himself against the wall. The silence returned with only subtle snores from Iain.

“Mark,” Jack chuckled, “I couldn’t sleep, and there are some people outside.”

Mark moved towards the window, “Who is out there?”

Jack gazed back outside to an empty street, “I guess they moved on, probably just looking at the infamous house.”

Mark laughed, “They probably thought you were a ghost and bolted.”

“Jesus!” Iain stumbled across the floor. Mark and Jack ran towards him.

“Where did she go?” Iain looked around.

Jack knelt down next to Iain, “who?”

“The woman, she was there!” Iain said.

“You were dreaming! There’s no one here.” Jack said.

“No, you were laughing, she was stood over me!”

The stairs creaked. The three men looked towards the stairs. Footsteps. Someone was running out of the house. Jack stood up. It was no ghost, someone was here. Jack jumped to the stairs to catch a glimpse of the intruder, but there was no one. Jack looked towards Iain and Mark, “Come on.”

“Are you insane?” Iain stood up.

“It’s not a ghost; someone is trying to scare us.”

A door slammed.

“There were people outside; it will be one of them.”

“Or it could be a psychopath.” Mark said.

“Or the murderous ghost?”

“Fine, you two can stay up here by yourselves while I go and be a hero, maybe that’s what the ghost likes to do, separate us all and take us out one by one?”

Mark and Iain looked at each other.

“Of course if both of you are too scared...” Jack stood at the top of the stairs.

“Okay, let’s go and check—together.”

The three of them walked downstairs. Jack lit his phone to show the degraded walls. They walked past the bedroom doors on the first floor, “I think they are in one of these. I didn’t hear them go any further down.”

“In here.” Jack placed his hand on the door handle and looked at Iain and Mark. The three of them nodded to each other. Jack twisted the handle and pushed the door open; he saw Iain and Mark in his peripheral vision look over his shoulder. He looked into the darkness shining his

light into the corners revealing nothing but a repugnant room, the smell of fetid damp rot filled his nose. Jack coughed and closed the door. He turned to Mark and Iain.

“Where is Mark?”

Iain looked around, “He was here. Mark?”

Only Iain’s dulled echo answered them. The two men looked up and down the short landing. There was no sign of Mark, not a single piece of evidence of a struggle or of Mark having ever been there. Jack pushed the next door open, “Mark?”

He flashed his light again into the new room, empty. He turned back to an empty corridor. “Iain?”

Silence. Alone.

There was only one more door on this floor to open. The handle was broken; Jack pushed the door opened without resistance.

“Hello, Jack. It’s been too long.”

Jack did not need his light in this room; the walls were decorated, wood panelling along the lower half and flock wallpaper dressed the top. The floor had a deep carpet, covered with a table in the centre surrounded by five chairs. One was occupied.

A lady with long hair draped down her shoulders. Her face was locked in an eternal half-smile, stared into Jack’s. He turned his light off. Across the walls were six lights, they looked like gas lamps to Jack. “Who are you?”

She looked away towards one of the empty chairs. Jack knew they would be comfortable.

“Sit.”

Jack did not move. “Where are my friends?”

She only answered with silence and her frozen face staring back at him.

Jack thought about his options, he knew he could overpower her if he needed to. He moved towards and sat in the chair waiting for her to speak.

“Why are you here, Jack?”

“We have a bet to stay here.”

“That is a reason, but it is not the reason that you are truly here. Why are you here, Jack?”

Jack did not know the answer to the question, nor did he care to play games, “Where are my friends?”

“They are not here.”

“You have looked after this room, but left the rest of the house to decay. You live here?”

“I have done nothing. Why this place?”

“Supposedly it is haunted by a ghost, people have died and vanished. “

“Your friends have vanished, so that part is true. Do you not see me as this ghost?”

“I don’t believe in ghosts,” Jack shook his head, “I think this is an elaborate. I don’t know why.”

Jack stood up. The lady jumped up, slammed her fists on the table, “This is no mere house!”

Jack fell back and hit the floor, the carpet was gone, and the table and chairs vanished in the darkness. Jack scrambled for his phone to light the room. It had transformed and was now just like the last two. He scrambled to the hallway, get his phone and dialling.

He held it to his ear until someone answered, “What emergency service do you require?”

“Police please.”

There was a pause, a click, “I’m sorry, sir. The police are unavailable at the moment. Can I help you, sir?”

Jack lowered his phone. He dashed to the stairs tripping on the second step falling to the bottom. His phone landed next to him still connected, “Hello sir, do you require an ambulance?”

Jack rubbed his head and disconnected his phone. He found Mark’s number and dialled. But Jack could not hear it ring. He tried Iain’s number with the same result. Jack looked round, he was on the first floor at the bottom of the stairs leading to the top room, he should have been on the ground floor, how had he ended up here? His phone rang, he answered without looking at the caller ID, “Mark? Iain?”

“I’m sorry, they aren’t available at the moment; can I be of assistance, sir?”

“Go to hell!”

As he hung up he thought he heard the voice agree. He climbed the stairs to the top room. At the window were two figures in the darkness. Jack shined his light towards them only to see them fade. The forms reappeared, unmoved in the darkness as he moved the light. They were featureless human shadows, stood where they had all been not so long ago. Jack ran back down to the hallway. It was different; there was no stairs down, only walls. The window was the only

way. He climbed back, the shades were gone, but the window remained. A clatter from the hallway froze Jack for a second as he put his hands on the fragile glass. He kicked part of the banister and got a hefty wooden club to hand. He didn't think twice before he swung it at the window.

The glass shattered. Jack was motionless only for a moment before he clambered out of the window and hung there and let himself drop. He did his best to roll when he landed but the knife like pain that shot through his left leg told him he had failed. He limped his way through the garden and out into the orange shrouded street. He dialled his phone, "Which emergency service do you require?"

"Police, ambulance..."

"Yes sir, which address?"

"Donovan Street."

"I'm sorry, sir? Where?"

"Hello? Donovan Street. Please."

Jack tripped and landed not on the cold wet tarmac as expected, but on the wooden floor of the top room. He saw down between the planks, a vast leather like creature moved, he sprang away and sat. The window was fine and the banister was still in one piece. His phone rang. Jack could not clear the fog in his mind. Another ring. He screamed and clawed at himself as he cried, a second scream and a third ring. Forth. Fifth. His mind was empty. Sixth, Jack answered, "Yes?"

"May I be of assistance, sir?"

"Let me go."

"I'm sorry, sir; I don't understand. May I be of assistance?"

"What do you want?"

"You, sir. Go to where you met the lady."

"Who is she?"

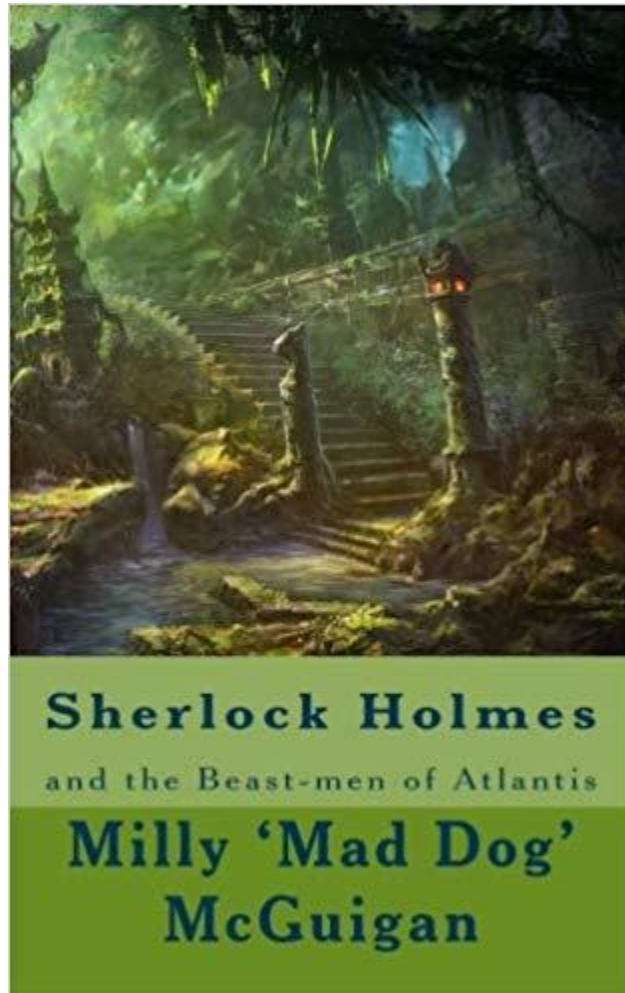
"I'm sorry sir; I do not understand. May I be of assistance?"

"I need to leave?"

"You have always wanted to leave, sir."

The line went dead, and Jack found himself at the door to the lady's room. A dim light emanated from the edge of the frame, the stairs were still non-existent. It seemed to Jack that his only choice now was the door and the games that the lady wanted to play. He opened the door.

THE END



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I WANT TO GO HOME!!! by Christopher T Dabrowski (translated by Monika Olasek)

‘Are you really that dumb? When will you finally see the truth?!’ An angry male voice was roaring. ‘How can you be so stupid and believe all those lies. They want to sell us out!’

‘Oh, God, they are fighting over the stupid politics,’ sighted little Katie with regret. ‘They could end this already, their quarrels won’t change anything,’ she thought because she was really smart for her six years of age.

She hated politics and politicians, because those adults were really very dumb and it was their fault that the parents are fighting every day; if only she could, she would scare them out and they would run for cover!

She took a sheet of paper and wrote with lopsided, printed letters:

‘I’m going for a walk because I can’t listen to your screamies!!!’

Quietly, she opened the door and walked out. She looked back. At the entrance door there was a small metal board with a white, stylized signing: “J. & M. Mathews”; a bit higher there were numbers indicating the number of their apartment—13.

Maybe this really is bad luck—wondered Katie, sucking her thumb. She turned around and started running down the stairs; there was no point in taking the elevator—she lived on a mere fourth floor.

When she jumped out from a cool staircase, she was hit by a wave of heat. The summer was extremely hot.

Nobody wants to have a sun-strokie—she thought—but I am too small to have a strokie. Never mind the heat, as long as she doesn’t have to listen to those terrible yelling and abuse!

The sun was burning like hell, the streets were completely solitude—even the birds hid somewhere.

From behind the apartment house a pair of young, smiling people emerged, with a little, happy girl between them; a happy family. Watching the idyllic picture, Katie thought about how horrible her parents were.

‘Sometimes I wish they were gone!’ She puffed with anger. ‘The hell with them!’

The air trembled with heat; the passers-by disappeared behind the neighbouring apartment house. She picked a piece of a little branch from a bush growing nearby. She was just about to bend and draw ornaments on heated asphalt when she felt terrible cold—just as if she suddenly landed on the North Pole. She felt as if a thousand of sharp icy needles got stuck in her body. She screamed. The strange feeling disappeared as quickly and unexpectedly, as it occurred.

She sat on the curb, shocked.

‘Maybe I’m ill and had an attack of temperature?’ she thought, recovering from the shock.

She remembered that mummy once said to her: ‘When you are ill, you have to lie in bed, because if you are not in bed, the evil bacteria will come and do you harm’ (for example a light headache can turn into a savage pain).

She decided she would not take the risk and it would better to listen to that quarrel, than suffer from headache and the unavoidable yelling.

She entered the staircase. She decided to take the elevator—going up the fourth floor is not the same as running down—especially when you are ill, right?

She pressed the “4” button. In her imagination she could see the swarms of bloodthirsty, vicious bacteria; the same as in that terrible advertisement of disinfection liquid for toilets! She shuddered with disgust.

Getting out on her floor, she noticed, that something is slightly different—as if a bit strange. She glimpsed at the wall—everything was correct; ‘Ms Elevator is never wrong and will always take you to the proper floor, you just need to know which button to push,’ her grandma once said and until now it had always worked.

She looked around, a bit nervous. The floor seemed different. Was grandma wrong? Was it possible that Ms Elevator was not always right? But the number on the wall is correct!

‘Never mind, I must have hallucinationy from my illness,’ she decided and went to the door that looked as usual. Painted with grey paint, with a thirteen on it; even the board looked the same.

Katie pushed the door handle.

It was closed.

Why did they close the door if they knew I went out? Maybe the paper has fallen down?

‘Woopsie daisies!’ she murmured. ‘How will I get inside now? I am far too small to reach the bell’ she worried.

She decided to jump and press the bell—who knows, maybe it will work?

After two failures she acknowledged the fact that this way she won’t succeed.

‘Maybe it is not polite, but you asked for it, I’m very ill and have no choice,’ she started banging at the door with all of her might.

A strange lady opened the door.

‘What do you want, little girl?’ She tried to be nice, but she didn’t seem that way.

‘What are you doing here... in my home, huh?!’ The woman seemed at least puzzled by this question. ‘Who let you in? Are you a burglar?!’

‘Child, you must be mistaken; this is not your home. You must be on the wrong floor.’

‘I... I...’ her voice started trembling because without any doubt this lady was a bad burglar and Katie decided she has to do something about it! ‘I live here! I’m calling the police and they will lock you in!’ She turned around and ran down the stairs leaving the burglar surprised.

When she ran outside, she had no idea where to look for the policemen.

‘Well, well!’ She got angry. ‘They are never around when you need them!’

Then she came up with a brilliant idea—I have a mobile, I can call my mum!

She took out the phone and for a while was looking for the right number. Then some lady answered the phone, with a surprisingly squeaky voice.

‘Mummy?’ Katie whispered, uncertain.

‘You’ve got the wrong number,’ the woman squeaked and hanged up.

Katie checked the number once again, hoping that she had misdialled, but the number was okay—it was signed “Mummy”.

Oh—she got scared—oh no! I wanted them gone; I said the hell with my parents!

Her eyes filled with tears, little mouth trembled.

‘I am sorry, dear God,’ she said with a shaking voice. ‘I will do anything, but please do something so that I can have my parents back... and my home.’

Nothing happened.

She sat on the curb and started weeping.

Suddenly she felt a terrible cold—just as a few minutes ago—her teeth started to chatter.

Just as before, the terrible phenomenon was over within a few seconds.

So I am not ill! This is the way that God makes our wishes come true!—She smiled, wiping the tears away.

‘Hurrah! I’m going home!’ She cried out and run to the staircase. She had so much energy, that she didn’t even want to wait for Ms Elevator—she run upstairs taking two stairs at a time. Breathless, but happy she got to the right floor.

This time everything was normal, no changes were visible. She didn’t even care that the door was locked.

‘I forgive you!’ she cried out and she started banging at the door, never minding the consequences.

When the door opened, she saw her mum.

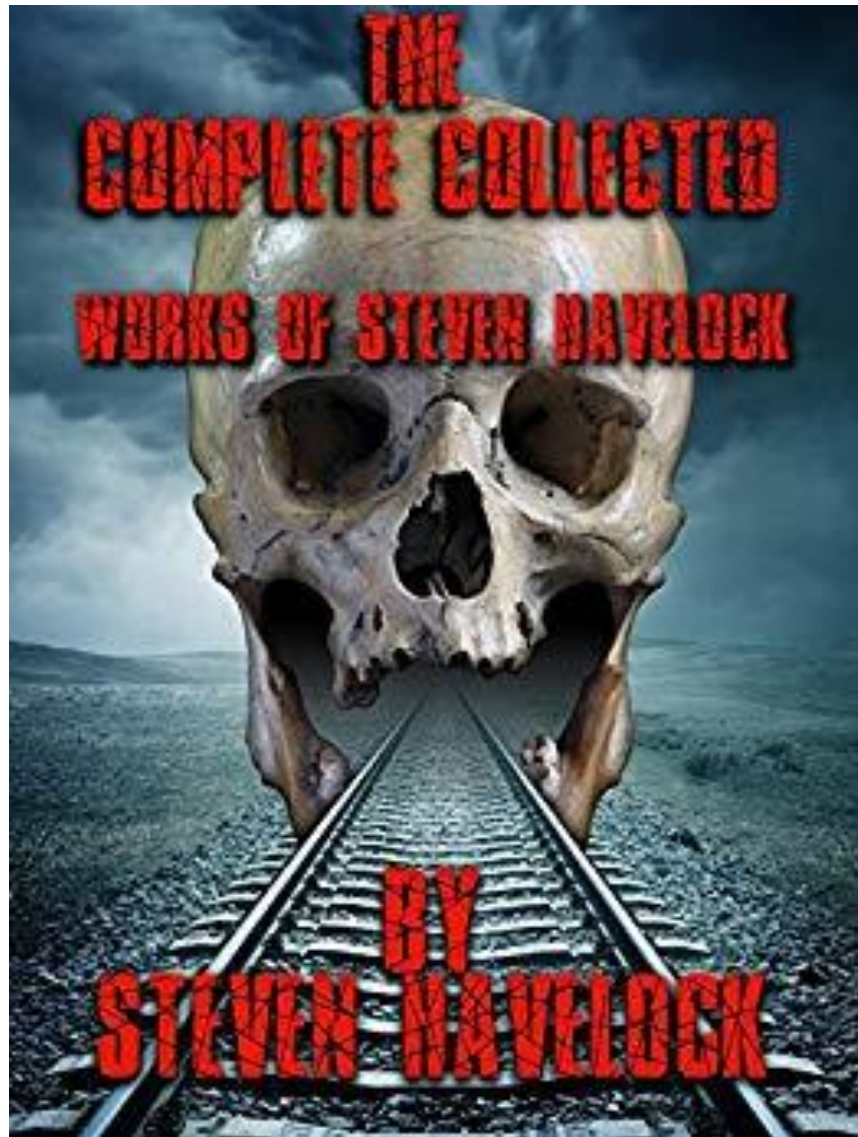
The mum knitted her brows and asked, with surprise in her tone:

‘Who are you, little girl? And what do you want from us?’

‘Mummy, it is me, Katie!’

‘Girl, you are wrong. I don’t have a daughter, I have a son, Patrick’—she said, caressing the hair of a corpulent, very surprised boy.

THE END



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THE GENTLEMAN by JL Corbett

On the day it began, I was running late. Or rather my train was running late, and I was its impatient hostage. When it finally juddered into Peterborough station I ran from the platform to the footbridge to the exit barriers, where I fumbled with my ticket and almost tripped over a small Yorkshire terrier that was being forcefully led through the barriers by a particularly grouchy pensioner.

By the time I burst from the station's exit into the crisp, December air I was convinced that I had missed the rail replacement service and would be forced to fester away the rest of my Sunday in the nothingness of East Anglia. Luckily for me, Britain's bus services are just as unreliable as its railway services; the coach was still outside the train station with a queue of tired passengers waiting by the door.

"Excuse me," I said, breathlessly, "are you waiting for the bus to Victoria?"

The last person in the queue turned around and smiled when he saw me. "I'm afraid so," he said with a droll smile. "Although why they've stuck us on this bloody thing instead of a train, I'll never understand."

His words were long and flat, possibly from the East End at one point but not for many years. He was wearing a fabulously tailored tweed suit, navy and pinstriped (and probably a touch too fashionable for a man of his age), and a matching trilby with a small brown feather tucked into the band. His scraggly beard had been dyed the same shade of blue as his eyeliner, both of which looked jarringly haphazard in contrast to his smart outfit. His smile turned my stomach.

"Thanks," I said and took out my phone, thus marking the end of our interaction.

The man in blue kept talking. He discussed the weather, the public transport system, the price of taxi cabs and the depressing reality of life outside of London before the queue finally began to move and I could feign distraction from his monologue.

The coach was as I'd expected it to be; cramped, musty and devoid of personal space. I spied a free double seat towards the back and made a beeline for it, only to sense a heavy figure drop into the seat next to me.

"Well, hello again!" the man in blue chirped, as though he'd sat beside me quite by accident.

"Hi," I mumbled. I told myself that all the other seats were most likely taken, perhaps the man hadn't had any choice but to sit next to me. He'd probably use the two-hour journey to get some rest.

He did not. He told me stories from "the war", of days spent surviving the heat and rain in the West Indies, of fighting through yellow fever only to be abandoned by his battalion when he proved too weak to fight.

“I was an ensign, you know what that was? Nah, nobody does nowadays. I held the flag when we fought, and I held it proud. Barely eighteen, I was, and with one of the most important jobs of all!”

He was clearly insane.

When the coach finally pulled into Victoria station, I grabbed my backpack from the overhead shelf and made a wordless departure. I walked as fast as I could without breaking into a run and only dared to look over my shoulder when I’d made it to the bustling street outside the entrance. He was following me.

On the tube, I glared at him.

“What do you fancy for tonight, love?” he said cheerfully, leaning towards me from across the gangway. “I’m feeling cosy. Shall we just get a pizza and find something rubbish to watch on the telly?”

“Please, just leave me alone,” I whispered. He chuckled.

“It’s a game she likes to play, pretending she doesn’t know me,” he told the old woman seated to my right. “She thinks it’s hilarious.”

The woman smiled and asked me how long we’d been together.

“Three years,” he grinned. “Today is our anniversary.”

The tube came to a halt and I leapt from my seat, shoved my way through the throng of rush hour commuters and ignored their cries of indignation and fury. As the doors closed and the tube began to slowly disappear into the tunnel I stood on the platform, trembling but finally alone. Our eyes met through the window, and then he was gone.

In the safety of an Islington pub, I slipped easily into my regular self. I didn’t mention the man in blue to Freya—it would have been a strange sort of thing to have to explain, and I’d rather spend the night exchanging more pleasant stories. Careless hours passed, and we emptied glass after glass—whisky and coke for me, white wine for her.

“Same again?”

Freya smiled sweetly. “Yes please, my lovely.”

It took three minutes for me to buy the drinks and return to the table. Four, at the most.

“Lou, you never told me your other half was coming!”

She was laughing with him the way she’d been laughing with me, sipping the wine he’d bought for her and touching him affectionately on the shoulder. His eyes, a piercing blue that clashed

uncomfortably with his dirty beard, locked with mine. The two glasses I'd been holding shattered against the wooden floor.

"Bloody hell, are you alright, darling?" his tan brogues crunched over the broken glass and his meaty hand touched my cheek. I recoiled violently.

"What are you doing?" I barked. The pub was now silent, and the collective disturbed gaze of its patrons felt heavy on my skin. The man in blue stared at me in mock concern, the faintest hint of a smile on his lips.

"Freya, this guy's been following me all day, I... I don't know him! He's crazy, he thinks he had yellow fever in the war! Can we just go back to yours?"

She wrapped her arm around my shoulders and gave my trembling body a little squeeze. Then she turned back to him. "Maybe you should take her home."

"I think that'd be for the best," the man in blue nodded and went to rub my back. I jerked away and held onto Freya.

"Go on, Lou. We'll catch up again soon, okay?" I searched her eyes for any sign of a joke but found only concern. She was sending me away with a middle-aged fantasist with a bad dye job who'd decided that afternoon that I was his wife.

Behind us, a teenage glass collector had started to clean up the spilled drinks. At the same moment I decided to make my escape, he was kneeling down, picking out the pieces of glass from the floorboards. My falling over him backwards was inevitable, but my foot stamping the shards deep into his palm was unfortunate. I stumbled over him and raced into the street outside, ready to hail a taxi cab and escape the day's insanity.

"Slow down, darling! You left your bag."

"Get away from me!" I screamed so loudly he dropped my backpack. I couldn't have him touch me. I ran.

A horn screamed in my ear and tires screeched against the road. The noise startled me, and I realised I was now lying in the middle of a busy road in Islington, on display for dozens of late night revellers, for everyone inside the bright red double decker bus which was looming over me, and for the policeman scurrying towards me.

"You alright, love?"

"She's fine!" the man in blue jogged over and wheezed as he knelt beside me. "Just having one of your turns, aren't you, darling? She'll be fine once I get her home."

"No, please, no!" I grabbed the young policeman's stab vest. "Please, help me! I don't know him, he's not my husband!"

The policeman studied my manic eyes and dishevelled appearance, and then glanced over to the calm man in the expensive suit. "You sure she's alright?"

"Yeah, really mate. She gets like this sometimes. She'll be fine once she's had a kip."

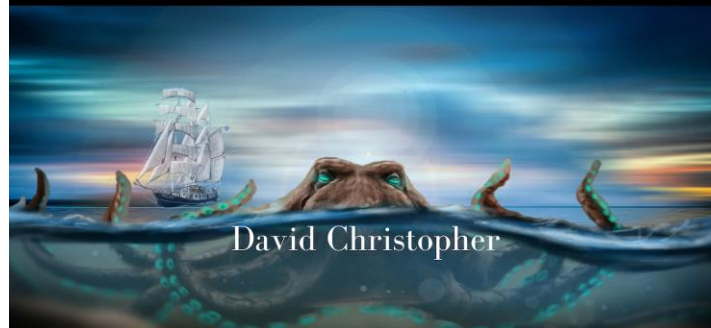
I begged the policeman not to let the man in blue take me. I clung to him so tightly it took the both of them to remove me, and I screamed for help as they pushed me into the back seat of a taxi cab. The door slammed in my face, and I was silent.

Across the road, Freya was speaking on her mobile phone. Her face was drawn, and she fiddled with her scarf as she paced back and forth outside the entrance to the pub. I wondered to whom she was speaking, and what she was telling them. I willed her to look up, to see me and save me. She didn't.

THE END

GONZO PULP PUBLICATIONS
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HORROR DOUBLE FEATURE/DUO DE MACABRE BY CHRISTOPHER MICHAEL CARTER reviewed by John C Adams

Duo de Macabre is billed as two gory and messy horror anthologies with short stories adapted from the author's original screenplays. It does exactly what it says on the tin. I can definitely say that if you're in the market for short stories where every scene reads like you're watching a film, then you'll take to this anthology at once.

This might feel like an odd premise for an anthology of short stories but since most aficionados of horror fiction can't get enough of horror films to fill their evenings, it's not as strange an idea as it sounds.

The writing was vivid. It almost felt like I was watching a movie as I turned the pages. After a few pages, I simply became immersed in the experience and didn't notice it any more. Kind of like when you're watching a film, in fact. The present tense just felt right, even though I don't usually take to that in fiction.

Annie's mom continues her laundry. She picks up the wicker basket of clothes. The sheets blow slightly in the breeze and the Stranger's dark figure emerges behind, as if he's materializing out of nowhere. She turns and her eyes catch this twisted man and widen.

The attention to 'set design', another legacy from the screenplay origins of these stories, made the locations feel very real—essential in a good horror story. Plus there was plenty of well-paced action.

A woman pushes the top of the typewriter over; another page done. She leans over the typewriter and she lifts her glasses and rubs her eyes. She's white and in her fifties with graying blonde hair. Her office is cozy; brown carpet with brick-red walls and white curtains.

This is definitely one for those moments when you can't quite decide between reading a story or watching a film. It works, you know?

Enjoy!

THE END

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A VAMPIRE AND A NECROPHILE WALK INTO A CAR CRASH by Rob Bliss

Chapter 2: A Ball

The Duke and Duchess of Schtroumpf were holding a jubilee for the popped cherry of their daughter, Princess Horseface. The Princess was very happy, as her gigantic teeth showed, and she laughed at everything, her snort and whinny echoing across the vaulted dome of her home and regal estate, Clitberg Manor.

The parents of Horseface made a contractual arrangement for their daughter to marry (or if not marry, at least get pregnant, or if not pregnant, then at least banged) by the Prince of Syphillanium, also called Sissyboy Pffluug. Sissyboy weighed ninety pounds soaking wet (usually when he peed himself from nervousness), had a body made of bone, and enjoyed wearing mascara and rouge and lipstick. He frequently visited the local monastery with a magnum of brandy and the assflap on his breeches poorly pinned. He enjoyed a good rough rogering by a long line of monks, bishops, cardinals and other holy men, who never failed to do their duty for royalty.

Horseface crushed him and cracked his hip bones. He ejaculated, but with his eyes closed, imagining it was Friar Phuck (the 'h' was silent) bouncing on his lap. She was in love. He was in traction. But he made it to the party. Now encased in a body cast, sitting in an ornate, wooden, family heirloom wheelchair. (Horseface had also grabbed his arm to fingerfuck her anus—snapped all six of his inbred digits—then had a go with his good hand—snapped those too—and he shattered a shinbone or two trying to escape her insatiable clutches.) His wheelchair was pushed over to the nearest naked baby statue with champagne pissing from its toddler cock so that his lust would hopefully overcome his pain.

Horseface made the odd jaunt to her lover to coo in his ear and tell him the disgusting things she wanted him to do to her when he could move (or at least lie still) again.

He vomited down his chest cast, signed by various monks with archaic, satanic symbols, and their cell phone numbers.

Sissyboy spewed every curse word in the Bible at Horseface, saying he would never go within a hundred yak dick-lengths of any vagina ever again. That's where pee and blood and babies came from, and possibly poo—he wasn't schooled on the female anatomy. Even the aristocratic school system taught Latin and Greek and calculus, but not where the clitoris was located. This would spell the doom for many European empires up through the eons and into the Twentieth Century.

She giggled and smacked the high, sharp cheek bones of his angular face. Then gave him a wet kiss on the forehead and tottered off to tell all of the royal guests the lurid details of her cherry-popping.

Much vomit flowed that night.

Those who did not spew were chubby-chasers who pulled the princess behind the brocade

curtains to bugger her. This was her lucky night. There was little chance that Sissyboy's sperm took to her egg—the tadpoles arrived expecting a prostate, not a uterus. They got confused, so they fucked each other to death, and the egg wept deep inside Horseface's vacuous womb.

Luckily, however, at least one of her rapists, if not all, had a real man's sperm. Who the daddy was didn't matter to either them or to her. They humped the shit out of her—literally—until one lucky tadpole drove right up into the egg and gave it to her good. The egg tingled. Horseface farted into a vase of geraniums. Shit herself a little bit, but this turned on several of her rapists so much that the mere smell of her vacated faeces made the rest of them unload on her hiked-up silk dress.

She paraded the cumshots around the party, spinning her dress high, making eyes at everyone who wasn't puking into their champagne flutes. She was in Heaven. Felt like every other girl who had a harem of rapists at her beck-and-call. She whinnied out a sneeze, and let a dollop of snot sit like an oyster in her cleavage.

She was a fucking pig. But a lot of guys like that type. I mean, a lot. Ask around, you'd be surprised at who says yes to pig-fucking. Possibly why so many religions say no to pigs. Far too sexy and tempting.

Horseface stood on the marble balcony gazing dreamily at the full moon as it puked up a meteor shower. She sung a light air from under her lizard-like tongue, danced where she stood, tripped, sat on the ground, giggled painfully as she rubbed her sore cankle fat.

Perhaps being injured would cause a new rapist in shining armour to swoop to her aid, she hoped.

Instead, a bat flew out of the night sky and got tangled in her porcupine-esque hair.

She flailed on the ground, screaming like a glue factory horse, tearing at her hair, slicing her fingers on the hairspray starched tresses, and finally wrenched out the bat. Once free, the bat instantly changed into Spanky the Gay Vampire.

(Spanky would like the reader to note that since we last saw him engaged in one of his wacky adventures, two things have happened, one helping to cause the other. One: he talked to his pharmacologist-slash-witchdoctor for a cure to the terrible male ailment with which he was afflicted. Small penis. The pharmacologist had treated the problem frequently throughout his career. He gather ingredients from various witches, voodoo shamans, Presbyterians, Rosicrucians, Shriners, and this guy named Antonio who worked in both gay and straight porn. Mixed up a concoction which Spanky took for eight to ten weeks, three times a day. His penis bloated and lengthened and was fucking awesome! He couldn't walk down the street without having phone numbers thrown at him like Pride Parade confetti. He loved the attention and the incredibly diverse sexual partners at first, but soon became exhausted, and had to stop walking down streets, especially at night when all the really kinky perverts come out to play in the shadows.

This endowment, of course, led to the second change in his person. He became more accepting of his homosexuality. This often happens when one accidentally finds oneself as the star attraction in a gay bathhouse orgy. That definitely loosened Spanky up, and he even relished telling people that his unofficial name was Spanky. That got him even more attention. He was okay with being gay. The world was a brighter place.)

Horseface, of course, didn't know he was gay. She preened herself while gazing at the handsome gentleman—probably a Duke or a Count by how he was dressed—possibly a rapist knight come to save her. She patiently waited for him to stop cursing, scratched up by her spiny hair, and finally noticed her.

“What's your fucking problem—you almost killed—shit! Is that your face?”

Princess Horseface giggled as she demurely batted clumped eyelashes at Spanky.

“I'm ever so sorry, good sir,” she said, rubbing the area of her dress where her foot may have been. “But, you see, I've turned my ankle and have become temporarily indisposed.” She reached up two wattle pig belly arms to hug the air in Spanky's direction. “Would you be ever so kind as to assist a lady to her feet?”

Spanky grabbed her wrists and heaved backwards, but he couldn't budge her. Instead, he spun her in a full circle as one of her wrists slipped from his grasp since she was flooding sweat from every one of her pores (who knew she had pores on her wrists and hands and arms? She was full of drooling holes).

Horseface spun like a break-dancer, circa. 1984, on the marble ... on her back, on her side, on her stomach, freestyle b-boy electric boogaloo. Spanky kept grabbing whichever of her limbs were spinning passed, still trying to help the leaden Shiva to her feet.

A crowd formed, circling the 'dancing' couple. The Duke and Duchess watched their daughter spin like an ostrich egg in a moo-moo as she giggled and cried out “Weeeeeee!”

Spanky gave up, stood his ground, and let friction slow his partner to a halt.

The crowd applauded. Confused, but flexible to changes in his environment, Spanky bowed and mouthed “thank you” to various members of the crowd.

The Duke clapped his hands slowly as he approached, his smile beaming, his white goatee bristling with glee (or tobacco spit). He proffered a lily white hand to shake paws with the vampire.

“I say, good sir, that was a marvellous display of acrobatic prowess. I used to be quite the shoe-stepper in my day. Isn't that right, mother?”

The Duchess offered her cold, wet hand, drooped at the wrist, to Spanky. He bowed to kiss it. Tasted opium and pee. Spanky coughed so as not to retch.

The Duchess was hot. A total cougar. Big-ass titties bulged out of her jewelled bodice, her face and cleavage covered in white powder. A fake mole at the side of her mouth. Plump cocksucking lips. At least thirty years younger than her husband.

“What is your name, my liege?” she asked Spanky.

He almost said “Spanky”, but had learned that that was only an accolade in bathhouses. One who has finally come out of the closet may often find they need to take the closet with them. For example, it would be unwise to proudly proclaim one’s sexual liberation while strolling down the street of a country largely controlled by an orthodox, homophobic religion. That is, if one wanted to retain one’s head and still make the flight out. Spanky tucked his gayness in the closet in order to curry favour with royals. Royals are famously anti-gay, unless they can perceive a fag as a jester to prance and fop around for their amusement.

After a moment or two of thought, the vampire recalled his full name.

“L. Draka Grimoire Gehenna Hellion von Spankula,” the vampire said. But he pronounced the final name as “Spahnkula”. Which, to the Duchess, sounded like “Spunkula”. Which she liked. Her false eyelashes fluttered and she pushed her ruby lips out at him.

The Duchess snapped a fan from out of her long lacy sleeve and waved a fresh breeze of opium and pee across her face. (She didn’t smell it anymore.) “Oh my, such an exotic name. Where does your royal lineage hail from?”

“Romania, my queen,” Spanky said, playing the part of a royal. He wasn’t. His dad attached a bunch of names to his birth certificate in the hopes that sonny boy would become someone important, and not a two-bit vampire cobbler, like the rest of his family’s male lineage. After all, how do vampires make money? They got jobs? What jobs? Lazy, neck-biting bastards! Get a job!

“Ah, then you must know the von Cruxes and the van Knewelposts and the vin Vinvinshinsins?” the Duke supposed.

“Dear friends of the family,” Spanky said, tipping his nose high to the ceiling, not missing a beat. He played his cards well, assuming the chances were good that there were more than one branch of those bizarrely-named families. His father’s rival vampire cobbler was named Hortence al Yuggaddabe Kiddinme. Vampires and humans bred like rabbits, so, therefore, there were likely many repeated names for all of them. Essentially, they were all from the same family, and all were terrible at coming up with new names to distinguish themselves from their kin.

“Funny we’ve never met before,” said the Duke. “Through whom did you get the invitation?”

Spanky was an excellent gambler—a vampire had to be. Not everyone liked their neck bitten, but one often didn’t know that until one bit the jugular and felt the victim’s lusty swoon.

“I’m a guest of the Rotheschillins, my Duke,” Spanky said with a slight bow.

“Not sure if I know them,” the Duke queried, turning to his wife for clarification. He was old, (like in his eighties or something, still assuming muttonchops were handsome, and using the word ‘wireless’ for electronic and ‘horseless’ for vehicles with gasoline engines, and still called those steel birds in the sky, ‘aeroplanes’. So ... old ...). He could know things but not know he knew. Thus, a younger wife was a good thing to have for an old man.

The Duchess was an excellent gambler herself—never knowing which of her unknown guests would be open to ploughing her in the topiary.

“Oh, yes, I know them well, my dear. Friends of the Hossenbachs.”

“Ah, the Hossenbachs!” the Duke said in reverie. He turned his hairy grey smile to Spanky. “Once owned a gold mine in the Tanzanian svelte with Lord Spitzzy Hossenbach. Good chap—top notch, top notch!”

The Duchess was giving Spanky the eyes of a panther. Yellow. Possibly has glaucoma, the vampire thought for a fraction of a second. He was no lover of the female form (unless it was on a young Laotian boy), but he knew how to grease a lover’s look to ensure he remained at the bitchin’ party.

The Duchess again proffered her wispy, putrid hand for Spanky to take. “Shall I introduce you to our guests?”

“It would be my honour, m’lady.”

The Duchess led Spanky around the room. Baroque Synclavier music played from an invisible room, echoing against the dome, tinkling the chandelier. They passed oil paintings of famously unknown inbreeders, and tapestries of battles that lead to the bloody founding of the estate. Spanky was bored out of his mind as the Duchess yammered on and on about herself and her family. He ignored her, but couldn’t get away to the buffet since she had linked her arm through his and kept sticking his face into the faces of her gruesome guests.

“Oh my, where are my manners?” she exclaimed, though no one was listening. “I should really introduce you to my daughter’s ... ahem ... well, what should I call him ... beau is a nice word, isn’t it? For lack of a better ...”

She guided the vampire to the cripple in the wheelchair who was still ogling the plaster penis of the statue he was parked beside. When in Rome ... fantasize about the homoerotic statues. (Likely why there are so many gay clergy in that city.) Then the Duchess called out for Horseface to get her ass off the goddamn ground—have some respect for yourself, my dear, you’re a Schtroumpf, for God’s sake!—and meet her dance partner on her own two feet!

Horseface’s face poured out sweat and snot and drool as she eventually got her thick legs under her and balanced her body long enough to call it standing. She tiptoed her hammering pins like a

pachyderm ballerina to the side of Sissyboy. Giggled at the side of his face.

“Count ... ahh, what is your shortened patronymic?” she asked Spanky.

This was not Rome. He chose the less offensive name in his moniker. “Draka, m’lady.”

“Mm, very exotic and exciting,” she swooned. Her eyes lit up like starfire and her clitoris throbbed beneath her petticoat. A very long tongue emerged from between her teeth as she stared at Spanky like a chest-heaving, horny she-rhino.

But he didn’t notice a thing about her. And he barely noticed his former dance partner, despite her incessant snorting and equine wheezing. Instead, he gazed lovingly and dreamily at the alabaster neck of Sissyboy.

“Ah yes,” the Duchess said, snapping back to reality. “This is ... uh ... my daughter’s ... uh, he’s a Pffluug—but that tells one very little. Oh, what do you call him? Cherry Breaker?”

Spanky stroked a hand along Sissyboy’s left arm cast. “Pleasure to make your acquaintance. I see you’re a tad indisposed. Perhaps you’d care for some fresh air.”

Spanky didn’t pussyfoot around—always went for the actual, or symbolic, jugular.

Sissyboy felt as happy as a lamb close to slaughter. His weak heart twitched fathoms below the plaster, and his wee-wee spasmed like a trapped miner choking on coal dust, tapping the stone walls with his rigor mortis canary for Morse code release. His eyes shone, and he too heard none of the inane gobbledygook of the Duchess or the fucking annoying tittering of Horseface.

Spanky pushed aside the princess, sending her back to earth where she flailed and giggled to her heart’s content, thinking her new rapist—Spanky—was about to have his way right there on the floor in front of everybody! Oh my! He cared for naught but his own concupiscence! Whatever is a post-virginal debutante to do? Relax and think of the rapeseed fields of the Schleswig-Holstein, obviously.

But it was not to be. Spanky sped Sissyboy’s wheelchair over the toes of the Duchess, to which she replied, “Cock-fuck-mother-suck!”, and dropped to the floor, holding her crooked toes, seven per foot, joining her agony to that of her daughter.

Spanky rushed Sissyboy onto the balcony which was, luckily, frickin’ huge. It wrapped around three of the four walls of the estate. The two gay guys wanted privacy, so Spanky rolled Sissyboy to a darkened corner, nearest the horse stables (the irony was appealing to both, the horses whinnying as the human and vampire played above).

At this far corner of the balcony knick-knacks and assorted royal crap was stored. In a dishevelled heap were old soiled Chesterfields, broken cherubim, smoke-damaged paintings of lesser important royal bastard sons, and lots of unwanted gifts like cheese baskets, scented lotions, multi-coloured candles, and plastic house-warming plants.

Plus, sitting on a stone balustrade was a small pot of Native American, or Indian, corn. Gift from across the pond, where royalty didn't exist, or was quickly assassinated.

He backed the chair against the wall, put on the brakes, and spread open his cape. Much to Sissyboy's enthrallment.

"I must have you!" Spanky declared.

"Yes, yes—take me! But I must warn you that my dillywhacker is encased in plaster, and it would give you a terrible time to uncase it."

Spanky glanced down at the diaper cast surrounding the target groin. "Fuck it—I'll get to that later, if I have time."

Spanky leapt onto Sissyboy's lap, causing the invalid to cry out from both pain and lust. Both victim and victimizer chose to interpret it as libido. The bones of Sissyboy creaked and some of the smaller ones snapped as Spanky drove his fangs into the fishbelly neck of his prey.

The prey didn't need the release of his thingy because the teeth penetrating his neck were enough to make him climax inside the plaster depths. It was disgusting. He made these sounds: "Oh my—I say—what's all this then—it seems as if I'm about to—oh yes, there we are—there it comes—**FUCKING CHRIST ON A BARBWIRE DILDO**—aah, aah, yes, hmmm—oh my—I say ... jolly ... jolly ... jolly good show ..."

Don't you hate when people talk too much during ... what a douche.

Blood gurgling under his tongue, Spanky stepped back from his quarry. Eyes aglow with acetylene light, he felt his half-risen penis rising some more. His trousers would've tented instead of domed, but they were a little constricting. Would have to get his tailor to put more material in the crotch, or start wearing track pants, but they didn't really go with his whole vampire look.

"Oh my!" said Sissyboy, eyes on his attacker's trouser balloon. "That's a fine kettle of fish!"

"Shut up, bitch," quote Spanky. "I'm only doing this for you. "Cause I'm nice."

He was a nice vampire, that's true.

Spanky unbuttoned his pants and released the albino python—seriously, thirteen inches! (Why vampires don't use their genitalia more often to make an extra buck in porn, no one will ever know.) That's thirteen inches long, five inches circumference ... damn ... kinda hot in here ... anyway, Spanky let that beast droop out of his fly like a question mark.

Sissyboy's eyes popped out of his papery skull. He shivered, terrified and excited at once, wondering what the neck-biter was about to do. And could Sissyboy take it? He'd give it the old

Eton Boys' Choir try.

"Put that damn thing away!" a voice called.

Spanky and Sissyboy jumped (well, Sissyboy jolted, shooting electric fire along his spine) where they stood. Necks twisted in all directions to find the voice's source. Fresh blood oozed out of Sissyboy's neck, but he was too shocked to swoon.

A tall body wearing a lot of denim and a greasy plaid work shirt stepped from the pot of corn.

Spanky's whole body sagged. His penis hung like a dead eel. He sighed, rolled his eyes, sucked a wash of blood off his fangs, and said, "Not you again."

The figure hopped off the balustrade and gave Spanky a hearty slap on the back of his cape, which smacked a small coughing fit out of the vampire's lungs.

"Hey, buddy," said Percy the Necrophiliac. He scanned Sissyboy up and down, nodded to himself. "Damn, he looks due for the grave. Did you bite him yet?"

"Yes," Spanky droned as he folded his softened penis in three and zipped it back into its confines.

"Dammit," said Percy, tilting his head to find the blood spots on the victim's sallow neck. "Now he's gonna be undead, ain't he? I need death, vampire old buddy, not undeath."

"What are you doing here?" Spanky whined.

"Just passing through," said the necrophiliac as he magically drew a three-foot Panamanian machete from inside his right pant leg. Fantastically, it did not stiffen his walk or straighten his stance in any way. "Which way to the ball?"

Spanky's glance along the balcony to the corner of the mansion gave it away before he could choose a lie.

"What are you going to do with that?" he asked, looking at the long blade reflecting moonlight.

Percy shrugged, and spun the machete in a revolution around his wrist. "When opportunity doesn't present itself—like at a car crash—I make it appear." He pointed the tip of the knife at the corner of the mansion. "This way? Lots of rich white folks, I bet. Good, good. The wealthy never carry weapons of mass hacking, and are always surprised when they're attacked." He snorted and scoffed. "Always think they're above Iron Age slaughter."

He stepped lightly, heels dancing as he headed along the balcony, wide enough to drive a three-horse chariot around to protect the mansion from a plebeian assault, should one ever show up.

"W-w-wait ... wait ..." Spanky stuttered, doing a dance of his own—a few steps following

Percy, a few steps back to stay faithfully by Sissyboy's side. If Sissyboy could move his hands, they would've reached out to the vampire like a sad toddler, reaching skyward to either God or mama, whoever reached down first.

Percy halted his sauntering machete hobo cane-swing, spun half a heel, toe lifted forty-five degrees, to see the fear in Spanky's vein-meshed eyes.

"S'a problem?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna kill someone to fuck. I am a necrophiliac, after all. We've been introduced, haven't we?"

Spanky pointed a shaking arm at him, looked at the moon, then down at the stomping horses. They were trying to have sex with each other, but there was just no room in the corral. "You ... you're not going to get away with it!" the vampire threatened.

Percy looked left, right, over his shoulder, at the moon, at the horses vainly thrusting their loins, at Sissyboy's sorrowful gaze, then back to Spanky.

"Yes I am."

"Why—but, you can't. Just. Kill. A room full of people."

"Okay, thanks, I think I will. The whole room. Watch your periods."

Spanky was pissed since he was being mocked. One should never mock a vampire—they're not used to it and they sometimes cry. "It's murder!"

Percy spun the machete end over end, caught it in his palm like an expert circus knife thrower. "And what you do to people is ...?" He rebutted Spanky without looking at him. "Exactly. Don't worry, I'll leave some pretty boys alive for you to bite."

Spanky felt a flush up his neck to his forehead as he glanced at Sissyboy. Feeling as though some secret of infidelity had been let loose. Sissyboy's eyes bulged and his mouth opened like that of a gasping fish.

"I don't want to be a part of it!" Spanky cried, his tone mostly for Sissyboy's benefit. He looked at Percy but pointed an arm at the wheel-bound waif. "His wife is in there!! Well, not really wife ... but her parents are there. His parents too! I think." He looked at Sissyboy, who meekly nodded his assent.

Percy was right-handed. He tucked the small sword under his left armpit, blade jutting out behind him, as he stepped up to Sissyboy.

He licked across the front of his teeth as he looked down at the cowering skeleton. As with all threats, Sissyboy enjoyed the fear, but also hoped that the threat would turn deliciously sexual. The monks had trained him in the ecclesiastic art of how to turn fear into a raging boner.

“Your folks in there, really?” Percy asked, tilting his head at the stone wall behind Sissyboy’s head.

“Yuh-yuh-mmma-mmnna ... yes, sir,” Sissyboy sputtered out.

Percy raised an eyebrow at Spanky. “Did you bite his neck or his tongue?” Glaring the length of Sissyboy’s mummified body, the necrophiliac asked somewhat rhetorically, “I bet you’re a disappointment to your folks, ain’t ya?”

Sissyboy’s goggle-eyed glances sparkled with stars of lust as his chest heaved and breath pulled in through flaring nostrils. The skin across his bony cheeks went as taut as a drum and quivered, waiting for the slap, the smack, the pummel, the punch that would surely be coming. Oh God, how he hoped this enticing new stranger hauled off and whacked him good!

He said with a slight lisp, his tongue somewhat tinged with paralysis by all the anticipation. “Yessth I am. A very dissthappointing son, my good ssthir.”

Percy’s shoulders sagged and his eyelids drooped. “Don’t come-on to me, buddy. Please. Gay or straight—I really don’t care. Alive or dead—I care.”

With a quick snap, Percy pulled the machete from the sheath of his armpit, slipped it soundlessly through the night air, and severed Sissyboy’s head from his shoulders.

Blood fountained up and the head bounced twice—once off the balcony railing, and once off the head of a horse below. It cried out and reared up, kicked the wooden fence holding it in, which started the other horses kicking, until they all smashed down their stable prisons and galloped off into the night forest ... to copulating freedom!

Spanky wheezed out his imploding chest, shocked by the sudden drama, the strange climax, and the end of his short-termed love affair with a weirdo.

“You weren’t really in love with that freak were you?” Percy asked, almost able to read the vampire’s thoughts. But Spanky could only stare at the headless cast sitting in the chair, the white plaster speedily washed red. Percy put his arm around Spanky and lead him along the balcony. “Come on, buddy, you could do better. Besides, I just saved his life ... well, his undead existence. Cut a vampire’s head off kills him, right? Hope so, ‘cause that is one ugly headless corpse. Wouldn’t want that wandering the neighbourhood. The other vampires would’ve eaten him alive, and not in a good way. Vampires shouldn’t be pussies ... or sissies, in his case.”

They were almost at the open balcony doors, light and music pouring out into the deathly quiet night. The night coming in to say hello.

Percy slapped Spanky on the cape. "Come on, my friend, I'll buy you a neck."

Sinking terror into the hearts, minds and souls of the pompously unsuspecting was just the thing to bring Spanky out of his funk.

As Percy hacked and slashed his way through the elite, Spanky leapt on all the good-looking males and sank his teeth in. Rarely held on long enough to slurp up some blood before flaring out his cape behind him, and rushing to the next neck.

In the whirlwind of spewing blood, Spanky accidentally bit the necks of more than a few females. Drew back his horrified eyes and spat out their oestrogen blood as the victim became amorous and grabbed his junk and dry-humped his leg.

He pushed them away, often in the path of Percy's jungle blade. Those who escaped the slicing steel with only a severed arm, returned to the vampire's lust-hunger bite, craving more ... perhaps a couple of punctures on my swelling breasts, m'lord?

Percy swung the machete wildly, not caring which body part flew free of its owner as long as the owner eventually died from his or her wounds.

Lord Thistlewick XIV, a dapper former helicopter pilot during some stupid skirmish over the Empire's right to a hunk of rock they stole centuries before, thousands of miles from the home country's shores, had his head about him.

A sixteenth-century rapier was pinned to a shield which hung next to the digital thermostat. Lord Thistlewick XIV slid the sword from its shield sheath and stood a fencer's stance before the approaching berserker.

"En guard!" quote the bourgeoisie.

Percy swung the machete and detached Lord Thistlewick XIV's hand from his wrist. Hand and rapier smacked against a portrait of Baron Zillian cum Nostrodomo, smearing a wash of fresh blood across the baron's painted Van Dyke beard.

Confused at where his hand had gone, Lord Thistlewick XIV didn't see the second machete swing which opened his throat like a hungry clam. He gurgled out the national anthem as his neck spilled a bib of blood down his unwarranted military medals. His body dropped backwards to a well-trod Persian throw rug, the trilling patriotism caught in his throat.

As Percy cut up the rich, his anger at them increased. Each one said something stupid like, "Look here, old boy" and "I say, what's all this then?" and "What say we have a wee cuppa?" and "That's not cricket" just before their blue blood ran red across the marble and crystal and pissing angels of gold.

Percy stopped hacking, caught his breath, listened to the dying cries, the moans, the jewel-jangling flight of his stumbling live victims screaming their retreat. He stuck his nose under each armpit and reeled back from the stank.

“Not one of them,” he said between gasping breaths. “Not a single one knows how to seriously fight. Fuck me. Why haven’t the poor conquered the rich by now? It’s so damn easy!”

While resting against a fountain of dribbling champagne, Percy didn’t see the malcontent sneak up behind him. Though he felt the champagne flute shatter over his head.

“What the hell, man?”

He touched his head with his non-machete hand, turned, and saw a gorgeous redhead, curls and corkscrews of thick hair spilling down her shoulders. Pursed plump lips and fire in her green eyes.

“You terrible ... horrible ... ahhh!” she exclaimed. Her usually pale, lightly-freckled face burned with ire.

Percy smiled. “Hey, baby. You’re hot.”

“You killed my husband!”

“You’re welcome,” the killer said, dipping his machete point in the fountain, leaning on it like a cane. “You know, usually I only do dead chicks, but ... well, maybe if you don’t move around too much ... we can have some fun without too much bloodshed.”

The redhead growled, raised the smashed flute stem over her head like a knife. Tried to bring it down onto Percy’s face, but come on ... that’s no way to stab someone ... doesn’t even work in the movies.

Percy held her stabbing hand aloft, licked his lips as he gazed into her emerald eyes. Chest swelled as in inhaled her scent. “Mmm, you smell like vanilla and pee... just like my mama’s panties.”

She screamed, wrenched her wrist from his grip, start kicking arrow shoe toes into his shins.

“Hey—ouch—knock it off!”

She kept kicking, broke a heel, hurt her toe. Switched feet.

“Stop it, would ya? You’re not hurting me. I have a high pain tolerance. I’m a necrophiliac—mass-murderer—whaddaya expect?”

Her toes burned with pain, shot electricity up her shins, but she kept kicking. Then added a few flimsy right hooks. Totally punched like a girl. Percy was annoyed. He hated to do it to such a

fiery hottie, but then again, this situation was indicative of why he got into necrophilia in the first place.

“If you don’t stop this shit, I’m gonna kill ya—then I’m gonna fuck ya! Then you’ll be nice and calm and not so damn bitchy!”

She didn’t hear a word. Wrath flooded her ears to deafness. Blinders in place, she just knew she had to kill the man who killed her husband. After all, her husband had just bought her a two million dollar diamond and sapphire necklace and matching bracelet, and they were about to go on a three-month trip to the south of France. So what if he was in his seventies?

Percy gripped the machete handle as its blade sat in the champagne fountain.

“Well, I gave you a chance. Guess I gotta do what I gotta do. But I want to keep your head on.”

He batted her small fists away from his face, grabbed her curls and corkscrews to steady her, dipping her chin to her chest. She saw, of course, the machete plunge into her solar plexus, but didn’t feel it exit her spine.

Percy wiggled the blade a bit, then let the hot ginger slip off the steel to the ground. He’d give her a few seconds to bleed out. Hoped she died with her eyes open. Such a pretty green.

Spanky wasn’t faring as well. The Duchess had knocked him to the floor and was writhing on top of him. She tore down her bodice, ripped open Spankey’s shirt (his good shirt, dammit!), and left lipstick ovals across his chest, neck, face, and was working on snapping the buttons of his pants with her teeth.

He couldn’t hold her arms still for any length of time. She was an octopus. He tried rolling from under her, but she had great balance and just rolled with him.

“Bite me some more, m’lord,” the Duchess heaved out with her libidinous gasps. “Bite my breasts, bite my neck, bite my buttocks, bite my labia majora!”

She reached into his pants and grabbed his trouser snake, which couldn’t help but inflate from her attentions. Which pissed him off more since she was lacking his preferred genitalia. Why must a vampire’s penis betray him?

Then she touched that spot (you know that spot ... just to the left of the penile root and up a bit), and Spanky writhed with girlish giggles. He tittered and guffawed and roiled with spasming chuckles as he smacked the Duchess on the top of her head and boxed her ears, trying to push her away.

But torture that looked like a game was a game. The Duchess played to win. She chuckled and giggled too—but like a randy hausfrau not a waif—as her hand twisted and spun in Spanky’s pants like a rabid ferret.

“Ooo, you like that, m’lord? Yes you do, you naughty, naughty boy! Mama likes it too. Is Mama tickling your tingly-wingly? Oh my! And what a tingly-wingly you have! A gift from the satyr gods! I wish to partake of the wonderful heathen blasphemy in your pants!” (eBook, release date: Dec. 25, 2020). “Let Mama see the beast in the flesh—she’ll take ever such good care of it, coddle it and coo to it and suckle it dry! And I’m sure it’ll take quite good care of Mama!”

Spanky farted as his stomach muscles quivered from the punching laughter. He was suddenly, but momentarily, embarrassed, hoping the Duchess didn’t hear (or smell) the toots he set free. But then he re-evaluated his flushed face. If she was repulsed, then perhaps she would get the hell off him. He squeezed and tried to push out more noxious air.

He was successful ... much to his regret.

The Duchess tilted up her chin, looked high up the length of Spanky’s torso, and smiled a mouthful of salivating teeth. She licked her lips as her nostrils flared.

“Oh, m’lord! I can smell your essence! How did you know I craved that most of all?”

Ah, come on ... really? Spanky sighed silently, squeezing his eyes closed while the succubus quivered on him. Just his luck, the Duchess was a scat freak ...

She drove her face into his crotch, smacked her cheek with his stiff cock, snuggled her nose into his scrotum, tongue tip flicked down, down, down to the epicentre of the male stench.

Which made Spanky laugh harder. His legs kicked like a tickled infant. He grabbed the crown of her head and tried to pull her up by the hair. No good. Along with biting and incest fantasies, and scatological odours, the Duchess loved pain.

She, like most of the cloistered leisure class, was an absolute pervert, en par with the guttural appetites and obscene gymnastics of the Marquis de Sade. Nothing would repulse her from her concupiscent goal.

“Is this chick bothering you?” a voice from a benevolent god asked the vampire.

Eyes snapped open, agog to the ceiling, chest heaving with giggles, stomach quivering.

“Help ... help ... hel—”

“Now you want my help,” Percy said. “Typical vampire. Always self-reliant, until you’re fucked. All about you, ain’t it?”

“Plea ... plea ... please get her ... get the freak off me!”

Percy sighed and snorted snot back into his sinuses. “You owe me one.”

Spanky nodded like an epileptic.

Percy grabbed the Duchess by the hair, hoisted her face from the vampire's lap, swung at a drop fly pitch, and the Duchess's frozen lusty visage swung in the necrophiliac's free hand like Medusa's head. The neck poured blood onto Spanky's pants, but he wouldn't complain. Envied the accumulating wealth of his dry cleaner.

Percy tossed the Duchess's head into the champagne fountain. "Oh, that reminds me."

He sauntered over to the fountain, looked down at the beautiful, well-bled corpse of the redhead, a rose bloomed on her perfect stomach.

He left his machete in the fountain to have a bubbly bath. Unzipped his fly and knelt between the dead legs of the hot chick. Looked across the room at Spanky. "Don't say a damn word. You had your fun ... you know the rules."

Spanky said nothing, composed himself, sat sagging beside the headless corpse of the Duchess, and caught his breath. Tried not to look up in the direction of his ... saviour?

The magnificent room was filled with the still-bleeding and the dead, and was void of the escaped and severely-wound-but-they'd-die elsewhere. Snapped heels littered the floor. Many ankles twisted in flight. If a victim had hit the ground, Percy had gotten to them before they could crawl away. The wealthy didn't know how to crawl very well.

Spanky felt tired and a little dizzy from all the laughter and from looking at the massacre. Best to concentrate on one's own appearance. He did up the buttons that still hung by a thread on his pants, then went to work on salvaging what he could of his shirt. His good shirt...

Once—and only once—did his gaze return to Percy. The necrophiliac was at work maintaining his fetish and reputation. But now he had company.

Horseface had been passed over by both sucker of the neck and fucker of the dead. Staying on the floor had saved her life. She stupidly giggled while all the people who hated her were slaughtered. Their massacre only made her giggle more.

From the chuckles of children came life-saving wisdom.

But it was still her party, and she was still having fun.

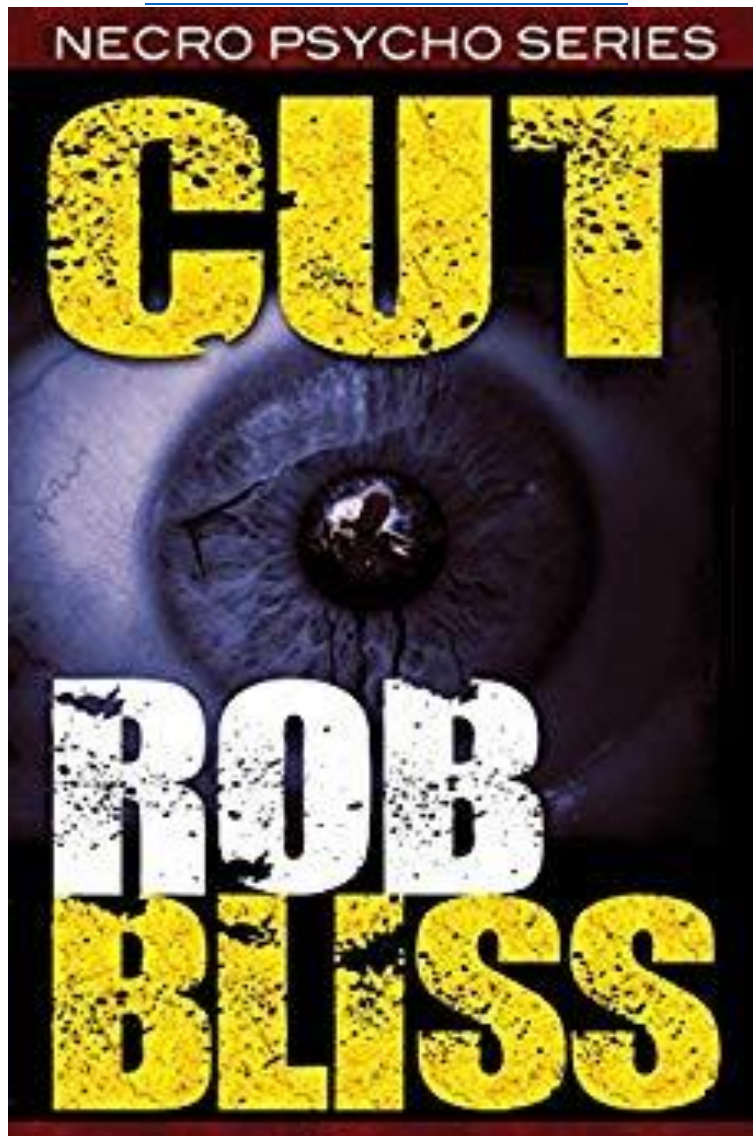
She loomed over Percy as he fucked the pretty redhead corpse (a pale ginger just looked hotter as the blood drained away from her sexy bits). Horseface hopped on her bare feet (shoes crushed) and swollen ankle and clapped as she cheered, hoping she was next.

Percy halted his thrusting hips, raised his sweating, rhubarb-red face, spat salty dew off his lips, and asked rhetorically,

"Do you fucking mind!"

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THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE by Gregory KH Bryant

Part Forty

As it happened, Turhan Mot's presentation of the prisoner Carter Ward to Horst Dal was no small event.

After his humiliating defeat at Callisto and, before that, Interplanetary Station 3, Turhan Mot seemed to have lost the smooth cunning and the slick showmanship for which he had been so well known among his pirate fellows.

But now, having successfully captured Carter Ward, the architect of his many defeats, Turhan Mot seemed to have recalled himself to what he once was. The presentation was important. Crucial. Indeed, the presentation itself could determine the outcome of one's venture.

A poor presentation insured failure, even of the best proposals. A good presentation promised success, even of the worst proposals. And so recalling himself the cunning man he once was, Turhan Mot set out to make his presentation of Carter Ward to Horst Dal should be an event of some consequence, and once surely to be remembered.

"Turhan Mot seeks plainly to curry my brother's favour with this exhibition of his prisoner, this Carter Ward," Yamir said to Horst Dal, as the two men awaited the arrival of Turhan Mot and his entourage (It was a custom among the Scroungers of rank to call each other 'brother', regardless of any familial connections between them. It was also a measure of Turhan Mot's fall, that Horst Dal, Yamir and others had stripped the honorific, 'Brother', from him.)

Horst Dal smiled, and then he grinned. He took the onyx pipe that Yamir handed off to him, and placed it in his mouth. A long, silent drag, and Horst Dal let the smoke of the mud drift from his lungs and through his nostrils. The smoke was blue against velvet carpets that lined the floors and the walls and the ceilings of Horst Dahl's receiving rooms. It was a measure of how Turhan Mot had redeemed himself in the eyes of his pirate fellows, that Horst Dal met him in his own receiving rooms.

The velvet carpets were ultramarine and viridian and scarlet and lilac and purple. The air, thick and redolent, suggestive nostalgia and naked concubines sleep-walked through midnight gardens. They carried crystal plates and platters and bowls, and offered fruits and berries, blackberries, blueberries, red raspberries, raw meats dipped in honey, rare shellfish cultivated in exotic tanks, served with pepper and vodka. Octopodes in the aquaria that served as windows.

In the near weightlessness of this world, silks and tapestries were tangled jungles of fabrics, spun gold and silver threads. Oxygen-rich plants grew in every direction, following the direction of tinted lights as they moved about the lush suites.

Horst Dal lounged in a heavy chair of hand-carved oak and pine. Grotesques were carved into the heavy armrests, and secret cabinets, too. Horst Dal kept a collection of knives secreted in the seat of his chair, in a drawer between his knees. Thick and plush cushions lined his chair. Piles of

pillows gave comfort to his feet. A man who, had he lived on Earth, would have been counted in his middle fifties, creature comforts had come to mean more to him than they had ever done before. A rugged man with greying, wiry hair and thick knuckles, he had spent his youth building Astra Palace, and making of it the flourishing multi-billion UC¹ concern that it was.

His friend, Yamir, regarded himself a free agent, and did not consider himself a Scrounger, though it's possible that those on the outside would find the distinction a little too subtle to draw. For Yamir was not above working with the Scroungers, if the pay was good. He was at the Battle for Callisto in his own ship, the "Reliant". Though his ship took on serious damage, Yamir did manage to salvage what was left of Turhan Mot's ship, the "Grand Marquis" after Turhan Mot had abandoned the ship in the early hours of the battle.

Yamir wore a blouse of yellow silk with patterns of interlocking dragons. It fell to his thighs. Under that, pantaloons of crimson silk, and sandals of gold thread. Aside from this, Yamir wore only a scowl upon his face. He had trusted Turhan Mot, only to be abandoned in the midst of battle. He had seen Turhan Mot only once or twice since the battle, and it was only Horst Dal's cool restraint that kept Yamir from slicing Ward's throat.

Yamir lounged in a chair next to Horst Dal's, in a chair that was no less opulent. Aside from them, there were only concubines and attendants, all there to minister to every appetite of the two men. Bodies painted gold and viridian, ultramarine and turquoise. Fires in pots gave the suites a yellow, flickering light.

Tapping his pipe out in the arm of his chair, Turhan Mot watched idly as the ashes spun in the air in front of his face, before finally dissipating into the air. He turned to Yamir, and asked, almost idly, "What do you think, my brother? Have we kept Turhan Mot waiting long enough?"

Yamir plucked a chronometer he wore on a chain about his neck, along with many other necklaces and beads. He held the chronometer up to his eyes, squinted, then rubbed his eyes with his free hand, and returned to studying the chronometer once again. At last, satisfied that the chronometer was indeed correct, he turned back to Horst Dal and, plucking the pipe Horst Dal offered from his fingertips, he answered, "Oh, maybe another fifteen minutes. This pipe still has plenty in it. Let's get it emptied first."

Horst Dal threw his head back, and gave Yamir a loud and good-natured laugh.

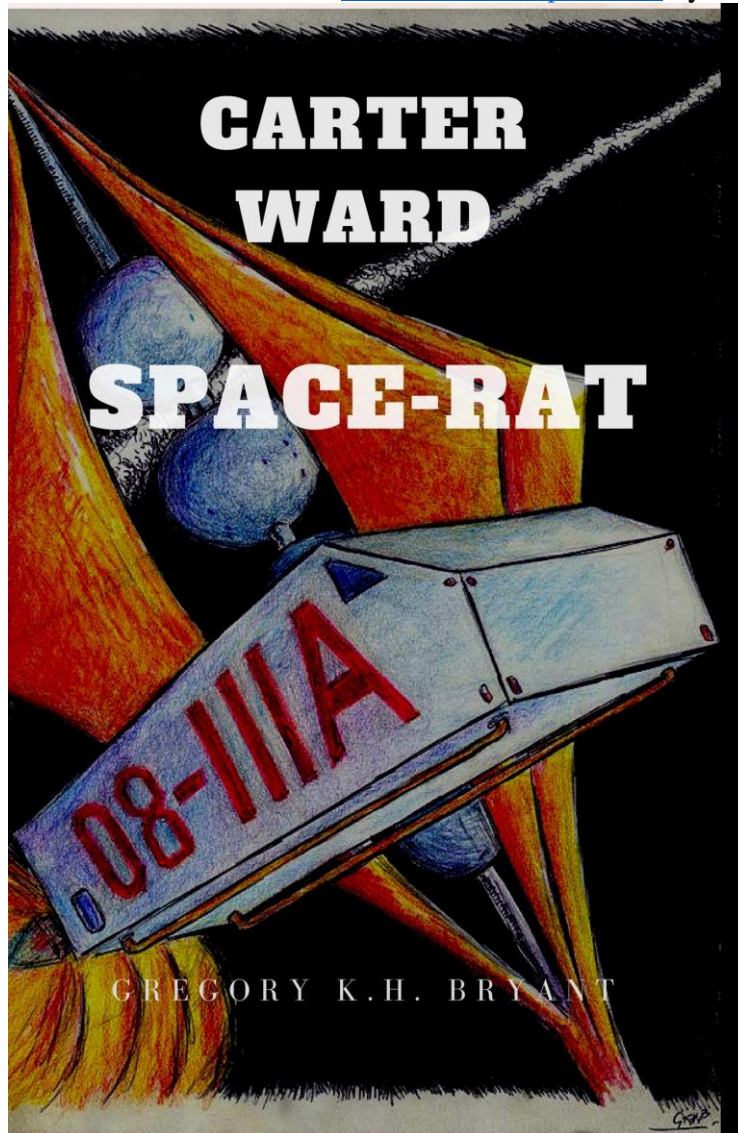
"Yes, well said, my brother," Horst Dal said. "Let's get us this pipe well smoked, and then we shall watch as Turhan Mot puts this Carter Ward through his paces. Fifteen minutes later, the pipe was emptied. Horst Dal and Yamir were both in very good spirits.

"Bring us this man," Horst Dal declared. "Let us see this Carter Ward!"

CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE

¹ UC; Universal Credit, a form of currency used between Earth's Moon and Jupiter.

Now available from Schlock! Publications: [Carter Ward—Space Rat](#) by Gregory KH Bryant.



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THE LOST WORLD by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Chapter XVI: "A Procession! A Procession!"

I should wish to place upon record here our gratitude to all our friends upon the Amazon for the very great kindness and hospitality which was shown to us upon our return journey. Very particularly would I thank Senhor Penalosa and other officials of the Brazilian Government for the special arrangements by which we were helped upon our way, and Senhor Pereira of Para, to whose forethought we owe the complete outfit for a decent appearance in the civilized world which we found ready for us at that town. It seemed a poor return for all the courtesy which we encountered that we should deceive our hosts and benefactors, but under the circumstances we had really no alternative, and I hereby tell them that they will only waste their time and their money if they attempt to follow upon our traces. Even the names have been altered in our accounts, and I am very sure that no one, from the most careful study of them, could come within a thousand miles of our unknown land.

The excitement which had been caused through those parts of South America which we had to traverse was imagined by us to be purely local, and I can assure our friends in England that we had no notion of the uproar which the mere rumour of our experiences had caused through Europe. It was not until the Ivernian was within five hundred miles of Southampton that the wireless messages from paper after paper and agency after agency, offering huge prices for a short return message as to our actual results, showed us how strained was the attention not only of the scientific world but of the general public. It was agreed among us, however, that no definite statement should be given to the Press until we had met the members of the Zoological Institute, since as delegates it was our clear duty to give our first report to the body from which we had received our commission of investigation. Thus, although we found Southampton full of Pressmen, we absolutely refused to give any information, which had the natural effect of focussing public attention upon the meeting which was advertised for the evening of November 7th. For this gathering, the Zoological Hall which had been the scene of the inception of our task was found to be far too small, and it was only in the Queen's Hall in Regent Street that accommodation could be found. It is now common knowledge the promoters might have ventured upon the Albert Hall and still found their space too scanty.

It was for the second evening after our arrival that the great meeting had been fixed. For the first, we had each, no doubt, our own pressing personal affairs to absorb us. Of mine I cannot yet speak. It may be that as it stands further from me I may think of it, and even speak of it, with less emotion. I have shown the reader in the beginning of this narrative where lay the springs of my action. It is but right, perhaps, that I should carry on the tale and show also the results. And yet the day may come when I would not have it otherwise. At least I have been driven forth to take part in a wondrous adventure, and I cannot but be thankful to the force that drove me.

And now I turn to the last supreme eventful moment of our adventure. As I was racking my brain as to how I should best describe it, my eyes fell upon the issue of my own Journal for the morning of the 8th of November with the full and excellent account of my friend and fellow-reporter Macdonald. What can I do better than transcribe his narrative—head-lines and all? I admit that the paper was exuberant in the matter, out of compliment to its own enterprise in sending a

correspondent, but the other great dailies were hardly less full in their account. Thus, then, friend Mac in his report:

THE NEW WORLD
GREAT MEETING AT THE QUEEN'S HALL
SCENES OF UPROAR
EXTRAORDINARY INCIDENT
WHAT WAS IT?
NOCTURNAL RIOT IN REGENT STREET
(Special)

“The much-discussed meeting of the Zoological Institute, convened to hear the report of the Committee of Investigation sent out last year to South America to test the assertions made by Professor Challenger as to the continued existence of prehistoric life upon that Continent, was held last night in the greater Queen’s Hall, and it is safe to say that it is likely to be a red letter date in the history of Science, for the proceedings were of so remarkable and sensational a character that no one present is ever likely to forget them.” (Oh, brother scribe Macdona, what a monstrous opening sentence!) “The tickets were theoretically confined to members and their friends, but the latter is an elastic term, and long before eight o’clock, the hour fixed for the commencement of the proceedings, all parts of the Great Hall were tightly packed. The general public, however, which most unreasonably entertained a grievance at having been excluded, stormed the doors at a quarter to eight, after a prolonged melee in which several people were injured, including Inspector Scoble of H. Division, whose leg was unfortunately broken. After this unwarrantable invasion, which not only filled every passage, but even intruded upon the space set apart for the Press, it is estimated that nearly five thousand people awaited the arrival of the travellers. When they eventually appeared, they took their places in the front of a platform which already contained all the leading scientific men, not only of this country, but of France and of Germany. Sweden was also represented, in the person of Professor Sergius, the famous Zoologist of the University of Uppsala. The entrance of the four heroes of the occasion was the signal for a remarkable demonstration of welcome, the whole audience rising and cheering for some minutes. An acute observer might, however, have detected some signs of dissent amid the applause, and gathered that the proceedings were likely to become more lively than harmonious. It may safely be prophesied, however, that no one could have foreseen the extraordinary turn which they were actually to take.

“Of the appearance of the four wanderers little need be said, since their photographs have for some time been appearing in all the papers. They bear few traces of the hardships which they are said to have undergone. Professor Challenger’s beard may be more shaggy, Professor Summerlee’s features more ascetic, Lord John Roxton’s figure more gaunt, and all three may be burned to a darker tint than when they left our shores, but each appeared to be in most excellent health. As to our own representative, the well-known athlete and international Rugby football player, E. D. Malone, he looks trained to a hair, and as he surveyed the crowd a smile of good-humoured contentment pervaded his honest but homely face.” (All right, Mac, wait till I get you alone!)

“When quiet had been restored and the audience resumed their seats after the ovation which they

had given to the travellers, the chairman, the Duke of Durham, addressed the meeting. ‘He would not,’ he said, ‘stand for more than a moment between that vast assembly and the treat which lay before them. It was not for him to anticipate what Professor Summerlee, who was the spokesman of the committee, had to say to them, but it was common rumour that their expedition had been crowned by extraordinary success.’ (Applause.) ‘Apparently the age of romance was not dead, and there was common ground upon which the wildest imaginings of the novelist could meet the actual scientific investigations of the searcher for truth. He would only add, before he sat down, that he rejoiced—and all of them would rejoice—that these gentlemen had returned safe and sound from their difficult and dangerous task, for it cannot be denied that any disaster to such an expedition would have inflicted a well-nigh irreparable loss to the cause of Zoological science.’ (Great applause, in which Professor Challenger was observed to join.)

“Professor Summerlee’s rising was the signal for another extraordinary outbreak of enthusiasm, which broke out again at intervals throughout his address. That address will not be given in extenso in these columns, for the reason that a full account of the whole adventures of the expedition is being published as a supplement from the pen of our own special correspondent. Some general indications will therefore suffice. Having described the genesis of their journey, and paid a handsome tribute to his friend Professor Challenger, coupled with an apology for the incredulity with which his assertions, now fully vindicated, had been received, he gave the actual course of their journey, carefully withholding such information as would aid the public in any attempt to locate this remarkable plateau. Having described, in general terms, their course from the main river up to the time that they actually reached the base of the cliffs, he enthralled his hearers by his account of the difficulties encountered by the expedition in their repeated attempts to mount them, and finally described how they succeeded in their desperate endeavours, which cost the lives of their two devoted half-breed servants.” (This amazing reading of the affair was the result of Summerlee’s endeavours to avoid raising any questionable matter at the meeting.)

“Having conducted his audience in fancy to the summit, and marooned them there by reason of the fall of their bridge, the Professor proceeded to describe both the horrors and the attractions of that remarkable land. Of personal adventures he said little, but laid stress upon the rich harvest reaped by Science in the observations of the wonderful beast, bird, insect, and plant life of the plateau. Peculiarly rich in the coleoptera and in the lepidoptera, forty-six new species of the one and ninety-four of the other had been secured in the course of a few weeks. It was, however, in the larger animals, and especially in the larger animals supposed to have been long extinct, that the interest of the public was naturally centred. Of these he was able to give a goodly list, but had little doubt that it would be largely extended when the place had been more thoroughly investigated. He and his companions had seen at least a dozen creatures, most of them at a distance, which corresponded with nothing at present known to Science. These would in time be duly classified and examined. He instanced a snake, the cast skin of which, deep purple in colour, was fifty-one feet in length, and mentioned a white creature, supposed to be mammalian, which gave forth well-marked phosphorescence in the darkness; also a large black moth, the bite of which was supposed by the Indians to be highly poisonous. Setting aside these entirely new forms of life, the plateau was very rich in known prehistoric forms, dating back in some cases to early Jurassic times. Among these he mentioned the gigantic and grotesque stegosaurus, seen once by Mr. Malone at a drinking-place by the lake, and drawn in the sketch-book of that adventurous American who had first penetrated this unknown world. He described also the

iguanodon and the pterodactyl—two of the first of the wonders which they had encountered. He then thrilled the assembly by some account of the terrible carnivorous dinosaurs, which had on more than one occasion pursued members of the party, and which were the most formidable of all the creatures which they had encountered. Thence he passed to the huge and ferocious bird, the phororachus, and to the great elk which still roams upon this upland. It was not, however, until he sketched the mysteries of the central lake that the full interest and enthusiasm of the audience were aroused. One had to pinch oneself to be sure that one was awake as one heard this sane and practical Professor in cold measured tones describing the monstrous three-eyed fish-lizards and the huge water-snakes which inhabit this enchanted sheet of water. Next he touched upon the Indians, and upon the extraordinary colony of anthropoid apes, which might be looked upon as an advance upon the pithecanthropus of Java, and as coming therefore nearer than any known form to that hypothetical creation, the missing link. Finally he described, amongst some merriment, the ingenious but highly dangerous aeronautic invention of Professor Challenger, and wound up a most memorable address by an account of the methods by which the committee did at last find their way back to civilization.

“It had been hoped that the proceedings would end there, and that a vote of thanks and congratulation, moved by Professor Sergius, of Uppsala University, would be duly seconded and carried; but it was soon evident that the course of events was not destined to flow so smoothly. Symptoms of opposition had been evident from time to time during the evening, and now Dr. James Illingworth, of Edinburgh, rose in the centre of the hall. Dr. Illingworth asked whether an amendment should not be taken before a resolution.

“THE CHAIRMAN: ‘Yes, sir, if there must be an amendment.’

“DR. ILLINGWORTH: ‘Your Grace, there must be an amendment.’

“THE CHAIRMAN: ‘Then let us take it at once.’

“PROFESSOR SUMMERLEE (springing to his feet): ‘Might I explain, your Grace, that this man is my personal enemy ever since our controversy in the Quarterly Journal of Science as to the true nature of Bathybius?’

“THE CHAIRMAN: ‘I fear I cannot go into personal matters. Proceed.’

“Dr. Illingworth was imperfectly heard in part of his remarks on account of the strenuous opposition of the friends of the explorers. Some attempts were also made to pull him down. Being a man of enormous physique, however, and possessed of a very powerful voice, he dominated the tumult and succeeded in finishing his speech. It was clear, from the moment of his rising, that he had a number of friends and sympathizers in the hall, though they formed a minority in the audience. The attitude of the greater part of the public might be described as one of attentive neutrality.

“Dr. Illingworth began his remarks by expressing his high appreciation of the scientific work both of Professor Challenger and of Professor Summerlee. He much regretted that any personal bias should have been read into his remarks, which were entirely dictated by his desire for

scientific truth. His position, in fact, was substantially the same as that taken up by Professor Summerlee at the last meeting. At that last meeting Professor Challenger had made certain assertions which had been queried by his colleague. Now this colleague came forward himself with the same assertions and expected them to remain unquestioned. Was this reasonable? ('Yes,' 'No,' and prolonged interruption, during which Professor Challenger was heard from the Press box to ask leave from the chairman to put Dr. Illingworth into the street.) A year ago one man said certain things. Now four men said other and more startling ones. Was this to constitute a final proof where the matters in question were of the most revolutionary and incredible character? There had been recent examples of travellers arriving from the unknown with certain tales which had been too readily accepted. Was the London Zoological Institute to place itself in this position? He admitted that the members of the committee were men of character. But human nature was very complex. Even Professors might be misled by the desire for notoriety. Like moths, we all love best to flutter in the light. Heavy-game shots liked to be in a position to cap the tales of their rivals, and journalists were not averse from sensational coups, even when imagination had to aid fact in the process. Each member of the committee had his own motive for making the most of his results. ('Shame! shame!') He had no desire to be offensive. ('You are!' and interruption.) The corroboration of these wondrous tales was really of the most slender description. What did it amount to? Some photographs. {Was it possible that in this age of ingenious manipulation photographs could be accepted as evidence?} What more? We have a story of a flight and a descent by ropes which precluded the production of larger specimens. It was ingenious, but not convincing. It was understood that Lord John Roxton claimed to have the skull of a phororachus. He could only say that he would like to see that skull.

"LORD JOHN ROXTON: 'Is this fellow calling me a liar?' (Uproar.)

"THE CHAIRMAN: 'Order! order! Dr. Illingworth, I must direct you to bring your remarks to a conclusion and to move your amendment.'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH: 'Your Grace, I have more to say, but I bow to your ruling. I move, then, that, while Professor Summerlee be thanked for his interesting address, the whole matter shall be regarded as 'non-proven,' and shall be referred back to a larger, and possibly more reliable Committee of Investigation.'

"It is difficult to describe the confusion caused by this amendment. A large section of the audience expressed their indignation at such a slur upon the travellers by noisy shouts of dissent and cries of, 'Don't put it!' 'Withdraw!' 'Turn him out!' On the other hand, the malcontents—and it cannot be denied that they were fairly numerous—cheered for the amendment, with cries of 'Order!' 'Chair!' and 'Fair play!' A scuffle broke out in the back benches, and blows were freely exchanged among the medical students who crowded that part of the hall. It was only the moderating influence of the presence of large numbers of ladies which prevented an absolute riot. Suddenly, however, there was a pause, a hush, and then complete silence. Professor Challenger was on his feet. His appearance and manner are peculiarly arresting, and as he raised his hand for order the whole audience settled down expectantly to give him a hearing.

"'It will be within the recollection of many present,' said Professor Challenger, 'that similar foolish and unmannerly scenes marked the last meeting at which I have been able to address

them. On that occasion Professor Summerlee was the chief offender, and though he is now chastened and contrite, the matter could not be entirely forgotten. I have heard to-night similar, but even more offensive, sentiments from the person who has just sat down, and though it is a conscious effort of self-effacement to come down to that person's mental level, I will endeavour to do so, in order to allay any reasonable doubt which could possibly exist in the minds of anyone.' (Laughter and interruption.) 'I need not remind this audience that, though Professor Summerlee, as the head of the Committee of Investigation, has been put up to speak to-night, still it is I who am the real prime mover in this business, and that it is mainly to me that any successful result must be ascribed. I have safely conducted these three gentlemen to the spot mentioned, and I have, as you have heard, convinced them of the accuracy of my previous account. We had hoped that we should find upon our return that no one was so dense as to dispute our joint conclusions. Warned, however, by my previous experience, I have not come without such proofs as may convince a reasonable man. As explained by Professor Summerlee, our cameras have been tampered with by the ape-men when they ransacked our camp, and most of our negatives ruined.' (Jeers, laughter, and 'Tell us another!' from the back.) 'I have mentioned the ape-men, and I cannot forbear from saying that some of the sounds which now meet my ears bring back most vividly to my recollection my experiences with those interesting creatures.' (Laughter.) 'In spite of the destruction of so many invaluable negatives, there still remains in our collection a certain number of corroborative photographs showing the conditions of life upon the plateau. Did they accuse them of having forged these photographs?' (A voice, 'Yes,' and considerable interruption which ended in several men being put out of the hall.) 'The negatives were open to the inspection of experts. But what other evidence had they? Under the conditions of their escape it was naturally impossible to bring a large amount of baggage, but they had rescued Professor Summerlee's collections of butterflies and beetles, containing many new species. Was this not evidence?' (Several voices, 'No.') 'Who said no?'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH (rising): 'Our point is that such a collection might have been made in other places than a prehistoric plateau.' (Applause.)

"PROFESSOR CHALLENGER: 'No doubt, sir, we have to bow to your scientific authority, although I must admit that the name is unfamiliar. Passing, then, both the photographs and the entomological collection, I come to the varied and accurate information which we bring with us upon points which have never before been elucidated. For example, upon the domestic habits of the pterodactyl—' (A voice: 'Bosh,' and uproar)—'I say, that upon the domestic habits of the pterodactyl we can throw a flood of light. I can exhibit to you from my portfolio a picture of that creature taken from life which would convince you——'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH: 'No picture could convince us of anything.'

"PROFESSOR CHALLENGER: 'You would require to see the thing itself?'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH: 'Undoubtedly.'

"PROFESSOR CHALLENGER: 'And you would accept that?'

"DR. ILLINGWORTH (laughing): 'Beyond a doubt.'

“It was at this point that the sensation of the evening arose—a sensation so dramatic that it can never have been paralleled in the history of scientific gatherings. Professor Challenger raised his hand in the air as a signal, and at once our colleague, Mr. E. D. Malone, was observed to rise and to make his way to the back of the platform. An instant later he re-appeared in company of a gigantic negro, the two of them bearing between them a large square packing-case. It was evidently of great weight, and was slowly carried forward and placed in front of the Professor’s chair. All sound had hushed in the audience and everyone was absorbed in the spectacle before them. Professor Challenger drew off the top of the case, which formed a sliding lid. Peering down into the box he snapped his fingers several times and was heard from the Press seat to say, ‘Come, then, pretty, pretty!’ in a coaxing voice. An instant later, with a scratching, rattling sound, a most horrible and loathsome creature appeared from below and perched itself upon the side of the case. Even the unexpected fall of the Duke of Durham into the orchestra, which occurred at this moment, could not distract the petrified attention of the vast audience. The face of the creature was like the wildest gargoyle that the imagination of a mad medieval builder could have conceived. It was malicious, horrible, with two small red eyes as bright as points of burning coal. Its long, savage mouth, which was held half-open, was full of a double row of shark-like teeth. Its shoulders were humped, and round them were draped what appeared to be a faded grey shawl. It was the devil of our childhood in person. There was a turmoil in the audience—someone screamed, two ladies in the front row fell senseless from their chairs, and there was a general movement upon the platform to follow their chairman into the orchestra. For a moment there was danger of a general panic. Professor Challenger threw up his hands to still the commotion, but the movement alarmed the creature beside him. Its strange shawl suddenly unfurled, spread, and fluttered as a pair of leathery wings. Its owner grabbed at its legs, but too late to hold it. It had sprung from the perch and was circling slowly round the Queen’s Hall with a dry, leathery flapping of its ten-foot wings, while a putrid and insidious odour pervaded the room. The cries of the people in the galleries, who were alarmed at the near approach of those glowing eyes and that murderous beak, excited the creature to a frenzy. Faster and faster it flew, beating against walls and chandeliers in a blind frenzy of alarm. ‘The window! For heaven’s sake shut that window!’ roared the Professor from the platform, dancing and wringing his hands in an agony of apprehension. Alas, his warning was too late! In a moment the creature, beating and bumping along the wall like a huge moth within a gas-shade, came upon the opening, squeezed its hideous bulk through it, and was gone. Professor Challenger fell back into his chair with his face buried in his hands, while the audience gave one long, deep sigh of relief as they realized that the incident was over.

“Then—oh! how shall one describe what took place then—when the full exuberance of the majority and the full reaction of the minority united to make one great wave of enthusiasm, which rolled from the back of the hall, gathering volume as it came, swept over the orchestra, submerged the platform, and carried the four heroes away upon its crest?” (Good for you, Mac!) “If the audience had done less than justice, surely it made ample amends. Everyone was on his feet. Everyone was moving, shouting, gesticulating. A dense crowd of cheering men were round the four travellers. ‘Up with them! up with them!’ cried a hundred voices. In a moment four figures shot up above the crowd. In vain they strove to break loose. They were held in their lofty places of honour. It would have been hard to let them down if it had been wished, so dense was the crowd around them. ‘Regent Street! Regent Street!’ sounded the voices. There was a swirl in

the packed multitude, and a slow current, bearing the four upon their shoulders, made for the door. Out in the street the scene was extraordinary. An assemblage of not less than a hundred thousand people was waiting. The close-packed throng extended from the other side of the Langham Hotel to Oxford Circus. A roar of acclamation greeted the four adventurers as they appeared, high above the heads of the people, under the vivid electric lamps outside the hall. ‘A procession! A procession!’ was the cry. In a dense phalanx, blocking the streets from side to side, the crowd set forth, taking the route of Regent Street, Pall Mall, St. James’s Street, and Piccadilly. The whole central traffic of London was held up, and many collisions were reported between the demonstrators upon the one side and the police and taxi-cabmen upon the other. Finally, it was not until after midnight that the four travellers were released at the entrance to Lord John Roxton’s chambers in the Albany, and that the exuberant crowd, having sung ‘They are Jolly Good Fellows’ in chorus, concluded their program with ‘God Save the King.’ So ended one of the most remarkable evenings that London has seen for a considerable time.”

So far my friend Macdona; and it may be taken as a fairly accurate, if florid, account of the proceedings. As to the main incident, it was a bewildering surprise to the audience, but not, I need hardly say, to us. The reader will remember how I met Lord John Roxton upon the very occasion when, in his protective crinoline, he had gone to bring the “Devil’s chick” as he called it, for Professor Challenger. I have hinted also at the trouble which the Professor’s baggage gave us when we left the plateau, and had I described our voyage I might have said a good deal of the worry we had to coax with putrid fish the appetite of our filthy companion. If I have not said much about it before, it was, of course, that the Professor’s earnest desire was that no possible rumour of the unanswerable argument which we carried should be allowed to leak out until the moment came when his enemies were to be confuted.

One word as to the fate of the London pterodactyl. Nothing can be said to be certain upon this point. There is the evidence of two frightened women that it perched upon the roof of the Queen’s Hall and remained there like a diabolical statue for some hours. The next day it came out in the evening papers that Private Miles, of the Coldstream Guards, on duty outside Marlborough House, had deserted his post without leave, and was therefore court-martialled. Private Miles’ account, that he dropped his rifle and took to his heels down the Mall because on looking up he had suddenly seen the devil between him and the moon, was not accepted by the Court, and yet it may have a direct bearing upon the point at issue. The only other evidence which I can adduce is from the log of the SS. Friesland, a Dutch-American liner, which asserts that at nine next morning, Start Point being at the time ten miles upon their starboard quarter, they were passed by something between a flying goat and a monstrous bat, which was heading at a prodigious pace south and west. If its homing instinct led it upon the right line, there can be no doubt that somewhere out in the wastes of the Atlantic the last European pterodactyl found its end.

And Gladys—oh, my Gladys!—Gladys of the mystic lake, now to be re-named the Central, for never shall she have immortality through me. Did I not always see some hard fibre in her nature? Did I not, even at the time when I was proud to obey her behest, feel that it was surely a poor love which could drive a lover to his death or the danger of it? Did I not, in my truest thoughts, always recurring and always dismissed, see past the beauty of the face, and, peering into the soul, discern the twin shadows of selfishness and of fickleness glooming at the back of it? Did she

love the heroic and the spectacular for its own noble sake, or was it for the glory which might, without effort or sacrifice, be reflected upon herself? Or are these thoughts the vain wisdom which comes after the event? It was the shock of my life. For a moment it had turned me to a cynic. But already, as I write, a week has passed, and we have had our momentous interview with Lord John Roxton and—well, perhaps things might be worse.

Let me tell it in a few words. No letter or telegram had come to me at Southampton, and I reached the little villa at Streatham about ten o'clock that night in a fever of alarm. Was she dead or alive? Where were all my nightly dreams of the open arms, the smiling face, the words of praise for her man who had risked his life to humour her whim? Already I was down from the high peaks and standing flat-footed upon earth. Yet some good reasons given might still lift me to the clouds once more. I rushed down the garden path, hammered at the door, heard the voice of Gladys within, pushed past the staring maid, and strode into the sitting-room. She was seated in a low settee under the shaded standard lamp by the piano. In three steps I was across the room and had both her hands in mine.

“Gladys!” I cried, “Gladys!”

She looked up with amazement in her face. She was altered in some subtle way. The expression of her eyes, the hard upward stare, the set of the lips, was new to me. She drew back her hands.

“What do you mean?” she said.

“Gladys!” I cried. “What is the matter? You are my Gladys, are you not—little Gladys Hungerton?”

“No,” said she, “I am Gladys Potts. Let me introduce you to my husband.”

How absurd life is! I found myself mechanically bowing and shaking hands with a little ginger-haired man who was coiled up in the deep arm-chair which had once been sacred to my own use. We bobbed and grinned in front of each other.

“Father lets us stay here. We are getting our house ready,” said Gladys.

“Oh, yes,” said I.

“You didn’t get my letter at Para, then?”

“No, I got no letter.”

“Oh, what a pity! It would have made all clear.”

“It is quite clear,” said I.

“I’ve told William all about you,” said she. “We have no secrets. I am so sorry about it. But it couldn’t have been so very deep, could it, if you could go off to the other end of the world and

leave me here alone. You're not crabby, are you?"

"No, no, not at all. I think I'll go."

"Have some refreshment," said the little man, and he added, in a confidential way, "It's always like this, ain't it? And must be unless you had polygamy, only the other way round; you understand." He laughed like an idiot, while I made for the door.

I was through it, when a sudden fantastic impulse came upon me, and I went back to my successful rival, who looked nervously at the electric push.

"Will you answer a question?" I asked.

"Well, within reason," said he.

"How did you do it? Have you searched for hidden treasure, or discovered a pole, or done time on a pirate, or flown the Channel, or what? Where is the glamour of romance? How did you get it?"

He stared at me with a hopeless expression upon his vacuous, good-natured, scrubby little face.

"Don't you think all this is a little too personal?" he said.

"Well, just one question," I cried. "What are you? What is your profession?"

"I am a solicitor's clerk," said he. "Second man at Johnson and Merivale's, 41 Chancery Lane."

"Good-night!" said I, and vanished, like all disconsolate and broken-hearted heroes, into the darkness, with grief and rage and laughter all simmering within me like a boiling pot.

One more little scene, and I have done. Last night we all supped at Lord John Roxton's rooms, and sitting together afterwards we smoked in good comradeship and talked our adventures over. It was strange under these altered surroundings to see the old, well-known faces and figures. There was Challenger, with his smile of condescension, his drooping eyelids, his intolerant eyes, his aggressive beard, his huge chest, swelling and puffing as he laid down the law to Summerlee. And Summerlee, too, there he was with his short briar between his thin moustache and his grey goat's-beard, his worn face protruded in eager debate as he queried all Challenger's propositions. Finally, there was our host, with his rugged, eagle face, and his cold, blue, glacier eyes with always a shimmer of devilment and of humour down in the depths of them. Such is the last picture of them that I have carried away.

It was after supper, in his own sanctum—the room of the pink radiance and the innumerable trophies—that Lord John Roxton had something to say to us. From a cupboard he had brought an old cigar-box, and this he laid before him on the table.

"There's one thing," said he, "that maybe I should have spoken about before this, but I wanted to

know a little more clearly where I was. No use to raise hopes and let them down again. But it's facts, not hopes, with us now. You may remember that day we found the pterodactyl rookery in the swamp—what? Well, somethin' in the lie of the land took my notice. Perhaps it has escaped you, so I will tell you. It was a volcanic vent full of blue clay." The Professors nodded.

"Well, now, in the whole world I've only had to do with one place that was a volcanic vent of blue clay. That was the great De Beers Diamond Mine of Kimberley—what? So you see I got diamonds into my head. I rigged up a contraption to hold off those stinking beasts, and I spent a happy day there with a spud. This is what I got."

He opened his cigar-box, and tilting it over he poured about twenty or thirty rough stones, varying from the size of beans to that of chestnuts, on the table.

"Perhaps you think I should have told you then. Well, so I should, only I know there are a lot of traps for the unwary, and that stones may be of any size and yet of little value where colour and consistency are clean off. Therefore, I brought them back, and on the first day at home I took one round to Spink's, and asked him to have it roughly cut and valued."

He took a pill-box from his pocket, and spilled out of it a beautiful glittering diamond, one of the finest stones that I have ever seen.

"There's the result," said he. "He prices the lot at a minimum of two hundred thousand pounds. Of course it is fair shares between us. I won't hear of anythin' else. Well, Challenger, what will you do with your fifty thousand?"

"If you really persist in your generous view," said the Professor, "I should found a private museum, which has long been one of my dreams."

"And you, Summerlee?"

"I would retire from teaching, and so find time for my final classification of the chalk fossils."

"I'll use my own," said Lord John Roxton, "in fitting a well-formed expedition and having another look at the dear old plateau. As to you, young fellah, you, of course, will spend yours in gettin' married."

"Not just yet," said I, with a rueful smile. "I think, if you will have me, that I would rather go with you."

Lord Roxton said nothing, but a brown hand was stretched out to me across the table.

THE END

NEXT WEEK: ERIC BRIGHTYES BY H RIDER HAGGARD

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THE MOON POOL by A Merritt

Chapter XX: The Tempting of Larry

We paused before thick curtains, through which came the faint murmur of many voices. They parted; out came two—ushers, I suppose, they were—in cuirasses and kilts that reminded me somewhat of chain-mail—the first armour of any kind here that I had seen. They held open the folds.

The chamber, on whose threshold we stood, was far larger than either anteroom or hall of audience. Not less than three hundred feet long and half that in depth, from end to end of it ran two huge semi-circular tables, paralleling each other, divided by a wide aisle, and heaped with flowers, with fruits, with viands unknown to me, and glittering with crystal flagons, beakers, goblets of as many hues as the blooms. On the gay-cushioned couches that flanked the tables, lounging luxuriously, were scores of the fair-haired ruling class and there rose a little buzz of admiration, oddly mixed with a half-startled amaze, as their gaze fell upon O'Keefe in all his silvery magnificence. Everywhere the light-giving globes sent their roseate radiance.

The cuirassed dwarfs led us through the aisle. Within the arc of the inner half—circle was another glittering board, an oval. But of those seated there, facing us—I had eyes for only one—Yolara! She swayed up to greet O'Keefe—and she was like one of those white lily maids, whose beauty Hoang-Ku, the sage, says made the Gobi first a paradise, and whose lusts later the burned-out desert that it is. She held out hands to Larry, and on her face was passion—unashamed, un hiding.

She was Circe—but Circe conquered. Webs of filmiest white clung to the rose-leaf body. Twisted through the corn-silk hair a threaded circlet of pale sapphires shone; but they were pale beside Yolara's eyes. O'Keefe bent, kissed her hands, something more than mere admiration flaming from him. She saw—and, smiling, drew him down beside her.

It came to me that of all, only these two, Yolara and O'Keefe, were in white—and I wondered; then with a tightening of nerves ceased to wonder as there entered—Lugur! He was all in scarlet, and as he strode forward a silence fell a tense, strained silence.

His gaze turned upon Yolara, rested upon O'Keefe, and instantly his face grew—dreadful—there is no other word than that for it. Marakinoff leaned forward from the centre of the table, near whose end I sat, touched and whispered to him swiftly. With appalling effort the red dwarf controlled himself; he saluted the priestess ironically, I thought; took his place at the further end of the oval. And now I noted that the figures between were the seven of that Council of which the Shining One's priestess and Voice were the heads. The tension relaxed, but did not pass—as though a storm-cloud should turn away, but still lurk, threatening.

My gaze ran back. This end of the room was draped with the exquisitely coloured, graceful curtains looped with gorgeous garlands. Between curtains and table, where sat Larry and the nine, a circular platform, perhaps ten yards in diameter, raised itself a few feet above the floor, its gleaming surface half-covered with the luminous petals, fragrant, delicate.

On each side below it, were low carven stools. The curtains parted and softly entered girls bearing their flutes, their harps, the curiously emotion-exciting, octaved drums. They sank into their places. They touched their instruments; a faint, languorous measure throbbed through the rosy air.

The stage was set! What was to be the play?

Now about the tables passed other dusky-haired maids, fair bosoms bare, their scanty kirtles looped high, pouring out the wines for the feasters.

My eyes sought O'Keefe. Whatever it had been that Marakinoff had said, clearly it now filled his mind—even to the exclusion of the wondrous woman beside him. His eyes were stern, cold—and now and then, as he turned them toward the Russian, filled with a curious speculation. Yolara watched him, frowned, gave a low order to the Hebe behind her.

The girl disappeared, entered again with a ewer that seemed cut of amber. The priestess poured from it into Larry's glass a clear liquid that shook with tiny sparkles of light. She raised the glass to her lips, handed it to him. Half-smiling, half-abstractedly, he took it, touched his own lips where hers had kissed; drained it. A nod from Yolara and the maid refilled his goblet.

At once there was a swift transformation in the Irishman. His abstraction vanished; the sternness fled; his eyes sparkled. He leaned caressingly toward Yolara; whispered. Her blue eyes flashed triumphantly; her chiming laughter rang. She raised her own glass—but within it was not that clear drink that filled Larry's! And again he drained his own; and, lifting it, full once more, caught the baleful eyes of Lugur, and held it toward him mockingly. Yolara swayed close—alluring, tempting. He arose, face all reckless gaiety; rollicking deviltry.

“A toast!” he cried in English, “to the Shining One—and may the hell where it belongs soon claim it!”

He had used their own word for their god—all else had been in his own tongue, and so, fortunately, they did not understand. But the contempt in his action they did recognize—and a dead, a fearful silence fell upon them all. Lugur's eyes blazed, little sparks of crimson in their green. The priestess reached up, caught at O'Keefe. He seized the soft hand; caressed it; his gaze grew far away, sombre.

“The Shining One.” He spoke low. “An' now again I see the faces of those who dance with it. It is the Fires of Mora—come, God alone knows how—from Erin—to this place. The Fires of Mora!” He contemplated the hushed folk before him; and then from his lips came that weirdest, most haunting of the lyric legends of Erin—the Curse of Mora:

“The fretted fires of Mora blew o'er him in the night;
He thrills no more to loving, nor weeps for past delight.
For when those flames have bitten, both grief and joy take flight—”

Again Yolara tried to draw him down beside her; and once more he gripped her hand. His eyes grew fixed—he crooned:

“And through the sleeping silence his feet must track the tune,
When the world is barred and speckled with silver of the moon—”

He stood, swaying, for a moment, and then, laughing, let the priestess have her way; drained again the glass.

And now my heart was cold, indeed—for what hope was there left with Larry mad, wild drunk!

The silence was unbroken—elfin women and dwarfs glancing furtively at each other. But now Yolara arose, face set, eyes flashing grey.

“Hear you, the Council, and you, Lugur—and all who are here!” she cried. “Now I, the priestess of the Shining One, take, as is my right, my mate. And this is he!” She pointed down upon Larry. He glanced up at her.

“Can’t quite make out what you say, Yolara,” he muttered thickly. “But say anything—you like—I love your voice!”

I turned sick with dread. Yolara’s hand stole softly upon the Irishman’s curls caressingly.

“You know the law, Yolara.” Lugur’s voice was flat, deadly, “You may not mate with other than your own kind. And this man is a stranger—a barbarian—food for the Shining One!” Literally, he spat the phrase.

“No, not of our kind—Lugur—higher!” Yolara answered serenely. “Lo, a son of Siya and of Siyana!”

“A lie!” roared the red dwarf. “A lie!”

“The Shining One revealed it to me!” said Yolara sweetly. “And if ye believe not, Lugur—go ask of the Shining One if it be not truth!”

There was bitter, nameless menace in those last words—and whatever their hidden message to Lugur, it was potent. He stood, choking, face hell-shadowed—Marakinoff leaned out again, whispered. The red dwarf bowed, now wholly ironically; resumed his place and his silence. And again I wondered, icy-hearted, what was the power the Russian had so to sway Lugur.

“What says the Council?” Yolara demanded, turning to them.

Only for a moment they consulted among themselves. Then the woman, whose face was a ravaged shrine of beauty, spoke.

“The will of the priestess is the will of the Council!” she answered.

Defiance died from Yolara's face; she looked down at Larry tenderly. He sat swaying, crooning.

"Bid the priests come," she commanded, then turned to the silent room. "By the rites of Siya and Siyana, Yolara takes their son for her mate!" And again her hand stole down possessingly, serpent soft, to the drunken head of the O'Keefe.

The curtains parted widely. Through them filed, two by two, twelve hooded figures clad in flowing robes of the green one sees in forest vistas of opening buds of dawning spring. Of each pair one bore clasped to breast a globe of that milky crystal in the sapphire shrine-room; the other a harp, small, shaped somewhat like the ancient clarsach of the Druids.

Two by two they stepped upon the raised platform, placed gently upon it each their globe; and two by two crouched behind them. They formed now a star of six points about the petalled dais, and, simultaneously, they drew from their faces the covering cowls.

I half-rose—youths and maidens these of the fair-haired; and youths and maids more beautiful than any of those I had yet seen—for upon their faces was little of that disturbing mockery to which I have been forced so often, because of the deep impression it made upon me, to refer. The ashen-gold of the maiden priestesses' hair was wound about their brows in shining coronals. The pale locks of the youths were clustered within circlets of translucent, glimmering gems like moonstones. And then, crystal globe alternately before and harp alternately held by youth and maid, they began to sing.

What was that song, I do not know—nor ever shall. Archaic, ancient beyond thought, it seemed—not with the ancientness of things that for uncounted ages have been but wind-driven dust. Rather was it the ancientness of the golden youth of the world, love lilts of earth younglings, with light of new-born suns drenching them, chorals of young stars mating in space; murmurings of April gods and goddesses. A languor stole through me. The rosy lights upon the tripods began to die away, and as they faded the milky globes gleamed forth brighter, ever brighter. Yolara rose, stretched a hand to Larry, led him through the sextuple groups, and stood face to face with him in the centre of their circle.

The rose-light died; all that immense chamber was black, save for the circle of the glowing spheres. Within this their milky radiance grew brighter—brighter. The song whispered away. A throbbing arpeggio dripped from the harps, and as the notes pulsed out, up from the globes, as though striving to follow, pulsed with them tips of moon-fire cones, such as I had seen before Yolara's altar. Weirdly, caressingly, compellingly the harp notes throbbed in repeated, re-repeated theme, holding within itself the same archaic golden quality I had noted in the singing. And over the moon flame pinnacles rose higher!

Yolara lifted her arms; within her hands were clasped O'Keefe's. She raised them above their two heads and slowly, slowly drew him with her into a circling, graceful step, tendrillings delicate as the slow spirallings of twilight mist upon some still stream.

As they swayed the rippling arpeggios grew louder, and suddenly the slender pinnacles of moon

fire bent, dipped, flowed to the floor, crept in a shining ring around those two—and began to rise, a gleaming, glimmering, enchanted barrier—rising, ever rising—hiding them!

With one swift movement Yolara unbound her circlet of pale sapphires, shook loose the waves of her silken hair. It fell, a rippling, wondrous cascade, veiling both her and O’Keefe to their girdles—and now the shining coils of moon fire had crept to their knees—was circling higher—higher.

And ever despair grew deeper in my soul!

What was that! I started to my feet, and all around me in the darkness I heard startled motion. From without came a blaring of trumpets, the sound of running men, loud murmurings. The tumult drew closer. I heard cries of “Lakla! Lakla!” Now it was at the very threshold and within it, oddly, as though—punctuating—the clamour, a deep-toned, almost abysmal, booming sound—thunderously bass and reverberant.

Abruptly the harpings ceased; the moon fires shuddered, fell, and began to sweep back into the crystal globes; Yolara’s swaying form grew rigid, every atom of it listening. She threw aside the veiling cloud of hair, and in the gleam of the last retreating spirals her face glared out like some old Greek mask of tragedy.

The sweet lips that even at their sweetest could never lose their delicate cruelty, had no sweetness now. They were drawn into a square—inhuman as that of the Medusa; in her eyes were the fires of the pit, and her hair seemed to writhe like the serpent locks of that Gorgon whose mouth she had borrowed; all her beauty was transformed into a nameless thing—hideous, inhuman, blasting! If this was the true soul of Yolara springing to her face, then, I thought, God help us in very deed!

I wrested my gaze away to O’Keefe. All drunkenness gone, himself again, he was staring down at her, and in his eyes were loathing and horror unutterable. So they stood—and the light fled.

Only for a moment did the darkness hold. With lightning swiftness the blackness that was the chamber’s other wall vanished. Through a portal open between grey screens, the silver sparkling radiance poured.

And through the portal marched, two by two, incredible, nightmare figures—frog-men, giants, taller by nearly a yard than even tall O’Keefe! Their enormous saucer eyes were irised by wide bands of green-flecked red, in which the phosphorescence flickered. Their long muzzles, lips half-open in monstrous grin, held rows of glistening, slender, lancet sharp fangs. Over the glaring eyes arose a horny helmet, a carapace of black and orange scales, studded with foot-long lance-headed horns.

They lined themselves like soldiers on each side of the wide table aisle, and now I could see that their horny armour covered shoulders and backs, ran across the chest in a knobbed cuirass, and at wrists and heels jutted out into curved, murderous spurs. The webbed hands and feet ended in yellow, spade-shaped claws.

They carried spears, ten feet, at least, in length, the heads of which were pointed cones, glistening with that same covering, from whose touch of swift decay I had so narrowly saved Rador.

They were grotesque, yes—more grotesque than anything I had ever seen or dreamed, and they were—terrible!

And then, quietly, through their ranks came—a girl! Behind her, enormous pouch at his throat swelling in and out menacingly, in one paw a treelike, spike-studded mace, a frog-man, huger than any of the others, guarding. But of him I caught but a fleeting, involuntary impression—all my gaze was for her.

For it was she who had pointed out to us the way from the peril of the Dweller's lair on Nan-Tauach. And as I looked at her, I marvelled that ever could I have thought the priestess more beautiful. Into the eyes of O'Keefe rushed joy and an utter abasement of shame.

And from all about came murmurs—edged with anger, half-incredulous, tinged with fear:

“Lakla!”

“Lakla!”

“The handmaiden!”

She halted close beside me. From firm little chin to dainty buskined feet she was swathed in the soft robes of dull, almost coppery hue. The left arm was hidden, the right free and gloved. Wound tight about it was one of the vines of the sculptured wall and of Lugur's circled signet-ring. Thick, a vivid green, its five tendrils ran between her fingers, stretching out five flowered heads that gleamed like blossoms cut from gigantic, glowing rubies.

So she stood contemplating Yolar. Then drawn perhaps by my gaze, she dropped her eyes upon me; golden, translucent, with tiny flecks of amber in their aureate irises, the soul that looked through them was as far removed from that flaming out of the priestess as zenith is above nadir.

I noted the low, broad brow, the proud little nose, the tender mouth, and the soft—sunlight—glow that seemed to transfuse the delicate skin. And suddenly in the eyes dawned a smile—sweet, friendly, a touch of roguishness, profoundly reassuring in its all humanness. I felt my heart expand as though freed from fetters, a recrudescence of confidence in the essential reality of things—as though in nightmare the struggling consciousness should glimpse some familiar face and know the terrors with which it strove were but dreams. And involuntarily I smiled back at her.

She raised her head and looked again at Yolar, contempt and a certain curiosity in her gaze; at O'Keefe—and through the softened eyes drifted swiftly a shadow of sorrow, and on its fleeting wings deepest interest, and hovering over that a naive approval as reassuringly human as had

been her smile.

She spoke, and her voice, deep-timbred, liquid gold as was Yolara's all silver, was subtly the synthesis of all the golden glowing beauty of her.

"The Silent Ones have sent me, O Yolara," she said. "And this is their command to you—that you deliver to me to bring before them three of the four strangers who have found their way here. For him there who plots with Lugur"—she pointed at Marakinoff, and I saw Yolara start—"they have no need. Into his heart the Silent Ones have looked; and Lugur and you may keep him, Yolara!"

There was honeyed venom in the last words.

Yolara was herself now; only the edge of shrillness on her voice revealed her wrath as she answered.

"And whence have the Silent Ones gained power to command, choya?"

This last, I knew, was a very vulgar word; I had heard Rador use it in a moment of anger to one of the serving maids, and it meant, approximately, "kitchen girl," "scullion." Beneath the insult and the acid disdain, the blood rushed up under Lakla's ambered ivory skin.

"Yolara"—her voice was low—"of no use is it to question me. I am but the messenger of the Silent Ones. And one thing only am I bidden to ask you—do you deliver to me the three strangers?"

Lugur was on his feet; eagerness, sardonic delight, sinister anticipation thrilling from him—and my same glance showed Marakinoff, crouched, biting his finger-nails, glaring at the Golden Girl.

"No!" Yolara spat the word. "No! Now by Thanaroa and by the Shining One, no!" Her eyes blazed, her nostrils were wide, in her fair throat a little pulse beat angrily. "You, Lakla—take you my message to the Silent Ones. Say to them that I keep this man"—she pointed to Larry—"because he is mine. Say to them that I keep the yellow-haired one and him"—she pointed to me—"because it pleases me.

"Tell them that upon their mouths I place my foot, so!"—she stamped upon the dais viciously—"and that in their faces I spit!"—and her action was hideously snakelike. "And say last to them, you handmaiden, that if you they dare send to Yolara again, she will feed you to the Shining One! Now—go!"

The handmaiden's face was white.

"Not unforeseen by the three was this, Yolara," she replied. "And did you speak as you have spoken then was I bidden to say this to you." Her voice deepened. "Three tal have you to take counsel, Yolara. And at the end of that time these things must you have determined—either to do or not to do: first, send the strangers to the Silent Ones; second, give up, you and Lugur and all

of you, that dream you have of conquest of the world without; and, third, forswear the Shining One! And if you do not one and all these things, then are you done, your cup of life broken, your wine of life spilled. Yea, Yolara, for you and the Shining One, Lugur and the Nine and all those here and their kind shall pass! This say the Silent Ones, 'Surely shall all of ye pass and be as though never had ye been!'"

Now a gasp of rage and fear arose from all those around me—but the priestess threw back her head and laughed loud and long. Into the silver sweet chiming of her laughter clashed that of Lugur—and after a little the nobles took it up, till the whole chamber echoed with their mirth. O'Keefe, lips tightening, moved toward the Handmaiden, and almost imperceptibly, but peremptorily, she waved him back.

"Those are great words—great words indeed, choya," shrilled Yolara at last; and again Lakla winced beneath the word. "Lo, for laya upon laya, the Shining One has been freed from the Three; and for laya upon laya they have sat helpless, rotting. Now I ask you again—whence comes their power to lay their will upon me, and whence comes their strength to wrestle with the Shining One and the beloved of the Shining One?"

And again she laughed—and again Lugur and all the fair-haired joined in her laughter.

Into the eyes of Lakla I saw creep a doubt, a wavering; as though deep within her the foundations of her own belief were none too firm.

She hesitated, turning upon O'Keefe gaze in which rested more than suggestion of appeal! And Yolara saw, too, for she flushed with triumph, stretched a finger toward the handmaiden.

"Look!" she cried. "Look! Why, even she does not believe!" Her voice grew silk of silver—merciless, cruel. "Now am I minded to send another answer to the Silent Ones. Yea! But not by you, Lakla; by these"—she pointed to the frog-men, and, swift as light, her hand darted into her bosom, bringing forth the little shining cone of death.

But before she could level it the Golden Girl had released that hidden left arm and thrown over her face a fold of the metallic swathings. Swifter than Yolara, she raised the arm that held the vine—and now I knew this was no inert blossoming thing.

It was alive!

It writhed down her arm, and its five rufescent flower heads thrust out toward the priestess—vibrating, quivering, held in leash only by the light touch of the handmaiden at its very end.

From the swelling throat pouch of the monster behind her came a succession of the reverberant boomings. The frogmen wheeled, raised their lances, levelled them at the throng. Around the reaching ruby flowers a faint red mist swiftly grew.

The silver cone dropped from Yolara's rigid fingers; her eyes grew stark with horror; all her unearthly loveliness fled from her; she stood pale-lipped. The Handmaiden dropped the

protecting veil—and now it was she who laughed.

“It would seem, then, Yolara, that there is a thing of the Silent Ones ye fear!” she said. “Well—the kiss of the Yekta I promise you in return for the embrace of your Shining One.”

She looked at Larry, long, searchingly, and suddenly again with all that effect of sunlight bursting into dark places, her smile shone upon him. She nodded, half gaily; looked down upon me, the little merry light dancing in her eyes; waved her hand to me.

She spoke to the giant frog-man. He wheeled behind her as she turned, facing the priestess, club upraised, fangs glistening. His troop moved not a jot, spears held high. Lakla began to pass slowly—almost, I thought, tauntingly—and as she reached the portal Larry leaped from the dais.

“Alanna!” he cried. “You’ll not be leavin’ me just when I’ve found you!”

In his excitement he spoke in his own tongue, the velvet brogue appealing. Lakla turned, contemplated O’Keefe, hesitant, unquestionably longingly, irresistibly like a child making up her mind whether she dared or dared not take a delectable something offered her.

“I go with you,” said O’Keefe, this time in her own speech. “Come on, Doc!” He reached out a hand to me.

But now Yolara spoke. Life and beauty had flowed back into her face, and in the purple eyes all her hosts of devils were gathered.

“Do you forget what I promised you before Siya and Siyana? And do you think that you can leave me—me—as though I were a choya—like her.” She pointed to Lakla. “Do you—”

“Now, listen, Yolara,” Larry interrupted almost plaintively. “No promise has passed from me to you—and why would you hold me?” He passed unconsciously into English. “Be a good sport, Yolara,” he urged, “You have got a very devil of a temper, you know, and so have I; and we’d be really awfully uncomfortable together. And why don’t you get rid of that devilish pet of yours, and be good!”

She looked at him, puzzled, Marakinoff leaned over, translated to Lugur. The red dwarf smiled maliciously, drew near the priestess; whispered to her what was without doubt as near as he could come in the Murian to Larry’s own very colloquial phrases.

Yolara’s lips writhed.

“Hear me, Lakla!” she cried. “Now would I not let you take this man from me were I to dwell ten thousand laya in the agony of the Yekta’s kiss. This I swear to you—by Thanaroa, by my heart, and by my strength—and may my strength wither, my heart rot in my breast, and Thanaroa forget me if I do!”

“Listen, Yolara”—began O’Keefe again.

“Be silent, you!” It was almost a shriek. And her hand again sought in her breast for the cone of rhythmic death.

Lugur touched her arm, whispered again. The glint of guile shone in her eyes; she laughed softly, relaxed.

“The Silent Ones, Lakla, bade you say that they—allowed—me three tal to decide,” she said suavely. “Go now in peace, Lakla, and say that Yolara has heard, and that for the three tal they—allow—her she will take council.” The handmaiden hesitated.

“The Silent Ones have said it,” she answered at last. “Stay you here, strangers”—the long lashes drooped as her eyes met O’Keefe’s and a hint of blush was in her cheeks— “stay you here, strangers, till then. But, Yolara, see you on that heart and strength you have sworn by that they come to no harm—else that which you have invoked shall come upon you swiftly indeed—and that I promise you,” she added.

Their eyes met, clashed, burned into each other—black flame from Abaddon and golden flame from Paradise.

“Remember!” said Lakla, and passed through the portal. The gigantic frog-man boomed a thunderous note of command, his grotesque guards turned and slowly followed their mistress; and last of all passed out the monster with the mace.

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