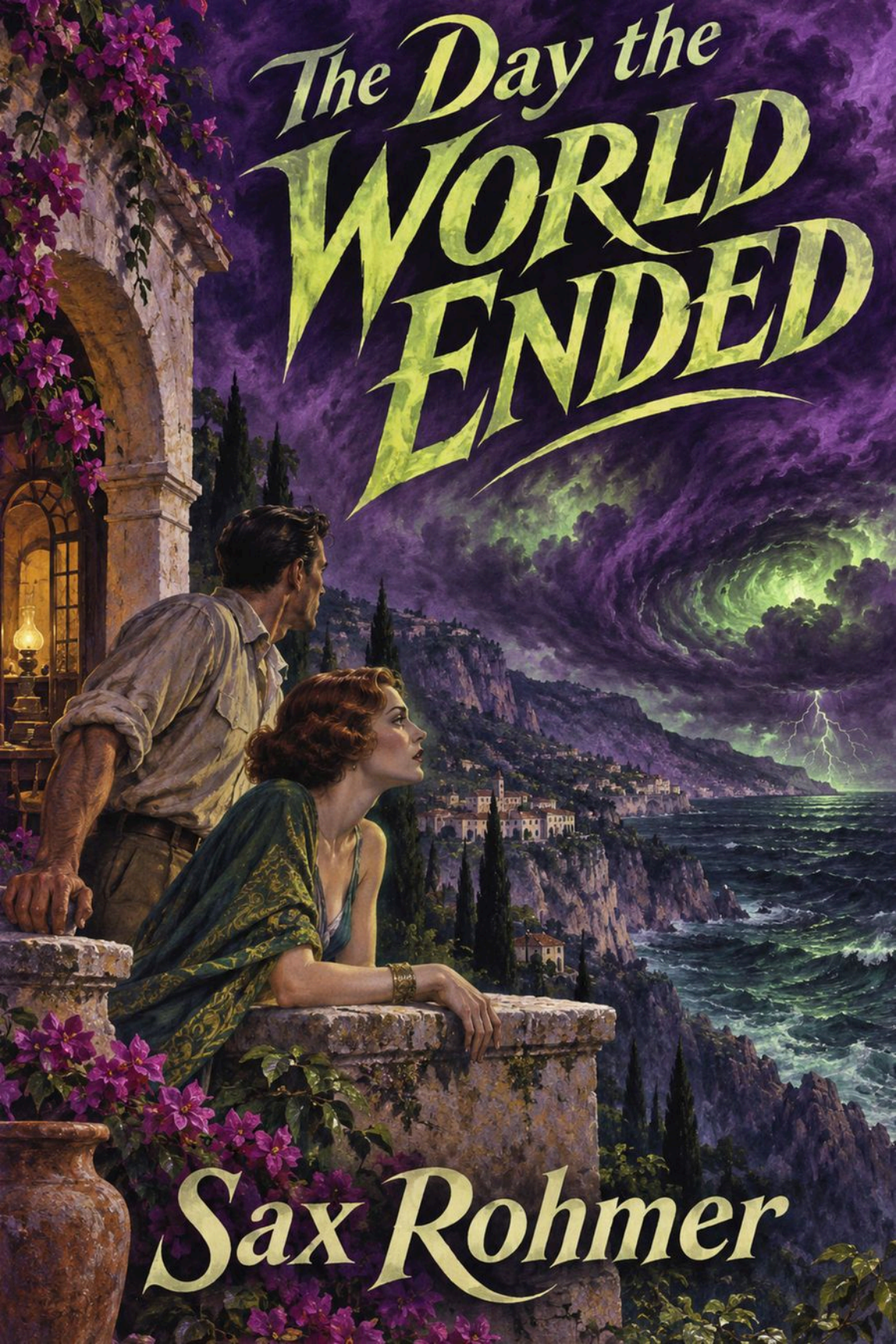
The Day the
WORLD
ENDED
Sax Rohmer

PIPCUB EDITIONS

The Day the World Ended

Sax Rohmer

THE AUTHOR



Sax Rohmer

1883 - 1959

AI-created interpretation after Photograph published in Mid-Week Pictorial, 12 January 1929.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sax Rohmer

Sax Rohmer was the pen name of Arthur Henry Ward, an English novelist born in Birmingham. His early working life included clerical work, experimenting and writing for music-hall performers. An interest in the occult and Egypt by helped shape the amber of his early fiction.

He became best known for the Fu Manchu series, which began appearing in serial form in 1912. The first three volumes in the series were written while he lived at Hen Hill in London. Their party enhanced by screen adaptations made the character of the most recognizable villain of commercial adventure fiction.

Rohmer's work combines mystery and heart-cal menace, but it also relies on a citizen's stereo of Chinese people and fears circulating in Britain during his lifetime. This is a sphere central to understanding the series's historical setting and receptor, rather than incidental details of its imagined world.

He continued writing beyond the early success of Fu Manchu, producing a substantial body of parfiction. His books offer evidence of the wyspe, sensational setting and repeated characters aimed a mass readership. They also show entertainment can carry the prejudices of its period, requiring readers to distinguish a lot of information the people and clients claim to represent.

Biographical references: English Heritage, Sax Rohmer; Wikipedia. Photo use: Photograph published in Mid-Week Pictorial, 12 January 1929. Full use records are retained in the editorial archive.

CONTENTS

I. I AM GIVEN THREE DAYS
II. MME. YBURG
III. FELSENWEIR
IV. THE DEVIL'S ELBOW
V. FROM THAT WHICH IS WRITTEN
VI. MR. JOHN LONERGAN
VII. GASTON MAX'S STORY
VIII. THE LAST WARNING
IX. LONERGAN DESERTS
X. TWO TURKISH LADIES
XI. THE GATES OF HELL
XII. BARRAGE
XIII. "WAKE—AND FORGET"
XIV. THE CASTLE GUARDS
XV. THE WILL OF ANUBIS
XVI. "ALL WE SAY IS HEARD..."
XVII. THE CHIEF CHEMIST
XVIII. SLAVES OF FELSENWEIR
XIX. FREEDOM OF FELSENWEIR
XX. MARUSA
XXI. GASTON MAX EXPLAINS
XXII. MAX'S EXPLANATION CONCLUDED
XXIII. ANUBIS SLEEPS
XXIV. THE DAY
XXV. THE HOUR

THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED

CHAPTER I.

I AM GIVEN THREE DAYS

1

"Brian Woodville!" I sat up in bed with a start. Pitch darkness prevailed in my apartment. But, staring intently out of the alcove in the direction of the half-shuttered windows, I could just discern a faint difference in the gloom. Beyond was the balcony; beyond that the gardens.

I reached up for a hanging switch and lighted my bedside lamp.

The room was empty. No sound was audible except a distant rippling from the little stream at the foot of the gardens and the intimate ticking of my wrist watch.

I raised my pajama sleeve and glanced at the dial. Just three o'clock.

Silence—emptiness... yet, a cold, commanding voice had called me by name! Or had I dreamed—dreamed vividly?

"*Brian Woodville!*"

This time I was *not* dreaming! I leaped out of bed in a flash, my heart beating rapidly. With concrete things I can cope moderately well; but this voice—*the voice of one not a yard removed*—was frankly, starkly something of another world!

My mode of life had trained me to action. And, conscious of a sensation which I can only suppose presaged hysteria, I did what anybody else would have done. Knowing it to be useless, beside the point, I searched everywhere—feverishly. I tried the door. It was locked. I ran to the French windows, raised the shutters fully, and looked out on a deserted balcony.

Not a soul was in sight. But, as I reëntered:

"Brian Woodville," said the cold inexorable voice—apparently at my elbow!—"you have three days. You will leave Baden-Baden within that time. This is the first warning. *You have three days.*"

The voice ceased. I dropped into an armchair beside the writing table. Perhaps this unfamiliar tension in my head had meant that I wanted to scream. Frankly, I think now, that it did.

Either I was at last face to face with what is loosely termed "the supernatural" or I was going mad!

Action, of some sort, I have found to be the only antidote to panic—of *any* sort. There was a bottle of whisky and some soda water on the table. I brewed a drink—with exaggerated care and coolness. I filled and lighted my pipe.

I had three days....

For five—ten—fifteen minutes, I sat there considering the mystery from every conceivable angle. One thing was certain. Either it had been the product of some form of hypnotism with which I was not acquainted, or it had been produced by means of apparatus concealed in my apartment.

I began an examination of the floors, walls, and furniture in search of: (a) a speaking tube; (b) a radio fitting.

But I found nothing.

Dawn was stealing wanly through the slats of my shutters when at last I gave up.

What did it mean? How the "warning" had been conveyed to me I simply could not imagine. But that it was associated with my mission, equally I could not doubt; that mission which I had undertaken so lightly! I had counted my Brazil expedition, in quest of a white race said to survive far up a tributary of the Rio Negro, perilous enough, God knows. For although at long last I had got back, it was more by good luck than good management.

Then there was the Sahara trek, fairly risky, but successful; and now...

When the *Daily World* had invited me to go to the Black Forest, professional zest and personal inclination both urged acceptance.

There was no danger attached to a holiday in these fruitful valleys. (To-night I had been disillusioned!) I badly needed a rest. (This was true.) And the subject came within my province. In short, said the powers behind the *Daily World*, this was clearly indicated as my job.

I had undertaken it. And—I had three days....

That most gruesome of all superstitions known to man—vampires—had reappeared in Germany! The details were few and conflicting. A peasant had been found dead in the Forest, exhibiting extraordinary symptoms of emaciation. Animals, also, and even birds. A number of witnesses spoke of a giant bat seen hovering over the trees. The locale it had proved impossible to trace more exactly than that it was "in the Black Forest."

Armed with all the known facts, I had set out, and now found myself living (hitherto, very pleasantly) in the charming garden of Baden-Baden.

Thus far I had made little or no headway. There seemed to be a damnable conspiracy of silence among the people most likely to be of help. Few denied having heard the stories, but none seemed prepared to enlarge upon them. Several persons whom I spoke to crossed themselves and abruptly changed the subject!

Was everybody who knew anything afraid to speak? If so, why? I had asked myself that question so recently as the previous evening. The voice in the night perhaps had answered it.

"You have three days...."

2

A waiter I had not seen before brought my breakfast. In the scented beauty and the sunshine it was hard to recapture that horror of the night. As he stepped out on the balcony, shouldering a laden tray:

"Good-morning, sir," he greeted me cheerfully.

"Good-morning," I returned, and watched him deftly arranging my light repast upon the white cloth.

During the restless hours which had intervened between the coming of that bodiless voice and sunrise, I had been thinking hard. I had bidden good-bye to the amused carelessness with which, thus far, I had regarded my Black Forest mission. Brazil had nearly put "paid" to my account, and I had stood fairly near the edge of beyond in the Sahara; but here, in a modern, fashionable town, I was up against something worse than fever, cataracts, and poisoned arrows; something harder to dodge than Arab bullets: something very insidious—its worst element being that I didn't know my enemies.

"I'm hoping," I went on casually, "for a glimpse of one of the giant bats which I hear have been seen in this neighbourhood."

Those words had an electrical effect. The man perceptibly paused in his labours. But, quickly recovering himself, he set down the coffee pot, and resting his hands on the table looked into my eyes.

"If you took my advice, sir," he said earnestly, "you would leave those things alone."

"Why?" I challenged.

He stood upright, bowed, and:

"It is just my advice, sir," he said, smiled, bowed again, and went out.

"Extraordinary fellow!" I muttered.

This constant evasion was getting on my nerves. Hitherto it had merely provoked me. But, after the inexplicable episode of the night, it began to assume a more sinister character.

I felt lonely. And it was a different kind of loneliness from any loneliness I had known before.

My plans for the day were vague. Where should I start? Whom could I question? One definite change I made, when I presently set out for Hohen-Baden; I had a well-tried Colt repeater on my hip. It seemed absurd, in that pleasure valley under smiling skies. I had roamed the byways of Fez at midnight, I had returned to my quarters in Timbuctoo under a setting moon—unarmed. Yet here I was, with merry German holiday makers about me, carrying a cargo of live shells!

However, I had no occasion to use them.

Feeling rather a fool, and asking myself again and again, "Could the 'warning' have been an unusually vivid dream?" I returned late in the afternoon to the Regal.

I had seen nothing, and I had learned nothing.

One lunches early but dines late in Baden-Baden. To-night I was one of the latest. But the head waiter had my table reserved.

Having fared well but sparingly, I found him at my elbow.

"Everything satisfactory, sir?" he asked.

I looked up; and his blue eyes met my inquiring stare unflinchingly. I had questioned Fritz—and had met with the usual evasions.

"Quite," I replied.

The long, softly lighted dining room was nearly deserted. In a near-by lounge, the hotel orchestra played a Slovak dance. Fritz was of Prague—a great commercial centre to-day but of old the capital of the witch country. Bohemia still cherishes vampires. And I thought I knew why Fritz was reticent.

But I did not know why his gaze wandered so strangely.

I stared out of the window, as he was staring. Beautiful gardens, unreally lovely in the dusk, backed by magically shadowed woodlands, lay before me. I could hear the laughing song of that tiny stream, crossed by a floral bridge almost directly in front of the window in which my table was set, from which those famous blue trout are brought fresh to the diner.

Then, I saw the tall, sinuous figure.

Fritz was watching Mme. Yburg.

Certainly she was worthy of inspection. For my own part, I like a woman to be slender; but there is a point at which the slender becomes definitely the lean. My vision may lack those nuances which endow a Jacob Epstein, but I must confess that I looked upon Mme. Yburg as lean. She was svelte to a degree. And if good taste is beauty, she was beautiful. She was graceful, white-skinned, had thin but very red lips, and perfect teeth. Her eyes certainly were magnificent.

As she went along the path toward the bridge, trailing a flame-coloured scarf with incomparable indolence, she glanced aside, saw me, and waved her hand. We were slightly acquainted. Her raised

arm, gleaming in the moonlight, seemed to possess separate volition, to be individual: I thought of an ivory serpent.

Turning, I trapped Fritz in the act of recomposing his expression.

"No," I said, smiling up at him, "that is not the kind of vampire I mean!"

He started, then shrugged his shoulders and poured out what remained of a bottle of *Liebfraumilch*. The willowy, swaying figure had disappeared.

"You never know, sir," he replied enigmatically.

"Who is she?"

"I cannot say. She often comes here. And she spends much money. She is very attractive."

He sighed. I looked at the blond Bavarian, and I knew that Mme. Yburg's dark, lithe womanhood represented his ideal.

"Yes," I murmured reflectively, "I suppose she is."

I lost myself for awhile in meditation. And when I returned to realities, Fritz had left me.

3

"*Very* quiet to-night," said I, glancing around the deserted bar.

"Yes." The barman set my liqueur before me. "There is a dance at the Casino."

"Ah, is that it?"

I studied George interestedly. Here was a possible source of information hitherto untapped. Barmen are students of humanity and reliquaries of strange secrets. For the cocktail breaks down reticence and makes the dumb speak.

"Nothing but dancing nowadays," he went on. "I like dancing myself; but it's bad for business."

"Really? You surprise me. I should have thought it promoted thirst."

"Bah!" George's expressive features registered scorn. "They drink soft drinks, the dancing men. If it wasn't for the women my trade would be finished!"

I invited him to join me and broached the subject uppermost in my mind—tactfully. The effect was extraordinary.

The man paused, siphon in hand, thumb on the lever, and stared at me in a way which I can only describe as reproachful. Then he glanced about the empty bar fearfully. At last:

"I shouldn't go in for that sort of thing, sir," he said, and squirted soda so nervously that some of his whisky was lost—"not if you're on a holiday."

"Why? What is there to be afraid of?"

Craning over the counter to assure himself that no eavesdropper was near:

"Have you asked anybody else?" said he.

"Yes," I replied irritably—"a dozen at least!"

"Then, sorry as I shall be to see you go, sir," was George's astonishing remark, "take the Rheingold Express to-morrow!"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

George beckoned me closer, and:

"Have you seen the cemetery above the town?" he asked with apparent irrelevance, and gestured to indicate its direction.

"I have not."

"It's full of new graves," said George. "*Good-evening, sir!*"

I started, turned—and found a man seated on the next stool to my own!

"Good-evening. Beer," the newcomer responded.

He nodded, as our glances met.

"Very warm," he observed.

He was Mr. Aldous P. Kluster. The presence of the middle initial indicates the American generation to which he belonged. He was lean, clean-shaven, ax-faced, and sallow. He wore a perpetual cigar which was rarely alight. He had a perfect mane of well-brushed gray hair and he dressed carefully but badly.

"Very," I agreed.

I was taciturn to the point of rudeness; and for two reasons. I strongly suspected him of having spied upon me in my conversation with George. And, as our eyes had met, his habitually languid

expression had been assumed too late.

Mr. Aldous P. Kluster had a regard like a gimlet. He was interested in me. Why?

As I lighted a cigarette:

"Not dancing to-night?" said he.

And, as he spoke, a possible explanation of his odd behaviour occurred to me. On the previous evening I had danced once or twice with Mme. Yburg. Kluster and Madame were apparently old friends. The theory presented itself that he was her lover—and a very jealous lover.

I recalled his almost open rudeness to a good-looking and debonair Frenchman who had succeeded me as Madame's partner and who had monopolized her throughout the rest of the evening.

"I dance very rarely," I said.

"The French acrobat makes up for you."

"M. Paul? Yes. He dances almost too well."

My theory, I considered, had received confirmation. Kluster disliked any man who approached his charming friend. I glanced at him curiously, as he set down his glass and replaced a stub of cigar in his thin, flexible mouth. He made an odd figure of a lover. Given a goatee and a high beaver hat with a stars-and-stripes band, he would have taken first prize at any carnival as Uncle Sam.

I registered a sincere prayer that, at Mr. Kluster's age, the tender passion might no longer disturb my peace. Conversation languished, and I stepped down to go.

"Good-night," I said.

"Good-night, sir," George called.

"Good-night," said Kluster, adding, as I left the bar, "Beer."

Outside, I turned right and walked along to the gardens. I followed the private path beside the little dancing trout stream. Along the parallel public path on the other bank of the Oos, Baden-Baden took the air. Here were family groups, courting pairs, and isolated strollers. Distinguished strangers taking the waters, and townsfolk to whom the beauty of the enchanted valley was a commonplace.

On my left, half hidden by flowers, were many lighted windows on the ground floor of the Regal. In one might be glimpsed an intimate party, in another some solitary figure unable or disinclined to join the promenaders.

Through the trees ahead came odd strains from the dance band in the Casino, and now I could see many twinkling fairy lights and detect moving figures.

A crescent moon hung in a sky dark and starry as that of Egypt. A delicious sense of coolness was conveyed by the laughing chatter of the tiny stream. And, when a slight breeze stirred, the fragrance of a million pines was borne down from the embracing forest.

"You have three days…"

I opened the communicating gate and strolled up to the Casino.

One of my three days was nearing its close.

The scene presented great animation and considerable elegance. Smart people from three continents were here. A maharajah famous for his racing stud, his family jewels, and his generosity to his lady friends was holding informal court at one table. At another presided a New York hostess whose Park Avenue parties were no less celebrated than the dances she gave in Bruton Street, and to whom Baden-Baden came as a rest from Juan les Pins.

There were a fair number of dancers, but very few of them either young or attractive. Mme. Yburg was not present. And a premonition that I should find her there in the company of the dazzling M. Paul—which would have accounted for Kluster's solitary beer drinking—was proved to have been misleading.

I looked on for awhile, but could see no friend or acquaintance anywhere. The nearly ceaseless moaning of the saxophones began to depress me.

Oddly, perhaps, I find in the music of this instrument something eerie. It does not stimulate in me a desire to dance or make love; it rather speaks of orgiastic rites beneath an African moon. I found myself thinking of George's words:

"Have you seen the cemetery above the town?… It's full of new graves…."

I left the Casino, not by way of the gardens, but by the door opening on to Schiller Strasse.

A big car passed, going toward the Regal. Its only occupant stared hard in my direction. If he saw me, recognized me, it was impossible to say. But his expression, as he peered out, affected me most unpleasantly.

It was the Frenchman, M. Paul.

An apprehension of being *hunted* formed the main factor in this strange expression which so deeply impressed me. His was a fugitive look.

"Three days..."

4

Steep paths, tree-shadowed, led me upward. At one point I could look down upon many roofs of Baden-Baden flooded with the blue amber of the moon rays. At another, I walked through a tunnel, rarely and irregularly patched with dim light.

Ere long, the human element—jazz and laughter—was left behind. I approached the frowning buttresses of the Forest. I met never a soul from the moment I turned aside off the main road. My right hand rested on the butt of the Colt.

Several villas I passed, perched fascinatingly above the paths upon rocky foundations. But in none did any light show.

I wondered if this was the road by which M. Paul had come.

Once, some time before I reached the long, low wall of the cemetery, I paused to light my pipe. In the act of striking a match I hesitated... and listened.

An echo, I told myself.

Stock still I stood for thirty seconds or more. Then I determined that unhealthy memories had been responsible for the idea that someone was following me.

At last I reached my goal. I could see the guardian trees. A strain of deathless but deathful music, Poe's "Through an alley Titanic of cypress," swept eerily across my brain. Beyond a low wall, below me

lay the white tenements, pure in moonlight; some stately as perhaps befitted their occupants, others simple, but of equal dignity. The whole quiet acre was mantled lovingly in those gay flowers which make this valley a poet's garden.

By the gate I paused.

It was locked. But it offered no barrier to an active man.

I was on the point of climbing over—for in this nocturnal expedition I had a definite plan—when I observed, plainly visible in the moonlight, a cigarette lying at my feet.

Perhaps the fact may seem insignificant. Nevertheless I picked it up. It was a common French *caporal*, and it had not been lighted. Again, perhaps not extraordinary. Such cigarettes could be bought in the town. I slipped it into the pocket of my dinner jacket.

Resting my hands on the gate, I was again about to scale it, when a second circumstance arrested me.

From high above my head, out of the deep blue, came a rhythmic whirring; not that of a flight of birds nor that of an airplane propeller: rather the amplified hum of a mosquito.

I stood still, and stared upward.

For a long time I could detect nothing. The sound had ceased, abruptly. Then... I saw it.

Descending with a hawklike motion was *a gigantic bat!*

Literally, horror froze me to the spot. Yard by yard the thing swooped down, silently, effortlessly.

It had a sort of vague luminosity. The incredibly long body as well as the extended wings were of a gleaming purplish-gray colour: I can only liken it to that of a meat fly or common "bluebottle."

The wing span, I was prepared to swear, was no less than four yards; the legless body of the thing, which, as it descended, resembled less a bat than a monstrous dragon fly, was close upon six feet!

Somewhere among the tombs it settled. I heard, or thought I heard, a dim, muffled rumbling....

I removed my hands from the gate. I had been clutching it grimly. My palms were clammy.

"Merciful heaven!" I whispered. "What does it all mean?"

CHAPTER II.

MME. YBURG

1

I CANNOT pretend to say how long I stood at the gate, nor what were my thoughts as I stood there.

Doubtless after the episode of the disincarnate Voice, I was prepared in a degree for things outside the normal. In lieu of supposing myself insane, I had to accept as a fact that there are laws, once called "supernatural," in the scheme of Providence which are not outside human control. Many of the devices which we are used to nowadays would have earned their inventor the title of magician two hundred years ago.

Powers ascribed by classic poets to their gods of old come within compass of latter-day science. All myths have some basis in fact. Earlier inquirers simply conserved their knowledge. To-day, discoveries are broadcasted.

Thus, I suppose, I argued... fighting, fighting to defeat a white panic.

Did the thing I had just seen conform to any cycle of laws known to me?

I listened intently.

The breeze had dropped. There was no sound.

As the creature had descended I had seen that it possessed a pair of enormous eyes. But, more horrible, I had not failed to note that its purplish gleaming body resembled that of a human being—or of a chrysalis encasing one—or of a mummy!

Now, the silence confounded me. The stirring of a leaf set my heart leaping. At any moment I expected to hear again a cold, merciless voice calling me by name.

Nine persons out of ten would have bolted—nor should I have been the man to blame them. That *I* didn't, I count not a jot or tittle to my credit. I merely knew from experience that to fly from peril, of body, mind, or soul, is to invite pursuit.

Again grasping the bars of the gate, I sprang up, and climbing over the top, dropped upon the further side.

But the first step forward from the gate in that cold moonlight demanded an effort of will I can never forget. The step taken, I proceeded with growing confidence. This is the way of things. But it's a way hard to learn and harder to follow.

What I found in the shape of a clue to explain the sight I had seen can be very briefly expressed, I found nothing.

At about the spot where I thought that incredible nocturnal thing had alighted I came upon an ancient mausoleum. Two cypresses mounted guard, one on either side of the door, and because of their dense shadows I could not make out to whom the tomb belonged.

But my left fist and my teeth were tightly clenched when I turned my back on those shadows—because I wanted to run! *How* I wanted to run!

Further on, in a new part of the burial ground, I saw a number of "new graves" as described by George. They seemed to be for the most part those of peasants and members of the working classes. I could not perceive any special significance in the fact that certain inhabitants of Baden-Baden had died recently. People die everywhere.

By the time that I had completed my tour, courage was slowly returning. My exercise had achieved its object. Courage, unused, becomes flabby even quicker than muscle.

No sound had disturbed me—excepting the soft flutter of a startled owl at one point—and the resulting throb in my ears caused by a sudden acceleration of pulse. It was touch and go. My finger trembled on the trigger.

That first cold panic was conquered however when I reclimbed the gate and found myself once more in the narrow, tree-bordered road. I don't claim that I was entirely my own man; but mainly a great amazement remained.

Failing its possession of those gruesome properties ascribed to the vampire by mediæval superstition, what had become of the great creature which I had watched alighting among the tombs? In my exploration, and it had been fairly thorough, I had met with no living thing except the owl.

I tried to picture it when not on the wing. Did it go on all fours? Did it *crawl*?... Did it walk erect in ghastly parody of humanity?

And then, as I turned and set out on my homeward journey to the town, came the crowning terror of that night.

I heard footsteps in the cemetery!

Nothing in my experience had prepared me for this. The steps, which were light, suggesting a woman's, and leisurely, plainly were those of someone, or of some *thing*, coming along the path which led to the gateway. Soon, *It* would be out in the road behind me!

To take to my heels—to run for my life, for sanity, salvation—was the only thing I wanted to do. And I wanted to do it desperately.

But I had won one victory. And it was to inquire into just these horrors that I had come to Baden.

A rough cart track broke the bushes to left of the road. I tip-toed along it, turned right, and threw myself prone at the edge of a plum orchard where I could see through the hedge.

I was no more than in time.

As I reached my look-out I heard the sound of a grating lock. It was the lock of the cemetery gate. Moonlight flooded that part of the road visible to me. Merciful shadow draped the margin of the orchard. I was afraid to breathe. Despite the warmth of the night, I was cold—with a sort of spiritual coldness.

The gate closed. Again I heard the sound of the lock.

Came—light footsteps, drawing nearer.

I had thought I was prepared for anything. But for that which now appeared I was not prepared.

Gracefully indolent, the flame-coloured scarf thrown carelessly over her white shoulders, *Mme. Yburg walked toward me!...*

2

Watching, all but breathlessly, as she passed my hiding place, my first feeling was one of intense relief. It was almost immediately succeeded, however, by another, by a mood of horrible doubt. Taking all the facts into consideration, what was this woman doing in such a place, at night? Where had she been hidden during my tour of inspection? Above all—why did she hold the cemetery keys?

Ghastly theories, belonging to the realm of black magic, flocked to my brain. Had she been to meet, in Coleridge's words, "her demon lover"? Or was she, herself...

These ideas were insane. I shook my mind free of them.

When the sound of Madame's footsteps was no longer audible, and I judged that she had passed a bend in the steep road which I remembered, I came out from the sheltering orchard and followed, very slowly.

An owl hooted, high up in a tree. But no other sound disturbed the serene night.

By a bend in the path where a flight of steps offered a short cut to the town, there was a seat. Owing to the position of the moon and the screening trees, this seat was mantled in darkness.

But as I passed it, intent upon descending the steps:

"Good-evening, Mr. Woodville," said a voice out of the shadows.

I knew the voice—nor was it unmusical. But its music turned me cold. I stopped dead in my tracks, as though Medusa's head had been thrust in front of me. I twisted about, staring.

Mme. Yburg rose from the seat and came toward me!

Conflicting emotions threatened to make me dumb. But I forced a remark.

"Why!" said I—"this is a surprise! Are you, also, addicted to lonely rambles?"

"I am," she replied simply, and walked out into the moonlight.

She wore a frock of some material which appeared black except where moonrays touched it, when it displayed a serpentine sheen. Dark eyes regarded me sombrely. Her slender body was grotesquely, horribly like the body of that flying thing which had alighted in the cemetery. Or so it seemed to me at this moment.

"A taste," I went on, desperately forcing conversation, "which one can't share. Were you returning, or have I broken in on the journey?"

"I'm going back," she answered, resting her hand on my arm. "Those steps are so steep."

I found myself clenching my teeth. Mme. Yburg's long, psychic hand looked waxen white in the moonlight, which also lent the narrow, burnished nails an unnatural purple tint. She wore a large emerald, which I had noticed before. Against the black of my sleeve it gleamed evilly—like the eye of a nocturnal thing.... Silently I cursed myself for a coward and a fool. There was—there *must* be—a rational explanation of her presence in the cemetery that night. And, as if she had read my thoughts:

"My lonely ramble was not without an object," she said as we went down the steps. "It may sound odd, but I had been up to the cemetery on the hill."

Her English was faultless, her poise perfect. If my ghastly theories had any foundation in fact, she was a great actress. The pressure of her thin white fingers was intensely vital.

"Good heavens! *Very* odd—at night!"

"Yes, I know it is." We were on a straight highroad, now, and Mme. Yburg removed her hand and adjusted the scarf which she wore. "But someone lies there, you see—a member of my family; and in the middle of all the gaiety I suddenly thought of him, and it seemed quite natural to go."

Her composure, which made me think of snow on a sleeping volcano, was more exciting than some women's hysteria. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask her if she spoke of husband, father, brother, when those former, uncanny ideas came flooding back to my mind.

Was she, secretly, laughing at me? Had she seen me from the first? Had she waited there knowing I must presently come that way? And why did she hold the keys of the cemetery gate? So my thoughts ran,

wildly, feverishly. The night was perfect, lacking those treacherous chills of the Riviera and reminding one of nights in the Canary Islands.

She had a manner of walking which must have marked her anywhere. She seemed to glide along beside me. There was a deep note in her voice, strangely like sincerity; and indeed she was undeniably a very charming companion.

Presently, we were among the trees of Lichtenthaler Allee, the little stream bubbling beside us, lights dancing over the water from the hotels and the Casino.

We walked across to the Regal. And there on the steps stood Mr. Kluster.

"Oh, dear!" Madame whispered to me. "There was a party to-night, and I had promised to go!"

Then, as we came up:

"I had such a dreadful headache and I hoped that the night air would cure it. Mr. Woodville found me wandering."

"Cured?" said Kluster.

"Quite," Madame replied, and an amused smile, which softened the line of her thin lips, was oddly fascinating.

I saw white, glittering teeth against the blood-red of her mouth… and I remembered…

"Here's the French boy-friend," remarked Kluster. "Now we're all set."

M. Paul came bounding down the steps. "Bounding" is the only word to describe his animated approach.

"My *dear* Mme. Yburg!" he exclaimed, and grasped both her hands. "Ah! but I have been inconsolable! So also"—he turned to the American—"has poor Mr. Kluster! We have cried together, Mr. Woodville"—he now included *me* in his oration—"until the bar has nearly run dry!"

Then he laughed, and we all laughed with him—Kluster excepted—for he was indeed a joyous creature.

"Very true," said Kluster. "Suppose we start." He nodded to me. "I wish you good-night, sir."

The others having also bidden me good-night, the party set out, M. Paul waving farewell in his gay fashion. I recalled that the M. Paul who had passed me earlier in the evening had been far from gay.

3

Here was the first copyworthy material which had come to my hand. But how could I use it? To send a thousand-word report to the *Daily World* covering my visit to the cemetery and my sight of a giant bat was simple enough—and good copy, if editor or readers could believe it. But where the story touched upon Mme. Yburg I must perforce be silent. There is a law of libel in England.

Furthermore, I did not know who Mme. Yburg *was*.

A mediæval observer would have declared, unconditionally, that she was a vampire, and that Kluster and Paul were her present victims.

I placed the *caporal* picked up at the cemetery gate in a drawer of my table. I sat staring at a blank writing block. And, consulting my wrist watch, I noted that nearly twenty hours had passed since I had received "the first warning." What were the links between that inexplicable happening and later events? Why should I obey the warning?... and what would result if I ignored it?

The unknown dangers of my commission became painfully apparent. Despatches were out of the question. A considered account—after I had left the Black Forest—was the only possible course.

I drafted a telegram, copied it on one of the forms provided in my apartment, and personally took it to the hall porter's desk for dispatch.

Equipped with two bottles of beer, for an hour and a half, perhaps two hours, I wrote. The dance band at the Casino had stopped. I had not noted the fact consciously: I only realized it when I had finished. My notes brought up to date, I looked at the time.

Half-past one.

Of the first of my three days only an hour and a half remained!

My quarters in the Regal consisted of a long alcove on the ground floor. There was a balcony overlooking the gardens on which I usually took breakfast. Sun shutters, with narrow oblique slats, closed the centre opening. The outer room, in which were writing table, telephone, and other appurtenances, was divided from the bedroom only by a heavy curtain, which during the day was open.

In my case it was open at night as well. I like fresh air. For the same reason I had hitherto raised the shutters, before turning in, not wholly but partly. (They were religiously closed by the chambermaid some time after dusk, to exclude nocturnal insects.)

To-night I left them closed, whilst I searched every foot of the apartment and also the adjoining bathroom. My tour of inspection was completed within a few minutes of two o'clock.

One hour!

As my investigations will have indicated, I had a theory touching the Voice. If it challenged me again—as I half expected—I proposed to test this theory.

Having had little more than two hours' rest in the past twenty-four, I was desperately sleepy. Nevertheless, until 3 A.M. had come and gone, further sleep was out of the question. I mixed a stiff peg of whisky, lighted my pipe, and settled down in an armchair with Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. I knew whole passages by heart; but five minutes in the company of Long John Silver unfailingly brings the tang of the sea to my nostrils. "Here you comes and tells me of it plain.... You're a lad, you are, but you're as smart as paint...."

The silence had grown so deep when at last I took leave of the *Hispaniola* and glanced at my wrist watch that the song of the tiny stream beyond my windows was magnified to that of a considerable torrent. Twice I had heard regular footsteps on the gravel path outside: a night watchman, I had concluded. But no other sound had disturbed me.

Laying my book down, I stood up. My pipe had burned out....

Five minutes to three.

I crossed the room, went into the lobby, and opened my outer door. Beyond, lay a sort of inner hallway, corridors branching off from it. It was empty. A lamp stood on the floor clerk's table and afforded the

only light.

Going over to this table, I stooped to the lamp and fixed my eyes on the minute finger of my watch as it crept to the hour....

Three o'clock!

"Brian Woodville!" said the Voice.

My heart was not beating quite normally. But this time I was certainly prepared for the phenomenon; and I had learned something.

The Voice was not connected with any hidden apparatus in my rooms. It had spoken at my elbow.

I crossed to a glazed swing-door and went several paces along a passage leading to deserted service quarters.

"Brian Woodville!"

The Voice had *followed* me!

Teeth hard clenched, I returned to the open door of my apartment—and just as I gained it:

"Brian Woodville," those measured tones continued, "you have two days. This is the second warning. You have two days...."

CHAPTER III.

FELSENWEIR

1

IN THE night hush—it was close upon four—I could hear the chattering Oos as it flowed in miniature cataracts but a few yards from my balcony.

Nature had claimed her due. Not even that ghastly omen of the Second Warning had sufficed to keep me awake. Yet I was not destined to sleep in peace. Something had reached me, deeply though I slumbered, and I had awakened automatically—as is the way of one who has lived in wild places.

Memory of a sound came over from sleep.

Creaking.

There was silence. No moon broke the blackness of the outer room, dimly visible from where I lay. Then, it came again—creaking.

I turned, noiselessly.

Someone—a vague silhouette—had stealthily raised the shutters!

Slowly and cautiously, hoping my manœuvres were unseen in the darkness of the alcove, I lifted myself upon an elbow. The figure was still there—stooping, I thought, and looking into the outer room. The shutter had been moved up fully three feet, by what means I could not imagine, but whilst it was high enough for cramped entrance, it was yet so low as to have hampered swift retreat.

I wondered if I had made any sound in the moment of awakening: the intruder was so motionless—so silent. My finger rested, tautly, upon the trigger of the Colt.

And as I lay there, watching, and awaiting the next development, this quietude became definitely horrible. I visualized that incredible thing with great gray-purplish wings, which had disappeared among

the tombs.

What was it, so silent out there on the balcony, which peered in? Did it crouch, animally, on all fours? Was it *crawling* toward me?

Whoever, or whatever, was there gave no sign. Inch by inch I drew myself up, preparatory to springing out. My eyes were becoming used to the darkness. Where I had seen, or thought I had seen, the silhouette of a stooping figure, I now could detect vague half-lights. Was it possible that the intruder had withdrawn even as I lay watching?

And now, being ready, I cast off the sheets and leaped on to the carpet. In nine strides I reached the window.

The gap, three feet high, between floor and shutter was vacant. Nobody, nothing was there! I stumbled back to the switch beside the door. A swift flood of light came and I stood blinking toward the window.

Then I recrossed, grasped the cords, and raised the central shutter fully.

Barefooted, I stepped out on to the tiled balcony. A table and two chairs alone broke its emptiness. Right, three steps led down to a gravelled garden path.

Someone moved... near me—below.

I leaned over the stone balustrade.

"Good-evening, sir," said a gruff voice in German. "Has something disturbed you?"

A wave of relief flowed over me hotly. There was nothing supernatural about this voice—and human companionship I welcomed.

"Good-evening," I replied. "Who are you?"

"Night watchman, sir. I patrol the gardens every half hour. These ground-floor rooms are so easily entered, you see."

I was peering in the speaker's direction. But he merely showed as a darker patch in the general gloom.

"They are!" I agreed. "When did you arrive?"

"At this moment."

"Someone raised my shutters a few minutes ago."

"That is impossible, sir, from outside, if they were fully closed."

"They were fully closed."

"Very strange, sir."

"But you saw no one?"

"No one came round the south corner, sir—the way I arrived. Could you describe him?"

"No. But I saw him—dimly."

"Nothing is disturbed?"

"No."

"I will report the matter, sir. Will you please reclose your shutters?—and make sure they are safe."

"I shall certainly take your advice!"

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night."

I heard footsteps on the gravel path as I withdrew and began to pull on the cords which lowered the heavy shutter. I was so engaged when the steps, or so I supposed, returned along the path, and:

"Hullo, there!" called a voice—but not the same voice!

I desisted. The bottom of the shutter was still some five feet from the floor. I looked out. A beam of light shone blindingly into my eyes.

"Hullo to *you*!" I cried. "What the devil's up?"

"This is what I am asking, sir," the speaker replied. "I am the night watchman and it is my duty to ask."

I was astounded. Not only was this voice unlike the other, but the man spoke with a sort of military brusquerie which inclined me favourably toward him.

Again I stepped out on the balcony.

Standing plainly visible on the path below in the light from my windows was a square-jawed, iron-gray figure wearing a perfectly fitting uniform, with smart field boots. The Regal badge was on his shoulder straps and glittered in his cap.

He stood at attention, looking up. His electric torch he held beside him like a rifle barrel at the order. We stared hard at one another, then:

“Come in for a moment, night watchman,” I said, “I have something for you to report.”

“Very good, sir.”

A moment later, ducking his close-cropped head, for he was all of six feet, and carrying his cap, he joined me in my room. He stood at attention again.

“Sit down,” I said. “Something very queer has happened here to-night.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The night watchman bowed stiffly, and sat down on the extreme edge of an uncomfortable chair. As his unflinching regard met mine:

“Is there another watchman on duty in the gardens?” I asked.

“At four o’clock, sir, I am relieved.”

“No one else is on duty now?”

“No one—outside the hotel. There are two men on duty inside.”

“Then listen to what I am going to tell you,” said I, “and explain it if you can.”

As briefly as possible I outlined what had passed, and finally:

“The man impersonating you,” I concluded, “was probably the same who raised my shutter.”

“Very little doubt of it, sir. He didn’t know how much you could see. He slipped to the nearest cover and waited. Allow me to examine the shutter.”

He rose stiffly, crossed and tested the apparatus; then:

“It does not lock,” he reported. “There is some fault. This man must have known of it.”

“But why did he speak to me?”

“To find out if you could identify him.”

“Very daring.”

“I agree with you, sir. I must report this. A dangerous man is evidently about the hotel.”

There was a bottle of Pilsener on the writing table, so, taking it up:

“A glass of beer?” I suggested.

The night watchman immediately sprang to attention.

"Thank you, sir. But contrary to orders."

One might have replied, "Nobody will be the wiser," or "What does it matter?" But, looking into hard blue eyes, I said:

"You are an old soldier?"

"I had the honour of being a sergeant in the Prussian Guard, sir."

As I had "had the honour of being" a lieutenant in the Coldstream Guards, the situation did not lack drama, or comedy. But never a ghost of a smile disturbed the speaker's grim lips.

"Orders are orders," said I, and put the bottle down. "Good-night, Sergeant."

"Thank you, sir," he replied, and clicked his heels. "Good-night, sir."

He turned smartly, ducked his head, and went out under the half-raised shutter. I heard his regular footsteps grow faint upon gravel paths.

If discipline could have conquered Europe, I reflected, then to-day Europe had certainly been one vast German Empire. I had never before met a night worker who could decline a bottle of beer at four o'clock in the morning!

My shutters were as safe as I could make them from outside interference when I turned in again; and my sleep was not disturbed a second time.

2

I breakfasted on the balcony, as was my custom, watching early promenaders in wooded paths beside the tiny river and trying to reconcile the morning beauty of this sheltered valley with that nightly terror of the Voice.

"You have two days…"

Already, I regretted having confided so much of the facts respecting my nocturnal visitor to the watchman. I had on my breakfast table a note from the management respectfully requesting an interview.

As I poured out a second cup of coffee and stared in the direction of Lichtenthaler Allee, I saw a slim figure moving through the trees with peculiar grace. That proud, slender body could belong to no one but

Mme. Yburg. I was not mistaken. And she was coming toward the hotel.

Ideas—fantastic, horrible—entered my mind. I flogged my memory for details of the shape I had seen, or thought I had seen, on this very balcony in the night. The man, the man who had spoken to me out of the shadows, might have been no more than an accomplice—his task to cover the retreat of... the other!

She saw me presently, waved her hand, and went on to where a bridge spanned the stream. I was lighting a cigarette when she came round an angle of the hotel and walked along a gravel path to the balcony.

"Good-morning," I said. "You don't look as though you had had a late night."

"I didn't," she replied, and tapped at the gravel with a light stick which she carried. "I was so terribly bored! I escaped. It was mean of you to desert me."

I met the glance of her unfathomable eyes. They were slightly oblique, which always defeats me.

"What could I do? Mr. Kluster is a most alarming dragon."

"No." She was watching me all the time and her gaze was disconcerting. "I had to be victimized, I suppose. What are you doing with yourself to-day?"

Now, this seemingly normal inquiry held for me a sinister meaning. I had been afoot early, and I had obtained in the town a handbook which dealt with local history. It lay before me now. Particularly, I had sought for information respecting the older tombs in the cemetery. The shopman had been able to help me and to augment the facts.

I had learned from this valuable handbook that the last of the once powerful Felsenweir family was buried approximately at the spot where that winged horror had alighted. The cypress-shadowed mausoleum which I had approached was in fact the family vault of the Felsenweirs. Their great hold in the hills was to-day a ruin and all but inaccessible.

"There are strange stories about Felsenweir Castle," the salesman had told me.

He was a Dutchman and did not display the extraordinary reticence upon the subject of the Black Forest "vampires" which hitherto I had met with.

"Anything to do with recent rumours?"

The man's light blue eyes had lighted up.

"Absolutely. The poor fellow who was found dead in the forest lay on the borders of the Felsenweir woods. The giant bat you may have heard about was seen in the same neighbourhood."

Putting two and two together, and studying an excellent map which I had obtained from my informant, I had arrived at the conclusion that a nearer view of Felsenweir was indicated. Approach to the castle ruins was next to impossible, I was told. The property was held by a trust and the surrounding woods were strictly private.

But I had made a plan, and now:

"What are you doing with yourself to-day?" Mme. Yburg asked.

"I shall be busy all the morning," I replied. "But you would make me very happy if you would join me for tea at the Casino."

She lowered her eyes and bit her lip meditatively. Her pale, clearly chiselled features were Greek in purity; but I thought that the little teeth were terribly white.

"I should love to," she replied. "But if I'm late—after five, I mean—you won't give me up?"

"Certainly not. I may be late myself."

3

In the office of the management I confirmed the report made by the Prussian watchman. There were polite regrets—masking incredulity, I rather fancied. But the fastenings of my shutter should certainly be looked to.

At about half-past ten on a perfect morning I set out. My Zeiss glasses I had stuffed into a pocket of my coat as I had no desire to advertise my intentions. Yet a dreadful sense of futility was growing hourly more oppressive.

The presence of a pistol on my hip no longer gave any feeling of security. One cannot shoot a Voice. I was watched, day and night: the fact was unmistakable. But although the watchers clearly possessed unusual, indeed superhuman, powers, I could not afford to suppose that they were infallible. To do so would be to acknowledge defeat. Some, at least, of my enemies were human enough; and I classified the chief suspects thus:

(A) Mme. Yburg

(B) Aldous P. Kluster

(C) M. Paul

If the men were victims of the woman or voluntary accomplices, I had yet to learn. But, until more data came into my possession, my only safe course was to look upon all three as active opponents of my mission.

In the lobby of the hotel I was confronted by a dazzling spectacle—a man arrayed in extravagant plus-fours, with really unique stockings. His tie was in harmony with his stockings but in harmony with nothing else. He wore a startling pull-over. Black hair, gray at the temples, was brushed straight back from a fine, pale brow. The handsome, clean-shaven face was dominated by laughing but penetrating eyes.

"My *dear* Mr. Woodville!" cried M. Paul—for he it was—"may I hope that you are not engaged?"

"Very sorry," I replied. "But I'm afraid I am engaged until dinner time."

"Ah!" cried the Frenchman. "But it is a shame! I am disconsolate. But dinner—yes! You will dine with me?"

"With pleasure."

"Good. Then we meet in the bar at half after six——"

"Say, a quarter to seven."

"Half six to quarter seven—for cocktails?"

"Delighted."

Presently, I got on my way again. As I came out into the street, I ran into Mr. Kluster, who was standing by the hotel entrance.

"Hullo!" said he, looking me up and down, "all set for a picnic?"

“Not exactly,” I answered shortly.

“Exploring the forest?”

“Something of the sort,” I called back; for I had scarcely checked my footsteps, so resentful was I of this man’s would-be facetious remarks.

But, already, I had gathered food for reflection. It might be no more than a series of coincidences: yet the fact remained that every suspect on my list had challenged me in some way regarding my plans for that day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEVIL'S ELBOW

1

TAKING all things into consideration, I doubted if it were possible for me to cover my tracks. A conviction was growing that I had to do with enemies whose methods of observation left me no means of countering.

The facts underlying all this mystery I had yet to learn. Upon what astounding intrigue had I innocently blundered? But I was now certain that these facts were of a character which would not bear light of day. The winged horror of the cemetery definitely defied conjecture. It was supernormal. The Voice formed a complement to it. But my midnight visitor, who imitated night watchmen, was a tangible opponent with whom one might hope to come to grips. Mme. Yburg....?

If there were vampires in the Black Forest, then certainly they had human accomplices—and clever ones. But with these, at least, I could deal.

I made several calls in the town, some of them necessary and others mere red herrings. On coming out from each of the offices and shops, I assured myself that none of the suspects, *A*, *B*, or *C*, was in sight. Presently, leaving the Bank, I turned sharply right and set out upon the real business of the day.

My plans from this moment onward included avoidance of spots in which I was likely to meet acquaintances. A study of the map had enabled me to lay a safe course. Once clear of the outskirts of the town, I counted myself moderately safe from ordinary espionage.

This route lay up climbing streets, in which the houses stood upon most various elevations. Whereas one would be based upon the level, the next might equally well be upraised upon so high a rocky

foundation that its porch overlooked the roof of a neighbour.

Flowers there were everywhere: set in window boxes, lining porches, bordering long flights of steps leading up to the more elevated sites, crowding the forecourts of those houses which opened directly on to the pavement.

The byways of the town are very quiet. And as I mounted ever nearer to the forest, it became less and less possible that I should be tracked without my knowledge. I took frequent occasion to pause and glance around me, also back and downward upon the route below.

Not once did I detect a follower—a fact which, in view of what happened later, is noteworthy, being a sidelight upon the methods of a very extraordinary man.

Once really clear of the town, I took fewer precautions. For a mile and a half my way was along woodland roads where travellers were rare.

At a point selected earlier that morning, a car awaited me. I had chosen the man with care. As a result of conversation with the Dutch bookseller and a close study of my map, I had come to the conclusion that there was only one coign of vantage from which I might hope to command a view of Felsenweir. (In this, by the way, I was wrong.) Part of the route was possible by car; the last half mile merely a forest path.

My purpose was secretly to study the ruins, closely and for a considerable time, with a view to learning if they were inhabited. And, at the moment of joining the car at the place appointed, a conviction seized me that my well-laid schemes had gone “a-gley.”

Something in the chauffeur’s behaviour seemed odd. He sprang down with alacrity and opened the door; but his glance was furtive—unfriendly.

Around me was the beautiful silence of woodlands. I might look through straight upstanding pines, and as far as sight could reach nothing stirred. Left of the climbing road a rock wall rose sheer for twenty feet or more. Above it, and beyond, on a slight gradient, the forest mounted to a distant peak.

And now, in this solitude where almost anything could happen and never be heard of in the world of men, I realized that I was dealing with criminals of a unique kind; such as perhaps only mediæval laws could reach—with human outcasts, pariahs so far beyond our modern pale that the life of an intruder would mean less to them than the flame of a candle.

By means which I utterly failed to understand, the Voice had learned the object of my visit to the Black Forest. To his—or to *its*—human accomplices had been assigned the task of learning how much I knew.

Now, noting an unmistakable change of demeanour in the man whom I had engaged early that morning outside the Kurhaus, the possibility crashed in on my mind that he might be one of them!

At which moment I observed something that seemed to confirm my unpleasant theories. On the point of entering, I turned and looked at the driver. But he evaded my glance.

"You told me, I think, that you had never been this way before?"

"Never, sir. No one ever comes."

I had given him to understand that I was a geologist; but now:

"It must lead somewhere," I said, "beyond the point to which we are going?"

"It leads to an old ruined monastery," he replied—"but not interesting, and then a mile further on it joins the Alt-Eberstein road."

He persistently avoided meeting my glance, but, nevertheless, I resigned myself to the next stage of the journey. As I dropped back on the cushions and the man returned to the wheel, I wondered why he was lying.

Because, on the finely powdered pine cone which coated the surface, clearly defined tire-tracks showed as far ahead as I could see.

And they had been made by the same brand of tire as that which shod the car I sat in!

2

Pursuing a typical Black Forest road, we mounted higher and higher. Sharp bends there were and dangerous corners overhanging tree-clad declivities. I had the map open on my knees; but every once in a while, where the surface was favourable, I peered ahead… and always those car tracks showed, speaking of a former but a recent journey!

I studied the chauffeur's back. He was not tall, but he had a formidable shoulder span and the thick, fleshless neck of a fighter.

Had I walked into a trap?

The man's behaviour when we arrived at the selected point—a mound marking the site of a Roman watch tower—must determine the problem, I argued.

A theory that he would pass the tower and endeavour to carry me on to some unknown destination was shortly disproved. Having passed not one pedestrian on the route, we presently negotiated a hairpin bend overhanging dizzy pine tops, and a sort of clearing in the woodland came into view not more than twenty yards ahead. There was a bay on the left of the road, occupied by a flat mound. Out of this mound, three tall, very slender trees started, their distant crests overtopping the forest below.

Here the Roman tower had stood.

We stopped.

I was out before the man had time to get to the door.

"This is the place," said he, coming round and facing me on the roadside.

Here the surface was hard. I had lost sight of the car tracks below the hairpin bend; but:

"Quite right," I replied. "Turn the car and wait for me."

"Very good, sir."

"I may be gone an hour or more."

"Very good, sir."

His behaviour was unexceptionable, if his glance remained evasive. I began to wonder. Perhaps the poor fellow, considering his odd commission at leisure, had come to the conclusion that I was mad!

I set out along the road. My map I had returned to my pocket, but certain essential notes relating to my route from this point to that which I had in mind were pencilled on a slip of paper which I carried in my cigarette case. And just before I reached the spot where my notes told me that there was a footpath, forest swept down and overhung the road; the surface was dusted with pine débris.

A bend concealed my movements from the chauffeur. Where a mountain path—indicated in the map—turned due west, there was a recess.

Sharply marked in this recess were impressions showing that a car had been turned here not very long before.

I pressed on and upward. Presently, where a fallen tree offered a seat, I paused for a rest. Glancing at my notes, I filled and lighted a pipe.

Thus far no sound had reached me from the road below. No sound reached me now. Was the chauffeur stealthily following me? Above and below were the curious blue shadows of the forest. But nothing stirred—bird, beast, or man. When presently I started to climb again, my scrambling footsteps broke a perfect silence.

Now the route followed a tiny stream, or rather, miniature cataract. It became a natural staircase. I could not be certain if the rocky footholds had been improved by man's handiwork in primitive times, but the ascent was very easy although the gradient was steep.

A grotto which might have sheltered gnomes gave birth to this mountain torrent. My path lay across its brow. Here, going was not so good, for the ground was cumbered with undergrowth.

But I was near to my goal.

Thirty yards saw me on the brink of a sheer precipice—a gaunt crag jutting up out of the forest like a mummy's bone from torn wrappings.

3

This was the Devil's Elbow—so called in my map; and the only point, I believed, from which one might overlook the heights of Felsenweir. I halted, a little breathless. My pipe had gone out, and I relighted it before consulting a pocket compass which I had brought with me.

"A quarter north of northeast by east," was my note.

The naked rock offered no facilities for comfortable observation. But since my purpose was to study the distant ruins at some length, I could not possibly stand upright.

Being now unpleasantly warm, I removed my coat, folded it to form a cushion, and, having the compass before me, lay prone, my elbows resting on the folded coat. I focussed the Zeiss glasses on a hazy blue crest lying northeast by east and a quarter north of the Devil's Elbow.

Forest climbed its slopes densely ranked. Gaps there were, here and there, and naked rock jutting out. But the height was warmly clothed almost to its summit.

At one point—as I had calculated—no verdure protected the ruins from observation. I could see the upper walls, and they appeared to be in a fair state of preservation; I could see parts of the main building; and I could see very clearly the high keep, and a tower, like a minaret, which rose above it.

Felsenweir had been a mighty hold in days when marauding barons had ruled the Rhineland.

Carefully, I adjusted focusses. That curious blue haze which overhangs the Black Forest dispersed magically through ever lighter shades as I turned the threads. At last, I secured a sharp, clear view. Intervening miles were spanned by the lenses. I could count the embrasures on the upper battlements and pick out iron bars of a window high in the frowning keep.

Except that the place seemed to be in wonderfully good preservation, I was unable at first to detect anything confirming my theory—viz.: that Felsenweir was inhabited.

But, with intervals of rest, since the eye strain of close watching was considerable, I continued to study the distant ruin.

I had hoped for no more than a glimpse of a moving figure. And this was what I presently saw—a moving figure. But never can I forget the figure which came into view....

The winged horror of the graveyard had turned me cold: I had had a desperate fight with myself to conquer panic on that occasion. The Voice in the night would disturb my dreams while memory remained. But the thing I saw now on the battlements of Felsenweir produced an almost sharper dread.

I saw it passing the embrasures of the upper battlements, and I counted, mentally, "One—Two—Three," and so on. It reached and passed the last one visible to me, and I lowered the glasses.

So clear are recollections of this extraordinary spectacle I can even remember that I closed my eyes for a moment, in an endeavour to concentrate on *facts*—to arrange my ideas in some sort of harmony with what I had seen. I told myself that I lived in the Twentieth Century, not in the Tenth.

A tall man, encased from head to foot in black armour, and carrying a heavy mace, had slowly patrolled the walls of Felsenweir!...

My pipe lay near my hand. I stared down at it dazedly. It seemed to have lost significance—to belong to another age. I raised the glasses again. I became an impersonal intelligence, belonging to no generation, but merely a time-detached spectator, watching—watching....

Heedless, now, of eye strain, I waited, for five, seven, ten minutes; and then:

A second man at arms crossed the battlements!

I think, as I watched him disappear, I was nearer to doubting my own sanity than I had ever been in my life. The giant bat. Had I really seen it? The Voice in the night. Had I really heard it?... "You have two

days…”

Again I dropped the glasses, and:

“*Am* I mad?” I said aloud.

“Not a bit of it!” a strident voice replied.

Stiff as I was from crouching so long upon the rock, that voice had me on my feet in three seconds. I twisted around.

Not six feet away, an unlighted cigar hanging from his mouth, Aldous P. Kluster stood regarding me!

“Don’t get fussed,” he went on quietly. “I’ve got you placed at last. We’re together on this.”

CHAPTER V.

FROM THAT WHICH IS WRITTEN

1

For several moments I was dumbfounded. Suspect B had shown his hand! In spite of all my precautions, I had been tracked. We confronted one another in silence, then:

"I don't know what you mean," I said, "and I can't imagine where you have sprung from."

"Easy answered." Kluster rolled the unlighted cigar from one end of his flexible mouth to the other. "I mean we both belong in the same camp. And I didn't spring from any place; I just walked up."

"Walked up?"

"You said it. I came along beside the baby canyon. That was your route."

"But I heard no sound."

"I don't make any sound when I don't want to. Besides, you were busy."

"Do you mean," I demanded angrily, "that you have been following me?"

"No, sir. I got here first."

"What!"

"You passed me by the little old cave back there. As soon as you were all set I crept up on you."

Anger left me. The man's imperturbable ill-humour was defeating. If, in spite of his surly friendliness, he "belonged" in the enemy camp, at least he was a comprehensible flesh-and-blood American citizen. Really, I hadn't a scrap of evidence connecting him with the purpose

of my journey, except his friendship with Mme. Yburg. After all, the Devil's Elbow was open to the public; and amid all this phantasmagoria it was good to get to grips with sanity; therefore:

"At the moment, Mr. Kluster," I said, "you definitely have the advantage. I don't know how you got here, and I don't know why you came here. I don't even know who you are, except that your name is Kluster——"

As I spoke, he had been regarding me under drooping lids—lids which concealed a pair of lancet-keen gray eyes. Now, he interrupted, and:

"Wrong!" said he: "it isn't! That's the name in my passport, but Washington knows different."

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

"It's easy. Your job's covering the Felsenweir circus-newspaper commission, I guess. Mine's the same—United States Secret Service. Name of Lonergan—John Lonergan. We might as well work together. I don't want publicity at the wrong time."

"But"—I was temporarily at a loss for words—"might I ask what Felsenweir has to do with the United States?"

"You might," he returned sourly. "A newspaper man might ask any damn thing. Are you the Brian Woodville who went up the Rio Negro for the New York *Bulletin*?"

"I am."

"Glad to know you better," said this extraordinary individual. "How are you fixed from now on? We ought to pool notes."

Perhaps, as coldly recorded, there would seem to be nothing in this interview on the Devil's Elbow to have convinced any but a credulous fool that Mr. Aldous P. Kluster was what he now claimed to be. Yet, for my part, I never doubted him. I saw the man in a new light. Much that had been obscure became obvious. I experienced an intense curiosity; and:

"I am meeting Mme. Yburg for tea," I replied truthfully, "and I am dining with M. Paul. Shall we meet somewhere later?"

"You bet we shall," he replied. He glanced down at the Zeiss glasses. "Seen anything fresh?" he asked.

And, at the question, realizing that I stood on the brink of a precipice with a stranger—probably armed; how only one other knew of my presence there—the chauffeur, a suspicious character—I suffered a revulsion of sentiment.

"I've watched for hours," Kluster (or Lonergan) went on. "Not from here. This look-out is a hundred per cent right. From three parts up the Mercuriusberg. I've seen the figures patrolling, but not a damn thing else."

I laughed to hide embarrassment—silently cursing my cowardly qualms.

"I saw them to-day for the first time."

He nodded, rolling the cigar between his lips.

"Didn't know why you were coming here," he murmured. "Plain enough now. I covered you early this morning. The gink driving the car fell for ten dollars and brought me here first! Listen. Mme. Yburg is clever. Play for safety. Paul beats me. But tell him *nothing*. Got it clear?"

"Perfectly."

"I'll go first, if it's all the same to you, and send the car back. Don't let the driver know you're wise to him. And do your look-out from farther beyond where the sun doesn't get your lenses. I don't know what kind of things live in Felsenweir, but I guess they can *see*. Ten o'clock outside the Kurhaus. Some table left of the steps. I'll look for you."

2

When I joined Mme. Yburg at the Casino, her manner struck me as odd. She was charming as ever, conveying that sense of coolness, physical as well as mental, which was part and parcel of her personality. She wore green, with a little tight-fitting hat which for some reason set me thinking of gnomes and fairies—and so brought back a memory of the grotto under the Devil's Elbow.

Her beautiful, calm eyes studied me with disturbing frankness, as the waiter brought tea.

"Has your busy day been successful?" she asked.

"Not entirely," I replied. "And yours?"

"I had lunch on the Mercuriusberg," she said, removing a handbag to make room for the tea tray. "Very much like a tripper, as you call it; but I adore the view."

"It must be a familiar view?"

She smiled, and glanced aside as the band began to play again. Her long, psychic hands fascinated.

"My husband had a villa here. But we were rarely in Baden."

"I'm sorry. Have I stirred up unhappy memories?"

"Not at all." Her regard became fixed upon me once more. "My marriage was not entirely happy—what marriage is? And if I had any regrets, time has softened them. My husband has been dead for eleven years."

"The war?" I suggested gently.

She nodded.

Upon my sympathy, my natural sympathy with any victim of that ghastly international tragedy, came hot-foot the most poisonous suspicions. She played cleverly. A beautiful widow bereaved by one's own countrymen or allies—it might be, by one's own hand—is a distractingly appealing figure. "Mme. Yburg is clever"—the strident voice seemed to ring in my ears. "Play for safety…." *Had* she been to the Mercuriusberg?

A number of dancers took the floor, and:

"Shall we dance?" I asked.

Mme. Yburg, watching me with those calm eyes in which lay so old and so dearly bought a wisdom as well as a smile which irritated whilst it caressed, shook her head slightly.

"You don't really want to, do you?"

"Frankly, I don't. I should rather talk here."

"So should I."

As a result, we talked—about a hundred and one things. But never about the Black Forest and its secrets. Mme. Yburg knew the world almost as well as I knew it. My only advantage was in respect of inaccessible spots right off the map. Europe, Asia, Africa, America—

she had travelled them all. Her knowledge of human character left me miles behind. She made me feel like an infant. Only when—out of pity, I think, for my masculine inferiority—she led me on to talk of the Sahara and of the unexplored country up the Rio Negro, did I recover my poise. At last:

"There are still a lot of jobs," she said—she spoke vernacular English in a fascinating unfamiliar way—"which only a man can do."

Her words awakened me to the passage of time. I had been absorbed in that most delightful task—talking about myself to an attractive and sympathetic woman. The band had ceased, and departed. I glanced at my wrist watch, and:

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Please forgive me! We have barely time to dress!"

"You are forgiven," said Mme. Yburg. "You have made me forget...."

3

It was all of a quarter to seven when I joined M. Paul in the bar. His resplendence was difficult to define: but he made me feel dowdy. He wore dinner kit which would have caused the editor of the *Tailor and Cutter* to scream with joy; but I was well turned out, too, for that matter. It was the personality of the man, plus his faultless clothes, which created the impression.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and leaped from his stool, regardless of the criticism of other occupants of the bar. "It is you—on the very tick of time!"

"A couple of ticks behind, to be exact," I murmured.

I had previously grappled with the problem of what it was about the Frenchman's mode of speech which intrigued me. At this moment I grasped it. He used the latest slang with facility—but gave the terms a new quality. In other words, reported, much of his conversation would have read like that of an Englishman; heard, it was peculiarly different.

He swept aside my natural suggestion with dramatic scorn.

"No, no!" he cried. "To-night *I* am host!"

Host he was—and a number-one host he proved himself to be. He had ordered dinner at the Kurhaus—not, he explained, because he regarded the cuisine there as superior to that of the Regal, but "because it is always a change."

I perceived, when we had taken our places at a reserved window table where we could both see and hear the excellent orchestra, that M. Paul was a gourmet of discrimination. He had ordered a dinner—upon which he invited my amateur comments—that displayed Teutonic cookery to its greatest advantage. This evidenced genius. So many people order a French meal in a German restaurant.

Any doubts I had had respecting my later appointment at the Kurhaus were speedily removed by M. Paul.

"I hope it does not mean loneliness for you," he said. "But at half-past nine I must run away."

It suited me very well and I said so.

"Good," said M. Paul. "Then we can enjoy our dinner."

He talked of many things, and entertainingly, but ere long, as I had anticipated, touched upon Mme. Yburg, to whom he referred as "your charming little friend."

I took him up on that, knowing the expression, translated into the speaker's tongue, to possess a subtly different meaning.

"Mme. Yburg is certainly charming," I agreed; "and we are friends. But only friends. We met a week ago."

His keen, handsome, actor's face registered a momentary surprise which I could have sworn was real. But believing, as I did, that M. Paul and Mme. Yburg were allies in a thus far incomprehensible conspiracy, I challenged my own judgment. In the woman's society, that afternoon, I had certainly forgotten, or had dismissed, those mediæval ideas which I had built up around her. Now, I asked myself if I was in the company of a dupe or of an accomplice.

Mme. Yburg was fascinating; I had experienced the thrall of her peculiar personality. Was this brilliant Frenchman, with his feverishly bright eyes and pale skin, a discarded fly? Had the spider bled him

white and cast him away? And was the poor infatuated victim jealously searching the horizon for who should be his successor? Or…?

"You surprise me, Mr. Woodville," he said—and his sincerity one would have set beyond dispute. "I quite thought you were old friends."

He looked at me in a new way, and began to talk about Paris.

I was nonplussed, and I fenced so badly in my subsequent attempts to draw the conversation into desired channels that I began to wonder if *all* my theories about M. Paul were wrong! A welcome turn was given to a very aimless conversation by my companion.

Gazing rapturously over my left shoulder:

"Ah, name of a good little man," he murmured—"how exquisite! No! it cannot be that she is German."

His racial prejudice made me laugh, but:

"Laugh, my friend, if you wish," he said. "But the goddess Diana is reborn a mortal. See, here is our coffee. You may move your chair. Please select a cigar"—the head waiter had brought a case—"and share with me the joy of looking at a beautiful girl."

I declined the cigar—I never smoke them—but lighted a cigarette and turned as M. Paul suggested. The object of his interest was unmistakable. She sat at a table not far removed, in the company of a plain, elderly lady than whom a more formidable duenna could not well be imagined.

Perhaps it was "written," as the Moslems have it; but, at the moment of my turning, the girl was looking in our direction. I found myself meeting a grave regard from the most liquid, frank, yet searching blue eyes I had ever seen.

Their glance held me. I stared too long for courtesy. "Diana reborn" was not so extravagant as I had supposed. The subject of M. Paul's poetry was deliciously tanned as one would imagine that divinity to have been. Her perfect arms and shoulders seemed to have absorbed the glow of sunlight. She was joyously, naïvely youthful, and her hair was a golden bronze such as surely must have crowned the Greek goddess.

No doubt my honest admiration was all too apparent. The girl flushed and glanced aside. I found myself focussed by a pair of black-rimmed spectacles worn by the duenna, which resembled dragon's eyes.

Embarrassed by my own bad form, I turned to M. Paul. But he was dreamily gazing over my left shoulder. The orchestra outside in the gardens began to play, and:

"Was I not right?" he murmured. "They are playing the Fire Music. See! it calls to her—the grandeur of Germany's only genius! She has a beautiful soul in a beautiful body!"

CHAPTER VI.

MR. JOHN LONERGAN

1

THE orchestra in the gardens had ceased. Only distant strains from a band inside the Kurhaus and a mingling hum of conversation played like a sustained motif over rhythmic crunching of many leisurely feet when Mr. Lonergan joined me at a sheltered table. A waiter hovered in the background, and:

"Beer," said Mr. Lonergan. "It's surely a treat to be able to order beer and to get beer when you order it. Do you keep your private papers under lock and key in your apartment at the Regal?"

I stared at the speaker in the semi-darkness. To my shame, be it confessed, I had been somewhat distracted up to the time that he had so abruptly fired this question at me. I had been listening in memory to a laughing voice with a queer, deep note in it, and watching a tall, slender figure moving through the throng with easy, graceful, yet boyish steps. The waiter had been unable to tell me who she was—and I had not dared to follow, being already suspect by the guardian dragon. But of whom did she remind me—and why?

But now, I came sharply to my senses, and:

"I do," said I. "Why do you ask?"

"Because somebody was exploring in there a while back."

"What! in my room?"

"Surely."

He rolled a very abbreviated cigar into a more comfortable position and paid for the beer which was now set before us. As the waiter moved away:

"It must have been the manservant," I said quickly. "He has the key."

"*I'm* talking sense," Lonergan rejoined ill-humouredly. "The kite *I* mean had no key. He arrived and he quitted per balcony window."

"You saw this! And you let him escape!"

"Suffering Moses!" Lonergan groaned. "How ever did you pull off the Brazil contract without brains!"

He drank deep whilst I watched him in growing anger. After all, the man was no more than a hotel acquaintance; and I should have resented such rudeness even from an old friend. As he set down his glass:

"Possibly, Mr. Lonergan," I said smoothly, "you confuse bad manners with wit. I assure you that I find nothing funny in being called a fool by a comparative stranger."

"Is that right?" he replied gloomily, and banged the table to attract the waiter's attention. "Well, *I'm* not laughing. Here am I playing a lone hand in a murderous game, and I find out that one of the suspects is on my side of the border. He's a man that's done good work, and I look for intelligent coöperation——"

The waiter attended.

"Beer," said Lonergan. "What do I find?" He shook his head gloomily. "Stupidity. But maybe I'm too hard on you. It's a game that needs experience. Listen! You're fussed. Forget it. If you and I are to get out of this pleasant spot alive, we have to be clever!"

As he spoke, somehow my anger changed to another emotion—in which wrath was present, certainly, but from which apprehension was not missing. Lonergan bent forward across the table, so that his face was lost in shadow.

"We're covered at this very minute!" he said tensely. "You and I are up against the toughest proposition that either of us ever faced. Don't look around. I have a plan. We'll go back to the hotel."

I reserved further comment, and some ten minutes later together we walked down the tree-lined arcade with its expensive little shops and on along Lichtenthaler Allee.

2

When in a comparative solitude my surly companion broke long silence:

"You put one wise move across," he conceded grudgingly. "You figured out that the best spot to study Felsenweir was the Devil's Elbow—and you covered your tracks from everybody but me. That's exploring, I guess. I'm not so good on maps."

My humour was nearly restored, and:

"For a man of your experience," I said, "wasn't it rather foolish to confuse me with the other party? My credentials are easily checked."

"Maybe they are," he returned. "But bigger men than you are in the enemy's camp."

His aggressive ill-humour was unique.

"If, as you say, we are covered," I remarked, "isn't it unwise of us to be seen together?"

"No, sir," he replied. "I've baited a trap, and you're part of the bait. We'll go straight to your apartment, and when I've done talking maybe you'll grasp the size of the proposition."

But when, at the far end of the alcove, a spot distant from my shuttered windows, John Lonergan had talked solidly for half an hour, I was merely more bewildered than before.

"May I suggest *beer*?" said I.

"You can keep right on suggesting beer," he replied, "while I stay in Europe. And you'll never hear me say No."

His place in the drama was clear enough. He had been detailed by the United States authorities to follow Mme. Yburg! (I now learned that she had recently returned from America.) Of his methods of "following" I had had personal experience; and he had adopted a similar system in the case of the mysterious German lady.

She had left the port of New York in a slow boat. Lonergan had "followed" in the *Mauretania*—sailing twenty-four hours later—and had been waiting at Cherbourg for her arrival!

During the overland journey he had succeeded in making her acquaintance.

"Get it clear," said he, in his unmusical voice, "that we'd never have let her go if we'd had all the facts on the day she sailed...."

The facts to which he referred were astounding. But in what way they were related to those other facts—known to me—and to the rumoured outbreak of vampirism in the Black Forest, was a complete mystery.

Briefly, it appeared that some two months earlier there had been a disastrous disturbance of radio in the American Continent. It had affected seven states; namely: New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Furthermore, it had operated in the North Atlantic over an area roughly contained within lat. 40-45, long. 65-70.

The newspapers had been "gagged," I was given to understand. But during a period of three weeks or more the phenomenon had occurred at irregular intervals. It had consisted of a complete silencing of all radio communications.

Experts employed upon the job had finally traced the mysterious influence, narrowing down their inquiries to a point where it seemed certain that a wave of unknown character, which "dumbed" or diverted all others, was being sent out from the neighbourhood of Hartford. A process of combing followed; and the result was noteworthy.

Interference had ceased for a week or more. But on private, enclosed property belonging to an absent landlord, the searchers came upon a dismantled plant which taxed the experience of many specialists. In some respects it suggested that here had been a secret transmitting station. In other respects it was unlike—or had been unlike—any such station known to the investigators.

"Some of the stuff brought away is still under examination," said Lonergan. "Latest reports don't help. But how I came in was this: the kite the lay-out belonged to—his name don't matter—had beat it to

some destination unspecified. A local hotel register showed that a certain Mme. Yburg had been staying in that locality all over the time the funny business was going on. Inquiry proved that they had been acquainted.

"One agent was detailed to trace the missing man and his associates. I was given the job of covering the woman. She'd quitted. But I cut in on her at Cherbourg."

"But have none of the American inquiries led to anything? She must have been in touch with others there as well as with the missing proprietor of the Hartford property."

"She was," Lonergan replied. "And they've been closely covered. It's a mighty big thing of some sort. There are people high up socially in it. She butted into another bunch of 'em in Paris. When she alighted here I thought *you* were one of the circus."

"And I thought *you* were! But who is Mme. Yburg? Have you any data bearing on her history?"

"No, sir." He regarded me under drooping lids. "Have *you*?"

"Nothing—beyond a few hints she has dropped about herself."

"I should quote that stock pretty low. And now—I've put my cards on the table. Where do *you* come in?"

3

Let me say at once that doubts of Lonergan's *bona fides* still remained. There is Scots in my make-up somewhere, and I am capable of a sort of belated cautiousness. But, I argued, in any event I had nothing to gain by hiding what little I knew.

Without undue waste of words, therefore, I told him. The rumours current in London had not reached New York apparently. Lonergan listened with a Sioux-like immobility; but I could see that he was keenly interested all the same.

When I spoke of the great bat alighting in the cemetery, he flicked his eyes, but otherwise gave no sign of incredulity. My later meeting with Mme. Yburg he seemed to regard as important, for:

"How was she dressed?" he snapped suddenly.

The inquiry, breaking his long silence, came with something of the effect of a pistol shot. I told him—for I remembered every detail very clearly. My conversation with Mme. Yburg I also reported, and:

"I could have sworn you had a date with her that time," he said. "I followed you for half a mile and then gave it up!"

"Good Lord! I *thought* someone was following me!"

"That so?" said Lonergan gloomily. "Bad work. Have you kept the *caporal* you picked up?"

"Yes."

"Mme. Yburg smokes——"

"Egyptians. Always."

"Ah! Did you see anything of Paul?"

"He passed me on my way up! He was in a car."

"Ah! I lost him for two hours. But I got the pair of 'em along to a party and listened in. They gave nothing away." He was silent for a while, then:

"Felsenweir is some kind of headquarters. I made my mind up on that point a week ago."

"But a headquarters of *what*?" I asked helplessly. "Of vampires?"

He shot one of his keen glances along the room in the direction of the shuttered window.

"It wouldn't be surprising—with men in armour on the walls!"

I could not fail to note a subtle change in the speaker's voice—a note of humility wholly unfamiliar. And now he fixed his eyes upon me, lids fully raised, with an expression almost of pleading.

"Is that your story, complete?" he asked. "Because if it is, you're lucky!"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that even a giant bat maybe can be accounted for; men in armour the same. But if *you* had heard a Voice in the night, calling you by name, when not a living soul was near——"

"Stop!" I jumped up. "I *have* heard it!"

"What!"

Lonergan was on his feet, facing me.

"I have been given *two days*!" I cried excitedly.

The knowledge that I was not alone in my nightly terrors, that another had experienced what I had experienced, that, in short, I was *sane*, brought a mental relief and a flood of gratitude which I found no word to express.

"Suffering Moses!" Lonergan dropped back in his chair, still staring at me. "My father, sir, was a pious man and a minister. If he never approved of anything I did before, I'll say he'll approve of what I do now."

He clasped his hands, closed his eyes, and:

"Thank God!" he whispered fervently.

4

That strange, short prayer completed, John Lonergan became himself again.

"Never mind the details," he said. "The plain fact's enough, and it's Balm of Gilead. There's work for both of us. Just step right across to the table and I'll show you something."

We moved out of the alcove and went to the big writing table. From a pocket of his dinner jacket, Lonergan drew out a fat wallet. And from the wallet he selected three photographic prints which he laid side by side on the blotting pad.

"I wasn't working from so good a look-out as you," he said. "There's a tree branch in the way. But if these aren't pictures of a man in armour, tell me what they are. I travel a telescopic camera—and it can't lie!"

With interest and ever-growing amazement I examined the prints. They represented the figure of just such a grotesque man at arms as I had seen on the walls of Felsenweir. The legs of the figure were concealed in each case. But the head and trunk showed in sharp detail. The quality of the armour intrigued me. It was unlike that of any period which I knew. And the odd, square helm worn by this weird patrol was equally unusual. One gleaming arm, upraised, held a heavy mace.

But, even whilst I studied these extraordinary pictures, I was listening. I thought I had detected a faint sound on the balcony.

I heard some few distant footsteps, voices, and the ripple of the Oos; but nothing else.

"Well?"

"I have never seen armour like it."

"Did you ever see any kind of armour walking?"

"Only at a pageant, perhaps, with an actor inside it."

"And who do you suppose was inside *that*?"

I looked up at him, over my shoulder.

Lonergan bent forward and rested a finger on one of the prints.

"That wall," said he, "is ten feet from there to there. I've figured it out—never mind how. Now, just see where the helmet comes." He doubled his long thumb to form a ruler. "I'm going to tell you, Mr. Woodville, that the man inside this suit must have been *seven feet high!*"

"Good God! You're right!"

Convinced against my will, I stared harder than ever. Seven-foot men at arms! Giant bats! Was it all some extravagant illusion? An insane practical joke? Small wonder that Felsenweir had a bad reputation!

"I've been moving heaven and earth," Lonergan went on, "to get a permit to view those ruins. But there's some big influence working against me."

"Nobody in these parts," said I, "will go near the place—not within a mile—after dusk."

"Most of 'em won't even *talk* about it," he growled.

"Oh, have *you* found that? My experience has been similar."

Lonergan moved left of the table, standing with his back to the shuttered window and facing in my direction.

"And now," said he, "I'm going to show you something still more surprising. I'll have to go to my apartment. But I sha'n't be gone many minutes. Are your notes up to date?"

"Fairly. I have some to add."

"What I've told you is private, yet. Wait right here."

Whereupon he crossed the room and went out.

I listened intently in the silence which followed the closing of the door. The hour was growing late—for Baden. Outside, everything was very still. Only the silvery music of the little stream was audible.

Nothing reached my ears to confirm an uneasy suspicion that I was spied upon.

Nevertheless, I was aware of a sense of tension. Something seemed to be closing in around me: I began, in the stillness of the night, to regard my mission from a new and even more unpleasant angle....

I started.

Surely a faint sound!

Was there someone—*something*—outside?

Unable to put up with this nervous doubt any longer, I pushed my chair back, and was on the point of standing up to investigate, when a sharp, low cry—a cry of pain—came from immediately outside the shutters.

I sprang up, as:

"Go easy!" said a strident voice—*Lonergan's*! "The time to break that hold was a second before you started! Mr. Woodville! Raise your shutters!"

But I was already hauling on the cords with all my might. And, as the centre shutter shot up, in from the balcony marched Lonergan, shoeless, his feet clad in silk socks—pushing before him a captive whose arms were oddly twisted behind him.

Light fell on the stranger's face, as he turned to glare at his captor, and:

"Suffering Moses!" said Lonergan, and released the prisoner's arms.

It was M. Paul!

CHAPTER VII.

GASTON MAX'S STORY

1

"THANKS for your hospitality, my friends!" said M. Paul.

He threw his head back and confronted us with a scornful smile.

I exchanged glances with Lonergan. That remarkable man, although he had discarded his footwear, had retained his cigar, and:

"You've got a gun packed," he growled. "I can see the bulge from here. Entertain M. Paul while I go get my shoes. I parked 'em under a rosebush."

He turned, walked out on to the balcony, and silently disappeared. I met the prisoner's unflinching stare, and:

"Won't you sit down, M. Paul?" I said, speaking in French—for no reason that I can assign other than that the defiant figure, with folded arms, was so gallant and so Gallic.

"I must refuse. I accept no favours from such enemies."

"I have never been your enemy," I replied, without any echo of his high challenge. "I was your guest to-night. If you can explain why you were eavesdropping outside my apartment, we shall continue to be friends."

There are nuances in French beyond the compass of our grand but downright language. I have indicated what I said; but in the tongue of M. Paul I said it with infinite delicacy.

He was puzzled. So much was evident.

"You have a perfect Paris accent," he replied—by which equivocal compliment I knew he was playing for time.

"The tone of the interview," said I, "rather rests upon yourself."

"I cannot agree. I am but one. You are many."

My stare of bewilderment was so honest that its naïveté broke through the armour of M. Paul's distrust. A familiar expression fled across his pale, handsome face. So he had looked at the Kurhaus when I had assured him that my acquaintance with Mme. Yburg was only a week old.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean. Mr. Lonergan and myself make two to one, certainly. But I cannot admit two to be many."

"What is this?"

M. Paul dropped his hands and bent forward, watching me.

"We stand alone. *You* represent the many."

Whereupon, throwing up his palms and his eyes in a simultaneous gesture:

"*Mon Dieu!*" M. Paul exclaimed; adding, in English: "How damn silly I am!"

At which moment Lonergan reëntered, wearing his shoes; and:

"I guess I'm damn silly, too," he said. "Listen, Woodville—I've been checking up on you, out there. Don't get upstage. You weren't dead sure of *me*! My French is practicable but not in the same class as yours. I followed what you said. Have you got a line on the facts?"

"No," I replied angrily.

"Suffering Moses! Isn't it plain that what you thought of me, and I thought of you, M. Paul here was thinking about both of us!"

"I have been a damn fool!" the Frenchman exclaimed.

"So have I," said Lonergan sadly. "But Woodville is the damnedest fool of the bunch. *He* hasn't got it *now*!"

"Oh, but yes—certainly!" cried M. Paul, and turned to me eagerly. "It is plain, my dear Mr. Woodville, is it not? You two gentlemen are engaged upon the same matter as myself! You are watching Mme. Yburg and Felsenweir? So am I!... And like a fool I think you two are her lovers or her accomplices! Perhaps both."

"Got it, now?" Lonergan growled. "When I figure out the time I've wasted covering you, Woodville, and you, M. Paul, I guess I haven't the pluck to log."

"But——" I broke in.

"One fool at a time," he said surlily. "*I* was saying something." He turned again to Paul, and: "My name's known to you?" he went on. "Mr. Woodville, here, was good enough to mention it. I'm Lonergan. United States special commissioner."

"But, name of a little dog!" cried Paul. "I know! I *know*! You are John Lonergan? When I heard the name spoken, I knew! It was hearing 'Mr. Lonergan' that told me what a fool I am. We have corresponded! And about this very matter!"

"What!" said Lonergan.

"You exchanged letters with me, in Paris, respecting Mme. Yburg—two weeks ago! We had been advised, at the Service, and it was I who replied to you! We should have met, but you left suddenly——"

Lonergan removed his stumpy cigar. It was an unusual gesture. His drooping lids were fully raised. He stared at the speaker, and:

"Name of Gaston Max?" he asked.

Our uninvited guest bowed, showing a row of perfect teeth. Lonergan turned to me.

"Woodville," said he, "meet Gaston Max of the Paris Service de Sûreté! Then, if you'd step outside and kick me, I should take it kindly."

2

Conversation between Lonergan and Gaston Max became technical. I gathered that the Frenchman enjoyed an international reputation; but since criminology, hitherto, had been out of my line, the name of Gaston Max had not reached me. His pre-eminence in his own trade was evident, however.

Lonergan treated him with definite respect.

So much did I feel out of the running, that presently:

"Gentlemen," I interrupted, "as a mere amateur I should like to intrude a remark. So far, we have none of us been very wise. I have two suggestions to make."

"Cough 'em up," said Lonergan.

"Beer."

"That motion's carried," he declared.

I rang for a waiter, and:

"As an interested party," I went on, "my second suggestion is this: Will M. Max be good enough to inform us in what way happenings in the Black Forest concern the Service de Sûreté?"

"But my *dear* Mr. Woodville," Max cried, "I am most remiss! My apologies! I am your guest—although the invitation nearly strangled me!" He turned again to Lonergan. "I will speak to you later about that trick."

Lonergan discarded half an inch of cigar, and from his waistcoat pocket took a new one—the first I had ever seen him use.

"Matter of timing," he growled.

Came a rap on the door and a waiter appeared—the same who had advised me to drop my inquiries respecting a giant bat seen in the neighbourhood.

I gave the necessary order; and, as the waiter withdrew and we heard the outer door close:

"No!" Max exclaimed. "I don't like that man! I think, from the way he looked at us, he knows something!"

"I'm sure he does," I replied. "Presently, I will tell you why I am sure."

It struck me forcibly what an odd trio we were as we awaited that suspected man's return: Lonergan, gaunt, gray-haired and imperturbable; Gaston Max, darkly handsome, and radiating a passionate energy and high spirits; and I, very brown-faced, I suppose, in contrast to my sallow companions, and no doubt very ordinary looking by comparison with either.

Both the American and the Frenchman would have claimed second glances; whereas one can meet a dozen Brian Woodvilles any fine morning in a walk from the Mall through St. James's to Bond Street.

When, presently, the ordered refreshments arrived, it was another waiter who brought them! Exchanging nods with Lonergan I made an inquiry, and:

"Your waiter has just gone off duty, sir," I was told. "Thank you. Good-night, sir."

As the door closed, Lonergan lighted his new cigar, and:

"That first kite with the squint in his eye has gone to make a report," he declared. "At noon to-day, where I lunched, he was three tables away, covering me!"

3

In an atmosphere of growing tension almost physically to be felt, Gaston Max told his story. It served, amongst other things, to illustrate how big a part chance—or call it Fate if you prefer—plays in all our lives.

It was, then, the presence of the American agent in Paris, and the nature of his correspondence with the French police authorities, which had given the Service de Sûreté their first clue to a mystery six months old! Expressing himself unwilling to call at headquarters or to receive a representative, Lonergan had asked for any information held by the Service relative to Mme. Yburg.

"Name of a good little man," Max exclaimed, "how puzzled we were by your invisibility!"

"Had my reasons," Lonergan growled.

But when, in a telephone conversation, the facts about the radio disturbance in New England came into Max's possession, the link was established.

They held no *dossier Yburg* in Paris; they had never heard of Madame. But, following the conversation with Lonergan, Gaston Max immediately communicated with the police at Argelès in the Pyrenees and asked a certain question.

"While I am awaiting the result," said Max, "you disappear! So also does Mme. Yburg!"

"I was covering her."

"So were we!" cried Max—"acting on your information. We knew she had gone to Germany. But none of my fools knew what had become of *you*! And the one in whom I had most faith described you as a dark man, fresh-colored, with a pointed beard!"

"That's right," Lonergan agreed, rolling his cigar reflectively. "I introduced myself to Mme. Yburg! That's why I thought I was safe."

But, at this, silently as I had listened hitherto, I burst in.

"You *introduced* yourself!" I exclaimed. "Please make this clear. Because, frankly, I'm quite out of my depth."

"So, also, am I," Max declared.

"Suffering Moses!" said Lonergan. "I made the acquaintance of Mme. Yburg on the journey from Cherbourg to Paris as a dark man with a pointed beard and a moustache; member of an old Southern family. Got *that* clear? Seeing she wasn't staying in Paris for long, I got to know where she was heading for. Then I told her that my maternal uncle, name of Aldous P. Kluster, was going the same way. Said I was leaving but that he'd call up and pay his compliments. He did. He travelled along with her to Baden-Baden. Here he is!"

The eloquent face of Gaston Max was a study. But, when he spoke, his question surprised me.

"How many passports do you use?" he asked.

"Five. Open that other bottle."

But, whilst I did as he suggested, I was watching Gaston Max. And that master sleuth was watching John Lonergan. Finally:

"You got me beat!" he declared.

And the accent with which he pronounced the words, spoken by a Frenchman, astounded me. Even Lonergan's calm was disturbed.

"No wonder," Max went on in his usual manner, "that you slip through our fingers in Paris! No wonder I make a damn fool of myself in Baden! My congratulations, monsieur! America employs clever men!"

"Sir," Lonergan replied, "I have to hand back the compliment to France. That Lower East Side stuff would pass on Mott Street!"

4

Gaston Max, who was, as now began to dawn upon me, France's star detective, told his singular story whilst I taxed my ingenuity in vain. I tried to discover a discrepancy in the appearance of Lonergan which

might help me to decide if the man I knew were the real man or if the pictures of John Lonergan *in propria persona* (attached, presumably, to one of his five passports) would prove to be totally unfamiliar.

Rather more than six months earlier, I learned, the little mountain township of Bagnères-dès-Barèges in the Hautes Pyrénées had suffered a visitation unparalleled in French history. Of the total population only thirty-five remained.

"These owe their lives," Max explained, "to the fact that on this fatal night they were not at home. Some were in the higher mountains above Bagnères, some were tending cattle, some calling upon friends who lived in remote places. But of living creatures actually within the town, from the High Bridge to the Valley Gate, only seven survived!"

"Stop a minute," Lonergan interrupted. "You said 'living creatures'?"

"I did."

"Meaning cats, rats, canaries, and such?"

"But certainly! Even some of the insects!"

"Suffering Moses! We had the story back home. I remember the headlines: 'Whole town struck dead by lightning!' Go right ahead."

"One moment!" said I, interrupting Max in the act of raising a clenched fist in characteristic forensic gesture. "We also had the story in London, I believe, although I was abroad at the time. But surely it was determined by meteorological experts that, owing to the peculiar setting of Bagnères-dès-Barèges, a tremendous electrical discharge had brought about the tragedy?"

"But certainly!" Max agreed again. "What else could one say? Of those witnesses who remained, no two were in accord as to the circumstances. True, there was thunder in the air. It seemed, at sunset, that a storm brewed. Black clouds hung over the mountains. Radio and telegraphic communication were disturbed. This we learned later. Then, at nine o'clock, when most of those simple folk were in bed, it came——"

"*What* came?" Lonergan asked.

"Death came!"

"That's agreed," the ill-humoured voice went on. "But you spoke of witnesses. What did they see? What did they hear?"

Gaston Max turned to me smilingly. He shrugged his shoulders.

"He is difficult, this one," he said—"my American *confrère*! I should prefer, Mr. Lonergan, to tell the story in my own way. But I will step aside and answer your questions. My portfolio—I have nine hundred pages of notes on the Bagnères mystery—is in my room. From memory, there was a vague booming sound—according to two witnesses. According to others, there was no sound at all. According to five or six, there was a flickering light, resembling a distant storm, and it played over the little valley in which the town lies. Three or four, equally well placed, failed to see such a light. But when those wanderers returned to their homes, gentlemen, they found tombs!... Nothing lived in Bagnères-dès-Barèges!"

"You said there were seven survivors," Lonergan complained.

The artist in Gaston Max—and I began to realize that the man was essentially an artist—rose in revolt. Leaping from his chair, he strode to the far end of the apartment. For a while he stood there, whilst Lonergan rolled his cigar reflectively between thin lips. But when Max turned he was smiling again.

"I said so, yes!" he admitted. "Notes are unnecessary. I will describe these seven."

He faced us, nine paces away.

"First—because she was so curious, I mention her first—there was a very old cow in an ancient stone byre! Second, third, and fourth: three deaf-mutes. Fifth, an aged man who lived in a cellar the walls of which dated back to Roman times. Sixth, a woman about to give birth to a child. Seventh, the child!"

"Quick!" Lonergan was on his feet. "Were there other cattle in that byre?"

"No."

"Were the deaf-mutes together, separated, or in the company of other people?"

"One was alone. Two were together with a woman. The woman died."

"The old man in the cellar?"

"He was alone."

"The mother?"

"A midwife was with her in the room. Her husband and her sister were in the house. Midwife, husband, and sister died."…

There was a moment of silence.

"It seems like nothing could cover those facts," Lonergan declared.

"So all the science of France proclaimed," Max answered. "The Service had not been called in. It did not appear to be their province. Until, one day, *you* wrote to us! It was my department, and I dealt with you. When I heard of the silencing of radio in America, I said to myself: 'Of what does this remind me?' When you asked for the history of Mme. Yburg, I said, 'This name is new to me.' But, Mr. Lonergan, you had sown the seed! Presently, so slowly, a possible link suggested itself. I wired to the prefect of the arrondissement of Argelès in the Hautes Pyrénées!"

"Well!" said I—since Lonergan remained silent.

"He presently replied to my question…. My question was: 'Did one, Mme. Yburg, visit Bagnères-dès-Barèges at or about the time of the catastrophe?' He replied: 'A Mme. Yburg was staying at the sign of the Coq d'Or during that week. She disappeared on the night of the catastrophe'!"

CHAPTER VIII.
THE LAST WARNING

1

FOLLOWING a silence of stupefaction—I can only describe it so:

"How did you join up with Madame?" Lonergan asked.

"I made her acquaintance here, in the hotel," Max replied. "Her associates seemed to be—first, yourself; second, Mr. Woodville! I was naturally suspicious of Aldous P. Kluster—knowing that Mme. Yburg had American interests. Also, Mr. Woodville"—he turned to me—"I looked upon you as a victim of this very fascinating woman."

"It's understandable," I admitted. "I returned the compliment!"

Gaston Max shrugged, thrust a hand into his pocket, and:

"Furies!" he exclaimed. "I forgot my cigarette case!"

One of those sudden ideas which, regrettably, come to me so rarely came now. I crossed to the writing table, opened a drawer, and took out the *caporal* which I had placed there. I offered it to Max.

"Is this what you're looking for?"

He accepted it, watching me wonderingly. He examined it, and:

"Suffering Moses!" Lonergan growled. "I begin to have hopes for you, Woodville!"

"*I* rather think," I went on, "that you may have dropped this cigarette——"

"*Mon Dieu!*" He stared hard into my eyes. "I too am thinking! And, yes! I know! At the cemetery gate?"

"Correct."

And, as he spoke, his expression changed. It was as though a mask had been slipped aside. I found myself looking into *hunted* eyes... those same eyes which had stared out in my direction from a passing car on the previous night.

Gaston Max laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"My friend," he said, "it is necessary that I should bring my story up to date."

He crossed to an armchair and dropped into it, looking from Lonergan to me; then:

"Last night," he continued, "I followed Mme. Yburg. She left the hotel after dinner, and I was curious about her movements. Bear in mind, gentlemen, that I believed my incognito to be unsuspected. I traced her... and she went to the cemetery on the hill!"

"We know she did," Lonergan interrupted. "Woodville met her coming away. I was covering you earlier on, but you handed me a rubber pass-out. What happened?"

Max frowned. The artist beneath that cloak of *savoir-vivre* which the investigator wore resented these intrusions; but:

"You have interrupted me so often, my friend," he went on smilingly, "that I am going to take the liberty of interrupting *myself*! I came to Baden-Baden expecting to find Mme. Yburg in touch with other members of a dangerous organization which undoubtedly exists. I found her to be in touch with nobody but yourself and Mr. Woodville! You"—he bowed to Lonergan—"occupied rooms which were not accessible; but you"—turning to me—"were vulnerable."

He paused, considered the cigarette which I had given him, placed it in an ash tray, and accepted one from my case. As he struck a match:

"I came to this apartment yesterday," he continued, "while you were away. I was disturbed by the manservant. I hid in a wardrobe. I was trapped! When the man had gone (he came to close the sun shutters) I considered these. I made it possible for them to be raised from *outside*. Then I departed."

"But you returned later last night?" I suggested.

"I did. And, clumsily, I awakened you. I hid under a bush, and pretended to be the watchman! The real watchman nearly caught me! Again, to-night, I observed your meeting, gentlemen, at the Kurhaus."

"Saw you," Lonergan drawled. "I tipped Woodville we were covered. That's how I roped you in later. But, listen—it's urgent—were you here earlier in the evening?"

"I was not."

Lonergan stared across at me.

"*Somebody* was," said he simply. "We're getting down to hard facts. And now, Mr. Max, maybe I've broken up your story quite a bit; but we come back to the point where you tracked Mme. Yburg to the lay-out and dropped a cigarette. Excuse my interruptions, and go on from there."

"I will."

Max stood up.

"She had entered the cemetery. She held a key of the gate. I heard the gate close behind her. Then I crept forward. Three or four minutes had elapsed. Inside the cemetery all was silent. No sound of footsteps. In the bright moonlight I could see right along a broad path which stretched from the point where I stood to the farther wall. I tried the gate. It was locked.

"Mme. Yburg—you follow?—had locked herself in among the graves!

"The strangeness of this brought me to pause. Why had she locked that gate behind her? There are horrible stories abroad, you understand, concerning the Black Forest, and Mme. Yburg is a woman of mystery—perhaps the high priestess of some new religion of destruction.

"I think best when I smoke. You say it would have been unwise to strike a match; but this point I had not considered when, almost without knowing, I took out my cigarette case. I withdrew a *caporal*...."

He paused dramatically, then:

"As I did so," he went on, lowering his tone, "a Voice called on me by name! This Voice, coming from nowhere, from no one, chilled my blood. I do not remember dropping the cigarette, but I know, now, that I must have done so.

"'Gaston Max,' the Voice said—right at my elbow in the empty road! —'return to Paris! You have two days!'"

He stared from face to face, expecting incredulity—a clever man taxed beyond the limits of his experience—when:

"We've made the grade together," Lonergan growled. "We've all got the same time!"

2

I can never forget those changing expressions which passed across the expressive features of Gaston Max whilst, as briefly as possible, I told him the story of the Voice... that Voice which had also spoken to me and to Lonergan. The fact that he was not alone with this bodiless terror seemed to remove a weight of years from him. As I concluded:

"It's eased your mind some to know," Lonergan said, "Woodville and I both sympathize. But except that we're all together, I can't see that it helps on the case a lot."

"I disagree!" Max cried. "It proves that the supernatural—for so we must call it—works to plan, as does the normal. If this is so, we may upset those plans!"

"Don't follow," Lonergan declared.

"But it is plain!" the Frenchman exclaimed impatiently. "There is *reason* behind this! And reason can work against reason. If it is not so —*why have we all two days?*"

"Suffering Moses!" Lonergan's tones were even less musical than usual. "I've been thinking cross-eyed! Let's sort out the facts. The Voice first spoke to me at 2 A.M., precisely, last Sunday morning. It gave me four days to quit. Two A.M. on Monday it gave me three."

"Exactly one hour later," I interrupted, "it first spoke to me!"

"Two o'clock yesterday morning," Lonergan went on, "I was given two days——"

"At nine last night," Max cried, "I, also, was given two days! More than one of them has passed!"

I looked at my wrist watch. One-thirty.

"It is now——" I began.

But I was interrupted.

"Gaston Max!" said the Voice.

We all sprang to our feet.

"John Lonergan!"

I glanced at Lonergan. His mask of Red Indian stoicism failed to hide the fact that he had paled.

"Brian Woodville!"

We stood there, a tense trio, amid silence which seemed to throb; then:

"All three have until to-morrow midnight," the Voice went on. "*This is the last warning*. You have until to-morrow midnight."

CHAPTER IX.

LONERGAN DESERTS

1

In my records of this encounter with a creature more than humanly terrible, in my memories of the part I played in, literally, saving the world from destruction, the following day—it was a Wednesday—forms a peak. It was destined to be memorable.

We had until midnight....

Since our feeble subterfuges were plainly matter for laughter on the part of the Voice, we had agreed to breakfast together on the balcony of my apartment.

As I came out of the bathroom and stood for a moment looking across sunny lawns where gaily chattering holiday makers already hurried to their hotels from early constitutionals, I questioned, once again, the reality of it all.

Gaston Max's story—what did it mean? That the presence of Mme. Yburg in that stricken village had been accidental was an explanation which reason rejected. Her visit to Hartford, Connecticut, at the time of the radio mystery, made it impossible to ignore the significance of what might otherwise have passed for a coincidence.

"A tremendous electrical discharge," someone had said in speaking of the Pyrenees tragedy; and the American mystery was also one of unknown waves.... "Perhaps the high priestess of some new religion of destruction." Mme. Yburg had been so described by Gaston Max.

At the time appointed, the latter gentleman joined me. He wore gray flannels and a blue reefer jacket. His socks, his shirt, and his tie harmonized pleasingly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, coming up the steps, "our American friend is late!"

"Not yet," said I, consulting my watch: "You are absolutely on time."

He dropped into a chair and stared reflectively at the beautiful prospect. Presently:

"I have been watching trout down there in the stream," he said.

"Inspiring idea. What about trout for breakfast?"

"Good," he acknowledged; adding, characteristically, "I am all for it. Early breakfast is not in my line. But blue trout, toast, and a cup of coffee—yes, I could manage this! But"—he glanced aside at me—"it was not of breakfast I was thinking as I watched those trout."

"No?"

"No! They head always upstream—watching the oncoming water. Any danger, they suppose, would approach on the current, which they can see. They do not realize—being fishes—that they are trapped; that it is only a question of somebody's whim how soon they will be cooked and eaten!"

I stared at him curiously. He was not looking in my direction. Seen in profile he had a magnificent head.

"*We* are heading upstream," he went on—"you and I and Mr. Lonergan. But we have this advantage over the trout: we *do* know when we are to be cooked!"

"At midnight?"

He shrugged.

"Say, rather, at any time after midnight. But where we share the ignorance of the fishes is in this: we do not know *how* we are going to be cooked—nor by whom we are going to be eaten!"

Following a short silence, during which I caught snatches of careless conversation from distant passers-by wafted to me over the song of the little stream:

"Having slept on the problem," I said, "has any theory explaining the Voice occurred to you?"

"None."

"Or one to account for the giant bat?"

He turned to me impulsively, and:

"I tell you," he declared, "we are face to face with powers against which we are as helpless as those trout in the Oos are helpless against the net!"

A silence fell upon us, in which no doubt Gaston Max was thinking, as I was thinking, that Lonergan, usually a model of punctuality, had presumably overslept. When, after some aimless chat which mainly served to hide a mutual doubt, fifteen minutes passed and our American colleague still remained absent, I made a suggestion.

"Either Lonergan has forgotten the appointment," I said, "or something is wrong with him. If you will excuse me for a moment, I will make inquiries."

"I wish you would."

I crossed to the telephone, and remembering only just in time the name in which Lonergan was registered at the hotel:

"Would you call Mr. Kluster's room," I said to the clerk who answered. "I don't know his number."

There was a silent interval, then:

"Mr. Woodville?" inquired another voice, that of an assistant manager whom I knew fairly well.

"Yes."

"You are asking for Mr. Kluster? I am surprised he neglected to advise you. Mr. Kluster has gone. He left for Düsseldorf by an early train!"

2

"One wise fish has escaped the net," said Gaston Max.

But, frankly, I regarded Lonergan's desertion less lightly. If ever I had come upon a man whom obstacles stimulated and to whom danger was refreshment that man was surely John Lonergan. Besides, ignominious flight was childish—a plain defection from duty with two witnesses to testify against Washington's special commissioner.

It was utterly incomprehensible.

"It is plain, is it not," said Max, as we strolled through the gardens after breakfast, "that for us to attempt to hide our movements from M. the Voice is simply silly?"

"Quite plain."

"Mr. Lonergan has recognized this. So—do not let us judge him hastily."

I paused, staring at the speaker, but:

"You and I," he went on smilingly, "have until midnight. Let us use this time to the best advantage. What line of inquiry had you intended to follow to-day?"

"I had planned to visit the Felsenweir mausoleum in the cemetery."

"Curious," Max murmured. "So had I. Let us go together."

A sudden and oppressive darkness had fallen when, half an hour later, we set out. The hall porter proffered a word of advice:

"Don't go too far, sir. When it rains in Baden at this season, it rains hard."

Nevertheless, we risked it. I welcomed the Frenchman's company, although his usual amusing chatter was absent during our walk up to the old cemetery. I could not reconcile Lonergan's desertion with the character of the man; I believed that Gaston Max had a theory; and he remained silent. Perhaps I was a little bit resentful.

Some few parties returning to the town we met, driven by the threatening storm, but beyond where the steep path bent sharply to the left, offering a prospect of the roofs of Baden-Baden, we had the road to ourselves.

An awning of cloud hung over the green bowl which shelters the town. Its effect was queerly forbidding. Robbed of sunshine, Baden looked like a dead place—like the shell of a fly (why did the image suggest itself?) whose life had been sucked out by a spider. And, as the unpleasant thought came to my mind:

"Do you know," said Gaston Max suddenly, "that up to the year 1449 or 1549—forgive my bad history—I am not sure which it is—there was a village of Felsenweir?"

"No."

"There was. No trace of it remains, I am told. It was deserted by all its inhabitants, and now the forest has partly reclaimed the soil it occupied."

"Why was it deserted?"

"Because of a plague."

"You mean the Black Death—called in Germany, I believe, the 'Basle Death'?"

"No, no, not at all. This was another kind of plague. One by one they died, the people of Felsenweir. They wasted away. And it was said—those were the dark ages, Mr. Woodville—that a *vampire* was visiting the village!"

"Good heavens!"

I pulled up shortly. The angry curtain drawn over the valley now touched with its eastern edge higher slopes of the hills. Premature night threatened us; and no fellow travellers followed the road. Cast back by Max's words into a dim past haunted by witches and werewolves, I saw that old "plague" in operation... I saw again a gigantic bat alighting amid the tombs. The red mouth of Mme. Yburg smiled at me, and I heard the Voice.

"Does it surprise you?"

"No. But it seems to link up with more recent rumours. I must compliment you on your thoroughness. This story is new to me. Was anyone identified as the vampire?"

"But yes! Those superstitious peasants traced the trouble to Adelheid, Countess of Felsenweir. She was dead, you understand? They enlisted the authority of Mother Church and she was removed from the family vault and buried elsewhere, with a stake through her heart."

"Then the Felsenweir tomb..."

"Has remained closed since the day that long dead lady was taken from it."

And now we had reached the cemetery. Its gate was open, but the impending storm had deterred visitors. A phenomenal gloom lay over that place normally gloomy enough. It appeared deserted. Gaston Max looked up at the pall above, and:

"We are in for a drenching, I think," he said. "But no matter. There is no one whose attention we are likely to attract."

"No one that we can *see*."

Max shrugged his shoulders.

"The Invisible we cannot hope to dodge. In the course of my professional duties, Mr. Woodville, I have of course come in contact with strange things, but never before have I been tracked by a disembodied Voice nor met with giant bats. Failing some new light on these mysteries, I must confess myself defeated. But until midnight we can go on hoping."

"And *after* midnight?..."

"We may have nothing to hope for."

He made a weary gesture, smiling lightly, but his manner—as did my own—concealed a deep unrest. In sunshine it had been possible to shake off the incubus of that invisible menace. Personally I am not ashamed to admit that now, surrounded by tombs, curtained by a lowering storm, a vast uneasiness was claiming me. What my feelings must be when midnight came I preferred not to imagine.

In silence we walked along the path, turning to the left, to the right, and to the left again, until in the oldest part of the cemetery we stood before the strangely conceived tomb of the Felsenweirs.

There was something barbaric in its form. It vaguely resembled a mosque. And I wondered if its builder had been influenced by the Crusades. A Felsenweir banner had flown in Palestine. Two ancient cypresses guarded the door, and this door was of some time-blackened wood, covered with iron scroll-work and seeming to have been unopened for generations. In fact, the queer, square building which palpably had not known a restorer's hand, ordinarily, I thought, must have lain in ruin. There was something phenomenal in its solidity.

Set in worn stonework above this door, a device had been carved; but Time or the hand of man—I could not be sure which—had completely defaced it. No doubt it had represented the crest of the Felsenweirs, but none could have deciphered it now.

Gaston Max stepped forward and examined the mediæval fastenings. He tested the strength of the woodwork. He turned, smiled, and shrugged. Then, from an inner pocket he took out a lens. He examined the lock, the hinges, and the worn stonework below. He replaced the lens.

"This door has not been opened for many years," he declared positively.

3

Vegetation grew close up to the mausoleum on two sides, rank and unkempt. There was an ancient, musty smell.

"Stay where you are on the path, please," said Max. "There is something I wish to investigate."

Stepping mincingly like a dancing master, he forced a delicate way through the undergrowth, stooping and peering at the soft ground. In this way he performed a circuit of the building. He rejoined me and again shrugged characteristically.

"Not a trace," he reported. "No steps but mine have disturbed that smelly tangle for long enough. Name of a good little man! the vampire leaves no footprints. It is not from here, Mr. Woodville, that our charming friend Mme. Yburg was coming when you met her."

The storm had gathered so blackly above us that I was anxious to commence the return journey, when:

"One thing more," said Max softly.

He was gazing through ever growing darkness along the path, westward.

"What?"

He pointed, and I stared wonderingly in the direction indicated.

"Mysterious," he murmured, "yet perhaps no more than a coincidence. But amid all these ancient tombs, most of them hundreds of years old, there is one yonder, you see, which has been renovated quite recently!"

To my mind the explanation was simple enough, but Max's expression held a sudden triumph as we walked along the narrow mossy path and stood before that monument which had arrested his attention. It bore no inscription and was palpably of great age, but as he had said, signs of recent repair were evident.

As Max, drawing the lens again from his pocket, stooped and began to examine the crevices in the stonework, a blinding flash of lightning came. It whitely illuminated the prospect. It seemed like a reproach, a threat, to those who would disturb the dwellings of the dead. Max started upright; my own heart seemed to miss a beat. As he turned to me, although his face thus lighted looked unnaturally pale, he was smiling. And I thought there was triumph in his glance.

"I may be wrong," he said enigmatically, "but I think I am right."

My reply was drowned in a deafening crackle of thunder. In silence we turned and ran along the path as the first great drops of rain began to fall. We made for the lych-gate, the only shelter we knew.

What prompted me to look back from the corner on to the main path, I cannot say. But I did so....

A tall cloaked figure was standing by the Felsenweir vault!... and I thought of the Countess Adelheid....

"Max!" I cried.

He was five paces ahead of me, but he pulled up with a jerk and turned. Even as he did so, the figure vanished. There came another blinding flash of lightning followed by a torrent of rain.

"What?" impatiently.

"Nothing. I must have been mistaken."

And we ran on side by side.

CHAPTER X.
TWO TURKISH LADIES

1

HAVING changed my wet clothing, had a shower bath and a brisk towelling, I came out of the bathroom and stared through open windows across rain-drenched lawns to Lichtenthaler Allee. The storm had passed, skies were blue, and the day had resumed all its old serenity.

My memories of our recent investigations in the cemetery seemed already trivial—insignificant. Rain-drenched roses gave freely of their perfume; all earth was fragrant; and under the trees which still dripped moisture, men in flannel kit and girls in flimsy summer frocks were appearing again.

Gaston Max, having also changed, presently rejoined me wearing gorgeous plus-fours. His expression was very thoughtful, and as he entered:

"I have been thinking hard, my friend," he said. "Do you remember the suit I am wearing?"

"I remember it very well."

"I was wearing it on Monday when I followed Mme. Yburg to the cemetery. I had had no time to change before dinner, and later when I returned, I forgot to leave it out for the valet...." From his pocket he produced a gold cigarette case. "In the coat is my missing case!"

"Good!" said I, ringing for a waiter. "In a less reputable hotel you might easily have lost it."

"Yes!" Max was staring out of the open window. "I first missed it, you remember, last night."

"Quite!"

I turned, glancing at him curiously.

"Does this suggest anything to you?"

"Nothing."

"Ah! I may be wrong. To me it suggests a possible theory."

He pressed a jewelled button in the ornate case and a cigarette shot up magically, which he proffered. It was a *caporal* but I accepted it.

"Your cigarette case is worthy of the late Harry Houdini."

Max stared at me fixedly for a moment and then glanced down at the case. There came a rap on the door and the waiter entered.

"I am inclined to agree with you."

I was puzzled. There was a hidden significance in his words which evaded me. And having ordered cocktails, as the waiter went out:

"You seem to be hinting that there is some mystery about your loss of the case," I said.

"No," Max replied, "not about my *loss*—that was pure chance. But about the case, yes. I think so."

"Is the mystery of a private nature?"

"Not at all. But as I dislike making a fool of myself, I should prefer to check my theories before I confide them to you."

He shot a second cigarette into the palm of his hand and replaced the gold case in his pocket; then:

"Consider," he went on, "the circumstances of our last warning. You remember it?"

"Very clearly."

"Apart from its apparently supernatural character, it was remarkable for one thing."

"What was that?"

"It will be clear if I simply remind you that at the time the last warning reached us *you* were expecting it."

His words puzzled me for a moment. And then:

"I think I understand what you mean," I said. "It came to *me* at precisely the same time as the others had come?"

"But exactly! Whereas *my* second warning had not been so accommodating. Had you considered this point?"

Frankly I admitted I had not.

"Does it seem significant to you?"

"It does."

"I will not stress this point—I may be wrong."

2

I had become accustomed to the presence of Mme. Yburg at the luncheon hour, but although Max and I lingered, she did not appear. I asked the Frenchman if he knew where she lived. He smiled wryly, and:

"Considering my profession, it seems absurd," he confessed, "but I have no idea."

"She is a very clever woman."

Max rolled a bread crumb softly upon the cloth.

"Undoubtedly. What we know of her history proves it." He glanced across at me. "How absurd! Never before have I been at such a loss. Frankly, my friend, although we have only until midnight, I have no idea how to occupy the remaining hours. No, none. In short, I have failed in the most elementary duty of a criminal investigator."

"What is that?"

"The elimination of unessentials."

"Ah!" I nodded, thinking deeply. "I see what you mean."

"I have nine theories," Max went on. "Into four of them I could begin to inquire this afternoon—but of these four three are certainly wrong, and it is possible that the true solution lies amongst the other five—which I cannot investigate this afternoon; or that no one of the nine is the true solution."

I laughed.

"In these circumstances, what do you propose to do?"

"I propose," Max replied, "to retire and to meditate."

"You mean you want to be alone this afternoon?"

He nodded.

"This does not offend you?"

"Not at all!"

"Good. To-night there is, as you must have observed, a fancy-dress dance taking place here. Such occasions always I have observed to be fruitful. Therefore, I think we shall be present."

"In fancy dress?"

Max shook his head.

"As ourselves," he answered solemnly. "Let us meet at seven o'clock in the cocktail bar and dine together."

"We shall still have five hours."...

3

When I joined Gaston Max at seven o'clock, I entered a fantastic world.

In England nowadays, except at elaborately organized affairs, the call of fancy dress falls upon deafish ears. On the Continent it is otherwise, or so it appeared to me at the moment I entered the bar.

As a rule few women penetrated to George's sanctum. This night provided that exception which proves the rule. Cleopatra was there with Frederick the Great in attendance. Pierrette's cigarette was being lighted by a cardinal. A peasant of the Black Forest came in escorting a nautch girl. There were grotesque figures; few black coats. But whereas the men wore heavy and elaborate costumes—one was in Moorish armour—the women seemed to have pursued a more simple ideal. If ugly man has a tendency to hide, beautiful woman loves to show herself in public.

Max emerged from the colour scheme, the most perfectly dressed man in the room. He looked like a silk hat fresh from the hatter's.

Having procured cocktails, we edged to a space near the door.

There had been no return of the storm. The night was still and hot. I greeted a few recognizable acquaintances as presently we made our way to a somewhat remote table in the dining room. Fritz was smiling but apologetic.

"It is so difficult, gentlemen," he explained. "There are many people here, notable people, who come for this occasion and reserve their table so far in advance."

When, having taken our wine order, Fritz had gone:

"Look about," said Max in a low voice, bending toward me, "and see if you can find Mme. Yburg."

"You think she is here?"

"I am sure she is here."

I leaned back and looked about me. An unseen orchestra played softly. Animated groups surrounded every table in view. Ice buckets were at a premium and I encountered many laughing glances. For the inscrutable, slightly oblique eyes of Mme. Yburg I searched in vain. Let me confess that my quest was not a wholehearted one. I was looking for Mme. Yburg, yes! Undoubtedly she formed a link with that mysterious power which had limited our hours in Baden-Baden. But I was hoping, too, for a sight of frank blue eyes, for a glimpse of a shapely tawny head, and of slim, sun-browned shoulders. My search was unfruitful and I sighed.

"Four and a half hours," said a voice.

I turned sharply. Gaston Max was smiling at me.

"Did I startle you?"

"Yes, I confess you did."

"It is amusing."

The sound of gay voices became a mere background, unreal, deceptive; a painted cloth against which Max and I, willy-nilly, must play a grim drama.

"It is certain," he went on, "that there are many people here to-night who belong to that invisible organization which speaks to us through the Voice. You agree with me?"

I nodded.

"Do you see our cross-eyed waiter anywhere?"

"No."

"It is possible he suspects, and has gone. Do you realize, my friend, that no violence has been offered to any of us—that only a Voice has spoken. Yet…" he shrugged… "do you doubt?"

Being conscious of a growing uneasiness almost amounting to a physical chill:

"It's impossible to doubt," I replied, "that we are up against the plans of some very high intelligence. What those plans may be..."

Max reached across the table and grasped my arm.

"Have you a match?"

I saw that he held an unlighted cigarette between his lips. Startled, I met his fixed look. Lowering his voice:

"Speak softly," he warned, "I think *somebody* is listening."

4

When later we penetrated to that crowded ballroom, utter unreality was the keynote of my feelings. I found myself thinking of Edgar Allan Poe's "Masque of the Red Death"—nor should I have been surprised if the Voice, incarnate and ghastly, a menacing figure from another world, had joined the revellers.

Whom Max had suspected of eavesdropping he had not told me. Perhaps the presence of a heavily disguised group at the next table may have aroused his suspicion. Toward the end of dinner I had asked him outright if he had learned anything which I did not know.

"Yes. My meditations this afternoon resulted in one definite discovery, and one theory. I shall presently tell you what I know and what I suspect. But, now, let us mix with the dancers and look out for Mme. Yburg. If you see her do not let her know—unless of course she is undisguised. If I leave you, do not be alarmed. But at a quarter of twelve be in your apartment."...

It was all abominably mystifying. We left the dining room and entered the ballroom. And as we pushed our way through a group of people standing immediately inside the doorway, I lost Gaston Max.

To say that he disappeared would be to suggest an illusion: the fact remains that, whereas he entered beside me, on gaining the edge of the floor he was there no longer.

Admittedly I became somewhat abstracted. And for this reason:

As I reached the outer edge of the throng and gazed across the room, my glance, as though magnetically attracted, rested on the gauzily clad figure of an Arab girl. Except for shapely brown arms and

suggested outline, nothing of her was visible but the bridge of her nose and two bright eyes.

These eyes, though the lids were darkened, were not the eyes of an Eastern. They were sky blue and they met my glance fixedly. No mistake was possible.

It was the girl of the Kurhaus!

Exploring has taught me many things, not least among them the importance of brisk decision. Rather rudely perhaps I pushed my way around the edge of the dancing floor.

Some few altercations I had, for the way was crowded. But I never lost sight of my objective. She seemed to be alone and I should have thought she was looking for someone amongst the many dancers, except that her glance rarely seemed to leave mine.

Presently I found myself beside her.

Let me say in my defence that I am no Don Juan. Having passed through all those temptations which the fag-end of the war with Germany offered to a fledgling officer, I had never experienced more than a passing interest in any woman. Somehow the sentiment awakened by this sun-kissed Diana was deeper, different, more vital. Otherwise, for my social assurance is not great and my sense of the proprieties is enormous, I should never have had the impudence to behave as I did behave.

When I stepped up beside her, the girl turned and looked at me. Through her gauzy *yashmak* I could see that she was smiling.

"Lady of the East," I said, and knew my speech to be rather ridiculous—my heart was beating rapidly—"may I have the honour of dancing with you?"

For one ghastly moment it occurred to me that she might not speak English, but:

"Yes, if you like," she replied.

Her English was faultless, quite without accent, yet the intonation told me that she was not an Englishwoman.

"Thank you."

And we joined the dancers. It was a slow procession, yet we were half around the room before we spoke again, nor had I looked into her eyes. Then:

"You must think me very rude, or very brave," I said, "but I have seen you before."

"I know." She met my glance frankly. "I saw you in the Kurhaus last night."

I laughed, but I was glad. The confession was at once naïve and gratifying.

"And I saw *you*."

"I know you did. And somehow I knew we should meet again."

She danced perfectly and I did not; but it's more of a woman's job anyway. Then:

"Surely you are not here alone?" I experimented.

"No. I came with a friend, but I have lost her."

"That's odd. Precisely the same thing has happened to me."

"We seem to have quite a lot in common," she murmured.

But her sophistication was that of a schoolgirl newly upon the world, and when I laughed at her words, she joined me gaily.

Midnight, with its threat, was forgotten. My mission in the Black Forest sank into a gloomy background. I had found myself in touch with hideous, terrible things. Their very memory was contaminating. I was in danger no doubt; but such is my make-up, thank God, I cast it aside as a snake casts its skin, and for one little hour I was content.

Presently we walked out into the moonlit gardens, my companion glancing about her fearfully.

"If I'm caught," she declared, "there'll be a fearful row."

And as she preceded me down the steps I cudgelled my brains in vain for a clue to something familiar in the way she carried herself—in her intonation—in the poise of her proud head.

I was not alone in my admiration of the graceful Arab, but she was satisfied to be in my company, and of this I was absurdly proud. She was so utterly removed from the dark things which I had met with in Baden—from the cemetery-haunting mysteries of the Black Forest.

We walked along beside the little laughing stream, and:

"It is only reasonable that you should know," I said, "that my name is Brian Woodville."

My companion was silent for a moment, then:

"Thank you for telling me," she replied, "but as it's all make-believe to-night, I almost wish you hadn't told me."

"What?"

"Well, in a sort of way, I'm not supposed to be here."

"Cinderella?"

"Something like that! But if I can just call you Brian, you can call me Marusa."

"Marusa? Surely that's Russian?"

"I suppose it is. Except that in my case I think it's Polish."

"But you speak perfect English."

"I was educated in England."

"And your home is here?"

"Yes." She hesitated. "At least temporarily."

The band had been playing for a long time, but I was loath to return, until:

"I'm afraid I must go back," Marusa said. "There'll be a perfect hue and cry if I'm missing."

"By whom?"

She paused perceptibly before replying.

"The friend I came with. Please let's go back."

We returned slowly.

"You don't mean you're going home yet, surely?"

"I'm afraid I may be."

"But…"

"I don't want to. I should love to stay."

"Then if you're dragged away, at least tell me when I can see you again."

"I can't possibly tell you that—but now that I know your name…"

"Yes…?"

She stopped in sight of the hotel steps and glanced at me quickly, then away again.

"Do you really want to see me?"

"You know I do."

"Well... you're staying here, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps we can meet again some time."

She walked on and passed up the steps, I following. At the glazed door she halted, extending one round, brown arm to check me.

"Please hide!" she urged. "There's someone looking for me!"

The sincerity of her words was unmistakable.

"Good-night," I said. "Promise to see me again."

Marusa turned and met my fixed glance for a moment. She nodded slightly. Then she went in and I lost sight of her.

A pair of wandering dancers followed a moment later, however, and gave me the cover which I needed. I entered the lobby behind them.

Marusa was standing in animated conversation with another Arab lady, almost identically dressed!

5

I had seen enough to convince me that my fascinating friend was being reprimanded by her companion and to guess that my night of pleasure was doomed to be cut short. I had seen something else. The slender, graceful figure of the second Arab definitely was not that of the dragon who had accompanied Marusa at the Kurhaus.

Who was this guarded beauty and why was she so mysteriously reticent?

It was sufficient evidence of my infatuation that with the unknown peril of midnight hanging over my head I determined to find out.

I thought I had entered unobserved, and crossing to a distant table I took up a strategic position behind a raised newspaper. As I had suspected, the two women went out. I rushed to a window.

The hall porter was going for a car. I stood up and moved toward the door. A fresh-faced, be-spectacled clergyman who, regardless of festivities in the neighbouring ballroom, had been reading the *Berliner Tageblatt* at a near-by table, stood up a moment later and

walked in the same direction. He carried a soft, black hat; and as I watched a big car draw up at the steps and saw the hall porter assisting the Arab ladies to enter it, the priest collided with me.

His mild eyes considered my irritation through owlish spectacles. I think I had so far forgotten myself as to curse under my breath.

"Pray excuse me, sir," came a soft clerical voice. "The error was mine. You see, I am very shortsighted."

"Sorry," I said. "I am entirely to blame."

I pushed the door open and hurried down the steps. The car was just moving off.

"Porter!" I cried, when:

"One moment," said the clergyman. He was at my elbow again. "I think I know your purpose. Do I divine that you are interested in the ladies who have just driven away?"

I turned and stared at him angrily.

"Even so, what business is it of yours?"

"None, my dear sir," he admitted. "It is not my place to rebuke. Indeed I rejoice in the works of the Almighty, but I may be able to save you a fruitless journey."

The hall porter had now joined us, and:

"Yes, sir," he said, "do you want a taxi?"

"I don't think we do," the mysterious clergyman replied. "We have changed our plans."

"Very good, sir."

Exhibiting a surprising power of grip, my priestly acquaintance urged me down the steps and we moved right, in the direction of the garden.

"My friend," he continued benevolently, as the hall porter stood staring after us, "I am happy to have been of service to you in this small matter."

I watched the car driving over the bridge, and disappearing into the shadowy distances of Lichtenthaler Allee.

"The nature of your services is not apparent," I said angrily.

But now, passing around the end of the building:

"Listen!" growled the priest.

He spoke in another voice! He released his grip of my arm and I turned, staring at him through shadows.

"You've got me now," he went on. "And I'm going to say we have to jump to it. I'm known as Rev. Josiah Higgins of Sydney, Australia. But I'm not sure the change is going to help along a whole lot. It's three hours to midnight!"

I inhaled deeply, then:

"*Lonergan!*" I said.

"Surely. But don't collect too big a crowd by loud applause. You've got a crush on the copper-haired maiden. That's in order—no queries. But what I figure you don't know is the identity of her girl friend."

"The other woman?"

"She's the Jane I mean... *Mme. Yburg!*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE GATES OF HELL

1

"I KNOW a cut-in," said Lonergan, "to where I figure they aim for. If we move fast and have luck we maybe can beat 'em to it."

I followed his lead, and a devil of a cut-in it proved to be. The discovery that Marusa was an associate of Mme. Yburg had positively dazed me. Marusa, a member of a criminal organization!

Marusa!

Even the miracle of Lonergan's disguise was forgotten.

On we went at a killing pace, using byways which seemed to be familiar to my guide. I lost sense of direction but my thoughts were so chaotic that I did not even trouble to ask him where we were going, until:

"Not a sound, now," he warned. "From here on we're trespassing."

Turning from a narrow climbing street into a street yet narrower, between houses the first-floor windows of which overlooked the roof of a neighbour, we scrambled up a crazily steep and muddy path, a gully dark as a mine.

I remember wondering vaguely what my dress trousers would look like at the end of the expedition. Presently we climbed out into a neglected kitchen garden.

"Keep me in sight," said Lonergan, "but don't talk."

We crossed an open space, so shadowed by tall trees that no moonlight penetrated to it. I heard the grating of a rusty bolt and followed my guide out upon a narrow lane climbing yet upward into wooded darkness.

For some reason it was more dry than the gully between the houses and the going was better. Presently we left it to go stumbling through a little orchard, with some broken barbed wire to be negotiated and a coppice of pines, the fallen cones soft underfoot. Here the slope was steep as a roof.

We were both breathing heavily as we plunged ankle-deep through soft, damp cones. At the speed we had kept up, it had been a terrific climb. But now we were out on a winding road. Below us lay trees; the town lower yet. Above us were more trees through which I caught a glimpse of a white wall. Lonergan began to run, and although I had little heart for the task, I followed.

He turned aside and plunged up the bank in the direction of the wall. It was a hard scramble and once he stumbled to his knees. He recovered and went on. As we reached the wall—only some four feet high—I inhaled sharply and stared at my companion.

We had come to the cemetery!

"Lonergan," I said, "what's the meaning of this? They cannot possibly be *here*!"

He rested his hand on my arm.

"Listen!"

We both listened intently. But I could detect no sound.

There was a drop of some eight feet on the other side, the level being much below that of the bank upon which we stood. Lonergan climbed over and dropped. I followed and found myself in the oldest part of the burial ground.

We were not twenty yards from the Felsenweir mausoleum. I could see it outlined in moonlight: a sombre, mysterious building.

Lonergan crept forward, choosing shadowy places between the tombs. Inspired by those ghostly surroundings, terrible ideas flocked to my mind. In the Middle Ages, many vampires were reputed to be young and lovely; deathless youth in a living death…

I was checked by a grip on my arm that made me wince.

But I, too, had heard the sound.

Someone was moving softly along on the farther side of the Felsenweir vault!

We crouched down by a moss-grown monument. Blackly one corner of the building lay outlined upon the ancient pathway. I could hear Lonergan breathing. But that faint sound of ghostly movement had ceased.

What I expected to see I cannot attempt to describe. What I did see was an incredibly elongated shadow slowly creeping forward—slowly creeping forward....

A headless figure!

It is difficult to explain my feelings at this moment. Tense though my curiosity was, redoubled by the shock of to-night's discovery, I wanted desperately to close my eyes... *not* to see the Thing which, slowly creeping forward, silently, must soon appear upon the path.

The shadow lengthened, and lengthened—and now, my senses recoiling from that which must come, a dark form detached itself from the angle of the tomb.

Lonergan's grip upon my arm tightened.

The shape—draped in black from head to feet—glided into moonlight....

A monk!

My heart was beating wildly. This was so true to pattern, so traditional, yet so ghastly. The shape moved forward, and I saw that what I had mistaken for a black garment was actually purple.

Crouching in an unnatural position, at this moment my foot slipped. I stumbled. Instantly the figure turned.

Under the hood of what I now saw to be a sort of purple domino, keen eyes stared at me.

We were discovered!

Lonergan's grip relaxed. His hand shot to his hip and he sprang upright. So did I.

"Great heavens!" The hooded man spoke, in a low voice. "It is you!"

Gaston Max!

Lonergan's hand dropped to his side. He uttered a sound resembling a subdued whistle.

"Suffering Moses!" he said. "This proposition's got me shot to ribbons!"

Max silently joined us, and:

"You are following the two women?"

He spoke urgently, in an undertone. He was agitated.

"Sure."

"They are here! Move farther back—still farther.... I arrived one minute too late. They disappeared by the Felsenweir vault. They have not come out."

2

In dense darkness under the high wall, we crouched. We were silent. Twenty yards removed, palled in shadow, vaguely resembling the Kaaba at Mecca, the vault of the Felsenweirs jutted up against a starry sky.

I reflected that no one seemed to know where Mme. Yburg lived. I could not forget that I had met her coming from this place under circumstances which she had never satisfactorily explained. Marusa's residence was equally a mystery. Could it be possible...

My ideas led me into a maze of ghoulish horrors.

Moments passed, lengthening into age-long minutes. A sense of pending horror grew and grew until it became all but insupportable. My mind persistently dwelled upon the shrouded figure of that Countess Adelheid whose body had been dragged from its resting place to...

A dim, hollow booming sound disturbed my ghastly train of thought.

I had heard it before... and, suddenly, I remembered when! I became conscious of a sort of vibration—a drumming in my ears—a sense of pressure.

The guardian cypresses beyond the mausoleum, ebony silhouettes, quivered—or so I thought—like objects seen through a heat haze.

Lonergan was very still.

"*Mon Dieu!*"

Gaston Max's whisper was barely audible.

Above the roof of the vault floated a gigantic bat!

Great wings outspanned and long body held almost horizontal, without perceptible movements of flight the thing swept swiftly upward into starry darkness.

I clutched Lonergan's arm convulsively.

Higher the horror mounted, fast, ever faster, effortlessly—up and up and up—until it looked no larger than a nighthawk far above our heads.

Then... from out of the blue came remote buzzing, like an amplified drone of a wasp. I saw that the bat was headed westward... toward Castle Felsenweir!...

A second purplish winged monster arose from the tomb—a creature identical in every respect! Upward it went—upward... soundlessly. At what I judged to be the same elevation as the other came that high, strange drone.

The second bat headed westward in the track of the first....

That painful throbbing in my ears ceased. I could see the tops of the cypresses motionless and no longer as through a moving haze. Deep down, from under our feet it seemed, came the dim rumbling. It died away. Silence claimed the old cemetery.

I cannot recall that I have ever before found myself in such a state of passive terror. I was literally bathed in cold perspiration.

That we had seen and heard things of another world would appear to be indisputable. That Mme. Yburg and Marusa—Marusa!—were ghouls, witches, vampires, name them as you please, presented itself as a fact no logic could assail.

Lonergan spoke hoarsely.

"Good God! The way of things is inscrutable. But, unless we're all mad, I say that to-night we've heard the gates of hell open and shut!"

3

"There will be time enough after midnight to talk—if we are still alive," said Gaston Max. He tossed his purple domino across his shoulder. "Until then, it is vital that we should *act*. I have my car hidden below.

We can reach it in a few minutes. Attack is always the best defence.... If I knew one thing, I should propose a plan."

We were following a footpath which would bring us to the town.

"Propose the plan," Lonergan growled, "and then tell us the one thing you don't know."

"Very well. My plan would be this: to drive to the woods below Felsenweir and under cover of darkness to climb up and try to explore that mysterious ruin."

He paused for a moment, and then:

"Felsenweir is the heart of the mystery, my friends," he added simply. "It was to Felsenweir the bats flew."

We walked on in silence for a while.

"I should move to accept your plan," said Lonergan, "only I kind of feel we're invisibly covered all the time.... That's why I changed my identity."

"Forget this feeling!" cried Gaston Max. "Presently I shall prove to you that such is not the case."

"Is that so? If you're right maybe I can help things along. What is it you don't know?"

"I don't know how to reach this ruin. I have investigated cautiously —very cautiously. In daytime it would be madness to attempt it. The original entrance is closed and is barred. Quite impossible without ladders. It is then a great climb to the castle ruins. I have explored every foot of the base of that hill but have found not a single point where one could penetrate with hope of climbing to the top."

"You surprise me a whole lot," Lonergan declared. "I've explored it too, but here's the difference: I *have* found a way."

"What is this?"

"I know a way in! It's camouflaged, but I found it."

"Triumph!" Max cried excitedly. "Do you carry a pocket torch?"

"Sure."

"So also do I. My friends, we are three, and I take it all armed. Let us be resolute, and as Right is on our side, it may be that we shall unmask even the Voice!"

Five minutes later, in Max's Hispano-Suiza—parked behind a hedge in a meadow—we were speeding along empty roads toward the hill of Felsenweir. I was unfamiliar with the route, but Max, who drove, clearly knew it well.

The little valley of the Oos was already sleeping and we passed not a single pedestrian. Very soon habitations were left behind and the solitude of the Black Forest closed in upon us like a black-gloved hand. Left of the climbing road vast aisles of trees fell away to the valley, to our right they towered up, a menacing wall.

Max pushed on at a speed dangerous for a less skillful driver. Then suddenly he slowed up. He negotiated a hairpin bend, and:

"The woods of Felsenweir," he said. "On which side of the gateway is this entrance you have found, my friend?"

"East," Lonergan growled, "but it's going to be some cross-word puzzle to find at night."

"All the same, we must find it."

Here the road lay white under the moon and Max shut off his headlights.

"Don't drive past the gate!" I said suddenly—"wherever the gate may be. Someone—or *something*—may be on guard there."

At my words, Max slowed up—stopped altogether. He turned and stared at me in the darkness.

"I believe this is wisdom. What say you, friend Lonergan?"

"I say," Lonergan replied, "that we're the craziest trio from here to the North Pole. I've been figuring as we came along that we're just three cornered rats. We're scared stiff. Let's agree we know it. We aim at the throat of the thing that's cornering us."

"Name of a good little man!" Max murmured, "it is true. You analyze me so perfectly! But are we to sit down and wait for this threat of midnight?"

"No, sir," Lonergan answered.

"I'm with you," said I. "But let's observe common precautions. Where's the gateway?"

"It is about another five hundred yards," Max decided.

"And have we to pass it, Lonergan, to reach this point which you discovered?"

"We surely have."

"Is there no other route?"

"There is!" Max replied; "though it will cost us fifteen minutes. However..."

He found a spot at which it was just possible to turn the car and we retraced our route for a considerable distance and then turned south along a narrow, bad road.

For a time, it was merely a high-banked, tree-topped tunnel, a cart track villainously rutted, until on the right, crouching under the frowning hill, a moon-patched space opened out.

I could see the sky and the stars and a sort of scarred piece of countryside covered with stunted vegetation and a few trees. Max slowed up.

"Here," said he, "up to the time of Countess Adelheid, the village of Felsenweir stood."

The road became all but impassable, inclining easterly. Then, where a fleeting glimpse of stars came again, I saw that we were headed north once more.

"Go easy," Lonergan growled.

We proceeded very slowly.

"Stop!"

We got out in darkness on to an uneven road. Twenty paces ahead a moon patch lay stark across the path and it pierced some little way up the Felsenweir slopes. The effect was as though silver had been spilled about the bases of ebony pines.

"It's just beyond the light bit," Lonergan said. "Maybe we're safer to leave the caravan right here?"

"Someone must stay to guard the car," Max stated simply. "Our retreat might be cut off. And then..."

I imagined him shrugging in the darkness.

"Suffering Moses!" said Lonergan. "You're right! Listen! We all carry German money. Everybody lay a coin on the running board. Odd man for guard duty."

There was a moment of silence, broken only by the sound of metal on metal. Lonergan snapped up his torch, snapped it off again.

"I am unlucky," said Max resignedly. "This is the plan I have thought out. Be cautious, but try to reach the ruins. If we can be sure they are inhabited, then without delay, to-night, we will use official pressure and this place shall be raided.... Good fortune, my friends!"

CHAPTER XII.

BARRAGE

1

At times when I recall that insane reconnaissance in the woods of Felsenweir, I know we were mad to have undertaken it. But this is because I fail to reconquer the spirit which drove us: desperation.

We had all in our different ways made light of the last warning and had concealed the real dread which it had inspired. Speaking for myself, I know now that I was behaving as a man behaves who has only one hour to live.

I was out to die fighting.

A shallow ditch bordered the woods and on the bank above it was a high hedge reinforced by barbed wire. Felsenweir was well protected. That point of access which Lonergan had discovered palpably was one in general use; in fact, a cleverly camouflaged gate, the hedge at this point being synthetic. Barbed wire terminated to right and left of the opening. A bolt was concealed amid this unnatural shrubbery. How any man could have discovered such a device was a problem which defeated me until:

"I saw a guy go in," Lonergan explained.

He fumbled for and found the bolt. Presently he swung back what appeared to be a section of hedge. I wondered again as I had wondered before what could be the connecting link reconciling clever human agency and the seemingly supernatural.

Somewhere beyond that patch of moonlight in the shadows which hid the car, Gaston Max was watching us. But I could not see him.

I followed Lonergan and he partly closed but did not shut the masked gate.

"From here," said he, "is a path right up through the trees. But we're lucky if we find it."

There was a queer blue half-light among the pines reflected from the sky. Max had lent me his electric torch and as we passed beyond the hedge I drew it from my pocket; but:

"Don't flash a torch," said Lonergan. "Stand still for a minute with your eyes closed. Stay that way until I give the word. You'll find you can see like a cat."

I accepted his guidance unchallenged. It was elementary woodcraft. Darkness so great as that which we produce when we close our eyes is rare. By contrast, half-light becomes full visibility.

"Open 'em," said Lonergan.

I opened my eyes. What had appeared as impenetrable shadow was impenetrable no longer. For ten or fifteen paces ahead I could trace the path.

"All I know of this old trail," Lonergan went on, "is what you can see. I got it from the highroad. I was covering the kite who went in. Where it leads, and if it's beset with 'pitfall and with gin,' I can't say."

His quotation from Omar was illuminating. John Lonergan was truly a remarkable man.

We stood awhile, getting our bearings. The silence was intense—almost unnatural. Normally, nature is never still, day or night. I listened in vain for those furtive sounds which tell of wild life disturbed.

"I've studied around here in the daytime." Lonergan spoke in a hushed voice. "Never a thing moves in these woods: not a bird—not a squirrel—not a rabbit."...

My feeling of spiritual oppression grew deeper. Amid a hush in which our movements seemed to create a tremendous disturbance, we moved forward cautiously....

"Did you ever see a plan of the castle?"

"No."

We were talking in that hushed undertone one employs when visiting a cathedral.

"I did. It took me long enough to find one; but I found it at last. From the main gate below there's a military road winding all around the hill at a fair gradient. There used to be other defences at intervals,

but they're defunct, I gather. Then there's a deep dry ditch, a drawbridge commanded by two towers, and a twenty-yard path leading up to the old guard room."

"Then I think we should turn left and get on to the road."

"Do you? Think again."

The ill-humoured growl, coming from one who in appearance was not only a mild-faced clergyman but also a perfect stranger, sounded indescribably strange.

"We keep off that road like a pussyfoot keeps off whisky. Get it out of your bean that we're exploring a deserted ruin. If there are men in armour on the walls, why not on the road?"

Men in armour! I think, up to this point, indeed from the moment of meeting Lonergan, disguised, at the Regal, I had moved through subsequent nightmares in a sort of mental stupor. Certainly, the actual facts of our situation now came to me with all the shock of novelty....

We had until midnight! Pitted against veritable powers of darkness —a bodiless Voice, those flying things—we were advancing upon a castle guarded by giant men in armour!

2

"Stop!"

Lonergan grasped my arm.

We had been following a faintly defined path sloping steeply upward. I thought we must soon come upon one of the windings of the road. Now, a sort of clearing showed ahead. Moonlight burst through, creating a very eerie impression, and reminding me of a setting of Gordon Craig's for *Macbeth*.

An appalling stench of rottenness came to my nostrils.

"With that moonlight in front it doesn't matter," Lonergan muttered. "Shoot your torch down on the ground—right here, at my feet."

I did as he directed.

Not a yard ahead amongst the tangled undergrowth lay a dead fox....

But the result of my action had far stranger consequences. The carcase was a mass of moving colour!

A sort of dermestes beetle was busy. Their wing cases shone like metal in the ray. But, beautiful yet horrible, a cloud of brightly coloured moths of the death's head or hawk moth family rose as unexpected light touched that filthy banquet.

"Suffering Moses! Light out!"

I switched off the ray of the torch. Some of the beetles had taken flight as well. These beautiful nocturnal things disturbed at their feast flew out into the moonlight toward the clearing. In a new, breathless silence, faint humming of the hawk moths' wings was clearly audible.

Then—just as those brilliant insects became visible in the moonlight—one by one, in quick succession, moths and beetles fell! As though the radiance of the moon had meant instant death, they were stricken!

Lonergan grasped my arm.

"Watch!... watch those things falling!"

I pressed the button of the torch again, flashing a ray to right and left. The cause of the stench became evident. The fox was not the only victim.

Hares there were and birds—most of them plucked clean as though long dead; but some, the hosts of beetles and other carrion guests which rose as my ray disturbed them... only to drop in the light of the moon!

"Woodville!" Lonergan's voice was hoarse, low pitched. "Woodville! We're on the edge of a death zone! Nothing can live in that clearing!"

I was clammy, icily cold.

"Back! Back!" I whispered. "There's an *invisible barrage*!"

3

Stumbling and slipping, we headed back down the slope. Through the trees in ghostly ranks below us I could see a patch of highroad touched by the moon. Somewhere right of it Gaston Max waited.

Only by a monstrous effort of will did I restrain myself from leaping blindly through the darkness like a wild thing fleeing the hunter.

Up there on the hillside silent Death had awaited us. Was the murder zone fixed mechanically? Was it mobile… *sentient*… controlled by some evil spider whose eyes, even now, were watching our futile struggles?

One gleam of hope there was in the black horror of my panic. That carrion stretched in the undergrowth suggested that the invisible barrage had been put down at this exact point before. Where they lay, their death leaps had carried them.

"Left!" came Lonergan's husky voice. "Bear more left. The gate's five yards this side the light patch."

Fifteen, twenty staggering paces we made, and nearly reached the hedge—freedom… when:

"Who's there?"

Lonergan pulled up, grasping my arm.

"Lonergan!"

"Max!"

A ray of light shone out from Lonergan's torch. We stood so far above the hedge that the ray shot over it and directly upon the pale face of Gaston Max looking upward at us.

In which very moment, and whilst we stood rooted to the spot, came a queer piping cry from high above our heads. A heavy body fell from some lofty, outstretching branch and crashed into the ditch beyond the hedge….

I saw Max stoop, peer down—move forward.

"Stand still!" I cried. "Stand still, Max! Don't stir, for your life!"

My voice was totally unfamiliar to me.

The light of Lonergan's torch became extinguished. I heard him groan.

"Max was *wrong*! We've been covered right along! There's a *second* barrage! It's just been laid down. That's why the owl fell. We're trapped between the two!..."

4

Amid many dreadful memories of those days and nights I find that this moment holds a unique place. There stood our ally. There lay the open road: escape, freedom. An invisible wall separated us!

Death lay in wait upon the slopes above, behind us... perhaps, even now, was creeping down stealthily. Death was before us, unseen, uncanny....

As once before, since I had found myself in the Black Forest, I fought with a ghastly desire to scream—or to laugh. A mad pageant of my life passed feverishly across my brain. Alone, a solitary, appealing figure, at the end of it—Marusa... and I clenched my teeth.

Max was speaking. I retain no recollection of his words. I think he was suggesting plans. None of them, I fear, would have saved us. But Fate had designed a better plan than any of the three could have conceived.

"Stop!" Lonergan's harsh voice definitely brought me to my senses. "I want to listen."

Max ceased speaking. The American agent, whose hearing was more acute than that of any man I had ever known, touched my shoulder sharply.

"There's somebody coming along the road," he declared. "Do you hear him, Max?"

"I hear nothing," the Frenchman replied.

"All the same there's somebody coming—and it's a hundred to one he's coming *here*! If he opens the gate, it's safe for *us* to open it. There's maybe a neutral path through the zones. It's up to you, Max! We'll beat back some way and take cover."

"Rely upon me, my friends."

We heard light movements, and Gaston Max was gone.

"Back, Woodville! We're all exposed here. No noise."

I stumbled back up the slope and lay at full length beside Lonergan in clammy, choking undergrowth, waiting and listening.

At last I heard the footsteps!… Nearer they drew, and nearer—a sound of possible salvation!—until, although I could not see the road, I realized that whoever approached must be near to the camouflaged gate.

Came a sharp scuffle, an angry cry… silence… a sort of muttered conversation… silence again.

"There's the gate!" Lonergan whispered. "Somebody coming in! Your gun handy?"

"Yes."

I rose stealthily to my knees, prepared I thought for any human emergency. But as I did so…

Coming up the slope, a vague, gigantic outline against the dim moonlight on the roadway beyond, was a huge figure, apparently some seven feet high!

A sharp inhalation from my companion told me that he too had seen the apparition.

"It's one of the Things in armour! Poor Max has gone! Don't shoot till I give the word."…

Closer, and closer yet, came the Thing—always with moonlight behind it. My trigger finger grew tense; when:

"Don't shoot, Lonergan!" came the voice of Gaston Max. "I can see you, although you cannot see *me*. I have my back to the light."

At a bound I came to my feet. Lonergan sprang upright beside me. I saw a tall fellow of the peasant class (more I could not determine in that light) upon whose broad shoulders, like the fabled Old Man of the Sea, Gaston Max was mounted, his pistol thrust against the head of his unwilling carrier!

"Suffering Moses!"

"Quick! Follow! I thought the danger might be electrical and that this one wore insulated boots—hence, my friends, the apparent clowning! He tells me it is not so. He would not lie! Follow, quickly!"…

I found myself stumbling down the slope again behind captive and captor. The gate was open and we came out upon the road.

"Cover this fellow," said Max.

Lonergan's pistol was rammed into the man's ribs as Gaston Max sprang lightly from his strange perch.

"Now," said Lonergan, "beat it to the car. It's still touch and go!"

We ran along the lighted patch already growing narrower; and:

"For God's sake," groaned the prisoner, who seemed to me to be a decent type of labourer, "don't take me with you! Don't take me with you!"

"Keep right on!" Lonergan pushed the man before him. "You can tell us a whole lot about Felsenweir! Show a light, Woodville."

Max sprang to the wheel. Lonergan and I with our prisoner bundled into the back of the car.

"I can tell you nothing," the man groaned. "I can tell you *nothing*! It just means my death—if I speak—if I go with you! It means my death!"

Max got the engine started.

"Don't turn her!" Lonergan shouted. "Go right ahead like blazes!"

"I go!" Max cried back.

Off we went headlong, and for three miles we raced blindly through the night. We were silent and the prisoner was strangely still.

When at last those lights marking the outskirts of the town came into view, I uttered a sigh of relief.

It was as I did so that the Voice spoke!...

"*Gaston Max!*"

Max pulled up the Hispano-Suiza in two lengths.

"*John Lonergan!*"

Dimly, over the oddly relaxed figure between us, I saw Lonergan sit rigidly upright.

"*Brian Woodville!*"

Max turned. I could see his eyes glaring in his pale face. Somewhere a clock began to chime the hour...

Midnight!

"Gaston Max—you shall survive for a thousand years, that future ages may look upon a clever man.... John Lonergan—you almost succeeded in deceiving me. Your reward shall be oblivion.... Brian

Woodville—upon *you* the decision shall rest…"

Silence!

The man seated between Lonergan and myself slipped limply to the floor of the car.

"Merciful God!" Lonergan groaned.

Our prisoner's former stillness was explained. He was dead!

CHAPTER XIII.

"WAKE—AND FORGET"

1

"Do you realize, my friends," said Gaston Max, "that our doom has been pronounced? We have defied the edict of the Voice. *Bien!* we are to pay the penalty! *I* am to survive for a thousand years! Appalling prospect! You, friend Lonergan, are to suffer oblivion: it is preferable, I think. But you, Woodville, are to *decide*..."

"What is it that you must decide?"

Behind closed shutters of my apartment we sat in conference. Lonergan took a long draught of beer. I had been studying him carefully since our return, and his genius for disguise positively amazed me. There seemed to be nothing more synthetic about the Rev. Josiah Higgins than there had been about Mr. Aldous P. Kluster.

"Let's review the facts," said he, "and figure out our chances. You claimed there awhile back, Max, that we weren't constantly watched. I say what happened in the Felsenweir woods showed for sure you were wrong. That outer barrage, whatever it is, was put down after Woodville and I went through. If it had been there when we started we'd have struck it."

"I cannot agree, my friend. In my opinion the gate is insulated—so is the path. You were lucky enough not to stray from this path."

"We were covered!"

"From the time you approached Felsenweir, possibly."

"What about the Voice?"

"Presently," Max replied, "I shall ask you a question and also Woodville. If your replies are what I expect, I shall offer an explanation, fantastic perhaps, but possible, of this Voice."

Lonergan and I stared hard at the speaker, and:

"If there's an acceptable explanation of the Voice," I said, "there may be one covering the bats, in which event we can rule out the supernatural element."

"I wish I could think that way," Lonergan growled. "But we've got to find some kind of answer to the question: Why did that poor devil die?"

"He died," I replied, "because he knew things which the Voice does not intend we shall learn."

"True enough!" cried Gaston Max. "But *how* did he die?"

"Let's just log it," Lonergan proposed, "that we haven't the mistiest notion how he died, and then let's get down to sawdust. He hadn't a thing on him to prove his identity or connect him with Felsenweir."

"I cannot agree," Max interrupted. "He wore a steel bracelet with a kind of medal attached to it. On one face of this medal was a number, on the other an Egyptian figure. A strange ornament for a man of his class."

Strange indeed. I, too, had seen that queer bracelet. Having driven our dead captive to a lonely spot and laid him under the trees, Max—Lonergan acting as torch bearer—had skillfully examined his possessions. It was a scene I could never forget.

"Possibly worn for sentimental reasons," I suggested. "The man may have been a sailor at some time."

"There's nothing sentimental about a *number*," Lonergan objected harshly. "4,396 is about as romantic as a taxicab."

"Congratulations!" Max murmured. "This was indeed the number on the disk."

"But if, as we have reason to believe," I went on, "he was killed by the Voice (we know our enemy by no other name), isn't this evidence that we were watched—even after we left Felsenweir?"

"My point exactly!" said Lonergan. "Let's agree we *were*. Next—have we covered our tracks? When the poor devil's found in the morning are we going to be arrested for murdering him?"

"If so, I was clumsy," said Max. "But I think—no!"

"I hope you're right," Lonergan declared. "Let's go ahead. We know Felsenweir is inhabited. If it isn't, why was that poor devil climbing up there? No normal citizen of these parts would go within a mile of it at night. We know: (a)"—he ticked off the points on his fingers—"it's haunted, or (b) guarded by men in armour—God knows what for!...

"We know it's protected by death zones of a kind unheard of by any of us. Argument: it is, as we're already agreed, the headquarters of somebody who doesn't encourage interviewers and photographers. We were plainly warned to beat it. We're still here! If you feel happy—*I* don't. I'll say that poor kite didn't die a natural death. And if the Voice can strike down that way..."

He paused, looking from Max to myself. The latter shrugged and smiled.

"I am willing to bet," he declared, "that the Voice cannot strike *us* down so easily. Otherwise he would most certainly have done so."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean that this Voice is not infallible. He failed to foresee the arrival of the poor fellow by whose misfortune you escaped death in those woods! For all his strange powers, he is not yet a god. Fate plays with him as it plays with others. He is, I think, the cleverest, the most dangerous man the world has ever known. He has a wonderful brain; obedient accomplices. Let me test one of my theories about him. Let me ask these questions I spoke of."

He turned to me.

"Have you recently lost or mislaid any object which you usually carry about with you?"

I stared, scarcely comprehending; but:

"*I* have," Lonergan broke in. "I lost my cigar lighter for a whole day: posted it as missing. Then a waiter brought it back—told me he found it in the garden."

A gleam of triumph lighted up the eyes of Gaston Max.

"If it's any answer to your question," I said, "my wrist watch stopped a few days after I arrived here, and I had to send it to be mended."

Max bowed as though I had paid him a compliment. He drew out his ornate gold cigarette case; and:

"The hinge of this case became mysteriously broken," he explained, "on the day I entered Baden-Baden. I also sent it to be mended. I was opening it, my friends, after its return, at the very moment the Voice spoke to me outside the cemetery gate!

"There are employees in this hotel who could tell us much we should like to know! There is a mysterious jeweller in the town who cleverly repairs watches, lighters, and cigarette cases!"

Lonergan had his cigar lighter in his hand and I was staring at my wrist watch as though I had never seen it before....

"I have examined my cigarette case with the utmost care," Max went on, "and although I do not understand its construction, I have found that a tiny, delicate mechanism—so tiny as to be almost impossible to detect—has been attached inside it!"

"Suffering Moses!"

"It is, I think, through this mechanism that the *Voice* speaks!"...

2

"Our only course," said I, "is to apply to the German authorities and have Felsenweir raided. If possible, to-night—certainly before to-morrow morning."

"Is that so?"

Lonergan regretfully examined an empty beer bottle.

"It is difficult," Max murmured. "And as for my own position, the French were never really popular in Germany."

"What's more," said Lonergan, "that's where we failed back home. When the raiding party got in the 'cupboard was bare.' I'd be willing to lay a hundred to one that a raid of Castle Felsenweir would draw blank. It's supposed to be empty. It's supposed to be haunted. If we could ginger the German police to take the matter up, we'd maybe find it wasn't haunted, but we'd surely find it was empty."

I looked from one speaker to the other. Dimly to my apartment penetrated strains from the dance band still playing almost continuously in the ball room. Laughing voices were audible—footsteps on gravel paths. On the return journey, having dropped our gruesome passenger, we had passed more than one lighted car crammed with fancifully clad figures.

"Imagine," Max resumed, "that we present ourselves before the chief of police. We identify ourselves. We say: 'We want a large party of men to go and surround the grounds of Felsenweir. We want the ruins of the castle raided to-night.' He is polite, and: 'Gentlemen,' he says, 'what evidence have you upon which I may take this action?'"

Max shrugged, looking from me to Lonergan.

"What do we reply? We tell a story, my friends, which no chief of police in Europe would believe. Consider what we know. I put it to you, Woodville, would any editor publish what you have to tell?"

"Frankly, I shouldn't care to put my name to it at the moment——"

"We can prove nothing," Lonergan broke in. "But there's one thing we *can* do."

"What?"

"We can log it! We can put the record in a safe place. We can tell London, Paris, and New York where the evidence lies. Then—if the Voice acts—we sha'n't have died for nothing."

"Good!" said Gaston Max. "With this I am in accord. Woodville—you shall be the scribe."...

I wrote an account of the night's strange work, prompted first by one, then by another. It was significantly like the act of a man who feverishly executes his last will and testament, knowing his hours to be numbered.

From moment to moment we were expecting an intrusion... the Voice.

Max's theory had yet to be proved. Even if correct, it pointed to knowledge on the part of our opponent passing the achievements of any scientist of Europe or America.

But except for the intrusion of a waiter summoned by Lonergan to bring more beer, distant strains of dance music, voices, and vague footsteps on garden paths, my task was uninterrupted. The account completed:

"Pin these pages to your earlier notes," Max directed. "We will all sign it."

This done and the signatures being blotted:

"What now?" I asked.

"Now," said Lonergan, "we put it in a large envelope—I see you've got some—and we have it locked in the manager's safe."

The manuscript was sealed in an envelope which we all three initialled. Max and I set out for the office.

"It would be kind of better," Lonergan explained, "if I didn't associate myself with this matter, as I'm now Rev. Josiah Higgins. I might easily have made your acquaintance but I don't have to be mixed up in your affairs. The Voice has got me taped but the gang mayn't know where I am."...

The manager was discovered. He agreed to lock the document in his safe. Gaston Max despatched a code wire to Paris, adding that it was to be transmitted immediately to Scotland Yard and cabled to New York Police Headquarters. This done:

"To-morrow," he said, "or, rather, later to-day, in France, in England, in America it will be known that important information is lodged in the safe of this hotel. It is a precaution which may be unnecessary or may be useless, but, name of a good little man, we can do no more!"

We went back to my apartment where Lonergan was waiting.

As I turned the key and opened my door, I heard—or thought I heard—a voice. I stopped dead. It was not Lonergan's voice! The words reached me confusedly, but they seemed to be:

"Wait—and forget!"

I turned to Max.

"You heard it?"

He shook his head.

"I heard nothing."

I hurried into the apartment, Max close behind me.

The first thing which caught my notice was the attitude of Lonergan. He was sitting in an armchair by the writing table, staring around him in a dazed way. In other circumstances I should have supposed that he had fallen asleep and had been awakened by the sounds of our return. But with the menace which hung over us such an idea was ridiculous. Nevertheless, his manner was oddly vague. He stared dreamily. But already my attention had wandered.

The shutters were raised fully six feet! Framed in that square opening was such a nocturne as genius never painted. I saw a moon-bathed nightscape. Max spoke.

"My dear friend, why in heaven's name did you raise those shutters?"

Lonergan stood up, staring almost angrily at the speaker.

"I thought there was somebody outside." He spoke in an oddly mechanical way. Max stared at him very hard, crossed, and lowered the shutters.

I was mystified, irritated. But the truth was far from my mind. Would that we had realized what had occurred since Max and I had left the room! Fate ordained otherwise.

Those haggard hands which hovered, eaglesque, over the world, met with no check.

3

Our final conference outlasted the band. All sounds of music and of laughing voices had ceased when at last we parted. Memory of that odd expression of Lonergan's as I had found him seated with the shutter raised haunted me from time to time. More than once I caught Max glancing shrewdly at him.

His behaviour was normal and his contributions to the conversation were characterized by all his old pungency. Nevertheless, I was uneasy. Admittedly, since the windows were open, the voice might

have been that of someone in the gardens. Lonergan's story was definite enough. Suspicion had prompted him to raise the shutter, but there had been no one on the balcony. Yet it was oddly unsatisfactory.

"This is a case," said Gaston Max at last, "where there is no strength in numbers. If you take my advice, Woodville, you will not go to bed wearing your wrist watch! It may be useless—one cannot shoot the invisible—but it is reassuring to have a pistol under one's pillow. And if the Voice decides to treat us as he treated that poor fellow whom we captured—well!..." He shrugged. "We have left a record of all we know."

"You are to survive for a thousand years," I reminded him mirthlessly. "And Lonergan is to taste of the Waters of Oblivion...."

He shrugged again.

"What does it matter?"

And so presently I found myself alone.

Whilst I undressed I listened to that merry music of the little stream, rippling on its way so near to my window. I made a very elaborate business of brushing my teeth in the bathroom and even then lighted another cigarette and mixed myself a final whisky and soda. My wrist watch I placed on the writing table.

Since hearing Max's ingenious theory I had had no opportunity of examining its mechanism and now I had no disposition to do so.

I was oddly reluctant to extinguish the light.

Lifting my telephone, I called up the night porter and gave orders that I should be awakened at seven o'clock. I was sorry when he wished me good-night. I found myself listening for footsteps in the gardens and calculating how long must elapse before the Prussian sergeant's patrol led him to my windows.

The Rev. Josiah Higgins had registered, and deposited his baggage, at a modest hotel near the Trinkhalle. To-night, however, he was occupying the spare bed in that large double room on the first floor above me in which Gaston Max resided.

I carefully locked both my outer and inner door and tested the fastenings of the shutters, with which the ingenious Max had found a means of tampering. They were safe enough to-night.

Yet when at last I scrambled into bed, leaving only one lamp alight beside me, the idea of darkness had become definitely terrible.

"But, you, Woodville, are to *decide*..."

In short, I'm not ashamed to confess that, while nothing palpable threatened me, I was as frightened as I had ever been in my life. I had merely to close my eyes to see again the still, white, masklike face of that unknown man who had died in the car, propped up between Lonergan and myself; stricken silently.

Nor could I forget those words heard in this very room as Max and I had returned.

"Wait—and forget."... I recalled the intonation, the muted strangeness of the tone; I tried to construe a sentence of which these three words might have formed a part.

I lingered over my whisky and soda and lighted yet another cigarette, resting on my elbow and looking toward the shuttered windows. Revellers had long since dispersed. There were no pedestrians in Lichtenthaler Allee. Faintly from the woods came the call of a night-hawk above musical chattering of the stream.

My glance was persistently drawn in the direction of the shutters. Owing to the position of the moon, bars of light shone through the slats on to the left-hand wall of the outer room. I found this pattern morbidly fascinating.

All the time I was turning over in my mind those strange words. Now, suddenly, like an inspiration, I grasped the clue. The voice had not said, "Wait—and forget," but, "*Wake*—and forget!"

This I realized, dropped my cigarette in the tray beside me, and sat bolt upright... staring.

A shadow had moved across that moon-cast pattern—the magnified shape of what might have been an upraised arm!

I had my pistol out in a trice. Stripping off the sheets, I stepped silently on to the floor.

Tap, tap, tap!

Someone, or something, was rapping on the shutters!

I forced myself to advance. Barefooted, I began to cross the carpet in the direction of the windows.

Tap, tap, tap!

I was now no more than five feet away, and:

"Who's there?" I cried.

"Mr. Woodville! Quick! Lift the shutters! Let me in!"

My heart seemed to miss a beat.

Running, a silver thread through the nightmare of my life in the Black Forest, a dream had persisted—a hope; and a prayer that it might be realized.

This was my dream come true!

Putting the pistol on the settee, I sprang to the cords. I raised the heavy shutters.

A muffled figure stood on the balcony....

"*Marusa!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CASTLE GUARDS

1

I RECLOSED the shutters, glanced at my disordered bed and then at Marusa who was standing by the writing table watching me.

Her fur wrap in which she had been muffled she had cast upon a chair, and I saw that she still wore her Arab costume, except that the veil was discarded. I thought of the gleaming figure with outstretched wings which had arisen from the Felsenweir tomb. Dark mediæval memories from works consulted prior to my visit to the Black Forest gave up ghostly reflections.

But, looking into those frank blue eyes, the past was forgotten. I leaped back into an eager present. My heart sang.

Whatever she was, whoever she was, Marusa in some part returned my interest. She was not indifferent. She had found it worth while to seek me out in the small hours of the night and to come to my room.

A sense of possession at once delicious and dangerous claimed me; then:

"I can't possibly stay long," she began, and her English schoolgirl accent added another note to the chord, the insoluble chord, struck by her unexpected arrival. "I wouldn't have come—I wouldn't have dared... but—" she hesitated—"I was told to-night..."

She ceased, bit her lip in agitation, and glanced aside.

"Yes!" I urged. "What were you told?"

"I was told you were in danger, and I thought that if I could save you—I ought to come."

She leaned back against the table, resting her sun-browned hands upon its edge.

I regretted, and the regret was unfamiliar, that my mode of life had led me along paths where the wiles of women had not come my way. Resolutely rejecting a number of memories from my recent studies, memories of Bohemian and of Polish vampires who inhabited young and lovely bodies, I endeavoured to consider Marusa as what she claimed to be—an English-educated girl of mixed parentage.

"I am very grateful. But I don't understand. You say you were told that I was in danger. Who told you?"

She watched me for a moment, and I would have staked all I owned on her honesty. Then she lowered her eyes.

"Please don't ask me questions," she pleaded. "If you knew what I risked to get here, you'd know that what I've come to tell you is serious. I mean—" she laughed in embarrassment—"it's obvious, without the risk I spoke about."

"I won't ask any questions. Please sit down in the armchair until I get my dressing gown. If you'd like a cigarette there are some on the table."

"Thanks!"

As I made myself rather more respectable, I saw her take a cigarette from the box and light it with a composure which I admired. I knew myself to be no psychologist but her behaviour definitely set my course.

"Do you mind if I smoke a pipe?" I asked.

"No, of course not. But really, I must hurry."

She watched me filling my pipe, and:

"The truth about what's happening here," she went on, "must seem as incredible to you as it seems to me, and I'm taking frightful chances by talking to you about it at all. But there's only one thing that really matters. You must leave Baden-Baden at once! I don't mean by train in the morning—I mean *now*."

"What!" I paused in the act of lighting a match.

"Truly it is so! You can easily have your things sent along later; but really"—she stood up and faced me—"I mean what I say. Your French friend has a car. He would be wise to drive you. The other one, the American, I'm told has gone."

Marusa's last remark interested me keenly. It would appear that Lonergan's theory was right. Whatever the Voice might know, others had been deceived by his change of identity.

"I hate to think that you're mixed up in this business."

Marusa made a little gesture of impatience.

"I'm running the most appalling risks"—she laughed unnaturally—"in telling you even as much as I've told you already. Oh! it's wildly absurd. How absurd, I haven't time to explain. Since I came here to the Black Forest my life's been just a sort of nightmare. My being here to-night and talking to you is all part of it. But I want you to make me a promise, before I say any more."

I walked across and grasped her slender strong hands.

"What is it you want me to promise?" I asked.

"That you will never tell anyone I came here to-night, and never use anything I tell you except to save yourself."

"I promise."

Our glances met and my grip on the sun-browned fingers tightened.

"Please!" Marusa whispered. "I like you awfully, but it wouldn't be fair, would it? Let me say what I came to say—then, I must go. I had to come, but I couldn't have come if I hadn't known I could trust you."...

2

I stood by the open window listening to Marusa's footsteps on a gravel path.

When silence fell with no sound of a challenge I returned to my apartment and lowered the shutter again.

Where had she come from? I strongly suspected, from Felsenweir. How would she return? I had no idea. I had asked her and she had evaded my question. In short, as I realized now, I knew very little more about Marusa than I had known before.

One thing I knew, however; and despite the barriers between us it was good to know—that she cared enough to risk everything.

I was in love. My respect of Marusa's wishes, the reverence which checked my impulse to claim the right which her blue eyes admitted, told me that I not only desired but really loved.

Sitting down at my writing table, I began to make notes.

We were opposed, it would appear, to a creature who concealed his identity under the extraordinary pseudonym of Anubis. He was the chief of a secret cult or religion—Marusa was not particularly clear on the point. Their creed apparently included a belief in a great catastrophe shortly to end the world. This in itself was not new. There are many such cults.

None but subjects of Anubis would outlive the cataclysm destined to destroy humanity. Those, admitted to the secrets of the order, who betrayed them, died.

I might have been disposed to doubt the truth of the latter statement had I not personally witnessed an example of the power of the dread being referred to by Marusa as the Master.

Anubis, I was told, had power over both hemispheres. My questions regarding the Voice and the giant bats she had declined to answer. Nor would she speak of Mme. Yburg. Over and over again I questioned the ethics of my behaviour. Marusa had trusted me. That was the keystone of the interview.

Nevertheless, I realized to the full what Lonergan and Gaston Max would have said. Admittedly she was a member of the organization against which we were pitted, and plainly my duty was to have detained her.

This organization, according to Max's theory, was already responsible for many deaths in the Pyrenees. I had therefore compromised with an enemy whose hands were red with innocent blood. Yet what could I do?

Now, every sound was a menace.

My watch, lying close beside the blotting pad on the table, I was frankly afraid to touch. If, as Gaston Max believed, it was the medium through which the Voice spoke—might it not be a medium through which the Voice struck?

How much I had failed to learn that I might have learned! Yet who can blame me? That Anubis could kill from afar silently, leaving no clue, I knew from experience.

Marusa had assured me that she incurred this danger by visiting me. I had let her go with a hundred things unsaid—a score of questions unasked. How much she knew I could only guess. Possibly she could have unravelled all those mysteries which had brought myself, Lonergan, and Gaston Max to the Black Forest.

Yet now, with some few facts added to my knowledge which I was not at liberty to share with them, I sat alone listening for any sound rising above the rippling of the Oos… not knowing what I expected to hear.

Death might be stalking me now! The silence became terrible. I thrust the notes into a drawer and stood up.

I determined to call Max's room. Sleep was out of the question—solitude insupportable. Menace of poisoned arrows in the jungles of Brazil was as nothing to this fear of the invisible. I crossed to the telephone. I had almost reached it—in fact my hand was outstretched to the receiver—when for the second time that night came a loud rap on my window shutters!

I turned, my heart thumping madly.

Rap! Rap!

"Woodville! Woodville! Are you awake?"

It was Gaston Max!

I rushed across.

"Quiet as possible! But, open quickly!"

I opened.

Max leaped into the room. He wore a dark overcoat, muffler, and a soft black hat. Obviously he had dressed in haste, and his expression was rather wild.

"Quick! Get some clothes on! Anything!"

His manner drove me. I began to dress. His next remark was in the nature of a bombshell.

"Lonergan has disappeared!"

"What!"

"I fell asleep, you see, and, it would appear, so did he. Something awakened me five minutes ago."

"What was it?"

"Unless I dreamed, it was a voice calling me by name."

"The Voice?"

"I don't think so. This is not my recollection. I sat up with a start and put on the lamp. Naturally, first I looked in the direction of the other bed.... It was empty! Lonergan had vanished! But the window opening on to the balcony was ajar. I ran out and looked. Nothing! I ran back and tried the room door. It was locked. I returned again to the balcony—from which, as my presence here shows, it is not difficult to climb down. By means of my pocket torch I searched about—and presently I found this!"

From his pocket he took a slip of paper and laid it on the writing table. He snapped up the lamp.

"Are you familiar with Lonergan's writing?"

I stared down at the message. It was dreadfully simple:

Felsenweir. Follow—for God's sake—

"Yes, this was written by Lonergan!... If he could write, why not speak—cry out—wake you?"

Max met my glance with one no doubt as blank as my own.

"I simply have not one idea on this subject! I did not wish to arouse the night porter and so I climbed down from my window to the garden. It was, I think, the route taken by our friend."

"You propose"—fastening my shoes and grabbing a hat—"to make for Felsenweir? What we can do unless we overtake him on the road isn't clear to me."

"Nor to me!"

"But if you don't intend to rouse the hotel, how are we going to get there?"

"Name of a very small dog! I am always prepared for sudden emergencies! My car is not in the hotel. No, no! I use a private garage. I have the key."

I nodded. A sort of apathy was beginning to claim me. Wonders were wonders no longer. Resembling an athlete in training—I wore flannel trousers and a pull-over—I extinguished all lights and followed Max out on to the balcony. We lowered the shutter as far as possible. Quietly we descended the steps.

That gate which gave on to the bridge I knew was locked. But to wade the shallow stream was a simple matter, provided the night watchman didn't see us. We crossed at a shady spot, climbed the opposite bank, and came out on the public footpath.

"Now," said Max, "we must hurry. My garage is in Maria-Victoria Strasse."

3

Clear of the hotel grounds, we took a short cut back over the public bridge and hurried through deserted streets. Once, Max stopped dead, grabbing my arm.

We stood for a moment listening intently. Not a sound could I detect to suggest that we were followed. We passed on.

The garage was a small one belonging to an empty house. Max unlocked the door and swept the interior with his torch, peering all about suspiciously. There was no evidence of an intruder and we ran the Hispano out, relocking the garage.

"We are two fools, I think," Max declared as we headed for the hills. "Helpless as insects. Felsenweir we cannot, we *dare* not, penetrate. Our only chance is to overtake him on the road—if he is on the road. I have serious doubts, my friend."

"I share them! But we can't ignore his appeal. We can do no less than try to overtake him."

After this, we proceeded in silence. Indeed, there was nothing to say. Mile after mile of empty road we traversed at high speed, always climbing nearer to those haunted woods.

At last came the hairpin bend which I remembered. Max checked to negotiate it, and:

"Not a sign, so far!" he said. "And here is Felsenweir."

We had reached the base of that frowning peak upon which the castle stood. We stopped. Max cut off the lights.

Resembling a speckled ribbon, under dim starlight the highway stretched empty before us to where it disappeared at that bend which concealed the main entrance. From here the military road spoken of by Lonergan wound its tortuous way up around the mighty crag.

We sat there, staring and listening. There was no sound: nothing stirred.

"I fear we risk our lives in vain," Max said sadly. "But we must reconnoitre. It would be craven to return, yet."

We alighted. I held the Colt repeater. My frame of mind was one which I find myself unable now to describe. I was conscious of a sort of buzzing in my ears; but, as I have since realized, this may have been due not to nervous excitement, but to an actual atmospheric condition surrounding the woods of Felsenweir.

"I shall go forward twenty paces," said Max, in a low voice. "Follow me slowly, so that you keep me in view. But never lose sight of the car. If you see anything or anyone, shout. I shall do the same. If you are attacked—shoot."

In this order we commenced our second reconnaissance of Felsenweir.

I had never in my life experienced a tension similar to that which held me as I watched Gaston Max march slowly forward. I stood beside the car counting his paces.... When, looking all about as he advanced, these paces totalled twenty, he checked. Turning, he raised his hand.

He moved forward again. And *I* set out, keeping him in sight. On he went toward the hidden gate. On I went, twenty paces behind him. The gate reached, he checked. Turning, he gestured—indicating that I should look back to assure myself I could still see the car.

I twisted about and stared through the dusk.

The Hispano was still visible, its metalwork gleaming dully.

I saw that Max was advancing again. I followed. In this way I reached the scene of our recent miraculous escape. Ahead of me Max was approaching that dim crescent which concealed the gates.

The night was deathly still. No sound was audible—if I except the queer buzzing in my ears.

Again Max signalled me to look back. I did so. The car remained discernible. I waved my hand, indicating that he should go on. He signalled that I should draw up closer, then went ahead slowly, and I hastened my steps in order that I might not lose sight of him....

He had rounded the bend and for a moment become invisible before I reached that point heavily overshadowed by trees which marked one horn of the crescent.

A dim stretch of road, its form resembling a new moon, stretched before me.

Not a soul was in sight!

I stood stock still. I was unwilling to believe the evidence of my eyes. I could hear no sound—see no living thing. Whereupon, precaution forgotten:

"Max!" I cried. "*Max!*"

My voice was tossed back to me mockingly from the Felsenweir slopes; but no answer came!

What I should have done had I been entirely master of myself I cannot say: I know that a sense of horror settled on me like a damp cloak. But what I did do was to run forward wildly in the direction of a gap in the trees which I knew must mark the gates.

I reached it. What I saw was this:

A towering ancient iron gateway, reinforced with barbed wire, and flanked by miniature stone towers. Beyond, a rising ill-kept road, ploughed up as by passage of heavy vehicles....

Not a soul was in sight.

Through trumpeted hands I shouted:

"*Max!*"

Again the word was buffeted back in mockery. That throbbing in my ears grew more intense.

4

I turned and doubled on my tracks. Round the horn of the crescent I raced to where star-lighted road stretched straightly.

Then I pulled up with a jerk.

I could see the car.

But between me and my goal, lurching down upon me with long ungainly strides, was a giant figure of gleaming black!...

Every man's courage has a breaking point. I am not ashamed to confess that mine came now. Raising the Colt, I fired again and again —wildly—at that advancing horror.

If I hit or if I missed I shall never know. I emptied the magazine. But its ungainly stride, heavy with the heaviness of the inevitable, never ceased, never changed. The Thing bore down upon me like a black Fate.

"Merciful God!" I cried—and knew that I was frightened as a child.

I turned. I began to run.

Now, my knowledge of maps, upon which Lonergan had congratulated me, came to my aid. Straight on toward the ominous gates I ran, but, running, wondered if I should pass them alive!... Max!

On I raced. And I passed the gates unchallenged. There was no road and no path marked in the map for five hundred yards or more. I must skirt those deathly woods. I concentrated on the map, visualizing it as I ran.

Yes! I could see the footpath, the path which led to safety—or at least away from Felsenweir, with its black guardian horrors.

It descended steeply past a ruined church—and, came a new pang of horror, actually led to that bleak, sparsely wooded expanse which marked the site of the former village of Felsenweir—scene of Countess Adelheid's horrible visitations!

No matter. It was a short cut to the highroad. I recalled that not a mile beyond were two or three scattered dwellings, the nearest so far as I was aware to the dreaded castle area.

Hope of assistance before this point, I had none. I well knew there was not a soul for miles around who would have approached the ruins of the ancient hold at night for anything short of a king's ransom.

I was none too fit, and my heart seemed to be bursting; but I carried on until—at last! at last!—I glimpsed the beginning of the path, a white finger pointing to safety.

Here I had to pull up to recover my breath. Panting, I stood and looked back.

What I expected to see was the armoured figure. For this I was in part prepared. For that which I did see I was not prepared....

A perfectly naked man of gigantic build, but so emaciated that he might have been an unwrapped mummy—his skin of a dull, lustreless yellow—was rapidly overtaking me!

I caught the gleam of sunken eyes, of a face resembling a death's head. I saw fang-like teeth!

The Thing—I could not otherwise identify it—carried something—a scarf, a cloak, flung over one shoulder.... With gigantic strides and a wild animal agility it sped toward me.

I think I shrieked. Certainly I tried to do so. Then I turned, and literally hurled myself down the steep slope!

At times, I could not see my way. Yet I never hesitated.

Pat—pat—pat!

The bare feet were ever behind me and ever nearer! My breath coming in sobs, I burst at last through a fringe of trees. Before me lay the desolation which had been Felsenweir Village.

So much I saw. I collapsed. Mighty hands grasped me....

CHAPTER XV.
THE WILL OF ANUBIS

1

My next contact with the world afforded a moment I can never forget. I opened my eyes, supposing myself to be in bed at the Regal, and wondering why I had left the lamp on.

Instantly, memory swept back—a flood of horrors.

I sat up and looked about me....

On setting out with Gaston Max I had dressed hastily over my pajamas. I discovered that I still wore them. My outer garments were folded on a chair beside the bed. Upon a small table lay my Colt and some few other personal belongings.

The room in which I found myself was flooded with what appeared to be sunlight. Yet it possessed no window! There was no lamp, nor could I detect the presence of any lighting device whatever. Furthermore, and most staggering discovery of all, there was no door!

This amazing room was square, having a polished wood floor. Its walls were olive green at the base, this green being graduated as the walls ascended and becoming aquamarine where they joined the ceiling which, whilst of the same colour, was of even lighter shade.

Immediately facing me and in direct line with my bed, a square opening showed a narrow bathroom. I could see to the end of it and all three walls. There was no window and no door. But, like my bedroom, it appeared to be flooded with sunlight!

Physically I felt as well as I had ever felt in my life. Having taken in my astounding environment, I closed my eyes again for a few seconds and then reopened them.

Yes, it was real! And at this moment:

"Good morning, Brian Woodville!"

The Voice!...

I clenched my fists, looking sharply about me.

"Don't be alarmed," the Voice went on. "You are my guest and quite safe. Indeed, I am glad you have joined us, although you did so somewhat reluctantly. We shall be meeting later. But in the meantime, what attendance would you like? I can send you a Japanese manservant, an English batman, or a French valet. On the other hand, I can recommend a beautiful Circassian highly accomplished in matters of the toilet, or a Nubian girl like an ebony statue carved by a Greek master, who will prepare your bath in such a manner that it will exhilarate and rejuvenate you."

The Voice ceased!

"Thank you," I said, speaking as one who comments upon a radio programme—confident that his criticisms are unheard. "I can dispense with their services. I'm used to preparing my own bath." A saving sense of humour came to my aid, and: "A cup of tea would be welcome," I added.

"My dear Woodville," the Voice assured me, "it shall be brought to you at once."

I sprang out of bed.

Not only could I hear the Voice, but also... the Voice could hear *me*!

Could he *see* me? I debated my next step.

A pair of comfortable slippers had been placed beside the bed. Wearing these, I walked into the bathroom, which was tiled in green and gold mosaic. A Gillette razor, evidently new, with a packet of unopened blades lay upon a glass shelf, together with a shaving brush of first quality and a sealed stick of soap.

The hot water proved to be boiling; the cold water was apparently iced. A bath of light green marble looked inviting; and one wall consisted of a single mirror some nine feet high and twelve feet long.

A number of jars ranged upon a shelf contained essences and crystals of various kinds. A jade bowl the size of a cooking pot held some kind of talc powder and was topped by a gigantic puff upon

which an ebony negress, possibly resembling that Nubian described by the Voice, crouched to form a handle. Sunshine warmed everything.

Yet there was no window....

I began to shave. Odd how habits of a lifetime cling to us. I suppose a condemned man shaves for his execution. I had little more to look forward to. Yet quite automatically I began to shave. I had not dared to begin to think. Having been once over my aggressive beard, I was relathering lightly when a sound like that made by an elevator arrested me.

Dropping the brush, I hastily wiped soap from my chin and stepped to the outer room.

A section of the wall—floor to ceiling and some four feet wide—had opened.... From it stepped a gigantic figure in armour!

I clenched my teeth but uttered no sound. I watched the figure pace slowly across the room. Its armoured hands held a tray. Upon the tray I saw a bowl of fruit, rolls, butter, sugar, cream, and a teapot—also a box of my favourite cigarettes!

The armour of this incredible servant clinked faintly, metallically, as it set the tray upon a table. Then, standing upright and turning—this slowly but with military precision—the figure walked back into the opening and began to sink, apparently into the floor!

Stupid with amazement as I was, nevertheless I saw that a panel was descending correspondingly. With the disappearance of the attendant's head below floor level, this panel closed completely. The wall became whole again.

I forgot that I had been shaving. I was tied remorselessly to the present. I dropped down upon the bed, staring at my breakfast tray....

2

That I was awake and in possession of my senses was certain. That I was a prisoner in the castle of Felsenweir seemed a reasonable deduction. I ate a roll and butter and a beautifully ripened peach, and I drank two cups of excellent tea.

I completed the operation of shaving and lighted one of the cigarettes so thoughtfully provided by my invisible host.

A pair of new brushes and a comb by a Bond Street firm suggested some rearrangement of my disordered hair.

Having bathed luxuriously, I groomed myself as for a lovers' meeting, resumed my pajama suit, added socks, shoes, the well-worn flannels, and that pull-over which had formed the hasty make-up in which I had left the Regal.

I sat down in a comfortably cushioned armchair and wondered when the master of my destiny would deign to indicate the next move.

There was perfect silence in the supernaturally sunlighted apartment. Smoking, I meditated. First, and this priority was significant, I thought of Marusa.

From that enchanting figure my ideas wandered to the armoured creature. Grotesque—abnormal. It undoubtedly corresponded to the figure photographed by Lonergan—the figure which had patrolled the battlements. It was the same as, or identical with, that black horror which had cut off my escape on the road below Felsenweir.

A possible truth intruded—an unwelcome truth.

The Thing was not human: it was an automaton! My old theories, based on mediæval superstitions, gave place to new ones. The great bats—were *they* susceptible of scientific explanation? Now that I had seen one of the armoured men at close quarters, I was disposed to believe, as Gaston Max had suggested, that all the mysteries that puzzled us might prove to be reducible to a reasonable explanation.

So far, so good. But a scientist capable of these achievements, one so far in advance of his generation, might further be capable of producing, not only the activities, but the *appearance* of humanity!

This was the new horror which obsessed me.

Marusa!

Was she a real woman or a creature of this master illusionist into whose power I had fallen?

The idea was maddening. I cursed the train of reasoning which had created it. I was beginning to ascribe powers almost godlike to my captor. This thraldom I must shake off.

I stood up and began closely to examine the walls of my apartment. If Gaston Max had formulated a theory, admittedly never substantiated, respecting the origin of the Voice, surely I could discover some explanation of why a windowless room should be flooded with sunshine.

Carefully I set to work, bringing to bear all I knew, had read, or had heard of modern lighting devices.

I drew a blank. There was no clue to the mystery. And I was about to smoke another cigarette, when:

"My dear Woodville!"

I dropped the match. I stood rigid, cigarette in hand.

It was the Voice!

"I don't know what you are looking for. If it is a way out, you will never find it. But perhaps the source of the light intrigues you? It will be made clear in time. For the moment I am going to ask you to have a chat with a friend which may perhaps lead to a better understanding between us."...

I heard that faint whining sound which I had heard before. My glance flashed to a part of the wall. As I watched, swiftly the wall opened. From the gap created, a man stepped out....

3

At great speed the panel reclosed, its descent marked by the characteristic whine. I stared at the newcomer.

I saw a man of about my own build, wearing pajamas, slippers, and a dressing gown of bright yellow. Abundant reddish-brown hair was brushed straight back from his forehead. It was slightly gray at the temples, which added character to a square-cut, clean-shaven face.

He met my regard with a sort of glassy fixity of expression. This expression was unpleasant—in fact ghastly. It was utterly unfamiliar—as was the man's whole appearance. But his eyes were not!

I experienced a degree of bewilderment to which I had never sunk before.

"Lonergan!" I whispered.... "Lonergan!"

"Himself!"

It was the well-known voice! Not the voice of the Rev. Josiah Higgins, but the voice which I had first associated with Aldous P. Kluster. And yet, in some odd way, it was different.

I grasped his hand.

"Thank God!" I exclaimed. "I was afraid——"

But I broke off, knowing myself to be face to face with a proposition in which stark insanity lurked immediately around the corner.

"I can guess," said Lonergan. "It don't matter, anyway. Whatever happened before you arrived here—just forget it."

I stared uncomprehendingly. For some reason I could not focus his glance. He seemed to be looking *through* me. I struck another match and lighted my cigarette.

"What occurred after you left the note?"

Lonergan's expression remained obtuse.

"The note," he repeated. "What note?"

His manner resembled that of one groping for forgotten lines; or, as I realized later, listening for the voice of the prompter.

"The note telling us to follow you to Felsenweir!"

"Oh!" He seated himself upon the side of the bed continuing to stare queerly before him. "Yes. That.... Well, it was necessary."

"Necessary?"

"Sure. Otherwise you'd have crashed with the rest of the world. I didn't want that to happen—not after I knew."

I stood in front of him looking down... but found myself quite unable to catch his eye.

"After you *knew*? Lonergan, I don't understand you. What has happened?"

He looked up. But although he was staring straight at me, there was no clash of interest. He was still looking *through* me. It was uncanny.

"Just this, Woodville: What I came to the Black Forest looking for, I've found. I can explain everything. But first, you've got to make a decision."

"About what?"

"About all of us. The world ends some time this week. Are we to end with it, or are we to go on?"

I experienced a keen pang. Lonergan had gone over to the enemy!

In the circumstances I determined to temporize. For how could I know what had led to his defection?

"We'll go on."

"That's sane," he replied mechanically. "I figured all along there were no bats in your belfry. You know me, and when I say you're wise it means something. Am I right?"

"Quite right."

"Take it or leave it, the world checks out. Neither the United States nor Britain nor France are going to mean a damn thing once the die is cast. They'll just be swept away. Only a fool would fight for a country that's ceased to exist except as a name—or a memory. There's suicide. If you like to take that route, I guess it's open to you. Short of it, there's no choice."

He spoke on monotonously. It was the voice of Lonergan—but not his diction, his manner. I was puzzled; horrified.

"The Deluge all over again, Woodville. For you and for me there's just one question: not what it means to the crowd who must go under, but whether we're shipping in the Ark or staying to be drowned. Just one question. But I'm here to say you've got to answer it in an hour. I had less."

"And you chose…?"

"The Ark, sure."

"You were wise." I marvelled that I had my voice in such good control.

Lonergan, who had been staring past me whilst he spoke, now looked up. For a brief moment I caught and held the fugitive glance. But that moment told me all…. Warning—entreaty—agony. These I read, and more!

Then his stare cut through mine again and became fixed on some distant spot far behind me, so that his eyes appeared to be slightly crossed.

"Have I convinced you?"

“Entirely!”

He stood up.

“We’re here,” he said with a sudden odd note of weariness. He moved in a mechanical way across the room. “And we’re safe.”

That whining noise accompanied his last words. A panel opened and Lonergan stepped through. Immediately he began to drop floorward.

“But I’m glad you’re wise, Woodville,” came as the panel closed.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ALL WE SAY IS HEARD...."

1

TIME had no existence in Felsenweir.

Endless sunshine and silence created an impression of eternity utterly beyond my powers to describe. That it was morning I had many reasons for supposing. But so far as other evidence went it might equally well have been midnight. (As a matter of fact, it was neither.)

Lonergan's visit had appalled me. Behind those glassy eyes I had glimpsed a soul in torment.

Was he bewitched—or under the influence of a drug? A *drug*! Here lay a possible explanation! At last I identified a hazy impression which had haunted me during the time Lonergan had been with me. I saw in imagination the witch doctor of a tribe living far up the Rio Negro as once I had seen him in the flesh. Again I listened to his oddly mechanical speech and tried in vain to hold his glassy and oblique glance. That man had been under the influence of a drug—a drug unknown to European pharmacists, but possessing seemingly magical properties.

I stared about my prison with a new apprehension. Lonergan's curious evasion of the point which I considered of paramount interest—namely, under what circumstances he had left the Regal—now presented itself in a new light.

Hazily, I started to formulate a theory. Purpose began to appear in what had seemed purposeless, and I saw that Max and I had walked into a cunningly laid trap.

I too had been drugged! The nude horror from which I had fled, only at last to fall a captive, had contrived in some way to drug me....

Even now, was I really master of my own will?

Suspecting myself to be constantly watched from some hidden spy-hole, I recognized the uselessness of any exploration. This idea of sleepless espionage was definitely horrible.

I dropped in the armchair and lighted a cigarette. Come what may, I must not lose my nerve. As I did so, the Voice addressed me.

"Woodville," came those cold tones in which I now seemed to detect a mocking note, "as I am anxious that you should understand the facts of your position, I have asked Marusa to come and talk to you."

My heart leaped. But I succeeded in retaining immobility.

"Since you are interested in her, she can possibly make you see reason. We are a friendly company, Woodville. When you have had a chat, I shall be ready to receive you."

Silence again!

Between horror of this proof, if proof were necessary, that Marusa was indeed a member of the shadowy group surrounding the Voice, and joy of knowing I was about to meet her again, I found myself in a chaotic frame of mind. Forces outside my knowledge and beyond my control stormed and tossed about me. Why I had been spared and what I was expected to do, I could only surmise. But, that cunning coercion would be brought to bear to influence that "decision" for which the Voice had made me responsible, I could not doubt.

I was to be offered apparently some alternative to death. Except that his behaviour was not that of one strictly *compos mentis*, it would seem that Lonergan had already made this decision.

What of Gaston Max?

The world was to be destroyed. This, frankly, I didn't believe. It might be possible for that terror behind the Voice to decimate a village in the Pyrenees, to strike down one of his unhappy creatures whose evidence threatened to be dangerous. But the whole of the world presented a vastly bigger proposition.

Nevertheless, my life was certainly at stake, however great or small might be the peril of the general population.

And Marusa was coming to see me....

Abruptly I stood up. I had heard that dim whine heralding the elevator's approach. A section of wall slid silently upward. In the car, which was only large enough to accommodate one passenger, Marusa stood. She wore a smart walking suit and a little green hat crushed down upon her coppery hair.

Her attitude surprised me.

She held a white handkerchief outstretched against her breast. Her glance was eloquent—urgent!

My stupidity, looking back, amazes me. Thank heaven, the meaning of her pantomime at last, and in time, dawned upon me!

Written in red, probably with lipstick, upon the cambric were these words:

ALL WE SAY IS HEARD
ALL WE DO IS SEEN

Marusa, realizing that I had read and understood, crumpled up the handkerchief in her hand and stepped out of the elevator. The panel dropped down behind her.

We were alone.

2

"Your personal ideas of right and wrong are of no importance," Marusa explained.

As I bent over her, lighting a cigarette which she had taken from the packet on my tray, her blue eyes were wells of unspoken eloquence.

"It's just a question whether you prefer to survive with the few, or pass out with the many. It's really quite simple, isn't it?"

"Painfully simple."

I extinguished the match and dropped it into a teacup.

"You see, the Master is a sort of Higher Power. One might as well disagree with the behaviour of a volcano as disagree with Anubis."

She smiled up at me. And insane wonderment came.

Marusa was a figure of virginal womanhood to which I should have been prepared humbly to offer all I had. That conspiracy, anarchy, assassination could be acceptable to her as part of the creed of life, I found it impossible to believe. Yet what else could I believe?

I thought of Lonergan! Not the truculent, self-sufficient Lonergan I had known, but a subdued Lonergan, servant of the Master. This was comforting. I stared eagerly, perhaps hungrily, into the charming face of my visitor. Then came a second idea....

Those figures in black armour—that remorseless, soulless thing possessed of the strength of ten men which had captured me! Were *these* human?

Either the magical beliefs of the past had a firmer foundation than modern science is prepared to grant, vampires and werewolves an actual existence outside mediæval fable, or I was dreaming, had dreamed since that hour when the Voice first addressed me, since the moment I had seen a giant bat alight upon the Felsenweir tomb....

In blue eyes raised to mine there was none of that queer, oblique evasion, sense of a focus beyond one, which had disturbed me in Lonergan's glance. Marusa's regard was passionately intense, as though she hoped to communicate thoughts to which she dared not give utterance.

I turned aside for a moment. I was trying to reject but knew myself helpless to dispel the idea that this girl was not entirely human.... Like other horrors I had met, she was the successful experiment of some mighty modern magician—a perfected laboratory product, a creature responsive to every whim of her creator; but having neither heart nor soul: a shell, a mockery, an allurement to drag me down....

"It's so hopelessly unavoidable."

I turned to her.

Gratefully reassuring, that English schoolgirl accent. But the odd hint of foreign parentage in her intonation touched a note of unreality, deep enough to keep my doubts alive.

"Quite!" I admitted. "What in the name of heaven you're doing in this galley defeats me. But I suppose it wouldn't be sane to ask?"

"Well!" Marusa flicked ash from her cigarette. "It's only natural after all that you *should* ask. I think I told you I came here straight from school? And I sort of accepted it all. I've never known anything different. Do please realize you're not in the hands of a madman with absurd theories. It's true, it's a fact that life on the globe is going to end very shortly. Only those who know will survive. It doesn't matter whether you think it's right or wrong. The *fact* remains, doesn't it?"

"It would seem to."

"Of course, I don't expect you to understand or to believe. But very shortly you'll know what I say is true. If you think it's any use dying, nobody can prevent you, I suppose. Frankly, I can't see that it would serve any purpose."

My heart turned cold. She spoke of wholesale assassination as she might have spoken of an invitation to a dance. Evidently I showed my feelings, for:

"It sounds awful to you, I realize," she confessed. "Once it would have seemed awful to me. But when it's all been explained to you, when you grasp that it's inevitable, necessary, part of the scheme of things, you won't feel like that."

I began to wonder—and I began to hope again.

"One doesn't curse an earthquake for killing thousands of people. There's no room for argument about it. We can't save them *all*, can we? They're not meant to be saved. The only reason, I think, why I have been allowed to tell *you*, is that time's so short, and... well!"

She glanced aside and made a little *moue* which filled me with a mad desire to kiss her.

"I like you very much and I should hate you to die!"

My hope had been realized! The truth was welcome, but strange.

Marusa believed Anubis to be not a destroyer, but a saviour! His real part in the pending catastrophe was concealed from her!

"But by what right does this Anubis impose the death penalty?"

"By right of his greater knowledge. Try to imagine what would happen if the masses got to know about their coming destruction! All the same, I must admit I used to think as you do. But there's an inevitableness about the whole thing which smashes down our poor

little laws. I can't expect you to understand. It's so colossal. It's entirely a matter of readjustment, you see… realizing how trivial and petty and silly the things are which we used to consider so big!"

She looked up at me eagerly.

"Has Anubis told you all this?"

Marusa shook her head. Her expression changed, as I suppose my tone had changed.

"I've never seen Anubis…. I'm only a sort of—privileged guest: I mean, I don't take any active part in the work of the order. I can't even tell you where he is!"

"You amaze me. Please go on."

"I don't know if you really mean it—but I'll try to. You see, the world is a sort of schoolroom. And just now it's overcrowded. Nobody can learn his proper lesson. A clearance is called for. The big war helped quite a lot, but we should need earthquakes and plagues and a score of big wars to put things right."

She detected my smile and returned it with a charming smile of her own.

"Do you think I'm mad?" she asked naïvely.

"No!"

I had ceased smiling and I suppose I spoke the word rather grimly.

"Are you furious with me?"

"Not at all."

"Then don't look at me like that! Because presently you'll find all your established ideas upset. I can see you don't believe me. But before judging, at least wait awhile."

The difference between the carefully preserved casualness of this conversation and that which underlay it impressed me forcibly.

"Am I allowed to ask questions?"

"No! Please don't!"

"But there are so many things I want to know."

"Probably things I should be unable to tell you."

She was watching me in an earnest way which served as a reminder of her warning:

All we say is heard—all we do is seen.

Her beauty, her composed manner, the modern carelessness of her speech combined to make me forget the true facts of my situation. Moreover, I understood, or thought I understood, her place in this bloody saturnalia. And now, Marusa stood up with a little wry smile.

"You surely don't mean you're going?"

"I'm afraid so."

"But," I said, claimed by a sudden and material curiosity, "how do you notify the mysterious elevator that you desire its presence?"

She laughed lightly. Her youth and gaiety were amazing in that place where artificial sunlight dispelled a gloom which should have been black as that of the Pit. For surely the Thing which I knew as the Voice had arisen straight from hell.

Another possibility regarding the girl, not quite so dreadful as the first, suddenly presented itself. I thought again of Lonergan. Might it not be that all creatures in Felsenweir, human and otherwise, were *controlled* in some way?

"It's stupidly simple!"

Marusa spoke the words in so easily natural a manner that my half-formulated theory was swept aside.

From a small handbag which she carried she took out a sort of disk, mounted in what appeared to be dull gold. It vaguely resembled a compass, but in place of a compass needle possessed a movable indicator. She held it up before me.

"You'll receive one of these," she said, "very soon… at least, I hope so. I haven't time to explain it now, but I can show you how it works."

She moved the indicator to a number and twisted a small knob like that of a watch. The result was that a succession of hieroglyphics appeared in a space immediately below the centre of the dial. Ceasing to turn when a figure resembling the Arab letter *'alif* occupied the space, she glanced at me, smiling with schoolgirlish mischief.

"There!"

She replaced the disk and closed her bag. I heard the whine of a rising elevator.

"Please say you won't be obstinate! I couldn't bear it, now...."

3

Throughout ten minutes of sunlit silence after Marusa's departure, I sat staring at that wall which masked the elevator shaft. I smoked without knowing I was smoking. I recalled every word she had said during our all too brief interview. By which tokens, if I had paused to consider my condition, I must have known myself in love.

So I was seated when the now familiar whine brought me sharply to my feet. I didn't know what to expect nor *whom* to expect. Perhaps that unimaginable being, the Master—Anubis.

The panel slid upward.

I saw that the elevator was empty; but:

"Will you be good enough to enter, Woodville," the Voice ordered. "When you arrive at your destination, you will be directed."

Since plainly I had no alternative, I stepped into the narrow car.

Immediately it began to descend. My last view of the room in which I had awakened was one of the floor on my line of sight as the lift dropped, carrying the closing panel with it.

Descent took place in absolute darkness. I still had a half-smoked cigarette between my fingers when light came blindingly.

Before me I saw a vast, luxuriously furnished apartment, not resembling any place that I had hitherto seen. Despite its air of luxury it possessed a sort of simplicity. Growing roses in square stone pots were used as decorations. The walls and floor were of gray stone blocks, the latter being covered with very fine rugs.

A flat ceiling bore a geometrical design in blue and gold. There were many cushioned settees. A strange-looking statue which I had no time or inclination to examine occupied the centre of the place. It was black. Along one side of this hall, vaguely resembling a cloister and separated from the main apartment by solid square pillars, was a sort of corridor.

Since I was plainly intended to do so, I stepped out of the car.

I paused, looking about me. There was no sound. The hall was silent as a tomb. I thought I was alone—until, standing far along the cloisteresque passage, I saw a gigantic armoured figure!

The Voice addressed me.

"Come to the door before which you see the Watch standing, Woodville. He will admit you."

I glanced down at my dwindling cigarette, dropped it and set my foot upon it. Resolutely I stepped out, turned left, walked along the cloister, and approached that armoured Thing. Lacking those experiences which had been mine, one could never have supposed this gleaming giant to be animate. One hand upraised held a mace which rested upon the mailed right shoulder. This primitive, formidable weapon would, I verily believe, have shattered the skull of an elephant.

Some three paces I was from the black guardian when slowly his gigantic mace was moved from the shoulder and lowered. Its head dropped with a metallic crash upon the stone floor!

The figure lumberingly took a pace to the right. In the patch of wall revealed I saw such a four-foot opening as that from which I had recently come.

This, I presumed, was another elevator.

I shall not attempt to describe my feelings as I passed the Watch. But I reflected that one sudden death was as good as another and stepped into the narrow car. Immediately it arose, either mechanically as the result of my stepping into it or because of some signal which I did not observe.

Complete darkness—then, suddenly, light, as the elevator became stationary.

I stepped out on to an ancient stone staircase....

This was part of the former hold of Felsenweir. I looked down to my right. A massive iron grille barred the stair. There were no windows. But sunshine prevailed. Clearly I was meant to go upwards. I began to ascend.

On and on I went. Three times I detected spaces left of the winding staircase (i.e., on the outside of the tower which clearly I was climbing) where windows had been bricked up and cemented over.

A memory came.

I recalled Felsenweir as I had seen it from the Devil's Elbow. The battlements, the first platform, the keep, and above the keep, jutting up like a minaret, the central watch tower.

This must be the watch tower. I was climbing to the highest point of Felsenweir.

What should I find at the top? Who awaited me there?

Already an age seemed to have elapsed since I had talked with Marusa. I was alone now in this haunted shell of a past tyranny, nearing the heart of that mystery which had brought me to the Black Forest.

Up I went and up....

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHIEF CHEMIST

1

THERE came a change in the form of the staircase. A rather low arch intruded. Beyond, I saw that the steps were narrower; that the spiral which they described was smaller. I consulted memories of Felsenweir based upon my study of the castle from the Devil's Elbow. Thus far, I reasoned, I had really climbed no higher than the top of the great keep.

This was the base of the watch tower. I passed the arch. The steps now were much hollowed, the masonry of the walls was crumbling with age.

I paused.

An iron gate checked further progress.

Immediately beyond this gate a section of stairway had collapsed. A black pit of unknown depth yawned before me and a draught of cold, clammy air swept up through the warmth of the passage. On the farther brink of the chasm, and about on a level with my eyes, the steps continued again, disappearing around a bend.

But—and I realized that it was an astounding phenomenon—they disappeared into darkness!

Sharply defined on the first step lay a shadow of the iron grille, an outline of the arched passage. In other words, artificial sunlight ended at the gate....

Clutching the bars, I stared, with a shiver of apprehension, down into the pit. I turned, and looked behind me. What was I expected to do now?

This problem was quickly solved.

A section of seemingly solid wall immediately before me opened silently. It was a masked door. I saw a short corridor, dimly lighted in contrast to that synthetic sunlight on the staircase. Obviously this corridor was new, composed of, or faced with, the same kind of stonework as the great hall below.

At the end, on the right, there was an opening. Upon the bluish illumination of the corridor a light which I judged to be green shone out, forming a square patch on the left-hand wall.

A pace beyond the masked door stood a gigantic black-armoured figure, motionless, inhuman, its huge mace grounded upon the pavement. I wondered, doubted, but knew that my fate was not in my own hands. Then:

"I wish you to inspect the laboratory, Woodville. Dr. Nestor is expecting you."

The Voice!

Teeth tightly clenched, I passed the guardian figure, walked on, and found myself looking into a large room in which subdued green light prevailed. It was a wonderfully equipped laboratory.

A man in white overalls awaited me. He was slim and of medium height; pallid. He wore a very small moustache, and jet-black hair grew low upon his cheekbones. Seen through the lenses of tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles, his dark eyes were very cruel. A Greek, I thought.

"Ah, Mr. Woodville," he said, and smiled unpleasantly. "My name is Nestor. I'm the second chemist here and my instructions are to show you around the laboratory. The chief chemist will be along any moment. Please come right in."

The world's greater universities endow their inmates with certain peculiarities of accent sometimes amounting to a dialect. I had no difficulty in placing this man. Dr. Nestor was a graduate of Harvard.

I went in. I resigned myself to what I recognized to be inevitable. Anger, violence were alike uncalled for. I must accept, and endeavour to behave normally.

"It would probably interest you," the second chemist continued, "to see one of our more simple devices. It has a certain personal interest."

He spoke perfect Harvard, but my first theory that he was of Greek parentage remained unshaken.

"Please avoid touching things. Some of them are very delicate; some, very dangerous. If you will come this way…"

I followed him through such a maze of scientific paraphernalia as surely never before had been assembled. By the farther wall of the place he paused, pointing to a sort of square desk, the top of which was covered with what appeared to be ground glass. A foot or so above it a peculiarly shaped lamp was suspended.

"I can't offer you a cigar," he went on, "as smoking isn't allowed here; but"—he held out a packet of chewing gum—"this is a fair substitute…. No? Well, you won't mind if I do?"

He stripped a slip of gum and placed it between his teeth.

"Now, sir, I will explain why you experienced such difficulty in exploring the woods below Felsenweir. This, you see, is a map of the territory."

He touched a button. Upon the glazed surface appeared a delicately outlined map.

"These red dots"—he indicated them—"mark the highroad surrounding the grounds of the castle. Of course, you remember the highroad? Now these, Mr. Woodville, are the three zones."

He manipulated a switchboard. A shimmering, changing wave of violet light sprang up within the dotted line which marked the highroad.

"The third zone."

An inner, irregular circle of violet light appeared upon the map.

"The second zone—to which you so nearly penetrated."

A third wave of light appeared surrounding the ground plan of the castle.

"The first zone."

I was silent.

"These are *sound waves*, Mr. Woodville. The Master, if he wishes, will give you further particulars. But these barrages consist of zones of sound, tuned to so high a key as to be inaudible but instantly fatal to animal life. If you'll notice"—the second zone disappeared in response

to some manipulation—"they can be put down or raised at will. So, as you must realize, not all Hindenburg's shock troops could reach us! Felsenweir survived five sieges in mediæval times. To-day, notwithstanding air power, artillery development, and modern tactics, it's impregnable as ever."

The zones disappeared. The map disappeared.

"I'm further instructed," my unpleasant guide continued, "to explain to you the death of the man Hans Pfal. He died in your friend's car on the way back to Baden. Will you please follow me very carefully. There are several danger spots in this part of the laboratory."

He moved away, chewing industriously; and I followed. The floor was slippery, being composed of what looked like green glass. The walls also were green and glistening; the ceiling was dull gray. Right and left of the path along which he led me stood glass tables bearing incomprehensible apparatus.

I shrank from touching anything, following my white-clad guide, who wore rubber-soled shoes, as one follows the light of salvation.

We passed from one end to the other of the lofty, silent room.

Dr. Nestor stopped before a sort of gigantic index which occupied nearly the whole of one wall. It consisted of hundreds of columns of figures, running from tens into thousands, irregularly arranged. In some respects it resembled the time table of trains used at railway termini. At its base was set a long, shallow desk.

"Here," said Dr. Nestor, smiling, "are the Brothers of Anubis—each bearing a number."

He pulled back a white sleeve, revealing a disk chained to his arm. I saw it to be identical with that worn by the man who had died in Max's car.

"363," he explained, "is my own number."

Reversing the disk, he glanced at me. It bore an Egyptian figure which I recognized.

"Only the first grade of initiates understand the significance of these amulets, or badges, which every member of the order must wear—I may add, under penalty of death. As a matter of fact, they're tuned in

to this keyboard. Distance doesn't count. Melbourne's as near as Berlin. I'll show you what I mean and then you can draw your own conclusions as to how Hans Pfal died."

He moved one of many levers upon the desk. A round spot of white light mounted a column of figures. Immediately over a number it stopped.

"Note!" said the demonstrator—"my own number: 363!"

Again he displayed the disk upon his wrist.

"It's only necessary now, Mr. Woodville, to move a certain switch and I should die instantly and painlessly. Nor would my body bear any mark of violence. This was how Hans Pfal died. And this, you see, is how we assure secrecy."

He reversed the lever. The spot of light descended and disappeared.

"You're surely privileged," Dr. Nestor declared. "Only chosen members of the order are ever admitted to this laboratory."

The queer, X-ray light of the place faltered momentarily.

"Chief chemist!" Nestor exclaimed. "This ends my watch, Mr. Woodville. I now go to change. Don't think I'm discourteous: I'm just obeying orders. The Chief will be with you in a moment. Stay right where you are... and don't touch anything! Good-bye, sir!"

I watched Dr. Nestor's white-clad figure receding among mazes of apparatus. He walked silently.

Came an interval. It was ended by a sound which I knew—that of an ascending elevator. I turned. Right at my elbow, beside the huge indicator, a panel opened.

Mme. Yburg stepped out!

2

Moments come in everybody's life which, because they are so numbing, leave no definite impression whatever. This was one of them.

I saw that she wore a long white jacket of the kind affected by surgeons. Beneath it, her silk-clad legs struck an incongruous note. But I observed, my first shock of amazement over, that she had

substituted rubber-soled slippers for the chic shoes which I associated with those slim, delicately arched feet.

"You look frightfully surprised!"

She was regarding me amusedly. The elevator panel had closed, the whine had died away.

"I am!"

"Why? Your brilliant friend, Mr. Lonergan, has told you of my association with the Hartford mystery. And that fascinating Frenchman, Gaston Max, assured you, did he not, that I was in the Pyrenees on a certain occasion? You must surely know I am a woman with a mission!"

She was mocking me—or so I thought; holding her head proudly erect and watching, under half-lowered lids, with those calm, slightly oblique eyes. One slender, psychic hand rested on her hip....

It fascinated me—that hand. I found myself wondering why it was so white, and not sunburned... the poise of the body, the pose of the head...

She smiled, a red-lipped smile which at once irritated and caressed.

"Well? What are you thinking about? You say nothing."

"I'm thinking about Apollonius of Tyana." She ceased to smile. "That great philosopher declared that 'loquacity has many pitfalls—but silence, none.'"

Her level gaze caught and held my own.

"You are not so clever as John Lonergan," she said quietly, "and you have none of the subtlety of Gaston Max. But although I never liked the English, I think I like *you*."

"A somewhat equivocal compliment!"

Mme. Yburg laughed outright. She pressed her hand lightly on my shoulder and as lightly withdrew it.

"Anubis never makes mistakes. I understand why, of three, he has selected *you* to make the choice."

"But I want to know——"

She checked me.

"Kindly ask no questions which I'm unable to answer. Ask any you like about the laboratory."

Her calm eyes held an unspoken warning.

"Sorry," I returned.

I forced myself back to a state of passivity. I washed my hands of speculations, and determined from now on to behave like a visitor being shown around an explosive factory. The feat was one of mental acrobatics. But I achieved it.

"Very well. I've had personal and unpleasant experience of the sound zones. Their principle defeats me. But I'm curious to know how an intruder is spotted. I ask for this reason: Your third barrage or zone wasn't laid down when Lonergan and myself recently penetrated to the woods. You trapped us with it. How did you know we were there?"

Mme. Yburg smiled again.

"I can explain very easily, my friend. Follow me closely. Touch nothing. Be careful."

Her solicitude was real. In this it differed from the sentiments of Dr. Nestor. Plainly, the latter disliked me. Yet, whilst I recognized Mme. Yburg's friendship, I knew unmistakably that sex had no place in it. All the time she was weighing me up, calmly. I wondered why.

Following her, fearful of stumbling on the slippery floor, of brushing against any one of the strange mechanisms right and left, I watched the lithe, swaying figure and tried in vain to pin down a memory which taunted me....

She led me through intricate ways to a place roughly centre of the laboratory, where a magnified green lampshade overhung a low, circular table. The top was covered with that same sort of opaque glass upon which I had seen the map of the sound zones.

Some change was made in the lighting. I gave a start of amazement.

As if from an airplane, I looked down upon the castle of Felsenweir!

I saw the woods which hemmed it in, the old military road winding through them. Every detail was sharp, clear, as if bathed in sunlight. I saw other roads surrounding the crag; the very spot at which I had been captured by that nude inhuman Thing! I saw the path down to the abandoned village....

"Whoever is on duty here is responsible, you see. I don't know if Dr. Nestor showed you the insulated path?... Well, there *is* such a path through all three barrages. Hans Pfal, returning from the town, meant to use this. But our clever French friend overpowered him....

"This mechanism operates in moonlight also. Dr. Nestor saw John Lonergan and yourself enter the woods. He was on duty at the time. He laid down the second barrage. Then the third.

"Frankly, you defeated us on that occasion. Dr. Nestor is frightfully sore!... Pfal, by the way, was one of our engine room staff. By the time communication was established with Anubis, other measures were useless. He ordered the poor Pfal to be silenced. Look! There's a man driving a cart along the highroad."

I looked. Crystal clear, I saw the horse, the vehicle, the driver, moving along a road below the castle. I judged it all of a mile distant.

That wondrous panorama vanished. The green light in the laboratory flickered—and became steady again.

"Anubis is ready to see you," said Mme. Yburg.

3

In complete darkness, I found myself speeding upward. This was my longest journey by elevator, and I decided that I was ascending the ancient watch tower by the only available route. The staircase I knew to be ruinous.

A panel opened as the elevator stopped. I saw a small, square lobby, dimly lighted with an amber light. I heard the elevator descend, knew that the panel had closed behind me, that I was alone with—what?

Immediately before me hung a curtain of bright and barbaric colouring, ancient Egyptian in scheme. Over it upon a ledge projected a figure of the god Anubis. I closed my eyes tightly for a moment. Silently I told myself, "You are Brian Woodville. You are in the Black Forest of Germany. Remember this—and fight! *Fight!*"

I opened my eyes. I stared at the gaudy curtain, when:

"Please come in, Woodville," said the Voice.

I walked to the curtain, drew it aside, and stepped through....

Quite still I stood, and looked. I had been tricked or had deceived myself. This was not the summit of the watch tower. I was in a very large room, so large that I thought it must have been the banqueting hall of the old fortress. Part of it was queerly illuminated from no visible source by a light resembling moonlight. Walls and ceiling were masked in shadow, so that I could only guess at its dimensions. I stood in darkness. Before me, in a deep, carved chair, a figure sat.

I had never seen a more magnificent head. The great domed brow, which appeared to be quite hairless, displayed a tremendous frontal development. The hawklike but pallid face was lighted by a pair of such beautiful eyes as I had never met with in man or beast. They were phenomenally large and golden: they seemed to be inspired by an inner fire of genius—or of madness.

They were watching me, those wonderful eyes. And I knew instinctively that, masked though I was in shadow, they could see me clearly....

Grotesquely supporting that terrible, wonderful head was a tiny, black-clad body, slender, feeble, and seated cross-legged in the great chair. Talonlike hands rested upon the knees.

I heard the curtain's rustle as it dropped behind me. There was no other sound.

The carved chair I saw now to be raised from the floor upon a sort of dais or platform. This platform was richly carpeted and bore two singular decorations: a pair of life-sized kneeling figures.

That right of the chair was wrought in ebony, surely by a great master: the figure of a Nubian girl, hands crossed upon her breast; her head, upon which appeared a close-wrapped turban of gold, lowered; upon one arm a golden bangle. The corresponding figure left of the chair was identical in every way, except that it seemed to be carved in ivory. Gold turban and armlet appeared again.

I had never seen such exquisite pieces of statuary. Yet, whilst I visualized these wonders, not once did I wholly withdraw my gaze from amber eyes looking out at me searchingly from beneath that great brow.

I was in the presence of Anubis....

And Anubis was a *dwarf*!

CHAPTER XVIII.

SLAVES OF FELSENWEIR

1

"We meet at last, Woodville!"

Anubis spoke. And I knew *the Voice*!

"Please come and talk to me. We have much to say to one another."

Those beautiful, dreadful eyes never moved in their regard. I came out of the shadow into blue light and at last stood less than a pace from the chair.

"Your work is familiar to me, Woodville." Thin lips under a hawklike nose scarcely seemed to move. "We shall understand one another presently."

He raised one of the talonish hands and snapped his fingers.

I abandoned speculation again and became a detached watcher. I was in a world where ordinary laws had ceased to operate.... In some way I had strayed over the border line.

The ebony statue stood up.

With a sense of amazement such as I cannot hope to convey, I realized that the figure *lived*! She disappeared into shadow but almost immediately returned carrying a low, tapestried stool.

In barefooted silence she approached, placed the seat for me, and returned to her place on the dais, resuming that pose in which I had first seen her....

"Mizmûn surprises you?" Anubis suggested. "She is a Nubian Arab, Woodville, and was born just outside Assouan. I procured her at the age of four. Is she not a beauty? Her companion"—with one talon hand he indicated the motionless ivory figure—"Isa, is a Georgian, as no doubt you had guessed from the texture of her skin."

He snapped his fingers and spoke rapidly in a tongue which sounded unfamiliar. The ivory statue stood upright. Raising white arms, she turned slowly, dreamily, like a mannequin. I was conscious of definite embarrassment, and I suppose I showed it, for:

"Pray do not consider the feelings of my attendants," said Anubis. "They have none."

He snapped his fingers again. Isa resumed her former pose.

"That unpleasant quality which women are fond of referring to as their soul is absent in Isa, Mizmûn, and the others. Twelve in all, Woodville, and as nearly perfect as Nature will permit Science to rear a human being. The members of my Corps of Pages approximate as closely to the *hourïs* of Mohammed's paradise as one could reasonably expect to approach."

He went on to tell me in his cold, cynical voice how he had procured these results—a mixture of surgery and dietetics which sickened me as I listened. My horror grew and grew—and my gorge rose against him.

"Every page, in addition, is mistress of some useful profession or pleasurable art. But perhaps I bore you. You may not share my passion for beauty—my hatred of all that is coarse in humanity, notably its proclivity for multiplying. I am personally unbeautiful. If I showed myself to the world, the world would mock at me. Therefore I hide and accumulate power. I am to-day, Woodville, the most powerful man living." He extended gaunt crooked fingers. "I hold that mocking world in the hollow of my hand!"

He paused, watching me, and I sought for composure—composure to retain the regard of those beautiful, wild-animal eyes.

"Your work in Brazil interested me deeply. Particularly, your account of certain native tribes on the upper reaches of the Rio Negro suggested possibilities. Later, I shall ask you to mark on a map the exact territory occupied by them. I wish to convince you of the futility of your opposition. I shall then give you ample time to decide—for yourself and for your friends.

"You may all join our company if you wish. Indeed, I have urgent need of you. In your very dissimilar mental developments you are, all three, unique—but useful. I rather think you find our little Marusa attractive?"

I clenched my fists and bent forward.

"No melodrama, Woodville, I beg! Directly you have made your decision, I will give her to you with pleasure.... But I see you regard this as bribery. I wish your conclusions to be based upon an appreciation of my aims, purely. For this reason, and for no other, you have been permitted to see the laboratory and to interview me in person. Few of my company have enjoyed these privileges."

He snapped his fingers.

"But let us forget worry and women, and consider wine!"

The girl Isa, in whom I had observed not the slightest indication of life since she had returned to her kneeling pose, stood up and disappeared in shadow. Mizmûn followed. A few moments later they returned silently as they had stolen away.

One set a high table at the edge of the dais between myself and Anubis, the other laid a tray upon it. Right and left of the table they stood, the ebony and the ivory statue.

I saw before me a large bowl of fruit, glasses, some very delicate-looking sandwiches, a bottle of Bollinger, a flask of white wine, some pre-war whisky, a syphon, and a plain black box.

Raising my eyes, they were caught and held by the fixed gaze of Anubis. He spoke softly.

"Your suspicions are... an insult, Woodville! Even the clumsy Borgias disdained drugged wine!"

"But...!"

"Those were your thoughts! Your suspicion I forgive. That you so gravely misunderstand my powers is disappointing. Would you be good enough to open the black box for me?"

I tore my gaze away from those golden eyes and looked at the box. Standing up, I raised the lid.

For self-possession I had been fighting all the time; but now, in spite of this hard-won control, a cry, a *shriek*, was torn from me.... A blinding light shone out of the box, searing my eyes! I was blind! This devil had... The cry was cut short upon my lips.

"Obey!" said Anubis.

And suddenly I could see again!...

But I was powerless, paralyzed! I tried to raise my eyes from the box to the speaker. It was impossible. I could not move a muscle of my body. I was tongue-tied—a dead man, save for my powers of sight and hearing. Bending over the box I stood rigid, until:

"Look at me," the Voice commanded.

I looked.

"When Gaston Max and yourself left your room at the Regal to wire to Paris, London, and New York, such a box was brought under the notice of John Lonergan. Since that moment he has been my slave. You understand?"

"I understand."

I was helpless. This devilish mechanism had robbed me of personality!

"It is my intention, however," Anubis continued, "that you shall be your own master. Therefore, close the box."

I obeyed.

"You are free."

It was so!

A sense of pressure like that of a steel helmet became removed from my brain. Anubis's talon fingers were delicately skinning a peach.

"I might bind you to me for ever. But I always fulfil my promises. Your part is to *choose*. John Lonergan enjoys that oblivion which I undertook to impose upon him. He is a mere echo. I can so check corruption of the flesh, Woodville, that a human body would survive for many generations—a condition under which the brain dies slowly. I believe I spoke of a thousand years? Allow me to illustrate what I meant. But first, whilst I can commend the wines, I feel that your choice will fall upon whisky?"

"Thanks! A whisky and soda would be acceptable."

And I was proud that I could speak, and speak unfalteringly!

A few phrases in that strange, guttural tongue Anubis uttered, and Mizmûn poured out a glass of white wine whilst Isa prepared whisky and soda.

I tried in vain to catch the girl's eyes. She looked beyond me, *through* me.

Anubis spoke again.

I shuddered, drank, and hastily set my glass upon the floor. The two girls disappeared into shadows.

"This was the condition to which I referred, Woodville. I have fulfilled all my promises." ...

A curtain was drawn aside.

In the dim bluish light I saw a crystal coffin, not upright, but tilted slightly backward. In it, naked as he was born, *lay Gaston Max*. His hands were clasped upon his breast, his sightless eyes stared straightly before him....

CHAPTER XIX.

FREEDOM OF FELSENWEIR

1

LIKE a caged animal I paced up and down my room. Snatches of the dwarf's conversation haunted me....

"So he would remain, Woodville, for many generations"—this had referred to Gaston Max—"but his brain would live on for an undeterminable period. He would watch himself die. This fate he may avoid....

"Certain indiscretions of the Watch master have created quite a local legend. Felsenweir is reputed to be haunted. But the trust which holds the property is influentially backed. Glimpses have been obtained of my Black Watch...."

The very sibilance of the soft, mocking voice seemed to be repeated in my ears....

"So named after a famous regiment of your British Army. Their armour, composed of metal unfamiliar to most metallurgists, renders them immune to the zones. They can patrol where no living thing could penetrate. My bodyguard, Woodville. They operate within a mile radius of the Watch master's quarters. Stripped of their armour they are unpleasant, but capable of swift movement under suitable direction. A lobster out of its shell would be a ghastly object, would it not? Owing to an unforeseen accident, I was compelled to despatch one of them to pursue you...."

Those creatures were not human—they were not human! It beat upon my brain with hammer blows: *they were not human!*

The monstrous dwarf in that blue-lighted room had even begun to tell me something of the life history of the Things composing his Black Watch. He invited me to visit a subterranean dungeon in which, in his own words, "these useful servitors are perfected."

But, rising supreme among all the horrors I had witnessed and had heard of, was that one of the girls to whom he referred as his Corps of Pages… "Recruited, Woodville, from many nations, in infancy…."

They had no souls!

I thought I knew what he meant. Selected for their beauty and trained with that one object in view (his details respecting this training had maddened me dangerously), they were, I deduced, permanently under that influence which I had experienced, and which I believed enthralled Lonergan. They were soulless in the sense that Anubis controlled their destinies.

Yet, sometimes, I reasoned, they must be permitted to leave the castle. On such occasions, by means of his devilish arts, he would temporarily relieve them of the control. Meeting one, she would seem to be a beautiful but a normal girl!

I clutched my head, pacing more and more rapidly up and down that narrow apartment.

Marusa! I could not believe it! Yet how could I dare to doubt so palpable a truth?

I saw her, as I had seen the others, in that shameful servitude—her shapely head bound by a golden turban, her lithe, sun-browned body….

Marusa was one of the Corps of Pages!

I had given my heart to a shadow! I loved a beautiful phantom, incapable even, if Anubis now willed it, of being my woman as I longed to be her man!

"I will give her to you…."

Dropping into an armchair, I lowered my head in my hands and clutched it frenziedly. So I sat facing a prospect which looked like madness when the Voice of Anubis addressed me.

"Truth is sometimes strong medicine, Woodville. But if we can assimilate it, it means new life. I have released John Lonergan of control. I suggest that you dine together. By the way, it is just seven o'clock. Lonergan has a brilliant brain. I could make use of him. Gaston Max has had also his experience. He is ready for the decision which I have demanded. I shall disconnect your room. Nothing that

takes place in it during to-night will be known outside its four walls. You have the freedom of Felsenweir. This upon my word, which you may disbelieve, but which I never broke. You have five hours. At midnight I shall ask for your verdict."

The Voice ceased.

I raised my head. I had heard that whining sound which told of an elevator ascending. The panel slid upward.

John Lonergan stepped into the room!

"Woodville!" A light of sanity shone in his keen eyes, the whole force of the man expressed itself in the grip of his hand. "Our time is short!"

The panel reclosed. The elevator descended. We were alone.

"Lonergan!"

"Woodville—we have *five hours*. In that time we've got to save the world!"

2

Lonergan's story was simple enough.

"When you left me back there, in the hotel," he explained, "to go send the telegrams, I heard a noise out on the balcony. I had the shutter up in a matter of seconds. Nobody was there. But I saw a little black box on the table. Right away, I guessed—a bomb!

"I guessed wrong. But I walked around it and didn't touch it. When my back was to the gardens and my face to the apartment, the lid opened! I know now I must have been covered. There was a line to it. A blinding light shot into my eyes!"

"I know! I know!" I cried excitedly.

"Is that so?" He looked at me dully. "I just thought my guess was right and the bomb had exploded. Because I wasn't given any more guesses until I found myself sitting in an armchair, Max and you looking at me.

"It's all clear from there on right to the time it was arranged I shared Max's room—beyond that, right to when I went to sleep. Then it's a mix-up like a Navaho blanket... patterns that don't seem to mean

anything.

"I've got a hazy idea of climbing down some place—the balcony, I guess—and of running... some time later I sort of dreamed, Woodville, I was talking to *you*. Mostly I remember a pair of tiger eyes... but it's all foggy. Until three minutes ago, when I found myself in a room the dead spit of this, empty, and the Voice directed: 'Be good enough to step into the elevator.' Said elevator arrived and I did as I was told. Here I am. I've certainly got a lot to learn!"

"You have! So have we all. You disappeared from that hotel bedroom, Lonergan, leaving a note behind."

"My own handwriting?"

"Your own handwriting! Max and I followed you here, to this hell-hole. It was a trap!"

"As I see it," Lonergan declared, "we've got just one hope... the copper-haired maiden."

I heard the elevator ascending. I glanced at Lonergan.

"It's all right," he nodded. "You can still believe what I say. My brain's clear."

When the panel shot up and the tiny car arrived:

"I suppose, an invitation to explore?" I said, smiling very mirthlessly—"as we have the freedom of Felsenweir! Wait for me below."

"Seems that way," Lonergan agreed.

He stepped into the elevator. It immediately descended and the panel closed. I waited, listening to the weird whining in diminuendo. We were trapped! The organization of Felsenweir was automatic. Our courses were preordained. The elevator ascended again. The panel opened. I stepped in. In utter darkness I went down.

I found myself in that strange, sun-lighted hall with the futuristic square pillars—the amazing statue—the sense of emptiness—futility. Lonergan was awaiting me. By him stood a big blond man wearing white overalls. His fair, graying hair stood upright, stubble-fashion, his ruddy face was decorated by spectacles containing such powerful lenses that any character which may have rested in his eyes was not to be detected. He smiled and bowed.

"Mr. Woodville," he said, speaking English with a marked accent, "I have already made myself known to your friend—but my name is Richter. I belong to the laboratory staff. At the moment I am instructed to act as your guide to Felsenweir. I may add, a pleasant duty."

I exchanged glances with Lonergan. He nodded reassuringly.

"You have seen the laboratory, I understand? What then can I show you?"

"I guess," said Lonergan, "we'll leave it to you."

"Very good!" Mr. Richter seemed to be delighted. "I shall explain to you therefore the system of the Black Watch. Follow me closely, gentlemen."

We followed him across the hall, which I remembered well, to a door upon the opposite side from that which gave access to the tower. It was open and unguarded. We descended a short flight of stone steps and found ourselves in a square room, obviously a survival of the original fortress. It was unoccupied and unfurnished, but an arched opening showed at the farther end. The room was more dimly illuminated than that above, and an effect of twilight was produced.

Herr Richter turned to us. His eyes, or what I could make out of his eyes through the thick lenses, were lighted up with the enthusiasm of the specialist.

"The secretary of the British Association of Chemists," he said—"I more particularly address you, Mr. Woodville, although Mr. Lonergan also will be interested—recently pointed out that, since we understand the composition of protoplasm, there would seem to be no reason why chemistry should not ultimately accomplish its synthesis, thus causing life to manifest itself. He suggested that a modification of this mysterious substance, which gives rise on the one hand to the amœba and on the other to a more highly organized being, might in time, by a process which he described as yet undiscovered, enable us to *incubate* a human being resembling ourselves."

"I read a report of his speech," I replied. "It was delivered in Birmingham, I believe?"

"Quite correct," Herr Richter confirmed. "He suggested—I quote from memory—that perhaps in a thousand years—somewhat pessimistic, I think—chemists might produce synthetic beings who could perform the workaday work of the world, thus setting free those naturally begotten to undertake fresh conquests of knowledge and of Nature. He added that this seemed to be an absurd dream, but that it would be unwise to dogmatize and to say that it could not be realized."

He paused, staring alternately at Lonergan and myself. Then:

"It *has* been realized!" he added. "And those thousand years suggested by the English chemist have been bridged by the greatest scientist the world has ever produced. Be good enough to follow me."

He stepped into shadow under the arched opening.

Exchanging a hasty glance with Lonergan, I followed.

My worst fears were realized!...

This was the incubating chamber referred to by Anubis, to which in fact he had offered personally to conduct me!

Over what I was now compelled to see I prefer to draw a veil. The enthusiasm of Richter was nauseating! I conceived a loathing for the man which I can find no words to express. Stage by stage, he showed us how the gigantic creatures known as the Black Watch were produced. Synthetic they were, undoubtedly—laboratory products. But, try as I would, my unscientific mind would not allow me to get away from the idea that in the end some spark of humanity animated those ghastly, hopeless creatures, controlled mechanically, as an engine is controlled, by a "Watch master."

To him Herr Richter now proposed to introduce us.

"There are in Felsenweir," he said, "a class of products, purely human, but subjected to scientific treatment, to whom I should be happy to draw your attention. But I am not free to do this. I refer to the Corps of Pages, more particularly attached to the Master, but frequently detailed for special duty when distinguished visitors are guests in the castle—as is the case at present."

"Anubis, himself," I interrupted harshly, "has been good enough not only to explain to me the education of these damsels, but also to introduce me personally to two of them. I think, Herr Richter, we may

pass over this subject."

Herr Richter shrugged his shoulders and smiled with unending amiability.

"As you wish," he replied, "as you wish, I merely desire to carry out my instructions. Shall we visit the rare animals?"

"Say—what do you mean, exactly?" Lonergan demanded.

"Well," Richter explained, "here in Felsenweir, since Felsenweir is our headquarters, we have the more rare and delicate beasts selected by the Master for survival. The more ordinary brutes, chosen by our experts, are, as no doubt you know, assembled at various spots, insulated, of course, all over the world. A series, Mr. Lonergan"—he turned to my companion—"of minor Arks!"

"I get your meaning entirely," said Lonergan, speaking without humour, or indeed any other emotion whatever.

And so, presently, in a subterranean place deep below the rock of Felsenweir, in queer light, I found myself looking through thick plate glass at creatures whose homes were so widely separated as Borneo is from Iceland.

"All essential, you see," Richter explained. "In the modified world, gentlemen, inimical life will find no place. That harmful phase will have been eliminated. What little remains in accidentally insulated spots it will be the duty of specialists like yourself, Mr. Woodville, to discover and exterminate."

My brain reeled! And as we proceeded on that incredible tour of inspection, the borderland of sanity receded farther and farther.

Lonergan's expression sufficiently indicated that he shared my frame of mind.

Thus we enjoyed the freedom of Felsenweir....

3

There were parts of the rambling old fortress where synthetic sunshine did not prevail: dark, dimly lighted tunnels, worn stairs, and crumbling arches. At one such point, a narrow flight of steps

descended on the left to impenetrable darkness, whilst rather farther ahead was an ascending flight, down upon which a dim light shone.

I had frankly lost my bearings. But from this indication and that, I had come to the conclusion we were in the base of the great keep.

An extraordinary desire to test this theory overpowered me.

Herr Richter, full of scientific enthusiasm, was leading Lonergan down the dark steps.

"Some noxious creatures," I heard him say, his voice echoing hollowly around the vault-like place in which we were, "play a definite and a useful part in the scheme of the world, Mr. Lonergan."...

He disappeared, Lonergan stumblingly following him.

I had just time to explore the stair on the right before I should be missed! I advanced, turned on to the stair, and above me saw what I took to be a spear of natural sunlight striking through an arrow-hole of some chamber to which the staircase led.

Standing still, I listened.

Richter's voice was dying away, deep in the bowels of the fortress. I was taking risks. I might get lost. I might blunder into some death zone. But that I should peer into this chamber at the top of the steps was imperative. I felt like a schoolboy being shown around some historic spot, as I slipped away from my guide to do a little exploring on my own account.

Quietly, but swiftly, I mounted the stair. On the threshold of the room to which it led, I pulled up short....

It was a large, rectangular, roughly paved chamber lighted by that one arrow-hole which really had been my objective. Yet, as I have said, on the threshold I pulled up. That part of the chamber immediately before me where the wall should have been—for the room plainly had once been square—now presented a black cavity into which the constrained light from the arrow-hole failed to penetrate!

This was queer enough, but not queer enough to have struck that chill to my heart which I had experienced at the moment I had reached the threshold.

Hanging from a beam not seven paces away were three monstrous bats!

I cannot express the horror and loathing which the nearness of the things induced. Seen in that dim light, they resembled at first glance, in every respect, bats in repose, for so, swung from some support, the bat sleeps.

Frankly, I think I should have bolted, but horror held me rooted to the spot. I was compelled to stare. Therefore my eyes slowly grew used to semi-darkness.

I noticed a peculiarity which distinguished these bats from any others with which I had come in contact (and on the Rio Negro my experiences in this respect had been ghastly and terrible: men wither and die there from nightly visitations of vampire bats).

The difference which had arrested my attention was this:

These bats hung upright and not head downwards!

They were monstrous creatures, at least as large as I had estimated when first I had sighted one in the cemetery above the town. They were of a fish-like colour. I imagined that in the light of the moon they would have been nearly invisible.

Dead, glassy eyes—of the size of the bottom of a tumbler—they had, flat and meaningless; attenuated bodies. But, peering more closely, I perceived that these bodies were *quite flat*. Mosquito-like wings drooped from the shoulders downward. But where the body—or, considering their abnormal size, the *carcase*—of the creature should have been, was this pendulous flatness, reminding me unpleasantly of a squashed beetle.

Courage was reborn. I advanced a step into the Room of the Bats; when:

"Mr. Woodville!" came dimly.

Herr Richter had missed me!

Quickly I stepped forward. I grasped the nearer of those three pendent forms.

"Mr. Woodville!"

The voice grew urgent, nearer.

"*Woodville!* For God's sake, where are you?"

The latter voice was Lonergan's.

Racing footsteps sounded. I turned as Herr Richter, his eyes glaring through the pebbles of his glasses, followed by Lonergan who looked very pale, ran into the room.

"You alarmed me, Mr. Woodville!" said Richter. "I am relieved to find you here."

I was my own master again.

"I merely stepped aside, meaning to overtake you. But these…" I pointed… "interested me."

"The flying suits?"

Richter nodded, and turning, drew Lonergan forward. For he too had been hesitating on the threshold, as *I* had hesitated.

"They function, gentlemen, on *energy waves* sent out at a sympathetic elevation of one mile above ground level. At suitable spots for alighting and departure are stations. Ascent and descent are vertical. These suits carry a simple steering gear, a radio attachment, and are absolutely fool-proof."

Lonergan joined me, gingerly touching one of the suits.

"Our chief chemist," Richter went on, "recently visited the United States to learn if energy waves functioned in the atmosphere of that continent. It is curious that even the brilliant brain of the Master has so far failed to solve the problem. Beyond cutting in on radio, those waves are powerless in America!"

Lonergan grasped my arm so tightly that I winced. The mystery of Hartford had been explained in one sentence!

"Energy waves have a limited range." Herr Richter was speaking again. "One station is insufficient. Unlike *sound*. Sound can be transmitted from the laboratory here, all around the world, and sound can kill."

His enthusiasm carried him away.

"I will demonstrate, gentlemen, while we are here, this revolutionary system of flying. Imagine a series of overhead cables, a mile above the earth—invisible, as radio waves are invisible. No cumbersome mechanism is necessary. We carry no juice. Through the observation openings known as the 'eyes,' we can study our course.

Within the limitations of the route, this course is not constrained. There is a simple control. A child could master it. These suits are ready for use: allow me to show you."

Lonergan and I watching with all our eyes, Herr Richter stepped to a sort of narrow trench running parallel with the beam above from which the "bats" were suspended.

"Movement one!"

He pulled a lever—and stepped aside.

The suit above slowly dropped. As it dropped, it opened out its pendulous belly.

"Standing beneath the flying harness," Herr Richter explained, "it would have enveloped me. All I should have to do would be this——"

He dived into the suit. It closed upon him.... It opened. Sweating with enthusiasm, he dived out again.

"Then," he continued, "this happens——"

He moved sundry things, and the "bat" sank to the paved floor.

"Note the launching rail." He indicated it—a steel bar along the floor. "If I were now inside the suit, I should press my elbows outward, and the wings would expand! I should then watch for a blue light beyond the pit, there, and when I saw it, I should thrust hard against the launching rail."

"Gee!" said Lonergan. "That's marvellous!"

"I regret," Herr Richter continued, "that Nicholson, the flight controller, is not on duty. Otherwise, I could complete my demonstration. But—please be very careful—we can peep down to the control platform from which he directs outgoing and incoming flights.... He is a Canadian. You would like him, Mr. Lonergan."

"I never met a Canadian I liked," Lonergan growled. "May be my misfortune. But it's a fact."

4

Back in my room I tried to marshal in some order the incredible facts which I had learned.

Not the least of the wonders was that of the Black Watch, those caricatures of humanity having each definite but limited functions, and controlled by the Watch master. His duties resembled those of the captain of the Guard in ancient days. But how much more intricate they were!

The troops under his command responded to a sort of amazing keyboard by means of which he could control them, limit their actions, follow their courses!

It was science gone mad—or, rather, it was a small piece of the world in charge of a superman whose genius had leaped many centuries into the future. I tried to review what Richter had told me about the "neutral zones," in charge of local officials all over the globe. The Brothers of Anubis all were armed with some sort of contrivance which insured immunity from that sound blast which was to destroy humanity....

Here at last was the explanation of those vampire rumours which had brought me to the Black Forest! Lonergan's mission and the tragedy of the Pyrenees appeared in a new light.

With these data in my possession, plus what Lonergan, Max, and I had learned from personal observation, it was obvious that the creature who called himself Anubis held the fate of millions of lives in the hollows of those talonlike hands!

I was assured—I dared not doubt—that the sound waves which he proposed to send around the globe in geometrically considered directions, so that no inhabited territory was left out of the design, must end life... whenever he willed!

Anubis, whoever he might be, possessed the brain of six men of genius. He was a dreadful phenomenon!

Curious to reflect that with such gigantic intelligence he yet was not immune from the vice of ambition. He aspired to rule the world, but recognized that, with the millions now populating it, such an aspiration was futile. Therefore, coldly logical, he had determined to reduce his vast kingdom to controllable dimensions.

Frenziedly, I paced up and down my silent apartment. I believed myself free temporarily from the ever watchful Master. Richter, that cold-blooded enthusiast with the eyes of a child, had said something

which had led me to believe that the dreaded Lord of Felsenweir was resting. After all, the most gigantic brain cannot dispense entirely with sleep!

But I knew that I was very near to the borderland—for why otherwise should I drop on the bed and clutch my head with twitching fingers?

To be defeated, helpless, with one's future in pawn, was a condition calculated to madden any man of action. Yet, at this moment, such was my state.

I heard the familiar whine of an ascending elevator. I raised my face. I don't doubt it was haggard. The panel lifted. The elevator reached floor level.

Marusa stepped out....

CHAPTER XX.

MARUSA

1

I DON'T know how it happened, but by some mutual impulse we found ourselves in each other's arms!

And when Marusa's sweet lips met mine, it seemed the most natural thing in the world. Perhaps the explanation may have been that it *was* the most natural thing in the world.

She snuggled her face against my shoulder; and:

"Have you forgotten," I said, "that we are heard and seen?"

"We are *not*!" she replied. "The Master of our Destinies is sleeping!"

The idea—although I had suspected it—struck me with all the charm of novelty. Of course, even the superhuman dwarf must sleep sometimes. Odd that I had never taken this into account!

"But even when Anubis is sleeping," I said, "surely someone else is watching?"

Marusa stood back from me and nodded slowly.

"The chief chemist takes charge," she replied. "But the chief chemist will not be watching; because, in the first place, the chief chemist is my friend, and, in the second place, he has other duties to-night...."

I tried to hold her, but she slipped away and dropped into an armchair. I stood watching her.

Women have told me of men whose glance seems to strip them. I am not one of these, yet I believe that my glance now must have possessed those properties. It was directed and fired by my imagination—and my imagination held before me an image of Marusa as one of that infamous Corps of Pages!

I seemed to see the golden turban tightly knotted about her shapely head.... Suddenly, meeting my glance with one which held a challenge:

"What are you thinking?" she demanded.

"I am thinking of Anubis," I replied.

"Anubis!"

She grasped my hand. "Do you mean you have seen him?"

"Certainly."

"How wonderful! Do you know, I have been in this queer place for three months, and I have never set eyes on him yet!"

"What!"

"Truly. He is a sort of nightmare to me. I can't doubt his powers—who could? There's no room for doubt. But sometimes I picture him in one way, and sometimes in another."

Marusa went on talking. But her words came to me as through a mist, dimly perceived.

She had never seen Anubis! Was this a condition imposed on all the Corps of Pages? Had that master brain, knowing the hideousness of the body in which it dwelled, achieved so remarkable a result?

"When you refer to the chief chemist," I said, "do you mean Mme. Yburg? Because, I know she is your friend. I've seen you with her."

Marusa started.

"Have you? I didn't know. But, after all, it's no more than natural. She is my mother."

"What!"

"Does it seem queer? She has made this thing her life work, you see. She has lots of degrees. She's clever, far more clever than I shall ever be. My father was killed in the last German attack on Ypres. Yes! He was a Prussian officer. Do you hate me?"

"No. Why should I hate you? How *could* I? It seems very odd, though, that you should have been educated in England."

"Yes, it does," Marusa admitted. "But up to the time of the war it had always been my father's wish and his intention. Perhaps," she added simply, "he never had time to tell us that he'd changed his mind. I can't tell you—can I?—because I don't know."

Sometimes one is called upon to make such rapid mental readjustments that they create a sort of gap in the consciousness. This was what happened to me on learning that Mme. Yburg was Marusa's

mother. Then, out of the gap, a great joy rose up—a recognition not only of my love for the girl, but of the hideousness of my former suspicions.

Everything pointed to the fact that Mme. Yburg, next to Anubis, was the most powerful figure in this strange movement, involving, I could not doubt, every inhabitant of the globe. Marusa was her daughter! Therefore, definitely, she was not one of the Corps of Pages; she was not a laboratory product! She was *real*, as I had first conceived her to be: strong, healthy, beautiful, clean-minded, approaching as nearly as frail flesh can approach to that ideal which every lover builds, a fragile monument, when first he recognizes his idol.

There was an interval which I might be able to recall but which I have no desire to report. There are limits even to the zeal of the professional copy hunter....

From this phase the first recollection which emerges is an expression of Marusa's:

"If *you* don't want to stay, I can see no reason why *I* should. I have always enjoyed a certain amount of freedom, and now, after all, I shall be twenty next birthday. I think I'm competent to choose my own course."

"What do you mean?"

"Mother says there's no choice in the matter. Until you came, I never doubted her, but Anubis, clever though he is, may nevertheless be wrong."

"Then you mean...?"

"I don't think I'm entirely clear," Marusa admitted, "as to what I *do* mean. But I had to see you again to-night, as I understand that it's critical, in some way."

"You're right. Certainly a psychological moment is approaching!"

"I know I'm right. Mother doesn't quite realize that I've outgrown childhood—have ideas of my own. I haven't done anything definite—I'm not clever enough to have thought of anything. But your friend Mr. Lonergan is practically free of the place—and he's *very* clever, isn't he? You understand? Do you, or don't you? I mean, I've done my uttermost. If, after *all*, you're determined to crash with the mob..."

"Yes?"

"Well... *I* don't particularly want to go on."

2

The silence which followed Marusa's departure bore down upon me with what seemed almost physical pressure. I had learned so much, and even now I knew so little. But my heart sang; for all those horrible doubts of the past were swept away. At least she was human—real—lovable! I had not, as once my dreadful imaginings had suggested, given my heart to a shadow.

But I was a captive—a fly netted in the web! Always underlying my reflections was the dread from moment to moment of the Voice.

At any instant it might intrude, ending all projects, terminating every hope!

Anubis was sleeping! How soundly did he sleep and for how long? At any time, I thought, he might awake. Secondly, what was the purpose of Mme. Yburg? I understood at last what I had hitherto failed to fathom—the critical interest which I had detected in the laboratory. I knew now, or I thought I knew, why she had seemed to be weighing me up.

I wondered if egoism spoke. I wondered if I might dare to believe that she approved of my love for Marusa—that she countenanced it—was prepared to further it. But how far? Under what conditions?

Always I had distrusted the elegant Mme. Yburg, but hitherto my distrust had been based upon frankly childish superstitions. Now, it had a firmer foundation. I knew her for what she was: chief officer of the blackest menace which had ever threatened the world!

This, Marusa did not know—did not suspect! It was because of my realization of her ignorance that I was so wildly happy.

Happy! Much had I to be happy about! What a fool I was—a vain fool—a selfish fool! Myself, if I could believe the preposterous project of Anubis, I was safe enough. Life and love were in my grasp. But my charge, my duty—my sacred duty to the public—what of these? To what extent was Lonergan's freedom real?

That it had been secured with the consent of Mme. Yburg, the chief chemist, I found myself unable to doubt. But was she merely humouring Marusa? Was Lonergan actually under close surveillance —a mouse on a wheel?

Above all, where *was* he? I had left him with Herr Richter. He had not rejoined me.... I looked at the little gold disk, resembling a very flat dress watch, which Marusa had left with me. I recalled her parting words....

Excepting Marusa, I could trust no one, believe no one, in Felsenweir!

All was mirage—illusion—unreality!

I dropped into an armchair and sank my head. Lives hung in the balance—mine, Lonergan's, Max's. Further, the world, or a great part of it, was threatened by a more colossal criminal than society had formerly visualized.

Yet my heart sang!

But my brain spoke urgently; raising queries—doubts—rebukes.

Where was Lonergan? To what extent could I count upon him?

Gaston Max lay in a crystal coffin. Myself, where did I stand?

"My God!"

I sprang up, fists clenched. They were buying me—*buying* me! I, Brian Woodville, was compromising with my conscience! I had a commission to execute. This, frankly, I had forgotten! But, vastly more important, I had a duty to the world. This—I despised myself—I had been prepared to forget! For what? For a woman... meaning, for my own selfish gratification!

Truly, the atmosphere of Felsenweir was unhealthy! It had already sapped that pride of race which makes a man cling to a higher and cleaner doctrine.

With my soul in torment, I paced up and down that narrow room. I wrestled with my lower nature. And, thank heaven! I can say it with a clean conscience—I conquered.

Facing facts, I realized I was helpless.

It was at the moment that this recognition forced me down again, so that I sat, head clutched in hands, that I heard the whine of an approaching elevator.

I stood up, watching….

The panel opened.

Dr. Nestor stepped out!

The panel reclosed behind him.

Dr. Nestor bowed.

"I have been unduly nervous," he declared. "My art is greater than my courage."

I clenched my hands—unclenched them; then:

"Max!" I whispered—"*Max!*"

"Quick!" His manner was urgent. "Bring me up to date. We are, I believe, unobserved. Anubis is sleeping. You understand?"

"I *know*."

"Ah! You *know*? Better still."

He threw his arms about my shoulders and hugged me in Gallic fashion.

"Be brief," he implored. "Condense your story. I, also, have much to tell. We both have much to *do*."

Conquering my amazement, I told him what I had to tell, nor did I withhold one single fact. No sound disturbed my story. We were not interrupted. But, at its conclusion:

"I am in a flat spin!" Gaston Max declared. "When I have explained, you will understand. Then it must be up to the two of us to determine upon some move. Because, my friend—— Well… you shall judge! I will tell you what happened."…

CHAPTER XXI.

GASTON MAX EXPLAINS

1

It was fast work, my friend, and faster thinking. But I take no credit. God has been good to me. The moment I lost sight of you, out there upon the road, an irresistible force seized me. My face was covered by what seemed to be a giant hand—the hand of an ogre.... I was lifted, I stifled, I kicked, struggled.

I could not cry out—a complete blank came.

My final thought said to me that I had met my Waterloo. This was the end which must come to every career. At last I had encountered that super-criminal who always has haunted my dreams.

When I fought my way back to life, I found myself seated upon a square wooden chair in a big laboratory. Facing me upon another such chair, his legs tucked up beneath him and his hands resting on his knees, was the dwarf who calls himself Anubis.

You know this one? Then there is no need, my friend, to describe those impressions the extraordinary creature made upon my mind. You have experienced the same. I have nothing to add.

There was no one else in this laboratory.

"You imagine," said the dwarf—whilst I remained stupefied by my new environment—"that by a sudden exercise of your agility you could perhaps succeed in strangling me? Dismiss, M. Max, this possibility. Your blow could never reach my chin, your hands never clutch my throat."

And as he spoke I knew that it was so.

I glanced about me, noting many unknown implements, realizing that I was in the stronghold of Felsenweir, in the headquarters of the most formidable criminal with whom my profession so far had brought me in contact. This dwarf, with his great head and tiger eyes,

was, then, a genius? His operations were world-wide. Physical violence became out of the question. Only a child could have attempted it. He was right. I bowed.

"I agree with you entirely, monsieur," I said. "You appear to be familiar with my name and so you have an advantage over me."

"I am known," the dwarf replied, "for purposes of my own, as Anubis. This is sufficient for a brotherhood numbering many thousands: it must be sufficient for you, M. Max."

He proceeded to talk to me as one intelligent man talks to another. His statements would have seemed monstrous—the babblings of a lunatic—to one who had not held my information. But when he spoke of the sound wave which can destroy, and instanced the tragedy in the Pyrenees, I realized that the powers to which he laid claim he truly controlled.

Perhaps, Woodville, you have forgotten the details of that tragedy in the tragedies which have befallen ourselves? No matter. Recollection will come as I tell you what Anubis told me.

You may recall that the only survivors of the mysterious electrical storm which destroyed the inhabitants of that little township were a very old cow in an ancient stone byre, three deaf-mutes, an aged man who lived in a cellar, a woman in childbirth, and her child?

These mysteries Anubis explained to me. And it was his explanation which restored my courage. You do not understand, perhaps? It was that I recognized how even that giant brain had its limitations! In short, my friend, there were things he could not explain—powers over which he had not yet obtained control!

To make my meaning more clear: The ancient byre and the walls of that old cellar—so Anubis had learned—both were constructed of a form of gneiss to-day unobtainable for building purposes; in short, from extinct quarries and of a character no longer employed. This stone, he had realized, was a non-conductor of his wave!

The three deaf men call for no explanation. The wave operates through the eardrum. Absence of an eardrum renders one immune. The woman in childbirth and the newly born infant, Anubis was unable to account for.

"This is a law, M. Max," he said, "which so far I have failed to grasp, although otherwise the result of my experiment in the Pyrenees—conducted from this laboratory—has enriched my knowledge immeasurably. I can only conclude that that urgent lust of reproduction, to which I have opposed myself in its immediate manifestation, is stronger than my science. In short, plan how I may, the world, after that day which I have fixed for its depopulation, must contain a number of females unaccounted for in my records and at least an equal number of newly arrived young. I include—since I suppose it is unavoidable—the lower animal world. With these intruders I shall prepare to deal as later circumstances may indicate."

One moment of triumph I knew! The Voice operated—outside Felsenweir—through a delicate mechanism which could be contained, imperceptibly, in a watch! This he told me.

"You may suppose, M. Max," said he, "that with all our precautions and our influential friends, we are vulnerable from one point? In the event of open warfare, you imagine that aircraft could destroy us?... You are wrong!"

Can you conceive it, Woodville! Bombs dropped on Felsenweir would explode *a mile above the castle*! Planes flying lower would be lost. Their pilots would reach the sound zones!

It was a question of mine—yes, we were on a footing most amicable—respecting Mme. Yburg which brought up this point....

There is what Anubis terms an "energy wave." This wave it is which renders air bombing ineffective. It is sent out at a sympathetic elevation of one mile above ground level. The "bats"—those bats, my friend, which turned our hearts cold—are *flying suits*! They function on this wave. They carry a simple steering gear and one of those mechanisms which we know, whereby the Voice—or some controlling officer—can keep in touch with the flyer.

The purpose of Mme. Yburg's visit to America was to learn if these energy waves functioned in the atmosphere of that continent. Her experiments, conducted from Hartford, Connecticut, proved that beyond cutting in on radio, the waves were powerless. A scientific mystery....

There is capital, Woodville, colossal, criminal capital, behind this monster! And he is the greatest evil genius the good God has ever allowed upon earth. Like Satan before him, he disputes the powers of Heaven....

"Energy has a limited range," he said to me. "One station is insufficient. Unlike *sound*. Sound can be transmitted from this laboratory all round the world. *And sound can kill*...."

He showed me—he *showed* me, my friend!... From the spot he calls "the control tower," those death waves may be sent in uniting circles! There is a great model of the terrestrial globe... Anubis can cover all its surface with his waves of sound. He can focus them—or deflect them. It is for him a matter of choice only. Where he wishes to spare—he spares!

Do you understand? What have you reasoned out? In only one respect is this Anubis vulnerable.... Artillery, I think, could destroy the control tower!

This monster was then so good as to give me particulars of his system of automatic hypnosis. Lonergan, he informed me, knew it well! You see how much I have learned?

It was through the *ear* that the sound wave struck—through the *eye* that mental paralysis came!

I saw that I had two hopes. First, this small piece of knowledge; second, the vanity of Anubis! You follow me? Like all scientists, of whom he is undoubtedly the greatest, he counts any type of brain, other than the purely scientific, as negligible!

Presently, in response to some signal which I failed to detect, a third person entered the laboratory.

Astounded, I stared at him. We were introduced, the new arrival and I. His name was Nestor and his nationality Graeco-American. He wore a black moustache. In one glance I had realized that, deprived of this moustache, M. Nestor and myself might have passed for twin brothers!

He was, I learned, the second chemist. We exchanged some amiable conversation, which later was to be profitable—to *me*. He withdrew, this unhappy one, when his part was played. Some secrets of that

great laboratory he had explained... and I had realized that the dwarf —conscious of his deformity—remained always seated. *Bien*....

Two damsels entered. Name of a name! What exquisite perfection! One was of that yellow of old ivory, a perfectly moulded Chinese maiden; the other a red-brown daughter of the Sioux, with black, tragic eyes. They brought light refreshments.

Instantly, I scented danger! I have studied murder, ancient and modern, my friend. People have died in Paris this very year simply because they ate an apple! Poisoned peaches were used by the Borgias.... Childish, these doubts, as I was soon to learn; but excusable, I think?

As those beautifuls placed a tray of refreshment between Anubis and myself, I determined upon direct action.

"Since I cannot believe, M. Anubis," I said, "that your great intelligence could stoop to so common a device as that of drugging me, I shall be honoured to take wine with you."

The effect of this speech was electrical. Anubis forced himself upright in the chair, pressing tiny skeleton hands upon those slender knees. He spoke gutturally: the handmaidens disappeared. The glare of his eyes was dreadful to sustain. His white anger, which I had so deliberately provoked, was more horrible than I could have anticipated.

"You insult me, Gaston Max!" he said.

I could have stung him again, but I decided that now I must endeavour to pacify this distorted, formidable creature; therefore:

"I have no reason to trust your hospitality," I explained, "since I am at this moment your unwilling guest.... Where then is the insult?"

He continued to glare at me in a manner which I cannot describe. There was a fire behind those wild-animal eyes. But, as I watched him, and it was a monstrous effort, slowly he sank back again to his former pose.

"I am not angry," he replied, "because you distrust me! I had looked upon you as a clever man. If I had thought you to be a fool, you would not be here now. But if you will consider your position it must become apparent, I think, that secret drugging is quite unnecessary. Whatever

I may desire of you—your life or your death—I could accomplish by a movement of the hand. You forget that you are utterly at my mercy. You forget your American friend Mr. John Lonergan, whom I did not find it necessary to *drug*...."

His emphasis on the last word started a fresh line of reflection in my brain. And, watching him, I began to think hard.

2

I drank wine with Anubis.

He was good enough to explain that in my own province he regarded me as unique. He thought there might be work for my type of intelligence in that New World which he planned to erect upon the ashes of the Old. He assured me that you, my friend, had appreciated his aims and had decided to join the crew of this Ark which alone was destined to survive the catastrophe.

The dimensions of this catastrophe I was at first unable to accept. But shall I say that Anubis convinced me completely?

I realized there might be flaws in his monstrous project. But also I realized that he intended to loose upon the world a blast of sound, a thing invisible, above the conception of any other living scientist, which—I remembered the Pyrenees—could not fail to mean death to thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions perhaps!

It was then that he definitely invited me to join the brotherhood.

I hesitated, watching him; whereupon:

"Explanation," he said, and his voice was very soft, "is never so convincing as demonstration."

M. Nestor returned, carrying a small ebony box. This he placed upon the table between Anubis and myself, and withdrew.

When we were alone together:

"I shall ask you, Gaston Max," said my truly appalling host, "to open this box for me. Be good enough to raise the lid."

I am trained to quick action. It is only because of my power to act quickly that I am alive to-day. Now, I thought swiftly. If he meant to attack me through my ears, I was helpless—I must die! If through my

eyes—the automatic hypnosis—I might act, I might malinger!

Standing up, I bowed to Anubis... and in the act of bowing I opened the lid of the box—at the same time closing my eyes!

That a bright light shone out I could detect even through lowered lids. It scorched me. I stood motionless. I opened my eyes. I looked down fixedly at the legs of the table on which this box was set.

A blue light shone up from it so that it must have touched the crown of my head....

"You will note, Gaston Max," said Anubis, "that your brain is now powerless to control your body. As you stand, so you would remain until death came and you fell forward—unless I willed otherwise."

It was my cue! I remained as I found myself.

"This is the fate which befell your American friend. It has now befallen you. I must approach your conversion, Gaston Max, from a new and a different angle. Stand upright!"

I stood straight up.

"Your body is now dead," Anubis continued; "only your brain lives. You are rigid as the dead are rigid."

It was sufficient! I knew I must remain stiff as a mummy. Again the Greek gentleman who was so strangely like my brother entered that laboratory. There was a short conversation in what I suppose was modern Greek—it sounded like it, but I am unfamiliar with the language.

I stood motionless, staring straight before me. As M. Nestor went out, Anubis, I realized, was watching me. There was an interval—a dreadful interval. M. Nestor returned with another man, carrying a stretcher! This I divined, for I could not glance aside or downward—only straight before me. I never blinked. I congratulate myself on one of the supreme achievements of my career.

A few words were spoken by Anubis. My clothes were stripped from my rigid body, Nestor using surgical scissors to cut the garments. I was laid upon the stretcher.

"Gaston Max," said Anubis, "fold your arms upon your breast."

I obeyed mechanically. A word of command was added in Greek and I was carried from the laboratory!...

Staring up at the ceiling with eyes which I tried to make appear sightless, I was brought to a smaller room on the same floor. I was lifted into a sort of crystal shell! A crystal lid was placed over me, and clamped down!

This coffin of a living death was raised upright. It rested upon a sort of trolley with rubber-tired wheels. I was pushed out into some place of darkness....

For the first time I closed my weary eyes and relaxed my tired muscles. There was air in this crystal coffin. It was possible to breathe. But every minute seemed like an hour, and the hours interminable. How long I lay there, *mon Dieu!* I cannot even guess. But suddenly—so suddenly that I had barely time to stare before me and become rigid again—I felt myself moving upward! I was in some kind of lift! The movement ceased. Curtains were parted before my glass tomb, and I saw a strange, dimly lighted room....

You were in it, Woodville, seated on a low stool! Before you, on a platform, was Anubis. Two beautiful creatures, one of ebony and one of ivory, moved dimly within my plane of vision.

Vaguely, because of the glass box which surrounded me, I heard Anubis speak to you.... The curtains were reclosed. I was in darkness again.... I was returned to that small apartment adjoining the laboratory and my sarcophagus was lowered to the floor.

There was a dim light in this room. By his shadow, I traced the one who had moved me. I saw him go.

Then I ventured to relax, and to think—to think—to think! Plans I could make none, for I had no idea what would happen next. My greatest chance lay in a surprise attack. If such an opportunity presented itself, on me, I reflected, must rest the fate of the world!

I heard vague sounds—once, the voice of Anubis. That peculiar whining noise, too, which is made by the elevators. But no one entered the room. It was an ordeal which I cannot describe, which, honestly, my friend, I do not think I could survive a second time. Hours passed—many, many hours! If it were day or night, I could not know. It seemed to me that it did not matter.

Then, suddenly, I saw a moving shadow!

I became rigid. I stared straightly upward.

Mme. Yburg stood watching me!

Except that she wore some white garment, I could not, dared not, learn more. She began to speak.

"Well, my brilliant friend," she said, "is it clear to you what occurred at Bagnères-dès-Barèges? You come at a critical moment—for at dawn to-morrow it occurs to all the world!"

I began to wonder. Had she detected my trickery? How far could I trust her?

"Short of joining us, there is only death." She mused on. "How strange! If it were otherwise I would help you.... *Stare*, my friend—and *accept*...."

She knew! She fell silent.

M. Nestor entered.

"Ah! Good-evening, my dear Chief!" he exclaimed. He spoke in German. "This pleasure was unforeseen. I expected Richter."

"Herr Richter is with Anubis," Mme. Yburg replied—so coldly. "I am standing by until he is free. Your watch ends, Dr. Nestor, when you have given the patient his first shot. Good-night."

I saw, from her shadow, that she was going; then:

"May I hope," said he, "when the anxieties of to-morrow are ended, that you will think over——"

Mme. Yburg laughed.

"You are very persistent!" she replied... and went out.

It was clear. M. Nestor found encouragement. He hummed a song—a popular dance melody. Yes, he was happy. It was sad. At all costs I must avoid the "first shot"!

Quickly, and in a workmanlike manner, M. Nestor removed the lid of my glass sarcophagus. He raised it upright. He rested it against some place which I could not see, since I did not dare to move my eyes. An itching, a tear, a sneeze—any of these must betray me—ruin me!

He came presently into view, his back turned in my direction. He wore dinner kit. I looked at him. He was charging a hypodermic syringe!...

I acted.

Silent, in my nakedness, and in spite of my cramped muscles, I rose from that glass coffin and hurled myself upon M. Nestor! We of the French police are trained in jiu-jitsu. (So also is Mr. Lonergan!) I threw the unsuspecting Greek without difficulty....

Let me make my meaning clear; for that which followed was horrible. I had secured a stranglehold—you understand? It was necessary that he should be not only helpless, but *silent*. Apparently he did not understand the nature of these circumstances. And—how shall I express this thing?

My friend... the unhappy M. Nestor *strangled himself!*

Realizing what had occurred, I looked down at him... I listened. All was silent! I crossed to the table at which he had been charging a syringe. This syringe lay upon the floor. On the table were surgical implements, including those very scissors which he had employed to cut my garments from my body.

I used them for another purpose. I cut off his black moustache! Much stubble was left—keen though the blades were. Myself, I was now unshaven for many hours and the difference between us was not great.

His garments I removed while yet it was possible to stir his limbs. I shudder when I think of it!

The dinner suit fitted me badly, but well enough. I broke one of the studs in removing his shirt—although this shirt was unstarched and of an impossible pattern. No one disturbed me. Only my own movements broke the silence. I wondered... but went on. I placed him in the coffin from which I had escaped and returned the lid, crossing his stiffening arms upon his breast, as mine had been crossed. One hand concealed the identification disk he wore. I ruffled his hair.

Yes, it was ghastly! But it was *his* life, or the life of *millions*!

Roughly I arranged my own hair in the manner which he had affected. There was a washbowl on one side of this small room and a mirror above it. The moustache, you understand, was tiny, like that worn by M. Charles Chaplin. I had cut a lock from the head of the dead man. I laid it on the bowl and in despair plunged my hands into the pockets of his dinner jacket....

This gesture saved me! What do you think I found? *Chewing gum!*

It was enough! My moustache was attached. I trimmed it with the surgical scissors.

I had become M. Nestor… except that I did not talk Greek!

CHAPTER XXII.

MAX'S EXPLANATION CONCLUDED

1

In the pockets of this unhappy's garments, I found several significant things. In order of interest they were:

A very neat and unusual folding headpiece, having tiny caps to fit the ears. (The purpose of this was apparent.) A case of good cigars—quite full. In the case a photograph of Mme. Yburg. A visiting card of one Dr. Schreiber, upon it pencilled: "9:30 Regal garden." And, as I have already stated, a packet of chewing gum.

In a little lobby I discovered a light overcoat and soft gray hat, also a gold-mounted malacca cane. Upon a side table lay a pair of gloves.

It is at such moments, my friend, that one calls upon one's experience. I had no clue to the hour. But it was safe to assume that, as M. Nestor had worn evening dress, it was night. Nevertheless, the appointment with Dr. Schreiber might not be for *this* night.

I was in a quandary—and for more reasons than one. The poor Nestor's spectacles not only fitted me badly but contained such powerful lenses that, wearing them, I saw everything through a fog! Supreme problem: how did I get out of the laboratory—and what was M. Nestor's behaviour in departing?

The anteroom, as well as the room containing my glass coffin, was dimly lighted. This, by heaven, was fortunate!

As I stood before the little mirror, endeavouring to adjust those spectacles, I heard footsteps! I turned.

A stout man, a German, in white overalls—and who also wore spectacles—was approaching. He was blond, half blind, and good-humoured....

He smiled.

"Forgive me, Doctor," he said, speaking in English, "if I have detained you. But you know how particular *he* is at his rest hours. He insisted upon a last word with the English journalist before retiring. Then, 'Herr Richter,' he said, 'it is death for anyone to wake me before midnight.' Thank God, he is asleep now! The Chief stood by. She is a darling. I know you agree with me?"

Swiftly, I became M. Nestor. This was leg pulling! Silence was indicated.

Herr Richter glanced at the crystal coffin.

"Another injection at midnight—is it so?" he asked.

I nodded. I recalled perfectly the speech of M. Nestor, and:

"Sure," I replied—"right arm. Don't move him."

Herr Richter nodded comprehendingly.

"A and B Zones are down," he said, turning away. "You will require your crown."

I understood. "Crown" was their name for the headpiece!

At what point of the journey was it usual to attach one's "crown"? More urgent—in which direction should I proceed? This Richter was half blind, but I might meet others who could see too well.... Name of a good little man, it was nervous work!

"Elevator waiting!" the German called over his shoulder as he passed from the room.

I followed him.

At the farther end of the great laboratory, I saw a gap in the wall—the car of an elevator! My unsuspecting confrère was bending over a table on which were a number of books and papers. I hoped he would not ask me to explain anything; I hoped I should not meet Mme. Yburg. As I passed Richter and had nearly reached the elevator:

"Doctor!" he called.

I paused—afraid to look back!

"Well?" I spoke over my shoulder.

"Crown!" he said. "Always put it on before you leave, Doctor, when the zones are down. You know what happened last week!"

Relief drew a great sigh from me.

"Sure!" I replied. "Thanks. Good-night!"

I stepped into the lift. Immediately, it descended. It stopped. I saw before me a great hall supported by square pillars and having in the middle a monstrous statue. In a corner, beside an open doorway, stood a giant figure, black-armoured, a mace upon its shoulder!

No other opening was visible. My heart in my mouth, I advanced in the direction of this one....

I was some ten paces off, when the figure in mail lowered his mace to the floor with a crash! I nearly choked. But he remained motionless. I continued to advance. I passed through the doorway, glancing back as I did so. The man at arms had replaced his mace upon his shoulder.

It was a salute!

Now I found myself upon a winding stair of ancient stonework. Above, it was in shadow; below, illuminated with what seemed to be bright moonlight. But there were no windows! I descended.

Presently I reached a great iron gate. Everything was silent—deathly silent! Here at this gate stood another of the gigantic black figures—dreadful to contemplate in that artificial moonlight. I was six steps above the gate; but the figure reached out a mailed black arm and opened it. I passed through and continued to descend. The gate closed with a clang behind me.

Down I went, at last reaching a low, arched doorway. I stepped through, and found myself... where do you think?

Clearly, in the ancient guard room of the castle! It retained many of its original features. But new and strange ones had been added. Behind a table near the great open fireplace, a table which contained a number of extraordinary-looking switchboards and other paraphernalia, a man was seated.

This room, alas! was more brightly lighted—as I had observed from the stairs. I now wore the headpiece and carried the hat, coat, and cane of M. Nestor.

The man at the table, an ascetic-looking creature who might have been a monk except that he wore quite ordinary and shabby clothes, stared at me hard with light blue eyes. He was, I think, a Swede. I did not care for his appearance, until:

“I am glad to see, Doctor,” he said, speaking in English, but now his Swedish accent was unmistakable, “that your experience of last week has taught you wisdom.”

He tapped his ear.

I nodded. That stare had been harmless. He had merely wished to learn if I wore the protective “crown”! Evidently M. Nestor was notoriously absent-minded.

So far, very good.

The Swede took up a bunch of keys, crossed, and opened a heavily iron-studded door—part, one could see at a glance, of the old fortress. He stood aside as I went through, and:

“If you return by road,” he advised, “use the zone path after midnight. But go out by the main gate. The Watch will open. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” I replied.

I walked out to find myself in an ancient courtyard.

Before me, at the foot of a declivity, were twin towers joined by a gateway above which projected the teeth of a portcullis. The night was perfect. I proceeded.

Clear of the castle and before trees obtruded, I turned, looking back. My friend, Felsenweir from that point presents a wonderful spectacle in the moonlight! Its silhouette against the sky took me back into the Middle Ages. From that point of view, nothing seemed to have changed.

This road upon which I found myself presently plunged into a perfect tunnel of pines. I pulled up, unable to proceed. Moonlight failed to penetrate; and I wondered why the lamented M. Nestor carried no torch.

Then my stupidity became apparent.

Some heavy object contained in the pocket of that light overcoat I carried, and which had been bumping against my leg, proved to be just the torch which I required!

I continued my journey.

It was a longer journey than I had anticipated. But at last it brought me to the foot of the slope. Ahead, I saw an iron gate. As I moved the ray of the torch right to left, presently it rested upon another of those gigantic black figures....

I doubted. I wondered.... Name of a little dog! Since I had left, *everything* might have been discovered!

This one's orders were perhaps to dash out my brains with that great mace which he carried! My torchlight touched his figure.... He lowered the mace, reached out one black arm—and opened a wicket gate!

Teeth very tightly clenched, I passed through to the road. I was in sight of the spot where I had been captured! The gate was closed behind me. I switched off my torch.

A smart two-seater stood by the roadside, no lights showing. I opened the door, removed the headpiece, threw in coat and cane, put up the lamps, and lighted one of M. Nestor's cigars....

This was an exercise; but exercises are useful at times, Woodville. The road I knew well. I seated myself at the wheel and drove off. No one checked me! I left the castle of Felsenweir unchallenged. Your fate, my friend, and the fate of many millions, I held in my hands.

Upon me rested the mighty task of saving the world!

2

My first problem was where I should park the car. I had now no key to my private garage. I sank myself into the personality of Nestor, the chemist. I determined that he would park his car north of the church, behind the Regal.

This guess was good, for the man there seemed to know me. He hailed me as "Herr Doktor." Some trifling formalities being completed, I now faced the greater problem. The time, I learned, was nine o'clock, and I was uncertain of myself, you understand—particularly of my moustache! Nevertheless, since no dressing room was available, I entered the Regal.

The hall porter and the clerk on duty both greeted me as "Herr Doktor"! *Bien*.

"I wish to see M. Gaston Max," I said. "Can you tell me if he is in?"

"Why! he left three days ago," the clerk exclaimed.

"What!" I cried.

And truly I was astounded. *Three days* had elapsed since we had been kidnapped on the road below Felsenweir!

"He left hurriedly with his friend Mr. Woodville," the clerk went on to say. "Someone from Cook's came, settled their accounts, and collected their baggage. Unfortunately, I have no address, Herr Doktor. These French people are nearly as mad as the English!"

How thorough were the methods of our enemies! "Someone from Cook's." No loose end had been left! But I wondered what had become of my car! To use the name of the great Cook was audacious, and, I thought, significant. Things must be coming to a head or so great a risk would never have been taken.

I left the Regal and hurried to a quiet café. Desperately, I needed nourishment. I devoured sandwiches and drank beer. Certainly the Germans can brew beer!

Then I called at the headquarters of police and made myself known.

It was a sensation! It covers me with embarrassment this, but it is a fact—my name was famous even in Baden-Baden! The German authorities, little as I have cause to love them, are efficient!

I left that office certain that all I had suggested would be carried out; that Paris, London, Washington, and Berlin from now onward would be actively behind me. I hurried back to the Regal. It might be that my appointment was for to-night; that in Dr. Schreiber I should find a link with Felsenweir which should enable me to get in touch with those I had left behind, and to return as an advance guard of reinforcements to the post I had deserted—or so I felt....

Along that path beside the little singing stream I walked. Your room, Woodville, was dark—no one else had occupied it. Moonlight aided me. Since I could not recognize Dr. Schreiber, I could only trust that he would recognize *me*. And, sure enough, presently a portly figure rose from a chair.

“Dr. Nestor!” I heard.

I paused. I was unaware of the exact intimacy which existed between us. I must be tactful; and so:

“Surely Dr. Schreiber!” I replied.

“My dear Dr. Nestor!” He grasped my hand. “It is a long time since we have met!” (I was glad of this.) “But it appears to me that you have not changed in the slightest.”

Always, I discovered, this Dr. Nestor was addressed in English. It was fortunate, since I have a good knowledge of the language. If I had been compelled to speak in German I might have betrayed myself. In Greek, I should have been lost!

“I return the compliment with pleasure!” I said. “Perhaps we have time to celebrate our meeting?”

“Why,” the doctor replied, “I think we might venture so far.”

“The Regal?”

“No, no! It is too public. I mean, one is noticed in hotels. Let us walk along to the Kurhaus and sit at a quiet table.”

We did as he suggested. And the table selected was not only quiet but in deep shadow. There we talked.

He was, or so it appeared, this worthy Dr. Schreiber, a high official of the brotherhood from the United States. Much of his conversation was unintelligible to me, although I contrived to pretend otherwise. But some of it was illuminating! The affiliated brethren on that continent, I gathered, had been broken up by the authorities. This had been a great disappointment, but it did not disturb their ultimate plans.

“I was told,” Dr. Schreiber continued, “that you would introduce me this evening, before visiting headquarters, to my British colleague, Sir Rathbone Edwardes, to Kluen Yung, of Hankow, and last but not least to that very remarkable man, Professor Dimes, of Melbourne. Where are we to meet them?”

You can imagine, my friend, the state of mind to which this remark reduced me! What I had learned was useless.

That there was a Kluen Yung, a Sir Rathbone Edwardes, and a Professor Dimes associated in this gigantic conspiracy would have been priceless information, if only I could have imparted it to the prefect of police! Now, it was too late!

I realized that I was getting out of my depth! But my experience with "Mr. King" of London, with "Diamond Ned" of New York, and at least one other super-criminal with whom I had come in contact, in this crisis served me well. "By the beard of the Prophet!" I exclaimed to myself—"now it is *wit*, for you have no data to act upon!"

"The Master has not advised you of the change of plan?" I asked.

"No!"

"We are meeting these gentlemen at Felsenweir. There is a certain urgency, you understand? Therefore we do not remain unduly long in Baden."

Dr. Schreiber nodded.

"I understand," he replied. "The hour draws near. And perhaps, as happened in America, interference threatens?"

"Serious interference," I assured him. "John Lonergan of the United States Secret Service is here, in Baden."

It is a compliment to Lonergan: Dr. Schreiber was staggered.

"What!" he exclaimed—"*Lonergan!* Then most certainly there is urgency!"

"I agree," said I. "There is a famous English journalist here also, hot upon the scent, and worse, an agent of the Sûreté Générale!"

"Which agent?" Dr. Schreiber demanded.

"Gaston Max!"

"*The* Gaston Max?"

"There is only one Gaston Max," I assured him.

He leaned across the table and pressed my arm.

"More and more I understand!" he declared. "What then are our orders?"

Again I found myself at a deadlock!

I must return. So much was evident. In the short time at my disposal I had done all that lay in my power. Now, my place was beside you. I must return! I must return!

But once I had done so, what were our chances?

Even now, the substitution might have been discovered! Certainly, it must be discovered within a very few minutes of my reëntering Felsenweir. The action I had requested of the German police authorities—no! name of a good little man! had *demanded* of them—could result in what?...

Felsenweir was impregnable! Those gallant troops formerly commanded by Foch could never have stormed it! Only by destruction with heavy artillery could access be obtained! Cunning—some treachery of the inhabitants—alone could aid us! Or, if the gun should arrive. This, I will explain later.

And it was then, my dear Woodville, that I thought of *you*!

Forgive me if I am obscure! This grotesque creature Anubis had said to me: "Your friend Woodville will join us. Because he is interested in the little Marusa and I will give her to him!"

How slender a thread! How hollow a hope! Yet I must hope for something. And above all, at the moment, I had to reply to Dr. Schreiber's inquiry.

"It would be best," I said, "if we returned immediately by road. My car is waiting."

"Very good," he agreed. "Let us go."

You can imagine with what feelings I drove back! My chances were a thousand to one. I had no knowledge of the routine—how to demand that the gates should be opened—how to proceed when they *were* opened!

Dr. Schreiber unconsciously aided me. For, as we drew up:

"At last!" he cried, "I am to meet the Master face to face!"

He leaped out upon the road. Rushing to the gates, he beat upon them with clenched fists.

"Anubis!" he cried.

There was an interval.

"Anubis!"

The wicket opened.

I switched off the car lights and followed Dr. Schreiber into Felsenweir....

When, at the end of that tedious climb, as we passed between those twin towers, under the teeth of the portcullis, and I saw light streaming out from Felsenweir's ancient guardroom, I said good-bye to myself.

It was too much to suppose that Herr Richter, or Mme. Yburg, had failed to discover who lay in the crystal coffin! Of Madame I was uncertain. I dared not to believe what I longed to believe.... How far was she to be trusted? Already, perhaps, she had betrayed me! For she *knew* I had tricked Anubis!...

The ascetic Swede was not on duty. The door stood open. A very genial Dutchman greeted us. He welcomed Schreiber with enthusiasm. He was second Watch master, I learned. I kept my hat on —the brim pulled down.

"Your baggage is already in your room, Doctor," he said. "Directly Anubis awakes he will see you. If you will be good enough to follow Yamamata..."

A Japanese manservant had appeared.

Presently, having made certain arrangements for a later meeting with Dr. Schreiber:

"I've got to see the Englishman," I explained. "What room is he in?"

I remembered that M. Nestor was absent-minded. The second Watch master was genial... Is it sufficient? Here I am. And here—name of a good little man!—it appears to me I remain!

Three hopes we have, Woodville: First—Lonergan. Where *is* he? Second—myself. It is not known yet that I have left the crystal coffin! Third—Anubis. He is sleeping!

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANUBIS SLEEPS

1

"With such a dial as you describe in our possession, Woodville, why should we..."

I produced the little apparatus.

"Good God! Let's get out of here!"

"I am all for it! Demonstrate, my friend."

With nervous fingers I moved the indicator until that hieroglyphic resembling an Arab A occupied the open space. There was a moment of tense silence, then:

"Listen!"

The elevator was ascending!

"Quick! We are perhaps going to our death—but what does it matter? If we stay, death is coming to *us*! Show me how I recall the lift... wait for me below."

It was soon done. I saw the panel slide up. I stepped into the car. Silently I said good-bye to the watching Gaston Max.... Below, the great hall was empty—except for one of the Black Watch posted before that door which led to the laboratory and the apartments of Anubis.

I waited. The panel closed behind me—and I heard the lift reascending.

A few moments later, Max joined me.

"We must be greatly daring," he whispered. "I shall become, in voice, M. Nestor."

I nodded.

"Your anxiety is very natural, Mr. Woodville," Max went on (his imitation of the dead man amazed and startled me). "Come right along. I expect your friend Lonergan is with Richter."

Confidently he walked toward the Black Watch! If this elevator automatically stopped at the laboratory, he could know no more than I knew… nor if the giant guard would give us passage…

We were within three paces of this monster when it lowered the mace crashingly, stepped aside and revealed that opening in the wall which I knew!

"Go right ahead, Woodville," Max directed in the voice of Nestor. "Wait for me."

I entered. In darkness I moved up. Light came. I stepped out….

This was the top of the staircase which once I had climbed! The elevator, this time, had brought me *higher*! Below, to the right, lay steps bathed in apparent moonlight; above, was the iron grille and the gaping pit. Before me, unguarded, I saw the opening in the wall and the short passage leading to the laboratory.

I heard the elevator going down.

A silence absolutely complete reigned about me.

I stood still. I listened.

Two—five—ten—fifteen seconds passed…. I heard the elevator ascending. I turned.

Max stepped out.

"Come this way, sir," he directed, and walked along the corridor. "We'll soon find Mr. Lonergan."

Holding myself strictly in hand, I followed. I entered the laboratory. Across a maze of apparatus I saw the third chemist, Herr Richter. He was bending over that circular table which enabled the creatures of Felsenweir to watch the surrounding roads. He looked up.

"Hullo, Doctor! You are back early. Where are Sir Rathbone, Professor Dimes, and…"

"Following. I brought home-news for our friend, here, and for Mr. Lonergan, too. Where is he?"

"I don't know," Herr Richter answered. "But I am glad you returned. I saw you arrive. Come and look. The roads below are curiously busy! I have put down Zone 3."

Max turned to me.

"Be very careful," he advised. "But I've warned you before. Follow me closely."

We bent over that wonderful panorama.

I suppressed an exclamation.

The roads surrounding Felsenweir were animate with tiny figures!

"What do you make of it?"

Max considered the picture, then:

"Trouble!" he announced laconically.

Mentally, I sat at the feet of this master of his art; who, aided only by dim lighting and a self-possession unparalleled in my experience, carried out his monstrous illusion with the audacity of a Houdini.

"To wake Anubis before midnight," Herr Richter went on, "would be fatal. He has not slept for over eighty hours. Dawn comes early. And we can laugh, after dawn!"

Max stood upright and spoke—but kept his back to Richter.

"Listen. I'll take charge."

"Excellent, Doctor! I am greatly obliged. I, also, am overtired, as you know."

"Go and sleep. I'll have you called ten minutes before twelve."

"You take a great responsibility—*to-night*."

"I'm taking it! We need to be fresh. All set?"

"Only too glad! I am dreadfully sleepy. Zone 3 is down, and you know that the control tower is cut off? Don't move anything. Anubis is sleeping there. He will remain now at Central Control until *the moment*.... The injection at midnight also you should remember...."

"The Frenchman?"

"Yes."

"Good-night."

"Good-night, Doctor."

Gaston Max peered down again at those busy roads mirrored minutely upon opaque glass. Richter, silent in rubber soles, went away.

"They are acting," he murmured. "After all, these Germans are efficient! We are surrounded, my friend! Witness, before you, the authority of my Sûreté Générale even in Germany! One thing only I doubt. Troops are bringing up a Krupp gun, resembling our own .75. Can they possibly get it placed upon the Devil's Elbow *in time*?"

"What!"

"The *control tower*, Woodville! A perfect target… and the brain of Felsenweir!"

2

In a small room adjoining the laboratory I looked down upon Dr. Nestor in his crystal coffin. The thing lay in partial shadow, so that only the dead man's face was lighted.

So startling was his resemblance—*sans* moustache and with his dark hair rearranged—to Gaston Max, that I gasped, and stared.

"Fate," said my companion, drawing on white overalls over his dinner kit. "Nearly, the poor M. Nestor was my double. This, my friend, is 'as it was written.' So Moslems say. They are very wise. It is not meant that the world should end yet." Suddenly, he resumed the voice of the dead man; and: "No, sir!" he added.

I dragged my gaze away from that ghastly thing.

"One point worries me. Where is Lonergan?"

"Mr. Lonergan is a clever man. Wherever he is, he is somewhere useful. Another point worries *me*! This point is: Since the Brotherhood of Anubis runs to timetable, what will happen when Sir Rathbone Edwardes, Professor Dimes, and Kluen Yung of Hankow realize that M. Nestor has missed his appointment?"

"They will come direct to Felsenweir."

"I agree. But before they arrive, my friend, *we must be gone!*"

"How?"

Gaston Max, so ghastly a double of the dead man that I shuddered as I watched him, shrugged his shoulders in a way that was not that of the late Dr. Nestor.

"This," he confessed, "is a small matter I have so far found myself unable to clear up!"

"Even if the gun is got there in time——" I cried.

"*Ssh!*"

I lowered my voice.

"*We* shall——"

"We shall have saved millions of lives," Max interrupted simply. "For *me*, such an end would be sublime!"

3

Two problems held my mind: (a) Lonergan had joined Marusa in some plan. What? (b) Where were they?

Max, before the small mirror, was adjusting his simple but surprisingly effective make-up. He was now clad in white overalls. The illusion was complete—hideous. A dead man lived again.

At risk of that mysterious espionage which we knew to be a feature of Felsenweir, we talked—but in tones low-pitched.

And at what point of our conversation a newcomer entered the room I cannot say.

Some slight sound brought me sharply about.

Marusa was standing in the doorway!

I ran to her.

She was dressed as I had last seen her. But, now, her face looked unnaturally pale. As I put my arms around her:

"What is this?" I heard from Max.

"You are mad!" Marusa whispered to me... but, though it meant destruction, I think she was glad of this madness of mine.

She drew back, and faced the speaker.

"I want a word with Mr. Woodville," she said composedly. "Please excuse us, Dr. Nestor."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Max slapped his thigh in the high ecstasy of an artist. "I am, then, perfect!"

Marusa stared at him—and I saw fear growing in her eyes. With that automatic gallantry of his race, he threw Nestor's light overcoat, which he had been carrying hitherto, across the shadowed crystal coffin, and stepped swiftly forward so that the girl never had a chance to see that horrible white face.

"Who are you? *You are not Dr. Nestor!*"

She clung to me.

"It is a friend," I said in a low voice—"Gaston Max... Marusa Yburg."

Max bowed.

"I have enjoyed the honour of admiring Mademoiselle," he said, "but never until now that of speaking to her."

There was an electrical moment, then:

"But Dr. Nestor——" Marusa began.

"Has gone away, dear Mlle. Yburg. I am impersonating him. It is only business. Until I met you I had succeeded!"

Marusa stared as if entranced.

"You are very wonderful," she declared.

Gaston Max seized and kissed her hand.

"You are truly adorable," he replied. "Quick! Where is Lonergan? What do we do?"

"We join him quickly."

Marusa bit her lip—and I realized that she was dangerously tensed up.

"Where?"

"Follow me. It's hell for leather. But we have a chance!"...

And so presently, our going unchallenged, we found ourselves upon an ancient staircase. Down we went, and down. Presently, came a memory. We had reached a point where a narrow flight of steps descended on the left, whilst rather farther ahead a second flight led upward.

The Bat Room! Those ascending steps led to that gloomy place where the flying suits were kept!

"I learned the truth to-night," Marusa exclaimed suddenly—and I realized that what she had to say lay at the root of her suppressed hysteria. "Anubis is a *fiend*! He's going to *destroy the world!*..."

Firmly I grasped her shoulders and held her.

"You are a wonderfully brave little lady," I whispered. "I understand…"

Still holding her, I stopped short in my stride. Max pulled up.

A low, wailing sound had broken the silence of those subterranean passages! I felt Marusa grow tense.

"Someone is flying in!" she murmured. "Oh, please God, he can see it through! Quick! Down here!"

We hurried down those narrow steps on our left. In a small, square, dimly lighted room—obviously an old dungeon—we paused. On the stairs and in the passages we had followed so far an unnatural moonlight had prevailed. This place was lighted differently.

Our hurried entrance, followed by silence, provoked a vague rustling…. I looked about me. The room was lined with glass cases. It was insufferably hot. I saw *eyes* watching me!…

"Spiders!" Max hissed—"Giant spiders!"

"*Ssh!*" Marusa clutched him. "For heaven's sake…"

This was the home of those "noxious creatures" to which I had heard Richter refer. But, swamping the horror of my surroundings and claiming priority of attention, was Marusa's expression—"please God, he can see it through!"

What could she have meant?

I became aware of an indefinable throbbing sensation.

In a tense silence I looked about me. My attention was swiftly arrested.

A man, stripped to trousers and vest, gagged and bound, lay in a shadowy corner!

Then, dimly, came a sound of voices.

Marusa grasped my hand.

One voice asserted itself. The speaker drew nearer—nearer. I heard footsteps—a dim, vaguely familiar *booming*. There was now a definite throbbing in my ears.

"Straight up the steps, Professor. I shall join you in a moment."

Mme. Yburg!

Imagination—or reasoning—told me the truth. She had gone into Baden-Baden to meet three of the visitors. It had been Nestor's job to bring Dr. Schreiber along to the rendezvous! He had failed.... Discovery was a matter of minutes!

... "This way, Sir Rathbone. I must wait for his Chinese Excellency! Straight up the steps...."

At last came silence again. But the throbbing continued.

"Quick! It's now or never!"

Helter-skelter we followed Marusa. Up the moonlighted corridor, left, and up the stair to that place I had mentally docketed as the Bat Room....

Out from the dark pit I had formerly noted, a man was climbing. He was apparently clad in aluminium! His head resembled that of a knight, vizor down. He stepped off the ladder. I shrank back.

"A flight controller is a terrifying object, I know," said Marusa. "But his platform is exposed to the energy waves and the suit is for his protection."

The aluminium man raised his vizor.

It was Lonergan!

"Oh, my God! how thankful I am!" cried Max emotionally. "My dear friend! But—what does it all mean?"

"It means," Lonergan panted, his face wet with perspiration, "that Woodville can't talk Canadian. *I* can. So Marusa here gave me the job. My predecessor's lashed up in the spider cellar."

"But, Lonergan!" I cried. "Even now..."

"Listen! It's easy! A child could operate any of the machines here! And Marusa got the flight controller to explain everything. Then I bashed him on the head. Don't waste time. Explain a flying suit to Max. I'm going back to the controls."

Lowering the vizor, Lonergan turned and slowly climbed down into the pit. Dazedly I saw him disappear—little realizing that he thought he had looked his last upon us; never suspecting that I watched a very gallant gentleman going uncomplainingly to what he believed to be certain death.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DAY

1

MARUSA, obviously, was flight leader. She knew the sailing marks. Max had quickly grasped the principle of those wonderful flying suits with their simple, fool-proof gear. A toss of a coin decided our order. Max followed Marusa—then I—and last, of necessity, Lonergan.

Max turned aside. Marusa threw her arms around me. She was deathly pale.

"My *mother*!" she whispered. "I can't believe it.... Oh, God, I can't believe it!"

Then she raised those beautiful, tearless eyes to me.

"In case there's any hitch"—her conquest of herself was wonderful—"good-bye!"...

I have only the dimmest recollection of her actual departure. I don't recall seeing her step into that strange, self-adjusting suit—there were six of them in the room. But I remember noticing the blue light spring up across the chasm—the sound of deep, unearthly booming as Lonergan turned on the power wave....

Hazily, too, I sometimes get a fleeting picture of a winged thing gliding out and down... then flashing swiftly upward past me.

"She has pluck, that one!" Gaston Max's hand was on my shoulder. "Her poor little life has been turned topsy-turvy."

I couldn't look at him for a moment—nor speak.

"For her, as for us," he went on, "even now there is only the chance of the .75——"

Then, I turned.

He was holding a small apparatus in his hand which resembled a very compact headpiece.

"She threw it down," he added simply, "before she went."

The deep booming continued.

"We are wasting time, Woodville. Good-bye, my friend—until we meet again!"

He moved a lever in the rack below that long beam upon which the bat suits were suspended. The one beneath which he stood dropped and enveloped him... I saw him making the adjustments. The great, hideous thing slowly descended to the stone floor. The wings opened.

I saw the blue light beyond. I saw the spasmodic movement of Max's feet against the steel rail....

Out he swept—and down. Up, at rocket speed, he flashed past me.

That deep roar in the pit continued. Lonergan was keeping the power on for me.

I stepped toward the third suit. I stopped.

Beside the headpiece discarded by Marusa a second headpiece lay!

It was that which Max had found in the pocket of Nestor's coat!...

A magnificent, theatrical gesture, you may say? Truly Gallic and in the best d'Artagnan manner? I agree on all four counts. But it must have been a high honour to have won the friendship of a M. d'Artagnan.

There was a sort of numbness claiming my brain. The unendurable throbbing—which, now, I knew to be produced by colossally powerful plants installed in Felsenweir—added to that subterranean booming, began to daze me.

Automatically, I moved again toward the third "bat."...

Running footsteps sounded on stone stairs!

I hesitated—and was lost.

Mme. Yburg ran in!

2

At sight, and in spite of my frame of mind, I recognized a change in her.

The mantle of ice which she wore had been melted. Her natural pallor was intensified. Her eyes were like jewels in shadow.

As always, she was perfectly gowned, meticulously groomed—but the ghostlike psychic hands twitched nervously, fingers opening and closing. Remembering Marusa as last I had seen her, every line, every contour, every little mannerism spoke to me intimately. My heart went out to this distracted woman.

"Tell me, quickly... has Marusa gone?"

"Yes."

Her hands became clenched so tightly that I knew the long, pointed nails must be buried in her palms.

"God! what madness! But at least she is protected."

I picked up the headpieces. I had no wish to be cruel, even now, but the truth might save the world.

"I'm sorry, but you're wrong! She has chosen to join... the many."

Those brilliant eyes opened widely—unnaturally. For a moment I feared that Mme. Yburg was about to lose control—that all was lost.

But her nerves were more than masculine.

"Why," she asked, her voice very low-pitched, "*why* did she do this?"

"*Because she knows.*"

Those slender white hands had not unclenched: they did not unclench now.

"You told her? And she believed you?"

"I did not tell her. I don't know who did."

She relaxed those clenched hands. And I saw, as I had expected to see, blood in her palms.

"*Fate* told her. It could never be. I always knew!"...

The deep booming ceased. Lonergan had turned the power off.

Our glances met and clashed.

"How did you buy over Nicholson?"

"It was never attempted."

I heard lumbering, metallic footsteps mounting the ladder from the control pit.

"What do you mean?"

"Nicholson, if that's his name, is lying insensible down below."

An aluminium figure appeared at the ladder head. Lonergan climbed out, stood still, and watched.

"This is John Lonergan," I said.

He raised his vizor.

Mme. Yburg stared at him as one might stare at a ghost. Her pallor was positively alarming; then:

"How," she inquired softly—and I could detect no hint of animus in her voice—"how did you intend to save *yourself*?"

From a glistening, sweat-daubed face Lonergan's eyes shot a glance at me like that of a guilty schoolboy.

"How in blazes do *I* know!" he replied. "Nobody had thought of that but *me*! But I guess I'd have found a way."

Then it was—but not until then—that I realized the truth:

Lonergan could never have followed us! We had overlooked this. *He had known*....

My eyes grew oddly misty. Perhaps it was due to that intolerable throbbing. Suddenly, as though coming through a thick curtain, I heard Mme. Yburg's voice.

"My friend"—she was addressing Lonergan—"where cleverness must have failed, it is after all self-sacrifice which has saved the world."

"The world's far from being saved!"

It was Lonergan's growl which snatched me back to normal.

I looked at Mme. Yburg. Her face remained deathly white. But she was smiling—that smile which was at once an irritant and a caress!

"You may be wrong, Mr. Lonergan. I have followed an ideal—an ideal you could never grasp. To-night, my personal loss has made me one of the many. I know that my ideal had its roots in hell!"

"Fine," said Lonergan. "But what do we do now?"

Mme. Yburg reached out one slender hand, with those deep nail wounds in its delicate palm, and touched the speaker's mailed shoulder.

"Take this off. Be quick!"

Little as I could see of Lonergan's glistening face, I saw enough of his expression to tell me that he had grasped the situation. He withdrew.

"My husband," said Mme. Yburg, in a low, monotonous voice, "Count von Yburg, was killed in the final assault on Ypres. My own family has lived for generations on an estate near Cracow in Poland. Marusa inherits courage, my friend, pride and poise. She also has a heritage of vices on both sides which it must be your task to study!"

"But——"

She grasped my shoulders, looked into my eyes.

"Tell me you love her—*really* love her!"

"I love her sincerely. I loved her from the first moment I saw her."

"That is physical love. She is very attractive."

"I have learned to know and respect her. She is the only girl I have ever wanted to marry."

"She has set her heart on you. These sudden passions are a part of her heritage. I have studied you, and I think you can make her happy—if you can handle her! Be good to her—you *must* be good to my Musa——"

The steely control nearly broke down. Her voice faltered on that pet name, which I had never heard but which now I treasured as a jewel.

Then, miraculously, she was self-possessed again.

"But let her feel the bridle from the very beginning. There will never be any trouble."

Lonergan returned.

He wore a very fine silk vest, trousers with belt, socks, and shoes. He carried the aluminium suit.

Mme. Yburg gripped my shoulders, smiled again—and turned to him.

"I am taking your job on, Mr. Lonergan," she explained. "Only temporarily…"

With a self-possession which must have disarmed the vilest prudery, she peeled off her smart frock. Then she proceeded to buckle on the aluminium suit of the flight controller. It was grotesquely big.

"I am lost in this!" she declared.

But at last:

"Take your chance quickly," she said, and stepped on to the ladder. "She will be hovering—may even have flown back. If Anubis wakes I am powerless. So be quick!"

"There's one hope!" I cried—"a gun is being moved——"

Lonergan clapped his hand over my mouth.

"Mr. Lonergan!" Mme. Yburg's voice even now held no note of anger. "That gun would save me from the only other way!"

Lonergan's hand was removed, and:

"Then there *is* another way?" he challenged.

"Yes! Next to Anubis, *I* shall be in charge at dawn.... Good-bye. Hurry!"

She climbed down the ladder....

Lonergan held out one clenched fist.

"Heads or tails?"

"Heads!"

He opened his hand.

I saw a worn English penny. It displayed the head of King Edward VII.

"Always was a fortunate gambler," Lonergan growled—"and then some.... Hello!"

The deep booming had begun again. Mme. Yburg had turned the power on.

"Go to it, Woodville! I'll be right behind you. Pray kind heaven Anubis stays asleep till we land!"...

3

The sensations of that flight—which I dare to predict no man will experience again for at least a generation—were indescribably pleasant.

Pushing off—one's heels against the metal bar—was definitely sickly. The blue light ahead alone promised safety. There followed a deathly fall, a pause—then, a swift uplift of breathless ecstasy. It

resembled those dreams of childhood in which we fly, untrammelled, across vast tracts of country.

That mysterious power zone reached, into which these invisible elevators shot the traveller, control became a matter almost of mood—so sensitive was the mechanism. I enjoyed all that glorious mastery of the air which so often I had envied in the sea gull.

Upon an impalpable wave I floated as a canoe floats lightly upon water. There was a gentle swaying, a nearly imperceptible tidal urge. A movement of either hand, slightest inclination of my body to right or left, swung me to port or starboard. To raise my feet was to dive; to press down my toes resulted in an instant climb.

A mile below me I saw Felsenweir as I had seen it reflected on that circular table in the laboratory. I could clearly see moving figures in surrounding and approaching roads.

I pressed the control under my right hand....

Inexperience betrayed me. At a speed that cannot have been less than eighty miles an hour I was hurled through space!

Raising my hand as eagerly as I had lowered it, I found myself floating serenely again.

At which moment Marusa's agonized appeal reached me.

"Brian!" I heard, eerily—"Brian! Answer me!... Where are you?"...

"Marusa!" I cried.

"Brian dear! Oh, thank God!"

"Gaston Max speaking! Where are you?"

"I'm all right, old man!"

"Heaven be praised, my friend! I am glad. I withdraw..."

One thing became evident. Confidences were impossible between travellers on the energy waves!

"Listen, Brian! Make for the Old Castle—Hohen-Baden. You can't miss it. You know it. I'll head you off. When you see me, follow on."

"All right, darling."

I studied the landscape far below. Gingerly, I moved around several points. I set my course. With extreme care this time, I pressed down the control....

And then, with such a sense of self-reproach as I cannot hope to convey, I remembered the man who had made all this possible.

"Lonergan!" I cried—"*Lonergan*..."

Loudly—he must have been very near—came his reply:

"I'm headed same way."

Ahead I saw two batlike shapes. Marusa's voice reached me:

"Swing round behind me, Brian. When you see I'm floating, watch. We'll be over the cemetery! When I drop, wait for M. Max to follow. Then come over. You'll see the green light below you. Just let yourself drop. Can Mr. Lonergan hear?"

"*I* heard!" Lonergan's voice replied.

4

My mile drop through space into the ancient vault of the Felsenweirs occupies a niche of its own in these memoirs. If the sensation of rocketesque ascent had been thrilling, this of a deadweight crash was appalling.

I knew we were in the hands of the flight controller on duty—and at the mercy of anyone having access to the Felsenweir power house.

And, as I fell, I could not rid my mind of an idea that somebody had cut off the energy wave!

Then came check—second check—third check... my descent grew slower. But, still falling at great speed, I flashed down into a black pit. Some hint entered my mind of a metal-clad figure on a platform... there were switches... it was not unlike a limelight perch in a theatre....

I was stationary... I was going up... then I felt the grapnel made fast —felt myself hauled clear.

Reaching down, I tugged at the release....

With the scene of reunion which followed I find myself unable to deal. Marusa was clinging to me, trembling wildly. Gaston Max had his arms about us both.... Then Lonergan came in.

"How do we cope with my opposite number on the downstairs control platform?" he inquired.

His unemotional attention to the job in hand was just the cold douche we required. This remarkable man would have entered heaven or hell without qualm or enthusiasm, concentrating all the time on (a) whereabouts of the party he was looking for; (b) how he was going to get him out.

As it chanced, the problem, did not arise. We followed Marusa up many stairs which ultimately led to a small, square chamber.

She opened a locked door, beckoning me to follow.

"I knew it!" Max murmured. "It is the renovated tomb adjoining the Felsenweir vault! I have ordered that it shall be watched!"

We were arrested as we came out... the cemetery was stiff with police!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HOUR

1

THAT last dash to Felsenweir is memorable down to the smallest details—because of how it ended. I can remember—most poignantly of all—Marusa's white face. In the passionate anger and indignation of her first discovery, she had been blind to all the consequences of her action.

Now she knew.

I held her hand very tightly as she sat between Lonergan and myself in the big police car. But I don't think she was even aware of my presence.

Max drove, a police official beside him.

News of the gun was somewhat disquieting. At a point considerably below the Devil's Elbow, tackle had parted and the carriage was badly jammed. Reinforcements of axmen and new tackle were already on the way.

It was close on one o'clock when we swung around the hairpin bend and saw the gleam of arms.

At which moment, Lonergan spoke dully.

"Don't take any advice I give from now on," he said. "I think... Anubis has taken control!"

"Great heavens!"

Max sprang down to the road. We all got out.

"Are you sure, old man?"

"No. It's maybe imagination. The strain of expecting—that is kind of heavy."

Max and I exchanged glances of silent understanding.

We must not lose sight of Lonergan for a moment....

Forty arrests had been made in Baden-Baden alone, of persons wearing the Anubis disk. But I could not help wondering if any of the armed men lining Felsenweir woods concealed similar amulets—under heavy wrist-watch bands, for example.

Was the gun crew reliable?

Acting contrary to definite orders, six men had lost their lives already. They had penetrated to the woods....

No more would go that way. A sort of dumb terror brooded over the roads and few words were spoken.

We made a complete inspection of the several groups surrounding the place, returning at a few minutes before two o'clock to the point from which we had set out.

Three planes had gone up, before Max could get the order cancelled. They had all crashed at points so far untraceable. I think the energy wave must have formed a death trap of some sort.

Clearly visible as I knew we must be to the watchers in Felsenweir, I wondered what methods of attack Anubis controlled and when he would put them into operation. At two o'clock came news of the gun. They expected to have it placed by three!

A suspicion that Anubis, in the circumstances, would loose death on the world before the hour arranged, I presently dismissed—realizing that to do so must result in serious havoc amongst his chosen ranks.

At half-past two, reports came from many widely separated points of a great flight of "bats" crossing the forest!

What did this mean? New arrivals? Or the garrison, an unknown quantity, deserting?

"Do you think," Marusa whispered, "that..."

"Yes, darling," I said in a very low voice. "I don't believe she would—go, and leave you."

Fifteen minutes before dawn the gun opened fire.

We heard the shell whining over our very heads—the distant report... a dull explosion.

Marusa threw herself into my arms, crushed her hands to her ears, and then slipped gently down—insensible.

“It is best for her,” Max whispered. “Lay her here on the cushions—I will look after her.”

A hoarse murmur, coming from thousands of throats, and swelling from miles around, rose eerily out of the darkness.... A second shell whined over the forest. It did not explode.

Premonitory flushes showed in the sky.

It was the third shell that scored... or was the cataclysm due to something else? To some unforeseen flaw in the monstrous power plant controlled by Anubis?—to Mme. Yburg?

At the time of writing, I don’t know. I wonder if I ever shall?

Even as we listened, breathlessly, to the shriek of its passing, came a blinding green light... brighter than tropical lightning—bright as the brightest sunshine! It illuminated the Black Forest for hundreds of miles, as later reports proved.

A veritable earthquake shook the land. I felt the road heave beneath me—I heard a blast of sound such as no explosion imaginable could have produced....

The concussion was unendurable. I lost consciousness... nor was I alone.

Rending and tearing of massive rocks in motion, of falling trees, awakened me—the sky was an angry red dome.

The crag of Felsenweir had become a veritable volcano! The huge castle was in flames!...

But the world was saved.

THE END

Colophon

The Day the World Ended
Sax Rohmer

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