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FANTASY FICTION

Worlds

CONJURE WIFE by Fritz Leiber, Jr.

All women carry handbags as big as young suitcases, full of bits of this—oddments of that. Powder and rouge and lipstick, recipes and formulas. But—maybe those formulas aren't all cake and cookie recipes. Maybe not all those powders are cosmetics. A bit of magic, a little witchcraft, mixed in—graveyard dirt and perfume, formulas for Dottie's Cake and How To Steal a Soul—



THE GOLDEN BRIDLE by Jane Rice

A tale of a bridle, a strange bridle picked up in a street in Tijuana—and of a jockey who could not lose while he used that bridle nor—give the bridle away. But more than the bridle's tale, it is a piece of beautiful writing.



NO GREATER LOVE by Henry Kuttner

He was a man to begin with, but a rat and a louse for all of that. The thing he stole from the strange little shop was a charm, a love charm that made him immune because everyone loved him too much to harm him. Until he picked the wrong role—



THE GIFTIE GIEN by Malcolm Jameson

Bobbie Burns asked that giftie—but Jameson suggests that it might serve a purpose other than pleasure. Instruction of a sort, yes. Yet something Hell could use for its own ends. But—wonder what your own resultant form would be?

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CONJURE WIFE

CONJURE WIFE

By Fritz Leiber, Jr.

Illustrated by Kramer

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I.

"I keep wondering if she knows about Us," said the woman with black button eyes. She played the queen of spades.

The queen of hearts trumped the queen of spades. "You can put your mind at rest," said the silver-haired woman sweetly, gathering in the trick. "She doesn't. Tansy Saylor plays a lone hand. Like most women, she thinks she's the Only One. Co-operation such as ours is rare."

"But I'm afraid of her. Oh, I know she hasn't upset the Balance, and uses only Protective Procedures. But she isn't our kind. Neither is her husband. They don't belong."

The silver-haired woman nodded primly, peering through her thick glasses at the dummy with the empty chair behind it. "I agree. The Saylor's are a disgrace to the Hempnell faculty. Modern. No sense of the traditional decencies."

"Yes, and she wants to make him president of Hempnell. She wants him to dictate to our husbands. She wants to condescend to us."

"This talk gets nowhere," broke in the stout, red-haired woman gruffly. "The point is that her Protective Procedures are effective—many things would have happened to the Saylor's during the last ten years if they weren't. And she hasn't made the mistake of upsetting the Balance. So what can we three do about it?"

"Oh, the Balance!" said the woman with black button eyes, throwing down her last two cards. "Sometimes I think we ought to upset it ourselves." She evaded the shocked glance of the silver-haired woman. "We've our Sounds, and our Pictures, and our Numbers, and our Cards. We could finish the Saylor's in a whiff. There's such a neat trick with cards I've just learned. Here, let me show you—" She slipped a dozen shiny paste-board oblongs out of her purse. They had the conventional backs, but their faces bore representations of a cryptic sort.

"Stop that!" The silver-haired woman stretched out fluttering hands.

"Put them away!" ordered the stout woman harshly. She glanced at the door. "Quickly!"

But the eyes of the little man who ambled in were not inquisitive. With white beard and amiable smile, he looked almost benign, in an absent-minded sort of way.

"I don't suppose you played much bridge while I was gone," he observed with mild joviality.

The silver-haired woman's laughter trilled sweetly. "It's his little joke. He always pretends that all women are fearful gossips. Well, at least I made the contract, dear. Four hearts."

His eyes twinkled. "Very commendable." He settled himself in the empty chair. "Still I imagine the three of you managed to find time for some very dark and devious plotting—" He chuckled innocently.

Norman Saylor, professor of ethnology at Hempnell College, was not the sort of man to go snooping around in his wife's dressing room. That was partly the reason why he did it. He was sure nothing could touch the security of the relationship between him and Tansy.

The house was very quiet. Spring sunshine and balmy air were sluicing gently through the bedroom windows. It wasn't five minutes since he had put in the final staccato burst of typing on his "Negro Recruit" brochure for the War Office. It looked as if for once they would have a lazy evening to themselves.

Totem, the cat, rose from her sun-warmed spot on the neatly piled silk quilt and indulged in a titanic, disruptive-looking yawn, neatly folded her white paws under her black waistcoat, and stared solemnly at Norman. Norman copied her yawn, and felt a partial unkinking of the twelve-work-hours-a-day tension that had traced lines on his chunky face and smudged shadows under his clear, yellow-brown eyes. Such moments as this did not come often these days, but when they did come, they sure felt good.

The door of Tansy's dressing room stood invitingly open. It was a tiny room, just a big closet, with no windows. But it was more than a rack of dresses and a creamy dressing table. It was Tansy. On the neat side, but not fussy. A slight pleasant disorder. Very sane—he wondered why that particular word came to his mind, but it hit the spot. A faint perfume conjured up amiable memories.

He studied the photographs on either side of the mirror. One of Tansy and himself in modified Indian costume, from three summers back when he had been studying the Yumas. They both looked rather solemn. Another, slightly faded, of an uproarious Negro baptizing in midriver. That was from when he had held the Hazelton Fellowship and been gathering material for his "Social Patterns of the Southern Negro" and his later "Feminine Element in Superstition." Tansy had done more work than two secretaries that busy year when he was hammering out a reputation.

There was an ample array of cosmetics—Tansy had been the first of the Hempnell faculty wives to use lipstick and lacquer her nails; there had been covert criticism and talk of "setting the students a bad example," but she had stuck it out. Flanked by cold-cream jars was a photograph of himself, with a little pile of small change, dimes and quarters, in front of it.

Idly he slid out a drawer, scanned the pile of stocking rolls, pushed it in, pulled at another, which jammed, so he had to give it a sharp tug. A large cardboard box toward the back caught his eyes. He edged up the cover and took out one of the tiny glass-stoppered bottles. What sort of cosmetic would this be? Too dark for face powder. More like a geologist's soil specimen. An ingredient for a mud pack?

The dry, dark-brown granules shifted smoothly, like sand in an hourglass, as he rotated the glass cylinder. The label appeared, in Tansy's clear script. "Julia Trock, Roseland." A cosmetician? Was Roseland a part of the name, or a place? And why should the idea that it might be a place seem distasteful? His hand knocked aside the cardboard cover as he reached for a second bottle, identical with the first, except that the contents had a somewhat reddish tinge, and the label read, "Philip Lassiter, Hill." A third, contents same color as the first: "J. P. Thorndyke, Roseland." Then a handful, quickly snatched up, of three: "Emelyn Scatterday, Roseland." "Mortimer Pope, Hill." "The Rev. Bufort Ames, Roseland."

The silence in the house grew thunderous; even the sunlight seemed to sizzle and fry, as his mind rose to a sudden pitch of concentration on the puzzle. "Roseland and Hill, Roseland and Hill, Roseland and Hill," like a nursery rhyme somehow turned nasty, making the glass cylinders repugnant to his fingers. "Roseland Hill—"

Abruptly the answer came.

The two local cemeteries.

Graveyard dirt.

Soil specimens all right. Graveyard dirt from particular graves. A chief ingredient of Negro conjure magic.

With a soft thud Totem landed on the table and began to sniff inquisitively at the bottles, but sprang away as Norman plunged his hand into the drawer. He felt smaller boxes behind the big one, yanked suddenly at the whole drawer, so it fell to the floor. In one of the boxes were bent, rusty, worn bits of iron—horseshoe nails. In the other were calling-card envelopes, filled with snippings of hair, each labeled like the bottles, but some of these names he knew. And in one—fingernail clippings.

In the third drawer he drew blank. But the fourth yielded a varied harvest. Packets of small dried leaves and powdered vegetable matter—so that was what came from Tansy's herb garden along with kitchen seasonings? Vervain, vinmoin, devil's snuff. Bits of lodestone, iron filings clinging to them. Goose quills which spilled quicksilver when he shook them. Small squares of flannel, the sort that Negro conjure doctors employed for their "tricken-bags" or "hands." A box of old silver coins and silver filings—strong protective magic; giving significance to the coins, all silver, in front of his photograph.

But Tansy was so sane—so healthily contemptuous of palmistry, astrology, numerology and all the other superstitious fads. A hard-headed New Englander. So well versed, from her work with him, in the psychological background of superstition and primitive magic. And yet—

He found himself thumbing through a dog-eared copy of his own "Parallelisms in Superstition and Neurosis." It looked like the one he had lost around the house—was it eight years ago? Beside a formula for conjuration was a marginal notation in Tansy's script: "Doesn't work. Substitute copper filings for brass. Try in dark of moon instead of full."

"Norman—"

Tansy was standing in the doorway, her hand stopped in the moment of drawing off the little half hat of deep-rose felt that matched her trim dress.

Never before had he had such a feeling that a human face was only an arbitrary arrangement of curved surfaces and colors. The tapering chin—an ellipsoid. The full lips—a complex arrangement of cycloids and other curves. The eyes—white spheres inscribed with gray-green circles centered with black. Without familiarity or significance. And yet, in the same instant he felt that it was desperately important that he spy out a significance. For a faint distortion of those angles and curves—a distortion so subtle as to be almost indiscernible—might signify ... yes, why not say it?... insanity.

The ghost of a smile curved Tansy's lips, and familiarity flooded back into her face.

"So you've found out," she sighed. And although it seemed incredible, he thought she sighed with relief.

For a moment he stood there confused, like a district attorney caught arranging evidence. Then he began his cross-examination.

"It all started so foolishly," she was saying soon. "Just before you came to Hempnell. I felt it was tremendously important that you get the appointment and just to relieve my nerves—no other reason—I did silly things. Put mild curses on the two other applicants, to confuse their thoughts during the interviews. I got the curses from your notes. I surrounded you with a web of protective magic, charmed the sociology faculty to make them regard you favorably.

"Well, you got the job, and I forgot all about my stupid private joke.

"Then, when your first book was at the publishers—you remember, Norm, in 1930—I tried again. We were so sure it would be rejected. I was planning

to tell you all about my idiotic conjures as soon as it came back, so at least we'd have a laugh. But it was accepted. And I didn't tell you.

"Then in 1931, when you had pneumonia. I didn't want to, because it was too serious this time, but you got worse and I couldn't help myself. And you got well.

"That was the real beginning. Not that I was certain—I've never been certain—but I didn't dare take chances. Careers hang on such little strings, and Hempnell can be so vindictive. You know.

"But I wasn't superstitious. No, I wasn't! At least, I didn't have what you'd call the superstitious feeling. In a twisted logical way, I was trying to be empirical. I judged everything by results, step by step.

"And of course, when I say empirical, I don't mean experimental. I didn't dare to omit any charms as a test, because I was too afraid of something going wrong. You can't be experimental about someone you love, any more than a sane sociologist would induce fascism in his own country just to study the consequences."

He listened, his mind working like a telephone exchange during an emergency, catching a thousand hidden connections in trivial memories of his life and Tansy's. Whenever she paused, he had a question to hammer at her.

"Those mirror decorations on your dresses, and belts, and handbags—why?"

She nodded, tiredly. "Yes, that's it. To ward off evil spirits, by reflecting them. I got the idea from Tibetan devil masks. Yes, and the reason I always use hooks and eyes is—you've guessed—to catch evil spirits that try to get at me."

The room was dark by the time Tansy had finished the catalogue of her activities at Hempnell, and said, "So you see, I've never been sure. I've wanted to stop, but there's been too much at stake. It always worked—or

did as soon as I made the proper corrections in the charms. I've wanted to tell you, but I've never dared. Now that you know, I'm glad."

The voice was very tired now.

Then, in the darkness he began his argument. It was the old, old argument of science against primitive ignorance, but he brought it home to her with careful persuasiveness. The argument which starts out with a demonstration that superstition is only mistaken empiricism, and ends with psychoanalysis.

"Didn't it really begin much earlier than Hempnell, Tansy?" he asked at one point. "I mean, the seeds of it?"

"No. Oh, I don't know. Perhaps. I've childhood memories of dark moments. Suspensions. Queer things people could do. Hints from I don't know where. But nothing certain. I just can't remember. I don't know."

Only once did the tired voice grow vehement.

"But I tell you I never tried to kill, or even to injure in a physical way! Never! Only to confuse or hinder people when they were working against you. It's terribly important that you understand this, Norman. Nine tenths of my magic was purely protective. To ward off evil."

He felt pettishly exasperated at this answer. What difference did it make whether or not she had tried to kill? It was all equally nonsense. And why should she harp on her efforts to protect him, as if he were some sort of incompetent? For a moment it occurred to him that, from one point of view, he *had* been very lucky in his career. He abruptly put aside this stray thought, along with his fit of impatience.

At another time she used a similar argument. "I never tried for anything really big. Like your inheriting a million dollars. Or becoming president of Hempnell overnight, even if I'd thought you wanted to. There's a law of reaction or retribution in all conjuring—I mean, I used to think there was. Like the kick of a gun. I was afraid."

After that there were no more interruptions—only the white smudge of Tansy's face in the darkness.

When he had finished his voice was tired, too.

There was a pause. Then she said, "I'll do what you want me to. I'll burn all my stuff. I'll never touch it again."

He snapped on the light, and it seemed to him that science and healthy skepticism had been created anew from the primeval dark. The hands of his watch stood at ten thirty. Then he saw that Tansy had begun to cry.

"Darling," she managed to say, "don't you see this is what I've wanted? Only I'd gotten in so deep I never dared. On your account. You had to find out and make me stop. That was the only way."

What followed was oddly anticlimactic—the ransacking of the house for all of Tansy's hidden charms. First the contents of the dressing table. He found then that he could be generous in his victory because his trust in Tansy was re-established—he did not demand to look into her locked little leather-bound diary, when she told him it contained no relevant material.

Then the rest of the house, Tansy darting from room to room, deftly recovering flannel-wrapped "hands" from the upholstery of chairs, the under sides of table tops, the interior of vases, until he marveled that he had lived in the house for more than ten years without chancing on any.

"It's rather like a treasure hunt, isn't it?" she observed with a rueful smile.

There were others outside—under front and back doorsteps, in the garage, and in the car. With every handful thrown on the roaring fire he had built in the living room, his sense of relief grew. Finally, she opened the seams of the pillows on his bed and carefully fished out two little matted shapes made of feathers bound with fine thread, so they blended with the fluffy contents of the pillow.

"See, one's a heart, the other an anchor. That's for security," she told him. "New Orleans magic. You haven't taken a step for years without being in the range of one of my protective charms."

The feather figures puffed into flame and were gone in an instant.

"There, that's the last one of them," she said. "All gone."

"You're sure?" For a moment his voice grew hard again. "Absolutely certain you haven't overlooked any?"

"Absolutely certain. There's not one left in the house. I've gone over it in my mind a dozen times. I'm tired now, really tired. I want to go straight to bed." Suddenly she began to laugh. "Oh, but first I'll have to stitch up those pillows, or there'll be feathers all over the place."

He put his arms around her. "Everything O.K. now?"

"Yes, darling. Only one thing I want to ask you—that we don't talk about this for a few days at least. I'm really terribly ashamed. But I'm glad it's happened, remember that."

After Tansy was gone, Norman threw a fresh log on the fire, and sank back in the easy-chair, watching the restless, rhythmic play of the flames. Gradually his thoughts began to unkind. He found himself wondering—not without admiration—at Tansy's relatively cool behavior. He would never have dared to try reasoned argument on any other woman in a similar situation. But that was like Tansy. Always fair. Always willing to listen to logic. Empirical. Except that she had gotten off on a crazy sidetrack.

He reached down to stroke Totem, who did not look away from the hypnotic flames.

"Time we got to bed, old man. Must be about twelve. No—quarter-past one."

As he slipped back the watch, the fingers of his other hand went automatically to the charm at the end of the chain—more a locket than a charm—a gift from Tansy.

He gazed ruminatingly at the flattened golden heart, weighed it in his palm. It seemed perhaps a trifle heavier than its metal shell would account for. He snapped up the cover with his thumbnail. There was no regular way of getting at the space behind Tansy's photograph, so, after a moment's hesitation, he carefully edged it out with a pencil point.

Behind the photograph was a tiny packet, wrapped in the finest flannel.

Just like a woman, was his first thought—to seem to give in completely, but to hold out on something.

Perhaps she had forgotten.

Angrily he tossed the packet into the fireplace. The photograph fluttered along with it, lighted on the bed of embers, and flared before he could snatch it out. He had a glimpse of Tansy's face curling and blackening.

The packet took longer. A yellow glow crept across its surface, as the nap singed. Then a wavering four-inch flame shot up.

Simultaneously a chill went through him, though he still felt the heat from the embers. The room seemed to darken. There was a faint, mighty roaring in his ears, as of motors far underground. He had the sense of standing suddenly naked and unarmed before something menacingly alien.

Totem had turned around and was peering intently at the shadows in the far corner. With an expectorant hiss she sprang sideways and darted from the room.

He realized he was trembling. Nervous reaction, he told himself. Might have known it was overdue.

The flame died, and once again there was only the bed of embers.

Explosively, the phone began to jangle.

"Professor Saylor? I just want to tell you that you're not going to get away with what you're trying to do to me. I'm not going to be flunked out of Hempnell without a protest."

The voice spluttered with rage. It was some moment before he recognized the student and cut in.

"Now listen, Jennings, if you thought you were being treated unfairly, why didn't you present your grievances three months ago, when you got your grades?"

"Why? Because I let you pull the wool over my eyes. I didn't realize until this minute that you were behind it all."

"Be reasonable. You flunked two courses besides mine last semester."

"Yes, because you dropped dirty hints. Poisoned everyone's mind against me."

"And you mean to tell me you only realized it now?"

"Yes, I do. It just came to me in a flash as I was thinking here. I saw your whole slimy plot. Oh, you were clever all right, but let me tell you, Saylor —"

The voice ranted on. Twice his "But what possible motive could I—" went disregarded. With a distasteful grimace he hung up.

He felt suddenly very tired. There was an unpleasant coincidence tangled up in the events of the past few minutes, if you bothered to figure it out, but a scientist ought to have a healthy disregard for coincidences.

He put the screen in front of the fire and went to bed.

II.

The red-haired woman knew immediately what had awakened her. She made no further movement, but lay there, propped on one elbow. From the opposite bed came placid snores.

Presently, although there was no further sound, her eyes were drawn to the blacker smudge of the phone. She lifted it quietly and whispered, "Expected you, dear. I was sure you'd feel it, too."

The other voice came over the wire in bursts—jerky. "How *couldn't* I feel it? Like a great gust of wind. Complete collapse of Protective Screen in her quarter. Balance gone. Oh, I told you this would happen. She's up to something. I'll go crazy until I know what."

"No need to lose your head," whispered the red-haired woman gruffly, eying the opposite bed. "She's upset the Balance, all right. But in a very peculiar way. Any upset I ever heard of came from Excessive Aggression, Unjustified Death-attempts, or sudden Career-smashing. But Tansy's done the reverse—let down her guard."

"Yes, just to hoodwink us! She's discovered a new weapon. Something bad. Why else should she take such a chance? She's planning to smash us. We've got to beat her to it!"

"Now, now, dear, no tantrums!" A third voice was coming over the wires, a sweetly reproving voice, just the sort to go with silver hair. "We mustn't do anything we'd be sorry for. We must be sure of our ground."

"Do you mean we're just to wait?" The jerky voice had grown stridently indignant. "When we know she must have a new weapon? While she gets ready to smash us?"

"I didn't say we were to wait forever." There was a chilling tingle of tartness in the sweet old voice. "I recognize the danger. I recognize also that she has upset the Balance and must take the consequences. When we are sure of our ground, we will act. A prospect which, I may say, delights me."

"And do nothing until then?"

"Yes, dear! Except to watch her—and him."

The red-haired woman smiled grimly, listening to the other two. Such chatterers! The other bed creaked as the sleeper changed position.

"In any case," she whispered, cutting in, "there should be consequences whether we act or not. With the Protective Screen down, things should begin to happen to her—and especially to him. Things which have been accumulating for a long, long, time—"

"And *how* is Tansy?" asked Mrs. Carr, with such sweet solicitude that for a moment Norman wondered if the silver-haired dean of women had even more of an inside wire on the private lives of the faculty than was generally surmised. But only for a moment. After all, sweet solicitude was the dean of women's stock-in-trade.

"We missed her at our last faculty wives' meeting," Mrs. Carr continued. "She's such a gay soul. And we *do* need gaiety these days." Cold morning sunlight glinted on her thick glasses and glowed frostily in her apple-red cheeks. She put her hand on his arm. "Hempnell *appreciates* Tansy, Professor Saylor."

Norman's "And why not?" changed to "I think that shows good judgment" as he said it. He derived sardonic amusement from recalling how five years

ago Mrs. Carr was a charter member of The-Saylors-are-a-demoralizing-influence Club.

Mrs. Carr's silvery laughter trilled in the chilly air. "I must get on to my student conferences," she said.

He watched her hurry off, brisk and erect for all her near-seventy years, wondering if the sudden friendliness meant that there had been an unexpected improvement in his chances of getting the vacant chairmanship of the sociology department. Then he turned into Morton Hall.

When he had climbed to his office, the phone was ringing. It was Thompson, the public-relations man.

"A rather delicate matter, Professor Saylor." Delicate matters were Thompson's forte. "This morning one of the trustees phoned me. It seems he had just heard something—I haven't the slightest idea from where—concerning you and Mrs. Saylor. That over Christmas vacation you had attended a party given by some prominent but ... er ... very rowdy theatrical people. I was wondering if—"

"—I would issue a denial? Sorry, but it wouldn't be honest."

"Oh ... I see. Well, that's all there is to it, then." Thompson answered bravely after a moment. "I thought you'd like to know, though. The trustee was very hot under the collar. Talked my ear off about how these theatrical people were conspicuous for drunkenness and divorce."

"He was right. Nice folks. I'll introduce you to them some time."

"Oh ... yes," replied Thompson apprehensively. "Good-by."

The buzzer sounded, terminating the eight-o'clock classes. Norman swiveled his chair away from the desk and leaned back, amusedly irritated at this latest manifestation of the Hempnell "hush-hush" policy. Not that he had made any particular attempt to conceal the Berryman party, which had been a trifle more tempestuous than he had expected. Still, he had said nothing to anyone on campus. No use in being a fool. Now, after three months it all came out anyway.

From where he sat, the roof ridge of Estrey Hall neatly bisected his office window along the diagonal. There was a medium-sized cement dragon frozen in the act of clambering down it. For the tenth time that morning he

reminded himself that what had happened last night had really happened. It was not so easy. And yet, when you got down to it, Tansy's lapse into medievalism was not so very much stranger than Hempnell's Gothic architecture, with its sprinkling of gargoyles and other fabulous monsters designed to scare off evil spirits.

Saylor's nine-o'clock class in "Primitive Societies" quieted down leisurely as he strode in a few seconds ahead of the buzzer. He set a student to explaining the sib as a factor in tribal organization, then put in the next five minutes organizing his thoughts and noting late arrivals and absentees. When the explanation, supplemented with blackboard diagrams of marriage groups, had become so complicated that Bronstein, the prize student, was twitching with eagerness to take a hand, he called for comments and criticisms, and succeeded in getting a first-class argument going.

Finally the cocksure fraternity president in the second row said, "But all those ideas of social organization were based on ignorance, tradition, and superstition. Unlike modern society."

That was Norman's cue. He lit in joyously, pulverized the defender of modern society with a point-by-point comparison of fraternities and primitive "young men's houses" down to the actual details of initiation ceremonies, which he dissected with scientific relish, and then launched into a broad analysis of present-day customs as they would appear to a hypothetical ethnologist from Mars. In passing, he drew a facetious analogy between sororities and primitive seclusion of girls at puberty.

The minutes raced pleasantly by as he demonstrated instances of cultural lag in everything from table manners to systems of notation and measurement. Even the lone sleeper in the last row surprised himself by listening.

"Certainly we've made important innovations, chief among them the scientific method," he said at one point, "but the primitive groundwork is still there, dominating the pattern of our lives. We're modified anthropoid apes inhabiting night clubs and battleships. What else could you expect us to be?"

Marriage and courtship got special attention. With Bronstein grinning delightedly, he drew detailed modern parallels to marriage by purchase, marriage by capture, and symbolic marriage to a deity. He showed that trial marriage is no mere modern conception but a well-established ancient custom, successfully practiced by the Polynesians and others.

At this point he became aware of a beet-red, angry face toward the back of the room—that of Gracine Pollard, daughter of Randolph Pollard, president of Hempnell College. She glared at him outragedly, pointedly ignoring the interest taken by the neighboring students in her blushes.

Automatically it occurred to him, "Now I suppose the little neurotic will go yammering to mamma that Professor Saylor is advocating free love." He shrugged the idea aside and continued the discussion without modification. The buzzer cut it short.

But he was left feeling irritated with himself, and only half listened to the enthusiastic comments and questions of Bronstein and a couple of others.

Back at the office he found a note from Harold Gunnison, the dean of men, asking for an interview. Having the next hour free, he set out across the quadrangle for the Administration Building, Bronstein still tagging along to expound some interesting theory of his own.

But Norman was wondering why he had let himself go. Admittedly, some of his remarks had been a trifle raw. He had long ago adjusted his classroom behavior to Hempnell standards, without losing intellectual integrity, and this ill-advised though trivial deviation bothered him.

Mrs. Carr swept by him without a word, her face slightly averted, cutting him cold. A moment later he realized the explanation. In his abstraction, he had lighted a cigarette. Moreover, Bronstein, obviously delighted at faculty infraction of a firmly established Hempnell taboo, had followed suit.

He frowned but continued to smoke. Evidently the events of the previous night had disturbed his mind more than he had realized. He ground out the butt on the steps of the Administration Building.

In the doorway to the outer office he collided with the stylishly stout form of Mrs. Gunnison.

"Lucky I had a good hold on my camera," she grumbled, as he stooped to recover her bulging handbag. "I'd hate to try to replace a lens these days." Then brushing back an untidy wisp of reddish hair from her forehead, "You look worried. How's Tansy?"

He answered briefly, sliding past her. Now there was a woman who really ought to be a witch. Sloppy, expensive clothes; bossy, snobbish, and gruff; good-humored in a beefy fashion, but capable of riding roughshod over anyone else's desires. The only person in whose presence her husband's authority seemed a trifle ridiculous.

Harold Gunnison cut short a telephone call, and motioned him to come in and shut the door.

"Norm," Gunnison began, scowling, "this is a pretty delicate matter."

Norman became attentive. When Harold Gunnison said something was a delicate matter, unlike Thompson, he really meant it. They played golf and squash together, and got on pretty well.

He braced himself to hear an account of eccentric, indiscreet, or even criminal behavior on the part of Tansy. That suddenly seemed the obvious explanation.

"You have a girl from the Student Employment Agency working for you? A Margaret van Nice?"

Norman nodded. "A rather quiet kid. Does mimeographing."

"Well, a little while ago, she threw an hysterical fit in Mrs. Carr's office. Claimed that you had seduced her. Mrs. Carr immediately dumped the whole business in my lap."

"Well?" said Norman.

Gunnison frowned and cocked an eye at him. "Things like this sometimes really happen," he muttered.

"Sure," Norman replied. "But not this time."

"Of course. I had to ask."

"Sure. There *was* opportunity though. We worked late several nights over at Morton, editing stuff."

Gunnison reached for a folder. "On a chance, I got out her neurotic index. She ranks way up near the top. A regular bundle of complexes. We'll just have to handle it smoothly."

"I'll want to hear her accuse me," said Norman. "Soon as possible."

"Of course. I've arranged for a meeting at Mrs. Carr's office. Four o'clock this afternoon. Meantime she's seeing the college physician. That should sober her up."

"Four o'clock," repeated Norman, standing up. "You'll be there?"

"Certainly. I'm sorry about this whole business, Norm. Frankly, I think Mrs. Carr botched it. Got panicky. She's a pretty old lady."

In the outer office he stopped to glance at a small display case of items concerned with Gunnison's work in physical chemistry. The present display was of Prince Rupert drops and other high-tension oddities. It occurred to him that Hempnell was something like a Prince Rupert drop. Hit the main body with a hammer and you only jarred your hand. But flick with a fingernail the delicate filament in which the drop ended, and it would explode in your face.

Fanciful.

He glanced at the other objects, among them a tiny mirror, which, the legend explained, would fly to powder at the slightest scratch or sudden change in temperature.

Yet it wasn't so fanciful, when you got to thinking about it. Any highly organized, complex, somewhat artificial institution, such as a college, tends to develop dangerous weaknesses. And the same would be true of a person or a career. Flick the delicate spot in the mind of a neurotic girl, and she would explode with wild accusations. Or take a saner person, like himself. Suppose someone should be studying him secretly, looking for the vulnerable filament, finger casually poised to flick—

But that was really getting fanciful.

Coming out of their eleven-o'clock classes, Hervey Sawtelle buttonholed him.

Hervey Sawtelle resembled an unfriendly caricature of a college professor. Sometimes he carried two brief cases, and he was usually on his way to a committee meeting. Routine worries chased themselves up and down his nervous face.

But at the moment he was in the grip of one of his petty excitements.

"Say, Norman, the most interesting thing! I was down in the stacks this morning, and I happened to pull out an old doctor's thesis—1930—by someone I never heard of—with the title 'Superstition and Neurosis.'" He produced a bound, typewritten manuscript that looked as if it had aged without ever being opened. "Almost the same as your 'Parallelisms in Superstition and Neurosis.' An odd coincidence, eh? I'm going to look it over tonight."

They were hurrying together toward the dining hall down a walk flooded with jabbering, laughing students. Norman studied Sawtelle's face covertly. Surely the fool must remember that his "Parallelisms" had been published in 1931, giving an ugly suggestion of plagiarism. But Sawtelle's nervous, toothy grin was without guile.

He had the impulse to pull Sawtelle aside and tell him that there was something odder than a coincidence involved, and that it did not reflect in any way on his own integrity of scholarship. But this seemed hardly the place.

Yet there was no denying the incident bothered him a trifle. Why, it was years since he had even thought of that stupid business of Cunningham's thesis. It had lain buried and forgotten in the past—a hidden vulnerability, waiting for the flick of the fingernail.

Asinine fancifulness! It could all be very well explained, to Sawtelle or anyone else, at a more suitable time.

Sawtelle's mind was back to routine worries. "You know, we should be having our conference on the social-science program for next year. On the other hand, I suppose we should wait until—" He paused embarrassedly.

"Until it's decided whether you or I get the chairmanship of the department?" Norman finished for him. "I don't see why. We'll be working together in any case."

"Yes, of course. I didn't mean to suggest that—"

They were joined by some other faculty members on the steps of the dining hall. The deafening clatter of trays from the student section was subdued to a faint din as they entered the faculty sanctum.

Conversation revolved among the old familiar topics, with an undercurrent of speculation as to what reorganizations and curtailments of staff the new war year might bring to Hempnell. There was some reference to the political ambitions of President Pollard—it was rumored that he might be persuaded to run for governor or senator; discreet silences here and there around the table substituted for adverse criticisms on this possibility. Sawtelle's Adam's apple twitched convulsively at a chance reference to the vacant chairmanship in sociology.

Norman managed to get a fairly interesting conversation going. He was glad that he would be busy with classes and conferences until four o'clock. He knew he could work half again as hard as someone like Sawtelle, but if he were compelled to do one quarter of the worrying that man did—

Yet the four-o'clock meeting proved to be an anticlimax. He had no sooner put his hand on the door leading to Mrs. Carr's office, when—as if that had provided the necessary stimulus—a shrill, tearful voice burst out with: "It's all a lie! I made it up."

Gunnison was sitting near the window, face a trifle averted, arms folded, looking like a slightly bored, slightly embarrassed but very stolid elephant. In a chair in the center of the room was huddled a delicate, fair-haired, but rather homely girl, tears dribbling down her cheeks and hysterical sobs racking her shoulders. Mrs. Carr was trying to calm her in a fluttery way.

"I don't know why I did it," the girl bleated pitifully. "I was in love with him, and he wouldn't even look at me. I was going to kill myself last night, and then I thought I would do this instead, to hurt him, or—"

"Now, Margaret, you must control yourself," Mrs. Carr admonished, her hands hovering over the girl's shoulders.

"Just a minute," Norman cut in, "did you say last night?"

"There, there, dear. I think you better leave, Professor Saylor." Mrs. Carr's eyes, magnified by thick glasses, looked fishlike. Her attitude was hostile. "There's obviously no need of asking questions."

"I think I should be permitted at least one," said Norman. "Just exactly at what time last night, Miss van Nice, did you get this idea?"

Gunnison registered puzzled but vague curiosity.

The tear-stained face looked up at Norman.

"It was just after one o'clock," she said. "I had been lying awake in the dark for hours, planning to kill myself. And then, in a flash the idea came to me." Suddenly she shook loose from Mrs. Carr and stood up, facing Norman. "Oh, I hate you!" she screamed. "I hate you!"

Gunnison followed him out of the office. He yawned, shook his head, and remarked, "Glad that's over."

"Never a dull moment," Norman responded, absently.

"Oh, by the way," Gunnison said, dragging a stiff white envelope out of his inside pocket, "here's a note for Mrs. Saylor. Hulda asked me to give it to you. I forgot about it before."

"I met her coming out of your office this morning," Norman said, his thoughts still elsewhere.

Somewhat later, back at Morton, Norman tried to come to grips with those thoughts, but found them remarkably slippery. The dragon on the roof ridge of Estrey Hall lured away his attention. Funny about little things like that. You never even noticed them for years, and then they suddenly popped into focus. How many people could give you one single definite fact about the architectural ornaments of buildings in which they worked? Not one in ten,

probably. Why, if you'd asked him yesterday about that dragon, he wouldn't for his life have been able to tell you even if there *was* one or not.

He leaned on the window sill, looking at the lizardlike yet grotesquely anthropoid form, bathed in the yellow sunset glow, which, his wandering mind remembered, was supposed to symbolize the souls of the dead passing into and out of the underworld. Below the dragon, jutting out from under the cornice, was a sculptured head, one of a series of famous scientists and mathematicians decorating the entablature. He made out the name "Galileo," along with a brief inscription of some sort.

When he turned back to answer the phone, it suddenly seemed very dark in the office.

"Saylor? I just want to tell you that I'm going to give you until tomorrow—"

"Listen, Jennings," Norman cut in sharply, "I hung up on you last night because you kept shouting into the phone. This threatening line won't do you any good."

The voice continued where it had broken off, growing dangerously high. "—until tomorrow to withdraw your charges and have me reinstated at Hempnell. If you don't—"

"I told you not to threaten. There were no charges. You just flunked out. If you want to talk it over reasonably, come and see me."

The voice at the other end of the line broke into a screaming obscene torrent of abuse, so loud that he could still hear it very plainly as he was placing the receiver back in the cradle.

Paranoid—that was the way it sounded.

Then he suddenly sat very still.

At twenty past one last night he had burned a charm supposedly designed to ward off evil influence from him. The last of Tansy's "hands."

At about the same time Margaret van Nice had decided to accuse him of seducing her, and Marvin Jennings had decided to make him responsible for an imaginary plot.

Next morning Hervey Sawtelle, poking around in the stacks, had found—

Rubbish!

With an angry snort of laughter at his own credulity, he picked up his hat and headed for home.

III.

Tansy was in a radiant mood, prettier than she had seemed in months, younger-looking than her thirty-six years. Twice he caught her smiling to herself, when he glanced up from his supper.

He gave her the note from Mrs. Gunnison. "Mrs. Carr asked after you, too. Gushed all over me—in a ladylike way, of course. Then, later on—" He caught himself as he started to tell about the cigarette, and Mrs. Carr cutting him, and the interview in her office. No use worrying Tansy with things that might be considered bad luck. No telling what further constructions she might put upon them.

She glanced through the note and handed it back to him.

"It has the authentic Hempnell flavor, don't you think?" she observed.

He read:

DEAR TANSY: Where are you keeping yourself? I haven't seen you on campus more than once or twice this year. If you're busy with something especially interesting, why not tell us about it? Why not come to tea this Saturday, and tell me all about yourself?

HULDA.

P.S. You're supposed to bring four dozen cookies to the Parents' Day Reception the Saturday after.

"Rather confused-sounding," he said, "but I clearly perceive the keen bludgeon of Mrs. Gunnison. She looked particularly sloppy today."

Tansy laughed. "Still, we have been pretty antisocial these last weeks. I believe I'll ask them over for bridge tomorrow night. It's short notice, but they're usually free Wednesdays. And the Sawtelles."

"Do we have to? That henpecker?"

Tansy laughed. "I don't know how you would ever manage to get along without me—" She stopped short. "I'm afraid you'll have to endure Evelyn. After all, Hervey's the other important man in your department, and it's expected that you see something of each other socially. To make two tables, I'll invite the Carrs."

"Three fearful females," said Norman. "If they represent the average run of professors' wives, I was lucky to get you."

"I sometimes have similar thoughts about professors' wives' husbands," said Tansy.

Then as they smoked over the coffee, she said hesitantly, "Norm, I said I didn't want to talk about last night. But now there's something I want to tell you."

He nodded.

"I didn't tell you last night, Norm, but when we burned those ... things, I was terribly frightened. I felt that we were ripping holes in walls that it had taken me years to build, and that now there was nothing to keep out the—"

He said nothing, sat very still.

"Oh, it's hard to explain, but ever since I began to ... play with those things, I've been conscious of pressures from outside. Things trying to push their way in and get at us. And I've had to press them back, fight back at them with my—It's like that test of strength men sometimes make, trying to force each other's hand to the table. But that wasn't what I was starting to say.

"I went to bed feeling miserable and scared. The pressure from outside kept tightening around me, and I couldn't resist it, because we'd burned those things. And then suddenly, as I lay in the dark, about an hour after I went to bed, I got the most abrupt tremendous feeling of relief. The pressure vanished, as if I'd bobbed up to the surface after almost drowning. And I knew then ... that I'd gotten over my craziness. That's why I'm so happy."

It was hard for Norman not to tell Tansy what he was thinking. Here was one more coincidence, but it knocked the others into a cocked hat. At about the same time as he had burned the last charm, experiencing a sensation of fear, Tansy had felt a great relief. That would teach him to build theories on coincidences!

"For I was crazy in a way, dear," she was saying. "There aren't many people who would have taken it as you did."

He said, "You weren't crazy—which is a relative term, anyway, applicable to anyone. You were just fooled by the cussedness of things."

"Cussedness?"

"Yes. The way nails sometimes insist on bending when you hammer, as if they were trying to. Or the way machinery refuses to work. Matter's funny stuff. In large aggregates, it obeys natural law, but when you get down to the individual atom or electron, it's largely a matter of chance or whim—" This conversation was not taking the direction he wanted it to, and he was thankful when Totem jumped up onto the table, creating a diversion.

It turned out to be the pleasantest evening they had spent together in ages.

But next morning he wished he had not gotten started on that "cussedness of things" notion. It stuck in his mind. He found himself puzzling over the merest trifle—in the precise position of that idiotic cement dragon. Yesterday he remembered thinking that it was exactly in the middle of the descending roof ridge. But now he saw that it was obviously two thirds of the way down, quite near the architrave topping the huge and useless Gothic

gateway set between Estrey and Morton. Even a social scientist ought to have better powers of observation than that!

The jangle of the phone coincided with the nine-o'clock buzzer.

"Professor Saylor?" Thompson's voice was apologetic. "I'm sorry to bother you again, but I just got another inquiry from one of the trustees. Concerning an informal address you were supposed to have delivered at about the same time as that ... er ... party. The topic was 'What's Wrong With College Education?'"

"Well, what about it? Are you implying that there's nothing wrong with college education, or that the topic is taboo?"

"Oh, no, no, no. But the trustee seemed to think that you were making a criticism of Hempnell."

"Of small colleges of the same type as Hempnell, yes. Of Hempnell, specifically, no."

"Well, he seemed to fear it might have a detrimental effect on enrollment for next year. Spoke of several friends of his with children of college age as having heard your address and being unfavorably impressed."

"Then they were supersensitive."

"He also seemed to think you had made a slighting reference to President Pollard's ... er ... political activities."

"I'm sorry but I have to get along to a class now."

"Very well," said Thompson. He sounded hurt.

Gracine Pollard was absent from "Primitive Societies," Norman noted with an inward grin, wondering if it had become too much for her warped sense of propriety. But even the daughters of college presidents ought to be told a few home truths now and then.

Yesterday's lecture had had a markedly stimulating effect. Several students had abruptly chosen related subjects for their term papers, and the fraternity president had decided to capitalize on his yesterday's discomfiture by

writing a humorous article on the primitive significance of fraternity initiations for the Hempnell *Buffoon*. They had a very brisk session. It put Norman in a good humor which lasted until after his three-o'clock class that afternoon, when he happened to meet the Sawtelles, in front of Morton Hall.

"I had lunch today with Henrietta ... I mean, Mrs. Pollard," Mrs. Sawtelle announced with the air of one who has just visited royalty.

"Oh say, Norman—" Hervey began, excitedly, thrusting forward his brief case.

"We had a very interesting chat," his wife continued, sweeping on as if her husband had not spoken. "We talked about you, too, Norman. It seems Gracine has been misinterpreting some of the things you've been saying in your class. She's such a sensitive girl."

"Dumb Bunny, you mean," Norman corrected mentally. He murmured, "Oh?" with some show of politeness.

"Dear Henrietta was a little puzzled as just how to handle it, though of course she's a very tolerant, cosmopolitan soul. I just mentioned it because I thought you'd want to know. After all, it is very important that no one gets any wrong impressions about the department. Don't you agree with me, Hervey?" she ended sharply.

"What, dear? Oh, yes, yes. Say, Norman, I want to tell you about that thesis I showed you yesterday. The most amazing thing! Its main arguments are almost exactly the same as those in your book! An amazing case of independent investigators arriving at the same conclusions. Why, it's like Darwin and Wallace, or—"

"You didn't tell *me* anything about this, dear," said Mrs. Sawtelle, as if he had cheated her.

"Wait a minute," said Norman.

He hated to make an explanation in Mrs. Sawtelle's presence, but it had to be done.

"Sorry, Hervey, to have to substitute a rather sordid story for an interesting case of independent investigation. It happened when I was an instructor here—1929, my first year. A graduate student named Cunningham got hold

of my ideas—I was friendly with him—and incorporated them into his doctor's thesis. My work in superstition and neurosis was just a side line then, and so I didn't happen to read his thesis until after he'd gotten his degree."

Sawtelle blinked. His face resumed its usual worried expression. A look of vague disappointment had come into Mrs. Sawtelle's black button eyes, as if she would have liked to read the thesis before hearing the explanation.

"I was very angry," Norman continued, "and intended to show him up. But then I heard he'd died. There was some hint of suicide. He was an unbalanced chap. How he'd hoped to get away with such an out-and-out steal, I don't know. Anyway, I decided not to do anything about it, for his family's sake. You see, it would have supplied a strong reason for thinking he *had* committed suicide."

Mrs. Sawtelle looked incredulous.

"But, Norman," Sawtelle commented anxiously, "was that really wise? I mean to keep silent. Weren't you taking a chance? I mean with regard to your academic reputation?"

Abruptly Mrs. Sawtelle's manner changed.

"Put that thing back in the stacks, Hervey, and forget about it," she directed curtly. Then she smiled archly at Norman. "I've been forgetting that I have a surprise for you, Professor Saylor. Come down to the sound booth now, and I'll show you. It won't take a minute. Come along, Hervey."

Norman had no excuse ready, so he accompanied the Sawtelles to the rooms of the speech department at the other end of Morton, wondering how the speech department ever found any use for someone with as nasal and affected a voice as Evelyn Sawtelle, even if she did happen to be a professor's wife.

The sound booth was dim and quiet, a solid box with soundproof walls and double windows. Mrs. Sawtelle took a disk from the cabinet, put it on one of the three turntables, and adjusted a couple of dials.

From the amplifier came a strangely intermittent wailing or roaring, as of wind prying at a house. It struck a less usual chord, though, in Norman's memory.

Mrs. Sawtelle darted back and lifted the needle, hurriedly, so it grated against the disk.

"I made a mistake," she said. "That's some modernistic music or other. Hervey, switch on the light. Here's the record I wanted."

"It sounded awful, whatever it was," her husband observed.

Norman had identified his memory. It was of an Australian bull-roarer a colleague had once demonstrated for him. The curved slat of wood, whirled at the end of a cord, made exactly the same sound. The aborigines used it in their magic making.

But now his own voice was coming out of the amplifier, and he had an odd sense of jerking back in time.

"Surprised?" she questioned coyly. "It's that talk on civilian defense you gave the students last week. We had a mike spotted by the speaker's rostrum—I suppose you thought it was for amplification—and we made a sneak recording, as we call it. We cut it down here."

She indicated the heavier, cement-based turntable for making recordings.

"We can do all sorts of things down here," she babbled on. "Mix all sorts of sound. Music against voices. And—"

It was hard for Norman to appear even slightly pleased. He knew his reasons were no more sensible than those of a savage afraid someone will learn his secret name, yet all the same he disliked the idea of Evelyn Sawtelle monkeying around with his voice. Like her dully malicious, small-socketed eyes, it suggested a prying for hidden weaknesses. And then that talk about mixing sounds—somehow it did not set good with him.

What it all boiled down to was that he detested the woman.

Rather brusquely, he excused himself.

"We'll see you tonight," Evelyn called after him. It sounded like, "You won't get rid of me."

Back at the office, Norman put in a good hour's work on his notes. Then, getting up to switch on the light, his glance happened to fall on the window.

After a few moments, he jerked away and darted to the closet, to get his field glasses.

Evidently someone had a very obscure sense of humor to perpetrate such a complicated practical joke.

Intently he searched the cement at the juncture of roof ridge and clawed feet, looking for the telltale cracks. He could not spot any, but that was not easy to do in the failing yellow light.

The cement dragon now stood at the edge of the gutter, as if about to walk over to Morton along the architrave of the big gateway.

He lifted his glasses to the creature's head—blank and crude as an unfinished skull. Then on an impulse, he dropped them to the row of sculptured heads, focused on Galileo, and read the little inscription he had not been able to make out before.

"Eppur si muove."

The words Galileo was supposed to have muttered after recanting before the Inquisition his belief in the revolution of the Earth around the Sun.

"Nevertheless, it moves."

A board creaked behind him, and he spun around.

By his desk stood a young man, waxen pale, with thick red hair. His eyes stood out like milky marbles. One white, tendon-ridged hand gripped a .22 target pistol.

Norman walked toward him, bearing slightly to the right.

The skimpy barrel of the gun came up.

"Hello, Jennings," said Norman. "You've been reinstated. Your grades have been changed to straight A's."

The gun barrel slowed for an instant.

Norman lunged in.

The gun went off under his left arm, pinking the window.

The gun clunked on the floor. Jennings' skinny form went limp. As Norman sat him down on the chair, he began to sob, convulsively.

Norman lifted the phone and asked for an on-campus number. The connection was made quickly. "Gunnison?" he asked.

"Uh-huh, just caught me as I was leaving."

"Theodore Jennings' parents live right near the college, don't they? You know, the chap who flunked out last semester."

"I believe they do. What's the matter?"

"Better get them over here quick. And have them bring his doctor. He just tried to shoot me."

There was a pause. Norman visualized Gunnison's startled reaction! Then, "Right away!"

Norman put down the phone. Jennings continued to sob agonizingly. Norman looked at him with disgust.

An hour later Gunnison sat down in the same chair, and let off a sigh of relief.

"I'm sure glad they're gone," he said. "It was awfully good of you, Norman, not to insist on the police. Things like that give a college a bad name."

Norman smiled wearily. "Almost anything gives a college a bad name. But that kid was obviously crazy as a loon."

They lit up and smoked for a while in silence. Then Gunnison looked at his watch.

"I'll have to hustle. It's almost seven, and we're due at your place at eight."

But he lingered, ambling over to the window to inspect the bullet hole.

"I wonder if you'd mind not mentioning this to Tansy?" Norman asked. "I don't want to worry her."

Gunnison nodded. "Good thing if we kept it to ourselves." Then he pointed out the window. "That's one of my wife's pets," he remarked in a jocular tone.

Norman saw that his finger was trained on the cement dragon, now coldly revealed by the upward glare from the street lights.

"I mean," Gunnison went on, "she must have a dozen photographs of it. Hempnell's her specialty. I believe she's got a photograph of every architectural oddity on campus. That one's her favorite." He chuckled. "Usually it's the husband who keeps ducking down into the darkroom, but not in our family. And me a chemist, at that."

Norman's taut mind had unaccountably jumped to the thought of a bull-roarer. Abruptly he realized the analogy between the recording of a bull-roarer and the photograph of a dragon.

He clamped a lid on the fantastic questions he wanted to ask Gunnison.

"Come on!" he said. "We'd better get along!"

Gunnison started a little at the harshness of his voice.

"Can you drop me off?" asked Norman, more quietly. "My car's at home."

"Sure thing," said Gunnison.

After he had switched out the light, Norman paused for a moment, staring back at the window. The words came back.

"Eppur si muove."

IV.

They had hardly cleared away the remains of a hasty supper, when there came the first clang from the front-door chimes. To Norman's relief, Tansy had accepted without questioning his rather clumsy explanation of why he had gotten home so late. There was something puzzling, though, about her serenity these last two days. She was usually much sharper, and more

curious. But of course he had been careful to hide disturbing events from her, and he ought only to be glad her nerves were in such good shape.

"Dearest! It's been ages since we've seen you!" Mrs. Carr embraced Tansy in a matronly fashion. "How are you? How are you?" The question sounded peculiarly eager and incisive. Norman put it down to typical Hempnell gush. "Oh, dear, I'm afraid I've got a cinder in my eye," Mrs. Carr continued. "The wind's getting quite fierce."

"Gusty," said Professor Carr of the mathematics department, showing obvious but harmless delight at finding the right word. He was a little man with red cheeks and a white Vandyke, as innocent and absent-minded as college professors are supposed to be, who gave the impression of residing permanently in a special paradise of transcendental and transfinite numbers.

"It seems to have gone away now," said Mrs. Carr, waving aside Tansy's handkerchief and experimentally blinking her eyes, which looked unpleasantly naked and birdlike until she replaced her thick glasses. "Oh, that must be the others," she added, as the chimes sounded. "Isn't it marvelous that everyone at Hempnell is so punctual?"

As Norman started for the front door he imagined for one crazy moment that someone must be whirling a bull-roarer outside, until he realized it could only be the rising wind living up to Professor Carr's description of it.

He was confronted by Evelyn Sawtelle's angular form, wind whipping her black coat against her legs. Her equally angular face, with its shoe-button eyes, was thrust toward his own.

"Let us in, or it'll blow us in," she said. Like most of her attempts at coy or facetious humor, it did not come off, perhaps because she made it sound so stupidly grim.

She entered, with Hervey in tow, and made for Tansy.

"My dear, how are you? Whatever have you been doing with yourself?" Again he was struck by the eager and meaningful tone of the question. For a moment he wondered whether the women had somehow gotten an inkling of Tansy's eccentricity, and the recent crisis. But Mrs. Sawtelle was so voice-conscious that she was always emphasizing things the wrong way.

There was a noisy flurry of greetings. Totem made a squeaky noise and darted out of the way of the crowd of human beings. Mrs. Carr's silvery voice rose above the rest.

"Oh, Professor Sawtelle, I want to tell you how *much* we all appreciated your talk on city planning. It was truly *significant*!" Sawtelle writhed, grinning in a flustered way.

Norman thought: "So now *he's* the favorite for the chairmanship."

Professor Carr had made a beeline for the bridge tables, and was wistfully fingering the cards.

"I've been studying the mathematics of the shuffle," he began with a bright-eyed air, as soon as Norman drifted into range. "The shuffle is supposed to make it a matter of chance what hands are dealt. But that is not true at all." He broke open a new pack of cards, and spread the deck. "The manufacturers arrange these by suits—thirteen spades, thirteen hearts, and so on. Now suppose I make a perfect shuffle—divide the pack into equal parts and interleaf the cards one by one."

He tried to demonstrate, but the cards got away from him.

"It's really not as hard as it looks," he continued amiably. "Some players can do it every time, quick as a wink. But that's not the point. Suppose I make two perfect shuffles with a new pack. Then, no matter how the cards are cut, each player will get thirteen of a suit—an event that, if you went purely by the laws of chance would only happen once in about one hundred and fifty-eight billion times as regards a *single* hand, let alone all four."

Norman nodded, and Carr smiled delightedly.

"That's only one example. What is loosely termed chance is really the resultant of several perfectly definite factors—chiefly the play of the cards on each hand, and the shuffle habits of the players." He made it sound as important as the Theory of Relativity. "Some evenings the hands are very ordinary. Other evenings they keep getting wilder and wilder—long suits, voids, and so on. Sometimes the high cards persistently run north and south. Other times, east and west. Luck? Chance? Not at all! It's the result of perfectly definite factors. Some expert players actually make use of this principle to determine the probable location of key cards."

Norman's mind went off on a tangent. Suppose you applied this principle outside bridge? Suppose that coincidences and other chance happenings weren't really as chancy as they looked? Suppose there were individuals with a special aptitude for calling the turns, making the breaks? But that was a pretty obvious idea—nothing to give a person the shiver it had given him.

"I wonder what's holding up the Gunnisons?" Professor Carr was saying. "We might start one table now. Perhaps we can get in an extra rubber," he added hopefully.

A peal from the chimes settled the question.

Gunnison looked as if he had eaten his dinner too fast, and Hulda seemed rather surly.

"We had to rush so," she muttered curtly to Norman as he held the door.

Like the other two women, she almost ignored him and concentrated her greetings on Tansy. It gave him a vaguely uneasy feeling, as when they had first come to Hempnell and faculty visits had been a nerve-racking chore. Tansy seemed at a disadvantage—somehow unprotected—in contrast to the aggressive air of purpose animating the other three.

But what of it?—he told himself. That was usual with Hempnell faculty wives. They acted as if they lay awake nights plotting how to poison the people between their husband and the president's chair.

Whereas Tansy—But that was like what Tansy had been doing. His thoughts started to gyrate confusingly, and he switched them off.

They cut for partners.

The cards seemed determined to provide an illustration for the theory Carr had explained. The hands were uniformly commonplace—abnormally average. No long suits. Nothing but 4-4-3-2 and 4-3-3-3 distribution. Bid one; make two. Bid two; make one.

After the second round, Norman applied his private remedy for boredom—the game of "Spot the Primitive." You played it by yourself, secretly. It was just an exercise for an ethnologist's imagination. You pretended that the people around you were members of a savage race, and you tried to figure out how their personalities would manifest themselves in such an environment.

Tonight it worked almost too well.

Nothing unusual about the men. Gunnison would, of course, be a prosperous tribal chieftain; perhaps a little fatter, and tended by maidens, but with a jealous and vindictive wife waiting to pounce. Carr might figure as the basket maker of the village—a spry little old man, grinning like a monkey, weaving the basket fibers into intricate mathematical matrices. Sawtelle, of course, would be the tribal scapegoat, butt of endless painful practical jokes.

But the women!

Take Mrs. Gunnison, now his partner. Give her a brown skin. Leave the red hair, but twist some copper ornaments in it. She'd be heftier if anything, a real mountain of a woman, stronger than most of the men in the tribe, able to wield a spear or club. The same sleepy brutish eyes, but the lower lip would jut out in a more openly sullen and domineering way. It was only too easy to imagine what she'd do to the unlucky maidens her husband showed too much interest in. Or how she would pound tribal policy into his head when they retired to their hut. Or how her voice would thunder out the death chants the women sang to aid the men away at war.

Then Mrs. Sawtelle and Mrs. Carr, who had progressed to the top table along with himself and Mrs. Gunnison. Mrs. Sawtelle first. Make her skinnier. Scarify the flat cheeks with ornamental ridges. Tattoo the spine. Witch woman. Bitter as quinine bark because her husband was ineffectual. Think of her prancing before a spike-studded fetish. Think of her screeching incantations and ripping off a chicken's head—

"Norman, you're playing out of turn," said Mrs. Gunnison.

"Sorry."

And Mrs. Carr. Shrivell her a bit. Leave only a few wisps of hair on the parchment skull. Take away the glasses, and then her eyes would be

gummy. She'd blink and peer short-sightedly, and leer toothlessly, and flutter her bony claws. A nice harmless old squaw, who'd gather the tribe's children around her and tell them legends. But her jaw would still be able to snap like a steel trap, and her clawlike hands would be deft at applying arrow poison, and she wouldn't really need her eyes because she'd have other ways of seeing things and even the bravest warrior would grow nervous if she looked too long in his direction.

"Those experts at the top table are awfully quiet," called Gunnison with a laugh. "They must be taking the game very seriously."

Witch women, all three of them, engaged in booting their husbands to the top of the tribal hierarchy.

From the dark doorway at the far end of the room, Totem was peering curiously, as if weighing some similar possibility.

But Norman could not fit Tansy into the picture. He could visualize physical changes, like frizzing her hair, and putting some big gold rings in her ears and a painted design on her forehead. But he could not picture her as belonging to the same tribe. She persisted in his imagination as a stranger woman, a captive, eyed with suspicion and hate by the rest. Or perhaps a woman of the same tribe, but one who had done something to forfeit the trust of all the other women. A priestess who had violated taboo. A witch woman who had renounced witchcraft.

Abruptly his field of vision narrowed to the score pad. Evelyn Sawtelle was idly scribbling stick figures as Mrs. Carr deliberated over a lead. First the stick figure of a man with arms raised and three or four balls above his head, as if he were juggling. Then the stick figure of a queen, indicated by crown and skirt. Then a little tower, with battlements. Then an L-shaped thing with a stick figure hanging from it—a gallows. Finally, a truck bearing down on a man whose arms were extended toward it in fear.

Just five scribbles. But he knew that four of them were connected with a bit of unusual knowledge buried somewhere in his mind. A glance at the exposed dummy gave him the clue.

Cards.

But this bit of knowledge was from the ancient history of cards, when the whole deck was drenched with magic, when there was a Knight between the Jack and the Queen, when the suits were swords, batons, cups, and money, and when there were twenty-two special tarot cards in the pack, of which today only the Joker remained. Tarot cards were used for fortunetelling.

Four of the tarot cards were the Juggler, the Empress, the Tower, and the Hanged Man.

Only the fifth stick figure, that of the man and truck, did not fit in. But it gave him a peculiarly personal shudder. Death by being crushed or mangled, as in an automobile accident, was his pet phobia.

Mrs. Sawtelle scratched out the stick figures and looked up at him sullenly.

Mrs. Gunnison leaned forward, lips moving as if she might be counting trump.

Mrs. Carr smiled, and made her lead. The risen wind began to make the same intermittent roaring sound it had for a moment earlier in the evening.

Why not, he asked himself. Three witch women, using magic as Tansy had, to advance their husband's careers and their own. Making use of their husband's special knowledge to give magic a modern twist. Suspicious and worried because Tansy had given up magic; afraid she'd found a much stronger variety, and was planning to make use of it.

And Tansy—suddenly unprotected, possibly unaware of the change in their attitude toward her because, in giving up magic, she had lost her sensitivity to the supernatural, her "woman's intuition."

Why not carry it a step further? Maybe all women were the same. Guardians of mankind's ancient customs and traditions—including the practice of witchcraft. Fighting their husband's battles from behind the scenes, by sorcery. Keeping it a secret; and, on those occasions when they were discovered, conveniently explaining it as feminine susceptibility to superstitious fads.

Half of the human race still actively practicing sorcery.

Why not?

"It's your play, Norman," said Mrs. Sawtelle, sweetly.

"You look as if you had something on your mind," said Mrs. Gunnison.

"How are you getting along up there, Norm?" her husband called. "Those women got you buffaloed?"

Buffaloed? He came back to reality with a jerk. That was just what they almost had done. And all because the human imagination was a thoroughly unreliable instrument, like a rubber ruler. Let's see, if he played his queen it might set up a king in Mrs. Gunnison's hand so she could get in and run her spades.

After that round, Tansy served refreshments, and the usual shop talk began.

"Saw Pollard today," Gunnison remarked, helping himself to a section of chocolate cake. "Told me he'd be meeting with the trustees tomorrow morning, to decide among other things on the chairmanship in sociology."

Hervey Sawtelle choked on a crumb and almost lost his coffeecup.

Norman caught Mrs. Sawtelle glaring at him vindictively. She changed her face and murmured, "How interesting." He smiled. That kind of hate he could understand. No need to confuse it with witchcraft.

He went to the kitchen to get Mrs. Carr a glass of water, and met Mrs. Gunnison coming out of the bedroom. She was slipping a leather-bound booklet into her capacious handbag. It recalled to his mind Tansy's diary. Probably an address book.

Totem slipped out from behind her, giving what sounded like a hiss as he dodged past her feet.

"I loathe the animal," said Mrs. Carr bluntly, and walked past him.

Professor Carr had made arrangements for a final rubber, men at one table, women at the other.

"A barbaric arrangement," said Tansy, winking. "You really don't think we can play bridge at all."

"On the contrary, my dear, I think you play very well," Carr replied seriously. "But I confess that at times I prefer to play with men. I can get a better idea of what's going on in their minds. Whereas women still baffle me."

"As they should, dear," added Mrs. Carr, bringing a flurry of laughter.

The cards suddenly began to run freakishly, with abnormal distribution of suits, and play took a wild turn. But Norman found it impossible to concentrate, which made Sawtelle an even more jittery partner than usual.

He kept listening to what the women were saying at the other table. His rebellious imagination persisted in reading hidden meanings into the most innocuous remarks.

"You usually hold wonderful hands, Tansy. But now you don't seem to have any," said Mrs. Carr. But suppose she was referring to the kind of hand you wrapped in flannel?

"Oh, well, unlucky in cards ... you know." How had Mrs. Sawtelle meant to finish the remark? Lucky in love? Lucky in sorcery? Idiotic notion!

"That's two psychic bids you've made in succession, Tansy. Better watch out. We'll catch up with you." What might not a psychic bid stand for in Mrs. Gunnison's vocabulary? Some kind of bluff in witchcraft? A pretense at giving up conjuring?

"I wonder," Mrs. Carr murmured sweetly to Tansy, "if you're hiding a very strong hand this time, dear, and making a trap pass?"

Rubber ruler. That was the trouble with imagination. According to a rubber ruler, an elephant would be no bigger than a mouse, a jagged line and a curve might be equally straight. He tried to think about the slam he had contracted for.

"The girls talk a good game of bridge," murmured Gunnison in an undertone.

Gunnison and Carr came out at the long end of two-thousand rubber and were still crowing pleasantly as they stood around waiting to leave.

Norman remembered a question he wanted to ask Mrs. Gunnison.

"Harold was telling me you had a number of photographs of that cement dragon or whatever it is on top of Estrey. It's right opposite my window."

She looked at him for a moment, then nodded.

"I believe I've got one with me. Took it almost a year ago."

She dug a crumpled snapshot out of her handbag.

He studied it, and experienced a kind of shiver in reverse. This didn't make sense at all. Instead of being toward the center of the roof ridge, or near the bottom, it was almost at the top. Just what was involved here? A practical joke stretching over a period of days or weeks? Or—His mind balked, like a skittish horse. Yet—*Eppur si muove*.

He turned it over. There was a confusing inscription on the back, in greasy red crayon. Mrs. Gunnison took it out of his hands, to show the others.

"The wind sounds like a lost soul," said Mrs. Carr, hugging her coat around her as Norman opened the door.

"But a rather noisy one," her husband added with a chuckle.

When the last of them were gone, Tansy slipped her arm around his waist, and said, "I must be getting old. It wasn't nearly as much of a trial as usual. They seemed almost human."

Norman looked down at her intently. She was smiling peacefully. Totem had come out of hiding and was rubbing against her legs.

With an effort Norman nodded and said, "Yes, they did."

V.

There were shadows everywhere, and the ground under his feet was treacherous and of uncertain texture. The dreadful strident roaring, which seemed to have gone on since eternity began, shook his very bones. Yet it did not drown out the flat, nasty monotone of that other voice which kept telling him to do something—he could not be sure what except that it involved injury to himself, although he heard the voice as plainly as if

someone were talking inside his head. He tried to struggle away from the direction in which the voice wanted him to go, but heavy hands jerked him back. He wanted to look up over his shoulder at something he knew would be taller than himself, but he couldn't muster the courage. There were great rushing clouds overhead making the shadows, and they would momentarily assume the form of gigantic faces brooding down on him, faces with pits of darkness for eyes, and sullen, savage lips, and great masses of hair streaming behind.

He must not do the thing the voice commanded. And yet he must. He struggled wildly. The sound rose to a rock-shattering pandemonium. The clouds became a black, ragged, all-engulfing torrent.

And then suddenly the bedroom became mixed up with the other picture, and he struggled awake.

He rubbed his face, which was thick with sleep, and tried unsuccessfully to remember what the voice had wanted him to do. He still felt the reverberations of the sound in his ears.

Gloomy daylight seeped through the shades. The clock indicated quarter to eight.

Tansy was still curled up, one arm out of the covers. A smile seemed to be tickling the corners of her lips and wrinkling her nose. He slipped out carefully. His bare foot failed to avoid a loose carpet tack. Suppressing an angry grunt, he hobbled off.

For the first time in months he botched shaving. Twice the new blade slid too sharply sideways, neatly removing tiny segments of skin. He glared irritably at the scowling face in the mirror, pulled the blade down his chin very slowly, but with a little too much pressure, and gave himself a third nick.

By the time he got down to the kitchen, the water he had put on was boiling. As he poured it into the coffeepot, the wobbly handle of the saucepan came completely loose, and his bare ankles were splattered painfully. Totem skittered away, and then slowly returned to his tin of milk. Norman cursed, and then grinned. What had he been telling Tansy about the cussedness of things? As if to prove the point with a final ridiculous example, he bit his tongue while eating coffee cake. Cussedness of things?

Say rather the cussedness of the human nervous system! Faintly he was aware of a potentially disturbing emotion—remnant of the dream?—like an unpleasant swimming shape glimpsed beneath weedy water.

It seemed most akin to a dull seething anger, for as he hurried toward Morton Hall, he found himself inwardly at war with the established order of things—and particularly educational institutions. The old sophomoric exasperation at the hypocrisies and compromises of civilized society welled up and poured over the dams that a mature realism had set against it. This was a great life for a man to be leading. Coddling the immature minds of grown-up brats, and lucky to get one halfway promising student a year. Playing bridge with a bunch of old fogies. Catering to jittery incompetents like Hervey Sawtelle. Bowing to the thousand and one stupid rules and traditions of a second-rate college. And for what!

He knew he was being silly, but some perverse quirk kept him from pushing back this intrusion of juvenile emotions.

Ragged clouds were moving overhead, pre-saging rain. They reminded him of his dream. He felt the impulse to shout a childish defiance at those faces in the sky.

An army truck rolled quietly by, recalling to his mind a little picture Evelyn Sawtelle had scribbled on a bridge pad. He followed it with his eyes. When he turned back, he saw Mrs. Carr.

"You've cut yourself," she said brightly, peering closely at his face.

"Yes, I have."

"How unfortunate!"

He did not try to answer. They walked together through the gate between Morton and Estrey. He could just make out the snout of the cement dragon poked over the Estrey gutter.

"I wanted to tell you last night how distressed I was, Professor Saylor, about that matter of Margaret van Nice, only I didn't think it was the right time.

I'm dreadfully sorry that you had to be called in. Such a disgusting accusation! How you must have felt!"

She seemed to misinterpret his wry grimace at this, for she went on swiftly, "Of course, I never once dreamed that *you* had done anything the least improper, but I thought there must be *something* to the girl's story. She told it in such *detail*. Really, Professor Saylor, some of the girls that come to Hempnell nowadays are *terrible*. Where they get such loathsome ideas from is quite beyond me."

"Would you like to know?"

She looked up at him blankly.

"They get them," he told her concisely, "from a society which seeks simultaneously to stimulate and inhibit one of their basic drives. They get them, in brief, from a lot of dirty-minded adults!"

"Really, Professor Saylor! Why—"

"There are a number of girls here at Hempnell who would be a lot healthier with real love affairs rather than imaginary ones. A fair proportion, of course, have already made satisfactory adjustments."

He had the satisfaction of hearing her gasp as he abruptly turned into Morton. His heart was pounding pleasantly. His lips were tight. When he reached his office he lifted the phone and asked for an on-campus number.

"Thompson?... Saylor. I have a couple of news items for you."

"Good, good! What are they?" Thompson replied hungrily, in the tone of one who poises a pencil.

"First, the subject for my address to the Off-campus Mothers week after next, 'Pre-marital Relations and the College Student.' Second, my theatrical friends—you know the ones I mean—will be playing in the city at the same time, and I shall invite them to be guests of the college."

"But—" The poised pencil had obviously been dropped like a red-hot poker.

"That's all, Thompson. Perhaps I shall have something more interesting another time. Good-by."

He felt a stinging sensation in his hand. He had been fingering a little obsidian knife he used for slitting envelopes. It had gashed his finger. Blood smeared the clear volcanic glass where once, he told himself, had been the blood of sacrifice or ritual scarification. Clumsy—The nine-o'clock buzzer cut short his musing. He ripped a bandage from his handkerchief.

As he hurried down the corridor, Bronstein fell into step with him.

"We're pulling for you this morning, Dr. Saylor," he murmured heartily.

"What do you mean?"

Bronstein's grin was a trifle knowing. "A girl who works in the president's office told us they were deciding on the sociology chairmanship. I sure hope the old buzzards show some sense for once."

Academic dignity stiffened Norman's reply. "In any case, I will be satisfied with their decision."

Bronstein felt the rebuff. "Of course, I didn't mean to—"

"Of course you didn't."

He immediately regretted his sharpness. Why the devil should he rebuke a student for failing to reverence trustees as representatives of deity? Why pretend he didn't want the chairmanship? Why conceal his contempt for half the faculty? The anger he thought he had worked out of his system surged up with redoubled violence. On a sudden irresistible impulse he tossed his lecture notes aside and started in to tell the class just what he thought of the world and Hempnell. They might as well find out young!

Fifteen minutes later he came to with a jerk in the middle of a sentence about "dirty-minded old women, in whom greed for social prestige has reached the magnitude of a perversion." He could not remember half of what he had been saying. He searched the faces of his class. They looked excited but puzzled, most of them, and a few looked shocked. Gracine Pollard was glaring. Yes! He remembered now that he had made a neat but nasty analysis of the politic motives of a certain college president who could be none other than Randolph Pollard. And somewhere he had started off on that premarital-relations business, and had been ribald about it, to say the least. And he had—

Exploded. Like a Prince Rupert drop.

He finished off with half a dozen lame generalities. He knew they must be quite inappropriate, for the looks grew more puzzled.

But the class seemed very remote. A shiver was spreading downward from the base of his skull, all because of a few words that had printed themselves in his mind.

The words were: A fingernail has flicked a psychic filament.

He shook his head, jumbling the type. The words vanished.

There were thirty minutes of class time left. He wanted to get away. He announced a surprise quiz, chalked up two questions, and left the room.

The cut finger had started to bleed again through the bandage, and there was blood on the chalk.

And dried blood on the obsidian knife. He resisted the impulse to finger it, and sat staring at the top of his desk.

It all went back to that witchcraft business, he told himself. It had shaken him much more than he had dared to admit. He had tried to put it out of his mind too quickly. And Tansy had appeared to forget it too quickly, too. A person could not shake an obsession that easily. He must thrash it out with her, again and again, or the thing would fester.

But with Tansy seeming so happy and relieved the last three days, that might be the wrong course to take, the selfish course—

His eyes started to stray toward the window, but the telephone recalled him.

"Professor Saylor?... I'm calling for Dr. Pollard. Could you come in and see Dr. Pollard this afternoon?... Four o'clock?... Thank you."

He leaned back with a smile. At least he had gotten the chairmanship.

It grew darker as the day progressed, the ragged clouds sweeping lower and lower. But the storm held off until almost four.

Big raindrops splattered the dusty steps as he ducked into the portico of the Administration Building. Thunder crackled and crashed, as if acres of metal

sheeting were being shaken above the clouds. He turned back to watch. Lightning threw the Gothic roofs and towers into sharp relief. Again the crackle, building to a crash. He remembered he had left a window open in his office. But there was nothing that would be damaged by the wet.

Wind swooped down past the portico with a strident, pulsating roar. The unmusical voice that spoke into his ear had the same quality.

"Isn't it a pretty storm?"

Evelyn Sawtelle was smiling for once. It had a grotesque effect on her features, as if a horse had suddenly discovered how to smirk.

"You've heard the news, of course?" she went on. "About Hervey?"

Hervey popped out from behind her. He was grinning, too, but embarrassedly. He mumbled something that was lost in the storm, and extended his hand vaguely, as if he were in a receiving line.

Evelyn never took her eyes off Norman. "Isn't it wonderful?" she hissed. "Of course, we expected it, but still—"

Norman guessed. He forced himself to grasp Hervey's hand, just as the latter was withdrawing it flusteredly.

"Congratulations, old man," he said briefly.

"I'm very proud of Hervey," Evelyn announced possessively, as if he were a small boy who had won a prize for good behavior.

Her eyes followed Norman's hand. "Oh, you've cut yourself." The smirk seemed to be a permanent addition to her features. The wind wailed fiendishly. "Come, Hervey!" And she walked out into the storm as if it weren't there.

Hervey goggled at her in surprise. He mumbled something apologetic to Norman, pumped his hand up and down again, and then obediently scampered after his wife.

Norman watched them. There was something unpleasantly impressive about the way Evelyn Sawtelle marched through the sheets of rain, getting both of them drenched to no purpose except to satisfy some strange obstinacy. He could see that Hervey was trying to hurry her and not succeeding. Lightning flared viciously, but there was no reaction apparent in her angular, awkward

frame. Once again he became dimly aware of an alien, explosive emotion deep within him.

And so that little poodle dog of hers, he thought, is to have the final say on the educational policy of the sociology department. Then what the devil does Pollard want to see me for? To offer his commiserations?

Almost an hour later he slammed out of Pollard's office, tense with anger, wondering why he had not handed in his resignation on the spot. To be interrogated about his actions like some kid, on the obvious instigation of busybodies like Thompson and Mrs. Carr and Gracine Pollard! To have to listen to a lot of hogwash about his "attitudes" and "the Hempnell spirit," with veiled insinuations about his "moral code."

At least he had given somewhat better than he had taken! At least he had forced a note of confusion into that suave, oratorical voice, and made those tufted gray eyebrows pop up and down more than once!

Mrs. Gunnison was standing at the door of her husband's office. Like a big, strong slug, he told himself, noting her twisted stockings and handbag stuffed full as a grab bag, the inevitable camera dangling beside it. His exasperation shifted to her.

"Yes, I cut myself!" he told her, observing the direction of her glance. His voice was hoarse from the tirade he had delivered to Pollard.

Then he remembered something and did not stop to weigh his words. "Mrs. Gunnison, you picked up my wife's diary last night—by mistake. Will you please give it to me?"

"*You're* mistaken," she replied tolerantly.

"I saw you coming out of her bedroom with it."

Her eyes became lazy slits. "In that case you'd have mentioned it last night. You're overwrought, Norman. I understand." She nodded toward Pollard's office. "It must have been quite a disappointment."

"I'm asking you to return the diary!"

"And you'd really better look after that cut," she continued unruffled. "It doesn't look any too well bandaged, and it seems to be bleeding. Infections can be nasty things."

He turned on his heel and walked away. Her reflection confronted him, murky and dim in the glass of the outer door. She was smiling.

Outside Norman looked at his hand. Evidently he had opened the cut when he banged Pollard's desk. He drew the bandage tighter.

The storm had blown over, and yellow sunlight was flooding from under the low curtain of clouds to the west, flashing richly from the wet roofs and upper windows. Surplus rain was sprinkling from the trees. The campus was empty. A flurry of laughter from the girls' dormitories etched itself on the silence. He shrugged aside his anger, and let his senses absorb the new-washed beauty of the scene.

He prided himself on being able to enjoy the moment at hand. It seemed to him one of the chief signs of maturity.

He tried to think like a painter, identifying hues and shades, searching for the faint rose or green hidden in the shadows. There was really something to be said for Gothic architecture. Even though it was not functional, it carried the eye along pleasantly from one fanciful bit of stonework to the next. Now take those leafy finials topping the Estrey tower—

And then suddenly the sunlight was colder than ice, and the roofs of Hempnell were like the roofs of hell, and the faint laughter like the crystalline cachinations of fiends. Before he knew it, he had swerved sharply away from Morton, off the path and on to the wet grass, although he was only halfway across campus.

No need to go back to the office, he told himself shakily. Just a long climb for a few notes. They can wait until tomorrow. And why not go home a different way tonight, around Estrey? Why always take the direct route that led through the gate between Estrey and Morton? Why—

He forced himself to look up again at the open window of his office. It was empty now, as he might have expected. That other thing must have been some moving blur in his vision, and imagination had done the rest, as when a small shadow scurrying across the floor becomes a spider.

Or perhaps a shade flapping outward—

But a shadow could hardly crawl along the ledge outside the windows. A blur could hardly move so slowly or retain such a definite form.

And then the way the thing had waited, peering in, before it dropped down inside. Like ... like a—

Of course it was all nonsense. And there really was no need whatsoever to bother about fetching those notes or closing the window. It would be just like giving in to a neurotic fear. There was a rumble of distant thunder.

—Like a very large cat, the color and texture of stone.

VI.

"—and henceforth his soul is believed to be knit up in a manner with the stone. If it breaks, it is an evil omen for him; they say that thunder has struck the stone and that he who owns it will soon die—"

No use. His eyes kept wondering over the mass of print. He laid "The Golden Bough" aside, and leaned back. From somewhere to the east, the thunder still throbbed faintly. But the familiar leather of the easy-chair imparted a sense of security and detachment.

Suppose, just as an intellectual exercise, you tried to analyze it in terms of sorcery.

The dragon would be a clear case of sympathetic magic. Mrs. Gunnison animated it by operating on the photographs. And if you hypothesized a bull-roarer, or the recording of one, it would provide a neat magical explanation for the wind last night and the storm and wind today—both associated with Mrs. Sawtelle. And then the similar sound in his dream—He wrinkled his nose in distaste.

He could hear Tansy calling Totem from the back porch, rattling his little tin pan.

Put today's self-injurious acts in another category. The obsidian knife. The razor blade. The cranky saucepan. The carpet tack. The match that he had

let burn his fingers a few minutes ago.

Perhaps the razor blade had been charmed, like the enchanted sword or ax which wounds the person who wields it. Perhaps someone had stolen the blood-smeared obsidian knife and dropped it in water, so the wound would keep flowing. That was a well-established superstition.

A dog was trotting along the sidewalk out in front. He could distinctly hear the *clop-clop* of paws.

Tansy was still calling Totem.

Perhaps a sorcerer had commanded him to destroy himself by inches—or millimeters, considering the razor blade. That would explain all the self-injurious acts at one swoop. The flat voice in the dream had ordered him to do it.

The dog had turned up the drive. His claws made a grating sound on the concrete.

The tarot-card diagrams scribbled by Mrs. Sawtelle would figure as some magical control mechanism. The stick figure of the man and the truck had grim implications if interpreted in the light of his irrational fear of automobile accidents.

It really didn't sound so much like a dog. Probably the neighbor's boy dragging home by jerks some indeterminate bulky object. The neighbor's boy devoted all his spare time to collecting old metal.

"Totem! Totem!" Followed by the sound of the back door closing.

Finally, that very trite "sense of a presence" just behind him. Taller than himself, hands poised to grab. Only whenever you looked over your shoulder, it dodged. Something like that had figured in the dream—the source, perhaps, of the flat voice. And in that case—

His patience snapped. An intellectual exercise, all right! For morons! He stubbed out his cigarette.

"Well, I've done my duty. That cat can sing for his supper." Tansy sat on the arm of the chair and put her hand on Norman's shoulder. "How are things going at college?"

He smiled up at her. He had been afraid of that question.

"Not so good," he replied lightly.

"The chairmanship?"

He nodded. "Sawtelle got it."

Tansy cursed fluently. It did him good to hear her.

"Make you want to take up conjuring again?" Hold on! He shouldn't have said that.

She looked at him closely.

"How do you mean that?" she asked.

"Just a joke."

"Are you sure? I know you've been worrying about me these last few days, ever since you found out. Wondering if I were going totally neurotic on you, and watching for the next symptoms. Now, dear, you don't have to deny it. It was the natural thing. I expected you'd be suspicious of me for a while. With your knowledge of psychiatry, it would be impossible for you to believe that anyone could shake off an obsession so quickly. And I've been so happy to get free from all that, that your suspicions haven't bothered me. I've known they would wear off."

"But, darling, I honestly haven't been suspicious," he protested. "Maybe I ought to have been, but I haven't."

Her gray-green eyes were enigmatic and serious. She said slowly, "Then what are you worrying about?"

"Nothing at all." Here was where he had to be very careful.

She shook her head. "That's not true. You are worrying. Oh, I know there are some things on your mind that you haven't told me about. It isn't that."

He looked up quickly.

She nodded. "About the chairmanship. And that some student has been threatening you. And about that Van Nice girl." She smiled briefly, as he started to protest. "Oh, I know you aren't the type who seduces love-struck and innocent mimeograph operators." She became serious again. "Those are all minor matters, things you can take in your stride. You didn't tell me about them because you were afraid I might backslide, from the desire to protect you. Isn't that right?"

"Yes."

"But I have the feeling that what you're worrying about goes much deeper than that. Yesterday and today I've even felt that you wanted to turn to me for help, and somehow didn't dare."

He paused, as if thinking exactly how to phrase his answer. But he was studying her face, trying to read the exact meaning of each little familiar quirk of expression around the mouth and eyes. She looked very contained, but that was only a mask, he thought. Actually, in spite of everything she said, she must still be poised close to the brink of her obsession. One little push, such as a few careless words on his part—How the devil had he ever let himself get so enmeshed in his own worries and those ridiculous projections of his own cranky imagination? Here was the only thing that mattered—the mind behind this smooth brown forehead and these clear, gray-green eyes; to steer that mind away from any such ridiculous notions as those he had been indulging in, the last few days.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I *have* been worried about you. I thought it would hurt your self-confidence if I let you know. Maybe I was unwise—you seem to have sensed it, anyway—but that's what I thought. The way you feel now, of course, it can't possibly hurt you to know."

It occurred to him that it was easier to lie convincingly when you loved someone, provided the lie were for that person's sake.

She did not give in at once. "Are you sure?" she said. "I still have the feeling there's more to it."

Suddenly she smiled and yielded to the pressure of his arm. "It must be the MacKnight in me—my Scotch ancestry," she said laughing. "Awfully stubborn, you know. Monomaniacs. When we're crazy on a thing, we're completely crazy, but when we drop it, we drop it all at once. Like my

great-uncle Peter. You know, the one who left the Presbyterian ministry and gave up Christianity on the very same day he proved to his satisfaction there was no God. He was seventy-two at the time."

There was a long and grumbling roll of thunder. The storm was swinging back.

"Well, I'm very glad you're only worried about me," she continued. "It's complimentary, and I like it."

She was smiling happily, but there was still something enigmatic about the eyes, something withheld. As he was congratulating himself on carrying it off successfully, it suddenly occurred to him that two could play at the game of lying. She might be holding something back herself, with the idea of reassuring him. She might be trying to protect him from her own blacker worries. Her subtlety might undercut his own. No sane reason to suspect that, and yet—

"Suppose I get us a drink," she said, "and we decide whether or not you leave Hempnell this year, and look for greener fields."

He nodded. She started around the bend in the L-shaped room for the sideboard.

"—and yet, you could live with a person and love a person for fifteen years, and not know what was behind their eyes."

There was the rattle of glassware, and the friendly sound of a full bottle set down on a table.

Then, timed to the thunder, but much, much closer, a shuddering, animal scream of anguished fear. It was cut off before Norman had sprung to his feet.

As he cleared the angle of the room, he saw Tansy going through the kitchen door. She was a little ahead of him down the back steps.

Light fanned out from the windows of the opposite house into the service yard. It revealed the sprawled body of Totem, head mashed flat against the

concrete.

He heard a little sound start and stop in Tansy's throat. It might have been a gasp, or a sob, or a snarl.

The light revealed a little more than the body. He moved so that his feet covered the two prominent scuffs in the concrete just beyond the body. They might have been caused by the impact of a brick or heavy stone, perhaps the thing that had killed Totem, but there was something so suggestive about their relative position that he did not want Tansy's imagination to have a chance to work on them.

She lifted her face. She was never one to show much emotion.

"You'd better go in," he said.

"You'll—"

He nodded. "Yes."

She stopped halfway up the stairs. "That was a rotten, rotten thing for anybody to do."

"Yes. We'll try to find out who."

She left the door open. A moment later she came out and laid on the porch railing a square of heavy cloth, covered with shed hair. Then she went in again and shut the door.

He rolled up the cat's body and stopped at the garage for the spade. He did not spend time searching for any brick or heavy stone or other missile. Nor did he examine closer the heavy footmarks he fancied he saw in the grass beyond the service yard.

Lightning began to flicker as his spade bit into the soft ground by the back fence. He kept his mind strictly on the task at hand. He worked steadily, but without undue haste. When he patted down the last spadeful of earth and started for the house, the lightning flashes were stronger, making the moments in between even darker. A wind had started up and was dragging at the leaves.

He did not hurry. What if the lightning did indistinctly show him a large dog near the house toward the front? There were several large dogs in the neighborhood. They were not savage. Totem had not been killed by a dog.

Deliberately he replaced the spade in the garage and walked back to the house. Only when he got inside and looked back through the screen did his thoughts break loose for a moment.

The lightning flash, brightest yet, showed the dog coming around the corner of the house. He had only a glimpse. A gray dog who walked stiff-legged. He quickly closed the door and shot home the bolt.

Then he remembered that the study windows were open. He must close them. Quickly.

It might rain in.

When Norman entered the living room his face was composed. Tansy was sitting in the straight chair, leaning a little forward, an intent moody expression around her eyes. Her hands were playing absently with a bit of twine.

He carefully lit a cigarette.

"Do you want that drink now?" he asked, not too casually, not too sharply.

"No, thanks. You have one." Her hands kept on knotting and unknotting the twine.

He sat down and picked up his book. From the easy-chair he could watch her unobtrusively.

And now that he had no grave to dig or other mechanical task to perform, his thoughts were not to be denied. But at least he could keep them circling in a little isolated sphere inside his skull, without affecting either the expression of his face or the direction of his other thoughts, which were protectively focused on Tansy.

"Sorcery *is*," went the thoughts inside the sphere. "Something has been conjured down from a roof. Women are witches fighting for their men. Tansy was a witch. She was guarding you. But you made her stop."

"In that case," he replied swiftly to the thoughts inside the sphere, "why isn't Tansy aware of what's happening? It can't be denied that she has acted very relieved and happy."

"Are you sure she isn't aware or becoming aware?" answered the thoughts inside the sphere. "Besides, in losing her weapons, she has lost her

sensitivity, which had probably declined in acuteness through familiarity. Without microscope or telescope, a scientist would be no better able than a savage to see the germs of typhoid or the moons of Mars. His natural sensory equipment would even be inferior to that of the savage."

And the imprisoned thoughts buzzed violently, like bees seeking escape from a stopped-up hive.

"Norman," Tansy said abruptly, without looking up at him, "you found and burned that hand in your watch charm, didn't you?"

He thought a moment. "Yes, I did," he said lightly.

"I'd really forgotten about it. There were so many."

He turned a page, and then another. Thunder crackled loudly, and rain began to patter on the roof.

"Norman, you burned the diary, too, didn't you? You were right in doing it, of course. I held it back, because it didn't contain actual curses, only the formulas for them. So in a twisted illogical way I pretended it didn't count."

That was harder to answer. He felt as if he were playing a guessing game and Tansy was getting perilously "warm." The thoughts in the sphere buzzed triumphantly, "Mrs. Gunnison has the diary. Now she knows all of Tansy's protective charms."

But he answered, "Yes, I did burn it. I'm sorry, but I thought—"

"Of course," Tansy cut in. "You were quite right." Her fingers played more rapidly with the cord. She did not look down at it.

Lightning showed flashes of pale street and trees through the window. The patter of rain grew in volume. But through it he fancied he heard the scrunch of paws on the drive. Ridiculous—rain and wind were making too much noise.

His eyes were attracted to the pattern of knots Tansy's restless fingers were weaving. They were complicated, strong-looking knots which fell apart at a single cunning jerk, reminding him of how Tansy had studied assiduously the cat's cradles of the Indians. It also recalled to his mind how knots are used by the primitives to tie and loose the winds, to hold loved ones, to noose far-off enemies, to inhibit or free all manner of physical and

physiological processes. And how the Fates weave destinies like threads. He found something very pleasing in the pattern of the knots and the rhythmic movements which produced them. They seemed to signify security. Until they fell apart.

"Norman"—the voice was preoccupied and rapid—"what was that snapshot you asked Hulda Gunnison to show you last night?"

He felt a brief flurry of panic. She was getting "very warm." This was the stage of the game where you cried out, "Hot!"

And then he heard the heavy, unyielding *clump-clump* on the boards of the front porch, seeming to move questingly along the wall. The sphere of alien thoughts began to exert an irresistible centrifugal pressure. He felt his sanity being smothered between the assaults from without and within. Very deliberately he shaved off the ash of his cigarette against the edge of the tray.

"It was of the roof of Estrey," he said casually. "Gunnison told me she'd taken a number of pictures of that sort and I wanted to see a sample."

"Some sort of creature in it, wasn't there?" Knots flickered into being and vanished with bewildering speed. It seemed to him suddenly that more than twine was being manipulated, and more than empty air tied and loosed. As if the knots were somehow creating an influence, as an electric current along a twisted wire creates a complex magnetic field.

"No," he said, and then made himself chuckle, "unless you count in a stray gargoyle or two."

Thunder ripped and crashed deafeningly. Lightning might have struck in the neighborhood. Tansy did not move a muscle in response. "That was a Lulu," he started to say. Then, as the thunder crash trailed off in rumblings and there was a second's lull in the rain, he heard the sound of something leaping heavily down from the front edge of the porch toward that part of the wall where the large low window was set.

He got to his feet and walked toward the window, as if to look out at the storm. As he passed Tansy's chair he saw that her rippling fingers were creating a strange knot resembling a flower, with seven loops for petals. She stared like a sleepwalker. Then he was at the window, shielding her.

The next lightning flash showed him what he knew he must see. It crouched, facing the window. The head was still blank and crude as an unfinished skull.

In the ensuing surge of blackness, the sphere of alien thoughts expanded with instant swiftness, until it occupied his entire mind.

He glanced behind him. Tansy's hands were still. The strange seven-looped knot was poised between them.

Just as he was turning back, he saw the hands jerk apart and the loops whip in like a seven-fold snare—and hold.

And in that same moment of turning he saw the street brighten like day and a great ribbon of lightning split the tall elm opposite and fork into several streams which streaked across the street toward the window and the stony form upreared against it.

Then—blinding light, and a tingling electrical surge through his whole body.

But in his mind's eye was indelibly traced the incandescent track of the lightning, whose multiple streams, racing toward the upreared stony form, had converged upon it as if drawn together by a seven-fold knot.

The sphere of alien thoughts expanded beyond his skull at a dizzy rate, vanished.

His gasping, uncontrollable laughter rose above the dying reverberations of the titan thunder blast. He dragged open the window, pulled a bridge lamp up to it, jerked the cover from the lamp so its light flooded outward.

"Look, Tansy!" he called, his words mixed with the manic laughter. "Look, what those crazy students have done!" She *must* be made to think it was a joke. "Those frat men, I bet, I kidded in class. Look what they dragged down from campus and stuck in our front yard. Of all the crazy things—we'll have to call Buildings & Grounds to take it away tomorrow."

Rain splattered in his face. There was a sulphurous, metallic odor. Her hand touched his shoulder. She stared out blankly, her eyes still asleep.

It stood there, propped against the wall, solid and inert as only the inorganic can be. In some places the cement was darkened and fused.

"And of all mad coincidences," he gasped, "the lightning had to go and strike it!"

On an impulse, he reached out his hand, and touched it. At the feel of the rough, unyielding surface, still hot from the lightning flash, his laughter died, and a grim lucidity flooded his mind.

"*Eppur si muove*," he murmured to himself, so low that even Tansy, standing beside him, might not have heard. "*Eppur si muove*."

VII.

Next day he went around campus like a man in a daze. He had had a long and heavy sleep, but he looked as if he were stupefied by weariness. Even Harold Gunnison remarked on it.

"It's nothing," he replied. "I'm just lazy."

Gunnison smiled skeptically. "You've been working too hard. That's the temptation we're all up against. But it butchers efficiency. Better ration your hours of work. Your jobs won't go hungry if you feed them ten hours a day.

"Trustees are queer cusses," he continued with apparent irrelevance. "And Pollard's more a politician than an educator. But he brings in the money, and that's what college presidents are for."

Norman indicated that he appreciated the sympathy, but he felt as far removed from Gunnison as from the hordes of gayly dressed students who filled the walks and socialized in clusters. As if there were a wall of faintly clouded glass between. His only aim—and even that was blurred—was to prolong his present state of fatigued reaction from last night's events, and to avoid all thoughts.

Thoughts were dangerous. He felt their presence here and there in his brain, like pockets of poison, harmless as long as you left them encysted and did not prick them. One was more familiar than the others. It had been there last night. He felt vaguely thankful that he could not longer see inside of it.

Another was concerned with Tansy, and why she had seemed so cheerful and forgetful this morning.

Another—a very large one—was sunk so deeply in his mind that he could only perceive a small section of its globular surface. He knew it was connected with an unfamiliar emotion that he had sensed yesterday more than once, and he knew that it must under no circumstances be disturbed. He could feel it pulsate slowly and rhythmically, like a monster asleep in mud.

Another had to do with knots and lightning.

Another—tiny but prominent—was somehow concerned with cards.

And there were more, many more.

His situation was akin to that of the legendary hero who must travel through a long and narrow corridor, without once touching the morbidly enticing, poisoned walls.

He knew he could not avoid contact with them indefinitely, but in the meantime the thought-cysts might shrink and disappear.

The day fitted with his superficially dull and lethargic mood. Instead of the cool spell that should have followed the storm, there was a hot foretaste of summer in the air. Student absences rose sharply. Those who came to class were inattentive, and exhibited other symptoms of spring fever.

Only Bronstein seemed animated. He kept drawing Norman's other students aside by twos and threes, and whispering to them heatedly. Norman found out that he was trying to get up a petition of protest on Sawtelle's appointment. Norman asked him to stop it. Bronstein refused, but in any case he seemed to be failing in the job of arousing the other students.

Norman's lectures were languid. He contented himself with transforming his notes into accurate verbal statements with a minimum of mental effort. He watched the pencils move methodically as notes were taken, or wander off into intricate doodles. Two girls were engrossed in sketching the handsome profile of the fraternity president in the second row. He watched foreheads wrinkle as they picked up the thread of his lecture, smooth out again as they dropped it.

And all the while his own mind was wandering off on side tracks. They were too fugitive, too much like daydreams to be called thoughts.

One began when he recalled the epigram about a lecture being a process of transferring the contents of the teacher's notebook into the notebooks of the students, without allowing it to pass through the minds of either. That made him think of mimeographing.

Mimeograph, it went on. Margaret van Nice. Theodore Jennings. Gun. Windowpane. Galileo. Scroll—(Sheer away from that! Forbidden territory.)

The daydream backtracked and took a different turning. Jennings. Gunnison. Pollard. President. Emperor. Empress. Juggler. Tower. Hanged man—(Hold on! Don't go any further.)

As the long dull day wore on, the daydreams gradually assumed a uniform coloration.

Gun. Knife. Sliver. Broken glass. Nail. Tetanus.

War. Mangled bodies. Mayhem. Murder. Rope. Hangman. (Sheer off again!) Gas, Poison.

The coloration of blood and physical injury.

And ever more strongly, he felt the breath-like pulsations of the monster in the depths of his mind, dreaming nightmares of carnage from which it would soon awake and heave up out of the mud. And he powerless to stop it. It was as if a crusted-over swamp, swollen with underground water, were pushing up the seemingly healthy ground above by imperceptible degrees—nearing the point when it would burst through in one vast slimy eruption.

Starting home, Norman fell in with Mr. Carr.

"Good evening, Norman," said the old gentleman, lifting his Panama hat to mop his forehead, which merged into an extensive bald area.

"Good evening, Linthicum," said Norman. But his mind was occupied with speculating how, if a man let a thumbnail grow and then sharpened it carefully, he could cut the veins of his wrist and so bleed to death.

Mr. Carr wiped the handkerchief around his beard.

"I enjoyed the bridge thoroughly," he said. "Perhaps the four of us could have a game when the ladies are away at the faculty wives' meeting next Thursday? You and I could be partners, and use the Culbertson slam conventions." His voice became wistful. "I'm tired of always having to play the Blackwood."

Norman nodded, but he was thinking of how men have learned to swallow their tongues, and when the occasion came, die of suffocation. He tried to check himself. These were speculations appropriate only to the concentration camp. Visions of death kept rising in his mind, replacing one another. He felt the pulsations deepen, become unendurably strong. Mr. Carr nodded pleasantly and turned off. He quickened his pace, as if the walls of the poisoned passageway were contracting on the legendary hero and, unless the end were soon reached, he would have to shove out against them wildly.

From the corner of his eye he saw one of his students. She was staring at him puzzledly. He brushed past her.

He reached the boulevard. The lights were against him. He paused on the edge of the curb. A large red truck was rumbling toward the intersection at a fair rate of speed.

And then he knew just what was going to happen, and that he would be unable to stop himself.

He was going to wait until the truck was very close and then he was going to throw himself under the wheels. End of the passageway.

That was the meaning of the fifth stick figure, the tarot diagram that had departed from tradition.

Empress—Juggler—The truck was very close. Tower—The lights had started to change but the truck was not going to stop. Hanged man—

It was only when he leaned forward, tensing his leg muscles, that the small flat voice spoke into his ear, a voice that was a monotone and yet diabolically humorous, the voice of his dreams:

"Not for two weeks, at least. Not for two more weeks."

He regained his balance. The truck rushed by. He looked over his shoulder—first up, then around. No one but a small Negro boy and an elderly man, rather shabbily dressed, carrying a shopping bag. They were waiting to cross in the opposite direction. A shiver settled on his spine.

Eyes shifting warily from side to side, he crossed the street, and proceeded home. He no longer thought of death, except to fear it. As soon as he was inside, he poured himself a more than generous drink. Oddly, Tansy had set out soda and ice. He mixed the highball and gulped it down.

So he had been given two weeks? Two weeks in which to pick his life slowly apart, savor each stage of doom, before he should walk again the narrow corridor at the end of which a truck was always rumbling by.

Anger surged in him at the idea.

But perhaps that was what he was supposed to do—get angry.

He mixed himself another drink, took a gulp, then looked at it doubtfully.

Perhaps that was part of the plan, too.

Tansy came in, carrying a bundle. Her face was smiling and a little flushed. With a sigh of relief she set down the bundle and pushed aside the dark bangs from her forehead.

"*Whew*, what a sweltering day. I thought you'd be wanting a drink. Here, let me finish that one for you."

When she put down the glass there was only ice in it. "There, now we're blood brothers or something. Mix yourself another."

"That was my second," he told her.

"Oh, heck, I thought I was cheating you." She sat on the edge of the table and wagged a finger in his face. "Look, mister, you need a rest. Or some excitement. I'm not sure which. Maybe both. Now here's my plan. I make us a cold supper—sandwiches. Then, when it's dark and nobody can see us, we get Oscar out of the garage, and sinfully waste a half gram of rubber off his

tires in driving to the Top of the Hill. We haven't done that for years. How about it, mister?"

He hesitated. Helped by the drink, his thoughts were veering. This was a crazy situation. Half his mind was still gripped by a sickening, panicky apprehension for his immediate personal future. The other half was coming under the spell of Tansy's gaiety.

She reached out and pinched his nose. "How about it?"

"All right," he said.

"Hey, you're supposed to act interested!" She slid off the table, started for the kitchen, then added darkly over her shoulder, "But that will come later."

She looked provocatively pretty, in her mock anger. He couldn't see any difference between now and fifteen years ago. He felt he was seeing her for the hundredth first time.

When the sandwiches came, he was reading the evening paper. The disquieting half-and-half mood persisted. He had found a local-interest item at the bottom of the fifth page.

STUDENT PRANKSTERS AT WORK AGAIN

A practical joke is worth any amount of trouble and physical exertion. At least, that is the sentiment of a group of Hempnell College students, as yet unidentified. But we are wondering about the sentiments of Professor Norman Saylor, when he looked out the window this morning and saw a stone gargoyle weighing a good three hundred pounds sitting in the middle of his lawn. It had been removed from the roof of one of the college buildings. How the students managed to detach it, lower it from the roof, and transport it to Professor Saylor's residence, is still a mystery.

Said Professor Saylor, "Thanks for the lawn ornament, boys, but I really don't want it."

When President Randolph Pollard was asked if the pranksters had been identified, he laughingly replied. "I guess our War

Program of physical education for men must be providing them with reserves of excess strength and energy."

When we spoke to President Pollard he was leaving to address the Lions' Club on "The College in War-time." (For details of his address, see page 1.)

Just what you might expect. The usual repertorial inaccuracies. It wasn't a gargoyle; gargoyles are ornamental rainspouts. And the reporter had not used the lightning angle in his story. Probably thought it would sound too fishy.

Finally, the familiar touch of turning the item into an advertisement for the physical-education department. You had to admit that the Hempnell publicity office had a kind of efficiency.

Tansy swept the paper out of his hands.

"The world can wait," she said. "Here, have a bite of my sandwich."

VIII.

It was quite dark when they started for the Hill. He drove carefully, taking his time at intersections. Tansy's gaiety still did no more than hold in check the other half of his thoughts.

"I might be a witch," she said, "taking you to a hilltop rendezvous. Our own private Sabbat."

She was smiling impishly. She had changed to a light white sports dress. She looked like one of his students.

Again he felt the craziness of the situation. The line between reality and pretense was become harder to distinguish. He must keep carefully in mind that when she said things like that, she was making a courageous mockery of her previous behavior. He must on no account let her see the other half of his thoughts. Or was that what she wanted?

The lights of the town dropped behind. Half a mile out, he turned off sharply onto the road that wound up the hill. It was bumpier than he

remembered from the last time—was it as much as ten years ago? And the trees were thicker, brushing the windshield.

When they emerged into the half acre of clearing on the top, the moon, two days after full, was rising redly.

Tansy pointed to it and said, "Check! I timed it perfectly. But where are the others? There always used to be two or three cars up here. And on a night like this!"

He stopped the car close to the edge. "Fashions in lovers' lanes change like anything else," he told her. "We're traveling a disused folkway."

"Always the sociologist!"

"I guess so. Maybe Mrs. Carr found out about this place. And I suppose the students range farther afield nowadays, or did until this year."

She rested her head on his shoulder. He switched off the headlights, and the moon cast soft shadows.

"We used to do this at Gorham," she murmured. "When I was taking your classes, and you were the serious young instructor. Until I found out you weren't any different from the college boys—only better. Remember?"

He nodded and took her hand. He looked down at the town, made out the campus, with its prominent floodlights designed to chase couples out of dark corners. Those garishly floodlighted Gothic buildings seemed for the moment to symbolize a whole world of barren intellectual competition and jealous traditionalism, a world toward which at the moment he felt as alien as if he were still twenty-six instead of forty-one and Tansy twenty-one instead of thirty-six.

"I wonder if that's why they hate us so?" he said, almost without thinking.

"Whatever are you talking about?" But the question sounded lazy.

"I mean the rest of the faculty, or most of them. Is it because we can do things like this?"

She laughed. "So you're actually coming alive. We don't do things like this so very often, you know."

He kept on with his idea. "It's a devilishly competitive and jealous life. The war, doing away with some of it, makes you more conscious of the rest. And competition in an institution can be nastier than any other, because it's so tight. Think so?"

"I've lived with it for years," said Tansy, simply.

"Of course, it's all very petty. But petty emotions can come to outweigh big ones. Their size is better suited to the human mind."

He looked down at Hempnell, and tried to visualize the amount of ill will and jealousy he had inevitably accumulated for himself. He felt a slight chill creeping around. He realized where this train of thought was leading. The darker half of his mind loomed up ominously.

"Here, philosopher," said Tansy, "have a slug."

She was offering him a small silver flask.

He recognized it. "I never dreamed you'd kept it all these years."

"Uh-huh. Remember when I first offered you a drink from it? You were a trifle shocked, I believe. Though you carried a flask, too."

"I took the drink."

"Uh-huh. So take this one."

It tasted like fire and spice. There were memories with it, memories of those crazy prohibition years, and of Gorham and New England.

"Brandy?"

"Greek style. Give me some."

Before that flood of memories, the darker half of his mind receded, was washed under. He looked at Tansy's sleek hair and moon-shadowed eyes. Of course, she's a witch, he thought lightly. She's Lilith. Ishtar. He'd tell her so.

"Do you remember the time," he said, "we slid down the bank to get away from the night watchman at Gorham? There would have been a magnificent scandal if he'd caught us."

"Oh, yes, and the time—"

When they went down, the moon was an hour higher. He drove slowly. No need to imitate the sillier practices of the prohibition era. A truck chugged past him. "Two more weeks." Rot! Who'd he think he was, hearing voices? Joan of Arc?

He felt hilarious. He wanted to tell Tansy all the ridiculous things he'd been imagining the last few days, so she could laugh at them, too. It would make a swell ghost story. There was a reason he shouldn't tell her, but it was an insignificant reason—part and parcel of this cramped, warped, overcautious Hempnell life they ought to break away from more often.

So when they arrived in the living room, Tansy flopping down on the sofa, he began, "You know, Tansy, about this witch stuff. I want to tell you—"

He was caught completely off guard by whatever force—subjective or objective—hit him. When it was over, he was sitting in the easy-chair, completely sober, with the outer world once more an icy pressure on his senses, and the inner world a whirling sphere of alien thought, and the future a dark corridor two weeks long.

It was as if a very large, horny hand had been clapped roughly over his mouth, and as if another such hand had grasped him by the shoulder, shook him, and slammed him down in the leather chair.

As if?

He looked around uneasily.

Maybe there had been hands.

Apparently Tansy had not noticed anything. Her face was a white oval in the gloom. She was still humming a snatch of song. She did not ask what he had started to say.

He got up, walked unsteadily into the dining room, and poured himself a drink from the sideboard. On the way he switched on the lights.

So he couldn't tell Tansy or anyone else about it, even if he wanted to? That was why you never heard from real witchcraft victims. And why they never seemed able to escape, even if the means of escape were at hand. It wasn't weak will. They were *watched*. Like a gangster taken on a ride from an expensive night club. He must excuse himself from the loud-mouthed crowd at his table and laugh heartily, and stop to chat with friends and

throw a wink at the pretty girls because right behind him are those white-scarfed, top-hatted trigger boys, hands in the pockets of their velvety dress overcoats. No use dying now. Better play along. There might be a chance.

But that was storybook stuff, movie stuff.

He nodded at himself in the glass above the sideboard.

"Meet Professor Saylor," he said. "The distinguished ethnologist and firm believer in real witchcraft—"

But the face in the glass did not look so much disgusted as frightened.

He mixed himself another drink, and one for Tansy, and took them into the living room.

"Here's to wickedness," said Tansy. "Do you realize you haven't been anywhere near drunk since Christmas?"

He grinned. That was just what the movie gangster would do, to grab a moment of forgetfulness when the Big Boy had put him on the spot. And not a bad idea.

Slowly, and at first only in a melancholy minor key, the mood of the Hill returned. They talked, played old records, told jokes that were old enough to be new again. Tansy hammered the piano, and they sang a crazy assortment of songs—folk songs, hymns, national anthems, revolution songs, blues, Brahms, Schubert—haltingly at first, later at the top of their voices.

They remembered.

And they kept on drinking.

But always, like a shimmering sphere of crystal, the alien thoughts spun in his mind. The drink made it possible for him to regard them dispassionately, without constant revulsions in the name of common sense. He began to see world-wide evidence for the operation of witchcraft.

For instance, was it not likely that all self-destructive impulses were the result of witchcraft, more or less efficiently screened off by protective magic, or not screened off at all? Those universal impulses that were a direct contradiction to the laws of self-preservation and survival. Poe had fancifully referred them to an "Imp of the Perverse," and psychoanalysts

had laboriously hypothesized a "death instinct" to account for them. How much simpler to attribute them to malign forces outside the individual, working by means as yet unanalyzed and therefore classified as supernatural.

His experiences during the past days could be divided into two distinct categories. The first included those natural misfortunes and antagonisms from which Tansy's magic had screened him. The attack on his life by Theodore Jennings should probably be placed in this category. The chances were that Jennings was actually psychopathic. He would have made his murderous attack at an earlier date, had not Tansy's protective magic kept it from getting started. As soon as the screen was down, as soon as Norman burned the last hand, the idea had suddenly burgeoned in Jennings' mind like a hothouse flower. Jennings had himself admitted it! "I didn't realize until this minute—"

Margaret van Nice's accusation, Thompson's sudden burst of interest in his extracurricular activities, and Sawtelle's chance discovery of the Cunningham thesis also probably belonged in the same category.

In the second category—active and malign witchcraft.

"A penny for your thoughts," offered Tansy, looking over the rim of her glass.

"I was thinking of the party last Christmas," he replied smoothly, "and of how Welby crawled around playing a St. Bernard, with the bearskin rug over his shoulders and the bottle of whiskey slung under his neck." He felt a childish pride in his cunning at having avoided being trapped into an admission. He simultaneously thought of Tansy as a genuine witch and as a potentially neurotic individual who had to be protected at all costs from dangerous suggestions. The liquor made his mind work by parts, and the parts had no check on each other.

His consciousness began to black out for indeterminate intervals. Things began to happen by fits and starts.

They were wailing "St. James' Infirmary."

He was thinking: "Why shouldn't the women be the witches? They're the intuitionists, the traditionalists, the irrationalists. And like Tansy, most of them are never quite sure whether or not their witchcraft really works."

They had shoved back the carpet and were dancing to "Chloe." Sometime or other she had changed to her rose dressing gown.

He was thinking: "In the second category, put the Estrey dragon. Animated by a human or nonhuman soul conjured into it by Mrs. Gunnison and controlled through photographs. Inhibited by the Protective Screen so long as the Protective Screen existed."

They had put on a record of Ravel's "Bolero," and he was beating out the rhythm with his fist.

He was thinking: "All sculpture has a magical significance, from the Aurignacian Venus to Epstein's 'Genesis.' The underlying intention has always been to produce a manikin capable of being animated by sorcery."

He was watching Tansy as she sang "St. Louis Blues" in a hoarsely throbbing voice. It was true, just as Welby had always maintained, that she had a genuine theatrical flair. Make a good chanteuse.

He was thinking: "Tansy stopped the Estrey dragon with the knots. But she'll have a hard time doing anything like that again, because Mrs. Gunnison has her book of formulas and can figure out ways to circumvent."

They were sharing a highball that would have burned his throat if his throat had not been numb, and he seemed to be getting most of it.

He was thinking: "The tarot stick figure of the man and the truck is the key to a group of related sorceries. Cards began as instruments of magic, like sculpture. These sorceries aim at finishing me off. The bull-roarer acts as an amplifier or reinforcement. The thing standing behind me, with the flat voice and heavy hands, is a guardian, to see to it that I do not deviate from the path appointed. Bull-roaring and flat voice were associated in my dream. Narrow corridor. Two weeks more."

The strange thing was that these thoughts were not altogether unpleasant. They had a wild, black, poisonous beauty of their own, a lovely, deadly shimmer. They possessed the fascination of the impossible, the incredible. They hinted at unimaginable vistas. Even while they terrorized, they did not

lose that chillingly poignant beauty. They were like the visions conjured up by some forbidden drug. They had the lure of an unknown sin and an ultimate blasphemy. He could understand the force that compelled the practitioners of black magic to take any risk.

His drunkenness made him feel safe. It had broken his mind down into its ultimate particles, and those particles were incapable of fear because they could not be injured. Just as the iron molecules of a battleship are quite safe from the bomb which blows the battleship apart.

But now the particles were whirling crazily. Consciousness was wavering.

They were in each other's arms.

Tansy was asking eagerly, coaxingly, "All that's mine is yours? All that's yours is mine?"

The question awakened a suspicion in his mind, but he could not grasp it clearly. Something made him think that the words held a trap. But what trap? His thoughts stumbled and reeled.

She was saying—it sounded like the Bible—"and I have drunk from your cup and eaten from your table—"

Her face was a blurred oval, her eyes like misty jewels.

"Everything you have is mine? You give it to me without hindrance and of your own free choice?"

Somewhere a trap.

But the voice was irresistibly coaxing, like tickling fingers.

"All you have is mine? Just say it once, Norm, just once. For me."

Of course he loved her. Better than anything else in the world.

"Yes ... yes ... everything—" he heard himself saying.

And then his mind toppled and plunged down into a fathomless ocean of darkness, and silence, and peace.

IX.

Sunlight made a bright, creamy design on the drawn blind. Filtered sunlight filled the bedroom, like a coolly glowing liquid. The birds were chirruping importantly. He closed his eyes again and stretched luxuriously.

Let's see, it was about time he got started on that article for the *Journal*. And there was still some work to do on the revision of his "Textbook of Ethnology." Lots of time, but better get it out of the way. No telling when the government would want another brochure. And he ought to have a serious talk with Bronstein about his thesis. That boy had some good ideas, but he needed a balance wheel. And then his address to the Off-campus Mothers. Might as well tell them something useful—

Eyes still closed, he enjoyed to the full that most pleasant of sensations—the irresistible tug of work a man likes to do and is able to do well.

No need to get started right away, though. Today was too good a day for golf to miss. Might see what Gunnison was doing. And then he and Tansy had not made an expedition into the country this whole spring. He'd talk to her about it at breakfast. Saturday breakfast was an event. She must be getting it ready now. He felt as if a shower would make him very hungry. Must be late.

He opened an eye and focused the bedroom clock. Twelve thirty-five? Say, just when had he got to bed last night? What had he been doing?

Memory of the past few days uncoiled like a loosed spring, so swiftly that it started his heart pounding and brought him up with a jerk. Yet there was a difference. From the very first moment it all seemed incredible and unreal. He had the sensation of reading the very detailed case history of another person. His memories could not be made to fit with his present sense of well-being. What was stranger, they did not seriously disturb that sense of well-being.

He searched his mind diligently for traces of supernatural fear, of the sense of being watched and guarded, of that monstrous self-destructive impulse. He could not discover or even suggest to himself the slightest degree of such emotions. Whatever they had been, they were now part of the past, beyond the reach of everything except intellectual memory. "Spheres of

alien thought!" Why, the very notion was bizarre. And yet somehow it had all happened. *Something* had happened.

His movement had automatically taken him under the shower. And now, as he soaped himself and the warm water cascaded down, he wondered if he ought not to talk it all over with Jones of psychology or a good practicing psychiatrist. The mental contortions he'd gone through in the last few days would provide material for a whole treatise! Feeling as sound as he did this morning, it was impossible for him to entertain any ideas of serious mental derangement. No, what had happened was just one of those queer, inexplicable spasms of irrationality that can seize the sanest people, perhaps because they *are* so sane—a kind of discharge of long-inhibited morbidity. Too bad, though, that he had bothered Tansy with it. Especially when her own nervous system had been in a shaky state. Poor kid, she had been working hard to cheer him up, last night in particular. It ought to have been the other way around. Well, he would make it up to her.

He shaved leisurely and with enjoyment. The razor behaved perfectly.

As he finished dressing, a doubt struck him. Again he searched his mind, closing his eyes like a man listening for an almost inaudible sound.

Nothing. Not the faintest trace.

He was whistling as he pushed into the kitchen.

There was no sign of breakfast. Beside the sink were some unwashed glasses, empty bottles, and an ice tray filled with tepid water.

"Tansy," he called. "Tansy!"

He walked through the house, with the vague apprehension that she might have passed out before getting to bed. They'd been drinking like fish. He went out to the garage and made sure that the car was still there. Maybe she'd walked to the grocer's to get something for breakfast. Unconsciously he began to hurry as he went back into the house.

This time when he looked in the study, he noticed the upset ink bottle, and the scrap of paper just beside it on the edge of the drying black pool. The

message had come within an inch of being engulfed.

It was a hurried scrawl—twice the pen point had gouged through the paper—and it broke off twice in the middle of a sentence, but it was undeniably in Tansy's handwriting.

For a moment it isn't watching me. I didn't realize it would be too strong for me. *Not two weeks not—two days!* Don't try to follow me. Only chance is to do exactly what I tell you. Take four lengths of four-inch white cord and—

His eyes traced the smear going out from the black pool and ending in the indistinct print of a hand, and involuntarily his imagination recreated the scene. She had been scribbling desperately, stealing quick glances over her shoulder. Then *it* had awakened to what she was doing and had roughly struck the pen out of her hand, and shaken her. He recalled the grip of those huge horny hands, and winced. And then ... then she had gotten together her things, very quietly although there was little chance of him awakening, and she had walked out of the house and down the street. And if she met anyone she knew, she had talked to them gayly, and laughed, because it was behind her, waiting for any false move, any attempt at escape.

So she had gone.

Where? Anywhere. Wherever the narrow corridor ended for *her*, no longer two weeks but only two days long.

In a flash of insight he understood *why*. If he hadn't been drunk last night, he would have guessed.

One of the oldest and best-established types of conjuration in the world. Transference of evils. Like the medicine man who conjures sickness into a stone, or into an enemy, or into himself—because he is better able to combat it—she had taken his curse upon herself. Shared his drink last night, shared his food. Used a thousand devices to bring them close together. It was all so obvious! He racked his brain to recover those last words she had said to him. "Everything you have is *mine*? All you have is *mine*?"

She had meant the curse.

And he had said, "Yes."

And then, without her formulas and her Protective Screen, the curse had proved too strong for her.

He wanted to run out into the street, to shout her name.

But the pool of ink had dried to glistening black flakes all around the margin. It must have been spilled hours ago—as early as last midnight even.

He beat his temple in a rage at his own impotence.

This mood did not last long. His anxiety persisted, grew stronger. But the supernatural terror rapidly died away. It could not sustain itself now that he no longer experienced it directly. Even the argument that he had lost his sensitivity only because the curse was now directed at her, did not convince him for a moment. No, there was nothing supernatural in this—no guardian except a figment of his and her neurotic nerves. What *had* happened was that he had suggested all this to her. He had forced upon her the products of his own morbid imagination. Undoubtedly he had babbled everything to her while he was drunk. And it had worked on her suggestible nature—she already believed in witchcraft—until she had got the idea of transferring his curse to herself, and had convinced herself that the transference had actually occurred. And then gone off, God knew where!

And that was bad enough.

There was a light chime from the front door. He extracted a letter from the mailbox, ripped it open. It was addressed with a soft pencil, and the graphite had smeared. But he knew the handwriting.

The message was so jerky and uneven that he was some time reading it. It began and ended in the middle of a sentence.

—and a length of gut, a bit of platinum or iridium, a piece of lodestone, a phonograph needle that has only played Scriabin's "Ninth Sonata." Then tie—

That was all. A continuation of the first message, with its bizarre formula. Had she really convinced herself that there was a guardian watching her, and that she could only communicate during the infrequent moments when

its attention was elsewhere? He knew the answer. When you had an obsession you could convince yourself of anything.

He looked at the postmark. He recognized the name of a town several miles east of Hempnell. He could not think of a soul they knew there, or anything else about the town. His first impulse was to get out the car and rush over. But what could he do when he got there?

The phone was ringing. It was Evelyn Sawtelle.

"Is that you, Norman? Please ask Tansy to come to the phone. I wish to speak to her."

The question was rapped out with precision, as if its wording had been carefully planned.

"I'm sorry, but she isn't in."

Evelyn Sawtelle did not sound surprised at the answer—her second question came too quickly. "Where is she then? I must get in touch with her."

He thought. "She's out in the country," he said, "visiting some friends of ours. Is there something I can tell her?"

"No, I wish to speak to Tansy. What is your friend's number?"

"They don't have a phone!" he said angrily.

"No? Well, it's nothing of importance." She sounded oddly pleased, as if his anger had given her satisfaction. "I'll call again. I must hurry now. Hervey is so busy with his new responsibilities. Good-by."

He replaced the phone. Now, why the devil—Suddenly an explanation occurred to him. Perhaps Tansy had been seen leaving town, and Evelyn Sawtelle had scented the possibility of some sort of scandal and had wanted to check. Perhaps Tansy had been carrying a suitcase.

He looked in Tansy's dressing room. The small suitcase was gone. Drawers were open. It looked as if she had packed in a hurry. But what about money? He examined his billfold. It was empty. Forty-odd dollars missing.

You could go a long way on forty dollars. The jerky illegibility of the message made it look as if it had been written on a train or bus.

The next few hours were highly unpleasant. He checked schedules, and found that several busses and trains passed through the town from which Tansy's letter had been sent. He drove to the stations and made guarded inquiries, with no success.

He wanted to do all the things you should do when someone disappears, but he held back. What could he say? "My wife, sir, has disappeared. She is suffering from the delusion that—" And what if she should be found and questioned in her present state of mind, examined by a doctor, before he could get to her?

No, this was something for him to handle alone. But if he did not get a line on it soon, he would have no choice. He would have to go to the police, inventing some story to cover the facts.

She had written, "Two days." If she believed that she were doomed to die in two days, might not the belief be enough? That was his worst fear.

Toward evening he drove back to the house, repressing the chimerical hope that she had returned in his absence. The special delivery carrier was just getting into his car. Norman pulled up alongside.

"Anything for Saylor?"

"Yes, sir. It's in the box."

The message was longer this time, but just as difficult to read.

At last its attention is somewhere else. If I control my emotions, it isn't so quick to notice my thoughts. But it was hard for me to post the last letter. Norman, you *must* do what I tell you. The two days end Sunday midnight. Then the Bay. You *must* follow all directions. Tie the four white cords into a granny, a reef, a cat's-paw, and a carrick bend. Tie the gut in a bowline. Then add

He looked at the post mark. The place was two hundred miles east. Not on the railroad lines, as far as he could recall. That should narrow down the possibilities considerably.

One word from the letter was repeating itself in his mind, like a musical note struck again and again until it becomes unendurable.

Bay. Bay. Bay. Bay.

The memory came of a hot afternoon fifteen years ago. It was just before they were married. They were sitting on the edge of a ramshackle little pier. He remembered the salt smell, and the faintly fishy, dry-wood smell of the splintery old planks.

"Funny," she had said, looking down into the green water, "but I always used to think that I'd end up down there. Not that I'm afraid of it. I've always swum way out. But even when I was a little girl I'd look at the Bay—maybe green, maybe blue, maybe gray, covered with whitecaps, glittering with moon-beams, or shrouded by fog—and I'd think, 'Tansy, the Bay is going to get you, but not for years and years.' Funny, isn't it?"

And he laughed and put his arms around her tight, and the green water had gone on lapping at the piles heavy with seaweed.

He had been visiting with her family, when her parents were still alive, at their home near Bayport on the southern shore of New York Bay.

The narrow corridor suited itself to its victim's most cherished fear. It ended for her in the Bay, tomorrow midnight.

She must be heading for the Bay.

He made several calls—first bus lines, then railroad and air. It was impossible to get a reservation on the air lines, but tonight's train would get him into Jersey City an hour ahead of the bus she must be traveling, according to the deductions he made from the place and time of the postmarks.

He had ample time to pack a few things, cash a check on his way to the station—

He spread her three notes on the table—the one in pen, the two in pencil. He reread the crazy incomplete formula. He shook his head.

He frowned. Would a scientist neglect the millionth-and-one possibility? Would the commander of a trapped army disdain a stratagem just because it was not in the books? This stuff looked like gibberish. Yesterday it might have meant something to him emotionally. Today it was just nonsense. But tomorrow night it might conceivably represent a fantastic last chance.

"Norman, you *must* do what I tell you." The scrawled words stared at him.

He went out in the kitchen and got a ball of white twine.

He rummaged in the closet for his squash racket and cut out the two center strings. That ought to do for gut.

The fireplace had not been cleaned since the stuff from Tansy's dressing table had been burned. He poked around the edges until he found a piece of lodestone.

He located the recording of Scriabin's "Ninth Sonata" and started the phonograph, putting in a new needle. He glanced at his wrist watch and paced the room restlessly. Gradually the music took hold of him. It was not pleasant music. There was something tantalizing and exasperating about it, with its droning melody and rocking figures in the base and shakes in the treble and elaborate ornamentation that writhed up and down the piano keyboard. It rasped the nerves.

He began to remember things he had heard about it. Hadn't Tansy once told him that Scriabin called his "Ninth Sonata" a "Black Mass" and had developed an antipathy to playing it? Scriabin, who had conceived a color organ and tried to translate mysticism into music, and had died of a peculiar

lip infection. An innocent-faced Russian with a huge curling mustache. Critical phrases Tansy had repeated to him floated through his mind. "The poisonous 'Ninth Sonata'—the most perfidious piece of music ever conceived—" Ridiculous! How could music be anything but an abstract pattern of tones?

And yet—while listening to the thing—one could think differently.

Faster and faster it went. The lovely second theme became infected, was distorted into something raucous and discordant—a march of the damned—a dance of the damned—breaking off suddenly when it had reached an unendurable pitch. Then a repetition of the droning first theme, ending on a soft yet grating note low in the keyboard.

He removed the needle, sealed it in an envelope, and packed it along with the rest of his stuff.

On an afterthought, he tore out of the big dictionary a page carrying an illustrated list of knots.

The telephone stopped him as he was going out.

"Oh, Professor Saylor, would you mind calling Tansy to the phone?" Mrs. Carr's voice was very amicable.

He repeated what he had told Mrs. Sawtelle.

"I'm glad she's having a rest in the country," said Mrs. Carr. "You know, Professor Saylor, I don't think that Tansy's been looking so well lately. I've been a little worried. You're sure she's all right?"

"How do you mean?"

It was then the other voice broke in.

"What's the idea of checking up on me? Do you think I'm a child? I know what I'm doing!"

"Be quiet!" said Mrs. Carr. Then, in her sweet voice. "I think someone must have cut in on us. Good-by, Professor Saylor."

The line went dead.

He picked up his suitcase and walked out.

X.

The bus driver they pointed out to him had thick shoulders and sleepy, competent-looking eyes. He was standing by the wall, smoking a cigarette.

"Sure, she must have been in my bus," he told Norman after thinking a moment. "A pretty woman, on the small side, in a gray dress, with a queer-looking silver brooch like you mentioned. One suitcase. Light pigskin. I figured her out as going to see someone who was very sick, or had been in an accident, maybe."

Norman curbed his impatience. If it had not been for the hour-and-a-half delay outside Jersey City, he would have been here well ahead of the bus, instead of twenty minutes late.

He said, "I want, if possible, to get a line on where she went after she left your bus. The man at the desk can't help me."

The driver looked at Norman. But he did not say, "Whatcha wanta know for?"—for which Norman was grateful. He seemed to decide that Norman was O. K.

He said, "I can't be sure, mister, but there was a local bus going down the shore. I think she got on that."

"Would it stop at Bayport?"

The driver nodded.

"How long since it left?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Could I get to Bayport ahead of it? If I took a cab?"

"Just about. If you wanted to pay the bill there and back—and maybe a little extra for the rubber he'd burn—I think Alec could take you." He waved in casual recognition at a man sitting in a cab just beyond the station. "Mind you, mister, I can't say for certain she got on the shore bus."

"That's all right. Thanks a lot."

In the glow of the street lamp Alec's foxy eyes were more openly curious than the bus driver's, but he did not make any comments.

"I can do it," he said cheerfully, "but we haven't any time to waste. Jump in."

The shore highway led through lonely stretches of marsh and wasteland. Occasionally Norman caught the sibilant rustle of the leagues of tall stiff seagrass, and a brackish tang from the dark inlets crossed by long low bridges. The odor of the Bay.

Indistinctly he made out factories and scattered houses.

"There's a dimout some places," Alec volunteered once. He was paying close attention to the road.

They passed three or four busses without Alec making any comment.

After a long while Alec said, "That should be her."

A constellation of red and green taillights was vanishing over the rise ahead.

"About three miles to Bayport," he continued. "What should I do?"

"Just get to Bayport a little ahead of her, and stop at the bus station."

"O.K."

They overtook the bus and swung around it. The windows were too high for Norman to see any of the occupants. Besides, the interior lights were out.

As they drew ahead, Alec nodded confirmingly. "That's her all right."

The bus station at Bayport was also the railway depot. Vaguely Norman remembered the loosely planked platform and packed cinders on the track side. The station building was dark, but there were several cars and a lone local cab drawn up, and there were some men standing around talking in low voices, and a couple of soldiers going back to camp.

He had time to scent the salt air, with its faint and not unpleasant trace of fishiness. Then the bus pulled in.

Several passengers stepped down, looking around to spot the people waiting for them.

Tansy was the third. She was staring straight ahead. She was carrying the pigskin suitcase.

"Tansy!" he said.

She did not look at him. He noted a black stain on her right hand, and remembered the spilled ink on his study table. Odd that it should still be there.

"Tansy!" he said. "Tansy!"

She walked straight past him, so close that her sleeve brushed his.

"Tansy, what's the matter with you?"

He had turned and hurried after her. She was heading for the local cab. He was conscious of a silence, and curious unfriendly glances. It made him angry.

She did not slacken her pace. He grabbed her elbow and pulled her around. He heard a remonstratory murmur behind him, and realized that a couple of the men were closing in.

"Tansy, stop acting this way! Tansy!"

Her face looked frozen. She stared past him without a hint of recognition in her eyes.

That infuriated him. He did not pause to think. Accumulated tensions prodded him into an explosion. He grabbed both elbows and shook her. She still looked past him, completely aloof—a perfect picture of an aristocratic woman enduring brutality. If she had yelled and fought him, the men might not have interfered.

He was jerked back.

"Lay off her!"

"Who do you think you are, anyway?"

She stood there, with maddening composure. He noticed a scrap of paper flutter out of her hand. Then her eyes met his and for one terrible moment—

but one moment only—he saw rise up behind her a shaggy black form twice her height, with hulking shoulders, out-stretched massive hands, and dully glowing eyes.

Only a moment, though. Then she turned away. But he fancied that a great shadow followed hers. Then they swung him around and he could no longer see her.

In a queer sort of daze—for the kind of fear he had just experienced mixes badly with any other emotion—he listened to them jabber at him.

"I ought to take a crack at you," he finally heard someone say.

"All right," he replied in a flat voice. "They're holding my hands."

He heard Alec's voice. "Say, what's going on here?" Alec sounded cautious, but not unfriendly, as if he were thinking, "The guy's my fare, but I don't know anything about him."

One of the soldiers spoke. "Where's the lady? She doesn't seem to be making any complaint."

"Yeah, where is she?"

"She got in Jake's cab and drove off," someone volunteered.

"Maybe he had a good reason for what he did," said the soldier.

Norman felt the attitude of the crowd change.

One of the men holding him retorted, "Nobody's got a right to treat a lady that way." But the other one slackened his grip and asked Norman, "How about it? Did you have a reason for doing that?"

"I did. But it's my business."

He heard a woman's voice, high-pitched. "A lot of fuss over nothing!"

Grumbling, the men let him go.

"But mind you," said the more belligerent one, "if she'd stuck around and complained, I'd 've sure taken a crack at you."

"All right," said Norman, "in that case you would have." His eyes were searching for a scrap of paper.

"Can anyone tell me the address she gave the cab driver?" he asked at random.

One or two shook their heads. The others ignored the question. Their feelings toward him had not changed enough to make them co-operative. And very likely, in the excitement, no one had heard.

Silently the little crowd drifted apart. People waited until they got out of earshot before beginning to argue about what had happened. Most of the cars drove off. The two soldiers wandered over to the benches in front of the depot, so they could sit down while they waited for their bus or train. He was alone except for Alec.

He located the scrap of paper in one of the slots between the worn planks. It had almost slipped through.

He took it over to the cab and studied it.

He heard Alec say, "Well, where do we go now?" Alec sounded dubious.

He glanced at his watch. Ten thirty-five. Not quite an hour and a half until midnight. There were a lot of things he could do, but he could not do more than a couple of them in that time. His thoughts moved sluggishly, almost painfully.

He looked around at the dim buildings. The seaward halves of some of the street lamps were painted black. Up a side street there were signs of life. He looked again at the scrap of paper.

Then he made a decision.

"I think there's a hotel on the main street," he told Alec. "You can drive me there."

"Eagle Hotel" read the black-edged gold letters on the plate-glass window, behind which the narrow lobby with its half-dozen empty chairs was nakedly revealed.

He told Alec to wait, and took a room for the night. The clerk was an old man in a shiny black coat. Norman saw from the register that no one else had checked in recently. He carried his bag up to the room and immediately returned to the lobby.

"I haven't been here for ten years," he told the clerk. "I believe there is a cemetery about five blocks down the street, away from the Bay?"

The old man's sleepy eyes blinked wide open.

"Bayport Cemetery? Just three blocks, and then a block and a half to the left. But—" He made a vague questioning noise in his throat.

"Thank you," said Norman.

After a moment's thought, he paid off Alec, who took the money and with obvious relief kicked his cab into life. Norman walked down the main street, away from the Bay.

After the first block there were no more stores. In this direction, Bayport petered out quickly. Most of the houses were dark. And after he turned left there were no more street lights.

The gates of the cemetery were locked. He felt his way along the wall, behind the masking shrubbery, trying to make as little noise as possible, until he found a scrubby tree whose lowest branch could bear his weight. He got his hands on the top of the wall, scrambled up, and cautiously let himself down on the other side.

Behind the wall it was very dark. There was a rustling sound, as if he had disturbed some small animal. More by feeling than sight, he located a headstone. It was a thin one, worn, mossy toward the base, and tilted at an angle. Probably from the middle of the last century. He dug into the earth with his hand, and filled an envelope he took from his pocket.

He got back over the wall, making what seemed a great deal of noise in the shrubbery. But the street was empty as ever.

On his way back to the hotel he looked up at the sky, located the Pole Star, and calculated the orientation of his room.

As he crossed the lobby, he felt the curious eyes of the old clerk boring into him.

His room was in darkness. Chill salt air was pouring through the open window. He locked the door, shut the window, pulled down the blind, and switched on the light—a glaring overhead which revealed the room in all its dingy severity. A cradle phone struck the sole modern note.

He took the envelope out of his pocket and weighed it in his hand. His lips curled in a peculiarly bitter smile. Then he reread the scrap of paper that had fluttered from Tansy's hand.

Add a small quantity of graveyard dirt, and wrap all in a piece of flannel, wrapping widdershins. Tell it to stop me. Tell it to bring me to you.

Graveyard dirt. That was what he had found in Tansy's dressing table. It had been the beginning of all this. Now he was fetching it himself.

He looked at his watch. Eleven twenty.

He cleared the small table and set it in the center of the room, jabbing in his penknife to mark the edge facing east. "Widdershins" meant "against the sun"—from west to east.

He placed the necessary ingredients on the table, cutting a short strip of flannel from the hem of his bathrobe, and fitted together the four sections of Tansy's note. The distasteful, bitter smile did not leave his lips.

Taken together, the significant portions of the notes read:

Take four lengths of four-inch white cord and a length of gut, a bit of platinum or iridium, a piece of lodestone, a phonograph needle that has only played Scriabin's "Ninth Sonata." Tie the four white cords into a granny, a reef, a cat's-paw, and a carrick bend. Tie the gut in a bowline. Add a small quantity of graveyard dirt, and wrap all in a piece of flannel, wrapping widdershins. Tell it to stop me. Tell it to bring me to you.

In general outline, it was similar to a hundred recipes for Negro tricken-bags he had seen or heard about. The phonograph needle, the knots, and one or two other items, were obvious "white" additions.

And it was all on the same level as the mental operations of a child or neurotic adult who religiously steps on, or avoids sidewalk cracks.

A clock outside bonged the half-hour.

Norman sat there looking at the stuff. It was hard for him to begin. It would have been different, he told himself, if he were doing it for a joke or a thrill, or if he were one of those people who dope up their minds with morbid supernaturalism—who like to play around with magic because it's medieval and aesthetic. But to tackle it in dead seriousness, to open your mind deliberately to superstition—that was to join hands with the forces pushing the world back into the dark ages, to cancel the term "science" out of the equation.

But, behind Tansy, he had seen that thing. Of course, it had been an hallucination. But when hallucinations start behaving like realities, even a scientist has to face the possibility that he may have to treat them like realities. And when hallucinations begin to threaten you and yours in a direct physical way—

He reached out for the first length of cord and tied the ends together in a granny.

When he came to the cat's-paw, he had to consult the page he had torn from the dictionary. After a couple of false starts he managed it.

But on the carrick bend he was all thumbs. It was a simple knot, but no matter how he went about it, he could not get it to look like the illustration. Sweat broke out on his forehead. Very close in the room, he told himself. "I'm still overheated from rushing about." The skin on his fingertips felt an inch thick. The ends of the cord kept eluding them. He remembered how Tansy's fingers had rippled through the knots.

Eleven forty-one. The phonograph needle started to roll off the table. He dropped the cord and laid the phonograph needle against his fountain pen, so it would not roll. Then he started again on the knot.

For a moment he thought he must have picked up the gut, the cord seemed so stiff and unresponsive. Incredible what nervousness can do to you, he told himself. His mouth was dry. He swallowed with difficulty.

Finally, by keeping his eyes on the illustration and imitating it step for step, he managed to tie a carrick bend. All the while he felt as if there were more between his fingers than a cord, as if he were manipulating against a great inertia. Just as he finished, he felt a slight prickly chill, like the onset of fever, and the light overhead seemed to dim a trifle. Eye-strain.

The phonograph needle was rolling in the opposite direction, spinning faster and faster. He slapped his hand down on it, missed it, caught it at the edge of the table.

Just like a Ouija board, he told himself. You try to keep your fingers, poised on the planchette, perfectly motionless. As a result muscular tensions accumulate. They reach the breaking point. Seemingly without any volition on your part, the planchette begins to roll and skid about on its three little legs, traveling from letter to letter. Same thing here. Nervous and muscular tensions made it difficult for him to tie knots. Obeying a universal tendency, he projected the difficulty into the cord. And, by hand and knee pressure, he had been doing some unconscious table tipping.

Between his fingers, the phonograph needle seemed to vibrate, as if it were being pounded by infinitesimal hammers. There was a very faint sensation of electric shock. Unbidden, the torturesome, clangorous chords of the "Ninth Sonata" began to sound in his mind. Rot! One well-known symptom of extreme nervousness is a tingling in the fingers—often painfully intense. But his throat was dry and his snort of bitter contempt sounded choked.

He pinned the needle in the flannel for greater safety.

Eleven forty-seven. Reaching for the gut, his fingers felt as shaky and weak as if he just climbed a hundred-foot rope hand over hand. The stuff looked normal, but it was slimy to the touch. And for some moments he had been conscious of an acrid, almost metallic odor replacing the salt smell of the Bay. Tactual and olfactory hallucinations joining in with the visual and auditory, he told himself. He could still hear the "Ninth Sonata."

He knew a bowline backwards, and it should have been easier because the gut was not as stiff as it ought to be, but he felt there were other forces manipulating it or other mentalities trying to give orders to his fingers, so that the gut was trying to tie itself into a slip-knot, a reef, a half hitch—anything but a bowline. His fingers ached, his eyes were heavy with an

abnormal fatigue. He was working against a mounting inertia—a dangerous, crushing inertia. He remembered Tansy telling him that first day—"There's a law of reaction in all conjuring—like the kick of a gun—" Eleven fifty-two.

With a great effort, he canalized his mental energy, focused his attention only on the knot. His numb fingers began to move in an odd rhythm, a rhythm of the "Ninth Sonata," *piu vivo*. The bowline was tied.

The overhead light dimmed markedly, throwing the whole room into a sooty gloom. Hysterical blindness, he told himself in a despairing effort to maintain the appearances of sanity and scientific law. It was very cold now, so cold that he fancied he could see his breath. And silent, terribly silent. Against that silence he could feel and hear the rapid drumming of his heart, accelerating unendurably to the thundering, swirling rhythm of the music.

Then, in one instant of diabolic paralyzing insight, he knew that *this* was sorcery. No mere puttering about with ridiculous medieval implements, no effortless sleight of hand, but a straining, back-breaking struggle to keep control of *forces summoned*, of which the objects he manipulated were only the symbols. Outside the walls of the room, outside the walls of his skull, outside the impalpable energy-walls of his mind, he felt those forces gathering, swelling up, dreadfully expectant, waiting for him to make a false move so that they could crush him.

He could not believe it. He had to believe it.

The only question was—would he be able to stay in control?

Eleven fifty-seven. He gathered the objects together on the flannel. The needle jumped to the lodestone and clung. It shouldn't; it wasn't that magnetic. He took a pinch of graveyard dirt. Between finger and thumb, each separate particle seemed to crawl, like a tiny maggot. He sensed that something was missing. He could not remember what it was. He fumbled for the formula. A current of air was blowing the scraps of paper off the table. He sensed an eager, inward surge of the forces outside, as if they knew he was failing. He clutched at the papers, managed to pin them down.

Bending close, he made out the words "platinum or iridium." He jabbed his pen against the table, broke off the whole nib, and added it to the other objects.

He stood at the side of the table away from the knife that marked the east, trying to steady his shaking hands against the edge. His teeth were chattering. The room was utterly dark now except for the impossible bluish light that beat through the window shade.

Abruptly the strip of flannel started to curl like a strip of heated gelatine, to roll itself up from east to west, *with* the sun.

He jerked forward, got his hand inside the flannel before it closed, drew it apart—in his numb hands it seemed like metal—and rolled it against the sun, widdershins.

The silence was intensified. Even the sound of his beating heart was cut off. He knew that something was listening with a terrible intensity for his command, and that something was hoping with an even more terrible avidity that he would not be able to utter that command.

Yet somewhere a clock was booming—or was it not a clock, but the secret sound of time? Nine—ten—eleven—twelve.

His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He kept on choking soundlessly. He could feel the walls giving way.

Then, in a dry, croaking voice, he managed: "Stop Tansy. Bring her here."

The walls were shaken as if they were at the center of a whirlpool. Darkness became absolute. There was an eruption of force from the table. He felt himself flung across the room.

Then the forces were gone. In all things, tension gave way to limpness. Sound and light returned. He was sprawled across the bed. On the table was a little flannel packet, no longer of any consequence.

He felt as if he had been doped, or were waking after a debauch. There was no inclination to do anything. Emotion was absent.

Outwardly everything was the same. Even his mind, with automatic rationality, could still wearily take up the thankless task of explaining his experiences on a scientific basis—weaving an elaborate web in which psychosis, hallucination, and improbable coincidences were the strands.

But inwardly something had changed, and would never change back.

Considerable time passed.

He heard steps mounting the stairs, then in the hall. They made a *squish-squish* sound, as if the shoes were soaking wet.

They stopped outside his door. There was a soft rap.

He crossed the room, turned the key in the lock—

A strand of seaweed was caught in the silver brooch. The gray suit was dark now and heavy with water, except for one spot which had started to dry and was faintly dusted with a white powder—salt. The odor of the Bay was intimate and close. There was another strand of seaweed clinging to one ankle against the wrinkled stocking.

And around the stained shoes, a little pool of water was forming.

His eyes traced the wet footprints down the hall. At the head of the stairs the old clerk was standing, one foot still on the last step. He was carrying a small pigskin suitcase.

"What's all this about?" he quavered, when he saw that Norman was looking at him. "You didn't tell me you were expecting your wife. She looks like she'd thrown herself in the Bay. We don't want anything queer happening in this hotel—anything wrong."

"It's quite all right," said Norman, prolonging the moment before he would have to look at her face. "I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. May I have the bag?"

"—only last year we had a suicide"—the old clerk did not seem to realize he was speaking his thoughts aloud—"bad for the hotel—" His voice trailed off. He looked at Norman, gathered himself together, and came hesitatingly down the hall. When he was a few steps away, he stopped, reached out and put down the suitcase, turned, and walked rapidly away.

Unwillingly, Norman raised his eyes until they were on a level with hers.

The face was pale, very pale, and without expression. The lips were tinged with blue. Wet hair was plastered against the cheeks. A thick lock crossed one eye socket, like a curtain half drawn, and curled down toward the throat, where it merged with a strand of seaweed. The dull eyes stared at him, without sign of recognition. And no hand moved up to brush the lock of hair away.

From the hem of the skirt, water was dripping.

The lips parted. The voice had the monotonous murmur of water.

"You were too late," the lips said. "You were a minute too late."

XI.

For a third time their exchange of conversation had come back to the same question. He had the maddening sensation of following a robot that was walking in a huge endless circle and always treading on precisely the same blades of grass as it retraced its path.

With the hopeless conviction that he would not get any further this time, he asked the question again: "But how can you lack consciousness, and at the same time *know* that you lack consciousness? If your mind is blank, you cannot at the same time be aware that your mind is blank."

The hands of his watch were creeping toward three in the morning. The chill of night's lowest ebb pervaded the dingy hotel room. Tansy sat stiffly, wearing his bathrobe and big fleece-lined slippers, with a blanket over her knees and a bath towel wrapped around her head. They should have made her look child-like and perhaps even artlessly attractive. They did not. If you were to unwind the towel you would find the top of the skull sawed off and the brains removed, an empty bowl—that was the illusion Norman experienced every time he made the mistake of looking into her eyes.

The pale lips opened. "I know nothing. I only speak. They have taken away my soul. But my voice is a function of my body."

You could not even say that the voice was patiently explanatory. It was too utterly empty and colorless even for that. The words, clearly enunciated and

evenly spaced, all sounded alike. They came with the regular beat of a machine.

The last thing he wanted to do was hammer questions at that stiff pitiful figure, but at all costs he must awaken some spark of feeling in the masklike face; he must find some intelligible starting point before his own mind could begin to work effectually.

"But, Tansy, if you can talk about the present situation, you must be aware of it. You're here in this room with me!"

The toweled head shook once, like that of a mechanical doll.

"Nothing is here with you but a body. 'I' is not here."

His mind automatically corrected "is" to "am" before he realized that there had been no grammatical error and shuddered at the implications of the trifling change in a tiny verb.

"You mean," he asked, "that you can see or hear nothing? That there is just a blackness?"

Again that simple mechanical headshake, which carried more absolute conviction than the most heated protestations.

"My body sees and hears perfectly. It has suffered no injury. It can function in all particulars. But there is nothing inside. There is not even a blackness."

His tired, fumbling mind jumped to the subject of behavioristic psychology and its fundamental assertion that human reactions can be explained completely and satisfactorily without once referring to consciousness—that it need not even be assumed that consciousness exists. Here was the perfect proof. And yet not so perfect, for the behavior of this body lacked every one of those little mannerisms whose sum is personality. The way Tansy used to squint and twist one little finger around another when thinking through a difficult question. The familiar quirk at the corners of her mouth when she felt flattered or slyly amused. All gone. Even the quick triple headshake he knew so well, with the slight bunny-rabbit wrinkling of the little nose, had become that robot's "No."

The sensory organs still responded to stimuli. They sent nerve impulses to the hindbrain or midbrain—or cortex—where they traveled about and gave rise to efferent impulses which activated glands and muscles, including the

motor organs of speech. But that was all. None of those intangible flurries we call consciousness hovered around the webwork of nervous activity in the cortex. What had imparted *style*—Tansy's style, like no one else's—to every movement and utterance of the body, was gone. There was left only a physiological organism, without sign or indication of personality. Not even a mad or an idiot soul—yes! why not use that old term now that it had an obvious specific meaning?—peered from the gray-green eyes which winked at intervals with machinelike regularity, but only to lubricate the cornea, nothing more.

He felt a grim sort of relief go through him, now that he had been able to picture it in definite terms. But the picture itself—his mind veered to the memory of a newspaper story about an old man who had kept locked in his bedroom for years the body of a young woman whom he loved and who had died of an incurable disease. He had maintained the body in a miraculous state of preservation by wax and other means they said, had talked to it every night and morning, had been convinced that he would some day reanimate it completely—until they found out and took him away, and buried it. Had that body—

"Tansy," he was asking, "when your soul went, why didn't you die?"

"Usually the soul lingers to the end, unable to escape, and vanishes or dies when the body dies," the voice answered, its words as evenly spaced as if timed to a metronome. "But He Who Walks Behind was tearing at mine. There was the weight of green water against my face. I knew it was midnight. I knew that you had failed. In that moment of despair, He Who Walks Behind was able to draw forth my soul. In the same moment Your Agent's arms were about me, lifting me toward the air. My soul was close enough to know what had happened, yet not close enough to return. Its doubled anguish was the last memory it imprinted on my brain. Your Agent and He Who Walks Behind concluded that each had obtained the thing he had been sent for, and so there was no struggle between them."

The picture created in his mind was so shockingly vivid that it seemed incredible that it could have been produced by the words of a mere

physiological machine. And yet only a physiological machine could have told the story with such total restraint.

"Is there nothing that *touches* you?" he asked abruptly in a loud voice, gripped by an intolerable spasm of anguish at the emptiness of her eyes. "Haven't you a single emotion left?"

"Yes. One." This time it was not a robot's headshake but a robot's nod. For the first time there was a stir of feeling, a hint of motivation. The tip of a pallid tongue licked hungrily around the pale lips. "I want my soul."

He caught his breath. Now that he had succeeded in awakening a feeling in her, he hated it. There was something so animal about it, so like some light-sensitive marine worm blindly yet greedily wriggling toward the sunlight.

"I want my soul," the voice repeated mechanically, tearing at his emotions more than any plaintive or whining accents could have done. "At the last moment, although it could not return, my soul implanted that one emotion in me. It knew what awaited it. It knew there are things that can be done to a soul. It was very much afraid."

He ground the words out between his teeth. "Where do you think your soul is?"

"She has it. The woman with the little black eyes."

"Evelyn Sawtelle?" He was remembering a phone call.

"Yes. But it is not wise to speak of her by name."

His hand shot out for the phone. At that moment he had to do something definite, or lose control of himself completely. For too long he had sat impotently by, watching the ghostly and harrowing drama unfold. Now he had to strike out.

After a time he roused the night clerk and got the local operator.

"Yes, sir," came the singsong voice. "Hempnell 1284. You wish to make a person-to-person call to Evelyn Sawtelle—E-V-E-L-Y-N S-A-W-T-E-L-L-E, sir?... Will you please hang up and wait? It will take considerable time to make a connection."

"I want my soul. I want to go to that woman. I want to go to Hempnell." Now that he had touched off the blind hunger in her, it persisted. He was

reminded of a phonograph needle caught in the same groove, or a mechanical toy turned on to a new track by a little push.

"We'll go there all right." It was still hard for him to control his breathing. "We'll get it back."

"But I must start for Hempnell soon. My clothes were ruined by the water. I must have the maid clean and press them."

With a slow, even movement she got to her feet and started toward the phone.

"But, Tansy," he objected involuntarily. "It's three in the morning. You can't get a maid now."

"But my clothes must be cleaned and pressed. I must start for Hempnell soon."

The words might have been those of an obstinate woman, sulky and selfish. But they had less tone than a sleepwalker's.

She kept on toward the phone. Although he did not anticipate that he would do it, he shrank out of her way, pressing close against the side of the bed.

"But even if there is a maid," he said, "she won't come at this hour."

The pallid face turned toward him incuriously. "The maid will be a woman." It was a little while before he got the implication of the words. "She will come when she hears me."

Then she was talking to the night clerk. "Is there a maid in the hotel?... Send her to my room.... Then ring her.... I cannot wait until morning.... I need her at once.... I cannot tell you the reason.... Thank you."

Norman was thinking: How can a physiological machine conceive and carry out even such a simple plan? Yet how could a conscious human being do it with such utter listlessness? Same paradox. He wondered if he ought to stop her. But an idea was growing in his mind.

There was a long wait, while he heard faintly the repeated ringing at the other end of the line. He could imagine the sleepy, surly voice that finally answered.

"Is this the maid?... Come at once to Room 37." He could almost catch the indignant answer. Then—"Can't you hear my voice? Don't you realize who is speaking?... Yes.... Come at once." And she replaced the phone in its cradle.

"Tansy—" he began. Then his eyes met hers, and once again he found himself asking a halting prefatory question, although he had not intended to. "You are able to hear and answer my questions?"

"I can answer questions. I have been answering questions for three hours." The lack of expression only made the irony more complete.

But—logic prompted wearily—if she can remember what has been happening these last three hours, then surely—And yet, what is memory but a track worn in the nervous system? In order to explain memory you don't need to bring in consciousness. Quit banging your head against that stone wall, you fool!—came another inward prompting. You've looked in her eyes, haven't you? Well, then, get on with it!

"Tansy, is that woman coming here because she's ... well, the same as you were?"

"Yes. But since you are present she will not speak of it."

"But if I weren't here—or if I hid myself?"

"She might respond to questioning." The hungry subanimal expression came back, and the tip of the tongue appeared between the lips. "If I make her speak ... if I make you believe—will we go back to Hempnell very quickly? Will you help me?"

"Yes." Of course he would. He wouldn't do anything else. But what good to say all that to a blank physiological machine beyond the reach of comfort? Besides, the maid should soon be here, and an unwholesome curiosity was eating at him.

"I'll leave the closet door just a little ajar," he said. "She probably won't notice. See?"

There were footsteps in the hall. The robot nod was his only answer.

"You wanted me, mum?" Contrary to his expectations, the voice was young, but very low. It sounded as if she had swallowed as she spoke.

"Yes. I want you to clean and press some things of mine. They're hanging on the edge of the bathtub. Go and get them."

The maid came into his line of vision, then. She would be very heavy in a few years, he thought, but she was handsome now, though puffed with sleep. She had hastily pulled on a dull-black dress, but her feet were in slippers and her hair was snarly.

"Be careful with the dress. It's wool," came Tansy's voice, sounding just as toneless as when it had been directed at him. "And I want them promptly at nine o'clock."

Norman half expected to hear an objection to this unreasonable request, but there was none. The girl walked rapidly out of the bathroom, the damp clothes hurriedly slung over one arm, as if her one object were to get away before she was spoken to again.

"Wait a moment, girl. I want to ask you a question." The voice was somewhat louder this time. That was the only change whatsoever, but it had a startling effect of command.

The girl hesitated, then swung around unwillingly, and Norman got a good look at her face. He could not see Tansy—the closet door just cut her off—but he could see the fear come to the surface of the girl's face as she turned, see the sleep-creased cheek pale.

"Yes, mum?" she managed.

There was a considerable pause. He could tell from the way the girl shrank, hugging the damp clothes tight to her body, that Tansy had lifted her eyes and was looking at her.

Finally: "You know The Easy Way to Do Things? The Ways to Get and Guard?"

Norman could have sworn that the girl gave a guilty start at that second phrase. But she only shook her head quickly, and mumbled, "No, mum. I ... I don't know what you're talking about."

"You mean you have never learned How to Make Wishes Work? You don't conjure, or spell, or hex? You don't know the Art?"

This time the "No" was almost inaudible. The girl was trying to look away, but failing.

"I think you are lying."

You could put any construction on those toneless words. The girl twisted, hands tightly clutching her overlapping arms. He wanted to go out and stop it, but curiosity held him rigid.

The girl's resistance broke. "Please, mum. We're not supposed to tell."

"You may tell me. What Procedures do you use?"

The girl's perplexity at the new word looked real.

"I don't know anything about that, mum. I don't do much. Just spells. Like now my boy friend's gone in the army, I do things to keep him from getting shot or hurt, and I've spelled him so that he'll keep away from other women. Honest, I don't do much, mum. And it don't always work. And lots of things I can't get that way." Her words had begun to run away with her.

"Very well. Where did you learn to do this?"

"Some I learned from ma when I was a kid. And some from Mrs. Neidel—she gets spells against bullets from her grandmother who had a family in some European war before the last one. But most women won't tell you anything. And some spells I kind of figure out myself, and try different ways until they work. You won't tell on me, mum?"

"No. Look at me now. What has happened to me?"

"Honest, mum, I don't know. Please, mum, don't make me say it." The girl's terror and reluctance were so obviously genuine that Norman felt a surge of anger at Tansy. Then he remembered that the thing beyond the door was incapable of either cruelty or kindness.

"I want you to tell me."

"I don't know how to say it, mum. But you're ... you're *dead*." Suddenly she threw herself at Tansy's feet. "Oh, please, please don't take mine! Please!"

"I would not take your soul. You would get much the best of that bargain. You may go away now."

"Oh, thank you, thank you." She hastily gathered up the scattered clothes. "I'll have them all ready for you at nine o'clock. Really I will." And she hurried out.

Only when he moved, did Norman realize that his muscles were stiff and aching from those few taut minutes of peering. The robed and toweled figure was sitting in exactly the same position as when he had last seen it, hands loosely folded, eyes still directed toward where the girl had been standing.

"If you knew all this," he asked simply, "why were you willing to stop last week when I asked you?"

"There are two sides to every woman." It might have been a mummy dispensing elder wisdom. "One is rational, like a man. The other knows. Men are artificially isolated creatures, like islands in a sea of magic, protected by their rationality and by the devices of their women. Their isolation gives them greater forcefulness in thought and action, but the women know. Women might be able to rule the world openly, but they do not want the work or the responsibility. And men might learn to excel them in the Art. Even now there may be male sorcerers, but very few.

"Last week I suspected much that I did not tell you. But the rational side is strong in me, and I wanted to be close to you in all ways. Like many women, I had not been awakened. I was not certain. And when I destroyed my charms and guards, I became temporarily blind to sorcery. Like a person used to large doses of a drug, I was uninfluenced by small doses. Rationality was dominant. I enjoyed a few days of false security. Then rationality itself proved to me that you were the victim of sorcery. And during my journey here I learned much, partly from re-examination of my own memories, partly from what He Who Walks Behind let slip." She paused and added, with the blank innocent cunning of a child, "Shall we go back to Hempnell now?"

The phone rang. It was the night clerk, almost incoherent with some sort of agitation, babbling threateningly about police and eviction. To pacify him, Norman had to promise to come down at once.

The old man was waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"Look here, mister," he began, shaking a finger, "I want to know what's going on. Just now my Sissy came down from your room white as a sheet. She wouldn't tell me anything, but she was trembling like all get-out. Sissy's my granddaughter. I got her this job, and I'm responsible for her."

He seemed genuinely concerned.

"I know what hotels are. I've worked in 'em all my life. And I know the kind of people that come to them—sometimes men and women working together—and I know the kind of things they try to do to young girls.

"Now I'm not saying anything against you, mister. But it was mighty queer the way your wife came here. I thought when she asked me to call Sissy that she was sick or something. But if she's sick, why haven't you called a doctor? And what are you doing still up at almost four? Mrs. Thompson in the next room called to say there was talking in your room—not loud, but it scared her. I got a right to know what's going on."

Norman put on his best classroom manner and blandly dissected the old man's apprehensions until they began to look very unsubstantial. Dignity told. With a last show of grumbling, the old man let himself be convinced. As Norman started upstairs, he was shuffling back to the switchboard.

On the second flight, Norman heard a phone ringing. As he was walking down the hall, it stopped.

He opened the door. Tansy was standing by the bed, speaking into the phone. Its dull blackness, curving from mouth to ear emphasized the pallor of lips and cheek and the whiteness of the toweling.

"This is Tansy Saylor," she was saying tonelessly. "I want my soul." A pause. "Can't you hear me, Evelyn? This is Tansy Saylor. I want my soul."

He had completely forgotten the call he had put in. It had been done in a moment of crazy anger. He hadn't even any clear idea of what he had been going to say.

He stepped forward. A low wailing sound was coming from the phone. Tansy was talking against it.

"This is Tansy Saylor. I want my soul."

He was almost there. The wailing sound had swiftly risen to a squeal, but mixed with it was an intermittent windy whirring.

He reached out to take the phone. But at that instant the phone twisted like a stumpy black worm, whipped tight to the skin, and dug into chin and neck just below the ear, like a double-ended black paw. The squeal became a muffled sucking.

If you tore that away, you would tear the face with it. He knew. He dropped to his knees and ripped the cord from the wall. Violet sparks spat from the torn wire. The loose end writhed like a wounded snake, whipped around his forearm, tightened spasmodically, then relaxed.

He stood up. The phone had fallen to the floor. There was nothing out of the ordinary about it now.

Tansy was still standing in the same place. Not an atom of fear showed in her expression. With the unconcernedness of a machine, she had lifted a hand and was slowly massaging cheek and neck. From the corner of the squeezed lips a few drops of blood were trickling.

The rack, he was thinking, would be too good for that woman. Or the scourge, or the wheel. So foully to attack a mere empty creature was an ultimate, unspeakable viciousness, like crushing a kitten under your heel. Perhaps the Boot, or the Funnel—

Swiftly the phantasmagoria of the Inquisition faded from his mind, as his first surge of anger spent itself and settled down to a steady hate.

"What did she say to you?" he asked evenly.

"She kept saying, 'Who is this? Who is this?' That was all. Then she stopped and the noise began."

"How did she sound?"

"She sounded very frightened."

"Good!" He smacked his fist against his palm. "Magic works," he said grimly. "We'll make it work better. She'll be more frightened after we begin."

"Perhaps you have already begun."

He did not understand at the time the significance of that toneless reply.

XII.

The rhythmic rattle and surge of the train had a soothing monotony. You could hear the engine puffing lustily. The wide, heat-baked, green fields swinging past the window of the compartment, drowsed in the noonday sun. The farms and cattle and horses dotting them here and there, looked equally somnolent. He would have liked to sleep, but he knew he would not be able to. And as for—She apparently never slept.

"I want to run over some things," he said. "Interrupt me if you hear anything that sounds wrong or you don't understand."

From the corner of his eye he noted the figure sitting between him and the window nod once.

It occurred to him that there was something terrible about an adaptability that could familiarize him even to—her, so that now after only a day and a half he was using her as a kind of thinking machine, asking for her memories and reactions in the same way that a man might direct a servant to put a certain record on the phonograph.

At the same time he knew that he was able to make this close contact endurable only by carefully directing his thoughts and actions—like the trick he had acquired of never quite looking at her directly. And he kept himself nerved up with the thought of what lay ahead, and his determination to regain what had been lost, and his hate. The present condition was only temporary. But if he once let himself start to think what it would mean to live a lifetime, to share bed and board, with that—blackness—coldness—vacancy.

Other people noticed the difference all right. Like those crowds they'd had to push through in New York yesterday. Somehow people always edged away, so they wouldn't have to touch her, and he had caught more than one following glance, poised between curiosity and fear. And when that other woman started to scream—lucky they had been able to lose themselves in the crowd.

The brief stopover at New York had provided him with some vitally necessary materials, though he still felt hampered by the lack of his library and notes. But he had been glad last night when it was over. The compartment seemed a haven of privacy.

What was it those other people noticed? True, if you looked closely, the heavy cosmetics only provided a grotesque and garish contrast to the underlying pallor, and powder did not wholly conceal the ugly dark bruise around the mouth. But the veil helped, and you had to look very closely—the cosmetics were practically a theatrical make-up. Was it her walk that they noticed, or the way her clothes hung—her clothes always looked a little like a scarecrow's now, though you could not put your finger on the reason. Or was it—

But that was what he must not think about.

"Magic is a practical science." He talked to the wall, as if dictating. "There is all the difference in the world between a formula in physics and a formula in magic, although they have the same name. The former describes, in terse mathematical symbols, some cause-effect relationship of wide generality. But a formula in magic is a way of getting or accomplishing something. It always takes into account the motivation or desire of the person performing the magic—be it greed, love, revenge, or what-not. Whereas the experiment in physics is essentially independent of the experimenter. In short, there has been little or no "pure"—nonpractical—magic, comparable to pure science.

"This distinction between physics and magic is just an accident of history. Physics is ultimately as practical as magic—but it possesses a superstructure of theory that magic lacks. Magic could be given such a superstructure by research in pure magic and by the investigation and

correlation of the magic formulas of different peoples and times, with a view to deriving basic formulas which could be expressed in mathematical symbols and which would have a wide application. Most persons practicing magic have been too interested in immediate results to bother about theory. But just as research in pure science has ultimately led, seemingly by accident, to results of vast practical importance, so research in pure magic might be expected to yield similar results."

He waited a moment for comment, then went on.

"The subject matter of magic is akin to that of physics, in that it deals with certain forces and materials, though these—"

"I believe it is more akin to psychology," the voice interrupted.

"How so?" He still looked at the wall.

"Because it concerns the control of other beings, the summoning of them, and the constraining of them to perform certain actions."

"Good. That is very suggestive. Fortunately, formulas may still hold good so long as their reference is clear, though we are ignorant of the precise nature of the entities to which they refer. For example, a physicist need not be able to give a visual description of an atom, even if the term visual appearance has any meaning when applied to an atom—which is doubtful. Similarly, a sorcerer need not be able to describe the appearance and nature of the entity he summons. But the point is well taken. Many seemingly impersonal forces, when broken down sufficiently, become something very much like personality. It's not too far-fetched to say that it would take a science resembling psychology to describe the behavior of a single electron, with all its whims and impulses, though electrons in the aggregate obey relatively simple laws, just as human beings do when considered as crowds. The same holds true of the basic entities of magic, and to a much greater degree.

"It is partly for this reason that magical processes are so tricky and dangerous, and why their working can be so readily impeded if the intended victim is on guard against them—as your formulas have to our knowledge been nullified since Mrs. Gunnison stole your book. That one formula I used on Sunday night worked only because it was not anticipated that *I* would be the operator. And even at that its working was greatly hindered."

His words possessed for him an incredibly strange overtone. But it was only by maintaining a dry, scholarly manner that he could keep going. He knew that at the first touch of casualness or informality, the latent morbidity of the situation would engulf him.

"There remains one all-important consideration," he went on swiftly. "Magic appears to be a science which markedly depends on its environment—that is, the situation of the world and the general conditions of the cosmos at any particular time. For example, Euclidean geometry is useful on Earth, but there are regions—and it would be easy to imagine more—in which a non-Euclidean geometry is more practical. The same is true of magic, but to a more striking degree. The basic, unstated formulas of magic appear to change with the passage of time, requiring frequent restatement—though it might conceivably be possible to discover master-formulas governing that change. It has been speculated that the laws of physics show a similar evolutionary tendency—though if they do evolve, it is at a much less rapid rate than those of magic. It is natural that the laws of magic should evolve or change more swiftly, since magic depends on a contact between the material world and another level of being—and that contact is complex and may be shifting rapidly.

"Take astrology, for example. In the course of several thousand years, the precession of the equinoxes has put the Sun into entirely different celestial houses—signs of the Zodiac—at the same times of year. A person born, say, on March 22nd, is still said to be born in Aries, though he is actually born when the Sun is in the constellation Pisces. A failure to take into consideration this evolutionary change since the formulas of astrology were first discovered, has rendered the formulas obsolete and invalidated them for—"

"It is my belief," the voice broke in, like a phonograph suddenly starting, "that astrology has always been largely invalid. That it is one of the many pretended sciences which have been confused with true magic and used as a kind of window dressing. Such is my belief."

"I presume that may be the case, and it would help to explain why magic itself has been outwardly discredited as a science—which is the point I'm getting at.

"Suppose the basic formulas of physics—such as Newton's three laws of motion—had changed several times in the last few thousand years. The discovery of any physical laws at any time would have been vastly more difficult. The same experiments would give different results in different ages. But that is the case with magic, and explains why magic has been periodically discredited and has become repugnant to the rational mind. It's like what old Carr was saying about the run of the cards at bridge. After a few shuffles of a multitude of cosmic factors, the laws of magic change. A sharp eye can spot the changes, but continual experimentation, of the trial-and-error sort, is necessary to keep the crude practical formulas of magic in anything like working order, especially since the basic formulas and the master-formulas have never been discovered.

"Take a concrete example—the formula I used Sunday night. It shows signs of recent revision. For instance, what did the original, unrevised formula have in place of the phonograph needle?"

"A willow whistle of a certain shape, which had been blown only once," the voice told him.

"And the platinum or iridium?"

"The original formula mentioned silver, but a heavier metal serves better. Lead, however, proved altogether ineffective. I tried it once. It was apparently too unlike silver in other respects."

"Precisely. Trial-and-error experimentation. I have a modern substitute for the flannel wrapping which may prove more effective. Moreover, in the absence of thorough investigation, we cannot be sure that all the ingredients of a magic formula are essential in making it work. A comparison of the magic formulas of different countries and peoples would be helpful in this respect. It would show which ingredients are common to all formulas and therefore presumably essential, and which are not essential. I have in mind a method for making such a comparison."

There was a discreet knock at the door. Norman spoke a few words, and the figure drew down its veil and turned toward the window, as if staring stolidly at the passing fields. Then he opened the door.

It was lunch, as long in coming as breakfast had been. And there was a new face—coffee-colored instead of ebony. Evidently the first waiter, who had shown growing nervousness in his previous trips to the compartment, had decided to sacrifice the tip and send someone else.

With a mixture of curiosity and impatience, Norman waited for the reactions of the new-comer. He almost felt able to predict them. First a very quick inquisitive glance past him at the seated figure—Norman guessed they had become the major mystery of the train. Then a longer, sideways glance while setting up the folding table, ending with the eyes getting very wide; he could almost feel the coffee-colored flesh crawl. Only hurried, almost unwilling glances after that, with a growing uneasiness manifested in clumsy handling of the dishes and glassware. Then a too-pleasant smile and a hasty departure.

Only once Norman interfered—to place the knives and forks so they lay at right angles to their usual position.

The meal was a very simple one, almost ascetic. He did not look across the table as he ate. There was something worse than animal greediness about that methodical feeding. After the meal he put the left-overs into a small cardboard box, covered them with a napkin he had used to wipe all the dishes clean, and placed the box in his suitcase beside an envelope containing clippings from his own fingernails. The sight of the clean breakfast dishes had been one of the things which had helped to disturb the first waiter, but Norman was determined to adhere strictly to a complete set of taboos. They were an odd assortment, gleaned from his memories of Negro, Polynesian, and Indian practices. Of course, there might be no protection gained by observing taboos. But then again there might be. So he collected food fragments, saw to it that no knives or other sharp instruments pointed toward them, had them sleep with their heads nearest the engine and their destination, and enforced a number of other minor regulations. Eating in private satisfied still another taboo, but there was more than one reason for that.

He glanced at his watch. Only half an hour until Hempnell. He had not realized they were quite so close. There was the faint sense of an almost physical resistance from that region, as if the air were thickening. And his mind was tossing with a multitude of problems yet to be considered.

Deliberately turning his back, he said, "According to the myths, souls may be imprisoned in all sorts of ways—in boxes, in knots, in animals, in stones. Have you any ideas on this subject?"

As he feared, this particular question brought the usual irrelevant response. The answering words had the same dull persistence.

"I want my soul."

His hands, clasped behind his back, tightened. This was why he had avoided the question until now. Yet he had to know more, if that were possible.

"But where exactly should we look for it?"

"I want my soul."

"Yes." It was hard for him to control his voice. "But how, precisely, might it be hidden? It will help if I know."

There was a rather long pause. Then, "The environment of the soul is the human brain. If it is free, it immediately seeks such an environment. It may be said that soul and body are two separate creatures, living together in a symbiotic relationship so intimate and tight that they normally seem to be only one creature. The closeness of this contact appears to have increased with the centuries. Indeed, when the body it is occupying dies, the soul is usually unable to escape and appears to die, too, or to migrate to another level of being—I have no clear knowledge of that matter. But by supernatural means the soul may sometimes be divorced from the body it is occupying. Then, if it is prevented from re-entering its own body, it is irresistibly drawn to another, whether or not that other body possesses a soul. And so the captive soul is usually imprisoned in the brain of its captor, unable either to escape from or to control that brain, in immediate contact

with the soul of the captor and forced to view and feel, in complete intimacy, the workings of that soul. Therein lies perhaps its chief torment."

Beads of sweat prickled his scalp and forehead.

His voice did not shake, but it was unnaturally heavy and sibilant as he asked, "What is Evelyn Sawtelle like?"

The answer sounded as if it were being read verbatim from the summary of a political dossier.

"She is dominated by a desire for social prestige. She spends most of her time in unsuccessfully attempting to be snobbish. She has romantic ideas about herself, but since they are too high-flown to find satisfaction, she is prim and moralistic, with rigid standards of conduct. She believes she was cheated in her husband, and is always apprehensive that he will lose what ground she has gained for him. Being unsure of herself, she is given to acts of maliciousness and sudden cruelty. At present she is very frightened and constantly on guard. That is why she had her magic all ready when she received the telephone call."

"I can't wait until tomorrow," he told himself. "I must begin with her this very afternoon."

Aloud, he asked, "Mrs. Gunnison—what do you think of her?"

"She is a woman of abundant vigor and appetites. She is a good housewife and hostess, but those activities hardly take the edge off her energies. She should have been mistress of a feudal domain. She is a born tyrant, and grows fat on it. Her appetites, many of them incapable of open satisfaction in our present society, nevertheless find devious outlets. Servant girls of the Gunnisons have told stories, but not often and then guardedly, for she is ruthless against those who oppose her or threaten her security."

"And Mrs. Carr? That is, if she comes in this category."

"Little can be said of her. She is conventional, an indulgent ruler of her husband, and enjoys being thought sweet and saintly. But I am uncertain of her deeper motivations."

"It may be then, that she is not hostile?" He was remembering the telephone call from Mrs. Carr just before he left for the East, when she had seemed to be trying to check on the activities of Evelyn Sawtelle.

"It may be. Yet at times I have been aware of her looking at me long and strangely."

There was a knock. It was the porter come for the bags.

"Be in Hempnell in five minutes, sir. Shall I brush you in the corridor?"

But Norman tipped him and declined the service. He also told him they would carry their own bags. The porter smiled jerkily and backed out.

Norman crossed to the forward window. There was only the gravel wall of a gully, and, above it, dark trees flashing indistinctly past. But almost immediately the gravel wall gave way to a wide panorama, as the tracks swung around and down the hillside.

There was more woodland than field in the valley. The trees seemed to encroach on the town, dwarfing it. From this particular point it looked quite tiny. But the college buildings stood out with a cold distinctness. He fancied he could make out the window of his office.

Those cold gray towers and darker roofs were like an intrusion from some other, older world, and his heart began to pound, as if he had suddenly sighted the fortress of the enemy.

XIII.

Norman looked briefly across the campus before he went into Morton. The thing that startled him most was something he had not expected—the air of normality. True, he had not looked forward—at least consciously—to any

outwardly demoniac manifestations, any physical stench of evil. But this feeling of wholesomeness—the little swarms of students trooping back to the dormitories or over to the campus soda fountain, the file of girls in white bound for a tennis lesson, the friendly smiles and nods, the way his own steps fell so easily and gratefully into the old familiar paths—almost for a moment he wondered if everything else were not some crazy dream. It came to him almost with a shock that things were outwardly as normal as they had ever been, that only with respect to himself had they changed.

"Don't fool yourself," the voice inside told him. "Some of those laughing girls are already infected. Their very respectable mammas have given them delicate hints. Don't be too sure you know what they're thinking while they sip their cokes or chatter about their boy friends."

But there was much to be done this afternoon, and he had no right to waste a second. He turned into Morton and quickly mounted the stairs.

His capacity for surprise was not yet exhausted, however, as he realized when he saw a group of students emerging from the classroom at the other end of the third-floor corridor, after having waited the usual ten minutes for him to appear. That was right—he had classes, and committee meetings, and appointments. He slipped around the bend in the corridor before he was noticed.

Taking suitable precautions, he entered his office. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, but he was careful in his movements and on the alert for unfamiliar objects. He did not put his hand into any drawer without closely inspecting it first.

One letter in the little pile of accumulated mail was important. It was from Pollard's office, requesting him to appear before a meeting of the trustees later this week. He smiled with grim satisfaction. His career was still skidding downhill. Hempnell still had its fangs.

He methodically removed certain sections from his files, stuffed his brief case full and made a package of the remainder.

Then he took from his pocket a small hard object, and looked at it reflectively.

It was made of lucite, and its shape was that of an egg. Sealed inside the thick, transparent shell were tiny bits of metal and fiber. It was the chief

trophy of his stay in New York. His friend in industrial chemistry had been very mystified. But here it was.

Placed in the Sawtelle home, it ought to constitute the terminal of a kind of circuit and clear the way for the operations he intended to begin tonight, for the recovery of that which Evelyn Sawtelle had taken and was holding captive.

It remained to place it.

After a last glance around, during which he noted that the Estrey dragon had not been restored to whatever was its original position on the roof, he started downstairs.

Outside he met Mrs. Gunnison.

This was something he had not anticipated with sufficient vividness. He was acutely conscious of the way his arms were encumbered by the bulky notes. For a moment he did not seem able to see her clearly.

"Lucky I found you," she began immediately. "Harold's been trying every which way to get in touch with you. Where have you been?"

Suddenly she registered on him as her old, blunt, sloppy self. With a sense of mingled relief and frustration, he realized that the warfare in which he was engaged was a strictly undercover affair, and that outwardly all relationships were the same as ever. He found himself explaining how Tansy and he, weekending with friends out in the country, had gotten a touch of food poisoning, and how his message to Hempnell must have gone astray. This explanation was intended merely for general consumption. Routine excuses were still necessary, and this one had the added advantage of providing a reason for Tansy's appearance, if anyone should see her, and it would enable him to plead a recurrence of the attack as an excuse for neglecting his academic duties.

He did not expect Mrs. Gunnison to believe it, but he ought to tell it to her just to be consistent.

She accepted the story without comment, offered her sympathies, and went on to say, "But be sure and get in touch with Harold. I believe it has to do with that meeting of the trustees you've been asked to attend. You know, Harold thinks a great deal of you. Good-by."

Odd, but at the last moment he fancied he caught a note of genuine friendliness, a strange little look, as if she was appealing to him to do something. Could he possibly be wrong in his estimation of her?

But there was work to do. Off campus, he hurried down a quiet side street to where his car was parked. With hardly a sidewise glance at the motionless figure in the front seat, he stepped in and drove to Sawtelle's.

The house was bigger than they needed, and the front lawn was very formal. But the grass was yellow in patches, and the soldierlike rows of flowers looked neglected.

"Wait here," he said. "Don't get out of the car under any circumstances."

To his surprise, Hervey met him at the door. There were circles under Hervey's always-worried eyes, and his fidgetiness was more than usually apparent.

"I'm so glad you've come," he said, pulling Norman inside. "I don't know what I'm going to do with all these departmental responsibilities on my shoulders! Classes having to be dismissed. Stop-gap instructors to be obtained. And the deadline on next year's catalogue tomorrow! Here, come into my study." And he pushed Norman through a huge living room, expensively but stiffly furnished, into a dingy, book-lined cubbyhole with one small window.

"I'm almost going out of my mind," he said. "I haven't dared stir out of the house since Evelyn was attacked Sunday night."

"What!"

"Haven't you heard?" He stopped and looked at Norman in surprise. Even here he had been trying to pace up and down, although there was not room enough. "Why, it was in the papers. Though I wondered why you didn't come over or call up. I kept trying to get you at your home and the office, but no one could locate you. Evelyn's been in bed since Sunday, and she gets hysterical if I even speak of going out of the house. Just now she's asleep, thank heavens."

It was borne in on Norman that Sawtelle was not even aware that he had been out of town. Hastily he related his trumped-up excuse. He wanted to get back to what had happened Sunday night. There was an idea forming at the back of his mind, but it was still nebulous. For the moment he neglected the real purpose of his visit.

"Just my luck!" Sawtelle exclaimed tragically when Norman had finished. "The whole department falling apart the very first week I'm in charge of it. And young Stackpoole laid up with the 'flu'!"

"We'll manage," said Norman. "Sit down and tell me about Evelyn."

Unwillingly, Sawtelle cleared a space so he could perch on the cluttered desk. He groaned audibly when his eyes chanced to light on papers concerned with urgent business.

"It happened about four o'clock Sunday morning," he began, still aimlessly fiddling with the papers. "I was awakened by a terrible scream. Evelyn's bed was empty. It was pitch dark out in the hall. But I could hear some sort of struggle going on downstairs. A bumping and threshing around—"

Suddenly he jerked up his head. "What was that? I thought I heard footsteps out in the front hall." Before Norman could say anything he went on, "Oh, it's just my nerves. They've been acting up ever since.

"Well, I picked up something—a vase—and went downstairs. About that time the sounds stopped. I switched on the lights and went through all the rooms. In the sewing room I found Evelyn stretched unconscious on the floor with some ghastly bruises beginning to show around her neck and mouth. Beside her lay the phone—we have it there because Evelyn has so many occasions to use it. I nearly went frantic. I called a doctor and the police."

Norman knew now what must have happened.

"When Evelyn regained consciousness, she was able to tell us about it, although she was terribly shaken up. It seems the phone had rung. She went downstairs in the dark without waking me. Just as she was picking up the phone, a man jumped out of the corner and attacked her. She fought him off—oh, it drives me mad to think of it!—but he over-powered her and choked her unconscious."

Norman listened with grim satisfaction.

"Thank heavens I came downstairs when I did! That must have been what frightened him off. The doctor found that, except for bruises, there weren't any other injuries. Even the doctor was shocked at those bruises, though. He said he had never seen any quite like them.

"The police think that after the man got in the house he called Central and asked them to ring this phone—pretending he thought the bell was out of order or something—in order to lure someone downstairs. They were puzzled as to how he got inside, though, for all the windows and doors were shut fast. Probably I forgot to lock the front door when we went to bed—one of my pieces of unforgivable carelessness!

"The police think that he was a vicious burglar, but I believe he must have been a madman besides. Because there was a silver plate on the floor, and two of our silver forks jammed together strangely, and other odds and ends. And he must have been playing the phonograph in the sewing room, because it was open and the turntable was going and on the floor was one of Evelyn's speech records, smashed to bits."

Yes, the picture was all very clear now. What Norman had forgotten to take into consideration was the ever-present possibility of reaction, if magic miscarried—"like the kick of a gun," or, better, like the breech of a gun blowing up. When he had severed the wire at Bayport, the thwarted Agency of Death had instantly struck back at the sender. And afterward Evelyn Sawtelle had invented the obvious story.

One thing bothered him. If the police should trace that phone call in an effort to prove their own theory, they would find it had been placed by Norman Saylor, at Bayport. But at the worst that would only convict him of a peculiar lie. For the present he would say nothing about it.

"It's all my fault," Sawtelle was repeating mournfully. Norman remembered that Sawtelle always assumed that he was guilty whenever anything hurt or merely upset Evelyn. "I should have awakened! *I* should have been the one to go down to the phone. When I think of that delicate creature feeling her

way through the dark, and lurking just ahead of her that—Oh, and the department! I tell you I'm going out of my mind. Poor Evelyn has been in such a pitifully frightened state ever since, you wouldn't believe it!"

"Good," thought Norman. "If she's really frightened, she may be easier to deal with." The idea of pity never occurred to him. Moreover, if what he had been told about the lodgment of captive souls were true, then Tansy's soul had suffered equally with that of Evelyn Sawtelle here in this very house on Sunday night.

"I tell you, I haven't slept a wink," Sawtelle was saying. "If Mrs. Gunnison hadn't been kind enough to spend a couple of hours with her yesterday morning, I don't know how I'd have managed. Even then she was too frightened to let me stir.... My God!... Evelyn!"

But it was really impossible to identify the agonized scream, except that it had come from the upper part of the house. Crying out, "I knew I heard footsteps! He's come back!" Sawtelle ran full tilt out of the study. Norman was just behind him, suddenly conscious of a very different fear. It was confirmed by a glance through the living-room window at his empty car.

He beat Sawtelle up the stairs and was the first to reach the bedroom door. He stopped. Sawtelle, almost gibbering with anxiety and guilt, ran into him.

It was not at all what Norman expected.

The pink silk coverlet clutched around her, Evelyn Sawtelle had retreated to the side of the bed nearest the wall. Her teeth were chattering, and her face was a dirty white.

Beside the bed stood Tansy. For a moment Norman felt a great, sudden hope. Then he saw her eyes, and the hope shot away with sickening swiftness. She was not wearing the veil. In that heavy make-up, with those rouged cheeks and thickly carmined lips, she looked like some indecently daubed statue, impossibly grotesque against that background of ridiculously feminine pink silk hangings. But a hungry statue.

Sawtelle scrambled past him, shouting, "What's happened? What's happened?" He saw Tansy. "I didn't know you were here. When did you come in?" Then, "You frightened her!"

The statue spoke, and its quiet accents hushed him.

"Oh, no, I didn't frighten her. Did I, Evelyn?"

Evelyn Sawtelle was staring at Tansy in abject, wide-eyed terror, and her jaw was still shaking. But when she spoke, it was to say, "No, Tansy didn't ... frighten me. We were talking together ... and then ... I ... I thought I heard a noise."

"Just a noise, dear?" Sawtelle said, somewhat taken aback.

"Yes ... like footsteps ... very quiet footsteps in the hall." She did not take her eyes off Tansy, who nodded once when she had finished.

Norman accompanied Sawtelle on a futile search of the top floor. When they came back, Evelyn was alone.

"Tansy's gone out to the car," she told Norman weakly. "I'm sure I just imagined those footsteps."

But her eyes were still full of fear when he left her, with Sawtelle fussing about straightening the coverlet and shaking out the pillows.

As he went down the stairs he became aware of a hard object in his pocket, and he remembered the lucite egg. He had not placed it. But, as things stood now, he must first know more.

Tansy was sitting in the car, staring ahead. He could see that the body was still dominated by its one emotion. He did have to ask a question.

"She does not have my soul," were the words. "I questioned her at length. As a final and certain test I embraced her. That was when she screamed. She is very much afraid of the dead."

"What did she tell you?"

"She said that someone came and took my soul from her. Someone who did not trust her very much. Someone who desired my soul, to keep as a hostage and for other reasons. Mrs. Gunnison."

And he had seen it and not known. The knuckles of his hands were white on the steering wheel. That puzzling look of appeal that Mrs. Gunnison had given him. For an instant Tansy had managed to look out of her eyes. And he had not known it.

XIV.

Professor Carr finished his inspection of the first of the five sheets.

"Yes," he said, "these are undoubtedly equations in symbolic logic."

Norman had been pretty sure they were, but he was glad to hear a mathematician say so. The hurried reference he had made to *Principia Mathematica* had not altogether satisfied him.

"The capitals stand for classes of entities, the lower case letter for relationships," he said helpfully.

"Ah ... yes—" Professor Carr's voice became a trifle diffident, and he rubbed his chin beneath the white Vandyke. "But what do they ... refer to ... if I may ask?"

"You could perform operations on the equations, couldn't you, without knowing the references of the individual symbols?" Norman countered,

"Most certainly. And the results would be valid—always providing that the original references had been made correctly."

"Then here's my problem," Norman went on hastily. "There are seventeen equations on that first sheet. As they stand, they are not consistent with each other. Now I'm wondering if one simple, underlying equation doesn't appear in each of the seventeen, jumbled up with a lot of nonessential terms and meaningless procedures. Each of the other sheets presents a similar problem."

"Hm-m-m—" Professor Carr began to finger a pencil, and his eyes started to go back to the intriguing sheet, but he checked the movement. "I must confess I'm rather curious about those references," he said, and added innocently, "I wasn't aware that there had been attempts to apply symbolic logic to sociology."

Norman was prepared for this. "I'll be frank with you, Linthicum," he said. "I have a pretty wild, off-trail theory, and I've promised myself I won't discuss it until I have a better idea of whether or not there's anything to it."

Carr's face broke into a reminiscent smile. "I think I understand your sentiments," he said. "I can still recall the disastrous consequences of my announcement that I had trisected the angle."

"Of course, I was only in high school at the time," he added hastily.

"Though I'm still convinced that I gave my teacher a bad half-hour," he finished with a touch of pride.

When he next spoke, there was a sly twinkle in his eyes. "Nevertheless, I'm very much piqued by those symbols. As it stands, they might refer ... hm-m-m ... to anything."

"I'm sorry," said Norman. "I know I'm asking a lot of you."

"Not at all. Not at all." Twiddling the pencil Carr glanced again at the sheet. Something seemed to catch his eyes. "Hm-m-m ... this is very interesting," he said. "I hadn't noticed this before." And his pencil began to fly about the sheet, deftly striking out terms, neatly inscribing new equations. The single vertical furrow between his gray eyebrows deepened. In a moment he was wholly absorbed.

With an unbreathed sigh of relief, Norman leaned back. He felt dog-tired, and his eyes hurt. Those five sheets represented twenty hours of uninterrupted work. Tuesday night, Wednesday morning, part of Wednesday afternoon. Even at that he couldn't have done it without Tansy to take notes from his dictation. He trusted the accuracy of her mindless neurons more than those of a conscious person.

The agile old fingers had half filled a fresh sheet of paper with derived equations. Their swift, orderly movements did not disturb but rather intensified the quiet almost monastic, mathematical atmosphere of the small office.

If Mrs. Gunnison had not shown herself to be so resourceful, he was thinking, he might have managed without using symbolic logic and Carr. But she was no Evelyn Sawtelle, to strike out viciously and then collapse. No, her competence and coolness under fire were of quite a different sort. She had become very elusive, and he had even been balked in the simple job of secretly planting a certain object in her home. And even if he had managed, he was doubtful whether he would have succeeded with the rest of the plan. Something of a decidedly stronger sort was necessary. Something new. Something basic.

Carr shoved a paper toward him, and immediately started working on the next sheet.

"You've found the underlying equation?"

Carr seemed almost annoyed at the interruption. "Surely ... of course." His pencil was once more darting about.

"Sorry to be making all this work for you," said Norman, wondering just what was the meaning of the brief ultimate equation. He could not tell without his code.

Carr spared him a glance. "Not at all. I'm enjoying it. I always did have a knack for these things, though it's not exactly my field." And then he was busy again.

The afternoon shadows deepened. Norman switched on the overhead light, and Carr thanked him with a quick, preoccupied nod. The pencil flew. Three more sheets had been shoved across to Norman, and Carr was finishing the last one, when the door opened.

"Linthicum!" came the sweet voice, with hardly a trace of reproachfulness. "Whatever's keeping you? I've waited downstairs fifteen minutes."

"I'm sorry, dear," said the old man, looking at his watch and his wife. "But I had become so absorbed—"

She saw Norman. "Oh, I didn't know you had a visitor," she said. "*Whatever* will Professor Saylor *think*! I'm afraid that I've given him the impression that I tyrannize over you."

And she accompanied the words with such a quaint smile that Norman found himself echoing Carr's "Not at all."

"Professor Saylor looks *dead* tired," she said, peering at Norman anxiously. "I hope you haven't been wearing him out, Linthicum."

"Oh, no, my dear, I've been doing all the work," her husband told her.

She walked around the desk and looked over his shoulder. "What is it?" she asked, pleasantly.

"I don't know," he said. He straightened up and, winking at Norman, went on, "I believe that, behind these symbols, Professor Saylor is

revolutionizing the science of sociology. But it's a great secret. And in any case I haven't the slightest idea of what the symbols refer to. I'm just being a comptometer."

With a polite, by-your-leave nod toward Norman, Mrs. Carr picked up one of the sheets and studied it through her thick glasses. But when she saw the massed rows of symbols, she put it down.

"Mathematics is not my forte," she explained. "I was *such* a poor scholar."

"Nonsense, Flora," said Carr. "Whenever we go to the market, you're much quicker at totaling the bill than I am. And I try to beat you, too."

"But that's such a *little* thing," cooed Mrs. Carr delightedly.

"I'll only be a moment more," said her husband, returning to his calculations.

Mrs. Carr spoke across to Norman in a half-whisper. "Oh, Professor Saylor, *would* you be so kind as to convey a message to Tansy? I want to invite her for bridge tomorrow night—that's Thursday—with Hulda Gunnison and Evelyn Sawtelle. Linthicum has a *meeting*."

"I'll be glad to," said Norman quickly. "But I'm afraid she might not be up to it." And he explained about the food poisoning.

"How too, too *terrible!*" observed Mrs. Carr. "Couldn't I come over and help her?"

"Thank you," Norman lied, "but we have someone staying with her."

"How *wise*," said Mrs. Carr, and it sounded as if she really meant it.

Carr put down his pencil. "There," he said, "I'm done."

With further expressions of thanks, Norman gathered up the sheets.

"Really no trouble at all," Carr assured him. "You gave me a very exciting afternoon." He added wistfully. "I must confess that you've aroused my curiosity."

"Linthicum dotes on anything mathematical, especially when it's like a puzzle," Mrs. Carr told him. "Why, once," she continued, with a kind of roguish indulgence, "he made all sorts of tabulations on *horse races*."

"Er ... yes ... but only as a concrete example of the calculus of probabilities," Mr. Carr interposed quickly. But his smile was equally indulgent.

Her hand was on his shoulder, and he had reached up his own to cover hers. Frail, yet somehow hearty, withered, yet somehow fresh, they seemed like the perfect aged couple.

"I promise you," Norman told Carr, "that if I revolutionize the science of sociology, you'll be the first to hear of it."

As soon as he was home, Norman got out the code. "*W*" was the identifying letter at the top of the first sheet. He thought he remembered what that meant, but he looked it up just to be sure.

"*W*—To conjure out the soul."

Yes, that was it. He turned to the supplementary sheet covered with Carr's calculations, and carefully decoded the final equation. "*C*—Notched strip of copper." He nodded. "*T*—Twirl sunwise." He frowned. He would have expected them to cancel out. Good thing he'd gotten a mathematician's help in simplifying the seventeen equations, each representing a different people's formula for conjuring out the soul—Arabian, Zulu, Polynesian, American Negro, American Indian, and so on; the most recent formulas available, and ones that had known actual use.

"*A*—Deadly amanita." Bother! He'd been certain that one would cancel out. It would be a bit of time and trouble getting a deathcup mushroom. And there was another even more difficult item. Well, he could manage without that formula, if he had to. He took up two other sheets—" *V*—To control the soul of another," "*Z*—To cause the dwellers in a house to sleep"—and set to work on one of them. In a few minutes he had assured himself that the ingredients presented no special difficulties, save that *Z* required a Hand of Glory to be used as well as the graveyard dirt to be thrown onto the roof of the house in which sleep was to be enforced. But he ought to have little difficulty in filching a suitable severed hand from the anatomy lab. Now he

was getting somewhere. With *Z* he could place the charm in the Gunnison house tomorrow night, and with *V* activate it.

Conscious of a sudden reaction of weariness, he pushed back his chair. For the first time since he had come into the house, he looked at her. She sat in the rocking chair, face turned toward the drawn curtains. When she had started rocking, he did not know. But the muscles of her body automatically continued the rhythmical movement, once it had begun.

With the suddenness of a blow, longing for Tansy struck him. Her intonations, her gestures, her mannerisms, her funny fancies—all the little things that go to make a person real, and human, and loved—he wanted them all instantly; and the presence of this dead-alive imitation, this poor husk of Tansy, only made the longing less bearable. And what sort of a man was he, to be puttering around with occult formulas, while all the while he—"There are things that can be done to a soul," she had said. "Servant girls of the Gunnisons have told stories—" He ought to go up there and take by force what was his!

The reaction was immediate. How could you take by force what was without form or material being? How could you use open force against someone who had your dearest possession as a hostage?

No, these repugnant occult formulas were his only hope, and he had gotten his usual punishment for making the mistake of looking at her. Deliberately he moved to the other side of the table, so his back was to the rocking chair.

But he was restless, his muscles itching with fatigue poisons, and for the moment, he could not get back to the work. All sorts of questions were plaguing his mind.

Suddenly Norman spoke. "Why do you suppose everything has become violent and deadly so abruptly?"

"What I believe they call the Balance was upset," was the answer. There was no interruption in the steady rocking.

"How was that?" He started to look over the back of his chair, but checked himself in time.

"It happened when I ceased to practice magic." The rocking was a grating monotony.

"But why should that lead to violence?"

"It upset the Balance."

"Yes, but how can that explain the abruptness of the shift from relatively trivial attacks to a deadly maliciousness?"

The rocking had stopped. There was no answer. But, as he told himself, he knew the answer already. This women's warfare was very much like trench warfare or a battle between fortified lines—a state of siege. Just as thick, reinforced concrete or armor plating nullified the shells, so countercharms and protective procedures rendered relatively futile the most violent onslaughts. But once the armor and concrete were gone, and you were out in a kind of no man's land—

Then, too, fear of the savage counterattacks that could be launched from such highly fortified positions, was a potent factor in discouraging direct assaults. The natural thing would be to sit pat, snipe away, and only attack if the enemy exposed himself recklessly. Besides, there were probably all sorts of unsuspected hostages and secret agreements, all putting a damper on violence.

This idea also seemed to explain why Tansy's apparently pacific action had upset the Balance. What would any country think if in the midst of a war, its enemy scuttled all his battleships and dismantled all his aircraft, apparently laying himself wide open to attack? For the realistic mind, there could only be one likely answer. Namely, that the enemy had discovered a weapon far more potent than battleships or aircraft, and was planning to ask for a peace that would turn out to be a trap. The only thing would be to strike instantly and hard, before the secret weapon could be brought into play.

"I think—" he started to say.

Then something—perhaps a faint *whishing* in the air or a slight creaking of the floor under the heavy carpet, or some less tangible sensation—caused him to glance around.

With a writhing jerk sideways, he managed—just managed—to get his head out of the path of that descending metal flail, which was all he saw at first. With a shocking *swish* it crashed downward against the heavy back of the chair, and there its force was broken. But his shoulder, which took only the end of the blow, went numb.

Clawing at the chair arm with his good hand, he threw himself forward against the table and whirled around.

He recoiled from the sight as from another blow, throwing back his good hand to save himself from overbalancing.

She was poised in the center of the room, having sprung back catlike after the first blow failed. Almost stiff-legged, but with the weight forward. In stocking feet—the slippers that might have made a noise were laid by the rocking chair. In her hand was the steel poker, stealthily lifted from the stand by the fireplace, so as not to make the slightest warning rattle.

There was life in her face now. But it was life that champed the teeth and drooled, life that pinched and flared the nostrils with every breath, life that switched hair from the eyes with quick, angry flirts, life that glared redly and steadily. And there was more than that.

With a low snarl she lifted the poker and struck, not at him, but at the chandelier overhead. Yet, even as pitch darkness flooded the tightly curtained room, he realized what that more-than-animal life was.

There was no one conclusive reason, but from a multitude of almost indefinable impressions—too many to be realized separately—he knew with chilling certainty that the bestial spirit animating Tansy's body, the crude and unfinished soul conjured into her body—possessing her body as it used to be said demons possessed the bodies of the insane—was the same soul that had animated the stone creature that had crept from the roof.

And then the darkness was complete.

There was a rush of soft footsteps. He ducked to one side. Nevertheless, the *swish* came perilously close. There was a sound as if she had dived or rolled across the table after he eluded the headlong rush—he could hear the slur of papers skidding and the faint crackle as some drifted to the floor. Then silence, except for the rapid *snuff-snuff* of animal breathing.

He crouched on the carpet, trying not to move a muscle, straining his ears to catch the direction of that breathing. Abominable, he thought, how inefficient the human auditory system is at localizing a sound. First it came from one direction, then another—although he could not hear the slightest rustle of intervening movement—until he began to lose his sense of orientation in the room. He tried to remember his exact movements in springing away from the table. As he had hit the carpet, he had spun around. But how far? Was he facing toward or away from the wall? In his zeal to avoid the possibility of anyone spying on Tansy, he had blacked out this room and the bedroom, and the blackout was effective. No discernible atom of light filtered through from the night outside. He was somewhere on what was beginning to seem an endless expanse of carpet.

And somewhere else on that expanse, it was. Could it see and hear more than he? Could it discern form in retinal patterns that were only blackness to Tansy's human soul? What was it waiting for? Now even the rapid breathing was no longer audible—it possessed cunning.

This might be the darkness of some jungle floor, roofed by yards of matted creepers. Civilization is a thing of light. When light goes, civilization is snuffed out. He was rapidly being reduced to *its* level. Perhaps it had counted on that when it smashed the lights. This might be the inner chamber of some primeval cave, and he some cloudy-minded primitive huddled in abject terror of his mate, into whose beloved form a demon had been conjured up by the witch woman—the brawny, fat witch woman with the sullen lip and brutish eyes, and copper ornaments twisted in matted red hair. Should he grope for his ax and seek to smash the demon from her skull where it was hiding? Or should he seek out the witch woman and throttle her until she called off her demon? But how could he constrain his wife meanwhile? If the tribe found her, they would slay her instantly—it was the law. And even now the demon in her was seeking to slay him.

With thoughts almost as murky and confused as those of that ghostly primitive forerunner, he sought to grapple with the problem, until he suddenly realized what it was waiting for.

Already his muscles were aching. He was getting twinges of pain from his shoulder, as the numbness went out of it. Soon he would make an involuntary movement. And in that instant it would be upon him.

Cautiously he stretched out his hand. Slowly—very slowly—he swung it around until it touched a small table and located the large book he had remembered was there. Clamping thumb and fingers around the book where it projected from the table edge, he lifted it and drew it to him. His muscles began to shake a little from the effort to maintain absolute quiet.

With a slow movement he launched the book toward the center of the room, so that it hit the carpet a few feet from him. The sound drew the instant response he had hoped for. Waiting a second, he dove forward, seeking to pin it to the floor. But its cunning was greater than he had guessed. His arms closed on a heavy cushion that it had hurled toward the book, and only luck saved him as the poker thudded against the carpet close by his head.

Clutching out blindly, his hands closed on the cold metal. There was a moment of straining as it sought to break his grip. Then he was sprawling backward, and the footsteps were retreating toward the rear of the house.

He followed it to the kitchen. A drawer, jerked out too far, fell to the floor, and he heard the chilling clatter and scrape of cutlery.

But there was enough light in the kitchen to show him its silhouette. He lunged at the upraised hand holding the long knife, caught the wrist. Then it threw itself against him, and they dropped to the floor.

He felt her warm body against his, the touch of it an instant check to violence. He dared not harm it, and yet viciousness animated it to the last limits of its strength. For a moment he felt the coldness of the flat of the knife against his cheek, then he had forced the weapon away. He doubled up his legs to protect himself from its knees. It surged convulsively down upon him and he felt jaws clamp the arm with which he held away the knife. Teeth sawed sideways, trying to penetrate the fabric of his coat. Cloth ripped as he sought with his free hand to drag her body away from him. Then he found her hair and forced back the head so the teeth lost their grip. It dropped the knife and clawed with both hands at his face. He seized the fingers seeking his eyes and nostrils; it snarled and spat at him. Steadily he

forced down the arms, twisting them behind it, and with a sudden effort got to his knees. Strangled sounds of impotent fury came from its throat.

Only too keenly aware of how close his muscles were to the trembling weakness of fatigue, he shifted his grip so that with one hand he held the straining wrists. With the other he groped sideways, jerked open the lower door of the cabinet, and found a length of cord.

XV.

"It's pretty serious this time, Norm," said Harold Gunnison. "A couple of trustees really want your scalp."

Norman drew his chair closer, as if the discussion were the real reason for his visit to Gunnison's office this morning.

Gunnison went on, "I think they're planning to rake up that Margaret van Nice business, and start yelping that where there's smoke there must be fire. And they may try to use Theodore Jennings against you. Claim that his 'nervous breakdown' was aggravated by unfairness and undue severity on your part, etcetera."

Norman nodded. Mrs. Gunnison ought to be here soon. The maid had told him over the phone that she had just left for her husband's office.

"Of course, those two matters aren't enough in themselves." Gunnison looked unusually heavy-eyed and grave. "But they have a bad taste, and they can be used as entering wedges. The real danger will come from a restrained but concerted attack on your conduct of classes, your public utterances, and perhaps even trivial details of your social life, followed by talk about the need for retrenchment where it is expeditious—you know what I mean." He paused. "What really bothers me is that Pollard's cooled toward you. I told him just what I thought of Sawtelle's appointment, but he said the trustees had overruled him. He's a good man, but he's a politician." And Gunnison shrugged, as if it were common knowledge that the distinction between politicians and scientists went back to the Ice Age.

Norman roused himself. "I'm afraid I insulted him last week. We had a long talk and I blew up."

Gunnison shook his head. "That would explain it. He can absorb insults. I've always said he was a good *politician*. If he sides against you, it will be because he feels it necessary or at least expeditious ... I hate that word ... on the grounds of public opinion. You know his way of running the college. Every couple of years he throws someone to the wolves."

Norman hardly heard him. He was thinking of Tansy as he had left her—the trussed-up body, the lolling jaw, the hoarse heavy breathing from the whiskey he had finally made it guzzle. He was taking a long chance, but he dared not give it an opportunity to carry off or destroy the body it had usurped. At one time last night he had almost decided to call in a doctor and perhaps have Tansy placed in a sanitarium. But if he did that he would be unable to protect her and might lose forever his chance to restore her rightful self. For similar reasons there was no friend he could call on for help. Now that his efforts to exorcise the thing by sorcery had failed, he had to strike quickly at the source of the usurping agency. But it was not pleasant to think of such headlines as: "PROFESSOR'S WIFE A TORTURE VICTIM. FOUND TRUSSED IN CLOSET BY MATE."

"It's really serious, Norm," Gunnison was repeating. "My wife thinks so, and she's smart about these things. She knows people."

His wife! Obediently, Norman nodded.

"Hard luck it had to come to a head now," Gunnison continued, "when you've been having more than your share of troubles, with sickness and what-not." Norman could see that Gunnison was looking with a faint shade of inquisitiveness at the strip of surgical tape close to the corner of his left eye and the other one just below his nostrils. But he attempted no explanation.

Gunnison shifted about and resettled himself in his chair. "Norm," he said, "I've got the feeling that something's gone wrong. You can weather this blow all right—you're one of our two-three best men—but I've got the feeling that something's gone wrong all the way down the line."

The offer his words conveyed was obvious enough, and Norman knew it was made in good faith. But only for a moment did he consider telling

Gunnison even a fraction of the truth. It would be like trying to take his troubles into the law courts, and he could imagine—with the sharp, almost hallucinatory vividness of extreme fatigue—what that would be like. Imagine, even if the thing were exorcised out of her body, putting Tansy in the witness box. "You say, Mrs. Saylor, that your soul was stolen from your body?" "Yes." "You know that to be a fact?" "Yes." "You are conscious of it?" "No, I am not conscious." "How, then—" Bang of the judge's gavel. "If this tittering does not cease immediately, I will clear the court!" Or Mrs. Gunnison called to the witness box and he himself bursting out with an impassioned plea to the jury. "Gentlemen, look at her eyes! Watch them closely, I implore you. My wife's soul is there, if you would only see it!" Then the judge, harshly, "Remove the man Saylor!"

But even such a trial was an impossibility in this day and age. And his method for righting the wrong that had been done must necessarily be as far outside the law as sorcery is outside the domain of recognized science.

"What's the matter, Norm?" he heard Gunnison ask. The genuine sympathy of the voice tugged at him confusedly. Groggy with sudden sleepiness, he tried to rally himself to answer.

Mrs. Gunnison walked in.

"Hello," she said. "I'm glad you two finally got together." Almost patronizingly she looked him over. "I don't think you've slept for the last two nights," she announced brusquely. "And what's happened to your face? Did that cat of yours finally scratch it?"

Gunnison laughed, as he usually did, at his wife's frankness. "What a woman! Loves dogs. Hates cats. But she's right about your needing sleep, Norm."

The sight of her and the sound of her voice stung him into an icy wakefulness. She looked as if she had been sleeping ten hours a night for some time. An expensive green suit set off her red hair and gave her a kind of buxom middle-aged beauty. Her slip showed and the coat was buttoned in a disorderly way, but now it conveyed to Norman the effect of the

privileged carelessness of some all-powerful ruler who is above ordinary standards of neatness. For once she was not carrying the usual bulging purse.

He did not trust himself to look into her eyes.

His hand stole from his pocket to the crevice at the back of the chair. He pushed the lucite egg out of sight. Then he stood up.

"Don't go yet, Norm," Gunnison told him. "There's a lot we should talk about."

"Yes, why don't you stay?" Mrs. Gunnison seconded.

"Sorry," said Norman. "I'll come around this afternoon if you can spare the time. Or tomorrow morning, at the latest."

"Be sure and do that," said Gunnison seriously. "The trustees are meeting tomorrow afternoon."

Mrs. Gunnison sat down in the chair he had vacated.

"My regards to Tansy," she said. "I'll be seeing her tonight at the Carr's—that is, if she's recovered sufficiently."

And to know that Tansy's soul was listening to the thoughts behind those words, in complete intimacy—He walked out rapidly and shut the door behind him.

While his hand was still on the knob, he saw Mrs. Gunnison's green purse lying on the table and, beyond it, the display case of items in physical chemistry. In that one long moment he smashed the plan he had been contemplating and built a new one.

There was one girl in the outer office—a student employee. He went up to her desk.

"Miss Miller," he said, "would you be so kind as to get me the grade sheets on the following people?" And he rattled off half a dozen student names.

"The sheets are in the Recorder's Office, Professor Saylor," she said, a little doubtfully.

"I know. But you tell them I sent you. Dr. Gunnison and I want to look them over."

Obediently she took down the names.

As the door closed behind her he pulled out the top drawer of her desk and found the key for the display case where he knew he would find it, on the bunch with the rest.

A few minutes later Mrs. Gunnison came out. She did not see him at first, because he was standing to one side of the door.

"I thought I heard you go out," she said sharply. Then, in her usual blunt manner, "Are you waiting for me to leave, so you can talk to Harold alone?"

He did not answer. He glanced at her nose, frowning a little.

She picked up her purse. "There's really no point in your trying to make a secret of it," she said. "I know as much about your troubles here as he does—in fact, considerably more. And, to be honest, they're pretty bad." Her voice had begun to assume the arrogance of the victor. She smiled at him.

He continued to look at her nose.

"And you needn't pretend you're not worried," she went on, her voice reacting irritably to his silence. "Because I know you are. And tomorrow Pollard will ask for your resignation. What are you staring at?"

"Nothing," he answered, hastily averting his glance.

"You saw a smudge on my nose!"

"Oh, no. No."

With an incredulous sniff, she took out her mirror, glanced at it puzzledly for a moment, then with a shrug held it up for a detailed inspection of her face.

Now was the moment, if only he could gauge it right. He was taut with expectation, cold with a feeling that the threads of destiny had come into his hands. The second hand of the wall clock seemed to stand still.

He dared not wait longer. In a soft yet straining voice he uttered the words, "Break glass. Shatter soul. Scatter glass. Come soul."

With a swift crackling, not very loud, yet with a tinkle to it, the mirror in Mrs. Gunnison's hand puffed into a little cloud of iridescent dust.

Instantly he felt a weight add itself to his mind, a tangible darkness press down upon his thoughts. And his mind seemed to grasp instinctively at the darkness and hold it there.

The gasp of astonishment or fear that issued from Mrs. Gunnison's lips was cut short. What seemed a loose, stupid look flowed slowly over her face, but that was only because her face lost all expression whatsoever.

He stepped up to her and took her arm.

"Come with me," he said. "It's your best chance."

Docilely she followed him into the hall. Near the stairs they met Miss Miller, returning with a handful of large cards.

"I'm very sorry to have put you to the trouble," he told her. "But it turned out that we didn't need them. You had better return them to the Recorder's Office."

The girl nodded with a polite but somewhat wry smile. Professors!

As Norman escorted Mrs. Gunnison out of the Administration Building, the darkness pressing upon his thoughts parted—as black storm clouds might part at sunset, letting through a narrow beam of crimson light. So, through the painfully bright slit in the darkness lying against his thoughts, there poured a flood of impotent red rage, of obscene anger. In a moment this cleared, and an intelligible thought appeared.

This thought, as the rage preceding it, was so intolerably *like* Mrs. Gunnison, such an intense concentration of what he had known only in diluted form, that his mind almost lost its hold on the dark entity pressing against it. For a moment his thoughts quailed at the touch of naked personality. He stared ahead, and his steps wandered like those of a drunken man. But only for a moment.

"How did you do it?" was the thought.

His own thoughts rallied, and, before he realized it, had answered:

"It was the Prince Rupert mirror from the display case. The warmth of your fingers shattered it. I held it lightly in folds of my kerchief while transferring it to your pocketbook. When the mirror breaks and the reflection is shattered, the soul is temporarily caught outside. At such times it is vulnerable."

All this, without the machinery of speech to delay it, flashed in an instant. He must be more cautious from now on.

"Where are you taking my body?"

"To our house."

"What do you want?"

"My wife's soul."

There was a long pause. The slit in the darkness closed, then opened again.

"You cannot take it. I hold it, as you hold my soul. But my soul hides it from you. And my soul holds it."

"I cannot take it. But I can hold your soul until you return my wife's soul to her body."

"What if I refuse?"

"Your husband is a realist. He will not believe what your body tells him. He will consult the best alienists. He will be very much grieved. But in the end he will commit your body to an asylum."

He could sense defeat and submission—and a kind of panic, too—in the texture of the answering thought. But defeat and submission were not yet admitted directly.

"You will not be able to hold my soul. You hate it. It fills you with abhorrence. Your mind will not be able to endure it."

Then, in immediate substantiation of this statement, there came through the slit a nasty trickle growing swiftly to a spate. His chief detestations were quickly spied out and rasped upon. He began to hurry his steps, so that the mindless hulk beside him breathed hard.

"There was Ann," came the thoughts, not in words but in the complete fullness of memory. "Ann came to work for me eight years ago. A frail-looking little blonde, but able to get through a hard day's work for all that. She was very submissive, and a prey to fear. Do you know that it is possible to rule people through fear alone, without an atom of direct force? A sharp word, a stern look—It's the implications that do it, not what's said directly. Gradually I gathered about myself all the grim prestige that father, teacher, and preacher had had for Ann. I could make her cry by looking at her in a certain way. I could make her writhe with fright just by standing outside the door of her bedroom. I could make her hold hot dishes without a whimper while serving us at dinner, and make her wait while I talked to Harold. I've looked at her hands afterward—"

Similarly he lived through the stories of Clara and Milly, Mary and Ermengarde. He could not shut his own mind from hers, nor could he close the slit, though it was within his power to widen it. Like some foul medusa, or some pulpy carnivorous plant, her soul infolded and clung to his, until it seemed almost that his was the prisoner. Not symbiosis, but parasitism.

"And there was Trudie. Trudie worshiped me. She was a big girl, slow and a little stupid. She had come from a farm. She used to spend hours on my clothes. I encouraged her in various ways, until everything about me became sacred to Trudie. She lived for my little signs of favor. In the end she would do anything for me, which was very amusing, because she was very easily embarrassed and never lost her painfully acute sense of shame —"

But now he was at the door of his house, and the unclean trickle of thoughts ceased, and the slit narrowed to the tiniest watchful crack.

He shepherded Mrs. Gunnison to the door of Tansy's dressing room. He pointed at the form huddled on the blanket he had thrown across the floor. It lay as he had left it, eyes closed, jaw lolling, breathing heavily.

"Take away what you have conjured into it," he commanded.

There was a pause. A black spider crawled off Tansy's skirt and scuttled across the blanket. Even as there came the thought, "That is it," he lunged out and cracked it under his heel as it escaped onto the flooring. He was aware of a half-cloaked comment, "Its soul sought the nearest body. Now

faithful King will go on no more errands for me. I will have to find another dog."

"Return what you have taken," he commanded.

This time there was a longer pause. The slit closed entirely.

The bound figure stirred, as if seeking to roll over. The lips moved. The slack jaw tightened. Conscious only of the black weight against his mind, and of a sensory awareness so acute that he believed he could hear the very beating of the heart in Tansy's body, he stooped and cut the lashings, removed the carefully arranged paddings from wrists and ankles.

The head rolled restlessly from side to side. The lips seemed to be saying, "Norman ... Norman—" The eyelids fluttered and he felt a shiver go over the body. And then, in one sudden glorious flood, like some flower blooming miraculously in an instant, expression surged into the face, the limp hands caught at his shoulders, and from the wide-open eyes a lucid, sane, fearless human soul peered up at his.

Not for one instant after that wonderful relief could his mind hold the repellent darkness pressing against it. And the swift lifting of that darkness was a relief almost equal to the first.

With one venomous, beaten glance, Mrs. Gunnison turned away. He could hear her footsteps trail off, the front door open and shut. Then his arms were around Tansy and his lips were against hers.

XVI.

Urgently she pushed him away from her eager lips.

"We daren't be happy, Norm," she said. "We daren't be happy for one single moment."

A disturbed and apprehensive look clouded the longing in her eyes, as if she had become conscious of a great wall shutting out the sunlight. When she answered his unspoken question, it was almost in a whisper, as if even to mention the name might be dangerous.

"Mrs. Carr—"

Her hands tightened on his arms, conveying to him in a physical way the immediacy of their danger.

"Norman, I'm frightened. I'm terribly frightened. For both of us. My soul has learned so much. Things are different from what I thought. And they're much worse."

He took hold of her shoulders, straightened her up. "You're safe," he told her, and there was a scowling strength in his face and his voice. "I've gotten you back, and I'm going to hold you. I've powers you don't know about yet. They can never touch you again."

"Oh, Norman," she began, dropping her eyes, conflicting emotions evident in her expression, "I know how brave and clever you've been. Only I know the risks you've run, the sacrifices you've made for me—wrenching your whole life away from rationality in the bare space of a week, enduring of your own free will the beastliness of that woman's naked thoughts which I was able to endure only because I was forced to. And you have beaten Evelyn Sawtelle and Mrs. Gunnison fairly and at their own game. But Mrs. Carr—" Her hands transmitted her trembling to him. "Oh, Norman, she only *let* you beat them. She wanted to give them a fright, and she preferred to let you do it for her. That's always her way. But now she'll take a hand herself."

"I think you're exaggerating," he said slowly. "What you've gone through was enough to finish you a dozen times. But ... we'll talk about it. First I'll get a drink."

And yet, he began to think, Tansy is not the sort to exaggerate. The fact that she's gone through so much and come out so magnificently, is itself a proof that she would not give way to unnecessary fears. He would have to watch himself. His physical weakness, coupled with repugnance for what he had done, was liable to bias his judgment and make him believe anything that promised peace and rest. He rubbed his eyes and blinked them, shaking his head. Relief was making him relax too much. He downed a stiff drink, and poured himself another. Better go easy with that, though. Up to a point it would help, but then it would be worse than nothing at all.

Mrs. Carr, eh? He hadn't paid much attention to her. He'd even wondered if she were concerned at all. Still, that might only mean exceptional cunning.

And yet she seemed such a silly old goat. But that might be pretense. Tansy had been in a position to learn a lot.

When he got back to the bedroom, Tansy had changed from her torn and creased dress into one of white wool, which he had always liked very much, but which she had not worn for some time. He remembered she had told him that it had shrunk and become too small for her. But now he sensed intuitively that, in the joy of her return, she took a naïve pride in her youthful body and wanted to show it to best advantage.

"It's like coming into a new house," she told him, with a quick little smile that momentarily cut across her apprehensive look. "Or rather like coming home after you've been away for a long time. You're very happy, but everything is a little strange. It takes you a while to get used to it."

Now that she mentioned it, he realized that there was a kind of uncertainty about her movements, gestures, and expressions, like a person convalescent after a long sickness and just now able to get up and about.

She had combed out her hair so that it fell to her shoulders, and she was still in her bare feet, giving her a diminutive and girlish appearance that he found very attractive. He felt a growing impatience with the possible dangers threatening him, although he knew such an attitude to be unwise. He'd smash anyone who tried to harm her or keep them apart!

She barely sipped her drink, and then put it aside.

"Back of everything, is Mrs. Carr," she began abruptly. "It was she who brought Mrs. Gunnison and Evelyn Sawtelle together, and that one act speaks volumes. Women are invariably secretive about their magic. They work alone. A little knowledge is passed from the elder to the younger ones, especially from mother to daughter, but even that is done grudgingly and with suspicions. This is the only case Mrs. Gunnison knew of—I learned most of this from watching her soul—in which three women actually co-operated. It is an event of revolutionary importance, betokening Heaven knows what for the future. Even now I have only an inkling of Mrs. Carr's ambitions, but they involve vast augmentation of her present powers. For

almost three quarters of a century she has been weaving her plans. Her real age is closer to eighty than seventy."

Tansy's voice was rapid, and she had grown pale again. Norman was listening intently.

"She seems an innocent and rather foolish old lady, strait-laced yet ineffectual—but that's only part of a disguise, along with her cooing voice and simpering manners. She's the cleverest actress imaginable. Underneath she's hard as nails—cold where Mrs. Gunnison would be hot, ascetic where Mrs. Gunnison would be a slave to appetites. But she has her own deeply hidden hungers, nevertheless. She is a great admirer of Puritan Massachusetts. Sometimes I have the queerest feeling that she is planning, by some unimaginable means, to reestablish that witch-ridden, so-called theocratic community in this present day and age.

"She rules the other two by fear. In a way they are little more than her apprentices. You know something of Mrs. Gunnison, so you will understand what it means when I say that I have seen Mrs. Gunnison's thoughts go weak with terror because she was afraid that she had slightly offended Mrs. Carr."

Norman finished his drink. His mind was slipping away from this new menace, fumbling at it instead of grasping it firmly. He must whip his mind awake! Tansy pushed her drink over toward him.

"And Mrs. Gunnison's fear is justified, for Mrs. Carr has powers so deadly that she has never had to use them except as a threat. Her eyes are the worst. Those thick glasses of hers—she possesses that most feared of supernatural weapons, against which half the protective charms in recorded magic are intended. That weapon whose name is so well known throughout the whole world that it has become a laughingstock of skeptics. The evil eye. With it, she can blight and wither. With it, she can seize control of another's soul at a single glance.

"So far she has held back, because she wanted the other two punished for certain trifling disobediences and put into a position where they would have

to beg her help. But now she will act quickly. She recognizes in you and your work a danger to herself." Tansy's voice had become so breathlessly rapid that Norman realized she must be talking against time. "Besides that, she has another motive buried in the darkness of her mind. I do not know what it is, but sometimes I have caught her studying my every movement and expression with the strangest avidity—"

Suddenly she broke off and her face went white.

"—I can feel her now ... I can feel her seeking me out ... she is breaking through—No!" Tansy screamed. "No, you can't *make* me do it!... *I won't!... I won't!*" Before he knew it, she was on her knees, clinging to him, clutching at his hands. "Don't let her *touch* me, Norman," she was babbling like a terrified child. "Don't let her come *near* me."

"I won't," he said.

"—oh ... but you can't stop her.... She's coming *here*, she says, in her own body—that's how much she cares for your powers! She's going to take me away.... I can't tell you what she's going to make me do—it's too *repulsive*."

"If she comes here, I'll stop her," he said in a flat voice.

Her babbling ceased. Slowly she lifted her white, frightened face until it looked up at his.

"You mean—"

He nodded. "I've still got a few cartridges for the revolver." His face was set.

"Norman, I can't let you do it ... except—"

"—that I am in as much danger as you are."

"Yes."

A semblance of control came back into Tansy's face.

"You might be able to do it," she said softly. "She wouldn't be expecting physical violence. But you would have to be very *quick*. If you hesitated for the tiniest *instant*, if you gave her the slightest opportunity to fix you with her eyes, you would be lost. She would seize control. You know the cobra that spits venom at its victim's eyes—it's like that."

Dully he tried to remember what you did when you committed a murder. There was the alibi—what would that be? And disposal of the body—the furnace, or he could steal some carboys of acid from the chem lab. What acid? And would it be wise to steal it? And then there was motive. That would be his strong point. The courts would not recognize his true motive.

He started. Tansy was shaking him insistently.

"Hurry, Norman. She's very close."

As if in some sticky nightmare of fear and rage and hate, he made his preparations. The curtains drawn. The door barely unlatched, so she could push her way in. Himself in the dark corner of the living room. She would make a good target, outlined against that oblong of daylight.

Suddenly Tansy slipped into his arms. Her body molded itself to his. Her moist lips found his own. Almost brutally he returned the kiss. He heard her whisper breathlessly, "Only be *quick*, darling. Don't let her *look* at you." And then she had retreated to the bedroom doorway.

There were steps hurrying up the walk. His emotions contracted to one tight knot. He was conscious of the cold metal in his hand.

The door was pushed inward. A thin form in gray silk was silhouetted there. Indistinctly he could make out beyond the sight of the gun, the faded face, the thick glasses. His finger tightened on the trigger.

But the thick glasses were turned in his direction. And the silver-haired head gave a little shake.

A dull, almost stupid look came over his face. His jaw sagged.

"Quick, Norman. *Quick!*"

The gray figure in the doorway did not move. The gun wavered, then swung suddenly around until it pointed at Tansy.

"*Norman!*"

The small restless breezes of night stirred the leaves of the venerable oak standing like some burly guardian beside the narrow house of the Carrs. Through the overlapping shadows softly gleamed the white of the walls—such a spotless, pristine white that neighbors laughingly vowed the old lady herself came out after everyone had gone to sleep and washed them down with a long-handled mop. Everywhere was the impression of neatly tended, wholesome age. It even had an odor—like some old chest which a clipper captain had used to bring back elegant spices from his voyages in the China Trade.

The house faced the campus. The girls could see it, going to classes, and it reminded them of afternoons they had spent there, sitting in straight-backed chairs, all on their best behavior, while a wood fire burned merrily on the shining brass andirons in the white fireplace. Mrs. Carr was such a strait-laced innocent old dear! But her innocence was all to the good—it was no trouble at all to pull the wool over her eyes. And she did tell the quaintest stories with the most screamingly funny, completely unconscious points. And she did serve the nicest gingerbread with her cinnamon tea.

A light came on in the hall, casting a pattern of gentle illumination through the New England fanlight onto the scrollwork of the porch. The six-paneled white door below the fanlight opened.

"I'm going, Flora," Mr. Carr called. "Your bridge partners are a bit tardy, aren't they?"

"They'll be here soon." The silvery voice floated down the hall. "Good-by, Linthicum."

He closed the door. Too bad he had to miss the bridge. But the paper they were going to hear on the Theory of Primes would undoubtedly be interesting, and one couldn't have everything. His footsteps sounded on the pebbly walk with its edging of tiny white flowers, like old lace. Then they reached the concrete and slowly died away.

Somewhere at the rear of the house a car drew up. There was the sound of something being lifted, then heavy, plodding footsteps. A door at the back of the house opened, and for a moment against the oblong of light a man could be seen carrying in a smaller figure whose position suggested the

presence of certain restraints. Then that door closed, too, and for a while longer there was silence, while the breezes played with the oak leaves.

With thriftless waste of rubber, a luxurious black automobile jerked to a stop in front. Mrs. Gunnison stepped out.

"Hurry up, Evelyn," she said. "You've made us late again. You know how she hates that."

"I'm coming as fast as I can," replied her companion plaintively, emerging from the car.

As soon as the six-paneled door swung open, the faded, spicy odor became more apparent.

"You're late, dears," came the silvery, laughing voice. "But I'll forgive you this once, because I've a surprise for you. Come with me."

They followed the frail figure in rustling, faintly hissing silk into the living room. Just beyond the bridge table, with its embroidered cover and two cut-glass dishes of sweets, stood Norman Saylor. In the mingled lamplight and firelight, his face was expressionless.

"Since Tansy is unable to come," said Mrs. Carr, "he's agreed to make a fourth. Isn't that a nice surprise? And isn't it very nice of Professor Saylor?"

Mrs. Gunnison seemed to be gathering her courage. "I'm not altogether sure that I like the arrangement," she said finally.

"Since when did it matter whether you liked something or not?" came the answer, sharp as a whiplash. Mrs. Carr was standing very straight. "Sit down, all of you!"

When they had taken their places around the bridge table, Mrs. Carr ran through a deck, flipping out certain cards. When she spoke her voice was as sweet and silvery as ever.

"Here are you two, my dears," she said, placing the queens of diamonds and clubs side by side. "And here is Professor Saylor." She added the king of hearts to the group. "And here am I." She placed the queen of spades so that

it overlapped all three. "Off here to the side is the queen of hearts—Tansy Saylor. Now what I intend to do is this." She moved the queen of hearts so that it exactly covered the queen of spades. "You don't understand? Well, it isn't what it looks like, and neither of you is especially bright. You'll understand in a moment. Professor Saylor and I have just had an ever so interesting talk," she went on. "All about his work. Haven't we, Professor Saylor?" He nodded. "He's made some of the most fascinating discoveries. It seems that there are laws governing the things that we women have been puttering with. Men are so clever in some ways, don't you think?"

"He's been good enough to tell all those laws to me. You'd never dream how much easier and safer it makes everything—and more efficient. Efficiency is so very important these days. Why, already Professor Saylor has made something for me—I won't tell you what it is, but there's one for each of you and one for someone else. They aren't presents, because I'll keep them all. And if one of you should do something naughty, they'll make it ever so easy for me to whisk part of you away—you know what part."

"And now something is going to happen that will enable Professor Saylor and I to work together very closely in the future—how closely you could never imagine. You're to help. That's why you're here. Open the dining-room door, Norman."

It was an old-fashioned sliding door, gleaming white. Slowly he pushed it aside.

"There," said Mrs. Carr. "My second surprise. I'm full of surprises tonight."

The body was lashed to a chair. From over the gag, the eyes of Tansy Saylor glared at them with impotent hate and a trapped fear.

Evelyn Sawtelle half rose, stifling a scream.

"You needn't get hysterics, Evelyn," said Mrs. Carr sharply. "It's got a soul in it now."

Evelyn Sawtelle sank back, lips trembling.

Mrs. Gunnison's face had grown pale, but she set her jaw firmly and put her elbows on the table. "I don't like it," she said. "It's too open—too risky."

"I am able to take chances I wouldn't have taken a week ago, dear," Mrs. Carr said sweetly. "In this matter your aid and Evelyn's is essential to me. Of course, you're perfectly welcome not to help, if you don't want to. Only I do hope you understand the consequences."

Mrs. Gunnison dropped her eyes. "All right," she said. "But let's be quick about it."

"I am a very old woman," began Mrs. Carr, with tantalizing slowness, "and I am very fond of life. It has been a little dispiriting for me to think that mine is drawing to a close. And, for reasons I think you understand, I have something more to fear in death than most persons.

"But now it seems that I am once more going to experience all those things that an old woman looks upon as forever lost. The unusual circumstances of the last two weeks have helped a great deal, in preparing the ground. Professor Saylor has helped a little. And you, my dears, are going to help, too. You see, it's necessary to build up a certain kind of tension, and only people with the right background can do that, and it takes at least four of them. Professor Saylor—he has such a brilliant mind!—tells me that it's very much like building up electrical tension, so that a spark will be able to jump a gap. Only in this case the gap will be from where I am sitting to, there"—and she pointed at the bound figure. "And there will be two sparks. And then, when it's over, the queen of hearts will exactly cover the queen of spades. Also, the queen of spades will exactly cover the queen of hearts. But it's the things you can't see that are always the most important, don't you think?"

"You can't do it!" said Mrs. Gunnison. "You won't be able to keep the truth hidden!"

"You think not? On the contrary, I won't have to make an effort. Let me ask you what will happen if old Mrs. Carr claims that she is young Tansy Saylor. I think you know very well what would happen to that dear, sweet, innocent old lady. There are times when the laws and beliefs of a skeptical society can be so very convenient.

"You can begin with the fire, Norman. I'll tell the others exactly what they are to do."

He tossed a handful of powder on the fire. It flared up greenly, and a pungent, cloying aroma filled the room.

There was a stirring at the heart of the world and a movement of soundless currents in the black void. Upon the dark side of the planet, a million women moved restlessly in their sleep, and a few woke trembling with unnamed fears. Upon the light side, a million more grew nervous, and unaccustomed daydreams chased unpleasantly through their minds; some made mistakes at their work and had to add again a column of figures or tie a broken thread or readjust the intricate mechanism of a fuse or detonators; and a few found strange suspicion growing mushroomlike among their thoughts. A certain ponderous point began to work closer and closer to the end of the massive surface supporting it, not unlike a top slowly wobbling toward the edge of a table, and certain creatures who were nearby saw what was happening and skittered away terrified through the blackness. Then, at the very edge, it paused. The irregularity went out of its movement, and it rode steady and true once more. The currents ceased to trouble the void, and the Balance was restored.

Norman Saylor opened the windows at top and bottom so the breeze might fan out the remnants of pungent vapor. Then he cut the lashings of the bound figure and loosened the gag from its mouth. In a little while, she rose, and without a word they started from the room.

All this while, none of the others had spoken. The figure in the gray silk dress sat with head bowed, shoulders hunched dejectedly, frail hands dropped limply at her side.

In the doorway, the woman whom Norman Saylor had loosed turned back.

"I have only one more thing to say to you. All that I told you earlier this evening was completely true—including that matter of the devices he has made for each one of you and which I will keep close by me. All completely true—with one very big exception—"

Mrs. Gunnison looked up. Evelyn Sawtelle half turned in her chair. The third figure did not move.

"The soul of Mrs. Carr was not transferred to the body of Tansy Saylor this evening. That happened much earlier—when Mrs. Carr had the easier task of exorcising a lowly bestial spirit from that body and then herself occupying the empty brain, leaving the captive soul of Tansy Saylor trapped in her own aged body—and doomed to be murdered by her own husband in accord with Mrs. Carr's well-laid plan. For Mrs. Carr knew that Tansy Saylor would only have one panic-stricken thought—to run home to her husband. And Mrs. Carr was very sure that she could persuade Norman Saylor to kill the body housing the soul of his wife, under the impression that he was killing Mrs. Carr. And that would have been the end of Tansy Saylor's soul, since the soul dies or vanishes with the body it inhabits.

"You knew, Mrs. Gunnison, that Mrs. Carr had taken Tansy Saylor's soul from you, just as you had taken it from Evelyn Sawtelle, and for similar reasons. But you dared not reveal that fact to Norman Saylor because you would have lost your one bargaining point. This evening you half suspected that something was different from what it seemed, but you did not dare to make a stand.

"And now as a result of what we have done this evening with your help, the soul of Mrs. Carr is once more in the body of Mrs. Carr, and the soul of Tansy Saylor is in the body of Tansy Saylor. That is all. And now, good night."

The six-paneled door closed behind them. The pebbly path crunched under their feet.

"How did you know?" was Tansy's first question, "When I stood there in the doorway, blinking through those awful spectacles, gasping after the way I'd hurried with only the blind thought of finding you—how did you know?"

"Partly," he said reflectively, "because she gave herself away toward the end. She began to emphasize words in that exaggerated way of hers. But that wouldn't have been enough in itself. She was too good an actress. She must have been studying your mannerisms for years. And after seeing how well you played her part tonight, with hardly any preparation, I wonder that I ever did see through her."

"Then how did you?"

"It was partly the way you hurried up the walk—it didn't sound like Mrs. Carr. And partly something about the way you held yourself. But mainly it was that headshake you gave—that quick triple headshake, I couldn't fail to recognize it. And after that, I realized all the other things."

"Do you think," said Tansy softly, "that after this you'll never begin to wonder if I am really I?"

"I suppose I will," he said seriously. "But I believe I'll always be able to conquer my doubts."

And Tansy laughed.

But he was not yet over being serious. "I think that tonight we were a lot closer to a much bigger danger than even we ever guessed," he said. He had not yet surrendered to the reaction that gripped Tansy. "There's more behind this matter of the Balance than we may realize. There's a lot we'll do with this, but we'll want to go slowly and test every step of the way."

There were footsteps, then a friendly greeting from the shadows ahead.

"Hello, you two," called Mr. Gunnison. "Bridge game over? I thought I'd walk back with Linthicum and then drive home with Hulda. Say, Norman, Pollard dropped in to speak to me after the paper had been read. He's had a sudden change of heart on that matter we were talking about. From what he says, the trustees may even cancel their meeting."

"It was a very interesting paper," Mr. Carr informed them, "and I had the satisfaction of asking the speaker a very tricky question. But I'm sorry I missed the bridge. Oh, well, I don't suppose I'll ever notice any difference."

"And the funny thing is," Tansy told Norman after they had walked on, "is that he really *won't*."

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CONJURE WIFE

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