
SHUDDERING CASTLE

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Author: Wilbur Finley Fauley

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SHUDDERING CASTLE

By Wilbur Fawley

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SHUDDERING CASTLE

SHUDDERING CASTLE is not a mystery novel in the generally accepted sense. It is a novel with a mystery; a highly imaginative story, with revelations in the field of radio and short-wave broadcasting. None of the strange events recorded oversteps the boundaries of accepted natural laws.

In this novel of exciting action, radio communication is established between Earth and Mars, with a world-girdling hook-up from Radio Center, in New York City, and the reader will be amazed to find that the Martians are human beings like ourselves, subject to the same laws, the same temptations and passions which affect humanity. Into this pulsating picture of tensed American life of the near future, comes another revelation from the sky. This brings the reader to the drama of a frightening but plausible visitor from the jungles of Mars to this world, whose presence in the old spooky castle of an eccentric millionaire-scientist on Long Island causes great fear to its inmates when night falls.

But there is thrilling romance to warm your hearts, the infatuation of a young newspaperman for the alluring debutante niece of the old scientist; a humanly drawn boy and girl who are caught in the violent web of mystery and sudden death. SHUDDERING CASTLE is a unique study in the mysterious recesses of the universe.

SHUDDERING CASTLE

As a staid and wealthy New York family, of distinguished but remote English ancestry, we moved formally and rather arrogantly within our small, exclusive circle, holding on grimly to the traditions and elegancies of the past. During the winter season, we viewed the outside world placidly, and with the respectful composure of middle-age, from the dignified privacy of our red brick mansion in Washington Square.

On May first, as regular as clockwork, year in and year out, and with all the solemnity of a ritual, we put our elaborate upholstered furniture in linen shrouds, veiled the somber, scowling family portraits in their dull gold frames with fly-netting, boarded up the windows and doors, and went to the country. Our summer home is called The Castle, and it is situated at Sands Cliff, Long Island. As a family we resembled nothing so much as this embattled stone fortress, of old-world design, in which we spent more than half the year.

As long back as I can remember, we had successfully preserved the family's seclusion from the living world. Wherever we happened to be, in town or country, we had protected our privacy with shuttered windows, and massive iron gates that were secured both day and night with heavy chains. Numerous signs of "Private" and "No Trespassing Allowed" dotted our grounds like grave markers.

And then, quite suddenly, our lives became incredibly transformed. A series of weird events brought us out of our privacy and seclusion—brought us plenty of excitement and trouble and even horror.

But that was not to be wondered at, with Henry, my elder brother, suddenly developing a mania for research in scientific matters, especially the science of heavenly bodies and the phenomena of radio. He did not pretend to be a scholar, although he had cultivated scholarly habits most of his life. Inexplicably, this mania had seized him late in life; a sort of bursting out of the abnormal repression which held us all in thrall, no doubt as the result of our long seclusion from the outside world and following the drab and barren routine of our lives with such punctilious rigidity.

Ample means had enabled him to completely outfit an observatory, with a powerful telescope, at our summer residence. Here he would spend hours gazing into the abyss of space. He saw things up there the trained, professional astronomer never saw, or ever hoped to see—colliding suns,

formation of temporary stars, the rejuvenescence of dying worlds, and gaseous explosions in the Milky Way.

One of his pet theories was that the planet Mars was inhabited by a race of people like ourselves, and that their men of science had long been trying to establish radio communication with the earth. The static on our radio set which annoyed me intensely, would galvanize Henry with delight and hope, and his eyes would glisten almost frenziedly behind their horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Those are distinctly electro-magnetic waves," he would say, "that come from some point far off in space, and they are not due to any terrestrial disturbance like thunderstorms, local or distant."

There was no opening, no escape, from Henry once he got started on the galactic radio waves as differing from the cosmic rays and from the phenomenon of cosmic radiation.

"I'm telling you, Livingston," he once declared in an excited, high-pitched voice, "that man has only begun his conquest of time and space. There are no limitations to human achievement. The world is on the threshold of things unheard of, undreamed of. I have no doubt that we will soon be able to establish radio communication with Mars, and with my leisure, money and the required taste for science, I feel that I am admirably fitted to make it come true."

And from that day he was changed, secretive. He refused to tell me what he had discovered. Again and again I begged him to explain and always it was the same vague answer, the same shake of the head, and tightened lips.

It all seemed fantastic and visionary then, Henry's theories about Mars and interstellar communication, but when unusual things began to happen and our peaceful and ordered living was suddenly and violently disturbed, I realized, as never before, that visions often come to reality in an unbelievable way.

At the time we were thrown into such turmoil, and the dread spotlight of publicity centered upon us, our family consisted of Henry and myself, both bachelors; Jane, our spinster sister, and Patricia Royce Preston—Pat for short—a very fascinating young person, who had come to live with us at the tender age of fourteen, after the shocking death of her parents, our youngish

sister, Virginia Royce Preston, and her husband, Allston, who were killed in an air-liner crash near Paris.

There is something strangely lovable about a young girl in the process of growing up. The advent of Pat meant, of course, less privacy and the trampling down of staid personal habits and family customs which we held virtually sacred. The fact that we were old and queer and our household drab and rather grotesque, in comparison to the modernistic and rather barbaric splendor of our more fashionable friends, scarcely troubled her. Nothing seemed to matter but that this bright-eyed, brown-haired girl should concentrate all her love and devotion on a trio of old fossils. A warm affection grew between us and our pretty niece. As she blossomed into young womanhood our lives became centered in her. She was now eighteen.

Although we were born rich, and received a huge income from the heritage of vast and various real estate holdings on Manhattan Island, both Henry and myself, strangely enough, had never splurged, and never married. I am sure the thought of matrimony never entered Jane's mind. Our natural emotions seemed to be stirred and exalted only by the importance of our family name and our wealth. Romantically, we were strangely neutral, as though, in the pursuit of riches, the family stock had been sort of washed out.

After our college days, Henry and I grew into old-fashioned, mellow bachelorhood, aloof from the world and very self-sufficient, and glad to have it so. Henry had just observed his sixty-fifth birthday when our lives became so tempestuous and convulsed. I was two years his junior. Jane had just turned sixty. As progeny, we seemed to have come into this world in swift successiveness, as though the marriage of our revered parents had fulfilled its promise in a bunch.

For an entire summer Henry lived virtually in seclusion in his observatory without any tangible result. Sweeping the sky with his telescope for anything that might happen. But nothing transpired. Yet he persisted. Finally, he detected a tiny comet, apparently on its way to the earth. At first it appeared no larger than a pin-prick of light, with a small, meteoric tail.

The night he made the discovery, he got me out of bed to see it, but I was in no mood or condition for sky gazing. In addition, looking into the eye-piece

of the telescope made me a little sick and dizzy. I couldn't see a thing. Deciding that he was suffering from a delusion, I went back to bed.

The odd thing was that Henry was right. He had actually witnessed the phenomenon of impact of two small planets which produced the comet. As he explained it afterwards to a group of eminent scientists, this collision of two celestial bodies had produced a distinct flash of light, out of which had grown a spiral swarm of very brilliant particles, and he had watched them as they took on orbital motion.

The comet soon became the most impressive and magnificent sight I have ever seen, stretching its scimitar-like form half across the heavens. Its wonder and beauty dragged New Yorkers up in the small hours, to gaze at it with fascinating awe. Many regarded it with terror, others with superstitious dread. In churches throughout the land, the people prayed: "Lord save us from the devil, and Royce's comet!"

The comet was not only named after Henry but his discovery was acclaimed by scientists the world over, and he was chosen a fellow of the two leading scientific bodies of America and England. While still rated as an amateur in science, nevertheless, many learned men began to look upon him as the depository of authority and authenticity in matters relating to the mysteries of the solar system.

Having disclosed something to the world in the order of creation, Henry became imbued with an overpowering sense of his own importance as a man of science; his ambitions soared to unsurmountable heights. The discovery of the comet having been far easier than he had dared dream, he now turned with profound intentness to establish radio communication with Mars. He began talking in a familiar and chatty way about the people on Mars, and to hear him talk one would think that he was going there for a week-end of golf.

In this project, he had enlisted the able assistance of Serge Olinski, assistant research engineer of the National Radio Corporation, whose unexceptional qualifications included an honor degree in cosmic ray research, with distinction in astronomy. Their experimental activities, in trying to pick up and decode the galactic radio waves, which both believed constituted some kind of interstellar signaling, were carried on behind locked doors, either at

Henry's observatory in the country, or in Olinski's laboratory in the NRC Building, in the new Radio Center Annex.

Olinski was a queer shrinking soul, and any sort of publicity to Henry was equally distasteful. They were two of a kind, in this respect. Notwithstanding all the praise and attention given to Henry by the press during the comet furore, he treated reporters with the utmost contempt, and accused them of being dishonest rogues. One reporter in particular he hated and feared. Just mention to him the name of Robert McGinity of the New York Daily Recorder, and his correctly chiselled and aristocratic features would crinkle up in rage and horrible chuckles would issue from his thin lips like unnamable profanities.

He had never forgotten his first encounter with McGinity on the telephone, nor had he ever forgiven the reporter for what he called an utterly disreputable transaction in news. But the business of reporting is at least an honorable one, and reporters have to get their stories, somehow.

This fellow, McGinity, published the first report of Henry's discovery of the comet, and scored a beat by calling him up and giving the impression that he was one of the assistant astronomers at Harvard University. I had no suspicions then how the information had trickled into the office of the Daily Recorder, but I believe now that our solemn-visaged butler, Orkins, who afterwards turned out to be so mercenary and treacherous, tipped off this morning paper, which paid liberally for exclusive stories.

It was the night following Henry's detection of the comet when he was aroused out of a sound sleep to answer an important telephone call. If I hadn't been up and overheard the conversation, I wouldn't have believed it possible for any man to be so easily deceived. But gullibility is one of Henry's weaknesses. I switched into the conversation from an extension on the second floor.

Henry seemed to have some recollection of the name of the Harvard professor, as it came over the telephone, and at first was a little taken aback and curious that the news of his discovery should have become known. Despite this, he told all about his detection of the new comet, and proudly, omitting no detail. It would have been ungrateful on his part to have distrusted the man at the other end of the wire, after he had gone to the trouble and expense of calling up, obviously from Boston, and it seemed so

unlikely that any one outside astronomical circles would be interested in the discovery. Up to that time, Henry had had no dealings with reporters. By exercising extraordinary discretion, he had managed all his life to keep out of the news, except for occasional real estate transactions, and had always avoided any encounter with the press.

After he had answered heaps and heaps of questions, the voice at the other end said: "Thanks, Mr. Royce. Thanks a lot. Darned good of you to tell me all this."

An oppressive silence descended. By that time, Henry must have guessed that he had been gulled. I got his voice but I missed the play of expression on his face.

"Who is this speaking?" he asked again. "Who the devil are you?"

"Bob McGinity of the Daily Recorder," came the prompt reply.

Henry gave a nervous jump. "What?" he gasped angrily. It was evident that he was utterly taken by surprise. "I—I find your action in calling me up quite incomprehensible, Mr. McGinity. I imagined that—that—"

"Pardon me," the reporter retorted with some dignity. "I never said I was an assistant professor of astronomy at Harvard. I simply asked if you knew of such a person, and you said you did, and then you proceeded to tell me exactly what I wanted to know."

"But surely you're not going to publish this," Henry fumed. "It's too immature. You must keep it out of the newspaper."

"I'm sorry but I have no power to do so, Mr. Royce," the reporter replied. "And no inclination, Mr. Royce."

Henry clawed at the telephone instrument with trembling fingers. "If I had you here, young man," he shouted, "I'd break your damned neck."

He hung up with a bang, and I don't think he slept a wink the rest of the night. And it was entirely due to this experience that he and Olinski took every precaution that nothing should leak out concerning their research in interstellar signaling, which, as far as I could learn, at the time, had entered on the final and exciting stage of their experimental work.

Henry's actions indicated that his mind was still working feverishly on this subject; he even raved about it in his sleep, according to his Filipino valet, Niki. But about his and Olinski's doings, not a word to me. When I would ask him if they had found anything worth finding, he would reply: "Just you wait, and see;" a vague term which he refused to make more definite.

In the silent watches of the night, he would sit at his telescope, his eyes trained on that beautiful, reddish planet, Mars. One morning, at four o'clock, I found him there, clad only in his pajamas, and he strongly resented my intrusion. But I had a task to perform, and that was to see that he got his proper rest. I had no wish that any member of our family should become psychopathic.

"Henry!" I exclaimed, rather harshly; "you've only a few hours before breakfast-time. Go to bed and get a bit of sleep."

I think he realized, instinctively, that I was not in sympathy with this business of trying to pick up radio signals from Mars. It all seemed so useless and incredible. His secret experiments had been in progress now for about a year. The tumult aroused by the discovery of the comet seemed a thing long past and forgotten. The memory of the public is short. Newer sensations had taken its place.

In this latest mad, scientific quest, Henry reminded me of one of Jane's goldfish, which swims in its bowl, and swims and swims, thousands of miles, perhaps, and then finds itself a few inches from its starting point. So one day I resolved to bring the matter to an issue. I slipped into his room just after he had disrobed and donned a dressing-gown, preparatory to taking a bath and dressing for dinner.

"Henry," I began, rather abruptly, "study and action are worth while, only when they lead you some place." But I was not destined to finish what was in my mind to say.

"I beg pardon, Livingston, if I disturb you," he interrupted in his meekest accents, and then went into his bathroom, and closed the door.

Determined to have my say, I followed him to the door, and knocked. The door opened, and his face, meek and anxious, looked out at me through a narrow crack.

"Henry!" I implored. "If I could only see you for a few minutes—"

"No!" he said, and shut the door. A second later, I heard the bar shoved into its slot.

There was nothing unusual in Henry locking himself in his bathroom, for he had the distressful habit of sitting in his bath-tub, by the hour, smoking and thinking. His bathroom seemed to be the only quiet retreat in the castle which afforded the complete solitude and privacy necessary for the employment of his brain cells. He felt that here he could relax, just as Napoleon did, after undue fatigue, dictating letters and giving important military orders from his steaming bath-tub.

I have often wondered where Sir Isaac Newton was sitting, at his home in Woolsthorpe, England, when the fall of an apple, so legend tells us, suggested the most magnificent of his discoveries, the law of universal gravitation. There is no evidence to refute that he was sitting in one of those queer, early English bath-tubs, looking out of the bathroom window, at his apple orchard.

I never see Rodin's famous sculpture, "The Thinker," but I am reminded of Henry, sitting in his bath-tub, thinking and thinking, especially during the early part of the eventful summer of which I write.

Evidently some fresh idea had come to him while in his bath on the evening I persisted in assailing his peace of mind. With startling suddenness he donned his bath-robe, rushed to the telephone, and communicated with Olinski. As quickly as possible, the next day, they got to work on Henry's idea. Then problems began to straighten themselves out. As to what they had discovered, they said nothing at the moment.

Soon after, however, an avalanche of adventure, mystery and excitement came thunderously down upon us, throwing our lives into chaos.

II

As I begin my narrative, my mind travels back for a moment to the days of my youth, and I am made more vividly aware of the changes that have taken place in the world. We are living in a new era now—a period marked

by a series of strange occurrences, manifestations of the weird powers that lurk in outer space. The New Deal has passed into history. A strangely remote time ago, that was....

The laboratory has supplied us with the basic means of lifting the curtain of space from scenes and activities at a distance. A system of sight transmission and reception, comparable in coverage and service to the world-wide hook-up of sound broadcasting, has brought all nations closer together. In the friendly exchange of ideas and feelings through the medium of television and the radio, the whole civilized world enjoys common participation.

Nationalism no longer endangers the peace of the world. All war debts between nations have been settled, and tariff barriers laid low. Internationalism reigns supreme, to the spirit and benefits of which Henry contributed his share by engaging servants representing seven nationalities. Thus we harbored at the castle of Sands Cliff about every conceivable question of society, politics and religion.

Our summer castle is such a place as you read of, in romances of the Middle Ages. It was built more than half a century ago by a wealthy New York society woman who must have had a strain of poetic romanticism in her veins. When Henry purchased the place, it was almost in ruins.

It is perched on the summit of a precipitous sand cliff, commanding an excellent view of Long Island Sound. From its windows, on a bright day, the majestic towers of New York appear dimly etched against a mauve horizon like the spires of a magical city. There it stands, dark and foreboding, and ivy-clad, in its own grounds, surrounded by a high brick wall. The main entrance gate is approached by a dark avenue which winds through a heavily wooded park. There is no other dwelling within a mile.

There are many mullioned windows in its slim, peaked towers. Inside, a clutter of rooms—endless rooms—some of them in the upper floors unused and smelling dusty and dank. The front door opens on a brick terrace, which has a stone balustrade as a protective measure against a sheer drop of two hundred feet to the rocky base of the cliff. From the east end of the terrace, stone steps wind down to a private yacht landing and a long stretch of beach, fenced in with barbed wire.

An outstanding feature of the castle is its galleried entrance hall, with its darkly gleaming oak panelling and great, stone staircase; a hall so large that when one speaks, the sound is echoed like the whispering of ghosts from the high, oak-timbered ceiling.

There is a queer element of solitude and uncanniness that always cloaks the castle at the twilight hour, before Orkins, in his routine of duty, switches on the lights. I noticed it particularly, one summer evening, about the middle of August, as I walked up and down the terrace, dinner-jacketed and smoking, awaiting the arrival of our two dinner guests, Serge Olinski and His Highness Prince Dmitri Matani.

The sun had gone down in a cloudless, violet sky, and purplish twilight had settled on the Sound and the marshland, stretching westward to a cove, where the lights of the village of Sands Cliff were beginning to twinkle. The silence was more oppressive than the heat. Now and then it was broken by a distant tugboat whistle, like the hoarse croak of a frog, and the faint calling of a thrush for its mate in the thick shrubberies that fringed Jane's flower garden, on the north side of the castle.

Far out in the Sound, two sail-boats were drifting along like tired ghosts. Presently the fringe of the opposite shore became magically outlined by tiny strands of lights. As the gloom of night slowly enveloped the scene, an island lighthouse, a mile away, began to flash its beacon over the dark, graying water with clock-like regularity.

Against this flashing light, the ruins of our own lighthouse showed dark and jagged, on a small, rocky island, rising out of the Sound about a quarter of a mile off our shore, and within easy rowing distance from the yacht landing. Henry had recently purchased the island from the Government, and it was now a part of our Sands Cliff estate. The old beacon tower of stone was built in 1800. In oil-burning days, its light had counted for something, but now it was nothing but a picturesque ruin, and largely populated during the summer by bats.

I had no sooner turned my gaze on the ruined lighthouse when a big bat swooped down at me out of the darkness. Only the night before, one of them had got into my bedroom. I've never been able to overcome my early fear of these nocturnal flying mammals. To my childish imagination, they were the very spirits of evil. I was in no mood this night to be pestered by

them. A vague uneasiness possessed me, an uneasiness caused on one hand by Henry's strained and haggard look, and on the other, by his encouraging Prince Matani's attentions to Pat.

Perhaps at the moment, his crazy quest in interstellar communication annoyed me most. I had already suggested to Jane that we send him to a psychoanalyst to be overhauled. This delving into the unknown was too ponderable a matter for a man of his years. It had become fixed on his mind with all the power of an obsession. All that day he had not stirred from his observatory, and now Olinski was coming from town to give a verbal report of his own findings. Much cogitation, much secrecy was, in effect, nothing at all. Unless they now had found the key. Was it possible that Olinski might be bringing a transcribed cipher of a radio message from Mars? His eager acceptance of the invitation to dinner seemed to hold an important significance for Henry.

Desperately bothered by both problems which confronted me, the bats made things more annoying still. Then, sudden-like, in the haunting stillness, I saw something moving towards me from the blackish void of trees and shrubbery bordering the west end of the terrace. At first, I was conscious only of an oncoming shadow, advancing with a rapid, noiseless movement.

I could feel my pulse jumping. Whoever or whatever it was, there was a risk. Rather than face the risk, I moved quietly but swiftly across the terrace towards the front door. But that did not stop the oncoming something; it had suddenly changed its direction and was coming right at me.

Luckily at that moment, the lights were turned on in the lower part of the castle. Then Orkins opened the front door, and gave voice to a surprised exclamation as he saw me making hurriedly for the doorway.

Suddenly I stopped, and turned. The glow of a floor lamp in the entrance hall had spread fanwise across the terrace, and into this arc of light strode—Serge Olinski.

"Oh, hello, Olinski!" I exclaimed, with respectful familiarity, and very cordially, stretching out my hand, and smiling to myself at the start he had given me, coming like an abortive something out of the shadows of the terrace. "That you?"

"Yes; it is I," Olinski replied, shaking my proffered hand, and breathing rather heavily.

I faced a short, dumpy, middle-aged man, with a paunch, and a Russian cast of countenance. Small, intelligent black eyes gleamed through shell-rimmed glasses, from a round face fringed with a short, black beard. He carried his hat, and I observed that his primly sleeked hair was as black as his beard. I had a suspicion that he dyed them.

"I caught an early train from the city, in order to enjoy the benefit of a walk from the village to your beautiful castle," he explained, half breathlessly, "after a most exacting but successful day in the laboratory. A million apologies if I have delayed your dinner."

"Time is infinite in the country, especially on a fine night like this," I remarked lightly, as we entered the hall, and Orkins relieved him of his black top-coat and hat. His dinner jacket, I noticed, was much too small for him, and his waistcoat so short that it came perilously near revealing a section of his middle-age bulge. There were soup stains on his shirt-front, which indicated that his shirt had been out to dinner before.

As I waved him to a chair, I said: "You're really very punctual, even if you avoided our car which was sent to the station to meet you, and walked here. You can depend upon it, Prince Matani will not miss the chance to drive to the castle in state when he steps off the train."

Unconsciously my lips sneered as I spoke the young princeling's name. Olinski nodded and smiled understandingly. "Ah!" he said. "I take it that you do not look with favor on the match your scholarly brother is about to arrange between your charming niece and my noble countryman?"

"To be frank, no," I replied.

"So I gathered. And why?"

"I have very strong reasons for opposing their marriage," I said; "and my sister, Jane, is just as dead set against it as I am. Every one knows that the Prince came to America to make a rich and advantageous marriage. Pat will soon come into a large inheritance from her mother's estate, and we don't want her to throw her fortune and herself away on this—this penniless, titled gigolo."

Olinski chuckled. "Perhaps just a trifle over-perfumed for a man," he said, "and addicted to the habit of biting his fingernails, but such details cannot detract from his royalty. He dances divinely. He seems to be your niece's devoted slave."

"He's been camping on our door-step all summer," I retorted. "Why Henry favors such a nincompoop, I cannot imagine."

"But the charming Patricia seems to have lost her head over him," Olinski rejoined. "So what can you do?"

"It's up to you to do something," I answered, promptly. "You are in a position to know all the discreditable incidents in the Prince's past, and your word carries great weight with Henry. Surely you do not believe that he really loves Pat?"

"Only for her money," Olinski replied. "A make-believe of love. Froth in an empty glass. He needs the money to get his coronet out of pawn, and get the gas and water turned on at the seedy, shabby chateau in France he calls his castle."

"Then you will tell Henry the truth about this threadbare, titled foreigner?"

"Ah, my friend, that will be a great pleasure, although he is the genuine article, you know. I can't disprove his claim to the title."

"After all, I suppose you have a certain fondness for the Prince," I suggested.

"Not at all," Olinski replied, almost wrathfully. "He is the most impudent person I ever met. At the last dinner we attended together, what do you think he said to me? He accused me of smelling of garlic. Did you ever hear of anything quite so low? As God is my witness, I detest that evil-smelling plant, garlic."

He clicked his teeth, and went on with desperate finality.

"I will tell you one thing more, and then I shall have told you enough. Your niece and Prince Matani should never marry, for he has a hereditary malady—sudden and violent attacks which produce unconsciousness. Some great excitement, and, then—pst!—he falls unconscious. At Monte Carlo, he gambled all he had, and lost. Pst!"

"Shocking!" I murmured.

"No doubt about its being hereditary," Olinski continued. "When the Czar of Russia first bestowed the title of prince upon his great-grandfather, Carlos, for his war-like feats, what does his great-grandfather do but get so excited he falls in convulsions at the feet of the emperor."

"What luck!" I reflected as soon as Olinski had finished. An intimate little peep into the private life of a royal personage, if ever there was one! And I was about to voice my appreciation for this absolute proof that the Prince was not a proper person to marry Pat when Henry entered, immaculately swallow-tailed for dinner.

Seizing Olinski's hand, he shook it heartily. "And you walked all the way from the station?" he exclaimed. "How extraordinary! But I'm glad you've come ahead of our Prince Charming. It's very important that we should get together, at once."

Linking his arm in Olinski's, he marched him off to the far end of the hall. Their heads together, whispering excitedly, and putting so much meaning in words that meant nothing to me, because I could not hear what they said, it was easy to assume that they had made some important and startling discovery in their crazy quest of exchanging radio communications with Mars.

I was diplomatic enough to leave them to themselves. A few minutes later, Jane appeared on the scene, and after greeting our guest, I took her to one side, as I was burning to tell her what Olinski had said. Jane is a plump, gushing soul, with soft, silvery hair, and very distinguished in her manner. She had sponsored Pat's formal coming-out the previous winter, and felt her responsibility keenly.

After she had heard all I had to report, she said: "Well, that's something. But things still seem to be against us. The spark of desire to be a princess or duchess burns in every girl's nature, whether she's rich or poor. Pat is just pent up with romance, but she's never had a chance to express it until Prince Matani came along."

"Just a lot of romantic piffle," I said. "What we need is some artful lead to get her mind off the Prince."

"I'm afraid it's too late," she sighed. "Even if Mr. Olinski tells Henry everything that you've just told me, he'll simply turn up his nose. Henry's as obstinate as a mule once his mind gets set on something, and it wouldn't surprise me a bit if he announced their betrothal at dinner, tonight."

Pat's future now appearing to be an unpleasant speculation, and feeling utterly disheartened about the whole situation, for I was enormously fond of her, I was about to go to Henry and speak my mind, when she suddenly appeared in the picture.

I had often thought of having a great artist do a study in oils of Pat coming down our great, stone staircase; she does it so gracefully and with such regal poise. Slim, brown-haired, and blue-eyed, no one could look at her without being enthralled. Her fragility, like a rare piece of Dresden china, was most appealing; she was so intensely feminine. She looked particularly lovely this night in her simple dinner frock, the soft and filmy draperies seeming to envelop her like a pastel-tinted cloud.

As Olinski advanced eagerly to meet her, she favored him with a delightful smile. He bowed low and kissed her hand, not in a perfunctory, European-custom way, but rather warmly and explosively.

"My dear Patricia!" he exclaimed. "You look—adorable."

"And you look hungry," she returned his compliment with a mischievous twinkle.

"And so I am," Olinski replied.

"As soon as I knew you were coming for dinner, I asked Aunt Jane to have one of your favorite desserts prepared—steamed peach roly-poly, with cream sauce," Pat informed him.

"Thank you for being so thoughtful and nice," he said under his breath.

"Of course, I never allow Pat to touch sweets," said Jane. "Girls of her age should keep their angles as long as possible."

"Speaking of angles," Olinski remarked, good-humoredly, "I've often wondered how Prince Matani, who dines out so much, manages to keep his angles."

"Oh, the Prince!" said Jane, taken a little unawares. "He is very slender, isn't he?"

"And very handsome and distinguished looking," Pat interjected, softly but emphatically.

Jane gave a little snort. "I hadn't noticed that particularly," she said, rather coldly, and walked away.

It was so unlike Jane's usual tone and manner that Pat looked after her in surprise, and then her anxious eyes met Olinski's.

"What is the trouble?" he asked, obviously to draw her out. "Is it possible that your Aunt is unfriendly to the young man with whom you're in love?"

She looked at him and laughed softly. "In love with Prince Matani? How amusing."

"But he seems to be very much interested in you," said Olinski. "Most girls would consider his attentions a supreme compliment. Is it possible that you're not in love with him?"

"I'm almost tempted to tell you," she answered with calm, amused eyes, "but I think I'd better leave you to make your own discoveries, just as you and Uncle Henry are doing about Mars—perhaps you'll get more fun out of it!"

And then Orkins announced: "His Highness Prince Matani."

III

Prince Matani was certainly good-looking and *distingué*; slender and dark, with an absurdly small black mustache plastered over his rather thick and sensuous lips. Scrupulously dressed for dinner, every detail of him indicated the care he devoted to his person.

Bowing formally and stiffly on entering the hall, he looked past us and made a swift movement forward to Pat's side. He kissed her hand with

dazzling grace. Then he turned his brilliant smile upon her, and beneath that smile, greatly to my alarm, she seemed as wax.

The cocktail prelude to dinner was unavoidably lengthened to a quarter of an hour, for Jane was called unexpectedly to the telephone. Her absence left Henry and Olinski still conversing earnestly at one end of the hall, while I sat patiently at the other end, under the staircase, fidgeting with my glass, and glancing around anxiously from time to time at Pat and the Prince, who were sitting informally, but luxuriously, on some cushions the Prince had placed on the lower steps of the stairs. Sipping at her cocktail Pat seemed to become more and more responsive to the young nobleman's flatteries.

Presently my position grew to be a most embarrassing one. While their voices came to me at first only in murmured undertones, I became suddenly conscious of hearing every word they said. Any attempt at eavesdropping is beneath my dignity, but confronting a situation so fateful and momentous in Pat's life, with the Prince exercising his fascinations upon her, I cast aside my principles and listened. And of all the fatuous, syrupy conversations, I had never heard the like before.

"It was so awfully, awfully sweet of you to ask me to dinner tonight," the Prince was saying in a low, rapturous voice.

"But I didn't invite you," Pat countered. "Uncle Henry did, for some reason or other."

"Some excellent reason, I hope," said the Prince. "He seems to appreciate my chivalrous devotion to you, my unselfishness and utter trustworthiness. And a truer help-mate I could never find. You are such a sweet-natured and lovable girl."

"You have said that before, Your Highness," Pat gently reminded him.

"And I shall say it a thousand times again," he answered. "True, I am well-born but penniless. But, please—please don't say that your regard for me is compounded more of pity than of love."

"We'll talk about that, after dinner, shall we?" Pat suggested artfully.

"Your pleasure is my pleasure," he said. "Yes; we'll talk about that after dinner. We'll take a stroll in the garden, where the night air is intoxicating

with its rich aroma of flowers. Or on the terrace, whichever you like. It's such a terribly sweet night, we mustn't miss it."

"I love sweet nights, don't you?" Pat cooed.

"They are very useful at times," the Prince rejoined. "What would you say if, in the sweet darkness, I found a pair of sweet lips."

"Oh, Your Highness! You wouldn't dare!" Pat exclaimed, in a disturbed voice. "I've always found you so—so perfectly trustworthy in the dark. Besides, taking undue advantage of a helpless young lady is only done by bores of the lower classes."

"Oh dear, no!" the Prince responded. "You're quite wrong there. The most extraordinary things happen to people in our class. Sort of dignified things, you know." Then he laid his hand on hers. "My dear," he went on, "I think you have offered every excuse there is. What I want now is to be told exactly what you think of me."

"I will also tell you that, tonight—after dinner," Pat replied, evasively.

"But I cannot—I cannot possess my soul in patience," he said. "I must know now—at this very moment. But if you are cruel, and spurn me—you, so gentle-souled, who would never intentionally hurt a fly, I know,—I will leap off the cliff. Men of my race, in love or in war, always act on the spur of the moment. You don't want me to jump off your cliff?"

"Listen, Your Highness," answered Pat. "This is what I want you to do for me. Just nothing at all."

"I'm afraid you'll have to grin and bear it—this deed of violence. But it will be a happy death."

"It'll put us all to a lot of trouble," Pat sighed.

"That's true. I hadn't thought of that. You'll have to buy orchids and go to my funeral."

"No; I'll have to go to the autopsy, first," she corrected him.

To my great astonishment, she seemed perfectly informed on that subject, probably from reading so many murder mystery stories.

"Very well," the Prince concurred; "perhaps it would be foolish for me to jump off your cliff. Some perfectly innocent person, like—well, like your Uncle Livingston—might be accused of pushing me off, and there would be a murder trial, and all those horrid newspaper reporters and photographers would make your life miserable. No; I cannot let the innocent suffer."

At this juncture, their voices trailed off again into indistinctness, leaving me in a mood to give the Prince all the encouragement he needed in his threat to jump off our cliff. Most unjust of me, but most human, I fear. At any rate, their tête-à-tête was soon interrupted by the return of Jane, and, a few minutes later, by Orkins' dignified announcement that dinner was served.

I was further agitated in mind when Henry linked arms with Pat and the Prince, and, walking between them, escorted the romantic pair to the dining room. The definite warmth with which he treated the Prince seemed to settle the matter. The announcement of their engagement seemed an assured thing. When we were finally seated at the candle-lit table, I began to pray silently, though desperately, that something might happen to stay Pat's unfortunate romance with the Prince, in what I felt to be its penultimate stage.

Luckily something did happen. Altogether, it was an extraordinary meal. We had just passed from soup to fish, when the telephone in the library, adjoining the dining room, began to trill, and what occurred after that, so disturbed Henry's peace of mind that the affair between Pat and the Prince became of secondary importance to him.

Niki, Henry's slim but powerfully muscled valet and bodyguard, was relieving Orkins and the second man during the serving of dinner. From my place at the table, I watched him through the wide connecting doorway as he answered the persistent telephone calls in the library, and curtly dismissed them with a quick hang-up of the receiver. Finally, when the bell began to trill at five minute intervals, he left the hook off the receiver, and stepped into the dining room and approached Henry.

"Pardon," he said, in his smooth, suave manner, and bowing low, "but there have been many telephone calls for you. The same voice in each case. The gentleman says it is verree important, but he will not give his name."

Henry nodded thoughtfully, and said: "And what does the gentleman require of me, Niki?"

"An appointment for an interview, sir, if you would be so kind," said Niki. "A very agitated gentleman, I gathered, sir."

"Very good, Niki," said Henry. "Tell the agitated gentleman that I will make an appointment to see him at nine o'clock tonight. Say that I am at dinner and cannot be disturbed at present."

Niki bowed, and started to withdraw.

"On second thought, Niki," Henry called after him, "tell the gentleman that I will make the appointment only on condition that he identifies himself—now."

Returning in a few moments, Niki said: "The gentleman says to tell you his name is Meester Robert McGinity."

Henry looked at him in quick astonishment, and then made a face expressive of extreme displeasure. "Is Mr. McGinity still on the wire? Yes; well, then, go back and tell him that under no consideration will I grant him an interview. You understand?"

Niki bowed understandingly, and re-entered the library, where he delivered Henry's ultimatum, which silenced the telephone during the remainder of the dinner.

Although Henry strove mightily to pretend unconcern, I could easily see that McGinity's telephone call had upset him terribly. His face became more drawn and whiter than it had been. I sensed at once that he had been thrown into a state of perturbation and dismay, in the belief that the reporter had somehow obtained inside information on the result of his and Olinski's research work in interplanetary radio communication, as he had on the comet.

Olinski seemed equally perturbed. "McGinity! The reporter?" he gasped. "Do you think he's found out anything?"

Henry smiled grimly, and replied: "He must have some knowledge of our discovery or he wouldn't have called up. As our first move, we must find out where the leak is, and stop it."

As he finished speaking, he glanced over his shoulder at Orkins, who was standing at his side with a bottle of sherry in his hand. Orkins, whom I had always regarded as a secretive, suspicious person, despite his dignified appearance as a well-trained butler, leaned over and spoke to Henry, which was an unusual proceeding on his part.

As he refilled Henry's glass with sherry, I heard him mutter: "If you've any suspicions about any of the servants in the house, sir, it's your plain duty to say so."

Henry looked coldly at the butler out of the corner of his eye, and replied, in a low voice: "I have no suspicions at all, Orkins, in that direction." Then his attention was attracted to Olinski, who said: "Your best move will be to continue to exercise the utmost caution, and to prevent any possible personal contact with this reporter."

Henry wagged his head defiantly. "He's certainly a mono-maniac on the subject of news, but I've got my eye on him now, and I'll give him something to try his teeth on. He'll never get the best of me again—never!"

At that point, Pat chimed in. "What's all this fuss about a reporter?" she asked. "Is this Mr. McGinity, who just called, the same reporter who got the first news about the comet?"

"The same cheeky rascal," Olinski replied; "and now, apparently, he's bent on getting some advance information about our experiments in interplanetary radio communication."

"And aren't you going to oblige him, Uncle Henry?" Pat inquired.

Henry's eyebrows went up. "Oblige him? Certainly not."

"It will be the perfect imbecility on this reporter's part to try and get anything out of your Uncle, or me, on our latest discovery," Olinski explained. "The time is not yet ripe for any sort of public announcement."

"If he's a live-wire reporter," I offered, "and he seems to be just that, I'm afraid he'll go the limit in getting what he's after."

"Of course he will," Pat smiled. "Now that Uncle Henry has refused to be interviewed, he'll try some other means to get at him. Oh, the life of a reporter must be terribly thrilling! One reads so much about them in detective and mystery stories." She paused for a moment, and then

continued, half musingly. "I wonder what he's like—this Mr. McGinity—this mono-maniac on the subject of news. Did you ever meet him, personally, Uncle Henry?"

Henry nodded, and replied grudgingly: "I met him personally, not long after he had tricked me into giving him the news of the comet. I was acting as toastmaster at the annual banquet of the Colonial Lords of Manors, and he was reporting the dinner. He tried to be friendly, but I squelched him good and plenty."

"Oh, how interesting!" Pat enthused. "Tell me, please! Is he young and good-looking?"

Henry's head jerked up. He did some rapid thinking, and then he lied firmly: "He's an oldish person, fat and awkward, and almost bald."

Pat smiled faintly, and did not have much to say after that. I divined that her little bubble of romantic anticipation had been pricked, but as she had no suspicions then, and had accepted Henry's description of the reporter as truthful, I passed it up. Considering Henry's position at the moment, I could not very well cross purposes with him and enlighten her. I happened to have been present at the same banquet, and I could have offered her a vastly different picture of the reporter from the fraudulent one Henry had painted.

An uncomfortable silence followed. The Prince was looking at Pat quizzically. "Well, what about it?" he said suddenly.

"About what?" she replied.

"I should have thought you almost the last person in the world to become interested in a news writer," he said. "To me, the most repugnant of persons is a nosey newspaper reporter."

"Reporters are not repugnant to me," Pat replied quickly. "I've never met one in my life, so why should I feel any contempt for them?"

"Thanks," said the Prince. "That's what I wanted to know."

"Don't be a cad," Pat retorted. "There is no more harm in my knowing a reporter than in knowing you."

"Well," said the Prince, "it's like this. If I ever caught you talking to a reporter, I'd lead you away by the ear."

"Really," Pat smiled dryly, as the color mounted her cheeks. "If any one but you, Prince Matani, had made such a threat, I should refuse to have anything more to do with him. As it is—oh, why be so fussed over something that hasn't happened, and may never occur?"

I wondered why the Prince should make such a silly and indiscreet remark. I could see that this little flash of petty jealousy and cruelty that lay hidden under his formal and polite exterior had annoyed Henry, although his voice was very kind as he continued to exchange pleasantries with the princeling. In fact, Henry conversed on every topic save that nearest his heart. It was only with the entry of dessert and the departure of Orkins that he came back to realities.

"Now, listen, everyone," he said. "Olinski and I have kept something to ourselves as long as possible, and now, assuming that some ungrateful, treacherous culprit has betrayed our secret to the Daily Recorder, we have decided to announce our discovery privately tonight."

"I see," the Prince commented, with a disdainful edge to his voice; "you are going to tell us something important, and we are supposed to know nothing until, of course, this McGinity, the reporter, gets the story, and his paper is adorned with your portraits."

Henry fixed a cold and disparaging gaze on the Prince for a moment, and then continued, with an even voice. "The servants are to know nothing, and no one present here must breathe a word of it." He paused a moment. "No one has anything to say? Very well. Instead of having coffee served in the library, we shall dispense with that formality and proceed at once to the observatory."

It was not long before we were gathered in the dome-ceilinged room in one of the peaked towers, where Henry carried on his astronomical observations. I was in an exultant mood, not because we were to be let in on a great secret, but rather on account of Pat. My heart sang with glee, and I suppressed a desire to whistle and whoop; and I thanked my stars that McGinity was up to his favorite tricks again. Unwittingly, by his telephone call, I felt sure he had forestalled the announcement of Pat's engagement to the Prince.

Henry constituted himself both host and lecturer. Pat and the Prince seemed quite happy together again, their little tilt at the dinner table apparently forgotten. But the evening had not progressed very far before I was again struck by the curious mixture of impudence and rashness in the Prince. I wondered if all men of his social caste possessed this overbearing consciousness of superiority.

After we were comfortably grouped about the room, Henry touched a button in the wall, and a section of the dome-shaped glass roof slid back. Simultaneously, the electrically propelled telescope moved majestically into place. A click of an electric switch and the room was partially darkened. We gazed upward into a bright field of twinkling planets, stretching above us like a dark blue velvet canopy, studded with gilt paper stars.

At Henry's invitation, Pat and the Prince viewed the ruddy-hued planet Mars through the telescope. As they enjoyed the close-up of this most famous of faraway planets, he grew discursive.

"Mars is now at the nearest point to the earth for the first time in one hundred years," he said, "and its south-pole is turned towards us. It is one-half the diameter of the earth, and its day is but half an hour longer than our own."

"And you really think the planet is inhabited by people like ourselves?" Pat said, her imagination seemingly enthralled by the gorgeous night spectacle of the planet.

"Why not?" Henry smiled. "Mars has oxygen, the breath of life, diluted with nitrogen, the same as the air of the earth. Its physical conditions for life closely resemble our own."

"Do I understand you to say that you believe life on Mars is similar to our own, and as far advanced as our own civilization?" the Prince interrogated.

"First, let me explain more fully the physical conditions on the planet," Henry said. "Mars has its seasons, which essentially resemble the earth's. That white spot you observed in the neighborhood of its south-pole is a polar cap of ice and snow, just now reforming after shrinking and melting away during the summer. Those greenish-blue areas you saw in the planet's southern hemisphere, parallel to the equator, are the vegetated sections—the tropical jungles."

"And what's all this tommyrot about canals being distributed like a network over the planet's surface, and supplying water from the melting polar snow-caps for the vegetation of Mars?" the Prince asked, a little impudently.

"Dr. Percival Lowell made the first study of these strange geometric tracings, on the regularity of the 'canal' patterns," Henry responded quietly. "On his studies was based largely the theory that the planet is inhabited.

"If your little country of Georgia, in southern Russia," he continued, "was slowly drying up and there were available large quantities of water from melting snow and ice at certain locations in your northern and southern boundaries, you would soon build canals, or ditches, for irrigation purposes, wouldn't you? You would—if you had any brains."

The Prince eyed him speculatively, and replied, "But I have failed to see any markings of these so-called canals on Mars, through your telescope. Why is that?"

"Objects on Mars less than ten miles in size cannot be seen clearly except through the largest telescopes," he answered. "These patterns follow the curves of great circles. Several of them appear to pass through the same point. At these spots 'lakes' are observed."

"Isn't there the possibility of an optical illusion about all this?" the Prince persisted. "Isn't it possible that you and other astronomers let your imagination run riot, and create in your mind these conditions on Mars necessary to sustain life, patterned after those existing on earth?"

"Nothing of the sort," Henry replied in exasperation. "The existence of life there is evidenced by the presence of free oxygen in the atmosphere."

"Do you mean to say that men and women of flesh and blood, with brains, like those who walk the earth, populate this dried-up planet?" the Prince said. "Ah, it is too impossible!"

"Yes, Uncle Henry, it does seem almost beyond human conception," Pat interjected.

"Furthermore," the Prince went on, "authoritative sources claim that no creature with warm blood could survive there, with the temperature ranging between 150 and 250 degrees. A cold-blooded creature might freeze and then thaw out, but a warm-blooded one would freeze and remain dead as a

door nail. The indications, I fear, are that your inhabitants of Mars are in the order of—of sublimated lobsters."

"Lobsters!" Pat repeated, laughing.

"Don't be an ass, Your Highness," Olinski interposed at that point. "Or, at any rate, try not to be an ass."

"But it all sounds so deuced silly," exclaimed the Prince, in some heat. "You know yourself, Mr. Olinski, that science has definitely proved that Mars cannot support life as we know it. You may as well admit," he continued, turning again to Henry, "that you really have no proof except your own imagination that there is life on Mars. Providing there is some sort of living organisms there, it is utterly absurd and preposterous to claim that life is as much advanced, physically and intellectually, as our own."

"But I have proof," Henry announced firmly. "Mr. Olinski and I have demonstrated that fact."

"I don't catch the point, really," said the Prince.

"Then listen attentively, Your Highness," said Olinski, "and you'll get an earful." Motioning to Henry, he added: "Let's have it."

"Yes," said Henry, in a deeply serious voice, "we have completely proved that life not only exists on Mars, but that in some respects civilization there is more advanced, especially in the sciences, than on earth."

"Life as we know it here on this sphere?" Jane inquired. "How extraordinary."

Henry nodded, and said: "It is information on our discovery, which has leaked out in some mysterious way, that this reporter, McGinity, apparently, is seeking. But we are not yet ready to divulge our secret findings until we have arranged to give a public demonstration."

"Oh, how thrilling!" Pat ejaculated. "And when will that be?"

"Probably within a week," Henry replied.

The Prince whistled. "Well, somebody's going dotty," he said. "That's all I've got to say. It's too utterly absurd—impossible."

"But it is possible," Henry said. "Radio has made it technically possible. Radio has successfully bridged the hitherto impassable sidereal abyss between earth and Mars—annihilated space."

"I'm not an authority on radio," the Prince grumbled.

"Every American schoolboy knows with what tremendous velocity radio spins round the earth, seven and one-half times in one second," Henry went on. "Now, we know it jumps from planet to planet. Its echo actually has come back to us from outside the orbit of the moon."

"I dare say the Martians have been listening in to our short wave broadcasts, symphony orchestras and jazz?" the Prince remarked. "Am I right?"

"Quite," answered Henry.

"Nevertheless," said the Prince, "I've read on good authority that our short waves can't possibly penetrate the outer layer of the earth's atmosphere, and so reach outer space. However, tell us what you and Mr. Olinski have discovered."

"And remember," Olinski broke in, "no one is to breathe a word of this to any one but the five of us who already know of it."

"Except to this reporter, McGinity, of course," the Prince added, with a sarcastic note.

"Keep calm, Your Highness," Olinski murmured, impatiently.

"H'm," said Henry, and then he began. "After many months of intense application, we have at last established direct radio communication with Mars by the use of short, high frequency waves, with which, as I said before, there is no limit to distance.

"The registering of mysterious galactic radio waves from outer space has long been puzzling the scientific world. As the intensity of these waves is very low, we constructed a very delicately-strung apparatus for their reception. At first, we got a strange group of sounds which baffled us completely. Less than a month ago, however, one night, about ten o'clock, our apparatus began to register a series of distinct dots and dashes. But these signals were in no known code, beginning on a low note and ending with a sort of 'zipp.'

"Outstanding were four distinct groups of four dashes, which convinced us that some form of intelligence in the upper atmosphere was striving for inter-galactic communication. They registered regularly, night after night, about the same time, ten o'clock. Now, here comes the amazing part. While I was busily engaged making measurements, and taking photographs, Mars, at present, being on its periodic parade past the earth, Mr. Olinski succeeded in decoding these four dashes. They turned out to be the signal of the transmitting station on Mars. We could not very well be mistaken, because when we replied, giving our station signal, in the same code, we got an answer.

"Last night, at the same hour, we established definite connection with this station on Mars, after considerable difficulty in making ourselves known to them. You see, the Martians do not know this planet by the name of 'Earth,' as we call it. They have given this world the appellation of the 'Blue Sphere,' which is quite natural, as the earth to Mars appears to be veiled in blue.

"On the other hand, we made the mistake of calling their planet, 'Mars.' Apparently, by their signaling, they were curious as to the meaning of the word. This gave us cause to think that it might be known to its inhabitants under an entirely different name. Later, it was proved that we were right, because the Martian station said so. They call their own planet, the 'Red Sphere.'"

At that point, Henry brought his startling disclosures to an abrupt conclusion. A sort of awe fell among us. The news of this wonderful scientific achievement had petrified us all in complete silence.

IV

As we sat in silence, my brain seemed somewhat numbed and dulled after the exaltation and excitement of the strange revelation. My mental condition was such that I wanted to believe that Henry and his co-worker, Olinski, had done this extraordinary thing, and yet I was unable, somehow,

to believe that they had. How could it be possible? And yet it was certainly as possible as it was utterly improbable.

I wondered if the reaction of the others to this tremendous discovery had been similar to mine. As far as the Prince was concerned, it struck me that it had. I had never known him to be so daring, assured, and insolent before, and I felt quite sure that he had shown himself to Henry in such an unfavorable light that his chances for winning Pat's hand had already passed outside the realm of the possible.

Thank God the wretched business was going to end—and yet, and yet ... my mind was just going off on a new tack when, without warning, a thunderstorm broke over our heads. A summer squall, which so often sweeps down on the Sound, playing havoc with all sailing-craft.

Scarcely half an hour before, the sky over us had been serenely starlit and cloudless. Now it had become black as ink and streaked with lightning. The wind howled and the tower seemed to tremble under the heavy assault of the elements.

Before Henry could get the sectional glass roof closed, the rain poured in, collecting in little pools on the floor. Jane climbed up on her chair, fearful of getting her feet wet. Alarmed in the semi-darkness, I managed to find the switch, and turned on all the lights.

To my great dismay, the sudden illumination disclosed that Pat was quite under the Prince's spell again. They were discovered, snuggled together on a divan, the Prince's arm encircling her waist. She extricated herself gracefully, with a half-nervous laugh, and then went back again to his protecting embrace with a little squeal of fright, when a flash of lightning showed through the glass dome like red fire, followed instantly by a deafening crash of thunder that seemed to rend the castle in twain.

"What a relief it would be," said Jane, as she climbed down from her chair, "if the Creator had given us thunderless lightning."

Her feet had no sooner touched the floor when we all, with one accord, stared inquiringly at each other. In the lull that so often follows a thunder-clap, we heard from the outside a distant, muffled cry of distress. A few moments later, in the renewed rush and beat of the wind and rain, we heard it again. This time it was a distinct cry of "Help! Help!"

Visions of the angry sea taking its toll raced through my mind, while I thought: "Oh, God! Pity the poor sailor that has to be out on a night like this!" And while these things were going through my mind, Henry was taking action. He had jumped to the house telephone, and was giving orders downstairs for our two strong-armed chauffeurs, George and William, to get their flashlights, and seek out and save the person in distress.

While Henry was searching frantically in a wardrobe for his rain-coat, which he always kept conveniently near him for emergencies, the dark, excited face of Niki, the valet, suddenly appeared at the stairs, just showing above the floor level like a head without a body.

"Oh, Meester Royce!" cried Niki, in a high-pitched, nervous voice. "Come—queeck! A man he has been washed ashore. He call for—help."

Niki's head disappeared, and there was a general and excited rush from the observatory. Pat led the way. She was down the narrow stairs, and flying along the dark corridor to the elevator before Henry could get into his rain-coat. Some minutes passed before we found ourselves assembled in the entrance hall on the main floor.

Henry stood just outside the front door, shouting instructions to the two chauffeurs. Pat and the Prince stood at a French window, which opened on the terrace, peering out into the black and tempestuous night.

Greatly to Henry's annoyance, I kept the front door open just a crack. I felt it my duty to see what was going on, and to impart such information to those inside. Presently, I heard one of the chauffeurs calling to Henry. "There's a man lying on the sand near the dock," he shouted.

Henry cupped his mouth with his hands, megaphone fashion, and called back: "Do you think he fell off the cliff?"

"No," came the reply, to a very foolish question, I thought.

"Who is he?" Henry shouted again; really a more foolish question than the first one. "Anybody you know?"

"A stranger," was the chauffeur's reply.

Ten minutes later, the two husky chauffeurs came slowly across the terrace, supporting between them a bedraggled, hatless young man, who seemed to have some difficulty in walking. The stranger's fortunate rescue—from

what cruel fate, of course, we did not know at the time—was a signal for Pat to let out a cry of mingled thankfulness and relief. "Oh, goody! He's alive!" she exclaimed. Then, pressing her face closer to the rain-washed window, she added: "I—I wonder who he is?"

One glance was sufficient to show Henry who he was. But I'm sure I gave a far louder exclamation of astonishment than my brother.

"God bless my life and soul!" I exclaimed. "It's Bob McGinity, the Daily Recorder reporter!"

Just as suddenly as the recognition had come, the reporter shook himself free of the two chauffeurs, and rushed up to Henry.

"Mr. Royce!" he said, excitedly. "Will—will you please confirm the report that—er—that you and Serge Olinski have established radio connection with Mars?"

Henry for a moment remained perfectly still and mute. His face looked as dark as the thunder-clouds that were sweeping over the castle. I saw the whole thing now, clearly enough. The reporter's predicament had been self-imposed; a ruse to gain personal contact with Henry which had been denied him by telephone. Anxiously, and puzzled, I watched closely the two of them.

"Can't I have a word with you—inside?" the reporter pleaded desperately. The rain ran in little rivers down his face; his dark, disheveled, kinky hair fringed his brow like the little, curled, rat-tail bangs that were fashionable when my grandmother was a girl. "I'm sorry, sir, if I've put you to so much inconvenience," he went on, "but in a case like this—momentous discovery—well, I've got—"

He got no further. "Not another word!" Henry interrupted sternly, raising his hand as though to command silence. Turning to the chauffeurs, he ordered, in a low, harsh voice: "Take him round to the garage, and dry him out. Then turn him loose—and—be damned with him!"

Just then, I heard a slight sound at my elbow. Pat, somehow, had wedged her pretty head under my arm, and was peering through the crack of the door. I had been so engrossed in the unhappy but thrilling scene outside, I hadn't noticed her presence. Apparently she had seen and heard everything. As the two chauffeurs, with a firm grip on the reporter, marched him off to

the garage, she spoke. But what she said was inarticulate. It sounded to me like a heart-cry.

And then, suddenly, an idea came to me. Under her little harmless affectations and artificialities, Pat was very human. She had contacted very few young men outside her own exclusive social set; she knew very little of the outside world. Since childhood, she had been guarded and protected from the world's disillusion and ugliness, a protection which only great wealth like ours can give; and she still had the sweet and tender heart of a child.

Now, it was plain to me, she did not approve of the way Henry was treating the reporter. A fleeting glimpse of his youth and good looks, so unlike Henry's description, seemed to increase her interest in him. Oldish, fat, and almost bald—indeed! Pity for the handsome young stranger had touched her heart; and pity so often borders on that emotional danger zone: love.

Of all the unlooked for contingencies which could have arisen, this seemed to be about the worst. While I shared with Henry the honest indignation he felt at what he considered unjustifiable trickery and intrusion, yet I knew, deep down in me, I would side with Pat should she take the reporter's part. On this she seemed determined, judging from the expression on her face, cold and resolute, as Henry entered the hall, still snorting with anger.

In the clatter of voices that followed his return from the field of storm and conflict, the voice of Pat rose in steady crescendo.

"Uncle Henry! How could you be so inhuman?" she exclaimed. "You make us all feel—so cheap."

Jane stretched out a warning hand. "Now, darling!" she admonished; "this is not necessary."

"It is necessary!" replied Pat. "Uncle Henry has behaved shamefully, and should be scolded. I've half a mind to go to the garage myself, and apologize to this reporter for Uncle's cruel and unspeakable behavior."

Henry regarded her quizzically for a moment, then smiled. "This has nothing to do with you, my dear," he said, as Orkins relieved him of his rain-coat and hat. "Why, I acted in the reporter's best interests. I sent him to the garage to be dried out when I should have booted him off the premises."

"But he's wet—and miserable—and disappointed," said Pat, gravely.

"And whose fault is it? Not mine, certainly." Henry chuckled.

"He hasn't a dry stitch on him," moaned Pat; "he may catch pneumonia. You should send him some dry clothes, and go yourself, and give him this information he's worked so hard to get. You really ought!"

"No!" thundered Henry, suddenly. "No matter if the papers send an army of reporters in motors, ships or airplanes, I refuse to give any information until the proper time, not if they tear the roof off." He took several fierce strides up and down the hall, then stopped dead, and again faced Pat. "Why, may I ask, are you so concerned in this driveling lunatic for news—this interfering, meddlesome young swine? Why?"

There was a pause. Pat's face took on a wistful look. Then she replied: "Why? Because I feel sorry for him, I guess. Oh, you don't know, Uncle, how wonderful this reporter seems to me. Never thinking of himself—taking dangerous risks—just to get news for his paper. I never realized until now how people who haven't much money, have to struggle to make a living. But I suppose life is like that—outside," she went on, half meditatively: "struggle and disappointment. In time, I dare say I'll find out more about life and get used to it, and pretend not to care—"

"Now, my dear, you're tired out," Jane broke in, in gentle solicitude. "You've had a tiring day." She laid an entreating hand on Pat's arm. "Better go to bed."

But once an idea was planted in Pat's brain, she clung to it tenaciously. Disregarding Jane, and still addressing Henry, she continued: "But I wouldn't get used to it, and I shall always care—always!"

"Care about what?" snapped Henry.

"Oh, just feeling I'm better than other people—poor, common people, and not caring what happens to them. No! I'll be darned if I will!"

"Patricia!" Jane chided.

"Oh, what's the good of pretending we are better than other people, just because we have everything," Pat retorted boldly. "If this reporter was in my own set, some young, rotten cad, and had driven up in a big motor car, and sent in his card, Uncle Henry would have received him with open arms. Because he is common and poor—"

"Will you be quiet?" Henry interrupted, resentfully. "You talk like a scullery maid, fed up on bolshevism. I don't feel a bit better than anybody else, although I am a Royce."

"Very well," murmured Pat, shrugging with hopeless resignation. Then she turned to Prince Matani, who all this time had stood by rigidly, like a soldier at attention, and who now clicked his heels together and said, brightly:

"Now, my dear Miss Patricia, you'll hear from me. Consider yourself under arrest for behaving so rudely to your uncle. And while this irrepressible reporter is being dried out, you shall be court-martialled for conduct unbecoming a—"

Pat stopped him. "Don't talk silly!" she said. Then she smiled thinly. "Perhaps I have been acting the little fool, but, please, don't rub it in." She walked away.

The Prince followed her, impetuously. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"Straight upstairs and to bed," she replied, wearily. "Why do you ask?"

"Because," said the Prince, raising his voice so that Henry might hear, "I'm afraid, on account of the storm, I shall have to spend the night here."

"So you shall, Your Highness," Henry responded, readily.

Until this moment, Olinski had contributed nothing to the controversial dialogue. With complete reconciliation in progress, he moved forward, and spoke.

"I am sure none of us have anything personally against this audacious reporter," he said. "Why should we? It's his profession, nosing into other people's business, that we object to. Anyway, no one wants a reporter running over the premises like a mouse looking for cheese. And now that our dear Patricia appears to have thought the matter over, and decided that she's made a mistake, I shall prepare to make my departure."

"No; I forbid you leaving the castle on a night like this," said Henry, supplementing his remark with a hearty slap on Olinski's shoulder.

Pat looked round at me, standing unmovable and silent, in the background. The glance that I gave her, I intended as a reminder that she had my

complete understanding and sympathy. Presently she drifted over to me and whispered something rapidly. I nodded and left the room unconcernedly.

A few minutes later, I returned from the library, where I had telephoned to the garage, and learned that the reporter had slipped out and disappeared into the night while the two chauffeurs were having their bread and cheese and beer. Patricia did not seem unduly surprised at the news I brought her.

"This McGinity fellow," I said to her, on the quiet, "struck me, what little I've seen of him, as being the sort of young man who could play a game to the limit."

"I shouldn't wonder," she agreed, with a smile that signified a new interest in life had arisen in her heart.

The hall cleared rapidly. Jane went upstairs with Pat. Prince Matani was shown to his room by Orkins. I accompanied them in the elevator as far as the gallery overlooking the hall, where I settled myself comfortably in the welcome silence and semi-darkness.

I had a slight headache; my head seemed to be in a whirl after the stirring events of the evening; I wanted to be left alone to meditate. There was no use of my going to bed and trying to sleep. I glanced at my watch. It was still early—ten-thirty.

Henry and Olinski had remained behind, and were now seated, conversing in low tones, at a side table, where there were books and magazines. Intermittently, I could hear the rain beating against the window panes; the noise of the wind came in little moaning gasps and flutters.

In fancy, I pictured the reporter, wet and disheartened, making his way back to the village, over an unfrequented road, against the driving wind and rain. I felt truly sorry for him. Pat was right. Henry had treated him shamefully.

As we learned afterwards, the reporter's life had really been endangered, and he had a perfect right to call for help. In his efforts to outwit Henry, and knowing he would be stopped at our lodge-gate, he had hired a fisherman's row-boat, and was seeking entrance to the castle grounds, by way of our dock, in a second attempt to gain an interview.

Caught in the sudden storm, and losing one of his oars, his frail craft had been dashed onto the rocks at the foot of the cliff. Pitched out headlong

among them, he had been rendered semi-unconscious. Coming to at last, with the waves threatening to engulf him, and unable to extricate himself, he had called for help. Finally he had managed to crawl to a safety spot on the shore, where the chauffeurs had found him.

My thoughts so occupied, and enjoying to the utmost the reposeful darkness and quiet of the gallery, but still reluctant to summon Orkins to fetch me a cigar and some whiskey, I was just beginning to feel thoroughly relaxed when I saw a slim, whitish figure, which I knew at once to be Pat's, come down the dark stairway that connected the gallery with the upper floor. That she, too, was restless and unable to sleep, was at once evident. Still, I made no move to accost her, being content to remain in my comfortable concealment. After a hurried glance down into the hall, from the head of the grand staircase, she returned the way she had come, soft and silent as a ghost.

By this time, the murmur of Henry's and Olinski's voices had risen into boisterous talk and laughter. Apparently they were bent on celebrating their scientific achievement. Prying a bit, I saw they were indulging in numerous whiskies and sodas, served by Niki, and smoking the big cigars of Henry's favorite brand. Orkins, I assumed, was on his usual round of the doors, in accordance with a time-honored custom of locking up the castle at eleven o'clock every night. Carrying the keys of some baker's dozen of doors, he usually began with the front door and ended up with the smaller ones.

With the soothing sense that the castle was being secured for the night; mightily pleased over Henry's and Olinski's startling and triumphant conquest, that extended to the very edge of the infinite universe, but wondering, too, if the riddle of Mars was really to be solved at last, and speculating what this would mean to the inhabitants of the earth, whose appetite for marvels is never satisfied; snug and secure from the battling elements, I fell into a doze.

Suddenly, I was awakened. Naturally puzzled to know what had roused me, I rose and stepped noiselessly to the gallery railing and took a view of what was occurring below, in the hall.

The front door-bell, an ancient contraption, was ringing—spasmodic, jerky rings, like a person would make who had hurried to a neighbor's house with some alarming news.

At Henry's command, Niki went to the door, unlocked it and looked out. As he did so, he gave voice to a sharp, surprised exclamation, causing me to wonder who would approach the castle at this hour, midnight, on such a tempestuous night.

V

The midnight visitor was the last person in the world I had thought of seeing, a district messenger boy, bringing a telegram for Henry. One of Henry's peculiarities was never to accept a radiogram or telegram relayed to the castle by telephone from the telegraph office in the village; it had to be delivered in person, no matter at what hour.

One glance at the messenger, as Henry bade him come in out of the rain, in tones of warm welcome, and I, like Niki, gave a sharp though suppressed exclamation. Completely enveloped in a black rubber cloak, which reached to the top of his puttees, and wearing one of those ugly rubber hats, with its broad brim turned down and extending well over his face, so that only his mouth and chin were exposed to view, he looked almost uncanny.

Catching the bright gleam of the nickel handle-bars of a bicycle parked outside, when Niki opened the door, I figured that the messenger must have had a hard pull in the storm. He had had no difficulty in entering the premises, I knew, as all district messengers were admitted at the lodge-gate without questioning. Looking uncertain and awkward, he leaned against the wall, just inside the door, while Niki handed the message to Henry. He made no move to remove his hat; either he was too embarrassed, or he didn't know any better.

There was nothing unusual, of course, in a message being delivered at this hour of the night; the unusual thing was the manner in which Henry received this one. Over his cups he had grown loquacious, but I never would have believed him capable of the silly flow, and the amount of it, that proceeded from his lips on this occasion, a condition in which Olinski contributed his share of inanities.

"Now, my friend," he began, "I will give you one million dollars if you can tell me the contents of this telegram before I open it. What do you think is in it, now?"

"I could do very nicely with the one million dollars," Olinski replied, "but I regret to say, at the present moment, my eye-sight does not carry very far beyond the end of my nose."

"You've been drinking too much," said Henry, rather crossly.

"Ah! That realization, at this very moment, crossed my mind," Olinski admitted. "And my great fear is that you have been drinking too much, yourself."

"There is the possibility, my friend," Henry returned, gruffly.

"Then you wouldn't advise our having another drink?" Olinski suggested.

"I would scarcely sanction it," said Henry. "Another drink between us, and we'll both be cock-eyed drunk."

Olinski laughed loudly.

"What are you laughing at?" Henry demanded, in a surly voice.

"That American expression, cock-eyed, it is so—so funny, and—and so beautifully illustrative of the way you look—to me, now."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I have drunk so much already I look—cock-eyed?" Henry retorted.

"There is that possibility, my dear friend," Olinski rejoined, rocking with mirth. "There—there is more than the possibility. You really do look—cock-eyed."

"No matter if I'm cock-eyed, or squint-eyed," said Henry, "my business is to ascertain the contents of this telegram—seeing you are too drunk yourself to tell me beforehand."

"Its contents, we can only conjecture," said Olinski. "My only hope is that it does not contain bad news. I am really distressed, for I have an intuition that it does contain bad news. Perhaps—er—another drink would alleviate my distress."

"You've had quite enough," said Henry. "My only anxiety is that we shall not be able to sleep off our cups before the sun, and sister Jane, have risen." As he finished speaking, he ripped the telegram open.

"That would be a great calamity," muttered Olinski, whose remark coincided with a smothered exclamation of rage from Henry. "Who is it from? What's happened?" Olinski inquired.

"It's from that damn reporter, McGinity," Henry roared. "For the third time tonight, he asks for an interview, and a confirmation of our discovery."

"But I thought he was in the garage—getting dried out," Olinski said.

"Apparently he's at the village." Henry glanced more closely at the telegram. "Yes; he's at the village, and he wants an answer—quick. Says he must have my confirmation before two-thirty this morning, which is the 'deadline' on his paper. Did you ever hear of such unmitigated gall?"

"These American reporters are capable of acting very shrewdly on occasions," said Olinski, whose brain seemed to be clearing somewhat.

"And so am I," thundered Henry. He tore the telegram into a thousand bits and scattered them over his own and Olinski's head. "I shall ignore his message," he continued. "Any sort of garbled, advance publicity will entirely spoil the effect of the news of our discovery. We shall announce it the day before the demonstration, so that it will come like a thunder-clap, and echo from one end of the world to the other."

"Still, our position, as far as this reporter, McGinity, is concerned, is very difficult," Olinski remarked, thoughtfully rubbing his chin. "Some one, unbeknown to us, has, what you Americans call, 'tipped' his paper off. He may publish the rumor without the facts, which would be ruinous."

"He wouldn't dare!" Henry cried, hotly. "Besides, he has no facts to go on. How could he have? It's too tremendous for the human mind to grasp, without the main facts leading up to our discovery. With all our precaution for secrecy, how in the world could this reporter find out that we have not only received, but decoded, these strange radio messages from Mars, and definitely exchanged messages by short waves with a race of people as human as ourselves? He's trying to trick me into giving him the facts, as he did with my discovery of the comet. I'll bet you a million, he doesn't know what it's all about—hasn't the remotest idea—"

Olinski interrupted by lifting a finger to his lips, and giving a prolonged, "Shh!"

"Why the devil shouldn't I talk as I like?" Henry retorted, defiantly. On second thought, however, he glanced round the hall. Niki was just moving towards the front door, near which the district messenger still stood, patiently waiting for the telegram to be signed for; shuffling uncomfortably from one foot to another, and staring curiously, from under the rim of his rubber hat, at the various objects of art in the hall. Two suits of armor, on either side of the fire-place, seemed to hold his attention.

Leaning over towards Olinski, Henry voiced his growing suspicions in a low tone. "You don't imagine that this messenger boy wanted to listen, do you? Or had any motive in listening?"

He had no sooner spoken when he sprang from his chair, as if some idea, an intuition, had flashed across his mind. He started towards the front door, where Niki and the messenger were standing.

Olinski halted him by saying, in a low voice: "Here! Here! What are you doing, my friend? It's damned silly to think this messenger would be interested in what we've been talking about."

"Leave it to me," Henry counseled in a hoarse whisper. "I've my own ideas. I shan't be rough with him, but I shall be firm." Then he turned to Niki, at the same time, jerking his thumb in the direction of the messenger.

"Niki, will you kindly remove this young man's hat," he commanded.

The valet quickly obeyed his master's order.

"My God!" Henry gasped, staggering as if under the force of a blow. Quickly recovering, he stepped up to the messenger. "I might have guessed it would be you," he said. "You are, without exception, the most asinine and brazen reporter that ever was at large. How dare you enter my house under false representation, in this disguise?"

McGinity made no reply; just stood his ground.

"I dare say you know it's actionable, your coming here like this," Henry went on. "I'll report you to the telegraph company the first thing in the morning," snapping his fingers under the reporter's nose.

"The telegram was faked. I'll admit that," said McGinity, in a low and even voice. "But I'm not wearing a district messenger's uniform." He threw back his great rubber-cloak. "Just my own clothes, dried out, thanks to you."

"I'll report you to your City Editor," Henry persisted, angrily.

"I'm acting on my own responsibility," McGinity informed him. "My seeming persistence in making personal contact with you is based on the soundest principle in the news-getting game—'get your man.'"

"You'll get no information out of me," stormed Henry.

"Please don't forget, Mr. Royce," said the reporter, "that I've overheard what you and Mr. Olinski have been talking about for the last ten minutes."

"You—you listened?" Henry exclaimed, aghast.

"You can hardly imagine that I did not want to listen," the reporter replied; "especially as your conversation gave me sufficient information of your discovery, on which to build a big story. I can see it now, with headlines extending clear across the front page of the Daily Recorder. It's a great story, Mr. Royce, and I'm in luck to get it exclusive, before our deadline. An amazing discovery, a scientific achievement that will echo down the ages. Please, allow me to congratulate you, sir, also Mr. Olinski."

As McGinity concluded, he bowed low, bending from the waist, first to Henry, and then to Olinski. He bowed elegantly, as though he were an important guest having cocktails with the two old gentlemen, and not as an intruder, likely to be kicked out of the house at any moment.

Watching from the gallery, I was astonished at the young man's display of good breeding; so different from what I had expected to find in a reporter. I could see that Henry's anger was getting beyond his control. The reporter's civility seemed to flick him on the raw.

"I've half a mind to break your damned neck," he shouted, shaking his fist menacingly under McGinity's nose.

"Any attempt to do so—to break my neck—might detain me here unnecessarily," the reporter rejoined, calmly. "You would facilitate matters exceedingly if you would allow me to use your house phone to call my office in the city. I'll have the call reversed, so it won't cost you a penny. You see—" glancing at his watch "—I want to phone this story in in time

for our last edition, the deadline for which, as I've already told you, is two-thirty."

Henry did not speak; he only growled, like an infuriated beast, ready to spring on its adversary.

"Very well, then," the reporter continued, "if you will not let me use your phone, I shall return to the village, and phone from there. I have about two hours before the paper goes to press. So I'll say good-night." He bowed again, very politely, and turned towards the door. But he never got to the door. Niki blocked his way.

"At him, Niki!" Henry cried furiously.

Niki's mighty arm shot out, and the blow he gave the reporter on the jaw was cruel and merciless; it was a knockout. McGinity staggered back against the wall, then crumpled in a heap on the floor. He never stirred after that.

"Now, you!" exclaimed Henry, shaking his fist at the reporter's prostrate figure; "you're not going to interfere any longer with my affairs. No story tonight, my boy! Deadline or no deadline!"

Olinski strode over to Henry. "What are you going to do with him?" he asked, excitedly.

"Lock him up for the rest of the night," Henry replied.

"Very good," Olinski agreed. "Then, in the morning, we shall bring him to terms. Bribe him, if necessary."

"That's it," Henry concurred. "That's it, exactly. A good idea. And he'll fall for it. Oh, he'll fall all right. Meantime," he added with a sardonic grin, "I shall make him as comfortable as possible for the night."

"Where on earth are you going to put him?" asked Olinski.

"Where there are no possible means of escape," replied Henry.

Henry moved to the wall under the staircase and pressed a button, which set the mechanism of a secret panel in the wall into action. The panel slid back. Henry stepped through the opening, and switched on the lights at the head of the secret passage stairs.

Poking his head out, he beckoned to Niki. The valet picked up the senseless form of the reporter, flung it over his shoulder as easily as he might handle a bag of flour, then passed through the secret doorway and followed Henry down the steps into the cellar.

Never, in my wildest fancy, could I have believed my extremely law-abiding and kindly dispositioned brother capable of such an act; it smacked of the sinister days of mediaeval times. Realizing the state he was in, his mind frenzied by anger and alcohol, I decided to let him carry out his own nefarious plan, and get out of the mess he had made the best way he could.

As I pictured the reporter coming out of the knockout blow, in his prison-cell below, a cold shiver ran down my spine. To me, it would have been frightening beyond endurance. While not exactly a prison, this underground section, like the secret panel in the wall, had been copied from the ancient Normandy castle, of which ours was an exact model. Opening off a narrow corridor were five cell-like rooms of stone and cement, with heavy steel doors. Four of them were in use, for wine and general storage purposes. The fifth, at the end of the corridor, was empty. The place was kept scrupulously clean, of course; it had outside ventilation and was electrically lighted.

About five minutes later Henry re-appeared, accompanied by Niki, to whom he gave instructions to remain on watch in the hall for the remainder of the night. Closing the secret panel, and apparently satisfying Olinski that he had made his prisoner comfortable for the night, they finally stepped into the elevator and went upstairs to bed.

As soon as they had gone, Niki switched off the ceiling and wall lights in the hall, leaving only the dim illumination of a lamp on the side table. He then curled himself up on a divan, and must have gone immediately to sleep.

I looked up suddenly from the sleeping watchman-valet to see a slim, whitish figure dart from the far side of the gallery, and disappear up the rear stairs, where a soft gleam of light penetrated from the corridor above.

Convinced that Pat was still wandering restlessly about the castle, and wondering if she, too, had viewed the regrettable scene in the hall below, I sank back in my chair and passed into unhappy meditation.

Feeling a certain curiosity as to what she might be up to, I remained in concealment to await events. I had not long to wait. Presently she re-appeared, creeping softly down the rear stairs. In her right hand she carried a flashlight; in the left, an object which glistened and jingled as she walked, which I took to be Orkins' collection of house keys.

She wore a satiny dressing gown of ivory-white, which trailed behind her like a bridal garment as she crossed the gallery and descended the staircase. Carelessly thrown over her lovely head was a filmy, white scarf, which billowed about her shoulders like a summer's cloud. There was every indication in her movements that she was on her way to locate the reporter, alleviate his distress, or, perhaps, release him. In spite of her hazardous undertaking, I could not avoid staring after her in deep admiration.

When she espied Niki on the divan, she switched off the flashlight. After satisfying herself, apparently by his heavy breathing, that he was asleep, she proceeded to open the secret panel. Its mechanism was familiar to her; she knew her way into the vaults below.

Immediately she had disappeared through the doorway in the wall, I went into action. Quietly but swiftly, I crept down the staircase. I stepped through the panel opening and stood at the head of the stone steps, where I watched her slow and careful descent of the winding stairs, in the shaky circle of light of her torch. I felt no trepidation over her safety; she was well acquainted with the geography of the place. My only fear was that the reporter might turn her adventurous visit to his own advantage. This seemed unlikely, for he had given me the impression that he was enough of a soldier of fortune to find amusement in his present predicament, despite his brutal treatment. This thought was uppermost in my mind when I heard his voice, raised in an exclamation of surprise.

I could well understand his note of surprise as he tried to connect the circumstances that had so recently and violently placed him in his present situation, with this after-midnight visit of a beautiful young lady in trailing white, lighting her way with an electric torch and jangling a bunch of keys.

"My dear young person, are you playing ghost—or what?" he addressed her, speaking through a small opening in his cell-door, through which, in its ancient pattern, food was passed to prisoners. "I am honored by your visit, of course, but isn't it a little—unconventional?"

"Lots of things are unconventional," was Pat's ready reply.

I could hear distinctly every word they said, owing to the peculiar acoustic properties of the cellar.

"Please don't tell me that you're bringing me a cup of tea!"

"I should adore some," said Pat.

"Adore some—what?"

"Some iced tea," she replied. "It's very hot and stuffy down here. You must be very uncomfortable."

"Oh, I'm okay," the reporter returned, sarcastically. "I've got a nice, soft cement floor to sleep on, and—oh, say! what I would really like is a good stiff highball. My jaw, you know—"

"Yes, I know all about it," Pat interrupted. "Niki must have given you an awful crack. I saw everything from the gallery in the hall!"

"Sympathetic, eh?"

"I very much regret to say I am," Pat answered. "I think my Uncle Henry is treating you outrageously. But he's rather eccentric, as you know, and tonight, I'm afraid he's a little tight, or he wouldn't have done a terrible thing like this."

"Ah, so you're Miss Patricia Preston, the society girl with so much money and leisure she doesn't know what to do with them," McGinity said quickly. "Your photo, sitting next to Prince Matani, at the polo tournament at Meadow Brook last week, in the box with your Aunt Jane, appeared in our Sunday rotogravure section. Don't tell me you've fallen for a foreign gink like that?"

Pat must have stared at him, thunderstruck, for she said, with a gasp: "How do you know so much?"

"I happen to know, and I have my own reasons for knowing," the reporter replied. "We won't discuss that for the moment. Suppose you answer my question?"

There was a pause, then Pat said: "No; it isn't like that. It isn't what you think at all."

"Well, I'm very glad to hear that," said the reporter. "Now, I'll tell you something you don't know. Your father, Allston Preston, and my dad were classmates at college—great pals."

"Really?"

"And on the same football team, at Columbia. Inseparable, until they each met the right girl and got married. Your father married into riches and society. My old man wed a poor but beautiful typist."

"I can hardly believe that they were friends," said Pat. "It seems so—fantastic." She paused, then went on, musingly: "Oh, but I would like to think they were—friends. I'm sure your father was capable and qualified, or he wouldn't have been such a close friend of my father."

"And, now, think what capabilities and qualifications his son, Bob McGinity, holds, also a graduate of Columbia."

"McGinity?" said Pat. "Bob McGinity! Oh, now, I remember. Surely—"

"Yes; I was the Columbia fullback, and I'll bet you a dollar to a doughnut, I was photographed more often than you are, now. But being a college graduate and a fullback didn't get me anywhere, so I went into newspaper work. I'm only a cub, but I've got ambitions. After what happened tonight, I suppose you think I'm a pretty rotten reporter."

"I wouldn't express it in that way, exactly," said Pat. "You had your nerve and persistency all right, yet you failed in your immediate object, didn't you? that of obtaining honestly"—she emphasized the word honestly—"the confirmation of Uncle Henry's discovery."

"Then you think I deserved the awful crack the Filipino gave me, and this temporary imprisonment, I take it, until after my paper goes to press?"

"I would like to think that you didn't," said Pat complacently. "However, I'm not in sympathy with Uncle's plan of locking you up here for the night. I

couldn't sleep with a clear conscience without making certain you were not seriously hurt. I know you must be nearly starved. So, if you'll agree not to try and escape, or get in touch with your office on the phone, I'll take you upstairs, and get you something to eat, also liniment for your jaw. I consider that you should be very grateful to me."

"Am I grateful?" the reporter replied; "I'm tickled pink. But, after all, what's the use?" he added, rather despairingly. "I've failed. Failed miserably."

"On the contrary, I believe you to be on the way to possible success, in getting all the information you want from Uncle Henry. But you've got to go after him in a different way. Perhaps you need an assistant—an ally."

"Do I need an ally? Oh, boy! And hungry? I could eat my shirt, really. But I'm not hurt as much as you think. What's a little sock in the jaw?"

"Then you'll agree to my proposition?"

A moment's pause, then: "How can my troubles interest you so much? Tell me."

With an attempt at bravado, Pat replied: "I have no personal interest. My whole idea is to get Uncle Henry out of the fix he's got himself into—with you."

The reporter sighed. "I'm incredibly foolish to imagine that you would be interested in me—personally. All the same, I'm eternally grateful, and give you my word I'll not give you the slip, or phone my office."

There was a heavy lock and bolt to negotiate, and when I heard the jingle of the keys and the snapping back of the lock, discretion counselled that I vanish from the scene. I had overheard enough to convince me that Pat was well able to look after herself. The comforting discovery that the reporter's father had been a close friend of Pat's parent had eased the situation immensely.

And yet the uneasy fear assailed me that Pat might get the worst of the bargain. How was one to know that the reporter was as honest and harmless as he sounded? At all costs, I felt, that remote contingency must be guarded against.

VII

I secreted myself in the elevator. A quarter of an hour passed. There was no sound of Pat and the reporter. My uneasiness grew by bounds. Finally, I decided to manifest my presence, if only for the sake of propriety. If Henry should appear unexpectedly and find these two together, alone, it would be hell let loose.

Emerging from my hideout, I found the hall in complete darkness. Not daring to risk rousing Niki, whom I still believed to be asleep on the divan, I stole quietly in the direction of a streak of light, on which my eyes had become focused in the dark. The light came from the dining room. I heard a low murmur of voices. The words were indistinguishable, but one of the voices was indubitably that of Pat's. Then, suddenly, I overheard her giving orders in a slightly raised voice:

"Cold chicken, and a salad.... See that you serve it promptly.... Wine, too—some sherry.... Now, look sharp about it.... And be as quiet as a mouse."

Peering cautiously between the curtains in the doorway, I had the surprise of my life. Pat was serving supper to McGinity in formal state. I could hardly believe my eyes. The reporter sat at the head of the long table, looking rather battered; his handsome, boyish face rather drawn and pale, his coal black hair dishevelled. His clothes looked like they badly needed pressing. The only illumination came from two burning candles in tall silver candlesticks on the table. Pat sat at the far end; a most discreet distance, which relieved my anxiety considerably.

My greatest surprise, though, came in discovering Niki. I gathered that Pat had roused him and pressed him into service. With the marvelous calm of the Oriental, he was placing the doilies and small silver before the reporter, to whom he had so recently delivered a knockout blow. He seemed most willing to assist Pat, to whom he always conceded absolute loyalty.

"Slippery little devil, isn't he?" McGinity remarked, after Niki had glided from the room. "But he's got an awful punch packed in that right arm," he added, as he rubbed his jaw, now slightly swollen and discolored.

"A glass of sherry will do your jaw good," said Pat.

"Supper for two," McGinity remarked, musingly. "It's too bad we haven't some music. You must dance divinely."

"You look utterly worn out," said Pat, steering with tact into another channel. "A shipwreck, and being cast ashore, a knockout blow, and a prison cell, is a whole lot for one evening."

"Another half hour of this—your delightful companionship—I'm sure, would quite finish me," said McGinity. "You've been a godsend."

"If you keep on like this, you'll make me angry, furiously angry," said Pat. "I'd much rather hear—well, how you chose to be a reporter."

"Temporary insanity, I guess," McGinity replied.

"Uncle Henry regards you as utterly insane, so far as news getting is concerned," said Pat.

"Well, then—a nebulous bank balance."

Pat seemed a little vexed. "If you can explain it in any other way, I shall be much obliged," she said, succinctly.

The reporter reflected for a moment, then spoke in a serious tone. "For one thing," he began, "you don't have to possess an intellect above the average to be a reporter. All you need is a nose for news, and lots of nerve. Most fellows use it as a stepping-stone into politics, the law, and the public relationship angle of the stage, screen and radio. Others stick to it all their lives; they can't break away. My dad was an editorial writer on the Herald up to his death. I thought I was cut out to be a lawyer, but I just couldn't click. I was born with the news instinct, I guess. Unlike my studious, conservative parent, I liked my news—hot. Perhaps I've got a yellow streak in me. That's why I'm on the Daily Recorder. I like sensation, big headlines.

"When I was at school, I thought life was learned from books," he went on, warming up a bit. "Life—I love it. And life at its utmost, that's reporting. Life that ticks off love, laughter, tears on every second. A foundling left on a door-step. Strange disappearance of a college girl. She's never seen or heard of again. Mystery. Death by misadventure. Murder. Fire-traps. Tenement fire—father, mother and grown-up kids burned to a crisp. Pet poodle, whining, discloses the baby under a bed, unharmed. Baby is adopted by a rich family. Poodle gets a decoration. Stories! Stories!"

He drew a deep breath, and continued: "The great thrill is putting your story over, hot off the press, satisfying the public's curiosity for news. Exclusive stories! The first thing the City Editor looks for. But there's no credit for them outside the office force. A pat on the shoulder, 'Good work, Bill!' and sometimes a 'by-line.' You write a good story, and you wallow in self-esteem. That's the only real compensation. No wallowing in wealth. The tragedy of reporting is that newspaper stories pay so little and die so quickly. You put your life's blood into them, your very soul. But they're not even yesterday's remembrance. In a couple of days they're dead—dead as a pickled herring!"

"Wonderful!" Pat breathed, as soon as the reporter had finished. "It all sounds so thrilling. I too love adventure—life, but until now—"

"Until you were nervy enough to take risks and rescue me from durance vile," McGinity broke in.

"Until now," Pat went on, "my adventures have been only in the pages of romantic and mystery books, although I've often tried to write myself—I really believe I have the talent. Anyway, I've often longed to step through those pages of romance and mystery, like Alice stepped through the looking-glass."

McGinity grinned. "Reporting isn't wonderland, by any means," he said; "it's the land of stark realities. I've had doors slammed in my face; I've been snubbed, insulted, double-crossed and kicked downstairs; but never—no, never in all my short experience as a reporter for a sensational tabloid sheet like the Recorder, have I ever had an experience like this one, tonight!"

"I'm sorry Uncle Henry was so ungracious and unkind," said Pat, in a low, sympathetic voice; "and Niki so cruel. I'm sure the valet didn't mean to knock you out."

McGinity grinned. "Oh, but I don't mean what you think I mean," he said. He leaned over the table towards her. "I mean this experience—you—at this moment. You—this incredulous you! A beautiful young princess, in these dark, ancient surroundings, and only forty-nine minutes from Broadway. An angel of mercy, too. It's all too fine and lovely to be true. I must be in a dream." He swept his hand across his eyes. "Maybe I haven't come to my senses yet—maybe—"

He stopped short as the telephone bell in the library began to trill sharply. He glanced at his watch. Two o'clock. Only half an hour before the last edition of his paper went to press. Time enough to get his story in, if only a flash. The old instinct—news instinct—loyalty to his paper, suddenly gripped him; it blotted out everything else—even Pat. He must get his story in. No longer would there be any interference with his plans. All danger—all obstacles—were past, and he was free at last to act.

He jumped to his feet, and with a bound, passed through the open doorway into the darkened library. The trilling of the bell guided him to the desk in the center of the room.

Pat sat staring after him. Then, suddenly, she understood his object. Instantly, she too sprang from the table, and darted into the library after him. A touch of the switch, and the room was flooded with light. McGinity was standing by the desk, in the act of lifting the receiver from the hook.

"I'm afraid you're forgetting yourself," Pat said coldly. "You agreed to follow out my instructions."

McGinity glanced at her strangely. "It's all okay. Everything's all right," he said, in an excited and husky whisper.

"Don't be absurd," said Pat. "Everything is not—all right. You're going to phone your story in, and you promised you wouldn't. Gentlemen always keep promises."

"I'm a reporter, and this is my business," McGinity retorted. "I've got to get this story in, and nobody's going to stop me."

"Very well, then," said Pat, and her voice was strangely flat and lifeless. "You're perfectly at liberty to do so, but—" she added, imperiously, "if this is your gratitude, the sooner we part company the better."

Even at this, his reason did not begin to assert itself. "This is my job," he exclaimed, heatedly. "I wasn't born rich like you. I've got to work for my living. I've got to make good on this story or I'm liable to be fired. You don't want me to lose my job, do you?"

Pat looked at him dumbly. "It means nothing to me—now," she said; "nothing in the least." She turned away from him, and re-entered the dining room.

"Please! Miss Preston!" he called after her. A thoughtful pause, and his lips went to the mouthpiece as though he were going to bite it. "You've got the wrong number," he angrily retorted to the insistent person at the other end of the wire. "Dammit! Get off the line!" He hung up the receiver, and swiftly followed after Pat. Coming up to her, he said, in a low, contrite voice: "I'm sorry if I seemed discourteous and ungrateful just now."

"It was most generous of you not to phone your story in," she said, and shrugged indifferently.

"I sort of lost my head the moment I heard that phone bell ring," he explained, "but a big story like this means a whole lot to me." He ran his hand nervously through his tousled hair. "At least, you might let me phone my office, and give the Night Desk some kind of a report about myself. They haven't heard beans from me since I was assigned to the story, early in the evening."

"Surely," Pat agreed. There was a little gentleness in her voice now. "I'll trust you."

Realizing that matters had approached a crisis, I resolved to make my presence known to Pat while the reporter was busy at the telephone, in the library. I could see she was suffering from nerves. The adventure was proving a little too much for her. When she saw my tall figure moving towards her, in the dimly-lighted dining room, she stifled a cry of alarm.

"It's all right, my dear," I said, taking her gently by the arm. "I've seen and heard everything. You've done nothing discreditable. Let's hope when morning comes, and Henry is sober, he'll act more sensible than he did tonight."

When McGinity returned, and saw me, his face went a little paler. He appeared relieved when I gave him a friendly smile.

"What's happened?" he asked, glancing at Pat, after she had introduced me.

"I don't want you young people to be alarmed," I said, "but there's no telling. Henry's a light sleeper, and he may drop in on you at any moment."

Just then Niki came in, bearing the reporter's supper on a huge silver tray. Niki was probably just as much surprised at seeing me there, as I was in discovering him, in the first place, but his face was still a stolid mask.

While he busied himself at the table, I shepherded McGinity and Pat to one side, and said, in a low voice:

"Now, Mr. McGinity, you hurry and eat your supper, and I'll relieve Patricia, and act as your bodyguard until I've locked you up again safely in our cellar."

"But he isn't to be locked up again," said Pat, after McGinity had seated himself at the table. "I've already given orders to Niki to put him in the Blue Room."

I gasped. It was almost incomprehensible. The Blue Room was the most attractive and spacious guest-room in the castle.

"Mr. McGinity can remain comfortably there, without any disturbance from Uncle Henry," she continued, "until Niki serves him his breakfast. As a prevention against catching cold, after his exposure this evening, I've instructed Niki to give him a good alcohol rub-down, and also to massage his jaw. You've no objections, Uncle Livingston?"

"None," I replied. Not a hint that I was utterly flabbergasted.

McGinity heard nothing of this, or seemed to hear nothing. He was obviously engrossed in eating his supper. But not so absorbed as I thought when Pat said: "Well, good-night—all," and turned to leave the room.

Then he leapt to his feet. "Don't go, please!" he pleaded.

"Oh, but I must," Pat said, lightly.

"Okay, then," he said, dejectedly. "See you in the morning, I hope. Thanks for all you've done for me—thanks a whole lot."

A tired smile, a flutter of trailing white, and Pat was gone.

"She's the stuff all right," McGinity remarked, as soon as she had left the room; "true stuff." Then I heard him mutter to himself: "I wonder what she sees in that gink, Prince Matani?"

After that, he barely spoke a dozen words. He looked all in; even a glass of sherry did not seem to revive him. He acted a little dazed. When I told him he was to sleep in our best bedroom, he simply said: "Good."

At three o'clock I left him there, in the hands of Niki, and trudged off to bed myself, feeling like a wet rag, and wondering what the morning would bring forth.

VIII

At breakfast, Henry wore a puzzled and anxious look, for which Pat and I did not find it hard to account. Apparently urged by a twinge of remorse, he had paid a secret visit to the cellar earlier in the morning, and to his great consternation and alarm, had found the reporter missing. Up to breakfast time, he was, of course, unaware of Pat's doings, and had only his own knowledge to go on. Niki had kept his silence, for a very good reason, which was—Pat.

Olinski was a few minutes late in joining us. Luckily only the four of us were seated at the table. Prince Matani had caught an early train for the city. Jane had remained in bed with a nervous headache. Olinski lost no time in making inquiry about the imprisoned reporter. Leaning over to Henry, he asked, in a low voice: "Is everything all right?"

"Disappeared!" Henry replied, in a low aside, using his morning paper, the Times, as a screen for the sub rosa conversation, which then ensued. "Clean gone!" he added.

Olinski looked positively sick for a moment. "Odd, isn't it?" he remarked.

"The whole affair's odd," Henry returned, placing a finger to his lips, to indicate the need for secrecy and caution.

Pat and I were both listening attentively, but camouflaging our attention with some silly chatter and laughter, as if deprecating any idea that we wished to listen in.

"Supposing someone got rid of him—Niki, for instance," Olinski suggested, sotto voce. "Niki's an Oriental. He may have misunderstood your motives. Faithful servant, you know. Heard of cases of that sort myself, in the Orient, not in this country, though."

Henry's eyes seemed to pop, and his face blanched at the suggestion of murder. "Oh, but I think that's impossible," he asserted, unconsciously raising his voice.

"What's impossible, Uncle Henry?" asked Pat.

"Oh!" said Henry, taken wholly by surprise. "Mr. Olinski and I were—er—we were just discussing a rather peculiar happening of last night, after you'd gone to bed. Something of a mystery, which seems difficult of solution."

"Perhaps I can solve it for you," Pat suggested demurely, giving me a knowing wink.

Olinski, who was watching Pat attentively, signed to Henry to remain quiet, and said: "I'm afraid your distinguished uncle has got himself into a peck of trouble."

"The thing's done, and can't be undone," Henry protested vehemently.

"What's done, Henry?" I inquired in a perfectly innoxious tone.

As Henry hesitated, Pat spoke. "Oh, I may as well blurt it straight out," she said. "Uncle Livingston and I were going to announce it, in due form, but I'd just as soon tell you now. Mr. McGinity, the Daily Recorder reporter, whom you cruelly attacked and locked up in the cellar, last night, received proper attention, and was put to bed in the Blue Room, after you and Mr. Olinski had retired. He's now having his breakfast, very comfortably, I hope, in bed."

Henry stared at Pat incredulously. "Um!" he exclaimed at last.

Thereupon, she gave a plain, straightforward account of things. Told all she knew, while I corroborated and amplified her statements whenever necessary. And two more surprised-looking men, I never saw in my life before. As she proceeded, Henry's face cleared. "Um!" he said again, when the full story had been told.

"I don't think I'm much of a hand at advising in such matters," Pat went on, "but in view of the nice mess of things you've made, Uncle Henry—"

As she paused uncertainly, Henry caught my eye. "What do you say, Livingston?" he asked.

"Well, if you ask me, Henry, I agree entirely with Pat," I replied, with decision. "Assault of this reporter, and his detention in the cellar, rank as an act in contravention of the criminal code, the penalties for which, as you are no doubt aware, are very severe."

"We don't want any more scenes like last night, do we, Uncle Henry?" Pat put in, ingenuously.

"Um! Um!" said Henry, reflectively.

Mentally he must have seen a picture of what might be if he did not patch things up with the reporter, who was in a position to bring a civil action and mulct him in very substantial damages. "I—I suppose I did treat him rather roughly," he admitted finally, now that the ground had been cut from under his feet. "What would you suggest, Livingston?" he asked, meekly, again turning to me.

Struck by a sudden, happy thought, I replied: "I would suggest offering the reporter the exclusive rights for the story of your amazing discovery, on condition that he is not to publish it until you've given him permission, or set a release date. Try that, and see how it works."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Olinski.

"Very good," said Henry.

At that moment, Orkins came into the room, and informed Henry that McGinity was in the hall, and would be obliged if Henry would see him for a few minutes. Henry accordingly hastened into the hall, and, as we learned afterwards, greeted the reporter with an open hand and a cordial smile.

On returning from his interview with the reporter, I was surprised to see him kiss Pat affectionately on the cheek. "I want to thank you, my dear," he said, "for saving me from a world of trouble."

Pat blushed and smiled, and kissed him back, then turned away to hide her tears.

"Family pride is a powerful instinct," I remarked, "and we still bear an honored name, thanks to Pat."

Henry had good reason to be thankful to Pat, who had saved him from what might have been an extremely serious contretemps. We all had, for that

matter. Pat had a head on her lovely shoulders. True to her romantic disposition, she waved adieu to McGinity from a mullioned window, high up in the castle, where she must have appeared to him in the likeness of a fairy princess, as he rode off, in company with Olinski, to the railroad station.

Henry appeared in a placid and cheerful mood during the rest of the morning. He had managed things pretty well so far. Knowing the value of publicity, I considered McGinity and the tabloid he represented, with its tremendous circulation, the best medium Henry would be able to find for the exploitation of his discovery. I knew he hated making terms with the reporter, his keen dislike and distrust of newspapermen seemed inherent, but McGinity had somehow to be caught and tamed, and unless it were done quickly, McGinity might be catching him. And that would never do.

Towards noon, Henry sent for me, and I joined him in the library, where I found him rummaging amongst the books and papers on his desk. He looked worried. There was something heavy bearing on his mind. As it turned out, there were several things that harassed him.

"What now?" I asked, a note of impatience in my voice.

"Livingston," he began, with a sudden compression of his lips, and motioning me to sit down, "will you answer a question that has been occurring to me all morning? During the time that this reporter, McGinity, and Pat were together, last night, did he show—well, any sentimental interest in her? I want to know—particularly."

"No, I'm sure he did not," I replied promptly. "I recall hearing him use such expressions as 'your delightful companionship,' 'this incredulous you,' and 'beautiful princess!'"

"What!" Henry exclaimed, with an awkward attempt to suppress an unbelieving smile; "do I understand you to say you attach no sentimental significance to such expressions?"

"Why, certainly," I answered. "I attributed his romantic talking to the after-effects of the knockout blow. At times, he appeared to be dazed."

Henry regarded me gravely for a moment, then he said: "Livingston, you are without a doubt the perfect ass!" He brought his fist down with a thud on his desk to emphasize more completely his opinion of me.

"Whatever do you mean?" I demanded.

"Listen to me," said Henry, leaning over the desk towards me. "What happened last night between Pat and this reporter is going to bring an alarming new situation in our household. Pat has become romantically interested in this young scallywag, and I feel sure he's fallen in love with her."

"You wouldn't say that unless you'd some grounds for it," I observed. "Have you?"

"Nothing that I can personally vouch for," was the reply; "it's only something that I suspect after putting two and two together. Now, after hearing you repeat those silly, sentimental expressions that fell from the reporter's lips, while Pat was treating him to supper, and speculating on what he may have said to her during the quarter of an hour you were secreted in the elevator, I feel I have grounds for my suspicions."

He leaned still further across the desk as he continued. "Now, this McGinity fellow was in his right mind and senses, take my word for it, when he called our Pat 'incredulous you,' 'beautiful princess,' and so on, and also in a perfectly normal state of mind, this morning, when he turned down my offer to square and hush up last night's unfortunate affair. I guess Olinski was right. I must have been 'cock-eyed.' Anyway, the amount I offered him was \$50,000. It was a good bargain, a damned good bargain. What's surprising you?"

"Do you mean to say McGinity turned down such a large offer of money, which had nothing to do with holding out on the story, nothing in the nature of a bribe, simply a stated sum in lieu of damages, say for assault and detention?"

"I do," Henry replied. "The young nincompoop fixed his own price, and declared he would be well satisfied if he got it."

"And what was that?"

"All he wanted, he said—now, listen carefully to what I'm telling you—all he wanted was the exclusive rights to the Mars story, the release terms of which he promised faithfully to obey. As for last night's occurrences—assault and detention, as you term them—he simply said: 'Let's forget that.'"

"Is that a fact?" I asked, amazed.

Henry nodded, and continued. "Do you get it? He's in love with our Pat, or he wouldn't have turned my offer down. Think of it—\$50,000. Enough to start him in the newspaper publishing business on his own hook."

"Supposing it's true, that a romantic attachment has sprung up between them, what shall you do?"

"I shall be ruthless," Henry replied, in a stern voice. "Ruthless," he repeated, and then gazed round the room, rather guiltily, as though Orkins might be there to hear him.

"By the way," I said. "What's happened to Orkins? I haven't seen him round the premises since Olinski and McGinity left, shortly after breakfast?"

"Ah!" said Henry. "That reminds me of another strange occurrence. Orkins has gone—gone for good."

"Well, that's a queer thing, isn't it?"

"Decidedly queer," Henry concurred. "He came to me quite unexpectedly this morning and resigned; said he was leaving at once. No explanation, simply that he was going and wanted his back pay. I remonstrated about his not giving the usual two weeks' notice, but he was adamant, so I paid him off and let him go."

"Leaving you no address?"

"No address at all. What do you make of it?"

"It certainly looks queer," I replied. "But I've been rather suspicious of Orkins from the very start."

"Why?" asked Henry.

"It's always been my opinion," I replied, "that he was mixed up in some secret, something that we know nothing about. He was too crafty and reticent to suit me."

"The mere fact that he was crafty and reticent doesn't prove anything," said Henry.

"Well, then," I said, rather testily, "if Orkins didn't sell you out on the comet business, who the devil did?"

"I've no idea," said Henry.

"I think it is pretty certain that he also tipped off the Daily Recorder about your latest discovery, and got well paid for it."

"Even so," said Henry, "these suppositions on your part can have no possible connection with his leaving so abruptly."

"I've got a notion about that too," I said. "Supposing that he did sell you out, in both instances, and was assured that his tips would be treated confidentially, then he must have got scared when McGinity turned up."

"Scared about what?" asked Henry.

"Well, after what happened to the Daily Recorder reporter last night, and Orkins must have known about it—you'd be astonished how quickly news travels among the servants—my idea is that he was afraid McGinity, in reprisal, would betray his duplicity. So he got away as quickly as possible to save his face. But it was a foolish thing to do."

"Foolish?"

"Yes; for newspapers never, under any consideration, betray their source of news information. I doubt if McGinity himself knew where the tips came from. He was simply assigned by his City Editor to get the stories, and Orkins did not figure in them at all as far as he was concerned."

"At any rate," said Henry, "I'm rather sorry to lose Orkins. While he had odd ways, I always felt he could be depended upon. He was the perfect English butler if ever there was one."

"Oh, but he's not English at all," I said. "I learned from one of the other servants, not so long ago, that he's a Slav by birth, and acquired his perfect English name, speech and manners during a long period of buttlng in London. By the way, on whose recommendation did you employ him?"

"Can't say," Henry replied, as he lighted a cigar. "Ah!" he added, after a thoughtful pause. "I have it! I employed him on Dr. LaRauche's recommendation, from whom he brought the most exceptional references. It's not likely, though, that Dr. LaRauche would have any ulterior reason in wanting me to give his former servant a place."

"After all," I suggested, "there's no getting away from the fact that Rene LaRauche hates you worse than poison."

"You're wrong, Livingston," said Henry, with emphasis. "Dr. LaRauche is only suspicious of my scientific achievements. He regards me as a rank amateur. A top-notch scientist himself, of international reputation, it is only natural that he should be jealous of any intrusion upon that which he feels is his own field. But hatred? Oh, no!"

"If we're going in for mere theorizing," I said, "here's one to cogitate over. Supposing Orkins, the sly, crafty devil, was a plant in this house; put here by LaRauche to spy on your scientific research work? Then what?"

"Well, give me the truth," Henry answered. "Truth's not so easy to come at in these matters, and I doubt if we shall get any substantial contribution to your theory. Certainly not by remaining quietly here, with our hands folded. Come to think of it, LaRauche borrowed a valuable book of mine more than two years ago, Lowell's 'Mars as the Abode of Life,' which I should like very much to have him return. Now, supposing you drop in on him. Haven't the least idea what you'll get besides the borrowed book, and I doubt if you get that. Anyhow," he added significantly, "you may find out something—one way or another."

The curiosity instinct, which was my second nature, rose, strong and eager, when I heard this announcement. "All right," I said, with a suddenly roused alertness; "I'll call on LaRauche this afternoon."

IX

It was late in the afternoon when I reached the LaRauche house, a big, old-fashioned place, which stood within large enclosed grounds of its own, in a heavily wooded section, on a lonely and unfrequented road, about three miles south of Sands Cliff village.

Outwardly the residence was shabby, neglected, much in the want of fresh paint. The grounds in front were grown up with weeds. At the rear was a level stretch of meadow, backed by woods, which LaRauche used as a

flying field. He owned and operated a small plane, in which he carried on experiments in wireless and meteorological observations. Ample private means enabled him to gratify his tastes to the full in the various fields of scientific research and exploration.

Astronomy held a particular attraction for him; he was a geologist and botanist as well. What with one thing and another, his life had been one long mad quest into the mysteries of the universe, and some of them he had solved. An astounding genius, if ever there was one, who was destined, I firmly believed, to spend his last days in a padded cell.

In appearance, he was a ramrod of a man, with hawk-like features surmounted by a mass of untidy, bushy white hair. Endowed with vast energy, he carried his sixty odd years with an air of perpetual youth and freshness. The man in the street who read of his scientific explorations into the unknown—recently he had been entertaining the reading-public with accounts of his plans and preparations to ride in a rocket to the moon—had no conception of the zeal that animated him as a scientific investigator, nor knowledge of the jealous fury that would seize him whenever he was outshone by the superior success of a fellow scientist.

Hot-headed, violently controversial, always quarrelsome, he had a malignant way of convulsing the various learned scientific bodies, to which he belonged, with stinging impeachments of his rivals. He had a turn for the sensational, which is rare in a man of his genius.

The breach between LaRauche and Henry dated back two years. It grew out of the first showing by LaRauche of several reels of motion pictures at the Exploration Club, depicting the life and customs of a hitherto unknown race of dwarfs, or midgets, he claimed to have discovered, living in a most primitive state in the jungles of Central Africa.

Henry and I attended the première, and Henry, in his rather dumb way, with no intention of wounding the feelings of LaRauche, or injuring his reputation, voiced his opinion to one of his intimates that the pictures were fictitious. His chance remark reached the ears of a member of the board of governors of the club, who made an official report of it to that body. Secret investigation by the board disclosed that LaRauche had, indeed, resorted to faking. The official inquiry revealed that he had recruited a small company of Negro midgets from Harlem, dressed them in skins of wild beasts and

put them through various African jungle stunts in a wild and wooded section of New Jersey. The midget tribe he so cleverly portrayed subsisted mainly on insects, frogs and toads, and their eating live toads was one of the most realistic and clever fakes I have ever seen.

As a result, LaRauche was expelled from membership for conduct prejudicial to the club. The fact that the club's action was made public turned the current of public feeling against him for a time. It should have covered him with shame and confusion—a very foolish trick for a scientist of his standing to perpetrate in the declining years of his career—but he assumed an utterly contemptuous attitude, and readily admitted once he was cornered that the pictures were intended as a fake, to fool his rivals in the African exploration field.

Naturally, he blamed Henry for his crushing defeat. There was no mistaking his ill will thereafter towards my brother, and he endeavored in many ways to injure Henry's reputation as a scientist. He wrote him letters, couched in violent terms; called him an "amateur meddler" in science; he wanted war to the knife. But it takes two to make a quarrel, and Henry, in his easy way, declined to enter the controversy.

Another crushing blow to LaRauche was Henry's discovery of the comet, which increased his rancor and violent antipathy towards my brother. So it was with no little trepidation that I approached his house.

Parking my car at the side of the road, I paused a few moments at the entrance gate to take a rapid, estimating view of the estate, apparently the only human habitation anywhere about. The grounds were fenced by a dilapidated hedge, and rows of maples and poplars.

Suddenly, through the screen of trees, I noticed an old brick house, set in a hollow, at the base of a hill that sloped gently down from LaRauche's place. It was set far back from the road, in a clump of trees, and possessed a considerable range of stables and outhouses, the possible use of which immediately roused my curiosity, as there were no indications that farming was being carried on. It struck me as odd that they should be there. There was a reason for the several outbuildings I saw on LaRauche's grounds; a hangar, a small frame building, set between two tall antennae towers of steel, apparently used for broadcasting, and a glass-domed brick structure, where, no doubt, he carried on his astronomical observations.

All this was running through my mind, as I walked up the gravel-path towards the LaRauche house, when I heard a rustle in the hedge. Glancing in this direction, I was amazed to see a grizzly bear emerge from the hedge and make towards me. A cold sweat broke out on me. I was terrified. I quickened my step, so did the bear, a ferocious-looking beast. I broke into a run. The bear followed, close on my heels, in its peculiar loping fashion.

Before I reached the house, a loud, gruff voice, emanating from the other side of the hedge, stopped the bear's pursuit. I saw a middle-aged man on the far side of the hedge. From that fleeting glimpse I had of his general build and swarthy complexion, I judged him to be an Italian. I was greatly relieved when the bear disappeared through a hole in the hedge and joined his master on the other side.

But this was not the only unusual and surprising event of that afternoon. In answer to my ring, the door opened and revealed the tall, dignified figure of Orkins. I immediately deduced from his presence there that LaRauche had some hold on him which made him Orkins' master. I was also convinced that my theory that he had been planted in our household by LaRauche to spy on Henry's work, was a very probable one.

I suppose I let my suspicions show themselves in my face, for Orkins questioned me before I could speak. I was still a little breathless from running.

"You are no doubt surprised, Mr. Royce, to find me here?" he said.

"Yes—I suppose so," I replied, evasively.

"Dr. LaRauche was kind enough to re-engage me after my leaving your brother, Henry, so suddenly this morning," he went on. "How did your brother take it?"

"I prefer not to say anything—about that," I answered. "In fact, I'm not going to!"

"Yes, yes. I quite understand your attitude, Mr. Royce," he said. "Just as you like."

"My business is with Dr. LaRauche," I said. "Is he at home?"

"Dr. LaRauche is very busy," Orkins answered, coldly. "He is not receiving callers today."

"I think he will give me a few minutes' interview on rather urgent business," I said. "Just give him my card, if you please."

Orkins took my card gingerly, backing away from the doorway as he glanced at it. He still seemed taken aback, afraid, as though he felt my business with LaRauche concerned him. I stepped through the doorway into a small outer hall. "Just so—just so," muttered Orkins. "It's highly probable that Dr. LaRauche will see you," he added. "Please wait here," motioning for me to enter the main hall.

After he had vanished up the stairs, I looked from the hall into the library, a room filled with books from floor to ceiling. I was staring at this vast array of books with interest when a wisp of a woman appeared at the head of the stairs. It was Mrs. LaRauche.

"Ah! Mr. Livingston Royce," she said as she came down the stairs. "You want to see my husband? Well, he's very busy. Why, he hasn't allowed himself a real night's sleep for several weeks."

Mrs. LaRauche was very much younger than her husband; a slim, smallish woman of rather sallow complexion, with sandy hair, pale-blue, restless eyes, and rather untidily dressed.

We shook hands cordially. She had always treated Henry and me with the most punctilious respect. I had not seen her for about two years, and I formed the opinion at once that her husband's break with Henry had not changed her friendly feelings towards us.

I noticed a great change in her. She seemed to have lost her old-time vivacity. She appeared tired and worn, and had aged considerably. I felt anxious and perturbed about her. Something, I was quite sure, had happened. And, of course, it had to do with her husband.

There was an atmosphere of mystery about her and the house, and it was further deepened when Mrs. LaRauche led me from the hall into the library. She gave me the impression at once of one who lives in constant fear. There was a sign of caution and watchfulness in her eyes, expressed in nervous, terrified glances over her shoulder.

"I'm sure you won't mind my asking if your business with my husband is so very important?" she began in a low, tremulous voice. "You see—" She stopped and turned at what seemed to be the sound of footfalls on the stairs. There was a look of terror in her eyes.

"It isn't," I interrupted. "I've merely called, at my brother's request, to ask Dr. LaRauche for the return of Professor Lowell's book on Mars which he borrowed more than two years ago."

She looked greatly relieved. "I'm so glad," she breathed. "Rene goes into a perfect rage if he's interrupted. He's been very upset all morning, but still continues at his work. What he's working on, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Probably working on that rocket to the moon idea," I suggested, smiling.

"Completely mysterious to me," she rejoined.

"You've heard, of course, of my brother's latest discovery?" I ventured.

"No," she replied. "I've heard nothing. My mind has been occupied all morning wondering what's brought Orkins back to us. I've always disliked and distrusted him intensely."

Not feeling free to explain the circumstances, or cloud, under which Orkins had left our household, I glanced out the window. "Your house is in a very lonely location," I observed. "I hope you do not go out much alone. You

seem to have some queer animals roaming about. I was chased by a grizzly bear as I walked through your grounds."

Mrs. LaRauche shuddered. "Oh, that terrible beast!" she muttered. "I never go out at night by myself on account of that bear. He's not vicious at all, really a pet, but it's frightening to run into him. Often I hear him, in the dead of night, clawing at our doors, whimpering and growling, and trying to get in."

"Who owns the animal?" I inquired.

"He belongs to our disreputable neighbor, Antonio Ranzetti," she replied, "an Italian animal trainer, who rented and took possession, much against our wishes, of that old brick house in the hollow. Rene would have bought the place, had we known, rather than suffer the annoyance of living next to a menagerie."

"Is it as bad as all that?"

She nodded. "He has a large collection of wild animals in the house and outbuildings, which he is training for the circus," she explained, "and he's just about as secretive in his work as Rene in his scientific researches. He's one of the most expert animal trainers in the world, I believe."

Then she suddenly remembered the book I was after. "I'm sure my husband did not keep your brother's book intentionally," she said. "He's very forgetful of what he calls trivialities." She walked over to a disordered desk, and with a sharp exclamation, picked up the book from among a row of volumes on top of it. "There you are!" she said.

My back was turned towards the door into the hall as I took the book, and expressed my thanks for its return. I was just on the point of departure, seeing I had no further excuse to remain on the premises, when I saw her start, and turn pale. Turning round quickly, I faced Dr. LaRauche, as he entered the library. In looks, he was about the angriest looking man I had ever encountered.

"Ah, Dr. LaRauche!" I said, without turning a hair.

He made no reply, just stood there, glaring, and inspecting me from top to toe. Finally, he spoke. "I know what's brought you here, Livingston Royce," he said. "I expected it."

Coming out of her cowering fright, and finding her voice, Mrs. LaRauche broke in falteringly. "Mr. Royce came after the Lowell book on Mars you borrowed from his brother, Henry, more than—"

A contemptuous exclamation cut her short. "Something more than the borrowed book brought him here," LaRauche said.

"What, for instance?" I asked him, point-blank.

"There's no doubt in my mind that your cunning brother sent you here to spy on me, on my work in its possible relation to his own, and to find out why I reengaged Orkins. But you haven't learned very much, have you?"

"To tell you the truth, I haven't," I replied, nonchalantly. "I'm not the sort of person gifted to see through a brick wall."

"Well, as you haven't found out anything," LaRauche thundered, "the next best thing to do is to go home, and report to your meddlesome brother that you haven't." As he concluded, he waved a hand towards the door.

With a polite bow, I withdrew, and left the house. I had not gone many yards down the gravel-path, when a woman's cry tore the air, a smothered cry of terrorized anguish. The sound died away without repetition. I passed on, convinced that some evil had befallen Mrs. LaRauche. There was more mystery in this house than I had at first imagined.

No success having materialized from the real motive of my visit, which LaRauche, with uncanny intuition, had so rightly surmised, I returned to the castle, and told Henry all that had occurred. He laughed heartily when I narrated my encounter with the grizzly bear. As for the secret work LaRauche was at present engaged on, and Orkins' possible connection with it, I was bound to admit that I had made little headway in obtaining any accurate information.

What seemed to Henry much the most important fact of the little evidence I had gained, was Mrs. LaRauche's statement that her husband was so engrossed in his work that he hadn't been sleeping properly at night for several weeks, and that he was keeping it a secret even from her.

"This is damned queer business," Henry said at last. "Let's suppose that Orkins, using the knowledge he gained of my recent discovery, is mixed up

in this work on which LaRauche is spending so many exciting days and sleepless nights."

"Now, just what information Orkins obtained, as your butler, would be valuable to LaRauche?" I asked.

"If you're asking me for an answer, Livingston," said Henry, "all I've got to say is, I haven't got one. I can't think of any important reason why LaRauche should barge this way into my private affairs. Beats me altogether."

"Well, you can be certain of one thing," I said, "that he had an object—"

"Yes, but what object?" Henry demanded. "What? He couldn't possibly profit by anything Orkins gained by snooping round. LaRauche knows more about science than I shall ever dream of knowing."

"Well, there is this to be thought of," I remarked, after thinking a bit: "Perhaps, in relation to your latest achievement, he's going to come forward with something he hopes will throw your accomplishment in the shade, like a rocket to the moon, and we both know that's been a bee in his bonnet for some years. Or he's going to try to prove that your discovery is not genuine, and will denounce you as a fakir, as you exposed him, unwittingly, in those faked motion pictures of the African midgets, he claimed to have discovered."

"Either way there may be something in what you suggest," Henry answered. "Both are possible. But I think—"

"But why think," I interposed; "why trouble yourself, or ourselves, any longer about LaRauche's affairs, now that things have turned out as they have? Why should you fear his opposition? The last connecting link has been broken, now that you've got your precious book on Mars back. Let him do his damndest! Good riddance. I don't care; you don't, I'm sure."

Henry saw the value of my proposition at once; and so matters were settled as far as LaRauche and Orkins were concerned. We never spoke of them again. They passed out of our consciousness as though they never existed.

Other things became of greater concern. So many things, strange things, happened, I didn't know whatever to expect next. It was as if the world was

being turned upside down. I never knew such times, nor expected to know such.

X

McGinity had lunch with us, on Henry's invitation, on the day following my visit to Dr. LaRauche's house. In the preparation of his story in advance, it was necessary that he should obtain from Henry all the scientific technicalities relating to the discovery. It was his task to make copious notes while Henry talked.

Seated at his desk in the library, Henry talked on and on for several hours; he never seemed to tire. While I sat by an open window, the weather being exceptionally hot, reading and smoking by fits and turns, and occasionally listening in to what Henry was saying. Whenever I turned to gaze at him, it was with frank bewilderment.

Ever since he had announced his discovery, my mind had been led by diverse paths, hither and thither, seeking, not an outlet, but rather a snug corner wherein to rest in the conviction that his and Olinski's claims of having established radio communication with Mars were true. Somehow I just couldn't grasp the idea of an intelligent exchange of ideas with another race of people so far away from us; it was too stupendous. As a matter of fact, I was still a little cynical and suspicious. And yet I knew if anyone had discussed the possibilities of the radio, as we know it today, in the time of General George Washington, as Henry was now agitating wireless communication with Mars, the people of the Colonial era would have thought such a person stark mad.

As McGinity's pencil flew across his note-book like a busy shuttle in a loom, transcribing Henry's utterances, I kept saying to myself: "How can this reporter accept facts that to him must seem perfectly crazy?" Then, suddenly, it came to me that to a reporter all things are either news or nothing. No matter if Henry was inventing something unreal, which, of course, he wasn't, he was giving the reporter news of the greatest

magnitude; news backed by the potentialities of Henry's vast wealth and the reputation he had already achieved as a scientist.

Watching them closely, I marveled at that inherent physical virtue in each of them, by which they were enabled to shake off any thought, or mention, of the very recent and unfortunate incident in our midst. McGinity must have found the library infinitely more comfortable than solitary confinement in our cellar. It was also very evident to me that he was going up in Henry's estimation by leaps and bounds.

In repose, McGinity had a shy, reserved look about him that suggested the student. He had proved a perfect guest at lunch. It puzzled me that he should seem so much at home, so much part of our company and our setting. Once the first shock was over, Jane had found him a person of immediate interest and excitement. When she discovered that he loved to poke round art galleries, and liked canary birds and goldfish, as she did, she invited him to lunch with us soon again.

The absurd antagonism of Henry and Jane against reporters now seemed a thing of the past. But not everything of the past, on McGinity's part, was forgotten. There was no mistaking that he missed Pat, who was absent from lunch because Henry had devised a means of preventing a second meeting between them. He had packed her off, with Prince Matani, to a luncheon party at the Sands Cliff Club, after which they were to attend a polo match.

There is, after all, no use trying to go contrariwise to fate. Pat, it seems, was fated to come home alone from the match, after a tilt with the Prince—they quarrelled constantly—and Henry had a bad moment when she breezed into the library a few minutes after he had finished dictating to McGinity.

She was all exclamations and astonishment and delight on seeing the reporter. "Dear old Uncle!" she said, as she hugged and kissed Henry. "Why, on earth, didn't you tell me we were going to have a visitor?"

Henry didn't answer. He sat silent, even when Pat went up to McGinity, and said: "What a piece of luck!" Then: "Lets go out on the terrace, where it's cool."

Thereupon Henry found his tongue. "But it's quite comfortable in the library," he said. "Why not talk to Mr. McGinity here?"

"But I want him to see the Sound and the boats from the terrace," Pat replied. "It's such a beautiful scene."

It wasn't beautiful at all, as she knew, at this time. A mist had come up, and cloaked everything in indistinctness. It wasn't even cool on the terrace; the slight, west breeze that had been stirring, had changed to the south. Nevertheless, she marched him off to the terrace.

Presently, they walked round the terrace extension at the end of the castle, and stood conversing near the open window by which I sat. Fortunately, they did not see me, and I made no move to indicate my near presence. I felt free to listen to their conversation as a matter of protection for Pat. Like my sister, Jane, I watched her out of eyes and listened with ears that saw and heard a great deal more than they pretended.

Pat spoke very fast, so as to leave the reporter little time to interrupt her. "Afraid you wouldn't see me again, you say? Well, I was afraid you'd never want to see me again, after what happened the other night."

"I—I'm glad it happened, now, aren't you?" McGinity ventured.

"Oh, ever so glad," replied Pat. "I'll never forget that night, not as long as I live. Fancy meeting a person for the first time in one's cellar. And, oh! I'm so glad I came home ahead of Prince Matani. We had a terrible spat at the polo game—over you. He detests reporters. Hasn't the slightest sense of humor, and I see fun in everything. And, oh, yes!" she raced on; "there's something I want to ask you. Will you be at Uncle Henry's demonstration in the city, next Tuesday night? Oh, of course, you will! And, please, I'd love to see how a newspaper is made. It must be very thrilling. You want to show me, don't you?"

"I should like to very much," said McGinity. "But I can't understand, with all the interests you have in life, what it is you want of me. I can't understand yet why you take so much interest in me, or trouble yourself with me at all."

She gazed at him, half laughing. "Are you really so stupid as all that?" Then she quickly added: "Perhaps I don't want anything. What then?" And, before he could reply, she flew at him: "At least I want you to stop calling me 'Miss'."

"What am I to call you?"

"Pat."

"Very well—Pat," he smiled, "let me talk to you a little about myself, of what I want of you." But he got no further; he became curiously bereft of speech.

"Well—Bob?" Pat said, after a period of silence.

"It's no good," he said at last. "Since I met you the other night, I've been thinking of what I'd like to say to you—and, now, it's best that I forget it."

He turned half away from her as he continued to speak. "I'd better go now."

Pat looked at him in astonishment. "Oh, please, Bob! Get it off your mind, whatever it is," she begged.

"The truth is," he began, "what embarrasses me most—"

"There you go!" she interrupted. "I know exactly what you're going to say, and to me it's such a silly thing."

"Will you explain just what you mean?"

"I mean, well, that I'm not a snob. I've never boasted about my position, about having everything I want. The most exciting thing in the world to me is meeting new people—nice people—and expecting one doesn't know what. I don't expect you to hand me any credentials; that would be odious. Of course, to you, I must appear disgustingly idle and useless. But it just happens that I like you very much, and—and I would like to be your friend."

McGinity grinned. "I think I can arrange that all right," he said.

"I'm very glad you can," she said. "And, please, get the other thing off your mind, whatever it is, and don't let it come back again, at any rate, not so—so overwhelmingly." She laughed out loud as she stretched forth her hand.

It was pretty hard to believe my eyes in the unexpected scene which swiftly followed. Prince Matani must have been in very bad humor to do what he did. I gathered that he had been standing in concealment, round the corner of the castle, for several minutes, listening in to the conversation, and nursing his jealousy and suspicion.

McGinity had just taken Pat's hand in his own when I saw the Prince's slim figure come round the corner suddenly, and upon them. Without uttering a word, he struck at the reporter. Of all expressions in the English language, I think "come-back" is one of the most significant. The Prince had no sooner planted a glancing blow on McGinity's jaw, still slightly discolored from Niki's knockout punch, when the reporter, with a quick come-back, swung a mighty right that sent the Prince backwards, reeling. It excited me almost to laughter to think that the reporter felt the same impulse towards the Prince as I.

Pat could be as cool as a cucumber when it was necessary. Turning to the Prince, she said, her face painfully drawn: "Why did you do this?"

The Prince made no reply. He gave her a sullen look and walked away.

McGinity met the situation good-naturedly. "If this keeps up," he remarked, working his jaw, "I'll have to wear a baseball catcher's mask whenever I come here, or ask for special police protection."

"It's extraordinary," said Pat, laughing in spite of herself, "that you should get two smacks in the face in succession. You must think we're a crazy lot. Anyway, that was a beautiful crack you gave His Highness, and he deserved it."

That practically ended the conversation. As they walked off, I turned in my chair to see the Prince in whispered conversation with Henry, obviously airing his grievances in connection with Pat and McGinity. I was rather surprised, but delighted, to hear Henry say to him: "This is your funeral, Your Highness. Your eye looks terrible. Better go upstairs, and have Niki put a cold compress on it."

The Prince had no sooner left the room to carry out Henry's suggestion when Pat and McGinity strolled in. I was uneasy for a moment, but Henry gave no indication that he knew what had just happened on the terrace. In matter-of-factness, he gave McGinity some final instructions, and dismissed him. Then the reporter left, and there was silence. Henry looked very grave.

"What's on your mind, Uncle Henry?" Pat asked, as she subsided into a chair.

Henry blew his nose, a trick he had when his feelings were disturbed. "I'm not angry, my dear," he began, and then paused to blow his nose again. "It

isn't that I mind so much this extraordinary encounter between His Highness and Mr. McGinity—the reporter had every right to strike out in self-defense—but you cannot go on in this way. I know—"

"Oh, so the Prince told you, did he?" she interposed. Then she added: "What do you know?"

"That you are in love with this young reporter."

Pat gasped. "Oh, you ought not to have said that, Uncle! You've spoiled it all now. It was such a beautiful thing—our friendship."

"It has been said, and very truthfully so," Henry observed, "that mere friendship is impossible between a man and a woman. Now, Mr. McGinity is a very smart and capable young person," he went on, "and I have nothing to say against your being friendly with him, but I do object to your flaunting him, on such short acquaintance, made under such unusual circumstances, in the face of His Highness as a possible rival."

"What do you mean?" Pat asked, as she rose out of her chair, and moved slowly towards Henry.

"I mean it is intolerably annoying to me that you should allow a nondescript person to come between you and this distinguished representative of the Georgian principality."

"Mr. McGinity is not nondescript," Pat retorted, "and—and I have no intention of marrying Prince Matani." There was a look of fear growing in her eyes. "Why, I don't love him, Uncle, well enough to marry him. I'd rather marry a counter-jumper in a Broadway haberdashery store. Oh, I couldn't—couldn't!"

"You know, and I know," said Henry, firmly, "that you've given the Prince every encouragement. My principle heretofore has been to leave you alone. But, now, it has become a different matter. Your growing interest in Mr. McGinity makes it necessary for me to show my authority."

"You mean that I can't see as much of Mr. McGinity as I have a mind to?"

"Just so long as it is within the bounds of discretion," Henry answered. "But I repeat, you shall not allow this reporter to come between you and the young nobleman you're destined to marry. I'll admit that I've encouraged the Prince's attentions towards you. In fact, I think it's about time that I

announced your betrothal to him. Now, as we've both given him encouragement, we can't break faith with him as easily as all that—now, can we?"

"Very well, Uncle." Pat's voice sounded tired and bored. After giving me an appealing, helpless look, she went briskly out of the room.

That night, Thursday, to be exact, Henry woke me out of the deepest slumber. He had stayed up late, at his telescope, and had come to tell me of a meteoric shower, the most amazing he had ever witnessed, he said. I dressed quickly, and accompanied him to the observatory. There I saw the most astounding spectacle. Swarms of fire-balls, they looked like, sweeping across the heavens. Many were hissing to the earth. It was like a celestial bombardment of the world.

The meteoric showers, transiently brilliant, continued the next night, and the next. Astronomers all over the country were mystified; Henry equally so. No one could seem to account for them; they were out of season; the whole thing was freakish.

The last shower of meteors of any note occurred in November, 1833, when swarms of shooting stars fell in North America. They fell then, I found in our encyclopedia, like flakes of snow, to the number, as was estimated, of 240,000 in the space of nine hours, varying in size from a moving point to globes of the moon's diameter.

The earth in its orbit is constantly encountering meteors, which are accepted by scientists as the debris of comets, Henry explained, but this encounter was—well, inexplicable and bewildering. Remnants of the metallic bodies were falling in all sections of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Some were dropping in populous centers, bringing death and disaster; some at sea, and in the Great Lakes, sinking ships. Seemingly there was no let-up to this weird and dangerous phenomenon of the heavens.

On the following Sunday night, while the presses of the Daily Recorder were grinding out, by the hundreds of thousands, McGinity's exclusive, front-page story on Henry's and Olinski's scientific feat, which meant the linking of the earth and Mars by radio, a discovery almost beyond human conception, a great ball of blinding, bluish fire, giving off a trail of sparks, hissed down out of the heavens, and fell in Times Square.

A messenger of death from space, this red-hot metallic wanderer of the skies, crashed into the small triangle, formed by the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, between Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth Streets. It tore through the surface into the subway, just missing a passing train, and was imbedded in a mass of tangled steel rails and cement ten feet under the level of the underground railway.

Smaller fragments in its wake rattled down like hail on streets and housetops within a radius of a mile. Hardly a window-pane within this area that was not shattered to bits by the explosion, which lighted the entire city in a bluish glare. All taxicabs parked, or moving, in the square were overturned and wrecked; pedestrians were thrown to the ground, stunned, many lying unconscious. Sixteen persons were killed outright.

The gilt minute hand of a huge, electrically-illuminated clock overlooking the scene of disaster, was torn off by the explosion; the hour hand was untouched. When the mechanism of the clock was put out of business, the hour hand was pointing exactly at two. Had the meteor fallen a few hours earlier, the loss of life no doubt would have been appalling.

The scene of terror and confusion that followed the fall of the meteor, according to eye-witnesses, was indescribable. Many persons on Broadway, women of the street, mendicants, fell down on their knees, and prayed, believing that the end of the world had come. One man went raving mad. He ran through the streets, shouting: "The stars of heaven are falling unto the earth! Hide yourselves in the mountains! Hide from the wrath of the Lamb!"

The whole city was aroused. Thousands came pouring in from the outlying districts by subway, and in motor cars, to visit the scene of disaster. The police were helpless. Many women and children were trampled to death in the crush of the thousands who fought and pressed their way into Times Square. Efforts were made to bring the crowd to its senses, to distract the people's attention from the scene of the catastrophe; sirens sounded, the deep, booming note of bells came from the church towers, but to no avail.

When dawn broke at last, it was estimated that one million persons were massed in and about Times Square. All the diverging cross-town streets were choked with people and traffic. While above the silent hush of the

terrified masses, milling about in the sepulchral gray light of dawn, rose the strident voices of news-boys:

"Wuxtra! Wuxtra! Planet Mars speaks to the earth! All about radio communication between earth and Mars! Wuxtra! Wuxtra!"

Thus, upon a sky-minded people, made conscious for the first time, it seemed, of the strange and powerful forces that lurk in the upper regions, by the awe and terror caused by the falling stars, descended the news of Henry's triumphant accomplishment.

A new world of people had been discovered. The inhabitants of Mars were no longer a mythical race. Radio, girdling the earth as quick as thought, had drawn all nations closer together; now, bridging the abyss of outer space, it had drawn into its friendly relationship a new human race. To a nation-wide, or world-circling, hook-up of the radio, Mars could now be included. Mars was now our neighbor, as convenient to reach by wireless as London, Rome or Peiping; made more accessible really than either the Arctic or Antarctic zones.

Our telephone at the castle began to trill about eleven-thirty o'clock, shortly after McGinity's story had been run off the presses and the paper was on the street. The central operator reported "no answer" to hundreds of calls, made by curious-minded people, until a little after two in the morning, when she reported "Busy." Henry, it seems, had seen the meteor fall in New York through his telescope. Immediately he had phoned to Olinski, who was in the city, and Olinski had hurried to Times Square to investigate. The next day, when he came down to the country, to assist Henry in his preparations for the public demonstration, he was able to give us first-hand information of the occurrence.

As early as eight o'clock that morning, reporters swarmed about our lodge-gate. Having no head, or inclination, for handling the press representatives en masse, Henry phoned to McGinity to come down and help him out. McGinity came in a hurry, and took control of the situation in a masterly way. The other reporters, including many foreign correspondents, all seemed to like him.

Pat remained aloof from all the hurly-burly and excitement. Once she got a good look at McGinity from the head of the staircase, as he stood talking to

a group of reporters in the entrance hall; but she took care that he did not see her. The situation in which she now found herself was like something read in childhood, a romantic fairy-story; and Henry, to her, was the ogre. What saved her in the whole miserable affair was her superb common-sense. Henry didn't have to explain things to her any further; she instantly realized that, still under his authority, she must obey him, and marry Prince Matani.

Late in the afternoon she came downstairs, on the pretense of getting a book, to have a better look at him, so she told me afterwards, just to make sure he was no different from the time when she first had got him by heart. All the reporters had gone, and McGinity was sitting at the big desk in the library, engaged in writing his follow-up story of Henry's discovery. He was alone, Henry having gone to the observatory.

She looked at him through the open door, from the far side of the dining room. He had his face to her, and his head was bent over his work. Presently he looked up and saw her, but that was all. There was a worried expression on his face; he seemed afraid to smile. What a fool she was to expect anything to happen in the way she made it up in her own mind! So she turned away, and started to leave the room.

When he called after her, she stopped and looked back. He had risen, and had come to the library doorway. "Don't run away like that, please," he implored.

"You seem to be awfully busy," said Pat. "I didn't mean to disturb you. I was just coming in to get a book."

"What book?"

Pat was puzzled for a moment. "Oh, just a mystery book—anything," she said, finally.

"Did you read my story in this morning's Recorder?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes; it was fine. Uncle Henry said it was magnificent. Just enough play of the imagination to give it color, and told with such simplicity that everyone could understand."

"Thanks," he said. "I'm glad you liked it. At first, I was afraid the falling of that meteor in Times Square would kill it. But it didn't. It has made the New

York public more open-minded for what your Uncle Henry is going to spring on them tomorrow night, at Radio Center. You'll be there, of course. Shall I see you?"

"If I'm free," Pat replied.

"Meaning that you're not free," he remarked. He passed into a thoughtful mood but quickly snapped out of it. "Yes; I—I understand perfectly. Your Uncle Henry told me about the Prince and yourself this afternoon—about your coming engagement—and I'm afraid I'm not able to take it in yet. I don't see why you ever bothered about me at all." He stopped short, and began staring at the floor in deep contemplation.

"I don't know myself why I ever did—why I ever bothered about you," she returned, in a low, tremulous voice. "I had a feeling—well, I had a sort of feeling—" She, too, stopped short.

When McGinity glanced up, she was walking away. Then he heard Henry's voice, and went quickly back to his work.

XI

The reign of terror caused by the falling meteors gripped New York for five days. On Tuesday night, when Henry and Olinski were scheduled to give a public demonstration of interstellar signaling and the exchange of radio messages between the earth and Mars, in Radio Center, remnants of the hot heavenly bodies were still hissing down in unexpected places, with many fatalities.

Thousands of timorous families in the metropolitan area were living in their basements. The principal thoroughfares, Broadway, Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue, were strangely deserted at night. The newspapers were still screaming at the scientists and scholars for their failure to offer any explanation of the remarkable phenomenon, at the same time making an intensive play on Henry's discovery.

One enterprising paper, having exhausted all resources in its efforts to explain the mystery of the huge swarms of meteors, dug up from an unknown source the story of a mad scientist, long since dead, who had predicted a similar heavenly occurrence, which was to precede some sort of cataclysm of the solar system. This gave them the opportunity to intensify the importance of Henry's feat as a possible connecting link in the solution of the meteoric mystery.

It was, therefore, with a full-fledged case of the jitters that many thousands assembled in the vicinity of Radio Center on that Tuesday night. The people had worked themselves into a state of hysteria, and were in a receptive mood for anything unusual that might happen. Police emergency squads were on hand to hold the crowd in check, while police on motorcycles kept the streets clear for the fire brigades which were being called out hourly, to fight the conflagrations caused by the falling meteors.

While the demonstration was to be held in the auditorium of the National Radio Corporation Building, in Radio Center Annex, it was not officially sponsored by the president of the concern, Alden Scoville, who was sceptical and suspicious; but he was very nice and polite about it. He made it plain that the corporation was merely donating the use of its premises and equipment for the public experiment, in compliment to the valuable work of its assistant research engineer, Serge Olinski. There was to be a world-girdling hook-up, so that the deciphered code signals from Mars, and the replies transmitted from the earth, could be heard in every land. Everything was perfectly arranged, with loud speakers for the masses congregated outside the building.

Accompanied by Jane and Pat, I motored in from the country for the great event. Henry had gone into town early in the afternoon, to see after last minute details. We were to meet him in the NRC Building, where Prince Matani was to join us.

An odd thing occurred just prior to our leaving the castle. Jane was seated in the car, and I was waiting in the hall for Pat. When she did not appear promptly, I sent Niki, now acting in the double role of butler-valet, to find out the cause of her delay. Pat refusing to see him, I hurried upstairs myself to investigate.

Much to my indignation, she refused to attend the demonstration. As an excuse, she said it had just dawned on her mind that Henry's discovery was incredulous, and it would be dreadfully humiliating to her if he failed to establish interstellar communication.

"It's such a crazy thing, anyway," she said. "No one ever has succeeded in doing it, and I think Uncle Henry is just plumb crazy. It's idiotic; it simply can't be done. There's a queer streak in him. Look how he treated poor Mr. McGinity."

At the mention of the reporter's name, her nerves gave way, and tears began to flow. Then I realized that her explanation about the incredulity of Henry's feat had nothing to support it but her own word. Her tears were the direct proof that she was refusing to go because she had to sit formally with Jane and me, and Prince Matani, when she much preferred to be mixed up in the excitement with McGinity.

I did the only thing I could think of at the time. I took her firmly by the arm, and conducted her downstairs; and after she had made a mysterious telephone call, we were soon on our way to the city. Then something else disconcerting happened at the entrance to the auditorium. McGinity met us there, as though by accident. It looked to me as if he had been tipped off by telephone in advance of our—or Pat's—arrival. Pat seemed so excited and thrilled, I fancied I could hear her heart going at the rate of a million beats a minute.

We occupied seats in the front row, where the Prince, with a terrible black eye, joined us, about five minutes after we had arrived. I noticed him glaring in the direction of McGinity, who sat at the head of the press table, with about fifty other reporters. Occasionally McGinity would glance up from his work, and exchange smiles with Pat, when the Prince wasn't looking. So the only delight she got out of seeing him there had to be a secret one. No more than a furtive glance, or smile, whenever it could be managed with discretion.

Jane's nerves were jumpy. Careful inventory of the invited guests, who taxed the capacity of the auditorium, and the crowd I had glimpsed outside the building as we came in, convinced me that everyone was sitting, or standing, on needles and pins. My nose and ears have a habit of twitching whenever I am under a tense, nervous strain, and I had the uncomfortable

feeling that persons back of me, in the audience, were watching my ears wiggling. My nose kept twitching and jumping like a Mexican bean.

I tried to distract my thoughts and ease my anxiety by studying the mechanical equipment on the stage. I couldn't have explained what they were if some one had pointed a shot-gun in my face. Radio has always been a great mystery to me. I can never seem to get it into my brain that radio waves can travel 186,000 miles a second. As for bridging the sidereal abyss, as Henry calls it, between the earth and Mars, I was stumped.

When Henry and Olinski finally stepped on to the stage, and my wiggling ears rang with the tumult of thunderous applause, my first horrifying thought was that my brother had gone mad, and that Olinski had gone crazy with him. Pat's words of warning came back to me: "It's idiotic! It simply can't be done!" The voice of wisdom often comes from unexpected sources.

Henry looked scared, but he showed no nervous hesitancy in his introductory remarks, after being formally presented to the audience by Mr. Scoville, who acted as host. It was just nine-thirty when he took his place before the microphone. The signaling and messages from Mars were due to arrive at ten; they had never failed to come through at that hour, during all the preliminary experiments, extending over a period of three weeks.

"My dear friends," he began, in his modest, shrinking way, "I feel privileged to be here tonight, to tell and show you something of interest in connection with the research studies on static, recently made by my co-worker, Mr. Serge Olinski, and myself.

"For some time, mysterious radio waves, which appeared to come from some definite source in space, have been puzzling men of science engaged in radio research work. We know that infra-red radiation and short radio waves make it theoretically possible to communicate with other planets. They can penetrate the upper atmosphere, and may be directed toward any planet with accuracy and power, as well as penetrating the planets without scattering. The receiving apparatus for infra-red rays consists principally of a sensitive cell, so sensitive that the light of a match struck on the moon and translated into an electric current, can be registered on the earth."

Henry paused, to wet his lips with a sip from a glass of water. The audience showing rapt attention, he continued.

"To detect these radio waves from outer space, Mr. Olinski and I contrived between us to construct a delicate receiving instrument. We found they were distinctly electro-magnetic waves, that could be picked up by any standard radio set. Then, one night, less than a month ago, while testing it out, there was registered on this same instrument, a series of distinct dots and dashes, somewhat similar to our Continental Morse code.

"These signals were received regularly every night thereafter, round ten o'clock, fading out in about half an hour. This convinced us both that some intelligible communication force was at work in outer space. One evening, Mr. Olinski startled me by exclaiming: 'I have it! It's someone on the planet Mars, trying to attract attention on the earth. It's their station signal they're trying to get through to us.' As it turned out, Mr. Olinski was quite right.

"Now the purpose of our demonstration tonight is to show you, in the simplest manner possible, how we have been conducting interstellar communication by means of short waves. We do not claim to have solved the riddle of Mars. We have received code messages from some definite source in space, which we believe to be Mars, and we have successfully deciphered these messages, and through the same medium we have exchanged ideas with this definite source in space. Before we begin our experiment, however, Mr. Scoville, president of the National Radio Corporation, who is still a little sceptical, has prepared a list of questions, which he wishes to put to me."

At that, Mr. Scoville stepped forward, and joined Henry in front of the microphone.

"As I understand it, Mr. Royce," he began, "you believe Mars to be inhabited, and that civilization there is just as advanced as our own?"

"For many years, I was doubtful," Henry replied. "But, now, I'm absolutely certain of it."

"As the earth is only a very small part of our illimitable universe," Mr. Scoville went on, "why should the Martians—" He checked himself as Henry interrupted with an upraised finger.

"It is execrably bad taste to interrupt a speaker," Henry interjected, in an apologetic tone, "but I wish to correct you on one point. The planet we call

Mars is not known to its inhabitants by that name, therefore, it is erroneous to call them Martians."

Mr. Scoville smiled, and said: "I'm afraid you'll have to be more explicit than that, Mr. Royce. Where did you get that information?"

"I can be entirely explicit," Henry answered. "In transmitting our first radio message to the planet, we said: 'Stand by, Mars! Earth is calling!' To our great surprise, we received this reply: 'Noble friends, you err in calling our planet, Mars. This is the Red Sphere. Your planet, which you call the Earth, is known to us as the Blue Sphere.'"

"And why should they call the earth the Blue Sphere?" Mr. Scoville inquired.

"Because the earth, to the Martian astronomers, appears in a bluish haze," Henry explained, "just as Mars looks reddish to us."

"But why should the Martians—I beg your pardon—why should the inhabitants of the Red Sphere, take such an interest in our insignificant globe?"

"Doubtless, because the conviction has persisted there, among scientists, that our planet is inhabited," said Henry, "just as the conviction has persisted here that Mars harbors life."

"Supposing this is true, how can you explain their knowledge of a radio code, which somewhat resembles our International Morse code?"

After a moment's hesitation, Henry replied: "It's my opinion that they gained this knowledge from the International Morse messages directed on their planet by a powerful beam of light, from the lofty summit of the Jungfrau, in Switzerland, less than a year ago. This was undertaken by a group of American scientists, in the hope of attracting attention on Mars."

"Were these code messages, to a strange people, in a remote planet, decipherable in English?"

"Oh, yes," Henry readily replied; "and there's no doubt in my mind that superior intellects on Mars worked them out into English."

"It doesn't seem possible," Mr. Scoville remarked. "Life, conditions, everything on Mars must be so totally different from things as they exist

here."

Henry smiled, and said: "I firmly believe that all things in the beginning were created alike. The countless stars, suns and moons, and all the great planets, are largely composed of the same material that entered into the composition of this world. These meteorites that are falling about us contain the same metals, among them, iron and tin, which we mine from the earth. There is also a striking similarity between things of the material universe and the invisible, or spiritual, world. In Heaven, so we are told in the Bible, there are cities, streets, mansions, trees, gates and fountains. All of which makes it certain that human beings, like ourselves, not the grotesque monsters, as so often pictured, inhabit other planets."

"I'm inclined to agree with you in that," said Mr. Scoville, fingering his chin thoughtfully; "but I can't get it into my head about these Martians having a knowledge of the English language."

"You must take this fact into consideration, my dear Mr. Scoville," said Henry, "that for some years our radio short waves have been bombarding the planets, including Mars, with speeches and songs in English."

"If that is so, then the Martians may be learning to speak English with our nasal, American accent—what?" Mr. Scoville interposed, laughing. And the audience seemed to enjoy this witticism.

"Hardly," said Henry, trying his best to look grave, as the laughter subsided. "I have no reason to believe that, but I do believe the Martians have devised a means to pick up our language from the radio waves, and are adapting it for the purpose of communicating intelligently with us, just as we study, and often use, in various ways, other languages besides our own."

"Are their code messages decipherable in good English?" Mr. Scoville asked.

"Their spelling is very crude, but the liberal transcription, surprisingly enough, reads rather classical."

"By the bye, what station signals do you use?"

"I'll show you," said Henry. He motioned to Olinski, who rose, and moved quickly to a large blackboard, which had been placed in the center of the stage. With chalk, Olinski wrote in big capital letters: "ABUBCUC."

"Now, that is our—the earth's—radio station signal," Henry explained. "Simply—'ABC.'"

Olinski erased the lettering, and then wrote: "ZUZZUZYUYX."

"Now, there, we have the radio station signal for Mars," Henry said. "ZZYX."

"Looks crazy to me," observed Mr. Scoville, after Henry had explained the signals for the benefit of his invisible audience.

"Perfectly simple, after we got on to the Martian's way of doubling up on the consonants," said Henry. "It's something like pig-Latin. Very similar to a code I used myself as a boy, at school, when I wished to communicate something of a secret nature to a schoolmate. If you will allow me, please, I will try and illustrate just what I mean."

He walked to the blackboard, and wrote in a large hand: "Lulookuk outut! Tuteacuchuherur isus cucomuminungug!"

"Whatever does that mean?" asked Mr. Scoville, in some bewilderment.

"It means," replied Henry, returning to his place in front of the microphone: "'Look out! Teacher is coming!'"

The audience rocked with laughter. Henry's poise was still serene, and remained so until another sound reached his ears, rising above the diminishing laughter. He glanced at his watch. Ten o'clock—to the minute. Quickly he advanced to the edge of the stage, and raised his hand, commanding silence. The audience was instantly stilled.

Then Henry spoke. "Everybody quiet, now! Mars is on the air!"

XII

The silence in the auditorium was broken by the clicking of a telegraph instrument, which acted as a monitor on the receiving desk. The mechanical equipment on the stage was similar to that found in the radio department of any large New York newspaper office, with two typewriter desks, one fitted

for the receiving and transcribing of code messages, the other equipped for their transmission.

The Martian signals were coming in by direct wire control, from the receiving station Henry had erected for his interstellar experiments, at great expense, at Orient Point, Long Island, about seventy miles from the city. The replies from the earth, that were to follow, would go by wire control from the stage to his transmitting station, situated at Longhampton. His two private stations were twenty-five miles apart, a distance necessary to prevent interference.

The moment Mars was reported on the air by the engineers at the Long Island receiving station, Henry's mind, likewise Olinski's, suddenly developed, as it were, enormous dynamic activity, and the audience seemed to become so remote to them as to be non-existent.

Henry strode back quickly to the microphone, and said: "Stand by all stations! Stand by, Mars! We can hear Mars calling! Lost their way? Hello, Mars! Earth—New York—calling!"

Olinski was an expert wireless operator and typist. His fingers flew over the keyboard as he transcribed the Martian code characters that were being impressed by the ink recorder on narrow tape, resembling ticker tape. Operated by a pull-motor, this tape ran in a brass-groove attached to the front of the typewriter, under the operator's eyes.

On the completion of each sentence, Olinski would call: "All right!" and Henry would rip off a short length of paper containing the sentence, and begin the second transcription, into understandable English—the Martian classical style. He wrote them in chalk, on the blackboard, while Olinski's laboratory assistant read them off into the microphone.

The blackboard was just about half filled when the short waves began to fade, and nothing further was heard except a weird chattering in a receiving apparatus at the back of the stage. The message, so far received, decoded and transcribed on the blackboard, ran as follows:

"Salutations to the men of the Blue Sphere, with one moon, from the white men, your brothers in space, inhabitants of the Red Sphere, with two moons! Electric waves, radiant energy of the gods, at last bridges the fearsome gulf that yawns between us. No longer shall we be as strangers in our great universe, but united in bonds of sympathy and understanding. Your wireless messages fill the air; they have taught us many strange and wonderful things. Yet we thirst for more knowledge of thee, and the planet on which thou dwellest. The Red Sphere is matter in old age, slowly drying up. We are facing extinction. Long has been the struggle of the minority, the white race, against the majority, the ape-men of the jungles, now warring to become our masters...."

From this point on, a considerable portion of the message could not get through, apparently due to some ethereal disturbance; a turbulence, somewhere off in space, which Olinski labelled as "very spotty."

Suddenly, the engineers' efforts to re-contact Mars were successful. Fading and fluttering, the dots and dashes of the code began once again to register on the receiving machine. Transcribed by Henry on the blackboard, although piece-meal, the message was fairly intelligible, and really contained more startling information than the first part. It read thus:

"If thou desireth greater knowledge of our planet and people, look for our ship in the sky. Search carefully, on your mountain-tops and in the valleys. Fourteen suns have passed since the ship, launched in the darkness of an equatorial solar eclipse, was caught up in a cloud of cosmic bodies streaming over our planet. The key of knowledge thou wilt find in this ship ... scroll written by young priest-astronomer, darling of the gods, who first deciphered code of your strange language.... Our astronomers study your planet diligently through holes in your clouds.... They see great bluish masses ... can this be water?..."

The second part of the message quickly fading out, Henry's presence of mind did not forsake him in this emergency. Immediately, he began to dictate a reply to the Martian message, which Olinski quickly coded and transmitted, with breathless interest on the part of the audience.

In this Mars-bound reply, Henry laid strong emphasis on the "ship," mentioned by the Martians in their message, concluding as follows:

"Explain more fully about the ship in the sky. We have no knowledge of this. Meteors by the thousands have been spraying the Blue Sphere for many days. This stream of meteors may be the same swarm that your own planet encountered, fourteen suns ago. Answer immediately."

But no answer came.

Highly agitated, and believing himself to be on the brink of a still greater discovery, Henry rushed again to the microphone, and immediately broadcast a world-wide appeal for assistance in finding the Martian "ship," which he described as a rocket. Then, as a cheerful glow of anticipated success diffused itself all over him, he offered a reward of \$25,000 to any trooper, or constable, from Tokyo to Timbuctoo, or to any one, in any part of the world, who found the "ship."

"This so-called ship," he explained to his audience, visible and invisible, "is most likely a metal rocket, which the Martians have catapulted into the sky during a solar eclipse and meteoric display. Their two tiny moons are so close to the surface of Mars, and their speeds are so great, that along the Martian equator there are three or four total solar eclipses every day.

"Apparently, they have taken advantage of one of these eclipses, in their astronomical calculations, in directing the rocket earthward. It may have been driven, by some mighty engine, beyond the planet's weak pull of gravity, into this very same cloud of cosmic bodies that are at present showering the earth. The 'fourteen suns,' mentioned in their radio message, really mean fourteen days. Their day is but a half hour longer than our own. Making all allowances, it would take a rocket, catapulted from Mars, about two weeks to travel through space, and reach the earth."

By this time, every one in the auditorium was on the edge of their seats, actually quivering with excitement. It was like a mad-house when the meeting was finally adjourned. People stood on their seats, waving hats and handkerchiefs, and cheering Henry and Olinski.

That night stands out in my mind as one of gradually accumulating excitement. The demonstration ending in the wildest sort of clamor, and a

general rush for the stage, to congratulate my brother and his co-worker, I became separated from my party. Jane disappeared from my view as completely as though she had dropped through a trap-door in the floor.

Pat, somehow, lost sight of Prince Matani in the crush. I don't think she minded much, or she may have lost him intentionally. I spent ten excited and violent minutes looking for her and Jane. When I finally reached the lobby, there I found Pat talking to McGinity, as calmly as you please, and she looked entirely happy. After a quick and agitated good-night, he left her in my care, and dashed off to the Daily Recorder office, to write what he termed a "new lead" for the second edition. During the demonstration, he had despatched his copy, page by page, by messenger boy, from the press table.

Pat and I had to literally fight our way through the milling thousands, outside the NRC Building, to reach our car, in a nearby parking space. We found Jane in the car. She acted rather peevish, and steadily persisted in saying that it was my fault that we had become separated. There we waited a full hour for Henry. At last, I left the car to look for him.

Suddenly, I was caught in a crowd that had broken through the police lines. A stout man collided with me, and knocked me down; then some one ran over me as I lay on the pavement. I believe the crowd would have trampled me to death then and there if a policeman had not rescued me. Then Olinski came rushing up to me. I must have presented a queer sight to him, my hat at a strange angle and my clothes mussed up.

"Where's Henry?" I gasped.

"In a telephone booth, in the lobby, hiding from the crowd," Olinski replied, breathlessly. "The crowd insists on carrying us both around on its shoulders, like a hero aviator, or a victorious football player. I've just escaped by the merest chance. Better get back to your car, and wait."

He dashed off, and I returned to the car. Another half hour, and still no sign of Henry. I was beginning to be quite alarmed when he appeared, at last, accompanied by a young man.

"Bob!" exclaimed Pat, when she saw them coming.

Sure enough, it was McGinity. Henry had waited until he had cleaned up on his story, and was now taking him to our country place to spend the night. It

was plain to see Henry had formed a sort of attachment for the young reporter. As it turned out, McGinity was to be a valuable ally the next day.

"I'm up to the neck in this thing now," Henry explained, as he joined us in the car, "and no one can render me more valuable assistance than Mr. McGinity. I've asked him to help me in making up a statement for the press, which I've promised to hand out, first thing in the morning."

McGinity insisted on riding in the front seat with the chauffeur. One look at Pat convinced me that she was very pleased to have him with us, even if he rode astride the radiator hood, which was hardly possible, with the chauffeur's usual rocket-like speed as we rushed through the dark countryside.

It was long past midnight when we rolled through the lodge-gate at our Sands Cliff estate. During the drive from the city, many meteors had flashed across the sky. We had just stepped up to our front door when there was a sudden flash of prismatic colors almost directly over our heads, a soft whirring noise, like a plane makes in the dead of night, followed by a heavy thud, indicating that perhaps some heavy object had struck the ground. Then everything became dark and quiet again.

The incident had an electrical effect on Henry. "That was a meteorite, as sure as shot!" he exclaimed. "Looks like it fell somewhere along the waterfront. What about going down, and having a look round?"

"Let's go," said McGinity, eagerly.

It took some argument on the part of Jane and myself to keep them from making the search, but at last we managed it. Half an hour later, we were all in our beds. I was so dead tired, I felt that I would never wake up once I got to sleep.

It was bright daylight, seven o'clock in the morning, when I was wakened by Niki knocking loudly at my bedroom door.

XIII

Niki was an early bird; he always took a walk round the castle grounds long before the rest of the household was up. His walk that morning had taken him along the water-front. On the beach, about a mile from our private dock, he had discovered a strange-looking object, something that resembled a huge sky-rocket, as he described it to me afterwards. On close inspection, he thought he heard a tapping sound inside the metal tube, as though some one was imprisoned there. This had alarmed him greatly, and he had taken it on the run back to the castle.

I was only partly awake when I admitted him to my room after his violent knocking at my door. His usual Oriental calm had disappeared entirely, and I gazed at him wonderingly as he stood, gesturing and talking wildly, as though he had lost his senses. I kept shaking my head dubiously.

"But Meester Livingston!" he cried. "I am telling you the truth. I am telling you."

"You're still dreaming, Niki," I said; "you haven't waked up yet. You'll drag me down to the beach, and what will we find there? Nothing."

"But I've seen it, touched it with my hands, Meester Livingston," he went on excitedly. "There is something inside of it—alive."

"Inside of what?" I asked, suppressing a yawn.

"Inside the big fire-cracker," he replied. "It is big enough to put an elephant inside—maybe not so big—" he stretched both arms full length; "maybe, this long. Maybe, it is that ship from the stars, Meester Henry was talking about on the radio last night. If it is, maybe, I will get the \$25,000 reward for finding it."

"Ship? A rocket?" Then I blew up. "Why, you little Filipino jackass, why didn't you tell me so before?"

"I have been telling you," he replied, shaking his head, as if in pity for my lack of comprehension.

I sent him off in haste to waken McGinity. By the time I was half-dressed, McGinity joined me, fully dressed. In less than ten minutes, we dashed out of the castle, and made a break for the beach. When Niki had pointed out the strange object to us, lying on the sand, I sent him back to rouse Henry.

Before we reached the queer-looking thing, I had made up my mind that whatever it was, it might be mysterious but nothing more. Not by the wildest stretch of the imagination could I see a projectile from another planet landing on this earth, even if it had wings. But when we got up to it, and I heard a sound inside, as Niki had first reported, as though some one was tapping against the metal, like men trapped in a submarine, signaling to their rescuers, and logical connection was established in my mind between the Martian radio message and the landing of this strange rocket from the sky, the only real brain-storm I ever had in my life was right there.

I judged the object to be about ten feet in length, and about ten feet in circumference at its widest part. The outer shell looked like copper. It had a cone-shaped nose, which seemed to have been embedded deep in the sand when it fell from space, but the weight of the body had tipped it over, so that it now rested in a semi-horizontal position. I noted at once that its metal surface was pitted, and had a fused crust, like the varnish-like coating of a meteorite, no doubt due to the action of the heat generated by its rapid passage through the earth's atmosphere.

What McGinity's thoughts were, during our hurried inspection, I did not know. He appeared to have been awed into silence. Presently, he said, in a very serious tone:

"This is the ship, or rocket, from Mars, all right. Nothing was ever manufactured on this earth that looks anything like it. As for that tapping sound—" he stopped, and leaned over, with his ear pressed against the projectile. "Something is alive in there, sure as faith. We must act quickly, or it'll be suffocated." He made a rapid examination of the rocket's exterior. "I don't see any way of opening the darned thing. Do you?"

I joined him in his inspection. "It seems to be hermetically sealed," I said. "Looks like a Chinese puzzle to me."

Hearing voices approaching, I wheeled round, to see Henry coming on the run—bareheaded, and wearing only his trousers and shirt and bedroom slippers. Niki was running some steps ahead of him. He was almost breathless when he came up to us. He gave the rocket one searching glance, and then he went plain crazy. Here it was, the "ship" from Mars, with all its potentialities.

"My God!" was all he said.

I don't suppose I'll ever remember exactly what happened after Henry's arrival on the scene. Revelations, weird and foreboding, crowded the ensuing half hour so quickly, one upon the other, I became dazed and dizzy. I know we all worked heroically, and swiftly, to free the living thing inside the rocket. We were assisted in the operation by a dozen, strong-armed men-servants. Already, we had quite a gallery of spectators; all of the servants practically on the estate, but no one from outside. Jane and Pat stood on a sod embankment, fringed with willows, some yards away; even at this distance, I could discern that Pat was wildly excited but was being held in check by Jane.

Henry was handy with tools, but McGinity proved himself more capable when it came to the actual opening of the rocket. Henry, however, was privileged to be the first one to look inside. He gasped, and stepped back like one stunned. Then McGinity took a look. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" I asked, as I stepped forward, tremulous and excited, to take my turn.

"That's what it is," he replied, cryptically. "Looks like Barnum's 'What Is It?'"

To my dying day, I shall never forget the strange and surprising sight that greeted my eyes as I peered through the opening. I could only describe the huge, revolting-looking creature inside the rocket, at first glance, as a man-ape.

Whatever it was, Henry gave orders for its quick release. "This creature," he said, as we prepared to carry out his orders, "greatly resembles the hairy, primitive man of Mars, inhabiting the jungles of the planet, described in the Martian radio message last night. It was probably captured and placed inside the rocket while in a restive state, like a protoplasm, so that life could be retained during the long and perilous flight through space. It seems, at present, to be in a semi-conscious state. Probably revived to some extent by the effect of the earth's atmosphere."

He stopped, and then, after taking another look inside, continued. "Yes; the creature's eyes are open; he stared wonderingly at me. In his right hand, he's clutching what appears to be a metal bar. Evidently, he's worked it loose

from some part of the rocket, and has been hammering with it on the sides, to attract attention."

"Which shows that he's got sense," supplemented McGinity.

Henry turned to me. "See here," he said, quietly; "you go and explain matters to Jane and Pat, and send them back to the house. Send all the women servants back. The sight of this thing may send them into hysterics—Jane especially."

After I had carried out his instructions, and returned to the spot, Henry took McGinity and me by the arms, and walked us away for some distance before he brought us to a stop.

"Now," he said, "we can take one thing as a fact: this ship, or pear-shaped metal rocket, fell out of the sky last night, and was embedded here in the sand. In view of the radio message registered from Mars last night in Radio Center, are you both willing and ready to accept this rocket, and the strange creature inside of it, as coming from Mars?"

"I imagine that's the real answer," McGinity said. "This rocket plunged from the sky, that's certain. Of course, I look at it from the newspaper story angle. But I'm willing to stand by you, Mr. Royce. Whatever you say, goes with me."

"And you, Livingston?" Henry looked at me.

"Well—er—it is not quite clear to me, Henry," I replied. "Your belief that it came from Mars may be good enough in theory, perhaps—"

"You must remember, Livingston," Henry interrupted, "that the Martians may be centuries in advance of us in many ways. Granting that they are, may we not assume that they could invent a gun of some unusual, or unknown style, that could shoot a rocket into space, beyond the gravitational pull of their planet, which is not so strong as ours?"

"Anyway, that's one way we can theorize," I said, "whether it's true or not."

"Grant anything or not," McGinity said to me, "you heard that radio message from Mars last night, announcing that such a rocket, or 'ship,' had been launched earthwards, and later, you saw the explosion in the sky right over this spot, which undoubtedly marked the fall of this rocket."

I nodded. "Yes; and it's absurd on the face of things, I'll admit, not to believe my ears and eyes." And then I committed myself. "I'm darned if I know what this thing is—or where it came from," I asserted, "but here it is, and I'll agree to anything you and Henry say."

"All right—good!" said Henry, slapping me on the back. "Now, we are all agreed on this. We are three witnesses, then, on whose testimony will hang the credulity of the world."

"Anyway, nobody can accuse me of cooking up a story," McGinity remarked, as we retraced our steps.

XIV

Returning to the rocket, we found that the problem of getting the strange passenger out of it had been solved by the foreman of the estate, a very ingenious and alert young man. Without the slightest indication of fear, he had passed a strong rope under the arms of the creature, padding the rope where it touched the body, as a protective measure against injury. Outside, he had rigged up a small derrick. His idea was to hoist the passenger by the shoulders, through the opening in the rocket.

One of the chauffeurs had brought a stretcher and some blankets from the garage in the car. Everything was set for the performance when I heard Henry murmur: "The providence of heaven for this rocket to land here!"

I was just pushing forward to get another peep. The creature was anything but pleasant to look at, or be near, and I was thankful that I was smoking a strong cigar. After it had been hoisted out of the rocket, and placed with tender care on the stretcher, I found myself still staring at this queerest of queer things; so extremely hideous as to be almost fascinating to the gaze; a sort of living satire on a man-beast, which might have been imagined by Jonathan Swift, or drawn by Doré.

He was unclothed, of course, and there was a strong probability that he had never worn any clothes at all, not even a loin cloth. But out of the strange fellow's face gleamed a pair of unusually bright, wondering eyes. His look

was suggestive of extreme gratitude for our rescuing him from his perilous plight.

Our first gesture of good-will and hospitality was made by Niki, who had brought from the castle two long-necked bottles, one containing milk, the other, sherry. Just before the creature was lifted out of the rocket, and was held in an upright position by the ropes from the derrick, Niki, at Henry's suggestion, had offered it the choice of the two bottles. To our amazement, the creature's sharp eyes had fastened themselves at once on the bottle containing the sherry, while a hand, that was suggestively like a chimpanzee's, pointed to it. Then he opened his enormous mouth and held it open.

Niki poked the bottle of sherry down his throat, and gave him an inordinately large dose of it, and the creature gulped it down as if it had been a teaspoonful of cough syrup; such a dose would have made me jump; in him, it did not produce the flicker of an eye-lash. The sherry was followed by a small dose of milk.

It is only fair to describe the creature in his natural state, for a few days later, Henry dressed him in custom clothes, under which his hairy ugliness, and revolting uncouthness, were almost completely hidden.

When first discovered, he appeared to be in a coma, his head drooped over to one side; his face was puffed and blotched, a little greenish. Henry had explained this condition as arising from the lassitude of space, for the rocket must have traveled at a frightening speed. At first touch, his body felt cold; there was hardly any pulse.

To my mind he was human, but a separate species, similar to the skeletons of the ancient type of man recovered from deposits in certain sections of our globe. As I studied him, I realized that the term "human" should be employed with reservation.

Judged by a human standard, I placed him at once in my mind as being in the zone between the form of man and ape, a man type but not a fully evolved product. His massive jaws, for one thing, suggested the ape. He was at least six feet in height. His shoulders were broad and massive, and his arms were a little longer in proportion to a man's. He had very broad hands, with short, thick fingers. But the fingers, I noticed, were not united

by a web, which is characteristic of apes on the earth, this web often extending to the first finger joint.

His skin was as black as the Negro types of Africa. It was covered with large coarse hair, under which was a coat of short, curly hair; a very ample bodily protection, I figured, provided by nature, against the range of temperatures on his planet. He had a small skull, and enormous canine teeth. The perplexing aspect was his human-like countenance. The skin of his face was a pinkish white, like a baby's, and of a glossy appearance. The beard-line was marked with a light powdery growth of hair, common to boys approaching manhood; under his chin was a real beard, a short and thick one. Judged humanly, he would pass for a man in his late twenties.

While I was studying his general appearance, it struck me as strange that so far he hadn't spoken. When Henry walked over to the stretcher from the rocket, I sounded him on the talk question.

"There's the possibility that the creature is still in the monosyllabic stage," he replied. "We won't know if he has the power of speech until he comes out of the terrific strain he's been under, and becomes acclimated. I dare say he'll be sluggish for some time, because of the earth's heavy gravitational pull, so different from that on Mars, where the people walk and leap with feathery lightness because of the planet's small size. While, on the sun, for instance, the gravitational pull is so powerful that you or I could only move about with the assistance of a steam-crane."

I smiled at the thought of being assisted in walking by a steam-crane, and wondered what would happen if I were in a hurry to catch a train. Then I laughed out loud. My laughter, however, was provoked at the sight of the creature opening his mouth, and holding it open, at the approach of Niki, as if to signify that he wanted another dose of sherry. Certainly he had brains even if he couldn't talk.

Calling the servants over to the stretcher, Henry said: "Now, men, this stranger from a far distant world needs our immediate assistance. Everybody give a hand, and we'll carry him to the car and then drive to the castle."

"Surely you're not going to take him inside the castle?" I said.

"Why not?" Henry retorted. "We're not used to this sort of guest, I know, but we'll just have to get used to him. I regard this helpless creature as an ambassador of good will from another world, and I intend to extend to him the same hospitality I would offer the Ambassador of Great Britain, if he were my guest."

"Have you consulted Jane about this?" I persisted.

"No!" he roared; adding, testily: "Am I not master in my own house?"

"You are being absurd, Henry. That's all I've got to say." This closed the conversation so far as I was concerned.

Henry went on, however, though in a more subdued tone. "In any case," he said, "since you've brought the matter up, I'll give you my word that as long as the creature is a guest in our home, he shall be kept under careful surveillance."

He walked off, and in a few moments, he was leading the way, as six men, with their uncanny burden, swung away toward the car. I followed them, at some distance, and to my stunned amazement, on arriving at the castle, I learned from Jane that Henry had put the thing to bed in our guest chamber de luxe, which we called the State Apartment. Jane was more disturbed than she cared to admit. She and Pat had both seen the creature, and she spoke of it as looking "rather dreadful." When I asked her how Pat had taken it, she said Pat had looked surprised but not at all startled.

"Listen, Jane," I said, in a serious tone. "Do you think if Henry was in his right mind, he would be capable of such action, housing this awful, frightful thing in with the rest of us?"

Jane pretended not to be listening.

"Nevertheless," I continued, "you know that our beloved parent went insane before he died, but it was kept quiet, and we can't afford to ignore a thing like this, breaking out in Henry, to conceal an old scandal in our family."

At this Jane turned on me. "Be careful, Livingston," she admonished; "no good rattling the skeleton in our closet with a reporter in our midst. I think Henry's acting very sanely, considering the strain he's been under, and I can't help thinking, as he does, that it was a definite act of providence for

this rocket from Mars to fall near our beach. As for the creature that came in the rocket, in its present state, I'm sure it can do no harm."

I tried to prolong the argument, but she refused to discuss the subject any further, and finally left me. On my way to breakfast, I ran into Pat, who had just finished hers. "Oh, Uncle Livingston!" she exclaimed. "What a lot of fun we're going to have with this big Teddy Bear in the house!" A remark so incredible that I almost gasped.

"It will be quite pleasant, won't it?" I observed, sardonically. "But some people mightn't like it."

Then she caught me by the arm, and drew me aside. She dropped the gay tone of her voice, and glanced round half-fearfully before speaking. "I really don't like the idea so much myself," she admitted. "But you see—now brace yourself for this—I must pretend I'm not shocked, or frightened, because Mr. McGinity says all this makes a whale of a good story, even better and bigger than the fall of the meteor in Times Square, and establishing radio communication with Mars. And, you know, I'm too good a friend of his to spoil—a whale of a good story."

"Isn't this stretching things rather fine?" I asked. "Mr. McGinity is a smart young man, as I believe I've said before, but there's no reason under heaven why you should jeopardize your comfort and personal safety just for the sake of his getting a story. It's dangerous business."

"Call it what you like," she returned evasively. "I've made up my mind not to be frightened, and I'm going to stick to it even if—" She checked herself, and I saw that she was trembling.

I was startled. "Look here, Pat," I said. "We can't have you work yourself into a state of nerves over this. I'll go and find Henry, and order him to get this Barnum's 'What Is It?' out of the house, quickly; and if he doesn't, I'll have it removed by force, and hand it over to the Bronx Zoo. Why—why, the creature might sneak out, in the dead of night, and get in your bedroom!"

"Why, in heaven's name, should it want to get in my room?" she said, with a return of her usual composure. "That sounds rather silly to me."

"I suppose I shouldn't be telling you this, Pat," I said, doubtfully, "as you're still very young, and—"

"I don't think you can tell me much I don't know," she interrupted. "Anyway, Niki is going to act as the creature's guard and valet, and he's very much pleased about it."

"Oh, Niki will do anything, now, short of murder, to please Henry," I said; "he's hot after that \$25,000 reward. But the whole matter to me—now prepare yourself—'ain't what you'd call natural.' If putting a big chimpanzee in our bedchamber de luxe, and giving it valet service, isn't the act of a lunatic, I don't know what is."

"I agree with you," Pat rejoined, "but I'm afraid, as far as Uncle Henry is concerned, the matter is hopeless. We must try to get his point of view."

"No; I'll be darned if I will!" I said to myself. Then I said, aloud: "Anyway, you will lock your door carefully, Pat?"

"I always do," she replied, laughing, and left me.

She had no sooner gone, when McGinity came downstairs, and we had breakfast together. He didn't say very much; apparently he was lost in thought. My mind was too confused to work properly, but while we ate, in strained silence, I was trying to think a way out of all the mess as best I could. Presently, McGinity broke the silence by exclaiming, partly to himself: "That terrible ape in the same house with Pat! Think of it!"

"I have thought, to my own shame, and to the shame of our house," I returned. "But Henry seems to think this visitor from Mars the gentlest thing alive."

"My hands are tied," he said, despondently. "Can't you suggest something?"

"The only thing I can suggest is that you stay on with us, if you can arrange to do your writing here," I said, "as a sort of personal guard for Pat. As Henry seems to have grown rather fond of you, I'm sure he can hold no objection. Of course, not a word to Pat about it."

McGinity sat up suddenly in his chair. "That's a great idea," he exclaimed. "My City Editor just ordered me to stick on the job, and I was planning to stay at a hotel in the village."

"If you were to act as personal guard for Pat," I remarked, "there would be nothing sentimental about it, of course."

"Oh, of course, nothing like that," McGinity replied; and he colored and looked at Pat's white cockatoo, on its perch, by the window, the furniture, the ceiling—anywhere but at me.

"I'm sure I can arrange it with Henry to have you stay," I said. "If he insists on keeping this Teddy Bear, as Pat jokingly calls it, in the house, I'm afraid, I'm sadly afraid, there's going to be trouble. Unpleasantness, at any rate."

McGinity looked me square in the eyes. "Pardon me, Mr. Livingston," he said, "but—is there any insanity running in your family?"

Recalling Jane's admonishment, I hesitated a moment before replying. "Isn't there a chance of an abnormal state of mind bobbing up in any family?" I said at last, and let it go at that.

"Anyway, we've got to keep Pat safe," McGinity said. "And as long as this creature is kept in the house, she should be instructed never to wander round alone, upstairs or downstairs. Why, I've got nerves of steel, myself, but I'll confess that if I bumped unexpectedly into a creature like that, in the dark, I'd run like hell."

At this, Henry entered the picture, remaining just long enough to dash down a cup of black coffee, and to invite McGinity and me down to the beach for a more detailed study of the rocket, and to search for the parchment scroll concealed therein, the deciphering of which he felt would help solve the riddle of Mars.

"I'm mighty glad to have your assistance, McGinity," he said, over his hasty cup of coffee, "and I've been wondering if you could arrange with your newspaper to remain with us, and write your stories here."

McGinity gave me a significant side glance, then replied: "I'm sure I can fix it, Mr. Royce. Thanks a lot for the honor and compliment."

On our way out, Henry further informed us that he had called in the best physician in the neighborhood, who was now at the bedside of the visitor from Mars, rendering every possible medical aid. He seemed rather disgruntled when Pat met us on the terrace, and insisted on accompanying us to the beach. But this mood was quickly offset by the appearance of Olinski, who had raced from the city to the castle as fast as a taxi-cab could get him there, in response to Henry's urgent telephone call.

XV

All that had transpired, of course, was of astounding revelation to Olinski. He could hardly contain himself when we showed him the rocket; in fact, he didn't contain himself. He threw his arms around Henry, and kissed him explosively on both cheeks, after the French manner, much to my brother's embarrassment. Then he began to act half-dotty. But, thanks to his half-dottiness, it was from him, and not from Henry, that we got our first intelligible explanation of the mechanism of this metal messenger from the far reaches of interstellar space.

I can't remember much that he said. I often think back and try to recall his clever explanations of this and that, but with little result. I suppose my mind lacks the scientific twist to understand such matters. I do recall, however, a few of his remarks.

After he had completed his first inspection, he turned to Henry, and said: "There isn't a screw or bolt, in the makeup of this rocket, that resembles those we make on this earth. Their screw-thread runs in reverse order to ours."

"In other words," said Henry, "to drive in a Martian screw you've got to use a reverse motion to ours."

"Precisely," Olinski agreed. "And their bolts are not cylindrical like ours, either, but square-shaped," he continued. "They wouldn't serve their purpose if they were round for the Martians seem only to drill square holes, and they don't use nuts to fasten their bolts. Instead, their bolt seems to have a peculiar form of polarity, capable of attracting to itself a magnetizable substance; in this instance, steel caps, which secure the bolts as firmly in place as our nuts do."

There was a brief pause, following this amazing elucidation, during which I whispered to McGinity: "Do you think it all seems possible?" And he quickly replied: "Screws and bolts cannot speak false."

"Now, it looks to me," Olinski said to Henry, as we gathered closer around him, "as though your contention that all things were created alike in the

universe, would also apply to the creative works of men. This rocket, if constructed on Mars—and I certainly believe it was—proves that the minds of human beings, whether they're inhabitants of the earth, or Mars, or any other planet in our universe, run in the same channel, or along similar lines."

"But why should they drive their screws in backwards?" I asked. "I can't understand it. It's so much easier the way we do it here, on earth. It sounds screwy."

Olinski smiled, but could give no explanation. "Now, this rocket," he went on, "is constructed of aluminum, and its cone-shaped nose contains a tiny bulbous chamber, in which the liquid fuel, which appears to be a mixture of highly volatile gasoline and liquid oxygen, burns to form the propulsion gases which shoot downward, like the gases from gunpowder in the ordinary fire-works rocket.

"It may be that this fuel is something we know nothing about," he went on. "Interplanetary travel involves the production of a substance that will produce more energy per pound than is required to lift that pound out of the earth's gravitational pull. We haven't been able as yet to produce such a fuel. Looks like the Martian scientists have put one over on us.

"There, you see," as he spoke, he pointed, and we all looked, "at the sides of this cone are two parallel tubes, which serve a double purpose. They are the fuel containers, and are also the standards on which are mounted the fins, or control tail, which apparently keeps the rocket on its course."

"I see it has asbestos insulation," Henry put in.

"Yes; and a circulating system that beats anything I've ever seen," Olinski said. "This creature you rescued from this rocket, practically sailed to earth in a vacuum, with the air inside trying to get out, while the oxygen he took out of the air was replenished by tanks. There they are! See?"

Henry nodded. "It's all perfectly understandable to me," he said, "and all marvelous, beyond measure."

"I'm afraid it doesn't seem perfectly all right to me, Mr. Olinski," I interposed. "You and Henry are both acting in great sincerity, but you are asking us to accept explanations that cannot be verified."

Henry turned to me, and said brusquely: "All facts so far advanced conflict in no way with the truth."

"But your facts may be wrong," I persisted. "In the first place, it is perfectly fantastic to even imagine that the Martians are so scientifically advanced that they could send a rocket like this, safely and unerringly through space to the earth."

"Fantastic?" Olinski exclaimed, heatedly. "No more so than Colonel Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic would have appeared to the world in the time of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella."

Our discussion was suddenly arrested by a cry of surprise from Pat, who had been inspecting the rocket, unnoticed by us.

"Oh, look! See what a pretty box I've found!" she exclaimed.

A very few steps brought the four of us to her side. She handed the box to Henry. It was a small, oblong box of some strange wood, beautifully made, the lid embellished with the design of a gold star. A most unusual looking box, which somehow had been overlooked. There was some trickery about opening it, which Olinski soon solved.

As it turned out, this was a discovery of first importance. The box contained a scroll of parchment, which, when unwound, was about three feet long. The parchment contained tiny tracings, the most minute writing I've ever seen, and apparently written in purplish ink. The tracings, or cuneiform writings, or whatever they were, were wholly unintelligible; to me they resembled myriads of fly-specks. Unfortunately, Henry and Olinski had forgotten their microscopic glasses, but they both accepted the scroll and its contents instantly as the "key of knowledge," mentioned in the Martian radio message, the deciphering of which, they predicted, would disclose the complete truth about Mars.

Looking back on that day, with all its strange and exciting revelations, I cannot help marveling at how really peaceful it was, in view of what was to come.

McGinity remained as our house guest. Before the afternoon was over, he had typed and sent off the bulk of his copy by messenger to the Daily Recorder. Every precaution had been taken by Henry to prevent any news leaking out about the landing of the Martian rocket, and the discovery of its

strange occupant, so that McGinity might score another "beat," which was, I thought, mighty decent of him. On the other hand, he put his foot down firmly on the reporter's plea to have photographs taken. He felt the popping of photographic flashlights might unduly excite the creature from Mars, in its present state of collapse.

McGinity was rather silent about his work, but Olinski nearly drove me wild. If he went half-dotty on first seeing the rocket, he went completely dotty when Henry ushered him into the presence of the horrible thing that had come in it. When he had worn Henry out, talking, he began following me around, and insisting on discussing the awful thing, and his various suppositions connected with it. He would have kept on talking indefinitely, I believe, if Henry, finally, had not locked him in the library and forced him to settle down to the laborious task of decoding the Martian code-message contained in the scroll.

The evening passed with intolerable slowness. After dinner, Pat and McGinity contrived to meet on the terrace. I watched them from a window in the entrance hall as well as I could, not that I felt there was anything wrong about their meeting secretly. When they strolled in, nonchalantly, about half an hour later, I was pretending to read the evening newspaper.

By ten o'clock, the castle was quiet and dark, everything locked up for the night, and we were all settled upstairs; Jane with a novel and her smelling salts. She had not come down for dinner; one of the servants reported that she looked like a ghost.

I was very uneasy myself. I had no sooner entered my bedroom when a queer apprehension seized me. I was shivering all over. Restlessly, I paced up and down, trying to diagnose my case. The strange experiences and the excitement of the day had been a little too much for my nerves, perhaps. No; it wasn't that; something deeper, something harrowing, possessed me.

No sound came from within the castle. Everything seemed enveloped in a weird-like silence, the silence that often precedes a storm. I was unable to set my thoughts in order. The whole affair did not ring entirely true. What was the meaning of all that had happened? Surely, some one held the secret.

I tried to think these things out slowly, but try as I would, I couldn't make my cogitations run along prescribed paths. I kept asking myself questions.

What would the world think of this latest, incredible revelation? But was it so incredible? Were not scientists agreed that there are probabilities in interplanetary travel which do not overstep the boundaries of accepted natural laws? And what about this frightening creature from Mars, Henry had brought into the castle and put to bed, across the hall from me? What was it doing? For I was certain, in my present disturbed state of nerves, that it was up to something.

Niki, I knew, had been relieved as guard for the night by the two chauffeurs, George and William, whom Henry had assigned to take turns in keeping watch at the bedside of this uncouth stranger within our gates.

The creature interested me more and more as I thought about it; by midnight, it had become a fearsome obsession. In my temporary aberration, I imagined it creeping about the castle, in the dark, trying doors—Pat's door. I wondered if she had taken my advice to have an extra lock put on her bedroom door.

In my anxiety about her, I finally turned off the lights in my room, and opened my door just a crack, to satisfy myself that everything was as quiet and secure as the deep silence denoted.

My room is one of six sleeping rooms on the second floor, which opens on a broad hall, reached by a short flight of stairs, leading from the landing in the gallery of the main staircase. Four of these were now occupied by members of our family. Henry's suite is at the east end of the hall, and mine at the west end. Between us, with bright southern exposure, are Jane's and Pat's bedrooms.

Across the hall, with windows fronting on the Sound, are the two principal guest rooms. The Blue Room, formerly occupied by McGinity, a nobly proportioned apartment, and the State Apartment, in which was ensconced the visitor from Mars. These two apartments are separated by an archway, spanning the landing of the short stairway from the gallery.

Practically the same arrangement holds on the third floor; that is, the six sleeping rooms open on a broad hall—rooms almost never used. But two of them were in use this night—McGinity in one, and Olinski in another. The servants sleep in a back wing, which is built on a lower level than the

second floor. A rear stairway, rather awkwardly placed, connects the service wing with the second floor.

When I poked my head out through the crack in my bedroom door, two things became obvious. One was, that all the lights in the hall had been turned off; the other, that the door of the bedchamber across from mine, where the Martian creature had been placed, was slightly ajar; the room itself seemed to be in complete darkness.

This was enough to startle any one with strong nerves and a normal heart. With my nerves jumpy, and my heart likely to go back on me at sufficient provocation, I experienced a strong emotional shock. Fear clutched me that the terrifying creature had escaped from its room, probably while its guard slept, and was now roaming about the castle.

Presently I heard a sound; it came from the far end of the hall, where Pat's room was. A sound of soft footfalls and of heavy breathing. I sensed at once that something terrible was going on. My first thought was to fly upstairs and rouse McGinity; then I decided to meet the situation single-handed. I was so scared that I was almost entirely incapable of thought.

The darkness of the hall was broken dimly at the stair landing by the reflection of light from the lower hall, where a lamp is kept burning all night. I do not consider myself at all a cowardly character, but when I saw a huge, black something moving stealthily in the vicinity of Pat's room, I experienced a shock that left me, for a moment, spineless and breathless.

I have no clear recollection of what happened immediately after this, save that the huge, black something I chased along the hall, and partly down the rear staircase to the servants' wing, turned out to be Mamie Sparks, our fat Negro laundress. She had done some late ironing, and had brought up the necessary fripperies for Pat, leaving the bundle of laundry outside her door.

I was never so glad to see any one as I was to see Mamie. Her jet black skin had gone a ghastly yellow.

"Lawzee, Mr. Livingston, w'at's de mattah?" she asked, faintly. "Yuh near scered de life out o' me. Ah t'ought yuh was dat big monkey-man chasin' me."

I had to explain then what I thought I had seen from my bedroom door. As it developed later, the chauffeur on watch in the Martian's bedroom, had

purposely turned off the lights, and opened the door slightly, to get a circulation of air, for which I did not blame him.

Mamie looked very solemn when she spoke, almost weird, as her great eyes rolled around, and her voice fell to a low whisper.

"Ah nevah did like monkeys, nohow," she said, "an' Ah reckon Ah'se nevah goin' to git us'd to havin' one round de house."

"Don't think about it, Mamie," I admonished; "and please forgive me for frightening you so."

"Yessah—yessah," she said, and went down the back stairs.

That is all that happened that night.

XVI

I shall go as little as possible into detail of what occurred on the day following the landing of the Martian rocket on the water-front, and the discovery of its terrifying occupant, who had been our guest over-night. By nine o'clock, the general demoralization of our household was utter and complete. Several of the servants had handed in their resignations, declaring they wouldn't sleep in the place another night, "with that thing in it!" Mamie Sparks, the colored laundress, had vanished at dawn. Jane had collapsed, which helped further to upset the household routine.

There was nothing I could do but to face it out. One thing I was thankful for, the calm and unruffled physiognomy of our new butler, Schweizer, who had taken Orkins' place, a middle-aged, round-faced German, who apparently had the proverbial goose's back, upon which rain has no effect.

In the midst of startling events, Jane's collapse really concerned me most. In a poor state of nerves myself, I finally induced Pat to accompany me to Jane's apartment, in an early forenoon gesture to cheer her up. As she was in bed, I did not make my presence known at first, choosing to remain in an adjoining room, where I could easily hear everything that was said between her and Pat.

Pat had no sooner entered the bedroom when Jane showed the nervous tension under which she was laboring. "I shan't sleep a wink as long as that thing stays in the castle," she said.

"Oh, nonsense! You are acting perfectly absurd, Aunt Jane," Pat returned, in a manner light and gay, but even the casual listener could have noted that Pat herself did not favor the idea of Henry's harboring this monstrous creature. "Why, this funny man-ape is as harmless as a poodle dog."

"Doesn't he frighten you?" Jane asked, in an awed whisper.

"Frighten me? I should say not! Why, Uncle Henry took me into its room this morning, before breakfast, and the creature was as gentle and affectionate as a kitten. It fascinates me. I'm really growing fond of it."

"But how is Henry going to manage it?" asked Jane.

"Oh, in several ways," Pat replied. "One is to dress it up in the latest style, and entertain it as befits a good-will ambassador from another planet. Niki, you know, is already acting as its valet, and teaching it good manners. The other, is to leave it 'as is,' and exhibit it before the leading scientific societies. Now, which do you advise?"

"Oh, stop, Pat!" Jane said, in an annoyed voice. "That's going too far. I know it's silly of me to be so afraid of the thing, but you're worse to play with it like that. It's right in Henry's line, though, and he's welcome to it. But, my dear, please, try and make him give it to some zoo, where it rightfully belongs, not in one of our best bedrooms. Anything to relieve us of the creature's unwanted presence."

"But it isn't a creature so much as we thought at first," Pat explained, sitting on the edge of Jane's bed, and patting her waxy, yellow hand. "The doctor from the village says it's almost genuinely human, like ourselves. It chatters now; says things you can't make head or tail of, in a strange tongue, of course. And—we've given it a name. At least, Mr. McGinity suggested one, which has met with Uncle Henry's approval, a name formed by the letters of the radio signal station of Mars. From now on our guest is a 'him,' and not an 'it,' and we're to address him as Mr.—" She paused, and then spelled the name—"Z-Z-y-x."

"Gracious!" Jane exclaimed. "How will you ever pronounce a name like that?"

"It's pronounced something like—Sykes. Like the name of Bill Sikes, in Dickens' 'Oliver Twist.'"

"All this doesn't matter," Jane groaned. "I tell you, I won't sleep another night in the castle with that ugly, hairy thing in it! I'll—I'll pack up and go —"

"Where could you go?" asked Pat, amusedly.

"I'd go somewhere," Jane declared, desperately.

"But I'm sure things will manage themselves," Pat went on, with a kindly smile; "and I don't think Uncle Henry will agree to presenting Mr. Zzyx to a zoo. Neither do I apprehend any trouble at all. But if trouble arises, we've got some one now who will tackle it when it comes—Mr. McGinity!"

At this I took my courage in my hands, if only to save Pat from embarrassment in any further discussion of the reporter. Poking my head through the half-open door, I said: "And how are you, dear Jane? Brave as ever I can see."

"Oh, Livingston!" she said. "I hope you and Henry are not being bothered to death by all these horrid reporters in the house?"

"Oh, no," I replied; "they are all very polite, and nice enough. The police people are here, too, and a perfect army of cameramen. Strangers tramping all through the house, and over the grounds—over your nice rugs and lovely flowers. And the servants are leaving, one by one. Mamie Sparks stole away at the crack of dawn. Too bad, really, that we haven't someone, some strong-minded woman, to take the helm."

Jane remained silent for a moment, in deep reflection, then she sat up suddenly in bed, and exclaimed, as she thumped her pillow: "I'll get at these reporters and cameramen and police, and they shan't bother poor Henry any longer! Tramping over my lovely rugs and flowers, indeed!" She turned to Pat, and added: "Call Fifi at once, my dear. I'm getting dressed and coming downstairs."

Everything was comparatively quiet when Jane finally came down, pale and a little shaken, but now firmly resolved to preserve the routine and dignity of our house. I said to her: "After all, Jane, it's none of our business to interfere in Henry's affairs." And to my great surprise, she agreed; and from

that time on, we both joined in all the fuss and clamor, but with a good deal of misgiving, and not without some trepidation.

Except for the crowd of curious village and country people congregated outside the lodge-gate, by noon, the castle had resumed its normal appearance. It was pretty much of a bedlam, though, earlier in the day, when the reporters and cameramen from the city newspapers again besieged us. Henry, at first, with something of his old inherent distaste for reporters showing itself, was against admitting them to the premises. "Damn them all!" he exclaimed to McGinity, in my presence. "If your paper has the story, why doesn't that suffice for all?"

"It doesn't suffice, as you say, by any means," McGinity replied. "Every City Editor expects the reporter he assigns to this story, to get all available information first-hand. The story of the rocket's arrival has now been published, in the Daily Recorder, thanks to you, sir, and the public must still be served. The public craves not only news stories but pictures."

"There you are!" said Henry. "And I'm expected to stand by and let this mob in, to swarm over my place, from which, for years, I've succeeded in keeping strangers out." Noticing that McGinity was smiling, he added: "And I'm not so well pleased either, young man, over the fact that a number of sketches and photographs were used in conjunction with your story this morning, when I distinctly told you I did not wish any pictures taken."

"Oh, come, now, Mr. Royce!" said McGinity. "I'm afraid you're being a bit unfair. Personally, I didn't break faith. But I can't control my City Editor. These sketches you speak of were made under his orders, from my verbal description. He also had photographs taken of the beach from a plane, marking with an 'x' the spot where the rocket landed. After all, Mr. Royce, what's a story without a picture?"

"I see," said Henry, smiling rather grimly.

"Another thing," McGinity went on, in a more serious tone. "You're putting over something very fantastic—almost incredible—on the public. First, your demonstration of radio communication with Mars, in Radio Center. And, now, you come along with the story of the landing of this rocket, predicted in the Martian radio message. This last incident will be rather hard to explain, especially the discovery of the rocket's passenger, this

black, hairy thing, whose presence in the rocket was not foretold, or mentioned, in the message from Mars." He hesitated for a moment, then continued: "Now, nobody is under suspicion, of course, but you are backing something now that strains the imagination even more than the interstellar radio contact."

"Tut, tut!" Henry exclaimed. "It's not incredible. There's plenty of evidence to support my claims."

"All well and good, Mr. Royce," McGinity said, rather pompously. "So what's the use of any more secrecy? You've started something, and you've got to go through with it. You must admit these reporters and let them make a thorough examination of everything. The cameramen must be permitted to take all the pictures they want, especially of the man-beast from Mars, amid all the luxuries with which you have surrounded him."

Henry agreed to this, but much against his will, as I could tell by his voice. "All right," he said. "Turn 'em loose!"

The gate was opened, and the newsgatherers and photographers streamed in. There was nothing on the premises that escaped their notice. Breaking in on the silence of the castle, they peered into the big vault-like rooms, stared at the old tapestries and paintings, and the grand staircase. It gave me quite a start when I overheard one reporter remark to another: "Gee, fellow! This is as great a spot for a nice, quiet murder as ever I saw! Who'd ever hear anything from the road outside?"

Two hours passed in statement and explanation, question and answer. The incredible thing had happened, and we were just as much in the dark as the reporters. Everything was still mysterious and secret. I had been dreading that they might accuse Henry of faking. But they all appeared to be deeply impressed, and very grateful to Henry for his openness and going to all this trouble.

By the time the press had departed en masse, we were beginning to feel the force of the curiosity aroused in the outer world by McGinity's exclusive story. Our telephone bell trilled constantly; there were transatlantic calls from the leading London and Paris papers; messenger boys bearing telegrams and radiograms kept up an almost ceaseless procession between

the castle and the village. Various old friends from neighboring country estates dropped in.

This caused great trouble to all of us, but we were not so uneasy as we had been the day previous, as we now had a police guard. Lunch was just over when a group of scientists swooped down on Henry. Olinski had returned to the city. The visiting group included representatives from the North American Museum of Natural History, the New York City Historical Society, the New York Museum of Science, and the Exploration Club. Among these unexpected visitors was an agent from the Bronx Zoo, who declared at once that Mr. Zzyx was a species of giant chimpanzee, and, in the same breath, admitted he might be mistaken. Finally, he said he didn't know what "the damned thing" was.

After crowding around and inspecting the rocket, which had been transferred from the beach to our terrace, for exhibition purposes, the scientists passed upstairs to study Mr. Zzyx, who happened to be on his best behavior. They could hardly believe their eyes; they were awed as never before in their lives.

When I stepped into the bedroom, they were gathered about Mr. Zzyx's bed, while Henry, in a businesslike manner, expressed his views.

"I am here to say to you, gentlemen," he began, "that to the best of my knowledge and belief, that radio message last Tuesday night, and now this rocket, and its strange passenger, originated on Mars. And it is not so incredible as we might think. We have reached a period in the earth's history and the evolution of man when we must expect new revelations.

"We are all deeply concerned in creature evolution as a purposeful, magnanimous demonstration of the Omnipotence of God. Man's nearest relatives are the chimpanzee and the gorilla. Brutes and humans belong to one great family by common descent. Only by strong imagination can we picture to ourselves men of the Neanderthal race, who lived on earth at least 100,000 years ago. Except for the imperishable records on the walls of caves in France, have we any clear conception of the artistic race of Cro-Magnons, who inhabited France and Spain, in a subarctic climate, 30,000 years ago; and they had powers, equal, if not superior, to our own.

"Now, there, gentlemen," he continued, pointing to the blinking Mr. Zzyx, "we have before us a sample of the evolution of man that is still taking place on Mars. As we all know, evolution is a law of Nature as universal in living things as is the law of gravitation in material things and in the motions of the heavenly spheres.

"This creature, however, is the same handiwork as ourselves. In many respects, as you will observe by his countenance, the human aspect has been attained. He comes from a planet where conditions of life appear to be somewhat similar to our own; where there are white men with a highly developed intellect, and black, hairy men of a low order of intelligence.

"Gaze, now, at Mr. Zzyx, for that is the name we have given him. Notice his arms and hands, which are first in importance on the operative side of the activities of the human organism. See how he picks up and handles that picture book. He even turns its pages by licking his thumb; and a well-defined thumb it is. Now, he stares at the pictures.

"Now, gentlemen, observe more closely as Niki hands him that empty drinking glass. Mr. Zzyx knows it is empty, therefore he shakes his head. Niki fills it with water. Ah, he shakes his head again! Now, watch! Niki has emptied the glass, and again he offers it, half-filled with champagne. See! He knows the difference at once. He nods his head. That grimace is a smile. He takes the glass in his hands, tips it, and, lo and behold, he gulps it all down. Good champagne, that, gentlemen!

"And, now, you have seen in Mr. Zzyx a co-ordination of hands and brains. Brain is of first importance, as you know, on the directive side of the activities of the human organism. And what you have seen, altogether, I believe, proves conclusively that life originated on Mars, and is still in course of evolution, on the same principles as on earth."

Following his somewhat lengthy discourse, Henry was subjected to a severe grilling by his fellow scientists, under which he grew defiant. Finally, he exclaimed: "See here, I'm not trying to put something over on you, my learned fellows! This is all as mysterious to me as it is to you."

The scientists left about four o'clock, wagging their heads, and unanimously agreeing that the whole thing had fooled them. Half an hour after they had gone, a familiar figure projected itself into the scene.

Prince Matani had a habit of calling around tea-time. He had abandoned all pretensions to being other than he was, a hard-boiled sceptic of everything that had transpired in relation to the planet Mars. Jane, Pat and I were gathered around the tea table, on the shady side of the terrace, when he appeared.

"Good afternoon, everybody," he greeted us jovially, and then he dropped his light manner, and put a copy of that morning's Daily Recorder in Pat's hand.

"I suppose you've read that awful stuff?" he said.

"Yes," Pat replied; "and it's all true."

The Prince shrugged. "What are the police doing here?" he asked.

"On guard," I informed him.

"On guard—for what, pray? Surely you're not frightened of a little baboon that came wrapped up in that toy sky-rocket?"

"We're all pretty shaky," said Pat.

"In that case, I shall invite myself to spend the night here, and go on guard. I want to be sure you're safe." He leaned over Pat, his face diffused with amorous longing.

Pat tweaked his ear. Her attitude towards him, while not exactly affectionate, was always chummy. "I hope you won't mind doubling up on the guard business," she said.

"Who is it?"

"McGinity, the reporter," I replied quickly. "One could hardly call him a guard, though, he's our house guest. He's now preparing his story for tomorrow morning's paper, with the assistance of Henry and the village doctor. If you have any doubts about it, just glance into the library."

"More rot!" said the Prince, ignoring my suggestion. "More gush about something that isn't true. And I know."

"You think you know," put in Jane, handing a cup of tea to Schweizer, to pass to the Prince.

"Now, just what do you mean by that, Miss Royce?" the Prince asked.

"You can't make a fair guess at something you haven't seen," she replied. "We've seen with our own eyes, and we're convinced that this little baboon, as you call it, is a visitor from Mars."

"I don't and can't believe any such nonsense," the Prince returned, with emphasis on the "can't."

"Meaning that you're afraid to go upstairs and see for yourself," said Jane, a bit snappily.

"He won't do you any harm," I broke in.

"Maybe, I'm only nervous, but—please don't risk going upstairs, alone," Pat joined in, suppressing a smile.

"What sort of a conspiracy is this?" The Prince glanced from Pat to me, and then to Jane. "Why on earth should I be afraid of a little baboon, that's probably escaped from some zoo or circus? You're not like yourselves at all. You're all three frightened by this yellow reporter's stories, and you really don't know what you're saying. A visitor from Mars?" He laughed out loud. "All piffle!" he continued. "And I'll soon find out for myself, and prove to you it is piffle."

He strode off, rather unceremoniously, and apparently in high dudgeon. About ten minutes after he had gone, I was gazing fixedly through the window into the entrance hall, when Niki suddenly appeared and beckoned excitedly through the window for me to come inside.

I went in to him. "What's wrong, Niki?" I asked.

He blinked at me, and stuttered a moment before he could find his voice. "Sorry to disturb you, sir," he said, in a low, shaky tone, "but something has happened to His Highness. Better come up, in a hurry. Queeck, sir."

I stood uncertain for a moment, and happening to glance toward the window, I saw Pat was watching us. I signaled to her, as best I could, to come inside without alarming Jane. Once she was in, I told her what Niki had just reported, and instructed her to go quickly to the library and notify Henry.

I hurried upstairs then to the State Apartment, with Niki at my heels, wondering what could have happened to the Prince. The bedroom door was slightly ajar; I pushed it open and walked in. Crouching on the edge of the

big double bed, amid disordered sheets and pillows, was that enormous creature from Mars, glowering at the Prince, who was stretched out on the floor beside the bed.

I tried to rouse the Prince, but he made no response, remaining stiff and rigid. His eyes were wide open and staring; on his face was fixed a look of utter terror.

Then I recalled what Olinski had told me about his suffering from his family's hereditary affliction. Some shock, or unusual excitement, and—pouf!—he was out. But I said nothing of this at that time.

According to the doctor, who accompanied Henry to the apartment, he had collapsed from shock and fright. But the doctor had only time for a preliminary examination on account of the frenzied actions of the creature in the bed. It took the combined strength of Henry and Niki to hold him while the doctor administered a hypodermic. Soon he was in the lethargy of a dose of morphia.

By that time, I had summoned the two chauffeurs, who carried the unconscious Prince to the Blue Room, and put him to bed. We were all hoping that he would awaken soon, so he could tell us what had occurred, but we were disappointed. He remained in a strange stupor, and the chauffeurs took turns sitting up with him that night.

Niki had no explanation to offer except that he had gone into the adjoining room for a few minutes, closing the door behind him very softly so as not to arouse the sleeping guest. He had not heard the Prince enter the bedroom, and his first intimation that any one was there came with a piercing, blood-curdling cry, and then a heavy thud on the floor. He had rushed back into the bedroom to find just what I had found when first entering the bedroom.

Hearing this, I was entirely convinced that some horror had closed down on Prince Matani after he had entered the bedroom. I pictured him, taking in the whole scene at a glance, the monstrous creature in the bed, where he had expected to find a small chimpanzee, or baboon, and becoming, as it were, petrified with horror. And there must have been some reason for the sudden murderous fury of our Martian patient. Whatever it was, I felt the Prince was lucky to have saved his neck.

Taking it all in all, I was puzzled. The incident disturbed all of us. Pat looked anxious and tired at dinner, and went to her apartment very early in the evening.

Luckily, the presence of the police guard in the castle grounds had relieved my apprehensions; even at that, I was unable to sleep. Several times during the night, I got up and went to the Prince's room, to inquire about his condition. On my last call, about four in the morning, George, the chauffeur, informed me that the Prince appeared to be sleeping naturally, so I urged him to get a little sleep himself.

With some sense of relief, I finally went to sleep myself. Imagine my surprise, on awakening a few hours later, to find that the Prince had gone. Niki, an early riser, reported to me that he had seen the Prince steal quietly from his bedroom before any one else was up, and go downstairs. It appeared likely that he had telephoned from his room to the village for a taxi-cab, without arousing George, for he drove away a few minutes after coming downstairs. He acted like a crazy man, Niki said.

XVII

Never before had I realized what it meant to be in the public eye. Our family privacy, held virtually sacred, was no longer so. We really had less privacy at the castle during the days and weeks following the discovery of the rocket from Mars on the beach than the hippopotami at the Central Park Zoo. It was not unusual for me to find scientists, explorers, college professors, high school teachers and reporters, wandering in groups about the place, as though it were some museum, and staring at me as if I were a recently acquired Egyptian mummy at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

And never before had I believed it possible to make a man out of a monkey, a gentleman out of a chimpanzee, no more than one can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. But that is precisely what had happened.

It was now the first of November, and plenty out of the ordinary had been happening. And everything that did occur had failed to arouse either

surprise or wonder in me. I had become so satiated with unusual, stirring, hair-raising occurrences that I had begun to wear a hard-boiled look on my face, like a hardened criminal, fed up with cracking safes, kidnapping rich children for ransom, and bumping people off; and this cultivated look of mine really expressed more than anything else my patient acceptance of the fact that one never knows what is going to happen next in this world.

The only strange note at the castle around November first was Mr. Zzyx, our guest from Mars, a village policeman on guard in front of it, and a cameraman lurking somewhere about, waiting to get a picture of the man-ape, should he go out on the terrace with Niki for a stroll, or drive off with Henry, to keep a dinner engagement.

We—that is, Jane, Pat and I—no longer exhibited any outward signs of objecting to Mr. Zzyx's presence in the castle. What was the use? Henry was master, and what he decreed was law. Confidence, to some degree, had been restored in our domestic affairs. The servants, who had been scared off from fright, had returned to their old jobs; even Mamie Sparks, our colored laundress, had come back. I burst into a roar of laughter one day when, coming into the servants' quarters, and remembering Mamie's strange experience with me on the first night we had harbored Mr. Zzyx, I found her carefully, and proudly, ironing his enormous shirts and underthings, which seemed more suitably fitted for a baby elephant.

My mind reverts to that early morning when Prince Matani left us so suddenly after his mysterious and unfortunate encounter with our guest from Mars. Perhaps I am oversuspicious as I look back, but it did not ring true, that story of the Prince's as he had told it to me on the telephone on the day following his departure.

The condition in which we had found him in Mr. Zzyx's bedroom was not caused by shock or fright, he said; he had been suffering of late from dizzy spells, and had simply fainted. I don't suppose we'll ever know the truth about it. At any rate, the incident had given him a good excuse to spend a month or so in California for his health, from which I gathered that he was hell bent for Hollywood and a film career. After he had gone, Pat saw a great deal more of McGinity, I noticed, without Henry suspecting it.

Apart from McGinity's valuable services in directing Henry's publicity, and keeping the public's interest keyed up to the highest pitch by his daily newspaper articles, I believe he had as much to do as Henry in the transformation that took place in our Martian visitor.

It is important to say here that at the beginning the public had accepted all these strange revelations from outer space without suspicion, and Henry had won the confidence of the people by stating that he was just as much puzzled about the different occurrences as they were.

But however things happened, three things were sure—facts. First, every one, practically the world over, had listened in to the deciphering of the mysterious dots and dashes on their radios, in the globe-encircling hook-up, that fateful Tuesday night; and this message was generally accepted as coming from Mars, which was then at its closest point to the earth in a hundred years.

Then the rocket, most curiously constructed, had reached the earth in a shower of meteors, which may or may not have been a part of the cosmic bodies which the radio message from Mars had reported as streaming over the planet, a fortnight before the projectile landed here. Lastly, a strange man-beast, totally unlike any living creature on the earth, and strongly resembling the Cro-Magnons, cavemen of 30,000 years ago, had been discovered in the rocket.

The creature in the rocket, Henry always contended, was incidental, but the reason for the rocket was vital. It was vital, he argued, because it carried a history, in code, of Mars and its inhabitants. This code, Olinski was still laboring over, day and night; and he had reported it was as cunning and mysterious a piece of work as he had ever seen. But the end was in sight. Any day now, and Henry could spring the glad tidings that the riddle of Mars had been solved. And in this new knowledge of life and conditions on the planet, he saw a means to dam the curious wave of doubt and suspicion regarding his claims that was threatening to engulf him and his theories.

What did matter, and it was almost fatal in that it gave impetus to this slowly rising tide of mistrust, was that no further radio messages from Mars had been received, following that Tuesday night demonstration. Both Henry and Olinski had made frantic efforts to re-contact the planet, but without result; and every known method to get understandable messages through to Mars was tried. The powerful radio stations of both the Army and Navy had stood by every night, for weeks, to listen in for possible signals from the planet, without success.

All this did not mean necessarily that people were losing interest. As a matter of fact, Henry didn't care what anybody thought. Even if no further messages came from Mars, he still had Mr. Zzyx, who was now living a very active and interesting life. He went out with Henry to clubs, to golf, to the homes of the very rich, and excellent dinners. And wherever he went, the police emergency squads had to be called out to handle the crowds.

The rocket was now reposing in a sealed glass case in the main lobby of the New York Museum of Science. Already it had been viewed by five million people, and they were still coming. Every day, from early morning until closing time, there was a queue of two abreast of those still eager to see the strange projectile that had hurtled through space.

Henry and McGinity gave Jane and me the surprise of our lives the first night they brought Mr. Zzyx downstairs for dinner. The transformation they had wrought in the creature was so utterly incredible that I burst out laughing. Equipped with an ample wardrobe, fashioned by the smartest Fifth Avenue tailors, Mr. Zzyx, through Henry's generosity, was now prepared to shine in the most brilliant and fashionable circles. And yet, even

in modern dress, there was still something sinister and ominous about this huge, hairy beast that fairly appalled me.

At my instigation, both Jane and Pat had put extra bolts and locks on their bedroom doors. As for getting into my sleeping apartment, it would have been much easier to get into the safe deposit vaults of the National City Bank. Henry called such precautions "senseless absurdity." Probably such provision against danger was unnecessary, but Pat had had an adventure, shortly after Prince Matani's frightening experience, that had caused the three of us to play safe.

It was easy to understand why Mr. Zzyx took such a fancy to Pat. During his convalescence, she had tried to teach him the alphabet by means of a primer; had shown him picture books, and built houses out of vari-colored blocks, entertaining and amusing him in various ways.

That particular night—early in the evening—she had gone to Mr. Zzyx's apartment with Henry. She happened to be carrying a new novel which she was particularly anxious to begin reading that night. Mr. Zzyx took a fancy to the book, probably on account of the picture of an African jungle luridly depicted in colors on its cover. Pat refused to give it to him, which put him in a bad temper.

She was in a dressing-gown and mules, when she discovered that, after all her trouble in holding on to the book, she had left it behind in Mr. Zzyx's apartment. She hurried back just as she was, and knocked at the door. Niki answered her knock, and on her request, returned the novel, and then closed the door. She went back to her own apartment, and was just about to re-enter it, when she glanced back, down the hall.

Mr. Zzyx was peering out of the doorway of his bedroom. This gave her quite a start, and she darted into her room, quickly locking the door after her.

Her story of what followed was an odd one.

"I wasn't so awfully frightened when I saw Mr. Zzyx peeping out at me," she said, "or I would have gone straight into Aunt Jane's apartment, the safest place in the castle. I had become so accustomed to Mr. Zzyx's antics—he's just as playful as a child—I saw no reason why I should become

unduly alarmed. So I settled down, and read my novel until about midnight. I went to sleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow.

"I don't know how long I'd been asleep when something aroused me. It was a sound outside my bedroom door. I switched on the lights, slid out of bed, caught up my dressing-gown and went to the door and listened. I distinctly heard a scratching noise outside my door—a sound my pet poodle makes when it wants to come into my room. Then I saw the brass knob, inside my door, moving, and I got the impression that some one was pressing his full weight against the door. Well, I was just too scared to scream, so I started hammering on the door.

"Then I listened again, by placing my ear close against the door. I'm sure I heard a stealthy movement outside, a soft, cat's-foot movement, as though some one was moving away, down the hall; then everything became quiet. Finally, I became more composed myself, and finding that I had not aroused anyone by hammering on the door, I went back to bed. But I never closed my eyes again that night."

When Pat recounted her adventure the next morning at breakfast, Henry was inclined to dismiss it as trivial. "My dear, you had a nightmare," he said. "Who on earth would want to get into your apartment at that hour of the night? As for Mr. Zzyx, why, he wouldn't hurt a fly."

Jane was stunned by Pat's story, and immediately added another bolt to her bedroom door. For myself, I had heard no sound during the night, and I'm a very light sleeper, and easy to waken. I felt, like Henry, that perhaps Pat may have dreamed it.

At least, that was my opinion, until shortly after breakfast, while examining the outside of her bedroom door, I found several distinct marks, where the paint had been scratched, or clawed, off. Discovering these marks, I felt it was not a nightmare of Pat's. So I questioned Niki.

"You don't think it could have been Mr. Zzyx at Pat's door?" I asked him.

Niki looked startled, then he grinned, and established a complete alibi for our guest. "No," he said. "Mr. Zzyx never left his room last night."

I left him, my mind confused in many ways, but entirely clear on one point. There was something at Pat's door, that was sure.

Jane was naturally upset and uncomfortable the first night Mr. Zzyx dined formally with us. We were both dressed for dinner, and waiting in the entrance hall for the others to come down. She had just been telling me of her resolve not to close the castle on November first, and open our town house, a custom we had rigidly followed for so many years, when she happened to glance up the grand staircase. Clutching my arm suddenly, she whispered: "My God, Livingston! Look!"

I turned, and gave one look, and then I burst out laughing, the sight that met my eyes was so incredulous. Marching down the staircase, three abreast, came Henry and McGinity, with Mr. Zzyx between them, all three in immaculate dinner dress and enveloped in an atmosphere of complete dignity. Henry seemed more astounded than affronted at my mirth. Before he could voice his sentiments one way or the other, an excited murmur came from Pat, who had just entered the hall from the drawing room.

"Good work, Uncle Henry!" she exclaimed, rushing over to the foot of the staircase. "And Mr. Zzyx! He looks as smart as they make them!"

Mr. Zzyx seemed pleased at the furore he was causing, and proud of his tailed dinner clothes. He kept drawing our attention to his pearl shirt-studs and cuff-links.

"Now, I suppose Mr. Zzyx will be expected to escort me into dinner," said Pat.

"Not a chance," said McGinity, moving quickly to her side; "unless he's smarter than I think."

As Mr. Zzyx advanced towards Jane, she walked away. She stopped when Henry said: "Don't be afraid, Jane. Mr. Zzyx has no idea of hurting anyone. What interests him is that gold-beaded bag you're carrying."

"Oh!" said Jane, flushing. Then she handed the bag to Mr. Zzyx, who inspected it closely, smelt it, and then gave it back to her.

"Really!" she exclaimed. "He acts almost human!"

At this stage of the proceedings, Schweizer appeared on the scene, to announce that dinner was served. And to my dying day, I shall never forget the mingled look of amazement and horror that spread over the butler's rotund face as his eyes fell on Mr. Zzyx.

And one couldn't blame him. It was enough to give any one the jitters to see this half-human creature in smart evening dress, his heavy animal fur framing a human face, and his hairy hands and forearms protruding from the white cuffs of a stiff-bosomed shirt.

We had not been seated long at the table before I realized that Mr. Zzyx, despite his repulsive appearance, possessed the mentality and playful urge of a child. This was evident during the entrée course, when he began to make wig-wag signals with his napkin, in an effort to attract the butler's attention. What possible motive could he have? Then, suddenly, the truth dawned on me. It was Schweizer who served the dinner, and it was the food he brought that interested Mr. Zzyx most. He had a most voracious appetite.

He sat between Henry and McGinity, in a great throne-chair which Henry had brought from Europe. I must admit Niki had accomplished wonders in teaching him how to handle his knife, fork and spoon. He ate everything that was set before him, and showed a great fondness for Henry's choice wines and champagne. Now and then, he would pause in his eating, and look round the table, his sharp black eyes taking us all in, one at a time; then he would chatter something unintelligible, and resume his eating.

Henry noted this, and remarked: "Of course, we all appear very strange to our honored guest, as it would be if we, ourselves, were catapulted to Mars in a rocket, and suddenly found ourselves dining with a group of Martians. In time, I hope he will be able to speak our language."

"And then we'll know what he thinks about us," McGinity suggested. "But he must realize by this time, how much we all think of him." Turning to Mr. Zzyx, he patted him on the arm, and added: "You're in pretty soft, aren't you, young fellow?"

And to our utter amazement, Mr. Zzyx turned to McGinity and spoke—actually spoke for the first time. He distinctly mouthed a word that sounded like "Spaghet!" with emphasis on the last syllable. He sort of hissed the word.

"There you are!" exclaimed Henry. "I thought all along he had the power of speech. I shall engage a tutor for him the very first thing tomorrow morning."

"He certainly said something," McGinity observed; "sounded like Latin to me."

And then Pat distinguished herself. "My opinion is that he tried to say 'spaghetti'," she offered. "That has some Latin connection, hasn't it? Niki says he's terribly fond of it."

After dinner, Mr. Zzyx lounged indolently in the largest easy chair in the library, while Schweizer served coffee. He smoked one cigarette after another with evident enjoyment. When Henry first offered him one of his big cigars, he surprised and amused us by biting off the end of it, and then throwing the cigar away. The end he thrust in his mouth and began chewing it.

A little later, as I placed my empty coffee cup on the butler's tray—this was after Niki had taken Mr. Zzyx upstairs, to undress him and put him to bed—Schweizer whispered: "I beg pardon, sir, but I don't like the looks of that fellow!"

"I'm afraid, Schweizer," I rejoined, "that you'll be seeing a good deal of this 'fellow' from now on."

The butler reflected a moment in silence on this information, and then walked away, muttering: "I don't like his looks—I don't like his looks!"

XVIII

The following morning, while Henry was making arrangements about engaging a tutor for Mr. Zzyx, and McGinity busied himself in giving proper publicity to our guest's first attempt at speech, Pat and I strolled down to our dock. We went there on Niki's pressing invitation to see the progress Mr. Zzyx was making in operating a runabout Henry had recently acquired.

When we arrived at the dock, Mr. Zzyx was seated in the bow, at the steering-wheel, looking very nautical and important in a blue worsted suit, a white, soft-collar shirt, with a blue and white polka dot tie, and a smart

yachting cap. He beckoned at once to Pat to come down and get into the boat.

"Oh, no! Thanks!" she called down to him.

He looked up at Pat and me imploringly. "I guess he wants us both to come for a ride," I said. But Pat said she didn't want to go.

What happened, then and there, was an exhibition of handling a runabout I didn't believe possible in a creature of such low mental caliber. He seemed to take to it instinctively. Knowing there was a great scarcity of water on Mars, I wondered how it came to him so easily.

At Niki's word of command, he started the engine, and then steered the boat, as unerringly as an arrow, in a swift and successful quarter-mile run between the dock and our tiny island of rock, on which stands the ruins of the old, stone lighthouse.

Pat and I applauded his feat on his return. In fact, Pat became so enthusiastic over his expertness in steering the boat, that she took her courage in hand, and ran down the steps, and jumped into the runabout. "Now, Mr. Zzyx," I heard her say, "please give me a ride to the island, and back."

Before I could voice my objection, Niki hopped out, and I was horrified to see the boat race off again towards the island. While I was protesting to Niki, I was keeping my eyes trained on the runabout, which had now reached the island. Even from that distance, I could see Mr. Zzyx doing a peculiar thing.

He had pulled up alongside the small dock; the engine was still running, and the propeller kicking up a lot of foam. Apparently, he didn't know how to tie up the boat. He was standing up, and making funny motions to Pat, who seemed to be protesting by gestures. To say I was not only puzzled but frightened is rather to understate the situation.

If I had any coherent thoughts at all, they were that Mr. Zzyx wanted Pat to go ashore with him and explore the island; he had an abnormal sense of curiosity. There was really nothing of interest to see there. It was all rock, devoid of trees and grass. The only habitable building was a small shanty, which the Government had used for storage purposes before Henry purchased the island.

"Why, in heaven's name, did you let him take Pat off like that?" I protested to Niki. "Why didn't you stay aboard? He's dangerous."

Niki shrugged rather insolently at my fears. Since receiving a liberal payment from Henry on the reward he had earned by first discovering the rocket, he had become rather impudent. "Mr. Zzyx is not dangerous, Meester Livingston," he countered. "He only likes fun—like a leetle kitten!"

"When I say he's dangerous I mean that he is," I replied, with vehemence. Then, profoundly shaken over Pat's security, I cried: "Oh, what shall I do?" and turned round to run back to the castle. The next moment, I had run full tilt into McGinity.

McGinity's reaction to the situation was typical. "That bird is too dangerous to trifle with," he said; and within a few minutes he was in one of our row-boats, heading for the island.

To my amazement, the next thing I saw was Mr. Zzyx bringing the speed-boat back to the dock. I had pulled myself together somewhat when he returned. I was surprised to see Pat, lolling comfortably among some cushions, a cigarette in her hand and a cool smile on her face. By that time, McGinity had put back to the dock. He arrived in time to help Pat out of the runabout.

"What's all the trouble?" she asked him, a little sharply.

"Oh, I don't know," he replied, vaguely. "We just thought you might be stuck over there, and couldn't get back."

"No fear," she returned, and laughed a little. "Mr. Zzyx has too much common sense for that. The way he handles the boat is simply marvelous. It was real excitement. I wouldn't have missed the ride—not for anything!"

"All the same," McGinity remarked, "it was lucky for you, perhaps, that I got here in time—that is, in case anything did happen."

Pat waved that off with a light gesture, and turned to me. "How does Uncle Livingston feel about it?" she inquired.

"I was pretty well excited myself, Pat," I replied; "uneasy-like."

"I simply wanted to show Mr. Zzyx that I'm not afraid to be alone with him, and that I'm a good sport besides," Pat explained.

"It's bad business," said McGinity, "any way you look at it. Matter of fact, I think Mr. Zzyx is bad business."

"I don't see it," Pat retorted.

It was not until an hour later, when I found myself alone with Pat, that I learned the truth about the situation, although I was convinced from the first that she had deliberately overplayed her attitude of indifference to danger.

"I was nearly scared to death," she confessed. "I did not miss Niki until we were well on our way to the island. Mr. Zzyx showed by his actions that he wanted me to tie up the boat, and go ashore with him, but I wouldn't budge. If he had remained there, at the dock, a minute longer, I would have yelled, screamed—jumped overboard. But—" she concluded, as she tightened her grasp of my arm, "never mind what I felt—Bob mustn't suspect."

In other words, she was still concealing her fear of Mr. Zzyx lest something might happen to spoil McGinity's news stories, and remove him from our midst. For some weeks now, he had been assigned by his paper to "cover" Mr. Zzyx's every movement, and to report all the news developments in connection with Henry's theories about Mars. This necessitated his remaining at the castle.

The Daily Recorder, however, long since, had announced in its editorial columns that while it printed all the news concerning the recent Martian revelations, the publishers assumed no responsibility for their veracity, and their readers were left to render a verdict in accordance with the facts. This was a little raw on Henry, I thought.

Anyhow, the incident of the runabout was forgotten in the excitement of the following day, when the Swedish-born Mayor of New York, His Honor, Oscar Swenson, gave an official reception for Mr. Zzyx at the City Hall. And what happened there became local history.

There was a large crowd outside our lodge-gate as we drove off, in an open car; and all along the way, in the suburbs, and through the city, to the downtown district, police reserves had to be called out to control the vast throngs which lined our route.

It was a triumphal procession through the city. Mr. Zzyx waved to the people in response to their loud huzzas. From the clouds of ticker-tape and confetti that descended upon us, he collected a great quantity. He and Henry, sitting in the rear seat, were knee-deep in it by the time we reached the City Hall. On our way, while the procession was held up by cross-town traffic, I bought a raspberry lollypop from a street vendor for Mr. Zzyx. Henry frowned on this as very undignified, but Mr. Zzyx sucked it with great enjoyment. His actions reminded me of a small boy at his first circus.

The day was perfect—the air cool and crisp. We found City Hall plaza one vast sea of faces. As we passed through a barrage of cameramen, a Swedish chorus burst into song; and we had no sooner taken our places on the steps, beside the Mayor, scores of other city officials, and many notable invited guests, when several hundred Swedish gymnasts entertained us with feats of physical prowess.

I wished that Jane and Pat had come with us, but they both had elected to remain at home, and enjoy the happenings at the City Hall through the medium of the radio and television.

Mayor Swenson is a tall, gaunt, rosy-cheeked Swede, but his head only reached to the shoulders of Mr. Zzyx when they stepped in front of the microphone and television transmission instruments. Niki had accompanied us as the Martian's bodyguard, and never left his side. He carried an automatic pistol, ready for any emergency, as I learned afterwards.

It was not my first experience of an official reception at the City Hall, but many years had intervened since I attended the last one. Although I was very familiar with the great changes that had taken place, politically, in the city administration, this first close personal contact with the Mayor, the Board of Aldermen, and the various Commissioners, was in the nature of a shock. There was not one single Irishman in the Aldermanic board, nor even a Jew. The board was composed mostly of Chinese, Turks, Filipinos, and Bulgarians, and one Eskimo, who had entered politics after graduating with honors from Princeton University.

Amid this gathering of mixed nationalities, Mr. Zzyx was an outstanding figure. As time passed, he grew restless, and kept running a long, hairy finger around his immaculate collar as though it choked him. He was attired in a formal cutaway coat and striped trousers, topped with a silk hat, which

he wore at an angle that gave him a rather rakish appearance. He looked to me exactly like a huge, over-stuffed piece of furniture, with the hair sticking out.

A breathless hush fell upon the thousands as the Mayor raised his hand to command silence. His voice sounded a bit squeaky through the loud speakers, not thunderous, as I had anticipated. I took notes of his speech, which follows:

"I t'ank it's about time I introduced the city's distinguished visitor from Mars." (A pause until the cheering had subsided.) "I bane t'anking as I stood here that Mr. Zzyx is probably the most unique visitor the great city of New York has ever welcomed, officially, yah?" (More applause.) "Some of you no doubt bane t'anking that he is a great fakir. My wife and me, we bane having an argument about this. My wife, she t'anks he's just a big monkey that's got loose from some zoo." (Laughter.) "When I ask our good friend, Mr. Henry Royce," (Mayor's voice lost in a tumult of cheers)—"when I ask him what he bane t'anking about Mr. Zzyx, and his coming in a rocket, on a beach out on Long Island, he only shakes his head, and says he knows next to noddings; and I t'ank he's just as much fooled as the rest of us. But whether our distinguished guest comes from Mars or the moon, I bane t'anking we must hold fast to our traditions, and bestow on him the key to our great city of fifteen million people—yah? Therefore, it is with the greatest pleasure that I confer such an honor upon Mr. Zzyx, the jungle man from Mars."

So saying, the Mayor handed an important-looking scroll to Mr. Zzyx, who took it, and immediately unfolded it and began to look for pictures. Not finding any, he passed it over to Henry, at whose signal, Niki stepped forward to superintend Mr. Zzyx's introduction at the microphone.

Our Martian visitor made a better showing at the microphone than I had expected. I did not know then that for several days previous to the reception, Niki had coached him in the use of the instrument. First, he peered curiously into it, then he stuck his finger in, as though he had seen some imprisoned insect inside.

Suddenly, he began to chatter, and then, just as suddenly, he stopped. Hearing his own voice amplified through the loud speakers seemed to have startled him. After Niki had patted him reassuringly on the arm, he burst

into chatter again, concluding with the only word he could pronounce—"Spaghet!" He seemed to spit the word into the microphone, which sent the crowd into convulsions of laughter and cheers.

That practically ended the official city reception. After stepping into our car, Mr. Zzyx further amused the crowd by smoking a cigarette, and tipping his hat to the ladies, another trick Niki had taught him. On the return trip to Long Island, he was greeted with even greater acclaim than had been shown him earlier in the day.

We found Pat in a state of excitement. Mrs. Cornelius Van Dyk, she said, had telephoned during our absence, to announce that she was giving a dinner for Mr. Zzyx on the following Monday. After dinner, she planned to take Mr. Zzyx to the opening performance of the winter season at the Metropolitan-Civic Opera House.

Naturally, Pat was excited about this; we all were. Mrs. Van Dyk is the last word in fashionable exclusiveness in New York society; even European royalty is more accessible.

XIX

Mr. Zzyx behaved beautifully at the very brilliant dinner given in his honor by Mrs. Cornelius Van Dyk at her town residence, the last red brick mansion of a remote period, except our own, still left standing in Washington Square. A dinner made more memorable than it otherwise would have been by the distinguished array of guests. Among them, Henry's beloved and revered old friend, the venerable Episcopalian prelate, Bishop William Buckingham, who had grown a bit queer in his dotage.

"A very novel idea on the part of our hostess," the Bishop remarked to Henry after dinner, in the smoking-room, while I sat by, listening and silent. "This sort of thing was done, years ago, at Newport, a monkey-dinner, as I recall reading about it, and the clergy and the newspapers made an awful row. Certainly times have changed when we can sit down to dinner with a man-ape without the flicker of an eye-lash. After this, I shan't be at all

surprised to have one of my old parishioners invite me to dine with a white rabbit. Mrs. Van Dyk sets the fashions in New York, you know."

"After all," remarked Henry, "brutes and humans really belong to one great family by common descent."

"Hold your miserable tongue, sir!" the Bishop responded, perkily.

"Not until I've extended an invitation to your reverence, to attend the banquet the Exploration Club is giving for Mr. Zzyx on November thirtieth," Henry rejoined.

"The Exploration Club! How extraordinary!" the Bishop exclaimed. "The most exclusive club of its kind in the city. What's up?"

"Oh, just another revelation concerning Mars," Henry replied, nonchalantly. "You will come, won't you?"

"Do my best to oblige," the Bishop replied.

At that, I felt my ears pricking. I already knew that Henry, Olinski and McGinity, had something new about Mars up their sleeves, which was to be disclosed at the banquet at the Exploration Club. What it was, I had no idea. And I found out nothing that night. The conversation between the Bishop and Henry was cut short by the return of Mr. Zzyx and Niki, who had taken our Martian visitor to the lavatory immediately after dinner, to tidy him up a bit before we left for the opera.

A few moments later, we joined Mrs. Van Dyk, and her house guest, Lady Gwynne of London, in the drawing room. The other dinner guests had gone. Both were ready for the opera, Mrs. Van Dyk in a stunning ermine wrap, and Lady Gwynne in sables.

We had no sooner entered the room, when, to my horror, Mr. Zzyx went straight up to our hostess, and began to chatter, and stroke her ermine coat. Then he walked over to Lady Gwynne, and repeated the action on the sable wrap. I could see that they were both terribly frightened.

Henry took the matter in hand at once, and drew Mr. Zzyx aside, tenderly, as a father would treat a child of doubtful sanity. After quieting him with a cigarette, he left him in Niki's care, and approached Mrs. Van Dyk.

"A bad break, I'm afraid," he said to her, "and I apologize for this breach of propriety. After all, Mr. Zzyx is part animal, and I'm afraid the high instinctive animalism in him was beguiled by the sight and smell of ermine and sable."

"A gesture of Martian jungle courtship," Lady Gwynne suggested.

Henry shook his head. "No; I don't think so," he said. "Mr. Olinski, my associate, and I, have definitely proved that he is not influenced in any way by what we mortals call sex appeal. Otherwise, he would be very objectionable to have about. Pretty clothes, sparkling gems and furs attract him just as toys intrigue small children. While instinctively curious, and perhaps a little bold, he means no harm."

"Let's hope he'll keep up this high standard of behavior," the Bishop remarked. "Undoubtedly a tremendous brute force lies sleeping under his apparent docility. A pretty go, if this brute force is ever aroused in him."

"I hope to God that'll never happen," said Henry, gravely.

And then Mrs. Van Dyk spoke. "We can't expect him to measure up to Park Avenue social standards," she said. "A little clowning now and then is relished by the best of men. Indeed, I've known men in my own set to go much further than the mere stroking of a lady's fur coat."

"Exquisite!" laughed the Bishop.

"How droll!" Lady Gwynne commented.

"As a creature from another planet," Mrs. Van Dyk continued, "I feel very honored in having Mr. Zzyx as a guest in my house."

Henry sighed gustily, and said: "Very friendly of you, Mrs. Van Dyk."

And then the Bishop said: "Well, let's push on to the opera."

The Metropolitan-Civic Opera House was packed that night with one of the largest crowds in its history. I was convinced upon our arrival that the throng was there, not to hear Verdi's opera "Otello," but to see Mr. Zzyx. The evening newspapers had heralded our coming, and we encountered a large crowd outside the opera house, and were met by a barrage of cameramen's flashlights as we entered. Once inside, the crush about us was so great, we had considerable difficulty in reaching Mrs. Van Dyk's box, in

the parterre. Although grand opera now was democratized, the "diamond horseshoe" still remained. Opera, I'm afraid, will always remain the pet hobby of the fashionably rich, just as racing will ever be regarded as the sport of kings.

Two uniformed city policemen stood on guard, in the corridor, outside the box. Mrs. Van Dyk, regal in black velvet and sparkling with jewels, occupied the corner nearest the stage. Mr. Zzyx sat in the other corner, with Henry sitting between. Behind them, Bishop Buckingham was sandwiched between Lady Gwynne and Jane, while I hovered, standing, in the rear, too nervous to sit down. Niki was at my elbow.

We had missed the first act. Five minutes after we had settled ourselves in the box, the curtain rose on the second act. Fashionable women, like Mrs. Van Dyk, seem to make it a point to be late at the opera. I doubt if our hostess had ever heard the first act of any opera in the entire Metropolitan-Civic repertoire, during her long ownership and occupancy of the box.

During that five minutes, every eye in the house appeared to be turned on Mr. Zzyx, who, fortunately, was now in a state of lassitude, which always overtook him after a heavy dinner. Apparently undisturbed by the sensation he was causing, he devoted himself, first, to a curious scrutiny of the packed masses in the balconies, then he looked down at the arena below, and, finally, rested his gaze on the two rows of boxes, filled with superbly gowned and bejeweled women.

I was curious to see what effect grand opera music would have upon him. What little music he had heard at the castle had come from our radio, and in this he had displayed only a mild interest. His attitude toward such music as he had heard rather dispelled the theory that had been advanced, that if direct radio communication was ever established between the earth and Mars, the interchange of ideas would necessarily have to be through the medium of music, on account of the lack of a common language.

Here, at last, was a chance to try music at its best on an inhabitant of Mars. I wondered what the reaction would be. Mr. Zzyx watched the musicians curiously as they trickled into the pit, and the noise of the tuning up seemed to interest him immensely. Finally, when the house went dark, he appeared quite excited. Then the baton of the conductor rose, and the first crash of the orchestra came like a thunder-clap.

Mr. Zzyx leapt to his feet, and started to climb over the edge of the box. For a frenzied moment, I thought he was going to dive head first into the midst of the spectators below. But Henry quickly grabbed him by his swallow-tails, and pulled him back into his chair. The incident did not attract the general attention it might have done if the auditorium had not been darkened.

While Henry patted Mr. Zzyx on the shoulder to quiet him, Mrs. Van Dyk leaned over, and said: "I don't wonder at him trying to jump out of the box. To many, grand opera is a perfect hullabaloo, and devastating. That's why so many people go out between acts for a cocktail."

Presently Mr. Zzyx fell to listening, with his mouth open. At first, I thought he was wholly lost in the delight of the orchestral movement—drums and horns were silent now—and the beautiful singing on the stage. Then, like a flash, it occurred to me that it was the dark-skinned Otello who was claiming his attention, not the music or singing.

I watched him, studied him attentively, as the opera swept on to its violent climax—the smothering to death of Desdemona—by the enraged Otello. After the final curtain, while the audience was recalling and applauding the singers, I noticed he looked a little wild about the eyes; a sort of inward brooding.

Was it possible that he had grasped the significance of the story, as it had been unfolded before him on the stage? Could the climax of the opera put ideas into his head beyond his purely natural instincts? The force of ideas even stronger than his own inherent brute force, which might quicken him to the fury of some deed of incredible violence?

But I had no time for surmises. Yet, as we passed out of the opera house, in an atmosphere of acclaim and some disorder, almost mechanically, I jotted down the details in my memory of what I had observed in him. From the look in his eyes, I felt some terrific instinct had been aroused. It gave me a strange and eerie feeling, but I made no mention of it to Henry.

Within ten days I was glad to have paid attention to such details. Little did I suspect then that a black, threatening cloud was gathering over our heads, or that more mystery, intrigue—even death—was closing in about us.

XX

Life at the castle followed its usual routine during the interval between Mrs. Cornelius Van Dyk's dinner and opera party, and the banquet at the Exploration Club, in Mr. Zzyx's honor, with one exception, which I shall mention further on.

I was delighted to see that McGinity shared the place of honor allotted to our family group at the banquet, and justly so, because he had put Henry's discoveries and theories over in the biggest possible way. Later in the evening, I found he had other honors accruing to him.

It was not until I was seated with the family party at the head of the long U-shaped table, that I noticed the motion picture screen at the far end of the dining room. Then the full significance of those secret visits to a large film studio in Long Island City, on the part of Henry, Olinski and McGinity, began to dawn upon me.

Gradually worming the secret out of McGinity, who sat on my left (Jane was on my right) I was in possession of the complete facts of the Martian revelations, shortly to be disclosed to this most highly honored body of explorers and scientists, by the time the soup course was over.

After Olinski had deciphered the Martian written message contained in the mysterious scroll, found in the rocket, McGinity had put the information contained therein into scenario form. A screen production, backed by Henry's money, had been staged by one of the largest and most progressive film corporations, at its Long Island City studio, with Henry and Olinski acting in an advisory capacity.

I am telling this circumstantially, because the part McGinity played in writing the scenario made the first real contribution to the solving of the strange mysteries that enveloped us, and because it explains how I myself in a small way became involved in the untangling of the web.

As we sat placidly at the banquet table, my last thought was that within twenty-four hours we would be plunged into a series of events, which

savored of the sort of thing associated with sensational fiction, or exciting melodrama on the screen.

At odd moments, I cast my eye across the table at Mr. Zzyx. His prolonged sojourn under our roof had become a "bestly vulgar business," quoting Jane's own words. Daily, we were growing more resentful of his impenetrable stupidity, and utterly bored with his gross and ugly presence. Often I felt myself in the mood to wring his neck.

It was also perfectly clear to me that Henry was beginning to tire of shouldering the responsibility of this big, lumbering creature, but so far he had kept it to himself. I felt angrier with him than I had ever been in my life, yet I was angry rather for him than with him. It was so utterly unlike him to allow the family's unpleasant associations with Mr. Zzyx to continue, when a word from him would have ended it.

The exception to our usual routine at the castle, during the week, related to our guest from Mars. He was beginning to act very queerly. I was of the opinion that a sort of madness was creeping on him, brought on by the unnatural state in which he was living, the strange food he ate so ravenously, and the constant excitement to which he was subjected. One of the spookiest things he did was to move about the castle during the night. Niki might be on guard, and Mr. Zzyx's own bedroom door locked and bolted, but with uncanny skill both were circumvented.

His first real outburst had come on the Friday night, preceding the banquet. He began throwing things at Niki, and did considerable damage to the furniture, pictures and walls in the State Apartment. When I questioned Niki, he had dismissed the affair lightly, with the excuse that Mr. Zzyx had been suffering from insomnia, and was not himself.

Certainly he was not himself at the Exploration Club banquet. During the dessert course, I saw that he had not touched his charlotte russe, and was making holes in the table-cloth with his fork. His pet hobby, while dining, was to roll his bread into little balls, toss them up in the air, and then catch them in his mouth as they fell, something I considered inexpressibly vulgar and disgusting.

I was astonished that Henry, or Bishop Buckingham, who was a member of our party, did not rebuke him for making holes in the cloth; but both seemed

preoccupied. In a state of anxiety, I glanced around at Pat, who was sitting on McGinity's left. It was not strange to find that they both were practically oblivious to their surroundings.

The speech-making was now going on, having begun shortly before coffee was served. The speakers were long-winded and tiresome. I am neither a student, nor a philosopher, but I would like some exponent of the doctrine of psychology to explain why men talk so much and at such great length at banquets. I've often wished that some bright person would organize a society for the suppression of after-dinner speakers.

For fully half an hour, now, a little, rabbit sort of man, with big ears and completely bald, and wearing tortoise-shell spectacles, had been telling of his pursuit of prey, biped and quadruped, in distant places, with minute detail of how he had killed one of every species of beast and bird and fish in the world. The guests were showing signs of impatience. Mr. Zzyx began making horrible grimaces, when Henry tapped him warningly on the arm. Then he started to amuse himself making those little bread balls. I became uneasy myself for fear he might throw one of them at the speaker, something I wanted to do myself but did not dare.

Then, suddenly, to my stunned astonishment, Mr. Zzyx picked up the untasted charlotte russe, which is custard in a form made of sponge cake, and hurled it at the speaker, who was directly opposite him. His aim was true, and the little rabbit man got the charlotte russe full in the face.

The guests roared with delight as the mighty hunter dug his features out of the spattering custard, while Henry shook Mr. Zzyx sternly by the arm, and whispered: "You ought to know better!"

Bubbling with mirth, I leaned over to McGinity, and said: "Too bad he got it in the face." To this, the reporter replied: "The main thing is that he got it."

After the bespattered speaker had gone to the lavatory to wash his face, the toastmaster rose, and said: "Now that Mr. Zzyx, our honored guest from Mars, has enlivened our dinner, we shall proceed to the surprise event of the evening.

"No one is asked to accept these new disclosures about Mars which our friend, Mr. Olinski, decoded from the mysterious writings of the scroll, discovered in the rocket, as infallible," he continued. "Even our fellow-

scientist, Mr. Royce, who is accountable for this, and other recent events of a scientific nature, which literally have rocked the world, declares an uncertainty still exists in his own mind, and that he is simply making public the information that has fallen into his hands, from strange and unknown sources. In other words, he wishes me to make clear to you all that he's not trying to put something over on us. So, now, let's see what we shall see!"

The film, in four reels, was in the nature of a travelogue, beautifully colored, and interspersed with sound and music. Henry was the pictorial lecturer. McGinity's clever hand was seen in the numerous whimsies and dramatic highlights. Many scenes were genuinely stirring.

Mr. Zzyx, closely guarded by Niki in the darkened dining room, watched the picture unfold with fascinated interest. At times, he would gesticulate, strangely, like one familiar with the subject matter, and utter primitive sounds, as though he wanted to speak, and tell us more startling things about his home planet.

This newly acquired and first-hand information of present day life on Mars, presented in picture form, supplemented by the free play of imagination on the part of the director, proved infinitely more valuable as educational entertainment than the cold facts would have been if delivered from the lecture-platform.

The picture divulged, first of all, that life on Mars had originated and evolved the same as on the earth, with the white division of the human species exercising supreme authority over the affairs of the planet.

Secondly, it showed that the strange, geometric markings on the planet, as studied by astronomers on earth, are not a canal system, or even man-made. The lines, or bands, which some of our astronomers believed to be canals, constituting a system of irrigation, are really deep wide canyons, ten to twelve miles in width at the rim, and descending 2,000-3,000 feet below the sterile plateau-surface of the planet, with cultivated vegetation in the bottom-lands.

The rims of these canyons are fortified with very high and very wide stone walls, a military defensive work, with watch-towers, designed as a protection for the white people who inhabit the canyons from attack by their

ancient enemy, the ape-men, who swarm over the tropical regions in countless numbers.

These fortifications somewhat resemble the Great Wall of China, and create a distinct boundary line. Following the course of the canyons, and extending over the surface for many thousands of miles, like a network, it is easy to understand how they were mistaken for the lines of canals, or waterways, as viewed from the earth through our great telescopes. Apparently these canyons were formed by volcanic disturbances in the early ages of the planet, which shivered and rent its surface into these stupendous fissures in the rock.

As a refuge from the bitterly cold nights peculiar to Mars, and the constant cyclonic sand-storms, the canyons make an ideal place of abode. The wind, it seems, blows eternally on Mars, kicking up a fearful dust from the reddish deserts, and making the planet a veritable dustbowl.

I must give Schiaparelli credit, however, for his discovery of the canals, in 1877, for these canyons do really serve as water routes. Running through them are great aqueducts which tap the arctic and antarctic regions, into which the Martians pump water from the melting snow and ice caps. As there are no seas on the planet, and very little rainfall, this water is stored in huge reservoirs, and used largely for irrigating the bottom-land of the canyons, thus rendering them extremely fertile.

Around these reservoirs the white inhabitants cluster, not in cities, but in vast cliff-dwelling communities, the sides of the canyons being honey-combed with homes. The wind-power of the planet is converted into electrical energy in immense funneled power-houses, just as we harness water-power on the earth. The current generated by this method is used to turn the wheels of industry, propel the passenger and freight trains which rumble through the tunnels in the cliffs, connecting the various communities, operate the elevators and escalators uniting the tiers of cliff homes with the fortifications at the rim and the bottom-lands, as well as supplying light and heat for all of the inhabitants.

I have always been puzzled as to how the Martians looked and dressed. The picture interpretation of their daily life revealed tall, stalwart men, with leathery complexions, owing to the lack of moisture in the atmosphere, and graceful, really beautiful women, with classic features, enveloped in veils

from head to toe as a protection against the climate. Men, women and children, all garbed and living as the ancient Grecians, with the difference that to their colorful spectacle of life is added the enjoyment of the benefits of scientific inventions.

I marveled at their magnificent temples, set in great plazas, in the bottom-land of the canyons, over thermal springs. Temples largely of glass construction, with airspace between the double walls, which are lined with a transparent substance, resembling cellophane, evidently to keep out the stinging cold of the nights. Grouped about each temple were universities, libraries, museums and coliseums, also of glass, and modeled after the highest forms of what we, on earth, call modernistic art, but which is now regarded on Mars as a relic of ancient art.

As I gazed at the swift moving scenes, I was deeply impressed by the similarity between Mars and Thibet, in Asia, in point of rarity of air, climatic severity, and the superiority and authority of priests. Since the Martians worship fire and water, and venerate as twin goddesses their two tiny moons, which revolve so closely to their planet, I could see how this excessive number of priests was really necessary for the propagation of the State religion. Furthermore, the entire intellectual and cultural life of Mars is vested in the priesthood, and naturally all education and refinement center in the temple areas, just as the industrial and agricultural activities seem to converge at the great reservoirs.

All products, watered by irrigation, are grown under glass; and stored summer sunlight, a process as yet unknown to science on the earth, is used to melt the nightly deposits of frost which accumulate the year round. Horses, cattle and sheep were shown peacefully grazing in glass-enclosed corrals, which are electrically heated at night.

I observed particularly how all the homes in the sides of the canyons had glass fronts, which made the towering steep rocks look like the façade of a modern New York skyscraper. The power of the sun is not so great on Mars as on the earth, consequently the practical utilization of glass for living purposes is quite necessary for the conservation of the sun's light and heat. The materials of which glass is made abound on Mars, the great plateaus having a natural bed of glassy volcanic rock.

If I were here sedulously to outline all of the startling revelations concerning Mars I saw in this picture, it would take many pages; much easier it will be to outline just a few more of the more important disclosures. Unfortunately, there are a few taboos as far as the moral law of our earthly civilization is concerned.

For instance, a specialized offspring is being produced on Mars to save the white race from extinction. Respiratory diseases and their frightening toll of lives, caused by the climatic extremes and the particles of sand in the air, have long been a national calamity. For the begetting and production of the young, the healthiest and most beautiful women of the planet give themselves up to the State as a patriotic duty. Their mates are carefully selected for their mental and physical fitness.

These eugenic babies are born in special establishments attached to the temples, and reared at the expense of the State. The unmarried mothers were shown as they took part in the ceremonials of the temples; some appeared as dancers, while others attended the sacred fire and water shrines, also engaging in the weaving of fine tapestries and in rich embroidery work.

As this strange phase of Martian life was unrolled to our view, I suddenly remembered Jane, with a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, but the room was too dark to observe what effect this scene was having upon her. I must say that at no time did it seem vulgar and lewd; everything was conducted in perfect good taste and propriety.

I was surprised to find that the Martians are ruled by a dictator, a form of government of which I very much disapprove. A very despotic dictator, who has the supreme power to frame the laws and order punishment. And instead of labor unions, they have labor units—units of agriculture, engineering, science, and so on, each with a leader responsible to the dictator.

There's this to say about the Martians. Despite all the handicaps imposed by nature, they manage to enjoy themselves. Fête days in the temple areas are very frequent. In the coliseums they hold thrilling chariot races and gladiatorial combats between trained ape-men from the jungles, who use short swords.

I was rather horrified to learn that slavery is common among them, which will account for the almost constant warfare between them and the ape-men. The herculean task of building their fortifications, which covered many centuries, was made possible by the employment of the ape-men as slaves. The process of evolution seems to have slowed up in the Martian tropics, leaving black, hairy creatures, in form and in intelligence intermediate between the highest ape and man. These ape-men worship the enormous wolf of the deserts, a war-like beast, in peculiar rites of sacrifice and the blood-covenant, which is an outspring of totemism, a stage in all human development.

In retaliation for the slave raids of the whites in the jungles, these ape-men move against them in vast armies, and with surprising agility, over the dead regions of the planet. When they leave their natural location, they live upon the fruits and berries which grow in the many oases scattered over the deserts, where thermal springs are found.

I could well imagine the frightful and devastating effect of these ape-men armies once they were victorious over the whites. The picture showed them attacking the fortifications, and being driven off with showers of bombs filled with deadly gases. When they succeed in plundering the temples, they carry off the cloistered white women as captives to their jungle lairs.

Besides the ape-men and the hazards of climate, the white population is also harassed continually by the foraging beasts, reptiles, birds and insects from the waste regions and the jungles, who destroy the plantations and devour the horses and cattle. To meet the perils of the marauders, the whites maintain a standing-army, scientifically-equipped. Quartered in the canyon fortifications, the army uses a system of wireless-signaling from the watch-towers, to warn the people when in danger of attack.

Getting a first view of these monsters of the Martian deserts and tropical zone, a chill ran down my spine. Many of them were what we term prehistoric monsters—the tapir, tree sloth, and dinosaur. I gasped in horror at the sight of the insects from the jungles—beetles having the bulk of baby elephants, and ants big and strong enough to carry a man on their backs. And what at first I believed to be an airplane, turned out to be an enormous, monstrous bat.

As the film moved swiftly onwards to its completion, the breathless interest of the assembled scientists and explorers was concentrated on the last episode, which proved to contain the most amazing revelation of all.

The rays from the motion picture projector now seemed to flash upon the silver screen like messages of hope. Hope for our white brethren, on a faraway star, beset on all sides by danger, and threatened with extinction. With increasing excitement, I watched, through a happy haze of light, the great transformation that was now taking place in that bright point of light that studs our darkling sky—the planet Mars.

XXI

There, fast unreeling before our eyes, were undeniable evidences of the changed conditions that our radio broadcasts had wrought on Mars. I had no misgivings now about our short wave programs reaching that planet. We saw the Martians listening in to our daily broadcasts, and becoming not only quite in sympathy with our American ideas but benefitting therefrom.

Intercepting musical and talking programs from New York, London, Paris, Rome, Bombay, Tokyo and Melbourne, and out of the strange babble of voices and senseless prattle, soon, presto! evolves a translation of the English language. Think of it!

But how, out of all this jumble of unintelligible words, which meant nothing to them at all, did they succeed in translating the English language? We shall see!

When the group of American scientists sent a message to Mars, in the International Morse code, by directing a powerful beam of light on the planet from the summit of the Jungfrau, in Switzerland, the beam was brought into the range of the telescope of a young priest-astronomer in one of the Martian temples. Having already made superficial translations of the English language, as it registered on the temple radio receiving set, this youthful Martian incarnation of an earthly Marconi, succeeded in deciphering the code as registered by this beam of light. The result was a

rather crude transcription into the English language, but sufficiently intelligible to exchange radio communications, in code, with the earth.

Our short wave programs and code messages, it seems, have long been registering on Mars, but their source was unknown until this beam of light from the Jungfrau was picked up and decoded. The belief, long persisting among the priest-scientists, that there were human beings on the earth, known to them as the Blue Sphere, as intelligent as themselves, it was perfectly natural that they should begin at once to try and contact, by wireless, the planet from which they had caught the beam of light.

For some reason or other, not made clear, they had failed. Perhaps their signaling was mistaken for static on our radios, and was unrecognizable among the weird chattering and apparitions, which scientists claim are caused by the auroras and echoes of radio signals sent from the earth. Certainly no one had the sense, or intelligence, to pick them out of the static, and decode them, until Henry and Olinski began their experiments.

It amazed me to learn that the radio had been developed by the priest-scientists on Mars long before it became generally used on the earth. But it had never been popularized. Its use there had been confined solely to the temples in religious ceremonies, to awe the superstitious masses, as the voice of their unseen gods, and in linking up the various governmental and military outposts. The idea of making it an instrument of popular education and entertainment first came from the earth's music broadcasts, with the result that life on Mars has become almost completely revolutionized.

It was my theory, then, that this clever, young Martian priest-astronomer, who had first decoded the beam of light signals into English, was the originator of the rocket-to-earth idea, and the author and transmitter of the radio message, which had thrilled the world, on the night of the public demonstration in Radio Center. There was every likelihood, too, that he had composed and penned the cuneiform message contained in the scroll, which had been so skillfully translated to the screen for our entertainment and edification.

My amazement grew beyond bounds as the last episode of the travelogue progressed, and I realized how completely Americanized the Martians were becoming through the medium of our radio broadcasts. The short waves from the American stations seemed to register stronger on Mars than those

of any other broadcasting stations in the world. And there was the stark truth, galvanized into life on the screen.

Martians flocking in thousands to the temple areas, to listen in, by means of loud speakers, to our educational broadcasts and national programs, as interpreted by their priests. Our school curriculum, talks on farming, science, finance and politics being discussed at symposiums. Applications of American rules of health and hygiene already in force, and largely decreasing the death rate.

Symphony orchestra concerts and grand opera broadcasts relayed from the temples to loud speakers in all public squares of the various communities. The younger generation learning to dance, with partners, to jazz music. Martian youngsters hearing bedtime stories for the first time in their lives—and learning of such important, earthly make-believe characters as Mother Goose and Mickey Mouse. Baseball rapidly displacing chariot racing and gladiatorial combats as a popular amusement.

Furthermore, the masses were beginning to enjoy luxuries hitherto unattainable; the Martian markets being flooded with soaps, tooth-paste, perfumes, hair dressings, cold cream, face powder and cigarettes, all patterned and manufactured after the American products, advertised so extensively in all short wave broadcasts reaching that planet. Martian women were being amazingly transformed into pinkly powdered persons, smartly rouged and lipsticked, slender lined, and giving out a fascinating scent.

The most astounding revelation was contained in the fact that the whole political, social and economic order of the planet was being threatened by the new ideas caught from the American short wave broadcasts. Armed with this new knowledge, the political order of the planet, a form of despotism, was facing disruption, the people actually demanding a democratic form of government, patterned after the American plan.

Even the State religion, the idolatrous worship of fire and water, and the twin moon goddesses, was being undermined. Flashing across the sidereal abyss that yawns between the earth and Mars, had come the first message of Christ. Christian cults were springing up in all parts of the planet despite the drastic action on the part of the State, to forestall the accomplishment of the people's designs, and the overthrow of their ancient religion. Hundreds of

pagan priests had become converts to Christianity; they were deserting the temples, and sallying forth to preach a new gospel of salvation.

The slavery of the ape-men was being attacked by the Christians as inhuman. Thousands of slaves owned by the whites had actually been freed. Christian missionaries were penetrating the jungles. A truce had been declared in the warfare that had long been raging between the white race and the ape-men. Mediation was already in progress. A movement for peace and good will among men, and charity for all, was sweeping the planet. Better days were coming to Mars....

The picture was over all too soon; enthusiasm ran high and oratory flowed freely. It marked the close of a great day in the life of Henry. The toastmaster moved his fellow-diners to thunderous applause when he declared: "This event will go down in scientific history as one of the greatest achievements of man." Subsequent speakers showered flowery encomiums on Henry, whose courage and capital had made the occasion possible. Even the sceptics conceded that it all seemed feasible.

The startling disclosures, together with the pictorial creation and grandeur of their interpretation, had held me spellbound. I was impressed as never before in my life; convinced now, in fact, that the information contained in the scroll of life on Mars, extraordinary and incredible as it seemed, was genuine. "Henry's a great man," I thought. My faith was pinned on him now; I didn't care what any one else thought. Transplanted for more than an hour, into a region of wide spaces, as I watched the film unroll, and grasping ultimately the idea that order and efficiency, among human beings like ourselves, could reign on another planet as well as our own, it took me several minutes to come out of my trance, after the close of the picture.

When I did, finally, just as the lights were turned on, I no longer saw a populous planet, with its strange and romantic people being dominated by American ideas, but Pat and McGinity hurriedly disengaging hands. I pretended to take no notice of them. Yet I smiled to myself. While the procession and pageantry of life, in a faraway world, had been weaving their patterns on the screen in astonishing illumination, these two had been holding hands under the table. New worlds might be created, and others grow dim and crumble, I thought, but love would go on just like that—holding hands under the table.

Maybe I was wrong. Perhaps McGinity was just patting Pat's hand to soothe her. She hadn't been well lately; her face had grown pale and anxious from the strain and excitement under which we were living.

McGinity turned to me. "Well, what d'you make of it?" he asked.

"Wonderful!" I replied.

"Oh, I wouldn't have missed seeing this, not for worlds!" Pat chimed in. "I feel as though I'd been up in the clouds, among the stars. It was so thrilling, so overpowering, I don't really feel let down yet. How do you feel?" she added, looking at McGinity.

"Me?" McGinity answered. "Oh, I feel as if I'd fallen down a couple of flights of stairs."

"I've seen great revelations in my time," I remarked, "but this is the most triumphant—" I stopped. The reporter's rather cryptic remark was puzzling me. I glanced at him quizzically. He did not look right, somehow; too much gravity and anxiousness in his pose and countenance, considering this crowning moment in his life. "Something displeased you?" I inquired. "You look worried."

His reply, though vague, immediately aroused my curiosity. "I'd like to see you, alone—tonight—after we return to the castle," he said, in a low voice. "I want to talk over something with you."

That ended our conversation. He excused himself, and hurried away to telephone to the Recorder. Newspapers, not only in New York but throughout the country, and the rest of the world as well, were prepared to devote columns to the momentous event; far more important, to my mind, than the radio message from Mars, and the landing of the Martian rocket, with its strange passenger, for here were actual revelations direct from the planet, proving conclusively that it was inhabited by human beings, who were subject to the same laws, the same temptations and passions which affect ordinary humanity.

It was amusing to see the small regiment of reporters present, rushing off to their different papers to write their stories, as soon as the picture had faded from the screen. McGinity, being more advantageously placed, was ahead of the rest of them in that he had filed his story for the Daily Recorder earlier in the evening. After he had telephoned to his office, and given word

for its release, and told what had happened at the banquet table, excerpts from the speeches, etceteras, he was free to accompany us to Sands Cliff.

He had something to tell me. What? It might be nothing, and it might be a good deal. The time of surmising came to its end. Within a few minutes after our arrival at the castle, we were closeted together in his apartment. Middle of the night though it was, I felt excited and bouyant, and filled with a sense of adventure. Lighting a cigar, I settled down in an easy chair, and waited.

The reporter walked up and down the room with his hands plunged deep in his trousers' pockets, and his head bent downwards. He appeared to be tracing the designs in the rug beneath his restless feet. Suddenly, he pulled himself out of his concentrated mental effort, stopped dead, and turned to me.

"Mr. Royce," he said, "do you believe all this stuff that's been happening?"

"Yes," I replied, promptly. "That is, in a way. Why, what do you think?"

For a moment he stood gazing at me in silence, intently. Then he asked: "I wonder if you think what I think?"

"Well," I answered, "if you want to know, I think that if all this that's been happening was contrived and worked out by a human mind, then a human mind can discover what it's all about."

He stared thoughtfully at me a moment before he spoke. "It wouldn't surprise me a bit if you've hit on something," he said at last.

"Yes?" I said. "I'm afraid I don't see it yet. I'm just telling you what I think."

"Exactly," said McGinity. "Now, you think something, and I think something. Very good. If we're both convinced on one point, why not join hands, and follow a new line, which may lead us out of all this mystery to something in the way of solution?"

"That," I replied, instantly, "is just the very thing we shall do!"

"Of course, you must know, as well as I do, that it's all highly improbable, utterly impossible," the reporter observed.

"I suppose it is," I answered, "yet the Science Editor of the Times declared only last Sunday that radio signaling to Mars was 'technically possible.'"

"Granted," agreed McGinity; "but that's another question. What concerns us now is what has already occurred—to prove that it isn't true, without injuring your brother's standing as a scientist."

"I've never known a man so positive as Henry is on this Martian radio signaling and rocket business," I said. "He believes it's all true, and I see no reason whatever to think that it isn't. While there's considerable scepticism in the outside world, no one has yet come forward with a clue—not a single clue—to prove that Henry and Olinski are all wrong, or are being duped."

"Would it surprise you very much if I produced—a clue?" McGinity asked.

"It certainly would," I replied.

The reporter then did a most surprising thing, which gave a startling and dramatic turn to our conversation.

"I've been convinced all along," he said, as he walked over to a secretary, in which he unlocked and opened a drawer, "that there was a human agency—a master mind—at the bottom of all this. In what way, I didn't know—couldn't guess. But, now, I'm sure of it."

From an inner receptacle of the drawer, he produced the scroll, which was found in the rocket, the contents of which Olinski had so skillfully decoded, and he had put into scenario form. He laid it on the table before me.

"Take a look at that," he said.

Carefully unrolling the scroll, I inspected it closely through a reading glass. The tiny cuneiform writing was no more intelligible to me than the hieroglyphics on Cleopatra's Needle in Central Park. It was inscribed on what I judged to be papyrus, the writing-paper of the ancient Egyptians. No doubt the papyrus-plant also grew on Mars. As I looked it over carefully, I detected a curious, subtle scent, like some rare perfume. The roller, I took to be ebony.

I smiled dryly, and made a move to hand it back to the reporter. "I'm afraid I can't make anything out of it," I said; "at least, nothing suspicious, or in the way of a clue."

He waved it off. "You're not finished with it yet," he said. "Try holding it up against the light. Study it again—carefully."

For a moment, the discovery completely overwhelmed me; I felt a little giddy. It affected me personally, more closely than anything I had ever had to deal with, mainly because of Henry. A sort of vision rose before my eyes. I saw the whole thing about Mars exposed, and my brother crushed in ignominy.

What the reporter had found was in line with what had been running in both our minds, the conviction that a superior intellect was at the bottom of all this Martian mystery, and its various resultants. It revealed a carefully conceived, highly ingenious conspiracy; a cruel and cold-blooded fraud, done in such a fashion as to leave no clue, which would make the tracing of the adroit and utterly unscrupulous perpetrator concerned, very difficult, if not impossible.

But here was a clue, thanks to McGinity's power of observation and reportorial inquisitiveness, even if it was only the ghost of one, that might put us on to the track of the perpetrator. A water-mark, a small translucent design, appeared in the body of the parchment paper, which proved that the scroll had not been made on Mars, but on earth. There it was, as plain as day: "Royal Bond—Made in U. S. A."

McGinity's reportorial and detective instincts combined—all newspaper reporters seem to have been born with a detective complex—quickly sent him again to the secretary, this time to look for a Manhattan telephone book; and while he was thumbing hastily through its pages, I took another squint at the water-mark, in the parchment scroll. I could hardly believe my eyes.

"What we want to find out now," the reporter said, "is the name of the manufacturer of that particular brand of parchment paper. Hello!—here it is. 'Royal Parchment Paper Company, 158 Beekman Street.'"

"Indeed?" I said, as calmly as I could.

"Now, one of us must take the scroll, and call on this firm, the first thing in the morning," he suggested. "They may be able to throw some light on the matter."

"I'll go," I quickly volunteered.

"Good," said McGinity. "Our job now is to find and bring to light the actual perpetrator of this fraud. This water-mark in the parchment may put us on his trail. That's about the situation, isn't it?"

"As far as I'm concerned," I replied, "that is the situation. But I'm afraid we're facing a many-sided problem. You must remember that we are dealing with events so stupendous that they can hardly be conceived by the human mind."

"But we're in possession of one thread now that may guide us through the maze," said McGinity, settling down finally in a chair opposite me. "I admit that what we have to deal with is most extraordinary—almost inexplicable—" he went on; "but here's this much to remember—your own idea, by the way—if this mystery was contrived and worked out by a human mind, then a human mind can discover what it is."

"Quite right," I agreed. "And if the person who made the scroll is the same one who sent those Martian radio messages, and dropped the rocket—"

"Dropped?" McGinity exclaimed, interrupting me. "Of course, that rocket was *dropped* on the water-front. Dropped! That idea had never occurred to me before. It wouldn't surprise me, Mr. Royce, if you've hit on another clue."

"Yes?" I said, a little bewildered. "Anyway," I began again, "if it is the same person, then I'm sure we can trace him."

"I'll tell you what I think, Mr. Royce," McGinity said; "we shall have to go back—and go back a long way, and find all we can about—Olinski."

"Olinski?" I exclaimed. "Surely, you don't suspect him?"

"He's a radio wizard, isn't he?" the reporter said. "He may have sent those alleged messages from Mars himself. He may have directed them to the moon, round ten o'clock, each night, during the experiments, and they were echoed, or bounced, back to earth. I understand he's quite an inventor besides. Now, he may have invented that rocket—everything—"

"You're forgetting, McGinity," I interrupted. "He couldn't possibly have invented Mr. Zzyx."

"That's so—I'd forgotten Mr. Zzyx," the reporter admitted. "All the same, just to be on the safe side, I think we'd better trace Olinski's career."

"We must remember this," I suggested, "that whoever is at the bottom of this fraud—if it is a fraud—had a definite purpose in putting it over. In criminology, that is called motive. Once you have the motive, the rest comes easier."

"I agree on that, Mr. Royce," said McGinity. "But the thought has just come to me that the perpetrator of this hoax—and I'm convinced now it is a hoax—has got nearly three months' start. Let's suppose, as you suggested, that he's a man who had some definite purpose in putting it over, the man we want to find. Very well, he pulls his two big tricks late in August, the Martian radio message in code, and the rocket from outer space, both occurring on the same night; and from that time, he passes into the unknown. No more messages from Mars. Everything cleaned up in one night."

"On that supposition," I said, "we shall, of course, have to eliminate Olinski, for which I shall be very glad."

"But suppose Olinski is the man we want," McGinity said, vehemently. "What about his having an accomplice? Olinski could be doing something else. And here's something that seems to have struck nobody. How could Olinski decode, so easily and expertly, those radio signals, and the cuneiform writing on the scroll? Besides, he's held on to this scroll like grim death, and never once allowed it to pass out of his hands until tonight, when I wheedled him into lending it to me, to be photographed for a Sunday article I'm writing for the Recorder."

"If you're convinced of Olinski's complicity in this, I'm not," I said, a little heatedly. "I've every confidence in him, and I've got to be shown. So, before we start in pursuit of knowledge of Olinski, you'd better let me follow up this clue of the water-mark, which may lead us to something in the way of success."

McGinity, after some hesitation, agreed to this, and after remaining silent for a few minutes, he said: "You have, of course, no idea who this perpetrator might be?"

"No idea whatever," I promptly replied.

The thing to do, we decided after some further discussion, was to keep everything to ourselves, while we combed out things that might give us a

further clue. Above all, neither Henry, nor Olinski, were to know anything whatever about our mistrust.

Meantime, McGinity was to acquaint the editorial executives of his paper with our suspicions, and to ease up on his sensational stories about Mars. On this subject, I felt pretty much at a loss at to what to suggest, but McGinity seemed to know his business. Before we parted for the night, he convinced me that slowing up on a newspaper story, removing it from the front page, reducing it to a few paragraphs, and finally dropping it altogether, was a much easier thing to do than most folk imagine. Besides, he said, the public forgets so easily and quickly.

It was in my mind to make a good start in the morning. I felt sure that the Royal Parchment Paper Company could tell me something that might be of great importance in guiding us to the solution of one of the most devilishly contrived plots I've ever known of.

All that the reporter and I had discussed was passing through my mind, after I had said good-night to him, and was heading down the hall to my own apartment. It was long after midnight. The castle was in darkness, and as quiet as a tomb. But just as I was about to enter my door, Pat came running down the hall, after me. Nearly breathless, she panted out her message. Would I go back to her room, at once? We hurried back, to find Jane there, all in a tremble, and her face showing ashen.

"It's that dreadful thing again," Jane exclaimed. She gave a little shudder, and turned away to get her smelling salts.

"What's up?" I asked. "Everything about the castle seems perfectly normal."

"But they're not," Pat said, miserably. "If you hadn't slept so soundly last night, you might have heard Mr. Zzyx, as I did, sneaking along the hall. Auntie wouldn't believe it when I told her. She said it was impossible for him to get out of his locked room without Niki knowing it."

"Now, dear Pat," I said reassuringly; "haven't you been having another nightmare? I'm positive that Mr. Zzyx was locked in his room, and asleep, at this hour last night, as he is now, tonight—tired out, like all of us, after a very exacting night at the banquet."

"But I'm certain he's not in his room, now," said Pat. "In fact, I've proved he's out, and wandering about."

"Proved?" I asked, amazed, as Jane moved to my side.

"Yes, proved, dear Livingston," Jane whispered. "She tied a silk thread across the hall, between her door and mine, after we came home from the banquet."

"Oh, I see!" I remarked, lightly.

"Nothing to be amused about," said Pat, with a wan, twisted smile. "I did it to prove to Aunt Jane that Mr. Zzyx was snooping about. She stayed in here with me, and we waited to see if anything happened."

"And nothing happened for half an hour," Jane supplemented, taking a good sniff of her sal volatile.

"When, suddenly, we heard something moving outside, in the hall," Pat resumed. "After a few minutes, and we didn't hear anything more, I switched off the lights in here, opened the door a few inches, and looked out. The hall was dark. I could hear the muffled sound of your voice, and Bob's, in his room. That gave me courage, so I stole outside to investigate. I found the thread had been broken."

"That's queer," I observed. "Still, it might have been broken by the butler. Schweizer suffers terribly from insomnia, and has a habit of roaming about the place at night, at unearthly hours. I really don't understand."

"But I do," Jane said, in a low, guttural voice; "and it's your business, Livingston, to rid this place of that terrible creature at once. If you don't, and I should see him roving about, in the dark, I know I'll die of heart failure, instantly." She placed strong emphasis on the last word, and took another strong whiff of her smelling salts.

At that Pat turned to me, the tears welling in her eyes. "Oh, Uncle Livingston!" she said, earnestly and pleadingly; "isn't there any chance at all of ending this terrible mystery business about Mr. Zzyx and Mars? Uncle Henry must be losing his mind, or he wouldn't be associated with anything so unearthly and—spooky!"

"While we are still utterly in the dark, my dear," I said, consolingly, "I have a feeling that it's only a question of time when the whole matter will be cleared up." I wished then I could have taken her into my confidence, and told her what McGinity had discovered, about the scroll, but I knew it

would be unwise to make any announcement at that stage of the proceedings, when we had only the wildest suspicions to go on. "And, now," I concluded, "I think we'll get to business at once."

"What are you going to do?" Pat asked, eagerly.

"I'm going to rouse McGinity," I replied, "and if your suspicions are correct, we'll find Mr. Zzyx, and put him back where he belongs."

"Lock him up!" Jane exclaimed. "And, for heaven's sake, keep him locked up!"

"Now, you two compose yourselves, and go to bed," I admonished gently but firmly. "You're both quite safe now."

I left the room, and went to my own apartment, where I got my flashlight. A few minutes later, I knocked at McGinity's door. Fortunately, he had not gone to bed. He was still pacing the floor and smoking furiously. The first thing he did, after I had poured out Pat's story to him, was to slip a small revolver in his hip pocket.

"There's no time to lose," I murmured, as we crept out into the hall. "Follow me—and not a sound."

I led the way to the State Apartment. Our difficulty was to effect an entrance into Mr. Zzyx's bedroom without awakening Niki, who slept in the adjoining room. As I stood racking my brains how to get into the creature's room, McGinity, on impulse, tried the door knob. To my amazement, the door opened. We walked into the room. As I trained my flashlight on the bed, he chuckled low, and said: "There's the bed, and, as you see, Pat's right. There's nobody in it."

The bedclothes were in disorder, showing that the bed had been recently occupied. Immediately, we turned our attention to the lock on the door, and found that it was not in working condition. A long brass bolt, on the inside, fitted into a deep groove in the jamb, and that was all there was to fasten the door. This would account for Mr. Zzyx's freedom of egress and ingress, and I smiled to myself at our utter stupidity in not having the lock examined. I wondered why Niki had not informed us about it, long before this. In many things, he was just plain dumb.

After creeping quietly upstairs, we explored the two upper floors, including Henry's observatory. We searched in many queer places, and looked into all the cavernous and gloomy chambers. And then we stumbled on something.

A room at the end of the corridor, on the third floor, used mostly for storage of furniture, bore traces of recent occupancy. A chair had been drawn up to a small table, on which there was a half-burned candle, a picture magazine of quite recent date, and an ash tray containing charred cigarette ends.

As I was examining the room and its contents in the light of my electric torch, a quick exclamation from McGinity directed my attention to a French window, which gave on to an iron-railed, stone balcony.

"There he is!" whispered the reporter; "out on the balcony."

I quickly turned off the flashlight. All I could discern was a black something standing on the balcony, silhouetted against a bright, starlit sky. The next moment, the shadow started to move towards the window. It was perhaps a little foolish of me, but I dashed forward, threw the window open wide, and turned a flood of light upon—Schweizer.

The butler, I immediately recalled, was occupying a bedroom a few doors down the hall from the one we were exploring. After he had explained that he often read and smoked in this room, and walked out on the balcony for fresh air, when he was troubled with insomnia, I dismissed him, without telling him what we were searching for. But he must have guessed it, for I heard him running down the hall to his bedroom.

He had no sooner gone when I was struck by a sudden idea. "It's possible," I suggested, "that Mr. Zzyx, in his after-midnight excursions, visits the butler's pantry, and makes a raid on our refrigerator. He has the appetite and stomach capacity of an ostrich. What do you say?"

"Possible," McGinity concurred. "Let's go."

As I crept stealthily downstairs, with the reporter at my side, I fully expected, at any moment, to be confronted with a long hairy arm, stretching out from some dark corner, to clutch at my throat. My feeling of nervousness increased when, in the midst of our search on the ground floor, my flashlight suddenly failed. We had just stepped into the dining room. I was reluctant to switch on the wall, or ceiling lights, for fear of alarming the servants, or attracting the attention of the night watchman who patrolled the

grounds. Under no consideration could we afford to arouse the household, especially Henry.

So we elected to sit down in the darkness and wait for something to happen, possibly the discovery of the prowling Mr. Zzyx. I marveled at the instinct which enabled him to move about so freely in the dark. It was so quiet in the dining room that we could hear the ticking of the grandfather's clock in the library. There we sat, waiting, in the utter silence of the night. One o'clock struck—then half-past.

All the time we were seated there, I fancied I heard a sound quite distinct above the ticking of the clock; a faint, crackling sound, like a dog makes when it is crunching bones between its teeth. I made no mention of it to McGinity, but my heart was going in great sickening thumps. Another ten minutes of strained silence in the darkness, and my nerves were stretched to the limit.

As it turned out, McGinity had heard the same mysterious sound. Also, his eyes becoming more quickly adjusted to the darkness, being so much younger than mine, he saw something that had so far escaped my notice. Flecks of white on the floor, just to the right of us, in front of the heavily curtained French window.

Suddenly, he put his hand on my arm warningly. I heard him draw his breath sharply as he slowly rose, and tiptoed a few steps beyond where we were seated. As I craned forward to try to see what he was up to, he lit his cigarette lighter.

"My God! Look!" I heard him breathe; and, rising, I saw, in the flickering glimmer, a lot of white feathers on the floor. As his lighter quickly burned itself out, the room once more was in darkness. But I had seen enough in that momentary flash to realize that at last we had found something we were waiting for.

"What do you make out of those white feathers?" McGinity whispered, gripping my arm.

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit," I replied, "to find that Mr. Zzyx has killed Pat's white cockatoo."

"Yes; and I'll bet you anything he's somewhere close by, in one of these rooms, enjoying a cold bird, bones and all," his quick whisper came back.

"That will account for the funny sound I've been hearing all the time we've been sitting here. Let's turn on the light—take a chance. What do you say?"

My memory of what immediately followed is rather blurred and confused. I have some memory of feeling my way through the library doorway, although how I accomplished it in the dark is more than I can figure out. What I most remember clearly is the strange, eerie sight that met our startled gaze after I had turned on the lights.

Crouching on the floor of the library, confronting us, was Mr. Zzyx, in his pajamas, and surrounded by feathers and bits of bone of the cockatoo, which obviously he had so cruelly slaughtered and devoured. And as we stood there gazing at him, he snarled at us like a wild beast defending its spoils.

Quick as a flash, McGinity's hand went to his hip pocket, but I restrained him. "Leave him alone," I advised. "Let him finish his feast."

"Pat's heart will be broken," McGinity sighed. "How could he do such a horrible, cruel thing?" He lit a cigarette.

"Because he's more animal than man," I answered; "a very dangerous and vicious animal."

We continued to watch him in silence until he had finished crunching the last bone. Then he got to his feet, and started to walk towards McGinity, round whose head spirals of tobacco smoke were curling. There was a dark stain all around the creature's mouth, which made him more repellent and disgusting.

"He wants a cigarette," I suggested.

McGinity gave him one, and lit it. And then, to our amazement, he followed us meekly as we led the way upstairs, and opened the door of his bedroom. He climbed into bed, and pulled the bedclothes over his head, like a child who has been caught in the act and is ashamed of his wrong-doing. Presently he was fast asleep.

XXIII

The after-midnight experience, especially the cruel killing of Pat's pet cockatoo, distressed me terribly. I was still feeling nervous and depressed the next morning when, after a hasty breakfast, I caught an early train for the city. I took a taxi-cab at the railroad terminal, and drove straight to the office of the Royal Parchment Paper Company, in Beekman Street, which is in the downtown district.

I did not reveal my identity—there was no reason why I should—simply explaining that I was interested in seeking out the maker of a very interesting scroll that had come into my possession, the parchment paper of which bore the firm's water-mark. In less than ten minutes, a point of high importance was settled. The parchment paper used in the scroll was identified as a heavy grade formerly manufactured by this concern but discontinued about three years before.

As it was a wholesale house, selling its products only in bulk to retailers, I was beginning to lose hope that I should ever be able to track this particular brand of parchment paper when, by great good luck, one of the assistant officials recalled having sold a small quantity of it, from the remaining store-room stock, to an aged, silver-haired man, four months back.

He remembered the transaction very well indeed because the customer explained that he had been looking for some time for this special, heavy grade of parchment paper, as he made it a business of transforming newly manufactured parchment into ancient-looking family and historical documents, for which he found a ready market among dealers in antiques.

He walked out of the office carrying his purchase, leaving no name and no address. As it was raining heavily at the time, the assistant official, because of the customer's age and apparent infirmities, followed him to the door with an umbrella, and politely volunteered to call a taxi. After he had done this, he put the old man into the cab. And now, after an interval of four months, he recalled the address the customer had given the taxi-driver: "Stuyvesant Place and Twelfth Street."

This remarkable display of memory sent me off at once to another field of inquiry. In a small, musty, corner curio and book shop, at Stuyvesant Place

and Twelfth Street, I found a courteous, white-haired old man, looking rather shaggy and unkempt, who recognized the scroll at once as a sample of his own handicraft. He did not know, of course, he said, for what purpose it was to be used, nor did he seem to care; and he appeared equally unconcerned over the strange inscriptions it contained. He seemed both surprised and grieved when I showed him the water-mark. Apparently, he believed that I had been taken in by some antique dealer, in the purchase of the scroll as an ancient document.

"I do not often make a slip like that," he said, "and I am very sorry indeed if I've caused my customer any embarrassment. He did not specify that it should look old, but just different from the usual run of scrolls. For instance, he requested me to perfume the gum that holds the parchment securely to the ebony roller."

"That's all very interesting," I said, as calmly as I could. "Now, there's just one more question—did your customer reveal his name?"

The old bookseller shook his head. "I have no idea who he is," he replied; "no idea at all of his actual identity. He paid me a pretty stiff price in advance for my work. That's all that interested me."

"Can you describe him?" I asked.

He took off his spectacles, and wiped them carefully on a frayed, white silk handkerchief. "No," he said, finally and slowly. "I'm afraid I can't describe him. My memory and eye-sight are both failing fast. If you were to leave here now, and an hour later, some one was to ask me to describe your appearance, I would be utterly at a loss. I do recall, however, that he was middle-aged, well-dressed, and well bred—a gentleman, I should say."

"And that is all you know of him?" I persisted.

"That's all I know of him," the old man assented. "Well, yes, I do just remember one other thing. The day he called for the scroll, he apologized for his hurried departure, saying that he had only a few minutes in which to keep an important engagement in Radio Center, and make his train."

"Ah!" I breathed. "Did he mention taking a train on any particular railroad?"

"No," was the reply. "But after he'd gone, I found a Long Island Railroad time-table on my desk. Evidently he had left it behind—forgotten it in his haste."

After some further questioning, I went away. At noon, I met McGinity, having promised the night before to join him at lunch, in town, and submit all the evidence I had collected about the water-mark in the scroll. The restaurant was one of his own choosing, a cheerful but obscure eating-place in the Times Square section, noted for its home-cooking and excellent beer, and largely patronized by newspaper reporters working in that district.

The reporter listened to my story with signs of ever increasing interest, as we sat together in a dining nook, and when it came to an end, he exclaimed: "'Middle-aged—well-dressed—well bred!' You see? Olinski! without a doubt."

"No, I don't see it at all," I answered. "The old bookseller's vague description of the man who gave him the order for the scroll, in my opinion, doesn't fit Olinski. True, there's evidence that the man left hurriedly for an important engagement at Radio Center, and later, to catch a train on the Long Island Railroad, but that proves nothing against Olinski. Why should he rush off to keep an appointment in Radio Center, when he spends most of his time in his laboratory there? Besides, he's perfectly familiar with the time schedules of the railroad, so far as Sands Cliff is concerned."

"Then, if it wasn't Olinski, it must have been his accomplice," McGinity persisted. "There's more than one person mixed up in this."

"Undoubtedly you're right," I concurred. "But it would be just as easy and logical to suspect Prince Matani. Personally, I would suspect the Prince of doing anything, short of murder, for money. He's been trying to force Henry's hand for some time, in regard to Pat, and failing, this may have been his revenge. But acting only as a paid agent for a superior intellect, who put the thing over in a much bigger way, perhaps, than the Prince had anticipated."

"If this is true, then it will account for the Prince falling in a fit the first time he set eyes on Mr. Zzyx," the reporter suggested. "He expected to find a small baboon, and he finds a monster. Then, he vanishes. Very odd that he should go off to California—disappear like that."

"You've taken the words right out of my mouth," I rejoined, with a benign smile. "However, as matters are now shaping themselves, it's my opinion that any suspicions we may have regarding either Olinski or the Prince are coming to a quick end. We might as well attach suspicion to Mamie Sparks, our colored laundress."

"Well, at any rate, Mr. Royce," said McGinity, "one thing is pretty well established in my mind, and that is—if the perpetrator of this gigantic fraud isn't a lunatic, he's certainly been carried away by some strange fanatical motive."

"The facts of the case are all very strange, and very puzzling," I observed. "I have been reflecting on the matter for the last hour or so, since leaving the old bookseller, and I'm beginning to feel that we're up against a pretty difficult task—perhaps an impossible one."

"Oh, please, don't say that, Mr. Royce!" the reporter said, earnestly. "We may be all tangled up in this web of mystery, but we've got a start—just a thread of a clue—haven't we? Not such a big one but still a start. If we keep on the alert, we may run into something else that will put us in possession of another thread of a clue. That'll be two threads, won't it?"

"Yes," I replied, lugubriously; "but as far as I can see at present, things look pretty hopeless, and we might as well stop now with our investigations, and let matters take their natural course."

"That I'll never do," said McGinity, bringing his fist down on the table, as though to accentuate his determination to see things through. "You must remember, I've been taken in, as well as your brother Henry, and on my shoulders rests the responsibility of all those printed articles of mine."

"And not inventions, either," I said, "but stories founded on facts. You can excuse—facts."

"Not if they're fictitious facts," said McGinity; "and it's my duty now to expose their falsity to the public. No, Mr. Royce, we can't turn back now!"

As he spoke the last word, a boy selling a special extra of an afternoon paper, entered the restaurant, and came straight to our table. "Want a paper, Mister?" the boy asked me. I shook my head, but as soon as McGinity had glimpsed the big, front page headline he snatched a paper out of the boy's hand.

Within a second he was directing my attention to the glaring headline, which read: "Martian Rocket Disappears—Stolen!" and then to a space in the center of the page, headed: "Very Latest News," under which appeared a few lines, printed in red ink. Together we read them:

"New York police notified today by officials of New York Museum of Science that the Martian rocket, found on Long Island, near the estate of Henry Royce, millionaire scientist, and placed on exhibition in the museum, was stolen from its glass-case during the night. Watchman found bound and drugged. While nothing uncovered so far to establish clue to identity of daring thieves, police have obtained information showing theft was committed by two men, who were seen to leave the museum, carrying the rocket, and drive off in a small van, about three o'clock this morning."

Before I could speak, McGinity jumped to his feet, and made for a telephone booth. Five tense minutes passed, then he burst out of the booth, and came to me.

"Ah!" he said, excitedly; "now, we're getting somewhere."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Just this," the reporter replied. "The theft of this rocket proves conclusively that the superior intellect, the master mind, is back on the job. Something has forced him out of hiding—out of the unknown into which he passed about three months ago. He's getting scared. He realizes that the finger of suspicion, sooner or later, will be pointed at him, and he's trying to destroy all evidence of his guilt."

"That is, of course, a possibility," I agreed. "But this theft of the rocket, now. Why, to me, it makes the whole thing seem more and more of a puzzle."

"It's the best thing that could have happened," McGinity observed. "It will prepare the public for the exposé, which is bound to come now, and put your brother in right. Public sentiment is always with the man who has been duped."

"Does this mean that we will not go on with our investigations?" I inquired.

McGinity shook his head. "My instructions from the Desk," he answered, "which I just received on the phone, are to continue with our private

investigations. And my first job is to make contact as soon as possible with your brother Henry. And let me say, right here, that I think it highly important that we keep nothing back from him. We must give him a clear, succinct account of the whole matter as we know it up to this moment."

"Whew!" I exclaimed. "You don't know Henry. He would consider any move like that, on our part, as highly meddlesome, even offensive."

"But in enlisting his services in tracking down the stolen rocket—ten to one, it's been dumped in the East River, which is only a few blocks from the museum—we must acquaint him with all the particulars that have come to light. Tell what we know and suspect in the matter. He's got to know sometime—why not now?"

"Very well, then," I assented; adding, with an amused chuckle: "Looks like we've got a very busy afternoon ahead of us."

"Busy isn't the word," McGinity rejoined, as he began making some hasty notes on a bunch of copy-paper, which he always kept handy in his coat pocket. "However, this is only the beginning."

"What are you making notes for?" I asked, curiously. "Are they for your paper, or the police?"

"Neither," replied McGinity. "They are intended for broadcasting. After I'd talked to my City Editor, I got Mr. Scoville of the NRC on the phone, and he's promised to have a good description of the rocket put on the air at three o'clock this afternoon, again at six, and at nine this evening."

"Excellent idea," I said, enthusiastically. "I only wish there was something I could do. What can I do?"

"Well, Mr. Royce," replied McGinity, as he finished making his notes, and gave me a smile and roguish wink that meant much, "a reward is always useful in these matters. Money can do things that mere words can't do."

"I see what you mean," I responded slowly. I thought a moment, and then said: "If my belief's correct, the sooner we lay hands on the two men who stole the rocket the better! Yes? Well, Mr. McGinity, I'm quite willing to help out on this, in a small way, of course. I'll offer a reward of \$5,000—"

"Five thousand dollars!" McGinity interrupted, gleefully. "That's a whole lot of money, Mr. Royce, and I'm sure it's going to help solve the mystery. And

say—here's an idea that occurs to me. Why not phone Olinski now, at once, and get a detailed description of the rocket from him. And then ask him—also for me—if he ever visited a certain curio and bookseller's shop at the corner of Stuyvesant Place and Twelfth Street. If he doesn't answer you directly, and begins to question you—well, just hang up. Better hurry now!"

I am easily excited, and I certainly felt my heart thump as I hurried into one of the compartments of the telephone booth, to carry out the reporter's suggestions, while McGinity stepped quickly into the adjoining section, to conclude the necessary arrangements by telephone for broadcasting the \$5,000 reward.

I smiled to myself as I impatiently awaited a response to my call. There I was, a staid member of society, a pillar of the church, holding dignified offices in at least a dozen of the most exclusive and conservative clubs of New York—tracking down an ingeniously concocted scheme to ruin my brother's reputation as a scientist, with the self-possession of a Hercule Poirot, or any other equally distinguished detective of fiction; lunching at a reporters' hangout, and, now, about to perform a rather dirty trick on my good friend, Olinski—altogether putty in the hands of a very audacious but ingratiating reporter.

Luckily for me, Olinski was reported "out" at his laboratory. In fact, he hadn't been in for two days; obviously his staff was worried.

"Of course, Olinski's out," muttered McGinity, when I told him; "he's got other business to attend to—pressing business." And then he proceeded to begin preparations to leave. "Now, we'd better get along to Sands Cliff—quick! Our next job's there."

The reporter's car was waiting for us, and in less than an hour we were outside our lodge-gate. The big iron gate is usually kept open during the day-time, but now it was closed. As there was no sign of the lodge-keeper, McGinity got out and opened the gate. When we rolled through, the radiator was spouting hot water and steam like a miniature Yellowstone Park geyser. The reporter had whirled me along country roads and through villages, in the drab light of a cloudy November afternoon, at a speed not at all to my liking.

Parking the car just inside the gate, we drew near the gray-walled castle. Something ominous was in the air. A deadly chill, floating in across the terrace from the dark waters of the Sound, seemed to penetrate to our very bones. Everything was weirdly silent. No sign of life. I grew very anxious and uncomfortable, although the incredible truth did not dawn upon me. Why was everything so horribly silent? Where were the usual sounds and stir of a big country estate? Why this tomb-like castle?

I was surprised to find the front door open. Within a few seconds we had entered, and were standing in the great, vaulted entrance hall, now dark and gloomy. Not a sound, nor a movement!

And then, suddenly, in the gloom and silence, we saw something that struck terror in our hearts. Jane—dear, lovable old Jane—lying, still as death, face downward, on the floor, at the base of the great staircase. Showing vividly on the stone steps, from top to bottom, were blotches of dark red. They looked like bloody footprints.

XXIV

I have often wondered, since all this occurred, how it happened that McGinity and I arrived at the castle at this very critical moment, which, afterwards, proved to be the crucial stage of our adventures in trying to detect and trace the utterly unscrupulous scoundrel who perpetrated the Martian hoax. Seconds—or minutes—later, and I might now be recording a much more terrible series of events. It was all horrible enough, God knows!

To our great relief, we found that Jane had fainted from shock. She showed signs of returning to consciousness as the reporter and I sprang to her side. She was, of course, the first person to give us the news. After we had assisted her to her feet, we partly carried her to a big easy chair, propping her up with sofa pillows. Luckily, her smelling salts were in her handbag, which I had picked up from the floor, and as I waved the vial of sal volatile to and fro under her nose, I urged her gently to tell us what had happened.

"Where's Henry?" was my first question.

"He went away—er—after lunch," Jane replied, slowly and painfully. She was still breathing with difficulty, and her words came in little gasps.

"Did he say where he was going?"

"No place—in particular. He was completely fagged out. I think he went for a drive."

"And Pat? Where is she?"

"She went out about an hour ago. I begged her not to go. She's been crying all day—about her white cockatoo."

"Did she say where she was going, Miss Royce?" McGinity asked.

"She said something about the dock. What she did say was that she felt that some fresh air, and a little exercise, would do her good."

"Did she mention any particular kind of exercise?" McGinity questioned again.

"No—she merely said—oh, yes—she spoke of rowing—that was it."

"Pat's very fond of rowing," I explained to McGinity, "and frequently goes over to the island, and potters about the old lighthouse ruins." Then I turned again to Jane: "Now, Jane, tell us—what about Mr. Zzyx?"

At the mention of the creature's name, she turned more pale and sank back in the chair, gasping. I thought she was going to faint again. Between us, McGinity and I rubbed her hands and forearms briskly. Quickly rallying, she murmured, with quivering lips: "He went mad—or something—stark crazy!"

I glanced at McGinity, and whispered: "He must have gone on a rampage—just as I feared."

"Where are all the servants, Miss Royce?" McGinity asked, as Jane recovered some semblance of her natural poise.

She smiled a little grimly. "I guess they've all been frightened away," she answered. "You see, I don't know about everything that happened, but it's my belief that all the servants have locked themselves up in the service wing. Oh, neither of you can comprehend the utter reign of terror we've just passed through. Here I was, by myself—Henry and Pat both out—the

servants fleeing in alarm. Naturally, at first, I was in a state of absolute despair as to what to do."

"Let's begin at the beginning, Jane," I counselled, softly. "When did you first hear of Mr. Zzyx acting up?"

"About half an hour ago," she replied. "I was in my room, reading, when Schweizer knocked at my door. His face was as white as a sheet. He said a great commotion was going on in the State Apartment, and hadn't he better call the police. But I advised him to summon all the men-servants in the place, as I felt they could handle the situation, whatever it might be."

"Then what?"

"The butler had not been gone two minutes when I heard that dreadful thing, screeching—oh, terrible to hear!—and running up and down the hall, outside my room, and smashing the furniture. Then everything became quiet. He must have gone downstairs, for, a few minutes later, I heard the woman servants screaming—such screaming as I never heard before and never want to hear again."

"What did you do, then?"

"As soon as the screaming had subsided, I decided that something must be done, for I suddenly realized that all the men on the place had gone off on a half holiday. Besides, the telephone extension on the second floor went out of order this morning. My intention, as I slipped out of my room, was to go downstairs to the library, lock myself in, and phone the police. As none of the servants, not even my personal maid, had shown themselves, and viewing the awful wreckage that creature had made of the tables, chairs and tapestries in the hall, I was convinced that something terrible was going on."

"But how did you happen to be lying at the foot of the staircase?"

"I will tell you." She drew a long, painful breath, and then continued. "All went well until I reached the bottom of the stairs, when I heard heavy footsteps above me. I turned and looked. Mr. Zzyx was coming down towards me, chattering, and showing his teeth, rolling his head, and waving his arms convulsively, like he had a fit. I was frozen with terror to the spot. I couldn't move. I remember seeing blood on his hands and clothes, as he

came nearer to me. I recall receiving a heavy blow on my arm. After that, I remember nothing."

"Thank God! you escaped without a scratch," I breathed. "But where do you suppose he's gone? The front door was open when we arrived. He may have gone out that way."

"I have no idea," Jane said. Then she wailed: "Oh, what are we to do?"

"We'll do something," I replied, and immediately went into action. I had a police whistle in my pocket, and, leaving Jane in charge of McGinity, I went quickly into the library. Opening the window that gave on to the terrace, I blew the whistle. Just then, I saw Schweizer coming from the servants' wing. I waved a hand to him, and he came hurrying on to the terrace and up to the window.

"What's become of everyone?" I inquired.

"The women have barricaded themselves in their quarters, sir," the butler replied. "That hairy fellow nearly scared the life out of 'em. Mamie Sparks went into a faint, and isn't out of it yet."

"Isn't there a strong-armed man left on the place?"

"None, sir," Schweizer replied. "The two chauffeurs went with your brother on a drive. I was afraid to tackle that hairy thing unarmed and single-handed, and ever since leaving Miss Jane locked up in her room, I've been searching everywhere for a gun."

"Did you see Mr. Zzyx leaving by the front door?"

"I saw nothing, sir, after I went back to the servants' wing to look for a weapon. If I'd found one, I meant to shoot that fellow dead. He surely made a mess of things with his tearing and smashing."

"Yes, I know," I rejoined, glancing back over my shoulder. The dining room looked as though a small whirlwind had struck it. "Better come inside, Schweizer, and help us get things straightened out."

"Just a word, sir," the butler said, coming up closer to the window, and speaking in little more than a whisper. "I think murder's been committed."

"Oh, I don't believe that," I replied, "but we'll soon see."

While alarmed and mystified at first over the red blotches on the marble staircase, it was my belief now that Mr. Zzyx must have cut himself severely during his rampage, which would account for the blood stains. But after the butler had joined us, and had told of hearing Niki screaming, during the commotion in the State Apartment, that put a different complexion on the matter. Leaving Schweizer to guard Jane, McGinity and I hastened upstairs.

It was my earnest hope that Niki was in hiding somewhere. I could not picture a person of his athletic prowess being outmatched, even by a strong-limbed creature like Mr. Zzyx. First, I tried Mr. Zzyx's door. It was locked on the inside. Then I knocked on the door which opened into the room occupied by Niki, a double room, one half of which was fitted as a bedroom. There was no response. Dead silence followed each knock—an eerie silence that caused my blood to run chill.

In a moment I had opened the door, and we were standing in his room. There were unmistakable traces of some sort of struggle. Several chairs and a reading-table were overturned, rugs disarranged, and books and magazines scattered over the floor. But no sign of Niki. I called him by name. "Niki! Niki!" my voice echoing weirdly from the high ceiling.

Then, at McGinity's suggestion, I opened the door connecting Niki's apartment with Mr. Zzyx's luxurious sleeping quarters. I gave one glance into the room, then recoiled with an exclamation of horror. The reporter leapt forward to look. The sight that met our gaze stayed with me for many days afterwards.

Niki was lying on the bed, on his back, his clothes almost torn to tatters, and the upper part of his body and head hidden under pillows and bedclothes, which bore crimson stains. I made no comment at the moment. My thoughts were going back to the performance of Verdi's "Otello" at the Metropolitan-Civic Opera House; the night I had studied Mr. Zzyx attentively as he watched, as if spellbound, the smothering to death of Desdemona by the jealous and enraged Moor. Had my surmises at that time been right? Had this violent climax of the opera taken hold of his primitive mind and obsessed him until it had quickened him to this deed of incredible violence?

Beyond any reasonable doubt, Niki had been overcome and smothered to death after a terrific fight with this hairy monster. The wreckage of the furnishings of the room bore evidence of such a struggle.

McGinity spoke first. "Awful!" he said in a faint voice.

"Poor Niki!" I said, in a tone which I scarcely recognized as my own.

"If that fiend smothered Niki to death, how do you account for all that—" McGinity checked himself as his voice choked.

"As Niki's face bears only scratches," I replied, "it's possible that Mr. Zzyx cut himself seriously while smashing window-panes and picture-glass. That will account for the bloodstains on the pillows and bedclothing."

"Then he must have killed Niki after going on a rampage through the castle," McGinity suggested.

"No, I don't think so," I replied. "I figure that he killed Niki first. He must have returned to the second floor by the back stairs, and by some strange instinct, re-enacted the killing with his cut and bleeding hands, to make sure his victim was dead."

"A cruel, murderous affair any way you look at it," said McGinity. "Better call the police at once."

"No," I demurred. "I mean to keep things quiet until Henry returns."

"In that case, then," the reporter suggested, "we'd better split up. You go and find Pat, and I'll start looking for Mr. Zzyx. It's my belief that he's escaped into the thick woods, back of the castle."

"Be careful, young man," I advised, in assenting to his proposed plan of action. "That fellow is mad—desperate, and likely to show fight."

"He'll not escape me, don't you worry," the reporter rejoined, his hand moving instinctively to his hip pocket. "I'll take no chances in tackling that bird. So now," he concluded, "whatever it is we're in for—"

He had no time to finish that sentence. The butler's voice broke in, coming from the hall. "Come, quickly, Mr. Royce! Come, at once, sir!" the butler shouted.

We left the chamber of death, taking good care to lock the door, and hurried down the hall to join Schweizer, who had only come to the head of the stairs, so as not to let Jane out of his sight. He had surprising news to tell. The gate-keeper, who had deserted his post at the first alarm, had come running up from his hiding-place, behind the terrace wall, at the brink of the cliff, to report that he had seen Mr. Zzyx go down to the dock, and, a few minutes later, cast off in a runabout, heading for the island.

The effect of this news was terrifying. The same thought must have struck McGinity and myself at the same instant. Pat was on the island. To be caught there—alone—by—It was too terrible to contemplate.

If the effect of the news was terrifying to us both, it was also electrical, so far as McGinity was concerned. Without uttering a word, he dashed out of the castle, ran across the terrace, and disappeared down the steps to the dock.

Apprehensive of the effect of this news, as well as the killing of Niki, on Jane, who was now comfortably ensconced on a divan in the hall, with her personal maid in attendance, I gave Schweizer a quick, whispered account of what we had found, and enjoined him to secrecy.

"Then there was murder, sir?" he said, in a low voice. "Niki murdered! Murder, says you, murder!" His mind couldn't seem to grasp it. "Lord help us!" he added. "I hope that reporter person gets that hairy, murdering thing, and gets it good!"

Increasingly disturbed and anxious about Pat's fate, I left the butler, signaling to him as I went outside, to stay back and look after Jane. Emerging on the terrace, another surprising sight met my gaze, giving a startling and dramatic turn to the tragic proceedings of the afternoon.

The shanty, which stood on the island, near the lighthouse ruins, was on fire. The bitterly cold, north-east wind was already whipping the flames and sending them upward in long, red tongues, which seemed to lick the lowering November sky. Cold and biting as the wind was, I was not sure that the quiver which shook me from head to foot was more from cold than from the dread anticipation of what was at hand.

Shaking and shivering, I somehow managed to get to the dock. McGinity had already cast off, and, as I breathed a prayer for the safety of Pat, I

watched him struggling against the wind and incoming tide in a big, unwieldy dory, the only boat available at the dock. A flat-bottomed boat with high flaring sides, largely used on the New England coast, and by American fishing vessels, and christened "The Tub" by our servants, who used it for fishing excursions.

Mr. Zzyx must have reached the island with incredible speed. The runabout was tied up at the tiny dock, on the far side of which Pat's row-boat rocked with the tide. The flames from the burning shanty were mounting still higher, their reflection turning the expanse of surrounding water into turbulent pools of fiery red. Still, no movement was noticed on the island that would indicate the presence there, either of Pat, or of the maddened creature, Mr. Zzyx. I was beginning to be more alarmed than ever, when suddenly things began to take shape.

First, I saw McGinity beach his boat at the far end of the island, where there was a small, pebbly beach. Then came a flutter of something white—Pat's scarf, or handkerchief—at the pinnacle of the ruins.

At that moment the flames died down, and myriads of sparks flew upward as the walls of the shanty collapsed. Visibility became obscure on account of the smoke. Presently I saw McGinity running up the steps, cut in the rocks, to the door of the lighthouse, the lower part of which was practically intact. I saw him enter the doorway. Then everything became indistinct in a cloud of smoke, and out of that obscurity, I saw a black figure come stealthily around the ruins, moving from the ledge of rock on the side next to the Sound, as though it had been in hiding. As it crept into the doorway, and disappeared into the dark interior of the ruins, I cried, "Oh, God!" It was Mr. Zzyx. Pat and McGinity were trapped in the lighthouse.

Standing there alone on the dock, in the biting cold and gathering gloom, and helpless to assist Pat and McGinity in their perilous position, I passed into a state of anxiety bordering on frenzy. It was only my abounding faith in the courage and resourcefulness of the reporter in meeting the situation that kept me sane. Also, I felt sure then, as I do still, that Mr. Zzyx did not go to the island in pursuit of Pat. By no possible means could he have known that she was there. Mad with fury, and out to wreck and kill, he was winding up his abnormal excitation with all the mischief he could do on the island.

It is natural to assume that when he rushed out of the castle and reached the dock, he saw in the runabout a means to further satisfy his madness for excitement; or the boat may have suggested a means of escape. As I learned afterwards, he had gone with Niki for a spin in the runabout, directly after lunch. The engine may still have been warm, for he seemed to have had no difficulty in starting it himself, and he had long ago become proficient in casting off and tying up. The fact remains that he got to the island.

Of course, from the dock, I could not see what was transpiring inside the lighthouse. But I know now what happened. As Pat told her story afterwards, she had spent about an hour on the island when she decided to row back to the mainland. The exercise of rowing, the cold, bracing wind, and quiet moments spent in wandering about the ruins, had refreshed her wonderfully. She was walking down the rocky slope to the island dock, when she saw the runabout approaching. Naturally, she suspected nothing out of the way.

"At first, I thought," she said, after it was all over, "that it must be either one of our servants, or—improbable as it seemed—Mr. McGinity. The runabout was halfway across before I recognized Mr. Zzyx.

"My first horrified thought was that he was coming after me," she went on, her voice still strained by excitement. "And to me that meant only one thing: that he was going to make an attempt on my life, using the same tactics as he had employed when he so cruelly killed my white cockatoo. He'd always seemed mild to me, and while I was afraid of him, I never considered him really dangerous. I had developed a sort of fondness for him, as I would for a big dog. But after killing my poor bird—well, that settled everything. I had decided not to spend another night in the castle while he was in it, and I was prepared to give Uncle Henry my ultimatum, and stay with friends in town, if he didn't rid the premises at once of that—killer.

"I was scared into a fit, too scared for a minute or so to think of anything to do. Then I thought of setting fire to the shanty. That's a thought that might occur to anybody in the same fix. I counted on the fire bringing someone, quickly, from the castle to the island, for I had told Aunt Jane I was going for a row, and I believed the fire would indicate that I was at the lighthouse, and in danger. I had been inside the shanty, and had noticed a barrel filled

with waste paper and pasteboard boxes—probably gathered up from one of the picnic parties trespassing on the island during the summer. So I ran back, into the shack, and threw a burning match into the barrel. The flames leapt up so quickly, it was a close call getting outside without getting singed.

"I was pretty shaky by this time, so I decided to hide in the ruins. Mr. Zzyx was tying up at the dock. I could hear him chattering; he was acting very queerly. I got down, and crawled on my hands and knees, behind the rocks, until I reached the lighthouse doorway. I don't believe he saw me.

"When I got inside the ruins it was so dark I had to light a match to find my way. As I did so, something rushed at me from above, and struck me on the head. It was a big bat. I screamed, and ran up the winding, stone stairway as far as I could go. I crawled behind one of the larger stones that had fallen inside, on the third landing, and stayed there until I got my breath. The clouds were hanging so low over my head, I felt I could almost reach up and touch them. This feeling suggested something, so I climbed up on one of the dislodged stones, leaned over the broken ledge of the circular wall, and waved the white silk scarf I had been wearing under my wool jacket. Then I went back into hiding again. It wasn't any fun, hiding there, in all that uncertainty, and expecting every moment to see Mr. Zzyx coming up the steps.

"Then I heard a voice. Some one was calling me by name. Again, I climbed up on the stone, and peered over the ledge. I had only a second or two to see that it was Mr. McGinity calling, and to wave to him. It was long enough, however, and I never felt so relieved in my life before, as I thought my last hour had come."

Pat must have looked pretty ghastly when McGinity finally reached her side, according to what he told me afterwards. He had no idea, then, what had become of Mr. Zzyx, and was surprised not to encounter him inside the ruins.

I don't think either of them told me exactly what passed between them, when McGinity came to Pat's rescue. Perhaps it was too sacred to both of them to repeat, even for a devoted uncle's ears. Anyway, the reporter took her gently by the arm, and assisted her down the winding stairs. They had

just reached the second landing when they heard Mr. Zzyx's labored breathing, as he came creeping up the steps below them.

Time was vital. McGinity's first thought was of Pat's safety. On this landing there was a closet in the wall, in which oil for the beacon lamp had been stored years ago. The heavy, studded oak door had defied the ravages of time. The hinges, though, were almost eaten away by rust. It required all the strength he possessed to open the door, and then to close it, once he had placed Pat inside. She was too frightened, it seems, to raise any protest against being shut up in the dark.

McGinity had just time to draw his revolver when Mr. Zzyx appeared at the top of the steps, and came at him, growling fiercely. He fired a shot to frighten off the creature, but it had not the slightest effect. Before he could get out of the way, Mr. Zzyx lunged at him in wild fury, caught him in his hairy arms, and held him with a grip like a vise. Luckily, his right arm was free, and he dealt the creature a heavy blow on the head with the butt of his revolver. This not only broke the clinch; it frightened off the maddened beast.

With a bound, Mr. Zzyx dashed up the steps to the peak of the ruins. McGinity quickly followed, firing three shots in the air in rapid succession. His idea all through had been to frighten and cow, and not to kill, and what occurred after they both reached the open landing certainly was not the act of wanton destruction on the reporter's part.

Mr. Zzyx wheeled, and rushed at the reporter. Again McGinity fired, a reckless shot. This time he stayed the onrush, and Mr. Zzyx turned in his tracks, leapt up on the dislodged stones, and gained the top ledge.

A wave of horror came over McGinity as he watched him waver a moment, to and fro, then, with a scream that sounded almost human, plunge to his death on the rocks below. If he was not instantly killed by the fall, he was drowned, for his body rolled off the rocks and was engulfed in the sea.

To this day, McGinity believes that when he fired that last shot, the bullet ricocheted off a stone and entered a vital spot in Mr. Zzyx's body; and that the creature was as good as dead when he plunged from the parapet. I never did believe that. For that matter, we had no means of knowing the truth, for the body was never recovered from its watery grave.

I doubt if Pat heard much of the stress and sound of battle. She insists that she did. She must have slipped off in a faint, and had had time to come out of it when McGinity burst the door open and released her. He found her crumpled up in the small closet space, like a pale flower broken in the storm. She gazed up at him dazedly, but with a faint smile.

By the time they got down to the island dock, the water seemed filled with private launches, wealthy residents living along the North Shore having been attracted to the scene by the fire. A belated fire-boat began spouting water on the smoldering ruins of the shanty as they cast off in the runabout for the mainland.

As soon as McGinity had given me a quick summary of what had happened, and Pat had enjoyed a good cry in my embrace, I advised keeping everything quiet until we could report to the proper police authorities. When we reached the castle, we were surprised to find village policemen all over the place. It seems that Jane, on being told of the fire, had ordered Schweizer to summon the village fire department, but the butler was so excited that he dialed the wrong number, and got the police station. Furthermore, he never mentioned the fire. A touch of comedy which is never far away from tragedy.

It was perhaps just as well, as everything had to come out eventually. To Chief of Police Meigs, of Sands Cliff village, I gave a clear account of the whole wretched affair, which caused even that big, grim-faced individual to shudder. McGinity was feeling pretty sick himself over the death of Mr. Zzyx. To hear him talk about it, and the way he carried on, you would think he was guilty of premeditated murder, and would have to answer to the law.

Something of his mental unrest must have reached the Chief of Police, for, just as the Chief was leaving, he put his hand gently on the reporter's shoulder, and said: "Now, you quit your worrying, son. We'll fix this up, all right."

There were more bad minutes for us both when Pat and Jane found out about Niki. It was pretty terrible to hear them go on. But an hour after the police had arrived, Niki's body had been removed to the village mortuary, and all signs of blood stealthily and carefully removed by the servants, while the furnishings of the various rooms and halls, which had sustained damage during the rampage, were replaced as far as possible, and some semblance of the former formality of things restored.

Naturally, we were again overrun by city reporters, to whom, acting as spokesman, I gave only the absolutely necessary facts. Unwittingly, McGinity had now got himself mixed up in the news, and for the first time in his brief reportorial career, publicity was the last thing on earth he wanted, or was at all interested in. I spared him as much as possible, for I quickly realized he was laboring under the delusion that to have his name linked to Pat's in his tragic encounter with Mr. Zzyx would cause her much embarrassment, if not unpleasantness. But I happened to know that Pat didn't mind in the least; in fact, that she was very proud of the association of their names, even in these most sordid and harrowing circumstances.

Henry returned from his long motor drive a little after five o'clock. I would have given a king's ransom to have avoided meeting him, and disclosing the drama of crime that had been enacted during his absence, involving the loss of two lives.

Fortunately, I was relieved of this very unpleasant duty. As it turned out, Chief of Police Meigs had met Henry on the road, recognized his car, and stopped him. So he had a rather fair idea of what had occurred. I could plainly see the news weighed on him heavily, betrayed by his white face, quivering hands, and the pathetic droop of his mouth.

When McGinity and I followed him into the library, he dropped into his desk-chair with a moan that stirred my deepest pity and sympathy. In his anguish of mind, he kept muttering: "Niki murdered ... in my house!" and glancing suspiciously at the reporter.

"It wasn't necessary, I'm sure, for you to drive Mr. Zzyx to his death," he said finally, addressing McGinity.

"No one regrets the occurrence more than I do, Mr. Royce, but it can't be helped now," McGinity said, in a low, apologetic tone.

"It seems such a senseless sort of murder," Henry said.

"But it wasn't murder," I promptly corrected him. "Pat's life was endangered, as well as McGinity's, and I think he would have been wise if he had shot Mr. Zzyx dead, on the spot, which, of course, he didn't. Mr. Zzyx's end, while horrible, was purely accidental."

"Oh, you think that, do you?" Henry turned on me savagely. "Well, it's a lie!" he quavered, as he came to his feet, shaking his fist at me. "It wasn't necessary for you, Livingston, to interfere in this matter at all, but it's the sort of thing you've done all your life—interfering in my affairs. You've never considered me in the least—thoughtless—selfish!"

Then, as suddenly as he rose, he collapsed over the desk. We both thought he had fainted, but he waved away our offers of assistance.

"I'm all right," he mumbled, sinking back in his chair. "Sit down, Livingston. Sit down, McGinity. I'm rather upset. At my age ... being met in my house with this dreadful news! Now, McGinity," he concluded, in a quiet voice, "tell me all about it."

McGinity told the story briefly, and Henry listened without interruption, believing when the reporter had finished that the subject had been brought to a definite conclusion. Unfortunately, there was something else to be cleared up. Matters had come to a crisis, and it was high time we convinced Henry that he had been made a victim of a hoax. But how were we to prove and justify our suspicions?

I had infinite faith in the capability of the reporter in meeting the situation, and I was greatly pleased when he rose to the occasion, and laid before Henry all the suspicious circumstances which he knew to be material to the point, particularly referring to the spurious scroll, which I produced immediately for my brother's inspection.

Henry seemed staggered by the disclosure. "Science has been a curse to me," he quavered. "I wish to God I had never dabbled in it."

"It looks to me now, Mr. Royce," McGinity observed, "that in all this careful preparation of the plot, there was only one slip, and that was in using this parchment paper containing a familiar water-mark, which you have just seen. If the scroll is counterfeit, then that radio message from Mars, which told of its being secreted in the rocket, was not legitimate. You

will also recall that no mention was made in this message of any occupant of the rocket. How do you explain the presence there of the late, lamented Mr. Zzyx? Was he just a coincidence?"

"I've been keeping my mouth shut on that point," Henry answered, "but I will be quite frank now, and admit that Mr. Zzyx was a coincidence. I'd particularly like to know how he got into the rocket. If he was a species of the man-ape inhabiting the tropical zone of Mars, as described in the scroll, and depicted on the screen last night, and was captured and locked in the rocket, and sent earthwards in the interest of science—"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Royce!" McGinity interrupted, with a kindly smile. "If the scroll is not genuine, then its contents can only be false."

"Too true," Henry admitted, mournfully. "But it was so cleverly thought out—a masterpiece of invention. I'll go further, and say it was an inspiration. The most original and logical concept of life on Mars that has ever been given to the world. But the question that's agitating my poor brain now, is how did Mr. Zzyx get into the rocket?"

"There'll be no difficulty in finding that out, sir, although it may take a little time," McGinity said. "No more difficult than proving that the scroll was a fake. Truth will out, sir."

"But how are you going to find out the whole truth, young man?" Henry asked, his voice fairly wailing.

"I can only tell you this much," McGinity answered. "Things have started to break—first, the discovery of the water-mark in the scroll, and, secondly, the theft of the rocket from the Museum of Science—and they'll keep on breaking. That happens every day in newspaper reporting business. In all big newspaper, or police stories, like mystery murders, kidnappings, state and civic scandals the underlying motives, means and methods are so closely linked that to solve one automatically brings another to light. When things begin to break, it's like touching off a string of fire-crackers—one explosion sets off another."

Henry shook his head, and rose abruptly. He appeared to have reached the limit of endurance. "I'm going out for a little air," he announced. As he went slowly out of the room, he looked pathetically old and broken.

As soon as he had gone, the reporter turned to me. "Well, what do you say, Mr. Royce? Shall we continue to go through with this business?"

"Of course," I replied. "And the sooner the next break comes, the better it'll suit me."

"All right, Mr. Royce," said the reporter, with a broad grin. "That suits me down to the ground. Now," he continued, glancing at his watch, and walking towards the radio, "let's tune in, shall we? It's just six o'clock."

A fraction of a second after he had tuned in, the stentorian voice of the announcer of the NRC radio press bureau broke the silence of the room. This is what he said:

"Late this afternoon, the police recovered the rocket from Mars, stolen last night from the New York Museum of Science. It was found on the bottom of the East River, at the foot of East Sixty-fourth Street. But nothing else so far has been uncovered by the police. Not the slightest clue to the identity of the thieves. Any person listening in, who may have information regarding this theft, and the subsequent disposal of the rocket in the river, will stand a good chance of winning a \$5,000 reward by communicating at once with Police Headquarters in Manhattan, or at any police station in the greater city."

"Well, McGinity," I said, after the announcer had signed off, "that's break number three. You're a pretty good guesser. Now, perhaps, you can predict when the next break will come."

"Oh, I don't know," the reporter answered, half musingly. "I'm chuck full of funny ideas, you know." He thought a moment, then said: "Well, I've a good hunch that the next break will come by telephone, and that it'll bring some startling information."

He had hardly uttered the last word when the telephone on Henry's desk began to trill. I strode quickly to the instrument, and as I picked up the receiver, McGinity came to the side of the desk, making no attempt to hide his amusement.

"Good Lord!" he remarked, laughing. "I'd no idea that break number four would come so quickly."

I silenced him with a wave of my hand. The voice on the telephone was weak and trembling—a woman's voice.

"Is this the home of Henry Royce?" inquired the voice. "Can I speak to Mr. Henry Royce, or to his brother, Livingston?"

"This is Livingston Royce, speaking," I replied.

"Oh, Mr. Royce! For God's sake, come to me at once! This is—"

The voice broke off abruptly, in a low gurgling sound that conveyed a sense of its being strangled in the speaker's throat. Then, curiously enough, I heard the voice again, miles off, it seemed—a smothered, muffled cry of "Help! Help!" Then it trailed out into indistinctness, and there was complete silence on the telephone. The voice was familiar, but for the moment I could not place it.

Cradling the receiver, I sat staring up at the reporter. He spoke first—it seemed as if a long time had elapsed before he did speak.

"Who was it?" he asked. "Somebody that we want?"

"Yes; I think so," I replied, almost breathlessly. "Yes; I'm sure it is."

The voice on the telephone had set my memory working; stimulating my forgetful mind. I had a sort of vision. In fancy, I could see the outline of an old house, silhouetted against the night sky. But there was not a speck of light to be seen in any of the windows.

And then, suddenly, as my mind groped in the darkness, a light dawned on me.

XXVI

I quickly recovered from the amazement which had momentarily possessed me. I had no doubt, hearing the mysterious voice on the telephone, that at last I had hit on something of a clue to the mystery of the Martian hoax. The voice, faintly familiar, had stirred up my recollections, and had established at once in my mind a positive suspect. Why this individual had not entered into my suspicions before is just one of those things that can't be explained. There was every chance now that he was mixed up in this. If so, I was convinced we were reaching the climax of the case.

"Well," I said, finally, turning to McGinity, "I think the stage is being set for the last interesting act of this affair."

He smiled a little dubiously. "Don't make me laugh, Mr. Royce," he said.

Having made an important discovery, I thought McGinity ought to know, so I told him briefly what had been said on the telephone, and my suspicions. He was silent for a moment, then he said: "Why didn't you think of this person before?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to reply: "Too stupid;" but I refrained from showing up my asinine denseness. Instead, I said: "The first thing to think of now is to trace that phone call."

"That'll be dead easy if the speaker used one of those old-time manual phones," he said; "but if the call was made on a dial instrument, there's no way of tracing it. You're sunk!"

A few minutes' conversation with the information operator proved the reporter's contentions to be true; I was "sunk." But not entirely.

"McGinity!" I exclaimed, "I must go to this place at once, and you must go with me. I'll lay anything I'm on the right track. I have a feeling too that every minute may be of importance."

To my surprise, the reporter hesitated. "Are you sure you recognized the woman who phoned by her voice?" he asked. "You may be mistaken, and with break number five liable to come any minute now, we can't afford to go off on some wild goose chase."

"Dead certain," I affirmed. "I'll stake all I've got on it. However, if you're so sure of number five breaking, we can stop at the Sands Cliff Police Station on our way, and you can notify them where we can be found."

"Queer doings, and not very plausible," McGinity remarked, after agreeing to my plan. "Yet—you may be right."

Feeling certain that on this expedition we should meet with some probably perilous adventure, I took good care to put one of Henry's revolvers in my pocket. It was an old-fashioned weapon, heavy and cumbersome, and just to prove that it was in good working order, I fired it off, up in the air, as we drove along the dark, unfrequented road bordering on our estate. McGinity, who was driving, gave vent to an exclamation of mingled surprise and amusement. Heretofore, he had been the one inclined to the impetuous, while I was always of a more cautious nature.

"That old horse-pistol has certainly got a bang to it," he remarked, laughing. "But we're not going to hunt elephants, you know."

"You never can tell," I countered. "I've an idea—instinct—McGinity," I went on, "that we've a night's work before us. And it's quite possible that we may encounter an elephant, or a lion, before we get through;" my mind slipping back to my thrilling encounter with the grizzly bear on the LaRauche estate. "Now, for the police station."

Fortunately, we found Chief of Police Meigs at his desk, and to him I poured out my suspicions.

"Oh! so you believe old Rene LaRauche to be implicated in this Martian fake?" he said.

"LaRauche was obsessed with a jealous hatred of my brother, Henry," I replied, "and his motive may have been revenge. He's heaven high above my brother in his knowledge and application of science, and mentally equipped to perpetrate a hoax like this. Besides, he's always had the reputation of being brutally cruel to his wife, and apparently he had some good reason for choking her off when she sought aid from the outside on the phone. She's always been very friendly and charming to Henry and myself."

"Sounds like the act of a crazy man," the Chief offered. "If my belief's correct, he'll probably show fight if you start any inquiry, and go nosing about his place."

"As a matter of protection, McGinity and I are both armed," I informed him, "as this is hardly a case for police investigation. The perpetration of this hoax, as I understand it, is quite within the law, and while not something to be called a crime, it is none the less dastardly."

"I have a hunch that before you get through with it, you'll have to call in the police," said the Chief. "I'm very much interested in the case. I drove past LaRauche's place yesterday, and I noticed it was all locked up, like he had closed the house, and gone to the city for the winter. I believe he has one manservant."

"A snoop, unreliable person, who answers to the name of Orkins," I said; "formerly in our employ as a butler."

"He's been pointed out to me," said the Chief, "but I never knew his name. He often comes to the village for groceries. I haven't noticed him around lately. Come to think of it, I haven't laid eyes on LaRauche for several months."

At that juncture, a motorcycle policeman, who had been standing by, evidently listening in, motioned his chief to step to one side. After a few minutes' conversation, Chief Meigs returned to us, and said:

"I've just been informed that LaRauche hasn't been seen around these parts for three months, at least. Looks like he's been in hiding. This motorcycle policeman also tells me that in passing the LaRauche house, on his daily route, two days ago, he saw a woman looking out of a top-story window, and waving. As there was no indication that she was in distress, or even signaling to him, he passed on. She was scantily clothed, he says; looked like she was wearing a nightgown. If that may be of any interest to you."

"I consider it very important information, Chief," said McGinity. "It confirms the intimation that Mr. Royce got on the phone, that Mrs. LaRauche is virtually a prisoner in her own home, and that her life is in danger. She was probably trying to attract the policeman's attention."

"If, in your inquiries, you find that to be the case," the Chief suggested, "all you've got to do is to get me word. If it's necessary, we'll get a search-warrant, and open the house and search it ourselves. I'll be at the station here for another hour, so you'll know where to find me, in case there's something I can do."

I thanked him for the suggestion, and in less than five minutes, McGinity and I were leaving the lights of the village behind, and were speeding over a winding, hilly road, along which I should have preferred to travel in daylight if I had been driving alone. As we neared the LaRauche place, the country became wilder and more solitary. I often wondered what could have brought LaRauche to these lonely, frowning hills.

Suddenly, I signaled a stop, and we halted a short ways from the gateway, taking care to dim our headlights. As we walked cautiously up the footpath, which led from the road to the house, I told McGinity about my encounter with the grizzly bear.

By that time, we could make out the outline of the old house quite clearly against the starlit sky. But there was not a gleam of light; the whole house looked black. For a few minutes, in order to get the lay of the land, we crouched behind some bushes directly in front of the residence.

Blinds were drawn; some of the windows were shuttered. There was an atmosphere of silence about the place that was uncanny; no sound, not even the distant bark of a dog one usually hears in the country at night. Certainly no sign of human life. I glanced over my shoulder, to the right, in the

direction of the old brick farm-house, in the hollow, where the Italian animal trainer lived, but I might just as well have been staring at a brick wall. No light—no sound—in that direction.

Presently, we crept upon the front porch. I tiptoed along the porch in the hope of getting a peep in at the lower windows, but the blinds were drawn, and I could see nothing of the interior. I knew where to find the bell, and I rang it once, twice, thrice. It was an old-fashioned, jangling bell that echoed dismally in the silence of the night.

When there was no response, we retraced our steps as far as the friendly bushes, and continued to watch the house from that point until we were both equally certain that the place, after all, was unoccupied. We were about to turn away, feeling that we might as well return to the police station, when something happened. That something was the sudden lighting up of a window in the top-story.

Silhouetted against this light, we saw a figure, unmistakably that of a woman. A few seconds later, another figure appeared in the window-frame of light. What followed was like old-time shadowgraphs, which used to delight me when I was a child: black, shadowy figures in action against a dimly lighted background. We saw an arm upraised and then fall, as though a blow had been delivered, and then two arms thrusting the woman-like figure away from the window, by force. Then the window went dark again.

There was nothing to do but turn away, and return to the car. On the way, I suggested to McGinity that we drive back about a mile, where I recalled seeing a light gleaming among a dense growth of pine trees. If it was a human habitation, I figured that the occupants, living so near the LaRauche estate, might give us some much desired information.

We found a light burning in a small cabin, in a clearing in the woods, set well back from the road. Our knock was answered by an elderly, gray-haired man, with a laborer's stoop in his shoulders. He inspected us a moment over his spectacles, then invited us to enter.

He turned out to be a carpenter and wood-chopper. His wife and daughter, he explained, had gone to the movies, in the village, with his wife's sister, who evidently was better placed in life and owned a car.

"Now, can I be of any service?" he asked, showing us to chairs in front of a blazing log-fire, in a plain but cheerful room, modern enough to have electric lights and a telephone.

I made a polite reply, without giving ourselves away. I was a friend of Dr. LaRauche, and had been surprised, on calling, to find his house dark. There had been no answer to the bell.

The carpenter smiled grimly, and said: "I'm afraid, stranger, you'll never git eny response to the ringin' of that bell, if you ring till Judgment Day. Others have tried, unsuccessfully, myself included. Old Doc LaRauche owes me considerable fer some wood-choppin' I done fer 'im."

"How do you explain it?" I asked.

"A lot of mysterious goin's on in that 'er house, of late," the carpenter answered, wagging his head, "which I, for one, can't answer fer. A very mysterious family!"

"From which I gather that Mrs. LaRauche is there, with her husband?" I said. "It's very urgent that I see her at once."

"No one 'ereabouts knows exactly what's happened to the poor lady," replied the carpenter. "It's common report that the old man keeps 'er locked up. Only yisterday, my wife went over with a paper bag of fruit, oranges and the like, which she intended leavin' fer the poor soul, but nary an answer to the bell."

"It's very lonely over there," I remarked. "No neighbors—"

"Ah, but they did have a close neighbor," the carpenter interrupted, "till the law stepped in and took 'im away. That old brick house, in the hollow. Maybe, now, you remember seein' it?"

"That's so—I'd forgotten," I said. "But tell me, what happened?"

"Last Spring, an Eytalian by the name of Antonio Ranzetti moved into the farm-house, vacant it was fer the last five years, and gone to ruin, like. He made a business of trainin' animals fer the circus, but he was cruel to 'em, awful cruel, so I 'eerd. So Doc LaRauche, wantin' to git rid of an undesirable neighbor, reported 'im to some society that protects animals—"

"Probably the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," I interjected.

"Anyhow," the carpenter continued, "the Eytalian was arrested, tried, and sent to the hoose-gow fer ninety days."

"Oh, indeed!" I murmured.

"Yes; and he oughta be gittin' out, now, one of these fine days," said the carpenter. Then he added: "Now, is there anythin' else you'd like to know, stranger?"

I shook my head, as I realized at once that we were not likely to get any more valuable information than this. As we rose to leave, a bright idea struck McGinity. Why not get in touch with Chief of Police Meigs while we had a telephone handy?

I did what he suggested, and spent a few minutes talking to the Chief, while McGinity collared the carpenter and engaged him in conversation until I had finished. Outside, I gripped the reporter by the arm, and exclaimed: "Things are still breaking. As sure as fate, LaRauche and Orkins are at the bottom of all this."

"What's happened?" asked McGinity.

"Chief Meigs says that five minutes after we'd left the station, a local garage owner called, and reported that he had rented a small, light truck to Orkins, night before last, who had explained that he was moving some of LaRauche's household belongings into the city. The description of the truck that carried off the rocket from the Museum of Science, in New York, as given over the air, and in the newspapers, he said, tallied with his own vehicle, which he found parked in front of his garage when he opened up this morning."

"Good!" the reporter exclaimed. "What else did he tell you?"

"This. He's getting a search warrant, and says he'll join us in about half an hour. We're to wait for him, at the side of the road, about a quarter of a mile beyond this cabin."

XXVII

The time of waiting came to an end, and as soon as Chief Meigs arrived in his car, armed with a search warrant and a short-handled axe, we drove straight on to the LaRauche estate, parking our cars about a hundred yards from the gate. As we strode along the high road, three abreast, the Chief imparted some more startling information, so particularly important that instinctively we quickened our steps.

"Listen," he began. "I had just hung up on you, Mr. Royce, when the phone rang. I answered. It was a man's voice, with an English-like accent, and low and trembly, if you know what I mean."

"Orkins, without a doubt," I said. "But he's not English. That accent is only a cultivated one."

"Well, he wanted to consult with the Chief of Police," the officer went on, "about the \$5,000 reward. When I informed him the Chief was speaking, he wanted to know if he came to the police station, and disclosed the name of the man who had stolen the rocket, would he stand a good chance in getting the reward. I told him I thought he would, and to come right along."

"Didn't he say who he was?" McGinity asked.

"No. And he was very particular that I promise not to reveal his identity after he had given me the necessary information. Finally, when I agreed to this, he said: 'I'll be with you inside an hour.'"

"Then what?" I inquired, agitatedly.

"Apparently we were cut off," the Chief replied; "and yet we weren't exactly disconnected, as I will explain. Something must have happened that caused him to drop the receiver, and get away from the phone in a hurry. I could hear two voices, now—muffled-like, and growing more distinct. Then came a sound like heavy and hurried footfalls would make on a bare floor, followed by two distinct crashes, like some furniture had been overturned. All of a sudden, there was a report, like the crack of a whip. It might have been a pistol shot, but that's only a guess."

"I think you've guessed right, Chief," I said. "It's my belief that LaRauche overheard Orkins, while he was phoning to you, and attacked him. There

was a scuffle, and one of them got shot."

"Double-crossing the old man, no doubt," McGinity suggested.

"Just that," I approved. "Orkins is as double-faced and treacherous as he's avaricious."

"Looks like we're going to have an interesting night," the reporter remarked. "Things seem to be getting a bit hot."

"Yes; and they're going to get still hotter, if I know my business," the Chief muttered.

We entered the estate, and went along the path to the dark, lonely house where there was so much mystery; and where there's mystery, there's always danger. Blinds were still drawn, and windows shuttered. After I had jangled the bell, several times, and there was no response, Chief Meigs began to hammer on the door. We waited outside for five minutes, ringing and hammering at intervals. Presently, the police officer took out his axe, and smashed a panel in the door, and thrust his arm through. I heard the snap of the lock as he pushed the door open.

I followed him into the entrance hall, and then I did something very foolish. I blew my police whistle. McGinity chuckled. "What are you scared about, Mr. Royce?" he asked. "Calling the police?"

"I'm scared," I admitted, in an embarrassed undertone. "I have a feeling that the man we're after—LaRauche—is not going to worry very much about your life or mine."

At that I turned, to give vent to an exclamation of horror. My flesh crept. The Chief's flashlight was trained on the stairs. The beam of light disclosed a body, spread-eagled halfway down the uncarpeted steps, head down, arms outflung, as though it had plunged backwards from the first landing which was rather spacious, and ornamented by an old grandfather's clock.

After a brief inspection, I identified the gruesome thing as Orkins, our former butler. "Is it not suicide?" I asked.

The Chief shook his head. "Looks like plain murder," he answered. "Shot through the back, by LaRauche, from the bottom of the stairs, probably, just as he reached the first landing, in a futile attempt to escape."

I stood looking down at the dead man. "So passes poor old Orkins," I thought. "Too bad he got the worst of it." But there was no time for sentimentalizing over the crafty, avaricious butler, who, apparently, had paid with his life for attempting to betray his employer.

Already Chief Meigs had found a switch, and he and McGinity were inspecting the library, where the dial telephone was, in the faint glow of an overhead light. The telephone receiver was dangling at the end of its cord; two chairs were overturned; all mute and unmistakable evidence of the grisly encounter the Chief had heard on the telephone, climaxed by the pistol shot.

Everything looked dingy and untidy; there was a musty smell about the room. After a quick search there, we passed through several other rooms on the ground floor, including the kitchen, where there were many greasy plates and plenty of unwashed china and cooking utensils. A door, under a back stairway in the kitchen, evidently led to the basement; it was fastened with a patent lock.

As none of the rooms on the ground floor, except the library and kitchen, bore evidence of recent occupation, Chief Meigs suggested that we make a quick search of the upper floors. "LaRauche, no doubt," he said, "is in hiding somewhere about the house, and I think we're going to have some trouble before we get him."

"That is, if he hasn't already escaped us," McGinity ventured.

"There's some doubt about that," the Chief answered. "All the doors and windows on this floor are locked, and fastened on the inside, and he couldn't possibly have snapped that patent lock on the door in the kitchen, from the inside, if he had wanted to hide in the basement."

"But Mrs. LaRauche!" I said. "Where is she? We've got to find her!"

In reply, the Chief signaled to McGinity and me, to follow him up the dark, back stairway to the second floor. Feeling along the wall in the hall, on this floor, I found a switch, and snapped on the lights. But they were very dim, of low candle-power, and in searching the bedrooms and closets, we had to again resort to the use of the flashlight. Two of the bedrooms seemed to have been recently tenanted, with beds unmade, and men's clothing and soiled linen lying about in great disorder. One of these, apparently Orkins'

room, contained a small radio, over which he had undoubtedly heard the announcement of the \$5,000 reward. The whole interior of the house showed the absence of a domesticated hand. At the end of the corridor, we looked into a large double room, which LaRauche had equipped as a laboratory.

Finally, we reached the narrow corridor in the top story, where we were faced by four doors. Three of them were unlocked. Pushing them open, we looked into two unfurnished rooms, and another used for storage. The fourth door, at the end of the passageway, was locked. Repeated knocking brought no answer.

This was the last unexplored room in the house. The room particularly interested me because it was there that McGinity and I had witnessed the dramatic shadowgraph episode in the window. So far we had failed to trace LaRauche's movements in the house, or gain the slightest clue to his hiding-place. Was he hiding in this attic room? And where was Mrs. LaRauche?

Chief Meigs was a man of infinite resources. He had either anticipated this, or had become expert in unlocking doors. He produced a heavy bunch of keys, from which he selected three. His first two attempts failed to open the door. The third time, proverbially the charm, the key turned in the lock, and the door swung open.

I would have been the first to step through, but the Chief stopped me. "Stay where you are," he whispered; "it's a little dangerous."

Standing in the doorway, the Chief trained the beam of his electric torch on various objects in the room. Finally it rested on an arm-chair beside an iron bedstead. Something was in that chair, and it was covered with a sheet. He strode over, and pulled back the sheet, and then we began to understand the secret which the old house held.

I gasped and stared. Huddled in the chair was Mrs. LaRauche, deadly pale and hollow cheeked, and apparently unconscious, her emaciated form showing under the folds of a quilted silk dressing-gown which had once been lavender in hue. Adhesive tape had been placed over her mouth, and her arms were bound to the side-rests of the chair by picture wire.

"Thank God, she's alive!" Chief Meigs murmured, as he stooped over her. "Looks like nothing very much wrong with her, except that she's had a

pretty bad shock."

As he finished speaking, the woman's head moved; her eyelids fluttered, and then she opened her eyes. We saw at once that she was in a panic of fear. I could hardly realize that this pitiful, ghostly shadow was the same woman I had met several months ago.

Swiftly we released her from the tape and wire that silenced and bound her; then, to our astonishment, we found that she was chained by the ankle to an iron post of the bed. The Chief immediately set to work to unfasten the chain, which looked like an ordinary dog-chain.

By this time, McGinity had discovered a light fixture in the wall, near the front window, containing one bulb, which he turned on. Mrs. LaRauche stared dazedly from one to the other of us, giving me no sign of recognition, although I addressed her by name. But she appeared to comprehend what we were up to. Still unable to speak, she raised one hand weakly, and pointed towards the window in the back of the room, behind the bed.

In doing this, she furnished us with an important clue. LaRauche had escaped through this window, which was set in the Mansard roof, and gave on to a broadish ledge, sufficient wide for a person to walk on. This ledge extended clear around the house.

"We've got to get LaRauche!" Chief Meigs exclaimed, but he couldn't get through the window because of his rather portly physique. Nor could I. McGinity, slim in figure, managed it nicely. He had such good eye-sight that he could distinguish objects which were beyond the view of normal-sighted people. And he was hardly outside, on the ledge, and debating whether he should turn to the left or the right, when he espied a figure, crouching in the dark, at the far end of the roof extension.

"You see it?" he asked Chief Meigs, who was leaning out of the window.

"I can't see a damn thing," the Chief replied.

"Next time, you'd better bring your opera-glasses," the reporter suggested, ironically.

"I wonder if it is LaRauche?" said the Chief, thoughtfully.

"It's a man, at any rate," said McGinity. "Looks like he's wearing black trousers and a white shirt. No coat or hat at all. He's got bushy white hair."

"Then it's LaRauche," the Chief exclaimed. "Call to him, and tell him to come back into the house. Say it's no use trying to escape."

McGinity did as the Chief requested, and there came in reply a cackling laugh.

"I heard that," said the Chief. "It's the laugh of a maniac." Then he added quickly: "What's he doing now?"

McGinity did not reply immediately. He had seen something very strange happen. LaRauche had mysteriously disappeared—vanished into the air.

"He's gone!" the reporter cried at last. "Escaped! He just flew off the roof."

The Chief gave a groan of disappointment. "Oh, come back in!" he ordered gruffly. "Don't be funny!"

McGinity came back through the window, his knees a little unsteady. Then he explained what he had seen. LaRauche had floated off the roof, into the air, lightly but swiftly, taking a downward course, and had been swallowed up in the darkness below.

"You don't expect me to believe a fairy story like that?" Chief Meigs growled. "Here, let's get downstairs. We're wasting time."

"It's the gospel truth, officer," McGinity declared, vehemently; "but how he did it is a puzzle to me."

It was no puzzle to me. I had always considered LaRauche mad, and mad scientists work in a strange, mysterious way. His vanishing into the air, from the roof, might have a perfectly natural explanation. Having my own views, which I was not inclined at the moment to expose, for fear of further disgruntling the Chief, I said nothing.

Five minutes after the Chief and McGinity had gone downstairs, the reporter to search for LaRauche in the back-yard, while Chief Meigs reported the mysterious death of Orkins, and summoned medical aid for Mrs. LaRauche, by telephone, my attention was again attracted to the back window. This time it was by a bright glare of light.

Hurrying to the window, I was made speedily conscious of what was happening. LaRauche had, indeed, escaped from the house by way of the

roof, in a manner yet to be revealed, and was now, apparently, making a quick getaway in his plane.

He had set off a magnesium flare. The small hangar and flying field were bathed in a weird and eerie silver-colored haze. His plane was in sight. Even at this distance, I caught the glint of its wings in the silver-colored light as it taxied across the field. With a roar, it shot upward, and was lost in the blackness of the night.

McGinity had heard the noise of the take-off, and came running up, to learn from me, and make sure his speculations, that LaRauche had really vanished from the roof, as if by magic, and was now escaping in his plane. I assured him on these two points very firmly and quickly.

And while he hurriedly retraced his steps downstairs, to report to Meigs, I again turned my attention to Mrs. LaRauche, whose mind, although still in confusion, was slowly clearing.

Later, we were to hear some very remarkable things from her.

XXVIII

My intuitive feeling that we had a night's work before us, which I had voiced prophetically to McGinity earlier in the evening, as we started for the LaRauche place, with only the faint clue of a woman's voice on the telephone to go on, proved conformable to fact. Dawn was breaking when we returned to the castle, weary and heavy at heart. The place was silent; the only sound that came to us was the swish-swish of the incoming tide, as it broke against the rocks at the foot of the cliff.

We were both so saddened and unstrung over our unpleasant and tragic experiences during the past twenty-four hours, and so physically dog-tired, that we were averse to talking them over.

The three tragedies, occurring so closely together, first, Niki, then Mr. Zzyx, and now, Orkins, after all, seemed to have been so unnecessary; or, as Henry had voiced his opinion about Mr. Zzyx's fearful death, so senseless.

And while there was a logical connection between them and the perpetration of the Martian hoax, so far they had contributed little or nothing in clearing up the mystery which was still baffling us both.

It was here that Mrs. LaRauche came into the picture. My conviction, from the time I recognized her voice on the telephone, was that she knew more than any one else did. I had been shocked rather than distressed at the death of Orkins. A providential death, perhaps, with LaRauche gone now, and his wife holding the secret.

But where was LaRauche going? Evidently, after the systematic manner of his escape, he had a set goal. He was an experienced pilot, and a very expert one, considering his age, and probably knew of many places where a man could land safely in the dark.

Word of his escape by plane had been broadcast; the machinery of police watchfulness set in motion along the entire eastern seaboard, and far inland, as well. Somewhere in the air, a man was flying—wanted by the police.

Mrs. LaRauche was a badly shaken woman, but her condition was not serious. I remained at her side until the arrival of an ambulance physician from the county hospital. He was accompanied by a nurse, who took her immediately in charge. But she had other ideas than of going to the hospital. Her brain had cleared considerably, and she insisted on remaining in her home. I agreed with her on this, and to the inconvenience of the proprietor of an employment agency in the village, who had retired for the night, I soon had a competent manservant, with his wife, on the premises.

By the time they arrived, bringing ample provisions and milk, which I had the foresight to order, the police had removed the body of Orkins, as well as all traces of his death. The couple set to work at once, systematically clearing up and setting things in order. By midnight, the house was freshened up considerably, and Mrs. LaRauche made as comfortable as possible in her own, redressed bedroom, with the hospital nurse in attendance.

What she needed most, the physician decreed, was absolute rest and quiet. The kindly attentions showered upon her appeared for the moment to compensate for the loss of her demented husband. She had come out of a

horror, but she was not thinking—or allowing herself to think—it seemed to me.

The house still seemed empty and queer as McGinity and I drove away, around one o'clock, trailing Chief Meigs' car back to the village. The Chief's last act was to station a policeman on guard, which made me a lot easier in my mind.

The situation was still lamentable enough, but McGinity and I, with an air of bravado, continued our inquiries on reaching the village. With police assistance, we had no difficulty in locating the light truck which Orkins had rented, and once located and properly inspected, we found nothing to indicate that it had been used to transport the stolen rocket from the Museum of Science to the East River.

And then McGinity suddenly found something, which was vitally important. A screw from the rocket. Chief Meigs chuckled; he couldn't see that a screw could possibly have any bearing on our situation. When we returned to the police station, I showed him.

"Why, that's just an ordinary screw," he said, after inspecting the screw more closely. "I don't see how it could mean anything."

"No?" I said. "Then you don't know how they make screws on Mars. If you think it's just ordinary, here's a screw-driver and a piece of pine wood. Now, drive it in!"

"That doesn't worry me at all," Meigs bantered. He went to his task cheerfully, even whistling, and giving a wink to several policemen who were looking on. But the screw refused to function in the ordinary way. Finally, he gave it up. "Why the damn thing won't go into the wood is a mystery to me," he remarked, as he handed the screw and screw-driver back to me.

"Because it works in reverse to our screws," I explained, as I drove the screw into the soft wood easily enough by a reverse motion. "There, I've done the job," I concluded, "which proves conclusively that only a Martian screw could be jolted out of a Martian rocket. And as the screw was found in the truck, the van therefore must have carried the rocket."

The Chief of Police grew pop-eyed in amazement.

"Everything about the rocket has this unusual element," I continued, "except the metal from which it was constructed, and it is a scientific fact that the metallic ores which abound on the earth are to be found in other planets."

The Chief's look of blank astonishment prompted me to go on.

"Now, whatever we may have thought at first about this rocket having originated on Mars, we know now that LaRauche manufactured it himself. He had the brain power necessary to create this fantasy in mechanism, and the means and method of carrying out his motive, which was to bring my brother Henry to shame."

"All of which stirred the popular imagination, and increased the circulation of the Daily Recorder half a million," McGinity interjected.

"Well," Chief Meigs drawled, "all I got to say is this. If making screws that go in backwards is not the act of a lunatic, then I'm crazy myself."

For several hours, McGinity and I remained at the police station, occupying ourselves piecing together from this and that all the information at our command; and at the end, it was as clear as daylight that we knew no more about the actual perpetration of the hoax than we did twenty-four hours back. The impression we both had gained was that tragedy had been obtruded into LaRauche's suave scheme that was shockingly disturbing, but had nothing whatever to do with clearing up the case.

There was little or nothing at the LaRauche home for the police to go on with. No trace of the revolver that had pierced Orkins' heart with its deadly bullet; no firearms of any sort, in fact. Mrs. LaRauche heightened the mystery by declaring her husband had an inherent fear of the use of firearms, as he had of fire, and had never owned a revolver. Nor was any sort of weapon discovered during the inspection of his laboratory, or workrooms, in the observatory and hangar, in which he operated outside his dwelling. No evidence even was found that would in the slightest degree incriminate him in the Martian fraud.

The city papers had come by plane, after midnight, and I read them all with interest. McGinity, fed up on the story, waved them away. They contained a very full account of what had occurred at the castle, Orkins' mysterious death, and LaRauche's escape by plane.

About three o'clock, I succeeded in reaching Olinski on the telephone, at his city home, and he was so upset over the whole affair, as reported in the papers, that at first all he could seem to do was to sputter into the mouthpiece.

"I fear, my dear Mr. Royce," he managed to say, finally, "that you and that reporter fellow have made a great mistake—a serious error. You have found nothing to prove that the radio message, and the rocket, did not originate in Mars, now, have you?"

"Nothing," I replied, "except that water-mark we found in the scroll."

"That proves nothing," he fairly shouted. "Some utterly unscrupulous and wicked person may have changed that scroll after it passed out of my possession."

"That is your theory, Mr. Olinski?" I asked.

"Can you suggest any other?" he countered. "No; because there can be no other. Unless you are accusing me of complicity—"

"I didn't say so, Mr. Olinski," I interrupted.

"Yet you believe this Dr. LaRauche, the scientist you've been telling me about, is at the bottom of this so-called hoax?"

"That is highly possible," I answered. "I myself think so."

"But you have, of course, no idea just how he did it?"

"No idea whatever, but it's quite plain that for motives of his own he had the opportunity."

"And that," Olinski declared, "that's as far as you've got?"

"At present," I replied.

"And that's as far as you'll ever get, my dear Mr. Royce," he rejoined in a bitter, sardonic tone, and then suddenly hung up.

When we had thus made an end, a dead silence followed, during which McGinity and I looked at each other for a moment or two, in silence. After I had told him what Olinski had said, the reporter spoke.

"I've put it out of my mind that Olinski had anything to do with this affair," he said. "The more I think of it, Mr. Royce, the more I'm dead certain that Mrs. LaRauche is our only hope. Finding her husband will be a police detail, and several days may elapse before he's apprehended. Now, if we could get to her, the first thing in the morning. Do you think that would be possible?"

Before I could answer, Chief Meigs walked in to say that a plane, answering the description of LaRauche's machine, had passed over Montauk Point, heading south, a little before three o'clock, had been picked up by a coast-guard searchlight, but had dodged out of the light. With this announcement, all thoughts of Mrs. LaRauche vanished, and—to me, at any rate—did not recur until we had driven back to the castle at the break of dawn, after a weary vigil of waiting at the police station to hear further word of LaRauche. But the reports were blank and disappointing.

XXIX

Interviewing Mrs. LaRauche did not prove as difficult as we had anticipated. At ten o'clock—McGinity and I were still in bed—the manservant I had installed at the LaRauche house, telephoned that Mrs. LaRauche was feeling much stronger, and was most anxious to see Henry and me on a matter of very urgent business; and would we please bring along the village Chief of Police, also the young newspaper reporter who had accompanied the officer and me to the house the night before.

At eleven o'clock, we drove off. On our way through the village, we picked up Chief Meigs, and the first thing he did after boarding the car was to give me a wink, and mutter: "Screws!" Henry was pallid and trembling. He had been deeply shocked when he learned of Orkins' death. He seemed to have aged ten years during the night.

McGinity was in a state of excitement. After a late and hasty breakfast, he and Pat had taken a stroll on the terrace. In spite of the tragedies and excitement, Pat had come downstairs looking as fresh and as bright as I had ever known her. I met them as I came out to get into the car. McGinity had

just reached out to take her hand in his, and she had not drawn it away. She seemed a little breathless.

The strain of the past twenty-four hours, and loss of sleep, had been too much for me. As we breezed along in the crisp, morning air, I was no more capable of keeping my eyes open than I was of writing poetry. My conversation was limited to monosyllabic answers; between monosyllables, I fell into a light doze.

Nearing the LaRauche place, I became more wide-awake, and began to speculate whether Mrs. LaRauche knew, and was in a position to tell, the whole truth. Doubt had entered my mind. Even after we had been admitted into the house, and had gathered around her, in a sitting-room adjoining her bedchamber, I felt certain that she would be able to contribute very little to the sum of information which we had.

She was dressed in a dark morning gown, and seated in an easy chair. The heavy window curtains were drawn, to save her eye-sight, after long imprisonment in a darkened room. In the dim glow of a shaded lamp, her face appeared pale and worn. Yet her poise was serene; to all appearances, she was very much mistress of herself. This was a great relief to me. I was afraid we would have a quivering, sobbing woman on our hands, and the thought was terrifying. Only once, when she grasped Henry's hand, on our arrival, did she show that she was under a strain which was almost at a breaking point.

She was a comely woman, even in her present pitiable state, and she had the voice of a woman of refinement and education. I had often wondered why she had married a man so much older than herself, and so eccentric. She was LaRauche's second wife. God knows what became of the first one!

After we had quietly taken seats, Chief Meigs broke the tension of silence. "Do you feel strong enough to answer our questions, Mrs. LaRauche?" he inquired.

She nodded, and replied: "I think so."

Then Henry spoke. "I wish to heaven, Mrs. LaRauche, you'd got in touch sooner with Livingston and me. We've always prized your friendship very highly, and if it had not been for—"

"Yes; I know," Mrs. LaRauche broke in, as though anticipating his closing remark; "but I've been unable to communicate with any one on the outside for several weeks. A day or so ago, I managed to get the front window open, and waved to a motorcycle policeman, but apparently he did not see me." She stopped, and glanced nervously over her shoulder, and added, with a little shiver: "Oh, you don't know how I've grown to hate this house!" Then, quickly regaining her self-possession, she looked at McGinity steadily for a moment, and said: "I haven't the slightest idea who you are. I only know that you were a very thoughtful and kind young man last night. Are you the newspaper reporter?"

McGinity nodded, with an embarrassed smile, and was about to reply when I interjected: "A thousand pardons, Mrs. LaRauche," I said. "Allow me to present Mr. Robert McGinity, of the New York Daily Recorder, a young but very capable reporter, in whom we place every confidence. In fact, we've grown so fond of him, he seems like one of the family." Turning to Henry for confirmation, I concluded: "I am quite right, am I not, Henry?"

"Of course, you're right," Henry answered, loudly. "And I don't know what we're going to do without him when this—er—Martian affair—I was about to say, Martian inquest—is finished."

I gasped with astonishment at Henry's remarks, while McGinity turned very red, and said, stammeringly: "Thanks, Mr. Royce." Then he began to fumble nervously with his inevitable bunch of copy paper and pencil.

Mrs. LaRauche smiled wanly, and addressed herself again to the reporter. "I'm so glad you've come, Mr. McGinity," she said, "for what I'm going to tell, I wish to be given as much publicity as possible. I want the public to know that Henry Royce was imposed upon, and that my husband, now a fugitive, although I refuse to believe he's a murderer, was wholly responsible, with the connivance of Orkins, his manservant, in carrying out this cruel deception, which, I know, is still puzzling all of you."

"Even at that, it doesn't seem so incredulous," Henry commented. "I guess I'm one of the die-hard kind."

There was a little pause, then Mrs. LaRauche turned to Chief Meigs. "Tell me," she said, "how is the search going? Have the police discovered any clue to my husband's whereabouts?"

"I'm afraid I can't give you any information," Meigs replied; "no clue at all."

"It isn't that I want him back," she said firmly, "or would ever want to see him again, after the many cruelties he practiced on me. But he's been out of his mind—insane—I'm sure, for weeks now, and is really unaccountable for his acts."

Her voice had grown shaky, and her face went whiter than it had been. We remained silent, recognizing the futility of questioning her until she got control of herself. Our chief interest, of course, lay in the unraveling of the mystery which still baffled us, and when she finally got to it, she answered all our questions in a cool collected way.

On my suggestion, McGinity began the questioning, giving us a specimen of his powers of observation. He omitted no detail of importance, carefully marshaling his facts and presenting them to Mrs. LaRauche as expertly as a lawyer examining a witness before a jury.

"Your married life has been a very unhappy one, hasn't it, Mrs. LaRauche?" he began.

"Very unhappy," she replied, sighing. "Insolent, quarrelsome, Rene LaRauche humiliated me in every possible way. I was simply his housekeeper—a vassal. He was the mighty, brainy scientist, and he never allowed me to forget it—not for one instant."

"Apparently he did not confide in you?"

"Orkins had been his manservant for some years prior to our marriage, and to him he entrusted the secrets of his scientific discoveries and inventions, rather than to me. This was only one of his many eccentricities, and I submitted to the indignity with exemplary patience."

"How do you account for his making Orkins a confidant?"

"He was too self-centered, too egotistical, to invite the confidence of brainy people. He seemed to like to impress—startle—inferior minds with his discoveries. Orkins was a highly trained servant, and a general handy man, but he was not intellectual."

"But you could easily have escaped all this bullying and domineering on the part of your husband?"

"I often considered divorce," was the reply, "but a latent sense of duty to my marriage vows prevented me from taking that step."

Here McGinity suddenly switched off that line of inquiry, and turned to another. "Why have you brought us here today?" he asked.

"To disclose certain facts which prove my husband tricked Henry Royce shamelessly in these Martian revelations."

"When did you come into possession of these facts?"

"Less than a month ago. Up to that time I had been as keenly interested in the matter, and as gullible as the rest of you, and the public at large. When Rene found that I had acquired this knowledge, and that, motivated by a deep sense of justice and fair play, I meant to disclose the real meaning of these revelations, he hid my clothes, and locked me up in that attic room, where you found me."

"How did you manage to get downstairs and phone to the Royce house, last evening?"

"Orkins, who served my meals, forgot to lock the door after him. He seemed preoccupied and nervous. It was my first opportunity to seek outside aid since my imprisonment. I stole out quietly, and crept downstairs, to the phone in the library, unaware that my husband was shadowing me."

"And he cut you short, it seems."

"Before I had a chance even to tell my name, he sprang upon me and choked me off, and then, in his usual cruel manner, bound me to the chair and bed. He acted like a maniac, I was terribly frightened." She paused, a little breathlessly, then added: "I am still in some dilemma as to how my unfinished message was understood."

"You may recall, Mrs. LaRauche, that you spoke to me," I answered. "Your voice was familiar, yet I couldn't place it at first. Finally, when I was convinced that it was your voice, the incident put us on the right track. Mr. McGinity and I already were in possession of several vital, suspicious facts, and your phone call gave us another important clue."

Then Henry spoke. "About Orkins. Had you any misgivings, Mrs. LaRauche, when he entered my service as butler? I took him, you know, on your husband's recommendation."

"It was not clear at the time," she answered. "Rene invented some explanation that Orkins wanted to make more money. Now, I know that he was deliberately planted in your house as a spy, and that he kept my husband advised on all your secret workings in science. He betrayed your confidence, as he cold-bloodedly tried to betray Rene, for that \$5,000 reward."

"Do you know anything at all about Orkins' death?" Chief Meigs broke in, abruptly.

It was a pertinent question to put, but a little cruel. "No," Mrs. LaRauche replied, almost defiantly. "I do recall hearing a distant, sharp sound of some sort—it may have been the shot that killed him—but I associated it with the back-firing of an automobile on the highway. About an hour later, I heard a noise downstairs."

"That was when I smashed a panel in your front door, probably," the Chief put in.

"Shortly afterwards," Mrs. LaRauche went on, "my husband entered the attic room, looking very excited. He threw a sheet over me, and then I heard him open the back window, and climb through, on to the roof. I had the uncomfortable feeling that something sinister had occurred, and that he was bent on escape. But I was bound to the chair and helpless, and in too much anguish to think clearly."

"Mrs. LaRauche!" McGinity asked suddenly. "We are very anxious to know how your husband escaped so magically from the roof, like he had flown to the ground. Have you any theory?"

She smiled faintly, and replied: "Rene invented many peculiar things, like the robot, now used in all New York subway and railroad stations, where the traveler's usual questions are answered by a phonographic voice, by simply pressing a button. He had a great fear of fire, of being trapped by fire. Some months ago, he installed a safety device, in case of fire, on our roof."

"What was it like?" I asked, eagerly.

"Simply a heavy wire stretched tautly from the roof to the ground, and terminating at some distance away from the house, to make the descent more gradual," she replied. "In case of fire, you step into a sort of trapeze,

which is attached to the wire by a grooved wheel, and your descent to the ground is something like the 'slide for life,' often seen at the circus, or in film melodramas. I can see how, in the dark, it would give the illusion of flying."

XXX

After the concerted gasp of surprise over LaRauche's weird method of escape from the roof had died away, McGinity put another important question: "How did you first discover that your husband was implicated in these Martian revelations, and that they were a fraud? Did you find anything—papers?"

"Something like that," she replied.

She took out of the little bag, which lay in her lap, a charred slip of paper, which she handed to McGinity; and while he passed it round for our inspection, she continued: "I found this paper in the charred rubbish, in the log fire-place, in my husband's laboratory, which Orkins had neglected to clean out. You'll recognize the lettering it contains as a portion of the code used for the radio messages from Mars, and its deciphering into English. After I had studied this, I began a secret investigation on my own, and gradually the scheme was unveiled to me."

"This detecting business must have been a new and novel experience," Henry remarked, good humoredly.

"Not exactly," Mrs. LaRauche replied. "You probably don't know—not many do—that I have written several mystery novels under the pen name of Martha Claxton."

This disclosure was followed by another concerted gasp of surprise. After it had subsided, McGinity exclaimed: "Well, that's certainly a knockout, Mrs. LaRauche! Why, I've read all of your novels, including the latest one, 'The Country House Mystery,' and I consider Martha Claxton—you—a close runner to the English Agatha Christie—a feminine J. S. Fletcher. No

wonder your husband, with his jealous temperament, had this constitutional antagonism against any rival in his household, in the field of fame."

"Combine jealousy and revenge," Mrs. LaRauche said, "and in these two forces you have the most perverse evil in the world. Rene was not only intensely jealous of Henry Royce for his successful findings as an amateur scientist and astronomer, but he nursed a revenge against him for the exposé of those faked African jungle films, and his subsequent expulsion from the Exploration Club. He blamed—"

"Officially, I had nothing to do with it," Henry interrupted, vehemently. "I simply voiced my belief to a fellow member of the club that the films looked like fakes to me."

"What raised your suspicions?" Mrs. LaRauche asked.

"Well, I recognized, among those African jungle midgets," Henry replied, "a Negro dwarf I had seen years ago at a circus side-show. She was exhibited as a human crow. She had the remarkable physiognomy and jet blackness of a crow, and she could caw like one. She must be an old woman by now. In your husband's faked film, she took the part of a chattering, pigmy grandmother, who was thrown into the river and drowned because of her great age and uselessness. As she was engulfed in the river torrent, and sank, I recognized her pitiful 'caw-caw'."

"Fancy your remembering that," Mrs. LaRauche remarked.

Again Chief Meigs spoke abruptly. "Pardon me, Mrs. LaRauche," he said, "but how long do you reckon your husband has been out of his mind?"

She looked startled for a moment, then calmly replied. "He was silent and brooding for some months past, but I attributed this to his being deeply engrossed in some new scientific research. It's rather difficult to say when he passed into the stage of actual insanity. It's my opinion that all inventive scientists are a little bit cracked." She hesitated a moment, and smiled apologetically at Henry. "It's my belief, though," she went on, "that he became definitely deranged when the success of his scheme centered the attention of the world upon Henry Royce, and raised him to the heights of fame. Rene had not figured on this. It was like a boomerang. When he realized that his scheme was reacting to his own damage, then, perhaps, something in his brain snapped."

"Have you any personal knowledge of the implication of your husband and Orkins in the theft of the rocket?" McGinity asked.

She shook her head. "Only a suspicion," she replied. "There were many, many nights, while I was locked in the attic, when I couldn't sleep, so I used to listen for sounds from the lower part of the house. The night the rocket was stolen, I remember distinctly the house was as quiet as a tomb. I remained awake all night, terrorized at the thought of being left alone. Towards morning, I heard familiar sounds again—footfalls in the hall—voices—and went to sleep."

"I wonder what motive prompted LaRauche to do a crazy thing like that?" I interrogated.

"Dispose of the rocket, and he would be less liable to detection," Mrs. LaRauche replied. "He must have become suddenly fearful of some one tracing the workmanship of the rocket to him. It was public knowledge that he had made considerable progress in the creation of a metal rocket, which he hoped, eventually, to catapult to the moon. No doubt he reconditioned this rocket to meet the requirements of his mad Martian scheme."

"It's one of the most intricate and puzzling pieces of craftsmanship and mechanism I've ever seen," I said, glancing at Chief Meigs, who punctuated my remark with a smile and a wink, and the silent mouthing of "Screws!"

By this time, McGinity was showing signs of impatience. "If there is no reason why we shouldn't," he said, emphatically, "I think we'd better get through with this business now, as quickly as possible. Mrs. LaRauche is under a great strain, and we must spare her all we can. So why not let her tell us, in as few words as she can, all she knows. I leave it to her."

"Very well, Mr. McGinity," she assented, nodding her head two or three times. Then she began. "There are a great many things I know nothing whatever about. Some things I say may be true, or partly true; the rest will be based on my deductions.

"As I've already told you," she continued, "my husband carried on this work in the greatest secrecy. My curiosity, rather than suspicion, was aroused when he began to collect scientific books on Mars, and studies of the ancient inscriptions, cuneiforms and hieroglyphics, of Babylon and Egypt. He began sending Orkins on frequent visits to the city. It was Orkins, no

doubt, who ordered the making of the scroll. He fits the old bookseller's description to a nicety—'middle-aged, well-dressed, well-bred.'

"The time came when Rene dropped his preliminary studies and research, and applied himself wholly to his work, in the laboratory, and at his workshop in the hangar. He worked at all hours of the day and night, in a kind of frenzy. Finally, late in the summer, as I reconstruct it, matters began to take shape. He must have had in his possession by that time all the information Orkins had obtained, surreptitiously, in relation to Henry Royce's and Serge Olinski's experiments in trying to establish radio communication with Mars.

"Early in August, he did a lot of night flying, always accompanied by Orkins. The trust he put in that scoundrel, and the money Orkins must have bled him for! They were usually in the air from nine to eleven. When I quizzed Rene on the purpose of these night flights, he said he was conducting a series of meteorological experiments. But what he was really doing—if my surmise is correct—was flying high over the Royce castle, or Radio Center, and testing his carefully thought out Martian code on Mr. Royce and Mr. Olinski, wherever they happened to be conducting their radio experiments; sort of baiting them.

"He was perfectly able to do this with the powerful wireless sending outfit with which he had equipped his plane. Apparently Mr. Royce and his co-worker were finally satisfied that these signals in code came from Mars, for we next heard of Mr. Royce erecting two stations, one designed for transmitting, the other for receiving Martian radio messages.

"Now, comes the strange story of the public demonstration of direct radio communication with Mars, at Radio Center. I happened to be in town that night, having gone there to visit friends, over the week-end, at Rene's persistent urging that I take a holiday, which was a rather strange attitude for him to adopt. Up to that time, I was not in the least suspicious, and listened in that night with a great deal of enjoyment, although I thought the Martian message, as decoded and broadcast—well, somehow it seemed perfectly incredulous to me.

"If any man was pleased with the success of this undertaking, Rene must have been. He achieved it with great risk, in a hazardous flight into the stratosphere. We must at least give him credit for this daring feat, also for

the cleverness of his Martian code, which he sent by wireless from this great height, and the perfect artistry of English into which it was so easily transcribed by Mr. Olinski. My suspicions of Rene's sub-stratosphere performance, in his plane, were confirmed after I had discovered a visored aluminum helmet, and a rubber fabric suit, in which he had received oxygen, hidden under some rubbish in the hangar.

"It is perfectly amazing to me how he accomplished two such remarkable feats in one night, transmitting the Martian message from the sub-stratosphere, garbling it and fading out, to indicate ethereal disturbance, and dropping the rocket on the water-front. Oh, he must have dropped it from his plane while flying low over the beach! There can be no other explanation. He had plenty of time in which to return to the field, after the altitude flight, attach the rocket under the plane, on the principle of a bomber, with Orkins' assistance, of course, and soar off again. The rocket appears heavy, but, as you know, it is constructed of comparatively light metal, and, without fuel, is easily handled. The exterior of the rocket was purposely fired in advance, I found, to give the effect of its having traveled through the earth's atmosphere at great speed.

"In this stunt, he had the spectacular accessory of the falling meteors, and he added to the realism by sending off a great quantity of fire-works from the plane when he dropped the rocket on the beach. There was little chance of his plane being detected at this time of night; he was just another strange traveler in the sky. He carried enough fire-works to equip a Fourth of July celebration. In my investigation, I found a dozen or so burned out Roman candles, and other unused fire-works, which he had secreted under his work-bench in the hangar.

"His mission achieved, he went into retreat. For weeks we lived in practical isolation, while the world buzzed with the great Martian revelations, and honors were heaped upon Mr. Royce. It is not easy for the mind to grasp how Rene managed to put over this stupendous hoax, having as its object the humiliation of a bitterly hated rival, unless one considers that it was the cold-blooded scheme of a great mind gone wrong. And into that deranged mind there must have gleamed some light of inspiration. His detailed description of life as it exists at present on Mars, which he set forth in the cuneiform code, contained in the scroll, I consider marvelous—absolutely marvelous. It is logical, and it rings true. No scientist, ancient or modern,

has ever given a more plausible picture of the history of Mars, and conditions of life there. No scientist in his right mind would have been so fearless. But Rene—the madman—dared.

"I'm sorry it isn't true. I want it to be true. I want to think there are people like ourselves living on Mars. We know now that it is technically possible to bridge the space between us with radio, to register our music, our ideas, in that planet. And we need the Martian ideas, and their hopes and illusions, as well, to buoy up our drooping spirit, just as much as they need ours. Perhaps, after we're all dead and buried, this revelation from Mars will come. Radio was given to the world to bring about universal harmony, to bring nations closer together. Why not interstellar harmony? Oh, it's coming! Who knows?

"And now, my friends, since I've given you every detail I can think of, what have you to say?"

There was deep silence for a few moments, and then I spoke. "Your findings and deductions, Mrs. LaRauche, are all very wonderful, and very convincing," I said; "but there is still one very important matter to be cleared up. It may be that your memory is at fault."

"Something important that I've overlooked?" Mrs. LaRauche asked, thoughtfully.

"Quite so," I replied. "We have awaited breathlessly for your theory regarding the passenger in the rocket—the man-ape."

"The dear, lamented ambassador of good will from Mars," Henry burst out, with a deep tremor in his voice; "the late Mr. Zzyx!"

She considered a moment before answering, and then said, very frankly: "As a matter of fact, I did not touch on that point because, I must admit, I haven't the slightest information that would throw any light on this very mysterious phase of the case. I have been puzzled, completely puzzled, and after careful investigation, I have failed to discover the origin of Mr. Zzyx. I have no idea how he came to be in the rocket."

"We're all puzzled, for that matter," McGinity remarked; "and I think it's very necessary that we should establish his origin in order to settle the whole case."

"Of course it is," Mrs. LaRauche assented. "But his presence in the rocket is just one of those irregular happenings that can't be explained. I saw Mr. Zzyx on several public occasions, and I was terribly impressed. He answered in every detail the fairest description that could ever be given of some strange creature from another planet. Recalling my first impressions of him, as an ape-man from the jungles of Mars, I feel, even now, as if I might have been imagining all that I've just told you, and that Mr. Zzyx, the rocket and the radio messages after all, did originate on Mars."

"In other words, the Martian mystery is still a mystery," McGinity said, "and will continue to be so until the origin and identity of Mr. Zzyx are established."

"And that's going to be rather difficult, I'm afraid," murmured Mrs. LaRauche.

And, then, the unexpected happened. The door-bell jangled loudly, and in an incredibly short time, the manservant, whom I had engaged the night before, entered the room, and politely announced a visitor who wouldn't give his name.

"I can't imagine what this means," said Mrs. LaRauche, "but I hope it's nothing unpleasant. So, whoever he is, send him in," she concluded, with an impressive gesture of command to the manservant.

XXXI

The visitor turned out to be a stout, middle-aged Italian, rather furtive-looking; a stranger to me, but evidently not unfamiliar to Chief of Police Meigs, who moved towards him the moment he entered the room.

"Oh, hello, Antonio!" the Chief accosted him. "When did you get out of the bastille? You've shaved off your mustache. Trying to disguise yourself?"

"I am no crook," the Italian retorted. "I come to see de lady of de house."

"Oh, that explains your visit, eh?" the Chief said. Then he turned to Mrs. LaRauche. "Do you know this man?"

"Yes," she replied. "He's our former, and particularly objectionable, neighbor, who got ninety days in jail for mistreating the animals he was training."

"Excuse, ma'am," the Italian said, wriggling uncomfortably, "but dat is not true."

"No matter," she rejoined. "I dare say it never struck you, Mr. Ranzetti, that I was made very uneasy and unhappy by members of your menagerie roaming at large on our place."

There was no reply to this, I felt. By that time, I had the visitor all straightened out in my mind.

"At any rate, why have you come to see me?" Mrs. LaRauche continued.

"I don' know what to doa about it, lady," the Italian stammered; "dat's why I coma to you."

"About what?" she asked, her eyes twinkling good-humoredly.

"About—Peter," the man faltered; and then, to our great surprise, the tears began to roll down his prison-pale, furrowed, cheeks.

"What do you suppose is the matter with the poor fellow?" Mrs. LaRauche asked, turning to Chief Meigs.

The Chief shook his head, and then tapped the visitor on the shoulder. "What's on your mind, Antonio?" he inquired.

The Italian swallowed hard, then clutched the Chief by the arm. "Maybe you can helpa me, Meester Policesamans," he wailed. "I search every place since I got out of de jug, for my poor Peter. In the zoo, I find my bears, my seals, my monkeys, but no Peter."

"One of your animals missing? Is that it?" the officer inquired.

"I no can finda Peter," the animal trainer replied, unshed tears glistening in his eyes. "Maybe, he escape in de night, after de cops tooka me away."

"And when was that?" I interrogated.

The reply to my question came from Mrs. LaRauche. "I happen to know," she said. "Strangely enough, Mr. Ranzetti was arrested on the very night Rene made his flight into the sub-stratosphere, transmitted that spurious

message from Mars, and afterwards dropped the rocket near your beach. He was arrested, and taken to jail, early in the evening."

I caught my breath, rose, and made straight for the visitor. "Who was this—Peter?" I asked. "A chimpanzee?"

"I tought he was a chimpanzee, Meester, when I boughta him, as a baby, in East Africa," the Italian replied, "but he got bigger and bigger, and he done t'ings no chimpanzee never has done. Sometimes, Meester, he looka and acta so mucha lika de biga, reala man, I t'ink I snuffa da coke. I traina him in secret. Teacha him de grand tricks. I mean, someday, to maka de great sensation with my Peter. He maka my fortune. But, now, poor Peter, he gone! I no finda him. I looka every place—every place."

My eyes wandered to McGinity, and he read my thoughts. He jumped from his chair, and moved to the side of the tearful trainer. He handed him a cigarette; even lit it for him.

"T'anka you, Meester," the Italian breathed fervently.

"That's better, now,—what?" McGinity said, patting him on the shoulder. "Well, I think I can tell you what happened to Peter," he went on, "but first you must tell me what tricks you taught him."

The Italian brightened perceptibly. "Oh, Meester!" he exclaimed, proudly, "I teacha Peter to act lika de gentlemans, to sit at de table, and eata and smoka de cigarettes, like de big millionaire, and never to maka de spit on de floor. I teacha him to sleep in de bed, to look at de picture books, to ride de bike, and lock and unlock de door of his cage."

"Was Peter always tractable? I mean by that—did you find it easy to teach him these tricks!"

The Italian shrugged his shoulders. "Peter, he was a funny fellow. Sometimes, he doa whata I say, and, sometimes, Meester, he doa nothing at all. He go hide in de closet, or under de bed. He act veery bad."

"Lapses, eh? He did things you didn't want him to do?" McGinity interrogated further.

"Once, Meester, he go nuts—clean nuts. He maka de fight wid de pillow. He tried to smother me—killa me! What doa you say for dat? Killa me! For two days, I lock him up in de dark closet, den he hammer on de door, lika I

teacha him to doa, and cry to git out—cry lika a leetle boy cry for his spaghetti."

"Oh! He liked spaghetti, did he?"

"Did my Peter lika de spaghetti?" the Italian echoed rather explosively. "And he lika de good wine too; he drinka plenty, and no git sloused. And, spaghetti—why, Peter, he lika de spaghetti so much he learn to speaka de name. Maybe, you don' believe a big champanzee speaka de Anglish word, spaghetti. Well, Meester, I swear—" he hesitated a moment and reverently crossed himself—"I swear he speaka dat word jist as good as you or me, only, Peter, he say—'spaghet!'"

The word, as the Italian pronounced it, or rather hissed it, with emphasis on the last syllable, brought Henry instantly to his feet, out of a sort of dozy quietude.

"You think it's possible?" he gasped, his gaze fixed on the reporter.

"I think so," McGinity replied.

The word, indeed, carried such convincing evidence that it was impossible to think otherwise than that Mr. Zzyx was no other than Peter, Antonio Ranzetti's missing chimpanzee.

McGinity began to walk up and down the room, hands in pockets, while I explained to Mrs. LaRauche, and Chief Meigs, the new evidence we had just succeeded in getting from the Italian animal trainer.

"Oh, Mr. McGinity!" exclaimed Mrs. LaRauche in astonishment. "Is it possible that you've solved the mystery of Mr. Zzyx? What is your theory? Tell us, quickly, what you think happened?"

"Well," said McGinity, after a pause, "Antonio has just given us some important information, but whether it'll clear up matters, I can't say. Anyhow, here it is:

"Now, we've got to guess what happened. In my opinion, Peter, the missing chimpanzee, answers Mr. Zzyx's description in every detail. He probably got out of his cage—he knew how to operate a lock—and escaped from his keeper's house after Antonio had been arrested. He roams about in the dark, finally reaching LaRauche's flying field. Somehow, he gets into the hangar. Nosing about curiously, he climbs up on the rocket. Finding the door into the projectile open, he creeps inside, curls up, and goes to sleep. According

to Antonio, the chimpanzee was accustomed to doing things like that, hiding in queer, dark places, like a closet, or under the bed.

"Now, he's still fast asleep when LaRauche returns from his sub-stratosphere flight," McGinity continued. "No doubt LaRauche had inspected the interior of the rocket, and placed the box containing the scroll inside, earlier in the evening. It was all ready to be hooked on to the plane; the only thing left to be done was to seal it. This LaRauche could accomplish in a few minutes, using a torch-blower to fuse the metal-catch that secured the door. If the noise awakened Peter, well, it was just too bad! He couldn't get out, and he couldn't make himself heard.

"How he ever survived the concussion, when the rocket was dropped from the plane to the beach, or escaped suffocation during the night, is something beyond me. But he did survive, and he had strength and sense enough to attract outside attention by hammering against the metal sides of the rocket. This trick of hammering, when he wanted to get out of a dark place, like a closet, he had been taught by his master, Antonio."

McGinity's summing-up brought matters towards a conclusion. We had come to the end of this drama of mystery, which, in its twisted course, involved the loss of three lives—perhaps four, for LaRauche was still to be accounted for.

The interview had no sooner ended when McGinity became very restless, and wanted to get back to the castle. A state of nerves which I could not but regard as possessing a certain significance. He was anxious to get back to Pat.

The next day we learned how Orkins had met his death, showing both McGinity and I, and Police Chief Meigs, were wrong in our idea that he had been shot in the back by LaRauche as he ran up the stairs. The autopsy disclosed that he had shot himself.

There was a fight between the two men, that was sure, after LaRauche had surprised his manservant at the telephone, in the act of betraying his master to the police for a price, in connection with the theft of the rocket. Maybe

there was murder in the mad scientist's eye; maybe he tried to down Orkins and strangle him to death. He must have put a terrible fear in his servant's heart.

But it's pretty hard to kill a strong and active man like Orkins, unarmed. The powder marks on his chest showed the bullet had been fired at close range. Still, there was no sign of a revolver.

It was a fat-headed policeman, assigned by Chief Meigs to guard the house for the night, after our interview with Mrs. LaRauche, who found something in the bottom of the antique grandfather's clock which stood on the first landing of the stairs. He called up the Chief, and said: "Looks like this is what we're after."

It was, Chief Meigs discovered. A little plated revolver bearing the monogram "O," which Orkins no doubt kept safely hidden away on his person. The implication was that after he had run away from LaRauche and dashed up the stairs, he had stopped on the landing, where, seized with sudden remorse for his act of betrayal, he had shot himself through the heart.

It is easy to imagine the small revolver slipping from his grasp as he fell backwards, his body plunging down the stairs, and being flung with such force that it hurtled across the landing and fell in the bottom of the clock. There was no glass in the door of the clock, so it must have worked that way.

Rene LaRauche was never seen again. In my opinion the poor old man, terrified at the sudden turn of events, and rational enough to realize that he would be involved in the death of Orkins, made his reckless escape by plane. No one will ever know, I dare say, and it doesn't matter now.

A week after he had winged his way into the night, portions of his plane were washed ashore at Cape Henry, in Virginia. He had set out on his night flight, apparently purposeless, and had perished at sea. All very sad and regrettable, but out of his tragedy, buried deep in the dark waters of the

Atlantic, his fame survived, and rose transcendently to heights he had never attained while alive.

Henry knew how to take advantage of his opportunities. Immediately he founded and sponsored a nation-wide movement among scientists to glorify and immortalize the name of Rene LaRauche. Thus, strange as it may seem, the perpetration of the greatest hoax known within living memory became the crowning achievement of the scientist's career.

In the deviltries of a deranged mind, prompted by his insane jealousy and hatred of Henry, LaRauche had made the world Mars-conscious to a degree greater than ever before in its history. Through his original and astounding conceptions of life and conditions on that planet, he had brought within the bounds not merely of possibility, but of almost immediate probability, the establishing of direct radio communication between Mars and the earth. All this had made a tremendous and lasting impression on the people.

He had proved almost conclusively that life, as we know it, exists on Mars. Actually, he had created a new Mars, and brought it within neighborly distance from the earth. The American people especially were anxious to preserve the feelings of friendliness and sympathy towards a kindred race which he had aroused in their hearts by his Martian revelations, however false. But were they false? Were they not rather prophetic of the true revelations that are destined to come in time?

Now and then I visit the Museum of Science, to see his portrait bust, which adorns a special niche in the museum's hall of fame, and to again survey, with varying emotions, the Martian rocket and the scroll, reposing under glass.

Only recently I drove along the lonely road that winds through the desolate hills which encompass his estate. The old house is closed, doors and windows boarded up, the whole place in utter decay, with a "For Sale" sign, swinging and creaking in the wind, over the front gate. Mrs. LaRauche lives in southern France; we hear she is about to publish a new mystery novel.

Winter has gone, and once again we are ensconced for the summer in the spooky-like castle at Sands Cliff, with the difference that it is no longer spooky. Our heritage of privacy and seclusion regained, life goes on much as before, in peaceful and ordered living.

But still everything is not quite the same. As a family we seem to have outgrown our weak spots. At least, some good has come out of all the exciting and horrible events through which we passed. Our arrogant detachment from the outside world, for one thing, has given way to a more neighborly feeling. We are trying to think more of others than we do of ourselves; we are sharing our inherited benefits with those less fortunately placed, whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Henry Royce, millionaire scientist, no longer exists for the world; rather, Henry Royce, philanthropist and amateur gardener. It is strange how Henry took so naturally and intensively to gardening, and he has covered his tracks as an amateur scientist so completely by his new hobby that no one would possibly suspect that the white-haired, old gentleman, wearing overalls, and a healthy sun-bronze, and hoeing and raking in his garden of herbs, once thrilled the world with his scientific exploits.

Scientific matters are taboo in his presence; the slightest reference to Mars, a painful subject; his splendidly equipped observatory stripped of its astronomical fittings. Nevertheless, after all the evidence presented, which proved beyond all doubt that the Martian revelations were a hoax, I have good reasons to believe that deep down in his inner self, he still clings stoutly to his fanciful theory that the radio messages, the rocket and even Mr. Zzyx, did actually come from Mars. I think he still believes that he was right, and the rest of us all wrong.

And in this secret belief he does not play a lone hand, judging from the spirited correspondence he carries on with Olinski, who is now in Russia, employed as a radio engineer by the Soviet Government. After the bursting of the Martian bubble, Olinski resigned from the National Radio Corporation; he brooded, and as a result, lost his health. He was terribly down-at-the-heel when Henry paid his way back to Russia, by way of the Orient; and in pure justice to the memory of Niki, commissioned him to find the valet's relatives, in the Philippines, and turn over to them the full amount of the reward Niki had won by finding the Martian rocket.

Some months later, Henry received a very sad letter from Niki's old mother, in the Philippines, expressing her mingled grief and gratitude. About the same time, he had a cheerful note from Antonio Ranzetti, who has returned to Italy, to live in ease for the remainder of his life, on the generous contribution Henry made to the animal trainer, as a consolation prize for the loss of Peter, his performing chimpanzee, although Henry would never admit that Mr. Zzyx was really Peter.

Out of the Californian void, into which Prince Matani had disappeared, there came at last an account of his marriage to a beautiful screen star of the first magnitude. By this time, I was past wonder and all power to feel astonishment, but the description of the wedding, as given in the newspapers, gave me food for speculation.

He was married quite recently, only a month or so ago, and the ceremony was performed, at the bride's request, on the lot of one of the big producing corporations, where she was appearing daily in an African jungle story, the filming of which was being rushed to completion. A very informal wedding, in a most unique setting. The minister had just pronounced them man and wife when a fierce, giant gorilla, used as local color in the picture, escaped from its cage, and turned the wedding party into a panic.

Before His Highness had time to kiss his bride, according to the papers—pst!—he passed out, and did not emerge from his strange coma until the following morning.

This second attack puzzled the family. It was pointless for me to confess that I knew the reason, never having disclosed what Olinski had told me in secret, of the Prince's family's hereditary affliction. And just a day or so ago, came further news that the Princess Matani had flown to Mexico, to seek a divorce. Fate seems to have done its worst for the Prince.

None of us really cared much what happened to His Highness, all interest in him in its bearing on Pat having ceased entirely. Which brings me to the last remaining piece of news.

A barrier formed by his own imagination kept McGinity and Pat apart for some time following the solution and wind-up of the Martian mystery; the barrier of riches, which so often prevents the "poor but honest" young man from popping the question to a girl he considers far beyond his reach by reason of her social rank and money. He felt, as I learned afterwards, that the honorable thing to do, as far as Pat was concerned, was to fade out of the picture.

It was an open secret in the family by this time that he and Pat were desperately in love. After all they had gone through together, things were bound to end like this. As soon as we learned that McGinity was suffering from a severe attack of conscientious scruples, we held several family councils; whispering together, we decided that nothing would suit us better than to have the young reporter as our nephew.

Jane was coldly enthusiastic, at first. But one could not blame her. Family pride is a mighty powerful instinct. All her life she had been a stout-hearted defender of the social impregnability of the Royces, regarding her world, or their world, as divided into Royces on the one hand, and the near relatives and close friends of the Royces on the other.

McGinity of course had no social credentials, but his father had been a college chum of Pat's father, and undoubtedly he had saved Pat's life when the late Mr. Zzyx, alias Peter, went on his rampage of death and destruction. "We owe him something," I argued; and so did Henry, who couldn't say enough now in praise of the reporter.

Besides, he came from a family of great antiquity. When I finally proved to Jane, through "Barker's Peerage," that one of his ancient, Scottish forebears had played a leading part in the crusade of taking Robert Bruce's heart to Jerusalem, the ice suddenly broke, and she began to express herself as charmed in having found him so charming.

And so we decided to take the high hand, so far as we dared; and we were about to summon Pat to a family conference, and tell her that she would hear something now that would surprise her, and so forth ... when, luckily for us, Pat took matters in her own hand. As she described her feelings to me afterwards, she realized that unless a miracle intervened the being who meant more to her than all the world would be lost; and the knowledge

seemed suddenly to clarify her mind, and her course of duty to save an endangered love became quite clear.

I wish I had space in which to tell, in full, the story of Pat's curing McGinity's attack of conscientious scruples against marrying a rich girl, and how she finally challenged him on common ground, for it was very romantic business; this alone would fill a large volume.

With fine courage, Pat set about to do a little newspaper writing on her own, with a definite purpose in view. A close study of McGinity's clever articles, and his remarkable technique of condensation and brevity, so necessary in newspaper reporting, provided exactly the sort of inspiration that she needed. She had the background of a splendid education, she was an inveterate reader of action stories, and was also very observing. Reading the early specimens of her work, neatly but laboriously typed, I was amazed to find that she showed real talent in dramatizing the commonplace things in life.

Her first serious article was founded on several visits she had made at the wretched homes of the very poor, calling on expectant mothers, in company with a nurse from the Rivington Street Settlement, on the governing board of which Henry had become an important factor. Under the pseudonym of Nora Nolan, and using the house address of a girl friend, she submitted the sketch to the City Editor of the New York Daily Recorder.

To her great surprise and joy, the article was accepted, and she received a check for fifteen dollars, the first money she had ever earned in her life. Realizing that she had been lucky, she made a quick follow-up with an account of conditions in the House of Detention for Women, of which I happened to be a member of the visiting board. This brought another and larger check, and a polite note from the City Editor, asking her to call on him at the Recorder office.

Then the incredible thing happened. As Nora Nolan, she got a job on the Recorder, and was assigned to write daily signed articles, at space rates; brief word pictures of the inside workings of the various city institutions. Her earnings now, at the least, would amount to forty dollars a week. She was given part-time use of a desk and typewriter, which she shared with an oldish, pleasant-mannered woman, who conducted a column for housewives.

What happened after this had all the accessories of fiction. The first day on her job, late in the afternoon, she was seated at her desk, in a far corner of the general news-room, nervously picking at the keys of a dilapidated typewriter, and trying to bring order out of the chaos of notes, taken at random during an inspection of the Children's Clearing Bureau. Conscious of the curious, covert glances of a dozen or so men and women reporters working in the room, she began to feel terribly embarrassed and nervous; she couldn't concentrate on her notes. But she kept picking away. Then suddenly she became conscious of another and closer gaze. She looked up, and met McGinity's amazed and inquiring eyes. Something seemed to fill her throat; she tried to swallow but the lump would not go down.

Then suddenly her courage returned, for she had caught in his glance something contemptuous. She held out a small hand, and he took it for an instant and released it.

"I hope you're well, Bob," she said. "I haven't seen you for several weeks. At least, you might say you're glad to see me."

"I congratulate you," he said, a little sternly.

"Oh, that's nice," she rejoined. "I feel that I have you to thank for what I'm doing now."

"I have done nothing," he said.

"Oh, but you have, Bob!" she replied. "You've been my inspiration. Otherwise, how could I have turned to newspaper writing practically overnight? I never knew it was in me, really, to do reporting. I've only written a few insignificant things, but your City Editor liked them, and he's given me regular employment. Isn't it wonderful that—"

"That what?" he interrupted, sourly.

"That I'm not so useless, after all," she answered.

"A bit rough on the girl reporter that has to work for her living," he said, with quiet bitterness, "There's lots of 'em, right now, looking for work. But just a lark for the girl with money, who can use her social position to land a job."

"Most undignified and unnecessary," said Pat, with a disdainful note in her voice. "But it just doesn't happen to apply in my case."

McGinity, with a little twinge of remorse, coughed awkwardly, and was about to mutter something, when he saw the City Editor moving towards them.

"Sorry, Miss Nolan," said the City Editor, eyeing McGinity a little suspiciously, "but I want to remind you that all copy must be turned in by seven o'clock. Tomorrow we go to press an hour earlier, so please have your copy in, on the Domestic Relations Court, promptly at six." Then he turned to McGinity. "Miss Nolan—Nora Nolan—is our latest recruit, Mac, if you haven't been properly introduced. No doubt you've read her two recent signed articles? Pretty good, don't you think?"

McGinity smiled bitterly. Before he could speak, Pat smiled up at the City Editor, and said: "Mr. McGinity and I have met before, but he doesn't know me by my pen name, Nora Nolan. He's a bit surprised, and I don't wonder at it."

The City Editor grinned. "I quite expected to find that it wasn't your real name," he said. "But it was your descriptive talent, Miss Nolan, that attracted me, and your nose for finding news in the most ordinary things. That's why I gave you the chance."

"Thanks," Pat murmured, smiling, and the City Editor walked away. Then she looked at McGinity, and said: "Awful sorry, Bob, and all that, but I must get on with my story."

McGinity went red and felt a fool. He seated himself at a vacant desk, opposite to hers, lit a cigarette, and watched her work.

Her notes a blur, Pat thought: "Bob's terribly angry with me. He's making me awfully unhappy." Then her mind went off on a new tack. "Suppose he doesn't really love me? Perhaps I've made a terrible mistake. Oh, dear! But I shall always love him—dear Bob! I shall go on loving him with the gift of love ungiven, always in my heart, always beautiful, like a shrine of dreams...."

She sprang up suddenly, and said, aloud: "Oh, I can't bear this room! It's so stuffy and noisy!"

Instantly McGinity was up, and looking at her across the desk. He looked into her eyes steadily, where he fancied he caught a glimpse of tears.

"Pat," he said, gently, and a little inarticulately, as though he was ashamed of himself, "may I ask you a bold question?"

"If you like, certainly," sighed Pat.

"Will you go to dinner with me?"

"Thank you, Bob," she replied; and sat down, and finished her article.

I learned of all this afterwards, of course, but where they dined, and what was said there, I have no personal knowledge. I can only guess. Afterwards they went to a popular cinema, where the lights are so conveniently dim.

About ten, Pat called up, and announced she would be home around eleven, which quieted our growing apprehension and anxiety. In the same breath, rather tremulous, she said: "Bob's bringing me home."

I had Jane turn off the bright lights in the lower part of the house. She lit the candles in the drawing room and hall, while I poked up the fire, and pulled up our softest and deepest chair, which was quite big enough for two. Henry, to my amazement, brought in some autumnal flowers he had gathered the day before from his garden at the castle, and arranged them in a vase on the mantelpiece.

We were of course much intrigued, and indulged in much speculation until they arrived. Schweizer admitted them, and then discreetly disappeared. Leaning over the railing at the head of the stairs, I contrived to remain so absolutely still that not a creak betrayed that I was looking on, and listening in, in spite of a twinge of conscience. But it was a moment so fateful and momentous in Pat's life that I felt I had the right to share it with her.

I could hardly believe my eyes and ears. In the dim candlelight, in the hall, McGinity's first act was to wrap her tenderly about with his warm young arms, and press her lips to his.

Then Pat spoke, softly and sweetly. "When did you first love me, Bob?"

A question well put, I thought. Something every woman wants to know.

"From the first moment I saw you," McGinity breathed passionately. "But I made myself so wretchedly unhappy," he went on, "believing that I'd no right to love you. But, somehow, seeing you at the typewriter like that, in the stuffy and cluttered news-room, it came to me that I had been most

selfish and wrong. I realized that you had made your interests common with mine. It was a challenge and a declaration. I feel now that I've the right to love you, and to ask you to be my wife...."

And the next thing that I knew was that I was dancing lightly up and down the upper hall, in the exaltation and excitement of this wonderful thing that had happened to Pat, to the surprise and perhaps disapproval of the proud and stiff Royces, male and female, who looked down from its walls. While Henry, smiles wreathing his face when I told him, murmured: "Don't be such a colossal ass, Livingston!"

In a surprisingly short time, Pat and McGinity were married. A quiet, informal wedding in our Washington Square house, in December, but rather noisily emblazoned by the newspapers, which dearly love a romance, especially when it's coupled with high adventure. A fortnight's honeymoon in Bermuda, and McGinity returned with his bride, to find a considerable boost in salary, and the offer of an important sub-editorship, awaiting him at the Daily Recorder office.

Pat does all her writing at home now, still under the pen name of Nora Nolan, with rather amazing success, while McGinity continues at his favorite newspaper employment.

This brings me up to date about things.

One day, late in June, as I was returning from an inspection of Henry's garden of herbs, at the rear of the castle, Mamie Sparks, our colored laundress, called to me from the door of the servants' wing. Staring wide-eyed and open-mouthed, she pointed at the peaked observatory tower, with its sliding glass roof, which now houses the happily married couple—where they can gaze up at the moon and stars, while their hearts chant paeans of praise and thanks to their particularly beloved and lucky star, Mars.

"Marse Livingston! Look!" Mamie exclaimed.

I looked, and saw a large, long-legged bird perched on the roof of Mr. and Mrs. McGinity's tower bedroom. Then I turned to Mamie, and said: "What d'you suppose it is?"

Mamie chuckled, and when she chuckled, every part of her body seemed to synchronize. "Why, man alive!" she said; "dat's a stork. Dat's certainly a good omen for our sweet Patricia, only it done come a little ahead of time."

"It looks like a crane," I ventured.

"Nosah, nosah!" Mamie countered. "No crane ain't nevah roostin' up dat high, Marse Livingston."

The strange bird flew away, and Mamie, still chuckling, returned to her work.

The true significance of the visit of that long-legged, foretokening bird that had perched itself on the tower roof of Pat's bedroom did not come to me until that evening, as I stood on the terrace, enjoying my after-dinner cigar. At first, I had regarded Mamie's prophetic suggestion with only startled incredulity. Now, after having talked the matter over with Jane, the thunder of the coming event seemed to crack in my brain.

Pat's going to have a baby! My heart was overfilled with joy. I looked proudly at the old castle that her child would some day own. Moved by my deep happiness, I gazed up at the beautiful, star-studded night sky. My gaze rested upon Mars, sparkling like a Burma ruby, and it occurred to me that what was going to happen to Pat, viewed scientifically, was more wonderful by far than a radio message or even a rocket from Mars. And yet these little physical and spiritual manifestations of a tiny soul being planted in a woman's body do not matter; they have become too commonplace.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SHUDDERING
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