

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

# Schlock!

WEBZINE

VOL. 15, ISSUE 29  
19TH JANUARY 2020

## FERAL

RON CAPSHAW  
"YOU COME  
HIGHLY  
RECOMMENDED,"  
HE FINALLY  
SAID...

## SOPHIE GOES APE

SARA  
MOSSMAN  
"BIPOLAR WENCH  
AT YOUR SERVICE,  
YOU BASTARDS..."

## FATTY UNFOLDING EW FARNSWORTH

## GRAVEYARD WATER RICK MCQUISTON

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Schlock! Webzine

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## SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

Vol. 15, Issue 29  
19<sup>th</sup> January 2020

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

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

Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk). We no longer review published and self-published novels directly, although we are willing to accept reviews from other writers. Any other enquiries, including requests to advertise in our quarterly printed magazine, also to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk)

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*This Edition*

This week's cover illustration is *Tarzan Lion Ruin* by [Mystic Art Design](#) from [Pixabay](#).  
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## EDITORIAL

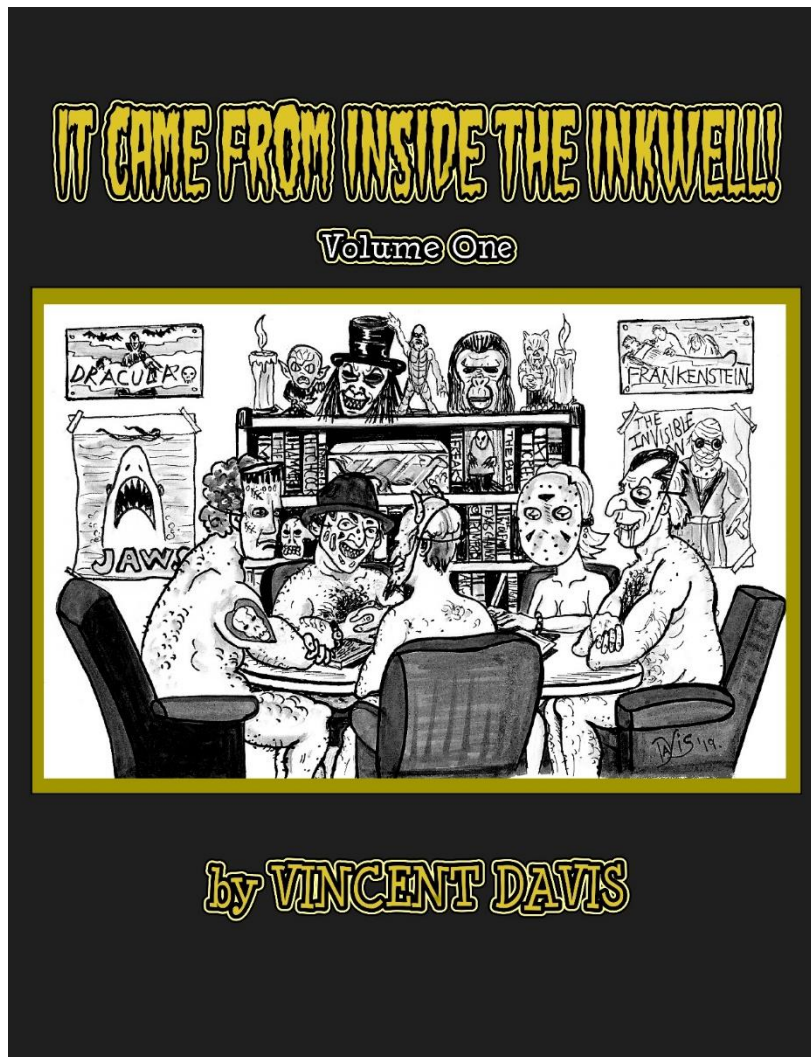
Firstly, we'd like to say a big thank you for everyone who voted not only for Schlock! in the [Critters' Poll](#) for Best Magazine/E-zine (coming in fifth place), but also for yours truly, as Best Magazine Editor (in sixth place).

This week, an English country house conceals murderous secrets. Things aren't much better in contemporary America, where a bi-polar woman is getting a little testy. Down Picklock Lane an alien agent proves to be a man of many parts. And rather bizarrely, Harry Valente seems to be leaking.

A man dreams of lost childhood, heedless of the lost child at his side. Eile and Sunny's latest Dreamland adventure continues. The witch girl meets her end. And Polaris reaches the Promised Land.

—Gavin Chappell

Available from Schlock! Publications: [\*It Came From Inside The Inkwell!\*](#)



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IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

## IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

By Vincent Davis



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

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

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

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FERAL by Ron Capshaw

The sunlight streaming through the stained glass window of the castle haloed only one of the two figures flanking the Blackstone Coat of Arms. The lit figure was a knight with his visor up and leaning with both hands on a broadsword in front of him, as if on guard duty.

The figure the sun seemed to refuse to shine on was a cave-man type with a bow and arrow.

The butler coughed politely and I stopped looking at the coat of arms. He looked like just the kind of butler an English lord would have. He had wavy white hair combed back, clear blue eyes and an unobtrusive manner.

He led me down a long hallway with suits of armour and portraits on the wall. As I walked past I saw a portrait of what had to be the present Duke's father. He was rosy-cheeked with a jutting jaw and grey-green eyes. He smiled and was holding a rapier pointed at the ground. The next picture showed the old boy himself leaning on a rifle, dressed as hunter.

We passed the last portrait. It was of the Duke's son, Clayton Beta-Jones, who went missing in Africa before the Great War. Word was the Queen herself sent the son on a secret mission to report on the German presence in Africa.

The son had apache-black hair, the same grey-green eyes and jutting jaw as his predecessors and was sporting a handlebar moustache. No rifles or swords were present, just a portrait of a man with his jaw seemingly pointed to a happy picture with his bride, the daughter of the Duke of Claremont. She was beside him in the portrait with her hand on his chest to show off a diamond ring.

By now we had made it to a khaki-coloured door. The butler knocked and said, "Mr. Nash, sir."

"Come," the voice from inside the door said. The butler opened the door for me and then politely excused himself.

Inside was a room devoted to the slaughter of animals. There were mounted heads of exotic animals on the wall: leopards, tigers, elks, and gorillas. Even the furniture looked exotic. There was a leopard-print couch (God knows how many leopards it took to cover the couch with their skin), tables with African artefacts on it, and even a picture of the Duke of Blackstone posing with Teddy Roosevelt. The two looked exactly alike and not just because they were dressed in the same safari clothes. They had the same triumphant, insane grin.

A man with snow-white hair carelessly combed back, a tanned face, and grey-green eyes put down a rifle he was cleaning and advanced toward me.

The Duke of Blackstone was dressed in khaki and easily six two. He glided over to me with cat-like grace.

"Mr. Nash," he said in growly British voice.

He gestured at a leather chair.

“Please, sit.”

“Scotch?”

“No thank you.”

He picked up the rifle he was cleaning, sat down across from me and put it on his lap. He returned to polishing it.

“You come highly recommended,” he finally said.

I smiled, wondering if the rifle was loaded.

“I know two of your employers back when you were a Pinkerton detective and later a major in Army Intelligence. Both spoke highly of you.”

I tilted my head forward as if bowing.

He grunted, and put the rifle to one side.

“Tell me about yourself,” he said.

“Well, if you talked to Allen Jaunders and Major Smythe you probably know the whole story. I worked for the Pinkertons before America the War Then I got drafted in 1917 and I suppose because of my detective background, I was recruited by Allied intelligence. After my discharge I decided I liked England and stayed.”

I grinned, “The rest is history.”

He didn’t laugh or even smile. Clearly the celebrated British sense of humour was not within him.

“What do you know of my family?”

“I know that despite your hatred of publicity, your family has made the news. You have one daughter, Cicely, who is a Hitler supporter. The other, Clarissa, is a supporter of Stalin. I’m sure dinner is a screaming match. Then you have a son who disappeared in Africa before the War, in 1913. You hired several detectives and government men to locate him, but to no avail. You yourself made several trips, the last in 1930, and couldn’t find him.”

He snorted.

“With the daughters I suppose it is in the Blackstone blood,” he said. “We have a tendency toward eccentricity. My father went native during the Sepoy Rebellion. He dressed like the wogs, but fought for the Empire. My daughters I suppose are going native as well. Cicely, photographed in Berlin with the Brown Shirts, has a Nazi uniform she wears at every event in England. Clarissa dresses in that long leather jacket and peasant clothes the Bolsheviks like to wear.”

“But that is not why I’ve brought you here.”



He reached into his many pocketed shirt and handed me a document.

It read:

“Congratulations my Lord. I have located your son. I assume that you would like this location known. Please pay my travel expenses and finder’s fee in order for me to bring him back to you.”

It was signed, “Philip Jose.”

“Who is this Jose?” I said, looking at the elegant hand-writing.

The Duke looked so angry his moustache was trembling.

“Probably some bounder who is trying to make money off my grief. Believe it or not, this is the first time I’ve had anyone claim to have found my son. The blackmailers swarm around Cicely and Clarissa instead. The public knows so much about that them, with their Nazi salutes and fist-clenches, that I am practically blackmail proof.”

I handed the note back. “So you don’t think this is legit?”

He took the note, held it by the corner, and let it float down to the ground as if something distasteful was on it.

“Trust me when I say this, Mr. Nash. My son is gone. No doubt murdered by a tribe or eaten by a tiger. I have spared no expense, and even his skeleton or that of his bride has never been found. Not even in the crude hut he constructed after the shipwreck. It could also have been the Hun, Clayton was tasked by his majesty to monitor them and we know full well of their bestiality from the last war.”

I scratched my head. “Why is this Jose bringing this up twenty years after your son’s disappearance?”

He shook his head.

“Okay. What do you want me to do?”

“Take the rotter out. Find out who he is, what his game is, and then warn him away.”

“It might not be that easy. I’m a private detective now. Perhaps when I was a Pinkerton I could have muscled him, but I can’t do that now and keep my license.”

He got up with the same fluid movement.

“Oh but you can Mr. Nash. I know several members of Scotland Yard who have assured me you have carte blanche in this matter. The only limit to your duties is you can’t commit murder, although I would support that.”

I rolled my arm slightly, wondering if I still had it in me for muscle work.

“Okay. Does Scotland Yard have any information on this Jose?”

My butler will give you what we have from Scotland Yard. No one has been able to locate the bastard however.”

“Okay,” I said, rising from the chair. “I’ll be in touch.

I met the butler in the hallway and he had a folder with “Scotland Yard” stamped on it.

“Thanks,” I said, taking it.

He escorted me outside to my car and said, “Please let me know if there is any way I can be of further assistance to you.”

Just then a cry went out, a bull-throated roar that rattled the windows, made a flock of birds fly away, and something cold go up my spine.

The butler didn’t even blink.

What Scotland Yard had on “Philip Jose” was useless. The name went nowhere. It turned out it was a pseudonym for a mysterious author who wrote anti-imperialist books. The police speculated that he probably lived abroad.

It looked like that Jose was going to be as hard to find as Clayton Beta-Jones.

I started with Jose’s literary agent.

Like myself, Arthur Carraway was an American who chose to live in England. He ran a fairly respectable publishing firm.

He was also determined to look English, down to the tweed jacket and jodhpurs, which it was rumoured he only took off for white tails when a society ball beckoned.

He smiled when I gave him my card.

“A private detective, eh? I thought they only existed in the books by Dashiell Hammett.”

“Nope. I’m for real.”

He motioned me to the carefully-stained wooden chair in his office.

“I suppose you are here about Philip Jose.” He got a cigarette holder, put a cigarette in it and lit it.

I nodded.

“I understand he is a mystery himself.”

He offered me a cigarette, which I took and smoked sans holder.

“Philip Jose is a pseudonym. I’ve spent years trying to find out who he really is.”

I crossed my legs in that American way the British thought effeminate.

“You’ve never met him?”

He nodded.

“No. His novels arrive via fair mail. From Libreville. What I know of him comes from his subject matter. He is left-wing, probably a Bolshevik, who writes socialist novels about British Imperial behaviour in Africa. He has intricate knowledge of the country and British officials that shows he has lived there. May still be there in fact.”

Great. A puzzle within a puzzle. A mystery man allegedly claiming to have “solved” the mysterious disappearance of an English nobleman.

“He claims to have found the Duke of Blackstone’s missing son. But he wants money for it.”

Carraway put his boot on the desk either to admire it or get me to.

“It’s possible. He certainly has spent enough time in the bush. But something else than money must be motivating him. He doesn’t need it. He makes a bundle from his novels that ironically attack capitalism.”

“No offense, but this is sketchy. Does anyone else know about him?”

He shuffled some papers on his desk.

“He does have devoted fans. One has made a study of Jose’s life who could be helpful.”

He wrote down his name and I left.

Jarvis Smith was a man obviously with money to spare for his dogged, obsessive quest to determine Philip Jose’s true identity.

That was evident from the shrine he built for the author inside his apartment. On the wall were covers of Jose’s novels. There was also maps of Africa on the walls with red circles drawn around particular sections. Flanking them were two drawings of man in a pitch helmet and jodhpurs I took to be the person he thought Jose was. There were also pictures taken on safari with a man in the back whose shadowy head was circled.

I gave him Smith my card and he smiled politely.

Smith looked too old to be a fan. He had a receding hairline and moustache. He had crow’s feet on a face that had been considerably tanned and wind burnt in the past. I put his age somewhere between 45 and 65.

“A detective? Oh yes, please come in,” he said in an accent that could have been French or English or Swiss.

He pulled two chairs away from the mounds of files and documents on his desk and with a courtly gesture invited me to sit down.

I did, and he moved the other chair near me, sat in it, and leaned forward, cupping his chin with both palms and studied me as if I was the most important person in the world.

“I suppose you are here about Jose,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Fascinating author.”

“Who is he?”

“Ha,” he said. “I have spent almost thirty years trying to solve that problem. But I think I have.”

He is, I believe, a German anarchist named Hans Kruger who fled Germany for Africa with the police on his tail. He is clearly left-wing and probably around 60 years old. I do know from reading his books that he has an almost pathological interest in violence and the greed that causes it.”

“So where is he? Could he be here?”

Smith stroked his chin.

“If he’s here, I would venture to say he would camouflage himself by living in the poor section of the London.”

I gestured around his dingy office/library.

“Like this?”

He grinned. “No. Not this bad.”

I left. But something about his manner wasn’t right. I had the impression Smith was toying with me.

I waited in the shadows outside his apartment in my car.

Smith soon left his apartment and hailed a taxi.

I followed behind, and he arrived at the gate of the Blackstone castle. The cabbie kept the car running.

Soon I saw Jenkins, the Blackstone butler, hand Smith a folder.

What the hell did Jenkins have to do with this?

I followed Smith, and he stopped off at a pub.

I played another hunch, and went back to Smith's apartment, picked the lock and went into this makeshift shrine to Philip Jose.

I first looked at the African map on the wall. A red circle was around a section entitled "French Colonial Africa." Inside the circle someone had written "Where it started: April 1930." Then there was a map of Paris, "Eight times, 1930." Then London, "Three times in 1931, four in 1932, and so far six in 1933."

I rooted around in his drawer and found several pictures of obvious working class women on a slab: "Marie Odette, 18. Decapitated." "Mary Jane Beaumont, 19, Throat ripped out." "Sarah Pomeroy, 24. Knife wound to the heart. The heart was not found." "Meredith Jenkins, age 25. Disembowelled. Found hung upside down from a street lamp."

I then found pictures of an African cabin, which I took to be one the Duke's son constructed after a ship wreck. Written on the photo was "Gabon, Africa, 1912." Standing in front of the hut was a clean-shaven man with long hair, dressed in a white shirt that had seen better days. Even with the long hair I recognized the Duke's son, Clayton Beta-Jones. Beside him was a woman dressed in a way that would be called immodest in England. She had on a buttoned white shirt and flowing white skirt and was holding a baby."

Blackstone's father didn't mention his missing son had a child.

Why didn't he?"

Jenkins was the soul of politeness as he let me in.

"The Duke is out for the moment but he said you could wait."

I waited a beat and then said,

"What's the connection between you and Smith?"

I had to give it to Jenkins. He didn't pale or shuffle.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I saw you hand Smith a packet. Is it about the missing son?"

Jenkins suddenly dropped the Jeeves act.

"What do you want?" he said in a less soothing voice.

"I want to know why Blackstone never mentioned his son had a baby while in Africa."

He looked up to the ceiling as if asking for help from the almighty.



“He didn’t want it known that he brought his grandson back.”

I took a step back.

“When was he brought back?”

“Blackstone assigned Sherlock Holmes himself to locate the family. The detective was able to determine that gorillas killed the son and his wife. Their skeletons were found, which I think the Duke later ordered burned. But, because there was no skeleton of the baby found, Holmes surmised that because of the hair on the scene it was apes. The Duke’s grandson spent the next 20 years of his life among them. The Duke located ‘it,’ and very quietly, after spending a considerable amount of hush money, took his grandson back to England, after some stopovers in France.”

I looked up.

“You said ‘it.’

Jenkins looked again up to the ceiling.

“The child could not be civilized. It was aggressive, killing anyone who came into its eye line and then ate them. To keep ‘it’ happy, Blackstone would let his grandson out to satisfy his blood lust albeit supervised and controlled as much as possible by the Duke and myself.”

Something clicked in my head, as if the last piece of the puzzle snapped into place.

“Did you say there were stopovers in Paris?”

That explained the entries Smith made about the wave of deaths in Paris.

“Where does Smith figure into this?”

“One of those slaughtered was Smith’s estranged daughter. I am sure by now you know that Smith is Philip Jose.”

The blackmailer and proletariat writer.

I looked at my hand that started to tremble.

“Why are you giving information to Smith?”

Jenkins looked down at his highly-polished feet.

“Because I can’t take it anymore. I’m tired of watching that animal rip people apart. No one would suspect the grandson of English royalty. Much like Jack the Ripper. So the murders will go on and on.”

Another scream was heard. From upstairs.

“‘It’ is upstairs, in the attic,” Jenkins whispered.

Before I could stop him, he whipped out a pistol, put it in his mouth, and blew the top of his head off.

I watched Jenkins' brains leak out onto the polished tiled floor.

Another bull-throated roar.

I drew my gun and ran up the stairs following the roars.

'It' was screaming behind a metal door.

I was able to open it and go in.

There was a swinging light bulb on a chair.

The door clanged shut behind me.

I went forward and stumbled over a body. It was Smith's or what was left of him. He still held a pistol in his hand. Something had scalped him and eaten his brains.

I followed the swinging light, hoping it would settle on the grandson.

Calloused feet hit my chest and I ricocheted off a wall. As I slid to the floor, I said "I know you are in here Blackstone. This doesn't end with me. Others will figure out what you and that creature have been doing."

The light swung by and I saw the Duke of Blackstone beside a crouching figure.

I heard the Duke say, almost lazily, "Kregah."

I heard a growl and as the creature rocketed toward me, teeth bared, I noticed he had the Blackstone jutting chin.

THE END

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## SOPHIE GOES APE by Sara Mossman

Sophie had adjusted, as much as was possible, to a life with mental illness, specifically bipolar disorder, but pulling down a 40-hour week always proved a challenge to her, no matter how “easy” the job. Yes, it’d been a slow slide from office work, to temping, to light retail, to fast food, and then finally to manning a tollbooth, a position she managed to snag with the help of a Department of Disabilities counsellor.

Besides withstanding the gasoline exhaust from all the passing cars, she had to contend with the relentless ocean of noise, the sweltering 100 degree Florida weather, the sight of car after car and truck after truck, as well as the berserk number of dirty looks and snide comments from the toll paying drivers. Frequent commentaries by drivers were,

“Hey, saving for that vacation cruise? Gimme a receipt right now please!” or

“Tough job, ain’t it, baby?” or

“I bet that cash stash under your mattress is getting’ pretty big, isn’t it?”

Basically most drivers assumed toll booth operators were sloths waiting for every chance to steal from the taxpayers. Her standard comeback as they drove off was a smile while muttering,

“Bipolar wench at your service, you bastards...”

Then one day, Sophie had the progressive ill fortune of meeting up with nasty Tommy Biggs, a loud mouthed, muscular, slightly overfed, American man driving a 1989, souped up, butter yellow, mint condition Cadillac from his father’s car lot in St. Petersburg. Tom Biggs was in his late thirties and loved all manner of evil, including dog fights, nudie bars, drinking binges and fixed up and foxed out tarts for hire on US Highway 41, as well as harassing homeless people late at night with his cousin Ben when they thought nobody else of importance was looking.

Tommy grinned and ran his right hand over his blonde buzz cut as he anticipated his mini assault on the upcoming toll booth operator. Sophie was a perfect target: (seemingly) shy, overweight, probably celibate for a good six to ten years, and no doubt wearing white socks and high-water stretch pants along with her worn out, light green uniform top.

Biggs reached into his pocket as he pulled up to Sophie’s booth and grabbed a giant pocket full of pennies.

“This is at least a buck!” He yelled at Sophie and then added, “The rest is a tip!” And with that he flung the hand full of change like a hardball of shrapnel at Sophie through the open top half of the government Dutch door and sped off laughing. Every set of tires going through her toll station affected the expected outcome of her till. Sophie scrambled about in her toll booth operator box to find all the change on the floor in between successive drivers so as to pick up and count the change. Sometimes he threw 89 cents, sometimes he threw barely more than fifty cents, and sometimes he threw a dollar with a bit more change.

Any other employee at the tollbooth station would have followed a grievance protocol for dealing with hostile drivers, but Sophie's mental illness clouded her understanding of her rights. She was mainly worried about recovering the change off the floor so as to not get in "trouble".

She was getting so obsessed with this man's daily gag that she started losing sleep, something bipolar people cannot afford. After having reached the hazardous point of having not slept well for a total of three weeks, Sophie completely lost track of her medications, lost track of meals, and lost track of which days were her days off and which days were her days to work. She just showed up seven days a week and was sent home if she showed up on a day that she wasn't scheduled. Normally very conscientious about her appearance, Sophie was now dishevelled and bleary, and rambled somewhat when speaking.

In Sophie's neighbourhood, zoned commercial, was a costume shop, and it just so happened that Halloween was approaching in only two days.

"This is WAR," thought Sophie. She'd been dreaming of going all out and dressing up as either a queen or a hairy jungle gorilla for years, but never had been able to stash away the cash for this fantasy.

"This year I'm not wearing another bed sheet toga with plastic flowers in my hair," thought Sophie. Using her grocery cash, her medication co-pay cash (instead of buying medications), her phone bill money, a portion of her rent, and all her laundry quarters, she bought a black, hairy, realistic gorilla costume with a removable head.

"Screw renting the costume," mulled Sophie to herself, "I need one of these..."

It was top of the line, and startling and frightening when worn. Sophie took the gorilla suit home, put it on, and practiced springing up and shouting very masculine monster noises. Again, no sleep. Sleep was irrelevant.

It was Halloween Day, and Sophie drove to work on empty in every sense of the word: no sleep in weeks, no meds in weeks, no food in days, dehydrated, no socks, underpants put on inside out as she'd used her laundry quarters to buy the costume, unbrushed, unwashed hair, unflossed and unbrushed teeth, no make-up, no body shower, not to mention her gas gauge, which registered about a 32nd of a tank. Her mission left in life was to spook the pants off her tormentor, Tommy Biggs.

Mr. Biggs usually passed through her booth at about 7:30 am, and used his binoculars from a distance to make sure he picked Sophie's booth. That Halloween morning, a Thursday, was different, however.

The night before, while Sophie had been jumping off her bed and hopping around her apartment in her gorilla suit, Biggs had spent his whole night on his knees, praying to God for forgiveness for the first time in his life. His cousin Jenna had convinced him to go to a Baptist prayer service with her. Jenna knew about all of Tommie's bad habits, vices and pastimes, including hurling fistfuls of pennies at Sophie at the toll booth, tossing frail, homeless vets headfirst into dumpsters in the middle of the night, heavy drinking, the turpitude of going to nudie bars, and the barbarity of supporting dog fighting.

That Wednesday night, the pastor of the church had started the service with old Baptist hymns, which ran up Tommy's spine like velvet zippers straight to his tear ducts. His eyes hadn't had a good flushing since his blighted childhood. Sad for many things, he was mostly devastated that not only did others hate him for his ill will, but he'd reached the point where he also hated himself. At the end of the service he was the first sinner to go forward to the altar to repent and accept Jesus as his saviour. The pastor told him that the best way to leave behind all the evil of the world was to get as involved in church life as possible: choir, men's ministry, weekly prayer meetings, Sunday service, and help with upkeep of the church. Enduring faith was like a three-pegged sturdy stool, said the pastor: daily prayer, daily reading of the word of God from the Bible, and frequent fellowship with other believers.

Tommy sat up straight in his butter-yellow Caddy, nervously holding a new one dollar bill in his left hand and a hot java in his right hand. His Cadillac was extremely easy to steer. Without using his binoculars, as if by magnetism, his car floated into Sophie's toll pay station. He held out the dollar, ready to say he was sorry to Sophie for having been such a jerk.

Meanwhile, as Sophie watched Tommy's yellow Cadillac roll up she ducked down below the Dutch door and put on her gorilla head. With that, she sprung up like a madwoman and hollered "RAHHH!!!" in the most guttural and horrific manner possible.

Tommy hit the roof of his car, spilled his steaming hot coffee onto his right leg, peed his pants, and began having his first adult panic attack. Never in his grown-up life, odd as it seems, had anyone scared or tormented him. Of all the pranks to pull on Tommy Biggs, Sophie had unwittingly selected his Achilles heel of insecurities. Tommy's older brother, Jack, used to hide behind doors, shower curtains, and closed closets when Tommie was as young as three, four, five, six, and seven.

Jack's disguise when he'd snarl and jump out had been a gorilla monster mask. Jack was older than Tommy by five years and ended up dying of undetected, untreated pneumonia when Tommy was only eight. Tommy always secretly thought Jack died because Tommie hated his monster pranks so much. Tommy, sitting in his Cadillac, hadn't seen a gorilla head, much less the best one on the market, in a good 30 years. He jolted through the toll booth area and parked as soon as he could on the side of the road.

"Oh Jesus, Lord be with me," thought Tommy Biggs as he drenched his new Hawaiian shirt with tears of panic. A full-blown combustion was occurring in that butter yellow Caddy. A half hour later the state patrol pulled over and found Tommy in shock, unable to speak, staring straight ahead with tears rolling down his cheeks.

Meanwhile, back at the tollbooth, Sophie immediately began to draw attention to herself. Having had her coup, seeing Tommy Biggs spill his piping hot coffee, seeing him shriek like a toddler, seeing his eyes bug out, was simply not enough. Sophie, now completely gonzo, kept her gorilla head mask on and managed to frighten the daylights out of plenty of additional drivers—that is, until the cops got twenty frantic phone calls and realized that they had a renegade loon at the toll station. Along with the tollbooth head manager, the cops descended upon Sophie and put a brisk halt to her shift.

The manager explained that Sophie was a referral case from the disability office. Sophie was unable to coherently explain who or what drove her to bring a gorilla monster mask to work



and scare innocent drivers. She was taken directly to a mental hospital where she got back on a pattern of regular sleep, a regular regimen of taking her meds, and into good hygiene. She would go on to have numerous constructive adventures, achievement, and even true love.

After three days in the local crisis unit, Tommy Biggs recovered his speech, received a referral for counselling, and faithfully kept attending the Baptist Church. He came to understand that the undetected pneumonia, which killed his brother Jack, was not his fault. He became a changed man.

THE END

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## FATTY UNFOLDING by EW Farnsworth

The few who knew about Fatty Millstone's clandestine work to stock his favourite Cracked Bell Pub with liquor for gold coins had no way of knowing how a single amateur criminal could do the work of two or three professionals. The job required one man to waylay the vehicle transporting the alcoholic beverages and another one or two strong individuals who could carry the heavy boxes and barrels from the stolen vehicle to the cellar of the pub on Picklock Lane. An additional man had to drive the lorry to the appointed place in the warehouse area around the docks, leaving the original driver trussed but able to breathe until the authorities arrived to free him the next morning.

Fatty's secret was his ability to multiply himself—within limits—to become a gang of many parts whose composition was himself. For Fatty was a genuine alien creature, deposited as an advance agent on Earth to serve as a spy with deep cover whose purpose in the coming invasion would be known shortly before his fellows came in their spaceships to conquer and pillage. The same secretive nature that allowed him to fade into the shadows of his pub made his dark purpose invisible to earthlings whose everyday woes kept them unconcerned about everything outside their own narrow lives.

Fatty's abode in the city therefore was a lodging for as many as a half dozen replicants of his general description. The aliens wore different clothes to differentiate themselves, but they shared one purpose with a single though variously manifested mind. What made Fatty the natural leader of this group was his innate ability at fission. As for fusion, or the recombination of parts to form a single body, he had no immediate concern. The rules of the game required only one set of identity papers since only Fatty needed identity papers, his description and data being sufficient for all of his offspring. Further, the limit to his progeny was not specific; Fatty had to be sure that no one in the city suspected the truth about his alien origin.

Among the alien family, the comings and goings from Fatty's domicile were orchestrated by their single mind. The remuneration from their illicit liquor trade was sufficient for the needs of six or seven able bodied creatures. Fatty relied on his gentleman benefactor to help them out of any jam they encountered. From Fatty's point of view, his operation was sufficiently remunerative to have significant value to warrant its preservation under most circumstances.

Fatty was occasionally alarmed by feature articles in the Times or the tabloids about the possibility that aliens dwelled among the populace of major cities. Sometimes those imaginative pieces came close to the truth that would endanger everything Fatty and his associates were meant to do. In the event that things should become untenable, of course, the alien had been given doomsday instructions. Those seemed no more destructive than the work of terrorist suicide bombers, but the explosives by which they would be atomized were atomic. The unintended sacrifices would raise suspicions among the authorities, but the destructive elimination or erasure of the alien signatures would be complete, or so Fatty had been informed.

Millstone's good fortune meeting the gentleman who had formerly sponsored the toymaker and his crew was an unforeseen windfall event. His benefactor's desire to keep his distance from his hires was a boon to all of them. Intrusive questions were never asked about how Fatty did his jobs. The advantages of not knowing also included an inevitable expansion of the alien's portfolio.

The extension of the liquor delivery trade was the first extrapolation, and it was not long before the gentleman was funding—in gold coins—a dozen heists a week. Fatty's brilliance at managing his expanding line was a marvel not only to the gentleman but to the chief of police, who was beside himself trying to discover ways to interdict the illegal trade. Fatty seemed to be aware of what the police were thinking, so he devised a way of thieving from the wholesalers first and then from the producers of the liquor. So the chief and his detectives were late pulling at the noose they had constructed to capture the harvesters of the lorries, for the aliens had shifted to steal the contents of warehouses and distillery yards.

By Fatty's accounting, the amount stolen was an insignificant portion of the liquor actually produced. The scotch alone equalled the amount lost to spoilage among tuns and kegs, for example. At his table at his favourite pub, he listened carefully to the rumours about liquor thefts. He knew the chief's plain-clothes men by sight. When those earnest officers came visiting, Fatty made himself invisible, like the proverbial fly on the wall. He was astounded how much a criminal could learn about the devices and self-deception of law officers. Arrests had been made at his very table, but no lawman touched him or his men.

As the alien operations grew, so the police activities strove to address the threat. The most brilliant humans were devoted to "the liquor trafficking problem." Fatty realized that he had to become part of the hunting party before he was himself hunted down. So when the brightest detective from Scotland Yard was assigned to the case, Fatty bought him a pint at his pub to sound him out. The man was intelligent but not very street wise. He warmed to Fatty's innocent-seeming questions about progress with the liquor thefts.

"Well, Sir, we are very close to making arrests. We only need more actionable intelligence on the criminal gang behind the operation. We don't want to capture the underlings. We want to cast our nets to bring in the big bosses as well."

Fatty nodded at the wisdom of this approach. "Tell me, just how high up do you want to reach to eliminate this dastardly theft ring?"

The detective's brow furrowed. "If I were the only police officer making the decisions, I'd want to take them all, even if the Lord Chancellor was in on the action."

Fatty said, "Hmm. So some of your colleagues are in with the swine who are doing the thieving?"

"I didn't say that, did I?" the detective said in alarm.

"No. Of course, you did not. No harm intended."

"No offense taken. You wouldn't have some special knowledge to contribute to our case, would you?"

Fatty noticed the lawman's glass was almost empty. He raised his head and signalled to the tapster.

"Bring my friend another pint with bitters—and bring another for me as well."

While they were being served, Fatty leaned towards the detective and said, “Do you think there is any truth to the news about aliens infesting this city? Could it be that they are the reason for the acceleration of our urban criminality?”

The detective took this question seriously. He sipped his new drink and squinted his left eye at Fatty. “I wouldn’t be surprised if that were so. What do you know about aliens?”

“I know what I read in the newspapers, that’s all.”

“Rubbish! That’s what you’ll learn from the yellow press. Hard evidence is what I like. You can take your conjectures and rumours and stuff them where the sun does not shine.”

“How’s a bloke to know what’s what?”

“Confidential police files, that’s how. Why, I was the detective behind the apprehension of the man called the toymaker and his two associates, all of whom are spending time in the tollbooth.”

“So you were the one who put them away? Good for you! I once saw the toymaker seated in the chair you’re using now.”

The detective looked to the right and left, suspiciously. “Were you aware he was the mastermind of a theft ring?”

“He seemed unassuming to me. I only knew that the man bought a round once in a while. I’ll accept a round from any man, same as you, I suspect.”

“I don’t drink with devils.” The detective’s eyes blazed with indignity.

Fatty nodded and held up his hands defensively. “I’m sure you don’t. Closing Time is coming right up. Shall I buy you another before it’s too late?”

“I don’t mind if I do. You’re a man who keeps his eyes open. Maybe you could provide me information from time to time—as you discover it, mind you. I don’t want to interrupt your daily routine. And I can’t pay you for your efforts.”

“I would be proud to serve. We all benefit from catching criminals, don’t we?”

“That’s the spirit I like. So let’s meet here on Tuesday nights an hour before Closing Time, like tonight. You can give me information. I’ll stand the drinks.”

Fatty seemed to brood on this proposition. “Not that I’m a snitch, but I’ll help as I can as a civic duty.”

The two shook hands. Then, each with his own thoughts, they drank their last glasses and departed.

Fatty was aware that he had competitors throughout the city. In fact, he did not know a single pub that was provisioned with liquor by any but illicit means. He devised ways of informing on all his competitors to the detective, who consequently became famous for his investigative

techniques. As their partnership continued, the alien picked up the action where his informing had blown the corrupt business behind it. The pubs continued to get their liquor, only the supply chain was now handled by the alien crew.

The detective was fooled for a long time. Gradually, he suspected that a new gang substituted for every gang he put in prison. Further, he wondered whether the aggregation of business benefitted one huge enterprise rather than a random set of small entrepreneurs. That was his greatest fear—an abiding nightmare. He was so fearful of what might be happening, he divulged his apprehensions to Fatty, who had become his closest confidant.

“You aren’t telling me that you suspect a conspiracy?”

“I can’t make a conclusion at this stage. The only thing I do know is that the influence of aliens is highly unlikely.”

“That’s a sentiment we should drink to.” Fatty raised his pint and said loudly, “Here’s to crime without alien involvement!”

The entire company of the pub echoed his sentiment. The detective shook his head but drank to the toast. A woman of the night approached their table.

“I liked your toast, young man.”

“It seemed like the right sentiment at the time, Ma’am.” The detective examined the woman closely. He was clearly suspicious why the woman had come forward.

The woman had an empty glass in her hand. She was reeling from what she had already consumed. As the detective pulled out a chair for her, she slouched into the seat. Fatty caught the tapster’s eye and signed for another pint for the woman. Quietly, he rose and left her in the company of the plain-clothes policeman. He snuck out the back door and made his way home.

The next Tuesday the detective was moody. He kept looking around the pub for someone.

“Whom are you expecting?” Fatty asked.

The detective said, “It’s that infernal woman who importuned us at the end of our last meeting. I never thought about the alien presence until that night.”

“So what do you plan to do?”

“First, I’m going to give her back her teeth.”

“What?”

“You heard me. After you left, she dropped her false teeth in her pint. Without her dentures, she looked like an alien. What if the rumours about an alien invasion are true?”

“You’ve lost me, Detective.”



“Sorry. All the toasting and talk about aliens convinced me that I should take that seriously. Mum’s the word—she’s here!”

“So there you are, you handsome man. Have you been hiding back here in the dark?”

“Ma’am, I am merely drinking with a friend. If you’d like to join us, feel free to do so.”

“I don’t mind if I do.” She backed into the seat that Fatty courteously drew back for her.

“I don’t mean to pry, Ma’am, but are you an alien creature?”

The woman’s open hand hit the side of Fatty’s face, leaving a pink imprint on his cheek. She turned to the policeman and said, “The audacity of some folks these days. I’ve never felt so insulted in my life.”

“Madam, please permit me to give you your upper teeth,” the policeman said.

“Thank you, Sir. You are a veritable gentleman, unlike your companion here.” She reinserted her dentures.

Fatty used this opportunity to bow and retire through the back door. The last thing he saw was the dour face of the detective, who winked at him in thanks for broaching the critical question of her alien identity.

On the way home, Fatty Millhouse had an inspiration. From this point forward, he was not only going to upset the plans of all his competitors but also to cast suspicion on anyone in the city who had a deformity suggesting he or she was an alien.

In the weeks and months ahead, Millhouse spotted at least three persons who could arguably be described as aliens. Those he spotted during that first week were examples. One had a face hideously deformed by some natural disaster. Another had a juddering limp that made him seem an enormous insect on the sidewalk. The third was a female whose pre-cancer surgery had led to her face becoming a mask over an alien visage with no nose or chin. The detective wasted no time investigating those unfortunates. After many weeks of such intelligence work, he became increasingly convinced of the ugliness and inhumanity that daily walked his city’s streets.

One Tuesday evening in their ritual cups, the detective admitted defeat: “I’m afraid there are so many candidate aliens in our midst, we’ll be sorely-pressed to shadow them all. Further, I have had to redirect critical assets from my alcohol task and caseload. The chief has endorsed my quest for an alien presence behind the thefts, so he thinks I’ll plumb both mysteries by focusing on the alien presence.”

Fatty was upset, but he kept his demeanour cool. He ordered another pint for himself and the detective. By trying to avoid the alien angle in the detective’s approach, he had stimulated the very kind of investigation that he most wanted to avoid. In the event, though, he realized that the ordinary citizens of the city had plenty of alien characteristics. Many of the gangs who ran the illicit liquor into the pubs had goons with alien characteristics. So Fatty decided to continue diverting the detective’s attention to his competitors while he assimilated their

businesses into his own. In this way, the true alien enterprise grew like Topsy while the seemingly alien gangs were systematically rolled up.

The yellow press used the photographs of apprehended criminals to bolster their rumours about an alien infestation. The city was in an uproar. Orson Wells would have been proud to foster such terror among the populace.

While his notoriety and celebrity burgeoned, the detective seemed to do no wrong in the eyes of his superiors. He had single-handedly championed an impossible cause—aliens—and racked up dozens of convictions under the guise of putting down an invasion.

While the police cleaned up the liquor thefts around the city, Fatty Millhouse and his aliens picked up the illicit business until they had reached the limit of their capacity. He had meanwhile encouraged the detective to follow the advice of the woman whose teeth had landed in her pint. She was rabid in identifying aliens of the city for the policeman. She had even decided that Fatty might be one of the invaders.

“Now you’ll have to let me draw the line there, Ma’am. A more upright and true citizen does not exist than Fatty Millstone. I’d bet my life on him. Keep your good instincts working on others, for if you direct criticism on my good friend Millstone, I’ll sic my men on you and your associates. I could think of no more nefarious strategy of the aliens than to cast aspersions on the good men and women of our city. While you’re at it, watch where your teeth fly while you are in your cups.”

The woman looked chastened by this last remark. “I withdraw my statement about Mr. Millstone. Does that earn me another pint?”

The detective nodded and raised his hand for the tapster to fetch her another pint. He loathed the idea of having to fish her teeth from the bottom of her glass, but it would have been worse, by far, if he had to harbour the suspicion that she, like so many others, was an alien invader and criminal. That’s the way it seemed to Fatty as he made his way out of his pub and back onto Picklock Lane where he was immediately absorbed by the pea-soup fog.

THE END

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## GRAVEYARD WATER by Rick McQuiston

Feeling much older than his 44 years, Harry Valente shifted in his chair. The bout of flu he was getting over, which kept him in the house for the better part of a week, was finally releasing its hold on him, and he found himself anxious to get back to work.

He glanced down at the remains of his breakfast. Yellow and white residue from scrambled eggs and crumbs of toast littered the surface of the plastic dish, and just the thought of having to clean it before he went to work left him cold.

Tossing his fork onto the plate, Harry grabbed his wallet and keys, and left for work.

Five minutes later Harry felt something. It was small, almost indiscernible, but was cause for alarm nonetheless. He rolled his car to a stop on the side of the road, and with one hand reached down between his legs to feel the seat cushion.

It was wet.

Harry unclipped his seatbelt, opened the door, and jumped out of his car. He felt the cool breeze on his rear end as he frantically tried to wrap his head around what was happening.

*Gas? Is there a leak in the car?*

This possibility raced across his puzzled mind (along with imagined dollar signs with wings) and prompted him to fall the ground to see if there was a problem with his car.

To his relief he saw nothing wrong. There were no puddles of gasoline, oil, anti-freeze, or brake fluid. Nothing.

He craned his neck to see as far into the undercarriage as he could, focusing mainly on the area beneath the driver's seat, but still saw nothing.

Feeling his pants again to reaffirm that he wasn't imagining it, Harry felt the wetness on his fingers.

And then a voice, distant and yet coherent, filtered into his already frazzled mind.

*It's leaking. It's starting the leak.*

"Stop it!"

*I'm getting wet. It's leaking.*

He stepped back into his car, hoping that immersing himself in his job would help clear his mind of the voice, but something else about it that disturbed him almost as much as the voice itself: it was somehow familiar to him. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he recognized something in the voice.

*It's not holding. It's leaking.*

The sensation was undeniable. He felt wet across his back. He flung his arm across his shoulders and was horrified to feel his shirt.

“What the...”

The words died in his throat when he felt the rest of the shirt. It was as wet as his shoulder. It made no sense. It was as if he were... leaking?

Harry slammed the car into gear and pulled back onto the road. He didn't notice the other car speeding down the street until it was too late. He felt a sudden rush of wind as the other car passed straight through him as if he wasn't there at all.

Still clutching the steering wheel, he opened his eyes in time to see the other car speed down the street, undamaged.

*It's leaking.*

The familiar voice rang in his ears. He knew then whose voice it was. He knew all too well.

He thought of driving home but decided not to. He didn't want to see what a mess his house had become. It had been nearly a week since anyone had lived there and there would be no telling what condition it would be in.

“Did you figure out the problem with the pump?” Jocko asked. A two-inch long Winston dangled from one side of his oversized mouth.

His co-worker at the cemetery, Tomas, a gangly Italian man who weighed approximately one half what Jocko did, finished priming the chamber of the pump and deftly screwed the cap back on.

“Impeller blade was stuck, that's all. She should work now.” He pulled the starter cord and the motor rumbled to life, quickly filling the suction and discharge hoses with dirty water. “There we go, that's a good girl.”

Jocko helped Tomas out of the shallow hole they'd dug. “The plumber is inside already. He's patching up the crack in the pipe. Says the flooding should stop after the glue dries, maybe an hour or two.”

Tomas grunted. “I just hope some of these people nearby aren't getting wet. That could be a problem.”

Jocko took one last hit of his cigarette and flipped it onto the sodden grass. “Yeah, I know.” He glanced around and gestured at a freshly dug grave. “But it looks like only this one, Mr. Harry Valente, might have some damage.”

Tomas nodded. “Well, if we gotta dig him back up at least he'll be fresh. He's been there less than a week.”

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## DAILY ROUTINE by Louis Kasatkin

Every evening at 5.09  
he leaves the office,  
takes the streetcar  
into town,  
goes for a stroll  
down to the park  
by the canal;  
there he sits  
on the bench nearest  
the ornate water fountain;  
He dreams,  
of a lost childhood  
long summers ago  
by the sea,  
days filled with singing,  
laughing and  
crying;  
Crying now,  
the little girl  
by the fountain  
who has lost her way,  
golden hair, eyes of grey,  
reflected in his thick lenses;  
As he watches her  
he dreams,  
of long summers ago,  
a childhood by the sea  
filled with laughing  
and crying;  
now in the park  
he lies beneath a summer sky,  
side by side with  
the golden girl  
and  
she lies  
very still.

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## THE ADVENTURE OF THE TOXIC CELEBUTANTE by Kevin O'Brien

### Part Two

The shelter was too small for all three to go in, so she and Liaison crouched down outside and watched Sunny do her thing. The creature was asleep, but she didn't disturb him, she just retrieved his bedpan and brought it out. She had asked the craftswomen to carved bowls for the bads and criticals to relieve themselves in rather than soil the floors of their huts. Eile could see it was half-full of urine, but it had no faeces.

Sunny set the bowl on the ground and knelt in front of it. "Last night I had a dream, in which I was back in college, taking a chemistry test. I had answered all the questions except one, and in the logic of dreams, I knew I would fail the course if I couldn't find the answer. It was a list of symptoms and the question was, what caused them? I struggled with it for what seemed like hours, then I realized the answer was staring me in the face. It was a chemistry class, so it had to be some form of chemical poisoning, and the most likely type was some kind of metal."

"You mean, like iron or something?" Eile asked.

"Not exactly, but close. Three-quarters of all elements are classified as metals based on their atomic structure and chemical properties, whether they might seem like it or not. Most likely it's a relatively light metal, something fairly common in rocks and minerals. Once I identify it, I can devise a treatment."

"So what's with the pee?"

"Metals are excreted in urine, especially the light ones. Now that I know what to look for, I know a spell that'll work. I'm gonna try and find out if anything unusual's in this urine."

She nodded. "Go for it."

Sunny gave her a weak smile. "Hold on to your butts." She then closed her eyes, as if deep in thought.

"What is she doing?" whispered Liaison.

"She's concentrating" Eile also kept her voice quiet. "She's imagining what the spell'll do and what it'll tell her. It's sorta like drawing in power."

He nodded. She figured he would understand it that way, and he did seem to have an awed expression on his face.

Presently, Sunny took her right hand and dipped her fingers into the urine. "Chemi-analysis." She spoke in a weird, resonate voice, as if she talked through a tube. Nothing else happened; there was no glow, or sparks, or smoke, or anything else that indicated the spell was working. Yet Eile knew that inside her partner's head, the Dream-magic told her everything that was in the urine. She just had to wait out the mumbo-jumbo.



After a few minutes, Sunny opened her eyes. She blinked and shook her head, then removed her hand and flicked the urine off her fingers. She finally focused on her.

“Arsenic.”

“That’s all?”

She nodded, but Eile knew that was enough. Arsenic was highly toxic; any good murder mystery could tell you that.

Sunny took a moment to place the bowl back inside the hut, then she motioned for her and Liaison to follow. She went back to their shelter, and they all went inside and sat down.

“We’ve got serious trouble, boy and girl. There was enough arsenic in that one person’s urine to kill him; not immediately, but eventually.”

“What is this ar-sin-ik?” Liaison asked.

“It’s a metal-like substance, not as heavy as iron or lead or gold, but similar in structure and properties. It’s fairly common in minerals, and some of its compounds are even deadlier than the pure element. It can be found in soil and water, and you can ingest it by eating or drinking anything contaminated with it. However, most of the time we consume so little that our bodies can handle it with no ill effects. These people have somehow consumed a fatal dose. It wasn’t so much that it killed them right off, but as long as it’s in their bodies, it will continue to make them sick until it does kill them, or they become so weakened that they die of something else. The only way to save them is to remove it as quickly as possible, and to find the source of the contamination and isolate it.”

“How do we do either one?”

“Well, arsenic can be scavenged by thiols; sulphur compounds. Garlic and onions contain substances that have these compounds. If we can find either or both, or something equivalent that isn’t itself poisonous, and feed it to them, it should eliminate the arsenic in their bodies. At that point, it’s just a matter of taking proper care of them until they recover. The problem is, it won’t do much good if they’re still ingesting it. That’s why we gotta find out where the arsenic came from and get rid of it or keep it away from them.”

“Well, where could they get it from?”

“Out here, there’s really only two ways: from their food or water. High doses of arsenic can be found in fish and other seafood, and particularly in mushrooms, but it’s usually in a pretty benign organic form. The arsenic in that patient’s urine was inorganic. The only other way to get it from food is to eat something that has itself been poisoned.”

“The grubs. One of the ambulatories told me they live underground.”

Sunny nodded. “They could’ve picked up the arsenic from contaminated ground water. I’ll hafta screen everything the gatherers bring in during the day. But I think the most likely source is contaminated drinking water, like from a pool or stream. If the levels are low enough, it wouldn’t poison them, or even make them visibly sick, but if they kept drinking

from the same source, the arsenic would build up in their bodies until it became dangerous, even lethal. I'll hafta screen all nearby water sources, including the spring Liaison showed you."

"But where would it come from?"

"Potable water always has trace amounts of arsenic leached out of rocks and the soil. For these levels, if we were in the Waking World, I'd suspect a mining operation, a waste dump, or runoff from an industrial complex. Here, it's probably due to erosion exposing a mineral vein that contains large amounts of arsenic, maybe even an arsenic mineral itself. Whatever, once I find out how the contamination occurred, we should be able to track it back to its source. We'll hafta question everyone, find out where they've been getting their water, and if they've been eating anything unusual or different lately. Meanwhile, it's business as usual: tend their illnesses, keep them clean and fed, and dispose of those who die. Priority one, though, is finding the right herb or plant to remove the arsenic. Liaison, I need to speak with the foragers before they go out in the morning."

He nodded. "I will collect them myself."

Sunny smiled. "Sounds like a plan, people. Together we can whip this thing!"

Eile returned her smile. Sunny's enthusiasm could be infectious, and once she had a viable idea of what was wrong, a cure seemed possible. But Eile still wondered how they were going to find the arsenic source, and if they could do anything about it once they did.

Sunny had garlic and onion that she used in camp cooking. She let each forager sniff and taste them, and a couple seemed to recognize them. Even so, most of them managed to bring back at least one item they thought would match. Sunny rejected most of them as being ineffectual due to the presence of toxins or tannins that rendered them inedible, but they had managed to find a variety of wild garlic and two varieties of onions, as well as a leafy herb. Sunny identified it as *tseapa*, and she sent them back out to collect as much of each as they could while she checked the food. She found no evidence of contamination in anything. The fungi did have high levels of arsenic, as she expected, but she determined it was of the benign organic form. The grubs and the tortoises did have higher than normal levels of inorganic arsenic, but not enough to account for the poisonings, even if they were all a creature ate. She also cleared the local spring, and Eile and her work party refilled the cauldron and cistern.

For breakfast, the creatures pulped the roots and fruits and mashed the grubs, then mixed it all together, making something that looked like a brownish farina-based porridge. The healthier individuals also got pieces of fungus and tortoise meat added on top. The ambulatories took it around to the bad and critical cases, removing their bedpans to be emptied at the same time. Sunny admonished a couple she caught just dumping the contents onto the ground outside the huts, instructing them to toss them out in the latrine instead, and Liaison backed her up. She actually wasn't concerned about the urine; she just didn't want to contaminate their new grounds with the faeces or arsenic. Besides, that had been part of the reason why they moved the camp, to get the creatures away from their own bodily waste. As that went on, Liaison showed Eile a technique for removing the head and viscera from a grub all at once and pinching off the legs, followed by wrapping them in leaves and roasting them in the coals.

After some minutes, they came out looking like grilled brats. Eile nibbled on one and felt surprised by how good it tasted. The soft, squishy, pasty flesh had toughened into the consistency of sausage meat, and it had an unusual nutty, shellfish flavour that she found quite tasty. She figured she could learn to like stuff like that. Liaison also roasted some roots and fungi, and she shared them with Sunny, followed by fruit.

When the foragers returned with the herbs, Sunny seemed disappointed at how little there was. She had enough to give each patient a bulb of garlic and a couple of bulbs of onions for a couple of days, but she figured it could take ten days to two weeks to get all the arsenic out of their systems. To get more they would either have to go further afield or try to cultivate them. The bright spot was that the *tseapa* herb was quite common, and she used it to make a strong tea. It wouldn't be as effective as garlic, but it was better than nothing, and those who could barely eat could still benefit from it. When she was ready, she and Eile made the rounds of the patients with her volunteers. While she dosed them and tended their illnesses, Eile spoke with those who were coherent enough for conversation. Unfortunately, no pattern emerged. There was not one food item they all ate in enough quantities to account for the toxicity, and they confirmed that, until they came to the Dying Camp, they drank from the Milk Stream.

Their progress was a mixed bag as well. Eile had taken it for granted that once they were removed from their filth and had fresh water, regular food, and medical attention, their physical health would improve as quickly as their morale. A few did seem to get better; however, most showed no change, a few got worse, and three criticals had died in the night. Two were from among the incurables, which didn't surprise Sunny, though it saddened her, and she decided the arsenic did them in. The third, however, was one of those she thought could be saved, but when she examined him, she realized he had died of systemic shock from blood poisoning. She figured one of his boils must have gone septic. Though she had lanced and drained them all the day before, the infection must have already been in his blood. At that point, nothing could have been done for him, short of a massive antibiotic treatment. It made her wonder which of the others were in the same predicament, but one of her herbal concoctions had antibiotic properties, so she figured that as long as they stayed alive, they still had a chance. Liaison and some of Eile's workers removed the bodies and took them to the clearing to be burned.

By mid-late-morning they had finished, and Eile and Sunny conferred with Liaison some distance from the camp.

"Looks like it's a bust." Eile felt dejected.

Sunny gave her a quizzical expression. "What do you mean?"

"These guys have nothing in common except bein' sick."

"But that's not true!"

"Wha'?"

"Didn't you hear them? They all drank from the Milk Stream."

“Well, yeah, so? That can’t be the source of the contamination, or the whole village’d be sick.”

“They probably are.”

“Eh?! Yer not makin’ any sense, ya butthead!”

“Look, arsenic doesn’t affect everyone the same way. Levels that a healthy person can shrug off with only minor discomfort might kill someone else who is sickly or otherwise has a low resistance. I mean, there may have been a number of deaths already, they just occurred among those who are expected to die. No one would even suspect anything was wrong until healthy people started falling ill. They may all be feeling the effects by now, but haven’t become debilitated enough to feel the need to come here.”

Eile noted that Liaison didn’t objected or even get upset. “You seem ta be taking this rather calmly.”

“I do not like her accusation, but what she says make sense. Before the outbreak began, there had been an increase in the mortality of the very young and the old and infirm, and then among those you have described as ‘sickly’.”

“Have your people noticed anything else unusual?” Sunny asked.

He thought it over. “Our females have had more miscarriages, and some of our babies have been born underweight or deformed.”

“That kinda thing is pretty standard with metal poisoning.”

His quills collapsed against his back and it seemed that his whole body drooped, as if he had suddenly become despondent.

“What’s the matter?”

“The Mother sometimes gets angry with us, but usually Her punishment is a storm, or a flood, or a wild fire. To poison us with Her own milk...” His voice trailed off, as if that thought was too disturbing to contemplate.

“Maybe it’s not her fault.”

He eyed Sunny with a look that mixed suspicion with hope. “How do you mean?”

“When your women nurse, do you restrict them from eating certain foods, to keep their milk from being contaminated?”

He gave her a surprised look. “Yes, we do. We don’t even allow them to smoke.”

“Your women smoke?!” Sunny squealed.

“Not now!” Eile barked.

But Liaison wasn't listening; he considered her words as he stroked his chin. "I see what you mean. You believe the Mother has consumed something noxious?"

"In a manner of speaking. I think the stream's been exposed to arsenic in some fashion and it's gotten into the water. Since your people drink from it almost exclusively, the arsenic has had a chance to build up in their bodies. That's also the reason you're fairly healthy; you only drink from it occasionally, so your body can remove the arsenic before it accumulates."

Eile felt confused. "Isn't this all kinda moot? We don't even know if their water is the source." Though she had to admit, that seemed likely.

"Well, there's only one way to find out!" Sunny focused on Liaison. "Can you take us there?"

He nodded. "Yes, it is only an hour's journey from here."

"Alright! Eile and I need to grab a few things, but we'll meet you here in a few minutes."

"I shall await you."

Eile followed Sunny back their hut, where they retrieved the rest of their ensembles.

"You really think their stream is the source of the arsenic?"

Sunny paused and gave her a worried look. "I certainly hope so, because otherwise I'm fresh outta ideas."

"Yeah." She didn't like the sound of that either.

When they reached the Milk Stream, Eile was surprised to see that it was more like a small river. The point Liaison took them to was where it ran down a steep, rocky slope, which created a cascade series of falls. It was then that she realized that it corresponded to the Meoluc River, one of the three major waterways that passed through the forest.

Sunny took the bucket she brought with her and made her way out on the slippery, moss-covered rocks, while Eile nervously watched, her heart pounding as she expected the bimbo to slip and fall at any moment and be carried away by the current. But Sunny reached one of the falls without mishap, rinsed out the bucket, then filled it and brought it back.

"That was fun!" she gushed.

"Way ta take yer life inta yer hands, ya butthead. Where'd you leave me if you broke yer neck?"

"Oh, poo on you. Do you always hafta rain on my parade?"

"Heh, speaking of rain, the view's kinda worth the aggravation."

Sunny gave her a puzzled look; Eile motioned towards her chest and she looked down at herself. She had removed her jacket before she went out, and the water from the falls had soaked her top so that it clung to her bosom like a second skin, showing every bump, swell, and curve exactly.

She crinkled her eyes and giggled. "I guess I do stand out at that!"

That's an understatement. If it weren't for the circumstances, I'd be ripping that shirt off by now.

"Yeah, well, cover up, we've got company." And she glanced at Liaison, who watched them both with a bemused look.

"You need not be concerned; you both look rather ugly to me."

Eile grinned as Sunny laughed. "Heh, yeah, we probably do. So, what's it ta be, ya ditz, analyse the water or have a wet tee-shirt contest?"

Sunny smirked and squatted down to stick her hand in the bucket. Eile waited for her to complete her mumbo-jumbo, and presently she stood up.

With a rather grim look on her face. "There's enough arsenic in the water to kill the whole village."

"That bad, huh?"

Sunny nodded and focused on Liaison. "Have your people noticed any changes in the populations or kinds of animals living in the stream?"

"Over the past few months, there has been a decline in frogs, salamanders, turtles, and certain types of fish."

"The arsenic probably killed off the creatures they fed on. That probably caused their numbers to crash, assuming it didn't kill them too."

"But why'd it take so long?" Eile asked.

"It may not have taken very long at all, three, four weeks tops for enough to accumulate to start killing. It just took a while to cascade through the ecosystem. Plus, the levels aren't high enough to cause acute poisoning in Liaison's people. And like I said, some of them may have been affected worse than others. But once in their system, it weakens them, suppresses their immune system, makes them vulnerable to other diseases."

"Which they picked up at the Dying Camp. But some have been there for up ta two months. Why didn't any of them recover?"

"Arsenic can stick around for quite some time, unless removed by specific scavenging agents. It builds up in the tissues and diffuses out only slowly. As such, even if cut off from the source of contamination for weeks, they can still have enough in them to eventually kill them."

Liaison gave her a pointed stare. "You are saying that all of my people are at risk?"

"Yes, they are. I'm sorry."

"What can be done about it?"

"Well, for now, we can find them a temporary source of water. The arsenic will eventually be excreted as long as there is no source to replace it. They can also make that happen faster by eating garlic and drinking that *tseapa* tea."

"They will not agree to those conditions. To do either of them would violate any number of taboos; they would not risk the shame."

"We hafta try; it's the only way to save them."

"What if we had the Mother's blessing?" Eile asked. "Would they do it then?"

He nodded. "They would, but how would we secure that?"

"You said the goddess of the well speaks for the Mother. What if she endorsed it?"

He stroked his chin again. "That would probably work. Presumably, the spirit would speak to the Mother. But we would need proof."

"And there's only one way to get it," Sunny said. "We hafta follow the river upstream until we find the source of the contamination."

"That may be difficult. The stream comes out of the Hills of Life. They are sacred to the Mother. To enter them without permission and proper purification would be a very serious offense. It would be as if we violated our own birth-mothers."

"Even for outcasts like us?" Eile asked.

"Especially for outcasts."

"What'd be the penalty?"

"If my people caught us entering or leaving the Hills, they would kill us without hesitation. Once inside, they would not follow, but then it would be the wrath of the Mother we should fear. And She can do more than kill us; She can prevent our spirits from entering the next life and force them to wander forever between the winds."

"But we're trying to help the Mother!" Sunny argued. "Surely she would see that!"

"One would hope so, but we could never be sure, unless the spirits told us."

"You don't hafta come with us." Eile tried to reassure him. "White-Lion and I'll take the risk alone."

He shook his head. “No. You are my responsibility. And outcast I may be, but I am still one of the People. If I can save them from their own folly, I will, even if I must risk the fate of my spirit to do it. Besides, someone needs to guide you, and no one else will do it.”

Eile smiled. She was starting to really like the little guy. “We’ll be glad ta have ya.”

“Okay, boy and girl!” Sunny squealed. “We’ll leave first thing sunup tomorrow. I just wanna make sure the others know what to do while we’re gone.”

Sunny spent the rest of the day instructing the healthier ambulatories on how to proceed in her absence, but it seemed to Eile that they needed little coaching, being as they had been her helpers from the start. She doubted they would be willing to perform any kind of surgery, no matter how minor, but she also knew that Sunny’s efforts had made that unnecessary, for the time being. All they needed to do was continue to administer her potions and teas, and she had made sufficient to last for seven days, which she calculated should be more than enough time to get where they needed to go and back. After they ate and retired for the night, this time sleeping on their bedroll for better comfort, Sunny was so excited that she couldn’t fall asleep until Eile gave her the relief she needed. After that they slept like comatose cats the entire night.

Liaison woke them at first dawn, and after they relieved themselves, washed, and dressed, they repacked their gear and rolled up their bedding, and joined him at the cauldron. They ate a couple of baked grubs along with fruit and some of their travel bread, then set out snacking on tortoise shish kebabs after Sunny had a last minute conference with her assistants. They finished the kebabs by the time they reached the Meoluc, and Liaison led them upstream towards the northwest.

Eile had a pretty good idea that what Liaison called the Hills of Life were, on a map, the Palin Hills, a knot of uplands that poked up out of the northwest corner of the Forest of Parg. It was the source of the region’s three major rivers: the Squros, which ran southwest between the Karthian and the Havasok Hills and eventually joined with the Zuro River in the Land of Sydathria; the Amassone, which ran northeast through the Forest to join up with the River Skai north of the port city of Dylath-Leen; and the Meoluc, which ran southeast through the Forest to empty into the Bay of Skailyn. She was grateful that the jungle wasn’t as thick along the river, so they had a fairly easy time traveling, except for clambering over or detouring around the occasional jumble of boulders, while twice they had to scale steep slopes that turned the river into a cascade.

This was the first time she and Sunny had actually entered the Forest, though they had gone around it numerous times. From the stories they had heard, it sounded much like the Congo or the Amazon, and their experience didn’t contradict that, though it was drier than they expected a rain forest to be. Actually, Eile would have been happy to have never entered it at all; there were no roads through it, and the natives had a reputation for being very unfriendly. But as Sunny had told the entity in the well, they were returning from their journey to find the Temple of Ubasti with Medb hErenn, and they were eager to get back to Ulthar before they woke up. The traveller they had met had informed them that cutting through the Forest would save them two whole days, so they decided to try it. He had instructed them to keep first the Squros and then the Hills on their right at all times, but somehow they had crossed the river,



because by afternoon they found it and then the Hills on their left. Not knowing how to get back on the proper track they just kept moving forward until approaching evening forced them to make camp for the night. Liaison's people discovered them in the morning after they had dressed but before they could eat or pack.

They didn't stop for lunch and instead ate jerky and adventurer's chocolate (a concoction of raw chocolate, flour, sugar, and lard that was virtually tasteless and had a reputation for being well-nigh indigestible), and snacked along the way by foraging at Liaison's instruction (though they balked at eating live wood grubs and maggot-filled fruits that smelled like faeces). They finally reached the foot of the Hills by late afternoon, and Liaison decided to stop there to spend the night rather than tackle the uplands in the evening.

As Eile set up camp, he and Sunny went hunting, and they brought back a small wild boar she brought down with her bow. Together they whipped up a passable kalua pig with side dishes of roasted forest snails and crawdads taken from a seasonal pond, and a poi made from starchy tubers and coarse fruits. When they had eaten their fill they buried the carcass in the cooking pit, and after cleaning up they sat around the fire, sharing a ration of brandy and rum with coffee and nuts, singing songs, and telling tall tales. At one point they told him how they had gotten lost.

"You were lucky," he said.

"How so?" asked Sunny.

"Where you entered the jungle is ruled by the Suramnese. They are a decadent people who kidnap and enslave trespassers, whom they subject to sadistic torture for their vile pleasure, and I have heard tales that they will lure attractive victims into their territory for exactly that purpose. Had you somehow avoided them, north of the Hills you would have encountered the Tsul Kalu, a tribe of vicious beast-men who kill and eat anyone they encounter. Even the way you did go is fraught with peril, because that portion of the Squros is the home of the Tiki-tiik. Though nominally peaceful, they will mercilessly attack anyone who harms their trees, and the poison they use with their darts is deadlier than ours. And even if you had been able to avoid us and cross the Milk Stream, you would have encountered the Kigani, a tribe of bloodthirsty cannibals, long before you reached Fort Grant."

"What if we had followed the Milk Stream?" Eile asked.

"Are you on good terms with cats?"

She glanced at Sunny. "Yeah, one of our best friends is a cat. She stayed behind in Oonai when we headed home."

He nodded. "Then you may have found refuge with the Mbuti downstream. They are a tribe of feral cats that have made that part of the jungle their home. They could help you get across the Stream and guide you north to friendly tribes that would see you safely to the fort. However, you would first have to cross the territories of two dangerous tribes, the Kerit and the Ske'er'eete; they do not tolerate trespassers any better than my people do."

"Geezus. Then what options do we have?"

“If you tried going south to the Havasok Hills you would encounter a community of Tcho-Tchos, who would try to capture you to sacrifice to their dark gods. Your best choice would be to cross the Stream then head down to the Sangha tribe. Though suspicious of strangers, they are mortal enemies of the Kigani, and for a reward they might agree to guide you to the fort. They are almost the only ones strong enough to protect you from the Kigani. Failing that, you could petition the Kuba-Teke, but you would have to face the Mikinalo along the way.”

“The who?” Sunny asked.

“A giant man-eating plant.”

She and Sunny exchanged worried glances. “Could you see us safely to Fort Grant?” Sunny asked.

Liaison took a moment to fill a pipe with dried weed and light it from the fire. “If you succeed in curing my people of this plague, you will have expiated your sin; we would not be beholden to you.” He expelled a puff of smoke. “But I have grown fond of the two of you, and would not see you put to unnecessary harm. If you succeed, I promise I will see you safely to those who can help you; the Mbuti most likely, or the Sangha. After that, you are on your own.”

Eile felt relieved, and from her partner’s expression she realized Sunny felt the same. “We’d appreciate it; thank you.”

“But that is only if you succeed. Otherwise it will be my sad duty to slay you both.”

She nodded. “We understand.” And Sunny nodded too. “By the way, do yer people have a name?”

“We call ourselves ‘The People’, as all others call themselves. But our neighbours call us the j’Anelicas.”

“May we call you that?” Sunny asked.

He shrugged. “It is of little consequence what you call us, provided it does not insult us.” And he accentuated his reply with a puff of smoke.

In the morning after he woke them, Liaison made them a breakfast of roasted grubs and tortoises, with more tubers and some sweet fruit. They were on the move before sunrise and followed the river into the mountains, sticking to the bank as much as possible. The going was tougher because of the rugged terrain, and they often had to detour around impassable falls or slog through the water itself. Eile figured it took longer to go half the distance of the day before, and the travel felt exhausting, but by mid-afternoon they reached the opening of a long, narrow ravine with steep walls. It had been closed off by a wooden palisade with a towered gate, except where the now smaller river flowed through a gap covered by an iron grate. As they watched from the cover of a stand of trees, a train of workers carrying large baskets filled with rocks on their backs wound its way through the gate.

Sunny shot her a pop-eyed astonished look, and she nodded. It was a mining operation.

Signalling silence, Liaison gestured for them to leave their packs hidden and he led them up the slope above the ravine to a spot where they could look down inside. It was V-shaped, the narrow end being a steep cliff-like slope with a waterfall running down its face. A levee diverted the water from the river bed to accumulate behind a dam. Runoff from the spillway turned a wheel, which was attached to a long wooden building. From inside, Eile could hear what sounded like dropping hammers. The water flowed along the length of the building to a collecting pool that sat just below the nearest end, before flowing through a ditch back into the river bed. The rest of the ravine held numerous tipi-shaped military tents along with a large Weatherport hut, as well as a smithy, an open-air refectory with a kitchen and bakery, an infirmary, and a bathhouse. Various people, all men, some armed, milled around, but none looked like slaves.

As they watched, a large door above the collecting pool opened, and workers dumped sludge from wheelbarrows into the pool.

“Son of a—!” That was as strong as Sunny’s language ever got. “That’s got to be the source of the arsenic!”

“Yeah.”

From where he lay between them, Liaison crawled back into the brush, and Eile heard him move further up the ravine.

“We’ve gotta close them down!”

Eile nodded. “We can destroy the building, but what about that pool? All that gunk’ll leak arsenic for years.”

“Not if also we tear down that levee. The water will return to its natural course. Then, we can block off the ditch and fill in the pool. That’ll seal it up for good.”

She nodded again. That could work—

“Grab ‘em!”

From behind her, she felt someone seize her by the arms and haul her to her feet.

“Hey! Leggo of me, you asshole!” She fought and kicked, but then someone else stuck a sword in her face. She calmed down and found that she and Sunny were each being held by a thug while a third, probably the leader, sized them up. At first she feared they were as good as dead, but then he lowered his weapon.

“You’re coming with us. Give us any trouble, and we’ll beat ya bloody, got it?”

“Yeah,” and Sunny nodded. Satisfied, he grunted and gestured to his companions. The men hauled them back down to the stockade and through the gate, pausing inside the guard house

just long enough to relieve them of their weapons. Then they dragged them to the Weatherport hut.

The toughs pushed her and Sunny inside, but didn't follow. She and Sunny looked behind themselves as they closed the door-like flap.

"Well, well, what do we have here?"

Her spine tingled and her skin goose-pimpled as she recognized the voice. She whipped around and caught a glimpse of Sunny's face; she looked as shocked as she felt.

A woman sat behind a table covered with ledgers and loose papers, lighted by a few lanterns hanging from the hut's metal ceiling frame. She had long, full-bodied, champagne-brown hair that flowed over her shoulders and framed a beautiful rectangular face with gold-amber eyes, dark-tan skin, and youthful but distinctive features, the most exotic being her slender triangular nose whose tip curved sharply downward like the tooth of a raptor's beak. Which didn't mar her appearance but reinforced her wilful domineering personality. She wore a short, long-sleeved, midnight-blue jacket with padded shoulders, but no shirt, thereby revealing the swell of her small breasts.

"Oh, my word!" Sunny breathed.

"Marseilles Sheraton." This wasn't good. She was the celebante heiress to the Sheraton hotel fortune, infamous in the Waking World for her partying private life and sexual escapades. She was also a criminal godfather who was into everything illegal from assassination to white slavery, especially pornography; her specialty was Internet snuff films involving rape and torture. And she hated their guts.

She smiled, but it was hard and cold. "Nice to meet you two again as well. Still the adventurous duo, I see."

"Yer the last person we expected ta find here."

"You took the words right out of my mouth."

"I'm surprised the cats haven't flayed you alive yet."

"You know better than I do, it's only the Waking World where they don't want people to know their secret. Here, they don't care. Besides, I am under the protection of the Queen's litter-brother, Lucifer. She cannot afford a feline civil war, so she leaves me alone as long as I don't interfere with feline concerns."

Sunny strode forward a couple of steps. "Just what's going on here, anyways?" Her voice sounded stern and disapproving, like she scolded a miscreant child.

Sheraton smiled again, but for once she beamed with pride. "You like my little operation? The surrounding hills contain rich deposits of cobalt."

"Cobalt?!"

“Yes, in the form of skutterudite ore.”

“Oh my fabulous gravy!” Sunny said. “That’s cobalt arsenide!”

“Why am I not surprised?” Eile said in a sarcastic tone.

Sheraton frowned in confusion. “What are you two talking about?”

“Yer operation is contaminating the river with arsenic.”

“So?” Her face appeared totally neutral, with no hint of emotion.

“It’s killing the j’Anelicas that depend on it for water!” Sunny said.

Sheraton’s expression didn’t change. “So? What do I care?”

Eile wasn’t surprised at her reaction, but Sunny exploded. “You monster!”

Sheraton scowled. “Spare me the histrionics! These deposits are clearly exposed. They’re easy to mine and extract; all I have to do is remove the arsenic. They yield large amounts of cobalt oxide, plus some nickel, a rich bonus. There’s no way in Hell I’m going to let concern for some primitive creatures, which aren’t even human, to interfere with that.”

“Isn’t cobalt radioactive?” Eile didn’t like the idea of being bombarded by nuclear death rays.

“Natural cobalt is a stable isotope,” Sunny replied, “so there’s no danger.” Then she addressed Sheraton. “But what good is it here?” Eile understood she meant the Dreamlands.

Sheraton barked out a laugh. “Are you kidding? It’s a worth a fortune! It’s highly prized for its blue and green colours in glass, ceramics, inks, and paints. It can be used to harden steel, making it corrosion, heat, and wear-resistant. It serves as a ground coating for enamelling. It can be electroplated to form a hard, lustrous shell that resists oxidation. Some sorcerers even use it in their spells. I’ve already made a million tahlers off this operation just in the past six months, and I expect to triple that by the end of the year.”

Eile smirked. “And being as the hills are sacred and taboo, you can operate in complete safety, undiscovered.”

Sheraton smiled. “Exactly.”

“There’s more to this than just a filthy purse string,” Sunny said.

Sheraton raised an eyebrow, not getting the reference, but she waved it off. “Why all this interest in those pygmy bastards?”

“They’ve been getting sick drinking your tainted water, and they asked us to cure them.”

“Asked you? My experience with them is that they kill first and forget to ask questions.”

Eile shrugged her shoulders. “Well, they were gonna, but then...um...” She looked at Sunny.

“Their god asked them to spare us.”

Sheraton looked dumbfounded. “Their...god?”

“Well, it’s not really a god, just some entity they worship.”

“But when it found out we were Team Girl, it convinced them ta ask us ta help them.”

“Really.”

“Hey! You needn’t make it sound like we’re nuts! You’ve been here long enough; you know what this place is like, what can be found here.”

Sheraton frowned. “You two always did have the devil’s own luck. Whatever. In any event, it’s been fun chatting with you two, but I’ve got work to do.”

“So, what’re you going to do with us?” Sunny sounded nervous.

Eile felt butterflies dive-bomb her stomach, but she’d be damned if she’d let Sheraton see her scared. “She’s probably gonna give us to her workers for their entertainment.”

Sunny gave her a puzzled look. “What sort of entertainment?”

Eile sighed in frustration. “Whaddya think, ya dope?”

For a moment, Sunny looked confused, but then she figured out what she meant.

“Oh!” Her eyes imitating her mouth. “Oh dear!”

“Yeah, ‘oh dear’ is right, ya ditz.”

“Don’t tempt me.” Sheraton gave them a fiendish leer. “I’d like nothing better. Though if it comes to that, I’d probably make a small fortune doping you up on black lotus and selling you as sex toys. Then again, the Leng Men have offered a substantial reward for your capture. Frankly, I’m rather curious about what they would do to you. I understand their tortures can be quite ingenious.”

“Why do you hate us so much?” Sunny asked in all innocence. “What did we ever do to you?”

Sheraton slammed a hand down on the table, startling them both. She bolted out of her chair and leaned over the table, bracing her hands on its top.

“What did you do to me?! You ruined me, that’s what you did! You destroyed my life! If I didn’t like getting blood on my hands—” She picked up a letter opener, holding it like a weapon, and left the rest of her threat unspoken.

Eile’s heart thudded against her sternum like it was trying to escape, but she was more mad than scared. “We didn’t do a freakin’ thing, lady! All we did was turn you in when you tried

ta blackmail yer own family with that phony kidnapping scheme. And you still managed ta pull it off. So yer not exactly hurtin’.”

Sheraton straightened up as she savagely threw the opener at the desk, and its point stuck in the wood. “A measly hundred million; hardly adequate compensation when I used to be worth a hundred times that.”

Eile smirked again. “That’s not what we’ve heard. You’ve been doin’ pretty good for yerself since then, and it hasn’t exactly crimped yer social life either.”

Sheraton came out from behind the table, jamming her fists into her hips. She had a fit, slim body and figure, with shapely legs covered by a short midnight-blue skirt that went two-thirds of the way down her thighs, but she was barely taller than either of them. Oddly enough, she was barefoot.

“The life I have now may not be a hard one, but it wasn’t what I chose!”

Sunny was more direct. “Oh, please! Cut the sob story, sister. Everything that’s happened is your own fault, and any ‘suffering’ you feel pales compared to what you did to those poor innocent people. Especially the children! Really, Sheraton, children? I mean, what kind of inhuman freak makes movies of kids being raped and tortured?! It’d be bad enough if you were titillated by that, but you did it for money! I don’t understand how a woman could be so cold and unfeeling! Don’t you have any warmth? Don’t you feel any guilt at all?!”

The expression the felonious celebutante flashed in that moment seemed so diabolically cruel that Eile feared they had crossed some sort of line. “You two are lucky that killing you here and now wouldn’t be nearly as satisfying as killing you in the Waking World, no matter how painful.” Her voice was so low it sounded like something heavy being dragged over coarse gravel. “And the only thing that keeps me from packing you off to the Dylath-Leen slave market is that whatever degradation you’d experience would only last as long as you’re asleep; I would prefer it lasted for years!”

Eile had thought the j’Anelicas were hard-core, but at least they were not sadists. It made her realize that sometimes a primitive savage could be nobler than a so-called civilized woman.

“Besides, I’m willing to forgo revenge, for the time being. I might have a use for you. There can be no doubt you are two very capable young ladies, and I have need of that here. I would be willing to put aside my hatred, if you would be willing to put aside your high moral ideals.”

“If you think—” Eile stepped on Sunny’s foot. “Ow!!”

“What did you have in mind?” Sunny threw her a shocked expression, as if she thought she had gone mad.

Sheraton stepped closer. She had a suspicious look in her eyes, but she said, “One reason this operation is not more profitable is because I’m not here to supervise it half the time, and my men are most certainly either goofing off or robbing me blind. I can’t trust any of them to look out for my interests, but if you agreed to oversee the work when I’m awake, I know I

could trust you, since the alternative would be far more unpleasant, however personally unsatisfying.”

“That’s not much of an incentive. What’s ta keep you from carrying out yer revenge after you close this operation down?”

Sheraton threw her a grim smile. “Nothing, but as long as this mine is profitable, I’ll keep it running until the ore plays out. That could be Dream-years from the size of it. Maybe by then you will prove invaluable, in which case I would be a fool to dispose of you.”

Eile shook her head. “Still not enough. We’d wanna share of the take.”

“Why should I agree?”

“Because even if we only double yer revenue, you’d still come out further ahead than you do now. And I can guarantee we’d at least triple it.”

Sheraton didn’t respond right away, but Eile could almost see the gears turning in her head as she calculated her advantage.

“How much would you want?”

“A third.”

Sheraton shook her head. “No, too much; an eighth.”

“We’ve got expenses too, ya know. A quarter.”

“There’s nowhere to spend it out here. A sixth.”

“Let’s split the difference; a fifth.”

Sheraton calculated some more, then favoured her with a wry smile. “On one condition: I want control of your bodies in the Waking World.”

“Meaning what?”

“Meaning that you’ll live with me, and you’ll sleep where I can keep an eye on you.”

“You’ll split our take, half dollars, half tahlers?”

Sheraton grinned. “Agreed.”

She nodded, smiling. “Agreed.”

“Eile, no!”

“I’m not dyin’ for those creatures, Sunny! Besides, we can help ‘em better this way.”



“Let’s drink to our partnership.” Sheraton walked over to a small table that had a decanter of wine and a dozen glasses.

“What are you doing?!” Sunny gave her an angry look.

“Just go along with me for now.” She whispered in her ear as Sheraton poured wine into three glasses. “I’ll explain later.”

Sunny arched her eyebrows, but then she smiled in a sly manner and winked. “Gotcha, partner.” She crinkled her eyes.

Sheraton turned around and came back, offering a glass to each of them. She raised hers and said, “To a successful collaboration.” They tapped their glasses against hers and started to take a sip.

“Oh, before I forget...” Eile and Sunny lowered their hands. “My men saw you with one of those creatures. We can’t have it causing trouble. Where can they find it?”

Cripes! She had hoped she didn’t know about Liaison. Maybe she could try a bluff. “He ran off before you caught us. We really don’t know where he is.”

Sheraton smiled in triumph, and Eile realized she had just blundered big time. “So, you are working together.”

“Huh?” Sunny squeaked.

“Eile wouldn’t have called it ‘he’ if you weren’t. What was your plan? To infiltrate my operation and then let it and its friends in after dark? Not bad, actually, it might have worked. Now, then, tell me where it is and I might—”

Sunny threw her glass of wine into Sheraton’s face. “We’d never betray a friend, even if you kill us!” Eile was shocked by Sunny’s sudden display of defiance, but after it wore off, she felt proud of her, even as she realized Sheraton wouldn’t forgive it.

Sheraton blinked and gasped in surprise, but then her face clouded in rage. “You filthy slut!” She spat wine off her lips as she raised her hand to strike Sunny across the face, but Eile dropped her glass and caught her arm as Sunny shrank back.

“Touch her, and I’ll break yer goddamned neck!”

Sheraton stared at her, still enraged, wine dripping off her cheeks, nose, and chin, but Eile also saw fear in her eyes. She wrenched her hand out of her grip, stepped back, and flung her glass away.

“Guards!”

The three toughs who had captured them opened the door-flap, but only one strode in.

“Get them out of my sight!”

He grinned and signalled to the other two, who came in and gripped their arms.

“Take them out of camp, cut their throats, and throw them into the ravine. Let the scavengers take care of them.”

“Yes, Ma’am, right after we have a little fun first.”

“No, now!”

“Don’t worry, we won’t take long.” And the other two laughed.

She walked up to him and jabbed a finger in his chest. “I said now! I want them killed immediately! They’re too dangerous, too resourceful, especially her!” She pointed at Sunny, who blinked an innocent ‘Who, me?’ look at her.

The leader thug looked down at her with a displeased expression. “Look here, lady—”

Sheraton whipped a kukri knife out from behind her back underneath her jacket and pressed the blade to his neck. “You are not indispensable. Do as I say, or I’ll replace you with someone more obedient. Understand?!”

His face resembled a mask of fright, as he sweated and gulped and gritted his teeth, and even Eile believed she would do it on the spot. He closed his eyes and said, “Yes, Ma’am.”

She lowered the knife. “Then get to it!”

He nodded and turned towards his companions. “Get ‘em out of here!” As they pulled her and Sunny out, Eile saw Sheraton turn away and head back to the table, wiping a hand across her face.

They were dragged a few yards from the hut, when the leader stopped and signalled to two more to accompany them.

“Get yer hands off us, assholes!” Eile jerked her arm loose.

“Let ‘em go, they can’t run anyway.” The four others surrounded them, taking out their swords, and formed an escort as the leader started off for the gate.

“I’m sorry,” Sunny said, sounding contrite.

“Eh, forget it. You only did what I was thinkin’; I couldn’t’ve turned him in either. Besides, we’re not dead yet.”

“Shut up!” the tough behind her ordered. She gave him a baleful stare, but made no reply.

Once through the gate the party didn’t go far. Out of sight of the camp around the bulge of an outcrop of granite, the terrain dropped away into a deep, forested ravine. Beside the edge, placed off to one side, stood eight man-high posts.

“Tie ‘em up.” They were pushed towards the poles while two of the men took lengths of rope out from under their coats.

“Hey, what gives?” another man said. “Aren’t we gonna bang ‘em first?”

“The bitch wants ‘em dead now.” The leader sounded less than pleased.

“Damn! The first pieces of tail to come our way in months, too! What’s her problem, anyway?”

“She says they’re dangerous.”

“Them?! Shit, they’re just girls, fer christsakes. What can they do?”

“Hell if I know, but her orders were clear.”

“Screw her orders! We can at least strip ‘em.”

“What if we tied ‘em to the posts backwards? Then we can do ‘em and they can’t stop us or get away.”

The leader thought that idea over. “You know, that just might work. As long as they’re helpless, it shouldn’t matter, right boys?”

The tough nearest Eile said, “Yeah, there’s nothing that says we can’t have some fun with ‘em.” And he stroked her ponytail.

She slapped the hand away. “Hands off, buster!”

The leader said, “Hey, you can fight all you want, it makes no difference to us, we’ll just take what we want regardless, but if you give it to us willingly, you’ll live a little longer. At least, you’ll have a happy memory when we cut your throats.” His men laughed with grim humour as he grinned in an evil fashion. “And if you’re really good, we might even let you go, right boys?” The laughter increased in strength.

“Hey!” The laughter stopped as the men looked at Sunny.

“You want what we got?” She slipped off her jacket. “Then come and get it!” And she lifted her shirt above her breasts.

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BURN, WITCH, BURN by A Merritt

XVI. —End Of the Witch Girl

The girl made no resistance whatever. She seemed entirely withdrawn into herself, looking up at me with the same vague stare I had noted on my visit to the doll-shop. I took her hands. She let them rest passively in mine. They were very cold. I said to her, gently, reassuringly:

“My child, no one is going to hurt you. Rest and relax. Sink back in the chair. I only want to help you. Sleep if you wish. Sleep.”

She did not seem to hear, still regarding me with that vague gaze. I released her hands. I took my own chair, facing her, and set the little mirrors revolving. Her eyes turned to them at once, rested upon them, fascinated. I watched her body relax; she sank back in her chair. Her eyelids began to droop.

“Sleep,” I said softly. “Here none can harm you. While you sleep none can harm you. Sleep... sleep...”

Her eyes closed; she sighed.

I said: “You are asleep. You will not awaken until I bid you. You cannot awaken until I bid you.”

She repeated in a murmuring, childish voice: “I am asleep; I cannot awaken until you bid me.”

I stopped the whirling mirrors. I said to her: “There are some questions I am going to ask you. You will listen, and you will answer me truthfully. You cannot answer them except truthfully. You know that.”

She echoed, still in that faint childish voice: “I must answer you truthfully. I know that.”

I could not refrain from darting a glance of triumph at Ricori and McCann. Ricori was crossing himself, staring at me with wide eyes in which were both doubt and awe. I knew he was thinking that I, too, knew witchcraft. McCann sat chewing nervously. And staring at the girl.

I began my questions, choosing at first those least likely to disturb. I asked:

“Are you truly Madame Mandilip’s niece?”

“No.”

“Who are you, then?”

“I do not know.”

“When did you join her, and why?”

“Twenty years ago. I was in a crèche, a foundling asylum at Vienna. She took me from it. She taught me to call her my aunt. But she is not.”

“Where have you lived since then?”

“In Berlin, in Paris, then London, Prague, Warsaw.”

“Did Madame Mandilip make her dolls in each of these places?”

She did not answer; she shuddered; her eyelids began to tremble.

“Sleep! Remember, you cannot awaken until I bid you! Sleep! Answer me.”

She whispered: “Yes.”

“And they killed in each city?”

“Yes.”

“Sleep. Be at ease. Nothing is going to harm you—” Her disquietude had again become marked, and I veered for a moment from the subject of the dolls. “Where was Madame Mandilip born?”

“I do not know.”

“How old is she?”

“I do not know. I have asked her, and she has laughed and said that time is nothing to her. I was five years old when she took me. She looked then just as she does now.”

“Has she any accomplices—I mean are there others who make the dolls?”

“One. She taught him. He was her lover in Prague.”

“Her lover!” I exclaimed, incredulously—the image of the immense gross body, the great breasts, the heavy horse-like face of the doll-maker rising before my eyes. She said:

“I know what you are thinking. But she has another body. She wears it when she pleases. It is a beautiful body. It belongs to her eyes, her hands, her voice. When she wears that body she is beautiful. She is terrifyingly beautiful. I have seen her wear it many times.”

Another body! An illusion, of course... like the enchanted room Walters had described... and which I had glimpsed when breaking from the hypnotic web in which she had enmeshed me... a picture drawn by the doll-maker’s mind in the mind of the girl. I dismissed that, and drove to the heart of the matter.

“She kills by two methods, does she not—by the salve and by the dolls?”

“Yes, by the unguent and the dolls.”

“How many has she killed by the unguent in New York?”

She answered, indirectly: “She has made fourteen dolls since we came here.”

So there were other cases that had not been reported to me! I asked:

“And how many have the dolls killed?”

“Twenty.”

I heard Ricori curse, and shot him a warning look. He was leaning forward, white and tense; McCann had stopped his chewing.

“How does she make the dolls?”

“I do not know.”

“Do you know how she prepares the unguent?”

“No. She does that secretly.”

“What is it that activates the dolls?”

“You mean makes them—alive?”

“Yes.”

“Something from the dead!”

Again I heard Ricori cursing softly. I said: “If you do not know how the dolls are made, you must know what is necessary to make them alive. What is it?”

She did not answer.

“You must answer me. You must obey me. Speak!”

She said: “Your question is not clear. I have told you that something of the dead makes them alive. What else is it you would know?”

“Begin from where one who poses for a doll first meets Madame Mandilip to the last step when the doll—as you put it—becomes alive.”

She spoke, dreamily:

“She has said one must come to her of his own will. He must consent of his own volition, without coercion, to let her make the doll. That he does not know to what he is consenting matters nothing. She must begin the first model immediately. Before she completes the second—the doll that is to live—she must find opportunity to apply the unguent. She has said of this unguent that it liberates one of those who dwell within the mind, and that this one must come to her and enter the doll. She has said that this one is not the sole tenant of the

mind, but with the others she has no concern. Nor does she select all of those who come before her. How she knows those with whom she can deal, or what there is about them which makes her select them, I do not know. She makes the second doll. At the instant of its completion he who has posed for it begins to die. When he is dead—the doll lives. It obeys her—as they all obey her...”

She paused, then said, musingly “All except one-”

“And that one?”

“She who was your nurse. She will not obey. My aunt torments her, punishes her... still she cannot control her. I brought the little nurse here last night with another doll to kill the man my—aunt—cursed. The nurse came, but she fought the other doll and saved the man. It is something my aunt cannot understand... it perplexes her... and it gives me... hope!”

Her voice trailed away. Then suddenly, with energy, she said:

“You must make haste. I should be back with the dolls. Soon she will be searching for me. I must go... or she will come for me... and then... if she finds me here... she will kill me...”

I said: “You brought the dolls to kill me?”

“Of course.”

“Where are the dolls now?”

She answered: “They were coming back to me. Your men caught me before they could reach me. They will go... home. The dolls travel quickly when they must. It is more difficult without me that is all... but they will return to her.”

“Why do the dolls kill?”

“To... please... her.”

I said: “The knotted cord, what part does it play?”

She answered: “I do not know—but she says-” Then suddenly, desperately, like a frightened child, she whispered: “She is searching for me! Her eyes are looking for me... her hands are groping—she sees me! Hide me! Oh, hide me from her quick...”

I said: “Sleep more deeply! Go down—down deep—deeper still into sleep. Now she cannot find you! Now you are hidden from her!”

She whispered: “I am deep in sleep. She has lost me. I am hidden. But she is hovering over me she is still searching...”

Ricori and McCann had left their chairs and were beside me.

Ricori asked:

“You believe the witch is after her?”

“No,” I answered. “But this is not an unexpected development. The girl has been under the woman’s control so long, and so completely, that the reaction is natural. It may be the result of suggestion, or it may be the reasoning of her own subconsciousness... she has been breaking commands... she has been threatened with punishment if she should—”

The girl screamed, agonized:

“She sees me! She has found me! Her hands are reaching out to me!”

“Sleep! Sleep deeper still! She cannot hurt you. Again she has lost you!”

The girl did not answer, but a faint moaning was audible, deep in her throat.

McCann swore, huskily: “Christ! Can’t you help her?”

Ricori, eyes unnaturally bright in a chalky face, said: “Let her die! It will save us trouble!”

I said to the girl, sternly:

“Listen to me and obey. I am going to count five. When I come to five—awaken! Awaken at once! You will come up from sleep so swiftly that she cannot catch you! Obey!”

I counted, slowly, since to have awakened her at once would, in all likelihood, have brought her to the death which her distorted mind told her was threatened by the doll-maker.

“One—two—three-”

An appalling scream came from the girl. And then -

“She’s caught me! Her hands are around my heart... Uh-h- h...”

Her body bent; a spasm ran through her. Her body relaxed and sank limply in the chair. Her eyes opened, stared blankly; her jaw dropped.

I ripped open her bodice, set my stethoscope to her heart. It was still.

And then from the dead throat issued a voice organ-toned, sweet, laden with menace and contempt...

“You fools!”

The voice of Madame Mandilip!

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## POLARIS OF THE SNOWS by Charles B Stilson

### Chapter 21: America!

“THEY say the wild man is going to live,” said a voice.

“Yes, Doc Clawson says he’ll pull through all right,” said another. “He’s had a close call, if ever a man had. I wonder who and what he is.” “So do I,” rejoined the first voice. “Do you believe that, that he is a wild man?”

“Dunno. What you goin’ to believe?” The first voice became confidential. “I heard Doc tell the mate that he hadn’t spoke an English word in all his sick ravings, except ‘Lady,’ which he might have learned from the girl. Then there’s the knife. Captain’s got that. It ain’t like no metal any one ever saw. There’s letters on it Doc says are Greek, but nobody here can read ‘em. Doc says he believes what the chap jabbers in Greek too.”

“He’s got a queer necklace, too,” chimed in the second voice. “It’s made of the same kind of stuff as the knife is, and strung with red pebbles. Wonder what they’ll do with him?”

“Sh-h-h! Don’t you let your wonderin’ run away with you. Cap’s actin’ queerer and queerer. Did you notice him when he came aft this mornin’—after the talk he had with the doc? I tell you somethin’s gone wrong, all right-”

Scuffling footsteps broke the tenor of the voices, and they faded away to a murmur, and then to silence.

Those scraps of a conversation drifted to the mind of Polaris, where for hours and hours a tiny spark of comprehension had been struggling back into being. They were the first words that his returning consciousness had understood.

He opened his eyes.

Surely that knot in the oaken beam above him was an old friend, the one shaped so like the head of a horse. And that row of iron bolt-heads; how often he had counted them over! He lay in a white-covered berth in a small cabin, in which every seam and stitch and object was strangely familiar, but which his reawakening consciousness refused to recognize. Sunlight was streaming in through a partly opened port, and with it came the sound of the sea.

Slowly, for he found it required considerable effort, he turned over on his side and looked about him. Where was he? Above all, how had he got there? As he moved he felt something at his neck slip, and through the open throat of the linen garment he wore fell the heavy loop of the necklace of Kalin.

Wondering, he stared at the iridescent links of ilium and the dull red stones. Then the spring that held the tight-wound coil of memory snapped, and the past unrolled like an endless ribbon.

He was weak. He had been ill. Yes, now he held the key—that conversation he had just heard. The “wild man” of whom the sailors talked was himself. He smiled. Already his

yellow beard had grown long and ragged, and covered his throat. The knife, and the necklace—all of the talk had referred to him.

And they said that in all his delirium he had spoken no word of English! He smiled to himself once more. So even when his conscious self had departed from control of his body and mind, he had held fast to his fanciful resolution. Rose Emer must also have kept her promise. Not a soul but herself guessed who he was.

But that last part of the sailors' talk? What did that mean? What were they going to do with him?

In an instant he was alert and bitterly suspicious. He was on a ship, a ship at sea. He was in the power of the American captain, the man who had sought and probably found the great and mystic pole; also the man who was the affianced husband of the girl whom Polaris had carried across the snow deserts in his arms. Now he had a duty laid upon him, which he secretly guessed would conflict sorely with the wishes of the captain. While he lived, he would strive to carry out that duty.

BUT why had he lived? At the end of his terrible journey darkness had fallen upon him in the camp; why had it ever lifted? If it had not, he had been freed of his promise, and would have been content.

What had happened since then? Where was Rose Emer? The gossip of the sailors had included no news of her; but so the inference was that all was well with her. Where was Marcus? How long had he been ill?

These questions remained unanswered. He could not know that he had lain heavy and inert on a sledge for days, with only the thickness of their fur parkas separating him from Rose Emer, while Scoland's men, abandoning all that did not make for speed, had driven dogs to death in their wild dash back to the Felix.

He could not know that he had been given up for dead by the men, and that, even then, that conclusion brought little of regret to the heart of the American commander. Nor could he know that Rose Emer would not have it so, and that, under her entreaties, the supposed corpse had been carried on to the ship, and to the good medical man on it, who found that somewhere in the fastnesses of the silent form stretched before him a tiny flicker of life still abode, and would respond to care.

That care he had received, and in good measure. To Dr. Clawson he most certainly owed his life—twice over. Having saved it once, the integrity of the physician withstood the hint, almost brutally direct, from Scoland, that the man would be better off if he were let to die quietly.

Polaris was the one fly in the ointment of the daring captain of the Felix. His vague suspicions concerning the origin of the stranger and his business in the snow land had become an obsession. From the girl he could obtain no satisfaction, and only food for more suspicion. She would say little of her rescue, and less of her rescuer, taking refuge from

anything like investigation in the declaration that the stirring of the memory of those days in the wilderness was too much for her already overwrought nervous system.

Scoland was a man greatly daring; he also was a man who would scruple little to remove, by any means that seemed safe to himself, any obstacle which stood between him and that which he desired. He had striven for a great prize and won. Another prize lay almost within his grasp. Should an obstacle to either intervene, he would do his utmost to sweep it aside.

Was this strange wanderer an obstacle? Could he be one of a party who had penetrated the fastnesses of the snows, to wrest from jaws of berg and glacier the secret of the pole?

Captain Scoland had heard of no such party. When he thought of how the man came, proofless, he smiled at his own suspicions. And yet—might not others have waited for the return of this man, as the crew of the *Felix* had waited for himself?

Then there was the strange demeanour of the girl, her reticence and her almost rapt interest in the man. Even now she might have been haunting the sick man's cabin, but that Scoland had persuaded her that his mind was gone, and that he was well enough off as far as the needs of the body were concerned.

To do the captain justice, the attitude of the girl, her interest in the strange man, were the minor considerations. Everything must step aside for his glory as the discoverer of the pole. Already the press of two hemispheres was heralding his successful return, and the savants of the nations were awaiting his proofs. There must be no cloud on his title, no question of his right. He would make that sure.

An unsuspected cunning in dealings with other men had been awakened in the breast of Polaris. Suddenly awake to the full consciousness of his mental powers, he was swayed by his suspicion, by the warnings his father had given him long ago, his oft repeated advice as to the intentions and possible actions of the first white men he was apt to meet.

He was awake from delirium, and his head was clear. To all appearances his mind still wandered. A little observation taught him when a sailor brought him food from the cook's galley, and when to expect the visits of the doctor. They soon found him changed in one respect. He accepted food, and once or twice they surprised him floundering weakly about the little cabin. But he showed them no brightness of mind. His glances were vacant, his manners those of an imbecile almost.

He bided his time.

His strength came back to him slowly, although he concealed that fact. They were far up the coast, not two weeks journey from New York, when he first came to a realization of being, after his long siege of brain fever and weakness. In those two weeks he took every measure to prepare himself against their landing on American soil.

He knew not at all what he should face, but he wished to be ready for it with all his old-time strength and agility. Not entirely could he disassociate his mind from the idea that opposition and trouble must be answered with the strength of one's body.

The man who brought the food and the physician who tended him came only in the day time. Therefore Polaris spent most of his days supinely in his berth. At night he was supremely active. Up and down the narrow confines he paced. He leaped lightly. He stretched and strained each limb and muscle.

Hour after hour he endured the severest “calisthenics”—not those taught in the gymnasium, but anything and everything in the line of the motion to which his surroundings lent themselves.

AT LENGTH the Felix lay in Quarantine. The next day they would dock. Scoland would meet and accept the homage of a nation which had gone temporarily wild over his exploits. Before that landing he would dispose of the living problem which lay and gibbered in the berth in the cabin that had been Burleson’s. Privately Scoland made arrangements with the authorities at a big institution for the care of the insane up the river. They were to send for the man. The captain explained that the patient was a member of his crew who had lost the balance of his mind due to the hardships he had endured.

That night Polaris checkmated all the captain’s carefully made preparations. Tense with excitement, the son of the snows had realized that they lay near the land. Then he had seen it from the port. Snatches of talk of the sailors told him that it was New York at last—the city of his dreams. One scrap of conversation focused all his long nursed doubts.

They had sailed to Quarantine through an almost continual blare of every kind of noisemaking instrument on the decks of every ship they passed or met. With his head at the port Polaris caught, in a sudden interval of quiet, a few words from the deck above him. He recognized the voice of Captain Scoland, talking to the mate.

“They’ll come for him in a launch at Quarantine,” he said. “It’s all arranged. Here’s the cabin key. Better take a couple of the boys to help the keepers. He might try to make trouble.”

That was all—and enough!

Soon after his return to consciousness Polaris had learned that the door to the cabin where he lay was kept locked always. It had been one of his earliest causes for suspicion. Sometime after midnight that night he set his powerful shoulder to that door, and pressed his weight against it. Minutes he stood there, gradually increasing the pressure, until the lock sprung, in its wards with a slight snap, and the knob yielded in his twisting fingers.

The man who had brought the food had left in the cabin a few rough garments such as the sailors wore. Polaris had donned them as he occasionally left the berth in the day time. He wore them now. Had any one met him, he scarcely would have been recognized as the “madman.” He had found a razor in Burleson’s cabin, and had shift to shave himself cleanly. He had hacked off the most of his long hair with the same instrument, and had disposed of the evidences of his tonsorial efforts by throwing all through the port into the harbour. Around his neck he wore the necklace of Kalin.

Only a half-defined notion of what he was about to do was in his mind, but there was no fear.

He stole along the silent corridor, and gained the deck and the rail, without being observed by the lone sailor on watch near the wheel-house. Ready to his hand, it seemed, were a short length of plank and a trailing rope, attached firmly to some part of the ship, but long enough and loose enough to serve him.

With the plank under one arm he clambered over the rail and let himself down with the rope. He could not swim a stroke, but he reached the water, and with one arm over the stout bit of plank, he struck out fearlessly for the glittering skyline of the great city that lay ahead.

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