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AUGUST, 1952

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EDITORIAL AND EXECUTIVE OFFICES, 366 MADISON AVE.,
NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All communications concerning subscriptions should be addressed to Circulation Dept., 61 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address.

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All **STORIES** *Complete*

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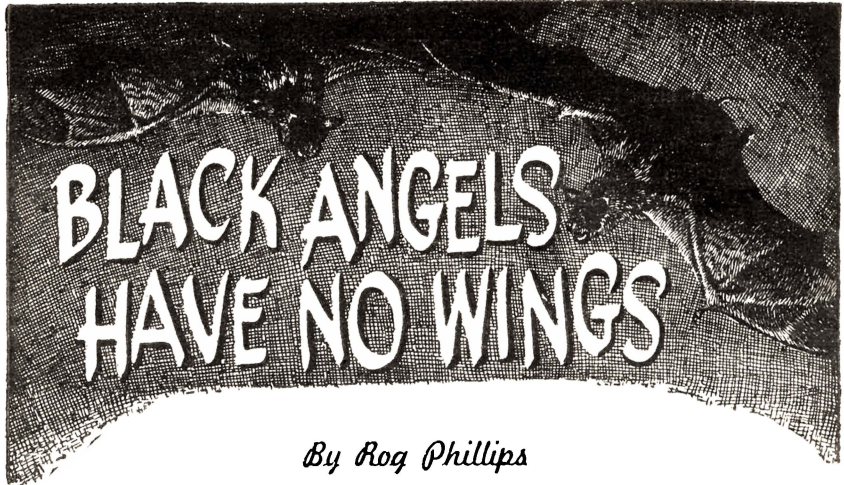
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Cover by Walter Popp, illustrating a scene from "The Return of Michael Flannigan"

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By Rog Phillips

**They opened a cave closed for centuries
and released the evil trapped therein —
an evil which was but a prelude to the
horrible secret of the dread Black Angels**

THE TWO men were sitting at the bar mildly arguing over the score of a baseball game. Suddenly the one who was talking stopped. He was staring into the mirror in back of the bar, his eyes wide. He dug his elbow against the ribs of his companion. "Ja see that, Mike?" he asked.

The one called Mike looked in the mirror and cursed softly. "I wonder what he did that for?" he asked wonderingly.

They studied the reflection of the girl in the mirror and drew their own conclusions. She was young, and looked rather nice. Almost too good to be sitting in a booth in a cocktail lounge.

"The guy could be her father," Mike said. "What d'ya think, Joe,

should we butt in before she drinks that mickey finn?"

"Why not, Mike?" Joe said philosophically, rising from his stool and turning.

He made sure Mike was flanking him and in the proper mood to back his play, then advanced to the booth. Leaning both hands on the table, he sneered at the man sitting there. "What'sa idear?" he shot at him enigmatically.

"Go away. You're drunk," the man frowned.

"Not too drunk to see what you just did, pasty-face. What'sa idear?" He lurched out and seized the girl's wrist just as she was about to take her drink. "No-no-no-no!" he said, wagging his head.



"No-no-no-no!" Mike backed him up. "He put a mickey in it."

"Yeah, we—" Joe began. The back of the man's hand caught him in the mouth. He shook his head, slightly stunned.

Mike, an elaborate patience in every move, pulled Joe to one side. The man in the booth started to get up. Mike assisted him by clutching a generous portion of his coat and shirt and lifting. When he had him elevated the proper distance, he wound up his left fist three times for luck and let go. There was no way for the man to duck.

The blow, if it had landed squarely, would have broken his nose and blacked both his eyes. As it was, glancing against the side of his jaw, it merely rendered him unconscious. He sagged limply in Mike's grasp.

Mike looked at him with a feeling of great satisfaction, then let go. The man dropped back in his seat, seemed to settle there securely for a moment, then slumped sideways and sprawled into the aisle between the booths and the bar.

"Oh, you beasts!" the girl said. She slipped out of her seat, bent down beside her companion, and started to lift his head. She gasped suddenly, placed the back of her hand against the man's cheek.

"You've killed him!" Her voice went up the scale.

"Naw," Mike said. "Didn't hit him that hard."

The girl said, with certainty, "He's dead. He's cold."

Mike bent down. The man *was* ice-cold! Mike straightened up in need of a drink. Without thinking, he picked up the girl's drink and downed it in one gulp. No one noticed.

"Out of the way," the bartender said. "Let me see that guy. I gotta know whether to call the doc or the

undertaker."

In a few seconds he straightened up again. "Marge! Get on the phone and call the cops."

He saw the twenty-one girl head for the phone, then fixed his eyes sternly on Mike. Mike, in turn, was staring at the barkeep with a strange expression on his face, eyes large and round.

"You," the barkeep announced, "I'm holding for the police."

"You know," Mike said as though he hadn't heard him. "I never realized it before, but you're the nicest guy I ever knew." He reached out with both hands.

"Hey, wait a minute!" the barkeep said, backing up so forcibly he tripped against some of the crowd. "What's come over you, Mike?"

"I like you," Mike said, going after him.

The bartender turned and pushed through the crowd. He reached the end of the bar, then made a fast turn. His fist caught Mike squarely, dropping him.

THE CROWD gathered round. After a while Mike lifted his head. The police appeared. One of them called, "Where's the body?"

"Back there, offi—" a voice began, then screeched, "It's gone!"

The bartender let out an oath. "It couldn't be. I tell you, Sarge, that guy was dead as a doorknob. I know. He couldn't have got up and walked out of here. Not unless somebody swiped the— Where's the dame that was with him?"

"Here she is!" someone called.

All eyes focused on her as the cop strode purposefully to the booth where she was sitting, too frightened to move.

"All right, sister. Who was the guy? What happened to him?"

"I don't know," she said, trying

hard to keep her lip from trembling. "He—me followed me on the street. I came in here to get away from him. He followed me in and sat down. He said he just wanted to get acquainted. He wanted to buy me a drink, and said after I drank it, if I didn't want to get acquainted, he would just sit there and let me walk out."

"Did you see him walk out?"

"No, I didn't look at anything. All I could think of was that he was dead, and the police would question me, and my aunt would kick me out of her house for being in a place like this with a man getting killed." She began to cry.

In a gentler tone the cop asked, "Did he give you his name?"

"Yes. He said it was Daar Olgno. D-a-a-r O-l-g-n-o."

"Foreigner, huh," the cop said. "What'd he look like? Dark hair, dark complexion?"

"Nah," Joe spoke up. "Hair blacker than the ace of spades, but pasty-faced. Like he was just out of stir except that his hair was long and combed back. He give me the creeps. Mike and I saw him put a mickey in the girl's drink. Mike socked him after he clipped me over the mouth."

Mike had risen and had been elaborately moving people out of his way. Now he had reached the booth where the girl sat. "My darling," he said tenderly, "I love you. I'm married, but that doesn't matter. I'll get rid of the old battle ax. I love only you. May I join you in a drink?"

Joe automatically glanced down at the girl's glass. It was empty. "Hey!" he said. "Who drank that? It had a mickey in it!"

Mike focused his eyes on the glass. "Humm," he said, "I believe I did. But never mind, my dear, I'll order you another."

The cop looked at Mike. "Mickey?" he said. "Looks to me like it was an aphrodisiac." He took Mike by the collar. "Come along, lover boy," he said. "And as for you, girlie, scram out of here and go on home to your aunt before we find the corpus delicti." He pushed Mike toward the street door.

IT WAS the Malayan jungle, sultry, the air filled with the unmusical calls of beautifully colored birds. Two tethered elephants swayed rhythmically in the shade at the edge of the clearing around the deep pit, and in the pit Mark Grant squatted at the base of the exposed stone wall, brushing dirt carefully from the inscriptions on its face. Natives, dressed only in loincloth and sandals, filled baskets with dirt, carried them up the steep path into the jungle, and returned with empty baskets to fill them again. High in the heavens to the north a bloated orange sun glared balefully down into the pit.

Suddenly a figure emerged from the jungle. Black eyes and high cheekbones were in sharp contrast to the pith helmet, sports shirt, neatly-creased slacks, and flawlessly-shined tan oxfords. "Hey, Mark!" the newcomer called. "Pop wants you at the house. We got a newsflash from the States that you'll be interested in."

Mark looked up at the number one son of his host, and grinned. "What is it? War declared on somebody?"

"Nope. And pop is sure you'll be interested. Something about some man-made tunnels in solid rock being uncovered by a California construction gang making a superhighway. We took it on the wire recorder so you could hear it."

The lazy grin vanished. Mark looked regretfully at the strange inscriptions on the wall, inscriptions for

which he had spent years searching. He dropped the brush and went up the incline.

The commentator's voice was saying, "... The new inland superhighway being constructed in northern California broke into what may be one of the greatest archeological discoveries of the age this morning. A tunnel through solid granite at the base of Mount Shasta, heading into the base of that mountain. The tunnel is man-made, and must be older than the earliest-known Indian civilization, because they had nothing that could have built it. The highway engineers are of the opinion that it would have taken power drills and explosives. Insects of unknown species, whitely transparent, as large as an inch and a half across, and vaguely resembling crickets, have been found. Where the insects found their food and moisture hasn't been determined yet. . . ."

"I'll have to go," Mark said. "Damn! And just when I—you'll make sure nothing bothers my find while I'm gone?" he asked his host.

"Of course. But why must you go? We thought it would merely interest you, not drag you from your work."

"You know of my origin?" Mark said. "I was born in a Tibetan temple. My mother died there from wounds she received at the hands of the brigands who killed my father. I was raised there until my uncle in the United States located me and took me home."

"That is known," his host said, nodding.

"What you did not know," Mark said, "was that that temple was built over the entrance to a tunnel like this one unearthed in California. It was the entrance to an ancient labyrinth. My playmates were the dwellers in this labyrinth, the *noro olgno*, or black

angels, guardians of the bottomless pit."

"Indeed!" his host exclaimed. "I have heard the ancient tales, but never before did I believe!"

"That much is true," Mark said. "I learned their language. They told me many things. Some of the things they told me even I can't believe."

"We are not curious unless you choose to tell us."

"THERE'S no reason why you shouldn't know. What is truth and what is fiction I have no way of knowing. Long before known history there developed what is known as the Serpent. It threatened to engulf all mankind, and so a great pit was constructed, its only entrances being labyrinths in solid rock, and the Serpent was banished to that pit. What the Serpent was is the incredible part. It was either an offshoot of the human race, coldblooded like snakes, though human in form, or it was the undead, dead yet immortal, cold and lifeless, yet able to move among men and to make them into the undead also.

"These were called the Serpent. They were taken beyond the labyrinths. The final passages into the pit were blasted closed. They would have all eternity to reopen them; but when they did they would still have to find their way through the labyrinths. They were so constructed that a person could wander forever through them without finding a way to the surface.

"To make it even more impossible, the *noro olgno* were given dominion in the labyrinths, and given the secret of a drug that would make even the Serpent go insane with fear. They were instructed to use it on anyone who stumbled accidentally into one of the tunnels, for it was certain that with the passage of time geographical

changes would uncover some of the passages."

"But why must *you* go?"

"Don't you see?" Mark said. "Here in Malaya, or anywhere else in the world except the United States, the *noro olgno* could drive away those who tried to enter. In the United States it will only make them want to enter all the more. They'll use poison gas to kill the black angels. They'll systematically explore the tunnels. I can see it now! Conducted tours through the explored passages at a dollar and a half per person. Systematic exploration by experienced crews with surveying equipment, making maps as they go deeper and deeper, until they meet the Serpent. And then that is unloosed again. I've got to stop it."

"Why not let the Masters of Tibet step in?"

"How could they? By tomorrow a corporation will be formed, with money stepping in to build a resort hotel near the opening. In a month the public will be going there in droves. I'll have to be there. Only a white man can talk to the owners and convince them they must blast the opening shut and forget it. I might even have to buy them out. In fact, I probably will."

"My fortune is yours."

Mark grunted. "I may need it at that, though I probably have enough of my own." He groaned. "It'll take me six weeks to get to the States. I'll have to start now. Today."

"Very well, Mark Grant," his host said. "There is one thing that interests me. The *noro olgno*. You say you learned their language. They are, then, human?"

"Human, but not as we are. They are very small. The tallest is less than a fifth as tall as a man. They are very light and have long pipestem

arms. And they wear bat-like wings that their arms fit into, so they can fly—like bats."

THE THREE-story neon sign atop the building said *Cosmick Cosmetics*. The sign on the door of the private office off the ornate waiting room said *Madame Cosmick*.

Inside, behind a half-acre walnut desk, Madame Cosmick, known in private life as Joan Smith, toyed worriedly with some columns of figures. Four years ago she had graduated from Cal Tech as a biochemist. She had promptly branded herself as a biochemical physicist, and had built her talents into what had almost overnight become a cometic empire.

Two years ago she had branched out, speculating in real estate and anything that looked promising. Sometimes she had made money, sometimes she had lost money. She had heard rumors of the projected superhighway and had bought land along what was supposed to be its route. Some of it had been, some had not. She had made enough off the sales, however, to more than pay the losses on that which wasn't. And she had still owned large areas of wastelands the highway cut through, since the state bought only a hundred-yard-wide strip.

It had been on her property that the tunnel had been uncovered. She had immediately seen its potentialities. She had formed a corporation and built a resort hotel at the nearest wide spot. She had built the whole area into a vacation spot. But it had cost money, and bad luck had plagued the thing from the start. Now she was down to her last twenty thousand, and worried.

"Something could easily break me about now," she worried. The phone

rang peremptorily.

"Needles is calling," the switchboard girl announced.

A moment later a male voice spoke. "Madame Cosmick? This is George Tremont. I'm afraid there's some trouble here."

"Oh, no!" she protested. "What is it? Isn't the plumbing they put in any good? I suspected as much."

"I'm afraid it's worse than that. Much worse. There has been some kind of catastrophe. We've had to close down the caves to the public until we can get it straightened out."

"Good Lord! What is it? A cave-in?"

"Worse than that, Madame Cosmick. Bats."

"Bats?" she echoed in surprise. "Oh good lord!" She took the receiver from her ear and laughed in relief for almost a full minute. Putting the receiver back to her ear she said, "Well, disinfect the caves. Shoot poison gas in to kill them off or something."

"You don't understand," George Tremont said. "They didn't bother us until this morning. Not a sign of them. But this morning there were fifty people on the conducted tour and they were all bitten by the bats."

"All?" she asked weakly.

"All. Including the guides. They're insane."

"Insane?" she asked even more weakly.

"Insane. Something about the bites, I think. We've placed them all on the top floor and sent for doctors and nurses. The highway patrol is taking care of them at present. They have them all tied up so they won't harm themselves. They just want to run, and scream."

"I'll get there as fast as I can make it. Do what you can till I arrive."

THE ALMOST beautiful straw blonde smiled up adoringly at the self-conscious young man who held her arm. Behind them was the plane. Ahead of them was the airport bus to the resort hotel. "Call me Mrs. Eggsbrook again, darling," she whispered. "I want to get used to it. We're going to stay at a hotel tonight, you know." She shivered happily.

He buried his nose in her soft wavelets, chuckling. "Mrs. Eggsbrook!" he whispered happily.

"Ohhh!" she squealed. Then, more practically, "Come on. We've got to get a seat together on the bus." She broke away from the grip on her arm and climbed into the bus. There she paused in dismay while her husband caught up with her. He too paused helplessly.

Every seat had two occupants except for three seats, and each of these had one person in them. The nearest of those was on the right, three seats behind the driver. Its occupant was a man. His appearance was striking. His hair, combed straight back, was of the deepest black. His face was a dead white, his lips thin red lines.

He returned their shocked stare with eyes that seemed to have a magnetic power smouldering in their depths.

They hurried nervously past him to the rear of the bus where the other two empty seats were. In one there was a woman. She might have been any age from twenty to fifty. Beautiful with all the fullness of the meaning of that adjective, with hair as black as the man's up front, but as alive as his was dead.

Jerry continued to stare at her. Jennifer looked beyond her to the man sitting immediately behind her. His

shoulders were broad. He seemed in his middle thirties. He was handsome in a way that spoke of strength and courage.

She stood on tiptoe and whispered into Jerry's ear, "C-could we ask them to sit together and give us a seat to ourselves?"

Jerry shook his head. "We don't want to give away the fact that we're newlyweds. Anyway, it'll only be an hour and a half before we—"

Jennifer looked at the woman again. "All right," she said reluctantly. "You sit by the man. I'll sit by the woman."

"Okay," Jerry agreed. He added as an afterthought, "Maybe after a while we can ask if they'd mind sitting together."

JENNIFER nodded and strode down the aisle, plumping herself down beside the woman. Jerry followed and sat beside the man, giving him a friendly grin.

"My name's Jerry Eggsbrook," he said, determined to get the switch made before the bus started. "I'm in the hardware business." That sounded more important than admitting he was a clerk in a hardware store.

Jennifer took the cue, smiled sweetly at the woman beside her. "Hello," she purred. "I'm Mrs. Eggsbrook."

"Glad to know you," the man beside Jerry was saying in a firm, cultured voice. "My name is Grant. Mark Grant. I'm a . . . tourist, more or less."

"Gee! That's wonderful," Jerry said enthusiastically. "Wish I could travel all the time. My wife and I are on our honey—that is, we're on my vacation. Old married people, you know. I wanted to go to the sea shore and she wanted to go to the mountains, so here we are . . . in the mountains."

"Jerry!" Jennifer said indignantly, turning her head and giving him an indignant how-could-you look, then switching her attention back to the woman beside her, who smiled lazily and said, "I am Madame Cosmick."

"Oh," Jennifer said weakly. She smiled, adding, "Well, we can't all be . . . that is, I guess I don't know what we can't all be. It isn't true that I made my *husband* come here to the mountains for our hon—I mean *his* vacation."

There was movement at the front of the bus. The driver stood up. "Attention, folks," he said. "We've just had word that the Titans' Caverns are being closed temporarily to the public." There was a buzz of disappointment that drowned out some of his words. He repeated, "Any of you who are on the bus just to go to the Caverns might as well get off. Passengers for Titan City and the Cavern Hotel can stay on."

Reluctantly, people stood up and moved down the aisle.

"What'll we do?" Jennifer said to Jerry.

"I don't know," he muttered, doing some fast mental arithmetic concerning finances. "We have our two weeks' reservation at the hotel. We sent them some money, too. We'd better go on anyway. Maybe they'll open the Caves later."

"Uh-huh," Jennifer said uncertainly. She brightened. "Well, anyway, now we can sit together!" She jumped to her feet and took a seat that was vacant, well back in the bus.

JERRY GRINNED at Mark and mumbled, "Glad to have met you," and followed her.

During the long trip around the base of the mountain they sat close together, holding hands and trying to

look forward cheerfully to their two-week honeymoon. But gloom settled over them. They took to studying the few remaining passengers. There were only four besides Mark Grant, Madame Cosmick, and the man up forward with the black hair and dead-white face.

"I'm afraid of that man up front," Jennifer whispered to Jerry.

"Afraid of him?" Jerry said. "I just don't like him. There's something about him..."

"That's why I'm afraid of him," Jennifer said, adding lamely, "I think."

"Madame Cosmick is nice," Jerry said, brightening. "I wonder if she's a movie star?"

"I think she's a fortune teller," Jennifer said. "Mark Grant is terrific. I'll bet he's been all over the world." She glanced at Jerry shyly.

"Oh, he's okay," he said, frowning. "A wolf, though, I'll bet."

Jennifer shuddered. "That other man up there is more the wolf type," she said. "He gives me the *shudders!*" She looked wistfully at Jerry. "We are going to be very happy, aren't we, Jerry darling?"

"We sure are, Mrs. Eggsbrook," Jerry growled protectively.

Jennifer sighed happily and snuggled against him, leaning her head on his shoulder and closing her eyes.

JERRY EGGSBROOK and his wife Jennifer emerged from the elevator and headed straight for the desk. Once there they asked eagerly if the Caves were open yet.

The clerk shook his head. "No," he elaborated, "and they won't be. If that's all you're here for, you might as well leave. They aren't open. They aren't going to be open. They're closed. They're staying closed."

"But we can't," Jerry said lamely. "We only have two weeks. We can't just up and change our plans like that. We've been looking forward—"

"I know, I know," the clerk said tiredly.

"I must say," Jennifer said, "that you are most impolite. We should complain to the management."

"Go ahead," the clerk retorted, turning his back on them.

They stared at him, then slowly turned away and walked across the lobby. They became aware that there had been an eavesdropper on their conversation with the clerk. It was the black-haired man with the dead-white face.

"Don't look now," Jennifer muttered, "but clammy-eyes is looking at us."

"At you," Jerry corrected.

"He gives me the shivers," Jennifer said as they reached the revolving doors and went outside.

They stood there, staring at the truck stop across the highway, the only other building in sight. Beyond it was nothing but evergreens, and in the far distance a range of mountains.

"Oh well," Jennifer said bravely, "we have a simply wonderful room, and the mountain air is very nice. And we have each other. That's what counts most."

"We could wire the bank to send us some money out of my savings account," Jerry said doubtfully.

"No. That's for our old age."

"Our old age," Jerry said in soulful tenderness. Jennifer sighed. They moved close together.

"I beg your pardon," a voice behind them said. Automatically they turned, to see the man with the black hair and dead-white face. His lips were stretched in a wound of a smile. "I couldn't help overhearing you in-

side," he went on. "I could perhaps help you in your desire to see the Caverns. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Daar Olgno."

"Pleased to meet you," Jerry said with obvious disinterest. He started to turn away.

"I could possibly get you in to see the Caverns," Daar Olgno repeated.

"Huh?" Jerry said, while Jennifer gripped his arm. "How? Do you know someone?"

"The main entrance is closed," Olgno said. "But suppose we go across the highway and have a cup of coffee. Would you be my guests?"

JERRY LOOKED at Jennifer for guidance. She dipped her head slightly, still clinging to him.

"All right," he said.

As they crossed the highway Jennifer whispered into his ear, "I wish you hadn't accepted, Jerry."

"But I thought you nodded!" Jerry said. "Anyway, we can't back out now."

In the cafe Olgno chose the corner booth. Shortly they were served with coffee. When the waitress departed he leaned forward.

"If you really want to see the Caverns of the Titans," he said, "I know of an entrance not far from here. Approximately a mile. I am planning on making the trip. If you would care to come along. . ."

Jerry looked at Jennifer, determined not to say anything. She waited, and when she realized he wasn't going to commit himself she said, "I—I guess we could."

"It would be a pleasure," Olgno purred. "That's why you came here, isn't it? To see the Caverns of the Titans?"

"Are they really man-made and thousands of years old?" Jennifer asked. "How do you happen to know

of this other entrance?"

"Shhh!" Olgno cautioned. "No one around here knows about it. I discovered this other entrance many years ago, and explored several miles of the underground corridors. Yes, they're man-made. Carved from solid rock thousands of years ago. You will find them interesting."

Jerry had been watching his wife. He decided she wasn't as afraid as she had seemed to be. "When should we start, Mr. Olgno?" he asked.

"How about right after lunch?" Daar Olgno said. "Your wife should wear some walking shoes. We will be going through the woods most of the way to the entrance. That would give us time to explore a little way into the Caverns—and return before dark."

Jerry and Jennifer looked at each other. "Okay," Jerry said.

"Very well," Olgno's tone was decisive. "The thing to do is this: tell the desk clerk you are going for a walk in the woods. When you leave the hotel go south along the highway. I will join you after you have gone a way." He stood up, dropped a dollar bill on the table, and left.

"I wonder if we're doing right," Jerry said.

"Of course," Jennifer said. "Isn't that why we came here? Look Jerry, he didn't touch his coffee."

Jerry stared at the cup. It was exactly as it had been placed by the waitress. He glanced down at his own cup. "And neither have we!" he said. But he wondered why, for just a moment, it had seemed so significant that Olgno hadn't touched his coffee.

IT WAS twelve o'clock. Jerry and Jennifer paused in the doorway to the hotel restaurant. "Look!" she said. "There's Mark Grant—"

Someone brushed past them, then

stopped. It was Madame Cosmick. "Oh, hello there!" she smiled. "Won't you two join me at lunch? I'd love to have you."

"Sure!" Jerry said without thinking. "That is," he stammered, "if Jenny—"

"Why, we'd be delighted," Jennifer hurried in.

After they were seated at their table, Madame Cosmick looked from one to the other of them, smiling serenely. "So you are honeymooners. I can tell."

"How did you guess?" Jennifer asked, interested.

"It's written all over both of you. You're so much in love."

"Yes," Jennifer said, "we are." She smiled tenderly at Jerry, "I love him very much."

"That's as it should be. You've been married—how long?"

"Since yesterday," Jerry confessed.

That led into the details. Jenny worked in the drugstore, he was a clerk in the hardware and ate his lunch at the drugstore. They had planned on getting married for two whole months before they did.

The food was brought. The waiter left them again. The subject of conversation seemed exhausted.

"What do you do, Madame Cosmick?" Jennifer asked.

"Me?" Madame Cosmick laughed delightedly. "I am a biochemical physicist."

"A—a what?" Jerry said.

"A biochemical physicist. I explore the physical properties of organic substances."

"Oh," Jerry grinned. "Jenny thought you might be a fortune teller. Your name, you know."

Madame Cosmick laughed, bit into a piece of toast with flawless white teeth. "No," she said, "I do not tell fortunes. I make fortunes, perhaps. I own a company that makes various

things, including cosmetics."

"Why did you come here?"

Madame Cosmick shrugged. "For a rest, perhaps."

Jerry glanced at his wristwatch. "Oh my gosh," he said to Jenny. "We'd better hurry. He'll be waiting."

They wolfed down their lunch. Jerry reached for his wallet.

"No no," Madame Cosmick said quickly. "I invited you. Remember?"

"Well... thanks," Jerry said. A flash of inspiration hit him as he and Jenny stood up to go. "Would you have dinner with us this evening?"

"Of course! I'd be delighted! At seven then?"

MARK GRANT watched the newlyweds leave. Then, grinding out his cigarette, he went over to the table where Madame Cosmick sat alone. He smiled. "Our newlyweds are quite transparent, aren't they?" "Aren't all newlyweds?" she countered, studying him.

"Would you like to join me over dessert?" Mark asked.

"Afraid I'm too lazy. Why don't you join me?"

Mark sat down. He offered her a cigarette. She accepted while he looked at her long, carefully manicured nails. "Your own product?" he asked.

"The nail polish?" She laughed. "Yes." She placed an elbow on the table and rested her chin on her fist. "I've been trying to figure out what you do for a living," she said. As he started to speak, she shook her head. "No—no. Let me guess. It's more interesting. You could be something as prosaic as an engineer, nothing so unusual as a mystic. You're the type of man who, if he worked in my factory and didn't become general manager within a year, I would fire—so he could find something worthy

of his caliber. And yet, I don't believe you do anything for a living. Probably you have independent means. That raises a question in my mind. You don't seem the type who would come to a tourist hotel catering to those who want to see some Caves. Not unless it was something else. Not idle curiosity. Am I right so far?"

"So far," Mark said, "you have said nothing that wouldn't apply equally to yourself."

She frowned. "That may be so. But it does apply to you?"

Mark studiously ground out his cigarette. "You are a biochemical physicist," he said. "This morning, early, I opened a door by mistake and saw carts of food, and trained nurses. They went to the top floor. There's a door blocking the stairway up there. It was put in last night."

"Yes?" Madame Cosmick said.

"I could suggest that you are here because of that, except for one thing."

"What's that?" she asked with a hint of mockery.

"Whatever happened that caused them to shut down the Caverns didn't crystallize until yesterday afternoon. And it would be too early for them to have called in anyone. You came here on your own."

"Yes?" The faint mockery was tinged with amusement.

"Either that," Mark said, "or you have other lines besides biochemical physics."

"Such as?"

"My reading is very deficient in some fields," Mark smiled apologetically. "For example, I've never read a book on diseases communicable to man from vampire bats." He smiled. "Have you perhaps written such a book? Or perhaps a chapter in a book dealing with—" He stopped abruptly, smiling with smug satis-

faction.

"Now," Madame Cosmick said, "you really do interest me. I wonder how you knew. . . ."

Still smiling, Mark stood up.

"Where are you going?" Madame Cosmick asked. "We haven't had our dessert."

"We can have it later," Mark said. "I wanted to satisfy myself concerning you. Now, I have to satisfy myself about someone else."

"Who?" She smiled at him archly.

"He signed himself on the register as Daar Olgno," Mark said. From her puzzled expression, he felt sure she didn't know whom he was talking about.

He hurried into the lobby. The swinging doors were still revolving. He had seen Jerry and Jennifer cross from the elevators to them. He followed.

When he reached the pavement, he saw them walking at a rapid pace to the south, away from the entrance to the Caverns.

"I WONDER why he had us meet him down the highway?" Jennifer asked. "It seems to me the natural thing would have been to meet us at the hotel."

"You don't realize the value of what he has," Jerry said. "Probably the other entrance is closed because of a cave-in. If that's so, this entrance could be worth plenty of money."

"Oh," Jennifer said vaguely. "Then why didn't he open it to the public when he discovered it?"

"You're too suspicious," Jerry said. "Don't worry. I can handle that guy."

The hotel was out of sight now. Ahead, the four-lane highway stretched into the distance. An occasional car sped by. On either side the pine trees densely bordered the

road. To the right, steeply rising, was the slope of Mount Shasta.

"Hallo!" Daar Olgno's voice came from behind them. They turned. He had stepped out from the concealment of the trees. "This way!" he called.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Olgno," Jerry called. "Come on, honey." He took Jennifer's hand.

Daar Olgno waited until they reached him, then led the way into the forest. They hurried to keep up with him.

"Don't go so fast," Jennifer complained.

"Sorry," Olgno said, slowing down a little.

Jerry studied his surroundings. They were not on a path. He wondered how the man knew where he was going. He wanted to ask him, but didn't want to show his ignorance of woodsmanship. He decided there must be some perfectly simple explanation.

They skirted the base of a steep, densely-wooded slope. They walked on a carpet of pine needles. Overhead, the pines formed a roof of cathedral-like pillars that hid the sky and the sun.

They came to a place where the steep slope became a cliff. After a short distance the cliff bulged out to form an overhang. Daar Olgno paused at the entrance to a deep gash in the face of the cliff. "We're here," he announced.

A STEEP trail led between the walls of the gash, with loose fragments of rock making the footing precarious. They had gone less than fifty feet when it turned. The split in the rock came together overhead. They reached a dead end.

"Where's the entrance?" Jerry asked.

"Right here. I covered it with loose rocks." Olgno began picking

them up and laying them down behind him. Jerry joined in.

Almost immediately the top of the opening was revealed. Excited, Jerry worked twice as hard. In ten minutes the opening was large enough for them to squirm through.

Olgno went first. Jerry followed, and guided Jennifer through. They stood on a flat floor of rock. The opening they had come through was a rough oval of light. The other way was darkness. While they stood there, catching their breath, a faint sound reached them from out of the darkness. It was a high-pitched piping.

"What was that?" Jennifer whispered. *What was that what was that*, whispered back at him from the depths of the darkness.

Daar Olgno chuckled. "You see?" he said. "Sounds echo in places such as these." He took something from his pocket. A faint glow grew from it, rapidly becoming a brilliant cone of light. "A hand generator flashlight," he explained.

It revealed walls that were perpendicular and smooth. Jerry and Jennifer gasped in surprise. The ceiling was ten feet above them, arched smoothly. Glistening white insects hopped away into the dark.

"Crickets," Olgno explained. "Harmless. Come. We'll have time to explore a mile or so before we have to turn around and come back."

He went forward. Jerry and Jennifer hesitated, but there was nothing for them to do but follow. They glanced back occasionally. The oval of light where they had come in grew smaller in the distance, until finally they could no longer see it.

The cone of light revealed an intersection ahead. They paused. Four man-made tunnels came together here.

"Do not be alarmed," Daar Olgno

said. "I'm going to let the light die down so you can experience absolute darkness for a moment."

"Gee, that'd be interesting. Wouldn't it Jenny?" Jerry said.

"Y-yes," she said uncertainly. "Hold my hand, Jerry."

The cone of light grew dim and vanished. For a second there was the glowing filament. Then it was gone.

Jerry turned his head the way they had come. "Hey!" he said. "It isn't absolutely dark. That opening we made lets in some light. It lights up the—"

Jerry felt a glancing blow against his face. There was a swishing sound. A shrill squeek. A scream of terror deafened him. Jenny! He groped for her in the darkness.

The light appeared again, growing rapidly brighter. The screaming continued in terror-stricken rhythm. Jennifer—on the floor of the cave, her arms flailing. Something rose from her and swooped off into the darkness.

Exclaiming forcefully in a strange language, Daar Olgno had dropped to his knees. With one hand he ripped Jennifer's blouse from her shoulder. In the exposed flesh were two dots of bright, glistening red.

"Work the light," Olgno ordered grimly, pushing it into Jerry's hand. Numbly, Jerry did as he was told.

Olgno took a small tin out of his pocket and worked off the lid. With his fingers he scooped out some of the white salve and rubbed it into the two small wounds. Jennifer's screaming had degenerated into a soft whimpering.

"There, there, my dear," Olgno soothed. "It will be all right now. The bite of the Black Angel can be dangerous, but not when the salve is applied in time. You'll be all right."

"Let's g-get out of here. . . ." Jennifer whimpered. She sat up and tried to pull her torn blouse over

her exposed shoulder. She looked up at Jerry. Suddenly she burst into tears and held out her arms.

He reached down and lifted her to her feet, holding her close.

Daar Olgno extracted the dying flashlight from his fingers.

MARK GRANT wasn't sure why he had decided to follow Jerry and Jennifer Eggsbrook. Certainly, there was nothing suspicious about their actions. As he followed them along the highway, keeping to the side of the road where they couldn't see him if they looked back, he decided his impulse was a combination of hunch and boredom, perhaps mostly the latter.

By the time the hotel was out of sight, he was making plans to wait until they joined whoever it was they were meeting, then skirt around ahead and "accidentally" encounter them. They might invite him to join them on their hike through the woods.

He left the protection of the trees to see if they had stopped. They were nowhere in sight. "Damn!" he muttered. "Which way did they go?"

He stood there for a moment, searching for where they had been the last time he saw them. He recalled a particular shrub. He estimated the time. In that way he narrowed down the stretch where they must have entered the woods. With his landmarks fixed, he stepped out into the open and boldly walked ahead.

He reached the fifty-yard stretch where he was sure they must have headed into the woods. He walked hurriedly along the edge of the highway, searching for a path, or at least signs of disturbed dirt. Not finding any, he crossed over to the other side and made his way back along the fifty-yard stretch. There was still no path. Not even an animal trail.

He went over the ground again,

more carefully. The shoulders of the highway were gravelled. They blended into the carpet of pine needles that stretched on under the trees. It would have taken inch by inch inspection to find where they had walked.

There was something else he might do. Perhaps away from the road there might be soft ground where they had left footprints. He went into the woods for fifty feet and paralleled the highway. Though he found places where the carpet of needles was sparse and the ground was soft enough to leave prints, he still didn't find anything.

He grew impatient. He had wasted twenty minutes. Unless they had just stopped somewhere to talk or look at something, they must now be almost a mile away.

He went back to the highway and tried to decide which way they must have gone. On the one side the ground sloped downward. On the other, in the distance, it went into the slope of Mount Shasta. In that direction might lie enough of interest to lure the hiker. At least, he decided, the probability was greater that they had gone toward the mountain.

HE WENT back into the woods, advancing toward the hills in a zig-zag course. Very shortly he made a discovery. Every fifty feet or so there was a tree with a broad scab of pitch about three feet from the ground.

He stopped at one of these and picked at it with his pocket knife. The pitch was old and hard. It could be natural, or it could be the scar of a blaze cut.

He went back to the last one, then retraced his steps to the one he had just examined. They were too much alike in size and shape to be accidental. Continuing on in a straight line about fifty feet he found another.

"That proves it," he muttered.

He went on boldly. Eventually he spied a place where the ground was soft and there were prints of shoes. It was obvious now that the Eggsbrooks and their companion were following an old blazed trail.

Why? The question disturbed him. He broke into a distance-consuming trot. He reached the place where the hill went up steeply. Gambling that the trail didn't go up, he turned to the right, and was shortly rewarded with seeing another blaze mark.

He came to the base of the cliff. He started to step out into the open. A movement off to the right made him pause and peek out cautiously. The Eggsbrooks and Daar Olgno were hurrying toward the spot where he was hidden.

He watched them. Jennifer looked as though she had fallen. As she came nearer he could see she had been crying. Her blouse was ripped. She kept lifting the torn piece over her shoulder, and it kept falling off. The rest of her clothes were coated with dust that she hadn't bothered to brush off. There was a look of fear in her eyes.

Jerry walked beside her, half turned to her and watching her with anxious concern.

"I'll take you as far as the highway," Olgno said suddenly. "Then I must come back. You must promise not to say anything about this. Do you understand? Not a word to anyone."

They hurried on. Frowning, Mark watched them disappear in the direction he had come.

He debated whether to follow them or try to find where they had been. It would be an hour before Olgno could return. He decided to go on.

He followed the base of the cliff to where it ended and was replaced by the steep slope again, and dense forest. None of the trees had blaze

marks. He had gone too far. He retraced his steps more slowly, searching the face of the cliff, and the trees that came almost to it. Here and there were deep gashes in the cliff. He followed some of these to where they ended without finding anything promising.

Eventually he gave up and started back toward the highway. He was unaware of Daar Olgno's dark brooding eyes following him thoughtfully.

When he reached the hotel the sun had gone down, and it was growing dark.

ENTERING the dining room he glanced quickly around. At a table near the vacant orchestra platform he saw Madame Cosmick and the Eggsbrooks. Madame Cosmick saw him and waved for him to join them.

He took the vacant chair, and lit a cigarette. With his eyes on the flame of his lighter, he asked casually, "Where were you two all afternoon?"

"Oh, just out walking in the woods," Jennifer said. Mark saw she was frightened, and trying hard to conceal it. Her voice was a little too high and too gay.

"Where were you this afternoon, Mark?" Madame Cosmick asked.

"Could be I went for a walk in the woods too," Mark said. He was studying both Jerry and Jennifer. Jennifer was definitely frightened. Jerry seemed genuinely worried about her, as was only natural.

A bellboy suddenly materialized beside the table. "You are wanted in the lobby, Madame Cosmick," he said.

An expression of concern and worry crossed her face. She rose hastily. Giving Mark a meaningful look, she hurried away. His eyes followed her, while he wondered what she had intended to convey to him. Was

it that she wanted him to remain at the table and keep an eye on the Eggsbrooks? Or was she trying to tell him something about the seventh floor?

He became aware that Jerry was scowling at him. "I'm afraid we'll have to leave you, Mr. Grant. Jenny doesn't feel well. We had quite an experience this afternoon—"

"Jerry!" Jennifer cried out. "You—you impossible beast!" Suddenly she shoved back her chair and ran from the dining room.

Jerry stared at her in alarm. He pushed back his own chair, anachronistically muttered, "Pardon me," to Mark, and hurried after his wife.

IN THE LOBBY Jerry saw the revolving doors still moving. Jenny was nowhere in sight. She could have caught the elevator which was even now moving upward, from the way the light was moving in the number plate above the doors. What had gotten into her?

He decided to take a quick look outside before going up to the room. The doors were still revolving when he reached them. This crystalized his conviction that Jenny had gone outside.

He was terribly upset—really worried about her. In the room when they were getting dressed for dinner, she had been a trifle feverish, had cried a couple of times. It had definitely been a horrible experience, that vampire bat landing on her and biting into her shoulder. What had Daar Olgno called it? A Black Angel. Just like that was its name and he had known about them before. But of course he must have. He had been in that tunnel before.

By now Jerry was out at the edge of the highway. The huge neon signs of the hotel weren't on. From all indications they wanted to close down

and were just waiting until all the guests moved out. But the truck stop across the highway was brightly lit. Maybe Jenny was over there.

He started to cross. A car was coming. He waited, keeping his eyes on the approaching headlights. Suddenly he saw something that made him freeze in horror. It was just a brief glimpse. All he could be sure of was that the figure was a girl. She was running at the edge of the highway.

"Jennifer!" he shouted. But he couldn't see her now. The car was between them.

He ran after her, taking to the pavement for greater speed. His eyes became adjusted to the dark. He could see her, less than a hundred yards ahead. He called to her again. She was barely perceptible as a moving shape. She seemed to have heard him, and stopped. Then he heard her laugh. It was mad laughter on a shrill hysterical key. Insane, terror-stricken.

"I'm coming, darling!" he shouted.

The laughter stopped as though cut with a knife.

He seemed to see her standing, waiting for him. But when he approached the spot it was just a small tree sticking out from the edge of the woods.

A car came into sight, its headlights sweeping the darkness away from both sides of the highway. There was no sign of Jennifer. She had gone from the highway into the woods.

Calling to her continuously, he stumbled a few yards into the darkness. Branches struck at his face, tore at his trousers. He came to the sick realization that he would have to return to the hotel for a flashlight.

For a long minute he stood still, listening, trying to catch some sound that would tell him if she were near. Then, holding his arms over his face to protect it from tree branches, he

went back to the highway, and ran toward the hotel.

In the lobby he rushed to the desk. "Have you got a flashlight?" he demanded of the clerk. Even as he spoke he saw the chrome barrel of one on the counter within reach. "Thanks," he said, grabbing it.

He started back toward the revolving doors. Just as he reached them he decided someone should know. Mark Grant! He about-faced and ran to the dining room doors. He saw Mark at the table, eating, and alone. Mark saw him at the same time.

"Jerry's run away into the woods!" Jerry said. "I'm going after her."

He didn't wait to see what Mark would do. He turned and ran, through the revolving doors and down the highway.

MARK IMPULSIVELY started to rise and follow him. Quick common sense took possession of him. If Jennifer had gone running off into the woods it was for only one practical purpose, to make Jerry follow her. She wouldn't go far. She would be afraid of the dark. She might hide and wait for him, and let herself be found, in tears. There would be a touching scene as they made up. And that would be that.

He smiled and resumed his eating, his thoughts turning to the more interesting problem of what had called Madame Cosmick from the table, and what she had meant by the meaningful look she had given him.

A few moments later she appeared in the doorway. He waved to her. She came over and dropped into her chair with a sigh. Mark signalled to the waiter.

"No," she said. "I couldn't eat now. I'm too worried."

"What about?" Mark said. "Our newlyweds?"

She became aware they weren't

there. "Where'd they go?" she asked.

Mark chuckled. "It seems that Jennifer ran off into the woods to make Jerry run after her. She's probably hiding behind some clump of bushes watching for him. When he gets near enough she'll let herself be found."

"Oh, but they mustn't!" Madame Cosmick said, half rising. "That mad person is loose!"

Mark frowned. "What are you talking about?" he demanded.

She sighed and sat down. "I suppose you might as well know. On the top floor are about thirty people who were in the caverns when they were attacked by hundreds of vampire bats. They seem to have contracted some disease that makes them insane. One of them escaped by breaking a window and climbing down the fire escape. There were three, but two of them were caught."

"Good Lord!" Mark groaned. "Maybe Jerry's following that one. I didn't think Jennifer would brave the darkness. She's probably up in their room waiting for him to come up to apologize to him."

"We'd better go after him," Madame Cosmick said. "Those people are dangerous."

"I know," Mark said. "And poor Jerry's out there in the woods looking for her right now. I'll go after him."

"I'll go with you," she said.

Mark quickly extracted a bill from his wallet and dropped it beside his plate.

"You didn't seem surprised about the patients upstairs," Madame Cosmick said as they made their way to the lobby.

"No," he said; smiling wryly. "I'd already figured that part out."

"Even to what was wrong with them? The madness?"

"I've seen that before," he said. "It'll leave them after a while."

They were in the lobby now.

"I'd better call their room and see if Jennifer's there," Mark said.

He went to a booth. Madame Cosmick stood outside while he listened to the phone ringing in Eggsbrook's room. No one answered. He finally gave up. "Maybe Jerry's right," he said. "Maybe it was her he saw."

"Or maybe she's in her room and won't answer the phone," Madame Cosmick said. "She might think it was Jerry. I think I'll go up and find out. You go after him."

The desk clerk had been watching them. "Were you trying to get Mrs. Eggsbrook?" he called to them. "She's not in her room. She went out, with Mr. Olgno."

WHEN DAAR Olgno had stopped pumping at his hand-generator flashlight in the tunnel, Jennifer had crept closer to Jerry, feeling miserable and afraid. She felt a nameless fear of Olgno. She hadn't wanted to come with him. She didn't like his interest in Jerry and herself, and had kept trying to figure out some reason for it. She wasn't naive enough to think it might be attraction to her. Or perhaps too naive in another way even to think of it.

She had *felt* something swishing through the air toward her. When it struck, it gripped her with sharp claws. There was a sound. Horrible and indescribable, yet not louder than a faint whisper. Then there was the sharp stab of pain in her shoulder.

The next instant the light was going on again. The thing attached to her blinked its small beads of eyes. It crouched as though to spring. She had one fleeting look at its face. Then it swooped upward and was gone.

But something was happening inside her. There was a strange odor in her nostrils, a strange taste in her mouth. And more. There was a fear

and, experiencing it, she knew that she had never really experienced fear before.

Olgno was rubbing the salve into the twin wounds in her shoulder, but she wasn't aware of that. The fear held her in a paralysis that was complete except for her heart. She knew that in a moment she would leap up and run. It didn't matter where. She would run and run forever and forever, because it was the only thing that could make her tolerate the fear, even for an instant.

But then something else began to make itself felt. The fear was still there, but something had allied itself with it, changed it. It was no longer fear.

Then both the new emotion and the fear were gone. She still hadn't tagged that other emotion. She tried to call it back, but it wouldn't revive.

As they made their way back to the tunnel opening and out into the security of open places, she again became conscious of still a third emotion. Uncertainty. It flavored her every thought. She caught herself being uncertain that she loved Jerry. That was absurd. But she found herself being uncertain that she was afraid of Olgno.

By the time they reached the highway and Olgno said he would leave them and return to close the entrance to the cave, she was being uncertain about having married Jerry.

One part of her knew this was insane and abnormal, and wondered at it. What caused it? What caused those other abnormal emotions?

One part of her mind told her this was madness, and made her kiss her husband. And on their way down to the dining room she was conscious of the thoughtful, suspicious glances he gave her. Those glances made her uneasy.

And suddenly she thought she saw

Jerry as he really was. An impossible, stupid, dumb hardware clerk, capable only of wrapping water faucets and ringing up sales on a cash register. She had rushed out of the dining room with a vague recollection of having said something appropriate to her feelings. The elevator doors were just starting to close. She called, and ran across the lobby into the elevator.

Upstairs, with trembling fingers, she began to pack. She was going home. She and Jerry were through. Mr. Sanders in the drugstore would be more than glad to have her back at the soda fountain. The marriage could be annulled.

She became aware that she was in the center of the room, swaying dizzily. Her travel bags blurred when she tried to focus on them. Her thoughts seemed to flow sluggishly. She swayed.

The spell passed. She started toward the bed to continue her packing—and paused in uncertainty. Would she regret it? It would be awful if she really loved Jerry and didn't realize it until after the divorce. But it would be even worse if she stayed with him and eventually realized she didn't love him.

Or did she love Daar? If she could see him just once before she went down and caught the bus she could be sure. Just once. But what if he didn't love her? It would be awful to love a man who didn't return the feeling.

A knock at the door exploded into her thoughts. With a gasp she stared at the door. The conviction grew in her that Daar Olgno stood on the other side. She knew it. It was Fate. It was the way it happened in books.

She went toward the door, slowly, her eyes on the panel, feeling that some strange sense in her mind could see through, and see Daar's sensitive, kind features as he waited for her to

open the door.

She wanted to call out and ask who it was, but even more she wanted to just open the door and see him standing there. So she opened the door, and Daar Olgno was standing there.

She was unaware of the analytical, clinical inspection he gave her, the imperceptible light of satisfaction in his eyes. All she was aware of as she retreated slowly into the room was that he was there, as in a dream of happiness.

"You are ready to go with me, my darling?" he said, his voice soft and rich and deep.

"Yes," Jennifer said. "Oh, yes!"

And there was no part of her able to whisper words of caution, or to question.

Side by side they rode in the elevator down to the lobby, across it to the revolving doors. She was unaware of the sharp, wary looks Olgno darted at the dining room doors, at those in the lobby.

Outside, as they started for the nearest place where the trees approached the hotel, she placed her hand under his arm. Her eyes stared straight ahead, unseeing. In her heart, her very soul, there was an ineffable, perfect Peace.

WHEN THE desk clerk said that Mrs. Eggsbrook wasn't in her room but had gone out with Mr. Olgno, Madame Cosmick turned to Mark Grant.

"How long ago did they go out?" Mark asked the clerk.

The man smirked. "Less than five minutes ago."

"Less than five minutes," Mark said. "I should have time to reach it before they do."

"Reach what?" Madame Cosmick asked.

Mark glanced at the wiggling ears of the clerk and took her by the arm, steering her across the lobby until they were out of earshot.

"There's going to be some trouble," he said so softly that only she could hear him. "There isn't time to tell you everything. Not even to start. I'll just tell you this much. Daar Olgno is taking Jennifer with him to another entrance to the Caves, and they *aren't coming back*. That's why I've got to get to that entrance first, and stop him."

"Are you insane?" Madame Cosmick exclaimed. "Good Lord! What is there in those Caves? Nothing but poisonous bats and—and—" She had remembered that the reports were that the tunnels were man-made. She looked at him again, saw that he was serious. "I'm going with you," she said.

"No," Mark said. "I could be killed—or worse. Someone has to stay behind to see that both entrances to the labyrinth are permanently sealed up."

"No." She shook her head, her eyes dancing with excitement. "The first opportunity I've had to live dangerously in years, and I won't remain behind to be errand boy. Come on. Let's go. And you can call me Joan."

"Okay, Joan," Mark said, with a mixture of grimness and admiration. "But you're going to have to keep up with me. We've got to get there first, and they have ten or fifteen minutes' head start on us."

THEY PUSHED through the revolving doors and started down the side of the highway. They had gone scarcely a hundred yards when a running figure loomed out of the darkness. Mark, without knowing who it was, seized the man and brought him

to a stop. Then he saw it was Jerry. "Mr. Grant!" Jerry said in recognition. "I found her, but it isn't Jenny. She's crazy. I don't know who she is. I couldn't hold her. She got away. But it isn't Jenny."

"We know," Mark said. "We can't take time to do anything about her. Daar Olgno's got your wife. We have to catch them before they reach that other entrance."

"Daar Olgno's... got... my wife?" Jerry said, trying to grasp the meaning of the words.

"Snap out of it!" Mark said sharply. "Let's get going. Can you remember where that entrance is?"

"Daar Olgno's got my wife!" Jerry screeched. "Where is he? Let me just get my hands on that cold-blooded snake! The entrance? God! I don't know how to get there. He just led us through the woods, and there wasn't any path."

"There's a path if you know how to look for it," Mark said. "I know the way to the base of the cliff. Can you find the entrance when we get there?"

"I'm sure I can find it from there," Jerry said.

They began walking rapidly down the highway. Jerry's breathing settled down to normal.

"What happened this afternoon?" Mark asked.

"It was pretty horrible for Jenny," Jerry said. "Olgno took us to this other entrance only he knew about. He discovered it a long time ago. We went inside. It was a man-made tunnel all right. We went along it maybe a hundred yards. We came to where another tunnel intersected it. Daar let his hand-operated flashlight die down. Then this bat came out of the darkness and bit Jenny on the shoulder."

"Good Heavens!" Madame Cos-

mick exclaimed. "Then she—"

"Then what happened?" Mark interrupted her.

"Olgno got his flashlight working again. He gave it to me, and rubbed the bites with some kind of salve he had with him. Then he told her the bite of the Black Angel can be dangerous, but not when the salve is applied in time. But Jenny was hurt, and frightened. So we turned around and came back to the hotel."

"He called the bat a Black Angel?" Mark asked. "Did you get to see what it looked like?"

"Not very well. When it came it was dark. Olgno got his flash going. I could just begin to see it, on Jenny, when it spread its wings and leaped into the air and flew away down the tunnel."

"But I can't understand it!" Madame Cosmick said. "The bite of those bats drove all the others insane in a matter of minutes. Could Mr. Olgno know enough about them to know of a salve that could counteract whatever causes the madness?"

Mark sighed. "There are many things occidental medicine doesn't know about." He took a hand generator flashlight out of his pocket and worked it until light shone against the trees at the side of the highway. "This is where the path begins," he said. He directed the beam at a tree. "See that scab of pitch? That's an old blaze mark, made years ago. I'm going to keep my flash working. We've got to get ahead as fast as we can. If they see us or hear us we can't help it. We've got to get to that opening before they do."

"OCCIDENTAL medicine?" Madame Cosmick asked. "But I don't understand. What have bats in a cave in the United States got to do

with oriental medicine?"

"Come on," Mark said. "We've got to go faster." They broke into a half trot that almost doubled their speed. "I'll tell you this much, Joan," he added. "Those people on the top floor of the hotel will recover completely in a few days. All that's wrong with them is that they are being governed by an artificially-induced emotion of intense fear."

"Then why wasn't Jenny?" Joan said between breaths.

"Because the salve added another ingredient that shifted the emotional complex," Mark said. An instant later he put his hand over the flashlight lense, plunging them into darkness. "Listen!" he whispered.

Ahead, barely visible through the trees, was the ghostly face of the cliff, partially illuminated by the crescent moon. There was no slightest breeze. At first as they listened there was no sound except the distant one of cars on the highway.

Then came the unmistakable sound of rocks being dropped on rocks. It came from ahead and to the right, but a long way off, and faint.

"He's uncovering the opening again!" Jerry said, his voice ragged with emotion. "God! What's he done to Jenny? What is he going to do to her? Why is he taking her into that cave with the bats?"

"Get hold of yourself!" Mark said sharply. "You've got to take us the rest of the way, and in seconds. Maybe already the opening is big enough and they're about to slip through. In that labyrinth we might never find them."

He had uncovered the lense. They broke into a run. Five minutes later Jerry pointed to a rough gash in the cliff.

"There!" he said.

Mark took the lead climbing the

steep path into the cleft. The sound of rocks falling on rocks had stopped. It could be because Olgno didn't want to give away his location, or because they had already entered the tunnel.

Reckless of danger, Mark plunged ahead. He reached the end of the path. His light touched and revealed the dark opening. He stopped. Madame Cosmick and Jerry Eggsbrook reached him. All three stared at the small opening, absorbing the full meaning of its silent testimony.

Daar Olgno and Jennifer had already entered the tunnel.

"But why?" Madame Cosmick asked, wonderingly. "What is there in there?"

Mark seemed not to have heard her. He was staring at that black hole, barely large enough for a person to slide through. Suddenly he shuddered.

Madame Cosmick took her eyes off him and glanced at the opening again. She gasped in fright. Two small eyes were watching them from inside. Too small and too close together to be human. They winked out. The opening was black once more.

"What is it, Mark?" she whispered, drawing close to him.

"One of the guardians, Joan," Mark said.

"Bats," Jerry said. His teeth began chattering.

"No, not bats," Mark said. He shook himself as though awakening from a dream. "Joan, you and Jerry had better go back to the hotel. I'm going after them."

"No, Mark," she said firmly. "Jerry should return to the hotel and inform them of what's happened. I'm staying with you."

"No," Mark said. "Alone I might stand a chance."

"I'm going with you, Mark," Joan

said. "Don't try to stop me. If you die, I die. But I'm going with you."

"Good God!" Jerry groaned. "What are we waiting for? Jenny's in there!" He tried to get past Mark.

"All right, we'll all go," Mark said. "Let me go in first. I want to talk to the guardian—if he can understand. This is so far from..."

He stooped down at the opening and called softly in strange syllables. There was a long moment of silence. The same type of strange syllables scudded from the interior of the cave, higher pitched.

When they stopped Mark replied, while his two companions listened in amazement and disbelief. To them it seemed impossible that any human being could utter such strange sounds. Yet, it was unmistakably a language.

MARK STRAIGHTENED and turned to them. "He says he doesn't know about them entering. He just arrived and saw our light. We are to wait while he looks into it."

"That bat said that?" Jerry exclaimed incredulously.

"He's not a bat," Mark said. "He's as human as you or I—in his own way."

"You said he was a guardian," Joan said. "Guardian of what?"

In the light from the beam, reflected from the granite walls of the cliff, Mark's lips twisted into a crooked smile. "Guardian of the Serpent's prison, you might say. Although it's not the way legends have brought it down to us. The Serpent is a race. A manlike race, perhaps even an offshoot of the human race, just as the guardians or Black Angels are." He was silent for a moment, then added, "Daar Olgno is one of them. In fact, he flaunted it, because Daar Olgno is the name of the Serpent, which is

the name of a race, not an individual. In an ancient language, it means stealer of souls."

"If you knew that, why didn't you stop him before?" Jerry asked.

"Because I didn't know. I knew what his name meant, but it could have been coincidence. It wasn't until tonight when you told me you and your wife had been here with him, and he had a salve that could fight the serum, the guardians inject, that I knew beyond any doubt. And it was too late."

"Serum?" Joan said. She laughed weakly. "I'm beginning to be utterly confused."

"Yes. Serum. The guardians make it. Here and there over the world geographical changes break open the tunnels of the labyrinths. People discover them and go in to explore. The serum was developed to drive them away. It acts on the system to create unreasoning fear that will cause the person to want to escape. Afterward they rationalize it as something evil that happened to them. They stay away. Like here, for instance. The tunnels were broken into by the highway construction crew. They were immediately commercialized. People started going in in greater numbers. It was something new to the guardians. They probably waited to see what would happen, ready to make their attack if the penetration of the labyrinth became too organized."

"I'm going in after Jenny," Jerry said desperately. "I don't believe any damn bat could talk, and it's a cinch they're afraid of light." He turned on the flashlight he had borrowed from the desk clerk, and which he had been using constantly until he joined Mark and Joan. Its light was bright for a brief moment, then degenerated into a feeble yellow glow.

"I WOULDN'T, Jerry," Mark said. "The *Noro Olgno* or Black Angel will find them. They would be angry if we penetrated their domain."

"I agree with Jerry," Joan Cosmick said. "It's too fantastic to be believable. Things that look like unusually large bats, that leave a bite like a bat's, yet which you say are really human beings, guarding still another race of human beings that look like us, but aren't. Or are they? Mr. Olgno looked enough like us to pass as one of us. He has a very pale complexion, but otherwise doesn't look different."

"I've never seen one of the Serpent before," Mark said. "So far as I know, no living person had up to now. I know the legends about them. The most authentic is the one that they are cold-blooded, like snakes and other reptiles."

"I can't believe that either," Joan said. "The human brain is too delicate a mechanism to exist in a cold-blooded creature. It wouldn't function properly much below ninety-eight degrees."

"You're talking about if one of us became cold-blooded," Mark said. "The argument can't apply to an organism that's hereditarily that way. But as I said, it's just one of the legends about them. So far as I know, the Daar Olgno have been imprisoned since before modern history." He frowned. "And I can't understand how one of them got out. That salve. Maybe that's the answer. Could it be that the Serpent has developed scientifically, so that now it's ready to break free?"

"Look!" Joan exclaimed, pointing at the opening into the tunnel.

There seemed to be light coming from it. Mark and Jerry stooped down so they could see in better.

"Jenny!" Jerry called.

Mark blinked his eyes in surprise and incredulity. Fifty feet away, and

walking toward the exit as calmly as sightseers, were Daar Olgno and Jennifer Eggsbrook. Olgno's hand generator flashlight was glowing brightly. As he looked, Olgno said something to Jennifer, who turned her head and looked at him with a bright and perfectly normal smile, then laughed.

Mark's gaze went beyond them. In the distant blackness of the tunnel he could see several pairs of glowing pinpoints, the eyes of Black Angels, watching.

Olgno and Jennifer were a few feet away from the opening now. Olgno saw them. Mark saw his eyes widen as though in surprise.

"Hello!" Olgno said good-naturedly.

Joan Cosmick's voice whispered in Mark's ear. "I think," she said, "I will ask them to put me with those on the seventh floor of the hotel. I'm sure I must be insane. None of this can be happening."

"YOU FIRST, Jennifer," Olgno was saying.

"Thank God!" Jerry breathed as he crowded past Mark to help his wife out through the small opening.

Mark stepped back, frowning in perplexity. Of course there was no reason for Olgno to have taken Jennifer with him in the first place, that would make sense. But this made even less sense.

Jennifer was out. She was being quite impersonal toward Jerry.

Olgno wormed his way through the opening and stood up, brushing his clothes off quite casually.

"Mrs. Eggsbrook recovered her courage," he explained, "and wanted to see more of the cave. Where were you, Mr. Eggsbrook? We looked for you before starting out and couldn't find you." He frowned down at the opening. "Will someone help me close this up?" he asked. He glanced sharp-

ly at Mark and Joan. "I hope you will promise not to say anything about this. This is my own entrance. I discovered it and it's on property I acquired. I own it. I want to keep it secret."

"We'll talk about that later," Mark said. "Let's get back to the hotel. Okay?"

He helped Olgno put enough rocks over the hole to conceal it. Then all five of them made their way down the steep path to the base of the cliff.

Jennifer and Jerry were well ahead, talking in low tones. Suddenly she turned and came back to the others. "I'm leaving Jerry," she said. "I want all of you to be witness, and to make him leave me alone."

"But why?" Joan exclaimed.

"Because he's the jealous type," Jennifer said, "and because I've discovered I don't love him. It was all a mistake."

"Quiet a minute!" Mark said.

In the silence the sound of rocks falling against rocks could be heard from the direction they had come.

"Something's coming out of the Cave," Jerry whispered in horror.

"Nonsense," Olgno said. "Just rocks falling from the cliff. What else could it be? Let's get on to the hotel."

"That, at least, is a sensible suggestion," Joan Cosmick said with a nervous laugh. "And don't you worry, Jerry. Jenny will be all right in a few days."

"I'm all right now," Jennifer said.

"Let's get moving," Mark suggested, going in the lead and lighting the way with his hand generator flashlight. He glanced back to see if they were following. They were coming in single file, Joan right behind him, Jennifer next, with Jerry at her heels, and Olgno last.

They reached the point where they turned away from the cliff and went

into the forest. Mark glanced back the way they had come. Was that a movement off in the darkness? For an instant he thought it was. Then he wasn't sure. Olgno's flashlight blinded him.

Abruptly Joan's eyes widened. "Look out!" she screamed.

Mark turned. A figure was rushing at him from the darkness. Instinctively he crouched. This was a man. He knew what to do. He waited until the man was almost upon him, then stepped in with a swift jab to the jaw.

HE BECAME aware that he had stopped pumping the handle of the flashlight. He worked it furiously until it was again bright. The knuckles of his free hand were still stinging from the blow.

Joan was beside him, staring down at the unconscious figure. She was wrinkling her nose in horror and disgust. Mark caught the odor. It was reptilian.

He stopped quickly and touched the bare skin of the shoulder. It was not warm as would be the shoulder of any normal person. He stood up again, slowly, his senses alert, his eyes darting into the darkness through the trees.

"God!" It was Jerry. "Is that a man? He looks like he came from the tunnel!"

"He did," Mark said. "And there's more like him surrounding us." He looked around. "Where's Olgno?"

"He's gone!" Jennifer cried. "Daar!" She started to rush after him. Mark seized her wrist.

She fought to free herself. "Let me go!" she cried frantically.

"Help me, Jerry," Mark said grimly.

"With pleasure," Jerry said. He stepped in and took her wrist. When

she struggled he twisted it.

"Jerry!" she wailed. "You're hurting me!"

"I'll hurt you worse if you don't behave," he said.

Joan Cosmick was peering into the darkness. "There are several of them," she said. "What'll we do?"

"We can't let them get us," Mark said. "If they do we're done for. They'll take us into the labyrinth and close it behind them. We'll never get away."

"Let me go!" Jennifer wailed. "I love Daar!"

"Hang onto her, Jerry," Mark said. "She'll be all right when the drug wears off."

"I can handle her," Joan said. "That would leave Jerry free to help you fight them off if they close in."

Jennifer started kicking at Jerry's shins. "Ouch!" he said. Then, angrily, he slapped her sharply. She stopped kicking and began to cry. He stared at her incredulously, then turned to Mark with an unbelieving expression. "I hit her," he said softly.

"Let me have her," Joan said grimly.

With reluctance Jerry gave in and joined Mark, who was jerking his flashlight in random directions, trying to catch a glimpse of anyone who might try to attack.

"What we've got to do," Mark said, "is try to get to the highway. They may not attack. And I don't think they have any weapons. I wish I had a gun."

"Lead on, MacDuff," Joan Cosmick said grimly. "Jennifer and I will be right behind you."

"Why don't they rush us?" Jerry asked. "They outnumber us."

"That I don't know," Mark said. "In my experience, though, people who know nothing about using their

fists show almost a superstitious awe of those who do." He chuckled grimly. "And I did lay that one out with one blow."

"And how," Jerry agreed. "What—" He staggered, dazed. A rock had struck him.

Mark cursed under his breath, watching warily. Jerry was rubbing his shoulder gently.

TWO MORE rocks came, missing their targets by wide margins. And still there was no sign of movement in the darkness.

"Why don't they rush us?" Jerry muttered wonderingly. "It wouldn't take many of them to overwhelm us."

"Go ahead and tell them," Joan said. "Maybe they hadn't thought of it."

A scream shattered the stillness of the night. It came from ahead. It was repeated, high-pitched.

"A woman?" Mark exclaimed.

"It must be the one who escaped," Joan groaned. "They'll get her."

But suddenly through the trees the woman materialized out of the darkness, half naked, her clothes hanging in tatters. Her eyes were wild and unseeing. She was still screaming.

"Stop her, Jerry," Mark said. "I can't let the flashlight die out."

Jerry tried to seize her by the wrists. Her hands clawed out wildly, raking him across the face.

"Hit her!" Mark said, but Jerry had already done so, his roundhouse swing catching her on the side of the jaw by pure luck. Her eyes glazed, over. She dropped. "Good work," Mark commended. "Can you pick her up and carry her?"

"Oh boy," Jerry said. "I'm feeling my oats now!"

She was a small woman. He picked her up clumsily and swung her limp

form over his shoulder.

"Let's hope you can keep on feeling your oats," Mark said. "If we don't make it to the hotel and get help we'll never see daylight again. They'll take us into the caves and keep us there, if they don't kill us."

The light shone on something. It was a heavy stick. A dead branch that had fallen from a tree. Mark picked it up and weighed it thoughtfully. He looked at Joan Cosmick and grinned.

"If they charge us," he said, "I'll toss you the flashlight. You can work it. That'll give me both hands to wield this stick. We might stand a chance yet. I doubt if there's more than three or four of them, or they would have rushed us by now."

They went forward slowly, warily, ready to duck if a rock materialized from the darkness, ready to fight if they were rushed.

Mark sensed rather than saw the dark shape swoop down. He turned the beam of the flashlight directly at it. Without thought he brought the stick upward in a wild swing that caught the creature. It dropped at his feet. He raised the stick to strike again.

"Wait!" it said in the ancient tongue. "You shouldn't have struck me, Mark Grant. I have come to tell you that the way ahead is clear for a time. We have driven the Daar Olgno back. But more have joined them and are approaching. You must run for it."

"How do I know you are telling the truth?" Mark said in the same tongue. "At the tunnel opening, one of you deceived me."

"It was I, and I did not deceive you. Twice I have prevented the Daar Olgno from taking the girl through the labyrinth with him, as he has taken many before her since he found his

way out years ago. The first time was when he shut off his light in order to sneak upon the man and kill him. There was no use striking the Daar Olgno. With his salve he is immune. But now you must run. Quickly."

"And what of you?" Mark said. "Your wing is broken."

"Leave me here. I can find my way to the tunnel."

"No," Mark said. "You can ride on my shoulder. We can get you fixed up and return you to the tunnel."

"No," the *Noro Olgno* said, but Mark stooped down and gently lifted it.

"**WE'VE GOT** to run for it," he told the others. "The Daar Olgno have enough reinforcements now to rush us and are coming."

He broke into a slow trot. Jerry jounced along with the unconscious woman over his shoulder. Joan Cosmick dragged Jennifer along, twisting her arm cruelly when she held back.

"I don't think I can go much farther," Jerry gasped.

"Save your breath for running," Joan shot at him. "This isn't a picnic, you know."

Abruptly, ahead of them, came a welcome sound. It was the noise of a car on the highway. They were still too far away from the highway to see its headlights.

"Only a little way farther," Mark said. "We can make it."

"Mark!" Joan screamed.

He turned to see glistening white forms rushing at her out of the darkness. Two quick steps and he shoved the flashlight into her hand, then stepped past her just in time to stop the first with a blow to the side of the head.

There were others. He felled them, and there were more to take their place.

"Run!" he shouted over his shoulder. "Get to the highway!"

It almost cost him the battle. It did cost him his stick. He brought his knee into the groin of the one that had seized it. The Daar Olgno fell back, dragging the stick with him.

He fought with his fists, realizing that defeat was near. His arms were growing sluggish.

"Run!" he shouted. "I can't hold them off forever!"

There were three of them, one dragging at his waist, another clinging to his left arm, the third trying to get his hands around his throat.

Suddenly the one at his throat screamed and staggered back, clutching at his eyes. Mark brought his knee ineffectively against the one dragging him down. He tried to push the one that held his left arm.

And abruptly that one fell back, clawing at his eyes.

Mark reached down and seized a handful of hair, pulling back the head of the one at his waist, hitting him between the eyes.

"We got them!" Joan said.

Mark waited, his chest heaving as he gulped in deep breaths; but no more attackers materialized from the darkness. Only three lay unconscious within the range of the flashlight. The others had fled.

"Oh!" Joan exclaimed, pointing. The frail body of the *Noro Olgno* lay twisted and dead near one of the unconscious Daar Olgno.

Mark stared at it dazedly, then looked around. Jennifer was slumped against the base of a tree.

"I adopted Jerry's tactics," Joan said grimly, "and came to your rescue. I didn't think I could hurt one of those beasts with my fists so I threw handfuls of pine needles at their faces."

"Let's get to the highway," Mark grunted. "We can't stand off another attack."

In another hundred yards they reached the highway. Mark was carrying Jennifer, who was beginning to show signs of reviving. Jerry still carried the woman who had escaped. Joan carried the crushed body of the *Noro Olgno*. Mark had told her to leave it, but she had been stubborn. "He deserves a decent burial," she said.

A car appeared down the highway. They stepped out to flag it down. It started to speed up as though to pass them. Then, as its headlights bathed them, it screeched to a stop.

"Good!" Mark grunted. "A station wagon." He called to the driver, "Will you take us to the hotel just ahead? We've had a little trouble."

THE STATE highway patrolmen studied the *Noro Olgno* with a mixture of awe and curiosity. It had been divested of its wings, and now its entirely human, though somewhat monkey-like shape, was obvious. It was just under a foot in height, its body covered with a thin coat of fur.

"You say this isn't the thing that attacked you?" their captain asked. "What are the others like, the ones that did?"

"So much like us they can pass for us," Mark said. "They're an offshoot of the human race that lost the power to maintain body temperature."

"Hmm. We didn't find any of them."

"Did you find where they came out?" Mark asked.

"Yes. We have men stationed there with tear gas guns if any of them show. As soon as we get reinforcements we're going in after them. They can't go too far, and we'll be able to track them."

"It would be better if you didn't," Mark said.

The captain looked at him curiously. "Why? Frankly I don't believe your story about them, in spite of this thing here on the table. It's impossible. I called Doc Summers at Needles, and he says a person will lose consciousness when his body temperature drops below eighty-two or three."

"I don't care what he says," Mark said. "He's talking about normal people, not the Serpent race. You won't find them. They will have fled through the labyrinth to where they live. If you get that far you'll find too many of them to handle. Your men won't come out alive."

"What else would you suggest then?" the captain asked, a note of sarcasm in his voice.

"Dynamite both entrances back a few hundred yards so that they can never be opened again," Mark said. "Do that—and forget about the whole thing."

"Nothing doing," the captain said. "This man, Daar Olgno, is wanted for kidnapping Mrs. Eggsbrook and doping her. We're going after him and his confederates. And don't try to hand me that story again. They're just people. They'll be caught and tried by law."

"Have it your way," Mark said. He frowned down at the remains of the *Noro Olgno*, the Black Angel. Then he turned away and left the hotel office.

In the lobby he saw Joan Cosmick in one of the modern relaxing chairs, her eyes closed. He went up and stood beside her looking down at her. Sensing his presence, she opened her eyes and smiled up at him.

"Feel okay?"

"Fine," she said.

"You did all right last night." Mark said gruffly. "I—I was sur-

prised." He bit his lip after the words were out.

HER LAUGH was soft and full of humor. "Surprised that the female of the species could be as deadly as the male—in her own way?" she taunted.

"Not exactly that," Mark said. "I was just surprised. That's all. I hadn't expected it of you."

"The troopers are taking things in hand?" Joan changed the subject.

Mark made a wry face. "Yes. They're going to go in and bring the culprits to justice. They'll find they're biting off more than they can chew."

"When?" Joan asked, getting up out of the chair.

"As soon as they get some more men up here. Maybe this afternoon."

"And what would you have done?" she asked.

"Dynamite both openings for a hundred yards or more."

"Then it shall be done," Joan said simply.

"What?" Mark laughed. "You sound like I'd just said I wanted fried eggs for breakfast, and you were going to fry them."

Joan smiled inscrutibly. "Perhaps I could do that too," she said. "Mark—what are you going to do when this is all over?"

"Go back to Malaya," Mark said. "I was uncovering some ruins there that are very interesting. Inscriptions."

"I see." She turned her head and looked out the window at the distant range of mountains. "Would you tell me sometime about the *Noro Olgno*, the guardian angels that have wings, and yet don't have them? About how you were able to talk with that one, maybe?"

"Sorry." Mark scowled. "Look, Joan—" He stopped abruptly and turned away.

"Joan Smith is my name," she said. "Cosmick is just a trade name. Cosmick Cosmetics."

Mark faced her again, grinning in spite of himself. "I suspected something like that," he said.

"Let's go get some dynamite. Okay?" Joan said.

"Just like that?" Mark said.

"Just like that," Joan said. She led the way to the swinging doors. There she turned. "In what part of Malaya are you digging up ruins?" she asked.

"I—" Mark started to say.

"Hey, Mark!" Jerry's voice called from across the lobby.

He turned. Jerry, struggling with three travel bags, was emerging from the elevator. Jennifer, with dark circles under her eyes, waved at Mark and Joan, a doubtful expression on her face. "Well, well," Mark said her face.

"Well, well," Mark said cheerfully. "What's this? You aren't leaving us already, are you? Jennifer looks like she needs a rest."

"She isn't going to get it here," Jerry said. He was changed. He seemed to have more confidence in himself.

"How are you feeling, Jenny?" Joan asked.

"All right," Jennifer said wanly. "I—I want to apologize for last night.

I think I was drugged. It was horrible. The things I said to Jerry..." She started to weep quietly.

"Stop that!" Jerry said. "Get hold of yourself."

"Y-yes, Jerry darling," she sniffed.

"Jerry!" Joan said protestingly.

"Uh-uh!" Mark said. "Never interfere between man and wife."

Joan stared at him queerly, then smiled slowly.

She watched as Jerry and Jennifer struggled through the revolving doors. She watched after they had gone and the doors came to rest. Then she turned and smiled at Mark. "I think I'll go up and pack too," she said.

MARK LOOKED at her, surprised. "You aren't leaving, are you?" he asked.

"I have to some time," she said. "The effects of the bat bites are lessening on the patients upstairs now. There's nothing I can do for them. I have to get back to the office."

"But—" Mark protested, then stopped, confused.

"Oh, the dynamite?" Joan said. "I'll order it done. You see, I own this resort." She smiled. "Don't worry. I can stand the loss." She turned and went to the waiting elevator. She was smiling when the doors closed.

THE END