

MAGAZINE OF  
**HORROR**  
AND STRANGE STORIES

Volume 1                      CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER                      Number 5

INTRODUCTION .....	4
CASSIUS .....	Henry S. Whitehead 5
LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT .....	J. L. Miller 38
FIVE-YEAR CONTRACT .....	J. Vernon Shea 42
THE HOUSE OF THE WORM .....	Merle Prout 58
THE BEAUTIFUL SUIT .....	H. G. Wells 74
A STRANGER CAME TO REAP .....	Stephen Dentinger 79
THE MORNING THE BIRDS FORGOT TO SING ....	Walt Liebscher 85
BONES .....	Donald A. Wollheim 90
THE GHOSTLY RENTAL .....	Henry James 96
IT IS WRITTEN (Readers' letters and Editor's comments) .....	126

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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# Cassius

*by Henry S. Whitehead*

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MY HOUSE-MAN, Stephen Penn, who presided over the staff of my residence in St. Thomas, was not, strictly speaking, a native of that city. Penn came from the neighboring island of St. Jan. It is one of the ancient West Indian names, although there remain in the islands nowadays no Caucasians to bear that honorable cognomen.

Stephen's travels, however, had not been limited to the crossing from St. Jan — which, incidentally, is the authentic scene of R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* — which lies little more than a rowboat's journey away from the capital of the Virgin Islands. Stephen had been "down the Islands," which means that he had been actually as far from home as Trinidad, or, perhaps, British Guiana, down through the great sweep of former mountain-tops, submerged by some vast, cataclysmic, prehistoric inundation and named the Bow of Ulysses by some fanciful, antique geographer. That odyssey of humble Stephen Penn had taken place because of his love for ships. He had had various jobs afloat and his exact knowledge of the house-man's art had been learned under various man-driving ship's stewards.

During this preliminary training for his life's work, Stephen had made many acquaintances. One of these, an upstanding, slim parchment colored Negro of

thirty or so, was Brutus Hellman. Brutus, like Stephen, had settled down in St. Thomas as a house-man. It was, in fact, Stephen who had talked him into leaving his native British Antigua, to try his luck in our American Virgin Islands. Stephen had secured for him his first job in St. Thomas, in the household of a naval officer.

FOR THIS friend of his youthful days, Stephen continued to feel a certain sense of responsibility; because, when Brutus happened to be abruptly thrown out of employment by the sudden illness and removal by the Naval Department of his employer in the middle of the winter season in St. Thomas, Stephen came to me and requested that his friend Brutus be allowed to come to me "on board-wages" until he was able to secure another place.

I acquiesced. I knew Brutus as a first-rate house-man. I was glad to give him a hand, to oblige the always agreeable and highly efficient Stephen, and, indeed, to have so skillful a servant added to my little staff in my bachelor quarters. I arranged for something more substantial than the remuneration asked for, and Brutus Hellman added his skilled services to those of the admirable Stephen. I was very well served that season and never had any occasion to regret

what both men alluded to as my "very great kindness!"

It was not long after Brutus Hellman had moved his simple belongings into one of the servants'-quarters cabins in my stone-paved ward, that I had another opportunity to do something for him. It was Stephen once more who presented his friend's case to me. Brutus, it appeared, had need of a minor operation, and the two of them, talking the matter over between themselves, had decided to ask me, their present patron, to arrange it.

I DID SO, with my friend Dr. Pelletier, Chief Surgeon, in charge of our Naval Station Hospital and regarded in Naval circles as the best man in the Medical Corps. I had not inquired about the nature of Brutus' affliction. Stephen had stressed the minor aspect of the required surgery, and that was all I mentioned to Dr. Pelletier.

It is quite possible that if Dr. Pelletier had not been going to Porto Rico on Thursday of that week, this narrative, the record of one of the most curious experiences I have ever had, would never have been set down. If Pelletier, his mind set on sailing at eleven, had not merely walked out of his operating-room as soon as he had finished with Brutus a little after eight that Thursday morning, left the dressing of the slight wound upon

Brutus' groin to be performed by his assistants, then that incredible affair which I can only describe as the persecution of the unfortunate Brutus Hellman would never have taken place.

It was on Wednesday, about two P. M., that I telephoned to Dr. Pelletier to ask him to perform an operation on Brutus.

"Send him over to the hospital this afternoon," Pelletier had answered, "and I'll look him over about five and operate the first thing in the morning — if there is any need for an operation! I'm leaving for San Juan at eleven, for a week."

I thanked him and went upstairs to my siesta, after giving Stephen the message to Brutus, who started off for the hospital about an hour later. He remained in the hospital until the following Sunday afternoon. He was entirely recovered from the operation, he reported. It had been a very slight affair, really, merely the removal of some kind of growth. He thanked me for my part in it when he came to announce dinner while I was reading on the gallery.

## II

IT WAS ON that Saturday morning, the day before Brutus got back, that I discovered something very curious in an obscure corner of my house-yard, just around the corner of

the wall of the three small cabins which occupy its north side. These cabins were tenantless except for the one at the east end of the row. That one was Brutus Hellman's. Stephen Penn, like my cook, washer, and scullery-maid, lived somewhere in the town.

I had been looking over the yard which was paved with old-fashioned flagging. I found it in excellent condition, weeded, freshly swept, and clean. The three stone servants-cubicles had been recently white-washed and glistened like cake-icing in the morning sun. I looked over this portion of my domain with approval, for I like things ship-shape. I glanced into the two narrow air spaces between the little, two-room houses. There were no cobwebs visible. Then I took a look around the east corner of Brutus Hellman's little house where there was a narrow passageway between the house and the high wall of antique Dutch brick, and there, well in towards the north wall, I saw on the ground what I first took to be a discarded toy which some child had thrown there, probably, it occurred to me, over the wall at the back of the stone cabins.

It looked like a doll's house, which if it had been thrown there, had happened to land right-side-up. It looked more or less like one of the quaint, old-fashioned beehives one still sees

occasionally in the conservative Lesser Antilles. But it could hardly be a beehive. It was far too small.

MY curiosity mildly aroused, I stepped into the alleyway and looked down at the odd little thing. Seen from where I stopped, it rewarded scrutiny. For it was, although made in a somewhat bungling way, a reproduction of an African village hut, thatched, circular, conical. The thatching, I suspected, had formerly been most of the business-end of a small house-broom of fine twigs tied together around the end of a stick. The little house's upright "logs" were a heterogeneous medley of little round sticks among which I recognized three dilapidated lead pencils and the broken-off handle of a tooth-brush. These details will serve to indicate its size and to justify my original conclusion that the thing was a rather cleverly made child's toy. How such a thing had got into my yard, unless over the wall, was an unimportant little mystery. The little hut, from the ground up to its thatched peak, stood about seven inches in height. Its diameter was perhaps, eight or nine inches.

My first reaction was to pick it up, look at it more closely, and then throw it into the wire cage in another corner of the yard where Stephen burned up waste paper and scraps at fre-

quent intervals. The thing was plainly a discarded toy, and had no business cluttering up my spotless yard. Then I suddenly remembered the washer's pick'ny, a small, silent, very black child of six or seven, who sometimes played quietly in the yard while his stout mother toiled over the washtub set up on a backless chair near the kitchen door where she could keep up a continuous stream of chatter with my cook.

I stayed my hand accordingly. Quite likely this little thatched hut was a valued item of that pick'ny's possessions. Thinking pleasantly to surprise little Aesculapius, or whatever the child's name might be, I took from my pocket a fifty-bit piece — value ten cents — intending to place the coin inside the little house, through its rounded, low entranceway.

STOOPING down, I shoved the coin through the doorway, and, as I did so, something suddenly scuttered about inside the hut, and pinched viciously at the ends of my thumb and forefinger.

I was, naturally, startled. I snatched my fingers away, and stood hastily erect. A mouse, perhaps a rat, inside there! I glanced at my fingers. There were no marks on them. The skin was not broken. That rodent's vicious little sharp teeth had fortunately missed their

grip as he snapped at me, intruding on his sacred privacy. Wondering a little I stepped out of the alleyway and into the sunny, open yard, somewhat upset at this Lilliputian *contretemps*, and resolved upon telling Stephen to see to it that there was no ugly rodent there when next little Aesculapius should retrieve his plaything.

But when I arrived at the gallery steps my friend Colonel Lorriquer's car was just drawing up before the house, and, in hastening to greet welcome early-morning callers and later in accepting Mrs. Lorriquer's invitation to dinner and contract at their house that evening, the little hut and its unpleasant inhabitant were driven wholly out of my mind.

I did not think of it again until several days later, on the night when my premises had become the theater for one of the most inexplicable, terrifying, and uncanny happenings I have ever experienced.

### III

MY GALLERY is a very pleasant place to sit evenings, except in that spring period during which the West Indian candle-moths hatch in their myriads and, for several successive days, make it impossible to sit outdoors, in any lighted, unscreened place.

It was much too early for the

candle-moths, however, at the time I am speaking of, and on the evening of that Sunday upon which Brutus Hellman returned from the hospital, a party of four persons including myself, occupied the gallery.

The other man was Arthur Carswell, over from Haiti on a short visit. The two ladies were Mrs. Spencer, Colonel Lorriquer's widowed daughter, and her friend, Mrs. Squire. We had dined an hour previously at the Grand Hotel as guests of Carswell, and having taken our coffee at my house, were remaining outdoors on the gallery "for a breath of air" on a rather warm and sultry February evening. We were sitting, quietly talking in a rather desultory manner, all of us unspokenly reluctant to move inside the house for a projected evening at contract.

It was, as I recall the hour, about nine o'clock, the night warm, as I have said, and very still. Above, in a cloudless sky of luminous indigo, the tropical stars glowed enormous. The intoxicating sweet odors of white jessamine and tuberoses made the still air redolent. No sound, except an occasional rather languid remark from one of ourselves, broke the exquisite, balmy stillness.

Then, all at once, without any warning and with an abruptness which caused Carswell and me to stand up, the exquisite perfection of the night was rudely

shattered by an appalling, sustained scream of sheer mortal terror.

THAT scream inaugurated what seems to me as I look back upon the next few days, to be one of the most unnerving, devastating, and generally horrible periods I can recall in a lifetime not devoid of adventure. I formulated at that time, and still retain, mentally, a phrase descriptive of it. It was "The Reign of Terror."

Carswell and I, following the direction of the scream, rushed down the outer gallery steps and back through the yard towards the cabins. As I have mentioned, only one of these was occupied, Brutus Hellman's. As we rounded the corner of the house a faint light — it was Brutus' oil lamp — appeared in the form of a wide vertical strip at the entrance of the occupied cabin. To that we ran as to a beacon, and pushed into the room.

The lamp, newly lighted, and smoking, its glass chimney set on askew as though in great haste, dimly illuminated a strange scene. Doubled up and sitting on the side of his bed, the bedclothes near the bed's foot lumped together where he had flung them, covered Brutus. His face was a dull, ashen gray in the smokey light, his back was bent, his hands clasped tightly about his shin. And, from between those clenched hands, a

steady stream of blood stained the white sheet which hung over the bed's edge and spread below into a small pool on the cabin room's stone-paved floor.

Brutus, groaning dismally, rocked back and forth, clutching his leg. The lamp smoked steadily, defiling the close air, while, incongruously, through the now open doorway poured streams and great pulsing breaths of night-blooming tropical flowers, mingling strangely with the hot, acrid odor of the smoking lamp-wick.

CARSWELL WENT directly to the lamp, straightened the chimney, turned down the flame. The lamp ceased its ugly reek and the air of the cabin cleared as Carswell, turning away from the lamp, threw wide the shutters of the large window which, like most West Indian Negroes, Brutus had closed against the "night air" when he retired.

I gave my attention directly to the man, and by the time the air had cleared somewhat I had him over on his back in a reclining position, and with a great strip torn from one of his bed-sheets, was binding up the ugly deep little wound in the lower muscle of his leg just at the outside of the shin-bone. I pulled the improvised bandage tight, and the flow of blood ceased, and Brutus, his mind probably somewhat relieved by this timely aid, put an end to his moan-

ing, and turned his ashy face up to mine.

"Did you see it, sar?" he inquired, biting back the trembling of his mouth.

I paid practically no attention to this remark. Indeed, I barely heard it. I was, you see, very busily engaged in staunching the flow of blood. Brutus had already lost a considerable quantity, and my rough bandaging was directed entirely to the end of stopping this. Instead of replying to Brutus' question I turned to Carswell, who had finished with the lamp and the window, and now stood by, ready to lend a hand in his efficient way.

"Run up to the bathroom, will you, Carswell, and bring me a couple of rolls of bandage, from the medicine closet, and a bottle of mercurochrome." Carswell disappeared on this errand and I sat, holding my hands tightly around Brutus' leg, just above the bandage. Then he repeated his question, and this time I paid attention to what he was saying.

"SEE WHAT, Brutus?" I inquired, and looked at him, almost for the first time — into his eyes, I mean. Hitherto I had been looking at my bandaging.

I saw a stark terror in those eyes.

"It," said Brutus; "de Ting, sar."

I sat on the side of the bed



and looked at him. I was, naturally, puzzled.

"What thing, Brutus?" I asked, very quietly, almost soothingly. Such terror possessed my second house-man that, I considered, he must, for the time being, be treated like a frightened child.

"De Ting what attack me, sar," explained Brutus.

"What was it like?" I countered. "Do you mean it is still here — in your rooms?"

At that Brutus very nearly collapsed. His eyes rolled up and their irises nearly disappeared; he shuddered as though with a violent chill, from head to foot. I let go his leg. The blood would be no longer flowing. I felt sure, under that tight bandaging of mine. I turned back the bedclothes, rolled poor Brutus under them, tucked him in. I took his limp hands and rubbed them smartly. At this instant Carswell came in through the still open doorway, his hands full of first-aid material. This he laid without a word on the bed beside me, and stood looking at Brutus, slightly shaking his head. I turned to him.

I RAISED Brutus' head from the pillow, his teeth audibly chattering as I did so, and just as I was getting the brandy between his lips, there came a slight scuttering sound from under the bed, and something, a small, dark, sinister-looking ani-

mal of about the size of a mongoose, dashed on all fours across the open space between the bed's corner and the still open doorway and disappeared into the night outside. Without a word Carswell ran after it, turning sharply to the left and running past the open window. I dropped the empty brandy cup, lowered Brutus' head hastily to its pillow, and dashed out of the cabin. Carswell was at the end of the cabins, his flashlight stabbing the narrow alleyway where I had found the miniature African hut. I ran up to him.

"It went up here," said Carswell laconically.

I stood beside him in silence, my hand on his shoulder. He brightened every nook and cranny of the narrow alleyway with his light. There was nothing, alive, to be seen. The Thing had had, of course, ample time to turn some hidden corner behind the cabins, to bury itself out of sight in some accustomed hiding place, even to climb over the high, rough-surfaced back wall. Carswell brought his flashlight to rest finally on the little hut-like thing which still stood in the alleyway.

"What's that?" he inquired. "Looks like some child's toy."

"That's what I supposed when I discovered it," I answered. "I imagine it belongs to the washer's pickaninny." We stepped into the alleyway. It was not quite wide enough for us to walk a-

breast. Carswell followed me in. I turned over the little hut with my foot. There was nothing under it. I daresay the possibility of this as a cache for the Thing had occurred to Carswell and me simultaneously. That, however, settled it. The Thing, mon-goose, or whatever it was, had got clean away.

WE RETURNED to the cabin and found Brutus recovering from his ague-like trembling fit. His eyes were calmer now. The reassurance of our presence, the bandaging, had had their effect. Brutus proceeded to thank us for what we had done for him.

Helped by Carswell, I gingerly removed my rough bandage. The blood about that ugly bite — for a bite it certainly was, with unmistakable tooth-marks around its badly torn edges — was clotted now. The flow had ceased. We poured mercuriochrome over and through the wound, disinfecting it, and then I placed two entire rolls of three-inch bandage about Brutus' wounded ankle. Then, with various encouragements and reassurances, we left him, the lamp still burning at his request, and went back to the ladies.

Our contract game was, somehow, a jumpy one, the ladies having been considerably upset by the scare down there in the yard, and we concluded it early, Carswell driving Mrs. Spencer home and I walking down the

hill with Mrs. Squire to the Grand Hotel where she was spending that winter.

It was still several minutes short of midnight when I returned, after a slow walk up the hill, to my house. I had been thinking of the incident all the way up the hill. I determined to look in upon Brutus Hellman before retiring, but first I went up to my bedroom and loaded a small automatic pistol, and this I carried with me when I went down to the cabins in the yard. Brutus' light was still going, and he was awake, for he responded instantly to my tap on his door.

I WENT IN and talked with the man for a few minutes. I left him the gun, which he placed carefully under his pillow. At the door I turned and addressed him:

"How do you suppose the thing — whatever it was that attacked you, Brutus — could have got in, with everything closed up tight?"

Brutus replied that he had been thinking of this himself and had come to the conclusion that "de Ting" had concealed itself in the cabin before he had retired and closed the window and door. He expressed himself as uneasy with the window open, as Carswell and I had left it.

"But, man; you should have the fresh air while you sleep.

You don't want your place closed up like a field-laborer's, do you?" said I, rallyingly. Brutus grinned.

"No, sar," said he, slowly, "'aint dat I be afeared of de Jumbee! I daresay it born in de blood, sar. I is close up everyting by instinct! Besides, sar, now dat de T'ing attackin' me, p'raps bes' to have the window close up tightly. Den de T'ing cyant possibly mek an entrance 'pon me!"

I assured Brutus that the most agile mongoose could hardly clamber up that smooth, whitewashed wall outside and come in that window. Brutus smiled, but shook his head nevertheless.

"Taint a mongoose, nor a rat, neither, sar," he remarked, as he settled himself for rest under the bedclothes.

"What do you think it is, then?" I inquired.

"Only de good Gawd know, sar," replied Brutus cryptically.

#### IV

I WAS PERHAPS halfway across the house-yard on my way to turn in when my ears were assailed by precisely one of those suppressed combinations of squeals and grunts which John Masefield describes as presaging an animal tragedy under the hedge of an English countryside on a moonlit summer night. Something — a brief,

ruthless combat for food or blood, between two small ground animals — was going on somewhere in the vicinity. I paused, listened, my senses the more readily attuned to this bitter duel because of what had happened in Brutus' cabin. As I passed, the squeals of the fighting animals abruptly ceased. One combatant, apparently, had given up the ghost! A grunting noise persisted for a few instants, however, and it made me shudder involuntarily. These sounds were low, essentially bestial, commonplace. Yet there was in them something so savage, albeit on the small scale of our everyday West Indian fauna, as to give me pause. I could feel the beginning of a cold shudder run down my spine under my white drill jacket!

I turned about, almost reluctantly, drawn somehow, in spite of myself, to the scene of combat. The grunts had ceased now, and to my ears, in the quiet of that perfect night of soft airs and moonlight, there came the even more horrible little sound of the tearing of flesh! It was gruesome, quite horrible, well-nigh unbearable. I paused again, a little shaken, it must be confessed, my nerves a trifle unstrung. I was facing in the direction of the ripping sounds now. Then there was silence — complete, tranquil, absolute!

THEN I stepped toward the

scene of this small conflict, my flashlight sweeping that corner of the yard nearest the small alleyway.

It picked up the victim almost at once, and I thought — I could not be quite sure — that I saw at the very edge of the circle of illumination, the scrambling flight of the victor. The victim was commonplace. It was the body, still slightly palpitating, of a large, well-nourished rat. The dead rat lay well out in the yard, its freshly drawn vital fluid staining a wide smear on the flagstone which supported it — a ghastly-looking affair. I looked down at it curiously. It had, indeed, been a ruthless attack to which this lowly creature had succumbed. Its throat was torn out, it was disembowelled, riven terrifically. I stepped back to Brutus' cabin, went in, and picked up from a pile of them on his bureau a copy of one of our small-sheet local newspapers. With this, nodding smilingly at Brutus I proceeded once more to the scene of carnage. I had an idea. I laid the paper down, kicked the body of the rat upon it with my foot, and picking up the paper, carried the dead rat into Brutus' cabin. I turned up his lamp and carried it over to the bedside.

"Do you suppose this was your animal, Brutus?" I asked. "If so, you seem to be pretty well avenged!"

Brutus grinned and looked closely at the riven animal. Then:

"No, sar," he said, slowly, "Twas no rat whut attacked me, sar. See de t'roat, please, sar. Him ahl tore out, mos' effectively! No, sar. But — surmise — from de appearance of dis t'roat, de mouf which maim me on de laig was de same mouf whut completely ruin this rat!"

And, indeed, judging from the appearance of the rat Brutus' judgment might well be sound.

I wrapped the paper about it, said good night once more to Hellman, carried it out with me, threw it into the metal wastebasket in which the house-trash is burned every morning, and went to bed.

AT THREE minutes past four the next morning I was snatched out of my comfortable bed and a deep sleep by the rattle of successive shots from the wicked little automatic I had left with Brutus. I jumped into my bathrobe, thrust my feet into my slippers, and was downstairs on the run, almost before the remnants of sleep were out of my eyes and brain. I ran out through the kitchen, as the nearest way, and was inside Brutus' cabin before the empty pistol, still clutched in his hand and pointed toward the open window, had ceased smoking. My first words were:

"Did you get It, Brutus?" I

was thinking of the thing in terms of "It."

"Yes, sar," returned Brutus, lowering his pistol. "I t'ink I scotch him, sar. Be please to look on de windowsill. Praps some blood in evidence, sar."

I did so, and found that Brutus' markmanship was better than I had anticipated when I entrusted him with the gun. To be sure, he had fired off all seven bullets, and, apparently, scored only one hit. A small, single drop of fresh blood lay on the white-painted wooden windowsill. No other trace of the attacker was in evidence. My flashlight revealed no marks, and the smooth, freshly-whitewashed wall outside was unscathed. Unless the Thing had wings — something suddenly touched me on the forehead, something light and delicate. I reached up, grasping. My hand closed around something like a string. I turned the flashlight up and there hung a thin strand of liana stem. I pulled it. It was firmly fastened somewhere up above there. I stepped outside, with one of Brutus' chairs, placed this against the outer wall under the window, and, standing on it, raked the eaves with the flashlight. The upper end of the liana stem was looped about a small projection in the gutter, just above the window.

The Thing, apparently, knew enough to resort to this mech-

anical method for its second attack that night.

Inside, Brutus, somewhat excited over his exploit, found a certain difficulty in describing just what it was that had drawn his aim.

"It hav de appearance of a frog, sar," he vouchsafed. "I is wide awake when de Ting land himsef 'pon de sill, an' I hav opportunity for talin' an excellent aim, sar." That was the best I could get out of Brutus. I tried to visualize a "Thing" which looked like a frog, being able to master one of our big, ferocious rats and tear out its inner parts and go off with them, not to mention liana stems with loop-knots in them to swing from a roof to an open window, and which could make a wound like the one above Brutus Hellman's ankle. It was rather too much for me. But — the Reign of Terror had begun, and no mistake!

## V

RUNNING OVER this summary in my mind as I stood and listened to Brutus telling about his markmanship, it occurred to me, in a somewhat fantastic light, I must admit — the idea of calling in "science" to our aid, forming the fantastic element — that the Thing had left a clue which might well be unmistakable; something which, suitably

managed, might easily clear up the mounting mystery.

I went back to the house, broached my medicine closet, and returned to the cabin with a pair of glass microscopic slides. Between these I made a smear of the still fresh and fluid blood on the window-sill, and went back to my room, intending to send the smear later in the morning to Dr. Pelletier's laboratory-man at the Municipal Hospital.

I left the slides there myself, requesting Dr. Brownell to make me an analysis of the specimen with a view to determining its place in the gamut of West Indian fauna, and that afternoon, shortly after the siesta hour, I received a telephone call from the young physician. Dr. Brownell had a certain whimsical cast apparent in his voice which was new to me. He spoke, I thought, rather banteringly.

"Where did you get your specimen, Mr. Canevin?" he inquired. "I understood you to say it was the blood of some kind of lower animal."

"Yes," said I, "that was what I understood, Dr. Brownell. Is there something peculiar about it?"

"Well . . ." said Dr. Brownell slowly, and somewhat banteringly, "yes — and no. The only queer thing about it is that it's — human blood, possibly a Negro's."

I managed to thank him, even

to say that I did not want the specimen returned, in answer to his query, and we rang off.

The plot, it seemed to me, was, in the language of the tradition of strange occurrences, thickening! This, then, must be Brutus' blood. Brutus' statement, that he had shot at and struck the marauder at his open window, must be imagination — Negro talk! But, even allowing that it was Brutus' blood — there was, certainly, no one else about to supply that drop of fresh fluid which I had so carefully scraped up on my two glass slides — how had he got blood, from his wounded lower leg, presumably, on that high window-sill. To what end would the man lie to me on such a subject? Besides, certainly he had shot at something — the pistol was smoking when I got to his room. And then — the liana stem How was that to be accounted for?

Dr. Brownell's report made the whole thing more complicated than it had been before. Science, which I had so cheerfully invoked, had only served to make this mystery deeper and more inexplicable.

## VI

HANDICAPPED by nothing more than a slight limp Brutus Hellman was up and attending to his duties about the house the next day. In response to my careful questioning, he had re-

peated the story of his shooting in all particulars just as he had recounted that incident to me in the gray hours of the early morning. He had even added a particular which fitted in with the liana stem as the means of ingress. The Thing, he said, had appeared to *swing down* onto the window-sill from above, as he, awake for the time being between cat-naps, had first seen it and reached for the pistol underneath his pillow and then opened fire.

Nothing happened throughout the day; nor, indeed, during the Reign of Terror as I have called it, did anything untoward occur throughout, except at night. That evening, shortly after eight o'clock, Brutus retired, and Stephen Penn, who had accompanied him to his cabin, reported to me that, in accordance with my suggestion, the two of them had made an exhaustive search for any concealed "Thing" which might have secreted itself about Brutus' premises. They had found nothing, and Brutus, his window open, but provided with a tight-fitting screen which had been installed during the day, had fallen asleep before Stephen left. Penn had carefully closed the cabin door behind him, making sure that it was properly latched.

The attack that night — I had been sleeping "with one eye open" — did not come until two o'clock in the morning. This

time Brutus had no opportunity to use the gun, and so I was not awakened until it was all over. It was, indeed, Brutus calling me softly from the yard at a quarter past two that brought me to my feet and to the window.

"Yes," said I, "what is it, Brutus?"

"You axed me to inform you, sar, of anything," explained Brutus from the yard.

"Right! What happened? Wait, Brutus, I'll come down," and I hurriedly stepped into bathrobe and slippers.

BRUTUS WAS waiting for me at the kitchen door, a hand to his left cheek, holding a handkerchief rolled into a ball. Even in the moonlight I could see that this makeshift dressing was bright red. Brutus, it appeared, had suffered another attack of some kind. I took him into the house and upstairs, and dressed the three wounds in his left cheek in my bathroom. He had been awakened without warning, fifteen minutes before, with a sudden hurt, had straightened up in bed, but not before two more stabs, directly through the cheek, had been delivered. He had only just seen the Thing scrambling down over the foot of the bed, as he came awake under the impetus of these stabs, and, after a hasty search for the attacker had wisely devoted himself to staunching his bleeding

face. Then, trembling in every limb, he had stepped out into the yard and come under my window to call me.

The three holes through the man's cheek were of equal size and similar appearance, obviously inflicted by some stabbing implement of about the diameter of a quarter-inch. The first stab, Brutus thought, had been the highest up, and this one had not only penetrated into the mouth of others, but had severely scratched the gum of the upper jaw just above his eye-tooth. I talked to him as I dressed these three wounds. "So the thing must have been concealed inside your room, you think, Brutus?"

"Undoubtedly, sar," returned Brutus. "There was no possible way for It to crawl in 'pon me—de door shut tight, the window—screen undisturb', sar."

The poor fellow was trembling from head to foot with shock and fear, and I accompanied him back to his cabin. He had not lighted his lamp. It was only by the light of the moon that he had seen his assailant disappear over the foot of the bed. He had seized the handkerchief and run out into the yard in his pajamas.

I lit the lamp, determining to have electricity put into the cabin the next day, and, with Brutus' assistance, looked carefully over the room. Nothing, apparently, was hidden anywhere; there was only a little space to

search through; Brutus had few belongings; the cabin furniture was adequate but scanty. There were no superfluities, no place, in other words, in which the Thing could hide itself.

Whatever had attacked Brutus was indeed going about its work with vicious cunning and determination.

## VII

BRUTUS TURNED in, and after sitting beside him for a while, I left the lamp turned down, closed the door, and took my departure.

Brutus did not turn up in the morning, and Stephen Penn, returning from an investigatory visit to the cabin came to me on the gallery about nine o'clock with a face as gray as ashes. He had found Brutus unconscious, the bed soaked in blood, and, along the great pectoral muscle where the right arm joins the body, a long and deep gash from which the unfortunate fellow had, apparently, lost literally quarts of blood. I telephoned for a doctor and hurried to the cabin.

Brutus was conscious upon my arrival, but so weakened from loss of blood as to be quite unable to speak. On the floor, beside the bed, apparently where it had fallen, lay a medium-sized pocket knife, its largest blade open, soaked in blood. Apparently this had been



the instrument with which he had been wounded.

The doctor, soon after his arrival, declared a blood-transfusion to be necessary, and this operation was performed at eleven o'clock in the cabin, Stephen contributing a portion of the blood, a young Negro from the town, paid for his service, the rest. After that, and the administration of a nourishing hot drink, Brutus was able to tell us what had happened.

Against his own expectations, he had fallen asleep immediately after my departure, and, curiously, had been awakened not by any attack upon him, but by the booming of a *rata* drum from somewhere up in the hills back of the town where some of the Negroes were, doubtless, "making magic," a common enough occurrence in any of the *vodu*-ridden West India islands. But this, according to Brutus, was no ordinary awakening.

No — for, on the floor, beside his bed, *dancing to the distant drumbeats*, he had seen — it!

THAT BRUTUS had possessed some idea of the identity or character of his assailant, previous to this occurrence of his most serious wound, I had strongly suspected. I had gathered this impression from half a dozen little things, such as his fervid denial that the creature which had bitten him was either a rat or a mongoose; his "Gawd

know" when I had asked him what the Thing was like.

Now I understood, clearly of course, that Brutus knew what kind of creature had concealed itself in his room. I even elicited the fact, discovered by him — just how I am quite unaware — that the Thing had hidden under a loose floor board beneath his bed and so escaped detection on the several previous searches.

But to find out from Brutus — the only person who knew — that, indeed, was quite another affair. There can be, I surmise, no human being as consistently and completely shut-mouthed as a West Indian Negro, once such a person has definitely made up his mind to silence on a given subject! And on this subject, Brutus had, it appeared, quite definitely made up his mind. No questions, no cajolery, no urging — even with tears, on the part of his lifelong friend Stephen Penn — could elicit from him the slightest remark bearing on the description or identity of the Thing. I myself used every argument which logic and common sense presented to my Caucasian mind. I urged his subsequent safety upon Brutus, my earnest desire to protect him, the logical necessity of co-operating, in the stubborn fellow's own obvious interest, with us who had his safety and welfare at heart. Stephen, as I have said, even wept! But all these efforts on our part were of no avail.

Brutus Hellman resolutely refused to add a single word to what he had already said. He had awakened to the muted booming of the distant drum. He had seen the Thing dancing beside his bed. He had, it appeared, fainted from this shock, whatever the precise nature of that shock may have been, and knew nothing more until he came slowly to a vastly weakened consciousness between Stephen Penn's visit to him late in the morning, and mine which followed it almost at once.

THERE WAS one fortunate circumstance. The deep and wide cut which had, apparently, been inflicted upon him with his own pocket-knife — it had been lying, open, by mere chance, on a small tabouret beside his bed — had been delivered lengthwise of the pectoral muscle, not across that muscle, otherwise the fellow's right arm would have been seriously crippled for life. The major damage he had suffered in this last and most serious attack had been the loss of blood, and this, through my employment of one donor of blood and Stephen Penn's devotion in giving him the remainder, had been virtually repaired.

However, whether he spoke or kept silent, it was plain to me that I had a very definite duty toward Brutus Hellman. I could not, if anything were to be done to prevent it, have him attacked

in this way while in my service and living on my premises.

The electricity went in that afternoon, with a pull-switch placed near the hand of whoever slept in the bed, and, later in the day, Stephen Penn brought up on a donkey cart from his town lodging-place, his own bedstead, which he set up in Brutus' room, and his bureau containing the major portion of his belongings, which he placed in the newly-swept and garnished cabin next door. If the Thing repeated its attack that night, it would have Stephen, as well as Brutus, to deal with.

One contribution to our knowledge Stephen made, even before he had actually moved into my yard. This was the instrument with which Brutus had been stabbed through the cheek. He found it cached in the floor-space underneath that loose board where the Thing had hidden itself. He brought it to me, covered with dried blood. It was a rough, small-scale reproduction of an African "assegai", or stabbing-spear. It was made out of an ordinary butcher's hardwood meat-skewer, its head a splinter of pointed glass such as might be picked up anywhere about the town. The head — and this was what caused the resemblance to an assegai — was very exactly and neatly bound on to the cleft end of the skewer, with fishline. On the whole, and considered as

a piece of work, the "assegai" was a highly creditable job.

### VIII

IT WAS ON the morning of this last-recorded attack on Brutus Hellman during the period between my visit to him and the arrival of the doctor and the man for the blood-transfusion, that I sat down, at my desk, in an attempt to figure out some conclusion from the facts already known. I had progressed somewhat with my theoretical investigation at that time. When later, after Brutus could talk, he mentioned the circumstance of the Thing's dancing there on his cabin floor, to the notes of a drum, in the pouring moonlight which came through his screened window and gave its illumination to the little room, I came to some sort of indeterminate decision. I will recount the steps — they are very brief — which led up to this.

The facts, as I noted them down on paper that day, pointed to a pair of alternatives. Either Brutus Hellman was demented, and had invented his "attacks," having inflicted them upon himself for some inscrutable reason; or — the Thing was possessed of qualities not common among the lower animals! I set the two groups of facts side by side, and compared them.

Carswell and I had actually seen the Thing as it ran out of

the cabin that first night. Something, presumably the same Thing, had torn a large rat to pieces. The same Thing had bitten Brutus' lower leg, Brutus' description of it was that it looked "like a frog". Those four facts seemed to indicate one of the lower animals, though its genus and the motive for its attacks were unknown!

On the other hand, there was a divergent set of facts. The Thing had used mechanical means, a liana stem with a looped knot in it, to get into Brutus' cabin through the window. It had used some stabbing instrument, later found, and proving to be a manufactured affair. Again, later, it had used Brutus' knife in its final attack. All these facts pointed to some such animal as a small monkey. This theory was strengthened by the shape of the bites on Brutus' leg and on the rat's throat.

That it was *not* a monkey, however, there was excellent evidence. The Thing looked like a frog. A frog is a very different-looking creature from any known kind of monkey. There were, so far as I knew, no monkeys at the time on the island of St. Thomas.

I ADDED TO these sets of facts two other matters: The blood alleged to be drawn from the Thing had, on analysis, turned out to be human blood. The single circumstance pointed

very strongly to the insanity theory. On the other hand, Brutus could hardly have placed the fresh blood which I had myself scraped up on my slides, on the windowsill where I found it. Still, he might have done so, if his "insanity" were such as to allow for an elaborately "planted" hoax or something of the kind. He could have placed the drop of blood there, drawn from his own body by means of a pinprick, before he fired the seven cartridges that night. It was possible. But, knowing Brutus, it was so improbable as to be quite absurd.

The final circumstance was the little "African" hut. That, somehow, seemed to fit in with the "assegai." The two naturally went together.

It was a jumble, a puzzle. The more I contrasted and compared these clues, the more impossible the situation became.

Well, there was one door open, at least. I decided to get through that door and see where it led me. I sent for Stephen. It was several hours after the blood-transfusion. I had to get some of Brutus' blood for my experiment, but it must be blood drawn previous to the transfusion. Stephen came to see what I wanted.

"Stephen," said I, "I want you to secure from Hellman's soiled things one of those very bloody sheets which you changed on

his bed today, and bring it here."

Stephen goggled at me, but went at once on this extraordinary errand. He brought me the sheet. On one of its corners, there was an especially heavy mass of clotted blood. From the underside of this I managed to secure a fresh enough smear on a pair of glass slides, and with these I stepped into my car and ran down to the hospital and asked for Dr. Brownell.

I gave him the slides and asked him to make me an analysis for the purpose of comparing this blood with the specimen I had given him two days before. My only worry was whether or not they had kept a record of the former analysis, it being a private job and not part of the hospital routine. They had recorded it, however, and Dr. Brownell obligingly made the test for me then and there. Half an hour after he had stepped into the laboratory he came back to me. "Here are the records," he said. "The two specimens are unquestionably from the same person, presumably a Negro. They are virtually identical."

THE BLOOD alleged to be the Thing's, then, was merely Brutus' blood. The strong presumption was, therefore, that Brutus had lost his mind.

Into this necessary conclusion, I attempted to fit the remaining facts. Unfortunately for the sake

of any solution, they did not fit Brutus might, for some insane reason, have inflicted the three sets of wounds upon himself. But Brutus had not made the "African" hut, which had turned up before he was back from the hospital. He had not, presumably, fastened that liana stem outside his window. He had not, certainly, slain the rat, nor could he have "invented" the creature which both Carswell and I had seen, however vaguely, running out of his cabin that night of the first attack.

At the end of all my cogitations, I knew absolutely nothing, except what my own senses had conveyed to me; and these discordant facts I have already set down in their order and sequence, precisely and accurately, as they occurred.

To these I now add the additional fact that upon the night following the last recorded attack on Brutus Hellman, nothing whatever happened. Neither he nor Stephen Penn, sleeping side by side in their two beds in the cabin room, were in any way disturbed.

I wished, fervently, that Dr. Pelletier were at hand. I needed someone like him to talk to. Carswell would not answer, somehow. No one would answer. I needed Pelletier, with his incisive mind, his scientific training, his vast knowledge of the West Indies, his open-mindedness to facts wherever these and

their contemplation might lead the investigator. I needed Pelletier very badly indeed!

And Pelletier was still over in Porto Rico.

Only one further circumstance, and that, apparently, an irrelevant one, can be added to the facts already narrated — those incongruous facts which did not appear to have any reasonable connection with one another and seemed to be mystifyingly contradictory. The circumstance was related to me by Stephen Penn, and it was nothing more or less than the record of a word, a proper name. This Stephen alleged, Brutus had repeated, over and over, as, under the effects of the two degrees of temperature which he was carrying as the result of his shock and of the blood transfusion, he had tossed about restlessly during a portion of the night. That name was, in a sense, a singularly appropriate one for Brutus to utter, even though one would hardly suspect the fellow of having any acquaintance with Roman history, or, indeed, with the words of William Shakespeare!

The name was — Cassius!

I figured that anyone bearing the Christian name, Brutus, must, in the course of a lifetime, have got wind of the original Brutus' side-partner. The two names naturally go together, of course, like Damon and Pythias, David and Jonathan! However, I

said nothing about this to Brutus.

## IX

I WAS IN the concrete wharf beside the Naval Administration Building long before the *Grebe* arrived from San Juan on the Thursday morning a week after Brutus Hellman's operation.

I wanted to get Pelletier's ear at the earliest possible moment. Nearby, in the waiting line against the wall of the Navy building, Stephen Penn at the wheel, stood my car. I had telephoned Pelletier's man that he need not meet the doctor. I was going to do that myself, to get what facts, whatever explanation Pelletier might have to offer as I drove him through the town and up the precipitous roadways of Denmark Hill to his house at its summit.

My bulky, hard-boiled, genial naval surgeon friend, of the keen, analytical brain and the skillful hands which so often skirted the very edges of death in his operating-room, was unable, however, to accompany me at once upon his arrival. I had to wait more than twenty minutes for him, while others, who had prior claims upon him, interviewed him. At last he broke away from the importunate ones and heaved his unwieldy bulk into the back seat of my car beside me. Among those who had waylaid him, I recognized Doc-

tors Roots and Maguire, both naval surgeons.

I had not finished my account of the persecution to which Brutus Hellman had been subjected by the time we arrived at the doctor's hilltop abode. I told Stephen to wait for me and finished the story inside the house while Pelletier's house-man was unpacking his traveling valises. Pelletier heard me through in virtual silence, only occasionally interrupting with a pertinent question. When I had finished he lay back in his chair, his eyes closed.

HE SAID NOTHING for several minutes. Then, his eyes still shut, he raised and slightly waved his big awkward-looking hand, that hand of such uncanny skill when it held a knife, and began to speak, very slowly and reflectively:

"Dr. Roots mentioned a peculiar circumstance on the wharf."

"Yes?" said I.

"Yes," said Dr. Pelletier. He shifted his ungainly bulk in his big chair, opened his eyes and looked at me. Then, very deliberately:

"Roots reported the disappearance of the thing — it was a parasitic growth — that I removed from your house-man's side a week ago. When they had dressed the fellow and sent him back to the ward Roots intended to look the thing over in the lab-

oratory. It was quite unusual. I'll come to that in a minute. But when he turned to pick it up, it was gone; had quite disappeared. The nurse, Miss Charles, and he looked all over for it, made a very thorough search. That was one of the things he came down for this morning — to report that to me." Once again Pelletier paused, looked at me searchingly, as though studying me carefully. Then he said:

"I understood you to say that the Thing, as you call it, is still at large?"

The incredible possible implication of this statement of the disappearance of the "growth" removed from Hellman's body and the doctor's question, stunned me for an instant. Could he possibly mean to imply —? I stared at him, blankly, for an instant.

"Yes," said I, "it is still at large, and poor Hellman is barricaded in his cabin. As I have told you, I have dressed those bites and gashes myself. He absolutely refuses to go to the hospital again. He lies there, muttering to himself, ash-gray with fear."

"Hm," vouchsafed Dr. Pelletier. "How big would you say the Thing is, Canevin, judging from your glimpse of it and the marks it leaves?"

"About the-size, say, of a rat," I answered. "and black. We had that one sight of it, that first night. Carswell and I both saw

it scuttering out of Hellman's cabin right under our feet when this horrible business first started."

Dr. Pelletier nodded, slowly. Then he made another remark, apparently irrelevant:

"I had breakfast this morning on board the *Grebe*. Could you give me lunch?" He looked at his watch.

"Of course," I returned. "Are you thinking of . . ."

"Let's get going," said Dr. Pelletier, heaving himself to his feet.

WE STARTED at once, the doctor calling out to his servants that he would not be back for one o'clock "breakfast," and Stephen Penn who had driven us up the hill drove us down again. Arrived at my house we proceeded straight to Hellman's cabin. Dr. Pelletier talked soothingly to the poor fellow while examining those ugly wounds. On several he placed fresh dressings from his professional black bag. When he had finished he drew me outside.

"You did well, Canevin," he remarked, reflectively, "in not calling in anybody, dressing those wounds yourself! What people don't know, er — won't hurt 'em!"

He paused after a few steps away from the cabin.

"Show me," he commanded, "which way the Thing ran, that first night."

I indicated the direction, and we walked along the line of it, Pelletier forging ahead, his black bag in his big hand. We reached the corner of the cabin in a few steps, and Pelletier glanced up the alleyway between the cabin's side and the high yard-wall. The little toy house, looking somewhat dilapidated now, still stood where it had been, since I first discovered it. Pelletier did not enter the alleyway. He looked in at the queer little miniature hut.

"Hm," he remarked, his forehead puckered into a thick frowning wrinkle. Then, turning abruptly to me:

"I suppose it must have occurred to you that the Thing lived in that," said he, challengingly.

"Yes — naturally; after it went for my fingers — whatever *that* creature may have been. Three or four times I've gone in there with a flashlight after one of the attacks on Brutus Hellman; picked it up, even and looked inside . . ."

"And the Thing is never there," finished Dr. Pelletier, nodding sagaciously.

"Never," I corroborated.

"Come on up to the gallery," said the doctor, "and I'll tell you what I think."

## X

WE PROCEEDED to the gallery at once and Dr. Pelle-

tier, laying down his black bag, caused a lounge-chair to groan and creak beneath his recumbent weight while I went into the house to command the usual West Indian preliminary to a meal.

A few minutes later Dr. Pelletier told me what he thought, according to his promise. His opening remark was in the form of a question; about the very last question anyone in his senses would have regarded as pertinent to the subject in hand.

"Do you know anything about twins, Canevin?" he inquired.

"Twins?" said I. "Twins!" I was greatly puzzled. I had not been expecting any remarks about twins.

"Well," said I, as Dr. Pelletier stared at me gravely, "only what everybody knows about them, I imagine. What about them?"

"There are two types of twins, Canevin — and I don't mean the difference arising out of being separate or attached-at-birth, the 'Siamese' or ordinary types. I mean something far more basic than that accidental division into categories; more fundamental — deeper than that kind of distinction. The two kinds of twins I have reference to are called in biological terminology 'monozygotic' and 'dizygotic', respectively; those which originate, that is, from one cell, or from two."

"The distinction," I threw in, "which Johannes Lange makes



in his study of criminal determinism, his book, *Crime and Destiny*. The one-cell-originated twins, he contends, have identical motives and personalities. If one is a thief, the other has to be! He sets out to prove — and that pompous ass, Haldane, who wrote the foreword, believes it, too — that there is no free-will; that man's moral course is predetermined, inescapable — a kind of scientific Calvinism."

"Precisely, just that," said Dr. Pelletier. "Anyhow, you understand that distinction." I looked at him, still somewhat puzzled.

"YES," SAID I, "but still, I don't see its application to this nasty business to Brutus Hellman."

"I was leading up to telling you," said Dr. Pelletier, in his matter-of-fact, forthright fashion of speech; "to telling you, Canevin, that the Thing is, undoubtedly, the parasitic, 'Siamese-twin' that I cut away from Brutus Hellman last Thursday morning, and which disappeared out of the operating-room. Also from the evidence, I'd be inclined to think it is of the 'dizygotic' type. That would not occur, in the case of 'attached' twins, more than once in ten million times!"

He paused at this and looked at me. For my part, after that amazing, that utterly incredible statement, so calmly made, so dispassionately uttered, I could

do nothing but sit limply in my chair and gaze woodenly at my guest. I was so astounded that I was incapable of uttering a word. But I did not have to say anything. Dr. Pelletier was speaking again, developing his thesis.

"Put together the known facts, Canevin. It is the scientific method, the only satisfactory method, when you are confronted with a situation like this one. You can do so quite easily, almost at random, here. To begin with, you never found the Thing in that little thatched hut after one of its attacks — did you?"

"No," I managed to murmur out of a strangely dry mouth. Pelletier's theory held me stupefied by its unexpectedness, its utter, weird strangeness. The name, "Cassius", smote my brain. That identical blood . . .

"If the Thing had been, say a rat," he continued, "as you supposed when it went for your fingers, it would have gone straight from its attacks on Brutus Hellman to its diggings — the refuge-instinct; 'holing-up.' But it didn't. You investigated several times and it wasn't inside the little house, although it ran towards it, as you believed, after seeing it start that way the first night; although the creature that went for your hand was there, inside, *before it suspected pursuit*. You see? That gives us a lead, a clue. The Thing possesses a much higher level of intelli-

gence than that of a mere rodent. Do you grasp that significant point, Canevin? The Thing, anticipating pursuit, avoided capture by instinctively out-guessing the pursuer. It went towards its diggings but deferred entrance until the pursuer had investigated and gone away. Do you get it?"

I NODDED, not desiring to interrupt. I was following Pelletier's thesis eagerly now. He resumed:

"Next—consider those wounds, those bites, on Brutus Hellman. They were never made by any small, ground-dwelling animal, a rodent, like a rat or a mongoose. No; those teeth-marks are those of — well, say, a marmoset or any very small monkey; or, Canevin, *of an unbelievably small human being!*"

Pelletier and I sat and looked at each other. I think that, after an appreciable interval, I was able to nod my head in his direction. Pelletier continued.

"The next point we come to — before going on to something a great deal deeper, Canevin — is the *color* of the Thing. You saw it: It was only a momentary glimpse, as you say, but you secured enough of an impression to seem pretty positive on that question of its color. Didn't you?"

"Yes," said I, slowly. "It was as black as a derby hat, Pelletier."

"There you have one point

definitely settled, then." The doctor was speaking with a judicial note in his voice, the scientist in full stride now. "The well-established ethnic rule, the biological certainty in cases of miscegenation between Caucasians or quasi-Caucasians and the Negro or negroid types is that the offspring is never darker than the darker of the two parents. The 'black-baby' tradition, as a 'throw-back' being produced by mulatto or nearly Caucasian parents is a bugaboo, Canevin, sheer bosh! It doesn't happen that way. It *cannot* happen. It is a biological impossibility, my dear man. Although widely believed, that idea falls into the same category as the ostrich burying its head in the sand and thinking it is concealed! It falls in with the Amazon myth! The 'Amazons' were merely long-haired Scythians, those 'women-warriors' of antiquity. Why, damn it, Canevin, it's like believing in the Centaur to swallow a thing like that."

THE DOCTOR had become quite excited over his expression of biological orthodoxy. He glared at me, or appeared to, and lighted a fresh cigarette. Then, considering for a moment, while he inhaled a few preliminary puffs, he resumed:

"You see what that proves, don't you, Canevin?" he inquired, somewhat more calmly now.

"It seems to show," I answer-

ed, "since Brutus is very 'clear-colored,' as the Negroes would say, that one of his parents was a black; the other very considerably lighter, perhaps even a pure Caucasian."

"Right, so far," acquiesced the doctor. "And the other inference, in the case of twins — what?"

"That the twins were 'dizygotic,' even though attached," said I, slowly, as the conclusion came clear in my mind after Pelletier's preparatory speech. "Otherwise, of course, if they were the other kind, the mono-cellular or 'monozygotic,' they would have the same coloration, derived from either the dark or the light-skinned parent."

"Precisely," exclaimed Dr. Pelletier. "Now . . ."

"You mentioned certain other facts," I interrupted, "'more deep-seated,' I think you said. What . . ."

"I was just coming to those, Canevin. There are, actually, two such considerations which occur to me. First — why did the Thing degenerate, undoubtedly after birth, of course, if there were no prenatal process of degeneration? They would have been nearly of a size, anyway, when born, I'd suppose. Why did 'It' shrink up into a withered, apparently lifeless little homunculus, while its fellow twin, Brutus Hellman, attained to a normal manhood?

There are some pretty deep matters involved in those queries, Canevin. It was comatose, shrunken, virtually dead while attached."

"Let's see if we can't make a guess at them," I threw in.

"What would *you* say?" countered Dr. Pelletier.

I NODDED, and sat silently for several minutes trying to put what was in my mind together in some coherent form so as to express it adequately. Then:

"A couple of possibilities occur to me," I began. "One or both of them might account for the divergence. First, the failure of one or more of the ductless glands, very early in the Thing's life after birth. It's the thymus gland, isn't it, that regulates the physical growth of an infant — that makes him grow normally. If that fails before it has done its full work, about the end of the child's second year, you get a midget. If, on the other hand, it keeps on too long — does not dry up as it should, and cease functioning, its normal task finished — the result is a giant; the child simply goes on growing, bigger and bigger! Am I right, so far? And, I suppose, the cutting process released it from its coma."

"Score one!" said Dr. Pelletier, wagging his head at me. "Go on — what else? There are many cases, of course, of blood-letting ending a coma."

"The second guess is that Brutus had the stronger constitution, and outstripped the other one. It doesn't sound especially scientific, but that sort of thing does happen as I understand it. Beyond those two possible explanations I shouldn't care to risk any more guesses."

"I think both those causes have been operative in this case," said Dr. Pelletier, reflectively. "And, having performed that operation, you see, I think I might add a third, Canevin. It is purely conjectural. I'll admit that frankly, but one outstanding circumstance supports it. In short, Canevin, I imagine — my instinct tells me — that almost from the beginning, quite unconsciously, of course, and in the automatic processes of outstripping his twin in physical growth, *Brutus absorbed the other's share of nutriment*s.

"I CAN FIGURE that out, in fact, from several possible angles. The early nursing, for instance! The mother — she was, undoubtedly, the black parent — proud of her 'clear' child, would favor it, nurse it first. There is, besides, always some more or less obscure interplay, some balanced adjustment, between physically attached twins. In this case, God knows how, that invariable 'balance' became disadjusted; the adjustment became unbalanced, if you prefer it that way. The mother, too, from

whose side the dark twin probably derived its constitution, may very well have been a small, weakly woman. The fair-skinned other parent was probably robust, physically. But, whatever the underlying causes, we know that Brutus grew up to be normal and fully mature, and I know, from that operation, that the Thing I cut away from him was his twin brother, degenerated into an apparently lifeless homunculus, a mere appendage of Brutus, something which, *apparently, had quite lost nearly everything of its basic humanity*; even most of its appearance, Canevin — a Thing to be removed surgically, like a wen."

"It is a terrible idea," said I, slowly, and after an interval. "But, it seems to be the only way to explain er — the facts! Now tell me, if you please, what is that 'outstanding circumstance' you mentioned which corroborates this, er — theory of yours."

"It is the Thing's *motive*, Canevin," said Dr. Pelletier, very gravely, "allowing, of course, that we are right — that I am right — in assuming for lack of a better hypothesis that what I cut away from Hellman had life in it; that it 'escaped;' that it is now — well, in trying to get at a thing like that, under the circumstances, I'd be inclined to say, we touch bottom!"

"Good God — the *motive*!" I almost whispered. "Why, its horrible, Pelletier; its positively

uncanny. The thing becomes, quite definitely, a horror. The motive — in that Thing! You're right, old man. Psychologically speaking, it 'touches bottom,' as you say."

"And humanly speaking," added Dr. Pelletier, in a very quiet voice.

STEPHEN CAME out and announced breakfast. It was one o'clock. We went in and ate rather silently. As Stephen was serving the dessert, Dr. Pelletier spoke to him:

"Was Hellman's father a white man, do you happen to know, Stephen?"

"De man was an engineer on board an English trading vessel, sar."

"What about his mother?" probed the doctor.

"Her a resident of Antigua, sar," replied Stephen promptly, "and is yet alive. I am acquainted with her. Hellman ahlways send her some portion of his earnings, sar, very regularly. At de time Hellman born, her a 'ooman which do washing for ships' crews, an' make an excellent living. Nowadays, de poor soul little more than a piteous invalid, sar. Her ahlways a small little 'ooman, not too strong."

"I take it she is a dark woman?" remarked the doctor, smiling at Stephen.

Stephen, who is a medium brown young man, a "Zambo," as they say in the English Is-

lands like St. Kitts and Montserrat and Antigua, grinned broadly at this, displaying a set of magnificent, glistening teeth.

"Sar," he replied, "Hellman's mother de precisely identical hue of dis fella," and Stephen touched with his index finger the neat black bow-tie which set off the snowy whiteness of his immaculate drill house-man's jacket. Pelletier and I exchanged glances as we smiled at Stephen's little joke.

ON THE GALLERY immediately after lunch, over coffee, we came back to that bizarre topic which Dr. Pelletier had called the "motive." Considered quite apart from the weird aspect of attributing a motive to a quasi-human creature of the size of a rat, the matter was clear enough. The Thing had relentlessly attacked Brutus Hellman again and again, with an implacable fiendishness; its brutal, single-handed efforts being limited in their disastrous effects only by its diminutive size and relative deficiency of strength. Even so, it had succeeded in driving a full-grown man, its victim, into a condition not very far removed from imbecility.

What obscure processes had gone on piling up cumulatively to a fixed purpose of pure destruction in that primitive, degenerated organ that served the Thing for a brain! What dreadful weeks and months and years

of semi-conscious brooding, of existence endured parasitically as an appendage upon the instinctively loathed body of the normal brother! What savage hatred had burned itself into that minute, distorted personality! What incalculable instincts, deep buried in the backgrounds of the heredity through the mother, had come into play — as evidenced by the Thing's construction of the typical African hut as its habitation — once it had come, after the separation, into active consciousness, the new-born, freshly-realized freedom to exercise and release all that acrid, seething hatred upon him who had usurped its powers of self-expression, its very life itself! What manifold thwarted instincts had, by the process of substitution, crystallized themselves into one overwhelming, driving desire — the consuming instinct for revenge!

I shuddered as all this clarified itself in my mind, as I formed, vaguely, some kind of mental image of that personality. Dr. Pelletier was speaking again. I forced my engrossed mind to listen to him.

"We must put an end to all this, Canevin," he was saying. "Yes, we must put an end to it."

## XI

EVER SINCE that first Sunday evening when the attacks began, as I look back over that

hectic period, it seems to me that I had had in mind primarily the idea of capture and destruction of what had crystallized in my mind as "The Thing." Now a new and totally bizarre idea came in to cause some mental conflict with the destruction element in that vague plan. This was the almost inescapable conviction that the Thing had been originally — whatever it might be properly named now — a human being. As such, knowing well, as I did, the habits of the blacks of our Lesser Antilles, it had, unquestionably, been received into the church by the initial process of baptism. That indescribable creature which had been an appendage on Brutus Hellman's body, had been, *was now*, according to the teaching of the church, a Christian. The idea popped into my mind along with the various other sidelights on the situation, stimulated into being by the discussion with Dr. Pelletier which I have just recorded.

The idea itself was distressing enough, to one who, like myself, have always kept up the teachings of my own childhood, who has never found it necessary, in these days of mental unrest, to doubt, still less to abandon, his religion. One of the concomitants of this idea was that the destruction of the Thing after its problematical capture, would be an awkward affair upon my conscience, for, however

far departed the Thing had got from its original status as "A child of God — an Inheritor of The Kingdom of Heaven," it must retain, in some obscure fashion, its human, indeed its Christian, standing. There are those, doubtless, who might well regard this scruple of mine as quite utterly ridiculous, who would lay all the stress on the plain necessity of stopping the Thing's destructive malignancy without reference to any such apparently far-fetched and artificial considerations. Nevertheless this aspect of our immediate problem, Pelletier's gravely enunciated dictum: "We must put an end to all this," weighed heavily on my burdened mind. It must be remembered that I had put in a dreadful week over the affair.

I mention this "scruple" of mine because it throws up into relief, in a sense, those events which followed very shortly after Dr. Pelletier had summed up what necessarily lay before us, in that phrase of his.

WE SAT ON the gallery and cogitated ways and means, and it was in the midst of this discussion that the scruple alluded to occurred to me. I did not mention it to Pelletier. I mentally conceded, of course, the necessity of capture. The subsequent disposal of the Thing could wait on that.

We had pretty well decided,

on the evidence, that the Thing had been lying low during the day in the little hut-like arrangement which it appeared to have built for itself. Its attacks so far had occurred only at night. If we were correct, the capture would be a comparatively simple affair. There was, as part of the equipment in my house, a small bait net, of the circular, closing-in-from-the-bottom kind, used occasionally when I took guests on a deep-sea fishing excursion out to Congo or Levango Bays. This I unearthed, and looked over. It was intact, recently mended, without any holes in the tightly meshed netting designed to capture and retain small fish to be used later as live bait.

Armed with this, our simple plan readily in mind, we proceeded together to the alleyway about half-past two that afternoon, or, to be more precise, we were just at the moment starting down the gallery steps leading into my yard, when our ears were assailed by a succession of piercing, childish screams from the vicinity of the house's rear.

I rushed down the steps, four at a time, the more unwieldy Pelletier following me as closely as his propulsive apparatus would allow. I was in time to see, when I reached the corner of the house, nearly everything that was happening, almost from its beginning. It was a scene which, reproduced in a drawing

accurately limned, would appear wholly comic. Little Aesculapius, the washer's small, black child, his eyes popping nearly from his head, his diminutive black legs twinkling under his single flying garment, his voice uttering blood-curdling yowls of pure terror, raced diagonally across the yard in the direction of his mother's washtub near the kitchen door, the very embodiment of crude, ungovernable fright, a veritable caricature, a figure of fun.

AND BEHIND him, coming on implacably, for all the world like a misshapen black frog, bounded the Thing, in hot pursuit, its red tongue lolling out of its gash of a mouth, its diminutive blubbery lips drawn back in a wide snarl through which a murderous row of teeth flashed viciously in the pouring afternoon sunlight. Little Aesculapius was making good the promise of his relatively long, thin legs, fright driving him. He outdistanced the Thing hopelessly, yet it forged ahead in a rolling, leaping series of bounds, using hands and arms, frog-like, as well as its strange, withered, yet strangely powerful bandied legs.

The sight, grotesque as it would have been to anyone unfamiliar with the Thing's history and identity, positively sickened me. My impulse was to cover my face with my hands, in the realization of its underlying

horror. I could feel a faint nausea creeping over me, beginning to dim my senses. My washerwoman's screams had added to the confusion within a second or two after those of the child had begun, and now, as I hesitated in my course towards the scene of confusion, those of the cook and scullery-maid were added to the cacophonous din in my back yard. Little Aesculapius, his garment stiff against the breeze of his own progress, disappeared around the rear-most corner of the house to comparative safety through the open kitchen door. He had, as I learned sometime afterwards, been playing about the yard and had happened upon the little hut in its obscure and seldom-visited alleyway. He had stooped, intrigued by this unusual plaything, and picked it up. "The Thing" — the child used that precise term to describe it — lay, curled up, asleep within. It had leaped to its splayed feet with a snarl of rage, and gone straight for the little Negro's foot.

Thereafter the primitive instinct for self-preservation and Aesculapius' excellent footwork had solved his problem. He reached the kitchen door, around the corner and out of our sight, plunged within, and took immediate refuge atop the shelf of a kitchen cabinet well out of reach of that malignant, unheard-of demon like a big black frog which was pursuing him



and which, doubtless, would haunt his dreams for the rest of his existence. So much for little Aesculapius, who thus happily passes out of the affair.

MY HALTING WAS, of course, only momentary. I paused, as I have mentioned, but for so brief a period as not to allow Dr. Pelletier to catch up with me. I ran, then, with the net open in my hands, diagonally across the straight course being pursued by the Thing. My mind was made up to intercept It, entangle It in the meshes. This should not be difficult considering its smallness and the comparative shortness of Its arms and legs; and, having rendered It helpless, to face the ultimate problem of Its later disposal.

But this plan of mine was abruptly interfered with. Precisely as the flying body of the pursued pick'ny disappeared around the corner of the house, my cook's cat, a ratter with a neighborhood reputation — and now, although for the moment I failed to realize it, quite clearly an instrument of that Providence responsible for my "scruple!" — came upon the scene with violence, precision, and that uncanny accuracy which actuates the feline in all its physical manifestations.

This avatar, which, according to a long-established custom, had been sunning itself demurely on the edge of the rain-water pip-

ing which ran along the low eaves of the three yard cabins, aroused by the discordant yells of the child and the three women in four distinct keys, had arisen, taken a brief, preliminary stretch, and condescended to turn its head towards the scene below. . . .

The momentum of the cat's leap arrested instantaneously the Thing's course of pursuit, bore it, sprawled out and flattened, to the ground, and twenty sharp powerful retractile claws sank simultaneously into the prone little body.

THE THING never moved again. A more merciful snuffing out would be difficult to imagine.

It was a matter of no difficulty to drive Junius, the cat, away from his kill. I am on terms of pleasant intimacy with Junius. He allowed me to take the now limp and flaccid little body away from him quite without protest, and sat down where he was, licking his paws and readjusting his ruffled fur.

And thus, unexpectedly, without intervention on our part, Pelletier and I saw brought to its sudden end, the tragical denouement of what seems to be one of the most outlandish and most distressing affairs which could ever have been evolved out of the mad mentality of Satan, who dwells in his own place to distress the children of men.

And that night, under a flagstone in the alleyway, quite near where the Thing's strange habitation had been taken up, I buried the mangled leathery little body of that unspeakably grotesque homunculus which had once been the twin brother of my house-man, Brutus Hellman. In consideration of my own scruple which I have mentioned,

and because, in all probability, this handful of strange material which I lowered gently into its last resting-place had once been a Christian, I repeated the Prayer of Committal from the Book of Common Prayer. It may have been — doubtless was, in one sense — a grotesque act on my part. But I cherish the conviction that I did what was right.