

U N K N O W N W O R L D S

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NO GRAVEN IMAGE

By Cleve Cartmill

● The natives of all lands have one superstition in common; that the camera and the painter and the sculptor are dangerous, for they steal your soul. Bit by bit, perhaps, and unimportant in amount to an ordinary man. But to a "most-photographed" movie star?

Illustrated by Kolliker

Lily Kung bowed before the makeshift altar in Norman Courtney's bedroom. She whispered a curse, and a prayer—a curse on the Soul Eater, a prayer to her ancestors' gods. With traditional ceremony, she burned a rectangle of miniature-camera film, and a puff of pungent smoke drifted upward.

I kept an eye on Norman, in the white sanatorium bed. I wasn't interested in her ancient abracadabra, but I was curious to see what would happen to him. It wasn't much.

Still, it was something.

It was a little gleam in his big chocolate eyes, a tiny flame of intelligence. Not much, but still more than the empty lifelessness of the past eight weeks. Not that he was human, or even nearly so, but he was no longer a living, breathing dead man.

"Hi, pal," I said, and for the first time in two months he rolled his head toward the sound of a voice. He didn't speak, he didn't smile, but he moved.

Lily got up from the floor in the corner, shucked off the robe she had borrowed from her father,

and was an American girl again—who only looked Chinese. She wasn't a priestess any longer—a priestess doesn't light her eyes with flames of enthusiasm. A priestess doesn't have the prettiest gams in town.

She looked down at Norman, and he shifted his gaze to her. She breathed a little hard, and clenched her hands. "You see?" she exclaimed to me. "You see, Al? Look! There's a change!"

She pattered around the end of the bed and tugged at my sleeve. "Come on, Al! Come on! We're on the right track!"

I shrugged. "Relax, baby. I'll admit something happened. He doesn't look so much like a zombi."

"He isn't, Al. He never was. He was simply undead. Now a little piece of his soul has returned."

"Maybe. Maybe. I don't necessarily believe it, but I won't argue. I've had every big specialist in the country here in this hide-out, and this is the first improvement. It may be coincidence, but I don't know. What do we do next?"

"We get all the negatives we can, and destroy them the same way. There must be several hundred miles of film filed in various studios. Not to mention the historic originals in the vaults of the Museum."

"Even a script girl," I said, "should know you can't get the negatives from a Hollywood vault. All that silver is valuable."

"And is a man's soul valuable?"

"Not to the people who own the film. Except Zachary, perhaps. He's got Norman under contract. Maybe he'll do something."

"Can't we get a court order?"

"What would you say? If it please the court, the savages were right, and every time a man's picture is snapped, a piece of his soul is trapped on the negative. We petition in the name of the most photographed man in history. We ask that all his negatives be given us to destroy with certain rites.' Is that what we say? Can't you hear the snickers?"

"What do I care about snickers? Look."

She pointed at Norman. The smooth face, the graying hair. Norman Courtney, famous on the screen from the age of five, when he was a freckled star with no front teeth. His hands were now outside the covers, and he was earnestly placing the tips of his fingers together in a geometric pattern, his ugly-handsome face drawn with concentration.

"That's a man," Lily said. "What's all the silver in the world, compared to his identity?"

"You're tossing away all your traditions, baby. Life is cheaper in China than almost anywhere." "I'm different, Al. Me and my generation."

"All right. As long as there's hope, I'll stick. What now?"

Lily looked at me. "Nobody knows he's here?" "Nobody but Dr. Barq and his staff. They won't peep."

"Let's go talk to him."

She gathered her stuff, shoved it into the Gladstone, and we took a last look at Norman.

You know what? You go to school with a guy, you see him grow through one stage of development after another, and you don't remember what he was like when you first knew him. It seems he was always that way.

Like Norman. Of course, I'd seen him in the Baby Bunting series, I'd seen him as Frank Merriwell, as Stalky, but I never knew him as a person till we attended the same school. From then until now we'd been together, with me acting as his agent, and I hadn't noticed any change. His personality was so strong that it never occurred to you that he'd ever been different.

It occurred to me as I looked at him in the sanatorium bed. Here he was with no personality—except the bit which seemed to have come back to him, just enough to enable him to fit the tips of his fingers together if he tried hard. I remembered the crooked, freckled grin of the little boy, the long stride of the college runner, the quiet humor of the man.

You look at an empty shell, you remember what was inside once upon a time.

"Let's go," I said. "Quick!"

The attendant who had been waiting in the next room cat-footed into the bedroom as we went out into the corridor where there was no prickly emptiness. The occasional patient buzzing around or dozing in a wheel chair just had ordinary things wrong with him, like old age, or paranoia, or a broken back. Anywhere outside Norman's suite was everyday routine.

Except in Dr. Barq's office. The pretty receptionist was burning up the telephone dial, a couple of nurses rushed into the doc's inner office, another rushed out with a grim look, and following her through the open door darted short groans of agony.

Dr. Barq's voice quivered with real terror—and pain, as if he were hanging by his fingernails from sharp hooks. I started for the door, but the little receptionist thrust a palm at me.

"Don't go in there!" she said to me, and into the telephone: "Send Dr. Williams at once!"

"What goes?" I asked her. "Sounds like the rats got to somebody."

"Dr. Barq has been taken ill suddenly. Will you please go? Please, please!"

"Keep your shoulders limp," Lily Kung said to her. "If we can't help, we want to leave a message. Will you shed enough hysteria to listen?"

The little blonde tensed at Lily's tone, then relaxed. When somebody in the private office

closed the door on doc's moans, she said, "Sorry. What is the message?"

"Write it down," Lily commanded. "This is important." When the girl had a pencil poised: "Nobody," Lily said, and underlined it, "nobody is to take a photograph of Mr. Courtney. If the newspapers find out he's here, you'll have your hair full of photographers. But if anybody gets in there with a camera, Dr. Barq will wish he'd never opened this place. Tell him that, from a Chinese physician's daughter."

The blonde questioned me with her eyebrows, and I said, "I'll back that up. Anything Miss Kung says goes. It's her war from now on."

When a stop light caught us on the way back to town, I frowned at Lily. "Didn't you kind of have your weight around?"

"Al," she said. "I have a feeling we'd better get him out of there."

"What's eating you?"

"I just have a feeling, that's all."

"Well, we can't. Besides, Dr. Barq runs the most suitable place within reach."

"Granted. But why can't we move him?"

"Because, baby, I'm broke. I can't get him out of hock till he can sign a check. I spent all the dough I had by flying specialists out here. They come high."

She was quiet for a few blocks. Then, "Al, I have a . . . a little. Maybe it's enough. You're welcome to it, for Mr. Courtney."

"Thanks, but why should you risk your savings? A script girl has tough enough time with her own troubles."

"But he got me the job, Al. All because my elder brother helped him through a course of philosophy. He's welcome to anything I've got."

"If we can't get along without it, baby, O. K. But why the jitters?"

"I don't know, Al. I got 'em. No reason."

"Well, let's duck into my office for a drink and some phone calls. What's the program?"

"Here's what my father told me, Al. He knows about this. He said we'd have to get hold of enough film to free fifty percent of his soul. With that much back where it belongs, the rest will follow."

"I'll play it your way, but I don't see it, baby. I don't see why the same thing doesn't happen to other movie people."

"It will, Al, as soon as they've been photographed as much as Norman. My father has been looking for something like this to happen for a long time. Take a look at this. You see some pretty peculiar behavior around Hollywood. Is it because of the strain? Father says no, but that they lose a piece of their soul each time a shutter clicks. We saw evidence that it's imprisoned on the negative."

"Coincidence, maybe. He's been resting for a couple of months. Anybody would get better."

"Not coincidence. Answer me this. Why did the news photos of Norman right after his collapse show nothing but a white silhouette? And why should he collapse immediately after I took that candid shot of him as he walked off the set of 'Hickory, Dickory, Death'? He registered on my film. I sold a print to *Pic* for twenty-five dollars. You saw it on this week's cover."

"I'd like to know how the *Pic* reporter got the story of his coma. Well, it landed your picture on the cover. Is that the first time you've hit a national mag?"

"Yes, but don't try to change the subject. Why wouldn't he photograph?"

"I'm afraid I wouldn't know."

"You just won't admit it. He had no soul, that's why. Look, Al, maybe the old adages had something to them, or the old legends. Vampires, werewolves, and other beings without souls will not reflect in a mirror. Therefore, they won't photograph. Norman Courtney wouldn't photograph, so it seems he had no soul."

"Mythology isn't very good evidence."

"Why not? People didn't dream up those stories without some basis. You've got a commandment: make no graven image. It has a new significance under the circumstances."

"Let me make myself clear," I said. "You don't have to sell me your screwy slant on things to get my help. I told you we'd play it your way till it plays out. So let's duck into the office and outline some action."

"Speaking of the office, Al, what are you going to do with Pat in this set-up?"

Pat, I thought. Patience Ryan, red-headed wood sprite, gentle Pat.

"I'm going to tell her. Don't be surprised if she strings along with you."

"I expect that. Let me ask you something, Al. Don't frighten Pat."

"Why does everybody in Hollywood think Pat needs protection? I'm able to protect her. I'm going to marry her. Besides, she doesn't need protection. She's a tough little mick."

"She's so frail, Al!"

"Don't worry about her."

I burned a little as I cut out *Sunset* to the office. All the time it was like that. Patience looked like threaded glass, flawed a little with a few freckles, and whenever we walked into a joint, strong men sat around grimly waiting for me to make a pass.

As we entered the building foyer, Lily gave a little cry and snatched the current *Pic* from the newsstand.

"Al! Look, Al!"

Norman Courtney's face wasn't on the cover,

where it had been earlier in the day. In the square from which he had exposed his famous teeth was now only a white silhouette of his profile, sleek head, and the tip of one ear.

My hackles rose as I looked at the other copies on the stand.

The colored border, masthead, date line—these were unchanged, as was the caption: "Zombi?" But the likeness of the most photographed man in history was a white outline with no shading, no perspective, no nothing.

Lily arched an eyebrow at the proprietor. "What?"

He shrugged, struck a match which he didn't apply to his cigar. "Don't ask me. All over town it's so. Bad ink, I guess. Happened about an hour ago. Herman the Hermit was here, tellin' his theory about Courtney, lookin' at the cover. Like to jumped out of his robe, and stubbed a toe roundin' the turn into the street. Damn!" he exclaimed, and flung down the match and sucked at his finger. "Did you find Norman yet?"

"No, he's still missing."

"Funnest damn thing."

"This is funnier," I said, looking at the blank cover.

Later, we found that Hollywood's Man of the Year had simultaneously disappeared from the copies of *Pic* on newsstands, in homes, hospitals, drugstores, dental offices; in gutters, ash cans, subways; in fan clubs, air liners, locker rooms; in New York and Narragansett, Memphis and Minneapolis, Denver and Des Moines, Oshkosh and Oakland, Harrisburg and Hollywood.

But even without knowing how universal the fade-out was, it gave us a chill. Lily dropped the magazine back in the rack and skittered toward the elevator.

"Come on, Al!"

My subscription copy of *Pic* was the same, and I began to feel some of the excitement which sent Lily around the office in a rigadon. The dance merely confused Pat, who, came to the connecting door between our offices and followed Lily's antics with wide green eyes.

"She had watch springs for lunch," I explained. "Come in, Red. We'll tell you a story."

When I finished, Pat picked up the magazine. "This cover blanked out on other copies, too?"

"Yes, and I'll admit it seems more than coincidence when it happened at about the time Lily destroyed the negative, together with that spark Norman seemed to get. I don't believe it, but—"

"Al!" Lily cut in. "I just got it. We *must* move Norman away from that place. Dr. Barq is a Soul Eater!"

She was a priestess again, like in Norman's bedroom. Afire inside. She stood stiff in the

middle of the floor, with sort of mystical flames in her wide black eyes.

Pat looked at me. "What's a Soul Eater?"

"A ghoul, Red. Look, Lily, enough's enough. I'll take the film yarn, with reservations, but Dr. Barq has one of the best reputations in the country."

"He runs no risk in a hospital," Lily said. "What better place could a ghoul operate inconspicuously? Now and then a patient dies, and Dr. Barq extends his own life by absorbing the soul."

"But if Norman's is on a lot of negatives," Pat objected, "what can the doctor gain from him?"

Lily came back to earth. "Ye-es, that's true. I'm off the beam, I guess. We still have the major problem, though, of making Norman a man again. You'll follow my leads?"

"You're driving."

"We must have the negatives, then. But, look, if you haven't any money, how do we go about it?"

Pat looked at me. She didn't say anything. She looked.

"Now take it easy, honey," I said. "I was going to tell you. I spent the bank roll on Norman's doctor bills."

"Am I out of line?" Lily asked.

"No," Pat said. "It's all right, Al. I hate to wait, but it's in a good cause."

"As soon as he's able to sign checks, we'll get married, Pat. I'm sorry."

"Al!" Lily exclaimed. "Didn't you tell her?"

"This isn't your business, Lily."

"It is, it is! Nobody's going to shove Pat around. You should have told her what you were doing. Look at the child. You've busted her heart!"

She eased Pat into a chair and stroked her hair.

"I'll kick him in the stomach, pet."

"It's all right," Pat said, blinking. "I wish you'd told me, Al, but it's O. K."

"I'll make it up to you, Red."

"I know you will, Al. Only— Well, it seems funny you didn't write checks on Norman's account. You have a power of attorney from him."

I dug it out of the file and showed it to her. "It expired a few days before this thing happened to him. I meant to have it renewed, but didn't."

"But why didn't you petition the court for an extension? You could even do it now, and get some operating capital."

I tried to grin as I reached for the telephone. "I'm a dope. Why do you want to marry me?"

"Somebody's got to keep you from giving away your shirt. And I'm the handiest."

I called Eddie Lanin. "You can do something to earn the fat retainer I promised, Eddie."



I told him what I wanted, hung up and looked at Lily. "Now what?"

"Let's go see Dunhill, and try to get the Museum's negative file."

"I'll call him."

Lily checked me with a gesture. "It's much easier to say no into a phone than to a person. Especially for Dunhill."

"Speaking of calling," Pat said, "Zachary has been screaming for you every fifteen minutes. Better give him a ring."

"Nuh-uh. All he wants to know is when Norman reports for retakes on 'Hickory, Dickory, Death.' He wants to cash in on all this collapse publicity. Come on, Lily. We're just talking. Let's get some action."

I kissed Pat briefly. "Don't tear your hair, Red. Soon as this business is finished, we'll page a parson and head for Murdoc Dry Lake."

"Head for what?"

"Everybody goes to Niagara for their honeymoon. All that water. It's silly."

Drew Dunhill hadn't learned the hard way. He hadn't worked his way from office boy to secretary of the Museum. Old Man Dunhill was the Museum for the last two years of his life, and Drew moved in the day after they filed the Old man under a brass marker and three tons of flowers.

Drew was tall and slouchy, with a pale and knowing eye. He had access to his father's files, and knew more detailed scandal than all the key-

hole columnists. When he wanted things done, they were done.

But his influence didn't extend to the top flight of boy geniuses who had rocketed into Hollywood in the past few years. The new stars, directors, and producers used him as a sort of office boy who provided them with historical data, who ran off old films for them when they needed a fresh plot, and who bowed deeply to them and their wives.

He regarded me with a nice mixture of obsequiousness and contempt. I had connections, I was Norman Courtney's agent, but I wasn't really big stuff. The swimming pool in my patio was no bigger than a bird bath, since that's what it was built for.

But for Lily Kung he had nothing. She simply didn't exist. She was a script girl, and Chinese to boot. He didn't acknowledge the introduction, he didn't look at her a second time, he didn't speak to her.

He folded his hands on the glass desk top and allowed his mouth to lift at one corner. "What do you want me to do, Al?"

I motioned Lily into a chair and sat on the arm. "I want to borrow, rent, or buy all the negatives of Norman's pictures and those in which he appears."

His pale eyes took on a slight glaze. "I'm very sorry, but it's completely impossible."

"Why?"

"All the negatives in our vaults are historical documents. I cannot allow them to be touched."

"But, Mr. Dunhill," Lily protested, "we want them only long enough to make prints. It's a matter of life and death."

He ignored her, kept his pale eyes steady on his sleek hands.

"You know," I said, "about Norman. A big mind-and-matter man from the East said that his breakdown might have been caused by a childhood trauma. You've got his early pictures. We want to borrow them, run 'em off and look for evidence of some major change in his childhood."

Dunhill made a reflective triangle of his thumbs and forefingers and placed his chin on the apex. "I could possibly let you have a print, Al, providing the directors will approve it—which I doubt. It's all right with me, you understand. But I'm just an employee here. Can you come in again next week, or give me a ring? And I'm glad to have seen you, Al."

"I don't want a print. Don't brush me off so fast. You know how prints are cut for programming, or how they sometimes catch fire and a sequence burns. I've got to have the originals."

"It's impossible."

I got up. "Come on, Lily."

Dunhill waved a negligent hand, started fiddling with a paper on his desk, and we went out to a corner drugstore. I telephoned Zachary.

"Would you like Norman to come back to work very soon?"

"If it's a hold-out you're holding," he snapped, "I can't pay a cent more. If all this is front-page stunting, you can quit. It won't do you good. Not any."

"The guy is really sick, Zach. But you can help. I got to have some pictures."

I told him what I wanted, giving a phony physicians' conference as a reason. "Will you telephone him, Zach?"

"You skip back and see that dope Dunhill," he said. "He can't do this to me."

Lily and I had a coke, and before we got away from the counter three girls and a small boy came over to ask if she was Anna May Wong. They were all a little sore because she denied it.

When we entered Dunhill's office again, he jumped up and shook hands. "Al, I've reconsidered. The Museum can hardly enforce a rule when a man's life is at stake. You're welcome to borrow the film. A deposit will be necessary, of course."

"I'll mail you a check as soon as I get to the office. You'll get it tomorrow."

"That is satisfactory, Al. Come on down to the vaults."

We filled the back of my car with cans of film, Dunhill shook hands again with me, but didn't

nod even to Lily, and we took off. "Where now?" I asked.

She hesitated. "Here's something I hadn't thought of, Al. We don't know how much film we have to get. Some of it has been destroyed, there's all the stuff that's lost in the cutting room or otherwise thrown away. I think we'd better stack this somewhere until we accumulate every foot in existence. My father mentioned this, but I'd forgotten it. Here's the point: he's got to have more than fifty percent of his soul. That much will then attract the remainder that is still in existence. We don't know what percentage is represented by undestroyed film, nor how much of that film we can get by hook or crook. So we better have the whole works in one pile, in hope that if it isn't really enough, the impetus of its destruction will carry over and drag in his soul."

"It's pretty damned complicated, baby. Even if I understood it, I wouldn't believe it. But I've seen one miracle today. Zach put Dunhill through the hoops and made a human being of him for a while."

"He didn't pay much attention to me," she commented. "I was just something to walk around. Speaking of miracles, though, I don't believe it either, Al. If it works, like father says it will, I'll never have my picture taken again. I wonder, Al, I wonder. I wonder if most people are shy when a camera is pointed at them because they have an instinctive knowledge of what it's going to do to them?"

"Count me out," I said. "I don't want any part of such notions."

We lugged the reels of negatives, each in its flat circular can, up to the office and dumped them on the floor. I got on the phone to give Eddie Lanin a kick in the pants.

"Don't grit your teeth," he said. "I petitioned the court, but Dr. Barq is ahead of you with his own petition."

"What kind of petition?"

"For power of attorney."

I chuckled. "Will he be surprised! That's one thing our courts are touchy about, a physician with power of attorney for his patient."

"But it was granted, Al. By Judge Curl."

"But he can't, Eddie!"

"He did, though. What do you want to do? Go to a higher court?"

"What can I do? I haven't got Federal-court dough. I'll call you, Eddie."

I turned to Pat and Lily. "Something's fishy, but we're helpless. Let's take the film back to Dunhill."

"What?" Lily flared. "Over my corpse!"

"But I can't put up the deposit I promised, baby. He'll want it back."

"Let him want. What can he do about it?"
 "He'll go to court. The Museum has plenty of money."

"Well, we're not going to take it back, just when we're getting somewhere. Take it over to my apartment. It'll be safe until we get all the rest. You didn't tell us what's the trouble."

I explained about Dr. Barq's petition.

"But why?" Lily said. "Pat pointed out that Norman is useless to him. What's he up to?"

"Maybe he wants Norman's money," Pat suggested. "I would, I think, if I were the doctor."

"He seems to be well heeled," Lily said, "and his prices are high."

"You're still thinking of him as a ghoul," I pointed out. "If he were . . . if there are such things . . . he'd want no truck with Norman. But if he's a chiseler, he'd like to sign checks on bank accounts. Norm has a nice piece of change salted away."

"Let's go see what goes on, Al. We'll drop this film at my place, and call on the good doctor."

"Hold down the fort, Red. We'll call you, and pick you up in time for dinner."

We were stopped at the gate. The attendant didn't even change expression when we swore at him, when we identified ourselves, or when we threatened to get police aid in calling on Norman. He gave us a steady, dark, blank stare, and repeated, like a gouged record:

"You are not to be admitted."

Lily yanked out her Contax and snapped several shots of him. "I'll remember you," she said.

We held council over the dinner table later. "Something is less than kosher," Lily said. "We better find out."

"Why don't you get the films together and forget Dr. Barq?" Pat asked. "Restoring Norman is the important thing."

"It is not," Lily snapped. "Getting Al's money back is the important thing. He promised to marry you, and he will or I'll beat his brains out against a newel post. Bringing Norman back to this world is just the first step."

"In order to do that, we have to get him out of that joint," I said.

"You say it so easily," Lily cracked.

Pat put down her knife and fork and placed both luminous hands against her throat. "I'm sick."

My heart turned half over, then back. "What's the matter, Red?"

"I think I ought to go to a sanatorium, Al."

"What's the matter?"

"Then," she said, grinning elfinly, "I could keep an eye on Dr. Barq and maybe find out what he's trying to do."

"Oh, no," Lily said. "Oh, no. We don't let you inside those walls."

"No, it's out, Red. We don't know enough about the doc."

"But I wouldn't be in any danger, and I might be of some help."

"Let's don't talk about it, Red. I suggest we go about collecting film tomorrow. Maybe we can get enough for the trick before anything breaks."

We did more running around and got less done in the next three days than a cageful of spinning mice. We learned two things: You can't get negatives from a studio vault, and you can't keep 'em if you do.

Zachary could have loaned the negatives from his studio. He was the current white-haired lad, with unlimited backing and a huge production schedule outlined. Top of the heap, and all that, and he would have done it if the little matter of a check to Dunhill hadn't come up.

"You got to play with fairness," the slim little man told me and Lily. "Me, I don't fret if you chisel Dunhill, but when I tell him it's O. K. and you run around him, you got me on a spot."

"But listen, Zach. Something went wrong. I intended to send him a check as a deposit, but I suddenly ran short of cash. You know how that can happen."

"God forbid!" he said fervently.

"Believe me, Zach, it's important to get the negatives of Norman's pictures, even if I double-cross every studio in town. If you want him to make another million for you, you better help."

He leaned back in his chair, folded manicured hands across his sports shirt and stabbed me with his keen black eyes. "I want him to work, all right, Al. But I don't get it how negatives can do it."

"I'm not clear on it myself, Zach, but I know it's worth trying. Please help, Zach. You won't regret it. Look, I'm gambling everything I've got, to make Norman well. If I fail, I might as well start peddling needles door to door. I'll lose what actors I'm handling, and never get another. And I don't have to do this, Zach. I could leave it alone."

"Like I'm going to, Al."

We argued for nearly an hour, with me fandancing all around the real reason why I wanted the film, but he wouldn't budge. I had let him down, and the Museum was sore at him.

"A man can't afford no more enemies than he can't help keeping, Al. I can't take a chance on pulling strings and getting tangled in 'em myself."

I got up. "I can't blame you, I guess. Come on, Lily, we'll try it on our own."

"Just a moment," she said, and turned to Zach-

ary. "My little sister thinks you are the greatest man in the world, M. Zachary. You would give her great pleasure if I could take her some trifle that has belonged to you."

It wasn't the words so much as Lily's tone, I guess. It simply dripped. "You great big wonderful man, you," and Zachary wallowed in it a little. He beamed at Lily.

"My wrist watch?" he suggested.

Lily gasped, flung up an ivory hand. "Nothing so magnificent. That would make her shy and unhappy." She pointed at his head. "If you'll pardon me, you have a wild lock of hair over your left ear. If I could cut it off?"

Zachary took a small mirror from his desk, examined his reflection. "My looks would get better, too," he said. "Sure. You got scissors?"

"No, but I will have in a second."

She went out, returned almost immediately, clipped the black lock, and we left. Lily stowed the hair in an envelope which she borrowed from Zachary's secretary.

"If we don't get anywhere by ourselves," she said as we drove off the lot, "this may come in handy."

We didn't get anywhere. Some of my friends in various studios were willing to let me borrow some film, but when I had to explain that I couldn't put up a deposit, they just stared as if I were a visiting relative.

Then, just to put a top on three wasted days, a process server handed me a subpoena to appear the following morning before Judge Curl and show cause why I should not return the Dunhill film.

"So," I said to Lily, going up to the office in the elevator, "that's the works. The whole thing was screwy, anyway. All we've done is to give me a bad name and advertise the fact that I'm broke."

"We're not through," she said. "We haven't started to fight yet."

"I'm through. What you do is your own affair. I'm returning the film."

"Oh, no. Remember, it's in my apartment. If you try to break in and get it, I'll have you pinched, Al."

I waited until we were out of the elevator, then took her arm. "You're not serious."

"Deadly."

"You can't do that to me, Lily. You'll get me in jail."

"We'll see. I don't think you'll suffer, but even if you do I'm going through with this."

"But why?"

"You're going to marry Pat, and you're going to get back all the money you've spent on Norman. The only way you can do it is to restore Norman's soul."

"Pat won't like marrying a convict."

"I'll keep you out of jail, too."

"That'll be a neat trick."

The first thing we saw when we went into the office was a note from Pat:

You and Lily aren't getting anywhere. I've got an idea. I'm at Dr. Barq's.

Lily caught my arm as I wheeled toward the door.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To get Pat, of course."

"Why?"

"She's so helpless. She'll get herself hurt."

"That isn't the story you gave out the other day. She was a tough little mick then."

"That was different," I said. "I was on the other side of the argument then."

"What makes you think she might get hurt?"

"I don't trust Dr. Barq."

"Why not? Are you beginning to believe he's a ghoul?"

"No, but—"

"But you'll admit he may be?"

"Nuts, I admit nothing. I'm upset, that's all. The girl I— Well, damn it, I love her, and I want to be sure she's all right, see? As long as she's in that joint I can't be sure. So I'm getting her out."

"Wait a minute, Al. You and I are *persona non grata* with Dr. Barq. Just suppose, then, that he is a Soul Eater. If he finds that you or I are connected with Pat, or have any personal interest in her, what would happen?"

That stopped me. It shouldn't have, but it stopped me. Not that I gave any house room to Lily's contention that the doc might be a ghoul, but still—

"Yeah. I don't believe it, Lily, but there's one chance in a million, maybe, that you might have tagged him. I won't take even that chance. What have I got a lawyer for, if not to do things like this?"

"And don't forget to tell him about the subpoena, she reminded as I dialed Eddie Lanin's office.

"Get her out," I told Eddie. "She's had some kind of brain wave, and all she'll get is trouble. You get her out. I'll take care of the spanking, myself."

I told him about the jam I was in with Dunhill, and he said he'd show up at court the next morning. He said he'd call me back on Pat, and I paced the floor for fifteen minutes before the phone rang.

"I'm afraid nothing can be done about Pat tonight, Al. She's there, all right. But the report is that she has a serious mental disorder, is in a critical condition, and can't be seen even by

her mother. We can take legal steps tomorrow, but we can't get a court order now, at six o'clock."

"But we've got to, Eddie! She hasn't any mental disorder. There's something phony."

"But, Al, we can't prove it tonight."

"I can prove it by getting her out."

"Wait, Al! Don't hang up. If you're thinking of snatching her, don't. You'll get in jail on so many counts the trial will take a year for preliminary hearing."

"I'm not impressed, Eddie."

"Al, believe me, you'd better be. You can't break into a hospital and throw your weight around. If you don't wind up in a padded cell, or get killed, you'll get pinched. Besides, how do you know the report isn't true? Maybe she has a mental kink. You don't know."

"Listen, Eddie. I got troubles enough without worrying whether my fiancée is crazy or not. I know, see? She's all right, and she's being held there against her will."

I slammed down the receiver and headed for the door. "Go on home," I told Lily. "I'm going to be busy."

"You'll get her killed, that's what you'll do."

I halted. "All we do is talk. I'm going to do something for a change."

"Al, listen once more. Dr. Barq is a reputable man. If his place gives out a report on a patient, he's got to be able to back it up. By the time you could bust in to see Pat, she would have a serious mental disorder. You can bet what you ever hope to have on that. In the meantime, though, she won't be in danger as long as she isn't identified as your intended. Tomorrow, we can take more subtle steps to get her out."

"But I can't just sit around and do nothing all night."

"You won't have to, Al. I'll furnish plenty of action. Come on over to my apartment."

Nothing much registered on me. I drove automatically to Lily's place. She did some talking, and cautioned me once about a red light, but I didn't hear what she said and I ran through the light, anyway.

She fixed me a drink and disappeared into another room. When she came back, she had on the ceremonial robes again. She was a priestess once more, slender, haughty, and tall. All the ancient dignity of her race was in her masklike face, blank black eyes, and the liquid stiffness of her walk. On her upturned palms she carried a doll as if it were a platter.

"What the hell?" I said.

She turned her inscrutable face toward me. "I am going to torture Zachary. I shall not kill him."

"Why?"

"He will pay for the Museum film, and also give us what we need."

I got to my feet. "I know enough crazy people. Good-by."

"This is for Pat, too."

"Try and make sense, Lily."

"Look," she said, nodding at the doll. "I made this, and used Zachary's lock of hair in the making. What I am going to do with it is simple and harmless, but frightening enough to force Zachary to grant our demands."

The thing was crude enough, fashioned of ordinary knickknacks you find in any home, yet it had that strange grace and beauty which comes, I suppose, from the oldest racial artistic heritage. Its painted face and rice-paper robe would have seemed ridiculous in any other language.

"Is this black magic?" I asked. "If so, good-by."

"Oh no, Al. It's simply the application of certain laws my ancestors have known for thousands of years."

"Are you going to stick pins in it? If so, I'm going."

"No. Please sit down, Al."

She laid the doll on a little table, and knelt beside it. She spoke a few Chinese phrases, and made a few graceful passes in the air. Then she took two feathers from the sleeves of her bright robe.

She tickled the doll. Not as you and I would, no. She made a ritual of it, and a pattern. She didn't just wiggle the tips of the feathers against the soles of the doll's button feet. I got a distinct impression that the doll had identity for her. For her, it lived.

She tried to surprise it. Not fiendishly, but with a perfectly blank face and expressionless eyes.

You've seen a cat play with a mouse? How it pretends indifference as the mouse scurries toward a hole, or a bush, or a dark corner? How it waits until the mouse has almost reached safety, then pounces with tender speed, brings it back and turns it loose again?

Lily pounced, so to speak. She knelt motionless until I thought she'd given the matter up, then with sudden blurred motion she tickled the doll with both feathers, one in each hand. Then motionless again.

This went on for half an hour, and became so realistic that I jumped, cringed, and shuddered each time she made a blur of her hands. When she put down the feathers and got to her feet, I was sweating all over.

"Now," she said, "will you telephone Zachary and tell him that you're responsible for this? You know what to say after that."

"I'll sound like a fool. This doll has no relation to Zachary, on the other side of town. I

don't believe anything happened, and I refuse to be connected with whatever it was. Even if that does sound mixed up, I mean it."

"Please, Al. If you want to get your problem worked out, you'll have to co-operate."

"This sort of thing is illegal, Lily. I'm breaking no laws."

"But you were anxious to barge out and do a spot of kidnaping a few minutes ago."

"That was dif— Oh, hell! It's lucky I've got his unlisted phone number in my little book."

I got Zachary on the phone and didn't know what to say except hello.

"Well?" he snapped. "Who is calling?"

"This is Al, Zach."

"So it's Al, Al. So what are you cooking?"

"How do you feel, Zach?"

Now tell me, what is it? I'm hurrying when possible."

"It isn't important, Zach. I'll call you tomorrow."

I hung up and turned to Lily. She had plenty of expression now. She was puzzled.

"Shall I call up some more people?"

"Don't be nasty, Al. Something's wrong."

"I'm getting a fine reputation," I went on. "I steal film and I call people up to ask if they tickle. What'll you think of next?"

"Please be quiet, Al. Let me think."

"Go ahead. But if you come up with any new ideas, I'll sock you."

She stood straight and still, and closed her eyes. Presently she said, "Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."



"I'm feeling late. I got to make a speech at the Roosevelt, and I got nothing but lost shirt studs. So what is it, Al? What do you want?"

"Do you feel all right, Zach? You don't tickle?"

"Again, please?"

"Do you tickle anywhere?"

"Do I tickle what?"

"You. Yourself."

"I'm a busy man, Al. I got better things to do.

"Do you know whether there's a big church between us and him?"

"Is that a serious question?"

"Very serious. If the church were big enough, and were directly in line, and near enough to him or us, this business wouldn't work."

Whether there was anything to it or not, she was serious, so I thought about it.

"No, I can't think of a church."

"Maybe he wears a toupee. If this hair is

false, it wouldn't work. Do you know?"

"His hair is his own."

"Then we'd better go in as straight a line as we can to his house, and look for a church."

I remembered something that was relevant, but it wouldn't take form in my mind.

"Be quiet," I said. "Let me think, for a change."

Just as I said it, I remembered. "Look. You know about the fad—I suppose that's what you'd call it—for bringing old European castles and stuff over here in pieces and reconstructing them? Well, the guy who lived in Zachary's house before him, the guy who built it . . . uh, I seem to remember that he had shipped the stones from a big house or palace over here. It had been occupied by a man who either became a Pope or was considered for the position."

Lily's eyes sparkled. "Then it was consecrated. Well! That's a relief. All we have to do is get him out of it."

"He's probably already out of it. He was in a stew to get to a banquet."

I told her about it, and much against my better judgment was soon headed for the hotel.

Since I had agreed to play the game by Lily's rules, I didn't ask any questions. I went into the grill, called the desk from the public phone, and asked to have Zachary paged.

"He'll be in the dining room adjoining the bar," I told the clerk.

Three or four minutes later, he was on the wire. "This is Al again, Zach. I want to tell you something."

"Listen, Al. If you want to get drunk, that's your headache. But why hitch me to it? I got to make a speech."

"I'm sober, Zach. I want to warn you. If funny things happen to you while you're speaking, it's me that's doing them. Remember that."

"What kind of funny, Al?"

"Any kind. I hate to do this, Zach, but I want you to square the beef with Dunhill, and I want all the negatives from yours and other studios. If you'll agree now, you won't suffer any embarrassment."

"Al, you're a good guy and I like you from friendship. But quit bothering me. That's my final word."

He hung up, and I went into the bar where Lily had taken a stool at the far end against the wall. Her robe and the doll she carried didn't get even a second glance from the sprinkle of customers. This was Hollywood.

I pretended not to see her, and took a seat at the bar from which I could see into the room where a banquet was in progress. Zachary came back from the lobby and took his place at the table. He began to eat.

Lily set the doll before her, took the straw

from her Cuba Libre and blew into the doll's ear. I shifted my eyes to Zachary and saw him flinch and twist a finger in his ear. Lily blew into the other ear and Zach put down his fork to use his left hand. Lily alternated from one ear to the other, and Zach went through some complicated motions which brought glances from the banquetters and caused words I couldn't hear between him and the young men sitting on either side of him.

To the casual eye, Lily was simply toying with an odd little manikin. The bartender watched her with amusement between wiping glasses and refilling. She apparently tired of the straw technique and laid it aside. She sipped at her drink, then fished out an ice cube and set the doll on it.

Zach rolled his dark eyes furtively around the banquet table, twisted uncomfortably in his chair, suddenly jumped to his feet. While some twenty persons eyed him with puzzled interest, he rubbed his seat, shivered, and examined his chair. Finding nothing there, he sat down again. He instantly shot to his feet once more, with a somewhat wild look in his eyes.

Lily pushed the ice cube to one side, and when Zach reseated himself his face took on an expression of purring relief. But not for long. Lily twisted her cocktail napkin to a point and tickled the doll's feet, as she had with feathers in her apartment. She had the cat and mouse technique again, and even though I couldn't feel a thing, I jumped with Zach.

His feet were hidden by the table, but from the contortions the visible part of his body went through, I could imagine him jerking first one foot, then the other, then both from the floor and attempting to sit on them. A harried expression began to grow on his face.

In rapid succession, Lily used the straw, the ice cube, and the napkin, and Zach put on an act that any circus would headline. It wasn't the fact that his twitching overturned all the glassware within reach that was spectacular, nor his bouncing out of his chair. But when he jumped up on the long table and danced on breaking dishes, the table began to empty. Diners got up, took a last look at his fancy footwork, and filed firmly out to the bar. A few looked back at him dancing on the deserted table, but most of them ordered drinks and downed them hurriedly.

Lily continued the tickling for nearly fifteen minutes, and Zach's gyrations took on a note of hysteria as waiters began to gather and make futile efforts to arrest his dervish spinning. Customers from the bar, and guests from the lobby added to the throng, and the dining room was soon pretty well filled with people who watched Zach and the busy waiters in hushed and puzzled silence.

Lily stopped tickling the doll, and Zach, with a finel pirouette, collapsed among fragments of chinaware and untouched food. He only writhed a little when Lily stuck the ice cube against the doll's stomach. He was tired.

I joined the spectators and waiters, and presently Zach's rolling eyes fixed on me.

"Al," he moaned. "Al."

He sat up and attempted to brush roast and gravy from his shirt front, celery from his hair, and a green salad off his vest. Lily joined me as I went over to the table, and as Zach in sudden pain pressed hands against his stomach, green salad and all, I saw that Lily had the point of a toothpick buried in the stomach of the doll.

"Wassa malla you?" she asked him. "Cloc-clumbers makee bellyache?"

Zach groaned. "I'm ruined! Get me outa here!"

"We'll take you home, Zach. Can you walk?"

"Make dancing," Lily said. "Velly fine."

She took the toothpick away, and the drawn look went off Zach's face. He got off the table and kept eyes on the floor while waiters wiped him with napkins.

"You dlunk?" Lily asked. "You been dlinkee?"

"Shh!" I cautioned her. "It could happen to anybody. Come on, Zach. A good night's sleep'll fix you up."

He swept the whispering, giggling audience with a black glance. Then he hung his head and walked quickly through the lobby, with me and Lily on either side.

We piloted him to my car, helped him in, and I got into gear. We crawled along with boulevard traffic until I cut down a side street and headed for my place.

"Thanks for getting me outa there, Al."

"It's all right, Zach. Glad to be of service."

After a long silence, he said, "What was all this stuff you gave me on the phone?"

"What stuff?"

"Didn't you call me at the hotel?"

"No, Zach. Lily and I just happened to drop in at the bar for a drink, and we saw you. You shouldn't drink so much."

"I didn't drink nothing!" he snapped. "Didn't you call me? Honest?"

"Honest. We just finished making the rounds of studios, and went into the bar. Then we saw you."

"Well, what did you mean when you called me at home?"

"What are you talking about? I didn't call you."

"Yes, wassa malla you?" Lily demanded.

Zach put his head in his hands. "I'm confused."

"While we're on the subject, Zach," I said

quickly, "I intended to call you in the morning. I'm about to be in a legal jam. Will you put up a deposit on Dunhill's film, and will you get those negatives I wanted?"

"For the last time—" he began.

Lily made a motion which I caught from the tail of my eye, and Zach clapped both hands to his stomach.

"It ain't decent," he moaned, "what happens to me. Are you doing this, Al? If you are, put a name on the price, and I'll do it."

I stopped in front of my apartment house. "Do you want to come up for a drink? We'll talk about it."

He hesitated. Lily moved her hands again, and he winced. "O. K., O. K., Al. Only stop this business. I can't take much more."

"I'm not doing anything. What happened to you?"

He glanced at Lily and dropped his eyes. "Even if I could tell you with ladies present, you wouldn't believe me."

"Wassa malla you?" Lily asked again, then giggled. "Come on, boys. There is work to do."

We went inside, and when I opened my door there was a rush of feet across the floor and Pat was clinging to me, red head buried on my chest, arms tight around me.

"Al, Al! I'm so scared, Al!"

"Take it easy, Red. Everything's all right now."

I heard a crash behind me. Zach had collapsed.

Beside him in the corridor lay the little manikin in its rice-paper robes, and above the two stood Lily, her face full of exasperation.

"Damn it!" she said. "I dropped the thing when I saw Pat. Come on, both of you. He may have a concussion. The doll landed on its head."

The shock was good for Pat. She snapped out of her shivers and helped us drag Zachary inside; she shut the door and stood ready to take instructions while I felt for his pulse. He was alive, but a wide bruise marked his forehead, a bruise which corresponded to a depression in the skull of the doll.

"This is new to me," I told Lily. "I've never seen anything like it, and I don't know what to do."

"Nor I," she replied. "I've been doing what my father told me. Let's get him in a bed. Maybe he'll come out of it if we just leave him alone."

"I'd rather he just had a plain hit in the head," I said. "We could call a doctor for that. Maybe you'd better get your father up here."

"He won't come. He won't even see motion pictures, much less get mixed up with movie people."

"O. K. Give me a hand."

We put Zach in my bed, where he lay breathing heavily. His breathing got easier when Lily mut-

tered some Chinese over the doll and stroked its forehead, but he didn't come out of it. We looked down at him for a while, then Lily put the doll carefully on the floor and we went back into the living room.

"What happened?" she asked Pat.

Pat started, shuddered, and clung to me again. "It was pretty awful. They put me in a room across the hall from Norman's. I pretended to be in bad shape after they found me wandering around the grounds and was watched so closely I had a hard time hiding my flower of garlic under my pillow."

"Your what?"

"If he was a ghoul," Pat said, "garlic would stop him. Anybody knows that."

"Go on."

"So I pretended to go to sleep and the nurses went away. I opened my door a crack and pulled the bed to where I could watch Norman's door. Sure enough I saw somebody go in. I supposed it was Dr. Barq. Is he tall and thin, with a face that . . . that make you feel funny?"

"It's the eyes," I said. "They're what make you feel prickly."

"What did you do?" Lily asked.

"Well, when he went in he didn't stop like you normally do to close the door. I could see he just gave it a shove and kept on walking. I knew the bedroom was inside, beyond the first room, so I slipped across the hall and into the sitting room. I was very quiet. A cat couldn't have heard my bare feet on that cork flooring. I sneaked over to the bedroom door and peeked around it."

Pat stopped for a moment. She didn't shiver again. She didn't do anything but stare at the wall. Not that she seemed to see anything, even the wall. She just stared.

"He was standing over the bed," she went on. "He wasn't doing anything. He looked down at Norman, and he had no expression on his long dark face, but his hands were clenched. He hated Norman. I could feel it, like a wall. But Norman couldn't, I don't think. He didn't even look at Dr. Barq. All he did was try to put the tips of his fingers on one hand against the fingers on his other hand, like a baby trying to put its foot in its mouth."

"I guess I must have made a noise when I went out, because I heard feet behind me."

She shuddered here, and so did I. Lily, I think, felt some of the chill, too.

"I didn't scream," Pat said. "I couldn't. I tried, but I was paralyzed for a second, and the feet came closer in a rush. Then I was able to run, I guess. I guess I ran, because the next thing I remember I was shoving the flower of garlic at him and crying, 'Go away, go away, go away!' and he was backing toward the door of

my room. You should have seen his face. I'll dream about those eyes, and the twisted mouth. He was livid. Hold me, Al! Don't let me go!"

She buried her head on my shoulder again, and I held her tightly. Presently the tension went out of her, but she made no move to pull away.

"Why did you go out there, Red, in the first place?"

"I thought maybe I could learn something that would help clear up Norman's trouble, and then we could get married like we planned."

"And all you did was scare yourself half to death. How did you get away?"

"I snatched my clothes as I passed the closet where the nurse had hung them and followed Dr. Barq down the corridor until I came to a door. Then I ran. I heard people come after me just about the time I reached the fence, but they were hunting in another part of the grounds. So I put on my clothes real quick, climbed through the fence and hitched a ride from a vegetable farmer. He brought me here. I waited with the lights on. I thought you'd never show up."

I stroked her hair. "It's all right now, Red. Stop trembling. Everything's under control."

I looked at Lily, and added, with my lips only: "I hope."

Her eyes looked like black marble. "We've got to get Norman out of there."

"Why? How?"

"As to why, because you and I can't get in like other people. Dr. Barq doesn't want us there, for reasons of his own. As to how, we'll have to kidnap him."

"We can't carry him, and he can't walk, even if we could get in. Which we can't."

"Pat got in. She knows how. She got out, too. And as for carrying him, we don't have to. I know a trick worth four of that."

"Why not leave him there? He seems safe enough."

Lily sighed. "Can't you understand we're bucking the Soul Eater, Al? It's a copper-riveted cinch that Dr. Barq doesn't want Norman to get his soul back. As long as Norman is soulless, and alive, Dr. Barq can retain his power of attorney and bleed Norman's estate. The proof is the hatred Pat felt as Dr. Barq looked down at Norman."

"I don't follow that."

"Look," Lily said patiently. "The doctor is a ghoul. Pat proved that. Do you follow that?"

"Well, I'll grant it for the sake of argument."

"Al, stop this literal denial of things you don't understand. Just because you're not conditioned to 'em doesn't mean they can't exist. Well, anyway, you'll grant he's a ghoul. He knows that Norman has no soul. He must know that his soul isn't destroyed, because he surely saw the change

in Norman after we burned that negative. That hatred Pat felt, I'll bet four dollars, is not at Norman, but at his own helplessness to locate the soul and absorb it."

"This is all guesswork."

"Surely, but what evidence we have supports it as a theory. Now. You can bet the doctor believes that you and I are working to restore Norman to completeness. He'll keep close tab on Norman's condition. If we get the negatives together and free Norman's soul, the doctor will be happy as a wolverine to eat it. He then knows where it is and can keep Norman a kind of zombi as long as desirable. When it's no longer desirable, Norman will die physically. What am I making a speech for? Take it from me, we got to get him out of there and put him in a safe place."

"All right. What do we do?"

"We buy up all the garlic in town."

"Before I crawl out on any more limbs, Lily, I want to know something. If you can convince me, then I'll agree to your latest screwy notion. How do you know Dr. Barq suspects that we have any interest in Norman—I mean, any more than the ordinary interest that an agent would show toward his friend and client?"

"I don't know it for certain, Al. But look at the evidence. Dr. Barq applied for and got a power of attorney from Judge Curl. Right?"

"Mm-m-m."

"Dr. Barq, if memory serves, is a trustee of the Museum. Check?"

"I didn't know that."

"I've heard it, I'm pretty sure. All right, what happens? We . . . ah, borrow some film from the Museum and we get called up before Judge Curl to explain why. Now look. In the first place, the courts will never grant power of attorney to a patient's physician. That's logical and fair. But Judge Curl does, so something looks phony. Added to that, you are to appear before this same judge. It's more than coincidence, Al, and I feel that Dr. Barq is behind it."

"It's pretty thin, baby, but it's something. O. K., I'm with you. What about Zach?" I nodded at the bedroom door.

"He'll be safe here. We won't be long."

So we bought practically all the garlic in Holly-wood.

The Hollyfax Market: arc lamps on the sidewalk, stabbing a veil of fog; hillbilly entertainers, stabbing your eardrums with sharp blades of nasal harmony.

"We want some garlic," I told the Japanese vegetable man.

He spread a smile between his ears. "Garric, how much, please?"

"All you've got."

"Ah? Have too much. Busher basket full. How much you want?"

"The whole works."

"Ah, so? Will never use, misser. Too much."

"Wassa malla you?" Lily snarled. "You savvy Inglis? Gollie you got, gollie we buy. You savvy? You bring, chop chop!"

As he scurried away, I said, "Cut out that coolie chatter. You speak better English than I do."

"I think it's cute," Pat said.

"That's just the trouble. She's got a Ph. D in languages, and uses the sloppiest English in town. Cute!"

"Hush yo' mouf," Lily said fiercely. "Time's a-wastin'."

We threw the bag of garlic in the car and buzzed off to the next market, where a Greek waited on us. Then an Italian, Chinese, Armenian, Jew, Hindu, and an Irishman goggled from their respective vegetable stands, and a man with phony Oxford enunciation at the Purchasers' Protective Market where the potatoes were displayed under plate glass.

"Listen," I said to Lily, "we got enough garlic to . . . to— We got enough garlic. There's no more room inside, on top, on the fenders or bumpers. What are you trying to do, corner the market?"

Lily surveyed the car, which had a lumpy, moving-day look. "If we don't have enough, we can come back for more. I'd like to do it in one trip, though."

"If we buy any more, every French and Italian restaurant in town will close its doors tomorrow. What are you planning for this spic-spice?"

"We're going to build a wailing wall. Detour by my place on the way to the ghoul's guest house."

"What have you got in mind, Lily?"

"I want to get some stuff. You agreed to let me play general in this war."

"Yes. I'll stick to it."

The stuff proved to be her Gladstone bag—with its altar, robe, altar lamp, and incense—and a can of film. She refused to explain, and we drove across the hills into the valley and headed for Dr. Barq's sanatorium.

"You know how it is on an unlighted country road? Within the throw of your headlights, you've got a warm and comfortable world. You know what's there, you can see it. Outside that fan of light is—what? You get the impression that it's seething with rabbits, for they bounce into the light and across the road to vanish with their powder-puff bottoms into the empty darkness.

Empty, ordinarily.

Not tonight. In spite of myself, I felt that things packed the darkness beyond the briefly lighted fence posts, the occasional amorphous sil-

houette of low hills. They didn't have definite form, but somehow they all looked like Dr. Barq. There were eyes, sure. Unseen, but seeing.

It's what you can't see in the dark that makes you afraid, that drops a hush over you and your companions. You don't fear what you see. You can organize a defense. You don't fear what you hear. You can identify the sound, and your memory supplies its form, and your defense is built. But those forms you can't quite see, and the sounds which are just below the level of consciousness can drive you screwy.

I hung to the steering wheel. It was solid, a part of my everyday world. I pushed the car beyond the safety mark, so as to get through this thick and pulsing darkness as soon as possible. I'd been through here by day, and I *knew* what was out there beyond my lights. Over and over I itemized the hills, a clump of trees, a ranch, a field of beans. But I clung to the steering wheel.

Because what assurance did I have that those objects were there now? Sure, they were plain to see by daylight. But are they still there at night? How do you know? You can find out by stopping the car and walking over to see with a flashlight, but what's beyond its beam?

That's the way I felt on the empty country road.

Pat and Lily must have felt it, too. Or maybe they were busy with private thoughts, or scared because I was driving too fast. At any rate, they were as quiet as I.

When the white sign, arrowed with brilliants that indicated the cut-off to Dr. Barq's, showed at the far edge of my lights, I slowed and braked for the sharp turn.

"I think we'd better walk," Lily said.

"O. K."

"Let Pat take us to where she got inside the grounds."

We all took a sack of garlic and with Pat flashighting us through a thin stand of stunt oak we filed along a tangent which intersected a gap in a high hedge. At the top of a five-hundred-yard slope of lawn perched the sanatorium, pocked with dark, square windows.

We dumped the garlic, left Lily to guard, and Pat and I returned to the car for the first of five trips.

"I'm scared," Pat said, when we had it piled in a shapeless heap. "I'm scared we'll see Dr. Barq. I . . . I don't want to see him again."

"Relax," Lily advised. "Gonna fix his wagon in a minute. First, we put a ring around his rookery, and leave no chink unfilled." She paused, repeated thoughtfully. "No chink unfilled. I'm hungry."

At her direction, we placed pod after pod end

to end around the grounds. It took quite some time, with only a bent-wire moon and pale stars for light, and when we met again at the gap we were on the tag end of the graveyard shift.

Lily lighted her altar lamp, donned her robes, and erected her altar.

"Please to be quiet," she said. "The gods will listen to the devout, but not to the empty chatter of children."

We were quiet. There was something about Lily Kung, priestess.

The altar lamp flame rippled over the sheen of Lily's robe, was bright and steady on the film can as she held it motionless for a moment. Then she removed the reel, unwound the film and let it fall on the ground in a twisted glittering heap of ribbon.

She knelt, pronounced her Chinese curse and prayer, and put flame to the film.

It burned hot, bright, and fast, flaring against the dark, loosing acrid smoke on the small wind. Lily jumped to her feet, dropped the robe, and kicked an almost-empty sack.

"Grab a handful of garlic and come on. If I'm right, Norman will be able to walk if we steer him, and Dr. Barq will be sick enough to keep the skeleton staff busy till we get Norman away. But hurry!"

We hurried up the lawn, a clutch of garlic in our hands. We were not challenged at the door, nor in the first-floor corridors. But from above, sounds drifted down.

These were moans, half screams, and the voice was Dr. Barq's. Their timbre chilled my blood, gave me a skinful of duck bumps. We hurried to Norman's rooms, turned on the lights, and entered his bedroom.

He was there, all right. It was Norman, no doubt about it. But—

Norman, in a waking coma, with volition enough only to place the fingers of one hand against the fingers of the other, was one thing; Norman completely unconscious was another. But this was something else again.

His eyes were dark and bright, like freshly dipped chocolate, and they fixed on Pat. They fed on her shock of bright red hair, her elfin face, green eyes, her small curved body and slender legs. His hands moved, reached for Pat. He raised himself from his pillow and strained for her. He noted Lily and me with one indifferent glance and dismissed us from whatever mind was his at the moment.

He was not like a baby, or a child, or an idiot. No, he was a man, he was Norman Courtney—to a degree. That was the impression I had under the indirect wall lights: he was incomplete. It was not adolescence, not a man without an arm or a leg—it was Norman without a part of Norman. The feeling was subtle. It didn't sock

you between the eyes. But it made you weak, and a little crawly.

Pat felt it, probably more than I, certainly more than Lily. She cringed a little, but stood her ground. I could almost hear her thoughts: "We've got to get him out. That's the main thing. Snap out of it. We can deal with this animal light in his eyes later. We've got another job now. Stick out your chin and help, stupe."

And she did. None of us spoke. We fell into practical figured action. Pat beckoned Norman, and he scrambled out of bed. He made a gesture toward moving on all fours, but straightened. He went toward her on bent legs, arms swinging loosely. She kept beyond reach, led the way outside, and Lily and I kept firm hands on each of Norman's arms.

With the sound of Dr. Barq's screams fading behind us we rushed down the lawn to the hedge gap, and through the woods to the car.

"You drive, Red. I'll get in the back with Norman."

"Me, too," Lily said.

"No. You get in front, but face us. If Norman gets out of hand, you can push him in the face."

We started, with Lily facing us. She knelt on the seat, with elbows on its top, and the wind blew her straight black hair around her face. She was not a Chinese priestess, she was not an American girl, short skirt swinging around pretty legs, she was a witch.

She apparently frightened Norman, when he noticed her. Mostly he was reaching for Pat, and mostly I was slapping him gently back into place. But now and then he'd notice Lily and cower in his corner until Pat got his attention again.

"I don't get it," I told Lily. "He wasn't like this when he was . . . uh—"

"Alive?" she supplied. "Don't kid yourself. That's the primal drive. He has just enough of his soul back to make him conscious of the urge to perpetuate the race. Self-preservation is there, too, because he gives up when you slap him or when he looks at me." She added thoughtfully, "I must be pretty."

"All you need," I said, pushing Norman back as we came down the pass into Hollywood, "is a boiling pot and an incantation."

She fixed pin-pointed eyes on Norman, made stirring motions with her hand. "Liver of blaspheming Jew, gall of goat, and slips of yew slivered in the moon's eclipse, nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips," she quoted. "It's my secret, black, and midnight hag's blood. Turn left at the next corner, Pat."

Norman had begun to whimper as she recited

the witch's speech in a curdled voice, and before she finished, that one hundred and seventy-five pounds of half man was cuddling against me like a frightened puppy.

I shoved him away, roughly, almost hysterically.

"Stop it!" I snarled at Lily. "You scared me, even. This is a horrid thing that has happened to Norman. It makes my—heart—shrive!—up."

I felt Norman surge forward. He had found Pat again, had forgotten Lily. I slapped him back, gently, and felt better. "Come down off that chandelier," I grumbled, and he twisted his face into a vacuous grin at my tone.

"Right at the next corner," Lily said to Pat.

"Where we headed?" I asked.

"My place."

"Why?"

"To pick up my camera."

"Again, please?"

"He can't be handled, the way he is. I'm going to photograph him."

"I don't get you."

The car was moving slowly now, and Lily pushed hair off her face. "Just think," she said in an awed voice, "how big the human soul must be. Norman has been photographed more than any man in history, and it took forty years of nearly constant exposure to a camera lens to make him an empty shell. That's not the important point, though. We burned one reel of film, and he got back his basic animal instincts—two, anyway. What a difference there is between man and beast. We've reduced that difference to a measurable quantity. Screwy, but measurable."

"In footage?"

"I said it was screwy, but that's the way it stacks up for us; man is so many reels of thirty-five-millimeter film superior to certain animals."

I suddenly had my hands full of Norman again, and dropped out of the conversation as I fought him back into the seat. But the conversation didn't dfop out of my mind. I was beginning to believe Lily's theory.

One rectangle of film, properly destroyed, had given Norman a tiny spark. An additional reel had given him a certain consciousness of desires. If the process, when reversed, reduced his consciousness to a measurable degree, I was willing to believe that the savages were right.

Willing to believe, too, that the commandment, "Make no graven image," had the deeper significance which Lily had speculated on.

She took her Gladstone inside, and I kept Norman away from Pat for a few minutes.

"Does he frighten you?" I asked.

Her eyes were big and round. "No, not exactly. I was always fond of him, you know that.

So . . . well, I want to bawl when I see him like this."

"Maybe we'd better drop it, then. Talk about something else. You're driving. You can't blubber and drive at the same time."

"It wasn't so bad," she went on, unheeding, "when he had—just nothing. But now, when I can see how much he *hasn't* got, I want to cry."

Her voice began to tremble, and Norman began to whimper again.

"Stop it, Red!"

"I can't help it," she said. "He's so—pitiful."

Norman shivered in synchronization with his whimpers.

"You're making him worse, Red. Stop it!"

Her back straightened, and she dabbed at her eyes. "Sorry," she said in a steady voice. "He's really the same person, isn't he? It's just as if he isn't quite awake, or something. Here, Norman, give me your hand."

She reached back, and he took her hand in both of his. Then he laid his face against it.

We didn't know Lily had come back until she spoke.

"Well, for pity's sake!" she said. "A touching tableau, if I ever saw one. Why waste sympathy on that hulk?"

She set a couple of small cases on the floor and got in. "Let's go over to Al's. Look, dopes, wait till he is somebody before you get dewy-eyed."

"It's not funny to see a friend like this," I snapped.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake!" Lily flared. "He can't

comprehend sympathy, or anger, or love, or hate. He isn't anything. Just an empty frame, with the picture missing. You might as well feel sorry for an old piano box."

"I'm more sensitive than that."

"Sensitive, nuts! You're only mawkish. When we get his soul back inside, you can feel sympathy for all the money he'll have to spend. He can appreciate your sympathy then. But why waste emotion on a clod?"

"He was a nice guy," Pat said stoutly.

"Do you think I don't know it?" Lily flared. "But I'm not donating a single snuffle to what he is now. That's what I don't understand about you people. You can get all worked up over something you didn't bring about, and ignore a hell of a lot of things you did. I don't mean you personally. I mean the whole nation. Well—" She paused, grinned. "Wassa malla me? Makee sloap blox spleech, allee same clazee."

She was right, I guess. There was no point in feeling sorry for Norman, but most of us want to protect the helpless things—babies' gallant bumbling, sober ducklings and drunken wide-eyed kittens.

Anyway, I didn't expect Lily to be anything but efficient when it came to getting Norman out of the car and up to my apartment. After her hard-boiled remarks, I was a little amazed by her tenderness in helping Norman to the sidewalk, and by her lashing out at me when I let him stagger once. But I didn't say anything. If she liked a brittle mask, let her wear it.



With Pat leading, all we had to do was guide Norman, and we got inside with no trouble.

"Get him to bed," Lily directed.

We rolled him in beside Zachary, still out and breathing heavily. The bruise on his forehead seemed not so purple as when we had dragged him in out of the corridor, but it was angry enough for anybody's money.

"What about it?" I asked, pointing.

"He'll live," Lily said. "Norman first. Keep him quiet. He may get excited at the lights."

"I'll do it," Pat said.

She sat on the bed and put a slim hand on Norman's forehead. He relaxed and spread a wide grin across his face. He didn't stir while Lily reflected two photofloods on him and mounted a chair to focus her camera.

"I have twenty-six shots on this roll of film," she said, "and four more rolls. You may have to go down to the corner after more. I haven't any idea how much this will require."

She made shot after shot, fast as she could wind film. She made no effort to pose him, and composition was a matter of no importance. If her theory was correct, Norman would eventually revert to the empty hulk he had been after she snapped him for the cover of *Pic*.

Just as he had suddenly collapsed on that occasion, so did something inside him disintegrate now. He remained static under Pat's hand for some two dozen snicks of the camera shutter, and he was dead again.

Dead inside, for he breathed, and his eyes were open. But they didn't roll at Pat, and the grin froze. Lily caught her breath.

"How come?" she said. "We burned a whole reel, and I've used only . . . let's see"—she glanced at the camera—"twenty-three frames. Is this more powerful than a motion-picture camera, or film?"

Pat took her hand away from Norman with a gesture of distaste. "I have an idea. If he appeared in the reel of the picture only for a second or two, it would be the same. You know, like you see a face at the window, or something. Could that be it?"

"Could be," Lily said, "but we'll never know. Oh, well. Let's get to work on Zach. My gosh, seems like all we do is make people conscious or unconscious. You get some sleep, Al. Pat and I will work on the hex victim."

"I'll help."

"You will not. You've got to go to court tomorrow. You need what wits you have. Scram."

She was right. I needed sleep, and it didn't matter about them, so I didn't struggle or assert my masculinity. I kissed Pat good night and collapsed on the living-room couch.

Zach was still out when I left the next morning, and I was a little too weary to care.

All persons having business with this court.

Eddie was there, slim and quick, and Dunhill, supercilious. The Museum attorney, poised and deliberate, was among those present.

So far as I knew, there were all who had business with the court.

I saw no reason whatever for Dr. Barq to show his thin dark face and burnt-amber eyes. I said so.

"What's he doing here?"

"As a trustee of the Museum," Dunhill said rather uncomfortably, "he has a right."

Judge Curl, behind the desk in his chambers, said nothing. Judge Curl was noted for his few words, his strict interpretation of the law's letter, his avoidance of publicity. Well, you could understand why he didn't want that square wooden face before the public, could understand why his billboards and throw-away circulars during election campaigns carried an artist's idealized portrayal of his features. If I had a blank face like that I'd wear a mask, or grow a beard.

The atmosphere was fairly informal. Not that you expected someone to pull a pair of dice from his pants and start a crap game, but all the flags and gavels of courtroom procedure were absent.

Dr. Barq, however, was going to observe the formalities. You could tell by his stiff, well-groomed posture. So I didn't ask how long he had been sick, or how long he had to wait before somebody swept a passage in that ring of garlic. Dr. Barq wouldn't like small talk.

They swore me in presently to tell the truth and nothing but, and the Museum's attorney—Hansen, Bulger, Grimes, I forget his name—asked me why I was acting up. He didn't ask why I didn't return the film, but that's what it stacked up to.

What could I say?

I said it. "I'm trying to save a man's life."

"Whose?" snapped Whoosis.

"Norman Courtney's."

"Why?"

"Why?" I echoed. "Because he's a human being. Because I'm his agent, and have a job waiting for him as soon as he's able to go to work."

"And how can illegal retention of the Museum's property save the life?"

"You wouldn't believe me."

"That is for the court to decide."

I looked at Judge Curl. "Honest, your honor, it would be like telling you the ceiling is paved with buttered parsnips. You wouldn't believe it."

Judge Curl asked a question, but for some strange reason I looked at Dr. Barq when I answered.

"Do you refuse to testify?" The judge wanted to know.

I looked at Eddie Lanin. "I— Something— what?—turned my eyes to Dr. Barq. "No. I

might as well tell it. I don't want to, but—"

Dr. Barq leaned forward.

"What goes on, Al?" Eddie asked.

"You can believe this or not," I said to Dr. Barq—why to him?—"but I know it's true. I can offer proof."

I told them about the magazine covers, how the portrait had faded when Norman's bit of soul was freed from the piece of negative. How the taking of that picture had coincided with his collapse which had baffled the experts. I gave them the theory, and with a sudden flash of recollection, I told them about the Mennonites.

That small religious group are reputed to be the happiest, most evenly balanced group in the world. And—they will not let you take a picture of them.

I cited the peculiar behavior of Hollywood picture people. Even if they are overpublicized, and even if their most normal action assumes greater than its justified importance, they still are not like the rest of us. Is it because they are gradually losing their souls to strips of celluloid? I asked.

"So that's why we want the film," I concluded. "We want every piece we can find with Norman on it. He's a shell now. He isn't a man. He can be, though, and it's only the humanitarian thing to do to let us try. Maybe we fail, but what's the loss of a little film compared to an identity?"

"Loss?" Dunhill put in. "Loss? What are you going to do with it?"

"That's my secret," I said. "We aren't going to destroy it. We only want to borrow it."

"But what if it becomes damaged?"

"Then we'll pay for it."

"No," he said. "Not under any circumstances. I never heard such a preposterous story. The Museum cannot agree to any sort of senseless experimentation with historical documents."

"Your honor," said the Museum attorney, "I think the court has heard enough of this farce."

Before Judge Curl could reply, Lily and Zach followed a knock into the room. Zach was white and drawn, and Lily had lost her bloom. Neither of them stood quite erect.

"Can it please the court," Zach said, "I got something to give out. Excuse the soup stains on my Tuxedo, I had a bad time. I want to tell it here that I will guarantee personal the films, or I'll be paying the full price if they don't come back. And I don't like it, but I will."

He was top dog in Hollywood. Nobody challenged him. They just looked at him. Dunhill relaxed; Dr. Barq watched keenly; and Judge Curl cleared his throat.

"This court," he said in measured words to which Lily's snicking camera played soft obliquity, "has never heard a more fanciful tale.

Not only does it refuse to entertain any of the notions introduced here, but it directs the defendant to fulfill his contract with the plaintiff within the next twenty-four hours. Court dismissed."

We filed out, with Zach at my elbow. Dr. Barq alone remained behind with the judge.

"Get it inside your head, Al," Zach said in my ear, "that you're not forcing me to guarantee personal. I'm not scared of your monkeyshines. But I seen some things, Al, and I wanta see more yet. Besides, Norman'll put up the cash when he can add two and two again, like before."

I looked at Lily. "What did you do to him?"

"Gave him his life," she said. "It's the little things that count."

We stopped in a little group in the corridor—Dunhill, Whoosis, Eddie, Zach, Lily, and I.

"Well, Dunhill?" I asked.

"If Mr. Zachary says it's all right, that's good enough for me," Dunhill said. "Eh, Zach? Is that right, old man?"

"I said it, didn't I?" Zach snarled. "I gave it my word personal, didn't I? What more you looking after?"

"That's good enough," Dunhill soothed. "Good enough for me, Zach, old man."

"We'll send you a check," I said, leading Zach away. "And thanks, Eddie. We'll send you one, too."

"Don't bother," Eddie said, falling into step with us, "the story was worth twice my services. I'd like to get in on the ground floor, though, if you've got hold of a good thing."

"Don't be obscure, Eddie."

His thin face became shrewd. "That story, Al. I couldn't have thought up a better one myself. What are you hiding?"

"It was the truth, Eddie, and I can't see why the court acted that way, what with the proof I could offer."

He chuckled indulgently. "O. K., Al, if it's private stuff. But look, just for the sake of argument, suppose it was true. If the judge granted your right to keep the film and get others—good-by Hollywood."

"Shh!" Zach hissed. "Don't even think such things. I got troubles enough."

"I got lost somewhere," Lily put in. "Do me a diagram."

We emerged from the hall of justice and sauntered toward the parking lot. "Don't you get it?" Eddie asked. "If a superior court recognized your theory, the whole umpteen-billion-dollar industry would fold up. Because who would stand in front of a camera if he thought a piece of his soul was going on the negative, umpteen frames a second? You'd have the biggest mess since the Flood. Say," he said suddenly, and

stood still, "you're not really on the level with this, are you?"

"So help me—" I began, but Lily interrupted.

"Wassa malla you?" she asked. "You clazee? Makee dleam talk?"

"I made it up as I went along, Eddie," I said lamely. "I'm sorry I can't let you in on what I've got. Maybe I can later."

So we got rid of Eddie. Lily, Zach, and I got in my car and we started home. "Where's Pat?" I asked.

"Getting some sleep."

"Norman all right?"

"Well," Lily said. "He's empty, and quiet. Which reminds me, I've got to develop this film. Can I use your lab, Mr. Zachary?"

"I'm making it clear," Zach said, "you can take anything I got, and anything I can get for you. But I don't believe it, see? Doing things with mirrors I can take, and I can swallow every time, but this. I'll do whatever you want, but don't ask me to pay attention to it."

"First," Lily said, "we want an estimate of the footage Norman has to his credit. We'd like to have the exact figure, but I suppose that's impossible."

"And don't forget the check to Dunhill," I reminded.

"And then," Lily went on, "we want more than fifty percent of that very film."

"You got to have a truck," Zach said. "If you can get the film."

"If?" Lily cried. "If?"

"Sure. Master negatives is the thing studios think most of. You got stuff from Dunhill, you can have what's in my vaults, but maybe that's got to be plenty."

So that was the way it stacked up. Zach's film added to what we already had made an impressive row of cans in Lily's apartment, but it wasn't enough. We had the figures. They were hard to get, but Zachary put a couple of accountants on the job, and they brought in a close estimate.

We needed three more complete pictures.

We canvassed Quickie Row, and ran down a couple of producers who had a few reels of shorts Norman had made.

We made the rounds of the advertising agencies and secured a few negatives of Norman posing for soap, gum, milk, cigars, liquor, automobiles, golf clubs, perfume—"Norman Courtney likes Vignette perfume on his women friends"—relief funds, mattresses, and Vitamin B-1.

We scoured newspaper offices and picked up shots of Norman getting on planes, trains, and boats; receiving an "Oscar" from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; and we raked up a few publicity stills.

Still we were short.

It proved to be impossible to beg, borrow, or steal master negatives from any but Zach's studio. They are kept in locked vaults, and two or more signatures are necessary to get them out. And for one producer to loan a rival his negatives is like loaning an enemy a new bomb sight. At least, that's the impression you get.

"We're close," I said a few nights later in my apartment after we had fed Norman. "Maybe we have enough. It depends on the amount of his personal footage. That's something we can't tell without examining each reel of film."

"That would be a career," Lily said. "Look! Aren't they about ready to release 'Hickory, Dickory, Death?'"

"I don't think they've made the retakes. But Zach wouldn't let us have an inch of that film. It'll be a box-office smash."

"Maybe he'd let us have a couple of reels of long shots of Norman. They could shoot 'em over with a double."

"Don't suggest it to Zach. You know he thinks we're only borrowing the film. I'll call him, though."

Zach was shocked.

"An A picture?" he gasped. "Not even released. The whole navy couldn't get it out even. It ain't even printed yet. They're printing it tonight. It ain't only impossible, Al, but it can't be done."

Lily took it in stride.

"Let's steal a couple of reels."

"As how, for instance?"

"We'll load the truck at my apartment. We can drive it in the lot O. K. We'll stop at the laboratory entrance, duck inside, grab a couple of cans and tear off to an open spot in the country and burn the stuff."

"It can't be done."

"We can try."

Pat had been silent on the divan, her green eyes thoughtful. "I think you ought to, Al. If you can't do it, then destroy what we have. As you said, it might be enough."

"You'll have to stay here, Red. If it works, and Norman does come to, you'll have some explaining to do."

"Well," she said, "I'm safe. We've got the garlic ring around Norman's bed, and I have a flower for myself."

"Dr. Barq is an unenterprising cuss," Lily said. "He hasn't reported Norman's disappearance to the police, he hasn't bothered us."

"Maybe we're all wrong about him," I suggested.

"No, Al!" Pat said.

I kissed her, Lily patted her red head, and we were off in the truck Zach had loaned us.

We loaded the film, Lily picked up her para-

phernalia, including the roll of film, from her Contax, which Zach had sent over from his lab, and Lily tore off the wrappings.

"Let's take a look at the proofs, Al."

She scanned them hurriedly, and gasped. She was anything but the popular conception of Chinese, with her wide black eyes full of wonder, her full mouth parted.

"Al, look! The guard at the sanatorium registered as a white silhouette, and so did Judge Curl!"

The hair stood up on the back of my neck as I checked her whispered statement. The gates of the sanatorium were sharp and clear, but in their center was the white outline of a man, the guard who said woodenly, over and over, "You are not to be admitted."

And Judge Curl. I was in the picture, and the Museum's attorney. But a flat silhouette of Judge Curl's hand extended into one corner of the negative.

"I don't get it," I said. "Don't tell me! I don't want to know."

"No," Lily whispered. "Let's don't talk about it." She tore off the ends of the strip, saving the shots of Norman. "I wanted a picture of you about to be sent to the pen. It would have been an addition to my collection. But I don't want those . . . those—" She broke off. "Let's get going." As I stood frozen, thinking of what the pictures meant, she snapped, "Wassa malla you? You affaid? You catchee white liver?"

I suddenly got the impression that she never dropped into Pidgin except when she was covering up her own tension. I grinned and walked out. "Come on, baby."

We drove into the lot and I parked by the laboratory entrance. The big sound stages were dark; no work tonight. This was all to the good, as we could make a fast getaway if necessary.

We walked into the labyrinthine entrance to the laboratory. Down a black-lined corridor to a right-angled turn, to another turn, to another turn, and another. This eliminated double doors and tricky locks, as no light rays, even in the brightest sunlight, would make all those turns and ruin film.

We wandered around unheeded under the safety lights among printing machines. We found three cans of "Hickory, Dickory, Death." While Lily engaged the attention of the man nearest, I slipped two under my coat, and we walked out. It was easy. Because it was unprecedented, I suppose.

"Let's don't stop to see Pat," I said.

"Nuts to that!" Lily snapped. "Do you want to worry the poor child to death?"

So we stopped. We ran up from the curb. because I was in a hurry to get it over with.

UNK—7M

I saw a car halfway down the block that looked something like an ambulance, but didn't give it a second thought at the time.

Once again when I opened the door there was a rush of feet across the room and Pat buried her head on my chest.

"Dr. Barq was here," she whispered. "Oh, Al!" Lily darted into the bedroom, came back instantly.

"What happened, Pat?"

"N-nothing. I pushed my flower of garlic at him, and followed him down the hall. He went away, and then you came right after. That's why I'm so scared. I didn't have time to calm down."

Lily put an arm around Pat's shoulders. "It'll soon be over, honey. Take it easy. Wassa malla you, you baby?"

Pat threw back her head. In her white face, her eyes were as green as the figured jade disk Lily wore on a delicate chain around her neck.

"I'll be all right," Pat said.

I thought of that ambulance-looking car. "My God!"

Lily followed me at a dead run to the sidewalk, and my first reaction was to sigh with relief. The truck was still there.

Oh, yes, the truck was there, all right. But the doors were open, and a stack of the film cans was missing.

"Down there!" Lily cried, and we broke into a run toward the ambulance where a familiar sleek figure was slamming the rear doors on the sheen of street lamps on tin. Dr. Barq ran around to the front of the ambulance, leaped in, and the machine lurched forward with screaming tires and roaring exhaust.

We wheeled, jumped into the truck after slamming doors, and were after him before he was a block away.

He was a good driver, and began to lose me. He had an advantage, of course—his siren. He swooshed through the intersection of Cahuenga and Hollywood Boulevard behind its full-throated scream, but the light went green before I reached it, and he didn't gain much.

I had no time to look at Lily, but once from the tail of my eye I saw her fingering the flat jade disk at her throat.

"We'll never catch him!" I shouted.

She didn't answer, and we put another hundred yards behind us while the gap between us and Dr. Barq widened a good ten yards. Suddenly she laid a tense hand against my right arm.

"Stop the car!"

"He'll get away. We might catch him if he's held up somewhere by a traffic jam."

"You said you'd play it my way. This is serious, Al. Stop!"

"O. K., but I think there goes the old ball game."

I slowed to a stop, and Lily rummaged in the Gladstone for her robe. She put it on, and her movements became deliberate. She removed the jade ornament, bowed over it and muttered a few words in Chinese. Then, with a manner which made her next move anything but ridiculous, she took lipstick from her purse and pulled off the cap.

She stepped out of the cab and knelt by the rear tire on the street side. She held the jade disk up to street lights and the lights of thick traffic on Cahuenga Boulevard. She carefully copied the Chinese characters on the white side wall of the tire, so that they were an evenly spaced circle of bright clusters.

She got back in the cab and motioned—not ordered—me to drive.

I shrugged. "What's the use? He's on that deserted cut-off by now."

She smiled and bowed her head over the jade. She began to chant in Chinese. The strange rhythm of her phrases continued as I drove over the pass and onto the road to Dr. Barq's sanatorium. She became silent for a few seconds. Then:

"Slow, Al. He might be anywhere along here."

"He? Who? Dr. Barq?"

"Certainly."

"He's at the sanatorium by now. What do we do, ambush him as he comes back?"

"He's not at the sanatorium, Al, if my prayer wheel worked."

I didn't say anything to this. What could I say? But her tone pulled my foot off the accelerator, and we coasted on compression until the motor began to buck, and I kicked the clutch pedal down.

"This," she went on after a silence, and held the jade disk where I could see it, "is one of the most powerful protective charms. I've had it since I was a child, as many Chinese babies have. All I did was print the characters around the tire and pronounce the curse while the wheel rolled. If I did it right— Oh, look!"

Some one hundred yards ahead, in the middle of a bean field, was the ambulance. Stalled, with lights burning. The road made a sharp turn, but the ambulance hadn't. It had continued along an extension of this piece of road through a barbed-wire fence. I pulled off the macadam and cut the ignition.

I took the heavy flashlight from its steering-column frame. "We may need a club."

"Dr. Barq won't be a problem any longer, I think."

He wasn't. He wasn't even there. Oh, his clothes were: crumpled suit, socks in shoes—one on the accelerator, one on the floor under the clutch pedal. But not Dr. Barq.

I played the flash on the clothes. "How could

he do that, I wonder? The shirt is still buttoned." "He disintegrated, Al."

"Now that we got that settled, let's take our film and get out of here." I thought it over. She hadn't been kidding. "He . . . what?"

"By the golden navel of Confucius," she said softly, in awe, "how old must that . . . uh, man have been! How many souls must he have absorbed! Look, Al, there's no trace of his body, not even dust. It must have exploded into gas." "I'm not very bright," I said. "Put it in single syllables."

"I told you before, Al. His soul long since died. But before his time was up, he had stolen a soul. Then another and another, for centuries maybe. He was simply glued together with somebody else's life, and when that was destroyed, his body disappeared. Go get the film from the truck, Al."

A chill ran down my spine. "Are you going to do it here? Here?"

"This is a good place, Al. And there's no traffic. Wassamallah you?" she demanded—with a slight quaver. "You catchee devil shakes. You afraid?"

We used the ambulance headlights until we had all the film off the reels and piled in the bean patch. Then Lily set up her altar, signaled me to flick off the lights, and went through her ceremony. She tossed a lighted match on the film, and we ran like hell from the blinding hot flare that lit the countryside for a few seconds.

We got into the truck. I felt as if I'd just been told a shaggy dog story—a tremendous, exciting build-up, and no tag line. The sense of anticlimax left me limp, frustrated, and a little resentful.

"I wonder how we'll pay for the film," I grumbled.

We started back to my apartment.

A light, and the rattle of dishes from the kitchen located Pat and Norman. Pat at the stove, fiddling with the coffeepot, and Norman at the table with a heaping plate of eggs, bacon, and toast.

He got to his feet and shook hands with me and Lily. Even in the hospital gown, he had a lot of stuff. He radiated, like the old Norman. Not like the new Norman who, for sometime before his coma, had become aimless, forgetful, rude, and always late; who spent more money than was his habit; who was inconsiderate of his fellow actors.

"It's nice to see you, Al!" he said warmly. "And you, Miss Kung. How is your job?"

Lily's mouth hung open, too, like mine. Pat just watched. Nobody said anything. Norman frowned. Politely, but he frowned.

"Miss Ryan either won't or can't tell me what happened," he said. "Did I get drunk last night? Did you have to put me to bed? Honestly, I don't remember. Tell me, Al. If it's bad, I want to know."

Well, we told him. Nine weeks out of his life, soul caught on strips of celluloid, waiting to be released by the proper incantation, or waiting to be destroyed, lost. Dr. Barq, attempting to prevent the restoration of that soul, so that he might write the checks by virtue of a power of attorney granted by a ghoul-ridden, zombi judge.

It sounded silly. I couldn't blame Norman for smiling.

"It's exceedingly handsome of you to try to spare me," he said. "And your fairy tale is entertaining. But I'd like to know what I did. It must have been colossal. Will there be damage suits?"

"Honest, Norm, we're giving it to you on the level. Look. Here's today's paper. Look at the date."

He began to feel our seriousness. He began to believe that something had happened to him. But he wouldn't accept our interpretation.

We told him about destroying the film, about the "borrowing" of negatives, about Zach climbing out on a limb.

"If money will straighten it out, Al, we'll give Zach a check in the morning. Now. What's my next picture? Retakes on 'Hickory, Dickory, Death?'"

Pat caught her breath. "You're not . . . not going back into pictures?"

He stared at her. "But of course. What else do I know?"

"You can't, Norm," I said. "You simply can't. Look, you've got plenty of money. Retire. Buy some chickens. Grow up with the country. But stay away from cameras."

"Al, I feel that you really believe this fantastic story."

"Believe it? I know it, Norm."

He chuckled. "May I sleep here again tonight, Al?"

"Sure, Norm. But listen—"

"Tomorrow, Al. You'll feel different tomorrow."

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. I don't feel different. One thing, though, it'll take another forty years, I suppose, to exhaust his soul again. Norman is safe, I guess. And, as he said, all he knows is acting.

But what about the others? You can't tell 'em. You can only wait.

Another worry, and it isn't mine exclusively: in times like these, I wish they'd stop photographing the president so much.

THE END.