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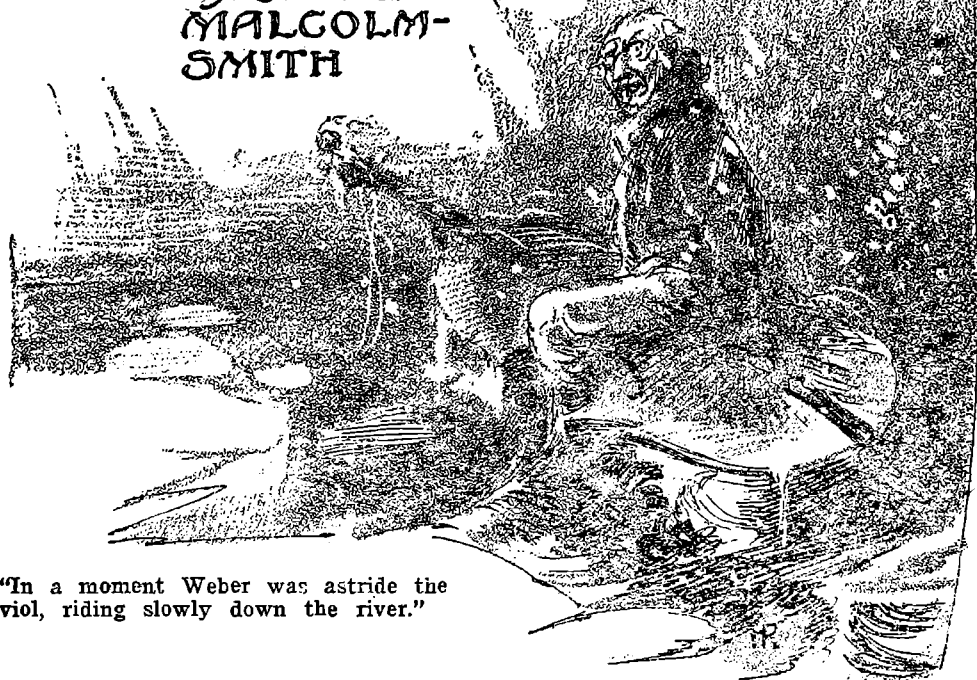
Contents for August, 1927

- Cover Design ----- Hugh Rankin
Illustrating a scene in "The Bride of Osiris"
- The Eyrie ----- 148
A chat with the readers
- The Bride of Osiris (Part 1) ----- Otis Adelbert Kline 151
A three-part Egyptian serial story of Osiris, the Festival of Re, strange murders, the Am-mits, and the dungeons of Karnctcr
- Satan's Fiddle ----- George Malcolm-Smith 173
The cataclysmic power of music—the death chord—and hideous dissonances that can cause a building to crumble
- The Power of the Dog ----- G. G. Pendarves 188
A tale of Arabian black magic, and the terrifying fate that befell two Englishmen at the hands of Daouad

(Continued on Next Page)

SATAN'S FIDDLE

by GEORGE
MALCOLM-
SMITH



"In a moment Weber was astride the viol, riding slowly down the river."

A SNOWSTORM in New England is a snowstorm. This truth was brought home convincingly to Hagedorn as he trudged up Huntington Avenue in Boston one midnight. Then, to make matters worse, just as he reached Massachusetts Avenue, the skies ripped open and spilled a torrent of hailstones. Tiny white frozen balls pelted him, landing on his hat as loudly as raindrops on a tin roof.

Through the beaded curtain of hailstones Hagedorn discerned before him the dim outline of Symphony Hall and stumbled clumsily toward it for refuge. The high steps of the main entrance would be too slippery, he decided, so he bolted for the Massachusetts Avenue doors.

He stood there roundly cursing the elements for fully fifteen min-

utes, when there came to his ears a rumbling sound which seemed to emanate from within the building. It was in Hagedorn's nature to be curious. He put his ear close to one of the glass doors and tried the door-knobs. He was surprised to find one of the doors unlocked.

Midnight, and a door unlocked! Could this be the usual condition? Automatically, Hagedorn opened the door and stepped into the foyer. No sooner had the warmth of the interior struck his face than the rumbling sound became quite loud.

He stood rigid. The sound he heard was a musical chord of deep bass. It sounded much like an organ, though certainly (Hagedorn told himself) no organ recital would be going on at this time of night. Propelled by his curiosity, he stepped

softly toward the inner doors. There was just enough light from the street for him to see his way.

When he reached the doors to the orchestra floor, he noted through one of their little round windows that there were no lights in the auditorium. This perplexed him. This, and the ever-increasing volume of the bass music.

He stood peering into the black circle framed by the little round window, thoroughly mystified. If someone were playing, where was he? The music was coming from the auditorium; of that he was certain. And why this playing without lights? And at this unearthly hour?

Suddenly the bass chords ceased, and as they did so, Hagedorn heard several plucking sounds—quick, staccato notes—which convinced him he had not been listening to an organ, but to some stringed instrument. A bass viol, he decided—a very large bass viol.

Soon the unseen musician resumed his concert. Reverberating bass notes again came to Hagedorn's ears. The solo this time seemed to contain no rests. The tones droned on and on unceasingly. Hagedorn marked this and thought it unusual. The notes ranged from the lowest rumbling bass to the mellowest cello-like tone. Their echoes became so loud and thick that the playing soon ceased to be music. It became a roaring jumble, ever increasing in volume.

Hagedorn's mystification had been overcome by an uncomfortable feeling akin to fright. There was something eery about this experience which caused chills to run down his back and made his heart beat faster.

Then the bass roar ceased again. Hagedorn shuddered with relief. The mystery of this midnight concert and the ominous sound of the bass viol made him believe that danger was imminent. He started blindly for

the foyer. He was in the street in an instant, and the cold air refreshed him as a thing natural and real. The hailstorm was over, and a light snow was falling.

Hagedorn was not of a mind to go home until he had learned more. He watched from across the street, intent upon the unlocked door. Whoever was inside, he told himself, would come out there.

A huge, overtowering form emerged from the door. Hagedorn squinted to see it better. It was a man with a giant bass viol slung over his back. With an awkward, jerky motion, the figure hobbled away and was hidden by the screen of snowflakes that stretched across Massachusetts Avenue.

Hagedorn did not follow the musician. He stood still for several minutes, then turned toward Huntington Avenue. He pondered over his strange experience all the way to his lodging house and far into the night. The adventure was unusual, mysterious, terrifying, and yet ludicrous. It tortured him in his sleep and was on his mind when he awoke.

IN THE evening, impelled by his intense curiosity and his desire to solve the riddle, he went to the concert at Symphony Hall. He arrived early. In fact, he was almost the first person to enter the auditorium.

People had told Hagedorn that their first visit to Symphony Hall had frightened them. They said they had experienced a feeling of being overwhelmed by something vast and terrifying. The bigness of the place scared them. The notion had hitherto appeared ridiculous to him, but as he sat in the hall this night he became more and more convinced that there was no little basis for his friends' convictions.

Symphony Hall *was* a big place, and it had now assumed an aspect sinister and unworldly. Perhaps the

ponderous Victorian architecture was the cause of it, Hagedorn reasoned with himself. Everything was too heavy and ornate.

The massive walls seemed to be leaning inward, as though they were about to close upon him and crush him. The blur of sickly colors, most of them bluish and fustian, depressed him. A huge girandole, suspended at an awesome height above his head, showering a hundred balls of light like a bomb at the moment of explosion, seemed on the verge of ripping from its fastenings to come hurtling down on his head.

As the auditorium filled, a sweep of pink and white faces jammed the orchestra floor like thousands of marbles in a box too small for them. Jutting perilously over this mass of heads were two crescent-shaped balconies, each crammed with still more faces.

All these people! Hagedorn gasped. They could not know what he knew, sitting here calmly like this. They could not know what ominous thing hovered over this scene.

Hagedorn decided not to look about too much, lest the terrifying thought of what might happen should the walls and ceilings tumble down send him screaming panic-stricken up the aisle and out of the building. He was absolutely convinced that he had heard in those bass chords of the night before an omen of disaster.

On this night every seat in Symphony Hall was occupied, because Hermann Schurtz, the new conductor, just arrived from Berlin to take Liebeskind's position, was to lead the orchestra for the first time.

Even before the first musician had taken his place on the stage, the drone of hundreds of voices had become a roar. Hagedorn imagined that every music-lover in Boston, even in the United States, had found his way into the auditorium, and he

wondered if any one of them sensed the evil that lurked near them.

Sauntering in by twos and threes, the musicians took their positions, some of them amid a clatter of hand-clapping. Incongruous little sounds were coming from them, as they tuned their instruments. Hagedorn's eyes were now focused on the platform. With bated breath he noted the entrance of every player. Any one of them might be the mysterious musician who gave the weird solo of the previous night. His nerves taut with excitement, he watched the nine bass viol players take their places on the top tier above the others. Which one had slipped out of the unlocked door and into the storm last night? Hagedorn watched every move of each viol player, but there was nothing to indicate which was the man he sought.

At length all the musicians were in their places in three semicircular tiers. The cautious, discreet plucking of strings and tooting of horns had subsided. Men and instruments were in readiness—and a jumbled spectacle they made, faces, instruments and shirt-fronts fused together in a hodgepodge under the glaring white lights. The colorful sight gave Hagedorn relief from his strained feelings.

With the last sounds of instruments being tuned, the roar of voices in the audience subsided. There came over the auditorium a hush of expectation.

Suddenly a new figure appeared in the door at the side of the stage. Hermann Schurtz, the new conductor! A din of applause swept through the hall.

Schurtz was slight in physique and impeccably tailored. He had a dainty, almost feminine bearing, carrying his elbows inward behind his back as though they were tied there, and letting his hands dangle limply at his sides. He reminded Hagedorn of the

statue of Nathan Hale in City Hall Park, New York. Schurtz looked a dainty and effeminate Nathan Hale saying, "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my art." He bowed perfunctorily and with no further ado turned toward the orchestra.

Facing the blur of faces, shirt-fronts, music racks and instruments, he preened himself by shrugging his shoulders and stretching his arms. He waited one long dramatic moment, then gave his music rack a tap with his baton. He raised it and, like a magician waving his wand, his arms writhing in and out, he summoned wondrous harmonies out of the confused throng of creatures before him. Their sounds would rush out at him with a menacing roar when he beckoned, or retreat with a docile sigh when he waved them back.

Hagedorn, his mind momentarily occupied by the present proceedings, consulted his program. It was Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben*, that mad, chaotic tone-poem which ranges through the whole cycle of human emotions. The stage was alive with pictorial rhythm. Heads nodded, bodies swerved, bows guided by flexible wrists darted across strings—all in perfect unison. Waves of music surged out and flooded the hall, then seethed back.

Ein Heldenleben had reached the passage wherein the hero returns to his helpmate after a tumultuous battle with his enemies. At that point, Hagedorn, watching every motion on the stage with a strange nervous anxiety, became aware of a peculiar behavior on the part of the conductor.

Schurtz appeared to be falling off his platform. He made jerky gestures with his hands as though warding away something invisible which was pushing him off his stand. As the score neared its conclusion, this became more noticeable. Hagedorn

sensed danger. He saw that those about him shared his nervousness. A stir passed through the audience. The musicians, too, seemed perplexed by the conductor's movements. Some of their faces manifested alarm. Perhaps, Hagedorn tried to convince himself, the titanic emotions of the music were overpowering the sensitive conductor. At last the piece came to an end—an end solemn and dirgelike with a melancholy preponderance of bass.

As the last rumbling bass notes died away, Schurtz swayed awkwardly from his pedestal. He wheeled to face the audience. Hagedorn gasped and leaped half-way to his feet. On the conductor's countenance was a look of open-mouthed bewilderment and horror. It was the face of a man who had peeked into eternity. Schurtz had seen something, heard something or felt something which had terrified him. With a horrible grimace he drooped forward to make his bow. He turned, his body still bent, to leave the stage, then toppled clumsily over and sprawled in a ludicrous heap.

THE orchestra surged to its feet. A roar of dismay echoed through the audience. Several musicians rushed to the crumpled figure. Then everything became confused. There were shouts and gestures. In the hubbub Schurtz's limp body was bundled off the stage.

Hagedorn found himself fighting toward the aisle, intent, for a reason unknown even to himself, upon reaching the stage. But the crowd, babbling and pushing and waving its arms, thrust him back. Then came a hissing sound and the audience became quiet. Hagedorn saw the concert-master shrieking something to the listening throng. Those near the stage who heard him began pushing toward the rear of the auditorium. The next thing he knew,

Hagedorn was being borne up the aisle by the wave of people. The concert had come to an abrupt end.

The crowd was moving slowly, and before it had borne Hagedorn to the foyer he had recovered his composure and decided upon a plan of action. He would wait a short distance up Massachusetts Avenue until the mysterious bass viol player came, then follow him. There was absolutely no doubt in his mind that the man who had played those ominous notes in the dark hail on the previous night was the person responsible for this night's occurrence. In the foyer, the crowd that had pressed Hagedorn thinned out.

"Hermann Schurtz is dead," he heard someone say.

He gasped and sped on his way.

It was snowing outside. A swirling avalanche of white flakes made it impossible to see the opposite side of the street. Cabs creaked up to wheel off patrons as they came out of the hall. Hagedorn bolted straight up Massachusetts Avenue. At St. Stephens Street he halted. A street lamp cast a faint yellow circle, inside which, he thought, he could see everyone who passed. He stepped outside it and stood near by at the corner of an apartment house.

Pedestrian patrons of the orchestra passed him. After fifteen minutes the last of them had appeared in the light of the lamp and disappeared. A sudden fear came to the watcher that he had missed his man. Perhaps he had left the hall before Hagedorn, or had taken another route home.

Hagedorn had almost decided to abandon his watch when a bulky figure appeared in the flickering light. It was a man carrying a bass viol on his back. Hagedorn's heart leaped. He narrowed his eyes to see. Then he gave a start, for the man's head poked itself around the side of his huge burden.

It may have been his imagination, made susceptible to the wildest fancies by his excitement, which made Hagedorn's hair stand on end when he viewed the face before him. It was a face ashen-gray, lean and cadaverous, with a look of almost satanic hatred. Before Hagedorn had recovered himself, however, the huge figure was swallowed up in the sheet of falling snow.

In the face he had just seen Hagedorn believed he had found such diabolical villainy that the solution of all the weird mystery of Symphony Hall narrowed down and focused upon one pair of gleaming eyes and one sneering mouth.

The chase was on. There was no hesitancy on Hagedorn's part. He scampered through the snow. Under the next street lamp he saw the ponderous figure forging ahead like an ant struggling under a heavy load. He quickened his step to make sure he would not lose his quarry. The labyrinth of zigzag streets of Back Bay, he knew, would make it a merry chase.

At every lamp-post he could see the ominous bulk of man and burden. No sooner would it be outside the dim light than Hagedorn would push into it himself. The man with the bass viol did not turn around, but plowed steadily ahead. Half-way up Massachusetts Avenue he turned into an alley and cut through to Gainsborough Street. Hagedorn was close behind him when he reached the other end of the alley.

Then he lost him. His prey had disappeared between lamp-posts on Gainsborough Street. Perhaps he had dived into one of the hundreds of doorways which lined the sidewalk. None of the windows of these houses was lighted, however, so Hagedorn determined to press onward. His pace might have been too slow. As he trudged on, it seemed the snow mounted higher with every

step. It was ankle-deep now, and making progress difficult.

Looking down at the white expanse ahead, Hagedorn's heart gave a joyful start, for there was visible a trail of footprints, so deep that they must have been made by one carrying something heavy. He noticed that the tracks were spreading farther and farther apart. He bent diagonal with the sidewalk as he stumbled on. There could be no doubt about it: his incredible quarry was fleeing. Perhaps the man with the bass viol realized he was being followed. Hagedorn bounded clumsily ahead, his eyes focused on the ever-lengthening footprints.

The trail swerved abruptly down Heminway Street. Hagedorn nearly fell as he pivoted obliquely around the corner. It occurred to him that his man had taken a roundabout course to reach the end of Massachusetts Avenue, and quite convinced him that the fellow was aware of being pursued. He raised his eyes from the white ground, then leaped quickly backward. There, only a few paces ahead, was the huge bass viol, the legs propelling it making it look for all the world like a lumbering dinosaur out of a geology book.

Hagedorn's egregious fugitive was not running now. He had probably reckoned that his pursuer was shaken off. He passed two more lamp-posts, and as he stepped out of the light of each his follower replaced him. To Hagedorn's chagrin, however, when the third lamp appeared the bulky figure was not visible. He looked down at the tracks. The outlandish scamp had started running again!

The chase was resumed at top speed. The snowflakes began to torment Hagedorn. They swarmed around him like little white flies, peppering his face and getting into his eyes.

THE trail turned into Fenway Park. For several yards there were running steps, then they dwindled into a short pace. His fatigue and the plaguing snowflakes had nearly maddened Hagedorn. Several times he almost determined to renounce the chase, but he plodded on through Peterborough Street, up St. Botolph, over Boylston to Audubon Road—a crazy, zigzag course.

In a little street off Audubon Road the long trail came to an abrupt end. The footprints had ceased. Hagedorn looked about him nonplussed. A mantle of falling snow enveloped him. He could see he was standing beside a high board fence—but that was all he could see.

Had the whole combination, man and burden, flown into the skies? Actually entertaining this absurd theory for a moment, he laughed to catch himself gazing into the snow-flecked heavens. It was fortunate he did so, for in so doing he discovered where his man had taken flight. On top of the fence was a space where the ridge of snow had been brushed off. It was a high fence. How had the rogue made the ascent, laden as he was with his heavy instrument? But Hagedorn lost no time in cogitation. Over the fence he clambered.

Inside was a small courtyard flanked by gloomy buildings. The intruder peered through the grayish curtain of snow. A square of bright orange light appeared in one corner of the court. Framed in it was a gigantic silhouette, that of a man with a bass viol on his back. Hagedorn plunged madly toward it, but before he could reach the spot the square of orange had narrowed to a mere crack. This disappeared just as he reached the door. He stood outside for a moment, listening. Then, with a bravery for which he was never afterward able to account, he turned the knob and slipped inside.

He found himself standing in a narrow hallway. A hanging lamp gave a brilliant light, revealing a steep flight of stairs. Suddenly he heard a door close on the floor above, and the sound of something heavy striking the floor. The bass viol! At that moment a feeling of shame came over Hagedorn. Now that the chase ended, his excitement subsided and his rational intellect asserted itself. Perhaps he had been foolish to undertake this mad pursuit. As he thought it over he suspected that mere curiosity had brought him here. He had no real reason for believing that last night's strange occurrence could be linked with tonight's tragedy, nor had he any basis for condemning this unknown and perhaps harmless individual, beyond ideas conjured up by an overwrought imagination. But now he had come this far, why not go just to the top of the stairs to see where this unusual character kept himself?

He grasped the baluster and crept noiselessly upward. There was no light on the landing, but he noticed a faint yellow gleam, apparently from beneath a door at the end of the hallway. He tiptoed toward the light, wondering if this were the musician's room. He stood there listening, but there was not a sound inside. Curiosity again got the better of him. He knelt on one knee. Something in the keyhole! Stiff with excitement and cold, he must have knelt there several minutes. Nothing was going on inside the room.

Then something happened—and happened quickly!

A viselike arm grasped his waist, a damp hand clamped over his mouth, and he was swept high off his feet. All this in an instant and without a sound. He quaked with terror. He felt himself being whisked away. Strong arms, several of them, were bearing him head-first down the stairs. His senses were swim-

ming. An arm over his face hid everything. Around a corner he went. A click came like the shooting of a gun. It was the turning of a key, and he felt himself being carried into a room. The arm over his face was removed but a hand still held his mouth. In the darkness he could hear his captors breathing heavily.

"Well, we didn't expect this," one of them whispered gruffly.

"Who the hell is he?" another rasped out.

"Here, one of you put on the light. I'll hold him."

The light flashed on. There were three men, one of them still holding Hagedorn's mouth. They were burly men in hats and overcoats. They gazed at him quizzically. Hagedorn was coming to his senses, glad to find he was dealing with tangible flesh-and-blood beings.

"Tie him and gag him, Maddigan," said the man holding Hagedorn.

As the man called Maddigan pushed back his coat to get his handkerchief, Hagedorn saw a badge.

Detectives! Hagedorn's relief was exhilarating. He attempted to prevent Maddigan from shoving the handkerchief into his mouth. Maddigan grinned as he would at a playful kitten. After the captive had been gagged and trussed, the three detectives stood watching him. They decided to go through his pockets. They found nothing but a wallet, a watch and his symphony program. The last article interested them most.

"Did you just come from Symphony Hall?" Maddigan asked.

Hagedorn nodded.

"What brought you here, peeking into other people's keyholes?" he demanded, as though Hagedorn could answer through the gag.

"Here, we'll get the dope from him," said one of the other two men as he drew a revolver from his pocket. "Take off that gag."

Brandishing the weapon in Hagedorn's face, he growled, "One loud word from you and I'll send a bullet through your skull. This is a serious business."

THE handkerchief was removed from the captive's mouth. Hagedorn talked fast and earnestly, careful not to raise his voice above an almost inaudible whisper. The detectives considered Hagedorn's reasons for his presence a bit fantastic, but they believed his story. Hagedorn opened his wallet and produced his press card, explaining that he had a special interest in the extraordinary happenings at Symphony Hall. This was entirely an afterthought, but it carried weight with the detectives.

"Now that you're here," said Maddigan, "we might as well let you know that the answer to a good many of the strange goings on at Symphony Hall lies right here in this house. We're going to follow this thing right through from here, and if you want the big break when it comes — after we get this case cleaned up—it will be wise for you to keep your mouth shut about what is going on. As we said before, this is a serious business, and we can't have any interference."

In the low-pitched conversation which followed, Hagedorn obtained many new and astonishing angles on the Symphony Hall mystery. The death of Schurtz, it developed, was the culmination of mysterious happenings which covered a period of several months. Liebeskind, Schurtz's predecessor as conductor of the orchestra, was said by the detectives to have left his position and fled the country as the result of these happenings. The attention of

the police had been brought to the case when members of the orchestra reported that the former leader had received threatening anonymous letters. Before an investigation could be brought to bear, Liebeskind had mysteriously disappeared.

This incident had been considered at first as merely the outcome of a clash between artistic temperaments. Later several other musicians took unceremonious leave of the orchestra. Some unknown influence was gradually disrupting the entire organization. It was then that an interest was taken in one of the bass players, Friedrich Weber, known by his fellow-musicians as an eccentric, though brilliant, character. Weber's habits were peculiar, but his long association with the orchestra and the high esteem in which leaders in music circles held him had diverted suspicion from him. But now his eccentricities assumed ominous significance. One of his odd practises, Hagedorn learned, was to play his bass viol all alone and in the dark at midnight in Symphony Hall. This had long been a habit with him, but the police attached some hidden meaning to it. Tonight, unless the tragic incident at the concert had upset Weber, he was expected by the detectives to repeat his nocturnal rehearsal.

Hence, shortly before midnight, the lights in the room were extinguished and a long, tense vigil began. Hagedorn sat anxiously awaiting the next development in his strange adventure.

At length, above the heavy breathing of his companions, he heard a slow, thumping sound as of a heavy man descending stairs.

"It's him!" one of the detectives whispered hoarsely. "He's going down to Symphony Hall again tonight."

The footfalls descended slowly, then halted outside the door of the

room in which the quartet sat waiting. There was a few moments' silence, then came the click of a doorlock. Hagedorn followed his companions to the window overlooking the courtyard. Over their shoulders he saw a gigantic shape, black and sinister as it was silhouetted by the snow, dissolve like a specter in the curtain of snowflakes.

MADDIGAN dispatched his fellows to shadow the musician. When they had stepped out into the white night, he and Hagedorn went upstairs to the room occupied by Weber. The door opened easily with a skeleton key.

It was evident to Hagedorn the instant he stepped inside that he was in the quarters of a man of extraordinary culture. The walls were flanked by crowded bookshelves. An upright piano, with opened scores of music on its rack and stacks of them on its top, stood in one corner. Near it were a cello leaning against a chair, and a music rack. In the center of the room was a table littered with books, pamphlets, music scores and hand-written sheets of foolscap. A bed-couch stood in front of a wall covered with books.

Maddigan stalked about the room silently. Hagedorn watched him, wondering what this burly plebeian could find in this storehouse of culture to give him insight into the mind of the man he was studying.

Hagedorn walked over to a bookshelf. He saw volumes in German, French and English, a heterogeneous array on philosophy, psychology and abstract mathematics. A strange library for a musician, Hagedorn mused. Here were Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Haeckel and other philosophers jammed into shelves with such psychologists as Freud, Jung, William James, and such physicists as Einstein and Herglotz. Indeed, Hagedorn thought, here must be a

bass viol player who played metaphysical theories from notes diagrammed on graph-paper!

He examined the open sheets on the piano rack. Here was a score by Richard Strauss, whose *Ein Heldenleben* had been played by the orchestra tonight. On its margin were many notes jotted down in ink. Many of the notes were scratched out, and several of them had exclamation points after them. The sight of exclamation points written in beside musical notes amused Hagedorn for a moment, but then he began wondering vaguely if there were not some underlying significance in them. On top of the piano were pieces by Wagner, Liszt and Beethoven. Among these Hagedorn was surprised to find one by Hermann Schurtz, the conductor who had met so sudden a death. On this, too, there were many marginal notes inscribed in ink.

Maddigan was examining the littered table in the center of the room. Suddenly he looked up from a pamphlet he held in his hand.

"Look here," he said. "Here's a book by Weber."

Hagedorn noted the title: "*Acoustics; Their Importance in Architecture*, by Friedrich Weber." A feeling of acute uneasiness seized him as he saw this and remembered the roaring notes he had heard the night before in Symphony Hall. It made him quite sure that there had been some malevolent purpose in them and that this purpose was all the more fearful because of the player's expert knowledge of what he was about.

Maddigan had been looking through other papers on the desk. He was reading something and grunting. Hagedorn looked over his shoulder. It was a symphony program opened at the page containing the names of the orchestra

players. On the page were scribbles in ink.

"Can you make anything out of this?" Maddigan asked.

Hagedorn took the program.

"It's German script," he announced.

"Can you read it?"

Hagedorn examined the writing closely. Then he gave a start which made his companion look at him in alarm.

"What does it say?" asked Maddigan.

Hagedorn pointed to the name of Hermann Schurtz, and said, "That word there, *die Todsaite*."

"What does it mean in English?"

"It means—the death-chord!"

"The what?"

Suddenly there was a sharp rap on the door. Hagedorn's heart missed several beats. Maddigan himself looked far from composed. He wheeled around and pulled open the door. One of the detectives stood in the hallway. He was covered with snow and panting for want of breath.

"Quick!" he whispered. "He's coming back. Get out before he catches you."

Maddigan beckoned to Hagedorn. He turned the key in the lock and the three hurried down the stairs. They were in their room barely in time, for the door from the courtyard opened and there came the sound of footfalls on the stairs. Several minutes later the third detective returned. He and the other explained that Weber had gone back to Symphony Hall, found several people still there and had started for home again. One of the men had hurried ahead to warn Maddigan of the musician's approach.

The remainder of the night one man remained in the room. The other two left with Hagedorn.

"That settles it," were Maddigan's parting words to Hagedorn.

"We're on the right track, and tomorrow this thing will be cleared up."

Nevertheless, tomorrow did not see the matter "cleared up", for the coroner's finding of that night gave the cause of Hermann Schurtz's death as "heart failure, superinduced by overtaxed emotions."

As far as Hagedorn was concerned, however, the matter was quite settled. What he had seen in Weber's quarters had convinced him that there was more to Schurtz's death and all the strange occurrences connected with it than the coroner had believed. He went to Professor Haroutine Chooljian, noted Armenian physicist of Harvard, under whom he had studied and whom he had kept as a close friend. In the professor he confided his whole adventure in the hope that he might shed some light on the relationship between music and physics, both of which subjects seemed well known to the mysterious Weber. The professor knew the musician and believed him a man of remarkable intellect. He became intensely interested in Hagedorn's adventure, and begged to be notified of every new development.

THE next symphony concert was not for two nights. Hagedorn could not have missed it any more than he could have stopped breathing and live. As he entered the foyer he caught sight of Maddigan talking to the policeman in charge of the hall. So, the police have not dropped the case, either, Hagedorn mused.

He was as restless in his seat as a schoolboy attending his first circus. At length the man for whom he waited appeared on the stage. Hagedorn gasped, for he could not believe such a transformation possible. Truly, here was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde! When Weber ap-

peared, he was the epitome of urbanity and self-composure. Hagedorn could not believe this was the satanic face which had snarled at him from behind the bass viol two nights before. His eyes followed Weber's every move.

Lessing, the concert-master, conducted the orchestra that night. The feature of the program was a score by Berlioz, a composer whose penchant for percussion effects is proverbial among musicians. For that reason, during the few moments in which Hagedorn was not watching the movements of Weber, he obtained entertainment from observation of the kettledrummer.

This interesting person was worthy of attention. He stood above his instruments, sticks in hand, looking out over the audience with a studied sang-froid, counting the measures with motionless lips. Suddenly, on the flash of an instant, a paroxysm would seize him, causing him to pounce upon his drums, and then, as suddenly as the convulsion had overtaken him, it would depart and he would throw his head back, calm and unruffled as he had been before.

The drummer had passed through several of his spasms during the course of the score. Then came a passage in which all the instruments were silent except the violins, which wavered a plaintive melody. Suddenly the conductor pointed his baton toward the custodian of the kettledrums.

The drummer's arm slashed the air. His padded mallet shot downward, swift and sure as a piston from its cylinder. It smote the taut parchment of the drum, giving a deep, hollow boom like the sound of a heavy stone dropped into a deep pool.

Hagedorn happened at the moment to be watching the drummer. He saw his face bob up quickly, but not with its accustomed serenity, for to

Hagedorn's horror he saw in it the ghastly expression which Schurtz had turned to the audience the moment before his death. The drummer swayed and fell across the mouth of his drum, his body making a deep thump as it hit the drum-head. Hagedorn lurched bolt-upright, his lips framed to utter a shriek.

He turned his eyes instinctively to Weber. There stood the bass viol player with his bow high above his head, his gaze fastened on the fallen kettledrummer. For an instant Hagedorn fancied there was a gleam of triumph on the bass viol player's countenance. Was it the look of a man who had accomplished some arduous task? Hagedorn shuddered.

The tumult which followed was greater even than that of the previous fatal night. The concert-master waved his arms frantically in a vain effort to quiet the audience. The audience chattered in wildest excitement. The stage was a scene of utter confusion. Three or four players were struggling with the drummer's limp body to drag it down from the percussionists' perch while all the others were fighting in a panic to get through the narrow door leading off the stage.

Hagedorn took no chances of being caught in the crowd. His first impulse was to dash out of the auditorium. In the foyer he caught a fleeting glimpse of Maddigan rushing down the inner corridor toward the stage.

Just as he reached the Massachusetts Avenue doors he heard a yell behind him.

"Hagedorn!"

He whirled about to see the diminutive figure of Professor Chooljian. His friend's presence surprised him.

"Why, Professor! What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Wait, you shall see," said the Armenian in his choppy Oriental ac-

cent. "The story you told me this afternoon interested me. I am sure I have the solution of the mystery. I couldn't believe it to be true at first, but what has happened tonight makes me certain. I have volunteered my services to the police. It is tragic that another life had to be lost. But tonight we shall put a stop to this affair."

"Come, come," blurted out Hagedorn rudely. "While we are talking here, the guilty man is making a getaway. Come quickly. I know where to find him."

"Not yet," said the professor insistently. "It isn't time yet. We shall stay right here until the crowds have gone away."

And that is exactly what they did. The police had accepted Professor Chooljian's theory, it developed, and he was to play a part in the plan to capture the culprit tonight and prove him guilty of two murders.

"We must wait some time," said the professor. "At midnight we shall join a squad of detectives and wait for the man to walk into our trap. He will do it, never fear. He is a madman."

The certainty of the professor's tone convinced Hagedorn.

"What do you make of it?" he inquired.

"Come, let us go elsewhere before the crowd comes out," the professor commanded. "I can explain everything later. We have more than two hours to wait."

THEY waited downtown at the Adams House, and there the professor gave his solution of the mystery.

"It's uncanny," he began. "I could not believe it myself at first, but it must be true. You see, Weber is a man of brilliant intellect, but a little warped. He is dangerous. He knows much. He has combined the supernatural and the natural, the psychic

qualities of music and the unfailing natural laws of physics to make one of the most frightful death-weapons ever conceived."

"What does it all mean, Professor?" asked Hagedorn. "I don't understand."

"It's not an easy matter to explain," the professor said, "but in as simple terms as I can put it, the solution of the mystery is this: Music is like fire. When controlled and used in the proper way, it is of inestimable benefit to mankind, but once it eludes control or is put to a malevolent purpose, it can cause frightful havoc.

"This man Weber has developed the power to use music to further his own ends. He has gone quite insane, there is no doubt of that, but his insanity has only enhanced his brilliant powers. He has a supernormal perception of tone colorings. For instance, he is an expert on acoustics. He has spent years on the study of sound waves and their peculiarities. No concert hall has been built within the past ten years without his expert advice.

"Added to this keen musical acumen is an intense interest in philosophical subjects. He has an understanding of such matters which amounts to clairvoyance.

"When this remarkable intellect cracked under the strain of overstudy and overwork, it naturally became obsessed with ideas resulting from his studies. After more study, he has discovered a musical chord which can crush the soul of any man who hears it!

"He selected Liebeskind, the conductor, as his victim because of a long-standing temperamental feud between them. It is probable that Weber gave him a touch of the dose he intended to administer him. Whether he did or not, Liebeskind, who was losing prestige in musical circles anyway, had the excellent good sense to disappear.

"It had been comparatively simple for Weber to pick the chord which would end the life of the new conductor, and it is likely he did it merely for the sport. Schurtz was a cocky and vainglorious personage. To plumb the personality of the vacuous kettledrummer and strike his death note was even simpler. The victims, hearing the fatal chord all the quicker with their musically sensitive ears, had succumbed easily.

"But this fiend's great ambition, I believe from what I have gleaned from the case, is something which concerns all of us, every man living on this planet. Weber, believe me or not, has come very near discovering what physicists call 'the cosmic chord', that is, a chord composed of all the chromatic semitones in the entire musical range. And this chord, once discovered and held long enough, could bring universal destruction!

"I say I do not know how near Weber has come to discovering this chord, but I do know that if any man living has the power to accomplish it, that man is Weber."

The professor gave grim examples to illustrate his points. Glass vessels can be shattered to bits by tapping their sides and shouting into them; soldiers are commanded to break step in crossing bridges lest the vibration cause them to fall; scientists have killed fishes by playing violins in aquariums; the shrillest tones of the human voice are capable of extinguishing flame; the Festungsburg cathedral tumbled to earth through the famous incident of the organist's holding one bass note. These and many other illustrations of the deadly powers of sound and vibration were cited by the professor. Hagedorn shuddered.

SHORTLY before midnight Hagedorn and Professor Chooljian returned to Symphony Hall. Outside they were met by Maddigan and several other

detectives. Few words were exchanged. Maddigan led the group to the Massachusetts Avenue entrance. He tapped on one of the big doors. Before his knock was answered a detective came running down the street.

"You'll have to hurry, Maddigan," he said breathlessly. "He's on his way here right now!"

At that moment a man who was evidently the watchman opened the door.

"Everything ready, Dorgan?" asked Maddigan.

"Everything," the watchman said laconically.

"Come," Maddigan beckoned, and the party stumbled into the dark foyer and into the auditorium.

"Sit here," one of the detectives commanded Hagedorn, pointing to a chair. "We'll be spread through the house. Whatever happens, don't make a noise. If you do, God help you!"

Hagedorn sat motionless a long time. His nerves were taut. He did not know what to expect. Suddenly—

"Just practising, you know," a voice boomed throughout the auditorium. "It seems to do me much good to play in the dark with nobody here but my music and myself."

It was a mellow and resonant voice. Its pleasant quality was a surprise to Hagedorn, hearing it for the first time. Undoubtedly it was Weber.

"Well," came the voice of the watchman, "I'll be goin' my rounds now. Be sure to close the door after you as usual, and I'll lock it."

He was heard no more.

Heavy footfalls sounded as the weird musician thumped down the aisle under the weight of his instrument. Soon he was up on the stage. The bass viol made a resounding boom as it struck the stage floor. Then came sounds of the player re-

moving the case and preparing to play. Next the rasping noise of resin being rubbed on the bow. The sound chilled Hagedorn.

After a short pause, Hagedorn heard full, deep tones as the bow was drawn across the thick strings. They filled the auditorium like thunder. When they ceased presently, Hagedorn thought he heard the player say, "No, no," as though dissatisfied with his efforts.

In a few moments the notes were resumed. This time Hagedorn recognized the sound as that he had heard on the night he had crept into Symphony Hall to escape the hailstorm. There was that same roaring drone, ever increasing in volume. The musician was evidently playing the chromatic scale over and over in an endeavor to fill the hall with echoes until every note of the scale would sound at once.

The noise was a jumble at first, but now it was taking definite form. One great and powerful chord was emerging. When it reached predominance it made the floor electric with vibration. It swelled ever louder and louder. At the end of a quarter of an hour it was deafening. Hagedorn's ears began to roar. They seemed about to burst with a feeling like that experienced in passing into an underwater subway tube. Then a swirling sensation came into them and Hagedorn felt as though he were losing his balance. He gripped the arms of his chair. His head was numb and spinning as though he were horribly drunk.

Was this the "cosmic chord" of which the professor had spoken? Hagedorn half arose to shout. Then, remembering the detective's admonition to remain silent, he slouched back again. What were they waiting for? The building would collapse!

The thought terrified Hagedorn. He sat cramped in horror. Into his

swirling brain came grim recollections of what the professor had told him. Death and destruction! He jumped to his feet with a roar. He swayed drunkenly. He would flee from the din before it drove him insane. Just as he reached the aisle he heard above the titanic rumble something which sounded like a voice. At first it was faint, then it swelled in volume even above the bass chord.

"Stop him! stop him!" it shrieked.

It was the professor. Hagedorn wheeled about and started blindly down the aisle in the direction of the voice. At the same time, above the roar of the bass viol, he heard a splintering sound from above. Terror wrenched his soul. The gigantic girandole had been jarred from its fastenings. There was a sharp whistle and the tinkling of glass as it shot downward, then an ear-splitting crash.

The bass chord stopped abruptly. Feet scuffed through broken glass and meaningless shouts came from different corners of the hall. A match flared up, revealing three detectives making clumsily for the stage, then went out.

Hagedorn stopped half-way down the aisle. The situation was both ludicrous and horrible. Ahead of him in the darkness a grim game of blind man's buff was in progress.

"Damn you, we'll shoot!" yelled a frantic voice.

"The lights, Dorgan, the lights!" came another voice.

Another match flickered, and by it Hagedorn saw several men in silhouette climbing onto the stage. The match went out. Feeling about for their prey with outstretched hands, the detectives were creeping over the stage like wild beasts. A knife might swish through the darkness into one of them. More horrible yet, it occurred to Hagedorn, that big

bass viol might come crashing down over the skull of one of them.

WHEN at last the next match flame pierced the darkness, Hagedorn discerned a group of detectives huddled together in a group, each bent forward and pointing his pistol in a different direction. Before the match had flickered out, the hall became flooded with light. No one except the detectives stood on the stage. Weber had escaped in the darkness!

There was a sudden scampering down the aisle and the watchman Dorgan appeared.

"Maddigan!" he shouted. "Quick! Out the stage entrance! He went out that way, passing me like a hound outa hell and flooring me with his big fiddle!"

He had not finished speaking before the detectives were piling off the stage. Hagedorn was close behind them. As soon as they reached the street, they saw, plainly outlined against the snow, the figure of the musician rounding the corner, his cumbersome instrument on his back.

"After him!" Maddigan yelled. "Shoot him if he won't stop! He's a murderous maniac!"

The chase through the snow was brisk, but the distance between the fugitive and his pursuers as they dashed down the avenue lessened steadily. When he had reached Fenway Park, struggling desperately under his heavy load, the musician was not forty feet ahead of his would-be captors.

Hagedorn heard a panting voice behind him. He turned quickly as he ran and saw Professor Chooljian.

"By God, he almost did it—the cosmic chord!" gasped the little Armenian.

Weber had reached the bridge over the river. He plunged on unsteadily.

"He can't last," someone shouted. "We'll get him alive when he drops."

Then the retreating figure turned to face his pursuers. He made a gesture and shouted something. The detectives halted as though hypnotized, then all in unison gave a cry of astonishment, for with incredible agility the mad musician dashed onto the bridge and hurled himself and his burden over the railing.

The pursuers lunged forward. When they reached the railing, they saw the bass viol floating amid the ice and snow in the river. Then the outline of a head bobbed up near it. A hand reached out, grasped the floating instrument, and in a moment Weber was astride it, riding slowly down the river. A grotesque spectacle he made, but no one could laugh.

The detectives ran back to the end of the bridge and rushed down the river bank. Weber was floating not fifty feet out. He waved his hand.

Suddenly a revolver barked. Hagedorn and Professor Chooljian, standing on the bridge, saw Maddigan pull back his right arm, something flashing in his hand. The figure astride the bass viol toppled slowly over and slipped into the water. The bass viol floated on alone.

