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Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"To escape him, she flung herself off the cliff path."



The Dark Star

By G. G. PENDARVES

A powerful weird tale about a lovely, beautiful girl whose life and happiness were held in thrall to an evil picture, with unutterable horror awaiting her in its cloudy depths

ALAN CLOVA hid the winged exultant uprush of his emotion with habitual control. His face, thin to emaciation, dark and cleanly chiseled, was aloof and proud as a Pharaoh's. It was hard to believe he was only thirty.

W. T.—4

So much experience, so much hard-earned knowledge, so much resolution and critical cool judgment was in his eyes. Beneath straight black brows they gleamed, steady, brilliant and serene. Here was a man of action no less than a man of in-

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tellec. Breeding, dignity, pride of race had molded the features, but they were instinct with a tense fighting awareness that was the New World's gift to the Old.

His cousin, David Wishart Clova, Earl of Glenhallion, narrowly observed his young kinsman. Hope stirred in him once more; hope he had thought was dead—dead and buried with his three sons beneath the sodden earth of Flanders. The words of the creed he had so often repeated in the little gray chapel on his estate, beat in his brain like the portentous opening bars of a tremendous symphony. *"I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come."* The words had never passed his lips since 1916, when his third and youngest son fell.

Now, looking at Alan's six feet five inches of brawn and muscle, the beliefs he had forsworn flashed up again. Here in the flesh once more was an heir to the great name, the centuries of tradition, the wild splendor of Glenhallion estates. Here, under the roof of Gorm Castle, stood a man who might well have been one of his own sons grown older, stronger, more mature. Resurrection! . . . Yes, it seemed a resurrection indeed.

Alan stood at a great window looking out over Glenhallion estate, from walled grounds about the castle to meadow, forest, craggy hills, and far-distant sky whose April blue darkened to hazy grays and purples above the Kaims of Vorangowl. His absorbed gaze traveled from point to point, then came back to rest on a square gray tower within the grounds, ivy-hung and partly obscured by beech-trees. He frowned at sight of a man who was pacing round its battlements. His appearance, a great hulking figure in outlandish-looking gray clothes, stirred a sudden cold antipathy in Alan and he

turned abruptly back to the room and its two occupants.

Lady Maisry, the Earl's only surviving child, sat by a log fire. She had a fragile look and shivered now and then at sound of the wind's bluster round the castle of Gorm. She looked, Alan thought, with her golden hair and green sheath dress, as if she had been transplanted from the daffodil-beds in the grounds below.

Some unfathomable instinct of protection for her made him hesitate to speak of the man on the tower roof. He strolled back to the window. Yes, the man was there still, pacing to and fro, to and fro, a long cloak flapping in the wind, hair and beard flaming red in the evening light. Such a fury of rage shook Alan that it was a minute before he could command his voice. Then he asked, "Is that old tower a complete ruin? Or, do—do people live in it?"

Earl Glenhallion came over to the window. "Birds, bats, spiders! That's all you'll find living in the old Keep. Fine old stronghold, all that's left of the original castle; the rest was burned down about two hundred years ago. No, you'd not find man, woman, or child who'd go inside that tower for five minutes."

"I'm going."

Alan's remark had the effect of a pistol-shot on Lady Maisry. She got to her feet and moved quickly across to him, put a pleading hand on his arm.

"No—no—no! You mustn't! It's dangerous, very dangerous. There's something . . . there's someone . . . you never know if—it skips some generations! My father thinks it all nonsense, but——"

ALAN almost promised never to set foot in the tower if it worried her. The distress in her gray eyes, the frightened pallor of her cheeks shook him. She interested and gripped his imagina-

tion profoundly. Yesterday's first impressions of her were strengthened by today's. Her clear ivory-pale skin, wide gray eyes, gold thick shining hair, gentle slow ease of every movement, and above all to his critical sensitive ear, her low deliberate exquisite voice, immensely charmed him. Beyond these things, though, rare as he had found such physical perfection, he was deeply aware of a mind fully as alive and equipped as his own, of a nature as exacting, and a will as inflexible. But there was something about her that puzzled him. He had the impression of a deeply hidden preoccupation which she dreaded might be discovered.

"She looks as substantial as a dragon-fly, but I believe she's made of steel covered with white velvet," he reflected. "I know that fragile-looking type of thoroughbred. She'd live through famine and earthquake—if she felt like living! I know horses and I know dogs, and that gives me a line on humans. She's letting go for some reason. And I'm going to know that reason."

All the same he found it difficult to remember she wouldn't die easily as he met her panic-stricken eyes. A grim thought struck him. Was that man on the battlements her lover?—was she hiding him there from the Earl?

"Why do you feel like that about the tower?" he asked.

Her father drew her to him, an arm about her shoulders. "She's had a queer life here in this old castle. You must forgive her fancies, Alan! The legend about that old Keep dies hard. Everyone on the estate swears by it. Maisry believes it, too."

"Just what is the legend?"

"A-a-ah! Hrumph!" The older man stalked over to the window and glowered at the gray Keep. "They say it's haunted by an ancestor of ours, who lived some

two hundred years ago. He was known as the Red Earl of Glenhallion, or Red Alastair, because of his flaming red beard."

Alan felt his heart jump as if a mine had exploded under the polished flooring under foot. He tried to keep his glance from the old tower, and failed. He must look again; perhaps the setting sun had dazzled him, given a false illusion. He joined the Earl; his keen gaze followed the other's look.

A clear shaft of light struck across the glen from over the high moorland of Vorangowl and picked out the tower like a searchlight; every ivy-leaf stood out like carved metal, every irregularity of weathered stone showed up, discolorations of dripping rain from the roof, the gold patina of lichen, the rusty brown of winter leaves lodged in iron-barred windows—all was mercilessly clear.

And, on the breast-high battlemented wall that ran round the roof, a man leaned with face directly turned to Alan and the castle window at which he stood. The man's hair and beard flamed red as torchlight.

"The story of Red Alastair does us no credit," went on the Earl. "He was a wild, dissolute, savage man, from all the records. You can read him up in the library if you're interested. But as to haunting the Keep—that's nonsense, the talk of ignorant peasants, the sort of story that people like to invent about any old ruin."

"So no one lives there, no one climbs up to the roof to look round, not for any reason?" Alan's voice was harsh.

"No one. It stands there as you see it now—deserted! I've been up, of course. Jamie has the key—the only key. When I succeeded to Glenhallion there were constant scandals and wild tales because visitors were allowed to go over the Keep and explore it. I locked up the

place, and since then there've been no more tales of ghosts and people being pushed off battlements or crushed behind doors and all the rest of it. I've not been inside for a year or more, and certainly no one else has. A good specimen of Tenth Century architecture it is, and that's all. If you see Red Alastair when you go over it, let me know. I rule here now; he's had his turn and made a very bad job of it, by all accounts."

THE two men turned back to the fire, the Earl chuckling, Alan feeling more angry, more stupidly bewildered than he'd ever felt in his whole vigorous sane existence. He believed in ghosts no more than he believed in the Divine Right of kings, and he connected both illusions with forgotten centuries when people had no bathrooms, enjoyed heretic burnings in place of cinemas and night-clubs, and fought for "the Glory of God" or some such unpractical cause.

He thrust the whole thing out of his mind for future cogitation. Maisry was watching him with painful anxiety as if she divined his inner discomfort. He was determined to share it with no one, and made up his mind to investigate the Keep before he slept that night.

The events and revelations of that same evening salted his determination. In order to get the legend as it was bandied about the countryside before reading up a literary account, he tried to extract information from the close-mouthed Jamie, who valetted him as he dressed for dinner. Jamie shied away from the subject like a nervous horse from a white flapping sheet.

"It's not good to talk of *him*, not about this time of year, my lord." The man spoke the broad Scots of the countryside, and became almost unintelligible as his agitation and embarrassment increased.

Alan turned to the big swinging mirror on his dressing-table, pretending to examine his chin. He saw the reflected Jamie glance over his shoulder.

"Why at this time of year, especially?"

"Eh, my lord?—you that'll be next Earl of Glenhallion to be asking that!"

The thin dark face turned from the mirror with a smile, so pleasant and friendly a smile that the old servant relaxed to it with: "It's not you I'll be blaming, my lord; it's those that brought you up so far from your own land and kinsmen. You that were born to all this!"

"But I wasn't! When I was born, exactly seven other heirs came before me."

"It's the Earl will be telling you all the family history, him and her Ladyship. It's not for me to be havering of the gentry."

"Tell me at least why April's a bad time to discuss Red Alastair? Must a ghost be in season like grouse or black-cock?"

"Wheest, wheest for pity's sake, my lord! You can't tell what's abroad these evenings. The master hasn't 'the sight'; he could go up into the Keep this very night and not see a thing to fright him. But there's others can—aye, there's others can see! And I tell you this, my lord: the Dark Star is up over the Kaims of Vorangowl again."

"You mean the high moors at the head of the glen?"

"No. Not the moors you've seen. The star's in the Picture, the cursed thing that *he* left in the Keep. Aye, the Picture I'm meaning of the moors and the cliff where the bride he stole from another man jumped to her death."

A deep sonorous booming distracted Jamie from his confidences.

"That's the dinner gong, my lord. I'll not weary you with my tales now. It's all writ in black and white, and every word's

true, for all the master's fleeing at the legend."

WHEN he made his way down to the lofty shadow-filled dining-hall, exasperation had rubbed Alan's temper rather raw.

"Am I crazy—or am I crazy?" he demanded of himself, one hand lightly sliding over the broad baluster-rail for the sensuous pleasure of touching the lovely seasoned wood, undesecrated by varnish, worn by time. His reason was floundering and plunging in heavy seas of unfamiliar and unpalatable sensations, ideas and thoughts.

"And, so far, there's nothing in the facts to justify my going up in the air like this," he complained to himself. "Even if I did see—and most certainly I did—a red-bearded man, what of it? They exist—especially here in Scotland; it's almost the hallmark of a Scot. Maybe porridge produces red beards! Jamie's daft about his old legend. Now there's a picture to reckon with, and a dark star, and a lady friend of Red Alastair's! Can you beat it? Even a Hollywood director couldn't think up this one. But the man—the man on the tower——"

A fighting look came into his dark eyes.

"Revolting sight! Don't quite know why—but somehow—filthy! Reminded me of that fat Greek in Paris, sitting like a blotchy swollen spider in his den, waiting for his doped girls to be brought along—bah! I'll get Red Beard! Hunt the hairy brute right off the map."

Poor Alan! In a few more hours he was to discover that a map, even a map of the world, was more than an affair of latitude and longitude as far as Red Beard was concerned.

Dinner rather took his mind off his troubles. There were guests he liked. One, an M. P. for one of the Border

counties, met him more than half-way on the question of road development. Over some fine old brandy from the cellars of Gorm, the two men built bridges and tunnels and roads over Scotland; opened up Northern China; decided on the best type of car for use in desert country; and were passionately reclaiming, for Holland, vast new tracts of submerged country when their host brought them back to social duties of the moment.

Alan, however, was himself again, perfectly confident of being able to deal with life and its problems in his rational systematic way. The old tower and the man on its battlements no longer seemed ominous.

"Liver, I suppose," he told himself. "Never knew I had one before, though. I'll satisfy myself that beggar's not about before I go to bed, though. Might set fire to the trees with his flaming red beard."

In the big drawing-room, where lamps and fires made shadows dance on molded ceilings and white-paneled walls, on the faded coral of brocaded curtains that shut out sky and stars and wind-torn clouds, the Lady Maisry sang to them; of love, of death, of ecstasy, of bitter longing—ballads of olden times. She sang with the last perfect simplicity of a genuine artist; and with smiles, with tears, the listeners paid tribute to her gift.

As the last note echoed in the quiet, spellbound room, Alan knew! He knew he was in love, exquisitely, irrevocably, passionately. What he did not know was that, because of it, he would cross a barrier into the unknown, and there meet terror beyond conception of what terror could be.

A FEW hours later, when the guests were gone and the old Earl sleeping in his room, he and Maisry sat and talked together. Her low, shaken voice confided

in him the horror that had thrust itself into her life, and he listened with a mounting love and pity and fear for her that carried him like a tidal wave far, far beyond every intellectual boundary his mind had ever recognized.

He wanted to think that she was ill, that her nerves were playing tricks, that the old castle of Gorm with its memories and legends had worked on her, that change of scene would cure her, that she must marry him and come away and live and laugh in the sun and forget. His sane logical mind clamored for such solution of her secret. But below the rational protests of his disciplined clear mind, deeper understanding stirred and apprehended.

The woman he loved looked at him, her haunted eyes besought him. He must make a decision. Now!

He got to his feet, bent down and drew her up beside him, her hands in his strong clasp. He did not kiss her—no, not even the cold slim hands that trembled in his own. But in the silence his very soul spoke to her, gave lasting deep assurance of his passion.

"I believe you," he said at last. "Every word you've told me. And I'm going to follow this up. It had never occurred to me that things like—like Red Alastair and his Picture could exist. You've convinced me."

"But Alan! Alan!" her low voice broke in fear. "I told you only because—your love gives you a right to know my secret, because I want you to see how useless it is to love me. It is hopeless, most dangerous to interfere. This is my fate. All these years, these centuries, he has waited, growing stronger. Perhaps, at first, he might have been sent back—back to his own place. Now it's too late. He's learned the trick of leaving his awful painted moorland and getting into our world."

She shivered at the fierce fighting light of battle her words brought to the dark eyes looking down into her own.

"Alan! It is fatal—quite fatal to oppose him. You must never put foot inside the Keep. Oh, can't you see, have I not explained it all? It is hopeless. I told my secret to prevent your interfering, running into hideous peril. To stop you going. Alan! Not you—not *you*——"

His grip of her hands slackened. He stooped, his eyes sought hers in sudden overwhelming wonder.

"D'you mean that you—that you care, too? Maisry! Maisry! If you do, nothing can separate us. No dream or ghost! Now I know the facts. I am prepared. You have armed me against surprize. I'm ready for Red Alastair. Do you think"—he held her softly, adoring her, sheltering her from all the world—"do you think I'd let man or devil take you from me—now?"

2

ONE. Two. Three.

The strokes tolled out from a church-tower of some near-by village as Alan left the castle and made his way to the old gray Keep. The chimes brought a flash of self-mockery into his face.

"If the old crowd at home could see me now—trotting off in the moonlight at three a. m. to meet a fellow who died two hundred years ago! Mack's waistcoat buttons would shoot clear across Lake Huron with the laugh he'd get out of it!"

The wild clear sky, glittering stars and stinging wind were beginning to put a different complexion on the past few hours at Gorm—vast shadow-filled firelit romantic old castle that it was. Here, striding across the turf, trees tossing and creaking, clouds driving, the shrill mad pipe of the wind in his ears, Alan's body exulted in the challenge to his senses; his

physical rather than psychical powers were called upon.

It was extraordinarily difficult for a man of his type to sustain the vision that Maisry's story had called up. With every step, old habits of reasoning took hold more firmly. When he reached the huge barred iron-studded door of the Keep he had once more put the Red Alastair legend into the realm of fantasy. He wondered at himself for accepting it at Maisry's valuation even for an hour. He recalled a bit of doggerel he'd chanced on that day, or, rather, the previous day:

Love, love, love, love,
Love it is a dizziness!
It winna let a puir body
Gang about his bizziness!

"And that explains me to myself." He fitted a big oiled key into the lock and gave a half-shamed laugh at his own expense. "What odds, though! If Maisry wants me to make a fool of myself in this particular way—I'm for it. Anyhow, I intended to see the ugly hairy beggar off the premises. Might as well take a look at the Picture too, while I'm here. There aren't many back home can beat me at sight-seeing, I'll say!"

He confided these conclusions to the inner side of the door as he closed and locked it behind him, in order to trap any vagrant lurking inside the tower. He switched on his torch, a large, powerful one with a new battery, and began his strangely timed visit.

"Better check up on the plan again."

He patted the wide pockets of his overcoat, drew out a folded piece of semi-transparent tough paper familiar to architects, opened out the worn crackling sheet and examined once more the scale-drawing and faded cramped letter press.

"H-m-m! Ground floor. This was where soldiers were lodged."

He forced back a narrow door on its rusted creaking hinges and went in.

Silence and darkness. The nine-foot thick walls were cut to north and south exposures, forming huge window-seats, broad and cold as tombstones. The windows were small, narrow, and heavily barred by iron grilles as thick as a man's wrist. A yawning fireplace like a roofless cupboard showed stained and blackened floor and a pair of massive iron dogs.

He stood on the hearth and peered up. A vast chimney gaped to the sky; he could see a pale moon with torn rags of cloud across her face. And she was the last friendly familiar object he remembered that night.

SOUND of a shuffling heavy footstep somewhere above took him to the foot of the stairway; he craned his head to listen. The spiral stairs were steep and a bare two feet in breadth; his shoulders rubbed the outer wall as he climbed. He reached the next level and flashed his torch into the thick absorbent darkness of another hollow room. The door of it stood wide. He moved cautiously across the threshold; the brilliant spotlight of his torch showed no one there.

This was the dining-hall and a higher ceiling, more windows, a smoother flooring, and less rough-hewn fireplace distinguished it from the room below. Above the hearth, with its hollowed blackened stones and battered mantelpiece, a startling vivid thing brought Alan's traveling torch to an abrupt halt.

"For heaven's sake! Is that the Picture?"

His dark lean face regarded it with a positive glare of incredulous belief—unwilling furious belief.

"Land of Moses! Just a fake! It's as new as—as the Chrysler Building! The paint's as fresh as a ship's just out of dry-dock."

In the shock of discovery, he forgot the

footsteps. He strode across the dusty floor, trained his torch full on the painted scene.

"Damn — and damn — and damn again!" he glowered, swearing in soft whispered fury, eyes narrowed under black impatient brows. "Maisry was dead right about its infernal technique. It's more like Vorangowl than it's like itself. It's damnable!"

It was. The thing confronted him, exquisitely improbable, perfect beyond human hand or brain to conceive and execute. Some six feet square of the rough wall that formed the chimney-breast had been smoothed down and prepared to a surface even and fine as asphalt. Far-reaching miles of country were compressed within that six-foot bit of wall, the whole of Glenhallion estates from castle grounds to the Kaims of Vorangowl — high brooding eagle-haunted plateau of moor and rock and fir-woods that was the western limit. It was the view that stretched before the windows of the library at Gorm castle where he had watched yesterday's sun go down behind the same craggy ridge of rock portrayed on the painted horizon before him; the view he'd been watching before his eyes dropped to the Keep and that abominable tramp that lounged there on its battlements.

Stranger, newcomer he might be, but he knew that view very thoroughly indeed, and his trained falcon-keen eye recognized and acknowledged the astounding reproduction of one landmark after another.

"It's like looking through a window at the thing. If it weren't three a. m. and this wall facing due east instead of west, I'd take my oath that I was staring through a sheet of plate-glass at Vorangowl itself as it looked yesterday about five o'clock! The same effect to the last detail—the same feathery cloud-shape

over the pointed hill—and blue haze over the patch of wood to the north. It's not just an April evening, it's the identical evening I watched yesterday."

He started, frowned, looked more intently at the Picture on the wall.

"This cursed torch . . . if it were only daylight! The infernal thing—why—it looks like mist rolling up over the road—actually rolling up before my eyes!"

And then his whole mind and body, every faculty and sense were suddenly sharpened to amazing perception. His breath came in deep sighs as though he were toiling up-hill with a weight to carry; his face hollowed and lost color; sweat stood in great beads on his forehead.

THE faint far-off figure of a man on the painted road—a stony track flung down across the heights—was coming nearer, nearer, nearer. . . . A figure that had been a vague shadow in the mist, when Alan first looked at the Picture, whose minuteness had served to emphasize the deserted aching loneliness of the moors. Now, the figure was moving forward, swiftly, swiftly over the stony endless road—past miles of dark woods, down the steep drop to the glen until it was swallowed up in the trees and shrubberies of Gorm which formed the foreground of the Picture.

A corner of the Keep itself showed in this same foreground, a bit of the gray weathered battlements.

Alan stared, waiting with pulses beating heavy and slow, watching for the man to reappear. Abruptly he came. He was there on the battlemented roof of the Keep, his great red head and fiery beard sharply defined. He turned to look at Alan, flung up a great arm in menace or derisive greeting.

In that instant a sound of high hooting wind filled the Keep, shrieked through

the barred windows, roared down the hollow shaft of the stairway. Alan whipped about, torch in hand, to see the door slam in his face. The wind dropped as he flung himself forward to pull and tug with mad violence at the clumsy ring of iron that formed a handle. As he vainly struggled, there was a sound of heavy footsteps coming from above, halting outside his door, moving on downward and out of hearing.

Silence, heavy and sightless as a grave's, closed down on the Keep and its prisoner.

The shock of it roused Alan like a blow in the face. He'd stood bemused, dreaming, hypnotized by a bit of painted wall and let himself be trapped. Tricked! Some bit of ancient conjuring, some ingenious contraption in the chimney-flue had caused the illusion.

And the uproar of the wild and sudden wind? He shrugged that problem off. Whoever worked the Picture fake could take care of that too!

He flashed his light up the chimney but could see nothing beyond bare, grimed old stones rising in rough crumbling perpendicular. He examined the rooms opening off the dining-hall; they were merely cells, unlighted, full of dust and rubble. He returned to the main room and looked up at the windows with careful calculating eye; they were narrow, strongly barred, set high on the walls so that no arrow, glancing through, should strike a human target. No faintest hope from them, even could he climb like a fly or were possessed of the sharpest of files. Only an explosive could burst open his prison bars.

And now that cursed red-bearded man was at large while he was trapped and helpless here. What was the game? Robbery—the old plate at Gorm? Or jewels—would the beast go near Maisry, frighten her, hurt her? What had he

plotted and planned as he hid here all those hours?

Not even hidden, though, Alan reflected. The creature had brazened it out on the battlements in full light. How was it no one but himself had seen? The Earl had been standing beside him when— Hastily averting his mind's eye from the thought that leaped out of ambush to answer his question, Alan said aloud in clearest, concisest tones:

"That's an easy one! The old man's sight is failing!" and this in spite of knowing that only twelve months ago the Earl had once more carried off the Fofarshire trophy for target shooting at the annual sports. "And, after all, it's not likely that people who live here go poking about and staring as I've been doing. It's *perfectly* simple that I happened to be the only one to see that infernal tramp."

Other explanations buzzed in his brain and he beat them back like a cloud of noisome flies. There was no other explanation.

Maisry's words sounded in his memory. "Only some have *the sight*. Father hasn't got it, and that's why he's never seen Red Alastair and doesn't believe in the legend—but it's fact and no legend at all. I have *the sight*. And you have it too, Alan. I knew at once; I always recognize this wonderful, this terrible power in anyone else. You will see Red Alastair, most certainly you will see him, and that is why I can explain to you about his Picture that he lives in."

For some minutes he closed his eyes, recalled deliberately scenes and images and places he had left behind in America. He wanted to shake off illusion, to steady his swirling thoughts, to forget the dark disturbance that swelled and rose and battered at his sanity.

He thought of a holiday he had spent loafing in the sun and warm salt water

in Florida. He remembered a day in the woods near a logging-camp when an angry she-bear had chased him as he made off with her cub. He saw himself rocking and smoking and yarning on the broad screened porches of his aunt's country-house in the White Mountains; flashed through the hours of last Christmas day, spent with old Friedland in New York . . . the fires and friends and brilliant dinner-table. . . .

He opened his eyes on the Picture, and had the sensation of dropping from heaven to hell. On the road—returning, retreating to the misty Kaims of Vorangowl—the man was back again. But this time, and Alan watched with all his soul although he denied the thing he watched, a faint shadowy second figure followed after the man. Beyond a rocky cliff-face far up on the Kaims the red-haired figure halted, turned about to beckon the weary shadow that toiled after him, a shadow that grew clearer with every step it took. Suddenly Alan knew it.

"Maisry! Maisry! Maisry! Come back—come back to me!"

His full-throated anguished cry beat and echoed against the high cold walls of his prison. Again, again he called. He must bring her back, he *must*, before she set foot on that high narrow trail skirting the precipice.

That meant death to her, lasting, damnable, eternal death. He was conscious of a single overmastering passion of determination to bring her back—back from the cliff-face where she would slip to darkness, where he would lose her in this world and the next.

With a new shock, he recognized that his will was locked with the will of the red-haired man who waited for Maisry beyond the cliff path. The Picture darkened. Mist rolled gray and baffling down from the heights, and in the leaden skies

a dark star shone, a star of evil coppered that changed the green woods and April grass to somber purples.

Old Jamie's warning darted across his memory: "The Dark Star is up over the Kaims of Vorangowl."

He saw Maisry move forward, saw Red Alastair beckon with insistent hand. Deathless love. Deathless hate. The twin fires leaped up, all his conscious being focused to a single point—to conquer Red Alastair.

He knew his antagonist, acknowledged him at last. He knew his weapon too. His only weapon. The Will. A clean strong sword that all hell tried to tear from his grasp.

And now Maisry was coming back, back to him from the dark cliff, from engulfing mists, from Red Alastair, slowly, moving wraith-like past wood and glen and through the enfolding trees in the grounds at last. As she vanished, she turned to smile at him.

His torch fell from his nerveless hand. He sagged to the ground, huddled with head on knees; he felt old and worn and done. His next recollection was of light at the windows. Dawn, and the high sweet note of skylarks on the wing.

And the Picture showed a fresh and verdant April evening, an empty road wound up over far-distant heights, a clear tender sky shone above all. It was a magic tender exquisite study of a northern spring. Alan looked and experienced emotions he had never dreamed of possessing.

"And that was her dream! That child caught—held—dragged to hell!"

"Maisry!" he addressed the Picture as if she were still on the road before his eyes. "Forgive me. My faithlessness, my stupidity. You shall never tread that road again. It is my fight now. It is between me and Red Alastair. *And—I—will—win.*"

The last words fell with slow, deadly emphasis, a vow abruptly extinguished, the echo of the last word torn from his lips by an inferno of wind. The Keep rocked in its fury, vibrating ominously to its high tremendous shriek.

He turned to the door, prepared for assault, and was faced by a new shock of surprize. The door stood wide open. Cool morning air, bearing a tang of pine and a freshness of young wet leaves and grass, met him as he ran to the lower floor, to find the outer door unlocked and opened to the misty morning.

Soberly, slowly, thankfully he returned to Gorm, deeply aware that the Keep was solitary now; no need to search. Its demon was not there. For the moment there was no enemy, no battlefield.

There was only Maisry, and he must go to her.

3

"AND Maisry?" Alan looked at the breakfast table laid for two and his eyes lost their eagerness. "Not joining us, Cousin David?"

"No. Her maid says she had a bad night. I don't know what to make of it; these last weeks she's altered beyond recognition. I've tried to persuade her to go away for a change. Our local man, Doctor Shields, says she's well enough but makes no effort; he thinks there's something on her mind."

Alan regarded the fish on his plate with a stern frown. He'd been doing some hard, intensive thinking and saw a gleam of light on the very dark horizon of his thoughts.

"I met a chap on the ship coming over. Lives in Stirling. Several people on board knew him well. Seems he's made a great reputation as a nerve specialist. Broome, Eliot Broome's his name."

The Earl's unhappy face lightened.

"Ah, that's a household word in Scotland, and in other countries too. A nerve-man, yes! I didn't think of him for Maisry. D'you suppose she——"

"It's hard to do anything but guess. This fellow Broome impressed me more than anyone I've met in years. Got to know him fairly well—y'know how it is on board ship. We yarned several nights away together. Made a good team for discussions, as he always took a diametrically opposite viewpoint from mine. I'm for fact, the proven fact."

His voice weakened as he proclaimed his lifelong standard. How foolishly short it fell of measuring up with last night's phenomenon!

"Maisry might be upset, imagine there was something seriously wrong if I called in Broome."

"Let me go to Stirling and talk to him. I could bring him back as a friend, not introduce him professionally. Let him see Maisry off guard."

It was quickly arranged. By ten o'clock, Alan was speeding along the road south, a great relief in his mind that there was someone likely to listen to his fantastic improbable story and discuss it without prejudice. As far as he knew Eliot Broome, the impossible and fantastic interested him profoundly. If only he'd come, and at once! Maisry must not endure last night's horror again.

He found Broome at home, and the specialist listened with immense concentration.

"Yes, I can come, and now!" he gave assurance. "I returned by an earlier ship than I had intended—meant to finish off some laboratory experiments before seeing patients. A few days in retreat, y'know. But this won't wait an hour; we'll talk on the drive back."

After lunch, at which Maisry did not appear, the Earl took the two younger men into his study. The father's idea

was that Maisry needed a change of scene, that she was moping here at Gorm; and it was evident he knew nothing of her dream, or the fear that shadowed her life. He would strongly have resented the idea of his daughter sharing the vulgar superstitions of the countryside; he appreciated Red Alastair as a picturesque legend but not as an existent contemporary.

After their conference, Alan took his ally over to the Keep.

"God! It's altered again!"

Alan, who had made straight for the Picture, regarded it with angry incredulity.

"It was a clear late afternoon scene when I left it. There was no figure. Just bare spring landscape. Now the man's back in it again! He was right up in the mist when I first saw this infernal thing; I thought it a clever dodge of the painter—that solitary tiny figure emphasized the vast desolate moor. Now—look at that, will you!"

The two stared. On the road, not a mile from the entrance-gate to Gorm, and facing toward it, a man's figure was painted. Insolently, he seemed to dominate the lovely lonely Glen, and his uncovered head burned red as fire under leaden skies.

ALAN'S face set like a mask. With loathing, he noted the changed aspect of the Picture, its gloom and shadow and brooding horror; a scene from Dante's purgatory rather than the living burgeoning earth.

"Even the star is in it again," he muttered. "The Dark Star."

His companion looked long at the blood-red portent over Vorangowl.

"The star is Red Alastair's signal, then! A sort of challenge."

In striking contrast with Alan's quick-silver energy, Broome stood regarding

the Picture; his massive proportions, leonine head, and slow deliberate movements typical of the man. Alan was all speed and movement and quick fiery courage, lean and swift and dangerous in anger as a black panther. Broome's was a slow, deadly, precise strength that makes no mistakes, that waits to strike and never misses; superbly master of himself, he was a man to seek as desert-travelers turn to the shelter of a rock.

"You consider this," Broome's quiet voice began, "the work of a man, some tremendous work of genius?"

The other looked at him, his lean face, his black eyes cold, furious, implacable.

"It's a trick, a damnable hellish trick—to put the wind up—to unnerve me. Why not? He's had two hundred years to learn, to practise his infernal game."

The specialist regarded him with pity, with comprehension.

"I was prepared to accept your theory, that Red Alastair was a miracle-man, a marvel who had discovered the secret of perpetuating life. The secret could—it will—be discovered! *But this Picture is not the work of a man.* It proves that Red Alastair died—in the flesh."

Alan turned an impatient eye on his companion. "What proves it?" he demanded.

"He couldn't accomplish that," Broome's eyes narrowed on the Picture, "while he was still bound by human limitations in his body. He had to say good-bye to that body before journeying to the hell where such magic was learned. Red Alastair is dead. The Picture is an open door by which he comes and goes to that far hell of his."

Alan flung a defiant look at the painted moors. "If there's a way to open a door, there must be a way to close it."

"Undoubtedly! As we saw in the records, though, a door of this nature

can't be manipulated in any obvious way."

The other nodded gloomy assent. "They seem to have tried everything. Painting it out—cutting it out—every sort of destruction——"

"And each failure gave new advantage to the enemy."

"How's that?"

"Because," Broome answered, "they actively acknowledged Red Alastair's power. Without defense or understanding, they offered combat and he won. His existence in our world depended, and still depends, on such victories."

The Picture gleamed sullen, threatening, unchanged upon the wall. Unchanged! Not quite. The man's face was lifted, flung back, its eyes green as a storm-wave in the lightning's glare.

Alan's eyes met them unflinching, he gave back look for look, he seemed to project his very soul to thrust back the power in that painted evil face. Broome, acutely aware of the sudden impact of will against will, stood like stone: he bent the whole weight of his strong disciplined mind to Alan's need. Then, like the snapping of a twig, it was over. The strain, the tension, the unbearable pressure ceased. Alan's breath was expelled in a long quivering sigh, he leaned his weight on Broome's shoulder, turned a gray face and sunken eyes.

"Let's get out—away from this."

With eloquent gesture he turned and left the tower, his companion close behind. They walked across the intervening space in silence, stood at the castle entrance to look back at the gray, ominous Keep.

"I was wrong!" Alan's voice was hoarse. "Reason — fact — logic — all wrong! It's neither genius nor science behind Red Alastair's devilish Picture. It's black magic, it's from hell."

"Don't blame yourself; no sane man

would accept the true explanation without proof—the sort of proof you've had." Broome put a hand on Alan's shoulder. "Can you arrange for us to see Lady Maisry now, and be undisturbed for the next hour? There's only a bare margin of safety for her; she must never, as you said, follow *him* on that road again; she'd not survive it."

"If she went away, now, at once, within the hour! Out of the country! She could fly across to——"

Alan stopped at the other's decisive gesture.

"Physical distance is a factor that does not count. The man, the devil she follows on that moorland road can summon her at will—from across the world. It is the soul, the ego, the flame within the lamp of clay that is subject to Red Alastair: the body is a thing apart, governed by different laws and limitations."

4

THEY went upstairs and were admitted by a maid to Lady Maisry's apartments. Alan sent a message.

The girl quickly returned. "Yes, my lord, at once! And this gentleman, also. Will you come to her sitting-room, please?"

The two waited in a room that hung like a nest high up in the southwest wing of Gorm castle. It's window thrust out in a semicircular sweep over a bit of wild uncultivated ground below—long grass and daffodils tossed together, and bushy willow-stumps flashed in sun and wind beside a shallow stream whose soft chuckle sounded in the room through widely opened windows.

How like Maisry, how like her strange lovely self, this room! Straight from the devil-haunted tower, it seemed to Alan as velvet-sweet and fresh as a copsis of wood-violets.

She came in to them at once. Her eyes, their cloud-gray beauty repeated in the chiffons of her dress, showed immense fatigue—dark pools no fresh quick source could stir, no sun touch to happy life again. Her face was pale as ivory; she moved across the room slowly, with trained habitual grace, but could not hide her deathly weariness.

Eliot Broome made up his mind at once. Here was one who deserved no less than truth. She was a fighter, strong, and able to endure. He explained himself without preamble, begged her to let him put what knowledge and resources he had at her disposal. She met him with equal directness.

"It is good of you—quite extraordinarily kind—to have come so quickly. Everyone knows your fame, your skill. Tell me one thing, first, and I want the absolute truth, please, Mr. Broome. Alan has told you about my dream?"

The specialist nodded.

"And that I connect it with Red Alastair and his Picture?"

Again he gave grave assent.

"You know, then, that I consider myself to be haunted by this ancestor of mine; and, knowing this, do you believe that I am unbalanced, my nerves deranged, my brain affected?"

"Dear Lady Maisry, I believe you to be as sane as I am, very sane and unusually well-balanced. That is the reason you can bear to hear the truth from me."

She grew very white. "I understand. I am in danger—in deadly peril?"

"Yes," he agreed. "In more than mortal peril; yet, courageous as you are, I would not confess this if I did not know you could be rescued."

Light flashed, died out again in her eyes, gray as lake-water at dawn. She shook her golden head.

"Please, not that! I dare not, dare not think along those lines. I am one of the

ill-fated of my line. In life, in death, *he* cannot be defeated."

Broome rose to his feet, took her two hands, and drew her up to face him. His eyes, his voice, were stern.

"Listen to me, Lady Maisry. That is a piece of un wisdom I had not dreamed you could say, or believe. It is just such unquestioning belief in Red Alastair that has enabled him to remain earth-bound, expanding his mad rapacious ego to colossal dimensions. *His existence depends utterly on people's faith and fear.*"

She stood rigid in his grasp, her face fixed in tense abstracted thought.

"But he—he is more than man! He is a devil—served by devils. It is not one human soul against another, it never has been that. You do not know Red Alastair's history, nor does Alan; there has been so little time."

"No. We have only glanced at the records. Is there any special reason why you are haunted? Are all the women of your family tormented?"

"No. I am the first; the first woman that has had '*the sight*'. And the reason why he—why he calls me, draws me after him, is this——"

She took up a small shabby leather case from a table at her side and opened it to show an oval miniature set in pale gold with rim of pearls. The two men looked at it and at her.

"A lovely portrait of you," Alan said.

"No—not of me. That was painted in 1700. It is a portrait of an ancestor of mine on my mother's side—Lady Jean Haugh. Red Alastair stole her on her wedding-day, snatched her from the bridegroom's side as the pair stood before the priest, and rode off with her. To escape him, she flung herself off the cliff-path on the Kaims of Vorangowl. He was riding recklessly, as always, and no doubt his grasp of her loosened as he held up his frightened horse. This is all

in the records, and there were many witnesses to this particular crime; for it was April and shepherds were all out on the moors tending the ewes and lambs."

"Then Lady Jean Haugh did actually defeat him for once!"

"Not finally. She merely postponed his victory. He has waited some two hundred years for her. And now—here am I."

"Exactly. Here are you. And you are not the Lady Jean Haugh."

"Physically I am, to the last gold hair. And more than that Red Alastair would not recognize. There is no time now to tell you more fully of his life; one year was like another to him, blood and battle, riding and fighting. But chiefly women—the records are black with their names—their unspeakable fate."

Eliot Broome watched the girl narrowly. His next question made Alan start and lean forward with hands suddenly cold and shaking, the pulses throbbing at his temples.

"And you? You have not thought of escaping as Lady Jean escaped?"

MAISRY did not shrink. The idea was evidently a familiar one.

"My unwisdom, as you call it, is not so great as that. Nor do I count suicide escape—from anything."

Broome's square rugged face lightened.

"Ah, now you are wise, indeed. If you will continue to think with such intelligence and courage, I repeat—Red Alastair can be defeated."

Again she shook her head.

"You scarcely know how truly monstrous he is, and was from the beginning. Oh, they are not old wives' tales, the records of his birth and life and death. They come from varying sources, perfectly sound and authentic, and all agree that

he was monstrous, devil-possessed from birth."

"And his death? What is recorded of that?"

"It was never recorded as proved fact. He lived alone at Gorm after Lady Jean's death; entirely, mysteriously alone, cut off from every human being. No one took food to the castle, no one saw him outside its walls. But at night the Keep would blaze with light—and books say 'ringed about with most infernal fire', and thin high pipings and whistlings echoed to the hills. It was a terror in the countryside for three years."

"And then?"

"The old castle of Gorm was burned to the ground. It blazed and smoldered for nights and days. No one would go near it. Only the Keep was left standing."

"And the Picture? Is it mentioned in the early records?"

Alan, listening, strained forward to hear her reply.

"Yes." Loathing dawned in her eyes. "Duncan, tenth Earl of Glenhallion, inherited after Gorm was burned. Red Alastair had vanished, although his bones were never found, and the popular belief was that he had not died in the fire. Duncan rebuilt the castle as it stands now, and attempted to destroy what was recorded in those days as 'a most strange and foule magick'. Instead, he was himself destroyed, his body found on the battlements with a broken back."

Alan frowned, turned to Broome.

"At least, Alastair was living then! He must have been responsible for that murder."

"But many have died like that," Maisry went on. "Many have tried to destroy the Picture. For almost two hundred years men have tried, and failed, and died most horribly."

"Opposing the psychical with the

physical." Broome's massive head was hunched between his shoulders, his abstracted gaze bent on the carpet. "Red Alastair died. He exists in another state of being. He must be met, opposed, conquered in that other state."

Alan's words came slow and weighted. "I would not acknowledge that before. I've been bluffing myself. I knew he was something — not human — when first I saw him on the battlements. I dared not admit it. It seemed too difficult, too dangerous. I was afraid."

Tears came to Maisry's eyes. Broome's smile, however, was a benediction.

"Now you've come to grips with yourself. Of course you're afraid. What do you expect? You're human, not a devil like Red Alastair."

"What I mean, more precisely," Alan continued in the same slow painful way, "is that I recognize at last what must be done—and I'm prepared to do it. I know in the main, that is; I shall leave details to you."

"I can give you protection. I can prepare you for the journey. Beyond that none can help."

"What journey? What are you both talking about?" Maisry broke in with quick breathless words. "Alan! You mustn't—you're not dreaming of—"

He took her hand, kissed the fingers that clung to his. She turned to Broome, her hand still holding fast to Alan's.

"Tell me! Tell me! What are you going to let him do? Protection, you said. Oh, what are you going to do?—where is Alan going?"

"Don't break now, my dearest." Alan rose and stood before her. "I need your help, all you can give."

"All you can give," echoed Broome, and his tone touched her to profound stillness. "You have a capacity for faith. It is a two-edged quality. You brought Red Alastair into the compass of your

existence by your faith in him and his power to do you harm. You can transfer that faith to Alan and his power to conquer Red Alastair. You must choose. There can be no compromise. Do you believe in Alan's power to defeat your enemy, or do you not?"

Her look turned to Alan's straight, tall figure. He was changed, much changed since his surrender to the deep-hidden unconscious self he had so long ignored. His dark Pharaoh look of impenetrable command and dignity added a decade to his years.

As she watched him, amazement swamped her fear. It was not possible to conceive defeat for this regal-looking man.

"I fight for *you*, Alan. I believe in *you*."

He looked long into her eyes, saw all that lay behind her spoken words, and took her hand as if to seal a compact. "Then we're ready now for the fight—for the victory."

He turned to Broome.

"We are of one mind now, one resolve, utterly and completely one."

5

Two great seven-branched candelabra, on massive stands, reached tall as young trees on either side of the fireplace. Their candles showed the Picture in warm golden light. Through the barred unglazed windows, night air drifted mild and sweet with scent of hawthorn, mingling with tang of wood and leaves that glowed and sizzled in a brazier upon the hearth.

A truckle-bed showed dimly in a corner of the dining-hall; two light garden-seats and a great pile of wood and many thick white candles were also visible.

"You are sure, you swear, that Maisry

is safe? To wait here while she, perhaps, is——"

Broome interrupted him.

"I know she is safe. For *her* I can absolutely vouch. For you, it is different; I can only protect you up to a point; the issue depends entirely on yourself after that. Your will against his. You are taking the most fantastic risk, as I warned you. If you lose, if your endurance and courage are mastered by him for an instant, you are mastered for all time. You will become what he is—a devil; you will work for him, yes, even if it means helping to bait the Lady Maisry to hell!"

"Never!" There was none of Alan's wonted fire and scorn in his voice; emotion was stripped from him, human attributes consumed by divine unbending will. "You are sure, then? She is tired, ill, she may fall asleep. And in sleep Red Alastair calls her."

"You don't know the laws that govern other states of being, but, believe me, Red Alastair is restricted in his activities as we are ourselves. Laws of gravity, of magnetism, of attraction and repulsion, of growth and decay, of tides and winds and electricity—all the myriad laws that govern us and our objective world have their parallels in other worlds."

"Who makes them?"

"Who makes ours?" was the quiet response. "Fire burns you; a fall from a height will break you in pieces! Why?"

"Because we're made of human stuff, perishable matter."

"And do you imagine that, free of your body, you cannot suffer or perish? Red Alastair, I repeat, has no power to pass the barriers that protect Lady Maisry for this one night."

"And after that?"

"Her protection will be in your power."

Broome turned abruptly to the wall. "Watch! Watch the Picture, on your

life! He mustn't see you first. He mustn't call you to him. The attack must be from you."

The two men stood shoulder to shoulder, their gaze sternly set upon the Picture. A faint copper tinge darkened its evening sky, gray haze began to cloud the heights, shadows fell across the wide moors, the woods, and glen; the long road seemed a net flung down—a trap—a sinister living thing that coiled and waited for its prey.

Mist thickened and spread upon the heights, and Broome's hand went to his breast pocket. He drew out a small phial and unstopped it, pressed it into Alan's hand.

"Keep your eyes on the mist, on the mist above Vorangowl. He is coming. Drink this, *on the instant*, when his figure appears. He must not catch you in the body."

The coppery gleam deepened in the sky, focussed, concentrated to a center. The Dark Star shone out over the broad estate of Glenhallion; and, on the far horizon of the Picture, mist rose, wreathed, and crept across the sullen moors . . . blind herald of doom.

Alan stood with the phial to his lips, breathing slowly, evenly. The hand that held the little clouded glass was steady, his dark brows met in a frown of concentration over eyes black as a deep tarn in winter, and as cold. The fine bones of his face showed under taut muscles and sunken cheeks.

On the heights of Vorangowl, on a craggy spur of rock above the fatal gorge and dizzy cliff-path, the mists grew thin . . . parted . . . swirled aside. A figure, a mere black speck, but infinitely menacing, was visible.

SWIFT as a bird's flash, Alan drank. The phial slipped, crashed to the stone floor.

Broome's strong arms were about him instantly, supporting him, lifting him to the truckle-bed in the corner. Blind, deaf, empty shell, his body lay there as Broome turned quickly back to the Picture.

Watching it, his heart seemed to turn over in his breast. The dread he had concealed from Alan racked him now.

"Gone. Beyond all help, all knowledge now. Fighting alone, unaided. Following—following that devil—even to hell."

Then, in the Picture, he saw Alan signal from the Keep, across the gulf of time and space the painted surface bridged; signal from the battlements with imperious command. Good! He had flung down his gage to battle. Next moment, Broome saw his tall light figure running through the grounds, through the gates, along the road that led to Vorangowl. Swiftly, swiftly Alan's feet carried him, borne by the impetus of his strong will.

Now the glen lay behind him; the wooded Kaims closed about him jealously. On, on he went, past threat of glooming trees, past barren reaches of the upper glen.

Broome watched, his heart going as if he himself ran across the fatal spell-bound moors. He could see Red Alastair fighting his way downward—restrained by Alan's stronger impetus—taken unawares. Ah, Red Alastair was gaining ground now! If he reached the cliff-path, if he crossed it first, then Alan must suffer terribly. It was clear the fact was apprehended by both adversaries.

All Red Alastair's unbridled longing, his mad unappeasable desire, had focussed on the scene of his defeated lust. For two hundred years his restless terrible ghost had wandered there, watching, waiting. The cliff and rocky narrow trail

were deep imprinted with his torment, his deathless hate.

Swifter, swifter Alan ran, up the steeps, over heather and stony tracts, on—on—on. And, from the mists, Red Alastair loomed larger; the balefire of hair and beard gleamed. From either end, the two antagonists approached the fatal wall of rock.

BROOME leaned forward, his whole consciousness centered on Alan's last tremendous effort.

"He's done it! He's there first!"

The quiet thankful voice rang in the still room and the candles flared in answer, showing every detail on the painted wall.

On the dizzy edge of space, Alan took the path lightly, easily; and, on its further side, Red Alastair bulked gigantic, the mist recoiling—leaving him in space—alone—waiting. . . .

Alan had crossed, flashed upon his enemy—closer, closer, until to Broome's sight there scarcely seemed a yard between them. Then, for a long moment of torture, both figures were motionless. Broome well understood the meaning of that titanic pause. Will battled with will. One must retreat, one pursue.

The Picture suddenly assumed the look of some vast amphitheater: hollow curving mountain ranges, their crested heads upreared, closed in upon the combatants. Beyond them, screened by vaporous mist, Broome was aware of watchers, felt the pressure of their blind malevolence.

"So," he whispered, "Red Alastair is not come alone!"

A knife seemed to twist in his heart as he watched; every moment was a year of horror; every instant of the grim rigid contest meant unspeakable effort to Alan.

The mist rolled blindingly, it wrapped about Red Alastair, drew him back, back to the heights. And Alan followed on.

Broome was aware that he followed with sure and steady purpose, more and more slowly, growing smaller, dimmer at every step. The Kaims of Vorangowl were being blotted out. Mist rose on every side. The hills, the glen, the woods were only smears of vague color. Now the foreground and the corner of the old Keep vanished. Only the Dark Star shone with metallic copper glow and showed Alan's tiny toiling figure going upward—upward. It reached the farthest peak, showed for a flashing second, black, tiny, remote; then it was lost.

Broome's eyes ached; he closed them, opened them again. No, it was really over now. The Picture on the wall was only a gray dull blur of moving swirling mist. Not a stone, not a leaf, not a blade of grass was visible. Even the Dark Star had sunk, its blood-red gloom wiped out. Mist—impenetrable, blinding, moving mist hid everything.

6

Two long days dragged to evening. The weary terrifying hours of a third night closed on Gorm. Maisry, sleepless and worn, went at midnight to share Broome's vigil.

Nothing was changed. The candles, burning in a windless night, showed nothing more—only gray surging clouds of mist in ceaseless movement. The Picture was like the crater of a volcano where smoke eddied and swung in the void before the destroying fire burst up from its depths.

The watchers saw no change in Alan's face except, perhaps, a deeper shadow of repose. It was a sign, Broome knew, that he was further and further away with every passing hour—following—following through space—on and on to dim uncertain perilous horizons where the finite mind can no longer function.

Broome faced his thought steadily, though it was overwhelming in its horror. Had Red Alastair the power to lead on to voids no mortal spirit can endure? His straining eyes grew more intent.

"Something is moving behind the mist," he said.

A rift showed at the top of the Picture; a glimpse of pale sky, a tooth of jagged rock appeared. Thin wispy trails floated across the rift. Gradually, as if rent and shredded by a furious wind, the whole horizon cleared to show a colorless cloudless sky and moorland heights, below which a sea of mist still whirled and eddied to and fro.

But no figure was visible. Until long past dawn the two kept watch, their eyes red-rimmed and aching, but a cold pale sky and desolate peaks of Vorangowl mocked them with their emptiness.

Broome had watched narrowly in all the long hours for some change in Alan, too; but it did not come. The day passed and the fourth night passed. Dawn of the fifth day approached. Broome and Maisry once more shared the vigil, for he had warned her it was the most pregnant of the twenty-four hours.

The Picture showed the same chill breadth of sky and sharp-toothed crags. The rest was veiled. It was in Alan's face that Broome read indication of a crisis. Its indescribable look of sphinx-like, age-old remoteness was softened. The eyelids no longer gave the impression of carven lids that covered sightless eyes; they seemed merely to have drooped in sleep. A warmer, fuller outline curved cheek and jaw and temples.

"Alan! Alan!"

"No." Broome curtly stopped her. "It is the Picture you must watch. It is the door he must pass through to his body."

Round a tall spur of rock they saw a dark speck moving. Slowly—oh, very slowly—it came on. Impossible to see its

face, its outline, or any distinguishing mark at all, but both knew at once who struggled there up on the heights of Vorangowl.

"Bring him back! Bring him back with all your will." Broome spoke to the trembling girl beside him but kept his eyes on the Picture. "He's done! You and I must give him strength—his is spent, and overspent."

They watched the efforts of the far-off lonely figure and tried to fight back their own despair. The road stretched so endlessly—so endlessly. . . . Would that halting, stumbling traveler, so miraculously returning—would he ever reach his bourn?

Now it was full dawn in the green leafy actual world outside the Keep. Birds shook the spell of silence into sound. Long rosy fingers of sunlight thrust through an east window and touched the dusty floor. The candles, paling ghostly sentries, burned on.

Dawn too, it seemed, in the changing Picture. Behind Alan the sky grew light, throwing sun and shadow on the heights he had passed. But in front of him the road wound into mist and shadows—shadows that fell blackest and most impenetrably into the deep gorge which the cliff-path skirted.

Once more that haunted cliff-path must be crossed. Could Alan traverse it? Could he control his swooning weariness on its sharp edge?

"Good, ah, good! His will holds firm."

Broome's voice sank to a deep exultant note as they saw Alan drop on hands and knees to crawl along the path. Maisry watched with pain too overpowering for tears. She spoke to him as if he were close beside her, as if she trod the path before him.

"Dear—it is half-way now. We will rest on the other side. Follow, follow me—a little more—a little more. Ah, you

will not let me go alone—Alan! Alan! Come with me . . . come. . . ."

Broome marveled at her. And Alan's face lifted as if he saw her on the path before him; now and again he put out a hand as if to touch her own. It was full noon when at last he reached the end of the path and lay on the heather slopes beyond.

UNTIL sunset, Maisry coaxed and pleaded and besought the figure on the painted Picture. With Broome beside her, aiding her strength, her wisdom, she fought for Alan, bringing him mile after weary mile along the dark glen road, bringing him back across the cursed painted miles from hell, back to the warmth and beauty of his own green earth, to her and to her love.

The sun sank low, and lower. And still Alan was outside the gates of Gorm. Candlelight showed him on the endless road, swaying and lurching with weariness beyond control. More than once he fell, but rose and stumbled on in answer to Maisry's low entreating words of love. Then at last he fell and did not rise; he seemed deaf to her voice, her pleadings, her tenderness.

Behind him, the long road was clear of mist and shadow, but the foreground he had not yet passed still lay obscure and dark.

Maisry turned imperiously to her companion.

"A chair! Put one close that I may touch him, help him up again."

He saw her climb and lean close until her hands could touch the exhausted broken figure lying on the road. Close, close to the painted wall, her moving tender hands seemed to raise, to lift him to his feet. Once more, miraculously, he dragged himself forward—on—on to the gates of Gorm. He reached them, passed

through and was swallowed up in velvet darkness of the trees.

No shred of mist remained in all the Picture. In its foreground, the gray Keep abruptly thrust up, grim, boding, expectant.

Dimly in the starlight, someone bulked faintly, uncertainly upon the battlements. Broome's lips formed a word:

"Alan!"

The name died on a sudden breath of horror. It was not Alan who so monstrously obscured the stars. It was a heavier figure. It moved, turned, thrust forward a great head. Ah, that demon's face, that flaming beard and hair!

Broome leaped to Maisry's side, to draw her away, to interpose himself between her—leaning forward, her golden head and lovely face not a foot from the painted Keep—and the peering lustful mask. But she resisted him, thrust back his hands, turned a changed face and eyes that flashed like swords full on Red Alastair. She was a golden flame of anger.

"Go back!" her voice rang in the echoing room like bugles blown for war. "Dead cursed thing—go back to your own hell! Dead—defeated—forgotten ghost! I am not afraid! Back—back to hell!"

The thing upon the tower roof shrank, wavered, dwindled in the starlight. Maisry's eyes pierced it, followed it, tortured it. The monstrous bulk grew vaporous, insubstantial as a web, a dusty cobweb flung on the massive wall. The

web, caught by a breath of wind, was torn from its last slight moorings—tossed from the Keep—drifted from sight. . . .

At it vanished, the Picture cracked across and across. Its painted scene faded, dissolving, disintegrating, obliterated by the all-pervading dust of centuries. In a moment, nothing remained of outline or of color. Above the hearth, a cracked and moldering wall showed in the golden candle-light.

Maisry sprang down, caught Broome's arm.

"Now he can come to me! Now I am free! Alan! Alan! Alan!"

She knelt beside the truckle-bed. Alan lay still. He seemed to sleep, to dream. A faint smile curved his lips, and his heavy eyelids quivered. Maisry kissed the curving lips, the fluttering eyelids, until the dark eyes opened wide. His voice was a faint exhausted whisper.

"You came for me. You brought me home. I could not have won back—alone. Your voice—dearest—I followed it—your voice—your little hands. . . ."

His eyes closed in weakness, then opened once again.

"I tried to warn you, to tell you he was coming too. It was forbidden—I was not allowed! If you had been afraid—he would have had power—to stay. We had to fight—together, my beloved—together. . . ."

He sank back to deep oblivion and sleep. Maisry, crouched beside him, let her head fall on the hands that clasped his own. Sleep folded her too, softly, suddenly.

