

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME VI

NUMBER 4

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holiday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. English office: G. M. Jeffries Literary Agency, Hopefield House, Hanwell, London, W. 7. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Copyright, 1925, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

Contents for October, 1925

- Cover Design ----- Andrew Bromsatch
- The Wicked Flea ----- J. U. Giesy 437
Rip roaring Story of a Flea That Grew to Gigantic Size
- The Horror on the Links ----- Seabury Quinn 449
A Tale That Climbs Steadily to a Climax of Stark Terror
- Dust of Shun-Ti ----- Charles G. Booth 463
A Scream in the Night—a Sudden Death—and a Mystery
- The Thing in the Pyramid ----- John Dwight 471
Strange Lure Draws Men to Destruction in This Mayan Landmark

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

- The Prophet's Grandchildren** **E. Hoffmann Price** 479
Sulu Folk-Tale Explains Why Mohammedans Never Eat Pork
- The Eternal Conflict** **Nictzin Dyalhis** 481
Complete Novelette of Cosmic Spaces—of Heaven and Hell
- Song of the Hound** **Sidney Lanier** 505
Verse Reprint
- The Fading Ghost** **Willis Knapp Jones** 506
The Suicide's Specter Explains His Demise to the Doctor
- The Death Shower** **Tom Freeman** 508
The Murderer's Deed Bore Unexpected Consequences
- Bad Medicine** **Alanson Skinner** 511
Old Owl Man Undertakes to Witch the Indian Agent's Wife
- A Mind in Shadow** **Tessida Swinges** 517
Touching Tale of Child Psychology and Remorse
- The Gargoyle (Second Part)** **Greya La Spina** 521
Three-Part Serial Novel of Devil Worship
- Weird Story Reprints**
- No. 4. The Severed Hand** **Wilhelm Hauff** 543
Eery Adventure of Zaleukos the Greek and the Purple Cloak
- Nomads of the Night** **David Baxter** 551
A Kansas Bat and a Four-Cornered Race of Death
- The Yellow Pool** **Frank Owen** 559
His China Girl Harmonized With the Tint That He Loved
- The Eyrie** 562
A Chat With the Readers

For Advertising Rates in WEIRD TALES Apply Direct to

WEIRD TALES

408 Holiday Building

Indianapolis, Ind.



Author of "When the Green Star Wand"

APOLOGY

I AM a member of a great and secret Occult Order, despite the fact that I am—or was—a businessman dwelling in New York City, and living in the midst of this practical Twentieth Century.

We hold, as do many, that the universe is ruled by a Supreme Power whose name no man knows, and whose attributes can be but dimly surmised.

We hold that the Presence is served by many beings throughout the universe—Archangels; Angels; Planetary Rulers; a Celestial Host.

We hold that, among these, and not the least, is One, feminine rather than masculine in appearance and attributes, whom we consider to be the goddess of Love, Beauty, Light, and Truth.

To her is our Temple dedicated; and to her we give reverence. We are not idolaters in any sense of that word, for we know that she is but one of those who serve the Presence.

After all, is the idea so *outré*?

This universe is a "going concern", as we would say of a huge industrial plant. Such a plant has its general manager; assistant managers; superintendents; foremen, etc. Why not

the universe, which is the greatest plant of all?

We hold that our Order is but incorporated into her department—that is all. So, if in the following narration of the stupendous events and adventures through which I have just recently passed (and which would never have been written without her permission) I refer to her as a *goddess*, it is not that I seek to impose my views upon anyone. I do but ask from others that privilege I myself am overjoyed to extend—tolerance of viewpoint and respect for divergent opinions.

One statement more I would like to add. It is useless for anyone to search for our address in any directory. We publish no periodical. We seek no converts nor members. I say this lest anyone should think this story is put forth as a new and subtle form of propaganda—for it is not so intended.

Likewise, where I have spoken plainly of the powers and forces of nature; the vibrations of the ether; the transmuting of latent energy into active dynamism; and of the multiplicity of the realms, regions, and planes of greater space; believe as

much, or as little, as you please. It matters not.

Yet bear this in mind: The mystery of today is the common experience of tomorrow—as the mystery of yesterday is the common knowledge of today. Science advances by degrees, nor is there any limit placed upon its progress.

So, to my tale.

I ENTERED the outer hall of the Temple, went direct to one of the little dressing rooms, undressed, bathed, and donned the robes of my rank. Thence I went on into the great room of the Temple proper; and made my way direct to the Black Shrine. So long as I was outside its walls, there were faint, dim lights shining all about; sufficient at least to see my way.

But once inside the Shrine, not even a cat could have seen—anything; for the place was so arranged as to exclude all reflected and latent light. Also, it was constructed entirely of black marble, unpolished, so that no reflections could by any possibility occur.

But I know the mystic chants, for I am a high initiate—so, raising my arms, in a whisper I intoned the mighty words.

Slowly the blackness lessened, and I ceased. I knew what was coming, and waited. There grew a faint, dim, all-pervading luminosity too vague to be styled "light"; but this gradually strengthened until it became clearly perceptible, although it was more of a glow than genuine light.

Suddenly as though ripped apart, it divided, brightened, formed into four columns in the four quarters of the Shrine—to north, east, south and west. That to the north assumed a white hue; the eastern one turned as blue as the noonday skies; that to the south glowed ruby red; and that to the west became a soft, warm yellow.

Yet in the center of the Shrine was still only blackness absolute. But it was a blackness wherein one could see—although all that could be seen was the square, black stone altar; bare of everything, not ornamented or carven in any manner.

The altar was nine feet high, and before it at foot of the eastern face stood the "couch of dreams", which was a stone slab seven feet long and a fraction over three feet in width. This was raised above the floor about two feet by small, square blocks of black stone placed under the four corners.

Crouched on the floor before the altar was one of the "Doves" of the Temple—a girl of surpassing loveliness. She had fallen asleep, and, as I stood above her, looking down, the intensity of my gaze penetrated to her dormant mind.

Her eyes opened. Hastily yet gracefully she rose to her feet, her perfect form reflecting shimmeringly through her sheer draperies the lights of the Shrine. Crossing her hands on her breast, she bent her head in acknowledgment of my rank and status; then raised her eyes to mine, half timid and half bold.

"Fortunate me!" she murmured. "It is but seldom that *you* come alone to the empty shrine. Never before has it been my lot to be here on such an occasion. I have seen you when the full chapter was convened—"

"Nor did I come here now to be with you," I reproved quietly. "Keep your allurements for those of lesser status. You know your task—perform that!"

I stretched myself full length on the stone slab, lying on my back with my hands crossed on my breast in the position of a corpse. The "Dove", rebuked, flitted about her task; lighted the burners of incense, and commenced singing softly the "Dream Chant". And I knew, although my eyes, fixed upon the ceiling above me, could not see her, that she was weav-

ing about me with twinkling, gliding feet and waving hands, the Dance of Sleep.

I do not mean the ordinary sleep of the material world—but the mystic Temple-sleep wherein the bodily faculties are all in abeyance and the self is free—free to go, but, perchance, never to return—free to reach to whatever plane it merits, be that plane one of the many hells of the universe, or—to the very Presence itself.

Softly, sweetly, the voice of the singer came to my ears, and, highly attuned as I was, I could sense in every nerve-fiber the vibrations which were fast filling the place; due to the mystic geometrical patterns and figures formed in the ether by her words, her tones, and her motions.

To me came the sensations one would experience were that one reclining full length in a boat on a gently heaving sea. It was a slow, easy, inexpressibly soothing lift and sway and rise and fall. I was drifting, half-conscious. The light of the shrine, even through my closed lids, became softer than moonshine yet surpassing vivid sunlight . . . an even greater rise and fall . . . a *lift*, with no after-feeling of sinking back—and I was free!

If an arrow from a powerful bow has sensation, it must feel as I felt in that moment. I was shooting through space—at first the ordinary atmosphere of this gray old earth which the ancients very truly styled *Myalba*, the "Abode of Trouble."

Thence I passed out into interplanetary space; through the blue-blackness of night wherein stars, planets and suns shone as bright spots of different colored lights, yet gave forth no illumination.

On and on I sped until a vague fear assailed me and several very definite questions took form within my consciousness—for I had not counted on any such extended trip as this!

"Whither was I bound? What lay before me? Should I ever return to earth, my home-planet? Or had the merit I had acquired during life been of such evil nature that I was to be expelled out of the known universe into some unknown and probably very dreadful realm outside all finite concept?"

I tried to check my progress, but to no avail. I tried to slow down my speed at least. Utterly futile! In fact, the effort seemed to accelerate it.

I noted, as I shot past it, a constellation to my left very near, and my astronomical knowledge informed me that it was one of the remotest in our solar system. And at that, the fear became anything but vague; for I became certain that ahead of me lay the Unknown—and what effect would *that* have upon me?

I thought of the Temple; of my brethren in the Occult Order; I thought of the couch whereon lay my earth-body. I thought of the Black Shrine; of the cubical stone altar; and finally I bethought me of that awful, beautiful and terrible, supernal goddess to whom that shrine was dedicated, to whom that altar had been raised, and who—if the whispered word spake truth—sometimes descended and rested thereon for a few moments; manifest as a tongue of flame of dazzling silvery brilliancy.

Would she let one of her followers come to grief—to an eternal woe? True, I knew that great though she was, she still was subordinate to the Presence Itself—although she was one of Its ministers—and might not be able to aid, despite her known powers.

I knew that to utter her secret name unworthily meant death on earth and punishment thereafter. But it seemed to me that never again could my need be so desperate—and I pronounced (not vocally, for my body was lacking, but shall I say "telepathically"?) her awful word.

Nothing happened! Yet, everything happened. I still continued that awful flight through space; but all fear left me. I was serenely conscious that all was well; that for all she had in nowise made herself manifest, I was under her direct protection. I felt certain that in some way as yet uncomprehended, my entire recent actions had been inspired by her will.

And once that certitude became fixed in my consciousness, I surrendered myself completely to that now delightful sensation of terrific momentum.

EVENTUALLY, far ahead of me I saw a faint, nebulous glow. Somehow I became convinced that it was my destination. And even as before I had experienced a vague, unnamable fear; so now I felt a very definite desire to reach that slowly increasing brightness. For I was fully convinced that there I should find and know the hitherto unknowable.

Brighter and yet more bright it shone, and I realized that it was neither planet, star nor sun; and for a little space I was lost in speculation as to what it could actually be.

The color changed, as I drew nearer, changed from an indeterminate tinge to a wondrous ruby red—inexpressibly *soul-comforting*, if I may use such a word. But, as I drew still closer, it shifted to a tender azure blue. No! It was clear topaz! Why, it was emerald — violet — orange — cerise—it had no color—it was of all colors—it was *color!* Color well-nigh celestial; and over me crept a strange reverence and awe.

I was in the luminescence itself. It did not burn, nor even warm, but oh, how it did invigorate! There was something spiritually magnetic about it, and I reveled in the radiance.

That wondrous effulgence streamed and scintillated from tower and temple and buildings. It sparkled and

shimmered in the very "air" itself. It shone and gleamed from the streets and the ground.

Oh! I know that I am using the phraseology of Earth. Yet, if I do not, how may I make my meaning plain to dwellers of Earth? So if I say "air," "ground," and other familiar words; find for me in your minds pardon and allowance, and eke out with your imaginations my poor descriptive attempts.

But to return to my narration. I was in a city of some sort. That was certain. But where? And why? How, I already knew.

Constantly I am confronted by the impossible, for how shall I describe the beings I saw? They were formed even as we of earth are shaped; but far more radiant, brilliant, seeming to glow with an internal light which shone through what looked to be translucent flesh that was not flesh. Yet of raiment, they wore none. But their chiefest glory lay not in beauty of forms and color; although no two shone with quite the same tints of light. Rather, their beauty lay in their faces and their eyes.

Had I reached to the great Central Heaven? I wondered. But even as I thought it, I received from all those shining beings a reply in a very definite yet calm negative.

As I say, it was a city, but not on any planet. Of that I felt assured. There was nothing to give the impression of planetary solidity—no gravitational pull, for example.

And these bright beings, although appearing to walk the streets, in truth, did but touch the surfaces of the walks and ways, nor did they move their feet as do we of earth, but rather glided along.

I noted that I, shooting high above their heads in contact with nothing, appeared conspicuous; so I deliberately willed myself to descend and progress as did they—and found to my delight that I could do so. Yet,

here and there, as I passed, I caught the thought flashing from one to another: "An earth-mortal whom She has summoned!"

I found myself before a vast building which shone with the combined light of all the lights, colored by the blending, or rather, the intermingling, of all the colors. And I knew that here was my actual destination.

I entered, and those whom I met, one and all, gave me salutation. It was but a gravely courteous bend of the head; yet it conveyed in some subtle manner a greater cordiality than any welcome I had ever known on earth.

Direct as if I had been long accustomed to tread that way, I went straight to a central sheen of light and passed within its effulgence.

"WELCOME, my servitor from Earth!"

The voice was that of all music. For one brief second I stared—and oh! here again, description baffles me!

It was a throne of ebony blackness, and seated thereon was that goddess to whom our Order upon Earth gives reverence. Had she stood, she had towered some thirty feet or more in height. Her form (for she like all others in that abode of light) was devoid of apparel, was of transcendent splendor. Yet there was about her majesty no suggestion of the nude—not even in the sense in which we speak of it in art and sculpture.

She was seated, and I came scarcely to her knee; yet I had already noted that my stature was half again that which it appears while inhabiting the house of clay.

But it was not her beauty of form or of face that stamped her with that awful yet gentle majesty. For she seemed formed of translucent silver light, rather than glowing super-flesh; and it was spirit, and spirit alone, that invested her with that supernal grandeur.

In deepest awe I knelt there on that night-black dais, before that shining silver foot above which I dared not raise my eyes.

"Nay," murmured that thrilling strain of music that, for want of a better word, I must call her "voice." "Kneel not, but rise and give attention. I have called you to my throne, for I have need of you!"

Did I hear aright? Could such as She, one of the Celestials, one of that shining host who serve the Presence, have need of me, an Earthman? It seemed absolute madness to think it. Yet she herself had just said it. In sincere humility I waited; rising and gazing straight into that glorious countenance, so calm, serene, so awe-inspiring.

"Will it please thee to make thy meaning clear?" I asked boldly. "My wits are but those of the dull Earth—I do not understand."

She smiled, and all the countless throng of those who stood to either side and back of the throne smiled likewise, much as drops of dew, sparkling, give back the sun-rays which touch them.

"I mean just this," she replied. "I have an enemy whom I may not reach; with whom as yet I cannot cope! Always has the balance of power between us been equal; although between us twain has always been war. Yet it has been—thou knowest what I am!" she broke off to query.

"Thou art Love itself—its Prototype," I responded as directly as she had asked. She nodded, well pleased, but amplified for my benefit the statement I had just made.

"Aye," she answered, "I am Love. But not alone am I that as it is understood upon thy world. For I am Love's Self. I am the love a man holds for a maid; the love the maid gives to the man of her heart's choice; yet I am the love the mother bears for her babe; the tigress for its

young; the serpent for its little snakes. I am even the love the miser knows for his treasure; that the warrior holds for strife; that the worshiper feels for his divinity—I am, as thou hast said, 'Love's Prototype'. Yet as abstract love touches each nature, that nature transmutes it into terms of its own desires—now hast thou begun to comprehend?"

"Very dimly," I replied, for my thought was racing, amplifying even beyond her revealing words, and I was amazed at the extent and ramifications of what I comprehended. For *that* love, carried to its extreme scope, includes desire for wisdom, and all that distinguishes man from beast—angel from demon!

"So," she approved; "I believe thou hast in truth grasped some faint idea as to my Self—ah, well! let that pass for the present. Yet, on every planet, on each world, in all the illimitable, immeasurable regions of space; wheresoever in all the universe the conscious egos have abode, there am I to be found in one ideal or another.

"So, too, this enemy of whom but now I spoke! He is Lord of Hate, even as I am Lady of Love. And even to him my power penetrates; for—strange words to go together!—*he loves to hate!* For it is in this wise that his nature transmutes! And so too, it is with me—for I, despite my nature, am touched by that power flowing from him; and my nature transmutes it all to hate of *Hate's* source.

"Learn, then, that these be natural laws! Nor can mere 'will', not even that of us Celestials, alter these, no matter how greatly we may desire to do so.

"And so, throughout all the universe the balance swings; the old, old patient contest of Love against Hate—the frenzied, virulent enmity of Hate against Love. But thus far, knowing what we know, there has

been no overt strife. It has been rather a quiet, silent struggle ever working in the conscious coils of the egos inhabiting the various planes.

"But now I have sure tidings that he meditates actual aggression—his hate having overruled his judgment! Not here, against my city of love alone, does he plot, but everywhere that my influence reaches! And oh! but he is served by such fiends, such demons, such *things* of absolute, concrete malignancy, that I sicken at thought of what must befall the universe if he actually takes the field of war!

"And that he so intends, I know for sure, but what his plans may be, I know not; for I am not omniscient. *That* is the attribute of the Presence Itself, and not that of us who do but serve.

"So, I have picked thee out and drawn thee to me. I need a spy! None of these who serve me can approach him; for if they did, terrible indeed would be their sufferings. For they carry about them always the vibrations of love; and even in the realms of hate, still would their presences be recognized.

"But thou art of Earth—as capable of hate as of love; and he, the Terrible, is served and followed and even adored by egos from all the worlds. An Earthman more or less would scarce be noted among his subject throngs. Now, dost thou realize my need of thee?"

I understood! And knew, as only the Self can know, the wild, thrilling allure of anticipated adventure! Say as they will; Mars may or may not be the planet of war; Jupiter may or may not preside over the plane of judicial intellect; and Mercury may or may not rule the selves of mechanics and inventors and those of excitable, volatile natures—but this is certain: Earth, that gray old planet that shines with the strange green radiance in the night skies, is unquestion-

ably the abode of the true adventurers.

No other planet in the universe is inhabited by so bold, daring, and hardy a race of egos. To them, space is merely a little-understood ocean; to be charted, mapped, traveled if possible in safety, but traveled anyway. Why, that courageous creature, "Man," has even the temerity to attempt to measure the measureless; to find, if possible, the limits of the illimitable!

Nay, let him but once dream its possibility, and he will devise methods of transportation and storm the walls of the Highest Heaven! And this he will do in no spirit of blasphemy, but simply from the sheer love of achieving the hitherto unaccomplished—the joy of the adventure itself! For thus is "Man" constituted!

And because he is thus, he has the right to style himself the "Apex of Creation." It is not arrogance, but simple truth. On all the other planets, in all the other realms of space, the dwellers are either content to obey the "Law" or to exist in sulky rebellion against it. But Man, the investigator, confronted with "laws", rests never content until he has explored their workings, fully comprehended them and recorded his observations for the benefit of others to be born in the years to come. And then, if in any way it may be achieved, he harnesses their energies and bends them to his will, and makes them do his work!

Knowing this, and proud of my heritage, I raised my head and smiled full into those glowing pools of light—her eyes.

"Great honor is mine," I replied; "that to me, of all Earthmen, has been given this mission. Let me go, O Shining One! I may fail or I may succeed—but this I promise: you shall have no shame from your messenger, nor regret because of your choice."

"There spake the true Earthman," she smiled. "Proud, confident, arrogant! Yet I would not have thee otherwise. I am well pleased with my choice. Go!"

I had no time in which to ask questions, receive directions, or even think. *I was gone!* To all intents and purposes, the glowing city of light, the shining inhabitants, the goddess herself, might as well never have existed! For I was once again hurtling through space at a hundred times my previous rate of speed.

I MAY have passed some few swarms of planets or suns or asteroids. But if I did I never knew it. True, several times I was aware of a flicker of light, but so transitory that each time it might mean anything or nothing.

Once more the blackness lessened, glowing faintly with a lurid, angry, deep crimson light shot through by streaks of sullen black and jagged lines of glaring, venomous scarlet. I had touched the borders of the regions of Hate! I knew it, felt it; through every atom of my disembodied body I could sense that terrific emotional vibration.

It may be a matter of wonderment to some, that I had found my way so accurately through the uncharted and unknown voids of space; but a moment's reflection will clear this up.

A freed ego, released into space, is inevitably attracted by the "Law of Affinity" to whatsoever plane it is in greatest sympathy with. So it will be noted, that I, by the time the Silver One had made clear to me her requirements and fears, so thoroughly hated the cause of her apprehensions that there remained to me in all space no other destination possible.

Too abruptly for immediate realization, I found myself standing on what felt like solid ground. And, furthermore, I felt myself re-embodied. For a long minute my shocked mind re-

fused to grasp the stupendous fact. But then, applying all my long scientific training to the solution of the problem, I came to a full realization of what had happened to me.

Hate is one of the lowest of the emotions. And the lower phases are invariably denser than are the higher ones. So, where hate has surcharged the ether, density is a natural outcome.

And the ego, let it find itself where-soever it may be borne—by fate or otherwise—throughout all the universe; by the "Law of Attraction" promptly is covered by an envelope commensurate to its needs and requirements for functioning in that environment.

And so I was once again an embodied ego, and I must say that I was in nowise proud of my appearance.

For after all, the Silver One was right. I am an Earthling; and as such I am as capable of hate as I am capable of love. Nay, within me are forever the two natures; as they are in all others. But in the shining city of light, I towered half as tall again as upon earth and shone with a clear brightness—while now I found myself, where the hate nature predominated, dwarfish, stunted, distorted, ugly in face and form and hue!

That I was strong in spirit goes without saying, and is no vanity on my part, because no spiritual weakling can ever hope to reach to the high status I held in our earthly Order. Our drastic tests and ordeals have sent many more aspirants to madhouses than have ever attained to the inner mysteries.

And so that strength of spirit was like to prove my undoing; for I sensed within me all the potentialities of a most malignant fiend! Worse, it was only by most strenuous efforts that I could remember clearly that Silver One and her mission upon which I had been sent.

And then I realized that I dared not *think* too strongly of her. No, the thought did not cause me to hate her; but was rather a comfort and a sort of stay whereto I might hold fast—but I feared that if I let my thoughts be too deeply tinged with her image, the fact would betray me to some of the inhabitants of this plane. And then the least that could ensue would be failure, and my ambitious spirit aspired to succeed.

It seemed a great, barren, rocky plain whereon I found myself. It was inexpressibly dreary and devoid of anything resembling towns or villages or even single habitations, so far as eye could reach. And of beings, either bipedal or quadrupedal, I could perceive none.

"When in doubt—take the initiative!"

That is an old maxim upon earth. Likewise it is sound philosophy. I did not know what to do nor where to go, so—I raised my voice in a shout! Rather, it was a most dismal *howl*—such a miserable, croaking bellow as I had never before thought I could emit!

But it did its work. Did it altogether too well! So well, in fact, that I came near to ending right there and then, before I had got fairly started.

OUT from a gaping hole beneath a huge drab-colored boulder near by burst a monster. It was part lizard, part toad, part serpent; yet none of these words describes the repulsive outrage to the eyes! The *thing* was not so large in girth when it emerged—not much bigger round than a vat or large hogshead. But once it drew all its loathly length free, it developed an amazing power of expansion. It swelled, bloating until it was big enough to make a bulk equal to that of four or five elephants.

Straight at me it charged so swiftly that I could not hope to avoid it.

Wallowing, squirming, hopping, writhing, tumbling and rolling—its gait was a queer medley of all these compounded.

Swiftly I stooped, caught up a rock and noted that the rock grew hot even as I took it into my grasp, but at that moment I failed to get the significance of this. I dashed the stone fairly into the nightmare horror that must for want of better words be called the creature's "face".

Undoubtedly that hot rock must have hurt; for the thing made a mumbling, hissing, whistling outcry of pain and rage. But the puny missile only served to arouse its anger, and it accelerated its speed toward me. The awful, ghastly head darted suddenly and—in one gulp I was swallowed!

Urgh! Such sensations! Those blubber lips had no sooner closed over me than I went sick all through. It was in no wise "fear", only repugnance, disgust. The thing's mouth was filled with sharp corrugations much like the teeth of a rasp or a file. Its breath was a loathsome, putrescent exhalation. And as with a single contractile movement of its throat-muscles it shot me downward, I felt a viscous slime besmearing me from head to foot, sticky, clinging, clammy, repulsive as rubber cement!

Plup! I landed, fortunately, on my feet in its nearly empty stomach. It nearly strangled me to breathe, but I had to breathe, or choke—and either way, there was little to choose—merely the way of choking!

Well, I tried breathing! It was not pleasant, but I did it, some way. But my sole emotion was wrath. There was no fear about it. I was just plain *mad!* Mad all through! Frenzied with hate! To think that this confounded *thing* had dared—actually *dared*, swallow me!

I never even thought of the probable physical consequences to myself once the digestive processes within the

beast commenced. My sole reaction was a demoniacal desire to wreak vengeance. I wanted to rend, tear, wrench and utterly destroy by torments unbelievable, this ugly monstrosity!

Apparently hate is a creative force, in its own plane. At least sufficiently so to enable the hater to supply himself with the means of destruction.

For no sooner had I formulated the wish than I found myself holding a fearful and wonderful weapon firmly grasped in both hands.

It had a short, thick, metal handle immensely strong; and at one end were half a dozen hooks, razor-sharp on the inner edges. Actually, the thing looked exactly like a metal hand and arm with sickle-shaped blades in place of fingers—and the intensity of my wrath turned the metal instrument and claws red-hot! Even in my extremity, I recall grinning with malevolent satisfaction as I contemplated the devilish contraption!

Whirling the thing above my head like a miner with a many-pointed pickax, I set to work. I have said enough! There are some things too repulsive to write down for human eyes to read. Suffice it to say that long before actual harm had occurred to myself, I was once more free. And the *thing*, with a great, gaping, ragged hole torn in its side, was tumbling about seeking me, to wreak vengeance in its turn. But I had disappeared from its sight, having fled into a thicket of bushes near by. They looked a safe hiding place enough!

Oh, yes! they looked innocuous, but every leaf and twig and branch and stalk and trunk were covered with an impalpable powder which rose in faint clouds about me and then settled again—mostly on me!

We've a little plant growing on Earth. It's called the "Nettle." We've another called "Ivy"—"poison-ivy" some name it. Take a good-sized wisp

of each and thrash your bare flesh with them until the tingling blood suffuses the surface skin. Let the effects *take* well—and you will have some dim idea as to what that dust did to me.

I burst from that thicket like a partridge from a covert! Not far from where I came out in such a hurry, I perceived a pool of water. I was too frenzied by that time to think ahead or exercise any caution, so I made straight for the pool and plunged in. I wanted to soothe my flesh from the agony of that burning dust as well as to cleanse it from the pollution of that beast-thing's interior, some of whose secretions still besmeared me in streaks and spots.

But I plunged out of that hole of water much more expeditiously than I had plunged into it! Had I stayed another instant, I had been *cooked*; for the fluid was scalding hot!

In agony I rushed from there as rapidly as my leg muscles could betake me, knowing that if I moved fast enough the passage of my body through air would equal a breeze blowing against me were I standing still. The idea was good, and I really derived a slight benefit from it. But it got me, after all, into fresh trouble.

For I had not run far when behind me I heard the soft *pad-pad-pad* of pursuing feet, and, glancing back over my shoulder, I perceived to my horror that a horde of creatures like earth-wolves, only twice as large, were chasing me!

I had laid my claw-club weapon on the brink of the scalding pool when I jumped in—and had not waited to pick it up and take it with me when I jumped out again, being in too great haste to depart; so I had nothing wherewith to fight.

I thought longingly of the guns of earth. But that failed to work like my desire while I was in the beast-thing's inwards. For this time, I was

afraid! And fear is seldom positively destructive. But, run as I would, the brutes were fast overtaking me!

I tripped, fell forward, and became the center of a worrying, snapping, snarling pack of four-legged demons; and every one of them had the rabies, to judge from the foam-froth flying and slavering from their mouths!

In one brief, lightninglike flash, I saw a vision of myself lying there—a badly torn, lacerated, mangled thing; writhing in all the anguish of hydrophobia, yet unable to die. The goddess? How could she aid, let alone rescue me, here on this plane, where, she herself had stated it, she dared not let her servitors come? At the least, I had failed her—and as a failure, I knew that I deserved anything that might happen to me.

SUDDENLY, cutting through my terror and despair, I heard a volcanic eruption of crashing, searing oaths, spoken in good plain English! And accompanying the tirade of blasphemy, I heard the *thud* and the unmistakable *chuck* of edged weapons chopping into flesh and bone. I caught the snarls and yelps of fear and pain; the howls of rage and the dying whines and whimpers of the wolves that had harried me—

Powerful hands seized me and yanked me to my feet. I was in agony, bitten all over, yet still able to stand, albeit shakily. Dazedly I stared, and well I might!

Before me stood a man clad in the armor of the period of the First Crusade! He was tall, broad-shouldered, huge of body and thick of arms and thighs; and repugantly brutal in features, although he was grinning at me from out the opening of his helmet. Yet that grin was not all goodfellowship. Partly it was malicious.

"Why!" he roared in a bull's voice. "Art an Earthling, man; e'en as I be myself?"

I nodded assent, noting as I strove to control my trembling limbs that the beasts were either all sorely wounded or fled; and that his followers were crowding about, staring at me quite as curiously as I was gazing at them.

Evidently they were from all planets and of all periods and races. None of them was at all prepossessing to look upon. Every countenance bore either ferocity or malignancy or both writ largely. I admit that as I looked at them I experienced greater fear than I had so far felt—their horrific weapons were enough to frighten anyone—swords, barbed spears, war-axes, clubs and things I can not name, not knowing the arms of the different planets.

But I strove to brazen the matter out. Turning to the huge leader, I held out my hand in the age-old gesture of our race, intending to clasp hands with him; the while I began expressing my thanks, my gratitude for this timely rescue.

"Well for me that you came when you did," I began, and got no farther. He stared down at my hand outstretched in amity; then with a snarl he caught my wrist, turned my hand palm upward, and deliberately, insultingly, spat into it; while a look of utter venom disfigured his bestial countenance still farther than nature had done.

"Well for thee?" he roared mockingly. "Little we cared for thee, thou oaf, thou fool! 'Twas but the hate we bear for the beasts! It did please us to cheat them of their sport!"

Utterly taken aback, I knew not what to say. Before I could formulate anything my arms were pinned from behind and bound thus; a noosed cord was thrown about my neck, the other end being held fast by the most bestial-faced, apelike, lumpish-looking lout it has ever been my

bad luck to behold—and we started for where I knew not.

What ghastly tortures did they intend inflicting? I wondered. The mail-clad leader caught my thought, read it accurately, and sneered in my face.

"Fear not," he jibed. "The dainty Earthling shall come to no harm at the hands of my sweet babes"—by which he meant his villainous crew of followers, I supposed—"not but that we would enjoy dalliance with thee," he went on vindictively; "but all who come to this realm must be brought before our lord intact!" I shuddered at the sinister implication of that last word, and noting it, he burst into a hoarse, braying laughter.

But in truth they did me no actual harm; although they did heap upon me every insult, contumely and indignity their depraved intelligences could devise. So that it was in anything but a spirit of pleasurable anticipation that I wended along with that crew, my pace accelerated every so often by a vicious yank from the ugly specimen holding the other end of the noosed cord about my neck.

Very evidently, when I volunteered for the service I was now engaged in carrying out, I had let myself in for something. And just as obviously, I was getting it, full measure and running over!

The sole gain that I could see lay in the fact that I was being taken directly to the presence of the one personage I most greatly desired to meet—albeit that promised to prove as detrimental as anything that could possibly happen. For there was little doubt as to the reception I might expect. Something unpleasant, unquestionably. No chance of its being otherwise. So, as I have said, my mood was the reverse of happy.

EVENTUALLY I found myself standing surrounded by the ugly-natured crew just outside the lofty

walls of a great city. The mail-clad leader was holding parley with the guards who apparently kept watch and ward at a small, narrow, arched doorway.

What passed of countersign and password between them I know not, but in another moment we were admitted. I had braced myself in anticipation of a renewal of petty annoyances from the inhabitants once we were within the city, but nothing of the sort happened.

Obviously, they were too accustomed to seeing captive arrivals from the various planets to pay attention to such, except to glower, malignant, as we passed. But by that time I had been fully impregnated with the all-pervading aura, so returned glare for glare; hate for hate; nor felt shame that I should feel so.

It was a mighty city, I must say that. It seemed, in a way, much as the cities of the Middle Ages in Europe appeared; and that type anyone can imagine for himself, so I shall not bother to describe farther.

Finally after marching through dismal streets we entered a lofty, gloomy building, which, I judged aright, was the palace of the Archfiend. And a few minutes later, I was standing in his very presence. I had prepared myself to confront a demon—and I found myself facing a gentleman, a prince!

He wore a darkly vivid red robe; and about his head, in place of crown or other insignia of his rank, there played a faint but clearly perceptible nimbus of scintillant flame of lurid crimson, garish purple, and somber sinister blue.

He was seated on a wondrously hideous yet highly ornamented throne of bronze which glimmered and gleamed with all the tints and shades of all the metalline oxides. His finely shaped head rested negligently on his hand, his elbow propped on the broad arm of his throne-seat; and his deep,

lustrous eyes swept me from head to foot in one all-inclusive, penetrating glance.

A single wave of his hand was sufficient. No spoken command, yet that hateful gang who had made me prisoner departed, hastily, as though glad to get away.

Those behind his throne and to either side barely glanced at me, for to them I was but an Earthling; and they, one and all, were nobles and dignitaries of the court of a terrible regnant prince of the powers of evil. And they were too great, in a way, to descend to petty levels.

"What sent thee to my realm, Earthman?"

His voice was quiet, low, pleasantly modulated. He gazed at me with no manifestation of aught save such mild curiosity as might be expected from a ruler granting audience to any newcomer in his territory.

For a fraction of a second I was at a loss for the right words in which to reply without arousing suspicions that might result awkwardly for me—then I remembered a bit of advice I had once received long ago: "When wishing to deceive—tell the truth. No one will believe it!"

"It was a woman sent me," I replied sulkily, playing my part, and noted an expression of wearied disdain flicker momentarily over his almost classically regular countenance.

"Only that?" he murmured, contemptuous. "So many Earthmen—" and a wave of his hand finished the remark for him. Then, as though having decided to get what poor sport from me might be had, he probed farther.

"But what did she do to thee?"

"Let me love her," I growled as if envenomed by bitter memories.

"Ah," he commented, gravely courteous. "I see! She let thee love her; then—refused thy love?"

"No!" I retorted savagely. "She accepted it!" Which was all true enough, but might be interpreted two ways.

"Then, since, because of her, thou hast suffered?" One, hearing, would have deemed him pitying, sympathetic.

"I have recently suffered very greatly," I replied, sulkily, as at first. Then I added, deliberately, insolently, moved thereto by one of those bursts of inspiration which at times come to even the dullest—"And now, O Prince of Hate, I have said all I will!"

He stared, as did his courtiers thronging the dais! Very probably, not in ages had any ego dared defy him thus, show such independence. It seemed, strangely enough, to please even while it apparently angered him. An enigmatic light glittered in his eyes, and he nodded reflectively.

I braced myself, expecting some terrific outburst; but again I was disappointed. He made no reply to my insolence, nor did he comment thereon. Merely he caught the eye of one standing near; and that one hastily bent the knee before him.

"Take this Earthman and find for him quarters here in the palace," he commanded. "Let him have such comforts as may please him. He has my favor. I will make him my personal attendant! Depart!"

As this last evidently meant me as well, we left the throne room together; and as we went, I fancied I heard a quickly suppressed, low-pitched murmur of amazement from the assembled courtiers. My guide's first remark to me fully confirmed this idea.

"Never before has our Master showed such treatment to any who have stood before him, let alone an Earthman; for above all others he hates thy world the worst!"

"Why?" I queried.

"Nay," he responded, grumpily, "I know not. Nor," he added, as aft-

erthought, "do I care! Nor is it any affair of thine!"

I returned his ugly stare with interest, and in mutual animosity we reached the rooms that were, for so brief a time, to be my abode. And here with no word of farewell nor other courtesy, my guide left me to shift for myself.

There was a comfortable couch, and a table spread with viands, and wine stood in a tall beaker.

Food and drink! I had not thought of them since I had left my physical body lying at foot of the black cubical altar away back there on earth. They had not since then been necessities; nor were they so here, but they were luxuries; and as such I appreciated them. And, of their sort, they were good. Then I reclined upon the couch, and for a time I slept.

FOR quite a long while I dwelt an inmate of the palace pleasantly enough—speaking strictly in a negative sense—for I was in nowise annoyed nor molested by anything or anyone.

My quarters were comfortable; I had all the luxuries which an honored guest might have expected placed at his disposal; the raiment furnished me was little short of sumptuous. And I was puzzled by it all.

Had I made such an impression upon him, the Lord of Hate, that I had won his actual regard? Or was it all but a prelude to some particularly and peculiarly devilish form of torment he had devised for me as reward of my temerity in replying so insolently during that one brief interview? I could not figure it out, so decided that the only sensible course was to accept the situation as I found it and await developments.

I even had the hardihood to leave the palace and wander about the infernal city at will, on several occasions. It was a chancy thing to do; but aside from several minor disagree-

able adventures, too trivial to set down in this relation of more important events, nothing happened to me during these rambles.

Then finally, when I was becoming so bored that once I caught myself seriously contemplating participating in the vice and depravity so prevalent in the city, a messenger came to summon me to the throne room. Fortunately, I was in my quarters at the time.

THE mighty Prince surveyed me with somewhat of approval in his gaze—or so I imagined.

"Earthman," he greeted me; "thou art improved in appearance since thine arrival. Henceforward thy place is here at my side."

I expressed my appreciation as best I might, but he waved the matter aside, as courteous as ever, treating the favor he showed me as a merest nothing.

I noted from time to time that messengers came and went—all of them apparently of some importance. They naturally varied greatly in appearance and types, as among them were representatives from practically all the realms and regions of space.

Not being wholly a fool, I judged them for precisely what they were—emissaries from the princes and rulers of evil, bearing tidings from their fiendish masters—who, doubtless, were his allies and who intended joining him in his projected war of aggression when all plans were complete.

I was right. For later, as I stood beside the prince, he turned to me.

"It is my will that thou goest with me," he commanded; and I coolly queried: "Where?"

"There is, in a great hall in this, my city, a council now assembled. It is formed by the Lords and Princes of the Powers of Wrong from all the many hells," he replied, smiling a

trifle indulgently at my obvious interest.

"I shall preside," he went on; "and as thou art high in my estimation, Earthman of mine, I shall have need of thee immediately our deliberations are ended."

"It is thine to command—mine be it to obey," I responded, outwardly servile, but inwardly delighted at my luck.

"Come then," he said quietly, rising from his throne of bronze.

I was a bit puzzled at his going forth to such an important gathering unattended by any retinue; and he read my thought.

"It is of too great moment for any but the highest to be allowed to attend," he stated, "but thou art my personal attendant, and as such, I shall need thee presently. Moreover," he added graciously, "I have no fear thou wilt ever betray me, no matter what thou mayest there learn."

He had paced slowly to the entrance while he had been talking, and now we stood upon a balcony overlooking that side of the city. He raised a hand and pointed out a huge, square, dark building.

"There," he said, "is the great council hall, where, at my command, convene the Lords of Wrong whenever I have need of them."

"Do they all yield obedience to thee?" I questioned.

An expression so utterly damnable came upon his usually controlled features that I shrank back a pace in stark terror—and I am not easily affrighted.

"They do well to obey," he snarled. Then, turning upon me the full strength of that awful hell-glare suffusing his eyes, he demanded in a chill voice:

"Who dost thou think I am—some subordinate, petty princeling? Nay, thou blind earthworm—I am the Ad-

versary himself! Knowest thou *now* whom thou dost serve?"

"*Lucifer!*" I gasped. This was more than I had calculated upon! Lucifer, the Archfiend; the Fallen Angel; the Rebellious One—he who was formerly the chiefest and fairest of all the Seraphim; and was now but a banished rebel against the Supreme Will.

And he it was who was planning—and the bare idea of what those plans must be made my spirit shudder, appalled. He had been watching my face intently, and now he nodded as if well pleased.

"Come," he said simply, mastering the momentary rage which had dominated him. I must say that, despite my knowing him now for what he was, he forced from me an unwilling admiration by his display of will dominating inherent nature.

Suddenly as an earthly rocket, he shot into air, and with no effort of my own, I was drawn after him precisely as a bit of steel might be drawn by a rapidly moving electro-magnet.

As we approached the great council building, I recognized it. I had seen it from every possible angle during my wanderings about the city; and I knew it for an immense, hollow cube, with no visible entrance on any face.

Never had I traveled at such high speed before! I had barely time for the fleeting thought that the tangible envelope I was wearing as a body would be splattered against that massive stone structure in a single smear as soon as we struck the nearest wall! But we passed through it—dense, solid as it was—with our forms intact!

I caught my breath and blinked in amazement. That proud prince, Lucifer, was already seated upon a richly jeweled throne, far and away more gorgeous than the one of bronze in the throne room of his royal palace. And I found myself standing in my regular place close to his left elbow.

But what caused me to actually gasp was the semicircle of seated forms, occupying each a throne scarcely less splendid than the one wherefrom Lucifer faced them. Yet theirs were reared not quite so high as was his; as was but fitting, for they were, after all, his tributary vassals, high though their rank might be in their own realms.

AWAY back in the medieval days upon Earth, someone with an imagination approximating that of a little child's tried to describe the different Lords of Wrong. And the best he could do was to endow them with the physical appearances of a horde of beasts and monsters, actual and mythological. And such has been the accepted idea ever since!

What puerile folly—merest piffle! They were, and are, masters of powers and forces such as Earth even yet knows nothing of. And is it to be supposed that, with such at their command, they could not weave for themselves whatever forms and semblances were pleasing to their notions?

I say emphatically that never in all my universal experiences have I looked upon a grander, statelier, or more beautiful assemblage.

True, there was one thing they, for all their powers, could not do. They could not wholly disguise their true characters. I saw infernal pride stamped on every countenance there; besides which, each face wore an expression of strange, wearied *patience* as of those immortals whose lots are fixed, unchangeable, immutable, for all eternity.

But there common resemblance to type ended. Just as on Earth every man has one besetting sin or vice or dominant desire, so was it with these. Only, precisely as their natures are more intense than are those of Earth-mortals, so too, their predominant evil

was stronger and marked them each with his own peculiar expression.

I shall not describe them farther. Let each one imagine them as he or she may please. We all know the look of avarice; of hate; of envy—but why amplify? This is enough for illustration.

That Infernal Council opened as formally as any lodge on Earth. And, long before it was ended, my soul was sick within me. Yet, oddly enough, I sincerely believe that despite the fact that these were archfiends and I a mere mortal, I was the one who, in all that vast hall, felt the greatest wrath!

But it was against them, one and all, that my hate burned. I had listened to the unbelievable—the unspeakable—the unthinkable! In truth, I know not how the very soul of me—the spirit itself—escaped shriveling to nothingness from horror—or kept from becoming even as they were from venomous rage in presence of such damnability!

I dare not write what I heard and learned!

I have made report to the Shining One who sent me. I have been commanded by an authority to which even she yields implicit obedience, to remain silent forever on this matter. And I certainly will not disobey the clear injunction I received before I was permitted to set down these events for my fellow mortals to read. Were those things written out, the very pages would burst into flames as the penpoint traced the horrific phrases! And mortals, reading, were I to grave them in stone, or scrawl them on asbestos, would pray in vain for annihilation!

Finally the deliberations ended. Ensued a brief pause. And over me swept such aghast fear as never before had I known. I realized that I was the focus of attention!

The fallen Archangel turned to me with jeering, softly sardonic words on

his lips and a mocking smile in his eyes.

“O Earthman of such great courage—and even greater folly; well and faithfully hast thou played thy part! Doubt not that she who beguiled thee into attempting to match thy feeble wits against mine own, will be much beholden to thee—*when thou dost make to her thy report!*”

I knew what he meant by that last sentence! Only too well I understood! He meant that my report would be made sometime after eternity itself had ceased to be!

If I had hated before, I now was like a dog suddenly gone mad. I had no weapons! I had nothing wherewith to smite! Emitting something between a snarl, a howl, and a shriek, I hurled myself straight at that evilly, luridly beautiful countenance!

The distance was less than arm's reach, yet ere I could overpass it, without the slightest gesture on his part, not even pointing a finger, I was stricken into immobility; smitten with a paralysis that was anguish untellable!

I had less power of motion left me than a stone image. Yet I was anything but stone. That is insensate. But I—I was a mass of little else save sensory nerves and perception. And what play those fiends made with me can be imagined; but never can I bear to describe it!

It was too agonizing, too awful for words. And the terrible part lay in the fact that not one of them left his seat. They did but *think*—and I suffered! It was humiliation unbelievable to realize that they were not even enjoying themselves but held me as being too trivial a subject to afford them amusement. Why, they were scarcely interested! Yet every one of them was as fully aware of my torments and excruciating anguish as was I myself!

As a final refinement of cruelty, the Arch-Enemy removed from me the

paralysis; left me free to wince and writhe and shudder—to moan, shriek, groan, and howl. And I, with all pride and strength sapped, in frenzy availed myself to the fullest of the capacity!

SUDDENLY all pain departed and was followed by the most exquisite sensations. I felt my tormented nerves and tissues tingle with a life and vigor such as are undreamable. The relief was so great that at first I could not believe it. But then I realized that it was real, and in the conscious thrill of that power of life flowing through me, I smiled! But that smile was a trifle premature!

Why, what was this? I was no longer standing on the floor, but was suspended above the center of the hall, about equidistant from all the seated members of the Infernal Group. I could feel no cruelty emanating from them—there was not either curiosity or anticipation. What was coming next? I found out!

About me was gathering a faint mist of a grayish hue. It was more like a cloud of dust-particles very finely sifted. It did me no harm. I did not even notice the dust as I breathed.

Then it commenced to *swirl*; apparently in all three dimensions at once. The motion became faster; the particles became more plentiful—I could no longer see clearly, although still I could see.

Faster yet the swirling became—friction soon set up—the density increased—centripetal and centrifugal forces came into play—attraction and repulsion balanced each other—there commenced to grow about me a dim light—I understood suddenly!

I was ensphered in a ball or globe of etheric particles. The fiends were sealing me up in the hollow center of what might, centuries or eons later, become a world, a planet in space!

But just then it was more like a comet or a sun—incandescent. Being burned alive is one thing, and being *baked* alive is another matter; the more especially when to it is added the certitude that by no possibility could death intervene to put an end to suffering. No matter how long I might roast, I knew I could not die!

Apparently, I was accounted for and there was no use wasting farther efforts upon me. The hollow sphere suddenly shot upward through the roof and departed forever from that plane.

Whirling and spinning, it tore on its way into outer, remotest space, where was never a gleam of light from planet or sun, and where the terrific absence of temperature was so great that presently the incandescence of my vehicle perceptibly lessened. And over me swept the nightmare conviction that it was cooling, would soon grow cold! Then contraction would ensue and—

It did! It contracted until it was pressing upon me in all directions at once. It grew colder than any iceberg ever was or will be—and still it contracted in that unimaginable chill of outer space.

The worst thing of all the Arch-Adversary had done to me was in endowing me with that terrible power of life. It had affected that body I was wearing until, no matter how great the pressure, I did not crush. But how it did hurt!

By then I was some milliards of miles from his realm; but suddenly, through the solid walls pressing so awfully upon me, I saw him still seated in full council; and I knew that for a fleeting moment he had allowed himself to think of me.

I knew, too, as soon as I caught his thought, that he was aware of that, also. And I saw a faint, mocking smile shine ever so briefly in his eyes. Then darkness and horror for what seemed eons untold.

I remember that at times I shrieked, raved, whined, and implored—begging mercy from the Merciless! Then again I would strive to reassert myself, trying to endure, to keep steadfast, and not give the proud Archfiend the satisfaction of knowing how deeply I suffered.

A TERRIFIC shock, the impact of which well-nigh stunned me! My whirling prison stopped, hung suspended. Some new form of torture, and I would have to endure it as best I might, I thought with a queer, resigned apathy.

Another shocking, jarring impact, worse than the first one. Another and yet again. The blows came faster and faster until there was no distinguishing one from another. Faster and harder still—and my prison-globe was commencing to give out a strangely musical humming note. Suddenly comprehension dawned upon me.

“Power is not great in proportion to weight of impact, but to number and regularity of impact.” Undoubtedly, some new vibratory force or energy was assaulting my shell—but why? Did it mean what I had first thought—fresh torment? Or could it—*could* it mean that—

The globe burst! Burst in all directions, simultaneously, as if from internal explosion. *And I burst apart also!* Flew asunder, outwardly, from a common center. Disintegrated with an instantaneous thoroughness that left nothing to be desired in its finality.

Why not? The pressure upon that body I had been wearing had been of tons and tons. And it had been too suddenly released. Expansion was but a natural consequence. Too much expansion—pressure too suddenly withdrawn!

Of course it will be understood that that self which is the real “me” did not burst. It was, as I have said, but the acquired body alone. But at last,

after experiences as hideous as though I were in truth one of the eternally damned, I was once again *free*.

The crowning joy came when I found myself surrounded by a throng of dazzling, shining beings—beings whose type I instantly recognized. And, at once, I saw *her*, the Silver One!

She had not forgotten, had not abandoned the Earthling whose chiefest wish had been to serve her. Through space uncharted, where never before had light gleamed; where never before had even the exploring Archangels passed, she had traced my prison-cell in its appalling flight; had finally overtaken it, for all its amazing speed and—

Despite the Arch-Adversary himself, I would, after all, make to her my report! And I did, then and there. At first, she bade me wait until we were once more in her shining city. But I boldly insisted that she hear me immediately. She graciously yielded the point in recognition of what she was pleased to term my claims upon her for meritorious service.

Well that I did report at once. When I had finished, she was, for all her supernal nature, plainly disturbed; aghast at the awful menace threatening the universe.

I thought I knew the laws of etheric vibration fairly well. And, for earthly requirements, I do. But all I had ever known put together was but the prattle of an infant, compared to the wisdom of the Silver One.

How far-reaching, how all-comprehending, how all-inclusive must have been that power of sight she controlled, to enable her to keep track of my arrival on the plane of Hate; and to know when I departed therefrom, and the manner of my going. How accurate, too, that she could follow that shell so closely. And how stupendous her ability; that she could and did disrupt it so promptly!

And that Lucifer, the fallen Archangel, was likewise one of the masters of the ether, is understood almost without saying. Already I had had more than one demonstration of his abilities; and I was to receive others very shortly.

IT WAS a joyous throng that swept in a brilliant, gleaming cortège through that black vault of Tartarus. And after my lengthy exposure to the vibrations of Hate, I fairly *soaked* up all the loving pity and sympathy that they so generously bestowed. I felt that I needed it to cleanse me from the pollution of that realm where I had dared venture like a spy into an enemy's chiefest citadel.

There was not even a preliminary glow of lurid light to warn us! One instant, ahead of us, still the void of outer space—and the next instant, hordes and legions of fiends, demons, imps, and goblins; swarming all about us, above us, below us. Everywhere, save in our very midst!

Once again—as while imprisoned in the shell—to me there came that far-reaching clairvoyance, and I could see the Great Adversary himself sitting on his brazen throne in his palace dwelling. He was guiding, controlling, directing, from that incalculable distance, his infernal host he had sent to intercept us. Why, I could even sense his thought waves—not directed to me, but to the Silver One herself.

"What I once have held is mine throughout all eternity! Yield to me that Earthling's spirit, and go thy ways in peace—for this time!"

I was in for it! That I could see plainly. I had incurred the personal animosity of one who never forgave; one who forever remained relentless; one who would not be deprived of his vengeance, once begun! He wanted me—and there was no hope. I knew my doom. Yet it was I who would finally triumph, of that I was assured,

for I would yield myself to him, give myself over to his tender care—and what that might be I could easily guess.

But in defying him, mocking him, flouting him even in the midst of his worst torments, I would be the tormentor—his tormentor—even while he tortured me! I could not, would not let harm come to her I served because of me. Why, who was I—?

Before I could demand of her that she give me up to him; I caught her answer.

"Lucifer, I yield not one of those who cleave to me. If he be thine—come take him! Cease malingering there on thy brazen seat; come in person—thou who wast formerly of our Celestial Host—*thou*, Fallen Seraph; Arch-Rebel; *Supreme Coward of the Universe!*"

That supernal defiance rang through space that heard with bated breath! The very atoms of the ether shuddered and wavered in their eon-old steadiness of flow; shocked and aghast at that most stupendous final insult! And I—I gazed spellbound at her whom, previously, I had deemed a gentle spirit!

Where now was that softly shimmering, silvery tint of living light that had composed her matchless form? It shone now with a vivid coruscating radiance far more like white-hot iron superheated; yet had all the hardness of appearance characterizing highly polished, chilled steel!

The soft gentle roseate flushes—color of love—which had faintly tinged her entire aura, had changed to the clear bright scarlet of wrath celestial. The serene brow was still calm, but bore an expression of awful sternness, lofty, implacable, unyielding. The great pools of light—her eyes—now blazed with indignation. And the smiling, tender mouth which had been so mobile, quivering with loving, yearning wistfulness, had

subtly hardened—the lips were curled with scorn and contempt—

A shriek burst from the regnant figure seated on its brazen throne! That hellish ululation rang through all the illimitable Etheric Ocean till the wave of Life itself well-nigh changed and became a tide of Death instead!

That supreme taunt had stung the Lord of Hate beyond all his demoniac endurance. It had cut straight to the very well-springs of his being! It could be replied to in but one manner.

In a blinding, dazzling, lurid flash of crimson and hectic purple he sped straight from his throne-seat to the very forefront of his hellish host which swarmed and swirled all about us; as yet not daring to attack.

His arrival and the opening of the war were simultaneous. His first act was to launch direct at me a streak of greenish-white luminescence that barely missed me, and would have taken me full, had not one of those who followed the Silver One interposed herself.

The shining being shrank, shriveled, seemed to wither; grow smaller, deformed; the splendid beauty of her aura turned dull gray and leaden in hue—she writhed and quivered in an agony excruciating to behold. Had that streak of Infernal Energy smitten me—I doubt if my supposedly indestructible self could have survived it!

I shame to confess it! I shrink from the admission as never have I cringed in self-loathing before, but I must tell it! There is that within me that compels me and will not be denied. Before that terrific battle was over, fifteen of those beauteous ones, male and female both, had interposed their unselfish selves; had been my preservation; rather than let me fall victim to the wrath of the Archfiend!

And I could not fight him back! Why, I was but a helpless babe in this most stupendous strife! The worst

—or best—powers I knew how to utilize failed to affect the most puerile and impotent of the least of the goblins in the Arch-Enemy's array!

But now, if I seem to digress, in truth it is not so. I find that I must shift from one thing to another, keeping as best I may to the thread of my narration; yet covering certain points of grave importance, in order to make some matters clear.

The self is indestructible, was never born, can never die. But it can know suffering, can be hurt, not permanently, yet terribly while the hurt endures. It may not be affected thus by any means known to Earth. But, as I have said once and again—in the Etheric Ocean of Space, which is the Storehouse of Universal Energy, there are strange powers and forces latent which may be set into activity by that chiefest and greatest dynamic energy, "Will."

All the universe is but ions and electrons—atoms. The solid rock, the yielding flesh, the intangible smoke, or the impalpable gas—atoms, all of these! Atoms, too, are electricity, chemistry, radium—

All that differentiates one thing from other things throughout all the universe is—vibratory rate! Certain vibrations are pleasant, soothing, gratifying, because they are harmonious, in attunement.

Then, given a vibratory wave of sufficient intensity, out of attainment with its objective—and injury is quite possible! And of such nature were the weapons used in that spatial warfare!

Again to revert—when she, the Silver One, turned from her gentle attitude, realizing that thus only could she maintain her integrity and insure the safety of her followers; they too, had promptly altered. Not so high, so potent as she, perhaps; still, in their ways, they were anything but weaklings!

So, indescribable as was that strife, and banal though the strongest words are for purposes of description, I still will try in my poor way to tell what I may of its progress.

THE lesser host, that of the Silver One's array, held closely together, despite the most determined assaults against them. At her command, they had assumed a strange geometrical formation, and from this they hurled forth flickering rays of clear lights, scintillant sparklings, corruscating whorls and spiriting puffs and jets of gases and vapors, faintly luminous, but devastating in effect.

Incessantly, from the forefront of that gleaming cohort where blazed the Silver One herself, there burst sheets and flares of blinding white, violet-tinted light which was almost solid in its atomic intensity of impact! It was shot through with sparks and bursting points and darting tongues of super-iridescence. And wherever that awful vibration smote, the unlucky fiends howled and yelled, and some even wept in their anguish—so terrible was the result of her wrath!

And ever as she smote, clear as a strain of music heard amidst the turmoil of an Earthly tempest, her challenge rang above all the hellish riot from that Infernal Army.

"Come and face me, Lucifer! Thou, who didst swear once, eons ago, to drag me down lower than the lowest goblin damned of all thy far-flung outposts! Leave off assailing my followers, and face my power, thou Scum of the Nethermost Pit!"

But he came not. Rather, he kept carefully on the farther side of her cohort; and in this one matter he had her at a disadvantage. For she, with those terrible sheets of celestial flame, was blasting for her attendants a path in a fixed direction—back toward her shining city, while to him and his demoniac legion, one direction was as good as any other.

And he and his hellish hordes were anything but passive! Their weapons were, in a way, more dreadful than were those they were facing. For they were using the vibrations of their kind. And between the two hosts played such display as no earthly pyrotechnics could ever hope to approximate.

Against us they launched whirling spirals and vortices of scarlet and crimson fires; flares of sulfurous blues and yellows; jets and gouts and splashes of flames of all colors, but all shaded with dark impurity; foul with wrath and malice and all indecency.

There came, ever and again, gusts of fetid odors; blasts of stifling, mephitic vapors of green and leaden and purple; and thick, black clouds, filthy, revolting to touch and smell; shot through with jagged sizzling darts and streaks of hell's own essence—which is a vibration indescribable to earthly concept.

Had I to choose, I had far rather have faced the worst that the Shining Band could do to me—for their weapons were clean, at least, however dreadful the effects might be. But the noxious, virulent emanations from the enemy array were pollution itself. They well-nigh choked the souls of us who faced them!

Again I shame to say it, but so far as possible, I had been kept in the middle of that geometrical figure. Yet, it was against me, as much as he could, that the Great Adversary directed his most determined efforts.

But following close on a particularly biting taunt from the Silver One—a taunt which held more than a hint of mocking merriment—he shifted his position enough so that he could launch straight at her one of those virulent greenish-white streaks of phosphorescence—a streak far more intense than any he had so far condescended to waste upon me!

Straight at her noble breast it sped—and for a brief second I grew sick

with apprehension. A faint, soft, rose-colored glow shone on her bosom for a mere moment—but the awful vibration, touching it, lost its power! Again he hurled one of those frightful darts; but again the soft, rosy glow foiled him. Again and yet again he smote, and ever as they struck, impotent, her jeering challenge retorted, maddening him.

I know not how it happened. It was all too quickly done for me to follow; but I found myself suddenly before her—and the baleful glance of the Adversary was quick to perceive his opportunity!

But because of his position, her form partially intervened. He changed location still farther and shot at me one terrific streak! I saw it start—and saw, streaming from the fingers of her left hand which she swiftly interposed before me, a shield, oval in shape, of that wondrous rosy glow. The hell-dart fairly crackled as it impinged upon that defense, but harmed me not at all.

I sensed the wild, thrilling exultation of her triumph—and realized that she had deliberately used me as a lure to entrap him!

Her magnificent, shapely right arm shot straight upward, full length, swept downward again in a superb gesture, her strong, slender tapering fingers pointing full at him; and from their tips there leaped a single flash of Black Light transcending all *Light!*

Concentrated to a spot no larger than an Earth-child's hand, it smote him full on his wrathful brow! And at its stabbing impact he screamed as never fiend nor imp nor lost soul ever screamed in direst tortures of his devising!

That ghastly yell of anguish rings yet in my memory! The coronal of lurid flames about his head went out. He turned a livid, sickly hue, suddenly grew limp, weaker than the

weakest member of all his hideous host—

He turned and fled! Fled, slowly, painfully, moaning and wailing in futile misery and humiliation! And, fleeing, was overtaken and passed by his entire army who broke and scattered when they witnessed their leader's defeat! But he could not flee fast enough to escape from her derisive mockery.

"Go, proud prince! Go, without this Earthling whom thou didst demand from my hands! Go, without taking me prisoner—me whom thou didst threaten to degrade! *Lucifer, thou hast my pity!*"

I think that last hurt him worse than all else!

WE WERE annoyed no farther. Space was but empty space until we reached the shining city. There were many of that bright band sorely hurt, and even in that Abode of Light it was some time ere they wholly recovered.

I was unhurt, but the very self of me was inexpressibly wearied, almost to exhaustion. Despite this, I would have returned to Earth, for I feared for that mortal body I had left so long lying in the Temple—asleep in the Black Shrine, but the Silver One forbade.

"Thy brethren care for thy body by my express command," she assured me, adding: "And as for that futility thou dost name thy 'business affairs' upon earth—fear not thou! Bide here yet awhile. It is my wish."

Now, who was I to refuse?

It was pleasant enough there, and finally I asked her outright to grant me permission to remain, permanently, forever. Over her serene features—now once more gentle—hovering on her lips there crept an enigmatic smile.

"Wait!" was all her reply.

I was wondering what that might mean when a blaze of sapphire and

gold filled all the place about her throne. Momentarily dazzled, I then became aware of a Radiant Being by contrast with whom even *she* appeared obviously of lesser rank. Nothing and no one told me, yet I knew it for one of the great Archangels who abide in the immediate light of the Presence Itself. He surveyed me a trifle curiously.

"Earthman," he stated bluntly, "thou art the greatest fool who ever left thy world."

I bowed my head abashed. Yet I was aware that the Silver One was smiling approvingly on me.

"But," continued the Seraph, "it is such daring fools as thou who serve the Inscrutable Purpose."

I felt even more abashed, for this was praise. From an Archangel!

"Wouldst thou dare alone face the Great Adversary once again, there on his dais in the heart of his realm?" he queried as if desirous of finding out just how bold a fool I really was.

I raised my head, looked at him, despite his blazing splendor, straight in eye.

"If it serves," I replied humbly.

"Give heed, then," he commanded.

"It is thy right to hear and judge if thou wilt go or not. Ages ago, this Lucifer sought to corrupt thy world. Thou knowest that it is far from perfect now! It was because of that that he was reduced to his present estate. Wherefore it is that he hates thy world, the Green Star, the worst.

"Now he has dared transgress again; has been prevented for a time; but still he meditates rebellion. And so, I have a message for him! But because he hates thy world so viciously, it is fitting that thou shouldst bear him that message—thou, an Earthman from the star he hates; thou, the one Earthman whom above all Earthmen he has greatest cause to hate! Well?"

"I serve," I replied simply.

Oh, the stupendous powers under the control of those Celestials! There was no message given me; no command to 'go'; there was not even perceptible transition—it was instantaneous transposition!

I was standing on the dais facing the Archfiend on his brazen throne! The very sight of me seemed to madden him, giving him the spur he evidently needed; for the jaded look faded from his worn-appearing countenance, being replaced by a wild ferocity.

"Thou?" he snarled, half incredulous. I suppose I should have quailed before that frightful rage, but somehow I did not do so.

"I have a message for thee," I stated bluntly.

In sheer mockery he assumed the manners at once of a gravely courteous, suave prince receiving an envoy.

"I listen," he replied, with but the faintest hint of irony in his tones.

"Lucifer," I commenced sternly, "once thou didst rebel against the Presence. As punishment, this is thy estate! Thou, too, dost serve the Purpose; as does the eternal conflict! But lately thou didst o'erpass the boundaries of thy province; and what that brought thee, thou knowest! O'erpass thy boundaries once again, and thou wilt o'erpass the limits of the Patience! And then—no worm squirming beneath the dust of the Green Star from whence I came can be so low as thou shalt be abased. *Heed ye the warning!*"

It was not of myself that I had spoken. That I knew. But the Archfiend was blinded by his hate, or he, too, would have known it. He leaped to his feet. In his eyes the hell-glare blazed as never before.

"Thou presumptuous—" he yelled, but never finished his remark, whatever it was. Facing him from the center of the throne room stood the Archangel who had sent me. Never

a word he spoke; his eyes looked—but did not even seem to notice the Prince of Hate. Had he gazed at nothingness, his eyes had held that same expression—serene, aloof, indifferent. Yet Lucifer sank back upon his throne, cowed, beaten once again.

"I hear—and—and—" he well-nigh choked on the final words—"I—obey!"

THERE was no throne before me; no fallen Seraph promising abject submission! Again that Celestial's supernal power! We were hovering just above the "couch of dreams" whereon still lay my earthly body.

"Man of Earth," said my companion, "we have need of such as thee in Space. There is a planet of which thou hast never heard, where things are far from what they were ordained to be. We can use thee there. Well?"

"Still I serve," I replied gladly.

"Re-enter thy body," he commanded. "Thy brethren will not attempt to question thee. Arrange thy earthly affairs as may please thee, but in such wise that if the call comes, it will find thee waiting in readiness—for when I come for thee, thou wilt 'die' as do all thy race."

"I will be ready at any moment," I promised.

Everything grew dark, I felt a strange strangling sensation—I gasped, opened my eyes wearily. I heard a startled exclamation. I turned my head slowly, for my neck felt queerly stiff and moved with difficulty.

That same "Temple Dove" who had woven for me the spell of the Temple-sleep was kneeling beside me.

"Oh," she exclaimed softly. "You have come to life again. I am so glad!"

"You have not been here all this time, I hope," I said.

"No, no," she replied, shaking her head emphatically. "Why, you have

been gone more than five weeks! But always someone has watched over you, waiting for your awakening. It has been done by command of the Hierophant of the Order."

"Help me up," I said, for I felt unable to rise by my own unaided efforts.

I got to my feet and stood swaying unsteadily. In fact, had not the girl placed her arm about me and supported me I should probably have fallen. But after a bit, as the circulation improved, I grew stronger.

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

"I'm so glad," she repeated, her eyes shining joyously. "I—I—prayed—for—you," she whispered diffidently.

I stared! *She! Prayed—for me! I who—!* Then comprehension dawned in my arrogant mind! After all, within her limits, she, too, served! Very gently I bent and kissed her on her smooth brow.

"Thank you, Little Sister," I said humbly.

Then I left the Black Shrine, and, a few minutes later, dressed for the street, I passed out of the Temple building.

AFTERWORD

I RETIRED from business. I have money enough and more than I shall ever use. I made a will, leaving everything to that kindly little maid who also serves. No one else had ever manifested any regard for me. Yet—she had "prayed".

A week ago I awoke from out a sound slumber. The room was so black that there might as well have been no room. There came a soft gleam of radiance! Clearly against the blackness, I saw the Silver One herself. A question passed from my mind to hers.

"Not yet," came her gentle, pitying reply. "It is another than I who will come—even as he said."

"Tell me," I implored. "May I write these matters out for the dwellers of earth to read?"

"You may—if it be your wish," she consented.

"When shall I—" I recommenced, but she shook her head in negation, and I did not finish that query. She smiled and was gone! But I lay awake awhile, staring into the darkness; and as I stared, a vision formed.

I saw a small, barren-looking planet, as yet scarcely cooled, where-

on dwarfish, distorted creatures, low in the scale of evolution, yet strangely *aspiring*; strove ever with a race of giants, malignant, brutish, stolid, stupid.

But what it was they strove for; or what part I was to take in their affairs—I saw not then, nor do I know as yet.

Only, I wait. Wait, that I may once again *serve*—

And, somehow, I do not think my waiting will be very long!