

The Hand

BY THEODORE DREISER

Illustrated by Arthur Fuller

DAVIDSON could distinctly remember that it was between two and three years after the grisly event in the Monte Orte range—the sickening and yet deserved end of Mersereau, his quondam partner and fellow adventurer—that anything to be identified with Mersereau's malice toward him, and with Mersereau's probable present existence in the spirit world, had appeared in his life.

He and Mersereau had worked long together as prospectors, investors, developers of property. It was only after they had struck it rich in the Klondike that Davidson had grown so much more apt and shrewd in all commercial and financial matters, whereas Mersereau had seemed to stand still—not to rise to the splendid opportunities which then opened to him. Why, in some of those later deals it had not been possible for Davidson even to introduce his old partner to some of the moneyed men he had to deal with. Yet Mersereau had insisted, as his right, if you please, on being “in on” everything—everything!

Take that wonderful Monte Orte property, the cause of all the subsequent horror. He, Davidson—not Mersereau—had discovered or heard of the mine, and had carried it along, with old Besmer as a tool or decoy—Besmer being the ostensible factor—until it was all ready for him to take over and sell or develop. Then it was that Mersereau, having so long been his partner, demanded a full half—a third, at least—on the ground that they had once agreed to work together in all these things.

Think of it! And Mersereau growing duller and less useful and more disagreeable day by day, and year by year! Indeed, toward the last he had threatened to expose the trick by which jointly, seven years before, they had possessed themselves of the Skyute Pass Mine; to drive Davidson out of public and financial life, to have

him arrested and tried—along with himself, of course. Think of that!

But he had fixed the man—yes, he had, damn him! He had trailed Mersereau that night to old Besmer's cabin on the Monte Orte, when Besmer was away. Mersereau had attempted to steal the diagram of the new field. Yes, just when Mersereau thought that no one was about, and that he was making safely away, Davidson had struck him cleanly over the ear with that heavy rail-bolt fastened to the end of a walnut stick, and the first blow had done for him.

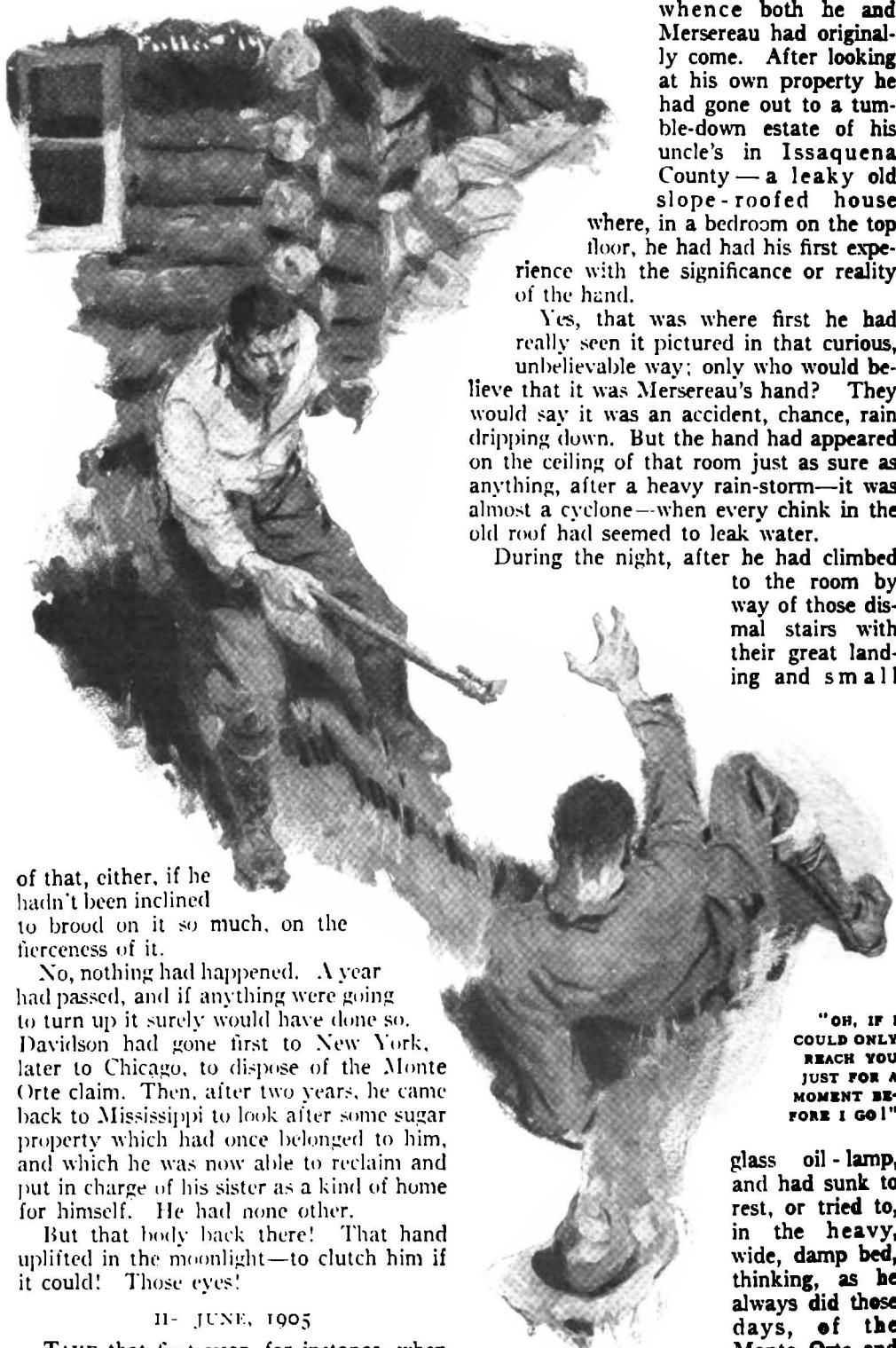
Lord, how the bone above Mersereau's ear had sounded when it cracked! And how bloody one side of that bolt was! Mersereau hadn't had time to do anything before he was helpless. He hadn't died instantly, though, but had turned over and faced Davidson with that savage, scowling face of his and those blazing, animal eyes.

Lying half propped up on his left elbow, Mersereau had reached out toward him with that big, rough, bony right hand of his—the right with which he always boasted of having done so much damage on this, that, and the other occasion—had glared at him as much as to say:

“Oh, if I could only reach you just for a moment before I go!”

Then it was that Davidson had lifted the club again. Horrified as he was, and yet determined that he must save his own life, he had finished the task, dragging the body back to an old fissure behind the cabin and covering it with branches, a great pile of pine fronds, and as many as one hundred and fifty boulders, great and small, and had left his victim. It was a sickening job and a sickening sight, but it had to be.

Yes, having finished, he had slipped dizzily away, like a jackal, thinking of that hand in the moonlight, held up so savagely, and that look. Nothing might have come



whence both he and Mersereau had originally come. After looking at his own property he had gone out to a tumble-down estate of his uncle's in Issaquena County—a leaky old slope-roofed house

where, in a bedroom on the top floor, he had had his first experience with the significance or reality of the hand.

Yes, that was where first he had really seen it pictured in that curious, unbelievable way; only who would believe that it was Mersereau's hand? They would say it was an accident, chance, rain dripping down. But the hand had appeared on the ceiling of that room just as sure as anything, after a heavy rain-storm—it was almost a cyclone—when every chink in the old roof had seemed to leak water.

During the night, after he had climbed to the room by way of those dismal stairs with their great landing and small

of that, either, if he hadn't been inclined to brood on it so much, on the fierceness of it.

No, nothing had happened. A year had passed, and if anything were going to turn up it surely would have done so. Davidson had gone first to New York, later to Chicago, to dispose of the Monte Orte claim. Then, after two years, he came back to Mississippi to look after some sugar property which had once belonged to him, and which he was now able to reclaim and put in charge of his sister as a kind of home for himself. He had none other.

But that body back there! That hand uplifted in the moonlight—to clutch him if it could! Those eyes!

II-JUNE, 1905

TAKE that first year, for instance, when he had returned to Gatchard in Mississippi,

"OH, IF I
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FORE I GO!"

glass oil-lamp, and had sunk to rest, or tried to, in the heavy, wide, damp bed, thinking, as he always did those days, of the Monte Orte and Mersereau, the

storm had come up. As he listened to the wind moaning outside he had heard first the scratch, scratch, scratch, of some limb, no doubt, against the wall—sounding, or so it seemed in his feverish unrest, like some one penning an indictment against him with a worn, rusty pen.

And then, the storm growing worse, he had gone to the window in a fit of irritation and self-contempt at his own nervousness, just as the lightning struck a branch of the tree nearest the window. He had retreated, feeling that it was meant for him.

But that big, knotted hand painted on the ceiling by the dripping water during the night! There it was, right over him when he awoke, outlined or painted as if with wet, gray whitewash against the wretched but normal pale-blue of the ceiling when dry. There it was—a big, open hand just like Mersereau's as he had held it up that night—huge, knotted, rough, the fingers extended as if tense and clutching. And, if you will believe it, near it was something that looked like a pen—an old, long-handled pen—to match that scratch, scratch, scratch!

"Huldah," he had inquired of the old black mammy who entered in the morning to bring him fresh water and throw open the shutters, "what does that look like to you up there—that patch on the ceiling where the rain came through?"

He wanted to reassure himself as to the character of the thing he saw—that it might not be a creation of his own feverish imagination, accentuated by the dismal character of this place.

"'Pears t' me mo' like a big han' 'an anythin' else, Marse Davi'son," commented Huldah, pausing and staring upward. "Mo' like a big fist, kinda. Dat air's a new drip come las' night, I reckon. Dis here ole place ain' gonna hang togethah much longah, less'n some repairin' be done mighty quick now. Yassir, dat air's a new drip, sho's yo' bo'n, en it come on'y las' night. I hain't never seed dat befo'."

And then he had inquired, thinking of the fierceness of the storm:

"Huldah, do you have many such storms up this way?"

"Good gracious, Marse Davi'son, we hain't seed no sech a blow en—en come three year now. I hain't seed no sech lightnin' en I doan' know when."

Wasn't that strange, that it should all come on the night when he was there?

Huldah stared idly, always ready to go slow and rest if possible, whereas he had turned irritably. To be annoyed by ideas such as this! To always be thinking of that Monte Orte affair! Why couldn't he forget it? It was Mersereau's own fault. He never would have killed the man if he hadn't been forced to it.

And to be haunted in this way, making mountains out of mole-hills, as he thought then! It must be his own miserable fancy—and yet Mersereau had looked so threateningly at him. That glance had boded something; it was too terrible not to.

Davidson might not want to think of it, but how could he stop? Mersereau might not be able to hurt him any more, at least not on this earth; but still, couldn't he? Didn't the appearance of this hand seem to indicate that he might? He was dead, of course. His body, his skeleton, was under that pile of rocks and stones, some of them as big as wash-tubs. Why worry over that, and after two years? And still—

That hand on that ceiling!

III—DECEMBER, 1905

THEN, again, take that matter of meeting Pringle in Gatchard just at that time, within the same week. It was due to Davidson's sister. She had invited Mr. and Mrs. Pringle in to meet him one evening, without telling him that they were spiritualists and might discuss spiritualism.

Clairvoyance, Pringle called it, or seeing what can't be seen with material eyes, and clairaudience, or hearing what can't be heard with material ears, as well as materialization, or ghosts, and table-rapping, and the like. Table-rapping—that damned tap-tapping that Davidson had been hearing ever since!

It was Pringle's fault, really. Pringle had persisted in talking. He, Davidson, wouldn't have listened, except that he somehow became fascinated by what Pringle said concerning what he had heard and seen in his time. Mersereau must have been at the bottom of that, too.

At any rate, after he had listened, Davidson was sorry, for Pringle had time to fill his mind full of those awful facts or ideas which had since harassed him so much—all that stu" about drunkards, degenerates, and weak people generally being followed about by 'ile, evil spirits and used to effect those spirits' purposes or desires in this world. Horrible!

Wasn't it awful? Pringle—big, mushy creature that he was, sickly and stagnant like a springless pool—insisted that he had even seen clouds of these spirits about drunkards, degenerates, and the like, in street-cars, on trains, and about vile corners at night. Once, he said, he had seen just one evil spirit—think of that!—following a certain man all the time, at his left elbow—a dark, evil, red-eyed thing, until finally the man had been killed in a quarrel.

Pringle described their shapes, these spirits, as varied. They were small, dark, irregular clouds, with red or green spots somewhere for eyes, changing in form and becoming longish or round like a jellyfish, or even like a misshapen cat or dog. They could take any form at will—that of a man, say, for a little while.

Once, Pringle declared, he had seen as many as fifty about a drunkard who was staggering down a street, all of them trying to urge him into the nearest saloon, so that they might reexperience in some vague way the sensation of drunkenness, which at some time or other they themselves, having been drunkards in life, had enjoyed!

It would be the same with a drug fiend, or indeed with any one of weak or evil habits. They gathered about such people like flies, their red or green eyes glowing—attempting to get something from them, perhaps, if nothing more than a little sense of their old earth-life.

The whole thing was so terrible and disturbing at the time, particularly that idea of men being persuaded or influenced to murder, that Davidson could stand it no longer, and got up and left. But in his room up-stairs he meditated on it, standing before his mirror. Suddenly—would he ever forget it?—as he was taking off his collar and tie, he had heard that queer tap, tap, tap, right on his dressing-table or under it, which Pringle said ghosts made when table-rapping in answer to a call, or to give warning of their presence.

Then something said to him, almost as clearly as if he heard it:

"This is me, Mersereau, come back at last to get you! Pringle was just an excuse of mine to let you know I was coming, and so was that hand in the Hatch house. It was mine! I will be with you from now on. Don't think I will ever leave you!"

It frightened Davidson and made him half sick, so wrought up was he. For the first time he felt cold chills run up and

down his spine—the creeps. He felt as if he could almost feel some one standing over him—Mersereau, of course—only he could not see or hear a thing, just that faint tap at first, growing louder a little later, and quite angry when he tried to ignore it.

People did live, then, after they were dead, especially evil people—people stronger than you, perhaps. They had the power to come back, to haunt, to annoy you if they didn't like anything you had done to them. No doubt Mersereau was following him in the hope of revenge, there in the spirit-world just outside this one, close at his heels, like that evil spirit attending the other man whom Pringle had described.

IV—FEBRUARY, 1906

TAKE that case of the hand impressed on the soft dough and plaster of Paris, described in an article that he had picked up in the dentist's office out there in Pasadena—Mersereau's very hand, so far as he could judge. How about that for a coincidence, picking up the magazine with that disturbing article about psychic materialization in Italy, and later in Bern, Switzerland, where the scientists were gathered to investigate that sort of thing? And just when he was trying to rid himself finally of the notion that any such thing could be!

According to that magazine article, some old crone over in Italy—spiritualist, or witch, or something—had got together a crowd of experimentalists or professors in an abandoned house on an almost deserted island off the coast of Sardinia. There they had conducted experiments with spirits, which they called materialization, getting the impression of the fingers of a hand, or of a whole hand and arm, or of a face, on a plate of glass covered with soot, the plate being locked in a small safe on the center of a table about which they sat!

Davidson couldn't understand how it was done, but done it was. There in that magazine were half a dozen pictures, reproductions of photographs of a hand, an arm, and a face—or a part of one, anyhow. And if they looked like anything, they looked exactly like Mersereau's!

There was not the least doubt of it—they were Mersereau's, intended, when they were made over there in Italy, for Davidson to see later there in Pasadena. Yes, they were! And looking at that sinister face reproduced in the magazine, it seemed to say, with Mersereau's old coarse sneer:



He saw a veritable cloud of evil creatures, swimming about like fish in dark waters

"You see? You can't escape me! I'm showing you how much alive I am over here, just as I was on earth. And I'll get you yet, even if I have to go farther than Italy to do it!"

It was amazing, the shock Davidson got out of it. It wasn't just that alone, but the persistence and repetition of this hand business. What could it mean? It was Mer-

sereau's hand, all right. As for the face, it wasn't all there—just the jaw, mouth, cheek, left temple, and a part of the nose and eye; but it was Mersereau, all right. He had gone clear over there into Italy somewhere, in a lone house on an island, to get this message of his undying hate back to Davidson. Or was it just spirits, evil spirits, bent on annoying him because he was nervous and sensitive now?

v—OCTOBER, 1906

EVEN crowded new hotels and new buildings weren't the protection Davidson had first thought they were. Even there you weren't safe—not from a man like Mersereau. Take that incident there in Los

Angeles, and again in Seattle, only two months ago now—he was always careful to take a room these days in the best and busiest hotels—when Mersereau was able to make that dreadful explosive or crashing sound, as if one had burst a huge paper bag full of air, or upset a china-closet full of glass and broken everything, when as a matter of fact nothing at all had happened. It had frightened Davidson horribly the first two or three times, believing as he did that something fearful had happened. Finding that it was nothing—or Mersereau—he was becoming used to it now; but other people, unfortunately, were not.

He would be—as he had been that first time—sitting in his room perfectly still and trying to amuse himself, or not to think, when suddenly there would be that awful crash. It was astounding! Other people heard it, of course. They had in Los Angeles. A maid and a porter had come running the first time to inquire, and he had had to protest that he had heard nothing. They couldn't believe it at first, and had gone to other rooms to look. When it happened the second time, the management had protested, thinking it was a joke he was playing; and to avoid the risk of exposure he had left.

After that he could not keep a valet or nurse about him for long. Servants wouldn't stay, and managers of hotels wouldn't let him remain when such things went on. Yet he couldn't live in a private house or apartment alone, for there the noises and sights would be worse than ever.

VI—JUNE, 1907

TAKE that last old house he had been in—or ever would be in again!—at Anne Haven, which was much worse, and which proved it all. There the hand actually appeared to him, a thing as big as a wash-tub at first, something like smoke or shadow in a black room moving about over the bed and everywhere. Then, as he lay there, gazing at it spellbound, it condensed slowly, and he began to feel it. It was now a hand of normal size—there was no doubt of it in the world—going over him softly, without force, as a ghostly hand must, having no real physical strength, but all the time with a strange, secretive something about it, a searching, as if it were not quite sure of itself, and not quite sure that he was really there.

The hand, or so it seemed—God!—

moved right up to his neck and began to feel over that as he lay there. Then it was that he guessed just what it was that Mersereau was after—he wanted to choke him to death!

It was just like a hand, the fingers and thumb made into a circle and pressed down over his throat; only it moved over him gently at first, because it really couldn't do anything yet, not having the material strength. But the intention! The sense of cruel, savage determination that went with it!

And yet, if one went to a nerve specialist or doctor about all this, as he did afterward, what did the doctor say? Davidson tried to describe how he was breaking down under the strain, how he could not eat or sleep on account of all these constant tappings and noises; but the moment he even began to hint at his experiences, especially the hand or the noises, the doctor exclaimed:

"Why, this is plain delusion! You're nervously run down, that's all that ails you—on the verge of pernicious anemia, I should say. You'll have to watch yourself as to this illusion about spirits. Get it out of your mind. There's nothing to it!"

Wasn't that just like one of these nerve specialists, bound up in their little ideas and what they knew or saw, or thought they saw?

VII—NOVEMBER, 1907

AND now take this very latest development at Battle Creek recently, where he had gone trying to recuperate on the diet there. Hadn't Mersereau, implacable demon that he was, developed this latest trick of making his food taste queer to him—unpalatable, or with an odd odor?

Davidson knew it was Mersereau, for he felt him beside him at the table whenever he sat down. Besides, he seemed to hear something—clairaudience, of course; he was beginning to develop that, too, now! It was Mersereau, of course, saying in a voice which was more like a memory of a voice than anything real—the voice of some one you could remember as having spoken in a certain way, say, ten years or more ago:

"I've fixed it so you can't eat any more, you—"

There followed a long list of vile expletives, enough in itself to sicken one.

Thereafter, in spite of anything he could do to make himself think to the contrary,

knowing that the food was all right, really, Davidson found it to have an odor or a taste which disgusted him, and which he could not overcome, try as he would. The management assured him that it was all right, as he knew it was—for others. He saw them eating it. But he couldn't—had to get up and leave, and the little he could get down he couldn't retain, or it wasn't enough for him to live on.

And Mersereau seemed always by, rejoicing in the result. Why, if it weren't for fresh fruit on the stands at times, and just plain, fresh-baked bread in bakers' windows, which he could buy and eat quickly, he might not be able to live at all. It was getting to that pass!

VIII—AUGUST, 1908

THAT wasn't the worst, either, bad as all that was. The worst was the fact that under the strain of all this he was slowly but surely breaking down, and that in the end Mersereau might really succeed in driving him out of life here—to do what, if anything, to him there? What? It was such an evil pack by which he was surrounded, those who lived just on the other side and hung about the earth, vile, debauched creatures, as Pringle had described them, and as Davidson had come to know for himself, fearing them and their ways so much, and really seeing them at times.

Since he had come to be so weak and sensitive, he could see them for himself—vile things that they were, swimming before his gaze in the dark whenever he chanced to let himself be in the dark, which was not often—friends of Mersereau, no doubt, and inclined to help him just for the evil of it.

For this long time now Davidson had taken to sleeping with the light on, wherever he was, only tying a handkerchief over his eyes to keep out some of the glare. Even then he could see them—queer, misshapen things, for all the world like wavy, stringy jellyfish or coils of thick, yellowish-black smoke, moving about, changing in form at times, always looking dirty or vile, somehow, and with those queer, dim, reddish or greenish glows for eyes. It was sickening!

IX—OCTOBER, 1908

HAVING accomplished so much, Mersereau would by no means be content to let him go. Davidson knew that! He could

talk to him occasionally now, or at least could hear him and answer back, if he chose, when he was alone and quite certain that no one was listening.

Mersereau was always saying, when Davidson would listen to him at all—which he wouldn't often—that he would get him yet, that he would make him pay, or charging him with fraud and murder.

"I'll choke you yet!" The words seemed to float in from somewhere, as if he were remembering that at some time Mersereau had said just that in his angry, savage tone—not as if he heard it; and yet he was hearing it, of course. *"I'll choke you yet! You can't escape! You may think you'll die a natural death, but you won't, and that's why I'm poisoning your food to weaken you. You can't escape! I'll get you, sick or well, when you can't help yourself, when you're sleeping. I'll choke you, just as you hit me with that club. That's why you're always seeing and feeling this hand of mine! I'm not alone. I've nearly had you many a time already, only you have managed to wriggle out so far, jumping up, but some day you won't be able to—see? Then—"*

The voice seemed to die away at times, even in the middle of a sentence, but at other times—often, often—he could hear it completing the full thought. Sometimes he would turn on the thing and exclaim:

"Oh, go to the devil!" or, *"Let me alone!"* or, *"Shut up!"* Even in a closed room and all alone, such remarks seemed strange to him, addressed to a ghost; but he couldn't resist at times, annoyed as he was. Only he took good care not to talk if any one was about.

It was getting so that there was no real place for him outside of an asylum, for often he would get up screaming at night—he had to, so sharp was the clutch on his throat—and then always, wherever he was, a servant would come in and want to know what was the matter. He would have to say that it was a nightmare—only the management always requested him to leave after the second or third time, say, or after an explosion or two. It was horrible!

He might as well apply to a private asylum or sanatorium now, having all the money he had, and explain that he had delusions—delusions! Imagine!—and ask to be taken care of. In a place like that they wouldn't be disturbed by his jumping up and screaming at night, feeling that he

was being choked, as he was, or by his leaving the table because he couldn't eat the food, or by his talking back to Mersereau, should they chance to hear him, or by the noises when they occurred.

They could assign him a special nurse and a special room, if he wished—only he didn't wish to be too much alone. They could put him in charge of some one who would understand all these things, or to whom he could explain. He couldn't expect ordinary people, or hotels catering to ordinary people, to put up with him any more.

He must go and hunt up a good place somewhere where they understood such things, or at least tolerated them, and explain, and then it would all pass for the hallucinations of a crazy man—though, as a matter of fact, he wasn't crazy at all. It was all too real, only the average or so-called normal person couldn't see or hear as he could—hadn't experienced what he had.

X—DECEMBER, 1908

"THE trouble is, doctor, that Mr. Davidson is suffering from the delusion that he is pursued by one or more evil spirits—I can't quite make out which yet. He was not committed here by any court, but came of his own accord about four months ago, and we let him wander about here at will.

"One of his worst delusions, doctor, is that there is one spirit in particular who is trying to choke him to death, especially at night. Dr. Major, our superintendent, says he has tuberculosis of the throat, with occasional spasmodic contractions. He won't believe that; but whenever he tries to sleep, especially in the middle of the night, he will jump up and come running out into the hall, insisting that one of these spirits is trying to choke him to death. He really seems to believe it, for he comes out coughing and choking and feeling at his neck as if some one had been trying to strangle him. He always explains the whole matter to me as being the spirits, and asks me to not pay any attention to him unless he calls for help or rings his call-bell; and so I never think anything more of it now unless he does.

"Another of his ideas is that these same spirits do something to his food—put poison in it, or give it a bad odor or taste, so that he can't eat it. When he does find anything he can eat, he grabs it and almost

swallows it whole, before, as he says, the spirits have time to do anything to it. Once, he says, he weighed more than two hundred pounds, but now he only weighs one hundred and twenty. It's pathetic, doctor!

"Dr. Major insists that it is purely a delusion, that so far as being choked is concerned, it is the tuberculosis of the throat, and that his stomach trouble comes from the same thing; but by association of ideas, or delusion, he thinks some one is trying to choke him and poison his food, when it isn't so at all. Dr. Major says that he can't imagine what could have started it. He is always trying to talk to Mr. Davidson about it; but whenever he begins to ask him questions, Mr. Davidson refuses to talk, and gets up and leaves.

"One of the peculiar things about his idea of being choked, doctor, is that when he is merely dozing he always wakes up in time, and has the power to throw it off. He claims that their strength is not equal to his own when he is awake, or even dozing, but when he's asleep their spirit is stronger than his. Sometimes, when he has had a fright like this, he will come out in the hall and down to my desk there at the lower end, and ask if he mayn't sit there by me. He says it calms him. I always tell him yes; but it won't be five minutes before he'll get up and leave again, saying that he's being annoyed, or that he won't be able to contain himself if he stays any longer, because of the remarks being made over his shoulder or in his ear.

"Often he'll say: 'Did you hear that, Miss Liggett? It's astonishing, the low, vile things that man can say at times!' When I say, 'No, I didn't hear,' he always says: 'I'm so glad!'"

"No one has ever tried to relieve him of this idea by hypnotism, I suppose?"

"Not that I know of, doctor. Dr. Major may have tried it. I have only been here three months."

"Tuberculosis is certainly the cause of the throat trouble, as Dr. Major says; and as for the stomach trouble, that comes from the same thing—natural enough under the circumstances. We may have to resort to hypnotism a little later. I'll see. In the mean time you'd better caution all who come in touch with him never to sympathize, or even to seem to believe in anything he imagines is being done to him. It will merely encourage him in his notions.

And get him to take his medicine regularly; it won't cure, but it will help. Dr. Major has asked me to give especial attention to his case, and I want the conditions as near right as possible."

"Yes, sir."

XI—JANUARY, 1909

THE trouble with these doctors was that they really knew nothing of anything save what was on the surface, the little they had learned at a medical college or in practise—chiefly how certain drugs, tried by their predecessors in certain cases, were known to act. They had no imagination whatever, even when you tried to tell them.

Take that latest young person who was coming here now in his good clothes and with his car, fairly bursting with his knowledge of what he called psychiatrics, looking into Davidson's eyes so hard and smoothing his temples and throat—massage, he called it—saying that he had incipient tuberculosis of the throat and stomach trouble, and utterly disregarding things which he, Davidson, could personally see and hear! Imagine the fellow trying to persuade him, at this late date, that all that was wrong with him was tuberculosis, that he didn't see Mersereau standing right beside him at times, bending over him, holding up that hand and telling him how he intended to kill him yet—that it was all an illusion!

Imagine saying that Mersereau couldn't actually seize him by the throat when he was asleep, or nearly so, when Davidson himself, looking at his throat in the mirror, could see the marks of his fingers—actually his fingers!—for a moment or so afterward. At any rate, his throat was red and sore from being clutched as Mersereau of late was able to clutch him! And to say, as they had said at first, that he himself was making it so by rubbing and feeling it, and then later that it was tuberculosis!

Rot! Wasn't it enough to make one want to quit the place? If it weren't for Miss Liggett and her devoted care, he would. That nurse was worth her weight in gold, learning his ways as she had, being so uniformly kind, and bearing with his difficulties so genially. He would leave her something in his will.

To leave this place and go elsewhere, unless he could take her along, would be folly. And anyway, where else would he go? Here at least were other people, patients

like himself, who could understand and sympathize with him. Old Rankin, the lawyer, for instance, who had suffered untold persecution from one living person and another, mostly politicians, was convinced that Davidson's troubles were genuine, and liked to hear about them. These two did not insist, as the doctors did, that he had slow tuberculosis of the throat, and could live a long time and overcome his troubles if he would—which he couldn't. They were merely companionable at such times as Mersereau would give him enough peace to be sociable.

The trouble was that he was growing so weak from lack of sleep and food—his inability to eat the food which his enemy bewitched and to sleep at night on account of the choking—that he couldn't last much longer. This new visiting physician was insisting that along with his throat trouble he was suffering from acute anemia, due to long undernourishment, and that only a solution of strychnin injected direct into the veins would help him.

Now that he was practically bedridden, not able to jump up as freely as before, Davidson was subject to a veritable storm of bedevilment. Not only could he see—especially toward evening, and in the very early hours of the morning—Mersereau hovering about him like a black shadow, but he could feel his enemy's hand moving over him. What was worse, behind or about him he often saw a veritable cloud of evil creatures, swimming about like fish in dark waters, and seeming to eye the procedures with satisfaction.

When food was brought to him, early or late, and in whatever form, Mersereau and they were there, close at hand, as thick as flies, even passing over and through it in an evident attempt to spoil it before he could eat it. Just to see them doing it was enough to poison it for Davidson. He could hear their voices urging Mersereau to do it.

"That's right—poison it!"

"He can't last much longer!"

"Soon he'll be weak enough so that when you grip him he will really die!"

He also heard vile phrases addressed to him by Mersereau, the iterated and reiterated words "murderer" and "swindler" and "cheat," there in the middle of the night. Often he saw as many as seven dark figures, very much like Mersereau's, although different, gathered close about him,

even though the light was still on. Some of them were upon his bed, and it seemed as if they were about to help Mersereau to finish him, adding their hands to his.

Behind them again was a complete circle of all those evil, swimming things with eyes, always watching—helping, probably. He had actually felt the pressure of the hand stronger than ever of late, when they were all there. Only, just before he fainted, and because he could not spring up any more, he screamed or gasped a choking gasp and held his finger on the button. Then Miss Liggett always came, lifted him up, and fixed his pillows. She assured him that it was only the inflammation of his throat, and rubbed it with alcohol, and gave him a few drops of something internally to ease it.

After all this time, and in spite of anything he could tell them, they still believed, or pretended to believe, that he was suffering from tuberculosis, and that all the rest was a delusion, a phase of insanity!

And Mersereau's skeleton still out there on the Monte Orte!

Mersereau would choke him to death, or get others to help, there was no doubt of it now; and yet they would believe that he had died of tuberculosis of the throat! Think of that!

XII—MIDNIGHT OF FEBRUARY 16, 1909

THE GHOST OF MERSEREAU (*to Davidson, bending over*)—"Softly! Softly! He's quite asleep! He didn't think we could get him—that I could! But Miss Liggett is asleep at the end of the hall and can't come, can't hear. He's become so weak now that he can scarcely move or groan. Strengthen my hand, you! I will grip him so tight about the neck this time that he won't get away! His cries won't help him this time! He can't cry as he once did! Now! Now!"

A CLOUD OF EVIL SPIRITS (*swimming about*)—"Right! Right! Good! Good! Now! Ah!"

DAVIDSON (*waking, choking, screaming, and feebly striking out*)—"Help! Help! H-e-l-p! Miss—Miss—H-e-l-p!"

MISS LIGGETT (*dozing heavily at her desk*)—"Everything is still. No one restless. I can sleep." (*Her head nods.*)

THE CLOUD OF EVIL SPIRITS—"Good! Good! Good! His soul at last! Here it comes! He couldn't escape this time! Ah! Good! Good! Ah!"

MERSEREAU (*to Davidson*)—"You murderer! At last! At last!"

XIII—3 A.M. OF FEBRUARY 17, 1909

MISS LIGGETT (*at the bedside, distressed and pale*)—"He must have died some time between one and two, doctor. I left him at one o'clock, as comfortable as I could make him. He said he was feeling as well as could be expected. He's been very weak during the last few days, taking only a little gruel. Between half past one and two I thought I heard a noise, and came to see. He was lying just as you see here, except that his hands were up to his throat, as if it were hurting or choking him. I put them down for fear they would stiffen that way. In trying to call one of the other nurses just now, I found that the bell was out of order, although I know it was all right when I left, because he always made me try it. So he may have tried to ring."

DR. MAJOR (*turning the head and examining the throat*)—"It looks as if he had clutched at his throat rather tightly this time, I must say. Here is the mark of his thumb on this side and of his four fingers on the other. Rather deep for the little strength he had. Odd that he should have imagined that any one else was trying to choke him, when he was always pressing at his own neck! Throat tuberculosis is very painful at times. That would explain the desire to clutch at his throat."

MISS LIGGETT—"He was always believing that an evil spirit was trying to choke him, doctor."

DR. MAJOR—"Yes, I know—association of ideas. Dr. Scain and I agree as to that. He had a bad case of chronic tuberculosis of the throat, with accompanying malnutrition, due to the effect of the throat on the stomach; and his notion about evil spirits pursuing him and trying to choke him was simply due to an innate tendency on the part of the subconscious mind to join things together—any notion, say, with any pain. If he had had a diseased leg, he would have imagined that evil spirits were attempting to saw it off, or something like that. In the same way the condition of his throat affected his stomach, and he imagined that the spirits were doing something to his food. Make out a certificate showing acute tuberculosis of the esophagus as the cause, with illusions of persecution as his mental condition. While I am here we may as well look in on Mr. Baff."