

JANUARY

Weird Tales

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A dead
man's
hand,
super-
charged
with
hate

"THE
HAND OF
SAINT URY"

GORDON MacCREAGH



Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1951

Cover by Charles A. Kennedy

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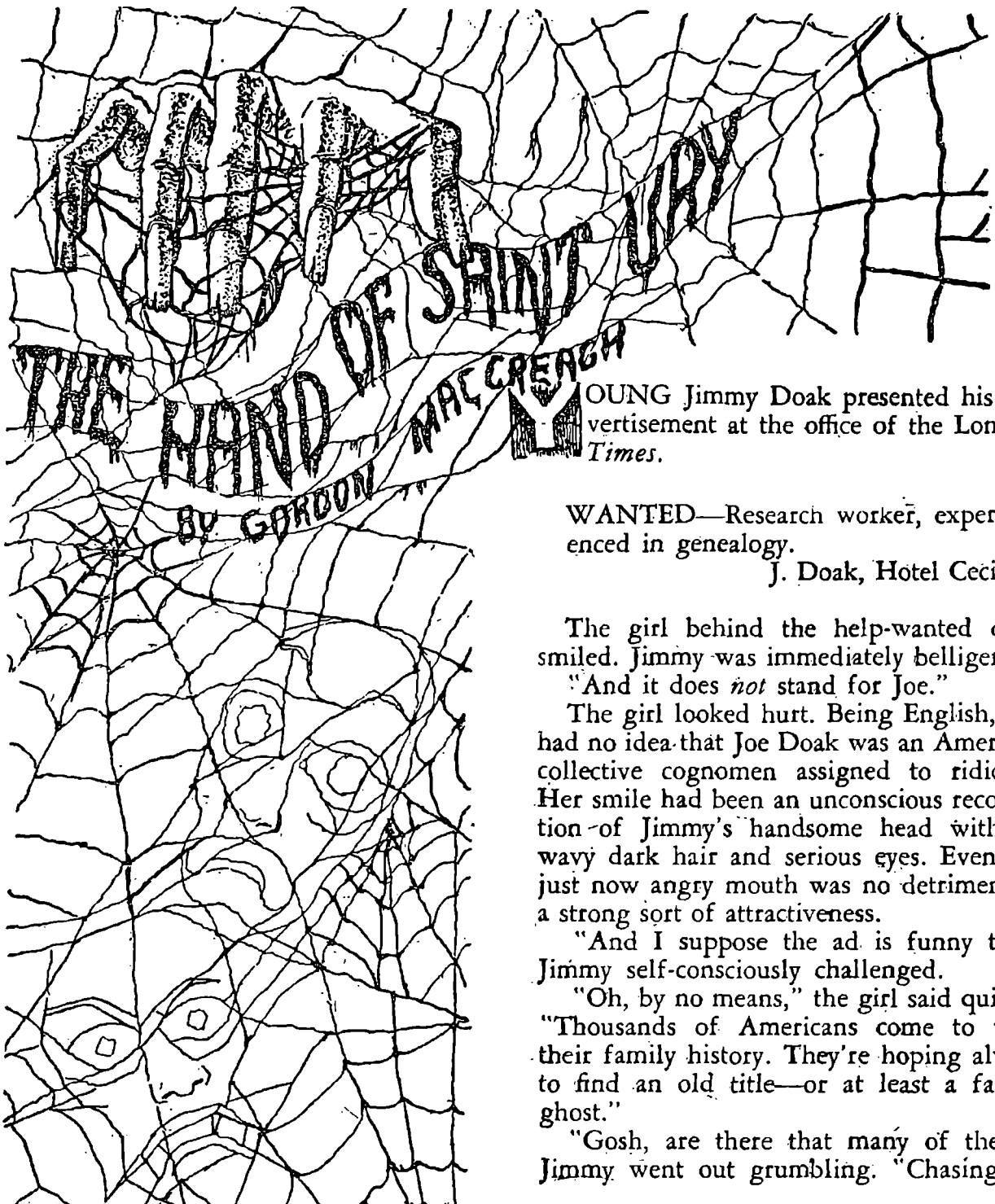
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D. McLLWRAITH, Editor



THE HAND OF SAINT VARY
BY GORDON MACCREGHA

YOUNG Jimmy Doak presented his advertisement at the office of the London Times.

WANTED—Research worker, experienced in genealogy.
 J. Doak, Hotel Cecil.

The girl behind the help-wanted desk smiled. Jimmy was immediately belligerent. "And it does *not* stand for Joe."

The girl looked hurt. Being English, she had no idea that Joe Doak was an American collective cognomen assigned to ridicule. Her smile had been an unconscious recognition of Jimmy's handsome head with its wavy dark hair and serious eyes. Even the just now angry mouth was no detriment to a strong sort of attractiveness.

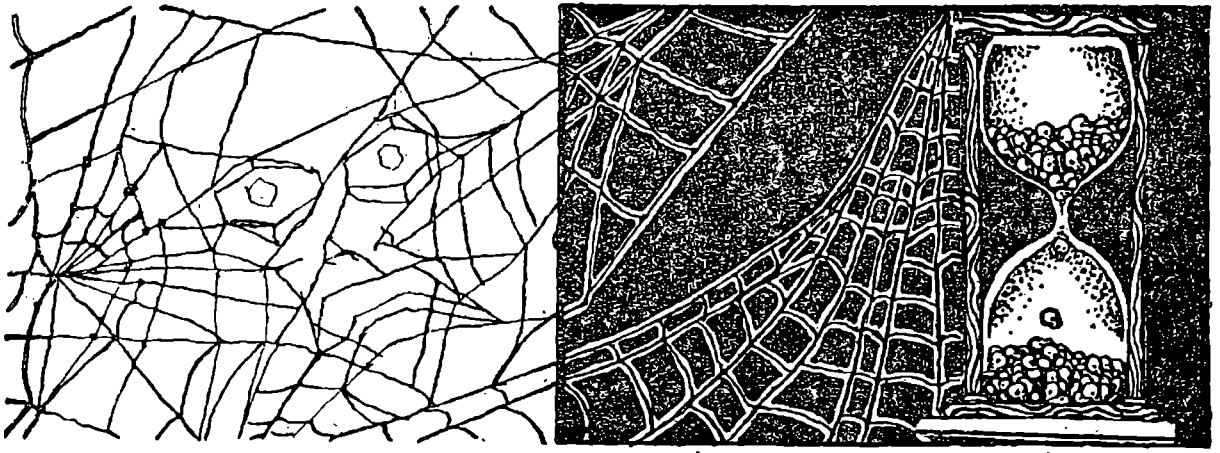
"And I suppose the ad is funny too?" Jimmy self-consciously challenged.

"Oh, by no means," the girl said quickly. "Thousands of Americans come to trace their family history. They're hoping always to find an old title—or at least a family ghost."

"Gosh, are there that many of them?" Jimmy went out grumbling. "Chasing an-



Heading by Charles A. Kennedy



tique families. I'd rather chase antiques."

Which is just what he went and did. It was in a little lost end of an alley off Marrowbone Road that he found a little lost Old Curiosity Shop that might have survived right out of Dickens, with a battered overhead sign and diamond pane windows and cobwebs all complete.

"Huh! Probably artificial." Jimmy had seen how spider webbing was made for American movies. "But good browsing, I expect."

That was just what the proprietor expected, too. He looked over the edge of his spectacles and invited crustily, "Just call me if you see anything as interests you." He went on picking at and polishing a trayful of the assorted rubbish that collects in a shop of that kind. A scuffling on a broad overhead shelf bothered him. He looked angrily through his eyebrows. "Blarsted nuisances! They don't usually get up there." But he did no more about it than go on with his work.

Jimmy presently brought a small jar to the counter. "What would you want for this majolica piece?"

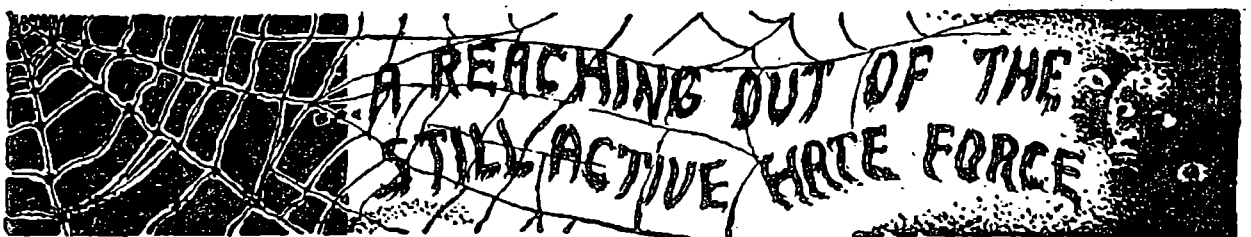
The old man was irritable but honest. "Well now, sir, I wouldn't delude you on that there. 'S a mattera'fact I don't believe it is genuine. You see—" The scuf-

fling and scrabbling overhead distracted him. "If I 'ad a 'undred bloomin' traps I couldn't keep the bloody pests down. I thought I 'ad 'em rid; but never 'eard 'em so bold as now." He was turning the jar over in his hands when forcefully shoved objects clinked overhead and a grizzly object fell with a dry plop onto the counter. Jimmy started back from it, grimacing sickly. The thing was a human hand! Old and dessicate, the fingers gruesomely half-hooked, as though in some last spasm. A thin tracery of spider webs spanned the contorted fingertips. A particular horror was a ring that rattled on the withered first joint of the index finger, held in place by the thicker bent joint. It might have been a signet or something set with two little red stones, almost like snake eyes.

As Jimmy recoiled, the proprietor poked at it gingerly himself. "Cawn't say as I like it myself, sir. A beastly sort of a piece, what?"

"What the hell is it?" Jimmy asked. "I mean, where—" The shop was mustily stuffy. Jimmy took off his overcoat and dropped it on the counter. "Where did you ever get a thing like that?"

"It's supposed to be the 'and of Saint Ury, sir; though I 'ave no idea 'oo 'e ever was. That 'ole through the middle is said to



be stigmata—what made 'im a saint, you know. Though if you awsk me," the man evinced all the disillusionment of an antiquarian "—I'd say somebody bloody well drove a nail through it."

Jimmy shuddered away. He left the jar there and went to examine things at the far end of the shop. But that horrid relic persisted in his vision. Almost as though some involuntary war activity of his own—shrapnel or something—had caused such a maiming that he had never known about but for which he might be indirectly to blame. He could imagine the broken thing, hating the world, and wanting to get back at him. He could find no pleasure in browsing.

"I think I'll be going," he said. "Some other time perhaps—"

The proprietor was stuffing his rubbish amongst the other clutter of his shelves. "It's orl right, sir. Glad to 'ave you look around, sir."

JIMMY took up his coat and went. He was barely round the corner when he heard footsteps pattering after him; and there was the proprietor, panting and furious.

"You give me back that there 'and, young man," he spluttered. "Or I'll 'ave to call the police."

Jimmy recoiled. "What d'you mean, the hand? D'you think I'd touch the filthy thing."

"You certainly did, young feller. I've seen the likes o' you before. There it was a'lyin' one minute, and the next thing you was gone and it, too. You with them big pockets." He dived at Jimmy and thrust his hands into the overcoat pockets—and there, out of one of them, he fished the horrid object.

Jimmy's stomach heaved. His mouth opened in protest; but he had to shut it again quickly to swallow his nausea.

"There we are!" The proprietor triumphed. "You bloody Yanks 'll swipe hanythink for a souvenir. Now just you pay me a pound, young man, and I'll say noth-ink about this."

"It's a racket!" Jimmy knew then. A

damned panel joint game. Slip something into the chump's pocket and then yelp about shoplifting.

"One pound." The proprietor held out an open hand. "Or I ups and whistles for them."

So what could Jimmy do but pay? He was here on business; he couldn't waste time in a court over a shameful charge of shoplifting. He went to his hotel more disgruntled than ever about this whole silly business. He spent a night dreaming about dried hands that crawled like hairy spiders all over his bed.

OVER a fantastic breakfast of bloaters on toast and porridge he was discreetly paged—not piercingly shouted for by any brass-buttoned midget. A desk clerk bent over his table.

"A lady to see you, sir."

"A lady? I—I don't think I know any ladies in London."

"In response to an advertisement of yours, sir."

Jimmy went rather uncertainly to the lobby. In his mind had been an idea that it was professorial men who did this sort of thing. He was quite glad that he had been wrong. A delightful picture awaited him; a girl, neatly dressed in something that showed a figure, with alert eyes in a fresh round face and a cute turned-up nose and full lips.

"I came in a hurry to be the first," she smiled at him ingenuously. "Because, frankly, I need the job, and the competition for this sort of thing is ferocious."

"Oh?" said Jimmy. "Are you—I mean, d'you know how to go about all this unpleasant business of digging up dead relatives?"

"Certainly, Mr. Doak. I have a certificate from the College of Heraldry." She fished papers out of a bag. "We are trained in all the various avenues of research. You wish, I presume, to trace your ancestry. Somewhere back from British stock, is it?"

Jimmy felt silly again. "It's just my dad. This name, you know. Like in a comic book. Well, Dad doesn't believe any human being was ever deliberately named Doak.

He thinks there must be some mix-up somewhere along the line. He's heard so many wisecracks about it, it's got to be a complex."

"Surely. We understand about that. Thousands of corruptions have crept into names during the illiterate middle ages and they got to be written by somebody who couldn't spell the nearest way to how somebody pronounced them; and then the pronunciation grew to follow the spelling. We have old books and records about all those things."

"You do seem to know all about it. Then you'll take on the chore?"

The girl smiled confidently. "That's what I came for." And then diffidently, "Er, we usually work on a day and expense basis."

Jimmy was feeling more at ease since he knew there were other people who wished they could be called something else. "Oh, of course. You need a retaining fee or something."

The girl had two distinct dimples. "I could use it. And I shall go straight to the museum and have some information for you by tomorrow morning. You might, in the meantime, call up the paper and cancel your advertisement. Right? Cheerio."

JIMMY got a *Times* to look up the telephone number—and there the horrid story stared him in the face.

"American Accused of Shoplifting"

The rewrite man was able to see what seemed to Jimmy to be a far-fetched British humor in his shameful experience; and it was worse even than he knew. The story went on: "So badly did this queer fellow want the relic that he apparently returned that night and broke into the shop to get it. A mystery note, however, comes in, for the police report that only a single small pane of glass was broken; and the extraordinary part of it all was that the glass was pushed out from the *inside!* Almost as though the thing had loved him at first sight, and had jumped out to him of its own volition. Sainly hands, of course, have been known to accomplish miracles more astounding than that."

What a foul thought! That a thing like

that should want to be friends! Jimmy had a creep all over to think of putting his hand into his pocket and finding the horny thing clasp his fingers. His next immediate reaction, naturally, was that he was a fugitive from lynx-eyed Scotland Yard. But the paper had given no description of him. He breathed easier, reflecting that the thing, after all, had no great value. It had remained, as its spider webs attested, on that top shelf for who knew how many years before it jumped down to— Jimmy, too, jumped from his chair with a hunted look. It had not been rats! If it had not jumped down of its own volition, how had the foul thing crawled into his pocket? Could it be really true that there were haunts in this old country of ancient traditions?

With a mad impulse Jimmy raced to his room to hunt through his coat pockets again. No. Thank God! Jimmy grinned sheepishly to himself. What a foolishness! But the beastly thing had made such a horrid impression on him. Why wouldn't it, getting into his pocket that way? Then Jimmy's eyes widened and he made a dash for his suitcase. Perhaps it— That damned reporter's loathesome suggestion that it had fallen in love with him—! He stood off to survey each tumbled article on the bed. His breath blew from him in a vast relief. He lit a comforting pipe and sat down to consider a reasonable theory for himself. The most reasonable one was that the proprietor, obviously a vile-tempered old crank, had flown into an insane rage and hurled the miserable thing through his own window pane. And then, repenting, he had gone out to retrieve the implement of his cunning racket, to find that some stray cat or something had run off with it, and he had been ashamed, then, to admit his silly rage.

"Bloody fool!" Jimmy expressed his quickly learned Anglicism. "And me too. This business of digging into dead men's pasts gets a guy morbid. But, phe-ew, what an experience!"

MORNING brought the girl, full of news and triumphant. "You never even asked my name," she blamed him and herself in the one breath. "And I was so

staggered with the amount of money you advanced that I just ran. I'm Eula Bogue." She dimpled. "It used to be Boggs—that's how I got into this research work. And I have lots of news. Let's sit down and look at it."

In businesslike manner she spread sheaves of notes over the little desk. "For just now let's never mind all the false starts. Let's look first at what seems to be a definite lead. It goes fascinatingly back. There seems to have been an old Anglo-Saxon name, Dork, or Dawk, or Dock, spelled half a dozen ways. Mostly north of England."

Jimmy whistled. "Whe-ee! As far back as that? Dad would sure be tickled. And it could be, I suppose, that it was twisted to Doak?"

"Oh, very possibly indeed. With the illiterate Puritan emigration from here, you know. And there's something even more exciting. Up in Cumberlandshire there's a little place called Dockbridge, apparently the family home town, and there's one of those fearfully old manor houses that's been built over and rebuilt and remodeled and it's full of rats and rattly windows and a mouldy library and a housekeeper and—it's vacant!" She finished all of that in one breath.

Jimmy was thrilling in response to her enthusiasm. "You mean, we could go there and dig in the library?"

"If," she said uncertainly, "you could—I mean, all you Americans are rich, aren't you—if you could afford to rent the place for a week or so."

"Gee!" said Jimmy. "A post-grad in ancient history! I'll cable Dad we've got a hot lead. So let's go."

DOCKBRIDGE manor house was not quite as Eula had described it. The more modern part was not full of rats and even had a bathroom. It was built on a knoll and apparently at one time there had been a moat, now a sunken garden of unkempt cannas and iris and weeds. There were crumbly walls and moss-grown mounds of masonry, some of which had been rock gardened and then left. Clearly, with the current austerity, it was too expen-

sive to keep up and now stood hopefully for rent.

The housekeeper, a gaunt lady dressed in ghostly gray, had lived so long with the older conventions that she turned a sternly disapproving eye on so modern an intrusion as a young man and a girl.

"I'm Mrs. Medford," she introduced herself. "And I'm as good a chaperone as any. So, if the young gentleman will carry the bags, I'll show you to your rooms."

She showed them to rooms discreetly separated at the two ends of a musty right-angled corridor. She had quite clearly moved her own things into a room right at the corner.

"So that, if you need 'elp, Miss, I'll 'ear your call."

"Why, the idea!" Eula flamed scarlet all round to the back of her neck.

"Oh, I down't mean from 'im, Miss. Though I wouldn't put it past 'im. We saw all about them good-lookin' Yanks during their invasion. It's just that old Sir 'arry's ghost miauws around moonless nights; 'im that was Prince Charlie's Marster of 'Orse when the old manor stood, what's foundations this is on."

Eula laughed gaily. "All my frowzy browsing"—as though she'd spent twenty years at it—"and I've never had a ghost yet."

The housekeeper's disapproval sank several notches lower. "It's you moderns as ain't no reverence. But I sees 'em!"

Jimmy stared at her. He was developing a habit of staring at these sudden surprises. Mrs. Medford seemed to be accustomed to surprising people. She added to this one, "You, sir, will not be 'earing the miaulin's and prowlin's on your side. You're over the old chapel. So your windows 'as the bars."

Jimmy looked his question at Eula, as though she ought to know all the conventions of old manors. The housekeeper offered the logical answer.

"Because them as don't say prayers regular goes balmy and jumps. I'll serve dinner before dark, sir and ma'am. We don't dress nowadays." She went sternly about her affairs.

"Is it an act?" Jimmy all unconsciously whispered it.

Eula giggled. "I think the poor soul has gone a little balmy herself, living alone in this mouldy old place. The library ought to yield pure gold. We'll dig tomorrow."

EVEN tomorrow's sun couldn't make a cheerful breakfast, because the morning paper had another item by the same rewrite man who dealt in humor.

NORTH LONDON DRUNKS HAVE A NEW HEEBIE-JEBIE

It's not pink elephants any more for a party of late home-stragglers from the Coach and Horn pub on the Lincoln Road. It's five-legged spider the size of a saucer that runs along the dark gutters with the speed of a greyhound.

Well, of course, there was nothing so much to that. But Jimmy stared at the paper with a reluctant horror. For the item went on:

Curious verification comes from two boys—models of rectitude, their parents insist—who say they saw it by dawn's gray light, scuttling along a country lane ten miles farther North in Middlesex. Only, to their juvenile imaginations, not so far removed from fairy lore—

This was the part that held Jimmy's eyes in their wide stare.

—it looked more like a hand running on its fingertips.

"What's the matter?" Eula was alarmed at Jimmy's pallor.

He pushed the paper to her, waited while she read the item, and to her answering stare said, "Did you see the one about the Yank shoplifting a dead hand, and then the broken window?" And, as she nodded, he silently pointed his finger to his own chest.

"You? Good heavens! But you didn't, of course."

"No, I wouldn't touch the filthy thing.

But—you know more about these antique incubi. What does it all mean? Why is it following me north?"

Eula was, for the first time, serious. "Why do you say 'incubi'? As though this one were hung onto you. Of course, we do have a lot of spooky legends in an old country like this; some of them accepted as authentic by professors of psychic lore; such as the Glastonbury crypt and the Monster of Glamis Castle. But a dried hand—" She closed her eyes in tight thought. "Wait a minute. Let me think. What is it about, somewhere, a 'hand of glory'?— But no. That's just black magic."

"Just black magic." Jimmy repeated it. "That's all. So what is this? A pure white symbol of grace?"

Eula made herself laugh again. "Oh, it's all rubbish! Some drunks have a D.T. and some boys read about it and let their imaginations run. This is our usual summer hysteria—to fill up space in the paper when there's no crime. You'll see."

AND within a couple of days they did see. A *Times* reader correspondent, and amateur entomologist, wrote a solemn article decrying hysteria and offered his theory that a tarantula (a large Central-American spider, he injected his educational note) might very easily have been imported with a bunch of bananas and that, like all the arachnidae, was capable of running with a considerable speed that, to people under the influence of liquor—etc., etc.

"There! You see?" said Eula. "Now perhaps you can help me with some of this mouldy reading."

The reading proved to be exciting. The library, although a muddle of volumes saved up from, it seemed, the beginning of printing, but never indexed, contained ancient tomes of incunabula, and even manuscript.

"Priceless!" Eula mooned over the mess. "I mean, even in money. And to think that the owner never comes here, nor, I suppose, has ever opened a book."

The housekeeper stood at the door. She had an uncanny memory for having, once upon a time, dusted some volume and, if

any of the old family names had appeared, remembering them.

"'E don't come," she stated like a Hecuba, "because this 'ouse gives 'im the 'orrors."

"I think," said Jimmy, "some of these books all about battle and murder and sudden death would give me the horrors if I should read them all."

"That's out of the prayer book," Mrs. Medford accused him. "Which, if you doesn't say it reverent, the Lord says the blasphemers shall perish. And if you'd a but told me you was a'unting for old family names, I'd a told the young lady, pore thing, to look in that there book with the brown binding ate by roaches."

"Why poor thing?" Eula grimaced.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Medford.

Only that, "Aa-ah!" and she drifted grayly out.

But the book proved to be some of the gold mine Eula had expected.

"Look! Oh, looky! Here's 'Ye Hystorie of ye Familye of ye Noble Sieur Armand D'Auk wyth his Battailles and his Hon-neurs.' "

"They sure thought up long titles in those days," Jimmy obtusely said.

"Yes, but don't you see, Silly? There's your name! D'Auk!—Dork, Dock, Doak, and I suppose dozens of other spellings. Norman origin, not Anglo-Saxon. I expect we'll be finding your dad to be one of our oldest families."

"Golly!" said Jimmy. "Damn if I don't think it may be. Can you read that olde Englyshe stuff?"

"Of course. What the roaches haven't eaten. And—it seems there ought to be three more volumes of it. Perhaps Mrs. Medford knows where to find—we must get a ton of paper and you take the notes while I puzzle it all out."

THE excitement of this find was such that they didn't read the morning paper until the afternoon. And then both looked at each other, questioning what each thought. For a sober scientist had written his screed to the *Times*, attacking with all the virulence of scientists the "insufficiently in-

formed" opinion of a layman who dared to shoot off his mouth.

A tarantula, he maintained, while capable of moving with considerable speed when attacking its food, was a creature as sedentary as a wolf spider or a common household daddy-long-legs; that all of them spent their life span within a circumscribed radius of perhaps no more than fifty feet; that the distance of ten miles was ridiculous to the point of impossibility; and that there this thing that the boys had seen in upper Middlesex, whatever else it might be, was certainly not a tarantula; and furthermore, a tarantula was not a nocturnal hunter nor could it withstand the night temperatures of the English countryside; and, if it could, it would be in a lethargic and dormant condition.

His thorough disposal of that matter left Jimmy's dark question:

"Then what was it? If not my—" his inadvertent slip brought a shiver. "If not that damned hand?"

Eula reassured him. "Oh, what does it matter what it was? A something. A scurrying rat, a rabbit, an anything. We've got much more exciting things here to speculate about. Look. This D'auks whole name was The Sieur Armand D'Auk D'Auberge and—" She suddenly clapped her hands. "Why, there it is! D'Auk D'Auberge— From which, following Grimm's law of colloquial sublimation, we get Dockbridge. This very village and the manor. Now for some of his 'battailles' and his 'honneurs', and there ought to be his 'offsprynges' somewhere."

THE research, while fascinating, was jarred to a standstill more than once by the morning paper that both of them avidly scanned for any follow-up on the tarantula that couldn't be a tarantula. The rewrite man was not laughing any more. He was calling it now, "The Spider Horror." There was the item about a lady, a stern and very well-balanced social worker, who was going home late from her church meeting and had been attacked by the Horror!

"I saw it in the moonlight," she related to her interviewer. "Scurrying along like a

—well, like something I, for one, had never seen before. So I struck at it with my umbrella and—now I cannot truthfully say that it snarled at me; but I could see its wicked little red eyes; and then it leaped at me! At least three or four feet, the distance must have been from my umbrella end. And it caught me by the ankle and threw me down; and then I suppose—no, I have never fainted. I should say not. But then I don't know what happened. When I came to—I mean, when I could see again, it was gone."

"Did you notice," Jimmy pointed out, "where that happened? In Leicestershire."

"Well, so what?"

"Still coming north! Following!"

Eula shrank away, envisioning a dead, mummified hand's relentless coming. "But, Jimmy, it *can't* be! She saw its red eyes, she said."

"The ring!"

Eula's hand covered her lips. "D'you really think the thing is after you for some weird reason? Like a voodoo or something?"

"How should I know? I don't know anything about voodoo."

"But, coming from America, isn't that sort of in your back yard? Your Negroes, you know; and Haiti. Don't they kill chickens with their teeth and project occult 'sendings'? Little dolls and snakes and things to go and carry curses and—?"

"Helluva idea you've got of America," Jimmy growled.

"Well, I've read it somewhere. And you're the one who insists it's following you. Jimmy, I'm afraid."

"You're afraid?"

"Yes, because—I mean, if it's as real as that; not just summer hysteria; and if it can jump at a strong-minded lady who hits it with an umbrella and can catch her by the leg and throw her down, it could—" She shivered close to him.

It was Jimmy's rôle to comfort her. "Well, at least it didn't bite her when her strong mind went out like a weak light. After all, what *can* it do, wandering about the country like a homeless ghost—" He wished immediately he had not said that.

"What I mean, what gave me the willies was just looking at the beastly thing. Come on, let's lunch."

Mrs. Medford supplied a skimpy lunch. "Seein' as 'ow the hiceman didn't come, the cold chicken went bad, so I gave it to Lady Jane."

Lady Jane was her woolly poodle that yapped at flies and assiduously hunted cockroaches in baseboard corners. The skimpiness of the lunch didn't matter because Mrs. Medford banished all appetite, remarking out of nothing:

"It's a'comin' 'ome!"

Both Jimmy and Eula sat suddenly stiff in their chairs. Mrs. Medford answered their stares with, "I've read it in the paper, same's you 'ave." To which she added the shock. "And me bein' a seventh daughter, I *seen* it!"

"Good Lord!" Jimmy had until now been willing to accept Eula's comforting theory that he had received a gruesomely strong impression and was attaching it to similarly gruesome accounts in the newspaper. "What d'you mean, it's coming home and you've 'seen' it?"

"I don't know, sir, just what it means. All I can say is, I was a'setting with me old friend, Mrs. Shaughnessy, she being psychic (physic, she pronounced it) and all a sudden I seen it in the dark before my mind's eye. A yuman 'and it was and it was nailed to a board! And Mrs. Shaughnessy she says, 'If you seen it, that means it must belong in your 'ouse, else why wouldn't I seen it too?'"

Jimmy, sanely unaccustomed to the jargons and hallucinations of psychics, flouted the phantasmagoria. "You've been reading the horror story in the paper and so you sat wishing for spooks and you dreamed the picture up in your imagination." And he repeated his self encouragement. "After all, what could a thing like that do?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Medford. "Aa-ah!"

The paper showed what it could do.

"A Mister Bill Dibbs," it reported, "of Kirkby-Sheperd in Westmoreland, a gentleman who has had his difficulties with Lord Gravely's gamekeeper, was strolling home with two dogs and a gun—harmlessly en-

joying the moonlit night, he insists—when his dogs flushed the 'Spider Horror' out of a ditch. The thing raced, he reports, along the edge of the road with incredible speed. He just happened, he says, to have had a cartridge in his gun and he would have shot the whatever it was, but for the dogs that were too close after it. They chased it into a copse and there he heard all the frenzied barking and scuffling of what might have been a rabbit hunt. Until suddenly one of the dogs let out a piercing yelp and came cringing back to him in apparent terror, as though it might have found a bear, and the other dog was ominously silent. His gun ready for emergency, he entered the shadows of the copse to investigate, and there, to his consternation, found his dog dead. Strangled! Choked, Mr. Dibbs said, as though by some strong man. The game-keeper reports having found nothing more menacing than rabbits in all the surrounding woods. The local police opinion is that it is funny that all these untoward happenings always occur at night and always to unreliable people."

Jimmy's only question to all this was, "Where's Westmoreland?"

"The shire just south of Cumberland where we are." Eula clung to his arm. "Jimmy, it can't be true, is it?"

"Comin' 'ome!" Jimmy quoted. "What do you in England do about getting a gun? And who is there who can tell us about the aims and motivations of this sort of thing? The whole works, I mean. All these stories add up to it can't be anything other than that brutal hand thing I saw in the store. The 'Hand of Saint Ury', he said; and not holy stigmata, but a nail hole. And our gray ghost woman threw her fit and saw it nailed to a board. So, very well, who can tell us what turned it loose. How? Why it's crawling home at night? Why pick on this place—on *me*—all the way up from London. If it gets here, what's it good for—or bad for? Who can tell us all about the rules and regulations of the haunt union?"

Eula frowned out of the window. "There's a whole lot of psychic investigators. I think the best would be possibly Dr. Eugene Harries. He's one of the W. T.

Stead Foundation and a member of the Psychic Research Society. They go about shooting holes into the ghost stories that crop up every now and then and they publish a bulletin about their findings. What I don't like is that every now and then, too, they find some horrid thing that they can't laugh off."

"Let's invite him in and throw the whole thing into his lap," said Jimmy promptly. "So we can put in a little time on our own work on ye olde Brityshe Families. The deeper we dig into the tomes, the better Dad will be pleased. Heck, make us Doaks respectable old-timers, and I'll hold him up to pay for our honeymoon."

"Wha-a-at?" Eula sprang away from him and put the great old carved desk between them, her eyes wider than at any time over Mrs. Medford's revelations.

"Well, we Doakses have to be respectable; and it would be the only way to quell Mrs. Medford's disapproving eye."

"Good—heavens!" The shock was burning Eula all the way up to her hair, rising like a red flame. "You Americans are certainly sudden. Is that the way you always propose?"

"Sometimes they do it in an automobile or some such romantic spot; but I figure you Englishers, with all your haunts and such, would have to be different."

Eula was recovering some of her composure. "Here we almost never marry our boss. We have too much work to do."

"Work to do *together*," Jimmy said. "Come on and dig. We've been neglecting the gold mine."

IT TURNED out to be, as Jimmy awesomely said, a dynamite mine! Though, when they first found it, they were thrilled.

"Ooh, look! The Sieur D'Auk was 'Lord of ye High Justice and ye Middle and ye Low' and a 'ryghte valliante Carryer of ye Crosse'."

"Does that mean a preacher? Another Saint?"

"No, silly. A crusader. He went to slaughter paynims."

"That makes us Doakses a whole lot respectable."

"And here's your—this is jolly exciting—here's Saint Ury!"

"I don't see him."

"You're not looking at the book. He isn't in my hair. Here—Benoit De La Ceinture. Benoit of the Belt. He wasn't a saint at all. He was seneschal of ye keepe—that means post commander while ye doughtie crusader was away. And then, as understanding of Norman French died out, our old colloquial adaptation law turned Ceinture into Saint Ury."

FURTHER investigation made him very far from a saint, and the two investigators sat looking at each other with gray faces.

The doughty crusader had come back, as crusaders did in those pre-telegraphic days, without notice and he found, as other warriors have, that his ladye faire whom he left to languish through his long absence had been more friendly than was thought proper, even in those days, with the captain of the home guard. Having the rights of

the High Justice and the Middle and the Low, he flew into a right noble rage and struck off the seneschal's offending right hand and spiked it to the great oaken door of the keep for all to see how the penalties of philandering were paid, naming at the same time the child—the second of his house—"a bastarde by fulle acknowledgement and herebye sundered from alle inheritance."

Jimmy put his own right hand over Eula's cold one. "So that's the Hand of Saint Ury. And it's coming home!" He essayed a lame joke. "Perhaps that leaves us Doaks not so awfully respectable."

"Don't joke about it," Eula shuddered. "Your line could have come from the earlier child and you'd be a descendant of D'Auk."

Jimmy did not perceive the dire import of this until Doctor Eugene Harries arrived. The doctor elaborated his theories of the case with professional obscurity.

"Interesting. Most interesting! From what you tell me, we must indubitably ac-

cept this scuttling creature of the dark as the hand of which you have traced the history. Quite clearly one of our more authentic cases."

"So all right," said Jimmy. "So it's a dead hand that was once nailed to the front door here, and it existed around somewhere and finally gathered cobwebs in an antique store. What I want to know is, what suddenly wakes it up? How? Why is it scuttling the night roads back to here? Who's it after?"

"Ah!" said the doctor, much as Mrs. Medford might. "These things are not very easy to explain. There is an old occult theory, now being almost reaccepted, that thoughts are *physical* forces; that a thought of hate can be a powerful enough force to persist after the death of its originator." He held up his hand. "A moment, please. I say the theory of thought force is being reaccepted in these modern days because you have the experiments of your own Dr. Rhine in America, who seems to have established that a concentrated thought can control so material a function as the roll of dice. In your big University of Ohio, isn't it?"

"Yes," Jimmy was closely following. "But that's a *live* thought."

"Ah!" the doctor said again. "But let us explore that liveness. A thought, an admittedly tangible force, has been created and projected into the, shall we say, surrounding ether? Where, then, is it, and for how long may it persist? To explain which very evanescent query let us consider the modern analogy of radio. A tangible impulse is projected. Where is it? It is everywhere. It can affect a properly tuned receiver at a great distance. It has been shown to circulate the earth with a certain perceptible time lapse and a diminished power that, however, can still affect a sufficiently delicately attuned receiver. Very well then; if once, we may logically assume the possibility of twice, or more, ad infinitum. Given, then, a sufficiently sensitive receiver, where, we may ask, is the point of extinction? The what you call *dead* hand is in this case the receiver, exactly attuned to the wave length of the powerfully projected thought of hate

because it was a part of the original projector."

"SOUNDS hideously reasonable. But that's drawing it pretty thin, isn't it?"

"Admittedly so. But, the possibility accepted, the point is not one of tenuity but of capability to affect the receiver. In the case of radio, to make it talk; which means, first, to affect *physically* a receiving element and *make it move!* To revitalize it! To make it repeat the impulse that was originally projected!"

Jimmy and Eula were both hanging on the doctor's words with a growing unease. "You mean, this hate force could affect a damned thing like that hand and make it move? Well, then, why didn't it hit it long ago? I mean, any time after it whatever way got loose off the board where it couldn't run. What suddenly tuned it in now?"

The doctor beamed benignly upon his class of two. "We have considered, so far, the analogy of diminishing, though persisting, wave lengths or impulses. Let us now consider another ancient theory of magic that has been accepted by modern science—that of transmutation. We have derided the middle-age mystics for their belief in the transmutation of baser metals into gold. But our quite latest experiments have shown that the very atomic structure of so dead a substance as a metallic ore, when bombarded by certain electronic impulses, can be transmuted to another arrangement of its nuclei; that what we have called dead matter can be vitalized to become something so devastating as a bomb."

"That one," said Jimmy, "seems to be drifting far afield."

"By no means. The principle established, who, in these days, will be bold enough to set a limit upon material or transmuting agent? The analogy is that within *you*, the descendant of this Sieur D'Auk persist the genes that create a, let us no longer say, *psychic* force, but a tangible electronic—we used to call it, magnetic—emanation that bombards the dormant atomic structure of the too glibly called *dead* hand. Your presence, then, in the shop was what vitalized its implanted hate force and released it to

exhibit its present destructive manifestation."

"Hate! Hate! Hate!" It sobbed from Eula. "And I suppose you mean that this hateful thing is now scuttling along the gutters, coming home; and it somehow wickedly knows that the descendant of the man who cut it off is here and it will exact some horrible vengeance."

DR. HARRIES looked at Jimmy and very soberly nodded. Jimmy asked his question for the third time, and not with any doubting scorn.

"Just what can it do?"

"We have so far," the doctor weighed the possibilities with merciless impartiality, "discussed only the material sources of its potential; and we know from the reports that it can strangle a hunting hound. We must accept the probability, then, that it could also strangle a man. If we are willing to admit the psychic sources of power—as they are today being admitted in studies of the abnormal strength displayed by lunatics—we must face the possibility that it could be deadly dangerous, not only to the object of its vengeance, but to any interference that might stand in the way of its purpose."

To Eula's close shudder against him Jimmy grunted. "Hm-mm!" But his tight-mouthed expression showed that he was no longer taking this thing as lightly as he once had. "I suppose," he asked, not very hopefully, "it's no use trying to run away? If the cursed thing can run on its fingertips under its own power it could follow anywhere. What's chances of it running out of gas?"

"We have no means of knowing," the doctor said judicially. "Records of our Society show that destructive forces from the mysterious 'other side' have been known to persist for many hundreds of years."

"That would eventually wear me out," Jimmy said. "We may as well stay here and fight it. . . How?"

"There remains," the doctor said hopefully, "yet another consideration. You have observed that it made no attempt to harm *you* that first day of your meeting. It has

retaliated only against those who have molested it—the umbrella woman, the poacher's dog. It is just possible, then—if I may offer a slightly embarrassing surmise—that its smuggling of itself into your pocket and the subsequent following may have been induced by motives of affection."

"Good Lord!" Jimmy's eyes boggled. "What d'you mean, affection from a foul thing like that?"

"Well, it might just be, you know, that—er—your branch of the family descended from that illegitimate offspring and that the hand, or rather its original owner, was your ancestor."

"Godamighty!" Jimmy shuddered away from the thought. "And it wants to snuggle up? Crawl out of the dark and hold hands? Get into bed on cold nights and—"

Eula shrieked. Jimmy looked quickly at her, for the moment forgetful of the impending horror. Eula shrank away from so fearful a connection.

"In any event," the doctor said, "the possibilities of this whole manifestation are so intriguing—quite one of our most authentic cases, I'm sure—that, if you would invite me, I would, despite the many dangers, have to consider it my scientific duty to stay and offer such assistance as I may."

Eula caught at him, not to let him go. "Oh, please! We're so helpless and—frightened. We wouldn't know what ever to do." It was not occurring to her that she had no inescapable part in this hideous thing, that she could pack and go.

"Would you advise," Jimmy asked, "that we should be armed?"

"By all means, and immediately. We must accept the surmise that the thing is coming here, and a force like that, if not benevolent, could be devastating, since it is a 'walker of the night'. Er, this tall lady in gray whom I have seen hovering in the background, could she be relied upon in a situation of danger involving, we must be prepared to accept, certain aspects of supernatural horror?"

"She's one of the three Norns," Eula said. "She lives with all the horrors of this house. If she approves of you she will let you stay."

Mrs. Medford did approve of Dr. Harries as being one who could understand her "physic" manifestations. And Dr. Harries approved of her idea of sitting in seance with her friend Mrs. Shaughnessy. "There is always a possibility," he said, "that out of these visualizations impressed upon the subconscious by wandering thought forces—spirits, as the faithful call them—one may obtain useful information, as one does also occasionally from people under hypnosis."

THE seance turned out to be a distressful affair of meanings and shriekings and dire threats. Mrs. Shaughnessy first moaned and shook and went into her trance, out of which she announced that a "dark spirit" filled the room and wanted to "get through," but not through her; it wanted to "control" someone closer to the house. Whereupon Mrs. Medford went through the moans and shudders and sat finally in a rigid coma. Till a ventral voice croaked from her.

"I'm 'ere," it said. "Not 'ere, but in this 'ouse before it was 'ere. I'm a'lookin' out a winder onto the cabbage garden; which they ain't cabbages but mossy cobblestones. And there's people an' soldiers in harmor an' lords in velvet an'—" Suddenly she shrieked. "I see 'im! There 'e comes! Shoved along by soldiers in harmor and all a'draggin' of iron chains. I see 'im! A 'orrid great 'airy man!" She shook and groaned the anguishes of the hairy man.

"It was a horrid great hairy hand," Jimmy fitted into the picture.

Mrs. Medford shouted out of her temporary quiescence. "E lifts them 'ands in their chains an' rattles 'is fists. A'cursin' 'e is. Eatin' an' drinkin', 'e says. 'Wakin' an' sleepin', Livin' an' dyin', I'll be awaitin' you, Lord of the Auberge. An' the velvet lord laughs and says 'e, 'Let the judgment of the 'igh Justice be carried out'." And then suddenly she clutched at her wrist and writhed in fearful resistance and shrieked agony again; and then she slumped down in a quivering heap of moaning and muttering semi-consciousness.

Jimmy and Eula came out of the dark

room shivering, Eula unconsciously chafing her own wrist. Dr. Harries was not so much impressed. "So many of these manifestations," he evaluated the experiment, "although the faithful insist that they are 'spirit-controlled', can be ascribed to demonstrations of the subconscious. Impressions formed in not too well balanced and sensitive minds out of reading or hearsay are portrayed with fearful reality. This phenomenon is, in fact, the explanation of visions of saints or Madonnas. Although," he was coldly judicious, "we cannot entirely dismiss the possibility that the sensitive medium, the receiving instrument, having been impressed by some wave length from an outside source. We have witnessed, then, either a visualization of subconscious impressions or—" his acceptance of the possibility was frightening—"a reaching out of the still active hate force. We can do nothing about it until the hand is here."

IT WAS Lady Jane who served notice that it had somewhere furtively arrived. Out of the dusk came the piercing ki-yies of a poodle frightened to the near death and the creature staggered, rather than ran, under a chair, there to continue its shuddering yelpings.

"So all right then," Jimmy said through tight teeth. "What can be done in the way of protection?" He did not say, in the way of offensive fight.

"Ah!" said Dr. Harries, this time signifying meditation. "If we but knew how to immunize you—that is to say, throw some sort of an impervious blanket about you, as is accomplished by lead in our analogy of radioactive force, we might shut off your emanations from continuing to vitalize the thing."

"Well," Jimmy's very impotence flared to anger, "I'm not doing it on purpose!"

"Of course not. Though that, too, may be an unconscious possibility; since we know that such activation can be consciously projected by such people as the so-called wizards of mediaeval history and by African witch doctors in our present. Protection is supposedly supplied by various 'magic circles' and 'holy pentagrams' and so on,

although I do not attach much faith in these myself. More credible is another one of the scouted mediaeval beliefs in the potency of cold iron against what they called witchcraft—which accounts for the spiking of the hand to the door with a nail, the spiking of suicides, supposedly dissatisfied and homeless spirits, through their middles, iron coffins, and so on. Which belief has persisted into our own times in the form of iron amulets, iron crosses, whether as medals or over grave stones. Unfortunately we cannot enclose you in an iron coffin; and in order to spike down the hand again we must first catch it."

"Like catching a cobra. How about," said Jimmy grimly, "the cold iron of a gun?"

"The possibility is acceptable. Since, if such a thing could be disintegrated—say, by a shotgun at close range—while the hate force would not necessarily be dissipated, its physical medium of offense would be shattered."

Jimmy drew a long breath of almost relief. But the doctor mercilessly continued. "We might then be rid of the whole business—unless the force might still persist in some telekinetic form that could move other objects so as to, for example, push a brick off a high wall." To Jimmy's hunted bafflement he offered the cold cheer, "The question of exactly why a brick, or even paint, falls upon the 'unlucky' person has never been sufficiently explored."

"Well, I'm going right into town," Jimmy said, "and buy a sawed-off shotgun."

"Or perhaps," Doctor Harries suggested with that chilly acceptance of the worst possible, "you might get two. And perhaps, although it is still daylight, I might accompany you as an escort."

THEY returned with an arsenal and, in addition, two gaunt boxer dogs. "If they catch it scuttling about the house gutters," Jimmy told Eula, "and between them tear it apart; or eat it; I guess it'll be considerably disintegrated."

Eula's face contorted over so sickening a thought. "I suppose they would at least keep it on the run. But that poacher's dogs—"

That first night after the thing's arrival was a bedlam of scurrings and furious barkings that yielded nothing. Stealthy noises sounded in the unkempt garden. The dogs yelped their excitement after whatever it might be and galloped their great feet hither and yon like mad dray horses. At each disturbance Jimmy and the doctor stood alertly at windows that overlooked the dark grounds. They could discern the shadowy forms of the great dogs racing through moon patches, but not a thing else.

"Of course," the doctor suggested. "It could still be rats."

"Oh, rats!" Eula expressed her English idiom of disbelief.

"Perhaps we'll at least find tracks in the morning," Jimmy hoped, "and then we'll at least be sure."

Such tracks as they found besides those of the dogs were indecipherable smudges.

"Did the thing," Dr. Harries asked, "when you saw it in the shop, have long

fingernails?" And he evaluated the situation so far. "We can at all events assume that the thing is nocturnal, as are nearly all of these darker forces. We may, therefore, feel safe during the day—or fairly so—if we do not venture into dark places. We know that it avoids overwhelming weight, as of two ferocious dogs; also that it is cunning enough to do so, and, as in the poacher's case, to segregate them and attack one at a time. And since it has remained furtive, has not shown itself, we must, I am sorry to say, resign ourselves to the ultimate fact that its purpose is definitely malignant and that it is intelligent enough to be deadly."

"If we could hunt it down by daylight then?" Jimmy expressed a hope. "We can't just go on, knowing that a hellish something in the shape of a great hairy hand is skulking somewhere about the grounds, waiting for darkness to jump out at somebody and tear his throat out."

"If we could but find it. Its grizzly advantage is that it is small enough to hide in any of a thousand holes in the ancient tumbled masonry, while the hate force that activates it is powerful enough to be murderous."

Mrs. Medford knew where to find it. "It's livin' in the root cellar!" she told them; and before they asked her, "I seen it!"

"With the 'physic' eye, I suppose," the doctor said. "But let's take our guns and go look."

THE root cellar was a dim vault of great stones behind a massive door, cool and mouldy. Holes where stones had fallen out dripped water. Bins along the walls contained potatoes and the gross turnips that country folk and cattle ate. The doctor with inadequate flashlight scrutiny surmised it to have been one of those sunless guard houses for prisoners in the old days of brutality and insanitation.

"Hell!" Jimmy swore. All this uncertainty and impending menace was wearing on his nerves. "There's a million hidie holes. If we could rig an extension light from the house perhaps—?"

"We would still not be able to explore all these holes. Who knows how deep they may burrow into the namks. We would need ferrets, as in a rabbit warren." And he could not refrain from adding his inevitable note of warning. "And we know it is vastly more dangerous than a rabbit."

A scuffling noise in a dim corner whirled both of them around. A choked squeak came from Jimmy's throat and spasmodically he blasted both barrels of his gun in that direction. The flash beam showed that he had very thoroughly disintegrated some onions and a rat.

"And we do know," the doctor mused as though studying a continuous theory, "that it immediately retaliates against aggression." His scientific approach, even in the face of danger, was excruciating. Acrid fumes of nitro powder drove them from the enclosed space.

"My God!" Jimmy coughed. "What a pessimist!"

"We cannot afford," the doctor rumbled, "to be optimistic about any force that operates in the darkness. It is not a mere Christian superstition that light and benevolence are compatible. All we can do is be desperately careful." Over the late meal he suggested, "I would advise, Miss Bogue, that you sleep in the same room with our so formidable housekeeper."

Eula fluttered her wide spread fingers at the prospect. "I'd be more afraid than—"

"And I," the doctor said, "will move in with Mr. Doak. I would also suggest contiguous rooms—in this old chapel wing with the barred windows."

So it came that the four of them foregathered that night to peer down at pandemonium all round the house. A crashing of bushes, a mad galloping of feet and yelping dogs, at times both together, furiously chasing a something; and then again in separate confusion, the one in a hysteria under something too high in a bush to reach, and the other equally convinced that it had something cornered in a drain. And then the watchers witnessed a horror in the moonlight.

One of the great dogs lurched out of

the shadows, coughing and choking, and staggered loose-legged across a strip of lawn. In the uncertain light it looked for a moment as though it held a limp something in its jaws and furiously shook it. But as its head writhed from side to side they could see that nothing was in its jaws; but that a something hung from its throat and was not at all limp!

JIMMY and the doctor snatched their guns and raced downstairs and out. But the dog had by that time staggered into the darkness of bush shadows. Calling brought no response. Not even from the other one!

"We had better not venture too far into the shadows," the doctor warned. "Nor leave the women alone."

At the door both stood for a moment shocked back on their heels.

"My God, we left it open!"

Within the house no worse was immediately apparent than that Mrs. Medford was shuddering back out of a swoon, Eula chafing her hands. Water profusely splashed from the old-fashion wash basin indicated the process of revivment.

"Gaw!" Mrs. Medford mumbled. "I seen it."

"Well, you've seen it before," Eula said crossly, "and you didn't go off like this and leave me all alone."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Medford. "But this time I seen it real. A 'orrible 'airy 'and it were."

"She could not," Doctor Harries said precisely, "have identified it in the uncertain light out from these upper windows. However, since the door was momentarily unguarded, we must sit up, and together, for the rest of the night."

Jimmy was furious with everything in the world; particularly with himself for his uncontrolled nerves that had permitted the door to stand wide. "Yeh," he rasped. "Sit up and tell ghost stories." His hand nervously caressed his throat.

Eula sent him a reproachful look. "He was only warning us."

"Perhaps," said the doctor, "I have not

impressed the warning sufficiently, even upon myself. Or we would not have left open that door. We shall know more in the morning."

All that they knew in the morning was that both dogs were dead. Both heavy-jawed faces contorted and tongues hanging out thickly black.

"Ye-es." The doctor hissed it slowly. "Cunning enough to have run them to exhaustion, confused them and taken one at a time. We must, while daylight lasts, make a very thorough search of every room in this house."

"And since dogs are no good," Jimmy said, "I'll go into town and hire a night watchman. Arm him, by God, with a battery of flashlights and a machine-gun."

JIMMY returned late. "Had a helluva job to find anybody who'd take the chore on. Not at old Dockbridge Manor, they popped their eyes. Why not? Well, there were jaunts there. Not relatives, 'black things'; and there were dead men's bones under the house, they had a legend; and so every damned yokel was scared. . . But I got a great lout finally. He'd been a guard in the Whitehaven prison; he says, and he'd watch a graveyard if he was paid. D'you find anything in the house?"

Dr. Harries shook his head. "We found only uncertainty; more nerve-racking than discovery. There are rat holes by the dozens in the dark corners of closets and cupboards. Holes large enough through broken plaster for cats to pass. I wish to heaven, since dogs are usless, we might hire a leopard or something that could adequately see in the dark."

It was almost a relief of the uncertainty that night to be awakened by Eula's screams from the next room. Rushing in, the two found her hysterical in Mrs. Medford's arms. Mrs. Medford darkly gave the answer.

"This time *she* seen it! I was a'sleepin' peaceful as a babe when I up and 'eard 'er a'screechin', 'There it is!', and I says, where?, and whatever she seen was so 'orrible, she went off like this."

Eula, shuddering back to normalcy, clung to Jimmy, her arms about his neck. "Take

me away!" she moaned. "Oh, take me away, Jimmy, from this fearful place."

All the comfort that Jimmy could give was, "I could let *you* go away. But it would be no use my running too. We know it can relentlessly follow. I've got to stick it out here. Isn't that right, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid so. Flight would be only a postponement, and here we at least know the conditions. This thing must be met and—since we don't know how to immunize its power source—it must be destroyed. *If* its power is destructible. Try to tell us, if you can, just what you saw."

Eula pointed shakily to the window. "Out there. I couldn't sleep, of course; and from the bed I could see the silhouette of that tree's branches outside the window. And then suddenly it was there! Its eyes! Its wicked little red eyes. Sitting on a branch and watching."

Puzzled, the doctor looked at Jimmy.

"The umbrella woman," Jimmy reminded him. "She said she saw eyes. Close, like a spider's, as everybody was calling it at that time. And it had a beastly ring, I think I told you, a black flat disk with two red stones."

"Hm-mm? I wonder? I just wonder now, could it be the dark mirror and the red eyes of Amubis?"

"What's the eyes of Amubis?"

"But no." The doctor shook that theory from himself. "That's an ancient Egyptian magic of terrible power. But that cannot apply here. This is black Norman hate—that history has shown to be powerful enough. You, my dear, you must try to get some rest. We can't have a nervous breakdown on our hands at this precarious juncture. Leave your door open. We shall sit up on watch by turns."

"I suppose," Jimmy grumbled. "we can't really blame that fool of a watchman for not spotting something as elusive as a rat climbing up a tree. It couldn't have jumped that distance, could it?"

"Twenty feet or so? I would hardly think so. At any rate there is no tree opposite this window. Have you any preference for first trick?"

"I'll take it," Jimmy said. "I couldn't

sleep under drugs. I'll light me a pipe and stay up. I suppose we must definitely take it by now that the thing is not, as you gruesomely suggested, friendly. It's out for revenge."

"I'm afraid so. And I hardly like to tell you how much afraid. So—don't for a second let yourself nod. Wake me if you even hear anything."

JIMMY soon enough did. The doctor was one who had the faculty of being instantly completely awake. "What goes?"

"There's a scrabbling in the ivy outside the window." Jimmy whispered.

Doctor Harries' answer was loud. "I wish we *could* pretend it might be rats or a burglar. It's not *it* that's afraid. It sounds, in fact, to have gained the window sill. Lights! For God's sake, quick! Light!"

The old-fashioned bulb in the ceiling lit the room but not the outside. With the same impulse both men snatched up their guns and rushed to the window, directing their white flash beams through the glass. Whatever had scrabbled was rat quick enough to disappear. Jimmy threw up the window before the doctor, crying, "Good God! No!" could stop him. The bright glare showed nothing. Only a rustle of retreat scuttled though the ivy.

"Ha!" The doctor found a small satisfaction. "As I thought, it functions best in the dark. Light is a certain measure of defense."

"Look!" Jimmy whispered again, hoarsely. His flash beam was directed on the window sill.

There in the dust was an imprint! Of a hand! Of long, withered fingers and a palm—and the thin scratches of uncut nails!

From below came another flash into their eyes. The watchman's dim form bulked behind it. "Hanythink up?" he called.

"We don't know," the doctor said quickly before Jimmy might blurt out the shocking discovery and perhaps, despite the man's boast, frighten him entirely away. "We heard something in the ivy. If you do, don't wait, but shoot at the sound."

"Hi will that, sir. Though that there ivy is a home for all the vermin, rats an'

sparrows an' what not, in the bloomin' county."

"So a watchman, then," Doctor Harries said, "is no better than dogs." He very firmly closed the window down.

"Why?" Jimmy could not break away from the awed whisper normal to a disturbed night. "Why didn't it break through the glass and in? It broke that shop window."

"I wonder." Dr. Harries stood with narrowed eyes. "Those were little *leaded* panes, weren't they? Could it be that it knew we were armed with weapons that could disintegrate it. Or could it be—could it just be on account of the bars of cold iron at the window? We know so little. Heavens, how little, about these darker forces. We know only that this one has a deadly potentiality."

"A dead man's hand!" Jimmy was muttering, his eyes staring out at nothing. "Supercharged with hate! Able to crawl! Able to run—to choke the life out of—"

"Here, here!" The doctor caught and shook him. "Snap out of that. Once let it crack your nerve and you're lost. Don't you see, that's just what it is hellishly trying to do? Like with the dogs; get them confused and hysterical. Come, get hold of yourself."

"*Phe-ew!*" Jimmy let go a long breath. He shook his head. "It's the damned beastliness of it all. The something from some evil portion of the outer dark. With all the advantage on its side."

"Not quite all," the doctor encouraged him. "We have the advantage of the light. Even flash beams. I don't know why. But it has always been that the darker forces function in the dark. Which, of course, is what makes them so frightful."

Jimmy shook himself to shed the shakiness of his nerves that had been creeping up on him. "You're damn right, Doc. We dassent let go. What about the watchman down there? Ought we not perhaps to give him an inkling, at least, of what sort of thing to watch for?"

"Or rather, to watch out for. If that thing should crawl up on him unexpectedly—"

"I'll tell him first thing in the morning,"

said Jimmy. "Before he goes home—and let's hope then that he'll come back."

JIMMY did not tell the watchman first thing in the morning. Because there was no watchman! A sick feeling of dread crept up the fine hairs of Jimmy's back as he explored the grounds, expecting to find a limp body with a blackened face huddled somewhere under a bush or in some dim corner of tumbled masonry. He found foot tracks. Not—he thanked God—hand tracks. Big flat-footed boot marks. The man had faithfully patrolled. But he himself had completely disappeared.

"Well, the hell thing can't completely dematerialize a man," he reported in. "Or is that something else we don't know?"

The doctor shook his head. "No. I'm sure that our danger is entirely physical."

"Then I suppose he saw it and emigrated out of the country."

Mrs. Medford offered her, "Aa-ah!" And, "You go an' look in the root cellar!"

"Good heavens!" It came from all of them. "You haven't 'seen' any new horror?"

"No, sirs an' ma'am. I ain't 'ad no sights. But I knows the likes of them constable chaps. I'll bet 'e went root cellar a'lookin' for cold beer, as most folks 'ere keeps it there account o' hicc bein' irregular. Else why did 'e 'ave to leave 'is fat job at the jail? You tell me that."

"Now be careful, Jimmy." Eula sent a worried look at him, starting up.

"Hold on a minute," said the doctor, "I want to look up an idea I have in one of these old records. It won't take long—you shouldn't go alone."

But Jimmy was too tense and impatient. "I'll carry my little old 'disintegrator'," he said grimly, "and flash light. I'm having an idea myself, and it's that the man may just possibly be needing help."

"Well, if you find anything, call," said the doctor, obviously torn between research and action.

Surely enough, Jimmy found the flat boot tracks leading to the cellar; and, as they came nearer, they seemed to have been walking on tip toe. The great door stood

open. Jimmy peered down the worn, slimy steps. He called. Listened hopefully for drunken breathing. His only answer was the slow grinding creak of the door in a buffety wind. It reminded him of a radio program. He damned it and shoved an old cobblestone under its lower edge. Leaning thus close, he saw a muddy toe mark on the very sill, and, naturally enough, on the next step.

"The fool!" he growled and he stepped on gingerly down, careful against slipping on the smooth, worn old stone slabs. Not a thing was in the cellar. It was the same dimly dank place that he had seen the first time, sourly redolent, not of stale beer, but of stored vegetables. He did not this time hysterically fire at the soft scurry of rats behind the bins. He flashed his light under them and into the darker corners. Nothing.

Though yes. A door again surely. So green and moss-grown in its equally mossy wall that it could easily be missed. The flash beam would, in fact, not have picked it out at all were it not for a lighter line all along its lintel and jambs. Jimmy stepped closer. And sure enough, the scummy growth had been scratched away by some blunt implement, as though to release old in-grown debris and free the opening. And there, by the sill, lay the implement; a sliver of broken lattice from the arbor outside.

"I wonder now," Jimmy muttered out loud. "I wonder if he could have guessed it would be in there?"

A verdigris brass knob invited his hand. The door swung easily out towards him. Within was wet darkness. He stood uncertainly and flashed his beam about. The place contained bins again—or rather, stout oaken shelves; and on the shelves, stout oaken boxes. Long narrow boxes.

A vague intuition was pressing at the back of Jimmy's mind as to what sort of storage this might be. His nose was curling, uncertainly sniffing, when he saw that one of the boxes had had its lid shoved slightly askew, and the pale whitish gleam that thrust out of the slit to reflect his flash could be nothing other than a bone.

"The old crypt, by God!" Jimmy was, with normal impulse, backing away from it when his lowered flash beam picked out the body! It was huddled limply on the floor and was unmistakable.

The watchman!

THE rough homespun sleeve feebly moved. "Good Lord!" Jimmy rushed in and bent to lift the man. He was heavy. Jimmy yelled over his shoulder:

"Help here! I've found him!"

The boisterous wind must have carried his voice away. A gust of it swung the inner door shut with a slam, cutting off even the dimness from the outer one, leaving only Jimmy's flash beam in the pit blackness.

Jimmy damned. And with the hot breath of the word, chilled. Had that been a gust? He had felt no draught. He'd have to get the man out of there in a hurry. To be in a crypt at any time was a creepy enough happening. To find a blacked-out watchman there, whether drunk or wounded, was a shock to anybody's nerves. To have a channel house's only source of light and ventilation slam shut on one was—Jimmy kept up his courage by furiously swearing.

His light on the stationary snap, he bent again awkwardly and in a frenzy of hurry to lift the man. His sawed-off shot gun in the crook of his arm, it was difficult to get a grip on so lumpy a thing as a man. And the man was—The realization came in like a blow over the heart. He was stiff!

How could his sleeve have moved then? Jimmy yelled again, futilely, for help.

And in that instant a something, violent and bone hard, dashed the flash from his hand! For a moment he could trace its spinning arc through the air and then it tinkled into the corner and was out!

Jimmy's breath ee-eked out in a choked gasp. His stomach fell away, his blood, everything. Pit blackness and pit silence enveloped him. His knees limp, he sank down on the body he had been trying to lift. Even that relict of humanity was a comfort. Only persistence of vision seemed to function. He could see in the blackness a pale green arc of his last light.

And then another function, desperately needed, began to assert itself out of his paralysis. He could fearfully listen. He heard his pulse—like a persistent and useless little rubber hammer. So he wasn't dead of shock. He could still move. He *must* move.

He shoved himself off that dead thing on which he had fallen and hurled himself toward the door. A blow hit him in the face and rocked him dizzily back. He didn't normally curse it. He was prayerfully thankful for it. What had hit him was mouldily damp; it was the side of one of the old coffins. It oriented him, at least in direction.

He plunged to the door. It must be the door. His hands, desperately fumbling, could feel the wet panels, the straight crack of its jamb. He clawed frenziedly up and down the crack, inches on either side. Desperately back and forth and around.

And there was no knob on the inside!

Jimmy lolled limp against the door. He could feel his knees bend against it and his chest sliding slimily down the boards.

An awful sound stabbed at him with galvanizing force. A sound in itself commonplace and harmless. But here, terrifying. A stealthy scuffling.

It came from that grizzly box up there with the opened lid! Where that bone had been sticking out! The sound was a bony scratching of pointed nails!

Breath surged back to Jimmy, absurdly to *who-oosh!* And out of his jetty blackness he fired at the sound.

Pit silence again.

A thin hope of desperation trembled through Jimmy. Could it be possible that there was a merciful God in this hell pit and his blast had shattered the—had "disintegrated"—no other word fitted in—the whatever had made that sound up there? Jimmy's chilled consciousness refused to give it the name that it fearsomely knew.

AND then his whole being shrank together once more to hear the scrabbling of fingernails again. Not rats. Rats never sounded like that. Rats softly pattered. They harmlessly scuffled. They cheer-

fully squeaked. Rats were inoffensive warm creatures of human homes. They were—

The scrabbling noise plopped onto the sodden floor! Jimmy madly fired in that direction. Madly listened. He was shockingly conscious of the gun-blasted air. Conscious of infinitely worse than that. For that was his all! His last defense! Nobody with a sawed-off shotgun ever carried more than the two cartridges in the barrels. With a sawed-off shotgun it was never necessary—not against anything on earth. . .

And then Jimmy shrieked. Every breath forced fearfully from him as a something scuttled up the outside of his pants leg, over his back, and rushed coldly savagely to tear at his throat!

Jimmy clawed furiously at it. Not his most remotely dragged-in hope could call for God's mercy. This was *it!* Dried flesh and loathly coarse-hair and overgrown nails! They tore at Jimmy with a savage hate.

Jimmy was able, with all the strength of his two hands, to loosen the thing's grip sufficiently so that he could at least suck in a breath to replenish the emptiness of his long-drawn shriek. The thing, quicker than any rat, let go of Jimmy's throat, twisted itself free, and out of the empty dark slammed itself against his neck. Slammed again at his face. It didn't seem to know about the modernly developed technique of a knockout blow to the jaw. It battered at any part of the head. Coming out of the blackness, Jimmy could see nothing to ward. Every advantage was with the pent-up hate that could see in the dark. It could beat a man to a pulp at its vengeful will.

With arms and elbows, like an already beaten fighter, Jimmy tried to protect his face. Then the thing was at his throat again, as though it could tell that Jimmy was gasping from the fumes of his shots.

Jimmy's desperation gave him strength to tear the thing away. He could feel blood oozing. The thing, needing no rest, battered at his face again. It was not floating in air; it seemed to be getting its take-off from his shoulders, from his arms, even up from his chest, any place where it could momentarily settle and spring. At one time it missed

its blow. Its own vicious force carried it on to slap hollowly against a coffin. It plopped to the floor.

With mad hope Jimmy jumped, both feet together, thinking to step on it. But there it was, scuttering up his pants again, a devil thing of the dark, vicious with life, savagely bent on death. Jimmy's feet stumbled over that other dead thing on the floor. Its stiff limbs tripped him. He fell. Immediately he felt the scrabbling fingers run onto his chest. His frenzied snatch this time caught it. It was strong enough, crawling on its three loose fingers, to drag his both hands remorselessly up to his throat and to dig those fingers in. Jimmy dizzily thought he could hear voices and a pounding on the door.

Hope brought him strength again. He tore the thing loose. He knew that flesh ripped with its nails. It twisted itself free. Jimmy tried to roll away from it. That was worse. On the floor it could choose any vantage point from which to fling itself at him. Jimmy heaved himself up to his knees. The thing leaped at his throat again. The light flashes of beaten nerves were sparking within Jimmy's head.

BUT there the beast suddenly let go. Jimmy was able to suck in life-saving breaths and to flail wildly with his arms. If it were possible for the thing to be even temporarily disabled by so soft a thing as a human fist—

The light flashes had not been in his head. They were real. White beams of flash lights. The doctor was curbing Jimmy's wild blind swings. Lifting him, hampered by Eula who clung sobbing to him.

The doctor sharply slapped her.

"Snap out! Get hold of him! This place is poisonous with the fumes of all hell."

Jimmy was able to croak, "Look out! It's *it!* Here! It comes from everywhere!"

Eula made tight-bitten noises out of her hysteria. Together the two rushed Jimmy out. The doctor kicked the door behind him. Uselessly, for they had battered the panels in. They hurried Jimmy, slipping and clawing, up the slime-green steps to

God's open air. The doctor slammed that door shut.

IT WAS Mrs. Medford who first had the courage to propose going back. After washing Jimmy off and bandaging his torn throat and after a stiff stimulant all round—that she stoutly refused—she offered her fearsome thought.

"It's 'ad its fight. It'll never be weaker than now. Lights, you say, is what scares it. If it's got to be destroyed, what I says is the time is now."

The doctor looked at the extraordinary woman. He slowly began to nod. Jimmy, his lips tightly set, nodded. Eula covered her eyes with her hands—and nodded.

They went then, with the one shotgun and a flash light each. The outer door had remained shut. In the root cellar nothing moved. The inner door stood broken as it had been left.

"You drag it open," the doctor told Jimmy. "I'll stand by with the gun."

Within the crypt nothing moved. The lights showed only the slime puddles where Jimmy had rolled. Those, and indented scratches of fingernails. From Jimmy's throat squeaked a memory and he turned his beam up to the coffin. The white bone that he had indistinctly seen before still protruded from the chink between box and lid.

Eula screamed. The doctor half leveled his gun and then he softly whistled. Mrs. Medford said "Aa-ah! I should ha' knowed it."

The white thing was the two bones of an arm—and they had no hand!

The doctor looked at the others, round-eyed. He pointed, thrusting with his finger. It was he who was whispering now.

"It's in there! Come home where it belongs!"

Silently, as though stalking a snake, he handed the gun to Jimmy. He made a rush to the coffin, shoved the arm bones in, and dragged the lid over to close the crack.

"Help me now," he shouted. "Help to hold it down! We don't know how strong it is."

"All together, swallowing down repug-

nance, they grappled with the box. "Light!" the doctor panted. "Out into the sunlight."

Inexpertly, getting in one another's way, desperately gripping down the lid, they pulley-hauled the coffin from its shelf. Shoved it sliding up the wet steps. Out into the warm summer sun.

There with an astounding courage the doctor sat his whole weight down on it. Beckoned Jimmy to add his weight. Beckoned Eula. She came, but would sit no closer to the oaken board than on Jimmy's lap.

Mrs. Medford said, "So now you've caught it. So now tell us 'ow a thing like that is kept caught."

THE doctor frowned away into the distances of his dark knowledge. "I—don't—know," he said. "For the present, in bright daylight, it will not burst out. I must think. My immediate thought is—nails. *Iron* nails. I expect Mrs. Medford must know where there are some. And the next thought is, what about the unfortunate watchman?"

"We can only guess," Jimmy said. "I'd guess he saw something and tiptoed after it; and then down there—" He shivered in the warm sun and put his fingers tenderly to his throat.

"Yes, I suppose so. We must get him out and notify the authorities."

Mrs. Medford came back with a hammer and nails. "Not that them'll 'old it down for long. Not come dark."

"No. We must think of something better."

Eula, nose wrinkling, watched with a determined vindictiveness the doctor's nailing of the lid. Suddenly she pointed to where his hands smudged off some gray mold.

"Look. It was he, sure enough."

Faint gothic letters showed. "B-n-t d- 1-Cein-ure."

"Yes," Doctor Harries said. "It would

make a priceless piece for some museum. But the more I've been thinking, the more convinced am I that light—fire light—will destroy this malignant force. And—why, not now? And here!"

"God knows there's enough of old timbers lying about." Jimmy, without any argument or question, set about collecting. Eula helped with a determined enthusiasm.

"The only thing I like about this dreadful place," she said. "Is its stock of old fire-wood."

In the bright sunlight, then, they hoisted the gray-mouldy coffin onto the pyre. Eula vindictively lit it, and they stood back.

The dry timbers roared up and quickly made a red furnace in the middle of which the coffin gave off a vast black smoke before its sides began to crack and long lines of fire crept along the slits and ate into its moldy interior. Eula suddenly covered her eyes and screamed. With a grim satisfaction Jimmy watched a gray spidery horror break through the burning side, scabble madly in the furnace and then fall back. In tight-lipped silence, his every nerve taut, he watched the gray fingers turn black and curl together and glow red and disintegrate in little licking blue fires.

"That," Doctor Harries said, "I think disposes of that."

Jimmy put his arm about Eula. "At all events," he said, "I think it proves that ours was the respectable branch of us Doaks. It took to my pocket in the first place for some sort of revenge. Fancy my going into the very shop it'd been in all these years.

"From now on, how shall *we* spell our name?"

Eula pushed away from him. "I'll have nothing to do with anything from the past. The plain American way is all we'll ever use," she said firmly.

"Oke—Doak," retorted Jimmy, at last able to get a grin out of the business. "But how are we going to convince Dad?"