

WEIRD TALES




NOVEMBER

1940

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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"Charles was capering like a ballet dancer—was chanting in a nameless language."

The Impossible Adventure

By H. T. W. BOUSFIELD

*The evolution of the human family disproved, denied—
every speculator since Darwin, wrong.*

IF YOU find this story incredible, I must ask you to remember that it is based upon notes made by my uncle who died in the Spring of 1939 and left me what small property he had—an old-fashioned and dilapidated house in Caithness, a quantity of debts and very little money with which to settle them.

My uncle must have been, I think, a man of greater classical learning than he believed, and if his notes had been published by himself in the form of a properly annotated paper he might have reached the head-lines. But as I hardly know the difference between Greek and Latin other people must make what they can of the affair. I cannot even date it, but I should imagine Uncle David's impossible adventure happened in the early thirties—if one is to believe that it happened at all—because I do vaguely remember that his great-niece, Barbara Schofield (not my side of the family), was lost in an air-liner in the Spring of 1933 or 1934, and the house itself was badly damaged by fire about a year earlier.

I say at once, I have no corroborative evidence. I am too busy to go to Greece—and I have no intention of doing so; it would cost hundreds, with an interpreter and so on. As for the Macdonald couple who looked after the Caithness house, anybody is welcome to their address, and I wish anybody joy of them—rude, independent, ungrateful. In fact, insolent.

(Undated)

THIS is a brief account of an adventure that befell me, David Gannon, in Greece less than two years ago. I must record it before I cease to believe in it myself.

My interest in Greek remains has never been scientific enough to qualify me for membership of any learned Society, I fear. I have been an amateur, and rather an idle one, all my life. But I have some critical faculty in literature, and I have a natural gift for languages. Greek literature and legend consoled me in my schooldays, and when I visited Greece for the first time I did not mind the primitive conditions that then confronted any traveler who went where tourists are not expected. The flowers in the valleys and the snow on the hills

actually seemed more familiar and more dear than my native Scotland.

I vaguely intended to write. But to my shame I never produced anything in all the years except one small book of lyrics—I refer to my *Sporades* which appeared in 1927 and is now out of print. It wasn't a success, I may say. The English Press as a whole ignored it, though a small edition went quite well in America.

I suppose I was Greek-mad, but I most certainly was not insane!

I could not write well, I say, of the Greece I loved, but I must write now of what I saw and did and experienced during my third year in Hypata.

It's in Arcadia (to use the traditional name). I made it my headquarters as soon as I saw it. Indeed I bought in that remote mountain village a house of sorts where I could watch the sunrise and dream my sterile dreams and write my poems that were never quite good enough—and forget that better men than I were doing real work in the world.

In Hypata I spent the Spring and early Summer, undisturbed by political upheavals and changes of government. Nothing ever changed in Hypata. It was too high and too far away.

The peasants accepted me without animosity. They never treated me as an alien and one—my real friend and my servant—had, I believe, a genuine affection for me.

He was an old man called Peter.

Now Greece is a volcanic country, full of semi-extinct volcanoes—a country where the hills are never quite asleep. There are earthquakes in Greece that never seem to make front-page news in London—many earthquakes.

I got quite used to them, but I remember—in March it was—being shaken almost out of my bed by what seemed an endless convulsion, so that I thought the little house would fall down on me. It did not; it was sturdily built of stone, but when

Peter arrived the next morning with goat's milk and provisions he had a tale to tell.

There had been a fall of rock, five hundred feet above me. A vineyard had been overwhelmed. The peasants had fled to the valleys. The hill-top was scarred and broken. And Peter had been caught in the catastrophe and narrowly escaped with his life.

In his guttural dialect he told me an incredible thing.

"I have found a centaur," he said. "It is wounded, and unless you can help it will die."

That is the proper way in which to announce the impossible: "I have found a centaur." As one might say: "The trout are rising; come quickly."

Of course we went through the natural exchange of incredulity and re-assertion. But I was dressing all the time I argued and disbelieved, and I ran as fast as Peter, the old goat, up that hill.

The fall of rock had been more tremendous than I'd imagined. Fortunately it had crashed away from Hypata. The top of the little mountain had been obliquely sliced off as if by a sharp knife. And one astounding thing was that a great tunnel was revealed, running down spirally into the earth.

IT WAS in the mouth of this tunnel that the incredible deferred to the impossible—

Most people imagine a centaur as a horse, four legs and all, with a man's body, neck, head and arms where the normal horse's head would grow. Such a monster is one of the commonest things in Greek art, and there are plenty of appropriate legends to describe them. It appears that such centaurs somehow contrive to be notoriously amorous as well as chronic dipsomaniacs, and no poet or story-teller bothered to answer the many physiological

questions that must have occurred to the least critical minds.

But I dimly remembered that before the quadrupled centaur established himself upon the average amphora there were earlier legends of creatures, derived before evolution, or God, had finally settled the problem of the ultimate body of man—creatures human to the buttocks, and then with two legs indeed, but horses' legs hoofed and covered with hair.

Before us there was something that was all man to the hips, and then all horse. It might have been dead. It was unconscious. One of those strange but strangely graceful legs had been broken by a rock. There was a bruise on the forehead.

I shall never be able to describe my sensations at the sight. I believe I might even have sniggered, but from the waist up, at any rate, there was a fellow-creature who needed help. And from the waist up was no savage, no half man or missing link, but a blond, strapping youth with a fine head, regular, intellectual features, a mass of cropped fair hair, a muscular body. From the waist up he would have made a model for Praxiteles. From the waist down the evolution of the human family was disproved, denied.

I imagine he was about seventeen years old.

In the most fantastic circumstances one can only do ordinary things. I know something of first-aid—indeed, I once began to become a doctor, but I got bored with the hard work. So I could examine "it" fairly professionally, and I soon found that there was nothing seriously wrong, apart from a simple fracture of the leg, and Peter, far calmer than I, helped me to carry it down to my house. It groaned once or twice, but I'd set the leg before pain really restored consciousness.

Life in that face made it beautiful, and intelligent. Wary blue eyes caught mine with astonishment. Movement attempted

was with pain abandoned. My centaur spoke.

I thought there was a hint of Greek in those unintelligible words, but nothing sounded that I could catch on to. I tried a dialect or two. Peter tried. I could see we were a millenium too modern. But with gestures evidently we managed to convey that we were friendly, and the centaur accepted a drink of milk, and presently slept.

This strange thing had been naked when we found him. In my bed, with blankets up to his chin, he looked like an athletic undergraduate. He looked like the sort of rowing-blue that flappers try to waylay for his autograph on the towing-path at Putney.

I said to Peter:

"Have you spoken about this to anybody?"

"No, sir."

"Then swear to me you will not. Swear to me that until I permit you to do so you will not even whisper that we have found—what is it that we have found?"

"I think, sir," said Peter, "that we have found a young god."

That day was spent by the centaur in sleep, and I spent it in trying to force some sense into my conventionally astonished brain.

THAT night there was another upheaval, and the following morning Peter reported that the mouth of the tunnel was quite obliterated.

I made Peter into a nurse, and apart from occasional attacks of awe he did very well. The patient was quick enough to notice the awe and I could see it relieved and amused him. Oh, he was a very normal young man of seventeen with the blankets up to his chin, and he began to pick up as only youth and health can. I sat most of the time by the bedside, finding by trial and error what he liked to eat and drink.

Very soon I gave up any attempt to understand his language and I began to teach him mine.

I had never taught anybody anything before, but I think he was unusually quick. He tacitly agreed to learn, and I soon discovered what he called himself—at least it sounded like "Chalchis," though that is the name of a city. Anyway, I called him "Charles." After a bit he realized that he was to be "Charles," and he laughed and nodded.

The first time he said slowly, in quite good English: "I am Charles, and you are Daveed," I mixed myself a strong drink; I don't know why.

I used to wake up in the night and disbelieve in the whole thing, until I realized I was lying on the floor, and Charles had my bed. Old Peter, of course, was wonderful. I think he was as interested as I was, and I know he told nobody. But as Charles began to get better I began to worry.

What was to be done with him? Sometimes he reminded me of Pan, but there were no goat's horns on his head; his ears were not pointed, and those unbelievable hoofs were not cleft. I began to see nothing incongruous in horse's legs attached to a magnificent human body. I began to think my own useless toes, that had to be cased in leather before I could carry myself over stony ground, the absurdity, the deformity.

When I have time to write a full account of this, the photographs I took of Charles standing, running, sitting* will prove indeed that his lower limbs were more practical than a normal man's. What of natural selection, of survival of the fittest? Every speculator since Darwin has been wrong.

How long would it take an ordinary

* *Editor's Note:* I have not been able to find any photographs. My uncle had a camera, but two rolls of undeveloped films which I discovered amongst his effects produced nothing but vague shapes.

modern youth, who was trying his best, and who knew no English, to express himself in that language? In three weeks Charles at any rate knew enough to tell me something about himself.

According to him the race of Centaurs had always lived in enormous caverns deep under the Arcadian Hills ever since some pre-historic battle with the Greeks had almost exterminated them. You can imagine my questions. What of air? They had plenty, it seemed, which Charles supposed came from unnoticed caves in those wild regions. That must have been a fact, or Charles himself could not have existed. What of light? Torches. Imagine a race living by torch-light for five thousand years! He added, however, that his people paid many visits to the surface of the earth, and were seldom or never seen by men. Any man or woman who came upon a centaur by chance was invariably murdered. So fear can persist! Food? They lived normally upon the blind fish caught in their underground lakes, upon mushrooms, and on any sheep or goats, birds or rabbits they managed to snare in the world above. Cereals were naturally outside their normal diet. They liked fruit when they could steal it. Vast bituminous deposits, I gathered, provided fuel for light and for fires.

Their politics? A simple patriarchy community. Religion? One god, who might have paralleled Chronos; one goddess—perhaps Diana. Arts? Pottery. Literature? They could write. He showed me some scrawls that I have carefully preserved. Upon my soul they were ideographs, as you can see; I have taken particular pains to preserve them.*

I asked if they knew clothing—for in winter the cold in those parts can be biting. It appeared that clothing was one of their

greatest problems. Almost any vegetation that they could furtively gather from the world above was beaten into fibre and with infinite care woven into fabric. Cloth was their medium of currency. A centaur with a spare robe or two was rich. No yard of cloth that could hold together, however thread-bare, was ever abandoned. And the skins of animals, of course, were used as well. But nobody wasted clothes by wearing them just to cover their nakedness.

I MADE friends with Charles. I won his devotion by giving him a shirt, a pair of trousers and a rather worn tie of my old school!

No extravagant socialite—as I believe they call rich and idle young women—has ever been more interested in clothes than Charles. I began to feel ashamed, when he got well enough to move about, that I had not provided myself with a more imposing wardrobe. He tried on everything I had—and his only distress was that my socks and my shoes were beyond him.

I had wondered at the hairlessness of his face. Can you imagine shaving with a blunt strip of immemorial tempered bronze? Apparently that was what Charles was accustomed to—for he explained that beards were forbidden as savagery. His delight at an old safety-razor and rather blunt blades was pathetic.

And Charles himself? He cheerfully admitted that he had no affection for his family or his race. He had no curiosity as to their fate in the earthquake. But he was quite sure they must have survived as they had survived a thousand in the past. How many of his race? He neither knew nor cared, but he did know that for some hundreds of years they had been dwindling in numbers. Were there ten thousand left? Not so many. Five? Perhaps. Two thousand more likely. His own contemporaries seemed to be suffering from an epidemic of depression.

* I am still hoping to discover these specimens of picture writing. If I do, they will be found as an appendix to this paper.

(If it were due to inbreeding, Charles himself showed no signs of deterioration). Himself, he had been forbidden to go up the tunnel on the night when the earthquake came by his father—the chief of the community—but he went because he did not care whether he were killed or not.

How did they know when volcanic disturbances were likely? There was a special class of Observers, who were also the priests, and they knew always—how, Charles did not know.

He easily got bored with too much questioning, but I obtained quite enough information for a paper that will stagger the British Association. Only I do not propose to publish it until I secure proper recognition. And the end of this adventure has, of course, produced some legal difficulties. I must take advice. I don't want to be prosecuted. I realize that I may thoughtlessly have placed myself in an awkward position.

One acts for the best, and then, alas, thinks later—too late.

By the time Charles was up and about, chattering to me in fluent but execrable English, overeating himself with all the luxuries I could get (and they were not many) I made him listen to my chief worry, which was his own future.

At first he was blandly prepared to assume that I was always going to live in Hypata, and he was always going to enjoy the hide-and-seek life of pretending to be a man in flannel trousers. But as his own keenness to learn English defeated his attempts to misunderstand me, we had to have a show-down.

I wanted him to go back. I promised an expedition to rescue his race from their self-imposed imprisonment. I convinced him that they would run no more risk of slaughter than he had. He believed that modern men would be more than merciful, more even than benevolent, but he just would not co-operate. He said at last

that he hated them, and their Patriarch, his own father, most of all. His mother was dead, and he unfilially stated he had never liked her. He had no brothers or sisters. He had no friends. And he was glad of it. He admitted that the destruction of one tunnel-mouth would not cut his people off from the world, but he refused to show me others.

HE WAS going with me, he said, wherever I went. He was going to see the modern world.

Even in flannel trousers he could not hide those legs. They were comic, they were tragic, in trousers. They bent the wrong way!

A naked centaur might be beautiful, even awesome; a centaur in trousers was below the waist a figure of fun or of pity.

And the weather was getting too hot for comfort. I was supposed to go home. Indeed, I had to go home, for my affairs needed a little attention and my Scottish house a little care.

I had to go back.

I interviewed Peter, and the interview was short. Peter would obey me and not even whisper about my centaur, but look after him, feed him, hide him, protect him in my absence, Peter would not do for all the money in Athens.

Then I had a telegram from my old fool of a family solicitor who ought to have been able to do by himself what I paid him to see to instead of me.

I *had* to go.

And I found I'd drifted into an absurd affection for Charles.

He was so gay and so amusing, and so utterly selfish and imprudent. He was so intelligent and quick. He could by then even read and write English. His comments on what he read enthralled me. Imagine them—! No proverbial hen with one chick was such a fool as I.

"Very well," I said, "you'll have to come

to Scotland with me. And if you don't do exactly everything I tell you, down to the smallest detail, I'll kill you!"

"You will kill *me*?" said Charles. "My dear, kind David, you could not kill me; I am strong, and young. And you will not want to. I will be so good and quiet. I will never disgrace you."

So far, so good. Obviously, by disguising Charles as an invalid, I could get him down to the coast, and as an invalid I could get him to Scotland without any tiresome questions being asked. But there are more things than tickets to buy when one goes from one country to another in these days. A passport for Charles was the next thing.

The methods by which undesirable persons can get passports have bothered the police of every country for many years, and I have (when I thought about it) inveighed against the scoundrelly underground traffic as sincerely as any other respectable citizen. Yet without the help of that underworld I do not know what I should have done.

Since some sort of passport must have been obtained, or I could never have got Charles out of Greece, there is no point in pretending that I did not get it. It was expensive. It purported to have been signed by Curzon of Kedleston. It carried Charles' photograph—just head and shoulders—and it had an array of past visas that would have deceived the devil himself.

Even if I'm prosecuted, I shall not betray the source from whence it came, because the job was well done. But I wish I had that passport still, even if it were evidence against me.

During my inevitable absence in contriving this international crime, Charles (now Charles Mountain, according to that same passport) behaved with perfect circumspection under the eye of Peter, and when I returned feeling like a criminal—

an international crook—he just said: "Now we can go?"

WE WENT.

The journey was uneventful, but very tiring for me. I had to see that Charles spoke as little as possible, for his accent naturally was far from perfect. We decided he should always speak in a whisper when he had officially to speak, on account of some unspecified injury to his throat. Really he was very good. He allowed himself to be wheeled about—always—on the boat that took us to Marseilles, and if he did make a little noise in our cabin, I was always prepared to take the blame.

I must have been over-anxious, for nobody complained. Such a handsome young man could not help attracting some attention, even in my rather shabby coats and caps and so on, and there was one young woman on that French boat who showed a very undesirable interest in him that Charles might have encouraged. But, as I say, he was very good—and I really did not give him a chance; when I was about—and I was always about—he resigned himself to the rôle of invalid. I told the few acquaintances I could not help picking up that he was my nephew who had been gravely injured in a motor smash.

Once across France, once across the Channel, I had no more worry over his passport. Really it was so good that nobody could question it. In Marseilles I bought him clothes. I could not bear him to be so shabby as my old things made him, so we reached Scotland without the least incident, though the journey was terribly expensive. Special carriages, stretchers, ambulances almost ruined me. But he had to go flat on his back.

My house in Caithness is not marvellous. I know it needs modernizing in half-a-dozen ways. But it has one advantage: Robert Macdonald and his wife, who

looked after it in my father's time as well as mine, are absolutely reliable.

They have never, I know, approved of my journeys abroad, but they are utterly faithful, and the first thing I did when we had arrived and the ambulance men had gone away was to call old Robert into my study.

I made him sit down, and I said to him:

"My guest, Robert, is no ordinary man. I may as well tell you now as later. He is a demi-god."

"And what heathen thing may that be, sir?"

"He is a centaur. He is a man—not yet a Christian, maybe, but a man. Only his legs are not a man's legs. Now he is to stay here until I can decide what is to be done. You must look after him, and I rely on you not to talk. And I rely on you that Elspeth doesn't talk either."

"Elspeth won't talk. But what's wrong with his legs? And what's a demi-god—what heathen thing have you brought?"

"I have brought here," I said, "a centaur. His legs are horse's legs."

"Indeed," said Robert.

"You can see him," I said.

I took him into the Jacobite room.

"Get up, Charles," I said. "This is Robert Macdonald who will look after you. No need to fear him! he served my father before me." And Charles stood up and held out his hand.

"Good-day," said Charles in his funny accent.

But Robert Macdonald crossed himself, and then he bowed. "In this house, sir," he said, "you have nothing to fear," and he turned to me. "I served your father before you, and my father did so before me. I do not know what this means, but there'll be no talking."

And then he went out.

And then I knew my worry was only just beginning.

I'M a coward, I suppose; at least a procrastinator. No need to do anything at once. That day, and next day, and the day after I was safe—we were safe. I needn't think immediately in that remote house where nobody would come that I didn't want to see. Time enough to decide when—when I had to.

Old Elspeth fell for Charles at once—as definitely, though dourly, as the pretty girl on the French boat. She gave us her best cooking, she waited on Charles hand and foot. She began to hint I was cruel to the poor wean in keeping him locked up, as she described it.

For his part, Charles was far too interested in his new surroundings to regard himself as a prisoner. With Robert's connivance I got rid of the only gardener, and he could get some exercise in the grounds. But most of the time he spent in the library and making me explain what he read of a world he still could not quite believe in.

Charles was never bored—and I was not, for I saw with every hour that I *must* make up my mind to do something. Even if we were not discovered by some mischance, the day was bound to come when I should have to betray Charles to the world. I could not bear to think that my beautiful, amusing, incredible Charles might be photographed and placarded as a monster. It would have killed him.

I'd settled matters with my old fool of a solicitor by letters and expensive trunk telephone calls, and that meant my family would know I was back from Greece. There is no defense from a family solicitor, especially a stupid one.

I was actually planning a disguise for Charles, artificial feet to be made by some bribed craftsman under the direction of a reliable orthopaedist, when I got a telegram from my great-niece, Barbara, to say she had heard I was back and she proposed to come and stay with me for a week.

Barbara never writes letters, and fortunately for her she has enough money to make her telegrams long. She was coming to stay with me because she had broken her engagement with John (who was John?) and she felt the pure air of Caithness would cure her wounded heart. Or words to that effect.

It was nearly lunch-time when I got that telegram, and the aged Angus who obliges now and then by carrying telegrams from the local post-office admitted he had loitered by the way. Loitering to him, meant anything you like in hours or days.

To cut a long and agonizing story short, I had hardly collected Charles from the orchard and hurried him indoors when she arrived.

I knew—I knew then that the game was up.

Barbara Schofield—my late wife's great-niece, actually—is very pretty. At least I think so. I'm not too old to admire pretty women, I hope. Her hair really is Titian red, and her eyes really are dark blue, with dark lashes. She's far too pretty to be happy, for only a plain woman can be sure of a faithful husband, and only a poor woman can even hope for one.

Barbara is rich, poor child, and critical and intelligent. Poor child.

I had an invalid staying with me, I told her, the son of a very old friend of mine who had been grievously injured in a motor accident in Greece. The young man, indeed, was half Greek, and his English mother had died in bringing him into the world. The motor accident had caused a spinal injury which could only be cured by rest and quiet.

BARBARA was all agog to see him. She had taken a course of nursing. She would look after him.

"That's just what you can't do," I told her. "The Macdonalds do all the look-

ing after he requires. But you can see him and read to him and maybe improve his English—he's very keen on getting better with his mother-tongue—and cheer the poor boy up. Yes," I said, "it will be a distraction to you, too, during your short stay here, and it will maybe take your mind off this John of yours. Who is John, by the way? I can't imagine any young man you had a fancy for letting you go."

"We won't talk about John, Uncle David, if you don't mind," she said. "John is nothing more to me than a reminder that I can be just as much a fool as any other woman. And I thought I was wise."

"But what do you mean by a short visit? Don't you generally spend the summer up here? I'm going to stay a month at least."

"A month?" I said.

"Don't you want me to stay, Uncle David?"

"My dear," I said, "my dear—you know you're welcome for ever, but an old man with an invalid in the house, in this remote place isn't an interesting proposition for anything as pretty as you."

"Uncle David, I was twenty-one last week—though you never sent me a birthday present—and I've come here for a rest-cure. You're not going to turn me out just because there's an invalid who takes up Elspeth Macdonald's time? I'll make my own bed, and I can cook."

"Do you know Greek?" I asked her.

"Now, Uncle David, you know I never went to Girton or to Oxford. If he speaks Greek and he doesn't speak French, I shall have to speak to him in English— Uncle David, did you say 'thank God'?"

"I said nothing of the kind, but it's best for you to speak English to the poor boy, for that's the best way to improve his English—and he's very sensitive about not being very good yet with his mother's tongue."

"What's the name of this young man?"

"Charles Mountain—Mountain was his mother's maiden name, and he is adopting it by deed-poll, for he wants to get naturalized. Now go and tidy yourself for lunch, and after lunch you shall be introduced."

Then I talked to Charles. I told him to be careful. I warned him not to give himself away. I reminded him that we had not yet decided just how to introduce him to the modern world. He promised to be good, but his eyes were sparkling with excitement. He was terribly good-looking.

At lunch Barbara pestered me with questions, and the less I answered them the more curious she grew. After lunch I took her up to Charles' room. He was swathed in blankets and rugs in his wheeled chair.

They stared at each other. Good Heavens, how they stared at each other! I could see what had happened. In a moment she had forgotten John—whoever John might have been. Charles perhaps had nothing to forget—

When I got her away my Charles was on fire. When I saw her later, Charles was all she would talk about.

I SUPPOSE I knew then that the situation was hopeless. If there is such a thing as love at first sight it had happened then under my roof.

Every day Barbara would spend her time talking to and reading to Charles. Whenever she was out of his room I was warning him and prompting him what to say about himself, his English mother and his Greek father.

The unfortunate creature, you see, actually knew far less about modern Greece than I did.

I had to describe Athens to him, Sparta, Olympus, Crete. I had to promise that I would find a way of telling Barbara the truth. I tried to convince him of the absurdity of loving a modern English girl. I tried to re-open the possibility

of collecting an expedition to rescue his nation.

And the implacable Macdonald warned me that there was tragedy all about us.

"Why will you not get her away?" he asked me every morning. "She must go," he said. "You can see how it is with them. It can't go on. It's wicked and heathen and unchristian." He crossed himself as he always did when we discussed Charles. "The poor creature's not to blame. But you'll be to blame, ye'll have blood on your hands if the young lady doesn't leave."

Barbara didn't leave.

Then, too, there was the question of exercise for Charles. A youth of his age, fit and well, cannot spend his life in an invalid chair. It was Macdonald who suggested midnight exercise, and midnight exercise it had to be, when Barbara was in bed and asleep. But I believe it took years off my life, the arranging of midnight runs and midnight exercise—and then trying to be normal and awake next day. Charles of course could sleep as an invalid should. I had no excuse for falling asleep whenever I sat down in a chair.

And all the time I *could not think* of a way to tell Barbara the truth about Charles, and Charles was beginning to get a look in his eyes that scared me.

And Barbara simply ceased to consider any date of going home or away anywhere else.

Well, I suppose the end was inevitable, but if I had ever had any luck it need not have been quite so dramatic.

I could not watch over Charles' midnight exercise indefinitely — I'm not a young man any longer. It was late summer and the weather was fine and the moon was full, when it all happened. Elspeth Macdonald was ill, and her obstinate old husband insisted on staying with her.

Now Charles was generally most ab-

stemious. I'd naturally as we were in Scotland introduced him to whiskey in moderation. That night, finding himself alone when he got up, for some reason he must have got drunk.

I was awakened by wild singing—chanting is perhaps the right word. There is a stone terrace on the garden side of the house where most of the bedrooms look out. I listened half asleep for a minute or two and then with dread in my heart I leapt out of bed and rushed to the window.

There on the terrace was Charles, capering like a ballet-dancer, his hoofs clattering, and chanting a dirge-like chant in his nameless language. Naked as the day Peter and I found him, the sight did not seem to me so much indecent as terrifying—beauty and grace and animalism and despair.

I said that most of the bedrooms were on that side of the house. Barbara's room was one of them.

Then I heard her screaming.

Now I am an elderly man, unused to alarms, and my nerves had been tried pretty high. When I heard the chanting and the screaming, only the frenzied haste with which I dressed saved me, I think, from fainting—and the clatter and the singing and the cries went on.

I found Barbara half out of her open window, crying and sobbing and calling to Charles, and he took no notice of her and went on dancing and went on singing.

Remember, I was alone that night. How I got some clothes on her, how I dragged her out by the front of the house I shall never quite remember, but by the

time I'd got her into the car she was in a state of collapse. I drove her to the doctor's, knocked him up, told him some frantic story of burglars, ghosts and nightmares, and he gave her an injection and let her stay—and let me stay—until morning.

Thank God he did.

MY HOUSE—most of it—was burned down that night, and Charles was burned in it. Macdonald and I buried what was left of him, but that was after Barbara, white and silent, had left for the South, borrowing money from the doctor for her fare.

She never asked me to forward her belongings. She never mentioned Charles to me. She never asked any questions. I never saw or spoke to her again.

But I heard she'd taken up flying, and the poor child killed herself when her plane crashed in the Mediterranean in the following year. I've always wondered if she was trying to fly to Greece.

FIRST the illegal passport, then the unreported death and burial—I still dare not make an official report. But the above is a brief, skeleton summary of the facts.

NOTE: The house was damaged but by no means destroyed. My old uncle patched it up before he died. Unless the whole property is dug up I don't see how I can find the Centaur's grave. Nobody seems to be sure whether or not David Gannon had an invalid visitor just before the fire. And the Macdonalds simply will not speak. But their very silence makes me think there is some truth somewhere in this incredible affair. I may take my time but I shall probably do something, find out something definite in the end.

H. T. W. B.