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The Rosicrucian Lamp . . .

BY STEPHEN BAGBY



"The truncheon descended, shearing flesh and crushing bone."

"**T**HIS fellow John Kenner Owen sure must be badly wanted and in one terrible hurry!" remarked the operator after having cabled to Dar-es-Salaam, Hongkong and Surabaya in succession. And then he tapped out the call for John Kenner Owen to the rest of the list of cable stations from which Franz von Reinitz thought a message might reach the son of his old friend.

One of the messages did connect; and John Owen within a few hours of its receipt was working his way southward through the steaming jungles of Burma, wondering, as he

slowly made haste toward the coast, why his father's old friend had cabled him to come to New York at once.

Surely von Reinitz was in dire need. Or had the old man's niece finally relented, and asked her uncle to recall Owen from the voluntary exile into which he had plunged three years ago when the last one of her oft-repeated and uncompromising rejections had finally cracked Owen's will to carry on his suit?

There was no explanation; no mention of Freya, who might have relented; nothing to indicate why his presence was so urgently de-

manded. But Owen knew that von Reinitz must have cabled at least half a dozen out-of-the-way places, stations along the proposed route of wandering which Owen had in a letter outlined, presumably for the old man's entertainment, but actually for Freya should she ever choose to recall him; and one does not cable Singapore, Rangoon, and Adis Abeba out of idle fancy, nor do practical jokers go to such expense.

Up the China Sea and across the Pacific went Owen and his reflections. It couldn't be death or serious illness, for with the time it took a cable to find him, and the time required for making the trip, his presence in such an emergency wouldn't be demanded.

Then Freya had relented. . . .

Freya had always cared for him. And her persistent rejections had always caused her as much grief as they had Owen. Never a reason: only regret, and uncompromising refusal.

Owen, it is true, had heard strange tales current in Ardsley-on-Hudson, subdued breaths of rumor about old Franz von Reinitz and his great Gothic mansion which from the wooded heights of its encircling estate commanded the town; but they were of such a vague, legendary, even outrageous nature that he had always classed them with the rest of the pre-revolutionary tales of Tarrytown and its environs.

The hushed surmises about the odd circumstances surrounding the death of the father of Franz von Reinitz—and of the curious end to which came the grandfather—were always glossed over with banal remarks about what strange things fire would do. . . .

The village loafers always dragged the von Reinitz family into their recurrent discussions on spontaneous combustion. If, for instance (they speculated), one remained in a state of extreme alcoholic saturation for weeks at a time, might one not final-

ly disintegrate from internal combustion, spontaneously generated? Particularly if one partook copiously and incessantly of the potent rum of a hundred years ago?

But in these whispered fantasies Owen took no stock; for rumor and legend invariably abound in a small town and center about the imposing mansions of wealthy recluses who have kept aloof for successive generations.

"What we are today, we owe to Franz von Reinitz," John Owen's father had often told him. "So if the old man ever asks a favor, don't deny him, no matter if it costs you your hide!"

But none of these reflections shed any light on Freya's everlasting rejection of John Owen's proposals, in spite of her undisguised affection for him.

FREYA met Owen at the Grand Central terminal.

"So you finally did change your mind!" exulted Owen.

"No, John. I'm sorry if you carried that hope all the way from wherever you were. It's Uncle Franz that called you." She disengaged herself from his embrace, and continued, "You might as well know why I've refused you these past half-dozen years. It's that rumor——"

"What rumor?" demanded Owen.

"You know as well as I do. That gossip about the curse of fire. You must have heard, from time to time."

"Surely you don't mean that that's the reason——"

"Yes. Exactly why I didn't marry you the first time you proposed."

"Good lord, is that all?"

"Wait until you see Uncle Franz, and you'll understand."

Nor could Owen's persistence get more than that ominously final sentence: for each attempt during the ride to Ardsley-on-Hudson was deflected by Freya's interest in Indo-China and the ruins of Angkor Wat.

All of which resulted in Owen's

finally declining Freya's invitation to stay at Schönbrunn until his own house could be set in order; for the growing premonition of something menacing and deadly in the background oppressed him with the thought that by avoiding even the temporary shelter of the von Reinitz house he would retain a detached viewpoint which would serve him well in answering what he now knew would be the outcome of his first words with Freya's uncle: an appeal for help against some sinister force that lurked in the background.

As Owen turned over his checks to the baggage transfer man at the station he noted, somewhat apart from the inevitable scattering of loafers, a tall, lean spectator whose presence and bearing had nothing of the loiterer about it. There was something vaguely foreign about the man: something remotely familiar in his expression rather than his features or stature, reminiscent of a curious scene in far-off Azerbaijan which Owen had never been able entirely to forget. It was not an encounter with a familiar face but rather a meeting with one whose background linked him with something outlandish, unforgettable. . . .

All of which passed dimly through Owen's mind as he assured the transfer man that there was no mistake about the address, and that he, Owen, was reopening that house. Nor was Owen aware that his right hand edged toward his hip until his fingers failed to meet the butt of the once ever-present Colt .45.

The stranger's veiled, smoldering stare was directed not at Owen but at Freya. As he caught her eye, she nodded distantly as to one entitled to recognition but not casual conversation; and the stranger bowed with courtly, foreign formality.

"Trencher Scarrett," remarked Freya as they passed beyond the stranger's hearing.

"Odd name," commented Owen,

keeping to himself the fact that Scarrett wore a familiar mantle.

In Azerbaijan curious things are done with fire and in honor of fire. . . .

Owen found himself vainly wondering just what name could be Anglicized to Trencher Scarrett. . . .

And then, as they approached the von Reinitz car, parked at the first corner past the station: "No, thanks, really. I've a bit of shopping to do, and it's only a short walk to the house. Tell Uncle Franz that I'll see him early in the afternoon."

But as Freya headed for Schönbrunn, Owen turned to retrace his steps. And then he decided not to accost Scarrett with that curious, fleeting gesture to which Owen felt Scarrett would most certainly respond as had one in Azerbaijan: whereupon he proceeded on foot to his house on the outskirts of the town.

THE towering, Gothic mass of Schönbrunn rose high above the tall grove that crouched about the center of old Franz von Reinitz's estate. Ponderous turrets and castellated battlements reared skyward their mediæval bulk. Yet that prodigious heap of carved gray stone might have been the tenuous fancies of an Arabian dream for all it served its master—if those outlandish tales that were told were true.

An aura of despair had been imposed on the somber atmosphere of the Schönbrunn that Owen had known in the years before his exile. He shuddered at the thought of Freya living under its solemn shadow, and recalled at least a hundred places that he would rather visit than the von Reinitz mansion.

Owen seized the ponderous knocker, and sought to remain unmoved by its sinister clank as it fell back into place.

An aged retainer ushered Owen into the presence of the master of Schönbrunn, bowed, and departed

silently, leaving Owen to announce himself however he saw fit. Freya evidently had elected to remain unseen until the end of the interview; and with the day's thoughts on his mind, and the uneasiness that came from his glimpse of Scarrett, Owen was relieved rather than disappointed at her absence.

The old man awoke with a start, but recovered his composure as he recognized Owen.

"I knew you'd not fail me! Such a long trip to satisfy an old man's whim. Freya said we dragged you out of upper Burma——"

"I was glad to get away, Uncle Franz."

Owen could not quite contrive any falsehoods about how well von Reinitz was looking. So he contented himself with attempting not to reveal any amazement at the old man's haggard features.

"Well, yes, I did have a good trip," continued Owen, as he seated himself. "But the delays did grate on my nerves, as I knew there must be something urgent. First a fire at the docks at Rangoon——"

"Fires!" groaned von Reinitz, fixing Owen with his dark, haunted eyes. "That's why I called you. Fires . . . ancient fires . . . the accursed light that burns in a hidden lamp is threatening my life."

"And so you seek protection by sheathing the walls of Schönbrunn with sheets of copper?" hazarded Owen as he sought to have his father's friend confirm what had for years been rumored in Ardsley.

"So you've heard? Well, that was only a portion. The enemy is closing in and will overwhelm me. Not only me, but Freya——"

"Good lord! Freya threatened?"

"Threatened? The doom is already upon her! Just as on all of her ancestors. As for me, it matters little. For me there is no escape; but for her there is still hope, as I just recently learned. So I called

you from wherever my cable reached you. You may help, if you have courage——"

"I'm with you, Uncle Franz! But tell me what it's all about. I've heard so many rumors and wild tales, ever since I was a boy——"

From the folds of his dressing-gown von Reinitz slowly drew an oiled silk envelope and took therefrom a folded manuscript.

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children," muttered the old man as he extended the packet to Owen. "Read it, please."

"Deckendorf, 12th of December, 1434," began Owen, frowning at the archaic script. "To the glory of God and the illustrious Emperor Sigismund——"

Then, returning the manuscript: "I'd miss the thought as well as the letter. Maybe you'd better translate it for me."

"Doubtless you're right," agreed von Reinitz. "I'll give you a synopsis which will do. Though when you leave, you might as well take the manuscript with you, so that you and Dr. Blanchard can study it together."

The old man shivered, thumbed the yellowed pages for a moment as he collected his thought, and repeated the prelude as one steeling himself for a plunge into black, freezing waters.

"The philosopher Rosenkreutz, they said in those old days," began von Reinitz, "revived the lost arts of the ancients, discovered the philosopher's stone, delved so deep into thaumaturgy that in the end he devised a lamp that would burn past the final moment of eternity."

"A lamp that would burn forever?" exclaimed Owen. "Did they really believe——"

"They believed, *and they were right*," solemnly affirmed von Reinitz. "In subterranean caverns and tombs, even to this day, are lights that have burned undimmed for ages. The

perpetual lamp is but one of the triumphs of ancient science. The priests who read the *Book of Thoth* and pronounced the hidden name of Osiris guarded their lore jealously; but the learned men of the Middle Ages rediscovered the secret. Yet in those troublous times the mere suspicion of thaumaturgical researches meant death at the stake; so that they hid the secret, not out of jealousy, but self-preservation."

Owen swallowed his incredulity and chewed his cigar.

"There was Meister Eckhardt, and Athanasius Kircher, and Rosenkreutz, the founder of the Rosicrucian sect, who made perpetual lamps."

"I know you're serious," interrupted Owen, "even if it does out-step reason. But that curse——"

Again the old man thumbed and glanced at the manuscript which he held, then resumed his discourse.

"Through his army of spies, the Emperor Sigismund learned that Rosenkreutz and other master alchemists delivered their formulæ and documents to their friend and patron, Graf Eberhard von Findelstein. Because of this, and the fact that Graf Eberhard had publicly styled the Empress Barbara the Messalina of Germany, he was proscribed for assassination, perhaps even the rack or the wheel. But he was forewarned, so that instead of accepting the Emperor's invitation, he fled Frankfort with his only child, the beautiful lady Thuringia, and a handful of loyal retainers.

"In his stronghold at Findelstein he defied the Emperor, serenely awaiting the approaching siege. . . ."

The old man paused, bowed his head, sighed.

"My ancestor, Gottfried von Reinitz, who wrote these pages, was in command of the forces assigned to the task of capturing Findelstein and taking prisoner the rebellious Count.

"Early in the siege, so the story goes, the Lady Thuringia ventured from the walls of the castle, believing that the besiegers had withdrawn before a sortie of her father's men at arms. She rode into an outpost, squarely into an ambush. Gottfried sought to capture her as a hostage to force the capitulation of the Count. His men closed in on her from three sides; and on the fourth she was hemmed in by the precipitous thousand-foot drop of a cliff. Gottfried spurred his horse forward, and attempted to drag her from her mount. But before he or his men could seize her, she wheeled and rode straight into the abyss.

"The following day another sortie, headed by the grief-crazed Graf Eberhard, routed Gottfried's forces and pursued him to Frankfort. And then the Count declared war on the Emperor. Gottfried, once more in the field with a larger force, again besieged the castle; and this time it capitulated without resistance. Graf Eberhard was dead of grief for his daughter's death—suicide forced by Gottfried's attempt to hold her as a hostage.

"THE Emperor ordered Findelstein sacked from foundations to top-most battlements and turrets; yet not a trace of alchemical manuscripts or apparatus could be found; nor a sign of the tomb of either Graf Eberhard or the Lady Thuringia. Torture could not wring the secret from Kuhrt, the Count's lieutenant; though before he died, he mocked Gottfried, and taunted him about the everlasting curse the dying Count had pronounced—the curse of endless fire, the eternal curse which would last until the perpetual flame of the hidden Rosicrucian lamp should dim to extinction. . . .

"Gottfried's misgivings, which are expressed in these very pages, and in his own handwriting, were well founded. The curse swiftly overtook

him. He persisted in seeking the hidden loot of the castle; sought out one day the nethermost passages and deepest crypts—and was never again seen alive. What remained of him was later found in the Danube, far in Bohemia. . . .”

The old man's voice trailed into an awed whisper.

“It was scorched and seared by fire. Gottfried was the first of our line to fall before the curse. And none since then has evaded it. Not one! The doom has cornered me; and Freya is next. . . .”

“It is written,” continued von Reinitz after a solemn pause, “how the spell was woven. Graf Eberhard, armed from head to foot, bade his retainers farewell, and ordered them to seal him alive in his daughter's tomb; him, and one of the everlasting lamps of Rosenkreutz, into whose eternal flames he chanted a remorseless curse which should endure as long as that fire burned. And then—so the story goes, aided by the inference of occultists, for no man knows precisely where the tomb is, nor what took place therein—the Count entered a mystic silence, composed himself to a sleep that was animate death; so that, living yet lifeless, he sits pondering on the endless vengeance which has endlessly fallen on my house and all those allied to it.

“None remains save only myself and Freya. Our ancestors fled from Bavaria more than a century ago, taking refuge here, and for a while seemingly evading the curse: for while my father and grandfather died strangely, the supernatural element was not plainly in evidence. Though the less said about their deaths, the better. . . .”

The old man shuddered, then continued, “But despite their appalling deaths, natural causes could easily be found. And I took fresh hope, fancying that the curse had spent itself. Yet I was wrong; for shortly after your last letter, I felt the in-

fluence of the curse, and quaked in the shadow of its terror. The signs are now unmistakable; the everlasting fires besiege me, and in spite of the counter offensive directed against it by the learned Dr. Blanchard, of whom you surely know—”

“Then where do I fit into the scene—”

“You can work with Blanchard. He needs help which you can give. For me there is no hope—though during the time that it takes to complete my doom, you or the doctor could break the curse. And even if too late to save me, there is a chance of saving Freya.”

“Then the curse can be broken?”

“Certainly,” affirmed von Reinitz. “If the lamp were found and extinguished, we are saved; though that is a dim hope, seeing that my ancestors sought it for centuries, and in vain. Old as I am, and infirm, I can't go to Bavaria and hunt that hidden tomb. So I can but pin my faith to some stout friend who has the courage—”

“Courage I have, but my knowledge—”

“Blanchard knows; but the curse knew him for an enemy. So today Blanchard is a cripple, helpless, his strong mind and great knowledge imprisoned and half useless in a withered shell.”

“Then Blanchard shall teach me!” declared Owen. “I'm with you to a finish; so count on as much as Blanchard asks me to do.”

Whereupon Owen took leave of von Reinitz, determined then and there to seek the learned occultist, Blanchard.

HE FOUND Dr. Blanchard on the rear sun-porch of his brick bungalow, seated in a wheel chair. The professor was a slender man, with luminous dark eyes and keen, aquiline features which could smile pleasantly enough.

Owen took the seat indicated by

the invalid, and drove to the point at once, summarizing the story of von Reinitz.

"It's all so incredible," concluded Owen. "Particularly the story of the eternal lamp. What do you think, Dr. Blanchard?"

"There is more truth in it than you could possibly believe. The eternal lamp is not the fabulous thing you think it is. Of those mysterious vessels made by Rosenkreutz, one was discovered some years after his death, in the underground vault where he lay buried. When those who profaned the tomb approached the weird light too closely, it flickered high and expired, so that its mystery and wonder might not be uncovered.

"And in the Museum of Rarities in Leyden are two lamps whose flames expired when human hands touched them. In the Museo Capitolino of Rome is another that on good authority is said to have been found in the tomb of Tullia, Cicero's daughter, where it had been burning brightly for fifteen hundred years."

"Your reputation in occult and psychic research compels my belief, even if the story surpasses all belief. But as to the accursed light which old von Reinitz——"

"That also is true," declared Blanchard solemnly. "I know, and to my great cost! I studied the case, and tried to fight the malignant influence that made the von Reinitz house a den of madness. And look what happened to me for interfering: I'm warped and twisted, and useless. They——"

"*They?*" queried Owen.

"Yes, *they*. For there is more now than in the beginning. More than just a hereditary curse which in most cases lies entirely in the minds of members of the family afflicted, and is kept alive by their fears. There is in this instance a powerful concentration of forces, strong personalities—human personalities, I mean,

as distinguished from spiritual entities—who are bent on destroying von Reinitz. Someone, hiding behind the mask of a curse, has decided on finishing old Franz, and his niece as well."

"His niece as well? Good God, Doctor——"

"I'm sorry, lad, but I'll not spare you anything. Yes, they're after her also. And if you interfere, as I know you will, they'll include you. *Me* they could not touch; but they caught me unaware and scared and scorched my body into what you now see. Medical men are puzzled; laymen call it paralysis; but I know better."

"What is my first move, Doctor?"

"Be on your guard as to your own safety; for if they get you, you can't save her. So watch yourself jealously and selfishly. Guard yourself——"

"Against whom?"

Before Blanchard could answer, Owen made a fleeting, swift gesture with his left hand. The doctor's brows lifted in Gothic arches.

"You know more than I thought," he said. "Tell me, did you offer Trencher Scarrett that sign and greeting?"

"No. I didn't know if I was right. And if right, all the more reason for not tipping off my hand. If he is what something told me he is—but I once used that sign, in Azerbaijan. . . ."

Owen shivered.

"Don't bother to continue. I know what you saw. And I wonder that you are here today."

"Then I'm right about Scarrett?"

"I don't *know*; but like you, I suspect it strongly. Old von Reinitz didn't call on me for assistance until shortly after Scarrett appeared in town a year ago. And Scarrett's past is too thoroughly covered. One can't trace him back beyond the day of his appearance. He might have emerged from the earth. All of

which convinces me that he's here on the trail of von Reinitz, though I can't prove it. Suffice it to say that something must be done, and done quickly. You arrived none too soon."

"Then what am I to do first of all? What move must I make?"

"Patience. I'll let you know. I had to see you before I could begin to plan for you. Now leave me to study it out, to fit you into the picture. But if you learn anything of interest, see me at once. I'm crippled, so you'll have to be both eyes and ears for me. And watch yourself closely!" concluded the invalid as he offered his hand.

OWEN spent the remainder of the afternoon in wandering about the town and its environs, hoping for a casual encounter with Searrett. And yet all the while he felt more like the hunted than the hunter; so that, failing to make any contact with Searrett, Owen returned to his house with the sense of one finding shelter from a pursuer.

"Driven home!" he exclaimed in disgust as the door clicked closed behind him.

In his restlessness and sense of insecurity even in his own house, Owen wandered about, forcing himself to take an interest in the home he had not seen for three years; but he could not drive off the feeling that he was the butt of an intangible yet powerful assault, the center of a vortex of power that was closing in on him. He found himself reading the last line of a page and then realizing that he retained not a word of what he had read in its beginning. Azerbaijan crept into his thoughts, and would not leave them. . . .

And then something snapped, liberating him from the bondage of the Land of Fire and the oppression of its memories. He was here to save old Franz . . . and he'd have Freya, curse or no curse!

Unmindful of the hour, Owen set

out on foot for Schönbrunn, once more himself, on the warpath, and resolved to see Freya then and there, look her in the eye, and laugh the curse out of existence. He wondered how anything could have distracted his thoughts from her ever since his interview with von Reinitz. It seemed grotesque that the fears of an old man and the warnings of an invalid and the memories of a devil-haunted adventure in a far-off province of Persia could have unnerved him. Thus he strode aggressively along the road to Schönbrunn, and finally passed the somber gate that opened into darkness unplumbed by the night's full moonlight.

A guttural murmuring as of a distant chant came to his ears; and beneath it he sensed rather than heard the rhythm of oddly accented drumming, the thump-thump of a curious drum played in but one part of the world. Owen would rather have retraced his steps; but he went on, though picking his way more cautiously. Then out of the darkness ahead of him he caught the nebulous, bluish glow of a faint light just around a curve in the road that wound on and on to the heart of the von Reinitz estate.

As he advanced, now stealthily and soundlessly on the trail of what lay before him, the oddly cadenced, muttering roll of the drum grew louder, and the chant less muffled; then both ceased abruptly.

Had the drummer heard his approach, and decided to do some stalking of his own?

Owen paused, grimaced at the thought of having for an instant considered retreat, and advanced more cautiously; and finally, hugging the outside of the curve in the road, making himself as much a part of the shadows as he could, Owen found himself regarding a spectacle that in no way added to his peace of mind.

A man squatted cross-legged in

the middle of the drive, with his back not quite squarely turned to Owen. Surrounding him was a circle of tapers that burned with an unwavering blue flame; and in the light of this incredible blue there glittered a concentric circle of orange-colored powder. At the man's left was the tiny kettledrum which he had just ceased playing.

The squatting figure swayed from the hips, as to the cadence of a measure that he alone could hear; and then, body still swaying, his hands flashed first to the left, then to the right, in precisely formal gestures—gestures statuesquely stiff as Egyptian sculpture, yet swift and sinister.

Scarrett was engaged in some devilish mummery. One fleeting glance at those predatory features sufficed to identify him.

Scarrett's voice again picked up the muttering chant to whose silent cadence he had been swaying; and this time Owen recognized occasional words, Persian laid on a background of a tongue more obscure.

"Lord of Everlasting Fire . . . Fire Everlasting . . . Fire . . ."

His suspicions and Blanchard's had been well grounded indeed! Here before him was the poisonous ritual that was reviving the curse that for nearly five hundred years had been damning the house of von Reinitz; and this hawk-beaked reminder of Azerbaijan was chanting out of existence all of Owen's hopes and aspirations, and heaping a doom on Freya. . . .

The night's misgivings and flashes of cowardice slipped from Owen's shoulders. He set himself for action. . . .

"Lord and Master of Everlasting Fire!" droned that half-intelligible chant. "Fire . . . Master . . . Fire . . . Everlasting. . ."

And now it was a war drum that sent hot flashes and cold chills up Owen's spine and coursing through

his blood. His hands stealthily combed the darkness of the surrounding ground, weaving in time to the rise and fall of the chant and the swaying of the singer. His fingers brushed against a piece of wood the thickness of his wrist. With infinite care he felt along its length, and found it not too long, nor yet too thick. . . .

Owen emerged from his shadow . . . one . . . two . . . and on the third pace struck. . . .

As he dusted the dead, dry bark from his hands, he regretted that his club had failed him, breaking under the force of his blow. But when he saw how quietly his quarry lay in the circle of unbelievably blue flame, Owen felt that the evening's work had been very good, and sufficient; so that instead of going on to the von Reinitz house, he retraced his steps to his own. It was too late to see Dr. Blanchard; and Owen felt that though Scarrett had probably survived the impact of that unfortunately defective club, he would at least engage in no further chanting that night.

"Just as I suspected," commented Dr. Blanchard the next morning, as Owen completed the recital of the previous night's events. "Scarrett is in back of it all. Now we know, definitely. Freya phoned me shortly before your arrival and told me how, for over an hour, her uncle had been writhing and twisting and complaining of fires that were consuming him, until shortly after 11, he suddenly became quite himself again and fell into a sound, restful sleep. That was just about the time you took a hand."

"But what are we to do?" fumed Owen. "Now Scarrett knows someone is on his trail and will be more wary. Our only hope is to patrol the estate and pot him as a trespasser. Thus far he's a fairly law-abiding citizen. One can't have him hanged

for sitting in a circle of blue tapers and chanting in a foreign language. From the looks of things I'll have to waylay him and shoot it out, and trust to luck to get clear of it——"

"That won't suffice," declared the doctor. "For the curse itself is a thing beyond Searrett's control. He's meddling with something that he himself couldn't stop. You must leave for Bavaria as soon as possible——"

"How about a passport?"

"You'll have time for that. Though if you had to leave very suddenly—say on account of last night's performance being more thorough than you think—try this address."

Blanchard handed Owen a card on which he had scribbled a name and address.

"He'll furnish a passport with skilfully forged seals and all, within the hour. And whatever cash you need. Never mind why; suffice it to say he's indebted to me, and that for good and sufficient reasons I don't care to expose him. Remember just this: that once you enter his door, you'll make a clean getaway if you follow his instructions.

"Keep those papers which von Reinitz gave you yesterday, for they contain a good deal of information he omitted in telling you his story. It will be difficult reading; but once you're on the ground, you'll be able to read between the lines. The hunt may not be as difficult as it was to those of the house of von Reinitz, who sought the hidden tomb while oppressed by the fear of the curse. . . . Good God! Look!"

Owen followed the invalid's compelling gesture.

Small stars of incandescent whiteness blazed, expired, and blazed again as they skipped dazzlingly across the surface of the pond at the edge of Blanchard's estate. A hissing, as of cold water trickling over hot metal, came to Owen's ears as he leaped to his feet.

"Fire elementals! Mad, and moving toward Schönbrunn! Sweeping everything before them to get at Franz! Quick! Get me outside! Wear this scarab. And on your life, don't drop it!"

Owen flung the chain about his neck, seized the invalid, and carried him out of doors.

"Don't stop!" commanded the invalid from Owen's shoulders. "March right into them!"

Owen obeyed, advancing full into the path of the burning, scintillant flecks of doom that converged on the house. A hissing, roaring, surging as of flames beyond all reason and measure thundered in his ears, and an intolerable fierceness of heat seared his cheeks; but Owen advanced.

And then, above the elemental tumult, Owen heard the voice of Blanchard chanting words that crackled and whipped through the blistering air.

The fumes, the ever-increasing fury of the advancing elementals dizzied Owen. He stumbled; but before he could recover his footing, he saw the doctor with a supreme effort rise to his knees and with a sudden, stabbing motion thrust his own amulet, held at arm's length, to the cardinal points of the compass, in the ritual of psychic pointing; and all the while Blanchard persisted in his sonorous chanting of a language that was ancient when Khafra laid the base of his great pyramid.

And then roared the voice of Blanchard, in English: "By the Sword and by the Rod and by the Power——"

To Owen's amazement, the advancing lines paused, swung in a right turn, retreated.

"They're headed for Schönbrunn! Run, man, for *their* lives! I'll stay here, but I'll think for you. Walk into them with your amulet before you; *think* power, even if you can't pronounce the words."

And Owen, lashed by the words of the invalid, ran toward Schönbrunn as though pursued by, rather than pursuing, the overflow of the nethermost hells.

The path of the elementals, strangely enough, was in a vast curve; though despite their deviation they bore inevitably on Schönbrunn. Yet Owen's direct course gave him the advantage; so that, even though on the verge of collapse from his frenzied dash, he had a lead of a hundred yards on the swiftly flickering menace that sought old von Reinitz in his last retreat.

Owen pounded the ancient brazen knocker. "Open!" he demanded. "Quick!"

As Freya unlatched the massive door, Owen crashed into the somber vestibule.

"Your uncle——"

A hoarse, agonized scream quenched his speech. Then came a heavy thud, and silence.

"Uncle Franz! He's hurt——"

Owen flung himself up the winding stairs, taking them three at a leap.

A BLINDING flare of fire shot from the grate to the threshold as Owen burst into the old man's room. He saw on the crest of that bed of glowing coals two flame-colored lizards with white-hot, adamantine eyes. The air thickened stiflingly, and darkened; and as he groped for the snap-switch to turn on the lights, the fumes of singed clothing and scorched flesh assaulted his nostrils. But before he could find the switch, the terrific darkness of the room thinned, leaving visible the horror he had anticipated.

On the floor, with terror unnamable burned on its twisted features and branded into its staring eyes, lay the body of old Franz. The curse had struck; and Freya alone remained of the house of von Reinitz.

On the chest of the old man was a

brand, the livid figure of a salamander deeply etched into the skin. Further examination disclosed a deep gash over the old man's left temple. A cane lay on the floor, a few inches from the stiffening right hand. Old Franz in falling had struck his head against the massive andiron.

Owen stooped to pick up the cane. . . .

A piercing scream sounded behind him. He turned and saw Freya reel into the room, totter, and collapse. But before he could reach for his flask and apply it to her white lips, an all too familiar roaring and crackling poured up the staircase. Sheets of livid flame surged and billowed into the vestibule, along the hall, and up the stairs. Tiny flecks of dazzling whiteness danced and leaped glitteringly with the advancing fire.

In another instant, the curse would claim the sole survivor of the house of von Reinitz. Lord God, but if Blanchard were there to speak his strange words! Then out of his despair came an overwhelming confidence; remembering the doctor's admonition, feeling his very presence, Owen tore the amulet from his neck, looped its chain about his wrist, seized the unconscious girl and advanced to meet the unquenchable fury that raged up the stairs. And though his lips could not speak the syllables, there flashed through his mind the cadence, the fierce and solemn thunder of Blanchard's ancient incantation; and to that cadence, Owen pointed in psychic ritual, ever advancing.

The flames lapped his cheeks——

"By the Rod and by the Sword and by the Power!" he pronounced in a voice that rang above the snarl of the flames and their crackling.

They retreated before him, dimmed, vanished; and Owen found himself a few seconds later in the vestibule,

still blinded by the awful radiance he had confronted.

As his sight returned to him, Owen busied himself with the unconscious girl he still clutched in his left arm. Her dress, torn open at the neck, exposed a fearful band deeply scored on her breast: the salamander, the mark of the curse!

She was not dead; the elementals had but succeeded in marking her for the death that hovered close at hand. There still was hope: and to make the most of her chance for life, Owen took possession of the von Reinitz car and raced from Schönbrunn as fast as steel and gas could carry him, feeling that he could place Freya in no refuge safer than the home of Dr. Blanchard.

Helene Spalding, Dr. Blanchard's widowed daughter and constant attendant, met Owen at the door.

"Bring her right up to my room. She'll be in good hands," assured Helene in a voice that betrayed not a trace of surprize at Owen's still unconscious burden. "Leave her to me; Father wants a word with you at once."

"There's not an hour to lose," began Blanchard, as Owen stepped into the doctor's study. "Last night's encounter with Scarrett was evidently not as conclusive as I wish it had been; and you see how he followed up by releasing this unholy manifestation."

"Well, I've at least been proof against his fires!" raged Owen, fuming at the mere mention of Scarrett. "And I'll shoot him at sight——"

"Steady, lad," cautioned Blanchard. "That would do little good. For though he accelerated the curse, brought it to a crisis by his rituals, he himself can't halt it or deflect it. And with the shock that Freya has received, she has not enough resistance to fight it off. It will surely get her in the end—and that end is not far off. So your killing Scarrett would only lead you into complica-

tions that would rob me of the one ally that can help me destroy the curse at its source. Don't you see the logic of it? That while a curse emanates from a focal point, an outside source, it gains most of its force from its destined victim's acceptance: and with what has happened, Freya's will can't fight it any more. So that more than ever, and without any delay, you must find that hidden lamp and destroy it.

"But should you discover this vessel, be on your guard, for it is undoubtedly the focal point of dangerous fire-elementals. On the other hand, have confidence. After what you did this afternoon——"

Owen shivered, and grimaced at the memory of his terror.

"You mean, after what *you* did!"

"I didn't think it could be done," answered Dr. Blanchard. "I knew I couldn't drive them away, but I hoped to deflect them from their course."

"So that's why they went on a curve while I ran in a straight line?"

"Yes. But the farther they went, the less susceptible they were to my thought concentration; so that in the end they closed in on you."

"But how do you account for my having the distinct impression of having pronounced in my mind those words of yours. They were meaningless; yet I could have sworn that at that instant I felt a sense of power, felt something within me pronouncing them. I was so sure that I advanced instead of retreating."

"Exactly. Your courage did it. And it really mattered little what syllables you *thought*, so that you *felt* power. The words themselves serve only in that those who know them can assume the power the words express and symbolize: thus you assumed for an instant some of the psychic strength I myself would have had had I been present.

"But as I said," continued the doctor, "be on your guard. Wear

your amulet, day and night. Elementals of fire, as typified by those salamanders, are not physical flame, as we know it, but vortices of force; not souls, as human beings are, but intelligences that live indefinitely. Yet being inferior to man, since they are only intelligences, they are under proper circumstances under the control of man; so that they may be used by adepts at sorcery to gain evil ends, and apparently overstep the very laws of nature. But remember that this afternoon your will and your courage saved you and Freya. So have courage; for they are but *psychic*, burning only that against which they are directed by a will superior to that of the victim."

The questions that crowded to Owen's lips were unuttered; for at that moment came a loud rapping at the outer door. But before he could leave the doctor's study, Helene waved him back, and went to the door herself. The next instant he heard the sound of voices mingled with Helene's sharp protest, and the slamming of a door. A moment later, Hinckley, the town constable, entered the study, with Scarrett in his wake.

"There he is!" growled Scarrett, leveling a finger at Owen. "He killed the old man!"

Hinckley hesitated, then, avoiding Owen's hard stare, drew forth a warrant.

"Owen," muttered the officer, "I'm sorry—but I got no choice. You got to come with me."

Owen knew that the charge couldn't be substantiated; but he also knew that the delay would play into Scarrett's hands, give him just the few days he needed to devote to uninterrupted deviltry.

Hinckley was armed, and would not let old acquaintance block the course of the law; but Hinckley was at the same time a stickler for the letter of the law.

Owen advanced a pace, leaned on the edge of the light table that was

between him and the intruders, and got a secure grasp on it, one hand at each end, all with a careless negligence that disguised his intent.

"Why not read me your warrant, Hinckley?" he requested suavely. "The whole thing sounds unreasonable. Someone must have sworn out that warrant before the old man died."

The constable unfolded the document. Scarrett edged closer, his hand seeking his hip.

"Well, I guess you're entitled to hear it," agreed Hinckley.

Owen, lifting the table and thrusting it before him as a shield, leaped forward. The constable, caught off his guard, tripped; and clutching Scarrett for support, threw Scarrett's drawn pistol out of line. The shot went wild.

Owen dropped the table and closed in. Scarrett, rocked by Owen's swift thrust to the jaw, sank in his tracks. And Hinckley clambered to his feet just in time to find himself staring into the muzzle of the pistol Owen had salvaged in the course of the encounter.

"Reach for the ceiling, Hinckley!" commanded Owen. "And don't trust old acquaintance too far——"

Hinckley wilted under Owen's fierce gaze.

And then, as he backed out of the study, pistol still leveled, Owen addressed Blanchard: "Take good care of her, Doctor. I'm getting that lamp!"

Whereat he slammed the door of the study, cleared the front door, and in a moment more gained the wheel of the von Reinitz car. And then the dash from Ardsley to New York, where he abandoned the car and sought out the man who would provide him with forged passports.

FROM Hamburg Owen went to Munich, and thence to his destination, Deggendorf, a mediæval city lying in the Bavarian forest, the

wildest and least known part of Germany, and far off the tourist's track.

Not far from the city was the Castle of Findelstein, ominously glowering at the Danube from its impregnable height. And there for a week he labored, never once finding a trace of that hidden tomb which he sought; for among the papers of old Franz von Reinitz there was nothing which gave any clue more definite than that the focal point of the curse lay hidden somewhere in or near the castle itself.

Yet one thing he did discover: that the curse on the von Reinitz family and the ruined castle were indeed connected; and that, though eluding him, the Rosierucian lamp must be within his reach.

The moldering walls of the castle were hot, hot with a torrid, tropical warmth that would have been welcome had it not been so unnatural to the season. The ruin was permeated with the radiation of subterranean fires, the emanation of monstrous forces that simmered and sweltered in their hidden prison, awaiting the day of release, the hour of the destruction they were to wreak against Freya. And the day of wrath was close at hand; for there was a tension in the air, an oppressive, stifling heaviness in those dusky passages and dim halls through which Owen prowled, seeking the panel, the trap-door, or the passageway which would lead to the spot where Graf Eberhard and his daughter lay fearsomely entombed and guarded by elemental fires.

One evening as Owen sat on the parapet, studying the papers which thus far had failed to yield a clue, he was startled by the crunch of a footfall behind him. He drew his Luger as he leaped to his feet and whirled to face the intruder.

Scarrett confronted him.

"Easy, there!" smiled the enemy as he raised his hands above his head. And then, grinning sourly: "This

looking into pistols you point at me is becoming monotonous. How about an armistice?"

"What brings you here?" demanded Owen.

"It's rather awkward to talk with one's hands clutching skyward," suggested Scarrett.

Owen suddenly felt quite the master of the situation. A Fire Master who didn't relish looking into the muzzle of a Luger couldn't be as terrific as the psychic flames Owen had faced that hideous afternoon at Schönbrunn. So he lowered his pistol.

"And now I'll answer your very reasonable question," announced Scarrett. "I propose working with you, if you'll meet me half-way."

"Fascinating!" agreed Owen. "What assassination do you contemplate now?"

He laughed to conceal the fear that crept over him at the thought that Scarrett's work in Ardsley might have ended with the destruction of Freya.

"I'll ignore the implication. But to come to facts, I want to be in on the opening of that tomb you're seeking."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You've taken a notion to get those thaumaturgical secrets buried with Graf Eberhard. And after what you did in the face of certain curious manifestations before Schönbrunn—yes, I heard the whole story—facing those fires and living to tell the tale, I feel that you're a man after my own heart.

"Be reasonable, Owen," continued Scarrett. "Need we be at sword's points? I admit that I tried to get you arrested on a trumped-up murder charge to give me a few days in which to explore Schönbrunn without interruptions. That charge wouldn't have stuck any longer than was necessary for me to make some important investigations of the phenomena attending the curious

death of von Reinitz. Your precipitate flight served me just as well; though I may as well admit that it did me no good after all, for the papers were not to be found at Schönbrunn. And, judging from your still being here, you likewise failed to find what you sought."

It was odd to hear the Fire Master, the arch sorcerer from Azerbaijan, making those matter-of-fact explanations; nor did it seem quite credible that this man had concentrated those fire elementals on Schönbrunn. Finally, Owen sensed the possibility of using the Fire Master instead of openly opposing him.

"Well, your proposition does interest me," admitted Owen. "It seems that I was mistaken about several things. My efforts thus far have been in vain. But working together, we might both succeed."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Scarrett, as he offered his hand.

"Just a moment!" countered Owen. "Supposing I refuse?"

"I had thought of that," mused Scarrett. "Supposing then that it leaked out in Deggendorf that someone was prowling about this unsavory ruin? The inhabitants would probably pull you into very small pieces, just out of idle curiosity to see what they could learn about the inside workings of a man who haunted an ill-favored place like this. Now, as I said——"

"The point is well taken," conceded Owen. "And we'll equip ourselves with easels and the like, pose as artists, which will explain almost any antics which anyone might witness or hear about."

"Good. Then we'll make our plans and come back in the morning."

Whereat the newly formed *entente* returned to Deggendorf.

IN THE morning, Scarrett and Owen, equipped with easels and sketching-materials, picked their way up

the steep path to Findelstein. Owen wondered whether they would continue in the same way he had started: systematically hunting for trapdoors and secret panels. Scarrett's first remark as they entered the courtyard, however, was certainly not what Owen had expected.

"It happens," announced Scarrett, as he dropped his artist's paraphernalia on the paving, "that I know precisely where this tomb is located."

"There," replied Owen as soon as he could catch his breath, "is where you have it on me."

Which, he fancied, was somewhat better than asking Scarrett what, then, the real problem might be, and wherein he, Scarrett, needed any help.

"And," continued Scarrett, "I have every reason to believe that you yourself know where it is, all protests to the contrary notwithstanding."

"And if I do?"

"Then you probably were confronted by the same problem that confronts me."

But without defining that problem, Scarrett advanced to the center of the courtyard, toward the basin of a dry fountain. He seized its odd centerpiece, a grotesque and not entirely savory statuette of lead, twisted it on its base, reversed the twist a part of a turn, and then, after a pause, jerked it toward him, all with the display of familiarity to be expected of one returning after a long absence to open the wall safe of his own house.

"Now give me a hand!" demanded the Fire Master.

Owen obeyed, and the two leaned against the edge of the basin, heaving and grunting; in vain, Owen thought, until, suddenly, the entire fountain yielded, turning on a pivot apparently in its circumference. A circular opening was revealed, and into its depths led narrow staircase

which vanished in dismal blackness far beneath.

"Follow me!" commanded Scarrett.

The two invaders, guided by the glow of Scarrett's flash lamp, picked their way down the spiral staircase. A fierce tropical warmth embraced them: the warmth of Samar and Cebu, and the fiery breath of Saharan expanses. . . .

"Just as I said!" exulted Scarrett.

Owen fingered the small crowbar he carried, and wondered whether it might not be wise to bend it across the Fire Master's head; for somehow it seemed to him that the Fire Master sought his aid for some reason not entirely to Owen's benefit. Still, Scarrett knew so well where the tomb was, and yet spoke of difficulty . . . and moreover, to assault a man from the rear was not the most heroic thing in the world, so that Owen desisted.

At the foot of the interminable sequence of stairs Scarrett halted, his advance barred by the wall of a circular vault. To save his flash lamp, he struck light to a half-burned torch which someone, hundreds of years ago, had left sticking in a crevice of the wall; and by its smoky, resinous flame they examined the curved surface of the masonry.

To the left of the staircase was a niche in the wall, some five feet deep, three feet wide, and five or six in height. Closer scrutiny revealed that the back of the niche was not curved, but flat; and that instead of being of stone, it was of metal.

"Steel!" exclaimed Scarrett. "A door . . . look at the hinge straps . . . and to get at the lock we'll have to demolish the five feet of masonry that was built in front of it. . . . Look! Now you can't doubt!"

Scarrett indicated a half-legible inscription graven into the door:

A double curse on him who violates the tomb of Graf Eberhard von . . .

The rest was too obscure for ready reading; but that sufficed.

Just beyond that door was the Rosicrucian lamp! The Fire Eternal!

"Well, what's a curse more or less?" laughed Scarrett; though his laugh was not quite convincing. "We've got to eat our way through five feet of granite——"

"Yes, and it's cemented together . . . and—good Lord!—each block was bound to its neighbor with molten lead poured into holes drilled from one stone to the next!"

"Dynamite in sufficient quantity to shake it would probably make the staircase collapse and fill up the vault, for it's not as securely built. And to knock the masonry from in front of that door would take the two of us weeks—or months, perhaps. I can't wait that long!"

Owen wondered at the anxiety in the Fire Master's voice. What was his game? Why his haste?

"There is an old tradition," reflected Scarrett, half aloud. "I've never had the courage to put it to test. . . ."

He took from his vest pocket a piece of chalk and drew on the floor of the vault a circle, in which he inscribed a pentacle; and then at each of the cardinal points of the compass he marked a curious symbol just tangent to the circle.

"Stay outside," protested Scarrett as Owen sought to take position beside him within the circle. "You'll spoil it all. I must work alone!"

Scarrett was too anxious. And Owen remembered a scene in Azerbaijan which he wished he could forget. . . .

"Like hell you must!"

Owen's Luger seconded the contradiction.

"So!" Scarrett smiled with an effort. "So! . . . Well, the advantage is yours. And since you must spoil

my one chance, have it your own way."

"Don't bother, Scarrett. Just call it off. I begin to see why you wanted me to work with you. If I enter that circle, and thus cheat Them out of Their sacrifice, They won't obey you, even if They do come. You see, I once saw that ritual, and I saw what remained of the man who stayed outside the circle."

Scarrett nearly succeeded in masking his wrath and disgust.

"I didn't contemplate *that* ritual. But since you don't trust me, we'll have to pick the masonry to pieces, stone from stone."

"The devil we will! Fire Master, you don't seem to know your fire! I'll turn that trick if I can assemble the stuff."

"How?"

"Wait and see."

And with that he turned and began the ascent to the courtyard, Scarrett following him.

Late that evening, Owen and Scarrett returned to Findelstein, this time leading a pack mule along the circuitous route they had picked to conceal their movements, and misled any of the idly curious who might have observed their departure. And their preparations having been made so stealthily, there was little chance of any shadowing by any inhabitant of Deggendorf.

In the courtyard of Findelstein they unslung the heavily laden pack saddle.

"Help me carry this stuff downstairs," commanded Owen. "Grab the large cylinder; I'll bring the rest."

Scarrett, tottering under the weight of a cylinder of compressed oxygen, led the way. Owen followed, carrying a smaller cylinder, several pieces of apparatus equipped with gages and handwheels, and a coil of rubber tubing.

"I had one hard time getting this stuff together without arousing comment. But thanks to an American-born superintendent of a saw mill out in this forest, I promoted a cutting torch and some gas."

ONCE in the vault, Owen assembled the apparatus, turned on the gas, adjusted the flame so that its heating jets burned in small, blue points of dazzling fire. Then, eyes protected with dark goggles, Owen applied the flame to the door.

"If it only works as well as it did this afternoon!" he muttered as, seeing an incandescent spot develop under the nose of the torch, he released the cutting jet of oxygen under high pressure. A shower of molten metal spattered back; fine, misty, white-hot droplets that seared and seamed his face and dusted through his hair. The torch backfired, sputtered, and went out. Owen relit it, and again applied it, this time with more success. A jagged, smoking-hot fragment of the door, about the size of the palm of his hand, dropped out.

Scarrett rushed to the opening, blinked, dropped his eyes; not because of the glare of the incandescent sides of the hole, but before the immeasurable radiance that sifted out from the other side: brilliant as a host of suns. Despite his goggles, Owen with difficulty faced the ferocity of that awful light.

It came from a bronze vessel, suspended by long chains from the ceiling, with its branched jets gushing silvery flame.

The eternal lamp of Rosenkreutz!

With a shock that left him cold came the realization that this light had been burning for ages, might burn for centuries more, evil and menacing, radiating a curse that even within the next few hours might destroy Freya, unless he quenched it.

The thought of confronting that fearful glare of living radiance froze

him. He shivered in spite of the fierce heat that poured through the opening in the door. He wondered whether he might not shatter the accursed lamp by means of a hod thrust through the hole he had cut, and whether even this device might not cost his life as the price of dissolving the curse.

As if on guard, in the farther end of the tomb, loomed the statuesque figure of a man in full armor of bronze. He sat beside a long table, leaning on his left arm, and holding in his gauntleted right hand a ponderous trunchcon whose butt rested against the flagging. The plumed and visored helmet drooped forward in an attitude of sleep; as if relaxed from the vigilance of the guard he stood over the body of an unbelievably lovely girl, the daughter of Graf Eberhard, inanimate, yet with all the semblance of life, reclining on a lofty dais just beneath the everlasting lamp. Surrounding the dais were great chests, half opened, from which blazed the iridescent fire of bloodily glaring rubies, cool, unblinking sapphires, diamonds, and fabulous emeralds. And flanking this treasure he saw other chests, richly carved, and sealed with seals of lead.

The archives of the philosophers! The secrets sought by Scarrett!

As he gazed, there came to mind Scarrett's haste to enter the tomb. . . .

He started violently as one suddenly roused from deep sleep—but not soon enough. The impact of something swiftly traveling and solid shook his brain. Fingers fluttered feverishly at his throat even before he sank to the floor; which mattered not at all to Owen, who was dropping through successions of unplumbed darkness. As he floated to a halt, he sensed that cords were being drawn about his ankles and wrists; that he was trussed securely.

Then—he couldn't estimate the length of that timeless interval dur-

ing which he had been stunned by the blow from behind—he saw Scarrett regarding him with a smile almost friendly.

"Unless I'm fearfully mistaken about who slugged me one dark night not long ago, you and I are about even. But since you've helped me get in to the treasure, I'll give you a fair deal: you may have whatever I leave of it; if you manage to escape."

Owen's reply was inarticulate.

"Come, come now," chided the Fire Master; "I'll have to leave jewels a-plenty, since one little pack mule couldn't carry them. But, my bright young friend, you may as well forget whatever plans you had, for I am taking the secrets of forgotten thaumaturgy back to a land where I shall be power made absolute. There can't be two of us."

And then Scarrett relit the torch and set to work.

Piece after piece of the massive door dropped to the floor. Owen wondered how Scarrett could endure the unearthly radiance that poured out of the tomb.

With infinite effort, Owen contrived to turn his aching head just enough to enable him to follow Scarrett's advance into the tomb. Scarrett was carrying Owen's amulet. And as he advanced, he thrust in front, and to the right, and to the left, in gestures of psychic pointing, chanting as he went.

Long jets of flame hissed from the lamp, enveloped him, but harmed him not at all. And then it dawned on Owen why he had been tapped on the head as soon as Scarrett had picked up the technique of the cutting torch: not only to be uninterrupted in his looting, but to get the amulet without which his occultism might fail before the lamp of Rosenkreutz.

The invader was stooping over the chest of archives.

Then the bronze knight stirred, stretched; paused an instant, and

with incredibly silent swiftness, stood bolt upright!

The plumed warrior lifted his truncheon—

Scarrett, moved by a premonition of doom, half turned. But too late. The truncheon descended, shearing flesh and crushing bone. The fierce flames of the lamp surged forth again; and once more the knight lifted his truncheon to strike. Then a deafening roar, a flash of flame even more devastating—and blackness impenetrable. The last glimpse of light showed Owen that the knight's blow had shattered the Rosicrucian lamp!

A metallic whirring . . . a roar that shook the earth . . . the sound of rushing winds . . . and then the silvery sweet laugh of a woman. . . .

"Free, Father, free from the curse by which you bound us to earth for a vengeance not worth taking . . ."

A tempestuous voice shouted triumphantly in reply.

"Hear, O ye winds of Heaven!" it boomed. "Hear, O mighty Osiris, Anubis, Hawk-headed Thoth! To the blackness of Egypt they return, thy servants who are released from bondage. They return to the Realms of Fire. . . ."

Then on the blackness was imposed a silence even darker.

OWEN had no recollection of his extricating himself from his bonds, nor of his exit from the tomb. The local police said they found him on the road to Deggendorf; and as his wits assembled themselves, Owen checked dates and found that by all reckoning the police had not found him until four days after the opening of the tomb.

His replies to their questions put an end to any further questioning; they tapped their foreheads, nodded wisely when Owen insisted that he was sane, and detailed one of their number to escort the mad American to the nearest American consulate.

The American consul dispensed with questions, much to Owen's satisfaction. And before he could arrange to leave, a radiogram kept him from dismissing the entire episode as the mad fantasy of an Arabian dream. It was from Dr. Blanchard, and read:

The brand has disappeared. Freya awaits your return.

A week later Owen, back in the States, called on the doctor in the latter's study at Ardsley.

"From all I can gather," explained the occultist, "Scarrett's motive in sending von Reinitz to his death was to gain, by experiment, sufficient knowledge of the laws of fire elements to enable him to cope with the forces emanating from the tomb. Your appearance in Ardsley led him to believe that you, too, were in the same way maneuvering to loot the hoard of Graf Eberhard: so that instead of carrying on his murderous studies and by way of further experiment destroying Freya, he hurried after you, his researches not yet completed. He reasoned that in view of your surviving the fires at Schönbrunn, you had the one missing link in the chain of knowledge; so he proposed working with you.

"Just what he had in mind when he drew that circle before the door of the tomb, I'm not sure: but from your account of it, he must, as you suspected, have contemplated some necromancy by which he hoped to open the tomb: something akin to the Oriental ritual of the seal of Suleiman, whereby all seals are dissolved. And it was fortunate for your sanity that you insisted on stepping into the circle with him.

"Yet in the end, he probably did save your life: for while the amulet protected against the psychic fires, it was no help against the blow of a mace. None of us contemplated that phase of the problem; and had he not been so anxious to take first choice of

the treasure, you might have been the victim of the knight in armor.

"The voices, those of the man and the woman? Why, as I once explained, the spirits of Graf Eberhard and his daughter were earthbound by the very force of the curse they kept alive; so that finally they wearied of vengeance everlasting, and with the

shattering of the lamp, rejoiced at their liberation.

"But don't weary me with any more questions! Yes, though she's still weak from her trying experiences, you may have a few words with Freya; say for half an hour. . . . Idiot! You know as well as I do what she'll say!"