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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The Wand of Doom

By JACK WILLIAMSON

*A weird-scientific tale of synthetic creation, of ghastly monstrosities
and spiders as big as horses*

1. The Atavistic Terror

I BELIEVE that Paul Telfair's unnatural fear of spiders was a dark heritage from the creeping, monstrous forebears of humanity, an atavistic survival from the things that wallowed and devoured one another in the ooze and slime of the primordial mud-flats where life began.

Psychologists have agreed with me that his haunting horror can be explained only as a race-memory of some stark jungle tragedy of the dawn-ages, seared so indelibly into the germ-plasm that it was transmitted to him across the eons—a maddening terror, slumbering in the cells of life through uncounted generations, to wake in the brain of my friend, to consume him, mind and body, with the mordant corrosive of elemental terror.

But if that hideous obsession was indeed a legacy handed down from some crawling monstrosity of the reeking jungle slime, it was certainly a regrettable incident of his own early childhood that wakened it.

The sleeping fear might have slumbered on for untold generations longer, in the unexplored recesses of the germ-plasm, had it not been for the unfortunate happening that roused it, to form my friend's life to its frightful mold, to make his existence unending nightmare, and to cut off his days at the very pinnacle of ever-mounting horror.

Doctor Paul Telfair and his younger brother, Verne, were friends of mine for

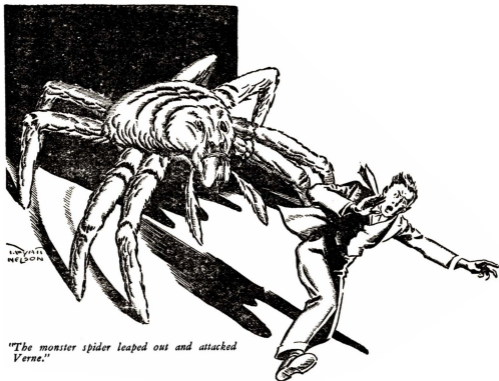
many years. I met them first during my student days at Tulane, where their father, the well-known naturalist, was professor of biology. Ancient French Creole blood, I knew, flowed in their veins. But the young men were both fine, modern Americans.

Paul, the elder by a dozen years, was, like his father, reserved and scholarly. His was a rare combination of scientific and artistic genius, marred only by that haunting atavistic inheritance. His ability in electrical research was early recognized with the coveted doctorate. He was an accomplished violinist. A few of his paintings have gained some distinction—fantasies somewhat suggestive of the latter Henri Rousseau, startling with their weird effects of light and color.

As might have been expected, Paul was mild-tempered, retiring, by nature introspective and imaginative. Though his manners were immaculately polished, he was almost diffident except among his very few intimate friends.

Paul never married. Verne told me, once, of his tragic first love. In his late teens he was engaged to a frail, lovely girl, a Miss Elaine LeMar. She became an invalid before the wedding, died within the year.

But I must tell of that other tragedy, in his early youth, that marked the beginning of the fear that dominated his life, of the soul-searing terror that swept him, at last, to unthinkable, inevitable doom. The awakening of the obsessive,



"The monster spider leaped out and attacked Verne."

atavistic phobia came about as a result of his father's study of the arachnids.

THE biologist, it appears, specialized in that branch of his science, and had spiders, tarantulas, and scorpions shipped to him at New Orleans from all parts of the world. From earliest infancy, Paul had a strange horror of those hideous creatures. But the phobia would probably have been outgrown—at least to the extent of allowing him to lead a normal life—had not the thing happened that awakened in full the slumbering atavistic fear, burned it indelibly upon his brain.

One night, crossing a dark room, the boy stumbled against a box containing a shipment of living tarantulas, which had just arrived from one of his father's associates in the Southwest. The box overturned and the cover fell from it, releasing the creatures that stirred in the sensi-

tive boy the fatal fear that was his dark heritage from the fathers of men in the dawn-era jungle-ooze.

He stood there in the darkness, rigid in icy paralysis of fear. He could not run. His throat was dry and constricted, so that he could not even cry out for aid. He was riveted helpless, while the formless, devouring terror from the past wakened in him.

He told me, once, about the occasion. Horror rendered his senses preternaturally acute, he said, so that he could hear distinctly the tiny, scratching, shuffling sounds of the tarantulas' feet, as they ran about him. In the darkness they were invisible, but he could *hear* them, and he thought they were attacking him.

The talons of elemental fear, reaching up through dark mists of time, held him unnerved and powerless in their searing embrace. He had collapsed, trembling

and shrieking, when his father reached him.

Paul Telfair was able, as he grew older, to banish the atavistic terror from his waking hours. But through the rest of his life, especially when ill or fatigued, he was subject to hideous dreams of gigantic spiders. Verne always slept near him, to waken him from the nightmares, in which he battled haunting fears come down from primal life.

Verne Telfair was nearly my own age. Stocky, powerful, lively, he was far different from the tall, scholarly Paul. Naturally hot-headed and impetuous, fond of social activity, he yet remained sincerely devoted to his brother.

When I left New Orleans in 1923, to take a position in Buenos Aires, the brothers were living together in the old Telfair mansion, Paul absorbed in his experiments and his music, Verne dividing his time between social duties and the care of his more delicate brother.

Their letters, a year later, abruptly ceased. I was unable to get in touch with them, or to learn anything of them save that they had gone from New Orleans.

Upon my return I found the old house deserted. In a year of search, I learned, the police had discovered only that the brothers had vanished into the desolate bayou swamps coastward from the city.

The Telfairs had been among my dearest friends, and since I had some spare weeks at my disposal, I set out to solve the mystery of their disappearance—little suspecting the sinister and amazing chain of horror I was to unearth.

2. *The Man Whose Eyes Were Haunted*

IT WAS through a New Orleans dealer in electrical equipment that I got the name of the Cajun, Henri Dubois.

The Telfair brothers, shortly before they vanished, had purchased a large

amount of heavy machinery, which had been taken—for what purpose the dealer did not know—into the unreclaimed swamps. The Cajun, as Doctor Telfair's agent, had received part of the goods.

I knew little of the man. His Cajun ancestry was evident from his name and situation. His illiteracy was evinced by the signature on the receipts, a rude cross with the words, "Henri Dubois, his mark."

In the week just spent in his search I had learned that he was unmarried, that he lived alone in the most solitary part of the bayou country, emerging only rarely with furs or fish to exchange for his staple necessities of tobacco, grits, ammunition and corn whisky.

More than one person had warned me that he was "queer"—a shy, shiftless recluse, whom no one actually knew.

I found his lonely shanty-boat at sunset on an oppressive summer day. The gray-green walls of swampy forest above the black, stagnant bayou had become unpleasantly depressing. And the dwelling that I found beyond the ancient, moss-bearded cypress and red gum upon the last bend, did not relieve my depression.

It was a heavy, square-ended barge, aground in the mud, supporting an ugly shack, tar-paper roofed. Silence of desolation clung about it, only intensified by the melancholy chorus of distant frogs, welling from the dark and implacable swamps.

I climbed to its narrow strip of deck to wait return of the absent owner. As I stood there, fighting insistent mosquitoes, the swart inscrutability of the swamps darkened to a brooding and sinister gloom. I could readily imagine ghostly life animating the white, miasmatic mists writhing up through bearded skeletons of trees.

When I first saw the Cajun he was

watching me suspiciously from his battered skiff, in the shadows of the dense, overhanging vegetation, a dozen yards away, fingering a rusty shotgun on his ragged knee.

Henri Dubois—I knew him at once for the man I sought—looked prematurely aged. While still abundant, his hair was iron-gray, white at the temples. Though he appeared fairly robust, his weak, querulous face was incredibly seamed and drawn.

His eyes were his strangest features. Watching me with unmistakable hostility, they roused my pity. In their depths was the inefaceable print of some experience that had seared the man's very soul, left him a mere shaken wreck, faith and courage broken.

His was the expression of a weak man who has encountered some overwhelming emotional experience that has twisted him, burned him out, if I may put it so, leaving him dazed, uncertain of life and without much interest in living. I have seen neurotic patients in psychiatric wards with that same look.

Studying the lurking dread in his eyes, I knew that the emotion photographed there was not grief or despair—it was sheer horror.

He was not the kind, I saw at once, to give me willingly any information about his dealings with my lost friends, or even to grant me ordinary civility.

"Good evening, Mr. Dubois," I called, as cordially as I could.

He stared at me silently, hands still on the gun in his lap.

"You *are* Henri Dubois, aren't you?"

He expectorated into the green, stagnant water, nodded voiceless assent.

"My name is Walters." I managed a smile. "Edwin Walters. I'd like to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind.

And I'm afraid I must impose upon your hospitality for the night—if I may."

He grunted something that I did not understand. I decided to explain myself more fully.

"I'm trying to find what became of the Telfair brothers."

The effect of my words was startling. Terror burst into his haunted eyes. He jerked back as if I had struck him, and flung up the ancient gun with shaking hands.

I hastened to assure him that I was not an officer, that I meant harm to no one. His face still strained and white, he lowered the gun, protesting in the French patois that he knew nobody named Telfair.

It was apparent that he was lying.

Before, it had not occurred to me to connect the Cajun with my friends' disappearance save as a possible source of information. But the name of Telfair had brought back to his face that fear whose shadow I had already marked there.

The brothers, then, had been involved in the experience, whatever it might have been, that had left such a print of horror upon the man. I was sure, at once, that he had knowledge of their fate, but perhaps not criminal knowledge. He looked too much the cowardly weakling to be a successful murderer.

I had blundered, I saw, in revealing my purpose so soon. In any case the man's confidence would not have been easily gained, and my incautious question had already raised a wall of mistrust before me.

Though I said no more of my quest, it took my best persuasive efforts to make him allow me to stay with him for the night. I followed him into the shantyboat's interior, narrow, ill-furnished, pervaded with the stale, sour odor peculiar to such craft.

A meager, unkempt figure in worn blue shirt and patched denim overalls, horny feet bare, he lit the dingy kerosene lamp and prepared a rude meal of coffee, fried pork, and rugged brown pones of cold corn-bread.

When we had eaten I brought in from my motor-boat a gallon jug of corn whisky I had purchased in anticipation of the present occasion. Thin hands shaking with eagerness, my host poured generously into two tin cups, handed one to me. I sipped cautiously at the raw, bitter moonshine, while he gulped his own as easily as if it had been water—and with the same visible effect.

The second cup, however, dulled the edge of his suspicion. With the third, he became almost genial, and I ventured to mention the Telfairs again, stressing my friendship and my worry.

He admitted in his rusty patois that they had employed him, that he had helped set up the machinery in the swamp. He agreed that he could guide me to the spot on the morrow.

But he still denied vehemently that he knew what had become of my friends. My question awakened that haunting terror in his eyes, sobered him to dogged, suspicious taciturnity. I could get no more from him that night, though he drank himself into a stupor, as if to drown in alcohol the memory I had raised.

3. *The Punctured Skull*

THAT night I tried in vain to sleep, beneath swarming mosquitoes, my blankets spread on the floor of the stale-smelling shanty-boat.

Next morning the Cajun was morosely sullen as ever. He appeared uncertain how much he had told me, and sorry he had told me anything. When we had breakfasted upon muddy chicory-coffee and grits and pork, I insisted that he keep

his promise to take me where the Telfairs had set up the machinery.

At first he refused blankly. When I offered him ten dollars, he agreed to take me to the old landing, and point out the trail. He would not accompany me away from the boat.

We ascended the bayou until it became a narrow, stagnant channel, dull green walls of swamp vegetation almost meeting above it. The Cajun poled in to a landing of rotting logs, between jutting cypress knees.

He showed me the end of the weed-choked trail, and promised to wait for me until sunset. He was not, he insisted, going to remain in that vicinity after dark.

Though the footing proved firm enough, the roadway was grown up with weeds and briars, the green, thorny tangles reaching to my waist. Gaunt trees rose about me, bearded with gray festoons of Spanish moss, their dark trunks limiting lonely vistas. The undergrowth was a luxuriant jungle, broken only by the black, decaying logs of fallen trees.

It was startling, amid such surroundings, to find a modern dynamo.

It stood upon a concrete platform that must have been a hundred feet square. The trees, for some little distance around it, had been felled; the lush jungle of undergrowth had consequently sprung up more luxuriantly. Green tangles were encroaching upon the concrete. In several places the force of imprisoned life had cracked it, bursting through in sprays of green.

The dynamo stood near the center of it, evidently long unprotected from the elements, black with rust. Beside it was the powerful gasoline motor that had driven it, grimy and corroded. A transformer, coils, condensers, rheostats lay about, smashed, ruined by rust and weather.

The silent and implacable spirit of the swamp already filled the place, and eager vegetation was fast obliterating this enigmatic scar in the tawny side of the wilderness. Fighting the loneliness of the place, and wondering at the meaning of it, I explored the conquering vanguard of the jungle until I found the skeleton.

A human skeleton, the bones scattered in the fringe of crowding weeds. I started back at first, as if this had been a dark and obscene jest of the brooding swamp, and then bent to examine them.

The skull was oddly injured. Two round holes were pierced in it, one in the frontal bone, above the left eye; the other in the occipital bone, at the back of the head, as if—and the thought came with a shudder of premonitory horror—great fangs had closed through the brain.

Searching in the dust beneath the skeleton, I found objects to identify it. A silver signet ring, bearing the initial "T". An old-fashioned, thick gold watch, which I well knew—crystal broken, works gone to rust, but case intact. Those articles told me, beyond question, that the grim remains were those of Doctor Paul Telfair.

But what dread fate could have overtaken him? I could not rid myself of my first mad idea that those puzzling punctures had been made by gigantic fangs, though reason told me the agent must have been some more credible instrument—a pick, perhaps.

I had no inkling, then, that his haunting, atavistic dread of spiders had played in the tragedy the hideous part that it did.

4. *The Purple Wounds*

I WAS three days in winning the complete confidence of Henri Dubois. I accepted his rude hospitality, regaled him with cheap whisky, and talked of my old

friendship for the Telfairs until he felt maudlin sympathy. In the end, I won.

When the machinery had been installed upon the concrete floor, he told me, in his rough patois, the brothers stayed there alone. Discharging the other employees, they retained him to bring the mail and the supplies they ordered, paying him ten dollars each week to make two trips.

At first there had been no roof above the machinery. On his first trip back, Henri had been astounded to see a house over the concrete platform. A house, he said, that looked like colored glass. He was uncertain what its material actually was, or where that material had come from.

On another trip he had found a queer sort of garden about the strange house—a garden whose leaves and blooms did not move in the wind, because they were hard, like glass.

The brothers had been alone. But a woman, near the end, appeared mysteriously with them. Henri had seen her, one time, in the amazing garden. She was young and pretty. He had heard her sing, with a voice like little bells.

On its face, his story, so far, was unreasonable, fantastic, incredible. Still, I was fairly sure that it represented no deliberate fabrication on his part. His manner had been that of one who tells an improbable story unwillingly, apprehensive of doubt. And I knew that he did not have the imagination to create such a narrative as he hesitantly and reluctantly unfolded.

Almost anything can be made to seem improbable, if presented in the right way. With his narrow, warped mind, Henri Dubois would inevitably see any unusual occurrence from an illogical angle; he was sure to overlook some factors, overstress others.

I listened without betraying incredulity,

alert to sort some reasonable explanation of the mystery from his strange words.

On his last return, Verne Telfair had run down to meet him at the landing, he said. The young man was hurt, bleeding. One arm was torn; his side was strangely wounded. His clothing was ripped, bloody. Henri had taken him aboard the skiff, put off in the haste he demanded.

Some hideous, unnamable horror, he insisted, had followed Verne down the trail. He would not try to describe it; he had not even seen it clearly.

The Cajun had wanted to take Verne out to Doctor Pichon. His strange wounds were alarming. But Verne insisted that they were not serious; he had remained upon the shanty-boat. He dressed his injuries, with Henri's aid, and for several days he appeared to be recovering.

On the fifth morning Verne went into delirium, the Cajun said. Screaming. Fighting things that Henri could not see. Trying to throw himself off into the bayou. Henri had tied him to the bed.

His wounds appeared to have been poisoned. They swelled, grew purple. Henri muttered, signed the cross. He had prepared, he said, to carry Verne down to see Doctor Pichon. But on the following night he died. His whole body became purple, swelled unpleasantly.

The Cajun had not dared carry the body out of the swamp, for fear of the inevitable inquiry. He had buried it. He would show me the grave.

IN THE gloom of evening, Henri Dubois took me back through the brooding shadows of the swamp, to a sunken, weed-grown mound, beneath the gnarled, skeletal arms of a moss-bearded swamp oak. A rude cross, of two sticks nailed together, leaned askew at the head.

I stood watching the sinking grave for

a long time, wondering if the hilarious, light-hearted Verne Telfair that I had known could indeed lie here in the dusky wilderness. It seemed incredible, blindly cruel.

Only when we had returned to the shanty-boat did Henri Dubois think to tell me that Verne had been writing in a book during the days before his sudden relapse. Henri could not read, he did not know what the writing was. He had not dared show it to any one, for fear of questions whose answers men would not believe.

Impatiently I watched him fumbling among his disorderly possessions. He pawed over piles of traps, worm-eaten peltries, balls of string, patent-medicine bottles, fish-hooks, odd rifle and shotgun cartridges.

At last he handed me a dusty laboratory notebook, rolled into a compact cylinder and tied with string. On its pages was the narrative that follows, headed like a letter, under a date four years before, and addressed to me.

I read it, there in the Cajun's malodorous dwelling. I suppose I was anticipating dark tragedy. But I was all unprepared for the lurid wings of dread that descended upon me as I turned the dusty pages, unarmed against the rending talons of terror that seized upon my soul as I neared the final act of the grim drama, the hideous and inevitable ending.

5. *A Wand of Creation*

DEAR ED [it began]—If you hear nothing from me, following this, it will mean that I have not survived my injuries. I have dressed and disinfected them as well as facilities permit. I am almost free from pain, today, and have every hope of recovery. My wound, though, is unique; I don't know what turn my condition will next take. I am

penning this brief account of the affair for your eyes, in case—anyhow, I shall address it, and tell Henri Dubois to mail it.

Henri insists that I let him take me out to medical aid. But I have washed the wounds, sprinkled permanganate in them. I doubt that a doctor could do anything else—my trouble, of course, is quite beyond ordinary medical experience. And my appearance could only result in unwelcome publicity, and the necessity for explanations that I am unwilling to make. In no sense am I responsible for Paul's death, but under the circumstances, the accusation might be made, and the story of it all is so bizarre that I should be helpless to prove it in a court of law.

You are, I think, the only human being likely to be much disturbed over the accident. I can't fancy any one else tearing his hair over it. For some time I have neglected our correspondence, for reasons that will become evident as you read. This will serve to explain our silence—and in case you hear nothing more, our disappearance. If I recover, as I have much hope of doing, I intend to join you immediately in South America, where I can add with my own lips any further details you may desire.

But preliminaries enough, except to hope that I can follow this letter very shortly, to renew old fellowship and forget what has happened here.

Paul must have been working for many years on his fatal discovery before I knew anything of it. You know how reticent he always was about any of his unproved theories.

I first learned of it one day, a few months ago, when I came home from a week's shooting on Colonel Allen's plantation—it was the first time I had been away from home so long, in ages. I found Paul sitting by a table covered with

radio apparatus—tubes, condensers, transformers, variocouplers. There must have been two dozen tubes in the bank; I noticed they were of unusual pattern. A little motor-generator was humming in the corner. Paul wore a sort of head-band, which held against his temples two little black disks; at first glimpse it appeared to be a set of ordinary phones.

"Going in for D X?" I asked him.

He took the apparatus from his head—I saw now that it was not a set of phones at all—and smiled up at me in a queer way.

"No, Verne, I'm not trying for distance," he said, in his tantalizingly slow voice. "But how did you find the quail?"

I was just beginning to see that his equipment was not a radio set at all, but something far different—and, his manner told me, important.

"Then what is the little toy?" I demanded.

"Think you could stand a shock?" he asked, and picked up the odd little head-piece. "Meaning something rather startling."

"I guess so."

He paused, then laid the little instrument back on the table.

"Verne, I suppose you've heard about the Hindoo fakirs who plant a seed in barren soil, wave their hands above it, and raise a tree before the eyes of their spectators. And perform similar impossible feats?"

"I think so. What of it?"

"You don't seem to take the matter very seriously. But plenty of credible travelers have reported such apparent miracles."

"Just hypnosis, isn't it?"

"That's the commonly accepted explanation. It is certain that the fakirs accomplish their wonders through their powers of intense concentration, gained

by long practise. But I have a new theory as to what their method really is. And I have devised this instrument to amplify the comparatively weak and uncertain mental emissions that I believe they use—"

"You mean to tell me you are going in for parlor magic?" I burst out. And I could hardly repress a laugh at the picture of my grave, sedate brother as a magician in a black top-hat.

"Hardly," he said. "But I have stumbled on something rather big. The principle, I suspect, has been known in the East for centuries. But it was left for me to apply to it modern electronics. As far as that goes, I can already perform a few tricks that would be rather baffling, I think, to the unscientific magician."

"Let's see them?" I challenged.

The idea of my conservative brother engaged in any sensational research was rather startling. But I was unable to doubt his words; I knew that he was no practical joker.

"Name your trick," he said, smiling.

"Well—" I hesitated. "Can you grow a tree out of the floor? That would be quite satisfactory."

To my considerable surprize, he nodded calmly, and inquired, "What sort of tree?"

"An orange tree would do nicely," I said, determined to keep even, if it were only a joke, after all. "Have it full of blooms and ripe oranges. You might add a few big red apples, for good measure."

"Very well," he said, and reached for his head-piece again. But he paused, and looked back at me. "Perhaps I had better explain it a little, first. I don't want to startle you too much."

"You can't get out, that way!" I said. "But then—if you think you can tell me how to grow oranges out of the floor, go ahead."

That seemed to touch him, slightly. He turned back to his table of apparatus, and adjusted the head-set so that its black disks were against his temples, which, I now noticed, were shaven. With a slow, confident, almost tantalizing smile, he looked up at me and said:

"Don't forget you asked for it."

HE TURNED the dial of a rheostat on the table, and the long row of queer electron tubes lit dimly. Then he leaned back in his chair, with his eyes closed. I stood watching him, a little anxiously I admit, despite my skepticism.

For a few seconds his brow was furrowed with intense concentration. Then he looked up at me again, with that slow, quizzical smile on his thin face. Deliberately he slipped off the head-set, and laid it back on the table.

"I suppose I'm to laugh, now?" I inquired, a little acidly.

He replied, in his maddeningly slow voice, "Verne, you might look behind you."

I spun around. And I suppose I cried out with amazement.

A small orange tree stood there, apparently rooted in the floor. Masses of white blossoms shone against the dark, rich green of its foliage. It was laden with bright, golden fruit. And on one branch was a cluster of red apples!

I stood gaping at it, fatuously.

"Would you care to gather some of the fruit?" the slow, amused voice of my brother penetrated my daze.

Weakly, wondering what trick he was playing upon my senses, I walked toward it. I half expected it to vanish before me, but it remained apparently substantial. I reached out a cautious hand, and touched one of the apples.

It felt firm, cool, slick-skinned, in all respects like a natural fruit. I pulled it.

The stem snapped with an audible sound. The quivering bough rustled, and an orange fell to the floor with a soft thud.

"Step back, and I'll turn off the power," Paul said.

I moved hastily away from the amazing tree. A faint click came from Paul's instruments. And the tree was suddenly gone. There was a flash of bluish light, a snapping crackle of electricity in the air. The apple had vanished from my hand, my arm jerked to a strong shock.

"Now," my brother suggested, smiling at my amazement, "perhaps you will be more willing to listen to my explanation."

I walked uncertainly to a chair, and sat down, incredulity struggling with the evidence my senses had received.

"You can see this table, can't you?" he began.

"Why, yes."

"And when you look away from it, you can still see an image of it, when I say *table?*"

"Of course, but what——"

"What is the difference between the table and your mental image of it?"

"The table is real, it is matter. And the image is—well, just an image. But I don't see——"

Paul was smiling at me, fingering the black disks of his head-set.

"The difference is purely one of energy," he said. "The image in your mind is a phenomenon of mental energy. And any student of physics could tell you that the table is composed merely of 'arrested energy.' Every atom in it is simply a set of balanced charges of positive and negative electricity. It isn't really *solid*, as it looks; no matter is. It is merely a 'space-lattice' of vibrating energy. Relatively speaking, it is about as empty as cosmic space with a few stars and planets scattered through it. Any bit of what we call matter is merely a 'frame' com-

posed of vibrating electrons. And the electrons, the vibrating charges of electricity, are so far apart that all those that make up the earth, packed close together, would form a sphere less than a mile in diameter."

I stopped him. "What has all that to do with growing trees out of the floor?"

"These things you mistook for telephones," he said, "are coils that pick up mental energy—though largely chemical, the activity of the brain gives rise to subtle electrical emanations. And the rest of the apparatus serves simply to amplify the picked-up energy a few billion times, and to project it, through the application of a new trick of wave-propagation I have come across, to become fixed in a space-frame of vibration that might be termed temporary matter. In other words, I can amplify my thoughts or mental images, until they are powerful enough to be fixated, for the time being, in what amounts to real matter."

"That's unreasonable," I protested.

"Rather astonishing, I suppose," he said. "But you have seen it done."

"You mean that tree was real?"

"It was as real, while it lasted, as any matter. The fixation was only temporary. I haven't power enough, here, to build up a permanent space-frame. But may I create something else for you?"

"*Create!*" The word struck me like a blow.

"Certainly. What else would you call it? Verne, this apparatus is a wand of creation!"

"You can—can create other things?" I stammered.

"Of course. Anything that I can imagine. I can materialize all my dreams into realities. I have only to form a clear mental image; the mental energy is picked up, amplified, fixated in the form of matter.

"There are just two limitations. Because I have so little power available, the space-frames are unstable, and collapse as soon as the power is shut off. And I haven't yet been able to create anything really alive. The forms of animals are easy enough, but they are always motionless, lifeless.

"With greater power, I think, I can overcome both difficulties."

"You want to create life?" Something in me was outraged.

"Naturally. I am going to follow the experiment to its logical end—try the full power of my wand of science."

A surge of something akin to horror rose in me. I am not religious. As the son of a biologist, I came naturally to accept the theory of creative evolution. But it seemed to me, none the less, a sacrilege to tamper with the power of creation.

"Better leave the creation of life to Nature," I said. "I'm afraid, Paul, you're playing with fire."

He laughed at me, amusedly, held out the odd head-set.

"Want to try it, Verne?"

I started back, instinctively. "I'll have nothing to do with it!" I cried. "Paul, you are mad to aspire to creation! It's not only dangerous, but somehow—well, *wicked!*"

He laughed again, tolerantly, and slipped the little black disks back over his temples.

"Forget your conventional prejudices, Verne. My wand of science is destined to make over the world!"

I was startled, horrified, by the insane daring of his plan. But he had spared me knowledge of the full extent of his fatal ambition. I did not know that he hoped not only to create life but to re-create the dead. That he hoped to resurrect the fair girl that death had taken from him. That he aspired to cheat the grave!

6. *The Lonely Laboratory*

IN THE course of a few days I became familiar with the wonders of my brother's amazing invention, and the instinctive horror with which I had at first regarded its use was almost forgotten. I became able to watch the startling creations of his "wand of science" without much emotion, though I was still unable to bring myself to use the instrument.

He refused to yield to my arguments against the use of the agency for the creation of life. But I think my opinions were largely responsible for his decision to move his apparatus to some isolated spot, where he could try his experiments on a larger scale, in secrecy and without fear of interference.

We decided upon some spot in the wooded swamps along Chicot Bayou. There we could be completely secluded, yet not far from civilization. I had some knowledge of the country, from fishing and hunting trips, and we employed a Cajun, Henri Dubois, who had once been my guide, to help find a location where the ground was firm enough to support heavy apparatus, and which would be sufficiently accessible.

Much as I opposed Paul's plan, it never occurred to me not to help carry it out. Despite his strange scientific enthusiasm, my brother was still the quiet, cultured gentleman for whom I held such affection. As always, he remained dependent on me to care for his practical affairs. I could not desert him merely because of disagreement with his scientific aims.

Too, his long hours of labor over the details of his invention brought increasingly frequent recurrence of those hideous nightmares that always came upon him as a result of illness or fatigue. Almost nightly I had to wake him from a rigid paralysis of terror, in which he lay trembling, covered with sudden chill sweat,

gasping for breath and making little strangled cries.

Sometimes he told me of his dreadful dreams. They were all of gigantic spiders. Sometimes huge black tarantulas appeared from nowhere, he said, in endless swarms, and pursued him relentlessly over dark, illimitable plains, until he was seized with the rigid paralysis, unable to escape them.

Or more often, he said, a harmless object, or even a familiar person, would change, by slow and hideous degrees, into a colossal spider, while he watched, frozen in stark and helpless fear.

These nightmares, of a type familiar enough to psychiatrists, were a natural result, of course, of that scar left upon his mind by his unfortunate childhood experience—but none the less torturing.

I could not leave him, of course, to endure such mental agony without the aid and comfort I could give.

In New Orleans we purchased equipment for assembling a far larger and more powerful installation than any with which he had experimented. Reaching the chosen site by water, we laid down a large concrete floor, and mounted upon it our large dynamo, with the powerful motor that was to drive it, and the other apparatus.

To my considerable surprize, Paul made no provision for a roof to shelter the equipment, nor for any lodgings for ourselves, though he had a supply of food left for us.

When the installation was at last completed, after several days of work, the Cajuns we had employed departed through the swamp, leaving the two of us alone with the apparatus.

The eeriness of it all almost overcame me, as I gazed from the edge of the newly-laid platform down the trail, where the backs of the laborers were vanishing in

the tawny forest gloom. The hoarse and interminable croaking of frogs rose in the distance, sounding through the twisted, moss-tufted trees, weirdly ventriloquial, infinitely depressing.

We were alone in the midst of primordial nature—its swarthy and implacable solitude might have been pre-human. The heavy vapors of the swamp wrapped dank fingers about me as I stood there, and I felt chill forebodings that my reason could not shake away.

My brother, however, appeared unconscious of the hostile and resistless spirit of the swamp. Having started the motor and the dynamo, he called me to him, and gave me brief directions for tending them.

Then he turned to his more delicate apparatus, which was set up on a long bench beside the dynamo. Closing his circuits to light the banks of huge, oddly formed tubes, he fitted in place the twin black disks of the head-set, closed his eyes, and assumed an expression of intense, concentrated effort.

At the moment, I was filled with a wild, almost uncontrollable impulse to stop the motor and smash the banks of weirdly glowing tubes—and what unspeakable horror might have been averted had I done so!

7. *The Shining House*

I WAS witness, that night, to the most astounding miracle that science had ever wrought. In the passing days I had lost part of the bewildered anxiety inspired by the first exhibition of the new instrumentality. I could understand that the process of "fixation," as Paul termed it, was a logical application of relatively simple natural laws. But, despite myself, I still regarded the "wand of science" with an awe not free from haunting dread.

My brother stood before his bank of instruments, with the black disks upon his

temples, his quiet dark face rigid in concentration. The quiet humming of the dynamo changed a little, as the load came upon it, and the powerful motor labored.

Walls came into being around us, upon the floor of concrete, shutting out the dank breath of the darkening swamp—walls erected silently, as if by swift, invisible elfin hands.

They seemed to be of some polished, translucent stone, whose depths were filled with pale, roseate opalescence. They gleamed softly, like rose quartz held against the light. In a few seconds we, with the apparatus, were enclosed in a long room, walled with rose-hued stone, and roofed with the sullen sky of dusk.

In one end was a broad, arched doorway, hung with shimmering white curtains bright as woven wire of silver, adorned with a fantastically conceived design in scarlet and black. Even in my amazement, I was conscious of a sudden strong desire to part the argent hangings, to see what mysteries might lie beyond.

Then a roof sprang over the room—a lofty vault of dark green crystal, seeming luminous with an inner light deep as the shadowed green of forest gloom.

A little anxiously, Paul put the headset from him, and shut off the power from the dynamo. I expected the amazing room about us to vanish in a blaze of released electricity, as his other "fixations" had always done. But rosy walls and emerald vault remained apparently substantial.

"You see that I was right, Verne," he said softly. "With the additional power, the space-frames are more permanent."

"You mean these walls will last like real matter?"

"They are real matter," he said; "that is, arrested energy. But I haven't been able to fixate as much energy in them as ordinary matter contains. They are un-

stable—the light they radiate is proof enough that they are disintegrating. They probably will be broken down completely in a few days—if we don't turn on the power again, occasionally, and build them back."

I left the dynamo, and came to him.

"Paul," I pleaded, "let's give it up, and go back to New Orleans."

He looked at me with a kindly smile. "Homesick for your wine, women, and song, eh?" he said. "Well, Verne, with the wand of science I can soon provide them all for you, right here."

"No," I said anxiously, "it isn't that! I simply can't help feeling that we are usurping forbidden powers. I know, if we keep on, something terrible is going to happen!" I could not help flushing at the mild, amused sarcasm in his brown eyes. "Call it what you will," I finished desperately, "premonition, hunch—I know that trouble will come, if we keep on!"

"Sorry you feel that way, Verne," he said. "But we haven't touched the possibilities of it, yet. I'd be insane to give up now. But you may go back, if you like, and I'll stay on alone."

"You know I couldn't leave you here by yourself!"

Impulsively he came over to me and took my hand. But he was steadfast in his refusal to abandon the experiment.

THROUGH all the night Paul remained at his instruments, seeming lost in a sort of artistic frenzy. Strangelight of exultant power burned in his dark eyes; for hours on end he remained silent, rigid, engrossed in his labor of creation.

At dawn he wearily turned from the long bench, and stopped the humming generator. He lifted the curtain of shimmering white, in the end of the rose-walled room, and we went out to inspect

the edifice he had created, or to use his own term, "fxated."

To understand that building, castle, palace—I hardly know what to call it—it is necessary to understand something of my brother's gloomy and imaginative nature. For it was a work of imagination, made manifest without the limitations of ordinary art or architecture.

The same weird and melancholy fancy was evident in its crimson-windowed walls and many-towered roof that Paul had always displayed in the haunting minors of his compositions for the violin, in the macabre and startling grotesqueries of his paintings.

The building was not remarkably large. It covered merely the concrete foundation we had prepared, which was approximately one hundred feet square. Its four floors communicated through a spiral stair in the great central tower which lifted its ebon height above the crenelated parapets of the roof.

The material of all the castle had the solid appearance of stone, but with an odd effect of translucent luminescence—due, Paul said, to the disintegration of its impermanent space-frame, and the consequent radiation of its energy as light. The radiance of the walls was so strong that we needed no other source of illumination in the building.

The palace must have been an old dream of my brother, for it bore no evidence of hasty planning. Every detail was vital to the dominating impression of the whole. It must have been conceived and executed as the expression of a single mood, to catch and fix one moment of barbaric, melancholy fantasy.

Strange and striking were the colors of its lucent stuff. Towers of dead and ebon darkness, of sullen gold of sunset. High domes of frozen, empyreal violet. Oval windows glazed with blood-red crys-

tal, whose ghastly radiance flowed in fatal floods across long halls jet-roofed and pillared with ebony, floored with ghostly silver.

True, there were lighter effects. Suites whose predominant tones were cool, restful greens and soothing saffrons and softly melancholy browns. But they served only to emphasize, by contrast, the grotesque strangeness of the castle as a whole.

We climbed to the summit of the central black tower, and looked away across the vast dark sea of green, wooded swamps, still dim and mysterious in the mists of dawn, exhaling an exotic atmosphere of primal power well in harmony with the eery and fantastic wonder of this castle of dreams that Paul had made physically manifest with his "wand of science."

Paul stood silent beside me for a time, looking away at the dark swamps, then down at the eldritch fantasies of violet domes below us, and towers of jet and sullen gold. In his dark eyes was a strange and fervid fire.

"This is just the beginning, Verne!" he cried, his voice quickened with the intoxication of limitless power. "The dwelling is done. Now we shall people it, with beings of our own creation!"

I caught up his hand, apprehensively, appealing.

"You don't mean that!" I cried. "You mustn't try that, Paul. You won't try to create life—human life! Promise me!"

He gravely shook his head.

"I'm sorry you're opposed to it, Verne. But that has been my aim, from the beginning. Think what it will mean to be able to mold human beings, perfect, flawless——"

"You won't try that!" I pleaded. "It would be madness!"

He drew away his hot hand.

"No, Verne, I'm not mad. A little drunk, if you insist, with the idea of it. . . . And why not go on a spree—when we have the power of gods? You've celebrated, many a time, with less excuse!"

"Perhaps," I said. "But there's a lot of difference between emptying a friendly bottle, and running amuck with the power of creation!"

Laughing tolerantly at my vehemence, he turned without speaking to lead the way back down the spiral stair.

8. *The Bright Butterfly*

THE dazed and bewildered incredulity upon the face of Henri Dubois, when he returned four days later with mail and supplies, was a sight I shall not forget. We were expecting him, and I had opened the postern gate before he appeared. I was standing in the gleaming emerald portal when he came in view along the narrow trail we had cut from the bayou.

For a moment he stood staring, half concealed in the green riot of undergrowth, his lean, unshaven face a very mask of astounded unbelief. Then, screaming something in French regarding the works of the devil, he dropped his pack and fled down the trail.

Calling to him not to be alarmed, I followed him. I found him on his knees, back on the landing, praying but ready to embark at a moment's notice. After some explanation and persuasion, he returned to the castle with me, to carry the supplies he had brought. Upon the promise of a substantial increase in his remuneration, he agreed to continue his trips. But nothing would have tempted him to enter the building; he always regarded it as the work of an unhallowed power.

Paul and I lived, for the most part, in a long, palatially splendid room on the

first floor, furnished with a richness almost barbaric. The deep-piled rugs were finer than ever came from Samarkand. The tapestries that hung on the marble-white walls were weirdly patterned as opium dreams. The elaborate furniture might have been designed for the setting of a futuristic drama.

I prepared our meals in a smaller room adjoining, from the supplies the Cajun brought—we were forced to depend upon outside sources for bodily necessities, since the stuff fixated by Paul's apparatus, "matter" though it may have been, was too unsubstantial to serve as food.

My brother spent many hours each day with his integrator. He made small additions to the castle, in the way of furnishings and such works of art as tapestries, pictures, and statues, which he had only to image clearly in his mind to make manifest as tangible realities.

From the first, however, the chief end of his labors seems to have been the creation of life, and he was continually changing his technique and the arrangement of his equipment, with that in view.

In the course of his early efforts in that direction, he fixated or integrated a garden in the cleared space about the castle. The fruit of his efforts was weird as one of Henri Rousseau's jungle paintings, and as motionless. Leaves and stems were rigid as if cast in green metal; huge and gorgeous blooms were hard and lifeless as if carved from mammoth gems by hand of elfin jeweler.

The Cajun experienced a second alarm when he walked from the darkness of the swamp into the strange bright splendor of that crystal garden. A second increase in his pay was required to overcome his new apprehensions.

Undaunted by his failures, Paul worked on—while I prayed silently that he might never succeed.

"I think that living things will require greater concentration of energy," he told me one day in the laboratory. "The space-frame must be not only definitely formed, but filled in pretty fully, to keep alive the fire of life."

Again I began my old argument against the wisdom of the experiment.

"Life is a holy thing. You have no more right to create human beings than you have to murder them——"

"Forget it, Verne," he said. "Let's go up and watch the sunset from the tower."

He smiled, took my arm in his, and led the way toward the stair in the central tower. His obsession forgotten for the moment, he was my brother again, human and sympathetic.

FROM the crown of the ebon minaret, we watched the sullen sun drop into the wild, far-flung ocean of desolate green. And when we had returned to the empty, barbaric splendors of our living-room, he took his violin and played for me many of the simple old tunes that I have loved since childhood.

"Must be lonely here, eh, Verne?" he asked, smiling at me gravely, almost tenderly. "Far from the old flesh-pots! I must try to make myself a more entertaining companion."

Then the mad, eager enthusiasm flared up again in his dark eyes, and he added, strangely, "Or make you another companion!"

The excitement attending his momentous accomplishments and the nervous strain of his long hours of concentration in the laboratory were telling heavily upon my brother. Despite all my care, he became thin and haggard; I feared collapse.

His mental state was even more alarming than his physical condition. That pathologic fear of spiders to which he

had fallen the unfortunate victim in his youth was obsessing him more violently. The frightful dreams returned with increasing frequency. Almost nightly I had to wake him, trembling, strangling, from the paralysis of nightmare. And I knew that often he lay awake for hours, fighting the sleep that would mean return of the appalling visitations.

Never before, to my knowledge, had he been troubled with somnambulism. But as the strain of his efforts wore him down, I found him, several times, walking in his sleep. On each occasion he had risen from his bed in our common room and started down the hall toward the laboratory as if to continue his labors.

I made his alarming condition another argument for giving up the experiment, and urged him to come out to New Orleans with me, to consult a psychiatrist, or at least to forget his work long enough for a thorough rest.

With his usual lack of regard for my opinions, he refused; and continued his work without any consideration for his health, often remaining in the laboratory for twenty hours a day, and having me bring his meals there—frequently to be left untasted.

Nearly a month we had been alone in the amazing castle, when one day he came eagerly to me in our magnificent living-room, holding in a trembling hand a small moth or butterfly, whose fluttering wings, uniquely marked, shone with a strange violet iridescence.

"I've done it, Verne!" he cried, hoarse with excitement. "I've done it!"

"Done what?" I asked, puzzled at his extreme agitation.

He stood holding the bright little insect out toward me, trembling, licking dry lips, evidently too excited to speak again. His bright, feverish eyes were staring at me oddly.

I bent over the butterfly, studied its glistening wings.

"Found a new species?" I asked, wonderingly. "I don't know——"

With an effort, he seemed to recover his old calm, reserved composure.

"Yes, Verne," he said slowly, "it does belong to a new species. In fact, it is the only one of its kind that ever existed. You see, I created it, myself."

9. Elaine

FOR several days following he immersed himself in his work so deeply that I feared for his health. The alarming recurrent nightmares allowed him little sleep, even when he would take time to lie down; he became distressingly haggard and nervous.

I met him one evening as he came from the laboratory, seized his thin shoulders. He was so tired he could hardly stand; his thin, pallid face was like a mask of death; his dark-rimmed eyes dull and lifeless.

"Paul, you aren't going back in that laboratory," I told him. "Not if I have to smash it, to keep you out. You're killing yourself!"

He smiled at me, wanly, agreed in a weary voice, "Yes, Verne, I suppose I have been working too hard."

"I have supper ready for you," I told him. "You are going to eat it. And then I'm going to put you to bed and keep you there!"

To my surprise, he made no resistance.

"All right, you win, Verne. I promise to stay out of the laboratory—except just to turn on the power a few minutes a day, to keep the castle from disintegrating."

Rejoicing, I gave him supper and saw him to bed, without ever suspecting what he had accomplished. To my delight,

his sleep was sound and untroubled. I sat beside him all night, but my care was unnecessary, for he scarcely moved; his weary face was relaxed, almost smiling.

He was still sleeping when my vigil was terminated by a most unexpected interruption.

"Oh-h!" came a low cry of surprise from the door of the long, magnificent room. Then a clear, pleasant feminine voice said, "Good morning."

Mute with astonishment, I sprang to my feet, to see that a young woman had come into the room, walking so silently across the deep-piled rug that I had been unaware of her entrance.

Slender, tall, with pale, lovely skin, she looked singularly attractive. Her large eyes, limpidly dark, were aglow with a frank and innocent candor. Upon her oval, fine-featured face were writ keen intelligence and penetrating, sympathetic humor. She held herself gracefully erect; her presence was somehow striking, almost commanding, even though she was attired most informally in a pale blue slip that came only to her knees. Her dark hair, long, luxuriously heavy, fell in loose, glistening wavy tresses about her shoulders. Slim, rounded arms were bare, as were her legs below the blue slip, and her small, high-arched, white-skinned feet.

Ordinarily, I think, I am not abashed in the presence of lovely women, even under such extremely informal circumstances. But on this occasion I found myself staring stupidly at the girl. Nothing could have startled me more than her sudden appearance, situated as we were in the midst of the swamps, which it was obviously impossible that she could have crossed in her present attire.

"Beg your pardon," I jerked out at last. "Good morning to you."

"I'm glad I found you," she said at

once, with a naïve sweetness of manner that put me immediately at my ease, if it did not end my wonder at her presence. "You must be Verne?"

"Yes, I'm Verne Telfair," I said, more than ever astonished that she should seem to know me. Attempting in vain to recall having seen her before, I went on mechanically, "A pleasure, indeed. This is quite a lonely hole. I hadn't seen anybody for ages. You rather startled me."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." She seemed faintly puzzled.

"That's all right. It's worth quite a shock, to see you."

"I'm Elaine," she informed me, with enigmatic simplicity.

"You're just in time to save the day," I told her, attempting a more vigorous sally. "I was in a fair way to become a vegetable. What's doing out in the big world, anyhow?"

A little frown of bewilderment appeared on her oval face.

"I'm glad if I can help you," she said, her clear tones troubled, doubtful. Abruptly she inquired, solicitously, "How is Paul feeling this morning?"

"Oh, Paul? Why, he slept well. The best he has in weeks. He's still asleep, in fact." And I added, "So you know my brother?"

"Of course," she replied, not very enlighteningly. "I suppose you are well, Verne?"

"Always."

"I shall be glad when Paul wakes, so we can talk with him."

"You called to see him?"

My amazement was exceeding all bounds. I could not imagine how the girl had reached the castle; certainly she had not crossed the swamps afoot, for her clean body was neither scratched with briars nor splashed with mud.

Other questions puzzled me. How had

she got inside, when the massive gates of the castle could not be opened from without? Why had she walked so confidently into the room, in negligee? How did she come to be on terms apparently so intimate with my brother, who, so far as I knew, had no close friends?

Her reply only increased my bewilderment.

"No, I didn't call. You see, I was already here."

"Already here!" I ejaculated, rather rudely I fear. "I beg your pardon, Miss—Miss Elaine, but where did you come from?"

"Why, Verne, I've been here—always!"

FOR an instant I was dumfounded. Then a suspicion of the truth flashed over me. In a moment the question was on my lips. But I did not speak it. It seemed somehow indelicate.

For the second time, I was confused and flustered by her presence—though through no fault of her own. I cast about for a means of making her comfortably at ease until I should have an opportunity to question my brother privately.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Elaine?"

"Thank you, Verne."

With unconscious grace she seated herself in one of the great, luxurious chairs, while I admired again the innocent, burgeoning beauty of her white body.

"An unusual picture, isn't it?" I said, pointing to one of Paul's studies on the wall, a rather grim, symbolic fantasy in crimson and black.

Her dark eyes moved toward it quickly.

"Yes, it's ably done," she said. "But I'd like it better if it were happier. We must encourage Paul. He's too gloomy. I hope I can make him happier."

My brother slipped out of bed, a few

minutes later, and came toward us, in pajamas.

The girl sprang up and ran to meet him. Throwing her bare arms around him with childish eagerness, she kissed his weary face with full, delicate red lips.

"Verne says you slept all night, Paul!" she cried warmly. "I'm so glad. How do you feel now?"

"Better, Elaine, my dear," he said, in kindly tones, with his arms around her fair body. "I'm a new man!"

"Splendid!" she cried, and kissed him again.

"You are all right?"

"Of course. I was awake early. I watched the dawn through the windows, and then came down here and found Verne."

His arms still around her, cherishingly, Paul turned to me.

"Good morning, Verne. I don't believe I told you about Elaine."

"You certainly didn't."

"I wanted you to meet her, first," he said. "You were so opposed——"

"So that's why you were so surprised!" cried the girl, suddenly. "You didn't know about me!"

"You mean——" I began, and hesitated. The subject seemed impossible, in the presence of the girl. "You mean that she—that Miss Elaine——"

The girl herself answered the question, with her direct candor.

"You see, Verne," she explained simply, "Paul made me."

Even though I had already suspected it, the truth seemed incredible.

"Yes," said my brother, "Elaine is the latest creation of the integrator. What do you say now, Verne, to the creation of human life?"

There was no answer. I watched the girl turn back to Paul and slip her smooth white arms caressingly around him again.

10. *Love Resurrected*

ELAINE was a most astonishing young woman. She puzzled and bewildered me more than did any other of Paul's creations. The very fact of her existence was almost beyond belief. Even to the end, it was hard for me to accept the fact that he had brought into being a mature and intelligent human being. But there was never any doubt of Elaine's reality, nor of her lovely humanity.

She was, of course, simply another creation of Paul's mind, made physically real through the amazing instrumentality of his "wand of science." And if her glorious reality was startling, it was no more remarkable than that of a few great characters of fiction, also creations of the human mind.

The love of his tragic youthful attachment had been Elaine LeMar. In this fair being of his own creation I recognized many of the traits, physical and mental, of the lost Elaine. In a sense, she was merely a resurrection of his old love—but only, of course, as he had remembered and idealized her.

She gave herself to my brother in unreserved devotion, and he displayed a passionate affection for her. That, I suppose, was inevitable, since she was his perfect ideal, and since in her creation he would naturally have eliminated any traits that might have been incompatible with his own nature.

For almost a month she and Paul lived in perfect happiness. They were invariably together, strolling through the bright halls of the castle, climbing the spiral stair to look from the black central tower across the swarthy wilderness of the swamps, merely sitting side by side in some splendid room.

I might have found the period tiresome had I not, myself, taken a tremendous liking for Elaine. She appeared to

return that liking—with no lessening, of course, of her entire devotion to Paul.

To my vast relief, my brother had completely ceased his experiments, surrendering himself completely to the joys of Elaine's companionship. He did not enter the laboratory save to run the dynamo for a short time each day, to build up the "fixations" of energy in the castle—and in the lovely body of Elaine herself—which was continually dissipated through a process of disintegration.

For the first time in many years, Paul slept in complete freedom from his haunting dreams of terror. Absence of worry, rest, and the stimulating influence of Elaine's companionship seemed to have completely banished the phobia. Not only did his nightmares cease, but he walked no more in his sleep.

His apparent recovery led me to make a fatal mistake.

Not wishing to intrude upon his and Elaine's intense communion, I removed my sleeping-quarters to a smaller room adjoining the long chamber which Paul and I had both occupied. The girl promised to call me if he ever seemed restless or disturbed in his sleep.

I anticipated no evil; we were totally unprepared for the dreadful thing that happened.

11. *The Doom From a Dream*

I DO not remember any specific thing that wakened me on that fatal night. Subconsciously I must have become aware of some faint sound. I am a light sleeper, probably because of the years I cared for Paul, keeping alert, even in sleep, for sounds of his distress. On that night I was suddenly awake, and filled with the positive, inexplicable conviction that my brother was in trouble.

On my feet in an instant, I ran through the curtained doorway into the long

room adjoining. In the soft, clear light radiated by the walls, I saw that Paul and Elaine were gone.

For a moment I was motionless, dumfounded. Then, recalling Paul's recent sleep-walking, I knew in an instant what had happened. He had risen, without waking, and gone out, probably toward the laboratory. And Elaine, aware of his going, had followed without thinking it necessary to disturb me.

The swiftly rising drone of the motor in the laboratory reached my ears, then the vibrant humming of the generator. Paul had already reached the laboratory, and started the motor.

My heart thudding with swift alarm, though even then I did not realize the full horror of the impending catastrophe, I raced desperately across the room, and down the shining halls to the laboratory.

When I burst into the room, Paul had already put on the curious head-set, with the little black disks fitting against his shaven temples. He had just lit the banks of tubes; his fingers were still on the rheostat.

His movements seemed normal, rapid and efficient enough. But a single terrified glance at his face told me that he was asleep. Though his eyes were open, they had a curiously glazed, staring, lifeless look. His features were set in a dull, leaden mask.

Immediately I realized that I might be too late to stop him.

Already, without waking himself, he had gained full control of the amazing power of the integrator, which could change his mental images, the stuff of his dreams, into physical reality. I did not know just what to expect, though the presence of danger was evident enough.

Elaine was just inside the door, watching Paul with puzzled apprehension. I must try to give some idea of that last

glimpse of her full-blown beauty. In the clear light shining from rosy walls and emerald vault, she was gorgeous, breathtaking. Richly curving, erect, white-skinned, her fine body was almost bare. Her abundant hair fell in glistening waves, parted by the soft curves of her white, upturned breasts. Her full red lips were parted a little, and her limpid eyes were filled with anxious concern. Swiftly, her oval face was turned to me. Her clear voice spoke quickly.

"Oh, Verne, I'm glad you came! Paul is acting so strangely! He doesn't seem to be able to hear me——"

"He's asleep!" I whispered, urgently. "Go to him, and slip that thing off his head. Hurry! But don't startle him."

I thought that she could approach him more quietly than I could. I was afraid of what would happen if he were alarmed, while commanding the power of the integrator.

Elaine moved swiftly across the concrete floor.

Paul's lifeless, sleep-filled eyes were lifted toward her, now. I saw recognition dawning in them—and horror!

I remember that her bare feet made a soft, scratching shuffle upon the rough concrete. It must have been that sound. . . .

Running through a dark room, in his childhood, Paul once overturned a box of live tarantulas that had been shipped to our father. He had always been afraid of them, and the accident paralyzed him with fear. Unable to call for help, or run, he stood there among the things. He said afterward that he could hear their feet. They made *soft, scratching, shuffling sounds*. . . .

What happened is almost too hideous to write.

The odd sound of Elaine's feet, on the concrete, must have brought back all the

circumstances of his great fright to Paul's sleeping mind. The sound precipitated the nightmare dream, that had its sinister roots in that fright. And the integrator translated the nightmare into reality!

I HEARD Paul scream. His cry was hoarse with insufferable agony of fear. It was choked off suddenly, into a strangling moan.

Paul struggled in the hideous clutches of nightmare. His whole body was trembling violently. Glittering beads of sweat burst out upon his grimacing, corpse-white face. He was gasping; little bubbling, squeaking sounds came from his lips, like the cries of a frightened animal.

His body was paralyzed by the recurrence of that awful fear that had been burned into his childish brain. . . . And the nightmare dream in his tortured mind was translated into unspeakable, soul-searing reality. . . .

Elaine, moving swiftly toward him, was suddenly stopped as if she had encountered an invisible stream of opposing force. Her fair white body was pushed back by some unseen energy. Even in her distress, the beauty of her made my heart ache.

She called out to me, her voice ringing clear in its desperate appeal.

"Verne, help me! Please! Something is—oh, Paul——"

Her clear, urgent call died in a dry and breathless gasp, as I leapt toward her.

Her body had been seized by the invisible projection rays of the machine. No longer was she a separate entity; she had become merely a magnified figment of Paul's nightmare dream. Her lovely form was suddenly enveloped in a luminous flux, so that I could not see it very plainly.

Then she changed. Oh, God, *she changed*. . . .

Paul had told me, many times, how

in his hideous dreams familiar persons were altered. . . .

Elaine became a spider!

Her fair body seemed to melt and flow in a shining vortex. It thickened, and swelled, and became dark. Her limbs grew long and black, with dreadful swiftness; additional ones were thrust out, like pseudopods. Limbs and body were covered suddenly with a rough black hair.

Her head sank, her white teeth became enormous and hideous fangs. Her limpid dark eyes grew scarlet, glowed insanely with implacable evil.

With the swiftness of a dream, the innocently lovely woman was transformed into a gigantic tarantula!

Having started to her aid, I recoiled from the incredible, monstrous thing she had become. I was paralyzed, for an instant, with an overwhelming, mind-blasting fear, akin to that of my brother.

Then, with the sudden return of desperate strength, I dashed to the accursed machine that had wrought such horror, wrenched a heavy condenser from its connections, and began smashing insanely with it the electron tubes and other delicate parts.

Like a madman, I was still hammering at the integrator when Paul screamed again, in ultimate horror.

He was awake, now.

But the gigantic spider had seized him in its hideous jaws.

Sunk in the depths of primal fear, he shrieked, babbled, implored me wildly to save him, and laughed . . . laughed. . . .

I was helpless. Even had there been a weapon available, I could not have broken the chains of stark horror that fettered me.

Physically sick, paralyzed with icy fear, I watched my brother, screaming and laughing in the jaws of the monstrous spider, until the great fangs closed with a

sickening sound upon his head . . . and his shrieks came mercifully no more. . . .

12. *The Lurking Horror*

AT LAST the hideous beast moved away, still carrying Paul's limp body in its encrimsoned jaws. Regaining some measure of control over my shaking limbs, I ran tottering from the room, and out of the shining castle into the swamp.

Behind me the pile glowed with weird and eldritch radiance against the moonless darkness. Scarlet-windowed walls of lucent green. Domes of gelid violet. Towers of dull black, of sullen gold.

I staggered on, breaking my way through rank undergrowth, tearing flesh and garments upon unseen briars, splashing through stagnant, scum-covered water, until the light of the accursed castle had vanished behind me, and the ground quaked under my feet.

Two days I hid in the swamp, without food or water that I dared to drink, suffering agony from hordes of mosquitoes that was but a trifle against the agony of my memory of that night of horror.

The castle and the hideous thing within it, I knew, would quickly disintegrate, when the machine failed to replace the energy they were constantly radiating. Knowing that Henri Dubois, the Cajun, would return on the third day, with the mail and supplies, I decided to venture as far as the landing, to intercept him.

I knew there was danger, though I hoped that the monstrous spider might already have met its fate.

The castle was breaking up, when I came in sight of it. Fantastic towers and domes were toppling, crashing, shattering into showers of colored sparks that vanished before they touched the ground. Purple lightning—the liberated electrical energy from the disintegrating space-frames—flickered in a lurid pall about

the crumbling walls, crackling and muttering.

The black central tower collapsed as I watched. It fell into a blaze of electric violet, above the ghostly, shining ruins of crenelated walls; and hollow thunder boomed upon my ears.

Only the bare concrete foundation, I knew, would remain in a few hours, with the dynamo and the wrecked apparatus upon it.

Hoping that the colossal spider had met its fate within the doomed building, and forgetful of the fatal fact that Paul had been forced to make denser and hence more enduring the fixations of energy in his living creations, I started down to the landing on the bayou, to wait for the Cajun's boat.

A crackling in the undergrowth beside the trail—

THUS, in the middle of a sentence, Verne Telfair's unfinished manuscript breaks off. At that point in his narrative he laid his pen aside, never to take it up again. For that night, the Cajun had told me, fever and delirium seized him, sweeping him swiftly to the lonely grave in the swamp.

It is not difficult, from what the Cajun told me, to outline the rest.

The monstrous spider, escaping disintegration longer than the castle, had left the falling building. Lurking in the un-

dergrowth beside the trail, it attacked the unfortunate Verne as he came past.

It was already weakened, perhaps, by its incipient dissolution, and he was able to escape its clutches, though somewhat injured, and to reach the landing, where he found Henri Dubois with his skiff.

His death, five days later, from injuries that appeared relatively slight, must be laid to some poison introduced in his body during the encounter with the spider. We know nothing of the reactions of the human organism to the "matter" fixated by Paul Telfair's marvelous integrator. In Verne's case, however, we may well believe that the spider's venom acted as a specific poison.

I have notified police authorities and the relatives of the two brothers, of their death, though without revealing the full circumstances of the tragedy. And I have had the remains of my friends removed to their family vault in a New Orleans cemetery.

When I last saw it, the time-blackened dynamo and the corroded and shattered apparatus of the wand of doom, as it might be termed, remained undisturbed upon the crumbling concrete platform in the swamp, though half buried beneath the silt and debris left by flood waters. The swift growth of vegetation is overwhelming it, however, and within a few years the very site of Paul Telfair's audacious and tragic experiment will be lost for ever.

