

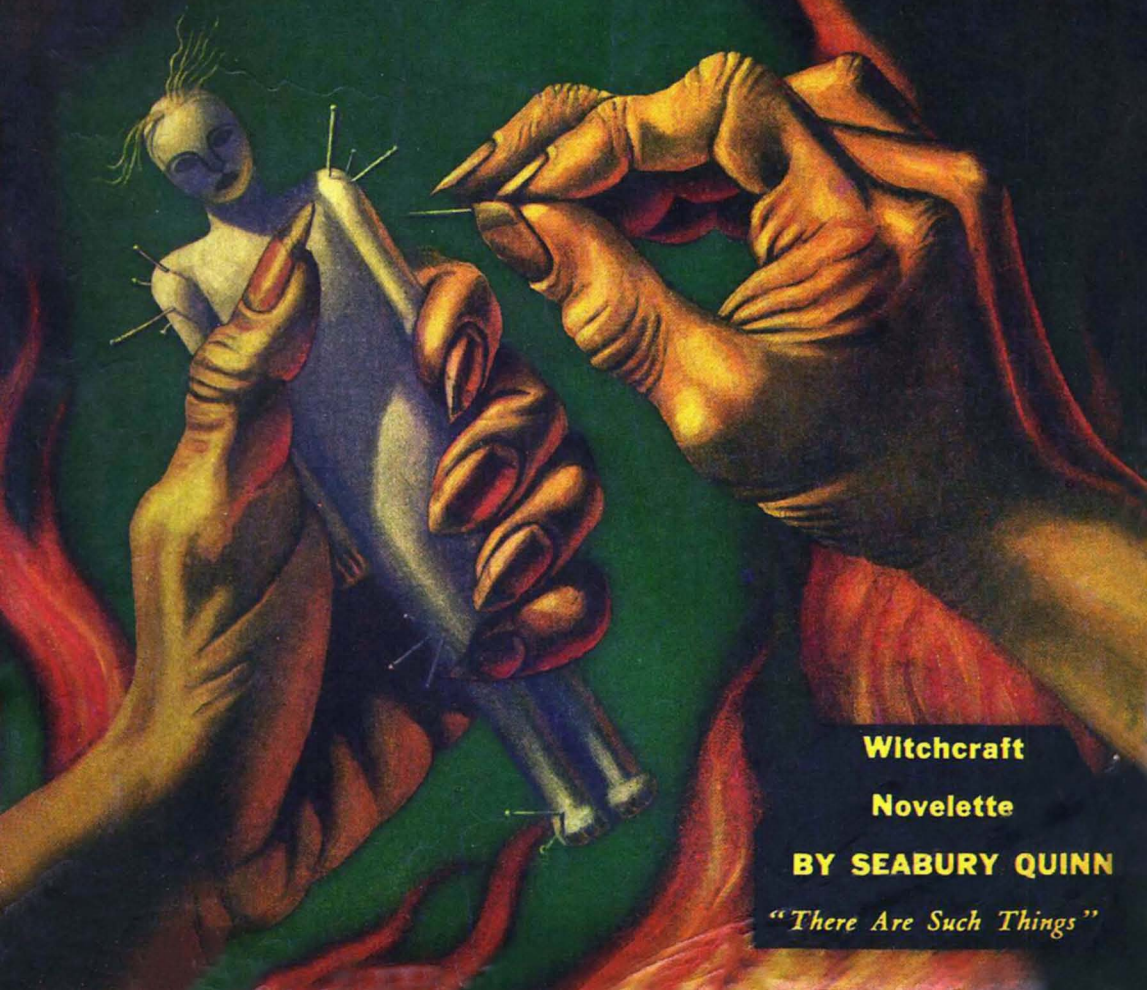
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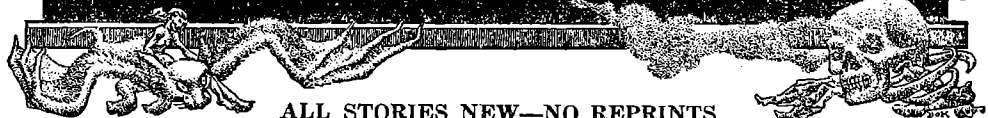
Witchcraft

Novelette

BY SEABURY QUINN

"There Are Such Things"

Weird Tales



MAY, 1941

Cover by Hannes Bok

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(In two parts—part I)

*The Finest and Most Thrilling Novel Ever Written by the
World's Acknowledged Master of the Weird Tale.*

NOVELETTE

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

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Vol. 35, No. 9

D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

H. AVELINE PERKINS, Associate Editor.

"Scarce daring to draw breath, she looked at them with wide-set, staring eyes."



"A single scarlet word burned in her brain . . . witchcraft!"—a mediaeval novelette of passion and sorcery.

There Are

SOME of this I saw myself, some of it was told me, some of it I reconstructed, adding scrap to scrap, as a paleontologist reconstructs a brontosaurus from fossil fragments salvaged from Jurassic silt.

I was serving with the Army of Occupation, attached to the M. P., since I was one of those whose orders read "to Coblenz"

instead of "to Camp Dix" when the A. E. F. was broken up. Jerry had taken his defeat philosophically and our principal duty at the time was to prevent fraternization between our men and our late enemies of the feminine gender. Periodically a brasshat came down from Ehrenbreitstein to lecture us on this. "G-I and all the folks back home are greatly concerned," he'd tell us

"These were the votaries of Lucifer the accursed—a ghastly crew of thirteen."



Such Things

By SEABURY QUINN

with the smock-faced smugness of a staff man laying down the law to the line. "Think what it would mean to patriotic American mothers if their boys came home with enemy wives—"

"Listen at the big lug!" muttered Fontenoy apKern, the battalion adjutant. "As if all wives ain't enemies!" apKern should have known. He was paying alimony to

two wives at home and ardent court to a blonde little English girl with buck teeth and a silly simper who drove a car for British headquarters up at Cologne.

Accordingly, duty rested lightly on us. On our own initiative we interpreted the order against fraternizing to mean we were to keep the boys from too great intimacy with Coblenz maidens noted more for care-

free spirits than attention to decorum, and let 'em go as far as they liked with legitimate love-making. Even the brigadier admitted we were wise in this, since keeping billeted soldiers from philandering is about as feasible as King Canute's attempt to order back the rising tide.

It was the twenty-third of June—Midsummer's Eve—though the date meant nothing to me then, and I was off duty. With nothing to do for a blessed twenty-four hours I'd rummaged through the old part of the city, looked in at the thirteenth century basilica of Saint Castor, crossed the famous Bridge of Boats and found myself in open country, my head pleasantly empty of intention, my throat exceedingly receptive to a draught of *liebfrauenmilch*, or beer, if nothing better offered.

I must have walked four or five miles, for the slate-gray roofs of Coblenz shimmered with an almost silvery luster in the brilliant summer sunlight as I looked down on them, when I came upon the Calvary. Time-mattered and overlaid with moss until the original drab of its granite was hardly perceptible, it stood beside the highway where the remnant of a Roman road, now scarcely more than a cart-track, cut across it, a mute reminder of the old faith in the very heart of Rhenish Prussia. The sculptor, probably some pious friar, had cut life, or, more precisely, death—into the cold stone. The corpus fairly writhed upon the road; tense, straining muscles stood out on the arms and legs and torso, the corded throat seemed overfilled with groans of torment, the brow beneath the plaited crown of thorns was knotted and bedewed with the cold sweat of the death-agony. Curiously, whether because of minute particles of mica in the stone or for some other reason, the slanting sunrays struck a sort of half-dulled brightness from the upright of the cross behind the up-thrown, tortured head, giving the effect of an illusive halo.

Across the plinth supporting the almost

life-sized crucifix ran what remained of an inscription, "—ORATE PRO EJS."

That puzzled me. I knew the Latin of the Medieval Schoolmen was not like that I had grappled with at Erasmus Hall High School, but . . . Understanding dawned on me at last. J and I were interchangeable in the Middle Ages, Germanic peoples favoring the J, and Latins using I. Whoever chiseled that inscription must have been a German, and chose J. That would make the last word read "*eis*"—them—so the remnant of the legend begged the passer-by to "pray for them."

This too was unusual. Such petitions usually appeared on family monuments, not on wayside Calvaries. Who, I wondered, were "they"? But even as I puzzled over the inscription I was vaguely conscious of another anomaly. These Medieval roadside shrines were placed along the highway, not at crossroads, for at the junction of two roads the witches gathered to mount broomsticks and fly screaming to the sabbat, suicides were buried at such places with stakes driven through their hearts; evil spirits made crossroads their rendezvous. Yet it was certainly a crossroads, and certainly a shrine stood there.

Beyond the hedge of hornbeam, once neatly clipped but now almost as ruinous as the old road sprawling past it, I saw the ivy-mantled relic of a gray-stone tower with what looked like a cottage roof beside it. And with the sight I realized I had walked a long way, that I'd eaten nothing since my early breakfast at the Monopole, and that I was hungry as a pike and thirsty as a sandbank. Perhaps the caretaker would sell me luncheon. Poverty was pressing hard on Fritz those days and a little American money would seem like a fortune to the average peasant.

“AND now, if the *Herr Leutnant* has completed his repast, he would like to see the ruins, *nicht wahr?*”

The "Herr Leutnant" had finished his repast, and very good he'd found it. Boiled fowl with dumpling, potatoes fried with just sufficient onion to make them perfect, great slabs of rich black bread with fresh sweet butter, and an *apfelstrudel* worthy of a king. *Apfelstrudel* you must know is cake made from dough that has been stretched and beaten to a paper-thinness, then rolled around a core of spiced sliced apple, and is the only thing in the world that outranks a New England apple pie. There had been no wine—worse luck—but the *bier* was all that could have been desired.

The ruins weren't very interesting. The outer walls had fallen long ago, taking five of the six watchtowers with them, and the keep was just a square stone building with small windows and no roof. The moat was overgrown with water-hyacinth, and the terraced flower beds were choked with weeds. Still, the old fellow had seemed so anxious to show me the place—his *dankerschöns* were almost overwhelming when I handed him a dollar—that I thought I might as well humor him. We'd made the round, and were back where we started when, "What's that little building over there?" I asked, pointing to an unroofed structure just outside the rim of the old ruined wall.

Something furtive came into my guide's china-blue eyes. He licked his lips and looked away, his mouth moved once or twice, but no words came from it. Finally: "Na, na, it's nothing, Herr Leutnant, just the chapel of the Hohenneitschütz. There is nothing there to interest you—"

"No?" I broke in. "Let's have a look at it." The man, for all his affability, was after all an enemy and I was an alien soldier in conquered territory, and a military policeman in the bargain. If there was something he particularly did not want me to see—and quite obviously he did not want me to inspect the chapel—it was my

duty to investigate. For the first time since I'd left Coblenz I was thankful that I'd worn my belt and gun.

"Take me to that chapel and no monkey business," I commanded sharply, snapping back the flap of my holster. "Go on, get going; shake it up!"

"*Jawohl!*" he answered scarcely audible, shrugging his stooped shoulders as he led the way across the weed-grown flower gardens. There was no need to draw my pistol. For generations he and his kind had taken orders unquestioningly from men in uniform. "The Herr Leutnant need not vex himself. I will show the chapel to him, but"—I could see a shiver ripple through his fat form as he spoke—"it holds no interest for the visitor."

THE chapel of the Hohenneitschütz family lay unroofed and open to its God. Grass had grown between the flagstones of the floor, the painted glass had long since disappeared from the stone mullions of the slim high Gothic windows. Carven in the walls were epitaphs in monkish Latin which I didn't bother trying to translate, each with its wreath of coats of arms about it, for the Hohenneitschütz were related to almost every noble family in the empire.

The sun was slanting toward the horizon and shadows filled the roofless chapel as cool wine might fill a cup. The altar, white stone, much discolored by the elements, took up most of the east wall. Above it was a basalt, lustrous black crucifix, almost man's-size, at each end were the bronze standards where in ancient days the eucharistic candles burned. I wondered as I looked at those discolored green-bronze candlesticks carved with saints and birds and stiff, unearthly-looking flowers, how long it had been since the scarlet-orange flame had bloomed above them at the tips of white, long, scented tapers, how long since the pungent tang of incense rose before the altar where the tabernacle stood

and a tonsured priest had ended service with his "*Ite, missa est.*"

A quick reconnaissance almost convinced me there was no place where a mouse could find an ambush in the chapel or a cache of arms be hidden, yet the man's apparent frightened, furtive manner and his anxiety to be rid of me struck a warning tocsin in my mind. "Who's this?" I asked as with elaborate unconcern I walked across the chapel pavement, testing each stone for a hollow ring, and paused beside the tomb that filled the space between the altar and the north wall on the Gospel side. "Careful, feller, watch it—keep your eye on him," that inward voice was warning as I circled round the tomb. The peasant's florid round face had gone visibly paler, the fat hand winding in the watch-chain of plaited human hair cabled across his bulging waistcoat had stopped still, he drew his breath in so sharply that it seemed like a sob.

"*Na, na, Herr Leutnant,*" he responded, almost sobbing with anxiety, "he was no one—nothing—nobody. Come, let us go if the *Herr Leutnant* has seen all he wishes—"

"Shut up!" I cut him off. "I'll tell you when I'm ready; meantime, keep your distance, or—" The gun half-drawn from my holster put pungency in the unspoken threat, and while the little fat man fairly writhed with what seemed like acknowledgment to me, I bent closer to inspect the monument.

Unlike the Calvary which had stopped me on the highway this piece of sculpture was entirely ordinary. The figure lying supine on the stone sarcophagus was a young man dressed in light plate armor, of the middle fifteenth century I judged by the graceful flutings and ridges on the cuirass and epaulières. He was unhelmeted, and long hair curled about his ears and underneath his neck. According to the custom of the time his hands were joined

above his breast as if in prayer. I glanced down at his steel-shod feet. They should have rested on a dog or lion or some heraldic animal, or possibly upon a cushion, but to my utter surprise I saw that a goose was nestled close against them, squatting complacently, feet tucked up beneath her, neck bent in a graceful curve to let her head rest on one shoulder, quite as if she'd waddled in and found the time and place propitious for depositing an egg. Had this been some young scapegrace fool? I wondered. And had the Medieval sculptor taken this sly way of telling future generations of the young knight's follies? "Who was he?" I demanded of the caretaker.

"*Herr Leutnant,* I cannot read the inscription," he lied shamelessly. "My eyes are bad, the light is poor, the Latin letters—"

I was bending forward while he spoke, deciphering the legend on the stone coffin. He might have told the truth, at that, I thought a moment later, for the letters had filled up with lichen till they were barely visible, and round them the stone had discolored till they scarcely showed against it. Still, I could descry a few dark lines of lettering, "—Junker Gustavus von Hohenneitschütz und—orate pro ejs—" There it was again, that "Pray ye for them." First it had appeared upon a wayside Calvary, where it had no business being, now it was on an individual tomb. Not pray for *him*, but pray for *them*.

"Is there more than one body interred here?" I asked the peasant.

His reaction to the question was astounding. He was a Prussian of the Prussians, round-faced, blue-eyed, fair-skinned. And doubtless a good Lutheran, too. But as I shot the harmless question at him he raised his right hand and crossed himself.

"*Nein, nein, mein Leutnant,* he alone is buried there—*Gott sei dank!*—but he was very wicked, very foolish, very head-

strong, and now he bears a dreadful penalty!" He looked across his shoulder at the shadows which were reaching out along the chapel pavement with the coming of sunset, and I saw the sweat break out upon his forehead. "Come, let us go, if you will be so gracious, *Herr Leutnant*, for the sun is setting quickly, and it is the eve of Saint John—"

There was no mistaking the genuineness of his terror. His face was fairly quivering, his jaws hung like the dewlaps of a hound, his eyes were round and dilated, and his mouth began to twist convulsively while spittle drooled from its corners. "Come, for gracious heaven's sake, *Herr Leutnant*," he besought me. "It is the eve of Saint John's Day, and with the coming of the darkness *they* have sway upon the earth!"

So that was it. The superstitious fool was scared of ghosts and witches and wanted to be safely away from the Hohenneitschütz' family mausoleum before sundown. "All right," I relented, shoving my gun back into its holster, "run along, but mind the curfew. If you're caught out after eight o'clock something worse than ghosts will get you, Fritz."

"Worse than ghosts, *Herr Leutnant*?" he repeated blankly.

"You said it, old scout. American M. P.'s."

HALF a mile down the road I paused irresolute. Saint John's Eve was a famous gathering-time for witches, I knew, a night when all the powers of evil held high carnival and the unquiet spirits of the earthbound dead came forth to wreak their spite on anyone unfortunate enough to cross their path. A superstitious peasant might well have dreaded being found away from home at sunset, but—

I'd given young Gustav von Hohenneitschütz' coffin a light kick, and it had sounded hollow as a kettle-drum. Six feet long and more it was, by three feet wide

and three feet high. What was to prevent arms being stored there? Rifles for a full platoon could be hidden in it, or three or four dismounted machine guns. Tildenson of the Intelligence had told me of a plot the M. P.'s nipped in half-bud down at Treves. They'd found guns and ammunition and about a half ton of "potato masher" hand grenades hidden in a cemetery there—why not in the Hohenneitschütz family tombs up there? Perhaps it had been fear of ghosts that made that little Heinie so jumpy—and perhaps it had been fear I'd run across their arms-cache. He'd certainly tried his best to keep me from the chapel when I wanted to look at it, and it had been broad daylight then.

What to do? Go down to Coblenz, pick up a squad and come back to make a search—and find they'd taken fright and moved the stuff while I was seeking reinforcements? No, that plan was out.

I took my gun out and looked at it. There were five shots in the cylinder. That would be enough to stop 'em unless they were too strong. If they were—"What are you waiting for?" I asked myself. "D'ye want to live forever? Get back there and take cover in the chapel. If it's all right you'll have done no harm; if Jerry's planning something it's up to you to put a stop to it before it starts. 'Bout face, forward march!"

Kicking my way through the hedge of hornbeam I made a circle of the castle keep, and did the last twenty yards to the chapel in approved skirmish order, wriggling quietly between the weeds that waved waist-high from the flower beds, finally dashing through the door and sprinting up the aisle to find a point of vantage in the angle of the wall beside the altar. Here I was in dense shadow and protected by the stone walls on each side. No one could sneak up on me, I could see anything bigger than a rat that crossed the threshold, and, which pleased me most of all, had an

unobstructed view of the Junker Gustav's tomb.

The sunset light had vanished now, and blue-purple shadows slipped across the chapel floor. Looking through a trefoil window in the farther wall I saw a star come out, a mere pin-prick of golden glow against the lilac of the evening sky. Presently, I knew, the moon would be up, and the bars of light that pierced the glassless windows would make it bright enough for me to shoot with some accuracy. Till then I'd have to watch myself. Five bullets weren't a lot, even if I could make every one count, and I'd no idea how many there would be in the party.

I didn't feel heroic crouching there against the wall. I felt uncomfortable and foolish. If I'd only had the sense to go to Coblenz for a detail—we could have commandeered a car and gotten back in half an hour—but no, I had to be a blasted hero, taking on a whole uprising single-handed. Had I fallen from my high chair and lit upon my head in infancy? I wondered while my muscles cramped and stiffened in the evening chill and every breath of breeze set branches swaying to throw shadows in the doorway, shadows that looked suspiciously like men with rifles in their hands—and I had only a revolver with five bullets in it.

My vigil wavered from the chapel door a moment, for as one may not quite see, yet dimly perceive, an object from the corner of his eye while looking elsewhere, I was aware of something moving by the tomb of Gustav Hohenneitschütz. My eyes and gun swung simultaneously toward the sepulchre. "That's it, eh?" the thought flamed through my mind. I'd heard of secret passages with tombs for outlets, now, it seemed, I was about to see—

"What?" the question fairly jumped from my lips, forced out by sudden pressure of surprise. Something like a vapor, tenuous and half-seen as a puff of breath

upon a frosty night, was rising from the statue's graven lips, fanning out in a slim cone, then hanging lazily in midair.

I felt a sudden chill go rippling down my spine, one of those causeless fits of nervous cold which, occurring independently of outside stimuli, make us say, "someone's walking on my grave." It wasn't easy to breathe, and there was a curiously unpleasant feeling in the region of my stomach. It was Midsummer Eve—the caretaker had warned me about ghosts—"Steady on!" I brought myself out of the mental nose-dive. "You know there aren't such things. Jerry's trying to pull a fast one—"

The humid summer heat seemed giving way to a chill which affected the soul as well as the body, a dull, hard, biting cold suggestive of the limitless eternities of frozen interstellar space. The little halituous white cloud swung motionless above the carved stone face, then gently, as though wafted by a breeze, it eddied slowly toward the altar, hung still a moment, then gradually spread out like a smoke-screen laid down by an airplane, a drifting, gently-billowing curtain which obscured the sanctuary from my gaze.

A HORRIFYING thought took hold of me. Gas! In some way they had set a cylinder of phosgene in the tomb, released it through a hidden vent in the statue, and were filling the place with it. Crawling like a snake over the flagstone floor I wriggled from the corner by the altar, making for the doorless portal of the chapel. There would be air-currents there; their pressure would drive back the gas—

I looked across my shoulder as I neared the doorway. They might be coming out now; I didn't want to take any chance of being shot at as my silhouette showed in the archway's faint light.

The gas-cloud still hung like a curtain before the altar, but in it I could see faint

points of bluish light, mere tiny specks of phosphorescence scintillating in the gently-wavering vapor. I flattened to the pavement and lay watching, gun in readiness. They had tried to gas me, and lost the first trick. Now—

Gradually, but with quickening tempo, the little points of light were multiplying till they floated like a maze of dancing midges, spinning luminantly till they seemed to merge and coalesce and form small nebulae as large as glowing cigarette ends, but burning all the while with an intense, blue eerie light. It was as if, in place of the gas-screen, the chapel had been cut in half by a curtain of solid, opaque moonlight.

The little light-points changed from spinning to a slowly weaving motion. The luminous curtain seemed breaking up, falling into a pattern of highlights and shadows.

A picture, as when the acid etches deeply in the copper of a half-tone plate, was taking form before my eyes.

Candles once more glowed in the bronze standards on the altar, their pointed, orange flames made small breeze-raveled stains against the darkness. The altar itself had been bleached from dirty, time-stained gray to spotless whiteness. I could read the legend, "*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*" cut across the chamfered slab that formed its top. In the honey-pale glow of the candles I descried a priest, a barefoot, tonsured monk in alb and stole who faced a man and woman standing at the lowest of the three steps leading to the altar.

These were no shades, no pale, anemic ghosts. Each of them was plain and clear-cut and distinct. I could see the gleam of light reflected from the gilt fringe of the priest's stole, make out every detail of the man's and woman's costumes, and—which settled it—descrie the shadows which they etched against the little pool of brightness spilled down by the flickering candles.

Ghosts cast no shadows; I'd heard that since my infancy.

The man stood nearest me, and I could see the narrow corded edge of gold that trimmed his wine-red velvet doublet and the collar of scrolled gold about his neck. A sword with a jeweled pommel hung belted in a velvet scabbard at his left side. His hair was long and fair, curled under at the ends where it swept his shoulders. His face was turned away from me, but in the way he stood, in the way he held his head and shoulders, I seemed to see something vaguely familiar.

The woman standing at his left was partly turned toward me. She was dark and vibrant, with small, sharp, clear-cut features, her hair was very black and shone with almost blue lights in the candle-rays. She wore it plaited in two long, full braids that swept across her shoulders and hung almost to her knees in front. Upon her head was a small cap of silver netting thickly set with seed-pearls, her gown was shimmering white silk and clung as closely as a sheath to her slim figure, a belt of silver plates was clasped about her waist.

ODDLY, though the priest's lips moved, I heard no words. It was like looking at a scene through a sound-proof glass screen, or watching the swift action of a silent motion picture.

But I could fit the words to the action. It was a wedding ceremony that I watched, and from the places where the parties stood I guessed the priest was asking, as the canon required, if anyone could show just cause why he should not unite the man and woman in the bonds of matrimony. From groom and bride the celebrant inquired, "—I do solemnly require and charge ye both—"

Something skittered past me up the chapel aisle. It might have been a wind-blown leaf, so lightly did it scuff along the flagstones, but—it wasn't. It was a girl,

young, slender, lovely as a flower nodding on its stalk, or—

There was something odd—unnatural—about her. I could make her features out, her clear-cut, small, sweet features, the mistiness of the dark hair that rippled down each side her face and swept across her shoulders. I could see distinctly that she wore a one-piece smock of blue linen with a hempen girdle bound about its waist and that her arms and feet were bare, but also I could see through her. She dulled but did not hide the candles' light as she stood between them and me. Dimly, as through a fog, I saw the outlines of the white altar behind her; as she stood full in the candle-rays I saw she cast no shadows.

She stretched her empty hands appealingly to the priest. Something had hurt them, they were crushed and bloody, drops of red welled from her finger-tips and fell down with a slow dribble to the flagstones.

For a minute—or an hour, or eternity, I couldn't say, for all time seemed suspended—they stood stone-still in a tense tableau, the priest about to say his office, the bride and bridegroom, and the visitant.

Then I saw the bride's mouth square in a shrill scream of terror, saw her waver like a reed hit by a blast of furious wind and fall full length upon the altar steps. The tonsured priest stepped back and raised his hands as if to ward off physical assault, then, brought to halt against the table of the altar, made the sign of the cross and spoke in hurrying, gabbling Latin. No skill in lip-reading was required to tell the words he said: "*—te conjuro—ad locum tuum!*—I conjure thee, return to thine own place!"

I saw the bridegroom's fingers crawl up to his throat. His lips drew back, his teeth showed white and hard as they ground on each other. There was less color in his cheeks than in the face of a corpse. Distorted as his features were I recognized

them as those of the stone face of the statue that stretched supine on the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz' tomb with hands joined palm to palm as if in prayer. Consternation glazed his eyes, his skin seemed wrinkling as with sudden frostbite. It was not merely fright that held him paralyzed, it was terror multiplied by horror, with sheer panic added to it. "*Du?—T'hou?*" the word jerked from him. "*Ach, mein Gott—*"

THE specter made no answer, but from her waist she took the double-twisted hempen rope that served her for a girdle, wrapped its loose ends about her wrist and swung it like a scourge.

Blow after blow she reined upon the cowering man, striking his face, his shoulders, his neck. He cringed and crouched beneath the flailing lash, holding up his hands to guard his face, dropping them again as the whip bit into his neck, groveling beneath the flogging like a beaten cur.

The maimed ghost-woman pointed with one bloody hand. The trembling, shuddering man obeyed the gesture, and slowly, as though unable to hasten, he walked down the aisle and out into the moonfilled ruin of the castle garden. Step for step she matched his tortured march, striking mercilessly as she flogged him round the angle of the chapel wall. Amazingly, there was no look of anger, hatred or vindictiveness in her still face. It was quiet and immobile, almost void of expression as were the features of those wooden Indians with which tobacconists once advertised their wares. Almost, but not quite. From her set and staring eyes great tears ran slowly, coursing down her bloodless cheeks in one another's tracks. She didn't sob or cry or wail, but drop on shining drop the great, slow tears slipped down her face.

I waited breathlessly. Would she—Before I framed the question in my mind I had its answer. She was driving him around

the building in a never-ceasing circle, lashing, scourging, beating him without surcease or mercy.

Again it seemed that time hung in abeyance. How long the beater and the beaten trod their dreadful *via Dolorosa* I had no idea. I do know that it seemed an age before I heard the far-off crowing of a cock and, fainter still, but silver-sweet in the cool summer morning air, the echo of our bugles sounding reveille in Coblenz.

The beaten man turned in his path and ran into the chapel, paused to genuflect before the altar, staggered drunkenly across the flagstones to the tomb and fell across it. For a long, shuddering moment he lay there, his arms outstretched across the graven image of himself, then raised his swollen, lash-bruised face. I noticed with a start there was no trace of priest or bride left in the sanctuary.

The woman dropped her scourge and took the young man's cheeks between her crushed and mangled hands. For just a moment she stood thus, then bent and pressed a kiss upon his bloody, swollen lips. Her loosened hair fell round their faces, hiding them from me as with a cloak, and I turned my eyes away. Dreadful as the agony of scourging was, this kiss—this embrace of renunciation and farewell—seemed infinitely more so.

The sky was brightening swiftly. In a branch a sleepy bird awoke and scolded musically. I turned again toward the chapel. It was empty. On its bed of weathered stone the statue of the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz lay with folded hands imploring mercy. The fragment of his epitaph still showed against the moss-discolored granite, "*—orate pro ejs—*pray for them," but of ghostly knight and ghostly peasant maid, of spectral priest and phantom bride there was no sign nor trace.

"Lord, what a nightmare that was!" I exclaimed.

But even as I said it I knew that I had

not dreamed; that what I'd seen had been no dream-bound vision of a sleeping man, but something terrible, inexorable and tragic. "He was wicked, foolish, headstrong, now he bears a dreadful penalty!" the caretaker had said of the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz.

Why? I wondered as I tramped along the road to Coblenz. Who was he and what was his crime? Where did the peasant girl fit in? Why did she scourge his tortured ghost around the chapel from the fall of dusk till cock-crow, and, most of all I wondered, why did she embrace him when the terrible ordeal was done?

"HI, LUG!" apKern called to me as I sat in the lobby of the Monopole digesting a so-so dinner and wondering what was happening in Brooklyn right then. The Dodgers would be playing out at Ebbets Field, and—

"Hullo yourself," I answered none too cordially. apKern had recently been transferred to the Office of Civil Affairs where there was more to do than at the provost marshal's, and as a result both his leaves and his attentions to the little buck-toothed British girl at Cologne had been curtailed. I had troubles of my own and didn't want to spend an evening listening to his grievances, but his next words made me move over and make a place for him beside me on the lounge:

"I think I know somebody who can shed some light on the mystery of the haunted chapel you've been deviling everyone about these last two weeks."

His accusation wasn't accurate. I wasn't going to be fool enough to tell them I'd seen ghosts at Castle Hohenneitschütz—they'd have me up before the psychiatrist so fast my head would swim, and the best thing I could hope for was a discharge for mental disability if I let that story out—but I had made inquiries about the Hohenneitschütz legend, and probably had been a

nuisance with my questions. "Who is it?" I demanded, tendering him my cigarette case. apKern was chronically just out of cigarettes. I knew he'd stay with me as long as mine held out.

"Cove from the Benedictine convent down by the Castor Platz, sort o' sub-prior or something, named Brother Ambrose. He comes into the O.C.A. 'bout every ten days, and the other day I got to talkin' with him. Seems like the Night-Shirt family's chapel was supplied by Benedictine fraters in the Middle Ages, and most of their old records are down in his convent library. He wasn't very talkative. Said there was a curse on 'em, and that there chapel is an evil place, 'specially on Midsummer Eve." He gave me an appraising look. "That would have been about the time you visited the ruins, wouldn't it?"

I nodded. "And—" I prompted, as he took a second cigarette, but made no move to continue his narrative.

"Well, that's about all, I guess. This Brother Ambrose feller seems to have the dope on the old chapel, so, if you'd like, I'll make a date for you to visit him next time he comes in. He's due tomorrow or the next day to get his fuel order renewed."

"apKern," I asked, "how would you like a nice, long brandy-soda?" Two minutes later we were in the bar and I was ordering, "*Zewi branntwein.*"

ONE doesn't bribe a frater of the Order of Saint Benedict, but I did something very like it when I called at the old convent by the Castor Platz two days later. Tobacco was at a premium in Germany those days, and I'd stopped at the Q.M. for a big tin of Prince Albert on the off chance that Brother Ambrose, like most of his countrymen, was addicted to pipe-smoking. The smile that lit the little cleric's face when I presented him with the gift was a reward all by itself. Even if he knew nothing about the Hohenneitschütz curse, I was re-

paid, I felt, as I watched while he tamped long-cut in his china pipe and set it glowing like a little furnace.

But virtue was not to be its reward alone that time. "*Ach, yes,*" he answered in his oddly thick English, "those Hohenneitschütz, I know him—as who does not around these parts? He was a very wicked family, false to his vows of knighthood, false to his plighted word, false to everything. But ah, Herr Leutnant, he has paid a dreadful penalty! On each Midsummer Eve—"

"I know," I shot the interruption at him. "I was in the chapel of the Hohenneitschütz on Midsummer Eve."

If I had suddenly announced that I was Mephistopheles, or Martin Luther's shade, he could not have been taken more completely aback. "You—the *Herr Leutnant* was in that devil-ridden, accursed place on Saint John's Eve?" he faltered. "Did you—did the *Herr Leutnant* see—"

"*Natürlich.* I saw the priest and bride and bridegroom, I saw the peasant maiden's ghost when she came in to stop the wedding; I saw her scourge him from the altar and around the chapel—"

"*Heilige Maria!*" the little frater blessed himself fearfully. "Then it is truly true; it is not merely legend—there *are* such things!"

"It's true enough," I answered grimly. "I wasn't asleep and I wasn't drunk that night. On the contrary I was very wide awake and alert, expecting—" I broke off lamely. After all, it was hardly courteous to tell him that I'd been on the lookout for some of his countrymen, expecting to be wiped out but resolved to take a few of them along for company. "It seemed to me that I was witnessing the reënactment of a scene from one of those old tragic dramas," I completed. "I've heard it said there is a theory that stones and wood and similar insensate matter have power to absorb vibrations from human beings labor-

ing under great emotion, and give them off again, like *tableaux vivants*, when a person emotionally attuned to them comes near. I was very much keyed up that night, and possibly that would explain why I perceived that scene, but why should it be there to see? Do you know the history of the Hohenneitschütz legend—or should I say their curse? Can you explain what that scene meant?"

He bowed his head in silence a moment, pulling at his pipe with long, thoughtful puffs. "All my life—and I am nearing seventy—I've heard the legend of the Hohenneitschütz, now from this one, now from that. In our archives we have documents which tell of it, but I have never read them through. You read Latin, *Herr Leutnant, nicht wahr?*"

"Not well enough to translate Medieval parchments, Father."

"*Jawohl*, I might have known as much. The classics are neglected in the schools these days. Never mind. I will read the records for you and inscribe an English translation—"

"But that would take you weeks, months, perhaps," I objected.

"When time hangs heavy on an old man's hands he does not count the minutes, my son," he assured me with a smile. "You have been most generous to me"—he tapped the tall red cannister of tobacco affectionately. "Cannot I do you some small favor in return?"

WHETHER Brother Ambrose had done me a favor was a moot point I thought as I looked at the great sheaf of manuscript the lay brother had brought me. Ambrose was a scholar with the Teuton's love of detail. He had made a literal translation of the records of the Hohenneitschütz, and though it was informative to read their armory contained *sallets*—which, I gleaned, were a form of helmet something like our own tin hats—for a thou-

sand men, five hundred arcubalists and enough arrows to supply them for a month-long siege, it was certainly not helpful in determining the reason for the family curse. Also, though he had written English in a lovely, clerkly hand which was almost wholly undecipherable, he had been thinking in German, with the result that his nouns and pronouns bunched at the beginning of his sentences, the adjectives were strung along the middle, and the verbs packed in close order at the end.

It was a long time before I came to the meat of it, but when I'd winnowed out the chaff of cluttering data I was in possession of a story as poetical as that of Faust or Tannhäuser and as tragically appealing as the song of Tristram and Isolde or Troilus and Cressida.

The Roman Empire of the East and the proud Hohenneitschütz family found oblivion the same year, it appeared, for it was on a lovely April evening in the year of Our Lord 1453 that the young Graf Gustav von Hohenneitschütz and von Ketlar rode the white horse he had jestingly named Weiss Tod—Pale Death—through the lush alleys of the wide greenwood that rimmed his father's castle round on every side.

It was the season which the Germans call *vorfrühling*—the forespring—the spring-before-the-spring—and the newly budded trees were bright with shining green leaves or frothy with a snow of blossoms. A soft breeze played among the branches and the black soil had a sweet, warm smell. In the meadows calves and lambs skipped playfully, the birds were carolling as they sought straws and twigs to build their nests, and Gustav, being young and heart-whole and romantic, felt the urge for song well in his throat resistlessly as the sap forcing its way through the tree trunks.

"*The minstrels sing of a jovial king;
A wonderful king was he—*"

he raised his voice in the old *lied*, then broke the song abruptly as he reined Pale Death back almost on his haunches. Unmindful of the charger's hoofs a flock of geese had debouched into the wood path, waddling majestically in long single file, pausing now and then to stretch their serpentine necks down to nibble at a sprig of new, fresh grass, then taking up their march again with slow, unhurried rhythm.

"*Herr Gott*," the young knight swore, "is my road to be blocked by these confounded, squawking—ah, *mädchen*, I am sorry if I startled you!"

Shepherding her toddling charges with a long thin wand of peeled willow, came the goose-girl, and at sight of her young Gustav's annoyed frown gave way to a quick smile.

She was a pretty thing, this peasant girl, straight and slender as a reed beside the river's rim, yet with a sweetly rounded figure whose desirability not even the almost shapeless smock she wore could quite conceal. Her hair was dark brown, clustering round her white brow in a coronel of loose curls like the tendrils of new grape vines, then sweeping down each side her face and cataracting over her shoulders until it nearly reached her waist. Her skin was very white and smooth, her lips as red as the rose Gabriel brought Our Lady. Her eyes were dark blue, blue as distant hills before rain, blue as midnight skies in winter. Round her head, as it had been a crown, she wore a chaplet of wild flowers, her one-piece smock of coarse blue linen was bound in at her small waist by a rough cord of plaited hemp. Her arms and feet were bare, but as he looked down he thought that he never had seen such white, slim, shapely feet; her insteps were two lines of arching loveliness, her ankles were as sharply cut as those of a blood-mare, her heels were narrow and the long, straight toes that never had been cramped by rigid shoes were like the fingers of a

high-born lady's hands. Certes, this were loveliness enough for anyone upon a soft spring evening.

The dark blue eyes moved up to his, demurely bright. "I am not feared, my lord," she told him softly, "only startled at thy advent. I had not thought there was another in the *grünwald* at this hour of this day, for the sun is sinking quickly, and with darkness comes those whom good Christians should not see—"

"Do they, i' faith?" he answered laughing. "And who might they be, pretty one?"

"Hast thou forgotten this is May Eve, *Herr*? It is the feast of Saint Walpurga, and tonight is Walpurgis-Nacht when the olden gods who were but devils and the witches who adore them gather for their unclean rites in secret places—"

His laughter cut her sober warning short. "Well spoken, *mädchen*! There be trolls and devils and all sorts of wicked beings in the wood this night, and here is he who will defend thee from them all. 'Fore God, I'll bring thee to thy father's cot unharmed, though twenty times ten thousand witches barred our way!"

She signed herself with the cross as he spoke and turned serious eyes on him reprovingly. "It is not well to speak thus lightly of the hosts of evil, good my lord. Thy challenge might be heard—"

He had dismounted from Pale Death, and now he bent and took one of her slim feet in his hand. "Up with thee, pretty one," he made, and raised her to the saddle. "Thou shalt ride like any princess to thy home, and I shall be thy courier and knight-defender."

Well-favored as the maiden was her escort matched her beauty. He was well made, though somewhat inclined to the lankiness of youth, with long fair hair and apple-cheeks and wide blue eyes that verged on gray. If his chin receded somewhat, the small beard of flaxen hair ob-

sured the failing, and he walked with the slight swagger that denoted all his kind and kin, for he was of the *berzogs*, noblest blood of the empire, and answerable to no one but the church, the kaiser and his father for his actions.

His apparel matched her person: a shirt of fine white linen, hose of brown silk, high boots of Spanish leather, and a doublet of brown satin slashed with gold and laced with gold-tipped points. A closely-fitting silk cap with an eagle's feather in its crown topped his fair hair, from his shoulders hung a heel-length cloak of bright red velvet fastened with a golden clasp at the throat.

"How art thou called?" he asked as he paced by her side, one hand upon the saddle-bow, the other steadying her in her seat. "Methinks 'twould take a name of wondrous sweetness to do justice to thy beauty, little forest-girl."

"My name is Else, an' it please your lordship," she responded softly. There was no need to ask if she had any other, for he knew well she did not. Peasants, like the beasts they drove to labor in the fields, had no family designations, nor would they for some centuries to come.

"It pleases me most excellently well," he assured her. "Knowest thou who I am?"

"Yea, thou art the young Graf Gustav who one day will be our lord and master," she replied, and a slow flush mounted to her cheeks and brow.

"One day, quotha? Am I not thy lord and master now, *mädchen?*"

She blushed still more violently, and he had to strain his ears to catch her whispered answer. "Aye, lord, as God is to thee so art thou to poor Else."

"Well spoken. And thou wilt obey me in all things, as becomes a peasant maiden when her lord commands?"

"Thou knowest it—"

"Then I command thee, as my serf and

thing and chattel, to embrace me straightway, fairest Else."

She put her hands upon his shoulders and leant downward till her lips touched his. The fragrance of her hair swirled round him, her arms clasped round his neck, he felt the quickening of her breath against his mouth—"Bei Gott" he muttered in a voice gone suddenly as hard and sharp as honed steel, "thou art the loveliest thing in all the world, my Else," and swung her down from the saddle.

THE chronicle does not record their idyl, but it is not hard to picture it. There were other meetings in the *grünwald* when the moonstained trees and shrubbery stood about them like a sentinel host, meetings when he held her close against his heart and they rehearsed the aching sweetness of their first kiss. The owl and the *fledermaus*—the little, harmless cheeping bat—heard their love vows, the stoat and weasel and the little timid rabbits that made nests deep in the wildwood watched them from the covert of the flowering thorn bush. *Ich liebe dich*—I love thee, little Else of the greenwood," he told her not once but a hundred times each night, and she, struck speechless by his condescension—breathless with adoration as the daughters of men when the sons of God first looked on them and found them fair—could not say anything at all. But her sweet bare arms showed whiter than the apple blossoms drifting from the forming fruit as they crept tightening round his neck and drew him to the yielding sweetness of her lips, the tender warmth and pulsing of her bosom.

We know the Junker Gustav's breed, its stiff-necked arrogance, its pride of blood and family, its blind worship of caste. But she was a woman, sweet and young and lovely as a half-blown rose. He was a man, young, impetuous and sanguine. What else could matter in the softness of

the scented woodland summer night? His heart, his blood, his youth were in league to defeat his pride. So, almost but not quite inexplicably, we find them standing hand in hand upon the packed-earth floor of the hut where a peasant village priest had his rectory while they repeated after the brown-cassocked religious the sacramental words that made their twain one flesh.

The days sped swiftly as a weaver's shuttle, and with the coming of high summer Gustav's ardor seemed to cool. The meetings by the rowan tree were less and less frequent, when she came running forth from the shadow, hands lifted toward him, he was slower in dismounting from Pale Death.

One July night when the moon was awash in a sky tremulous with silver clouds he lay with his head couched in her lap while she let down the waterfall of her hair above his face and brushed the silken ends of the unraveled strands against his lips and cheeks. "And thou wilt surely take me to the castle and acknowledge me as thy true wedded spouse eftsoons?" she whispered, bending till he felt the flutter of her breath like moth-wings on his mouth.

"Have I not said it, little bride of my heart? There are grave reasons for my tarrying, my father's consent to our nuptials must be first obtained, for I am not of lawful age as yet," he answered somewhat petulantly. "Why plaguest thou me thus?"

"Oh lord and master of my heart and life and soul, believe me it is not for myself alone that I ask," she replied, and her voice sank till he rather felt than heard the words. "Thy condescending love is all that thy poor Else asks. To meet thee thus beneath the greenwood tree, to feel thy arms about me and thy kisses on my lips, *ach, Gott*, it is such heaven as I had not thought existed, but"—pride made her words shine like new-minted silver—"there is another

with us now, my lord. We are not alone in the forest."

"*Herr Je*, how meanest thou?" he asked in mock-fear. "Dost mean the fairy-folk—"

"Nay, silly one!" her laughter rippled like the running of clear water over stones. "'Tis here—" She took his hand and laid it just below the gently-swelling rondure of her bosom. "'Tis of thee, my Gustav, and of me. And, oh my lord, when first I knew it I felt as the ever-blessed *beilige Maria* must have when the Angel of the Lord appeared to her—" sublimity of prideful joy rendered her inarticulate, but he could feel the quickened pulsing of her heart in the hands pressing his.

Slowly he rose to his knees, then to his feet. His hands felt cold, and the hollows of his shoulders ached suddenly with a fine pain. Each word she'd spoken ate its way into his brain as if etched by strong acid.

To make love to a pretty peasant maiden in the moonlit forest while the little cheeping insects hymned their lyric canticles and the wind crooned a soothing song among the branches of the rowan tree, even to go through the form of marriage before an obscure priest who knew neither him nor her—that was one thing. But to stand before his cold-eyed, sneering friends and own this peasant woman as his wife, to tell his race-proud sire that he was wedded to a serf, the father of a villein wench's child—his heart gave a cold, nauseating lurch inside his breast. "*Auf weidersehen, liebchen*," he faltered as he climbed into the saddle. "I—I must away to the castle—my august sire—" His farewell faded to an echo broken by the clacking of his horse's hoofs against the flints of the roadway. And so Gustav von Hohenneitschütz und von Ketlar rode out of little Else's life—but she had not gone out of his.

SHE could not understand. Night after night she went to the trysting place by the rowan tree and waited while the stars

came out and the moon swam across the sky, telling and retelling her rosary of deferred hope—"He will come; oh, surely, any moment he will come!"—until the eastern sky grew bright and the sun rose amid a tossing surf of ruddy clouds.

At last her desperation made her bold and, greatly daring, she trudged up the long road to the castle. She knew the risk she took in doing this, for though the stiff-necked townsmen had begun to curb the nobles in their arrogance the peasant still had no rights of property or person which the lord or his underlings were bound to respect.

A bugle-horn was sounding as she neared the moat and a troop of cavaliers and ladies clattered through the gateway and across the drawbridge. First came the *fauconiers*, the men who trained and groomed the falcons, brave in livery of Lincoln green and gold and riding on small shaggy horses, then, two by two upon their blooded mounts, the gentle folk, each with a hooded hawk perched on his gauntleted left wrist.

Her breath quickened with sudden joy, for in the foremost rank she glimpsed a tall white horse—Pale Death—and striding him in green doublet and russet cloak was Gustav.

Beside him, laughing at some jest he made, a lady rode upon a delicately-pacing palfrey. Tall, elegantly slender, white-skinned, black of hair and black of eye she was, with thin red lips that made her white teeth even whiter as she shrilled to sudden tinkling laughter at her partner's sally. "Well spoken, kinsman, thou must come to court, they would appreciate thy wit there," Else heard her say as they swept past her at a brisk canter.

Pale Death gave her a whinnying greeting and would have turned his soft nose toward her, for she had often fed him tender grasses while he stamped impatiently beneath the rowan tree, but his rider

jerked the bridle sharply, dragging him away as he struck spurs into his flanks.

"Gustav, my lord," the girl raised empty, pleading hands, "thou comest not—" Her voice snapped like a broken thread, for the young man glanced down at her with a look void of recognition as if she had been a roadside bush or boulder.

"Who was the lady riding with the Junker Gustav?" she asked the guardsman lolling on his pike beside the drawbridge.

"It is the Graäfin Elnora von Hernaldorf," the man-at-arms replied negligently. "She is the Junker's cousin and betrothed. They wed at Michaelmas—"

Three men-at-arms came grinning from the guardroom. They were off duty, and the summer day was young. The pretty chit might prove amusing, though she were as mad as any hare in March.

Else realized her peril. Once they had her inside the castle—Like a doe pursued by greyhounds she fled headlong down the path, the guardsmen's raucous laughter following her like hurled missiles. "*Ach Gott*," she moaned when she had reached the sanctuary of the forest and regained her breath a little, "he passed me by unheeding as if I had been a stock or stone, his horse knew me, but he—"

A single scarlet word burned in her brain: Witchcraft! Her lord and husband was bewitched. Nothing but an evil spell could make him renounce his pledged word, only witchcraft could have wiped the memory of her kisses from his heart. She must fight fire with fire, she must find a wise woman who could lift the spell from her adored and make him own her as his lawful spouse before the world.

IT WAS Lammas Night, the first night in August, the Feast of Saint Peter's Chains, when witches and warlocks and all the host of those who forswore God and served Beelzebub were gathering for their unclean worship. The sun had gone down

in a riot of wrathful color and dusk had fallen early. The sky was sullen with the weight of rain that would not fall, and from every hilltop blazed the guardian fires the peasants lighted to keep off the witch-brood. Else had been wandering through the forest since the first long shadows had begun to dull the outlines of the trees. Somewhere, she knew, a witches' coven would be meeting, somewhere thirteen lost souls would be giving adoration to the Evil One; she must find them and secure their help. A dozen times she'd thought she heard the skirking of the witches as they cleft the air on flying broomsticks, but each time it had proved a flight of water-fowl flying homeward from their feeding-grounds. Once or twice she thought she heard a witch-hag running through the woods, but when she followed she had found it a red deer or spotted buck that hurried down a by-path of the forest.

At last, footsore and weary, she had sunk to rest beneath the rowan tree where she and Gustav had met in the happy time before he was enchanted. "Oh, good, kind *Herr Teufel*, regard me if it pleaseth thee," she prayed with all the simple trustfulness she would have used in offering a petition to Saint Anne. "I am very tired and most miserable. My wedded husband is spell-bound, and I would have one of thy people lift the spell from him. Lead me to their congregating-place, good Devil, and I shall thank thee very much. Amen."

Like an echo to her closing words she heard a muted drumming, a hurrying, insistent rhythm that beckoned her like a bent finger. She knew the place from which the sound came—the fairy-ring that stood deep in the forest. A dozen times she'd crossed it with half-bated breath, for it was said to be a meeting-place of witches, yet never till that moment had she thought to look there. She ran half stumbling down the trodden woodland path, crashed

through the wall of flowering briars that cut her feet and legs until the red blood spurted from them, and came at last with fluttering heart and wide eyes to the border of the clearing.

Upon a flat stone in the center sat a creature robed in red and masked with leather. Deer's antlers crowned his head, and from the falseface that obscured his features swept a long blue beard. One hand was hidden in his scarlet robe, in the other he held a thick club with which he drummed upon the stone, and round him danced a ghastly crew of thirteen forms, half-animal, half-human, wholly evil.

She saw that they had human legs, thin, knob-kneed, spindle-shanked, but from the thighs up they were clad in goatskin, topped with the beasts' heads, haired and horned. In their furred hands each bore black candles which gave a little light but more smoke, and a sharp, unpleasant smell. Round and round the throne they jumped and capered, leaped and danced with squeaking, shrilling cries that made her think of rats caught in a trap.

Scarce daring to draw breath she looked at them with wide-set, staring eyes. She knew now that she could not do it, she dared not! These were votaries of Lucifer the accursed, to speak with them, or even stay to witness their abominations would be—

With a sudden squeaking cry one of the demons darted from the ring, leaped straight at her and seized her by the wrists. Before she realized her plight she had been dragged into the center of the circle with the witches chattering round her, thrusting at her with their flaming candles, threatening her with claw-hooked hands.

"What dost thou at our secret session, maiden?" The seated figure's voice was deep and rumbling, but not angry.

"May it please your worship, good Herr Devil, I was not spying on you," she mustered courage to reply. "I did but seek

for a wise woman who could lift a spell from one I love—”

“What wilt thou pay for such a service?” broke in the masked master of the coven.

“Pay?” she faltered, taken utterly aback. In all her life she had not touched a piece of money; except for the blue linen smock she stood in she had nothing she could call her own. “What can one who has nothing pay, *Meinherr?*” she asked simply.

He laughed, a booming, rumbling laugh which somehow had no mirth in it. “Wilt promise to give anything we ask, no matter what, if we perform this service for thee?” he demanded.

“Yea, good Herr Devil, anything that’s mine to give I’ll give thee freely, if thou wilt do this for me,” she promised.

“’Tis well, tomorrow morning go to Margareta’s hut hard by the water-ford, and do what she commands thee. Speak not to any of thy visit here tonight, or we shall wreak such vengeance on thee that in years to come thy story shall be used to frighten children from their naughtiness.” He waved his hand in dismissal, and her captors led her to the margin of the clearing and thrust her out into the briar-patch, where the sharp thorns tore her tender skin until her feet and legs were criss-crossed with bright bloody weals.

OLD Margareta’s hut was dark and dirty and overflowing with the odor of evil. A stuffed and much moth-eaten owl graced the shelf above its fireplace, a black cat with a single eye arched its back and spat at Else as she paused trembling on the threshold of the witch’s house.

The mistress of the place was suited to her surroundings. She was clothed in evil-smelling rags no one of which matched any other in weave or color, around her neck was strung a chain of tarnished metal plates, brass rings gleamed dully in her ears and on each finger of her gnarled and

dirty hands. As far as Else could discern she had but four teeth, none of which met, and she had been chewing some dark aromatic herb so that the odor of it almost stopped the girl’s breath, and discolored spittle ran down from the corners of her withered mouth and made twin lines across her bristly chin.

“Come in, my dear, come in!” she bade in a cracked, cackling voice. “Hast come to pay thy call on Mother Marg; good, kind old Mother Marg?” The laugh accompanying her words was anything but good and kind, and Else would have turned and fled had not the old hag grasped her by the wrist with such a grip that she was almost fainting from the pain when finally she sank down on a stool before the empty fireplace.

“And what can Mother Marg do for thee, my sweet pigeon?” asked the crone when Else, after two attempts, found that she could not speak for very fear and loathing of her hostess.

Now her words were loosed, and tearfully she told how she had met Gustav Walpurgis Night, how they had loved and wed, how he had passed her by unseeing and how he purposed to be false to his vows and take his cousin Elnora to wife.

The old hag listened, nodding understandingly. At last, when Else had completed her recital: “It is his father, the *graf*, who has made him thus, my child,” she announced. “He has cast a spell upon his son and wiped all recollection of his marriage from his mind—”

“The Graf von Hohenneitschütz a warlock?” Else asked incredulously. “One so noble, one so high—”

“Eh, eh, thou’d be surprised at those who worship at the witch’s altar, and at the things the noble Graf von Hohenneitschütz knows,” the beldame answered with another cackle.

Which was quite true, for nearly every noble in the empire those days had his favo-

rite sorcerer or witch, and as for Johann Hohenneitschütz—the old witch Margareta had once been young and pretty, and he had met her in the *grünwald*, wooed, won and left her empty-hearted. Like father like son, the hag reflected as she nodded at her tearful visitor. He had taken all and given nothing. Now to strike him through his son, his dearest treasure—“Hast anything of thy true love’s?” she asked abruptly. “A lock of his sweet hair, belike, or the handkerchief with which he wiped his dainty face—”

“Thou’lt—thou’lt give it back to me?” asked Else tremulously as she reached into her bosom and drew out the linen sack in which she kept a ringlet clipped from Gustav’s hair.

“Of course, I will, thou silly little fool!” the hag replied as she snatched at the treasure. “I do but want it that I may attune my spell to him. When I am done thou’rt welcome to it. Now begone, and come not here again until I send for thee!”

That night old Margareta made magic. Out of candle wax filched from the parish church when none was looking she made a poppet, a doll with features strangely like the features of the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz, and with cloth chopped from her rag dress she clothed it in doublet and hose and painted blue eyes in its face and red lips on its mouth. Finally, upon its head she set the lock of Gustav’s hair and combed and curled it till it fell in clustering ringlets round the neck.

This done, she laid the image on her clean-swept hearth and knelt beside it while she said six *Parternosters* backward and summoned her familiars:

Black spirits, white spirits,

Spirits brown and gray,

Hear me, heed me, give me what I pray:

May this wax be as his heart,

May he feel my baneful dart,

May his flesh and spirit part

At thy dread command!

She drew blood from her wrist and made a ruddy circle round the supine image, then, with a smile so terrible it would have frightened Satan, drove a long pin slowly through the waxen figure’s middle. “As this poppet wounds, so may you be wounded, Gustav Hohenneitschütz; as this wastes away, so may your bones and blood and body waste away to nothingness; may you suffer torments never-ceasing till you wait for death as the bridegroom waits the coming of the bride.”

Slowly, very slowly, with the science of a surgeon and the neat precision of a torturer, she thrust the cruel pin deeper and more deeply in the yielding wax.

And, recites the chronicle, it was at that precise moment that Johann Georg Ulric Mathias von Hohenneitschütz und von Kettlar clapped both hands to his right side and fell face-forward to the floor in a groaning-fit. Leeches came post-haste, but though they rubbed him with a salve made from the fat of weasels mixed with badgers’ blood and dosed him liberally with the ashes of burned toads mixed in white wine with moss scraped from a murderer’s skull his pains increased, so that the doctors were dismissed and an exorcist sent for. Even this proved unavailing. The patient lapsed into a coma on the second day, and never regained consciousness.

The cry of witchcraft was raised forthwith, and the officers of justice went from house to house, arresting all who could by any chance be deemed in league with Satan, old Margareta among them.

Her case was hopeless from the start. The one-eyed black cat, the stuffed owl, the waxen image with the bodkin thrust into its midriff would have been evidence enough to send her to the stake on charges of black sorcery even if she had not made a full confession of her sins.

Of course, she did not damn herself without persuasion. The thumbscrews proved inadequate, for she was very strong.

and very stubborn, but when her legs and arms had been disjoined by the rack, her feet crushed in the boot and hot lead poured upon her naked belly she broke down and confessed fully, naming all her witch-companions in the cavern and saying she had worked her mischief on the *graf* at the behest of Else the goose-girl.

Else lay upon a straw-stuffed mattress, and though it was an afternoon in torrid August and the logs heaped in the wide-mouthed fireplace before which she lay flamed with almost blistering heat, she shivered as if she had been exposed to a December blast. Three men looked down on her as she lay there, three learned doctors of the law, two in the black stuff gowns with fur hoods marking them as civil justices, the third in the black cassock and white scapular of an ecclesiastic. "This is thy full and free confession, woman, made without fear and with no hope of favor?" asked the chief magistrate.

"Yea, good, my lord, the words are mine," she whimpered.

"*Is gut.* Subscribe it." He tendered her a quill pen dipped in ink.

"I cannot, *Exzellenz*; I have no schooling—"

"*Jawohl*," the judge spread the parchment upon a table and wrote her name in a fair hand. "Make thou a cross mark here"—he pointed to a spot above the signature—"we will bear witness to thy mark."

Slowly, painfully, she drew the pen across the cracking parchment in a wavering X. Her hands were bandaged, and as she moved them a drop or two of blood oozed from the linen bands and fell upon the document. The justice nodded to the leather-aproned executioner who stood in readiness and at the signal dropped upon his knees beside the girl and held a bowl of meat soup with an egg in it to her lips. "Drink, *mädchen*," he whispered, "'twill give thee strength."

The judges put their heads together, reading through the statement she had signed. They made little deprecating noises with their tongues against their teeth as they perused the document, for in it she admitted that she was a witch and the consort of witches; that she had enchanted the Junker Gustav by devilish arts; that her story of their marriage was a monstrous lie; that she, in concert with the self-accused witch Margareta, had connived by prayers and supplications to the Evil One to bring about the death of Johann Georg Ulric Mathias von Hohenneitschütz und von Ketlar.

When they had first arrested her she told her story with an artless fearlessness. Gustav was her lord and adored husband, they had been wed according to the rites of Holy Church, she loved him better than her life and only sought old Margareta's help because she thought he was bewitched. No, she knew nothing of the witch's spells and magic. What should she, a Christian, know of such things?

They set her hands in the thumbscrews.

"Thou didst bewitch the Junker Gustav by thy wicked arts—thy story of thy marriage to him is a monstrous lie, is't not?"

"Nay, lords, it is the very Gospel truth. We loved each other from the moment that our eyes first met. He wed me out of love and nothing else, for I had nothing I could bring him as a dowry save my love and devotion—"

The judge signed to the executioner, who tightened the thumbkin, and she shrieked and writhed and tried to draw away.

"This story of thy marriage is a wanton's lie, is't not?"

"Nay, *Exzellenz*, it is the truth—O gracious heaven, mercy! Mercy on me, my lords!" as the thumbscrews bit with sudden crushing pressure on her hands again.

Little Else was not made of Spartan

stuff. Old Margareta stood the torment for a day and night, and even then the rack and boot and molten lead were necessary. Less than an hour's screwing in the thumbkins dragged from Else sobbing assents to their accusations. So, at last, we find her signing a confession in which she admits crimes she never heard or knew of till the magistrates informed her she was guilty of them.

IT WAS a pompous, awe-inspiring scene when they brought her before the court to hear her doom. The judges in their robes of office sat at a long table of age-darkened oak raised three steps from the courtroom floor. Behind them and before the doors and windows stood the halberdiers in leather jerkins and steel helmets, sunlight glinting on the polished heads of their weapons. The Emperor's justicer—the executioner—stood by the steps that led up to the judges' table, and he was in full regalia, habited in red from neck to heels, coiffed and masked in red, and holding on his shoulder his great axe with its red handle and red blade, the gleaming white of whose edge never had been wet save with the blood of men and women.

A crowd of boors had gathered in the hall of jutsice, and at sight of Else they broke into a murmurous outcry, but the clamor of the halberd butts on the stone floor brought instant silence, for the halberdiers were not slow to rap for order on the heads of the rabble if their first admonition went unheeded.

She halted before the long table, and the president of the court rose facing her, a parchment scroll in his hands. Before him on the table lay a light wand of dried willow, and her face went paler at the sight, for well she knew what it portended.

A pause ensued which seemed as long to her as an eternity, then she heard her

sentence pronounced: That the self-confessed witch and murderess be dragged by the hair of her head to the gallows in the public square and there be flogged with knotted ropes until she die, and afterward that her body be burned to ashes."

As he finished the judge took up the willow wand and beckoned to someone waiting in the shadow of the arras. Dressed all in black, with falls of white lace at his throat and wrists, the Junker—now the Count—Gustav Hohenneitschütz stepped up to the bench, took the light stick from the judge and crossed the little space that separated him from Else. She raised her bandaged hands imploringly to him. "Gustav—husband, lord—adored lover—"

He looked full in her tear-brimmed loving eyes and nothing moved in his face. It was as if he looked at a stone thing that had no power to look back. Holding the wand by each end he raised it over her head, snapped it in two and flung the pieces on the floor at her feet. This was to signify that as the wood was broken in two parts so should her soul and body be severed in the furtherance of justice. As Count of the Mark Gustav had the right to perform this ceremony, for Else had been his serf, and he was giving her up to the Kaiser for execution.

He turned upon his heel, but as he moved away she pointed at him with one maimed hand and spoke the first unkind words she had ever uttered in her sixteen years of life:

"False! False to thy pledged word and plighted troth art thou, Gustav von Hohenneitschütz. Flogged I may be till I die, but I shall last to scourge thee for thy perfidy, and never shalt thou call another wife—" Then the jeering of the rabble drowned her words and she was led back to her cell to wait the morning and her death.

Despite the sentence passed upon her,

it seems she did not suffer greatly. More merciful than judge or priest or husband, the executioner, whose business was to kill and torture, struck her on the head with a club ere he dragged her to the gallows, so what hung swinging by bound wrists beneath the flailing of the flogging-ropes was nothing but a corpse.

THE bride and bridegroom stood before the altar, and Brother Josef waited to unite them. Young Count Gustav was smiling as he took his cousin's slim white hand in his. All was well, exceedingly well, with him. His father, for whom he had never had much real affection, was dead and one might hope well on his way to heaven by this time; he was about to wed the Gräfin Elnora von Hernsdorf, one of the richest heiresses in all the Rhineland, and an orphan with no brothers or sisters. He had escaped the toils of a romantic mistake, Else—and the child—were ashes now.

All that stood in his way had been burned with them. The past was really nothing to him. He could just open his hands and let it slip away. He was striding ahead into the future—

The priest's low, droning admonition broke through his pleasant musings: "—if any man can show just cause why these two should not be wedded—" What was the matter with good Brother Josef? His face was drawn, his eyes were staring, there was a horrid moisture on his brow.

He looked from the priest to his bride. She was staring past him, face fright-frozen, lurking terror wakening to life in her wide eyes. *Herr Gott*, was everybody gone stark, staring mad? He swung about to see what they looked at.

Stark panic clutched him by the throat; terror hammered at his will, for, near enough to touch him, Else stood at his elbow, bandaged hands held out imploringly, as she had held them out to him

before he broke the wand of doom above her head.

There was no anger in her glance, but oh! her lovely eyes were tragic in her white, set face. Hope was dead and sorrow mourned in them.

"*Mein Gott, Du—thou?*" he gasped. "Back from the grave—the fire—to haunt me with—" The broken words died on his lips, for she had taken the hemp girdle from her waist and swung it like a lash against his face.

He felt the stinging bite of it, but greater than the pain the horror of it struck him, overwhelmed him. "I shall last to scourge thee for thy perfidy," she'd said, and now—O, gracious heaven!—she was doing it.

He staggered from the altar steps, ran stumbling toward the chapel door—ah, but he could not run! His feet seemed cased in leaden boots, he could not make them do his bidding. Slowly, like a man who wades breast-high in water, he moved toward the doorway, and step by step the spectral shape kept pace with him, lashing, beating, scourging—

He woke at last as from a nightmare. He was in bed and Brother Josef was attending him. Elnora? She had left the castle, gone back to her home, they told him.

Had he been ill? Yes, very ill, and he was still too weak to rise. He must rest quietly—"Father," he asked feebly of the priest, "is there forgiveness for me?"

"*Was sagst Du, mein sohn*—what hast thou done?"

"She—it was true, Father. Else did not lie when she declared I was her wedded husband. I married her and then repented of my bargain. I thought that I could face her down—who would believe a peasant woman's word—" Half sobbing, half raving in delirium, he told the sordid story of their pitiful, brief romance while the little priest stood by with horror

mounting in his eyes. At last: "Can I find absolution, Father?" he besought.

"I—I do not know, my son. The girl was condemned for a witch and murderess, and though she pleaded for the last rites of the church they were denied her. She died unshriven. It may be that they fate is linked with hers throughout eternity, that not until she finds release canst thou look for redemption."

Gustav groaned and turned his face to the wall. He did not answer when the priest spoke to him. Later, when they came to rouse him to take nourishment, they found that he was dead.

He must have been a man of parts, this Brother Josef. Certainly he was a skilled sculptor, as the Calvary he carved and set up at the crossroads testifies. It was he who carved the legend "Pray for Them" upon the shrine, thinking in the simple goodness of his heart that those who knelt and said a prayer by it might offer a petition not alone for Gustav, but for the wife he had renounced and betrayed to her death. And on the tomb where they laid Gustav with the pomp and circumstances befitting his high rank good Brother Josef carved a goose to nestle at the dead knight's feet. He could not put an effigy of Else on her husband's sepulchre, but—she had been a goose-girl—let the symbol stand for her.

BROTHER AMBROSE had attached a letter to the manuscript:

My very good, kind friend: From what you told me you had witnessed, and what we learn from reading these accounts of the old days, it seems that Gustav Hohenneitschütz is earthbound and doomed to suffer flagellation every

Saint John's Eve until the wife whom he renounced and sent to cruel death finds peace within the quiet of the grave. They would not let her be absolved before she died, but she had the desire and intention. Tomorrow I shall exorcize the Hohenneitschütz chapel, and grant her plenary absolution. Thereafter, every Saint John's Eve I shall say Masses for the rest of their unquiet souls. We cannot know if this will win them rest eternal—all things are with God, my son—but we can try. Will not you come with me and help me in the rite of exorcism?

Nothing could have pleased me more, but next morning a field clerk handed me an order typed in triplicate stating that I would proceed to Saint Nazaire. There was of course, no telephone by which I could reach Brother Ambrose, nor could I stop to call on him. I sent an orderly with a note—and another tin of tobacco—but could not wait for his answer.

My letters to him all came back. Perhaps they moved him to another convent, maybe the postmen didn't try to deliver them.

Things were pretty chaotic in the last days of the Weimar Republic.

Did he bring peace and rest to those two troubled shades, or does poor little Else still come to the Hohenneitschütz chapel every Saint John's Eve and lash her faithless lover through the long night from sunset to cock-crow? Does she still weep soft, compassionate tears as she lays on the scourge, and does she heal him with the kiss she gives him when they part at last, he to go back to his tomb-sleep for another year, she to go—who knows where?