

IN CRESCENT TERRACE" by SEABURY QUINN

MARCH

Weird Tales

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A novelette of ominous omens and double-evil

"TWICE CURSED", by Manly Wade Wellman

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1946

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Twice Cursed

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

"... see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou has murdered thyself."

—EDGAR ALLAN POE,
William Wilson.

I

BUt everything was a wonder now that I was in New York again, and pleasantly wonderful, too—not horribly wonderful, like the sniper-haunted jungles and bullet-ripped beaches I had striven for in the war I hoped would be the last forever. I still wore my uniform, since I had no other clothes, with on the right breast a discharge device in bright yellow thread and on the left my color-mixture of campaign ribbons. A sandy-haired civilian bought me a drink in a bar near Union Square and assured me that battle-fears weren't as terrible as fears of the unknown. He argued that you knew what to expect in war. What could you tell someone who had never heard a shot fired in anger, a shot fired in anger straight at him? Of that nothing is more unknown than the outcome of the battle you are in, with Joe and Mac and the other friends you love dropping limp and dead beside you or trying to stuff back their insides that have been blown out, and the thought coming to you a dozen times a minute that perhaps your side is losing? I plastered on a smile, thanked him for the drink, and went out to walk down Fourth Avenue among the bookshops. And there it was, not far from Tenth Street, rather different because it hadn't a table in front with shabby old volumes for a dime or a quarter, but with its windows jammed with interesting things and its sign:

THE SPOORN, BOOKSELLERS

I have never decided if the bizarre arrangement in those windows was an arrangement at all, but it was impressive. The biggest book was bigger than a volume of the *Congressional Record*, bound in some pale leather, with strange printing that might be Arabic or Urdu, and a colored picture of something ten-armed and scowling and staring. Near this, a Summers, *Geography of Witchcraft*, flanked by paper-bound *Albertus Magnus* and *The Long Lost Friend*. There were some recent publications—*Tell My Horse* by Hurston, *Hex Marks the Spot*, by Ann Hark, and poor William Seabrook's *No Hiding Place*. One shabby book looked like a pasted-up collection of scraps and manuscript notes, entitled in ink *The Jersey Devil*. This was like old times, when I found all my thrills and chills in strange writings about ghosts and devils.

I walked in. The shop itself couldn't have been more perfect if it had been built as a set for one of those B-picture scaries at the Rialto. All the lights were close to the door, quite glaring, and the shelves that stood endwise to us at the back had no lights at all, so that the spaces between them were like gloomy caves. Under the lights were some counters and tables, with cards saying things like: RARE AND CURIOUS—ASK CLERK—COLLECTOR'S ITEM. On the wall hung a painting, one of those clutters that can be put with any edge up and be something different and startling.

From one table I took up a book. On its fly-leaf was written in pencil: *Of Brownynis and of Bogilis full is thys Buke*. I'd read that somewhere—Gawain Douglass or Robert Burns? Or had Burns quoted Douglass at

*There are some things more deadly than war experiences—
like working in a particular bookstore!*

the head of some poem? *Tam O'Shanter*, maybe?

"Yes, Sergeant?" someone was half whispering at my elbow, evidently with eyes on those three stripes I wore. I put down the book and turned.

THE Spoom's proprietor was smaller and slighter than I, though I am hardly a big man. His clothes did not look expensive, but they fitted him beautifully, there is no other word for it. Some figures are like that, any cheap suit in their size arrays them as though



Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

brilliantly tailored. He was long-jawed and sharp-nosed, smiling harshly, with bracket-lines all around his mouth and his tin-colored eyes. His hands, with their great long fingers and great long nails, rubbed together rather like Uriah Heep's. "What would you like to see?" he was prompting.

To tell the truth, I could hardly buy anything worth money. I had received only part of my separation pay and had spent most of it. "I'm not exactly a customer," I ventured, smiling back.

"I see," said the proprietor, and rubbed his hands faster. "A job, then. What's your name, Sergeant?"

The thought of working in a bookshop was brand new to me, and intriguing. I wondered why I hadn't considered it before. "I'm Jackson Warren," I told him, "and I'm not a sergeant any more."

"Yes, I know. We hadn't really planned on your being here until tomorrow morning, but—"

This was where training and experience in strange and surprising situations helped. The fellow was actually hiring me, pretending some kind of second sight or other sympathy that had prepared him to do so. I hadn't expected to be employed so soon, or in any field I liked so well. Even as I decided not to act mystified or stupid, he was naming a salary not too small, and discussing hours of work. "One day you can open the shop in the morning and stay until six," he said, "and the next come at noon and remain open until nine at night. Since you're here today, sit down in the office back there read what I've written about the job. You're intelligent and liberal-minded. I know. Tomorrow morning you'll be ready to start."

I went past those dark bookshelves at the rear of the room, and into a little cell not much larger than a telephone booth, with its walls solidly lined with old, curious and strangely-titled books. There was room for a chair, a little table with a typewriter and a telephone. I sat down with the pencilled sheets of paper he indicated, and began to read and puzzle.

Plainly those instructions had been written lately and hurriedly. My name was at the top, and the first sentence was enough to make my eyes pop. "I expect great things from you, on the word of your sponsor. . . ."

"My name," said the proprietor, "is, of course, the Spoomn."

"The Spoomn?" I repeated. "It's a Scotch name?"

"Yes," and he was gone. I reflected that the heads of Scottish clans used the definite article to name themselves—the MacDon-ald, the MacLeod, and so on. I had never heard of Clan Spoomn, or of the head of a clan who ran a bookshop in a foreign country. As I returned to my written pages, the telephone purred on the table, and I picked it up. "The Spoomn Bookshop," I said briskly.

"This is Jackson Warren." That was not a question, but a confident statement.

"Jackson Warren speaking," I told the transmitter.

"Hmmm," said the man at the other end, in a way I sometimes use myself. "You don't understand. I'm Jackson Warren. I wanted to call about the job—"

"But I have the job," I assured him. "I've just been hired. What can I do—"

"Hmmm," he said again, and hung up. I shook my head over it, all by myself in that tiny office, and resumed my reading.

"As an ex-soldier and an ex-sergeant, you know without being instructed what is meant by loyalty and discretion," the Spoomn had written for me. "Any good employee will keep his council while learning—"

The telephone rang again, and again I picked it up. "The Spoomn Bookshop," I announced into it.

"Did I hear you right?" said the same voice as before. "You called yourself Jackson Warren."

"Ex-Sergeant Jackson Warren," I replied. "Just out of the service and into the retail book trade. What can I do for you?"

"You can explain," was the sharp rejoinder. "It so happens that I'm ex-Sergeant Jackson Warren."

"Is this a gag?" I laughed, not very heartily. "There can't be two of us."

"I wonder." There was a moment of moody silence. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Such as?" I prompted.

"When you leave there, will you meet me?" He sounded eager and a little shaky. "Somewhere near there?"

I frowned over it, then told him the name of the bar where the civilian had instructed

me about known and unknown fears. "I'll be there as soon after six as possible," I informed him. "Right?"

"Right, and thanks."

I hung up. The Spoom had come to the door.

"Why," I asked him, "should anybody know I was working here?"

"Why shouldn't he know, if he's a friend of yours?" asked the Spoom. "Wasn't it arranged some time ago?"

To those questions I had no answer to give. I took up the sheets. "May I take these with me? I'll absorb them between now and opening time tomorrow."

He nodded his head to grant the request, and I folded them and slid them into my shirt pocket. I left almost at six, and went to the bar.

But as I sat on a stool and ordered a beer, it came to my mind that neither I nor the strange man on the telephone had offered any basis for recognition. There were half a dozen men at that bar, and unless I asked each in turn if he had taken part in a strange conversation that day—

But someone came in at the door, and toward me. I stared straight into the questioning eyes of myself.

II

THE man was young, twenty-six years old or so. He was perhaps five feet nine inches tall, sparely made, a little wide in the shoulders.

His hair was dark and short, with a square face and wide-set brown eyes and a creasy dimple in his chin. He wore an army uniform, a little worn but neat, with the three stripes of a sergeant and the device that betokened honorable discharge. All these things I recognized instantly. I had seen them so often before, in mirrors.

He and I smiled at the same moment and with the same perplexity. He spoke first: "You look enough like me to be my twin brother."

"I haven't any twin brother," I said. That was out of Wedehouse.

"Neither do I. This is a funny thing. I came here to meet somebody with the same name as I have."

"I'm Jackson Warren," I told him.

He put out a hand just the size and shape of mine. "So am I. Let's start talking."

I picked up my beer and we went to a booth. A waiter brought him a beer like mine, and he began talking rapidly.

"Let's get it straight at once," he said. "That's my job. Rowley Thorne—my friend—knew I was looking for work, and called up the Spoom shop and fixed it for me to start there tomorrow. What are you doing with my job and my name and my face?"

It never took me too long to get angry. "The job you can have, because apparently the Spoom thinks I'm you," I told him. "But I grew up with the name and face and they're as much mine as yours. I won't change the name, and I don't think you'll get far changing the face."

For a moment he glared back. His expression must have been a mirror-replica of mine. Then he relaxed a little, and the hardness became mystification. "We're going at this wrong," he said. "I don't blame you for being sore if you're as rattled as I am. Maybe it's not too much that we look alike—we're only a little more than average size, and we both have the usual Anglo-Celtic face. As to the name, Warren's not uncommon, but Jackson is—for a Christian name, anyway."

"I was born in Lynchburg, and my people named me for Stonewall Jackson," I explained, also a little less heatedly.

"And I'm Carolinian, though I haven't kept much of the accent," said my companion. "I was named for the other Jackson, Andrew. Let's go back to the last remark but one, as somebody says in *Alice*. I thought you'd been pretty elaborate about gnawing under me into that job. But you said you didn't want it."

"Oh, I want it. I'm not very rich or anything. But," and I drew the Spoom's instruction sheets from my pocket, "I haven't really started, and I won't start where I don't really belong. You can have these, study them—they tell what your duties will be—and go in there tomorrow. The Spoom won't know the difference."

The other Jackson Warren took the sheets, but did not glance at them for a moment. "You know, I've heard of a case like this before. At Leavenworth Prison it was, I think—two men sentenced there, the same size and with faces alike enough to fool their

mothers. Both named West, and I can't remember the first name, but they both had it. Fingerprints were the only difference. I wonder if ours are alike, or anywhere near alike."

"I was born in Lynchburg," I said again, "May 8, 1921—"

"Me, too!" he cried, so sharply that one of the two customers glanced our way. And now neither of us spoke for a moment, until I tried to say something.

"There's too much coincidence here. Too much."

"There's no coincidence," he said harshly. "This was planned some way or other. But how? Why? I wonder if the two of us aren't in a jam."

"Read those instructions," I suggested. "Since you're the right man for the job, they may make sense to you."

HE BEGAN to read, and I sipped at my beer. After some minutes he folded the papers carefully, picked up his own glass and drank deeply.

"They make sense, all right," he said. "Who do Rowley Thorne and the Spoomn think they're fooling?"

I couldn't answer that, so I waited for him to go on. He was studying my campaign ribbons. "Pacific Theater," he said. "Well, we're different there. I was in Europe, and for a while in Iceland. I had time on my hands, and dug into witchcraft and demonology—"

"For which Iceland is famous," I added.

"I'm not very surprised that you know that," he said. "Somebody up there gave me the name of Rowley Thorne in the States, and when I came back here he and I got together. He suggested that I take this job, and I was grateful for it. Wait a second, are you part of whatever his scheme is?"

"I'm part of no scheme that I know of, and everything I told you is true." I dug out papers and orders I had been given at the separation center, and he took them and read my name on them. He passed them back as though they weighed a ton. Then he tapped his fingers on the Spoomn's written pages.

"Here's the payoff. The Spoomn is running a funny bookshop, a very funny bookshop indeed. What Rowley Thorne sent me there for, and what the Spoomn hired me—

or you—for, was the stuff I studied in Iceland. But I don't want anything to do with it."

"It's a shop full of peculiar books," I said, and told him a little about it. He heard me silently, nodding a little as if I was telling him a lot.

"I have a notion," he said when I finished. "Let's both go up there and wreck the place. Wish we had some grenades."

"Is it that bad?"

"Worse. What little I know—and I don't want to know any more—wait. We'll have to talk this over. Where are you staying?"

I had no place, and said so. My baggage was checked at the Pennsylvania Station.

"Come to my place, then. I've got a big room, with a bed and a couch, on West Nineteenth. I meant what I said a moment ago, this is no coincidence. We've both been put into this as duplicate cogs in some sort of machine. Let's talk and think and get the machine running the right way."

"That's a deal," I said, and our identical right hands grabbed at each other again. "Come up with me to get my bag. But what'll we call each other? We can't both be Jackson."

"We're different Jacksons," he reminded. "I'll call you Stonewall."

"You be Andy," I said, and he grinned. I liked that grin, perhaps because I'd seen it so often in my shaving mirror. We finished our beer and started out together.

A man turned from the bar to stare at us. His eyes grew as big as dollar watches, and he set the highball he was holding back on the bar.

"Not another drop," he stammered to the bartender. "Never again. Not when I see 'em in twos—"

Andy and I went out laughing at the tops of our voices. I mention that because we had so little to laugh at in the days that followed.

III

ANDY'S lodging was on West Nineteenth Street, and we went there after eating dinner in the Village. His street was full of immense, loud trucks, but the rooms—he had two, part of a widow's apartment—were at the back. We took

more beer up with us, and sat talking, more about ourselves than about The Spoon's shop.

It kept adding up to a case of complete duplication. We found we were both orphans, reared by aunts. We'd both been half-mile runners in high school, we'd both gone to college—he at Chapel Hill, I at University of Virginia—and left in junior year to enlist. Even our studies and grade-levels were alike. We both liked to read about the supernatural; he'd logically poked into Icelandic demon-lore, just as I'd tried to learn something about devil-devil and praying to death when I was stationed in the Solomons.

"I wonder if we aren't both avoiding one consideration," said Andy, pouring beer into my mug.

"You mean the doppelganger business." I nodded. "The way I used to hear it, everyone has his replica, either a spirit or a living creature. You come face to face with it, and you fall dead. But I never felt better in my life, Andy."

"Me, too," he informed me. "If we wrote all this down it wouldn't be convincing."

"It sounded convincing enough when Edgar Allan Poe wrote it," I argued. "Remember *William Wilson*?"

"I've been remembering all evening. Likewise Charles Dudley Warner—*My Double and How He Undid Me*. Probably we ought to decide which of us is the victim and which the nemesis. Toss a coin—"

"Roger," and I pulled a dime from my pocket, flipped it in the air and let it fall. It rolled, struck a wide crack between two floor boards, and remained on edge.

"There's our answer," said Andy, handing the dime back to me. "We're both in this thing together. Let's keep on drinking, or we'll not get much sleep."

We didn't, anyway. The reveille habit was strong in both of us, and we woke before dawn. Andy pulled open a closet.

"I'm a little up on you," he smiled. "I've got some civvies, two or three suits. Pick one out. Shirts in the drawer. You'll buy some for yourself today or tomorrow."

His clothes fitted me nicely. I helped him with breakfast, eggs and rolls and coffee,

whipped up over an electric grill on his bureau. "Now what?" he asked.

"Go to the Spoon's, and meet me for lunch at noon. We'll powwow some more. Don't let on about this double business. Maybe it's an ace in the hole for us."

"Right." We decided on a cafeteria not far from the shop, and he went away.

Even then my chief reaction was of fascinated wonder that I had stumbled upon so complete a twin to myself. I spent the morning in clothing stores of the Twenties, getting a gray suit and some shirts and ties of different style from Andy's. This was deliberate. I even considered growing a mustache, or wearing spectacles, but the clothes were enough of a difference.

I WAS at the cafeteria a quarter of an hour before noon, and so was Andy. He had begged off early, saying he must buy some cough medicine. I put plenty of lunch on my tray, but Andy's appetite, at least, was different from mine. He led the way to a semi-remote table, gulped at his coffee, and began lecturing me.

"It's a little more disgusting than I thought possible," he began. "That sounds funny, from an old frontline infantryman who knows what the score is on disgust; but I mean it. They don't want me to sell books—they don't sell books themselves, except as a front—"

"They?" I interrupted. "Who are they? Are there two Spoon's, too?"

"Lots of 'em," said Andy. "He's one of a bunch of wrong guys, Stonewall. All wrong guys. You and I read about witches and devil-worshippers for fun and think it's fiction. They *are* witches and devil-worshippers, and think—and know—it's real."

"Then they're mad," I began, but he waved me quiet.

"With rotten method in their madness. Think off all the dirt you've ever heard or suspected about black magic. Nasty ceremonies, baby sacrifices, death spells, cowardly sneaky organizations to fight anything that's normal and pleasant and friendly. Think of it as actual, or at least studied and done by all sorts of little cabals and societies everywhere—thick in New York, because this is a big town and full of funny doings. And think of a sort of library-meet-

ing place for those people, or anyway their leaders, their miserable wry-faced, wry-minded leaders. Did you notice the bookshelves without any lights at the back of the room?"

"I wondered how anybody could even read the titles there," I remembered, watching Andy closely and nervously.

"Don't look at me as if you wanted to call for a straitjacket. Some people can read the titles, because they have special eyes. Or perhaps they know the books by touch or instinct—anyway, the Spoom has nothing there that he offers for sale. Odd customers look only at the stuff on the tables and counters. The Spoom's real business is with people who come in and borrow those dark-shelf volumes."

"Get to some sort of starting point," I begged him, and he drew a long breath.

"You saw those instructions, and didn't understand them. I read them a bit more clearly, because they referred to a wish to use my studies in Iceland, and because they were building up to some kind of oath of secrecy." Again Andy drew a long breath, as if to clean some sort of bad air out of his lungs. "When I arrived, this morning, the Spoom was waiting for me. He had me into that little cubby of an office, and gave me a book to translate. It was all in handwritten letters of a funny jagged sort—runes, I think, and Icelandic. When I said I couldn't read Icelandic, only talk a little, he wasn't at all disappointed. He said I'd pick it up soon, and left me alone. He was right. After I was alone a while, that writing began to make sense."

"What was it about?"

"Magic. Power. All the wrong sort. There were spells to bring up devils—I stopped reading one in the middle, because I had a sense of something getting ready to crawl out from under the table. There was quite an essay, sneering because the investigators of the Moira-Blockula witchcraft seem to have missed the boat on its real leaders. And a lot of instruction for novices coming into the outfit. That's when I paused and shut it up and told the Spoom I wasn't having any."

"What was he doing while you were letting those runes seep into you?" I asked.

"He waited on a customer or two, and greeted several of his ugly friends. Twice men came in with what I think was food—lots of food—and he unlocked a door and let them go downstairs to deliver it—some-where." Andy licked his lips. I do that, too, when my lips are dry from excitement. "But when I said I'd had enough of his runic book, he turned on one of those hard smiles of his. He said it was too late. By reading the book at all, I was practically past my first initiation into a very unorthodox but very interesting fellowship. Those were his words. He tried to get me to go downstairs through that door he keeps locked. Finally I pretended to agree, but asked for a chance to go to lunch first. He made me swear, by some names I never heard, that I'd tell nobody about it except myself."

Andy told me the names, and it will shortly be apparent in this account why I do not mention them here.

"You're breaking your oath," I reminded him. "You're telling me—but, when it comes to that, I'm really yourself, or your other face and mind. Look here, you're upset. Let me go back there instead of you."

"Neither of us will go back," he said firmly.

"We can't let it sweat us out, Andy," I argued. "We're onto something that needs to be investigated. We're the guys to do it. Go back to the room and I'll sit in for you this afternoon."

But he shook his head. "We're dressed differently now. He'd wonder about that. I'll go myself—you're right about finding out more things. Meet me at the corner after quitting time."

And I let him arrange it that way. I went back to West Nineteenth Street, washed my face—it was hot and feverish—and sub-ways up to the public library to track down something I seemed to remember.

I found it in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book Eight, Chapter Fifteen. I copied it down in modern spelling: ". . . and they have so frayd us with bull-beggars, spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, Pans, fauns, sylvans, Kitt-with-the-candlestock, tritons, centaurs, dwarfs, giants, imps, calcars, conjurers,

nymphs, changelings, incubus, Robin Good-fellow, the spook, the man-in-the-oak, the hellwain, the fire-drake, the puckle, Tom Thumb, Hobgoblin, Tom Tumbler, Boneless and such other bugbears, that we are afraid of our own shadows, insomuch that some never fear the devil but on a dark night; and then a polled sheep is a perilous beast, and many times is taken for our father's soul, specially in a churchyard, where a right hardy man heretofore durst not to have passed by night but his hair would stand upright."

That catalogue of frightening monsters held its riddles. The man-in-the-oak must be a forest devil, the hellwain perhaps Hellequin—harlequin?—but what were Kitt-with-the-candlestick, Boneless, and the spook?

I had used to wonder about that last. Now it was a name I knew.

Going back to the room, I smoked too much and made myself some coffee. The landlady came and knocked and said there was a visitor. "John Thunstone, he says his name is," she told me.

I knew no John Thunstone, but Andy might. "Tell him to come in," I said, and he entered, stooping to get through the door. He was inches over six feet, and unusually broad even for that height. All his clothes must have been made specially for him, suit, shoes, shirts. He had a face like a rectangle, with a broad brow and jaw, a small dark mustache and black hair combed close to his great cranium.

"Are you Jackson Warren?" he asked, and when I nodded his big face lighted up with relief.

"Thank heaven for whatever made you fail to go back to work at that bookshop this afternoon," said John Thunstone. "Because if you had, I might never have brought you out again."

IV

I SAT down hard, without the thought or manners left to invite him to take a chair. He stepped closer and towered over me like some statue of heroic size.

"You know a little something, I think, about demonology," he began. "Enough to appreciate what I mean when I tell you

that the Spook and his shop are a front for a rankly wicked group of—"

"I know a little about it," I broke in, not too politely. "But how do you know? What makes it your business?"

He smiled down, as from calm summits. "So many people think I meddle where I have no right or motive," he said. "Let me say at once that such people are the sort whose good will I reject, and whose destruction I practise. I found out about you the same place that Rowley Thorne found out, from someone in Iceland. That someone said you were being referred to Thorne in New York, and that Thorne would try to use you in a way you'll find decidedly unsatisfactory—"

"Mr. Thunstone," I interrupted again, "You've got the wrong Jackson Warren. You're talking about my double, Andy."

I was probably foolish to trust him on his own showing, but I told him everything as quickly and simply as I could. He listened calmly and politely, and without the slightest indication that he found the story unusual.

"I like what your friend—Andy, as you call him—said about this being no coincidence. Only deliberate and cosmic plan could make you duplicates in all things, and bring you together at this time and in this situation. I have an explanation—but no time to make you understand it. Later, perhaps. We have to get your friend Andy out of a dangerous mess."

"What kind of mess?" I demanded.

He picked up his gray felt hat, a hat big enough for even Daniel Webster's spacious cranium. "Come along, and I'll talk as we get a taxi."

He did, while we rode to Tenth Street. He said that Rowley Thorne was one of many who patronized the Spook's back shelves full of evil books, and that the shop was a sort of rendezvous for diabolists and psychic scoundrels, just as a certain corner drugstore draws the adolescents of a neighborhood, or a certain bar is a hangout for prize fighters and their managers, or a certain restaurant gets the artistic trade to the exclusion of most others. It was not only an unofficial reference library for them, but a place to receive mail—lots of them, said Thunstone, did not dare stay at

one address for any length of time for a variety of reasons. And there was something going on in the basement that he, Thunstone, was trying to learn about.

"Andy told me something at lunch," said I. "About food being sent down through a locked door."

"Food?" echoed Thunstone. "In other words, not only is there activity in that basement—there's a set of living quarters. Here's where we get out."

It was not at the Spoom shop, nor even on the same street, but around the corner. Thunstone led me to a door flush with the sidewalk, a little stationery stand. The proprietor greeted him with a smile of warm welcome that used the mouth, the eyes, the whole face. Thunstone led me to a telephone booth with a sign that said "out of order," and pulled open the door. He squeezed his big body in—and through. His hand came back to twitch me by the sleeve, and I followed him. As I entered, I saw that the back of the booth was hinged, and when it swung before us we went into a chamber beyond.

"My busybody activities have gathered me friends and helpers like the fellow out there," Thunstone told me. "People give me information and shelter and weapons and—no time to tell all about that. I've spent months arranging to slip quietly along here," and he led me through another door to a room still rearward, "to a point directly behind the bookshop."

This last room we entered was completely bare of furniture, rug or pictures. Its walls were drab, covered with that stuff they call—very accurately—distemper. The one window was covered with a blind, and a single naked light bulb hung from a cord overhead. Thunstone moved silently as a foraging cat for all his size, coming to the wall and placing his ear against it. At his gesture, I did the same.

AT ONCE I heard something, muffled at first, then separating itself into sounds, words. They were words in a language I did not know—or did I not? The sense, at least, of what was being said behind the wall was clarifying in my ear and my brain. It was like a prayer: *Saya Salna Elenke Serna, give us the wisdom which*

only we can endure, having strength by humility. . . .

Thunstone had caught my shoulder, pulling me away from the wall and through the door into the first hidden room. There were chairs, and he pushed me into one, then sat down himself. "How many were reciting?" he asked.

"Several. More than one, anyhow."

"It's the school," he muttered, to himself more than to me. "And the poor kid's being matriculated—" He paused, looking at me. "Tell me something again. I think you said that Andy spoke of giving a promise of some sort to the Spoom."

"That's right," I remembered. "He pretended to agree to a suggestion—"

"Pretended—and put himself in danger!" exploded Thunstone. "The very nursery tales are full of things like that. A chance word or action, not meant at all, becomes binding when the dark powers are interested. Willing or not, deliberate or not, your friend Andy has made an act of allegiance. The book he began to read was another point. A glance at it showed him it was downright evil. He should have walked out then and there, and all they could have done was try to kill him."

"But you spoke of a school," I said unsteadily. "You think Andy's being put into that."

"I do, and I believe it will change him completely. Up to now he's been normal, decent, sane. But three years underground—"

I whistled sharply. "Three years! In that basement?"

"Others have done that course of study. I knew one, who died wretchedly and whose only hope was that he could repent enough before death. I'm sure of the school now, the Icelandic tie was the final bit of evidence."

He told me a story, out of the history of Iceland. It can be read in almost any library of the United States, for he quoted largely from the sagas of Eric the Red and Leif the Lucky. The beginning was with Eric's voyage to Greenland, after he had been exiled for murder from Norway, then from Iceland, and gave to his bleak new home what he thought was a good name to attract colonists.

To Greenland and Eric's colony came the sorceress Thorbiorg at the invitation of the pagan settlers, to prophesy for them the fate of their venture. Even her description descends to modern time—a dark blue cloak, a hood made of the fleece of a black lamb, a necklace of glass beads, a jewel-headed staff, a leather pouch full of charms. On her second evening she asked for help, someone to sing the chants of power, and nowhere in that colony were there sibyls or warlocks.

Gudrid, a girl of the colonists, said: "Although I am neither skilled in the black art nor a sibyl, yet my foster-mother, Halldis, taught me in Iceland that spell-song, which she called Warlocks."

"Then are thou wise in season," applauded Thorbiorg, but the girl demurred. "This is an incantation and ceremony of such a kind that I do not mean to lend it any aid," she said, "for that I am a Christian woman."

BUT her friends and relatives pleaded with her until she consented to help, and Gudrid sang, "so sweet and well" that the sorceress thanked her for the song. "She has indeed lured many spirits hither," said Thorbiorg, "those who were wont to forsake us hitherto and refuse to submit themselves to us." She prophesied glibly about an end to famine and disease; but the following year, the winter after Leif's first voyage to shores which must have been Canadian, there was an epidemic in Greenland that had horrible aspects. One woman who died and was buried rose and walked in the night, so that only a spell involving the holding of an axe before her could make her return to her grave. Thorstein, son of Eric, also returned after death to say that Christian burial rites must be practised for all funerals to prevent such phenomena.

Thunstone paused in his story, looking at me significantly. "You have, then, the story of Gudrid—a sane and honest and well brought up young person—being prevailed upon to perform a rite of black magic she had learned in Iceland and which she did not particularly believe. After that came supernatural terror. What's the thought in your mind?"

"My friend Andy," I said at once. "He was sane and normal, and in Iceland he learned—"

"Exactly," broke in Thunstone, slapping his great hand down on his knee. "Using him in what they're doing will be a triumph to them. A thousand years ago in Greenland, magic was used to start a whole series of ugly events."

"Including the discovery of America before Columbus?" I put in. "Was that ugly?"

"It was a failure, at least. They went to Vineland the Good only a few times, and lost touch. America was found for us by Columbus and his Spaniards, who while sailing called on the saints, not the devils, with almost every breath. But to get back to the sagas and their accounts—"

He told about the voyage to Vineland of Karlsefni, of how the pagan prayers of Thorhall brought a whale to the hungry voyagers and of how eating that whale made them sick. There was fighting with the swarthy, broad-faced natives the Norse called Skraelings, who had a weapon that sounded like a bomb—a black ball that exploded loudly when flung. The women of the voyage waited behind a fence while their men fought. Among them was Gudrid, to whom suddenly appeared a woman like herself, with chestnut hair, pale white skin and large eyes.

"What is thy name?" demanded the apparition.

"My name is Gudrid," replied the girl who once had allowed herself to be argued into singing of black magic. "But what is thine?"

"Gudrid!" cried the strange being, and vanished with a crash like that of the Skraelings' strange weapon.

When Thunstone had made an end, I did not wait to be asked a question.

"Gudrid met her doppelganger," I said. "Someone like her in appearance, even in name. It's the story of Andy and myself."

"Exactly," said Thunstone again. "Well, after the battle the explorers sailed back to Greenland. A Christian bishop sailed for Vineland later, and never was heard of again. The Greenland colony itself vanished. But Icelandic magic remained, and

now it makes its return to the shores of this continent once called Vineland."

"You make it sound baleful," I ventured.

"And so it is. A bad beginning's been made, and your friend Andy is involved without knowing why or how. You and I are going to get him out of it, I say, and at once."

V

I KEPT wondering about the school. Three years underground—it seemed incredible, impossible. Thunstone must have read my thoughts, as a surprising number of clever people can.

"The institution's old enough in its beginnings," he said. "I can give you even a reference in medieval history—the career of Saemund inn Frodi Sigfusson, Iceland's great teacher and poet of the eleventh and twelfth centuries."

"All that I can remember," I said, "is that he's credited with writing the Elder Edda."

"He spent years of study on the continent," Thunstone told me. "His friends lost track of him, and a very good priest—St. Jon Ognurdson, later bishop of Holar—went to find him. Saemund bobbed up, but so changed that St. Jon barely recognized him. He even had a new name—Kol. You change your name when you go diabolist, you know."

"I know," I nodded, for I had read about that in Summers, Wickwar, and Margaret Alice Murray.

"He'd attended the *Svartaskoli*, the Black College," went on Thunstone. "It took prayers and holy water and other things—St. Jon's white magic—to restore him. And after that, a nip-and-tuck flight from those who wanted to hang onto him. But he got away, was an ornament in the crown of Iceland's cultural history, and by his escape we know about that school, its terrors, and the way to fight it. Well, the *Svartaskoli's* right on the other side of the wall from us now, or a branch of it, anyway. Are you game for—"

He broke off, and we both stared. Something was happening on that drab wall.

You can see such things over a period of days or weeks, where damp and decay

darkens and cracks and disintegrates a stretch of plaster. But this happened fast, in moments.

All at once a great patch went rotten and porous, and through it seeped a cloud of something.

"Freeze, Stonewall," muttered Thunstone, not even his lips twitching. "Don't move a muscle until I speak. Then—"

I made a statue of myself. My eyes stung with a desire to blink. I fixed them on the vapor. It was dark, oily-seeming, here and there clotting as if with particles of moisture coming together. It made a figure, vaguely human, the half-man-form that is the most terrifying thing of which imagination is capable.

We'd been detected from beyond the wall, then. It had been too much to hope that we would go unguessed. And this that had been sent—it must have power to destroy, or it would not have come. Something else, more terrible, would—

My dry throat convulsed in spite of me. I had kept silent in my time, within touch almost of scouting enemy infantry, but I could not now. I made a noise, a sort of choking rattle. And the cloud turned to me, turned its lumpy half-shaped headpiece as if it had a face and eyes and could see. Its arms, like two streamers of oil smoke, lifted, then paused. It was afraid, or surprised. It shrank back toward the wall from which it had cleared.

"No!" yelled Thunstone.

I never saw a big man move so fast, not even the ex-wrestler who'd taught us his rough-and-tumble school of fighting and killing with bare hands. Thunstone was down on hands and knees, between the thing and the wall, and one fist shot out with a lump of something pale red. He scraped the floor—a mark—he was drawing with chalk, seemingly speeded up like the decay of the wall. He slashed here, angled off there, and was back. The vapory thing turned back to him, and he scrambled off around it. A big rough star of chalk-lines showed all around the bottom of it, where real figures would have feet.

"Recite," said Thunstone. "The beginning of the Gospel of St. John. Do you know it?"

I did know it, or something put th

words into my mind and my mouth. "In the Beginning was the Word," I stammered, "and the Word was—"

BETWEEN the points of the star, Thunstone was dashing in signs, or perhaps letters in an alphabet I had never seen. As I quoted the Gospel, the thing in the center of his diagram quivered and writhed, but did not move. It was rooted, I thought, to the worn floor-boards. Rising to one knee, Thunstone fairly whirled a circle outside his star and the signs. He stood up, panting.

"It's in prison," he told me exultantly. "See what I've done? Instead of drawing the pentacle and circle around us, I got it around it—and there's no passing that set of lines and figures."

"I'm afraid I almost bungled it," I managed to say, and my voice and my knees trembled.

"You didn't mean to, and neither of us knew that the best way to surprise the thing was to rivet its attention on you," Thunstone assured me. "You're the image of Andy, who's the last human being it expected to find here. Its dark mind, or what it uses for a mind, was taken aback, and gave me my chance. Look!"

The thing wavered here and there, but shrank back from the chalk lines, as from electric wires. I half understood that it was confined as stone walls and iron bars could never confine such a thing. "What is it?" I became bold enough to ask. "Where did it come from?"

"From a bottle, in which nasty things were mixed. Men like those we're fighting can make their own crude ghosts and demons. We'll stop that, along with some other things."

Thunstone pointed to the rotted space of plaster. "It would have retreated through there, and warned them in ways they'd understand. Since it's helpless here, we can use its passageway. Best defense is a good offense."

"Get there first with the most," I glibly quoted Bedford Forrest, and Thunstone's great hand clapped my shoulder in approval.

"Pay attention," he bade me solemnly. "We can get in there easily now; but we'll find ourselves among things you can't

imagine, and I can't explain. I speak of a school in a cellar—it won't be a cellar. Once for a few moments I slid into the other world they make, and none of its mysteries are pleasant to solve. But remember this, Stonewall; *the only way they can defeat and destroy you is to awe you into helplessness.*"

"We're both quoting a lot," I replied, as solemnly as he. "I'll give you something from John Bunyan: 'For here lay the excellent wisdom of him that built Mansoul, that the walls could never be broken down nor hurt, by the most mighty adverse potentates, unless the townsmen gave consent thereto.'"

"*The Holy War,*" Thunstone identified the passage, and clapped my shoulder again. "And it's true. The most evil spirit is powerless unless you give it power over you. A werewolf shifts his shape back to human if you speak to him boldly, if you even look levelly. A vampire runs from the simple sign of the cross, made with two fingers. The devil's afraid of music, and the Angry Gods died, the whole lash of them, from the negative cause of having no more worshippers. Will you follow my lead? Then come on."

He stepped forward and with a sweep of his hand as at a curtain struck away the decayed plaster. It fell to dust, and if there had been lath or siding beyond, that vanished too. He stooped, strode through, and struck hard at something beyond. As I followed him in, I saw his target lying on the floor in a shadowed little corridor—a man almost as tall as Thunstone, but scrawny and with evil lines in his stunned face. The man wore a star-spangled garment like a gown, and from his untidy head had fallen a cone-shaped cap, like the archaic costuming of a sorcerer.

"One of the least important of our opposition," said Thunstone quietly. "He was posted here just to guide that vapor-creature in and out." His left palm massaged his right fist. "When I hit men like that, they don't get up for an hour. It should be enough."

Down the corridor was a single door, marked with a looped cross like an Egyptian sign. Thunstone turned the knob, and the door swung inward with a whispany

creak. He went down stairs into darkness as black as a pond of ink, and I went with him

VI

NO, IT WAS no cellar. If you choose not to believe me, probably you are going to be easier in mind. We came down the steps, and I am sure that if I had turned to look for them they would have vanished.

I had done what I once learned to do in night operations, closed my eyes tightly to dilate the pupils, and so when I opened them I was able at once to see a little. Every moment I saw a little plainer, and quite plainly enough to suit me.

We were in the open somewhere. The strange ground underfoot was flat, and the flatness extended far. There may have been hills or cliffs in the distance. Here and there grew what I shall call trees, and lower brushy clumps, without a leaf on them. I thought some of them quivered, thought it might have been a conscious blind writhing, like the writhing of half-sleeping snakes.

In the empty dark overhead, what passed here for sky, rode a round moon, and it was the color of blood, as if foretold of the moon at the world's destruction in the Book of Revelations. It gave only the faintest bloody light, outlining nearby banks of dark, filthy clouds. I chose not to believe that those clouds were gigantic vapor-forms of life, bigger and grosser and more grotesque than the man-size entity Thunstone had trapped in his magic chalk-lines.

Thunstone, a pace ahead of me, snapped his fingers for attention, like a bush-guide in the Pacific islands. I followed his intent gaze. Something came toward us.

It seemed as large and strangely shaped as a camel, and it gleamed tallow-pale as with its own inner radiance. After a moment I had the impression of a man on a horse, approaching at a shambling trot. But though the rider might once have been a man, he rode no horse thing.

They were bones, skeleton things, but not clear-cut to the bony anatomy we know in medical schools or museums. Everything was gross, strangely joined, lacking here

and extra there. The beast had earlike juttings to either side of its skull, and below its eye-caverns sprouted a horn, set too far forward to make it a unicorn. It wore a bridle of sorts, but the rider seemed not to guide it. He sat upright in his saddle, as awkwardly arrogant as Don Quixote who had gone over to Satan. I thought he wore a blunt-peaked helmet, then judged that this was part of his bald, polished skull. From the chin-point below the lipless teeth hung a beard, long, lank and white as thistledown. Over his shoulders was draped a cloak of the moon's same bloody red, his left arm wore a shield with a squat, ugly figure for blazonry, and in his right hand he held aloft a spear. All this I saw as he came toward us, with an unhurried noiseless intensity of movement. At perhaps thirty yards he dropped the lance in rest. Its head, that seemed of some rough white stone like the point of a stalactite, aimed full at Thunstone.

If Thunstone had not stood so confidently immovable, I myself might have turned and run, and I cannot think where I could have run to safely. As it was, I was able to draw from my companion some part of the mighty assurance that matched his mighty frame, and I, too, stood fast. The horrid rider on the horrid beast sped at him, upon him—and Thunstone had shot up his massive forearm, striking aside the lance, and was in close with both big hands clutching at the bridle.

HE STOPPED the creature, forcing its bumpy, horned skullhead up and back until its fore hoofs rose and pawed. The two lipless rows of teeth on the rider's bearded face shot apart, and out came a reedy cry. I ran in on the left side, took a glancing blow from the shield that filled the upper space around the red moon with pale swimming stars; but then I got my arms around a bony leg in rattly chain mail, and with a heave in and up I tumbled him out of his saddle. As he fell, and I threw myself upon him, I saw that Thunstone had somehow twisted the steed's head and neck so that it fell uncouthly on its side, with a sickening clatter of bare bones.

Because I was beyond amazement, I had no sense of wonder at the burst of strength

by which Thunstone achieved that overthrow.

My own capture had dropped his lance, but he flogged at me with the shield bound to his arm. I got my knee on his mailed chest and worked a hand through that white beard—it was coarse and dry as dried grass—to find his throat. There was no throat, only a struggling column of bones joined together, like a spinal column. My fingers recoiled of their own sickness, closed in the beard, and it twitched off of his skeleton jaw, like something gummed on. I would not allow fear, but disgust shook me and made me faint. Somehow I stayed on top, pinning the thrashing body until Thunstone sprang to my side and knelt.

"Thunstone!" wheezed the lipless, fleshless mouth. It needed no lips to articulate that name. "You—"

"You know me," said Thunstone, with a quiet triumph that somehow made everything all right. "I know you, then. Who are you—who *were* you?"

The misshapen skull shifted and turned its sockets up to me. Deep in their shadows was the hint of real, glaring eyes. The jaw stirred again.

"Stonewall. . . ."

"You know me, too!" I gasped.

"Call him by name," Thunstone bade me quickly.

Only one person beside Thunstone himself had ever called me Stonewall, and I spoke at once.

"Andy," I stammered. "Andrew Jackson Warren. What have they done to you?"

The form I held shuddered and went slack. I heard hoarse breathing, like a dying man struggling for a hold on life as it left him. A hand rose, not to strike or push, but to grope at me, appealing and pitiful. My eyes were sprung all full of tears, and I scrubbed them clear on my sleeve. Then I could see.

It was Andy.

He was trying to sit up, and I crept clear of him. He stared blankly at me and at Thunstone, his wide mouth open in his pallid face. He dabbed at his disordered hair. The red cloak fell from his shoulders. He looked down at the shield he wore, and wiggled it off of his arm.

"Ghaal!" He cleared his throat, and spat

on the ground, near some things like faintly phosphorescent toadstools. "What goes on here?"

THUNSTONE hooked a big fork of a hand under Andy's armpit and set him on his feet. "Of course they'd send him," he said to me. "Send him, changed like this, to blood himself into their horde by killing his rescuers. Try not to puzzle it out too much, Stonewall. This place where we've come isn't logical. It's proof of more dimensions than three, and of more senses than five."

I was thinking of what Thunstone had said about the *Svartaskoli*, and of the years spent there. They had had Andy brief hours, and had changed him to—Thunstone read my thoughts again.

"It wasn't real," he told me. "The old scholars called such thing a glamor, and they didn't mean Hollywood glamor. Things can seem otherwise than they are, to sight and touch. You know about werewolves, and the 'appearances' in Salem long ago—disguise by sorcery, not by grease-paint or theatrical costume." He smiled down at Andy. "You don't know how much good this has done all hands. Their logic sent you against us, for they sensed our attack; and put you back into the right ranks."

I strolled over to where Thunstone had hurled that riding creature. It lay in a heap of mouldering bones, like some ancient fossils dug up by scientists. I stooped to touch them, and thought better of it.

"What else is standing in the way here?" Thunstone inquired gently of Andy.

Andy shook his head again, slowly, as if to get sense back into it. "Nothing that I know of. Everything's been blurred, like a dream. But they pointed me out here alone. Their orders were definite, anyway, and a moment ago I was set to carry them out."

"Remember Saemund, the Icelandic scholar?" Thunstone reminded me. "St. Jon called him his own name, and he was himself again. We've done just that. Now, Andy, tell us what you know, while it's still even faintly in your mind. Then I want you to go on and forget it."

Andy told, haltingly, as if it was a story

out of his babyhood. The Spoom and one or two others had given him a book to read, in characters that were provocatively mysterious but which clarified as if his effort to decipher them made them more easy. And he grew foggier and dreamier, and gathered ideas that seemed at the time like brilliant truths, worth following to death and beyond. Finally they told him to come downstairs, and he did so very willingly, into the country we now saw. A long trail led to a squat tower, blacker than soot, and inside was his school.

"I was to stay there and learn to be worthy of their fellowship," Andy told us. "Those were the Spoom's words. It was so black inside, charcoal would have made a white mark on the wall. But the books—they had letters of cold fire, like rotten wood—"

"Never mind telling us what they said," interrupted Thunstone. "How many were with you?"

"Two others, I think. We weren't to speak to each other. Only study. Once a hand came from somewhere, all shaggy with gray hair, and put down food. I didn't eat it."

"Probably a good thing," I ventured. "Three students—not much of a university, Mr. Thunstone."

"Harvard was no larger in the beginning," replied Thunstone sententiously. "One more question, Andy. Which way is this tower where you entered the primer class of the *Svartaskoli*?"

Andy pointed silently into the dark distance behind him.

"Come," said Thunstone, and stepped out lightly and swiftly as the biggest of all cats.

We followed side by side, Andy and I. It seemed a long, gloomy way, though there was a marked trail underfoot which our feet easily groped upon. Once or twice we passed through ugly thickets, which I fancied were alive and menacing, like ranks of tentacled animals. There was a way up a steep slope, and once we all three scrambled on all fours over a wall of close-set stone that was warm as if from recent fires upon it. I felt a damp wind, and had the sense of great space everywhere.

Thunstone stopped at last, under a

mighty overhanging boulder tufted with lichenlike growths, and snapped his fingers as before. We saw what he saw.

The red moon had dropped toward a horizon, not far away. Against it was silhouetted a squat, square tower, black, to quote Andy, as soot. The damp wind blew from that direction.

VII

THE purpose of all military training is success in battle, and there are a myriad sciences toward that success. If you have been an infantryman, you have learned how best to approach a hostile building.

Thunstone must have been an officer once, with plenty of experience in the front lines. He knew and did everything admirably.

He even knew the silent motions, nudges and signs by which to give us orders. We crept, belly to the gritty soil, on a long dim circle to the right that brought us around and in toward the tower. I wished for a weapon—an M-1, a carbine or a BAR—on that approach crawl. Then I reflected that Thunstone had a master plan that involved no rifles.

He went ahead, leading us to the right, then in. We kept the tower between us and the red light of the sinking moon. It showed us two scrubby trees like gnarled talons spread upward, and then it showed us moving figures. These were human, or probably human. Two of them stood beside the tower, by the door, as if conversing. The other, a hunched thing with skinny long arms that hung almost to the ankle, stood to one side, as if guarding something that lay on the ground. At last one of the two moved to this hunchback, with a gesture and apparently a word. I guessed that this speaker was the Spoom, for he showed small and slim, with a suggestion of elegance in position and movement. The long arms of the hunchback scooped up something, a tray, and waddled toward the tower and in.

"The food," whispered Andy, faint as thought, in my ear.

I remembered what he said about the shaggy gray hair on the hands of the food-bringer, and hoped that if I came into close

conflict with that thing I could make a quick job of it.

The two who had spoken had a final word together, and one of them started in our direction, along the trail we had followed.

Thunstone scrambled back to us, and in less than six words gave us our orders. I lay flat on the trail. Thunstone, a few feet ahead, made his big body small as possible behind one of those filthy-seeming bushes. Andy, on the opposite side of the trail, found a hummock behind which he took cover like the good soldier he had learned to be. The man came briskly along, whistling something minor. He was not the Spoon, too squat and ruggedly built.

He did not see me until he was almost upon me, and I sprang to my feet. Of course he stopped dead. I think he would have yelled, but Thunstone and Andy were upon him from both sides. I saw the darting chop of Thunstone's big hand, edge in, to the fellow's throat. That bruising wallop on the adam's apple quiets anybody. A moment later Andy had pinned the enemy's elbows from behind, and Thunstone hit him four or five times, to head and body. I could hear Thunstone grunt with the effort. When Andy let go, the man dropped as limply as an old rag.

We clustered around him. Thunstone's face was close enough to me to let me see his grin of savage relish.

"I know him," he whispered. "A fool, of course—nearly everyone in business like this is a fool or a tricked victim, as they planned to make Andy."

He gave the forward sign, and we headed towerward again.

THE one remaining outside was the Spoon, all right. He was humming the same song that our late objective had whistled. Thunstone, still leading, gained cover within twenty yards of him. Then he stood up and walked swiftly forward. Andy and I did likewise, but kept behind.

"Hello, Thunstone," said the Spoon, with an affectation of quiet cordiality. "We knew you'd be in this. You've come awfully close."

"I like to get close to my work," replied Thunstone.

"I see," and the Spoon's head-silhouette nodded. "You've come so far by brash, brainless audacity, and probably a few wallops with those big fists. You think you can crush me like a fly? But I'm no fly, Thunstone."

"A spider," amended Thunstone.

The Spoon nodded again. "I accept the compliment. A spider. A blood-drinking spider. I'll drink your blood, Thunstone—figuratively. And it'll be drunk literally, and your flesh eaten, by some of the native fauna of this little pleasure ground. All I have to do is whistle a note through my fingers and they'll be here."

"I'm safe for the moment, then," said Thunstone, and edged around the Spoon. "You won't dare whistle them up unless you can get inside to safety, or they'll eat you, too. As long as I stay between you and the door—"

"I've always admired your ability to find things out," said the Spoon. "You ought to be in with us. Really you ought. You'd have fun here."

"This place," said Thunstone, "is a dream. It's here because an attitude of mind creates it. I don't live in dreams, not this kind of dream, anyway. We're going to wake up the dreamer."

"Your friends are still shy," put in the Spoon, and laughed quietly. He had a master flair for restrained drama.

"If you insist on meeting them—" Thunstone beckoned us. "Come on, gentlemen."

We marched quickly in, shoulder to shoulder, and the Spoon turned to gaze at us. At the same moment Thunstone struck a match.

I saw the Spoon's mouth open, his eyes goggle. In the light of the match Thunstone held, his face turned whiter than wax. He tried to say something, and achieved only a bat-squeak. Then:

"Not two!" he wailed. "Not two!"

Maybe he fainted. Thunstone caught him and picked him up.

"Come on," he said, and rushed at the tower. It seemed made of earth, as if whittled out of a great natural mound of claylike consistency. Even the door was like that, perhaps its hinges. Thunstone threw the Spoon like a javelin, and the door broke all to pieces.

We were inside, lighting more matches. There was a little entry, and in one corner wriggled and cowered the hunchback, holding the tray in front of him. He wore no clothes that I could see, only a thick coat of grizzly hair.

"He's blind," said Thunstone. "Look, inside this place is wood—old wood, older than the first planks ever sawn in America."

He touched a match to the wall, and it kindled like candlegrease. Someone yelled farther inside—one of Andy's ex-school-fellows, I suppose. We backed out into the open, and it wasn't the open.

It was a cellar now, a cellar such as you find under many old houses in New York. The walls were of crumbly cement, there was a mass of trash everywhere. From the direction we had just quitted, and to which we now turned, beat a wall of flame, healthy red flame as in a monstrous fireplace.

"The stairs," said Andy, and pointed. "We can get out."

"Wait." I panted, and bent to look at something lying among the trash. "It's the Sporn. Here, too. Help me lift him."

Thunstone's hand closed on my shoulder and plucked me up and away.

"But he'll die in that fire!" I protested.

"Certainly he will!" Thunstone snapped.

"Fire in this world, and fire in the next—that's the judgment on him!"

He rushed me up the stairs, and Andy followed. We were in the corridor we had once seen, and Thunstone poked me through the hole in the wall into the room behind the stationery stand.

VIII

ON THE floor of the room showed a rough figure in chalk, a star, some letters and a circle. There was nothing, not the slightest suggestion of anything, in its center. Thunstone scuffed the lines away with his heel.

"So much for the Sporn's magic," he said. "Do you understand what happened?"

"I do," I said. "A little. You said down there that the place was a dream place."

"Dreamed up—in the strictest sense of the word," nodded Thunstone. "Normally, we have a bookshop and a cellar beneath

it. Some individuals with warped impulses and a decidedly unusual pattern of thought get together and read things and make complicated ceremony-gestures. The cellar becomes a subterranean country, full of abnormal conditions and objects. Frightening, unspeakable—but if it's that easy to create, it's that easy to destroy."

"The Sporn made it?" ventured Andy, and Thunstone nodded again.

"He considered himself master of all magic. What paralyzed his mind was the sudden sight of you two. Somewhere along the line you decided that your duplication wasn't coincidence, but a depart of a deliberate plan. You were right."

"Why couldn't he stand the two of us?" asked Andy.

"Because he knew he had lost power over the one by the freedom of the other. You were aware, too, of the belief that doubles are a curse. They were this time—a curse on the Sporn. He had not expected any such opposition to him. He wanted all the supernatural on his side. When you popped in on him together—"

"He folded up," finished Andy. "Quit. Blacked out."

"And everything he had charmed up for himself was ruined. We had a few seconds to set the fire, which always makes everything clean."

Outside we heard voices, commotion and gongs. Thunstone led us out through the shop into the street.

"Fire engines?" he inquired mildly of an excited fat housewife.

"The bookshop around the corner," she chattered. "It's blazing like tinder. Firemen say they can save the shops around it, but that nice man that runs the place—Mr. Sporn—he and his friends are caught inside—they'll never be got out—"

"I see." Thunstone strolled away, and we with him.

"It's almost dinner time," he told us, "and I've an invitation. Won't you two come along? Several others will be there. A little Frenchman named de Grandin, who will want to hear all about this. And," he smiled, "my host has daughters. Two strikingly beautiful girls. They're identical twins—can't be told apart."

"Let's go!" cried Andy.