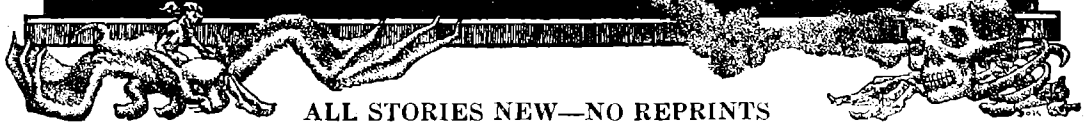


# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1943

Cover by E. Franklin Wittmack

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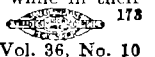
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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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# Under Your Spell



By **HENRY  
KUTTNER**

**WANTED:** Assistant, experienced in magic field, for position in trick and novelty shop. Must be god. . . .

**“G**OD!” said Joseph Tinney explosively. “Good! Not god! Damn all linotypers anyway.”

“Well,” hedged the tall young man who had recently entered the Presto Trick Shop, “all I know is that I saw your ad in the *Times*, and I want a job.”

Tinney rubbed his lean jaw. “Which is fair enough. I need an assistant, sure. But it isn’t necessary to give me a spiel. Just—”

“You advertised for a god,” the young man said stubbornly. “So you must hire me, not a mortal. Unless another god turns up, which isn’t probable.”

Tinney considered his fingernails. “What’s your name?”

*Want to gather yourself a fortune—or shoot a meteor at your landlord?  
Get to know Mr. Silver, the A. W. O. L. god from Mt. Olympus.*



"Silver. Q. Silver."

"Q?"

"Uh—Quentin," said Mr. Silver, rather hastily. He was an extremely handsome young man, with curly golden hair, blue eyes, and a smile which, though pleasant, had in it an inexplicable suggestion of nastiness, as though at any moment he might break into a string of blasphemous oaths. He wore well-fitting tweeds, and

certainly would appeal to the women customers. Not that there were many of those. Pranksters and magicians are usually men.

"How did you get in the store?" Tinney asked.

"Ah," Mr. Silver said thoughtfully. "Perhaps I transformed myself into a wisp of fog and blew through the keyhole. Still, that isn't likely, is it?"

"No," Tinney said. "Maybe you pulled

a Houdini? Let it go at that, anyway. It occurs to me that the *Times* isn't on the newsstands yet. How in hell did you run across my ad?"

"I get around," Mr. Silver remarked. "Now how about that job?"

The proprietor pondered. "Experienced—"

"In magic field. I wondered if you were being figurative. In my time I've often visited the Elysian Fields—by the way!" Mr. Silver broke off to say abruptly. "You don't believe me, do you?"

Tinney just looked at him.

There came a rattle at the door. Tinney opened it, to admit a short, plump man with a goatee and waxed mustache. "Professor Zeno!" he exclaimed. "Good morning. How did that bread-knife illusion work out?"

"Ha—satisfactorily," Professor Zeno grunted, toddling along the aisle and casting sharp glances at the stock. "Not spectacular enough, however. Need something new. *Big*—you know."

**T**INNEY hesitated. He had nothing on hand at the moment, for certain experiments were as yet unfinished. The illusion of the Skeleton Girl . . . no. Zeno wouldn't be satisfied with an incomplete job.

But before he could speak, Mr. Silver had deftly taken over. "I'm Mr. Tinney's new assistant, Professor. And we *do* have something to show you. Quite new in these parts. If you'll step this way—"

At this moment the door opened again, admitting a large man in a checked suit. He was holding a crumpled edition of the *Times* in one capable hand.

"Mr. Tinney!" he said, looking around at the three faces turned toward him. "I saw your ad—"

Tinney, about to remonstrate with Silver for butting in, saw a chance to even the score. "You want the job?" he asked. "Okay. You're hired."

"Wait," said Mr. Silver, and walked with singularly menacing lightness to where the large man stood. "Are you," he inquired, "a god?"

"No," he added. "I can see you're not. Tinney!" said Mr. Silver, swinging around to face the proprietor. "Are you going back on your printed word?"

Tinney glowered stubbornly. "I never hired you. Go chase yourself." He said something about screwballs.

The large man seemed to understand the situation. "Yeah," he added, glaring at Silver. "Beat it. Or you'll get thrown out."

Professor Zeno had been fondling his goatee in a confused fashion. "But I want an illusion!" he said plaintively. "This young man was about to show me—"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Silver smiled. "It's quite simple. I can demonstrate in a moment. You can build up the patter to suit yourself. The hand motions go like this. Then you say—" His words broke into unintelligible gibberish.

**H**E FINISHED by pointing at the large man in the checked suit. Instantly a jagged streak of lightning flamed out of nowhere. It went away, taking the large man with it.

On the floor was a fairly large heap of whitish ash.

There was silence.

Professor Zeno said, "No props?"

"Just what I showed you."

"Ah. Excellent. Luckily, I know Greek, so I can repeat your—ah—incantation. Now bring the man back. A trapdoor?"

Mr. Silver smiled flashingly. "Oh, I can't bring him back. He's been destroyed."

It is interesting that Tinney believed him without question.

Professor Zeno, however, did not. He chuckled, played with his goatee, and peered at the ceiling. Nothing. He got

down on his hands and knees to scrutinize the floor. Still no results.

Thunder rolled, distantly. Tinney, who had been staring at Mr. Silver, saw the young man's eyes widen. Silver cast an almost frightened glance toward the door.

Then he vanished.

A large white rabbit appeared near the crouching figure of Professor Zeno. The latter, in his crawling investigations, slowly swiveled around till he was nose to twitching whisker with the rabbit. For a space the two remained there, eyeing each other.

"Part of the trick?" Professor Zeno asked. The sound of thunder had died.

"No," said the rabbit. "Sometimes I get tired of my own shape, that's all."

"May I compliment you on your ventriloquistic abilities?" the Professor inquired.

"You may," said the rabbit, "if you're that dumb."

Zeno clambered to his feet. "I want to go over that lightning illusion with you again," he said. "The back room? Where are you, anyway?"

"Oh, come along," said the rabbit impatiently, and hopped along the aisle. Professor Zeno followed, casting occasional glances behind the counter.

The pair vanished through black curtains, leaving Joseph Tinney inexplicably worried.

**B**EFORE he could follow, a small boy entered to purchase a box of itching powder. Tinney rang up the amount and leaned against the cash register, brooding. Insolence he could not tolerate. His employees—well, after all, they *were* employees. And this brash young chap was taking altogether too much for granted.

Tinney remembered the lightning bolt, and unaccountably shivered. As a magician of many years' standing, he should have been able to explain away the illusion. Yet—

He walked to the pile of ash on the floor and stirred it up with his foot. Something gilt and gleaming emerged. A collar button.

Professor Zeno came from the back of the store, looking white and ill. He brushed hastily past Tinney, who said, "Is something wrong? Can I—"

"Your assistant," Zeno whispered. "I know who he is. Why did you do it, Tinney?"

"Do what?"

"*You* know," said the magician accusingly. "How much did he give you for it?"

Tinney took a deep breath. "For what?"

"Your soul," Zeno said in a hushed voice, and fled as though Mr. Silver pursued him.

The silence was broken only by the occasional growl of motors and the squawk of horns from the street outside. Tinney pursed his lips and squinted at nothing. Odd. Zeno was a pretty hard-headed chap. It'd take a good deal to throw him into a panic. . . .

A battle-axe of a woman, carrying a campstool and a portable phonograph, halted in the doorway to stare at Tinney. Automatically he stepped back, but she came no farther.

"Yes, madam?"

"I," said the battle-axe, "have a message for you." With incredible deftness she opened the camp-stool, set the phonograph on it, and started a record. Tinney blinked rather dazedly. Words came, rather raspingly, as though the unknown speaker had a cold.

"The end of the world is coming," said the phonograph. "Sister Seelah brings you warning! Verily I say to you, you are evil—"

Tinney winced. A crowd, he noticed, was gathering. The electrician who had the shop next door slipped to his side.

"She's been hanging around my place, bothering the customers," he muttered. "Nuisance! I know her—a crook. She bothers you till you give her five bucks to go away."

The battle-axe's eyes were gleaming. She adjusted the volume of the phonograph till it rasped distressingly on Tinney's eardrums.

"You are evil! Hearken to me—"

"Look," said Tinney plaintively, "please go away. Here's a dollar. I've got a headache, and that thing's making it worse."

"Can you save your soul with a dollar?" the battle-axe inquired.

"I had to give her twenty," the electrician whispered.

At that precise moment the tone of the phonograph changed. So did the import of the message that was pouring from it.

"Repent," it said, "and—oh, the hell with it. That reminds me of a limerick. There was a young man from Nantucket—"

It wasn't a very nice limerick. But the one that came next was definitely unfit for women and children. The battle-axe stood glaring at the machine, frozen with amazement, as it continued in a hoarsely raucous screech:

"Gather 'round, everybody! I come here to offer you a bargain—a tremendous bargain! Get your French postcards here! Three for a dollar!"

It went on . . . getting no better.

**T**HE battle-axe concentrated her fury on Tinney. She moved toward him, fingers curved into talons; but just then a tall figure interposed itself between the woman and her prospective victim. It was Mr. Silver, his pleasant smile now definitely nasty.

"I think I see a policeman," he remarked. "Yes, I do. Here he comes. You know, madam, it's really unwise to

sell—er—to sell such goods in the street. Our local laws—"

The woman sent one glance toward the oncoming blue-coated figure, and fled, leaving her phonograph behind. Oddly enough, the record instantly resumed its original tenor, dilating upon the evil of the world.

Tinney felt himself drawn back into his store. "So true," Mr. Silver remarked. "It's an evil world. But an interesting one. I've had remarkable adventures here, in my time. One thing, I never got bored on earth. Whereas an eternity spent running messages for—"

"For?"

"Jove!" Mr. Silver exclaimed, abruptly changing the subject. "I almost forgot. Professor Zeno gave me a check. Five hundred dollars for the illusion."

"Too cheap," said Tinney, his trading instinct automatically coming to the fore. "That trick's worth a couple of grand."

"Well," Mr. Silver inquired. "That's what he paid, isn't it?"

Tinney, who already had taken the check, glanced at it again. His eyes must be going back on him. It no longer said "Exactly Five Hundred Dollars and No Cents." Instead, it was made out in the amount of two thousand bucks.

Tinney licked his lips. He looked very closely at Mr. Silver's face, noting the disarming frankness of the blue eyes and the hidden qualities of that deceptive smile.

"Are you the devil?" he asked in a hushed voice.

"Which one?" Mr. Silver inquired. "In any case, no. I'm neither Belphegor nor Satan nor Hel nor Baal nor—well, I told you I was a god, didn't I? That's perfectly true. Ymir—I'm no devil!"

Tinney went back of the counter and drank whiskey. He reappeared feeling logical and argumentative. "That rabbit—" he hazarded.

"You know," Mr. Silver countered cryptically.

"I know—nothing! You're a clever trickster. So what?"

"Humans were always skeptical. Even Danae, I heard—though not for long. It's difficult to convince a human. If I appeared to you in my rightful form, you'd die of it. Too drastic—and it wouldn't fit in with my plans."

"Your plans?"

Mr. Silver sat on the counter and swung his tweed-sheathed legs. He smiled.

"Well, I'm bored. I'm supposed to be indispensable in Olympus, but that's not true. It's been long since I visited your planet. There was always excitement here. And other inducements." A gleam showed for an instant in Mr. Silver's candid blue eyes. "Let that pass. I'm incognito here, so it will be best for me to assume a normal place in your world. What better place is there than a magician's assistant for Mer—for me?"

"No," Tinney said. "No! It's too fantastic. Alice in Wonderland stuff. This is New York, not Egypt or Babylon. Gods. . . . It's like that clock coming to life and talking about politics." He pointed to the big old-fashioned timepiece on the wall.

"What," inquired the clock suddenly, "is more interesting than politics, anyway? It charts the course of the world. If you had as much time on your hands as I have—"

"*Humb!*" Tinney cried with inarticulate abruptness. The clock resumed its familiar ticking. Mr. Silver smiled.

Presently Tinney found speech again. "Did it?" he asked.

"It did. Magic is contagious. History proves that. Once a bit of enchantment creeps into the world of yours, it acts as a magnet, so to speak. In Ilium, Chryses started the trouble when he asked Apollo to wreak vengeance on the Greeks. Briseis got help from Jupiter, and of course Juno stuck her nose in. After that all the gods

and goddesses were sucked in, with all sorts of minor magics. I'm running on. . . . My point is that magic attracts magic. Your trickery is a low-grade form, of course—legerdemain chiefly. But it makes use of the basic principles of magic—bluff, for example. You're nothing new in the scheme of things; the ancient priest was your prototype. Priests and gods have much in common."

Tinney shut his eyes. After a while he said, "It's good patter. But not quite good enough. You're no god. Are you going to leave quietly, or shall I phone the police?"

Mr. Silver ruffled his golden curls. "Seldom have I met such a skeptic. Oh, well. There are ways of convincing even . . . Get out."

"Eh?"

"I said get out. Go away. I'll take care of the store while you're gone; I'm smart enough for that. When you're ready to admit that I'm a god, come back."

"Listen!" said Tinney—

**T**O THE threshold of his store entrance. He was outside. How he had got there, standing on the sidewalk, he had not the slightest idea. But there he was, thinking mad thoughts about hypnotism.

"Magician!" said Mr. Silver bitterly from the interior. "Be one, then—the passive type. And come back when you're wiser."

Tinney's nostrils twitched. He took a step forward, and halted. Some invisible barrier barred his path. He could not re-enter his own shop.

Rot! He was imagining things. And yet the glassy wall inexplicably remained. Tinney slid his palms along it. From the rear, it seemed as though the man was making mystic passes in the air.

"Pardon!" a florid, paunchy man said, and pushed past Tinney, who caught the other's arm. "Eh?"

"You—you can't go in."

"Pickets!" said the paunchy man. "Well, you look hungry. Here's a quarter." And he walked into the store, leaving Tinney in no very happy frame of mind.

He made another attempt to get past the barrier, but of course failed. Thoughtfully he slid the quarter in his pocket. There *were* laws. . . . Magic, indeed! He hailed a passing bluecoat.

"Morning, Flanagan."

"Mornin', Mister Tinney. A nice one, too."

Good! This was it. Flanagan was big enough to throw Mr. Silver bodily out of the shop. He'd do it, too.

"Wait a bit," Tinney said. "I need your help."

"Ah? Sure. What can I do for you?"

"Diddle, diddle dumpling," Tinney explained—

"Eh?"

"My son John—"

"I don't get it."

"Went to bed—"

"Sure," Flanagan soothed. "Feelin' good, ain't you? Well, no harm in that. Now I must be on my way."

"With his stockings on!" screamed the harassed Joseph Tinney, and stood staring. What the devil . . . he hadn't meant to recite that imbecile nursery rhyme. He'd meant to tell Flanagan about Mr. Silver. But somehow the doggerel had popped out of his mouth of its own volition.

"Flanagan!" Tinney cried desperately.

The officer turned back, one eyebrow lifted. "Sor?"

"For heaven's sake, listen to me!"

"I'm listening," Flanagan said patiently. "What?"

"Higgeldy, piggeldy, my black hen; she lays eggs for gentlemen!"

"It was a red hen, the way I learned it," Flanagan murmured. "Now why don't you go back in your store and take it easy for a bit? Lie down or something?"

"That's just it!" Tinney gasped. "I—I can't—"

"Can't what?"

"A tisket, a tasket—"

There seemed little point in pursuing such an incoherent conversation. Even Tinney saw that. With a groan he turned and made one more attempt to reenter his store. Useless. Mr. Silver was selling the paunchy customer a dozen dribble glasses, he saw.

**M**AYBE Silver was a crook. Maybe he intended to rob the till. Tinney grinned tightly. He'd gone to the bank yesterday, so there wasn't much petty cash on hand. Not enough to matter. Just the same—

Just the same, Tinney decided he needed a drink. With a glazed look in his eyes, he tottered to the nearest corner, where he glimpsed a cocktail bar, chrome and glass. It was the visual equivalent of a Mickey Finn, but Tinney saw only an oasis in a mad Sahara. He entered, and, at the bar, saw a familiar figure—Luciferno the Great, a man who looked exactly like the devil.

"Hiya, Tinney," said Luciferno. "Come over and have a drink."

"Thanks, Lu. Whiskey. Beer chaser. Thanks. . . ."

"Your hands," Luciferno remarked, "are trembling. Hangover, nerves, or ghosts?"

"The last. I'm in trouble."

"So?" The saturnine eyebrows lifted. "What's wrong?"

"Diddle diddle—nothing!" Tinney said violently. "Nothing at all." He gulped whiskey, wondering why he couldn't tell either Flanagan or Luciferno what had happened. Hypnotic suggestion. Yeah. That was it. On an impulse he pulled pencil and an old envelope from his pocket and began to scribble on it.

What he wanted to say was, "I've been hypnotized. Help! A man named Silver won't let me into my store."



What he wrote was, "Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been—"

Tinney crumpled the envelope and reached for his beer. Then he hesitated, seeking the bartender with his eyes. That worthy, a largish man with a bristling mustache, wandered over.

"Sir?"

"Er . . . there seems to be a fish in my beer."

"Sir?"

"A goldfish," Tinney amplified. "It's swimming around. See?"

"Now that is clever," Luciferno commented. "Not new, of course, but you managed it deftly. Barman!" he added in a loud voice. "There's a snake in *my* beer."

So there was. A small garter snake was coiled in Luciferno's goblet, its wedge head raised, regarding the world with dim malevolence.

"Don't!" Tinney pleaded softly. "This isn't a gag. I can't help it."

"He's enchanted!" cried Luciferno, always a publicity hound. "Or it's the beer. Look! Another fish!"

It was true. Two small goldfish were swimming contentedly in Tinney's goblet. The beer, by some odd legerdemain, had apparently turned into crystal-clear water.

"Look," said the barman. "This is bad for business. Are you guys going to lay off?"

At that moment a fountaining spray of water geysered up from Tinney's goblet and splashed against the ceiling. The extraordinary fountain continued to play. The bartender cursed luridly, seized the glass, and lifted it. Instantly streams of water shot from the horrified man's ears.

"A stooge!" Luciferno accused. "That's not fair."

"Will you shut up?" the wretched Tinney groaned. "I'm getting out of here!" He sprang from his stool, seized his hat, and jammed it down on his head. Imme-

diately he lifted it again to shake out three field-mice and an eel. That done, he took a hurried departure.

LUCIFERNO trailed him. "Hey, I want to see you. I need some new equipment. By the looks of things, you've been brushing up on your tricks."

"Lu, for Pete's sake, not now! I—I—diddle diddle—" Tinney abruptly fell silent.

Luciferno stared. "You're drunk? On one boiler-maker?"

"I just hired a new assistant," Tinney managed to get out without difficulty. "He's good. Why not drop into the store and see him? I—I've got an engagement." He left the magician staring after him, and hailed a taxi.

"The Parkway," he said at random. And relaxed on the cushions, pondering.

Of course it was obvious that Mr. Silver wasn't human. Tinney had realized that long ago. But to admit the fact, even to himself, was extremely difficult. It would automatically mean admitting a lot of other things. The stability of life would vanish. *Anything* might happen. . . .

Tinney was arguing against himself. Psychologically, he was on the spot. He didn't dare believe in Mr. Silver's abnormal powers. But he couldn't disbelieve, either. A god!

With a violent effort Tinney turned his mind into coldly logical channels. He didn't believe in the Philosopher's Stone, either, but he admitted the possibility of its existence. Transmutation of elements could be achieved in the laboratory. Cyclotrons . . . atomic bombardment . . . yeah. Science had an answer.

If only such an answer existed to explain Mr. Silver!

Perhaps it did. Magic was—what?—contagious; legerdemain was based on the elementary principles of goety. A kindergarten, as it were. A six-year-old child

would be baffled by calculus. A cosine on the triangle's rim, a simple line would seem to him. . . . Tinney shut his eyes tightly. He was veering.

Legerdemain is to genuine magic as addition, say, is to calculus. Similar ratio. Grant that. Okay. Well, then—

Mr. Silver was familiar with advanced magic. The Greeks had a word for it. Tinney found himself wishing he was an ancient Greek. One of Hellene's babies. . . . Curious reaction he had to this business. His usually staid and logical mind was spinning off at wild tangents. He forced himself to relax.

But—the thought was jolting—a god would have almost unlimited powers! Mr. Silver had already proved his unusual abilities. Suppose they could be turned to practical ends?

That logical thought gave Tinney the rational basis he had been seeking. He forgot the impossibility of his thesis in pondering the incredible possibilities. Only they weren't incredible. They were . . . *hm!*

**T**INNEY lit a cigarette with shaking hands. He was remembering his lease. It still had four years to run, and was a definite handicap to him. He needed larger quarters. The landlord would not compromise. There was no possibility of sub-leasing. Suppose, now, a fire gutted the shop . . . nothing incendiary, of course. Nothing that would interest the insurance company unduly. A—a meteor!

It was a slightly staggering thought. But why wouldn't Mr. Silver be able to control meteors? If he could—and would—one troubling problem would be solved. The chief difficulty would be the necessity of handling Mr. Silver with unerring tact.

The possibilities were unlimited.

Tinney leaned forward. "Take me back to Times Square," he commended. "And hurry!"

Mr. Silver was alone in the store. This time Tinney found no difficulty in passing the threshold. The handsome young man looked up and smiled.

"Ah," he said. "Changed your mind, I see. Good!"

Tinney looked around. "We're alone?"

Mr. Silver perched himself on a counter and swung his legs. There was a curiously cryptic smile on his lips. "I see," he said. "Trust a mortal . . . you've figured out a way to profit by my appearance. Greed is always convincing. A man believes what he wants to believe. You know, Tinney, if a human could only forget self—his ego—permanently, he'd be a god. That's the big difference."

Tinney lit a cigarette and examined the till. There was quite a lot of money in it.

"Made many sales?"

"A few. Stop beating around the bush. What do you want from me?"

"Well—"

Silver smoothed back his curly golden locks. "Why be ashamed of the bargaining instinct? It's a prerogative of humans. You can be helpful to me, Tinney. When a god visits earth, he's subject to certain three-dimensional strictures. His powers are limited. Thus human contacts are helpful to him. Half the fun of—*this*—is pretending to live as an ordinary man. I get a kick out of it," he added. "Eating the sort of food you do, following your crazy life-patterns . . . one of which involves making a living."

Tinney hesitated. "Making a living?"

"Part of the game. I could easily create gold—but that would be cheating. When you play a game, you handicap yourself by following its rules, don't you? Well—I'm playing at being human. It's fun."

"But you have—certain powers?"

"Sure. And I'll use them, as long as I don't break the rules by doing so. Now let's have it. I'm willing to help you. A fair bargain. D'you want money?"

Somehow Tinney could not grasp the thought of a million dollars being dumped in his lap. It was like trying to comprehend astronomical terms. He explained about the lease.

"Meteor, eh?" Silver said, and vanished. In a moment he was back, grinning.

"Fair enough. There's a small one not far away. I can guide it down here . . . let's see. You own a house in Jersey, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"I advise you, then, to let the meteor destroy it."

"You're—you don't understand!" Tinney objected. "It's this lease—"

"I know," Silver murmured. "I'm just giving you good advice. If you don't want to take it, suit yourself."

"You'll bring the meteor down here? And make sure the shop's burned completely? And—I don't want anybody killed."

"A laudable thought," Mr. Silver remarked. "No one will be killed. One final warning, Tinney. Don't try to double-cross me."

"Of course I won't try," Tinney said virtuously.

The other's sardonic eyes dwelt on him. "That's well. You see, the gods seldom exact personal vengeance, but there's an unpleasant sort of justice that takes over in such cases. An automatic adjustment, more or less. Often mortals have tried to get the best of the gods. Please don't do that, Tinney."

"I wouldn't think of it."

"Sorry I put the idea into your head," Mr. Silver said. "Let's get out of here before the meteor strikes."

AS THEY reached the door, there was a whistling crash. The crash kept re-echoing; the whistle kept shrilling in Tinney's head. His eyes, he discovered, were closed.

He opened them. He was staring up at a white ceiling.

His skull ached. What the devil had happened?

"Sorry," said a familiar voice. Mr. Silver appeared. "A falling tile hit you. I couldn't guard against accidents. But nobody died."

Tinney licked his lips. "W-what happened?"

"What you wanted. The meteor struck. Here!" Silver said, thrusting a folded newspaper into Tinney's hands. "I have work to do. See you later."

He vanished. Tinney read the paper. Exultation filled him.

The shop had been gutted. That automatically canceled his lease. As Silver had said, no one had been seriously hurt by the accident. The meteor itself had crashed into an adjoining shop, and the resultant fire had gutted half a city block. The entire property had been owned by the same man, Jonas Kidder.

"Good!" said Tinney, who didn't like Mr. Kidder. Then his jaw dropped as he read on.

The meteor had contained diamonds. Not many, but they were large ones, and for the most part nearly perfect. An unusual happenstance. Yet scientists admitted that there was no reason why diamonds shouldn't exist in a meteorite.

Since the object had fallen on Kidder's property, he profited accordingly. He had become even more wealthy than before. . . .

"Oh, damn!" Tinney gasped. His triumph had turned to ashes. Why hadn't he taken Silver's advice? If the meteorite had fallen on his new Jersey property, he'd be a rich man now. Why hadn't Silver been more explicit?

Obviously because the gods liked their little jests. Their weakness in that respect was notorious. Tinney closed his eyes and considered.

Next time . . . next time! This wasn't a fairy tale in which you had a limited num-

ber of wishes. Mr. Silver was presumably ready and willing to assist Tinney in various profitable ways. If the god could bring down a meteorite from the sky, he could certainly perform equally potent miracles.

Then—

Money. That was the answer, of course. Tinney found a button and summoned the nurse. He learned that he could leave the hospital within a few days. . . .

In the meantime, Mr. Silver appeared. "The insurance has gone through okay," he remarked. "I'm handling the business for you, by proxy."

"I didn't sign a proxy—"

"Well, your signature's on it. What are your plans now? Going to open another shop?"

"Look," Tinney said, "I want to get some money."

"There's insurance money."

"I mean—an inexhaustible purse, or something like that. Can you—"

Mr. Silver nodded and vanished. He reappeared to thrust a leather wallet into Tinney's hands.

"This is what you want, I think. Unzip it."

Tinney obeyed. He took out ten twenty-dollar bills.

"Now close it. Good. Open it again."

Tinney extricated ten more bills of the same denomination. He looked up inquiringly.

Mr. Silver shrugged. "An old trick. The cornucopia formula. The inexhaustible purse isn't new by any means. Each time you open that wallet, there'll be two hundred bucks in it. A good round sum, two hundred bucks."

**T**INNEY tried it again. And again. And yet again. It worked, all right. There was a thousand dollars in his lap. Struck by a thought, he compared the serial numbers of the bills.

"That's all right," Mr. Silver smiled.

"They're legal tender."

"But where do they come from? They're not new—"

"Treasure trove. We have power over all dark places. Wherever money is hidden in the dark, our hands can reach it. This batch, for example, came from the cache of an old miser in the—um—the Panamint Mountains in California."

"But it's stolen!"

Mr. Silver didn't answer. There was a mocking gleam in his blue eyes. Tinney flushed and glanced away.

"So you'll keep the wallet, of course," Mr. Silver said. "Fair enough. Now let's make plans."

"Plans? I—"

"You don't want to open another store, do you?"

"Lord, no!" Tinney exclaimed. "I'm sick of that. I—I think I'll retire."

"Not yet you won't," Mr. Silver told him. "I want to see the world. Take part in life, as it were. You're going to become a practicing magician, Tinney."

"Uh?"

"Like Houdini and those boys. Tinney the Great. You'll tour the country. I'll act as your assistant."

"But I'm not a magician," Tinney expostulated. "I can't do a thing like that."

"Leave it to me," Silver smiled. "All you'll have to do is follow my orders, and—there'll be magic."

"Now wait a minute. I don't like the idea at all. I don't want to travel. I—"

"You're an ungrateful so-and-so, aren't you?" Mr. Silver inquired. "I've made you wealthy. You can live in luxury for the rest of your life. All I ask is your cooperation for—say—two years. After that I'll have had enough of earth for a while, and I'll push off. You won't see me again. You can settle back and enjoy your ill-gotten spoils."

Tinney pulled at his lower lip. "But—"

"It seems a fair bargain to me. But if

you prefer, I'll take back the wallet and try someone else. Eh?"

"No!" Tinney said sharply. "I'll do it. Of course I'll do it."

Mr. Silver smiled once more, rather sardonically. "One deals with the lower orders on their own ground," he remarked cryptically. "Well, I fly. There's much to be done. See you presently."

He vanished. Tinney lay back and considered, clutching the wallet greedily. Two years of road shows . . . *um*. It might be worse. Not the sort of life he enjoyed, but—

Mr. Silver was busy. The next day traffic in Times Square was halted by a curious phenomenon. Above the pedestrian island in the center of the street, slightly north of the subway kiosk near the Times Building, a human form was observed floating in midair. A female human form. A strikingly pretty one, in an intriguing bathing suit. It was difficult to tell whether she was alive or dead for her eyes were closed, and she floated, face down, twenty-five feet above street level.

Great interest was aroused.

A FIRE-TRUCK was summoned, and the ladder swung upright. The body of the girl floated up, beyond the reach of the topmost fireman. When the truck had departed, the girl descended to her former level.

There she stayed, with occasional excursions into the upper atmosphere. The Mayor came down and was photographed. A cowboy from Madison Square Garden tried to lasso the floating girl. There was little work done in the offices adjoining Times Square. There were more people outside the Paramount Theater than there were inside the building.

Matters remained static until nightfall, when the girl abruptly vanished. In her place a shower of leaflets came fluttering down. They read:

TINNEY THE GREAT IS COMING!

The World's Greatest Greatest Magician  
Will Soon Appear in New York!

BE READY!

IT IS regrettable that already Joseph Tinney was considering the safest and best method of double-crossing Mr. Silver. Nothing crude, of course. And definitely nothing dangerous. The thing was, Tinney didn't want to waste the next two years playing vaudeville circuits.

It seemed a small matter, and no doubt was. But Tinney was avariciously anxious to employ his new-found fortune in ways best known to himself. Hedonistic by nature, he nevertheless would not willingly have caused pain to another—unless it seemed necessary.

In this case, it seemed necessary. Why waste two years? More than forty of them had been wasted already in hard work. Tinney wanted to take his inexhaustible fortune and raise hell. He wanted to go to South America—Rio, Buenos Aires, and other locations publicized by Don Ameche. He wanted—lots of things.

He wanted them now!

"But," his more sensible self argued, "why take a chance? Two years isn't so long. And when the time's up, you'll be completely free. Mr. Silver said so."

"Damn Mr. Silver," was the inaudible response. "Why should I play nursemaid to him for the next two years?"

"A bargain's a bargain."

"It didn't cost Silver anything, did it? If I were a god, I'd have something better to do than travel around the country on the vaudeville circuit."

"But you can have plenty of fun while you do."

"I wouldn't feel safe," Tinney argued passionately. "You know how gods are. Capricious. He might take it into his head to do—anything!"

"So you're going to get the jump on him, eh? Louse."

"Shut up!" Tinney commanded, and was obeyed. He turned his thoughts to the immediate problem. Getting rid of Mr. Silver.

It didn't sound easy, and was harder than it sounded. You couldn't sprinkle holy water on the man. You couldn't shoot him with a silver bullet. Well, he wasn't a man—or a demon. He was a god.

Tinney brooded.

He had found no answer several days later, when Mr. Silver informed him that a huge New York theater had been rented for the initial performance.

"Rented?"

"I used argument," Silver smiled. "After all, you're a big name in New York now. I've been giving you a great deal of publicity."

"I know," Tinney grunted. "I saw the papers. An elephant on top of the Empire State, for heaven's sake! What a thing to do!"

"Oh, it wasn't a real elephant. And it was marvelous publicity."

They were in the uptown apartment Silver had rented for the two of them. Gray light slanted in through the tall windows. A storm was approaching.

Silver cast a vaguely apprehensive glance around. "You remember your lines? And the action?"

"Sure. But—"

"Then you'll be at the theater tonight. Don't forget the time. I'll meet you there."

"What's the rush?" Tinney asked, but got no answer. Mr. Silver had vanished. He evinced a curious fear of thunderstorms, Tinney decided. He began to wonder why, but was distracted by the buzzing of the house phone.

**I**T WAS Luciferno the Great. He said, "Hi, Tinney. I'm coming up—" and the phone went dead. Soon afterward, the

gaunt, diabolic-looking man appeared at the door, grinned at Tinney, and collapsed in the nearest chair.

"Had a hard night. I was trying to keep Zeno sober. Got a drink?"

Tinney went to the sideboard and mixed highballs. "Zeno? Is he on a tear?"

"Yeah," said Luciferno slowly. "Funny. He hardly ever touched the stuff. . . . If I didn't know him better, I'd say he was crazy. He kept telling me that you'd—um—sold your soul to the devil."

Tinney laughed falsely. "Imagine that!"

"I'd rather not," Luciferno said, tugging at his goatee. "I just dropped over to wish you luck in your debut tonight. You joined the Union, didn't you?"

"Sure." Mr. Silver had attended to that detail.

"You've been hiding your light under a bushel, Tinney. The publicity you've been knocking out lately—it's good. I wish you'd sold me some of those illusions before you gave up your shop."

"Oh, well," Tinney said vaguely. "I had to save a few for myself."

"Um." Luciferno had something on his mind. That was obvious. Finally he put down his drink and leaned forward.

"I'm a magician," he said quietly. "I work with illusions. Tricks, if you like. Real magic doesn't exist. All my life I've known that."

Tinney glanced away. "True."

"But I *have* wondered, sometimes, if—hell!" Luciferno said sharply. "You know, Zeno got me going last night. We were both pretty tight. And—who is this man Silver, anyway?"

Before Tinney could answer, the buzzer warned him of someone at the door. He rose with relieved alacrity and admitted the newcomer. It was Professor Zeno.

The little man was still drunk. He bounced into the room like a rubber ball, glared at Tinney, and swung toward Luciferno. "Well?" he snapped. "I'm glad

to see you're safe. I got worried about what *he* might do to you, alone up here."

"Good Lord, man," Luciferno pacified, and grinned at Tinney. "Zeno got me to come up here and see you. He was waiting in the lobby. . . . For my money, somebody's acting a little crazy. But I don't know who."

Zeno went uninvited to the sideboard and poured himself a stiff hooker. "Okay," he said, turning. "Ask Tinney. Just ask him. Ask him who that—that horror Silver is!"

"Who's that horror Silver?" Luciferno asked obediently.

Tinney sat down and recovered his highball. "He's not the devil, anyhow."

Zeno gulped brandy and shuddered. "You're a liar. He—he worked magic for me in the back room of your shop. Pretty nasty magic. He wasn't faking."

Luciferno sighed. "An old-timer like you being taken in by smart patter," he remonstrated. "I'm surprised."

Tinney said suddenly, "He isn't human—Silver, I mean. Zeno's right."

**T**HERE was a dead silence. Tinney went on, watching his glass: "He's not the devil. He's a—a god."

Luciferno was having trouble with his highball. Zeno watched Tinney with round, slightly glazed eyes.

"Spill it," Luciferno said. "I'm going around in circles. You and Zeno—let's have it!"

Tinney obeyed. He told them what had happened. Not everything, though. He omitted a few significant items—such as the inexhaustible wallet.

When he had finished, the long silence grew longer. Zeno was the first to break it.

"Devil or god, he's not anything that belongs in this world. You've got to—to exorcise him!"

Tinney's smile was lop-sided. "Just

like that, eh? D'you think I want to have him around?"

**L**UCIFERNO said carefully, "I don't admit that I'm convinced, of course. But working on the assumption—the perfectly insane assumption—that Silver *is* a god, it's obvious that something has got to be done. I spent years learning my trade. I can make an elephant disappear from the stage—and I get paid plenty for things like that. Now suppose this guy Silver can wave his hand and make—hell, make a whole theater disappear! It's unfair competition."

"Eh?" Tinney didn't quite comprehend.

"Suppose you were a miner," Luciferno explained. "You made a living digging gold out of the ground. Somebody comes along with the Philosopher's Stone and says he can transform anything into gold. Unfair competition. Nobody'd pay you to work in a mine if gold could be got out of empty air. Magic can create far more spectacular effects than stage-craft. I can't compete with a god. Neither can Zeno. It—why, audiences simply won't pay to see us. We'll be penny-ante stuff to them. They'll want the real thing—your friend Silver."

Tinney hadn't considered that aspect of the situation. Personally, he didn't give a damn. But the problem seemed sufficiently important to Luciferno and Zeno.

"It isn't my fault," he said at last. "I'm just as anxious to get rid of Silver as you are. I didn't want to become a magician."

"Can't we pay him off?"

"He's a god," Tinney reminded the other.

"True. He wouldn't need money. . . . What about threats?"

"He's a god," Tinney repeated. "Dangerous—you know!"

Zeno shivered. "It's against nature. He's a menace to civilization."

Luciferno finished his highball. "I don't

know why I'm discussing this crazy business seriously. But I've got to protect my business."

Tinney veiled his eyes as he considered a new thought. "What you said about threats—"

"Eh?"

"Silver told me that he's handicapped by his human form. He's more or less subject to natural laws."

Zeno's round face was flushed. "He wouldn't listen to threats."

"That's just it. The—the creature's a menace. We'll be justified in acting to protect ourselves. Lu, your floating basket illusion—"

"I know. What about it?"

"You use a stooge inside the basket—and then stick swords through the wicker. Suppose you didn't use a stooge. Suppose—Silver—"

"That's murder!" Curiously enough, it was Zeno who spoke.

"Murder?" Tinney glared at him. "You're the guy who's been yelling about devils. Is it murder to liquidate a devil?"

"I—"

Luciferno stood up. "Zeno, we don't want Silver coming in while we're talking. Go down to the lobby and stand guard. If you see him, phone up here. Quick!"

THE note of command in his voice was conclusive. Zeno, after a worried glance around, departed. Luciferno mixed a strong highball and smiled at Tinney.

"Now we can talk."

"Silver can appear out of the air, Lu. It's no use having Zeno stand guard downstairs."

"I know. I just wanted to get him out of the way. Why are you so willing to give up a theater tour that'll mean big dough? You're not in the chips."

"I'm afraid of Silver."

Luciferno gulped whiskey-and-soda and leaned back. "I'll wait till you're ready to

tell me. Here's the angle, Tinney. I'll help you get rid of Silver. But—what's in it for me?"

Tinney thought quickly. "Five thousand bucks."

"Ten."

"Ten."

"You agreed too quickly," Luciferno chuckled. "You've got dough—big dough. You got it from Silver, eh? I thought so! Now spill the dirt!"

But Tinney stubbornly refused to tell Luciferno about the wallet. They compromised, finally, with an exchange of fifty thousand dollars. Tinney simply retired to his bathroom and pulled currency out of his wallet till he had the required sum.

The plans were made at last, and Zeno called back upstairs. But the little man refused to have any part in the business. He advocated calling a priest. He was afraid of Mr. Silver. He didn't mind admitting it. He boasted of the fact. It proved that he was a damn sight more sensible than his colleagues, he said . . .

Luciferno and Tinney let him go, toasted each other with a final highball, and parted. Both were well satisfied.

There would be no question of murder. Not without a *corpus delicti*. Luciferno, being a master of stage magic, could easily arrange for the hiding and ultimate disposal of Silver's corpse. And Tinney . . .

He would not have embarked on the plan had he not considered it completely safe. Suppose Luciferno failed? Tinney would blandly disavow any knowledge of the other magician's murderous intentions. Luciferno had acted on his own initiative, and surely Tinney wasn't to blame for that! Besides, Luciferno could always contend—if he failed—that he hadn't planned to injure Silver. The sword had slipped, that was all.

There were plenty of outs.

Tinney drank another highball and got ready for the show.



Before he left, Luciferno telephoned.

"Been thinking. Swords, you know. . . . We can't afford to take any chances. I've got a better gag."

Tinney himself had been a little worried about whether or not cold steel could injure Silver. "Yeah? What?"

"A metal cabinet—the X-13 model. I'll challenge Silver to get himself out of it. He'll get inside, and the moment the door's shut, everything will be over. He'll be incinerated."

"Thermite?"

"Something like it. There'll be no trace. We'll open the cabinet, admit that Silver managed to escape—and there'll be no kickback. All right?"

"Perfect," Tinney agreed. . . .

**I**T WAS a sell-out at the theater. S. R. O. signs gladdened the manager's heart. Park Avenue had turned out *en masse*. Broadway Rose circulated in the lobby. Everybody from Walter Winchell to Alex Woolcott was in evidence. The Little Flower showed up, hoping, perhaps, for a fire. A big night.

It was to be far bigger than anyone realized.

Joseph Tinney, resplendent in white tie and tails, sat in his dressing-room and from time to time discussed a bottle of Scotch he had thoughtfully brought with him. For the twenty-second time the manager popped in, scrabbling at his hair.

"Mr. Tinney! The props haven't come yet."

"Forget it."

"But you need props! And where's your troupe? I—"

"It's my show, isn't it?" Tinney snapped.

"It's my theater! If anything goes wrong—"

"Nothing will go wrong," said Mr. Silver blandly as he pushed open the door. "Everything's under control, Mr. Tinney."

The god was looking like a sleek, well-

fed cat tonight, slim and handsome in a dinner jacket, the tail-end of an amused smile lingering on his lips. He dismissed the manager with a nod.

"Almost curtain time," he said. "How do you feel? Nervous?"

"Not a bit," Tinney lied. He was struck with a sudden qualm of fear. Silver's smile was definitely nasty. But then it always was, more or less. Still, if anything went amiss—

Tinney remembered his inexhaustible wallet and steeled himself. Two years of trouping . . . no! He wanted to enjoy life now. And he was going to!

"Two minutes to curtain," said a page-boy, popping into the room.

"Okay. . . . Let's go, Tinney."

They went out and stood in the wings. Mr. Silver applied his eye to a peep-hole.

"Good audience. The orchestra's playing Grieg. That's the cue."

Obediently Tinney walked to front center. With a resounding crash the excerpt from *Peer Gynt* ended. The curtain rose, revealing a rather ill-at-ease Joseph Tinney standing gaping at the audience.

Remembering his action, he raised his arms high and permitted a diabolic grin to grow on his countenance. It was not an unqualified success. Tinney was not by nature intended to be an actor. He seemed on the verge of going mad, in a pretty unpleasant fashion. In a moment, perhaps, he would drop on all fours and hurl himself across the footlights, teeth bared.

"Oh, well," said Mr. Silver, and made a quick, unobtrusive gesture with one hand. The stage was instantly filled with a dense fog that blotted out Tinney's figure. Tinney found himself standing beside Silver, gasping a little.

As the smoke cleared, a group of green girls was revealed. Their hair was emerald, and behind each one stood a tree.

"Dryads," Mr. Silver remarked.

The dryads broke into a dance. The

fog cleared still farther, permitting the audience a glimpse of an odd figure who sat on a stump, blowing vigorously into a set of pipes. The person's lower extremities were unusual.

"Pan?" Tinney whispered.

"Just a satyr pinch-hitting for him. All the stays are musicians. . . ."

A group of centaurs burst onto the stage, and the dryads leaped astride them. The centaurs formed echelons and trotted obediently about the stage. They were apparently well trained.

The manager of the theatre was watching Tinney out of thoughtful, rather wondering eyes.

THERE was a deafening roar. Something lumbered on to the stage. It was a dragon—indubitably a dragon. The immense jaws gaped, fire shot from them, and the centaurs and dryads disappeared. The satyr blew a despairing toot and fell off the stump, to vanish from the audience's ken.

"Now," said Mr. Silver, giving Tinney a little push.

Tinney unwillingly advanced on stage. The dragon stared at him broodingly.

Tinney raised his arms. The dragon began to shrink.

The audience yelled. This was good. A swell illusion. The only dissenter was a youth from Brooklyn, seated in the balcony, who remarked scornfully to his companion, "It's all a fake. I don't take it serious."

"Gee," said his companion, and giggled.

Meanwhile the dragon had been reduced to the size of a Gila monster. Tinney picked it up by the tail and flung it into the air. It turned into a hovering horror with wings, a vulture's body, and the face of an ill-tempered woman. Squalling, the harpy swept out over the audience.

"Wires," said the Brooklynite, nodding wisely. "It's on wires." He ducked as

the monster swooped toward his head.

Mr. Silver yawned in a bored fashion and twitched his fingers. The harpy returned to the stage, perched on Tinney's shoulder, and began to sing a popular ballad of the day.

Things went on. . . .

There was an interruption. A tall, saturnine man strode up the aisle, followed by six porters carrying a huge metal cabinet. It was Luciferno.

Tinney's heart flipped over.

By this time the show was well under way. Silver's magic had created illusion after illusion. The manager had retired to his office for an ice-bag and a pint of gin. The stage-hands were talking among themselves. The audience, however, was applauding fiercely.

Luciferno stopped by the runway and yelled something. Tinney hesitated. On stage at the moment were sixteen mermaids, lying on their backs and flipping their tails in unison, with an accuracy that rivaled the Rockettes.

With a questioning glance at Silver, Tinney stepped out on the stage. As he did so, the mermaids vanished.

There was silence.

Luciferno said, "Are you Tinney the Great?"

"That's right."

"I am Luciferno!" the rival magician cried, and vanished in a cloud of crimson smoke. When it cleared, he was standing on the stage beside Silver. The audience applauded.

Luciferno held up his hand for silence. "Wait! I'm here to challenge Tinney the Great. I claim that I'm a greater magician than he. To prove it—"

He raised his arms. Doves began to pour from his coat-sleeves. Dozens of them. Hundreds, apparently. Presently the stage was filled with the birds. . . .

Tinney squinted into the wings at Mr. Silver, who nodded reassuringly and

snapped his fingers. Instantly a head thrust itself out from Tinney's bosom. It wasn't a reassuring sort of head. It was flat, reptilian, and quite horrid. The scales were of a virulent shade of green, and the head, after peering dreamily into Tinney's eyes for one ghastly moment, swung around and darted its tongue at Luciferino, who could not help quailing.

The snake commenced to come out of Tinney's shirt. Inch after inch, foot after foot, yard after yard, poured out. The serpent was endless. It was longer than the longest boa. It lapped itself around the horrified Tinney till the man had completely vanished, concealed under a palpitating mound of shining green coils.

The serpent vanished. There was no trace of Tinney.

He came scrambling up the runway, however, breathing hard, and faced Luciferino once more. "Now what?" he inquired.

Luciferino gestured. The porters lugged the metal box to the stage.

"This!" he cried. "I challenge you to escape from the Enchanted Cabinet. Houdini himself was baffled by it."

Tinney gulped. "Me?"

"Ha!" Luciferino roared. "You dare not try! Then watch!" He swung open the doors of the cabinet, entered, and stood looking out at the audience. "I call for volunteers to examine this prison. Will someone in the audience please—"

**T**HERE was no lack of response. Four men and a woman hurried up the runway, scrutinized the box, tapped it, and seemed satisfied.

"Now lock it," Luciferino demanded.

Good Lord! Did the man intend to incinerate himself, Tinney wondered? He caught the tail end of a significant glance from Luciferino and felt relief. This was the build-up. . . .

The cabinet was closed and locked, and,

after a few moments, opened again. Luciferino wasn't in it. He came down an aisle, grinning, and leaped lightly onto the stage.

The audience applauded like mad.

Luciferino bowed. "Wait," he said at last. "Let Tinney the Great try and duplicate my feat. Or better yet!" He seemed to expand. "Let him choose some subject to be locked in the Enchanted Cabinet—and magic him out of it!"

Tinney hesitated, but Luciferino went on swiftly.

"First let me prove that it can be done—by a great magician. Will someone in the audience volunteer—"

There were several responses, and Luciferino selected one. Tinney recognized the man. A stooge. At Luciferino's command, he scrambled into the cabinet.

The routine was gone through again. And, as before, the subject appeared in the aisle.

"Do you dare to attempt that?" Luciferino demanded of Tinney.

"Why—yes. O course. I—"

"Then I shall select the subject, so there will be no chance of trickery. I select that man!" Luciferino pointed into the wings, directly at Mr. Silver, who had been lounging against a prop, obviously enjoying himself.

The god smiled and sauntered out on the stage. He didn't seem troubled. At Luciferino's request he entered the cabinet. Only Tinney saw the other magician make a slight adjustment inside the metal box.

Luciferino slammed the door on the subject. There was silence. The audience waited. . . .

"That did it," Luciferino whispered softly to Tinney. "I released the mechanism. When I shut the door, Silver went up like a puff of smoke."

The audience began to applaud. The two magicians looked over the footlights, and nearly fainted. Sauntering casually up the aisle, beaming happily, was Mr. Silver.

Luciferno hastily swung open the doors of the cabinet. A slight odor of scorching drifted out. The inner walls were burned, Tinney saw. Then he had no time to make further investigations. Mr. Silver was on the stage.

"They did it with trapdoors," said the Brooklynite.

Silver's smile was more than a little nasty. He bowed to the audience, turned to the white-faced Luciferno, and said:

"Tinney the Great's magic is stronger than locks or bars. Tinney the Great has such tremendous powers that even his assistants are greater sorcerers than all other magicians. With your permission—" He bowed to Tinney, who forced a smile.

SILVER faced the audience, snapped his fingers, and turned into a marble statue. Then he turned into Gypsy Rose Lee. Then he turned into an eagle. Then—  
It kept on like that.

Finally Silver, in his own shape, proposed an experiment. "Let's have a final contest. Let my master and Luciferno each try to make the other disappear. The one who succeeds is the undoubted master of his art."

The audience liked the idea. So Tinney and his opponent faced each other, while Mr. Silver leaned negligently against the back-drop.

Luciferno began. From somewhere he whipped a sheet and tossed it over Tinney's head. He chanted a sonorous phrase or two. And removed the sheet.

Tinney hadn't vanished.

"Your turn," said Luciferno, not very happily.

Tinney's hand rose without volition. He felt Silver's insistent gaze upon him. Without will of his own, Tinney spoke a word in no known tongue. His fingers twitched.

Luciferno vanished.

"Ulp!" Tinney said, and staggered. Silver covered swiftly.

"This magic is extremely difficult," he explained to the audience, after the applause had died. "My master is exhausted. And it's time for the intermission."

With a crash of music from the pit the curtain dropped. Silver and Tinney were isolated on the stage.

"I wish you wouldn't try tricks like that," the god remarked. "It doesn't do any good, you know. Well, I'll give you another chance. One can't expect too much of mortals."

"I don't know what you mean," Tinney gulped.

"Perhaps you don't," Silver said thoughtfully. "Still . . . it isn't wise. I'm above personal vengeance, myself. I wouldn't harm you—it'd be like kicking a kitten for clawing you. But the Fates are tricky old girls, remember. There's an automatic sort of justice that—well, just keep it in mind."

"I—"

"Forget it. I've got to call up some naiads for the next act. See you later."

"Wait! Where's Luciferno?"

Mr. Silver smiled nastily. "On an island, with an old friend of mine. Ha!" He vanished.

Tinney pushed past the stage-hands and hurried to his dressing-room, where he drank long and deeply from his bottle. Things were looking bad. Still and all, they might be worse. Silver might have been—unpleasant.

Above personal vengeance, was he? Well . . . that was a relief, anyhow.

The thin air swirled before Tinney like a furling curtain and a woman's angry and melodious voice began, "Listen!" before she had completely materialized out of emptiness. "I don't like trespassers, do you hear?"

THE astounded Tinney looked up. She was a particularly luscious creature in a form-fitting garment of thin white linen,

and her black eyes, lambent with fury, reminded Tinney vaguely of Theda Bara's heyday. He blinked at her and took another drink, being by now far beyond astonishment.

Yet he couldn't help realizing that this was not merely another of the pretty dryad chorines whom Mr. Silver apparently ordered up by the dozen. She was a definite personality, and a very angry one. Black brows meeting above magnificent black eyes, she went on in a rich voice:

"I hate trespassers! Somebody's going to pay for this, and it looks as if you—"

"I haven't done anything!" Tinney said hastily. "This is Silver's show."

"Who? Silver? I don't know what you're talking about. I'm talking about that tall, stupid-looking man you teleported to my home. He's the third this week, and I tell you it's got to stop. Somebody's playing jokes, and I won't stand for it. I like isolation. Peace and quiet. And you have the nerve to magic riff-raff all over my island. I warn you, I won't have it."

Tinney stared at her. Magnificent was the word for her, he thought. Lush magnificence in the rather overpowering fashion of a generation ago, when an angry lady was something to quail before. Dangerous and lovely. . . .

He said, "I didn't do a thing. It was Silver. He—"

"Silver? Not Q. Silver?"

"Uh-huh. Quentin."

"Quentin indeed," said the woman, and hurled the rich black ringlets off her white shoulders in a furious gesture. "Quentin! So he's back on earth again, is he? I might have known it. This is his idea of a joke. Well, I never liked him and I don't think it's funny. He did me a dirty trick once before."

The black brows met again and she tapped a sandaled foot.

"Oh?" A thought began to take form in Tinney's mind. Perhaps. . . .

"Listen," he said, "maybe you can help me. I don't like Silver either. Uh—have a drink."

The lady shot him a piercingly suspicious glance. Then the suspicion faded and she permitted herself a slightly mollified smile. "Thanks. Why should I help you?"

"You said you didn't like Silver."

"I don't." She rolled the whiskey around her tongue thoughtfully. "Nice stuff, this. Well, what's the angle?"

Tinney quickly recapitulated. The lady, watching him with a burning black gaze, smiled like a tiger when he had finished. He thought again how extremely beautiful she was, and how far he wished he were from her.

"Why, that's easy," she said, holding out her glass. "Give me a little more—thanks. Haven't you noticed how Silver behaves when it thunders? Frightens him, doesn't it? He's probably A. W. O. L.—absent from Olympus without leave. So he hides during storms when Zeus is abroad."

"I'm afraid—"

"Merc—Silver does it every once in a while," she explained, sipping her drink. "Zeus gets mad as hell till he finds him again. If Zeus knew where your little pal was, he'd snatch him back to Olympus before you could take a deep breath."

"Oh?"

"It's a cinch. Do you remember the spell you used to teleport that man—who?—Luciferno?"

Tinney shuddered. "I wish I could forget it."

"Use it on Silver, fat-head. Just change the first syllable. Make it *Olympus-zak'thing* instead of *Aea-zak'thing*. He'd be teleported to Olympus instantly. And once Zeus sees him, Mr. Silver won't be back to earth in a hurry." She drained her glass and scowled above it, while her richly red lips curved in no pleasant smile.

"Interfere with my island, will he?" she muttered, and added cryptically, "Moly, indeed."

"Moly?"

"Oh—nothing. It's a plant—an herb. Quentin!" She fell silent, brooding..

TINNEY poured her another drink and replenished his own glass. She looked menacing as she stood above him, frowning, and yet singularly exciting too—rather like a typhoon about to strike.

"Won't it be dangerous?" he inquired.

"Oh, no. Silver doesn't take vengeance on earthlings nowadays. He's an easy-going god. Anyhow, he has it coming to him. He shouldn't have meddled with my island, either now or that other time. He deserves punishment and he's overdue for it. There's a sort of justice, you know—the Fates see to that."

She bent a speculative gaze upon Tinney, who quailed without knowing just why.

"Justice," she said again. "They've got it working perfectly now, though goodness knows they should, after all this time. But who'd ever have thought that *you'd* be the means of avenging me on Mer—Silver after all these years! Of course, judging by the story you've told me, there's a little matter of debit against you, too. I wonder—"

With a swish of suddenly displaced air, Mr. Silver made a neat magical landing between them.

The woman dashed her emptied glass to fragments on the floor and shot splendid black lightnings at the newcomer under thunderous black brows.

"Now!" she rolled out the word. "Quick, earthling—the spell!"

Mr. Silver was momentarily taken by surprise. So was Tinney, but desperation sharpened his mind and quickened his reactions. Almost by instinct his hand was moving in a series of gestures. And he

was chanting a polysyllabic word he remembered quite well. . . .

"*Olympus-zak'thing*—"

"Wait!" Silver said urgently, beginning to fade. "Tinney! I warn you—"

Tinney mouthed the last phrase. Mr. Silver vanished.

There was a clap of thunder from far away. The woman patted her snake-like curls.

"That was Zeus. Well, you won't see Silver any more. It'll be centuries before Zeus lets him out of sight again. And now—"

Tinney drained the bottle. His eyes were glistening with triumph. "Here's to crime!" he proposed.

"Ah," said the woman, smiling an alarming smile.

Tinney was too drunk with exultation and Scotch to see it at the moment. "Here's to the Fates, too," he added. "Good old girls—"

"Shut up," said the woman ominously. "The Fates just did me a good turn, and I feel I owe them something. A little matter of balancing their books for them, eh, Tinney?"

He stared at her, a cool premonition stealing over him. "What do you mean?"

"It couldn't have been merely accident that I, of all people, got involved in your nasty little schemes. . . . I wonder if I've lost my old knack," she mused, paying no attention to Tinney's questioning face.

"Eh?"

"Thus," she said. "And thus . . ."

THE manager, tugging worriedly at his hair, headed for Tinney's dressing-room. "Good heavens," he muttered. "Less than a minute to curtain time. Doesn't the man know enough to answer the call-bell? I wish—"

His wish died on his lips as he pushed the dressing-room door open a crack. He retreated as it swung wider and a woman

emerged—a woman who stood facing him with a smile of extreme satisfaction on her lips. She was exceptionally handsome. But the manager didn't know her. He blinked.

"What are you doing here?"

"Meting out justice," she purred. "And a more appropriate justice I never heard of."

"Huh? Who the—who are you?"

"The name," she said, "is Circe."

The manager stared at her blankly. "Oh. Well." He raised his voice. "Tinney! Mr. Tinney! It's curtain time." No response from beyond the door, which was once more closed. Only a curious hasty clicking. . . .

He's inside," said the woman. The manager glanced around, just in time to see the circumambient air engulf her statu-

esque charms. He scarcely blinked. After what had been going on under this roof tonight, nothing would ever surprise him again.

"Tinney!" he bawled, thrusting his shoulder against the door, which had apparently stuck. "Curtain time! The orchestra's vamping! Come out!"

THE door yielded suddenly, and the manager staggered into the dressing-room, almost losing his balance. For a moment he did not realize that the cubicle's occupant was obviously not the magician. Automatically he snapped:

"Curtain going up, Tinney! Didn't you hear me?"

This time there was an answer—of sorts.

"Oink!"