

Strange STORIES

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*Professor Enderby Warned
His Visitor Not to Open
Up that Fatal Book Whose
Pages Held Within them a
Soul-Destroying Threat!*



*The form began to take a
hideous shape*

VIGIL

By
HAMPTON
WELLS

*Author of "Fear of the Dark,"
"The Wolf King," etc.*

IF SELF-ASSURANCE is a virtue, then the Junoesque Hermione Simmons was virtue's paragon. No person ever crossed the hewn-hickory threshold of Professor Enderby's cabin on the brink of the Susquehanna with more confidence of personal charm and welcome.

"Professor Enderby!" she accented cordially. "This wonderful old house—you're a dear to let me come!"

Professor Nathan Enderby hoisted his little, linen-clad body from the well hollowed easy chair, a long forefinger between the leaves of a book by John Ashton. He removed a pair of thick-lensed spectacles and smoothed down a curly gray forelock. His

gentle mouth opened, then closed again, in something akin to embarrassment. At a reception in New York the previous winter, he had been so injudicious as to tell Hermione Simmons where he spent his summers; but as for inviting her to visit him—well, it was too late now.

She clasped his small, sinewy hand with her long, over-manicured one. She was large for a woman, as he was small for a man, and smart grooming had given a false svelteness to her body. Only wise eyes, like the professor's mildly peering ones, would notice that her hair was too blatantly auburn, with too exact a wave; that her lips were too berry-red for nature; that her eyelashes flared too long to be real; that just beneath her jeweled ears fine white scars bespoke the face-lifter's attentions.

"Won't you sit down?" Professor Enderby was obliged to invite her.

Miss Simmons would. And she took, of all chairs in the room, that favorite from which he had risen to greet her unexpected arrival. The professor's solemn Chinese servant still lingered after having admitted this overwhelming avalanche of assurance and synthetic pulchritude.

"Fetch some drinks, Quong," ordered Enderby. "Miss Simmons, I can offer you only whiskey and soda, but it's very good."

He sought another chair, not quite as comfortable, near his littered desk. Hermione Simmons was too obviously appraising his sitting room's masculine appointments, undoubtedly scorning the oak-and-leather furniture, the rugless floor-planks, the plethora of books on stands and shelves. And he could see that she deplored the open fireplaces and the carbide lamp, even though it was a bright summer afternoon and neither was alight.

"Did I interrupt your work, or anything?" she inquired, though very patently she did not care.

"I was puzzling over something in this book of Ashton's," he admitted. "It is called, 'The Devil in Britain and America,' and—"

Without waiting for him to finish,

his guest plunged on into fresh whirls of words.

"I was driving to Chicago, and I knew that I mustn't pass by without seeing you, so I took a room at that quaint old tavern in your amazing little town; Marsville—or is it Myersville?" She broke off to stare at a signed photograph on the mantel-piece. "Who's that intriguing looking old man with the bushy hair?"

"A friend. His name is Albert Stainstein."

HERIMONE SIMMONS laughed a thrilling peal, and said that Albert Stainstein reminded her of a sheep dog. To mask Enderby's annoyance, the tactful Quong entered with two highballs on a tray.

The woman accepted one, sipped, then turned toward a shelf. "What a distinctive binding for that book," she crowed. "It's parchment! I must see it."

And she drew it from the chair without so much as a by-your-leave.

"It's bound in human skin," Professor Enderby informed her, as he took the other glass from Quong's tray.

Hermione Simmons squeaked like a large, coy rat, then giggled brightly.

"Why, Professor Enderby!" she reproved him, the book still in her red-tipped fingers. "How can you say such a bizarre thing?"

"Because it's the solemn truth. And I must ask you not to read that book."

Quong departed. Hermione Simmons laid the buff-colored volume on a smoking stand, and sipped more whiskey and soda. Her eyes widened in their collars of false lashes. "Why not?" she demanded.

"I'll try to tell you. About two hundred years ago, in that town of Myersville where you're stopping, a man was hanged."

"Lynched?"

"No, due process of colonial law. He was a witch."

"Witch?" she repeated. "How fantastic! Nobody believes in witches any more."

"But they do. This whole part of

the country believes in hexes and hexcraft, but to get back to my story. The book you see was in this man's possession when he was caught—a manuscript work that was old long before the hanging. The binding is newer, probably the work of the witch himself. And the prosecutors read only a little of the beginning, before they turned it over to a minister. That minister decided it should be buried, with appropriate prayer."

"How fantas—" But Hermione Simmons did not finish the inane repetition.

"The book was dug up a number of years later," the professor went on. "It caused a great deal of trouble. Three years ago it fell into my hands, after an unpleasant adventure."

"An unpleasant adventure?"

"Very," admitted Enderby. "For me, and for the man I got the book from. I keep it here because it would be dangerous in most hands."

"Then why not burn the thing?" she suggested, with a smile she thought superior.

"I tried once," he said. Hermione Simmons' eyes sought the book, but saw no mark of fire. "In any case, I don't think you should dip into it."

"Why, Professor Enderby?"

"Please. I must insist."

She appeared to accept that, and changed the subject at once. She gave her host news of various New Yorkers who, though he could remember them but vaguely, seemed to have sent him warm and even affectionate greeting. She spoke of numerous new dress shops, dance steps and refinements of fashionable card playing, all apparently much in vogue wherever she went, but all excruciatingly uninteresting to Enderby. Finally, in many cordial and strangely accented words, she bade him goodbye. He escorted her to the door, and found it hard to dissemble his relief as she got into a vivid green roadster and drove away along the tree-lined road toward Myersville.

Returning again to his parlor, Professor Enderby again reclaimed his easy chair and assigned Quong to

the mixing of a drink rather larger and stronger than the one he had taken with Hermione Simmons. When it arrived he took it in one hand, and Ashton's book about diabolism in the other. He was reading the conclusion of the preface:

The frontispiece is supposed to be the only specimen of Satanic calligraphy in existence, and is taken from the "Introductio in Chaldaicam Linguam" by Albonesi (Pavia, 1592). The author says that by the conjuration of Ludovico Spoletano the Devil was called up, and adjured to write a legible and clear answer to a question asked him. Some inviolable power took the pen, which seemed suspended in the air, and rapidly wrote what is facsimiled. The writing was given to Albonesi (who, however, confesses that no one can decipher it), and his chief printer reproduced it very accurately. I am told by experts that in some of the characters may be found a trace of Amharic, a language spoken in its purity in the province of Amhara (Ethiopia), and which, according to a legend, was the primeval language spoken in Eden.

Enderby turned to the frontispiece, which was made up of several lines of symbols, quite incomprehensible to him. Some of them suggested three-pronged forks, diabolical enough. "Facsimile of the only known specimen of the Devil's writing," read a legend below. But, if Ashton's preface was correct, this was really a printer's copy of such writing. What if one could translate it, understand it? Enderby grunted in intrigued puzzlement, and put out his hand to set aside his half-empty glass. Then, suddenly, he turned and looked hard at his smoking stand.

Surely Hermione Simmons had laid on that very stand the book bound in human skin. He had seen her do so. But now it was gone. It was not in its place on the shelf, either.

AT ONCE he called for Quong. The Chinese appeared.

"Did you pick up a book in this room, Quong?"

"No, Plofessa." The dignified, lemontinted face was reproachful. "Quong neva take up you' books, Plofessa Endaby."

"Then she sneaked it out," muttered Enderby, suddenly bristling in

strange, apprehensive anger. Aloud he said: "Quong, is the car still out of order?"

"Yes, Pofessa. Quong can't fix. Call mechanic—he come tomollee."

Enderby got to his feet and finished his drink. He buttoned the white linen coat around his slender, spry little figure.

"Get me my hat, Quong. I'm going to walk to town."

WHEN he arrived in Myersville—the walk across fields had taken a good two hours, and dusk was gathering—Hermione Simmons had left the little inn. She had not exactly checked out, said the man at the desk in the front hall; she had hurried through the place about half an hour before, and jumped into her car at the curb in front, and driven wildly away.

"All her stuff's still upstairs," finished the clerk.

"May I go up?" asked Enderby hopefully, and the clerk nodded. People in Myersville were usually complaisant about any of the professor's requests.

Hermione Simmons' room was at the head of the stairs, and the professor let himself in with the borrowed passkey. The bed was rumbled, and two open suitcases gushed expensive feminine frills. But it was on the floor that Enderby's eyes fastened themselves.

The rug had been kicked back from the clean, white-painted boards, and upon the bared space had been drawn a circle, more than a yard in diameter. It was of dull red, as were four names in big block letters, spaced evenly around the circle at the four points of the compass. In the exact center of this diagram was an intensely black stain, that might have been made by a pick, hot touch of fire, or the presence there of utter filth.

Enderby put on his spectacles, stooped and looked at the red markings, taking care not to touch them. They had apparently been made with a lipstick, of the same extreme redness as Hermione Simmons' mouth.

He read only one of the four names, grimaced over it, and knew what the other three were without looking at them.

Only once before had Professor Enderby seen the "evocation ring" of the diabolist sorcerers, but he had not forgotten how it looked nor what it meant. And this one had been completed, crudely but correctly, with all the proper words and rituals—even to the stain in the middle which showed how truly the ceremony had run its course to a climax he did not like to think about.

Straightening, the professor looked around. He saw on the bed that which he had come to reclaim. In making his way to it, he stepped with catlike gingerliness around the red-drawn circle on the floor.

The buff-colored book that Hermione Simmons had pilfered lay open on the pillow. It was written in strange but legible red characters with, at this point, a diagram similar to the circle in lipstick on the floor. Enderby glanced at the exposed pages, then caught up the book and snapped it shut. His eyes flashed worry signals.

"If she read that far," he said under his breath, "I can guess what it was that appeared. Naturally, she ran from it. And, naturally, she ran to—"

He tucked the book under his arm, left the room and went down the stairs.

"I'll make a deal with you," he said to the clerk.

"Deal?" repeated the other.

"There's a mess upstairs. But if you leave it alone and stay out of the room, I'll send over my servant to clean it up."

The clerk was curious, but sometimes things happened in Myersville that taught people not to interfere with Professor Enderby.

He studied Enderby.

"Just as you say, Professor," he agreed.

Enderby emerged from the hotel and went to a house in the next street. There he talked to a certain respectful young man, who agreed to

drive him back to his cabin beside the Susquehanna.

When Enderby sprang out at his own front door, he recognized a bright green roadster parked there. He felt that he might not be any too soon.

Hermione Simmons was again sitting in his favorite chair, but in no other way did she resemble the breezy interloper of the afternoon. She stared up wildly when he entered and spoke to her, but she did not answer. The professor passed through the room and interviewed Quong in the kitchen.

The Chinese listened closely to some rather exact directions as to the cleaning of the room at the inn. If he was amazed or daunted, his solemn face and slant eyes gave no hint. "Go now," finished Enderby. "A friend of mine is waiting at the front door with his car. You can have all day off tomorrow."

"Yes, Pofessa," assented Quong. "You be all light here?"

Enderby smiled and nodded, and Quong went out the back way.

WHEN he heard the rumble of the departing car, Enderby returned to his own sitting room. Hermione Simmons sat as he had left her. He lighted the carbide lamp, and set the front door slightly ajar.

"Let me tell you a story," he offered, but not hospitably. "Once a Russian soldier went to visit a comrade, and found him out. But a book lay open on a table—a book written in blood-colored characters, such as this one." He held up the retrieved volume, with its binding of human skin. "The strange words intrigued him, and he read them aloud. And then, in answer to the spell so ignorantly cast, there suddenly appeared—"

"Don't," It was a low but gusty response, like a puff of wind at a chimney. Hermione Simmons had awakened to life and horror. Her rouge was smeared, her hair disordered. "I didn't mean—"

"You're going to say that you did not mean any harm," broke in Enderby coldly. "I daresay you didn't.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. And the road to hell can be traveled from either direction. Things can come from hell just as easily as things can go there."

He carefully replaced the controversial book on its shelf, and selected instead a brown-backed volume. It was *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcraft*, by the Reverend John Gaule; and the date upon its flyleaf was 1646.

"Whether you want it or not," said Enderby, wiping his spectacles and putting them on, "you have procured yourself what is called a familiar—a personal spirit of evil."

Hermione Simmons shook her disordered dyed locks, in denial and horror.

The professor did not bother to argue with her.

"Have you ever heard," he began again, "of what happened when Cornelius Agrippa was lecturing at Louvain, four centuries ago? Probably not, or you wouldn't be in this present trouble, Miss Simmons. You can read about him in any library." He laid Gaule's book face down on his knee, and began to fill a pipe that looked very large for so small a man.

"Well, Agrippa's young wife had an admirer, a student, who wheedled from her the key to Agrippa's study. The student crept in, and found a most fascinating book—again all written in red, a favorite color of wizards." Professor Enderby was able to observe a trembling of Hermione Simmons' wretched, painted mouth. "With some difficulty, he deciphered aloud a few words which must have been a spell of magic; for there was a noise at the door, exactly as with the Russian soldier I have mentioned, and in there stole—"

"No!" wailed the unhappy woman. "It doesn't happen! It can't happen—not to everybody!"

"That's something of an admission, Miss Simmons—an admission that it happened to you, at least." Enderby thrust the pipe stem between his square white teeth, and struck a match. Tobacco would hardly spoil any diabolical doings, he reflected sagely—not when King James, the

witches' bane, hated it so deeply. The woman stirred in her chair.

"Don't get up," the professor said at once, with gentle insistence. "You are to sit right where you are, until I tell you to move."

Hermione Simmons subsided, gazing at him incredulously.

"I mean it," he assured her. "If you don't do as I say, I'll tie you there."

"Tie me?" she echoed faintly.

A GAIN he lifted the book on his knee. "Let me read aloud: 'Having taken the suspected witch—'"

"I'm not a witch!" she wailed hysterically.

"Not willingly, perhaps; but we have no time to argue the point." Enderby resumed his reading: "'Having taken the suspected witch, she is placed in the middle of a room upon a stool or table, cross-legged, or in some other uneasy posture.'"

He paused, and looked at her over the tops of his spectacles. Hermione Simmons appeared uneasy enough without being cross-legged, and he continued: "If she submit not, she is then bound with cords. There she is watched and kept without meat or sleep for the space of twenty-four hours for (they say) within that time they shall see—"

Hermione Simmons was weeping, loud enough to drown out several sentences, and Enderby had to wait for the sobs to subside before he could read on: "'—and lest it might come in some less discernible shape—'"

At last he fell silent, and perused the remainder of the passage to himself with set lips. He muttered something that sounded like "beastly," and put away that book also. Then he glanced at the clock. It was just fifteen minutes after eight, and quite dark.

Settling back in his chair, he talked to Hermione Simmons more charmingly than she deserved. Gradually the woman in the easy chair seemed to rise from her hysteria as from a slough, listening and calming the quiver of her lips. She even dabbed her hair into something like order, and made a twitery rejoinder or two.

"Am I really going to stay here all

night, Professor?" she timidly asked. "In this chair?"

"All night, and probably all day to-morrow. Without food or sleep."

"But how can I?"

"You must. I also am going to do without food or sleep. You see, we're going to have a visitor."

"I see. . . ." And her voice trailed off. Then: "You truly believe it is going to come?"

"Yes, and so do you. You saw it once already today."

"I've—I've tried not to think about it."

"Well, think now. Describe it."

She gazed at him, and courage flowed from the little professor to her.

"It came into view the way you told in those stories," she said. "First like smoke, but then taking form. And it put out hands, or something like hands—and caught hold of me—oh!"

Her eyes had turned toward the front door, which Enderby had set so slightly ajar. Something was there—a gross, crawly-surfaced lump, like a dark shoulder thrusting slowly in. Or was it no more than a cloud of particularly heavy smoke, of a sort that somehow kept from dissipating in the atmosphere? Whatever it was, a long, lean streamer of the vapor came slowly inward, its end lifting and swaying from side to side, like a half-blind snake.

Hermione Simmons shrieked, loud and shrill, so that the drums of the professor's ears rang unpleasantly. But he did not stir in his chair, nor noticeably draw tense. He watched the mystery at the door, with attention that was earnest but not fearful. In a moment the thing evaporated, or drew back.

THE woman shrank in her easy chair, growing smaller than even her tight girdling had ever made possible. Enderby rose, and with a steady hand poured water from a thermos carafe into two glasses. From a box in the top drawer of his desk he produced some small white tablets.

"Swallow two of these," he directed Hermione Simmons. "You needn't stare in such horror—they're nothing more occult than caffeine tablets.

They'll keep you from growing faint, or from going to sleep. I'm taking a dose myself."

And he did so.

The glass trembled in Hermione Simmons' over-manicured fingers. "That thing at the door," she said hoarsely. "That was how it—it looked at first."

"I know. I've been told, in similar cases. And it wanted to come in to you." Enderby blew from his pipe a swirl of smoke not unlike that exploring streamer that had shown itself briefly in the doorway. His small, slender figure relaxed easily, as though he were quite sure of what he said.

"Come it shall, within the twenty-four hours of our watch, though just now it's timid. For a witch's familiar cannot stay away. In the end, driven to your side, it must show itself in a solid form. And with a solid form I shall be able to deal."

He turned over many odds and ends in his mind. They began to shape into a plan of campaign. Rummaging in drawers of his desk, he produced first of all a metal-topped glass cylinder; then what looked like a coil of braided leather cord; and finally a stick or sliver of wood. These he arranged on the desk-top, within easy grasping distance.

Hours ticked by with very little conversation, and that little strained. Finally:

"It's nearly midnight," said Hermione Simmons dully.

"I know," nodded Enderby. "If Bolingbroke were here, he'd warn us to be on our guard."

"Bolingbroke?" The allusion mystified her.

"Yes. You need go no further than Shakespeare for him. The second part of King Richard the Second. Look yonder, at the door. Perhaps my mention of Shakespeare is a sort of evocation."

They both looked; Enderby with his calm interest, the woman with horror.

It was not smoke this time, but a definite and solid form, pressing through the narrow space of the door ajar, pushing its stealthy way in. It seemed to grow, rather to unfold, like

a membranous wing or a jointed limb trailing a dark garment. At the top showed a swaddled lump, like a head in a cowl. Enderby thought he saw something in the depths of the folds, a gleam as from a secret, peering eye.

Enderby held up his slim right hand, palm outward, to still the cry which he knew was rising to Hermione Simmons' lips. The same hand then took up the nearest of the objects he had arranged upon the top of his desk. More of the visitor was coming in, a further clump of draped membrane or fabric. Against the wall spread a spidery something—a clutching talon, black as soot.

ENDERBY hurled what he had taken from the desk. It whipped, sparkling, through the air, and burst like a little grenade against the wall just above that exploring talon. The air there was momentarily full of white particles, and something made a noise, like the brief rasp of a locust in flight.

Then the visitor snatched itself back from view. Enderby rose and went to the door, peering out. His nostrils flared over the smell of damp decay. He looked at the wall beside the door-jamb. The print of the talon still remained, like a narrow-rayed star drawn in smudgy grime.

"I almost got it," he remarked. "Keep your seat, Miss Simmons."

Fetching a brush from the hearth, he began to sweep the threshold.

"What did you throw?" asked Hermione Simmons fearfully.

"Salt—a whole shaker of it. If I'd made a direct hit, we would have been rid of our friend forever. Demons can't abide salt, and certain other things." He continued to sweep. "But it'll be back, and the next time it may come all the way in. That's why I'm clearing away the scattered salt that may warn of danger."

Enderby's prosaic manner restored some little assurance to his companion and she was able to resume the story of her adventure.

The entity had appeared in her room at the inn, she said, seeping up like murk from the section of floor inside the circle she had idly drawn and

lettered. Her first emotion had been of intrigued curiosity, and she had stepped across the red line. Immediately the vapor had taken on form and solidity, a cloaked figure that beneath its wrappings seemed to conceal strange deformities.

The head, cowed as they both had just seen it, had thrust close to hers, and arms or tentacles had embraced her. And she had seen piercing eyes and gross lips, that opened and showed gaunt, sharp teeth.

"I fainted," she finished, "but first I was aware—I was sure—it kissed me."

Enderby shook his gray head. "Not exactly a kiss. There's a little scratch or cut on your cheek, isn't there?"

She lifted a red-polished fingertip and quipped gingerly. "Yes. Like a burst blister."

"That's where the mouth touched—but not in a kiss." He came close, stooped and peered. His eyes narrowed behind their thick lenses. "Mmmmm—yes. A little dried blood."

Hermione Simmons was no longer able to dismiss such ideas with the word "fantastic." She only looked up with fear under her false lashes. "Like Dracula?" she suggested faintly.

"In a way, yes. But this was no vampire. It's what the ancients called a familiar. Not a new conceit; the woman whom Saul visited at En-Dor had one. There was more in colonial Salem and Hartford, and, within sixty years past, on Staten Island. And your visitor wouldn't have been the first of his kind in Pennsylvania.

"I've a book here by a Mr. Aurand of Harrisburg—but perhaps you're a bit tired of my books. In any case, I think we have here the truth of the matter. Where there is a witch, look for her familiar demon, waiting for her to give it evil work to do."

"But I—I didn't dream of anything like that," Hermione Simmons managed to protest. "I haven't any work for it to do, and so perhaps—"

"Then," Enderby finished for her, "it will destroy you in anger. When evil is released, it must strike somewhere, unless it's destroyed. And that's why we wait now. The thing is obliged to win to you once in every

twenty-four hours and taste your blood—that's a part of the machinery of witchcraft, too complex to explain. Yes, we'll see this visitor a third time; and the third time may be the traditional charm."

HERMIONE SIMMONS looked ready to faint, and Professor Enderby forced her to swallow another caffeine tablet.

"Sin crouches at the door," he quoted. "That's from the Bible, Miss Simmons, another book it would do you good to read. Now to improve on scripture, and get that thing inside."

Dawn came, and Hermione Simmons expressed relief at its coming.

"Won't we be safe during the day?" she asked.

"Not entirely, but we can relax a little." Enderby was hungry, but he would not eat in the presence of the woman, lest she beg for the food she must not have. He made a pot of coffee in the kitchen, with the door open and an eye on the woman in her chair. They each had three cups and, as the sunlight and warmth increased, the professor brought a basin and Hermione Simmons bathed her weary eyes.

The day wore on.

"Are we going to wait here forever?" wailed the woman at last, eying her ravaged makeup in the mirror of her vanity case.

Enderby shook his rumpled head. "No, not forever. It's getting toward evening; our sitting will last only twenty-four hours at most. At the end of that time—but something is sure to happen first."

Eight o'clock was striking somewhere, far off and faint. Enderby looked at his own clock, plain in the light of the rekindled carbide lamp. It was exactly on time. He tried not to yawn, and for the hundredth time filled and lighted his big pipe.

"Fifteen more minutes," he said very softly.

As if in response to his voice, there was noise in the early darkness outside. Hermione Simmons turned quickly against the back of her chair, as though she would climb it for safety. Enderby faced the door with-

out rising. The narrow aperture was widening, slowly and steadily.

A figure stepped upon the threshold, expressionless of face and silent of foot, but recognizable.

"Oh," breathed Hermione Simmons in instant relief, "it's only your house man."

"On time to the dot, Quong," Enderby greeted the bowing Chinese. "Did you have a good time on your day off?"

"Yes, Plofessa," replied the soft, accented voice of his servant. The quiet feet still lingered on the threshold of hewn hickory, the graven yellow face slanted downward as if to study something on the floor. "Is there salt or something here, Plofessa?"

"There was, but I swept it away, Quong. Why are you standing there? Come in."

It was a strangely diffident and cautious Quong that moved forward into the bright light. The long yellow hands, clenched tightly, rubbed their knuckles together, as if nervously. The slant, jet eyes turned to Enderby.

"Everything been all light?" asked Quong.

"Up to now, yes," replied the professor, somewhat enigmatically.

"I sink maybe I help some way?"

"Yes. Get a good supper for us," directed Enderby. "A bottle of white wine, if there's any left, and some chops."

AT MENTION of food, Hermione Simmons sat up. The bright eyes of Quong regarded her interestedly.

"Is the lady all light?" he asked.

"Don't worry about me," she said, and smiled urbanely. Her eyes were on the clock, that was ticking off the last minutes of the danger period. Quong moved slowly toward her chair.

"Anything I can do, lady—" he began.

"There's just one thing, Quong," said Professor Enderby mildly, his hand sliding across the desk to the coil of braided thong. "If you'll just—*stay where you are!*"

The last four words exploded almost as one in the still air of the

room, and Enderby, swift as a gray cat, sprang from his chair upon the yellow man.

Quong's voice rose to a windy howl, and he tried to leap away from Enderby and toward Hermione Simmons. His hands unclenched, spreading toward her as if to clutch, and there was a flash of sicklelike claws, such as never grew on human fingers. His mouth, writhing open to his cry, exposed narrow, cruel-pointed tusks, white as china and sharp as needles.

Enderby's free hand slipped from a clutch at the yellow wrist, but the looped cord fell around Quong's neck and drew tight. With strange strength Enderby whipped Quong backward and down, like a snared rabbit. The parchment face twisted into a hideous and horrifying mask of rage, the body distorted strangely as it thumped the floor. The air was suddenly charged with an acrid smell of animal musk.

Quong was not Quong.

But Enderby had pinned his captive with a sharp knee, and drew the braided noose tighter, strangling a coughing roar. His own little linen-clad body could not blot from view all of the struggling shape he had felled, and what could be seen was strangely and suddenly dreadful. Hermione Simmons, staring in horror, thought of scrawny apes, then of bats and reptiles, and of spiders unthinkable huge—

Enderby's free hand darted back and up toward the desk, his arm making itself needfully long. He clutched the last curiosity he had laid out ready. For a moment he poised it on high—a child's toy, whittled crudely out of pale wood into a dagger shape. With all the strength of his lean, hard arm, the professor drove it downward, into the center of the changing, churning form that was becoming not a form.

There was another ear-twisting shriek, this time of agony and despair, and a sudden bursting forth of sooty vapor that hid from view a final unthinkable metamorphosis. Back from this obscuring cloud sprang Professor Enderby. His hair and glasses were awry, and his nose crinkled in disgust as he straightened erect.

"Whoof!" he snorted. "What a filthy business!" He turned to Hermione Simmons, and his voice became calm again. "It's all over. Even demons can be destroyed."

She stared at the vanishing swirl of soot. It was transparent once more, and she could see through it. "But it—it's still there!" she quavered.

He shook his head.

"No. Look again. Only a black stain on the floor, such as it made when it first appeared to you at the inn. I had braided silver wire into my noose—it held the creature, where an ordinary bond would have been useless. The stab of that whitethorn spike found whatever mystery passed for its heart. Whitethorn is a holy wood, Miss Simmons. Read about it in Sir John Mandeville, or James Grant, or *The Golden Bough*. Maybe you'd like this piece for a souvenir."

HE HELD out the wooden dagger. She rose from her chair, but was afraid to accept the thing.

"And to think," she chattered tremulously, "that it was your servant, all the time."

Enderby smiled indulgently, as at a dull child. "Wrong again. It wasn't Quong. The demon, desperate to

reach you, took Quong's shape in an effort to deceive us. Just as you, Miss Simmons, dye your hair and glue on false lashes and rouge your face—"

Again a sound at the door made them both turn quickly.

Quong was coming in. He smiled shyly, glad to be home. It was hard, now, to see how the other creature had ever hoped to be mistaken for this honest looking retainer.

"Bring water and suds, Quong," the professor directed at once. "Clean up this mess. Say the words that I taught you for that other cleaning job at the inn. After that, we will want food."

Hermione Simmons had become herself again. She gazed with an extravagant show of rapture at her deliverer.

"Oh, I think you're wonderful!" she twittered. "I'll never be able to repay you! Anything you ask—"

Enderby looked up at her calculatingly. "I'll ask three things."

"Yes?" Hermione Simmons coyly half held out a hand to him.

"Wash off that paint and keep it off," said Professor Enderby. "Then eat your supper without talking. And finally—aren't you in a hurry to get to wherever you're going? Well, then, don't let me keep you."