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CULTURE CRAG BY EVERIL WORRELL.



"The man you came to find is dead."

WHEN Donald Chester was invited to accompany his new friend, Count Zolani, on a hunting-trip, he was surprized. Count Zolani had showed sufficient preference for Donald's company—more than Donald had been able, in the bottom of his heart, to feel for Zolani. He wouldn't have been surprized in the least at a week-end invitation on a house-party, even a yachting-party. But Count Zolani and the simple life—an unattended camp for two in one of the near-by lonely places of the world—that was the unexpected feature of the affair.

"We'll camp at a place I found

on a solitary expedition," the count had said. And that added to the strangeness of things. Count Zolani, who moved surrounded by satellites, attended always by at least one good serving-man pre-eminently not of the type to be converted at a moment's notice into a wilderness guide, to have been in the habit of making lonely trips away from civilization and its amusements and luxuries!

Until the actual moment of starting, Donald had half expected that all this was only Zolani's way of talking about his trips, and that after all the two of them would be attended by a retinue of servants.

But when they set forth together in a gray dawn in midsummer—which meant that they started very early indeed—he was obliged to admit to himself that here was a Zolani with whom he was unacquainted. The languid grace, the touch of boredom, the weary sophistication—all had fallen from the count. In the beginning of this new day he was as keenly eager as any great explorer might have been before plunging into an unmapped continental interior. One might have imagined that the two men were on the verge of an adventure, instead of merely being about to camp alone for a few days in a spot on the Maryland sea-coast—a spot unfrequented, but not far at all from the beaten paths of travel.

Through the long, hot day his enthusiasm did not flag. Donald relieved him at the wheel for a few hours, at his own suggestion, knowing that Zolani was not at all weary, and believing that he would have been capable of making a non-stop drive of days and nights on end, so long as that quiet look of intensity brooded on his aquiline features. Toward sunset, they were well down into the "eastern shore" country. The macadam road stretched fair and even, with few turns and no hills, between primeval bits of forest and empty meadows. The world might have been asleep while it still was light, so deep was the sense of peacefulness that brooded over it. Only when the road was tinged with red and the shadows of the pines were blue-black across it, the count turned his low-slung roadster from the highway and headed eastward over an unmade road.

"I take it we're in reach of the end," Donald volunteered. Words had been few between the two men, all through the long day of hot high speed. The car, of necessity, went slowly now for the first time in many hours.

"In reach of the end," Zolani

smiled, with a sudden flash of teeth beneath his well-kept tiny black mustaches. "I wonder—I wonder what you will think of the end, when you see—and when you know!"

Donald was not altogether surprized at the turn of his companion's sentence. It implied that there was about this journey something that lay beneath the surface. That, however, was not altogether a new thought to Donald.

"I'm expecting to see something—and maybe to know something too," he said carelessly enough. "I'll be glad to get to it, Zolani. I never thought you insisted on dragging me down here for nothing except the beauties of nature!"

For a moment, Zolani's flashing smile was turned on him again. Then the count's attention was taken by the nature of the road, which had degenerated rather suddenly after the last crossroad into a rough, rutty pair of wheel tracks with grass growing between them. From that point, also, the road became winding; at the next crossroad and at the next, Zolani turned to right and left. Turns came frequently during the next hour, while the red of sunset faded to the ashes of twilight and plunged into the blue gloom of dusk. The thought crossed Donald's mind that Zolani knew this lonely territory well, well enough to have been here not once, but many times, and that his frequent turnings were in the nature of detours, which brought him back always to a direction he might have adhered to more closely but for a desire to make the way of his going intricate and labyrinthine.

"Is it possible he's trying to lose me?" Donald wondered idly, once, and blushed at the fantastic nature of the thought.

"We're here, and soon the moon will rise and I shall show you—Vulture Crag!"

Zolani's words sounded like a shout of triumph, so silent was the night around them as the car went slowly with motor all but inaudible.

"Vulture Crag! Cheerful name!" Donald commented.

"I named it, but not without good reason," the count rejoined. "I like the name. The truth is, Chester, I'm planning to make some improvements in this part of the country; but I'm not planning to make it a popular summer resort. Not even to attract picnic parties from the countryside near by."

INTO the stillness of the summer evening a new sound had crept—a rhythmic, murmuring sound which Donald at first had hardly been conscious of. Now it was louder, nearer. The road had become sandy and heavy. It seemed almost to shake itself, so sudden was the next turn—and Donald uttered a cry of pleasure. He loved the sea, and they had come upon it so suddenly that its far, dark mystery was like an unexpected adventure. Through a break in crags they saw it, across a miniature sandy desert where rolling dunes rose toward the distant horizon. Upon that unbroken sky line blazed a tiny speck where a ship moved, and above, the sky was sown with stars.

"Ecstasy, to stand upon the shore of the trackless sea!" Count Zolani's voice showed more feeling than Donald had ever heard in it. "Ecstasy! In imagination one breaks the bonds that hold him to the shore and follows his outward gaze. Think, friend! In all the universe, I think there is possible one greater ecstasy of contemplation. What, then, is that?"

Donald gazed into his companion's face, half visible in the deepening gloom. Was he idly philosophizing, playing with an abstract fancy, or was he challenging Donald to answer a riddle which had to do with this

odd trip of theirs? Donald made a sudden gesture of impatience.

"I've come along because you asked me to, Zolani, and I've gone blind for quite a while. I know there's something beneath the surface, something I hope you're going to explain, and something I hope will give motive to our journey—not that it needs one to be pleasant, but because I feel there is one. So I won't do any guessing at meanings; I'll just tell you I'm waiting, and getting more than a little anxious to find out what it's all about. The ecstasy of contemplation doesn't sound like an adventure; yet, somehow, you make me feel as though we're on the edge of an adventure!"

Zolani stopped the motor and leaned back in his seat, lighting a cigarette with provoking deliberation.

"The greatest ecstasy of contemplation!" he resumed slowly. "To stand, my friend, on the shore of the sea—on the shore of the world! To gaze outward across the boundless ocean—outward into more boundless space! To know that one can voyage afar upon that sea—can voyage farther, farther—farther than the farthest stars your feeble vision can detect, in the limitless sea of space. You, Chester, if you will, shall know the delirious thrill of traversing space. I promise it. Is that adventure enough for you?"

There was silence between the two men. Count Zolani's cigarette made a near-by circle of light which outshone some of those distant specks of light which were, perhaps, larger than the sun around which the earth and her sister planets revolved. Donald was caught in an odd feeling of futility. Not for a moment did he think Zolani mad, although he wondered why he did not. He felt only that space was a thing apart, a thing that did not concern mankind; he felt that his spirit had been called

upon to grasp a thing beyond its conception. He could have read of such a thing between the covers of a book, and felt his imagination kindle; but personally to him like this, the very stupendousness of the idea stunned his perceptions.

The count's profile, visible in the starlight, gave a tinge of reality to the impossible statement he had made. It was not the profile of a dreamer's face. In it there was power. There might be in it, also, evil; but no touch of vagueness, of futility. Looking at it, Donald forced himself to clear thought. If he was to take Zolani's words literally, and since he could not for a moment think of Zolani as the victim of a hallucination, he was up against a tremendous opportunity—a new thing. Later, he would realize it; even now he might at least try to understand it. There were the tales of Jules Verne—the *Trip to the Moon*—Edgar Allan Poe's fanciful trip, and others. . . .

"I suppose you're going to perfect an invention down here, and I suppose you're going to tell me you've solved the problem of making a space-ship—that will fly!" he said at last. "I can't grasp it at once; but everyone knows that the fancies of yesterday are the facts of tomorrow. So another tomorrow has come!"

Zolani turned to face him. The glow from his cigarette lit up his aquiline features, which seemed more clearly lit by his triumphant smile.

"Proud as Lucifer!" Donald found himself thinking. "And Lucifer fell through pride. But Zolani has reason enough to be the proudest man on earth, if he's solved the thing few men have dared dream of attempting!"

"Chester, my friend," Zolani began, "my invention is to be perfected here, but it's not an old dream of another man made real by myself; it is my own dream, my own thought,

perhaps, if there is any new thought under the sun. It is——"

At that instant a flapping of great wings swept away the sound of his words, and a dark, ugly form blotted out the starlight and swooped low toward the side of the open car. Donald caught a glare as of red eyes in the darkness and smelled an evil smell—and then the thing was gone.

"One of the vultures—my friends!" Zolani said, with a little, twisted smile. "Look yonder!"

Donald, gazing seaward, had noticed but little the sides of the ravine through which they had approached. The structure was unusual for the eastern coast so far south as this. A low crag to the south made the end of the ravine on one side, a high crag to the north; and for the first time Donald saw that a house stood on this northern crag, built against the natural elevation of the land so that in the darkness it was easily overlooked. It seemed, however, to be a large house—an abandoned mansion. Some recluse had fancied a home in this lonely spot, and had tired of the unchanging solitude. Everything about the place spoke of utter desolation. And—final touch—and most sinister—as the two men gazed, several dark forms detached themselves from the block of unlit darkness which was the deserted building, and circled against the sky, while odd, raucous, creaking cries were borne on the sweet sea breeze.

"More of our friends!" Zolani spoke again. "That old house is their roosting-place. Odd fancies, vultures have, to take to artificial shelter of four walls and a roof. The windows, mostly broken, give them easy access, however; and you and I, my friend, will camp in the open. And not too much in the open either; our tent shall have the flaps well drawn together. A man need hardly be dead, but only sleeping, to have his eyes plucked from his head by our scavenger friends, whose inde-

fatigable zeal makes them so valuable that the state sets a fine of fifty dollars on the killing of one of them. Well! I shall explain no more of my grand plan until tomorrow. I can see that you need time for adjustment; tomorrow in the light of day what I say to you will be real; if I told you all tonight, tomorrow it would appear as a dream and require retelling.

"Only let me say that I am to rob our vultures of their happy home—I intend to make use of that building. I hope, friend Chester, for your interest—and for the loan of a little of your superabundant wealth. A short loan; with the working of my scheme, gold will flow freely to our hands. And for the rest, and to keep the curious of the countryside from showing too much interest in our affairs, I depend on our friends the vultures, who make this portion of the coast very disagreeable by their presence, and who will not go far from the home of which I dispossess them."

TO THE end of his life, Donald Chester would remember the year 1928 as the most vivid of his whole manhood; at least it eclipsed utterly all the years and all the seasons which had preceded it.

It was only a few days after the memorable night when he beheld for the first time Vulture Crag, and the equally memorable morning of shining blue and silver when he listened to Count Zolani's recital of his plans and intentions, before he was back again in the city arranging a loan of several thousand dollars, which would put Zolani's scheme in the way of fruition. That scheme burned day and night in Donald's brain, with its wonderful train of adventures. Donald would make possible the realization of man's loftiest dream; he would be a pioneer in exploring the mystery of the universe; he would know the unknowable,

grasp the unattainable, help Zolani to add a new and most lustrous wreath of laurel to the ever more glorious wreath of man's victories and achievements.

Then, on the top of adventure's highest pinnacle of rapture—and now it was all as real and close at hand as on that first evening beside the sea all had been tenuous and unreal—he met Dorothy Leigh.

Dorothy—"Gift of God!" Never was any living creature so well named. There were stars in the depths of her blue-black eyes, stars which beckoned as those stars in the night sky toward which Donald never failed now to lift eager eyes in anticipation of the nearing time of his flight of exploration toward them. But there were other things about Dorothy, so dear that they might well nigh hold a man to the earth. There were her little, clinging hands, that seemed eloquent when they caressed merely the leaves of a book or touched the steering-gear of Donald's car; there were all her graceful, little, unstudied ways, her fragile beauty of form and feature, and the gay daring of her sudden laughter.

Donald had only begun to hope that he, too, by some mysterious magic, was beginning to live in Dorothy's heart, when he found himself telling her about the great secret. And in the telling, there was an interruption; and by the interruption many things were made clear.

"Oh, Donald—my dear!" Dorothy had cried, the pain in her voice a heritage from time immemorial, since the first woman watched her man go forth to adventure hand in hand with death. "My dear, must it be you—among the first?"

For a while after that, Donald did not give the details which had been locked in his heart for months. Neither the world nor the universe mattered beside Dorothy's "My

dear." But when a little later Donald remembered, his spirit was more than ever unshaken. If he had been able to dare the horror of utter emptiness through which stars and planets hurtle on their courses, how much better able was he to dare them, now that he held Dorothy's love locked safe within his breast, a charm against all evil?

"You won't ask me to give up my adventure when you know how much it means to me," he said gently to Dorothy. "When a man loves as I love you, he wants, more than ever, to prove his manhood. But after all, my darling, this adventure, while thrilling enough, has hardly enough of peril about it to prove that. In fact, when I have explained it to you as the count explained it to me on a June morning, you'll laugh at your fears."

He went on, then, to paint her the picture of Count Zolani's great project in the colors in which he himself saw it.

"You're familiar with simple chemistry, Dorothy," he began. "Well! Take one of the very simplest experiments of all—the conversion of water into its two elements, hydrogen and oxygen. Is there any doubt that hydrogen and oxygen can be brought together to form water?"

Dorothy shook her head, deeply puzzled. What a simple chemical experiment had to do with the extreme safety of the launching of a ship in space, she could not imagine. Nevertheless, because she was rather given to quiet thought than to disjointed protest, she listened after that without a word until the end of Donald's rather long explanation.

"Suppose, now, that the hydrogen and oxygen so separated and released could be given a certain rate of atomic vibration—you've heard of that, too. So that, wherever they might wander in the whole universe, they would retain a separate entity

from any other atoms of hydrogen and oxygen. And now—I'm mixing my metaphors because it is necessary, because as the different laws of nature are always interactive, so to explain any complicated phenomenon of nature whether naturally or artificially—which still, of course, is naturally—produced, it is necessary to describe the various actions of the different laws involved in whatever way makes them most easily comprehended.

"To continue where I broke off to apologize. Suppose, now, that the hydrogen atoms to which you give a certain atomic vibration were to be magnetized with a certain definite magnetism, as definite as the positive and negative magnetism which everybody knows, but infinitely diversified—as diversified, in fact, as the infinite differences of wave length which can be established in a radio station, so that the etheric vibrations to which that station is attuned will be received there, out of all the other vibrations that permeate space.

"I'm afraid this is all rather deep, and quite involved, but Zolani gave it to me in far more intricate and technical terms, and I'm doing what I can to translate. In brief, Dorothy, Zolani's achievement lies rather within the field of physical chemistry than in the field of mechanics. He isn't going to launch me, with other favored souls, through space in a ship the mechanism of which *might* go wrong. He is, instead, through a triumph of chemistry and physics which involves plain chemistry, atomic vibration and magnetism all three, to change the nature of my being, and of the others, so that we, loosed from the chains of gravity and physical necessity, can travel at our own free will through space, to be drawn back quite definitely and certainly by means of his apparatus to our own bodies."

Dorothy had grown paler as she listened to the end of Donald's speech. A low cry of horror issued from her lips, at last.

"I didn't understand what you were talking about, Donald. And now that I see the application of it, it still seems vague, and horrible. Do you mean that you are going to put yourself in the hands of that man, to be altered in the inmost fibers of your being?—Oh!"

She shuddered, and the words died away on her lips. Donald shrugged his shoulders in mock despair.

"Darling, I've been telling you how very safe it is, and this is the impression you've drawn from all I've been saying!" he protested. "Well! It serves me right for unloading that scientific stuff on a girl who only dabbled in the shallowest ripples of science a finishing-school ever taught. I haven't given up making you see and understand, however. I'll tackle it next, Dorothy, from the descriptive angle. Suppose——"

Donald was off again, talking eagerly, urgently. And this time, as he talked, Dorothy was better able to understand the picture his words painted.

ZOLANI, he told her, had taken the lonely house at Vulture Crag (he touched lightly on the subject of those vultures, and the desolation of the spot). In the basement, Zolani had set up a powerful apparatus, while the top of the house, renovated and repaired, had been made into a sort of hospital. In that hospital, carefully guarded, were to repose the bodies of the space-travelers, while their intelligences and certain vital elements temporarily translated out of those bodies roved freely through space. Out of that exploration would vanish the black night of ignorance; to future generations the ways and customs of the oddest denizens of the farthest stars, were

any of them indeed populated, would be as freely studied as were now the habits of people living on the other side of the world.

The powerful apparatus which Zolani had set up in his basement laboratory would react upon men and women harmlessly. Upon each space-traveler it would be set differently in certain small degrees, so that the liberated spirit might have a "vibration number" of its own. Twenty space-travelers could be taken care of at the same time, and twenty levers corresponded to twenty storage batteries—Donald described them so. At least, they stored the current which would draw back, when the levers were shot backward in their slots, the various twenty wandering spirits. The unconscious physical forms of the twenty, properly attached to the apparatus, would then receive the spirits, souls, intelligences—Donald rather stammered in his search of words, since no words previously coined exactly described what actually took place; "the released entity" suited him better than the triter forms, but he sought for a terminology which would make the things he spoke of more real to Dorothy.

"Since the portion of the man or woman who has been exploring space comprises only the intelligence, plus a certain amount of vital energy—all the vital energy not required to keep the body which remains behind from actual death," he added, "the space traveler can not have been harmed. You see there is nothing to hurt. Since Zolani's apparatus is minutely tuned, as I must express it, to each individuality, that individuality must be attracted back to its earthly habitation, so soon as he sets in action the powerful magnetic current which 'receives it.'

"I don't mean to become technical again. But this, you see, is what really happens. On October first, I,

and nineteen others, will find ourselves with Count Zolani at his restored mansion beside the sea. In the building comfortable arrangements are made, so that a person might comfortably sleep and rest for—two weeks was the period he spoke of. You may picture, Dorothy, the safe orderliness of a hospital ward, if you like. Well, there our bodies will sleep, after we have spent a quiet hour in the laboratory below, and had an agreeable current passed through our bodies, like a mild, invigorating electric current, or so Zolani describes it.

“Say that the two weeks are up. Attendants will carry our sleeping forms back to the laboratory, and each man and woman will be attached to the storage battery which has the power to call him, or her, back to life. A slight effort of will will be required on the part of the wandering spirit to re-enter the body itself, but that will present no complications; should any one of us desire, for some strange, unknown, unpredictable reason, to remain free in space, it is understood that we will make our return there at a future time. Zolani has picked only honorable men and women for his great experiment—men and women who will not be subject to freaks of fancy which might embarrass him and thwart the purpose of the experiment. As for myself, beloved, returning to earth will mean returning to you; my effort of will, then, will hardly be an effort at all, since my soul will speed to you—would speed to you even if the forces of Zolani’s magnetism were directed not for but against it.”

Love had won where arguments might all have failed. Looking into the depths of Dorothy’s eyes, Donald knew that there was to be no strife between them. And in the weeks that followed, love even displaced in his mind the thrill of anticipation that had filled his days

and nights, together with his thoughts of Dorothy. Now that he knew Dorothy returned his love, everything in the world beside that magnificent fact seemed dwarfed and of no consequence. And as for Dorothy, he suspected that she almost forgot the ordeal the autumn would bring. Having spent herself in combat to no avail and yielded gracefully—although, thinking back, Donald was not sure that either combat or yielding had taken place in words—she was now feeling the unreal dreaminess about the affair which had possessed Donald in the beginning. Perhaps she believed that, after all, Zolani would be defeated; that the first of October would find him ready to give up his fantastic scheme. Perhaps she only felt that life and love and the world on which the sun shone were real, and that the vast emptiness which encircled these things was not, and could not actually become so, to herself or to Donald or to anyone.

THE summer had come in on rose-flung wings of anticipation; it came to its height of beauty on a high-pitched ecstasy that seemed, perhaps, too beautiful to last. The perfection of summer, the full sweetness of love, have about them something of the evanescent shimmer of the wings of a dragon-fly, which is a thing of beauty doomed to live full and vibrantly, but never long. Summer had, then, to die, and its passing was sorrowful, wind-torn and rain-weary. Toward the end of September heavy rains set in, but they were not as dismal as the slow falling of inward tears which takes the place of the tears a man may not shed.

It had been inevitable that Dorothy should meet Zolani, with whom Donald had associated in a social way before the two men became identified with the same venture. The meeting had taken place on a hotel roof garden, and the stars Don-

ald had all but worshiped through the summer in his eagerness to explore them seemed to be watching in a shining surprize, as Dorothy gave to Zolani the deep, sweet look Donald had never seen her give to anyone but him.

After that, Dorothy had seen Donald often, but not so often as before, although their engagement was not broken. She had, however, seen Zolani at least as often, while he was in town; and, what was worst of all, Donald knew that he was not wrong when he felt that Dorothy's deepest interest hung upon Zolani's slightest word. Never a word was spoken now of her concern for Donald in the coming adventure; and while Donald did not want Dorothy to be distressed, it cut him cruelly to know that the reason for her ceasing to worry was, simply, that she had ceased to care. Donald's journey among distant stars and planets? It had become more real to Dorothy since her meeting with Zolani, and since certain long talks which she had had with him alone. Donald knew that, but he knew, too, that she wasted no alarms now. Let the first of October come; it brought no slightest uneasiness with it, so far as Donald could see. He himself was not uneasy, but he knew that Dorothy, in the natural course of events, should now be deeply worried.

And the last week of September brought in the delayed equinoctial storm, and the weeping skies opened their fountains yet unemptied, and the winds tore the sodden, clinging leaves from the trees. And on the last day of the month; Donald drove four men over the road that led to Zolani's restored mansion, followed by two other cars, each carrying five. Zolani had driven down the day before. Not since the evening before that day had Donald seen Dorothy; she had suggested then that she wish him luck, and say good-bye—thus

hastening needlessly the time of their parting.

DUSK on this thirtieth of September was dull and heavy, and fell early. It was dark night, and the rain-wet wind from the sea howled like seven demons, when the party under Donald's convoy reached Vulture Crag. Even in the blackness, Donald had a consciousness of black wings upborne on the raging wind. He was glad to step inside the square lighted hallway of the building Count Zolani had restored, and conscious of a sense of hurrying drama as he stood waiting there with his four companions. It was as though a long-awaited hour at last had struck.

The count came to them after a short delay.

"I shall take our newcomers with me into the laboratory," he smiled with the flash of white teeth Donald had come to dislike, since he had so often seen its glitter turned upon Dorothy. "For you, Chester my friend, I have a great surprize. Wait here. Ah!"

The door through which the count had entered swung slowly open again. Donald, following his gaze, saw the last face he would have expected to behold here, of any in the world which he, perhaps, might be leaving forever, in spite of the confidence he had felt stedfastly for months. It was the face of Dorothy.

The count bowed low, his eyes on the deep blue ones turned to him. His voice when he spoke again was a caress.

"My dear, you had better explain to our friend Chester, who does not understand."

Once more the white teeth flashed. The count was bowing the four men who were to join in his experiment through another doorway. A moment more, and they were alone—Donald and Dorothy, with the sound of Zolani's "My dear" ringing in

Donald's ears. So Dorothy had first revealed her love for Donald—in just those two words. But Zolani must have had full confidence that his love was returned, to use those words to Dorothy in the presence of others; in the presence of Donald, whose engagement to Dorothy had not been definitely broken.

It was Dorothy who broke the silence.

"You see, Chester—Zolani considers that we are engaged," she offered timidly.

And then Donald's wrath broke the bounds that had held it.

"As I have still considered that you and I——" he began.

Looking back later, he could not remember all that he said then to Dorothy, though he never forgot the stricken look in her eyes as she listened. At last she held up her hand with a gesture which stopped him.

"Donald, I thought I could go through with it, but I can't," she said with a little moan. "I had steeled myself to endure your hurt. But I find that I can't. To let you believe that I am honest with Zolani—that would have been safer for both of us, dear. Since I can't, I will explain. There is no time to lose."

A little flame of hope springing up in Donald's heart seemed to change the universe from a barren waste back to the old paradise, as Dorothy continued.

"Donald, I was determined to share in this experiment. To go with you—wherever you go—to become as you become—not to be parted from you, whatever may be your destiny. I knew there was no hope of persuading you to let me go. I knew, too, that, so long as Zolani was your friend and I nothing to Zolani, he would probably accede to your wishes if the matter were put up to him. So—I let him fall in love with me, Donald. Perhaps I made him. Certainly, I willed him to. I'm sorry, but it was

the only way to accomplish the thing I was determined to accomplish—that I should not be parted from you. When this is over, when we are safely back on earth in the bodies our spirits inhabit, I shall explain to Zolani. I hope he will forgive me. Surely, he can understand the feeling that drove me to make him serve my purpose.

"At least, that was the way I have felt about it until lately. Of late, I have come to doubt his forgiveness, and to feel that I can do without it. Because, Donald, I do not trust Zolani. I have come to feel that he is evil; and if he knew, or dreamed, or guessed that my love is unalterably yours——"

She was leaning toward him now. In the brilliantly lit entrance hall, Donald could see deeply into her blue-black eyes, could mark every shade of expression in their tender depths. Never had she been more adorable than with the expression of anxiety softening them, as she thought of Zolani with regret and foreboding. With a sudden motion, Donald drew her into his arms, where he had thought never to hold her again. Their lips met——

"Zolani!"

Donald cried the name out like a challenge, as the count's dark, hawk-like face appeared suddenly in the doorway. There was again the flash of the count's white teeth—Donald had come to dread that ordinary phenomenon.

"I smile—because a man must be as you would say, a good sport!" Zolani said in light, but slightly strained tones. "So a love is not so easily changed, and my promised bride is still *your* promised bride—and her wandering heart returns to its allegiance, as her wandering spirit will return *at my command* to the lovely form which enshrines it. Well! Perhaps, friend Chester, her heart never wandered at all. Never has she looked at me as she looked

at you, and she has withheld her lips. Perhaps it was all a game—to make me consent to experiment upon so lovely a victim, so that she could accompany you on your flight through space.”

There was a heavy silence in the little room, except for the beating of the wind outside—could the beating of wings be heard as well? Donald and Dorothy had given one startled glance, each at the other. Had Zolani heard everything, or had he guessed? Now they stood silently, with eyes downcast. Dorothy, Donald knew, was both frightened and ashamed. As for himself, he was conscious of a heavy depression which he could not analyze.

After a little, Zolani spoke again.

“Perhaps it will be as well to speak no more of this unhappy affair—unhappy for me, however fortunate for my friend. Although I have smiled, my heart is breaking. Now, however, I am ready to forget myself, and to show to my two most honored guests what I have done, and what will take place tomorrow. It is my suggestion that you, Chester, and Miss Leigh, behold with me the beginning of my experiment upon the others. After that, it will be the turn of you two. And, in the meantime, I shall give myself the honor of showing you over the place—my dormuary.”

“Dormuary?”

Dorothy’s lips parted as Donald repeated the word. It had an ugly sound. Donald was sure that it had put both of them in mind of the same other word, “mortuary,” which it greatly resembled. The count smiled back at them serenely.

“Don’t like the sound of it? Think it sounds like ‘mortuary?’” he said coolly. “I created it from that word, of course. Pardon me if my humor is a little grim, but a man who works his brain as hard as I work mine requires the relief of humor, and his humor should suit his fancy. My

fancies have always, I am afraid, been a little grim. You see, this place I have equipped is a reposing-place for the sleeping, as a mortuary is for the dead. I put away the sleeping, as I shall show you, to remain asleep for the period I shall choose, as a mortician puts away the dead, to be dead forever. I, then, am a dormician. But I must show you these sleeping-places.”

DURING the hour that followed, Dorothy clung close to Donald’s arm. It was a rather horrible hour.

Zolani had prepared his house to accommodate more than twenty, although he was not completely equipped as to laboratory apparatus to handle more than twenty now. Donald had spoken of the upper regions of this building as a sort of hospital; they did, in fact, much more resemble the corridors of a morgue.

There were no beds, in the ordinary sense of the word, to accommodate the tenantless, sleeping bodies. It was well, perhaps, that the others who had already retired had not been shown over the place at all, and were to see only the laboratory. Donald marveled at the calmness with which they accepted their ignorance, until he remembered that they were spending this night crowded together in several large, comfortable bedrooms containing various beds and couches, and that they probably pictured these very rooms as their abiding-place for Zolani’s period of two weeks, during which only their bodies were to remain on earth. As a matter of fact, instead of beds and rooms, the sleepers were to occupy lockers very much like the lockers of a well-equipped morgue, except that comfortable mattresses had been installed.

Gruesome, indeed, were the rows of empty, yawning lockers. Gruesome, and suggestive of either a morgue or a mausoleum. Certainly,

Zolani in his efficiency had had no regard for esthetics.

"They're safer in lockers, you know!" Zolani answered Donald's thought with his usual uncanny intuition. "A lever in the laboratory controls all the doors of these lockers at once. Ordinarily, I don't think it will be necessary to have them closed. But in case of any accident or disturbance, I should close them immediately. Should there be even so much as a broken window, I should close the lockers, for otherwise the dispossessed vultures, returning, might make a meal——"

"I beg your pardon!" Zolani broke off abruptly, his eyes on Dorothy's face, who looked as though she might be about to faint. "I forget, where we are all daring adventurers, that one of us is yet a delicate girl who should be shielded from too much of the gruesome. But let me continue, taking care not to offend again."

With a long forefinger, he pointed within the nearest white-enameled locker.

"My device for pumping air through all the lockers, should it be necessary to close the doors," he explained. "You see, although these sleeping bodies will hardly seem to breathe, yet breathe they will a little, and must."

The pipe he had designated had openings through which the air would pass. Another pipe beside it, however, had none.

Donald questioned him as to the use of this pipe. "It looks like——"

He broke off as Zolani had done a moment before, mindful of Dorothy.

"It is. You see, I thought some day I might wish to use this place for the other thing which it resembles. My scheme is safe enough, but it might break down. The government might object to my sending its citizens so far abroad without passports—anything might happen. Then

I had a scheme for using the refrigeration plant"—Zolani approached his mouth to Chester's ear—"making a sure enough morgue of the joint, you see, and keeping people here preserved by cold without embalment for a while, while I tried to resuscitate them. No, I'm not the wizard of the ages; I can't restore life, and I have no hope of doing that. But I could pull in some money while making the attempt."

Before Donald's horrified stare, the count showed some slight uneasiness.

"Well, perhaps I'm letting you see and know too much. But you needn't assume an air of superior virtue. Most people resort to various methods of gaining their ends. Perhaps if you knew *everything* I have in mind at this moment, you would be even more shocked. Your fiancée tricked me quite thoroughly and well. And you know many men in your own world who have founded fortunes by putting something over on the right person at the right time, or even cheating thousands out of their just dues. No! I wouldn't presume to look down on me, if I were you. Life is short—too short for indulgence in snobbery."

They had returned at last to the outer hall, and Zolani pressed an electric button.

"Show the gentleman and the lady to their respective rooms. They have a hard day ahead tomorrow," the count said to a herculean colored man who appeared.

They passed the door of Dorothy's room before they reached the one which was Donald's. Talking together, Dorothy and Donald did not address the giant serving-man. It was only at the door of his own room that Donald discovered that the negro could hear but not speak. He pointed to his mouth in explanation and Donald, looking, saw that his tongue was shriveled almost to the root.

"As he fell asleep, the sight of that shriveled tongue was with him like a nightmare horror.

"Born like that? Maybe. But Zolani wouldn't have to *cut* a tongue out. He'd know a way—some chemical, some devilish compound—that would produce an effect like that without being telltale." That was his last conscious thought.

ZOLANI had selected the hour of dawn for his great experiment. Seeing the group of men who reported at that zero hour in the little waiting-room off his basement laboratory, Donald marveled. Bank presidents, statesmen, college professors—these were among others at whose identity Donald could only guess. Truly, this affair was to make Zolani famous immediately, and rich almost as soon. There could be no claiming that a fraud had been practised upon one or two insignificant or unbalanced dupes. Zolani had assured Donald that he had set free and recalled the spirits of one or two individuals who "did not greatly matter." Perhaps the servitor with the withered tongue was one of these. At any rate, the count was marvelously sure of himself.

In spite of himself, Donald sickened as he watched this experiment proceed—so far as one could watch a thing, the salient feature of which was invisible. He saw eighteen men lie back in comfortable reclining-chairs and suffer Zolani to hook them up by means of wires to a great, humming dynamo in the center of the room; so far, it was unpleasantly like the preparation for an electrocution. There were dials which Zolani watched, delicate manipulations which he performed. Over the top of the dynamo was a great flask in which a watery bubbling liquid alternately clouded and cleared. Before each man was a smaller globe which seemed to duplicate the reac-

tion of the large one; and, as Donald observed that the men leaning back in their chairs appeared one by one to drowse and doze, he observed the liquid in each man's respective globe change color from white to rose. A little later a white flame appeared to shine within the center of the fluid, which was now brilliant in color and quite clear, and no longer bubbling at all; and as this phenomenon appeared, each man drew a long sigh and appeared to sink into deep slumber. Donald, watching the nearest man—the one who was president of one of the large eastern universities—observed an expression of peace upon his face, which seemed a moment later to grow sharp of feature and livid of complexion, so that Donald felt as though he were indeed gazing upon a corpse. He would have cried out, then, and called upon Zolani, perhaps, to bring the hovering spirit back to the habitation in which God had placed it for the span of an earthly lifetime; but in that moment the light disappeared from the rose-colored, liquid-filled globe, as though it had been snuffed out, and the liquid itself suffered a change, becoming leaden gray, with an over-tinge of green. This, for some reason, was more horrible to Donald than all the other features of the transformation: it spoke so clearly of the withdrawing of life to a far distant place. Even the carting away of the limp figures one by one, in the arms of Zolani's withered-tongued assistant, to be stored in their respective locker spaces like so many carcasses, was no worse than that sickly changing of the bright-colored liquid in the glass.

Donald turned to Zolani now, prepared to fight out a thing upon which he had determined.

"Miss Leigh can't be allowed to take part in this, however safe, however sure," he said firmly. "Women were never meant to pioneer among

new dangers and new horrors. They are to be cherished, safeguarded. You have loved Miss Leigh; perhaps you still love her. I love her, too, and, since I am to be her husband, I must protect her. I have no doubt that you will agree with me—that you will forbid at the last minute that to which you have already consented.”

Zolani's smile cut whitely across his dark face like a menace.

“My friend, you are too late!” he cried softly. Beckoning Donald, he led him to a near-by doorway and bade him look through it. Incredible, Donald saw the deeply slumbering form of Dorothy Leigh stretched upon a couch in the room beyond.

“This is the chair in which she reclined, and this the glass globe filled with the essence into which her spirit was withdrawn, before it took its farther flight in space.”

As Donald looked upon these things, his heart sank sickly, while the pounding of his pulse was like the beating of a drum. Oh, he had believed in the safety of Zolani's experiment!—but then he had trusted Zolani. What had Dorothy said? “I have come to feel that he is evil.” Donald, too, had come to feel that the count was evil.

“You will want to follow her swiftly,” the count was continuing. “See, you may have this last place—the one next Dorothy Leigh's. You will wish to hasten?”

Donald was about to follow the count's instructions. What instinct he had indeed prompted him to share as rapidly as possible Dorothy's fate. He should follow her out into the great unknown, even though he did not trust Zolani, because it was the only thing he knew which he could do.

And then a little thing occurred.

Donald was possessed of keen powers of observation. Now, just before he seated himself in the reclin-

ing-chair, he noticed a tiny green bulb, apparently an ordinary electric light, which burned upon the baseboard that supported the individual smallish globes of liquid. This light was burning beside none of the other globes—only beside his own. Donald was sure that during the experiment which had been completed on the others—completed in its first stage, at least—this light had not been lit. And now, stooping suddenly, he was able to read the letters of an abbreviated word, small and almost invisible on the black baseboard underneath the green light: “Refrig.”

He started back, more than half expecting to be instantly engaged in a fight for his life. The doors of the room were closed—probably locked. There was no escape, and besides, the helpless, sleeping, deathlike form of Dorothy Leigh lay in the adjoining room, dependent upon Count Zolani's whim if it were to be restored ever to life and consciousness. To challenge Zolani would do little good, but perhaps it was as well to have all of the cards on the table.

“Zolani!” Donald cried as these thoughts coursed through his brain. “I'll stay in my own body, please; and I'll see that you take good care of that helpless girl in there. I'm not blind, nor a fool.”

He pointed to the green light with its all but invisible labeling.

“You had the refrigeration current turned on for me—only for me, Zolani,” he continued. “You would have locked me into my locker and let me freeze—killed my body while my soul was absent, so that I could never come back to claim Dorothy—to protect her!”

For several minutes, the two men stared into each other's eyes. At last Zolani shrugged his shoulders, though now his white-toothed smile was absent.

“Well, it is true you are not the fool I thought you!” he said, slowly. “So, while you may perhaps surmise

that your future is a brief one, you may as well see a little drama which will deeply interest you. Dorothy Leigh sleeps only for a brief interval—only for the space of one hour. Already that hour is near its end. And I shall let you see the restoration. One warning, first.

“It is not my will that you leave this place alive. So much you have already divined. But since I choose to let you take with you the bitter memory of that which you are to behold, remember this: only *I* can restore the absent soul of Dorothy Leigh. And, whatever you see me do, if you interrupt me it shall not be restored. It shall wander, homeless and friendless in outer space, until the normal time of the termination of her life upon this earth—a period of some fifty years, no doubt. If you interrupt me, you will have condemned her whom you love to the most horrible exile the mind of man can imagine. Do you agree—do you swear—to hold your hand, not to interrupt me under any circumstances?”

Donald took the oath which Zolani commanded. He watched then, while Zolani brought the deathlike body of Dorothy Leigh and laid it in the reclining-chair which awaited it. The horrible apparatus which had reminded him of the electric connections essential to a death chair was put in correct arrangement. Zolani showed him the irreversible switch marked “time,” which he had set for one hour, and which in a few minutes would have its period of operation fulfilled. He showed him the other switch which was to be operated by the throwing of a lever—and when this switch was thrown in, the returning spirit of Dorothy would appear as a bright flame in the glass globe. Then, and then only, the element of will-power entered into consideration: Dorothy must will herself back from the rosy fluid into her waiting body.

“No trouble there—she’ll come to me! She’ll come to me!” Donald thought, trying to forget that soon after her coming she would in all probability find herself mourning Donald’s death by murder at the hands of Zolani or his dumb assistant.

IT SEEMED a long time, but was probably in reality only minutes, before the leaden-colored liquid began to quiver and change within its glass walls. Donald’s heart leaped high; then suddenly a soft brightness like the glow of a sunrise made the globe beautiful, and in another instant a pure flame like the fire of a star bathed in dawnlight appeared—the soul of Dorothy Leigh imprisoned in the globe, needing only an effort of her pure will to re-enter the waiting body, which now seemed to stir a little and to breathe visibly.

“Dorothy!” Donald’s soul was on his lips. But Zolani suddenly stooped over the girl, reminding Donald of the swooping flight of one of the vultures whose home this desolate place had been. His arms encircled the plastic waist of the girl, his lips were laid upon her fluttering lips. Donald cried out again, this time in horror. For a moment only, Zolani turned to him.

“She makes her choice!” he cried triumphantly. “Either her exiled spirit refuses to re-enter her body, and is condemned to the horrible fate I have described—or she comes back, not only to herself, but—to me—to my arms, my lips! My spirit strives with hers. If Dorothy Leigh is now restored to life, never can her spirit shake off mine—never can she be free of me, or free to love any but her master! Fool! I could almost let you live, in your harmlessness—almost!”

In the next moments, Donald lived an eternity of anguish. What fate to pray for, for the girl he loved, he did not know. Horrible, that long

disembodied exile—horrible beyond words! But equally horrible, the slavery Zolani hinted at—the slavery which would begin by forcing Dorothy, who loathed Zolani, to return to consciousness in his arms, never again to be far from them or free of him.

Once more, Zolani's embrace clasped the girl more closely. Once more his avid lips sought hers. And suddenly, a splintering crash, which was again and again repeated, broke the spell which seemed to hold them all immovable. Zolani sprang to his feet, a pale horror on his countenance:

"In spite of all precautions, I am discovered!" he cried. "In spite of my silencing all those who have helped, in spite of all—surely, men are battering in the windows of the house upstairs—the windows of my dormuary——"

Undecided, he looked at the body of Dorothy Leigh. But to Donald, nothing but Dorothy mattered—nothing else in the world. For him there was no fatal moment of vacillation. Even as Zolani spoke, he had rushed to her, drawn her into his arms, kissed her warming lips—and felt the ecstasy of their return kiss.

He turned, then, to Zolani. Before either man could speak, another crash and clatter made the building shake, and he could hear the screaming of voices through the thick walls, and the screaming of other things—could they be the angry souls of the eighteen sleepers who had been mysteriously attacked and could not return to their dwelling-places?

"One of my men must have gotten away—and managed to communicate with the nearest town, which is only ten miles from here!" Zolani hissed. "You know what the ignorant mob mind is capable of—fanatics and fools! They have heard a tale of my putting men to sleep and incarcerating their bodies in my dormuary above. They have made of it a tale

of wholesale murder, and come to wreak revenge. Explain to them, convince them? It would be hard to do as much to a body of savants, unprepared for my stupendous discoveries—impossible to a herd of yokels. No! One thing there is that terrifies me, as some men are stricken out of themselves with horror by great heights, or fire, or water. The thing that makes me less than a man with fear, is—a mob! Once I suffered at the hands of a mob——"

He covered his face with his shaking hands. Then, leaping forward, Donald strove to tear those hands from the count's face, seeing that in the palm of one was held a small vial full of a black fluid, which, even as Donald stared in horror, disappeared down the throat of the count. Zolani dropped his hands, then, and stared blankly at Donald, with a horrid, empty smile. His body, Donald knew, was tenantless, before it crumpled slowly to the floor, and to it there would be no returning of the banished spirit, for the very lips were blackened and burned with the poison which had brought instant and strangely painless death.

An overpowering impulse seized then upon Donald—an impulse to catch up Dorothy in his arms and make his escape with her—to get her away from this room of death, and away from the confusion and rioting which he could hear from above stairs and from without. Zolani had been right—there were shouts of men mingled with sounds of violence, and again that other shrieking which seemed to touch Donald's heart with a strange horror. He turned hastily to Dorothy now, but made no move to touch her; before he had the right to take her away, there was work to be done. To his relief, her eyes were open, and she smiled.

"Don't be afraid, my darling—I will be back at once," he reassured

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Vulture Crag

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her. "Can you wait alone here for just a little while?"

The girl nodded. Her eyes seemed full of a strange dream, but they were clear and calm.

Donald rushed through the door which, after all, Zolani had not thought it necessary to lock, and up a winding stairway. As he burst into the entrance hall of the building, he heard the crackling of flames: the building had been fired by a thrown torch, so that the upper portion was burning before the lower part took fire. And now those eery screeches were no longer mystery, but horrible fact. Around the gloomy mansion the vultures were wheeling; in and out through broken window-panes they flew, and one bore in his talons something at which Donald could not look. . . .

HE FLUNG open the outer door and faced the mob. A shower of missiles seemed about to descend around him; the mob, after the manner of mobs, had gone berserk, and the light in the eyes of its leaders was not the light of reason. And yet, by some miracle of perils escaped and vital need, Donald made them listen—made them believe.

"The man you came to find is dead," he shouted above the din, and they heard him. "The man who rebuilt this house—the man who filled it with corpses, as you think. *Men!* That man was about to murder me—I escaped death at his hands because you came. Now there is barely time to avert—to *try* to avert—a horrible tragedy. I can explain later, not now. The bodies you thought were dead bodies are about to be burnt here, as though this whole house were a funeral pyre. Worse still, these horrible birds——"

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Donald felt a responsive shudder run through the crowd.

"It is worse than you think. These men——"

He stopped suddenly. He had been about to tell them that these men were not dead, but sleeping. But to say such a thing to these farmers and small shopkeepers would be to brand himself as a madman. Moreover, even if Count Zolani's apparatus could yet be saved from the flames, he was not sure that he knew how to operate it. And if it could not be operated, the sleepers would sleep on. He wondered, miserably, just when that sleep would become grim, literal death. And, even as he wondered, he flung out his hands in a gesture of entreaty. He dared not identify himself with the count's great experiment, if he were to preserve a hope of attempting to complete it.

"Carry out the bodies! Save them!" he begged.

He rushed back, then, to rescue Dorothy. There were enough of those others to carry the eighteen helpless bodies of men out of the lockers of the "dormuary," which had become more sinister than its name, borrowed from the name of an abode of death. There were enough, and they were responding to his appeal. Would there be time? And could the basement laboratory be saved?

When he fought his way back through suffocating fumes to the open air, one of the leaders of the mob whose face bore the recent mark of an angry burn, sought him humbly.

"We have added horror to horror," he confessed, sadly. "We made our way inside—we found that dreadful locker room, like the locker room of a morgue. *What has been going on here?* Well, though the foreigner we heard of who conducted this establishment is dead, we may

solve that problem later. But—I can not tell you of the condition in which we found those bodies. Before the flames drove them away, the vultures——"

He covered his face with his hands. And in that moment, the very air seemed shattered, and a burst of flame and smoke belched from the broken, yawning windows. Already the structure was falling.

On the grass there lay the body of one man. Donald had caught sight of it—it seemed the only one the men had carried out.

"The flames were getting to them, and it seemed *better to leave them,*" the man beside him said then with a shudder. "*This one was in much better condition than any of the others.*"

Looking, Donald saw that vultures first attack the eyes of an unconscious victim. Even though they had not finished their work, never, as long as he should live, would he be able to look upon a vulture without the dreadful feeling of nausea creeping over him which overcame him now. In that moment, he abandoned all hope of saving the laboratory. Even knowing what *he* knew, he agreed with the villager who had said "better to leave them."

DOROTHY and Donald were cared for in the village. There was an investigation, and later another, for all of the eighteen had been important men. The story the two survivors had finally to tell was converted by scientists who walk in beaten paths, into other terms. Zolani had been making hypnotic experiments, and most of his victims, or dupes, had died. That was the version which was accepted.

Terrors outlived together bind closer the ties of love and affection, and Donald and Dorothy were married before they left the village. And not until then did Donald question

Dorothy as to the things which had befallen her absent spirit, during the brief hour of its wandering.

"I had thought that I, like the others, was to be left without my body for two weeks," she said musingly. "And it was such a little while—only an hour you say, Donald. Well! Perhaps that is why I have so little to tell, because the time was so short—and yet that hour, though empty, seemed an eternity. It seemed as though there is no time to a disembodied spirit—as though in one instant there is eternity. Besides that feeling, there was another—of great emptiness, of space, I suppose, and a feeling of being alone there, as a star is alone in space. And really, Donald—that is all. I think there will be more than that, in the life that comes after death. God has given me a body here on earth, and eyes to see with, and ears to hear with. Since my spirit is indestructible, I think some day He will give me another, perhaps not like this one which we know, you and I, but still a way of expressing that which I am, of comprehending in a greater or a less degree those things which are about me.

"As to the count's experiment—well, as I said, it was only an hour. But it left me with two feelings—one that of my indestructibility, and the other, a consciousness of eternity. And it left me with a conviction that though men should learn to synthesize both body and soul, only God can make them live, as He sees fit."