

Fantastic Novels

Magazine

Vol. 1

November, 1940

No. 3

Complete Book-Length Novel

THE SNAKE MOTHERA Merritt 6

Chapter I	Graydon's Story	Chapter XIII	The Painted Chamber
" II	Ramparts of Yu-Atlanchi	" XIV	The Taking of Huon's Lair
" III	The Lizard Men	" XV	The Arena of the Dinosaurs
" IV	In the Lair of Huon	" XVI	The Snake Mother
" V	Outlaws of Yu-Atlanchi	" XVII	Wisdom of the Serpent Mother
" VI	The Deathless People	" XVIII	Cavern of the Lost Wisdom
" VII	The Secret Ancient City	" XIX	The Amphitheater of Opal
" VIII	Cavern of the Frog-Woman	" XX	Feast of the Dream Makers
" IX	Shadow of the Lizard Mask	" XXI	The Taking of Suarra
" X	The Shadow of the Black Throne	" XXII	Bride of the Lizard-Man
" XI	"Lend Me Your Body, Graydon!"	" XXIII	The Collar of Nimir
" XII	Refreshment of the Dark One	" XXIV	Twilight of the Gods
		" XXV	Farewell of the Snake Mother

Complete Novelet

WHO WANTS A GREEN BOTTLE?Ted Robbins 113

Special Features

TO A. MERRITT: AUTHOR OF THE SNAKE MOTHER.....Robert W. Lowndes 112
 A WORD FROM THE EDITOR 125
 WHAT DO YOU THINK?The Readers 126

The January 1941 FANTASTIC NOVELS Will Be On Sale November 13
 Featuring "The Radio Beasts" by
 Ralph Milne Farley

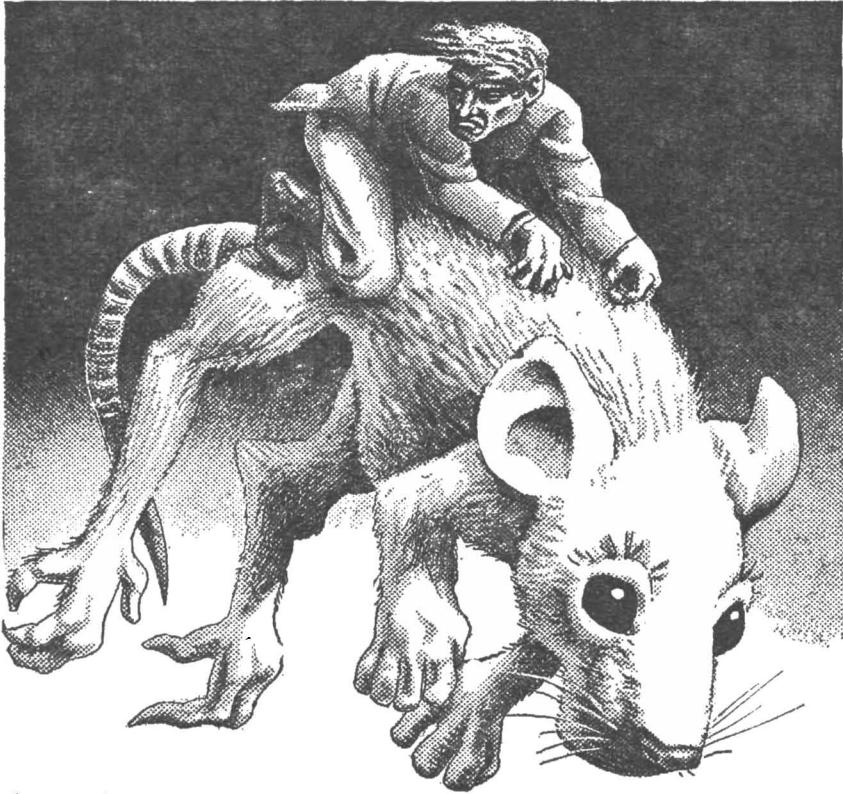
A RED STAR Magazine

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.
 WILLIAM T. DEWART, *President & Treasurer* WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., *Secretary*

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur
 LONDON: THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD., 3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4
 Copyright, 1940, by Frank A. Munsey Company. Published bi-monthly. Single copies 10 cents. By the year \$0.50; in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, \$0.75. Other countries, \$1.20. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Application for second-class entry pending at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A.

Other RED STAR Magazines

CRACK-SHOT WESTERN • RED STAR MYSTERY • ARGOSY • RED STAR ADVENTURES • FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES • DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY • RED STAR DETECTIVE • CONFESSION NOVEL OF THE MONTH • RED STAR WESTERN • RED STAR LOVE REVELATIONS • FOREIGN LEGION ADVENTURES • RED STAR SECRET CONFESSIONS • DOUBLE DETECTIVE • ALL STORY-LOVE • BIG CHIEF WESTERN • LOVE NOVEL OF THE MONTH • CAVALIER CLASSICS • RAILROAD MAGAZINE • FIFTH COLUMN STORIES • SEA NOVELS



FRANKLIN DICK

Out of the shadows there suddenly loomed the figure of a man riding some strange round-eared beast, as if all the hounds of hell were after him

Who Wants a Green Bottle?

By TOD ROBBINS

A Complete Novelet

CHAPTER I SINGING MICE

SUDDENLY there came a flash of lightning, so brilliant, so dazzling, that all the wild countryside was lit up for an instant as though by an immense conflagration. Then, far off, from the other side of those threatening, humpbacked mountains, I heard a low, rumbling sound as night once more closed and barred her ebony doors.

But in that brief moment I had caught a glimpse of what I sought. There, not a hundred yards away, on a rise of ground overlooking the road and the val-

ley, was the long, low building which a second before the lightning had traced on a madly galloping background of clouds. Now, although my eyes were still straining in that direction, I saw nothing.

Not a light beckoned me. The house, the hill, the sky, had been blotted out.

Nevertheless I had the general direction. Backing the car into a nest of bushes beside the road, I took out my small electric flashlight and began to ascend the slope.

It was a stiff climb for a corpulent man well over fifty, and soon I was breathing like one of my asthmatic patients.

Copyright, 1918, by The Frank A. Munsey Company

What little breath I had left was swept away by a gust of wind which struck me full in the face, just as I breasted the slope. It took me quite by surprise—for down below I could have held a lighted match till it burned my fingers—and snatched off my soft hat, spinning it away somewhere into space. My legs were not too steady under me when I reached the house. For a space I leaned against one of the large, white pillars on the veranda to regain my breath and something of my dignity.

As I waited, another gust, straight from the lake, went howling by, stirring the tall pine-trees about the house into a muttering, mutinous revolt, and causing a loose shutter somewhere in the upper blackness to beat out a devil's tattoo against the ivy-covered wall. Then suddenly all became silence again—a brilliant silence lit up by a flash of lightning which showed me the rounded bowl of the valley and the white stretch of road. And on its heel there followed such a crash of thunder that the whole landscape seemed to turn sick and dizzy.

"This is no night to be out," I thought, and, wasting no more time, rapped sharply on the door.

SCARCELY had the echo of my knocking died away when the windows on the lower floor winked out at me; and before I could so much as brush the wind-tossed hair out of my eyes, the door swung open and I came face to face with the Laird of Lockleaven.

After the blackness which had followed the flash of lightning, that hallway seemed blazing. And there he stood, as long and lean as a fishing-pole, looking out at me with the great terror-stricken eyes of a startled deer. He wore some kind of fuzzy bathrobe which made him seem even taller; and he had a mad tuft of gray hair on his chin which twitched oddly—or maybe it was the wind stroking it. That was all I caught at a glance.

"Come in, Dr. O'Brien," he said with a bow like a dancing-master. "You're late."

Now, what from the battering of the wind, the loss of my best hat, and perhaps a glass too many at the Claymore, I was too fuddled already to marvel much at his words. Not a thought did I give to how he knew my name or why he expected me at all, till after the door had closed on the night.

"You'll pardon my intrusion, sir," I said as soon as I got my breath. "The fact is that I was motoring home, and a half mile up the road my headlights

flickered out. Now, if there had been a moon, or—"

But he cut me short with a wave of his hand. "Nonsense, Dr. O'Brien!" he said as sharp as the snap of a whip. "I was expecting you; and this lady and gentleman—they were expecting you, too." He jerked his thumb toward the wall.

I wheeled about in some confusion at that, and came face to face with a hard-featured old chap in a periwig glaring down at me from a mildewed picture-frame. To his right was the portrait of a very determined old lady with a pointed chin that curled up like the toe of an old slipper. She had a fan in her hand, but she held it as I have seen boys grip their shillalaha on the way to the county-fair.

"Ancestors?" I asked with a half-hearted chuckle, for the stony eyes of the painted lady had somehow or other got under my skin.

"My great-grandfather and grandmother, Sir Robert Lockleaven and his lady," he says rather proud. "Now step this way, Dr. O'Brien. There's a fire in the library and a bottle of good old port uncorked. And I'm thinking you'll be needing both before the dawn breaks."

With that he ushered me into as cheery a looking room as I ever want to see. In the days when this house was built, they knew the meaning of fireplaces. It did my heart good to see the great log flaring up on the hearth—a log the size of a well-grown tree-trunk; and, in front of it, a semicircle of easy-chairs that tired men could sleep in; and last of all, the mahogany table with two glasses and a decanter of wine which glowed ruby-red where the light touched it. And even the glimpse I caught of other sour-featured portraits on the wall failed to overshadow my good spirits.

HE MOTIONED me into one of the easy-chairs, and pouring out two glasses of port, handed me one and raised the other aloft. "Here's success to you, Dr. O'Brien!" he cried, while his frightened eyes flashed, and once again the mad wisp of hair on his chin twitched oddly.

"And here's success to you," said I, draining my glass at a swallow, for the dust of the road had got into my throat.

"That goes without saying," said he. "If you win, I win. Do you happen to have a green glass bottle in your pocket, Dr. O'Brien?"

"A green glass bottle?" I said, dumfounded. "Whatever would I be doing with a green glass bottle, Mr.—"

"Lockleaven's the name," he muttered, seating himself and adjusting the folds of his bathrobe as I have seen old ladies do with their skirts after getting into a bus. "I was christened Robert Lockleaven after my great grandfather." He bent his head and began to pick nervously at a loose strand of worsted. "I'm pretty well known in the village," he finished with a haughty tilt to his chin.

At that I started so that I nearly dropped the glass. I was new to that country, but already the name was familiar enough. Indeed, it had more than once figured in Scottish history. But gradually that fiery stream had slackened; and now—if report could be believed—the last of the line was a man weakened in both body and mind. In the village he was known as "the Daft Laird of Lockleaven"; and scandalous stories were still told of his escapades before old age had taken the marrow out of his bones.

Now, as he refilled my glass, I studied the man. He had the high, broad forehead of a thinker, the deep-set, fiery eyes of a dreamer, the firmly arched nose and expanding nostrils of a warrior. But the lower half of his face was deplorable. Here all the weaknesses of his soul were laid bare. The pitiable indecision of the twitching chin, the animal pout of the thickish red lips, the long, yellow tooth poking out at each side of his mouth—all these were enough to give a Christian the shivers.

"How did you know I was coming to-night, Mr. Lockleaven?" I asked.

"Know it!" he cried with an unpleasant snicker. "Why, I know everything." He paused, and a look of caution creased his jowls. "Besides, didn't I send Meg for you?" he finished.

"I've been away for the week, and—"

But again he cut me short with that quick motion of his hand. "Never puzzle your head over that, man," he cried peevishly. "There's more pressing matters afoot. What's crystal-gazing and such bairns' play, when it comes to the saving of a live, human soul?"

"Is there some one sick here?" I asked.

"So there is," he said very soberly; "so there is—unco sick. But *sh!* What's that?"

Usually I am steady as the next man. But there was something in the Laird of Lockleaven's eyes as he looked at me; something in the Laird of Lockleaven's voice as he spoke to me, which grated on my nervous system like sand-paper. In spite of myself I felt gooseflesh rippling up my back.

For several moments we both sat silent,

listening to the reverberating thunder which still echoed faintly far off in the hills, to the crackling of the fire, and the scampering of the mice behind the wainscoting in the wall.

"Do you hear them?" he asked.

"I hear nothing," I answered sharply enough; "nothing but the thunder and the fire and the mice in the wall."

"The mice!" cried the Laird of Lockleaven with a quick, low laugh. "Did you ever hear tell of mice that could sing and talk and cry? Put your ear to the wall and listen."

To humor him I did as he told me. At first I could hear nothing; but soon a low, suppressed note, very much like a muffled sob, made my eardrum tingle. Once more a spasm of childish fear passed through me.

"Poor Aunt Mary!" said the Laird of Lockleaven solemnly. "She wouldn't stop mourning in life, and now she cannot. Night and day I hear her, night and day."

With a mighty effort I shook off the strange, numbing fear which was creeping over me like a coverlet of snow. "Mr. Lockleaven," I cried with a forced laugh, "you are to be congratulated—you have singing mice in your wall! They're not too common, but there are such things. Look, there goes one, now!" I pointed to a little, brown speck which scurried across the room and vanished somewhere in the shadows.

The Laird of Lockleaven raised his head. "My grandfather has just let his cattle out to graze," he murmured.

"What did you say?" I asked, making no sense out of his words.

For a moment he was silent, and then he cried out in a loud, authoritative voice: "Will you listen to me, Dr. O'Brien, or will I just have to be trusting my soul to Meg's withering hands and dim eyes? Will you listen to the tale I've got to tell you, Dr. O'Brien?"

I took a long pull at the port before I spoke. My nerves were trembling like fiddle-strings. I had an odd fancy that the portraits on the walls—all these hard featured, sour-faced Lockleavens—had poked their heads out of their frames to lend an ear to our talk.

"I am awaiting your pleasure, sir," I said very slowly.

CHAPTER II

IN A WHISKY GLASS

"THE Lockleavens are an ill-starred race," my host began. "The balance of sanity is not in them. Each one of my house must either ride or be ridden. They saddle and bridle a hobby, then

spur it till both horse and man are foundered. Whether it be generosity or greed, swashbuckling or psalm-singing, drunkenness or sobriety, each of us travels too far on that road. We begin by denying the devil and we end in denying God.

"My uncle, the tenth Laird of Lockleaven, like others of his blood, spurred his hobby a wee bit too far. As a young man he had the name in the countryside of being a canny laddie; at middle age, when I first remember him, he was as withered as a dead branch, with a pinched, frost-bitten face, and bitter, blue eyes. He had begun by being careful with the small fortune his gambling father had left him, and he ended by nearly starving his household to death to fill the great money-chest at the head of his bed.

"One by one he got rid of the extra mouths to feed, till at last there was only Meg and myself to minister to him. What a spider of a man he was—going about the house soft-footed in his slippers and cocking his eye at us if we so much as blinked at his iron-bound chest. I can see him now with his sidelong gait, his long, thin fingers stroking his beard like bent twigs in a hedge, and his silly, solitary smile wrinkling the loose skin of his jowls.

"When he came to die there was little mourning in Lockleaven Hall. I was a lean lad of eighteen on the night when the great sickness gripped him. Meg had set me to watch at his bedside, while she had scuttled off to the village for Dr. MacLean. Before she had left she had lighted the old-fashioned tapers above his bed, and I sat all hunched up in one corner, watching the light flickering over the sick man's face and the heaving bedclothes at each long breath.

"How long I sat there, to this day I don't know—it might have been an hour or more—but after a time I grew drowsy and closed my eyes for a bit. When I opened them again, there had come a change. The laird had been lying flat on his back, his eyes on the ceiling; but now he lay on one side, his face to the wall. The frayed fringe of his whiskers trembled slightly, but his loud breathing had ceased.

"I rose and approached my uncle with a feeling of awe that death should have hovered so near while I slept; and then, as I put my hand on the footboard of his bed and looked down, horror gripped me by the hair. Horror did I say? It was more than that. It was just as though my brain had been turned into soft, quivering jelly.

"Unconsciously my eyes wandered to my uncle's long gray beard; and there, through the tangled meshes on the pillow, I saw a tiny, crouching form and a pair of pinpoint eyes.

"At that I must have cried out and fallen back in a swoon. The next thing I remember is Dr. MacLean bending over me and the taste of brandy in my mouth. He had found me unconscious beside my uncle's death-bed."

The Laird of Lockleaven paused to wipe gleaming drops of perspiration from his forehead. Through the silence which followed his words, I heard a great commotion behind the wainscoting—a galloping as of a troop of horses, a shrill piteous squeaking, and then a sound which might have been a distant bugle-call.

"You hear them?" he said with a haggard smile. "That's Mad Anthony and his hounds. They've sighted a buck, or I'm much mistaken."

"There's an army of rats and mice in your walls," I broke in with an involuntary shudder, for the knowing, listening tilt of his head was an unhealthy thing to see.

"Rats and mice there are for those who hunt and ride," he said. "But it's not these I have in mind, nor one of them I saw that night through the tangle of my dead uncle's beard."

"WHAT was it then?" I asked, taking another long drink of the port to steady me.

"I'm coming to that," said he. "After my uncle's death, the chest of money was mine. You can readily surmise that I lost no time in opening it. Having no taste of pleasure up to this—and for the most part going about in rags with a belly as empty as a toy balloon—it was no wonder that I played pitch and toss with the ten commandments.

"I can give you my word that I lived the devil of a life for a round dozen years, with never a breathing spell on the Sabbath, till my uncle's old chest sounded hollow as a drum when I gave it a tap with the toe of my boot. And Meg grew soft and yellow as a tub of butter from good living and gin; and tales were told in the village of how she was seen taking a glass with the devil on Black Friar's Heath.

"Well, time went on with a jig-step till one All Souls' Eve—twenty years ago tonight. I had had a few gentlemen playing cards with me up at the Hall, but they had ridden off before midnight in a black rage with some cock-and-bull story of how I had slipped a card up my sleeve.

"Now, I was sitting in this very chair, nodding a bit, an empty glass in my hand, when what should I see but a gold piece lying on the carpet at my feet. I was about to reach down for it—for I was always a careful man even in drink—when out of the corner of my eye I spied something which made my hair ruffle up.

"You can believe it or not—but there, creeping out from the wall, was a wee man no bigger than my thumb; a wee man in a yellow gown and nightcap, with a few threads of beard hanging from his chin. On all fours, he was creeping toward me, wagging his head as he came.

"'A fairy!'" I said to myself, remembering what Meg had told me of the tiny folk who dance in the moonlight. 'If I can catch him, he'll give me a wish.' So I waited as patient as Job with my eyelashes lowered, snoring a bit just to put heart in him, till he came up and laid hold of the gold piece. Then you should have seen the sweating time he had over it! First he'd bend his crooked old back to it and hoist and hoist till he had lifted it up a pin's breadth on one side; and then, just as he thought he had it fairly started, down it would come on his knuckle-bones and he'd let out a shrill squeak like a mouse. It was all I could do to watch him and not roar with laughter.

"'So!' I thought to myself. 'After all the good things I've heard tell of you from Meg, you're nothing but a pack of thieves when it comes to that! Break into my house and steal my gold, will you?' As quick as a flash, I leaned down and clapped my glass over him—and he with his back still bent over the coin.

"But he wasn't quiet long. No sooner did he have the bottom of the tumbler as a roof for his head, than up he jumped as spry as you please. And what a commotion there was! First he leaped straight up like a startled buck, and the top of his head clinked against the glass; next he whirled about with outstretched arms, making a noise all the time like a beetle caught between two window-panes; and then, when there came no hope from heaven or hell, down he flopped on his knees and whimpered and whined till all the tumbler was tinkling with it.

"By this time, as you may guess, I was near dead from laughing so. But soon I remembered that it was All Souls' Eve and that, if Meg did not lie, a wish might be had for the asking. So I got down on all fours and squinted through the tumbler. Then, of a sudden, I knew the

wee man—and I clapped my hand to my mouth to keep back a yell."

CHAPTER III

A DEAD MAN TELLS A TALE

THE Laird of Lockleaven paused, and the tuft of hair on his chin was wiggling like a squirrel's tail popping into a rotten log. And all his face was twitching till it seemed to me that he hadn't one face but a dozen. But his eyes were still, and they looked out like two frozen lakes in the moonlight.

"And who was the little man?" I asked.

"There was only one mortal man could cock his eye like a Kelpie," said the Laird of Lockleaven solemnly. "'Twas none other than my dead and buried uncle.

"Yes, there he sat in his old yellow robe and slippers, his nightcap clapped on his head all awry, his bitter blue eyes eating holes in my self-esteem. It was a sight to make your blood run cold. And he was champing his old lean jaws at me like one who has the taste of bitter words on his tongue.

"'Well, Uncle Peter,' said I, though my teeth were clinking together from fright, 'it's a pleasure to welcome you home to the Hall. And to see you so spry for a man of your years,' I added, for he had made a spring against the glass like a spider at a fly.

"'Robbie Lockleaven,' my uncle cried, 'I'll have the hide off you for this!'

"'You will not, Uncle Peter,' said I. 'You'll stay right where you are as a disgusting example of an old man in his cups!'

"At that his eyes glowed like two fire-flies and his beard curled up, till I would have taken to my heels had it not been for the good liquor in me. As small as he was, I couldn't forget the fear I had of him when I was a boy.

"'Robbie Lockleaven,' he cried again in a voice like a pin scratching against the window-pane, 'you're a spendthrift and worse! You're building up a mountain of trouble in the life to come. But just lift up the tumbler, laddle; and I'll let bygones be bygones. Ye'll no be adding disrespect to your ither sins? Ye'll no be sic a fule, Robbie?'

"Now as his speech began to soften into the dialect of the countryside, I saw plain enough that I had the upper hand. Besides, when it came to that, how could a mite of a man do me bodily harm? Thinking in this wise, I spoke up bravely enough.

"'I'll lift up the glass under one condition, Uncle Peter,' I said. 'It's All Souls' Eve; and it's only fair that a body should

wish a wish. Grant me a wish, and I'll let you go free.'

"Well, he grinned a bit in an uncommonly nasty way, and he stroked his beard a bit, and then he lifted his voice in a whine. 'Hae ye no had my bonny treasure-box?' he squalled. 'Hae ye no scattered my siller to the four winds like chaff? Hae ye no made me come out o' the wall no less than twascore times to lift precious guineas till my auld back is no more than a broken reed?'

"Now I knew I had won the victory, and I laughed aloud. 'You old foxy-eyed thief!' I cried, 'I've caught you fair; and a wish I will have. You can't go prowling about Lockleaven Hall when you should be six feet deep in the kirk-yard, stealing my money and playing pranks altogether unseemly for a man of your years, without just paying the piper. A wish I will have.'

"'Weel then, have your wish and be damned!' cried Uncle Peter in a rage. 'Wish quick now, for the fumes of vile liquor in this glass are makin' my auld head spin around like a whirligig.'

"Well, I thought for a while before I spoke. Finally I said: 'There's only one thing worth knowing to a worldly wise man like me. I'm going to ask you for that which has no weight in the hand, but is more precious than jewels. I'm just seeking knowledge of heaven and hell. What's the human soul like, Uncle Peter; and what follows life for the good and the bad?'

"Now the old man cocked again his eye at me, and he stroked his beard like I'd often seen him do while driving home a good bargain. 'So that's your wish, Robbie?' he says smooth as sirup.

"By the tone of his voice, the manner he had of stroking his beard, and most of all by the glint in his eye, I knew well enough that trouble was brewing. But I couldn't retract, having once stated my wish in the King's English. So I answered: 'Just that,' and held my breath like a man under water.

"'Weel then, to begin,' said Uncle Peter with a twitch of a smile, 'the human soul is just a wee mite o' a man like me. I am the human soul of Peter Lockleaven, deceased.'

"'Did you take shape after death?' I asked.

"'Na, na,' says he. 'I was always in the man like the core in an apple. You have one as weel, Robbie Lockleaven—a canny, wee man, hidin' within, as like to yourself as two peas. Hae ye no felt him tinkerin' away at your brain?'

"'Nonsense!' said I. 'Such a theory is contrary to science.'

"'Is it so?' he cried. 'To modern science, ye mean. There were wise men of old who knew well enow that the human soul had a body to it. Did they no debate lang syne on the matter—growin' red in the face ower questions of how many souls could be dancin' a hielapd fling on the point of a needle? Robbie, will ye be denyin' that the human body weighs a wee mite less when the soul has sped?'

"'So I have heard,' I answered with a flicker of fear. 'Yet surely it can be accounted for by—'

"'But Uncle Peter brushed my words aside as though they had been so many dead leaves. 'Na, na,' he piped. 'It canna be accounted for—except ye believe lies. There's nae doot about it—a human soul there is, with a body to it and all.'

"'THEN Uncle Peter,' I said, 'will you explain to me how it is that doctors don't see it when they operate; or why we don't get a glimpse of it when we see a man die?'

"'I will that,' said Uncle Peter with a smile and a sneer. 'We souls are no ower anxious to be poked at and handled. When a doctorin' man cuts into our hame, we just scuttle awa to anither room till he's done with his work. Say he's tinkerin' at the brain; weel, we take to our heels and hide in the belly.'

"'And when a man dies?' I broke in.

"'When a man dies, we just bide our time till naeboddy's heedin'; and then awa we go to heaven or hell. It's simple enough, laddie, when they're bendin' ower the deceased, half-blinded by tears—or maybe the fule doctor's feelin' for the heart beats and not carin' ower-much what the soul may be at—to scuttle awa to the foot of the bed, to slip to the floor and go tiptooin' off in the dark. But, mind ye, I'm not sayin' that we hae no been seen one time or anither. There was yourself, Robbie, poppin' your een at me when I was bidin' my time in the dead Laird of Lockleaven's beard.'

"In spite of myself, my knees began to shake from fright. Uncle Peter had begun to chuckle; and his merriment came through the tumbler like the chirping of a sick canary.

"'And where does your soul go to when it leaves the body?' I asked.

"'Heaven or hell lies in the walls of ilka hame. Lockleaven Hall,' he said, 'is well stocken with souls, Robbie. Do ye not hear 'em scramblin' about in the wainscotin', chatterin' and whimperin', blowin' on horns and pipin' on bagpipes? Rats and mice? Na, na. Though some of them we hae for Mad Anthony, who is never content till he's thrown his leg

ower the back of a nag and is awa to the huntin'. Twascore Lockleavens hae died in this house—twascore souls are in yonder wall. You'll be joinin' us soon, Robbie, I'm thinkin'.

"But still I wasn't convinced that Uncle Peter was telling the truth. 'If I let you out of the tumbler,' I said, 'you'll have to show me heaven and hell.'

"I canna do that, Robbie,' he whined. 'Heaven is no for me. They wouldna hae us prowlin' aboot through that blessed wall. Now will no a vist to hell content ye?'

"Well, I thought so hard for a minute that my head ached; and then, all of a sudden, I made up my mind like a man jumping off a high cliff. 'I'll just have to be contented with hell, Uncle Peter,' I said, 'seeing that you're not overanxious to take me to heaven.'

"'Dinna think that!' he cried with a shake of his head. 'The will is there, but the godliness is missin'. Now just lift up the tumbler, Robbie; and we'll be startin' in twa shakes.'

"'And you will not take to your heels?' I asked.

"'Na,' he muttered, 'I couldna do that on All Souls' Eve.'

"'And you'll bring me back safe out of hell, Uncle Peter?' I said, not liking the grin that twitched his flea-bitten beard.

"'That I will, laddie,' said he very solemn.

"Well, Dr. O'Brien, I took a long drink out of a bottle of Scotch which stood on the table; and then I bent down and lifted the tumbler. And my dead uncle sat still as a toad the while, and never so much as blinked an eye.

"'Now sit ye doun beside me, Robbie,' he said. And when I had done as he wished he began to sing a snatch of a song which ran something like this:

"'Dinna ye hear the pipes of Locklear
A-weepin' and whimperin' oot there in
the night?
Dinna ye greet for souls that maun keep
A watchin' and waitin' for threads o' the
light?

Come oot o' the body,
Wee souls, while ye can;
There's buckets o' toddy
For ilka wee man.'

"Hardly had his voice died away, when everything seemed to vanish into space. I felt that I was enclosed in some kind of shadowy dungeon—or rather at the bottom of some pit down which a faint light had sifted. And with this feeling, there came a wild desire to escape. I climbed up and up and soon came to

the mouth of the tunnel. Squeezing between two jagged lines of ivory pillars which blocked my path, I leaped out into the open.

"At the next moment, I was rolling down a steep declivity with the speed of lightning. At last I collided violently with Uncle Peter at the bottom—an Uncle Peter who had suddenly regained his full stature and who was regarding me sourly.

"'Ye daft fule!' he cried, rubbing his back. 'Is that any way to be runnin' against a man? Ye should look afore ye leap oot o' sic a tall hame.'

CHAPTER IV

OUT OF THE BODY

"WELL, Dr. O'Brien, I looked up and saw that I was standing in the shadow of a gigantic statue—a statue which I thought must be at least two hundred feet tall. It sat cross-legged with bowed head and its huge tunnelliike mouth was open.

"'What's that, Uncle Peter?' I asked.

"'That's naething more nor less than your ain body, Robbie Lockleaven,' he said very solemn. 'I've charmed your soul oot o' it.'

"'I see you've grown to full size!' I cried.

"'Na, na,' said he. 'It's you that's grown as small as a match. But we'd best be on our way, Robbie, for it's a lang walk to the wall of hell and I'm no so spry as I was.'

"Well, as you may guess, my head was spinning around from all I'd heard; so I thought it best not to say any more, but just to follow his lead. When he started ambling off with a jerk of his head at me, I put my best foot forward and was at his heels in no time.

"First we skirted a small tower of glass, which Uncle Peter said was the tumbler—not that I believed him or could—and off we started across a level space where long red grass sprouted up above my slippers.

"'Ye should tear up this carpet, Robbie,' Uncle Peter called back over his shoulder. 'It's most unco wearisome thing when a body's leg weary.'

"But I made him no answer, for I was looking about and wondering at all I saw. I seemed to be on a kind of a desert. As far as the eye could reach, the landscape was flat except for the statue and several weird wooden structures which rose up on each side of it. The sky was threatening gray. Not a star glimmered. But somewhere in the remote distance, I saw a gigantic, blazing sun which

lighted the whole landscape with blazing effrontery.

"'So this is hell!' I murmured.

"'Na, na,' said Uncle Peter, uneasily. 'We hae no reached it yet. This is naething more nor less than the library of Lockleaven Hall.'

"'What's hell like, Uncle Peter?' I asked coming up alongside of him.

"'Hell?' he cried with a start. 'Why hell is just hell. Ye can be takin' notes soon enow, Robbie. It's an unco wearisome place.'

"'Then why were you so anxious to return to it?' I couldn't help asking, for the drink and curiosity was still strong in me.

"'Anxious to gang back!' cried Uncle Peter. 'Are ye daft, Robbie? If ye had had a wee bit of sense, ye'd have just kept me in that bonnie glass till judgment-day. And I'd have thanked ye for it on my bended knees, Robbie; though I'm a temperate man with a distaste for the smell o' strong drink.'

"'You were clamoring loud enough to get out of it,' said I.

"'Nae doot,' he muttered. 'But ye shouldna hae given me heed. 'Twas not me that was clamorin', Robbie, but the spirit of hell which gives me no rest. After we leave our mortal bodies behind us, we can no longer do just as we please. We've just got to scuttle awa on the devil's errands, and pay with sweat for our sins.'

"'And how do you pay, Uncle Peter?' I asked.

"'Why, just by livin' under the same roof with a fule like you,' he says very sharp. 'Do ye no think I sweat tears o' blood when I see ye throwin' my gude siller awa like it was chaff? Twascore times hae I seen my bright gold pieces lyin' on the carpet; twascore times hae I bent my old back to 'em—just to find 'em ower heavy to lift. Me, who they say was a wee bit too canny, to see sic wastefulness in Lockleaven Hall!'

UNCLE PETER had worked himself up into such a fury, that I thought it best to say no more for the present; so once again, I glanced about me.

"We had been walking at a brisk pace for upward of a half-hour, yet, on looking over my shoulder, I could still see that gigantic, seated colossus which my uncle assured me was my own body. Indeed, from this distance, I noted a certain resemblance to myself. Of course, when I had been standing directly under it, it had seemed all out of human proportion; but now, from a mile or so away, I noted with an odd sensation of fear

that it had something strangely familiar about it. Perhaps it was the incongruity of a statue wearing a dressing-gown and slippers like my own, which caused great beads of perspiration to spring out on my brow.

"As I continued to stare back over my shoulder, I suddenly heard a threatening roar above my head, and looking up, I saw a flock of strange birds flying swiftly past. They were larger than eagles and inky black; and they emitted a thundering sound like a thousand steam-engines going at once. Soon they became black specks in the distance, specks which hovered over the gigantic statue; and finally I saw one of them descend on its nose.

"'Never fash your head ower them, Robbie,' said Uncle Peter. 'They're naething more nor less than houseflies taking a wee flight. Come awa, laddie.'

"I turned about, and as I did so I saw, very dim and hazy in the distance, a black, towering cliff which seemed to rise straight up into the somber sky.

"'Tis the wall of hell,' said Uncle Peter sadly; and he started off again at a brisk pace.

"Now, as I followed him, pushing through the tangle of red grass, I fell to wondering what the old gentleman meant when he said that he'd have been happy to live out his days in my whisky glass. Perhaps, if I found hell to be such an unpleasant place as he hinted, I could cheat it in time, had I once the secret.

"'Were you safe from hell in that glass, Uncle Peter?' I asked.

"'Not altogether,' he said kind of careless over his shoulder. 'They couldna hae got me out, but they would hae tormented me sore. Had it been a green glass bottle, Robbie—as green as the sea—why, I'd ha been as safe as a bug in a rug.'

"At that I burst out into a laugh, 'Thank you kindly, Uncle Peter!' I cried. 'So a green glass bottle is the refuge from hell? I'll be minding that when my time comes to die.'

"And then, as I saw plainly, the old gentleman could have snapped his own nose off in rage. But all he said was: 'Ah, weel, Robbie, there's mony a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. Ye canna hide awa in green glass bottles when hell is beckonin'.'

"By now we were in the shadow of the cliff. And well might Uncle Peter call it a wall, for it shot straight up with no foothold for man or beast. And away to the left, a cave had been scooped out of it; and in this cave, roaring and thundering, was a many-headed sheet of flame fully a hundred feet high.

"'Is that hell?' I asked.

"'Na, na,' said Uncle Peter with a snort of contempt. 'That's naething but your ain fireplace, and a wee birch log sputterin' a bit. Come this way, Robbie, if ye are seekin' hell.'

"At that, Uncle Peter took my hand as though I were a bairn, and led me right up to the face of the cliff. Then I saw that it was no cliff at all, rightly speaking, but just a great wall of dark-colored wood which ran up and up till it lost itself in the sky. And down at my feet was a round hole in this wall, just large enough for a man to put his head and shoulders through.

"I'll gang ahead," whispered Uncle Peter; and he got down on his knees and popped into that hole as smooth as a rat.

"Before I followed, I turned and took a last look at the world I was leaving.

"There, that strange desert stretched away from me as flat as the palm of your hand; and there, like a giant brooding over the universe, sat that great statue of me in its gown and slippers—its jaw dropped low on its chest. How I pitied it then, Dr. O'Brien—yet, for the life of me, I couldn't tell why. There it sat, staring out over that crimson grass with its sightless eyes. 'You are leaving me forever,' it seemed to be saying, 'me, who have carried you in sickness and health, in joy and in sorrow! Shame on your soul, Robbie Lockleaven!'

"'Now, that ye are at hell's gate, do ye fear to enter?' said Uncle Peter, popping his head out of the hole and sneering at me. 'I misdoot ye have the heart for the venture.'

"For answer, I flopped down on my hands and knees, and after a tight squeeze of it, crawled after him through the gates of hell."

CHAPTER V

"A BELLY FULL OF HELL"

A GAIN the Laird of Lockleaven paused to wipe glistening drops of moisture from his forehead; and I took advantage of his silence to stir the fire a bit. Indeed, I was needing the warmth and cheer of it. What from my host's wild words, the distant rumble of thunder and all, I was never before so much in want of creature comforts. I have seen mad men enough in my day, but never one with such a plausible way of telling a tale as this same old chap in his gown and felt slippers.

And to make matters worse, as the saying is, the rats and mice in the wall were never still for a minute. I could

hear them tripping, trapesing about as though they were dancing; and every now and then, a thin quavering squeak which sounded uncommonly like a poorly played fiddle.

"It's the Highland fling they're dancing," said the Laird of Lockleaven with a ghastly grin. "Do you get the lilt of it, Dr. O'Brien?" And he began to sway his head from side to side and tap out the tune with the toe of his slipper.

"You were about to tell me of hell," I said, thinking the man was better talking.

"To be sure," said he with a start. "I had just entered the jaws of hell—"

"You had," I answered, wishing with all my heart that he had stayed there.

"Well, Dr. O'Brien, it was a tight squeeze at first; and so black that you couldn't see your hand before your face. But after a few minutes of crawling, we got through the neck and into the belly of hell, so to speak. The tunnel grew bigger and bigger till a man could stand on his feet. And then a strange, green, quivering light came creeping along the black roof like a snake. Uncle Peter had his face turned over his shoulder; and I give you my word, his head looked like an unripened melon.

"'Where does this unwholesome light come from?' I asked in a voice which I intended to make low, but which echoed through the vault like the boom of a cannon.

"The old gentleman chuckled at that, and it made a most horrid din. 'Tis naething more nor less,' said he, 'than the sulfur ta'en from matches. Hae ye no heard auld Meg complainin' when she has found wee broken bits of 'em lyin' about the carpet? Weel, for all her witchcraft, she had no suspicion 'twas her auld master had a hand in it.'

"He turned and started on, still cackling to himself over his thieving; and I followed uneasily beneath the band of quivering light which seemed to be creeping along on its belly. At first the passage was so straight that you might have shot an arrow down it; but soon it began to twist a bit from side to side like the trail of a man coming home from the ale-house.

"Just as we got to one of these sudden bends, Uncle Peter wheeled around on his heel and pushed me up against the wall. 'Here comes Mad Anthony!' he whispered hot in my ear. 'He's ridin' hard and fast to-night, and he's no man to turn aside for anither soul. Flatten yourself to the wall, Robbie! Dinna ye hear the thunderin' and screechin'? All hell's let loose when Mad Anthony rides!'

"As I stood flat against the wall, I heard a great hubbub. First, there came to my ears the clear note of a hunting-horn; next, a shrill scream and a thundering as of horses' hoofs; and then, as I peered fearfully around the bend in the passage, out of the shadows there suddenly loomed the figure of a huge man riding some strange round-eared beast. Down he swept on me like the wind, with never a look to right or to left, leaning low on the neck of his steed like a man riding a race; while, not fourleaps to the rear, were a dozen gray monsters with red, flaming eyes and long, dragging tails. Before I had time to draw breath, they were past me and vanished in the shadows.

"As I rubbed my eyes, I heard Uncle Peter's unpleasant snicker. 'Ha, ha, Robbie,' he says, nudging me with the point of his elbow, 'ye're no owerpleased with hell, I'm thinkin'. But never ye fash yerself about Mad Anthony. He, who was for always huntin' the puir beasties, must now be hunted by 'em. There's a kind o' justice in hell, Robbie. 'Tis only with me they've been ower severe.'

"'What's he being hunted by?' I asked with a shudder.

"'Just a half-dozen o' rats, Robbie,' said Uncle Peter. 'And Mad Anthony's ridin' a wee gray mouse. But step along, laddie; we hae muckle to see ere the dawn breaks.'

"Although I was still trembling in every limb, I followed close behind him till he took a turn to the left which brought us up sharp in a large chamber that had no less than four phosphorescent ribbons of light on the ceiling. There were a score of dark figures in the center of this chamber; and a monotonous stream of talk rose from them, as though the flood-gates of reason had been swept away.

"'What manner of place is this?' I asked.

"'Tis just the council-room of those puir souls that went aboot the world tryin' to make ithers understand them,' said Uncle Peter very solemnly. 'Step up, Robbie, and lend an ear to their talk.'

"Obediently, I strode up to the group; and although I was nearly deafened by their uproar, I managed to overhear a few words of a man and woman who stood on the outskirts. Looking up into his face piteously, she was saying: 'Hector Lockleaven, canna ye no understand me? My soul is—' And he was saying, at the same time, giving no heed to her: 'Anna, my dear, canna ye understand me? When I do this, it is because—' And then both his words and hers swept away

in a furious torrent of words from others—words which battered against the ceiling and fell back again, hollow and dead. I heard a loud buzzing about me of 'Won't you listen? Can't you understand? I've got something to tell you,' till I couldn't bear it any longer, and shoving my thumbs in my ears, hurried back to my uncle.

"'Not one of them hears what the other is saying!' I cried. 'They're all talking at once, Uncle Peter!'

"He grinned at me in a queer way and turned to go. 'All those souls,' he mumbled over his shoulder, 'hae pestered the lives oot of ithers by bein' overcommunicative. Take warnin', Robbie. If ye want to be understood in the world, say naething about yourself.'

"UNCLE PETER led the way out of that chamber and into another, several hundred yards further down the passage. This was larger than the first, and even more noisy. Before we reached it, my ears were deafened by a thundering sound as though a thousand hammers were beating on iron, intermingled with loud shouts and deep groans.

"'Here ye will find the chieftains of Lockleaven who were owerfond of blood and rapine,' said Uncle Peter when we reached the threshold. 'These gentry were owerquick to draw steel.'

"I looked in, and saw a dozen figures in armor slashing at each other as though their blood were up. The clashing of their claymores, the clanking of their shields, their shouts and groans, made the hollow chamber echo like a drum.

"I watched them for several moments with a beating heart. 'No one falls, Uncle Peter,' I said at last.

"'Quite right,' said he with a bitter smile. 'We hae no victors and vanquished here—and no rest. They must just keep at it, with aching backs and wheezing lungs, till the end of time. This is hell, Robbie.'

"'I think I'll be stepping back into the library, Uncle Peter,' I said. 'You've shown me more than I wanted to see.'

"'Ye'll no be ganging hame till ye've had a peep at your ain chamber?' murmured Uncle Peter in his most persuasive tone. 'I'll no rest content till I've given ye a glimpse at Pleasure Hall.'

"'Pleasure Hall?' I said.

"'Pleasure Hall,' said he. 'Tis the room we hae gi'en to those jolly souls who hae frisked aboot. Ye'll find gude company there, Robbie.'

"Now, by this time, I had had a belly full of hell; but I couldn't offend Uncle Peter on his own hearthstone, so to

speak, so I just followed where he led. Well, we walked for a dozen score yards or more, when suddenly I heard such a howling and screaming and sobbing that it was enough to make your blood run cold. I can hear that hubbub yet in my dreams. And pretty soon we came to a bright light, and then—"

The Laird of Lockleaven broke down and clasped his hands over his eyes. And then he began to tremble in his arm-chair like a leaf in a gale.

At last my host dropped his hands from his face. "I cannot tell you of Pleasure Hall," he said, very solemn. "What I saw there, is locked in my breast for all time. But this I will say: No man could have seen what I saw and gone about there-after like other men. It left a red mark on my brain like the touch of a bloody hand."

"There's no doubt about that," I thought to myself. But aloud I said: "Did your uncle guide you safely back out of hell, Mr. Lockleaven?"

"Yes, he did that. But he kept chuckling all the way like a man who is well pleased with a stroke of business. But I didn't pay him much heed, for my mind was on other matters. All I know is, that we got out of hell, some way or other, and waded back across the miles of red grass till we came to the big statue of me which sat with its chin on its breast. Then he chanted some devil's rime; and up I popped into the statue's mouth and squeezed through the ivory pillars. Then, before a man could call for a hot Scotch; I blinked my eyes open and saw Uncle Peter scuttling away, turned into a wee little man not as big as a pencil."

"And you let him go back to hell?" I asked.

"I did so," said the Laird of Lockleaven with a weary gesture. "After the unpleasant time he had given me, I wouldn't

have saved Uncle Peter had I been able. Besides, there was no green-glass bottle handy."

CHAPTER VI

"LAIRD OF LOCKLEAVEN IS GANGING AWA"

AFTER the Laird of Lockleaven had told his tale, he half-closed his eyes like a man who is tired. The lamp on the table was going out in a fretful flickering.

"I'm afraid I'm keeping you out of bed, Mr. Lockleaven," I said at last. "There's the dampness of morning in the air. Why not turn in and leave me here? I'll be off when the light is strong enough to see the road by."

But he wouldn't listen to that. "No, no," said he, sitting up with a start. "There are matters we've got to face ere daybreak."

"Matters to face, Mr. Lockleaven? What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I'm saying!" he cried, wiggling his beard at me in an excited way. "First, we'll drink a toast to the confusion of hell; and then we'll prepare our plans accordingly."

He rose to his feet and poured out two glasses of wine. Then he handed me one with a courtly bow, but he hid the other for an instant in the folds of his gown ere he lifted it on high.

"Here's confusion to hell!" he shouted, and drained the glass without once taking his lips from the brim.

"With all my heart, Mr. Lockleaven," said I, following suit. "From what you've told me this night, 'tis not a country I'd like to be traveling in."

"Then get yourself a green-glass bottle when your time comes to die," he muttered. "That's what I'm doing this night."

"But Mr. Lockleaven," I put in, persuasive enough, "your time's not come."

At that, he laughed as wild as a loon on the lake. "So you think so, Dr. O'-

Brien?" he cried. "And do you suppose that I'd be willing to live those years with the devils of doubt gnawing away inside, not knowing at what moment my soul might pop out and be off to the wall of hell? No, no, I've had enough of this life; and now I'm just longing to rest in the green-glass bottle."

"You don't tell me," said I, "that you've—"

"Just that," said he, very calm. "I've taken a wee nip of poison. It was in that glass of port. No, don't trouble me, man"—for I had leaped to my feet—"but just give heed to my words."

"If you've taken poison, I'll have it out of you!" I cried.

"You'll not," said he, "for it's—" And he mentioned the name of the deadliest drug known to man. "But there are matters of more importance on hand. Come close, for already I'm feeling its grip."

As I bent over the dying Laird of Lockleaven, he raised his voice to a shrill halloo. "Meg!" he cried, "Meg! You bag of old bones, where are you?"

Now hardly had the echo of his voice died away, when I saw the library door swing open; and there on the threshold, curtsying and grinning, was a skinny old woman with the long white whiskers of a cat. In one hand, she held something which flashed green where the light touched it.

"Have you got the green bottle, Meg?" cried the Laird of Lockleaven.

"Aye, that I have, Robbie," she cackled, stepping up to him like a walking broomstick. "'Tis the bonnie one oot o' the cellar with the wee angels stamped all over it. Ye can rest quiet betimes, Robbie."

The Laird of Lockleaven heaved a deep sigh of relief and the twitching of his beard ceased as though by magic. "Well done, tried and trusted servant," he muttered, and his chin sank down on his breast.

But soon he bethought himself of something and raised his great eyes to my face. "'Tis your duty as a medical-man, Dr. O'Brien," he said, with a catch in his breath which I knew meant the beginning of the end, "to tell Meg the exact moment when the spark of life flickers out; and then to help her find my soul and pop it into the bottle."

"Where think ye it'll be hidin' when it's weel oot o' your body?" piped Meg, champng her nutcracker jaws. "I dinna ken rightly where to be searchin'."

"Just search my body from top to toe!" cried the Laird of Lockleaven in a breaking voice. "And Dr. O'Brien, here, will be lending you a helping hand."

We carried him over to the couch by the window where the light from the fire could scarce reach us. And we propped a pillow under his head, then sat ourselves down and waited for death and the morning. But how long the man took to die! A dozen times I thought his soul had sped; but when I'd bent down, I'd see the mournful gleam of his eyes and the twitch of his beard which meant that life was still in him. Once he murmured low: "Have you the green-glass bottle handy?"

And Meg, who held it to her breast, piped up: "I hae it, Robbie."

Well, the gray of morning was sifting through the blind like the mildewed shreds of a rotting pall, when the Laird of Lockleaven sat up on a sudden as quick as the blade of a jack-knife. "I'm a dead man!" he cried in a voice which seemed to come from far down underground. "I'm a dead man! Take heed, for my soul is ganging awa!" And with that, he fell back with a gasp and a sigh.

But before I could so much as reach out to feel for his heart beats, Meg, that withered old witch, had sprung on him like a cat on a mouse. "I'll find your bonnie soul, Robbie," she mumbled. And at that, she began to paw him in a manner I thought unseemly.

"Away with you, old she-cat!" I cried, for it made my blood run cold to see her antics. "Have you no respect for the dead?"

But she paid me no heed—just began to cackle away like a dozen hens disturbed in the night.

"Get out of this!" I shouted. "Get down from that perch, or I'll give you the back of my hand!"

Now she let out a squeal like a Banshee; and I saw both her withered hands slip under his robe and grip hold of something. And then she turned her head over her shoulder; and, though the light was still dim enough, I could see that her eyes were as bright as a toad's and that the long gray hairs on her chin were trembling as though she were sitting close to a furnace.

"I hae it fast!" she cried. "The soul of Robbie Lockleaven will no sup in hell this day! Will ye jus' hand me the bottle—Dr. O'Brien?"

"I will not, Meg," I said, for the light of dawn was giving me common-sense. "All night I've been lending an ear to the most scandalous lies that were ever told. You're mad, like your master before you; and I'm through with dancing attendance on goblins and fairies."

"Mon, mon!" cried Meg in a voice shrill with alarm, "don't be standin' there

blasphemins! If ye winna bring me the bottle, just grip Robbie's wee soul tight, for it's owerstrong for these auld fingers!"

Well, as you've found out by now for yourselves, I am an accommodating, easy-going man. In an instant I realized that the only way to get Meg off her master's chest was by humoring her a bit. Madness is kindlier disposed when you pat it on the back. So I nodded my head, without any more to say on the matter, and leaned down and put my hands where she showed me.

"Do ye feel the wee body o' it?" she mumbled, cocking her eye at me.

"Yes," said I—for at the moment I had felt something through his bathrobe which might have been a chamois bag where he kept a charm against evil.

"Weel, hold tight to it then, she said, "while I'm gettin' the bottle. A human soul is an unco canny beastle when it's fairly oot o' the body."

"Never you fear that," said I. "I'll never let go of it this side of hell."

I've often noticed that when a man throws big brave words up in the air they're as like as not to come down on his head. So it happened to me. No sooner had I said my say, thinking that I had a bag of beads in my fist and nothing more, no sooner had Meg come down from her perch and hobbled off for the bottle, than I let out a yell and loosened my grip. And well might I stagger back from the fright of it, for the bag had come to life in my hand.

Alive did I say? Yes, and more than that. It had kicked out like a beast caught in a net; it had wriggled and turned; and, last of all, it had set its teeth in my thumb. And I have a scar to this day to prove my story is true.

"Mother of Heaven! What's that?" I cried, as soon as I could speak at all.

Then Meg spun around on her heel. "Ye fule!" she cried. "Ye have let Robbie's soul slip through your fingers!" And then, as I stood silent with a great fear at my heart, she scuttled back to the Laird of Lockleven. "Quick!" she cried.

"Dinna be gapin' and gabblin' there! On your knees, mon, and be searchin' the floor; while I give a look to the couch."

Well, I did as she told—for somehow or other I believed all she said. But it was a black business crawling over the carpet, with not light enough yet to make out what was lurking in the corners. Once, I caught sight of something near the fireplace which scampered away into the wall when I reached out a hand. Whatever it was, it was too quick to be caught by a portly old chap on all fours. At last I climbed to my feet.

Meg, too, had given up the search. She now sat beside her dead master, rocking back and forth, with her face in her hands.

"The Laird of Lockleven is ganging awa!" she moaned.

"Nonsense, woman" I cried sharply enough. "Twas nothing more nor less than a mouse in his gown. Now I'm off to the village for help. He's in no fit state to go into his grave."

YOU have heard my story. Now, what do you think? Was it a mouse I held in the fold of his gown, or was it— But why should I put such thoughts in your head? They've worried me now for ten long years—worried me so that each night I put my ear to the wall, listening and wondering, till I seem to hear voices and music and the treading of feet.

Perhaps, it was a mouse after all. Don't let such thoughts work into your mind. If they once get in, they will rattle about like dice in a cup. And they will make you do very strange things—things which you wouldn't confide to your neighbors.

What sort of things? Why, soon you'll be collecting bottles of every shape and size known to man—little ones and big ones, thin ones and fat ones, round ones and square ones.

And here's a queer thing! They may be all shapes, and they may be all sizes; but there's only one color you'll want. And that color will be green—pale green like the sea. Isn't that strange, now?