

m a g a z i n e o f
HORROR

The Bizarre and The Unusual

Volume 3

CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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Wolves Of Darkness

by Jack Williamson

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INVOLUNTARILY I paused, shuddering, on the snow-covered station platform. A strange sound, weird, and somehow appalling, filled the ghostly moonlight of the winter night. A quavering and distant ululation, which prickled my body with chills colder than the piercing bite of the motionless, frozen air.

That unearthly, nerve-shredding sound, I knew, must be the howling of the gray prairie or

lobo wolves, though I had not heard them since childhood. But this sound carried a note of elemental terror which even the trembling apprehensions of boyhood had never given the voice of the great wolves. There was something sharp, broken, about that eerie clamor, far-off and deeply rhythmic as it was—something which suggested that the ululation came from straining human throats!

Striving to shake the phantasy from me, I hastened across the icy platform, and burst rather precipitately into the dingy waiting room. It was brilliantly lit with unshaded electric bulbs, and a red-hot stove filled it with grateful heat; but I was less thankful for the warmth than for the shutting out of that far-away howling.

Beside the glowing stove a tall man sat tense over greasy cards spread on the end of a packing box which he held between his knees, playing solitaire with strained, feverish attention. He wore an ungainly leather coat, polished slick with wear. One tanned cheek bulged with tobacco, and his lips were amber-stained.

He seemed oddly startled by my abrupt entrance. With a sudden, frightened movement, he pushed aside the box, and sprang to his feet. For a moment his eyes were anxiously upon me; then he seemed to sigh with relief. He opened the stove door, and expectorated into the roaring flames, then sank back into his chair.

"Howdy, Mister," he said, in a drawl that was a little strained and husky. "You sort of scairt me. You was so long comin' in that I figgered nobody got off."

"I stopped to listen to the wolves," I told him. "They sound weird, don't they?"

He searched my face with strange, fearful eyes. For a long

time he did not speak. Then he said briskly, "Well, Mister, what kin I do for ye?"

As I advanced toward the stove, he added, "I'm Mike Connell, the station agent."

"My name is Clovis McLaurin," I told him. "I want to find my father, Dr. Ford McLaurin. He lives on a ranch near here."

"So you're Doc McLaurin's boy, eh?" Connell said, warming visibly. He rose, smiling and shifting hiswad of tobacco to the other cheek, and took my hand.

"Yes. Have you seen him lately? Three days ago I had a strange telegram from him. He asked me to come at once. It seems that he's somehow in trouble. Do you know anything about it?"

Connell looked at me queerly.

"No," he said at last. "I ain't seen him lately. None of 'em off the ranch ain't been in to Hebron for two or three weeks. The snow is the deepest in years, you know, and it ain't easy to git around. I dunno how they could have sent a telegram, though, without comin' to town. And they ain't none of us seen 'em!"

"Have you got to know Dad?" I inquired, alarmed more deeply.

"No, not to say real well," the agent admitted. "But I seen him and Jetton and Jetton's gal often enough when they come into Hebron, here. Quite a bit of stuff has

come for 'em to the station, here. Crates and boxes, marked like they was scientific apparatus—I dunno what. But a right purty gal, that Stella Jetton. Purty as a picture."

"It's three years since I've seen Dad," I said, confiding in the agent in hope of winning his approval and whatever aid he might be able to give me in reaching the ranch, over the unusual fall of snow that blanketed the West Texas plains. "I've been in medical college in the East. Haven't seen Dad since he came out here to Texas three years ago."

"You're from the East, eh?"

"New York. But I spent a couple of years out here with my uncle when I was a kid. Dad inherited the ranch from him."

"Yeah, old Tom McLaurin was a friend of mine," the agent told me.

IT WAS three years since my father had left the chair of astro-physics at an eastern university, in 1928, to come here to the lonely ranch to carry on his original experiments. The legacy from his brother Tom, besides the ranch itself, had included a small fortune in money, which had made it possible for him to give up his academic position and to devote his entire time to the abstruse problems upon which he had been working.

Being more interested in medical than in mathematical science, I had not followed Father's work completely, though I used to help him with his experiments, when he had to perform them in a cramped flat, with pitifully limited equipment. I knew, however, that he had worked out an extension of Weyl's non-Euclidian geometry in a direction quite different from those chosen by Eddington and Einstein—and whose implications, as regards the structure of our universe, were stupendous. His new theory of the wave-electron, which completed the wrecking of the Bohr planetary atom, had been as sensational.

The proof his theory required was the exact comparison of the velocity of beams of light at right angles. The experiment required a large, open field, with a clear atmosphere, free from dust or smoke; hence his choosing the ranch as a site upon which to complete the work.

Since I wished to remain in college, and could help him no longer, he had employed as an assistant and collaborator, Dr. Blake Jetton, who was himself well known for his remarkable papers upon the propagation of light, and the recent modifications of the quantum theory.

Dr. Jetton, like my father, was a widower. He had a single child, a daughter named Stella. She had

been spending several months of each year with them on the ranch. While I had not seen her many times, I could agree with the station agent that she was pretty. As a matter of fact I had thought her singularly attractive.

Three days ago, I had received the telegram from my father. It was a strangely worded and alarming message, imploring me to come to him with all possible haste. It stated that his life was in danger, though no hint had been given as to what the danger might be.

Unable to understand the message, I had hastened to my rooms for a few necessary articles—among them, a little automatic pistol—and had lost no time in boarding a fast train. I had found the Texas Panhandle covered with nearly a foot of snow—the winter was the most severe in several years. And that weird and terrible howling had greeted me when I swung from the train at the lonely village of Hebron.

"The wire was urgent—most urgent," I told Connell. "I must get out to the ranch tonight, if it's at all possible. You know of any way I could go?"

For some time he was silent, watching me, with dread in his eyes.

"No, I don't," he said presently. "Ten miles to the ranch. And they ain't a soul lives on the

road. The snow is nigh a foot deep. I doubt a car would make it. Ye might git Sam Judson to haul you over tomorrow in his wagon."

"I wonder if he would take me out tonight."

The agent shook his head uneasily, peered nervously out at the glistening, moonlit desert of snow beyond the windows, and seemed to be listening anxiously. I could hardly restrain a shiver of my own.

"Naw, I think not!" Connell said abruptly. "It ain't healthy to git out at night around here, lately."

HE PAUSED a moment, and then asked suddenly, darting a quick, uneasy glance at my face, "I reckon you heard the howlin'?"

"Yes. Wolves?"

"Yeah—anyhow, I reckon so. Queer. Damn queer! They ain't been any loafers around these parts for ten years, till we heard 'em jest after the last blizzard." ("Loafer" appeared to be a local corruption of the Spanish word *lobo* applied to the gray prairie wolf, which is much larger than the coyote, and was a dreaded enemy of the rancher in the Southwest until its practical extermination.)

"Seems to be a reg'lar pack of the critters rovin' the range," Connell went on. "They've killed quite

a few cattle in the last few weeks, and—" he paused, lowering his voice, "and five people!"

"The wolves have killed people!" I exclaimed.

"Yeah," he said slowly. "Josh Wells and his hand were took two weeks ago, come Friday, while they was out ridin' the range. And the Simms' are gone. The old man and his woman and little Dolly. Took right out of the cow-pen, I reckon, while they was milkin'. It ain't two mile out of town to their place. Rufe Smith was out that way to see 'em Sunday. Cattle dead in the pen, and the smashed milk buckets lying in a drift of snow under the shed. And not a sign of Simms and his family!"

"I never heard of wolves taking people that way!"

Connell shifted his wad of tobacco again, and whispered, "I didn't neither. But Mister, these here ain't ordinary wolves!"

"What do you mean?"

"Wall, after the Simms' was took, we got up a sort of posse, and went out to hunt the critters. We didn't find no wolves, but we did find tracks in the snow. The wolves is plumb gone in the daytime!"

"Tracks in the snow," he repeated slowly. "Mister, them wolf tracks was too tarnation far apart to be made by any ordinary beast. The critters must 'a' been jumpin' thirty feet!"

With that, Connell fell silent, staring at me strangely.

I WAS staggered. There was, of course, some element of incredulity in my feelings; but the agent did not look at all like the man who has just perpetrated a successful wild story, for there was genuine horror in his eyes. And I recalled that I had fancied human tones in the strange, distant howling I had heard.

There was no good reason to believe that I had merely encountered a local superstition. Widespread as the legends of lycanthropy may be, I have yet to hear a tale of werewolves related by a West Texan. The agent's story had been too definite and concrete for me to imagine it an idle fabrication or an undergrounded fear.

"The message from my father was very urgent," I told Connell presently. "I *must* get out to the ranch tonight. If the man you mentioned won't take me, I'll hire a horse and ride."

"Judson is a damn fool if he'll git out tonight where them wolves is!" the agent said with conviction. "But there's nothing to keep ye from askin' him to go. I reckon he ain't gone to bed yet. He lives in the white house, jest around the corner behind Brice's store.

He stepped out upon the platform behind me to point the way. And as soon as the door was

opened, we heard again that rhythmic, deep, far-off ululation, from far across the moonlit plain of snow. I could not repress a shudder. And after pointing out to me Sam Judson's house, among the straggling few that constituted the village of Hebron, Connell got very hastily back inside the depot, and shut the door behind him.

2

SAM JUDSON owned and cultivated a farm nearly a mile from Hebron, but had moved his house into the village so that his wife could keep the postoffice. I hurried toward his house, through the icy streets, very glad that Hebron was able to afford the luxury of electric lights. The distant howling of the wolf-pack filled me with a vague and inexplicable dread; but it did not diminish my determination to reach my father's ranch as soon as possible, to solve the riddle of the telegram he had sent me.

Judson came to the door when I knocked. He was a heavy man, clad in faded, patched blue overalls, and brown flannel shirt. His head was almost completely bald, and his naked scalp was tanned until it resembled brown leather. His wide face was covered with a several week's growth of black beard. Nervously, fearfully, he scanned my face.

He led me to the kitchen, in the rear of the house—a small, dingy room, the walls covered with an untidy array of pots and pans. The cook stove was hot; he had, from appearances, been sitting with his feet in the oven, reading a newspaper, which now lay on the floor.

He had me sit down, and when I took the creaking chair, I told him my name. He said that he knew my father, Dr. McLaurin, who got his mail at the postoffice which was in the front room. But it had been three weeks, he said, since anyone had been to town from the ranch. Perhaps because the snow made traveling difficult, he said. There were five persons now staying out there, he told me: my father and Dr. Jetton, his daughter, Stella, and two hired mechanics from Amarillo.

I told him about the telegram which I had received three days before; and he suggested that my father, might have come to town at night, and mailed it to the telegraph office with the money necessary to send it. But he thought it strange that he had not spoken to anyone, or been seen.

Then I told Judson that I wanted him to drive me out to the ranch, at once. At the request his manner changed; he seemed frightened!

"No hurry about starting tonight, is there, Mr. McLaurin?" he asked. "We can put you up

in the spare room, and I'll take ye over in the wagon tomorrow. It's along drive to make at night."

"I'm very anxious to get there," I said. "I'm worried about my father. Something was wrong when he telegraphed. Very much wrong. I'll pay you enough to make it worth while.

"It ain't the money," he told me. "I'd be glad to do it for a son of Doc McLaurin's. But I reckon you heard — the wolves?"

"Yes, I heard them. And Connell, at the station, told me something about them. They've been hunting men?"

"Yes." For a little time Judson was silent, staring at me with strange eyes from his hairy face. Then he said, "And that ain't all. Some of us seen the tracks. And they's men runnin' with 'em!"

"But I must get out to see my father," I insisted. "We should be safe enough in a wagon. And I suppose you have a gun?"

"I have a gun, all right," Judson admitted. "But I ain't anxious to face them wolves!"

I insisted; and finally, when I offered him fifty dollars for the trip, he capitulated. But he was going, he said — and I believed him — more to oblige a friend than for the money.

He went into the bedroom, where his wife was already asleep, roused her, and told her he was going to make the trip. She was rather start-

led, as I judged from the sound of her voice, but mollified when she learned that there was to be a profit of fifty dollars.

She got up, a tall and most singular figure in a purple flannel nightgown, with nightcap to match, and busied herself making us a pot of coffee on the hot stove, and finding blankets for us to wrap about us in the farm wagon, for the night was very cold. Judson meanwhile, lit a kerosene lantern, which was hardly necessary in the brilliant moonlight, and went to the barn behind the house to get ready the vehicle.

HALF AN HOUR later we were driving out of the little village, in a light wagon, behind two gray horses. Their hoofs broke through the crust of the snow at every step, and the wagon wheels cut into it steadily, with a curious crunching sound. Our progress was slow, and I anticipated a tedious trip of several hours.

We sat together on the spring seat, heavily muffled up, with blankets over our knees. The air was bitterly cold, but there was no wind, and I expected to be comfortable enough. Judson had strapped on an ancient revolver, and we had a repeating rifle and a double barrel shotgun leaning against our knees.

Once outside the village of Hebron, we were surrounded on all

sides by a white plain of snow, almost as level as a table-top. It was broken only by the insignificant rows of posts which supported wire fences; these fences seemed to be Judson's only landmarks. The sky was flooded with ghostly opalescence, and a million diamonds of frost glittered on the snow.

For perhaps an hour and a half, nothing remarkable happened. The lights of Hebron grew pale and faded behind us. We passed no habitation upon the ilimitable desert of snow. The heart-stilling ululation of the wolves, however, grew continually louder.

And presently the uncanny, wailing sounds changed position. Judson quivered beside me, and spoke nervously to the gray horses, plodding on through the snow. Then he turned to face me, spoke shortly.

"I figger they're sweeping in behind us, Mr. McLaurin."

"Well, if they do, you can haul some of them back, to skin tomorrow," I told him. I had meant to sound cheerful, but my voice was curiously dry, and its tones rang false in my ears.

For some minues more we drove in silence.

Suddenly I noticed a change in the cry of the pack.

The deep, strange rhythm of it was suddenly quickened. Its wailing plaintiveness seemed to give

place to a quick, eager yelping; but there was something ventriloquial about it, so that we could not tell precisely from which direction it came. The rapid, belling notes seemed to come from a dozen points scattered over the brilliant moonlit waste behind us.

The horses became alarmed. They pricked up their ears, looked back, and went on more eagerly. I saw that they were trembling. One of them snorted suddenly. The abrupt sound jarred my jangled nerves, and I clutched convulsively at the side of the wagon.

Judson held the reins firmly, with his feet braced against the end of the wagon box. He was speaking softly and soothingly to the quivering grays; but for that, they might already have been running.

He turned to me and muttered; "I've heard wolves; and they don't sound like that. Them ain't ordinary wolves!"

And as I listened to the baying of the pack, I knew that he was right. Those ululations had an unfamiliar, an alien, note; there was something about the howling that was not of this earth. It is hard to describe it, because it was so utterly foreign. It came to me that if there are wolves on the ancient, age-dead deserts of Macs, they might cry in just that way, as they run some helpless creature to merciless death.

"Reckon they are on the trail,"

Judson said suddenly, in a low, strained voice. "Look behind us."

I TURNED in the spring seat, peered back over the limitless flat desolation of sparkling, moonlit snow. For a few minutes I strained my eyes in vain, though the terrible belling of the unseen pack grew swiftly louder.

Then I saw leaping gray specks, far behind us across the snow. By rights, a wolf should have floundered rather slowly through the thick snow, for the crust was not strong enough to hold up so heavy an animal. But the things I saw—fleet, formless gray shadows—were coming by great bounds, with astounding speed.

"I see them," I told Judson tremulously.

"Take the lines," he said, pushing the reins at me, and snatching up the repeating rifle.

He twisted in the seat, and began to fire.

Ten horses were trembling and snorting. Despite the cold, sweat was raining from their heaving bodies. Abruptly, after Judson had begun to shoot, they took the bits in their teeth and bolted, plunging and floundering through the snow, dragging the wagon. Tug and jerk at the reins as I would, I could do nothing with them.

Judson had soon emptied the rifle. I doubt that he had hit any of

the howling animals that ran behind us, for accurate shooting from the swaying, jolting wagon would have been impossible. And our wildly bounding pursuers would have been difficult marks, even if the wagon had been still.

Judson dropped the empty rifle into the wagon box, and turned a white, frightened face toward me. His mouth was open, his eyes protruding with terror. He shouted something incoherent, which I did not grasp, and snatched at the reins. Apparently insane with fear, he cursed the leaping grays, and lashed at them, as if thinking to outrun the pack.

For a little time I clung to the side of the rocking wagon. Then the snorting horses turned suddenly, almost breaking the wagon tongue. We were nearly upset. The spring seat was dislodged from its position, and fell into the wagon box. I was thrown half over the side of the wagon. For another agonized moment I tried to scramble back. Then the grays plunged forward again, and I was flung into the snow.

I broke through the thin crust. The thick, soft snow beneath checked the force of my fall. In a few moments I had floundered to my feet, and was clawing madly at my face, to get the white, powdery stuff away from my eyes.

The wagon was already a hundred yards away. The fear-

maddened horses were still running, with Judson standing erect in the wagon, sawing wildly at the reins, but powerless to curb them. They had been turning abruptly when I was thrown out.

Now they were plunging back toward the weirdly baying pack!

Judson, screaming and cursing, crazed with terror, was being carried back toward the dimly seen, gray, leaping shapes whose uncanny howling sobbed so dreadfully through the moonlight.

Horror came over me, like a great, soul-chilling wave. I felt an insane desire to run across the snow, to run and run until I could not hear the wailing of the strange pack. With an effort I controlled myself, schooled my trembling limbs, swallowed to wet my dry throat.

I knew that my poor, floundering run could never distance the amazingly fleet gray shapes that bounded through the silver haze of moonlight toward the wagon. And I reminded myself that I had a weapon, a .25 caliber automatic pistol, slung beneath my shoulder. Something about the message from my father had made me fasten on the deadly little weapon, and slip a few extra clips of ammunition into my pockets.

With trembling hands, I pulled off a glove and fumbled inside my garments for the little weapon.

AT LAST I drew out the heavy little automatic, gratefully warm with the heat of my body, and snapped back the slide to be sure that a cartridge was in the chamber. Then I stood there, in a bank of powdery snow that came nearly to my knees, and waited.

The dismal, alien howling of the pack froze me into a paralysis of fear.

The wagon must have been four hundred yards from me, across the level, glistening snow, when the dim gray shapes of the baying pack left the trail and ran straight across toward it. I saw little stabs of yellow flame, heard sharp reports of guns, and the thin, whistling screams of bullets. Judson, I suppose, had dropped the reins and was trying to defend himself with the rifle and shotgun, and his old-fashioned revolver.

The vague gray shapes surrounded the wagon. I heard the scream of an agonized horse— except for the unearthly howling of that pack, the most terrible, nerve-racking sound I know. A struggling mass of faintly seen figures seemed to surround the wagon. There were a few more shots, then a shriek, which rang fearfully over the snow, bearing an agony of pain and terror that is inconceivable . . . I knew it came from Judson.

After that, the only sound was the blood-congealing belling of the

pack—an awful outcry that had not been stilled.

Soon—fearfully soon—that alien ululation seemed to be drawing nearer. And I saw gray shapes come bounding down the trail, away from the grim scene of the tragedy—to toward me!

3

I CAN GIVE no conception of the stark, maddened terror that seized me when I knew that the gray animals were running on my trail. My heart seemed to pause, until I thought I would grow dizzy and fall. Then it was thumping loudly in my throat. My body was suddenly cold with sweat. My muscles knotted until I was gripping the automatic with painful force.

I had determined not to run, for it was madness to try to escape the pack. But my resolution to stand my ground was nothing in the face of the fear that obsessed me.

I plunged across the level waste of snow. My feet broke through the thin crust. I floundered along, with laboring lungs. The snow seemed tripping me like a malevolent demon. Many times I stumbled, it seemed. And twice I sprawled in the snow, and scrambled desperately to my feet, and struggled on again, sobbing with terror, gasping in the cold air.

But my flight was cut short. The things that ran behind me could travel many times faster than I. Turning, when I must have gone less than a hundred yards, I saw them drawing near behind me, still vague gray shapes in the moonlight. I now perceived that only two had followed.

Abruptly I recalled the little automatic in my hand. I raised it, and emptied it, firing as rapidly as I could; but if I hit either of those bounding gray figures, they certainly were invulnerable to my bullets.

I had sought in my pocket for another clip, and was trying with quivering fingers to slip it into the gun, when those things came near enough, in a milky haze of moonlight, to be seen distinctly. Then my hands closed in rigid paralysis upon the gun—I was too astounded and unstrung to complete the operation of loading.

One of those two gray shapes was a wolf, a gaunt prairie wolf, covered with long, shaggy hair. A huge beast, he must have stood three feet high at the shoulder. He was not standing now, however, but coming toward me with great leaps that covered many yards. His great eyes glowed with a weird, greenish, unnatural light—terrible and strange and somehow hypnotic.

And the other was a girl.

IT WAS incredible. It numbed and staggered my terror-dazed mind. At first I thought it must be a hallucination; but as she came nearer, advancing with long, bounding steps, as rapidly as the gray wolf, I could no longer discredit my eyes. I recalled the suggestion of a human voice I had caught in the unearthly cry of the pack; recalled what Connell and Judson had told me of human footprints mingled with those of wolves in the trail the pack had left.

She was clad very lightly, to be abroad in the bitter cold of the winter night. Apparently, she wore only a torn, flimsy slip, of thin white silk, which hung from one shoulder, and came not quite to her knees. Her head was bare, and her hair, seeming in the moonlight to be an odd, pale yellow, was short and tangled. Her smooth arms and small hands, her legs, and even her flashing feet, were bare. Her skin was white, with a cold, leprous, bloodless whiteness. Almost as white as the snow.

And her eyes shone green.

They were like the gray wolf's eyes, blazing with a terrible emerald flame, with the fire of an alien, unearthly life. They were malevolent, merciless, hideous. They were cold as the cosmic wastes beyond the light of stars. They burned with a malicious intelligence, stronger and more fearful

than that of any being on earth.

Across her lips, and her cheeks of a labaster whiteness, was a darkly red and dripping smear, almost black by moonlight.

I stood like a wooden man, nerveless with incredulous horror.

On came the girl and the wolf, springing side-by-side through the snow. They seemed to have preternatural strength, an agility beyond that of nature.

As they came nearer, I received another shock of terror.

The woman's face was familiar, for all its dreadful pallor and the infernal evil of the green, luminous eyes, and the red stain on her lips and cheeks. She was a girl whom I had admired, whom I had even dreamed that I might come to love.

She was Stella Jetton!

This girl was the lovely daughter of Dr. Blake Jetton, whom, as I have said, my father had brought with him to this Texas ranch, to assist with his revolutionary experiments.

IT CAME TO ME that she had been changed in some fearful way.

"Stella!" I cried. More a scream of frightened, anguished unbelief, than a human voice, the name came from my fear-parched throat. I was startled at my own call, hoarse, inchoate, gasping.

The huge gray wolf came directly at me, as if it were going

to spring at my throat. But it stopped a dozen feet before me, crouching in the snow, watching me with alert and strange intelligence in its dreadful green eyes.

And the woman came even nearer, before she paused, standing with terrible eyes like those of the wolf—luminous and green.

The face, ghastly white, and fearfully red-stained as it was, was the face of Stella Jetton. But the eyes were not hers!

Then she spoke. The voice had some little of its old, familiar ring, but there was a new, strange note in it. Her voice bore the foreign, menacing mystery of the eyes and the leprous skin, a note that had a suggestion of the dismal, wailing ululation of the pack that had followed us.

"Yes, Stella Jetton," the voice said. "What are you called? Are you Clovis McLaurin? Did you receive a telegram?"

She did not know me, apparently. Even the wording of her sentences was a little strange, as if she were speaking a language with which she was not very familiar. The delightful, human girl I had known was fearfully changed.

It occurred to me that she must be afflicted with some form of insanity, which had given her the almost preternatural strength which she had displayed in running with the wolf-pack. Cases of lycan-

thropy, I thought, it must indeed be a singular case.

"Yes, I'm Clovis McLaurin," I said, in a shaken voice. "I got Dad's telegram three days ago. Tell me what's wrong—why he worded the message as he did!"

"Nothing is wrong, my friend," this strange woman said. "We merely desired your assistance with certain experiments, of a great strangeness, which we are undertaking to perform. Your father now waits at the ranch, and I came to conduct you to him."

This singular speech was almost incredible. I could accept it only on the assumption that the speaker suffered from some dreadful derangement of the mind.

"You came to meet me?" I exclaimed, fighting the horror that almost overwhelmed me. "Stella, you mustn't be out in the cold without more wraps. You must take my coat."

I began to strip off the garment. But, as I had somehow expected, she refused to accept it.

"No, I do not need it. "The cold does not harm this body. And you must come with us, now. Your father waits for us at the house, to perform the great experiment."

She said *us!* It gave me new horror to notice that she thus classed the huge gaunt wolf with herself.

Then she sprang forward with an incredible agility, leaping through the snow in the direction

in which Judson and I had been traveling. With a naked, dead-white arm, she beckoned me to follow. And the great, gray wolf sprang behind me.

Nerved to sudden action, I recalled the half-loaded automatic in my hand. I snapped the fresh clip into position, jerked back the slide mechanism to get a cartridge into the breech, and then emptied the gun into that green-orbed wolf.

A STRANGE composure had come over me. My motions were calm enough, almost deliberate. I know that my hand did not shake. The wolf was standing still, only a few yards away. It is unlikely that I missed him at all, impossible that I missed him with every shot.

I know that I hit him several times, for I heard the bullets drive into his gaunt body, saw the animal jerk beneath their impact, and noticed gray hairs float from it in the moonlight.

But he did not fall. His terrible green eyes never wavered in their sinister stare of infernal evil.

Just as the gun was empty—it had taken me only a few seconds to fire the seven shots—I heard an angry, wolfish snarl from the woman. I had half turned when her white body came hurtling at me like a projectile.

I went down beneath her, instinctively raising an arm to guard

my throat. It is well that I did, for I felt her teeth sinking into my arm and shoulder, as we fell together into the snow.

I am sure that I screamed.

I fought at her madly, until I heard her strange, non-human voice again.

"You need not be afraid," it said. "We are not going to kill you. We wish you to aid with a greatly remarkable experiment. For that reason, you must come with us. Your father waits. The wolf is our friend, and will not harm you. And your weapon will not hurt it."

A curious, half-articulate yelp came from the throat of the great wolf, which had not moved since I shot at it, as if it had understood her words and gave affirmation.

The woman was still upon me, holding me flat in the snow, her bared, bloody teeth above my face, her fingers sunk claw-like into my body with almost preternatural strength. A low, bestial, growling sound came from her throat, and then she spoke again.

"You will now come with us, to the house where your father waits, to perform the experiment?" she demanded in that terrible voice, with its suggestion of the wolf-pack's cry.

"I'll come," I agreed, relieved somewhat to discover that the pair of beasts did not propose to devour me on the spot.

The woman—I cannot call her

Stella, for except in body, she was not Stella!—helped me to my feet. She made no objection when I bent, and picked up the automatic, which lay in the snow, and slipped it into my coat pocket.

SHE AND THE gaunt gray wolf, which my bullets had so strangely failed to kill, leaped away together over the moonlit snow. I followed, floundering along as rapidly as I could, my mind filled with confused and terror-numbered conjecture.

There was now no doubt remaining in my mind that the woman thought herself a member of the wolf-pack, no doubt that she actually was a member. A curious sympathy certainly seemed to exist between her and the great gaunt wolf beside her.

It must be some form of lunacy, I thought, though I had never read of a lycanthrope whose symptoms were exaggerated to the terrible extent that hers appeared to be. It is well known that some maniacs have unnatural strength, but her feats of running and leaping across the snow were almost beyond reason.

But there was that about her which even the theory of insanity did not explain. The corpse-like pallor of her skin; the terrible green luminosity of her eyes; the way she spoke—as if English were an

unfamiliar tongue to her, but half mastered.

The pace set for me by the woman and the wolf was mercilessly rapid. Stumble along as best I could, I was unable to move as fast as they wished. Nor was I allowed to fall behind, for when I lagged, the wolf came back, and snarled at me menacingly.

Before I had floundered along many miles, my lungs were aching and I was half blind with fatigue. I stumbled and sprawled in the soft snow a last time. My tortured muscles refused to respond when I tried to rise. I lay there, ready to endure whatever the wolf might do, rather than undergo the agony of further effort.

But this time the woman came back, I was half unconscious, but I realized vaguely that she was lifting me, raising me to her shoulders. After that, my eyes were closed; I was too weary to watch my surroundings. But I knew dimly, from my sensations of swaying, that I was being carried.

Presently the toxins of exhaustion overcame my best efforts to keep my senses. I fell into the deep sleep of utter fatigue, forgetting that my limbs were growing very cold, and that I was being borne upon the back of a woman endowed with the instincts of a wolf and the strength of a demon; a woman who, when I had last seen her, had been all human and lovable!

NEVER CAN I forget the sensations of my awakening. I opened my eyes upon gloom relieved but faintly by dim red light. I lay upon a bed or couch, swathed in blankets. Hands that even to my chilled body seemed ice-cold were chafing my arms and legs. And terrible greenish orbs were swimming above in the terrible crimson darkness, staring down at me, horribly.

Alarmed, recalling what had happened in the moonlight as a vague nightmare, I collected my scattered senses, and struggled to a sitting position among the blankets.

It is odd, but the first definite thing that came to my confused brain was an impression of the ugly green flowers in monotonous rows across the dingy, brown-stained wall paper. In the red light that filled the room they appeared unpleasantly black, but still they awakened an ancient memory. I knew that I was in the dining room of the old ranch house, where I had come to spend two years with my uncle Tom McLaurin, many years before.

The weirdly illuminated chamber was sparsely furnished. The couch upon which I lay stood against one wall. Opposite was a long table, with half a dozen chairs pushed under it. Near the end of

the room was a large heating stove, with a full scuttle of coal and a box of split pine kindling behind it.

There was no fire in the stove, and the room was very cold. My breath was a white cloud in that frosty atmosphere. The dim crimson light came from a small electric lantern standing on the long table. It had been fitted with a red bulb, probably for use in a photographer's dark room.

All those impressions I must have gathered almost subconsciously, for my horrified mind was absorbed with the persons in the room.

My father was bending over me, rubbing my hands; Stella was chafing my feet, which stuck out beneath the blankets.

And my father was changed as weirdly, as dreadfully, as the girl, Stella!

His skin was a cold, bloodless white—white with the pallor of death. His hands, against my own, felt fearfully cold—as cold as those of a frozen corpse. And his eyes, watching me with a strange, terrible alertness, shone with a greenish light.

His eyes were like Stella's—and like those of the great gray wolf.

AND THE WOMAN—the dread thing that had been lovely Stella—was unchanged. Her skin was still fearfully pallid, and her eyes strange and luminously green.

The stain was still on her paleface, appearing black in the somber crimson light.

There was no fire in the stove. But, despite the bitter cold of the room, the woman was still clad as she had been before, in a sheer slip of white silk, half torn from her body. My father—or that which had once been my father—wore only a light cotton shirt, with the sleeves torn off, and a pair of ragged trousers. His feet and arms were bare.

Another fearful thing I noticed. My breath, as I said, condensed in white clouds of frozen crystals, in the frigid air. But no white mists came from Stella's nostrils, or from my father's.

From outside, I could hear the dismal, uncanny keening of the running pack. And from time to time the two looked uneasily toward the door, as if anxious to go to join them.

I had been sitting up, staring confusedly and incredulously about, before my father spoke.

"We are glad to see you, Clovis," he said, rather stiffly, and without emotion, not at all in his usual jovial, affectionate manner. "You seem to be cold, but you will presently be normal again. We have surprising need of you, in the performance of an experiment, which we cannot accomplish without your assistance."

He spoke slowly, uncertainly,

as a foreigner might who has attempted to learn English from a dictionary. I was at a loss to understand it, even if I assumed that he and Stella both suffered from a mental derangement.

And his voice was somehow whining; it carried a note suggestive of the howling of the pack.

"You will help us?" Stella demanded in the same dreadful tones.

"Explain it! Please explain everything!" I burst out. "Or I'll go crazy! Why were you running with the wolves? Why are your eyes so bright and green, your skins so deathly white? Why are you both so cold? Why the red light? Why don't you have a fire?"

I babbled my questions, while they stood there in the strange room, and silently stared at me with their horrible eyes.

FOR MINUTES, perhaps, they were silent. Then an expression of crafty intelligence came into my father's eyes, and he spoke again in those fearful tones, with their ring of the baying pack.

"Clovis," he said, "you know we came here for purposes of studying science. And a great discovery has been ours to make; a huge discovery relating to the means of life. Our bodies, they are changed, as you appear to see. Better machines they have become; stronger they are. Cold harms them

not, as it does yours. Even our sight is better, so bright lights we no longer need.

"But we are yet lacking of perfect success. Our minds were changed, so that we do not remember all that once it had been ours to accomplish. And it is you whom we desire to be our assistant in replacing a machine of ours, that has been broke. It is you that we wish to aid us, so that to all humanity we may bring the gift of the new life, that is ever strong, and knows not death. All people we would change with the new science that it has been ours to discover."

"You mean you want to make the human race into monsters like yourselves?"

My father snarled ferociously, like a beast of prey.

"All men will receive the gift of life like ours," his strange voice said. "Death will be no more. And your aid is required by us—and it we will have!" There was intense, malefic menace in his tones. "It is yours to be our aid. You will refuse not!"

He stood before me with bared teeth and with white fingers hooked like talons.

"Sure, I'll help you," I contrived to utter, in a shaken voice. "I'm not a very brilliant experimenter, however." It appeared that to refuse would be a means of

committing very unpleasant suicide.

Triumphant cunning shone in those menacing green eyes, the cunning of the mantac who has just perpetrated a clever trick.

"You can come now, in order to see the machine?" Stella demanded.

"No," I said hastily, and sought reasons for delay. "I am cold. I must light a fire and warm myself. Then I am hungry, and very tired. I must eat and sleep." All of which was very true. My body had been chilled through, during my hours on the snow. My limbs were trembling with cold.

The two looked at each other. Unearthly sounds passed between them, incoherent, animal whinings. Such, instead of words, seemed to be their natural speech; the English they spoke seemed only an inaccurately and recently learned tongue.

"True," my father said to me again, in a moment. He looked at the stove. "Start a fire if you must. What you need is there?" He pointed inquiringly toward the coal and kindling, as if fire were something new and unfamiliar to him.

"We must go without," he added. "Light of fire is hurtful to us, as cold is to you. And in other room, called—" he hesitated per-

ceptibly, "kitchen, will be food. There we will wait."

He and the white girl glided silently from the room.

Shivering with cold, I hurried to the stove. All the coals in it were dead; there had been no fire in it for several days. I shook down the ashes, lit a ball of crumpled newspaper with a match I found in my pocket, dropped it on the grate, and filled the stove with pine and coal. In a few minutes I had a roaring fire, before which I crouched gratefully.

IN A FEW minutes the door was opened slowly. Stella first peering carefully, apparently to see if there was light in the room, stepped cautiously inside. The stove was tightly closed; no light escaped from it.

The pallid, green-eyed woman had her arms full of food, a curious assortment that had evidently been collected in the kitchen in a haphazard manner. There were two loaves of bread, a slab of raw bacon, an unopened can of coffee, a large sack of salt, a carton of oatmeal, a can of baking powder, a dozen tins of canned foods, and even a bottle of stove polish.

"You eat this?" she inquired, in her strangely animal voice, dropping the articles on the table.

It was almost ludicrous; and too, it was somehow terrible. She seemed to have no conception of

human alimentary needs.

Comfortably warm again, and feeling very hungry, I went over to the table, and examined the odd assortment. I selected a loaf of bread, a tin of salmon, and one of apricots, for my immediate use.

"Some of these things are to be eaten as they are," I ventured, wondering what her response would be. "And some of them have to be cooked."

"Cooked?" she demanded quickly. "What is that?"

Then, while I was silent, dazed with astonishment, she added, "Does it convey that they must be hot and bleeding from the animal?"

"No!" I cried. "No. To cook a food one heats it. Usually adding seasonings, such as salt. A rather complicated process, requiring considerable skill."

"I see," she said. "And you must consume such articles, to keep your body whole?"

I admitted that I did, and then remarked that I needed a can cutter, to get at the food in the tins. First inquiring about the appearance of the implement, she hurried to the kitchen, and soon returned with one.

Presently my father came back into the room. Both of them watched me with their strange green eyes as I ate. My appetite failed somewhat, but I drew the meal out as long as possible, in

order to defer whatever they might intend for me after I had finished.

Both of them asked many questions. Questions similar to Stella's query about cooking, touching subjects with which an ordinary child is familiar. But they were not stupid questions—no, indeed! Both of them evinced a cleverness that was almost preternatural. They never forgot, and I was astounded at their skill in piecing together the facts I gave them, to form others.

Their green eyes watched me very curiously when, unable to drag out the pretense of eating any longer, I produced a cigarette and sought a match to light it. Both of them howled, as if in agony, when the feeble yellow flame of the match flared up. They covered their eyes, and leaped back, cowering and trembling.

"Kill it!" my father snarled ferociously.

I flicked out the tiny flame, startled at its results.

They uncovered their terrible green eyes, blinking. It was several minutes before they seemed completely recovered from their amazing fear of the light.

"Make light no more when we are near," my father growled at me. "We will tear your body if you forget!" His teeth were bared; his lips curled like those of a wolf; he snarled at me frightfully.

Stella ran to an east window,

raised the blind, peered nervously out. I saw that the dawn was coming. She whined strangely at my father. He seemed uneasy, like an animal at bay. His huge green eyes rolled from side to side. He turned anxiously to me.

"Come," he said. "The machine which we with your aid will repair is in the cellar beneath the house. The day comes. We must go."

"I can't go," I said. "I'm dog tired; been up all night. I've got to rest, before I work on any machine. I'm so sleepy I can't think."

He whined curiously at Stella again, as if he were speaking in some strange wolf-tongue. She replied in kind, then spoke to me.

"If rest is needful to the working of your body, you may sleep till the light is gone. Follow."

SHE OPENED the door at the end of the room, led me into a dark hall, and from it into a small bedroom. It contained a narrow bed, two chairs, a dresser, and wardrobe trunk.

"Try not to go," she snarled warningly, at the door, "or we will follow you over the snow!"

The door closed and I was alone. A key grated ominously in the lock. The little room was cold and dark. I scrambled hastily into the bed, and for a time I lay there, listening.

The dreadful howling of the

wolfpack, which had never stilled through all the night, seemed to be growing louder, drawing nearer. Presently it ceased, with a few sharp, whining yelps, apparently just outside the window. The pack had come here, with the dawn!

As the increasing light of day filled the little room, I raised myself in the bed to scrutinize its contents again. It was a neat chamber, freshly papered. The dresser was covered with a gay silk scarf, and on it, in orderly array, were articles of the feminine toilet. A few dresses, a vivid beret, and a bright sweater were hanging under a curtain in the corner of the room. On the wall was a picture—of myself!

It came to me that this must be Stella's room, into which I had been locked to sleep until night had come again.

And I knew now that no mundane explanation, no form of insanity, could explain what I had seen and heard. The thought had been in my mind from the first, but I had tried to put it aside, looking for a simpler explanation. I had thought of Mars—and realized now that this was a symbol for alienness, something not of this world.

Stella and my father were possessed by alien entities, intelligent malevolent entities. The human personalities had been driven out, or taken over—and the usurping

entities wanted my help . . .

Presently I examined the windows with a view to escape. There were two of them, facing the east. Heavy wooden bars had been fastened across them, on the outside, so close together that I could not hope to squeeze between them. And a survey of the room revealed no object with which they could be easily sawed.

But I was too sleepy and exhausted to attempt escape. At thought of the ten weary miles to Hebron, through the thick, soft snow, I abandoned the idea. I knew that, tired as I already was, I could never cover the distance in the short winter day. And I shuddered at the thought of being caught on the snow by the pack.

I lay down again in Stella's clean bed, about which a slight fragrance of perfume still lingered, and was soon asleep. My slumber, though deep, was troubled. But no nightmare could be as hideous as the reality from which I had found a few hours' escape.

5

I SLEPT THROUGH most of the short winter day. When I woke it was sunset. Gray light fell athwart the illimitable flat desert of snow outside my barred windows, and the pale disk of the moon, near the full, was rising in the darkening eastern sky. No

human habitation was in view, in all the stretching miles of that white waste. I felt a sharp sense of utter loneliness.

I could look for no outside aid in coping with the strange and alarming situation into which I had stumbled. If I were to escape from these monsters who wore the bodies of those dearest to me, it must be by my own efforts. And in my hands alone rested the task of finding how to restore them to their old, dear selves.

Once more I examined the stout wooden bars across the windows. They seemed strongly nailed to the wall on either side. I found no tool that looked adequate to cutting them. My matches were still in my pocket, however, and it occurred to me that I might burn the bars. But there was no time for such an undertaking before the darkness would bring back my captors, nor did I relish the thought of attempting to escape with the pack on my trail.

I was hungry again, and quite thirsty also.

Darkness fell, as I lay there on the bed, among the intimate belongings of a lovely girl for whom I had owned tender feelings—waiting for her to come with the night, amid her terrible allies, to drag me to I knew not what dread fate.

The gray light of day faded imperceptibly into pale silvery moonlight.

Abruptly, without warning, the key turned in the lock.

Stella—or the alien entity that ruled the girl's fair body—glided with sinister grace into the room. Her green eyes were shining, and her skin was ghastly white.

"Immediately you will follow," came her wolfish voice. "The machine below awaits the aid for you to give in the great experiment. Quickly come. Your weak body, it is rested?"

"All right," I said. "I've slept, of course. But now I'm hungry and thirsty again. I've got to have water and something to eat before I tinker with any machine."

I was determined to postpone whatever ordeal lay before me as long as possible.

"Your body you may satisfy again," the woman said. "But take not too long!" she snarled warningly.

I followed her back to the dining room.

"Get water," she said, and glided out the door.

The stove was still faintly warm. I opened it, stirred the coals, dropped in more fuel. Soon the fire was roaring again. I turned my attention to the food I had left. The remainder of the salmon and apricots had frozen on the plates, and I set them over the stove to warm.

Soon Stella was back with a water bucket containing a bulging

mass of ice. Apparently surprised that I could not consume water in a solid form, she allowed me to set it on the stove to thaw.

While I waited, standing by the stove, she asked innumerable questions, many of them so simple they would have been laughable under less strange conditions, some of them concerning the latest and most recondite of scientific theories, her mastery of which seemed to exceed my own.

My father appeared suddenly, his corpse-white arms full of books. He spread them on the table, curtly bid me come look with him. He had Einstein's *The Meaning of Relativity*, Weyl's *Gravitation und Elektrizität*, and two of his own privately printed works. The latter were *Space-Time Tensors* and the volume of mathematical speculation entitled *Interlocking Universes* whose bizarre implications created such a sensation among those savants to whom he sent copies.

MY FATHER began opening these books, and bombarding me with questions about them, questions which I was often unable to answer. But the greater part of his queries related merely to grammar, or the meaning of words. The involved thought seemed easy for him to understand; it was the language which caused him difficulty.

His questions were exactly such as might be asked by a super-intellectual being from Mars, if he were attempting to read a scientific library without having completely mastered the language in which its books were written.

And his own books seemed as unfamiliar to him as those of the other scientists. But he ran through the pages with amazing speed, pausing only to ask an occasional question, and appeared to gain a complete mastery of the volume as he went.

When he released me, the food and water were warm. I drank, and then ate bread and salmon and apricots, as deliberately as I dared. I invited the two to share the food with me, but they declined abruptly. The volley of questions continued.

Then suddenly, evidently concluding that I had eaten enough, they started toward the door, commanding me to follow. I dared not do otherwise. My father paused at the end of the table and picked up the electric lantern, whose dimly glowing red bulb supplied the only light in the room.

Again we traversed the dark hall, and went out through a door in the rear of the fram building. As we stepped out upon the moonlit snow, I shuddered to hear once more the distant, wailing ululation of the pack, still with that terrible

note which suggested strained human vocal organs.

A few feet from us was the door of a cellar. The basement had evidently been considerably enlarged, quite recently, for huge mounds of earth lay about us, filling the back yard. Some of them were covered with snow, some of them black and bare.

The two led the way down the steps into the cellar, my father still carrying the electric lantern, which faintly illuminated the midnight space with its feeble, crimson glow.

The cellar was large, neatly plastered. It had not been itself enlarged, but a dark passage sloped down beside the door, to deeper excavations.

In the center of the floor stood the wreck of an intricate and unfamiliar mechanism. It had evidently been deliberately smashed — I saw an ax lying beside it, which must have been the means of the havoc. The concrete floor was littered with the broken glass of shattered electron tubes. The machine itself was a mass of tangled wires and twisted coils and bent magnets, oddly arranged outside a great copper ring, perhaps four feet in diameter.

The huge copper ring was mounted on its edge, in a metal frame. Before it was a stone step, placed as if to be used by one climbing through the ring. But, I

saw, it had been impossible for one actually to climb through, for on the opposite side was a mass of twisted apparatus — a great parabolic mirror of polished metal, with what appeared to be a broken cathode tube screwed into its center.

A most puzzling machine, it had been very thoroughly wrecked. Save for the huge copper ring, and the heavy stone step before it, there was hardly a part that was not twisted or shattered.

In the end of the cellar was a small motor-generator — a little gasoline engine connected to a dynamo — such as is sometimes used for supplying isolated homes with electric light and power. I saw that it had not been injured.

From a bench beside the wall, my father picked up a briefcase, from which he took a roll of blue prints, and a sheaf of papers bound in a manila cover. He spread them on the bench and set the red lantern beside them.

"This machine, as you see, has been, most unfortunately for us, wrecked," he said. "These papers tell the method of construction to be followed in the erection of such machines. Your aid we must have in deciphering what they convey. And the new machine will bring such great, strong life as we have to all your world."

"You say *'your world'*!" I cried. "Then you admit, you

don't belong to this earth? You are a monster, who has stolen the body of my father!"

BOTH OF THEM snarled like beasts. They bared their teeth and glowered at me with their terrible green eyes. Then a crafty look came again into the man's orbs.

"No, my son," came his whining, animal tones. "A new secret of life have we discovered. Great strength it gives to our bodies. Death we fear no longer. But our minds are changed. Many things we do not remember. We must require your aid in reading this which we once wrote—"

"That's the bunk!" I exclaimed, "I don't believe it. And I'll be damned if I'll help repair the infernal machine, to make more human beings into monsters like you!"

Together they sprang toward me. Their eyes glowed dreadfully against their pallid skins. Their fingers were hooked like claws. Saliva drooled from their snarling lips, and naked teeth gleamed in the dim crimson radiance.

"Aid us you will!" cried my father. "Or your body will we most painfully destroy. We will eat it slowly, while you live!"

The horror of it broke down my reason. With a wild, terror-shaken scream, I dashed for the door.

It was hopeless, of course, for,

me to attempt escape from beings possessing such preternatural strength.

With startling, soul-blasting howls, they sprang after me together. They swept me to the cellar's floor, sinking their teeth savagely into my arms and body. For a few moments I struggled desperately, writhing and kicking, guarding my throat with one arm and striking blindly with the other.

Then they held me helpless. I could only curse, and scream a vain appeal for aid.

The woman, holding my arms pinioned against my sides, lifted me easily, flung me over her shoulder. Her body, where it touched mine, was as cold as ice. I struggled fiercely but uselessly as she started with me down the black, inclined passage, into the recent excavations beneath the cellar's floor.

Behind us, my father picked up the little red lantern, and the blueprints and sheets of specifications, and followed down the dark, slanting passage.

6

HELPLESS IN those preternaturally strong, corpse-cold and corpse-white arms, I was carried down narrow steps, to a high, subterranean hall. It was filled with a dim blood-red light, which came from no visible source, its angry,

forbidding radiance seeming to spring from the very air. The walls of the underground hall were smooth and black, of some unfamiliar ebon substance.

Several yards down that black, strangely illuminated passage I was carried. Then we came into a larger space. Its black roof, many yards above, was groined and vaulted, supported by a double row of massive dead-black pillars. Many dark, arched niches were cut into its walls. This greater hall, too, was sullenly illuminated by a ghastly scarlet light, which seemed to come from nowhere.

It was a strange, silent, awful place, a sort of cathedral of darkness, of evil and death. A sinister atmosphere of nameless terror seemed to emanate from its very midnight walls, like the stifling fumes of incense offered to some formless god of horror. The dusky red light might have come from unseen tapers burned in forbidden rites of blood and death. The dead silence itself seemed a tangible, evil thing, creeping upon me from ebon walls.

I was given little time to speculate upon the questions that it raised. What was the dead-black material of the walls? Whence came the lurid, bloody radiance? How recently had this strange temple of terror been made? And to what demoniac god was it consecrated? No opportunity had I to

seek answers to those questions, nor time even to recover from my natural astonishment at finding such a place beneath the soil of a Texas ranch.

The emerald-eyed woman who bore me dropped me to the black floor, against the side of a jet pillar, which was round and two feet thick. She whined shrilly, like a hungry dog. It was evidently a call, for two men appeared in the broad central aisle of the temple, which I faced.

Two men— or, rather, malevolent monstrosities in the bodies of men. Their eyes shone with green fires alien to our world, and their bodies, beneath their tattered rags of clothing, were fearfully white. One of them came toward me with a piece of frayed manila rope, which must have been a lasso they had found above.

Later it came to me that these two must be the mechanics from the city of Amarillo, who, Judson had told me on the evening of our fatal drive, had been employed here by my father. I had not yet seen Dr. Blake Jetton, Stella's father, who had been the chief assistant of my own parent in various scientific investigations— investigations which had borne dreadful fruit!

While the woman held me against the black pillar, the men seized my arms, stretched them behind it, and tied them with the rope.

I kicked out, struggled, cursed them, in vain. My body seemed but putty to their fearful strength. When my hands were tied behind the pillar, another length of the rope was dropped about my ankles and drawn tight about the ebon shaft.

I was helpless in this weird, subterranean temple, at the mercy of these four creatures who seemed to combine infernal super-intelligence with the strength and the nature of wolves.

"See the instrument which we are to build!" came the snarling voice of my father. Standing before me, with the roll of blueprints in his livid hands, he pointed at an object that I had not yet distinguished in the sullen, bloody gloom.

IN THE CENTER of the lofty, central hall of this red-lit temple, between the twin rows of looming, dead-black pillars, was a long, low platform of ebon stone. From it rose a metal frame—wrought like the frame of the wrecked machine I had seen in the cellar, above.

The frame supported a huge copper ring in a vertical position. It was far huger than the ring in the ruined mechanism; its diameter was a dozen feet or more. Its upper curve reached far toward the black, vaulted roof of the hall, glistening queerly in the ghastly red light.

Behind the ring, a nuge, parabolic mirror of silvery, polished metal had been set up.

But the device was obviously unfinished.

The complex electron tubes, the delicate helixes and coils, the magnets, and the complicated array of wires, whose smashed and tangled remains I had observed about the wreck of the other machine, had not been installed.

"Look at that!" cried my father again. "The instrument that comes to let upon your earth the great life that is ours. The plan on this paper, we made. From the plan, we made the small machine, and brought to ourselves the life, the strength, the love of blood—"

"The love of blood!" My startled, anguished outcry must have been a shriek, for I was already nearly overcome with the brooding terror of my strange surroundings. I collapsed against the ropes, shaken and trembling with fear.

The light of cunning came once more into the glaring green eyes of the thing that had been my father.

"No, fear not!" he whined on. "Your language it is new to me, and I speak what I do not intend. Be not fearing— if you will do our wish. If you do not, then we will taste your blood.

"But the new life came only to few. Then the machine broke, be-

cause of one man. And our brains are changed, so that we remember not to read the plans that we made. Your aid is ours, to restore a new machine. To you and all your life!"

He stepped close to me, his green eyes burning malevolently. Before my eyes he unrolled one of the sheets which bore plans and specifications for the strange electron tubes, to be mounted outside the copper ring. From his lips came the curious, wolfish whine with which these monsters communicated with one another. One of the transformed mechanics stepped up beside him, carrying in dead-white hands the parts of such a tube—filaments, plate, grid, screens, auxiliary electrodes, and the glass tube in which they were to be sealed. The parts evidently had been made to fit the specifications—as nearly as these entities could comprehend those specifications with their imperfect knowledge of English.

"We make fit plans for these parts," my father whined. "If wrong, you must say where wrong. Describe how to put together. Speak quick, or die slowly!" He snarled menacingly.

Though I am by no means a brilliant physicist, I saw easily enough that most of the parts were useless, though they had been made with amazing accuracy. These beings seemed to have no

knowledge of the fundamental principles underlying the operation of the machine they were attempting to build, yet, in making these parts, they had accomplished feats that would have been beyond the power of our science.

The filament was made of metal, well enough—but was far too thick to be lit by any current, without that current wrecking the tube in which it were used. The grid was nicely made—of metallic radium! It was worth a small fortune, but quite useless in the electron tube. And the plate was evidently of pure fused quartz, shaped with an accuracy that astounded me; but that, too was quite useless.

"Parts wrong?" my father barked excitedly in wolfish tones, his glowing green eyes evidently having read something in my face. "Indicate how wrong. Describe to make correct!"

I CLOSED MY lips firmly, determined to reveal nothing. I knew that it was through the wrecked machine that my father and Stella had been so dreadfully altered. I resolved that I would not aid in changing other humans into such hellish monsters. I was sure that this mechanism, if completed, would be a threat against all humanity.

My father snarled toward the woman.

She dropped upon all fours, and

sprang at me like a wolf, her beastly eyes gleaming green, her bare teeth glistening in the sullen red light, and she was hideously howling!

Her teeth caught my trousers, tore them from my leg from the middle of the right thigh downward. Then they closed into my flesh, and I could feel her teeth gnawing . . . gnawing . . .

She did not make a deep wound, though blood, black in the terrible red light, trickled from it down my leg toward the shoe— blood which, from time to time, she ceased the gnawing to lick up appreciatively. The purpose of it was evidently to cause me the maximum amount of agony and horror.

For minutes, perhaps, I endured it—for minutes that seemed ages.

The pain itself was agonizing: the steady gnawing of teeth into the flesh of my leg, toward the bone.

But that agony was less than the terror of my surroundings. The strange temple of black, with its black floor, black walls, black pillars, vaulted black ceiling. The dim, sourceless, blood-red light that filled it. The dreadful stillness—broken only by my groans, and by the slight sound of the gnawing teeth. The demoniac monster standing before me in the body of my father, staring at me with shining green eyes, holding the plans and the parts that the mechanic had brought, waiting for me to speak. But the most horrible thing was the

fact that the gnawing demon was the body of dear, lovely Stella!

She was now digging her teeth in with a crunching sound.

I writhed and screamed with agony. Sweat rolled from my body. I tugged madly against my bonds, strove to burst the rope that held my tortured leg.

Fierce, eager growls came wolf-like from the throat of the gnawing woman. Her leprously pallid face was once more smeared with blood, as it had been when I first saw her. Occasionally she stopped the unendurable gnawing, to lick her lips with a dreadful satisfaction.

Finally I could stand it no longer. Even if the fate of all the earth depended upon me—as I thought it did—I could endure it no longer.

"Stop! Stop!" I screamed. "I'll tell you!"

Rather reluctantly, the woman rose, licking her crimson lips.

My father—I find myself continually calling the monster by that name, but it was *not* my father—again held the plans before my face, and displayed upon his palm the tiny parts for the electron tube.

It took all my will to draw my mind from the throbbing pain of the fresh wound in my leg. But I explained that the filament wire would have to be drawn much finer, that the radium would not do for the grid, that the plate must

be of a conducting metal, instead of quartz.

He did not easily understand my scientific terms. The name tungsten, for instance meant nothing to him until I had explained the qualities and the atomic number of the metal. That identified it for him, and he appeared really to know more about the metal than I did.

For long hours I answered his questions, and made explanations. A few times I thought of refusing to answer, again. But the memory of that unendurable gnawing always made me speak.

The scientific knowledge and skill displayed in the construction of the machine's parts, once the specifications were properly understood, astounded me. These monsters that had stolen these human bodies seemed to have remarkable scientific knowledge of their own, particularly in chemistry and certain branches of physics—though electricity and magnetism, and the modern theories of relativity and equivalence, seemed new to them, probably because they came from a world whose natural phenomena are not the same as ours.

They brought, from one of the chambers opening into the great hall, an odd, glistening device, consisting of connected bulbs and spheres of some bright, transparent crystal. First, a lump of limestone rock, which must have been dug up in the making of this

underground temple, was dropped into a large lower globe. Slowly it seemed to dissolve, forming a heavy, iridescent, violet-colored gas.

Then, whenever my father or one of the others wished to make any object—a metal plate or grid, a coil of wire, an insulating button, anything needed in building the machine—a tiny pattern of it was skilfully formed of a white, soft, wax-like substance.

The white pattern was placed in one of the crystal bulbs, and the heavy violet gas—which must have been disassociated protons and electrons from the disrupted limestone—was allowed to fill the bulb through one of the numerous transparent tubes.

The operator watched a little gauge, and at the right instant, removed from the bulb—not the pattern, but the finished object, formed of any desired element!

The process was not explained to me, but I am sure that it was one of building up atoms from the constituent positive and negative electrons—a process just the reverse of disintegration, by which radium decomposes into lead. First such simple atoms as those of hydrogen and helium. Then carbon, or silicon, or iron. Then silver, if one desired it, or gold! Finally radium, or uranium, the heaviest of metals. The object was removed whenever the atoms had reached

the proper number to form the element required.

With this marvelous device, whose accomplishments exceeded the wildest dreams of the alchemist, the construction of the huge machine in the center of the hall proceeded with amazing speed, with a speed that filled me with nothing less than terror.

It occurred to me that I might delay the execution of the monsters' dreadful plan by a trick of some kind. Racking my weary and painclouded brain, I sought for some ruse that might mislead my clever opponents. The best idea that came to me was to give a false interpretation of the word "vacuum". If I could keep its true meaning from my father, he would leave the air in the tubes, and they would burn out when the current was turned on. When he finally asked the meaning of the word, I said that it signified a sealed or enclosed space.

But he had been consulting scientific works, as well as my meager knowledge. When the words left my lips, he sprang at me with a hideous snarl. His teeth sought my throat. But for a very hurried pretense of alarmed stupidity, my part in the dreadful adventure might have come to a sudden end. I protested that I had been sincere, that my mind was weary and I could not remember scientific

facts, that I must eat and sleep again.

Then I sagged forward against the ropes, head hanging. I refused to respond, even to threats of further torture. And my exhaustion was scarcely feigned, for I had never undergone a more trying day—a day in which one horror followed close upon another.

Finally they cut me loose. The woman carried me out of the sullen crimson light of the temple, up the narrow passage, and into the house again; I was almost too weak to walk alone. As we came out upon the snow, the distant, keening cry of the pack broke once more upon my ears.

The pale disk of the moon was rising, cold and silvery, in the east, over the illimitable plain of snow. It was night again!

I had been in the subterranean temple for more than twenty-four hours.

7

AGAIN I WAS in the little room that had been Stella's among her intimate possessions, catching an occasional suggestion of her perfume. It was a small room, clean and chaste, and I had a feeling that I was invading a sacred place. But I had no choice in the matter, for the windows were barred, and the door locked behind me.

Stella — or, I should say, the were-woman — had let me stop in the other room to eat and drink again. She had even let me find the medicine cabinet and get a bottle of antiseptic to use in the wound on my leg.

Now sitting on the bed in a shaft of cold, argent moonlight, I applied the stinging liquid, and then bound the place with a bandage torn from a clean sheet.

Then I got to my feet and went to the window: I was determined to escape if escape were possible, or end my life if it were not. I had no intention of going back alive to the hellish red-lit temple.

But the quavering, dismal, howling of the pack came faintly to my ears, as I reached the window, setting me trembling with horror. I gazed fearfully across the fantastic desert of silvery snow, bright in the opalescent haze of moonlight.

Then I glimpsed moving green eyes, and I cried out.

Below the window was a huge, lean gray wolf, pacing deliberately up and down, across the glistening snow. From time to time he lifted his head, stared straight at my windows with huge, malevolent eyes.

A sentinel set to watch me!

With my hopeless despair came a leaden weight of weariness. I felt suddenly exhausted, physically and mentally. I stumbled to the

bed, crept under the covers without troubling to remove my clothing, and fell almost instantly asleep.

I AWOKE UPON a gray, cold day. A chill wind was whistling eerily about the old house, and the sky was gloomy with steel-blue clouds. I sprang out of bed, feeling much refreshed by my long sleep. For a moment, despite the dreary day, I was conscious of an extraordinary sense of relief; it seemed, for the merest instant, as if all that had happened to me was a horrible nightmare, from which I was waking. Then recollection came, with a dull pain in my wounded leg.

I wondered why I had not been carried back into the terrible temple of blood-red gloom before the coming of day; perhaps I must have been sleeping too soundly to be roused.

Recalling the gray wolf, I looked nervously out through the window. It was gone, of course, the monsters seemed unable to endure the light of day, or any other save the terrible crimson dusk of the temple.

I wrapped a blanket about my shoulders, for it was extremely cold, and I set about at once to escape from the room. I was determined to win my liberty or die in the attempt.

First I examined the windows again. The bars outside them,

though of wood, were quite strong. My utmost strength failed to break any one of them. I could find nothing in the room with which they might be cut or worn in twain, without hours of labor.

Finally I turned to the door. My kicks and blows failed to make any impression upon its sturdy panels. The lock seemed strong, and I had neither skill nor tools for picking it.

But, while I stood gazing at the lock, an idea came to me.

I still had the little automatic, and two extra clips of ammunition. My captors had shown only disdain for the little weapon, and I had rather lost faith in it after its puzzling failure to kill the gray wolf.

Now I backed to the other side of the room, drew it, and deliberately fired three shots into the lock. When I first tried the door again, it seemed as impassable as ever. I worked upon it, twisting the knob, again and again. There was a sudden snap, and the door swung open.

I was free. If only I could reach a place of safety before darkness brought out the weird pack!

In the old dining room I paused to drink, and to eat scantily. Then I left the house by the front door, for I dared not go near the mouth of that hell-burrow behind the house, even by day. In fearful,

desperate haste, I set out across the snow.

The little town of Hebron, I knew, lay ten miles away, directly north. Few landmarks were visible above the thick snow, and the gray clouds hid the sun. But I plodded along beside a barbed wire fence, which I knew would guide me.

Slowly the time-yellowed ranch house, an ugly, rambling structure with a gray shingle roof, dwindled upon the white waste behind me. The outbuildings, resembling the house, though looking smaller, more ancient and more dilapidated, drew toward it to form a single brown speck upon the endless desolation of the snow-covered plain.

The crust upon the snow, though frozen harder than upon the ill-fated night of my coming, was still too thin to support my weight. It broke beneath my feet at every step, and I sank ankle-deep in the soft snow beneath.

My progress was a grim, heart-breaking struggle. My strength had been drained by the nerve-racking horrors and exhausting exertions of the past few days. Soon I was gasping for breath, and my feet felt leaden-heavy. There was a dull, intolerable ache in the wound on my leg.

If the snow had been hard enough to support my weight, so that I could run, I might have reached Hebron before dark. But,



sinking deep into it at every step, it was impossible for me to move rapidly.

I must not have covered over half the distance to Hebron, when the gloom of the gray, cheerless day seemed to settle upon me. I realized, with a chill of fatal horror, that it had not been early morning when I set out; my watch had stopped, and since the leaden clouds had obscured the sun, I had no gauge of time.

I must have slept through half the day or more, exhausted as I had been by the day and night of torture in the dark temple. Night was upon me, when I was still far short of my destination.

Nearly dead with fatigue, I had more than once been almost on the point of stopping to rest. But terror lent me fresh strength. I plodded on as fast as I could, but forcing myself to keep from run-



*illustration by
Sewell*

ning, which would burn up my energy too soon.

ANOTHER MILE, perhaps, I had covered, when I heard the weird, blood-congealing voice of the pack.

The darkness, for a time, had

been intense, very faintly relieved by the ghostly gleam of the snow. But the clouds had lightened somewhat, and the light of the rising moon shone through them, casting eldritch shadows of silver on the level snow.

At first the dreadful baying was

very distant, low and moaning and hideous with the human vocal note it carried. But it grew louder. And there was something in it of sharp, eager yelping.

I knew that the pack which had run down Judson and me had been set upon my trail.

The terror, the stark, maddening, soul-eating horror that seized me, is beyond imagination. I shrieked uncontrollably. My hands and body felt alternately hot and fevered, and chilled with a cold sweat. A harsh dryness roughened my throat. I reeled dizzily, and felt the pounding of my pulse in all my body.

And I ran.

Madly, wildly. Ran with all my strength. Ran through the thick snow faster than I had thought possible. But in a few moments, it seemed I had used up all my strength.

I was suddenly sick with fatigue, swaying, almost unable to stand. Red mists, shot with white fire, danced in front of my eyes. The vast plain of snow whirled about me fantastically.

And on and on I staggered. When each step took all my will. When I felt that I must collapse in the snow, and fought with all my mind for the strength to raise my foot again.

All the time, the fearful baying was drawing nearer, until the wail-

ing, throbbing sound of it drummed and rang in my brain.

Finally, unable to take another step, I turned and looked back.

For a few moments I stood there, swaying, gasping for breath. The weird, nerve-blasting cry of the pack sounded very near, but I could see nothing. Then, through the clouds, a broad, ghostly shaft of moonlight fell athwart the snow behind me. And I saw the pack.

I saw them. The pinnacle of horror!

Gray wolves, leaping, green-eyed and gaunt. And strange human figures among them, racing with them. Chill, soulless emerald orbs staring. Bodies ghastly pallid, clad only in tattered rags. Stella, bounding at the head of the pack.

My father, following. And other men. All green-orbed, leprously white. Some of them frightfully mutilated.

Some so torn they should have been dead!

Judson, the man who had brought me out from Hebron, was among them. His livid flesh hung in ribbons. One eye was gone, and a green fire seemed to sear the empty socket. His chest was fearfully lacerated. And the man was — eviscerated!

Yet his hideous body leaped beside the wolves.

And others were as dreadful.

One had no head. A black mist seemed gathered above the jutting, lividly white stump of his neck, and in it glowed malevolently — two green eyes!

A woman ran with them. One arm was torn off, her naked breasts were in ribbons. She ran with the rest, green eyes glowing, mouth wide open, baying with other members of the pack.

And now I saw a horse in that grotesque company. A powerful, gray animal, he was, and he came with tremendous leaps. Its eyes, too, were glowing green — glowing with the malignant fire of an evil intelligence not normally of this earth. This was one of Judson's animals, changed as dreadfully as he and all the others had been. Its mouth yawned open, with yellow teeth glistening, and it howled madly with the pack.

Swiftly, hideously, they closed in upon me. The weird host sprang toward me from all directions — gray wolves, men, and horse. Eyes glaring, teeth bared, snarling, the hellish horde came closer.

The horror of it was too much for my mind. A merciful wave of darkness overcame me as I felt myself reeling to fall upon the snow.

I AWOKE WITHIN the utter stillness of a tomb. For a little time I lay with eyes closed, analyzing the sensations of my chilled, aching

body, conscious of the dull, throbbing pain from my wounded leg. I shuddered at recollection of the fearful experiences of the past few days, endured again the overwhelming horror of the moment when the pack — wolves and men and horse, frightfully mutilated, eyes demoniacally green — had closed in upon me on the moonlit snow. For some time I did not dare to open my eyes.

At last, nerving myself against the new horrors that might surround me, I raised my lids.

I looked into the somber, crimson radiance of the ebon-pillared temple. Beside a dull jet wall I lay, upon a pile of rags, with a blanket thrown carelessly over me. Beyond the row of massive, black, cylindrical pillars, I saw the great, strange machine, with the huge copper ring glistening queerly in the dim, bloody light. The polished mirror behind it seemed flushed with a living glow of molten rubies, and the many electron tubes, now mounted in their sockets, gleamed redly. The mechanism appeared to be near completion; livid, green-orbed figures were busy about it, moving with a swift, mechanical efficiency. It struck me abruptly that they moved more like machines than like living beings. My father, Stella, the two mechanics.

For many minutes I lay very still, watching them covertly. Evi-

dently they had brought me down into this subterranean chamber, so that I would have no chance to repeat my escape. I speculated upon the possibility of creeping along the wall to the ascending passage, dashing through it. But there was little hope that I could do it unseen. And I had no way of knowing whether it might be night or day; it would be folly to run out into the darkness. I felt the little automatic still under my arm; they had not troubled to remove a weapon which they did not fear.

Suddenly, before I had dared to move, I saw my father coming across the black floor toward me. I could not repress a tremor, at closer sight of his deathly pallid body and sinister, baleful greenish eyes. I lay still, trying to pretend sleep.

I FELT HIS ice-cold fingers close upon my shoulder; roughly I was drawn to my feet.

"Further assistance from you must be ours," whined his wolfish voice. "And not again will you be brought back living, should you be the fool to run!" His whine ended with an ugly snarl.

He dragged me across toward the fantastic mechanism that glistened in the grim, bloody radiance.

I quailed at the thought of being bound to the black pillar again.

"I'll help!" I cried. "Do anything you want. Don't tie me up, for God's sake! Don't let her gnaw me!" My voice must have become a hysterical scream. I fought to calm it, cudged my brain for arguments.

"It would kill me to be tied again," I pleaded wildly. "And if you leave me free, I can help you with my hands!"

"Be free of bonds, then," my father whined. "But also remember! You go, and we bring you back not alive!"

He led me up beside the great machine. One of the mechanics, at a shrill, wolfish whine from him, unrolled a blueprint before me. He began to ask questions regarding the wiring to connect the many electron tubes, the coils and helixes and magnets, all ranged about the huge copper ring.

His strange brain seemed to have no conception of the nature of electricity; I had to explain the fundamentals. But he grasped each new fact with astounding quickness, seemed to see the applications instinctively.

It soon developed that the great mechanism was practically finished; in an hour, perhaps, the wiring was completed.

"Now what yet is to be constructed?" my father whined.

I realized that no provision had been made for electricity to light the tubes and energize the mag-

nets. These beings apparently did not even know that a source of power was necessary. This, I thought, was another chance to stop the execution of their hellish plan.

"I don't know," I said. "So far as I can see, the machine now fits the specifications. I know nothing else to do."

He snarled something to one of the mechanics, who produced the bloody rope with which I had previously been bound. Stella sprang toward me, her lips curled in a leering animal snarl, her white teeth gleaming.

Uncontrollable terror shook me, weakened my knees until I reeled.

"Wait! Stop!" I screamed. "I'll tell if you won't tie me!"

They halted.

"Speak!" my father barked. "Quickly describe!"

"The machine must have power. Electricity?"

"From what place comes electricity."

"There is a motor generator up in the cellar, where the other machine is. That might do."

He and the monster that had been Stella hurried me down the black-pillared hall, and up the inclined passage to the old cellar. He carried the red-glowing electric lantern. In the cellar I showed them the generator and attempted a rough explanation of its operation.

Then he and the woman bent and caught the metal base of the unit. With their incredible strength, they lifted it quite easily and carried it toward the passage. They made me walk ahead of them as we returned to the machine in the black hall—blasting another hope for a chance to make a dash for the open.

Just as they were placing the heavy machine—gasoline engine and dynamo, which together weighed several hundred pounds—on the black platform beside the strange, gigantic mechanism, there came an interruption.

From the passage came the rustle of feet, and mingled whining, snarling sounds such as the monsters seemed to use for communication. And in the vague, blood-red light, between the tall rows of great black pillars, appeared the pack!

Huge, gaunt wolves there were. Frightfully mutilated men—Judson, and the others that I had seen. The gray horse. All their eyes were luminously green—alight with a dreadful, malevolent fire.

Human lips were crimsoned. Scarlet smeared the gray wolves' muzzles, and even the long nose and gray jaws of the horse. And they carried—the catch!

OVER JUDSON'S livid, lacerated shoulders was hung the torn, limp bleeding body of a woman—

his wife! One of the gaunt gray wolves had the hideously mangled body of a man across his back, holding it in place with jaws turned sidewise. Another had the body of a spotted calf. Two more carried in red-dripping jaws the lax gray bodies of coyotes. And one of the men "bore upon his shoulder the remains of a huge gray wolf.

The dead, torn, mutilated specimens were dropped in a horrible heap in the wide central aisle of the jet-pillared temple, near the strange machine, like an altar of death. Dark blood flowed from it over the black floor, congealing in thick, viscid clots.

"To these we bring life," my father snarled at me, jerking his head toward the dreadful, mangled heap.

Shuddering and dazed with horror, I sank on the floor, covering my eyes. I was nauseated, sick. My brain was reeling, fogged, confused. It refused to dwell upon the meaning of this dreadful scene.

The mad, fearful, demonic thing that had been my father jerked me roughly to my feet, dragged me toward the motor generator, and began plying me with questions about its operation, about how to connect it with the strange mechanism of the copper ring.

I struggled to answer his questions, trying vainly to forget my horror in the work.

Soon the connection was com-

pleted. Under my father's directions, I examined the gasoline engine, saw that it was supplied with fuel and oil. Then he attempted to start it, but failed to master the technique of choking the carburetor. Under constant threat of the blood-darkened rope and the werewoman's gnawing fangs, I labored with the little motor until it coughed a few times, and fell to firing steadily.

Then my father made me close the switch, connecting the strange machine with the current from the generator. A faint, shrill humming came from the coils. The electron tubes glowed dimly.

And a curtain of darkness seemed suddenly drawn across the copper ring. Blackness seemed to flow from the queer tube behind it, to be reflected into it by the polished mirror. A disk of dense utter darkness filled the ring.

FOR A FEW moments I stared at it in puzzled wonder.

Then, as my eyes became slowly sensitized, I found that I could see through it—see into a dread, nightmare world.

The ring had become an opening into another world of horror and darkness.

The sky of that alien world was unutterably, inconceivably black; blacker than the darkest midnight. It had no stars, no luminary; no faintest gleam relieved its terrible, oppressive intensity.

A vast reach of that other world's surface lay in view, beyond the copper ring. Low, worn, and desolate hills, that seemed black as the somber sky. Between them flowed a broad and stagnant river, whose dull and sullen waters shone with a vague and ghostly luminosity, with a pale glow that was somehow unclean and noisome.

And upon those low and ancient hills, that were rounded like the bloated breasts of corpses, was a loathsome vegetation. Hideous, obscene travesties of normal plants, whose leaves were long, narrow, snake-like, with the suggestion of ugly heads. With a dreadful, unnatural life, they seemed to writhe, lying in rotting tangles upon the black hills, and dragging in the foul, lurid waters of the stagnant river. Their thin reptilian, tentacular vines and creepers glowed with a pale and ghastly light, lividly greenish.

And upon a low black hill, above the river, and the writhing, obscene jungle, was what must have been a city. A sprawled and hideous mass of red corruption. A foul splash of dull crimson pollution.

This was no city, perhaps, in our sense of the word. It seemed to be a sort of cloud of foul, blood-hued darkness, trailing repulsive tentacles across the low black hill; a smear of evil crimson mist. Mad and repulsive knobs and warts

rose about it, in grotesque mockery of spires and towers. It was motionless. And I knew instinctively that unclean and abominable life, sentience, reigned within its hideous scarlet contamination.

My father mounted to the black stone step between the copper ring, and stood there howling weirdly and hideously, into that world of darkness.

In answer, the sprawled, nightmare city seemed to stir. Dark things—masses of fetid, reeking blackness—seemed to creep from its ugly protuberances, to swarm toward us through the filth of the writhing, glowing vegetation.

The darkness of evil concentrate, creeping from that nightmare world into ours!

For long moments the utter, insane horror of it held me paralyzed and helpless. Then something nerved me with the abrupt, desperate determination to revolt against my fearful masters, despite the threat of the bloody rope.

I tore my eyes from the dreadful attraction that seemed to draw them toward the foul, sprawled city of bloody darkness, in that hideous world of unthinkable evil.

Realization came to me that I stood alone, unguarded. The green eyes of the monsters about me were fixed in avid fascination upon the ring through which that nightmare

world was visible. None of them seemed aware of me.

If only I could wreck the machine, before those creeping horrors of darkness came through into our world! I started forward instinctively, then paused, realizing that it might be difficult to do great damage to it with my bare hands, before the monsters saw me and attacked.

Then I thought of the little automatic in my pocket, which I had been permitted to keep with me. Even though its bullets could not harm the monsters, they might do considerable damage to the machine.

I snatched it out and began firing deliberately at the dimly glowing electron tubes. As the first one was shattered, the image of that hideous, nightmare world flickered and vanished. The huge, polished mirror was once more visible beyond the copper ring.

For the time being, at least, those rankling shapes of black and utter evil were shut out of our world!

As I continued to fire, shattering the electron tubes and the other most delicate and most complicated parts of the great mechanism, a fearful, soul-chilling cry came from the startled monsters in human and animal bodies.

Suddenly the creatures sprang toward me, over the black floor, howling hideously.

IT WAS THE yellow, stabbing spurts of flame from the automatic that saved me. At first the fearfully transformed beasts and men had leaped at me, howling with the agony that light seemed to cause them. I kept on firing, determined to do all the damage possible before they bore me down.

And abruptly they fell back away from me, wailing dreadfully, hiding their unearthly green eyes, slinking behind the massive black pillars.

When the gun was empty, some of them came toward me again. But still they seemed shaken, weakened, uncertain of movement. In nervous haste, I fumbled in my pockets for matches—I had not realized before how they were crippled by light.

I found only three, all, apparently, that I had left.

The monsters, recovered from the effect of the gun flashes, were leaping across toward me, through the sullen, blood-red gloom, as I struggled desperately to make a light.

The first match broke in my fingers.

But the second flared into yellow flame. The monsters, almost upon me, sprang back, wailing in agony again. As I held the tiny, feeble flame aloft, they cowered, howl-

ing, in the flickering shadows cast by the huge, ebon pillars.

My confused, horror-dazed mind was abruptly cleared and sharpened by hope of escape. With the light to hold them back, I might reach the open air.

And to my quickened mind it came abruptly that it must be day above. It was morning, and the pack had been driven back to the burrow by the light of the coming sun!

As swiftly as I could, without extinguishing the feeble flame of the match with the wind of my motion, I advanced down the great hall. I kept in the middle of the wide central aisle, afraid that my enemies were slinking along after me in the shadows of the pillars.

Before I reached the passage which lead to the surface, a stronger breath of air caught the feeble orange flame. It flickered out. Dusky crimson gloom fell about me once more, with baleful green eyes moving in it, in the farther end of the temple. The howling rose again, angrily. I heard swiftly padding feet.

Only one of the three matches was left.

I bent, scratched it very carefully on the black floor and held it above my head.

A new wailing of pain came from the monsters; they fell back again.

I found the end of the passage,

rushed through it, guarding precious flame in a cupped hand.

In the great hall behind me, the blood-chilling wail of the pack rose again. I heard the monsters surging toward the passage.

By the time I had reached the old cellar, from whose wall the slanting tunnel had been dug, the match was almost consumed. I turned, let its last dying rays shine down the passage. Dreadful cries of agony and terror came again; I heard the monsters retreating from the tunnel.

The match suddenly went out.

In the mad haste I blundered heavily into the wall. I found the steps that led to the surface and rushed up them desperately.

I heard the howling pack running up the passage, moving far swifter than I was able to do.

At last my hand touched the under surface of the wooden door, above the steps. Beyond, I knew, was the golden light of day.

And at the same instant, corpse-cold fingers closed about my ankle, in a crushing, powerful grasp.

Confulsively, I thrust upward with my hand.

The door flew up, slammed crashingly beside the opening. Above was soft, brilliant azuresky. In it the white morning sun blazed blindingly. Its hot radiance brought tears to my eyes, accustomed as they were to the dim crimson light of the temple.

Fearful, agonized animal wailing sounds came again from behind me.

The grasp on my ankle tightened convulsively, then relaxed.

LOOKING BACK, I saw Stella on the steps at my feet, cowering, writhing as if in unbearable agony, animal screams of pain coming from her lips. It seemed that the burning sunlight had struck her down, that she had been too much weakened to retreat as those behind her had done.

Abruptly she seemed to me a lovely, suffering girl—not a demoniac monster. Pity for her—even, perhaps, love—came over me in a tender wave. If I could save her, restore her to her true self!

I ran back down the steps, seized her by the shoulders, started to carry her up into the light. Deathly cold and deathly white her body still was. And still it had a vestige of that unnatural strength.

She writhed in my arms, snarling, slashing at my body with her teeth. For a moment her green eyes smoldered malevolently at me. But as the sunlight struck them she closed them, howling with agony, and tried to shield them with her arm.

I carried her up the steps, into the brilliant sunlight.

First I thought of closing the cellar door, and trying to fasten it.

Then I realized that the light of day, shining down the passage, would hold back the monsters more effectually than any locked door.

It was still early morning. The sun had been up no more than an hour. The sky was clear, and the sunshine glittered with blinding, prismatic brilliance on the snow. The air, however, was still cold; there had been no thawing, nor would there be until the temperature had moderated considerably.

As I stood there in the blaze of sunlight, holding Stella, a strange change came over her. The fierce snarling and whining sounds that came from her throat slowly died away. Her writhing, convulsive struggles weakened, as though a tide of alien life were ebbing from her body.

There was a sudden last convulsion. Then her body was lax, limp.

Almost immediately, I noticed a change in color. The fearful, corpse-like pallor slowly gave place to the normal pinkish flush of healthy life. The strange, unearthly chill was gone; I felt a glow of warmth where her body was against mine.

Then her breast heaved. She breathed. I felt the slow throbbing of her heart. Her eyes were still closed as she lay inert in my arms, like one sleeping. I freed one of my hands and gently lifted a long-lashed lid.

The eye was clear and blue—normal again. The blaeful, greenish fire was gone!

In some way, which I did not then understand, the light of day had purified the girl, had driven from her the fierce, unclean life that had possessed her body.

"Stella! Stella! Wake up!" I cried. I shook her a little. But she did not rouse. Still she seemed sleeping heavily.

Realizing that she would soon be chilled, in the cold air, I carried her into the house, into her own room, where I had been imprisoned, and laid her on the bed, covering her with blankets. Still she appeared to be sleeping.

For an hour, perhaps, I tried to rouse her from the profound syncope or coma in which she lay. I tried everything that experience and the means at hand made available. And still she lay insensible.

A most puzzling situation. Stella—the real Stella—had been dispossessed of her body by some foul, alien being. The alien, evil life had been killed by the light, and still she had not returned.

AT LAST IT occurred to me to try hypnotic influence—I am a fair hypnotist, and have made a deep study of hypnotism and allied mental phenomena. A forlorn hope, appeared so deep. I was driven to clutch at any straw.

Exerting all my will to recall her mind, placing my hand upon her smooth brow, or making slow passes over her still, pale, lovely face, I commanded her again and again to open her eyes.

And suddenly, when I was almost on the point of new despair, her eyelids flickered, lifted. Of course, it may have been a natural awakening, though a most unusual one, instead of the result of my efforts. But her blue eyes opened and stared up at me.

But still she was not normally awake. No life or feeling was revealed in the azure depths of her eyes. They were clouded, shadowed with sleep. Their opening seemed to have been a mechanical answer to my commands.

"Speak. Stella, my Stella, speak to me!" I cried.

Her pale lips parted. From them came low, sleep-drugged tones.

"Clovis." She spoke my name in that small, colorless voice.

"Stella, what has happened to you and my father?" I cried.

And here is what she told me, in that tiny, toneless voice. I have condensed it somewhat, for many times her voice wandered wearily, died away, and I had to prompt her, question her, almost force her to continue.

"My father came here to help Dr. McLaurin with his experiment," she began, slowly, in a low monotone, "I did not understand

all of it, but they sought for other worlds besides ours. Other dimensions, interlocking with our own. Dr. McLaurin had been working out his theory for many years, basing his work upon the new mathematics of Weyl and Einstein.

"Not simple is our universe. Worlds upon worlds lie side by side, like the pages of a book—and each world unknown to all the others. Strange worlds touching, spinning side by side, yet separated by walls not easily broken down.

In vibration is the secret. For all matter, all light, all sound, all our universe, is of vibration. All material things are formed of vibrating particles of electricity—electrons. And each world, each universe, has its own order of vibration. And through each, all unknown and unseen, are the myriad other worlds and universes vibrating, each with an order of its own.

"Dr. McLaurin knew by mathematics that these other worlds must exist. It was his wish to explore them. Here he came, to be alone, with none to pry into his secrets. Aided by my father, and other men, he toiled through years to build his machine.

"A machine, if successful, would change the vibration rate of matter and of light. To change it from the order of our dimension, to those of others. With it, he might see into those myriad other worlds in space

beside our own, might visit them.

"The machine was finished. And through its great copper ring, we saw another world. A world of darkness, with midnight sky. Loathsome, lividly green plants writhed like reptilian monstrosities upon its black hills. Evil, alien life teemed upon it.

"Dr. McLaurin went through into that dark world. The horror of it broke down his mind. A strange madman, he came back. His eyes were green and shining, and his skin was very white.

"And things he brought back with him—clinging, creeping things of foul blackness, that stole the bodies of men and beasts. Evil, living things, that are the masters of the black dimension. One crept into me, and took my body. It ruled me, and I know only like a dim dream what it made my body do. To it, my body was but a machine.

"Dim dreams. Terrible dreams. Dreaming of running over the snow, hunting for wolves. Dreams of bringing them back, for the black things to flow into, and make live again. Dreams of torturing my father, whom no black thing took, at first.

"FATHER WAS tortured, gnawed. My body did it. But I did not do it. I was far away. I saw it only dimly, like a bad dream. One of the black creatures

had come into my body, taken it from me.

"New to our world were the black things. Light slays them, for it is a force strange to their world, against which they have no armor. And so they dug a deep place, to slink into by day.

"The ways of our world they knew not; nor the language; nor the machines. They made Father teach them; teach them to speak; to read books; to run the machine through which they came. They plan to make black clouds to hide the sun forever, so our world will be as dark as their own. They plan to seize the bodies of all men and animals, to use as machines to do that thing.

"When Father knew the plan, he would not tell them more. So my body gnawed him — while I looked on from afar, and could not help. Then he pretended to be in accord with them. They let him loose. He smashed the machine with an ax, so no more evil things could come through. Then he blew off his head with a gun, so they could not torture him, and make him aid them again.

"The black things could not themselves repair the machine. But in letters they learned of Clovis McLaurin, son of Dr. McLaurin. He, too, knew of machines. They sent for him, to torture him as Father had been tortured. Again my mind was filled with grief, for

he was dear to me. But my body gnawed him, while he aided the black things to build a new machine.

"Then he broke it. And then . . . then . . ."

Her tiny, toneless voice died wearily away. Her blue eyes, still clouded with shadowed sleep, stared up unseeingly. Deep indeed was her strange trance.

She had even forgotten that it was I to whom she spoke!

10

AN AMAZING and terrible story, was Stella's. In part, it was almost incredible. Yet, much as I wished to doubt it, and much as I wished to discount the horror that it promised our fair earth, I knew that it must be true.

Prominent scientists have speculated often enough of the possibility of other worlds, other planes, side-by-side with our own. For there is nothing solid or impenetrable about the matter of our universe. The electron is thought to be only a vibration in the ether. And in all probability, there are vibrating fields of force, forming other electrons, other atoms, other suns and planets, existing beside our world, yet not making their existence known. Only a tiny band of the vibrations in the spectrum is visible to our eyes as light. If our eyes were tuned to other bands, above

the ultraviolet, or below the infrared, what new, strange worlds might burst upon our vision?

No, I could not doubt that part of Stella's story. My father had studied the evidence upon the existence of such worlds invisible to us, more deeply than any other man, had published his findings, with complete mathematical proof, in his startling work, *Interlocking Universes*. If those parallel worlds were to be discovered, he was the logical man to make the discovery. And I could not doubt that he had made it—for I had seen that world of dread nightmare, beyond the copper ring!

And I had seen, in that dark, alien world, the city of the creeping things of blackness. I could well believe the part of the story about those malignant entities stealing the bodies of men and animals. It offered the rational solution of all the facts I had observed, since the night of my coming to Hebron.

And it came to me suddenly that soon the monstrous beings would have the machine repaired; they could need no further aid from me. Then other hordes of the black shapes would come through, to seize our world, Stella had said, to enslave humanity, to aid them in making our world a planet of darkness like the grim sphere they left.

I must do something against them! Fight them—fight them with

light! Light was the one force that destroyed them; that had freed Stella from her bondage. But I must obtain better means of making light than a few matches. Lamps would do; a searchlight, perhaps.

And I was determined to take Stella to Hebron, if she were able to go. I must go there to find the supplies I needed, and yet I could not bear the thought of leaving her for the monstrosities to find when night fell again, to seize her fair body again for their foul ends.

I found that at my command she would move, stand, and walk, though slowly and stiffly, like a person walking in sleep. It was still early morning, and I thought there might be time for her to walk to Hebron, with me to support her steps, before the fall of darkness.

I investigated her possessions in the room, found clothing for her: woolen stockings, strong shoes, knickers, sweater, gloves, cap. Her efforts to dress herself were slow and clumsy, like those of a weary child, trying to pull off his clothing when half asleep, and I had to aid her.

She seemed not to be hungry. But when we stopped in the dining room, where the remainder of the food still lay on the table, I made her drink a tin of milk. She did it mechanically. As for myself, I ate heartily, despite, ill-omened recollections of how I had eaten at this

table on the eve of my first attempt to escape.

We set out across the snow, following along by the wire fence as I had done before, I could distinguish my old footprints and the mingled tracks of wolf, man, and horse, in the trail the pursuing pack had left. We followed that trail with greater ease now, for the soft snow had been packed by the running feet.

I walked with an arm about Stella's waist, sometimes half-carrying her, speaking to her encouragingly. She responded with slow, dull mechanical efforts. Her mind seemed far away; her blue eyes were misty with strange dreams.

AS THE HOURS of weary struggle went by, with her warm body against mine, it came to me that I loved her very much.

Once I stopped, and drew her unresisting body fiercely to me, and brought my mouth close to her pale lips, that were composed, and a little parted, and perfumed with sleep. Her blue eyes stared at me blankly, still clouded with sleep, devoid of feeling or understanding. I pushed her pliant body back, and led her on across the snow.

The sun reached the zenith, and began declining, slowly westward.

As evening wore on, Stella seemed to tire—or perhaps it was only that her trance-like state became

deeper. She responded more slowly to my urgings that we must hurry. When for a few moments, my encouraging voice was silent, she stood motionless, rigid, as if lost in strange vision.

I hurried her on desperately, commanding her steadily to keep up her efforts. My eyes were anxiously on the setting sun. I knew that we would have scant time to reach the village before the fall of night; haste was imperative.

At last, when the sun was still some distance above the white horizon, we came within sight of the town of Hebron. A cluster of dark specks, upon the limitless plain of glittering snow. Three miles away, they must have been.

Still the girl seemed to sink deeper into the strange sea of sleep from which only hypnotic influence had lifted her. By the time we had covered another mile, she refused to respond to my words. She was breathing slowly, regularly; her body was limp, flaccid; her eyes had closed. I could do nothing to rouse her.

The sun had touched the snow, coloring the western world with pale rose and purple fires. Darkness was not far away.

Desperately, I took the limp, relaxed body of the girl upon my shoulders and staggered on beneath the burden. It was no more than two miles to Hebron; I had

hopes of getting there with her before dark.

But the snow was so deep as to make the effort of even unburdened walking exhausting. And my body was worn out, after the terrible experiences I had lately undergone. Before I had tottered on half a mile, I realized that my effort was hopeless.

Dusk had fallen. The moon had not yet risen, but the snow gleamed silvery under the ghostly twilight that still flooded the sky. My ears were straining fearfully for the voice of the dreadful pack, but a shroud of utter silence hung about me. I was still plodding wearily along, carrying Stella.

Abruptly I noticed that her body, against my hands, was becoming strangely cold. Anxiously, I laid her down upon the snow, to examine her—trembling with a premonition of the approaching horror.

Her body was icy cold. And it had again become ghastly, deathly white. White as when I had seen her running over the snow with the gaunt gray wolf!

But her limbs, strangely, did not stiffen; they were still pliant, relaxed. It was not the chill of death coming over her; it was the cold of that alien life, which the sunlight had driven from her, returning with the darkness!

I knew that she would soon be a human girl no longer, but a weird

wolf-woman. For a few moments I crouched beside her inert body, pleading wildly with her to come back to me, crying out to her almost insanely.

THEN I SAW the hopelessness of it, and the danger. The monstrous life would flow into her again. And she would carry me back to hateful captivity in the subteranean temple, to be a slave of the monsters—or perhaps a member of their malefic society.

I must escape! For her sake. For the world's. It would be better to abandon her now, and go on alone, than have her carry me back. Perhaps I would have another chance to save her.

And I must somehow render her helpless, so that she could not pursue me, when the dread life returned to her body.

I snatched off my coat, and then my shirt. In anxious haste, I tore the shirt into strips, which I twisted rapidly into cords. I drew her ankles together, passed the improvised bonds about them, knotted them tightly. I turned the frightfully pallid, corpse-cold girl upon her face, crossed the lax arms behind her back, and fastened her wrists together with another rope of twisted cloth. Then, by way of extra precaution, I slipped the belt from my trousers and buckled it firmly about her waist, over the crossed wrists, pinioning them.

Finally I spread on the snow the coat I had taken off, and laid her upon it, for I wanted her to be as comfortable as possible.

Then I started off toward Hebron, where a little cluster of white lights shone across the snow, through the gray, gathering dusk. I had gone but a few steps when something made me pause, look back, fearfully.

The inert, deathly pallid body of the girl still lay upon the coat. Beyond it, I glimpsed a strange and dreadful thing, moving swiftly through the ghostly, gray twilight.

Incredible and hideous was the thing I gazed upon. It was a mass of darkness, flowing over the snow. A creeping cloud of foul blackness, shapeless and many-tentacled. Its form changed continually as it moved. It had no limbs, no features—only the inky, snake-like, clinging extensions of its blackness, that it thrust out to move itself along. But deep within it were two bright green points—like eyes. Green baleful orbs, aflame with fiendish malevolence!

IT WAS ALIVE, this living darkness. It was unlike any higher form of life. But it has since come to me that it resembled the amoeba—a single-cell animal, a flowing mass of protoplasmic slime. Like the amoeba this darkness moved by extended narrow pseudopods from its mass. And the green eyes

of horror, in which its unearthly life appeared to be concentrated, perhaps correspond to the vacuoles or nuclei of the protozoan animals.

I realized, with a paralyzing sensation of horror unutterable, that it was one of the monsters from that world of black nightmare, beyond the copper ring. And that it was coming to claim again Stella's body, to which it was still connected by some bond.

Though it seemed only to creep or flow, it moved with a terrible swiftness—far faster, even, than the wolves.

In a moment after I saw it, it had reached Stella's body. It paused, hung over her, a thick, viscid, clinging cloud of blackness with those greenish, fearful eyes staring from its foul mass. For a moment it hid her body, with its creeping, sprawling, ink-black and shapeless masses, crawling over her like horrid tentacles.

Then it *flowed* into her body.

It seemed to stream through her nostrils, into her mouth. The black cloud hanging over her steadily diminished. The infernal green orbs remained above, in the writhing darkness, until the last. And then they seemed to sink into her eyes. Abruptly, her pallid body came to terrible life.

She writhed, straining at her bonds with preternatural strength, rolling from the coat into the snow, hideously convulsed. Her eyes were

open again—and they shone, not with their own life, but with the dreadful fire of the green, malevolent orbs that had sunk into them.

Her eyes were the eyes of the creeping blackness.

From her throat came the soul-numbing, wolfish baying, that I had already heard under such frightful circumstances. It was an animal cry, yet it had an uncanny human note that was calling to the pack!

That sound nerved my paralyzed limbs. For the few moments that it had taken the monstrous thing of blackness to flow into Stella's body, I had stood motionless, transfixed with the horror of it.

Now I turned and ran madly across the snow toward the dancing lights of Hebron. Behind me the werewoman still writhed in the snow, trying to break her bonds, howling weirdly—summoning the pack!

Those twinkling lights seemed to mock me. They looked very near across the ghostly, gleaming plain of snow. They seemed to dance away from me as I ran. They seemed to move like fireflies, pausing until I was almost upon them, then retreating, to scintillate far across the snow.

I forgot my weariness, forgot the dull, throbbing pain of the unhealed wound in my leg. I ran

desperately, as I had never run before.

Before I had covered half the distance, I heard behind me the voice of the pack. A weird, wailing, far-off cry which grew swiftly louder. The werewoman had called, and the pack was coming to free her.

ON I RAN. My steps seemed so pitifully slow. My feet sank deep into the snow which seemed to cling to them with maleficent demon-fingers. And the lights that seemed so near appeared to be dancing mockingly away before me.

Sweat poured from my body. My lungs throbbed with pain. My heart seemed to hammer against the base of my brain. My mind seemed drowning in a sea of pain. And on I ran.

The lights of Hebron became unreal ghost-fires, false will-o'-the-wisps. They quivered before me in a blank world of gray darkness. And I labored on toward them, through a dull haze of agony. I saw nothing else. And nothing did I hear, but the moaning of the pack.

I was so weary that I could not think. But I suddenly became aware that the pack was very near. I think I turned my head and glanced back for a moment. Or it may be that I remember the pack only as I saw it in imagina-

tion. But I have a very vivid picture of gaunt gray wolves leaping and baying hideously, and pallid, green-eyed men running with them, howling with them.

Yet on I ran, fighting the black mists of exhaustion that closed about my brain. Heartbreaking inertia seemed to oppose every effort, as if I were swimming against a resisting tide. On and on I ran, with eyes for nothing, thought for nothing, except the lights of Hebron, that seemed very near, and always fled before me.

Then suddenly I was lying in the soft snow with my eyes closed. The yielding couch was very comfortable to my exhausted body. I lay there, relaxed. I did not even try to rise; my strength was utterly gone. Blackness came upon me—unconsciousness that even the howling of the pack could not keep away. The weird ululation seemed to grow fainter and I knew no more.

II

"PRETTY NEAR all in, ain't you, Mister?" a rough voice penetrated to my fatigue-drugged mind. Strong hands were helping me to my feet. I opened my eyes and stared confusedly about me. Two roughly clad men were supporting me. And another, whom I recognized as the station

agent, Connell, held a gasoline lantern.

Before me, almost at hand, were the lights of Hebron, which had seemed to dance away so mockingly. I saw that I had collapsed in the outskirts of the straggling village—so near the few street lights that the pack had been unable to approach me.

"That you, McLaurin?" Connell demanded in surprise, recognizing my face. "We figgered they got you and Judson."

"They did," I found voice to say. "But they carried me off alive. I got away."

I was too nearly dead with exhaustion to answer their questions. Only vaguely do I recall how they carried me into a house, and undressed me. I went to sleep while they were examining the wound on my leg, exclaiming with horror at the marks of teeth. After I was sleeping they dressed it again, and then put me to bed.

It was noon of the following day when I awoke. A nervous boy of perhaps ten years was sitting by the bed. His name, he said, was Marvin Potts, son of Joel Potts, owner of a general store in Hebron. His father had been one of the men who had found me when their attention was attracted by the howling of the pack. I had been carried into the Potts home.

The boy called his mother. She, finding that I was hungry, soon

brought me coffee, biscuits, bacon, and fried potatoes. I ate with good appetite, though I was far from recovered from my desperate run to escape the pack. While I was eating, still lying in bed, raised on an elbow, my host came in. Connell, the station agent, and two other men were with him.

All were anxious to hear my story. I told it to them briefly, or as much of it as I thought they would believe.

From them I learned that the pack had found several more human victims. A lone ranch house had been raided on the night before and three men carried from it. They told me, too, that Mrs. Judson, frantic with grief over the loss of her husband, had gone out across the snow to seek him and had not come back. How well I recalled now that she had found him! Bitterly I reproached myself for having urged the man to risk the night trip with me.

I inquired if any steps had been made to hunt the wolves.

The sheriff, I learned, had organized a posse, which had ventured out from Hebron several times. Abundant tracks of men and wolves, running side by side, had been found. There had been no difficulty in following the trail. But, I gathered, the hunters had not been very eager for success. The snow was deep; they could not travel rapidly, and they had

owned no intention of meeting the pack by night. The trails had never been followed more than six or seven miles from Hebron. The sheriff had returned to the county seat, twelve miles down the railroad, promising to return when the snow had melted enough to make traveling easier. And the few score inhabitants of Hebron, though deeply disturbed by the fate of their neighbors who had been taken by the pack, had been too much terrorized to undertake any determined expedition on their own account.

When I spoke of getting someone to return with me to the ranch, quick evasions met me. The example of Judson's fate was very strongly in the minds of all present. None cared to risk being caught away from the town by night. I realized that I must act alone, unaided.

MOST OF THAT day I remained in bed, recuperating. I knew that I would need my full strength for the trial that lay before me. I investigated the available resources, however, and made plans for my mad attempt to strike at the menace that overhung humanity.

With the boy, Marvin, acting as my agent, I purchased an ancient buggy, with a brown nag and harness, to carry me back to the ranch house; my efforts to rent

a vehicle, or to hire someone to take me back, had proved signal failures. I had him also to arrange to procure for me other equipment.

I had him buy a dozen gasoline lanterns, with an abundant supply of mantles, and two five-gallon tins, full of gasoline. Finding that the Hebron High School boasted a meager supply of laboratory equipment, I sent the boy in search of magnesium ribbon, and sulphur. He returned with a good bundle of the thin, metallic strips, cut in various lengths. I dipped the ends of each strip in molten sulphur, to facilitate lighting.

He bought me two powerful electric flashlights, with a supply of spare bulbs and batteries, extra ammunition for my automatic, and two dozen sticks of dynamite, with caps and fuses.

Next morning I woke early, feeling much recovered. The shallow, gnawed wound in my leg was fast healing, and had ceased to pain me greatly. As I sat down to a simple breakfast with the Potts family, I assured them confidently that, on this day, I was going to return to the den of the pack, from which I had escaped, and put an end to it.

Before we had finished eating, I heard the hail of the man from whom the buggy had been bought, driving up to deliver it and collect the ample price that Marvin Potts had agreed that I would pay.

The boy went out with me. We took the vehicle, and together made the rounds of Hebron's few stores, collecting the articles he had bought for me on the day before—the lanterns, the supply of gasoline, the electric searchlights, and the dynamite.

IT WAS STILL early morning when I left the boy at the end of the street, rewarding him with a bill, and drove alone through the snow, back toward the lonely ranch house where I had experienced such horrors.

The day, though bright, was cold. The snow had never begun to thaw; it was still as thick as ever. My brown nag plodded along slowly, his feet and the buggy's tires crunching through the crusted snow.

As Hebron vanished behind me, and I was surrounded only by the vast, glittering sea of unbroken snow, fear and dread came upon me—a violent longing to hurry to some crowded haunt of men. My imagination pictured the terrors of the night, when the pack would run again upon the snow.

How easy would it be to return, take the train for New York, and forget the terrors of this place! No, I knew that I could never forget. I could never forget the threat of that dread, night-black world beyond the copper ring, the fact that its spawn planned to seize our

world and make it a sphere of rotting gloom like their own.

And Stella! Never could I forget her. I knew now that I loved her, that I must save her or perish with her.

I urged the pony on, across the lonely and illimitable desert of sunlit snow.

It was somewhat past noon when I reached the ranch house, but I still had a safe margin of daylight. Immediately I set about my preparations.

There was much to do: unpacking the boxes piled on the buggy; filling the dozen gasoline lanterns, pumping them up with air, burning their mantles, and seeing that they operated satisfactorily; attaching caps and fuses to the sticks of dynamite, testing my powerful flashlights; loading the little automatic and filling the extra clips; stowing conveniently in my pockets an abundance of matches, ammunition, extra batteries for the electric torches, the strips of magnesium ribbon.

The sun was still high when the preparations were completed. I took time then to put the pony in the stable behind the old house. I locked the door, and barricaded the building, so that, if any dread change converted the animal into a green-eyed monster, it would find itself imprisoned.

Then I went through the old house, carrying a lighted lantern.

It was silent, deserted. All the monsters were evidently below. The door of the cellar was closed, all crevices chinked against light.

I lit my dozen powerful lanterns and arranged them in a circle about it.

Then I threw back the door.

A weird and fearful howl came from the dark passage below it! I heard the rush of feet, as the howling thing retreated down the tunnel. From below came angry growls, shrill feral whines.

A physical wave of nauseating horror broke chillingly over me, at the thought of invading that red-lit temple-burrow, where I had endured such horror. I shrank back, trembling. But at the thought of my own father and lovely, blue-eyed Stella, down in that temple of terror, possessed by foul monsters, I recovered my courage.

I stepped back toward the yawning black mouth of the den that these monsters had built.

The lanterns I had first intended to leave in a ring about the mouth of the burrow, except one to carry with me. Now it occurred to me that they would prevent the escape of the monsters more effectively if scattered along the passage. I gathered up six of them, three in each hand, and started down the steps.

Their powerful white rays illuminated the old cellar with welcome brilliance. I left one of them there, in the center of the cellar's

floor. And three more of them I set along the slanting passage that led down into the deeper excavation.

I intended to set the two that remained on the floor of the temple, and perhaps return to the surface for others. I hoped that the light would drive the alien life from all of the pack, as it had from Stella. When they were unconscious, I could carry out Stella and my father, and any of the others that seemed whole enough for normal life. The great machine, and the temple itself, I intended to destroy with the dynamite.

I STEPPED FROM the end of the passage, into the vast, black, many-pillared hall. The intense white radiance of the faintly humming lanterns dispelled the terrible, blood-red gloom. I heard an appalling chorus of agonized animal cries; weird, feral whines and howls of pain. In the farther end of the long hall, beyond the massive ebon pillars, I saw slinking, green-orbed forms, crowding into the shadows.

I set the two lanterns down on the black floor and drew one of the powerful flashlights from my pocket. Its intense, penetrating beam probed the shadows beyond the huge columns of jet. The cowering, howling shapes of men and wolves shrieked when it touched them, and fell to the black floor.

Confidently I stepped forward, to search out new corners with the brilliant finger of light.

Fatal confidence! I had underestimated the cunning and the science of my enemies. When I first saw the black globe, my foot was already poised above it. A perfect sphere of utter blackness, a foot-thick globe that looked as if it had been turned from midnight crystal.

I could not avoid touching it. And it seemed to explode at my touch. There was a dull, ominous *plop*, and billowing darkness rushed from it. A black gas swirled up about me and shrouded me in smothering gloom.

Wildly I turned, dashed back toward the passage that led up to open air and daylight. I was utterly blinded. The blazing lanterns were completely invisible. I heard one of them dashed over by my blundering feet.

Then I stumbled against the cold temple wall. In feverish haste I felt along it. In either direction, as far as I could reach, the wall was smooth. Where was the passage? A dozen feet I blundered along, feeling the wall. No, the passage must be in the other direction.

I turned. The triumphant, unearthly baying of the pack reached my ears; the padding of feet down the length of the temple. I rushed along the wall, stumbled and fell over a hot lantern.

And they were upon me . . .

THE STRANGE, sourceless, bloodhued radiance of the temple was about me once more. The thick, black pillars thrust up beside me, to support the ebon roof. I was bound, helpless, to one of those cold, massive columns, as I had once been before, with the same bloody rope.

Before me was the strange mechanism that opened the way to that other plane—the Black Dimension—by changing the vibration frequencies of the matter of one world, to those of the other, interlocking universe. The red light gleamed like blood on the copper ring, and the huge mirror behind it. I saw with relief that the electron tubes were dead, the gasoline engine silent, the blackness gone from the ring.

And before the ring had been erected a fearful altar, upon which reposed the torn, mangled, and bleeding bodies of men and women, of gaunt gray wolves, and little coyotes, and other animals. The pack had found good hunting, on the two nights that I had been gone!

The corpse-white, green-orbed, monstrous things, the frightfully changed bodies of Stella and my father and the others, were about me.

"Your coming back is good," the whining, feral tones of the thing

in my father's body rang dreadfully in my ears. "The manufacturer of electricity will not run. You return to make it turn again. The way must be opened again, for new life to come to these that wait." He pointed a deathly white arm to the pile of weltering bodies on the black floor.

"Then the new life to you also we will bring. Too many times you run away. You become one with us. And we seek a man who will act as we say. But first must the way be opened again.

"From our world will the life come. To take the bodies of men as machines. To make gas of darkness like that you found within this hall, to hide all the light of your world, and make it fit for us."

My mind reeled with horror at thought of the inconceivable, unthinkable menace risen like a dread specter to face humanity. At the thought that soon I, too, would be a mere machine. My body, cold and white as a corpse, doing unnamable deeds at the command of the thing of darkness whose green eyes would blaze in my sockets!

"Quickly tell the method to turn the maker of electricity," came the maleficent snarl, menacing, gloating, "or we gnaw the flesh from your bones, and seek another who will do our will!"

12

I AGREED TO attempt to start the little gasoline engine, hoping for some opportunity to turn the tables again. I was certain that I could do nothing so long as I was bound to the pillar. And the threat to find another normal man to take my place as teacher of these monsters from that alien world brought realization that I must strike soon.

Presently they were convinced that they required more than verbal aid in starting the little motor. One of the mechanics unbound me, and led me over to the machine, keeping a painful grip upon my arm with ice-cold fingers.

Unobtrusively, I dropped a hand to feel my pockets. They were empty!

"Make not light!" my father snarled warningly, having seen the movement.

They had awakened to the necessity of searching my person. Glancing about the red-lit temple, I saw the articles they had taken from me, in a little pile against the base of a huge black pillar. The automatic, spare clips of ammunition, flashlights, batteries, boxes of matches, strips of magnesium ribbon. The two gasoline lanterns that I had brought into the great hall were there too, having evidently been extinguished by the black gas which had blinded me.

Two gray wolves stood alertly beside the articles, which must have been taken from me before I recovered consciousness after the onrush of the pack. Their strange green eyes stared at me balefully, through the crimson gloom.

After fussing with the engine for a few moments, while my father kept his cold, cruelly firm grip upon my shoulder, and scores of hideous green orbs in the bodies of wolves and men watched my every move, I discovered that it had stopped for lack of fuel. They had let it run on after I wrecked the machine, until the gasoline was exhausted.

I explained to my father that it would not run without more gasoline.

"Make it turn to cause electricity," he said, repeating his menacing, wolfish snarl, "or we gnaw the flesh from your bones, and find another man.

AT FIRST I insisted that I could not get gasoline without visiting some inhabited place. Under the threat of torture however—when they dragged me back toward the bloody rope—I confessed that the fuel in the gasoline lanterns might be used.

They were suspicious. They searched me again, to be certain that I had upon my person no means of making a light. And the lanterns were examined very care-

fully for any means of lighting without matches.

Finally they brought me the lanterns. With my father grasping my arm, I poured the gasoline from them into the engine's fuel tank. Under any circumstances it would have been difficult to avoid spilling the liquid. I took pains to spill as much as seemed possible without rousing suspicion—contriving to pour a little pool of it under the exhaust, where a spark might ignite the fumes.

Then they made me start the engine. Coils hummed once more; the electron tubes lit. Blackness seemed to pour from the strange central tube, to be reflected into the great copper ring by the wide, polished mirror.

Again, I looked through the vast ring into the Black Dimension!

Before me lay a sky of gloom, of darkness unutterable and unbroken, stagnant, lurid waters, dimly aglow with the luminosity of foul decay; worn black hills, covered with obscene, writhing, reptilian vegetation that glowed vaguely and lividly green. And on one of those hills was the city.

A sprawled smear of red evil, it was, a splash of crimson darkness, of red corruption. It spread over the hill like a many-tentacled monster of dark red mist. Ugly masses rose from it, wart-like knobs and projections—ghastly

travesties of minarets and towers.

It was motionless. And within its reeking, fetid scarlet darkness, lurked things of creeping gloom—nameless hordes of things like that unthinkable monstrosity that I had seen flow into Stella's body. Green-eyed, living horrors of flowing blackness.

The monsters about me howled through the ring, into that black world—calling!

And soon, through the copper ring, came flowing a river of shapeless, inconceivable horror! Formless monsters of an alien universe. Foul beings of the darkness.—spawn of the Black Dimension!

Fearful green eyes were swimming in clotted, creeping masses of evil darkness. They swarmed over the pile of dead things on the floor. And the dead rose to forbidden, nameless life!

Mutilated corpses, and the torn bodies of wolves sprang up, whining, snarling. And the eyes of each were the malevolent, glaring green eyes of the things that had flowed into them.

I was still beside the rhythmically throbbing little engine. As I shrank back in numbed horror from the fearful spectacle of the dead rising to unhallowed life, my eyes fell despairingly upon the little pool of gasoline I had spilled upon the black floor. It was not yet ignited.

I had some fleeting idea of trying to saturate my hand with gasoline and hold it in front of the exhaust, to make of it a living torch. But it was too late for that, and the ruthless, ice-cold fingers still clutched my arm painfully.

Then my father whined wolfishly.

A creepy, formless, obscene mass of blackness, with twin green orbs in it, glowing with mad, alien fires, left the river of them that poured through the ring and crept across to me.

"Now you become one like us!" came the whining voice.

The thing was coming to flow into my body, to make me its slave, its machine!

I screamed, struggled in the cruel hands that held me. In an insanity of terror, I cursed and pleaded—promised to give the monsters the world. And the creeping blackness came on. I collapsed, drenched with icy sweat, quivering, nauseated with horror.

THEN, AS I had prayed it would do, the little engine coughed. A stream of pale red sparks shot from the exhaust. There was a sudden, dull explosive sound of igniting vapor. A yellow flash lit the black-pillared temple.

A flickering column of blue and yellow flame rose from the pool of gasoline beside the engine.

The things of blackness were

consumed by the light—they vanished!

The temple became a bedlam of shrill, agonized howls, of confused, rushing, panic-stricken bodies. The fierce grasp upon my arm was relaxed. My father fell upon the floor, writhing across the room toward the shelter of a black pillar, hiding his green eyes with an arm flung across them.

I saw that the gray wolves had deserted their post beside the articles of mine they had been guarding, at the foot of the massive black column. I left the flickering pillar of fire and dashed across to them.

In a moment my shaking hands had clutched upon one of the powerful electric flashlights. In desperate haste I found the switch and flicked it on. With the intense, dazzling beam, I swept the vast columned hall. The hellish chorus of animal cries of pain rose to a higher pitch. I saw gray wolves and ghastly white men cowering in the shadows of the massive pillars.

I snatched up the other searchlight and turned it on. Then, hastily gathering up pistol, ammunition, matches, and strips of magnesium ribbon, I retreated to a position beside the flaring gasoline.

This time I moved very cautiously, flashing the light before me to avoid stumbling into another bomb of darkness, like that which

had been my undoing before. But I think my precaution was useless; I am sure, from what I afterward saw, that only one had been prepared.

AS I GOT back to the engine, I noticed that it was still running, that the way to the Black Dimension, through the copper ring, was still open. I cut off the fuel at the carburetor. The little engine coughed, panted, slowed down. The wall of darkness faded from the copper ring, breaking our connection with that hideous world of another interpenetrating universe.

Then I hastily laid the flashlights on the floor, laying them so they cast their broad, bright beams in opposite directions. I fumbled for matches, struck one to the end of a strip of magnesium ribbon, to which I had applied sulphur to make it easier to light.

It burst into sudden blinding, dazzling, white radiance, bright as a miniature sun. I flung it across the great black hall. It outlined a white parabola. Its intense light cut the shadows from behind the ebon pillars.

The cowering, hiding things howled in new agony. They lay on the black floor, trembling, writhing, fearfully contorted. Low, agonized whinings came from them.

Again and again I ignited the thin ribbons of metal and flung

them flaming toward the corners of the room, to banish all shadow with their brilliant white fire.

The howling grew weaker, the whines died away. The wolves and the corpse-white men moved no more. Their fierce, twisting struggles of agony were stilled.

When the last strip of magnesium was gone, I drew the automatic, put a bullet through the little engine's gasoline tank, and lit a match to the thin stream of clear liquid that trickled out. As a new flaring pillar of light rushed upward, I hurried toward the passage that led to the surface, watching for another of those black spheres that erupted darkness.

I found the gasoline lanterns I had left in the tunnel still burning; the monsters had evidently found no way of putting them out.

On the surface I ran. I gathered up the six lanterns I had left there—still burning brilliantly in the gathering dusk—and plunged with them back down the passage, into the huge, pillared temple.

The monsters were still inert, unconscious.

I arranged the powerful lanterns about the floor, so placed that every part of the strange temple was brilliantly illuminated. In the penetrating radiance, the monsters lay motionless.

Returning to the surface, I brought one of my full cans of gasoline, and two more of the light-

ed lanterns. I filled, pumped up, and lit the two lanterns from which I had drawn the gasoline.

Then I went about the black-walled temple, always keeping two lanterns close beside me, and dragged the lax, ice-cold bodies from their crouching postures, turning them so the faces would be toward the light. I found Stella, her lovely body still unharmed, except for its deathly pallor and its strange cold. And then I came upon my father. There was also the mangled thing that had been Judson, and the headless body that had been Blake Jetton, Stella's father. I gazed at many more lacerated human bodies and at the chill carcasses of wolves, of coyotes, of the gray horse, of a few other animals.

In half an hour, perhaps, the change was complete.

The unearthly chill of that alien life was gone from the bodies. Most of them quickly stiffened — with belated *rigor mortis*. Even my father was quite evidently dead. His body remained still and cold — though the strange chill had departed.

But Stella's exquisite form grew warm again; the soft flush of life came to it. She breathed and her heart beat slowly.

I carried her up to the old cellar, and laid her on its floor, with two lanterns blazing near her, to prevent any return of that forbidden life, while I finished the ghastly work left for me below.

I NEED NOT go into details . . .

But when I had used half my supply of dynamite, no recognizable fragments were left, either of the accursed machine, or of the bodies that had been animated with such monstrous life. I planted the other dozen sticks of dynamite beside the great black pillars, and in the walls of the tunnel . . .

The subterranean hall that I have called a temple will never be entered again.

When that work was done, I carried Stella up to her room, and put her very gently to bed. Through the night I watched her anxiously, keeping a bright light in the room. But there was no sign of what I feared. She slept deeply, but normally, apparently free from any taint of the monstrous life that had possessed her.

Dawn came after a weary night, and there was a rosy gleam upon the snow.

The sleeping girl stirred. Fathomless blue eyes opened, stared into mine. Startled eyes, eager, questioning. Not clouded with dream as when she had awakened before.

"Clovis!" Stella cried, in her natural, softly golden voice. "Clovis, what are you doing here? Where's Father? Dr. McLaurin?"

"You are all right?" I demanded eagerly. "You are well?"

"Well?" she said, raising her

exquisite head in surprise. "Of course I'm well. What could be the matter with me? Dr. McLaurin is going to try his great experiment today. Did you come to help?"

Then I knew — and a great gladness came with the knowledge — that all memory of the horror had been swept from her mind. She recalled nothing that had happened since the eve of the experiment that had brought such a train of terrors.

She looked suddenly past me — at the picture of myself upon the wall. There was a curious expression on her face; she flushed a little, looking very beautiful with heightened color.

"I didn't give you that picture," I accused her. I wished to avoid answering any questions, for the time being about her father or mine, or any experiments.

"I got it from your father," she confessed.

I have written this narrative in the home of Dr. Friedrichs, the noted New York psychiatrist, who is a close friend of mine. I came to him as soon as Stella and I reached New York, and he has since had me stay at his home, under his constant observation.

He assures me that, within a few weeks, I shall be completely recovered. But sometimes I doubt that I will ever be entirely sane. The horrors of that invasion from

another universe are graven too deeply upon my mind. I cannot bear to be alone in darkness, or even in moonlight. And I tremble when I hear the howling of a dog, and hastily seek bright lights and the company of human beings.

I have told Dr. Friedrichs my story, and he believes. It is because of his urging that I have written it down. It is an historical truism, my friend says, that all legend, myth, and folklore has a basis in fact. And no legends are wider spread than those of lycanthropy. It is remarkable that not only wolves are subjects of these legends, but the most ferocious wild animals of each country. In Scandinavia, for instance, the legends concern bears; on the continent of Europe, wolves; in South America, jaguars; in Asia and Africa, leopards and tigers. It is also remarkable that belief in possession by evil spirits, and belief in vampires, is associated with the widespread belief in werewolves.

Dr. Friedrichs thinks that through some cosmic accident, these monsters of the Black Dimension have been let into our world before; and that those curiously widespread legends and beliefs are folk-memories of horrors visited upon earth when those unthinkable monstrosities stole the bodies of men and of savage beasts, and hunted through the darkness.

Much might be said in support

of the theory, but I shall let my experience speak for itself.

Stella comes often to see me, and she is more exquisitely lovely than I had ever realized. My friend assures me that her mind is quite normal. Her lapse of memory is quite natural, he says, since her

mind was sleeping while the alien entity ruled her body. And he says there is no possibility that she will be possessed again.

We are planning to be married within a few weeks, as soon as Dr. Friedrichs says that I am sufficiently healed.

