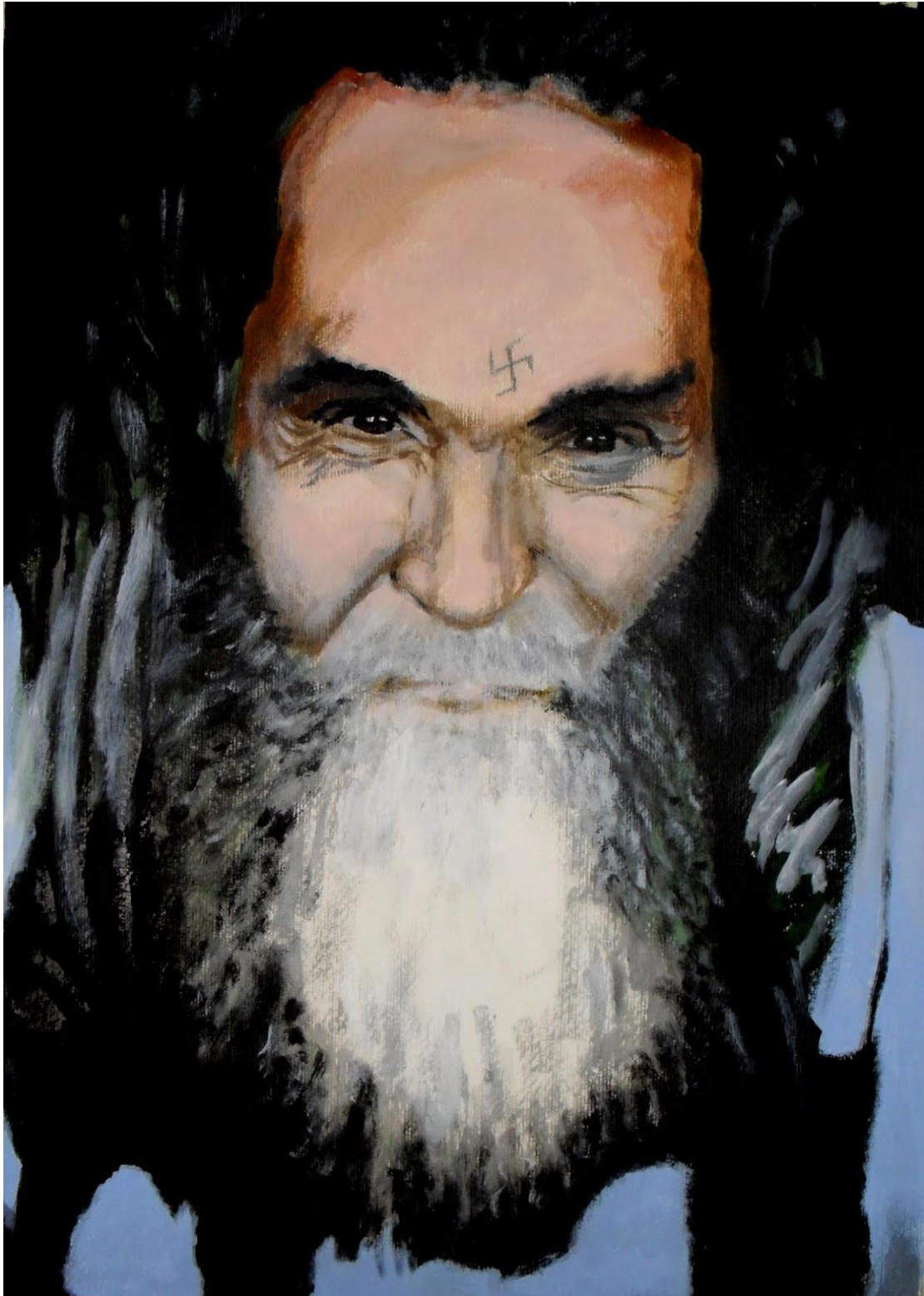


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Welcome to Schlock! the new webzine for science fiction, fantasy and horror.

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Schlock! is an exciting new weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels and novellas within the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of schlock fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

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This Edition

Featured in this edition is a collection of stories, new and old.

This week's cover illustration is *Charles Manson* by Paul Mellino.

State of Emergency - Part Three by David Christopher - *After the demo...* SCIENCE FICTION

Sawney Bean by John Nicholson - *The true-life inspiration for The Hills Have Eyes...* TRUE CRIME

Super Duper - by James Rhodes – continues next week... SCIENCE FICTION

Babbage Must Die - Part Fifteen by Gavin Chappell - *Ada faces the noose...* SCIENCE FICTION

The Dark Place: Part Twelve by James Talbot - *Shocking revelations from Estonia...* DARK FANTASY

Schlock! Classic Serial: Varney the Vampire: Part Twenty ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest. *Before Twilight... before Nosferatu ... before Dracula... there was Varney...* GOTHIC HORROR

Schlock! Classic Serial: Brigands of the Moon (Part 15) by Ray Cummings - *...it was she whose wits brought us back from the shining fairyland of our love, into the sinister reality of the Planetara....* SPACE OPERA

Spiral Castle - Part Four by Gavin Chappell - *Eloise and her friends meet an old enemy...* Eighth in the Going Underground series. URBAN FANTASY

**Schlock! Classic Serial: Carmilla - Part Thirteen by J. Sheridan LeFanu -
The Woodman... GOTHIC HORROR**

STATE OF EMERGENCY by David Christopher

Chapter Three: After the Demo

In the end Will scaled a wall to get away. Massed ranks of riot police cordoned off every street, but the noise of rioting receded as Will hurried towards Westminster.

He halted in a small square, listened to shoppers and idlers talking quietly. Some of them seemed to have heard about the riots on the radio, or seen it on TV, but what they were saying was distorted, bearing no resemblance to what Will had seen. Apparently, gangs of masked anarchists were on the rampage, and several multinational chain stores had been ransacked. Will had seen nothing like that.

He glimpsed two familiar figures ahead of him, walking away through the crowd, casting suspicious, alert glances about them. Will realised how many CCTV cameras stood around the streets in this part of London. They might be tracking him at this very second. But he was glad to see Daisy – and Rex – had escaped. He hurried to catch up.

'You got away, then,' he said as he levelled with them. Daisy turned with wide eyes; after a moment of confusion recognised him. Rex saw him too. With a quick glance around, he hustled them into an alleyway. As Will was about to complain, he saw police flooding the square behind them.

'They're looking for the ones who got away,' Rex muttered, as the black-clad figures marched past.

'Have you seen the Professor?' Daisy asked urgently. Will felt himself go pale.

'I saw him,' he said grimly. 'They got him.'

Rex swung round. 'What?' he said excitedly. 'They got Quigley?'

Will nodded, bitter. 'Piled into him with truncheons and knocked him down. Then some other guy...' He paused, as recognition hit him. That lean figure... 'Tarrant!' he said. 'It was Tarrant.'

'Tarrant?' Daisy asked. 'The security man? What did he do?' She shook him roughly. 'What happened, Will?'

He stared into her frightened eyes. 'They slung him into a riot van and took him away.'

'He'll be in the cells at Paddington Green by now,' said Rex.

'I can't believe they got him,' Daisy said.

'You saw him,' Rex said dismissively. 'Marching at the head like the lord of creation. No wonder they got him. I told you he had no idea of the realities.'

'Shut up, Rex,' Daisy snapped. She turned to Will urgently. 'Was he hurt?'

'They beat him to the ground,' he replied. 'The bastards. It's true, isn't it? All the things he said? But what can we do?'

'For the moment, not a lot,' Rex said, before Daisy could reply. 'The organisation knows lawyers who can deal with the situation.' He scowled. 'If I

had my way, we'd bust our way in there, shoot the place up and take Quigley to safety.'

Daisy sighed. 'Grow up, Rex. There's a time and place for direct action...'

'I'd come with you,' Will told Rex, ignoring Daisy for the moment, wanting to assert himself. 'I can use a gun.'

Rex looked at him with what looked like new respect. 'Can you...?' he murmured.

'Look, we were all at the riot,' Daisy said, impatient at this macho bragging. 'The chances are, our faces will have been seen. Now the police have their hands full mopping up. But we need to keep our heads down for the moment.'

'We can't go to the hotel,' Rex said. 'That'll be the first place they'll look, now they've got Quigley.'

Will looked from one to the other. 'You can stay in my flat,' he offered. 'There's only me there, now.'

Daisy patted him on the shoulder. 'Lead us there,' she said.

Will's flat was on the far side of the city. The three fugitives had to take a circuitous route through back alleys and side streets to avoid the police. After a fraught, dangerous journey they reached the dismal streets that led to the decaying concrete pile that had been Will's home these last three years. It was very different from the gated community in the Leeds suburb where he had grown up.

He led them up the concrete steps – the lift was out of order again – and into his empty flat. Most of the furniture had gone. It was her, he knew. She'd taken it all while he was out. At least she'd left the telly. He apologised to his friends for the situation, and glanced into the kitchenette. The kettle was still there, some mugs, and a box of teabags. Otherwise, the room was as empty as his life.

Rex and Daisy were watching the news when he returned to the main room with a tray full of mugs. Scenes of rioting protestors – it all looked suspiciously like stock footage to Will – were followed by earnest discussions of the morning's events. Suddenly a picture of Professor Quigley flashed up on the screen.

'Have you got any sugar?' Daisy looked up from the screen and gave the mugs a cursory glance.

'I'll have a look,' Will replied, gazing absently at the screen. He returned shortly after with the remains of a packet of sugar and a blackened spoon. As he did so, he came to a halt in the doorway. Unheeded, the sugar hissed out of the packet in his hand to pile on the carpet. He watched the screen open-mouthed.

'... home secretary is demanding an immediate health and safety investigation into the tragic events that occurred at the police station,' the announcer was saying. 'Although all is speculation at the moment, it has been noted that Professor Quigley suffered from a heart condition.'

It cut to a doctor, saying earnestly; *'The day's exertions were clearly too much for the Professor. It was inappropriate of him to become involved in the demonstration, and I understand he received prior warnings that such involvement would be injurious to his health.'* He shook his head. 'Sadly, it

seems he chose to ignore them. Surely the investigation will provide us with the facts of the case.'

'In other news today...'

Will looked from Rex to Daisy.

Daisy's face was white as bone. Rex glowered at the TV. 'The bastards killed him...'

Daisy shook her head wordlessly.

'But they're holding an investigation,' Will said feebly. Rex fixed him with his eye.

'An investigation?' he asked. 'A cover-up! I told Quigley that demonstrations would achieve nothing. We have to smash the system, not work within it.' It all felt unreal to Will

'Shut up, Rex,' Daisy said bitterly. 'The Professor told you that wouldn't work. It's not possible. How can we smash the system on our own? And don't give me all that rubbish about "the organisation." You know it's just us and a few others.'

Rex rose, and paced up and down. 'Good point,' he said at last. 'But direct action is what we need. An eye for an eye. They killed Professor Quigley. We should kill one of them.'

Will shook his head. 'Come off it,' he said. 'Look, the Professor had a weak heart. He shouldn't have been at the demo. He was warned.' For a moment, Will remembered Thames House, and Tarrant's barely veiled threats. The security man's words seemed to take on a new significance. 'But he got mixed up in it all the same. It was a tragic accident.' He appealed to Daisy. 'You believe me, don't you?'

Surely, he wasn't the only sane one here?

Daisy turned her haunted eyes on him. 'I don't know about that...' she said slowly. 'The government hated him, so did the security forces. They saw him as a threat...'

'But they wouldn't kill him!' Will said. 'This is a democracy, not a dictatorship.'

'Just means they have to go to greater lengths to convince people they're honest,' Rex said cynically.

Will shook his head. He had seen some shocking things in the last two days, but this was unbelievable. He preferred to believe what the TV told him. The idea that these two wild-eyed postgraduates had a better idea of what was going on was laughable.

Still, Tarrant had warned the Professor. Warned him about a "little accident." Will shook his head. It was too fantastic.

But the Professor had seemed perfectly healthy.

'What are we going to do now?' Daisy asked. 'Rex, we don't have the resources to take revenge. They know we were linked with the Professor. We've been seen on CCTV. Will too. Tarrant thinks Will is directly connected. We need to get away.'

'Back to Oxford?' Rex shook his head. 'They'll follow us there.'

'We can find somewhere to lie low,' Daisy replied confidently. She looked at Will. 'You'd better leave as well. Where can you find a safe house?'

Will shook his head. 'I'll go back to my parents' place,' he said. 'Up north. Leeds.'

Daisy took his hand solemnly. 'You've been dragged into this,' she said, looking directly into his eyes, to his consternation. 'You're an innocent. But now there's no going back. The Professor is dead. We're all in danger until this blows over...'

Will shook his head. 'I'm going to take a few weeks off from work,' he said. 'I don't think I'll be up to anything after this, and I'm owed holiday time. I haven't been back home for a year. I'll see how my folks are. But I'm going to come back. If the Professor was murdered, people will want to know why. I was the only one who was with him when Tarrant threatened him. And besides, there's his book. I know where he left the manuscript...'

Rex broke in impatiently. 'You can do what you like! Daisy and I are going to a place we know, where we'll be safe. If you need to contact us, I'll give you a number to use in emergencies. But you'll have to memorise it. And tell no one.'

They left shortly after. Will watched them head for the steps a little sadly, but with something of a sense of relief. He wouldn't miss Rex, but he hoped he would meet Daisy again.

As they vanished from sight, they were arguing again. Will went to pack his few possessions, and to find out the time of the next train for Leeds.

SAWNEY BEAN by John Nicholson

The following account, though as well attested as any historical fact can be, is almost incredible, for the monstrous and unparalleled barbarities that it relates; there being nothing that we ever heard of, with the same degree of certainty, that may be compared with it, or that shews how far a brutal temper, untamed by education, and knowledge of the world, may carry a man in such glaring and horrible colours.

Sawney Bean was born in the county of East Lothian, about eight or nine miles eastward of the city of Edinburgh, in the reign of James I of Scotland. His father was a hedger and ditcher and brought up his son to the same laborious employment.

He got his daily bread in his youth by these means, but being prone to idleness, and not caring to be confined to any honest employment, he left his father and mother, and ran away into the desert part of the country, taking with him a woman as viciously inclined as himself.

These two took up their habitation in a cave, by the seaside on the shore of the county of Galloway; where they lived upwards of twenty-five years, without going into any city, town or village.

In this time they had a great number of children and grandchildren, whom they brought up after their own manner, without any notions of humanity or civil society. They never kept any company, but among themselves, and supported themselves wholly by robbing: being, moreover so very cruel, that they never robbed any one, whom they did not murder.

By this bloody method, and their being so retired from the world, they continued for a long time undiscovered; there being no person able to guess how the people were lost that went by the place where they #lived. As soon as they had robbed any man, woman or child, they used to carry off the carcass to the den, cutting it into quarters, they would pickle the mangled limbs, and afterwards eat it; this being their only sustenance: and not withstanding they were at last so numerous, they commonly had superfluity of this their abominable food, so that in the nigh-time they frequently threw legs and arms of the unhappy wretches they had murdered into the sea, at a great distance from their bloody habitation; the limbs were often cast up by the tide in several parts of the country, to the astonishment and terror of all beholders, and others who heard of it.

Persons who have gone about their lawful occasions fell so often into their hands, that it caused a general outcry in the country round about; no person knowing what was become of their friends or relations, if they were once seen by these merciless cannibals.

All the people in the adjacent parts were at last alarmed at such uncommon loss of their neighbours and acquaintance, for there was no travelling in safety near the den of these wretches: this occasioned spies to be frequently sent into those parts, many of whom never returned again, and those who did, after the strictest search and inquiry, could not find how these melancholy matters happened.

Several honest travellers were taken up on suspicion and wrongfully hanged upon bare circumstances: several innocent inn keepers were executed, for no other reason than that persons, who had been thus lost, were known to have lain in their houses, which occasioned a suspicion of their being murdered by them, and their bodies privately buried in obscure places to prevent a discovery. Thus an ill-placed justice was executed with the greatest severity imaginable, in order to prevent these frequent, atrocious deeds; so many innkeepers, who lived on the western road of Scotland, left of their business, for fear of being made examples of, and followed other employments.

This, on the other hand, occasioned many inconveniences to travellers, who were now in great distress for accommodation when they were disposed to refresh themselves and horses, or take up lodging for the night. In a word, the whole country was depopulated.

Still the king's subjects were as much missed as before, so that it became the admiration of the whole kingdom how such villainies could be carried on, and the perpetrators not discovered. A great many had been executed, not one of them all made any confession at the gallows, but maintained to the last, that they were perfectly innocent of the crime for which they suffered.

When the magistrates found all was in vain, they left off these rigorous proceedings, and trusted wholly to Providence, for the bringing to light the authors of these unparalleled barbarities when it should seem proper to the divine wisdom.

Sawney's family was at last grown very large, and every one of it as soon as able, assisted him perpetrating their wicked deeds, which they still followed with impunity. Sometimes they would attack four, five or six, footmen together, but never more than two, if they were on horseback; they were, moreover, so careful, that not one whom they set upon should escape, that an ambuscade was set on every side to secure them, let them fly which way they would, provided it should ever so happen that one or more got away from the first assailants. How was it possible that they should be detected, when not one that saw them ever saw anybody else afterwards.

The place which they inhabited was quite solitary and lonesome, and, when the tide came up, the water went near two hundred yards into their subterraneous habitation, which reached almost a mile underground; so that when people, who have been sent armed to search all the places about have passed by the mouth of the cave, they have never taken any notice of it, never supposing any human being would reside in such a place of perpetual horror and darkness.

The number of people these savages destroyed was never exactly known; but it was generally computed that in the twenty-five years they continued their butcheries, they had washed their hands in the blood of at least a thousand men, women and children.

The manner they were at last discovered was as follows:

A man and his wife behind him on the same horse, coming one evening home from a fair, and falling into the ambuscade of these merciless wretches, they fell upon them in a furious manner. The man to save himself as well as he could, fought very bravely against them with sword and pistol, riding some of them down by main force of his horse.

In the conflict the poor woman fell from behind him, and was instantly butchered before her husband's face, for the female cannibals cut her throat, and fell to sucking her blood with as great a gust, as if it had been wine: this done, they ripped up her belly, and pulled out all her entrails. Such a dreadful spectacle made the man make the more obstinate resistance, as he expected the same fate, if he fell into their hands.

It pleased Providence while he was engaged that twenty or thirty who had been at the same fair, came together in a body; upon which Sawney Bean and his blood thirsty clan withdrew and, made the best of their way through a thick wood to their den.

The man who was the first who had ever fell in their way, and came off alive, told the whole company what had happened, and shewed them the horrid spectacle of his wife, whom the murderers had dragged to some distance, but had not had time to carry her entirely off. They were all struck with stupefaction and amazement at what he related; they took him with them to

Glasgow, and told the affair to the magistrates of that city, who immediately sent to the king concerning it.

In about three or four days after, his majesty in person, with a body of about four hundred men, set out for the place where this dismal tragedy was acted, in order to search all the rocks and thickets, that, if possible, they might apprehend this hellish crew, which had been so long pernicious to all the western parts of the kingdom.

The man who was attacked was the guide, and care was taken to have a large number of blood-hounds with them, that no human means might be wanting towards their putting an entire end to these cruelties.

No sign of any habitation was to be found for a long time; and even when they came to the wretches' cave, they took no notice of it, but were going to pursue their search along the sea shore, the tide being then out; but some of the blood-hounds luckily entered the Cimmerian den, and instantly set up a most hideous barking, howling and yelping; so that the king, with his attendants, came back, and looked into it: they could not tell how to conceive that anything human could be concealed in a place where they saw nothing but darkness; nevertheless, as the blood-hounds increased their noise they went further in, and refused to come back again; they then began to imagine something or other must inhabit there. Torches were immediately sent for, and a great many men ventured in, through the most intricate turnings and windings, till at last they arrived at that private recess from all the world, which was the habitation of these monsters.

Now the whole body, or as many of them as could go in, and were all so shocked at what they beheld, that they were almost ready to sink into the earth. Legs, arms, thighs, hands and feet of men, women and children, were hung up in rows, like dried beef; a great many limbs laid in pickle, and a great mass of money both gold and silver, with watches, rings, swords, pistols and a large quantity of cloths, both linen and woollen, and an infinite number of other things which they had taken from those they had murdered, were thrown together in heaps or hung up against the sides of the den.

Sawney's family, at this time, besides himself, consisted of his wife, eight sons, six daughters, eighteen grand-sons, and fourteen grand-daughters, who were all begotten in incest.

These were all seized and pinioned by his majesty's order in the first place; then they took what human flesh they could find, and buried it in the sands; afterwards loading themselves with the spoils which they found, they returned to Edinburgh with their prisoners; all the country, as they passed along, flocked to see this cursed tribe. When they came to their journey's end the wretches were committed to the Tollbooth, from whence they were the next day conducted, under a strong guard to Leith, where they were executed without any process, it being thought needless to try creatures who were even professed enemies of mankind.

The men were dismembered, their hands and legs were severed from their bodies, by which amputation they bled to death in a few hours. The wife, daughters, and grand-children having been made spectators of this just punishment inflicted on the men, were afterwards burnt to death in three separate fires. They all in general died without the least sign of repentance, but continued cursing and vending the most dreadful imprecations to the very last gasp of life.

from *Historical and Traditional Tales Connected with the South of Scotland* by John Nicholson (1843)

BABBAGE MUST DIE by Gavin Chappell

Chapter Fifteen

The gaol felt like something from the Middle Ages.

Ada leant despairingly against the dank stone wall as the dungeon filled up with Luddites. Guards had carried Mr. Ludlam in beforehand and he lay beside Ada, unconscious. Her hopes for him would have been low under the best circumstances. In this crowded, insanitary, dank cell, she felt nothing but despondency.

Will knelt beside his brother-in-law, looking mournfully down at Ned's face. Weaver crouched nearby; the rest of the Luddites looked down from the middle of the cell.

'He needs care and attention,' Ada muttered.

Will looked up. 'That's what he's not going to get, in here,' he said.

'None of us will,' said Weaver gloomily, and the other Luddites in the cell nodded their assent. 'We'll hang. If lucky, we'll be sent to Australia to rot out our term.'

Ada shuddered. The true horror of this England of the early nineteenth century impinged on her. Starving rebels... never-ending war... public execution for the slightest offence... Or the more merciful alternative, to be sent to a penal colony on the other side of the world. Stalinist Russia was nothing on Regency England.

'There must be some way out of here,' she said.

Weaver shook his head. 'We've gambled and lost, miss,' he said. 'Now we've got to face our fate like men.'

Will looked up from Ned. 'Weaver's right,' he said gently. 'Or at least, face it as best we can.'

Ada wrapped her arms around her legs and stared worriedly at Ned. Was this the end for the Luddites? Did Ned Ludd die here? And what of her own fate? Had she journeyed back in time only to end her life swinging on the gallows pole?

'Can't we escape?' she moaned.

'How, miss?' Weaver asked. 'How do we get past that door?' He pointed at the heavy oaken door that covered the cell entrance, in which only a small barred window was visible in the gloom.

Ada shrugged. These were the swashbuckling rebels; she was only a minor academic. 'Can't we trick the guards?'

'How do we do that?' Will asked.

'We could pretend one of us is sick...' Ada halted. It would be no pretence. 'Alright, we have to get Mr. Ludlam to safety. He needs medical attention.'

Weaver shook his head. 'Looks like he'll be saved from the gallows,' he said darkly. 'Take comfort in that.'

Then Ada heard the key turning in the lock. She swung round to see the heavy oak door rumbling open.

Silhouetted in the lantern light from the passage was a bald, fat-bellied man in late middle age, clad in rough homespun garments. At his side were two musket-bearing soldiers.

The fat man, who Ada realised must be the gaoler, had a sheet of paper. 'John Weaver,' he said. 'You're wanted in the courthouse. Move, rebel scum!'

Weaver looked round at his companions. His face was pale, his lips grey. He was shaking.

Will rose from Ludlam's side, and clasped Weaver's hand.

'Good luck,' he said. Weaver stared at him in horror.

'Get moving!' the gaoler roared. 'Or I'll send the soldiers in!'

Weaver turned and walked stiffly across the crowded cell. Ada saw him reach the gaoler, then the door slammed shut and he was gone.

'What do you think will happen to him?' she asked Will tremulously. 'Will they transport him?' Maybe Weaver's descendants would become a rich Australian family.

Will shook his head doubtfully. He rose, and led Ada to the grating that looked out from the stone walls of the gaol, down on the courthouse yard. Ada saw to her horror that a gallows stood in the centre. She felt cold sweat on her skin.

'That's where he'll go,' he said darkly.

Ada looked at him in shock, but he did not return her glance.

She sat on her own, as far as that was possible in this overcrowded dungeon, and thought dark thoughts. What did she have to do with this century? Why had she been so foolish as to throw in her lot with the Luddites? They had been no help. Again and again, she had tried to direct them towards assassinating Babbage, but they were too narrow-minded to see anything more than their own agenda. She looked at Will, sitting by Ned and mopping the older man's brow. What had happened to his wife and children? Would he ever see them again?

It had all gone wrong. It had gone wrong from the moment the parish constable had locked Brian and her in the lockup. Gone wrong for her, and gone wrong for Will. If he hadn't met them, he would have been set free the next day, probably, and sent on his way with a flea in his ear. He could have got back home and done what he could to keep his family out of the gutter. But he had tried to help her, and she had dragged him into this. And to what purpose? The Luddites had been no help. And now there was no way she could get to Cambridge, and Babbage. She'd settle for getting out of here. An awful sick feeling of helplessness crept over her in waves. If only she could have gone a different way. If only she hadn't...

There was a commotion from the men gathered near the grating. From outside came the monotonous beat of drums. The men were staring out at something. She went to join them, worming her way to the front where she saw the courthouse yard.

It was filled with crowds. Soldiers were surrounding a figure that Ada recognised as that of Weaver. They marched him up onto the steps of the gallows. A man wearing the black mask of an executioner took Weaver, hooded him, and hung a noose over his head.

Ada gasped and turned away.

When she turned back, Weaver's unmoving body hung from the rope. She stared down at the corpse and found herself praying to a God she had never believed in.

'That'll be us next,' one of the men said solemnly.

Ada sat down by Will. 'They just hanged him,' she said, in a state of shock. 'They killed him.'

Will touched her arm compassionately. 'It will be quick,' he said.

Ada scowled. 'Quick? Choking at the end of a rope?'

'Get used to the idea,' said Will, speaking curtly this time. 'We've all got it to look forward to. Except maybe Ned.'

Ada looked down at the severely wounded man. He had trusted her, asked for her advice, taken her with him when he was calling on sympathetic gentlefolk... Gentlefolk... She realised she still had a purse full of Regency coinage on her.

'Maybe not,' she said hurriedly. 'I've got an idea. We need to talk to the gaoler.' Triumphantly she produced the purse.

'You can't hope to bribe him,' Will said. 'He's in plain sight. People will notice if he starts setting the prisoners free.' He broke off. 'You don't hope to free yourself alone?'

Ada shook her head impatiently. 'I hope to see us all in the clear,' she said. 'But at the very least, I want to make sure that Mr. Ludlam is taken somewhere he can be looked after.'

'You won't be able to bribe the gaoler to do that,' Will began.

'No,' she said. 'What we need is someone with influence.'

Will shrugged. 'Granted,' he said. 'But who?'

Ada smiled. 'What would you say to... a Peer of the Realm?'

Will gaped at her. Ada rose and went to the cell door. Banging on it, she shouted imperiously, 'Gaoler! Gaoler, come here this minute!'

After a lengthy pause, during which Ada continued to shout while her fellow inmates looked on in bewilderment, the blubbery face of the gaoler appeared at the cell window.

He was scowling. 'Quiet in there!' he roared. 'Quiet, or I'll have you in irons!'

'There you are, my good man,' Ada said. 'Bring me writing materials at once.'

The gaoler looked at her incredulously. 'Writing materials? Paper and pen?'

'That's right,' said Ada confidently. 'Come on, man, chop-chop!'

His eyes narrowed. 'What's it worth?'

Ada sighed. She felt inside her purse and produce a gold sovereign. The gaoler's eyes brightened. 'Take this, gaoler,' she said. 'And bring me what I ask for. There will be more if you arrange for my letter to be taken to Lord Byron at Newstead Abbey.'

The gaoler took the sovereign and went away.

'Lord Byron?' Will asked. 'Is that the nobleman you visited with Ned?'

Ada rejoined him and his brother-in-law.

'Yes,' she said, looking down at Ned's unconscious figure. 'He has influence. He'll get us out of here.'

They waited a long time. Finally, Will stirred.

'The gaoler's cheated you,' he said, and the other Luddites nodded their agreement. 'He won't be coming back.'

Ada shook her head. 'He's greedy,' she said. 'He'll want more money. So he'll come back.' But she was wondering if she hadn't made a mistake. They had to get Ned out, at the very least, before he fell prey to gaol fever. The rest of them, too, if it could be arranged. Surely a member of the House of Lords could help. But would the gaoler?

To her relief, he returned half an hour later, and thrust paper, a tatty quill pen and a pot of ink through the barred window.

'You'll be wanting your message taken as well?' he asked, as Ada took them. 'That'll be two sovs.'

'You'll get it when I know it's been sent,' Ada said.

'I'll get it when you give me the message,' the gaoler replied. 'Else it won't get sent.'

Ada realised that the gaoler had the whip hand. Well, at least he was willing to deal with her. 'Alright. Two sovereigns to take it, and four more when I get an answer.'

The gaoler licked his lips. Ada knew that sovereigns were coins that few people saw in this day and age. The man would be able to retire quite comfortably if things went on like this.

She spent that night trying to sleep on the cold hard flagstones of the cell. Would Byron save them? Surely he would help her! Ned was stirring and muttering in his sleep. Maybe the gaol fever had already got him. That wound in his skull might well be fatal anyway. He needed proper care and attention, the best this century could offer...

Slowly, she drifted off to sleep.

She was woken by Will shaking her. She blinked in the morning sunlight filtering in through the barred grating. Will's face was stark.

'What is it?' she asked, sitting up quickly, instantly awake.

Will tried to speak, but then he gestured towards Ned's unmoving body. Ada rushed to the older man's side and put her hand on his brow. But he was cold and heavy and stiff.

He was dead.

'He must have died in the night,' said one of the other Luddites.

Ada cursed Lord Byron. Had the message not got through? Was he not going to come to their rescue? She turned as the cell door rumbled open and she saw a gaoler there, flanked by guards. It was not the man she had bribed, but a taller, younger fellow. Ada wondered what had happened to the previous gaoler.

'William Yates,' the new gaoler said. 'Time to face the beak. Which one of you is William Yates?'

Will exchanged a glance with Ada. 'This is it,' he said. 'Goodbye Ada.' He let the guards hustle him from the cell.

'Gaoler!' she shrieked, indicating Ned's body. 'This man is dead! You can't leave us in here with him!'

The gaoler grinned oilyly. 'Pretty soon you'll all be joining him,' he said, before closing the cell door.

Ada stared at Ned's body and shuddered.

She leant against the wall, staring morbidly down at the courthouse yard. Any moment she expected the crowds to gather, the drums to beat, the soldiers to lead Will out to the gallows, as they had Weaver. She tried not to think of Ned's stiffened corpse in the corner, as dead as the Luddite movement.

And yet Will never appeared. The gallows remained empty. Weaver's body had been taken away to be placed in a gibbet in the town, and the gallows remained empty. That afternoon, they came for her.

The soldiers hustled her out of the cell and down the stone passages of the gaol.

'Where did the other man go?' she asked the new gaoler.

'He's in another cell,' the man told her. 'He was arrested last night in an alehouse. Issuing false coinage. Went in there with forged sovereigns. The fool.'

Ada despaired. Her last hope was gone. As Brian had pointed out, the money she had brought with her was repro, not coin of the realm. Issuing false coinage. Was that a hanging offence? Probably; most things were in 1812.

The courtroom was a vast, oak-panelled hall, flanked by the public gallery on one side and the jury box on the other. Ada took her place, flanked by the guards, and saw an elderly judge gazing down from his seat on the other side. The charges were read. Ada was accused of sedition, frame-breaking, and conspiracy to murder.

'Not guilty, your honour,' she said. This was nonsense. She had joined the Luddites, yes, but she hadn't broken any frames. As for murder...!

'Call the first witness!' the cry went out.

'I call as first witness William Yates of Haby, Cheshire,' said the counsel for the prosecution.

Ada saw a familiar figure appear in the witness stand. Will, washed, and better dressed than he had been as long as she had known her. As he took his oath, she remembered his worries about his wife and children. What had kept him with the Luddites? Circumstance, and the fact that Mr. Ludlam was his brother-in-law. Now Ludlam was dead.

And it seemed that Will had turned king's evidence. He had betrayed them all.

He had betrayed her.

Will began to tell the court about the Luddite ambush on the soldiers taking stocking looms to the mill in Cheshire, and Ada knew that she hadn't a hope.

THE DARK PLACE by James Talbot

Chapter 12

Slowly Isobel's sobbing grew less and her breathing became more even. Martin held her close and they both took comfort from just being together.

'I'm scared Martin,' Isobel said quietly.

'So am I,' Martin replied. Martin checked the time on his watch. It was only 8.30 and he wondered how they were going to get through the night. Isobel suddenly wiped her eyes, sat up straight and turned to face Martin.

'I'm not going to be a victim, Martin,' she said with an air of defiance. 'There must be some thing we can do about what's been happening and I'm sure we can find some way to put a stop to it.'

Martin was surprised at Isobel's sudden show of resolve. Her voice grew firmer and she seemed to draw strength from somewhere inside as she spoke. She was determined to face whatever had been happening to them over the past week full on and confront whatever it was on her terms rather than as some kind of passive, impotent casualty.

Steve and Jess stood outside Martin's front door. Steve had rung the doorbell a few times but there was no answer.

'Looks as though he's not in,' he said to Jess.

'I'm worried Ste,' she said, her breath made white clouds in front of her face in the cold night air.

'I don't know what else we can do,' said Steve 'he could be in work or out somewhere so what can we do?'

'Do you know where Isobel lives?' Jess asked. 'Martin said she lives in Sandfield Park, I think he said Central Drive but I don't know the number. You're not suggesting we drive over there looking for him are you?' said Steve.

'Well, we could and if we see his car at least we'll know where he is won't we?' Jess replied.

'What if we don't see his car?' asked Steve. 'What do you suggest we do then? We can't drive all over Liverpool looking for Martin can we?'

'I'm worried about him Steve, I just think something's wrong,' replied Jess.

'OK,' said Steve. 'We'll drive over there but only to Sandfield Park. We're not going all over Liverpool on some wild goose chase.'

'Thanks, Steve,' said Jess as they walked away from Martin's house and back towards their car.

As Steve and Jess stood in the cold night air outside Martin's house in West Derby, a dark coloured sports car was making its way slowly through Sandfield Park. The car's ice white headlights made grotesque shadows of the trees against the dirty white backdrop of the pavements. The car's engine

had a deep throaty rumble which cut through the silence of the snow-covered streets as though a peal of thunder was sounding in the distance.

Martin and Isobel were sitting on the settee when someone began pushing the buzzer on the gatepost. Martin checked his watch and it was just after nine.

'Are you expecting anyone?' he asked.

'No,' said Isobel. 'I've no idea who it could be.' Isobel and Martin walked into the hall together and Isobel pressed the button on the intercom.

'Yes? Can I help you?' she said and released the button as she waited for a reply.

'Hello Isobel,' said a heavily accented male voice. 'It's Aleksander Vukovic. I'm sorry for calling so late and unannounced but I wonder if I could speak to you?'

Isobel pressed the button on the intercom again. 'Hello Alex,' she said. 'I'll open the gates for you.'

'Who's that?' said Martin as Isobel walked towards the front door.

'He's one of my suppliers. He's the one I bought the sideboard from,' said Isobel as she unlocked the front door.

A minute or so later, a tall thin man in a dark overcoat and carrying a thin black leather briefcase was coming through the front door. He was of a similar height to Martin but he looked older. He had jet-black hair that was greying at the temples and he moved with the relaxed ease of an athlete. He shook hands with Isobel and then turned to face Martin.

'Aleksander Vukovic,' he said extending his hand towards Martin while at the same time inclining his head towards him.

'Hi. Martin Davies,' said Martin shaking hands with the stranger. Aleksander's grip was firm and Martin had a sense of inner strength in the handshake.

'Come through into the lounge,' said Isobel. 'It's cold out here.' She moved towards the lounge and both men followed her through the door and into the lounge.

'Would you like a drink, Alex?' asked Isobel.

'A small glass of whisky if it's not too much trouble,' he replied. Isobel walked over to the small Georgian drinks cabinet in the corner of the room. The circular cabinet had glass doors that opened on both sides and the top could be lifted off and used as a tray to serve drinks. It was a lovely piece of furniture and perfectly suited the character of the room.

'Is Irish whisky OK?' said Isobel as she took a bottle of Tullamore Dew from the cabinet.

'That would be excellent,' replied Aleksander, smiling. 'Believe it or not Tullamore Dew is more popular than any of the Scotch whiskies in Estonia,' he said, 'although it is, as with most luxury items, very expensive.'

'Would you like water or ice?' Isobel asked.

Aleksander grinned and said, 'Thank you but no. I would not want to spoil the taste of so fine a drink by diluting it.'

Isobel poured a small measure of the golden coloured liquid into a heavy diamond cut crystal tumbler, which she handed to Aleksander.

'So, Alex. What brings you here at this time of night?' she asked.

Steve and Jess drove slowly down Central Drive peering through the darkness as they passed the houses and looked for Martin's car.

'I think that's it,' said Jess, as she looked through a tall wrought iron fence.

Steve stopped the car and squinted as he tried to make out the car parked outside the house at the top of the drive. He thought he could see Martin's Mercedes but his view was obscured by the sleek low sports car parked just in front of it.

'Are you sure that's Martin's car?' he asked Jess. 'I can't really tell from this angle.'

Jess had a slightly better view from the passenger side of the car. 'I'm pretty sure it is,' she said. 'That Porsche or whatever it is that's parked in front is blocking the view a bit but I'm pretty sure it's Martin's car.'

'Right. So now we know where he is, can we go home?' asked Steve.

'We don't know if he's alright though, do we?' said Jess.

'Come on, Jess,' said Steve angrily. 'We've driven over here like some kind of private detectives or something. It's as if we're spying on Martin. What's he going to think if we knock on the door and ask how he is?'

'I don't think we'd be able to get near the door, judging by the height of that iron fence and the gates,' said Jess.

'That's beside the point,' Steve said quickly. 'We can't just go barging in on them can we?'

Jess turned towards Steve. 'How long have you known Martin?' she asked.

'You know how long I've known him,' said Steve, 'since we were kids. But what's that got to do with tonight?'

'I just think that if you were going through the same kind of things Martin is at the moment, and he was worried about you, he wouldn't let his fear of looking silly in front of other people stop him from making sure you were OK, that's all.'

'Alright,' said Steve 'you've convinced me. No doubt, I'll ring the bell if there is one, and make a complete fool of myself because it isn't even Martin's car. Whoever lives there will think a complete lunatic is outside their house.'

'Steve,' Jess said as he opened the car door and started to get out.

'What?' said Steve, turning towards her.

Jess leant across the car and kissed him. 'Thanks,' she said.

Aleksander Vukovic sipped his whisky and regarded Martin and Isobel over the rim of the crystal tumbler.

'Have you heard any of the stories coming from the village of Kallaste in Estonia, that have been reported on the news last week?' he asked.

Martin and Isobel looked at each other before Isobel replied. 'We've heard some of the reports and some friends of mine have told us about what they've seen on the Reuters website,' she said. 'Why do you ask, Alex, and what do you know about Kallaste?'

'Your great grandfather was Dmitri Stefanovich who left Kallaste sometime towards the end of the 19th century?' said Alex. It was more of a statement than a question.

'That's right,' answered Isobel. 'I think he left there in 1890 and moved to England.'

'Do you know why he left Estonia?' asked Aleksander.

'I'm not really sure,' said Isobel. 'All I know for sure is that he came to England and changed the family name to Stevens because he thought an English sounding name would help him establish his business.'

'That's partly true,' said Aleksander. 'It's also true that he changed the family name because he had committed a murder before leaving Estonia and he wanted to hide his identity.'

Isobel looked shocked as Aleksander finished speaking. 'That can't be true,' she said. 'I never met my great grandfather, but surely someone in the family would have known if he'd committed such a crime?'

'He left Estonia alone,' said Aleksander. 'No-one in his immediate family knew where he had gone or how he travelled. It was easy for him to conceal his identity once he arrived in England. He married an English girl and established a family here. You must remember that there were no high-speed information services at this time. Wired telegraph links had only recently been established between the United Kingdom and India and it wasn't until 1897 that the first wireless telegraph signals were sent across the Bristol Channel by Marconi. Interpol wasn't established until 1923 and there was no pursuit of Dmitri from Estonia so it wasn't that difficult for him to disappear once he arrived in England and changed his name.'

Martin had remained silent as Aleksander and Isobel had been speaking but now he had a question.

'How come you know so much about this, Alex? If Isobel's great grandfather was so successful in concealing his past how is it you know so much about him?'

'My great grand uncle Vladimir Vukovic helped him commit the murder,' said Aleksander quietly. At that moment, the buzzer in the hall sounded again.

Once again, Isobel and Martin exchanged glances.

'I certainly seem to be popular tonight, don't I,' said Isobel as she stood up and made her way into the hall to answer the buzzer. She pressed the intercom button and said, 'Hello can I help you?'

'Hi, is that Isobel?' said a familiar voice. 'It's Steve Jones. I'm sorry to bother you so late but Jess and I were worried about Martin. We knew you lived in Sandfield Park so when we couldn't get any answer at his house we came over here on the off chance we'd spot Martin's car.'

'Hi Steve, I'll open the gate for you,' said Isobel. Steve went back to the car and as he got back in the car large metal gate at the end of the drive swung open.

'I hope you're happy,' said Steve as he started the car. 'I felt such a fool explaining to Isobel just what we're doing here at this time of night. She must think we're a pair of lunatics,' he said as he guided the car slowly up the drive.

'Don't worry, Ste,' said Jess, 'Isobel will understand why we're here.'

'I hope so,' Steve replied.

Isobel was waiting at the door as Steve and Jess got out of their car. 'This is a surprise,' she said. 'Come in out of the cold.' Steve and Jess walked into the hall and Isobel closed the door on the cold night air. 'Come through into the lounge, Martin is in here,' said Isobel leading the way.

Martin stood up, a surprised look on his face as Steve and Jess walked into the room.

'Hello! What are you two doing here?' he said.

'All right mate,' said Steve. 'Sorry to bother you but we were worried about you and when we couldn't get any answer on the telephone or at your house we decided to see if we could spot your car over here,' he said apologetically.

'Well, I'm OK,' said Martin, 'but thanks for thinking about me,' he said smiling at his friends. 'This is Aleksander Vukovic,' said Martin, introducing Steve and Jess to the man. 'He's one of Isobel's antique suppliers.'

'A pleasure to meet you,' Aleksander said to Steve and Jess in his heavily accented English as he shook hands with them both.

'Would you both like a drink?' Isobel asked her new guests.

'We really should be going,' said Jess. 'We didn't mean to interrupt your evening.'

'Nonsense,' said Isobel. 'You can have a cup of tea or a coffee or something stronger if you like? You can't just arrive like this out of the blue and then leave without first having a drink. I insist,' she said. 'Take your coats off and get warm while I put the kettle on.'

Isobel took Jess and Steve's coats and walked out into the hallway to hang them up.

'I'll give you a hand,' said Jess as she followed Isobel out of the door.

'I'm really sorry to spoil your evening like this,' said Jess when she was in the kitchen with Isobel.

'Don't be silly,' said Isobel. 'It's lovely that you've just dropped in. I would have liked to tidy the place up a bit before you arrived but it's nice that you're here.'

'Your house is lovely,' said Jess 'you have some beautiful furniture.'

'Thank you,' said Isobel as she switched the kettle on to boil. 'Now what would you like to drink?' she asked. Jess said she'd have a cup of tea and Steve would have a coffee.

In the lounge, Martin, Steve and Aleksander were discussing the latest political issues and the effect they were having on the world's stock markets. Martin had been careful not to mention to Steve what had happened last night or about his visit to the church to see Michael Carey. Martin didn't want another argument about what had happened over the last few days or Steve questioning him about things again, not in front of Aleksander anyway. Isobel

and Jess returned to the lounge a few minutes later with a tray of hot drinks and a plate of biscuits.

'I know you like black coffee,' Isobel said to Aleksander as she handed him a steaming mug.

'Thank you,' said Aleksander taking the cup.

'Coffee for you Steve,' said Jess passing another mug to him. 'Coffee for you as well Martin,' said Jess, passing him the last mug. Isobel and Jess had opted for Earl Grey tea. The delicate smell of bergamot from the tea and the strong smell of coffee filled the room with pleasing aromas.

Almost an hour later Jess said, 'Come on Steve let's get home and let Isobel and Martin have some peace.' Jess and Steve stood up and thanked Isobel for the drinks and the biscuits.

'I'll get your coats,' said Isobel as she walked into the hall.

'It's been lovely to meet you, Aleksander,' said Jess shaking hands with him.

'The pleasure has been all mine,' Aleksander replied as he shook hands with Jess before shaking hands with Steve. Martin followed Jess and Steve into the hall where they took their coats from Isobel and pulled them on.

'We're really sorry for interrupting your evening,' said Steve.

'Don't be silly,' said Isobel, 'it's been lovely having you here.'

Isobel and Martin watched as Steve and Jess drove slowly down the drive and out through the open gates onto Central Drive.

'They really care about you,' said Isobel as they waved towards the departing car. Isobel closed the door and Martin put his arms around her shoulders.

'Thank you for making them so welcome,' he said, before kissing Isobel.

'Come on,' she said as she moved out of his embrace, 'we have another guest, you know.' Martin followed Isobel back into the lounge.

'So are you happy now?' Steve asked Jess as they drove away from Isobel's house.

'I feel better knowing he's OK,' said Jess.

She didn't say anything else and Steve wondered at her silence. Jess seemed to be lost in thought so Steve concentrated on negotiating the slippery road.

'I'll be glad when this snow is gone,' he said as they reached the edge of Sandfield Park and emerged onto the clear main roads.

Jess was thinking about what Isobel had told her had happened to Martin last night and the experience they had both had earlier that evening. She told Jess that they didn't know what was happening but that Aleksander may have some information for them that might shed a bit of light on things. Jess had wanted to leave straightaway to allow them to speak to Aleksander but Isobel had insisted they stay and have a warm drink before they left.

'So if Isobel's great grandfather covered his tracks so well when he came to England how have you been able to find out so much about him?' asked Martin.

Aleksander thought for a moment and then said, 'Have either of you experienced anything strange over the last week?'

Both Martin and Isobel were silent for a moment before Martin said, 'How do you know about what's been happening?'

'I don't,' Aleksander replied. 'That's why I'm asking you.'

'You must think we're pretty stupid,' said Martin angrily 'you turn up out of the blue and tell us some kind of bizarre story that Isobel's great grandfather was a murderer and that one of your relations helped him. Then you ask us if we've experienced anything strange over the last week. It's you that's been making all these strange things happen, isn't it!'

'I can assure you I have had nothing to do with anything that might have happened to you' insisted Aleksander. 'I came here to warn you.'

'Warn us about what?' asked Isobel.

'You are in grave danger,' Aleksander said to Isobel. 'Your great grandfather was cursed by his victim and you are being pursued by something that will not rest until you are dead,' he said in a matter of fact voice.

'Come on, Alex,' said Martin. 'That's a little bit much to take isn't it? You're honestly sitting there and telling us that Isobel's great grandfather was cursed by someone he then killed and because of that something has been searching for Isobel for the last hundred plus years?'

'No, not exactly,' said Aleksander. 'Isobel is the last Stefanovich left alive. All the others have been killed or have died, some in mysterious circumstances, and now it is her turn that is why she is being pursued.'

'Do you expect us to believe all this nonsense?' said Martin. 'It sounds like the plot to a very bad low budget horror film.'

'Perhaps you don't believe me,' said Aleksander, 'but please have a look at this,' he said as he drew a slim manila folder from his briefcase. Inside the folder was a clear plastic envelope with a sheet of yellow brown paper inside.

The sheet of paper looked as though it was many years old and it had faded writing on one side. There was also a sheet of new white paper with clear black type on it. 'This is a translation of what is written on this paper,' said Aleksander passing the white sheet to Martin and the clear plastic envelope to Isobel.

Martin quickly read through the few paragraphs typed on the page and as he quickly read the page a look of distaste passed across his face. Isobel looked at the aged sheet of paper in the plastic envelope. It was stained and looked very old. The words were faded and indistinct in places but she thought that enough letters from each word remained to be able to decipher what was written on the paper.

'It is written in Estonian,' said Aleksander as he regarded Isobel. 'It was written by my great grand uncle and tells what Dmitri did to a young girl named Vasilisa.'

'How do we know this is an accurate translation?' said Martin as he passed the white sheet of paper to Isobel.

'I promise you it is accurate,' said Aleksander with a calm certainty that defied questioning.

'What that describes is horrible,' said Martin. Isobel lifted her hand towards her mouth and gasped as she read what was written on the paper.

'It was difficult for me to translate as well,' said Aleksander. 'Apart from the problems caused by the aging of the paper and the fading of the ink I felt sick as I read what was written.'

'So you're saying because of what is written on this,' Martin held up the clear plastic envelope, 'Isobel's life is in danger?'

'Not just Isobel,' replied Aleksander. 'Quite possibly your life as well.'

'Once I knew the approximate date of Dmitri's arrival in England finding out about him was not that difficult,' he went on. 'Admittedly there weren't that many butchers from Eastern Europe in England at the time, which made it easier, and even fewer who changed their name to Stevens, but after a while I found what I was looking for. Dmitri landed in Hull and then travelled to Liverpool where he established his business before changing his name to Stevens. He married the daughter of a rival butcher perhaps to form an association with his competitor. This union allowed his new business to flourish, he became quite wealthy, and the family prospered. When he died, he left a sizeable legacy to his heirs. This inheritance allowed your father to set up his antique business, a profession which you have continued,' finished Aleksander.

At the same time Aleksander was explaining how he had traced Isobel's great grandfather, Karen and Tom were sitting in the lounge of their house trying to

watch the TV. Both of them were thinking about Isobel and neither of them could concentrate on what was happening in the wildlife documentary they were watching.

‘What do you think we should do about Isobel?’ asked Tom.

‘We’ve been over this before Tom and I don’t know,’ Karen replied. ‘She told me I was being ridiculous, thinking that something happening so far away in Estonia could possibly be connected to her. I told her about the police reports and all the family members now being dead but I don’t think she was convinced.’

‘Isobel wanted you to believe her stories though, didn’t she?’ Tom said.

‘There’s nothing we can do Tom,’ said Karen patiently. ‘We’ve tried to tell her about what the police in Estonia said so there’s nothing else we can do.’

Michael Carey was also thinking about Martin and Isobel. He was consumed by doubt as he sat in his study at the rectory. The only illumination in the room came from the fire. The darkness at the edges of the room seemed eager to fill the space as the coals on the fire began to sink to a red glow and the flames from them died down. He wanted to believe Martin but the rational, sceptical part of him told him that what Martin had described was impossible.

‘It just isn’t possible for a person to have a physical presence in a dream, be injured in that dream and for the injuries to be manifesting themselves in reality once the person wakes from the dream. It’s equally impossible for something that exists only in that dream to have any kind of corporeal properties. So why do you so much want to believe him?’ Michael Carey asked himself again. ‘Is it because it will finally prove my belief and faith in God and the Church to myself? Or is it just a selfish desire on my part to have my faith confirmed in the eyes of others?’

Michael Carey wrestled with his thoughts and tried to find some kind of resolution to the conflict he was facing. The final part of his conversation with Martin, ‘I don’t know, Martin. What if I am wrong?’ kept running through his mind like a tape recording on an endless replay. As Michael Carey sat in the gradually darkening room, the moon was rising behind the clouds in the night sky.

At Isobel’s house, Aleksander Vukovic was leaving. He said goodnight to Isobel and shook hands with Martin. He was about to leave when he turned to face them both.

‘Please believe me when I say I only wanted to warn you,’ he said. ‘As I told you, I found the piece of paper in a small compartment at the back of one of the drawers in that sideboard you have in your hall. I bought the sideboard from a house in Pusi not far from Kallaste. The house had recently been vacated after the owners died. I had no idea what was written on the paper until I translated it last week. It had lain in my office untouched for weeks

since I found it. It was only when I translated it that I made the connection between what was happening in the house outside Kallaste and what was written on the paper.' He looked at Martin and Isobel for a moment before seeming to come to a decision. 'I pray God watches over you,' he said.

Then with his index finger and his middle finger extended from his curled thumb, ring finger and little finger Aleksander made the sign of a cross in front of them, then turned and walked quickly across the gravel to his car. He started the car and the high performance engine roared into life before the engine settled down to a dull throbbing, which sounded incongruous in the cold night air. Aleksander Vukovic waved once towards them and then drove slowly down the driveway and away from the house.

'So what did you make of all that?' Martin asked when he and Isobel were seated once more in the lounge.

'I don't know,' said Isobel thoughtfully. 'Poor Aleksander believes what he told us is true. It must have been very hard for him to come here and show us what he'd found especially as he sold the sideboard to me.'

'Don't you think it's too much of a coincidence that he sold you the sideboard and then he turns up with the story about your great grandfather and the paper as supposed proof of what he's saying?' said Martin a note of suspicion in his voice.

'It does all seem very convenient, doesn't it?' said Isobel. 'The paper looked genuine but I suppose it could have been made to look older than it was. What would Aleksander gain by doing that, though?' she said.

'I don't know,' said Martin. 'The alternative is we accept his story about what happened to this girl Vasilisa, or whatever her name was, and the fact that you've been cursed.'

'Whatever it was that happened to us earlier tonight felt real enough to me,' said Isobel quietly. 'When we were out walking on Sunday I genuinely felt as though something horrible was trying to keep us in the park and I can't explain that either,' she said. 'It's only 10.30,' she went on. 'Do you think Reverend Carey might be able to help? You could give him a call couldn't you?'

Martin noticed the hint of worry in Isobel's voice. 'OK,' he replied 'I'll give him a call but I'm sure he'll think we've taken leave of our senses when I tell him about what's happened tonight.'

For the second time that night, Martin stood in the hallway and dialled the rectory telephone number. After a few seconds, Michael Carey answered the telephone.

'Hello, Michael Carey.' The deep rich tones in Reverend Carey's voice were instantly recognisable and Martin wondered what it was like to be in church when Michael Carey was in full flow delivering a sermon.

'Maybe I'll go one Sunday and find out,' he thought to himself before he spoke.

'Hi Reverend Carey it's Martin Davies,' he said. 'I'm really sorry to bother you again tonight but I needed to speak to you.'

Something about the tone in Martin's voice worried Michael Carey. 'What has happened since I spoke to you earlier Martin?' he asked.

Martin told him about what had happened that evening and what he and Isobel believed they'd heard during their encounter with the shadow. Martin then went on to tell him about the visit of Aleksander Vukovic and the story he had told them about what he claimed had happened in Kallaste involving Isobel's great grandfather and Aleksander's great grand uncle.

'Did you believe him?' asked Reverend Carey.

'He seemed to believe what he was telling us,' said Martin 'but it all seems too convenient to me. He sold Isobel the sideboard that he says had the paper hidden in it and the sideboard itself came from somewhere close to Kallaste where all this is supposed to have started.'

'Have you heard of the theory of "six degrees of separation" Martin,' said Reverend Carey.

'Yes of course,' said Martin 'but that's just an urban myth isn't it?'

'I'm not so sure,' replied Reverend Carey. 'The idea was first postulated by a Hungarian author called Frigyes Karinthy in 1929, before the American psychologist Stanley Milgram took the idea a stage further with his Small World Problem experiment in the late 1960s. More recently, there have been experiments using the internet and its associated instant messenger technology, which seem to support the theory. The fact that Isobel and Aleksander have come into contact through the buying and selling of antiques while not realising they were connected may be part of a similar phenomenon. There have been previous examples of people who were closely connected to each other by a web of social networks they knew nothing about. Prior to this evening, did Isobel even know that there might have been a connection between the two families in the past?'

'I don't think so,' said Martin. 'As far as I know they've known each other for a number of years but Isobel never mentioned anything about a connection in Estonia.'

'It's not beyond the realms of possibility though is it?' said Michael Carey.

'Let me get this straight,' said Martin. 'What you're suggesting is that Aleksander could be telling the truth about the message on the paper and the sideboard? Not only that but Isobel and Aleksander are linked through her

great grandfather, who she has never even seen, but lived in Kallaste over a hundred years ago and his Great grand uncle. On top of that neither of them had any idea that there was a link?' said Martin incredulously.

'It's possible,' said Michael Carey, 'but that's all it might be. I'm not suggesting that the things you have described to me haven't happened but the link between the sideboard and Isobel might also be something simple and unconnected. The dreams you and Isobel have experienced and the physical trauma you yourself have suffered may be unrelated to the sideboard and the paper that suggests Isobel's great grandfather may have murdered somebody.'

'I had hoped you'd be able to give us some pointers about what to do,' said Martin with an air of resignation that quickly turned to anger, 'not try and rationalise and support all this nonsense! I'm sorry,' Martin said quickly. 'I didn't mean to get angry but you're suggesting that neither Isobel nor I have any choice in this and I can't accept that.'

'I'm sorry if I gave you that impression Martin,' said Michael Carey. 'I didn't mean to do that. I was just trying to point out there might not be any connection between your dreams, the things you have seen, and the paper Aleksander says he found in the sideboard. Your dreams and sightings of the shadow might be occurring because of something unrelated to those things and you are simply seeing a connection that doesn't exist.'

'But there could be a connection,' said Martin. 'You also seem to have avoided the way the vial of holy water has appeared to help in the encounters with the shadow. Isobel said she saw me approaching from a distance and that I had a bright light like a searchlight in my hand.'

'I have no idea why the water has helped you,' said Michael Carey 'unless of course you have instilled power in the water by believing it can help you.'

'So we're back to the auto-suggestion again aren't we?' answered Martin.

Michael Carey was silent for a moment, then said, 'I don't know what else to say Martin. Do you think it would help and you would feel better if I came over to the house to speak to you and Isobel?'

'I think Isobel would like that,' Martin replied, 'but it's really late and perhaps we should wait until tomorrow?'

'What's the address?' said Michael Carey with businesslike efficiency.

'Number 6, Central Drive in Sandfield Park,' said Martin.

'I'll be there as soon as I can,' said Michael Carey.

'Thank you,' Martin replied. 'We'll leave the gates open so you can drive straight up to the house.'

Martin walked back into the lounge.

'You sounded as though you were getting angry,' said Isobel a soft smile playing at the corners of her mouth.

'I was, for a moment,' said Martin, 'but despite that Reverend Carey said he'd come over to the house. I don't know what he can do but he's coming anyway.'

'Thank you,' said Isobel standing up and then putting her arms around Martin's shoulders and hugging him. 'Whatever this is I'm sure we can beat it Martin but we may need all the help and support we can get,' she said as she rested her head on his shoulder.

Michael Carey slipped the white collar round his neck and fastened it to his Rabat by the metal studs. The collar seemed to glow against the blackness of the vest as he adjusted it against his throat. Reverend Carey took the wooden cross from where it rested on top of the leather case containing the vials of holy water. He kissed the cross, slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat, and then picked up the leather case. He paused for a moment and wondered if he was doing the right thing. He'd only met Martin that weekend and now here he was going to see him and his girlfriend at nearly eleven o'clock at night on an errand that might test his resolve to its limit.

'So do I believe what Martin has told me?' the Reverend asked himself again. 'If I do and I accept that they are being threatened by some malevolent spirit I may have my faith in God and the Church tested as well as my personal resolve.'

Michael Carey started to walk from the study, then turned back and picked up the large leather bound book he had been reading earlier that night and had left resting on the table. With the book nestled under his arm and the leather case containing the vials of holy water in his hand Michael Carey walked from his study.

Jess and Steve were standing in the kitchen at their house and Jess had just finished telling Steve what Isobel had told her that evening.

Steve looked at the floor and then said, 'That's ridiculous, she's making it up.'

'How can you say that, Steve?' said Jess. 'Why would Isobel lie?'

'Oh come on,' said Steve. 'We went through all this nonsense on Saturday night at Martin's house. If what she said happened to Martin last night and they both saw this red eyed shadow tonight, why didn't he tell me about it?'

'I don't know,' said Jess. 'Maybe because Aleksander was there?'

'I've a good mind to go back there and ask her just what the hell is going on,' said Steve angrily. 'All this stuff only started after he met Isobel so it must be something to do with her. I wish we'd never gone into that bar now.'

'It's not fair to say that, Ste,' retorted Jess angrily. 'Isobel is having just as hard a time with all this as Martin is. In fact I'd say it's probably worse.'

'Well, she's not the one that was nearly throttled is she?' continued Steve, 'and it, whatever it is may have threatened her but as far as I can see all the physically dangerous stuff has happened to Martin!'

Jess walked over to Steve and put her arms around his shoulders.

'Let's not fight about this Steve,' she said. 'I know it's difficult not to think Isobel is responsible for what's happening. It did all start after Martin met her but what if Martin is caught up in all this by chance. Martin could have met anyone that night it just happened to be Isobel and whatever is happening is happening to her as well as Martin isn't it?'

'I suppose you're right,' said Steve. 'I just can't help worrying about what's happening. Martin has been my best mate for years and we've always looked out for each other.'

'I know,' replied Jess, 'and I'm sure Martin would do the same for you. The thing is all we can do is support them both until we know what's happening.'

'I suppose your right,' said Steve. 'I wish Martin had told me about what happened last night, though.'

As Martin and Isobel waited for Reverend Carey to arrive each was busy with their own thoughts about what was happening. Martin picked up the piece of paper Aleksander had left for them with the translation of the message he claimed to have found in the sideboard.

'What do you think about this?' he asked as he scanned the type written words once again.

'I think it's horrible,' Isobel replied. 'How can somebody even think about doing that to another human being?'

'I know,' said Martin. 'It doesn't make easy reading, does it?'

'No, it certainly doesn't!' said Isobel. 'Just imagining that happening made me feel sick.'

Martin read the type written page again. Aleksander had typed the translation using italic font, which gave the writing an air of truth. The words were written by somebody who seemed to know their time left alive was limited, as though they were under sentence of death and wanted to atone for their sins.

I Vladimir Vukovic write this as a testament to the fact that the death of Vasilisa Borosov on the eve of Ivan Kupala's day was an abomination in the eyes of God and the Church. I hope and I pray that when I meet my death and stand before the Lord our God to be judged he will forgive me for my part in this unholy crime. I admit that I helped Dmitri Stefanovich take Vasilisa from outside her house to a clearing in the forest close to the edge of Lake Peipus. I deny any part in the horror that was done to her in the name of preserving the old rituals and hereby attest to the fact that I tried to stop Dmitri and halt the depravation that was visited on Vasilisa before her death.

Martin read the passage again and a cold shiver ran down his spine as he imagined the scene in the clearing in the forest so long ago. He tried to suppress an image of the naked girl suspended upside down and spread-eagled against the hoary bark of the old oak tree but it was no use. It was as though he could see the events in his mind as they happened. The splash of the deep red blood and the screams of the girl as the waves of pain assaulted her already broken and abused body.

VARNEY THE VAMPIRE by Thomas Preskett Prest

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE STORM AND THE FIGHT.-THE ADMIRAL'S REPUDIATION OF HIS PRINCIPAL.

"Well," said the admiral, when they were fairly under the tree, upon the leaves of which the pattering rain might be heard falling: "well—what is it?"

"If your young friend, Mr. Bannerworth, should chance to send a pistol-bullet through any portion of my anatomy, prejudicial to the prolongation of my existence, you will be so good as not to interfere with anything I may have about me, or to make any disturbance whatever."

"You may depend I sha'n't."

"Just take the matter perfectly easy—as a thing of course."

"Oh! I mean d——d easy."

"Ha! what a delightful thing is friendship! There is a little knoll or mound of earth midway between here and the Hall. Do you happen to know it? There is one solitary tree glowing near its summit—an oriental looking tree, of the fir tribe, which, fan-like, spreads its deep green leaves; across the azure sky."

"Oh! bother it; it's a d——d old tree, growing upon a little bit of a hill, I suppose you mean?"

"Precisely; only much more poetically expressed. The moon rises at a quarter past four to-night, or rather to-morrow, morning."

"Does it?"

"Yes; and if I should happen to be killed, you will have me removed gently to this mound of earth, and there laid beneath this tree, with my face upwards; and take care that it is done before the moon rises. You can watch that no one interferes."

"A likely job. What the deuce do you take me for? I tell you what it is, Mr. Vampyre, or Varney, or whatever's your name, if you should chance to be hit, where-ever you chance to fall, there you'll lie."

"How very unkind."

"Uncommon, ain't it?"

"Well, well, since that is your determination, I must take care of myself in another way. I can do so, and I will."

"Take care of yourself how you like, for all I care; I've come here to second you, and to see that, on the honour of a seaman, if you are put out of the world, it's done in a proper manner, that's all I have to do with you—now you know."

Sir Francis Varney looked after him with a strange kind of smile, as he walked away to make the necessary preparation with Marchdale for the immediate commencement of the contest.

These were simple and brief. It was agreed that twelve paces should be measured out, six each way, from a fixed point; one six to be paced by the admiral, and the other by Marchdale; then they were to draw lots, to see at which end of this imaginary line Varney was to be placed; after this the signal for firing was to be one, two, three—fire!

A few minutes sufficed to complete these arrangements; the ground was measured in the manner we have stated, and the combatants placed in their respective positions, Sir Francis Varney occupying the same spot where he had at first stood, namely, that nearest to the little wood, and to his own residence.

It is impossible that under such circumstances the bravest and the calmest of mankind could fail to feel some slight degree of tremour or uneasiness; and, although we can fairly claim for Henry Bannerworth that he was as truly courageous as any right feeling Christian man could wish to be, yet when it was possible that he stood within, as it were, a hair's breadth of eternity, a strange world of sensation and emotions found a home in his heart, and he could not look altogether undaunted on that future which might, for all he knew to the contrary, be so close at hand, as far as he was concerned.

It was not that he feared death, but that he looked with a decent gravity upon so grave a change as that from this world to the next, and hence was it that his face was pale, and that he looked all the emotion which he really felt.

This was the aspect and the bearing of a brave but not a reckless man; while Sir Francis Varney, on the other hand, seemed, now that he had fairly engaged in the duel, to look upon it and its attendant circumstances with a kind of smirking satisfaction, as if he were far more amused than personally interested.

This was certainly the more extraordinary after the manner in which he had tried to evade the fight, and, at all events, was quite a sufficient proof that cowardice had not been his actuating motive in so doing.

The admiral, who stood on a level with him, could not see the sort of expression he wore, or, probably, he would have been far from well pleased; but the others did, and they found something inexpressibly disagreeable in the smirking kind of satisfaction with which the vampyre seemed to regard now the proceedings.

"Confound him," whispered Marchdale to Henry, "one would think he was quite delighted, instead, as we had imagined him, not well pleased, at these proceedings; look how he grins."

"It is no matter," said Henry; "let him wear what aspect he may, if it is the same to me; and, as Heaven is my judge, I here declare, if I did not think myself justified in so doing, I would not raise my hand against this man."

"There can be no shadow of a doubt regarding your justification. Have at him, and Heaven protect you."

"Amen!"

The admiral was to give the word to fire, and now he and Marshal having stepped sufficiently on one side to be out of all possible danger from any stray shot, he commenced repeating the signal,—

"Are you ready, gentlemen?—once."

They looked sternly at each other, and each grasped his pistol.

"Twice!"

Sir Francis Varney smiled and looked around him, as if the affair were one of the most common-place description.

"Thrice!"

Varney seemed to be studying the sky rather than attending to the duel.

"Fire!" said the admiral, and one report only struck upon the ear. It was that from Henry's pistol.

All eyes were turned upon Sir Francis Varney, who had evidently reserved his fire, for what purpose could not be devised, except a murderous one, the taking of a more steady aim at Henry.

Sir Francis, however, seemed in no hurry, but smiled significantly, and gradually raised the point of his weapon.

"Did you hear the word, Sir Francis? I gave it loud enough, I am sure. I never spoke plainer in my life; did I ever, Jack?"

"Yes, often," said Jack Pringle; "what's the use of your asking such yarns as them? you know you have done so often enough when you wanted grog."

"You d——d rascal, I'll—I'll have your back scored, I will."

"So you will, when you are afloat again, which you never will be—you're paid off, that's certain."

"You lubberly lout, you ain't a seaman; a seaman would never mutiny against his admiral; howsomever, do you hear, Sir Francis, I'll give the matter up, if you don't pay some attention to me."

Henry looked steadily at Varney, expecting every moment to feel his bullet. Mr. Marchdale hastily exclaimed that this was not according to usage.

Sir Francis Varney took no notice, but went on elevating his weapon; when it was perpendicular to the earth he fired in the air.

"I had not anticipated this," said Marchdale, as he walked to Henry. "I thought he was taking a more deadly aim."

"And I," said Henry.

"Ay, you have escaped, Henry; let me congratulate you."

"Not so fast; we may fire again."

"I can afford to do that," he said, with a smile.

"You should have fired, sir, according to custom," said the admiral; "this is not the proper thing."

"What, fire at your friend?"

"Oh, that's all very well! You are my friend for a time, vampyre as you are, and I intend you shall fire."

"If Mr. Henry Bannerworth demands another fire, I have no objection to it, and will fire at him; but as it is I shall not do so, indeed, it would be quite useless for him to do so—to point mortal weapons at me is mere child's play, they will not hurt me."

"The devil they won't," said the admiral.

"Why, look you here," said Sir Francis Varney, stepping forward and placing his hand to his neckerchief; "look you here; if Mr. Henry Bannerworth should demand another fire, he may do so with the same bullet."

"The same bullet!" said Marchdale, stepping forward—"the same bullet! How is this?"

"My eyes," said Jack; "who'd a thought it; there's a go! Wouldn't he do for a dummy—to lead a forlorn hope, or to put among the boarders?"

"Here," said Sir Francis, handing a bullet to Henry Bannerworth—"here is the bullet you shot at me."

Henry looked at it—it was blackened by powder; and then Marchdale seized it and tried it in the pistol, but found the bullet fitted Henry's weapon.

"By heavens, it is so!" he exclaimed, stepping back and looking at Varney from top to toe in horror and amazement.

"D——e," said the admiral, "if I understand this. Why Jack Pringle, you dog, here's a strange fish."

"On, no! there's plenty on 'um in some countries."

"Will you insist upon another fire, or may I consider you satisfied?"

"I shall object," said Marchdale. "Henry, this affair must go no further; it would be madness—worse than madness, to fight upon such terms."

"So say I," said the admiral. "I will not have anything to do with you, Sir Francis. I'll not be your second any longer. I didn't bargain for such a game as this. You might as well fight with the man in brass armour, at the Lord Mayor's show, or the champion at a coronation."

"Oh!" said Jack Pringle; "a man may as well fire at the back of a halligator as a wamphigher."

"This must be considered as having been concluded," said Mr. Marchdale.

"No!" said Henry.

"And wherefore not?"

"Because I have not received his fire."

"Heaven forbid you should."

"I may not with honour quit the ground without another fire."

"Under ordinary circumstances there might be some shadow of an excuse for your demand; but as it is there is none. You have neither honour nor credit to gain by such an encounter, and, certainly, you can gain no object."

"How are we to decide this affair? Am I considered absolved from the accusation under which I lay, of cowardice?" inquired Sir Francis Varney, with a cold smile.

"Why, as for that," said the admiral, "I should as soon expect credit for fighting behind a wall, as with a man that I couldn't hit any more than the moon."

"Henry; let me implore you to quit this scene; it can do no good."

At this moment, a noise, as of human voices, was heard at a distance; this caused a momentary pause, and, the whole party stood still and listened.

The murmurs and shouts that now arose in the distance were indistinct and confused.

"What can all this mean?" said Marchdale; "there is something very strange about it. I cannot imagine a cause for so unusual an occurrence."

"Nor I," said Sir Francis Varney, looking suspiciously at Henry Bannerworth.

"Upon my honour I know neither what is the cause nor the nature of the sounds themselves."

"Then we can easily see what is the matter from yonder hillock," said the admiral; "and there's Jack Pringle, he's up there already. What's he telegraphing about in that manner, I wonder?"

The fact was, Jack Pringle, hearing the riot, had thought that if he got to the neighbouring eminence he might possibly ascertain what it was that was the cause of what he termed the "row," and had succeeded in some degree.

There were a number of people of all kinds coming out from the village, apparently armed, and shouting. Jack Pringle hitched up his trousers and swore, then took off his hat and began to shout to the admiral, as he said,—

"D——e, they are too late to spoil the sport. Hilloa! hurrah!"

"What's all that about, Jack?" inquired the admiral, as he came puffing along. "What's the squall about?"

"Only a few horse-marines and bumboat-women, that have been startled like a company of penguins."

"Oh! my eyes! wouldn't a whole broadside set 'em flying, Jack?"

"Ay; just as them Frenchmen that you murdered on board the Big Thunderer, as you called it."

"I murder them, you rascal?"

"Yes; there was about five hundred of them killed."

"They were only shot."

"They were killed, only your conscience tells you it's uncomfortable."

"You rascal—you villain! You ought to be keel-hauled and well payed."

"Ay; you're payed, and paid off as an old hulk."

"D——e—you—you—oh! I wish I had you on board ship, I'd make your lubberly carcass like a union jack, full of red and blue stripes."

"Oh! it's all very well; but if you don't take to your heels, you'll have all the old women in the village a whacking on you, that's all I have to say about it. You'd better port your helm and about ship, or you'll be keel-hauled."

"D—n your—"

"What's the matter?" inquired Marchdale, as he arrived.

"What's the cause of all the noise we have heard?" said Sir Francis; "has some village festival spontaneously burst forth among the rustics of this place?"

"I cannot tell the cause of it," said Henry Bannerworth; "but they seem to me to be coming towards this place."

"Indeed!"

"I think so too," said Marchdale.

"With what object?" inquired Sir Francis Varney.

"No peaceable one," observed Henry; "for, as far I can observe, they struck across the country, as though they would enclose something, or intercept somebody."

"Indeed! but why come here?"

"If I knew that I could have at once told the cause."

"And they appear armed with a variety of odd weapons," observed Sir Francis; "they mean an attack upon some one! Who is that man with them? he seems to be deprecating their coming."

"That appears to be Mr. Chillingworth," said Henry; "I think that is he."

"Yes," observed the admiral; "I think I know the build of that craft; he's been in our society before. I always know a ship as soon as I see it."

"Does you, though?" said Jack.

"Yea; what do you mean, eh? let me hear what you've got to say against your captain and your admiral, you mutinous dog; you tell me, I say."

"So I will; you thought you were fighting a big ship in a fog, and fired a dozen broadsides or so, and it was only the Flying Dutchman, or the devil."

"You infernal dog—"

"Well, you know it was; it might a been our own shadow for all I can tell. Indeed, I think it was."

"You think!"

"Yes."

"That's mutiny; I'll have no more to do with you, Jack Pringle; you're no seaman, and have no respect for your officer. Now sheer off, or I'll cut your yards."

"Why, as for my yards, I'll square 'em presently if I like, you old swab; but as for leaving you, very well; you have said so, and you shall be accommodated, d——e; however, it was not so when your nob was nearly rove through with a boarding pike; it wasn't 'I'll have no more to do with Jack Pringle' then, it was more t'other."

"Well, then, why be so mutinous?"

"Because you aggrawates me."

The cries of the mob became more distinct as they drew nearer to the party, who began to evince some uneasiness as to their object.

"Surely," said Marchdale, "Mr. Chillingworth has not named anything respecting the duel that has taken place."

"No, no."

"But he was to have been here this morning," said the admiral. "I understood he was to be here in his own character of a surgeon, and yet I have not seen him; have any of you?"

"No," said Henry.

"Then here he comes in the character of conservator of the public peace," said Varney, coldly; "however, I believe that his errand will be useless since the affair is, I presume, concluded."

"Down with the vampyre!"

"Eh!" said the admiral, "eh, what's that, eh? What did they say?"

"If you'll listen they'll tell you soon enough, I'll warrant."

"May be they will, and yet I'd like to know now."

Sir Francis Varney looked significantly at Marchdale, and then waited with downcast eyes for the repetition of the words.

"Down with the vampyre!" resounded on all sides from the people who came rapidly towards them, and converging towards a centre. "Burn, destroy, and kill the vampyre! No vampyre; burn him out; down with him; kill him!"

Then came Mr. Chillingworth's voice, who, with much earnestness, endeavoured to exhort them to moderation, and to refrain from violence.

Sir Francis Varney became very pale agitated; he immediately turned, and taking the least notice, he made for the wood, which lay between him and his own house, leaving the people in the greatest agitation.

Mr. Marchdale was not unmoved at this occurrence, but stood his ground with Henry Bannerworth, the admiral, and Jack Pringle, until the mob came very near to them, shouting, and uttering cries of vengeance, and death of all imaginable kinds that it was possible to conceive, against the unpopular vampyre.

Pending the arrival of these infuriated persons, we will, in a few words, state how it was that so suddenly a set of circumstances arose productive of an amount of personal danger to Varney, such as, up to that time, had seemed not at all likely to occur.

We have before stated there was but one person out of the family of the Bannerworths who was able to say anything of a positive character concerning the singular and inexplicable proceedings at the Hall; and that that person was Mr. Chillingworth, an individual not at all likely to become garrulous upon the subject.

But, alas! the best of men have their weaknesses, and we much regret to say that Mr. Chillingworth so far in this instance forgot that admirable discretion which commonly belonged to him, as to be the cause of the popular tumult which had now readied such a height.

In a moment of thoughtlessness and confidence, he told his wife. Yes, this really clever man, from whom one would not have expected such a piece of horrible indiscretion, actually told his wife all about the vampyre. But such is human nature; combined with an amount of firmness and reasoning power, that one would have thought to be invulnerable safeguards, we find some weakness which astonishes all calculation.

Such was this of Mr. Chillingworth's. It is true, he cautioned the lady to be secret, and pointed to her the danger of making Varney the vampyre a theme for gossip; but he might as well have whispered to a hurricane to be so good as not to go on blowing so, as request Mrs. Chillingworth to keep a secret.

Of course she burst into the usual fervent declarations of "Who was she to tell? Was she a person who went about telling things? When did she see anybody? Not she, once in a blue moon;" and then, when Mr. Chillingworth went out, like the King of Otaheite, she invited the neighbours round about to come to take some tea.

Under solemn promises of secrecy, sixteen ladies that evening were made acquainted with the full and interesting particulars of the attack of the vampyre on Flora Bannerworth, and all the evidence inculcating Sir Francis Varney as the blood-thirsty individual.

When the mind comes to consider that these sixteen ladies multiplied their information by about four-and-twenty each, we become quite lost in a sea of arithmetic, and feel compelled to sum up the whole by a candid assumption that in four-and-twenty hours not an individual in the whole town was ignorant of the circumstances.

On the morning before the projected duel, there was an unusual commotion in the streets. People were conversing together in little knots, and using rather violent gesticulations. Poor Mr. Chillingworth! he alone was ignorant of the causes of the popular commotion, and so he went to bed wondering that an unusual bustle pervaded the little market town, but not at all guessing its origin.

Somehow or another, however, the populace, who had determined to make a demonstration on the following morning against the vampyre, thought it highly necessary first to pay some sort of compliment to Mr. Chillingworth, and, accordingly, at an early hour, a great mob assembled outside his house, and gave three terrific applauding shouts, which roused him most unpleasantly from his sleep; and induced the greatest astonishment at the cause of such a tumult.

Oh, that artful Mrs. Chillingworth! too well she knew what was the matter; yet she pretended to be so oblivious upon the subject.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Chillingworth, as he started up in bed, "what's all that?"

"All what?" said his wife.

"All what! Do you mean to say you heard nothing?"

"Well, I think I did hear a little sort of something."

"A little sort of something? It shook the house."

"Well, well; never mind. Go to sleep again; it's no business of ours."

"Yes; but it may be, though. It's all very well to say 'go to sleep.' That happens to be a thing I can't do. There's something amiss."

"Well, what's that to you?"

"Perhaps nothing; but, perhaps, everything."

Mr. Chillingworth sprang from his bed, and began dressing, a process which he executed with considerable rapidity, and in which he was much accelerated by two or three supplementary shouts from the people below.

Then, in a temporary lull, a loud voice shouted,—

"Down with the vampyre—down with the vampyre!"

The truth in an instant burst over the mind of Mr. Chillingworth; and, turning to his wife, he exclaimed,—

"I understand it now. You've been gossiping about Sir Francis Varney, and have caused all this tumult."

"I gossip! Well, I never! Lay it on me; it's sure to be my fault. I might have known that beforehand. I always am."

"But you must have spoken of it."

"Who have I got to speak to about it?"

"Did you, or did you not?"

"Who should I tell?"

Mr. Chillingworth was dressed, and he hastened down and entered the street with great desperation. He had a hope that he might be enabled to disperse the crowd, and yet be in time to keep his appointment at the duel.

His appearance was hailed with another shout, for it was considered, of course, that he had come to join in the attack upon Sir Francis Varney. He found assembled a much more considerable mob than he had imagined, and to his alarm he found many armed with all sorts of weapons of offence.

"Hurrah!" cried a great lumpy-looking fellow, who seemed half mad with the prospect of a disturbance. "Hurrah! here's the doctor, he'll tell us all about it as we go along. Come on."

"For Heaven's sake," said Mr. Chillingworth, "stop; What are you about to do all of you?"

"Burn the vampyre—burn the vampyre!"

"Hold—hold! this is folly. Let me implore you all to return to your homes, or you will get into serious trouble on this subject."

This was a piece of advice not at all likely to be adopted; and when the mob found that Mr. Chillingworth was not disposed to encourage and countenance it in its violence, it gave another loud shout of defiance, and moved off through the long straggling streets of the town in a direction towards Sir Francis Varney's house.

It is true that what were called the authorities of the town had become alarmed, and were stirring, but they found themselves in such a frightful minority, that it became out of the question for them to interfere with any effect to stop the lawless proceedings of the rioters, so that the infuriated populace had it all their own way, and in a straggling, disorderly-looking kind of procession they moved off, vowing vengeance as they went against Varney the vampyre.

Hopeless as Mr. Chillingworth thought it was to interfere with any degree of effect in the proceedings of the mob, he still could not reconcile it to himself to be absent from a scene which he now felt certain had been produced by his own imprudence, so he went on with the crowd, endeavouring, as he did so, by every argument that could be suggested to him to induce them to abstain from the acts of violence they contemplated. He had a hope, too, that when they reached Sir Francis Varney's, finding him not within, as probably would be the case, as by that time he would have started to meet Henry Bannerworth on the ground, to fight the duel, he might induce the mob to return and forego their meditated violence.

And thus was it that, urged on by a multitude of persons, the unhappy surgeon was expiating, both in mind and person, the serious mistakes he had committed in trusting a secret to his wife.

Let it not be supposed that we for one moment wish to lay down a general principle as regards the confiding secrets to ladies, because from the beginning of the world it has become notorious how well they keep them, and with what admirable discretion, tact, and forethought this fairest portion of humanity conduct themselves.

We know how few Mrs. Chillingworths there are in the world, and have but to regret that our friend the doctor should, in his matrimonial adventure, have met with such a specimen.

BRIGANDS OF THE MOON by Ray Cummings

XV

A moment when, beyond the thought of the nearby brigand—or the possibility of an eavesdropping ray trained now upon my cubby—a moment while Anita and I held each other, and whispered those things which could mean nothing to the world, but which were all the world to us!

Then it was she whose wits brought us back from the shining fairyland of our love, into the sinister reality of the Planetara.

"Gregg, if they are listening—"

I pushed her away. This brave little masquerader! Not for my life, or for all the lives on the ship, would I consciously have endangered her.

"But Grantline's findings!" I said aloud. "In his message—see here, Prince—"

Coniston was too far away on the deck to hear us. Anita went to my door again and waved at him reassuringly. I put my ear to the door opening and

listened at the space across the grid of the ventilator over my bunk. The hum of a vibration would have been audible at those two points. But there was nothing.

"It's all right," I whispered, and she clung to me—so small beside me. With the black robe thrown aside, it seemed that I could not miss the curves of her woman's figure. A dangerous game she was playing. Her hair had been cut short to the base of her neck, in the fashion of her dead brother. Her eyelashes had been clipped: the line of her brows altered. And now, in the light of my tube as it shone upon her earnest face, I could remark other changes. Glutz, the little beauty specialist, was in this secret. With plastic skill he had altered the set of her jaw—put masculinity here.

She was whispering: "It was—was poor George whom Miko shot."

I had now the true version of what had occurred. Miko had been forcing his wooing upon Anita. George Prince was a weakling whose only good quality was his love for his sister. Some years ago he had fallen into evil ways. Been arrested, and then been discharged from his position with the Federated Corporation. He had taken up with evil companions in Greater New York. Mostly Martians. And Miko had met him. His technical knowledge, his training with the Federated Corporation, made him valuable to Miko's enterprise. And so Prince had joined the brigands.

Of all this, Anita had been unaware. She had never liked Miko. Feared him. But it seemed that the Martian had some hold upon her brother, which puzzled and frightened Anita.

Then Miko had fallen in love with her. George had not liked it. And that night on the Planetara, Miko had come and knocked upon Anita's door, and incautiously she had opened it. He forced himself in. And when she repulsed him, struggled with him, George had been awakened.

She was whispering to me now. "My room was dark. We were all three struggling. George was holding me—the shot came—and I screamed."

And Miko had fled, not knowing whom his shot had hit in the darkness.

"And when George died, Captain Carter wanted me to impersonate him. We planned it with Dr. Frank to try and learn what Miko and the others were doing; because I didn't know that poor George had fallen into such evil ways."

She whispered, "But I love you, Gregg. I want to be the first to say it: I love you—I love you."

We had the sanity to try and plan.

"Anita, tell Miko we discussed the multiple powers of the catalyst. Discussed how carefully it would have to be transported; how to gauge its worth. You'll have to be careful, clever. Don't say too much. Tell him we estimate the value at about a hundred and thirty millions."

I repeated what Miko had told me of his plans. She knew all that. And Snap knew it. She had a few moments alone with Snap and gave me now a message from him, "We'll pull out of this, Gregg."

With Snap she had worked out a plan. There were Snap and I; and Shac and Dud Ardley upon whom we could doubtless depend. And Dr. Frank. Against us were Miko and his sister, and Coniston and Hahn. Of course, there were the members of the crew. But we were numerically the stronger when it came to true leadership. Unarmed and guarded now. But if we could break loose—recapture the ship....

I sat listening to Anita's eager whispers. It seemed feasible. Miko did not altogether trust George Prince; Anita was now unarmed.

"But I can make opportunity! I can get one of their ray cylinders, and an invisible cloak equipment."

That cloak, that had been hidden in Miko's room when Carter searched for it in A20 was now in the chart room by Johnson's body. It had been repaired now. Anita thought she could get possession of it.

We worked out the details of the plan. Anita would arm herself, and come and release me. Together, with a paralyzing ray, we could creep about the ship, overcome these brigands, one by one. There were so few of the leaders. With them felled, and with us in control of the turret and the radio room, we could force the crew to stay at their posts. There were, Anita said, no navigators among Miko's crew. They would not dare oppose us.

"But it should be done at once, Anita. In a few hours we will be at the asteroid."

"Yes. I will go now and try to get the weapons."

"Where is Snap?"

"Still in the radio room. One of the crew guards him."

Coniston was roaming the ship. He was still loitering on the deck, watching my door. Hahn was in the turret. The morning watch of the crew were at their posts in the hull corridors. The stewards were preparing a morning meal. There were nine members of subordinates altogether, Anita had calculated. Six of them were in Miko's pay. The other three—our own men who had not been killed in the fighting—had joined the brigands.

"And Dr. Frank, Anita?"

He was in the lounge. All the passengers were herded there, with Miko and Moa alternating on guard.

"I will arrange it with Venza," Anita whispered swiftly. "She will tell the others. Dr. Frank knows about it now. He thinks it can be done."

The possibility of it swept me anew. The brigands were of necessity scattered singly about the ship. One by one, creeping under cover of an invisible cloak, I could fell them, and replace them without alarming others. My thoughts leaped to it. We would strike down the guard in the radio room. Release Snap. At the turret we could assail Hahn, and replace him with Snap.

Coniston's voice outside broke in upon us. "Prince."

He was coming forward. Anita stood in the doorway. "I have the figures, Coniston. By God, this Haljan is with us! And clever! We think it will total a hundred and thirty millions. What a stake!"

She whispered, "Gregg dear, I'll be back soon. We can do it—be ready!"

"Anita—be careful of yourself! If they should suspect you...."

"I'll be careful. In an hour, Gregg, or less, I'll come back.... All right, Coniston. Where is Miko? I want to see him. Stay where you are, Haljan. In good time Miko will trust you with your liberty. You'll be rich like all of us. Never fear."

She swaggered out upon the deck, waved at the brigand, and banged my cubby door in my face.

I sat upon my bunk. Waiting. Would she come back? Would she be successful?

SPIRAL CASTLE by Gavin Chappell

4

Kohl sat alone in the cellar, gazing irritably into his crystal. Just as he was expecting the longhaired boy to return with the Sword of Nodons, a great light had shone out from the image of the house in his crystal, blinding him. Now the crystal was dead, useless. He hurried from the cellar.

In the operations room, he accosted one of the native policemen, a small, ill-favoured subhuman fellow whose Neolithic Cymric blood clearly flowed thick in his veins.

'Inspector McCavity!' he barked. 'Call him on the radio!'

The subhuman looked at him with all the abysmal stupidity of the savage.

'Well, I don't know if you have the authority to ask that,' he said, too asinine to recognise Kohl's natural superiority. 'You and these London coppers come barging in here, ordering us all about, the superintendent's doing everything you tell him without any questions... What's going on, that's what I want to know.'

'Your radio, give it me,' Kohl snapped impatiently, seizing it from the fellow's jacket. He called up the inspector.

'He's not answering,' said the savage with brutish sarcasm. 'Now give that back or I'll arrest you for theft!'

Kohl flung the radio at the man, who dropped it, then caught again. The Neo-Nazi looked scornfully at him.

'Weak and flabby,' he sneered. 'What right to exist has an evolutionary degenerate like you?' He turned and swept from the room.

Quietly, the constable returned the radio to his pocket.

'Like that is it, eh?' he said. 'We'll soon see about that, sir.'

The roar of an engine came from the car park, followed by a screech of gears. The constable hurried to the window to see Kohl speeding towards the road in a squad car.

'And that is theft,' said the constable quietly.

'How are we going to cross the lake?' Eloise gasped, trying to keep up with Menyw's long strides. The druid turned a corner and Eloise hurried after him, to see a police car parked in the lane. Two slumped forms were visible in the front.

'Our work, that,' said Menyw with satisfaction. The others came hurrying up.

'Aye, very nice,' said Osborne. 'But couldn't you just tell us what's going on?'

Menyw led them at a fast walk down the lane, past the vehicle.

'The ultra-secret Masonic lodge known as the *Ordo Templi Typhonis* - the Order of the Temple of Typhon - whose members include senior police officers and captains of industry, are in league with the Neo-Nazi Tybalt Kohl. They plan to use the Cauldron of Annwfn - the Cauldron of Rebirth, the reality behind the myth of the Holy Grail - to revive the Nazi Party and weld the European Union into a fascist superstate that will go on to crush the world beneath its jackboot.'

'And aren't you sorry you asked,' Nick said to Osborne in an undertone.

'We'd gathered that much,' said Eloise testily. 'But we want the Cauldron for good reasons. How will we get it, with these people against us?'

'By performing the Rite of Opening in the cellar of Caer Pedryfan Castle,' Menyw replied. 'But we must hurry. Kohl is still around and if he gets there first, who knows what may occur?'

They crested the rise to see, in the valley beyond, the spreading waters of Llyn Anwn.

'You still haven't said how we're going to get across to t' island,' said Osborne, gazing out at the ruined castle in the middle of the lake.

'Haven't I?' asked Menyw vaguely. He indicated the dark shape of a boathouse directly below them. 'My yacht, the Prydwen,' he said proudly. 'We'll use that.'

'You've been expecting this to happen, haven't you?' said Eloise, as he led them down the path to the boathouse.

'For thousands of years,' the druid replied sombrely.

'Wake up!' Kohl snarled.

Inspector McCavity awoke from comforting dreams of global supremacy to see the Führer-to-be glaring through the van windscreen. Behind him, parked at a far-from legal angle, was a squad car belonging to the North Wales Police.

'Did you have permission to take that?' he asked.

The Neo-Nazi glared impatiently at the car.

'Don't be so obscurely legalistic, oaf!' he barked. 'The hippie degenerates are even now heading for the castle - and you're sleeping on the job!'

'What?' the inspector bellowed. DS Dover stirred. 'Get driving!' McCavity shouted.

While Dover blinked in bewilderment, Kohl threw the door open and sat beside the inspector.

'Obey your superior!' he screamed. In panic, Dover turned the key in the ignition. The engine roared into life. 'Now drive to the lake!' Kohl said hysterically. Dover obeyed.

Menyw's yacht was all ready to sail and with a little help from Hamish, Nick and Eloise, they were soon crossing the still waters of the lake.

'How did you three learn so much about yachting?' asked Osborne from the cabin door.

Eloise glanced at him. 'The hard way.'

'By accident,' grunted Hamish.

'In the middle of the North Sea,' added Nick, with a cracked laugh. 'Don't ask.'

'I won't!' Osborne replied.

They reached the island a few minutes later.

'Weigh anchor here,' said Menyw. 'We should be able to wade the rest...'
He broke off, as they all heard the distant sound of a vehicle engine from the shore of the lake. Rapidly, it grew louder.

'That sounds ominous,' said Osborne.

'Some no-good boyo ragging his engine,' Siân said dismissively.

'No,' said Menyw. 'I know who is coming. Hurry, children. Onto the island.' He climbed over the side and splashed across the shallow water.

'Children!' said Osborne in disgust. But he followed the others over the side.

The water was not deep and they were close to the rocky shoreline. They splashed across while Menyw waited for them on the shore. Behind him rose the wall of the castle.

'Hurry!' he said urgently. The distant engine noise had ceased and now the lake was silent apart from the gentle lapping of water against the shore.

On the further shore, Kohl stood brooding darkly, while the two policemen investigated the boathouse.

'Empty,' reported the inspector.

Kohl turned on him.

'Idiot!' he hissed. 'We will have to swim!'

'Swim?' asked Dover.

Kohl glared at him. 'Do you want the Cauldron to fall into the hands of these degenerates?' he asked coldly.

'With respect, Führer,' the inspector said, 'they do have both the Spear and the Sword. Within those castle walls is the Stone of Pretanos. I can't see what we can do.'

'Face it, Kohl,' said Sergeant Dover, bitterly. 'The cause is lost. Nothing can stop them now.'

Kohl laughed wildly. The two policemen exchanged puzzled glances. McCavity shook his head.

Eloise's heart beat rapidly with excitement as they hurried up the winding path to the castle entrance. Beside her was Osborne, carrying the Sword and Hamish with his spear. Menyw strode on ahead, while Siân and Nick were bickering quietly behind them.

Finally, they had reached their goal! Eloise cast her mind back over the events of their long and varied journey. They had come so far, endured so many perils, to reach this point.

The door was locked.

Menyw rattled it and glanced in embarrassment at his companions.

'I forgot,' he said. 'This is private property nowadays.' He looked defensive. 'It's been a few centuries since I was last here. I've had no real reason to pop over. But I have been prepared for this moment. Otherwise.'

'Don't worry, mate,' said Nick in his business-like voice. He pushed forward. 'The bizzies didn't even bother searching me,' he added, smugly producing his lock pick. 'Now.... Let me see.'

Eloise folded her arms and stamped her feet against the night chill. She looked down at the crouching crustie. How long would it take for them to get past this final obstacle?

'The car's been abandoned, sir,' reported the constable.

The sergeant looked around the scene.

'What's going on here?' he said. 'Inspector McCavity's civilian friend stealing police vehicles! You did see him driving it off, didn't you, constable?'

'I did,' the constable replied stolidly.

'And all those blokes asleep back there,' the sergeant added ruminatively, pacing back and forth. 'Aha! What's this?' he said suddenly, crouching down.

'Sarge?' asked the constable.

'Tyre tracks,' the sergeant announced. 'Someone drove off from here, at high speed. Towards the lake.'

'You think it's this German bloke?' asked the constable.

'Could be,' the sergeant replied. 'Someone got out of this car in a hurry.' He indicated the open door.

'What now, sarge?' prompted the constable. 'Down to the lake?'

The sergeant nodded.

They reached the lake moments later, in another squad car. Pulling up beside the vicarage boathouse, the constable turned off the engine and they gazed at the lake.

'Sarge - what's that?' asked the constable suddenly.

The sergeant followed his pointing finger.

'Looks like three men swimming towards the island,' said the sergeant. He grabbed a pair of binoculars from the glove compartment and trained them on the dark bobbing specks.

'That island's private property, isn't it?' asked the constable.

'Yes...' said the sergeant. 'Where are they now... Ah!' He went silent.

'Who is it?' asked the constable. 'Is it the German?'

The sergeant nodded grimly.

'And with him that Saes inspector and his snot-nosed sergeant,' he said, putting down the field glasses. He seized the radio. 'Time to call up support...'

The lock finally creaked into life. The door opened slowly, revealing a dark antechamber within.

'Who's going first?' asked Eloise.

'Ah will,' said Hamish, hefting his spear.

'Better if I do,' Osborne replied. 'There could be something dangerous in there.'

Hamish glared at him.

'That's why Ah'm gaun first,' he growled.

'If you two are going to fight about it...' snapped Siân, slipping between them. She entered the building.

They glared at her.

'Come on,' said Eloise, smiling to herself. They crowded into the dark hallway.

'Light switch,' announced Siân. There was a click and the room was instantly bathed in electric light.

Eloise blinked around. The castle had evidently been refurbished sometime in the 1930s, by the look of things. Back then, there had been something of a fad for castles among rich occultists; everyone from Yeats and Crowley to Jung and Himmler had found their own towers to occupy, before the outbreak of war.

'The castle must have been like this since Anghelides' master first lived here,' she murmured.

'What's that?' asked Siân.

Eloise looked at her. 'Samaël Anghelides,' she replied. 'The notorious chaos magician! His spiritual master reoccupied this castle in the thirties. It was after I read Anghelides' notebooks that I decided to come to Wales.'

There was a noise from upstairs. Hamish hefted his spear and advanced on the little door in the wall. As he opened it to reveal a spiral staircase winding upwards and downwards, Menyw turned to him.

'Where are you going?'

'Ah'm gaun to see what's gaun on upstairs,' the Scot replied.

Eloise glanced anxiously at her watch.

'It's getting very close to midnight,' she pointed out. 'Hadn't we better get the rite started?'

'Eloise is right,' the druid announced. 'Besides, I'm sure that noise is nothing to worry about.'

'We'd better hurry up, then,' said Nick. 'Downstairs, Hamish.'

Hamish glowered at them, then clumped down the spiral staircase. The others followed him in single file.

The staircase ended at a dark archway, beyond which Eloise, peering over Hamish's brawny shoulder, could see nothing. The light from the room above had illuminated their ascent, but now they were in darkness.

'Didnae anyone remember to bring a torch?' shouted Hamish.

'Here!' said Nick, passing a pen-torch to Eloise. She handed it over to Hamish.

'Trust gadget-man,' Hamish said. 'How d'you turn this fuckin' thing on... Och, right.'

The thin beam lanced through the darkness. Hamish shone it around, revealing a high-roofed vault, supported by rough-hewn pillars, looking like the monoliths of a stone circle.

In the centre of the vault was a horizontal stone, roughly box-shaped, about the same size as the Stone of Scone.

'That's the stone!' Menyw hissed. 'It was on that stone that I crowned Pretanos high king of Albion, over two thousand years ago.'

'That's the stone?' asked Nick. 'That's what we've come so far to find?' He walked over to it, strangely fascinated. The others followed.

'Eloise, what is the time?' asked Menyw, after a while.

She glanced at her watch in the dim light of the pen torch. 'Ten minutes to midnight,' she said. How time had flown!

'Good,' said Menyw indifferently. 'We still have sufficient time. Do you remember the chant?' They nodded. 'Now, Hamish - stand here.' Hamish took his place at one side of the stone. 'Osborne, on the other.' Osborne moved where he was directed. 'Nick, here.' Nick stood between them. 'Eloise, my dear, on the other side.' Eloise completed the circle. 'Siân, stand behind Eloise and I will stand on the far side. Now, circle the stone and repeat the words.'

The chant he had taught them was in some ancient tongue that meant nothing to Eloise, but it possessed a strange lulling rhythm as it echoed through the stone chamber. The surrounding walls magnified their voices, flinging them back to boom around them eerily. As the chant reached a

crescendo, Menyw motioned to Osborne to plunge the Sword into the stone. The biker raised it uncertainly. Menyw lifted a hand for silence.

Just as Osborne was about to sink the shining sword into the ancient stone, a voice came from the arch behind him.

‘So, you are here at last?’

Eloise turned to see a horrifying figure standing in the archway.

Semi-naked, his body covered by horrific burns and flayed in places, his throat gashed open, Samaël Anghelides, infamous Chaos magickian and Ipsissimus mage of the *Ordo Templi Typhonis*, regarded the little group. He paced forward.

‘Surprised to see me?’ he wheezed.

‘Surprised to see you standing,’ said Eloise. ‘Then again, the last time we saw you, you were already one of the walking dead.’

‘Death has no hold on me,’ Anghelides replied.

‘Who is this man?’ Siân asked, gagging.

‘This is Samaël Anghelides,’ said Eloise. ‘The occultist I mentioned. He’s also dead - twice. The second time, I killed him.’ Her voice dropped towards the end of the sentence.

‘And left me to burn in my house, which you proceeded to loot, you naughty child,’ Anghelides added. ‘But now we are reunited at last - and I may take my revenge.’ He cocked his head at a commotion from upstairs.

‘How can you do anything?’ Hamish growled. He broke away from the circle and menaced the magician with his spear. ‘There’s more of us than you, pizza-face.’

Anghelides raised his arms quickly, splaying out his fingers.

‘Stop!’ he said. His voice rang out commandingly. Hamish scowled, finding that his legs refused to move. ‘My will is infinitely stronger than yours,’ he added.

Osborne turned and came at the occultist with his sword. He turned his hands in the biker’s direction and Osborne also halted. Anghelides cast his hands across the entire group.

‘Return to your places,’ he told Osborne and Hamish. To their own amazement, they obeyed. ‘Now,’ Anghelides went on, as footsteps came tramping down the stairs. ‘I believe you have met our guests.’

Kohl appeared in the doorway, the two policemen behind him. He nodded distastefully at Anghelides.

‘Your material shell has seen better days,’ he remarked viciously. ‘How long will that body last?’

‘Longer than your own,’ Anghelides sneered. ‘Now - take the places of these degenerates and complete the rite they have begun. Once the way to the cauldron is open, I need concern myself with this weak flesh no longer.’

‘Fool,’ Kohl spat. ‘You know full well that the cauldron may only be used once every thousand years. You think your life is more important than that of the Partei? There is no place for you on the quest for the Cauldron of Rebirth.’

‘You have been my rival ever since the ill-fated day we allowed you to enter the Temple!’ snarled Anghelides. ‘You will try to stop me now? Your crazy schemes are of no interest to the Order. We chose you to bring this situation about - and a poor choice you have been. But now you have fulfilled your purpose, it is time for the Order to decide how we shall utilise this great artefact! Only when my body has been restored to health and vitality can we

hope to seize control of the world! Your Nazi dreams are nothing besides the global domination we will achieve.'

Menyw had been standing in silence throughout the exchange. But at this, he stirred.

'Now!' he bellowed at Osborne. The biker looked at him, startled to find Anghelides' hold over him had gone, then plunged the Sword into the stone.

As the four intruders whirled round, the shimmering blade sank easily into the surface of the stone, coming to a rest six inches down. Marvelling, Osborne took his hands away. For a second there was silence, as the people in the room stared at the sight.

A distant grinding sound came from the rock at their feet.

'Get back,' cried Menyw, as the noise grew louder. The floor began to vibrate. The travellers scurried towards the walls, while their enemies ducked into the cover of the arch.

Slowly, gradually, the stone began to rise. Beams of light flickered out from beneath as it levitated to a height of about six feet. Slowly, the hole in the stone beneath began to open up, cracking backwards as the light blazed upwards and dimmed down to reveal a dark abyss. The Sword and the stone hung suspended above it.

'Behold,' said Menyw, his voice thick with emotion. 'The gateway to Annwfn.'

Kohl stepped forward.

'My thanks, old man,' he sneered. Hamish turned and menaced him with the Spear.

'Inspector! Sergeant!' Kohl snapped. The two policemen leapt on Hamish, bearing him to the ground. Osborne and Siân threw themselves at them. Somewhere in the scrum, Hamish lost hold of his spear.

Eloise leapt forward to grab it, but Kohl got there first. Menyw took a step forward. Kohl jabbed at him with the Spear.

'Did you learn nothing from your master's downfall?' said the druid. 'He who uses occult powers for evil ends faces a terrible fate.'

'Nonsense,' Kohl laughed. 'No genuine morality exists in this blind, uncaring universe. Opportunity is for the strong, while the weak deserve to be crushed.' He indicated the struggling figures nearby. 'These fools are their own worst enemies. I seized my chance and I have won.'

Anghelides was about to speak when another voice rang out from the archway.

'Alright, that's enough out of you,' the Welsh police sergeant bellowed. Eloise turned, as police flooded into the room. They seized hold of the scuffling figures and forced them to the ground.

'Get your hands off me, idiot,' the inspector spat. 'I'm a policeman!'

'You're a criminal, inspector,' said the sergeant. 'There's only one thing worse than a corrupt copper - and that's a corrupt copper up from London. I don't know what's been going on in here' - he nodded towards the levitating stone and the eccentric figures dotted about the room - 'but I know enough about you to have you put away for a long time. And you can put that away, too,' he told Kohl, nodding at the Spear. 'That's an offensive weapon.'

'Indeed,' Anghelides croaked, stepping out of the shadow where he had ensconced himself as the police entered the room. 'Or rather, give it to me, your spiritual superior.'

He seized the Spear. Kohl tried to heave it back out of his hands. They began to struggle at the edge of the hole.

'Stop that!' the sergeant shouted. 'You'll fall into that... hole...'

Before he completed his sentence, the two rival occultists toppled over into the abyss. The sergeant crossed to the edge of the hole and looked cautiously downwards.

'Well, that's two less suspects to deal with,' he said.

Menyw bustled forward. 'You fail to understand, sergeant. Those evil men have the Spear. Whichever one of them reaches the cauldron, they will return to wreak havoc.'

'Too right I don't understand, vicar,' the sergeant replied. 'I don't understand what you're doing mixed up with this lot. But seeing as you are a good man and have been a pillar of our community since my dad's day...'

'Longer than that,' Menyw corrected gently.

'...I'm willing to turn a blind eye,' the sergeant went on. 'But this lot are coming with me.'

'Take the two policemen, by all means,' said Menyw. 'But the others are my friends and were merely trying to stop them do something far worse than break the law of the land.'

'There's a distinct lack of respect for the law around here,' said the sergeant heavily, 'and I'm not at all sure I care for it. Still, I'm not so hidebound that I wouldn't consider bending a few rules myself.' He turned to his men. 'Take the coppers, but let the others go. Mr. Menyw will vouch for them.'

Grumbling, the policemen uncuffed Hamish, Osborne and Siân, then hustled McCavity and Dover up the steps.

'Now I want to hear no more about this,' said the sergeant. 'I'll leave you now, since I'm sure you've all got things to discuss. But I want you out of this tower by morning. It is private property.'

He turned and left.

'There now,' said Menyw. 'Not all corrupt policemen are bad!'

The others looked unconvinced.

'But what are we gaun to do the noo?' demanded Hamish. 'Those two keeches took ma spear.'

'Are they dead?' asked Eloise.

'I somehow doubt it,' said Menyw grimly. 'We must get after them. If they find the cauldron before us, who knows what they could be capable of?'

'Down there?' Eloise asked, gazing down into the darkness. She remembered her last look into the abyss and shuddered.

'We must go, or we will all be doomed.' Menyw looked around at all of them and they gazed back. Hamish was the first to nod.

'Aye,' he said. 'We're gonna get ma spear back!'

CARMILLA by J Sheridan Le Fanu

XIII

The Woodman

"There soon, however, appeared some drawbacks. In the first place, Millarca complained of extreme languor--the weakness that remained after

her late illness--and she never emerged from her room till the afternoon was pretty far advanced. In the next place, it was accidentally discovered, although she always locked her door on the inside, and never disturbed the key from its place till she admitted the maid to assist at her toilet, that she was undoubtedly sometimes absent from her room in the very early morning, and at various times later in the day, before she wished it to be understood that she was stirring. She was repeatedly seen from the windows of the schloss, in the first faint grey of the morning, walking through the trees, in an easterly direction, and looking like a person in a trance. This convinced me that she walked in her sleep. But this hypothesis did not solve the puzzle. How did she pass out from her room, leaving the door locked on the inside? How did she escape from the house without unbarring door or window?

"In the midst of my perplexities, an anxiety of a far more urgent kind presented itself.

"My dear child began to lose her looks and health, and that in a manner so mysterious, and even horrible, that I became thoroughly frightened.

"She was at first visited by appalling dreams; then, as she fancied, by a specter, sometimes resembling Millarca, sometimes in the shape of a beast, indistinctly seen, walking round the foot of her bed, from side to side.

Lastly came sensations. One, not unpleasant, but very peculiar, she said, resembled the flow of an icy stream against her breast. At a later time, she felt something like a pair of large needles pierce her, a little below the throat, with a very sharp pain. A few nights after, followed a gradual and convulsive sense of strangulation; then came unconsciousness."

I could hear distinctly every word the kind old General was saying, because by this time we were driving upon the short grass that spreads on either side of the road as you approach the roofless village which had not shown the smoke of a chimney for more than half a century.

You may guess how strangely I felt as I heard my own symptoms so exactly described in those which had been experienced by the poor girl who, but for the catastrophe which followed, would have been at that moment a visitor at my father's chateau. You may suppose, also, how I felt as I heard him detail habits and mysterious peculiarities which were, in fact, those of our beautiful guest, Carmilla!

A vista opened in the forest; we were on a sudden under the chimneys and gables of the ruined village, and the towers and battlements of the dismantled castle, round which gigantic trees are grouped, overhung us from a slight eminence.

In a frightened dream I got down from the carriage, and in silence, for we had each abundant matter for thinking; we soon mounted the ascent, and were among the spacious chambers, winding stairs, and dark corridors of the castle.

"And this was once the palatial residence of the Karnsteins!" said the old General at length, as from a great window he looked out across the village, and saw the wide, undulating expanse of forest. "It was a bad family, and here its bloodstained annals were written," he continued. "It is hard that they should, after death, continue to plague the human race with their atrocious lusts. That is the chapel of the Karnsteins, down there."

He pointed down to the grey walls of the Gothic building partly visible through the foliage, a little way down the steep. "And I hear the axe of a

woodman," he added, "busy among the trees that surround it; he possibly may give us the information of which I am in search, and point out the grave of Mircalla, Countess of Karnstein. These rustics preserve the local traditions of great families, whose stories die out among the rich and titled so soon as the families themselves become extinct."

"We have a portrait, at home, of Mircalla, the Countess Karnstein; should you like to see it?" asked my father.

"Time enough, dear friend," replied the General. "I believe that I have seen the original; and one motive which has led me to you earlier than I at first intended, was to explore the chapel which we are now approaching."

"What! see the Countess Mircalla," exclaimed my father; "why, she has been dead more than a century!"

"Not so dead as you fancy, I am told," answered the General.

"I confess, General, you puzzle me utterly," replied my father, looking at him, I fancied, for a moment with a return of the suspicion I detected before. But although there was anger and detestation, at times, in the old General's manner, there was nothing flighty.

"There remains to me," he said, as we passed under the heavy arch of the Gothic church--for its dimensions would have justified its being so styled--"but one object which can interest me during the few years that remain to me on earth, and that is to wreak on her the vengeance which, I thank God, may still be accomplished by a mortal arm."

"What vengeance can you mean?" asked my father, in increasing amazement.

"I mean, to decapitate the monster," he answered, with a fierce flush, and a stamp that echoed mournfully through the hollow ruin, and his clenched hand was at the same moment raised, as if it grasped the handle of an axe, while he shook it ferociously in the air.

"What?" exclaimed my father, more than ever bewildered.

"To strike her head off."

"Cut her head off!"

"Aye, with a hatchet, with a spade, or with anything that can cleave through her murderous throat. You shall hear," he answered, trembling with rage. And hurrying forward he said:

"That beam will answer for a seat; your dear child is fatigued; let her be seated, and I will, in a few sentences, close my dreadful story."

The squared block of wood, which lay on the grass-grown pavement of the chapel, formed a bench on which I was very glad to seat myself, and in the meantime the General called to the woodman, who had been removing some boughs which leaned upon the old walls; and, axe in hand, the hardy old fellow stood before us.

He could not tell us anything of these monuments; but there was an old man, he said, a ranger of this forest, at present sojourning in the house of the priest, about two miles away, who could point out every monument of the old Karnstein family; and, for a trifle, he undertook to bring him back with him, if we would lend him one of our horses, in little more than half an hour.

"Have you been long employed about this forest?" asked my father of the old man.

"I have been a woodman here," he answered in his patois, "under the forester, all my days; so has my father before me, and so on, as many

generations as I can count up. I could show you the very house in the village here, in which my ancestors lived."

"How came the village to be deserted?" asked the General.

"It was troubled by revenants, sir; several were tracked to their graves, there detected by the usual tests, and extinguished in the usual way, by decapitation, by the stake, and by burning; but not until many of the villagers were killed.

"But after all these proceedings according to law," he continued--"so many graves opened, and so many vampires deprived of their horrible animation--the village was not relieved. But a Moravian nobleman, who happened to be traveling this way, heard how matters were, and being skilled--as many people are in his country--in such affairs, he offered to deliver the village from its tormentor. He did so thus: There being a bright moon that night, he ascended, shortly after sunset, the towers of the chapel here, from whence he could distinctly see the churchyard beneath him; you can see it from that window. From this point he watched until he saw the vampire come out of his grave, and place near it the linen clothes in which he had been folded, and then glide away towards the village to plague its inhabitants.

"The stranger, having seen all this, came down from the steeple, took the linen wrappings of the vampire, and carried them up to the top of the tower, which he again mounted. When the vampire returned from his prowlings and missed his clothes, he cried furiously to the Moravian, whom he saw at the summit of the tower, and who, in reply, beckoned him to ascend and take them. Whereupon the vampire, accepting his invitation, began to climb the steeple, and so soon as he had reached the battlements, the Moravian, with a stroke of his sword, clove his skull in twain, hurling him down to the churchyard, whither, descending by the winding stairs, the stranger followed and cut his head off, and next day delivered it and the body to the villagers, who duly impaled and burnt them.

"This Moravian nobleman had authority from the then head of the family to remove the tomb of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, which he did effectually, so that in a little while its site was quite forgotten."

"Can you point out where it stood?" asked the General, eagerly.

The forester shook his head, and smiled.

"Not a soul living could tell you that now," he said; "besides, they say her body was removed; but no one is sure of that either."

Having thus spoken, as time pressed, he dropped his axe and departed, leaving us to hear the remainder of the General's strange story.