

BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

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Sine

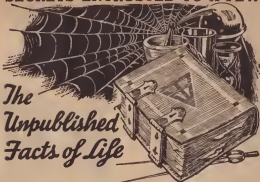
THE white letters on the corrugated blackboard spelled out — COVENTION — October 30 and 31—Crystal Room.

I chuctled. Hotel bulletin boards are like movie marquees. Often as not, there is something misspelled on them.

My smie faded and I glanced around uneasily, but my man

Illustrated by VIDMER

SECRETS ENTRUSTED TO A FEW



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE ARE some things that can not be generally told—things you ought to know. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for personal power and accomplishment in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of the hidden processes of man's mind, and the mystery of life's problems. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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San Jose, California, U.S.A.

Please send copy of sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life," which I shall read as directed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

of the magus

*Being an unusual private eye, Casey
could spell . . . but he couldn't spell
a way out of enchantment and murder!*



hadn't come in. There was no reason to be uneasy, except that I didn't like the job. Not that it promised to be tough. It was too simple, really, and the old lady was paying too much, and I felt as if there were eyes watching me—which was a good switch and enough to give any private detective a neurosis and . . .

Hell! Why should anyone pay me a thousand bucks just to find out a guy's name?

I walked across the wide polished-marble floor to the desk. I rigged myself against it so that I could watch the door, and the clerk looked up. You know the type. Thin, thirtyish, his embittered bald head gleaming even brighter than the floor, obsequious to his superiors, vindictive toward those placed under him. It was my misfortune that he knew me.

"Hello, Charlie," I said.

"Casey," he said suspiciously. "What are you doing here?"

"Business."

"No trouble, Casey," he said warily, "or I'll have you tossed out of here. The management won't have you raiding rooms and snapping pictures. Our guests pay—"

"No trouble," I said. "It's not that kind of assignment."

HE subsided, but his eyes were restless on my face. "Since when have you handled anything but divorce cases?"

"I've come up in the world, Charlie. Who puts the notices on the board over there?"

"I do," he said. "Why?"

"Can't spell, either, eh?" I said.

He glanced at the board and then back at me, his face serious. "There's nothing misspelled there," he said.

"You know," I told him, "I've always wanted to attend a convention." It started as a joke but, when I got to the key word, my voice broke, and a shiver ran up my back.

"Now's your chance," Charlie said, "because that's what it is. He insisted on it being spelled that way."

"A nice story," I said, "but it would never stand up in court."

"There he is now, coming through the door," Charlie told me.

I turned my head and froze. He was a tall man, with dark hair and graying temples, slim and distinguished in evening clothes. And in his lapel, as he passed, was a five-pointed star, small, golden and engraved. The description checked. This was my man.

I started after him.

"Casey . . ." Charlie began. He was warning me.

I waved a reassuring hand back at him and followed the dark back that moved straight and purposefully toward the elevator bank.

One car was almost full. My

quarry stepped into it and turned around. The doors started to close in front of my face. He looked directly at me for a long moment before the doors slid together.

His eyes were deep and black and speculative. And I got a foolish impression that they continued to stare at me through the closed brass doors, seeing, weighing, and discarding contemptuously, before they turned their speculative depth on something more worthy.

The after-image vanished. I looked up quickly. The arrow was slowing. It came to a stop on C, there hesitated before it began swinging again.

"Going up?" someone asked, almost in my ear.

I jumped and caught myself, then stepped through the open doors of the car on my right. The doors closed. "C," I said.

We silently slid upward. Bricks alternated with painted metal in the frames of the small windows. *M, A, B*, went by. The first stop was mine. The doors parted in front of me, and I was in a carpeted hall facing a cream-colored corridor wall. Painted in gold, was an arrow pointing to my right. Above it, were two words—*Crystal Room*.

THE Crystal Room had double doors, but only one of them was open. There was a dark back just going through it. A young

man stood beside the door, nodding respectfully to the man who entered. A doorkeeper—the party was private.

Keeper of the crystal door. Inside was something called a convention that sent unreasonable shivers up my back. And inside, too, was a nameless man — I couldn't mistake that erect back—whose name was worth a thousand dollars to me, and who had eyes like polished black obsidian daggers.

I pushed the flat automatic in my shoulder holster into a more comfortable position and started after my thousand bucks. I nodded familiarly to the doorkeeper, who had broad shoulders, a crew-cut and a pleasant sunburned face, and started through the doorway.

I felt as if I had walked into a glass wall. I stopped and rubbed my nose ruefully.

"Where's your name card?" the doorkeeper asked.

"Name card?" I said aimlessly. I snapped my fingers. "I knew I forgot something. But you know me. Casey from Kansas City? Met you last year. Don't you remember my face?"

He frowned. "How would I remember your face?"

That stopped me. Why wouldn't he remember my face—outside of the fact that he had never seen it before? He didn't recognize me, but, apparently, that was all right.

He didn't expect to!

"Maybe I've stuck the card in one of my pockets," I said.

I began rummaging hopefully through my gray flannel suit. There was only one way to go from here—back, the way I came—but I could make it graceful. Then, I felt something slick and rectangular in my right-hand coat pocket. Slowly, I pulled it out. It was a name card.

The young man looked at it and nodded. "Gabriel," he said. "Wear it from now on. I can't let anybody in without a card."

I nodded mechanically and walked cautiously into the large room. The invisible wall was gone. Just inside the door, I stopped and turned the card over.

In the center was a circular seal. Imprinted over it in black, were two lines of type. *Call me GABRIEL, I read, or pay me five dollars.*

That was funny enough, but it wasn't the funniest part. The card had no business in my pocket. No one could have put it there. The suit had just come back from the cleaners. I put it on just before I left home this morning.

"Gabriel," I muttered to myself. Gabriel was one of the archangels, the one who carried messages and blew trumpets. That was a hell of a name for a man.

Convention — brass doors with eyes in them — invisible walls —

archangels! I shivered.

The Crystal Room was pleasant enough. It wasn't the largest ballroom in the hotel, but it was one of the most attractive. A huge crystal chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling. Two smaller ones flanked it on either side. The ceiling and walls were painted a deep rose. The carpet on the floor was dark burgundy.

A MAKESHIFT stage had been put up at the other end of the room. It was draped in black with black hangings behind it. Several chairs were lined up neatly at the back of the stage. In front of them, was a lectern. Between me and the platform, were rows of wooden chairs—I counted thirteen rows of thirteen chairs each. A few of the the chairs were occupied, but most of the people in the room were standing, clustered in small groups, chatting. I looked them over carefully, but my man wasn't among them.

The scene was typical of hundreds of professional meetings that take place in hundreds of rooms daily, all over the country. Once a year, they assemble to discuss their single shared interest, to talk shop, to listen to the latest advances, to raise standards. And, to indulge in some heavy drinking, character assassination and idle—or not so idle—flirtations.

The men here were well dress-

ed—although none of them were in evening clothes—and distinguished. The women—there were fewer of them—were all young and beautiful. I'd never seen so many beautiful women in one room before, not even the time I tailed one wandering spouse backstage at a Broadway musical.

But what was their profession? It was a meeting of—what?

If I moved a few steps to the right, I could get a better look at a Junoesque redhead. I moved a few steps to the right. My foot caught. I stumbled. As I pitched forward, my arms reached out for support. They closed around something. It was softly rounded and yielding. It gasped. I looked up into a pair of blue eyes that were crinkled with sudden laughter. I was pressed tightly against one of the most delightful figures it has been my luck to be pressed tightly against.

"You see?" a soft low voice said. "Redheads are unlucky."

"For who?" I muttered.

"I don't think you'll fall down now," she said, laughing, "if you let go."

I straightened up and let my arms drop at my sides. "I must have stumbled over something." I looked down at the plush carpet suspiciously. But there was nothing to stumble over.

"It's better to stumble than to fall," she said. "Especially for La

Voisin. She's a hag, really. Fifty, if she's a day."

I took another look at the redhead. "I don't believe it."

She shrugged lightly, and I looked at *her* for the first time. She was only pretty—the rest of the women in the room were beautiful. Her blue eyes and dark hair made an interesting contrast, but her features had small imperfections. Her eyes were too large, her nose was too small and turned up a little at the end. Her mouth was too generous, her chin too stubborn. Now that I was straightened up, she reached only to my chin. But her skin was smooth cream and her figure was—well, I mentioned that already.

SHE seemed to be in her early twenties, which gave her almost a decade on me. The other women didn't look much older, it was true, but there was a maturity to them, and a youthfulness in her that revealed itself in an impish grin. She knew she was being inspected, and she didn't care.

She laughed again. It was a pleasing, girlish sound. "Have a program, Gabriel," she said.

She handed me a booklet from a stack beside her. I took it, wondering if her eyesight was unusually good. It would have to be, to read my name plate. I still had it in my hand.

I leaned forward to read the

name on the card attached to the exciting slope of her white knitted dress.

Call me ARIEL, it read, or pay me five dollars.

"Ariel?" I said. "Ariel? Where's Prospero?"

"He's dead," she said simply.

"Oh!" I said. That was the trouble with being an uninitiate. You couldn't say anything, for fear of saying the wrong thing. "Thanks for the program, Ariel. And the support."

"Any time," she said.

I started to turn away. A large, jovial man with white hair barred my path.

"Ariel," he said over my head. "It was sad news about your father. The society won't seem the same."

She murmured something while I glanced at the card on the broad chest in front of me. It demanded that its wearer be called Samael.

"It's a disgrace that he's got you here, passing out programs like a neophyte," Samael said. "You should be up on the platform with the others."

"Nonsense," she said. "I volunteered. And in spite of what my father was, I'm just an apprentice."

"Tut-tut," he said. I listened with fascination. I didn't think anyone said tut-tut any more. "You're an adept, if there ever was one. I'd match you against any of them."

"Excuse me," I said, trying to squeeze past.

"Samael," Ariel said. "This is Gabriel."

The large red face swiveled around to inspect me. "Gabriel, eh? I've heard fine things about you. Great things are expected—great things indeed."

He'd heard about me? "You haven't heard anything until you hear me blow my trumpet," I told him.

"Exactly," he said. "Exactly." He turned back to Ariel. "How did your father die, my dear?"

"Oh," she said slowly, "he just seemed to wither away."

"*Wither!*" The word held connotations for the red face that bleached it white. "Oh, dear! Withered, eh?" He was backing away, shaking his head in distress. "Very sad—very sad indeed. Ah, well, we all must go. Good-by, my dear."

I watched Ariel. She was staring sadly after the rapidly disappearing white haired Samael. "That's what always happens," she said.

JUST then, I saw my man come out of a small door in back of the platform and climb to the top of the stage. "Who's that?" I asked quickly, incautiously, touching her arm.

"I wish I knew," she said slowly.

"He's a stranger?" I said.

"Of course not. He's the Magus."

"The Magus?"

"That's what we call our chairman."

"But what's his name?" I wanted to know.

"He calls himself Solomon."

"Or pays five dollars. I know." I sighed. "See you around, Ariel."

The seats had begun to fill up, but the back row was still empty. I wandered over and sat down. Overhead, the crystal chandeliers tinkled their eternal music. This, in spite of the fact that I couldn't feel a breeze.

I wasn't playing it smart. I was blundering along, giving myself away at every opportunity. The girl now—she knew I didn't belong here. But she didn't seem to care. How many others knew?

It had all seemed so simple at first. Here's a thousand bucks. Find out a man's name.

A name, a name—what's in a name? Gabriel, Ariel, Prospero, Samael, La Voisin—how the hell did she sneak in?—and now Solomon, the Magus. I should have told the old lady that. I should have said, "What's in a name?"

II

I'D sat alone in my office for a long time after she left, thinking it over. I'd sat there flipping a quarter before she showed up, be-

cause it was my last quarter. I kept telling myself that, if it turned up heads, I would walk out of the office for the last time and go down and spend the quarter for a hot dog and a cup of coffee and then start looking for some lucrative work.

But, no matter how many times I flipped it, it always came up tails. Finally, I let it lay on the blotter.

When I'd looked up, the little, old gray-haired lady was sitting there, looking lost in the big chair. It was the one respectable piece of furniture in the office, except for the desk—and that was somewhat marred by my heels. The chair, of course, was due to be repossessed any day now.

I must have looked startled. I hadn't heard her come in.

"I knocked, but you didn't seem to hear me," she said. Her faded blue eyes twinkled. "Shall we talk business?"

"Business?" I said.

"I want you to find a man."

"Who?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't need a detective, would I?" she asked briskly. "He'll be coming into the lobby of the hotel around the corner between nine-thirty and ten o'clock tomorrow morning. You won't have any trouble recognizing him. I'm sure he'll be tall and slim, with dark hair, graying around the temples, very distinguished-look-

ing. He'll be wearing formal clothes."

"At ten o'clock in the morning?"

"Oh, yes. And he'll have a pentacle in his lapel."

"A what?"

"A five-pointed star, made of gold and engraved with symbols."

I nodded as if I understood. It was a good piece of acting. "What do you mean, you're sure he'll look like this and that? Haven't you seen him before?"

"Oh, yes. I saw him yesterday. I'm sure he won't trouble to change."

"Change what?" I asked with heavy sarcasm. "His clothes or his face?"

"Either. But I can see I'm confusing you. Oh, dear!"

CONFUSING me—that was the understatement of the year. My head was spinning like the gears of a slot machine. I should have called the whole thing off right then, but I looked down at the top of the desk and hit the jackpot. Beside the quarter was a rectangular piece of paper printed green. In each corner was a figure 1, followed by three lovely symbols for nothing. One by one the gears clicked to a stop. This, I could understand. I picked up the bill and turned it over. I crinkled it gently. It seemed genuine.

I looked at the little old lady

sitting in the chair, her spectacles perched on the end of her nose, and I didn't remember seeing or hearing her get up to approach the table.

"Will that be enough?" she asked anxiously.

"To start with," I said, and I was lost. "Let me get this straight. He'll be coming into the hotel lobby about ten in the morning. I spot him. I tail him—"

"And make very certain he doesn't know you're doing it—very certain! It could be dangerous."

"Dangerous, eh?" I stared at the bill in my hand. Maybe it wasn't so big after all. Not that I'm afraid of danger—not in moderate amounts. I just wasn't sure I wanted a thousand bucks' worth. "I tail him, and then what?"

"You find out his real name."

"I see." I nodded. "He's going under an alias."

She hesitated. "I guess that's what you'd call it. But you must remember that he's very skillful at—disguises. If you see him get in a car, and see someone get out later, looking much, much different, you musn't be surprised. His name will be what I want."

"I get it," I said. I really did. The old lady had a monomania. She had been looking under her bed for so long that she had started seeing things. Specifically, a man of many faces. And now, she wanted to know his name. You

wouldn't have suspected it, just looking at her, but monomaniacs are usually completely normal, except on the one subject of their madness. Nobody would show up in the lobby. I would charge her for a day's work and expenses and give the rest of the money back. Hell, if I turned her down, she might go to someone who wasn't ethical, who would give her a fake name and keep the whole thousand. It was the only thing to do. I was also hungry. "Where will I get in touch with you, Miss . . . ?"

"Mrs.," she said. "Mrs. Peabody. You won't." She hopped up spryly. "I'll get in touch with you." I got a final faded-blue flash of twinkling eyes as she swept out the door and was gone.

I leaped to my feet and reached the door in three strides. I tore it open and looked down the corridor both ways. The corridor was empty. I had wanted to ask her something. I'd planned to ask the name the man was going under, his alias. Mrs. Peabody had really hired herself a detective.

I went back to the desk and studied the bill for a long time. I almost didn't make it to the bank . . .

SOLOMON—that was his name. So what? There were lots of people named Solomon. I knew one myself. Sol the Tailor. But he had a last name. You don't go up

to a person and say, "I'm Solomon." Not unless you want the other person to reply wittily, "And I'm the Queen of Sheba." It wasn't such a hot alias.

I looked down at the program. It had a shiny black cover. Across the top it said:

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL
CONVENTION OF THE MAGI
October 30 and 31

In the middle was a seal, an odd-looking design of two concentric circles, enclosing what looked like the plan of an Egyptian burial pyramid. Not the pyramid itself, but the corridors and hidden chambers and transepts, or whatever they're called. In the corridors and between the two circles were letters printed in a foreign alphabet I didn't recognize.

The seal looked familiar. I looked at my name card. The same seal.

I leafed through the program. There were the usual advertisements. I read them with interest. They would give me a clue to the society.

One of them was illustrated with engraved five-pointed stars. **PENTACLES OF GUARANTEED EFFICACY**, it said. *Consecrated. Guaranteed. P. O. Box—*

Pentacles? I didn't know what they were, but if I ever needed one, I'd know where to get it. *Guaran-*

teed, too, for whatever it did.

Another ad touted a book entitled, ONE HUNDRED SPELLS FOR ALL OCCASIONS. *Revised, with mathematical and verbal equivalents printed side by side. Satisfaction or your money back.*

Spells? I frowned.

There was a long list of books which could be obtained from the Thaumaturgical Book Shop, for prices ranging from one hundred dollars. All were listed as manuscript copies.

At the bottom, all by itself, was CLAVICULA SOLOMONIS. *The true Key of Solomon—In his own hand.* This was priced at \$10,000. At that, it was dirt cheap. A manuscript written by Solomon himself!

I skipped over the page of the day's program and continued my inspection of the ads. You never realize the fantastic things you can buy until you chance upon a specialized bulletin like this.

Magic wands—cut from virgin hazel with one blow of a new sword; quill pens—from the third feather of the right wing of a male goose; arthames—tempered in mole blood; black hens and hares, nails—from the coffin of an executed criminal; graveyard dust—guaranteed . . .

IT was fascinating. Also, it pinpointed the nature of the society. It was a professional

organization for stage magicians. The names they used were their stage names. The things advertised were their tools, their props. Still, it was all so serious. *Guaranteed—satisfaction, or your money back.* The words and phrases were everywhere. Nothing was labeled as an illusion.

I shrugged. It was some kind of esoteric joke. I turned back to the list of the day's activities and puzzled over it for a moment. It was headed October 30, and it was the only page. Where was the one for October 31? I shrugged again. I decided I had been given a defective program.

I glanced down the page—

OCTOBER 30

- 10:30 SPELL and GREETINGS
by the Magus
- 10:45 WITCHCRAFT—A DERIVATION
- 10:50 SAFETY IN NUMBERS
—THE COVEN
- 11:00 THE ELEMENTS OF THE ART (with examples)
- 11:30 CONTAGION — WHY SPELLS ARE CATCHING
- 12:00 IMITATION — THE SINCEREST FORM OF SORCERY
- 12:30 CALCULUS, THE HIGH ROAD TO BETTER FORMULAE
- 1:00 Recess
- 3:00 PRACTICAL USES FOR FAMILIARS
- 4:00 ALEXANDER HAMILTON'S CORBIE
- 5:00 LYCANTHROPY — A DEMONSTRATION

That stopped me. I knew what lycanthropy was. It meant people turning into werewolves. And these people were going to demonstrate it. They were crazy, all of them, and the sooner I got out of here, the happier I would be.

"You don't belong here," someone said softly.

I looked around quickly. Ariel was sitting beside me, her head close to mine. In other circumstances, I would have enjoyed it. Now I drew back a little. "You're telling me," I said. "I mean, why do you think that?"

"It's obvious. You didn't know Solomon. You act like a stranger. And I happen to know that Gabriel is dead."

"Did he wither away?" My voice was uneven.

"No, he was hit by a car while crossing a street. I don't think anybody else knows."

I was wearing a dead man's card. "That does it," I said, getting up. "I'm leaving." This was obviously no place for me.

She had hold of my coat. She was yanking it vigorously, "Sit down," she whispered, looking around anxiously. I sat down. "You can't leave now," she said. "They'd get suspicious. And they don't take any chances. I won't give you away. Wait until recess, when everybody leaves."

I pointed a shaky finger at the program. "But this—*this* . . ."

SHE looked at me, and her eyes were wide and blue and innocent. "It's only magic."

"*Magic!*" I exclaimed softly. "Real magic?"

"Of course," she said. "What did you think it was?"

I had ideas on the subject, and they didn't coincide with hers. Magic? Madness was more like it. The only question was, who was crazy? She didn't look crazy. The rest of them didn't look crazy. They looked like handsome, intelligent people gathered together to discuss their profession. Magic? Oh, no! Not today. Not here and now in a big metropolitan hotel, with the sun shining down, and cars in the street outside, and airplanes flying overhead, and people going about their everyday business.

Spells and magic wands and graveyard dust. Witchcraft and formulae and sorcery. "*Ouch!*" I said.

"What's the matter?" Ariel asked anxiously.

I rubbed my thigh. I was awake all right. It was bad news. If I wasn't asleep, and *they* weren't crazy, *I* was the one who was off his rocker.

The man called Solomon was on his feet, standing behind the lectern. Everybody else was seated and the place was almost filled. Against the black drapes, Solomon's face floated whitely above

a triangular expanse of shirt front, and his disembodied white hands hovered in the air for silence. They got it.

He began to speak. His voice was low, resonant and clear, and I couldn't understand a word he said. His fluttering hands gestured a strange accompaniment. He finished, smiled and launched into a general welcoming speech to the society. It could have been repeated, word for word, to any professional meeting in the country.

Ariel leaned toward me. "The first part was an Egyptian spell," she whispered. "Asking that we be blessed every day."

"Damned decent of him," I growled, but it was to hide the fact that I did feel happier. Well, not happier exactly. There was a word for it, but I didn't want to use it. Blessed.

THE first five speakers on the program were as dry as only the learned can be when they are discussing their specialties. Even the audience of initiates grew restless, as they expounded their technicalities and quibbled over minutiae.

And I sat and listened in a state of shock. They were being dull about magic. They were being pedantic about sorcery. And a pragmatic belief in its existence as a practical, usable force lay behind everything they said.

One of them demonstrated, etymologically, that witchcraft is the art or craft of the wise. Another pointed out the significance of the Medieval satanist groups of thirteen, which were called covens, and why their annual meeting had been named as it was this year, and the thirteen rows of chairs in the room, each with thirteen chairs in it, and the number of people in attendance — exactly one hundred sixty-nine.

The audience murmured. Ariel stirred beside me. "I don't like it," she said nervously. "I was afraid of this."

If I had not been dazed by a continual bombardment of the impossible, I might have come out of the meeting with a liberal education in the theory and practice of magic. The next three speakers went into it thoroughly.

Terms swirled around me. Demonstrations went on in front of my eyes. Spells, rites, the condition of the performer—faith and works—Sir James Frazier—the reservoir of psychic power. Twisting columns of smoke assumed sub-human, leering faces. A beautiful girl in a bathing suit materialized out of the air and posed prettily for the audience. A tall cool drink appeared in a speaker's hand and was drained thirstily.

Contagion — the association of ideas by contiguity in space or time—the part is equal to the

whole—hair—nail clippings—the law of contact.

Imitation—the association of ideas by similarity—an effect can be produced by imitating it—wax images—homeopathy—the law of similarity.

Demonstrations. I held onto my seat.

The final speaker climbed slowly to the stage from the floor. For some reason, he had not been given a seat with the rest of the speakers. He was a little man, rosy-cheeked, with a fringe of white hair encircling a bald spot that gleamed pinkly from the stage as he bent over a thick bound manuscript.

He looked out over the audience hopefully and read a few introductory paragraphs in a high sprightly voice. His thesis was that developments in higher mathematics had made psychic phenomena truly controllable for the first time in history. He implied that the society had been founded on this theory, that its purpose had been to develop the theory into a workable science. He suggested that these things had been allowed to slip overboard—if they had not been purposefully jettisoned for something darker and less significant.

The audience murmured. There was a note of uneasiness in it. The speaker peered over the lectern benignly.

"Who's that?" I whispered to Ariel.

She was sitting up very straight, her eyes roaming over the audience. "Uriel," she said, and sighed.

In spite of this, Uriel said, he had been going ahead with the research as originally planned, and he now proposed to give the society a summary of the results.

HE asked for a blackboard and, like every other lecturer I've ever seen, had trouble getting it on the stage. Two young men struggled with it, stumbling, juggling, catching their feet on unsuspected projections. When it was finally in place, it effectively barred Solomon and the previous speakers from the view of the audience, but the board seemed to have a life of its own. It kept jiggling and jumping while Uriel was trying to write on it.

The audience tittered.

Uriel stepped back and turned his head to scan the upturned faces below him. He sighed, as if he was accustomed to this sort of thing. "We have practical jokers," he observed. "That is quickly remedied. You are all familiar with the usual verbal formula, which sometimes works and more often does not."

He drew two crude arrows on the blackboard. They pointed down at the floor. Above them, he scribbled a formula that looked

vaguely familiar to me, filled with elongated *f*'s and little triangles which, were, I supposed, the Greek letter *delta*. The moment Uriel wrote down the last symbol, the board stopped jiggling.

"Now," he said, in a patient professor with a backward class, "let us proceed."

And then he launched, unfortunately, into a history of calculus, beginning with Newton and Leibnitz, which bored everyone in the audience except a few who may have been professional mathematicians—and me, oddly enough. A little of my college mathematics came back, and the idea fascinated me. This was the first thing I could really understand. Magic as a science, and mathematics as the key to it.

"The merit of calculus," Uriel concluded, "is that it expresses concisely and accurately what verbal equivalents only approximate. Accuracy is what is needed, accuracy and limitation. How many times have you summoned something, a glass, say, from the kitchen, only to have your table littered with glasses? Accuracy. Accuracy and limitation. If you want to improve your formulae, know your calculus."

He turned to the blackboard, scribbled a formula on it, and the blackboard disappeared. Just like that—without smoke, curtains or prestidigitation. I blinked. There

was a smattering of applause. He nodded and trotted off the stage.

Ariel was clapping beside me.

"They didn't seem to like that very much," I whispered.

"Oh, they're too lazy to learn anything that complicated. It's a wonderful work, really, and Uriel's a dear, getting up every year and trying to help them. But they just laugh at him behind his back."

Those who had not sneaked out during Uriel's talk were getting up to leave. The morning session was over. We got up, too. I walked, dazed, into the corridor with Ariel. I didn't believe it. I tried to convince myself that I didn't believe it. But I had heard it and seen it. These weren't stage magicians with their illusions and distracting patter. They were the real thing—in the middle of the Twentieth Century.

And they were less suspected than if they had met atop Brocken on Walpurgis Night.

III

"**A**RIEL!" I said. "*Ariel!*" She was getting away from me, and she was my one bridge to reality. "I've got to talk with you."

"My company comes high," she said.

I frowned. "How much?"

"A steak," she said. "About that thick." She held out her fingers, two inches apart.

"Sold." A good deal all around.

There were fifty people waiting for the elevators. "Let's walk," Ariel suggested.

We started down the stairs.

"What's to stop me from telling the world?" I asked abruptly.

"Who'd believe you?"

"Nobody," I said gloomily.

I awoke to the fact that we had been walking down the steps for a long time—and I saw that they continued downward, without turning, until they vanished in the murk of the distance. I looked back the way we had come. The steps went up and up, unending. The walls were smooth and unbroken.

Panicky, I turned to Ariel. "Where the hell are we?" I asked.

"Oh, dear!" she said, looking around. "It looks very much like a trap."

"A trap?" I almost shouted.

"A maze." She caught my hand and patted it. "There's nothing to be alarmed about. It's very simple. We'll just have to sit down until I can get my bearings. People have starved in these, of course, but there's really no danger as long as you keep your head."

She sank down on a step. I collapsed beside her. She took some bobby pins out of her hair and began to bend them.

"You can talk if you wish," she said, her hands busy, "it won't disturb me."

"How long have people been able to do things like this?" I asked shakily.

"Not long. Unless you count the Chaldeans and the Minoans, and we can't be certain about them. In recorded history, it has been a haphazard business. Someone might stumble on the right formula and procedure, but he wouldn't tell, and the knowledge would die with him. The groundwork wasn't laid until my father and Uriel began experimenting with mathematical expressions of old spells."

"How did the rest of them get into the act?"

"Uriel wanted to give it to the world, publish it in a mathematical journal, you know—that sort of thing. But Father said they would be laughed at and locked up. He wanted everything investigated and documented before they disclosed anything. So he and Uriel recruited a few trusted friends and formed the society to compare results and present papers and decide policy."

I LOOKED far down the steps and shivered. "Nice friends."

"It grew," she said ruefully. "One member would present a friend of his for consideration. And then there have always been a certain number of practicing magicians and witches, in any period. Not adepts, you understand, but getting results occasionally. They

found out about the society. It couldn't be hidden from them. They demanded admittance, and Father decided it would be better to have them where they could be watched, and where they would have to obey the rules. But . . ."

She stopped. I looked up. Her eyes were filled with tears. I handed her my handkerchief. She wiped her eyes and smiled at me as she handed it back.

"That was silly," she said.

"No, it was natural. Go on."

"But it didn't work out that way. Gradually the others took control and turned the society in other directions. Now it's just a social group, without any real power, and the Art is used for all sorts of personal gratifications. So, last year Father, as Magus, proposed that it was time to make the Art public. Private research had done its part. The Art could best be furthered by general participation and discussion. He was voted down. He gave them an ultimatum. He would give them a year to think about it. If they didn't agree in that time, he and Uriel would reveal it."

"And then?" I prompted.

"A month later he died."

"Murder?" I exclaimed.

"You couldn't pin it down—he just seemed to wither away," she said. "Come on."

She got up. In her hands was a V-shaped wire, made of bobby

pins twisted together. She held the two ends, muttered something under her breath and walked up a few steps, holding the wire stiffly out in front of her. Or, maybe it was pulling her.

She stopped and turned toward one blank wall. I scrambled up after her, just in time to see her step through the wall. I stared at the wall with startled eyes. I was alone.

A white hand reached out from the wall, like the Lady in the Lake reaching up for Excalibur. It took my hand and led me forward. I closed my eyes. When I opened them, I was in the hotel lobby.

I looked back. The open stairs went up to a landing, turned and ascended toward the mezzanine. I faced Ariel. My knees were trembling, but I managed to keep my voice steady. "What would have happened if we had continued going down?"

But that was one question she refused to answer.

ARIEL got her steak. It was broiled, medium-rare, and she ate with an appetite that was a pleasure to watch. I was growing quite fond of Ariel. She was pretty, talented, natural . . .

I started talking, quickly. I had remembered her talent. "People don't just wither away," I said.

"Just before he died, Father told Uriel that somebody had said a Mass of St. Sicaire for him. But

his mind was wandering by then."

"A what?"

"A black mass. He said he'd been wrong—that they should have given the Art to the world as soon as they'd had proof."

"Or, better yet, burned it," I said gloomily.

"They thought of that. But somebody else would have discovered it—somebody less scrupulous, like some of the people who wormed their way into the society."

I returned to her father. The subject had a horrible fascination for me. "Can they do that? Make a man wither away?"

She shrugged. "Father was always so careful. He burned his nail clippings and hair combings. We haven't dared experiment with things like that, Gabriel, but some—"

"My name isn't Gabriel," I said firmly. "It's—"

"Sh-h-h!" she said, looking around fearfully. "You mustn't speak your real name. Anyone who knows it has power over you. That must have been what happened to Father. Several people knew his name. One of them must have mentioned it."

"To whom?"

She looked cautiously around the restaurant again. "To Solomon. He was always Father's chief rival, and he was the leader of the party that opposed making the Art pub-

lic. And now that Father is dead, Solomon has made himself Magus. No one will ever again suggest releasing the Art."

"But couldn't somebody talk? Couldn't you and Uriel tell the newspapers or somebody?"

She grew pale. "Oh, we *couldn't!* You don't know what Solomon could do! Only Father had a chance of defying him, and Father is dead. Did you notice how feeble Uriel looked today. I'm scared, Gabriel. If Uriel goes, I'll be all alone."

"But if you had his name," I said slowly, "you'd have a weapon against him. He would be helpless."

"That's right," she said eagerly. "Could you do that? Could you find out his name, Gabriel? I'd pay you. I'd—"

I frowned. "What do you think I am?"

She paused, as if she were considering the question for the first time. "I don't know," she said quietly. "What are you?"

"A private detective," I told her. "And I've got a client."

"It isn't Solomon, is it?" she asked quickly.

I thought about it for a moment and shook my head. "No, it isn't Solomon."

"Then couldn't you do this, too? What does your other client want?"

"The same as you."

"Then it wouldn't hurt to tell me, would it, Gabriel?" she said anxiously. "Please, Gabriel." Her blue eyes pleaded with me. I looked into them as long as I dared. My eyes fell away.

"I guess not," I said.

She breathed again. "Who is your other client?"

I shrugged. "A Mrs. Peabody. A little old lady. Know her?"

SHE shook her head impatiently.

"It could be anybody. Don't you see? We all go under assumed names when we're together, and most of us change our appearances, too, so that we won't be recognized."

I sat up straight. "You mean that you don't really look like this?"

"Oh, not me," she said quickly.

"Everybody knows me."

"That makes it even tougher to pin down Solomon. No name—no face. If we assume he's American, male and adult, we only have about sixty million people to choose from." Suddenly I snapped my fingers and got up.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Got an idea," I told her.

I breezed into the lobby and up to the desk. Charlie looked up respectfully, but his face fell into more familiar lines as he recognized me.

"The fellow who told you how to put that notice on the board,"

I said, "is he registered here?"

Charlie scowled at me. "Tricks?" he said.

"No tricks. Scout's honor!"

"Penthouse," he said.

"How'd he register?"

Charlie shuffled through a stack of cards and flipped one out on the desk. I looked at it hopefully. Then my heart sank down in the pit of my stomach. In bold black letters on the card was written the name—*Solomon Magus*.

He was bold and confident. He flaunted himself and the society in the face of the world, sure of its blindness. But did his daring approach the foolhardy? Was he getting overbold, overconfident? It was a key to his character. It might be the key to his downfall. I wondered what he was building himself up to.

"Thanks," I said, and went back to Ariel. "What was the meaning of that trap?" I asked. "Why did they do it?"

She put down her coffee cup. "That was a warning."

"To you or to me?"

"I'd thought it was to me," she said slowly. "But now . . ."

"Yeah," I said. "Be good or else."

"What are you going to do?" Ariel asked, her eyes fixed on me.

"I don't like warnings," I told her.

Ariel and I parted, after agreeing that it would be safer if we

weren't seen together again. I sat through the afternoon program alone. It made a difference.

I was more attentive and more frightened. Magic! It was real and prosaic, and the latter was the more frightening. It was a casual everyday thing, done by the light of the sun—they accepted it, like the water that comes out of a pipe when you twist a faucet, or the lights that come on when you flick a switch.

A MAN talked about familiars and their practical uses. An unseen hand turned the pages of his manuscript. A glass raised itself to his mouth. I thought to myself that it could have been done just as easily, perhaps with less effort, by hand.

"Proof!" someone shouted from the audience.

Solomon was beside the speaker. He was lean, dark and compelling. "Will the person who spoke stand and make his objection clear?"

Uriel stood up. I saw his pink bald spot gleaming. "What proof does the speaker have of the existence of familiars? Where does this mysterious intelligence come from?"

"You've just seen . . ." the speaker began, motioning to the glass and the manuscript.

"Telekinesis!" Uriel scoffed. "Anyone here could do that with-

out predicating a familiar."

The leaves of the manuscript fluttered wildly. The glass rose in the air, spun rapidly and dropped gently to the lectern.

"Child's play," Uriel snorted.

"What point do you wish to make?" Solomon asked, frowning.

"I wish to register a protest against the trend of this 'covention,' as you insist on calling it. Covens—familiars. Is this the type of research the society should approve? Is this the kind of investigation the society was set up to consider? It smacks, sir, of rank superstition."

A murmur ran through the audience.

"Then you do not believe in the spirit world?" Solomon asked with open malice.

"No, sir," Uriel said. "I do not. And I do not believe in slipshod investigations and wild surmises without any scientific basis. I ask a vote of disapproval."

Solomon looked out over the audience with a dark cold eye. "Is there a second?"

A moment of silence was broken by a voice I recognized. "I second the motion," someone said. It was Ariel.

A brief smile twisted Solomon's lips. "All in favor," he said.

Two voices were raised. I sat back, silent and afraid.

"It seems," Solomon said, smiling more broadly, "that the motion has failed."





Alexander Hamilton's corbie turned out to be a cat, and Alexander Hamilton an English witch, in Lothian. The speaker used it as a take-off point for a general summary of divining and augury. Undaunted, Uriel rose to protest against the unwarranted assumption that the future can be known, that such medieval ideas had any validity.

"Proof," he demanded. "*Proof!*"

Solomon thanked him for his contribution. The audience chuckled. It was obvious that whatever prestige Uriel had was vanishing under Solomon's treatment.

"Now," said Solomon, "perhaps



we can give Uriel some of the proof he has been demanding.”

I realized, with a shock, that the next speaker's subject was LYCANTHROPY — A DEMONSTRATION.

He brought props with him—some oddly shaped lights, which were plugged in but not turned on, and a dark frightened young man, whom he installed in a chair at the back of the stage.

After going through a historical discussion of lycanthropy and the geographical distribution of the supposed myth, he described his research into the possible truth of the phenomena. He had found a subject in one of his own classes who confessed to strange appetites and stranger dreams. One evening, by the light of the full moon, the speaker saw the subject change.

IN order to make this demonstration, the speaker had duplicated with these lights the constituent parts of the moonlight which stimulated the cell changes. He motioned the young man to the front of the stage. The subject obeyed with the gait of a sleepwalker.

“Watch carefully!” the speaker said. And he flicked on the lights.

As the young man was bathed in silver, Uriel was on his feet, protesting. The growing murmur of the audience drowned him out.

Because the young man was changing . . .

His dark face grew darker and sharper. His jaw thrust forward horribly. As his arms and legs shriveled and shortened, he dropped to all fours. He was hairy. He shook himself free from his encumbering clothes, and the wide mouth in the pointed muzzle opened to let a long tongue loll out between sharp white teeth. His eyes gleamed redly in the odd light. A growl started deep in his throat. He crouched.

A woman screamed.

And he sprang — he sprang straight for Uriel!

There was shouting and scurrying and the crashing of upset chairs as people jumped aside. Uriel stood straight and unafraid, a small white-haired figure, oddly courageous and alone. He pointed a finger at the leaping wolf and muttered something I couldn't hear.

The animal crashed into an unseen wall. He dropped among the chairs, tried to get up and failed, and lay among the splintered furniture, snarling at his left hind leg. The leg was obviously broken. The wolf whimpered as it touched the leg with its muzzle. It was a strange pitiful sound.

Uriel bent over the animal and marked a few symbols on the floor with a piece of chalk. There was

no longer a wolf on the floor. In its stead was the young man, naked, his face twisted with pain.

Crouching beside him, Uriel drew a broken line on the floor, marked out a mathematical formula and joined the broken line with another chalk mark. A look of dazed relief spread over the young man's face. He felt his leg incredulously. It was no longer crooked.

URIEL helped the man to his feet, whispered a few words in his ear, patted him on the arm and motioned toward the door. The man left, glancing back fearfully. Uriel's face, as he turned it toward the stage, was stern and hard. No one had moved. No one *could* move.

"This has summed up the present leadership of the society," he said grimly. His high-pitched voice had deepened. "A morbid delving into mysteries better left untouched. A wanton disregard for the sacred rights of the individual. A degradation of precious talents and knowledge.

"Lycanthropy! A psychological state associated with hysteria—a pathological condition of depraved appetite. In this case, abetted by hypnosis and sorcery. It is a matter of record that the Malays often induced lycanthropy in such persons of extreme suggestibility, who

were known as *latak*. They will torture that boy no more."

He turned to the audience. "Will you approve this, too?"

They moved uneasily, but no one spoke. A few glanced toward the stage, where Solomon leaned against the lectern, staring down calmly, undisturbed.

Uriel swung back, his lip curling. He pointed a finger at Solomon. The Magus straightened quickly. Uriel laughed.

"You needn't worry. I won't use my power against my fellow man except in self-defense." But Uriel gave the last words peculiar emphasis. "You think you are wise—you are foolish. You think you know everything—you know nothing. As the surviving co-founder of this society, I disavow your leadership. I disavow the society. And I leave you this thought to consider—I will not permit the Art to be used for evil."

He turned and stalked out of the room, small and defiant. As I watched, uncertain, Ariel followed, calling, "Uriel, *Uriel!*"

At the door she turned. "You cowards!" she said. Before she hurried after the little mathematician, her eyes met mine appealingly.

Appealingly. What did she want of me? That I find out the name of the mysterious Solomon? Or something more?

WHILE I thought about it, the meeting broke up. Some of the audience walked toward the door in little groups, talking excitedly. A few of them gathered around the stage, around Solomon. The red-headed La Voisin was among them. Her figure was magnificent—her hair was striking—her face exquisite. But they no longer appealed to me. I compared them unfavorably with the figure and face of a girl who was only pretty, but who was real.

I noticed, too late, that I was sitting all alone in the room save for the group on the stage. It was too late, because Solomon's intense black eyes were fixed on me curiously, even as he was talking to the others. He broke off.

"Sir," he said, not raising his voice, but projecting it at me so that it seemed to come from a few feet away, "we would be honored if you would join us."

Join them! It was the last thing in the world I wanted to do, in either sense, but it would be the most dangerous kind of cowardice to break for the door.

"The honor," I said, "is mine."

I walked toward the stage, feeling myself dissected by the gaze of the four men and the one woman gathered there. The woman's eyes held a kind of personal inquisitiveness that seemed to me

colder than the more casual curiosity of the rest.

"Gabriel, eh?" Solomon mused when I was close enough for my badge to be read.

La Voisin looked surprised. "But I thought—" She stopped abruptly.

I was glancing at her name card. It was difficult to read. Her magnificent bosom tilted the card almost horizontal, but I made out the first name—*Catherine*. Catherine La Voisin—it still meant nothing to me.

"You thought what, my dear?" Solomon asked, beating me to it.

"I thought Gabriel would be rather different," she went on smoothly. Her eyes narrowed speculatively as she looked at me with open erotic interest.

But that wasn't what she had been about to say—and we all knew it.

"Well, Gabriel," Solomon said, "what is your opinion of this afternoon's activities?"

"Very interesting," I said.

He smiled with real amusement. Perhaps, he enjoyed this verbal swordplay. Or, perhaps, he was contemplating the fate he had planned for me.

"But not as noncommittal as your answer. The issue has been joined. The body of the society against one old man and a young girl. The question is—where do you stand?"

"Where I have always stood."

"Which side are you on?" Catherine inquired.

I looked at her and smiled. "On my own, of course."

"Of course," Solomon said, leaning lazily against the lectern, looking down at me. He gave Catherine a quick, reproving glance. "But in this case, self-interest should ally you with the side that will win. There can't be any doubt about that. And, at the risk of being melodramatic, we must insist that all those who are not for us are against us."

I shrugged. "Understandable. But in a case of this kind, superior numbers do not always indicate superior forces. It seems to me that the issue is still in doubt."

SOLOMON'S eyes glittered. "Your name seems to place you on the side of the angels. But names have ceased to mean anything. My admiration for your independence would torment me if we were forced to strike blindly. But, perhaps, you could give us some reason to trust you."

"Like what?"

"Like, say," he appeared to reflect, "like your real name."

"Certainly," I agreed. "Providing you give me the same reason to trust you. Starting with—" I let my eye roam around the group—"starting with you, Magus."

Solomon laughed. "You are a

clever man, Gabriel—and a bold one. I hope you choose the right side. It would be a shame to—lose you."

"When the time comes," I said slowly, "you'll find me on the winning side."

I nodded to them all, turned and left. I walked quickly to the door and through it.

"Gabriel!" someone said huskily behind me.

I stopped and turned, shivers running up and down my spine. It was Catherine La Voisin, gliding toward me like the figurehead on a sailing ship.

"Gabriel," she repeated. She stopped only when she was close to me—very close. "You interest me, Gabriel. There is something very real and male about you."

I wanted to say that there was something very unreal and female about her, but her nearness left me speechless.

"Are you—perhaps—undisguised?" she asked. She pressed closer.

"Perhaps," I said. It came out in a kind of gasp. Two firm breasts were trying to bore their way into my chest.

"I like you, Gabriel," she breathed. Her lips came up toward mine.

I looked at them as they approached me like rippling red snakes, held in a sort of frozen fascination. They blurred. My gaze shifted upward to her eyes.

They were bottomless, like dark-blue lakes.

Her lips met mine with an electric tingling. They moved restlessly. My arms went around her automatically. I felt her hand work up the back of my neck into my hair. I struggled to breathe.

After an eon, she moved slowly back, her eyes heavy-lidded and sleepy. I took a deep breath.

"What was that for?" I gasped.

She was walking away from me down the corridor. Her head turned to look back over her shoulder. "That," she said, smiling slowly, "was by way of being a preview."

An elevator door opened in front of her and she stepped in. As the doors closed she was still looking at me, and her smile was strangely triumphant.

I breathed deeply again, feeling oddly unclean. I reached for my handkerchief and scrubbed my lips with it, and the three men who had been with Solomon passed me, smirking. When I took the handkerchief away, it was stained with orange smears, and the three men were gone.

I WAITED a few minutes more, but Solomon didn't come out. I glanced quickly into the Crystal Room. It was empty—very empty. It felt hollow. The chandeliers had stopped tinkling.

I walked uneasily to the only other door in the room, the one

back of the stage, hesitated in front of it and finally pulled it open, stiffening myself for a shock. But the little room beyond was empty, too. Opposite me, another door opened into a large central kitchen and serving area. Naked stairs went up and down.

I stepped into the little room and closed the door slowly behind me. I couldn't visualize the elegant Solomon trotting up or down the service stairs. But then he hadn't come out by the main door. He had either gone through here or . . . Speculation like this was futile. It was time I stopped playing someone else's game and began playing my own, such as it was.

I looked around the room. Solomon had been here. Some of the others, too, but Solomon I knew about. Except for an empty coat and hatrack, the room was bare. I moved the rack a few inches and noticed something on the floor. I picked it up. It was a rectangular piece of paper. I turned it over. It was a return-trip ticket to Washington, D. C., dated the day before yesterday.

I shrugged. Maybe, maybe not. I slipped it into my coat pocket. I searched the rest of the room carefully, but it was obviously wasted energy. I went back into the Crystal Room and looked on the platform and around it and finally noticed a small yellow corner of

something sticking out from under the black drapes at the back. I pulled it out. It was a blank manila binder, enclosing a thick manuscript of about seventy-five pages, handwritten in a precise, readable script. It was littered with formulas. The first one was—

$$\lim_{\Delta x \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(x + \Delta x) - f(x)}{\Delta x}$$

I vaguely recognized the formula. It had something to do with what was called the derivative, an abstract limit. It had been a long time since I'd taken calculus, and I had never been a star pupil in mathematics. But I know whose manuscript it was. It belonged to Uriel.

There was nothing else under the platform or in the room, and I went out into the corridor, with the manuscript under my arm, and waited ten minutes for an elevator. It would be months before I would trust stairs again. I stepped out into the lobby and registered for a room. Solomon had me spotted, and I had a strong suspicion that it wouldn't do me any good to run now, even if I wanted to. But it was time I learned the rules of the game.

Charlie was off duty, and the clerk at the desk was an obliging young man.

"Say," I said, turning back to the desk as if on impulse, "have

you got a girl registered here? A girl named Ariel?"

"Ariel who?"

I shrugged and put on a sly, man-to-man smile. "Hell, I didn't catch her last name."

He shuffled through the recent cards. "Not today," he said.

"Well," I ventured, "what about an old boy named Uriel."

He stopped being so obliging. "Ariel—Uriel? What's the gag?"

"Well," I said desperately, "what about a little old lady, a Mrs. Peabody?"

He turned away with a withering look of disgust.

I trudged to the elevator, feeling like a man who sits down to a game of poker and finds that everything is wild except the cards he happens to hold. I went up to the seventh floor and walked down the hall to my room. I unlocked the door, opened it and stepped into a bottomless black pit through which I went falling, falling, falling . . .

I was spinning, my arms and legs reaching desperately for handholds and footholds in the formless night, cartwheeling madly through the lightless void.

This isn't real, I told myself, but the thought was twisted away from me by a cold rushing wind. *Illusion!* I clung desperately to the thought.

Panic tried to force sounds past

the tightening muscles of my throat. Tension was growing into rigidity. Through the gathering block, I pushed one sane thought —*if this is illusion, if I am not really falling, I am standing just inside the door, and the light switch is to my right against the wall.*

It's a lie, my reeling senses told me. But I hugged the thought tightly, and my flailing hand reached out, grabbed frantically and—

The lights came on. I was standing just inside the door, looking into an ordinary room, and wondering if I wasn't going mad.

I stepped inside and looked back. On the floor, was a piece of shiny black glass, about two feet square. I leaned over and dug a finger between the glass and the carpet and picked it up. I looked into it.

It wasn't black glass. It was a mirror, but it wasn't silvered. Instead, the back was painted a shiny black. My face, square and craggy, looked back at me darkly. It almost seemed like another person. I shuddered and turned it over. Scratched in the paint around the edge, was an endless string of kabbalistic letters, similar to the ones I had noticed on the seal. I pulled the program out of my pocket and compared the two. They were the same letters, but not in the same order.

I walked to the far wall and

leaned the glass carefully against it with the mirror face turned away from me. After a few minutes, I stopped shaking.

I slumped into a chair, suddenly aware that I was more tired than I could remember being. Shaking my head incredulously, I let the day's happenings pass in review. But every time disbelief grew too great, I glanced at the black square I had placed against the wall.

I WAS enmeshed in a fantastic cobweb of magic and witchcraft. The only way to pull loose was to find out who these people really were and where they hid.

Who was Mrs. Peabody, the little old lady who had drawn me into this with a crisp green lure? Was she working against Solomon? Did Ariel and Uriel have an unknown ally? Was she one of Solomon's own confederates, seeking protection, or trying to take his place? Or had it only been a trick by Solomon, safe in his anonymity, to use me against an undetermined third party?

Who was the red witch, Catherine La Voisin?

Who was Ariel? Who was Uriel? Could I trust them to be as frank and honest as they seemed? A witch and a sorcerer?

And, above all, who was Solomon?

I was fighting shadows. I was

the blind man in a game of blind man's buff. If I could only tear aside the blinders for a moment and see a face . . .

What had been the purpose of the black mirror? Another warning? Had it said, *be careful or something really deadly may happen to you?* Or had it been an attempt that failed? That was hard to believe. I didn't know enough to get out of traps.

I'd had enough of stumbling around in the dark. I needed light. I needed knowledge.

I PULLED the bound manuscript out of my pocket, took off my coat and tossed it on the bed. I unstrapped my shoulder holster and hung it over the back of the chair, where the butt was within easy reach of my hand. I stripped off my tie and settled back in the chair.

I leafed through the manuscript, glancing at headings. *Introduction* — *Principles*; — *Equipment*; — *Simple Spells*; — *Counter-Spells*; — *Teleportation*; — *Illusions*; — *Disguises*; — *Medical and other Practical Applications*. The last section was entitled *Ethics*.

I went back to the introduction and began to read carefully. The material had been worked and reworked, simplified and boiled down, fitted into a theoretical framework. A collection of diverse phenomena had been noted, their

similarities observed, a hypothesis derived to explain them. The hypothesis had been tested, changed and retested, until the theory was evolved and proved sound. In other words, a scientific mind had been at work and had developed, out of discredited phenomena, a working science.

Unfortunately, the manuscript had not been written as a textbook. Most of the connective and explanatory material had been omitted. It was a notebook filled with personal jottings, perfectly comprehensible to the author, who supplied the background material and examples automatically, but only half-meaningful to the casual reader. And the examples that were given led inevitably to mathematical formulations, usually in calculus, which were incomprehensible.

But my time was not completely wasted. Uriel's basic theory postulated a store of energy ordinarily unavailable to our world. It existed in a place which was undefinable except in mathematical terms, although it might be inaccurately termed a co-existent universe, parallel with ours, or some verbal equivalent which was equally descriptive and equally inaccurate.

The idea was not absurd. The theory of continuous creation must assume some such energy store. And the theory worked out in practice.

This energy, then, was available. Not by physical means, which were necessarily limited to this place, this universe, this moment. But the mind was unfettered. It could range anywhere, backward, forward, sideways. It could tap that source of energy and channel it into this world.

Minds had tapped it, inefficiently, haphazardly, in the past. Myths and folklore gave us gods and demons and fairies and the spirit-world, and all the rest. The appearance of the energy was fitful and uncertain because it lacked two things—theory and discipline. Where there was no theory there could be no control, and the wrong theory was worse than no theory at all. A disciplined mind was seldom found among the warped personalities of priests, witches, and magicians.

OCCASIONALLY, desire or fear might accidentally work in the proper manner and call forth what the mind wanted or dreaded. Because the energy was formless—the mind was the matrix.

Physical or symbolic devices could help discipline the mind. The best of these was mathematics. It expressed relationships exactly without unfortunate connotations or subconscious responses. And modern developments in mathematics had made possible the conversion of a bastard art into a science.

The extra-mundane energy could be controlled accurately and exactly by use of such mathematical tools as calculus, which took limits—analysis situs (topology), which was concerned with proximity—and tensor analysis (absolute differential calculus), which constructed and discussed relations or laws which were generally covariant, which remained valid, that is, when passing from one to another system of coordinates. By using the proper equations, the mind could be directed toward channeling the desired amount of energy into the desired function.

I looked up from the book, my mind churning with speculations. If this was true, anyone could be a magician. *Anyone?* Even a novice like me.

A luxury hotel is a self-contained city. Anything can happen in one, from rape and murder to conventions of sorcerers, and the outside world need never know. But it has its advantages. All things are possible, not by magic but by the expenditure of strictly mundane energy on the part of the hotel employees and strictly U.S. money on the part of the guest.

I picked up an interesting little device, which is not too far from telepathy and asked for room service. And I gave the girl what was perhaps the oddest order in an interesting history of unusual requests.

"I want a book on the history of magic and witchcraft," I said. "Also, texts on higher mathematics, specifically calculus, analysis situs, and tensor analysis."

"Yes, sir," the girl said. She didn't even ask me to spell anything. "Anything else, sir?"

"A fried ham sandwich on white bread and a cup of coffee."

"Yes, sir," she said. "Is that all sir?"

"Oh," I said, "and a box of chalk."

V

THE first thing I tackled was the ham sandwich. The second was the history of magic, since it looked to be the easiest of the lot. Hunger appeased, a trifle more alert, I skimmed through the book and came out with some orientation and the answers to a few questions.

The Magus, for instance, had taken his name from the great source of Medieval magic, Solomon. The Biblical king enjoyed a posthumous reputation as the greatest of wizards. The angel Raphael, it was believed, had brought him a magical ring from God, which wielded control over all demons. Some of them, Solomon put to work building the Temple—the more intractable, he imprisoned in brazen vessels which he threw into a Babylonian lake.

Solomon was wise and powerful, and there was a certain darkness about his later years. Only magic could account for it. The great search for his secret books was on.

The most important to turn up thus far was the Key of Solomon, which contained detailed descriptions of the preparations and ceremony for summoning demons—and for dismissing them. The instructions were so detailed that it was little wonder the magicians did not succeed. They could try until they died of senile decay, without losing hope or faith in Solomon.

Christianity brought in other, darker elements. What may have seemed a search for knowledge—and hidden wealth—became a dedication to evil. Magic became witchcraft. The summoning of demons became a pact with Satan himself.

Ariel and Uriel, like Gabriel, were angels, but Catherine La Voisin was a professional palmist and clairvoyant during the reign of Louis XIV. She secretly sold love and death charms to her clients. Besides being a witch, she was a poisoner and was involved in a lewd, bloody Amatory Mass said over Madame de Montespan, the king's favorite, and eventually in an attempt to poison the king.

What a lovely namesake, I thought, for the red-haired witch.

I plowed my way through dif-

ferential and integral calculus, and Uriel's formulas became a little more meaningful. With a briefer perusal of the elements of analysis situs and tensor analysis, I surrendered to a feeling of mastery.

If Uriel's manuscript was what it pretended to be, I was now qualified to work magic. I decided to try. What should I start with? I remembered how one of the speakers had summoned a cold drink. I thought thirstily of a nice cold mint julep, but I pushed the idea back hastily. I wanted nothing so complicated for my first attempt. I settled for an ordinary highball—bourbon and soda.

I LEAFED through Uriel's manuscript until I came to the section headed *Simple Spells*, studied it for a moment, then turned to *Equipment*. The only essential, it said, was a piece of chalk, and that was only an aid to concentration in jotting down equations. But it was also helpful to have an element of similarity, if the mind was not accustomed to thinking in mathematical terminology.

I got a water glass from the bathroom, poured a little water into it and set it on the desk. Beside it, I chalked a small circle and jotted down the prescribed equation.

I repeated the equation aloud, linking the unknowns to the object

I wanted and the place I wanted it.

In the beginning, the manuscript read, verbal equivalents are sometimes helpful.

"Highball, highball," I chanted, feeling more than a little silly, "come to me, come to Casey Kingman, who is in room 707 of —"

There was a glass in the circle. An instant before, it had not been there. I stared at it, wide-eyed. I had done it! I had worked magic—or, perhaps I had practiced a new science.

I picked up the glass with trembling hand and raised it to my lips and let a little roll over my tongue. *Phew-w-!* I spat it out. The bourbon was lousy and the soda was water and the water was hot.

I put the glass down, feeling greatly chastened. Obviously I was not yet an adept.

I needed somebody, somebody to talk to, somebody to answer questions. The only one I knew who would talk to me was Ariel. I had no idea where she was, what room she was in, whether she was staying in the hotel at all. Could I bring her here? I could try.

I had to have a link. I thought about it for a moment before my eyes saw the coat on the bed. Girls always left hairs on flannel coats. Sometimes make-up, too. But always hairs.

I picked it up. There were hairs. One was long and red. I rolled it up between my fingers and was

about to throw it away, when I had a second thought. I straightened it out carefully, folded it, slipped it into a hotel envelope, put the envelope in my inside coat pocket. There were some short, blond hairs, but they were mine. Finally, I found one that was long and dark.

I held it in my hand, thoughtfully. Could I do a better job of it this time? Was there any danger to Ariel if I muffed again? I decided there wasn't. The worst that could happen would be the summoning of some other girl—Catherine La Voisin, say. I shivered. That would be bad enough.

THIS time I wasn't leaving anything to chance. I got a cake of soap from the bathroom and started to work on it with my pen-knife. In fifteen minutes I had a surprisingly good model of a reclining nude. Not Ariel, of course. But I could take care of that. I moistened the top of the figure's head, coiled the hair by drawing it between two fingernails, then stuck it to the damp soap.

I referred to the section on tele-transportation as I knelt on the floor. I drew a circle on the rug, placed the figurine inside the circle and chalked an equation around it.

I stood up and compared it with the instructions. It checked. "X is for Ariel," I muttered, "Y is this spot in my room." I re-

cited the equation aloud. "Wherever you are, Ariel, come to me. Come to this spot. Appear in this circle. Ariel, come to me . . ."

Air fanned my face. My eyes, fixed on the circle, saw a pair of small, bare white feet. Somebody gasped. I looked up quickly. It was Ariel, all right. All of her, and not much more. Her eyes were wide and blue and startled. My eyes, no doubt, were startled, too, because it was obvious that Ariel had just stepped out of a shower.

The *not much more* was a towel, which she draped hastily in front of her. She let out her breath and it sounded like relief. I sank back in the chair, speechless and suddenly weak, but interested in the fact that my earlier impression of her charming figure had been vindicated.

I wished fervently for a breeze. The wind whistled past my head and whipped the towel aside.

Ariel clutched at it desperately with both hands, looking annoyed. But it was slowly replaced by a grudging smile.

She picked up the soap figurine, muttered a few words and disappeared—towel, figurine and all.

Belatedly, I found my voice. "Ariel, Ariel," I called after her. "Where can I find you? Where can I . . . ?"

But it was no use. She was gone. And, with her, she had taken my last hope of getting the answers.

FIFTEEN minutes later, I remembered the handkerchief. I pulled it out, remembering how it had wiped her tears away as we sat on the stairs that led nowhere. I stared at the orange smears. All my ventures into magic had been bungled. It would be just my luck to summon the carnivorous Catherine La Voisin. And, this time, she might have her poison with her.

But I had summoned Ariel once, I thought with growing determination.

I could do it again.

The circle and the equation were still on the floor. They had worked once. I saw no reason why they shouldn't serve a second time. I dropped the handkerchief in the center of the circle, took the glass of water that stood on the desk, sprinkled the handkerchief gently with it.

"Ariel, Ariel," I said, "by the tears you shed into this handkerchief, come now to claim it, come here to me once more . . ."

This time I was not so surprised when Ariel appeared. She was more modestly clad in a nightgown—but not by much. Her hair was brushed dark beauty around her shoulders. I took a deep, quick breath. Perfume! She was infinitely desirable. She was almost beautiful.

Did she always wear so flattering and revealing a nightgown?

Did she always put on perfume when she went to bed? I chided myself for my suspicions.

Ariel frowned. "I don't know how you've become adept so quickly, Gabriel, but this business must end. It's very disconcerting, being whisked around, not knowing whether you'll be here or there the next moment. Besides, what will people say? What will the house detective say?"

I began to laugh. I couldn't help it. There was witchcraft in the Crystal Room—witchcraft and werewolves, magic and murder—and she was worried about house detectives and minor indiscretions.

Her frown twisted as she tried to keep a straight face, but then she was laughing, too. I noticed that she was looking down at her feet, and my laughter died.

I jumped to my feet. "Stop! Don't go away! I've got to talk to you."

"Well," she said, "I'm not going to talk standing in the middle of the room. Let me out."

"Let you out?" I repeated blankly.

She pointed down at her feet. "The circle," she said impatiently. "I can't get out until it's broken"

I rubbed out a chalked arc with my shoe, and she brushed past me in a delicate cloud of black lace and fragrance. I breathed deeply and turned toward her, but she was looking back toward the cir-

cle, her eyes on the handkerchief. I leaned over quickly, picked it up and started to stuff it in my pocket.

She held out her hand, snapping her fingers meaningfully. Slowly, reluctantly, I pulled the square of linen out and tossed it to her. I shrugged as she spread it flat and stared at the orange smears. She frowned for a moment and then her face crumpled.

"Oh," she wailed, turning blindly toward the bed. "You've been with that redheaded witch, kissing her, making love to her. You've gone over to their side!" She fell on the bed, sobbing.

I SAT down on the edge of the bed and patted her shaking shoulder. It was a very nice shoulder. I liked patting it. "I wouldn't get within ten feet of her," I said, shuddering. "Once is too much. Besides, she isn't my type."

She moved away from my hand. "Don't touch me," she said savagely. And then, more softly. "What is your type?"

I thought about it, and it came as a revelation to me. "A girl with dark hair," I said, "and blue eyes—about your size . . ."

She sat up, brushing her tears away with the back of her hand. If I could have kept my eyes off the nightgown, and kept from remembering what the towel had failed to conceal, I would have

thought she looked like a little girl. But there was no chance of that.

Her eyes were bright and blue, undimmed by tears. "Am I, really?"

I nodded. I said, "Tell me what's happened? What is Uriel going to do?"

"He's staying. He's going to help. He swears he'll strip Solomon of his powers. The werewolf was a terrible mistake."

"What do you mean?"

"If that attempt to kill Uriel hadn't been so obvious, I don't think he'd ever have done anything about the situation. He's always gone out of his way to avoid trouble. As long as he could convince himself that things weren't too bad, he was willing to let them go along any way they would. But now he's made up his mind, and he's the best of the lot. None of them can touch him."

"But there's just the two of you?" I asked. "Just you and Uriel?"

She nodded.

"That's tough odds," I said slowly.

"And Uriel's not well," she said thoughtfully. "He scoffs at the idea of the Mass of St. Sécaire. Superstition, he says. But he knows he could do something similar if he wanted to. He's tried to protect himself with counter-spells, but they're only really effective when he's concentrating on them, and

he has to sleep sometime."

"Well," I said, "now there's three of us."

I was rewarded with a glance of pure gratitude. "Thank you—Gabriel," she said. "Did you—did you have any luck in finding out Solomon's name?"

I shook my head. "All I found was this," I said. I pulled the railroad ticket out of my coat pocket. "And I can't swear it was Solomon's."

SHE took the ticket, looked at it carefully, then shrugged as she handed it back. "That doesn't seem to be much help, but keep it. It might fit in with something else." Suddenly she stiffened. She was staring at something across the room. I turned. She was looking at the back of the mirror I had leaned against the wall.

I walked over to the wall and started to turn the mirror around. "I stepped on it when I came into the room. It gave me the odddest feeling."

"Careful," she said. "That's enough. I've heard of black mirrors, but never saw one before. Someone wants to get rid of you."

"Oh!" I shrugged. "I imagine it was just another warning. The sensation stopped when I turned on the light."

"Don't you believe it," she said earnestly. "You were either very strong or very lucky. In the black

mirror, time is meaningless. A few seconds is like eternity. You could have gone mad. Or, some say, if the mirror is broken while you're trapped, you'll die."

I shivered. This wasn't my kind of danger. I could have faced a dozen ordinary bullets and not felt half so cold.

"But how did they work it?" she went on, frowning. "Do they know your name?" I shook my head. Ariel snapped her fingers. "That witch! When she kissed you, did she run her fingers through your hair?"

"Why—yes," I said. "I guess she did. So what?"

"You poor unsuspecting male," she said, shaking her head sadly. "Did you think she was overcome with your masculinity?"

"Well, as a matter of fact . . ." I began, but she was up and coming toward me. I watched her warily.

"This is what she did." She put her face up and raised her arms and pulled my head down to hers. Our lips met. There was nothing electric about it, but it was much sweeter and more satisfying. I felt my pulses begin to pound. Her hand moved tenderly up my neck into my hair. "M-m-m!" she said, her lips half parted.

Finally, she pulled away, her eyes glazed and distant. They snapped back to the present. "Oh, dear!" she said. She held out her

hand to me. "Look!"

I looked. Several of my blond hairs had come away in her hand. I winced. The redheaded witch had something that belonged to me. God knew what she was going to do with it, if she hadn't already done it. "We came out even, then," I said. "I have one of hers."

Her eyes narrowed. "Let me have it," she said eagerly.

I got the envelope from my coat and handed it to her. She stepped back into the circle on the rug, bent and picked up the chalk, drew the arc I had rubbed out and, before I could move or say anything, waved at me and disappeared.

"Hey, wait!" I yelled. "I still don't know where to find you."

That's me. Always too late.

THE insistent ringing of the telephone dragged me up out of a bottomless pool of sleep. I fumbled for the instrument, my eyes still glued shut, and mumbled, "Hello?"

An almost soundless whisper came to my ear. "There is danger. A message is in your box. It would be wise to act on it."

"Hello? Hello?" I said.

The line was silent, but I thought, dazedly, that I could hear someone breathing.

"Who is this?" I said.

There was no answer.

I dropped the phone back into the cradle and rolled over and

went back to sleep. This time I dreamed. I dreamed I was being choked to death by a person who stood behind me and pulled a garrote tighter and tighter around my neck . . . A garrote woven from my own hair. All I could see was a hand out of the corner of my eye, a woman's smooth, white hand, but as I watched, the hand changed into a spotted, wrinkled claw.

I woke up gasping for breath.

I looked at my watch. It was not quite eight, but I was wide-awake. There was no use trying to go back to sleep. I rubbed my neck again. I wasn't sure I wanted to.

I thought of Ariel and smiled. I felt warm inside when I thought about her. She was a nice kid—well, not a kid, exactly, I amended, as I remembered—caught in a worse mess than I was. She was right in the middle of it, and there was no way out. By God—I'd get her out, and then . . .

I caught myself. Poor, frightened girl? She's a witch, a real, honest-to-god witch, and she makes it work. But what a witch! I mused, and sat up straight in bed. Good God! Could I be falling in love with her? I had to admit that I could.

Well, I thought, worse things could happen to a man. Like being strangled with a rope made from his own hair.

I looked at the telephone. A note in my box? I picked up the handset and asked for the desk. Charlie answered.

"How did you get registered here?" he asked indignantly.

"Never mind that," I snapped and thought of a story I could tell him that would make his few remaining hairs stand on end. Charlie and his precious hotel! "Is there a note for me—room 707?"

"As a matter of fact, there is. Want me to read it to you?"

"Isn't it sealed?"

"Just a slip of paper. Not even folded."

"All right. What does it say?"

"On one side it says 707."

"Okay, that's me."

"On the other, it says IIII. Are you playing games again?"

"You're a big help," I told him and hung up.

So there was a message. But had I really received a phone call, telling me it was there? Maybe this magic business had a recoil to it. Maybe my subconscious had reached out to gather that information and then put in a call to my conscious mind.

AND then, of course, my conscious mind had rolled back over and gone to sleep. How did that sound? I thought it stank. Maybe it was coincidence. Or, maybe, somebody had called me.

I turned it over and over as

I let a cold shower get me fully awake, shaved hurriedly with a razor I had picked up last night in the hotel drugstore and reluctantly redonned the clothes I had worn yesterday.

Eleven-eleven. Obviously a room number—too obviously. Or was I being too subtle? A room number, then. Whose—Ariel's? That was logical. It could also be a trap.

I shrugged. There was danger in being overcautious, too. I strapped on the shoulder holster and inspected the clip. I felt a little safer. Maybe I was being foolish, but I had a hunch Betsy might come in handy before the day was over. She wasn't subtle, and she didn't know the first thing about magic, but when she spoke, people listened.

I hid Ariel's manuscript, hesitated at the door and returned for a piece of chalk. I jotted an equation across the inside of the threshold. I stepped out into the hall, closed the door behind me and heard it latch. That should keep everybody out, including hotel employees.

I waited a few minutes for an elevator. "Eleven," I called out to the boy. My voice was firm. I was proud of it. The doors opened in front of me, and I stepped out into a corridor just like my own. It was a corner room. I took a deep breath, grabbed the door

knob and turned it. Something snapped. The door swung open.

I looked at the sun-bright room for a long moment before I understood what was going on.

"My God!" I cried, my voice quivering with horror. "Ariel!"

VI

SHE was still in her nightgown, and the face she turned up to me was twisted with guilt and something else. In her hands, as she sat cross-legged upon the floor, was a little waxen figure. Even if I had not seen the blond hairs pressed into the head, I would have known whom the figure was supposed to represent. It was me.

Her hands were still busy, winding darker hairs around the chest of the tiny figure. In the window, directly in the sunlight, were two other figures. One was made of a darker material. Around its chest was a red hair. Next to it, was a wax image that the sun had partially melted into a puddle.

But the strangest part of the scene was Ariel. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, and my throat ached with loving her, and my arms twitched with the desire to gather her into them.

"Oh, no!" I said, and turned away, my hands thrown up to cover my face.

"Wait, Gabriel!" she said urgently, her silence suddenly broken.

"Wait! You don't understand!"

I moved away blindly. She muttered something behind me. I stopped. I couldn't move. I was fixed to the spot, paralyzed. I took my hands away, and I was inside the room with the door closed.

Ariel was standing before me. Her look of guilt had changed to one of annoyance. "Oh, *why* did you have to break in here now?"

"*Ariel!*" I blurted. "Why? *Why* are you doing this? I thought we were working together, and now I find you making wax images of me. It's fantastic. It's terrible. Why are you doing this to me?"

Her annoyance had been replaced by blankness. "What in the name of . . . What do you think I'm doing?"

"Look!" I said, trying to point to the images in the window, and failing. "You've been trying to kill me."

Slowly, irresistibly, a smile spread over her lovely face. She began to laugh. It bubbled out of her uncontrollably. She threw herself across the bed and howled. I watched her with growing irritation as my anger faded. I didn't see anything funny about it.

"Kill you, Gabriel?" she gasped. "Oh, no, Gabriel. Not *you!* Anybody but you."

"Well, then," I snapped, "what's the meaning of all this?"

She sat up in the bed, suddenly sobered, studying my face. "It's a





love-spell," she said, avoiding my eyes.

"A love-spell!" I repeated. And I recognized instantly that it was true. I loved her madly. She was the most precious thing in the world. It would be ecstasy to die for her. "But all these images . . ."

"They were part of it. The wax one there, the one melting in the sun, made your heart soften toward me. The clay image that is hardening hardens your heart against La Voisin. You should have seen me earlier, when I was chanting."

"But why?" I asked. "You didn't have to do that to get me to help you."

"Don't you see?" she said quickly. "I was trying to protect you from La Voisin. When they found out that their mirror trick didn't work, she would have tried a love-spell—an Amatory Mass, rather, since that is the way their minds work. I had to protect you."

I SHUDDERED. In love with Catherine La Voisin! I would rather be in love with a black widow spider. I wasn't sure, either, that my feeling was all due to the clay image.

Ariel muttered something. Suddenly I was free to move.

"You can go now," she said quietly.

I turned toward the door, frowning. I didn't like the way I was being pushed around, bought here, involved there, trapped, my feelings changed, and—

I thought of something else and smiled.

I turned back into the room. Ariel was still sitting on the bed, watching me with his, serious eyes.

I took three steps toward her and gathered her in my arms and kissed her passionately.

She stiffened and struggled impotently, her hands heating a gentle tattoo on my chest. "Stop!" she gasped. "Stop it!"

"I can't," I said. "I can't help myself."

Slowly, she relaxed. Her arms curled around me. We sank down onto the bed. I gathered her in close to me, knowing that I would never be closer to paradise.

Finally, she drew back and sighed. She opened her eyes. "Then you don't mind?" she whispered.

"Mind?" I said. "Beauty is a witch against whose charms faith melteth into blood."

We sank into another rapturous spell, and I discovered that she was proficient in an older and more powerful witchcraft. Finally, she pulled herself away and sat up, straightening her hair. I reached for her again, but she pushed my hands away.

"I can see that I'm going to have trouble with you," she said severely. "The grimoirs and keys and the Faustbooks are so impractical. They never mention this kind of difficulty."

"You have no one to blame but yourself," I pointed out. "You have bewitched me. I am a slave of passion."

"I suppose so," she said moodily, "but do I have to lose my

honor in order to prove it?"

"Is there any danger of that?" I asked quickly.

She caught her breath. "Oh, you know," she said softly. "You know!"

I controlled myself and rolled over, away from her. "Did you work that spell just to save me from La Voisin and a fate worse than death?"

Her eyes widened, innocently. "Why, Gabriel! What other reason would I have?"

I growled and lunged for her, but she jumped off the bed and skipped out of my way, laughing. I was after her instantly, but she was as elusive as a frightened doe.

"You beautiful witch!" I said, panting, as I tried to corner her. "You must have known what would happen when you put your room number in my box."

She stopped. I caught her. I almost ran over her. Only my arms around her kept us both from falling to the floor. Clasped together, swaying, we stood in the middle of the room, her face upturned to mine, wide-eyed and afraid.

"I didn't put anything in your box," she said.

WWE were pressed close, but the half-controlled urgency of passion no longer bound us together. Around us, the almost-forgotten night was closing in.

"They must have done it," I said. "At least we have that to thank them for."

"Maybe," she said. She was trembling a little in my arms. "If they did it to drive us apart . . . If they wanted you to find me working spells."

"Why else?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. But I'm afraid."

I bent down and kissed her gently. Her lips were cold. "The frightened witch," I chided. "Don't be afraid. This was their second mistake. They can't beat us now."

She raised her head and smiled. I had another reason to be proud of her.

"Listen," I said. "We need a council of war. Can you get hold of Uriel?" She nodded. "Bring him down to my room, then—707—half an hour. Okay?"

She nodded again. I released her, stepped back and looked at her with fond and possessive eyes. "I love you, Ariel," I said. "I don't think the dolls did it, but I don't care."

"I love you," she whispered, "and there wasn't any witchcraft about that. I'll remove the spell." I shrugged. "No—I want to. Not because of you—for me. I want to be sure it's real. I want you to love me for myself."

"Don't you dare!" I said. I shivered. "Do you think I want to take a chance of losing this—this

way I feel. But," I added wryly, "I'd appreciate it if you'd put those dolls in a safe place. I wouldn't want them to fall into just anybody's hands."

I closed the door gently behind me. I felt too good to wait for the elevator, forgetting my distrust of stairs, and I ran down four flights three steps at a time. I ran out into the hall and slowed to a decorous walk as a well-dressed, elderly couple passed. I could feel them turning to stare at me.

"It's magic," I bumbled.

The woman sniffed, audibly.

I reached the door, inserted the key and turned it. Nothing happened. I was startled and glanced at the room number to check, before I remembered my precautions. I took the piece of chalk out of my coat pocket and scribbled another equation on the front of the door. Added together, the two equations canceled each other out. Their sum was zero.

THE door swung open. I scrubbed the figures off both sides of the door with the heel of my hand, stepped into the room and closed the door behind me. I fastened the chain latch. I swung around. The room was just as I had left it, down to the smudged circle on the rug.

I stood there for a moment, reliving the morning's experiences. Things were breaking. We'd win,

now. I had no doubts about that. All that was left was a little detail work.

Ariel! My face flushed warmly as I remembered the beauty of her face, the warm sweetness of her lips, the fire of her body, a perfect blend of youthful firmness and womanly softness. And the wonder of it all—the abiding wonder—was Ariel herself, an under-standing, gentle, delightful . . .

I decided I needed a cold shower.

The water was icy. I stood it as long as I could, puffing and blowing and gasping and then reached blindly for the towel. And as I reached, I remembered a feeling of uneasiness that had greeted me when I entered the bathroom. I knew the reason for it now. When I left, the towels had been used and disarranged. When I entered, everything had been straightened up. Someone had been in the room since I left—someone had been in the bathroom . . .

Too late—the towel slipped through my fingers. It coiled itself around my neck. It tightened with the irresistible strength of a boa constrictor. I stumbled out of the shower, tugging at it with both hands, struggling for breath.

I staggered and slipped across the tile floor, my eyes beginning to bulge, the room beginning to turn a little red, the need for air a frantic burning in my chest. It

was useless to struggle with this bewitched thing, but I could not give up. I had too much to live for.

What a fool I was!

Half an hour, I told her, and it hasn't been fifteen minutes. And if she should arrive early, the door is locked and chained. Better to be stupid than half-smart!

The redness darkened. I staggered and almost fell.

I had to think—and I couldn't. The darkness was invading my mind inexorably and, as it closed in, I thought of Ariel, I thought of her sorrow and despair when she saw my body.

And the last light went out.

"WELL, young man," someone said, "are you going to wake up or do I have to drown you?"

I opened my eyes, spluttering and breathed deeply. The air entered my lungs like live steam. I raised my hands and massaged my throat, wincing. It was wet, like my face.

"Ah," said the voice, "that's better." It was a woman's voice. I knew that I should recognize it.

I turned my head over. "You!" I said. It came out in a hoarse croak. She was standing beside the bed, an empty water glass in her hand.

It was Mrs. Peabody. Her gray curls bobbed as she nodded vigorously. "And a lucky thing for you that it was. Another minute,

and you'd have been beyond caring."

I turned my head back and forth, wondering if it was going to fall off. Apparently it wasn't. My circumstances began to interest me a little more.

I was lying on the bed. I was cold. I was also naked, except for the deadly towel, which was lying across me, lifeless but strategic.

She chuckled. "Is this the way you greet all your female guests? Well, don't lie there, lewd and naked, all day. Go get some clothes on."

I sat up, clutching the towel. She turned her back while I slipped shakily back into my clothes.

"How did you get in?" I asked hoarsely. "I'm not complaining, you understand," I added quickly.

"Same way your other visitors got in," she said. "You may have had your door locked, but you left another doorway wide open." She pointed to the center of the rug.

There was the circle I had drawn last night, in which Ariel had appeared and disappeared twice, one arc of it scuffed out by someone's foot.

"You're a very careless young man," the little, old lady said, turning around abruptly. I turned my back to her and hastily zipped up my pants. "Carelessness is never profitable," she went on, "but when you get to fooling

around with magic and witchcraft, it becomes downright foolhardy. Well, what have you found out?"

The question caught me flat-footed. I blinked. "Nothing," I said.

"Wasted my money, did I?" She nodded as if she had expected it all along.

"Hold on," I objected. "I've only been on the case a little over twenty-four hours."

"Long enough," she said. She stamped around the room.

I WAS beginning to be annoyed. "I've got a few complaints myself. You threw me into this situation without a word of explanation. You—"

"Would you have believed me if I'd told you?"

"Well, no," I admitted. "But you let me blunder my way around, nearly getting killed two or three times, and—"

"I told you there'd be danger."

"Not this kind of danger." I motioned to the towel.

"You didn't think of that when you were looking at that bill." She chuckled. "Want to give it back?"

I hesitated and made up my mind. "All right—deducting a day's work and expenses." I pulled out my hillfold.

She held up a pale, thin hand. "Now, just a minute. I haven't said I wanted it back. You can't quit a job that easy. What have

you found out since yesterday?"

"I told you," I said. "Nothing." I started taking out the remains of the thousand dollars. Luckily, I hadn't used too much of it.

"Didn't find out his name?"

"Solomon," I said. "Solomon Magus." I kept counting.

"Nonsense," she said impatiently. "I mean his real name."

"No." I counted out nine hundred and seventy-six dollars on the bureau top, extracted eleven dollars, to make it twenty-five dollars for the day, plus ten dollars expenses, and shoved the rest toward her.

"No clues?" she asked. "Is that all I get for my money?"

"Well," I asked reluctantly, "I found a return-trip ticket to Washington, D.C."

"Ah," she said significantly.

"But I'm not even sure it belongs to him. There's your money. Take it."

Her faded blue eyes looked me over shrewdly. "You're too eager. Why? Got another client, have you?"

"Maybe," I admitted.

"Who is it?"

"That," I said pointedly, "is none of your business."

"Paying you as well as I am?" she asked quizzically. "Bet not. Bet it's a girl. Paying you in kisses, I bet. You look like the kind of young fool who'd rather have kisses than money."

I flushed. "Maybe you're right," I said.

"Tell me," she said complacently, "does this new job conflict with what I paid you to do?"

"Well . . ." I began hesitating.

"Then," she said triumphantly, "why not do both jobs at once? I guess you're not allergic to money."

I thought about it for a moment and shook my head. I looked aside and was turned to stone. Somehow, the black mirror leaning against the wall had been turned around so it faced into the room. The little old lady should have been reflected in it, but it wasn't the little old lady I saw.

Darkly, glimmering up at me through the mists of night, was the face of Ariel.

SHE turned her head, and I looked into the mirrored eyes of a frightened angel. A dark angel. I looked back and forth between the night-ridden image of youth and beauty and the reality of withered age. Angel? Witch! And I loved the one in the black mirror.

"Ariel?" I groaned. "Why? And which one is you?"

She took a step toward me, her hand half-raised, and just then the door swung open. Uriel walked into the room, calmly and stopped, glancing quickly at us. He grasped the situation almost instantly.

Uriel was only an inch or two taller than the old lady, and his white hair went well with her gray, perky curls. They made a jolly old couple. But where did that leave me? In love with a phantom in dark glass?

A cry broke from the old lady's throat. It was strangely incongruous. "Don't you know?" she said, and it was Ariel's voice.

"How can I?" I groaned. It was getting to be a habit. "Everybody's someone else. Nobody's themselves. How do I know what to believe. Who are you?"

She broke into tears and sank down into a chair. "You don't love me!" she said brokenly.

"Look in the mirror, son!" Uriel said firmly.

I looked. Uriel was mirrored there. Uriel himself, not someone else. "What is that supposed to tell me?" I asked. "That you're not disguised?"

"Exactly," Uriel said. He walked quickly to the mirror, keeping to one side of it so that he could not see his own reflection, and turned it to the wall. "And that means the mirror shows people as they are, not as they aren't." He inspected the letters around the edges. "Interesting," he mused and became engrossed.

I turned to Ariel—and it was Ariel. Mrs. Peabody was gone. Ariel's eyes were wet with tears as she looked up at me.

"How old are you?" I asked sternly, unable to keep my doubts from spilling over.

"Twenty-two," she said, looking miserable.

"Really?"

"Well," she said, "twenty-three."

I sighed. That had the ring of truth. And after my experiences of the last couple of days, it had the added flavor of novelty. "Why?" I asked. "Why did you do it?"

"Think, Gabriel!" she said, and a hint of impatience was creeping into her voice. "I didn't want anyone to know that I was investigating Solomon. And I certainly had no way of knowing I could trust you."

"Not at first, maybe," I said doggedly, "but you had plenty of chances to tell me later."

She blushed. "I was going to tell you, Gabriel. I was going to tell you when I came down here. And then when I knocked and couldn't get an answer, and I had to materialize inside the room and saw you with your face all red—I decided it would be better for Mrs. Peabody to save you. You would never have to know that I had deceived you and Mrs. Peabody could just fade away."

"And you had to make one last test to be sure you could trust me," I added, scowling.

"If I'd known you were going to act like this, Gabriel, I'd never

have bothered," she retorted stubbornly, with supreme illogic.

"For God's sake!" I shouted. "Stop calling me Gabriel! You know my name."

Her eyes grew big with alarm. "Sh-h-h!" she said. "Don't say it!"

I WENT toward her, with some high-class illogic of my own, my arms outstretched. "Then you *do* care," I sighed.

The next thing I knew, I was sitting in the chair, and she was curled up in my lap, her head on my shoulder, whispering things in my ear, and Uriel was coughing, having spent as much time inspecting the mirror as he could find excuse for.

"Children," he said, "there is work to do. And I must say, Ariel, you're growing very careless about your spells."

"Goodness!" Ariel said, sitting up and looking down at her dress—Mrs. Peabody's dress, that is. "This lavender and lace doesn't do a thing for me, either. You'll have to excuse me for a moment."

She dashed to the circle and disappeared. Uriel and I stared blankly at each other, shaking our heads. Minutes later she was back in a sleek black dress that did a great deal for her, but Uriel and I, under a gentleman's agreement, ignored her appearance and continued our discussion of the books he had noticed on the desk. He

cleared up a number of my vaguer conceptions about the principles of magic.

Ariel sat down on the edge of a chair, looking hopefully back and forth between us, like a little girl trying not to be heard, but seen. At last she gave up. "I'm back," she said.

I turned to her. "Tell me. Who was Gabriel?"

She sighed heavily. I forced back a smile. "He was Father's protégé, a graduate student who was really quite an adept. Uriel thought Gabriel was almost as good as he was himself. We were hoping he could help us with Solomon. And then he was killed in a traffic accident."

"That was no accident," I said, and I told them about La Volsin's slip.

"The murderers!" Ariel said angrily.

"Was he in love with you?" I asked.

Ariel was thoughtful. "Maybe. But I didn't—I mean he was just a nice boy."

"That makes two murders, then. Gabriel and your father."

"If Prospero's death was murder," Uriel said, shaking his head. "I didn't realize anything was wrong until too late—he didn't tell me. Even now, I can't believe that Solomon would stoop to the disgusting nonsense involved in the Mass—the ruined church, the black

host, the water from the well in which an unbaptized infant has been drowned, all the rest."

"He's already made two attempts on Gabri—on *his* life," Ariel said. "The black mirror and an enchanted towel that almost strangled him. The only thing Solomon cares about is power, and the only way he can be sure of that is to kill us off."

"I understand that you haven't been feeling well," I said, turning to Uriel, while I massaged my throat reminiscently.

"Nonsense," Uriel said stoutly. "Never felt better in my life." He started coughing. It had a hollow sound. For the first time, I noticed that Uriel's rosy appearance of health was an illusion. His red cheeks were rouged. Ariel and I exchanged worried glances.

"Let's get to work," Ariel said. "Tell him about the clue, Gabri—"

She stopped and stared at the expression on my face. Something had just occurred to me.

"You might as well call me Casey," I said. "I just remembered. I signed the hotel register with my own name."

VII

THEY stared at me, aghast. I shook my head remorsefully. "I'm afraid I'm a bust at this business. I'll never remember all the rules. I suppose they know

your name," I said to Uriel.

"I'm afraid so. Since Professor Reeves and I founded the society, we had little opportunity for deception. Many early members knew us, and our preliminary researches attracted a little publicity. Anyone could have learned our names, without much more than asking."

"Professor Reeves was Prospero?" I asked. "Ariel's father?"

"Yes," Ariel said.

"And what about you?" I asked, turning to her. "Do they know your name?"

"Yes," she said, "but they don't know it."

"Eh?" I said blankly. "Go through that once more. They know it, but they don't know it?"

She shook her head. "It isn't a good thing to talk about."

"But what is this name business?" I asked. "Does it have to be all your names, or just your first or last name, or what?"

"Your real name," Uriel said. "The name that is you. In most cases, that's your Christian name, although, in many primitive tribes all over the world, the child was given a secret or sacred name, known only to himself or his parents."

"That's me." I chuckled. "I'm not so bad off after all. Casey isn't my real name. And I don't think anyone has used anything else since I was christened."

"Thank God!" Ariel breathed.

I took her hand and squeezed it.

"You said you had a clue?"

Uriel said quickly. Maybe he wanted to forestall another outburst of affection.

I fished out the ticket again. It was getting a little battered. "Maybe—but I don't know what good it can do us."

Uriel looked it over carefully. He balanced it on his fingertips and muttered a few words. The ticket fluttered. "It fits," Uriel said, looking up. "I'm almost sure Solomon held this in his hand at one time. And now that I think about it, it's natural that he should be from Washington."

"Washington?" I echoed foolishly. "Why?"

"That's where the power is," Ariel said thoughtfully. "And he's the most ambitious man I've ever known."

"Washington," I mused. "That narrows it down some, but not much. He could be anyone, from a public figure to a man behind the throne whom nobody knows."

Ariel's face fell.

"But it isn't hopeless," I said. "Hold everything."

I PICKED up the telephone, asked for long distance and then for Jack Duncan at the Associated Press Washington newsroom. I turned to smile at Ariel. She and Uriel were watching me blankly.

"Jack?" I said. "Casey . . . Fine, fine . . . Business. Tell me, who's gone from Washington?"

"Oh, man, you started drinking early this morning," Jack replied sarcastically.

"You know what I mean. Someone important."

"Everybody, my boy. Nobody hangs around here over the weekend but us wage slaves."

I was silent for a moment, thinking just how to phrase the question that had occurred to me. "Answer me this, then. Who's the luckiest man in Washington?"

"Me, boy—I start on my vacation Monday."

"Come on, Jack! Who thinks you're important besides your wife? This is important. Who's the luckiest man in Washington?" I repeated impatiently.

"At cards, love or horses?"

"All of those, but especially in getting where he wants to be. Top of the heap, maybe."

"Well, well," Jack was thinking now. "Tain't the Great White Father. The honeymoon is over and he don't like it so good. The word is going around that he won't be running again. Hell, man! There's only one boy that fits. Never seems to need money. All of his enemies have bad luck, but he comes up smelling like a rose. And in the last year or so, all of his intraparty rivals have died or retired with poor health

or something equally unlikely."

"His name, Jack, his name." I was excited now.

"You know it, boy. Names are dangerous. No telling who might be tapping this line."

"Give me a clue, Jack!" I said eagerly. "I have to be sure."

"America's biggest, bestest, one-man self-help organization. Look in today's headlines, or yesterday's, or tomorrow's. You'll see his name. No doubt about it. The party might not like it, and a lot of Americans might feel like cutting their throats, but he's gonna sweep the convention unless somebody fixes his little red wagon. And probably get elected, too. That's private stock, boy. Don't spread it around."

"Got it," I said exultantly. "He's out of town now, isn't he?"

JACK hesitated. "Wait a second." I could hear him yelling over the teletype clatter to somebody across the room. "Sorry to disillusion you, sonny," he said. "The great man was seen this morning, taking a brisk walk around the block." He sounded disappointed himself. "For a moment I thought you might be able to do the American people their greatest service."

"Thanks, Jack," I said dully. I lowered the phone gently and turned slowly to Ariel and Uriel. I shrugged. "I guess you heard.

It was a thought, anyway."

"Don't get discouraged so easy, son," Uriel said, and his eyes were sparkling. "You've got him."

"Maybe you didn't hear after all," I said in amazement. Then, I snapped my fingers. "That's it. He flew back to shake my possible suspicion."

"Could be," Uriel said, "but I don't think so. Too risky. Somebody might spot him."

"Then what?"

"Casey," Ariel said. "Did you ever hear of a simulacrum?"

"An image?" I asked.

Uriel nodded. "That's the hard way, of course. He could have left somebody in disguise, but there's nobody he can trust with his real identity. He can assign a few minor jobs, but he has to do all the big things himself. That's his weak point. That, and his lust for power."

"And overconfidence," I said, thinking back.

"Maybe," Uriel said.

"Then we've got him!" I said eagerly.

Uriel gave me a reproving glance. "We can't proceed on guesswork. We must have proof. It might be the wrong man."

"What loss?" I shrugged.

"Casey!" Ariel said, frowning.

"What do you want him to do? Come up and present his birth certificate?" I said disgustedly. "For magicians and witches, it

seems to me you two are awfully particular. But don't mind me. I'm just a novice at this thing."

"You don't understand," Ariel said firmly.

"The greater the power, my son," Uriel said, "the greater the responsibility."

"That ain't the way I heard it," I said. "The greater the power, the greater the corruption."

Ariel turned her back on me. I could see from the set of it that I had gone too far.

"I'm sorry," I said. "But, after we've got a lead like this, the first break in the case, you aren't going to make any use of it . . ." I took hold of Ariel's shoulders and tried to turn her around, but she seemed to be made of stone. "Ariel," I said softly, "I'm sorry. I'll go along with whatever you say."

She looked back over her shoulder. "Well-I-I." And she turned around to face us again.

"You're jumping to conclusions again," Uriel said patiently. "We aren't going to throw this away. There are some things we can do without harm. This, for instance."

HE rubbed out the circle I had drawn on the rug and chalked in another. He started inscribing equations around it. After a moment, he hesitated and rubbed his forehead. "My memory isn't as good as it used to be," he apolo-

gized. "I wish I had that book. Must have lost it somewhere."

I bent down and lifted the corner of the rug and pulled out the manuscript. "This?" I said.

"Yes," he said happily. "Dear me, yes. You *are* a help! Where did you find it? Never mind."

He went back to his task, consulting the manuscript occasionally. When he was finished, the rug was almost covered with chalk marks. "There!" he said, getting creakily up off his knees.

I looked at it dubiously.

"It's an old Chaldean spell—an exorcism," he explained. "In cases of this kind, it's helpful to recite the verbal equivalent, too."

He entered the circle and lifted his face toward the ceiling. Little, white-haired, cherubic, he was not my idea of a magician. He looked more like a professor about to expand on some dull minutiae.

He began to chant in a low and surprisingly effective voice, "He who makes the image, he who enchants, the evil face, the evil eye, the evil mouth, the evil tongue, the evil lip, the evil word . . ."

Shivers ran up and down my spine.

"Spirit of the sky, exorcise them! Spirit of the earth, exorcise them!"

"The magician has bewitched us with his magic, he has bewitched us with his magic.

"The witch has bewitched us

with her magic, she has bewitched us with her magic.

"He who has fashioned images corresponding to our whole appearance has bewitched our appearance;

"He has seized the magic draught prepared for us and has soiled our garments, he has torn our garments and has mingled his magic herb with the dust of our feet;

"May the fire-god, the hero, turn their magic to nought!"

I LET out my breath and realized that I had been holding it a long time.

"My goodness," Uriel said. "I feel better already."

He looked better. The pallor beneath the rouge had changed to a healthier pink. I felt better, too. My neck had been sore and stiff. I touched it tentatively. It seemed as good as ever.

"What now?" I asked.

"Now," said Uriel vigorously, "is the time for the counterattack. We must trick him into showing his true face."

Silently, I pointed toward the back of the mirror leaning against the wall.

"Ideal!" Uriel cried. "Now, where would be the best place? I'm afraid the Crystal Room is out."

"How about his rooms?" I suggested. "He won't be expecting

us to come there after him."

"His rooms?" Ariel said, frowning.

"The penthouse," I said.

"The very thing," Uriel said. "I don't know what we'd do without you, son."

"But will he be there?" Ariel asked anxiously.

"There's one good way to find out," Uriel said. He turned to me. "A program."

I pulled it out of my coat pocket. "It won't do you any good. Only October 30 was listed."

Uriel opened it to the middle. "Oh, no. This is fine."

I looked over his shoulder. The page headed October 30 had changed completely. It now read—

OCTOBER 31

10:00 THE ORIGINS OF
ROODMAS (WALPUR-
GIS NIGHT)

10:30 WHEN THE GOD WAS
KILLED—A PANEL DIS-
CUSSION

11:00 EINSTEIN'S FIELD THE-
ORY — A VINDICATION
OF THE ART

"Oh, dear!" Uriel said. "That was my lecture. I'm afraid there will be a blank in the program."

11:30 THE KABBALISTS—
RITER THAN THEY
KNEW

12:00 A SPELL FOR ADONIS

12:30 USEFUL WAX IMAGES
AND HOW TO MAKE
THEM

1:00 Recess

3:00 AN ARGUMENT FOR
AUGURY

3:30 WHY THERE ARE NO
PROFESSIONAL MAGI-
CIANS IN EGYPT

"No magicians?" I said.

"All priests. It was the state religion."

4:00 INVISIBILITY — A LOST
ART

5:00 THE VAMPIRE IN
MYTH AND FACT

"Oh, dear!" Uriel moaned soft-
ly. "Darker and darker."

8:00 Banquet

11:00 INVOCATION — PENT-
HOUSE

"I thought the invocation al-
ways came at the beginning," I
said.

"Not this kind of invocation,"
Ariel said.

"Oh, me," Uriel said. "Do you
suppose . . ."

Ariel shook her head grimly.
"I'm afraid so."

"We'll have to stop them," Uriel
said with determination.

"What's this all about?" I asked,
but they were looking at each
other in distress. I shrugged and
glanced at my watch. Five minutes
after ten. Only five after ten? I
shook it, but it was still running.
"According to this, then," I said,
"he should still be in the Crystal

Room—for several hours yet.”

“But how can we be sure?” Ariel asked.

I picked up the telephone and asked for the Crystal Room. I listened to the phone ring at the other end, and then someone picked it up and said, “Hello,” very softly. Someone was speaking in the background.

“The Magus, please,” I said.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the voice replied. “He’s on stage now. Can I have him call you when he’s free?”

“Never mind,” I said quickly. “I’ll call back later.” I turned to Ariel and Uriel. Uriel was chalking equations on the back of the mirror. Ariel was looking at me expectantly.

“Let’s go,” I said bravely. “Let’s go beard the magician in his pent-house.”

But my knees were shaking.

URIEL stepped back, inspected his work, and turned to us. “You two will have to go ahead. There are some preparations I must attend to. Take the mirror, and put it somewhere so he won’t see it until too late. Then search his rooms for some clue to his identity. Failing that, try to get some hairs or nail clippings. Even Homer nods. Why not Solomon?”

I pulled the automatic out from under my arm and inspected it again before I replaced it.

Ariel watched me, frowning. “That won’t do you any good.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” I said. “Maybe it won’t do Solomon any damage, but it sure makes *me* feel a lot better.”

I got a towel out of the bathroom, wrapped the mirror in it and turned toward the door. “Ready?”

We took an elevator to the thirty-fifth floor. The hall was empty and dark. I watched the shadows suspiciously, ready to jump—for the stairs—if anything moved. I wasn’t cut out for this kind of work.

I put my hand on the doorknob and tried to turn it. The door was locked. I looked at Ariel inquiringly.

She muttered something under her breath and reached out with one finger to touch the knob. Nothing happened. She frowned and bit her lip.

“There’s a spell on it,” she said.

I racked my memory for the section of Uriel’s manuscript called Counter-Spells. I reached in my pocket for the piece of chalk that had become standard equipment, drew a circle around the knob and an X across the keyhole in the knob, then hesitantly jotted down an equation. As I finished writing the last figure, the door swung gently open.

I turned to smile proudly at Ariel. She smiled back and said,

"You continue to surprise—"

She stopped, and her eyes got big. There was fear mirrored in them. They looked over my shoulder. I spun around and stopped petrified.

In the doorway, facing us, green eyes glinting, tail lashing wickedly back and forth, was a tiger.

And, as I identified it, I knew it wasn't a tiger at all. There never was a tiger with black face, ears and paws, and fur the color of cream. It was a Siamese cat, but it was big as a tiger, and its eyes studied us hungrily as it crouched a little closer to the floor.

"A familiar!" Ariel breathed.

THE paralysis left me. I made the fastest draw of my life. The .38 was pointed and my finger was squeezing the trigger when Ariel put her hand past my arm, her finger aimed at the cat, and muttered a few words. Suddenly, I was aiming two feet over the cat's head. It had shrunk to normal size. I eased my finger off the trigger and put the gun away, feeling foolish.

Ariel moved past me and bent down to pet the cat, but it stared at her haughtily, sniffed at me and moved aloofly away on business of its own. I was just as happy to see it go. I let out a sigh and discovered that I was still hugging the mirror under one arm.

"I don't think I'm ever going

to get used to this," I said. "Let's get it over with."

Ariel nodded quickly, uneasily, and started across the lush living room toward two doors that opened off it. I looked around for a place to spot the mirror. Finally, I got an idea. The windows were fitted with venetian blinds, but one of them was partly raised. I unwrapped the mirror carefully and propped it in the window frame. The bottom of the blind kept it from falling out. I stepped back and admired it—for an angle. If the man who called himself Solomon didn't return until night—and there was a good chance that he wouldn't—he would never suspect that one window was a mirror, until too late.

I hoped he would get trapped in it as I had.

Ariel came out of one room, empty-handed. I pointed out the mirror, so that she would know where it was. She nodded.

"Find anything?" I whispered. There wasn't any reason to whisper, but that was the way I felt.

She shook her head. "No papers—nothing," she whispered back. "I've never seen a place so clean."

She vanished into the other room. I poked around the living room, lifting cushions, peering under furniture, searching desk drawers. There wasn't even any dust or lint. Ariel came back.

"The rooms are spotless," she

whispered. "Even the sheets have been changed."

"It's impossible," I said. "Nobody could live here, even for a few hours, without leaving some trace. I'd think we were in the wrong rooms, if it weren't for that cat. Come to think about it, where is the cat?"

Ariel shook her head. "I haven't seen it."

My nerves were beginning to quiver. I was ready to admit defeat and try something else, but there was one more door. We walked toward it together.

"Those were bedrooms?" I asked.

She nodded. "And a bath."

"No personal things?" I said. "No razor? No toothbrush?"

"Just unused glasses and towels and unwrapped soap."

We went through the door and into a kitchen. It was all enamel and glass and stainless steel. Everything glistened and gleamed. There weren't even any dirty glasses. The place was fantastically, implausibly clean.

I snooped through the cabinets and drawers without much hope. Dishes were stacked neatly, glasses were turned top down, silverware was perfectly aligned.

"Where's that damned cat?" I muttered.

It wasn't in the kitchen, either. There was nothing in the kitchen that didn't belong there except

Ariel and me. We were stamped.

The cat meowed loudly from the living room. We stiffened and turned toward the door. I pushed it open. The cat was sitting in front of the hall door, looking up at it expectantly. I held Ariel back, feeling suddenly chilled.

There was a noise from the hall, distant and uncertain, like doors sliding. The cat looked at us and back at the door, and I looked at the cat, and Ariel peered over my shoulder.

We all heard it then—a key slipping into the doorknob and turning.

VIII

"**M**EOW-W!" the cat said. "*R-r-reow!*" It was a warning.

The door swung open. I pressed Ariel back into the kitchen and let the door close to a slit. I pulled the .38 out of the shoulder holster and held it ready in my hand. Maybe it was useless, but it felt good there.

Solomon stepped into the room, cautiously, looking at both sides of the door and at the floor. The cat jumped at him, clawing his black pants, and chattering angrily about strangers who had broken into the penthouse in a voice that was almost understandable.

Solomon ignored it. His head, slowly turning, swept his gaze around the room. He half-turned,

his left arm straightening out suddenly in a savage arc that sent something in his hand hurtling away. Involuntarily, my eyes followed it. Glass tinkled. A square of night shivered itself into black fragments.

But just before the black mirror broke, shattered by the heavy key, I saw Solomon as he really was. That momentary glimpse was enough. I knew him. There could be no mistake. I only hoped the information hadn't come too late.

I looked back toward Solomon. He was gone. My heart missed a beat. It started again, strongly, hopefully. Had he been trapped in the mirror before it broke? Had the key he threw shattered Solomon himself into a million shards? For a moment, I let myself believe it.

In back of me, Ariel shattered my illusion. She gasped. I swung around, my gun ready.

We faced Solomon. He leaned, dark-faced and smiling, against the stainless-steel sink. The cat rubbed against his dark leg, her eyes fixed on us malevolently.

"So," he said urbane, "the beautiful witch and the intrepid detective." Cream-colored fur lifted on the cat's back—she growled deep in her throat. "Baal!" Solomon said. "You mustn't be inhospitable to our guests, even if they did get here a little early." He looked back at us.

"So nice of you to come to see me. You saved me endless trouble in searching you out. I did want to invite you to my little party this evening. Especially you, my dear—" and he bowed mockingly to Ariel. "There is a special place in the ceremony for a virgin, and virgins are so hard to find these days."

"Don't move!" I said, shoving the automatic toward him, my finger tightening on the trigger. "Don't lift a hand! I won't have any remorse about shooting you."

He frowned. "I don't think you would. That isn't very friendly of you." His face cleared. "But you must realize that, if Ariel's spells are useless, that thing you're holding is a mere toy." He looked at Ariel. "You can stop muttering now. Nothing will work here. I put in too many hours of preparation." He smiled broadly.

Anger was a red tide rising in my throat. My finger got white. The hammer clicked futilely against the cartridge. It clicked again and again. I stared down at the automatic in dazed disbelief.

"There, now," Solomon said gently. "You can relax. In fact, you can't move at all."

I was true. As I looked up, I froze, unable even to twitch an eyelash. Only my chest expanded shallowly, automatically, to draw in air, and my eyes could move from side to side. I looked at

Ariel. She was rigid, too.

"Now," he said, "I'll have to put you both away until tonight. I must get back to the meeting—" he turned to me—"but thank you for calling and letting me know you were on your way up."

I cursed my eternal stupidity. When would I learn? Now, it was too late to learn.

Night came like blindness. I had a moment to wonder if it was permanent before the light came back. I was in a bedroom. Ariel was nowhere in sight. She could have been behind me. I would never have known, since I could not move my head, but I had a feeling she wasn't in the room.

The room was large and well furnished. I remembered that the penthouse had two of them.

Somewhere, a door opened and closed. I could still hear. But after that there was silence.

I stood it as long as I could. It wasn't very long. I struggled against the invisible bonds that held me so tightly, but it was useless. I sagged, worn out.

Ariel, Ariel! I moaned silently. *Where are you?*

Here. It was a cool, quiet voice inside my head. And it was Ariel.

Telepathy! Have you always had it?

Not until just now, when you called.

Where are you? I'm in a bedroom.

In the other bedroom.

Are you all right? He didn't hurt you?

Oh, no.

Can he hear us?

No. He's gone.

The calmness of her voice surprised me. She wasn't frightened any more. The worst had happened, and now she wasn't afraid. I was the one who was scared.

Can you do anything, Ariel?

No. I've been trying.

We're trapped then?

Yes, Casey.

Uriel can help us!

Yes, Casey darling.

But Solomon will be watching for him.

Uriel knows it. In spite of his appearance, he's very clever.

Ariel,

Yes, darling?

What's your real name? I want to know. You said that Solomon knew it, but he didn't know that he knew.

It's Ariel. Father said they'd never suspect the completely obvious. They'd keep looking for something hidden.

My name's Kirk. Kirk Cullen. K. C. Casey. I love you, Ariel.

I love you, Casey. The sweetness of it poured through me like wine. I longed to take her in my arms and hold her there forever, but I could only stand stiffly like a statue—a statue of ice with a melting heart.

Ariel, we've got to get out of here.

Yes! Darling.

Uriel. Uriel will rescue us.

We stood there, sharing our thoughts, and watched the shadows creep across the floor. And finally we heard a door open.

Uriel! It was an explosion of relief, and I thought I heard Ariel echo, *Uriel!*

And then we heard the bland voice we hated.

"Put him down here," Solomon said.

Our hopes plummeted together. The door closed.

"Still silent, old man?" Solomon said. "Well, we'll put you away for now, and put you away for good a little later. You've caused me more trouble than all the rest put together."

A MOMENT later, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something flicker into being. It was Uriel, small and pale and stiff. The door opened and closed again. Uriel didn't stir. Even his eyes were motionless.

Is he there with you, Casey?

Yes, I answered hopelessly.

I can't reach him, Ariel said. What has Solomon done to him?

What did Solomon mean, Ariel, when he was talking about virgins?

I don't know.

But she knew. She didn't want to tell me, and I knew now that I

didn't want to know. Not then.

We stood and watched the shadows creep across the floor and waited for the night . . .

The darkness was almost complete. Clouds must have covered the sky as the night came, because not even starlight entered the room. I could just barely make out the faint glimmer of Uriel's face.

We had been listening to voices in the living room for some time now. We had heard furniture being moved around. But the bedroom doors were closed, and we couldn't see what was happening.

A brilliant stroke of lightning lit up the room for a moment with awful clarity. I saw Uriel standing as stiffly as before. He hadn't moved. He might be dead. The thunder rolled. If I could have moved, I would have shuddered.

Ariel! What's going to happen?

Something bad—something evil! Solomon's been building up to it for a long time, with the covens and the black magic. And now it's November-eve. We should have suspected why he picked this date.

Why? Why November-eve?

It's All-Hallows E'en. Oh, Casey! The door is opening. They're coming for me.

A scream rang through my mind, and I struggled desperately against the terrible paralysis. But uselessly. I couldn't stir a finger. I

listened helplessly to Ariel's broken thoughts, transmitting to me a scene of horror made vivid.

The living room was changed. Ariel scarcely recognized it as two men carried her into the dark room, lit only by tall tapers and the intermittent flickering of lightning. The penthouse was a new Brocken, a modern, exceedingly high mountain, from which to see the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

They carried her through the room toward a black altar at the other end, where Solomon waited. There were others in the room. Their dark faces slipped past Ariel on either side. She recognized only one, the magnificent Catherine La Voisin, who smiled at Ariel and winked.

Ariel's overwrought senses felt other things in the room. She could not see them, but they crowded around. They pressed in close.

ON a tripod, in front of the altar, was a copper dish. In it, charcoal burned fitfully. Solomon stood behind the altar. He was dressed in a long white tunic.

The men ripped off Ariel's clothes. They placed her face up on the altar.

Casey! she moaned. Her voice was terror.

The room was silent, except for the thunder that came at intervals

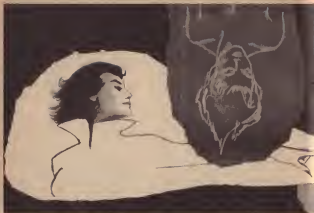
like a roll of giant drums. Solomon began to speak in a low voice. Ariel could not make out the words at first and then his voice grew louder.

"... gathered here in the required numbers, we summon Thee, Prince, Ruler of Darkness, Lord of Evil. Your worshippers summon Thee to receive our sacrifice. We summon Thee by our allegiance. We summon Thee by the great Names of the God of gods and Lord of lords. ADONAY, TETRAGRAMMATON, JEHOVA, TETRAGRAMMATON, ADONAY, JEHOVA, OTHEOS, ATHANATOS, ISCHYROS, AGLA, PENTAGRAMMATON, SADAY, SADAY, SADAY, JEHOVA, OTHEOS, ATHANATOS, a *Liclar* TETRAGRAMMATON, ADONAY, ISCHYROS, ANTHANATOS, SADY, SADY, SADY, CADOS, CADOS, CADOS, ELOY, AGLA, AGLA, ADONAY, ADONAY . . ."

Casey! He's got a sword! And there's something coming. I can feel it. It's getting closer!

Her silent screams echoed and re-echoed through my mind. I made one last convulsive effort that broke my unseen bonds like rotten ropes and sent me hurtling to the door. I tore it open.

Far across the room, was the altar, with Ariel's white body outlined against its blackness. Behind her, was Solomon, white-



robed, his face lit redly by the fire in front of the altar. But the face glowed from within, with a darker light. Behind him, cast like a shadow against the wall, was a towering shape of darkness that appeared to draw in upon him as I watched. His hands lifted the sword high . . .

"Stop!"

The shout froze the room into a fantastic tableau. But it hadn't been my shout.

Someone else was moving in the room. Someone came close to

the altar, into the flickering light. It was Catherine La Voisin, her hair gleaming brighter than the fire. And then it was no longer the red-haired witch. Uriel stood where she had been. Small, old, shabby, he defied the room.

"Begone, shadows!" he said, pointing one long finger toward Solomon and the altar. A spear of light shot out from his finger. "Flee, shadows—as you must always flee before the light!" His body seemed to glow in the darkness. "Twisted projections of a



twisted mind, vanish into the nothingness whence you came!"

He rattled off a series of equations, filled with functions and derivatives, faster than I could follow. I felt a fresh clean wind blow through the room, sweeping cobwebs away before it. Ariel stirred.

The shadow behind Solomon had shrunk when Uriel's finger of light struck it. Now it dwindled farther. It crouched behind Solomon.

"Go!" Uriel commanded sternly.

Solomon woke from a daze. "Night conquers the day," he thundered. "Darkness conquers the light. Power makes all men bow before it. Bow, then!"

THE sword over Ariel trembled in Solomon's hand, as he fought to bring it down. His Satanic face and white robe towered over Uriel's white-haired shabby insignificance. They battled for the sword, the two of them, straining against invisible forces.

Slowly the sword started down. "Senator!" I shouted.

Solomon looked up. He peered across the room at me, his face contorted and headed with sweat.

"This time the gun will not fail, Senator!" I yelled. "The bullets are silver, and your name is written on them!"

I pulled the trigger of the gun that had rested in my hand for over twelve hours. My hand recoiled again and again. I saw his robe twitch. He staggered. The sword dropped in his hands. And then it lifted again.

The hammer clicked empty.

"Lights!" Uriel shouted. "Let the light chase away the darkness!"

Blindingly, the lights came on. The young man who had been the doorkeeper of the Crystal Room was blinking dazedly beside the switch. The others in the room seemed just as dazed.

Uriel's finger was outstretched

toward Solomon, his lips moving rapidly. Energy flashed through the room, brilliantly, electrically. Thunder crashed.

The lightning seemed to pour down the blade of the uplifted sword. The sword fell. There were no bands to hold it. The white robe crumpled emptily to the floor. There was no one inside them.

Solomon was gone . . .

I heard the door open and the sound of running feet, but I didn't look to see what was happening. I was racing toward the altar. I gathered Ariel into my arms and kissed her and held her tight. She was crying shakily, but, in a moment, her arms went around me. She stopped shaking.

"Casey!" she said softly. "I knew you would save me."

"It wasn't me," I said. "It was Uriel."

I half-turned. Uriel was standing beside us, smiling mildly, looking pleased. Otherwise the room was empty. The others had fled.

"It was mainly trickery," he said, grinning sheepishly. "To confuse Solomon." He opened his hand. There was a pencil flashlight in it. "That was the beam of light. I used a phosphorescent dye on the clothes and, by hypnosis, induced the young man by the light switch to smuggle in an ultraviolet projector. The most difficult job was immobilizing La Voisin." He shuddered. "A violent woman."

"What about Solomon?" Ariel asked, shivering, as she turned to the crumpled white robe.

"Oh, he's gone," Uriel said cheerfully. "Where, I haven't the slightest idea. But he won't be back. I hated to do it, but he insisted on forcing his warped ideas onto formless energy. Now that he's gone, his simulacrum in Washington will die in a few days. A very neat ending for public consumption, although something of a puzzle to the doctors, I'm afraid." He looked at me approvingly. "Those bullets were very helpful. They distracted him at a crucial moment."

"They didn't seem to do much damage," I said puzzledly. "Of course, they weren't silver, and they didn't have his name on them."

"Wouldn't have helped if they had," Uriel said. "In those clothes, I think you'll find what was called in my day a bulletproof vest. He always liked to play both sides."

"You gave us a scare, though," Ariel said. "We thought you were captured."

I TURNED quickly and raced to the bedroom door. "My God, yes!" Uriel was still standing there in the darkness. I looked back and forth between the two. "But what . . . ?"

"Solomon wasn't the only one who could manufacture simulacra.

I let him take this one, and he didn't even wonder why it was so easy. He had a bad habit of underestimating his opposition. But I'd better get rid of this."

He muttered something under his breath. The image disappeared.

I sighed. "Now we can forget the whole thing."

"Forget!" Uriel exclaimed. "Dear me, no! The Art is still valid. It must be given to the world."

"But—but," I spluttered, "that would be like telling them how to make atom bombs in their basements!"

"Knowledge can never be suppressed, young man," Uriel said sternly. "Common understanding is the finest safeguard. Of course, there are some finishing touches that are necessary. Oh, dear me, yes. I must be going. There is so much to be done."

He nodded happily at us and trotted out of the room.

I turned to Ariel in bewilderment. She had slipped back into her torn clothing. She fumbled behind her back, looking at me over her shoulder.

"Don't worry, Casey," she said.

"He'll be putting finishing touches on his theory for years. Fasten this, will you?"

I fastened it, and it seemed very commonplace and marital, but it sent shivers running up and down my arms, and this time it wasn't terror.

"I wonder what my life will be like," I said, bending down to kiss the soft hollow between her throat and her shoulder, "when I'm married to a witch."

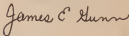
She took a deep breath and leaned her head against mine. "It's a good thing you said that. Because you haven't any choice. From now on you're going to be a faithful, submissive husband."

"Why?" I asked uneasily.

"Because," she said, twisting around to press herself against me, "I know your real name."

I sighed and resigned myself to my fate. After all, every man marries a witch, whether he knows it or not.

And one kind of witchcraft is pretty much like another.



This is a formal invitation to attend the informal Fifth Indian Lake Conference to be held on May 22 and 23, 1954, at the Hotel Ingals, Bellefontaine, Ohio. You'll meet your favorite writers, artists and editors there.