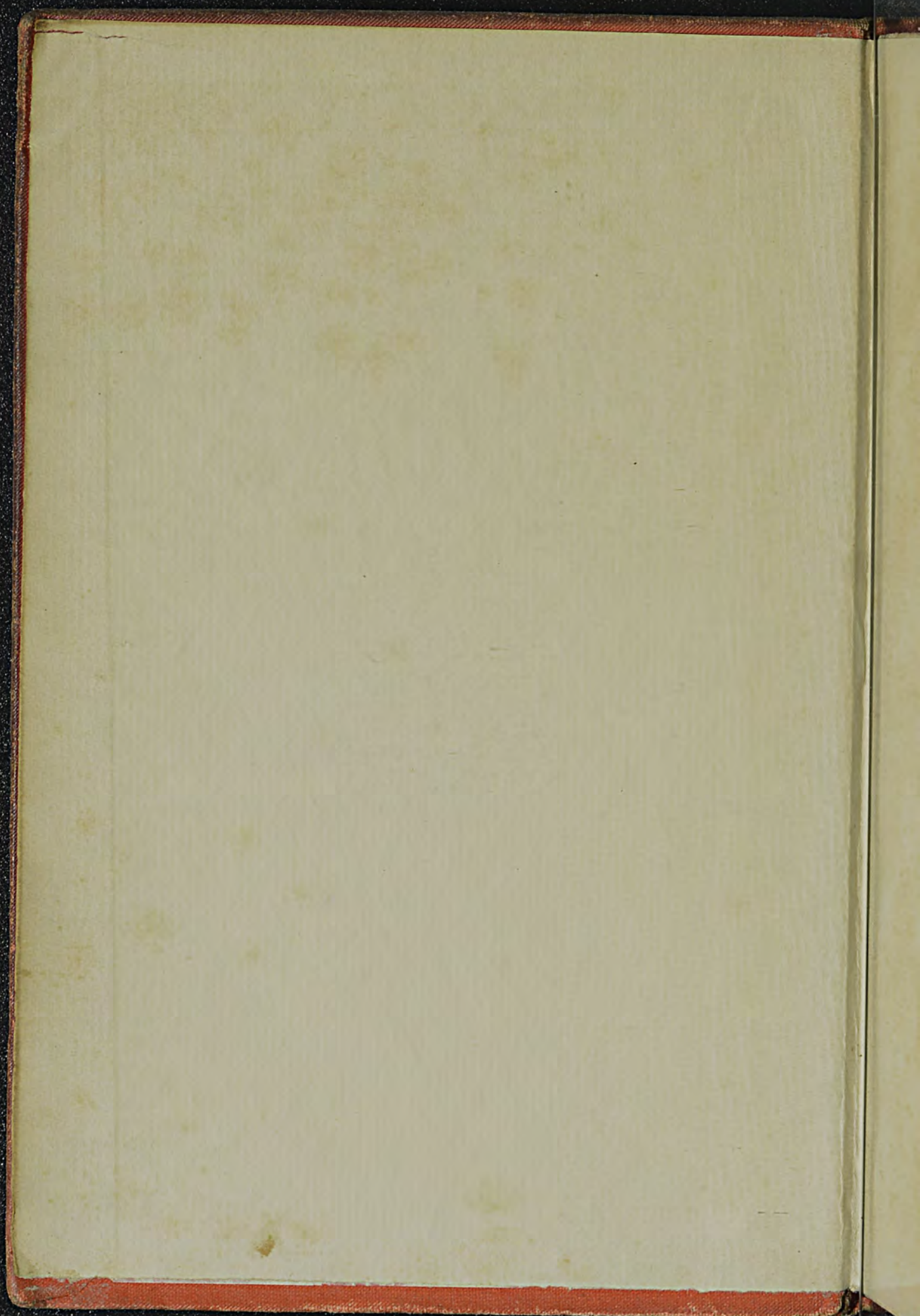


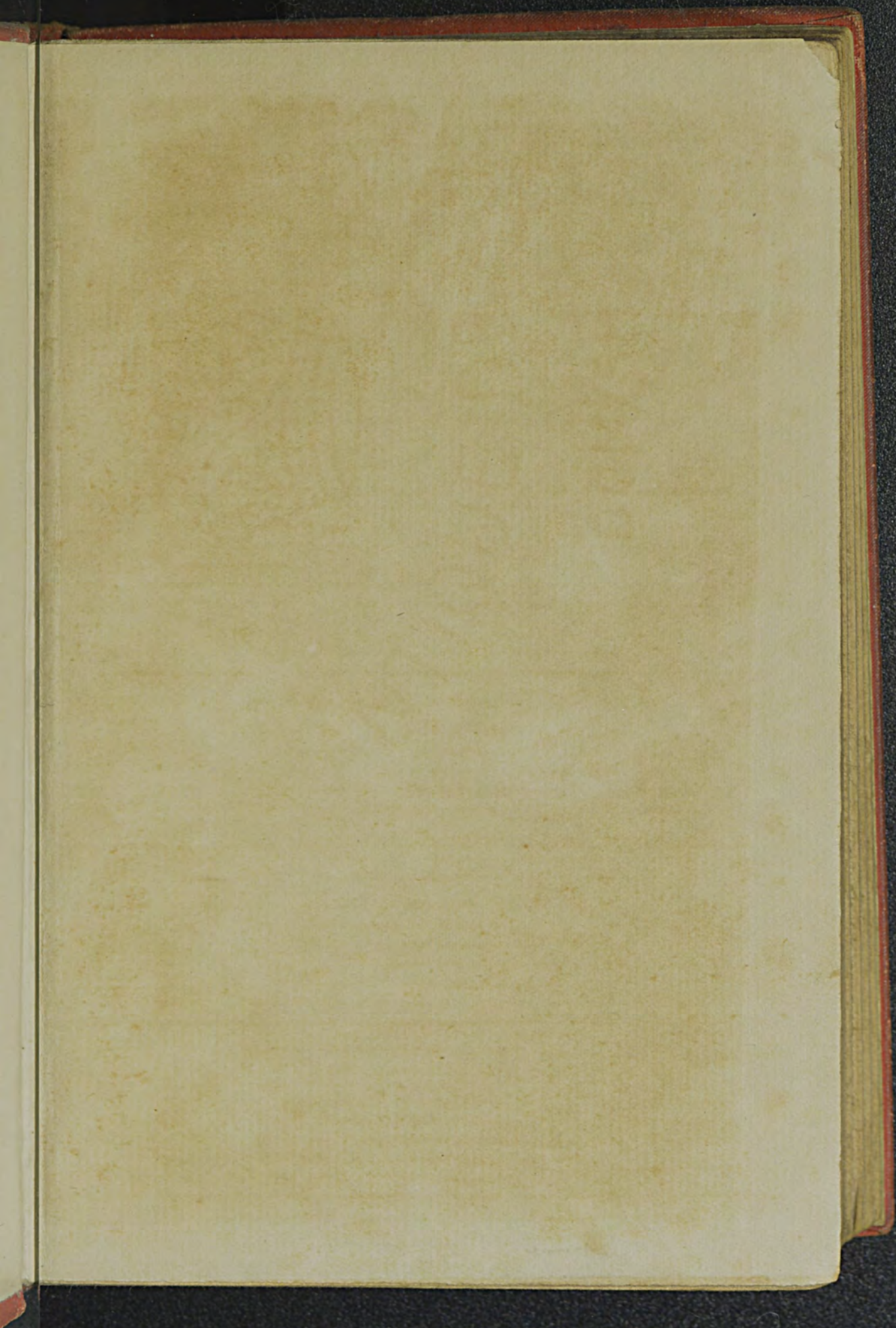
DEVIL-MAN FROM MARS

JAMES CORBETT

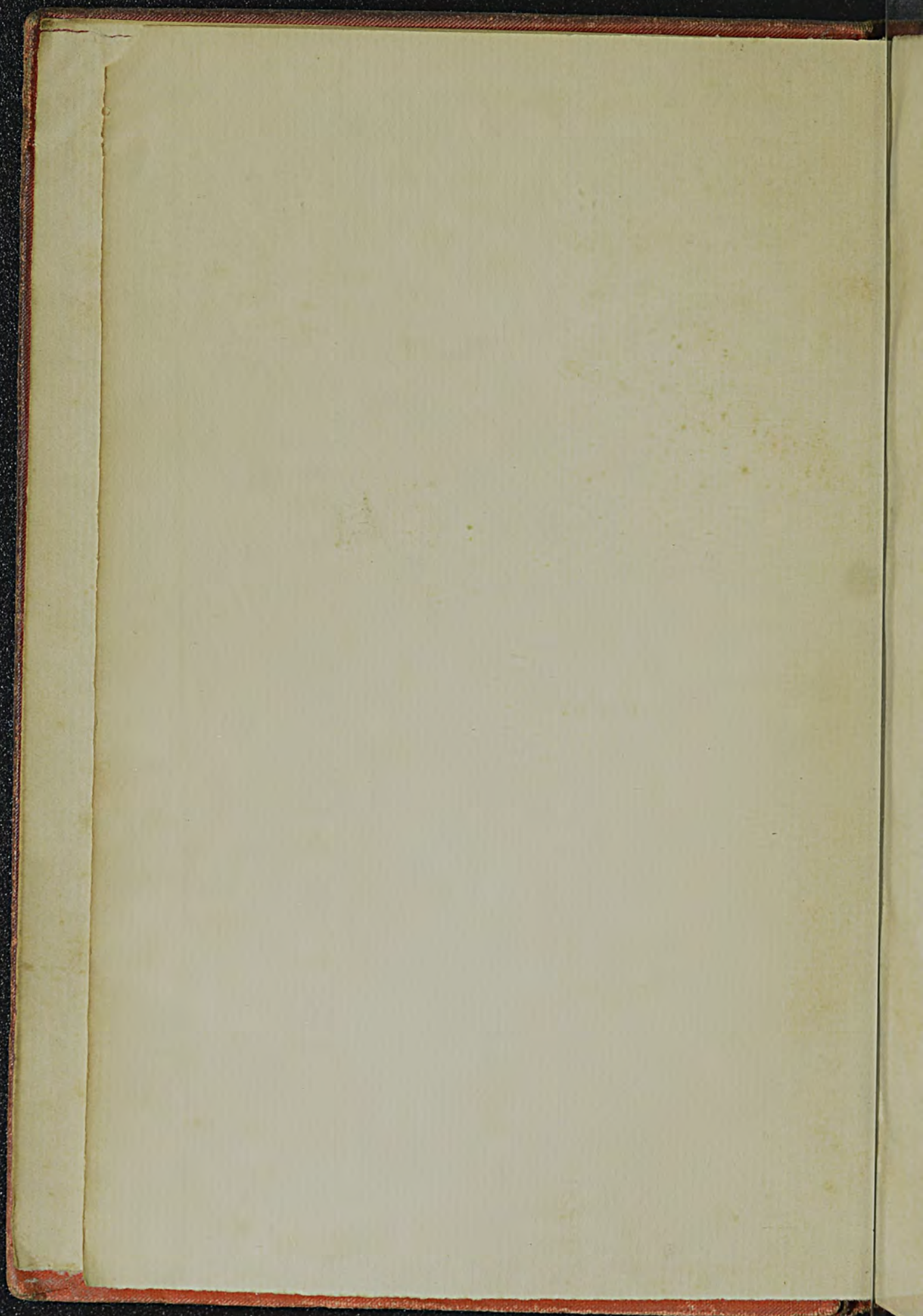














## DEVIL-MAN FROM MARS



### WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

This is a really exciting story of the imaginative order. It tells how Paul Church, an eminent scientist, established communication with Mars and the Martians; it reveals how a Martian ambassador is sent to the world and describes vividly the nature, appearance and temperament of this man. The author has drawn powerfully on his imagination in his description of this strange visitor, his airplane and his remarkable propulsive ray with which he is able to project himself through space. This is a yarn that goes with a swing—the reader has no time to question its feasibility but is simply carried forward by the breathless rush of events as related by Mr. Corbett.

*For list of books by the same Author  
see page 313.*



# DEVIL-MAN FROM MARS

BY

JAMES CORBETT

HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED  
3 YORK STREET, ST. JAMES'S  
LONDON S.W.1.    ⌘    ⌘    ⌘





*First printing 1935*

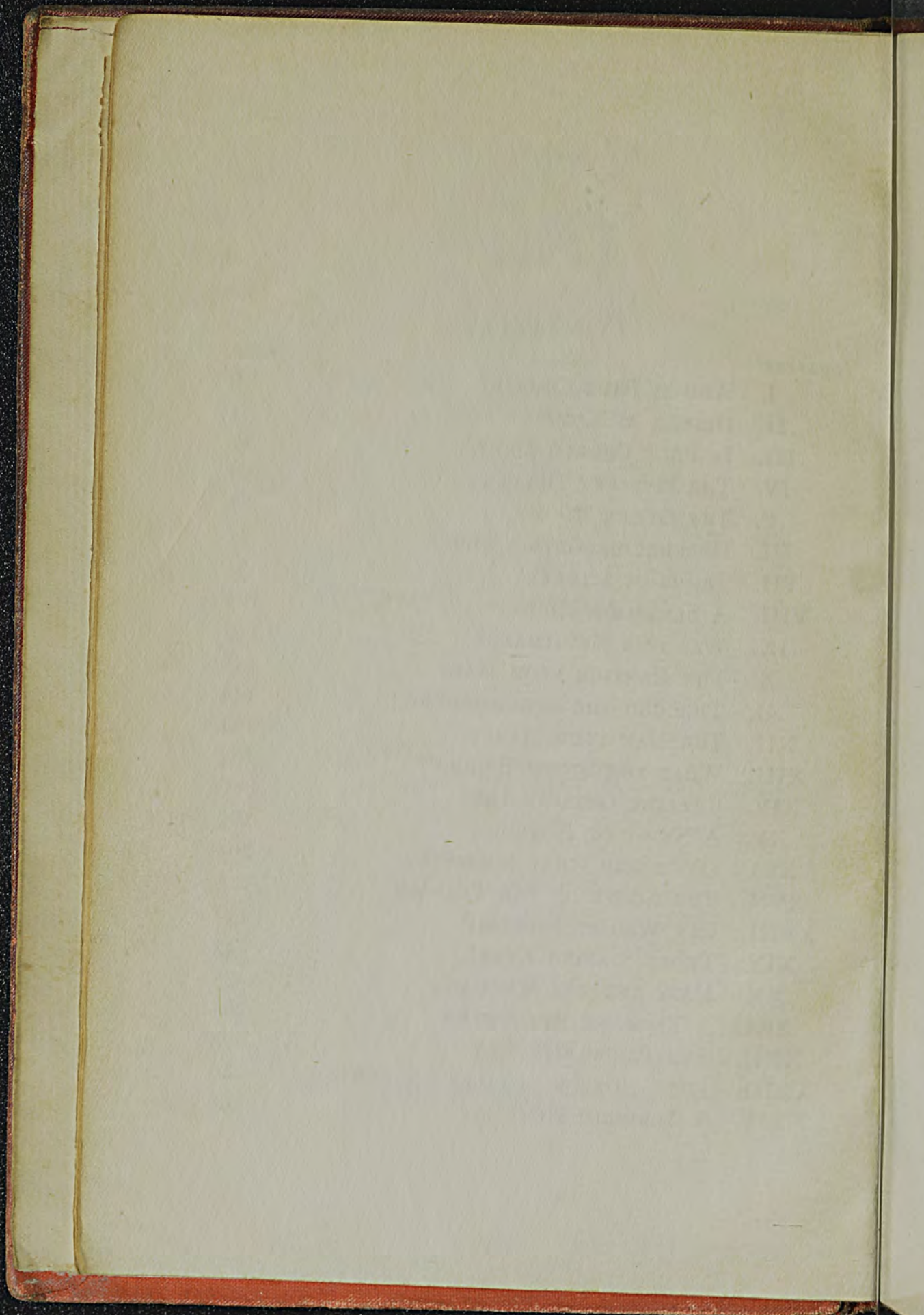
MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY PURNELL AND SONS  
PAULTON (SOMERSET) AND LONDON



## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WHO IS PAUL CHURCH? . . .	9
II. DINNER AT EIGHT . . .	24
III. IS PAUL CHURCH MAD? . . .	37
IV. THE MYSTERY DEEPENS . . .	49
V. THE GREEN ROOM . . .	62
VI. DORCHESTER GETS A SHOCK . . .	77
VII. TERMS OF SILENCE . . .	91
VIII. A SLEEPLESS NIGHT . . .	105
IX. WAS IT A NIGHTMARE? . . .	117
X. THE MESSAGE FROM MARS . . .	131
XI. THROUGH THE STRATOSPHERE . . .	144
XII. THE MAN FROM MARS. . . .	154
XIII. WHAT THE STORM BROUGHT . . .	164
XIV. GATACRE GETS AN IDEA . . .	176
XV. A NIGHT OF HORROR . . .	189
XVI. DAWN AND WHAT FOLLOWED . . .	203
XVII. THE SCENE ON THE TERRACE . . .	216
XVIII. CAN WAR BE STOPPED? . . .	230
XIX. THOSE STARING EYES! . . .	243
XX. MARS AND THE MARTIANS . . .	253
XXI. A TERRIBLE ENCOUNTER . . .	264
XXII. THE PROPULSIVE RAY . . .	275
XXIII. THE "HORROR" STALKS LONDON! . . .	286
XXIV. A TERRIBLE NEMESIS . . .	298

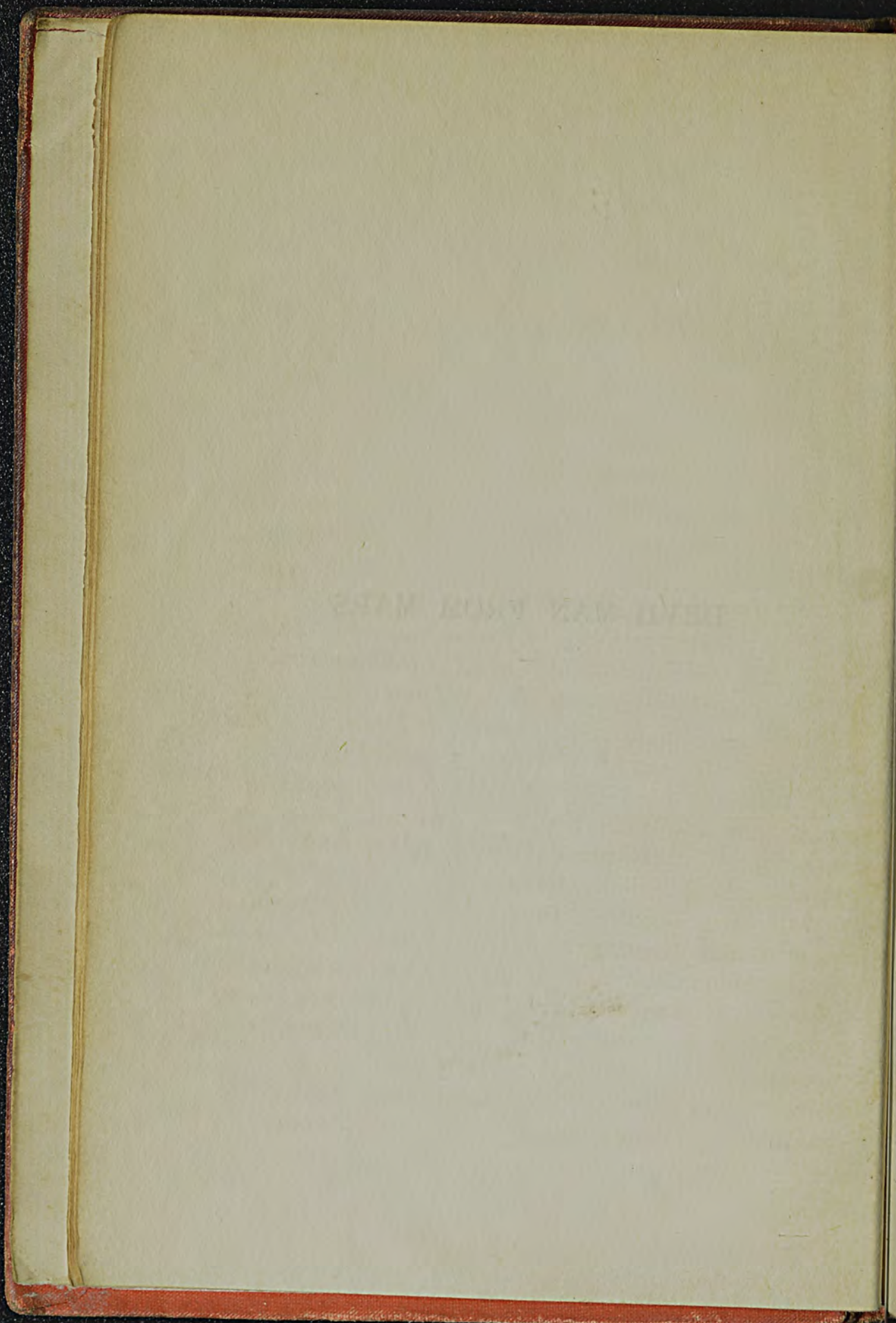






DEVIL-MAN FROM MARS





D.  
  
I  
of th  
"P  
hour  
"P  
a no  
mean  
and  
matt  
some  
straig  
"L  
good  
trati  
energ  
novel  
seller.  
"D  
outsta



# DEVIL-MAN FROM MARS

## CHAPTER I

### WHO IS PAUL CHURCH?

**D**ORCHESTER gave a purring sound that kept back a laugh. The man in the Torquay train was reading a thriller and he was the author of the book.

"Is it a good yarn?" The silence had lasted half an hour, and they were the only occupants of the carriage.

"Nothing extraordinary," the stranger sighed. "It's a novel by Brian Dorchester and you know what that means!" The speaker possessed an air of distinction, and although he was dressed as if clothes did not matter he had a wonderful personality. There was something arresting about his raven-black eyes, straight nose, and fine forehead.

"I confess I don't!" Dorchester grinned. He was a good-looking youngster of twenty-eight with penetrating blue eyes and a figure stressing muscular energy. At twenty-eight, he was the author of twelve novels and there was a chance he would write a best-seller.

"Dorchester has written a dozen books with nothing outstanding about one of them," continued the



stranger. "That suggests a stereotyped mind and no imagination. He has nothing ahead but a succession of dull novels."

"Why criticise if you read his books?"

"I read him because the fellow attracts me to a vast extent. Dorchester has a virile mind yet makes no effort to come out of the rut. He writes a thriller in six weeks, but if he sat down for two years he might write something big."

"What do you mean?"

"Thousands of novels are published and only half a dozen make best-sellers." The stranger stared as if he had developed an interest in the young man who interrupted his reading.

"Although aware of that fact, are you fair to Dorchester? We live in an age of speed, and if we study Einstein we discover that Time is a matter of relativity. Great novels are beyond Time, and genius ignores the clock."

"I am not referring to genius," the stranger answered. "That is something accidental and belongs to the immortals. I spoke about the method Dorchester adopts in writing books. Thousands of writers are turning out thrillers. There is another plan if he used his imagination."

"You speak in riddles," observed the young man. "As I happen to be Brian Dorchester, I am rather interested."

The stranger sat up and there was a brief pause.

"Is that true?" he asked.

Dorchester withdrew his card and handed it across.



"These things happen occasionally," he smiled.  
"Just why are you concerned, Mr——?"

"Arthur Gatacre is my name."

"Not the famous steel magnate?"

"These things happen."

Both laughed. It was a wonderful meeting, for Arthur Gatacre was in the news owing to the coup he had made in gold shares. Yes, it was Gatacre, the millionaire. He recognised him from his portrait in the papers.

"Delighted to meet you and allow me to offer congratulations," Dorchester announced. "I see you have scored in the market by a huge deal in gold shares. Bought them when they stood at 1½d. What uncanny foresight!"

"I am more intrigued at meeting a novelist," Gatacre replied, "and hope you are not offended. I spoke the truth when I mentioned ordinary thrillers. If you want to make a hit you must select a plot that transcends the ordinary. I believe you can do it because you betray a subtle sense of imagination."

Dorchester proffered a cigarette case.

"No one is more anxious to succeed," he continued, "and if I could touch the market with an outstanding book nothing would give me greater happiness."

Gatacre accepted a cigarette and leaned back.

"If you study your reading public, you will find they are film-soaked. They crave the extraordinary, which means that they pick up your novel and throw it aside. It does not grip; it is not sufficiently tense; it does not contain the fantastic element to hold them spellbound. Do not forget we live in 1935. Give your public what it demands!"



"You don't know my publishers," laughed the young author. "Powell and Garrett are realists, and I doubt if they would accept anything that does not contain probability. I have scored because my plots have been logical."

Gatacre waited until the guard examined tickets. He listened to the roar of the train passing through the tunnel, and glanced at a man moving along the corridor.

"You forget the law of supply and demand," he replied. "If a film-drenched public desires fantastic fiction, publishers are fools if they do not rise to the occasion and fill the market."

"I write detective stories," Dorchester said boyishly, "and once I am known my novels will sell like hot cakes."

"I hope your anticipation is realised," Gatacre smiled. "Let me tell you something, however. We have got beyond that. We have re-entered the Edgar Allen Poe age, and unless you stimulate imagination to a superlative extent, no thriller will rank a best-seller. That explains why *King Kong* made a hit. *The Invisible Man*, *The Ghost Train*, and *The Ghoul* are in the same category."

Dorchester could not offend a famous man like Arthur Gatacre, but he had a big desire to inform the steel magnate that he knew nothing about the writing-game.

"You forget," he said, "that only outstanding writers get those ideas across, and I do not pretend to be Edgar Wallace or H. G. Wells. After all, those plots are phantasies, and they could never happen."



Gatacre shook his head.

"You are wrong!" he contradicted. "*King Kong* was no impossibility. Vast portions of the earth have never been explored, and animals we term prehistoric still roam the world. Wells is more than an imaginative writer. As a man in close contact with the latest scientific achievement, Wells realised that invisibility was more than conjecture. Science has neither frontier nor boundary line. We have no conception of what may be achieved in the realm of science, therefore Wells scored when he wrote that book. You could do the same."

"Thanks!" Dorchester laughed. "Perhaps I could if confronted with some extraordinary phenomenon, if I beheld with my own eyes and could write afterwards from my own experience. You see, I am a realist, I write of things that could happen. What you suggest is the bizarre, fantastic, incredulous. Don't forget the modern reader is wide-awake. You could never get across with that stuff. If I attempted it, the public would write me down a madman or visionary, and inform the publishers I ought to be certified."

Gatacre leaned across. The train emerged from another tunnel, and they were rushing across country.

"You live in a dream," he affirmed. "The world of reality in which we exist is more stupendous than anything from your pen. That is no idle statement. *I can prove it!*"

There was something impressive behind the voice, something dramatically suggestive, and Dorchester moved uneasily. What was coming?



"You are staying in Torquay?"

"That was my intention," Dorchester affirmed. "As I am hunting material for a plot I may remain a fortnight."

"Come to my place at Rockdene Hall, Grangefield. It is thirty miles outside Torquay. As a widower, I live there with my daughter and a few friends. If you can stay a few weeks, I guarantee to make it profitable; everything depends on your seizing this priceless opportunity."

"I accept with pleasure and think it most kind," Dorchester answered. "Are you suggesting you have material for a novel?"

Gatacre spoke with a pre-occupied gaze. "There is data that would lift your name for a generation," he replied. "It is out of the ordinary—something you would describe as fantastic and uncanny."

Dorchester, excited, took the cigarette from his lips.

"I was booking rooms at a Torquay hotel, and now you have saved me the trouble. I am intrigued. You are a prince in disguise."

Gatacre made no rejoinder, but his car was waiting when they got to Torquay, a high-powered Daimler, the blue, stream-lined type with all the latest accessories. Exchanging a few words with the brown-liveried chauffeur, the millionaire ushered Dorchester into the car and the latter entered with his suit-case.

"I am on velvet," he remarked, "for I had nothing but a dismal sojourn in an hotel. You are a potentate. I am tremendously in your debt!"

"If you say another word on that subject," rejoined the millionaire as the luxury car glided forward, "I



may feel sorry I extended the invitation. Try another rug. We will travel fast, and Radford has his instructions."

That drive through Torquay was singularly pleasant, for they took the cliff road and the sea air was a welcome change to London and its environs. Dorchester had a notion that big events lay ahead. The feeling overpowered him. He could not get rid of it. There was an air of reticence about his companion that conveyed the unknown and unfathomable. What was the grim secret of Rockdene Hall?

"Have you become entrammelled with an opposite number?" Gatacre queried with a sly chuckle.

"Heavens, I avoid girls like the plague," Dorchester rejoined. "Concentrating all my energy on thrillers I have no time for the feminine realm. Why ask? Have you some entrancing gem at the Hall?"

"You will meet three young ladies," Gatacre grinned, puffing at his cigar. "My daughter, secretary, and the daughter of an ex-service friend. I call them the three V's: Venetia, Veronica, Violet. I hardly know who is the loveliest, but they are charming girls, and I suppose I bet on Venetia. Violet Church is a different type. Her father is a peculiar man, and that is why I am bringing you. You must meet Paul Church. We were together on the Somme. He is a famous scientist and the most outstanding character alive. Some experts imagine him insane. I regard him as the biggest genius in the world!"

"Gosh, that sounds interesting," Dorchester declared. "Afraid I am a cynic with regard to the other sex, but you excite me about your friend. How did you run across him?"



"We will go into that after a glass of sherry," Gatacre replied. "Meanwhile you can accept my assurance that you will not regret your visit."

They discussed various topics until Grangefield was reached. The millionaire was not interested in anything that appertained to Westminster, and beyond the fact that he approved of a National Government during an economic crisis it was impossible to draw him. Dorchester did not disturb him until they swept up the long drive leading to Rockdene Hall, but although darkness had fallen he could see the outline of a huge estate and perceived the Hall was a mansion on the grand scale. Many lights shone from the building, and most of them were on the ground floor.

"You will see the place better to-morrow," Gatacre announced, as the car drew up at the terrace, "but I expect you are tired after a long journey." He spoke in a low tone to Radford the chauffeur, gave him some further instructions, then ushered Dorchester into the Hall.

A valet took the suit-case, a footman relieved him of hat and coat, another ushered him into a sitting-room on the right of the entrance-hall. A huge fire illumined the grate, and the apartment had an atmosphere of comfort.

Gatacre motioned him to a red-leather chair, and Dorchester smiled with contentment. He was filled with curiosity. He saw that much of the furniture had a history of two centuries. The mahogany stressed that point. It had the sheen and warmth that comes with age, yet there was a skilful blending of the old with the new. The room had a distinctive colour scheme. The walls were covered with paper in pale



primrose with a light design in green, orange, and gold; folding shutters flanked the recessed French windows; and Eastern curios adorned a wicker table. It was the abode of a millionaire.

"I am giving you a great chance," Gatacre announced, pushing across cigarettes. "You will have a bath, change of clothes, and a cocktail, but let me be frank. There is more going on here than you dream. That is why, under special circumstances, I ask you to consider yourself on parole. You will not leave or telephone without permission, and all letters will be censored. Servants assigned will act under orders, and an attempt to bribe them will have my disapproval. There is really no help for it. You must, for a period at least, consider yourself my prisoner."

Dorchester swallowed hard and sat up like a ramrod. Had he heard aright? What the devil was Gatacre talking about?

"You speak in a foreign language!" he said dazedly. "Censored letters, no permission to wire or telephone, no liberty to leave Rockdene Hall. I might as well be in a concentration camp. Does it mean you are harbouring an escaped convict?"

A well-trained servant entered like a shadow, and moved to a highly-polished table glittering with glass and silver. He had the air of a man obeying a cryptic command. From a heavily-cut decanter he poured out two glasses of sherry. These he placed on a gold tray and withdrew.

"Forget those queries," Gatacre commanded, "and drink to an outstanding thriller. A best-seller that will leave the world breathless."



It was a deep, satisfying wine that must have known years, and Dorchester's blood tingled.

"Something like a toast," he muttered.

The millionaire selected a chair and drew it near the fire.

"You will meet Paul Church at dinner," he commenced. "It is on his account that I act in such a strange manner, but when you have heard details about this genius, you will realise we cannot take risks where his secrets are involved. Rockdene Hall has been guarded for months. I have men stationed in the grounds and near the exits, and you would be surprised how everyone is watched. You see, attempts have been made to discover what Church is doing, why I have him under patronage. When I met Church in France, I realised his brain-power and knew one day he would astound the world. . . . We lost track of each other after the Armistice, but I met him on the Embankment three years ago, and Church was a sorry spectacle. Unemployment had dogged his footsteps, and although he secured a few temporary appointments he could never concentrate because his mind was filled with something else. No employer will retain a man whose brain is pre-occupied, and when I met Church his stamps were exhausted and he was not entitled to Labour Exchange benefit. He had nothing but a bread-ticket, and that night he was on the point of suicide."

Dorchester was engrossed. There was something about Gatacre that held him spellbound, and this recital gripped him like a vice.

"A moment!" he interrupted. "I have not con-



sented to this parole business, but you interest me about your ex-service friend. How did you meet? Did you hold commissioned ranks?"

"No, I joined as a private and rose to sergeant, and when I met Church in Arras he was a lance-corporal. He was posted to my battalion, and later we were sent to the Somme. He was just one of a draft that came to France, but in four hours he made a suggestion about a new mode of signalling. It reached the ears of the officer, and although he laughed he forwarded it to the Colonel, and soon Church was transferred to the Signalling Section. Later he went to Brigade. He invented a new code better than Morse, for the Germans were tapping our messages. Then I ran against Church in the front line. He was sent up by Divisional Headquarters after we had taken some German trenches, and Church was sent on a job of inspection. We exchanged a few words, and from that moment I had faith in his genius, but he never breathed anything about his operations. Five times he got mentioned in despatches, and although they offered him a Commission, he preferred the Signal Section and no rank. His inventions were astounding. He discovered the best method of tapping enemy wire, getting first-hand information about a raid, learning what reserves lay behind enemy lines. Twice he was wounded, but he always came back with that inscrutable face. I have never seen him smile. He looks like a man with an unalterable purpose, and when I met him on the Embankment he told me what was at the back of his mind. Frankly I thought him mad. This time it was the most stupendous thing, and I imagined



something had warped that splendid intellect. Yet one remark told me I was talking to the biggest genius the world has known, a man who might eclipse Einstein, a human being who might contact with a new planet. I took charge of him, and for three years have given him all the assistance in my power. Like myself, he is a widower with one daughter. Violet lived with an aunt, but I knew Church would need attention, so Violet came here and has looked after her father like a slave. I gave Church a suite of rooms, servants, fitted him with a laboratory, bought him instruments, erected a turret-tower for his signalling apparatus, and not a word has reached the outside world. That is why I have brought you here, Dorchester. I want you to write the story of a man who has placed himself on the scroll of the immortals. *Paul Church has communicated with Mars!*"

Dorchester sat still. Nothing so funny had reached him since the story of the three bears. An ex-service man talking to Mars! That was rich. How had he hoodwinked the steel magnate, and why was he not certified? A man who could bluff a millionaire was a commercial proposition. He would make a fortune in the States and earn a huge sum in England.

"It seems a wonderful joke," he said in a steady voice.

The millionaire glared, then broke into an uproarious laugh. Finally he sobered and frowned.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"My dear Gatacre, I am not a babe," Dorchester answered. "I believe in telepathy, and admit there is occultism, but I draw the line at talking to the Martians."



The millionaire lit a cheroot, and the smile returned to his face.

"I am prepared to allow for immaturity of thought. You have much to learn, Dorchester. Indeed you are in for a mighty surprise."

The Japanese clock ticked on the mantelpiece.

"You believe Church has established communication with another planet?" the author queried. "Why, it's enough to break a blood-vessel. I am dazed at your credulity, at the way he has fooled you, and any pathologist would have him examined. Perhaps it is a case of war-reaction. Church may have impinged his imagination on your brain, or you may have allowed him to hypnotise you. Tell me something more about this new Jules Verne."

"So you believe I am mad and you think Church is balmy!" Gatacre exclaimed. "Well, I am hardly astonished, for had you come to any other conclusion, without data to support that sensational pronouncement, you would be the most gullible chap alive. I felt like that. I was certain Church had had a breakdown. I thought there were bats in his belfry, so I decided to humour him, let him continue his experiments with the ether, then get the best Harley Street man I could find. I received the biggest shock of my life. Church, never losing faith, proved he was sane, and allowed me to listen-in to Mars."

Dorchester sat upright.

"You listened-in to Mars!" he gasped.

"Yes, and heaven knows what the outcome of this stupendous discovery will mean. I tell you, Church is the biggest genius of the age, and you can test



that for yourself. You will hear the Martians after dinner."

This time Dorchester shook with laughter. The mirth returned to his eyes, and he thought it the richest joke. Where were Wells and the rest of them?

"If I could talk to the Prime Minister of Mars," he grinned, "I should ask him how he balanced his Budget and if he had ever heard of Mussolini? I should want to converse with a distinguished Martian novelist and try to address him in four dialects."

Gatacre enjoyed the situation as keenly as Dorchester. It was natural the young author should regard this epoch-making discovery in a humorous light, but what a surprise awaited him!

"As might be expected," he continued, "people on Mars speak the Martian language, but Church mastered that for himself. He received messages and decoded them. It took him a considerable time, yet the Martians assisted him to a vast extent. They are miles ahead of us in intelligence, so do not look dumb-founded when I tell you they are now able to speak English."

Dorchester looked hard at Gatacre. Was the famous steel magnate a prey to his imagination; was all this Martian business just a rambling concept of his brain?

"I suppose they know Gracie Fields," he spluttered.

"Don't be absurd!" Gatacre reproved. "My dear chap, the Martians contacted with us immediately we set up the first wireless station, but obviously we had no idea of their wave-length. Church made that discovery. It took him months. Now here is the biggest sensation of all. Not merely do we listen-in



to the Martians, but Church is able to talk to that planet."

Dorchester wondered if it were the sherry? Was his head going round?

"You mean one of those radio sets purchased in London or Paris?"

Gatacre guffawed.

"Nothing like it. Church made a special transmission set, got the correct wave-length, and after that contact was established. I shall never forget the first talk with the Martians. Neither of us slept for days. However, we have taken every precaution to keep the discovery a secret, and the Martians approved from the outset. They are a most advanced race. They are in communication with other planets, and although we may think ourselves important, they can only afford us one wave-length. We must preserve the secret until we reach agreement with the Martians. There must be a definite plan for broadcasting, then the discovery will be handed to the British Government."

The Japanese clock chimed the quarter.

"I am afraid there is a catch in it," Dorchester said gravely. "Pardon me, Gatacre, if I still remain incredulous, but I can hardly imagine myself being fooled by a lunatic. Why have you invited me to Rockdene Hall?"

Gatacre gazed through a cloud of smoke, and when he spoke his voice was exceedingly dramatic.

"*You are here to meet the man from Mars!*" he answered.



## CHAPTER II

### DINNER AT EIGHT

DORCHESTER could hardly breathe. Obsessed by the revelation that reached him, he stared at the millionaire with pity. Who would have imagined that Arthur Gatacre was insane, that he was a creature of hallucination? *A man from Mars!* Why, the idea was inconceivable. This might suit the dream-phantasy of a scientist, but no human would swallow that yarn. Gatacre would have to be placated, then he, Dorchester, would have to get away at the first opportunity.

"It is not every day that one is honoured with a visitor from Mars," he said in a low voice. "I suppose you will do it in style? Reception by the Lord Mayor, big dinner at the Town Hall, the local band, flags waving, people cheering, and a procession of Boy Scouts to give it colour! We might arrange something with the B.B.C. I am sure the Martian would like to broadcast. He could tell us how to run Co-operative Societies on a new basis, how to settle the unemployment problem, and we could get his opinion on gangsters."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"About this chap who will blow in from Mars," Dorchester mumbled. "I should like him to come on



a Friday. He must see a Saville Row tailor and be introduced to the Lord Lieutenant. Unless we do it in style, the Martian will be disappointed and take the next plane back to the old home-town!"

The millionaire laughed until the tears came to his eyes and his body shook.

"So you are more confident than ever that I am mad?" he chuckled. "Well, having regard to the miraculous thing that Church has done, and the devastating surprise awaiting you after dinner, I forgive you for writing me down a fool. Meanwhile, your bath is waiting, and Jackson will look after you."

"One moment!" Dorchester begged, rising to his feet. "I have not the faintest conception of what you are driving at, Gatacre, but I have a notion you are either insane or have made some stupendous discovery. If what you say is correct about contacting with Mars, I should travel 4,000 miles to meet Paul Church. As it is, I am a mediocre person. I estimate you are fooling to a vast extent, and after dinner you may explain why you play this joke on a young novelist. You see, I have read a good bit about astronomy, and it will be difficult to throw dust in my eyes when you start talking about another planet."

Gatacre appeared to arrive at a decision. He rose and took the cheroot from his lips.

"Only three men know of this stupendous discovery, Dorchester, and you are one of them," he said solemnly. "Church and I have told no one else. Even the girls are ignorant of the sensational news, so I ask you to keep the matter a secret for the present."



The thing seemed a nightmare, a ghastly joke of the brain, and the author smiled.

"Very well," he promised, "but do not saddle me with restrictions, for I may decide sooner than you suppose to leave Rockdene Hall. Business may call me back to London, or my publishers may desire an interview. A hundred things may happen."

Gatacre stood in his path and a frown crossed his face.

"You do not leave until I give permission," he said quietly. "I am in earnest, Dorchester, and I give no chances where you are concerned. We cannot publish this news until the proper time. If you still think me insane, and wish to leave this place without my sanction, you will meet one or two barriers and perhaps an accident. I regret to talk in that fashion. You are my guest, but no one can leave these gates without permission, and I hardly imagine you have an airplane or communicated with the police."

Dorchester saw he would have to be strategic if he wished to make an escape.

"All right," he temporised, "offer me proof that the whole thing is not the fabrication of a madman. Forgive me, Gatacre, but I do not take you seriously, and I am glad you make allowance for my want of faith. Just remember I make no stipulation that I consider myself your prisoner, so if I make a get-away you must put up with the consequences."

The millionaire touched a bell and a black-coated figure entered. It was the valet assigned to Dorchester and he had the appearance of an ex-Guardsman. He stood there like a sergeant on parade, his blue eyes steady, his demeanour that of the perfect servant.



"Jackson, I sent a message that a bath would be required, and that you would look after Mr. Dorchester. Is everything ready?"

"Quite, sir."

"Then show my guest to his rooms and see he has attention. You know what that means?"

"I understand perfectly, sir."

"Dinner at eight," Gatacre said to his companion, "but if you are a trifle late, Dorchester—that is, in looking for something you will not find—I will not impose a penalty or demand an apology. We are informal at Rockdene Hall!"

"That is most kind," Dorchester answered. "Well, Jackson, now that we are introduced you may show me to my rooms."

"Second floor, first on the right, sir. We keep that suite for a special guest."

Dorchester followed in silence. Special guest? Any significance in the words?

"This way, sir!" Jackson took the lead, walking with the precision of a trained valet, shoulders erect, glancing neither right nor left. After mounting the staircase, Dorchester was ushered into a spacious apartment on the second floor, where other rooms interconnected, and his suit-case stood near the window. He noted that point for there was a revolver at the bottom of it, a souvenir given him by an ex-service friend, and it might prove useful.

The valet followed his glance.

"I found the case locked, sir, or I would have left out your dinner clothes!"

Dorchester strolled to the window and back to the



dressing-table. A luxury bedroom, elegantly furnished, and everything he desired. He sighed with relief for there was comfort at least.

"Thanks, Jackson, I will see to that part of it," he announced. "By the way, where is the telephone in case I wish to send a call to Town?"

The valet drew up and his brows contracted. He was ill at ease, as if he wished the question had not been asked, and he cleared his throat.

"You will find the telephone in a booth near the library, sir," he replied. "I regret the door is locked, but that is an instruction from my employer, and if you desire to send a message you must get permission from Mr. Gatacre."

"How long has that been in force?"

"A considerable time, sir."

Dorchester unlocked the case and with a deft movement transferred the revolver to his pocket. It was loaded, and he knew how to use it.

"Awkward," he drawled, "but I suppose an order must be obeyed. Another point, Jackson. How many exits are there from the Hall?"

"North and south, sir," the valet replied. "But that is also a difficult matter. You see, we have received special instructions regarding you, and if I may make so bold I suggest you ask permission before you attempt to leave."

Gatacre had seen to it that no one should divulge he was a madman or that he lodged a genius who was *non compos*.

"Have you any idea why that order was given, Jackson? I mean can you suggest why I should be retained at Rockdene Hall against my will?"



Jackson held himself like a rock.

"I hardly think you should put it that way, sir," he replied. "We have an eccentric employer who issues curious orders from time to time, but we are not in a position to question, and as he always treats us with generosity we have no fault to find."

"Yet supposing I asked you to take a message to Torquay, say to a doctor or the police station, would you be disposed to carry out the request if it meant a handsome remuneration and no one knew anything?"

Jackson shrugged and his features relaxed.

"We had a servant who accepted a bribe of that description," he said courteously, "but the consequences were deplorable. He was dismissed without a character and has not obtained a job since. Mr. Gatacre is influential, sir. We dare not disobey him."

A few moments later, Dorchester was ushered into a gleaming white bathroom, leading from a connecting-door in his own suite, and soon he was revelling in hot, steaming water. It was a deep, marble bath, filled to within six inches of the top with a white foamy liquid, and it gave the novelist a delicious thrill. It made him forget his mental chaos, that terrible suspicion with regard to his host, and the ghastly fact that he was a prisoner.

Notwithstanding that knowledge, he dressed scrupulously, allowing Jackson to give him a brush-down, adjust his tie, and ten minutes later he descended to the library. He found the millionaire awaiting him. Gatacre must have hurried with his toilet. He stood near the fire, dressed for dinner, his hands thrust carelessly behind coat-tail. A servant entered with



two Martinis and withdrew. The cocktails were superb.

"My dear chap, you treat me like a prince," Dorchester announced, sinking into a chair. "Please accept my thanks, and allow me to compliment you on your efficient staff."

"Yes, no good trying to bribe them," the millionaire replied. "You have made that discovery? Good. Well, I hope you have reassured yourself about my sanity. Before midnight, unless I am mistaken, you will be offering an apology for any misgiving you have indulged."

Dorchester stared at the massive bookcase and countless volumes. Yes, he could have spent his life in that room and never worried about a Martian. It was the most artistic library he had entered, although he had seen one like it in the West End and that belonged to a famous judge. He glanced at the paintings, the Flemish picture above the mirror, the Eastern curios on the Turkish sideboard, and at those wonderful red curtains.

"I have a half-defined notion you are right," he muttered, "but I am bewildered by everything so am going to postpone judgment."

A girl entered and Dorchester held his breath. She could not have been more than twenty and looked a poem in loveliness. What entrancing blue eyes, alluring form, and creamy skin! She was in evening dress, a naïve creation in velvet, partly white, with nothing sophisticated about the style. There was a smile on her lips as she handed the millionaire some letters.



"This is Brian Dorchester, the novelist," Gatacre introduced. "I expect you have heard of him, Veronica. His mind is tortured with thrillers and now he contemplates a best-seller. Dorchester, my secretary, Miss Richmond."

The author bowed, and the girl extended another smile.

"Yes, I have heard of the famous Mr. Dorchester," she murmured, "but hope he won't put any of us in his books. What evil mood inspires you to write thrillers?"

"I must come under the Satanic eye," he stressed with a laugh. "Mr. Gatacre may think it a disease, but I hope, Miss Richmond, I am not so big a criminal as you imagine. I have come down here for material. I love your Devon scenery, the red Torquay soil, and the delightful environment."

"I am not a native of Devon," the girl continued with a demure glance. "I am more a Londoner, but I have spent five years in Devon, and have no regrets."

Gatacre, still reading his letters, moved to the door, and a good-humoured smile touched his lips.

"I must sign these in my study," he declared. "Dorchester, I have to glance at one or two contracts, but Miss Richmond will discuss Devon scenery in my absence. Don't let her monopolise the conversation. When it comes to talking, she leaves one breathless."

When the door closed, Veronica moved nearer the fire. She was attracted by the visitor's good-looking face, Mr. Dorchester reminded her of an actor she had seen on the London stage, and she admired his virile appearance. The blue eyes had penetration. Summing him up, she knew he was more intellectual than his



books portrayed, and that thought pleased her. Was this the beginning of Romance?

"You read a great deal?" he asked, lighting a cigarette, and watching her critically.

"That seems all there is to do," she assented. "We have few visitors, and you are the first stranger we have seen for months. I am afraid this place is full of restrictions. Very few people are invited."

Dorchester sent a puff of smoke to the French chandelier.

"You live here?" he queried in a casual tone.

"Yes, I am also a companion to Miss Gatacre, and it was my employer's wish that I should regard this as my home. How did you meet Mr. Gatacre? He is not disposed to invite people to the Hall, unless under exceptional circumstances, and we have all commented on the fact."

"It was something like a coincidence," Dorchester smiled. "We occupied the same carriage in the train, and your employer was reading one of my thrillers. That started the conversation, and it ended with an invitation to Rockdene Hall. I find, however, that I cannot leave without permission, that I am not allowed to use the telephone, or even to get in touch with my friends. I have no idea how long that may last, but you will admit it is awkward."

Veronica nodded.

"I imagined you were a business friend," she laughed, "and now I see it is different. You are in search of writing material? Did Mr. Gatacre inform you that ample data would be found here, and that you might write a best-seller as a result?"



"Something like that. Do you imagine I will be disappointed?"

Veronica shrugged and averted her eyes.

"I hardly know what to think," she said timidly. "You may be startled at what you discover at the Hall. Perhaps I ought to keep silent. I also wonder why you dare not leave without permission, or why you have come under the same restriction!"

Dorchester wondered what was coming.

"That mystifies me," he muttered. "Who is this mysterious Paul Church?"

Veronica shivered and her face became grave.

"He is the most important personage at Rockdene Hall," she said swiftly, "and his slightest wish must be obeyed. He is the greatest enigma I have known, and there is no getting to the bottom of him. We are told he is an inventor, a man absorbed in strange experimentation with the ether, and night and day he is rarely absent from his laboratory. If not there, you will find him in his observation turret—the one specially built for him—but the doors are always locked, and no one except Mr. Gatacre knows what he is doing."

Dorchester knocked the ash off his cigarette.

"I hope to meet him at dinner," he announced. "I have heard he is a genius, Miss Richmond, so perhaps that accounts for it. Your employer is non-communicative. No doubt there is a reason for his silence, for the mystery at the Hall, and why everyone is watched. What about the others? Can Miss Church or Miss Gatacre not enlighten you?"

"We are all in the dark," Veronica half-whispered. "I am treated like a daughter of the family, so is



Violet Church, but she can tell me nothing about her parent, and I don't think she knows more than I do. Venetia Gatacre is in the same position. We are great friends, thrown together in a strange web, but we know nothing about the mystery."

Dorchester gazed at the door. He thought he heard a sound. Was the millionaire returning to the library?

"I feel convinced something is wrong," he said with brutal frankness. "I have a notion your employer is mentally deranged."

The girl turned pale, then gave a nervous laugh.

"I hope not," she murmured. "At any rate, I am glad you have arrived, for you may help at a solution. You see, Paul Church and my employer are war friends, and the two men are inseparable. We do not know what they are discussing, but they are constantly together, and often they spend the whole night in the turret-tower watching the stars. We hardly imagine it is astronomy, for Mr. Gatacre was never interested in the stars, or anything relating to them, but whatever experiment Paul Church is making with the ether holds my employer spellbound. It has taken his mind off business. True, he was successful with those shares, but he is head of a great steel industry, and he could manage more than he is doing. He can think of nothing but Paul Church and his inventions."

Dorchester gave a nod of comprehension.

"I have been taken into confidence to some extent," he confessed, "but I am not at liberty to talk. I know what Paul Church is supposed to have done. It explains why this place is guarded day and night, why you have no visitors, why I am not allowed to



use the telephone. That is why I think your employer is in need of a rest. The whole thing is unbelievable. I think his mind is unhinged. He and Paul Church ought to be examined by specialists."

Veronica glanced towards the door in alarm. Was anyone listening?

"What is it you have been told?" she asked breathlessly. "We have made wild guesses, Mr. Dorchester, but we cannot imagine what Paul Church has discovered, and he will not tell his own daughter. It must be something sensational. Mr. Gatacre is no fool. He has certainly acted in peculiar fashion, but he is always a shrewd individual, and one does not attain his position in the steel industry, or make coups in the stock market, if one is mentally weak."

"I am afraid I cannot answer," Dorchester replied. "I may know part of the mystery to-night, but I am still under an obligation of silence."

The girl moved nearer and a waft of perfume came from her dress. She looked wistfully at the novelist and Dorchester found himself meeting her eyes. Why did she gaze in that fashion?

"When you do hear," she begged, "I hope you will tell me at least. You see, we are in desperate straits. Venetia is very much worried, and Violet is deeply distressed about her father. The mystery is uppermost in our minds. We talk of nothing else, for we imagine all kinds of horrors, and think those men must be victims of a delusion. That is madness, isn't it?"

Dorchester started.



"Yes, that is mental disorder," he admitted. "Perhaps a greater will impinging on a lesser. At any rate, there is one thing on which you can rely. There is no insanity in my family, and if I am told anything incredible depend on it I will know how to act, then you must help me to get away to the outside world. If you and the others are under this thralldom, it has got to end if we are dealing with madmen."

Veronica thanked him with her eyes and her mouth softened.

"They are always asking us to have patience," she sighed. "We keep beseeching Mr. Gatacre to open the Hall to the public, to have parties, whist-drives, and dances, to give us some social outlet during the winter months. Always there is the same reply. No visitors to the Hall until permission is given. My employer seems waiting for something to happen. That is what makes it so difficult. We are left alone night after night. We have to amuse ourselves. We get tired of reading, become bored with cards, and it's not always possible to listen to the radio. That interferes with the ether, and nothing must obtrude upon what Paul Church is doing in the turret-tower!"

The door opened with a stealthy movement. It was like a spectral hand pushing it back. The figure who stood there was a man with snow-white hair, gaunt, tall, with luminous grey eyes, dressed in a shabby blue suit, yet carrying himself with a poise that baffled one to describe.

Dorchester was not long left in doubt.

The man was Paul Church !



## CHAPTER III

### IS PAUL CHURCH MAD?

“WHO is it?” shouted the newcomer. “A visitor? Good heavens, impossible! Arthur never told me, and never would he have sent an invitation without consulting me. Young man, who are you? How did you get here?”

Veronica gave a shrill laugh and tried to make light of it.

“This is Mr. Brian Dorchester, the novelist!” she announced. “He was brought here by Mr. Gatacre, who is in the study now signing letters. Mr. Dorchester, this is the famous Paul Church you have been waiting to meet!”

The novelist moved forward. He was doubtful about his reception, for Church was glaring at him with an unmistakable frown, and it was plain he was unwelcome.

“This is a pleasure,” he commenced. “I have heard a great deal about you, Mr. Church, and hope I have not arrived at an awkward moment.”

“Stop!” It was a voice of thunder. The scientist spun round, furious with anger, his right hand clenched. “I will confirm this for myself!” He left the room dramatically and slammed the door behind him.

“What on earth is wrong?” Dorchester enquired. He was dazed yet vividly impressed by the spectacle



of Paul Church. Never had he seen such a remarkable man. The tall, gaunt figure would haunt him for days. And those luminous grey eyes! Was that madness peering forth, and did it mean Church was insane? His conduct was not that of a rational being.

"We went through that performance when we last had a visitor," Veronica smiled. "He forgets he is only a guest himself, that he owes everything to Mr. Gatacre. It was the vicar who called about a bazaar or something. Paul Church said something dreadful about bazaars, stamped about like a bull, then had a furious row with my employer!"

In a few minutes the door re-opened and the two men re-entered. The millionaire was smiling. He made a further introduction, and Paul Church approached with a look of contrition.

"A thousand apologies," he begged. "My dear Dorchester, the whole thing was a misunderstanding and I entreat your forgiveness. I looked on you as an intruder, a gate-crasher from Fleet Street. You see, I am engaged on an important scientific experiment, and until it is finished I must not be disturbed. That is why I behave in that extraordinary fashion, why my friend Gatacre does not extend the hospitality he would like, and why Rockdene Hall is not an abode for strangers. There is no one we can trust, not even the vicar, milkman, or grocer, and we have no wish to be interviewed. Come and tell me about yourself. Good lord, do you write thrillers? In God's name, why do you indulge in such a criminal hobby?"

One could see he was intensely amused.

"My dear Paul," Gatacre rejoined with a laugh,



"Dorchester regards it as a disease and thinks he ought to be examined, but his publishers permit him to remain at large. Now, Dorchester, you know what to expect. Paul Church may curse you blind, or swear at the universe, then make the most generous apology. His nerves are strained. Indeed, we are both on the tiptoe of excitement, and if he has not behaved politely, you must excuse him. Veronica, those contracts are correct, and there is time for another letter before dinner."

The millionaire and secretary left the room. Non-plussed, Dorchester lit a fresh cigarette, then Church ambled to a seat near the fire, and when his gaunt body reposed in it he seemed to shrivel up.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "Arthur said you had come down for material, and that you might write a best-seller. Heavens, that is rich. You have certainly come to a spot where exist all the elements for a fantastic novel, and it will either make you famous or get you certified. If Arthur has taken an interest in you, I suppose you may as well have the news as the Press."

Dorchester smiled, took the seat opposite, and relaxed his limbs.

"I hardly know what to think," he confessed. "The steel magnate has taken me into confidence, but I'm hanged if I can swallow the sensational tidings. I understand you are going to demonstrate some wonderful wireless discovery. I hope you are not hoaxed. You remember the young wireless pirate up in Norwich? Perhaps someone is playing a similar game and you are not able to trace him. Why not get in touch with the Post Office? Surely they can put an expert detector on the job?"



Church sat in a strange silence. His fingers twitched in curious fashion. He did not seem to have heard a word, but eventually he stirred, and a flicker of interest crossed his features.

"You see, Dorchester, I am not insane as you think," he said forcibly. "I have tumbled up against another world. It is true beyond the shadow of a doubt, and will prove one of the greatest sensations of the age. *I have contacted with Mars!* Nothing like it has been known to history. After dinner you will hear the Martians, their wonderful music, their broadcast announcer, and I will transmit my radio message back to them. When you have witnessed that, you may alter your opinion regarding my brain. You will be amazed like Gatacre when he made the first test."

Those luminous grey eyes were fixed on the fire. The man's forehead stood out in bold relief. A marvellously shaped head, one that would have caught the attention of an artist, and the gaunt body was impressive. The frame was fragile. The scientist was in poor condition physically, with pouches under the eyes, marks telling of ceaseless strain, long vigils, terrible evidence that he was living on nervous energy. With those tight-drawn lips, he appeared to have passed through some terrific ordeal. The white hair gave him a patriarchal appearance, yet he was only middle-aged.

"I am just the tale end of something that commenced in the Torquay train," Dorchester laughed, "so you must not mind me. If I am sceptical about your vast achievement, it means I have been asked to swallow more than a double portion. I am what the French call a realist. Is it true you are expecting a chap to



drop in from Mars? Splendid news for the *Police Gazette*, but no human could make a speculation of that kind without being under lock and key. I think your health is affected. All that messing about with the ether has upset your mental digestion. Frankly, you seem on the verge of a break-down."

Church made a motion of dissent. He remained in a preoccupied state, and the words reached him as in a dream.

"Gatacre has been talking," he observed, "and he might have known you would not comprehend. He was the last person to credit my statement, so you must think me a lunatic. I know the brain and its limitations, and you would never understand I had got in touch with Mars. What about Bleriot and the Channel crossing, Mollison and his Atlantic solo, Malcolm Campbell when he raced like a rocket? If those things happened, never rule out the improbable. The word is not in the dictionary of Science." He paused with a violent fit of coughing.

"Have you taken your daughter into confidence?"

"No, Violet is twenty-one and I still regard her as a child. She believes I have achieved success, and in that surmise she is correct. I wonder could she stand the shock of the surprise? I even ask if the world will realise what I have done! There are times when I think I have gone mad, when the whole discovery seems colossal, when one loses grip with Reality. That is why I have kept the secret from Fleet Street. If we offended the Martians, they might deny us that single wave-length."

"How long have you experimented with the ether?"



"Since the Armistice. I have always taken exceptional interest in transmission, and could have been a broadcasting pirate had I wished, but I am out to help humanity. If I thought communication with Mars would not benefit the world, I should never divulge my secret and would destroy what I created. However, the biggest experiment has yet to be made. The Martians have assured me that a visitor can be sent through space, irrespective of the stratosphere, and when conditions favour they will make the hazard. That will be a red-letter day, and the biggest event in the history of the world."

Dorchester took the cigarette from his lips. He was conscious of one thing. Paul Church was terribly in earnest, and whatever he achieved in the ether realm seemed of paramount importance.

"I suppose you do not admit the possibility of failure?" he queried. "Do you imagine any being could traverse those thousands of miles and live?"

Paul Church sent a swift glance.

"The Martians are miles ahead of us in intelligence," he answered. "We have guessed that for centuries. Wireless has been known to them for countless years, and they are already communicating with other planets. We are behind them all, and all my protestations fail to convince the Martians we have any intelligence. That is why they entrust us with a single wave-length. Believe me, Dorchester, you are in for a terrific surprise. Just wait until you have a talk with the Martian operator."

Dorchester felt inclined to laugh.

"I should like his portrait," he observed with a restrained smile. "Did he give you any information



about trade unions, or if many people were signing at the Labour Exchange? I should like to know if they have a Society of Authors, and if their publishers pay a heavy percentage on royalties? I also wonder what they think of Bernard Shaw."

Paul Church rose with a stern face.

"It would be folly to continue in that vein," he rejoined. "Ah, here is my daughter. Violet, I thought you were never going to put in an appearance. Allow me to present a young man who writes thrillers and likes the job—Mr. Brian Dorchester."

Dorchester jumped to his feet, hardly prepared for this vision of radiant beauty, and for a second he was tongue-tied. He thought the secretary left nothing to be desired, but Violet Church was the sweetest girl he had seen for ages. Tall, slim, exquisitely graceful, she had dark, magical eyes, that were simply entrancing. She was dressed in white with a rose at her corsage, and when she spoke her greeting was sincere.

"We are only allowed a visitor in a blue moon," she exclaimed with a disarming smile. "How nice to meet you, Mr. Dorchester! I hope we can coax you to stay a long time, for life here has grown terribly monotonous, and we do not know the mystery. I have read some of your novels."

Dorchester grinned. He felt shy and embarrassed.

"I am just struggling towards the dawn," he explained, "but I have resolved to write something outstanding, and that is why I have come to these parts. I am sorry you have not more social amenities. We must persuade the dictators to alter their programme."



Paul Church threw a comprehensive nod.

"Yes," he assented, "I am afraid Rockdene Hall has not been as jolly as we would have liked. Even the radio has been restricted, and that is a pity. However, you know what we are attempting, Dorchester, so we rely on your silence until I give the word. I must have a chat with Gatacre."

"Are you in the secret?" Violet asked, when the door closed. "If so, we hope you will lift the curtain, for we are getting worried. What is the big mystery? We know Dad is conducting some wonderful experiment with the ether, but beyond that we are in the dark. What is this meaning of it? Why is this place guarded day and night, and why are we treated like prisoners? You are in the same position, Mr. Dorchester, for special instructions have been issued, so why have you been assenting to this state of things?"

Dorchester felt in a fog.

"I am afraid I can't help," he confessed. "I am as baffled as you, Miss Church, but I imagined you would have known something definite."

Violet smiled, accepted a cigarette, and allowed him to light it.

"I know Dad is a genius," she confided. "Even a practical man like Mr. Gatacre guesses that my father has an outstanding brain. He did wonderful things in the Army, and they wanted to give him all kinds of promotion, but he refused every favour. Since the Armistice, there has been something on his mind. He has been trying big experiments with the ether, and I believe he is about to do something stupendous in the broadcasting line. You see, Dad is a big mathema-



tician, and he is familiar with the Einstein formula. He was always an expert at figures, and often he sits up all night working out abstruse calculations. I have tried to solve his secret and have failed, yet for three years he has been engaged on some big task, and I know he will succeed in the end."

Dorchester caught the magic of her eyes. He was intrigued with her amazing loveliness, at the effortless way she moved, at the glamour she exerted over his senses. Yet she was the daughter of a madman, and he pitied her in his heart.

"I am prepared to believe all that," he rejoined, "because one has only to glance at Paul Church to realise he is an intellectual, a man of superlative brain power, one fated to do big things in scientific achievement. Yet there is one matter I should mention. Has it occurred to you that he may be attempting the impossible, that he is endangering his health, that he is drifting to a breakdown?"

The girl glanced at him with a shrewd gaze. She saw he was good-looking and possessed all the virile attributes. He was fascinating to a degree, and she was aware the other girls would be striving for his attentions, monopolising him, and perhaps the inevitable flirtation.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"Because I have watched him closely, and should not be surprised if a Harley Street expert verified my statement. Your father looks dangerously ill and is in need of a complete rest. Why not persuade Mr. Gatacre to take him on a long yachting cruise? A trip round Southern Europe? Anything to get away from



this environment. Besides you girls deserve a holiday, so why not use your influence with the steel magnate? That might save the situation!"

Violet felt touched at the words, for they conveyed a personal message she could not fail to understand.

"I only wish that were possible," she murmured in a tremulous tone. "One might as well discuss Madame Tussaud's, for Dad would never change his plans. I know you are right. I have seen the collapse coming for months, and yet Dad will not listen to one word of protest. I do wish you would intervene. We have endured months of it, and a word from you might change everything."

Dorchester gave a decisive nod.

"I promise," he answered. "There will be a conference after dinner, and if I can intervene, Mr. Gatacre may come to my aid. Do you really mean that you are a prisoner? Surely you can visit Torquay at least? In heaven's name, you don't mean you are not allowed to go outside those gates!"

Violet glanced at the door and her face lost colour.

"It is true," she said in a low voice. "We are not allowed to telephone without permission, or to leave Rockdene Hall grounds. Yet we want for nothing. Mr. Gatacre is frightfully kind. The food is excellent, the servants are courteous, and we can go where we like about the estate. If we want clothes, they are sent direct from London or Paris, and the local dress-maker may visit the Hall. Yet letters are collected at the gate, and we have little freedom. You may wonder why we have not rebelled. That has been our intention, but I plead with the others to wait for I



have every confidence in Dad. Your presence here means that liberty is at hand."

Dorchester threw his cigarette in the fire. The situation seemed more beyond him than ever.

"I think it a shame for those men to treat you in this fashion," he declared, "and all the scientific discoveries in the world won't compensate for the loss of liberty. England would be seething if it knew the facts. What about the servants?"

Violet looked distressed. Again her eyes flashed to the door.

"They have never an opportunity of hearing anything important," she replied, "and they do not interfere in what does not concern them. We have heard odd scraps of conversation, but most of it is unintelligible, and Dad never takes a risk where we are concerned."

The novelist gave a disconnected laugh.

"I ought to prepare you in advance," he said quietly. "I am not disclosing what has been revealed, but I do not see the faintest possibility of the discovery being anything beyond an illusion. I think your father is being hoaxed. Someone is playing a trick on him with the ether."

The girl gazed into space, beyond the window, into the unknown darkness without.

"It is only natural you should be sceptical," she rejoined. "Army staff officers maintained the same opposition until Dad convinced them he was a genius, and the same thing will happen at Rockdene Hall. Dad is the last person to be fooled so far as wireless is concerned, and he would be the first to get on the



track of anyone playing that game. He has convinced Mr. Gatacre, and the very fact of you being invited proves the end is in sight."

Dorchester groaned.

"If you only knew the task your father has set himself, and what he expects is going to happen, you would agree he ought to be examined. Gatacre is in the same position. He has come under the same influence. I ought to be fighting my way to that telephone and getting in touch with the nearest police-station."

Violet rose and came forward. She lost her composure for a second.

"Is it as bad as that?" she asked in a frightened tone. "Why, then, do you not tell me, Mr. Dorchester? I am his daughter, and I have the first right to hear the truth. What are those men seeking? Is it anything criminal, anything for which Dad might be arrested?"

"No, Scotland Yard would not be interested," he answered, "but we should not be deprived of liberty for one hour, and that is the magnitude of the error."

Violet laughed, and the colour returned to the lovely face. She moved across to the bookshelves.

"I might have known you were not serious," she ventured. "At any rate, I am going to regard you as one of our supporters. You see, I am fighting for Dad. I am doing everything to make the others have faith in him, and it was my will-power that made them suspend their final judgment. You are the first sign of the dawn. Your presence here will make all the difference in the world."

The door opened.

"Dinner is served," announced a servant.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

**A**N hour later in a reception room on the other side of the library a girl sat at a grand piano, her fingers manipulating the key-notes of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata in C sharp minor. She was Venetia Gatacre, daughter of the millionaire, and the young man beside her was Brian Dorchester.

"You play well," he remarked conventionally.

The girl glanced up, her shoulders gleaming like polished ivory. Indeed the dress was embarrassingly low, yet it suited the wearer, for Venetia was the most beautiful girl at Rockdene Hall, and she had dressed for the occasion. It was a Spanish dress of the old regime, with wonderful lace trimmings, and a smartness that appealed. A brownish silk that Dorchester would remember all his life.

"Is that intended for a compliment?"

Dorchester shrugged. He was interested in this girl with the cold, patrician face, and those amazing blue eyes fascinated him. He knew he had been silent at dinner, and although she sat beside him this was the first chance for intimate talk. There had been one distressing moment when Paul Church had a fainting attack and was carried to his room. Violet was with him at present, while Veronica was taking letters,



and the steel magnate promised to join them shortly.

"It was unintentional," he laughed. "*I* admit you played that Sonata like Beethoven himself, and I am glad because I was getting morbid. There is something oppressive about the Hall, as if the walls were closing in on you and there was no escape. You have helped me to forget that absurd feeling."

A silvery laugh reached his ears. Venetia was amused. The idea of anyone escaping from Rockdene Hall was the best joke for some time. Besides, Dorchester intrigued her. She wanted to anger him. There was something about his lips that told of an implacable will, and it made her furious.

"I suggest you return to reality," she murmured. "We are all victims of the wicked giant, and all the piano-playing in the world cannot alter the fact that we are prisoners. As a bachelor, Mr. Dorchester, you are in a difficult position. You may have to marry one of us, and I am jolly certain it won't be myself."

Dorchester found himself losing patience. Venetia seemed the last person he would dream of marrying, for that hauteur maddened him. Why was she so arrogant? It might have been different were she an aristocrat, a titled daughter of nobility, but her father was a steel magnate from the commercial north, and there were dozens of millionaires in England.

"You are right," he said brutally. "Afraid you are not my style, Miss Gatacre. We seem to have entirely different dispositions, and that would hardly lead to harmony. Don't you think Violet Church is a particularly nice girl?"



"Yes, but not half so pretty as Veronica," was the retort. "She may be only a secretary, but if I had a brother I should not rest night and day until he married her. She is the sweetest girl in England."

"I may make a proposition of that kind," Dorchester hinted, "but a good deal depends on what happens. After all, give me a sporting chance. This is my first evening, and your father's secretary may not be prepared to fall in love at sight. As regards Miss Church, I find her most charming indeed. What a pity an unfortunate parent has tied you all up in this spot."

Venetia moved nearer the fire. This young man was proving more difficult than she imagined, yet she admitted he had a spark of intelligence and he was not bad-looking. Ordinarily she had a contempt for novelists. When she married, her husband must know all about the steel industry and shine pre-eminently in commerce.

"There is nothing the matter with father," she said decisively. "He happens to be brainy and that makes a difference. We are used to this detention, but you will find it irksome. Have you reckoned what it means when you cannot go to a cinema, when you have to write to Torquay for your cigarettes, when you cannot bribe a single servant? I once tried to send a wire to my cousin but it never got to the Post Office. These walls have ears, for that servant was detained at the porter lodge, then sent back with a message that the wire could not be transmitted. Father is inexorable, like Paul Church, and if you can find a more ruthless type than the man who invented the



new signalling code lead me to him. That is the worst of being a genius. We all suffer for his madness."

Dorchester proffered his cigarette case, but it was declined.

"I suppose it is a form of lunacy," he observed. "I am glad you think Paul Church is insane. That is the first time we have reached agreement."

Glancing across, Venetia wondered why this handsome young novelist irritated her to such an extent? Was it his accent, the way he arranged his tie, or his melodramatic appearance at Rockdene Hall?

"I never know where to place the scientist," she answered. "Paul Church has been an enigma from the first day, and I never understood why father brought him here. Perhaps you have the same thought concerning my parent?"

"No, I don't think so," Dorchester replied. "They are war-friends and have absolute faith in each other. I am surprised that you girls have borne this treatment without revolt."

A fresh laugh reached him. It was like the tinkle of a musical box.

"You are wrong," she stressed. "I kicked up more fuss than anyone, for I hate this nun-like existence, and can see no sense in Paul Church spending all his days in that laboratory. It is only surpassed by the estate being guarded day and night, and not allowing us to visit Torquay or the outside world."

"Then why not impress those facts on your father?" Dorchester protested. "You could have the scientist examined by an expert. If he is *non compos*, you



ought to do everything to remove him to a mental home."

Venetia found it difficult to hide her confusion.

"Paul Church is not a mental case," she corrected. "I meant something different. He lives in a dimension beyond us, and if I regarded him fit for the asylum that would classify my father in the same category. Don't you understand I am in the same position as Violet Church? That is why I have exerted all my patience."

Dorchester lit a cheroot. He found himself gazing into those deep blue eyes.

"Then you are in for a terrific surprise," he said dramatically.

"What do you mean?"

"I was taken into confidence, and I believe Paul Church suffers from a delusion. That is not an accusation of lunacy, but I believe the scientist is attempting the impossible. He anticipates an event that would revolutionise everything if it happened, an event so stupendous that we would be terrified even to believe it. I am suspending judgment because I have to hear further details this evening."

A flash of anger touched the lovely face. Then Venetia leaned back and hid her resentment under a careless laugh.

"Apparently you forget," she rejoined, "that father is patron of this scientific venture, and that he is a hard-headed business man. That accounts for his control of the steel industry, and why he gives you the chance of writing a best-seller. We have known for some time that Paul Church is on the verge of a



breakdown, yet all the experts would not alter his resolve to see this thing through to a success."

Dorchester looked grave.

"It may be a matter of psychology," he continued. "Those two men are war-chums and they will never desert each other. Perhaps your father is playing a part, just holding out until the experiment proves a fiasco. I certainly see a drama with my own eyes, and it affords data for a super-thriller!"

Venetia gave a sniff that sounded contemptuous.

"Please do not include me in your imaginative efforts," she begged. "As regards the scientist, those fainting attacks are not unusual. He will be all right in forty minutes, and you will not suspect anything wrong. I also think you are to be envied. If you are to hear details of the experiment, you will be the only one in the secret in addition to father. Why have you been singled out?"

Dorchester shrugged. The enmity in the tone amused him, but he was too polite to comment on it.

"Can any woman be trusted with a secret?" he asked. "Your father had a definite object in inviting me here, Miss Gatacre. Church may be attempting something that will end in failure, and, knowing I can write, I may be asked to put the whole scheme in a gigantic phantasy. Perhaps that is the plan. Won't you accept a cigarette?"

Venetia leaned forward and something in his gaze brought the crimson to her cheeks.

"Very well," she assented, "I will accept the offer, but do not ask me to play that piano again. I am in



a strange mood, and something in the nature of a dirge might appeal. Don't you sing?"

"Only in the bath," Dorchester laughed, "and, in any case, there is no greater agony than listening to my voice!"

"Tell me something about yourself," Venetia suggested. "I am not in the least interested, but it is thrilling to hear a strange voice in the room."

"I should prefer hearing how you spend your existence? Have you any hobby? Do you paint?"

"A few water-colours but nothing serious on canvas. My bedroom is adorned with them. As that is a sanctum you will not enter, they are safe from your critical eyes. Don't ask me how I exist? We never know what to do with ourselves, but in good weather we are seldom indoors. We plan all kinds of schemes. Boating parties on the lake, picnics in the woods, a display of tennis, golf, and swimming. Winter is a ghastly affair. How we would enjoy an occasional film, but we dance like ghosts to the radio, and you can imagine what that means when you cannot ask a servant to be a dancing partner. Are you a Londoner?"

"A flat in town and a country den at Welwyn," Dorchester answered. "You see, my parents are dead. I correspond regularly with a married sister in New York."

"And sport?"

"A cricket club in Welwyn, then a round of golf when the mood takes me, but I prefer boating, and spend hours on the river. It helps inspiration and suits a lazy temperament."

"You cannot be lazy if you write books," Venetia protested. "Well, you may be a typical bachelor,



but I am not the slightest bit anxious to gobble you up. Violet may be in the market. There are also possibilities about Veronica, and I think she would make an excellent cook. Her only fault is a ceaseless chatter, which would keep you awake and drive you to a perfect crime."

"You would be the first victim," Dorchester predicted. "I should devise the most ghastly method of putting you to death, and you would deplore the moment I commenced writing thrillers."

They chatted for fifteen minutes, then the door opened and two people entered. It was the millionaire and his secretary, and Gatacre approached with a smile.

"Hello, Venetia, I thought you were playing the piano!" he exclaimed, taking the nearest chair near the glowing fire. "You don't mean Dorchester has kept you engrossed, and that you are actually enjoying his company? Heavens, so unusual for you to appreciate anyone."

Venetia blew out a whiff of smoke, sent a cheery greeting to Veronica, and made Dorchester pass the cigarette case.

"No, we are enemies!" she declared with a laugh. "Dorchester and I are not temperamentally suited, father, and as we quarrel most of the time we were just considering the possibilities of murder. At the last second we arranged an armistice, which means a weakness for Russian cigarettes."

"I must correct that statement," Dorchester answered gallantly. "Miss Gatacre has been engaged in the gentle art of leg-pulling, and although she takes



the opposite viewpoint we are not really hostile. At any rate, I should never dream of murdering her. What about our distinguished invalid? Has he retired for the evening?"

Gatacre waved his hand, and the smile returned to his lips.

"Paul will be down in a few minutes," he replied. "There was really nothing the matter, for he is subject to these weak turns, and perhaps the excitement of your visit accounted for it. You see, we are near the end of a great work, and when that is finished I will take Paul on a long sea voyage."

Venetia threw the end of her cigarette in the fire.

"That would suit my plans," she said significantly, "but I should go on condition that Violet and Veronica accompanied us. Do not forget your martyrs, father. Heaven knows how we have endured this environment, but we could write a book about our imprisonment. What do you say, Veronica?"

"I think you know my opinion," that young lady answered tactfully. Now and again she glanced at the novelist, and as a secretary she realised she must be discreet.

"I may have made the same mistake as the Kaiser," Gatacre laughed, withdrawing his cigar case. "I thought this job would be over in three months, and as I am not in charge of the major operation, why blame me in the matter? I admit you girls have played your parts, and you will get recognition for it. But publicity would be fatal and ruin everything at this juncture."

Venetia took another cigarette, for the Russian



brand gave her a secret thrill, and Dorchester's eyes were somewhat provoking. Why did he stare in that fashion? Had he never seen a member of her sex in a brown dress?

"Veronica, we will change the subject," she decided. "What has come over you? You have only spoken in monosyllables, and I put you down as a talkie with a ceaseless transmission. Don't you think we ought to get this stranger photographed? We could have several portraits enlarged, and you could sleep with one under your pillow. You see, Dorchester may escape one day. The gods are jealous of what they send to mortals."

The laugh from Veronica sounded infectious. Yet it was a prudent laugh, for she knew Venetia required delicate handling, and it was best to humour her.

"I hardly think Mr. Dorchester will manage that part of it," she said lightly. "You see, Venetia, he is the only bachelor we have, so he must never regain his freedom. Besides, we are hardly fair to your father. After all, Mr. Gatacre never refuses a reasonable request, and he makes certain about our comfort. To-night perhaps we may hear the radio!"

The millionaire threw an indulgent nod from the red-leather chair.

"Yes," he answered, "in a few minutes Dorchester and I will adjourn to the Green Room, and Paul will join us. If everything is in order, our guest will be initiated into the mystery, and he is in for a tremendous surprise. I want you to see we are not disturbed, Venetia. If we happen to enter the tower, the radio



must not be touched, for that would interfere with our test."

Venetia made a movement of impatience.

"I think our best plan is to build a plane and escape within the next fortnight," she murmured.

Dorchester flashed a glance of admiration at the speaker, then turned to the millionaire.

"Mr. Gatacre, I beg of you to reconsider your decision about these young ladies. Why not take them into confidence? I think they deserve an inkling of what is going on at the Hall."

The steel magnate gave a polite cough. It was a reasonable request made with commendable frankness.

"That is the difficulty," he replied. "These girls would not break faith, but they might comment on the stupendous discovery, and the servants would overhear. My decision is final. They will be compensated for all restriction on their freedom, and they know I never break my word. Paul and I have discussed this point from every angle. Our plans would fail if a precipitate disclosure were made."

Venetia glanced at her wrist-watch, and knew the colour had left her face. She was doing her utmost to keep back a torrent of words. She wanted to tell her father he was nothing but a tyrannical monster; that he had fallen under the spell of that white-haired scientist.

"I might have known you could not trust us, father," she said passionately. "I consider your attitude cruel in the extreme. All these months we have kept from revolt, or from being shot down by those gunmen. We have waited three years for a solution of this



mystery, and now you select a stranger for your confidence instead of your own flesh and blood."

The millionaire frowned. He had no wish for a scene with his daughter, but he knew her tempestuous temperament, and realised she must be placated.

"There is logic in your protest," he temporised, "but if you were in my position, Venetia, you would understand I had no alternative. I have given my word to Paul Church. It was in the nature of an oath, and as I have never let him down, I am not going to begin at this stage. Paul was emphatic that no one should know about this investigation. Now you may turn on the radio, Veronica."

"One moment," Dorchester begged. "Do you really think Paul Church should come down this evening? He looked dreadfully ill, and I thought he was never coming round from that fainting-fit. Why not let him see a doctor and allow this experiment to stand over until his health has recovered?"

"A doctor!" Gatacre repeated in an odd voice.

"Why not? You can have my parole, and the others will keep silent. A Torquay doctor could be here soon. If Paul Church should collapse, his death would be on your hands."

Gatacre gazed into space. Dorchester was right. His friend was dreadfully ill, and everything pointed to a breakdown unless Paul called a halt.

"Paul is not in the condition I could wish," he assented, "but I am in a quandary about a doctor. I have sworn to keep strangers away from the Hall, and a medical man might complicate matters. He would order a complete rest, and Paul would never



carry out that injunction. Let us leave it in abeyance for a few days."

The door opened to admit the scientist and his daughter. Dorchester jumped to his feet and placed chairs for both. Gatacre helped his friend to a seat beside him.

"Well, Paul, how are you feeling?" he asked. "Here, let me place this cushion against your back. What about a cigar?"

"Nonsense, I don't feel like a cigar," Church echoed. "Not even a brandy either. It was just something I ate at dinner. That turbot, I expect. It gave me an acute attack of indigestion, and I just went funny. Dorchester, I am sorry if I have caused you inconvenience. We are going to have an interesting chat about the ether, and in a few minutes we will go to the Green Room."

"Dorchester thinks you should see a doctor," Gatacre announced.

"Yes, when I am dying," the scientist growled. "There is nothing the matter with me, Arthur, and right well you know it. Besides, we cannot trust a soul, and we have yet to prove whether we have not made a mistake about this young writer. The job must be finished, and you know the imperative reason behind it. A doctor would be a terrific blunder. He would order me to the Mediterranean, and that means the end of our plans."

Veronica switched on the radio, and under cover of the music the girls held a conference at the far end of the room.



## CHAPTER V

### THE GREEN ROOM

**H**ALF an hour later, at the end of a recital of band tunes, the three men adjourned to a luxuriously-furnished apartment in the left wing known as the Green Room and when Dorchester entered the door was locked.

Gatacre switched on the light, motioned the novelist to a seat, and pulled down the blinds. Dorchester selected a green-leather chair near the fire, and gazed round the room.

It was divided into two parts by a green curtain and the furniture had been selected with a view to repose. A few fine etchings adorned the walls and in the far corner stood a writing-desk of American design. An Italian book-case stood near the window, with an Austrian chess-table alongside, then a row of green-leather chairs. The Turkish carpet, Morocco rugs, and lace curtains must have been priceless. It was the abode of a philosopher.

"No one can approach this room within thirty yards," Paul Church commenced, pushing forward the cigarettes. "As you passed along the passage, you might have seen a uniformed servant at each end. Those men are armed and have instructions to shoot if instructions are not obeyed. You will realise that



a tremendous exception has been made in your case, and Gatacre and myself will be disappointed if you let us down."

The millionaire settled himself in a huge armchair and seemed inclined to do nothing but listen.

"Don't count on me for anything," Dorchester begged. "I am in your hands, gentlemen, but whether I attempt to escape depends on what you tell me to-night. You have to convince me, Paul Church, that all this is real, that you are actually in communication with Mars, and that a visitor from that planet may be expected. That will take some doing."

The millionaire held up a warning hand. It was a gentle hint that the scientist must not be excited.

"My dear chap, I had the same incredulity when Paul first hinted at his experiment," he said kindly. "I was prepared to swear that something had gone wrong with his brain, then he made me exert all my patience, and when I listened to his theory and saw it demonstrated in practice, then heard the wonderful talk with the Martians, I knew he had triumphed beyond the shadow of a doubt. I realised Paul Church was a genius, that the world would acclaim him a magician, and that his name would go down to history as the first scientist who had placed us in touch with another planet. You will come to the same conviction. Paul will talk to you about the stars in his own inimitable way, and I guarantee he will hold you spellbound. Astronomy makes one understand infinity, the littleness of man, the vast concept of Design."



The scientist with a start realised that the eyes of Dorchester were fixed on him and that it was time for him to begin.

"I am going to chat to you about the stars," he commenced, "and show you how the idea of planetary communication took root in my brain. First, what do you know about astronomy?"

"As much as I do about the Einstein formula," Dorchester confessed, "and that is not much, although I have an idea that the subject was mentioned at school. I know that the earth is round like a ball or globe, that most of the planets have a solar system similar to our own, but beyond that I am lost."

Paul Church exchanged a glance with his friend.

"Having studied the stars all my life," he continued, "I may claim to know something about them. There is no greater glory than the heavens. Have you ever on a fine spring evening, with the crescent moon shining in the west, contemplated the grand spectacle of the stars as they marched along the vast path of the heavens? To me, each star is a point of interrogation, and I never regard the depth of space as inaccessible. I have always thought there was a bridge, a media of communication, a line of contact, and I have proved that beyond doubt. Mars is a celestial world near our own, and it has always fascinated me. Venus, the white star of the shepherds, also attracts, as well as the giant Jupiter. You should gaze at the seven stars of the Great Bear, as they seemingly point out the Pole while they slowly revolve round it. It forms an amazing sight. You would marvel at the nebulous light that whitens the heavens then crosses the



constellations like a celestial wind. That is the Galaxy or Milky Way, and is composed of millions of suns. If the darkness is profound, you will notice a shooting star glide silently across the sky, like a sentinel of night, then it disappears."

Dorchester took a cigarette, and lit it thoughtfully. He was caught in the vortex of this man's oratory and something in the luminous grey eyes struck him as magical.

"Einstein demonstrated that a lot depends on relativity," Paul Church proceeded. "We must study the stars if we are to understand the constitution of the universe, its grandeur and beauty, the world in which we live. We discover our position in the cosmos. That is how we appreciate creation. If we are to comprehend our existence, we must study our solar system, the sun by which we live, the endless succession of days and nights, the motion of the heavens, the star-lit skies, the divine rays of the moon, the system of things that make up a universe. Most of us are blind to these realities. We never half-suspect the marvels of the universe!"

"I read Flammarion when I was nineteen," Dorchester interrupted. "He seemed to me an artist in words, a dream-visionary with an amazing imagination, and the beauty of his writing is undeniable."

"Flammarion was more than a dreamer," the scientist stressed. "He was a realist of astronomy, and there was more behind his speculation than you imagine. Remember that the stars gaze back at us. They have questioned every thinking soul so long as humanity has existed. Homer sang about the stars.



They shone upon the civilisations that have disappeared, upon Egypt of the Pyramids, Greece at the time of the Trojan Wars, Rome and Carthage, Constantine and Charlemagne, and generations are buried with the dust of their ancient temples. Symbols of eternity, the stars are always there."

"Then it must take the devil of an aerial to get in touch with them," Dorchester interjected.

"It has been found," Paul Church said dramatically. "Remember that astronomy is the first of the sciences. We trace it back to the unknown ages of antiquity. It gives us the design of the heavens. It tells us what part we occupy in the solar system, for not only is the earth a planet but we seek to know how different we are to Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and the rest. We could never have done without astronomy. We should have lived like blind bats in ignorance of our terrestrial existence. This tiny world would have represented the universe. Our humanity would have meant all creation, and we should have had no conception of reality. Thanks to the labours of intellectual giants, to men of genius like Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, Kepler, we have torn aside the veil of mystery and gazed on the splendid truth of the heavens."

"Yes, there were giants in those days," Dorchester admitted with a peculiar laugh, "but did they not arrive at results by algebra, geometry, and mathematics?"

"To a large extent, but figures do not represent everything. Astronomy teaches you to open your eyes, to see where you are, to ascertain the path of



truth and happiness. It is the most glorious quest in the world for it brings us a reality beyond our dreams, beyond the most fantastic imagination, and once we commence a study of the stars there is no need to be coaxed to persevere. We will be gripped by the stupendous panorama of the skies. Diamonds, turquoises, rubies, emeralds, all the precious stones which women love are to be found in the immensity of heaven. In the big telescopic field, one can see armies of majestic and powerful suns, wandering comets with flowing tails, shooting stars and stellar nebulae, and when one has gazed one asks what romance in the history of nature is comparable with that vision?"

The millionaire moved in his chair. His cigar had gone out. He was tremendously interested, and he leaned forward to make one observation.

"Yes, but don't forget, Paul, that one can be oppressed with it all," he declared. "I always feel lost in that limitless immensity. There is something unfathomable about all that space in which our globe is floating. We ask where are we rushing in this rapid flight? We seem travelling into the depths of the infinite!"

The scientist was pleased with the intelligent comment, and beamed with the gaze of a schoolmaster.

"Yes, but the greater the mystery the more amazing the solution," he affirmed. "Don't forget the march of progress. We cannot afford to be as ignorant as the ancients. Before our position was determined in the universe, this world was supposed to have fantastic supports that penetrated the infernal regions. No one could conceive of the earth being isolated. There was



a false idea of its weight. To-day we know the earth rests upon nothing, and is attached to nothing. There is neither 'above' nor 'below' in the universe. What we call 'below' is the centre of the earth. We know this planet turns on its axis every twenty-four hours. Night is only a partial phenomenon due to the rotary motions of the planet, and that motion would not be maintained without the isolation of our globe in space!"

Dorchester wanted to laugh. He had an idea that he was back at school, his arms folded across a little desk, his ears drinking in every word that fell from the science master.

"Is this a lecture on astronomy?" he asked cynically. "I enjoy it, of course, but I am anxious to hear something about your wireless set and that super-transmitter you have invented!"

"Please do not spoil the sequence of a wonderful talk," Gatacre begged. "This is the groundwork on which my friend has created his invention. You will inspect that machine in a moment, but for heaven's sake don't interrupt unless to ask a question."

The scientist was not in the least disconcerted. He glanced at the young author as if he had not spoken, and his voice held no trace of irritation.

"I can see, young man, you are consumed with a natural impatience," he continued, "but unless I get you vitally interested in the cosmogony of the heavens, and the manner in which astronomy is studied by the modern scientist, you will not comprehend the discovery I have made. I have referred to the fact that the earth is sustained by nothing material. That which



maintains her in the ether is an immaterial force. We call it gravitation. The sun attracts the earth, and if we did not revolve we would drop into the sun, but by revolving round the sun at a speed of 66,000 miles per hour, the earth produces a centrifugal force, and two balanced forces keep this globe at the same distance from the sun. I know that is elementary stuff, but has it occurred to you that each star we admire in the sky is another sun burning with its own light, and perhaps the chief of a numerous family of sun stars? I want you to concentrate on the infinity of the universe. Think of that limitless space. If we could make a journey to the Milky Way, we should be appalled at the grand spectacle of a new universe, and after crossing the archipelago of that new world we should still find universe succeeding universe, with millions of suns rolling on into the immensities of space, and on all sides creation renewing itself in an infinite variety."

Dorchester lit a fresh cigarette. He was gripped by the voice of the white-haired scientist, and something in that pale face kept him from making the slightest interruption.

"Now we ask why should the germ of intelligence be absent from those distant worlds," Paul Church pursued. "You see, everything points to the fact that Life is the goal of Nature. Burning foci, undying sources of warmth and light, those brilliant suns shine down on the worlds in their orbit. Why should our globe be the single exception? Our earth is a celestial orb, nourished and warmed by the sun which is also a star. You and I, Dorchester, can dream of those



innumerable worlds. Why should their unknown inhabitants not think of us in their turn, and why may space not be traversed by waves of thought as it is by vibrations of light and gravitation?"

"It is a possibility," Dorchester confessed.

The scientist wiped his face with a silk handkerchief. He glanced at the novelist with keener interest, as if he detected a spark of comprehension, and it was evident he was well pleased.

"I realised," he continued, "that this globe was turning round a colossal sun, a globe of relatively light weight, isolated on all sides in space, just like a balloon tossed up by a careless child. Contemplation of the stars makes us confident of one thing. There must be more than tangible and visible matter. There must be forces, laws, destinies. The brain of an astronomer is mightier than that of an ant. We realise there is something greater than the earth, something more absolute than the visible and invisible, nobler than the sordid things of this earth-life, transcendent in truth, beauty, goodness."

He took a small book from his pocket, turned to a certain page, then went on: "Listen to Flammarion:

"O night, mysterious, sublime and infinite, withdrawing from our eyes the veil spread above us by the light of day, giving back transparency to the heavens, showing us the prodigious reality, the shining casket of the celestial diamonds, the innumerable stars that are set in the immeasurable distances of space! Without you, we should know nothing. Without you, our eyes would never have divined the starry throng, our intellects would never



have pierced the harmony of the sky, and we should have remained the blind, deaf, parasites of a world isolated from the rest of the universe. O sacred night! If on the one hand you rest upon the heights of truth beyond the day's illusions, on the other your invisible urns pour down a silent and tranquil peace, a penetrating calm, upon our souls that weary of life's troubling: you make us forget struggles, deceptions, intrigues, the miseries of the hours of toil and noisy activity, all the conventional deceits of civilisation. Your domain is that of rest and dreams. We love your truth. We love you because you place us in communication with the other world, because you show us universal and immortal Life, because you give us hope, because you name us citizens of the sky.'

Dorchester, that is the Flammarion concept of Night. I wonder if you will ever write like that!"

"Heaven forbid!" answered the novelist. "What would my publishers say? If I sent them a manuscript with that nonsense they would return it by next post and say it was minus sex appeal. But go ahead and tell me something about Mars. I can see you are trying to make me believe something incredible."

The scientist exchanged another good-humoured glance with his war friend.

"Very well," he assented, "I now come to the planet in which I am interested. Venus is close to our planet, but at 140,000,000 miles from the sun we reach Mars. It is known as the red planet. It is also called the God of War. Mars is about half the size



of the earth, which means it has a lesser degree of attraction. It is a much older planet than the Earth. If you look in the text-books of astronomy, you will find that Mercury is a dead world, and a theory has been formulated that Mars is a dying world. We know the Martian atmosphere is very thin, that no clouds hide the surface of the planet, so Mars is assumed to be a dry world. It is nothing of the kind."

"I thought they would rule out Prohibition," Dorchester chuckled.

"It was estimated that Mars had plenty of air and water for countless centuries, just as we have on this Earth planet, but as Mars has a smaller bulk, with lower power of attraction, it was predicted that air and water would escape into space, giving us the impression that Mars is a dying world, a planet perishing with suffocation and thirst."

"Which meant somebody kept praying for rain."

"But the Martians solved that difficulty themselves. You see, it has always been imagined that there was life on Mars, and that it must be an intelligence greatly in advance of our own. I am proud to affirm that fact. Thousands of years ago the Martians perfected wireless and aeroplanes, and our wisest men are ignorant compared to their philosophers. Life developed along similar lines to that on this earth. We have heard about the Martian canals. Astronomers have disagreed about that for ages, but I can inform the savants, and the distinguished members of the British Association, that those canals were dug by Martian engineers, and that a water supply was distributed over the planet by that means."



"I will drop Lodge a postcard to-night."

"Ah, that is something Lodge has guessed. Mars has two moons. One revolves round the planet three times in the Martian day of  $24\frac{1}{2}$  hours. As you know, all the maledictions of mortals have fallen on Mars. Beginning with war, that scourge of humanity, all misfortune caused by power have been attributed to Mars. We have looked on it as the Evil Eye. Yet you will be glad to hear that Mars is innocent of all those calumnies, and we have not the slightest right to speak ill of it. Mars and this planet are so much alike that if we were travelling there and lost our way it would be impossible to recognise which of the two were our planet."

"You could never hoodwink me over Piccadilly Circus," Dorchester chuckled.

"Frankly, we should run a risk without the Moon, of arriving amongst the Martians, and we might descend in Europe or some other part of this planet.

"The seasons on Mars have nearly the same intensity as our own, but their duration is twice as long, for it takes Mars 1 year, 10 months, and 21 days to accomplish its revolution round the Sun. The characteristics of our seasons are found on the Martian planet. Wait, there is one distinction. Our Earth, seen from a distance, must appear tinted with green, on account of the colour of its atmosphere, vegetation and waters. Mars is shaded with red, and this gives it the reddish light with which it is seen to shine. There are certain periods when both planets are near together, that is, when they are both on the same side of their path



with regard to the Sun. It is then estimated they are not more than 48 millions of miles apart."

"Quite far enough to make a Martian visitor a distinct improbability," Dorchester smiled.

"This may seem a huge joke to you, Dorchester," Gatacre intervened, "but remember you are on the verge of the greatest sensation of your life."

Paul Church made a dramatic motion of his hand.

"Kepler was right," he continued. "He told us it was from Mars that astronomy will reach us, and from the study of that planet will our future progress advance."

"How far is Mars from the sun?" Dorchester queried.

"Approximately 140,000,000 miles. It gravitates in an orbit exterior to that which the earth takes round the same centre. I have always been sorry for Mars. I used to wonder what evil fairy presided at his birth, for all the curses of antiquity seem to have fallen on him. He is the god of war and carnage, the protector of armies, the inspirer of hatred among the peoples, the demon who pours out the blood of humanity in hecatombs of the nations. Mars burns like a drop of blood in the depths of the firmament. That ruddy colour inspired its name and attributes."

"Ruddy is a good word," Dorchester muttered. "They use it in the States, and George Bernard Shaw mentioned it in one of his plays."

"Yet here is something to ponder," Paul Church proceeded. "While we attributed a great part of our misfortune to Mars, that planet, ignoring our tragedies, pursued its own celestial path marked out in destiny."



I won't trouble you with figures, but day and night are a trifle longer on Mars. A Martian year consists of 668 days, which means the Martian year is equal to two of our own. Again, the intensity of the seasons is more accentuated than on this earth because the Martian orbit is elongated. Yet there, as here, are three distinct zones: the torrid, temperate, and glacial."

"How much of this can you observe from your telescope?"

"I can follow the variations of the Martian seasons, especially the polar snows, which aggregate during the winter and melt during the summer heat. Those snows are easily observed. They stand out clearly with dazzling whiteness. Sometimes they disappear during the Martian month that corresponds to August, but that never happens with our polar ice. Yet although Mars is further away from the sun it does not appear to be colder, and I have verified that the polar snows are less thick. There are few clouds. The Martian atmosphere is always limpid, and fine weather is the regular state of the planet. At times one can discern fogs or vapour in certain regions but those are soon dissipated and the sky clears. Arthur, you have made a few of those observations."

The millionaire signified assent. He moved slightly in his chair. He had been listening intently to the talk, and now he roused himself.

"Yes, as far as I have noticed," he affirmed, "Mars appears a much more congenial planet than our own. It is more ancient, is smaller and less massive. Evidently it has run quickly through the phases of its



evolution. I am told its astral life is more advanced, and we have proved that Martians are much superior to ourselves in mind-power, just as our successors, a million years hence, will be less coarse and barbarous than we are at present. The law of progress governs all the worlds."

"I have never despaired of communicating with Mars," Paul Church concluded. "There have been rumours of signals from them, but the luminous points observed were high summits or light clouds illuminated by the sun. Frankly, the idea of communicating with Mars is less audacious than the invention of spectral analysis, X-rays, or wireless telegraphy. . . . Now I will show you what lies behind that mysterious green curtain, and for the first time in your existence you will be given the opportunity of listening to the Martians."



## CHAPTER VI

### DORCHESTER GETS A SHOCK

DORCHESTER rose to his feet in that moment of breathless expectancy for Paul Church had pulled aside the curtain and a wonderful sight met his gaze.

It was a monstrous radio set with sixteen valves and the same number of lamps on an oblong table, with wires running from it to a huge aerial outside the window. The super-radio seemed vibrant with power, and not merely did it fill him with a definite curiosity but it gave an overwhelming sense of uneasiness. What did it portend?

When Paul Church touched a switch all the lamps were illumined. In the far corner stood a gigantic electric battery, and a single wire ran from it to the mammoth radio. Dorchester crept forward on tiptoe. Never had he beheld a more extraordinary invention, and it must have cost a thousand pounds. There were over a hundred devices cunningly concealed yet apparently everything was made to design. The extraordinary valves were spindle-shaped, spaced zig-zag fashion, and the lamps corresponded to that alignment. There were five special ear-phones.

"Do you mean this is your own creation?" Dorchester asked in a hoarse voice, spell-bound with excitement.



"Yes, this is my Martian radiol!" the scientist announced with a smile. "I have carried out instructions, and there is no duplicate of that set on earth. There is nothing haphazard about it, for the Martian expert gave me full particulars, and that is a pattern of what is used on the Mars planet. Soon we will establish television, then we will watch the Martians in real life, observe them move in their own orbit, and will find them behave as natural beings like ourselves."

Dorchester was speechless. He glanced at the millionaire and saw he was watching a lamp with grim intentness. It was a signal lamp. One slightly larger than the others yet set apart in a special position on the left-hand side of the set. That lamp held the attention. There was some stupendous significance behind it. What would it reveal?

"What is the next move?" he asked breathlessly.

Gatacre pointed to the signal lamp.

"When that glows a bright red," he answered dramatically, "it means we are in communication with Mars. The time is variable. Everything depends on the ether, for we are handicapped with aerial disturbances, with etheric noises that cannot be determined, but as a rule contact is made in a few minutes. You perceive we are outside the zone of the British Broadcasting Corporation, but there are other factors concerned and we have to exert patience. At any rate, you are going to get the thrill of your life. Soon you will hear a Martian speak in his own tongue."

The scientist moved to a couch with a gesture of weariness but his eyes remained on the signal lamp.



Gatacre took a seat at his side and both men stared in the same direction. Dorchester drew up a chair close to the radio set and watched the signal lamp as if his life depended on it.

"I don't want to be rude," he muttered, "but perhaps the Martian operator is having a sun-bath or construing some new Einstein formula! You see, gentlemen, I object to this leg-pulling. You have hoaxed me to a tremendous extent and it's time you realised I am no fool."

"You will confirm everything for yourself," Paul Church replied. "The Martian operator mastered our language in three weeks. His name is Aristide Jephthah, so you see they have peculiar names on the Martian planet, but that is the English definition at least."

Dorchester took a cigarette and lit it thoughtfully. He watched the smoke drift upward, and wondered why no sound disturbed the silence. Then he guessed it. The walls of the Green Room were sound-proof, and the heavily curtained windows had the same protection. It was like a prison cell, for they were isolated from the rest of the world, and the tension of waiting got on his nerves. Was he locked up with two madmen? Were they bamboozled by some clever exponent of wireless science in Northumberland or the north of Scotland who was gulling them that they were in communication with Mars?

The signal lamp glowed red. Gatacre gave an exclamation of delight, and Dorchester leaned forward with keen interest. Moving to the machine Paul Church released a lever at the side and a strange voice spoke.



Heavens, what did it say? The words were incomprehensible, just the most meaningless jargon Dorchester had heard, yet there were syllables, intonation, a dignified accent, and he felt thrilled from head to foot. Was that the Martian tongue? Was this some overwhelming discovery in wireless science?

Then the voice ceased and a silver gong rang out. At that instant came the most heavenly orchestral music, something that convinced Dorchester for all time—although he would not admit it—that they were in contact with some strange world of reality, thought, and action. The witchery of that music engulfed him. It was the most delicious harmony that ever reached him, and irresistibly the tears came to his eyes. A spell-binding orchestra with musical sounds never heard on earth. It seemed to Dorchester he stood on some foreign shore, with that wonderful orchestra coming across the waters, borne from some fairy isle of the Seven Seas, and its sweetness engulfed his senses. In God's name, what was the meaning of it? Nothing like it had ever emanated from Broadcasting House or from any source known to man. Did it mean Paul Church had contacted with another world? He felt choking, and a terrific emotion seized him. He was as weak as a babe. He wanted to slip down on his knees, to worship the members of that mighty chorale, for a thousand voices had joined the orchestra and every note was perfect.

The music stopped abruptly as it commenced, and a voice addressed them in peculiar English.

*"Mars sends greetings to Paul Church. We regret we are two minutes late, but the ether is over-*



charged to-night and we hope you accept our apology."

The scientist touched another lever and wheel-like coils of wire revolved rapidly. It was the secret transmission invention, and when he lifted the speaking tube his voice soared into space.

"Paul Church sends greeting to Jephthah. No need to apologise, for you are in good time, and the two minutes were not exceeded. Let me warn you that we have a young novelist here named Brian Dorchester who has come for a demonstration. He believes we are all mad, but now he is staring with a dazed surprise. He is partly convinced I have struck something outside the ordinary channels of communication, and yet he wonders if he should get in touch with the police. What do you suggest?"

A rich laugh came over the air.

"He might help himself to some sherry and a piece of cake," was the rejoinder. "Well, I will speak to Dorchester in a few seconds. We must not be too hard on him. I suppose it is natural he should be in a satirical mood, but I imagine that orchestral selection made him furiously think. I presume friend Gatacre is beside you as usual. Greetings, Gatacre. Tape machine stuff has just reached us about your latest deal in Throgmorton Street gold shares. Heartiest congratulations."

The millionaire smiled and moved to the speaking tube.

"Thanks, Jephthah," he answered courteously. "I see you are still picking up messages from this planet. I am wondering what you will do if the British Government sues you for damages? May I add a word about



Dorchester? I ask pardon for bringing him here without your formal consent, but our meeting was in the nature of a coincidence, and I am giving him the data for a best-seller. I thought it too good a chance to miss, and you know my weakness for helping people. Dorchester is my protégé, and he may turn out as famous as H. G. Wells."

"Don't worry in the least," came the cheery response. "It rests with you entirely about Dorchester, but until we have established television contact, my Chief suggests we should not enlarge the private circle. You see, I have to report everything to my Committee, and they are listening-in at the moment. Fortunately it is a private transmission, granted through the concession of our Chancellor, so there is no chance of interruption from this side."

Gatacre exchanged a glance with the scientist.

"We have told Dorchester about the representative you are sending from Mars," he continued, "but he remains incredulous. I have just returned from London and am anxious to make arrangements. Have you any official message, Jephthah, or must we wait a further period? Indeed Paul is thinking more about your representative than anything else, and every day he expects your distinguished delegate, or at least a message to say he is travelling through space. Can you enlighten us about the time of arrival?"

There was a dramatic pause. Jephthah appeared to be consulting someone, for there was an undercurrent of talk, and even Dorchester felt the uncanny implication of the words.



"We hope to have definite news soon," Jephthah answered. "Every detail of the journey is being examined, but you will be notified in ample time. All the maps are in readiness, and Marcus Donzelon has been appointed our representative. He is the greatest aviator in Mars. He will arrive in a red plane, but not the kind to which you are accustomed. You Earthians are miles behind us in stream-line effect. We have given you that name because you imagine no humans exist in the universe but yourselves. That was the richest joke since you found Moses in the bulrushes."

Paul Church breathed hard with suppressed excitement.

"So you are sending Donzelon?" he queried. "That is a big honour, and a thousand thanks for the information. I heard you mention Donzelon in our last talk, so you need not expect us to sleep until your distinguished airman arrives. Do you think he will live through the stratosphere?"

A cheery laugh echoed forth.

"My dear Church, don't forget that Donzelon is the greatest air ace on this planet. His keenest rival is his brother Mizardi, but the Air Control Commission decided to send Marcus, and we will notify you in due course. We know you will give him a good reception. As to flying through the stratosphere, his machine has been tested in that respect, and everything has come up to expectations. Donzelon will survive."

"How long will the journey take?"

"Our super-engines have terrific speed," came the swift answer, "and Donzelon reckons it should be



accomplished in eight hours. He would leave here one afternoon at what you call four p.m., and reach Rockdene Hall, Grangefield at midnight. Everything is down on the map you outlined for us, so we have left nothing to chance. Donzelon will fly like a bird."

There was a breathless pause during which Dorchester felt thrilled in every nerve. The look on the faces of the two men held him entranced. Why did the lips of the millionaire close in that ruthless fashion? What was he planning?

"Splendid news, Jephthah!" exclaimed the scientist hoarsely. "You have behaved like a Martian gentleman, and if you could only have accompanied Donzelon I should have recommended you to be decorated with our Order of Merit."

"One day that meeting will be possible. Meanwhile you ought to feel privileged for we had to get special permission for the attempt and our papers will be seething with news when the big journey is accomplished. It will be a record-breaking performance, for nothing like it has happened since creation, and if Donzelon makes the journey we may introduce a regular service."

Dorchester could stand the strain no longer so he burst out laughing. The whole scheme sounded the most fantastical thing in his brain, and that last remark was incongruous. Yes, they were being hoodwinked by some Northumberland expert, some ether pioneer who knew as much as Paul Church. There could be no other solution. The music, of course, demanded a rational explanation, but doubtless that could be explained also!



The scientist signalled to Dorchester.

"Jepthah," he announced, "you are going to be addressed by a young man who writes thrillers, so please make allowance if he is inclined to be satirical."

Dorchester moved to the transmitter with a smile on his lips, and the others gazed at him with some uneasiness.

"What part of England do you hail from?" he asked in a bold voice. "You don't think I am as gullible as the others! Why, I should recognise that Northumberland accent anywhere, but apparently you have fooled these men at my elbow. I suppose you are transmitting from some northern station, or is it an island in the South Hebrides? At any rate, I suggest you put a sock in it, friend, or you may find yourself under arrest."

The silence was significant, for Gatacre sat with an unmistakable frown, and the scientist paced the room with brow black as thunder. Both were embarrassed and angry.

"Well, Dorchester, it is good to hear your voice," came the reply. "I am prepared to allow for your incredulity, and I am quite certain you do not recognise my accent. May I ask if you know any private wireless station where you could transmit in that fashion like an ordinary house-telephone, or where you have witnessed a super-radio of this pattern? One of these days, you will admit that Paul Church is the biggest intellectual on your planet."

Dorchester gave an irritating cough. He had an uneasy feeling that he was listening to the truth, that the whole thing was a staggering discovery in



wireless science, and yet he was filled with the most absurd suspicion that it was all bluff!

"I am ready to concede that Paul Church has invented something new in the world of wireless," he continued, "but we have already telephonic-communication with America, and there should be a logical explanation of this discovery. You see, I am a realist, and you cannot convince me that I am speaking to anyone outside this world, so I dare say you are comfortably seated in the backwoods of northern England chuckling over the way we are being goofed! I happen to be an exception, so I call your bluff."

A slight laugh echoed in the room.

"I am afraid you would be startled, Dorchester, if you knew how many miles distant Northumberland is from the place where I am sitting. I suggest you retire a trifle early to-night and think over this invention, but if you still prove incredulous I know you will get a shock when our delegate arrives from Mars."

"I hope he brings his insurance card," Dorchester laughed. "I have asked Gatacre to notify the Lord Mayor when he arrives, and we may have the band of the Gordon Highlanders to meet your distinguished representative. Oh, we'll do it in style, Jephthah! I may even invite the Prince of Wales. If he declines, we may get J. H. Thomas or Winston Churchill. At any rate, I can promise five or six reporters."

Gatacre pulled him roughly aside, and controlled himself with an effort.

"Jephthah, my apology for the remarks you have just heard," he begged. "They are the observations



of one not versed in wireless science. We have noted everything concerning the arrival of Donzelon, and meanwhile we will perfect arrangements for his reception. We will extend all the hospitality in our power, and if we can arrange with our Government to accept your wave-length, Donzelon can sign the agreement on your behalf."

"That will suit excellently. You understand that Great Britain is entitled to a priority call on the Martian wave-length, then you must arrange, at Geneva or elsewhere, for a distribution of the calls. Later we may make further accommodation."

"You can depend on that part of it," Gatacre replied. "Paul Church is leaving the formalities in my hands, and all he retains is the secret of transmission. I am afraid we may have trouble with the politicians. It will not rest with our Prime Minister. There are men behind who would see in this a great chance for exploitation, and the fight will be to keep it in our hands. That is why I am taking precautions. We have to out-manceuvre the clever people."

"So you will make no move until Donzelon arrives?"

"That is the position. A delegate from your planet will convince the most incredulous that we are in communication with Mars."

"Very well, I will notify you at the earliest moment of Donzelon's departure."

The scientist stepped to the instrument.

"What kind of chap is Donzelon?" he asked. "I merely ask in order to interest him to the greatest extent."

There came a discordant laugh that sounded ominous.



"I am certain you are in for a surprise," came the voice. "You see, we have developed an ethical code of our own, based on our advanced civilisation, and you will find Donzelon a peculiar type. He is a splendid aviator and first-class linguist, but he may disappoint you as regards morals and religion. Possibly he is the last person you would select as a permanent guest."

The three men gazed at each other in a dazed silence.

"How interesting!" Paul Church answered with a forced laugh. "I confess I am anxious to meet your mystery man, Jephthah, and we will give him all the latitude possible. Indeed, we will keep a close watch on him, otherwise he may get into trouble with the authorities. Our local magistrates might find it difficult to accept his theories."

Again that odd laugh floated out.

"Donzelon has a few murders on his crime sheet, but each time he was defended by a brilliant advocate, and has always been granted a free pardon. You see, we do not regard killing with the same scruples as you Earthians. Everything depends here on motive, or the impulse that caused the slaying, and Donzelon has always justified his deeds."

Gatacre changed colour, and for that second Paul Church was embarrassed.

"That makes it very awkward," the scientist said gravely. "We have still the death penalty for murder, so I hope your distinguished representative will bear that in mind, otherwise we are not responsible for anything that happens to him on this planet."



"That will be quite understood. As regards capital punishment, that belongs to the dark ages. A life for a life is a worn-out creed on Mars. We do not expiate in that manner. If a life is taken on impulse, there are degrees of punishment, but we do not go to the extent of hanging. No one has been put to death in that manner for three hundred years!"

Gatacre breathed hard, and something in his eyes caught the glance of the novelist, a look of downright cunning that was disturbing. What was the millionaire planning?

"Then Donzelon has a lot to re-learn in our realm of crime and punishment," Church stressed. "It is hard for us to realise you have such an advanced code. We even hang a woman if she has committed a murder!"

"That is monstrous! Our code is based on the freedom of the individual, and punishment is inflicted when a crime is committed against the State. The act must be deliberate. We have developed our methods of detection to a great extent. We have machines for testing when a man has told the truth. When it comes to punishment, rest assured we have no compunction."

"What about churches and chapels? Do you subscribe to some form of religion?"

"We have a strict ethical code, but State religion has vanished for five centuries, and a Martian is free to worship at any shrine. We are not concerned so much with formal religion as with the problem of living, and war has been eliminated for ten centuries. We have other methods of settling quarrels."



"And unemployment?"

"Ah, there are no idle people here," was the stern reply. "We solved the distribution problem about your sixteenth century, which means we have inter-control of all finance. We established a Commission of experts for raw material, and after placing distribution in their hands a plan was evolved to eliminate the workless."

"The red lamp is glowing," Church said in a solemn tone.

"Yes, a signal that our chat must be postponed. Good night all!"

"Good night!"



## CHAPTER VII

### TERMS OF SILENCE

WHEN the voice ceased Dorchester gave a chuckle that increased in volume until his whole body shook with laughter.

"So you still think we are in our second childhood and victims of an outrageous deception?" Paul Church asked. "If so, what about the wonderful music you heard and those words that came through the ether? Do you imagine that broadcast was from the North of England or any other part of the world? Do you think I could be fooled by an operator in Northumberland or at the end of the earth? Don't you know the ether is my province and that I have studied it for years? If you imagine any of these things, and believe that my intelligence is less than that of a glow-worm it is you and not us who should be mentally examined."

"I was going to express myself in the same terms," Gatacre announced. "When I met you in that London train, Dorchester, I assumed you were a young man of superior intellect with an extra reserve of imagination, and so I extended the invitation to Rockdene Hall. I thought you deserved a chance. It seemed at least that you would recognise a genius in Paul Church, and I estimated that after some bewilderment you would jump to the fact that we were speaking the



truth and had really contacted with the Martians. Apparently you imagine the broadcast to which we have just listened, and the wonderful transmission you have witnessed, were either a hallucination of the brain or some gigantic act of comedy staged for your benefit. Is that why you are infinitely amused?"

Dorchester pulled himself together and wiped his eyes with a handkerchief. He regarded the two men with the shamefaced gaze of a schoolboy.

"Gentlemen, you have got it wrong!" he said quietly. "If you want the truth, I have never come across an invention like this in my life, and I am not certain whether I have been fooled or witnessed the greatest miracle in wireless science. If I do admit that you have been talking to a Martian, or that I have conversed with a being on another planet, you must concede it is something incredible for the mind to grasp. I don't know whether to go on laughing or ask you to accept my apology."

The scientist exchanged a glance with the millionaire.

"Then you suggest a compromise," he answered, "but if you take a hint, Dorchester, you will not mention this matter to anyone. We want your parole in that respect. We don't wish to keep you a prisoner. We prefer to take you into confidence, and allow you to assist in getting ready for Marcus Donzelon whose arrival is due at any moment. At the same time, if you are contemplating a treacherous move we should never allow you to disclose what you have heard until we gave permission at least."

"Those are the terms," Gatacre affirmed with a significant nod. "Those girls are filled with a burning



curiosity and they will fire all sorts of questions, but we want that demonstration to remain a secret. No one must know for the present that we are in communication with Mars. Are you clear on that point, and can you give us your promise to keep quiet or do you prefer imprisonment in your own room?"

Dorchester regarded the two men with a frown, for he did not like being spoken to in that manner. It was certainly an aspect he had forgotten for the girls would demand news and he had half-promised to enlighten them about the discovery. He saw now he was handicapped and would not be allowed to disclose the secret unless he wished his liberty jeopardised.

"I have been invited to Rockdene Hall under peculiar circumstances," he replied, "and my freedom has been curtailed to an extraordinary extent. I am not allowed to leave the building nor use the telephone and as an Englishman I hate that sort of treatment. No, I cannot give the parole you ask because I prefer my freedom to remain unchecked but I will keep my mouth closed about the discovery."

The curtain was pulled across and they returned to the other section of the Green Room.

"My dear Dorchester," continued the scientist, "when you understand the magnitude of this discovery, your biggest anxiety will be to get in touch with Fleet Street. We have all a craving for sensation, so when Donzelon arrives in his airplane and demonstrates that he has traversed the distance between two planets you will be anxious to write his biography. When the Prime Minister is notified about his arrival, and when thousands are fighting to see our Martian visitor,



Rockdene Hall will become the most historical part of the British Islands!"

A faint smile touched the lips of the millionaire.

"You are right," he affirmed. "We are going to give this world a stupendous shock, Paul, the biggest it has ever known, and every journalist will rush in this direction. Publicity-merchants will try to capture Donzelon for commercial purposes, and it will be the devil to rescue him from their hands. He will be deluged with contracts, and company-promoters will surge round him wanting him to appear at the Albert Hall. He will be painted, pampered, fêted, honoured, and the American President may cross the Atlantic to see him. *The man from Mars will become the greatest figure of the age!*"

Dorchester coughed.

"I don't know how you feel about it," he announced, "but I have a big desire to inspect the turret-tower. I want to examine those super-lenses and the astronomical instruments which you use to explore the heavens, and incidentally I should like to have a glance at Mars."

Gatacre exchanged a long look of interrogation with his friend.

"Yes, you will see the tower," Paul Church conceded, "but I think, Dorchester, we had better come to an understanding. You know why this room is padded, why men outside are armed with revolvers, and why guards patrol the grounds day and night. The turret-tower comes under the same ban, and you will be a privileged person to enter. However, we are going to take no risks. You had better realise that if



any secret is divulged about the super-radio or concerning the arrival of our Martian visitor you will meet with a distressing accident. That will be deplorable under the circumstances, but we have our plans made, and if you betray us in the least respect it will mean the end of your career as a novelist. In other words, you will have signed your own death-warrant."

Dorchester gazed from one to the other in blank surprise. He saw both men had arrived at that decision and that they would keep their word at all cost.

"You leave me no alternative but to accept your terms," he answered dramatically. "Yet there is one point you have forgotten. When the girls ask what has happened in the Green Room, and what terrible mystery lies behind all this secrecy, what do you imagine I am going to tell them?"

The laugh that escaped the lips of Gatacre was somewhat brutal.

"We will leave that to your inventive resource," he replied. "With your fertile imagination, you should find it easy to dupe womenfolk, and as I have managed that with a certain finesse you should have no difficulty in keeping them in the dark, you can bamboozle them to any limit, for even if you told them the truth they certainly would not believe it!"

"And the tower?"

"Not to-night," Gatacre announced in an odd voice. "Paul has had an exciting evening, and we will postpone the visit to the tower to another hour. Paul, I want you to go straight to bed. You are looking pale, and just now I fancied you were taking



another weak turn; it would be terrible if you had a breakdown at this stage."

Paul Church gave a nod and rose to his feet. A glance at his features revealed that Gatacre had spoken the truth. The scientist looked ill. His right hand shook ominously and there was a significant twitching of the lips.

"Yes, you are right," he said in a low voice. "I am not as strong in the heart region as I would like, and I have been burning the candle at both ends. That is the penalty of astronomy, Dorchester. One must study the stars when the rest of England is asleep."

Gatacre opened the door with a special key and the three men passed out together. Afterwards the door was re-locked on the outside, and one of the armed guards took up his position. The scientist passed down the hall, his head erect as if defying the universe, and Gatacre led him up the big staircase. Dorchester, hearing the sound of voices, opened the door of one of the smaller libraries and found the three girls awaiting him. Each face was a study in emotion. They led him to a sofa like an invalid, placed a cushion behind his head, and gathered round in grim expectancy.

"Well, what have you to tell us?" Venetia asked in a solemn voice. "We are depending on your promise, Mr. Dorchester. Those moments you spent in that Green Room have seemed like hours, and all the time we have been praying for it to end. What did you see there, and what is all the mystery?"

Dorchester gave a faint laugh, lit a cigarette, and tried to appear normal.

"I am afraid it's getting late," he remarked. "Won't



you excuse me and put it all off until to-morrow? I have really been through a trying experience, an ordeal of the most difficult nature, and I simply could not make you understand what has happened."

Something like a sob broke from Venetia. The other two girls exchanged a quick glance. Veronica stood in an agony of apprehension. Violet, breathless with excitement, leaned forward in doubt and fear.

"There is something more important than sleep," Venetia said in a clear voice. "You are dealing with three determined girls, and we hope you understand what has happened. We have reached the limit of endurance. All these months we have waited, and now you have been privileged to enter the Green Room. You have seen with your own eyes something that has been denied the rest of us, and we ask you to tell us what you found there. What is the big secret? What terrible power has Paul Church over my father, what invention has the scientist made, and why are we kept here as prisoners? If you cannot tell us, we will go mad, for we can stand the strain no longer, and we seem to be living on the edge of a precipice."

Dorchester, startled, gazed and read the truth. These girls were on the borderland of hysteria, and at any instant there would be a nervous breakdown. He could see the quivering lips, the clenched fingers, the indrawn breath. Heavens, must he add to their suffering? Must he tell them he knew nothing or that both men were mad? If he told them the truth, they would think he had gone potty and would rush from him screaming with laughter. No, he must use



all the diplomacy at his command. Besides, he was certain there was someone outside that door, and if he uttered one incautious word it would mean the death penalty.

"Miss Gatacre, I am placed in a hopeless position," he answered. "I have been taken into confidence, have seen everything in the Green Room, but owing to the extraordinary nature of the invention and circumstances you would not comprehend, my lips must remain sealed."

The girls gazed in dismay, and the disappointment on their faces was terrible.

"It cannot be true!" Violet gasped, the picture of distress. "Dad would never be so cruel as to make a condition of that kind, and I am sure Mr. Gatacre would not forbid you to speak. They both know we are on tenterhooks, that we have waited all these months, and that we deserve an explanation of what is going on, and why Rockdene Hall is surrounded with armed guards. Do you understand that we must know what you saw in the Green Room."

"I was ordered to remain dumb," Dorchester answered hoarsely. "I believe they are right from their standpoint because the consequences would be terrible if their secret were revealed in advance, but I am absolutely baffled by the events of the evening.

have just passed through the most amazing experience of my life, and there will be no sleep for me to-night. I think the best thing is to get a book and remain in the library. Meanwhile I suggest you girls stop puzzling your brains and leave matters for the present. You will not have long to wait. Something



is about to happen here that may alter the whole trend of events."

"If Paul Church has discovered something marvelous in the realm of science," Veronica interposed, "why reveal it to you if it is a secret?"

"I have been shown the invention for a special reason," Dorchester smiled. "You see, I happen to know most of the Fleet Street men and when the time comes I can get this all the publicity it deserves. However, there is one piece of news. I feel confident the big secret will be revealed in a few days."

Venetia glanced at him sharply and saw he was keeping something back, that he was doing his best to placate them, and she sensed the tragic note in his voice.

"You are trying to ease our minds and send us off like naughty children," she admonished. "You say your lips are sealed and that you dare not breathe a word of what you have seen in the Green Room. Why not? What is the penalty?"

"Death!" Dorchester answered in a quiet voice.

Something approaching horror entered the face of each girl, and somehow they were not surprised. Murder at Rockdene Hall! It was really the climax to which they were all rushing.

"You mean they threatened to kill you?" Venetia asked steadily.

Dorchester wanted to laugh, but the dramatic note had entered their conversation and he saw he had dropped a bomb-shell.

"Murder is a ghastly word," he smiled. "Those two men have a different name for it, but I was told



in the clearest terms that an unfortunate accident would happen if I attempted anything in the nature of a broadcast. They will take no chances where I am concerned, and if you understood the situation from their angle you would realise that they are justified in that respect!"

Violet made a movement of impatience that seemed the first sign of hysteria.

"Oh why act so childishly!" she exclaimed with a sob. "Who is to know what you tell us! We are alone, and there is no chance of being overheard if you speak in a whisper. Put it in a single sentence, and we promise the secret will not be divulged!"

Dorchester made a lightning movement with the door and drew back. His premonition was correct. A man stood there with revolver levelled, and it was plain he had heard every word.

"I suggest it would be wiser if you retired for the evening," he announced in an ominous tone. "You have said quite enough already on the subject of the Green Room, Mr. Dorchester, and I have instructions regarding you if you are inclined to be voluble."

"Go to hell!" Dorchester barked savagely, and banged the door in his face. He turned to the stupefied girls. "Well, there is the position, ladies. You can see the kettle of fish into which I have landed. That chap out there is an ex-soldier, and he has received a definite command from Mr. Gatacre, his employer. Those men have been selected with care. They may not shoot to kill, but I have no desire to spend months in a Torquay hospital."



Venetia stamped her foot and righteous indignation filled her face.

"Rockdene Hall is becoming a madhouse!" she exclaimed. "Those men must be insane or they would never act so stupidly. Mr. Dorchester, we owe you an apology. I never thought one of our guests would be threatened with murder. You would have greater protection in prison. What on earth are we to do? This problem is getting on my brain and if there is no solution I will go potty myself. Is there no way of communicating with the outside world?"

It was Veronica who retained her sense of proportion. She was more disturbed than she confessed yet she had a wonderful faith in her employer and she knew Paul Church was a genius. The mystery of the Green Room was perplexing, yet there must be a rational explanation of everything.

"I think we all ought to retire!" she suggested practically. "I agree we are approaching a climax, Venetia, but we will be taken into confidence sooner than you think. I feel confident your father is the last person to be hoodwinked, or to maintain a delusion with regard to an invention, and his loyalty proves he has faith in the scientist. Those guards may be imperative, and our silence may be just as essential. Neither is it right that Mr. Dorchester should run any risk in the matter."

"Where is Dad?" Violet asked.

"Gone to bed," Dorchester answered. "There is no need to be alarmed, Miss Church, but your parent is tired and Mr. Gatacre has gone with him to his room. The strain has been terrific. If you knew what those



men are attempting, you would make big allowances for everything that has happened. I am convinced the invention is the most amazing one in history, and no risk can be taken in regard to it."

Veronica nodded approvingly and turned to the others.

"That is what I believe!" she affirmed. "What fools we will look, Venetia, if we have proved to be wrong and if a stupendous invention has been created. Besides, if Paul Church won't take his daughter into confidence we cannot expect Mr. Dorchester to be given a free hand. Good night all, I am going to set the splendid example!"

Dorchester opened the door as she passed out, then Violet rushed forward.

"I must see Dad!" she insisted. "Just a word with him before he goes to sleep. I wonder if a chance exists for him to take me into the secret. Anything is better than this terrible suspense. If I have luck, Venetia, I will come to your room at once. Good night, darling!"

She kissed Venetia on the cheek and when the door closed Dorchester led the millionaire's daughter to a chair near the fire. It was strange the enmity between them had dissolved, for each had something in common in that uncanny silence that filled the room.

"Veronica spoke in that fashion," Venetia declared, "because as my father's secretary she cannot offend anyone, and so she adopts that plan of compromise. Clever, but I'd prefer her to tell us what was in her mind concerning this mystery."



Dorchester passed his cigarette case with a smile.

"I hardly agree!" he protested frankly. "I believe Miss Richmond has great faith in both men, and if I have analysed her correctly I imagine she has greater confidence in your father than anyone. You see, that secretarial position gives her an opportunity to study her employer and comprehend his methods. I do not think she would make a mistake with regard to his sanity. She is just bewildered that she is excluded from what is going on in the Green Room, and I expect she has exercised all her ingenuity to find out."

Venetia felt the tension release a moment and she gave a low rippling laugh.

"Let us hope father is not going to lose her," she murmured.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, your admiration for Veronica may develop into a crazy infatuation, and in a few seconds you may tell me she is the only woman in the world who could coax you out of bachelorhood."

"Don't be ridiculous," Dorchester exploded. "I may develop love-plots swiftly in novels but I go slow in real life. However, you have put an idea into my head. Doubtless she would make an excellent partner, but don't you realise what a disaster it would mean if I plunged into marriage?"

"Not exactly!"

"Hang it, I am a creative artist, and must concentrate all my energy on writing. I must not enmesh myself for another fifty years, so put me down as a confirmed misogynist."



Venetia smiled softly to herself. It was a pity their views did not concur for Brian Dorchester was decidedly good-looking, and she was a trifle more interested than she realised.

"So you can tell me nothing?" she begged in a whisper.

"Nothing about the Green Room," Dorchester answered emphatically. Suddenly he gazed at his questioner and was thrilled by the magic of her eyes. He was also stirred by the lovely face, the bare shoulders with the gleaming skin, and that Spanish dress of wonderful lace trimmings.

"If you knew the deaf-and-dumb language," she ventured, "we could make signs and the individual outside that door would be frustrated. Won't you help me to invent a secret code of some kind? I want to know the mystery of the Green Room and prove to father what a clever daughter he really possesses."

Dorchester shrugged and glanced at the wall opposite. Yes, his senses had not deceived him. They were still under observation. Under a French oil-painting close to the door he saw a cunningly-contrived aperture big enough for two human eyes to see everything from the hall beyond. Well, if Venetia were not aware of that spyhole he would not enlighten her for the present.

"I cannot betray the promise I have made," he said frigidly.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A SLEEPLESS NIGHT

**A**T midnight Dorchester sat up in his chair and rose to his feet.

Half an hour ago Venetia left the library but he remained like a figure of Fate. He had much to occupy his thoughts, for he knew he was still being watched and that the man with the revolver stood in the hall. Yet he waited before the dying fire trying to puzzle out the problem in his own brain. He hated all this espionage, this feeling he was a prisoner, unable to use the telephone, and everything he did under surveillance. It was terrible to be deprived of liberty, unable to leave without permission, helpless to consult a friend on the telephone, powerless to send a telegram or write a letter.

When the clock finished striking twelve, he opened the door and confronted the man in the hall. He was a tall, broad-shouldered individual in a dark blue suit, with the air of an ex-sergeant and something brutal in the fish-like eyes. A coarse twitching of the lips denoted ruthlessness.

"How did you sign the pay-roll in the Army?" Dorchester demanded.

"That's my business!" was the swift retort. "At any rate, I am not a servant and if there is anything you want, ring the bell."



"What is your occupation?"

"Looking after birds like you and making certain orders are carried out. When you go to your room upstairs my job will be finished for the night and someone else will look after you. I advise you not to walk in your sleep, and suggest it's getting late."

"You can keep your damned suggestions," Dorchester growled. "You seem to talk mighty big because you can shoot without an inquest, yet you don't seem aware you are acting criminally and if I get through to the Yard I can have you arrested and put away for a long term."

"That is something you can explain to Mr. Gatacre," the man sneered. "I don't worry about Whitehall and I have no intention of visiting Parkhurst. You are just a visitor here and so far as I make out you are not particularly welcome. Mr. Church did not send you an official invitation, and that means someone blundered when you entered those gates. However, I have nothing to do with that part of it, but if you are going to cause trouble, or think you can mess about with my orders, you are going to meet with a nasty accident." He fingered the revolver ominously and would have pressed the trigger without a cough.

"Stand aside, you fool; I am not going to bed for another hour," Dorchester announced. "If you are curious on the point, I am taking a stroll on the terrace and perhaps a walk through the grounds."

The man was in a quandary. He had no power to prevent Dorchester acting within reason so long as he made no attempt at escape, yet the whole thing



seemed a curious procedure, and it meant he would still be on duty.

"You can have ten minutes," he growled. "If you are interested in the stars, you will find the turret-tower locked up for the night and unless you are after sudden death better not try to get in there. You can have a glance at Mrs. Venus from the terrace!"

Dorchester passed him, opened the hall-door, and walked out on the moonlit terrace. A strange silence brooded everywhere, so lighting a cigarette he strolled across to the balustrade. The man with the revolver moved at his elbow.

"How much do you get for this job?" asked the novelist.

"Perhaps more than you think."

"Yes, but it occurred to me that for a consideration you might secure my leave of absence from Rockdene Hall."

"You will have to do some more speculating."

"How much do you want?"

The man laughed without mirth in his voice. He leaned against the stone parapet and kept his gun ready.

"How the devil could you get from these grounds alive?" he mocked. "And if I was caught in the business it would mean a bullet with my name on it! Bribery is no good in this game, for Mr. Gatacre pays well and we have no reason to complain."

"A hundred pounds for getting a message through to the police!"

"How the blazes do you know I would do the job?"



"The police would be sufficient evidence and you would have earned the money. Your name would not be mentioned, and after the police toddled along the money would reach you without a soul being the wiser."

The man gave a hoarse laugh like the discordant cry of some animal.

"I value my life more than that!" he retorted. "Besides, my employer would know in a flash I had betrayed him and the rest of the men would soon tumble to what happened if I was caught *en route* to the police station."

"What did they christen you in church?"

"Well, if you are burning up with curiosity, and don't ask for my birth certificate, I wrote John Maltravers on my Army papers and that happens to be my name."

"I'm not as interested as you think, but you will have just a number if the Yard gets on your track. What is that shadow moving to the left of those trees?"

He pointed down to the copse beneath and the man averted his head. When he turned he was confronted with a revolver held in the steady hand of Dorchester and there was no time to do any quick shooting. The revolver pressed against his ribs and gave him a sickening sensation in the region of his liver.

"How the devil——!"

"His Satanic Majesty had nothing to do with it. It just means, Maltravers, that if you don't take my orders for a change there will be a deplorable tragedy.



Put your gun down on that wall. Good, I am taking charge of it for the present. Now make tracks for the nearest boundary wall and don't go to sleep over it."

"What in hell's name——" Then the man's face turned a green shade and his body shook.

"It means the position is reversed," Dorchester grinned, "and you are hiking with me to the police station. If you call out or make a false move you are going to be drilled by a bullet. You would have meted out that sauce to me, so don't expect me to be chicken-hearted."

Maltravers stared like a man in a trance and the perspiration stood out on his brow.

"This is going to mean both our deaths," he groaned. "I wish it had occurred to me that you had a gun. That, of course, alters the whole position."

"Yes, it was thoughtless on your part, but are you going to move——"

Maltravers turned sullenly, moved towards the terrace steps, then after proceeding twenty yards Dorchester called him back.

"I've changed my programme," he said quietly. "I was putting over a bluff, Maltravers, and I know you are right about those snipers. It would be hopeless for us, with those walls guarded like Sing Sing, to escape armed men, and I have no desire for a bullet. I will make other arrangements. Here is your gun, and I'm toddling off to bed."

Maltravers, dazed, snatched at the revolver. He had just received a big shock he was not likely to forget.



"You're a funny cove," he grunted, "but don't talk big over this incident, for that gun of yours might get pinched one of these days, and that might be awkward if you were in a jam. I won't squeal for you were too quick for me and I should never be excused for letting you get the upper hand. Just forget you have done anything smart."

Dorchester grinned.

"Are you still hostile?" he queried. "Would you not agree to send a telegram or get a message through to a friend?"

Maltravers kicked a stone with his boot and the crafty look returned to his face.

"You haven't got the hang of this business," he snorted. "Paul Church and Mr. Gatacre were in my regiment in France, and the steel magnate gave me this job when he found I was workless. I am not the sort to let him down. Quick, hand over your revolver. I have you covered this time."

"Then fire and be damned," Dorchester laughed. "If you take the trouble of glancing at your peashooter, Maltravers, you will see I have removed the cartridges in case you would get an inspiration of this sort."

Maltravers gave a loud curse, but Dorchester had entered Rockdene Hall and was moving up the staircase.

"Thought you were never coming, sir!"

The voice belonged to Jackson, the valet, and Dorchester stared at the man in amazement. He was seated at the door of his room, but now jumped to his feet with an air of watchfulness.



"Say, you don't imagine I want a night-nurse or a bottle of syrup?" Dorchester asked coldly. "I have spent the last hour under the guardianship of Maltravers, who appears to pride himself on an automatic, and if I am going to be bothered with you until dawn I had better ring for my hotel bill and clear out."

Jackson gave a wan smile and folded his arms with resignation. It was plain he concealed a weapon and would use it without hesitation.

"Don't put me on the same sheet as Maltravers," he begged. "I am here as your manservant, Mr. Dorchester, and I could not retire until you had everything you wanted. What time do you desire to be called in the morning, sir?"

Dorchester took another glance. Jackson had the self-assured air of an ex-pugilist and those huge arms were sufficient. The man had the strength of a lion.

"I have no idea," the novelist replied. "You see, I may find it difficult to get sleep to-night, but why burst a blood-vessel on my account? All I want is a little shaving-water and that should not be difficult. Frankly, I have a hunch you are a kind of warder, and as I find it awkward to be a prisoner I feel like assigning you to Hades!"

"Precisely, sir, but I carry out orders."

"You carry a Colt revolver in your hip-pocket, and you were never trained as a manservant," Dorchester retorted. "You are planning forty winks outside my door and if I turned sleep-walker you would feel constrained to stop that dangerous habit."

"You speak like a barrister, sir," Jackson grinned. "If I carry a gun, Mr. Dorchester, it is only for killing



rats, and I do not regard you as vermin. I believe you are going to act sensibly for I am responsible for your safety and any violence on my part would be most embarrassing."

Dorchester switched on the electric light in his bedroom.

"You make me tired, Jackson," he said with a yawn. "You and Maltravers are members of a gang, splendid toughs picked up for a few pounds a week, and you would have no compunction about sending me to a mortuary."

"I have certainly received instructions regarding you, sir, and should find myself in a mess if you escaped. As a gentleman, you will see the position is difficult, and I hope you make my job as pleasant as possible."

Dorchester gripped him by the arm and glared into his eyes.

"Get this straight," he ordered. "I am not repeating the attempt to bribe you, Jackson, but get this into your thick skull and pass it on to the man who employs you. I am making my own plans about a disappearing-trick, and when the time comes to do that fade-away you may find me a difficult customer to handle. I may not be the gentleman you think."

He closed the door sharply and five minutes later he was in bed. Sleep was out of the question. He felt he had drifted into a madhouse and his brain was tortured with a thousand thoughts. If he closed his eyes he was doomed to a nightmare, a ghoulish phantasy where Martians would fill the room and the air would become alive with that strange music.

"Who is there?" he called out. It was thirty



minutes later and a knock sounded on the door. He switched on the light.

"My apology for disturbing you at this hour," came the voice of Arthur Gatacre, as he advanced into the room in a blue dressing-gown, "but I had a notion the events of the evening might have troubled your serenity so I came along for a chat. My rooms are at the end of this corridor, so please don't regard me as a somnambulist."

Dorchester ventured on a hoarse laugh.

"It was a good bet that I was awake," he growled. "What do you want, Gatacre? Have a cigarette and tell me what's on your mind?"

He pushed his case along the wicker table and extracted a cigarette for his own use. Gatacre drew up a chair near the bedside and lit a match. Through the smoke he spoke in a tired voice.

"The telephone in my room, Dorchester, brought me a message from Maltravers, and I guess you know what it was about. That chap is an ex-service man who is doing duty at Rockdene Hall, and I have asked him to take an interest in you personally. He informs me you are in possession of a revolver, and as he had no orders to relieve you of the weapon he has allowed you to retain it."

Dorchester wanted to laugh riotously. He had extracted five cartridges from the gun of the man they were discussing, but why mention the incident?

"If you spread guards all over the estate like mushrooms," he said decisively, "you must not be surprised, Gatacre, if I regard a revolver as distinctly useful."



The millionaire shrugged. There was a sternness about his lips that was not pleasant but his features relaxed into a quiet smile.

"I could relieve you of that weapon easily," he drawled, "but that is not on my programme. I warn you, however, that if you attempt to use it, or threaten any of my men, they may feel justified in killing you. That would be bad for your publishers."

Dorchester sent a whiff of smoke to the ceiling. He was bored with the interview and wished to end it. Why should Gatacre disturb his privacy in this manner? If he was a prisoner he was at least entitled to sleep.

"What precisely did you come to see me about?" he asked.

"Well, I am subject to strange fits of intuition," Gatacre proceeded, "and I had an idea, Dorchester, that you might be constructing a plan of escape. That is why I have a man outside your rooms, why two men patrol the terrace under your windows and why Maltravers is acting as your shadow."

Dorchester yawned.

"I wish to heaven you had never given me that invitation to Rockdene Hall," he confessed. "You see, Gatacre, I value my personal liberty, and even if you were anticipating a visit from the man in the moon you would not be justified in treating me as a prisoner. As regards Paul Church, I am at a loss about his demonstration in the Green Room, and must have time to reflect on what happened. That broadcast has left me in a state of stupefaction."

The millionaire changed his position in the chair and knocked the ash off his cigarette.



"You may regard me as a lunatic," he observed, "but I am confident that Paul Church spoke to the Martians. That is not the difficulty. What we are concerned about is the projected trip of Marcus Donzelon from Mars! If that event happens, a vast number of changes will occur on this planet."

"What do you mean?" Dorchester queried. The terrible earnestness of the speaker overawed him.

"Don't you realise what it will portend?" Gatacre continued. "Donzelon will tell us how Mars is governed, and we will be the first to learn the amazing secrets of that other world. Does that not stir your imagination?"

"Yes, if we are thousands of years behind those people!" Dorchester conceded. "Assuming that to be the case, Gatacre, I admit we are in for a few big surprises. We may see a new world, a new system of economics, a new plan of abolishing war——"

Gatacre banged the table with his fist.

"At last the right note!" he exclaimed. "Dorchester, I will take you behind the scenes of my mind. I fought through the last war, but, given the chance, I am determined to do all I can to abolish war throughout the world, Marcus Donzelon may tell us how war may be averted, and, if so, we would be fools to let Downing Street know about any invention in advance. We must have a scheme in readiness. What do you think about disarmament?"

The question seemed fired from an angle and Dorchester was hardly prepared.

"I believe in the futility of war," he answered "but I might fight if the occasion demanded. I have not seen war like you fellows——"



"Precisely, and just because thousands of young men are in your position, fledglings who would glory in the limelight of a fresh world-crisis, explains why I am going to seize the biggest chance of removing war from this world."

Dorchester sat up in bed.

"You hate war as much as that?"

"You will never understand how much I hate it," Gatacre replied, rising to his feet. "I hate war so much, Dorchester, that if six men plotted another such conflict I should have no compunction in bringing about their deaths."

The novelist breathed hard. He had an odd premonition of events at that second and he experienced an odd sensation down the spine.

"Well, let us hope old Marcus solves the problem," he declared boyishly, "but just how long are we going to wait before that chap drops to Earth?"

"One of these evenings when you are sound asleep, when you do not imagine that anything sensational is going to happen, will occur the most overwhelming event in the history of the world."



## CHAPTER IX

### WAS IT A NIGHTMARE?

WHEN Dorchester ran down the white steps of the terrace the following morning he made his way across the lawn, paused at the sundial, then stared up at Rockdene Hall with undisguised curiosity.

It gripped him from the first for it was a modern mansion built in palatial style and curved in semi-circular shape with an unique appearance. It was of the grey-stone type that arrests attention, and apparently the owner had no hankering after Gothic architecture or Elizabethan design for it looked as if everything had been left to a modern architect. Yet it retained an artistic effect with towers suggesting a replica of a past period and just that slight touch of cold austerity.

After noting the profusion of French windows he turned his gaze to the floral beauty of the gardens and his heart gladdened at the sight. He noted the tennis lawn beyond the flower-beds, the glistening water-fountain, the regal golf-course that stretched away in the distance, and the carriage-drive curving sinuously between long lines of elms.

Two gardeners were using hose-pipes with scant regard to the economy. He wondered if they were



Gatacre guards for they watched him covertly and doubtless they were armed like the other men, and if he tried to escape they would bring him down like a rabbit.

Moving east of the Hall he paused bewildered as the turret-tower struck his imagination, and he gazed up at the huge conical building with awe. Why was he spellbound? The turret-tower was stupendous, higher than Rockdene Hall, with an upper gallery like a lighthouse, and at the end of the winding staircase stretched a huge platform for observation purposes, but the mighty projectors were not visible. Those titanic lenses would be inside the tower. What else did that mystery-building contain, and what secret lay behind the walls?

Then memory returned in a flash. The super-radio. in the Green Room, the amazing music on the ether, the stupefying words from the wireless set, *and that voice from Mars!* He grinned at the thought. Here in the cold reality of dawn with the bird-songsters sending their message from the trees such a thing as contact with Mars seemed the maddest improbability. Paul Church was to be pitied. He was a deluded scientist of the age, and it was a sublime tragedy that Arthur Gatacre, the famous steel magnate, should suffer from the same delusion. It was a trick of the brain, the hypnosis that comes to a man when he dreams of a gold-mine, who believes that mine exists yet cannot give the geographical bearings. Well, he, Brian Dorchester, would not be the victim of a similar Fate for he would retain a grip on reality and the first chance that offered he would escape from Rockdene Hall.



"Had a restless night, friend, or was it the twittering of the birds that fetched you out so early?"

Dorchester wheeled, and standing there on the terrace was John Maltravers who apparently was still keeping an eye on the solitary guest of the Hall.

"What the hell does it matter to you?" Dorchester growled. "Besides, why stand like an eighteenth-century ogre? Does it mean you are going to play the shadow-game and I am to regard you as Texas-Jack, because if it does I wish I had put you out of pain last night. I can't help disliking your face, Maltravers, and I suggest your employer should arrange for your cremation and hand the ashes over to your relatives."

The Gatacre guard gave a hoarse chuckle and even at that distance one discerned a significant bulge in the near pocket.

"You were smart with those cartridges," he scoffed, "but don't forget they fit my revolver."

"I am keeping those souvenirs," Dorchester answered. "Meanwhile, as you are giving me a pain in the neck, why not try a running race and throw yourself in the duckpond? I am sure Mr. Gatacre would contribute a headstone and I can guarantee a black coffin."

"Is this a private fight or can anyone intervene?" asked a girlish voice at this juncture, and turning both men gazed at an entrancing vision who had stepped on the terrace. The newcomer was Venetia Gatacre clad in a smart blue costume, hatless, and resembling a sun-flower.

"Your father engaged this man to shoot me down if I tried to escape," Dorchester explained politely,



"and I am merely pointing out to him, with as much emphasis as I can command, that the continual sight of his face spoils my digestion, and I should prefer he made a hole in the ground. You see, Miss Gatacre, this deluded person thinks he is my escort and imagines that I would make a good target if I vaulted your boundary wall. I wish you would send him away before I commit murder."

Venetia turned with prompt decision.

"Inform my father, Maltravers, that I am responsible for Mr. Dorchester and do not subject him to further annoyance," she said frigidly.

Maltravers touched his cap and withdrew, but it was merely a few paces and the menacing look on his face was not pleasant. Apparently he intended to keep within revolver range.

"Why rise at this ungodly hour?" Dorchester queried, as Venetia leaned over the parapet. As her eyes sent him an invitation, he quickly made his way to her side and she awaited his approach. A touch of crimson mounted in the lovely cheeks.

"It is unnecessary to confess I did not sleep well," she replied, "but I see no point in being late for breakfast. Why have you kept the grass from growing?"

"Perhaps it was conscience!" Dorchester ventured with a smile. "You see, I have never been sufficiently important to be guarded by armed men, but they forget that I carry no insurance card and that an unlucky shot might prove fatal to my health. Why should a humble novelist be treated in this fashion? What harm have I done your father or Paul Church?"



I am beginning to think I must have committed some heinous crime in a former existence."

Venetia laughed and gazed critically. She admired his smart appearance, the scrupulous shave, the careless way he arranged his tie, and realised there was something in his eyes that made him dangerous. She avoided that glance skilfully.

"Don't be absurd!" she pleaded. "Being one of the lucky mortals, you have been admitted into the inner sanctum of the Green Room while other miserable sinners are denied that privilege. It tempts me to think you belong to a secret society, Mr. Dorchester, or perhaps you are qualifying to enter a monastic order."

There were moments when Dorchester thought he would laugh continually and this was one of them.

"My dear young lady," he answered, "unless there is a time-limit to this gigantic joke I think we will all be pushed into an asylum, and it will not matter whether I am a mason or a moulder. I should hate to think of you in a padded room, and I have a horror of steel waistcoats."

Although Venetia gave that musical laugh, she saw that Maltravers still lounged against the nearest balustrade listening to every word, and obviously with instructions that Dorchester must not talk too fast or even mention the Green Room.

"I am never astonished at anything father does, or Paul Church for that matter," she replied, "but inviting you to Rockdene Hall leaves me bewildered. Why, even the postman dare not come up the drive and the letters are collected at the lodge."



Dorchester shrugged, but although he was inclined to be satirical, he confessed it was difficult for the beauty of this girl was undeniable, and after all, she was the daughter of the eccentric who had brought him to this abode of mystery.

"Don't blame me for that state of affairs," he begged, "and as for the rest I am thinking we are due for a tremendous sensation, not exactly a cloudburst or earthquake, but don't be startled if something stupendous occurs very soon. If nothing happens, the mystery will fizzle out like a burst tyre and Maltravers and the rest of them will be dismissed with a life-pension."

The girl gazed steadily.

"I have a confession to make," she said solemnly "and I am indifferent whether Maltravers hears it or not. We girls made a vow that we must discover the secret of the Green Room, and you cannot blame us if we are determined to make you talk. We saw you from our bedrooms this morning and I was selected to lead the attack. So far I have failed in the attempt, but the others will try later. Do let me be the first to hear the big news."

Maltravers moved nearer without pretence of hiding and a single incautious sentence from Dorchester would have meant a tragic incident. The novelist saw that revolver held in a position of readiness.

"I am afraid I am sadly handicapped," he replied. "You see, Miss Gatacre, I am under a vow of secrecy to those two men, and in case I might forget your father has turned that chap loose with a gun. He is the modern gangster-type, and would probably get a



hundred pounds for disposing of a dead body in a quiet part of the estate. I see no reason why I should seek an early death."

There suddenly came the sonorous sound of the breakfast-gong, and Venetia smiled with relief when she heard that summons.

"The housekeeper has granted an armistice," she declared. "It will be of short duration, for I have just as strong a will as my parent and we will see who wins at this game. Come, you must taste our Devon cream and coffee."

Dorchester paused, for a thought struck him.

"Just a second," he begged. "You say Miss Richmond is included in this quest for information, but has it not occurred to you that anything she gleaned would soon reach her employer. That girl is passionately loyal, and she would feel it her duty, irrespective of anything, to tell your father that he had been betrayed."

Venetia gave a little nod, and again the faintest smile touched her lips.

"You must be a mind-reader," she said softly. "That is exactly the thought Violet and I entertain about Veronica. She is very estimable as a secretary, and she regards father as a kind of god. Yes, you may pat yourself on the back for that idea."

With a laugh they passed into the dining-room, but breakfast proved an informal affair. Arthur Gatacre graced the head of the table, but Paul Church did not appear until the meal was advanced and the girls spoke in low tones.

"Well, I saw you near the sundial!" announced the



scientist. "I hope you don't imagine, Dorchester, this is Rotten Row where one must ride before breakfast or any of that sort of thing. I hope nothing was the matter!"

The novelist forced a smile without mirth in it. Paul Church noted that fact. Was the youngster going to be a nuisance, and was he planning something underhand, a subtle move to betray them to the police?

"There was nothing wrong with me," Dorchester answered, "beyond the fact that I seem in a dream and the Devon atmosphere can hardly be blamed. It was a glorious morning to be abroad, which reminds me that it must be heavenly here in the heart of summer. What about yourself? You look less pale, so I hope you had a good night."

"I seldom sleep well," Paul Church replied. "You see, I am used to snatching a few hours through the day, for it is nothing unusual for me to stay up until dawn has arrived. If one has pretence to be an astronomer, one must be prepared to sacrifice a good deal for the stars, and we know they do not disappear with morning sunlight. They are still there, eternal vigils of the past, present, and future. . . . Let me warn you, however, that it is dangerous to go near the walls of this estate. Your action might be misinterpreted."

Dorchester nodded and sent a glance to the millionaire.

"I can get all the shooting I want at Bisley," he announced, "and I object to being a target for the armed guards who haunt these grounds. There is just a chance, you see, I may wish to be eligible for



the Old Age Pension, and I should never dream of going outside this place in a coffin."

"I wish you would change the subject," Venetia pleaded with a look of protest on the lovely face. "Life is dull enough here without talking about funerals or discussing the possibility of being shot. Are you catching the 10-15 for London, father?"

Arthur Gatacre reached for the marmalade, and allowed a pause to intervene, then he exchanged a glance with the scientist.

"I am not leaving for a few days," he answered. "You see, Paul and I are engaged on important work, and we believe matters are approaching a climax."

The words sounded ominous and the girls looked at each other. It was Violet who broke the silence that followed.

"Dad, I hate bringing up a distressing topic," she exclaimed, "but how long are we to be detained within the walls of this estate? We three girls are dying to see the outside world, and if this confinement goes on longer we will suffer from a breakdown. We feel on the verge of that at present!"

The scientist helped himself to coffee, adding sugar and Devon cream.

"The permission you ask, Violet, may be given within a short time," he said politely; "sooner indeed than you suppose. Subject to the success of my work, you may be allowed to go where you like within a few weeks, and even Dorchester will not be troubled with his guards. That is why I ask an extension of your patience, and if you knew what was at stake,



I believe you would all grant that request without a murmur."

The silence was electrifying and even the millionaire was perturbed. He had no idea his friend would make an announcement of that kind, so he remained dumb.

"Do you really mean that?" Venetia enquired breathlessly, her voice low and strained. She could hardly credit the good news.

"Yes, although a lot depends on what may happen within forty-eight hours, I believe all restrictions will be removed within a fortnight."

"Then why not let me take the girls into Torquay?" Dorchester suggested. "You can send Maltravers along and give him as many revolvers as you like. Be a sport, Gatacre. These girls have been incarcerated like nuns in a convent, so give them some real freedom and I will bring them back before five o'clock."

The millionaire held out his hands with a gesture that could have only one meaning.

"That is impossible!" he declared. "It is far too risky, and you don't understand the opposite sex, young man. These girls are angels up to a point, but where a big secret is concerned they might let the cat loose. I know the situation is unprecedented, but you are all being fairly treated, and that is clear indication of the magnitude of our task. When my friend gives the 'All Clear' signal, you will have liberty to do as you please, and that may be in a few more days."

Dorchester rose with a curious shrug, for even food seemed distasteful at a table where he was a prisoner.



"Very well," he answered, "but I warn you that I am making my own plans to get away from Rockdene Hall and if anyone is hurt in the process you have only yourself to blame. I have a few letters to write. Will you deny me that privilege?"

The steel magnate frowned, for he did not like the tone in which he was addressed.

"Hand your letters to Paul Church," he said frigidly, "and when they have been censored they will be sent out for delivery. You can mention where you are staying, but if those letters are to reach the Post Office you will not refer to the Green Room or its secret."

Dorchester banged the door in a fury, and the girls stared after him curiously. What was the novelist planning?

"Insolent young pup not to wait until we were finished," growled the millionaire.

Venetia lit a cigarette to control her resentment at the words.

"Father, you made a blunder when you showed Dorchester the Green Room!" she predicted.

"What in thunder do you mean?"

"I think he is clever enough to outwit you," Venetia continued. "He may not succeed for a few days, but he has got sufficient brains to escape and get a message through to the police. Believe me, if he ever gets in touch with Fleet Street, he will make you the laughing-stock of two continents. I saw it in his eyes. You cannot affront an Englishman of his type more than deprive him of liberty, or let it be known that his correspondence is censored. That was a mistake in tactics!"



"Rubbish!" snapped the millionaire. "Dorchester is just a headstrong young fool, and one of these days he will be making us a complete apology. Meanwhile, he behaves like a young colt who had not been tamed. Veronica, I have a few letters for you in the library, and they must go by the first mail."

Meanwhile, Dorchester went to his room and taking out writing pad, fountain pen and envelopes placed them on the Japanese table. He remained motionless a few seconds, for it was difficult to concentrate, and his mind was chaotic with a thousand thoughts. Jackson was pacing the corridor outside. . . . Then a thought struck him, and pulling the pad towards him he gave a whoop of delight and wrote three letters in a firm hand: one to the junior director of his publishing firm, another to his literary agent, and the last to a member of the P.E.N. Club. Then he rose, opened the door, and Jackson came in response to a signal.

"Take those letters to Mr. Church and when he has examined them see they are sent by first mail," he ordered. "I have stamped the envelopes, so there is nothing to do but seal and drop in the pillar-box!"

Jackson smiled and took the letters.

"I understand perfectly, sir," he answered. "I have instructions about any letter you write, and for your further information Maltravers will be in this corridor until I return."

Dorchester watched the man depart with a mask-like face, then crossed to the window and stared down on the terrace. He had just committed a daring act prompted by desperation, but if that letter got



through to Basil Norton at the P.E.N. Club the situation would be saved for it contained a code, and Basil and he often communicated in that fashion. The latter prided himself on being a criminologist as well as a writer of history books, and one could not please him better than communicate in a secret code. This time Norton was due for a surprise. He would act immediately, for that letter was a request to go to the Yard and get experts down to Rockdene Hall without delay.

"Mr. Gatacre wishes to see you in the library, sir," Jackson brought that message in fifteen minutes.

Dorchester followed in silence and wondered what had happened.

"Well, are you going to sanction the Torquay visit?" he queried in a casual voice as he entered the library. The millionaire and scientist awaited him, and two of the guards remained at the door.

"You are doomed to a disappointment," replied the steel magnate coldly. "Frankly, Dorchester, I am placing you under special surveillance, and you will be confined to your rooms until further orders."

Dorchester flashed a hand to his pocket then thought better of it. Maltravers and Jackson had him covered, and they anticipated a move of that kind.

"What do you mean?" he blurted out.

The millionaire pointed to the letters.

"Two will go to the pillar-box!" Gatacre continued. "The third will be destroyed. I refer to the one you wrote your friend Norton at the P.E.N. Club, but seemingly you forget that Paul Church was the greatest signalling expert in the British Army, and that it is



easy for him to decode a letter. You have just asked Norton to get in touch with the Yard, but the clever move has failed. As you cannot grant us your parole, and you are determined on betraying us, we must keep you under lock and key. Your meals will be served in your room, you will be allowed exercise in the grounds, but permission is refused to speak to the girls, and you will not re-enter the Green Room!"

Dorchester watched the letter being torn to fragments and felt his head whirling. He gazed at Church with amazement. Yes, the man was a genius, for that code was an elusive one, yet he had solved it with ease.

"So be it!" he thundered. "Gatacre, you've asked for it, and by heaven someone will pay. Come on, you rats, shoot and be damned to you, but I will show you what it means to interfere with a——!"

He got no further. There was a deafening report, and the revolver was shot clean out of his hand. It was wonderful marksmanship, and the man responsible for it was the white-haired scientist with the mask-like face, his right hand holding the automatic he had just withdrawn from his pocket!



## CHAPTER X

### THE MESSAGE FROM MARS

**T**HREE days passed in a strange captivity. Deprived of his revolver, Dorchester was taken to his room after a furious struggle, and soon he realised his position was hopeless. They would have shot him without compunction. Indeed he was surprised to be alive. Maltravers and Jackson had instructions to act without mercy, and they were relieved by other men at night. There was always that double guard, always men pacing the corridor until he was sick of their footsteps, but they took no notice of his protest. He was a prisoner who had to be watched.

Apart from that solitary confinement, Dorchester, had nothing to complain of in the way of food and drink. He might have been in an hotel, for even champagne was not denied him, and at six each morning he was taken a walk round the estate. The journey lasted an hour, which he thoroughly enjoyed, for it gave him air and calmed his thoughts, but Gatacre men walked on each side, and there was not the slightest chance of escape. He met other armed men who knew he was under surveillance and they watched him with eyes that never wavered. Dorchester felt like a trapped animal, yet he had



committed no criminal act, and he wondered at the sequel.

He saw the girls from his bedroom window. They waved their hands from the terrace, Venetia taking considerable pains to evince sympathy. She stood longer than the others, but her companions were reticent in their demonstration. They seemed afraid of being watched, for they were not allowed to speak to him or send a message. He kissed his hand with mid-Victorian gallantry, but they knew he chafed under imprisonment, and they could read the anger on his face. Standing on tiptoe, Venetia blew a special kiss, the lovely face illumined in the sunshine. She hardly knew what prompted the act, for it meant a great deal, and it left her dazed. How stupid to betray herself like that. Her companions giggled as if at a huge joke.

Yet Venetia contrived to be on the terrace. She made excuses, and was always ready with that cheery greeting and that tremulous smile round her lips. No one knew what went on behind the scenes, yet Venetia was furious with her parent and angry with Paul Church. The shooting incident gave her a shock. She blamed both men for their stupidity and told them they were acting insanely. The scientist ignored her as if she did not exist, which made her anger worse, and she poured out indignation on her parent. The millionaire was perturbed, for he loved his daughter more than he admitted, and he was worried about the Green Room. He would have liked Venetia to share his confidence, so the days passed in dismal dreariness.



On the fourth evening came an unexpected development. Dorchester was summoned to the library, and when he entered he found the millionaire present. The Chinese lamps were lit and the apartment glowed with that Oriental effulgence. It was after dinner, and the steel magnate sat in the far corner of the room. There was an enigmatic smile on his face and he waved to Dorchester in the friendliest fashion.

"Bring your chair near the fire," he suggested kindly. "I want a talk with you, Dorchester, and we are not going to be disturbed. It is time we understood each other, for you are a determined individual, and I should not like you to blunder. I am sorry for what has occurred. Perhaps Paul and I made a mistake, so I am going to restore your liberty. There will be the usual restrictions, but I am re-instating you on the same terms as when you arrived, and I believe you will play the game."

Dorchester sank into the nearest chair in a kind of stupor. He could scarcely believe his ears. Did it mean his confinement was over and he could meet Venetia when he liked? What on earth had happened and where was the scientist? Why had the guards disappeared? He could have strangled the millionaire if disposed for the man was at his mercy. Yet doubtless there was someone behind the curtains, a gunman ready to shoot at the first indiscretion.

"I am curious to know the meaning of this move," he observed in a casual tone. "Why have you cancelled the programme? You hardly imagine I am going to forget those days when you treated me like a convict. You will pay for that injustice. Why did



you address me that day in the Torquay train if you planned this indignity? Is that how you treat a guest? You could not have meted out worse torture if I had maltreated your daughter."

The millionaire smiled and pushed across the cigarettes.

"It is odd you should mention Venetia!" he observed. "Frankly, Dorchester, that girl has been very precious to me since her mother died, and it is to her you are indebted for this concession. She has given me no peace about restoring your freedom, or some measure of it, and she asked me not to breathe a word of her name. Well, it took all my persuasive powers to make Paul see the matter in the same light, but he has also given consent."

Dorchester sat rigid, for it took some time to realise what had occurred. So Venetia was interested to this extent? The mere thought gave him the biggest thrill.

"Then why not return my gun?" he demanded.

The millionaire pushed revolver and cartridges across the table.

"You see, Dorchester, I had no idea my daughter should fall headlong into this romance, but apparently you appeal to her and I suppose I must regard you as a prospective son-in-law."

"You are making an unholy mistake," the novelist answered. "Your daughter has developed a sentimental vein because I am the first male visitor who has approached Rockdene Hall for months, but I will soon convince her that the whole thing is delusion on her part."

The millionaire grinned afresh.



"You will do nothing of the kind."

"Why not?"

"Because you happen to be in love with Venetia and cannot deny it. I have used my eyes and know what has happened. It will change my plans, but I must bow to the inevitable."

Dorchester could not speak for a few seconds. He knew the accusation was true. He could not deny he was madly in love, that no girl but Venetia could enter the orbit of his happiness.

"All right, you've won!" he muttered. "What, in heaven's name, can I do about it?"

"Marry her!"

Dorchester sat up.

"Good God, I haven't got a bean beyond tin-pot royalties of a writer who has never achieved a best-seller."

"You have the potentiality," Gatacre protested. "Besides, as a future son-in-law, you are going to hear a secret. The man from Mars will arrive at any moment, and if you can get all the data about the Martian planet you will make the biggest scoop alive."

Dorchester's brain was throbbing and a thousand voices rang in his ears.

"What do you mean?"

"We are just waiting a message. We have had several talks with Jephthah, and everything is arranged for that stupendous dash through space. After that it will be a matter of hours."

Dorchester leaned forward. His voice was hoarse and strained. He laboured under galvanic excitement.



"Look here, Gatacre, my brain throbs with doubts and fears. Heavens, supposing you do get such a message, and the whole thing turns out a fiasco, will you return to your steel business and give up this hopeless dream of communicating with Mars."

The millionaire smiled imperturbably.

"My dear fellow, do you honestly imagine we have not got in touch with that planet?"

"I don't know what to think," Dorchester groaned.

"The whole project is too overwhelming. I am trying to imagine the whole business is some devilish fabrication of the brain conjured up by Paul Church."

"Yes, but supposing he is right?" Gatacre queried.

"The world will get the greatest surprise in history and everyone will be trekking to Rockdene Hall. However, we are not going to turn this place into a circus. Paul Church, the high-priest of adventure, has done this thing for Science, and he is going to confront you with a flesh-and-blood Martian."

Dorchester breathed hard, then blew a white cloud of smoke to the ceiling.

"Following the Asquithian principle," he replied, "I will wait and see what drops from the clouds. Where is Paul Church?"

"In his tower with those big projectors. You may come along and have a glance at those astronomical toys. The lenses alone cost hundreds of pounds, but as Einstein affirms we must place ourselves at the nearest angle to Truth!"

They moved along the hall to the terrace and two footmen watched them in silence. Behind like shadows crept the sinister forms of Maltravers and Jackson,



but the millionaire threw them a signal and they made no effort to retard the progress of the novelist. It was a glorious night, with a few clouds moving across the vast amphitheatre of sky and overhead glistened that vista of countless stars.

"Do you operate a searchlight from the tower?" Dorchester asked as they mounted the spiral staircase.

"Occasionally, but we do not care to attract attention. We have no desire to make Devon people curious, and we think there is too much speculation in the district already. A searchlight is imperative, however, when we are more than usually suspicious about a prowler on the estate, but my guards are generally adequate for the purpose. Each man has a six-chambered revolver with instructions to shoot without consulting a dictionary!"

"Well, you have brought the prize mug!" Paul Church exclaimed as Dorchester entered the cone-shaped building.

"Yes, we have fixed up an armistice," Gatacre laughed. "He is coming slowly to the conviction, Paul, that we may be speaking the truth, and he wants to have a glimpse at Mars. Being a novitiate in astronomy I have brought him for his first lesson."

Dorchester grinned and stared round like a school-boy. The apartment was larger than he had surmised, furnished as an observatory, and lacked nothing in comfort. From huge openings in the walls loomed stupendous projectors ranging the infinity of space, and beyond was an outer platform encircled with iron



railings. Electric bulbs were in profusion. Dorchester gazed spellbound at the huge projectors directed up to the starry firmament.

"I see everything but a bed," he drawled. "I suppose, Paul Church, you never think of Morpheus when you are watching Mars and his satellites?"

"No one sleeps here," grunted the scientist. "What we deplore is the approach of dawn. From now to three in the morning are precious hours if an astronomer is worth his salt and I never forget it. I may say that you are privileged, Dorchester, to be allowed into this building, but Gatacre, being a sentimentalist, can do what he likes with his own property. Had my personal wishes been carried out, you would not have troubled until this work was finished."

"And when will that be?"

"Sooner than you imagine. The message from Mars may arrive at any moment. I have an extension from the tower to the Green Room, and can always receive a message from Jephthah. You see, it takes four minutes to reach the Green Room, and when it is a matter of picking up a communication from Mars every second counts."

Dorchester allowed the smile on his face to extend. Perhaps he ought to humour these madmen. He would have to exert all his ingenuity for they were desperately in earnest about the project.

"Well, I've come here for a peep through your super-binoculars," he continued, "and I hope you will allow me to see if Jephthah wears shorts."

The scientist guided him across to a huge lens, fixed it in position, demonstrated how the sights



could be adjusted and the way to manipulate the powerful glass.

"If you are not blind," he said roughly, "you ought to pick out seven large stars to your immediate right. They belong to the Great Bear and are more brilliant than the others. You can see two other distinctive stars: 'the white Vega of the Lyre' and burning 'Arcturus.' But do not regard them as stars. Gaze into that vast firmament of space and think of innumerable eyes looking out on the infinite. If you have imagination, you must realise you are gazing at something more than constellations. There are new worlds; hemispheres of thought and action; each an invitation to soar into those mystery regions and pierce the enigma of the universe."

Dorchester heard the words in a dream. Never had he gazed through a window like this in his life. Through that mighty projector he stared at a vast concourse of new worlds, new continents of space and time, all illumined as it were by countless fires. What galaxy of stardom! What beauty and majesty! How Paul Church must have feasted on those planets with wonder and delight! Could he be blamed if he lost sanity or mental adjustment in that grand amphitheatre of space? What wealth and symbolic beauty was reserved there for enraptured souls! Who could remain blind to the magic witchery of those star-worlds?

"Well, I would rather spend an hour here than ten years in the British Museum," he acknowledged gratefully. "Paul Church, I owe you an unqualified apology, for I never realised how insignificant I was until this



second and how stupendously vast is the universe of space. Gatacre, you should never regret those lenses or what they cost. They are worth a fortune to the human mind, and personally I can do without sermons so long as I am privileged to gaze at those stars. I feel sick with awe. Never have I imagined space so limitless!"

The millionaire kept silent. He also gazed through one of the huge projectors absorbed in his own vista of stardom. His eyes were riveted on the planets. He could name them all. Mercury, Venus, Mars; Jupiter, Uranus, Saturn. They ranged themselves before him, defying analysis, his concept of their origin. He focussed on the Great Bear, the Milky Way, the long line of stars stretching in the path of the Moon. What were his thoughts? Not of the steel business in the north of England, nor the latest market prices on the Stock Exchange, nor of anything appertaining to Throgmorton Street. He centred his gaze on Mars and on that planet he concentrated. What a panorama of thought it conjured! Of one thing he was certain. Paul Church had got in touch with that world. What romance, what adventure of the mind, what a pioneer of Science! And one of these nights a messenger would come forth from the Martian stratosphere, just like a Spirit from Space, and who could predict what would happen if the Martian arrived on this earth! Why, it would be the wonder of the centuries, something that would eclipse everything in history!

"Yes, this is worth a thousand guineas," he muttered. "I have no regrets about the money spent on



this turret-tower or for what I have done for the man who stands beside you. Paul Church is the greatest genius of the age, and those projectors would have meant nothing had he not attuned to that Martian wave-length."

The scientist stood like a pleased child and exchanged a long glance with his friend. It was the bond of a deep friendship, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse.

"The journey through space will be accomplished," he predicted. "We must never forget, Arthur, that Martians are thousands of years ahead of us in intelligence, and we have nothing to teach them about speed, aircraft, or stream-line effect. Marcus Donzelon will reach his goal. He will land in the centre of that golf-course, and when his flight begins the task is ended so far as I am concerned. The rest will remain between you and the British Government."

Dorchester mopped his brow with a handkerchief, then gazed at the two men with awe, for they spoke in a language he could only faintly comprehend. They had returned to their hypnosis, and gone back to the delusion that they were in communication with Mars, and actually envisaged a Martian airplane rushing through all that vista of space.

"Both of you have great faith," he said quietly. "Through those super-lenses I have gazed at Mars and although it gives one a feasible outline of canals or strange markings I am still to be convinced that the planet is inhabited. I hate to hurt your feelings, gentlemen, but Mars seems to me more incredibly distant than ever, and the mere thought of getting



in touch with denizens of that world makes the mind dizzy. I may be a nincompoop. Perhaps there is something wrong with my thinking apparatus. At the same time I cannot rise to a mileage of that description."

Paul Church regarded him with the glance a savant might bestow on a small child, a gaze full of infinite pity.

"Dorchester," he announced, "there is no need for you to consult a Harley Street expert. Your brain is functioning in the proper manner, but if you would only give more play to your imagination you would realise that wireless communication with New Zealand was just as wonderful. You do not understand the ether. Time-distance has no effect. The important point is to contact with one wave-length, to have everything perfect with your own receiving-or-transmission station, and the mysterious forces of Nature do the rest!"

Dorchester groaned.

"If you take my advice, Paul Church, you will leave Mars alone," he groaned. "You have attempted the impossible, and to do that is to go into a mad-house. I should never like to think of you in a mental home. Go on with your research work and scientific inventions, but leave the Martians to look after themselves."

The scientist pushed back his white hair and stared at the speaker like some new kind of microbe.

"You poor nit-wit," he snapped, "you have as much grey-matter as an Andalusian rabbit. Are you foolish enough to believe that this tiny globule of earth is



the sum total of God's creation, that this is the only stage in the vast universe where we play out the drama of Life?"

There was a gong-like sound in the room and Paul Church rushed to the far corner. His hand moved to a receiving-set on the small wicker table shaped like a telephone ear-piece, and he pressed a lever. The voice that came through was distinctly clear.

"Message from Jephthah to Paul Church. . . .  
Message from Jephthah to Paul Church. . . .  
*Marcus Donzelon leaves Mars eleven o'clock to-night!*"



## CHAPTER XI

### THROUGH THE STRATOSPHERE

THERE was a dead silence.

"Well, am I supposed to cheer?" Dorchester queried with a grin that threatened to become a convulsive laugh. "You have heard that absurd message from the wilds of Northumberland and you know what it means. Simply that a bloke has jumped on a Croydon plane and will land here at two in the morning. You are to be bamboozled worse than ever, so I advise you, Gatacre, to notify your guards and hand that chap over to the police the moment he lands."

The words were ignored. Instead the millionaire caught the scientist by the arm.

"Paul, it has happened!" he said in a low voice. "The dramatic message that Donzelon will be here in a few hours. We must get everything ready, have the landing lamps put on the golf course, and switch on the searchlight from this tower. To-morrow I will get in touch with Downing Street."

The scientist nodded and lurched heavily to a seat. He seemed dazed and unable to speak. Dorchester anticipated another heart attack, for the face turned ashen grey and the lips bloodless.

"My work is finished," he said in a steady voice



"I leave the rest to you, Arthur. Donzelon should reach us in three hours and you must complete the arrangements. Do as you like about Downing Street. We must make the Government the first offer. We are entitled to a priority wave-length, and I have the secret of the super-radio. But don't worry me with contracts. I leave the business side to you."

"Take it quietly!" Gatacre counselled, bending over his friend. "I have only to send a message to Maltravers and he will see all details are completed."

Dorchester gazed at the steel magnate.

"Do those men know anything about this Martian bunk?" he queried in an astounded voice.

"I have told them to be prepared for a night landing by a special plane," Gatacre replied, "but, like yourself, they imagine it may be a visitor from Croydon or one of the aerodromes."

The scientist chuckled. His breathing was more regular, and the colour re-entered his cheeks.

"What a surprise when they see that Martian plane," he muttered. "I take no bets, but it will be like nothing on earth. However, the men are all sworn to silence, and we have already sent a message that Donzelon must not converse with strangers."

Dorchester grinned.

"Yes, say that the pilot flew all the way from Pekin," he intervened, "and that his correct nationality is Sudanese."

Gatacre regarded him with contempt, then glanced at his watch.

"Let us go to the Green Room," he suggested. "A further chat with Jephthah might clear about



Donzelon, and I can speak to Maltravers on the way."

He suited the action to the words and the lights were extinguished, then they left the tower and descended the staircase. Taking his friend's arm in a strong grip, Gatacre guided Church to the terrace and Dorchester walked alongside. Maltravers met them. The steel magnate exchanged a few words in a low voice then withdrew into the darkness. He would pass those instructions to the others. The signal had been given.

"Why not tell the girls?" Dorchester asked when they entered the Green Room and switched on the light.

"Meaning what?" the scientist queried in a hard voice.

"Why not give the girls a chance to witness this stupendous event?"

The silence was embarrassing. The scientist exchanged a glance with the steel magnate.

"You mean tell them about Mars?" asked the millionaire.

"That is immaterial," Dorchester answered, "for they will be as incredulous as myself, but if you are right that a Martian is rushing through the stratosphere at uncanny speed, then why not let the girls witness such an historic spectacle as the landing on the golf-course."

"We have already discussed that," Gatacre replied. "We could never entrust any part of our secret to the girls, and it would be dangerous to make a false move at this stage."



Soon the signal lamp glowed red, and Dorchester regarded it with apprehension.

"Jepthah speaking to Paul Church! . . . Donzelon has just left from the summit of Mount Etoile—the highest peak in Mars—but he went without fuss and just sent us a hand-wave. He took his special 'M' plane, and we believe he will reach you safely."

Paul Church leaned forward to the transmitter and his voice shook with emotion. He was trembling with excitement, and even Gatacre paced the room like a man possessed.

"A thousand thanks for your welcome message, Jepthah," the scientist replied. "We have been waiting on it, living at the highest pitch, and the tension has been almost unbearable. Yes, we will send you a message the very instant he is sighted, and all arrangements are made. What a pity that only a few people are privileged to witness this epoch-making event, but Donzelon must be safeguarded at all costs."

"If he makes it," Jepthah continued, "we will confer on him the Order of the Martian Eagle. That is the highest, and it will be pinned on his breast by President Alexis, our greatest statesman. Church, have patience. I may accompany Donzelon on his next trip. How would you like that?"

Church staggered to a chair, but held on to the transmitter with one hand.

"You would have a thousand welcomes," he answered, "and if they can spare me I might make the return journey."



"You certainly deserve the honour," came the voice. "Have you still got Dorchester under special guard or has he escaped?"

"We have arranged an armistice, and he is here at my elbow more cynical than ever. He still thinks you a wireless fan in the north of England and that you are bamboozling us about Mars. I think he is due for the surprise of his life."

A rich, infectious laugh came over the ether.

"You are all due for a mighty surprise," Jephthah continued. "I think Donzelon will keep you guessing for days, and as he happens to be stupendously strong I hope Dorchester proves civil. You will not hear any sound from the engines. They are noiseless, and when the machine lands you will put it down as a new type of glider."

Dorchester drew a deep breath, and his curiosity was now definitely roused. Supposing——?

"How long will Donzelon be my guest?" Gatacre asked, stepping across.

"Three weeks, but he may have an extension if you have special work on your side. I hold out no promise, for he is paying a visit to Saturn next, and as he is our best long-distance pilot we cannot spare him long. He contemplates paying a visit to the Moon. That will constitute his biggest record."

"He ought to go on to Hades," Dorchester suggested in a loud voice of derision. "I hear His Satanic Majesty is deeply interested in aviation, and he might purchase a few shares in airplane companies."

"Needless to say, that was Dorchester," Gatacre



apologised. "He is still confident we are mad, and that the whole business is a deliberate fake. I might add that our British Premier may converse with you soon over this super-radio. He will probably sign on behalf of the Government the wave-length contract."

A momentary pause, then the voice continued.

"We are delighted with the news, Gatacre, and our Grand Vizier has just promised to converse with your Premier at the first opportunity. We send greetings to your famous statesman."

Dorchester felt that he would burst a blood-vessel.

"Ask him if he has met the Archduchess of Patagonia," he intervened.

Gatacre frowned then stepped back as the laughing voice came again.

"Well, Dorchester, what do you think of the Devon climate? When Donzelon arrives, you might hand him a few of your novels, for we are anxious to see the stuff you write, and when we translate it we may get a bigger laugh than you think. Odd if you should become a best-seller on Mars before you achieved that success on Mother-Earth."

Dorchester pushed his way to the transmitter.

"Listen, my smooth-tongued walrus," he exclaimed, "when your representative reaches this part of the world, he is in for a wonderful reception. Your bluff will soon be called when it is discovered that your delegate is no more a Martian than I am a Dutchman. We will soon track you down, then it is going to mean ten years without the option of a fine, and I hope they make it solitary confinement."



"You are going to have difficulty in arresting Donzelon," purred the voice. "I should like to inspect the handcuffs that would keep him quiet. No, young friend, you are in for the sensation of your life, and soon I hope you will broadcast an apology. . . . Paul Church, stand by for special news. A message has come through from Donzelon. He is seventy thousand miles out and is making big progress in your direction. Expects to do journey in three hours; conditions more comfortable than anticipated, and has experienced no difficulty with the stratosphere; engines running smoothly; has the wind at his back, and steers a south-easterly course for England!"

When Paul Church replied it was in a strained voice.

"That is the most exciting news yet," he exclaimed. "I deplore we cannot give him publicity in our papers nor mention a word to Downing Street. If the secret leaked out, Jephthah, thousands of motor-cars would be making for this part of Devon and battalions of soldiers would be fighting back the mob of sight-seers. Only a few will witness the greatest event in history—the first landing of a Martian on this planet—and there is not a journalist on the horizon. Dorchester is the only writer present, and if he were not crack-brained he could make the greatest scoop of his life, but he is allowing the opportunity to pass, and he will regret it all the days ahead."

"Do not be startled if Donzelon is much different to what you expect," continued the mystery voice. "We have no idea what you people look like, although that will be remedied when you adopt television,



and your description of everything is rather meagre. Words are a poor substitute for actual vision. You may find Donzelon an unique specimen, and we hope he does not frighten you too much."

Paul Church stepped to the super-radio.

"Is there a chance of Donzelon steering a zig-zag course and getting out of his bearings?" he asked.

"There is that possibility, but his 'M' plane is fitted out with the latest instruments and he has a special astronomical chart. Donzelon always gets there. . . ." The red lamp glowed and the voice ceased.

At that instant something unnerving happened: a blinding flash followed by a cannonade of thunder that burst the heavens, then simultaneously a torrential rain-shower and the windows rattled with the fury of the storm. Another flash followed by an ear-splitting crack of thunder, and again that crescendo of rain and hail.

"An exceptional cloudburst," Paul Church exclaimed, as he disconnected the super-radio from the aerial. The others stared back in consternation, and, running to the window, Gatacre jerked up the blinds. What a sight met their gaze. The thunderstorm increased with blinding fury, lashing itself into a mad tempest, and the Green Room became illumined with vivid flashes of lightning. The effect was terrible, for the rain fell with greater intensity and the earth rocked with the fury of the gale.

"Heavens!" Dorchester gasped, "I pity any devil who is night-flying in this storm, and I don't care if his plane comes from Timbuctoo or the Land of



the Rising Sun! He will probably turn back, whoever he is. No plane could get through that storm, which means, gentlemen, that Providence has intervened at the critical hour, and your Northumberland hoodlum has been pronounced a fake."

His companions gazed at each other bereft of speech. Was this the unforeseen end to all their plans, was the great flight nothing but a dream, and would that Martian plane crash somewhere in mid-Atlantic?

"God, we must do something!" Gatacre exclaimed. "Get in touch with Jephthah, Paul. Risk it. There may still be time to send Donzelon a warning message of this gale. They may be able to recall him by wireless."

Paul Church dashed to the radio, then paused. Should he imperil the safety of that precious instrument? But a man's life was in danger and he had the power to save him. He switched over the connecting-lever, then something snapped like a match and he gave a low gasp. The lever was broken. It had been destroyed by the lightning and it might take hours to repair.

"What the devil does it matter?" Dorchester laughed brutally. "Don't you see it's a heaven-sent mercy we have not all been electrocuted with that ghoulis instrument in this room? Besides, if that Croydon pilot is mad enough to come through this storm, or make the attempt from any aerodrome in England, he is less than an idiotic chump and deserves his fate."

Gatacre turned in a fury.



"You ass!" he bellowed. "Don't you realise a man is flying from Mars and we have no power to stop him!"

"Mars my foot!" Dorchester growled. "Look here, Gatacre, this scientific hoax has gone far enough, and all your talk about Donzelon leaves me cold. I suggest we get to bed and say our prayers."

Certainly the storm was increasing in violence, and there was no cessation to the rain and vivid streaks of lightning. One peal sounded like a thunderbolt crashing on the lawn.

"Get to the phone, Arthur," commanded the scientist. "Ring up the Air Ministry and Meteorological Department, find out the zone of this storm and how long it will last." Crash! A giant tree fell a few yards from the terrace steps. The gale was sweeping everything in its path.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE MAN FROM MARS

**W**HEN Gatacre returned in a few minutes he gave a low gasp, for Paul Church was lying on the couch with a white face and rigid body.

"Another heart attack?" he queried. "Why didn't you ring the bell? Still, you have acted pretty decently, for there is no guard in the corridor, and you might have made a bolt for it. I presume you are thinking of Venetia and wondering how she will fare? Well, the girls are all scared to death in the library, and none of them has gone to bed."

"Yes, your friend had another seizure," Dorchester drawled. "Nothing bad, but I put him on that couch and made him comfortable. He has dropped into a doze and I should not disturb him. He ought to be in bed tucked between sheets, and the same advice applies to us all."

"Lie down for a couple of hours," Gatacre suggested, "but Donzelon will not disappoint us. I have rung up the Meteorological Department, and although the storm is universal over the British Isles it is estimated not to last longer than forty minutes. I will call you before Donzelon arrives. We will keep a vigilant look-out and the searchlight will blaze from the tower."



Dorchester moved to the door and paused on the threshold.

"Wish to heaven you had never met Paul Church," he answered. "You would have saved yourself vast disillusionment and Venetia would be enjoying a normal existence. Believe me, Gatacre, the gap between us and Mars is too incredibly vast for anyone to traverse, and if you imagine anything else it is time you started growing orange-trees on the southern slopes of the Himalayas."

Gatacre came across and the sternness returned to his lips.

"If you are going to speak to the girls," he advised, "drop not the slightest hint that a midnight visitor is expected, otherwise our plans may be upset at the last moment. When Donzelon arrives, we shall have to determine what kind of an individual he is, and if he is not fit to associate with the girls he will be given a special suite of rooms and kept under surveillance until he returns to Mars."

Dorchester stared back into those eyes.

"Supposing the girls see the flares on the golf-course and your guards making preparation for a night-landing?" he queried. "They will realise that the climax to the Green Room mystery has arrived, and if they rush out you are bound to take them into confidence."

"I am ready for that contingency," Gatacre replied in a steady voice. "If anything like that happens, we must use all the diplomacy at our command and perhaps invent the tale of a Croydon plane."

Dorchester shrugged.



"I wish you had kept to the steel business in the north of England and left the Martians to look after their own part of the universe."

He moved into the corridor with those words, and Gatacre locked the door with a smile on his face. There was something about the novelist he liked.

The storm grew worse. As Dorchester moved from the Green Room, the corridor was lit up with vivid flashes of lightning, and the deafening thunder that followed was ear-splitting. There seemed no end to the reverberations. Was any pilot forcing his way through that storm to play a practical joke on three men? If so, Dorchester knew no plane could survive the fury of that gale. Never had he known anything like it. Rain beat incessantly against every window, lashing against the panes like hail-stones, and every tree sent up a whine of terror.

When Dorchester entered the library, the girls rushed forward with one spontaneous movement. It was a wonderful welcome, for they were all overjoyed to see the novelist, and they escorted him to a comfortable seat near the fire. Venetia held him tightly by the arm and smiled into his face. She looked surpassingly beautiful in that light green dress, and Dorchester sent her a tender glance that could not have escaped the others.

"Oh, we are so glad to see you again!" she exclaimed in a tremulous whisper. "We have been praying for this moment, and muttering incantations against the men who imprisoned you. What do you think of this terrible storm? Seven trees have crashed already,



and honestly we are terrified to death. We feel something dreadful is going to happen!"

Dorchester patted her hands.

"I have given a kind of parole," he answered "which means that for a few days I will make no attempt at escape, and that is why we are not surrounded with guards. As regards the storm, I confess that fireworks of this kind are bad for everybody, so I suggest you girls get to bed and forget all about the Big Bad Wolf."

Violet huddled near the fire as if cold. She looked extremely pretty in her neat brown dress but the face had a pallor that was significant. There was something of hysteria in those eyes, as if the girl bordered on a breakdown, and her hands were clasped like those of a praying child.

"We are all horribly frightened," she murmured. "This storm may blow down the Hall and we shall all be killed. Besides, Mr. Dorchester, we are terribly curious about you. We heard of your release and everything points to some important development of the mystery. Do tell us what has happened? We know you have been up in the turret-tower, so Dad must have told you all about his invention at last. Don't you think we have earned the right to know what is going on at Rockdene Hall?"

"I certainly do and I only wish to heaven I could tell you girls everything," Dorchester groaned, "but my lips are still sealed and if I talk about the Green Room I will be as uninteresting as an Egyptian mummy. I have a decided objection to anyone interfering with my respiratory powers."



"Why, there is no sense in it!" Venetia half-sobbed. "Have those men not one inch of pity? We are getting more hysterical every hour, and that storm has driven us frantic. Is there no end to it? Are we all going mad and are those two men insane? Violet, I hate to say it, but your father must be suffering from some frightful malady of the brain, and my parent is nursing him through that dementia. That must be the vital explanation of everything."

Convulsive sobs shook Violet from head to foot.

"It must be true!" she moaned. "I have fought against it all these months, but science is not an esoteric cult, and there is no experiment that Dad should keep from his daughter. Night and day I have begged him to take me into confidence, but he always gives that strange shake of the head, and I am convinced he suffers from some monstrous affliction of the mind."

"And what do you say about it?" Dorchester asked the secretary. Veronica had kept very quiet, and there was something ethereal about her at that instant. Dressed in an evening gown of blue silk, displaying all the grace of figure, she could not have looked more captivating. It was plain she was vastly excited, and when the novelist spoke she glanced up with a start.

"I believe something will happen before dawn," she predicted. "You see, Mr. Gatacre has not dictated a letter for days, and I can tell by his manner when he anticipates sensational news. To-night at dinner he did not speak a word, and Paul Church sat in the same strained silence. I am not a prophetess



but do not be startled if something exceptional occurs before breakfast, and it will have nothing to do with the thunderstorm."

"Look here, girls," Dorchester exclaimed with sudden decision, "let us all behave sensibly. Your father, Venetia, has just rung up the Meteorological Department, and this storm will be over in a few minutes. Take my advice, all of you, and go to bed. To-morrow after breakfast we will go for a good walk round the estate and play all the games we have known in childhood."

Two of them obeyed without a word, but Venetia still reclined on the low chair, and Dorchester regarded her with a frown.

"Aren't you going?" he asked.

"No, I want a chat with you," she answered. "You see, that storm has frightened me, so I realise I am a woman and want comfort and protection. I have longed for that since mother died, and father is too absorbed in the mystery of the Green Room. . . . Brian, there is something on your mind?"

He gazed at her in amazement, and read the avowal of love in her eyes. It was the great surrender, for she wanted him completely, wanted his arms round her in that great wave of tenderness, a passion sweeping all else aside.

"Yes, I love you!" he said in a hoarse voice.

She lay tense in his arms, then her body seemed to melt as their lips met in that first kiss. She found herself clinging, holding him as if she would never let go, and outside the storm increased to greater fury than ever. Was it the terror of the gale? He



asked that blindly, as his lips sought hers afresh, as she clung to him like an affrighted child.

"I knew it from the first night," she whispered. "Now what becomes of all your vows of celibacy, or does it mean you really care enough to renounce bachelorhood? Brian, I am weak and want to hear it again from your lips. Say that nothing matters but your love! Mine for you is deathless."

"It means all that," he answered brokenly. "Venetia, I have fought against you like the devil, but I felt we were destined to quarrel, that we were as opposite as the poles, that I could never beat down that haughty coldness. Now the miracle has taken place and you are lying in my arms. I know if you had the wealth of the Indies I must still love you and make you mine. Idiotic the mistakes we make, isn't it, which shows how little we understand the book of Fate."

She closed his lips with a lingering kiss, then slipped from him at last with a little cry of exultation, the laugh every woman makes when she has won the man of her heart.

When Dorchester went to his room he did not undress but switched off the light and lay down on the bed, unerring instinct telling him that big events loomed ahead and that he would be wanted before dawn; that there would be no other night like it in history.

Sleep came in fitful starts. He fought desperately, but slumber came and like a tired infant he did not waken for a couple of hours. When he did it was because a loud knock sounded on the door and someone



rushed into the room. He switched on the light, and saw it was Arthur Gatacre with a pale, drawn face. He pointed skyward and at last came a coherent sentence.

"*The man from Mars!*" he gasped. "He is coming, and we can see him with our glasses. He will get here in a few minutes."

Dorchester deposited himself on the carpet and being dressed there was no need to make any fuss. The revolver was in his pocket, and he could pick up a mackintosh in the hall.

"Go ahead, I'm right behind you!" he said cheerfully. "Whether it is Donzelon or the Bank of England manager leaves me cold, but I'm going down to have a peep at him, and I guess he owes us an apology. Fancy landing here in the teeth of a storm that was never surpassed on sea or land. I bet he crashes! His old flying bus must be blown to smithereens!"

"The storm went down an hour ago," replied the millionaire as they descended the staircase, "and that proves the Meteorological Department was right. There has been a great lot of damage, with many trees blown down, and the gamekeeper's cottage has been struck by lightning but no one injured. Paul Church is on the golf-course counting the seconds until I get back, but I promised to call you when the big moment arrived."

They pushed forward through the darkness and soon the golf-course was reached. The flares were burning brightly, forming a complete square on a flat surface. It was an ideal landing spot, and about twenty Gatacre men stood round the flares, each armed with a revolver and gazing skyward. Paul



Church stood a little apart with a thin line round his lips and breathing hard with excitement.

"I have brought the erring lad," Gatacre announced. "He must have been waiting for the message because he did not take off his clothes, which proves he had some faith in us."

The scientist gave a brief nod and took his friend's arm.

"I am thinking of Donzelon," he stressed. "Arthur, contemplate that lone figure in the white plane who has flown all the way from Mars and not a soul but ourselves the wiser. These men will think, like Dorchester, he has come from Croydon or some other aerodrome, but we are privileged beyond other mortals."

Dorchester moved uneasily. There was no denying the sincerity of the scientist's voice, and it was terrible to think he should be hoaxed in this fashion.

"What direction?" he asked.

Paul Church pointed to the north-east. He shaded his eyes with his hand, for the big lamp in the tower was already focussed on that part of the heavens, a gigantic searchlight giving the novelist the idea they were searching for a Zeppelin!

"Marcus Donzelon will soon be overhead," the scientist announced in a steady voice. "We have no idea how he is going to land. He may glide down at a steep angle or adopt some form of descent not known in aviation."

Suddenly there came the sound of running feet, bursts of girlish laughter, then the sensational appearance of the three V's from Rockdene Hall. The girls had dressed hurriedly, each wearing a hooded cloak,



their feet encased in velvet slippers. Madly they had dashed from their bedrooms to the golf-course, and the Gatacre men stared at them in bewilderment. It was an embarrassing situation.

"What the devil——" Gatacre began.

Venetia laughed up in his face.

"We simply saw the flares and came to see the excitement," she explained. "What is the meaning of it, father, and why the searchlight in the tower! Who on earth are you expecting at two in the morning, and what are your men doing with all these flares?"

Dorchester grinned, for to him it seemed the richest joke in Christendom.

"It simply means we are expecting an airplane," he answered with remarkable candour. "I'm sorry we can't offer you girls a cup of coffee, but we have arranged everything but a canteen."

They stared up at the sky and followed the path of the searchlight.

"Dad, is this true?" Violet asked the scientist. "Are you really expecting a pilot from one of the aerodromes, and has it got something to do with your work in the Green Room?"

The scientist spoke in a calm voice.

"Dorchester has only told you part of it," he answered. "If you girls want the truth you can have it from my own lips. *I have communicated with Mars, and the visitor we are expecting is a man from Mars. . . . And by God, there he comes! . . . Look, don't you see him! Yes, that is his white plane with the cockpit gleaming like pure silver, and engines silent as the grave. The man from Mars!*"



## CHAPTER XIII

### WHAT THE STORM BROUGHT

DORCHESTER felt faint. He saw the calamity had happened, that Violet imagined her father had gone insane, and a moan of horror escaped her lips. While the others gazed at that curious object in the sky, a scintillating fish-like plane flying towards them, she slipped over to the novelist.

"Heavens, it's not true!" she gasped. "Mr. Dorchester, you have heard the remark Dad has just made about someone coming from Mars, and that he has communicated with that planet! It means he suffers from a delusion, doesn't it? He can't be in earnest!"

Dorchester struggled to hide the anger that engulfed him, for Venetia would receive the same shock, and he could never answer her queries.

"Have patience!" he begged. "There is something I don't understand, something that has defied analysis, but it is part of the Green Room mystery, and we will have the elucidation soon. That white plane will tell us something. There it is coming from behind that bank of clouds. Good Lord, what freakish aircraft! Perhaps the War Office is keeping it a secret, and that explains why it is flying at night!"



Violet sobbed into her handkerchief. Yes, she saw something up there like a white-plumaged bird, but was too agitated to concentrate her glance.

"Well, if that is a plane, commend me to the Air Ministry!" Venetia exclaimed. "I never saw a funnier object in my life. It looks like a huge sword-fish I saw at the Museum, but the wings are ridiculously small. I suppose that is the latest streamline effect where everything is sacrificed for speed, but why in the name of St. Christopher was such a night selected for a test experiment?"

Veronica had an uneasy sense that something was wrong, yet she endeavoured to appear normal.

"The War Office must have known about the climatic conditions in Devon," she ventured, "so that means they are trying this machine in the worst kind of weather. I never saw a plane like it in my dreams, and there is no sound of an engine. Perhaps it has shut them off in order to glide down from some terrific height."

"Give your imagination a chance," Gatacre announced in great excitement. "Paul Church has spoken the truth. *That pilot has flown from Mars!*"

Venetia turned in a flash. She was pale to the lips, for she had heard what Paul Church had told Violet, also that observation made by her own parent, and her patience was exhausted. There was something more important at stake than an advancing plane. Her father was offering her the evidence of his insanity.

"Please stop fooling us!" she begged. "Tell me, father, what pilot is flying to Rockdene Hall at this



unearthly hour, and why does he come here, of all places?"

The steel magnate gazed down into the beautiful face with a glow of tenderness, for at that instant Venetia reminded him of his dead wife. There was something mystical and ethereal about her that appertained to the world of memories. Venetia would have to be brave. There was no going back after Paul's dramatic pronouncement!

"Paul Church is neither mad nor bluffing," he answered in a firm voice. "He will soon be acclaimed as the greatest genius alive, for he has attained communication with Mars, and the man who is flying towards us is a Martian. His name is Marcus Donzelon, and he will speak perfect English. *That is the mystery of the Green Room!*"

Venetia swayed. Something ran through her like a sword and an infinite sadness touched her face. It was terrible to think her father was deluded like the mad scientist. A lump rose in her throat. She wanted to throw herself on the ground in wild grief. She must act drastically and there was no time to lose.

"Father, you must leave for the Continent at once," she declared vigorously. "You must get away from the atmosphere of the Green Room and the ghastly environment of Rockdene Hall under present conditions."

She paused, for her father was not listening. Everyone was staring up at the sky, and suddenly an astonished shout rose from the lips of the watching men. The silver plane was gliding downward, and soon they



saw its alignment with perfect clearness, yet they had never seen anything like it in their existence. It still resembled a white fish or canoe-shaped boat, but they saw no wings of any kind. Yet as it drew near the scientist perceived a fan-shaped contrivance which apparently closed when the machine was about to descend. There could be no other solution.

"What in God's name is it?" shouted one man. The Gatacre guards closed in one group and ranged themselves near their employer. There was something about the business that staggered them, and already they were sending swift glances to the white-haired scientist. Was this his invention?

"I'm looking for the pilot," Maltravers grinned. "He has slowed that machine down as if nervous about landing, but there is no sign of his blinking face." He paused in confusion and again stared at the scientist. What was this weird object bearing down on them?

"Well, that bus was never made in Bristol or any part of the British Isles," Dorchester exclaimed with emphasis, his features a study in stupefied amazement. "Neither did it ever emerge from a British aerodrome, and how the devil is it manipulated without wings?"

Suddenly the fish-like object glided down between the flares and made a perfect landing. . . . A dramatic silence followed. Where was the pilot? Everyone felt too dazed to move, then slowly that gauze-like curtain was flung back and something horrible rose on two legs from the cockpit. . . . The men gave a shout of horror and dropped back in alarm. Violet and Veronica took one glance and swooned



away in a dead faint. Venetia gripped the arm of Dorchester like a vice.

"Merciful God, what is it?" she moaned. "Brian, speak to me! Is it man or devil?"

Dorchester could frame no words. His tongue rose to the roof of his mouth. The thing standing there was ghastly in all truth. It was seven feet in height, and no human had seen anything like it in a museum or elsewhere. It was the nude figure of some animal-man—nude, save that white cloth round the lower region of the body—but the head was bald, and the skin a bright pink. Man or devil, the apparition was a Goliath in stature, yet every bone was perfectly developed. The huge arms and legs were those of a giant. . . . The men dropped further back and looked as if they were about to dash off in fright, but the calm demeanour of the scientist held them in check. . . . They gazed again at the strange visitor of the night, the denizen from the skies, and the creature gazed back with as much curiosity. The mouth had a softness as if prone to laughter. It was also an intellectual countenance, apart from the eyes, and the huge dome-shaped forehead made the face distinguished.

"Well, strike me orange——!" Maltravers began in something like a shriek, then he paused, for his employer had made a sign, and four men carried the two girls back to the Hall. Then the millionaire moved to the side of Paul Church, and the two friends stood there with white faces and perspiration on their brows. They could not utter a word.

"Wait, that is no animal," Dorchester muttered in



a dazed voice. "It means, Venetia, that your father and Paul Church have certainly brought something out of space, but don't faint like the other girls. Just remember that if this is the man from Mars, we are witnessing the greatest thing that has ever happened, and any fears about the sanity of those two men are dissipated. Here, hold tight to my arm, and don't forget there is nothing to fear." His right hand supported the half-fainting girl, and although he spoke confidently, he felt giddy with uneasiness. *Was this the man from Mars in all truth?*

Then something happened at last. It came from the lips of the devil-man, a terrible laugh ringing out on the night-air, gradually increasing in volume until it resounded all over the estate. There was something devilish about that sound, and Paul Church exchanged a mystified look with his friend. Meanwhile the Gatacre men were getting out of control, and the scientist saw at a glance they were on the point of using their revolvers.

"Don't shoot for God's sake!" he exclaimed, striding forward, and as he did so the strange creature took a magnificent leap from the plane and landed beside him.

"Are you Marcus Donzelon?" Paul Church asked in a hoarse voice. "If so, I offer you a thousand welcomes."

The strange creature laughed uproariously again, and they were compelled to wait until the giant mirth subsided. Everyone crowded a little nearer.

"Yes, I am Donzelon," answered the sky-monster in good English, "and you, I presume, are Paul Church,



the famous scientist! Your friend looks like Arthur Gatacre, the steel magnate, and I take it that funny-looking chap is Brian Dorchester, the thriller-writer. Well, I am flesh and blood, gentlemen, and I do not carry a gun. We dispensed with those uncivilised toys a thousand years ago. I may seem strange, but you have no idea how terribly ridiculous you appear to me!" He roared again with that convulsive laughter, and for the first time the Gatacre men seemed more appreciative. The monster at least could speak English, and certainly he was the most stupefying spectacle they had seen.

"Yes, I am the owner of Rockdene Hall," Gatacre announced, pushing forward, "and take my word for it you are mighty welcome. I expect you are exhausted after your terrific journey from Mars. We have rooms specially prepared for you, and you may be inclined for something to eat. Your plane will be guarded by my men, and if you come with me I will attend to your comfort!"

Venetia felt she was living through a nightmare, and Dorchester pinched himself to make certain he was awake. The Gatacre men conversed audibly amongst themselves and it was significant they still clutched their revolvers. Most of them were sick with horror, and they gazed at their employer with anxiety. Was this monstrosity just a freak in disguise, and what was the meaning of that talk about Mars! The whole business was incomprehensible to their stupefied minds!

"One moment!" intervened the scientist. "Arthur, I had better speak to the men. They are bewildered by what has happened, and they are not sure whether



Donzelon is hostile or otherwise. I think we can dispense with their services on the golf-course, but I take it the grounds will be patrolled as usual."

"Go ahead!" assented the steel magnate. "My men will see your instructions are obeyed. Secrécy is still imperative."

The men gathered round the white-haired scientist, but they still kept a furtive eye on the monster from the clouds. They knew the storm had sent them a monstrosity in human shape and most of their nerves were on edge.

"Gentlemen, I wish to reassure you about our visitor from the sky," Paul Church announced. "We are privileged spectators of the greatest event in history, for the strange being beside you has flown from the planet Mars, and you will read all about this stupendous event in a few days. I ask you to have patience and to keep silent about what has occurred. Meanwhile, you are speculating as to what part I played in this drama. It was a very minor one in comparison with the flight from Mars to this world, but it explains the mystery of the Green Room. If you want the truth, I have got into wireless communication with Mars, and I have also been able to transmit conversational talk to that planet. It was just a matter of attuning my wireless set to a correct wave-length, and after contact was established I heard to my great surprise that a Martian would venture on a flight through the stratosphere to this world. *That stupendous, death-defying journey has been accomplished, and Marcus Donzelon, the man from Mars, stands before you.*"



A loud murmur of vast excitement rose from every throat, and everyone pressed forward to the giant figure of the Martian. Most of the men were still incredulous, and a good number of them thought the scientist had lost his sanity. Being sturdy Devon folk they demanded a more rational explanation of the events of the night. As for Venetia, she was white to the lips and her strength was almost exhausted. She could not look at the monster, but something tugged at her brain that Paul Church might be right, that the strange creature had really flown from some other sphere, and she was appalled by the knowledge. Once Donzelon stared at her and she almost swooned. She crept behind Dorchester and shivered as if with ague.

"I am sorry you are all so incredulous," Paul Church continued. "I presume that is natural, but you will soon find I have spoken the truth, and that we have actually witnessed the end of a flight from Mars. We have reached an epoch in science. Marcus Donzelon, the first Martian to land on this world, will be examined by leading scientists and expert medicos, and, as I have stated, it will soon be affirmed that he is a Martian. Until that is confirmed, you must carry on, gentlemen. We rely on you for your co-operation in keeping this mighty event a secret, and you know the penalty if that order is disobeyed. Six of your men will be required to look after this machine, Maltravers. It must not be touched by anyone, and a special shed will be built for it immediately. Later we will allow you a full inspection of it for yourselves."

The discipline of the men was amazing. Maltravers



rattled out a sharp order and the Gatacre guards returned to their duties on the estate, leaving six men to look after the strange plane on the golf-course, but they all took one prolonged glance at that terrible figure of the Martian. Most of them shivered at the sight. The memory of that monster would haunt their imagination all their lives.

"Well, Donzelon," observed Dorchester, pushing his way nearer with the half-fainting Venetia at his side, "I want to see you at closer quarters in order to convince myself that you are flesh-and-blood realism. I hope you will excuse my rudeness, but you are honestly the funniest cove I have met since reading Edgar Allen Poe and *The Arabian Nights*. You have given us all a terrific surprise, and my first job will be to apologise to that chap Jephthah when I speak to him on the super-radio. I don't know what to say about your dress-suit. We are rather conservative in this part of the universe, and we are hardly accustomed to pilots arriving at two in the morning attired only in bathing costume."

He kept talking to maintain his nerves, for he felt a sinking feeling at the legs, and he was not re-assured when the Martian broke into another ear-splitting laugh that resounded all over the estate. Venetia held back like a frightened child, and even to glance at this enigma made her sick. She wanted to scream and shout, but no words could escape her lips.

"I accept your apology," Donzelon said at length. "Why not introduce me to your lady-friend?"

Dorchester was startled, for the words might have come from a habitué of Bond Street. Venetia dared



to lift her eyes and found the terrible monster was staring at her with those dark orbs. Her heart almost failed at the sight. Heavens, was there ever such a terrifying object!

"Why not?" answered the novelist. "Venetia, this is an old friend of the family who has just dropped in from the clouds, but he appears to have forgotten that beloved school tie. He calls himself Marcus Donzelon and possibly Mussolini will make him a prince. You will notice his scanty clothing, but he finds it rather warm in Mars, and he appears to be under the delusion that we are living close to the equatorial zone. This, my noble Marcus, is Miss Gatacre, daughter of the famous steel magnate, and the young lady I hope to marry."

Donzelon executed a formal bow—one that could not have been surpassed in a Mayfair drawing-room—and his manner, when he spoke, was almost deferential.

"I am really pleased to meet you, Miss Gatacre," he replied in a deep voice. "I also ask forgiveness if I have caused one single nervous tremor, but it is hardly my fault if the Creator turns us out on Mars to a different pattern. Martians maintain a state of nudity, with the exception of the loin-cloth, which is the last link with an ancient susceptibility."

Paul Church and the millionaire joined in the laughter that followed, but Gatacre noticed the novelist maintained a critical silence.

"Take me back to the Hall," Venetia whispered to Dorchester. "I cannot bear this longer, and if I don't get away I think I shall go mad." However,



she braved herself for a supreme effort, and faced the Martian, who was staring down with daring admiration in his terrible gaze. "Marcus Donzelon, you have given us all a terrible fright, but it is a relief to know you are human and can speak English. We did not expect anything so awe-inspiring at two in the morning, so you can imagine the shock we have received. If you accept a hint offered in kindness, perhaps if you wore some conventional clothes, it might ease the situation a good deal. I am wishing you good night, but I pray to heaven I don't dream about you."



## CHAPTER XIV

### GATACRE GETS AN IDEA

“**F**OR heaven’s sake, take a peep!” Gatacre exclaimed, dragging the scientist to the Martian plane. “Look at that steering arrangement and those gadgets of mystery! Donzelon, you must excuse us behaving like schoolboys, but we are overwhelmed with wonder, and you will have to explain everything. I see the wings open and shut like a lady’s fan, which means a new device for our designers. At what height did you shut off the engines?”

“About thirty thousand,” Donzelon replied. “We drew up a chart before I left Mars, so it was just a matter of steering by compass and those instruments. I bet you never saw anything like those dual-engines, but the details would require a lengthy talk, and I see you are all tired. You say, Mr. Gatacre, you have special rooms for me. That will be awkward, for we Martians do not sleep under roofs. We abolished that habit four thousand years ago, and you will dispense with it when you know your own bodies. We find it healthier to bask under a canopy of sky, with nothing above but the blue dome of the heavens, and if it happens to rain we use tarpaulin sheets. I have two at the bottom of that cockpit, but generations of skin exposure have made us immune from cold.”



The scientist gave a discreet nod, for he was drinking in every word, and was more interested than the Martian imagined. What wonderful talks they would have, and what data he would obtain on scientific subjects! Perhaps Donzelon had a cure for cancer; perhaps he knew all about disease, death, life; perhaps he could explain the multi-coloured rays of the spectrum and the infinity of space? Yes, they would have a long chat on the stars. Donzelon would know a lot about astronomy, how the planets were governed, and how many were populated. This might mean the beginning of a long chain of inter-planetary communication. He swayed dizzily at the engulfing thought.

"No, I am not tired," he corrected. "I confess you have alarmed me, Donzelon, for I am only human, and you are not what I expected. I am picturing what Mars must be like. As we are going to be friends, we must have long talks, and we will compare notes on many subjects. As regards sleeping arrangements, you will only be with us three weeks, so perhaps you can reconcile yourself to our environment. That reminds me, I must notify Jephthah of your safe arrival. I had a breakdown in my radio caused by that thunderstorm but I managed to adjust it before you arrived. We were worrying about your safety. Did you hit the storm zone?"

The Martian gave a careless shrug. He stood with folded arms, his naked body glistening in the moonlight, a splendid Titian-like figure, full-chested and powerful, and in perfect condition.

"Yes, I touched the fringe of it," he confessed, "but there was no discomfort. My 'M' plane has



passed through worse gales. We have heavy storms on the northern side of Mars, and that is the region of my air station. You see, our planes must pass a test, and unless we can fly in the worst possible weather, no pilot gets his ticket and the plane is disqualified."

They moved in the direction of the Hall and the Gatacre men stared after them. They still imagined they were passing through a nightmare and believed the sky-monster part of their indigestion. They tried to convince each other it was a huge joke, a special "bluff" that would be explained in the morning.

"Are you a good sleeper?" Gatacre asked.

"Yes, but we never sleep longer than four hours. Martians regard life spent in slumber a hideous crime, so four hours are sufficient. That is why we live in the open air." He was walking like a denizen of the jungle, grotesque in appearance, and even the stride was tiger-like.

"Sorry to have rushed off in that fashion," Dorchester announced, meeting them on the terrace, "but Venetia is in safe hands and has quite recovered. Now what is the programme? I suggest we go into the Green Room and have a chat. There can be no sleep for anyone to-night, and we are all dying to ask questions. Let us stay up and see the dawn."

"The Green Room?" repeated Donzelon. "That sounds mysterious!"

The novelist sniffed.

"Allow me to inform you," he answered, "that the Green Room is guarded day and night. There



is no charge for admission but I had to give a special oath of secrecy before I got inside. You see, Paul Church has installed his super-radio there."

"Lead me to it," Donzelon grinned. "I must send Jephthah a message at once, then you can ask as many queries as you like, but don't blame me if the answers are not satisfactory."

Paul Church and the millionaire conferred in a low tone.

"Dorchester is right," the steel magnate exclaimed. "There is no sense in retiring for another hour, Donzelon, so we will make our way to the Green Room, have something to eat, and continue that little chat about Mars. Paul Church will contact with your planet at once. He has promised to send a message about your arrival, and I expect your people are anxious to learn about the triumph of your great flight. It might be interesting to read a Martian newspaper to-morrow."

They passed along the terrace, mounted the white steps, and when the sky-monster entered Rockdene Hall a butler collapsed on the floor like a dead man. Two other servants gave a shout of terror and bolted for life. A maid ran screaming as if pursued by demons.

"Bad management," Paul Church apologised. "We should have thought of this in advance, Donzelon, and I am dreadfully sorry. We had no idea you would turn out such an unique personality, and even I still suffer from shock. I'm dazed to think of what will happen when you reach London and Paris. As Dorchester might remark, if there is anyone in



Whitehall suffering from delirium tremens you are going to be the limit."

The sky-monster raised a laugh that could be heard from one end of the Hall to the other, and Dorchester shivered in his boots. He would have preferred a sea-lion or walrus, for one knew where one stood with those animals, but this Martian was the final word in horror.

"Here we are!" The millionaire opened the Green Room door with his special key, and the scientist pulled aside the green curtain exposing the super-radio to view. Donzelon took a critical glance and hurried forward. He saw the details had been worked out to Martian design so he was familiar with the mechanism. The red lamp glowed in a few minutes, and soon Jephthah's voice came over the ether:

"Mars speaking. Waiting on news of Donzelon. Jephthah speaking to Paul Church. Has Donzelon reached you? Our editors are waiting on news and the Grand Vizier is at my elbow. We are on the tip-toe of excitement."

The scientist leaned forward in that breathless moment, and directed the Martian to the transmitter. The huge form towered over the machine. It was a fearsome sight, and the three men gazed at him spellbound.

"What's all the fuss about, Jephthah?" asked Donzelon in a cool tone. "Don't you recognise the voice. Yes, Donzelon. Of course I've done it!" He rattled off several long sentences in the Martian language, then sent the wild laugh across the ether. The effect was instantaneous, for there came the



sound of a tumultuous burst of cheering, then peal after peal of bells. Donzelon stood as if carved in bronze, and he remained in that rigid attitude until the chime finished.

"Good old Donzelon!" came Jephthah's voice. "Mars sends heartiest greetings and thanks. The Grand Vizier will speak."

Again Donzelon sprang to that rigid attitude, gazing at the instrument as if at some god, and a subtle emotion crossed his face. He was being addressed by the greatest man on the Martian planet.

"My son, we are overjoyed to hear the good news," came the voice, "and to know you reached your destination in safety. You have brought honour and glory to Mars, countless radios have listened to your voice, and millions of hearts have rejoiced. We await your return in three weeks; on you will be conferred the highest order in this planet, and you will be made Vice-Commander of the Air Corps. Words cannot express our admiration of your feat, for no greater flight has been accomplished in history. Convey our greetings to the inhabitants of your new world and our special commendation to Paul Church, the famous scientist."

The Martian was disturbed. He seemed overawed by the sound of that majestic voice.

"Most noble Vizier," he replied in deep-throated tones, "I crave no reward for what I have done for Mars. The journey through the stratosphere was the most thrilling I have experienced, and I hope my flight to the next planet will be equally victorious. I have been received with the warmest welcome, and



my special report will reach you in a few days. I hope to send you items of vast interest. Please convey my kindest regards to all Martians. It is good to know I have earned your approval."

The red lamp dimmed, a sign that the Grand Vizier had finished. Donzelon stood for a moment gazing into space. Had a fit of isolation seized him? Was he oppressed by the fact that he was a monster in an unknown world? He subsided heavily on a chair and his head sank forward.

Moving to a window recess, the millionaire opened a secret panel and produced wine and glasses. After pressing a bell a Gatacre guard appeared with a large tray which he placed on the table and hurriedly withdrew. It contained choice viands of every kind, cold chicken, asparagus, fruit, salad, Homburg cigars, and hot coffee.

They seated themselves before that ideal repast, and Donzelon rubbed his hands with satisfaction. His skin glowed a brightish pink and the dark eyes had a peculiar intensity. Dorchester was glad when the wine was poured out and he drank three glasses at single gulps. He felt he would go mad if he gazed long at that monstrosity from the clouds. It was like a scene from a ghastly film and he was one of the actors!

"Donzelon, we drink to your success!" Gatacre announced in a steady voice. "Whether your stay be lengthy or otherwise you have achieved the greatest air flight in the history of the race, and we greet you as ambassador from Mars. We honour you as a super-creature. My country will honour you to a great



extent, but you must accept the hospitality of Rockdene Hall, and everything will be done to make your visit a memorable one. You will be the admiration of our Air Force, and pilots from five continents will rush to greet you. That means you are going to be mighty busy for three weeks."

They drank accordingly, and Donzelon sat with a smile on his face. He reached for the bottle and drank deeply, then forgot everything but the chicken and choice viands. It was a splendid repast, and Dorchester considered Donzelon's stomach worth a fortune; he was a walking advertisement. At length he pushed back his chair and sighed with satisfaction.

"No wine like that on Mars," he announced with emphasis. "That chicken was also delicious, Gatacre, and I owe you a thousand thanks. Flying through stratosphere makes one ravenous, so when I make my return journey you must put a few bottles of wine in my case. Now what do you gentlemen wish to talk about? I am ready for questions, so if you are not in a hurry for bed we can amuse ourselves."

The millionaire pushed across the cigarettes, but the Martian shook his head.

"We stopped that nonsense three thousand years ago," he declared vigorously. "We found smoking had a devastating effect on our physique, deadened the brain, and made the liver sluggish. Finally, our Grand Vizier promulgated a decree against it, and all the tobacco firms went into bankruptcy. The habit has died a natural death."

The others were not impressed with that philosophy, for they lit up at once.



"Say, I'm writing a book about you!" Dorchester announced. "Gatacre invited me here for that purpose, so that means your replies to my queries may be published. I hope you don't mind. I am wondering how much you Martians picked up on the ether concerning this world. You have mastered our language, but then you have superlative brains, and I expect you know forty dialects. What about music? Could you tell me the name of any song we have popularised so that I may realise this is not a dream."

The sky-monster chuckled.

"What about 'Danny Boy', 'The Marsellaise', and 'Killarney'?" he replied. "That 'Londonderry Air' always brings the tears to the eyes of our Grand Vizier and it takes a lot to make him sentimental. We have a sneaking affection for 'Killarney' when it is sung by an Irishman named Cavan O'Connor with a good tenor voice."

"What about our world war?" hazarded the scientist. "Surely you know about the Armageddon of 1914?"

The Martian nodded and something sinister entered the dark eyes. He threw a reminiscent gaze into the past and when he spoke his voice was deep-throated.

"Yes, I can tell you plenty about August, 1914," he affirmed. "That was a red-letter date in your calendar. Your Lloyd George announced in the House of Commons that a three days' Bank Holiday would be held, and we picked up messages from British war-ships. Your European crisis commenced with the assassination of a minor royalty and his wife at Serajevo. Russia sided with Serbia and Germany fell into line with Austria. Russia was allied to France,



which meant another Franco-German war of 1870 was threatened. We smiled when we picked up a speech by the Kaiser. 'This is a dark day and hour for Germany,' he declared. 'The sword is forced into our hands'!"

"Yes, and Belgium refused to be dragooned!" Gatacre prompted.

"Correct, and afterwards their invasion by field-grey hordes. Your Foreign Secretary announced that *the lamps were going out, one by one, all over Europe, and that few would live to see them lit again in their lifetime*. Your London Times announced that Europe would be the scene of the most terrible war since the fall of the Roman Empire, and from that second your British Navy was on guard. Grey was right in his prophecy. The lamps of Europe went out that night with a vengeance, and many parts of this earth are still in darkness. You know what followed. The deathless stand of your contemptibles, the storming of the Dardanelles, the retreat from Mons, the immortal defence of Verdun, the battle of the Marne, the slaughter of the Somme, the dreaded Hindenburg Line, Hill 60, the gallantry of Australians, Trones Wood, Delville Wood, Lens, Loos, your dauntless Canadians, the agony of Passchendaele——"

"Stop, for God's sake," Gatacre groaned, covering his face with his hands. His shoulders heaved and a great sob escaped his lips. The memory of it came back with a rush and before his mind marched that mighty host of ten million lives lost in the Great War. Boots, boots, boots! . . . The tramp of boots, boots, boots!



"Those two men were in the thick of it," Dorchester explained with a significant shrug. "I was a youngster when the blow fell, but you have spoken the truth, Donzelon. Are there many more at home like you?"

The Martian grinned, then controlled himself. He saw that Gatacre was passing through deep waters.

"We have trained our minds," he answered, "and we profit by the lessons of experience. Is Mars not the god of war? We have had terrible fighting on our planet, and we have counted our dead not by the million but by the hundred million. War almost wiped out Martian civilisation. Three thousand years ago, we were on the verge of becoming a dead world owing to the massacres of war and the terrible economic privation that followed. NEVER AGAIN is the vow of every Martian. Unless you make a similar resolve, the lights of your world will go out never to be re-lit!"

"We have still a Hindenburg Line!" Paul Church observed. "The men on opposite sides are not friends, and again we see the fires of an Armageddon furnace. We are building armaments, signing treaties, rushing—to God knows what!"

The Martian's right hand clenched, and something entered his face which sent a shiver down Dorchester's spine.

"Yes," he assented, "we have contacted with those things. Our aerals pick up most events. We know Hitler is All-Highest in Germany, that Mussolini is the most formidable statesman in Europe. It may be the parting of the ways, the beginning of another fight for so-called national supremacy. You should



read what is written in the stars before you travel to Hades in that fashion."

Gatacre nodded.

"There are times," he intervened, "when it seems inevitable for history to repeat itself. Our Versailles Treaty solved nothing. Like other treaties made at the conclusion of a dictated armistice it was foredoomed at the beginning. We have all the neurosis of Fear because we have extended our frontier from the white chalk cliffs of Dover to the beautiful Rhine. Yet, when you consider everything, there are no frontiers. No bombing-plane will pause at an air frontier—neutral or otherwise—once war is declared."

Donzelon crashed his fist on the table.

"War is madness!" he shouted. "Gatacre, you must make up your mind, once and for all time, to finish with war. Laugh it out of existence, and the more you laugh at the idea of war the further it will recede. Owing to the cost, the victors turn out to be the vanquished, and even although you win you lose in the end for you have turned the world into a hell and there is no glory in sticking a man with a bayonet. Take those boys on the Continent all dressed up and no place to go; they strut about in military uniforms and even learn the goosestep. They cannot smile. They hear nothing but the raucous voice of a sergeant and do nothing but march and drill. What a performance for civilised beings!"

The scientist exchanged a significant glance with his friend.

"How have you solved it?" Dorchester asked.



"Mars is a world-state," Donzelon answered promptly, "and it attained that position because it saw the wisdom of solidarity. That is why H. G. Wells is your cleverest Englishman. He is more than an idealist, and his concept of a world-confederacy is perfectly logical. We have done it as the only solution to the problem of distribution and the fetish of nationalism. Good heavens, Church has fallen asleep!"

It was true. The scientist had suddenly dropped forward with both arms on the table and a glance affirmed that he had succumbed to exhaustion.



## CHAPTER XV

### A NIGHT OF HORROR

DORCHESTER left the Green Room fifteen minutes later, his intention being to mount the staircase leading to his rooms, but he noticed a light burning in the smaller library, and opening the door he drew back in surprise for a pitiful scene confronted him. The three figures of the girls were huddled up near the fire, and he realised the terror written on their faces.

"Well, do you imagine we are sleeping with that monster abroad?" Venetia queried in the calmest voice she could muster. "If we do go to bed before dawn—and nothing is more unlikely—Violet and Veronica will come into my room with the doors heavily barred, and if you can loan us your revolver it will be a great favour indeed. We are taking no chances with that brute. We don't care whether Donzelon has come from Mars, the Moon, or Hades—we believe it is Hades—but he has ruined our beauty sleep. We object to his bathing-costume. It is not respectable, and that terrible figure gives us the creeps. We will keep guard until the morning, and if you want the truth, we allowed you into this library because we recognised your footsteps, but that door has been locked up to the present."



Dorchester grinned then subsided heavily on the nearest chair. He was really tired, but he knew sleep would not touch his eyes that night, and he might as well talk to the girls. Besides, he could see they were terrified from their blanched faces. That nervous terror, coming as a climax to all they had endured, was sufficient to give them a breakdown. Venetia looked like a ghost. He saw the terror in the blue eyes, and he wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her like a sick child, but felt shy before the others. Did they know what had happened? He felt certain the news was out, for they watched him keenly.

"I don't blame you," he replied, "and if my revolver is any comfort have that with pleasure. I am in the same state, for I decided to wait until the dawn arrived, but I was toddling up to my room when I saw the light in the library, and I thought a burglar might have broken through the cordon of men on the estate. That seemed too rich a joke. I am dead sorry for you girls. You really have passed through enough for one evening, and at least you ought to have rest. Donzelon has the appearance of a super-monster, yet so long as he remains here I don't think he would go off the deep end. I know he has peculiar ideas about your sex, for he made that confession himself, so I am dropping you a hint. He will be watched night and day more carefully than you think, so there is not the slightest reason to feel worried!"

"Where is he now?" Veronica asked in a tense whisper.

"He has been conducted to his rooms," Dorchester laughed. "Mr. Gatacre assigned him a suite in the



left wing, so as you are all berthed in the right wing there is not much sense in getting into a panic. I know it's a terrible business. We have seen nothing like this man-animal on sea or land, and heaven forbid that he has brothers or sisters. However, he seems to be the climax to the Green Room, and Paul Church assures us he comes from Mars. That seems incredible, yet it is one of those improbable things we must accept until someone proves the whole thing a hoax. Donzelon is flesh and blood, and as he is too big a reality to be ignored we must make the best of things for the present."

"Has Dad retired?" Violet asked feverishly. She was shaking with fright, and had not fully recovered from the fainting attack. It was pitiful to watch that white, strained face.

"Yes, he has gone to bed," Dorchester replied. "We were all having a chat in the Green Room when your father dropped asleep in the middle of everything. He was beat to the world. Why not follow his example and get some rest, Miss Church? Two armed guards are patrolling the passages between the wings, so all three of you blot this horror from your minds and get to sleep. If there is any shooting going I am in need of practice, so let me keep the revolver and I will stay awake till dawn."

Venetia shuddered and crept closer to the other girls.

"Brian, I am surprised at you," she scoffed. "Donzelon would make mincemeat of a dozen Buckingham Palace sentries if they barred his path, and the way he looked at me I will never forget.



Frankly, we are terrified of this horrible creature who has dropped from the clouds, and we will get no peace until he departs. How long will he pollute the place?"

"Three weeks," Dorchester answered with a chuckle.

"Heavens, must we endure the sight of him all that time! What do they intend to do with him, and why has he come here? If he is a Martian why didn't he fly to the Air Ministry and create a first-class sensation in Whitehall? Why drive us insane at the sight of him. Brian, what in heaven's name is the secret of the Green Room?"

Dorchester sighed.

"Simply that Paul Church, after experimenting for months, has contacted with Mars. After endless trials with the ether, he hit on the wave-length that communicated with that planet, and that is all there is to it. I assure you there is nothing like that super-radio on earth, and to-morrow you will be privileged to inspect it for yourselves. It has a multitude of lamps with a thousand gadgets and a special transmitter which sends a message back to Mars. Paul Church has proved himself the greatest genius of wireless science!"

"A super-radio!" Violet repeated. "Is that what Dad invented? Then he is not insane as we imagined, we will not have to have him examined, and that suspicion is removed from your minds. Oh, I feel so thankful. Mars, of course, is a different proposition, and the visit of that monster has complicated things. Veronica, I am dying to see that super-radio, so without fail we will examine it to-morrow. We are bound



to hear everything from Dad now that the secret is out!"

"Perhaps not so much as you think," Veronica cautioned; "but I confess the Green Room has played on our nerves and I am just as curious as you, Violet. I commenced to think it haunted, and when they placed an armed guard there I imagined someone was imprisoned in that dreadful place."

"What kind of a radio?" Venetia queried in vast astonishment. "How is it different to any other wireless set, and why pick on Mars? Why not Jupiter, Saturn, or Venus?"

"I would have selected the last-named," Dorchester grinned. "But don't blame me if I can't find the answers. The technical details of that machine are beyond me to explain. It astounded me from the first, and it will give you the same shock. It has a tremendous number of valves and a special signal lamp glowing red when contact is established with the Martian wave-length. It gave me the creeps when I first heard that Martian voice on the ether. It is vastly different to that of any B.B.C. or foreign announcer and the transmission is clever."

"Go on, please!" Violet coaxed in breathless excitement, the colour returning to the lovely face, the dark eyes shining with a more healthy light. Her father was normal and they were acclaiming him a genius. She knew they would discover that in the end.

"Well," Dorchester continued, lighting a cigarette, "I have no idea how your parent discovered that new wave-length, Miss Church, but whether accidental



or deliberate as the result of some stupendous formula in mathematics, Paul Church has definitely communicated with some other sphere. He claims it to be Mars, and none of us dare contradict him. We have also this strange flesh-and-blood specimen that dropped from the skies in a spectral plane, so there must be some logical base to the whole problem."

"We will wait and hear the views of the experts," Venetia chimed in with a forced smile. "Go ahead, Brian, you make me goofy with excitement."

The novelist passed them his cigarette case and apologised for his carelessness.

"You are going to sit up," he predicted, "when you hear the music that super-radio produced. It was the divinest harmony I ever heard. It seemed at first like a chorus of heavenly voices, although I have never been further north than Newcastle, then came an orchestral selection that convinced me we had passed outside the orbit of the B.B.C. or any of the foreign stations. I realised we had contacted with a realm about which we knew nothing."

Venetia laughed in spite of her fears.

"I am glad to hear there is something interesting in the Green Room," she replied, "and if we wish to forget the horror in the left wing we had better listen-in to that Martian music. Brian, these girls are simply dying to hear the glad tidings. Won't you let them share our big secret?"

Dorchester struggled to his feet and Venetia slipped to his side.

"Ladies," the novelist announced, "unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I think it right for you



to know that Miss Venetia Gatacre, only daughter of the famous steel magnate, has honoured me with her promise to become my wife, and I therefore place myself at the mercy of the Court fearing anything I may add on my own behalf may be used in evidence against me!"

"You silly boy!" Venetia whispered and kissed him on the lips.

That was the signal for the other girls to jump to their feet and shower congratulations. It never occurred to them that a sensational romance of this kind would happen at Rockdene Hall, and for the moment they were breathless with excitement.

"You wicked pair!" Violet exclaimed. "Fancy perpetrating a plot of this kind behind our back. Still, it is a beastly shame, Mr. Dorchester, for now you won't be able to flirt with Veronica or myself and if you even attempt to kiss one of us Venetia will sue us for damages."

"Never mind," Veronica consoled with a gay laugh, "there is still the man from Mars, and if the worst happens I can propose to my employer next Leap Year. After all, he is a widower, Venetia, and they tell me that men of his age are adorable. How would you fancy me in the role of mamma?"

"I should hate it," Venetia declared vigorously. "Hush, here is someone coming. Goodness, father, what on earth brought you downstairs?"

The millionaire entered wearing the brown suit he had on the golf-course, but his face was pale and strained. There was no hiding his anxiety.

"My dear girls, I am not deaf," he answered. "When



I heard laughing and voices I guessed that Dorchester was keeping you out of bed. Now what is the meaning of it, Venetia? Why are you not all in your rooms getting your beauty sleep, and how can you face the tremendous events ahead if you do not get rest? Veronica, I am surprised at you of all people. I thought you would have shown the others a good example. Dorchester, why have you not ordered these young ladies to bed?"

The novelist grinned like a schoolboy for there was something about the situation that amused him vastly. He had no idea he was going to spend such a riotous time at Rockdene Hall when he accepted that dramatic invitation in the Torquay train. Why, he would not have missed this for anything. Besides, he had won the girl of his dreams!

"I am helpless," he replied. "I happened to see a light burning in this room, Mr. Gatacre, and here is the result of my investigation. You can see I have caught the miscreants. Yet I hardly imagine they can be blamed. If you expect these girls to sleep after what has occurred to-night or after that thunderstorm I must write you down an optimist. When I entered they were paralysed with fright. If you can coax them to go to their rooms you will accomplish something like a miracle. Being human I give the job up in despair."

The girls exchanged a glance.

"Brian has told you the truth, father!" Venetia announced calmly. "We had no idea we would be visited by a monster of that kind, and we have resolved to sit here until the dawn. We know the end will



come if Donzelon takes it into his head to visit the right wing, and the mere fact you have allotted him rooms on the other side of the Hall would not matter a jot if he started knocking down your guards like ninepins. I tell you he has the strength of twenty men. Did you not see his arms? Why, he must weigh eighteen stone! I never saw such a powerful creature in my life!"

The millionaire patted her shoulder, realised there was logic in her words, and saw the need for compromise.

"I admit Donzelon is a problem," he confessed, "yet everything points to the fact that he should act the gentleman. We cannot teach the Martians. They know everything about culture, and while they may have a different philosophy to our own they are a vastly intelligent people, and Donzelon has been sent as their representative. We can communicate with his rulers. If he blundered on this planet he would receive a terrible punishment when he returned to Mars. He confessed that himself, so he will hardly play the fool. What makes you think he would harm you?"

The shudder from Venetia was significant.

"I am not blind!" she retorted. "I saw the way Donzelon regarded me on the golf-course, and I interpreted his philosophy to my satisfaction. He is a beast of the super-kind who would not pause at murder. Violet and Veronica have formed the same opinion, so no wonder we feel frightened. We take no chances with a Zoo monster."

The millionaire looked inexpressibly shocked.



"When you talk like that, Venetia," he said reprovingly, "it shows you are a victim of imagination and nerves. Donzelon is my guest, and is the greatest air-ace on the Martian planet. He has flown thousands of miles through the stratosphere from Mars on the most epoch-making flight the world has witnessed, and we have to treat him with all the kindness at our command. He is neither beast nor monster. I admit he has an extraordinary personality because he is made different to the rest of us, but why express abhorrence because his skin is pink? He has certain attributes we do not possess, and we have never seen anything like him in our lives. It was inevitable he should frighten us, but we have given him the same shock. We must accept him as a Martian and make the best of things while he remains at Rockdene Hall."

"Why have the brute here at all?" Venetia asked desperately. "Why not billet him in a London hotel or deposit him at Whipsnade for examination by the experts? You could make a fortune with a commercial proposition of that kind. What proof have we that he is a Martian? He may be a freak of some kind, but we have no evidence that he flew further than the north of Scotland."

"Perhaps you imagine he is the Loch Ness horror!" suggested the steel magnate with some annoyance. "Venetia, you must think of everything Paul Church has accomplished. He is the greatest genius of the age, and you will be astounded at the super-radio he has created. We had no idea anything so terrible would drop from the skies, or you would never have



been allowed on the golf-course without a warning of some kind."

There was no hiding the bewilderment on Venetia's face. She left Dorchester and stepped to her parent with a quick movement.

"But we don't understand," she continued in a resolute voice. "What do you intend to do with this monster who has dropped from the clouds? Is he to be exhibited by the Museum authorities? Surely you are not proposing to deal with him as a human being? He is going to be a source of potential danger, a constant menace to our peace of mind, and you can never treat him as a rational creature. I don't care how much he is civilised or whether he has come from Mars or some other part of the universe. We believe he is a man-devil. We are convinced he belongs to the jungle, and you ought to send immediately for the Torquay police!"

"Rot!" interposed her parent. "My dear girl, are you a complete ignoramus? Does scientific research represent nothing to your mind? Can you not imagine what Donzelon will mean to the experts of the age, and how Paul Church will be congratulated on his vast achievement of inter-planetary communication? Why should I tell you my plans or take you into confidence about anything? If you want a few details, I must make certain that the Martian wave-length is secured by our Government, which means we have a priority claim on aerial communication with the Martian planet, and Donzelon has been sent to complete the contract. We must disregard everything concerning his physical appearance recognising that



the Creator is working out some different Design on the Martian plane, and we must accept Donzelon as we are compelled to recognise the brontosaurus of a past age. He is a flesh-and-blood reality, and we must consider ourselves honoured by his visit."

"Yes, and for further particulars see casualty list," Dorchester observed.

The millionaire turned in a flash.

"Just why that remark?"

"Because the Martian may possess supernatural powers about which we know nothing and in that case Venetia would be right in her forecast. I predict trouble ahead. I have an idea Donzelon will let you down by performing some terrible act of destruction and we will all regret the night he landed on the golf-course."

The steel magnate gave a jerky laugh.

"What do you mean by talking in that fashion?" he groaned. "I might have known, Dorchester, you would be afflicted with imagination, but never dreamt you would drivel like a schoolboy. What harm can the Martian do? He will be watched night and day and there will always be men at hand with revolvers. We take no risks where he is concerned, and in three weeks he will return to his own planet. Why raise an objection to Rockdene Hall? This is only his first world-flight, but next time he may visit Germany or America. He deserves great honour in England, and two continents will soon acknowledge that fact."

Dorchester made no reply. That was due to the sudden effort he made at self-restraint, for it recurred to him that Donzelon was already guilty of two



murders, and he wondered what effect that knowledge would have on the girls? The Martian, a murderer, had been pardoned for his crimes by the peculiar laws of his planet, but in the eyes of this world he should have paid the penalty of his deeds.

"What suite have you given him?" Venetia asked satirically.

"No. 13 in the left wing," replied her parent. "He has been apportioned the French rooms—those looking out on the terrace—and it took all our persuasion to make him enter. He feels a stranger in a strange land. He has always been used to a canopy of sky with nothing on his face but the winds of heaven, and frankly I have not the foggiest notion how he is going to sleep on that bed. The whole contraption seemed odd, and it was laughable to watch his antics. He thought at first it was some kind of man-trap with all kinds of mechanical devices, and I had to assure him it was perfectly harmless, then he flung all the clothes on the floor. He said they were unnecessary, but he kept two pillows for his head. He sleeps a maximum of four hours, so he ought to be down in good time for breakfast."

"Yes, it will be interesting when he enters the dining-room," Violet laughed. "Mr. Gatacre, I have resolved to show the others a good example, so I have decided to go to bed and will sleep in my own room."

Suddenly a knock sounded on the door and they all exchanged glances of apprehension. Who was coming? Was it Donzelon, the man-devil? With one accord the girls clustered round the men with a sickening sense of fear.



"Don't open, for God's sake," Veronica sobbed. "Mr. Gatacre, I can't bear it. I will go raving mad if ever I see him again!"

The door opened in spectral fashion, but the figure who stood there was a human being like themselves. It was Fenton, one of the guards who patrolled the intervening passage between the wings, and his face was ghastly white. His lips moved, but no sound came.

"What the devil is it?" asked the steel magnate. "Fenton, why do you stare in that fashion? Has a murder been committed or have you seen a ghost?"

"The monster has escaped!" the man exclaimed hoarsely. "Maltravers and Scott are unconscious. There was an awful struggle, but he has the strength of forty men, sir, and after knocking us all down he dropped from the window on to the terrace. He said he was going to sleep in the woods!"



## CHAPTER XVI

### DAWN AND WHAT FOLLOWED

“**F**OR God’s sake, come at once, sir! We ought to send for the police. We never saw anything like it in our lives, and the men are stricken with terror!” It was Fenton who shouted the sensational words, and all the time he hammered on the door like a man pursued by a thousand devils.

“What the blazes is it?” asked Dorchester in a furious temper, still half-dazed for want of sleep, but taking a flying leap from bed. He had merely taken off his coat and pulled the clothes over him, for he had a notion he would be disturbed, and in that forecast he was correct.

“It’s that jungle-brute, sir,” Fenton exclaimed, dashing into the room with a white face. “The creature took a wood-axe from one of the men, and he’s knocking down trees by the dozen. Come across and look, sir. You can see him from this window. He has thirty of our men round him, and Mr. Paul Church thinks it ought to be filmed, but the rest of us think that man-devil should be shot.”

Dorchester rushed across to the window and saw the most amazing sight in the world. Donzelon stood on the fringe of the estate, in his hands a huge wood-axe which he wielded with shattering effect. Dumb



with amazement, Dorchester rubbed his eyes. With each stroke the axe buried itself in the tree, and on the third stroke the tree crashed to the ground. It was stupefying to witness. Indeed it was the most prodigious feat Dorchester had seen, and when each tree fell the men gave a hoarse shout of wonder, while Donzelon replied with a mighty whoop from his lungs, a bellow of defiance, a deep-throated crescendo of sound. He appeared enjoying himself, for his body shook with laughter and his voice echoed over the estate. Tree after tree fell in that uncanny fashion, but Gatacre made no protest. He and Church relished the entertainment, yet the men seemed filled with forebodings, and talked audibly amongst themselves.

"Let us join the circus!" Dorchester exclaimed, slipping on coat and boots, and running downstairs. He never paused until he reached the terrace, then glancing back at the Hall he saw the girls watching the extraordinary scene from their bedroom windows. They waved excitedly, then he ran on breathless to the estate and the millionaire greeted him with a cheery smile.

"Sorry your morning toilet was disturbed," he observed, "but this sport is too good to miss, Dorchester. It's seven o'clock and Donzelon has amused us for twenty minutes. He begins like this each morning on Mars, but I am wondering if he will leave us any trees after three weeks!"

White-haired and pale-looking, the scientist gave a friendly nod, but seemed preoccupied with the evolutions of the Martian.

"Am I dreaming or have I read anything like this



in Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales?" Dorchester muttered. "Say, Gatacre, this chap ought to join a Trade Union, or someone ought to count his insurance stamps. How about engaging him as forester or assistant agent who would push down trees at a nominal cost? Look at those arms! Heavens, what physical perfection! No need for that fellow to spend a fortnight in Torquay!"

The Martian saw Dorchester arrive and surveyed him in silence. It was impossible to read the emotion flitting across his face, but at length he came across to the trio.

"Greetings!" he announced with faint sarcasm. "Hope you slept well, Dorchester, or have you been awakened by my tree-felling? You see, we Martians have completed a cycle. We have not returned to primeval habits, but we have discovered that Nature is still the most lovely mistress. That is why I prefer sleep on the leafy branches of a tree to the luxury of a bedroom. I have spent a glorious three hours with Morpheus, but those men disturbed me with their chatter. Look out, gentlemen, I am moving fast!"

He was in truth, for, throwing the axe aside, he took a flying leap to the nearest branch, swung on it lightly with one hand, then with a splendid swing hurled himself to the tree adjoining and kept on leaping from branch to branch like a denizen of the jungle. The pink skin made him grotesque; the gleaming eyes sent a shiver down the spine of all who gazed. The monster jumped from branch to branch with effortless ease, and when he came to earth there was no fatigue.



"Is that the end of the act?" Dorchester asked.

"No, there is another item but don't lift a collection!" Donzelon retorted, and before anyone divined his intention he swarmed up the tallest tree, hand over hand, just like an ape, never pausing in that terrific ascent until the topmost bough was reached. Then, holding himself erect, he balanced himself uncannily, and his voice rang out in a deep-throated song that resounded over the estate and awoke the echoes beyond. The girls heard it up at the Hall; the gamekeeper heard it down at the porter's lodge; the village postman heard it as he cycled along with the letters. A wonderful outburst of twenty verses, rollicking, virile, with a chorus that half-tempted the Gatacre men to repeat.

"Heavens, what a voice!" muttered the scientist, staring aloft in admiration. The men gazed up as well with that strange awe and apprehension. Was it man or beast? Did that strange creature emanate from the jungle, or had he flown from a far-off planet? They felt convinced he did not belong to this earth.

"A splendid find for C. B. Cochran," Dorchester grinned. "And what would Paul Robeson say if he heard this rival to his gramophone records?"

There was a strange silence when the last note died away. The Gatacre men gazed at each other with foreboding. When Donzelon descended, he burst into another gargantuan laugh.

"My dear Gatacre," he exclaimed, "I apologise if I have given you a headache, but I advise you all to cultivate my laugh. It will make you feel good, and no matter what happens, keep on laughing. That



is the greatest healer in the universe. Shall we return to the Hall? I scent food, and after breakfast one must wash and shave. I admire your luxury bathrooms. That reminds me. I have a safety razor at the bottom of a case in my plane, and you have not seen anything like it. It has brush and blade combined with a strap attachment, and a shave takes less than a minute."

The millionaire seemed lost in thought.

"So you slept in the woods?" he hazarded.

"Yes, I am sorry I had to bump the heads of two of your men, but they tried to intercept my progress. Do you usually keep armed guards on the premises?"

The millionaire indulged in a good-humoured laugh.

"The whole business was regrettable," he remarked, "and most of it was my fault. However, I have talked the matter over with Paul Church, and if you prefer sleeping out that is a point for yourself. We have no wish to interfere with your comfort. I should like to rig you out in conventional attire, but you are something of an out-size, and a tailor will have to meet your requirements. Yes, let us make for the dining-room and get something to eat. The morning air is keen and I feel ravenous!"

At this juncture came an interruption. Fenton detained the millionaire, and the other men hung round in a hostile group, sending the most menacing glances at the Martian, so it was plain a protest was about to be made. Paul Church walked tactfully ahead with Donzelon in the direction of the Hall, but Dorchester waited to hear the deputation, for



his sympathies were with the men. They had been subjected to strain and two of them had been hurt. A crisis loomed near.

"Sorry to make a complaint, sir," Fenton commenced, "but I have been asked to speak to you about this Zoo creature."

"Go ahead!" encouraged the millionaire. "What have my men got to say about him? I am most anxious to hear your remarks, and if I can remedy matters depend on me to that extent."

Fenton seemed embarrassed, but a glance at the others was sufficient.

"Well, sir, we think that animal should have a chain!"

"Why?"

"Because he is half-man and half-devil, sir, and he frightens us to death. None of us will sleep for days, and we are all suffering from nerves. The creature is dangerous because he has the strength of twelve men, and look how he treated Maltravers and Scott. Both are excused duty, for Maltravers has got a bump on his head like an egg and Scott thinks he was hit with a sledge-hammer. We thought it only fair to make this protest, Mr. Gatacre, because if we don't use our revolvers that Zoo animal will get the upper-hand and we will all be butchered. A monster who can knock down trees in that fashion ought to be chained up at Whipsnade."

The millionaire beckoned and the men gathered round with folded arms. The grim look had not passed from their faces, and nothing but loyalty to their employer saved them from mutiny and revolt.



"Men, I thoroughly understand your position," Gatacre answered in a kind voice, "and you have my sympathy. I had no idea anything like Donzelon would land on the golf-course, but the most sensational event in history has happened, and I think you have acted wonderfully. I will see you are recompensed accordingly, and I know you will stand by to the end. I cannot let the world know about this discovery until the right moment, for this creature is a super-monster from the skies, and he might never get back to Mars alive. I want you to remember that Donzelon is my guest, and if anything happens someone will have to pay the penalty."

"Why bring him here?" one of the men growled. "He looks to us the devil-incarnate, and already we think we are seeing things."

Several laughed and Dorchester joined in the merriment.

"Yes, I want you to grin over this business," Gatacre stressed. "But don't forget, men, that we are living through a moment that has never been paralleled, and in a few days you will be reading about this tremendous event. You will be surrounded by reporters, and they will ask a thousand questions about that sky-monster. I suppose you will make your fortunes by writing special articles. Believe me, Donzelon is a flesh-and-blood Martian, and as I am responsible for his safety, you must see he does not escape from the grounds. Don't shoot to kill, and do not fire at all unless under the strongest provocation."

The men fell back with a murmur of agreement, then moved off talking volubly amongst themselves,



and commenting on the strange events. Most of them were dead tired and reliefs would have to be arranged for the rest of the day. In the absence of Maltravers, Fenton took command and issued orders.

"The whole thing seems a ghastly dream," Dorchester remarked, as he walked back to the Hall with the steel magnate. "If I write this up, Gatacre, depend on it I will turn out a best-seller. Every publisher in London will fight for the manuscript."

"There may be something more important than the publication of your book," commented the millionaire. "Huge events lie ahead. When we have a confidential chat with Donzelon I believe he will open our eyes. We are centuries behind the Martians in intelligence, and as they have known television a thousand years we have nothing to teach them. Is it any wonder he laughs when he surveys our progress? He may look a monster of the underworld, but he has forgotten more than we have learned."

"What are you planning?"

Gatacre patted his shoulder, another sign of friendliness, for he thought highly of the young novelist, and now that Dorchester was engaged to Venetia the whole situation was changed.

"You will assist tremendously," replied the steel magnate, ascending the terrace steps. "Before Donzelon returns to Mars, I will carry out the biggest coup in the world, and European peace will be settled for a generation at least."

A few hours later Donzelon conferred with his host in the Green Room. He had just concluded a chat in the Martian language with Jephthah, and when



it was over and the red lamp flickered out Gatacre drew up a chair near the Martian. The others had retired to obtain some rest after a disturbed night, but Gatacre remembered his duty as a host.

"I am anxious to meet the ladies," Donzelon announced with a charming smile. "I expect they are equally curious to see me again, but too thoroughly frightened to meet me. How can I reassure them of my peaceful intentions?"

Gatacre forced a smile, for it was difficult to gaze at the Martian with equanimity. The bald head was grotesque; the dark eyes uncanny.

"I suggest you make up like one of ourselves!" he answered. "Would you care to wear an overcoat and cloth cap? That might help!"

Donzelon shook his head, and throwing himself back on an easy chair took in all the details of the Green Room.

"I should feel uncomfortable!" he confessed. "I am afraid, Gatacre, you must accept me as a Martian, for if I wear clothes you will make me the most miserable creature on earth, and I should be in continual agony. When those young ladies are accustomed to my peculiar physiognomy, they will overcome all apprehension, and I will do my utmost to make them at ease. If we were all made by the same Creator, why should I be ashamed of my appearance or try to hide my identity?"

The millionaire sent some cigar smoke to the frescoed ceiling.

"I can understand that viewpoint," he ventured, "but really, Donzelon, you have no idea how awkward



it is going to be. Nudity is not such a terrible thing with due regard for the limitations, but you forget what a monster you appear to us! We have never seen anything like you even on the films, and even I had to take a strong glass of brandy before entering this room. Frankly, you have frightened my men out of their wits, and if ever you visit London or Paris I don't know what will happen. You will upset all traffic regulations, and they will call out the troops. What will occur when you stroll down Birdcage Walk or the Champs Elysées staggers my imagination!"

The Martian shook with unrestrained laughter, but he had the good sense to keep under control. It occurred to him at the critical second that a good many of the Rockdene Hall inmates were soundly asleep.

"Nevertheless I will visit those places," he promised. "Surely you don't imagine, Gatacre, I am going to spend all my time in Devon? I must see your world. I must visit your capitals and industrial towns, then I will make my report to the Grand Vizier."

The millionaire knocked the ash off his cigar. His eyes held a dreamy look, and when he replied his voice was distinctly dramatic.

"Not so fast," he pleaded. "Candidly, Donzelon, I want to get in touch with Downing Street. That is the official residence of our Prime Minister. You have no idea of the complications that may exist in regard to the ether and that special wave-length contract. I should like you to stay here until that agreement is signed."



The door opened to admit Paul Church and Dorchester who had just awakened and a message had been left where the Martian was to be found. Lunch was due in twenty minutes and there was time for a chat.

"Wish I had your constitution, Donzelon, and the capacity to sleep only four hours," the scientist exclaimed. "What were you discussing? Anything important or just a chat about nothing that mattered."

"No, nothing special," Donzelon answered. "Gatacre has been telling me about your Broadcasting Corporation, I thought it was a Government enterprise."

"Not entirely," Paul Church explained, helping himself to a cigar and passing the cigarettes to Dorchester. "It is known as the British Broadcasting Corporation, and its ten-years' licence will expire in 1936. I suppose we regard it as a public utility trust, but it differs in its constitution from other trusts. For instance, the Port of London Authority and our Central Electricity Board were formed by Act of Parliament, but the B.B.C. was created by Royal Charter, made in pursuance of an agreement between the privately-owned Broadcasting Company and the Postmaster-General. Parliament gave general approval to the terms of the agreement, but secured neither Governmental nor public control over the new Corporation."

"Awkward for the politicians," Dorchester suggested with a sly chuckle.

"Yes, no Minister is responsible to Parliament for the policy of its governors," continued the scientist.



"Has it ever occurred to you," asked the Martian, "that one Broadcasting Corporation might embrace your world? It would be easier to arrive at a common language and philosophy, and a vast brotherhood might result. That was the evolution which occurred on Mars. We arrived at a common denominator of thought when we simplified everything by a Martian broadcast. We have no rival corporations, and our only Dictator is the Grand Vizier. That is why Martians worship him as a kind of god. One of these days you will rule out frontiers, my friend. There is no other solution. We have no rival currencies or trade barriers, no fluctuating Stock Exchange or competitive systems. We have one great ambition to make Mars the most advanced planet in the universe."

The eloquent pause was interrupted in a strange manner.

"Is it true," Dorchester enquired, "that you committed two murders on your wonderful planet?"

The millionaire moved uneasily and the scientist sent a frowning glance. The Martian remained perfectly calm.

"Yes," he replied, "and if Jephthah communicated that information, Dorchester, I hope he also informed you that I was defended by a clever barrister and obtained a free pardon each time."

"Yes, there was something about condonation," Dorchester admitted in that satirical tone, "but why were the crimes committed? Pardon my curiosity, but we have definite views about murder in this world, and I am wondering if we could reconcile your defence viewpoint with our outlook."



The Martian shrugged and a peculiar smile touched his lips. Obviously he regarded the novelist with some contempt.

"I killed two men," he said slowly, "because they conspired to start a war between States in the north-east continent of Mars. I had proof of their guilt and their elimination was a necessity. I had no twinge of conscience in the matter. I merely took the law into my own hands and saw those men ceased to exist. How I accomplished that part of it had better remain a secret."

A knock sounded on the door and a white faced butler entered.

"Luncheon is served, gentlemen," he announced in a trembling voice.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SCENE ON THE TERRACE

WITH great trepidation the girls strolled out on the terrace one hour after luncheon, and although the sun shone with a midday brilliance, and the flower-gardens looked entrancing, everyone was conscious that a super-monster sat in the Green Room and might emerge at any moment. Indeed a message had been sent out to that effect, and it was a terrific event for which the girls prepared. They mustered all their courage to confront the Martian, or whatever he called himself, and despite all their fears concerning him, and the terrible appearance he presented, they had an uncontrollable curiosity to learn more about him or watch him from a distance. The same instinct made them dress in their smartest clothes.

"There is no help for it," Venetia announced calmly. "If Donzelon is my father's guest, we are bound to meet him sooner or later, and as he is apparently civilised to some extent, if we disregard the men he knocked unconscious, we can rely on the others to protect us. Brian carries a revolver, and I believe each of our parents have an automatic, Violet. They are prepared for eventualities, and we must follow that example."



Veronica looked highly attractive in a grey sporting costume with the latest French hat, but she was not comfortable. It was no good trying to appear normal and self-possessed, for she could not hide that inner fear, and like her companions her face contained not a vestige of colour. They were all facing a grim ordeal and wished it was over.

"I am not sure if an ordinary bullet would stop Donzelon," she ventured with an hysterical smile. "Can you picture what a struggle it would mean if he turned out unpleasant? Why, it would take forty men to chain up that brute! Just supposing, Violet, he seized one of us and flew off in that plane! Can you imagine anything more horrible?"

"I am afraid it is impossible," Violet affirmed. In that white Russian dress she looked like a fragile flower, and there was something ethereal about her loveliness. "Contact with that monstrosity would be worse than a thousand deaths. I don't like the idea of his sleeping in the woods. It means our bedroom windows will be barricaded, and there will be no rest for one of us. I have a conviction the brute would break through any barrier. He is a creature of the jungle that should never have been allowed to escape, and heaven help us if he goes mad!"

Venetia put her arm round her protectingly.

"Goodness, we must stop being ridiculous!" she declared vigorously. "Nothing can happen to us. Brian would never hesitate to shoot if that monster meant mischief, and he is watching him like a hawk."

Her voice died away in a whisper, for the Green Door suddenly opened and four individuals stepped



out on the terrace. Gatacre, Dorchester, Church, and the man from Mars. They were chatting naturally, and as they advanced to the girls there was nothing about Donzelon's demeanour to make them afraid. All the same their teeth chattered and they only recovered composure with an effort. They clung to each other in nervous fear, and all eyes were fixed on that tall, monster-like figure with the pink skin, and bald head. It was terrible to glance at him for the dark eyes held one spellbound, and even his walk was uncanny. It was like the stride of a tiger or some horrible man-beast of the jungle. A jaguar? Yes, that was it. He resembled a jaguar in human guise.

"Well, Venetia, here is our guest," announced the millionaire in a reassuring voice. He saw all three girls were terrified, and he was disturbed at the pallor of their faces. Even the scientist was perturbed, for Violet seemed on the point of fainting, and he saw her companions were supporting her.

"What's wrong, little girl?" he asked, putting his arm round her in fatherly fashion. "My dear Violet, Donzelon would not harm you for all the planets in the universe. Look, he is a trifle odd, we admit, but surely you realise that people who live in Mars are bound to be different. Do not let him be a monster of your imagination. Regard him as a stranger who wishes to convince you that he is perfectly harmless."

"Yes, I'm told they haven't got a single cannibal on Mars!" Dorchester affirmed with a hearty laugh, "and Donzelon does not intend to be the first. Venetia, I am surprised at you, of all people. You look as white as a sheet. I agree Donzelon is not exactly



the answer to a maiden's prayer, but just look at the fortune he may make at the London Coliseum!"

Donzelon flung his head proudly back and squared his massive shoulders. Folding his huge arms he regarded them with a broad smile.

"You must be fair to the ladies," he begged in a charming voice. "It is only natural, gentlemen, they should be perturbed at my unusual appearance. They have not recovered from the shock I gave them when I jumped from that airplane, but I hoped that in the clear light of this noonday sun they would understand I was a flesh-and-blood reality, and bound to give some rational explanation of my origin. Miss Gatacre, do make a confession and say you are anxious to chat with me."

The Martian gazed into that lovely face, noting the stylish blue costume and wonderful grace of form. There was something about her that reminded him of a vision which once occurred to him in Mars, a strange, beautiful dream about a princess in another planet, and when he looked down into those deep blue eyes he realised what had come to him. That explained why he disliked Dorchester, why the novelist jarred on him! Venetia moved uneasily, for there was something personal in that glance of the monster, a passionate admiration from the piercing eyes, and it made her terrified. A shudder passed through her; then suddenly the discomfort passed and with a supreme effort she found herself speaking in a natural voice.

"Do forgive me," she replied with irresistible frankness. "I suppose it is frightfully stupid, but it is



most difficult to get accustomed to your unusual appearance, and we have not recovered from the terrific surprise. I take my father's word that you have come all the way from Mars, but that is almost incredible to believe. How do we address you? Have you some particular rank?"

The giant gave a courtly bow, and Dorchester was impressed by that salute. Why did the uncanny thrill run down his spine? Heavens, was the Martian enamoured of Venetia? If so, it would be the triangular drama with a vengeance! What would be the climax? A duel to the death between them? His hand moved to that automatic in his right-hand pocket. The Martian would be taught a lesson if he played any pranks at Rockdene Hall.

"I am entitled to Air Commodore status," Donzelon answered, "but I only use that on official duty. I should prefer if you call me Donzelon like the others, and if we are going to be real friends my first name is Marcus."

Venetia smiled despite her fears.

"I am going to pay you a compliment," she continued, "and I speak on behalf of my girl friends. We all admired your tree-felling exploits before breakfast. Is that not strenuous work for a small boy like you?"

Donzelon grinned.

"On the contrary, I enjoy it very much," he answered in a cultured tone. "We have many forests in Mars, and there is always an abundance of trees. I hope my singing did not disturb you. If you enjoyed it, I will sing any time you like. When I sing and



laugh I try to make other people happy, which means my dual nature must be very pronounced. You see, I am told I am both devil and saint. One moment I see the bright side of Life, then I get a terrible vision of the sordid and tragic. It depresses me to reflect on the misery of existence. There is much sorrow and gloom even in Mars. It is brought about by the selfishness of other Martians, by mean thoughts and wicked ambitions, so we have our own problems of sin and avarice. When I get depressed, I burst out laughing again, then the clouds disappear in a flash. I suppose that will be the solution of the Great Scheme. Everything will come right in the end."

"Yes, but meanwhile these cross-word puzzles are difficult," Dorchester interposed with a chuckle. "We have to work out our problems with patience, Donzelon, and the solution is not always found in the Bible. Have you a Bible on Mars?"

It was an odd question yet natural under the circumstances, and they waited eagerly for the reply. The giant did not answer immediately, for he seemed absorbed by the white-faced Violet who had suddenly caught his attention, and the glance he levelled was rather peculiar. It was the way a snake glances at a bird, and even Veronica felt the extraordinary fascination of those eyes. She moved uneasily under their scrutiny, for they also gazed at her in turn, then the Martian's features expanded in a broad grin.

"Yes, we have a Bible," he responded dramatically, "but I fear it is vastly different to the one you possess. I should prefer not to talk on that subject. It might commence a long discussion on ethics, morality, and



religion, and you would be distressed at the views I hold. Why not examine my 'M' plane? I think the young ladies want amusement, and you can all inspect the portrait album at the bottom of my case. You gentlemen will be interested in the special silencers on the engines, but I hardly think you will discover the secret of that invention until I have explained the technical details. Lead the way, Dorchester, and I will conduct Miss Gatacre."

"I think the idea splendid," affirmed the millionaire. "My men have erected a shed for your plane, Donzelon, on the south-east corner of the golf-course, and it was finished before lunch. We are certainly keen to have a look at those engines. If we can get the secret device of those silencers, Paul, all the motor-manufacturers and engineers will be on our track."

"If engines can be silenced in that fashion," the scientist remarked, "the same principle should apply to a pneumatic drill or a rifle."

"Yes, I have a loaded revolver that does not make a sound," Donzelon confirmed. "You are welcome to the secret, Paul Church, but you must realise the danger involved. Silent revolvers are not going to help your police, and silent air engines are a menace to world-peace. They are Martian secrets it would be better for you not to learn."

The Gatacre men accompanied them but remained in the background, and they walked in pairs at intervals of thirty yards. Each had a revolver, and they had definite instructions in regard to the Martian. The girls saw them and were thankful. Even in the



glare of that midday sun it was disconcerting to gaze at that monster.

"I hope you are not jealous!" whispered Violet to the novelist. "What a surprise if Donzelon becomes infatuated with Venetia! I suppose that would be romance *in excelsis*! Just look how close they are walking. I shouldn't be surprised if Donzelon offered his arm. That would be a sight for the gods." She gave a forced laugh for she had partly recovered from her nervous terror, and although the excitement was terrific she enjoyed the situation keenly.

"Yes, there is no doubt Commodore Donzelon is intrigued with his companion," Dorchester growled. "Heavens, this is rich. This is the first time I have been crossed in love and my temperature is at normal. To-night it will be my turn to climb to the highest tree-top and sing a lament. Incidentally that noiseless revolver that Donzelon mentioned might come in useful."

Veronica stared.

"You would never dare shoot him," she gasped.

"No, but I might have a darned good try," Dorchester muttered in a sly voice. "At any rate, supposing I flirt with you girls instead. Let us go for a row on the lake this afternoon and leave Venetia to her sky-pilot!"

Violet smiled, trembled, and suddenly sobered.

"That must never happen!" she said fiercely. "We must never leave Venetia alone with that man-devil. That would be the end of all things, for I would not trust him as far as the terrace. He is just the kind who would strangle a girl if she did not surrender.



He belongs to the jungle I tell you. A creature without conscience or pity, and he terrifies me like nothing on earth. We will rue the day Dad ever contacted with that planet. Donzelon spells misery, unhappiness, Death, and I care not from whence he comes. He is unspeakably evil."

Dorchester was astounded at the intensity of the words. They were terrible from the lips of a young girl, yet something told him she had spoken the truth. There was no disguising the fact that despite all his culture Donzelon belonged to the brute creation. It was written all over him, and a girl in his power would have no chance at all.

"That is just how I feel," Veronica added nervously. "We must never be alone with that creature, Venetia is in great danger, for he is attracted already. I saw it in his eyes when he came on the terrace, and what a fool she is to be in his company. Is she trying to be brave and show the rest of us she is not afraid? But we know she is more frightened than you could possibly imagine. We should have kept to our rooms. Violet. Even to gaze at that creature sends my heart to my mouth!"

"Thanks for the hint," Dorchester announced in a tense voice. "I think you are right about Venetia. She can hardly be enjoying herself, and I expect she is trembling at the knees. Depend on it, a single wrong move on Donzelon's part will mean a message for an undertaker."

"Getting back your nerve?" Donzelon asked his companion in a casual voice.

"Yes," Venetia answered, "but please don't expect



much courage for the present. My girl friends are desperately frightened, and I am trying to be brave before them. If I look at you at all, I shall want to faint or do something dreadful. Your voice has saved the situation. It is vastly different to what you seem in my imagination, so what a blessing you mastered English before you attempted the flight through the stratosphere."

Donzelon laughed in jerky fashion. He gave her a prolonged glance of admiration, and Venetia was acutely conscious of that tense scrutiny. It sent an agonising lump to her throat.

"Wait until you hear the Martian broadcast," he grinned. "You will hear the sweetest music that has reached your ears. I will get them to play 'The Carnival of the Stars,' 'The Martian Boat Song,' 'Moonlight on the Juniper,' and 'The Madrigal of Love' . . . When you hear those tunes, Miss Gatacre, you will realise that Paul Church has got in touch with a new world, a new universe of thought and feeling. It is Paul Church to whom you owe the laurel wreath, and if he ever comes to Mars we will bestow on him the highest honour."

Venetia listened with breathless interest, and still felt in a maze of wonder, then she gazed ahead at the scientist walking arm-in-arm with her parent, and gave a bright smile.

"Yes, Paul Church is a genius," she assented. "Father and he are old trench-comrades. It has been an amazing friendship. We girls had no idea what was occurring behind the walls of the Green Room, and we have really felt prisoners all these months."



"That was unjust to keep you cooped up in that fashion," Donzelon declared in a sympathetic tone. "Miss Gatacre, I have a confession to make. I hear you are engaged to Brian Dorchester, yet I want you to know that you are the most beautiful girl I have ever encountered. I really mean it. We have nothing like you on the Martian planet, and I know Dorchester must be the luckiest man alive. May I wish you every happiness?"

They paused and Venetia lifted her eyes for one second. There was something compelling about his gaze, and quite suddenly she understood. The Martian had fallen in love. Heavens, what was to be done about it. Would he molest her in some fashion? Brian had hinted that the Martians had a strange sex-philosophy, quite different from their own ethical code, and would he——? She pushed the horror from her thoughts and tried to think rationally.

"That is most kind," she answered in a low voice, the pallor returning to her face. "Yes, it has been an amazing romance between Brian and myself. Indeed at first it was amusing for we did nothing but quarrel, then came the storm last night and I realised he meant everything, that I was just a fool to think otherwise."

"You must also realise," the Martian said slowly, "that it is in the destiny of things for more than one man to be your slave."

At that instant the wooden shed was reached, and two Gatacre men stood in charge of the plane. They touched their caps as the millionaire approached, then withdrew to a convenient distance with the other



men. Everyone stared at the nudish monster with excited eyes, and it was still evident the men did not like him. He had assaulted two of their number and they were determined to keep their revolvers handy. Gatacre pushed open the door of the shed and they all stared at the wingless plane. In the clear light of day it was the weirdest object they had seen, and it was hard to realise it was not a monster-fish.

"I hardly know how to describe it," Paul Church muttered after a prolonged scrutiny. He had walked round it like a speculative buyer, examining every detail, peering at the mystery engines and the general stream-line effect. "The nearest approach we have to it is the new tailless Sesquiplane, which we call Pterodactyl MK V, and, as you know, Gatacre, it was constructed at the Westland Aircraft Works, Yeovil. It is vastly different in design. As for the engines, they baffle me completely."

"I think it worse than a bad dream," Dorchester chuckled. "If our Air Minister saw it, he would have forty faints then dash down Whitehall into the nearest Belisha Beacon. How much do you charge for a joy-ride, Donzelon? Five shillings a flip?"

The Martian expanded his lips in a grin, but a curious expression entered his eyes.

"Miss Gatacre can have one free of cost," he announced. "She would be absolutely safe in my charge, and there is plenty of room for a passenger."

Everyone stared with a kind of dumb horror. Had they a premonition of what lay ahead, a dim foreboding of some sickening spectacle that might occur? The girls retreated further from that terrible figure



with the staring orbs, and it was Dorchester who broke the uncanny silence.

"I am afraid there is no chance of that invitation being accepted," he said quietly.

"What is the secret of the silencer?" Paul Church asked, anxious to preserve an atmosphere of good-humour.

"I may disclose that later," Donzelon replied, "but with your brain power you may arrive at it by a process of thought. You will find the solution lies within a definite time-formula. Linked to that timing arrangement there is a synchronised shock absorber of terrific resistance, also a special repercussion device on each piston. You will note the electric dynamo which meets the shock-resisting process. The same principle on a lesser scale applies to the revolver in my case. Here is that portrait album I promised to show you. You will notice the Martian girls are good-looking but not overburdened with clothes!"

The girls took one horrified glance at some of the portraits then Venetia pushed the album across to her parent.

"We dare not look at those," she said in a whisper.

The millionaire opened the album then stepped back in amazement. Dorchester and the scientist glanced over his shoulder. They stared at portraits of Martian men and women absolutely nude, without even a loin-cloth, and they seemed perfectly at their ease. Gatacre handed the album back with a shudder.

"Rather strong meat for us at the moment," he said awkwardly. "I don't think you realise, Donzelon, that we have a decided aversion to nudity of that



description. That album would not be allowed into our Museum."

Suddenly a revolver shot rang out followed by a shout from one of the men, then a chorus of excited voices from the Gatacre guards. They ran out to find a man being held down by six others, and obviously he was in a fit, for his struggles were desperate. When overpowered Fenton approached and touched his cap.

"Robert Morton has just tried to commit suicide," he announced in a hoarse voice. "We managed to push his revolver aside in the nick of time. You see, sir, we have been watching him closely, for that sky-monster has frightened him out of his wits."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### CAN WAR BE STOPPED?

**A**N hour after the party returned to Rockdene Hall a roar of laughter sounded from the library, and when Dorchester entered after escorting the girls to the drawing-room he found Donzelon doubled up in mirth. His hand clutched a London paper and when the novelist appeared he waved to him excitedly. Gatacre and the scientist watched from chairs opposite, and although bewildered by the sudden turn of events they were glad to find their guest amused.

"What has happened?" Dorchester queried with a forced grin. "Have they got a note about you in the Agony Column, or have you just found your wisdom tooth?"

"Listen to this for the love of Jupiter," Donzelon exclaimed, "and if it does not confirm snobbery I will return to Mars within the hour:—

"Amid the leafy glades of Dorset, within the confines of the New Forest, an amazing Club in a 'Garden of Eden' has come into existence. Few people outside its membership know of it, yet here men, women, and children, from infants to old men over sixty, eat and drink, play games, and wander amid the thickets completely nude.



"The Club is hidden away on the fringe of the woods, and the six acres of grounds are ringed round with a high fence and barbed wire. The only way of getting past the fence is through a small door. Each member is provided with a special key which unlocks this door, and they are warned never to let the key out of their possession. There is one stringent rule. Married men without their wives are not accepted under any circumstances!"

"Well, what's funny about it?" Dorchester asked, leaning back and crossing his legs.

"It simply means you are all tarred with the same brush when it comes to convention," Donzelon retorted with marked acidity. "Your Bernard Shaw is right. You are all afraid of doing something original. Yet a small group who decide to do the decent and proper thing, such as forming a Nudist Club in Dorset, and to protect themselves from the vulgar gaze of the public, must barricade themselves in with high fencing and barbed wire. Protection from their own people! Is it any wonder I laugh? Why, it would make our Grand Vizier grin for a fortnight."

"That is not the reason for the barbed wire," Dorchester answered with some frigidity. "Nudity, my dear chap, is regarded as an extreme in this country. We have only a veneer of civilisation. We discovered the thin edge of that veneer during the war. That sort of thing would never suit the rank and file."

"Dorchester speaks the truth," Paul Church affirmed. "We discovered a sham civilisation during the latter years of Armageddon, and even now we



have not recovered from the earthquake. That is why we preserve tradition and convention. Heaven forbid another war in our lifetime. It would mean the end of everything."

Donzelon gazed across the room. A bright fire burned in the grate. The millionaire stared at the glowing coals with a thoughtful frown, then he nodded in complete agreement.

"Yes, another war would mean irretrievable disaster," he muttered.

"What are the probabilities?" Donzelon enquired.

"There is an uneasy dread on the Continent," Paul Church answered, "that it may come at any moment. Recent Austrian events sent a shudder through Europe. As you know, the assassination of an Austrian prince precipitated the last catastrophe, and we thought history would repeat itself when an Austrian Chancellor was eliminated the other day. The future is dark. We have our Jugo-Slavs and Hitlerites. The world asked if Hitler would support his Nazi compatriots and was Europe again to suffer the crashing devastation of the guns."

"Next time," Gatacre intervened, "the area will be widened by fleets of long-distance bombers. We have perfected those things since the last war."

"Do you really mean that another war is inevitable?" Donzelon queried.

"It seems the writing on the wall," Paul Church continued dramatically. "Everything points to the resurgence of the war spirit in Germany. We hear whispers she is re-arming on a gigantic scale with new weapons more deadly than anything devised.



There is an historic parallel, for we can compare it to the national uprising in Germany after the defeat of Jena which made Prussia a more formidable military Power than ever, and enabled her in a few years to dictate peace within the walls of Paris."

"Do French statesmen and journalists believe those things?" Dorchester asked gravely.

"Yes," Gatacre added, "that explains the great war fortresses built at vast expense on the frontiers facing Germany. They have been thrown up hurriedly to arrest the march of the new armies which the French Secret Service is assured by its agents are being drilled and equipped clandestinely in Germany with the inexorable purpose of another French invasion."

"We know that Germany has manufactured thousands of the newest types of airplanes," continued the scientist, "so arranged that by the easy attachment of certain appliances, already in stock, they can be converted into the most redoubtable bombing machines invented. We know what that means. Those squadrons will drop poison and disease germs which will wipe out whole cities. Swarms of pilots are trained and ready for the word of command, given without warning, to fly anywhere and everywhere on that last devilish, demoniacal errand."

"Can you wonder at our panic?" Gatacre queried. "It is responsible for our commitment to a £25,000,000 increase in our building programme for new airplanes. There you have the atmosphere which, unless there is some miraculous change in the lives and hearts of men, will lead to another war."



Something like a vast emotional shadow passed across the mobile features of the Martian. The dark eyes lit up with a curious, tense gleam.

"That is the gloomy side," he replied. "Surely there is a rainbow? Are there not conditions that might postpone that conflagration?"

"You mean," Gatacre counter-asked, "that fear, and the sense of despair so full of danger, may create the very perils we dread?"

"Precisely," responded Donzelon. "Nations are tempted to deliver a blow at an advantage to avert the chance of being hit at a disadvantage. Would it not promote world peace if nations cleared their minds from the suspicion that other nations awaited an opportunity to attack?"

"That is the position," Paul Church agreed. "Our apprehension of an immediate war is based on the assumption that Germany will be the aggressor, that she is ready to play that part. She is not ready. In 1914 Germany had the finest, best-equipped army in the world, and knew it. To-day she has the smallest, worst-equipped army in Europe, and knows it. In 1914 Germany had powerful Allies. She has not one left to-day. Austria is her bitterest foe; Turkey is indifferent; Bulgaria has concluded a pact with Serbia. In 1914 Germany had every reason to suppose that the forces at her disposal would overwhelm her foes swiftly and crushingly. To-day she could not face the Czecho-Slovakian army! Hitler has had to face humiliation. He dare not offend Mussolini. He has shaken hands with Poland across the Corridor. In that sense, Germany cannot attack the feeblest country in Europe."



"In other words," Gatacre added, "offensive war cannot be waged against any nation armed with rifles and machine guns unless it possesses cannon of a sufficiently heavy calibre to destroy entrenchments."

"Those are the facts," Paul Church concluded. "Germany has no heavy artillery and few light guns. She cannot manufacture big guns without its being known, and it might take her two years to become a formidable aggressive Power."

"Yes, but the danger exists," Donzelon hazarded. He leaned forward as if intensely interested.

"Yes, the blow may fall sooner than we think," Paul Church groaned. "You see, although Germany has no artillery she possesses a powerful fleet of bombing airplanes, and one day without warning those squadrons may fly at her enemies. Picture the result of that move. Loaded with poison gas and incendiary bombs, they would lay whole cities in ashes and strangle inhabitants in the poisonous fumes. That may occur without provocation. If it did, Germany would consolidate the world against her once more, and the anger stirred up in 1914 by the Belgian invasion would not compare with it. However, the evil does not lie entirely with Germany. Other countries are equipped with airplanes and incendiary bombs, and they also possess cylinders of poison gas. If such an outrage was perpetrated on civilisation, Germany would invite the most devastating reprisals from a world excited to frenzy by her barbarous action. You see the throw of the dice. Unless Germany could destroy all her enemies within twenty-four hours, the great gamble would be incalculably foolish as well as criminal."



"And France?" Donzelon asked in a tense whisper.

Paul Church spread his hands in complete impotence.

"There you have me guessing," he answered. "As you anticipate, France may invade Germany to get the blow in first, and under the impression that Germany is preparing against her. There is the real danger to world peace."

"And what becomes of your League?"

"The French Government might ignore the League as Poincaré did in 1923, and a serious situation would then arise. It might lead to that European war we all dread. France might blunder. If Germany is armed defensively, France lands in a morass where her feet would be sadly tangled. She would find German entrenchments defended by machine-guns as difficult to break through as the Hindenburg Line. She would sustain enormous losses and incur a crushing expenditure. No indemnity could be demanded from a bankrupt Germany. No, I cannot see Pétain marching across the Rhine without being supported by an army four times the size of that which occupied the Ruhr in 1923. That is why France hesitates."

Donzelon gave a discordant laugh.

"Ever heard of the Death Ray?" he asked.

The scientist leaned forward and when he spoke his dramatic earnestness betrayed his excitement.

"Yes, but we are still in the experimental stage," he replied. "I expect you Martians have perfected that Ray to its full capacity? We have research workers engaged on it. A few of them, in the Marconi experimental station near London, have discovered that tiny wireless waves, just a hundredth part of a



metre in length, send up their temperatures to nearly the death-point. Yet they feel no ill effects. They remain well with temperatures of 104, which, in ordinary circumstances, would make a man seriously ill. After they leave the field of the waves, their temperatures return to normal."

There was something demoniacal in the smile of the Martian.

"Anything else?"

"Yes, the waves are the same as those used by Sir Leonard Hill to kill cancer cells at the St. John Clinic, London, and by Professor Thomas J. Headlee to kill millions of insects at the New Jersey Agricultural Experimental Station, near Brunswick, U.S.A. They are the nearest approach to the death-ray of warfare that has been invented, and their powers are by no means completely known. A report has been received from America on Professor Headlee's experiments with these waves. He says that his death-ray kills beetles, cockroaches, and other hardy insects with great ease. He has killed millions of them, and thinks a development of this ray would kill millions of men."

Donzelon nodded, and when he spoke there was something in his gaze that held the attention of the three men. What was coming? What suggestion was emanating from that brain, and what contribution would the Martian make to Science?

"That American professor is right!" he replied. "We have perfected a Death Ray on Mars which is only used on rare occasions. Our research workers were engaged on it for a century. It was discovered



by one of our professors, and the secret was divulged to me before I left the planet. It will be your reward, Paul Church, for contacting with Mars. I will teach you how the Death Ray can be created, and whether you pass it to your Government is a matter for you to decide."

The silence was tense with drama. The scientist rose and came forward. The other men gazed with breathless interest.

"Is this a joke?" Paul Church asked in a stern voice.

"Then it is the most unholy jest I have made," Donzelon replied. "I speak the truth. That Death Ray is created from micro-waves derived from the ether. We have lost interest in it because we have ruled out war as a factor of progress. However, there are occasions when it comes into operation. We use the Death Ray against notorious criminals. Don't imagine it is painless. High-tension micro-waves make that death agonizing. That is why our Grand Vizier is held in profound respect."

The steel magnate gripped his friend by the arm.

"Heavens, Paul, think what this means," he exclaimed. "Here is something that will stop war. If Donzelon will impart this mighty secret of scientific research achieved in the laboratories of Mars, there is no need for another war on this planet. The mere threat of the Death Ray will make it impossible."

"How do you propose to act?" Dorchester asked in a practical voice.

"Nothing could be more simple," Gatacre answered. "Paul Church is a member of the British Secret



Service, and if that Death Ray is purchased by the Government the Prime Minister can compel foreign statesmen to sign a treaty of world-peace. They would be terrified to refuse. A demonstration of that Ray would be sufficient for our purpose. We will make certain that the formula is never disclosed, and any nation who resolves on war as a solution of national difficulty, financial embarrassment, or revenge, without recourse to the League of Nations will be faced with the penalty of the Death Ray."

Paul Church caught the millionaire's hand in a grasp of understanding. Each face was illumined with a new light and even Dorchester felt he stood in the presence of something sacred. It was like a vow before the Almighty.

"You have solved it from the political standpoint," affirmed the scientist in a hoarse voice. "If Donzelon can do that, we will thank heaven for the day I contacted with his planet. Donzelon, you place a great strain on our credulity. Do you mean it? Am I to believe you will bestow on me this great honour? You will actually impart the formula of the Death Ray?"

Donzelon stood up like a great giant and everyone was impressed with the solemnity of the moment.

"If you want the truth," he answered, "my Grand Vizier gave me that permission before I left Mars. I am carrying out orders, for we had a conviction that this was the most signal honour we could confer, and we felt Great Britain would be the safest nation to retain the formula. The actual preparation of the



Ray is only a matter of twenty minutes, and the technical details can be explained from that super-radio in the Green Room."

"I begin to see light," the scientist said dazedly. "The special micro-waves are generated by those extra valves, plus the secret of the formula. Donzelon, we must go to the Green Room at once. Arthur, you can remain here with Dorchester and keep the girls amused until we return."

"One moment!" Gatacre begged in vast excitement. "I presume the Death Ray will annihilate everything."

"It will eliminate all in its path," Donzelon affirmed. "For instance, if I entered that turret-tower and turned a single beam on Rockdene Hall this mansion would disappear in a flash. We make no mistake when it comes to the wiping-out process."

"Then we can stop a war going on at present," Gatacre announced. "It is taking place in Chicago, and has lasted eighteen months. The cause of it is supposed to be the Pentonville Forest, a neutral zone where large mineral tracts are rumoured to lie buried, and the Blue and White Armies of the Chicago population are fighting over that forest to the death. Each army is entrenched, and thousands of lives have been lost. There are sporadic raids, but the heaviest casualties are caused by big guns supplied by the armament firms who are reaping a huge harvest from the struggle. Donzelon, I know you have a profound hatred of war. That was why you eliminated those two arch-plotters on Mars. You believe in the Brotherhood of Man, and although I do not know your creed, you must be a humanitarian. You have a definite code



and have lived up to it. Well, four men are responsible for the terrific loss of life in Chicago."

"Yes, but what about your League?"

"Neither side will have anything to do with the League, and meanwhile the casualties mount up. Paul Church and I have taken a great interest in the struggle. We know the four men who are supplying the guns and munitions, and they are in London at present. This week-end they paid two visits to our Foreign Office, and there is still a deadlock. We have made every effort to bring about an armistice or cessation of hostilities."

"What has that got to do with the man from Mars?" Dorchester asked in a bewildered voice. The novelist was uneasy. Was the millionaire, owing to his passionate hatred of war, going to involve himself in some plot that would mean arrest by the Yard?

"I am just thinking what a fine joke we could play on these four men if we invited them to Rockdene Hall and demonstrated the Death Ray," Gatacre replied. "How amusing to watch their faces and hear what offer they would bid for the formula. We could bluff them to some extent and perhaps unmask them at the finish."

"They are certainly men who ought not to be allowed to live," Paul Church assented in a grave voice. "However, we cannot commit murder at Rockdene Hall, Arthur. What have you got in your mind beyond a practical joke?"

"If you want to know something," Gatacre continued "those four men are exceedingly wealthy, and they are all rivals. They approached me a year ago



about large quantities of steel, but I turned down their offer and they made another proposal last week. I did not answer their letter so they imagine it is still in abeyance. This would be a fine opportunity to invite them to Rockdene Hall."

"Where are they staying?" Dorchester enquired in a hoarse voice.

"At the Savoy Hotel."

The scientist turned to the Martian.

"What would happen to those four individuals if they strayed in the path of the Death Ray?"

The smile that crossed the features of the monster was devilish.

"They would pass out like that," he answered, and he gave a careless wave of the hand.

"You mean there would be no trace?"

"Nothing beyond a white, flakish powder."

"I know what I think!" Paul Church exclaimed. "I believe you are going barmy, Arthur, and want a long taste of sea-air. Come along to the Green Room, Donzelon, and leave that would-be murderer to his fiendish plans."



## CHAPTER XIX

### THOSE STARING EYES!

A TENSE silence followed the departure of Paul Church and Donzelon from the library. Lost in thought, the novelist moved to the French window and stared up at the blue sky. His thoughts were in a chaotic state and he wanted to think clearly. It was early in the afternoon and tea would be served presently. Would the girls join them in the dining-room?

"Brian, I always understood you hated war," Gatacre announced from his seat near the fire.

"Yes, more passionately than you think," Dorchester replied, "but one has to draw the line somewhere. Hang it, Gatacre, I can never subscribe to murder. I mean you talked about the elimination of those four men, but anything cold-blooded like that revolts the instincts of an Englishman. For heaven's sake, don't refer to it again."

He turned and flung himself in an easy chair, and the millionaire regarded him thoughtfully. He was smoking a cigar with a far-away look in his eyes, and at that second he had the air of a man planning a stupendous coup, weighing all the details, conjecturing the odds against him. Then he gave a sharp cough.



"I do not believe you would betray us to Scotland Yard," he muttered, "because you are sympathetic to a vast extent. You cannot be a novelist, Dorchester, unless you hate war in your heart, and you know sufficient about the horror of war to realise the havoc it has wrought."

"I can still remember the casualty lists," Dorchester rejoined.

"Well, here is the chance to do something big for the League of Nations and not a soul need be the wiser. We can arrange for the elimination of those four men, and you need not have the slightest remorse over their extinction."

Dorchester could scarcely believe his ears.

"Heavens," he gasped, "you mean Donzelon will do the wiping-out business and we lie low until he returns to Mars?"

The millionaire nodded.

"Why not?" he demanded. "Donzelon will think no more of operating the Death Ray on those men than I should about killing a rattlesnake. Those armament kings had a good run for their money. They supplied the guns and munitions of war, and owing to their ghoulish machinations we cannot effect an Armistice between the Blue and White armies at Chicago. Why quibble? They will pass out like a flash in the night, and Donzelon will return to Mars without a soul knowing what he accomplished."

Dorchester lit a cigarette and smoked furiously.

"I can't believe you are in earnest!" he replied. "Two wrongs don't make a right, Gatacre, and you cannot estimate how much the Yard will discover.



I have an idea Donzelon is in possession of uncanny powers. Have you ever noticed the mesmeric influence of his eyes?"

"Don't put him down as a necromancer," Gatacre laughed. "If we give rein to our imagination we could think the most evil things concerning him."

"He is determined to sleep in the woods?"

"That is the arrangement and we must reconcile ourselves to it. As he is my guest, I have to study his comfort and carry out the duties of a host, although I admit this Tarzan business may be awkward."

"Has it occurred to you," Dorchester ventured, "that if Donzelon takes only four hours' sleep, then he must be refreshed at two in the morning, so from that time onward there will be little rest for most of us."

"Why not?"

"The girls won't close an eyelid, and when they realise that monster is strolling about from two in the morning how can they get peace of mind? I think your best plan is to pack him off to Paris or Madrid, and if he visited Moscow he might outline another five-year Plan."

The millionaire groaned.

"I am in a dilemma about the travelling part," he admitted. "As Donzelon's patron I must accompany him to any capital if he decides to go abroad, and incidentally meet all expenses involved. I should have to notify every town in advance, otherwise they would shoot him at sight or destroy him with poison gas and incendiary bombs."



They made their way to the dining-room and found that tea was about to be served. Venetia gave a whoop of delight when the two men entered.

"Hullo, we thought you were never coming!" she exclaimed. "We have been listening to the 'Wireless Military Band' on the radio. Where have you left Paul Church and our illustrious guest?"

She spoke with a confidence far from genuine, and both men noted her white features and that strained look near the eyes. Venetia had changed into a dark velvet gown, and at that instant looked entrancing. The other girls remained strangely quiet, and it was plain they were nerving themselves for some ordeal.

"Oh, the gentleman from Whipsnade will not join us," Dorchester announced, casting an ardent glance at Venetia, for her beauty left him breathless. "Paul Church has taken him to the Green Room, and I suppose they are hatching another plot. Your father and I were too discreet to attend the conference. As you have been frightfully neglected, we thought we would come along and cheer you up."

"Yes," the steel magnate added, "we are inviting you all to the Green Room after eating, and you are bound to enjoy yourselves. I can guarantee you the most wonderful music, and if you are not convinced that Paul Church has contacted with some strange planet, then we shall be disappointed."

The girls exchanged glances and there was an uneasy silence.

"Well, we have toasted muffins that might suit the Martian's appetite," Violet interposed, "so let us hope he comes along before they are cold."



"Yes, the gentleman from Mars will join us soon," Dorchester affirmed with a forced laugh. "It is better for you to face the ordeal of eating with a nude Martian than keep postponing it like a dreadful nightmare. Perhaps he has been sent as a punishment for our sins. What did you think of his exploits this morning? He never paused to take breath. When he pushed those trees over in that fashion I put the chap down as a wizard, and think he deserves a job of some kind, but whether he has any chance with the Ministry of Labour is a doubtful problem."

Everyone joined in the merriment that ensued.

"It certainly proved to me that Donzelon is a super-being," Venetia smiled, passing the marmalade. "Those huge arms make me shiver. I think he is the kind who might tackle Carnera without difficulty. But seriously, do any of us believe that he is a Martian, and that he has actually flown from a far-distant planet? I mean the whole thing seems too incredible. We girls are expecting to wake up every second and find it a ghastly dream."

The novelist helped himself to a buttered scone, and a fresh grin overspread his attractive face.

"For pity's sake, don't ask me conundrums!" he begged. "I am so mesmerised by the creature that I am prepared to accept any scandal regarding his ancestors. There may be a chance that something stupendous has occurred, and that he is a visitor from another sphere, but he does not carry much laundry for identification purposes. When they make him exhibit 'A' at the British Association I look forward to thrills."



"When you stop poking fun at my guest," Gatacre protested, "you will realise that we can teach him nothing in the way of scientific knowledge."

Venetia pointed to the French window.

"What has happened, father?" she asked with some excitement. "Paul Church and Donzelon are mounting the steps of the turret-tower. Surely there is nothing to discover about the stars at this hour?"

It was true. The scientist and the Martian were mounting the spiral staircase.

"Haven't the ghost of an idea," Gatacre answered truthfully. "You can take it from me, however, that Paul Church does not visit the turret-tower for his health. It means that Donzelon is Master of Ceremonies and some of those instruments may be necessary for demonstration purposes. Venetia, pass me one of those delightful cakes, please, and leave the two great scientists to their own devices."

They turned their attention from the French window and proceeded with their tea, but Dorchester felt more uneasy than ever. He could see the steel magnate was vastly perturbed.

"Well, prepare for a surprise, Venetia," he announced. "We will celebrate our engagement at the Savoy. Your father must realise that your detention has come to an end, and we must have that party in London or Paris. Merely because a Martian has dropped from the clouds is no reason why we should be treated like political prisoners."

They all smiled at his audacity, and the girls bestowed on him a grateful glance. What earthly excuse existed for them remaining at Rockdene Hall?



"Very well, make it the Savoy," Gatacre agreed with gracious assent, "but I beg you to wait a few more days, Brian. There may be a chance of disposing of the Martian, for he might accept Paul Church as his escort, and I could still meet all expenses involved if they travelled to any of the European capitals. But you understand that a precipitate move would spoil my plans. I have no desire for publicity, and we don't want this place turned into a bear-garden. Rockdene Hall must be preserved from the mob, and once it got in the papers that a Martian was my guest this estate would be transformed into a circus. Let us avoid that at all cost."

He paused, for a scream from Veronica held everyone breathless. She was pointing through the French window to the terrace and suddenly she dashed across the room.

"Why, it's gone!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Gatacre, something uncanny has happened. Look, it has completely vanished!"

The men exchanged glances. So the Death Ray had been discovered! Something had been eliminated before the eyes of the girl. They moved across to the window and saw something significant indeed. Donzelon and the scientist stood on the outer balcony of the tower, and in the hand of the Martian was something that resembled a flash-lamp. Both men were peering into the garden, and even from that distance they could see the astonishment on the features of Paul Church. The aged scientist had witnessed a demonstration of the Ray and no need to ask if it had been a success. That hoarse laugh from Donzelon was sufficient.



"Veronica, have you gone crazy?" Venetia asked in practical fashion. "What has disappeared? The terrace, garden, and flowers are still there, so what are you excited about? You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"What is it, Veronica?" Violet pleaded, losing colour, for an odd premonition came to her and she felt trembling. Something whispered that the Martian was behind the mystery.

"*Don't you see the sun-dial has vanished!*" Veronica exclaimed, pointing to the garden beyond. "I saw it only a few seconds ago, for I was astounded to see it covered with a greenish ray, then the sun-dial disappeared in a flash."

There was a shout of wonder, and even the two men stared in incredulous surprise. Yes, the sun-dial had gone. It had dissolved like a bubble. The great golden bowl, an historic relic of Rockdene Hall, had disappeared like a whiff of cigarette smoke.

"You want to ask the gent. with the pink skin about that business," Dorchester said in a sardonic voice.

They gazed blankly at the novelist, then turned to the Martian and saw him wave his hand in courteous fashion. He realised they had connected him with the disappearing trick, that someone had explained the secret to the girls, and a broad grin covered his face. He pointed to another object in the garden, and suddenly they beheld the large stone fountain bathed in a greenish ray, but only for a few seconds, then, when they rubbed their eyes, the *fountain had gone!* All they saw was empty space!

"A stupendous success!" Gatacre exclaimed in



hoarse excitement. He turned and gripped the hand of the novelist, and even then he swayed unmistakably.

"What is the meaning of it?" Venetia cried out in sheer perplexity. "Father, what was Donzelon doing with that lamp in his right hand?"

Dorchester shrugged, and his face turned curiously pale.

"That is the beginning of the end," he answered huskily. "Believe it or not, Venetia, we have just witnessed a demonstration of the Death Ray."

The girls repeated the words as if they were foreign, then gazed at each other in blank confusion.

"There is no need to be worried," Gatacre added. "Those experiments were intended for the gaze of Paul Church, but it means, Violet, that the secret of the Death Ray has been imparted to your father by the Martian. Paul Church knows how it is created. All our scientists have sought that Ray for countless decades, and Donzelon has brought the knowledge to this planet. That was the meaning of the Green Room conference and the visit of those men to the tower. The Death Ray is drawn from etheric waves, plus a hidden formula, and the secret has been passed on to Paul Church as proof of the esteem in which he is held by the Martians. Look, they are returning to the Green Room and will join us in a few seconds."

"Glad they have not eliminated the Hall," Dorchester added with relief. "How inconvenient if we had not the chance to finish off those Devon tea-cakes. Venetia, another cup of tea, please, and don't look round for ghosts."



The girls re-seated themselves in a stricken silence. They glanced towards the door, hardly daring to breathe, but at last Venetia found voice.

"We don't understand!" she exclaimed, pouring out tea with a trembling hand. "Why should we lose a valuable fountain and sun-dial merely to humour the caprice of that monster? Do you mean, father, that the Death Ray can eliminate thousands of human beings in the same manner?"

"Precisely," Gatacre answered, "but there is no need for anxiety, for that Ray will pass automatically into the hands of our Government in order to prevent further wars between nations. No army would face the horror of that wiping-out process, so the Peace Treaties will be signed, and we may knit the world into a great Federation. Now you understand the great events that lie ahead, and why secrecy must be maintained."



## CHAPTER XX

### MARS AND THE MARTIANS

WHEN Marcus Donzelon and the scientist made their appearance in the dining-room in twenty minutes the silence was tense. Fresh tea had been ordered, and it was served at a signal from the millionaire. When the Martian took his seat at the table after a polite bow to the ladies, and Paul Church selected a chair opposite, Venetia remembered her duty as a hostess and returned to pour out the tea. It was a difficult moment handing tea to a monster nude with the exception of that loin-cloth, with those staring eyes, bald head, and pink skin, so she was glad when the operation was finished and light conversation commenced.

"So you have been watching our experiments?" Donzelon drawled in a cultured voice.

"Yes, and you terrified us to death," Venetia answered, forcing a smile to her lips. "We begin to regard you, Donzelon, as a super-being with occult power over the forces of the earth. You see, we are not used to a Death Ray at Rockdene Hall."

"Who told you it was a Death Ray?" snapped Paul Church, reaching for the marmalade.

"There was no help for it," Dorchester intervened. "We are logical beings, and we had to give some



plausible explanation for the disappearance of that sun-dial. We are going to watch the knives and forks, for if things start disappearing in that manner, and we cannot find any professional burglar, we will imagine you are hovering about with that weird flash-lamp."

The Martian gave an enigmatic smile. He had been staring at Venetia and his gaze was so prolonged that the girl felt herself under a spell.

"Tell us something about Martian weddings," Violet suggested, plucking up courage and dragging Veronica nearer. "We are dying to hear all about your planet. Surely you don't tell us that they dispense with the marriage ceremony?"

They all stared after this outburst from the scientist's daughter, for Violet was usually quiet as a mouse and Donzelon fixed his gaze on her with unusual interest. It occurred to him that she was attractive in an inconspicuous sense, not with the dazzling loveliness of Venetia, but with a winsomeness all her own, and something in her eyes appealed to him. The smile deepened near his lips.

"If I tell you a lot about Mars I am afraid you will think us barbaric," he responded. "However, the fact remains, Miss Church, we do not undergo a marriage ceremony on the Martian planet. There is no minister nor signing of a register, but when a date is fixed for the wedding, a letter is sent to the Record Office, which is filed like a birth or death notice, and the actual wedding is just a feast amongst relations of bride and bridegroom. There is nothing more simple than a Martian wedding!"



"What about it, Venetia?" Dorchester queried. "How about a flip to Mars and dispense with church formality?"

"I should have a horror of the stratosphere," Venetia replied with a forced smile, for the idea of flying anywhere with Donzelon as pilot was not attractive. "No, Brian, darling, I think we will make it St. Margaret's, Westminster, and keep strictly to convention. Besides, a marriage certificate might come in useful in case we wanted a divorce."

"Do you really mean," Veronica asked in an interested tone, "that there are no clergymen on Mars? If so, how do you manage about baptism and who officiates at funerals?"

The Martian shot her a keen glance, and what his thoughts were it was difficult to guess.

"You would not comprehend our tenets of faith," he replied in a grave voice. "We have always an official at a baptism or funeral but there is no ceremony. You see, we have passed beyond organised religion, and our churches are just meeting-halls. We have no cathedrals, but have developed a State religion on a high plane, with many forms and cults to suit the popular taste, but in the end the Martian State is the only thing that counts."

Paul Church paused in the act of drinking his tea, and putting his cup down deliberately stared across the table.

"Let us have it from the shoulder," he demanded. "Do you worship the Supreme Deity?"

"Why, of course, but our conception of the Deity is vastly different from your own. You would not



recognise our Bible, for it is a sacred collection of books from inspired writers, and we have no prophecy and divine utterance. I hope you will allow me to take a copy of your Bible back to my people."

The scientist exchanged a glance with the millionaire, and Gatacre remembered that look long afterwards, for it was something he failed to understand and it gave him an odd foreboding about the future.

"Take as many copies as you want," Paul Church assented. "There is much allegory in our Bible, Donzelon, you may not be able to accept, but it is the most sacred Book we have in the world, and it ought to keep you Martians interested for centuries. If you can live up to the divine teaching of that Book, there will be no need for you to worry who officiates at your demise. I presume you cremate everyone at death?"

Donzelon flashed a peculiar smile and shrugged his shoulders.

"Cremation is a crude word," he replied, "and it is not to be found in our dictionary. No, friend, the Death Ray is applied when a Martian has passed onward, and after that we have no regrets."

"What is the average span of a Martian life?" Dorchester queried. "We seldom pass an allotted span of three score years and ten."

Donzelon gazed through the French window and appeared lost in thought.

"I expect you will be astounded to hear," he answered, "that our Grand Vizier is five hundred years old. You see, we have a special rejuvenation process that would startle your scientists, and it is nothing for a Martian to live five or six hundred years."



I presume you would like to learn my age, but that must remain a secret for it might prejudice my chance of taking one of these young ladies back to Mars."

The girls gazed at each other in horror.

"We must get hold of Voronoff," Paul Church announced with a hearty laugh. "Perhaps you can give him one of your recipes, Donzelon. We are familiar with a gland treatment for longevity, but we find it difficult to exist longer than a century."

Donzelon grinned, and accepted a second cup of tea from Venetia, with polite thanks, then helped himself to sugar and a buttered scone.

"Some of our Martian giants compete in games until they reach four hundred," he declared. "We admit a few of them get stiff joints, and others are granted a gratuity equivalent to your old-age pension, but they do not linger on until death comes. They fight disease and decay until the last moment. Believe me, we Martians are difficult people to eliminate."

Dorchester breathed hard. He was getting a number of important facts for his book, and he wondered what his publishers would say when he mentioned these points in his super-thriller. Meanwhile, the tea-things were cleared away, cigarettes passed round, chairs drawn closer to the blazing fire, and with the uncouth figure of the partly-clad Martian in their midst a fusillade of questions were fired concerning the far-distant planet.

"I presume you have discovered the secret of ether-wave reproduction?" Paul Church queried. The Death Ray formula was in his possession, and he



could demonstrate the Ray at any instant with the flash-lamp he had locked in the turret-tower.

"Yes, we made that discovery two thousand years ago," Donzelon drawled. "We can bring back the voices of mighty singers of a past age, for nothing is lost on the ether, and even the voice of your famous Melba reached us years ago, which means that her glorious voice is still travelling onward to distant stars. Nothing can be destroyed, for everything is known and determined, and that is the sum total of our philosophy. We have captured all the voices of the past, can re-hear the speeches of dead centuries, and listen to the dramatic events that occurred when Mars was in a primeval state of evolution. That is our greatest achievement, so small wonder we have developed a State religion and that nothing counts to a Martian but Mars."

"That means your profits are derived from gramophone records," Dorchester suggested with a grin. "What do you ask for the exclusive patent of that ether-reproduction process?"

"You speak like a schoolboy of ten," Donzelon retorted. "I am not certain whether it is within my power to impart further Martian secrets, not at least until I send in my report to the Grand Vizier. The Death Ray was in a different category, for I was commanded to pass on that formula to Paul Church, but if we have wrested these secrets from Science you cannot expect us to pass them on to your world without a pause. Perhaps we have blundered already? Perhaps you are not in a position to utilise the Death Ray? Has it not occurred to you that you may not be



ready for some of the secrets we have actually discarded in our evolutionary progress?"

Paul Church gave a grunt of assent and waved a hand in complete comprehension. He also glared at the novelist, for Dorchester, in his opinion, was just the super-fool who would spoil anything.

"You are right," he declared promptly. "We dare not move too fast, Donzelon. At the same time, we could retain a few of your Martian secrets in a special room in our Museum. I mean you will admit that knowledge is universal, and if Einstein, Marconi, Edison, Lodge, or any of our great thinkers have contributed anything you have missed you are welcome to that data. We know that you Martians are thousands of years ahead of us in intelligence and that we are just pigmies of thought in comparison. I wish you could give us a few antidotes to disease or solve the cure of cancer. I am asking that on behalf of our stricken humanity, for we are all struggling towards the dawn, fighting desperately against disease, pestilence, and death."

The Martian stared at the speaker in a terrible silence.

"You really ask for Life to be prolonged beyond your allotted span?"

"Why not?" Dorchester queried with his boyish laugh. "If life can be snuffed out in a flash with that Death Ray Lamp, we want to know something about the other side to the argument. We do not seek Death. It is Life we want, and more abundantly. Are you aware that I could write a hundred super-thrillers for my publishers if I could live a fraction of the period allotted to your Grand Vizier?"



"Stop!" thundered the Martian. "You do not know what you are asking. We have prolonged life on the Martian planet but I do not confess it has brought happiness. We still seek the elixir of contentment. Perhaps we have missed something in that respect, something that may be revealed within the covers of your Bible. We live in a restless state of striving after some unobtainable goal, and perhaps in your present state of progress it would be madness to assign you the rejuvenation process or delude you with the hope that it would bring anything but misery, and into the bargain I very much doubt if the Grand Vizier would sanction it. Many of the diseases which you pronounce incurable happen to be the result of a certain state of mind, which means we have developed mental healing to a stupendous extent, and high-priests of Martian psychology would astound you. We have ferreted out many so-called occult secrets and a great number of Martians live in a seven-dimensional world. Apparently you have only reached the fourth dimensional plane of psychometry. That is the science of association with Nature when one becomes cognisant of the historical side of something touched. We have passed beyond that stage. Telepathy is a recognised Martian cult, and mind-reading was known to us four thousand years ago. Intuition and inspiration are kindred subjects of Martian knowledge. Indeed most of the occult arts are known to our experts, for we have even reached an etheric plane where consciousness is distinct from the body, and we can present you with a clear manifestation of mind over matter."

"To change the subject, would you mind telling us



something new about tinned salmon," Dorchester broke in irrelevantly. "You see, Donzelon, all those things are beyond the majority of us but we are curious to know if you have a special preservative for tinned foods, and if so I ought to make a fortune in Chicago or the great Middle West."

The Martian treated him to a cool, contemptuous stare.

"Martians do not specialise in the tinned food industry," he answered frigidly, "but may I ask if tinned salmon is the inspiration of modern thriller-writers?"

"Tell us something about your cinemas!" Venetia begged hurriedly, divining the growing hostility between the Martian and her fiancé, and anxious to avoid a scene at all cost. "You must have made great progress with the films, so I suppose you know everything about television and the latest form of sound-reproduction without the aid of the screen?"

Donzelon's features softened and the angry curve at his lips relaxed. He knew when he gazed into that lovely face that Venetia Gatacre must return with him to Mars in his 'M' plane and belong to him throughout all the years.

"Yes, we have accomplished a great deal in the world of kine-matography," he admitted. "We make a screen for our pictures out of the air itself and our films can be projected on any surface you mention. There is no limit to the genius of our film-producers, for we have the loveliest climate in the universe, and our screen stars move like spirits through space. They are like the solid thoughts of your imagination,



and almost touch you they are so life-like. For instance, when you enter a Martian cinema salon, a screen-figure guides you to your seat in the auditorium, and everything is arranged by the manipulation of a switch. Our projections could not be excelled for they are the last word in scenic effect and scientific presentation. We specialise in every branch of the cinema industry, and when we do use screens they are huge affairs. It is nothing for our film-experts to project five thousand actors at a given moment. In addition, every Martian household has its private cinema, its television apparatus, its wireless phone, and a hundred inventions you would not comprehend. We have no walls to our homes. We live in the open and all those other devices add to our comfort."

They listened with breathless amazement, and even Dorchester was impressed with the wonder of it all.

"I am just speculating what will happen when Donzelon visits London," Gatacre announced with a hearty laugh. "What a chapter of incidents we will witness. The Strand will be in chaos, Piccadilly Circus will be impassable, Regent Street and the West End will be choked with people. Every street will be blocked from end to end, and trains will be rushing sightseers from every part of the suburbs. Newspaper placards will decorate every corner, and the mob element will tramp each other down in a mad effort to see a Martian for the first time in their lives. There will be endless confusion and countless accidents. I foresee a terrible casualty list."

The Martian gave one of his Gargantuan laughs.



It shook the ceiling in an ominous manner and even the windows rattled.

"There is no need to dread the mob element," he answered placidly. "We have a method of our own on Mars in dealing with crowds and I assure you it is quite effective. We call it the Propulsive Ray, and it operates as a searchlight, pushing back crowds like a magic wand. If you care to come with me in my plane to-morrow, Gatacre, I will guarantee that your London crowd will not get within twenty paces of my machine when I land in Hyde Park."



## CHAPTER XXI

### A TERRIBLE ENCOUNTER

VENETIA spent a troubled night, with sleep coming in fitful starts, and long after midnight when Rockdene Hall seemed enveloped in a ghostly silence she rose and dressed under an impulse she could not understand.

She looked out on the terrace and saw it bathed in a pale, white light, with a mysterious moon shining overhead, and black clouds drifting across the heavens almost hiding the stars from view. What had happened and why could she not sleep? Why had she risen and dressed, and what was the impelling force urging her to act in this fashion?

She could not define it, yet had a vague sense that she was only partly conscious of her actions, that her movements were too deliberate to be normal, and even when she opened her bedroom door—the one adjoining rooms containing Violet and Veronica—and walked down the great staircase she had an idiotic notion she was half-asleep.

She knew it was about two in the morning, so picking up a white wrap she hung it loosely over her shoulders. As she opened the side door leading on to the terrace, she took extreme care to make as little noise as possible, and even that seemed the result of some peculiar injunction. She could not explain it, but when she



tried to analyse the whole thing it seemed that a voice was speaking to her and leading her somewhere against her will.

Yet she possessed no fear at that instant, for as she moved across the terrace and down the white marble steps leading to the garden she never paused once on that strange mission. Her direction led her towards the golf-course. She could not reason why she selected that path, but was thankful for the cold breeze enveloping her, and if she thought once of Donzelon it was to utter a grateful prayer that the monster was in the woods and not on the golf-course. There seemed no danger of meeting him.

As Venetia continued her walk across the fields, moving like a grey ghost in that mysterious moonlight, she recalled what had happened after dinner. It had proved a wonderful evening, and never would she forget the tingling sensation that came to her when she first heard the music emanating from that super-radio in the Green Room and listened to Jephthah's voice across the ether. That strange aerial held them transfixed, and how they gazed at the scientist with awe as they realised the gigantic radio was the creation of his brain. Even now, walking across that field towards the golf-course, still under the spell of some strange impulse, Venetia felt that the heavenly Martian music had been a dream, for that vast chorus and symphony of sound had held her and the others spellbound with the sweetest harmony they had ever heard in their lives. Donzelon had conducted himself with conspicuous charm, adding wonderful facts concerning Martian development, their economic



system, the method of distribution, the growth of the Martian State, how wealth was apportioned, how they dispensed with armies and navies, how Martian nations federated into one vast commonwealth, and he answered all questions with cultured ease. Through it all, she was ever conscious of Donzelon's steady scrutiny, those dark eyes gripping her with a weird fascination, and even when it came to say good night, prior to his departure for the woods, he held her in that occult gaze she could not resist, for she was helpless under the hypnotic sway of those orbs.

Now she paused at the shed that had been erected for the Martian plane. Why had she come here? She could not answer that query, for it baffled her inmost soul, yet through her sub-conscious mind ran a feeling that she had arrived at the spot, that she had obeyed instructions and must go no further. In heaven's name what was wrong with her? Had some part of her brain snapped with the excitement of it all, and was this the beginning of some fearsome nervous breakdown? Supposing the others knew of this escapade? What would Brian think, and what would her father say? Why, she had never done a monstrous act like this in her life!

She must return to the Hall, she must run like a deer in case she met any of the Gatacre guards, or, horror of horrors, lest she would dash into the path of Donzelon himself! The monster at that hour of the morning! Heavens, the thought almost sent her insane. It must be near two o'clock, and that was the time Donzelon awoke for his tree-felling. He boasted he never slept longer than four hours.



Suddenly she stopped dead and something made her glance round. Footsteps sounded behind her, lithe, firm steps that also conveyed a message of bare feet, then when she gazed at the figure who emerged, apparition-like, from the wooden shed her heart stood still and every particle of blood seemed to leave her body. She swayed as if confronting Death itself, for the monster who stood there was no other than Donzelon in all his hideous reality.

"Don't be alarmed," he begged in a quiet voice, "I do not intend to harm one hair of your head. It was I who sent for you, Venetia, it was I who called you from the depths of space, it was my telepathic voice you heard from the instant you left the Green Room last night and it has never left your brain. I am responsible for you being here at this spot and am prepared to take all the blame."

Heavens, he had used her Christian name. What did that imply! Was it all a diabolical plot to get her in his power? Was she trapped, was there no means of escape? Now she understood everything, and the mist departed from her brain. Donzelon had mesmerised her in some fashion, and this was the result of his occult power. Should she scream for help? She tried but could do nothing, for her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. Weak as water she felt on the point of swooning when suddenly an inspiration came as if in answer to prayer. She would face him with all the dauntless courage at her command. She would show this Martian monster that an English girl was not afraid of him.

"What a despicable trick to play on the daughter



of your host!" she exclaimed in a scornful voice. "Donzelon, our friendship is at an end from this instant. I am returning to the Hall, and if you take as much as a single step towards me I will scream for help and those Gatacre guards will swarm round you like flies. You are not over-popular and they will shoot you at sight if I give the word. However, I am anxious to know why you resorted to this move? If you do not intend anything devilish, why seek me here at this hour, why drag me here of all places?"

Donzelon folded his arms and stood there with the flicker of a smile at the corner of his lips.

"I had naturally an object in bringing you here," he answered, "but first of all disillusion your mind of everything evil. Venetia, you must know the truth. You are the loveliest creature I have met in my Martian existence. Nothing has exceeded you in beauty for you represent a vision that has haunted my mind since birth, a dream-creature of culture, beauty and grace, and the mere fact that you belong to this earth has nothing to do with my worship. I adore you. I have fallen hopelessly in love with you, and I use that word deliberately because I know you are betrothed to Dorchester, and in one sense you are as far removed from me as Mars itself. Yet there is one proposal I wish to make, and I want you to give it consideration. You can give me your answer when I return from London."

Venetia swayed before him, then stepped back with increased horror. She knew the monster had become enamoured of her, for there had been passionate admiration in his gaze, but there was something



behind those words that frightened her, making her catch her breath as if in dire agony of mind. She wanted to shriek yet had not the power. The Martian held her in that occult control.

"What do you wish to say that could not have been repeated in the library?" she demanded. "Why have you brought me here? Before heaven, you will answer for this trick. We have still the power to report you to your Grand Vizier for one single act of misdemeanour and I have only to cry out to bring those men on the estate here in a few seconds. I warn you if you are thinking of anything clever there is small chance of success."

Donzelon shook his head and his dark eyes flashed. He seemed pale as if struggling with some terrific emotion that threatened to engulf him, but he held himself in check.

"No, I am not trying to be clever," he muttered humbly. "I just act naturally as a Martian, and you do not understand my composition. I hear your warning, but you forget that my plane is in that shed and that I could fly with you to the clouds before you could utter a sound. I allow you speech but you have no further power unless I grant it. Yet I know my limitations, for I would never consent to take you by force. You would have to come to me of your own free will, Venetia. I brought you here because the suggestion I wish to make could not be offered before the others, for I want to avoid a scene at all cost. I can never do you harm, because my love for you is greater than life, and I envy the man who wins you for his bride."

"Don't make a sermon of it," Venetia scoffed, summoning all her strength. "The night air is chilly



and I wish to return to the Hall." Even as she spoke she knew Donzelon held her in that mesmeric power. She could do nothing until he released her. It was impossible to remove her eyes from his face. He gazed in a way that transfixed her with horror.

"I have already told you that our Martian sex-philosophy is different from your own," he continued. "We have love and romance on Mars but children are not born there purely as a result of sentiment. We have absolute faith in eugenics, and we do not trust natural selection. Martian children are born on a basis of physical perfection. Venetia, I know you have not a spark of affection for me in your nature, yet I realise you admired my physical fitness from the instant you saw me first on the golf-course. I caught the look in your eyes, and it was very easy to read. Frankly, your sex cannot avoid that involuntary admiration, for I have seen it in the eyes of your girl friends. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is destined for your sex to carry on the race and when you saw me for the first time I knew one thought dominated your mind. We have mastered the power of thought-transference, and it occurred to you that I was a super-being in a physical sense, that any descendant of mine would have the same physical attributes, the same splendid arms and body, and this magnificent strength you know I possess."

"Stop! stop! I know what you are going to say!" Venetia exclaimed in wild embarrassment. "And it's not true, not one word of it. That wicked thought never once entered my mind. I hate you more than anything on earth. Let me go, or must I call to those men?"



"You must hear me, to the end!" Donzelon pursued in his cool, deliberate voice. "I have spoken the truth, and the thought that came to you runs through every member of your sex. You felt, if the chance came, that it would be your duty to reproduce the finest type of manhood or womanhood possible. That is the chance I offer you if you care to take it. It is a duty you owe your race, for if you allow a man-child to be born to you it may alter the destiny of this world. It will be a Martian man-child, for we Martians have solved the problem of sex-determination. I can offer you that secret knowledge and the opportunity of centuries. Posterity will regard you as the goddess of the new race, for through you can the earth be repopulated with a new stock of men. Men with a high order of intelligence, lofty concepts, vast physical perfection, and the women of this planet will rise and call you blessed. That is the honour I place at your feet. Dorchester may put you out of his life for a period, but you are bound to win him back when he realises the sacrifice you have made for the race, and the eugenists of this world will take care of the Martian man-child that will be born unto you. I speak as one who has looked into the crystal of the future."

Venetia wanted to laugh hysterically, and all that flashed through her brain was the maddening thought that Donzelon was making an outrageous proposition, something that would drag her down to an obscene level, that filled her soul with horror, and for a few seconds she found it impossible to speak. She could not express her loathing and disgust, and when words came she poured them out in ungovernable anger.



"You vile, unspeakable beast!" she gasped. "You will meet death for this insult. At any rate, I will see you leave Rockdene Hall never to return. I will tell my father and Dorchester everything, and the facts will be related to your Grand Vizier. Let me go at once. I never wish to see your evil face again. You are horrible in my sight. I thought you cultured and refined, but what you have suggested is the last word in beastliness. If you dare touch me, I will scream for help!"

"No, you will not scream," Donzelon commanded. "That is something I forbid. Neither will you relate what happened at this shed. In that respect you will also obey my wishes, and only my death will release you from that bond. You see, I made provision that you would not report the matter, and I admit I have no desire for a censorious report going to my Grand Vizier. Be fair, however. I have not harmed you. I have treated you as a Martian gentleman, for if I wished to act in the brutal manner you mention don't forget you are in my power and I am a creature of flesh and blood. Venetia, I do want to hold you in my arms, but even that I forgo. I must prove that my love is greater than physical desire. I have made you an offer that any Martian male would make at the command of our eugenists, and you may still reflect on it. I will not seek to influence your mind, for you must come to me of your own free will. I shall know when that period of surrender arrives, when you will make the great sacrifice on behalf of your race, and at that hour you will find me waiting at this shed. I salute you, Venetia, and give you liberty to depart."



Venetia ran from him like the wind. She never paused in that mad flight until she reached the shelter of her own room at the Hall, and even when she undressed and crept back to bed like a frightened child she knew Donzelon still held her in his mesmeric power. One portion of her mind was gripped in an icy grasp, and she could not relate that terrible experience to a single soul until Donzelon's death released her from the spell.

Dorchester found her pale and pre-occupied at the breakfast table. He kissed her when she entered the dining-room, for they were the first to arrive, and she clung to him with a convulsive tenderness.

"Heavens, darling, you look like a ghost!" he exclaimed in profound concern. "What has happened? Have you been sleep-walking or something? I am not going to believe you had a peaceful night. I hear Donzelon and your father leave at one o'clock in the 'M' plane and will land in Hyde Park an hour later. Heaven knows what will happen afterwards but that is the programme. What is to hinder——"

He paused, for the millionaire entered followed by the scientist, Violet, and Veronica. They all appeared in great excitement.

"Venetia, I have splendid news!" exclaimed her father. "Paul Church and Dorchester will take you girls to London. You see, I have realised the impossibility of convincing Downing Street that a Martian has arrived in this part of Devon, so I resolved to spring a surprise on London. The newspapers will do the rest, and this afternoon you will all witness the sensation when Donzelon and I land in



Hyde Park in that 'M' plane. Now you have not a moment to lose if you are going by that train."

The girls screamed with delight, clapped their hands, kissed and hugged each other in sheer joy of liberty. Dorchester gave a loud shout of approval, wrung the millionaire by the hand, and danced the girls round the room. It was a moment of stupendous thrill, for they would witness the most epoch-making event London had ever experienced.

"Well, it seems too good to be true," Venetia exclaimed at last, taking her seat joyfully at the table and reaching for the coffee-pot. "Dad, it is the best news this year, and you are a dear for giving us back our freedom. Violet, we won't return till the last train, which means we may call at every cinema in London, and I know those two men will be exhausted by the time we shout a halt. We don't know what will happen in Hyde Park in the afternoon but I think the London papers will be worth a penny to-night."

"I sympathise with the traffic constables," the scientist laughed, making a dive for the toast and marmalade, "for they will have the busiest afternoon of their lives, and if the Cameron Highlanders don't chase you and the Martian out of Hyde Park, Arthur, I shall be surprised. The Chief Commissioner will ask Donzelon to leave at once. He won't mention a destination. He will just ask him very politely to go away for a few days until London has recovered from the shock of a monster with a bald head, pink skin, and practically nude body! Heavens, it will be the richest joke since the days of Queen Anne."



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE PROPULSIVE RAY

**P**RECISELY at 11.45 that morning Paul Church accompanied by Dorchester and the three girls entered a nondescript building in Whitehall, London, and proceeded in an elevator to the third floor. Here they were met by four commissionaires, the senior of whom exchanged a few words with the scientist, then the party mounted the staircase leading to the next floor where another commissionaire took charge of them from that instant. At a room marked No. 5 near the end of a long passage the men halted and saluted. Paul Church passed into this apartment after being duly announced, but Dorchester and the girls were ushered into a private waiting-room where a plenitude of magazines were stocked for perusal.

"Sir Miles Loder will see you presently," announced a young man to the scientist with great deference. "He is engaged with the Prime Minister, but I have told him you have arrived, and do not think you will wait long. Ah, here is the Chief!"

A white-haired man emerged from an inner door. This was Loder, the head of the British Secret Service, and the most important man in the British Isles. He was tall, dark, swarthy, carried himself like a Guardsman, and maintained that erect demeanour throughout.



He had kindly blue eyes, a debonair smile, and just the slightest touch of hauteur. He shook hands affably with the scientist and seemed delighted to see him.

"I am glad, Church, you have arrived on time," he said pleasantly. "The others are waiting, for your phone message sent us guessing, and we have not recovered from the shock. With great good luck I secured the Premier before he went to the north of Scotland, and Sir Mervyn Johns has arrived from Harley Street. We have also Sir Richard Alderson, head of the British Association, and two friends from the Yard. We can give you fifteen minutes, but that time may be extended."

"I have not come to bargain," Paul Church replied coolly. "As a member of your Department, Loder, I have to present my report, and it is for you to confirm that I have been doing good work. I had intended to seek a special audience with the Premier, but this business concerns your Department, so I will see them all in a bunch and you can watch the result. You need not bring a stenographer if your dictaphone is waiting."

"Everything is ready for your requirements," Loder smiled. "You certainly rouse my curiosity. For heaven's sake let us hear the stupendous news. If it is not sensational then I may think of placing you on the retired list, but we have only one Paul Church in the Empire and we are trusting you to the last trench. Go straight inside and meet the Premier."

The scientist recognised everyone present when he stepped into that inner sanctum, and he gave a formal bow. Sir Ronald Middleton, the Prime Minister,



shook hands with him cordially, he nodded politely to Mervyn Johns, the Harley Street expert, glanced at the two Yard men, bowed to Sir Richard Alderson from the British Association, then accepted the chair pushed towards him.

"Gentlemen, I am sorry to keep you waiting," he announced with something like an apology.

"Not at all, we have only just arrived, and it is splendid to see you again," replied the Prime Minister, taking off his horn-rimmed glasses, pushing back his mass of wavy white hair, and crossing his legs more comfortably. "As you know, gentlemen, there is no need to stress the importance of this occasion. Paul Church made himself the brightest star of our Signalling Section during the war, and had it not been for the German messages he intercepted and decoded we would have suffered many casualties indeed. Since that time he has been untiring in his efforts for the British Secret Service, and his great scientific knowledge has been applauded by our British Association. We have not heard from him for some months, but we knew he was engaged on special work for Sir Miles Loder, and this morning came a message that he must see us all on a matter of stupendous importance. We have set everything aside to meet him, and we know he will not disappoint us. Now Church, we are consumed with impatience to learn of your new discovery."

Paul Church folded his arms, stared at each in turn, and something like a smile of contempt touched his lips.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "I have got into communication with Mars!"



They all stared at the speaker and no one spoke for a few seconds. Sir Miles Loder stroked his chin reflectively and exchanged a glance with the brain expert. What had happened to their distinguished friend?

"I beg pardon!" observed the Prime Minister in a dry voice. "I don't think I heard that last remark."

"*I have got into communication with Mars!*" Paul Church repeated in a louder tone.

The Prime Minister rose, bowed gravely to the assembled company, and moved to the door.

"Loder," he said casually, "I am afraid you work the members of your Secret Service too hard. I am certain, for instance, that Paul Church needs a holiday. You might see he is sent for a prolonged cruise on the Mediterranean, or perhaps a trip to Australia would do him good. We will meet all expenses involved, and if you have any doubt on the subject of his health, Mervyn Johns will see you are furnished with a proper certificate. Gentlemen, I wish you *au revoir* and am sorry there has been some misunderstanding, but Paul Church has been taken suddenly ill and you can guess the nature of the malady. Overwork and brain fag necessitates for him a complete rest."

"Stop!" Paul Church thundered, rising to his feet and nothing could have been more arresting than the look on his face. The Premier paused on the threshold.

"What more is there to say?" Sir Ronald Middleton demanded in a tired voice. "My dear Church, you have just informed us in the presence of a distinguished member of the British Association that you have got



into communication with Mars. I assure you I am not deaf. I heard you distinctly the first time, and you were kind enough to repeat your remark. Unfortunately I have an express train to catch for the north of Scotland, and unless you can offer me some substantial proof of your incredulous statement, I am afraid I cannot delay my departure another instant."

"I possess overwhelming proof!" Paul Church continued in that dramatic tone.

The Prime Minister closed the door and returned to his seat. The Yard men resumed their places. The atmosphere was a trifle strained.

"Gentlemen, I apologise," the Premier said courteously. "You have just heard the sensational statement from the lips of Paul Church. He qualifies it by assuring us he can furnish us with substantial evidence that he is not suffering from a delusion. I suppose he must be humoured. Now, Church, you are one of the best fellows in the world, but I know your limitations. You have been working laboriously under the patronage of Arthur Gatacre, the famous steel magnate, who has taken a vast interest in you since the war days, so there is a distinct possibility you have discovered something extraordinary about the ether, but when you announce in plain English that you have contacted with the Martians you must admit we are not to be bamboozled in that manner."

Paul Church waited until the Premier had finished, then subsided on the chair he had vacated, and leaning back he surveyed his audience with the same look of bland contempt.



"Gentlemen, you are all fools!" he exclaimed with supreme indifference. "Frankly, we have imagined we knew everything concerning this mighty universe, but when it comes to bedrock we know absolutely nothing. I was a complete ignoramus until I made this investigation into space, and now I comprehend that this earth-world is but one tiny unit in a vast system of worlds."

Sir Richard Aldington coughed.

"I have never doubted that for one instant," he declared vigorously. "I, for one, am firmly convinced that wireless contact with some planet may one day be a distinct contingency, which means, my dear Church, that I am prepared to hear you to the end. Surely you do not imply that some voice has answered you on the ether from a space-zone we have not fathomed?"

"I mean nothing less!" Paul Church answered in a firm voice. "As the Premier has remarked, Sir Richard, I have been engaged on ether-research for months, and recently I contacted with a wave-length that brought me into contact with another planetary world. Yes, a world of human beings like ourselves, a world not belonging to the area circumscribed by our British Broadcasting Corporation. It formed part of ether vibrations that have baffled me for a quarter of a century, and when I contacted with that new realm of sound and harmony I realised I was the pioneer of a wonderful discovery in wireless science. I built a special radio which conformed to a certain design, containing a large number of valves, and fitted out with an unique aerial, but my reception remained poor



until I contacted with that peculiar wave-length, then I knew my mathematical formula had proved correct. I had discovered the Martian wave-length."

They listened in a dead silence. Mervyn Johns, the Harley Street pathologist, exchanged a further significant glance with the Chief of the Secret Service, but the latter signalled patience. They could not terminate the conference so long as the Premier was interested.

"May I ask one question?" said the Prime Minister in a practical voice. "How did you know, Paul, you had contacted with the Martians? Are you asking us to accept a rational statement that the Martians are a distinct race of people and that they can speak to us in our own language?"

The scientist bestowed a glance of pity.

"Yes," he replied, "the Martians first addressed me in their own language, and needless to say it proved unintelligible. Yet night after night I kept sending out the letters of our own alphabet on my special transmitter, and one evening they answered me back with the one word: 'MARS'."

The Premier could hardly restrain his merriment.

"Are you sure they did not spell out 'GUINNESS IS GOOD FOR YOU'?" he demanded with a chuckle. "Alderson, I appeal to you as a distinguished member of the British Association, do you really advise me to sit here one moment longer?"

"My dear sir," Alderson answered promptly, "there is nothing to prevent wireless communication with Mars as Marconi has hinted, but that is presupposing that Mars is inhabited. Perhaps we could inspect this super-radio?"



Paul Church leaned forward.

"You are all invited to Rockdene Hall to-night," he announced, "and there you will have the chance to demonstrate everything for yourselves. I will guarantee the finest orchestral entertainment you have heard, for you will listen to musical selections that have never been broadcast from any part of this world, and if you find I have played a trick you can throw me in an asylum for the rest of my life."

"That seems fair enough," muttered the Premier in a dazed tone. "Has Arthur Gatacre heard this Martian demonstration?"

"He has listened to every Martian broadcast, has acted as my colleague throughout, and would be here to-day only he is keeping an important appointment."

"Are there any other witnesses?"

"Yes, they are in the waiting-room, and you can cross-examine them to any extent," Paul Church replied. "I refer to Venetia Gatacre, the daughter of the steel magnate, Violet Church, my own daughter, Veronica Richmond, secretary to Gatacre, and a promising young novelist named Brian Dorchester."

"Good, we will talk to them!"

"One moment!" begged the scientist, clutching at his arm as he moved to the door. "I have far bigger news than contacting with a Martian wave-length. Are you ready to hear it?"

The Prime Minister sighed and mopped his face with a silk handkerchief. Even the Yard men possessed an air of resignation, for they were convinced they were dealing with a lunatic.

"We are ready for anything!" Sir Miles Loder



answered. "Do not forget, Paul, that the Premier must catch that train to the north of Scotland."

"I have also a number of important clients," Mervyn Johns mumbled.

"Gentlemen," Paul Church announced, "I am going to make the astounding statement that a Martian has actually flown through the stratosphere to this world, and he will fly here from Devon to Hyde Park this afternoon accompanied by Arthur Gatacre, the steel magnate."

Any doubt about the insanity of the speaker seemed definitely removed by those words. They were all convinced that something terrible had happened to the great intellect, and out of pity for the tragedy that had occurred they were doing their utmost to let him think he had duped them.

"What is the name of this Martian?" asked the Prime Minister in a quiet voice.

"Marcus Donzelon!" Paul Church answered pleasantly. "He will give you the greatest shock of your life, and all London will regard him as a super-monstrosity. He has terrible eyes, a bald head, pink skin, is nude save for a loincloth, and has the strength of twelve men. He followed the instructions I sent on my radio, and he has been staying with us at Rockdene Hall. Those four young people in the waiting-room will confirm every word I have said for they have all met and spoken to the man from Mars."

Mervyn Johns rose and buttoned his overcoat.

"Well, we may consider the conference at an end," he replied significantly. "I take it, Mr. Prime Minister, that Paul Church has fallen a victim to some peculiar



form of mental hallucination, caused no doubt by overwork, and your suggestion is good that he should be granted a prolonged holiday."

"Wait!" Alderson begged in a hoarse voice. "Gentlemen, although the words you have just heard may sound incredible statements of fact I am going to suspend judgment until I have a chat with these young people in the waiting-room. We must have some concrete explanation of what has happened at Rockdene Hall."

They left the room and all trooped back in ten minutes. The Premier pushed in first and there was some strange excitement about his distinguished face. The others pressed in behind him, and everyone gazed at the white-haired figure of Paul Church with something like awe.

"Well," declared the Premier, "you are either going to prove the biggest genius in history, Paul, or we are the victims of the strangest conspiracy ever hatched. There must be some glimmer of truth in all these sensational statements from those young people outside so we are going to suspend judgment until we see what happens in Hyde Park this afternoon. Have you anything else to tell us?"

"Yes, the Martians are thousands of years ahead of us in intelligence, and Donzelon has given me the formula of the Death Ray," answered the scientist in a dramatic voice.

They all gazed at each other in a tense silence.

"The Death Ray!" Sir Richard Alderson repeated in an odd tone. "You mean——?"

"I mean it is derived from ether waves!"



Alderson gasped and leaned forward.

"God, if that is true!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "I remember, Paul, that was the basic thesis of the paper you read two years ago before our Association, and that was why we made you an honorary member. Mr. Prime Minister, if all this is true, we are standing on the verge of stupendous events in the history of this world, and it may represent the beginning of a new era of happiness and progress for all mankind!"

"No other power but the British Government will get the formula of the Death Ray," Paul Church declared in a firm voice. "That will be my contribution, Loder, to this Department."

The Prime Minister glanced at his watch.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "my visit to the north of Scotland is indefinitely postponed."



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE "HORROR" STALKS LONDON!

AT two o'clock that afternoon a strange, fish-like plane circled over London then flew steadily in the direction of Hyde Park. When first sighted it attracted the attention of thousands, for it dipped to a height of a thousand feet and its weird appearance caused endless comment from the vast throng of people who gazed curiously up at it. They were stupefied by the fact that no engine could be heard, and as the plane showed every indication of descending in the vicinity of Hyde Park there was a general stampede in that direction.

The police were helpless, for Hyde Park was stormed and those fortunate enough to enter the gates saw the strange-looking plane descend in the centre of the Park, and what a scene followed. Everyone rushed towards it, but suddenly the crowd was checked, for a huge force of Metropolitan police had assembled and they were already pressing back the crowds.

"What the devil is it?" men shouted. "Never saw anything like it in my blinking life!"

Then a strange hush went over the multitude assembled, and it was a moment filled with all the drama of the ages. Good heavens, what was that terrible thing that leaped from the plane when it landed?



## THE "HORROR" STALKS LONDON! 287

A wild cry of terror broke from many lips as they gazed on the unearthly figure of Marcus Donzelon with the dark staring eyes, bald head, pink skin, and almost nude figure! Women and children screamed, strong men fainted, and pandemonium broke loose. When those on the outskirts realised that something unprecedented had happened they pressed forward like a huge wave to see the uncanny sight for themselves.

Arthur Gatacre remained in the machine with folded arms, for he knew what was coming, and as he saw the huge crowd pressing forward like an engulfing sea he held his breath knowing what would happen in a few seconds. Donzelon waited until the crowd broke through the first police barrier, then he released a spring in the torch-like object in his hand, and immediately the incredible occurred. A bluish-ray lit up the faces of the crowd like a gigantic searchlight, and to the profound amazement of all the mob pressed back as if suddenly confronted with a tidal wave! Gatacre was astounded, for he had never witnessed anything like it in his life. Nothing could withstand that deadly Propulsive Ray, and the crowd fell back like thousands of frightened sheep. A strange hush fell on all. What in God's name had happened? What was the meaning of it, and who was this monster creature who had suddenly appeared in the centre of Hyde Park?

Gatacre stood up in the plane and his voice could be heard distinctly.

"Let the Fleet Street men come forward to meet the man from Mars!" he commanded.



A dozen reporters jumped to it when that dramatic pronouncement was made. Four camera-men were also present, and at the last second two cinematographers appeared from Wardour Street. Taking courage, they all rushed forward to the "M" plane and were seemingly relieved to find their progress unbarred by that mysterious blue ray. Nonplussed, the crowd allowed the Fleet Street men to pass between their ranks, but when the vast throng made another move to get near the Martian Donzelon treated them to another demonstration of his Propulsive Ray.

It pressed them back like an invisible battering ram and those who resisted that Ray were thrown down mercilessly, but they soon clambered up and rushed back with the others. The policemen were swept back with the same power. They gazed at each other in bewilderment until they saw the humorous side, then everyone laughed uproariously. The wild, jungle-like roar of the Martian echoed above the tumult of the mob, and Arthur Gatacre confessed afterwards it was the funniest sight he had witnessed.

Fainting women were passed through the crowd, and above the tumult came the cries of frightened children, for to their innocent gaze that monster represented the last word in horror. Even their elders knew the Martian would haunt their memory for all time, and had they been told he came from Hades they would have manifested the same stupor. Those nearest the plane gaped and stared at the super-being from another world. They laughed and grinned at his nudity, at the loin cloth and pink skin, at the terrible eyes and powerful physique. Camera-men and



cine-operators worked like Trojans, for this was the biggest scoop of their lives.

"Mr. Gatacre," exclaimed an enterprising journalist, "permit me to say that I am familiar with your portrait and know you are one of our big millionaires in the steel industry. I represent the *Daily Echo*, and should like an introduction to your mysterious friend!"

The steel magnate laughed and waved his hand.

"You are all entitled to a square deal," he announced blandly. "This is the first London visit of Marcus Donzelon, and you can take as many snaps as you like. Accept my word for it, gentlemen, that this is a real Martian who has flown all the way through the stratosphere from Mars, and you will not find his duplicate on terra firma. He is staying with me at Rockdene Hall, South Devon, and he will be examined by distinguished members of the British Association. He has just demonstrated to you a Martian invention known as the 'Propulsive Ray,' but it is perfectly harmless and has no ill effects. Had he not aided your Metropolitan police to that extent, this Martian plane would have been smashed to pieces."

It was noticed that Donzelon was about to speak, and a dead silence fell on the crowd. Even the reporters stood with pencils poised, and most of them had an unmistakable sense of fear. A cold sweat broke out on their foreheads, and a good few of them vowed they would sign the pledge for life. A super-horror of this kind was the last thing in mental phantasy.

"Tell the people of London that I am honoured to visit their great City," Donzelon commenced in a good-humoured voice. "I came to glance at Buckingham



Palace and stroll down Whitehall, but I fear I may interfere with the traffic. Mr. Gatacre has told you the truth. I have made the journey from Mars in that special 'M' plane and I have mastered your English language."

"Say, mate, is that supposed to be your bathing-costume!" came from a typical Cockney, causing a general grin. The journalists roared with delight and the Martian joined in the merriment. His ear-splitting laugh horrified the crowd like nothing on earth and women struggled desperately to get away from the sound of that voice.

"So you will grant me a front page?" Donzelon scoffed. "How many columns would you allocate if I told you I could wipe Fleet Street out in three minutes? You have just seen a demonstration of one invention, but you have not witnessed a manifestation of the Death Ray. That dog, for instance!"

From the inner fold of his loin-cloth Donzelon produced a second torch and before Gatacre could divine his intention a greenish Ray was levelled on the huge Alsatian who had strayed into the space between the journalists and the crowd. That was the end. Everyone rubbed their eyes in amazement. The Alsatian vanished into thin air. It disappeared like a spectre.

"Good heavens, don't use that in London!" Gatacre begged, his face deadly white. "Donzelon, be careful or you will rouse the fury of that mob and they will tear you to pieces if they realise what you have done with that animal."



THE "HORROR" STALKS LONDON! 291

"Yes, I dare say they would prove hostile," Donzelon admitted, "but don't forget they would never get within five yards of this machine so long as I held this Propulsive Ray. You can see I am keeping it handy. I am sorry if I have blundered, Gatacre, but better a dog than a human being and the crowd had to be entertained. Besides, that dog never knew what happened to it."

A police inspector pushed his way forward and gave the steel magnate a smart salute.

"Beg pardon, sir," he announced, "but the crowd is getting out of hand."

"We will leave the Park at once, Inspector," Gatacre answered. "I know you will see that the plane is guarded, but my friend has decided to stroll down Whitehall and he has as much right to see the sights of London as any other visitor. I know you will see that a passage is cleared for him."

"Have those instructions carried out!" added a voice, and turning both men confronted Sir Ronald Middleton, the Prime Minister, accompanied by two Yard men who had just pushed their way through the crowd.

"Very good, sir," replied the Inspector with another salute, and hurrying off he issued a few sharp orders to his colleagues.

"This is a surprise, Sir Ronald!" Gatacre exclaimed, shaking hands warmly with the newcomer. "Allow me to present Marcus Donzelon, the first Martian who has flown to this world. Donzelon, permit me to introduce you to our distinguished Prime Minister, Sir Ronald Middleton!"



"Sir, you do me a very great honour," Donzelon exclaimed with a dignified bow. "I hope one day you will have the pleasure of meeting our Grand Vizier."

"You have certainly made me reflect on my past life," replied the Premier with a forced laugh, staring at the sky-monster with extreme diffidence and displaying every sign of nervousness. "I do not wish to be rude, or to cause the slightest offence, but you are more unnerving than you realise, and I am not surprised at Londoners getting into a panic when you first made your appearance."

During the talk the Martian kept the crowd interested by manipulating the Propulsive Ray, and the scenes that followed being most laughable there was a momentary lull in a tense situation.

"What do you think of the demonstration?" Gatacre asked, surveying the scene.

"I am more intrigued with the Death Ray and the elimination of that dog," promptly replied the Prime Minister. "That is why I have accepted the invitation to dine at Rockdene Hall this evening. You see, Paul Church paid us a visit in Whitehall this morning, and needless to add we were all incredulous, but now I have the evidence of my own eyes and I am going to see a further demonstration of that Ray to-night. May I bring a few friends?"

"Bring as many as you like, my dear Middleton," Gatacre responded with great enthusiasm. "We shall be delighted to have you at the Hall and perhaps you can stay a few days. I ought to mention that Paul Church is somewhere in that huge crowd, and when



he can extricate himself from the enveloping folds of that Propulsive Ray he will join us at once. He has brought my daughter and a few friends to see the fun. We owe everything to Paul in connexion with this Martian visit, and when you hear his super-radio this evening I think you will concede he is the greatest genius in England."

They chatted together for a few moments, then with a rush came Dorchester and the three girls, followed by Paul Church, the white-haired scientist. They made a circuitous path through the struggling mob and found an opening at last. Paul Church greeted them all with a bright smile.

"Well, Donzelon," he exclaimed good-humouredly, "I see you have been giving Londoners a free entertainment, and have not been arrested by the police. I never imagined your Propulsive Ray would prove so effective. We saw the landing of the plane and what happened afterwards. Dorchester and the girls nearly broke their sides laughing, and the look on the faces of those Metropolitan police was something we will never forget. We also witnessed the elimination of the Alsatian. I am just wondering what would happen if you gave them a demonstration of your tree-felling ability, but that might get us into trouble with the London Corporation, so we had better get to the next part of the programme. Mr. Prime Minister, I nodded to you twice, but you were busily engaged watching that Propulsive Ray. Confess I had something up my sleeve when I paid you that Whitehall visit this morning."

The two men shook hands dramatically, and the Premier seemed moved with some deep emotion. He



patted the famous scientist on the back and took his arm affectionately. Dorchester pushed his way nearer, and although the girls hung back in awe of the Martian, one could see from their smiling faces they were hugely enjoying themselves. Venetia avoided Donzelon's gaze with cold deliberation, but the others laughed uproariously each time the crowd was pushed back with that mysterious Ray.

"Well, what is the next item?" asked the novelist vigorously. "Mr Gatacre, don't imagine we have been idle. These girls dragged us round Regent Street, Oxford Street, all the principal dress emporiums, and we ended up with a ripping lunch in the Regent Palace Hotel. Donzelon, I salute you in the name of the gods. This Hyde Park fun beats everything to a frazzle. I dare you to walk down Whitehall or even get within fifty yards of Buckingham Palace sentries."

Regarding him frigidly, the Martian tried to conceal the hatred in his glance. The man before him was his rival and even at that instant he knew Venetia would never consent to the proposition he had made. Her eyes had given him his answer in unmistakable fashion.

"My dear Dorchester, I accept the challenge," he answered suavely. "In any case I have a notion my death might not appear to you such a lamentable event. On the other hand I may stand higher in your regard than I imagine, so to carry on the good work of entertainment I am going to give a demonstration from Big Ben that should last your Londoners a century at least."

Dorchester and the girls exchanged glances. What was going to happen in the region of Whitehall? They



pressed nearer, and even Venetia partly forgot her terror of the sky-monster. What sensational act was Donzelon going to perform when he passed the Cenotaph and moved towards the Houses of Parliament? Why, the crowds would be stupendous and they might all get crushed to death.

"What is the programme, Donzelon?" Paul Church asked with a forced smile, for he also had acute misgiving, and these thousands of Londoners unnerved him more than he confessed. He never anticipated a reception of this kind.

"Wait and see!" the Martian grinned back.

"My car is outside the Park," announced the Prime Minister. "I suggest, Donzelon, you do me the honour of riding in it as far as Big Ben and I will see the traffic is regulated. We will follow in taxis behind and offer up special prayers on your behalf."

What followed was an unprecedented sight, and never would London forget it.

As the Premier's car hove in sight containing that uncanny monster from the skies standing upright for everyone to behold, traffic was brought to an automatic standstill and a rush was made for every point of vantage. Good order was maintained, for at the least threat of road congestion Donzelon manipulated his torch with unerring accuracy, and the dense masses were thrust back like a magic wand.

What a sight for the London populace! As the huge crowd surged into Whitehall and moved past the Horse Guards Parade a sentry on duty almost rubbed his eyes in amazement, but true to tradition he stood like a figure of granite and Donzelon gave him



a smart salute. He stared at the Guardsman in frank admiration, but what the Guardsman thought of him is not chronicled.

A dramatic pause came at the Cenotaph when Donzelon jumped from the car and stood before England's Shrine in a silence most impressive. . . . The moments passed. . . . Two, three, then the Martian bowed three times to the ground without the least sign of haste. It was the Martian obeisance before the Cenotaph to our Glorious Dead, then he stepped back into the car in that dead silence.

The strange procession moved onward. Journalists, camera men, constables kept pace with it, and every thing was noted. Already feverish messages were rushing to Fleet Street and in a few minutes the presses would be pouring out the sensational tidings to the world that a Martian had passed down Whitehall!

When the Houses of Parliament were reached and the crowds surged forward, Donzelon stepped from the car like a member of royalty, crossed the pavement and passed into the main entrance of the House of Commons. A message had already been sent to the policemen on duty.

The crowd waited anxiously. What would happen?

Four minutes later a huge roar went up from the crowd as the whisper went round that the Martian was climbing to the top of Big Ben. That message sent an electric thrill through the crowd, and every eye gazed up at that gigantic nude figure as Donzelon climbed, hand over hand, towards the pinnacle of London's mighty clock. He was doing the job with magnificent ease, yet the crowd gasped at the awe-



inspiring sight. The thing was uncanny for Donzelon was like a huge creature of the jungle as he made that hazardous ascent without the least hesitation.

What next?

Another mighty roar from every throat as the crowd realised the terrific task had been accomplished, and that Donzelon had actually reached the highest pinnacle of the clock tower. He stood there like a strange spectre of the skies and at that instant Big Ben struck four solemn notes. Donzelon waited until the last reverberation died away, then with a dramatic gesture to the crowd beneath he flung himself far into space.

A terrible groan went up from the thousands who gazed upward. Had the Martian plunged to death?

Then came a deafening, tumultuous cheer as the vast crowd realised what had occurred. Donzelon was manipulating his Propulsive Ray torch against himself as he lowered gradually in mid-air, keeping himself suspended like a bird in its downward flight to the ground. That torch was his salvation against the menace of destruction, and cheer after cheer rent the metropolis as the Martian slowly drifted to the earth and safety.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### A TERRIBLE NEMESIS

ROCKDENE HALL was bathed that evening in a pale, white glow, and not a sound disturbed the silence. It was a night of stars, a night when it seemed as if every jewel in the firmament had conspired to glow with extraordinary beauty, and the two human beings on the terrace were conscious of the strange spell that had fallen on that part of Devon. The girl, Venetia Gatacre, was dressed in white, the long, shapely throat relieved with a single necklace, and as she stood there she represented a dream-vision of youth and loveliness, a perfect setting for a magic scene. The young man beside her was Brian Dorchester in evening dress, looking handsome and particularly fit. It was nine p.m. and dinner had just ended.

"Happy?" he whispered.

Venetia held up her lips to be kissed.

"Yes, and the scene from this terrace could not be more captivating," she murmured, "yet I have a premonition that this amazing day will not end so tamely as we imagine. Don't forget we have the Prime Minister with us, and the chief resident of Downing Street is always important. We have also those four men from the Savoy Hotel, but I cannot say they appeal



to me at all. That Samuel Harford appears the leader of the group, and I know he is an American. He does nothing but talk, and I think he lives for his stomach. How do you like Sir Miles Loder? I think he makes an ideal Secret Service Chief, and he kept us amused with those stories of Paris and the Riviera. I am also interested in Sir Richard Alderson, the famous head of the British Association. His dome-like forehead seems to contain all the knowledge of the ancients. As for Mervyn Johns, the Harley Street pathologist, he could not be more intriguing."

"Darling, you are not thinking of those people," Dorchester protested. "I can see the horror in your eyes. You are still haunted by that sky-monster from Mars. I believe that brute Donzelon has terrified you more than you will confess. I wish he had forgotten his Propulsive Ray when he took that terrific leap from Big Ben."

Venetia cuddled close and her voice reached him in a whisper.

"Brian, I hate Donzelon more than you think," she confessed. "But what a day it has been! We have never been through so much excitement in our lives, and those London papers must have sold by the million to-night. I am feeling tired and should like to retire early, yet I seem to live in dread since that uncanny creature landed on the golf-course. He fills me with unspeakable loathing. I feel as if he were more demon than man, as if he might be guilty of any act of fiendish cruelty, and he hates you into the bargain."

Two laughing voices reached their ears, and turning they saw Violet and Veronica rushing out to find them.



Both girls, despite the secret terror they cherished concerning the Martian, appeared to be in the highest spirits and seemed determined to spoil the tête-à-tête on the terrace.

"Look at these turtle-doves," Violet exclaimed, dragging her companion forward. "Venetia, congratulations on that lovely engagement ring, which really proves that we have been to London, but we have strict orders that we must retire early. Brian is wanted for some important conference in the library."

Meanwhile the four men from the Savoy Hotel were having a serious chat in the billiard-room. They had made a move to this part of Rockdene Hall before the chat in the library commenced. These four individuals were responsible for the arms traffic in Chicaco and they certainly looked the part. Reginald Cody represented the beer-drinking type, with a short stocky form that was almost grotesque. His ferret-like eyes betrayed him at every glance.

"That beast Donzelon gives me the creeps," he growled.

Samuel Harford gazed at him with contempt. He was stoutish in appearance, had blue watery eyes that held derision and a thick underlip signifying brutality. His evening dress had been made in a hurry, and even the white tie had the suspicion of a smudge.

"Well, I have a Mexican six-shooter," he snarled, touching his hip-pocket, "and I am aching to put a bullet through that ape-like Martian. Nevertheless, he has opened our eyes to the significance of the Death Ray, and that demonstration in Hyde Park completed our education. We must secure the formula at all



cost. You can see the British Government is fighting shy of it, and we were not invited down here for our health. I believe the British Exchequer is in need of a substantial sum, and Paul Church is just the patriot who would sell his soul to help England out of a hole. Arthur Gatacre falls in the same category, and the British Premier is playing a clever game. He wants to see how far we can be persuaded to increase our price. Well, we have our minds made up on the figure. We are not going to be fooled by the politicians, and if we have made a pile over the Chicaco operations, we can afford to make a speculative grab for the formula. Does that go for all of you?"

The Frenchman, François Bosanquet, nodded assent. He was a thick-set, dark-faced Gallic, with black eyes abnormally large, and a chin none too prominent. Like the American he wore an ill-fitting dress suit, and somehow did not fit the part. He chalked his cue vigorously and glanced towards the door.

"Yes, we must secure the formula," he affirmed in good English. "Harford, you have charge of the negotiations, and we look to you to make the deal a success. Not one penny more than the sum we agreed. We ought to outclass Gatacre and his friend at this game. Loder is a different proposition, but he is watching points for his own Department, and obviously Church and Gatacre are the men with whom to deal."

Ernst Muller, the German, nodded his blonde head. Tall, robust, florid, his blue eyes narrowed to pin-points. Unlike the others he was exceptionally well tailored, and had it not been for his bulky frontage due to excessive eating would have been good-looking.



"Gott in Himmel, make no mistake about the formula," he said with dramatic earnestness. "We leave the talking to you, Harford, for we know our limitations, and you are the head of the group. You also know what the Death Ray means to our negotiations abroad, and even if it comes to increasing our price we must not return without the formula. We have sworn that oath."

Ten minutes later they trooped into the library in an odd silence. Four chairs were allotted near the bookshelves. The Prime Minister sat at the head of the oval Japanese table, on his right the white-haired Paul Church, on his left Arthur Gatacre, the steel magnate. Sir Miles Loder sat between Dorchester and the Martian, and in a distant corner, on a small couch, reclined Victor Serge, the Yard expert, who was looking after the Premier. Ostensibly he was reading a crime novel, yet his dark penetrating eyes took in every detail of the proceedings, and even Dorchester noted the sinister bulge in his pocket.

"Gentlemen," began Sir Ronald Middleton, "we are not going to waste time. We have assembled to discuss the possibility of eliminating war. Our good friend, Marcus Donzelon, has not spoken much, but you can accept my word that he is keenly interested in this conference. As you know, the arrival of a Martian has meant a new epoch in our history, and as you have all realised Donzelon has introduced a potential factor into the war game. We have all witnessed a demonstration of the Death Ray in London. I am glad, Harford, you and your three friends got to Hyde Park, and we are delighted to have you this evening.



I understand you are keenly interested in the Martian invention and wish to make a proposition. Before hearing that offer, I should inform you that Paul Church is uncertain whether the Death Ray would confer a boon on the world, but an attractive offer might alter the state of his mind."

"We are not going to be fooled," Arthur Gatacre intervened. "May I suggest that if this formula goes to Harford and his friends a declaration will be signed that the Death Ray will only be used as a definite factor for Peace."

"I agree!" Paul Church declared, banging his fist on the table. "War must be outlawed from the world, and if that assurance is given in writing I confess it would weigh with me considerably."

Harford exchanged a glance with his colleagues.

"Before making an offer for this formula," he observed, "will you permit me to state, Sir Ronald Middleton, that your friends place us in a difficult situation. Have we reached a civilisation where war can be discarded? Are we not still fighting the primeval impulses of man? Seemingly you forget, gentlemen, that war is the sole, final arbitration between nations, therefore we are forced to——"

"Stop!" thundered the Prime Minister. "War solves nothing. In 1914 we had a Directory of Great Powers, all conscious of a common responsibility for the peace of Europe, and none of them desired war. We had the Balance of Power. We had two diplomatic groups—the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. We regarded them as an insurance corporation. We thought the latter would prevent Russia or France from making



a blunder. To some extent they both justified themselves, and a certain equilibrium was maintained. We retained command of the sea, and up to the end of the nineteenth century we were not regarded with jealousy or suspicion. Unfortunately the French never forgot Alsace-Lorraine. There was also an Italia irredenta. We had no Polish question. The German, Russian, and Austrian Governments were in harmony. Even the *status quo* in the Balkans satisfied down to 1912. The European frontier system did not justify war. The territories of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were an economic unit. European States paid their way and engaged in mutual trade. There appeared a close affinity between the political systems of the Great Powers. There was the Morocco question creating tensivity between France and Germany. We had German Colonial rivalry in East and Central Africa. However, those points were settled by the Franco-German Treaty of 1911 and by the Lichnowski-Grey Agreements concerning the Portuguese colonies.

"Only two big questions remained: Anglo-German naval rivalry and Austro-Russian rivalry in the Balkans. Failure to solve those problems led to the world-war. You know what happened afterwards. Armageddon smashed the old frontier-system. It smashed the 'Directory' of Great Powers. We have no longer a Concert of Europe. The Hapsburg Monarchy disappeared like a flash in the night. Russia has withdrawn from European politics, and since 1918 the remaining Great Powers have been at loggerheads. Mussolini's Four-Power Pact of 1932 was never ratified. The political homogeneity of Europe has been



eliminated, and Parliamentary government has changed hands for dictatorships. There is a new Italo-Yugoslav problem. We have still the Franco-German divergence, and every Government has a programme of Economic Nationalism. The Disarmament Conference failed. War solves nothing, gentlemen. Not only were ten million lives thrown away in the Great War, but we know that war on a vast scale may break out again at any moment. We believe that the Death Ray may save the world and the League when all else fails. That is why we must have a written guarantee, Harford, that the Ray will only be used as an instrument for international Peace."

A dramatic pause ensued. Everyone was moved at the Premier's eloquence, and even the Martian admitted the British Prime Minister had risen to the occasion. He nodded in profound agreement. Then he sent a stern glance in the direction of Harford and something unpleasant entered his eyes. He folded his arms as if awaiting developments. Dorchester studied him closely. He could not understand the silence of the Martian. What was coming? Were they on the verge of grim tragedy? Victor Serge pushed his crime book aside and gazed at the assembly. He also felt the tragic solemnity of the moment.

"There is another point," Gatacre announced with marked coldness. "If Harford makes a money bid for the formula, a special clause must be inserted that he and his friends suspend all further interference with Chicaco operations. If we intend bringing peace to this world, we must stop the supply of armaments to belligerents who think in terms of war."



Again the fist of Paul Church descended on the table, and when he spoke his voice was clear and deliberate.

"Those are my sentiments," he affirmed. "I should never part with the formula unless the Chicaco bloodshed comes to an end. An immediate armistice will have to be signed between the contending armies."

"Most of us know what war means," Sir Miles Loder added in a husky tone. "I lost four sons at Gallipoli, and know the agony endured by Chicaco fathers and mothers. We have determined, Harford, to put an end to that hideous struggle in South-Eastern Europe."

"We have banished war from Mars," Donzelon observed in a deep voice. That was the only remark he made, and they all gazed at him in an odd silence. His eyes were concentrated on Harford, and Dorchester was startled by the sinister light in those orbs. What was the Martian planning? What counter move would he make? He seemed like a huge tiger about to spring.

"Gentlemen," Harford announced, "we offer two million pounds for the formula, but with your permission, Mr. Prime Minister, we will retire to consider the other points that have been mentioned. Personally I regard war as inevitable between nations, and am strongly disinclined to interfere in the Chicaco dispute. That is the advice I will tender my colleagues, but I will report to you in a few moments."

Arthur Gatacre rose from the chair opposite.

"Harford," he said in ringing accent, "I speak on behalf of my friend Paul Church. We should never dream of accepting that sum for the formula, and you



may as well know that at once. If you wish to amend your proposition, you will find the Blue Room on the left of the corridor at your disposal, and we allow you five minutes to come to a decision. Needless to add, there are other markets!"

The four men trooped out as silently as they entered, and Donzelon followed Harford with his eyes. Even Paul Church was moved by the terrible tensivity of that gaze, and he stared at the Martian in surprise.

"Donzelon, I don't think you like that chap," he laughed, "You looked at him just now as if you wished to eliminate all four men with that Death Ray. I know they all deserve a cruel fate, but that would be a dismal end to our conference and spoil all chance of an amicable settlement."

The Martian offered no reply. He simply stared at the door through which those men had passed, and they all looked towards him uneasily. The Martian's face had whitened. His fingers clenched and there was something devilish in his gaze. Then the incredible happened. Three revolver shots in rapid succession rang through the Hall, and everyone jumped, for the sound came from the Blue Room. The next instant Harford dashed into the library and moved to the Martian with a slow gesture. In his right hand was that Mexican six-shooter, and he was laughing horribly with a white foam at his lips.

"Donzelon, I have carried out instructions," he said thickly. "I have shot all three through the brain. Cody, Bosanquet, and Muller are dead. That was an excellent suggestion you made as we left the room. I knew when I eliminated those men I would be at



liberty to bid for the formula. The Death Ray will be mine."

The Martian gave a revolting grin they would never forget, yet above the din of voices in the corridor, the screaming of women and shouting of men, Donzelon dominated the scene in the library. He pointed at the American with an accusing finger.

"You are the mass-murderer," he snarled. "You murdered thousands of people in the Chicaco war-zone. Why blame me for the death of your colleagues? If you have shot those three men, Harford, you will pay the penalty with your own life. See that my command is obeyed."

Before anyone could divine his intention, the Mexican revolver was raised, and Harford dropped with a bullet through his own head. Was it suicide? Serge made a rush for the door, jerked it open, pushed back the struggling journalists seeking admission, entered the Blue Room, inspected the dead bodies of the three men, then returned to the library and confronted the Martian, while all the others gazed in bewilderment.

"Marcus Donzelon, I arrest you for the murder of four men," Serge announced. "By a devilish process of auto-suggestion, you made Harford obey instructions under some mesmeric impulse and then made the American take his own life."

Everyone gasped, and Paul Church exchanged a quick glance with the steel magnate. The Prime Minister wiped the perspiration from his forehead, then shot a quick look at Loder.

"Serge you have made some mistake," Gatacre said in a voice of protest.



The Martian held up his hand, perfectly self-possessed, and only that devilish grin remained on his lips.

"Serge is right," he affirmed. "I have eliminated those men by the method he has outlined, but don't you think I have committed the perfect crime, gentlemen? Can any barrister prove in a British Court of Justice that I killed those four men? Don't you admit that, in any case, those scoundrels deserved a horrible death for they caused the murder of seventy thousand people in South-Eastern Europe, and all they have received is a bullet through the brain. A painless passing compared to the agony of war-wounds or poison gas. Apart from that, Serge, you intrigue me with your sagacity, but just how are you going to arrest me?"

The expert drew something from his pocket and held it in his right hand.

"Look out, Donzelon!" Gatacre warned. "Serge has got your Death Ray torch. He means to wipe you out if you offer the least resistance."

Serge shrugged and gazed into the eyes of the Martian.

"Precisely my intention," he answered. "You see, Donzelon, I watched you conceal that torch in your loin-cloth this afternoon in Hyde Park, and that was why I selected the sofa behind you to read my crime novel. During the talk that ensued I removed the Death Ray from your possession, and knew it would prove safer in my custody."

The journalists pressed forward, and everyone watched the scene breathlessly. The din in the corridor was getting louder, but everyone in the library was spellbound by the dramatic words of the Yard expert.



"You have not the power to operate that," Donzelon replied. "I command you to hand the torch back to me, and disobey at your peril."

To the intense astonishment of all, Serge surrendered the torch to the Martian then slipped to the ground unconscious. A cloud had passed over his brain.

"Donzelon, you deserve death," announced the Prime Minister. "The laws of our country would command you to be hanged, but we have not the power to arrest you for these crimes. That being so, you must return to Mars and take that Death Ray with you. Go before it is too late!"

The Martian bowed and the grin remained on his face.

"A wise decision, Mr. Prime Minister," he scoffed. "I will take your hint and return to Mars, but I have one job to execute first. I regret, Paul Church, that I must visit your Green Room and destroy your super-radio. I can never give you the chance of reporting this little episode to the Grand Vizier. I warn you all to keep your distance. If you make a single move in my direction, or interfere with my departure in that plane, it will mean the end of Rockdene Hall and every soul inside it."

He moved back, pushed open the French window, and walked stealthily along the terrace, still holding that grim torch in his right hand. They watched him until he disappeared into the Green Room and everyone gazed at the scientist.

"He will keep his word!" Gatacre groaned. "He will smash your radio, Paul. In heaven's name, what can we do!"

"You will hear no sound!" Paul Church replied.



"Donzelon will eliminate that radio with his torch. I am not worrying about that part. I am wondering what else the fiend has in his mind!"

They soon knew, for after two minutes that seemed like an eternity the Green Room door was pushed open and Donzelon made his reappearance carrying the unconscious form of a girl on his shoulder. Heavens, it was Violet Church. The scientist covered his face with his hands in an attitude of prayer, and they heard the deep sobs rising from his throat. It was a ghastly moment of torture, and Dorchester felt the tears blinding his own eyes, but they were all absolutely powerless with Donzelon approaching the wooden shed like some creature of the jungle with his prey.

Then the scientist moved, and they turned startled faces in his direction, but Paul Church ran to the turret-tower as fast as his legs could carry him.

The "M" plane rose from the golf course. They saw its sinister, fish-like shape by the weird light of the moon and the myriad stars. It headed in their direction, flying straight to the Hall. Would Paul Church be in time with the torch containing the Ray that Donzelon had given him before going to London?

Nearer came the plane. It circled dramatically over the Hall as if in final salute to some occupant, then came a diabolical laugh followed by a dramatic hush, for suddenly the plane was illumined with a greenish ray from the turret-tower, operated by the steady hand of Paul Church, then a few seconds later there was nothing left but empty space. Donzelon had gone to his doom and with him the unfortunate daughter of the scientist.



Gatacre rushed up the spiral staircase like a man possessed, but even as he burst into the turret-tower he knew he was too late. Paul Church lay there white as death, the Death Ray torch broken and destroyed beside him.

"Good-bye, Arthur!" muttered the dying scientist. "It has proved a fatal heart-seizure this time, but I am going with the formula undisclosed to a living soul. *We cannot afford the knowledge of the Martians.*"

THE END



# CORBETT FOR THRILLS

---

In planning and producing a new story, James Corbett keeps his main objective steadily before him. To create and maintain an atmosphere of intense excitement is the effect he strives for, and the success he has achieved to this end can be accurately gauged from the length of this list of his very popular thrillers.

**7/6** net

THE DEVIL-MAN FROM MARS

RED DAGGER

**3/6** net

THE MAN THEY COULD NOT KILL

**2/6** net

THE MAN WHO SAW THE DEVIL

DEATH COMES TO FANSHAW

MURDER AT PRINGLEHURST

HER PRIVATE MURDER

THE VAMPIRE OF THE SKIES

MURDER AT RED GRANGE

THE WINTERTON HOTEL MYSTERY

---

Herbert Jenkins, Ltd., 3 York Street, St. James's, S.W.1



# NEW ROMANCES

7s. 6d. net each

## THE GLEN OF CARRA

By PATRICK MACGILL  
Author of *Moleskin Joe*

It is fitting that so great a writer as Patrick MacGill should return to the land of his fathers for the setting of this novel. Ireland, green and mellow, land of soft voices and pretty faces, forms an admirable background to this story in which the proud and obstinate O'Donnell, and his charming daughter, Moira, play their skilfully drawn parts.

## WHO WINS?

By J. P. RUSSELL  
Author of *Into the Fire*

J. P. Russell was the author of *Into the Fire*, a modern romance told with a wealth of description and a sympathetic insight into the lives of the present generation. *Who Wins?* is another tale from the same pen. It tells of the rich man who married a beautiful statue for a wife, how he tired of her, and how he longed to marry another woman. It describes how he eventually gained his end and the terrible chaos that victory brought in its train.

## THE PIPER'S LAY

By MARION CRAN  
Author of *The Garden of Ignorance*

Marion Cran has many books to her credit but of these only one is a novel. This is *The Lusty Pal*, a tale that found favour in the eyes of the critics in the first place and has maintained a steady sale ever since. Now, we can announce *The Piper's Lay*, a strong and simple novel which will be much appreciated by those with a taste for romance.

---

PUBLISHED BY HERBERT JENKINS



# THREE THRILLERS

7s. 6d. net each

## AN ACCIDENTAL DON JUAN

By EDGAR JEPSON  
Author of *An Obstinate Girl*

Mr. Jepson has a happy knack of mixing the macabre with the humorous—of slipping lightly from the tense to the gay—and in this new story he excels himself. Those who know Mr. Jepson at his best will readily appreciate what a wide appeal *An Accidental Don Juan* is bound to command.

## LESSINGER COMES BACK

By RICHARD ESSEX  
Author of *Slade of the Yard*

With his first novel, *Slade of the Yard*, Richard Essex topped the list of our detective stories. With the publication of *Slade Scores Again*, he repeated the performance, and now we believe *Lessinger Comes Back* will surpass anything he has yet done. How many readers, we wonder, will have forgotten that Lessinger was the fascinating gentleman-crook whose activities as related in the previous two novels were the despair of the police.

## THE WOLF SWEPT DOWN

By ROBERT LADLINE  
Author of *They Stuck at Nothing*

Mr. Ladline believes in action and movement in his stories and he maintains a high pitch of excitement by introducing one incident after another and never allowing the interest to flag for one instant. This new story will undoubtedly rank among the best work that he has yet done.

---

PUBLISHED BY HERBERT JENKINS



# CERTAIN SUCCESSES

7s. 6d. net each

## BLANDINGS CASTLE

By P. G. WODEHOUSE  
Author of *Right-Ho Jeeves*

Mr. P. G. Wodehouse's admirers will need to be told nothing about this book save that they will meet again such old friends as the Earl of Emsworth, his pig the Empress of Blandings, his butler Beech, the cheery Mr. Mulliner, and many other favourites. With Mr. Wodehouse at the top of his form, this book is bound to be the hit of the season.

## THE EXQUISITE BURDEN

By A. A. THOMSON  
Author of *The Lilac Maid*

It is with the pleasant feeling of welcoming an old friend that we announce this new story by A. A. Thomson. Mr. Thomson is one of the most popular authors of the day for light fiction even as he is as a companionable guide to the highways and byways of Scotland. Some time has lapsed since he gave us a new novel, so it was with eager expectation that we awaited its arrival. *The Exquisite Burden* has more than fulfilled the promise of his earlier works.

## DIVORCED FROM REALITY

By D. E. STEVENSON  
Author of *Miss Buncle's Book*

This is a poignant story, sincerely related, which reveals the efforts of a man and woman to fight against the buffetings of Fate. In spite of its dramatic theme, the subtle, mocking humour, so inseparable from this writer's work, is as marked as ever.

---

PUBLISHED BY HERBERT JENKINS



# BOOKS THAT THRILL

---

7s. 6d. net each

## THE DEVIL MAN FROM MARS

By JAMES CORBETT  
Author of *The Merrivale  
Mystery*

James Corbett needs no introduction from us—he and his thrillers are known to all. For the last ten months he has been engaged—to quote his own words—on a super thriller—a yarn calculated to place its author in the front rank of writers of this class of fiction. *The Devil Man from Mars* has been selected as a suitable title for this exciting, highly-imaginative piece of writing.

## DIAMOND DUEL

By SID G. HEDGES  
Author of *The Malta Mystery*

It is a well-known fact that Sid G. Hedges, besides being a novelist of some repute, is also an authority on swimming. His works on this sport have won him much fame, but it is his ability as a writer of fiction that interests us most. We have already published several novels by him, and now we have a new one which bears the title *Diamond Duel*. As in all his previous fiction, this yarn is of the mystery-thriller class.

## THE WRECKING RAY

By G. E. C. WEDLAKE  
Author of *Looted Gold*

G. E. C. Wedlake recently made his debut as a novelist with a fine adventure story entitled *Looted Gold*. Having spent many years of his life at sea, it is not surprising that ships and seamen should figure prominently in his stories. *The Wrecking Ray* is an adventure yarn, skilfully told, that takes a bulldog grip of the reader's interest and maintains it throughout the three hundred pages.

---

PUBLISHED BY HERBERT JENKINS



# OUTSTANDING THRILLERS

7s. 6d. net.

## THE SPIES OF PEACE

By WYNDHAM MARTYN

In this novel we again meet the smiling, fearless young man called Christopher Bond. Those who have read of his adventures in an earlier book will know that his thirst for excitement is insatiable. Wherever he goes he seems to find trouble—he certainly finds plenty of it in this tale, anyway.

## THE HIDDEN DOOR

By ARTHUR GASK

There can be but few readers of detective fiction who have not, at some time or another during their leisure hours, encountered the famous Australian detective, Gilbert Larose. His many cases have been brilliantly narrated by Arthur Gask, as, indeed, is his latest, *The Hidden Door*.

## AN OBSTINATE GIRL

By EDGAR JEPSON

Call her what you like—determined, pig-headed, obstinate—Ann certainly had nerve. If she made up her mind to unmask a murderer, unmask him she would—no matter what danger she herself might be called upon to face. Dominic, the attractive young detective, learnt all about her obstinacy, and a lot of other things about her, too.

## THE KING'S MISSAL

By NOEL DE VIC BEAMISH

Without wishing to frighten off readers from taking up this book, we feel we ought to point out that it is definitely not a bedside novel for nervous people. When a young man falls into the clutches of a Spaniard like Don Esteban or the mad Van Duysen unpleasant things are likely to happen to him. They did.



# OUTSTANDING THRILLERS

7s. 6d. net.

## RED DAGGER

By JAMES CORBETT

Murder is committed and the weapon is a red dagger. Another murder—again the red dagger. What was the motive behind these identical crimes? And who had struck the blows? A tale that will be appreciated by those who enjoyed his earlier works.

## GET WALLACE

By ALEXANDER WILSON

*Wallace of the Secret Service* was one of the best-selling thrillers of the autumn of last year; it was a great success. Now Wallace has come back in another yarn, a tale guaranteed to stir the pulses of the most hardened reader of exciting fiction.

## MURDER MARKET

By CHARLES RUSHTON

There were a good many things happening which were worrying Sergeant Hawke. Since the death of Sir Thomas Cummynge a series of problems had cropped up to mar Hawke's peace of mind, but when a certain young lady began to be drawn into the net, he began to investigate in real earnest.

## THEY STUCK AT NOTHING

By ROBERT LADLINE

When a man is alone, fighting with his back to the wall against a powerful organization, he's got to be wide awake. Nigel O'Neill soon discovered this when he found himself against as choice a bunch of crooks as one could wish for. But Nigel knew a thing or two, as his enemies soon found out.

## TERROR BY NIGHT

By PETER LUCK

Murders had been committed, but whether by human agency or by some fabulous monster it was impossible to say. With the experience he had gained as a secret service agent, Richard Brandon-Bassingham pieced together shreds of information until he discovered the cause of the tragedies.





**Q** The Herbert Jenkins' Wireless is published monthly and it is priceless. In other words it will be sent post-free to all book-lovers—and others.

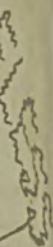
**Q** It tells all about the latest Herbert Jenkins' Books. It also contains many good stories and interesting personalities—in the best sense of the term.

**Q** There are facts about authors and fictions about publishers. Above all there is real information about books, not just press-opinions and other people's opinions, but what a book is about.

**Q** One enthusiastic reader of The Herbert Jenkins' Wireless writes that it has enabled him to discontinue his subscriptions to Punch and The Times Literary Supplement!

**Q** The Star in big headlines refers to The H. J. Wireless as "Gingering up the Book Trade," and goes on to say that "nothing so ingenious has yet been issued in this country." Are you going to send for it to Herbert Jenkins Ltd., 3, York Street, St. James's, London, S.W.1?





shed  
ords  
and

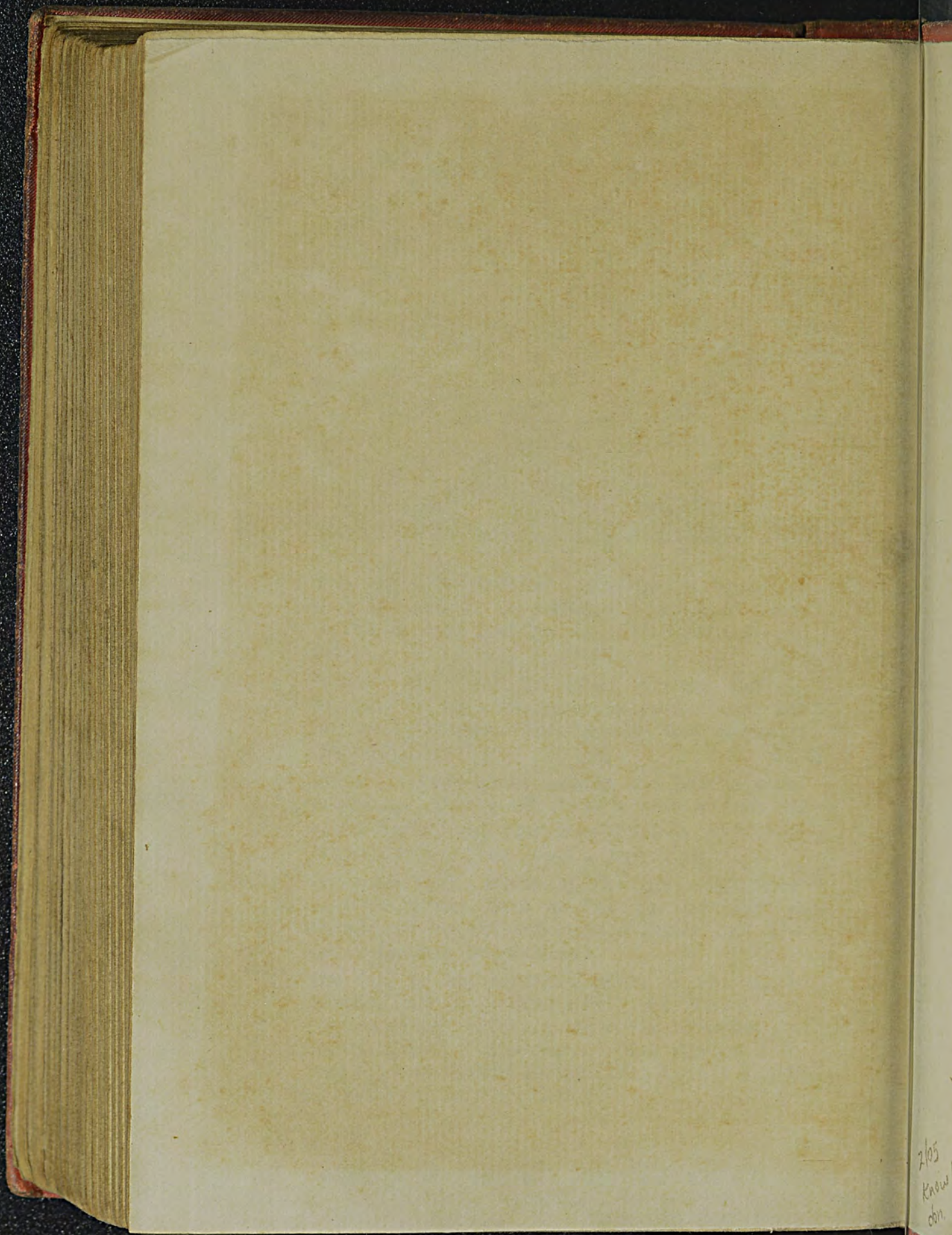
ins'  
and  
of

out  
on  
her

as'  
to  
he

J.  
and  
yet  
to  
cet,





2105  
Knowl  
con.



2/05  
Knowlton  
obn.



