

**STANLEY  
GRAUMAN  
WEINBAUM**

THE DARK OTHER

**Stanley Grauman Weinbaum**  
**The Dark Other**

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=34336786](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=34336786)*

*The Dark Other:*

# Содержание

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| 1                                 | 4  |
| 2                                 | 12 |
| 3                                 | 20 |
| 4                                 | 28 |
| 5                                 | 36 |
| 6                                 | 43 |
| 7                                 | 50 |
| 8                                 | 57 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 63 |

# Stanley Grauman Weinbaum

## The Dark Other

### 1

### Pure Horror

"That isn't what I mean," said Nicholas Devine, turning his eyes on his companion. "I mean pure horror in the sense of horror detached from experience, apart from reality. Not just a formless fear, which implies either fear of something that *might* happen, or fear of unknown dangers. Do you see what I mean?"

"Of course," said Pat, letting her eyes wander over the black expanse of night-dark Lake Michigan. "Certainly I see what you mean but I don't quite understand how you'd do it. It sounds—well, difficult."

She gazed at his lean profile, clear-cut against the distant light. He had turned, staring thoughtfully over the lake, idly fingering the levers on the steering wheel before him. The girl wondered a little at her feeling of contentment; she, Patricia Lane, satisfied to spend an evening in nothing more exciting than conversation! And they must have parked here a full two hours now. There was something about Nick—she didn't understand exactly what; sensitivity, charm, personality. Those were meaningless clichés,

handles to hold the unexplainable nuances of character.

"It is difficult," resumed Nick. "Baudelaire tried it, Poe tried it. And in painting, Hogarth, Goya, Dore. Poe came closest, I think; he caught the essence of horror in an occasional poem or story. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know," said Pat. "I've forgotten most of my Poe."

"Remember that story of his—'The Black Cat'?"

"Dimly. The man murdered his wife."

"Yes. That isn't the part I mean. I mean the cat itself—the second cat. You know a cat, used rightly, can be a symbol of horror."

"Indeed yes!" The girl shuddered. "I don't like the treacherous beasts!"

"And this cat of Poe's," continued Nick, warming to his subject. "Just think of it—in the first place, it's black; element of horror. Then, it's gigantic, unnaturally, abnormally large. And then it's not all black—that would be inartistically perfect—but has a formless white mark on its breast, a mark that little by little assumes a fantastic form—do you remember what?"

"No."

"The form of a gallows!"

"Oh!" said the girl. "Ugh!"

"And then—climax of genius—the eyes! Blind in one eye, the other a baleful yellow orb! Do you feel it? A black cat, an enormous black cat marked with a gallows, and lacking one eye, to make the other even more terrible! Literary tricks, of course,

but they work, and *that's* genius! Isn't it?"

"Genius! Yes, if you call it that. The perverse genius of the Devil!"

"That's what I want to write—what I will write some day." He watched the play of lights on the restless surface of the waters. "Pure horror, the epitome of the horrible. It could be written, but it hasn't been yet; not even by Poe."

"That little analysis of yours was bad enough, Nick! Why should you want to improve on his treatment of the theme?"

"Because I like to write, and because I'm interested in the horrible. Two good reasons."

"Two excuses, you mean. Of course, even if you'd succeed, you couldn't force anyone to read it."

"If I succeed, there'd be no need to force people. Success would mean that the thing would be great literature, and even today, in these times, there are still people to read that. And besides—" He paused.

"Besides what?"

"Everybody's interested in the horrible. Even you are, whether or not you deny it."

"I certainly do deny it!"

"But you are, Pat. It's natural to be."

"It isn't!"

"Then what is?"

"Interest in people, and life, and gay times, and pretty things, and—and one's self and one's own feelings. And the feelings of

the people one loves."

"Yes. It comes to exactly the point I've been stressing. People are sordid, life is hopeless, gay times are stupid, beauty is sensual, one's own feelings are selfish. And love is carnal. That's the array of horrors that holds your interest!"

The girl laughed in exasperation. "Nick, you could out-argue your name-sake, the Devil himself! Do you really believe that indictment of the normal viewpoint?"

"I do—often!"

"Now?"

"Now," he said, turning his gaze on Pat, "I have no feeling of it at all. Now, right now, I don't believe it."

"Why not?" she queried, smiling ingenuously at him.

"You, obviously."

"Gracious! I had no idea my logic was as convincing as that."

"Your logic isn't. The rest of you is."

"That sounds like a compliment," observed Pat. "If it is," she continued in a bantering tone, "it's the only one I can recall obtaining from you."

"That's because I seldom call attention to the obvious."

"And that's another," laughed the girl. "I'll have to mark this date in red on my calendar. It's entirely unique in our—let's see—nearly a month's acquaintance."

"Is it really so short a time? I know you so well that it must have taken years. Every detail!" He closed his eyes. "Hair like black silk, and oddly dark blue eyes—if I were writing a poem at the

moment, I'd call them violet. Tiny lips, the sort the Elizabethan called bee-stung. Straight nose, and a figure that is a sort of vest-pocket copy of Diana. Right?" He opened his eyes.

"Nice, but exaggerated. And even if you were correct, that isn't Pat Lane, the real Pat Lane. A camera could do better on a tenth of a second's acquaintance!"

"Check!" He closed his eyes again. "Personality, piquant. Character, loyal, naturally happy, intelligent, but not serious. An intellectual butterfly; a dilettante. Poised, cool, self-possessed, yet inherently affectionate. A being untouched by reality, as yet, living in Chicago and in a make-believe world at the same time." He paused, "How old are you, Pat?"

"Twenty-two. Why?"

"I wondered how long one could manage to stay in the world of make-believe. I'm twenty-six, and I'm long exiled."

"I don't think you know what you mean by a make-believe world. I'm sure I don't."

"Of course you don't. You can't know and still remain there. It's like being happy; once you realize it, it's no longer perfect."

"Then don't explain!"

"Wouldn't make any difference if I did, Pat. It's a queer world, like the Sardoodledom of Sardou and the afternoon-tea school of playwrights. All stage-settings and pretense, but it looks real while you're watching, especially if you're one of the characters."

The girl laughed. "You're a deliciously solemn sort, Nick. How would you like to hear my analysis of you?"



"I wouldn't!"

"You inflicted yours on me, and I'm entitled to revenge. And so—you're intelligent, lazy, dreamy, and with a fine perception of artistic values. You're very alert to impressions of the senses—I mean you're sensuous without being sensual. You're delightfully serious without being somber, except sometimes. Sometimes I feel a hint, just a thrilling hint, in your character, of something dangerously darker—"

"Don't!" said Nick sharply.

Pat shot him a quick glance. "And you're frightened to death of falling in love," she concluded imperturbably.

"Oh! Do you think so?"

"I do."

"Then you're wrong! I can't be afraid of it, since I've known for the better part of a month that I've been in love."

"With me," said the girl.

"Yes, with you!"

"Well!" said Pat. "It never before took me a month to extract that admission from a man. Is twenty-two getting old?"

"You're a tantalizing imp!"

"And so?" She pursed her lips, assuming an air of disappointment. "What am I to do about it—scream for help? You haven't given me anything to scream about."

The kiss, Pat admitted to herself, was quite satisfactory. She yielded herself to the pleasure of it; it was decidedly the best kiss she had, in her somewhat limited experience, encountered. She

pushed herself away finally, with a little gasp, gazing bright-eyed at her companion. He was staring down at her with serious eyes; there was a tense twist to his mouth, and a curiously unexpected attitude of unhappiness.

"Nick!" she murmured. "Was it as bad as all that?"

"Bad! Pat, does it mean you—care for me? A little, anyway?"

"A little," she admitted. "Maybe more. Is that what makes you look so forlorn?"

He drew her closer to him. "How could I look forlorn, Honey, when something like this has happened to me? That was just my way of looking happy."

She nestled as closely as the steering wheel permitted, drawing his arm about her shoulders. "I hope you mean that, Nick."

"Then *you* mean it? You really do?"

"I really do."

"I'm glad," he said huskily. The girl thought she detected a strange dubious note in his voice. She glanced at his face; his eyes were gazing into the dim remoteness of the night horizon.

"Nick," she said, "why were you so—well, so reluctant about admitting this? You must have known I—like you. I showed you that deliberately in so many ways."

"I—I wasn't quite sure."

"You were! That isn't it, Nick. I had to practically browbeat you into confessing you cared for me. Why?"

He stepped on the starter; the motor ground into sudden life. The car backed into the road, turning toward Chicago, that glared

like a false dawn in the southern sky.

"I hope you never find out," he said.

## 2

# Science of Mind

"She's out," said Pat as the massive form of Dr. Carl Horker loomed in the doorway. "Your treatments must be successful; Mother's out playing bridge."

The Doctor gave his deep, rumbling chuckle. "So much the better, Pat. I don't feel professional anyway." He moved into the living room, depositing his bulk on a groaning davenport. "And how's yourself?"

"Too well to be a patient of yours," retorted the girl. "Psychiatry! The new religion! Just between friends, it's all applesauce, isn't it?"

"If I weren't trying to act in place of your father, I'd resent that, young lady," said the Doctor placidly. "Psychiatry is a definite science, and a pretty important one. Applied psychology, the science of the human mind."

"If said mind exists," added the girl, swinging her slim legs over the arm of a chair.

"Correct," agreed the Doctor. "In my practice I find occasional evidence that it does. Or did; your generation seems to have found substitutes."

"Which appears to work just as well!" laughed Pat. "All our troubles are more or less inherited from your generation."

"Touche!" admitted Dr. Horker. "But my generation also bequeathed you some solid values which you don't know how to use."

"They've been weighed and found wanting," said Pat airily. "We're busy replacing them with our own values."

"Which are certainly no better."

"Maybe not, Doc, but at least they're ours."

"Yours and Tom Paine's. I can't see that you young moderns have brought any new ideas to the social scheme."

"New or not, we're the first ones to give 'em a try-out. Your crowd took it out in talk."

"That's an insult," observed the Doctor cheerfully. "If I weren't acting *in loco parentis*—"

"I know! You'd give me a few licks in the spot popularly supposed to do the most good! Well, that's part of a parent's privilege, isn't it?"

"You've grown beyond the spanking age, my dear. Physically, if not mentally—though I don't say the process would hurt me as much as you. I'd doubtless enjoy it."

"Then you might try sending me to bed without my dinner," the girl laughed.

"That's a doctor's prerogative, Pat. I've even done that to your Mother."

"In other words, you're a complete flop as a parent. All the responsibilities, and none of the privileges."

"That expresses it."

"Well, you elected yourself, Doc. It's not my fault you happened to live next door."

"No. It's my misfortune."

"And I notice," remarked Pat wickedly, "that you're not too thoroughly *in loco* to neglect sending Mother a bill for services rendered!"

"My dear girl, that's part of the treatment!"

"So? And how?"

"I furnish a bill just steep enough to keep your mother from indulging too frequently in medical services. Without that little practical check on her inclinations, she'd be a confirmed neurotic. One of those sweet, resigned, professional invalids, you know."

"Then why not send her a bill tall enough to cure her altogether?"

"She might change to psychoanalysis or New Thought," chuckled the Doctor. "Besides, your father wanted me to look after her, and besides that, I like having the run of the house."

"Well, I'm sure I don't mind," observed Pat. "We've a dog and a canary bird, too."

"You're in fine fettle this afternoon!" laughed her companion. "Must've been a successful date last night."

"It was." Her eyes turned suddenly dreamy.

"You're in love again, Pat!" he accused.

"Again? Why the 'again'?"

"Well, there was Billy, and that Paul—"

"Oh, those!" Her tone was contemptuous. "Merely passing fancies, Doc. Just whims, dreams of the moment—in other words, puppy love."

"And this? I suppose this is different—a grand passion?"

"I don't know," she said, frowning abruptly. "He's nice, but—odd. Attractive as—well, as the devil."

"Odd? How?"

"Oh, he's one of those minds you think we moderns lack."

"Intellectual, eh? New variety for you; out of the usual run of your dancing collegiates. I've often suspected that you picked your swains by the length and lowness of their cars."

"Maybe I did. That was one of the chief differences between them."

"How'd you meet this mental paragon?"

"Billy Fields dragged him around to one of those literary evenings he affects—where they read Oscar Wilde and Eugene O'Neil aloud. Bill met him at the library."

"And he out-shone all the local lights, I perceive."

"He surely did!" retorted Pat. "And he hardly said a word the whole evening."

"He wouldn't have to, if they're all like Billy! What's this prodigy's specialty?"

"He writes. I think—laugh if you want to!—I think perhaps he's a genius."

"Well," said Doctor Horker, "even that's possible. It's been known to occur, but rarely, to my knowledge, in your

generation."

"Oh, we're just dimmed by the glare of brilliance from yours." She swung her legs to the floor, facing the Doctor. "Do you psychiatrists actually *know* anything about love?" she queried.

"We're supposed to."

"What is it, then?"

"Just a device of Nature's for perpetuating the species. Some organisms manage without it, and do pretty well."

"Yes. I've heard references to the poor fish!"

"Then they're inaccurate; fish have primitive symptoms of eroticism. But below the vertebrates, notably in the amoeba, I don't recall any amorous habits."

"Then your definition doesn't explain a thing, does it?"

"Not to one of the victims, perhaps."

"Anyway," said Pat decisively, "I've heard of the old biological urge before your kind analysis. It doesn't begin to explain why one should be attracted to this person and repelled by that one. Does it?"

"No, but Freud does. The famous Oedipus Complex."

"That's the love of son for mother, or daughter for father, isn't it? And I don't see how that clears up anything; for example, I can just barely remember my father."

"That's plenty. It could be some little trait in these swains of yours, some unimportant mannerism that recalls that memory. Or there's that portrait of him in the hall—the one under the mellow red light. It might happen that you'd see one of these



chaps under a similar light in some attitude that brings the picture to mind—or a hundred other possibilities."

"Doesn't sound entirely convincing," objected Pat with a thoughtful frown.

"Well, submit to the proper treatments, and I'll tell you exactly what caused each and every one of your little passing fancies. You can't expect me to hit it first guess."

"Thanks, no! That's one of these courses where you tell the doctor all your secrets, and I prefer to keep what few I have."

"Good judgment, Pat. By the way, you said this chap was odd. Does that mean merely that he writes? I've known perfectly normal people who wrote."

"No," she said, "it isn't that. It's—he's so sweet and gentle and manageable most of the time, but sometimes he has such a thrilling spark of mastery that it almost scares me. It's puzzling but fascinating, if you grasp my import."

"Huh! He's probably a naturally selfish fellow who's putting on a good show of gentleness for your benefit. Those flashes of tyranny are probably his real character in moment of forgetfulness."

"You doctors can explain anything, can't you?"

"That's our business. It's what we're paid for."

"Well, you're wrong this time. I know Nick well enough to know if he's acting. His personality is just what I said—gentle, sensitive, and yet—It's perplexing, and that's a good part of his charm."

"Then it's not such a serious case you've got," mocked the doctor. "When you're cool enough to analyze your own feelings, and dissect the elements of the chap's attraction, you're not in any danger."

"Danger! I can look out for myself, thanks. That's one thing we mindless moderns learn young, and don't let me catch you puttering around in my romances! *In loco parentis* or just plain loco, you'll get the licking instead of me!"

"Believe me, Pat, if I wanted to experiment with affairs of the heart, I'd not pick a spit-fire like you as the subject."

"Well, Doctor Carl, you're warned!"

"This Nick," observed the Doctor, "must be quite a fellow to get the princess of the North Side so het up. What's the rest of his cognomen?"

"Nicholas Devine. Romantic, isn't it?"

"Devine," muttered Horker. "I don't know any Devines. Who are his people?"

"Hasn't any."

"How does he live? By his writing?"

"Don't know. I gathered that he lives on some income left by his parents. What's the difference, anyway?"

"None. None at all." The other wrinkled his brows thoughtfully. "There was a colleague of mine, a Dr. Devine; died a good many years ago. Reputation wasn't anything to brag about; was a little off balance mentally."

"Well, Nick isn't!" snapped Pat with some asperity.

"I'd like to meet him."

"He's coming over tonight."

"So'm I. I want to see your mother." He rose ponderously. "If she's not playing bridge again!"

"Well, look him over," retorted Pat. "And I think your knowledge of love is a decided flop. I think you're woefully ignorant on the subject."

"Why's that?"

"If you'd known anything about it, you could have married mother some time during the last seventeen years. Lord knows you've tried, and all you've attained is the state of *in loco parentis* instead of *parens*."

### 3

## Psychiatrics of Genius

"How do you charge—by the hour?" asked Pat, as Doctor Horker returned from the hall. The sound of her mother's departing footsteps pattered on the porch.

"Of course, Young One; like a plumber."

"Then your rates per minute must be colossal! The only time you ever see Mother is a moment or so between bridge games."

"I add on the time I waste with you, my dear. Such as now, waiting to look over that odd swain of yours. Didn't you say he'd be over this evening?"

"Yes, but it's not worth your rates to have him psychoanalyzed. I can do as well myself."

"All right, Pat. I'll give you a sample analysis free," chuckled the Doctor, distributing his bulk comfortably on the davenport.

"I don't like free trials," she retorted. "I sent for a beauty-culture book once, on free trial. I was twelve years only, and returned it in seven days, but I'm still getting sales letters in the mails. I must be on every sucker list in the country."

"So that's the secret of your charm."

"What is?"

"You must have read the book, I mean. If you remember the title, I might try it myself. Think it'd help?"

"Dr. Carl," laughed the girl, "you don't need a book on beauty culture—you need one on bridge! It's that atrocious game you play that's bothering Mother."

"Indeed? I shouldn't be surprised if you were right; I've suspected that."

"Save your surprise for when I'm wrong, Doc. You'll suffer much less from shock."

"Confident little brat! You're apt to get that knocked out of you some day, though I hope you never do."

"I can take it," grinned Pat.

"No doubt you can, but you're an adept at handing it out. Where's this chap of yours?"

"He'll be along. No one's ever stood me up on a date yet."

"I can understand that, you imp! Is that the famous Nick?" he queried as a car purred to a stop beyond the windows.

"No one else!" said the girl, glancing out. "The Big Thrill in person."

She darted to the door. Horker turned casually to watch her as she opened it, surveying Nicholas Devine with professional nonchalance. He entered, tall, slender, with his thin sensitive features sharply outlined in the light of the hall. He cast a quick glance toward the Doctor; the latter noted the curious amber-green eyes of the lad, set wide in the lean face, deep, speculative, the eyes of a dreamer.

"Evening, Nick," Pat was bubbling. The newcomer gave her a hasty smile, with another glance at the Doctor. "Don't mind Dr.

Carl," she continued. "Aren't you going to kiss me? It irks the medico, and I never miss a chance."

Nicholas flushed in embarrassment; he gestured hesitantly, then placed a hasty peck of a kiss on the girl's forehead. He reddened again at the Doctor's rumble of "Young imp of Satan!"

"Not very good," said Pat reflectively, obviously enjoying the situation. "I've known you to do better." She pulled him toward the arch of the living room. "Come meet Dr. Horker. Dr. Carl, this is the aforesaid Nicholas Devine."

"Dr. Horker," repeated the lad, smiling diffidently. "You're the psychiatrist and brain specialist, aren't you, Sir?"

"So my patients believe," rumbled the massive Doctor, rising at the introduction, and grasping the youth's hand. "And you're the genius Patricia has been raving about. I'm glad to have the chance of looking you over."

Nick gave the girl a harassed glance, shifting uncomfortably, and patently at a loss for a reply. She grinned mischievously.

"Sit down, both of you," she suggested helpfully. She seized his hat from the reluctant hands of Nick, sailing it carelessly to a chair.

"So!" boomed the Doctor, lowering his great bulk again to the davenport. He eyed the youth sitting nervously before him. "Devine, did you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"I knew a Devine once. Colleague of mine."

"A doctor? My father was a doctor."

"Dr. Stuart Devine?"

"Yes, sir." He paused. "Did you say you knew him, Dr. Horker?"

"Slightly," rumbled the other. "Only slightly."

"I don't remember him at all, of course, I was very young when he—and my mother too—died."

"You must have been. Patricia claims you write."

"I try."

"What sort of material?"

"Why—any sort. Prose or poetry; what I feel like writing."

"Whatever inspires you, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir." The lad flushed again.

"Ever have anything published?"

"Yes, sir. In *Nation's Poetry*."

"Never heard of it."

"It has a large circulation," said Nick apologetically.

"Humph! Well, that's something. Whom do you like?"

"Whom do I like?" The youth's tone was puzzled.

"What authors—writers?"

"Oh." He cast another uncomfortable glance at Pat. "Why—I like Baudelaire, and Poe, and Swinburne, and Villon, and—"

"Decadents, all of them!" sniffed the Doctor. "What prose writers?"

"Well—" He hesitated—"Poe again, and Stern, and Rabelais—"

"Rabelais!" Horker's voice boomed. "Well! Your taste can't be

as bad as I thought, then. There's one we agree on, anyway. And I notice you name no moderns, which is another good point."

"I haven't read many moderns, sir."

"That's in your favor."

"Cut it!" put in Pat with assumed sharpness. "You've taken enough whacks at my generation for one day."

"I'm glad to find one of your generation who agrees with me," chuckled the Doctor. "At least to the extent of not reading its works."

"I'll teach him," grinned Pat. "I'll have him writing vess libre, and maybe even dadaism, in a week."

"Maybe it won't be much loss," grunted Horker. "I haven't seen any of his work yet."

"We'll bring some around sooner or later. We will, won't we, Nick?"

"Of course, if you want to. But—"

"He's going to say something modest," interrupted the girl. "He's in the retiring mood now, but he's apt to change any moment, and snap your surly head off."

"Humph! I'd like to see it."

"So'd I," retorted Pat. "You've had it coming all day; maybe I'll do it myself."

"You have, my dear, innumerable times. But I'm like the Hydra, except that I grow only one head to replace the one you snap off." He turned again to Nicholas. "Do you work?"

"Yes, sir. At my writing."



"I mean how do you live?"

"Why," said the youth, reddening again in embarrassment, "my parents—"

"Listen!" said Pat. "That's enough of Dr. Carl's cross examination. You'd think he was a Victorian father who had just been approached for his daughter's hand. We haven't whispered any news of an engagement to you, have we, Doc?"

"No, but I'm acting—"

"Sure. *In loco parentis*. We know that."

"You're incorrigible, Pat! I wash my hands of you. Run along, if you're going out."

"You'll be telling me never to darken my own door again in the next breath!" She stretched forth a diminutive foot at the extremity of a superlatively attractive ankle, caught Nick's hat on her toe, and kicked it expertly to his lap. "Come on, Nick. There's a moon."

"There is not!" objected the Doctor huffily. "It rises at four, as you ought to know. You didn't see it last night, did you?"

"I didn't notice," said the girl. "Come on, Nick, and we'll watch it rise tonight. We'll check up on the Doctor's astronomy, or is it chronology?"

"You do and I'll know it! I can hear you come home, you imp!"

"Nice neighbor," observed Pat airily, as she stepped to the door. "I'll bet you peek out of the window, too."

She ignored the Doctor's irritated rumble as she passed into the hall, where Nick, after a diffident murmur of farewell to

Horker, followed. She caught up a light cape, which he draped about her shoulders.

"Nick," she said, "suppose you run out to the car and wait. I think I've stepped too hard on Dr. Carl's corns, and I want to give him a little cheering up. Will you?"

"Of course, Pat."

She darted back into the living room, perching on the arm of the davenport beside the Doctor.

"Well?" she said, running her hand through his grizzled hair. "What's the verdict?"

"Seems like a nice kid," grumbled Horker reluctantly. "Nice enough, but introverted, repressed, and I shouldn't be surprised to find him anti-social. Doesn't adjust easily to his environment; takes refuge in a dream world of his own."

"That's what he accuses me of doing," grinned Pat. "That all you've got against him?"

"That's all, but where's that streak of mastery you mentioned? You lead him around on a leash!"

"It didn't show up tonight. That's the thrill—the unexpectedness of it."

"Bah! You must've dreamed it. There's no more aggressiveness in that lad than in KoKo, your canary."

"Don't you believe it, Dr. Carl! The trouble is that he's a genius, and that's where your psychology falls flat."

"Genius," said the Doctor oracularly, "is a sublimation of qualities—"

"I'll tell you tomorrow how sublime the qualities are," called Pat as she skipped out of the door.

## 4

# The Transfiguration

The car slid smoothly along a straight white road that stretched ahead into the darkness like an earth-bound Milky Way. In the dim distance before them, red as Antares, glowed the tail-light of some automobile; except for this lone evidence of humanity, reflected Pat, they might have been flashing through the cosmic depths of interstellar space, instead of following a highway in the very shadow of Chicago. The colossal city of the lake-shore was invisible behind them, and the clustering suburbs with it.

"Queer, isn't it?" said Pat, after a silence, "how contented we can be with none of the purchased amusement people crave—shows, movies, dancing, and all that."

"It doesn't seem queer to me," answered Nick. "Not when I look at you here beside me."

"Nice of you!" retorted Pat. "But it's never happened to me before." She paused, then continued, "How do you like the Doctor?"

"How does he like me? That's considerably more to the point, isn't it?"

"He thinks you're nice, but—let's see—introverted, repressed, and ill-adjusted to your environment. I think those were the points."

"Well, *I* liked *him*, in spite of your manoeuvres, and in spite of his being a doctor."

"What's wrong with being a doctor?"

"Did you ever read 'Tristram Shandy'?" was Nick's irrelevant response.

"No, but I read the newspapers!"

"What's the connection, Pat?"

"Just as much connection as there is between the evils of being a doctor and reading 'Tristram Shandy'. I know that much about the book, at least."

"You're nearly right," laughed Nick. "I was just referring to one of Tristram's remarks on doctors and lawyers. It fits my attitude."

"What's the remark?"

"Well, he had the choice of professions, and it occurred to him that medicine and law were the vulture professions, since lawyers live by men's quarrels and doctors by men's misfortunes. So—he became a writer."

"And what do writers live by?" queried Pat mischievously. "By men's stupidity!"

"You're precious, Pat!" Nick chuckled delightedly. "If I'd created you to order, I couldn't have planned you more to taste—pepper, tabasco sauce, vinegar, spice, and honey!"

"And to be taken with a grain of salt," retorted the girl, puckering her piquant, impish features. She edged closer to him, locking her arm through his where it rested on the steering wheel.

"Nick," she said, her tones suddenly gentle, "I think I'm pretty crazy about you. Heaven knows why I should be, but it's a fact."

"Pat, dear!"

"I'm crazy about you in this meek, sensitive pose of yours, and I'm fascinated by those masterful moments you flash occasionally. Really, Nick, I almost wish you flamed out oftener."

"Don't!" he said sharply.

"Why not?"

"Let's not talk about me, Pat. It—embarrasses me."

"All right, Mr. Modesty! Let's talk about me, then. I'll promise we won't succeed in embarrassing me."

"And it's quite the most interesting subject in the world, Pat."

"Well, then?"

"What?"

"Why don't you start talking? The topic is all attention."

He chuckled. "How many men have told you you were beautiful, Pat?"

"I never kept account."

"And in many different ways?"

"Why? Have you, perchance, discovered a new way, Nick?"

"Not at all. The oldest way of any, the way of Sappho and Pindar."

"O-ooh!" She clapped her hands in mock delight. "Poetry!"

"The only medium that could possibly express how lovely you are," said Nick.

"Nicholas, have you gone and composed a poem to me?"

"Composed? No. It isn't necessary, with you here beside me."

"What's that? Some very subtle compliment?"

"Not subtle, Pat. You're the poem yourself; all I need do is look at you, listen to you, and translate."

"Neat!" applauded the girl. "Do I hear the translation?"

"You certainly do." He turned his odd amber-green eyes on her, then bent forward to the road. He began to speak in a low voice.

"In no far country's silent ways  
Shall I forget one little thing—  
The soft intentness of your gaze,  
The sweetness of your murmuring  
Your generously tender praise,  
The words just hinted by a breath—  
In no far country's silent way,  
Unless that country's name be Death—"

He paused abruptly, and drove silently onward.

"Oh," breathed Pat. "Why don't you go on, Nick? Please."

"No. It isn't the mood for this night, Dear. Not this night, alone with you."

"What is, then?"

"Nothing sentimental. Something lighter, something—oh, Elizabethan. That's it."

"And what's stopping you?"

"Lack of an available idea. Or—wait. Listen a moment." He began, this time in a tone of banter.

"When mornings, you attire yourself  
For riding in the city,  
You're such a lovely little elf,  
Extravagantly pretty!  
And when at noon you deign to wear  
The habit of the town,  
I cannot call to mind as fair  
A symphony in brown.

"Then evenings, you blithely don  
A daintiness of white,  
To flash a very paragon  
Of lightsomeness—and light!  
But when the rounds of pleasure cease,  
And you retire at night,  
The Godling on your mantelpiece  
Must know a fairer sight!"

"Sweet!" laughed Pat. "But personal. And anyway, how do you know I've a godling on my mantel? Don't you credit me with any modesty?"

"If you haven't, you should have! The vision I mentioned ought to enliven even a statue."

"Well," said the girl, "I have one—a jade Buddha, and with all the charms I flash before him nightly, he's never batted an



eyelash. Explain that!"

"Easily. He's green with envy, and frozen with admiration, and struck dumb by wonder."

"Heavens! I suppose I ought to be thankful you didn't say he was petrified with fright!" Pat laughed. "Oh Nick," she continued, in a voice gone suddenly dreamy, "this *is* marvelous, isn't it? I mean our enjoying ourselves so completely, and our being satisfied to be so alone. Why, we've never even danced together."

"So we haven't. That's a subterfuge we haven't needed, isn't it?"

"It is," replied the girl, dropping her glossy gleaming black head against his shoulder. "And besides, it's much more satisfactory to be held in your arms in private, instead of in the midst of a crowd, and sitting down, instead of standing up. But I should like to dance with you, Nick," she concluded.

"We'll go dancing, then, whenever you like."

"You're delightfully complaisant, Nick. But—you're puzzling." She glanced up at him. "You're so—so reluctant. Here we've been driving an hour, and you haven't tried to kiss me a single time, and yet I'm quite positive you care for me."

"Lord, Pat!" he muttered. "You never need doubt that."

"Then what is it? Are you so spiritual and ethereal, or is my attraction for you just sort of intellectual? Or—are you afraid?" As he made no reply, she continued, "Or are those poems you spout about my physical charms just—poetic license?"

"They're not, and you know it!" he snapped. "You've a mirror, haven't you? And other fellows than I have taken you around, haven't they?"

"Oh, I've been taken around! That's what perplexes me about you, Nick. I'd think you were actually afraid of kissing me if it weren't—" Her voice trailed into silence, and she stared speculatively ahead at the ribbon of road that rolled steadily into the headlights' glare.

She broke the interval of wordlessness. "What is it, Nick?" she resumed almost pleadingly. "You've hinted at something now and then. Please—you don't have to hesitate to tell me; I'm modern enough to forgive things past, entanglements, affairs, disgraces, or anything like that. Don't you think I should know?"

"You'd know," he said huskily, "if I could tell you."

"Then there is something, Nick!" She pressed his arm against her. "Tell me, isn't there?"

"I don't know." There was the suggestion of a groan in his voice.

"You don't know! I can't understand."

"I can't either. Please, Pat, let's not spoil tonight; if I could tell you, I would. Why, Pat, I love you—I'm terribly, deeply, solemnly in love with you."

"And I with you, Nick." She gazed ahead, where the road rose over the arch of a narrow bridge. The speeding car lifted to the rise like a zooming plane.

And suddenly, squarely in the center of the road, another

car, until now concealed by the arch of the bridge, appeared almost upon them. There was a heart-stopping moment when a collision seemed inevitable, and Pat felt the arm against her tighten convulsively into a bar of steel. She heard her own sobbing gasp, and then, somehow, they had slipped unscathed between the other car and the rail of the bridge.

"Oh!" she gasped faintly, then with a return of breath, "That was nice, Nick!"

Beyond the bridge, the road widened once more; she felt the car slowing, edging toward the broad shoulder of the road.

"There was danger," said her companion in tones as emotionless as the rasping of metal. "I came to save it."

"Save what?" queried Pat as the car slid to a halt on the turf.

"Your body." The tones were still cold, like grinding wheels. "The beauty of your body!"

He reached a thin hand toward her, suddenly seized her skirt and snatched it above the silken roundness of her knees. "There," he rasped. "That is what I mean."

"Nick!" Pat half-screamed in appalled astonishment. "How —" She paused, shocked into abrupt silence, for the face turned toward her was but a remote, evil caricature of Nicholas Devine's. It leered at her out of blood-shot eyes, as if behind the mask of Nick's face peered a red-eyed demon.

## A Fantasy of Fear

The satyr beside pat was leaning toward her; the arm about her was tightening with a brutal ruthlessness, and while still staring in fascination at the incredible eyes, she realized that another arm and a white hand was moving relentlessly, exploratively, toward her body. It was the cold touch of this hand as it slipped over her silk-sheathed legs that broke the chilling spell of her fascination.

"Nick!" she screamed. "Nick!" She had a curious sensation of calling him back from far distances, the while she strove with both hands and all her strength to press him back from her. But the ruthless force of his arms was overcoming her resistance; she saw the red eyes a hand's breadth from her own.

"Nick!" she sobbed in terror.

There was a change. Abruptly, she was looking into Nick's eyes, blood-shot, frightened, puzzled, but indubitably Nick's eyes. The flaming orbs of the demon were no more; it was as if they had receded into Nick's head. The arm about her body relaxed, and they were staring at each other in a medley of consternation, amazement and unbelief. The youth drew back, huddled in his corner of the car, and Pat, breathing in sobs, smoothed out her rumpled apparel with a convulsive movement.

"Pat!" he gasped. "Oh, my God! He couldn't have—" He

paused abruptly. The girl gazed at him without reply.

"Pat, Dear," he spoke in a low, tense murmur, "I'm—sorry. I don't know—I don't understand how—"

"Never mind," she said, regaining a vestige of her customary composure. "It's—all right, Nick."

"But—oh, Pat—!"

"It was that near accident," she said. "That upset you—both of us, I mean."

"Yes!" he said eagerly. "That's what it was, Pat. It must have been that, but Dear, can you forgive? Do you want to forgive me?"

"It's all right," she repeated. "After all, you just complimented my legs, and I guess I can stand that. It's happened before, only not quite so—convincingly!"

"You're sweet, Pat!"

"No; I just love you Nick." She felt a sudden pity for the misery in his face. "Kiss me, Nick—only gently."

He pressed his lips to hers, very lightly, almost timidly. She lay back against the seat for a moment, her eyes closed.

"That's you again," she murmured. "This other—wasn't."

"Please, Pat! Don't refer to it,—not ever."

"But it wasn't you, Nick. It was just the strain of that narrow escape. I don't hold it against you."

"You're—Lord, Pat, I don't deserve you. But you know that I—I myself—could never touch you except in tenderness, even in reverence. You're too dainty, too lovely, too spirited, to be hurt,

or to be held roughly, against your will. You know I feel that way about you, don't you?"

"Of course. It was nothing, Nick. Forget it."

"If I can," he said somberly. He switched on the engine, backed out upon the pavement, and turned the car toward the glow that marked Chicago. Neither of them spoke as the machine hummed over the arching bridge and down the slope, where, so few minutes before, the threat of accident had thrust itself at them.

"We won't see a moon tonight," said Pat in a small voice, after an interval. "We'll never check up on Dr. Carl's astronomy."

"You don't want to tonight, Pat, do you?"

"I guess perhaps we'd better not," she replied. "We're both upset, and there'll be other nights."

Again they were silent. Pat felt strained, shaken; there was something uncanny about the occurrence that puzzled her. The red eyes that had glared out of Nick's face perplexed her, and the curious rasping voice he had used still sounded inhumanly in her memory. Out of recollection rose still another mystery.

"Nick," she said, "what did you mean—then—when you said there was danger and you came to save me?"

"Nothing," he said sharply.

"And then, afterwards, you started to say something about 'He couldn't have—'. Who's 'he'?"

"It meant nothing, I tell you. I was frantic to think you might have been hurt. That's all."

"I believe you, Honey," she said, wondering whether she really did. The thing was beginning to grow hazy; already it was assuming merely the proportions of an upheaval of youthful fervor. Such occurrences were not unheard of, though never before had it happened to Patricia Lane! Still, even that was conceivable, far more conceivable than the dark, unformed, inchoate suspicions she had been harboring. They hadn't even been definite enough to be called suspicions; indefinite apprehensions came closer.

And yet—that strange, wild face that had formed itself of Nick's fine features, and the terrible red eyes! Were they elements in a picture conjured out of her own imagination? They must be, of course. She had been frightened by that hairbreadth escape, and had seen things that didn't exist. And the rest of it—well, that might be natural enough. Still, there was something—she knew that; Nick had admitted it.

Horker's words concerning Nick's father rose in her mind. Suspected of being crazy! Was that it? Was that the cause of Nick's curious reluctance where she was concerned? Was the face that had glared at her the visage of a maniac? It couldn't be. It couldn't be, she told herself fiercely. Not her fine, tender, sensitive Nick! And besides, that face, if she hadn't imagined it, had been the face, not of a lunatic, but of a devil. She shook her head, as if to deny her thoughts, and placed her hand impulsively on Nick's.

"I don't care," she said. "I love you, Nick."

"And I you," he murmured. "Pat, I'm sorry about spoiling this evening. I'm sorry and ashamed."

"Never mind, Honey. There'll be others."

"Tomorrow?"

"No," she said. "Mother and I are going out to dinner. And Friday we're having company."

"Really, Pat? You're not just trying to turn me off gently."

"Really, Nick. Try asking me for Saturday evening and see!"

"You're asked, then."

"And it's a date." Then, with a return of her usual insouciance, she added. "If you're on good behavior."

"I will be. I promise."

"I hope so," said Pat. An inexplicable sense of foreboding had come over her; despite her self-given assurances, something unnameable troubled her. She gave a mental shrug, and deliberately relegated the unpleasant cogitations to oblivion.

The car turned into Dempster Road; the lights of the teeming roadhouses, dance halls, road-side hamburger and barbecue stands flashed by. There were many cars here; there was no longer any impression of solitude now, in the overflow from the vast city in whose shadow they moved. The incessant flow of traffic gave the girl a feeling of security; these were tangible things about her, and once more the memory of that disturbing occurrence became dim and dreamlike. This was Nick beside her, gentle, intelligent, kind; had he ever been otherwise? It seemed highly unreasonable, a fantasy of fear and the hysteria



of the moment.

"Hungry?" asked Nick unexpectedly.

"I could use a barbecue, I guess. Beef."

The car veered to the graveled area before a brightly lit stand. Nick gave the order to an attendant. He chuckled as Pat, with the digestive disregard of youth attacked the greasy combination.

"That's like a humming bird eating hay!" he said. "Or better, like a leprechaun eating that horse-meat they can for dogs."

"You might as well discover that I don't live on honey and rose-petals," said Pat. "Not even on caviar and terrapin—at least, not exclusively. I leave the dainty palate for Mother to indulge."

"Which is just as well. Hamburger and barbecue are more easily budgeted."

"Nicholas," said the girl, tossing the paper napkin out of the car window, "is that an indirect and very evasive proposal of marriage?"

"You know it could be, if you wished it!"

"And do I?" she said, assuming a pensive air. "I wonder. Suppose we say I'll let you know later."

"And meanwhile?"

"Oh, meanwhile we can be sort of engaged. Just the way we've been."

"You're sweet, Pat," he murmured, as the car edged into the line of traffic. "I don't know just how to convey my appreciation, but it's there!"

The buildings drew more closely together; the road was

suddenly a lighted street, and then, almost without realizing it, they were before Pat's home. Nick walked beside her to the door; he stood facing her hesitantly.

"Good night, Pat," he said huskily. He leaned down, kissing her very gently, turned, and departed.

The girl watched him from the open doorway, following the lights of his car until they vanished down the street. Dear, sweet Nick! Then the disturbing memory of that occurrence of the evening returned; she frowned in perplexity as the thought rose. That was all of a piece with the puzzling character of him, and the curious veiled references he'd made. References to what? She didn't know, couldn't imagine. Nick had said he didn't know either, which added still another quirk to the maze.

She thought of Dr. Horker's words. With the thought, she glanced at his house, adjacent to her own home. A light gleamed in the library; he was still awake. She closed the door behind her, and darted across the narrow strip of lawn to his porch. She rang the bell.

"Good evening, Dr. Carl," she said as the massive form of Horker appeared. She puckered her lips impudently at him as she slipped by him into the house.

## A Question of Science

"Not that I'm displeased at this visit, Pat," rumbled the Doctor, seating himself in one of the great chairs by the fireplace, "but I'm curious. I thought you were dating your ideal tonight, yet here you are, back alone a little after eleven. How come?"

"Oh," said the girl nonchalantly, dropping crosswise in the other chair, "we decided we needed our beauty sleep."

"Then why are you here, you young imp?"

"Thought you might be lonesome."

"I'll bet you did! But seriously, Pat, what is it? Any trouble?"

"No-o," she said dubiously. "No trouble. I just wanted to ask you a few hypothetical questions. About science."

"Go to it, then, and quickly. I was ready to turn in."

"Well," said Pat, "about Nick's father. He was a doctor, you said, and supposed to be cracked. Was he really?"

"Humph! That's curious. I just looked up a brochure of his tonight in the American Medical Journal, after our conversation of this afternoon. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I'm interested, of course."

"Well, here's what I remember about him, Pat. He was an M.D., all right, but I see by his paper there—the one I was reading—that he was on the staff of Northern U. He did some

work at the Cook County Asylum, some research work, and there was a bit of talk about his maltreating the patients. Then, on top of that, he published a paper that medical men considered crazy, and that started talk of his sanity. That's all I know."

"Then Nick—."

"I thought so! So it's come to the point where you're investigating his antecedents, eh? With an eye to marriage, or what?"

"Or what!" snapped Pat. "I was curious to know, naturally."

"Naturally." The Doctor gave her a keen glance from his shrewd eyes. "Did you think you detected incipient dementia in your ideal?"

"No," said the girl thoughtfully. "Dr. Carl, is there any sort of craziness that could take an ordinarily shy person and make a passionate devil of him? I don't mean passionate, either," she added. "Rather cold, ruthless, domineering."

"None that I know of," said Horker, watching her closely. "Did this Nick of yours have one of his masterful moments?"

"Worse than that," admitted Pat reluctantly. "We had a near accident, and it startled both of us, and then suddenly, he was looking at me like a devil, and then—" She paused. "It frightened me a little."

"What'd he do?" demanded Horker sharply.

"Nothing." She lied with no hesitation.

"Were there any signs of Satyromania?"

"I don't know. I never heard of that."

"I mean, in plain Americanese, did he make a pass at you?"

"He—no, he didn't."

"Well, what *did* he do?"

"He just looked at me." Somehow a feeling of disloyalty was rising in her; she felt a reluctance to betray Nick further.

"What did he say, then? And don't lie this time."

"He just said—He just looked at my legs and said something about their being beautiful, and that was all. After that, the look on his face faded into the old Nick."

"Old Nick is right—the impudent scoundrel!" Horker's voice rumbled angrily.

"Well, they're nice legs," said Pat defiantly, swinging them as evidence. "You've said it yourself. Why shouldn't *he* say it? What's to keep him from it?"

"The code of a gentleman, for one thing!"

"Oh, who cares for your Victorian codes! Anyway, I came here for information, not to be cross-examined. I want to ask the questions myself."

"Pat, you're a reckless little spit-fire, and you're going to get burned some day, and deserve it," the Doctor rumbled ominously. "Ask your fool questions, and then I'll ask mine."

"All right," said the girl, still defiant. "I don't guarantee to answer yours, however."

"Well, ask yours, you imp!"

"First, then—Is that Satyro-stuff you mentioned intermittent or continuous?"

"It's necessarily intermittent, you numb-skull! The male organism can't function continuously!"

"I mean, does the mania lie dormant for weeks or months, and then flare up?"

"Not at all. It's a permanent mania, like any other psychopathic sex condition."

"Oh," said Pat thoughtfully, with a sense of relief.

"Well, go on. What next?"

"What are these dual personalities you read about in the papers?"

"They're aphasias. An individual forgets his name, and he picks, or is given, another, if he happens to wander among strangers. He forgets much of his past experience; the second personality is merely what's left of the first—sort of a vestige of his normal character. There isn't any such thing as a dual personality in the sense of two distinct characters living in one body."

"Isn't there?" queried the girl musingly. "Could the second personality have qualities that the first one lacked?"

"Not any more than it could have an extra finger! The second is merely a split off the first, a forgetfulness, a loss of memory. It couldn't have *more* qualities than the whole, or normal, character; it *must* have fewer."

"Isn't that just too interesting!" said Pat in a bantering tone. "All right, Dr. Carl. It's your turn."

"Then what's the reason for all this curiosity about perversions

and aphasias? What's happened to your genius now?"

"Oh, I'm thinking of taking up the study of psychiatry," replied the girl cheerfully.

"Aren't you going to answer me seriously?"

"No."

"Then what's the use of my asking questions?"

"I know the right answer to that one. None!"

"Pat," said Horker in a low voice, "you're an impudent little hoyden, and too clever for your own good, but you and your mother are very precious to me. You know that."

"Of course I do, Dr. Carl," said the girl, relenting. "You're a dear, and I'm crazy about you, and you know that, too."

"What I'm trying to say," proceeded the other, "is simply that I'm trying to help you. I want to help you, if you need help. Do you?"

"I guess I don't, Dr. Carl, but you're sweet."

"Are you in love with this Nicholas Devine?"

"I think perhaps I am," she admitted softly.

"And is he in love with you?"

"Frankly, could he help being?"

"Then there's something about him that worries you. That's it, isn't it?"

"I thought there was, Dr. Carl. I was a little startled by the change in him right after we had that narrow escape, but I'm sure it was nothing—just imagination. Honestly, that's all that troubled me."

"I believe you, Pat," said the Doctor, his eyes fixed on hers. "But guard yourself, my dear. Be sure he's what you think he is; be sure you know him rightly."

"He's clean and fine," murmured the girl. "I *am* sure."

"But this puzzling yourself about his character, Pat—I don't like it. Make doubly sure before you permit your feelings to become too deeply involved. That's only common sense, child, not psychiatry or magic."

"I'm sure," repeated Pat. "I'm not puzzled or troubled any more. And thanks, Dr. Carl. You run along to bed and I'll do likewise."

He rose, accompanying her to the door, his face unusually grave.

"Patricia," he said, "I want you to think over what I've said. Be sure, be doubly sure, before you expose yourself to the possibility of suffering. Remember that, won't you?"

"I'll try to. Don't fret yourself about it, Dr. Carl; I'm a hard-boiled young modern, and it takes a diamond to even scratch me."

"I hope so," he said soberly. "Run along; I'll watch until you're inside."

Pat darted across the strip of grass, turned at her door to blow a goodnight kiss to the Doctor, and slipped in. She tiptoed quietly to her room, slipped off her dress, and surveyed her long, slim legs in the mirror.

"Why shouldn't he say they were beautiful?" she queried of the image. "I can't see any reason to get excited over a simple



compliment like that."

She made a face over her shoulder at the green Buddha above the fireplace.

"And as for you, fat boy," she murmured, "I expect to see you wink at me tonight. And every night hereafter!"

She prepared herself for slumber, slipped into the great bed. She had hardly closed her lids before the image of a leering face with terrible bloody eyes flamed out of memory and set her trembling and shuddering.

## The Red Eyes Return

"I suppose I really ought to meet your friends, Patricia," said Mrs. Lane, peering out of the window, "but they all seem to call when I'm not at home."

"I'll have some of them call in February," said Pat. "You're not out as often in February."

"Why do you say I'm not out as often in February?" demanded her mother. "I don't see what earthly difference the month makes."

"There are fewer days in February," retorted Pat airily.

"Facetious brat!"

"So I've been told. You needn't worry, though, Mother; I'm sober, steady, and reliable, and if I weren't, Dr. Carl would see to it that my associates were."

"Yes; Carl is a gem," observed her mother. "By the way, who's this Nicholas you're so enthusiastic about?"

"He's a boy I met."

"What's he like?"

"Well, he speaks English and wears a hat."

"Imp! Is he nice?"

"That means is his family acceptable, doesn't it? He hasn't any family."

Mrs. Lane shrugged her attractive shoulders. "You're a self-reliant sort, Patricia, and cool as iced lettuce, like your father. I don't doubt that you can manage your own affairs, and here comes Claude with the car." She gave the girl a hasty kiss. "Good-bye, and have a good time, as I'm sure I shan't with Bret Cutter in the game."

Pat watched her mother's trim, amazingly youthful figure as she entered the car. More like a companion than a parent, she mused; she liked the independence her mother's attitude permitted her.

"Better than being watched like a prize-winning puppy," she thought. "Maybe Dr. Carl as a father would have a detriment or two along with the advantages. He's a dear, and I'm mad about him, but he does lean to the nineteenth century as far as parental duties are concerned."

She saw Nick's car draw to the curb; as he emerged she waved from the window and skipped into the hall. She caught up her wrap and bounded out to meet him just ascending the steps.

"Let's go!" she greeted him. She cast an apprehensive glance at his features, but there was nothing disturbing about him. He gave her a diffident smile, the shy, gentle smile that had taken her in that first moment of meeting. This was certainly no one but her own Nick, with no trace of the unsettling personality of their last encounter.

He helped her into the car, seating himself at her side. He leaned over her, kissing her very tenderly; suddenly she was

clinging to him, her face against the thrilling warmth of his cheek.

"Nick!" she murmured. "Nick! You're just safely you, aren't you? I've been imagining things that I knew couldn't be so!"

He slipped his arm caressingly about her, and the pressure of it was like the security of encircling battlements. The world was outside the circle of his arms; she was within, safe, inviolable. It was some moments before she stirred, lifting her pert face with tear-bright eyes from the obscurity of his shoulder.

"So!" she exclaimed, patting the black glow of her hair into composure. "I feel better, Nick, and I hope you didn't mind."

"Mind!" he ejaculated. "If you mean that as a joke, Honey, it's far too subtle for me."

"Well, I didn't think you'd mind," said Pat demurely, settling herself beside him. "Let's be moving, then; Dr. Carl is nearly popping his eyes out in the window there."

The car hummed into motion; she waved a derisive arm at the Doctor's window by way of indicating her knowledge of his surveillance. "Ought to teach him a lesson some time," she thought. "One of these fine evenings I'll give him a real shock."

"Where'll we go?" queried Nick, veering skilfully into the swift traffic of Sheridan Road.

"Anywhere!" she said blithely. "Who cares as long as we go together?"

"Dancing?"

"Why not? Know a good place?"

"No." He frowned in thought. "I haven't indulged much."

"The Picador?" she suggested. "The music's good, and it's not too expensive. But it's 'most across town, and besides, Saturday nights we'd be sure to run into some of the crowd."

"What of it?"

"I want to dance with you, Nick—all evening. I want to be without distractions."

"Pat, dear! I could kiss you for that."

"You will," she murmured softly.

They moved aimlessly south with the traffic, pausing momentarily at the light-controlled intersections, then whirring again to rapid motion. The girl leaned against his arm silently, contentedly; block after block dropped behind.

"Why so pensive, Honey?" he asked after an interval. "I've never known you so quiet before."

"I'm enjoying my happiness, Nick."

"Aren't you usually happy?"

"Of course, only these last two or three days, ever since our last date, I've been making myself miserable. I've been telling myself foolish things, impossible things, and it's only now that I've thrown off the blues. I'm happy, Dear!"

"I'm glad you are," he said. His voice was strangely husky, and he stared fixedly at the street rushing toward them. "I'm glad you are," he repeated, a curious tenseness in his tones.

"So'm I."

"I'll never do anything to make you unhappy, Pat—never. Not

—if I can help it."

"You can help it, Nick. You're the one making me happy; please keep doing it."

"I—hope to." There was a queer catch in his voice. It was almost as if he feared something.

"Selah!" said Pat conclusively. She was thinking, "Wrong of me to refer to that accident. After all it was harmless; just a natural burst of passion. Might happen to anyone."

"Where'll we go?" asked Nick as they swung into the tree-shadowed road of Lincoln Park. "We haven't decided that."

"Anywhere," said the girl dreamily. "Just drive; we'll find a place."

"You must know lots of them."

"We'll find a new place; we'll discover it for ourselves. It'll mean more, doing that, than if we just go to one of the old places where I've been with every boy that ever dated me. You don't want me dancing with a crowd of memories, do you?"

"I shouldn't mind as long as they stayed merely memories."

"Well, I should! This evening's to be ours—exclusively ours."

"As if it could ever be otherwise!"

"Indeed?" said Pat. "And how do you know what memories I might choose to carry along? Are you capable of inspecting my mental baggage?"

"We'll check it at the door. You're traveling light tonight, aren't you?"

"Pest!" she said, giving his cheek an impudent vicious pinch.

"Nice, pleasurable pest!"

He made no answer. The car was idling rather slowly along Michigan Boulevard; half a block ahead glowed the green of a traffic light. Faster traffic flowed around them, passing them like water eddying about a slow floating branch.

Suddenly the car lurched forward. The amber flame of the warning light had flared out; they flashed across the intersection a split second before the metallic click of the red light, and a scant few feet before the converging lines of traffic from the side street swept in with protesting horns.

"Nick!" the girl gasped. "You'll rate yourself a traffic ticket! Why'd you cut the light like that?"

"To lose your guardian angel," he muttered in tones so low she barely understood his words.

Pat glanced back; the lights of a dozen cars showed beyond the barrier of the red signal.

"Do you mean one of those cars was following us? What on earth makes you think that, and why should it, anyway?"

The other made no answer; he swerved the car abruptly off the avenue, into one of the nondescript side streets. He drove swiftly to the corner, turned south again, and turned again on some street Pat failed to identify—South Superior or Grand, she thought. They were scarcely a block from the magnificence of Michigan Avenue and its skyscrapers, its brilliant lights, and its teeming night traffic, yet here they moved down a deserted dark thoroughfare, a street lined with ramshackle wooden houses

intermingled with mean little shops.

"Nick!" Pat exclaimed. "Where are we going?"

The low voice sounded. "Dancing," he said.

He brought the car to the curb; in the silence as the motor died, the faint strains of a mechanical piano sounded. He opened the car door, stepped around to the sidewalk.

"We're here," he said.

Something metallic in his tone drew Pat's eyes to his face. The eyes that returned her stare were the bloody orbs of the demon of last Wednesday night!



## 8

# Gateway to Evil

Pat stared curiously at the apparition but made no move to alight from the vehicle. She was conscious of no fear, only a sense of wonder and perplexity. After all, this was merely Nick, her own harmless, adoring Nick, in some sort of mysterious masquerade, and she felt full confidence in her ability to handle him under any circumstances.

"Where's here?" she said, remaining motionless in her place.

"A place to dance," came the toneless reply.

Pat eyed him; a street car rumbled past, and the brief glow from its lighted windows swept over his face. Suddenly the visage was that of Nick; the crimson glare of the eyes was imperceptible, and the features were the well-known appurtenances of Nicholas Devine, but queerly tensed and strained.

"A trick of the light," she thought, as the street car lumbered away, and again a faint gleam of crimson appeared. She gazed curiously at the youth, who stood impassively returning her survey as he held the door of the car. But the face was the face of Nick, she perceived, probably in one of his grim moods.

She transferred her glance to the building opposite which they had stopped. The strains of the mechanical piano had ceased;

blank, shaded windows faced them, around whose edges glowed a subdued light from within. A drab, battered, paintless shack, she thought, dismal and unpleasant; while she gazed, the sound of the discordant music recommenced, adding, it seemed, the last unprepossessing item.

"It doesn't look very attractive, Nick," she observed dubiously.

"I find it so, however."

"Then you've been here?"

"Yes."

"But I thought you said you didn't know any place to go."

"This one hadn't occurred to me—then."

"Well," she said crisply, "I could have done as well as this with my eyes closed. It doesn't appeal to me at all, Nick."

"Nevertheless, here's where we'll go. You're apt to find it—interesting."

"Look here, Nicholas Devine!" Pat snapped, "What makes you think you can bully me? No one has ever succeeded yet!"

"I said you'd find it interesting." His voice was unchanged; she stared at him in complete bafflement.

"Oh, Nick!" she exclaimed in suddenly softer tones. "What difference does it make? Didn't I say anywhere would do, so we went together?" She smiled at him. "This will do if you wish, though really, Honey, I'd prefer not."

"I do wish it," the other said.

"All right, Honey," said Pat the faintest trace of reluctance in her voice as she slipped from the car. "I stick to my bargains."

She winced at the intensity of his grip as he took her arm to assist her. His fingers were like taunt wires biting into her flesh.

"Nick!" she cried. "You're hurting me! You're bruising my arm!"

He released her; she rubbed the spot ruefully, then followed him to the door of the mysterious establishment. The unharmonious jangle of the piano dinned abruptly louder as he swung the door open. Pat entered and glanced around her at the room revealed.

Dull, smoky, dismal—not the least exciting or interesting as yet, she thought. A short bar paralleled one wall, behind which lounged a little, thin, nondescript individual with a small mustache. Half a dozen tables filled the remainder of the room; four or five occupied by the clientele of the place, as unsavory a group as the girl could recall having encountered on the hither side of the motion picture screen. Two women tittered as Nick entered; then with one accord, the eyes of the entire group fixed on Pat, where she stood drawing her wrap more closely about her, standing uncomfortably behind her escort. And the piano tinkled its discords in the far corner.

"Same place," said Nick shortly to the bartender, ignoring the glances of the others. Pat followed him across the room to a door, into a hall, thence into a smaller room furnished merely with a table and four chairs. The nondescript man stood waiting in the doorway as Nick took her wrap and seated her in one of the chairs.

"Quart," he said laconically, and the bartender disappeared.

Pat stared intently, studiously, into the face of her companion. Nick's face, certainly; here in full light there was no trace of the red-eyed horror she had fancied out there in the semi-darkness of the street. Or was there? Now—when he turned, when the light struck his eyes at an angle, was that a glint of crimson? Still, the features were Nick's, only a certain grim intensity foreign to him lurked about the set of his mouth, the narrowed eye-lids.

"Well!" she said. "So this is Paris! What are you trying to do—teach me capital L—life? And where do we dance?"

"In here."

"And what kind of quart was that you ordered? You know how little I drink, and I'm darned particular about even that little."

"You'll like this."

"I doubt it."

"I said you'll like it," he reiterated in flat tones.

"I heard you say it." She regarded him with a puzzled frown. "Nick," she said suddenly, "I've decided I like you better in your gentle pose; this masterful attitude isn't becoming, and you can forget what I said about wishing you'd display it oftener."

"You'll like that, too."

"Again I doubt it. Nick, dear, don't spoil another evening like that last one!"

"This one won't be like the last one!"

"But Honey—" she paused at the entrance of the bartender bearing a tray, an opened bottle of ginger ale, two glasses of ice,

and a flask of oily amber liquid. He deposited the assortment on the red-checked table cloth.

"Two dollars," he said, pocketed the money and silently retired.

"Nicholas," said the girl tartly, "there's enough of that poison for a regiment."

"I don't think so."

"Well, I won't drink it, and I won't let you drink it! So now what?"

"I think you'll do both."

"I don't!" she snapped. "And I don't like this, Nick—the place, or the liquor, or your attitude, or anything. We're going to leave!"

Instead of answering, he pulled the cork from the bottle, pouring a quantity of the amber fluid into each of the tumblers. To one he added an equal quantity of ginger ale, and set it deliberately squarely in front of Pat. She frowned at it distastefully, and shook her head.

"No," she said. "Not I. I'm leaving."

She made no move, however; her eyes met those of her companion, gazing at her with a cold intentness in their curious amber depths. And again—was that a flash of red? Impulsively she reached out her hand, touched his.

"Oh, Nick!" she said in soft, almost pleading tones. "Please, Honey—I don't understand you. Don't you know I love you, Nick? You can hear me say it: I love you. Don't you believe that?"

He continued his cold, intense stare; the grim set of his mouth

was as unrelaxing as marble. Pat felt a shiver of apprehension run through her, and an almost hypnotic desire to yield herself to the demands of the inexplicable eyes. She tore her glance away, looking down at the red checks of the table cloth.

"Nick, dear," she said. "I can't understand this. Will you tell me what you—will you tell me why we're here?"

"It is out of your grasp."

"But—I know it has something to do with Wednesday night, something to do with that reluctance of yours, the thing you said you didn't understand. Hasn't it?"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes," she said. "I do! And Nick, Honey—didn't I tell you I could forgive you anything? I don't care what's happened in the past; all I care for is now, now and the future. Don't you understand me? I've told you I loved you, Honey! Don't you love me?"

"Yes," said the other, staring at her with no change in the fixity of his gaze.

"Then how can you—act like this to me?"

"This is my conception of love."

"I don't understand!" the girl said helplessly. "I'm completely puzzled—it's all topsy-turvy."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.