

it an idle boast—a part of the game of bluff the man was playing, or was it—

He rose up in bed and lit the lamp. What had come over the atmosphere of the place. Surely it seemed suddenly to have grown close and tainted. It bore down upon him with overwhelming force, dimming the light and growing thicker and more solid every moment. It tasted horribly in his mouth—it was choking him!

A deadly feeling of nausea seized him, but by a supreme effort he rallied, sprang to the window, and threw it open. How cool and sweet was the night air!

Something touched him lightly on the cheek—a spatter of mud, perhaps, thrown up by the cab rattling by just then. He withdrew his head and glanced backward into the room. The light was burning clear, the air in the apartment seemed clean and fresh. Inexpressibly relieved, he closed the window and got into bed.

Oblivion was just stealing over his grateful senses when the dull booming of some winged insect sounded from the corner of the room. Nearer and nearer it came, circling about his pillow and restoring his dulled faculties to life again. With an oath he sprang out of bed and searched the room once more. The noise had ceased and he could see no sign of the thing, but directly he was on the point of sleep again, it commenced buzzing round him, never once actually settling, but occasionally brushing his face with the tips of its wings.

Not once, but many times did this

happen, till the grey dawn, struggling with the yellow lamplight, showed a wild-eyed man peering in odd nooks and corners for an invisible enemy. Fifty, forsooth! The mirror said nearer seventy. A few days more of this sort of thing would make a madman of him. Should he give in?

He washed and dressed, took a nip of brandy, and felt somewhat better. On the doormat lay a note addressed to him. He tore it open and read:

"If the thing I spoke of yesterday has convinced you of the uselessness of attempting to oppose the will of the destroyer, lower your shop blinds at noon to-day. Your last chance."

Wright angrily crumpled the paper up and flung it into the street.

"There's his answer, if he's anywhere near," he said. The man by daylight was a different being to the shivering, sweating wretch of the night. The blinds remained up as usual.

The dealer had a busy day of it. First of all he instituted a complete search for his persecutor of the previous night, an unsuccessful search, though he ransacked the house from top to bottom. Then he went out, taking the joss with him, and made arrangements for his departure for Holland, shrewdly avoiding all back streets. Returning home, he packed up his most portable valuables in a couple of trunks. The rest, he reflected, looking round with a sigh, would pay the rent that was owing. The air of the States might not be healthy for him for some time after to-night.

Determined to take no risks of another night like the last, he had transferred his sleeping quarters to the top of the house. It was a small room, lighted only by a tiny skylight in the roof. He set the alarm for an early hour—the boat departed at nine—then rested his head on the pillow thinking he would sleep well to-night.

He had pasted paper over every chink and crevice of the door to preclude any insect during the night. Yet after all he could not be certain that there had actually been anything in the room the previous night. That strange buzzing in his ears might have been produced by the stuffiness of the place. And that in its turn—what had caused that? Who or what was the old man? What—

Speculating on these matters he fell suddenly asleep. And dreamed. Dreamed that he had taken the stones to the lapidary's and was watching them being cut. The stones were as large as his head and the machine, strangely enough, a kind of circular saw, whose rasping grated painfully on his ears. It grew louder and louder—a sudden deafening crash, the stone was split into a thousand fragments, and he was sitting up in bed—awake.

"What is it?" he asked, for it seemed that someone had called him by name. There was no answer, but the peculiar rasping noise he had heard in his dreams recommenced. No! It was the unaccountable buzzing, just as he had heard it last night.

He threw off the bedclothes and searched the room. From one spot to

another the noise led him in a hopeless maze of wanderings. It was the same as ever; he could see nothing.

Finally it ceased altogether. He got into bed and was on the brink of sleep again when it restarted. He pulled the clothes over his head.

Boom! boom! He could have screamed aloud as he felt its sticky legs about his face. He could neither sleep nor keep awake.

He started up in bed once more. At last! There was the thing, whatever it might be, circling with heavy wings round the table. Slower and slower it flew, till at length it settled. A mosquito!

Even as he had grasped this fact, it suddenly rose and flew straight at his face. Was he mad? For it seemed to him to have assumed the face of the tall, white-haired priest. "Your last chance!" it boomed. "Your last chance!" In a frenzy of rage and repulsion, he struck at it with the pillow and knocked the lamp over.

The old house burned like tinder and formed a gratifying spectacle to the crowd that, moth-like, had been drawn to it. To quote from the morning's paper: "Foremost among those who in the early stages of the fire tried to save some of the dealer's effects, was a tall, dark-skinned man who displayed an activity little short of marvellous in one of his apparent age; but modestly disappeared when it became known that no hope could be entertained of rescuing the unfortunate proprietor."

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DO YOU KNOW—

that a world-wide famine can only be averted by increasing this supply?

DO YOU KNOW—

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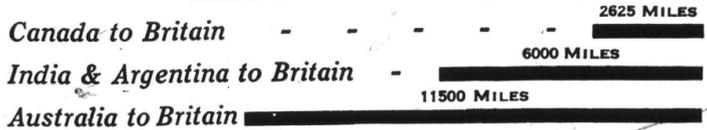
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