

## **Gargoyle**

*By Edwina Stanton Babcock*

From Harper's Magazine

Gargoyle stole up the piazza steps. His arms were full of field flowers. He stood there staring over his burden.

A hush fell upon tea- and card-tables. The younger women on the Strang veranda glanced at one another. The girl at the piano hesitated in her light stringing of musical sentences.

John Strang rose. "Not now, Gargoyle, old man." Taking the flowers from the thin hands, he laid them on the rug at his wife's feet, then gently motioned the intruder away. Gargoyle flitted contentedly down the broad steps to the smooth drive, and was soon hidden by masses of rhododendron on the quadrangle.

Only one guest raised questioning eyebrows as Strang resumed his seat. This girl glanced over his shoulder at the aimless child straying off into the trees.

"I should think an uncanny little person like that would get on Mrs. Strang's nerves; he gives me the creeps!"

"Yes? Mrs. Strang is hardly as sensitive as you might suppose. What do you say of a lady who enjoys putting the worms on her shrinking husband's hook? Not only that, but who banter the worms, telling them it's all for their own good?"

The mistress of Hearthholm, looking over at the two, shook a deprecating head. But Strang seemed to derive amusement from the guest's disapproval.

Mockwood, where the Strangs lived, had its impressiveness partly accounted for by the practical American name of "residential park." This habitat, covering many thousands of acres, gave evidence of the usual New World compromise between fantastic wealth and overreached restraint. Polished automobiles gliding noiselessly through massed purple and silver shrubberies, receded into bland glooms of well-thought-out boscaje. The architecture, a judicious mixture of haughty roofs and opulent chimneys, preened itself behind exclusive screens of wall and vine, and the entire frontage of Mockwood presented a polished elegance which did not entirely conceal a silent plausibility of expense.

At Heartholm, the Strangs' place, alone, had the purely conventional been smitten in its smooth face. The banker's country home was built on the lines of his own physical height and mental breadth. Strang had flung open his living-rooms to vistas of tree branches splashing against the morning blue. His back stairs were as aspiring as the Apostles' Creed, and his front stairs as soaring as the Cantic to the Sun. As he had laid out his seven-mile drive on a deer track leading to a forest spring, so had he spoken for his flowers the word, which, though it freed them from the prunes and prisms of a landscape gardener, held them, glorified vassals, to their original masters, sun and rain.

Strang and his love for untrammelled nature were hard pills for Mockwooders to swallow. Here was a man who, while he kept one on the alert, was to be deplored; who homesteaded squirrels, gave rabbits their own licentious ways, was whimsically tolerant of lichens, mushrooms, and vagabond vines. This was also the man who, when his gardener's wife gave birth to a deaf and dumb baby, encouraged his own wife to make a pet of the unfortunate youngster, and when he could walk gave him his freedom of the Heartholm acres.

It was this sort of thing, Mockwooders agreed, that "explained" the Strangs. It was the desultory gossip of fashionable breakfast tables

how Evelyn Strang was frequently seen at the gardener's cottage, talking to the poor mother about her youngest. The gardener's wife had other children, all strong and hearty. These went to school, survived the rigors of "regents" examinations, and were beginning to talk of "accepting" positions. There would never be any position for little Gargoyle, as John Strang called him, to "accept."

"Let the child run about," the village doctors had advised. "Let him run about in the sun and make himself useful."

But people who "run about in the sun" are seldom inclined to make themselves useful, and no one could make Gargoyle so. It would have been as well to try to train woodbine to draw water or to educate cattails to write Greek. The little boy spent all of the day idling; it was a curious, Oriental sort of idling. Callers at Hearthholm grew disapprovingly accustomed to the sight of the grotesque face and figure peering through the shrubberies; they shrugged their shoulders impatiently, coming upon the recumbent child dreamily gazing at his own reflection in the lily-pond, looking necromantically out from the molten purple of a wind-blown beech, or standing at gaze in a clump of iris.

Strang with his amused laugh fended off all protest and neighborly advice.

"That's Gargoyle's special variety of hashish. He lives in a flower-harem--in a five-year-old Solomon's Song. I've often seen the irises kowtowing to him, and his attitude toward them is distinctly personal and lover-like. If that little chap could only talk there would be some fun, but what Gargoyle thinks would hardly fit itself to words--besides, then"--Strang twinkled at the idea--"none of us would fancy having him around with those natural eyes--that undressed little mind."

It was in good-humored explanations like this that the Strangs managed to conceal their real interest in Gargoyle. They did not remind people of their only child, the brave boy of seven, who died before they came to Mockwood. Under the common sense that set the two instantly to work building a new home, creating new associations, lay the everlasting pain of an old life, when, as parents of a son, they had seemed to tread springier soil, to breathe keener, more vital air. And, though the Strangs adhered patiently to the recognized technicalities of Mockwood existence, they never lost sight of a hope, of which, against the increasing evidence of worldly logic, their human hearts still made ceaseless frantic attestation.

Very slowly, but very constructively, it had become a fierce though governed passion with both--to learn something of the spiritual life coursing back of the material universe. Equally slowly and inevitably had the two come to believe that the little changeling at the lodge held some wordless clue, some unconscious knowledge as to that outer sphere, that surrounding, peopled ether, in which, under their apparent rationality, the two had come to believe. Yet the banker and his wife stood to Mockwooders for no special cult or fad; it was only between themselves that their quest had become a slowly developing motive.

"Gargoyle was under the rose-arbor this morning." It was according to custom that Evelyn Strang would relate the child's latest phase. "He sat there without stirring such a long time that I was fascinated. I noticed that he never picked a rose, never smelled one. The early sun fell slanting through their petals till they glowed like thin little wheels of fire. John dear, it was that scalloped fire which Gargoyle was staring at. The flowers seemed to lean toward him, vibrating color and perfumes too delicate for me to hear. I only saw and smelled the flowers; Gargoyle looked as if he felt them! Don't laugh; you know we look at flowers because when we were little, people always said, 'See the pretty flower, smell the pretty flower,' but no one said, 'Listen and see if you can hear the flower grow; be still and see if you can catch the flower speaking.'"

Strang never did laugh, never brushed away these fantastic ideas. Settling back in his piazza chair, his big hands locked together, he would listen, amusing himself with his pet theory of Gargoyle's "undressed mind."

"By the way," he said once, "that reminds me, have you ever seen our young Solomon of the flower-harem smile?"

"Of course I haven't; neither have you." Young Mrs. Strang averred it confidently. "He never has smiled, poor baby, nor cried--his mother told me that long ago."

The banker kept his eyes on the treetops; he had his finger-tips nicely balanced before he remarked, with seeming irrelevance:

"You know that nest in the tree we call the Siegfried tree?"

She nodded.

"The other day a bird fell out of it, one of the young ones, pushed out by a housecleaning mother, I suppose. It killed the poor little feathered gawk. I saw Gargoyle run, quick as a flash, and pick it up. He pushed open the closing eyes, tried to place the bird on a hollyhock stalk, to spread its wings, in every way to give it motion. When, after each attempt, he saw it fall to the ground, he stood still, looking at it very hard. Suddenly, to my surprise, he seemed to understand something, to comprehend it fully and delightedly. He laughed." Strang stopped, looking intently at his wife.

"I can imagine that laugh," she mused.

Strang shook his head. "I don't think you can. It--it wasn't pleasant. It was as uncanny as the rest of the little chap--a long, rattling, eerie sound, as if a tree should groan or a butterfly curse; but wait--there's

more." In his earnestness Strang sat up, adding, "Then Gargoyle got up and stretched out his hands, not to the sky, but to the air all around him. It was as if--" Here Strang, the normal, healthy man of the world, hesitated; it was only the father of the little boy who had died who admitted in low tones: "You would have said--At least even I could imagine that Gargoyle--well--that he saw something like a released principle of life fly happily back to its main source--as if a little mote like a sunbeam should detach itself from a clod and, disembodied, dart back to its law of motion."

For a long time they were silent, listening to the call of an oven-bird far back in the spring trees. At last Strang got up, filled his pipe, and puffed at it savagely before he said, "Of course the whole thing's damned nonsense." He repeated that a little brutally to his wife's silence before in softened voice he added, "Only, perhaps you're right, Evelyn; perhaps we, too, should be seeing that kind of thing, understanding what, God knows, we long to understand, if we had 'undressed minds,' if we hadn't from earliest infancy been smeared all over with the plaster-of-Paris of 'normal thinking.'"

Time flew swiftly by. The years at Heartholm were tranquil and happy until Strang, taken by one of the swift maladies which often come to men of his type, was mortally stricken. His wife at first seemed to feel only the strange ecstasy that sometimes comes to those who have beheld death lay its hand on a beloved body. She went coldly, rigidly, through every detail of the final laying away of the man who had loved her to the utmost power of his man's heart. Friends waited helplessly, dreading the furious after-crash of this unnatural mental and bodily endurance. Doctor Milton, Strang's life-long friend, who had fought for the banker's life, watched her carefully, but there was no catalepsy, no tranced woman held in a vise of endurance. Nothing Evelyn Strang did was odd or unnatural, only she seemed, particularly before the burial, to be waiting intently for some revelation, toward which her desire burned consumingly, like a powerful flame.

Just before the funeral Strang's sister came to Doctor Milton.

"Evelyn!" in whispered response to his concerned look. "Oh, doctor, I cannot think that this calmness is right for her----" The poor, red-eyed woman, fighting hard for her own composure, motioned to the room where, with the cool lattices drawn, and a wave of flowers breaking on his everlasting sleep, the master of Hearthholm lay. "She has gone in there with that little deaf-and-dumb child. I saw her standing with him, staring all about her. Somehow it seemed to me that Gargoyle was smiling--that he saw something----!"

For long weeks Doctor Milton stayed on at Hearthholm, caring for Mrs. Strang. From time to time the physician also studied and questioned Gargoyle. Questioned in verity, for the practised hand could feel rigid muscles and undeveloped glands that answered more truthfully than words. Whatever conclusions Milton arrived at, he divulged to no one but Mrs. Strang. What he had to say roused the desolate woman as nothing else could have done. To the rest of the world little or nothing was explained. But, after the consent of the mother at the gardener's cottage had been gained, Doctor Milton left Hearthholm, taking Gargoyle with him.

In the office of Dr. Pauli Mach, the professional tongue was freed. Milton, with the half-quizzical earnestness habitual to him, told his story, which was followed by the exchange of much interesting data.

The two fell back on the discussion of various schools where Gargoyle might be put under observation. At last, feeling in the gravely polite attention of the more eminent man a waning lack of interest, Milton reluctantly concluded the interview.

"I'll write to Mrs. Strang and tell her your conclusions; she won't accept them--her own husband humored her in the thing. What John Strang himself believed I never really knew, but I think he had wisdom in his generation."

Milton stood there, hesitating; he looked abstractedly at the apathetic little figure of Gargoyle sitting in the chair.

"We talk of inherent human nature," said the doctor, slowly, "as if we had all knowledge concerning the possibilities of that nature's best and worst. Yet I have sometimes wondered if what we call mentally askew people are not those that possess attributes which society is not wise enough to help them use wisely--mightn't such people be like fine-blooded animals who sniff land and water where no one else suspects any? Given a certain kink in a human brain, and there might result capacity we ought to consider, even if we can't, in our admittedly systematized civilization, utilize it."

The Swiss doctor nodded, magnetic eyes and mouth smiling.

"Meanwhile"--in his slow, careful speech--"meanwhile we do what we can to preserve the type which from long experience we know wears best."

Milton nodded. He moved to go, one hand on Gargoyle's unresponsive shoulder, when the office door swung open.

"Now this is real trouble," laughed a woman's fresh, deep-chested voice. "Doctor Mach, it means using one of your tall measuring-glasses or permitting these lovely things to wilt; some one has inundated us with flowers. I've already filled one bath-tub; I've even used the buckets in the operating-room."

The head nurse stood there, white-frosted, smiling, her stout arms full of rosy gladioli and the lavender and white of Japanese iris. The two doctors started to help her with the fragrant burden, but not before Gargoyle sprang out of his chair. With a start, as if shocked into galvanic motion, the boy sat upright. With a throttled cry he leaped at the surprised woman. He bore down upon her flowers as if they had



been a life-preserver, snatching at them as if to prevent himself from being sucked under by some strange mental undertow. The softly-colored bloom might have had some vital magnetizing force for the child's blood, to which his whole feeble nature responded. Tearing the colored mass from the surprised nurse's arms, Gargoyle sank to the floor. He sat there caressing the flowers, smiling, making uncouth efforts to speak. The arms that raised him were gentle enough. They made no attempt to take from him his treasures. They sat him on the table, watching the little thin hands move ardently, yet with a curious deftness and delicacy, amid the sheaf of color. As the visionary eyes peered first into one golden-hearted lily, then into another, Milton felt stir, in spite of himself, Strang's old conviction of the "undressed mind." He said nothing, but stole a glance at the face of his superior. Doctor Mach was absorbed. He stood the boy on the table before him. The nurse stripped Gargoyle, then swiftly authoritative fingers traveled up and down the small, thin frame.

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Life at Heartholm went on very much the same. The tender-hearted observer might have noted that the gardens held the same flowers year after year, all the perennials and hardy blooms John Strang had loved. No matter what had been his widow's courageous acceptance of modern stoicism, the prevailing idea that incurable grief is merely "morbid," yet, in their own apartments where their own love had been lived, was every mute image and eloquent trifle belonging to its broken arc. Here, with Strang's books on occult science, with other books of her own choosing, the wife lived secretly, unknown of any other human being, the long vigil of waiting for some sign or word from the spirit of one who by every token of religion and faith she could not believe dead--only to her wistful earthly gaze, hidden. She also hid in her heart one strangely persistent hope--namely, Gargoyle! Letters from Doctor Milton had been full of significance. The last letter triumphantly concluded:

Your young John Strang Berber, alias Gargoyle, can talk now, with only one drawback: as yet he doesn't know any words!

The rapidly aging mother at the gardener's cottage took worldly pride in what was happening to her youngest.

"I allus knowed he was smart," the woman insisted. "My Johnny! To think of him speaking his mind out like any one else! I allus took his part--I could ha' told 'em he had his own notions!"

There was no doubt as to Gargoyle's having the "notions." As the slow process of speech was taught and the miracle of fitting words to things was given unto John Berber, alias Gargoyle, it was hard for those watching over him to keep the riotous perceptions from retarding the growing mechanistics. Close-mouthed the boy was, and, they said, always would be; but watchful eyes and keen intuitions penetrated to the silent orgies going on within him. So plainly did the fever of his education begin to wear on his physical frame that wary Doctor Mach shook his head. "Here I find too many streams of thought coursing through one field," said the careful Swiss. "The field thus grows stony and bears nothing. Give this field only one stream that shall be nourishing."

For other supernormal developments that "one stream" might have been music or sports. For Gargoyle it happened to be flowers. The botanist with whom he was sent afield not only knew his science, but guessed at more than his science. His were the beatitudes of the blue sky; water, rocks, and trees his only living testament. Under his tutelage, with the eyes of Doctor Mach ever on his growing body, and with his own special gifts of concentration and perception, at last came to Gargoyle the sudden whisper of academic sanction--namely, "genius."

He himself seemed never to hear this whisper. What things--superimposed on the new teeming world of material actualities--he

did hear, he never told. Few could reach Berber; among fellow-students he was gay, amiable, up to a certain point even frivolous; then, as each companion in turn complained, a curtain seemed to drop, a colorless wrap of unintelligibility enveloped him like a chameleon's changing skin; the youth, as if he lived another life on another plane, walked apart.

Doctor Milton, dropping into the smoking-room of a popular confr re, got a whiff of the prevailing gossip about his prot g .

"I'll be hanged if I can associate psychics with a biceps like Berber's; somehow those things seem the special prerogative of anemic women in white cheese-cloth fooling with 'planchette' and 'currents.'"

"You've got another guess," a growling neurologist volunteered. "Why shouldn't psychic freaks have biceps? We keep forgetting that we've dragged our fifty-year-old carcasses into an entirely new age--a wireless, horseless, man-flying, star-chasing age. Why, after shock upon shock of scientific discovery, shouldn't the human brain, like a sensitive plate, be thinned down to keener, more sensitive, perceptions?"

Some one remarked that in the case of Berber, born of a simple country woman and her uneducated husband, this was impossible.

Another man laughed. "Berber may be a Martian, or perhaps he was originally destined to be the first man on Jupiter. He took the wrong car and landed on this globe. Why not? How do we know what agency carries pollen of human life from planet to planet?"

Milton, smiling at it all, withdrew. He sat down and wrote a long-deferred letter to Mrs. Strang.

I have asked John Berber if he would care to revisit his old home. It seemed never to have occurred to him that he had a home! When I

suggested the thing he followed it up eagerly, as he does every new idea, asking me many keen questions as to his relatives, who had paid for his education, etc. Of the actual facts of his cure he knows little except that there was special functioning out of gear, and that now the wheels have been greased. Doctor Mach is desperately proud of him, especially of the way in which he responds to normal diversion-environments and friendships. You must instruct his mother very carefully as to references to his former condition. It is best that he should not dwell upon the former condition. Your young friend, Gargoyle, sees no more spooks. He is rapidly developing into a very remarkable and unconceited horticulturist!

The first few days at Mockwood were spent at the little gardener's cottage, from which the other youngsters had flown. Berber, quietly moving about the tiny rooms, sitting buried in a scientific book or taking long trips afield, was the recipient of much maternal flattery. He accepted it all very gently; the young culturist had an air of quiet consideration for every one and absolutely no consciousness of himself. He presumed upon no special prerogatives, but set immediately to work to make himself useful. It was while he was weeding the box borders leading to the herb-gardens of Heartholm that Mrs. Strang first came upon him. Her eyes, suddenly confronted with his as he got to his feet, dropped almost guiltily, but when they sought his face a second time, Evelyn Strang experienced a disappointment that was half relief. The sunburnt youth, in khaki trousers and brown-flannel shirt, who knelt by the border before her was John Strang Berber, Doctor Mach's human masterpiece; this was not "Gargoyle."

"That is hardly suitable work for a distinguished horticulturist," the mistress of Heartholm smiled at the wilting piles of pusley and sorrel.

White teeth flashed, deep eyes kindled. Berber rose and, going to a garden seat, took up some bits of glass and a folded paper. He showed her fragments of weed pressed upon glass plates, envelopes of seeds

preserved for special analyzation. "There's still a great undiscovered country in weed chemistry," he eagerly explained, "perhaps an anodyne for every pain and disease."

"Yes, and deadly poisons, too, for every failure and grief." The mistress of Heartholm said it lightly as she took the garden seat, thinking how pleasant it was to watch the resolute movements and splendid physical development of the once weazened Gargoyle. She began sorting out her embroidery silks as Berber, the bits of glass still in his hand, stood before her. He was smiling.

"Yes, deadly poisons, too," agreeing with a sort of exultation, so blithely, indeed, that the calmly moving fingers of the mistress of Heartholm were suddenly arrested. A feeling as powerful and associative as the scent of a strong perfume stole over Evelyn Strang.

Before she could speak Berber had resumed his weeding. "It's good to get dictatorship over all this fight of growing," looking up for her sympathy with hesitance, which, seen in the light of his acknowledged genius, was the more significant. "You don't mind my taking Michael's place? He was very busy this morning. I have no credentials, but my mother seems to think I am a born gardener."

This lack of conceit, this unassuming practicality, the sort of thing with which Gargoyle's mind had been carefully inoculated for a long time, baffled, while it reassured Mrs. Strang. Also the sense of sacred trust placed in her hands made her refrain from any psychic probing.

For a long while she found it easy to exert this self-control. The lonely woman, impressed by the marvelous "cure" of John Berber, magnetized by his youth and sunny enthusiasms back to the old dreaming pleasure in the Heartholm gardens, might in the absorbed days to come have forgotten--only there was a man's photograph in her bedroom, placed where her eyes always rested on it, her hand

could bring it to her lips; the face looking out at her seemed to say but one thing:

"You knew me--I knew you. What we knew and were to each other had not only to do with our bodies. Men call me 'dead' but you know that I am not. Why do you not study and work and pray to learn what I am become, that you may turn to me, that I may reach to you?"

Mockwooders, dropping in at Heartholm for afternoon tea, began to accustom themselves to finding Mrs. Strang sitting near some flower-bed where John Berber worked, or going with him over his great books of specimens. The smirk the fashionable world reserves for anything not usual in its experience was less marked in this case than it might have been in others. Even those who live in "residential parks" are sometimes forced (albeit with a curious sense of personal injury) to accept the idea that they who have greatly suffered find relief in "queer" ways. Mockwooders, assisting at the Heartholm tea-hour, and noting Berber among other casual guests, merely felt aggrieved and connoted "queerness."

For almost a year, with the talking over of plans for John Strang's long-cherished idea of a forest garden at Heartholm, there had been no allusion between mistress and gardener to that far-off fantasy, the life of little Gargoyle. During the autumn the two drew plans together for those spots which next spring were to blossom in the beech glade. They sent to far-off countries for bulbs, experimented in the Heartholm greenhouses with special soils and fertilizers, and differences of heat and light; they transplanted, grafted, and redeveloped this and that woodland native. Unconsciously all formal strangeness wore away, unconsciously the old bond between Gargoyle and his mistress was renewed.

Thus it was, without the slightest realization as to what it might lead, that Evelyn Strang one afternoon made some trifling allusion to Berber's association with the famous Doctor Mach. As soon as she

had done so, fearing from habit for some possible disastrous result, she tried immediately to draw away from the subject. But the forbidden spring had been touched--a door that had long been closed between them swung open. Young Berber, sorting dahlia bulbs into numbered boxes, looked up; he met her eyes unsuspectingly.

"I suppose," thoughtfully, "that that is the man to whom I should feel more grateful than to any other human being."

The mistress of Hearthholm did not reply. In spite of her tranquil air, Evelyn Strang was gripped with a sudden apprehension. How much, how little, did Berber know? She glanced swiftly at him, then bent her head over her embroidery. The colored stream of Indian summer flowed around them. A late bird poured out his little cup of song.

"My mother will not answer my questions." Young Berber, examining two curiously formed bulbs, shook the earth from them; he stuffed them into his trousers pocket. "But Michael got talking yesterday and told me--Did you know, Mrs. Strang? I was thought to be an idiot until I was twelve years old--born deaf and dumb?"

It was asked so naturally, with a scientific interest as impersonal as if he were speaking of one of the malformed bulbs in his pocket, that at first his mistress felt no confusion. Her eyes and hands busying themselves with the vivid silks, she answered.

"I remember you as a little pale boy who loved flowers and did such odd, interesting things with them. Mr. Strang and I were attracted to your mysterious plays.... No, you never spoke, but we were not sure you could not hear--and"--drawing a swift little breath--"we were always interested in what--in what--you seemed--to see!"

There was a pause. He knelt there, busily sorting the bulbs. Suddenly to the woman sitting on the garden bench the sun-bathed October gardens seemed alive with the myriad questioning faces of the fall

flowers; wheels and disks like aureoled heads leaned toward her, mystical fire in their eyes, the colored flames of their being blown by passionate desire of revelation. "This is your moment," the flowers seemed to say to her. "Ask him now."

But that she might not yet speak out her heart to John Berber his mistress was sure. She was reminded of what Strang had so often said, referring to their lonely quest--that actual existence was like a forlorn shipwreck of some other life, a mere raft upon which, like grave buffoons, the ragged survivors went on handing one another watersoaked bread of faith, glassless binoculars of belief, oblivious of what radiant coasts or awful headlands might lie beyond the enveloping mists. Soon, the wistful woman knew, she would be making some casual observations about the garden, the condition of the soil. Yet, if ever the moment had come to question him who had once been "Gargoyle," that moment was come now!

Berber lifted on high a mass of thickly welded bulbs clinging to a single dahlia stalk. He met her gaze triumphantly.

"Michael says he planted only a few of this variety, the soft, gold-hearted lavender. See what increase." The youth plunged supple fingers into the balmy-scented loam, among the swelling tuber forms. "A beautiful kind of ugliness," he mused. "I remember I used to think---" The young gardener, as if he felt that the eyes fixed upon him were grown suddenly too eager, broke abruptly off.

"Go on, John Berber. What you have to say is always interesting."

It was said calmly, with almost maternal encouragement, but the fingers absorbed in the bright silks fumbled and erred. "Used to think"--words such as these filtered like sunlight to the hope lying deep in Evelyn Strang's heart.



But young Berber leaned upon his garden fork, looking past her. Over the youth's face crept a curious expression of wrapt contemplation, of super-occupation, whether induced by her words or not she could not tell. Furtively Mrs. Strang studied him.... How soon would he drop that mystical look and turn to her with the casual "educated" expression she had come to know so well?

Suddenly, nervousness impelling her, she broke in upon his reverie:

"How wonderful, with such dreams as you must have had, to be educated! How very grateful you must be to Doctor Mach."

She heard her own words helplessly, as if in a dream, and, if the unwisdom of this kind of conversation had impressed the mistress of Heartholm before, now she could have bitten off her tongue with that needless speech on it. Young Berber, however, seemed hardly to have heard her; he stood there, the "Gargoyle" look still in his eyes, gazing past his mistress into some surrounding mystery of air element. It was to her, watching him, as if those brooding, dilated pupils might behold, besides infinitesimal mystery of chemical atoms, other mysteries--colorless pools of air where swam, like sea anemones, radiant forms of released spirit; invisible life-trees trembling with luminous fruit of occult being!

When Berber turned this look, naked as a sword, back to Evelyn Strang, she involuntarily shivered. But the boy's face was unconscious. His expression changed only to the old casual regard as he said, very simply:

"You see, I wish they had not educated me!"

The confession came with inevitable shock. If she received it with apparent lightness, it was that she might, with all the powers a woman understands, rise to meet what she felt was coming. The barrier down, it was comparatively easy to stand in the breach, making her soft note

of deprecation, acknowledging playfully that the stress of so-called "normal" life must indeed seem a burden to one who had hitherto talked with flowers, played with shadows. Berber, however, seemed hardly to hear her; there was no tenseness in the youth's bearing; he merely gazed thoughtfully past her efforts, repeating:

"No--I wish they had not taught me. I have not really gained knowledge by being taught."

Mrs. Strang was genuinely puzzled. Yet she understood; it was merely theories about life that he had gained. Again she called to mind a sentence in Doctor Milton's letter: "I know that you have followed the case in such a way as to understand what would be your responsibility toward this newly made human soul." Was it right to question Berber? Could it be actually harmful to him to go on? And yet was it not her only chance, after years of faithful waiting?

Trying to keep her voice steady, she reproached him:

"No? With all that being educated means, all the gift for humanity?"

The young fellow seemed not to get her meaning. He picked up the garden fork. Thoughtfully scraping the damp earth from its prongs, he repeated, "All that it means for humanity?"

"Why not"--urging the thing a little glibly--"why not? You can do your part now; you will help toward the solving of age-long mysteries. You must be steward of--of"--Mrs. Strang hesitated, then continued, lamely--"of your special insight. Why--already you have begun--Think of the weed chemistry." Had he noticed it? There was in her voice a curious note, almost of pleading, though she tried to speak with authority.

John Berber, once called "Gargoyle," listened. The youth stood there, his foot resting upon the fork but not driving it into the ground. He

caught her note of anxiety, laughing in light, spontaneous reassurance, taking her point with ease.

"Oh--I know," shrugging his shoulders in true collegian's style. "I understand my lesson." Berber met her look. "I had the gift of mental unrestraint, if you choose to call it that," he summed up, "and was of no use in the world. Now I have the curse of mental restraint and can participate with others in their curse." Suddenly aware of her helpless dismay and pain, the boy laughed again, but this time with a slight nervousness she had never before seen in him. "Why, we are not in earnest, dear Mrs. Strang." It was with coaxing, manly respect that he reminded her of that. "We are only joking, playing with an idea.... I think you can trust me," added John Berber, quietly.

The surprised woman felt that she could indeed "trust" him; that Berber was absolutely captain of the self which education had given him; but that from time to time he had been conscious of another self he had been unwise enough to let her see. She silently struggled with her own nature, knowing that were she judicious she would take that moment to rise and leave him. Such action, however, seemed impossible now. Here was, perhaps, revelation, discovery! All the convictions of her lonely, brooding life were on her. Temptation again seized her. With her longing to have some clue to that spirit world she and her husband had believed in, it seemed forewritten, imperative, inevitable, that she remain. Trying to control herself, she fumbled desperately on:

"When you were little, Mr. Strang and I used to notice--we grew to think--that because you had been shut away from contact with other minds, because you had never been told what to see, as children are told, 'Look at the fire,' 'See the water,' and so forever regard those things in just that way, not seeing--other things--Oh, we thought that perhaps--perhaps----"

It was futile, incoherent; her tongue seemed to dry in her mouth. Besides, the abashed woman needs must pause before a silence that to her strained sense seemed rebuking. She glanced furtively up at the youth standing there. It troubled the mistress of Hearthholm to realize that her protégé was staring gravely at her, as if she had proposed some guilty and shameful thing.

At last Berber, with a boyish sigh, seemed to shake the whole matter off. He turned to his bulbs; half at random he caught up a pruning-knife, cutting vindictively into one of them. For the moment there was silence, then the young gardener called his mistress's attention to the severed root in his hand.

"A winy-looking thing, isn't it? See those red fibers? Why shouldn't such roots, and nuts like those great, burnished horse-chestnuts there--yes, and cattails, and poke-berries, and skunk cabbages, give forth an entirely new outfit of fruits and vegetables?" Berber smiled his young ruminating smile; then, with inevitable courtesy, he seemed to remember that he had not answered her question. "I am not surprised that you and Mr. Strang thought such things about me. I wonder that you have not questioned me before--only you see now--I can't answer!" The boy gave her his slow, serious smile, reminding her.

"You must remember that I am like a foreigner--only worse off, for foreigners pick up a few words for their most vital needs, and I have no words at all--for what--for what vital things I used to know--so that perhaps in time I shall come to forget that I ever knew anything different from--other persons' knowledge." Berber paused, regarding his mistress intently, as if wistfully trying to see what she made of all this. Then he continued:

"One of our professors at college died, and the men of his class were gloomy; some even cried, others could not trust themselves to speak of him.... I noticed that they all called him 'poor' Landworth.... I could see that they felt something the way I do when I miss out on a

chemical experiment, or spoil a valuable specimen--only more so--a great deal more." The boy knit his brows, puzzling it all out. "Well, it's queer. I liked that professor, too; he was very kind to me--but when I saw him dead I felt glad--glad! Why"--Berber looked at her searchingly--"I grew to be afraid some one would find out how glad!"

The young fellow, still anxiously searching her face, dropped his voice. "You are the only person I dare tell this to--for I understand the world--" She noted that he spoke as if "the world" were a kind of plant whose needs he had fathomed. "But after that," concluded Berber, speaking as if quite to himself--"after that I somehow came to see that I had been--well, educated backward."

She moved impatiently; the youth, seeing the question in her face, answered the demand of its trembling eagerness, explaining:

"Do you not see--I have--sometimes known, not 'guessed' nor 'believed,' but known that death was a wonderful, happy thing--a fulfilment, a satisfaction to him who dies--but I have been educated backward into a life where people cannot seem to help regarding it as a sad thing. And----"

"Yes?--Yes?" breathed the eager woman. "Tell me--tell me----"

But he had come suddenly to a full stop. As if appalled to find only empty words, or no words at all, for some astounding knowledge he would communicate to her, he stammered painfully; then, as if he saw himself caught in guilt, colored furiously. Evelyn Strang could see the inevitable limitations of his world training creep slowly over him like cement hardening around the searching roots of his mind. She marveled. She remembered Strang's pet phrase, "the plaster of Paris of so-called 'normal thinking.'" Then the youth's helpless appeal came to her:

"Do you not think that I am doing wrong to speak of these things?" Berber asked, with dignity.

The mistress of Heartholm was silent. Recklessly she put by all Doctor Mach's prophecies. She could not stop here; her whole soul demanded that she go further. There were old intuitions--the belief that she and Strang had shared together, that, under rationalized schemes of thought, knowledge of inestimable hope was being hidden from the world. Here was this boy of the infinite vision, of the "backward educated" mind, ready to tell miraculous things of a hidden universe. Could she strike him dumb? It would be as if Lazarus had come forth from the open grave and men were to bandage again his ecstatic lips!

Suddenly, as if in answer to her struggle, Berber spoke. She was aware that he looked at her curiously with a sort of patient disdain.

"The world is so sure, so contented, isn't it?" the youth demanded of her, whether in innocence or irony she could not tell. "People are trained, or they train themselves, by the millions, to think of things in exactly one way." He who had once been "Gargoyle" looked piercingly into the eyes of this one being to whom at least he was not afraid to speak.

"Anything you or I might guess outside of what other people might accept," the boy reminded her, austere, "could be called by just one unpleasant name." He regarded the face turned to his, recognizing the hunger in it, with a mature and pitying candor, concluding: "After to-day we must never speak of these things. I shall never dare, you must never dare--and so--" He who had once been "Gargoyle" suddenly dropped his head forward on his breast, muttering--"and so, that is all."

Evelyn Strang rose. She stood tall and imperious in the waning afternoon light. She was bereaved mother, anguished wife; she was a

dreamer driven out of the temple of the dream, and what she had to do was desperate. Her voice came hard and resolute.

"It is not all," the woman doggedly insisted. The voiceless woe of one who had lost a comrade by death was on her. In her eyes was fever let loose, a sob, like one of a flock of imprisoned wild birds fluttered out from the cage of years. "Oh no--no!" the woman pleaded, more as if to some hidden power of negation than to the boy before her--"Oh no--no, this cannot be all, not for me! The world must never be told--it could not understand; but I must know, I must know." She took desperate steps back and forth.

"John Berber, if there is anything in your memory, your knowledge; even if it is only that you have imagined things--if they are so beautiful or so terrible that you can never speak of them--for fear--for fear no one would understand, you might, you might, even then, tell me--Do you not hear? You might tell me. I authorize it, I command it."

The woman standing in the autumn gardens clenched her hands. She looked round her into the clear air at the dense green and gold sunshine filtering through the colored trees, the softly spread patens of the cosmos, the vivid oriflammes of the chrysanthemums. Her voice was anguished, as if they two stood at a secret door of which Berber alone had the key, which for some reason he refused to use.

"I--of all the world," her whisper insisted. "If you might never speak again--I should understand."

Berber, his face grown now quite ashen, looked at her. Something in her expression seemed to transfix and bind him. Suddenly shutting his teeth together, he stood up, his arms folded on his broad chest. The afternoon shadows spread pools of darkness around their feet, the flowers seemed frozen in shapes of colored ice, as his dark, controlled eyes fixed hers.

"You--you dare?" the youth breathed, thickly.

She faced him in her silent daring. Then it seemed to her as if the sky must roll up like a scroll and the earth collapse into a handful of dust falling through space, for she knew that little Gargoyle of the "undressed mind"--little Gargoyle, looking out of John Berber's trained eyes as out of windows of ground glass, was flitting like a shadow across her own intelligence, trying to tell her what things he had always known about life and death, and the myriads of worlds spinning back in their great circles to the Power which had set them spinning.

Not until after the first halting, insufficient words, in which the boy sought to give his secret to the woman standing there, did she comprehend anything of the struggle that went on within him. But when suddenly Berber's arms dropped to his sides and she saw how he shivered, as if at some unearthly touch on his temples, she was alert. Color was surging into his face; his features, large, irregular, took on for the instant a look of speechless, almost demoniac power; he seemed to be swimming some mental tide before his foot touched the sands of language and he could helplessly stammer:

"I cannot--It--it will not come--It is as I told you--I have been taught no words--I cannot say what I know."

His powerful frame stood placed among the garden surroundings like that of a breathing statue, and his amazed companion witnessed this miracle of physical being chained by the limitations of one environment, while the soul of that being, clairaudient, clairvoyant, held correspondence with another environment. She saw Berber smile as if with some exquisite sense of beauty and rapture that he understood, but could not communicate, then helplessly motion with his hands. But even while she held her breath, gazing at him, a change came over the radiant features. He looked at her again, his face



worked; at last John Berber with a muffled groan burst into terrible human tears.

She stood there helpless, dumfounded at his agony.

"You--you cannot speak?" she faltered.

For answer he dropped his face into his strong hands. He stood there, his tall body quivering. And she knew that her dream was over.

She was forced to understand. John Berber's long and perfect world training held him in a vise. His lips were closed upon his secret, and she knew that they would be closed for evermore.

They remained, silently questioning each other, reading at last in each other's speechlessness some comfort in this strange common knowledge, for which, indeed, there were no human words, which must be forever borne dumbly between them. Then slowly, with solemn tenderness, the obligation of that unspoken knowledge came into Evelyn Strang's face. She saw the youth standing there with grief older than the grief of the world stabbing his heart, drowning his eyes. She laid a quiet hand on his shoulder.

"I understand." With all the mother, all the woman in her, she tried to say it clearly and calmly. "I understand; you need never fear me--and we have the whole world of flowers to speak for us." She gazed pitifully into the dark, storming eyes where for that one fleeting instant the old look of "Gargoyle" had risen, regarding her, until forced back by the trained intelligence Of "John Berber," which had always dominated, and at last, she knew, had killed it. "We will make the flowers speak--for us." Again she tried to speak lightly, comfortingly, but something within the woman snapped shut like a door. Slowly she returned to the garden seat. For a moment she faltered, holding convulsively to it, then her eyes, blinded from within, closed.

Yet, later, when the mistress of Hearthholm went back through the autumnal garden to the room where were the books and treasures of John Strang, she carried something in her hand. It was a lily bulb from which she and Berber hoped to bring into being a new and lovely flower. She took it into that room where for so many years the pictured eyes of her husband had met hers in mute questioning, and stood there for a moment, looking wistfully about her. Outside a light breeze sprang up, a single dried leaf rustled against the window-pane. Smiling wistfully upon the little flower-pot, Mrs. Strang set it carefully away in the dark.

FOOTNOTE:

[3] Copyright, 1920, by Harper & Brothers. Copyright, 1921, by Edwina Stanton Babcock.