

rare good humour.

'I have just obtained, by exchange with another collector,' he said, 'a splendid specimen of the *Ophiophagus*.'

'And what may that be?' the lady inquired with a somewhat languid interest.

'Why, bless my soul, what profound ignorance! My dear, a man who ascertains after marriage that his wife does not know Greek, is entitled to a divorce. The *Ophiophagus* is a snake which eats other snakes.'

'I hope it will eat all yours,' she said, absently shifting the lamp. 'But how does it get the other snakes? By charming them, I suppose.'

'That is just like you, dear,' said the doctor, with an affection of petulance. 'You know how irritating to me is any allusion to that vulgar superstition about the snake's power of fascination.'

The conversation was interrupted by a mighty cry which rang through the silent house like the voice of a demon shouting in a tomb. Again and yet again it sounded, with terrible distinctness. They sprang to their feet, the man confused, the lady pale and speechless with fright. Almost before the echoes of the last cry had died away the doctor was out of the room, springing up the staircase two steps at a time. In the corridor, in front of Brayton's chamber, he met some servants who had come from the upper floor. Together they rushed at the door without knocking. It was unfastened, and gave way. Brayton lay upon his stomach on the floor, dead. His head and arms were partly concealed under the foot rail of the bed. They pulled the body away, turning it upon the back. The face was daubed with blood and froth, the eyes were wide open, staring—a dreadful sight!

'Died in a fit,' said the scientist, bending his knee and placing his hand upon the heart. While in that position he happened to glance under the bed. 'Good God!' he added; 'how did this thing get in here?'

He reached under the bed, pulled out the snake, and flung it, still coiled, to the centre of the room, whence, with a harsh, shuffling sound, it slid across the polished floor till stopped by the wall, where it lay without motion. It was a stuffed snake; its eyes were two shoe buttons.

Terrified

Paul Santin had had a good day. Small town doctors and drug stores were doing a thriving business, and, therefore, so was Paul Santin, pharmaceutical salesman. But it had been a long day, and now it was past eleven. Santin was driving fast on the country back road, trying to make it home before midnight.

He was tired, sleepy, fighting to stay awake for another half hour. But he was not dozing. He was in complete control of his car. He knew what he was doing.

He'd passed few other cars. Right now the road seemed deserted. He'd chosen this route just for that reason. Light traffic. And that's the way it was—an almost empty road—when he saw the other car.

He saw it first as a pair of headlights rounding the curve a quarter mile ahead. The lights were fantastically bright, and the driver failed to dim them. Santin cursed him, whoever he was. He dimmed his own lights, but received no answering courtesy. He cursed again, vindictively switched his own lights back to high-way brightness. But he sensed no real danger in it.

He was vaguely aware that the other car was rocketing toward him at high speed. Too much speed for the kind of road they were on. Mechanically, he slacked off on the accelerator, concentrated on staying on his own side of the road, and on not looking directly at those oncoming lights.

But it was much too late when he realized the other car was hogging the centre of the road. And he had to make his decision too quickly. Whether to bore right in, perhaps leaning on his horn, hoping the other driver would pull aside. Or to hit the shoulder and take his chances with gravel and dirt.

He took the second choice, but not soon enough. He saw the other car wasn't going to concede an inch; so he swerved to the right. The blow was delivered against his left rear fender and wheel. The rear of his car skidded ditchward ahead of the front. Then the whole car seemed to defy gravity. It rolled sideways, leaped into the air, throwing Santin clear of itself at the top of the leap.