

Enoch

BY
ROBERT BLOCH

*My business? Killing people...
so step right up!*



Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE

IT ALWAYS starts the same way.

First, there's the *feeling*.

Have you ever felt the tread of little feet walking across the top of your skull? Footsteps on your skull, back and forth, back and forth?

It starts like that.

You can't see who does the walking. After all, it's on top of your head. If you're clever, you wait for a chance and suddenly brush a hand through your hair. But you can't catch the walker that way. He *knows*. Even if you clamp both hands flat to your head, he manages to wriggle through, somehow. Or maybe he jumps.

Terribly swift, he is. And you can't ignore him. If you don't pay any attention to the footsteps, he tries the next step. He

wriggles down the back of your neck and whispers in your ear.

You can feel his body, so tiny and cold, pressed tightly against the base of your brain. There must be something numbing in his claws, because they don't hurt—although later, you'll find little scratches on your neck that bleed and bleed. But at the time, all you know is that something tiny and cold is pressing there. Pressing, and whispering.

That's when you try to fight him. You try not to hear what he says. Because when you listen, you're lost. You have to obey him, then.

Oh, he's wicked and wise!

He knows how to frighten and threaten, if you dare to resist.

But I seldom try, any more. It's better for me if I do listen and then obey.

As long as I'm willing to listen, things don't seem so bad. Because he can be soothing and persuasive, too. Tempting. The things he has promised me, in that little silken whisper!

He keeps his promises, too.

Folks think I'm poor because I never have any money and live in that old shack on the edge of the swamp. But he has given me riches.

After I do what he wants, he takes me away—out of myself—for days. There are other places besides this world, you know; places where I am king.

People laugh at me and say I have no friends; the girls in town used to call me "scarecrow." Yet sometimes—after I've done his bidding—he brings the riches of the world to me.

Just dreams? I don't think so. It's the other life that's just a dream; the life in the shack at the edge of the swamp. That part doesn't seem real any more.

Not even the killing. . . .

Yes, I kill people.

That's what Enoch wants, you know.

That's what he whispers about. He asks me to kill people, for him.

I don't like that. I used to fight against it—I told you that before, didn't I?—but I can't any more.

He wants me to kill people for him. Enoch. The thing that lives on the top of my head.

I can't see him. I can't catch him. I can only feel him, and hear him, and obey him.

Sometimes he leaves me alone for days. Then, suddenly, I'll feel him there, scratching away at the roof of my brain. I'll hear his whisper ever so plainly, and he'll be telling me about someone who is coming through the swamp.

I don't know how he knows about them. He couldn't have seen them, yet he describes them perfectly.

"There's a tramp walking down the Aylesworthy Road. A short, fat man, with a bald head. That makes it easier."

Then he'll laugh for a minute, and go on.

"His name is Mike. He's wearing a brown sweater and blue overalls. He's go-

ing to turn into the swamp in about ten minutes when the sun goes down. He'll stop under the big tree next to the dump.

"Better hide behind that tree. Wait until he starts to look for firewood. Then you know what to do. Get the hatchet, now. Hurry."

SOMETIMES I ask Enoch what he will give me. Usually, I just trust him. I know I'm going to have to do it, anyway. So I might as well go ahead at once. Enoch is never wrong about things, and he keeps me out of trouble.

That is, he always did—until the last time.

One night, I was sitting in the shack eating supper when he told me about this girl.

"She's coming to visit you," he whispered. "A beautiful girl, all in black. She has a wonderful quality to her head—fine bones. Fine."

At first I thought he was telling me about one of my *rewards*. But Enoch was talking about a real person.

"She will come to the door and ask you to help her. To fix her car. She has taken the side road, planning to go into town by a shorter route. Now the car is well into the swamp, and one of the tires needs changing."

It sounded funny, hearing Enoch talk about things like automobile tires. But he knows about them. Enoch knows *everything*.

"You will go out to help her when she asks you. Don't take anything. She has a wrench in the car. Use that."

This time I tried to fight him. I kept whimpering, "I won't do it, I won't do it."

He just laughed. And then he told me what he'd do if I refused. He told me over and over again.

"Better that I do it to her and not to you," Enoch reminded me. "Or would you rather I—"

"No!" I said. "No. I'll do it."

"After all," Enoch whispered, "I can't help it. I must be served ever so often. To keep me alive. To keep me strong. So I can serve you. So I can give you things. That is why you have to obey me. If not, I'll just stay right here and—"

"No," I said. "I'll do it."

And I did it.

She knocked on my door just a few minutes later, and it was just as Enoch had whispered it. She was a pretty girl—with blonde hair. I like blonde hair. I was glad, when I went out into the swamp with her, that I didn't have to harm her hair. I hit her behind the neck with the wrench.

Enoch told me what to do, step by step.

After I used the hatchet, I put the body in the quicksand. Enoch was with me, and he cautioned me about heel-marks. I got rid of them.

I was worried about the car, but he showed me how to use the end of a rotten log and pitch it over. I wasn't sure it would sink, too, but it did. And much faster than I would have believed.

It was a relief to see the car go. I threw ~~the wrench in after it.~~ Then Enoch told me to go home, and I did, and at once I felt the dreamy feeling stealing over me.

ENOCH had promised me something extra special for this one, and I sank down into sleep right away. I could barely feel the pressure leave my head as Enoch left me, scampering off back into the swamp for *his* reward. . . .

I don't know how long I slept. It must have been a long time. All I remember is that I finally started to wake up, knowing somehow that Enoch was back with me again, and feeling that something was wrong.

Then I woke up all the way, because I heard the banging on my door.

I waited a moment. I waited for Enoch to whisper to me, tell me what I should do.

But Enoch was asleep now. He always sleeps—afterwards. Nothing wakes him for days on end; and during that time I am free. Usually I enjoy such freedom, but not now. I needed his help.

The pounding on my door grew louder, and I couldn't wait any longer.

I got up and answered.

Old Sheriff Shelby came through the doorway.

"Come on, Seth," he said. "I'm taking you up to the jail."

I didn't say anything. His beady little black eyes were peeping everywhere inside

my shack. When he looked at me, I wanted to hide, I felt so scared.

He couldn't see Enoch, of course. Nobody can. But Enoch was there; I felt him resting very lightly on top of my skull, burrowed down under a blanket of hair, clinging to my curls and sleeping as peaceful as a baby.

"Emily Robbins' folks said she was planning on cutting through the swamp," the Sheriff told me. "We followed the tire tracks up to the old quicksand."

Enoch had forgotten about the tracks. So what could I say? Besides.

"Anything you say can be used agin you," said Sheriff Shelby. "Come on, Seth."

I went with him. There was nothing else for me to do. I went with him into town, and all the loafers were out trying to rush the car. There were women in the crowd too. They kept yelling for the men to "get" me.

But Sheriff Shelby held them off, and at last I was tucked away safe and sound in back of the jailhouse. He locked me up in the middle cell. The two cells on each side of mine were vacant, so I was all alone. All alone except for Enoch, and he slept through everything.

It was still pretty early in the morning, and Sheriff Shelby went out again with some other men. I guess he was going to try and get the body out of the quicksand, if he could. He didn't try to ask any questions, and I wondered about that.

Charley Potter, now, he was different. He wanted to know *everything*. Sheriff Shelby had left him in charge of the jail while he was away. He brought me my breakfast after a while, and hung around asking questions.

I just kept still. I knew better than to talk to a fool like Charley Potter. He thought I was crazy. Just like the mob outside. Most people in that town thought I was crazy—because of my mother, I suppose, and because of the way I lived all alone out in the swamp.

What could I say to Charley Potter? If I told him about Enoch he'd never believe me anyway.

So I didn't talk.

I listened.

Then Charley Potter told *me* about the search for Emily Robbins, and about how Sheriff Shelby got to wondering over some other disappearances a while back. He said that there would be a big trial, and the District Attorney was coming down from the County Seat. And he'd heard they were sending out a doctor to see me right away.

SURE enough, just as I finished breakfast, the doctor came. Charley Potter saw him drive up and let him in. He had to work fast to keep some of the oafs from breaking in with him. They wanted to lynch me, I suppose. But the doctor came in all right—a little man with one of those funny beards on his chin—and he made Charley Potter go up front into the office while he sat down outside the cell and talked to me.

His name was Dr. Silversmith.

Now up to this time, I wasn't really *feeling* anything. It had all happened so fast I didn't get a chance to think.

It was like part of a dream; the sheriff and the mob and all this talk about a trial and a lynching and the body in the swamp.

But somehow the sight of this Dr. Silversmith changed things.

He was real, all right. You could tell he was a doctor by the quiet way he talked; he sounded like a the doctor who wanted to send me to the institution after they found my mother.

That was one of the first things Dr. Silversmith asked me—what had happened to my mother?

He seemed to know quite a lot about me, and that made it easier for me to talk.

Pretty soon I found myself telling him all sorts of things. How my mother and I lived in the shack. How she made the philtres and sold them. About the big pot and the way we gathered herbs at night. About the nights when she went off alone and I would hear the queer noises from far away.

I didn't want to say much more, but he knew, anyway. He knew they had called her a witch. He even knew the way she died—when Santo Dinorelli came to our door that evening and stabbed her because she had made the potion for his daughter who ran away with that trapper. He knew about me living in the swamp alone after that, too.

But he didn't know about Enoch.

Enoch, up on top of my head all the time, still sleeping, not knowing or caring what was happening to me. . . .

Somehow, I was talking to Dr. Silversmith about Enoch. I wanted to explain that it wasn't really I who had killed this girl. So I had to mention Enoch, and how my mother had made the bargain in the woods. She hadn't let me come with her—I was only twelve—but she took some of my blood, pricking-me with a needle and dropping it into a little bottle.

I don't know exactly what she did, but when she came back in the morning, Enoch was with her. I couldn't see him, of course, but she told me about him—and I could feel him when he perched on my head.

He was to be mine forever, she said, and look after me and help me in all ways.

I told this very carefully and explained why it was I had to obey Enoch, ever since my mother was killed. Enoch protected me, just as my mother had planned, because she knew I couldn't get along alone. I admitted this to Dr. Silversmith because I thought he was a wise man and would understand.

That was wrong.

I knew it at once. Because while Dr. Silversmith leaned forward and stroked his little beard and said, "Yes, yes," over and over again, I could feel his eyes watching me.

He had the same kind of eyes as Sheriff Shelby. Beady eyes. Mean eyes. Eyes that don't trust you when they see you. Prying, peeping eyes.

THEN he began to ask me all sorts of funny questions. You'd think he'd ask me about Enoch, since *he* was the explanation of everything. But instead, Dr. Silversmith asked me if I ever heard any *other* voices. If I ever saw things that I knew weren't there.

He asked me how I felt when I killed Emily Robbins and whether I—but I won't repeat that question! Why, he talked to me as if I was some kind of—crazy person!

I just laughed at him, then, and shut up tighter than a clam.

After a while he gave up and went away, shaking his head. I laughed after him because I knew he hadn't found out what he

wanted to find out. He wanted to know all my mother's secrets, and my secrets, and Enoch's secrets too.

But he didn't, and I laughed. And then I went to sleep. I slept almost all afternoon.

When I woke up, there was a new man standing in front of my cell. He had a big, fat smiling face, and nice eyes.

"Hello, Seth," he said, very friendly. "Having a little snooze?"

I reached up to the top of my head. I couldn't feel Enoch, but I knew he was there, and still asleep. He moves fast, even when he's sleeping.

"Don't be alarmed," said the man. "I won't hurt you."

"Did that doctor send you?" I asked.

The man laughed. "Of course not," he told me. "My name's Cassidy. Edwin Cassidy. I'm the District Attorney, and I'm in charge here. Can I come in and sit down, do you suppose?"

"I'm locked in," I said.

"I've got the keys from the sheriff," said Mr. Cassidy. He took them out and opened my cell; walked right in and sat down next to me on the bench.

"Aren't you afraid?" I asked him. "You know, I'm supposed to be a murderer."

"Why Seth," Mr. Cassidy laughed, "I'm not afraid of you. I know you didn't mean to kill anybody."

He put his hand on my shoulder, and I didn't draw away. It was a nice, fat, soft hand. He had a big diamond ring on his finger that just twinkled away in the sunshine.

"How's Enoch?" he said.

I jumped.

"Oh, that's all right. That fool doctor told me when I met him down the street. He doesn't understand about Enoch, does he, Seth? But you and I do."

"That doctor thinks I'm crazy," I whispered.

"Well, just between us, Seth, it did sound a little hard to believe, at first. But I've just come from the swamp. Sheriff Shelby and some of his men are still working down there. Digging, you know.

"They found Emily Robbins' body just a little while ago. And other bodies, too. A fat man's body, and a small boy, and some

Indian. The quicksand preserves them, you know."

I WATCHED his eyes, and they were still smiling, so I knew I could trust this man.

"They'll find other bodies too, if they keep on, won't they, Seth?"

I nodded.

"But I didn't wait any longer. I saw enough to understand that you were telling the truth. Enoch must have made you do these things, didn't he?"

I nodded again.

"Fine," said Mr. Cassidy, pressing my shoulder. "You see, we do understand each other now. So I won't blame you for anything you tell me."

"What do you want to know?" I asked.

"Oh, lots of things. I'm interested in Enoch, you see. Just how many people did he ask you to kill—all together, that is?"

"Nine," I said.

"And they're all buried in the quicksand?"

"Yes."

"Do you know their names?"

"Only a few." I told him the names of the ones I knew. "Sometimes Enoch just describes them for me and I go out to meet them," I explained.

Mr. Cassidy sort of chuckled and took out a cigar. I frowned.

"Don't want me to smoke, eh?"

"Please—I don't like it. My mother didn't believe in smoking; she never let me."

Mr. Cassidy laughed out loud now, but he put the cigar away and leaned forward.

"You can be a big help to me, Seth," he whispered. "I suppose you know what a District Attorney must do."

"He's a sort of a lawyer, isn't he—at trials and things?"

"That's right. I'm going to be at your trial, Seth. Now you don't want to have to get up in front of all those people and tell them about—what happened. Right?"

"No, I don't, Mr. Cassidy. Not those mean people here in town. They hate me."

"Then here's what you do. You tell me all about it, and I'll talk for you. That's friendly enough, isn't it?"

I wished Enoch was there to help me, but

he was asleep. I looked at Mr. Cassidy and made up my own mind.

"Yes," I said. "I can tell you."

So I told him everything I knew.

After a while he stopped chuckling, but he was just getting so interested he couldn't bother to laugh or do anything but listen.

"One thing more," he said. "We found some bodies in the swamp. Emily Robbins' body we could identify, and several of the others. But it would be easier if we knew something else. You can tell me this, Seth. Where are the heads?"

I stood up and turned away. "I won't tell you that," I said, "because I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"I give them to Enoch," I explained. "Don't you understand—that's why I must kill people for him. Because he wants their heads."

Mr. Cassidy looked puzzled.

"He always makes me cut the heads off and leave them," I went on. "I put the bodies in the quicksand, and then go home. He puts me to sleep and rewards me. After that he goes away—back to the heads. That's what he wants."

"Why does he want them, Seth?"

I told him. "You see, it wouldn't do you any good if you could find them. Because you probably wouldn't recognize anything anyway."

Mr. Cassidy sat up and sighed. "But why do you let Enoch do such things?"

"I must. Or else he'd do it to me. That's what he always threatens. He has to have it. So I obey him."

MR. CASSIDY watched me while I walked the floor, but he didn't say a word. He seemed to be very nervous, all of a sudden, and when I came close, he sort of leaned away.

"You'll explain all that at the trial, of course," I said. "About Enoch, and everything."

He shook his head.

"I'm not going to tell about Enoch at the trial, and neither are you," Mr. Cassidy said. "Nobody is even going to know that Enoch exists."

"Why?"

"I'm trying to help you, Seth. Don't you know what the people will say if you men-

tion Enoch to them? They'll say you're crazy! And you don't want that to happen."

"No. But what can you do? How can you help me?"

Mr. Cassidy smiled at me.

"You're afraid of Enoch, aren't you? Well, I was just thinking out loud. Suppose you gave Enoch to me?"

I gulped.

"Yes. Suppose you gave Enoch to me, right now? Let me take care of him for you during the trial. Then he wouldn't be yours, and you wouldn't have to say anything about him. He probably doesn't want people to know what he does, anyway."

"That's right," I said. "Enoch would be very angry. He's a secret, you know. But I hate to give him to you without asking—and he's asleep now."

"Asleep?"

"Yes. On top of my skull. Only you can't see him, of course."

Mr. Cassidy gazed at my head and then he chuckled again.

"Oh, I can explain everything when he wakes up," he told me. "When he knows it's all for the best, I'm sure he'll be happy."

"Well—I guess it's all right, then," I sighed. "But you must promise to take good care of him."

"Sure," said Mr. Cassidy.

"And you'll give him what he wants? What he needs?"

"Of course."

"And you won't tell a soul?"

"Not a soul."

"Of course you know what will happen to you if you refuse to give Enoch what he wants," I warned Mr. Cassidy. "He will take it—from you—by force."

"Don't you worry, Seth."

I stood still for a minute. Because all at once I could feel something move. Enoch was waking up!

"He's awake," I whispered. "Now I can tell him."

Yes, Enoch was awake. I could feel him crawling over my scalp, moving towards my ear.

"Enoch," I whispered. "Can you hear me?"

He heard.

Then I explained everything to him. How was I giving him to Mr. Cassidy.

Enoch didn't say a word.

Mr. Cassidy didn't say a word. He just sat there and grinned. I suppose it must have looked a little strange to see me talking to—nothing.

"Go to Mr. Cassidy," I whispered. "Go to him, now."

And Enoch went.

I felt the weight lift from my head. That was all, but I knew he was gone.

"Can you feel him, Mr. Cassidy?" I asked.

"What—oh, sure!" he said, and stood up.

"Take good care of Enoch," I told him.

"The best."

"Don't put your hat on," I warned. "Enoch doesn't like hats."

"Sorry, I forgot. Well, Seth, I'll say good-bye now. You've been a mighty great help to me—and from now on we can just forget about Enoch, as far as telling anybody else is concerned.

"I'll come back again and talk about the trail. That Dr. Silversmith, he's going to try and tell the folks you're crazy. Maybe it would be best if you just denied everything you told him—now that I have Enoch."

That sounded like a fine idea, but then I knew Mr. Cassidy was a smart man.

"Whatever you say, Mr. Cassidy. Just be good to Enoch, and he'll be good to you."

Mr. Cassidy shook my hand and then he and Enoch went away. I felt tired again. Maybe it was the strain, and maybe it was just that I felt a little queer, knowing that Enoch was gone. Anyway, I went back to sleep for a long time.

It was night time when I woke up. Old Charley Potter was banging on the cell door, bringing me my supper.

He jumped when I said hello to him, and backed away.

"Murderer!" he yelled. "They got nine bodies out'n the swamp. You crazy fiend!"

"Why, Charley," I said. "I always thought you were a friend of mine."

"Loony! I'm gonna get out of here right now—leave you locked up for the night. Sheriff'll see that nobuddy breaks in to lynch you—if you ask me, he's wasting his time."

Then Charley turned out all the lights and went away. I heard him go out the front door and put the padlock on, and I was all alone in the jailhouse.

All alone! It was strange to be all alone for the first time in years—all alone, without Enoch.

I ran my fingers across the top of my head. It felt bare and queer.

THE moon was shining through the window and I stood there looking out at the empty street. Enoch always loved the moon. It made him lively. Made him restless and greedy. I wondered how he felt now, with Mr. Cassidy.

I must have stood there for a long time. My legs were numb when I turned around and listened to the fumbling at the door.

The lock clicked open, and then Mr. Cassidy came running in. He was all out of breath, and he was clawing at his head.

"Take him off me!" he yelled. "Take him away!"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Enoch—that thing of yours—I thought you were crazy—maybe I'm the crazy one—but take him off!"

"Why, Mr. Cassidy! I told you what Enoch was like."

"He's crawling around up there now. I can feel him. And I can hear him. The things he whispers!"

"But I explained all that, Mr. Cassidy. Enoch wants something, doesn't he? You know what it is. And you'll have to give it to him. You promised."

"I can't. I won't kill for him—he can't make me—"

"He can. And he will."

Mr. Cassidy gripped the bars on the cell door. "Seth, you must help me. Call Enoch. Take him back. Make him go back to you. Hurry."

"All right, Mr. Cassidy," I said.

I called Enoch. He didn't answer. I called again. Silence.

"It's no use," I sighed. "He won't come back. He likes you."

Mr. Cassidy started to cry. It shocked me, and then I felt kind of sorry for him. He just didn't understand, after all. I know what Enoch can do to you when he whispers that way. First he coaxes you, and then he pleads, and then he threatens—

"You'd better obey him," I told Mr. Cassidy. "Has he told you who to kill?"

Mr. Cassidy didn't pay any attention to

me. He just cried. And then he took out the jail keys and opened up the cell next to mine. He went in and locked the door.

"I won't," he sobbed. "I won't, I won't!"

"You won't what?" I asked.

"I won't kill Dr. Silversmith at the hotel and give Enoch his head. I'll stay here, in the cell, where I'm safe! Oh, you fiend, you devil—"

He slumped down sideways and I could see him through the bars dividing our cells, sitting all hunched over while his hands tore at his hair.

"You'd better," I called out. "Or else Enoch will do something. Please, Mr. Cassidy—oh, hurry—"

Then Mr. Cassidy gave a little moan and I guess he fainted, because he didn't say anything more and he stopped clawing. I called to him once but he wouldn't answer.

So what could I do? I sat down in the dark corner of my cell and watched the moonlight. Moonlight always makes Enoch wild.

Then Mr. Cassidy started to scream. Not loud, but deep down in his throat. He didn't move at all, just screamed.

I knew it was Enoch, taking what he wanted—from him.

What was the use of looking? You can't stop him, and I had warned Mr. Cassidy.

I JUST sat there and held my hands to my ears until it was all over.

When I turned around again, Mr. Cassidy

still sat slumped up against the bars. There wasn't a sound to be heard.

Oh, yes, there was! A purring. A soft, faraway purring. The purring of Enoch, after he has eaten. Then I heard a scratching. The scratching of Enoch's claws, when he frisks because he's been fed.

The purring and the scratching came from inside Mr. Cassidy's head.

That would be Enoch, all right, and he was happy now.

I was happy, too.

I reached my hand through the bars and pulled the jail keys from Mr. Cassidy's pocket. I opened my cell door and I was free again.

There was no need for me to stay now, with Mr. Cassidy gone. And Enoch wouldn't be staying, either. I called to him.

"Here, Enoch!"

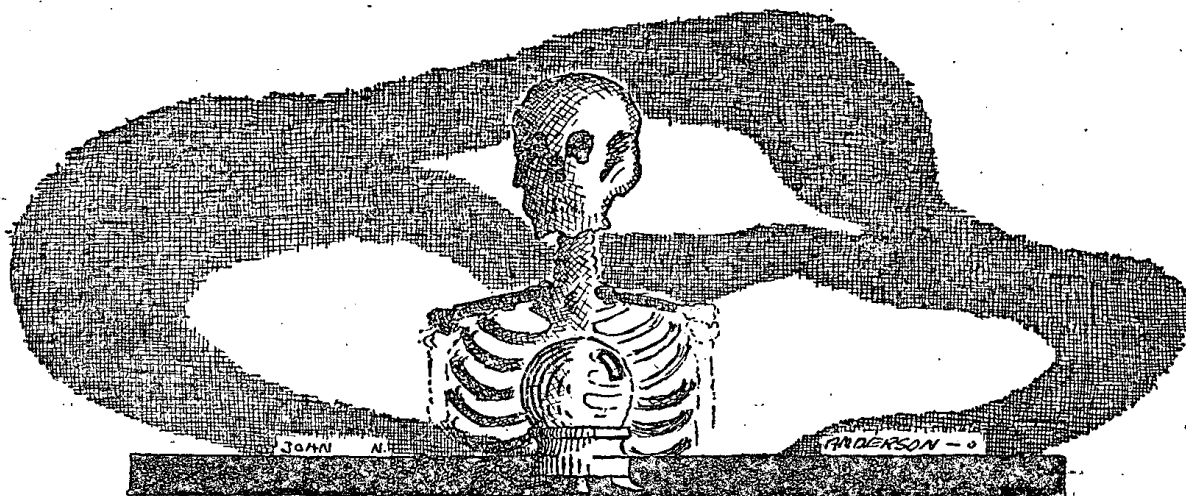
That was as close I've ever come to really seeing Enoch—a sort of a white streak that came flashing out of the big red hole he had eaten in the back of Mr. Cassidy's skull.

Then I felt the soft, cold, flabby weight landing on my own head once more, and I knew Enoch had come home.

I walked through the corridor and opened the outer door of the jail.

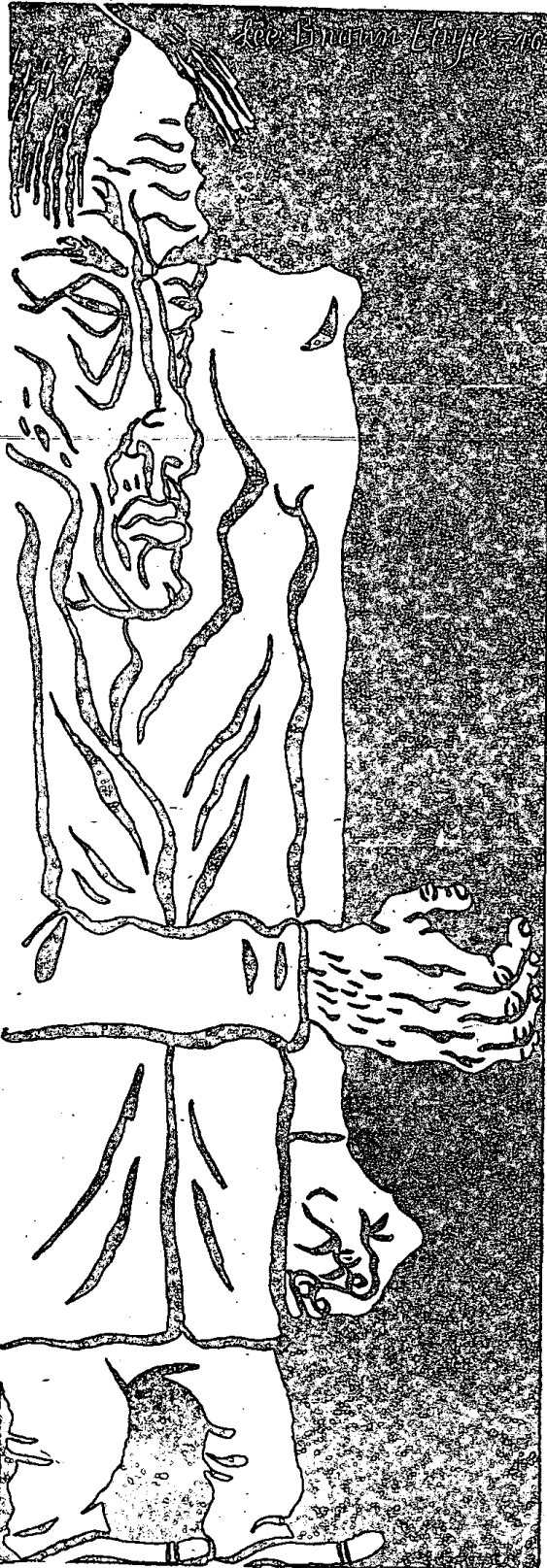
Enoch's tiny feet began to patter on the roof of my brain.

Together we walked out into the night. The moon was shining, everything was still, and I could hear, ever so softly, Enoch's happy chuckling in my ear.



Alice and the Allergy

BY FRITZ LEIBER



THERE was a knocking. The doctor put down his pen. Then he heard his wife hurrying down the stairs. He resumed his history of old Mrs. Easton's latest blood-clot.

The knocking was repeated. He reminded himself to get after Engstrand to fix the bell.

After a pause long enough for him to write a sentence-and a half, there came a third and louder burst of knocking. He frowned and got up.

It was dark in the hall. Alice was standing on the third step from the bottom, making no move to answer the door. As he went past her he shot her an inquiring glance. He noted that her eyelids looked slightly puffy, as if she were having another attack—an impression which the hoarseness of her voice a moment later confirmed.

"He knocked that way," was what she whispered. She sounded frightened. He looked back at her with an expression of greater puzzlement—which almost immediately, however, changed to comprehension. He gave her a sympathetic, semi-professional nod, as if to say, "I understand now. Glad you mentioned it. We'll talk about it later." Then he opened the door.

It was Renshaw from the Allergy Lab. "Got the new kit for you, Howard," he remarked in an amiable Southern drawl. "Finished making it up this afternoon and thought I'd bring it around myself."

"A million thanks. Come on in."

Alice had retreated a few steps farther up the stairs. Renshaw did not appear to notice her in the gloom. He was talkative as he followed Howard into his office.

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

You avoid things you're allergic to—but suppose you can't!