

The Rabbit And The Rat

by Robert Arthur

There are worse things than solitary confinement—but not if you're confined for life in the neatly horrible way Chuck Banning was when the rabbit little man got through with him—

Illustrated by Orban

Dr. Nicholas Dete, late professor of psychology of Westate University, recently retired to do research work in his own home following the tragic kidnapping and murder of his only child and the subsequent suicide of his wife, looked up as José, his clever Filipino assistant, entered the little office. In his pale-blue watery eyes there was a question which the other answered by nodding.

"I left him inside the door. They did not hear me," José reported. "They will be glad to see him, I am sure. I arrived just after the postman delivered the package."

"Good." A queer glow came into the little psychologist's eyes. "And the others? Have you learned what became of them?"

"Yesterday, while Mr. Banning was eating breakfast," José reported, "a pigeon flew in his window and began to flutter agitatedly about the room. Finally it settled on the table and cooed at him. Mr. Banning cursed and threw a book at it, breaking its wing. He tossed it out

the window. It fell into the street, and an alley cat promptly killed it.

"A little later, when Mr. Banning left his apartment, a small, dirty dog with curly red hair that had been lying outside the door leaped up at him, barking frantically as if to attract his attention. Banning cursed again, and kicked it, breaking some of its ribs. Then when he had been driven off by his chauffeur, the man Monk Norman, obviously agitated, some boys caught the dog and chased it away with tin cans tied to its tail."

"Ah!" For a moment Dr. Nicholas Dete sat silent. His glance turned toward a pane of glass, transparent from this side but silvered so that in the next room it seemed a mirror, which let him look into his laboratory. In the room were two rubber-tired operating tables, a cage holding a monkey that now was hunting fleas boredly, and a curious cylinder of white cheesecloth dropping from the center of the ceiling. Then the little man rose.

"Today, I think," he said quietly, an

obscure look in his eyes. "Shall we make ready?"

Dete. Dr. Nicholas Dete. It was a silly name. As silly as the man himself looked—a small, rabbit-like creature with protruding front teeth, wide-set pale eyes, and straw-colored hair that never seemed to be brushed in any particular direction, but which lay haphazardly over the rounded dome of his skull like dead grass blown by the wind.

Dr. Nicholas Dete! It was a name that Chuck Banning used to get a lot of laughs out of. Nicholas Dete, who looked like a rabbit, and had more lettuce stashed away than the mint!

Only, somehow, Banning wasn't amused any more.

Chuck Banning stood before his dresser, critically appraising himself. He straightened his tie and brushed a bit of lint from his lapel. Then immaculate in a slate-blue sharkskin, white shirt, pale-blue cravat with tiny fingers, and gleaming cordovan shoes, he was ready for the day.

He turned away, adjusted a handkerchief in his breast pocket, and stalked into the living room of his perfectly appointed apartment.

"Manuel," he said, and his Filipino boy popped into the room from nowhere. "Serve my coffee in here."

Manuel vanished again. The tall man dropped into an easy-chair, crossed his legs, and with irritability plain on his squarish face, marked by subtle lines of cruelty, lit a Turkish cigarette.

Dr. Nicholas Dete! It had been funny enough to see the little man squawking around after they had snatched the kid. As if anyone could have loved a kid like that! A slobbering, hare-faced nuisance that yelled continually and would have grown up to look exactly like its father. Why, it was practically a public service to put the brat out of its misery.

Not that it had been as dumb as it looked, though. In spite of being only five, it had recognized him the one time he slipped into the hide-out and it had

somehow wriggled its blindfold off. Recognized him from just seeing him that once, the day its old man had had it out walking; and Chuck Banning had stopped to talk to Dete. Sometimes kids were bright that way. Anyway, it had recognized him.

So after they'd collected from Dete, Chuck Banning had had to slap it silly with the butt end of a gun. Funny that anybody's skull, even a kid's, could be so thin a gun butt would go right in and the brains splash out like so much butter—

Never mind that. It was the kid's own fault, wasn't it? Nobody had meant to hurt it. But that was how it turned out. Not that he gave a damn. And if the little roach's mother wanted to go jump in the river afterward, that was her own business. One thing, Dete hadn't shown his rabbit face around town much after that. He's resigned his professorship in the university and just withdrawn into himself, hardly ever leaving that big old hewn stone house out on the River Road.

A year and a half back, that was, and he'd hardly been seen in town three times since. There wasn't any more heat on the case. All the clues had pointed toward a Chicago mob—who'd ever dreamed it was done by a local mob that had never even left the city limits, except to collect the ransom—and no finger of suspicion had ever pointed at Chuck Banning, the master mind. Nor at Pidge Block, Red Henson, Froggy Lawrence, or Monk Norman, either.

So why did he still keep thinking about Nicholas Dete so much?

Chuck Banning knew damned well why. Because he wanted to know where Pidge Block and Red Henson had disappeared to!

Chuck Banning lit another cigarette, automatically brushing a fleck of ash from his knee. The doorbell rang as he snapped out the match. Manuel appeared, like a suddenly materialized wraith.

"Misto Norman heah," he said.

Banning nodded. "Bring him in. And

bring an extra cup with that coffee."

Manuel slipped out. A moment later Monk Norman was treading across the Sarouk rug with heavy, flat-footed stride.

Monk was an ex-pug who'd had sense enough to quit before his brains got addled too much. He had a flat-nosed face, like a simian's, but he was nobody's dummy.

Now his apish features were clouded over with something more than worry.

"Well?" Chuck Banning asked, lips tight, as Monk dropped into the chair opposite. "What is it? Spit it out!"

Monk's lips worked, but for a moment no words came. Manuel, entering with a tray, interrupted him, and while Manuel was spreading cups and saucers, cream, sugar, coffeepot and silverware on a coffee table, Monk got his tongue working.

"Chuck," he said. "Chuck—"

"Well? Take the knots out of your tonsils and talk!"

"Chuck—Froggy's gone, too!"

Banning put his cup down with a clatter.

"What do you mean, Froggy's gone?" he demanded.

"Just g-gone," Monk gulped. "He ain't in his room. Nobody's seen him since last night, when he went out to get a couple of beers. He never got to Dave's bar, and he never went back to his room. His bed ain't been slept in. His clothes is all there. His dough, most of it, was in th' coat he left hangin' up. I called up you-know-who at headquarters, and the cops ain't picked him up. He's just gone."

Chuck Banning said something under his breath.

"A snatch!" he rasped.

"But who'd snatch Froggy?" Monk asked. "Froggy ain't got no dough. He's just a dumb punk. It don't signify."

Banning gulped his coffee, then swore because he'd burned himself.

"All right, wise guy," he rasped, "you guess."

Monk licked thick lips.

"He's gone the same place Pidge and

Red Henson went," he muttered. "Nobody seen them go, either. They just went."

"They blew town, I tell you!" Banning snarled.

"But they left all their stuff behind 'em, just like Froggy," Monk persisted. "And, Chuck. I been nosing around that little house they had out on th' edge of town. In fact, I rented it for a couple months, through a friend. Day before yesterday I was out there, pokin' around. And I found somethin' buried behind th' furnace—"

"What?" The word came out like a bullet.

"Twenty-five grand in cash," Monk told him. "Their cut from th' snatch of Dete's—"

"Shut up!" Chuck Banning ordered. "I've told you never to think that name, much less say it out loud. If you found the dough two days ago, why're you just tellin' me?"

Monk Norman chewed his lips some more.

"Well," he began tentatively, "Froggy hadn't disappeared then, an' I thought maybe Pidge an' Red might come back, so I left th' lettuce where I found it an'—"

"And if they didn't come back, you were going to slip it into your own pocket and not say anything," Banning told him, eyes vicious.

For a long moment his slate-colored eyes were hooded, like a hawk's. The ex-pug would never have admitted finding the money if he weren't scared—scared silly. Scared, maybe, enough to blab if anybody put pressure on him. And he was right about Pidge and Red. They hadn't blown town. Not and left twenty-five G's behind them.

Chuck Banning rose and began to pace the room. A misplaced candlestick above the fireplace caught his eye, and he moved it. That was one thing he could not stand—dirt, or untidiness. Things about him had to be absolutely neat and clean, his own person at all times immaculate. The horror of dirt, of filth,

was an obsession with him.

About other matters he was less sensitive. Kidnaping, for instance. Or murder—

If Dr. Nicholas Dete, whose ransom money had paid for most of this luxury, looked like a rabbit, Chuck Banning as he paced back and forth, tall, suave, gray-clad, slate-gray-eyed, looked more than anything else like the human counterpart of a great, vicious gray rat. Although it would have been dangerous to tell him so, for rats, because they lived in dirt and filth, sewers, garbage dumps, and other places of uncleanness, caused a physical revulsion in him far beyond any momentary distress produced by crushing the head of a helpless child—

Now Chuck Banning took his time about replying to Monk. The truth was, he was uneasy too. Red Henson and Pidge Block had been nobody's suckers. They'd been tough. It was inconceivable anyone had taken them without leaving some evidence of a struggle. But they were gone. Who—

The doorbell rang briefly before his churning thoughts had clarified. Then Manuel shuffled in, bearing an oblong Manila-wrapped package.

"Mailman leave," Manuel announced. "Speshuh d'ivery."

Banning took the package. His name and address had been typed on a conventional white label. It was hard, as if the paper covered wood. Like a cigar box. And cigar boxes—

Chuck Manning scowled and handed the package back to Manuel.

"Take it out in the kitchen and open it," he ordered. Manuel padded off. If it was a bomb now, whoever had sent it would be disappointed. If it wasn't—

Monk's gaze was inquiring. Banning shrugged.

"I don't know what it was," he muttered, features grim. "I'm not expecting any package. If—"

He broke off. From the next room had come a small thudding sound, as if a soft object had fallen on the floor.

Three seconds later it was repeated. *Thump*. Once more it came. *Thump*. This time it was closer.

Chuck Banning's hand slipped to his armpit. Monk Norman slid his gun half out. They both faced the open door into the hall.

"Manuel must have left the door open after the mailman," Banning whispered. "Somebody came in. Sit quiet."

They waited, little drops beading their brows. The thumping sound was repeated twice. Then through the open door a small green object leaped, coming down with a *squashy* plop on the hardwood floor.

For a moment it rested there, panting, little eyes staring at them. Then it made three more leaps in quick succession and came to rest at Chuck Banning's feet, staring up at him with goggle eyes.

"It's a toad," Monk muttered.

"A frog," Banning corrected him. "A lousy little frog. What is it doing in here? Yesterday a pigeon flies in. I go outside and a red dog jumps all over me. Today a frog hops in. What goes on?"

His voice was hoarse, because he was nervous and upset. The small creature's cream-colored belly was rising and falling with the effort of its breathing. Its beady gaze was fixed on Banning's face, and its mouth opened. A curious sound came forth, a croak that had an uncanny whimpering note in it. Twice the frog repeated the sound, and there was something almost like desperation in its stare.

"It's like it was trying to talk to you, Chuck," Monk Norman whispered.

Banning had already had that thought himself. He cursed and kicked the thing. The frog flew through the air and fell heavily a dozen feet away. The impact of his toe had made a crunching sound. Now it lay on its side, breathing with difficulty, blood dribbling from its mouth, its eyes fixed on Banning with a look of dumb appeal.

With senseless rage Banning snatched up the fire tongs and picked the little green creature up with it. Holding it

thus, he strode to the window and flipped the frog outward. It landed in the street. An instant later a truck rumbled by, a wheel passed over the feebly struggling amphibian, and when the truck had gone on, nothing was left except a large ugly stain on the concrete.

Banning was wiping his brow with his handkerchief when Manuel entered. Momentarily they had forgotten the package that had arrived. Now, no explosion having occurred, Manuel brought in a cigar box—the large size, built for a hundred cigars—and the paper wrappings neatly folded.

"Rats," he said blandly.

"What do you mean, rats?" Banning demanded.

"Rats," Manuel repeated, and held out the box. "You order um rats, Misto Banny?"

He lifted the lid. Banning and Monk, who had risen, peered in. At sight of the contents, Banning went pale and his stomach turned. In the cigar box were jammed three rats, very dirty and very dead. Their glazed eyes looked up at him. Their tiny, sharp-toothed mouths were open as if in a kind of rattish laughter. And they gave off an odor—a stench of sewers and varied corruption.

Banning gagged and was almost ill as he thrust Manuel away.

"Take them out!" he choked, and had difficulty in controlling his voice. "Out of the house! A long ways away. Get rid of them!"

"Yes, Misto Banny," Manuel agreed, and closed the cigar box. "You no order, yes?"

"You know I didn't!" Banning rasped. "Give me that wrapping paper and get out!"

He took the Manila paper, and Manuel scuttled away, the box of dead rats under his arm. Banning's face, as he met Monk's round-eyed stare, was pale and wet.

"Well?" Banning demanded with viciousness as Monk's lips twisted.

"Three dead rats." The words were

just a husky whisper. "An' a frog. A frog that comes hoppin' in as if it was tryin' to get to you an' tell you somethin'. Three dead rats and a frog that made me think somehow about Froggy Lawrence—"

Banning cursed him. He cursed in a quiet, toneless voice for three minutes. Then he stopped. He was swearing because his nerves were all on edge, too. And when a man got nervous, the skids were under him. Abruptly he got hold of himself, took a bottle from a drawer, and poured two drinks.

"Here," he said, "drink this. And forget about th' frog. It don't mean anything. Th' three rats—yeah, maybe they do. Somebody who knows how much I hate 'em sent 'em to get me rattled. Just a gag to put me off my feed. We'll find out who it was and settle with him."

The drink calmed them both. Banning spread out the paper the box of rats had been wrapped in.

"Substation 1," he read the postmark. "That's out th' other side of town. Th' ritzy River Road section."

"Yeah," Monk agreed. "Where them rich guys from th' college live. Why, what's wrong, Chuck?"

Chuck Banning's breath was coming with a whistle, and his face was blackly congested. So that was it! It wasn't possible—but it was the only answer! It had to be. There wasn't anyone else who had a motive. He knew. He knew, and he—

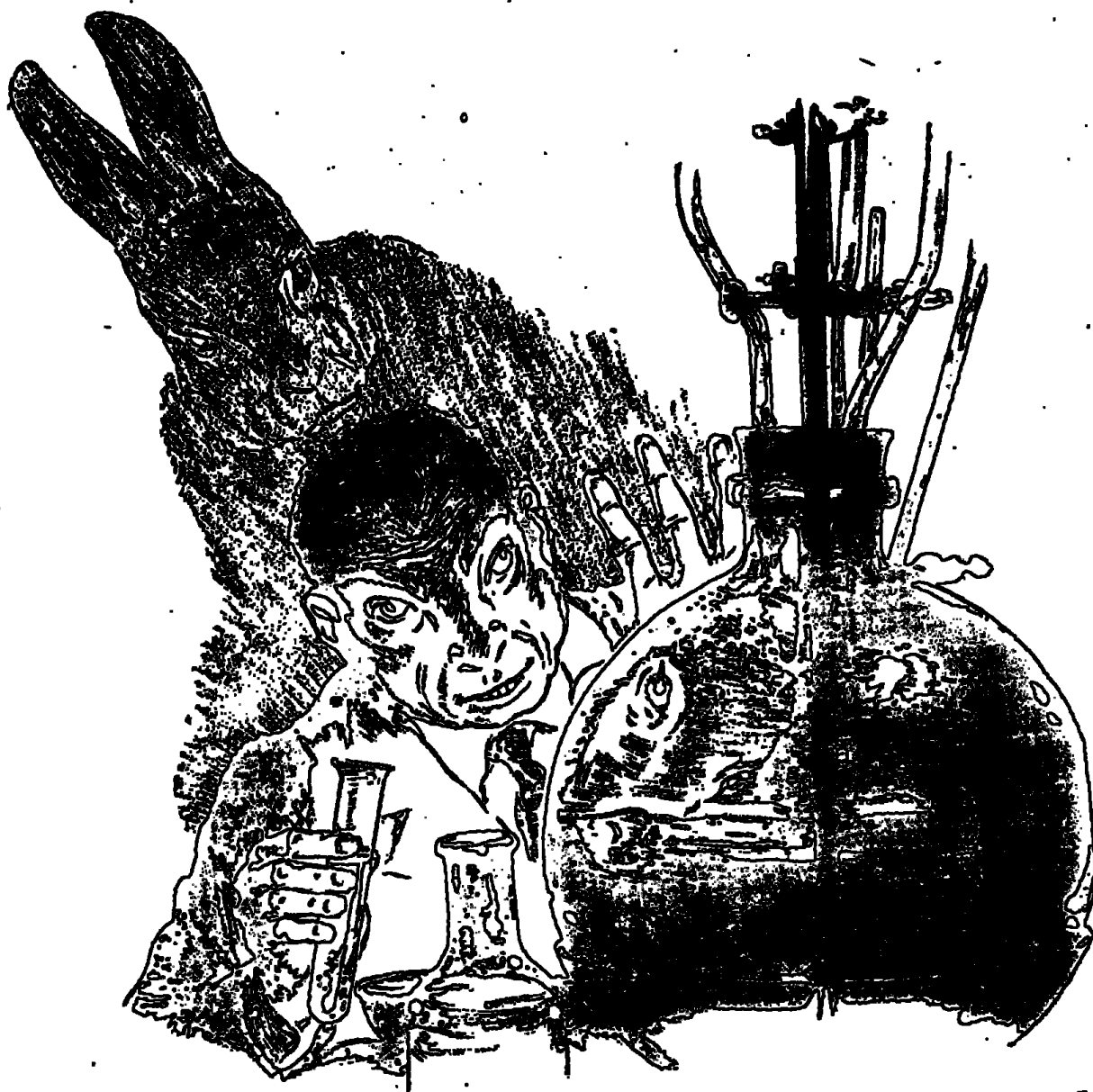
"All right!" Chuck Banning grated, his eyes burning bright. "If that's the way he's playing, we'll play with him. We'll call on him tonight and show him what it means to be really tough. We'll work over him until his own mother couldn't tell him from a side of beef."

"Who, Chuck? Who're we gonna call on?"

Banning's teeth closed like the jaws of a spring trap.

"Dr. Nicholas Detel"

"O. K., Chuck Banning said curtly. "It's time to get going."



He rose in the darkness from his crouched position behind a heavy clump of shrubbery, overlooking the home of Dr. Nicholas Dete, below. Automatically, after he had put the light binoculars, into his pocket, he brushed himself.

Monk Norman rose too, a shadow in the darkness that had settled as they waited there in hiding.

"I need a smoke," he grumbled. "Three hours we been sitting here. For what?"

"For plenty!" Chuck Banning snapped. "For one thing, to make sure Dete is alone in that house with nobody but his

Filipino assistant. Now come on. It's time to move."

He began to pick his way carefully down the night-shrouded slope of the hill, toward the house in which three lighted windows showed as oblongs of yellow.

With some reluctance, Monk Norman followed him.

"Chuck," he whispered. "Chuck, I dunno if we oughta try this. I been thinking. Chuck, I been thinking about those animals. First Pidge Block an' Red Henson disappeared. Then-yesterday a pigeon comes flyin' in th' window

like it wants to talk to you. Next a dog with curly red hair, just like Red's, leaps up at you like *he's* tryin' to tell you something. Then Froggy Lawrence goes, an' today a frog comes hoppin' in, like *it* has a message for you. Chuck, it makes the feel sort of funny inside to think—"

"Then stop thinking!" Chuck Banning swore back at him. "I'll do all the thinking around here. You just do what I tell you, see. And the first thing you're going to do is cut th' phone wires. You've been an installation man. You shouldn't have any trouble. Here's the pliers you'll need."

Monk took the tool, and followed in silence. They picked their way to the bottom of the slope, crept across an open stretch of lawn, and reached the cover of a double garage a few yards behind the house. Here they paused. The incoming light and telephone wires were strung from a pole behind the garage. A man on the roof could reach them.

Monk made the garage roof with the aid of a sapling growing alongside, and cautiously crawled up to the peak. There, standing erect and reaching above his head, he was able to touch the wires. It took only a moment to select the phone wire and cut it. The loose end, falling, made a scraping noise in the gravel that sounded loud in the night, but no one responded. After a moment's tense waiting, Monk slid down the roof, dropped to the ground, and rejoined Chuck Banning.

"I saw somethin' in th' gravel down here, Chuck," he reported. "It was catchin' light from one of th' windows. Right over here—"

He stooped, brought up something from the driveway.

"Look, Chuck!" he whispered, his breath an indrawn whistle.

Banning took the object. It was a small silver medal, gleaming faintly.

"Froggy's broad-jump medal, from a public-school meet when he was a kid," Monk choked. "That's how he got his nickname. He carried it for a good-luck piece."

Banning's lips were a thin line.

"O. K., Monk," he said. "It proves Froggy's been here. Maybe he's still here. We're going in now. They'll be sweatin' for a chance to tell us about it in half an hour."

Silently they rounded the house, avoiding the driveway's noisy gravel. Then three stone steps led up to a door of solid oak, sunk beneath a massive arch. Chuck Banning faced it with his right hand in his pocket, fingers curled about the butt of his gun. He waved Monk to one side, into the shadows, and with his left hand pressed the bell beside the door.

The house was too large and solid for the sound of the ring to reach them. They waited in silence. A minute passed, and another. Monk's breathing became heavy in the silence.

He whispered nervously, unable to remain silent, "Maybe they—"

"Shut up!" Banning hissed. Then the door opened. And an instant later Banning, one foot on the threshold, was shoving the muzzle of his gun into the stomach of José, Dr. Nicholas Dete's assistant.

"Quiet!" he said between his teeth, "or I'll blow your backbone right through to the parlor!"

A moment after that, he and Monk were both inside, with Monk fastening the door behind them and Banning staring slit-eyed down into the startled features of José, whose hands were raised.

"Where's Dete?" Chuck Banning demanded of the Filipino, in a low-voiced tone raspy with threat. "We've got a little business with him."

José backed nervously away from the gun that gouged his ribs, his lips opening and closing for a moment before words would come.

"Uh . . . upstairs," he said. "In the laboratory."

"O. K." Chuck gestured to Monk Norman. "Monk! Pin this guy in the belly with your gun sight, and hold him there until I get back. I'm going to take

a quick look through this floor. Then we'll go upstairs. If he makes any noise, liquidate him."

Monk Norman took over his prisoner. Chuck Banning, his gun ready, slid across the dimly lit entrance hall and through the open door beyond. It opened into an empty library, which he scouted swiftly and passed through to a living room, also empty.

He moved with silent speed, and found nothing. It was a fair-sized house and there were five rooms downstairs. They were all empty, and all dark.

But in the kitchen he came to an abrupt halt. Across the kitchen was a door, just an inch or so ajar, and light was streaming through the opening.

Banning paused and listened, heard nothing. The door probably led down into the cellar. There wasn't space for another room beyond. On his toes he crossed the room, reached the wall, slipped up to the doorway without making a noise, and peered through the inch-wide crack without touching the door.

Then a curse caught and strangled in his throat. He was jumpy, and in spite of himself, he started, so that the gun rattled against the door jamb. The noise echoed loudly in the silence, but brought no response. Not even from the three men in the cellar below.

"Pidge!" Chuck Banning grunted. "Red! Froggy!"

His three missing henchmen were all in the cellar at the foot of the stairs beyond the door—a stairs that had at the head of it an ordinary barred door, like the door of a prison cell, hidden behind the innocent wooden door. They lay side by side upon the stone floor, unbound but unmoving. An overhead light shone directly upon their faces, bringing out the ghastly green-white pallor of their skins. Their eyes were closed and their mouths half open, their hands lax beside them. Chuck Banning had seen the posture of death before, and this was it.

For a moment panic threatened to overwhelm him, and he had to fight for self-control. The barred door was locked.

He could not get down, and if they were dead, he couldn't do them any good. He backed away, forgetting to be quiet in his haste, then turned and almost ran through the living room and library back to the hallway where he had left Monk and the Filipino assistant of Nicholas Dete.

"Monk!" he whispered urgently. "Monk—"

His voice trailed off. Coming through the doorway, he came to an abrupt stop and stared foolishly at the empty hall.

Monk and José were gone.

Chuck Banning's eyes were wide now, wide with panic. It was only with a desperate effort that he kept himself from bolting, yelling, for the front door and out into the night. That wouldn't do any good. Dete knew. He'd gotten Red, Pidge, Froggy, and now Monk. He'd get him, Chuck, next. Unless Chuck did something. Unless Chuck— Unless Chuck— Unless Chuck—

Vaguely Chuck Banning realized that his uncompleted thoughts were running around in his head like a broken phonograph record. Even as the realization came to him, they blacked out completely. His knees sagged and he hit the floor, a limp bundle. He didn't even know he had fallen.

The first thing Chuck Banning was aware of after that was the high shrill whine that cut through his mind like a saw eating into something soft.

Everything else was blackness—everything but that shrill mechanical tone that filled the universe. It kept on and on and on, and as it continued, something inside seemed to be wound up by it, like the mainspring of a watch.

Desperately Banning tried to move, to break free from the darkness that held him. And managed to open his eyes. That was all. The rest of him remained immobile. But he could see now.

He was in a room. The room was in semidarkness save for a cone of light in the center. Hanging beneath the light was a curious white cylinder of cloth.

And just beneath this cylinder was a white table on which a man lay, dead or unconscious, while two other men bent over him.

Monk. It was Monk Norman on the table. Chuck Banning could not quite make out where he himself was, or why he could not move. But he could see Monk clearly. Above Monk, close to the ceiling, a small mirror was flashing. It was spinning rapidly, flashing in Monk's eyes every time it went around.

For some reason only a part of Chuck Banning's mind seemed to be working. The rest was all wound up tight by that continual screaming whine. But with the part that was working, he saw Dr. Nicholas Dete, rabbitlike, as he moved nervously about, lean over Monk. Then Dete raised his hand.

Instantly the mirror stopped whirling, and the shrill scream ceased. Dete swung the cloth cylinder hanging from the ceiling down and arranged it to hide all of Monk's body. He waited a moment, completely still. Then a queer thing happened.

The cylinder of white began to move, as if something was inclosed within it. The instant it first quivered, Dete gathered up the ends and tied them tightly together. Then he pushed Monk away, the table sliding out of Chuck's sight as if it was on wheels.

Fascinated, Chuck Banning watched that tied-up white cylinder. It was pulsing and struggling now as if a captive bird in it were trying to beat its way out. It throbbed, and bulged. Yet it was only cheesecloth, and Banning could see right through it. And he saw there was nothing inside. Nothing whatever. Yet still the cloth fluttered.

Then Dete came back. He was pushing the table again. Only now Monk was gone. Instead, there was a monkey in his place. A little hairy monkey, lying quite still in the middle of the table. Monk had become a monkey, like Froggy had become a frog, Pidge a pigeon, and—

No, that was silly! He knew better.

Still, there was a monkey there. Maybe he'd better watch.

Dete pushed the table beneath the cylinder of cloth. The high whine started up again. It continued for a moment, and the white pillar ceased to move. Dete untied the cord about its bottom and draped it over the still form of the monkey. For a minute longer perhaps the unnerving sound continued. The hollow cylinder of cloth made one last convulsive movement, as if the thing inside, the thing Chuck Banning couldn't see, had made a final attempt to escape. Then it hung motionless.

Dete signaled. The sound ceased. He raised the cloth toward the ceiling again, and the monkey on the table stirred and sat up. For a moment it stared about it, dazedly. Then its tiny eyes fell on Chuck Banning—anyway, he guessed they did, because they were looking toward him.

The monkey let out a shrill yelp, and before Dete could catch it, had bounded off its table, raced across the room, and bounded up beside Banning.

Now Banning began to realize he was lying on a table just like the one he could see. Was lying on it, and couldn't move. Because he tried to move, to shove away the ugly hairy little animal that hopped up on his chest and leaned over, peering down into his eyes and chattering, as if trying to talk to him.

Trying to talk to him! But the frog had tried to talk to him. And the pigeon! And the red dog! Had tried to tell him—tell him they were . . . were—

"No!" Chuck Banning screamed. "No! No! It isn't so! Get away, Monk! Go away! It's not you! It's not! It's not!"

But the sound of the words was only in his mind.

Then Dr. Nicholas Dete was lifting the chattering monkey from Chuck's chest and was restraining its efforts to escape again.

"Awake, eh?" he murmured, looking down at Chuck Banning's open eyes.

"Excuse me a moment while we take care of monk. Come on, boy, you'll be safe where we're going to put you. Tomorrow you can go to the zoo. Lots of other monkeys there to play with. You've been through quite an experience this evening. Naturally you're upset."

José came up and took the monkey from Dete. Then the little man stared down at Banning, his pale-blue eyes blank, his buckteeth showing rabbitlike.

"A lot of questions you'd like to ask, I suppose," he suggested, conversationally. "There isn't very much I can tell you though. We haven't fully worked out the theory of what we're doing, ourselves. But it all hinges on the soul.

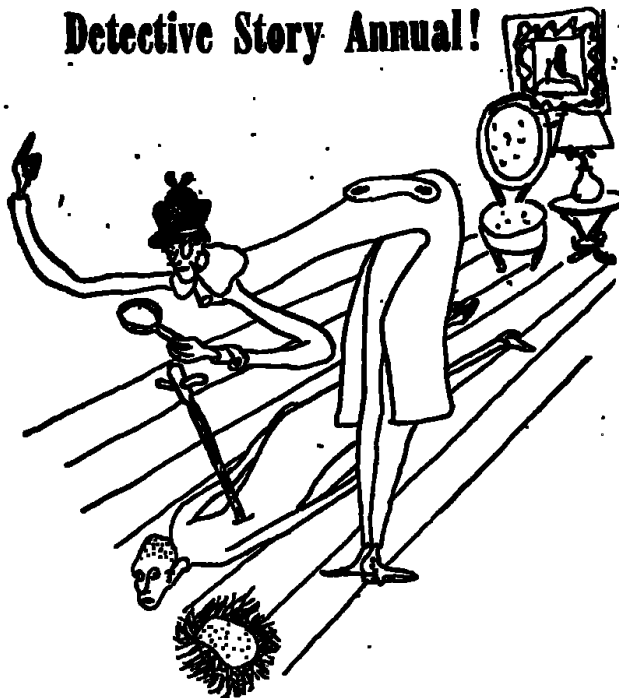
"Oh, yes," he insisted, as though Banning had contradicted him, "there is such a thing as a soul. Too much evidence to doubt it, even before we succeeded. In certain Scandinavian countries, you know, the house has a small window built in the parlor, close to the ceiling. That's for the soul of the dead to leave through.

"That isn't very scientific, though. However, we have evidence that is. Time-exposure photographs have been taken of dying persons. And have been found by queer light streaks later, when developed. What could that be except the record of some kind of force escaping the mortal body?

"All we've done is discover how to capture that soul. Cage it, so to speak. Were you watching long? Then you saw us do it. That flashing mirror and the whinnying sound—those were hypnotic aids, designed to throw the subject into a hypnotic stupor. So deep in fact that the bonds between life and death are loosened, and the soul is freed from its mortal envelope. You disbelieve me? That's quite all right—even scientists will, for a long time to come. We don't mind. We have the proof right here in the laboratory.

"Of course," he went on, "the soul as we . . . well, force it from a living body isn't quite the same soul that emerges after true death. That's why we're able

Quick, Watson!—the 1943 Detective Story Annual!



But whether you're a real detective or just a detective story fan, this is your book!

Four full-length novels, five novelettes of 15,000 words each, by famous authors like Richard Salo, George Harmon Cox, Oscar Schisgall and Hugh B. Cave, and a short story.

All in all—150,000 words and new illustrations. A collection of the finest detective fiction ever published by Street & Smith, and only 25c. Don't wait to get your copy—if your dealer cannot supply you, fill out the coupon below.

DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL 1943

25c A COPY

(30c IN CANADA)

AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL 1943
79 SEVENTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

Inclosed is 25c (30c in Canada). Kindly send me a copy of the new 1943 DETECTIVE STORY ANNUAL.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE.....

to capture it. It's still tied to earth. So we can nab it—and then rehouse it, as it were, in another body. Transference of that intangible essence known as personality. An amazing idea, isn't it?

"Of course, the transference of personality isn't complete. That monkey, for instance—it didn't have a man's mind. Its soul, its individuality, were partly man, partly monkey. Probably the monkey element is predominant. In time the man side may even die out and be almost forgotten. Though I don't think so. But you'll have a chance to test that out for yourself.

"Would you like to see the new body we've chosen for you? Here it is."

Dr. Nicholas Dete turned, and lifted a wire cage from some place outside Banning's vision. It held a large, dirty gray rat, with vicious red eyes and bared teeth, white and sharp. Without smiling the little man stared at it a moment, then put it back.

"I wonder, Banning," he murmured thoughtfully, "what the result will be. Of course, you yourself hate rats. It's an obsession of yours. Naturally, when you find yourself—or your ego, which is the same thing—imprisoned in the body of one, there will be a strong psychic conflict. You will still remember your own fastidiousness, your own horror of physical uncleanness, while you are actually



living in a sewer and feasting on garbage. You'll know what you're doing, at least for quite a while. The man side of you will have perception, and the rat side will have control. I imagine you'll suffer quite dreadfully. But you must console yourself. It's for the sake of scientific progress. Really it is."

He looked down into Banning's eyes, and may have seen there the horror that was screaming and yelling in a small part of Banning's sleepy mind. But his expression did not change.

"José," he said, "if the apparatus is ready, I think we can go ahead. Mr. Banning is impatient for release."

The small Filipino joined him, and together they wheeled the operating table on which Banning lay beneath the cone of white cloth.

Swiftly Nicholas Dete removed the pillow on which his head was lying. Banning now had to look straight up, at the little mirror overhead, which began to whirl, flashing into his eyes half a dozen times a second. Banning tried to shut his eyes, and could not.

Then the whinnying started. High, keen, piercing. It pulled at him, drawing him taut, as if trying to turn him inside out. The light flashing in his mind, and the whine pulling him inside out, began to lift him. He could feel himself rising. He felt lighter and lighter, like a balloon tugging at a restraining string. He was weightless, existing only in a great sea of flashing light pervaded by that terrible, soul-shattering whine.

He was weightless, being turned inside out; there was a sick screaming horror inside him and a rat in a cage, dirty and disgusting, waiting, waiting, waiting—

Something snapped. Like a violin cord. Banning heard it distinctly. Something snapped, and the whinnying scream ceased, the light stopped flashing, and he was floating free in a great white shaft that inclosed him, light as a feather.

He drifted through space to the edge of the shaft, tried to tear it aside. It gave before him, but he could not rip it. He

beat at it with his fists—and that little segment of his mind shot back to the sight he had seen a few minutes ago. An empty white cone of cloth pulsing as if something within was trying to escape—

Then it began to grow dark. A sense of being pulled at came to him. He struggled against it, but it grew darker and darker, and he was being pulled harder and harder, remorselessly, inevitably. He was being dragged down and squeezed into something, forced into something by an invisible power he could not fight against. He—

Then final darkness, and for a while unconsciousness.

When Banning opened his eyes again, he was back in the same position he had been in the first time he had come to consciousness in this room. But now he was able to move. The paralysis no longer held his limbs, his muscles, his will.

He rolled over, to get up, to make a dash for liberty. And then he remembered.

He looked down at his arms, and saw gray-furred legs. He looked at his body, and saw sleek fur. He pawed at his face, and felt the pointed furry countenance of a rat.

Banning screamed, and the sound came forth to his ears as a shrill squeak. He flung himself from the operating table, and struck the floor heavily on his side. Inside him there was a churned-up, dreadful horror, mixed with clear-headed sagacity and the knowledge he must escape. The horror of the man he had been, and the native sagacity of the rat he was, battling. As they would always battle...

He wanted to fling himself about, scream, yell, shout out this terror that was in his soul, but instead he scampered across the floor, began to dash along the floor boards, seeking a hole, seeking an escape to the sewers and the filth that were his life and his doom forever more—

In his little office, Dr. Nicholas Dete took up his telephone.

"Hello," he said, when he had gotten his long-distance number. "Is this Burke? Dete speaking. Sorry to disturb you this time of night. But I knew you'd want to know I've collared the whole gang who kidnaped my son. Yes, five of them—

"I'll give you the details later. I've been on their trail for months. Ever since my assistant picked up the clue from a remark overheard by the Filipino houseboy of the leader. No, I didn't tell your office. There was no evidence, and I wasn't sure you'd find any. Besides, I wanted to handle things my own way.

"No, no, nothing like that. They're all perfectly sound, physically. They'll probably live many years—since we don't have capital punishment in this State, and solitary confinement is the worst they'll get. No, I had no trouble. . . . I said I'll have to give you the details later. It's a long story. I didn't really do it alone, anyway. The whole university helped. Without knowing, of course.

"It's surprising, though, what a fund of scientific weapons against crime a man can dig up in a big university. As a matter of fact, I only needed two or three. The new anæsthetic they've been developing at University Hospital helped a lot, though. It's amazing stuff. You release it in a room, or close to a man's face, and he inhales it without even knowing it. Until all of a sudden without warning he keels over. You can keep him under with it as long as you like. It has a mild hypnotic effect. Marvelous thing. You can be in the room with him, and if you can hold your breath sixty seconds or so until he goes under—

"Well, I'll tell you all about it when you come. Right now I've got four of the gang waiting for you on ice. Unconscious all of them. Sleeping like logs. In the cellar. Perfectly safe—

barred in. Prepared the place for them long ago. Have written confessions from three of them. Of course, I got the confessions under hypnosis, but they signed them when they were quite conscious. The psychology department—my old department—supplied the necessary apparatus for the hypnosis work. And for a little more, too. A few tricks—quite simple, really, but effective.

"And my own knowledge of psychology did the rest. Really, there wasn't any special difficulty at any point. They did just what I anticipated in every instance.

"Yes, I said four. The fifth one is Banning. Chuck Banning, he's called. Local dandy. Gambler. You know him? Oh. . . . Yes, I have him, too. But not asleep. No—"

Dr. Nicholas Dete, the rabbit, inoffensive, unimpressive-looking little man turned to gaze through his trick mirror into his laboratory, where the thing that had been Chuck Banning was scrambling frantically around the room, looking for a means of escape.

"No," he said into the phone, "he won't go into solitary. You'll have to reserve a special cell for him at the asylum. He's quite mad. Hopelessly so. He thinks he's a rat. And he hates rats, you know. Dreads and detests them. So. . . . Well, a strait jacket, I think, as long as he lives. No, not nice to think about. Not at all. But then, there are other things that aren't nice to think about either, aren't there?"

Slowly Nicholas Dete replaced the receiver. Beside him, José, a very clever man with animals, able to train them to do almost anything, was staring through the mirror at Chuck Banning who, his eyes rolling, his lips writhing in a continuous choked whimpering, still was scrambling on hands and knees from one side of the room to the other in his frantic search for escape. José's countenance reflected a certain horror. But the buck-toothed, rabbit countenance of Dr. Nicholas Dete was stern and unmoved.

THE END.

The Devil Is Not Mocked

by Manly Wade Wellman

Transylvania has known many invaders, many conquerors—and yet has its defenders that remain unkilld, their ranks recruited from the enemy.

Illustrated by Alfred

Do you not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world hold sway? Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to?

BRAM. STOKER.

Balkan weather, even Balkan spring weather, was not pleasant to General von Grunn, leaning heavily back behind the bulletproof glass of his car. May 4th—the English would call it St. George's Day, after their saint who was helping them so little. The date would mean something to Heinrich Himmler, too; that weak-chinned pet of the Fuehrer would hold some sort of garbled druidic ritual with his Schutzstaffel on the Brockenburg. Von Grunn grimaced fatly at thought of Himmler, and leaned forward to look out into the night. An armed car ahead, an armed car behind—all was well.

"Forward!" he growled to his orderly, Kranz, who trod on the accelera-

UNK—SM

tor. The car moved, and the car ahead took the lead, into the Borgo Pass.

Von Grunn glanced backward once, to the lights of Bistritz. This country had been Rumanian not so long ago. Now it was Hungarian, which meant that it was German.

What was it that the mayor of Bistritz had said, when he had demanded a semiremote headquarters? The castle along this pass, empty—ready for him? The dolt had seemed eager to help, to please. Von Grunn produced a long cigarette. Young Captain Plesser, sitting beside him, at once kindled a lighter. Slim, quiet, the young aid had faded from von Grunn's consciousness.

"What's the name of that castle again?" inquired the general, and made a grimace when Plesser replied in barbarous Slavic syllables. "What's the meaning in a civilized tongue?"

"Devil's castle, I should think," hazarded the captain's respectful voice.

"Ach, so—Transylvania is supposed