

No. 3

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Risque

Stories

*New Adventures of...
TARA of the Twilight*

John Gorman
Julie deGrandin



Fiction by Justin Case - Carl Jacobi - Lin Carter -
Duane Rimel • *Poetry by* **Robert E. Howard**

RISQUE STORIES

July 1985

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Number Three

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FOREPLAY

We hope you're comfortable, sitting there in the closet with the flashlight, sneaking a peak at the third issue of *Risqué Stories*. Let's hope your battery holds out, because there's plenty of hot stuff in this issue, starting with Carl Jacobi's "Woman of the Witch-Flowers," written in 1937. It was written for *Eerie Stories* but somehow never got submitted. Another veteran of the golden age of the pulps is "Justin Case," better known today by his secret identity of Hugh B. Cave. Case was a regular writer for the spicy line and we are glad to have him as a *Risqué* regular as well. He will titillate and terrorize you in his customary manner in his "House of Dark Desire." Dare you enter? Can you resist?

The ongoing adventures of Tara of the Twilight continue with "Pale Shadow" by Lin Carter. And, what do you know? here comes John Gorman slugging his way into your heart, as

Hoffman and Cerasini bring Robert E. Howard's character to life again in "Jungle Curse," Gorman's most bizarre exploit yet.

Duane Rimel brings us a fiendish fable on domestic infidelity in a small town, a theme not too far removed from that of a new bit of vivacious verse by Robert E. Howard, "The Harlot."

Did you think we'd dare to bring back Julie de Grandin? Well, who said we had any common sense here at *Risqué Stories*? We did at least have sense enough to entrust Will Murray's script to a competent artist this time round, Mike Harris, whose work you have seen in DC Comics' *All-Star Squadron* and others.

Indefatigable researcher Will Murray has also managed to unearth still more intriguing data on the Spicy pulps and the rascals who wrote for them. Take a look at his detective work in "The Spicy Scribes."

Robert M. Price
Editor

WOMAN OF THE WITCH-FLOWERS



by Carl Jacobi

The rusted sign hung there like a fever-spot in the red light of the setting sun:

Conday's Place
Cabins
Trailer Accommodations
Drive In.

Steve McCall peered through the windshield and nodded to the girl at his side. "Home for the night," he said. "Soon as I park you can hustle back into that caboose of ours and start a steak. I'm starved." He engaged the clutch and sent the coupe and trailer nosing down into the little side-lane.

But his wife frowned as she glanced at the weed-grown camp-grounds before them. No other car or person was in sight. The scattered tourist cabins

were old and in need of paint and repair. The fact that the cabins each bore the name of a flower in crude painting—Larkspur, Salvia, Clarkia—failed to offset their gloomy appearance.

Farther back a huge, many-gabled house reared its dark bulk upwards. The shutters were closed, and the structure bore an air of neglect and desertion.

"Steve, where are we?"

Guiding the car and trailer into a little clump of cedars, he switched off the ignition and considered.

"Hundred miles out of Minneapolis. We'll move right through Duluth and onto Superior's north-shore tomorrow. And by tomorrow night . . ."

"Steve, I don't like this place."

He looked at her sharply. Mary McCall's blond hair framed a face

that was pale and drawn. A full day's driving under a hot Minnesota sun had no doubt left its mark of weariness. But Steve knew the look in his wife's eyes went deeper than that.

He patted her hand, climbed out of the car and moved to the door of the trailer. Abruptly he jerked rigid. They were not alone in the cedars. Five feet away a man lay sleeping.

Sleeping. The figure was sprawled limply in the long grass, face covered by a large felt hat. For a brief instant Steve stood there in surprised silence. Then slowly a cold chill crept up his spine. There was no perceptible rise and fall to the man's chest.

He paced forward, lifted the hat. A cry of horror caught in his throat.

The figure, judging by the grey hair, was that of a man in middle age. He was dressed in a well-tailored grey suit, soft shirt and white shoes.

But the face was gone! Between the stark white of the forehead and the termination of the neck was a gaping cavity, a blood-rimmed hole. It was as if some ravenous animal had selected this part of the skull and fed with deliberate efficiency.

"Steve! Oh God, how horrible!"

Fighting back the horror within him, Steve replaced the hat and turned to draw his wife back toward the car. His voice was husky as he spoke.

"I'll look up someone, report this. From the looks of things that poor devil's been dead only a short time." He opened the car door, motioned her to enter. "You sit tight until I get back."

He stood still a moment, heart pounding. Then he pushed through the cedars and paced across the unkempt lawn to the house.

He reached the veranda without sighting any living person. The rattle of his knock on the door echoed through the trees.

Minutes passed, and the door re-

mained closed. Then a window to the side rasped open, and a witch-like face appeared in the opening.

"Cabin? Take the third one to the left marked 'Moonflower.'"

Steve McCall's fists clenched. "I don't want a cabin," he snapped. "I came here to report a murder. In case you're interested, there's a dead man lying over there in the cedars."

Without emotion the face continued to survey him. It was a woman's face, toothless and wrinkled like parchment. White stringy hair hung down to her shoulders.

The window banged shut. Steps sounded a slow diminuendo. But when the door opened, and a figure appeared on the threshold, Steve McCall's eyes jerked wide with astonishment.

It was not the old hag. Tall and supple, a young woman stood before him. Her hair was black as onyx, done up in two tightly coiled braids over either ear. Her skin-tight black dress was cut daringly low, accentuating the alabaster whiteness of her skin. She was beautiful, yet Steve felt a queer shudder mount to the roots of his hair.

"A man has been hurt, *M'sieu?*" Her voice was low and throaty. "You must show me quickly."

Steve opened his lips, but the words did not come. There was something magnetic and at the same time voluptuously horrible about this woman.

Then the spell was broken. Quickly Steve explained what he had seen. The woman heard him until he had finished. Then, in slow gliding steps, she moved off the veranda and followed him across the lawn.

A moment later she bent over the motionless figure in the cedars and nodded quietly.

"It is the *Monsieur* Lathrop. Robert Lathrop. He had the cabin of the Moss-rose."

"But what . . .?" Steve began.

M'sieu Lathrop came here alone. He has been with us almost a week.

I feared something like this would happen. You see he is a chemist.

"A chemist," the woman continued. "Every night in his cabin he poured colored liquids into a jar and heated them. He said he was on the verge of a great discovery, but . . . the acids he used were very dangerous."

Steve hesitated. An impalpable aura like a cloak of evil seemed to emanate from this woman. "Then you think . . .?"

"I do not think, *M'sieu*. It is self-evident. Poor Robert Lathrop mixed the wrong liquids. They exploded in his face, and he rushed out here to die in agony. He has been missing since last night."

The cold indifference of the woman was somehow mutely terrible. Abruptly Steve found himself meeting the full stare of her eyes. They were long-lashed and piercing, those eyes, and their gaze seemed to probe him to the depths of his soul.

"I will have the body taken care of, *M'sieu*," she said. "You perhaps will wish to park in another part of the grounds. The fee is fifty cents."

Mechanically Steve found the silver in his pocket and handed it across. The woman nodded, smiled, and was gone, gliding back through the cedars.

Mary McCall served the evening meal on the tiny folding table of the camp trailer. Battery-powered electric lights illuminated the compact quarters with a cozy glow. Yet a cloud of gloom seemed to hang over Steve and his wife. Outside the pitch blackness of the camp grounds pressed against the screened windows.

At length Steve rose with a scowl and lit his pipe.

"It's funny, if you ask me," he said. "I don't know much about chemistry, but I've fooled with acids enough to know that if Lathrop had been burned by a chemical explosion his screams would have been heard in the house."

"Steve," Mary McCall said slowly. "There's something wrong with this place . . . something evil. Why

can't we move on tonight? There must be other camp grounds farther along the road and . . ."

He shook his head. "The authorities will be here in the morning, and I'll be wanted as a witness. We'll have to stay until tomorrow noon at least."

Puffing his pipe, Steve strolled to the trailer door. A moon was rising in the east, silver-tipping the tops of the cedars. For a moment he stood there, deep in thought. Then abruptly he opened the door.

"I'm going to have a look around," he told his wife. "Back in a moment."

Outside, he seemed irresistibly drawn toward the house. He scuffed through the weeds, past two tourist cabins, and stopped before the veranda, staring up at the dark, shuttered windows. There was no sound save the low drone of insects.

Around the side of the house he continued, following a small gravel path. And then, five minutes later, he stopped again, while an electric thrill coursed through him.

A small rectangular garden lay before him, but it was a garden, the like of which he had never seen before. Flowers in violent profusion grew in symmetric rows, exuding an overpowering, sickly-sweet fragrance. In the background stood a small pergola, almost hidden by moonflower vines. The blossoms were open to the night sky, their stark white petals gleaming in the moonlight.

But it was something else that caught Steve McCall's eyes and held him there, galvanized to attention. In the center of the bed low white and flesh-colored flowers had been compactly planted to produce a startling effect.

In the moonlight it looked as if a nude girl lay there supine and motionless, hands folded across her breasts!

Teeth clamped hard about the stem of his cold pipe, Steve took a step forward. The illusion was perfect. Even at close range it did not change. He saw then that the design

was no trick of chance. The flowers had been carefully planted, crimson ones for lips, queer Medusa-like vines for hair, and bizarre, almond-shapes blossoms with purple petals for eyes.

"*M'sieu* likes my garden, yes?"

Steve whirled. He had heard no sound of steps, yet the woman in black was there, close behind him. She was smiling slightly, leaning on a heavy willow stick which she held in her right hand.

"My garden, it pleases you?"

By sheer force of will Steve tore his gaze from her and nodded. He was confused, dazed by the strange emotions that seized him whenever he was in this woman's presence.

Gently she grasped his arm, led him closer to the flowers.

"Gypsophilia, *M'sieu*, here along this border. Here are Moss-roses, here Clarkia, here Azaleas. Each has been planted chronologically so as to bloom at the same time."

Her voice lowered to a whisper, and she smiled at him like an actress who knew the effect of her lines.

Suddenly she jerked the willow stick in a wide arc and probed it toward a corner of the garden.

"And here, *M'sieu*, is my pet, the only one of its kind in this country. It is the Lover Plant of Sierra Leone. Observe the beauty of its blossoms. Does it not seem almost alive? I think so, and I have given it a name. I have called it Marie, after myself. Marie Conday. A pretty name, yes, *M'sieu*?"

She had moved close to him now, and Steve could feel her hot breath against his face. A strange irresistible desire swept over him. He wanted to put his arms around her body, to draw her close, to . . .

And then it happened!

From out of the tall undergrass beside the garden a white something moved out into the moonlight. Steve saw it out of the corner of his eye. It was a small wild rabbit. Halting on the gravel path, the animal list-

ened a moment, then moved into the flower-bed, directly toward the Love Plant.

Marie Conday saw it too. With a guttural cry she whipped around, lunged forward. Her arm brought the willow stick up over her shoulder. Snarling through her lips, the woman struck with incredible strength and rapidity.

There was a sickening crunch, an animal squeal, and where the rabbit had been lay only a lifeless lump of blood-spattered white fur.

Rage seized Steve McCall then. He seized the woman by the wrist, snapped,

"You damned . . .! Why the devil did you do it?"

The suave smile returned to her lips. "You do not understand, *M'sieu*. That plant is very valuable. I could not afford to have it ruined."

She answered his hard gaze for a brief moment. Then the smile faded. She gathered up her dress and walked slowly back toward the house.

Two hours later Steve lay wide awake in his bed, thinking. The interior of the trailer was dark and quiet. By his side, Mary, his wife, was asleep, breathing rhythmically.

What did it all mean? Who had killed Robert Lathrop, and what was the significance of that strange flower garden in the rear of the house? Questions, one after another, hammered against his brain.

Who was the toothless hag that had first appeared in the window when he had gone to the house? And finally, who was Marie Conday, the woman who affected him so strangely?

A pall of brooding evil seemed to hang over these camp-grounds, reaching its highest pitch in the moon-washed blossoms surrounding the Love Plant.

Steve tossed from side to side restlessly. Tired though he was from a dull day's driving, sleep would not come. His whole body seemed drawn with a nervous tension, an expectation

of something about to happen.

Across the room an alarm clock ticked steadily. The rear window stood forth in the darkness, tessellated with moonlight.

And then abruptly he sat bolt upright. Some one, some *thing* was moving parallel with the outer wall of the trailer toward the door. He could hear it distinctly, the stealthy swish of footsteps through the long grass.

A cold wave swept up Steve's spine. Faintly through the night air he could detect the sickly-sweet odor of heliotrope.

An inch at a time he pushed aside the bed covers, slid to his feet. He crossed to the door, unlocked it silently, pulled it open.

Gloom lay before him. Gloom and a darker shape that gradually took form five feet away. Then a twig snapped. A silver something glittered in the moonlight, whipped through the air and slammed into the wall inches from his head with a dull thud.

Even as Steve realized it was a knife, he braced, lunged forward.

He catapulted into the blackness, struck a body soft and yielding. A hideous shriek vibrated in his ears. Clawing, long-nailed fingers raked and tore at his face. As he fought Steve realized his opponent was a woman.

He squeezed her body down hard on the ground, snapped both wrists flat and panted:

"Lie still. If you move I'll kill you."

The woman writhed frantically. Unintelligible words hissed to her lips. And then in a flash Steve sensed the danger from behind.

He half swung about when something threw itself upon him. He slammed his right fist upward with all the strength he possessed. But the fist caught only empty air, and simultaneously the heavens seemed to crash down upon his skull. A burst of lights, and he felt himself falling back—unconscious.

* * *

When he opened his eyes, the moon was low in the sky. His head ached with a dull pain, and all his strength seemed to have left him. Unsteadily he groped to his feet, sought to collect his thoughts. Suddenly terror struck him to the roots of his soul.

Mary . . .! Had they . . .?

He lunged across to the trailer door, rushed inside. A cry of despair rose to his lips. The bed against the wall was empty!

Heart racing, brain in a whirl, he stood there. Then a sob welled to his lips and he ran out.

Without knowing why, he ran toward the shuttered house, circled its white brooding wall and followed the gravel path to the wild yard in the rear. He stopped dead in his tracks.

There it lay, the garden of Marie Conday, silent in the moonlight like a corpse's bier. There were the moss roses, the moonflowers, the azaleas—the Love Plant to the side, overflowing the soil like some botanical octopus.

And there—God in heaven—was Mary, his wife!

In the center of the garden she lay. Her body was nude, motionless as in death; her blond hair streamed behind her over the Gypsophilia; her hands were folded over her breasts.

As in death she lay on the spot, the exact spot that had been occupied by the design of the flower-girl!

Steve McCall felt his senses reel. Ice froze in his veins. He staggered forward, hands outstretched, then halted mechanically as a voice cut through the silence.

"You will stand where you are, *M'sieu*. You will make no move or a bullet will enter your brain."

It was Marie Conday, the woman in black. But gone was her suave smile now. In the moonlight her face was contorted with a fanatical determination. Her eyes under the heavy black brows were twin pools of malignant violet.

She held a revolver in her right hand, bore pointed straight for Steve.

The shadows swirled, and a second figure appeared beside her. The old hag he had seen at the window of the shuttered house.

And before he realized what was happening the hag was upon him, lashing his wrists with a length of rope. Another rope was drawn tight about his ankles.

"You may stand and watch, *M'sieu*," the woman in black said, "since you have followed us. 'But if you . . .'"

"My wife . . .!" Steve's voice was a hollow whisper. "What have you done . . .?" He felt riveted to the spot as if the very presence of Marie Conday paralyzed his muscles.

"Your wife is asleep, under the effect of a powerful drug. As you can see, her head lies close to the roots of the Love Plant. In a few moments I will insert those roots deep in her body. They will fasten themselves and slowly drain her blood.

"You perhaps do not know the story behind the Nigerian Love Plant, *M'sieu*. It grows in Sierra Leone. It is very rare, very difficult to find. But it is said that whoever takes such a plant, permits it to feed upon the blood of a lover, that person's mate will fall in love with the owner of the plant.

"Do you understand, *M'sieu*, your wife will give her life blood to the plant, and I, by eating that plant, will become your mistress."

As from far off Steve heard the words. "You're mad!" he cried.

"Mad, *M'sieu*? Perhaps. But I want you, and what Marie Conday wants she does not permit to slip through her fingers."

She moved close to him, stood there breathing hard for a brief moment. Then abruptly she whirled on the nude figure in the garden.

From the low-cut bosom of her dress she drew forth a long-bladed knife. Grasping it by the hilt she raised it slowly above Mary McCall's breast.

A bomb exploded within Steve then. Bracing his lashed feet he threw himself forward. It was the second time he had fought that night. But where he had been coldly deliberate before, he was a raging tiger now.

His bound hands clawed outward, seized the woman's wrists, knocked the knife from one hand, the revolver from the other. Grimly he continued to grip those hands while Marie Conday screamed and struggled like a maniac.

Spittle on her lips, she kicked and bit at him. And suddenly as they rolled over and over on the wet earth Steve saw the old hag dart forward and seize the fallen revolver. The old crone swiveled the weapon and yanked at the trigger.

He hurled himself sideways . . .

There was a crashing roar, a flash of flame, and a scream. Even as Steve saw the powder smoke billow upward over the weeds into the moonlight, he felt the woman in black's body go limp in his arms. A round crimson hole appeared on her forehead. Marie Conday was dead!

He forced himself to a standing position.

"Drop that gun!" he snarled. "Drop it or . . .!"

But the old hag seemed not to hear him. Stark horror was written across her face. She paced forward, staring down at the motionless figure. She picked up one of the lifeless wrists, let it fall limply to the earth.

And then her leprous lips parted, and a shriek of remorse and terror spewed from her lips.

She staggered backward, lifted the revolver to her breast and fired.

The little coupe sped down the highway under the morning sun. Behind it rolled the camp trailer, aluminum roof glistening with dew, chintz curtains swirling in the breeze.

In the car Steve McCall's face was grim as he tooled the wheels around a curve.

"Funny," he said. "The whole setup had me going for a while. But you can thank an efficient state police for gathering the evidence and releasing us as soon as they did."

His wife nodded slowly. "That woman . . ." she said. "I still don't understand . . ."

"I'm not sure I can explain it all," Steve replied. "We had to piece things together, you know, from the papers and newspaper clippings we found in the house. The old crone lived a few hours before she died, and told us a little."

"It all goes back to Robert Lathrop, the man we found dead in the cedars. He was a chemist, right enough, as Marie Conday said. But what we didn't know was that he was Marie Conday's husband."

"He met her in New Orleans a year ago, became infatuated with her beauty and married her. Not until a few weeks ago did he learn of her true racial background."

"But I thought . . ." interrupted Mary.

"You thought she was French, and she was. But her mother, the old hag proprietress of the camp grounds, was more than that. Born in Haiti she was a voodoo *mamaloï*, a native *Obeah* witch-doctor woman who came to this

country from Port au Prince.

"When Lathrop discovered that his wife had native blood in her veins, he was horrified. He told her outright he intended to divorce her. In a fit of rage Marie Conday killed him in his sleep, poured acid on his face to make his death appear an accident."

Mary McCall shuddered. "And the Nigerian Love Plant . . .?" she began.

"Pure voodooism. The old woman was a *mamaloï*, steeped in West Indian witchcraft which her ancestors had brought to Haiti from Sierra Leone on the west coast of Africa. She exerted a powerful influence over her daughter, taught her to believe all the rites of her black religion."

"When we came to the camp, Marie Conday saw in me a man who might take the place of Robert Lathrop, with whom, strangely enough, she had been madly in love. The only obstacle in her path was you, my wife. Freshly jilted, she was almost insane with desire and grief. She reverted to her black background and planned to . . ."

But Mary McCall moved closer to her husband's side and shook her head.

"It's all over now, Steve," she said. "Drive faster. I . . . I want to breathe the fresh air."

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Whirling away from the horror, Gorman ran screaming from the hut and through the deserted village. He reeled, fell, rose bleeding, and ran on. Fleeing the village, he plunged

into the jungle once more, running as fast as his bloody feet could carry him. From behind, deep, resonant, ghoulisn laughter followed Gorman, echoing in his ears again and again.

HOUSE OF DARK DESIRE



by Justin Case

The room in which he lay would be furnished as a bedroom one day soon, but at present it contained only an old mattress. No bed—just a mattress on a bare plank floor, a few feet in from the door to the hall. In another upstairs room of this unfinished rural home in New Hampshire was an old kitchen chair in which he sometimes sat while waiting. Otherwise the house was empty.

Tonight, just before midnight, 67-year-old Enoch Padgett lay there on the mattress, silently watching the bedroom doorway. His were good blue eyes, a carpenter's eyes, but now they were glassy-bright with expectancy. His work-worn hands were hard clenched. Beads of moisture on his face glistened in the moonlight streaming through a window.

Suddenly he was not alone.

There had been no sound of foot-falls on the stairs leading up from the floor below. No sound in the hall as his caller came along it. But there she was, framed in the doorway: a young woman with dark, dark hair and even darker eyes. A stark naked young woman with a gloriously lovely face and body.

Enoch's mouth twitched open and he struggled for breath as she came toward him.

He was not naked—yet. He wore the clothes in which he had come across the road from his home an hour before: a blue denim shirt, coveralls that cried out for a session in a washing machine, work shoes, socks, underwear. But now as the woman knelt beside him and smiled down at him, displaying small, even teeth that were wonderfully white against the

pale copper of her skin, he began almost mechanically to make himself naked.

His fingers fumbled trancelike at the buttons of his shirt, then at his belt, then at the rawhide laces on his shoes . . . and on removing each piece of apparel he tossed it aimlessly aside while his gaze remained fixed on the hovering face of his lovely visitor.

At last, in a hoarse whisper, he spoke to her. "Ah, Majawa, I thought you'd forgotten me! I thought you'd never come tonight!"

For answer the woman hungrily put one arm around his head and pressed his face against a golden breast. And then her other hand eagerly stroked his good, solid chest and whatever else it could reach.

But not for long. Only until he was aroused and ready.

Then she took her usual place beside him and invited him to make love to her by silently spreading her arms while smiling up at him.

Standing at a window, peering out at the unfinished house across the road, Della Padgett said in a voice of despair, "I can't bear the thought of spending another winter in this house, Enoch. I just know I won't be able to stand the cold that comes through every crack in these old walls."

Lowering her gaze to the cat that was rubbing itself against her right ankle, she slowly shook her head in sadness while awaiting her husband's reply. When none was forthcoming, she addressed her next remark to the cat.

"And you don't want to live here another winter, do you, Emily?"

When the little reddish-brown Abyssinian turned her bright yellow eyes upward and responded with an almost angry "Mrreow!" the woman was pleased. The cat was her constant companion and, according to a new book she had, might even be a direct descendant of the sacred cats of old

Egypt.

"Enoch, did you hear me?" Della said with a sigh.

A well-preserved and handsome man for his age, her husband sat in his favorite overstuffed chair with the Sunday paper. It was late Sunday afternoon and he had at last reached the home-building section which, being a carpenter, he always saved until last. Without looking up he said guardedly, "Yes, Della, I heard you."

"Well?"

"Well what, Della?"

"Give me one good reason why you can't finish up over there so we can move in before the snow falls." Again she looked out the window at the house on the other side of the two-lane blacktop. The unoccupied dwelling at which she gazed so longingly was the only one in sight. Enoch had begun it two and a half years before.

"Just one good reason," Della persisted. "One *truthful* reason, Enoch. That's all I ask."

Her husband sighed again as he lowered his paper to look at her. "I *been* telling you the truth, Della."

"You've been telling me we haven't the money. We've money in the bank."

"For a rainy day. Not to spend now. I'm retired, Della. Can't you understand that? I'm not *earning* any money. And you're not either, now that you've stopped the sewing and needlework."

That, of course, was true. Della had to admit it. There was just no work now for a man of his years, and she couldn't see well enough to do her part any more. But the house was finished enough so they could move into it.

She said that, and Enoch shook his head at her. "There's no electricity yet, Della."

"We could use lamps. My folks did when I was a child. I even liked it."

"There's the staircase to finish, and some other things. The kitchen counters and cupboards, for instance. I'm doing the best I can."

Was he? Della asked herself that

as she stood there frowning at him. She wasn't sure of him any more. In the months he'd been building the house, which he had promised her so many times would be a warm, comfortable home for them to spend their last years in, Enoch had changed in some ways. She still loved him, of course. She had when they were students in high school, holding hands on the school bus, and all through their long marriage, and she always would. But that house across the road . . .

He went to it every day. Sometimes he spent an hour there, other times most of the day. He even spent part of the night there at times. Some teenagers from the village were sneaking into the place at night, he told her, leaving cigarette butts, or maybe they were marijuana butts, all over the floors. He'd shown her a used condom he claimed to have picked up, though there was no real furniture in the house yet, certainly no bed for games of that sort to be played on. "I'll catch 'em," he vowed. And so he sat there sometimes for hours in the dark, with his shotgun. But he never caught anyone.

"Enoch." She was still staring at him, a kind of defiance building up inside her.

"Huh?"

"I'm going over there. I want to see what you've done lately."

"Now, Della." Sighing was getting to be a habit with him. "Well, all right, if you want to. But it's close to nightfall. Don't you stay over there after dark."

Della's gaze went to the old Seth Thomas clock on the wall above the silent TV set. Why, she wondered, had he never allowed her to go with him at night when he was hoping to catch the intruders? Why did he always warn her to be out of there before dark when she did go over? What went on over there when he stayed?

Well, maybe she could find out. And if she couldn't, there was always her brother Lyman, who had been a detective on the Manchester police

force before he retired. He'd help if she asked him to.

With a final glance at Enoch, who had put aside his paper and was gazing at her with a look of sadness, she turned to the door. Always eager for an outing, the Abyssinian cat glided along beside her, a thing of grace and beauty with her lithe body and long, tapering tail.

Across the road they went together, and through what would one day be a front yard, to the house she longed to live in. The key to the front door was in her sweater pocket—she must have known she would be doing this today—and presently the door closed behind them.

Enoch and she had designed this house together, sitting night after night at the kitchen table in their present home, covering large sheets of paper with sketches and plans. She would know her way around blindfolded even if she had never been here before. Because she had a special fondness for the living room, her feet took her in that direction.

Such a lovely living room, so much larger than the one they had now. And the fireplace! The fieldstones had come from the foundation of a house that had stood on this site before, one that had burned down even before Enoch and she bought the one across the road. He had used its old foundation stones for the chimney, too, and even for a slab in front of the fireplace to catch any sparks that might explode out into the room.

"Isn't it nice, Emily?"

The cat's response was musical this time. Emily always knew when her mistress was happy.

"Let's go upstairs before we look at what he's done in the kitchen."

Together they climbed the stairs, which, as Enoch had said, were unfinished, lacking a banister. Since it was nearly dark and her eyes gave even more than the usual trouble in dim light, Della was extra careful as she ascended. A loss of balance here and a fall to the hall below could result in broken bones.

"There!" she said gratefully at the top, and turned into the first of the two bedrooms.

At once she noted a change. Where there had been no furniture of any kind in either of the bedrooms before, there was now a mattress on the floor here. Studying it, she recognized it as an old one from their own attic, a twin size thing they had discarded years ago when she gave in to Enoch's plea for a double bed instead of two singles. Even now he enjoyed his sex.

But why a mattress here? Was he using it to stretch out on while waiting to catch the intruders? And how, for that matter, had he got it over here without her seeing him? He must have done it when she drove to the village to do the shopping.

Kneeling beside the mattress, she sniffed at it. Yes, he was using it to lie on. That stuff he used on his hair all the time, to keep it from turning gray, had an odor. But there was another odor as well. An even stronger one. A *womanly* one. As she rose to her feet, she was trembling and guessed her face was pale.

So that's why he won't let me be here at night.

She had lost interest in looking at the house now. "Come!" she snapped at the Abyssinian. "And we're not going to say anything about this, you hear? What we're going to do this very evening is write to my brother in Manchester!"

"Well?" Enoch said when Della and the cat returned to him in the house across the road.

"What do you mean, 'well'?"

"Are you satisfied I'm doing my best over there?"

She looked at him. Apparently he hadn't moved from his chair during her absence. He still had the home-building section of the Sunday paper in his hands. "I suppose so," she said.

"Aren't you going to ask me about the mattress in the bedroom? What it's for?"

"What is it for, Enoch?"

"Well, I have a chair over there, too, but I get tired of sitting up, waiting for those kids to come. So I put the mattress there to lay down on."

"Suppose they found you there asleep with the shotgun beside you."

"I don't fall asleep, Della. I just lay down."

After supper that evening Enoch said he had an idea the kids might be coming around, seeing it was a Sunday night, and he would just go on over to the new house in case they did. "Don't wait up for me now," he said. "I might stay there a good while."

Della did not protest. As soon as he was out the door with his shotgun, she sat at the kitchen table with a pad of ruled paper and began a letter to her brother Lyman.

She wrote about the mattress, and how Enoch in spite of his promises kept finding ways to avoid finishing the house, and she ended up by writing: "Don't think I've stopped loving him, Lyman. I haven't done that. Nor will I, even if you find out he's bedding another woman in that house. After all, I'm not as pretty as I used to be, and he's still young-looking and real handsome, so I couldn't blame him. I guess I'm not meeting his needs in bed, either. Not really. But I do want to know what's going on, because he could get into trouble or even be hurt. I don't want anything like that to happen."

The letter finished, she read it over—out loud, in fact, to Emily, who had sat on the table watching her compose it. And when the cat seemed not too attentive, Della scolded her.

"You pay more heed to this, you hear? The book says your ancestors in Egypt protected the families they lived with. There was even some kind of rattle called a—well, I forget what, but there was one—that had a cat figure on the top of it, and people shook it to ward off evil spirits."

"Mrreow," replied Emily, and rubbed

the sides of her mouth against Della's hand.

"All right," Della said, relenting enough to kiss the animal's nose. "But just you mind what I'm telling you, and be ready to help out if you're needed."

Then she put the letter into an envelope, put the envelope into her handbag, and went to bed.

In the almost empty house across the road Enoch lay on his mattress again, waiting. And again there was no sound on the stairs or in the hall, but suddenly in the bedroom doorway, naked, stood the woman who had told him her name was Majawa.

This time he did not have to undress himself; she did it for him. And when it was done she sat there beside him on the mattress for nearly half an hour, ceaselessly caressing him with her hands and lips and tongue.

And that was but the beginning.

Awaiting her husband's return, Della lay in bed gazing at the clock on her dresser. It had luminous hands and, besides, there was a wash of moonlight in the room. The hands of the clock stood at ten past two when she heard the front door open downstairs. She hadn't been asleep or even dozed off.

He went into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator door for something and then ran the water in the kitchen sink awhile. Longer, in fact, than he would have had to run it just for a drink, so maybe he was washing his hands. Then he climbed the stairs and came into the bedroom and got undressed.

Della pretended to be asleep.

He didn't touch her when he got into bed. Actually, he was a considerate man and never did disturb her when she was sleeping. It was just a standard double bed, though, not an oversized one, so he was close to her. Close enough so she at once had an answer to the question that tormented her.

Tears came into her eyes when she smelled the woman odor from the mattress again. Smelled it on him, on his body, right through his pajamas, and it was strong.

Oh, Enoch, why? Why at this time in our lives, after we've been happily married for so long?

She mailed the letter to Lyman the next morning when she drove to the village to do some shopping. A reply came in four days, and it was she who took it from the roadside mailbox. Enoch and she always shared their letters with each other, and knowing she mustn't share this one, she had watched every day for the mail car to come by.

What Lyman said was that he couldn't believe Enoch had "turned into an old alley cat" after having been a good and faithful husband for so many years, but it was strange that he hadn't yet finished the house. "So, yes, I will certainly look into it for you, and you can expect to hear from me again in short order. As a matter of fact, it will be good to get to work on something again. I never thought retirement would be such a drag."

Two nights later Enoch again said he intended to "catch those kids at it" and would be staying in the house across the road until late, "so don't wait up for me." It was already dark when he went, and Della stood at a window watching the beam of his flashlight move across the blacktop.

Silhouetted against the glow he looked ever so much younger than he was, she thought. His stride was long and straight, and there was not the slightest stoop to his shoulders. Oh, she must be careful! Nothing must happen between her and Enoch, even if he had lost his head over someone younger.

Standing there at the window, she watched him go into the house across the road, saw the door close blotting out the glow of the flashlight, then saw the glow reappear in the living-room windows. Had he gone first into

that room with its beautiful field-stone fireplace because it was his favorite room in the house too? Or did he have some other reason? She watched for more than half an hour and could tell by the glow in the windows that he was just standing there. Actually there was nowhere in that room to sit, was there? Then at last the glow disappeared.

When she saw it again, it was in the windows of the bedroom where she had discovered the mattress. Then it went out.

Determined to be up when he returned, she switched the TV on and watched it through the eleven o'clock news and even most of a movie. Then just as she was ready to admit defeat, the front door opened. Rising from her chair, she turned to face him and was shocked at what she saw.

This was the man she had thought so young-looking and handsome just a few hours ago? His eyes were dull now. His mouth drooped. His face was lined with what had to be exhaustion. "Enoch," she said, "what happened?"

"Happened?" Even his voice lacked strength.

"What's wrong with you? You look as if—as if you've been a week without sleep."

"Thinking," Enoch said. "I been thinking, Della."

"Just using your mind wouldn't make you look like this," she retorted. "But all right—thinking about what?"

"That house. How I could finish it."

"So now you want to finish it, Enoch?"

"Of course I do. I always did."

"I don't know if I believe you," she said.

"I just didn't know how, with the little money we have left. But now I have an idea. I'll tell you about it in the morning, Della."

Because right now you're too tired even to talk, Della thought, and it isn't just from thinking. What have

you been doing over there in that house all this time since your flashlight went out, Enoch? And then as he went past her to the stairs, she caught the woman smell again and had her answer.

"Enoch."

Halting, he turned wearily to face her. "Yes, Della."

But she couldn't do it. "Nothing," she said after a hesitation. "Go on to bed. I'll lock up."

When the phone rang at nine-thirty the next morning, Della answered it. The phone was in the kitchen. Enoch was still asleep upstairs.

The caller was her brother. "Can you talk?" he asked her.

"Unless he wakes up and comes downstairs. So if I hang up on you, you'll know I heard his door open."

"I've got some information for you," Lyman said. "But it's too long anyway to tell you over the phone. Needs explaining. Can you meet me in the village this morning?"

"I can tell him I have some shopping to do. No, not that—he might want to come with me. I'll say I want to see Maude Claflin about having my hair done. Lord knows I ought to do that, anyway."

"Suppose you meet me at Nelson's sawmill," Lyman suggested. "He's got it shut down now, hasn't he?"

"Yes, it's closed."

"Meet me there in about an hour, then. And Della—"

"Yes?"

"It's important, so don't let anything keep you from getting there."

When she drove into the sawmill yard, Lyman was waiting in his car beside the old gray lumber shed. At once he squirmed out from behind the wheel and came over to her smaller, older car, having to stoop even more to get into that because he stood six-foot-four. Normally an easy-going man who joked with her a lot, he was solemn as a church this morning.

"That piece of land you're build-

ing your new house on," he said—"did you know anything about it when you bought it?"

"Not really. Only that there was a house on it some years ago, but it burned down. Somebody said the owner burned it to collect the insurance."

Ever since Lyman had been a boy, he'd chewed at the inside of his lower lip when he was troubled. He was doing that now. "The owner burned it, all right, but not for any insurance, Della. He was crazy. I talked to him yesterday at the asylum."

"You what?"

"Two different families lived in that house, Della. The folks who built it were named Casserly. Clark and Karen Casserly, in their thirties, no children. Mrs. Casserly was found there in the living room one day with her throat cut, and her husband was charged with killing her. He got off because he could prove he was out of town when it happened. But he died a few months later of some mysterious ailment. People said he just wasted away."

Too shaken to interrupt, Della could only sit there staring at him while her mouth went dry.

"After Casserly died," Lyman went on, "a couple named Mundle bought the place. Daryl and Angela Mundle. They had two kids. One day she was found dead there with her throat cut, and he was brought to trial for it. But he, too, got off because he could prove he was somewhere else."

Della was still tongue-tied.

"He's the one burned the house down," Lyman went on. "And it was a planned thing, not any spur-of-the-moment madness. His wife was murdered in July. At Christmas he packed the two kids off to her mother's, where the four of them had always spent the holidays. Then he burned the house and was arrested for it, but ended up in the asylum as a mental case."

Della found a voice at last, though it was little more than a whisper. "Is he really crazy, do you think?"

"I guess. He told me what I've

just told you. But when I asked him who did kill his wife, and why he burned the house down, he screamed at me to leave him alone." Remembering it, Lyman wagged his head and blew his breath out. "He screamed so hard they came and took him away."

"Lyman"—again it was a whisper—"who do you think killed those poor women? You say their throats were cut and their husbands couldn't have done it. So who did?"

"Give me a little more time," Lyman said. "I'll find out."

He would, too, Della thought as she drove home. He'd been a fine detective, highly praised for his work, and he was like a dog with a bone when it came to a mystery. He just wouldn't let go.

Then, coming in sight of the two houses—the one Enoch and she lived in and the one he now claimed he intended to finish—she had another thought that made her slow the car to a crawl lest in her fright she lose control of it.

Enoch, she reminded herself, had used the foundation of that old house in building the fireplace and chimney for the new one. Knowing what she now knew about the house itself, did she want to move across the road?

Did Enoch know the history of the old house? She was certain he didn't, or he would have talked about it, but should she ask him? No, she decided. If she did that, she would have to confess she had turned to Lyman for help.

Leave it alone, she told herself. But be on guard every second. Remember what happened to those other two wives!

Enoch was wasting away, Della decided. Two weeks had passed since her conversation with Lyman at the sawmill, and he looked years older. Wasting away? That was how Lyman had described the first of the two men who lived in the old house, wasn't it? And he had died.

"Enoch, I don't like what's hap-

pening to you." She had risen from her chair to turn the TV off and now stood with her back to it, facing him. "It's my fault, I know, for nagging you about finishing the house. But I don't want it finished if it's doing this to you."

"Now, Della, I'm all right. Don't fret yourself."

"You're not all right. Just look at you."

Enoch spread his work-roughened hands, palms up. "It's just that I've been pushing real hard to get the place done, Della. I'll be fine as soon as we move in there."

"Enoch, listen to me. You're worn out." So worn out, Della thought, that you haven't even touched me lately, and that's not like you at all. "Forget about the new house until you get your strength back. We can stand another winter in this one if you'll just patch it up a little."

"No, Della." Oh, Lord, he could be stubborn at times! "I said we're moving over there, and we're going to." Rising, he glanced at the clock on the wall. "I'm going over there now, as a matter of fact."

"At this hour?" It was nearly nine in the evening. "What on earth for?"

"Well, I heard something in the village today." He'd gone there for some lumber. "I heard a rumor that those kids are planning to meet there tonight to initiate someone new into their club."

"Enoch," she said, "those young people haven't once shown up when you expected them. It's part of why you're so tired, the way you waste so much of your sleeping time trying to catch them."

He went, though. And he was still over there when she went to bed at quarter to twelve. What time he returned on this occasion she didn't know, but he was still sleeping deeply when she went downstairs in the morning to fix herself some breakfast.

The phone on the kitchen wall rang

while she was doing the dishes. It was her brother. "Is it okay for me to talk, Sis?" he asked.

"He's asleep again. But like I said before, if I hang up on you, you'll know—"

"All right." There was a crispness in his voice that told her he had something really important on his mind and didn't want to waste any more time. "I've been real busy since I saw you," he went on. "First I had another talk with that fellow in the asylum, that Daryl Mundle."

"Oh?"

"He told me there was a woman living in that old house when he and his wife lived there, Sis. I don't mean family or anything like that. This was an Indian woman, and she was always naked. He thinks it was her who murdered his wife, and he suspects she did the same to Mrs. Casserly, who lived there first. Sis, he also told me there's a cave under that house."

"Oh my God," Della breathed.

"So after I talked to him I went to see my old friend Ev Nembhard. You remember him, at the college? If there's two things he knows about, it's caves and Indians. He said he'd look into things and—"

The sound of a door's being opened upstairs told her Enoch was leaving the bedroom. "He's up," Della whispered in a panic. "Meet me at the sawmill!" Hurriedly she returned the phone to the wall and ran back to the sink.

But Enoch had heard something. When he appeared in the kitchen doorway, he said, "Who you talking to?"

"A woman in the village. She wants me to help her with a dress she's making. Said she'd pay me just to tell her what to do."

She could tell by Enoch's expression that he didn't know whether to believe her or not. But he shrugged and said, "Well, all right. I just wondered."

"What time did you get in last night?"

"About one-thirty, I suppose."

"Did the kids turn up?"

"Not unless they came later."

"Are you planning to go over there and work today? You look awful."

"The work has to be done, Della."

"Enoch," she said, "I don't want to live there!"

"You mean I went and built a whole house for you for nothing?"

"I don't want to live there yet, anyway."

"You will when you see everything tidied up and our furniture in place over there," he predicted. "You'll change your mind then, Della."

At the sawmill Lyman was out of his car and waiting to stoop into hers even before she had brought hers to a halt. Catching hold of her hands, he peered into her face and began talking.

"Like I said, Ev Nembhard promised to look into all this for me, and he did, Sis. First he showed me a map of the cave Mundle talked about. It's a pretty big one, and sure enough part of it runs right under that house where the two women were murdered."

"Does it run under the house we're building?" Della asked, dreading the answer.

"I'm afraid it does. Yes. And listen to what else Ev told me. That cave was used by Indians in some of their ceremonies, he said. Some really strange stories are told about it in a book of Indian lore he has in his collection and showed to me."

Della tried to stop trembling, but couldn't.

"The Indians were a tribe of Algonquins called Micmacs who came here from the St. Lawrence River area," Lyman went on. "And one of the things they did in that cave was to seal a young woman up in it, naked, and leave her there to die."

"Why?" Della moaned.

"It seems she wouldn't leave other women's men alone. Just kept stealing them away. So the elders of the tribe got together and said she had

to be gone away with. Her name was —" Lyman reached into his jacket pocket for a scrap of paper. "Her name was Majawa, and she was said to be a beauty."

"And she's the woman who was living in the old house that burned down?"

"Seems so, doesn't it? The one Mundle talked about was an Indian and always naked. It would seem her spirit, if that's what we're dealing with, kept right on stealing other women's men even after she was put to death for it."

"How do we know if any of this is true?" Della managed.

"Well, it says in Ev's book that a young woman's skeleton was found in the cave years ago. Some fellows exploring it opened up a room that was sealed off with big boulders."

"And now she's after my Enoch," Della sobbed. "Oh my God, Lyman, what should I do?"

"I'd move out if I were you, Sis. Sell that unfinished house if you can. Sell the one you're in, too, because if you go on living there, Enoch will keep seeing the woman somehow."

"And if he won't agree to move?"

"Then leave him."

She drove home dry-eyed but badly shaken by what Lyman had told her. Even Emily noticed something was wrong the moment she entered the house. The Abyssinian was curled up on a chair close to the door, and got to her feet slowly enough but then stood there with her head thrust forward, her bright yellow eyes staring at Della with a strange intensity.

"Where's Enoch?" Della asked. "Over at the new house?"

"Mrreow!"

"Well, all right. I don't want to talk to him yet, anyway. Not till I've decided what to say."

What *should* she say? Should she come right out and tell him everything Lyman had told her? What good would it do if that Majawa creature already had him convinced he couldn't

live without her? Don't be hasty, Della, she told herself. Think about this hard before you do anything at all.

Then at noon, when Enoch came across the road for his lunch, he dropped a bombshell. "It's finished," he said while she poured him a glass of buttermilk. "I already called Aston Townsend and Roy Ewan to come this afternoon and help us move our things over."

The buttermilk missed the glass and spilled on the table, from where it dripped to the floor and was hungrily lapped up by Emily. "This afternoon?" Della gasped.

"Why not? Everything is tidied up and ready. Tonight you'll sleep in the new home I promised you."

And how long will it be, Della wondered, before you have to be out of town some night and I'm left alone there? But already she was having some thoughts on how to handle that situation when it arose.

It really was a nice house when everything was moved over, she told herself—even though the move had been made in such haste that few things were in their proper places. The electricity hadn't been turned on, either, but it would be in a few days, Enoch assured her. They spent that first evening in front of the fireplace, and Della nearly forgot her fears.

But not entirely. Oh, no, not entirely. *Her* Enoch would have made love to her on their first night in a new home, but this one didn't touch her. Not that night or the following two. So when he informed her he would be out of town the next night, she was expecting it and ready.

"Aston Townsend's son over in Vermont has bees, and I want to talk to him. We could make money here with some bees, I believe. Aston's going with me and we'll be staying at his son's overnight." Enoch seemed almost apologetic. "But don't you worry, Della. I'll phone to make sure

you're all right here."

Yes, you'll phone, she thought. And you'll have Aston and his son and his son's wife as witnesses to prove you phoned. And when you come back here the next day and find me dead, you'll have your alibi. That's how she planned it twice before, Enoch. But, of course, you don't know about that, do you?

"It's all right," she told him. "I'll have Emily for company, and those kids won't come around now that we've moved in." If they ever truly did come around, she thought. More likely *she* put all that into your mind so you'd have an excuse to be over here.

But anyway, she silently added, if I don't face up to this now, I'll have to later. So what's to be gained by putting it off?

He left at ten, and she spent the rest of the day rearranging things in the house. In that respect she was glad to have him out of the way, because he'd only have been underfoot. When night came she had to quit, though, because she couldn't carry on by lamplight.

She was tired then, but not too tired to build a fire in the fireplace and go for Enoch's shotgun before settling down in the living room for the evening. With the gun loaded and leaning against her chair, she told herself she only had to keep her wits about her and not be scared.

Emily, the Abyssinian, had been eating her supper in the kitchen. She came into the living room now and sat in front of Della's chair and looked at Della with her yellow eyes. "Mrreow!" she said.

"Meaning you want to be up in my lap?" Della replied. "Well, all right. I'm going to read some more in my cat book, anyway, so I'll share it with you. That is, if I can read in this poor light."

Emily gained her lap in a graceful leap and settled down in a tawny curl, still gazing up at her. The two hands holding the book rested

lightly on the cat's back, so that Emily's head and the book could be looked at together.

"Do you know you have ESP, darling?" Della said. "That means extrasensory perception, it says here. It means you have more than just the usual five senses and can hear things or maybe even see things that I can't. Isn't that interesting?"

Emily's "Mrreow!" meant "Indeed it is," of course.

"And as I told you before, your ancestors in ancient Egypt were looked upon as very special creatures, even long before the time of Christ. Those Egyptians had a sacred goddess whose symbol was a cat very much like you."

"Mrreow!" replied the Abyssinian, meaning, of course, "That's nice to know. Continue, please."

"It says here that almost every family in those bygone days had a cat to protect it from evil," Della went on. "Would you protect me from evil, Emily?"

"Mrreow!"

"Yes, I'm sure you would. But if that woman comes tonight, you needn't bother. I have this." Reaching down, Della stroked the cool barrel of the shotgun. "I know how to use it, too, so don't worry your pretty head about me."

Della continued to turn the book's pages and comment on what she was reading. The cat went on responding. Time passed, and the telephone rang. Gently moving Emily from her lap, Della went to answer it.

"Are you okay, Della?" It was Enoch, of course.

"I'm fine. Just reading a little, and then I'll be going to bed. Did you talk to Aston's son about the bees?"

"I sure did. Watched how he tends to them, too, and it's a thing I'd be pleased to get into. You want to say hello to him, Della? He'd like it if you did, I believe."

"All right," she said, and talked for a while with the man who had the bees, then said goodnight to Enoch and hung up. "Well, Enoch," she said

aloud on her way back to the living room, "now you've got a witness to prove I was alive at nine o'clock and you were miles away in Vermont. That Indian girlfriend of yours is real and truly smart, not a doubt about it. What time is she coming for me, Enoch? But of course you don't know that, do you? You only know what she wants you to know. It took a crazy man in an asylum to figure out the rest of it."

Back in her chair before the fireplace, in which the fire was beginning to die down now, she touched the shotgun again to be sure it was there, and again let the cat leap into her lap. But she was tired now from all the work she had done. And from thinking. And from being apprehensive for so long. Her eyelids began to feel heavy. She had to struggle to keep staring at the fireplace.

It was a good thing she did not let her eyes close. Suddenly a wisp of smoke in the fire began to take on a strange shape. Curling upward from the dying fire, it became something other than woodsmoke. At first the shape was nothing Della could put a name to, though she was wide awake now and rigidly alert. But slowly it filled out and acquired substance and became a young, naked woman with dark, dark hair and eyes. And having become a woman, it stepped out of the fireplace toward her, and she saw a strange-looking knife, a sort of dagger, clutched in its right hand.

Crying out in terror, Della snatched up the shotgun that leaned against her chair. Without even rising from the chair, she put the weapon to her shoulder and, though trembling from head to foot, managed to take aim and squeeze the trigger. The room filled with thunder that rattled the windows. Emily, the Abyssinian, leaped from Della's lap to the floor.

But the blast of twelve-gauge shot went right through the naked Indian woman without even causing her to miss a step.

Della struggled to rise then and

found she could not. Her legs were too paralyzed with fear to respond to her will. The shotgun had fallen from her hands, and the hands now tried to fasten on the chair-arms to push her erect, but they, too, were useless.

Continuing her silent advance with the knife upraised, the Indian woman was no longer a creature made of smoke but a flesh-and-blood intruder with a lovely young face and body. On that lovely face, though, was a smile of triumph that turned *Della's* blood to ice-water.

But in front of *Della's* chair crouched Emily, the Abyssinian, and something was happening to her, too. Something as unreal as what had happened to the woman, but in reverse. Emily was losing her familiar outline. Emily was growing. Emily was changing from a flesh-and-blood cat into a much larger feline that was barely visible. A very much larger feline, on the order of a panther.

With her tapered tail angrily lashing back and forth, this unreal Emily gathered herself into a quivering mass of shadow there on the floor and then suddenly, silently, launched herself at the intruder!

Tearing at the Indian woman's throat, this oversized image of Emily attacked with such fanatical fury that the naked woman fell writhing onto her knees. Fighting for her life, she tried to reach the cat with her dagger. But Emily's fangs sank into her wrist and her fingers went limp and the weapon dropped to the floor.

Strangely, it made no sound when it did so. And neither the woman nor the cat had made any sound at all.

Then Emily's mouth and claws re-

turned to the woman's jugular, and blood spurted. Dark red blood gushed over the floor almost to the chair in which *Della* sat rigid with terror. And as it did so, the woman whose life it was began to revert to a thing of smoke or mist, and slowly disappeared.

Not back into the fireplace, though. She just faded away into nothing, with the huge cat's teeth and claws still slashing at her.

When the woman was no longer there, the phantom cat slowly turned toward *Della* and became Emily again. Emily, the tawny little Abyssinian. Leaping lightly onto *Della's* lap, she sat there and gazed up into *Della's* face with her bright yellow eyes and voiced a soft "Mrreow!" through a mouth that should have been red with blood but wasn't.

Della, recovering slowly from her terror, took a handkerchief from her sweater pocket and wiped the mouth anyway. "Just in case, darling," she murmured. At the same time, she saw that the pool of blood on the floor had disappeared, too. As had the knife.

"You saved me, darling," *Della* said in awe. "Just like the book said you would!"

Emily turned her head to look toward the fireplace for a few seconds. Then her gaze focused on *Della's* face again, and again she said, "Mrreow!"

"Oh, thank you! Thank you, little one!" *Della* cried. "But have you saved Enoch, too? Have you freed him from that awful creature so I can have him back? Please, Emily—have you?"

In reply, the little Abyssinian curled up on her lap and began to purr.

PALE SHADOW



by Lin Carter

I.

They came wearily through the woods, Tara the War Maid and Evalla, the young and lissom girl-child she had rescued from her vile captivity to the horde of Hunza, and who had become her lover. For two days and two nights had they made their way through the Perilous Wood, ever alert for prowling monsters or savage men, but the luck of Xargo seemed to have been with them, for naught had occurred to trouble them on the way hither.

They walked like the lovers they were, arms about each other's waist, and from time to time the little girl nuzzled amorously against Tara's supple nakedness. Yestereve they had loved in a soft bed of moist moss

like velvet: Evalla, usually the passive partner, had for once played the aggressor. Tara had lain back, permitting her little lover to take her hungrily, as she wished. For hours had they loved, finally slumbering, satiated, in close embrace.

Now they entered upon a glade in the Perilous Wood, and paused to inspect it. For a long, low house stood before them; builded all of rough gray stone it was, and roofed with slate, with diamond-paned windows of varicolored glass nestled under overhanging eaves, like half-lidded eyes.

No smoke arose from the two chimneys, no fowl scratched in the fenced henyard; no milk-cattle lowed or ambled in the larger enclosure: yet, somehow, the steading did not seem

uninhabited. Tara still bore with her, after many tribulations, her long knife scabbarded against her thigh. She drew it now, gestured Evalla to walk behind her, and approached the structure. Mayhap they could secure bedding for the night ahead, once Dimming came.

And Dimming was almost fallen.

They approached the house. The little garden had become a weed-patch through neglect; dust scummed the small window-panes. No reply came to her call, and when Tara tested the door, it swung open easily, invitingly.

They entered, Tara in the lead, the long knife naked in her hand. The main room was large and low-ceilinged. Cut wood was stacked on the stone hearth; an old trestle table stood beneath one window. Dust lay thick on every surface, and the rafters had long since become the dominion of spiders.

For all its obvious air of neglect, curiously, the house seemed inhabited. So strong did this feeling grow, that Tara lit a candle and searched every room. Behind the main room were pantry and larder; a wooden stair led to the second storey, where she discovered a large bedroom with a capacious four-poster, and a smaller room with a cot where, perhaps, a servant had slept. There was no one in the house, but still Tara sensed an indefinable presence lurking.

Darkness was upon them. Tara lit a fire on the grate; they found a huge wheel of dried cheese in the pantry; its inner core was still spiced, moist, edible. There were rotten apples in a barrel, but those at the bottom were still sound enough to be eaten. A cupboard held an age-crusted bottle of excellent wine. The two girls feasted by firelight and retired to share the great bed.

But at the door, Evalla paused and turned pale, her huge, lustrous eyes wide and frightened.

"What is it, darling? Come, the bed awaits."

The child shook her head. "I can't go in there," she whispered. "I don't know why; I just can't!"

Tara stared at her. "But . . . where will you sleep?"

"On the little cot in the second room," Evalla breathed.

Tara lay down on the coverlet and left the child to her own devices. She had become too sleepy to discuss the matter; lassitude seeped into her flesh. Perhaps it was the wine . . .

II.

Later, she woke, or seemed to wake. It was like dreaming that you have awakened. For a moment, Tara could not recall what had aroused her from her rest. And then it came again, that touch of an impalpable hand, combing through her fiery mane. It was oddly soothing, and strangely, she could not actually feel the brush of invisible fingers combing through her curls. It was like the insubstantial caress of the breeze, combing long meadowgrass . . .

Something was lying atop her, a ghost of weight: cool, moist, softer than any softness she had ever known. Now those incorporeal fingers were at her bare breasts, fondling, lingering . . . she looked down in vague wonder to see the tender flesh of her breasts indented by the grasp of hands she could not quite actually feel. . . . Then a cool moistness caressed her breasts and captured her thrusting nipples like a ghostly mouth. The warmth of desire flickered through her loins; her thighs parted.

The strangest element in this uncanny visitation was that Tara felt neither fear nor alarm, still deep in the spell of that dreamy lassitude. Something like cool fingers entered the core of her being, then an eager moistness like a phantom tongue. She gasped, moaned, yielded . . .

Some sense of strangeness had

roused Evalla from her rest, too. She went to the doorway of the room that would not permit her to enter in, and cried out faintly, for a pale shadowy shape lay atop Tara's naked body, like a wraith of cool mist. Tara turned her head sleepily to observe the child cringing in the doorway.

"Do not . . . come in . . . darling," she whispered. "Everything is . . . all right . . . go . . . to sleep . . ."

Evalla shrank back, shuddering, then returned to her little room to crouch in a corner fearfully, helpless to intervene. From the other chamber there came to her hearing panting moans, soft cries of pleasure, as Tara's passion mounted under the moving moistness of that pale shadow that made phantasmal love to her body.

III.

With Lambence they woke and rose, both oddly listless. Something seemed

to have drained Tara's vitality, feeding hungrily on her vigor. They broke their fast as if famished, finishing the wine, the apples, and the cheese. Both avoided any mention of the weird events of the dark hours of Dimming. But both were eager to leave this strange house of shadows.

They descended to the main room, and saw for the first time a great painting hung upon the wall. Yesterday the light had been too faint for them to observe it.

It was the portrait of a woman, with cold white skin, sleek ink-black hair, a red voluptuous mouth, and dark, avid eyes. They stared at it, intuitively knowing that the picture was a portrait of the owner of the house.

Evalla shuddered faintly. "She is . . . very beautiful," whispered the child almost jealously. Tara smiled dreamily, then slid her arm around Evalla's slender shoulders.

"Perhaps, but her love is a pale shadow of yours," smiled Tara of the Twilight.

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JUNGLE CURSE



by Charles Hoffman and Marc A. Cerasini

"What would your feelings be, seriously, if your cat or your dog began to talk to you, and to dispute with you in human accents? You would be overwhelmed with horror. I am sure of it. And if the roses in your garden sang a weird song, you would go mad. And suppose the stones in the road began to swell and grow before your eyes, and if the pebble that you noticed at night had shot out stony blossoms in the morning?

"Well, these examples may give you some notion of what sin really is."

—Arthur Machen

"The White People"

The verdant underbrush parted and a man stepped silently into the clearing. His large, powerful frame

stilled as he scanned the open area with wary eyes. The face beneath the wide brim of the bush hat had been burned bronze by the suns and winds of many climes. His thick chest and heavily muscled arms, rigid with tension, were bared where shirt front had been opened and sleeves rolled back.

The large man's bearing bespoke a kinship with the wilds coupled with the tense alertness of an animal who has strayed too far into some rival creature's territory. He remained motionless as his ears strained to catch the slightest noise. Perceiving no sign of danger, he slowly relaxed. Though no stranger to the wild places, it was plain from his bearing that the man found the eternal dusk of the vine-choked African

rain forest to be almost too much for even his steel nerves.

Turning back to the leafy vastness from which he had just emerged, the man gestured for others still concealed there to come forth. There was a rustling in the bush followed by the swish of machetes, and presently the man's two charges came cautiously into the clearing, accompanied by half a dozen native bearers. The other two—a man and a girl—were garbed in safari attire similar to the large man's own, and both wore sun helmets. The girl clinging to the shorter man's arm was young enough to be his granddaughter, but the big man knew otherwise.

"I say, Mr. Gorman," said the smaller white man, "shall we be setting up camp on this spot? It's getting rather late." The speaker looked about sixty, but bore his age well. His eyes were clear, his complexion ruddy, his limbs still strong. When he spoke, the cultured accent of British nobility was unmistakable.

The man called Gorman barked some orders in trade Swahili, and the bearers immediately set down their burdens and began to unpack. Turning to the Englishman, Gorman answered, "This will do. The area is large enough so no big animal can approach unseen. There's plenty of dry wood for fire, and potable water not far away. M'brando there will set up your tent. Now, if you'll excuse me, Lord Farley, I'll be lending the boys a hand."

Later, after the work in the new camp had been completed, Gorman rejoined Lord Farley, who was smoking a pipe beside the roaring campfire. Darkness had come, and the noises of the night animals emanated from the jungle that surrounded them. Both men kept their rifles close at hand. Seating himself on a folding stool, Gorman accepted a tin cup of freshly-brewed coffee from the native who proffered it. The beverage was strong and dark, the way Gorman liked it. He took a deep draught and sighed with satisfaction.

"That M'brando makes a smashing cup of coffee, eh?" commented the Englishman.

Gorman nodded in agreement. "He's promised us a special surprise for dinner. Will your wife be joining us soon?"

"I should imagine so. Ah, here she comes now."

Gorman looked up and saw the girl approaching. Farley's wife, Joan, was an American like himself.

As she drew near, Gorman found himself staring at her once more. She was about average height, fair-skinned, with thick masses of foamy dark brown hair. He judged her age to be about nineteen or twenty, and noted with appreciation how her girlish figure was still ripening, her swelling breasts straining against her blouse with the full firmness of youth. Her hips, however, were those of a woman: wide, rounded, and svelte. Gorman had felt a tension between them since they first met, weeks before, at the Trading Post in Hotobo. He had also found that whenever she was present, it took an effort for him to take his eyes off her. There was some strange, compelling quality about her that he couldn't quite put his finger on, but that drew his gaze to her again and again. When he spoke to her, which was seldom, he could never bring himself to address her as "Lady Farley," yet "Joan" seemed too intimate under the circumstances. Gorman cleared his throat and looked away, toward M'brando and the boys, who were chanting a song of their tribe as they cooked the food.

After dinner, as they all relaxed over more coffee, Farley asked eagerly, "Do you suppose we'll be sighting our quarry soon?"

Gorman shook his head. "I can't make any promises. I've never led a safari this far into the interior before. There's a good chance that this one will be a wild goose chase. We've still time to swing round and head north to the savannah. You'd be

sure to beg a cape buffalo. They make splendid trophies. At least you wouldn't go home empty-handed."

It was Farley's turn to shake his head. "Why, that would never do! I swore to bag the Devil Leopard, and I've simply got to try for it. Surely you can understand that it would take more than a cape buffalo to impress the chaps back at the Adventurers' Club. I imagine you must have had a few adventures yourself, eh, Mr. Gorman?"

"A few." Gorman's face became thoughtful as he stared into the fire, letting the conversation lapse. Inwardly, his brain seethed. He vowed to himself that this would be his last safari. John Gorman may have sent the souls of countless men into the dark, but the wanton slaughter of animals for sport sickened him. He had agreed to lead the Farley party because he had lingered too long at the outpost, where the drums of the nearby river tribes boomed through many a sweltering night and threatened to drive him mad. Exactly how long he had been in Africa Gorman could not remember, but it seemed like centuries. When this was over and he had Farley's money in his pocket, he would head straight for the coast and board the first steamer to anywhere.

At length, Gorman spoke: "Bagging the Devil Leopard may be more a matter of luck than tracking skill. The natives say the Leopard's a demon, and aside from those native legends we don't have much to go on. Few blacks ever come this way. Fewer whites. The Leopard has been sighted on rare occasions, once by a white man whom I believed. He swore, cold sober, that the natives' descriptions were accurate, even the part about the red eyes. If you could bag him, Lord Farley, your reputation would be assured."

Farley's wife broke in, "Why is that, Mr. Gorman?"

Gorman felt a delicious thrill run along his spine when she called him

by name, even as he cursed himself for it.

"Any hunter will tell you that the leopard is the true king of the beasts," he replied. "Oh, lions and tigers may be bigger, but pound-for-pound the leopard is stronger than either. And more ferocious. Lions kill for food, but well-fed leopards often kill just for practice. I handled the big cats when I was a kid with the circus, and saw plenty of tamed lions and tigers. But no one has ever been able to tame a leopard. Now, the Devil is supposedly a black leopard as big as a lion—quite a trophy in anyone's book."

"What's the difference between a leopard, a black leopard, and a black panther?" the girl asked.

"They're all the same animal. A black panther is just a leopard with an all-black pelt. Examine the pelt closely and you can even see the spots."

The girl seemed to ponder this as she fell into a pouting silence. Gorman studied her face, so beautiful and provocative in the firelight. Large hazel eyes glinted with hard shallowness above the small snub nose of a tomboy and the full, perpetually-pouting lips of a succubus. These features were pleasantly arranged, though they often displayed the blasé expression of a bored hat-check girl. To Gorman she seemed at once singular and commonplace. He begrudgingly admitted to himself that he found her fascinating.

Gorman's reverie was broken when the object of his attention leaned towards him, rested her chin on her dainty fist, stared him directly in the eyes, and said coolly, "You spoke of a native legend. Tell me about it."

Gorman hesitated for an instant, not wishing to be drawn into a conversation with the woman. He was recalling the grim story he had heard from a native pack-boy who spoke Swahili poorly, and stumbled over each word as he related the tale. In many

ways it was a typical local folktale. The American had heard many, but to this particular story he had listened with horrified fascination. And when the boy had finished the tale, as the fires dimmed and the sun rose over the savannah, Gorman had sworn, not for the first time or the last, that he would flee this soul-scorching land.

Then, for reasons the adventurer could not explain, he turned to face the woman, and told her the tale: "There was once a tribe that lived hereabouts. They were called the Wazuzu. Many years ago a chief of theirs named N'Bolu led a portion of the tribe away from their ancestral lands, to this country. They resettled in a place the other tribes call the 'Haunted Hills', an area shunned by all until the coming of N'Bolu and his people. There the Wazuzu began to practice head-hunting and cannibalism.

"Now, this N'Bolu must have been an outcast, expelled with his followers from the original tribe. He's said to have delighted in human sacrifice, torture, and depravities of all sorts. Eventually, the dark gods of the jungle tired of N'Bolu's follies and transformed him into the Devil Leopard because he possessed the soul of a killer beast. The boy who told the story claimed N'Bolu was transformed into 'the shape of sin itself' and would haunt this land forever."

Finishing the tale, Gorman returned the girl's stare. She had listened intently, wetting her lips from time to time with the tip of her tongue. Now Gorman sat regarding her coolly, noting once more how her eyes reflected the glowing embers of the dying campfire.

Abruptly a gruff, masculine voice grated in Gorman's ears: "Damned interesting story, eh?" It was Lord Farley. The adventurer had completely forgotten him.

"Those bloody natives sound rather dangerous," the Englishman continued.

"Do you suppose we'll be running afoul of them?"

"No one has seen any of the Wazuzu in years," answered Gorman. "Hopefully they're extinct. The Haunted Hills are still a few days' trek from here, though, and this is about as far as any white men have ever penetrated. But the hill region is where you're likely to bag the Devil Leopard . . . always assuming, of course, that the Devil doesn't bag you."

That night, Gorman thrashed on his cot, his troubled sleep haunted by nightmare phantasms. He started awake drenched in cold sweat, and lay still listening to the jungle noises. He thought immediately of the girl Joan, as if sensing she were somehow to blame for his discomfort. He imagined her naked.

Cursing, Gorman rose and dressed. He left his tent and relieved the bearer on watch. Better pacing about the camp, he thought, than lying on that damned cot. Outside there was no relief; the air was warm and still. The nighted jungle pressed in on all sides, and Gorman mused that all manner of abhorrent shapes could be slinking through its inky depths even now.

He tried unsuccessfully to keep his thoughts from straying back to the girl. Yet, unbidden, her naked image kept superimposing itself on the black jungle background. It beckoned lewdly to him, like the most common of strumpets. As Gorman brooded on the images that writhed in his brain and danced before his eyes, a strange sick feeling came over him and settled in the pit of his stomach.

When morning came, the safari broke camp and pushed on into the jungle. Progress was slow. The dense vegetation seemed to grasp them in its cloying grip. Great-boled trees festooned with vines towered silently on all sides, their branches forming

a dark green canopy high above. The only sunlight to touch the verdant floor of the rain-forest was the long golden bars that came slanting through gaps in the leaves overhead. The forest everywhere else was shrouded in everlasting twilight. Over all an ominous silence hung like a weight, broken only occasionally by the plaintive cries of brightly plumed birds or the chatter of monkeys capering in the trees. They had entered a lost world as old as time itself.

As they made their way through the jungle expanse, Gorman was acutely aware of their remoteness from the artificial world men had made. This primeval forest had seldom known the tread of man, had never known his machines, and would never know the pretensions of his civilized laws, philosophies, and customs. The jungle seemed to diminish and envelop everything that was not a part of it. Gorman thought of himself and the girl who obsessed him, and of the inscrutable fate that had brought them together in this primitive setting.

Gorman shook his head, cursing softly under his breath. He was not normally given to such obsessions and morbid soul-gropings, but the Dark Continent had slowly wrought changes in him so that his brain was now constantly acrawled with strange whispering doubts and black, bitter broodings. Africa was the back door to Hell, he thought grimly, a zone of darkness in the world where man's nobler aspirations were rendered ludicrous. Here layers of reason, control, and sanity were brutally stripped away to lay bare the howling bestiality that lurked beneath man's placid exterior.

That evening they camped on a grassy knoll where the jungle thinned. The place was smaller than their previous campsite; the surrounding jungle pressed in more closely. Once more Gorman's sleep was broken by dimly glimpsed dream images that leered at him obscenely and seemed

to mock him.

Gorman rose before dawn once more, and busied himself preparing breakfast. Later, when the gear was being packed away, M'brando came to the white man and warned him that the other bearers were growing restless. The dreaded Haunted Hills were now too close for their liking, and they threatened to desert the safari and forfeit their pay. Gorman snarled harshly that any act of insubordination would be met with a sound thrashing and curtly dismissed the black from his presence.

As he stood fuming over this turn of events, Joan appeared at his shoulder and asked pointedly what had transpired between him and the native. The sight of the girl swept all else from his mind. She looked radiant in the morning sun, which seemed to highlight the haughtiness of her features. After a few seconds of surprise, he found his tongue and explained the situation, adding that he had everything under control. "You're sure of that, Mr. Gorman?" she said presumptuously. Feeling no little anger at her brazen hauteur, Gorman remarked sourly that he was positive.

The girl turned and strode away on well-formed legs that looked strong. As her figure receded, the man's burning gaze locked on her round buttocks, visible in the tight safari pants. Gorman gritted his teeth. The thought came unbidden to him that those firm buttocks begged to be spanked like those of a spoiled child, despite the fact that their provocative swaying motion was one he usually associated with more knowledgeable women.

Gorman felt his mouth go dry. The sick feeling was back, and it brought with it a furious rage. That little slut, Gorman thought, how dare she question him like that! By all rights a woman like that should be on her knees servicing him. Gorman felt his soul grow black with rage, and he imagined himself taking her by force—

brutally—from behind, his every thrust bruising her tender flesh.

Gorman tore off his bush hat and shook his head to clear it. He raked fingers through black locks drenched with sweat and replaced the hat. The most galling part of it all, he thought angrily, was that he was certain that Joan wanted him just as much as he wanted her. He had held many women in his iron embrace, and there was no mistaking the fire that came into Joan's eyes when she looked at him. The only trouble was that she didn't seem to be consciously aware of the attraction. Her own experience had been too limited for her to fully understand the promptings of her vibrant young body. Gorman cursed. He could see the desire on her face. Why the hell couldn't she understand it for what it was? Instead she took every opportunity to bait him.

A little later, when the gear was packed, the safari took up its trek once more. Gorman's massive bicep swelled as he swung his machete, chopping away the dense jungle growth that barred their way. With every slash Gorman seethed with rage and longed to bury the blade in a human throat. The day was hot and muggy, and his garments clung to him uncomfortably. At the head of the column, Gorman could not see the girl behind him, but he thought of her all day long. His musings became more vile. By the end of the day his arms and shoulders were stiff and sore.

Camp was set in a narrow space still smaller than the previous evening's site. M'brando prepared a tasty stew of dried zebra meat and tubers, but Gorman did not partake of it. He retired early to his tent, and this time he slept soundly.

When he awoke, it was the middle of the night. He did not know what had awakened him. Sensing a note of discord in the air, Gorman rose and pulled on pants and boots. He slipped quietly out of the tent.

The camp was silent, the boy on

watch nodding by the dying campfire. He thought about kicking the watch awake and pacing the perimeter of the camp—but it was then that Gorman looked toward the Farleys' tent. A small kerosine lamp burned within, casting clearly-defined silhouettes against the canvas. He could see them—see them both. Farley was on his back. Joan was astride him, riding him.

How long Gorman stood there and watched he did not know. He could not look away. The sick feeling washed over him and he felt an icy hand inside him clawing at his vitals. Gorman's whole body trembled as with an ague. His fists clenched involuntarily, the knuckles turning bone-white. His eyes narrowed and his lips writhed back to bare gnashing teeth. Now sounds from the tent were reaching Gorman's ears—sighs and soft moans from the girl, a hoarse rasping noise from the old man. Another chill wave of nausea swept over Gorman, leaving him shaking and drenched with sweat.

By an intense effort of will, Gorman tore his eyes from the scene and stumbled back to his tent. There he ripped through his belongings until he discovered the bottle of whiskey he had brought along. It was almost full. He drained it in four draughts, then smashed the bottle. Spurning the dubious comfort of his cot, he cast himself on the hard ground next to it and shortly passed out.

By the time Gorman came to, the sun had been up for several hours. He rose wearily and splashed water from his canteen onto his face. Donning his shirt, he exited the tent.

Immediately he sensed something wrong. The native bearers were nowhere in sight. Looking about the camp, he saw the girl before she saw him. The dissatisfied expression on her face was replaced by one of surprise when she noticed him approaching.

Gorman spoke first, before she could begin to admonish him for ris-

ing so late. "So," he said, "the boys have all deserted us."

Joan's lips curled petulantly as she nodded, confirming Gorman's suspicion.

Gorman scanned the camp, then asked, "Where's your husband?"

"He set out early after the Leopard," she replied softly.

"Alone?"

"M'brando is with him. The others are gone. They were afraid. Clayton said that you'd break off the hunt now. That's why he took M'brando and went out after sunrise."

Cursing, Gorman fastened his gun-belt and snatched up a rifle. "Which direction did they go?" he snapped.

A few minutes later, Joan led Gorman into the jungle in the direction taken by the Englishman and the native. Before long he picked up their tracks. At length, the man and woman came upon some shallow hills, densely wooded. They climbed for a bit, still following the easily discernible tracks of those ahead. They broke through a line of trees and descended into a valley where the morning mist had not yet dispersed.

A sigh escaped Joan's lips as they stepped into a quiet glade crowded with exotic blossoms. An unreal, dreamlike aura permeated the scene. Gorman seemed not to notice as he scanned the spongy sward for signs of the others' passing.

Finding the path taken by Farley and M'brando, Gorman continued across the glade. Suddenly, he was aware that Joan was no longer following him. He halted in his tracks and turned about. Joan stood facing him, her eyes burning into his. She looked feverish, and was trembling slightly. Her bosom heaved with the quickness of her breath. She seemed unable to speak, but, for Gorman, no words were necessary.

She wanted him. She waited for Gorman to seize her in his powerful arms and take her—then and there. They both realized it instantly. Her youthful passion, long dormant, had

abruptly and mysteriously flared into full, turbulent life. Gorman's own lust, shunted aside temporarily, came roaring back to him.

Gorman dropped the rifle he carried on his shoulder. His sinewy hands reached for the girl and pulled her roughly against him. Her yielding body clung to his as his massive arms encircled her possessively. She belonged to him now, at long last, and Gorman would soon make her completely his.

Her moist lips drew his like a magnet—closer and closer. Gorman's heart pounded in his breast as the girl's lips parted to admit his tongue. They were so close now he could feel her hot sweet breath in his own mouth. His head swam in a maelstrom, his vision blurred, and he felt the warm wetness as contact was made and her lips brushed his. . . .

Then suddenly, jarringly, from deep in the jungle, they heard shouts, an eerie semi-human scream, and the staccato report of gunshots from nearby. Gorman exploded into instant action, tearing free of the girl's embrace and snatching up the fallen rifle in one deft movement. In the space of a heartbeat he was racing at full stride toward the source of the commotion. The passion that had lit his eyes only moments before was replaced by a grim readiness to do battle with whatever threat had emerged from the loathsome jungle.

2.

Gorman rushed headlong into the densely grown rain-forest, surging through the roots and fronds that entangled his feet and clawing at vines and branches that slapped his face. Joan followed closely, reeling in her gait as she endeavored to keep up with him. Tearing his machete from its sheath, Gorman hacked through the brush that obstructed him. Within minutes, the pair emerged into another large clearing, this one the

scene of nightmarish carnage.

Lord Farley lay disemboweled beneath the bleeding carcass of a monstrous black beast that could only be the Devil Leopard. The creature was huge, bigger than any lion Gorman had ever seen, and so black it seemed a piece of solid night trespassing into the day. The fangs arrayed in its gaping red maw were the size of daggers; its razor-sharp talons were still embedded in the human form beneath it. Hunter and prey had perished together, and in death the bodies and limbs of both seemed merged into a single grotesque being, like some half-man/half-beast of mythology.

M'brando stood trembling nearby, his rifle still smoking in his hands. He nodded weakly to Gorman when the white man entered the glade. Gorman approached warily, studying the creature. Joan clung close to him, her face a mask of confused terror. Gorman could tell by the locations of the Leopard's wounds that Farley had sent at least two rounds directly through its heart, and that M'brando had hit other vital spots. Yet the fire in the monster's blood-red eyes was only now beginning to dim. Gorman was struck by the notion that the unholy life-force that had animated the thing's body dwarfed the life that pulsed in his own, or in any other creature of nature.

Gorman felt a chill crawling along his spine. His head cocked, he listened intently. The adventurer noticed that the forest, which had erupted with the shrieks of birds following the gunfire, had grown as still and silent as a Pharaoh's tomb. He looked up. Dozens of painted faces leered at them from the bush, the sub-human visages of some split by grins that revealed filed teeth. The white man knew with grim certainty that these were the Wazuzu, come, no doubt, to avenge the death of their god.

M'brando nervously inserted fresh ammunition into his rifle, while Gor-

man thrust his machete point-first into the ground and raised his own weapon. The Wazuzu did not fan out and surround the small party, but broke screaming from the bush when they knew their presence was known. Gorman and M'brando opened fire, dropping those in front. The others continued their charge undaunted, leaping and waving their arms like madmen. Gorman, making every bullet count, sent shots through groups of two and three bunched tightly together, while M'brando picked off those who came closest.

By now the howling pack of savages was upon them. His ammunition spent, Gorman pushed the girl behind him and stepped forward. He swung his heavy rifle like a club, felling several more foes before hurling the splintered stock into the face of yet another. Snatching up the machete, he thrust it into the breast of a savage closing in from the left, even as he drew his sidearm.

Gorman fired from the hip, sending a slug tearing through the guts of the nearest Qazuzu while his slicing machete kept others at bay. Raising his pistol to eye level, Gorman blasted a painted face into ruin, then another, and another. . . .

Black bodies now littered the sward, but the bestial head-hunters continued to pour from the bush. M'brando had exhausted his ammunition and grappled with his attackers hand to hand, brandishing his rifle as a club as Gorman had done. The girl Joan cowered in helpless fear behind the pair throughout the attack. Gorman had been counting the shots he fired and knew he had one bullet left; he was saving it for Joan. He could not allow a woman of his race to be taken alive and defiled by these devils. Gorman knew that within minutes the Wazuzu would overwhelm them, like a pack of hyena dragging down a wounded buffalo. Now that the firesticks no longer spoke thunder, the Wazuzu were standing their ground, hurling spears. As the deadly shafts

rained about Gorman and his companions, he realized their deaths were but moments away. He pressed the muzzle of his revolver against the girl's head, but before he could fire the shot there was a white flash of agony as a spearhead grazed his skull, laying open his scalp. . . .

The next thing Gorman was aware of was running . . . running. He felt strong black arms holding him up and heard M'brando's voice in his ear exhorting him to greater speed.

"B'wana! B'wana! We must flee! Paesae! Paesae!"

As Gorman's vision cleared he looked down, saw his own running feet. M'brando guided him between trees and over difficult terrain. From behind them came the sounds of pursuit. Gorman ran blindly on, trusting M'brando's knowledge of the region. The big native led him deep into a marshy area and steered him clear of treacherous bogs they hoped would ensnare the pursuing headhunters.

Their flight through the swamps lasted the rest of the day, all that night, and most of the following day. The headhunters broke off the pursuit sometime before the morning of the second day. At length the beleaguered pair came to a village of friendly natives that M'brando had visited in times past.

Gorman collapsed almost immediately upon reaching sanctuary. The wound on his head had begun to fester, and in the swamps he had contracted one of the ravaging jungle diseases that decimate white men in the tropics. Within a few hours he was raving in the throes of feverish delirium, the sweat pouring from his body as his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. His brain afire, Gorman imagined that he was being roasted alive over hot coals, or being scourged with wire whips until his flesh fell away in bloody ribbons.

The white man was sheltered in an empty hut while the malady ran its

course, and many days later, after his fever finally broke, Gorman was still too weak to sip water from a cup held to his lips. And although the fever had vanished, many of its phantoms lingered. He knew that he had never fired that last shot—he knew that the girl Joan had been torn from his very grasp and taken from him by a race of devils. Now, as he lay helpless, faint spectres hovered near, leering, whispering, mocking. . . .

He was personally tended by the chief's daughter, a strapping young wench whose naked hide glistened like oiled ebony. The native girl dressed Gorman's wounds, cleansed him, and even fed him. Because he was barely able to swallow, the girl chewed his food into a thin pulp and then passed it through lips pressed tightly against his. The black girl's superbly formed body, which Gorman often glimpsed as she went about her tasks naked or near-naked, exuded a strength and vitality that increased his sense of debilitating helplessness.

But Gorman's fierce vitality reasserted itself, and he recovered his strength gradually over a period of several weeks. During that time M'brando departed to rejoin his own people, and with many tears and entreaties begged the American to accompany him. But the white man knew what he had to do, and so bade his only friend in this cursed land farewell. And after M'brando departed, Gorman rose and, leaning on the strong breast of his nurse, took himself to the hut of the village witch-doctor. Gorman squatted down beside the ancient wizard and they spoke in trade Swahili for many hours.

Then came the day when Gorman was well enough to leave the village. His former nurse came to bid him farewell. Her broad smile told him she was more than gratified to see him fit. The open lure of her brazen posture was so blatant an invitation that only a blind idiot could

misread it. But Gorman would have none of her. He knew that a savage coupling with this proud young animal could only aggravate, rather than soothe, the complex desires and frustrations that lay curdled within him.

The first day he could walk unassisted, Gorman set out once more in the direction of the Haunted Hills. He was certain that Joan was a living captive of the Wazuzu, for during his conversation with the witch-doctor he had learned that the headhunters awaited the full moon to perform their ghastly human sacrifices. The next full moon was scant days away, and Gorman knew he had little time to reach the hill country and, somehow, rescue the white girl. He could not leave her to such a fate, but in truth he would have crossed a continent to reach her even had she been safe within the bosom of her family.

Gorman followed the trail he and his party had cut weeks before, and soon melted into the dim shadow-world of the swamps. He took with him only a native bow and some arrows and a long, stout spear. He went alone, asking none of the natives to accompany him to the forbidden region. He had no plan other than a vague notion of stealing into the Wazuzu village unseen and spiriting the girl away once more. It did not matter that his reckless plan was likely to gain him naught, save a hideous death by torture.

Deep in the swamps, the thoughts and feelings of humanity receded from the forefront of Gorman's mind, which remained fixed on a single immediate objective. He became truly a part of the jungle for the first time, and glided through its shadowy depths as naturally as any of its other savage denizens.

Shades of evening were darkening the sky when Gorman reached the environs of the Haunted Hills. An eerie wind moved through the upper branches of the trees, and a bloated full moon rode a wild sky. Enormous bats

floated past on silent, leathery wings. Great serpents slithered over fallen trees. The entire jungle seemed quick with unsuspected life. The moon cast its pallid radiance over all, lighting the open spaces and warping the shadows into bizarre and alien configurations.

Through a break in the jungle growth, Gorman sighted the black wall of the hills looming against the night sky. He halted momentarily, studying the jagged line of the foothills to determine the area of easiest access. Then he continued on his way, clawing blindly through some dense foliage. It was then that Gorman felt something long and thick stir beneath him.

Looking down, Gorman's eyes widened in sick horror as he beheld a gigantic snake—a huge constrictor, perhaps twenty feet in length—gliding from its place of concealment. Terrified, he attempted to leap back, but the serpent had already ensnared his feet in sinewy coils he could not kick free of. Like scaled lightning, the snake slithered upwards over the man's body, encircling his waist. Dropping his spear, useless in such close quarters, Gorman made a grab for the serpent just below its wedge-shaped head, but it eluded his clutching grasp by darting behind him and downwards once more.

Gorman staggered with the weight of the enormous serpent, struggling in vain as it threw more coils around his waist and hips. He felt a crushing pressure about his loins as the snake constricted. Clawing desperately at the scaly coils, Gorman was unable to free himself from the writhing flesh that held him prisoner. Groping downwards, he was finally able to seize the snake's upper body as its flat head emerged from between his legs. He pulled the head away from his body with both hands, drawing the monster's upper length out and stretching it taut in front of him. The coils about him tightened and the snake's tail thrashed

wildly in the brush behind him.

Gorman's pulse hammered in his temples and the muscles of his arms stood out in great cords as he sought to control the writhing of the monster serpent. His grip tightened on its thick, sinewy bulk as he sought to hold it steady. The coils contracted once more, and Gorman toppled to the lichen-covered earth. On the ground, man and reptile rolled back and forth as Gorman strove to crush the snake's horrible head.

Gorman was beating the snake's head with his fist when their combined thrashing plunged them into a pool of deadly quicksand. The man momentarily felt the coils about him loosen and slip away, only to find himself in no less grave a predicament. The mire was sucking him down fast and he looked about desperately for a means of escape. Reaching up he was able to grasp the overhanging branch of a nearby bush. Gorman hauled himself hand-over-hand along the length of the branch, reaching the edge of the pool just as the plant's roots tore free of the sandy soil.

Pulling himself from the mire, Gorman came upon his spear, which had somehow been broken in half during his battle with the snake. Bow and arrows were gone—undoubtedly lost in the bog. Gorman rose unsteadily and staggered away; the fever seemed to return and pounded his weary brain. Gorman, from his conversation with the witch-doctor, suspected the serpent was yet another incarnation of N'Bolu's spirit, come to claim him as it had Farley. For the first time in weeks, Gorman felt a savage satisfaction; for he had sent the demon back to hell unfulfilled.

The moon was at its zenith by the time Gorman had ascended the foothills and lurked outside the village of the Wazuzu. From his vantage point, Gorman could see no sign of movement or activity within. Venturing closer, he was puzzled to find the village deserted. All signs in-

dicated that the village was inhabited; the huts had been kept in repair, tools and weapons lay about, there was evidence everywhere of tasks half-completed. But of the headhunters there was no sign. It was as though they had faded away like vapors.

Dazed, weary, and covered with grime, John Gorman wandered through the empty hamlet like the last man alive at the end of the world. A weird, ghostly light flickering between the abandoned huts caught his attention, and he followed it to its source. In the center of the village stood a loathsome fertility idol, its features obscenely exaggerated. Before the idol a bonfire burned. Gorman stared in amazement as the twisting flames changed color with each passing second—from orange to crimson to violet to blue.

Smoke began to rise from the unnatural blaze, its pungent scent filling Gorman's nostrils. His head whirled as the whole world went rushing away from him. There was silence, then the sound of roaring winds as the world came rushing back. The shifting colors of the bonfire seemed deeper, richer, more intense now, as did the moon and sky above, the ground beneath his feet, the village itself and the jungle beyond. The lurid glare of the blaze sent disturbing shadows wavering about the idol, which now seemed endowed with life and evil intelligence.

Gorman turned from the grotesque idol and moved slowly away. Feeling himself drawn to a nearby hut, he sensed somehow that surcease from the cravings that had long tormented him waited within. He paused nervously before the door of the hut, then pushed it open and entered.

The hut's interior was vast, far larger than seemed possible from the outside. Sputtering candles of human fat cast a wan yellowish glow over rows of shrunken heads that dangled hideously from the rafters. Gorman took no heed of the grisly,

dwarfish objects, however, not even the one that bore so horrid a resemblance to the late Lord Farley. In the center of the hut, a slim white figure waited.

It was Joan. She was lounging on the pelt of the Devil Leopard, gazing up at him. Save for a few bangles and ornaments of beaten gold she was naked. Gorman's pulse pounded in his temples. The girl lay sprawled on the glossy black pelt in an incredibly lewd posture, one nowoman could self-consciously assume. She looked as though a dozen virile men had just exhausted themselves between her thighs, and was smiling like the Devil's mistress. Oddly, it was the way Gorman had always imagined her.

The instant he laid eyes on her, Gorman felt flushed with hot blood that raced through his veins like liquid hellfire. The cloying garments that clung to him suddenly felt intolerable, and he hurriedly began to strip them away. Buttons and buckles seemed to resist his fumbling; in a frenzy he clawed at the clothing, tearing it from his body. A moment later he towered naked over the girl. Most of the grime from the mire clung to his garments; his nude body was only slightly soiled.

The jungle, the Wazuzu, and the danger were all forgotten as Gorman stood on wide-braced legs, exulting in the moment like a laughing young god. His every muscle tensed, standing out in well-defined relief on his powerful frame. His proud manhood jutted forward at right angles from his hard-muscled loins. In every respect he epitomized the virile human male—not at all like the wasted, gibbering apparition that was to stumble out of the jungle days later before the astonished traders at a remote British outpost.

The girl rose, still smiling, from her pallet of fur. She seemed to float as she approached Gorman. Standing before him, she caressed his broad chest with one tiny pink hand

while the other darted out and seized his wrist in a vise-like grip that made him wince. Her smile spread wide, revealing teeth filed to needle-sharp points. And she spoke.

She spoke in the deep, guttural voice of a large, powerful man! Gorman's hackles rose and icy sweat broke out on the small of his back as his desire withered away. The thing he had thought was Joan held him in an iron grip he could not break free of and continued to speak, talking to him in a man's voice—impossibly, absurdly, hideously. Gorman tried to wrench his arm free with all his might, but could not. All the while that voice assaulted his ears. The thing that held him in its clutches spoke English—that much Gorman could remember later, though he was never able to recall exactly what it said to him. The sound of the words was so loathsome to him that he was not cognizant of their meaning.

Gorman shrieked aloud, and with his free hand rained what should have been skull-crushing blows upon the monster. As the awful masculine voice continued to rumble from those full, red woman's lips, he felt as if a door had swung open onto unplumbed gulfs of nightmare and madness. He knew with dread certainty that he was in the presence of a cosmic obscenity, and that his life, soul, and sanity depended on breaking free and running far, far away.

Desperately he lashed out more violently, smashing the grinning face again and again, until he could feel flesh and bone cave in under his hammering fist. Redoubling his efforts, Gorman smote at the girlish form, smashing arms, shoulders, face, neck, breasts. Finally, after an eternity of bitter, hellish struggle, he felt the grip that still imprisoned him loosen slightly. With blinding speed he pulled his hand free as though withdrawing it from a nest of scorpions.

Continued on p. 9

THE GIFT

by Duane Rimel

Her name was Seleena Barnes, and everyone in Hampdon knew her by sight or reputation. Of course rumors abound in the ancient village, mouldering away beside the sinister Snake River. Those nearby grim and rocky hillsides abound with rattlesnakes, and these would not be mentioned at all had such creatures not entered into her life in a most unusual manner.

Seleena and her husband came as young people to the village, renting a house not far from the forbidding and ancient edifice once belonging to Exer Jones, the infamous old former pirate who had died so mysteriously many years before.

Nathan Barnes had good employment downriver in Croydon, some seven miles distant, and even in later years, when he grew affluent, he refused to buy a motor. But he did purchase the property he had formerly rented.

Meanwhile his young and voluptuous wife Seneela was acquiring a considerable reputation; men from out of town came to call on her during the daylight hours, one or two at a time, and obviously for one thing: fleshly pleasures. She seemed to thrive on this questionable activity, paying no attention to all the gossip that raged through the whole township.

People who knew Nathan could scarcely believe he was unaware of his sensual wife's pastime, although it was later learned that she collected very considerable fees for her expertise in the bedroom arts. The women of the village were shocked and

outraged; there was talk of lynching and torture for her awful deeds. The village marshal could do nothing. No proof existed. Local gentlemen dared not cross the threshold, although several apparently wanted to.

Seleena's appearance in the village stores always created a new round of gossip. It was the way she walked, the sway of her bosom inside her blouse. One elderly lady whose own past was questionable had often remarked that the women of Hampdon were merely envious, that the bolder ones wished they could behave the same way were it not for public censure.

That they could lose their husbands in the bargain needed no mention. Mind you, in broad daylight! What is the world coming to?

Nathan earned his living as a sign writer and sculptor, and it gradually became known that he carved various objects for very high fees. His customers were mostly from back East, where art appeared to be more deeply appreciated than in the raw, newer West.

Every workday morning he rode the bus to Croydon, and every evening he boarded it for the trip home. One day, on his walk to the place where the bus picked him up, along with other working villagers, he stumbled and sprained an ankle.

He rested a while in the shade on an old bench, nursing his pain. He dozed. Finally, around noon he walked back toward home. He was feeling lightheaded, the story goes, and was quite surprised, on reaching the bor-

der of his lot, to see a shiny new car parked in front of his house.

What happened next is related by a curious neighbor lady who lived across the street. Nathan walked up the pathway to the front door, appeared to listen intently. He then walked around to the east side of the structure where the bedroom was situated.

He returned to the street and walked back toward the village center. The neighbor claimed he showed no anger; he appeared to be in deep thought. The next day a truck appeared in front of the Barnes home and two workers were seen removing effects which belonged to Nathan.

It is reliably recorded that he never again came to Hampdon.

Seleena continued to carry on her questionable trade; she wore expensive clothes and was often gone for days at a time. It was at this juncture in her life that, on a trip to the village center, a boy carrying a live bullsnake as a pet came face to face with Seleena.

Her scream of terror brought tradesmen to the doors of their stores. She had fainted. There was some reluctance among passersby to go help her, as she rested in a somewhat suggestive pose, flat on her back. Her skirt had somehow slithered up to expose her lower limbs . . .

A few weeks later a fancy delivery van was seen to arrive at the Barnes home, and a gaudily wrapped parcel, as large as a hatbox, was delivered to Seleena's door.

For what transpired next we have again only an account from the curious woman who lived across the street. She was outside watering flowers when a scream, the like of which she had never heard before, came eerily from the Barnes abode.

In mid-afternoon a shiny new vehicle drew up in front and a snappily dressed man walked to the front door. No one came to answer the knocking. The man waited, and finally moved inside. In less than a minute he came rushing out, climbed in his car, and

flew away, tires howling on the patched and uneven pavement.

The neighbor watching all this did not remember the license number of the car. Finally, however, as evening came on and no lights appeared in the Barnes house, the lady did call the town marshal. An hour later a Croydon undertaker arrived, along with various other town officials.

Seleena was dead.

As reported in the Hampdon weekly *Advertiser* a few days later, she had suffered a severe shock, brought on by the contents of a most unusual gift she had received earlier in the day. One man who saw it left town a week later because the nearness of rattlesnakes to the village boundaries made him uncomfortable.

The only halfway reliable witness, who would not talk to the editor of the local weekly, was coroner Ed Janson. He said the gift box contained a remarkable object that resembled two quite ordinary things—a snake's head and the "head" of a penis.

Delvers into erotica will agree that the similarity of the two is obvious . . . if the glans on the penis is swollen.

Janson said, further, that the lid of the gift box was spring-loaded and the carved object inside also contained a coiled spring, so that when the box was lifted, the offensive snakelike thing had leaped out.

Villagers knew instantly who had sent the gift. A few years later word reached Hampdon that Nathan had found himself a new young wife. His fame had grown, and he moved back East.

Several weeks after Seleena's demise the Barnes home burned to the ground. There were whispers about arson, but nothing was ever proven. Today Seleena lies in the village burying ground in an oddly marked grave. Carved mysteriously on a headstone that appeared from no one knows where is the image of a snake's head. No name, no dates.

Villagers know, and that is enough.

THE HARLOT

by Robert E. Howard

Mrs. Crown was a dame of the town,
A housewife in good repute;
Margie Lore was a brazen whore,
A fact none might refute.

A wild carouse in the bawdy house
When the pious dames burst in,
For Mrs. Crown had led them down
To clear the town of sin.

Young Margie Lore fled through a door
Pursued by Mrs. Crown
Who tripped and felled her, raised and held her
And took her bloomers down.

PARIS... THE PLACE
PIGELLE DISTRICT

Julie de Grandin

PSYCHIC SLEUTH

in
**"Paris
NiteLife"**
BY WILL MURRAY
AND MIKE HARRIS

WELCOME
TO THE
Café MAURIS
NOIR, M'sieur...
TABLE FOR ONE?

JULIE! WHAT ARE YOU
DOING--

TROY?!

HUSH!
I'm undercover...

YOU REMEMBER LYNETTE
OLIVER? SHE WAITRESSED
HERE. LYNETTE
VANISHED
TWO DAYS
AGO...

HARRIS



... BUT I THINK SHE'S STILL HERE

YEAH?! AND WHERE DO YOU THINK THOSE TOUGHS ARE GOING -- TO POWDER THEIR NOSES??

... SOMEWHERE!

THEY'VE BEEN DISAPPEARING BEHIND THAT SCARLET CURTAIN ALL NIGHT. IT IS SUSPICIOUS, NON?



IT IS SUSPICIOUS, YES!

THEN IT IS TIME JULIE DE GRANDIN POWDERED HER NOSE, TOO!!!



ESPECIALLY A BLONDE ONE!

I CANNOT WAIT TO GET INTO MY ROBES, GUY...

HEH, HEH, HEH!

OUI! IT IS NOT EVERY NIGHT WE SACRIFICE THE WHITE GOAT...

BLONDE?! OH, NO!!







ZE SACRED SPIKE IS CONSECRATED!

BRING ZE TORCH OF TERROR!

A BLACK MASS!!

I MUST GET CLOSER...

Nom du Organe! A SPY!

MY ANKLE... IT'S TWISTED!

SEIZE ZE WENCH!

Oh, no... a RUN!



THE SPICY SCRIBES

by Will Murray

In "An Informal History of the Spicy Pulp" (*Risqué Stories* #1), I wrote at length on the many authors who were the mainstays of the now-quaint line which published *Spicy Detective Stories*, *Spicy Mystery Stories*, *Spicy Western Stories* and the inexplicably hyphenated *Spicy-Adventure Stories*. Since publication of that article, new information has come to light—information which calls for an expansion (and a few corrections) on the subject of the Spicy authors.

Who were they?

Really, they could have been any pulp hacks of the Thirties and Forties with a yen for writing genre sex stories, a handy pen name, or the courage to write under their given names. No doubt, in the beginning of the Culture/Trojan empire, all sorts of writers jumped on the bandwagon. Some, like Robert Leslie Bellem, stayed and became regulars. Others just wrote for the company when the mood—or dire necessity—moved them. All four titles were open markets. Yet by 1936, only two years after the first "Spicy," *Spicy Detective Stories*, blazed the trail for the others, *Writer's Digest* reported that ". . . the field has narrowed down to about a score of writers for the simple reason that a lot of people just don't care or can't write this [sic] sort of hot sex required." One of the overriding reasons was the bad press the line received. The same year *Writer's Digest* announced the problems the line had in recruiting new writers, their formal announcement of the debut of *Spicy Western* remarked: "If the new

Spicy sells, the contamination will spread into the hitherto untouched Western field." On another occasion, *Writer's Digest* archly but correctly pointed out that while the line was edited in New York City, the editors preferred manuscripts to be mailed to their maildrop in Delaware "because of the prejudice of the Metropolitan Police."

Of course, the bad press wasn't the fault of *Writer's Digest*. It was there from the beginning. In fact, most pulps had difficult reputations. For it was during the Thirties that the industry was saddled with that famous but disreputable appellation, "The Bloody Pulp." But the Spicies were considered even less savory and so writers who were not ashamed to appear in *The Spider*, *Gangsters Stories* and *Underworld Love* quailed at the thought of seeing their real names on the contents pages of Culture's titles.

But some were slow to catch on. One was Norman A. Daniels. He started writing for *Spicy Detective* even before the first issue hit the stands, responding to an open call for manuscripts. His first stories appeared under his own name, but after he realized what he'd gotten himself into, he asked the remainder be bylined "Kirk Rand." And they were. Rand seems to be a personal pen name of Daniels. When he dropped out of the Spicies altogether after a year or so, the Rand byline vanished, too.

Some of the bylines used were obviously fictitious. One of these was C. A. M. Donne. This oblique but much used name was one of the famous Spicy names. It turns out to be a

corruption of the name of a writer who wrote as Don Cameron, Don C. Cameron and possibly other names. His full name was Donald Cameron Shafer. His secret was accidentally revealed in an issue of *Trojan's Super-Detective*, when they announced that C. A. M. Donne's "As It Was Written" would appear in the next issue. When that story did appear in the December 1940 issue, the byline had become Don Cameron and the secret was out. He later went on to write for *Trojan's* comics, *Superman* and *Batman*.

Rex Norman was another ubiquitous byline. The key to this author's true identity is a roundabout deduction. It's been long known that a bespectacled Los Angeles court official named John A. Saxon was a frequent Spicy contributor and a sometime collaborator with Robert Leslie Bellem. But Saxon's name seldom if ever appeared in the magazines. The closest it came was the infrequent byline "King Saxon." King Saxon seems to have been John A. Saxon, and the former had a distinctive habit of showing up in issues where "Rex Norman" also had a story. Rex Norman? King Saxon? The resonances speak for themselves. Apparently Rex Norman was John A. Saxon's chief *nom de plume* and when he had more than one story in an issue, he invoked the name of King Saxon rather than risk his own.

Robert A. Garron was a frequent contributor, often writing cover stories. He was really Howard Wandrei, the correspondent of H. P. Lovecraft and brother of Donald Wandrei. And when not writing for the Spicies as Robert A. Garron, he used his more familiar pseudonym of H. W. Guernsey for Culture. It's not known whether or not Donald Wandrei was a Spicy hacy, too.

Next to Robert Leslie Bellem, the most prolific Spicy scribe was the illustrious Lew Merrill. In *Spicy Mystery*, for example, there were twenty-two cover stories bylined Lew Merrill compared to the mere fourteen Bellem did under different pseudonyms.

(The next most prolific were Justin Case with eight and E. Hoffmann Price with six.) While this is not absolutely certain, Merrill seems to have been a real person. At least, Phoenix Press published two westerns bylined Lewis C. Merrill in the Forties—*Lonesome Kid* (1940) and *Cole of the Broken Spur* (1943). It seems almost anticlimactic when a mysterious Spicy byline turns out to be someone's real name! Maybe Merrill also wrote under pseudonyms yet to be unearthed.

Not all these writers are unmasked so easily. Previously, I reported that Alan Ritner Anderson used the name "Lars Anderson" in the Spicies. While it was known that Anderson wrote for the Spicies, assigning the Lars Anderson name to him was a simple and obvious deduction. But the matter is more complicated than that. Try to stay with me now.

Alan Ritner Anderson wrote for the Spicies as Alan Anderson (not to be confused with Spicy cover artist Allen Anderson). Maybe he also wrote as Lars Anderson, but this is now in doubt. Why? Hold on—you're going to love this: In the April 1936 *Writer's Digest*, there's a letter from a writer who signs himself Lars Anderson and gives his address as 1309 Esplanade Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana. In the letter, he claims to have sold 46 pulp stories over the previous year, and specifically mentions two unnamed stories just published in the April 1936 issues of *Thrilling Mystery* and *Spicy Detective*. A check of that issue of *Spicy Detective* shows a Lars Anderson story, "Death Pays Off."

So there seems to be a real Lars Anderson, you say? So what? So this: In that very same issue of *Writer's Digest*, there's a letter from a woman named Thelma B. Ellis of 1755 Exton Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey, who gleefully announces the sale of her eightieth pulp story—"Death Pays Off" in the April 1936 *Spicy Detective*! She goes on to say that for three years now, "I have been writing

fiction under my own name, another feminine moniker and two masculine nom de plumes [sic]. I've had printed love, adventure, confession, murder, psychic and sex stories."

One could argue that Lars Anderson was a house name, and that anyone could have used it—except that it appeared *outside* of the Culture line, most notably on the Domino Lady stories in *Saucy Romantic Adventures* and *Mystery Adventure*. House names don't run away from home. But two authors don't lay claim to the same story, either. Was someone playing a joke on *Writer's Digest*? Or could the Spicy editors have accidentally transposed the bylines on "Death Pays Off" and one other story in that issue, prompting the wronged authors to gently set the record straight in this backhand way? Transposed bylines *did* sometimes occur. In that case, Ellis might be Clint Morgan or Paul Loomis or Atwater Culpeper—the last, however, is reputedly legitimate.

In the absence of knowing, take your pick: "Lars Anderson" was either Alan Anderson, Thelma B. Ellis, or Lars Anderson.

Some of the Spicy scribes were not afraid to write under their own monikers, as I've pointed out. E. Hoffmann Price was bold that way, but sometimes he also used the name "Hamlin Daly." Laurence Donovan was brave, too. Having had his Doc Savage, Whisperer, Phantom Detective, Black Bat, and Skipper pulp novels printed under house names, it was probably a relief to be known simply as Laurence Donovan—even if it was on the covers of *Spicy Western*. There, he sometimes took the backup name of "Larry Dunn." Another Doc Savage author, William G. Bogart, used his own name and the pen name of "Russell Hale" on different occasions. Norvell W. Page, who wrote Spider novels, juggled his name a bit to get "N. Wooten Poge" and so joined the Culture tribe. "Grant Lane" was an interesting byline. At Street & Smith, it hid two writers, Steve

Fisher and William G. Bogart. But Bogart merely borrowed it when assuming a series Fisher had to abandon. When the name "Grant Lane" appeared in a Spicy title, it meant Steve Fisher was moonlighting. Manly Wade Wellman was "Wade Wells." George Harmon Cox was "George Harmon."

Then there was James A. Lawson. He appeared in various Spicy issues under that byline and the variation, Lawton Jameson. But which was the real name? Or were either of them real names? Could both have been assumed by pulp western writer and editor Arthur H. Lawson?

It boggles the mind to attempt to pierce the bylines used. Was there really a Tom B. Stone—"tombstone"? And who was José Vaca—"Joe Cow" in Spanish? Were Carson West and Carson Train the same, and could either of them have been a supposedly real writer who wrote outside the Spicies as Sam Carson? You could spend a year of your life trying to decipher the byline "Clow Mand." It appeared in all the Spicy titles and seems to be an anagram. But for what? One unscrambling produces the word "woman" and three leftover letters, "c-l-d." Not much help. A more probable transformation might be this: Mand is a scrambling of the final letters of Laurence Cadman's last name. Cadman was an early Spicy editor. Clow can be extracted from the rest of his name, with the exception of that one vowel. Single-letter changes are allowed in anagrams. It could well be that Cadman wrote as Mand, but it might have been a house name as well.

Spicy editors may have written for their own magazines with wild abandon. Frank Armer, the first Culture editor and a partner in the firm, once wrote a western novel with the juicy title, *Passion Pulls the Trigger* (Valhalla Press, 1936), as "Arthur Wallace." Wallace was a frequent visitor to Spicy contents pages, and even appeared in similar risqué magazines. Was Arthur Wallace really Frank Armer? Probably. Did Armer

also write under the Tay Wallace and Wallace Kayton bylines? Who knows? But it's possible.

Then there were the Morgans. There were a lot of Morgans writing sexy stuff, it seems. Clint Morgan, Grant Morgan and Morgan LaFay. Morgan LaFay was Popular Publications' star writer, Arthur Leo Zagat, moonlighting from *Horror Stories* and *Terror Tales*. The other two remain a mystery.

And let's not forget the Phillips: John Phillips, a house name, and Tay Philips, maybe not a house name. And the Cutlers, Arthur and Roy. The Careys, Tim and Walt, Jr. The Coopers, Ken—who is supposed to be real—and Edgar L., who wrote outside the Spicies and was probably a different person, maybe even the person he claimed to be. The Richards, Sam and Paul. Paul seems to have written for other naughty magazines as Paula Richards. The Kings, Don and Tom, Jr. The Steeles, Francis and Richard. The Hornes, Byrne and Jackson W. Jackson W. Horne also wrote as Jackson W. Thorne—or maybe one of them is a typo. You get the idea. I think it's called nepotism. Or is that incest?

In my previous article, I stated that W. T. Ballard used the Spicy bylines Isaac Walton and Clive Trent. My sources for this were two Jim Anthony novels Ballard wrote for *Super-Detective* as "John Grange" in which Ballard dropped both names into the text. I assumed from this that Ballard was making playful mention of his pet pseudonyms. However, I've since learned that old-time science fiction pulpster Victor Rousseau Emanuel has laid claim to the Clive Trent byline. This does not mean Ballard might not have been Clive Trent, too—it could have been a house name—but it can no longer be safely suggested that either Trent or Walton were personal pen names.

Super-Detective also featured a short-lived series about a character called "Abba the Absolute," which was bylined Dale Boyd. Boyd also wrote

for *Spicy Detective*. These stories read as if they could be the work of Ballard. But they might just as well have been by Ronal Kayser, who, as "Dale Clark," wrote for many houses, including the later *Speed* titles, or by *Terror Tales*' Mary Dale Buckner, a.k.a. Donald Dale.

Another SF writer who dabbled in Spicy scribbling was Ray Cummings. But his chosen pen name remains undiscovered, if not undiscoverable. Roger Sherman Hoar, an old-time SF writer who cobbled together the pseudonym Ralph Milne Farley from relatives' names, did Spicy work under the Farley pen name and possibly others as well. Given his penchant for triple names, he might have been Willis Vachel Keith, too.

Quite a number of these bylines were not restricted to just Culture's Spicy titles. They also published, at various times, *Private Detective Stories*, *Hollywood Detective*, and *Super-Detective*. And many familiar names crossed over, including the tons of Spicy house names. Sometimes an author ashamed to appear in the Spicies was not so shy about appearing in *Super-Detective*. So when Travis Lee Stokes showed up in one issue, it made you wonder if he'd done certain Spicy yarns as L. Travis Knowlton. Hugh Speer and Luke Terry did tons of stuff for both arms of the Culture/Trojan empire, but to this day no one knows who they were. Real authors who had never appeared in the Spicies (under their own names, that is) but who magically popped up after the Spicies became the Speeds in 1942 (i.e. *Speed Mystery*, *Speed Detective*, etc.) include Harold de Polo, Edward S. Williams, Don James, Roger Torrey, H. S. Moynahan, and George A. McDonald, whose Dan Turner imitation, "Killer" Cain, ran in *Private Detective Stories* during the war. Some of these writers may have felt more comfortable appearing in the Speeds under their familiar bylines, but who is to say they hadn't been Spicy stars under less familiar names? One exception was science

fiction stylist Henry Kuttner. He had no qualms about doing SF under his real name in *Spicy Mystery*, but for some reason a solitary SF story ran in an early *Super-Detective* under his pen name, "Paul Edmonds."

Some Spicy authors had a real thing about not owning up to their work. Another anonymous woman writer had a letter published in the September 1935 *Writer's Digest*. She admitted having written love and sex stories for "the Snappy and Spicy groups," as well as detective stories under a man's pen name for unspecified magazines for about four years. She gave no address, only a city: Charleston, South Carolina. She was probably Vina Lawrence, a Charleston woman known to have written love stories under her own name after breaking into print in 1932. She was one of agent August Lenninger's clients. Lenninger provided many stories to the early Culture line, among them the works of Norman A. Daniels, E. Hoffmann Price and Edgar L. Cooper. There was an S. W. Paul in Lenninger's stable, and he was very likely the man who wrote for *Spicy Detective* (and for other pulp houses) as Saul W. Paul.

One of Lenninger's clients later made quite a mark for himself with Frank Armer's Spicy chain. This was Wilton F. Matthews, whose first sale, "Invitation Received," was made through Lenninger in 1934. Possibly the story appeared in one of the Spicies. Only a year or two later, Matthews joined the chain as an editor and went down in pulp history as one of the two editors (the other was Kenneth Hutchinson) who were imprisoned in 1947 for their editorial practices. The story was given by W. T. Ballard in an *Armchair Detective* interview: "Frank Armer was no worse than the others, but his editors were crooked. They were pulling old copy out of the files, slapping a current writer's name on as author, and drawing checks to the new names, cashing them at the bar on the corner. Bob Bellem and I combined to

send them to Sing Sing for five years each. We discovered the ploy after I received a notice from the IRS that I had failed to report \$35,000 paid me by Armer Publications. Since I had sold them no copy for that year I checked with Bob. He had sold to them but he was being charged with not reporting twice what he had been paid. We contacted Frank, then blew the whistle." Matthews and Hutchinson pleaded guilty to forgery upon their arrests.

Most of these reprints were run under a swarm of house names. But figuring out pen names and house names is very difficult. Robert Leslie Bellem alone wrote for Armer under nearly forty bylines, of which perhaps two or three are known to be personal pseudonyms. Bellem's papers and manuscripts are housed at UCLA, if anyone cares to sort them out. According to those holdings, Bellem used approximately 110 pen names throughout his writing career. It would require an exhaustive collation of pseudonyms to determine which of them were limited to the Spicies.

There are many still-mysterious Spicy scribes. We still don't know who the following people were—if they were anyone other than the names signed to their stories: Carl Moore; Cary Moran; Mort Lansing; Charles A. Baker, Jr.; Stewart Gates; Jane Thomas; and Cliff Ferris—who just might have been Western writer Cliff Ferrell. And these are just the most prominent names. We may never know if Curtis Blount also wrote for other chains as Damascus Blount, and who he/they really were. Or if Arthur J. Burks was behind A. J. Barclay and A. J. Borden. But that's part of the fun of the Spicies. Knowing, not knowing, and guessing.

Who were the Spicy authors? Why, they were almost everyone who ever wrote for the pulps—but they tried not to be anyone at all.

Special thanks to Glenn Lord, Victor A. Berch, John Godin and Bob Weinberg for help with this article.

Readers' Rendezvous

I never ordered Risque Stories because of the inclusion of "Tara." That book [Tara of the Twilight] was excruciatingly bad, and not in the spicy tradition at all--more an out and out porno book in a fantasy setting. But I looked at Risque #s 1 and 2 (at the Science Fantasy Bookstore in Cambridge) and discovered much good pulpy material in them, so I bought them. I think you should drop "Tara," though. I really liked Shudder Stories and Two-Fisted Detective Stories, also. I hope you'll continue as a publisher of good pulp fiction, old or new.

--Jim Bosclair
Waltham, MA

I read Risque #2 last night. Excellent lineup of stories. Oddly enough (since it's not from the pulp era), my favorite was the John Gorman story ["Temple of Forbidden Fruit"] by Cerasini and Hoffman. You're certainly doing pulp-lovers a great service by making new-old stories available for the first time--plus the new yarns, too!

--Dixon Smith
St. Paul, MN

Just a note to say how much I enjoyed your first two issues of Risque Stories. Most enjoyable of all, however, were the two stories of John Gorman by Cerasini and Hoffman. "She Cats of Samarkand" really captured Howard's verve, not too unnaturally since it was based on an existing plot outline; while the second, "The Temple of the Forbidden Fruit,"

though still quite good, lost something in its reliance on the supernatural and Chtulhoid shenanigans. I think it would be best for this series to stick to straight adventure and historical accuracy. The old intrigue amongst the colonial superpowers in prewar Near and Far East should present plenty of plot material to go around. Also, a vital element I find must be kept in the stories is Howard's strong pro-American stand, in that his typical brawny American soldiers of fortune are always brave, strong, honorable (with certain sexual exceptions of course! which, come to think of it, is pretty American after all!) and always come out on top. I think an operable phrase here would be a quote from the story by Carl Jacobi in his "Pawns of the River King" (let's see more stories of Jim Regan!) where Regan faces his defeated adversary and says something to the effect of "That'll teach you not to fool around with Americans!" That's real speak softly and carry a big stick Teddy Roosevelt stuff! And now the inevitable request, if it's at all possible: John Gorman must meet Francis Xavier Gordon!!!

Lin Carter's stories, though certainly spicy, I think miss the mark here. Especially in their routine disregard for the cardinal rule of the spicys, never mention anything below the waist. I found his stories particularly distasteful rather than delightfully entertaining.

--Pierre Comtois
Lowell, MA

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"Woman of the Witch-Flowers" by Carl Jacobi

"House of Dark Desire" by Hugh B. Cave

"Pale Shadow" by Lin Carter

"Jungle Curse" by Charles Hoffman and Marc A. Cerasini

"The Gift" by Duane Rimel

"The Harlot" by Mrs. P. M. Kuykendall

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