



BADGER  
BOOKS

FEATURING  
CURSE OF THE  
TOTEM

R. L. FANTHORPE

# SUPERNATURAL

STORIES Nº 65

STRANGE . WEIRD . EERIE

MONTHLY

2/6





# **SUPERNATURAL STORIES**

---

**Vol.1 No. 65      A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION      2/6**

---

## **CONTENTS**

### **Feature Story**

**CURSE OF THE TOTEM** by R. Lionel Fanthorpe, M.B.I.S.      **5**

Dark, evil life lay entombed in the grotesque carvings.

**VEANGANCE OF THOR** by Leo Brett      **48**

There was a surge of power as he lifted the ancient hammer out of the soil.

**THE VOICE IN THE WALL** by Bron Fane      **77**

Uncanny sounds were emanating from behind the faded paintwork.

**WOKOLO** by Pel Torro      **109**

Only a fool would ignore the curse of a Baramba witch doctor.

**SECRET OF THE SHAMAN** by Trebor Thorpe      **137**

His claw-like hands rose and fell on the weird drum as he chanted an evil prayer.

---

**SUPERNATURAL STORIES** is published monthly by John Spencer & Co. (Publishers), Ltd., 131 Brackenbury Road, London, W.6. No story or part of story may be reproduced without written permission of the publishers. Manuscripts are invited and must include a stamped addressed envelope. No responsibility can be accepted for lost MSS.

## INTRODUCTION

**"CURSE OF THE TOTEM,"** by veteran supernatural author, R. Lionel Fanthorpe, S.M.B.I.S., is a gripping saga of a timeless cavern and the grotesque carvings it contained. Can living evil dwell in a wooden figure? Above all, can it be released?

Leo Brett's **"VENGEANCE OF THOR"** is a fascinating yarn about a 20th century Scandinavian peasant who found the god's hammer and used it for his own ends.

Finland is the scene of Trebor Thorpe's **"SECRET OF THE SHAMAN,"** which is the story of an old magician's vengeance on the ignorant sceptics who scorned him.

**"WOKOLO,"** by Pel Torro, is based on an authentic African legend of the celebrated Baramba tribe. Perhaps it is wise to treat a witch doctor with courtesy.

Bron Fane's contribution **"THE VOICE IN THE WALL,"** is a spine-chilling account of *something* which moaned behind faded paint-work in a derelict country house.

Supernatural 65 is a collection of short stories worthy of every connoisseur of the macabre.



## **CURSE OF THE TOTEM**

**By R. L. Fanthorpe S.M.B.I.S.**

**"Dark evil life lay entombed in the grotesque carvings."**

**THERE** were stars, still, silent, solemn stars, high overhead. Like the eyes of gods of stone, looking down on the world. Alalu looked up with the intelligent, questioning glance of the ten-year-old. He did not understand the stars, any more than he understood the rocks, or the mountains, or the tepées of his people. He did not understand the stars any more than he understood life and death. He knew the legends and the tales that were told and he knew that like the sun and the moon, the stars marked the seasons and the times when his people did certain revulsion. He wondered whether it had already done

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

things and when they did not do certain things. In a way he supposed that the stars were the law makers. Alalu was not certain whether he was in favour of law makers. There seemed to be so many things that man made laws about, and so few of them were good things.

His young eyes held a mixture of sadness and intelligence, as he broke his immobility and began walking softly, on moccasined feet, between the rocks at the foot of the mountain.

Ahead of him he heard a sound; it was a soft, yet fierce, sound, a sound as of some great beast struggling to free itself. It was a sound that he had heard before. He knew that it was expected of him to be thrilled at the sound. But he was not . . . He felt sad and he felt sick.

He knew that he was not expected to be afraid, and in this he could fulfil the expectations, for Alalu was not afraid. On the other hand, he experienced a feeling, he was aware of a sensation which he knew would not have met with the approval of those who made the laws, the laws of man, the laws of the tribe, the laws of the hunter. He knew that it was wrong to feel pity for the beast in the trap—at least it was wrong in the law. The beast in the trap was either an enemy or food, often both! Men killed enemies and men ate food, that was the law. Alalu was a man—in the trap was a beast. Man was not the same as beast, and beast was not the same as man, yet Alalu felt a strange affinity to the unseen thing in the trap.

He approached it without fear, but with a certain Alalu's arm—the wolf had gone. With five great bounds it cleared the rocks, stood for a moment sil-

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

itself an irreparable injury, straining at the clever thongs . . . He reached the trap, set cunningly between two rocks, and then he did experience real fear for a few seconds. The beast in the trap was the biggest grey wolf he had ever seen. It was caught by a hind leg, and it was straining desperately to free that leg. There was no fear in the boy now; there was no fear of the wolf; instead he saw it was a thing of beauty. Moonlight shone on the massive teeth, sharp as rows of twin knives in the hands of many small hunters. The eyes were big and round, solemn as the moon itself, reflecting back the light of the moon and the light of the stars. Alalu grew steadily closer to the wolf, and looked it full in the eyes. It did not draw back, but just kept tugging silently at the leg in the trap.

The Indian boy reached out a hand, slowly, carefully, so as not to startle the great beast. The huge wolf put forward a great tongue and licked the hand gently. Alalu felt a strange affinity with the grey monster. The beast was as big as he was—no, bigger, much bigger, yet the boy felt no fear. He put an arm round the beast's shoulders, and the creature stopped straining against the trap that held its leg. With small, strong, skilful fingers Alalu unfastened the thongs. The wolf stretched its newly freed limb for a moment till strength and feeling returned to the imprisoned leg. The great red tongue lolled out once more and touched the boy's hand, then the grey shoulders were no longer resting gently under houetted against the lightening sky before disappearing. Alalu suddenly realised that he had broken the law. He looked urgently at the trap, there were

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

wolf prints and boy prints, there were struggle marks and freedom marks. The story was there for a hunter to read as surely as if Alalu had gone straight to him and confessed that he had broken the law.

Meat was scarce and wolves were dangerous. He had robbed the tribe of food and he had freed an enemy. It was not good to help an enemy, nor to take food from a tribe that was hungry, and he who does those things can expect only punishment. Indian punishment can be notoriously savage. Alalu stood in the moonlight and the starlight, looking down at the incriminating tracks. If he covered them, the fact that they had been covered would be as much an admission of guilt as leaving them uncovered. Something had to be done, but what? he asked himself. The only way to escape the reprisal of the law was to go beyond the reach of the law, but that was much more easily said than done. The law had a frighteningly long arm, it was not easy to get beyond it!

Alalu wondered which way to turn. He worked the problem out in his mind. With a strange kind of simple, natural logic, he turned the facts over this way and that way. What was he to do? Could he escape the law? Could he escape retribution? Could he escape the probably just punishment which the tribe would inflict upon him?

Finally he decided that flight offered the best possibility. But the woods were tall, the mountains were high, the valleys were steep, and the torrents flowed fast. There were wolves and bears, and the nights are cold for he-who-is-alone. Alalu did not like the prospect in the least, but it was preferable to the



## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

other prospect, the beating, or the stoning, or the starving. The prospect of one of them, or perhaps, even all three, would await him when he returned. It would be better to rely on Nature than on the mercy of the hunter whose trap he had robbed; of the tribe whose food he had freed.

Alalu scrambled up the rock in the wake of the great grey wolf and disappeared into the wilds of the unknown.

Night ended and morning came; the day died and the night fell once more, and still Alalu remained free . . .

A year passed, then two, then five, and still Alalu survived, a boy without a tribe, and then a young man without a tribe; a creature of the wilderness, a creature of the wild; strong, rugged, fast of foot, keen of eye; quick to hear and see either food or danger, and yet, deep down within himself, strangely sad and strangely lonely, feeling that something was missing, feeling that something was lacking, feeling that somehow he had missed a vital, integral part of life.

As each succeeding Spring came, Alalu grew increasingly aware of the great urge that ran through the rest of the wild. He saw the mountain cat with its mate and its cubs, the wolf with her cubs, and from time to time he saw the great grey wolf that he had once rescued running with its great grey mate. He saw the bears awaking from their long sleep and Alalu felt that his loneliness was more than he could bear. Spring sunshine was driving the stubborn rearguards of Winter from their shadowy citadels when Alalu ventured back to the tents of his people.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

In a stream that ran by the side of the village was a girl. Her hair was as black as the raven's wing, and her eyes were as dark and as clear as the pools at the bottom of the river. Every movement that she made was gentle and graceful, and as Alalu looked at her he felt a strange stirring within himself. Memories came back, as from long ago and far away, and he realised that this was Dancing Sunbeam, daughter of the great chief Black Wolf, Black Wolf, whose arrows were sharper, and whose bow was stronger than the arrows, or the bows of any other warriors in the tribe. Perhaps it was because of the stark, savage masculinity of Black Wolf that the tender, gentle beauty of Dancing Sunbeam stood out so strongly, so noticeably, so clearly. Alalu came out from his concealment and the girl started. He had recognised her in an instant, for the mind of the lonely man is full of the memories of people he has known. The mind of the castaway is filled with the faces of those he has seen and known in the days before he became a hermit, or a castaway.

There was a moment of tension as though electric impulses were passing between Alalu and Dancing Sunbeam. For a time she looked at him without recognising him, then, in a rather soft, strange whisper she said,

"So you have come back to us, friend of the wolves!"

"I have come back," he agreed.

"There has been much anger," said Dancing Sunbeam.

"And I have had much sadness," answered the wild boy.

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

"Black Wolf has sworn that you must die," said the girl.

"I will go to Black Wolf and ask forgiveness," said Alalu. "I know much of the ways of the wild, more than I would have learned here in the tribe. I will offer my knowledge to Black Wolf. I will bring in enough food for three warriors, every day. I will say to Black Wolf that if I am dead I cannot make amends, but if I am alive I can pay back to them all."

"He might listen," said the girl, "but have you ever known him to change his mind?"

"Black Wolf is strong and cruel," said Alalu, finding some difficulty in getting his tongue around the words, for a man who has had no company but the beasts for a long time finds that human speech comes strangely to him once more. "But Alalu does not speak with a forked tongue, he speaks with a straight tongue. If Black Wolf makes a bargain, then he will keep that bargain."

"That is true," replied the girl. "My father is a man of cruelty, but in his own way he is a man of strength, and a man of honour."

Dancing Sunbeam realised that the wild boy was looking at her in a strange way. She became troubled by his glance. Their eyes met.

"Who do you look at me so?" asked Dancing Sunbeam.

"You are very beautiful," answered the boy, "you make my blood run fast as the red deer runs upon the mountain, as the wolf springs upon its prey, as the mountain lion leaps for the kill."

"You speak strange words," replied the girl, but she smiled a deep smile of feminine understanding,

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

as though she was not displeased by the words that he had uttered.

A shadow fell between them. So engrossed had they been in each other that neither had seen the approach of Black Wolf himself . . . The old chief was extremely tall; Alalu was a big, strong youth, toughened and hardened by life in the wilds, but the chief dwarfed him into insignificance; his face was cruel, sharp, like the face of a hawk. He was not alone, beside him stood Curling Feather, the old medicine man, crabbed with age, but his eyes were still bright and they glittered like the eyes of some evil bird of prey.

"The devil boy has returned!" said Curling Feather.

"And he shall die, as I swore he should die," answered Black Wolf.

Dancing Sunbeam knelt at her father's feet,

"Do not kill him!" The plea in her voice would have melted a heart of flint, but Black Wolf pushed her roughly to one side.

"I have sworn that he will die! Therefore he will die!" A dagger appeared in the old chief's hand as though by magic.

"Before you strike, listen, O great chief. I have come to say that I was wrong to break the law, I have come to say that I will put right the wrong that I have done. I have learnt much of the ways of the wild, I have learnt much that even the greatest hunters in your tribe do not know. I can speak to the beasts and the birds and they hear me. I can bring in as much food as three warriors!"



## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

Black Wolf's face did not relax by a fraction of an inch.

"If you could bring in enough food for a hundred and three warriors, or for three times that number, if you could bring in food for the whole tribe, it would not be enough. I have said you will die!"

"You are the chief of a great tribe," answered Alalu. "You are their father, you bring them their food. I offer you more food. Dead I am worth nothing."

"Dead, you are worth my honour," said the great chief. "I have sworn that you shall die!" he seemed to hesitate for a second. "It is not good that you should die here, with only two to watch Black Wolf's vengeance! Tonight we will have a feast, and when the feast is over, then you will die!"

Alalu hesitated for a second, wondering whether, fleet of foot as he was, he could outrun Black Wolf's bow, but he knew that without needing to unsling the bow from his back, the great chief's knife would be enough to end any run before it began. Besides, if he had time to think about the offer, he might change his mind. He followed the old medicine man and Black Wolf back to the village. Dancing Sunbeam made as if to follow them.

"Stay here and finish your work," commanded Black Wolf. Alalu noticed that there were tears in the girl's soft, dark eyes; could they be for him? he wondered, that would indeed be good medicine!

He was tied to a stake outside Black Wolf's own tent and a curious procession wound past him through the hours of the day. The sun rose hot and high, but he was given neither food nor drink.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

At last the shadows of evening began to fall, and a great feast was prepared. There was wild dancing of the warriors, the firelight flickering on their grotesquely painted bodies. Presently Curling Feather began to sharpen the sacrificial knife, and every so often the cruel eyes of Black Wolf would turn upon Alalu as though to say, "Soon, soon, shall honour be revenged. I have sworn that you shall die, therefore you shall die." And Alalu listened to the distant call of the wild beyond the village. He looked at the stars coming up beyond the flickering fire-light, and the fire seemed to grow brighter and the stars seemed to grow brighter as the night grew darker, and the sounds of the wild drew a little nearer and a little more powerful. The howl of the wolf, and the growl of the bear, the hoarse, shrill cry of the mountain lion, and the almost noiseless wing of the owl came with the night, as more time passed. Still, old Curling Feather, wizened and dried Curling Feather, old, evil Curling Feather, continued to sharpen the sacrificial knife, just near enough and just loud enough for the keen ears of Alalu the wild boy to hear.

Fire water was brought, and fire water was drunk. The dances grew wilder around the flickering fire, and the looks of Black Wolf and Curling Feather in the direction of the prisoner grew less and less frequent as they joined more and more in the wild spirit of the dancing . . .

As they joined more and more in the feasting, and the wild dancing, and the carousing and the revelry a soft, gentle, dark shadow came closer and closer to the stake to which Alalu was tied. The shadow held a knife, and the knife fell against the thongs that

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

held the youth, as gently as rain falls on a blade of grass. It began to stroke the thongs as gently as dew strokes the petals of a flower. Soft as the snow, quiet as the foot of the mountain lion, the knife played upon the thongs, until with no more noise than the brush of a mountain cat's whisker against the side of a tree, the thongs were parted, and Alalu felt the handle of a knife being laid gently into the palm of his hand. Then the shadow melted into the darkness at the back of the tent.

The boy watched with wary eyes, watched and waited and presently he saw Dancing Sunbeam rejoin the festivities, handing more fire-water to her father; he saw Black Wolf drain the cup and ask for more . . . she gave him more, and then another . . . Alalu let the time pass, let the time pass until he could be sure that Black Wolf would believe that Dancing Sunbeam had been with him throughout the feast, so that no shred of suspicion or blame could be attached to her. When he guessed the moment was right he gathered up the severed bonds so that they should not betray the truth and he fled into the darkness like a shadow, running as only the great grey wolf could run, running as a mountain cat could run, running with the speed of the racing river, leaping like the great salmon that fling themselves from the waters.

He had covered many paces before he heard the wild shouts of the feasting tribesmen turn to cries of dismay, as they realised that he had escaped.

He was back in his wild country, back with the great grey wolf, the bears, the mountain lions, the salmon, the river, the rocks, the trees, the hills, the mountains, the plants, the flowers and the sweet

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

smell of the clean, fresh air. He felt that life was good again, but all the time he longed quietly, and deep down within his heart was Dancing Sunbeam, daughter of Black Wolf.

Days passed slowly and sadly, the brightness of the Spring was spoiled because Dancing Sunbeam was in the village and Alalu was out on the mountains.

There was a little-used trail that came through his mountains, and as Alalu sat looking down that trail he heard the distant but unmistakable sound of a rider approaching. It was not an Indian rider, for the sounds of the horse echoed far along the trail. Alalu peered carefully from behind the rock where he was concealed. A rider came slowly along the trail below him. He was a big man, as big as Black Wolf, heavier if anything, for Black Wolf had the tall, slim strength of the Indian, this man had the broad, heavy strength of the white man. His face was scarred and pock-marked, a broad Stetson shaded his face from the sun, and his ornamental saddle was embellished with both rifle and shot gun. A pair of heavy .45's hung low on his hip in well oiled holsters. The leather looked worn but very serviceable, as did the leather slings of the rifle and the shot gun.

Alalu did not see many travellers on the trail, but he had seen enough to know what weapons they carried, and he had seen enough to judge whether a man was a hunter or whether a man was a trader. But this man looked like neither hunter nor trader. This man looked like hunter, trader, and something else, and he looked as if the hunting and the trading were a shield behind which he hid when he did other things.



## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

The youth was so curious to know more about this strange white man that his foot slipped on a pebble and it rolled down within a few feet of the rider. Ace Boulder flung himself from the saddle, rolled over twice till he was concealed behind a rock, and all the Indian youth could see, pointing in his direction, was the ugly, deadly barrel of the big rifle.

"I got you covered," yelled Boulder, "come on out, with your hands up . . ." The gun was pointing unerringly towards the rock behind which Alalu crouched, and he had no means of knowing that Boulder was only bluffing. The Indian boy raised his hands obediently and came out from behind the rock.

His encounters with the white man had not been many, but he knew enough of the white man's language and the white man's ways to understand what he was supposed to do now. Ace Boulder stood up as the boy appeared.

"Come on over here," he roared in a voice that made the mountains shake.

As Alalu came closer, and Boulder saw that he was only a youth, he whistled his horse, and thrust the big Winchester .75 back into its case.

"Hell, kid, you gave me a scare," said Boulder accusingly. "What you doin' around these parts—you're a long way from the tribe."

"I do not belong to tribe," answered the boy.

"You mean they turned you out?" asked Boulder, looking at him through narrowed eyes. "Why, what did you do?"

"I released a wolf from a trap," answered Alalu.

"You're a queer kid and no mistake," replied Boulder. "You released a wolf from a trap, did you?"

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

What in tarnation did you want to do a fool thing like that for? Don't you know wolves are dangerous and that the more we kill the safer the West gets? Don't you know that the more wolves we kill the more game here is left for us?"

"Wolves are my friends," said Alalu quietly.

"You must be loco," snorted Boulder, then his eyes took on a strangely cunning appearance. It was a change that was not lost on the boy. "I reckon if you live outside the tribe you know all these wild areas well, huh?"

"I know all places well," agreed the boy.

"That's just great! I'm looking for a cave."

"The cave," said Alalu, not understanding. "What cave?"

"The Cave of the Totem," answered Boulder, "the tribal secret."

"No member of the tribe would lead a white man to the Cave of the Totem," replied Alalu.

"So you know where it is," said Boulder. The boy realised his mistake and said nothing. "Yeah, you know where it is," went on Boulder, "that's fine."

"It is taboo. I cannot lead you there."

"But you're no longer a member of the tribe, they turned you out, remember?"

"It is still taboo," said the boy. "It is forbidden. It is the secret sleeping place of many great ancestors."

"It's also pretty well packed full of gold, from what I've heard," said Ace Boulder.

"Yellow metal which white men crave! Yellow metal bring death!" said Alalu.

"Yeah, quite often it does," agreed Boulder, "but I'd be prepared to risk that."

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

"All yellow metal in world not worth one life . . ."

"You're something of a philosopher, kid," said Boulder, "but I don't agree."

"Dead man have no use for yellow metal," said Alalu. Boulder looked at him darkly.

"Coffin of wood same as coffin of yellow metal to man inside it," said the Indian youth again.

"I wasn't exactly figurin' on having any use for a coffin," answered Boulder, "unless, of course, you'd like to fill one."

"Why you kill me?" asked the boy. "I not harm you."

"You take me to the Totem Cave and nobody'll kill you," said Ace Boulder.

Alalu shook his head stubbornly. Boulder's .45 appeared in his hand as though by magic.

"Just hold it right there," he said. He swung a lariat expertly and dropped it clean over Alalu's head and shoulders. A tall tree grew by the side of the trail. A half-dozen coils of the lariat pinned the boy helplessly to the tree. Boulder sat down and began making a fire.

"I got lot's o' time, boy," he said. "I got all the time in the world. A man can get awful hungry tied to a tree! I'm lookin' for that cave! In these parts there must be a thousand caves. Some of them a man can't find if he don't know where to look. A man could go prospecting for caves around these parts until he grew old and grey. Now I shan't grow old and grey while you go hungry. You just figure out how you're gonna feel watchin' me eat. Every mouthful is gonna be a pain in your belly . . . Sooner or later you're gonna say 'Mr. Boulder' you're gonna

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

say, 'Mr. Boulder if you'll give me some food I'll tell you where the cave is.' And do you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna say 'You lead me to the cave, boy, and then you can eat all you like! You can have bacon and beans, and anything I can shoot, anything in my pack.'

"Alalu not tell," answered the youth.

"Sure, you'll say that today, you may say it tomorrow, but just let a few days go by. Then, of course, there's thirst. I gotta canteen here full of lovely clear water. Now just you listen, over there is a mountain river; cool, fresh and clean. Just listen to the water in that river, boy. After two days you'll be screaming for some of that water! Do you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna get my canteen and pour it out in front of you, so's you can watch it sink into the ground. Guess maybe the ground is kind-a thirsty; I'm a kindly man, if the ground is thirsty I'll give it some water. I'll give you all the water you can drink, I'll take you right to that mountain stream and let you drink it dry—after you've shown me where the cave is! Now look, boy, be sensible. I got no quarrel with you, no fight with you. Up in that cave there's gold. That cave is sacred to your tribe, but your tribe turned you out. Why should you suffer for them?"

A night and a day came and went, and Ace Boulder's words kept running round inside Alalu's mind like hungry, gnawing rodents. 'Why should you suffer for them? Why should you suffer for them? The tribe turned you out.' Why should he go hungry for Black Wolf? Why should he go hungry for Curling Feather?—But there was more than this. There was



## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

another stronger thought that held the rodent thoughts at bay. It was the thought of Dancing Sunbeam. Dancing Sunbeam was also of the tribe.

To her the Cave of the Totem was a sacred place. It was the place of their ancestors; it was a place of peace and quiet, the quiet of eternity. If it was profaned by Ace Boulder, then something that belonged to the Great Spirit, something great and eternal which was part of Dancing Sunbeam's heritage would have been destroyed for ever. Alalu didn't think it out in quite those terms, but Alalu knew that in a sense, the sacredness of the cave was part of Dancing Sunbeam's life as a member of the tribe, and he would not sacrifice her right to that quietness and peace, just because there was hunger in his belly and thirst in his throat.

Ace Boulder made himself a cup of coffee.

He looked at the boy again,

"Sure you won't change your mind, son?"

Alalu shook his head rather weakly.

"Powerful good coffee I've got here. These are some of the tastiest beans a man did ever eat, too. He licked his lips rather coarsely. "You know, son, this is some of the finest bacon . . . "

"I do not hunger for bacon and beans. And I do not thirst for coffee. You do not tempt me with your talk of white man's food and white man's drink. I eat the food of the wild and I drink the water of the wild," said the boy.

"You'll get hungry for some kind o' food, and thirsty enough for some kind o' drink about this time tomorrow, when the sun is up," said Ace Boulder. In the distance Alalu heard a sound; Indian

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

ponies, four Indian ponies coming up the trail. For a second he wondered whether that sound would mean rescue. Then, as he listened and sniffed at the air with his fantastically keen scent, he knew it would not mean rescue, but only a fate worse than that which had befallen him already, unless he could manage to play one enemy off against the other. He had the scent of Black Wolf, the old chief, and the scent of Curling Feather the medicine man, and two warriors were with them. Perhaps they were looking for him? Obviously the chief's pride had been hurt by his escape. Alalu wondered which he feared most, the rough white man, or Black Wolf . . .

The four Indian ponies trotted quietly into view. The sight of the white man made them draw rein. He held up a hand in time-honoured greeting.

"How!"

"How!" The sign was returned. Alalu's heart sank, they were not enemies but friends. They had met before.

"Do you bring us fire water and white man fire sticks?" asked Black Wolf.

"Nope! Ain't trading that kind of merchandise at the moment!" said Ace Boulder. The chief's eyes fell on the bound form of Alalu. "I got a trade here that might be of some interest, though."

"Of much value," said Black Wolf, pointing to the boy. "Tied to that tree is honour of Black Wolf, Black Wolf swear Alalu die. If Alalu not die, Black Wolf lose honour."

"Yeah, that's mighty important . . . mighty important. You see, Black Wolf, it's like this—I got my honour, too. I swore that I would find the treasure

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

cave of your tribe. I want to carry away a little of that yellow metal."

"No white man see cave!"

"Then I guess I ain't gonna let you have this boy," said Ace Boulder.

"We are four," observed Black Wolf. "You are one."

"Maybe you're three and I'm one," said Ace Boulder looking contemptuously at Curling Feather. "Didn't know your tribe were so thin the old men had to fight!" He laughed. "You'll be bringing the squaws out next!"

Black Wolf looked angry." Is not true! Boulder speak with forked tongue."

"But why bring the old man?"

"Medicine man necessary to sacrifice boy in proper manner, to please spirits," answered Black Wolf.

"You won't need him after all, 'cause there ain't gonna be no sacrifice," said Boulder.

The big man's hands hovered so close to the handles of the big .45's that they fluttered above the iron like birds fluttering above a marsh, picking up mud in their beaks to make their nests against the cliff face.

"There will be sacrifice," snapped Black Wolf.

"I say there won't be sacrifice, unless I get the yellow metal," retorted Ace Boulder.

The old medicine man edged his pony up beside his chief and whispered something in Black Wolf's ear.

"Very well, you shall have yellow metal."

"How do I know there's no trickery in this?"

"Black Wolf speak true—you shall be taken to

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

cave and given yellow metal!"

"No, no!" cried Alalu, "It is the honour of the tribe that no white man goes to the cave! You accused me of breaking the tribal law, now you are breaking the tribal law!"

"Soon you will not speak," said Black Wolf, quietly. There came the sound of another pony coming up the trail. It was lighter and moving swiftly, very swiftly indeed, as though it had wings, and some strange, sixth sense seemed to tell Alalu that this was Dancing Sunbeam. A moment later he knew he was right. The girl dismounted and flung herself at Black Wolf's feet.

"Do not kill him!" she begged. "Do not kill him!"

"Why have you disobeyed me and followed me?"

"Because I do not wish you to kill him!"

"You love this wild one," said Black Wolf, half-statement, half question. A cruel smile played about Black Wolf's lips.

Tears sprang into Dancing Sunbeam's eyes.

"Yes, I love him," she said.

The cruel smile on the chief's face became broader.

"You are too soft, too gentle," he said. "You must learn to be strong. You shall watch as he dies!"

"No, no!" screamed the girl.

"Yes!" thundered Black Wolf.

Ace Boulder's eyes had never left the girl since she had dismounted.

"The price has gone up," he announced suddenly.

The old chief turned towards him.

"What you mean—price has gone up?" he said.

"We made bargain. Yellow metal from cave for life of boy."

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

"There is another commodity I want to trade for—the price has gone up," said Boulder.

Black Wolf looked towards Dancing Sunbeam and his cruel smile flashed again.

"You want squaw?" he asked.

"Yeah—I want squaw," agreed Boulder.

"You can have squaw," said Black Wolf.

Dancing Sunbeam looked at her father in horror. Looked towards the scarred, pock-marked face, the swarthy complexion of Ace Boulder, with its week's stubble of beard, his cruel, hard, glittering eyes, and she cowered back from what she saw.

Alalu saw the girl's fear, and struggled with his bonds.

Ace Boulder took his lustful eyes off Dancing Sunbeam and looked into Black Wolf's face. Suddenly he realised what the other half of the bargain entailed, and why Black Wolf acquiesced so readily.

"I think I'll change my mind . . ." said Ace Boulder.

"What you want now?" asked Black Wolf.

"I don't think I want anything," returned Ace Boulder. "You don't speak with forked tongue, Black Wolf. You just speak half the truth. You said I could have the yellow metal from the cave—how far would I get when I'd got it?"

"I did not promise life," said Black Wolf, "only yellow metal!"

"And that's why you gave me that girl as a squaw, that's why you agreed to give your own daughter away, because it wouldn't matter a damn to give her to a dead man!" snarled Ace Boulder. "You wouldn't have let me live long enough to spend any of the

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

gold! I'd have got a lance between the shoulder blades! No, thanks, Black Wolf; I don't do business like that!" And suddenly twin .45's appeared in his hands as if by magic. "And I don't like men who try to do business with me that way."

The anger in his eyes made even the mighty chief cower back a little.

"I do my business this way!" said Boulder, and Black Wolf saw death in the cowboy's face.

The hawk-like face the old chief moved almost imperceptibly, as an expression, a glance, a look, the ghost of a look, the shadow of a look, the wraith of a glance, passed almost unnoticed between him and the nearer of the two warriors. It was almost imperceptible, but not quite, that coded look, that shaded glance. Men like Ace Boulder can live only as long as they are quick on the draw. Men like Ace Boulder have to be fast enough to let the other man make his play first and beat him in the vital split second that separates life from death, like the edge of God's own razor.

A gunman like Ace Boulder could tell whether or not a hardening of the eye, a swift, furtive twitch of a face muscle meant that a hand was going to snake down towards a .45. and he knew what that furtive signal from Black Wolf meant. The nearer of the two warriors, the closer of the two braves, had also picked up the signal. The tomahawk was halfway from his belt when a big .45 erupted. The impact of the heavy slug carried the dying Indian a full three yards backwards, before he crashed to the cold earth of the trail itself.

"That was a nasty, sneaky trick, Black Wolf," said

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

Boulder, "I would have thought you were more a man of your word than that."

"Black Wolf man of honour!"

"Oh yeah," said Boulder, "yeah! Some honour!" and he spat expressively. "Worth about half as much as a quid of tobacco when a man's finished chewing it."

"You shall die for saying this about honour of Black Wolf!" raged the chief.

"Well, I don't reckon there's anything wrong with my heart, it's given me no trouble before," returned the gunman. "We ain't got no history of folks dyin' of a stroke in my family. Mind you, my old grandpas, he got a sudden chill, but he was comin' on for a hundred years old . . . and even then, it wasn't that sudden."

The big gunman was laughing out loud now. He was mocking the chief, and enjoying himself . . . "You see, Mr. Black Wolf, I don't reckon anything's gonna happen to me unless somebody does something to me, and right now neither you, nor your men, are in any position to do anything to me." Black Wolf's seething anger suddenly erupted. He flung himself from the pony like an eagle with wings outspread. The bullet took him in mid-flight, and with surprising agility for so big a man. Ace Boulder ducked to one side. Black Wolf was dead before his body hit the trail. Dancing Sunbeam flung herself across her father's prostrate form, sobbing wildly.

"Well, now, ain't women difficult to figure," commented the gunman. "One minute she don't like the old man; he's pushing her around. Next minute she's crying like hell 'cause he's dead! All women are

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

funny, but Indian women, I reckon, are funniest of all. There just ain't no logic in it."

The remaining warrior made a threatening grimace.

"Now, look, son," said Boulder, "You know bullets are kind-a expensive, and I've already used two. You want another one? 'Cause next time this gun goes off you ain't gonna hear it. A man never hears the one that gets him. That's how it's gonna be with you. So you just stand real still, take that tomahawk out of your belt real easy now. Just drop it on the trail, and your knife. Then you can get rid o' that bow you're carrying and your quiver. Then I'll feel a lot better.

As for you, you old bag o' bones," Ace Boulder turned in the direction of the medicine man, "Why, you can just kind-a do the same thing for me; you can relieve yourself of that knife in your belt. I don't know why an old man like you carries a bow and arrow, because I don't reckon you've got enough strength in your arm to pull the bow string." He looked at the impotent old medicine man, and laughed uproariously.

"Goddam my hide if you ain't just about the biggest fool I ever did see! Medicine man!" Curling Feather was grinding his gums together in rage.

Ace Boulder threw back his great head and laughed. The Indian brave thought that Boulder wasn't looking. He stooped with a swift, darting movement to recover the tomahawk that he had dropped at Boulder's command. A bullet took him straight between the eyes before his fingers closed on the shaft.



## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

"Well, now. I had to use that extra bullet after all!" commented Boulder.

"You have the killing sickness," said Alalu.

"Well, that just might be, and then, again, it might not," commented Boulder. "But whichever way you like to look at it it's a kind of successful disease, don't you think?"

"You are sick," said Dancing Sunbeam.

"Well, I'm kinda sick of not getting the results I want," agreed Boulder. Then his eyes went hard again. "But right now I reckon I'm gonna get all the results I want! I'm gonna get 'em quick. Come here, gal."

Dancing Sunbeam remained motionless.

"I thought you'd be kind-a stubborn," commented Ace Boulder, "You come from a pretty stubborn tribe, little lady. But I've got a way to get rid of your stubbornness." He looked towards the boy, "He's pretty stubborn, too, you know. But it kind-a occurs to me that if you get two stubborn people together you can ge through that stubbornness a lot better than you can when you've only got one on his own."

"What you do?" demanded Alalu, and there was fear in his voice. He had just seen Boulder kill three men with the deadly ease of a striking snake. The great chief, and two of the finest warriors in the tribe had stood no chance at all against the lightning fast .45's of the ruthless gunman.

"I reckon I'll show you what I'm gonna do," replied Boulder. There was another tree a short distance away across the trail, they grew quite thickly on the slopes.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"First of all I'm gonna tie up this old bag o' bones, so's he don't go gettin' any funny ideas into that ancient head of his."

Watching the girl through narrowed eyes, Boulder did as he had threatened, and the old medicine man was tied to the tree, opposite to the one on which Alalu was tied.

"And now you, little lady," said Boulder. He tied the girl to a third tree, her face towards the bark, her arms around it. Boulder looked at the boy and then at Dancing Sunbeam.

"You know, this girl must think a mighty lot of you," said Boulder to Alalu. "Comin' up here, beggin' her father to spare your life. I reckon you may think something o' her, too."

"What you do?" demanded Alalu again.

"Oh, I ain't gonna do nothing yet. I'm just going to let you think about the situation for a little while," said Ace Boulder. "Then I'm going to give you a little demonstration." He sat down and finished his coffee.

"It's a mite cold, but it's still a drink," he said, and he shot the dregs out on to the trail.

He whistled his horse, and took a long, heavy stock whip from the saddle. He strode casually up to the tree against which Dancing Sunbeam was tied. With one jerk of his massive hand he tore open the back of her buckskin jacket. He took a step backwards and brought the heavy stockwhip down with vicious force. He turned to the boy.

"Got a lot o' time to spare, young fella," he said, "a lot o' time. A man who's got a lot o' time can

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

have a lot o' fun, playing a little game like this." He drew the whip back again.

"No," said Alalu, "What do you want?"

"You know what I want, boy. I want to find that cave!"

"Do not tell him; do not tell him," sobbed the girl.

"Why, you must have funny tastes in enjoyment," grunted Ace Boulder. The heavy whip came down again, leaving a vicious red weal across her copper-coloured skin.

"I will take you to the cave," said Alalu wearily.

"No! No! It is taboo!" cried Dancing Sunbeam.

"I will take you to the cave."

"Now you're being real sensible, boy. Just to make sure you're gonna go on being sensible I'm gonna take the girl and the old man with us, and if I find you playing any tricks what I've just done is nothing to what I'm gonna do!"

Looking at him, Alalu knew that he meant it.

\* \* \*

Three men and a girl, climbing a mountain, a setting sun, long dark shadows fleeing away from the red mouth of the sunset, like frightened fish trying to escape the net. A boy, a girl, a vicious killer-giant, a wizened old man climbing up a mountain. The giant had a cruel look in his eyes and hands that hovered within an inch of his guns, hands the size of hams . . .

"I hope it ain't far to this cave, now, son," commented Ace Boulder, "I sure hope it ain't far! Old man, you're slowing us up, go faster!"

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"Curling Feather no longer young, Curling Feather live many moons, Curling Feather have tiredness of old age . . . "

"Curling Feather have lead in his belly if he doesn't shut up and climb faster," hissed Ace Boulder. The old man said nothing, but there was a look in his eyes that would have killed a rattle-snake.

Higher and higher they climbed, the sun dipped lower and lower, and one by one the stars began to rise, twinkling out from the grey-blue backdrop of an early evening sky. The moon came up over the mountain, and the grey-blue turned to bluish-purple.

The bluish-purple gave way to the black velvet of night. The silver moonlight shone on the rocks, and still they climbed, higher and higher. The mountains seemed to be all around them. There was nothing left in the world but mountain and moonlight. Nothing left in the world by rocks and stars.

Two men, a girl, a boy. A vicious murderous giant, a boy, a girl and an old man.

"How much further?" The giant's voice cut through the evening silence, as his whip had cut through the air to the girl's back. She flinched at the sound of that voice. It reminded her too much of the whip. No one answered him.

"I said 'how much further'?"

"Not much more climbing now," said Alalu.

"Can we not rest?" asked old Curling Feather.

"You can rest when I've got the gold and got out o' here," said Ace Boulder.

"I shall sleep with my fathers if I do not rest soon," said the old medicine man.

"It is true," said the wild boy. Alalu had no love

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

for Curling Feather, but as long as old Curling Feather was alive it was one more of them against the vicious white giant. They kept on climbing. The mountain seemed to have no beginning and no end. Just an endless amorphous uphill grind. On and on; on and on; weary step after weary step; dragging tired limbs after tired limbs; three men and a girl up a mountain. A boy on the mountain, a girl on the mountain, a giant on the mountain, a weary old man on the mountain . . . up and up, past jagged rocks, past trees, past scrubby bushes, every now and again came the howl of a mountain lion, the grunt of a bear, the long drawn-out call of the wolf.

At last, as they rounded the perimeter of an enormous rock, they saw a clump of bushes growing low against the side of the mountain up which they climbed.

"That is the entrance," said Alalu.

"Is that so?" answered Ace Boulder. "Well, now I've heard about some of these totem caves, they can be full of nasty little surprises for people who don't know the way in, so I reckon you ought to go in first, boy. Then you old man, and I'm going to bring the girl in with me."

"There is no trap in the entrance," answered the boy. "See, I will go first." He parted the bushes and stepped through into a huge dark aperture. There were small rock chimneys in the enormous cavern itself and down through these rock chimneys fell shafts of moonlight. On either side of the door, torches were thrust into crevices in the walls, and there was flint and dry tinder on a small stone table.

Alalu struck fire to the tinder and lit a torch. He

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

held it up so that the smoky, orange-yellow flames illuminated the interior. In the light of the shafted moonbeams and the yellow-red flickering of the torch, he beheld the enormous carved totems; tall, grotesque, terrifying. Totems of fear, totems of terror, totems which seemed to carry a curse in their wooden faces. Totems that seemed to carry danger and death in their carved claws. The old man was thrust roughly between the bushes guarding the entrance. Then came Dancing Sunbeam grasped tightly by the gigantic Boulder.

"So you were telling the truth at last," said Boulder.

"I had no choice," said the boy. "It could not let you do what you were doing."

"Now isn't that real chivalrous," said Boulder. Alalu had no idea of what the word chivalrous meant, so he said nothing. Boulder strode swiftly through the cave, paying scarcely any attention at all to the gigantic, carved totems . . . He dragged the girl along with him. There was a carved stone chest at the far end.

"Open it," commanded the giant to Dancing Sunbeam. It took all her strength to get the lid off. The moonlight fell on a cascade of glittering gold. Coins going back to the 16th and 17th centuries, coins that must have been taken from the very earliest settlers. But the coins were scarce beside the nuggets. There wasn't only gold in that stone coffer.

"This is some haul. I figured I might just find some bits of wampum, for my trouble. I didn't reckon the legends could really have been true. This is magnifi-

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

cent. You know, I might almost have been tempted to let you off, when I first saw this."

"So our reward is to be death," said Alalu.

"Well, you can't expect me to let you go blabbing the whole story around. I don't know of a better way to quieten a man than to put a bullet through him."

"And the girl?" asked Alalu desperately. "Will you kill her, too?"

"Well, not straight away," said Boulder. "She's too pretty to kill. I reckon I'll take her with me for a few weeks."

"No," said Alalu.

"And just what are you going to do to stop me?" enquired Ace Boulders.

"I can stop you," said the old medicine man in a strange faraway voice. "I can call down the spirit of the Totem."

"Ah, you stupid old crow, you make me sick! Spirit of the Totem!" Boulder laughed uproariously. There was suddenly an ear-splitting crash as the .45 erupted in the confines of the cave. The bullet tore away part of the features of one of the poles. "He looks a mite better without that great nose. Watch me shoot his ears off!"

"No, no, do not do this," cried Curling Feather. "It is powerful medicine!"

"Not so powerful as the medicines I've got in my two holsters!" retorted Ace Boulder and fired again. An ear and an eye were torn off the grotesquely carved wooden totem.

"Then I will call the Spirit of the Totem from its

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

sleep," said the medicine man, "and you shall learn the power of this cave!"

"Go ahead and call what the hell you like, 'cos in five minutes from now you won't be callin' nobody or nothin!" retorted Ace Boulder. "They say a condemned man has a last request, O.K., old bag o' bones, have your last request!"

The old medicine man began to chant quietly. It was a tongue that was unknown to both Dancing Sunbeam and to Alalu.

"What is he saying?" whispered the girl.

Alalu shook his head.

"It is not the language of man, neither is it the language of the beasts. It must be the language of the spirits . . . "

"You finished croaking, old frog?" asked Boulder.

The old man pretended he hadn't heard—perhaps, in reality, he hadn't. He walked straight across the cave and flung his arms round the feet of the Totem whose features had been carried away by Boulder's .45 slugs.

"I reckon that's as good a place to die as any," said Boulder, and the .45 erupted once more.

The old Indian's body jerked convulsively. Thick, dark blood welled on to the floor of the cave, running down the carved feet of the totem . It was as though in some strange way the old medicine man had made a final sacrifice to the spirit of the Totem, a sacrifice that would release something that lurked within the wooden effigy. Subtly, and almost imperceptibly at first, the atmosphere in the cave began to change. It was as though a great dark presence enveloped them all. Dancing Sunbeam cowered



## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

against Alalu and the torch in the boy's hand began to flicker and go out. The shafts of moonlight coming down through the rock chimneys grew fainter and the interior of the cave was a mass of dark shadow, in which grotesque, darker shadows stood wild and stark.

"I hope you ain't got no thoughts about escaping, Indian Boy," said Ace Boulder, "Cos you ain't gonna get far; I'll tell you that son, you ain't gonna get far!"

A .455 exploded again, Alalu and Dancing Sunbeam saw the orange stab, and heard the whine of the heavy slug as it ricocheted from the wall of the cave. The gunman fired again and again, but by some strange miracle that in itself seemed supernatural, none of the bullets hit them in the darkness.

Then the darkness itself began to lighten. The outline of the disfigured Totem began to glow with a hideous reddish-green illumination that seemed to be emanating from the heart of the hideously carved wood. The light throbbed and pulsed at the base of the totem where the dead medicine man lay, as though the old man's life blood was a heart pumping power into the wood, as though it was the catalyst assisting the strange action, the psychic reaction and the paranormal inter-action.

Ace Boulder backed away from the totem as far as the confines of the cave would permit. He emptied both of his .45's into the glowing wood. Bullets and chips of carved timber flew around the cave like angry hornets and then Alalu and the girl heard the clicking of hammers on empty shells. Something seemed to be coming out of the totem, something be-

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

sides the light. It was an amorphous thing, and yet a thing of great horror. It was indescribable, but a feeling of fear radiated from it.

Alalu clutched Dancing Sunbeam tightly in his arms as though to protect her from the thing that was emanating from the shattered totem.

Despite its indescribable horror there was something hideously familiar about the thing that was emerging in all its ghastly neonate devilry. It had the features of the grotesque totem god and yet there was a different kind of familiarity about the weird physiognomy. Surely, thought Alalu, surely I must be seeing visions. The spirits have filled my mind with the images of demons. I must be seeing that which cannot really exist. My eyes are speaking with forked tongues. My brain is bewitched. The spirits are inside my head deceiving me.

This cannot be.

This cannot be.

THIS CANNOT BE.

The thing emerging from the glowing totem pole had a strange resemblance to the old Medicine man, Curling Feather, as well as to the grotesque carvings of its wooden original.

Ace Boulder had turned as white as graveyard marble. His face was a ghastly sheet in which his eyeballs had almost disappeared, like spit holes in the snow. The weird light from the Totem-thing only served to accentuate the gunman's deathly pallor.

He moved forward by a supreme effort of will, staggering helplessly. Dancing Sunbeam clung desperately to Alalu and the knowledge that she depended on him, trusted him and relied on him, gave

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

new strength to the wild boy. The amorphous thing from the totem was encircling Ace Boulder. It reminded Alalu of a cunning spider entombing a fat fly in folds of deadly gossamer. The hideous hybrid features, part totem, part medicine man, contorted yet further. Pure evil looked out from the blemished eyes. Ace Boulder gave a sobbing, choking scream and clutched at his throat. The totem thing enfolded him more closely, as though determined to deny him even the relief of a scream. His voice died away into a muffled sob. Then it broke out again. The Totem thing was not like an adversary of flesh and blood, but Ace Boulder was not an ordinary man. He was a villain in every sense of the word, but he was a singularly tough villain. You could hate a man like Ace Boulder. You could fight him. You could loathe him, you could detest him, you could chronicle him as the last word in abominations masquerading as human beings. You could rank him with Nero, Caligula, Vlad the Impaler, Ivan the Terrible, Hitler, Eichmann, Madame Defarge and the 'sans culottes'. But there was one thing about Ace Boulder that even his bitterest enemy had to give him credit for. Even the devil deserves his due. Ace Boulder was a devil incarnate in many ways but there was one thin streak of a redeeming feature in him. He was strong. A weak villain dies alone despised, forgotten. The Totem thing would already have extracted the life of anyone weaker than Ace a hundred times over. Its deadly psychic power would have meant death or worse at the first touch. It was actually wrapped right around the gunman. It was exerting fantastic psychic pressure. It was attempting to suck the liv-

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

ing soul out of his body . . . by an incredible miracle of will-power, and sheer strength on the gunman's part, it had not yet succeeded.

The might of a great ocean is incomparably greater than the might of a cliff. The strongest rock must ultimately yield to the ravages of the great waters. Basalt and limestone, granite and flint; all must crumble as surely as chalk and sandstone, if the remorseless, relentless pressure is kept up long enough. The Indian boy and girl watched in horrified fascination as the might of the granite that was the personality of Ace Boulder began to surely but slowly crumble under the oceanic pressure of the imminence of the Totem thing.

Constant dripping will ultimately wear away the strongest of stones. The psychic dripping of the Totem thing was too much for Ace Boulder, the merciless repetition of the psychic attack was too much for the ramparts of Boulder's mental and psychic castle. His ethereal port-cullis began to tremble. His drawbridge of will-power crashed to the banks of his mental moat. The battering ram of the psychic onslaught of the Totem thing crashed through the doors of Boulder's reason. His will-power had failed. His mind had failed. His reason had deserted him. His sanity had fled. His hair turned suddenly as white as snow. He was babbling childishly to himself. His arms groped before him like the eyes of a somnambulist. He walked like a blind man, or a man in a trance. The weird Totem-entity relaxed its psychic entanglement of the pathetic remains of Ace Boulder. A mindless, soul-less thing staggered out of the cave of the Totems. Its trembling hands clutched

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

yellow nuggets. The jaw that had once been strong as a steel trap hung slack. Saliva drooled from the twitching lips. The blemished eyes rolled in their sockets. The once deep voice that had seemed to shake the mountains in its anger had become a pitiful, prematurely senile, whining sound. Ace Boulder had mocked the old medicine man, Curling Feather. He had mocked senility. Now senility had visited Ace Boulder. It had visited him with swift, merciless aggression. It had done the damage of forty years in as many seconds.

The wreck that had once been Ace Boulder staggered mindlessly, sightlessly, from the cave and stood gibbering on the hillside. The glowing hybrid, part man-spirit, part totem-spirit, gathered itself together and seemed to hover quite motionless.

"Now," whispered Alalu.

"Where?" asked Dancing Sunbeam.

"Out of the cave," answered the wild boy. He took a firm grip of her hand and began advancing resolutely towards the doorway of the deadly cavern. The shadows of the dreadful totems seemed to lie everywhere about them, an invisible barrier of umbra and penumbra between the fugitives and the freedom they craved.

The condensing thing with the features of the old medicine man and the features of the Totem turned slowly, horribly, in their direction.

"Stay," hissed a terrible voice. It was the voice of Curling Feather. Alalu felt fear tugging at his heart strings.

"We have done no evil, let us go," he said softly.

"Stay," repeated the hideous Totem-thing.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"What do you want with us?" asked Alalu, sounding a little bolder.

"Stay," hissed the dreadful voice again.

"But I tell you again, we have done no wrong," persisted the wild boy.

"STAY," demanded the Totem-thing.

"Why?" begged Alalu.

"You have broken the laws of the tribe. You must die. You freed the enemy from the trap. You let food escape from your people when they were hungry. You led the evil white man here to the sacred cave. You betrayed your people." The voice was angry and accusing.

"Dancing Sunbeam has committed no wrong," said Alalu bravely. "She has broken no laws. Let her leave in peace and then I will die willingly."

"The girl has done no wrong," said the strange voice, the voice that was partly the voice of Curling Feather and partly the voice of something else.

"Then let her go," begged Alalu.

"She may go," said the weird hybrid voice of the weird hybrid totem-thing.

"I will not go alone," said Dancing Sunbeam, fighting back her tears. "Nothing shall separate us."

"If you disobey me you will die with the wrongdoer," said the Totem thing.

"Life is death without the man who loves me," said Dancing Sunbeam.

"There will be nothing but death for you if you remain in this cave when I turn upon him in wrath," said the Totem thing.

"You are the sacred Totem of the tribe," said Dancing Sunbeam fearlessly.

## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

"You have said so," replied the strange voice. It was an oddly ambiguous answer.

"Are you the spirit of the tribe?" asked the girl persistently.

"Again I tell you that you have said so," replied the weird hybrid voice.

"I do not believe that you are," said Dancing Sunbeam suddenly. Perhaps it was feminine intuition. Perhaps it was something more. Something older. Something deeper. Something stranger. Something stronger. Something as instinctive as the innate belief in the Great Spirit. Something as fundamental as Manitu the Mighty. Something as innately good as Hiawatha himself.

"What is this you say? O my beloved," asked Alalu the wild boy. "What deep mystery is here?"

"The Totem spirit is not the true Totem spirit," said Dancing Sunbeam enigmatically. "It speaks with a forked tongue!"

"You are wise beyond your years," said the weird psychic voice. There was mockery in the sound; horrible, hideous, baleful mockery. It made Alalu's blood run cold in his strong young veins and normally his blood raced madly hot when he held the beautiful Dancing Sunbeam in his arms.

"I am a Wild Spirit," went on the voice. "I am not one spirit, but many spirits."

"Are you evil?" asked Alalu.

"We do not serve the Great Spirit," said the weird voice.

"Then you are not the spirit of our tribe; you are not the rightful spirit of our Totem," said Dancing Sunbeam.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"The Totem is the reflection of the tribe. The tribe does not always obey the Great Spirit. When the tribe is evil the spirit of the Totem changes. When the tribe obeys the Great Spirit the true spirit of the Totem returns."

"If you are not the true spirit of our Totem," said Dancing Sunbeam challengingly, "then you have no right to kill Alalu."

"Who are you to speak of rights, puny mortal?" mocked the voice of the Totem-thing. "The mind of a mortal is like the summer grass. Today it is here. Tomorrow it has gone."

"But it returns next summer," said Dancing Sunbeam bravely.

"Summer or winter, past or present, all are alike to me," said the hideous voice of the Totem-thing. "I am not bound by time as mortals are bound by time."

"Does time have no effect on you at all?" asked Alalu in bewilderment.

"I was old before the snow on the mountains. I was old before the mountains. Before the earth was, I was." There was terror in the voice; fear reached out its icy fingers to encircle the Wild Boy's heart.

"We have wasted time in talk," said the deadly Totem-thing, the spirit-entity that was part man, part something else. Something else that was unknown and unknowable.

"Let Dancing Sunbeam go," demanded Alalu.

"She had her chance," said the Totem-thing, and there was deadly chill in the weird psychic voice. "She has made her choice. If she does not want life that is no concern of mine. Is the river to blame when fools shoot the rapids in frail canoes, and die



## CURSE OF THE TOTEM

for their recklessness? Is the mountain to blame when puny mortals fall from slippery rocks? Is the forest to blame when men die amid its trees?" Alalu could find no answer at first. He remained stubbornly silent.

"Speak," ordered the Totem spirit.

Alalu shook his head bravely.

"Speak," hissed the Totem thing again.

Still the boy remained silent.

"SPEAK," roared the deadly voice of the Totem thing.

"I have nothing to say, O false spirit that steals the rightful place of our tribal Totem," said Alalu defiantly.

"Then die!!" thundered the mighty voice. The voice boomed and ricocheted in the cave. The other Totems seemed to tremble. Alalu drew Dancing Sunbeam more tightly to him. It was a gesture of defence and defiance. It was his bravery's answer to the hideous spirit entity that resembled both the wraith of old Curling Feather and the evil thing from the grotesque Totem.

The dreadful entity, the awesome spirit sentence, the psychic anima with the foul hybrid features advanced on the Indian lovers. Death seemed to hover in the air of the dreadful cave. It leered down from the wooden faces of the Totems. It moved menacingly among the rocks. It whispered from hidden crevices.

The thing moved almost imperceptibly nearer.

The Indian boy and girl clung to each other helplessly. Like two tiny animals mesmerised by a snake they waited for the inevitable.

The thing had almost reached them.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

There was a flurry of movement and an angry growl. The growl rose to a howling roar. Its high decibel gain challenged the ululations of the weird psychic voice of the Totem thing, the terrible Totem thing, the tremendous Totem thing, the tenebrous Totem thing. The great grey wolf with an ancient trap scar on its left hind leg bounded into the cave. Its massive teeth were bared in an almighty snarl, its fur stood vertically along the rippling muscles which sheather its spine.

"It is the great wolf I once freed from the trap." Alalu sounded breathlessly excited.

"He has come to pay his debt to you," said Dancing Sunbeam.

"But how did he know we were here?" persisted the boy.

"Perhaps he is no ordinary wolf," suggested Dancing Sunbeam. "Perhaps he is the great wolf spirit himself." Even as she spoke something was apparently happening to the great grey wolf. It was changing before their very eyes into something else. It was growing larger, incredibly larger, magnificently larger. Now it was as big and as strangely amorphous as the hideous spirit of the Totem which had threatened the young Indians. Wolf-spirit and Totem-spirit locked in a titanic struggle. The cave seemed to come alive as though its atmosphere was filled with powerful psycho-electric discharges. Alalu and the girl ran out into the clean, fresh night air of the mountainside.

The sounds of a fiendish struggle emanated from the cave. At last the grey wolf appeared, looking as he had always looked. He ran happily up to Alalu and

## **CURSE OF THE TOTEM**

licked the boy's hand. He nuzzled his great head against Dancing Sunbeam and then trotted off back to the wilds that he loved.

The Indian lovers walked down the mountainside hand-in-hand as the sun rose symbolically in the east and flooded their path with the promise of golden dawn.

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

By Leo Brett

**"There was a surge of power as he lifted the  
ancient hammer out of the soil."**

**SCHLUSKA DAHL** was not exactly the answer to a maiden's prayer. He might have been something like the answer to a demon's prayer, for he was a singularly unprepossessing character. His hair—if those rather bovine wisps of red-brown, matted substance, dangling low over a receding forehead, could be called hair—was not the kind of thing that was sought after by the enterprising managers of hair-cream companies . . . The forehead, as we have already noticed, was a rather sloping affair, it was also craggy. It sloped after the manner of a terrace; it was somewhat reminiscent of the silhouette of a

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

Ziggurat, except that the slope was a little steeper and the steps of bone were slightly softened, by the flesh, epidermis and dermis adhering to them. The brows themselves were very prominent, and the eyes, by contrast, were deep set, sunk far into the skull, and endowed with a singularly pig-like character.

Schluska Dahl had singularly crafty eyes, which were the apt reflection of a singularly blunt but crafty mind.

Between the eyes and apparently depending from them, like an unhealthy and overripe pear, about to drop from the bough, was a protuberance which Schluska Dahl euphemistically referred to as his 'nose'. Aesthetic taste forbids that we describe this appendage in too close detail! Suffice it to say that it was not by any means an attractive olfactory attachment!

Below the nose was a rank patch of what would have been hair in a more human, and although Schluska Dahl had a birth certificate among his other possessions, it was a singularly doubtful document! Under the moustache was a long, rather pendulous, upper lip, and beneath the upper lip, almost hidden by its pendulousness, were a row of teeth that stuck forward like pickets in a fence . . . Whether Schluska Dahl had grown that upper lip to try and hide the picket fence teeth, or whether the teeth had appeared as by some kind of dental self-defence to push the lip forward and thus prevent it from running suffocatingly down the throat, no one had ever really bothered to take the trouble to find out. Big as the teeth were, and pendulous as was the upper lip, there

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

was no danger of either the protruding teeth or the hanging flesh curtain touching the lower jaw. Schluska Dahl's lower mandible hung permanently open—perhaps his sash cord had broken! Or maybe he just had a flat battery! But whatever the cause—and wise men know that you can't search for a motive too long and too hard without running into such a skein of perplexities that it would require Sherlock Holmes to untangle them—suffice it to say that Schluska Dahl was just about the most vacuous, most fatuous and of the least pleasing physiognomy which has been described to the reading public for quite some time. Imagine a second cousin to Frankenstein's monster, or a kid brother for Quasimodo, a friend for the Phantom of the Opera, a chum for King Kong, and a helpmate for Mr. Hyde—somewhere between these fanciful characters lies an apt picture of Schluska Dahl. Schluska Dahl lived somewhere in Scandinavia, because he was so singularly untypical of Scandinavia, or for that matter of anywhere else in the civilised world, his exact point of origin need not be too closely analysed.

The fact that he was a Scandinavian was just Scandinavia's misfortune. He might just as well have been a Russian, a Slav, an Englishman, or a Frenchman; now and again the civilised race has a misfortune and a Schluska Dahl is produced.

Not that he was a bad man, not that he was a foolish man, not that he was merely an ugly man. He wasn't really outstandingly bad, or outstandingly foolish. He was not good and he was not clever; certainly he was not handsome. It was, perhaps, the overwhelming way in which he combined the ab-

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

sence of all these virtues that made him seem such a complete and utter travesty of humanity . . .

It was a cold October afternoon, and Schluska Dahl was out foraging in the woods; thick grey clouds promised a light snowfall before morning. Already the white evidence on the trees testified mutely to the fact that it would not be the first fall of winter.

Dahl had an odd habit of poking, prodding, prying, and exploring around the knotted and gnarled roots of the ancient pines on the upper slopes. Many an ordinary human being would rather have been at home on a cold October afternoon, but not so Schluska Dahl. Schluska Dahl looked for things which ordinary, mortal men did not understand! In the distant village, far below in the valley, there were two schools of thought about Dahl, one, that he was in some way singularly fey, and that he could see things which ordinary men could not see, hear things which ordinary mortal men could not hear, and sense and experience things which ordinary mortal men could not sense and experience. The other school of thought was equally and oppositely convinced that Schluska Dahl was a simple, straight-forward head case who wanted taking away to a place of safety, that men who go poking around in tree roots on a snowy October afternoon don't really belong with the rest of us, and that both they, and the rest of us, would be happier if some sort of ridge—in the form of an asylum wall, for example—could be built between them! But Schluska Dahl's village would have been the first to admit that their opinion was that of the layman rather than of the professional, and that in the absence of professional opinion

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

there was nothing for it but to allow Schluska Dahl to continue prying and prodding, and poking among the roots of trees, even when a light fall of snow threatened, even when its predecessor had already transmuted the branches into a garden of white, crystalline beauty and pristine magnificence.

Schluska Dahl prodded and pried at the trunks of the trees, now and then he would find a short piece of broken branch, fallen in the storm of yesteryear, and he would scurry and flurry and worry the snow until he had ploughed his way back through the cold, hard, brown earth beneath. Then he would kick the brown earth with his heels as though it was some bitter enemy upon whom he was venting his spleen, as though it was some fallen foe upon which he was fomenting his ferocity.

As he foraged Schluska Dahl was deep in thought, as we have seen, he was not a good man, and his thoughts at this particular time were turned towards his fellow villagers. It was as well for those villagers that his mind was as imperfect as it was! He would otherwise have been quite a formidable antagonist. Schluska Dahl was thinking of the way he was treated. He knew in an embryonic sort of way, that he was not like the others. In what respect he did not resemble the others he was not absolutely convinced, but he was aware of his own differences and distressed by those differences. The distress had turned to a rather nasty, in fact a dangerous, form of embittered hatred. Schluska Dahl wished that he had the power to make the others do as he wanted. He wanted them to be afraid of him. He didn't know the word, and he didn't know the meaning of the



## VENGEANCE OF THOR

word, but if he had been just a little more intelligent, he would have said that he craved their respect. He was regarded as having just about as much significance as a stray dog, that pretty well ranked the limit of his social standing. Scarcely that, for a dog would be made welcome and given food. Schluska Dahl was not made welcome and given food. If he had no food of his own he went without food. This, to Schluska Dahl was not a good state of affairs, this was a state of affairs that would have to be altered. This was a status quo that would have to be amended. This was a part of the establishment that would have to be dis-established. Of course, Schluska Dahl didn't think of it in quite that way, but that was what he meant . . .

He was kicking away at the earth with his heel, thinking of what he would do if ever he got the chance. if ever the great Wheel of Fate overbalanced itself and turned so that power was with him at the expense of those who had abused him. It was while his mind was filled with thoughts like these that his foot suddenly made contact with something beneath the snow. It was something extremely hard, and Schluska Dahl leapt back as though he had received a very violent electric shock. Schluska Dahl leapt back in very much the same way that a man jumps back when he has stubbed his bare toe on the bed-post. In fact, Schluska Dahl had stubbed his toe. The toe was not bare, for there are limits, even to the cruelty of Schluska Dahl, and though he presented his fellow men with the unremitting sight of his face, he had at least spared them the sight of the other parts of his revolting body. His feet certainly came

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

well within the category of worst. It didn't matter very much with which of the senses you made the acquaintanceship of Mr. Dahl's feet. You could see them and shudder at the sight, for it was many a long moon since they had come into contact with soap and water. You could hear the unrhythmic thud they made, going on long, constitutional tramps. While on the subject of long, constitutional tramps, Schluska Dahl was the sort of nitwit who could be advised by his doctor to 'go for a long tramp in the country' and then set about the first gentleman-of-the-road he met who happened to be more than six feet in height! Schluska Dahl was not a man who had any kind of sense of humour, but anyone who could have watched him gyrating wildly, after stubbing his foot on the strange object beneath the snow and earth, would have thought that he was the greatest natural comedian of all time, a man who threw his heart and his soul into his work, a man whose one concern was to make his audience laugh.

Schluska Dahl began scrapping about to try to find the object which had produced this very violent pain in his foot. He did find it at last, and when he had succeeded in withdrawing it from the hard ground, he looked at it in bewilderment. It looked for all the world like a hammer, with a long, powerful handle and a thick, square, iron head. As Schluska Dahl looked at it, however, he was at a loss to understand whether it was really iron or whether it was some kind of stone, it could have been either. It was covered in an ancient runic inscription. He read out the name slowly, for, although Schluska Dahl had taken very little harm from education he had at least

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

been taught the rudiments of literacy . . . In a dull, rather awkward voice he read out the name 'Mjolnir'. He thought for a moment, although 'thought' is a rather euphemistic term with which to describe the process that went on inside that rather simian head, 'Mjolnir' the Destroyer! There was something else in the earth nearby, Schluska Dahl poked and prodded about and finally he prised loose a second object. It appeared to be some kind of girdle, and there were still other things hidden beneath the snow and the frozen soil . . . More poking and prying; more fiddling and scraping and scratching at something like a great human hand, until finally Schluska Dahl pulled out a pair of iron gauntlets. As he put them on an incredible feeling came over him, and he was seized with the impulse to pick up the great iron or stone hammer. Schluska Dahl was not the man to resist any impulse, let alone one that was as strong as this! The moron picked up the hammer, and as he did so, felt a very strange sense of power running through him. It was as though he had plugged himself in to a gigantic dynamo which, instead of giving out violently painful shocks, was supplying him with some of its own power and force, was lending him a proportion of its energy Schluska Dahl's face lit up into a warm beaming smile. He set the great hammer down and took off the iron gloves. Then another impulse seized him, and scarcely knowing why he did so, he fastened the girdle, which he had found, around his waist. He had scarcely finished securing it there when an inexplicable feeling took hold of him completely. Just as he had felt a surge of power and strength coming from the hammer, now he felt

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

a strange sense of power and strength coming from the girdle . . .

He put the iron gloves on again, picked up the hammer and flung it experimentally against the trunk of a thick pine a few yards away. There was a reverberating crash, a sound of splintering wood and the mighty pine fell to the forest floor as though the sawyers had been working on it for the best part of a day!

Schlusska Dahl raced over to inspect the results of his rather violent handiwork. He threw the great hammer into the air and caught it again, like an exuberant child who had just discovered a new toy.

The new power surging through his limbs made him feel intoxicated, gave him a weird light-headedness. He seemed to be springing along the mountain-side, rather than walking, all thoughts of further foraging had gone from his head entirely. He turned and made his way back down the mountain-side. His sole object was to reach the village and display not only his newly-acquired trophies, but the peculiar attributes which the newly-acquired trophies seemed to have bestowed upon him. He had gone scarcely a score of paces before he became aware that he was not the only pedestrian abroad on the mountain. It was not so much that he could hear footsteps on the snowy, leafed floor of the forest, as a kind of uncanny sixth sense, which a mountaineer is apparently born with; one mountain-man can always tell when another is there, sharing the mountain with him. It was not that Schluska could scent the presence of another human being, it was something deeper than that. Perhaps it was the

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

gestalt of the experiencing mechanism of all his senses together. Perhaps it was the ghost of a sound; perhaps it was the faintest shadow of a sigh, perhaps it was the thinnest soupcon of a smell and maybe—blending all together—there was just some strange instinctive knowledge, something that might have been a mountaineer's telepathy . . .

Schluska Dahl, of course, could never have expressed it in that way, Schluska Dahl was not the sort of man who could ever have expressed anything except his desires for food, sleep and the other primitive and straightforward functions of the physical body. Thought was a process, which, although not entirely alien to him, did not come with any undue readiness.

Schluska Dahl looked across the snow towards the spot where his mountain man's instinct, or knowledge, or call it what you will, had indicated to him that another human being stood. He knew that he was right before he looked, the looking was merely a kind of confirmation of his original knowledge rather than a necessity to affirm whether or not his original proposition had been a correct one. Coming towards him was Erik, the shepherd. In the brief period that it was possible for craggy, lean, mountain sheep and goats to be pastured on the short-lived summer grass, Erik the shepherd tended them, and during the rest of the year occupied himself as best he could in the village.

He raised a hand in a purely perfunctory greeting. Schluska waved back with considerably more enthusiasm than Erik had shown towards him. Schluska had discovered something and Schluska

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

wanted to share his discovery with the shepherd.

The shepherd was a year or two younger than Schluska, and because of his occupation was fleet of foot and nimble of limb. He looked towards Schluska with some surprise, the morose Dahl was not in the habit of greeting his contemporaries with such a show of enthusiasm as that which Erik had just witnessed. Obviously Dahl had discovered something and wished to appear important, thought Erik.

"I see you, Dahl," called the shepherd.

"I see you, Erik," called back Dahl.

"I greet you," said the shepherd.

"I return your greetings," said Schluska.

"Have you found anything?" asked the shepherd.

"I have found three things," replied Dahl with great satisfaction.

"Are they of use or of value?" called back Erik.

"Of great use and value," replied Dahl, rather mysteriously. The two men were scarcely an arm's length apart now.

"Is this one of them?" asked Erik, pointing to the belt.

"It is indeed one of them," answered Dahl.

"A very fine piece of what looks like historic workmanship," replied the shepherd.

Dahl nodded. Erik's education had exceeded his own, and besides, the shepherd was a great thinker, being alone so often.

"It resembles pictures I have seen of the magic belt of the great god Thor," said the shepherd suddenly.

"You may well say that it is a magic belt," agreed

"Two weeks ago I bought a 'Joan the Wad' and today I have won £22 10s. Please send two more." B.C. Tredegar, S. Wales.—Extract from "Everybody's Fortune Book, 1931"

# JOAN THE WAD



**GUARANTEED DIPPED IN WATER  
FROM THE LUCKY SAINTS' WELL**

"For 10 years I have enjoyed the most unbelievable good fortune and have always had my J.T.W. by me. Unfortunately I have lost her and feel exactly as if I had lost a human relative. My friend tells me his wife's mother has had Joan for 40 years and would not part with her for all the tea in China."

**SUCCESS FOR SEVEN YEARS.** Another writes . . . "I sent for Joan the Wad seven years ago, during which time I have had many wins on Pools, including one of £72 2s. 0d. and another of £542 15s. 0d. I lost Joan and things immediately began to go wrong. Please send me another, for which I enclose P.O. 6s." Mr. D. H. R., Greattham, Hants, 26.1.56.

**WON HOLIDAY CONTEST.** Mrs. B. E. H., of Kingston-on-Thames, Surrey, writes, 12.4.56 . . . "I really feel I must write and tell you of my good fortune. After having J.T.W. for only a month or so I have just won a Holiday Contest and I feel I owe my good luck to the little lady. It has made me feel very happy."

**ANOTHER POOLS WINNER.** "Please send me 3 Histories. Enclosed is 3s. I want them for friends. By the way, you may be interest to know that I had only received my J.T.W. two weeks when I won £1,068 on the Football Pools—thanks to Joan the Wad, and since I have sent for 4 others for friends and now want 3 more as soon as possible please." writes Mrs. E. M., of Bebington, Cheshire, 6.2.54.

**COMPLETELY CURED, FOUND A JOB, PROMOTION TWICE, OWN HOME.** Mrs. D. J., of Stockport, writes, 29.5.56. "On coming to England 2½ years ago we were dogged by ill-luck. A friend told me I ought to have 'Joan' for my husband and 'Jack O' Lantern' for myself. I did, and from that very week all our luck changed for the better. My husband was a very sick man and is now completely cured. He had no job, and very soon he got a job and promotion twice. I myself bettered my position. We are now in our own house, which we are succeeding to buy. We are a happy and most contented little family and attribute all our present happiness and success to J.T.W. and J.O.L. Thank you for all you have done for us. I tell everyone about it."

**JOAN THE WAD'S** achievements are unique. Never before was such a record placed before the public. Ask yourself if you have ever heard before of anything so stupendous. You have not. Results are what count, and these few extracts from actual letters are typical of the many hundreds that are received, and from which we shall publish selections from time to time. We unreservedly **GUARANTEE** that these letters were absolutely spontaneous and the originals are open to inspection at **JOAN'S COTTAGE**. Send at once for full information about this **PROVED** Luck Bringer. You, too, may benefit in Health, Wealth and Happiness to an amazing extent.

All you have to do is to send a Shilling (Savings Stamps accepted) and a stamped addressed envelope for the history to:

**736, JOAN'S COTTAGE, POLPERRO, CORNWALL, ENGLAND**

*For Canada and U.S.A., send 50 cents for History, or 2 dollars for both History and Mascot. For Australia, S. Africa, New Zealand, Rhodesia, Barbados and other Colonies, send 2s. for History or 10s. for both History and Mascot.*

is the **LUCKY CORNISH FISKEY** who Sees All, Hears All, Does All. **JOAN THE WAD** is Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys. Thousands of persons all over the world claim that Joan the Wad has brought them Wonderful Luck in the way of Health, Wealth and Happiness. **HISTORY FREE FOR A SHILLING** If you will send me your name and address, a Shilling and a stamped addressed envelope for reply, I will send you a history of the Cornish Piskey folk, and the marvellous miracles they accomplish. **JOAN THE WAD** is the Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys and with whom good luck and good health always attend.

**ENJOYED THE MOST UNBELIEVABLE GOOD FORTUNE**

Mr. D. H. of Leek writes 3.10.55

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

Dahl, "for when I put it around me I felt great power surging through my limbs."

"Oh," said the shepherd rather incredulously. To him the olden day gods were something of a myth, to him the olden day gods were far from reality. To him the old Norse gods were as far from the truth as Scandinavia is from Australasia.

"Oh!" said Erik again, and this time his voice held all his disbelief. To him the old gods were interesting stories, neither more, and for that matter, nor less. Schluska Dahl threw out his chest expansively.

"You are very fleet of foot, Erik the shepherd!"

"I am very fleet of foot, much fleeter than you!" answered Erik.

"Now I will prove that the belt I wear is of great power and value," said Schluska. Surely, he told himself, he could not be imagining this feeling? He could not be imagining this sensation, as though all his muscles were twice as strong and twice as powerful? As though every fibre was endowed with twice its strength? As though every sinew was filled with some kind of psychic charge? As though pure adrenalin rather than blood, raced around his veins?

"You would not say that I was among the fleetest of runners?" asked Dahl.

Erik the shepherd laughed.

"I would say that you ran like a cow with two broken legs on the same side!"

Schluska felt suddenly bitter.

"It is true that I run clumsily," he said.

"You run like a stranded whale!" retorted the shepherd. "You run like a beast that is tethered!"



## VENGEANCE OF THOR

"And you run like the mountain goat when it charges, I suppose?" demanded Schluska, rather sullenly.

"Compared to you, indeed yes!" retorted Erik.

"Then let us go to yonder ledge," said Dahl, "where there is room for a man to run!"

The ledge was really a kind of shelf, like a step cut out of the mountain, about fifty or sixty yards wide and two hundred yards long.

"I will race you to the tree at the end of the ledge and back again," said Schluska.

"You would not get half the distance without falling over!" laughed the shepherd.

"If I did run such a distance, Erik the shepherd, would you not agree that there is some strange power in this girdle which I have found and that it is a thing of great value and magic?"

"I would more than agree! I would say that you have found the very girdle of Thor!"

There was something strangely serious about Schluska's pithecanthropic face, as the two men made their way over to the ledge.

"How much start do you want?" asked the shepherd.

"I ask no start, I will give you some!" said Dahl.

Erik laughed.

"If it were not so cold I would say that the sun has been on your brain," he laughed, "for your thoughts are twisted, like the boughs of a broken tree."

"Save your breath for running!" advised Schluska Dahl.

"Who shall start us?"

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"You shall start, and when you have taken a pace I will start running . . . "

"Very well," agreed the shepherd, "I shall start now!" and as he pronounced the last syllable he hurled himself away towards the far end of the rocky ledge. His feet skimmed lightly, for Erik undoubtedly ran well. The surge of power which Schluska Dahl had felt in his limbs seemed to redouble itself and then to redouble itself again. The more power he used the more there was to draw on. There seemed to be no limit to the power. His limbs moved up and down like piston rods in a car engine. Within twenty yards he had drawn level with the shepherd, and within thirty he had passed him. Erik looked in bewilderment, and increased the fury of his own pace.

Try as he would he could not overtake Dahl. Schluska deliberately slowed up and let the shepherd almost catch him once or twice, egging him on, tantalising him. Dahl galloped home ten yards ahead, feeling no more tired than when he had started!

Erik collapsed like a wild stag that has run its heart out in the fury of the chase. Schluska picked him up and looked down at him with some concern.

"I will carry you back to the path, shepherd, so that you may recover your breath," he said, "truly, you run like an old woman!"

Erik made no answer other than to breathe deeply and heavily. At last he had recovered himself enough to say,

"What strange power is this?"

"This is my power," said Schluska, "the power of Schluska Dahl!" and he said it with a kind of vicious exultation. "The power of Schluska Dahl!" he re-

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

peated and slapped the curious girdle that he wore.

Erik had fully recovered by this time.

"I wish I had such a girdle," he said rather grimly, "for then there would be no sheep lost upon these mountain pastures . . ."

Dahl laughed,

"Who is fleet of foot now, shepherd? Who runs like a cow with two broken left legs?"

"Certainly not you, Schluska Dahl," agreed the shepherd, "for I will agree that you played with me. That you are three times fleeter than I."

"You will not forget it," commanded Dahl, "and you will tell it loudly in the inn tonight!"

"I shall not forget it," said the shepherd, and continued on his errand.

Schluska Dahl went on his way, a few hundred yards further down the mountain-side he encountered Raj the blacksmith. Raj was in his early thirties with great square shoulders, a barrel chest and eyes that glowed like coals. He was a powerful man and quick tempered, and on more than one occasion Schluská Dahl had felt the back of his hand. No one had felt the front of Raj's hand, for it was rumoured that should he forget himself in a fit of temper, whoever received such a blow would make a one-way journey to the Great Beyond.

Raj the blacksmith looked at Schluska Dahl and raised a hand in greeting with rather less enthusiasm than Erik the shepherd had shown.

Schluska Dahl returned the greeting and there was a strange expression on his prehistoric face.

"What do you want, Raj the blacksmith," he said, "where do you go?"

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"I mind my own business, Schluska Dahl!" answered Raj, for there was no love lost between these two men, and Raj was not in the mood to bandy words with what he considered to be a congenital idiot of the worst possible type.

For a moment, something that might have been fear in a more intelligent mind, flickered through Schluska Dahl's head, and then it dissolved like morning mist in the surge of his new-found power.

"You have a big mouth, Raj, the blacksmith," said Schluska Dahl, "but you lack the courage to back up the words that flow from it!"

Raj was unable to believe his ears, was this really Dahl the idiot? Perhaps he had been working too hard, perhaps he was imagining things? His coal-red eyes rested on Dahl as though he was trying to melt him.

"Speak like that again, twisted branch of a corrupted pine tree," said Raj, "and I will bend you as I bend iron in my forge!"

"Your words are foolishness, an idle boast!" returned Schlukas Dahl. "You lack the strength to bend a twig, it is I who will bend you, Raj the blacksmith! And after this you will go in fear of me, and speak with respect to those who are stronger and better men than you are!"

The blacksmith's flaming temper exploded, erupted, burst forth in a shower of emotional lava and ashes and wrath. He advanced towards Schluska Dahl, his great fist clenched into a knot of iron-hard bone and muscle. He was seeing the idiot's grinning face through a cloud of red anger. The fist connected with the point of Schluska Dahl's jaw, but

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

Schluska Dahl felt practically nothing, it was as though a leaf blown by the wind had brushed against his face as it passed. It was as though yesterday's newspaper blowing down the village street on an eddying gust of air had touched his body. The blacksmith backed away with an oath and rubbed his bruised knuckles. Schluska Dahl laughed, a strange, exhilarating feeling coursed through his veins more strongly than ever.

"Now, boaster," he said, "make good your words, come on, bend me! Bend me like a piece of soft iron heated in your forge."

Temper overcame surprise in the blacksmith. He rushed at Schluska Dahl again, this time the pithecanthropic-browed idiot seized the blacksmith's jerkin; it was thick leather and strong. It screwed up in Schluska Dahl's hands as though it had been made of tissue paper, he jerked the blacksmith off his feet and held him in the air. Raj weighed nearly twenty stone. It was an incredible feat of strength. Schluska Dahl grinned at the astonished blacksmith. Raj's feet and arms were working in the air like piston rods; his face had gone suddenly deathly white. The red glow in his eyes had died out. He looked like a man whose fire has been slaked, whose bellows have stopped working, whose hammer is broken and whose anvil is rusted and flaked with age. The shock was too much—Raj the blacksmith fainted quietly away in mid-air. Schluska Dahl set him down and stirred the enormous bulk with his foot, laughing uproariously. Finally, the blacksmith re-opened his eyes, blinked up at Schluska Dahl, who was looking down at him and laughing, rubbed his eyes as though at

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

the memory of some fearful dream. It had to be a dream thought Raj, he couldn't possibly have been bested by the simpleton, by Schluska Dahl, he couldn't possibly—it didn't happen! He was twice the other's weight, he was three or four times as strong! It just did not happen! Schluska Dahl still stood laughing at him.

"What happened?" demanded Raj. "Did I faint, or something?"

"I held you in the air, and you fainted with fright, you coward!" replied Schluska Dahl.

The blacksmith scrambled to his feet and swung another almighty punch at the grinning, neandethal face. Schluska Dahl made no attempt to duck out of the way of the hay-maker, again he felt no more of the punch than if he had stopped a newspaper, or a leaf blown by the wind. It was like the flapping of a man's jacket as he walks in a strong breeze. The blacksmith stepped back with a howl of pain and rage. Dahl picked him up, this time with his left hand, and hoisted him high into the air by his twisted, torn, leather jerkin; finally Dahl set him down two yards away at the foot of a tree. He drew his hand back threateningly. The blacksmith cowered away.

"No, Mr. Dahl! No! Please, please. I'm sorry!"

"I asked you where you were going," said Schluska Dahl "and you told me to mind my own business."

"I meant no harm," replied the blacksmith, gibbering with fright. He looked like a very small and insignificant rat cowering before a rodentiferous terrier. "I was just going up the hill to call on a cus-

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

tomer! He wanted a plough repaired. I was going up to fetch it."

"Very well, you may go," said the idiot. He grinned a huge, lop-sided grin as Raj scrambled to his feet and retreated up the hill as though all the devils in hell were pursuing him.

Just before entering the village Schluska Dahl encountered Bjorn. Bjorn carried a rifle slung over his shoulder.

"A pleasant afternoon's shooting to you," called Schluska Dahl. Bjorn was a particularly silent man, as is the way with many hunters, he didn't bother to return Schluska Dahl's greeting. A frown crossed Dahl's face, if Raj the blacksmith now called him 'Mr. Dahl' and retreated in terror at the thought of a blow from one of his hands, then Bjorn the hunter must be taught the lesson as well.

"I spoke to you, Bjorn the hunter," said Schluska Dahl.

"Quiet, you frighten the birds," said Bjorn. He had a deep, bass baritone voice. His long, dark hair was tucked into a peaked cap of vaguely nautical pattern, and a checkered scarf of yellow and grey accentuated rather than concealed his massive iron-grey beard. He looked more like a musical comedy Nordic hunter than any Nordic hunter has a right to look. The rifle he carried gleamed in the afternoon sun, the barrel was beautifully polished, the sights were as straight and true as superb Scandinavian craftsmanship could make them. The feel of the hammer in Schluska Dahl's hand increased in its taunting urgency. It seemed to be trying to convey a message to him, he wasn't quite sure what the

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

message was, for his pithecanthropic brain was incapable of receiving anything too detailed in the way of communication, even from a hammer! The hunter cast him a sideways glance, Schluska Dahl decided to try a new trick.

"They tell me you grow old, hunter," he said, "your eye is not so keen. They tell me it is many days since you have brought back game!"

If there was one thing which would draw the stoic, silent Bjorn out of himself, it was any kind of aspersion cast upon his skill with a rifle. He was magnificent; he had cups and medals for shooting, and no bird or beast came within the sights of that deadly long gun lived to tell the tale!

"Your brains are more addled than usual," commented Bjorn.

"My brain is not addled at all," retorted the emboldened simpleton, "You are proud of your skill as a hunter, are you not, Bjorn the hunter?"

"I am as proud as a man has a right to be when he does something well," said the hunter simply.

"Ah," said the simpleton, "but you do not do it well Bjorn the hunter! Your skill has left you and departed. You are resting upon the memory of things that you could do when you were younger!"

"Why do you go out of your way to annoy me?" asked the hunter.

"Because you were rude to me," answered Dahl. "You said that I frightened the birds when I spoke."

"There is no time to be wasted cackling here with you. I need a fowl for the pot for supper! Curb your tongue, you idle chatterer before I lay the back of my hand about you."



## VENGEANCE OF THOR

"The blacksmith tried that recently," said Schluska Dahl. He laughed suddenly, loudly, uproariously, "without any success!"

"Then he must have been playing with you."

"Ask him to deny it, in the inn," said Schluska Dahl. Bjorn the hunter looked at him very curiously indeed.

"That's a strange girdle you are wearing," he commented, "and what is it you carry?"

"My treasure," said Schluska Dahl. It was an enigmatic cryptical reply. The hunter continued to look at him in puzzled bewilderment.

A few moments of silence passed, a bird winged by overhead, high and faraway. The hunter unslung the rifle, and scarcely seeming to aim he fired. The bird fell like a stone, landing about forty yards ahead of them, lying small, black and pathetic across the snow.

"Let us see you equal that, loud-mouth," said Bjorn, and made as if to pass the rifle across with a mocking smile.

"I can do better than that without a gun," said Schluska Dahl.

Bjorn roared merrily.

"What will you do—spit into the sky? Or breathe from your ill-favoured mouth and bring the bird down with the smell of your breath? Perhaps you will pick up a small pebble and throw, or use one of your great ears as a catapult!"

Schluska Dahl looked suddenly mean and dangerous.

"Watch your tongue, Bjorn the hunter," he

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

warned, "or I will treat you more roughly than I treated the blacksmith."

Bjorn did not look particularly impressed. Another bird flew far and high.

"If you want me to believe you," said the hunter, "bring that bird to earth as I brought my quarry down."

An electric ripple of power seemed to pass from the iron gauntlets to the great hammer. With a swinging, sweeping movement Schluska Dahl brought his arm around and the feeling of electrical power seemed to erupt from the glove into the shaft of the hammer. It sped away like an arrow from a bow.

"The devil!" exclaimed Bjorn the hunter. "What fantastic trickery is this, Schluska Dahl?"

"No trickery," returned the idiot, "skill, pure skill, Bjorn the hunter. Skill such as you cannot achieve. Any fool can shoot game with a gun!" he added scathingly. The hammer struck the bird with unerring force. The creature dropped as though it had been struck by lightning. It landed with an audible thud a few yards from the bird which Bjorn the hunter had brought down. Dahl held out his gloved hand, and gently as a hawk returning to a beloved master, the hammer returned to him.

"You could not do it again in a thousand years," said Bjorn rather uneasily, but his tone of voice belied the words which he spoke.

"Throw a rock into the air, a small one," said Schluska Dahl. Bjorn the hunter picked up a small stone and flung it high into the air.

It was a microscopic speck in the brightness of the

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

sky. The hammer sprang from Schluska Dahl's hand up like a great kestrel, like some powerful 'T' shaped bird of prey. There was a loud crack as the flying hammer hit the stone, shattering it into granular particles. The hammer spun and swooped gracefully in the air, like a living thing and then returned once more to the iron-gauntleted hands. Dahl gave a prehistoric grin and broke into peals of laughter. Bjorn the hunter shouldered his rifle and walked quietly back to the village. His normal, healthy, outdoor tan had been replaced by a strange waxen grey pallor. He looked like a man who had just seen the impossible, he looked like a man to whom the Indian rope trick had just been undeniably demonstrated. He looked like a man who had just watched the resurrection of a fakir who was buried alive for ten years. He looked like a man who has commanded a mountain to move into the sea and has seen the mountain actually begin to move!

Schluska Dahl could see the light of the afternoon sun reflecting in the windows of the nearer houses. He continued down towards the village.

Suddenly there crossed his path a tall, broad-shouldered stranger. The man was not dressed in the clothing of the 19th century. He wore an old Norse tunic, and his grey beard was dressed after the fashion of two thousand years ago.

"A word with you, Schluska Dahl!" said the voice. It was the deepest and most powerful voice that the simpleton had ever heard. He felt strangely uneasy despite his new-found power. Then his courage began returning to him. He could run faster than Erik the shepherd; he was stronger by far than Raj the

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

blacksmith, and he was a greater hunted than the mighty Bjorn himself, what had he to fear then, from this stranger, despite his strange beard and even stranger costume.

"Stand aside," said the simpleton rather churlishly. There was something that might have been a twinkling laugh in the stranger's eyes.

"And who commands me to stand aside?" he asked.

"I do," said Schluska Dahl.

"But I do not care to stand aside," replied the stranger and the twinkle in his eyes looked somehow grimmer . . .

"I warn you I am a man of mighty power," said Schluska Dahl. "I can run faster than Erik the shepherd, I am stronger than Raj the blacksmith, and I can bring down game with greater skill than Bjorn the hunter!"

"My, my," said the uncanny-looking stranger, "how terrible you are!"

Then, simple-minded as he was, Schluska Dahl knew that he was being mocked. He felt a sudden anger welling up within him, seizing the enormous hammer he hurled it with all his strength at the stranger a few feet in front of him. He expected to see the other collapse into a crumpled heap of fatality . . . but the other merely held out his hand and the hammer alighted as gently into that massive palm as though it had rested there for millenia.

Schluska Dahl felt suddenly more uneasy and afraid than he had ever felt in his life before, but he still felt angry and he wanted his hammer back. He rushed at the stranger and grappled with him, try-

## VENGEANCE OF THOR

ing to tear the hammer from his grasp. He might as well have tried to tear the side from a mountain, or to tear a breakwater out of the sea.

He might as well have tried to lift an ocean-going liner in one hand; he might as well have tried to alter the position of mother earth herself. Finally he sank to the ground exhausted. The electrical power was still tingling through him but more in mockery than anything else. It seemed that every time he touched the stranger he was coming into contact with a much greater electrical power—he felt rather as if his two-volt accumulator had tried to give a shock to a ten thousand volt dynamo. He felt as though he was one raindrop trying to wash away the sea. He felt as if he was a fly crashing into the wind screen of a plane and wondering why the plane didn't stop and go backwards. The tall, bearded stranger looked down at him, not only admonishingly, but kindly.

"I'll have my girdle now, Schluska Dahl," he said, and before the simpleton could do anything about it the tall man had stooped over and removed it, buckled it around his own waist.

"And the gloves," he said quietly, "they won't be any use to you now."

"I am obliged to you for finding them," said the stranger. "In fact, I feel I owe you something." He looked long and hard into Schluska Dahl's eyes. "No, I don't," he said, "for I see that you have already had your reward."

Then suddenly the stranger vanished; he didn't walk down the village street, he didn't walk away to left or right amid the trees, and he didn't go towards the distant heights. He just vanished. One moment

## **SUPERNATURAL STORIES**

he was there and the next moment he wasn't.

There was a sudden crack of thunder. It wasn't like natural thunder at all, decided Schluska Dahl; it was like the thunder of the gods, like the thunder of Thor . . . And suddenly in the mind of the simpleton the truth was born and he realised just what he had held in his hands.

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

By Bron Fane

**"Uncanny sounds were emanating from  
behind the faded paintwork"**

PETER DALTON was talking to Frobisher, the estate agent. Dalton was one of those gloriously scruffy, rather nondescript characters, who could be almost anything and never turn out to be what you expect.

He had a shock of rather untidy black hair which might have been curly if it hadn't been crammed higgledy-piggledy under a direputable old cap, which Dalton would not have parted with under any circumstances whatsoever. He wore a battered check jacket which had seen far better days, and his keen, intelligent eyes blinked at the world from behind

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

heavy-framed tortoiseshell spectacles. He had a round, rather moon-like face which was covered with freckles and sheer honest-to-goodness, dirt.

Heaven-alone knew when Dalton had last had a haircut. He was one of those people who would have sent the tonsorial profession bankrupt had they been more numerous.

He wore battered brown corduroy trousers, odd socks which he fondly imagined no one would notice—though here he was sadly disillusioned. and a pair of old, flapping sandals which looked like a cross between elderly moccasins and genuine antique footwear of a Roman legionaire. Under the check sports jacket was a waistcoat. The waistcoat was, if anything, rather older than the check sports jacket, and slightly more battered and disreputable. It was minus two buttons and those that it had didn't match.

Those who knew Dalton well enough to discuss such pleasantries had been known to ask whether this waistcoat was the origin of the old story about the school-boy who had been asked to give a sentence using the word 'fascinate' and who had said, 'My uncle has ten buttons on his waistcoat, but he can only fasten eight'.

Dalton, however, was not a punster, though he enjoyed them from time to time. Dalton was a water diviner, at least, that was how he was thought of from time to time, when his strange gift and wild talents were employed. But he could divine other things besides water. He had found lost metal articles; once he had even traced a seam of lead in a Derbyshire mine, which had not been paying its way.

He was, in fact, one of those people who make the world a more interesting and worthwhile place than it would be if we were all uniform and respectable



## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

and too afraid of what other people might think . . .

Dalton simply expressed himself. He was not in the least ashamed of his scruffiness, he was proud of his water divining and those who knew him, understood him, and thoroughly enjoyed his companionship.

Frobisher, the estate agent, did not know him particularly well, and did not know what to make of him, though he was inclined to come down favourably rather than unfavourably.

"What kind of premises did you have in mind, Mr. Dalton?" asked Frobisher impeccably. Frobisher was as different from Dalton as chalk is from cheese. He was, in fact, more different. He was as different from Dalton as it is possible for one human being to be different from another and still belong to the same species. Frobisher was very tall, very proper, very correct, immaculately dressed and as concerned about what his fellow 'homo sapiens' thought of him as he was concerned about his health, about cricket results and about the state of his business. He was, in fact, a very normal specimen. A likeable fellow, but extremely run-of-the-mill. He was a good background for Dalton, for when one observed Dalton beside Frobisher, then Dalton really sprang out in all his bright, gay relief.

"I want a cottage," said Dalton. "It's got to be out in the country with two or three acres of land round it. I don't care about mod. cons.' I don't give a dam' if it hasn't got any 'cons' at all. I want it to be far enough away from everywhere so that I shan't be disturbed."

"I see," said Frobisher, "we have a delightful rural residence here in a secluded position——"

"That means isolated, does it?" asked Dalton.

"Well yes, if you like to put it that way. If isolation is what you're looking for . . ." said the estate

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

agent. "It needs a certain amount of basic, structural repair——"

"I don't care about that!" said Dalton, "it's not falling down, is it?"

"Well—not immediately," said the agent with a smile.

"Hmm," said Dalton. "Is this a picture of it?"

"Yes," murmured the house agent.

Dalton took a twig from his waistcoat pocket, a small 'Y' shaped twig, closed his eyes, opened them again, looked up at the ceiling, looked down at the picture, put the twig over the picture, closed his eyes once more, then tilted his head sideways in the attitude of a bird that is listening intently.

"I like it," he said, "it will do very nicely." The house agent was blinking; he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Mr. Dalton, sir, whatever were you doing?"

"You wouldn't understand if I told you," said Dalton, "so I won't waste our time. I want to go out and see it please." He was a man of a few words.

Frobisher smiled.

"We can go now, sir." He drove Dalton to the cottage. It stood in two and a half acres of its own gardens, surrounded by a flint wall that had crumbled in places and through the gaps of which sheep occasionally strayed from neighbouring pastures.

"I hope they won't be inconvenient," said Frobisher, as he shooed one away from the back door.

"Not at all, not at all," said Dalton, "as a matter of fact, I like sheep, they remind me of people, they are a kind of living parable. They warn you of what kind of man not to be . . ."

"Yes I suppose they do," agreed Frobisher, "you're something of a natural philosopher, Mr. Dalton."

"We're all philosophers at heart," said Dalton,

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

"only some of us are a bit shy of letting the fact be known."

"I must admit," said Frobisher, "if I was a sheep I should take great care to walk in exactly the same footsteps as all the other sheep . . . I would eat where they ate, and I would sleep where they slept. I would not be an individualist."

"Yet, try as we will," said Dalton. "we are all to some extent what we don't want to be. You see, even those of us who kick over against conformity and establishment, if they are in the way—even as I do—establish a new kind of conformity of our own. I can tell at once by looking at you that you are a conformist."

"Yes, I'm very orthodox in many ways," said Frobisher. "It's a failing, really, I suppose."

"Not at all, if it's what you want to be. If you do what you want to do, you're a success!"

Dalton went on, "There must, at the same time, be some things that you do that are not conformitory, just very occasionally, there must be traces of rebellion, things that you would not even discuss with your nearest and dearest, let alone a complete stranger like me . . ."

Frobisher was looking thoughtful and nodding quietly to himself.

"I would go so far as to admit that you are probably right, Mr. Dalton," he said, in that precise, rather Public School accent.

"I can tell you're a conformist in the same way that you can tell I'm a nonconformist," said Dalton. "Not in a religious sense, but in the sense of being outside the establishment, being not against the establishment, but preferring to retain my own individuality separate from the establishment."

"Yes, I see what you're driving at," said Frobisher.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

Dalton smiled rather elfishly. There was something fey about him. "How do you tell that I'm an angry young man, or if not that, at least a different young man—not even young any more." He shrugged his shoulders, "You can tell that I'm not one of the establishment?"

"I suppose by your unconventional dress, by your unconventional mode of address, by your unconventional taste in property," returned Mr. Frobisher, groping rather awkwardly for words. "I suppose I can tell by certain unconventional actions. There aren't many people who run a water diviner's twig over a photograph and then say they like the property!"

"So you see, even my unconventionality has a conformity to itself. The rebel has a certain code. He dresses informally to prove that he's a rebel, just as the formalist dresses formally to show that he's a conventionalist."

"I'm afraid all this is rather too deep for me," said Frobisher. He gave a little smile. "That's part of being conventional, I suppose, the desire to be thought ordinary."

"If anybody mentions philosophy or that sort of thing, it's conventional to give a little shrug and pretend you're out of your depths. You're not really, it's just that you don't want to get involved, not that you haven't got the ability to get involved," said Dalton. Frobisher's eyes narrowed, and just for a second there was a moment of truth between the two men.

"I find your conversation very stimulating and at the same time, very disturbing," said Frobisher.

"Good!" said Dalton. "I like to disturb people! There you are! I'm being a rebel again, you see! However, this is most unkind of me, and most unfair. You are being courtesy and kindness itself, and I'm going out of my way to make you feel awk-

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

ward and embarrassed. I'm not that kind of a rebel."

Frobisher felt that odd though Dalton was, his heart was in the right place. He was a most uneasy man to be with. The water diviner was smiling again, now, a most disarming smile.

"You see, Mr. Frobisher, just as the devout evangelist makes it his ambition to hate the sin and love the sinner, so a man in my theological and theosophical, philosophical position does his best to dislike conformity without disliking the conformist. I make it my job to dislike the conventions without disliking the conventionalists. I make it my crusade to dislike the establishment without disliking the establishmentarians. And so it goes on——"

Frobisher was smiling. He shooed another sheep away from the door.

"Shall we go inside," he said, "or would you rather see the garden first?"

"I'm not madly interested in the garden as a garden, all I want is a good-sized piece of land to stamp over. There's a good-sized piece here. I don't care what it's like now, it's what it's like when I've finished with it that will be important to me."

"As you will," said Frobisher.

The key he finally produced was a very Victorian-looking affair, standing out from the others on the bunch. There were traces of rust on it.

"Has this cottage been on the books a long time?" asked Dalton.

"You are an honest man, Mr. Dalton, and you will therefore appreciate honesty," said the agent. "I'm not going to tell you a lot of nonsense about this house." He lowered his voice a little. "It has been on the books a very long time. There have been persons who have come down to look at it; one gentleman told me he'd have it, then for some reason he

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

changed his mind. I don't know why. Some people say it's too far out in the country. Some say the garden is too big, too wild, too overgrown, and it would be heart-breaking to try to get it into order again. Some people say they don't like the atmosphere. I expect you are quite sensitive to atmosphere?"

"Well, I am in a way, and in another way I'm not," said the strange Mr. Dalton rather cryptically. "Some people find an atmosphere unpleasant and regard it as prohibitive. If I find an atmosphere unpleasant, or abnormal, I regard it as a challenge, a stimulus. It makes me want to go out of my way to find out more about it. I believe in cause and effect, Mr. Frobisher. Cause and effect is an almost universal principle. If, in effect, atmosphere is odd, then it must have had an odd cause and I want to know what that cause is. Do you know any possible cause, Mr. Frobisher?"

They were standing in a big old-fashioned kitchen, the floor was tiled after the style of the mid-Victorian kitchen. The windows were high and the sills were wide. There was a cool lime-wash over everything. Frobisher shook his head.

"I don't," he said, "honestly I don't . . . There is an odd legend of a disappearance, but that was way back in the last century. Nobody seems to know who disappeared or why. It was nothing as concrete as murder, or suicide; just a riddle, like the 'Mary Celeste.' Nobody knows why or what for. The thing was never properly chronicled."

"Those people who came to look and went away," said Dalton, "did any of them ever say they thought it was haunted?"

Frobisher laughed.

"No, I'm afraid it's nothing so romantic as that! One of them did complain of odd noises—but he

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

thought it was rats; that's what he told me, anyway."

"If he was a conventionalist he would have told you that because it's not conventional to talk about ghosts—except in a light-hearted sort of way."

"I suppose so," agreed Frobisher. He was getting just a little tired of this talk of conventionalist and non-conventionalist, conformist and non-conformist, establishmentarian and non-establishmentarian. He was growing tired of the unexpectedness and lack of pattern in Dalton's conversation.

"Let's press on and have a look at the rest of it," said Frobisher suddenly, almost tartly. They moved on into the next room. It was, perhaps, the dining-room of the little cottage. Plaster was falling from the walls in sundry places and the ceiling had a nasty crack across it.

Frobisher looked at it apologetically.

"Could be patched up without much difficulty," he said, "perhaps we could make some kind of price adjustment, on that score?"

"It doesn't look as though it's going to fall in, does it?" said Dalton.

"Oh, no! I don't think there's anything structurally defective. It's just a matter of the fabric being a little bit dilapidated," said Frobisher, taking heart. What an odd man Dalton was, he thought. The sight of that crumbling plaster and cracked ceiling would have put most people off straight away. But not so the water diviner. It was no more to him than the unkempt appearance of the garden, less if anything. That garden had put many people off. Maybe, thought Frobisher, Dalton was the man he had been waiting for for a long time, the man who was going to take this ghastly place off his hands. It would be

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

nice to get it off the books! It had been there such a long time.

"I think the front room is in rather better repair," said the house agent, as he led Dalton through. There were little, lead-paned latticed windows, an old-fashioned, wrought iron fireplace that looked as if it might have been imitation Adam but hadn't quite made it, and some low, heavy beams. There was a general smell of dry rot and decadence about the front room. Dalton sniffed appreciatively.

"Dry rot!" he remarked with interest. Frobisher nodded; that had probably done it!

"Yes, I'm afraid there is," he said out loud.

"Never mind," said Dalton, "that can be put right if everything else is suitable." Frobisher breathed again.

"Shall we go upstairs?" he said brightly.

They went back into the passage and up the stairs. The stairs creaked, but they were sound, literally and metaphorically, there was no trace of dry rot there . . . Everything was covered in a thick layer of dust and Dalton sneezed suddenly.

"I trust you haven't taken a cold, Mr. Dalton," said Frobisher, rather apprehensively.

"No, it's just the dust," replied Dalton.

"It's surprising how different everything would look with a good clean up," remarked Frobisher, brightly.

"Yes, I'm sure it will," said Dalton, "I'm sure it will!"

There were two bedrooms and a loft or attic on top of them. In the loft there were one or two holes in the thatch. Daylight streamed in rather challengingly.

"What's the price?" asked Dalton as they went downstairs.



## THE VOICE 'IN THE WALL

"Well, it's on the books at six hundred—that's because of the land, you know," said Frobisher hurriedly. "I mean-er-er-um, I mean-er-um we are quite willing to negotiate."

"Splendid," said Dalton. He stood back and looked at the place thoughtfully. "How much are you willing to negotiate?"

"Well, I think a sensible offer would be considered favourably," said the house agent, hedgingly.

"What do you consider a reasonable offer? How much are you prepared to come down?"

"Hum, now you've set me a ticklish problem," said Frobisher, "I'm supposed to be acting for the seller, you know."

"Would you call four hundred sensible?" asked Dalton.

"I would be prepared to consider it," replied Frobisher.

"I will make you a solid offer of four hundred," said Dalton. "How soon can you let me know?"

"By the end of the week," answered Frobisher.

"Fair enough," said Dalton, "I'll be staying at the Blue Boar. If you can get it done quicker than that I'll be very grateful."

Frobisher did his best and it was only two days after the visit to "Dawn Cottage" that Dalton found a letter waiting in the 'D' rack at the Blue Boar. It bore the village post mark, and was embossed with the house agent's name and telephone number. The water diviner opened the envelope with keen excitement. There was something exciting and fascinating about "Dawn Cottage" and he hoped that his offer had been successful. Two lines told him it had been, and reading between the lines he realised that the house agent was very glad to get it off the books.

Dalton wondered if he could have got it for three-

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

fifty if he had just haggled a bit more! Still, the thing was done now, and four hundred wasn't bad for the mid-60's, considering all that land. Why he could get planning permission for that! It could eventually be worth the earth! He might make a very handsome profit out of that! Still, similar thoughts must have gone through the house-agent's mind. Perhaps it was in the 'green belt' or something! Dalton didn't understand planning and green belts, or any other kind of belts, they were outside his sphere of interest. He understood water divining and various other bits and pieces of occult lore and phenomena, but he was not interested in the everyday mechanics of house building, or property development.

He obtained the services of two stalwart, local casual labourers who undertook such jobs and had "Dawn Cottage" scrubbed from cellar to roof. A local builder made good the thatch where there were holes in the loft roof, and the same gentleman also attended to the cracked ceiling and the plaster work in the dining-room. After that Dalton got on with the job of moving in. He was not a man of many possessions, and his furniture was far from elaborate. It fitted rather well with the bare, simple interior of "Dawn Cottage."

He found the place very pleasant, except for that odd atmosphere which he had noticed before . . . It was the third evening after he had moved in; he sat in the front room, looking out of the lead-latticed windows. Very, very faint and far away he heard what sounded like a cry for help. Perhaps it was a mouse, or a rat, squeaking behind the boards; perhaps some little creature of the wild was running through the garden? There could be a thousand, ordinary, rational explanations for the sound that he had heard, and yet his sensitive mind had fitted the sound to the strange atmosphere as though the two were

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

somehow bound up together. Dalton got up and began lighting the lamps. The room took on a cheerful yellow glow. He took down a volume of Trollope and began to read, but his mind would keep harking back to that sound. That faint, faraway sound; that sound that some instinctive sixth sense warned him was connected with the atmosphere . . . He read half a chapter and put the book down, somehow he couldn't get interested. He couldn't tear his mind away from "Dawn Cottage." What had made that sound? Where had it come from? There was just the faintest of hissing noises emanating from his oil lamp, there was just the softest crackle from the fire, and he listened over and above those noises. The lane that led past "Dawn Cottage" on to the distant farm, maybe two miles away, was innocent of traffic. An occasional courting couple, or an even more occasional visitor to the farm were the only pedestrians who would use it. It was most unlikely that the noise could have come from some chance traveller outside. Dalton found himself feeling more and more curious about the source of that noise. The memory of noise was sometimes distorted, like all memories, by the amount of time that has elapsed since the event that gave rise to the memory. Yet Dalton felt fairly sure that he had not imagined anything in connection with the memory of the noise. It had been a sound very definitely akin to the human voice calling out for help. The water diviner had quite a strong, vivid imagination; could it be someone imprisoned without his knowledge?

Could there be another compartment of the attic, could there be another compartment of the cellar? He went upstairs and listened very attentively just below the trap-door leading to the attic-loft. There was no sound there now, not even the pattering of rodent feet. Nothing. Nothing but a rather challeng-

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

ing silence and the odd little creaks that an old building makes as it settles down for the night—like an old man climbing into bed and settling his weary bones upon the mattress.

The water diviner fetched the ladder, put it under the trapdoor, pushed that to one side and went up into the loft. There was only the usual musty smell that he had noticed before. He shone an electric torch powerfully around in all directions. The outline of the loft was in keeping with the general size and shape of the roof, viewed from outside, there was no secret compartment here. There was scarcely space to imprison a rat, never mind a human being. Besides, if a man was locked up in a loft he had but to thunder on the floor of his prison with his heels and he would make enough noise to waken the dead, not to mention the showers of plaster which would come crashing to the floor. Dalton decided that the answer did not lie there.

He made his way quietly down the ladder again, having replaced the trap-door. He stood on the landing looking uncertainly first at the door of his bedroom and then at the door of the spare bedroom. Now that he was conducting a systematic search perhaps it would be best to do it all. He went into his own bedroom first, there was a large built-in cupboard, big enough to contain two or three prisoners, except that he knew it was empty save for his suit, for in spite of his love of informality Dalton did boast a suit, which he wore on extremely rare occasions; some other odds and ends of clothing were also there, but that was the lot.

Dalton heaved a big sigh, closed the cupboard door and shone the torch around the bedroom—he even looked under the bed! He came out again. As an after-thought he took the key from the inside of the lock, reversed it, locked the door from the outside

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

and slipped the key into his pocket. Then he walked along the landing to the door of the spare bedroom. The same key he found by swift trial, fitted both doors. There was also a built-in cupboard in the spare bedroom and niches one on either side of the fireplace. He examined them all carefully; he looked under the spare bed; there was nothing there. Shaking his head slowly in bewilderment, he came out of the door, locked it, and returned the key to his pocket.

The landing itself was quite devoid of any place of concealment. Still shaking his head in a bewildered fashion, Dalton came quietly down the staircase. He tried the kitchen, the dining-room, and the room where he had been sitting. Still nothing. Nothing to cause any suspicion. He shrugged and went downstairs into the cellar. It was a big, roomy cellar, but there was nothing to be seen except damp-looking, rather sinister grey-black walls. Dalton shook his head, there had to be an answer to this problem, there had to be . . . but where was that answer? Where could he find it? There must be an answer! He wondered whether the sound he had heard was objective or subjective . . .

Had it been mere imagination? Was he hearing voices in his mind? But he hadn't been working very hard lately. The extra work and excitement occasioned by moving hadn't been that much, and he wasn't a child any more to get excited over a simple thing like that. He completed his tour of the house and went back to the front room; he tried a second time to interest himself in the novel, but it was quite useless. All the time he was on the 'qui vive' for that noise. Listening and half expecting to hear that strange cry for help, so faint and far away. Perhaps it was all imagination? It was one thing to assume

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

it was other than imagination, yet . . . and yet . . . ?

He decided that he must really force his concentration on to the pages of the book. It was a bad thing to let imagination run away with you, insanity could lie that way!

"Get a grip on yourself, Dalton," he said out loud, "get a grip on yourself." It was far more easy to order the mind to get a grip on itself than to put that order into effect. Try as he would to read, the words just kept dancing past a meaningless succession of symbols of sound. The logical sequence of paragraphs, the local sequence of events, was just not coming across. He knew it was not coming across because his mind was not on it. His mind was on that sound. His interest, in consciousness, like a bloodhound on a leach, kept sniffing round the room, trying to define the sound. Inspiration came to him quite suddenly; it might be possible to use the twig! He fished in his pocket and produced the little 'Y'-shaped fragment of wood and then set off very carefully on a tour of the room. He worked slowly and systematically, although he had very little hope of success. Expert water diviner that he was he had very little hope that even his ancient and skilful profession of the water diviner's art could assist him here. The twig did not seem to show any particular interest in any area of the floor over which he walked, and then, quite suddenly he heard the voice again. It was still faint and faraway, but nevertheless clear, compelling and very disturbing. Dalton stood absolutely stock still when he heard it this time. An atmosphere seemed to have been brooding over "Dawn Cottage" ever since he arrived, and now it had condensed. The whole room was now vibrant with that atmosphere. The water diviner became aware of a feeling of very intensive cold. He was colder than he ever remembered in his career before.

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

It was not a damp cold coming out of the ground, it was not the crisp, dry cold of a winter's morning, when the frost is on the branches and in patterns on the window pane. It was not the artificial chilliness of a refrigerator, it was unlike any cold that he had ever previously experienced with his physical senses. He had to pause and ask himself whether he really was experiencing it now with his physical senses. He was aware that he was shivering, but that could have been a nervous condition rather than one that was directly linked to the drop in temperature. His teeth were chattering and he could feel the short hairs rise on the base of his skull and the back of his neck. Butterflies with icy wings were performing interesting gyrations in his abdomen. The nerves of his solar plexus felt strangely tight. The nerves of every part of his body and limbs seemed strangely tense and taut.

Dalton was frightened as he had never been frightened before. Dalton was not a man who frightened easily . . .

A strange, weird, eerie silence descended upon the room. It was like the silence of a midnight churchyard; it was like the silence of a dark, empty, lonely ocean. It was like the silence of night; it was like the silence of death . . .

There was fear riding on the silence. Dalton held his breath for a few moments, wondering what to do, wondering if there was anything he could do; wondering if there was anything anybody could do, except wait and see what happened. He stood for long minutes, with his head cocked on one side like a listening bird.

Would that voice call again? Would he hear that strange, faint, faraway call for help? Perhaps he was imagining it . . . ? Perhaps the whole thing was in his mind? He made a great effort to force his nerves

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

under control. Suddenly he felt like a drink, he had a bottle of dinner wine, a cheap white wine, in the cupboard. He walked swiftly across to the cupboard, took out the bottle, and with a rather shaky hand poured half a tumbler full, splashing some on the cupboard door as he did so. He replaced the bottle, corked it and shut the cupboard door. He drank the wine in the glass at a single gulp. It went down fast and strong.

"Agh!" he breathed a heavy sigh of relief; he was getting some measure of control back again, the wine was beginning to spread ail over his body. He was feeling considerably better, not by any means completely better, but certainly better than he had felt. The feeling of intense cold still hung in the room and the silence seemed, if anything, to have grown more intense. He set the tumbler down and the noise of the glass on the woodwork sounded thunderous. It seemed a sacrilege to break that silence. Deliberately he challenged the silence, for Dalton was the kind of man who would be willing to challenge almost anything. He picked the glass up and set it down again. He laughed at himself, laughed out loud at the stupid, futile little act. He didn't like the silence so he was banging a glass on the wooden surface of a sideboard, just to challenge, to break, the silence. He was acting in the way that an angry child acts when it has flown into a tantrum, and is beating its little spoon on the tray in front of its high chair. He took the glass into the kitchen and washed it up. He was halfway back when he heard the voice again.

"Help!"

Faint, faraway, distant; Dalton felt himself trembling uncontrollably. What was it all about? What was happening and above all, why was it happening to him? What did it mean, what could it mean? Either his mind was cracking, or there were things



## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

in this house beside and above mortal explanation. There were things here above the reach of reason, things the infinite human mind could not solve, because they were infinite things.

Dalton could feel his heart beating hard against his rib cage, his breath was coming in short, quick gasps. He licked his dry lips and then dashed impulsively to the cupboard and poured himself another half-tumbler of wine. He knocked it back as rapidly as he had knocked back the first one. A cague, alcoholic glow suffused him. So there was a noise in the house, was there? So some beggar was calling out for help, so what? Let them call for help! It was a nice little cottage, and it was his little cottage, and he wasn't going to be scared out of it by any voice, no matter where it came from, came from, came from . . . the phrase repeated itself over and over in his mind. That was the thing he had to find out!

"You can't defeat your enemy if you don't know where he is," said Dalton, half to himself and half to the tumbler in his hand. "I've got to find out where the bounder is."

The cold had become even more intense. A strange feeling of mystery and foreboding filled the room.

"You've taken on the wrong man this time," said Dalton out loud, his words were slurred a little.

"You've taken on the wrong man, Mr. Voice, and I'm going to find you. Jekyll and Hyde or hide and seek; I'm going to find you! My job is finding things, you see, and I'm going to find you." His voice was very slurred now. "I find things with my little twig, yes I do! I can find water, and oil, and mineral deposits, and lost things, and everything! An' I can certainly find you! I don't care whether you are in the ceiling or in the floor, or where you are; I'm gonna find you! And when I find you, you'll have to go!" He hiccupped suddenly, and laughed at the

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

sound. "I've been all over the floor," he said to his twig, "where shall we try next, little twig? Where shall we—Oh, go up the wall?" It was more of a drunken jest than a serious proposal. "I'm going up the wall, yes, I'm going up the wall," he sang in a kind of uneasy bravado. "And when I find you, Voice, I'm going to throw you outside and stamp on you, oh yes, I am, or my name's not—oh, what is my name?" He hiccupped again. "I'll catch you and throw you outside and stamp on you—hic—or my name is not—Dalton!"

It'sh a nice name, Dalton, you should know that. You've worked for Dalton for a long time, little twig."

He steadied himself with an effort. "Now I've got to find this voice."

His progress round the wall was rather erratic.

Gradually the effect of the dinner wine began to wear off and he steadied himself down.

"Now, why am I looking on the wall," he said out loud. The twig twisted and fell from his fingers. "That's a clever little twig." He stooped and picked it up with some difficulty. "That's a very clever little twig. Find it little twig, find it in the wall. What am I looking in the wall for?" He asked himself again. "It can't be in the wall. You can't hide a man in the wall." He held his arms about a foot and a half apart. "You can't put 18 inches of man in a 4½-inch wall, can you little twig?" He looked at the wall again and went as far as the door on unsteady feet. He opened it, and tried to judge the thickness of the wall. "Oh, it's more than 4½ in., it's nearer a foot; but you still can't put a man in a wall?" This time it was a question rather than a statement. He looked at the twig as though expecting it to answer him. He ran the twig over the wall near the door. "You take the high road, and I'll take the low road, and I'll find the

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

little voice before you . . . " he warbled to the tune of 'Loch Lomond'. "Now then, clap your branches, little twig, that was a very good song!" The twig refused to clap its branches. "You're no criterion of mushic," complained Dalton, "no criterion of mushic whatever. You're the mosht unfriendly twig I've ever worked with! Oh no you're not!"

Suddenly, almost in an instant, the water diviner was sober again. "No, you're not," he repeated under his breath, "you're on to something."

In his strangely skilled hands the twig was twisting and turning as his wild talent took over. The twig was tracing something on the wall . . . "What have you found, I wonder?" murmured Dalton. He could make very little of what the twig was tracing, except that it was vague circular in shape. Oval, perhaps, rather than circular. The twig went over and over the same shape as he held it. He took a pencil from his pocket and drew around the outline which the twig had apparently indicated, then he returned the little diving tool to his waistcoat picket. The cold seemed to be emanating from the spot the twig had indicated. Dalton put his hand over it and found it frightening in the intensity of its coldness. "I don't know whether I ought to or not," he said, "but I'm going to see what's under there."

He patted the pocket where he kept the little divining twig. "Well done, little dowser's friend! Well done!"

He went out to the kitchen in search of tools and came back with a large, flat knife, that looked as if it had been originally designed for icing cakes, but as Dalton never made any cakes there was little demand for it. However, it was in demand as a scraping tool. Crumb by crumb, Dalton began removing the paint and the plaster beneath it. He smiled to himself rather ironically as he thought how he had just

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

paid a builder to come and patch up the other side of the room, and he was now making a somewhat larger hole here. Never mind, he supposed that it was all good for trade. Quite suddenly the plaster came off. Instead of finding bare lath, or even brick, or clay-lump beneath it, he found another layer of something like polished plaster or smooth white stone.

There was something painted on it, at least something appeared to be painted on it . . . It was a human face, a young man's face. The eyes held a tremendous sadness and an almost unbelievable loneliness.

Dalton stood staring at the face for long, long moments. Finally he found his voice again. "Was it you I heard speaking, was it you calling out for help? If so, who the devil are you, and what the devil are you doing under my wall-plaster, and who put you there?"

It was a most incredibly life-like portrait. He looked all round the room again, as though half afraid that something, or someone, would be standing behind him.

"Help," said a voice. "Help me, for God's sake, help me!" Dalton spun on his heel, by the time he was looking at the portrait again the voice had stopped, but he was almost certain that out of the corner of his eye he had detected just the tiniest, slightest movement from those painted lips.

"You spoke," said Dalton, swallowing hard. He touched the cold forehead of the portrait; "you spoke!" he repeated, "it's you who are asking for help!"

Dalton was neither a hero, nor a coward, he was neither a sage nor a simpleton. Yet he had plenty of common sense, and was also well endowed with a fair sprinkling of un-common sense.

At the end of the lane was a road, and about a mile

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

down the road was a telephone box . . . He walked down the lane, reached the road, turned in the direction of the phone box and increased his pace.

He didn't like the loneliness and the darkness of the evening, although it was a feeling that he had never experienced before. He seemed to see that face everywhere whispering, "Please help me," from behind trees and hedges, from behind haystacks and ditches, from behind gates and stiles. He reached the telephone box, switched off his torch, opened the door and stepped inside; he picked up the receiver, dialled the exchange and asked for trunks, London. He called the number which he knew by heart, the number of a very old friend of his, Val Stearman.

Stearman was sitting with his feet up, reading a lengthy treatise by John Stuart Mill, he cast a rather weary eye in the direction of the telephone.

"Would you like to answer that, darling?"

La Noire looked up from her own reading, where she was engrossed in a tome of Ancient Greek, which completely eluded Stearman, but there were many strange things about La Noire, and Val had learned to live with them and to ask very few questions. She could pick up a page of Egyptian hieroglyphics, a page of Sanskrit, a carved Runic stone, or a Greek palimpsest and read them with the same ease with which he would read the fourth leader in "The Times."

It made life interesting, he reflected. One never quite knew what La Noire would be reading next.

It might have even been a couple of pages from linear 'B'!

She picked up the telephone with a dainty, graceful hand.

"La Noire Stearman speaking," she said softly.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"This is Dalton," said the water diviner, "you remember me. Mrs. Stearman?"

"Mr. Dalton, how delightful to hear from you. Where are you now? We've rather lost touch with you over the last few months."

"I have just moved into a cottage in Hertfordshire," said Dalton.

"You sound rather upset," remarked La Noire.

"I am that, Mrs. Stearman," said the diviner. "I don't suppose you and your husband could spare the time to—no, that's too much to ask. I'm sorry I bothered you, really . . ."

"Mr. Dalton, it's no trouble if we can help you; whatever's wrong?"

"It's this cottage I've just moved into. I've only been here a day or two. There's a strange atmosphere and I seemed to hear a voice."

Val had set John Stuart Mill aside and was standing by the telephone listening intently to every word.

He ran a hand through his curly, iron grey hair; it was a typical gesture with him.

"Let me talk to him," he whispered.

"I'm going to put Val on," said La Noire, and handed over the receiver.

"Hello, Dalton old man, nice to hear from you again," said Val. "What's this about a strange atmosphere in your cottage?"

"Well, as I was telling your good wife, there is a very strange atmosphere, and I heard a voice, Val; I heard a voice that couldn't have had any emanation in this world. It was crying for help. So I got my divining twig——"

"Yes. yes, go on," urged Stearman, with keen interest.

"I went over the floor and couldn't find anything;

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

that shook me; then I heard the voice again. I stopped and had a drink. I suppose I had a bit too much, because the next thing I knew I was running the divining twig over the wall. I wouldn't have done that if I had been sober, because I should have known darned well there wasn't anything in the wall to be found."

"And then——?" persisted Stearman.

"Then, suddenly, I got the message from the twig, the signal. I knew there was something behind the plaster. I scraped the plaster away——"

"And then——" urged Stearman.

"And then I saw this face painted on the white stone, marble, plaster, or whatever it is. I turned round for a second and I heard the voice again, louder and clearer, and as I heard the voice again and looked round at the face I could have sworn I saw the lips move."

"This sounds incredibly interesting, Dalton old man; look, give us the exact address of this place of yours and I'll be over there as soon as I possibly can. I reckon about two hours drive if you're not too isolated, are you?"

"Well, it's rural Hertfordshire," said Dalton almost apologetically. "You know how I like seclusion."

"Yes—it's a good idea, too," said Stearman. He got the address of "Dawn Cottage," then he and La Noire piled into their powerful sports saloon without even stopping to pack. Stearman did things like that, lively things, exciting things, interesting things. Life was movement and adventure, as far as they were concerned. Sometimes too much movement and adventure. At other times they felt that they had struck one of those bald desert patches, when life has very little of either adventure or excitement to

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

commend it. The drive down was an uneventful one, albeit rapid. When they knocked at the door it was a very relieved Dalton who admitted them.

"Glad to see you, Val, and you too, La Noire, my dear. I'll offer you a drink if there is any left!"

"Thank you," said Stearman, "I'm hot and dry after that mechanical gallop!"

Dalton poured out what was left of the dinner wine into three tumblers.

"Hmmm, quite pleasant," remarked Stearman.

"It's only a cheap one," said Dalton.

"It hasn't got to be expensive to be pleasant," answered Val. "Some of the best things in life are free, if one may use the old cliché."

"Some of these old clichés have a wealth of meaning behind them," said Dalton. "Oh, it's nice to have you here! It really is! Come and have a look!" He showed them the picture.

"Has it moved again?" asked Stearman.

"No. I haven't taken my eyes off it since phoning you."

"There's a powerful feeling of psychic cold in here," said La Noire.

"Yes, even I can feel it," said Val, "and I'm not half as sensitive as you are . . ."

"There's a sense of foreboding, too," went on La Noire. "rather grim foreboding, as though a deep, psychic power is weighing down on this house."

"Do you sense anything evil?" asked Val.

"No not essentially evil," she answered, "just something very strange. There may have been evil long ago, but the power is broken and only the strangeness is left behind; like the perfume that lingers when an oriental vase is broken, like the scent that hangs in the air when an orange has been peeled, and the peel thrown on the fire and burnt . . .



## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

just the ghost of a perfume, just the essence of an aroma. There is sadness here; sadness and mystery. There is a kind of remorse and regret." La Noire put the long sensitive fingers of her left hand over the features of the portrait. "There is something there," she whispered, "I can feel it. That face is a psychic centre; that picture is a soul, in some strange way of its own . . ."

"Well, I have every reason to respect your opinion, darling, especially on psychic matters," said Stearman.

"It's begging to be released . . ." murmured La Noire.

Then all three of them not only heard, but saw.

The lips, those painted lips parted by the veriest fraction and a faint, faraway voice called from the portrait.

"Help me! Release me!" Then all was still again, and the face was only a portrait once more. They all looked at one another.

"Did you hear it, too?" asked Dalton.

"We heard it," Val assured him.

"And we saw it," murmured La Noire.

"Thank God it wasn't only my imagination! I was really worried," said Dalton.

"It's a strange, exciting experience," said Stearman. "Somehow a living soul has been imprisoned in those lifeless pigments. I don't know how; but that soul is begging to be released."

"Just a face," said La Noire thoughtfully, "there's no knowing how long it's been there, because there's no costume to judge by. We don't know if it's 18th century, 17th, 16th. maybe earlier!"

"Do you know how old the cottage is?" asked Val.

"I've got the deeds about here, why? Is it important?"

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"Might be," said Stearman.

"You see," broke in La Noire, "the release may be very dependent upon the circumstances of the imprisonment, and if we could get some idea of the period when the incarceration began it would help us a great deal towards effecting the freedom. I think that the best thing to do would be to hold a seance."

"A seance!" exclaimed Peter Dalton. "You think that the imprisoned spirit would be able to communicate with us?"

"I think there is every possibility . . ." said Val. "Would it take long to arrange?" asked Dalton eagerly.

"Well, La Noire is one of the finest mediums in the country," said Val. "It would take practically no time at all. We want a table and three chairs and the lights out."

"Where would be the best place for the table, do you think?" asked Peter Dalton.

"Here," said La Noire, sounding unusually authoritative, "just in front of the picture."

Big Val Stearman picked up the table easily and set it with one side against the wall, so that the painted face looked at them over the polished surface rather pathetically, like the head of a guillotined aristocrat just waiting to drop into the basket.

La Noire sat immediately opposite the painting, with Val on her right and the water diviner on her left. As soon as she had composed herself Val nodded to Peter to turn down the oil lamps. When it was almost completely dark in the room they joined hands across the table top. La Noire's left hand held Peter Dalton's right, while the water diviner's left hand touched the painted face. Val touched the painted face with his right and held La Noire's right with his own left. La Noire began humming very softly

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

to herself. The melody was indeterminate at first, as though she were looking around for inspiration and then she intoned a sad, rather plaintive little 16th century air; a feeling of intense cold, of psychic cold, gripped the three of them.

"She's gone into a trance," whispered Val.

Peter Dalton nodded. A thin stream of ectoplasm emerged from between La Noire's beautiful bow-shaped, moist, red lips. It drifted like psychic smoke across the table and then disappeared into the painted face between the hands of Val Stearman and Peter Dalton. After the first cloud of ectoplasm had passed, a second drifted from the beautiful La Noire, across the table, and into the portrait.

Then, very slowly at first, a strange grey-green, yellow-fringed psychic light began glowing around the painted features. Then they were flat, painted features no longer, but they stood out in relief. They were the 3-dimensional face of a sad youth, pale and wan, and now the lips moved quite perceptibly, and the voice was clearly audible.

"Help me," said the voice, "please help me."

"Of course we will help you," answered Stearman, "that is why we have made contact with you, so that we may help you. Are you able to hear me and to communicate with me?"

"Yes," answered the sad voice, "I can hear you and I can communicate with you."

"What is your name?" asked Val.

"Richard Mantle," answered the boy's face.

"Can you tell us how you came to be imprisoned in the wall?"

"I am a painter, an artist——" there was a note of sadness, of regret, in the voice now. "I did not—— I did not——" he broke off altogether.

"Try to tell us," urged Stearman.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"I did not use my gifts as I should have done," said the artist.

"I painted only for gain, instead of using my art for its own sake. I was very proud; although I was only a boy I felt that I was the greatest painter in England. I felt that I was more beautiful than Lucifer, Prince of the Morning. At least, if I did not equal his beauty I equalled his deadly pride . . . his deadly, deadly pride." The face took on an earnest look, of sadness and of deep remorse. "I think that I have learnt much during the centuries while I have been imprisoned here; souls do not sleep! I could do nothing but think, and cry for aid." The ectoplasmic eyes of the bas-relief face of the spirit seemed to grow moist with spirit-tears.

"And what happened then?" asked Stearman.

"I felt that only I was worthy to paint a portrait of myself, and that only the finest white marble would be a fitting medium for my talent. I chose the finest pigments and hour by hour I studied the mirror. I became absorbed in my work . . . At least I had finished, and I said that this was perfection. I knelt before it and offered up a prayer as though it were the god of Beauty itself—a silly, profane prayer to my own skill, and my own beauty. I have long remembered and long forgotten that prayer. And then, as I knelt in prayer before my own picture, suddenly, I could no longer see my picture. I saw the room, I could see and I could hear, but I had no feeling of touch, just my sight and my hearing. I saw the room, and on the spot where I had been standing, there was nothing there! Then I realised that somehow I had been sucked up into my own portrait, that I was looking out through painted eyes, and hearing with painted ears. I screamed and cried for help. Time passed. People came looking for me, and I cried, 'I'm here, you fools, release me, release

## THE VOICE IN THE WALL

me," but they didn't hear. Some of them looked troubled and at last I heard one say, 'We must plaster over that wretched face. It reminds me of the poor missing painter.' After they had plastered I saw nothing and I heard nothing. But at last a strange instinctive feeling came to me and whenever anyone was in this room, whenever anyone was close to me, I would cry out. I would sense sometimes that people were drawing closer and closer, and then they would go away and I would be left here, a victim of my own pride. Please help me. I know now that I am not the most handsome youth. I know that I am not the most famous painter. I know too, that if I were it would be wrong to worship my own skill and to worship my own beauty." There was a stirring in the painted face and it seemed to relapse into a portrait again . . . The voice was very faint and faraway now and clouds of ectoplasm were drifting back from the portrait towards La Noire, who stirred a little in her trance.

"Please help me," came the last faint whisper from the portrait, and then silence. The last faint wisp of ectoplasm disappeared as it was re-absorbed into the living body of La Noire. She opened her eyes slowly, drew a deep breath, stretched her beautiful, graceful arms; Peter Dalton got up and adjusted the lamps. A cheerful yellow light flooded the room.

Quickly Val told La Noire everything that had happened since she had been in a trance.

"I see . . . We must help the boy," she said.

"Of course we must help him," agreed Val. "Do you have a cross or a crucifix of any kind that we could use?"

"I have one upstairs, by my bed," said Peter.

"Splendid," answered Val. "Fetch it for me."

The water diviner went upstairs and returned with a plain polished wood cross on a small stand.

"Splendid," said Stearman.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

Val stood the cross just in front of the portrait, and moved a big lamp around so that the shadow fell across the painted features on the white marble.

"Requiescat in pace," whispered La Noire.

"Amen," said Stearman.

"Amen," said Peter Dalton.

So faint and far away that they could scarcely hear it, there was a sound as of a gentle sigh of relief, and then, so faint that it seemed to be only imagination, a gentle "thank you!"

The psychic cold vanished from the room. The strange air of foreboding lifted from above "Dawn Cottage."

"He has gone," said La Noire, "I sense it."

Peter Dalton picked up his diviner's twig and held it in front of the portrait.

"There is no response now," he said, "none at all."

"He is gone," said Stearman with an air of finality.

"He has learnt his lesson," said La Noire.

"And taught us one," murmured Val.

"All of us," said Dalton.

## **" W O K O L O "**

**By Pel Torro**

**"Only a fool would ignore the curse of a  
Baramba witch doctor."**

**COLONEL FARJEON** pushed pack his pith helmet and wiped perspiration from a bright red brow. Farjeon was a big, beefy individual with a florid complexion and bright, rather angry eyes. His heavy jowls had a look which was a combination of superiority and aggression. He was accompanied by Johann Sturdekker. Sturdekker was a Dutch trader, he was big and rather bestial in appearance. He looked rather like what he was; a great, angry, wild boar of a man.

Behind Farjeon and Sturdekker padded a long, silent line of Baramba bearers. First in the line came the two gun boys, one bearing Farjeon's big Express and elephant rifle, the other carrying Sturdekker's weapons. Farjeon suddenly held up his hand for silence, somewhere in the jungle ahead of them something was moving. It was Baramba country through which the safari was trekking, and here there was

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

game a-plenty for the man who was wily enough and savage enough to take it.

Farjeon was after gorilla. He had a deep-seated, personal hatred of gorilla, and those who didn't like him suggested that it was perhaps because he knew, deep down in his subconscious, that he resembled the beasts he hunted! The fact that Johann Sturdekker shared Farjeon's dislike, may also have had something to do with the fact that the Dutch trader resembled a bull ape, more than another human being. Through the silent jungle ahead of them they heard the sound that they had been waiting for. It was a sound that shattered the silence, it was a roar, the deep-throated roar of the bull ape, an angry bull-ape; it was the challenge of the ape. It was the challenge of the gorilla. A grim smile played across Colonel Farjeon's rather cruel mouth. He made an imperious gesture to the gun boy, and his Express rifle was laid reverently in his hands. Farjeon went on into the jungle. Sturdekker's gun boy had passed him a rifle, and slowly the big Dutchman followed Colonel Farjeon in pursuit of that deep-throated roar which they had heard.

The gun boys moved up quietly behind the Englishman and the Dutchman, without any noticeable degree of enthusiasm . . . for neither Farjeon nor Sturdekker had the kind of personality which inspired the love and confidence of their men.

Sturdekker's gunboy stubbed his toe against a hidden tree stump, and went headlong. The elephant gun that he still carried went off with a reverberating roar and the heavy ball trimmed pretty well clean through a young sapling a few yards ahead of them. It did no other damage, save that it sent the bull ape, whom Farjeon and Sturdekker had been pursuing, away out of reach into the distant jungle ahead of them.



## W O K O L O

"Damn and blast the b— fool," roared Farjeon, "who was that?"

"It was my gun boy," said Sturdekker, looking round. He stirred the prostrate Baramba tribesman with his foot. "Clumsy idiot," he snarled in a thick, guttural voice, "why don't you watch where you put your feet?"

"I sorry, b'wana, I very sorry!"

"It's no good being sorry," snapped Farjeon, "you've put us a few hours back with the hunt, you blithering idiot!"

There was a very unpleasant rhinoceros hide whip tucked in Colonel Farjeon's belt. His complexion went through several interesting colour changes, involving the red-purple end of the spectrum, then, with a savage oath, he began belabouring the luckless gun-bearer.

Sturdekker laughed.

"You have to wake him up from time to time, otherwise the fool sleeps!"

Whimpering with pain the gun bearer ran back to the end of the line.

Farjeon looked at the leading bearer.

"Better see if you can do any better with the gun than he can," he said. "Give him your pack."

The leading bearer came meekly forward and took the place of Sturdekker's gun boy. "And if you trip up," warned Farjeon, "God help you, for I certainly shan't!"

He wiped blood from the rhinoceros hide whip on to a nearby leaf, and replaced the vicious weapon in his belt. There was the sound of footsteps approaching. A keen, sun-bronzed stranger suddenly appeared and confronted Farjeon and Sturdekker. Farjeon took a pace back.

"Hello," he exclaimed, "Who the devil are you?"

"My name is Bramley," replied the stranger, "Dr.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

Bramley, I run the Baramba medical mission."

"Oh, sort of native horse doctor, eh?"

Bramley's dark eyes narrowed a little as he looked at Farjeon. "One of those chaps who couldn't make it in England, eh? Came out to practise on the natives, eh what? Eh?"

"If you're interested," said Bramley coldly, "I came out to practise among the Baramba because there is a very serious need for medical care in this part of the world. I was previously working in an area which was very well supplied, and I thought that from an ethical point of view it was rather more worth while to care for those who were genuinely sick than to waste time on wealthy hypochondriacs!" Farjeon looked at Bramley rather angrily. Colonel Farjeon was not used to being spoken back to.

"I thought I heard a man calling out in pain," said Bramley, "was one of your bearers hurt?"

"Oh, I just tickled me gun boy up, that's all," said Farjeon.

"What the devil do you mean—you 'just tickled your gun boy up'." His eye fell suddenly on the rhinoceros hide whip. "Do you mean to say you actually struck one of your bearers?"

"They're my blasted bearers, I'll do what I dam' well please with them!" exploded Farjeon. "You listen here, sawbones, if you've got any sense you'll mind your own damn business! We're a fair way from civilization out here, and I don't take kindly to people who try to tell me what to do!"

Sturdekker's mouth was parted in a mocking smile.

"Do what the Colonel says, and go and look after your sick natives, we don't need your help," he said. "Go on, beat it!"

Dr. Bramley looked at Sturdekker with an expression he usually reserved for poisonous microbes. He

## W O K O L O

made as though he was going to reply and apparently thought better of it. He walked down the line till he came to the gun boy at the end.

"This man is in urgent need of medical attention," said the doctor quietly, "I shall put in a report to the Commissioner about this."

"Drop dead," said Farjeon, "I'm a personal friend of the Commissioner!"

"Perhaps," answered Bramley. He beckoned to the bleeding native, "Come with me, friend," he said. "We will go to the house of Father Curtis."

"I happen to need that bearer," snorted Farjeon, "what the blazes do you think you're doing with him?"

"He needs medical attention and rest," said Bramley, "and I'm going to see that he gets 'em. If you need bearers I advise you not to flog them. Do you realise what kind of infection you're liable to let in, giving a man an open wound out here?"

"Natives don't get infected, they're used to the bugs," said Farjeon.

"You are a singularly poisonous specimen," returned Bramley. Farjeon went through his interesting series of facial colour changes again.

"Your blood pressure is very bad," said Bramley, "I wouldn't excite yourself if I were you."

"You impudent bounder," barked Farjeon. He drew the whip from his belt and held it up threateningly. Sturdekker burst out laughing again. He had a singularly deep and annoying laugh. Bramley was a very peaceful man, he was extremely loth to start trouble, but, idealist that he was, he felt that his cause was justified and he was not prepared to back up with certain very definite limits . . . He stepped in swiftly under the whip, caught Farjeon by the wrist, spun around, executing a movement that is known in professional wrestling circles as the IRISH

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

WHIP and deposited the spluttering Colonel flat on his back on the jungle floor . . . Utterly winded and completely flabbergasted, Farjeon lay where he was, unable to move for a few seconds. Bramley looked at him rather dispassionately, took the whip from the unresisting fingers and threw it far into the jungle.

Sturdekker had stopped laughing.

"The colonel won't like that!" said the big Dutch trader.

"The colonel shouldn't have asked for it," said Bramley. "Are you planning to do anything about it?"

Sturdekker had clenched two fists as big as hams. Bramley looked towards him thoughtfully.

"Think before you act, Mr. Sturdekker," he advised quietly.

"How you know my name?" asked the Dutchman belligerently.

"Let us say your reputation has preceded you," said Bramley, "and it hasn't preceded you with a particularly savoury aroma, either! In other words, Mr. Sturdekker, you are not popular."

The Dutchman gave an uneasy laugh.

"I am not popular because I know how to discipline the natives, eh?"

"You are not popular because you are a brute, a beast and a blackguard," said the doctor evenly. "You are also something of a scoundrel. There are some very fine, and some very honest traders in these parts—Johann Sturdekker, you are not one of them! You are a disgrace to your profession, people like you are exploiters. You are pushing Africa closer and closer to a blood bath. Yet through your trickery, you arrange that when the axe falls it falls upon the innocent!"

"Are you a doctor or a preacher?" sneered Stur-

## W O K O L O

dekker. The two men eyed each other, Farjeon recovered himself a little.

"Go on, Jan, deal with the boundah!" he puffed from his prostrate position.

Sturdekker swung a wild right hand. Bramley ducked easily, casually. He replied with a piston shot left that cracked and jarred with precision against the point of the big Dutchman's jaw. Sturdekker's eyes glazed over, his jaw dropped open as a sledge hammer right came over, and Sturdekker joined Farjeon on the ground. The native bearers were cheering delightedly.

Bramley beckoned to the gun boy who had been injured.

"Come with me," he said softly, "we will go to see Father Curtis." The gun boy nodded gratefully, and followed the doctor through the jungle. They reached the missionary's house about half-an-hour later. Father Tom Curtis' mission station and dwelling quarters combined were an oasis of peace, and quiet, unassuming restfulness. To step across the threshold was like stepping into another world. Outside was squalor, the foetid aroma of the jungle; inside was cool whiteness; clean, soft, upholstered furniture. Father Tom Curtis was a small man, but he was one of those energetic men who appeared to have got involved physically in some kind of mistaken organic issue as far as the size/energy ratio was concerned. He was not so small as to look insignificant, physically, but he gave the impression of a dwarf who has been issued with the heart of a giant. He always had enough to spare for the needs of others. He swooped upon the luckless native, who had got on the wrong end of Colonel Farjeon's rhinoceros hide whip, and was assisting Bramley to bathe and disinfect his wounds within a second of getting them inside his house. When the man was comfortable again Tom

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

Curtis looked angry rather than pious.

"Who the devil did this, David?"

"I don't know the fellow himself," returned Dr. Bramley, "but he was with the extremely unsavoury Mr. Sturdekker."

Father Tom Curtis tried hard to be charitable to all men, but the very mention of Sturdekker was enough to send him livid with anger.

"If there was any justice in this corrupt world," he said, "Sturdekker would be serving a life sentence . . . if they hadn't already executed him! If anybody's with Sturdekker it's ten-to-one he's tarred with the same brush, but I'm tending to be uncharitable, I'm afraid. I rather forget my principles when I think about Sturdekker."

"I'm afraid I do, too," admitted the doctor, "he's the one man that I would feel some reluctance about treating; yet the medical oath is the medical oath, and it applies even to the Sturdekker's of this world."

"Yes, and a priest's duty is to all men," said Father Curtis, and added wily, "even to the Sturdekkes of this world. May God forgive us both for even forgetting it for a fraction of a second!" He looked straight at the doctor, "but there are some men whom it is easy to love, and there are others whom it is very difficult to love."

His face creased into an angry frown as he thought of Sturdekker and his companion again, "and there are some," he added rather grimly, "whom it is almost impossible to love, even though we are commanded so to do . . ."

"I think they're after game," said the doctor suddenly, apropos of nothing.

The priest had been lost in a reverie of his own, and he jumped at his friend's sudden remark.

"What was that, David?"

## W O K O L O

"I said 'I think they're after game'; Sturdekker and this other character."

"They would be," said the priest, "money is desperately needed for food and medicine and they spend it on cartridges and safaris and—oh, it's no good trying to preach an ethical, economic sermon to men like Sturdekker and that colonel character; why do people like that always have the money to spare?"

Bramley shrugged broad shoulders.

"I don't know——" he said, "but I'm afraid we're committing the sin both of judgment and generalization. It's not fair to judge all traders by Sturdekker, in fact many of them are extremely good-hearted and generous men. It is not fair to judge all hunters by this other fellow. I have met some really splendid hunters, fine sportsmen and men of fine ethics."

"There are good, bad and indifferent in every walk of life, I suppose," said Father Curtis. "Still, I can't help feeling the money could be better spent."

"I know how you feel," agreed Bramley, "but then you see, you and I are . . ."

"You and I are what?" asked Curtis interestedly.

"Well, without falling into the sin of spiritual pride—from which the Lord deliver us both—I wonder whether you and I are odd, different, peculiar, in the sense of being unusual, not in the sense of being strange, or funny . . ."

"I'm not quite sure that I follow you," said Tom Curtis.

"What I'm trying to say," said the doctor, "is that we are in a very small minority. We, who are concerned about other peoples needs; but it's so easy to sound pious; it's so easy to say, like the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, 'I thank thee, Lord that I am not as other men are.' We are liable to say we are thankful that we are idealists and

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

not like Johann Sturdekker, or the other fellow with him!"

"You're quite right, of course," agreed Curtis.

"And because we are in the minority," said Bramley, "how can we know that we are right? Objectivity sometimes gets distorted; maybe we're wrong to be idealists, maybe we are wrong to try to change the world; maybe we ought to leave it to go its own sweet way."

"You don't really mean that," smiled Tom Curtis.

"No, of course I don't," said the doctor, "just, perhaps, sometimes when I see a man like Sturdekker, who is so utterly opposed to everything I think I stand for. I wonder how two such opposing types can exist, when you think about the physical basis of personality, remember how much is inherited. I wonder how much has been contributed by a long line of Sturdekkers . . . ?"

"Then we come back to the problem," said Tom, "of whether or not there is such a thing as a genuinely objective ethic, or whether all ethics and morals are purely subjective. Have we any right to judge men like those? If so, to them, ethics is a purely subjective and personal matter, if, to them, it is a matter of saying that good is what is good—for ME, and bad is what is bad—for ME. then by their own lights they are obeying certain ethical laws. We do not see them in the same light, that's all."

"I think," said Bramley, "that when we start getting philosophical and stop being practical we might as well abandon the world altogether to people like that. Let them go ahead and wreck it in their own sweet way!"

"But then," replied Curtis, "we have no proof that they would wreck it. It would just be a very different world from the kind of world in which we believe."



## W O K O L O

"Very true," reflected Bramley. He glanced across to the other side of the room where the native bearer had just dozed off. "I see our patient is asleep," he said with a smile.

"Good," answered the priest, "a man who sleeps does not feel pain. Do you think he will be all right?"

Bramley nodded, "Yes, yes, I'm sure he will. He wouldn't have been though, if he'd got those wounds infected. If I hadn't been coming back from a call to one of the native villages and crossed their track at that point, they'd have forced him on as he was. There are the filthy flies, plus the air-borne bacteria, and I suppose he would have eventually consulted some Baramba witch doctor out in the wilds, and that would have been it . . ."

"You're not very keen on Baramba witch doctors, then?" asked Curtis.

"Well, they're perfectly decent human beings as far as that goes," said the doctor, "but I wouldn't consider them as fellow practitioners, would you?"

Curtis laughed.

"No! I suppose in a way we regard them as rivals! They are my spiritual rivals with their ju-ju's and their fetishes, and they are your medical rivals, let us make sure that we are not unfairly biased against them! Let us be quite sure we are not jealous of the respect with the Baramba pay them."

"I think we're beginning to break the back of that particular battle," said Bramley.

"I hope so," agreed Curtis, "I tell my people that when they are sick it is not caused by evil spirits but by evil germs, and that doctor Bramley will do them more good than a Baramba witch doctor."

"Well, as you know. I try as much as possible to return the compliment for you, Tom; I tell them that when the crops fall it is not because of evil spirits, it is just because the weather is bad, or they have not

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

been planted right; that it is no good going in for elaborate rain-making ceremonies involving the tribal deities when the true God is as sorry that their crops have failed as they are, and that He will help them to grow better crops next year. I tell them that they should come to you to learn about Him, and pray to Him."

Tom Curtis was nodding.

"There is much to do in this area, and there are so few of us! So few of us and so many Sturdekkers; so many characters like the other fellow who was with him."

"The very fact that we are outnumbered," said Curtis, "ought not to discourage us. Do you remember at the beginning of all things——"

"I wasn't here then," said Bramley with a smile.

"You know perfectly well what I mean," said Curtis. He sounded just a trifle irritated.

"Sorry," said the doctor, "I was being facetious, and I shouldn't have been. It's a serious matter."

"A handful of Gallilean fishermen," went on Curtis, "a handful of Gallilean fishermen against the rest of the world, against pagan idols, against those who made Sturdekker and his companion look like saints by comparison. They were fighting a very grim battle and they were overwhelmingly outnumbered. But they didn't give up, and the fact that they didn't give up," he went on enthusiastically, "is the reason that we are here today! So much more depended on them than on us, far more, a million times more, and they didn't give up! Their opposition was much greater."

"Yes, I see the parallel," agreed Bramley. "You mean that they were right, although they were hopelessly outnumbered."

"Of course they were right," said Father Curtis.

They were interrupted by a sudden knock at the door. Before the priest could open it, it was flung

## W O K O L O

open from outside and a Baramba native collapsed across the threshold. He was a mass of cuts and bruises, his eyes were closed and swollen. He looked as though he had just been involved in a collision with a railway locomotive.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bramley; he dashed across to the man and began a swift examination of his wounds. The doctor's eyes narrowed and he looked at the priest. "He's been beaten up," he pronounced, "and beaten up pretty savagely . . ."

Curtis looked back at the doctor.

"Our two 'friends'?" he suggested.

"Who else?" countered Bramley.

The doctor crashed one bronzed fist into the palm of the other hand.

"I blame myself for this," he said darkly, "I humiliated both of them in front of the bearers, so as soon as anybody stepped out of line they had to re-establish their reign of terror. The first man to slip got this lot!" He looked down at the man, "I hardly know where to begin," he said . . .

"He's in a terrible mess," agreed Curtis; he looked down. "I suppose it would be systematic to start at the top and work down, or start at the foot and work up."

"You make it sound as though we were repairing a machine," commented the doctor.

"I didn't mean to be callous," said the priest, "you know me better than that, David."

"I know you were just being practical," answered the doctor. He felt the injured native's heart, "I think it's too late to be either practical or impractical," he said, and his eyes narrowed.

"He's dying?" asked the priest.

"He's dying," verified the doctor.

The first gun boy had woken up and his eyes dilated in horror at the sight of his companion.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"Doctor Bramley—what happened?" he asked in a deep, rich voice, that shook with emotion.

"He just staggered in," said Bramley.

"It was Farjeon of the evil temper, Farjeon and Sturdekker! Curse them both."

"You knew him?" asked Bramley.

"He was my friend! His name was M'Gowa, and he was my friend! I will have vengeance!" said the Baramba.

"Vengeance is not good," said the priest, "two wrongs do not make a right. Evil can only beget more evil."

"All the same, I will have vengeance!" the Baramba tribesman looked from one to the other. "I am grateful to you, Father Curtis. I am grateful to you, Doctor Bramley. But vengeance is vengeance, and I mean to be avenged."

"What are you going to do?" asked Bramley.

"If you take the law into your own hands," said Curtis, "then the Great Lord will punish you."

"I shall take vengeance in a way that is beyond the law," said the gun bearer.

"Nothing is above the law," said the priest.

"Farjeon thinks he is above the law. Sturdekker thinks he is above the law!"

"But they're not," said the doctor.

"I will prove to them that they are not; I will prove to them that there is a law that can reach them though they fly to the ends of the earth. I will teach them the law of Wokolo!"

"The law of Wokolo?" said the priest.

"I will go now," said the gun bearer.

"You are scarcely fit to travel," said the doctor. The native looked at his friend.

"He was scarcely fit to travel—but he got here. The spirit of vengeance drove him to me. Now I must carry the spirit of vengeance to the witch doctor."

## W O K O L O

Again the priest and the doctor exchanged glances.

"It is not a good thing which you are doing, my son," said Father Curtis.

"It may not be a good thing, but it is a necessary thing," persisted the gun-bearer. He rose, strangely tall and erect, a grim, purposeful expression in his eyes. He strode out of Father Curtis' mission station combined home.

"Shall I go after him?" asked the doctor.

The priest shook his head.

"He wouldn't listen to you if you did, David. I have been here several years longer than you have, I know these people. Nobody can really know them, I suppose, but I know them as well as any stranger can hope to know them. In some ways they are like children, in other ways they are wiser than we are, and believe me there are stranger things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophies, and among those strange things I include the Baramba witch doctors, and the legend of Wokolo."

"What about this 'legend of Wokolo'?" asked the doctor.

"Sit down, I'll tell you." He poured brandy and soda for the doctor. Bramley sipped it appreciatively. The priest helped himself from the syphon and replaced the brandy decanter in the case. "I've been fighting against Wokolo ever since I came," he began, "and I'm not an imaginative man—I don't fight something that doesn't exist!"

"You're sure you're not fighting against the image of Wokolo in the minds of the natives?" suggested Bramley.

"No—I'm fighting something real," affirmed the priest, "something real, something strange, something deadly, something that I will confess, frightens me. Wokolo is a kind of native god or devil. Of course he is evil and vindictive, I think I must call him a

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

devil, although he has some attributes of a deity."

"Do you mean to say this thing really exists?" asked Bramley, sipping his drink, and looking the priest straight in the eye.

"He exists all right! At least to these people. He may be a purely localized demon, it's difficult to explain. The great C. S. Lewis once said, 'there are two equal and opposite mistakes, into which the human thinker can fall when he is considering the subject of demonology. The first is to pretend that they don't exist at all, and the second is to show an unhealthy curiosity in them.' The first mistake is very easy to make, to imagine that they don't exist. Out here in this Baramba country it is pretty easy to find plenty of unexplained happenings to indicate, shall we say, the likelihood of the existence of things like Wokolo. It is also very easy to show an almost unhealthy interest in him or it, for I am not sure whether Wokolo has a gender!"

There was a pause while both men sipped their drinks.

"Go on," urged Bramley, "I must confess I am very interested, Tom." The priest started up and took a quick pace about the room.

"It is very difficult to find out much about Wokolo; he has certain conditions, if anyone wants to invoke him they smear the blood of an animal on a tree and then pray to it. Wokolo is sacred to trees and to the banks of streams and rivers. His weapon is the bow; the arrows that he flies are invisible and envenomed, if such a contradiction in terms is allowable."

"Have you ever seen Wokolo?" asked Bramley.

For answer the priest took another silent pace about the room and then said,

"Have you ever seen electricity?"

"Touche," smiled Bramley.

## W O K O L O

"You have no doubt seen an electrocuted corpse," said the priest.

"I have," agreed the doctor, "and it was not a pretty sight."

"Corpses rarely are," commented the priest and his eye fell upon the body of the native bearer whom Farjeon and Sturdekker had literally beaten to death.

"If you saw the evidence of electricity, would you believe in it? Would you be prepared to agree from the principle of cause and effect that it existed?"

"Y-e-es," agreed Bramley rather slowly.

"Very well, then," said the priest, "I have not seen Wokolo, in the same way that you have not seen electricity but I have seen men who have died without cause."

"No man dies without cause," said Bramley.

"Theoretically, I suppose you're right," said the priest, "but let me put it this way, doctor. I have seen men on whom there was no mark of death, but they have been dead. I have seen men whose faces registered such abject and hideous terror that I have felt the reflection of that terror falling upon my own face, chilling the blood in my veins, and slowing down the beating of my heart. I do not think—whatever my other faults may be—that I am a coward."

"You're not a coward," agreed the doctor, "would say, quite honestly, Tom, that you are one of the bravest men I know."

"I wasn't fishing for compliments," said the priest.

"No, I know you weren't," said the doctor, "but I believe that you deserve one."

Curtis smiled.

It was just the ghost of a smile, an enigmatic smile, a cryptic smile.

"Why did those men die, without mark upon them?" he asked, suddenly, rhetorically.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"I don't know," said Bramley, "I didn't examine them!"

"I believe that, though their bodies were unharmed, they died because their souls had been struck by the dart of Wokolo," said the priest.

"I find that very, very difficult to believe," said Bramley.

"Yet you believe in the existence of psychosomatic medicine! You know the powers of auto-suggestion and you know the powers of ordinary suggestion. You know what a hypnotist can do with a suitable subject . . ."

"Yes, I grant you all these things," agreed the doctor, "but I say that there is a world of difference between even the most advanced auto-suggestion or psycho-somatic medicine and the kind of effect which you are claiming can be produced by the soul over the body."

"Let's substitute the word 'mind' for 'soul'," said the priest.

"Very well," agreed the doctor.

"If a mind has been stricken down, surely the body must follow?"

"Not necessarily," said Bramley, "hopeless mental deficients, some practically mindless, live for a considerable time."

"But they live only shadowy lives."

"I don't know," returned Bramley, "they seem happy in their own way. I would be the last to deny them the right to live."

"That opens up a whole new field of discussion, which we are not concerned with at the moment. What I was saying was this—that there is to my way of thinking enough evidence of unexplained mysteries in this Baramba territory to account for the existence—or at least to allow me to postulate the existence of some force which is certainly not physi-



## WOKOLO

cal, a force which I call Wokolo. I believe we have enough evidence to show that the power of the Baramba witch doctor, the curse of Wokolo, the shooting-devil of the river banks and the trees, has been laid on to victims and proved fatal!"

"Do those victims know that the curse is laid on them?" asked Bramley interestedly.

"In some cases yes, and in some cases no," replied the priest, "I think that answers the point you were going to raise?"

"It wasn't so much an objection as an explanation," he paused. There was a moment of silent thought before Bramley continued, "You see, I would go so far as to say that if a man knew he was cursed, and believed in the efficacy of that curse, he would possibly die as a result of it, but that would be evidence for both suggestion and auto-suggestion of a very high degree, rather than evidence for the existence of some horrible thing which you call Wokolo. I can quote you the case," went on Bramley, "of an Indian in North America who was terrified of rattle snakes. One day a member of his party round the camp fire stuck a fork into his heel and shouted, 'Look out, rattler'! He died the next day with all the symptoms of rattle snake poisoning!"

"A strange case, agreed the priest, "but Wokolo is more than a practical joke in bad taste."

"I wouldn't say that joke was merely in bad taste, I'd say it was in fatal taste!" said Bramley, rather grimly

"If I told you," said the priest, "that Wokolo was after you, you would not believe me?"

"Of course not!"

"And you think that no harm would come to you?"

"Well, of course it wouldn't! Unless somebody got at me with a poison arrow, shot at me with a pois-

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

~~and~~ blow-pipe, knocked me on the head, and dropped me into the river . . . ”

“Suppose I told a native that Wokolo was after him?”

“Well, he might even die, inspired by the fear.”

“We know that our Baramba friend has gone out to ask Wokolo to call down a curse on—what was that character’s name?”

“Farjeon,” answered Bramley.

“Oh yes. That’s what the boy said, ‘Farjeon’.”

The priest was silent for a moment, then he began again. “Let’s assume that our Baramba friend has gone out to ask a witch doctor to put the Wokolo curse on Farjeon. Do you think Farjeon believes in Wokolo?”

“Of course not!” answered the doctor.

“Well, then,” persisted Curtis, “Wokolo cannot harm him.

“Again, I agree with you,” said the doctor.

“But I would be quite willing to bet—if I was a betting man”—said the priest, “that by morning both Farjeon and Sturdekker will be dead! This time they have gone too far, they have killed a Baramba tribesman. The vengeance of Wokolo will be sure and remorseless.”

“I have great difficulty in believing that,” said the doctor.

“I give you my solemn assurance that it is true,” persisted the priest.

“Is there nothing we can do to save them?”

“I doubt it,” said Curtis.

“I admit,” said Bramley “that I am not very enthusiastic about saving them!”

“Neither am I,” said the priest, “but I suppose it is our duty.”

“I was just thinking,” said Bramley. “I wonder what kind of reception we would get if we went into

## W O K O L O

their camp and said we have come to save them from a witch-doctor's curse'."

"Ridicule must not be a deterrent, when one seeks to do good," said the priest. His voice was very firm, he sounded very sure of himself.

"You're right, of course," said the other, "I suppose I was being selfish, in a way."

"No—just practical," assured the priest, "sometimes the two terms are almost interchangeable."

"Are they?" said Bramley.

"I think so," answered the priest, "—just sometimes," he smiled. "At least, we make one the excuse for the other!"

"Perhaps we do," agreed David Bramley, "perhaps we do." He looked down at the pathetic piece of Baramba mortality lying across the priest's floor.

"I'll get some of my staff to give him a burial," said the priest. He knelt by the body and whispered a quiet prayer, then he called "Chukandari!"

A tall, ebony youth appeared from the other end of the building. Curtis nodded towards the Baramba.

"Will you place him in the chapel and see that the last rites are performed?" he said.

Chukandari nodded, smiled at the doctor and withdrew to find assistance.

"Chukandari is my curate," explained the priest. "He is a fine man, he is also a Baramba."

"He did not seem emotionally disturbed," said the doctor.

"Chukandari is not an emotional man," answered the priest. "At least, he is not a man who demonstrates his emotions, but he has them, believe me. They are very deep, and it will not be an easy thing for him to bury one of his own people like this. One glance at the wounds will tell him what has happened."

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

Priest and doctor set off into the jungle night. Bramley carried a .303 slung loosely across his shoulders, but the priest spurned any kind of weapon. The doctor looked at him with a rather puzzled expression.

"Don't you feel you need some kind of protection?"

"So long as God has a task for me to perform," answered the priest, "I do not somehow feel that He would allow one of his fur-legged creatures to devour me."

"You have a stronger belief in Divine intervention than I have!" said the doctor.

"It is a purely personal matter," replied Tom Curtis, "and one upon which we do not see eye to eye theologically, my dear David. I know this, I respect your views."

"And I certainly respect yours," said the doctor. They carried on through the darkness. The jungle was full of little eyes, and noises of the night. Great luminous moths flittered across their path; things scurried away from beneath their feet. Once the doctor made as if to half-unslung the rifle as he saw a pair of large green eyes looking down at them from a height.

"He will not harm us," said the priest, "he is only curious," and Bramley left the rifle where it was. It was an extremely difficult task, but they accomplished it before three hours had passed.

Fårjeon and Sturdekker had camped against the bank of a stream. It was not an enormous stream, but it was wide enough to present some kind of natural obstacle.

"This is bad," commented the priest, "he has given himself into Wokolo's hand!"

"How do you mean?" asked David Bramley.

"Have you forgotten what I told you? The bank of a stream is Wokolo's territory, and see how the

## W O K O L O

tent is slung between two trees! The trees and the bank are sacred to Wokolo. It is like walking naked and unarmed into the camp of a deadly enemy; like walking unarmed into the lair of a wounded tiger."

"I don't go all the way with you, as you well know," replied David Bramley, "but I will admit there is a strange feeling in the air around this river bank."

"Better hail them," said the priest quietly. "Farjeon, Sturdekker!" his voice rang out across the stream.

The Colonel appeared, rifle at the ready.

"All right, who's that?" he boomed across the water.

"Vot you vant?" grunted Sturdekker, also gun in hand.

"There are two things I want to see you about," said Tom Curtis.

"Who the hell are you, anyway?" demanded the colonel, staring into the darkness.

"My name is Curtis. I'm a priest," said Tom.

"We have already met—I'm Doctor Bramley," called back David.

"Huh! I don't want to see you again!" said Farjeon. "What have you got to say for yourself, priest? Why have you come waking us up at this hour of the night?"

"I have come to bring you a warning," said the priest.

"Pshaw!" snorted the colonel. "What sort of warning?"

"You are in very serious danger," said Curtis, "I can help you, if you will let me."

"I don't think we're in any kind of danger that you can help us with," snorted back the colonel.

"That only goes to prove how great your danger is. The man who does not recognise danger is in greater

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

peril than the man who at least recognises it and takes steps to avoid it," answered the priest.

"Save your sermons for someone else! Run away and play," snarled Farjeon, rudely.

"Jah, go away and let us get some sleep," agreed the Dutchman.

"Don't say I haven't given you my warning," said Tom Curtis. "A Wokolo curse had been put upon you. If you let me stay in your camp, to protect you by the sign of the Cross, and pray, we may be able to ward off the evil, but if you don't—you'll be dead before morning."

"Nonsense!" jeered the Dutchman.

Farjeon burst out laughing.

"You must have been here a long time to allow your mind to become infected by this native rubbish!" he cried. "Go back to your mission station! You bother me!"

"There is a second message," called Bramley angrily, across the river bank.

"I don't want to hear anything from you, Bramley," called the colonel.

"Well, you're going to, whether you damn well want to or not," stormed Bramley. Before either Sturdekker or Farjeon could say any more the doctor called, "I shall see that a full report of the death of that native bearer goes to the Commissioner."

"Oh, go and tell the Commissioner anything you like! I shall claim that the man attacked me, and that I hit him in self defence!" said the colonel, "and Sturdekker will back me up!"

"What about the bearers—won't they tell a different story?" asked Bramley.

"Who the devil would listen to what the natives have to say? I don't think any serious judiciary would be interested in native gossip."

"The truth of a man's statement is in no way re-

## W O K O L O

lated to the colour of his skin," said Bramley, "and if I was trying you, I would be more inclined to believe your bearers than I would a soundrel like you!"

"I told you to get out," said the colonel, sounding angry, more angry than he had sounded yet, and a bullet suddenly thudded into the bole of a tree a few feet above the doctor's head.

"That one went high—it was a warning," said the colonel, "now, the light isn't good and the next one may be lower . . ."

"I don't frighten easily," replied the doctor, "and it wouldn't be so easy to explain my death as you apparently think it will be to explain the death of one of your bearers."

Farjeon's answer was another bullet, a little lower than the last.

"Come," said the priest, wearily, "we have done our best, but they do not wish to listen. We cannot help them . . ." he turned on his heel, "Good-bye," he called over his shoulder, "we will pray for you!"

Farjeon's only answer was a derisive laugh. A laugh which blended with the boom of Sturdekker's guffaw.

The doctor and the priest settled down a few feet from the river bank. The priest dropped to his knees on the damp jungle floor, clasped his hands and prayed fervently.

At last he opened his eyes and rose to his feet again, and beckoned quietly to the doctor,

"Come," he said. "I feel that there is great evil in the air. At any moment the terror will strike." There was no sound from the jungle bank now, as though all the creatures had deserted it, as though they had fled from the evil presence of Wokolo, the devil with the envenomed soul-darts. A minute passed, and then another. Despite his unbelief, Dr. Bramley found himself becoming aware of an atmos-

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

phere, unlike any atmosphere he had ever experienced before.

"Something strange is happening," he whispered to the priest.

"It is the coming of Wokolo," answered the priest. "We will pray hard, we may yet be able to save them." Doctor and priest returned and knelt on the river bank, staring across to the place between the trees where Sturdekker and Farjeon were sleeping.

"What's that?" whispered the doctor suddenly. He was looking towards a strange dancing light, flitting up and down the river bank, drawing closer and closer to the two trees.

"That is Wokolo," whispered the priest, "Pray for them now, David, pray for them now."

The dancing light seemed to hesitate as though some kind of wall had been built up. The priest suddenly crashed one fist into the palm of the other hand.

"It's no good, David, it's no good, we're too far away. The power of Wokolo is very great indeed, and if we were to do them any good we should have been praying beside them in that tent, we should have been there, on that bank of the river, we should have crosses around the tent . . . our prayer shield is not strong enough from this distance."

"We must keep praying," said Bramley. He looked at the priest out of the corner of his eye, "You have convinced me, Father," he said. "What I see is not a mirage, what I see is not an hallucination. I feel that evil is vibrating and emanating from it . . . It is a terrible thing, a thing of death and vengeance."

As the two men watched and prayed, slowly and relentlessly the little dancing devil of strangely coloured lights made its way down the bark of the tree nearer to the river bank, from which the tent of Sturdekker and Farjeon was slung. From the tree to



## W O K O L O

the tent danced the strange living light. In the distance across the water, doctor and priest heard a faint musical 'twang', as though a bow-string had just been released. Once, and then twice, they heard the sound.

The dancing light left the wall of the tent, waltzed away up the bark of the tree, down the other side, and danced off into the jungle, until it was lost in the overgrowth near the river.

The feeling of heavy, oppressive evil passed away, the river bank became an ordinary river bank again. "He has accomplished his purpose and gone," said the priest.

"Why did he not harm us?" wondered the doctor.

"Because we were praying," said the priest, "and because we had done no harm to his people. The witch-doctor's curse was directed against Farjeon and Sturdekker."

Like men in a trance, like men in a dream, the priest and the doctor crossed the stream. Curtis drew back the folds of the tent, Sturdekker and Farjeon lay as though they were asleep, but there was no sound of breathing below the mosquito nets, there was no movement . . .

Very quietly Bramley examined the two silent forms.

"Both dead," he said.

"Knew they would be," said the priest, "there was nothing we could do." Bramley shook his head. The priest drew a heavy sigh.

"Perhaps we did not try hard enough," he said, "perhaps we should have forced them to let us come across the river . . ."

"They drove us off at gun point," reminded the doctor.

"I still feel guilty about it," replied the priest. "I feel that I ought to have done more . . ."

## **SUPERNATURAL STORIES**

But as the two men walked quietly back to the mission station in the red of a tropical dawn they seemed to hear a whisper among the trees, "Wokolo. Wokolo . . ."

## SECRET OF THE SHAMAN

by Trebor Thorpe

**"His claw-like hands rose and fell on the weird drum as he chanted an evil prayer."**

**THE name of the port is not particularly important, in fact it might be better if the name of the port remains a secret. There are some of us who are particularly vulnerable to the most prevalent of human weaknesses, curiosity, and just as that vice allegedly ended the life of the cat, so it might prove equally unfortunate for the human explorer to share the rash temerity of the proverbial feline. The port, therefore, must remain anonymous, but the country need not. In fact, the absolute clarity and authenticity of our story demands that the country must not remain anonymous. It happened in Finland. The Finno-Ugric face is built up from a very large number of tribes and ethnic groups using different dialects, which have all come down from the same original language. They do not live in a compact society,**

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

but in separate groups, and they are enveloped on every side by other ethnic groups. The Finns themselves really fall into four main categories. They are the Ugrian, consisting of Voguls and Ostyaks, who are mainly to be found in Siberia's west, then there is the Permian group living in the provinces of Vyatka and Perm in Russia. This group consists mainly of Zyrians, Votyaks and Permyaks. On the left bank of the upper Volga are to be found the Cheramis with the Mordvins: they form the Cheramis-Mordvin group; the fourth and final group are the western group, they are the Finns, the Karelians, the Esthonians, and the Livonians, together with the Lapps. Because of the separation of the peoples the Finno-Ugric races has been subjected to a vast number of different persuasions and influences. Their religious development has been along very different lines. The Magyars became staunch Catholics; the Finns and Esthonians became a bulwark of Lutheranism; Orthodoxy claimed the Finno-Ugrians of Russia, save for a small percentage who followed Islam, although both groups retained remnants of their old pre-Christian beliefs for a surprisingly long time.

The other great thing which it is necessary for the reader to remember is that Finland was regarded up to the Middle Ages, and indeed until long after the Middle Ages, as the traditional home of magic in this quarter of the world. The Kalevala which was gathered together by Lonnrot, as recently as 1828 is a collection of the popular songs and the folk-lore of ancient Finland.

And strange messages it contains! Messages of weird magic; above all, tales of shamanism. And there was other magic, the magic of the shaman's drum; there was the magic of the bells on the shaman's back; the magic of the feathers which enabled

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

him to fly towards the spirits. There were the weird, ritual dances, and the strange collection of objects which the shaman keeps in his hut, and which none save he can understand. There is the weird tale of how Lemminkainen's mother restored him to life by weird, dark magic. There is an account of the birth of the world. There are incredible stories of the dark divinities of the earth and the waters. No one who knew the truth about the strange magic of Finland could fail to tremble at the strange curse of Kullervo, or thrill with excitement at the story of the forging of the Sampo. To the student of the Finno-Ugric mythology the swan of Tuonela and the gaunt Virgin of Mana are both stories full of life and pulsating with power, and having about them a quality of haunting fascination, which modern literature does not always possess, which it rarely equals and which it seldom surpasses. The Finno-Ugric scholar would confess to a strange feeling of uneasiness when he hears the name of the monster Tursas, and thinks of it emerging from the waves, huge, fearsome and as full of horrible power as a water sprite . . .

Archaeologists who have visited the sacrificial hill and seen those gaunt, spiked skulls on the Isle of Vaigatch cannot help but wonder at the mystery behind them. What traveller to Finland has not seen offerings to the spirits tied high on the branches of a birch tree?

The strange stone and wooden gods of the Lapps, the Sejda, as they are known, are a world of mystery on their own.

Old Captain Daniel knew as much about the mysteries of Finland as it is possible for anyone to know, who is not a Finno-Ugric by birth. Old Captain Daniel had been Old Captain Daniel for so long that no one knew his other name, he had sailed in the

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

days when the word meant something, when it meant masts and rigging and the creak of straining canvas, when it meant ropes and sheets, when it meant salt tears and sometimes, salt blood . . . No one knew quite how old he was, he was one of those legendary skippers, master and owner of his own little tramp steamer, plying round Scandinavia and Finland and back through the waters of the Black Sea to the east coast ports. Sometimes he carried timber, sometimes he carried grain, sometimes he carried nothing but ballast, for old Captain Daniel was the kind of man who would go to sea just for the hell of it. He would sometimes use one voyage to subsidize another, as long as he could feel the movement of a deck under his feet, and see the swell of billows, and rolling breakers. There was only one thing to which he was averse and that was a protracted spell on land. To him land had one function only and that was that you had to have somewhere to build a port. So far as he could see, so long as land was used for producing raw materials or manufactured goods, or crops that it would be necessary to transport to some other land—for heaven alone knew what purpose—the land was fulfilling its purpose. In every sense of a literally simple sailor Cap'n Daniel was just a simple sailor. He had found, in his own opinion, the be-all and the end-all of existence. A boat and somewhere to go. He would have been quite happy if he could have sailed the oceans for ever. In fact, to him, the legend of the flying Dutchman would have seemed more like a reward than a punishment from the angry gods.

Old Captain Daniel would have been very glad indeed if he could have been sentenced to spend eternity trying to round Cape Horn or any other Cape. All he wanted was a ship and an objective. One was

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

an end in itself. The other was a means to an end . . . He was a tall, raw-boned old man, and he had yet a sufficiently youthful look to be able to persuade the authorities that he was still young enough to hold his ticket, and he was so evasive, and for that matter, so explosively sensitive upon the subject of retiring age that that part of the authority which came into contact with him had turned a discreet but somewhat Nelsonian eye in his direction when the subject came up.

After all, rules were made for men, and not vice versa, and Captain Daniel at sixty or seventy, or however old he was, was still, undeniably, not merely a safe skipper, but a brilliant skipper, and to that end the rules could be bent a little, even if they could not be actually fractured.

The old man's iron-grey beard was caked with salt as he stood on the bridge, while the 'Northern Queen' butted and crashed her way into the teeth of a thirty-knot wind. The old skipper was not alone on the bridge. The first mate was a dour Scot named MaGraw, who had accompanied Captain Daniel on more voyages than either of them really cared to remember.

They were similar in temperament, and if anything, the Scot was even less loquacious than the captain, and that was a difficult thing to achieve, even for as dour a clansman as MaGraw! But they shared between them the deep, mystic companionship that seems to come to men who spend long hours alone with the great forces of nature, who spend long nights staring over the darkness of the sea, looking at the stars, watching the slow progress of the sun across the heavens; of the gulls across the waves, and, as often as not, the ice that threatens and moves slowly until you are almost upon it, and

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

then, as though possessed by some devil of the deep, as though Tursas himself had seized hold of the bottom of the 'berg, it moves with unexpected suddenness and speed and the proud vessel grinds itself to a wreck. They knew the ice. they knew the sun, they knew the wind and the waves and the rocks, and the coast, and the ocean; and they were confident of each other and of the ship. Their confidence was like a powerful hawser upon which hung the confidence of the crew. The majority of the crew had sailed with Daniel and MaGraw on many occasions, for the "Northern Queen" was the kind of ship on which a man was either sublimely contented, or which had no attraction for him whatsoever. It was a real sailors' ship. There was no malcontents on the 'Northern Queen'; it was a peaceful ship and a rapid ship.

Although the 'Northern Queen' had no malcontents on board, a malcontent is not necessarily an interchangeable term for a wild man, and one or two of the younger element, while being largely very, very satisfied with life on board the 'Queen' were, at the same time, quite capable of exploding into violent exhilaration whenever they hit port. They were just a minor element, who regarded wine and women as the legitimate prerogative of every sailor setting his foot on dry land. Of this handful Jack Kelly was the ringleader—not that they needed a ringleader! But had they of necessity had to rally round one human person as a focal point, then Kelly was the person round whom they would have rallied.

Kelly was a big, broad-shouldered, flame haired young giant, with a devil-may-care glint in his eye and a heart that was about as emotional as a piece of flint. He was a man who believed in taking his fun where he found it and devil take the hindmost. That was all very well from Kelly's point of view, but on



## SECRET OF SHAMAN

more than one occasion MaGraw or even Cap'n Daniel himself had had to exert considerable influence and go to a great deal of trouble to assist Kelly to avoid his just deserts . . . On board ship he justified himself, he was a stoker and he did the work of three men. Kelly did everything in a rather 'larger-than-life' manner. He ate like a horse, drank like a fish, fought like a tiger, and worked like an engine. When he was sober, from a work point of view, he was worth any two or three ordinary crew men. But once he had got enough alcohol pounding round his veins, he was a very different proposition, for when he was wild, fighting drunk, only the Captain himself, or MaGraw, was able to control him. There was a kind of inborn loyalty in Kelly which, drunk or sober, made him loyal to the captain, who treated him fairly . . . He was wild rather than bad, he was thoughtless rather than vicious, but that did not in any way condone or excuse the Kelly conduct.

They reached the port, that port which must remain anonymous, save that it lies on Finland's eastern seaboard, and here our saga really begins. Jack Kelly was having himself an evening. He had been around every bar within reach of the dock, and now, heavily loaded he was looking for further mischief. It seemed that the word had gone around to some extent that big red Kelly was back in town, for save for the presence of the tough water-front characters there was nobody in striking distance, either literally or metaphorically. Kelly decided to turn his attentions a little further inland. A few blocks away, from the dockland waterfront pubs he found himself confronted by the dim neon sign of a little cafe. He felt in need of strong, hot, black coffee. He staggered inside and flung himself down with a crash which shook the little building from one end to the other.

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

There was an old man leaning on a counter with a white cloth over one arm—and there was a girl. She was young and attractive after the style of her own people, and when Kelly's eyes rested on her something seemed to snap at the back of his mind, for a drunken Kelly was an extremely unhibited beast.

He beckoned the girl across to his table, she came over rather nervously, hesitantly. The old man's eyes dilated with fear and he made as though to move towards them, then, as he looked at Kelly's massive build, he seemed to shrink into himself in hopeless resignation.

"Whasha name?" demanded Kelly thickly.

The girl's English was far from perfect, but she understood that much.

"Moya," she said softly.

"Gemme shum coffee," said Kelly thickly, in a slurred voice.

The girl disappeared. Five minutes later the old man returned with a cup of coffee.

"Whersha girl?" demanded Kelly, with an alcoholic slur, an alcoholic slur that was somehow made ugly by the anger underneath it.

"She has gone to bed, sir. She has been working hard, and is not well, sir."

"You're a goddam liar!" snarled Kelly and threw the coffee in the old man's face. It was hot, but not desperately scalding. The old man backed away with a shrill cry; he sounded like a wounded animal.

"If she's not here in five minutes I'm going to tear you apart," said Kelly, in a voice that could be heard all over the little cafe. The old man looked around desperately, but there was no one there but himself and the massave, alcoholically angry Kelly.

"I sent her away," said the old man. "She is my grand-daughter, I am responsible for her!"

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

"You'll be going to your own funeral if she's not back pretty soon," said Kelly.

"No, no," said the old man. "This cannot be. It is not as you think . . ."

A door opened somewhere at the back of the counter, the girl re-appeared.

"It's all right, grandfather," she said softly in her own tongue, and she smiled at Kelly, who released his grip of the old man's shirt front and stared at the girl.

"What you come back for?" he demanded thickly.

"I came back so that you would not hurt my grandfather," said the girl quietly. She was still smiling, but it was a frozen, icy smile.

"I don' wanna hurt anybody," said Kelly, and slumped forward, his head in his hands.

"You need some fresh air," said the girl, and got him as far as the door.

Kelly suddenly had the feeling that she was going to put him outside and lock him out. They were trying to be clever with him, because he was drunk, were they? Well, he'd dam' well show them! He'd show this girl, with her stupid, fixed smile. He'd show 'em, or his name wasn't Jack Kelly.

His mind was inflamed with alcohol. There was some strange quality about the Finno-Ugrik girl that lured him on. Her beauty was not of the conventional, west European style, but there was something older, something more barbaric, something irresistible in its intensity . . .

When Kelly finally left he felt strangely dirty inside. He felt no triumph, no success, and the alcohol was wearing off. He didn't feel like going back to the 'Queen' that night, and Jack Kelly was a big rough man; sleeping on the cobbled waterfront was no more hardship to him that it would be to the average man

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

to sleep on a sofa because unexpected company had descended upon his domicile . . .

Jack Kelly woke feeling cold and stiff. His head throbbed, his mouth and throat felt thickly furred. He decided that he needed a drink. He decided to try and find the cafe again, perhaps he could say that he was sorry . . .

He laughed. He had never felt sorry before. He must be getting old. He must be getting soft. Oh, damn life and the way things turned out! Finally he found the cafe, it was shuttered and barred. He crashed his great fists on to the door until it opened. The old man opened it, and Kelly had never seen such hatred in a human face before. He backed away as though he had lifted a stone and suddenly found himself confronted by a cobra.

"I came to say I'm sorr .yl—I—I—I was drunk—" He groped for his wallet. "Maybe—maybe—I—I can put things right?"

The old man shook his head. Kelly moved slowly across the threshold. His eyes moved questioningly from one side of the room to the other. He saw a black robed priest; a number of tables had been put together. The priest was chanting something, something low and melodious. Kelly looked at the silent form of the table.

It was the girl. She was dead. She was rather horribly dead; strangely bloated. All that wild, savage beauty had gone. There was something odd about her long, dark hair. He realised that it was wet. The body was waterlogged. The old man pointed an accusing finger at him, and the black robed priest looked up with an expressionless face, then turned back to the corpse and continued his chant. Kelly realised that the girl had thrown herself from the docks after he had left. She had drowned herself be-

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

cause of what he had done to her. Suddenly Jack Kelly felt very, very sick, deep down inside himself . . . He felt emotions of remorse that he had never felt before. He didn't exactly feel penitent, but he did feel that he didn't like himself. He did try to think of himself objectively rather than subjectively, and the picture which his mind presented to him was not one with which he was enamoured. He took money from his wallet, it seemed somehow pathetic and useless. He laid it on a chair. The old man's eyes rested on it, and if anything the bitterness increased. Kelly watched as, with slow, dragging footsteps the girl's grandfather moved towards the money, picked it up and tore it through twice, then laid it beside the corpse. Kelly ground his teeth together, put a hand over his face and staggered out.

"What have I done?" he whispered, "What have I done?" The morning air seemed strangely chill, and as he stumbled and staggered towards the harbour he could see the "Queen" riding at anchor. Somehow he didn't want to go back on board. How could he tell them? No doubt they'd find out sooner or later. How could he face old Cap'n Daniel? How could he face MaGraw? How could he tell Bailey, and Westholme, and his fellow crew men? He'd done it this time! By god, he'd done it this time!

"You're a damned fool," he said to himself over and over again, and then another voice reared itself in his subconscious, and slowly percolated to the top.

"You didn't kill her, Jack! What are you reproaching yourself for? All you did was have a bit of fun with her. If she couldn't take it, that wasn't your fault! You weren't to know!"

"You forced yourself on her," said another voice, "maybe things like that mean a lot to a girl like her."

"Oh what the hell, this is the 20th century," said

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

the other voice, "Chastity's old fashioned! What had she got to worry about. This isn't England, this is Finland! It doesn't count if you do it away from home!"

"Oh, yes it does," said the sterner voice. "Human beings are human beings the world over, whether they're English, or Finnish, or what they are. It's just as important as if you had done it at home. That girl knew that if she didn't come back you were going to beat the old man up. You're a stinking bully! You're a scum!"

"No you're not—you're just a sailor out for a good time," said the other voice. "Don't worry about it, what the hell! It's over now! Why make yourself miserable; you can't bring her back!"

"You'll live with it for the rest of your life," said the first voice.

"Forget it," whispered the opposition.

"Shut up!" shouted Jack Kelly out loud, and a startled sea gull flew high into the air at his shout.

He stood leaning on an old-fashioned iron bollard let into the quay, trying to think, trying to silence the arguing voices back in his own mind.

At last he slunk back on board, avoiding Daniel's eye, avoiding everybody's eye. He got back to his engines, at least engines weren't reproachful; a shovel and a heap of coal, they didn't reproach a man.

He busied himself moving fuel heaps unnecessarily, turning them from one locker bay to another. It didn't matter a damn where the coal was, it was something to do . . . But on every gleaming black diamond he seemed to see a reflection of the dead girl's face. The wet black coal looked like wet black hair, lying on a cafe table. The dull black was like the dull

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

black of the priest's robes. The dull noise of the water against the sides of the ship was the voice of the priest intoning over the girl who had committed suicide, because of him, because of Jack Kelly . . . To hell with everything, thought Kelly. To hell with the girl, and the priest and her grandfather, what did it matter anyway, a hundred years from now it would all be the same. Damn it, what was morality? What was conscience? What was good and what was bad? What was right and what was wrong? None of it mattered, none of it mattered a damn . . .

At last the order came to stoke up. Jack told the other stoker, Johnny Bailey, to stand still.

"I wanna work; I wanna work something outa my system, said Kelly thickly. "Gotta get it out of my system. Gotta work. Get out of the way Bailey, and let me work."

"I don't mind," said Bailey.

He leaned on his shovel and watched while Kelly shovelled like a maniac. Sweat poured into his great thick beard, into his eyes; Kelly spat out salt sweat, wiped his eyes with the back of a grimy hand and shovelled until his great heart thundered like a trip hammer, until the veins stood out like a whipcord on his neck.

"Take it easy," advised Bailey, "you'll kill yourself!"

"I don't care!" gritted Kelly through clenched teeth. "Mind your own dam' business, Bailey! If I want to kill myself I'm going to do it my way!" His voice was choking with emotion.

"You must be nuts!" said Bailey. "If you want to kill yourself that much, why the hell don't you jump overboard!"

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

"Because I can swim too dam' well!" snarled Jack Kelly, and he went on shovelling like a maniac. At last they had such a great head of steam that the stoker was forced to stop loading the furnaces, and the "Northern Queen" went chugging on her way through the waters of the North Sea. There was a strange feeling of foreboding hanging over the entire ship, a strange feeling of foreboding which seemed to centre of the stokehold.

\*     \*     \*

The old man, the girl's grandfather, the proprietor of the little cafe, watched the priest go in sad-eyed, solemn silence. There was, he reflected, much beauty in the new religion but what he wanted now was vengeance. This new religion, this Christianity, it was all very well, it was a thing of great beauty, great joy, great peace. But Moya's grandfather did not want peace . . . he wanted vengeance, and the new religion had nothing to say of vengeance. The new religion said 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' The new religion said 'Love your enemies! The new religion said 'Bless them that curse you! The new religion said 'Turn the other cheek,' and the black-robed priest with the expressionless face would not be the one to give the vengeance which Moya's grandfather craved.

But in strange dark places the old religion still lived. There was a hut on the edge of the town, in the hut a shaman lived. This shaman was an outpost of an old religion, the shaman would understand vengeance; the shaman would understand about great red-bearded giants who forced their unwelcome attentions upon young girls, who pushed aside feeble old men. The shaman had powers which were greater



## SECRET OF SHAMAN

than the physical powers of the red-bearded giant. The shaman could avenge Moya. The old man's heart was one great black crystal of bitterness, as he crept away from the shuttered cafe with its silent occupant and its burning candles.

He reached the Shaman's hut and went quietly inside, it was very dark and gloomy, fittingly dark and gloomy. The old man looked at the collection of magical objects with which the shaman surrounded himself. A voice suddenly spoke out of the darkness.

"You seek vengeance upon the red-bearded one," said the voice, "it is just that vengeance should be done. Death must be given for death; fear must be given for fear."

"You know all things, O great shaman!" said Moya's grandfather.

"I know all things," repeated the shaman; he repeated it in a flat, unemotional voice, as a straightforward expression of fact. "I know all things," he repeated.

"How shall it be done?" asked the old man curiously.

"It shall be done in the way of the ancient magic," answered the shaman. He put on a strange costume with bells along the back, and feathers across it, and then, from its place of honour in the centre of the hut, he took the sacred drum. He began a low, dismal chant as his fingers, claw-like fingers, caressed the surface of the strange magic object. The rhythm rose and fell, horrific ululations filled the hut as the weird chant of the shaman rose and fell, in a fantastic series of crescendos and diminuendos. On and on went the weird chant to the beat of the claw-like hand on the drum, and hatred seemed to glow in the eyes of Moya's grandfather and pass to the eyes of

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

the shaman, like a carrier wave being borne out to the four corners of the world. On and on went the chanting; on and on went the drumming. On and on went the hatred. Endless drumming; endless chanting; endless hating. To chant, to drum, to hate; to hate, to drum, to chant. The whole world seemed to be a mass of drumming and hating and chanting; the entire hut became like Satan's broadcasting centre, to radiate evil and malediction, and like envenomed darts, the hate filled thoughts and impulses winged their way across the land and across the ocean, to Big Jack Kelly, stoking and shovelling and watching his dials and gauges, and watching the steam pressure, watching the pipes, and the boilers, and the churning of the great engines.

Hate climbed the mountains and crossed the valleys, hate swam down the rivers and erupted into the waters, hate soared with the clouds and swam with the great fish and the monsters of the mighty deep, and hate projected from the shaman's drum towards the 'Northern Queen.'

Seafaring men are sensitive to atmosphere; old seafaring men are particularly sensitive, for they know the great waters in all their moods. Captain Daniel turned to MaGraw as they stood on the bridge together.

"There's something amiss this night," said Daniel. MaGraw nodded, "As though we were pursued, by some dark force," said the dour Scot. Then there was long silence as the two mariners sniffed the air.

"There are things abroad this night that bode no good to the "Northern Queen," said Cap'n Daniel. MaGraw nodded but said nothing. There was a long, thoughtful silence between the two men. The ship dipped and lapped through the North Sea like a mer-

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

chandised Viking long boat striking westward, ever westward.

"What's the matter with Kelly?" asked MaGraw. He asked it rather rhetorically, the Captain shook his head.

"I wish I knew," he said darkly, into his iron grey beard. There was more silence. The waves broke over the bows, the wake lit up in the moonlight, phosphorescent and strange. Stars came out danced and twinkled in the sky, and bowed to their reflections, twinkling and dancing in the waters beneath.

"I think Kelly is beginning to develop a conscience," said MaGraw at last.

"None too soon," said the Captain.

"I fear it's too late," said MaGraw. "I heard one of the men saying something about a dead girl in the port, drowned herself. It could have been one of Kelly's passing fancies."

There was another silence that became oppressive, finally the old Captain said:

"It's like having a Jonah aboard, this time I think he's overstepped the bounds."

"There's not a better man at sea, not a worse man ashore," said MaGraw.

The Captain consulted his chart, and cast a weather eye at the stars, he moved the wheel to a point to starboard.

The wind, that had been blowing about fifteen or twenty knots, began to freshen up.

"I think we're in for a bit of a blow," said MaGraw enigmatically.

"Aye, I think we are," agreed Cap'n Daniel. Again there was a long silence between the veteran sea dogs and the 'Northern Queen' plodded on through

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

the seas, and the darkness, and the stars. The spray and the foam lashed over her, and the waves beat against her, and the sea murmured beneath her like a great cauldron that boiled and seethed as a twig is thrown into it as though it wants to throw the twig back into the elements beyond the cauldron from which it came.

Even Kelly's gigantic frame began to weaken from the self-imposed punishment he was inflicting on it. It seemed to him that the mouths of the furnaces were reaching forward for him, and that the thundering roar of the engines was saying, 'more food, more food, more food.'

"They're hungry" gritted Kelly under his breath. "I've gotta feed 'em; they're hungry; they want food.'

"Crash! Crash! Crash," went the coal.

"Take this and this," said Kelly and yet more coal rattled and crashed into the furnace, and the shovel banged against the iron coal-racks and against the hard black surface of the coal itself. Kelly was swinging the coal with an automatic swing, Bailey stood watching him as though unable to believe his eyes. Kelly moved slower and slower. Then, over the thudding of the engines, he seemed to hear, blending with the marine thumping, another noise . . . a noise like the hands of an old man tattooing on the surface of a drum. As he looked into the furnace he seemed to see the eyes of Moya's grandfather, then he saw another pair of eyes; older, more powerful, more deadly. The howling of the wind, and the battering of the seas seemed to carry another sound with them, a strange, horrific ululation; a sound as of a voice chanting a saving chant a Finno-Ugrik chant; chanting the chant of a shaman, chanting the chant of a black

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

magician, chanting the chant of vengeance; singing the song of retribution; incanting the incantation of death. And then, in the third great gaping mouth of hot coal, Jack Kelly saw another face, it was the face of Moya, the Finno-Ugrik girl with the strange, haunting, unusual beauty; then it changed and became a dead face, a wet-dead face, and the wet, black coal was wet, black hair; and hot salt sweat ran down Kelly's face, dripped from his beard; he wiped his forehead with a grimy hand, and the furnace whipered: "I'm hungry," and the eyes glared back at him, the eyes of Moya's grandfather, and the eyes of something else, something with power; he heard the whisper "Shaman, shaman; the vengeance of the shaman, the curse of the shaman is upon you Jack Kelly."

He shovelled coal with a new desperation as he tried to cover the glowing red faces which leered at him from the mouths of the furnaces, but the glowing faces would not be covered, and the new coal that he threw in became new faces, and yet the new faces were only the same as the old faces. Kelly shouted hysterically to himself as he shovelled; Bailey stood and watched, and Bailey felt fear as he had never felt it in his life before. It was as though he was a spectator at some battle in which an invisible monster fights a giant. And the giant was losing; hatred was winging through the air from Moya's grandfather and the shaman, and it was bearing Jack Kelly down to his knees.

Now Kelly's actions had become wild and erratic, now he would shovel desperately like a demon, he would shovel like fury, he would hurl coal as the figure on the ramparts hurled broken stone on the heads of the attackers; then he would collapse on the handle of the shovel and take great gasping lungfuls

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

the seas, and the darkness, and the stars. The spray and the foam lashed over her, and the waves beat against her, and the sea murmured beneath her like a great cauldron that boiled and seethed as a twig is thrown into it as though it wants to throw the twig back into the elements beyond the cauldron from which it came.

Even Kelly's gigantic frame began to weaken from the self-imposed punishment he was inflicting on it. It seemed to him that the mouths of the furnaces were reaching forward for him, and that the thundering roar of the engines was saying, 'more food, more food, more food.'

"They're hungry" gritted Kelly under his breath. "I've gotta feed 'em; they're hungry; they want food.'

"Crash! Crash! Crash," went the coal.

"Take this and this," said Kelly and yet more coal rattled and crashed into the furnace, and the shovel banged against the iron coal-racks and against the hard black surface of the coal itself. Kelly was swinging the coal with an automatic swing, Bailey stood watching him as though unable to believe his eyes. Kelly moved slower and slower. Then, over the thudding of the engines, he seemed to hear, blending with the marine thumping, another noise . . . a noise like the hands of an old man tattooing on the surface of a drum. As he looked into the furnace he seemed to see the eyes of Moya's grandfather, then he saw another pair of eyes; older, more powerful, more deadly. The howling of the wind, and the battering of the seas seemed to carry another sound with them, a strange, horrific ululation; a sound as of a voice chanting a saving chant a Finno-Ugrik chant; chanting the chant of a shaman, chanting the chant of a black

## SECRET OF SHAMAN

magician, chanting the chant of vengeance; singing the song of retribution; incanting the incantation of death. And then, in the third great gaping mouth of hot coal, Jack Kelly saw another face, it was the face of Moya, the Finno-Ugrik girl with the strange, haunting, unusual beauty; then it changed and became a dead face, a wet-dead face, and the wet, black coal was wet, black hair; and hot salt sweat ran down Kelly's face, dripped from his beard; he wiped his forehead with a grimy hand, and the furnace whined: "I'm hungry," and the eyes glared back at him, the eyes of Moya's grandfather, and the eyes of something else, something with power; he heard the whisper "Shaman, shaman; the vengeance of the shaman, the curse of the shaman is upon you Jack Kelly."

He shovelled coal with a new desperation as he tried to cover the glowing red faces which leered at him from the mouths of the furnaces, but the glowing faces would not be covered, and the new coal that he threw in became new faces, and yet the new faces were only the same as the old faces. Kelly shouted hysterically to himself as he shovelled; Bailey stood and watched, and Bailey felt fear as he had never felt it in his life before. It was as though he was a spectator at some battle in which an invisible monster fights a giant. And the giant was losing; hatred was winging through the air from Moya's grandfather and the shaman, and it was bearing Jack Kelly down to his knees.

Now Kelly's actions had become wild and erratic, now he would shovel desperately like a demon, he would shovel like fury, he would hurl coal as the figure on the ramparts hurled broken stone on the heads of the attackers; then he would collapse on the handle of the shovel and take great gasping lungfuls

## SUPERNATURAL STORIES

of hot, swelting, coal-fumed air, and then, as though an invisible whip had stimulated him to further action he would shovel frenziedly once more, and then he would collapse again.

"You're ill," said Bailey quietly, "I'm going to tell the skipper."

"Don't move!" Kelly roared like a dying bull gorilla.

"I'm going to tell the skipper," said Bailey, quietly, "for your own good, Jack, I've got to tell him; You must rest Jack. You'll kill yourself."

"If you move, I'll kill you," warned Kelly.

"I'll have to risk that," commented Bailey. Kelly lifted the shovel threateningly.

"We're hungry," whispered the mouths of the furnace. And Kelly shovelled more coal into the faces of the shaman and Moya's grandfather as they glowed back at him, from out of the coal. He felt pain in his chest, pain that seemed to grow stronger in rhythm with the beating of his great heart.

Bailey reached the bridge.

"Cap'n, sir! Mr. MaGraw, sir! It's Kelly, in the stokehold . . . I think his mind has gone, sir! Shovelling like a maniac, and won't let me help him!"

"How long has he been doing this?" asked Captain Daniel.

"Since we left, sir!"

Daniel and MaGraw looked at Bailey enquiringly.

"I had a job to get away from him," said Bailey quietly.

"Why did you let him do it?" asked MaGraw.

"He's done it before today, sometimes for an hour or two, if he has to get something out of his system,



## SECRET OF SHAMAN

but now he's going at it like a madman! I think he's killing himself deliberately. He's deliberately working himself to death . . . "

Jack Kelly's head filled with the rhythm of the beating of the shamans' drum, and the rattle of the coal became the rattle of shaman's claw-like fingers upon the skin of the drum, and the faces in the furnaces grew larger with every shovelful of coal that went in; larger and clearer; clearer and larger; more condemning, more angry. And Kelly knew that he was fighting a hopelessly losing battle, and yet, in a way, he was glad that he was losing . . .

With a last despairing effort he hurled the shovel itself right into the glaring furnace.

"Damn you!" he screamed. "Damn you, all of you!" And the laughing, grisly eyes of the girl, and the shaman and the old grandfather, seemed to erupt into a shower of sparks, and the mouths of the furnaces opened in great guffaws of mocking laughter.

Jack Kelly was aware of nothing except the pain in his chest, thudding and throbbing in rhythm with the drum hundreds of miles away, the drum that thundered and beat as his collapsing heart thundered and beat. It was as though the fingers on the drum were playing a devil's tattoo on his own heart, remorseless, relentless fingers with death in their claw-like tips.

There was a final Thud! from the drum, and there was a feeling in Kelly's chest as though someone had seized his heart in a steel hand and wrung it. His fingers twitched convulsively upon the black coal beneath his prostrate body, and he seemed to hear the frightened cry of the girl, the pathetic plea of the old man, and above it all the horrific ululation of the chant of the shaman; the crescendo and diminuendo

## **SUPERNATURAL STORIES**

of that fantastic voice, and then all was silence and darkness.

Bailey ran down the companionway, MaGraw and Cap'n Danfel hot on his heels. The Captain bent over the prostrate form, he felt for a pulse but there was none, he felt for a heart-beat, but it had ceased. He looked up at MaGraw and Kelly.

"He's dead," said Cap'n Daniel. "He's dead . . . "

A little trickle of coal ran from the top of the heap, two or three small black diamonds, and fell to the floor beside Kelly's body. The sound of them was like the sound of fingers on the shaman's drum . . .

**THE END**

## **BADGER BOOKS**

# **THE BEST IN READING**

---

(Western LW 36) 2/6

**CHUCK ADAMS**

**Stranger With A Gun**

They handed him a badge and a gun and then gave him the chance to use them.

(Science Fiction SF 69) 2/6

**JOHN E. MULLER**

**Orbit One**

What will the aliens be like? How will human culture compete with non-human culture? Which will survive?

(War WW 120) 2/6

**R. L. ENFIELD**

**Ardennes Break-Through**

This is the exhilarating and inspiring novel of the American defence of Bastogne.

(Weird Fantasy SN 56) 2/6

**JOHN E. MULLER**

**The Eye of Karnak**

Would twentieth century weapons work on a being older than time itself? If not, how did a mortal fight against an evil deity?

---

*For List write to:*

**DEPT. A.D., JOHN SPENCER & CO, (Publishers) LTD.**  
**131 Brackenbury Road, London, W.6.**

## **BADGER BOOKS**

# **THE BEST IN READING**

---

**(Crime CS 13) 2/6**

**J. K. BAXTER**

**The Set Up**

When Johnny Ricardo, private investigator, took on Joe Bushemi, big-time gangster, as a client, he little knew the trouble he was letting himself in for.

**(Hospital Romance RS 6) 2/6**

**D. K. JENNINGS**

**The Healing Breed**

After four years in a modern hospital, Ralph Conway was totally unprepared for the conflict in which he found himself when asked to help start a small hospital.

**(Weird Fantasy SN 57) 2/6**

**R. L. FANTHORPE**

**Supernatural Stories**

A superb collection of outstanding supernatural stories, by a carefully selected cross section of today's top authors, tales not to be read at night, and not for the nervous.

**(Science Fiction SF 73) 2/6**

**JOHN E. MULLER**

**The Day The World Died**

Carl was strapped in and waiting for blast-off when the first bombs fell. Could a handful of human beings survive such terrible odds.

---

*For List write to:*

**DEPT. A.D., JOHN SPENCER & CO, (Publishers) LTD.  
131 Brackenbury Road, London, W.6.**



# SUPERNATURAL STORIES

**R. L. FANTHORPE**

"Curse of the Totem" by veteran supernatural author R. Lionel Fanthorpe, S.M.B.I.S., is the gripping saga of a timeless cavern and the grotesque carvings it contained.

Can living evil dwell in a wooden figure? Above all can it be released?

Leo Brett's "Vengeance of Thor" is a fascinating yarn about a twentieth-century Scandinavian peasant, who found the god's hammer and used it for his own ends.

Finland is the scene of Trebor Thorpe's "Secret of the Shaman", which is the story of an old magician's vengeance upon the ignorant sceptics who scorned him.

"Wokolo", by Pel Torro, is based on an authentic African legend of the celebrated Baramba tribe. Perhaps it is wise to treat a witch-doctor with courtesy?

Bron Fane's contribution, "The Voice in the Wall", is a spine-chilling account of something which moaned behind faded paintwork in a derelict country house.

Supernatural 65 is a collection of short stories worthy of every connoisseur of the macabre.



**BADGER  
BOOKS**

**The Best Value in Pocket Books**

Published by

**JOHN SPENCER & CO. (Publishers) LTD.**