

SHADES and SHADOWS

RANDOLPH EDMONDS

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BY

RANDOLPH EDMONDS



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To
MY SISTER
MAZIE E. BROOKS
and
MY BROTHER
THOMAS B. EDMONDS

FOREWORD

Although written in the form of drama, the following stories are for reading rather than for the stage. The whole aim has been to create fanciful stories, heightened in their imaginative quality by their subjects and the particular form in which they are written.

In two of the stories: "The Devil's Price" and "Shades and Shadows," some attempt has been made to introduce action, clash of wills, motivation and other requisites of good drama. The stage directions in these are only as important as they are in any printed play. In the other stories they are more important. They are used to get the tone, atmosphere, mood, and once and awhile a poetic effect, I hope.

It might seem presumptuous to offer these stories to the readers of the realistic literature of our times. It seems still more so to offer them to those who are acquainted with the gems of Maeterlinck and William Sharp. But youth is bold. So if they serve only to call attention to these two masters of the poetry on the borderland, they will have done some good.

RANDOLPH EDMONDS

“By imagination, a man in a dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole course of nature.”

—Addison.

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THE DEVIL'S PRICE

*At the devil's booth are all things sold,
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking:
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking.*

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL,
"The Vision of Sir Launfal"

THE DEVIL'S PRICE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOHN WALTON	.....	A Farmer
MARY WALTON	.....	His Wife
WALDO	.....	His Servant
GEN. DE QUINCY	.....	Walton's Aid
COL. GODFREY	.....	Walton's Aid
EVIL SPIRIT	.....	The Devil
GOOD SPIRIT	.....	An Angel
ANTHINATHEUS	.....	King of Blufustu
PRINCESS MARGARET	.....	His Daughter
LORD WHETMORE	.....	Her Fiancee
GEN. SUNDERLAND	.....	King's Commander
CARISSIVA	.....	A Dancer
A doctor, guests, messengers, pages, soldiers, and angels.		

SCENE

The Fictitious Country of Blufustu.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The opening curtain shows us the main room of a peasant's home in Blufustu. Blufustu is a small kingdom which exists somewhere among the nations of the world. It is untouched by the modern industrial age, however, for it is just as primitive and superstitious as other countries were in the dark ages.

On the left of the room downstage is a door which leads to the kitchen. Further down is a huge wooden box filled with logs for the fire. In the back near the left is a window at which hang ragged lace curtains. There is a large antique wooden bed stretched along the back, also. It is evidently where the couple sleep for the night. On the right near the back is another door which leads to another room in the house. Further downstage is a huge fireplace in which a large fire crackles merrily. In the middle of the room is a large home-made table with an oil lamp which supplies the light for the room. Other antique pieces of furniture are placed conveniently in the room.

Mary Walton and Waldo sit in home-made chairs before the fire. Mary is a young woman of about twenty-five dressed in a long black dress and a calico waist. She has her hair tied up in a cloth resembling the peasants of the interior countries of Europe. She is knitting some socks. Waldo is a man of medium size. He is dressed in a pair of close-fitting brown trousers with a ragged coat. He, also, has on a brown woolen shirt. His hair is very unkempt, showing that it hasn't been combed for days.

It is nightfall in early spring.

MARY

(Looking up anxiously from her knitting.)
I wonder where John is. He never stayed away this late before.

WALDO

(Biting a chew of tobacco.)
Don't worry about John. He got delayed, that's all.

MARY

(Getting up and looking out of the window.)
Yes, but it has been three whole days. He has never done anything like this in his life before.

WALDO

Don't worry. He'll be back.

MARY

I didn't want him to go to sell that load of grain anyway. He might have known I would worry, What do you suppose has happened to him?

WALDO

To tell you the truth, Madame Walton, I really haven't supposed at all.

MARY

(Exasperated.)
You are a nice one to sympathize with a person in trouble. Suppose he has gone to the city and got into trouble? fallen into bad company or something like that?

WALDO

The ways of men are strange. You can never tell what they will do.

MARY

You needn't think John has run away from home and left me. He would never do that.

WALDO

I never meant that at all. I was only joking. I know John loves you. Something unforeseen must have happened to keep him from you this long. But I feel that he will come shortly.

MARY

There, Waldo, that is more sympathetic. I try not to worry, but I do feel uneasy about him.

WALDO

Don't worry. The old eagle can always be depended upon to come back to his mate.

MARY

You must get your wit in, Waldo.

(Straining her ears.)

Did you hear a noise?

WALDO

What kind of a noise?

(There is a rattling sound of a wagon. A loud "whoa" is heard from the outside.)

MARY

A wagon, of course.

(Running to the door.)

It is John!

(John comes in. He is tall and dressed in peasant clothes. There is something weighing heavily on his mind for he merely mumbles.)

JOHN

How are you, Mary! Hello, Waldo!

(He pushes past them to the fire and sits with his head between his hands.)

MARY

What is the matter, John? You didn't even kiss me.

JOHN

I meant to, Mary.

(He rises and kisses her and resumes his former position.)

WALDO

We thought you weren't coming back, Master John.

JOHN

You knew I wasn't going to stay away forever.

MARY

We thought so.

JOHN

I guess you had better go and take out the horses, Waldo. Give them plenty of feed because they're hungry.

WALDO

All right, Master John. *(Exits.)*

MARY

(Going up to him and putting her arms around his neck.)

There must be something wrong, John. What is it?

JOHN

There is bad news, dear, bad news.

MARY

(Sitting down beside him.)

Tell me about it, dear. You know I will understand.

JOHN

Well, I arrived at the capitol all right with the load of grain. I was very fortunate, for some traders were there who were trying to fill their boat for a trip to the south. They gave me ten gold pieces more than I thought it would bring.

MARY

That's good.

JOHN

Don't be so fast. You haven't heard the whole story. I was so happy that I stopped by an inn to get some coffee and something to eat. I heard a group of men in the rear talking about the political situation of the kingdom. I went back and joined them—hesitantly at first but more and more as I warmed to the subject. It grew late before I knew it. Just as I started out, the king's guardsmen came up and arrested all of us for starting a revolution against the kingdom.

MARY

Oh John!

JOHN

I know I was a fool to have stopped to talk to those men.

MARY

That's all right, dear. What did they do?

JOHN

I was taken before the king's attorney and questioned, then I was thrown into jail. Later I was taken out and put into the dungeon. They tortured me with every kind of thing imaginable to make me tell who the leaders were. But, of course, I didn't know. Finally by the help of the merchants, and the stableman where I kept my horses, I was able to prove that I didn't know a thing about the others. So they let me go.

MARY

I am glad they let you go anyway.

JOHN

Yes, but they took all the money with which I was going to make the final payment on our home; and here we are just where we were last year this time.

MARY

(Taking his hand in her hand.)

I am so glad that they sent you back to me. If I had known they were torturing you, I would have died.

JOHN

I don't mind the torture so much now, since it is all over, but to think—they kept the money with which I was going to finish paying for our home!

MARY

We cannot change that which has already happened. The only thing that we can do is to go to work and pay it off next year.

JOHN

That is nobly said, but it doesn't satisfy me.

MARY

Well, what else can you do against the king?

JOHN

There are many things a person can do. I could kill him.

MARY

John, you don't realize what you are saying. You couldn't be thinking about assassinating the king.

JOHN

I don't know whether I am or not. Even the king shouldn't do evil deeds to his subjects.

MARY

But we can't help it if he does. He is different.

JOHN

(With emphasis.)

He may be different in that he has made me worse off than I have ever been before. I wanted to surprise you with a new dress, but how could I do it? I know

you cannot help but feel the pinch of poverty after the luxuries of a beautiful home. Sometimes I feel like a criminal for dragging you out of your home to make you suffer like this in my hut. That is what we were talking about—poverty and the economic state of this kingdom. Conditions are such that they pauperize the poor while the rich roll in luxury. I have been forced to agree with those men that there must be a revolution before things get straight in Blufustu.

MARY

Don't get excited, John. As for my lot, I am satisfied with it. I did not marry you for your wealth, I married you because I love you. We may not have all the things we need, but by hard work and trusting in God, we shall yet enjoy the good things of life.

JOHN

Sometimes I think God is dead.

(Patting her on the shoulder.)

But you are the one priceless jewel I have in my poverty.

MARY

God is not dead, John. Please don't believe that.

JOHN

At least justice is.

MARY

You'll feel better about it after you have rested. Are you hungry, dear?

JOHN

No, but I am tired.

MARY

You lie across the bed while I go in the kitchen and make you a cup of tea. I am going to warm some other things for you, too.

JOHN

(Getting up and taking her in his arms.)

You are a wonderful little wife, Mary. No man ever had a better one.

(He lies across the bed, and she pulls the cover over him and tucks it around him.)

MARY

I guess you are tired and sleepy after suffering in that dungeon. You will feel much better on the morrow.

(He is asleep before she finishes. She gently goes out to the kitchen. The lights go out and he can be heard snoring for awhile. Then they come back on and he gets up rubbing his eyes. He speaks in a very meditative mood.)

JOHN

I was right. It is a crime to make her suffer here in poverty. She tried to hide her disappointment behind a cheerful smile, but I can see it. It is not my fault, either, for God knows I have tried to accomplish something to be worthy of her. Every step I have taken so far has been hampered somehow. I cannot improve my farm, I cannot buy new stock by not having the necessary gold pieces. And now comes the crowning defeat: the seizure of my money by the king. I wish there was some way I could get even, but I can't think of a thing. I can barely eke out the necessities of existence. Poverty is the curse of civilization. Happiness cannot exist where this hydra raises its head. I would to God that I could devise some way to rid the world of this curse! Sometime there seems to be hovering around me an evil spirit telling me to lie, and steal, and anything else in order to get some of the good things of life which are due every man. But there seems to be another spirit, a soft gentle one, bidding me to wait, and hope, and work. I have reached this fork in life's road, and hardly know which way to turn.

(He sits down in a chair in the middle of the room, and drops his head meditatively. The door slowly opens on the left. A red hue illuminates the room. At the same time the door opens on the right, and a wave of white light floods in. The devil advances slowly from the left and the angel from the right.)

DEVIL

(Slapping him on the left shoulder.)

Cheer up, my friend. You seem to be in trouble. Tell me your ills, and I will help you. A friend in need is the best one after all.

ANGEL

(Pleading to him on the right.)

Don't listen to him. He will lead you into the pitfalls of wickedness. If you have troubles, confess it to the God above. He alone can give you everlasting help.

JOHN

(Looking forward as if talking into space.)

I am not only in trouble, I am in misery. I have worked hard to own a home and make my wife happy; but I have met reverse after reverse. The demon Poverty hovers over me like a giant eagle ready to swoop down and clutch its prey in its talons and fly away to some distant spot to end him.

ANGEL

Nothing has been done in this world without great efforts and an ideal—efforts which at times seem wasted upon the desert sands while the ideal is far away in the mirage of imagination. There has to be the dark, cold nights of January to appreciate the shining sun of a June day. Your ideal is beyond question, so don't give it up. But you can't do it by stooping to do the low mean things. Let your thoughts be

as the lofty mountains whose peaks tower in the beautiful snow, far, far away from this evil earth.

JOHN

I have tried all these things. I have tried to think noble thoughts and live by them. But it is hard to keep up the struggle with the mill stone of poverty about your neck.

DEVIL

Listen, my friend, I speak to you like a father. If you have a mill stone about your neck, break the chains which hold it; and I am here to help you. It is a pitiful sight to see human beings held down by slavery and poverty, and look for deliverance, not from practical work assisted by myself, but from a vague imaginary something they call a God. If you but let me, I can raise you out of your poverty and make you king of the universe. It is for you to decide.

JOHN

You seem convincing.

DEVIL

I am convincing.

ANGEL

Do not be persuaded by his cunning talk which is only half true. Think of the heavenly things, the things which will last when these earthly ones will have passed away.

DEVIL

Be not fooled. You are forced to think of things terrestrial. However high a bird might fly, and however far into the blue a ship might sail, they must come back to land. The vague intangible things the lady offers you are but instruments to keep the poor in their poverty.

JOHN

Something has kept me there all right.

DEVIL

And always will, if you listen to the lady.

ANGEL

This decision is very momentous to you. Think well before you decide. He offers you a few things for the rest of your life, but I offer you eternal pleasures which last until the end of time. He won't dare tell you what's in store for you after this life, because he knows you will not accept. Ask him what comes after the end.

JOHN

What's after the end?

DEVIL

No one knows. When one closes his eyes in death no one knows what lies beyond the grave. All of your religions are mere conjectures, and all of your ethics mere conjectures. You are living in a great world of reality, and turn reason abroad you will work havoc. You should cast aside, as worthless, those antique shackles of thought. You are a man, and know I offer you tangible things. I stand ready to lift you out of your poverty. You wouldn't expect me to do this for nothing. Well, all I want is a little service, and that after you have obtained your desires.

ANGEL

His service is eternal damnation for your soul. You will pay dearly for the little pleasure you get on this earth, for you are doomed forevermore. Come reconsider, accept the only thing you won't have to pay for. The great God above is the only free gift worth having.

JOHN

(To the devil.)

How much do I have to pay for your services?

DEVIL

(Sure of victory.)

Oh, not much—a paltry sum for the help I am willing to give you.

ANGEL

Why pay dearly for something that will harm you? I am offering what is best for you absolutely free.

DEVIL

She is offering you poverty, and you have found by experience that it is not good. Then, too, you pay for everything you get in this world. She boasts that her God is free, but the people pauperize the poor by making them pay for expensive churches, priests, and a hundred other things. As a reward for all this, religion has killed more people than any other single force in the world, and you can't deny that. If religion is so exacting, why can't I expect something for my services?

ANGEL

I can see that his argument is such that you are leaning towards it. Oh, don't let him trick you into a miserable life hereafter with his eloquence!

JOHN

His side is the more convincing.

DEVIL

Nay, my boy. Rather say that facts are more convincing.

JOHN

How much did you say your service would cost?

DEVIL

Oh, nothing much. Don't let that worry you.

ANGEL

Once more I plead for your soul's privilege to enjoy everlasting life. You must decide.

JOHN

(After studying for a moment. To the devil.)

I will accept your offer as the best way out of my situation.

ANGEL

You accept his offer. Well, I am indeed sorry for you. You will regret the time you made that decision.

JOHN

I don't see how I could be any worse off than I am now, no matter what happens.

ANGEL

You shall see.

DEVIL

You made a wise choice. It is the only one that common sense would allow you to make. I shall begin to help you immediately—immediately I say.

(The angel and the devil turn to go out. The halo of light that followed them in follows them as they go out. When they are about halfway out, the devil calls back over his shoulder.)

The next time a contest is to be staged you tell Gabriel to come down himself and not be so lazy. Imagine a woman beating me in an argument—ha, ha, ha!

(They disappear. John meditates for awhile.)

JOHN

I am sure I acted for the best. I am tired of merely existing. Life certainly should give me more than that. Damn the king! I could run my sword through

him. He and his whole autocratic crowd should be hounded out of existence.

(A knock is sounded on the door to the right.)

JOHN

Come in.

(De Quincy and Godfrey come in.)

Well if it isn't De Quincy of the Royal Guards!

DE QUINCY

(Saluting.)

You mean formerly of the Royal Guards, Colonel.

(De Quincy is slightly over middle age. He is tall, inclined a little to stoutness. He is every inch a military man. He is dressed in a blue uniform with gold trimmings. There are gold stripes and decorations on his arms, shoulders and cap.)

(Godfrey is a younger man—about Walton's own age. He is dressed in the same kind of uniform with less stripes and trimmings.)

JOHN

You don't mean to say that you have resigned?

DE QUINCY

First, I want you to meet my friend, Captain Godfrey.

(They salute, then shake hands.)

JOHN

I am glad to meet you, Captain Godfrey.

GODFREY

I have always wanted to meet the former Colonel Walton of the king's army.

DE QUINCY

Yes, Walton, I have resigned from the king's guards. I am now with the army of the people.

WALTON

What army of the people?

DE QUINCY

Of course you have heard about the revolt of the people against the autocratic king?

JOHN

No, I haven't. But pardon me. Won't you sit down?

DE QUINCY

It is no time for a loyal citizen of Blufustu to sit down. We have gone as far as possible in yielding to the exacting demands of our autocratic king. The taxes, as you know, have increased a hundred per cent in the last year, and now comes a special tax for the dowry of his daughter who is going to marry Lord Whetmore. This, too, while he is spending for gay parties. Last week he gave a banquet for Carisiva, the actress. It is said to have cost a thousand gold pieces of the people's money. This is too much for the most patient of beasts, especially when he is starving. We have revolted and plan to drive him from the throne.

JOHN

That is indeed good news. The tyrannical monster ought to be driven from the land.

GODFREY

We are glad to see that spirit in you, Mr. Walton.

DE QUINCY

But I did not come here just to give you news of the revolt. You know all great enterprises must have a leader to succeed. We met secretly tonight to select one. The selection happens to be yourself.

JOHN

I, I—elected as leader?

DE QUINCY

I must acknowledge that I was surprised myself at the election. But the people remembered your exploits

in the last war of the kingdom. They remembered that when the Blufustuan army was trapped between the cross fire of the enemy, a mere lieutenant from the farms gave the command that turned almost certain defeat into victory.

JOHN

Yes, but what did it get me—only a discharge from the army just as soon as they found the first chance for an excuse.

DE QUINCY

The people remembered that.

JOHN

But, De Quincy, you don't mean to say that I was elected over you who have stayed in the army, while I was forced to retire forgotten to the farm?

DE QUINCY

I admitted that I was surprised.

GODFREY

Quite a few people were.

DE QUINCY

But we are good soldiers, Walton. We obey the ones we serve. In this case it happens to be the people.

(Pulling a sword from its sheath.)

They sent us to offer you this sword to lead their forces in the highest and most glorious battle known to terrestrial man—the fight for liberty and democracy.

GODFREY

We feel sure that you will accept it in the name of the people.

JOHN

Gentlemen, I am stunned and bewildered at the great honor so suddenly thrust upon me. I cannot help but

accept the voice of the people. I willingly take this sword and promise to do all that is in my power to keep the women and children of this country from being starved to death by a despotic king. I will crush the royalist, or give my life to the cause.

(He takes the sword.)

DE QUINCY

We know that you will give the best that is in you, Walton. We salute our new leader.

(He and Godfrey salute. John salutes them in return.)

JOHN

I know that you will give the best that is in you, too.

DE QUINCY

There are ten thousand men ready for your command, and more will be flocking to the standard every day. Win or die is our motto.

JOHN

I accept the motto, also.

GODFREY

We knew you would do that.

JOHN

Where is the new army assembling?

DE QUINCY

It is assembling at Stanfield about five miles from the Balden mountains. News came that the royal army is mobilizing also and is planning to advance from the south.

JOHN

Good. I know the country well. You go on tonight, De Quincy, and take charge until I get there. Retreat slowly to the base of the mountain, and I will be there by day after tomorrow morning.

DE QUINCY

We'll do as you say.

JOHN

You'd better have the cavalry placed on both sides of the archers for protection. You know—in regular army formation. We shall wait for the royalist there.

DE QUINCY

It is a good place to meet them. We shall be on our way.

(They salute and walk hastily out of the door to the right. John looks after them for awhile and smiles. Then he calls his wife.)

JOHN

Mary! Mary!

MARY

(Coming out of the door to the left.)

What is it, John?

JOHN

I want to tell you the good news.

MARY

I thought I heard voices in here, John. That is why I didn't come in before.

JOHN

Well, they have gone now. Can you guess who it was?

MARY

No, but I peeped through the crack of the door. I was afraid that it was someone from the king.

JOHN

No, it was Colonel De Quincy from the Royal Guards. The people have revolted against the king and have elected me to be their leader.

MARY

You didn't accept, did you?

JOHN

Why, of course!

MARY

Oh, John, I don't want you to go to war again!

JOHN

Why, little wife?

MARY

Something might happen to you.

JOHN

Don't worry. I'll be safe enough behind the lines.

MARY

John, don't go.

JOHN

I must, little wife. It would be cowardly to ignore the people after they have elected me. And besides, if we win, I can take you from this hut of poverty back to the state that you so willingly forsook to join me. So lovely a flower was not made to blush in the country. I know you must have hated me when I dragged you out here after my discharge.

MARY

I have never regretted it, John. I would rather have your love here in a shack than to be a lady again with all of the privileges of court.

JOHN

That's nobly said, little sweetheart; and I appreciate it.

MARY

(Throwing her arms around his neck and crying.)

Oh, John, don't go! Don't leave me!

JOHN

I must, sweetheart. I must!

(He kisses her tenderly as the curtain closes.)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

(The banquet room in the palace. It is a large room, richly furnished as befitting a palace. A large rectangular table is in the center. It has a rich silver-looking cover on it, and is set with beautiful china and glassware. The chairs around it are heavy oak ones, and here and there on the walls are hung rich pieces of tapestry.)

(King Anthinatheus comes in followed by a page. The king is slightly over middle age, and his attire is in the style of the Elizabethans, which consists of knee breeches, a doublet, and a long flowing black robe. He looks at the table and smiles appreciatively.)

ANTHINATHEUS

I see you have everything prepared for the guests.

PAGE

Yes sir, your majesty. Is there anything else you would like to have?

ANTHINATHEUS

Yes. Fetch me my fool. I desire to laugh while waiting for the hour when my guests shall arrive.

PAGE

I am sorry, your majesty, but the fool is ill.

KING

(Frowning.)

Whoever heard of a fool being ill. Get him I tell you.

(The page starts out to obey orders.)

Stay! Fetch me a bottle of that choice wine instead.

PAGE

Yes sir, your majesty.

(The king looks at a tapestry on the wall while the page goes after the wine. He returns with it on a tray. He gets a small table and places it in front of the large table for the tray. Then he places a chair on the right for the king to sit.)

ANTHINATHEUS

(Sitting down in the chair and taking a drink.)

Faith, not a bad substitute for a fool.

PAGE

No sir, your majesty.

(A loud knocking is heard. The page goes to the door. He soon returns.)

Lord Whetmore, your majesty.

ANTHINATHEUS

Send him in, you fool.

PAGE

Yes sir, your majesty.

(Lord Whetmore comes in. He is a young man attired in the same kind of costume as the king. It is not as rich looking, and is minus the robe.)

ANTHINATHEUS

Well, how do you do, my dear Lord Whetmore?

WHETMORE

(Kneeling gracefully.)

I am most happy to see your majesty once more.

(Rising.)

You seem to be alone. I must be early.

ANTHINATHEUS

You are just in time to get some of this choice wine I just had the page bring in. Pour yourself a drink and sit down. Just because the others won't be here right away is no reason why we shouldn't enjoy it.

WHETMORE

(Pouring the king a drink and taking one himself.)

I am sure the time will be most pleasantly spent, your grace.

(Whetmore gets a chair and sits on the left.)

ANTHINATHEUS

You were not up last week to my banquet. It was quite a sumptuous affair. Carissiva, the new dancer, sang and danced for us. We feasted far into the night.

WHETMORE

I am sorry to have missed the opportunity of such a glorious feast, but when your invitation came, I was stag hunting in the south. I arrived home in ample time to get your message for tonight, however.

ANTHINATHEUS

The one tonight is only a private dinner for a few guests—only a ghost of what the one last week was. Carissiva will be here tonight, also, to sing and dance for us. Fill these glasses, and let's drink to her health.

WHETMORE

(After they drink.)

Your majesty seems to be greatly interested in this Lady Carissiva.

ANTHINATHEUS

I am not interested in the lady nearly as much as in the good time I have when she dances. You know I always did like life, Whetmore, and she is life personified.

WHETMORE

(Meditating for awhile.)

While we are alone, your majesty, I would like to take this opportunity to speak of one I not only like, but love. I have reference to the Princess Margaret, your daughter.

ANTHINATHEUS

Proceed. The marriage has already been agreed upon by your father, Grand Duke Whetmore, and myself.

WHETMORE

I feel highly honored to have been the fortunate one chosen for the hand of Princess Margaret; but I don't believe the dowry was stated in your agreement.

ANTHINATHEUS

The Grand Duke did not take the trouble to talk about it because he knew it would be sufficient. Fill the glasses again and I will outline it to you.

(After they drink.)

After the ceremony I shall present you with twenty thousand gold pieces from the royal treasury, and in addition a vast tract of land in the south. Is that sufficient, my dear Lord Whetmore?

WHETMORE

It is, your majesty. The pecuniary interest did not interest me personally as long as I have my estate in the west. But it was of the Princess Margaret I was thinking. I want her to be happy and live in the state which befits her rank.

ANTHINATHEUS

That's not quite all, Whetmore. I plan to give you the Dukedom of Stanfield, and make you keeper of the king's seals.

WHETMORE

Your goodness knows no boundary. How can I ever merit such beneficence?

ANTHINATHEUS

Merit is nothing in Blufustu. You get them because I want you to have them. But away with such conversation. Are you satisfied?

WHETMORE

No one could wish for more.

ANTHINATHEUS

Well, take another drink. I assure you, it is the best wine that we have in the royal cellars.

(The king drinks. Whetmore makes a show of drinking his.)

WHETMORE

I assure you, it is the most delicious I have ever tasted.

PAGE

The Princess Margaret!

(Princess Margaret is a beautiful young girl. She is dressed in a white dress which is trimmed with much lace, and has a long train. Whetmore kneels and kisses her hand. The page places a chair for her between the king and Whetmore.)

ANTHINATHEUS

It is good you came in. We were just discussing your marriage.

MARGARET

And what did you say about it?

ANTHINATHEUS

Oh! I just told Lord Whetmore about the settlement for the dowry. I was about to tell him that it is going to be the most elaborate and costly that Blufustu ever had. Nothing shall be spared to make it as dazzling as the weddings in the fairy tales of Arabia.

MARGARET

But father, why talk of spending money and making things as costly as possible? The people over which you are ruling are crying for bread, at least some of them. Since Lord Whetmore and I love each other, why can't we marry in simplicity, and give the rest of what we would spend as a gift to the poor? They would love us more and add glorious pages of devotion to your reign. What say you, my Lord Whetmore?

WHETMORE

I think you speak wisely, dear Princess. Of course we were discussing the financial part of the marriage, but I, more to obey custom than from real interest. With the Princess Margaret for my bride, I could live in a hut near the slopes of the Balden mountains if she were only happy.

MARGARET

I appreciate that, Lord Whetmore. See, father, Lord Whetmore does not object to simplicity.

ANTHINATHEUS

Tut! Tut! The daughter of the king to marry like a peasant? Impossible! Absurd! You were born to marry in silks just as the peasants were born to marry in rags. They expect pomp and dignity of us, just as much as we expect labor and drudgery of them.

MARGARET

Suppose they change?

ANTHINATHEUS

What if they did?

MARGARET

They would rebel.

ANTHINATHEUS

And by heavens, I would crush them with my army!

MARGARET

Have it your way, father. But I am sure you are making a mistake.

ANTHINATHEUS

I am going to have my way as long as I am king. You are going to marry in state like all the rest before you. Is that satisfactory, Lord Whetmore?

WHETMORE

Have it as you like, your majesty. I am interested only in the princess herself.

ANTHINATHEUS

Well, you can tell your dressmaker to have your trousseau made from the finest materials in Blufustu.

MARGARET

But suppose—

ANTHINATHEUS

Suppose nothing. I have said what you shall do. I wish to God your mother, the queen, was alive to put some sense into that stubborn head.

PAGE

The guests have arrived!

ANTHINATHEUS

Show them in.

(They arise and the page places the chairs in order before he goes out. The guests come in. The men are dressed in the style of the king,

and the women in the style of Margaret.)

Welcome! Welcome!

(The men come up and bow before the king, and then kiss Margaret's hand. Whetmore does the same to the incoming ladies.)

Be seated. We shall be served immediately.

(They talk among themselves as they take their seats. The waiters come in to help them. They pour wine for the guests. Anthinatheus raises his glass.)

We will drink to the health of—

ONE OF THE MEN

The king!

EVERYBODY

The king! The king!

ANTHINATHEUS

I wasn't going to propose a toast to myself, but if you insist, I thank you.

(They drink to the health of the king. The waiters bring in the food and they eat and talk among themselves for awhile. The king's musicians come in and play while they eat.)

(Slapping his hands together which brings the page.)

Has Carissiva arrived yet?

PAGE

She awaits in the outer room, your majesty.

ANTHINATHEUS

Tell her to be ready to come in when I announce her.

PAGE

Yes sir, your majesty.

(The waiters fill the glasses with wine. Finally Anthinatheus holds up his hand for silence.)

ANTHINATHEUS

My loyal subjects, and friends; I am glad to see you tonight, making this place happy with your voices and smiles. The glasses are full with wine from the royal cellars—the best that it contains. I shall ask you to drink to the health of one who will sing and dance for you in order to assure your having a pleasant evening. Let us drink to the health of Carissiva.

EVERYBODY

To Carissiva!

(They drink. Carissiva comes in and bows in acknowledgment. She is attired in a dancing frock trimmed with ostrich feathers. Her hair hangs loose around her shoulders. Her costume is a study in blue and white. She arises and nods to the musicians. They strike up a tune and she sings.)

CARISSIVA

My voice rings out with praises
For Blufustu, the land of my birth.
How I long for your hills and your mountains!
You're the dearest spot on earth.

CHORUS

Strike up the band for Blufustu land,
And let us sing loud and long.
For our wondrous king, let the hills ring
With the praise of a mighty throng.
Oh Blufustu land of beauties grand,
To thee I could ever sing.
Let the earth rejoice, for you are my choice:
Blufustu and your king.

If God should give me a thousand tongues,
Of my country and king I would cry
Till the earth rings out in one great voice
That resounds from the great blue sky.

(There is tremendous applause after the song. Carissiva breaks into a dance. She whirls and glides—sometimes fast, and sometimes slow, but always with a beautiful rhythm. Finally she stops with a graceful bow. Applause and expressions of approval follow.)

(Drinking has been going on all the while, and the king shows signs of becoming intoxicated. He arises in a kind of drunken stupor.)

ANTHINATHEUS

I am sure the verdict is unanimous that Carissiva's renditions were wonderful.

(Applause. The king reels with drink.)

Ask what you will, Carissiva, and I, like King Herod of old, will give it to thee.

PAGE

General Sunderland.

(General Sunderland does not wait for an acceptance, but rushes in.)

SUNDERLAND

(Bowing and rising quickly.)

Your majesty, the peasants have revolted, and are marching towards the capitol leaving wreck and ruin in their wake!

EVERYBODY

(Stunned.)

Revolted!

MARGARET

(To Whetmore.)

I suppose the king will believe now.

ANTHINATHEUS

General Sunderland, you must have forgotten the rules of the court since you rush into the presence of your king without waiting to be received. Surely you must be losing your reason.

SUNDERLAND

(Bowling).

I beg your most gracious pardon, your majesty; but I deemed the news of sufficient importance to dispense with the formalities in getting the news to you.

ANTHINATHEUS

It is never necessary to dispense with the formalities in dealing with your king. Remember that, Sunderland.

SUNDERLAND

I have asked your grace to forgive me.

ANTHINATHEUS

You said there was a rebellion. Well, why didn't you rush the Royalist troops there to crush it without breaking into the king's entertainment?

SUNDERLAND

I dispatched all I had under my command which numbered about four thousand. But the rebels are swarming up the Stanfield Valley towards the Balden mountains. It is reported by my aids that John Walton, a farmer who won fame in your majesty's army, will soon take charge. It is necessary for you to sign an ordinance for me to recruit troops before they start marching closer towards the capitol.

ANTHINATHEUS

In an emergency you are allowed to recruit as many men as you please to protect the kingdom.

(Swaying in drunkenness.)

All of this unnecessary interruption to put down a crude farmer. Well, I will not break up my party tonight to write ordinances.

(To Carissiva.)

Carissiva, for your splendid performance tonight, I shall still further emulate that wise old King Herod

by sending you the head of this traitor on a golden platter.

SUNDERLAND

But, your majesty, you underestimate the immensity of this task. The rebels are gaining in numbers every day. John Walton, aided by De Quincy and Godfrey, will be harder to beat than you think. Why they—

ANTHINATHEUS

I am weary of this prattle.

(Holding on to the table for support!)

Waiters, bring on more drinks. This is one night we shall revel if we spend tomorrow in hell. Sunderland, don't bother me again to-night with that rant.

(Pointing towards the door,)

But go and wipe that speck from off the earth!

(Sunderland salutes and marches out. Anthinatheus drops into a chair. The guests are concerned and disconcerted.)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE TWO

(Headquarters of the rebels. A rude tent is pitched in a section of mountainous woods amid a few evergreens. The flap is open which reveals a crude table, a couple of stools, and rumpled heaps on the ground where the inmates slept. It is early morning, and far off the snow-capped peaks of the Balden mountains can be seen rising up in their impressive beauty.)

(De Quincy stands outside watching the lay of the land.)

(Godfrey comes in and salutes.)

GODFREY

I have made the inspection, sir, and find that everything is well. The troops are arranged as you ordered, and are prepared to attack when orders are given.

DE QUINCY

There is nothing to do but wait, then.

GODFREY

That is the maddening thing before a battle. Your nerves are on edge.

DE QUINCY

Well, that is better than their being in pain from an arrow or sword. How did everybody take the excitement?

GODFREY

The other men didn't feel it so much—I was excited because this is the first time I have had to receive report of inspection as a colonel. How do you feel being a major general?

DE QUINCY

I haven't felt very much about it.

GODFREY

I think it is a great thing to have a command in the army of the people. I suppose today will be the beginning of the end of the old regime. Monarchy is fading, and the world is looking forward to democracy.

DE QUINCY

I suppose today will be a glorious one in the annals of liberty. Everything is in readiness to withstand the onslaughts of the enemy that is marching upon us. We only await the arrival of General Walton to have everything completed.

GODFREY

When will he arrive?

DE QUINCY

He ought to have been here. I suppose we can expect him any time now.

GODFREY

It is good that General Walton accepted the leadership, don't you think?

DE QUINCY

Sometimes I think that we were fortunate, and again I don't. There seemed to have been a diabolical presence in the room the night we elected our leader. I can't quite explain what I mean.

GODFREY

Since you spoke of it, I, too, experienced a strange, weird feeling that night. I thought I was a little drowsy, that's all. Everyone thought you would be chosen leader. You don't think anyone could have influenced our minds, do you?

DE QUINCY

(Slowly.)

I don't know, Godfrey. But anyway we will forego our claims to leadership, if we have any, for the good of the people at large. A division among us now would be disastrous to the cause. We will stick to Walton as long as he acts for the good of the people; but if he doesn't—that's different.

GODFREY

If you think of changing you know—

DE QUINCY

Hush. Here he comes.

(Walton walks in with a military step. His uniform is new and shiny. He has a few more decorations and stripes than De Quincy. He is fol-

lowed by Waldo, who has on a uniform that does not begin to fit him. His scabbard hangs half way down his legs. He is a very seedy-looking soldier, and acts the part of a clown.)

WALTON

(Saluting.)

How goes everything, my worthy comrades?

BOTH

(Shaking hands.)

Fine, General.

WALTON

Well, how is the situation, De Quincy?

DE QUINCY

Everything is arranged in the regular battle formation. We are on a short rise in the Balden mountains. The cavalry is placed on both sides of us, but concealed from view. We received news this morning that the Royalists are advancing upon us determined to crush us before we have time to prepare a large army. They will even attack us in a bad place to try and prevent our getting a large army. We thought we would wait for them here and let them advance upon the archers and a few cavalry, and then let the main body of cavalry rush upon them from their concealed places and annihilate them between the three fires. Do you like those plans?

WALTON

I think they are good, very good, De Quincy. You are a genius in the art of war, yourself. You certainly shall have charge of the national defense, when democracy has reared itself upon the ruins of autocracy.

(Looking towards one of the sections mentioned.)

Don't you think that that section of the cavalry

should be moved further back, De Quincy? Scouts on the hill to the right could detect their presence.

DE QUINCY

You are right. Col. Godfrey, have that branch of the cavalry moved back.

(Godfrey salutes and walks off the stage. He returns and salutes.)

GODFREY

The order has been sent, sir.

WALTON

Well, since everything is in readiness, we can only wait until the royalist dogs show their faces to prove to the world that we are tired of tyranny and oppression.

DE QUINCY

Who is this man with you, General?

WALTON

That is Waldo, my faithful servant. I brought him along as a kind of mascot. I always have luck when he is around.

DE QUINCY

We need everything around that will give us luck now.

WALDO

(Mimicking.)

You need everything around for pluck, not luck.

WALTON

You know, De Quincy, I really want this to be a war for democracy. If I have anything to do with it, every person in the kingdom will be allowed to participate in the government. If this is carried out, there will be no need for a future uprising.

DE QUINCY

We want to make the government secure so that the people will not rise up against us in turn.

WALTON

I haven't planned to stop there. I want to invite all the kingdoms to come to a conference to agree to abolish war. If we all agree, we won't have to fight any more.

DE QUINCY

I am glad to hear you talk like that, Walton. I must confess that I had some misgivings about you as a leader, but a man who has such high ideals of the people participating in the government must be the right one to guide us through this crisis.

WALTON

I thank you, De Quincy.

GODFREY

I am tired of waiting for the enemy. I wish they would hurry up and come.

WALDO

Don't be rushing them, colonel. Don't be rushing them.

WALTON

You know this location reminds me of the battle of Black Horn in the last war.

WALDO

This reminds me that I am tired.

(He sits down on the ground and crosses his feet in a kind of squatting fashion.)

WALTON

It was in a mountainous country like this, and the weather was deathly cold. We had to wait two days in the rain and the snow before the enemy appeared.

GODFREY

I hope we don't have to do that here.

WALTON

After all that waiting we came near getting defeated, for the enemy pressed us into a narrow neck of land with the mountains on one side and a small river on the other. We had nearly given up hope when Black Simon, a huge giant of a fellow from the north, hewed his way through the enemy lines with a great big battle axe.

GODFREY

It is a wonder he didn't get killed.

WALDO

He did get killed, a mule kicked him.

WALTON

That was later, fool. Well, we pressed through and joined him and won the day. It was a thrilling battle after it was all over.

WALDO

I wish Black Simon was around now.

(A messenger enters hastily.)

MESSENGER

The enemy approaches. They are a quarter of a league away.

WALTON

Colonel Godfrey, take charge of the field operations. General De Quincy and I will observe from here and send you orders.

(Godfrey salutes and exits.)

The royalists are really trained soldiers. They advance with even tread.

WALDO

(Springing up.)

Oh, Black Simon, we need you now.

WALTON

(Watching intently. Then he waves his sword.)
What are they waiting for? I gave them the signal to fire.

(There is a blowing of horns and noise of battle.)

DE QUINCY

Our men have driven them back; they run like sheep.

WALDO

But there might be some black sheep among them.

WALTON

They have rallied and come on again.

WALDO

(Groaning.)
Oh, Black Simon!

DE QUINCY

The cavalry is sweeping down upon them.

WALTON

They run again.

GODFREY

(Coming in again.)
Everything has gone as we planned. We have twice repulsed them. They are now on the retreat. I sent two detachments to follow them. Shall I give orders for the whole army to pursue?

WALTON

Just tell both branches of the cavalry to do so. Give orders to run them into the farthest corners of hell.
(Godfrey salutes, goes out, gives the order, and returns.)

GODFREY

The order has been sent, sir.

WALTON

Let's go into the tent and celebrate the victory with a drink. You have something around, haven't you, Gen. De Quincy?

DE QUINCY

I think so.

(They go into the tent and sit upon the stools. De Quincy searches around and finds a bottle and hands it to Walton.)

WALTON

(Holding it up.)

Here is to the spirit of democracy!

WALDO

That's all democracy is—a ghost.

(Waldo drinks out of the bottle and passes it around to the rest.)

DE QUINCY

That was about the quickest victory I ever witnessed.

WALTON

When your plans are well laid, it will always turn out that way.

(A messenger runs through hurriedly. He hardly stops to give the message.)

MESSENGER

Run for your life. The enemy has countered, and our army is retreating. You are nearly cut off from the rest of the men.

WALTON

The fools.

(Just as they leave the tent, they are set upon by three of the royalists. At the sound of the leader's voice Waldo darts into the tent and hides behind the table.)

LEADER

Halt! Throw up your hands, you rebel dogs, or we will run you through with our swords.

WALTON

We are fighting for liberty, and we mean to win or die! So on guard, you royalist hounds!

(Three sword duels commence. The royalists gradually push them back towards the mountains. When Waldo sees that they are all busy, he unsheathes his sword and starts after an imaginary foe. He talks as he thrusts, as if he is really fighting someone.)

WALDO

(Shouting bravely.)

Stand back, you royalists, or I will feed your bones to the vultures. I will make you rue the day that you did not join the rebel army—back, I say, you scoundrels, you oppressors of the poor—back and make way for freedom and democracy!

(Walton, De Quincy and Godfrey are nearly jammed by the royalist swordsmen. Waldo looks around and sees their plight and makes a rear attack. He then talks to the royalists.)

Halt, royalists, we want the rebels alive. They will surrender. This is your commander speaking!

(The three royalists look back and are immediately run through by the rebels.)

WALTON

(Shouting with battle frenzy.)

Quick, men, quick! Stop the coward dogs! De Quincy, take charge of the right flank, Godfrey the left! Rally your men and hold that line like hell!

(Walton darts off to the right, Godfrey and De Quincy run out to the left. Waldo drags out slowly to the right after his master.)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

(The banquet hall in the palace the same as Act Two, Scene One. The arrangement of everything is the same. Walton is sitting on the right dressed in kingly attire with a crown on his head. He is drinking wine from the royal cellars.)

PAGE

General De Quincy.

WALTON

Send him in.

(De Quincy comes in, kneels and bows before the new king. Walton waves him to a seat.)

Well, De Quincy, we are here in the royal palace. Last week this time I hadn't arrived to take command on the battlefield. The most optimistic among us did not dream that we would be here so soon.

DE QUINCY

Especially when the royalists made that counter attack.

WALTON

That was a clever piece of strategy the royalists pulled on us, by retreating to get our whole army in front of them, and then turning on us.

DE QUINCY

Well, nobody will do that one again.

WALTON

I hope not.

DE QUINCY

I heard that you announced yourself king last night, so I thought I would come over and take a look at the new king.

WALTON

Well, here I am: King John the First of Blufustu.

DE QUINCY

I see that you are here all right. Anthinatheus himself would be proud of your kingly air.

WALTON

I'll be the proud one if I ever lay my hands on him.

DE QUINCY

I came over to talk to you, Walton—

WALTON

King John please, De Quincy.

DE QUINCY

Beg your pardon, King John. I wish to ask you to take a moderate course in dealing with the royalist.

PAGE

General Godfrey announces that the Duke of Halstead has been captured.

WALTON

That is worth giving him a promotion. Tell General Godfrey to have a public gallows erected in the capitol square to be ready for use tomorrow morning.

(Exit page.)

DE QUINCY

May I speak plainly with you, King John?

WALTON

You may, General De Quincy.

DE QUINCY

I think that you are carrying things just a little too far. You fought for liberty and democracy, and no sooner had the battle smoke cleared away than you declared yourself king. Just before you arrived at the camp on the morning of the battlefield, Gen. Godfrey and I were discussing whether you would carry out your aims. I admit that there were doubts in both of our minds, but they were dispelled when you gave your ideal of government for all the people. This was further strengthened when the invaders broke into the camp and you answered them with such patriotic words. Please wake up and do the things you promised the people.

WALTON

Let me say in the beginning that what you think is of no consequence to me, De Quincy. I am king of Blufustu. You are intelligent enough to know that after every war of rebellion there has to be a dictator for awhile to make the shift from one form of government to the other. Royalty is deep-rooted in the people, and I assumed the role of king to satisfy the majority. I might change when things get more settled, but as long as I have the army back of me I can rule as I please. Is that not so, De Quincy?

DE QUINCY

I will not dispute it, but I know the people fought for liberty from oppression. Still further I know that public opinion is a very unstable thing. It can be blown about with the slightest breeze, especially after a revolution. Who knows that it will not be blown from you? You are courting it, I am sure, by doing the very things which the royalist did.

WALTON

(Taking a drink.)

Whether it does, or not, as long as I am king, I am going to be king.

(Waldo comes skipping in singing. He is now the court fool.)

WALDO
A king today
May be a fool tomorrow,
So sing today,
And forget your sorrow.

WALTON
Hush, fool. I am having a conference.

DE QUINCY
(Annoyed by the interruption.)
Reflect, Walton—I beg your pardon, I mean King John—

WALTON
Thank you.

DE QUINCY
Don't make the mistake that many idiots have made before you. Now that you are in a position to do something for the people you fought for, don't be a traitor to them. Carry out your first plans and posterity will call you a saint.

WALTON
De Quincy, you weary me with your arguments.

WALDO
(In a shrill voice.)
Right wearies people. We do wrong, not because we like it, but simply because it is wrong.

DE QUINCY
I didn't mean to weary you, your majesty.

WALTON

Have a drink, De Quincy, and we shall talk about something else besides myself.

DE QUINCY

As you like, your majesty, but beware what the end will be.

WALTON

I know what the end will be. If I get my hands on all the royalists, I am going to hound them out of the kingdom.

WALDO

Let's get some beautiful pink bloodhounds.

DE QUINCY

You said royalty was deep-rooted in a large part of the people; well, if you continue to persecute them, you will drive the people from your side.

WALTON

(Plainly annoyed.)

I shall pursue my own policies, De Quincy. It is strange that you persist in trying to tell me what to do, after I have been kind enough to ask you not to do so. Don't make an enemy of me, De Quincy. I am trying to be your friend, but if you force me to be otherwise, I shall have you beheaded with the rest.

DE QUINCY

Accept my pardons for the last time, your majesty. I shall never attempt to advise you again, since my advice meets with such disapproval.

WALTON

Let's have another drink and forget it.

(They drink.)

WALDO

Forget your troubles in a river of wine,

And they'll come back when the sun does shine,
So drink till your troubles go away.

WALTON

Everything has been so exciting that I want to forget for awhile. I am having a little party tonight to celebrate our victory. I was going to send for you, but since you are here, you'll stay.

DE QUINCY

With pleasure, your majesty.

WALTON

(Getting up and moving about. Waldo gets in his way so he kicks him sprawling.)

Get out of the way, you fool. I have a good mind to run you through with a sword.

WALDO

(Pleading on his knees.)

Pity me, I am a fool.

WALTON

That's true enough.

WALDO

You get no spurs for killing a fool.

WALTON

You are right enough.

WALDO

Don't kill yourself.

(Walton makes a vicious kick at Waldo, who eludes him by galloping out on his hands and feet.)

DE QUINCY

Ha! Ha! That fool is funny. But he did save our lives on the battle field.

WALTON

That fool is a fool!

PAGE

The guests have arrived, your majesty.

(The guests come in. They belong to the lower classes, and have on evening clothes for the first time. They appear ill at ease. The musicians come in and begin to play. The waiters pour wine for the guests.)

WALDO

(Holding up the wine. The musicians stop.)

To the success of the new kingdom!

EVERYBODY

To the new kingdom!

(They drink.)

PAGE

General Godfrey!

WALTON

Send him in!

(Godfrey comes in smiling.)

You have a radiant smile on your face which shows that you must bring good news, General Godfrey.

GODFREY

The king has been captured.

EVERYBODY

King Anthinatheus!

GODFREY

King Anthinatheus, Princess Margaret, and Lord Whetmore.

WALTON

That is indeed good news, Gen. Godfrey. Where is the autocratic hound?

GODFREY

They are all outside under heavy guard.

WALTON

Bring in the vipers.

(Walton takes a big drink while he is gone. Godfrey comes back with the prisoners securely bound. Waldo sneaks back to see what is going on. Walton walks up and slaps the king in the face with his gloves.)

Aha, you autocratic cur, you come back very differently from the way you went.

ANTHINATHEUS

(Trying to break his bonds to hit Walton.)

You low-born wretch. How dare you strike your king?

WALDO

(In a shrill voice.)

You mean ex-king, don't you Anthinatheus?

WALTON

The fool is right, ex-king Anthinatheus. Your days of reigning in Blufustu are over.

ANTHINATHEUS

Curses be on you, you heartless traitor.

WALTON

You are a fine one to talk about heartlessness, you, who crushed the poor with mountainous taxes, and squeezed them in a vise of royal privilege, you, who tried to strangle them with oppression, and sucked their blood like a weasel.

WALDO

You were a bad king, Anthinatheus—a bad, bad king.

MARGARET

Please don't be so hard on poor father. He didn't mean to do wrong.

WALTON

Whether he meant it or not, he did, and must pay the penalty.

ANTHINATHEUS

I demand that you let me go.

WALTON

You are in no position to make demands, ex-King Anthinatheus.

ANTHINATHEUS

What are you going to do with us, you low-born wretch?

WALTON

I was just thinking your case over—Ah, I have it!

(Beckons to the page.)

Get me pen and paper.

ANTHINATHEUS

What are you going to do, I say?

WALTON

There is no hurry, is there?

(The page comes back. John scribbles a note and gives it to him.)

Take this to Lady Carissiva.

ANTHINATHEUS

If you hurt a hair on her head, I'll—

WALTON

Save your breath, Anthinatheus, you are in no position to make threats. You invited her to your entertainments, why can't I to mine?

WHEATMORE

Don't answer him, your majesty. He dares not do anything.

ANTHINATHEUS

If you don't let me go, you'll rue the day when you were born.

WALTON

When I was born doesn't interest me at present. You seem to want to know what was in that note. Well, you are fond of Carissiva, I am, too. I simply asked her to come here tonight to dance for you at my entertainment. Lord Whetmore and his charming fiancée don't seem to like her very much, so they will be locked in solitary cells. The servants will bring in the royal cage, and you shall be caged as the beast you are. I am sure you will enjoy the dance.

(Everybody gasps.)

MARGARET

(Pleading.)

Oh, sir, take the kingdom and everything in it; but spare my father this humiliation. Is there not a spark of goodness in your soul?

WALTON

As for the kingdom, I have it; and remember, he showed no goodness when he was ruling.

MARGARET

Oh take me, my soul and body, anything I have as payment for these two. Only let them go and I will pay the price.

WHETMORE

Oh no, let me pay. Anything I have and can do, I will sacrifice gladly if you let them go.

WALTON

(In a firm manner.)

All of your pleading is of no avail. When we took the capitol, I vowed that I would wipe out the house of Savont; and neither the tears of women, the curses

of men, the wrath of God, nor the wiles of devils shall stop me. So rise up, Princess Margaret, and prepare to die with the coming of tomorrow's sun.

WHETMORE

Let me die in her place. I would willingly die, if you but spare her.

WALTON

She belongs to the house of Savont, and there never will be peace as long as one lives.

ANTHINATHEUS

You low-born cur, I could strike you down and crush your head like the snake you are.

(To the guests.)

Men, I appeal to you to protect your lawful king from the vileness of this devil.

DE QUINCY

Reflect, sir. Don't you think this a little too drastic? You will drive everyone from your banner if you put him in a cage.

WALDO

Caging a bird is like caging a king,
When they both get tired, why they both can sing.

WALTON

I am now king of Blufustu, and I intend to govern as I please. That goes for you, tyrant, De Quincy, and the rest. Is that clear?

(Everybody cowers before him.)

WALDO

I suppose we all understand.

ANTHINATHEUS

Do you mean to say that you intend to subject me to the ignominiousness of a cage in the presence of Carrissiva?

WALTON

I certainly do.

ANTHINATHEUS

I could chew you up as would a tiger!

WALTON

(Taking another drink.)

That's right. Show how much brute there is in you. You will soon be caged.

ANTHINATHEUS

I would rather die than submit to such atrocity.

WALTON

You will die tomorrow at sunrise.

ANTHINATHEUS

I would willingly give half of my after-life in hell to see you undone.

(The devil walks across the room in back of the guests. No one sees him.)

WALTON

(Calling to the guards outside.)

Guards, bring in the royal cage, and take two of these prisoners away.

(The guards come in. With one mighty effort, Anthinatheus breaks his bonds. He gets a silver dagger from the folds of his robe, and brandishes it aloft.)

ANTHINATHEUS

This is one time you are fooled. I would rather die.

(Looking towards heaven.)

Oh, God, let me die!

(He plunges the knife into his breast.)

I die cursing the ribald plebeians who dare to desecrate the palace of the king with the stench of their obnoxious presence.

(He falls to the floor. Margaret runs to him but is unable to do anything because her hands are tied. Walton takes a hasty drink, and bellows to the guards. Some of the guests scream.)

WALTON

Take those two prisoners away!

(Two of the guards drag Margaret out. She is screaming.)

(Another takes out Whetmore. Walton walks over to the dead body of Anthinatheus, and shouts in a kind of drunken glee.)

Go, fool, and fill thy niche in hell!

DE QUINCY

This is going too far, Godfrey. If this drunken fool keeps on, the people will rise up and kill us all.

GODFREY

He is going too far. What is the matter with him? Just a fool drunk with power?

WALTON

(Shouting to the other guards.)

Take his body out and feed it to the vultures of Blufustu.

DE QUINCY

Godfrey, go swing the army to our support. I am going to make some kind of excuse and try to see Carrissa before she comes in. Between the two we ought to work out some plan.

WALTON

(The guards have moved slowly.)

Take him out, I say!

(They obey him quickly.)

DE QUINCY

Think of what you are doing, your majesty. For God's sake don't do that.

WALTON

I am king here, De Quincy, and I mean to be obeyed.

PAGE

The detachment sent by General Godfrey announces the capture of Lord Winter.

WALTON

Have a scaffold erected by tomorrow morning in the capitol square, General Godfrey. Assemble all the prisoners at daybreak.

GODFREY

(Saluting.)

I will go and attend to everything, your majesty.

WALTON

Put them all under heavy guard so none will escape.

GODFREY

Trust me, your majesty.

(He goes out.)

WALTON

I mean to rid the country of every one of those auto-crats.

DE QUINCY

I must ask you to excuse me, your majesty. I want to make sure that the city is adequately policed.

WALTON

Be sure that it is, De Quincy.

(De Quincy goes out.)

PAGE

WALTON

She must meet the same fate.

(Mary Walton comes in. She has on a richer-looking dress, but she is sad-faced, and seems to be haggard.)

Didn't I tell you not to come down tonight, Mary—that I wanted to entertain some guests.

MARY

I know, but the news of your doings have spread through the palace. I came down to ask you to please come to reason, and stop executing these people before it is too late.

WALTON

Be gone, woman, you know not of what you speak.

MARY

(Pleading.)

Come, John, please give up this troubled place with its horrors and bloodshed; and let's go back to our farm in the country and live our simple life. Let's be happy again like the lovers we used to be.

WALTON

Come, woman, don't plague me with your talk!

MARY

You know how happy we were in the green fields, and the stately forests which surrounded our humble home. Humble though it was, it was filled with a love as true as stars. But the few days you have been here and have been king, you seem to have forgotten all about your little farm wife. You stay drunk most of the time, and keep yourself surrounded by frivolous women who care nothing for you except to bring about your downfall. Oh, John, reflect, and let's go back to the country and live a simple life of love!

WALTON

(Getting peeved.)

I have a commission to execute here. I am not going anywhere before it is done. So leave me before I lose my temper.

MARY

John, you never talked like that to me before. For God's sake, let's get away from this place.

WALTON

I told you to leave me.

MARY

(Defiantly.)

I shall not go until I get ready. We have always been willing to listen to each other and give each other advice, and I don't intend to be driven around like a slave now, because it pleases your fancy.

WALTON

You mean to say that you are not going?

MARY

Not until I am ready.

WALTON

Then I must force you.

MARY

You wouldn't dare do that.

WALTON

(Taking a drink.)

I wouldn't eh?

(Calling loudly.)

Guards take her away!

(The guards start towards her.)

MARY

(To the guards.)

Don't you dare put your vile hands on me!
(To Walton.)

You fiend, you cur, the incarnation of everything that is evil! The idea of telling someone to force your wife from where she rightfully belongs. You are no longer my husband, you are the devil, himself!

WALTON

Guards, place her under arrest and in a solitary cell until she learns to hold her tongue.

MARY

You have killed all of the love I ever had for you. Henceforth we meet as strangers.

WALTON

(To the guards.)

Have her executed right away.

ONE OF THE GUESTS

(He is forced to speak.)

Surely your majesty jests. You cannot possibly have her executed.

WALTON

I do not mean to be worried by women even if I have to do like the ruler in the Arabian Nights—marry one every night and have her beheaded the next day.

DE QUINCY

(Coming in just in time to hear his last words.)

Oh, God, what will the end be?

MARY

(Pulling away from the guards.)

Surely you cannot mean that you are going to have your wife executed, John. Please say that you are joking.

WALTON

I am no longer your husband. Take her away, guards!
(*They drag her out.*)

DE QUINCY

(*Saluting.*)

I have made the inspection, your majesty.

WALTON

Good. Have a seat, De Quincy, we can now go on with the dinner and entertainment. Will Godfrey come back?

DE QUINCY

He will be back soon, your majesty. He only had a few more details of the army to look after when I left. Then he will inspect the gallows before he comes in.

WALTON

He must have it ready, for the royalist dogs must die.

PAGE

Lady Carissiva!

WALTON

Tell her to come in.

(*Carissiva comes in. Her dancing costume this time is black and silver.*)

CARISSIVA

(*Bowing before Walton.*)

I am here to do your bidding, King John. But where is the ex-king? Your note requested me to dance before him.

WALTON

I did intend to have the fool here in the royal cage; but he stabbed himself. However, you will favor us with a dance?

CARISSIVA

I am always at your service, King John.

WALTON

Let us have a drink first.

(The waiters fill the glasses.)

Ladies and gentlemen, I gave this party here tonight to celebrate the overthrow of the old autocratic monarchy, and the ushering in of the new government of all the people. You may celebrate any way you like, and as long as you like. You may sing and dance until the singing of tomorrow's birds. But first Lady Carissiva has kindly consented to dance for us.

DE QUINCY

(Whispering.)

Don't forget.

CARISSIVA

Trust me.

(The music starts, and Carissiva commences to dance. She starts slowly at first with many graceful steps, but increases in tempo until she spins like a top. She stops amid a thunder of applause.)

WALTON

Fine! Fine! A handful of gold shall be given you from the royal treasure, Lady Carissiva, and also some choice jewels.

CARISSIVA

(In a meek tone.)

I desire nothing for myself, your majesty. All the happiness I could ever wish for, has been had in dancing before you. Only one favor I would ask of you. I have made some choice wines with my own hands which I would like to present to your guests tonight. I would like to ask you to drink a glass of it, and if it meets with your approval to serve the rest to your guests.

(A waiter brings in a bottle of wine on a tray. He pours out a drink for the king.)

WALTON

(Holding the glass up for a toast.)

With the greatest of pleasure I accept your gift, Lady Carissiva. Here's to the new government, and you!
(He drinks, then collapses.)

I—I am poisoned!

(He falls to the floor.)

(Everybody jumps up with excitement and some start after Carissiva, who jumps behind De Quincy.)

DE QUINCY

(Holding them off and speaking in a sneering tone.)

Yes, you are poisoned, oh foolish man. You shall die a lingering death like the snake you are. You shall writhe in agony.

GODFREY

(Rushing in and shouting.)

The whole army is behind you, De Quincy. We have the palace surrounded.

(A few of the loyal supporters of Walton pick him up and take his groaning body away.)

SOMEONE

To the carriage, and his country cabin before more of the soldiers come in! Go through the hidden passage.

DE QUINCY

(Facing the guests with one foot in his chair and the other on the banquet table.)

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to give your allegiance to a government which will truly look after all the people. No sooner had this fool gotten into power than he made himself a king, and had a scaffold erected to hang all the members of the royal family.

True government cannot live upon the death of its citizens. We shall let the royalists live but the people must rule.

EVERYBODY

(With wild shouts.)

Long live De Quincy! Long live the new government!

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR

(The scene is the same as the first. Walton is brought back into his home by some attendants and supporters. He is groaning and writhing in pain. They place him upon the bed. A doctor examines him, but slowly puts his instruments away.)

ATTENDANT

Is there anything you can do, doctor?

DOCTOR

Nothing.

ATTENDANT

Will he live? Is there no hope?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid not. He was poisoned with the juice of a deadly plant that grows in the southern part of the kingdom. It acts slowly but surely, making the muscles of the stomach contract until they become as hard as cords. Up to now there is no cure known to the medical men of Blufustu. I'm sorry, but those are the facts.

ATTENDANT

Are you sure, doctor?

DOCTOR

Absolutely. I am sorry for the patient, but there is nothing further I can do. So I will bid you good night.
(He goes out.)

WALTON

Oh, God, what happened? Where am I?

WALDO

A soul in misery turns to God,
He will find him under the sod.

ATTENDANT

You are in your cottage by the forest. You were poisoned by your traitorous friend, De Quincy, in the royal palace.

WALTON

(Groaning.)

Oh, yes, I remember. Oh, how my stomach burns! It seems as though I am on fire. Water! Water! Give me some water!

(The attendant goes out and gets a pail of water. He places it on a box near the bed, then gives him a drink.)

ATTENDANT

Here it is.

WALTON

(After gulping the water down.)

Did De Quincy do that to me? Why did he do it? I was always a friend to him.

ATTENDANT

He claimed that you were too autocratic, and that it was best for the country.

WALDO

Many crimes are committed in the name of country.

WALTON

I, too autocratic when I fought for the liberty of the people?

ATTENDANT

He said so.

WALTON

(Groaning.)

Tell me. Am I going to die?

ATTENDANT

I am sure you won't. We are doing everything that we can for you.

WALTON

I must live so I can carry the government safely through this crisis. I am not ready to die. I am the only one who can do it.

WALDO

Man overestimates his importance in the world by thinking that he is the only one that can do some things.

WALTON

Mary! Mary! Where is my wife? She is the only one who can stop these horrible pains.

ATTENDANT

You had her executed. Don't you remember?

WALTON

(Groaning.)

When did it happen?

ATTENDANT

At the beginning of the royal entertainment tonight.

WALTON

That's true. Oh, God, too true! I must have been a maniac, utterly devoid of reason to hurt anyone so fair.

ATTENDANT

You'd better pray. That might give you some consolation.

WALTON

I have tried, but I cannot. I guess it is too late for me to do so.

(A messenger enters in haste.)

MESSENGER

Run for your lives. The army has found out your hiding place and is thundering like mad down the road. Is there no hope for the king?

SUPPORTER

(Whispering.)

None.

MESSENGER

You'd better leave, then, for the general has declared that he will kill everybody he finds with him.

(Everyone leaves hastily.)

WALTON

I am deserted by all in my greatest hour of need.

WALDO

Not everyone, your majesty.

WALTON

You were faithful enough to stick, Waldo. Give me a drink of water.

(He drinks.)

Just to think that I am deserted by everyone but my fool.

WALDO

That's the only reason I'm here.

WALTON

(Groaning.)

Waldo, I wish I could reward you for your loyalty, but I have nothing. And I was to blame for my downfall.

WALDO

We all realize our mistakes too late.

WALTON

I am the fool, Waldo, and you are the wise man. You should have been put in my place.

WALDO

I am a fool and fit only for that. It is hard for most people to realize their limitations.

WALTON

You speak as a sage, Waldo. With every word you make me realize what a fool I have been.

WALDO

You'd better be quiet.

WALTON

(Groaning.)

Give me water, Waldo. My legs feel numb, and my brain reels. But who is that, Waldo?

WALDO

(Looking around.)

I don't see anybody.

(Mary passes through dressed as an angel.)

WALTON

It is Mary. Darling, I did not mean to kill you. Tell me you will forgive me. Come to my arms once more, and I will never hurt you again.

(Mary does not say a word, but walks sorrowfully across the room and out.)

You are right in not speaking to me, Mary. I am only getting punished for what I have done. Oh, how did I do it?

WALDO

Lie quiet.

WALTON

Give me water. My heart is pumping boiling blood through my body. My tongue is scorching and my head is on fire.

WALDO

(Giving him the water.)

Feel better?

WALTON

Only a little. Just a little. No, water only makes it worse.

WALDO

You'd better not drink any more then. Try to be easy.

WALTON

How can I when I am burning up? Give me water, Waldo.

WALDO

No, water only makes it worse. Lie down and be easy.

WALTON

Who is that singing, Wado?

WALDO

I don't hear anyone singing.

WALTON

(Shouting.)

I tell you, fool, that there is someone singing. Listen! It is sweet and enchanting.

WALDO

You'd better try to go to sleep.

WALTON

Ah, angels! Gloriously beautiful, robes as snowy

white as swan's down, and voices so beautiful they make me forget my misery.

(Angels come in from the left. They sing.)

ANGELS

When daylight is slowly shading
To shadows sent from above,
Sin souls that are surely fading
Yearn for the heavenly love.
When evils around beguiled you,
You were warned what price they cost.
Now hope's grey twilight has darkened,
We're sorry your soul is lost.

WALTON

(Groaning.)

Waldo, they say my soul is lost.

WALDO

Your body will be lost if you don't be quiet.

ANGELS

In spurning the path of salvation
For life's soft ways and song.
Your pay is eternal damnation
And hell, the place for the wrong.
With springtime of beauty about you
Your flowers were blighted with frost.
Now hopes of the future have withered,
We're sorry your soul is lost.

(They go out to the right.)

WALTON

They have vanished, Waldo, and with them my hopes.

WALDO

You are dreaming bad dreams, and they are making you nervous.

WALTON

(Pleading pitifully.)

Give me water, Waldo. My eyes are becoming heavy, and my insides seem on fire.

(He drinks. Suddenly he sits bolt upright.)

Waldo, who is that coming into the room?

WALDO

There is no one coming. You can hear nothing but the wind in the forests.

(The door to the right slowly opens, and becomes illuminated by a red light. The devil walks in grinning maliciously.)

WALTON

(Almost jumping out of bed.)

It is the devil! It is the devil!

WALDO

Lie down. You are the only devil in this room.

WALTON

He is there right in the middle of the room. Drive him away.

WALDO

(Making a pretense of driving him away.)

There. He is gone. Now lie down and rest.

WALTON

No. He is still there. Drive him out.

DEVIL

I have come for you to go with me.

WALTON

I can't go! I don't want to go!

DEVIL

But you promised.

WALTON

I have promised nothing. I never said I would go with you.

WALDO

Be still. You are making yourself worse by talking.

DEVIL

You remember when you were only a farmer near the edge of the great forests, and how you wanted to punish the unjust king? You said if I helped you, you would render me a service. Well, I made you king, and now I want my service.

WALTON

I can't give you any service. My insides are burning up.

DEVIL

I want your whole body to burn the same way.

WALTON

Waldo, do you hear that? He wants my whole body to burn. Ageless burning is what I have to pay for the miserable hours of being a king.

DEVIL

Everything in this world is bought with a price.

WALDO

Try to go to sleep.

WALTON

Remember I fought for democracy.

DEVIL

Yes, yes. Of course.

WALTON

I see. I must pay the price.

DEVIL

You are not the only one. Anthinatheus promised half of his after life just to see you undone. I took him at his word. He is there now waiting for you.

WALTON

Where? Where is he?

DEVIL

In hell, of course.

WALTON

Must I go there?

DEVIL

Of course.

WALDO

Lie down and don't throw the cover.

DEVIL

Come, it is time to go.

(He starts towards Walton.)

WALTON

(Yelling.)

Mary! Mary! My beautiful wife, can't you help me?
No, she cannot help me. She is dead.

DEVIL

(Walking to the bed with the pitchfork in his hand.)

I can help you.

WALTON

(Yelling.)

Go away! Go away! Don't stick that pitchfork in me.
Help! Mary! Mary!

(The lights go out. Only the devil is visible as he plunges his pitchfork in the cover. He walks back and smiles at his gruesome work. Then he

goes slowly out of the room, leaving it in darkness. When the lights come on again Waldo has vanished, and Walton finds himself in his peasant clothes tangled in the cover.)

MARY

(Rushing in. She is dressed in her peasant clothes.)

Did you call, John?

(Looking at the tangled cover.)

Why, what happened?

WALTON

(Getting up and feeling her arms as if unable to believe his eyes.)

Is this really you, Mary?

MARY

(Mystified.)

What is the matter? You know this is nobody else.

WALTON

(With relief.)

Thank God it is not so. I just had a horrible dream, Mary—a horrible dream. I thought I was king of Blufustu, and had the king assassinated, and the worst part about it was I thought I had you assassinated, too.

(Putting his arms around her.)

Mary, you don't know how glad I am that it was only a dream. I shall never talk about revenge against the king as long as I live.

MARY

While you were asleep his messengers came and returned your money. In addition they brought fifty pieces of silver with the message that you can get your old commission in the army. I didn't wake you be-

cause you seemed to be sleeping so soundly. So you see, the king is good after all.

WALTON

He is, indeed, Mary. But the best person in the world is my own sweet wife.

(He kisses her gently.)

CURTAIN

HEWERS OF WOOD

Let them live: but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation.

JOSHUA 9-21st.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HAJAN
NABOB
THE ANGEL
THE DEVIL
THE MULTITUDE

HEWERS OF WOOD

Off on the borderland lies a land of unknown location. In this dim, imaginary country which lies somewhere between the real and unreal, the front of a chapel—a blur of stone with many Gothic trimmings, rises with all its medieval splendor from an earth of glistening sand. In the middle of the great arch, high above the earth, is a huge multi-colored stained glass window which opens upon a balcony.

On the ground, to the right and left stand the grotesque figures of two pagan gods, grinning in all their hideous ugliness. A little farther to the right, and a little nearer front is an old-fashioned well with a handle that winds the pail from the depths below. On the ground and all around are huge logs; some on benches are glistening white from trimming, while the others appear rough and sombre looking.

The people that inhabit this strange land are Negroes, with shining black bodies. The men have skins of various animals draped around the middle of their bodies, leaving the rest bare. They are armed with axes and drawing knives, and are busy hewing the great beams into shape.

The women are dressed in long, sweeping skirts that are lifted as they step over the logs showing their bare feet and legs. They file to the well, fill their pails, and carry them around to the rear to make mortar for the stones.

The whole scene is bathed in a twilight grey and is designed to give us no particular place at no particular time. It is mainly ancient, however; and gives us, not a realistic picture, but rather that bizarre combination of Oriental and African that comes to us as a general impression after reading many books, or through the

shadowy haze of a dream. The general weariness which envelops these dark toilers shows that they have been at their tasks for centuries just as the doomed ones in Grecian mythology.

HAJAN

(Laying aside his axe.)

Come, chilluns, it is time to pray.

NABOB

(In a manner of resigned disgust.)

Whut's de use?

HAJAN

(Reverently.)

We mus' pray tuh Gawd, ef we ever expect fuh Him tuh release us from dis misery.

NABOB

But we's been praying and praying, and ain't never got nowhar yit.

HAJAN

(Casting his eye upward to the grey vault above, and speaking very reverently.)

We mus' not lose courage, brothers and sisters. We mus' still keep our faith.

NABOB

It is hard tuh keep on praying, and at de same time realize dat yuh is bound heah forever and ever tuh build dis church so white folks kin come and wurship de same Gawd we does.

HAJAN

Hush yo mouf, Brother. Yuh'll blasapheme dereckly.

NABOB

I ain't blasapheming. I jes' has ma doubts dat's all.
(There is silence for awhile, and nothing is

heard in this lonely land save the dull tread of the women, the creak of the well chain, and the dull chip, chip of the axes.)

HAJAN

(Shouting.)

Hear ye! Hear ye! Brothers and Sisters!

MULTITUDE

(Ceasing their work and crying out with the agony of many stunted souls.)

Hear! Hear!

HAJAN

It is now time fuh us tuh pray tuh God fuh our deliverence.

MULTITUDE

Yes, let us pray.

(They drop their axes and pails and kneel down with reverent awe, and bow their heads until they touch the soft, white sand. Hajan, apart from the rest, clasps his hands and bends his head. His voice rolls out in a deep bass, rumbling through the void of the vast unknown like deep thunder.)

HAJAN

(In a moaning voice.)

Oh, Gawd, on our bended knees we axe yuh tuh heah our prayers.

(The multitude takes up the moaning, and re-echoes it in a wailing rhythm like the death chant of superstitious savages.)

MULTITUDE

Lawd, heah our prayers!

HAJAN

Oh Lawd, on our bended knees, off in dis barren land

dat knows no night, and knows no day, we axe yuh tuh heah our prayers.

MULTITUDE

Heah our prayers, good Lawd.

HAJAN

O-o-o-h, Gawd, we axe yuh how long befo' our task will be done.

MULTITUDE

How long, oh Gawd, how long?

(There is a rumbling sound like the rolling of empty barrels. A hushed awe comes over the people.)

HAJAN

Gawd is gitting ready tuh speak tuh us.

(The noise increases, and the restrained awe of the people is increased to terror and wild fear. The rumbling ends in a piercing clap of thunder as if the earth itself is being destroyed.)

HAJAN

(In a trembling voice.)

Speak, Lawd, fuh yo' chilluns heah.

(The stained glass window in the center of the chapel arch opens with a creaking sound. The devil steps upon the balcony surrounded by a halo of red. He grins maliciously as he gazes upon the huddled forms trembling with terror below. There is a hushed silence as if submitting to the judgment of God.)

DEVIL

Listen, ye children of Ethiopia.

MULTITUDE

(Moaning.)

We is listening, Lawd.

DEVIL

I made you black in order for you to wander forth in the world despised of all men. They will look upon thy dark skin and curse and revile you in my name.

MULTITUDE

Have mercy, Lawd.

DEVIL

Thou wast made to be the hewers of wood and drawers of water for other men, to build stately churches that they might come and worship and sing praises to my name; for verily thou art the scum of the earth because thy skin is black like midnight.

MULTITUDE

(In an agonizing moan.)

Have mercy, Lawd! Have mercy!

DEVIL

If thou art not satisfied with thy lot, I'll utterly destroy thee—wipe thy form from off the earth in order that room might be made for men of lighter colors.

(When he finishes these words there is a cataclysmic upheaval of elemental forces. A blinding flash of lightning whizzes from the depth of the infinite void. Deafening rolls of thunder follow, while tongues of flame leap up around the edges of the vast vault of grey, dyeing everything a rosy red.)

MULTITUDE

(In terror.)

Lawd, spare us! Lawd, spare us!

DEVIL

(Commandingly.)

Get thee back to thy tasks or the last semblance of thy dark forms shall be consumed in the fire of my wrath.

Woe be unto you if my passion is aroused, and I hurl down the thunderbolts of anger upon you.

(Saying this he disappears within the church, banging the stained glass window behind him. The people, terror-stricken, spring up and return to their work quickly. Once more the dull chip, chip of the axes is heard, and the creak of the well chain, accompanied by the muffled sobs of women trudging wearily across the desert sand. The red flames die down around the rims of the world, and the scene once more becomes shrouded in a dull grey.)

HAJAN

(In a suppressed, grief-stricken tone as if crying inwardly.)

Gawd has spoken.

NABOB

(Silence hangs like a pall upon the scene, save the chip, chip of the axes, and the creak of the well chain in the well. Nabob speaks as if impelled by an irresistible force to break the awful monotony of the cosmic hush.)

I don't believe dat was Gawd nohow.

HAJAN

(Looking at him with amazement.)

Be careful what yuh says, brother, or yuh'll git us all destroyed by yo' blaspheming.

NABOB

(Raising his voice.)

I kain't hep it. I don't believe Gawd is jes' by making us suffer lak dis.

(The dull chip of the axes ceases, and women stop winding their way to the well. A deep pause passes over the multitude as if these

words of blasphemy seem to take on an unyielding force.)

HAJAN

Brother, cease yo' wild talk. Gawd done spoke.

MULTITUDE

(Giving him support.)

Yes, Gawd done spoke.

NABOB

(Defiantly.)

I ain't ceasing nothing. I don't believe He is de right Gawd nohow; and I ain't gwine tuh wurship him no mo.

(There is a ripple of fear that runs through the multitude like wind in a wheat field.)

HAJAN

(Pleading.)

Brother, please don't git us destroyed by yo' blasphemy.

NABOB

We's already destroyed. Ef dat was Gawd, he ain't jes', and I'm gwine tuh wurship another one.

(The multitude trembles in frantic fear. Nabob turns to the idol on the left. Terrible and formidable it looms up with its wide mouth yawning in the mist of grey; but to the heretic it seems that a halo of gold shines around its head.)

HAJAN

Let's go back tuh wurk and let date nigger go and eradicate hissef.

NABOB

(Turning around and pleading to the multitude.)

I entreat yuh, brothers and sisters, tuh turn wid me and wurship de true Gawd.

HAJAN

Naw suh. We's got our souls tuh look out for.

NABOB

(Pleading with the multitude.)

Yo' Gawd done already doomed yuh tuh wurk at dese tasks fuh ever and ever; and yuh knows how long dat is. I'se axing yuh tuh turn wid me and wurship de true Gawd, and be freed frum all dis bondage.

HAJAN

Ef we be meek and penitent, Gawd mout fugive our sins.

NABOB

Dat's it, he mout and he moutn't. We's give him his chance, and I'se axing yuh tuh turn wid me and give somebody else a chance.

HAJAN

(To the multitude.)

We'd better go on tuh our tasks, chilluns. Gawd will soften His heart when he sees we is penitent.

(The multitude obeys. Once more the dull chip, chip of the axes is heard, and the creak of the well chain in the well. Nabob kneels before the grinning idol and his voice is heard above the other noise with the agonizing cry of a soul that feels itself lost in a great spiritual struggle.)

NABOB

Oh, Gawd of Ethiopia, will yuh listen tuh ma prayers?

(When he utters these words, a great darkness creeps over the misty void like nightfall after twilight. The multitude ceases its work and

falls down with abject terror, appearing like ghostly silhouettes on the sand. Above the moans of terror the voice of Hajan rises in supplication.)

HAJAN

Oh, Gawd, we need yuh now lak we never needed yuh befo. Don't fusake us in dis hour of need, fuh Jesus' sake.

NABOB

O Gawd of Ethiopia, I pray yuh tuh delived us from our bondage.

(From somewhere in the chapel comes a piercing cry like the death roar of a gigantic beast. The eyes of the idol turn to brilliant spots of green. Huge puffs of smoke come from its dilated nostrils, while from its mouth roll great volumes of flame.)

MULTITUDE

(Moaning in terror.)

Have mercy, Lawd!

NABOB

Deliver us, good Lawd, deliver us.

(A whizz of lightning, followed by a huge burst of thunder, comes from the depth of the vast unknown. Nabob disappears in a cloud of flame.)

MULTITUDE

(Moaning.)

Have mercy, Lawd! Have mercy!

(The darkness melts again into twilight. Far out the moon comes up on the rim of the world and rests on the edge of the desert, bathing everything around with a silvery splendor. There is a creaking sound and the stained glass

window of the church opens gently. Out steps the Angel of God draped in a flowing robe of snow-white, and with feathered wings as soft and white as the yielding down of a white bird; and when she speaks, her voice is sweet and musical like tinkling chimes heard far off across snow-covered fields on Christmas eve.)

ANGEL

Listen, ye children of Ethiopia.

MULTITUDE

We is list'ning, Lawd.

ANGEL

Ye have been through the waters of trial, even as Job, the servant of the Lord, did.

MULTITUDE

We is dat, Lawd.

ANGEL

In spite of your trials and tribulations placed upon you by the devil, only one deserted the forces of what you believed the true God.

MULTITUDE

Amen! Amen!

ANGEL

Sometimes it is necessary for the innocent to suffer as a means of testing the true faith. Your trials are now at an end. God has heard your prayers, and now sets you free—free to wander forth in the world and take your rightful place with other men in their glorification of God.

(The angel disappears behind the closed doors of the church. The multitude breaks into an ecstasy of wild joy. Far out on the fringe of things the full moon comes up and rises higher and higher, outlining the whirling silhouettes

with pearly splendor as they dance and dance, intoxicated with the joy of being free. Finally they all join their voices in an anthem of praise.)

MULTITUDE

When I was in trouble, I bowed on my knees,
 When I was in trouble, I bowed on my knees,
 When I was in trouble, I bowed on my knees,
 And God done set me free.

God done set me free,
 God done set me free,
 Oh I prayed to my God up above in the sky
 And He done set me free.
 Oh, He done set me free,
 Yes, He done set me free.
 Oh I prayed to my God up above in the sky
 And He done set me free.

When all hope was gone, I prayed to my God,
 When all hope was gone, I prayed to my God,
 When all hope was gone, I prayed to my God,
 And He done set me free.

CHORUS

Now I'll believe in God till I die,
 Now I'll believe in God till I die,
 Now I'll believe in God till I die,
 'Cause He done set me free.

CHORUS

THE END

SHADES AND SHADOWS

*Imagination frames events unknown,
In wild, fantastic shapes of hideous ruin,
And what it fears creates.*

HANNAH MOORE,
"Belshazzar."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RUSSELL WENTWORTH
REGINALD KELLEY
HELEN ROSS
ANDREW DUNCAN
DR. WATKINS
SAM
MR. ROSS

SHADES AND SHADOWS

A ONE ACT TRAGEDY

In the suburbs of a certain city is a "House of Mystery, so-called because the inhabitants for many years have lived to themselves. They never mix with the neighbors, and are always referred to as "those strange people."

The opening curtain shows the living room in this house. It is very richly furnished, and shows that the people who live there are wealthy. A door down-stage to the left leads to the outside. What would have been the left corner is circled into an arch forming a bay window. There is one large window and two small ones. They are hung with yellow and blue draperies. It is raining without.

In the center are two French doors which lead into the dining room. There is an octagonal corner at the right, through which is a door. Down-stage on the right is a fireplace. There is an expensive rug on the floor. A baby grand piano is on the left side, while near the fireplace is a divan. A bookcase filled with books is placed between the bay window and the French doors.

There is a table in the center on which is a lamp with a pink and blue shade. There is a floor lamp beside the divan and one beside the piano. The walls are blue and decorated with rich tapestries. Everything is in perfect order, but there is a weird atmosphere about the whole place because of the semi-darkness and the shadows cast by the one lighted lamp on the center table.

Reginald Kelley, called "Reggie" for short, is sitting at this table writing as if his life depended upon the results. He is serious, and is of the melancholy type. He is the kind of person that gets so completely absorbed in something that everything else is excluded. He is very irritable when one talks to him while in this mood. After finishing a certain amount, he reads it over hastily, and goes to the door on the right and calls excitedly.

REGGIE

Father! Father!

WENTWORTH

(Off stage.)

Yes, son.

REGGIE

Come here. I want you to listen to this.

(Mr. Wentworth comes in. He is a middle-aged man with a sharp nose and hawk-like eyes. There is a furtive look about him. In all his mannerisms and speech, there seems to be something deceptive behind them.)

WENTWORTH

Another good idea, I suppose.

REGGIE

I'll let you say that after I finish reading. You know that nothing I ever write seems good to me.

WENTWORTH

(Sitting on the divan and lighting a cigar.)

Everybody who writes feels the same way.

REGGIE

(Sitting down in the same chair, and holding the paper so the light will fall on it.)

I suppose I should have taken more time before I

asked you to hear it. It suddenly came to me while I was sitting here.

WENTWORTH

(Blowing out a cloud of smoke.)

Sometimes the spontaneous things are the best. Well, anyway, let's hear it.

REGGIE

All right. Here goes.

(Reading.)

For ages, and ages, it seemed, I wandered through the abysmal darkness of the tropical forest. Every kind of imaginable horror assailed me. My throat was dry and parched, and my hair constantly stood on end. When it seemed as though I would drop from sheer exhaustion, I stumbled upon a small clearing. The blood-red sun just coming up through the tangled labyrinth rolled back the oppressive darkness in huge grey streams. I raised my eyes to heaven to thank God for the coming daylight, when I was interrupted by a dull noise. Looking down—Oh horrors! There was a battalion of dog ticks crawling towards me with bodies as large as cocoanuts.

WENTWORTH

Marvellous! Marvellous! That is a great piece of imaginative writing. I see them as plain as day: "Dog ticks as large as cocoanuts."

REGGIE

Do you think that is an effective climax?

WENTWORTH

(Holding his cigar in his fingers and blowing out a cloud of smoke.)

That is one of the most effective things I've ever heard. Just work up to it with the appropriate details and you will have a great story.

REGGIE

(In a meditative mood.)

Sometimes I despair of ever writing a good story.

WENTWORTH

If you do as I say, you'll become the greatest short story writer in America.

REGGIE

I hope so.

WENTWORTH

(Breaking in.)

I know so. I may not be anything but a business man, but I have read all the great masters. You can bet your life that I know talent when I see it.

REGGIE

(Turning to him.)

But I can't see why you always insist upon my writing weird and imaginative things.

WENTWORTH

I have explained that to you often enough. I do so because the greatest field in America for the short story writer is the field of imagination. Too many hacks are writing these drab, dull, painfully realistic stories of factory, farm, and tenant life. People are getting tired of them. There is no future in that, people want to weep and shudder some more. Goodness knows they haven't done so in a long time.

REGGIE

(Half pleading.)

I know, but sometimes I'd like to do some sketches of real folks.

WENTWORTH

(With resignation.)

Well, do as you like, but I've told you. People experi-

ence enough hardship in real life without reading books and going to shows to see it. My advice to you is the same as I would give to any young man with talent: let your mind wander out into the shades and shadows—the strange, exotic, and mysterious world of the imagination—and create there an absorbing story around the places and figures of your own fancy.

REGGIE

You sound right enough.

WENTWORTH

(In a positive manner.)

I know I'm right. Look at Poe. He chose the narrow field of the grotesque and terrible, but he is one of the greatest writers that America has ever produced. What America needs now is a second Poe. Except for him, you have a virgin territory in which to work.

REGGIE

(With the screwed-up determination of a weak will.)

I'm going to work, too. I'm going to be a second Poe. I'm going to create my own strange world of the mysterious.

WENTWORTH

That's the way I like to hear you talk. I'm not your real father, only your stepfather, but I promised your mother before she died that I would look after you the same as if you were my own son. You've got talent, and I'm going to give America the benefit of it, if you'll listen to me and work.

REGGIE

(Shouting with a kind of hysteria.)

I'm going to work, work, work!

WENTWORTH

(Smiling in a quizzical fashion.)

Just to show you how interested I am in your work, I have invited an editor here tonight to look over your stories.

REGGIE

(Nervously excited.)

Who is he? Who is he?

WENTWORTH

He is the editor of "Weird Stories."

REGGIE

(Disappointed.)

Oh, I don't want to have my stories published in that cheap magazine.

WENTWORTH

(Consolingly.)

It wouldn't hurt to have one or two published in it. Anyway, what I want is his opinion of your work.

REGGIE

(Getting enthusiastic again.)

Which ones are you going to show him?

WENTWORTH

(Screwing his cigar in the tray to get rid of the ashes.)

Oh, I suppose "The Galloping Ghost," "Confessions of a Maniac," and a couple of others.

REGGIE

Show him "The Dead Soul Returns."

WENTWORTH

All right, if you wish.

REGGIE

I wish I had this one finished. I'm going to call it "The Crazy Dawn."

WENTWORTH

That's a good title.

REGGIE

It's going to be good. Just watch and see if it isn't.

WENTWORTH

I bet it will be good, too. By the way, are the manuscripts of those others in the bookcase?

REGGIE

I'll get them for you.

(He goes to the bookcase and gets a sheaf of manuscripts.)

Here they are.

(The bell rings.)

WENTWORTH

(Rising.)

I guess that is the editor now. You go upstairs and work on that idea while it is hot. I'll talk to him before I call you to meet him.

REGGIE

All right. I am in the mood for working.

WENTWORTH

By the way, leave your diary. He would be interested in seeing the kind of notes you keep.

REGGIE

(Taking a black notebook from his pocket.)

Here it is.

(Gives it to him.)

I'll now make my exit.

(Reggie goes out of the door to the right. Wentworth looks where he disappeared for awhile. He smiles quizzically, then speaks in a hollow deep voice, sinister in its implication.)

WENTWORTH

If things go well, you'll make a long, long exit to-night, my boy—a long, long exit.

(The bell rings again with more force. He hurries to the window and pulls down the shades. Then he goes to the left to answer the doorbell. While outside,)

Come in.

HELEN

(Off stage.)

How do you do, Mr. Wentworth?

WENTWORTH

Good evening, Helen.

(He comes in followed by Helen and Andrew Duncan and plainly shows his disappointment. Helen is a young vivacious creature. She is gay and unsophisticated, a sharp contrast to the sombre atmosphere of the place. She is the type of girl that might easily earn the nickname of "baby face")

(Andrew Duncan is a man who might be in his late thirties. He is of medium height and somewhat stocky. They both have on raincoats. When they take these off, their dress shows correct taste.)

HELEN

Mr. Wentworth, I would like to have you know Mr. Duncan.

(They both shake hands in acknowledgment.)

WENTWORTH

I'll take your raincoats. You must pardon me, Mr. Duncan, but our butler leaves very early since we rarely have visitors.

(He takes their raincoats into the hall to the left. When he comes back—)

HELEN

Mr. Duncan is a—what do you call it?—one of the young literati. He would like to meet Reggie.

WENTWORTH

(To Helen.)

I suppose he isn't the only one.

DUNCAN

I'll answer for her. No, because she has been telling me too much about him. That's why I'm so anxious to meet him.

WENTWORTH

All right. I'll get him for you.

(He goes out the door to the right. He looks back at them with an angry scowl, and clenches his hands in disappointment.)

HELEN

(In a baby-like tone.)

Why are you so anxious to meet Reggie, Andy?

DUNCAN

Just heard he was a kind of interesting chap, that's all. You know amateur writers always like to meet someone that is equally enthusiastic. He writes well, doesn't he?

HELEN

Oh, I suppose so. I don't like the things he writes, though. They are too morbid and grotesque. I wish he would write something light and funny sometimes.
(Duncan's eyes are constantly roving around the room as if searching for something. Helen does not notice this, however.)

DUNCAN

He is somewhat serious, isn't he?

HELEN

Very. Why he is as nervous as a woman sometimes, and he does some of the queerest things.

DUNCAN

His mother has been dead a long time?

HELEN

About five years. His father has been dead a long time, too. Mr. Wentworth is just his stepfather.

DUNCAN

(Looking around the room.)

They have a beautiful home. They are quite wealthy, aren't they?

HELEN

Mr. Wentworth isn't, as far as I know. Reggie's mother was, and she left everything to him; but he won't get it until December when he is twenty-one.

DUNCAN

Has he any other relatives?

HELEN

Not that he knows. But he'll have me. You know Reggie and I are engaged, don't you?

DUNCAN

If anything happens to him now, Mr. Wentworth would get all the money, wouldn't he?

HELEN

You know I was thinking about that the other day. I don't think he likes it because Reggie and I are engaged. He doesn't say anything, but he has the funniest kind of smile all the time. Did you notice how he smiled when we came in?

DUNCAN

No, I didn't notice it.

HELEN

I was quite small, but I remember people said a lot of things about his marrying Mrs. Kelley for her money eight years ago. But he always treated her all right.

DUNCAN

You know quite a bit, don't you?

HELEN

Well, you see we live next door. Very few people come here. I never came myself until Reggie and I became engaged.

DUNCAN

Well, as long as they got along all right, there is no kick coming.

HELEN

I guess you think I am an awful gossip, don't you?

DUNCAN

No, I think you are an interesting conversationalist. What you said, you said in passing, that's all.

HELEN

(Looking around.)

I wonder where Reggie is?

DUNCAN

Perhaps he isn't coming down.

HELEN

He'd better.

(Reggie comes in from the right. He shows signs of being irritable from being disturbed.)

REGGIE

Good evening! I'm sorry that I kept you waiting, but I was in the middle of a paragraph that I wanted to finish while it was fresh in my mind.

HELEN

(Running to him and attempting to kiss him.)

Hello, Reggie!

(He pushes her arm down without kissing her. She is peeved for a second.)

Reggie, this is Mr. Andrew Duncan who has been wanting to meet you for some time.

REGGIE

(In a disgruntled manner.)

How do you do?

DUNCAN

How do you do, Mr. Kelley?

HELEN

I met Andy at the party a month ago that I tried to get you to take me to, Reggie. I told him I wanted him to meet you. Well, he caught me down-town in the rain, and brought me home in his car. He insisted on meeting you tonight.

DUNCAN

Well, I'm glad I caught you in the rain. I very seldom get out this way, Mr. Kelley.

HELEN

Is the story you are working on now as morbid as the others, Reggie?

REGGIE

(Dropping into the chair by the center table and not paying much attention to them.)

Well, I would call it imaginative.

DUNCAN

(They—Duncan and Helen—sit on the divan when they see that Reggie isn't going to ask them to sit down.)

I heard that you are very interested in writing, Mr. Kelley. That is why I wanted to meet you.

REGGIE

(Grinning foolishly.)

Well, I try to do a little scratching sometimes.

HELEN

Nonsense, Reg-gie. You know your stories are good, only they are so morbid.

REGGIE

(A little irritated.)

I would call them imaginative.

DUNCAN

(Eyes roving around the room to give the lie to what he is saying.)

A small group of us on the south side has organized a writing club. We call ourselves the "Pen Pushers." I was wondering if you would like to come over and read some of your stories to us one night, Mr. Kelley.

REGGIE

(Still grinning foolishly.)

I—I am afraid they are not good enough.

HELEN

You know they're good enough, Reggie. You're just modest.

(As an after-thought.)

They are quite morbid, though.

REGGIE

I told you imaginative.

DUNCAN

Don't worry about its not being good enough, Mr. Kelley. It can't be any worse than some of the stuff we write.

(Rising and walking behind the divan to a point mid-distance between Helen and Reggie.)

Will you come over?

REGGIE

I guess I will sometime.

DUNCAN

(Lighting a cigarette and putting the case on the table.)

That's good. We don't mind if they're weird. A good ghost story would go well for a change.

REGGIE

(Repeating in a parrot-like way the argument of his stepfather.)

You see, I think the field of imagination is the greatest field for the short story writer.

DUNCAN

(Looking around the room, and blowing out a cloud of smoke.)

I dare say.

(He looks mysteriously to the right and left. Then he saunters casually towards the French doors in the back.)

HELEN

But who is going to read ghost stories now, Reggie? I thought—

REGGIE

Anybody will, if they're well done.

(Duncan looks around to see if they're looking. Then he opens the doors and takes a hasty look inside. He then closes them.)

HELEN

I thought they were old-fashioned.

REGGIE

Nothing is old-fashioned in the hands of a genius.

HELEN

(Looking at him in a coquettish manner.)

Oh, I see.

DUNCAN

(Moving a chair and placing it near the doors.)

You have a beautiful home here, Mr. Kelley. I like these tapestries.

REGGIE

(Mumbling.)

Thank you.

HELEN

I think they're very pretty, too. I always did like tapestries.

DUNCAN

(Taking out his cigarette case and putting it on the table.)

I guess I'll be going now. I am going to let you know when the next meeting of "The Pen Pushers" is.

REGGIE

(Rising absent-mindedly.)

Thank you.

DUNCAN

And don't fail us.

REGGIE

I won't.

DUNCAN

You aren't going now, are you, Helen?

HELEN

(Looking a little embarrassed.)

Well you see—you see, I only live next door.

DUNCAN

That's all right. I'll be going, then.

HELEN

I'll get your raincoat for you.

(They go out in the hall to the left. Reggie flops down in the chair again. He grins foolishly as if proud of the invitation. Coming in,)

You look sick, Reggie. Is anything the matter with you?

REGGIE

I'm a little nervous, perhaps. I suppose it is partly because of the rain, and partly because of the story I'm writing. I always get excited when an idea grips me.

HELEN

I wish you wouldn't write such impossible stories. They seem to make you so serious and blue all the time.

REGGIE

Impossible or not, I'm going to write about what I want to. You are always referring in a sarcastic way to what I write. I want you to stop it.

HELEN

I didn't mean any harm, Reggie. You know I didn't.
(Bell rings.)

REGGIE

See who that is.

HELEN

(Off stage.)

Oh, it's you.

DUNCAN

Yes. I left my cigarette case.

REGGIE

Here it is on the table.

DUNCAN

(Taking it.)

Thank you.

REGGIE

I'm sorry that I am feeling too miserable tonight to entertain you, Mr. Duncan. You must come again sometime.

DUNCAN

I'm not looking for entertainment tonight. I hope to get that when you read your stories.

REGGIE

You may be just as disappointed then.

DUNCAN

I know better than that. Well, I'll say good-night once more.

BOTH

Good-night.

*(Duncan casts a significant glance as he leaves.
Mr. Wentworth comes in the door to the right.)*

WENTWORTH

I heard the door bell ring. Was it someone to see me, Reggie?

REGGIE

No. That was Mr. Duncan. He forgot his cigarette case.

WENTWORTH

Oh, I see. Call me if anyone comes.

REGGIE

All right.

(Wentworth goes out showing his disappointment again. Reggie cups his chin in his hands and doesn't pay any attention to Helen. He is evidently thinking.)

HELEN

(Looking at him intently.)

You know, Reggie, I believe you are sick.

REGGIE

I told you I'm not sick, just nervous.

HELEN

Don't you think you had better go with me to the doctor tomorrow?

REGGIE

(Getting irritable.)

I'm not sick, I tell you.

HELEN

(Not knowing when to stop.)

But will you go with me anyway?

REGGIE

(Raising his voice.)

I'm not going. Do you hear? I'm not going!

HELEN

Why, Reggie!

REGGIE

Why nothing. I'm not going, that's all.

HELEN

I didn't think you would talk to me like that, Reggie. You look a little pale, and I just thought I would go with you to the doctor if you wanted me.

REGGIE

(Going to pieces. Shouting.)

I told you I wasn't going. So get out! Get out!

HELEN

(Rising. Showing her feelings are hurt.)

You can drive me out, if you want to. You know I love you just the same. Tomorrow when you feel better, I'm coming back to see about you.

REGGIE

(Very nervous.)

Yes, yes. Come back tomorrow. Anytime, but please go now. I'm just as nervous as I can be.

HELEN

Good-night, sweet heart.

(She walks with hurt dignity out of the room. Reggie runs his fingers through his hair. He is visibly agitated. Wentworth comes in.)

WENTWORTH

What is the matter, Reggie?

REGGIE

Oh, she got on my nerves, that's all.

WENTWORTH

(Soothingly.)

Calm yourself. Don't holler at her like that. Remember she is going to be your wife.

REGGIE

I guess I was rude. But I hate to be bothered when I'm working. She ought to have known better than to stay so long.

(The bell rings.)

WENTWORTH

I suppose that is the editor at last. You run upstairs

and calm yourself by writing. I want you to be calm when you meet him.

REGGIE

(Going out.)

I guess writing is about the only thing that can calm me now.

WENTWORTH

(Reggie leaves the door half open. Wentworth tips across and makes sure he has gone. Then he shuts it tight with a sinister implication.)

I hope I'm not mistaken about your exit this time. You'll have plenty of time for writing.

(Wentworth goes to the door. The French doors open. A large arm reaches around and drops something black behind the chair. Nothing is seen but the darkness and the arm.)

WATKINS

(Off stage.)

Hello, Wentworth!

WENTWORTH

Come right in, doctor.

WATKINS

(He is a man of medium height. He has a van dyke beard. His whole appearance and demeanor suggests that of a doctor. He sits by the table, and Wentworth on the divan.)

I suppose I'm a little late, Wentworth; but a foolish nurse detained me at the sanitarium just as I was coming out.

WENTWORTH

It is good you were late.

WATKINS

What do you mean?

WENTWORTH

I've got more evidence.

WATKINS

That's good. What is it?

WENTWORTH

(Looking around cautiously.)

His sweetheart was here, and he drove her away. He shouted: "Get out! Get out!"

WATKINS

That couldn't have been better if we had planned it ourselves. She would testify in an emergency; but we have got to get more tangible evidence than the fact that he writes morbid stories and drove his sweetheart from the house.

WENTWORTH

(Pulling Reggie's diary from his pocket.)

WENTWORTH

Trust me for that. Just listen to this: June 26. "The moon was clear and beautiful as I walked by the dank woodland. Suddenly over the moon-kissed hills came a voice. Clear and beautiful, it was, like that of an angel. My head swam. I was intoxicated with joy, for the voice was the voice of my mother."

WATKINS

That isn't very compromising.

WENTWORTH

It is, though. You know I told you his mother has been dead five years.

WATKINS

That makes a difference. Talking to the dead, eh?

WENTWORTH

Listen to this. "July 20. This thing called sense is an alternating current like electricity. It is positive and negative, and comes and goes like wild geese. Sometimes I look upon the face of people I've known all my life, and somehow the connection snaps. I am propelled back into an unknown land of mystery, probably where I was before I was born. Instead of the face of a friend, I find myself looking into the hairy face of a gibbering cave man."

WATKINS

So the connection snaps sometimes! Now we're getting real evidence.

WENTWORTH

"August 1. Yesterday I gazed up at the blue vault of heaven from a shady spot under the umbrella tree. It was half covered with fleecy clouds that writhed into the hideous shapes of historic monsters. Suddenly bursting through the veil, in a pæan of song, came a host of angels. They flew around the circle of the horizon, their snow-white wings glist'ning in the stray beams of the sun. Angels have always sung to me. I can hear their beautiful songs as I write."

WATKINS

Sing on, little angels, sing on. The thing that amazes me is why he wrote such things!

WENTWORTH

Oh, that's easy. Just talk to a person who is interested in the so-called cultural art of literature about his ability, and he will believe anything you say. I simply told him that a person with his imaginative mind ought to keep a diary. That would help him to recall his spontaneous thoughts.

WATKINS

How did you get him to write it down in the first person?

WENTWORTH

That was easy, too. All I did was to point out the fact that all the great mystery stories were written in the first person.

WATKINS

(Knocking his cigar ashes in the tray.)

The tendency towards seclusion, the morbid stories, the driving out of his fiancée, and that diary would convince any set of doctors, if they didn't examine him too closely.

WENTWORTH

I think the evidence is conclusive enough.

WATKINS

When do you want me to take him away?

WENTWORTH

Tonight would be a good time, since it follows right after the affair with his fiancée. Can you arrange it tonight?

WATKINS

I think so. Sam, the chauffeur, drove me down in the wagon. He often helps me to take in cases.

WENTWORTH

That's good.

WATKINS

I guess we'd better do it tonight all right.

(Rising.)

Good. You go and call the chauffeur, and I'll get Reggie down.

WATKINS

(Rising.)

Just a minute. When do I get the money?

WENTWORTH

(Taking out cash)

I'll give you one-third now, another third when he is declared insane, and another third when he is put out of the way altogether.

WATKINS

That suits me.

WENTWORTH

Here you are—fifteen thousand dollars.

WATKINS

All right, I'll go get Sam.

(Exits.)

(Wentworth goes out to the right. Soon Watkins and Sam come in. Sam is a big, tough-looking Negro. He is dressed in a chauffeur's uniform.)

SAM

Is dis a big man, Doc?

WATKINS

No, he isn't so large. I don't expect any trouble, but you have been with me enough to know that they might get desperate any time.

SAM

Let him git desperate.

(Pulling a big club from his hip pocket.)

I knows how to handle sich cases.

WATKINS

I know you do. If you have to hit him, hit hard.

SAM

Don't worry, Doc. He's gwine back in dat wagon tonight.

(Wentworth comes back, followed by Reggie.)

WENTWORTH

This is the gentleman I was telling you about, Reggie.

REGGIE

(Enthusiastically.)

I'm glad to meet the editor of "Weird Stories." Did you like any of my stories?

(Sam looks at him with amazement. He puts his thumb to his head and wiggles his other fingers.)

WATKINS

Yes, I liked them. They are very interesting stories—very interesting.

REGGIE

(Uneasily.)

I'm glad you liked them. Did you think enough of them to publish them?

(Sam wiggles his fingers again.)

Yes, I'll publish several. I expect the reading public to be greatly interested in them, too.

REGGIE

(Happily.)

Do you think so?

WATKINS

Without a doubt. In the meantime I am going to ask you to come with me.

REGGIE

(Not understanding.)

It is late now. Where are you going?

WATKINS

Oh, just for a little ride.

(He motions for Sam to come closer.)

REGGIE

But it is raining so hard now.

WATKINS

That's all right. You won't get wet.

WENTWORTH

(Coughing nervously.)

You must go with the gentleman. He won't hurt you.

REGGIE

(Looking around at the grinning face of Sam. Sensing trouble, he backs away.)

What do you mean he won't hurt me?

WENTWORTH

Come on now. Be a good boy.

REGGIE

(Sharply.)

What is all this joking about?

WATKINS

(Soothingly.)

You've been sick. I'm going to take you down to the office and examine you.

REGGIE

(Conflicting emotions register in his face. He then shrieks out.)

You lie! You know I haven't been sick. Let me out of here!

(He starts towards the door in the back but is blocked by Wentworth. He starts out to the right but is blocked by Sam. Then, in sheer desperation,)

Let me out of here!

SAM

You is coming wid us, see. And don't make no trouble.

WENTWORTH

You'd better go quietly, Reggie.

REGGIE

(Shrieking.)

I'm not going anywhere!

SAM

(Unfolding the straight jacket.)

I guess I'd better put de muzzle on him, hadn't I, Doc?

WATKINS

I guess you'd better.

(Sam comes up from behind and puts the straight jacket over his head. Reggie struggles and finally lets out a piercing yell. Sam clamps his big hand over Reggie's mouth and subdues him. They finally succeed in gagging him.)

SAM

(Wiping the perspiration from his forehead.)

De lil boy tried tuh be bad.

WATKINS

Yes he did. Put him in the wagon.

(Sam starts towards Reggie. Before he can pick him up, the middle doors are flung back suddenly.)

DUNCAN

Hands up! Put them up, I say, or I'll shoot!

(They all put up their hands. Sam backs further away.)

SAM

Don't shoot, Boss, don't shoot!

WENTWORTH

Who are you?

DUNCAN

I am detective Duncan.

WENTWORTH AND WATKINS

Detective!

DUNCAN

Things have been looking pretty fishy up at the asylum for quite a while. So this accounts for all the mysterious deaths up there. You take in innocent people and murder them.

WATKINS

The boy is insane. I can prove it.

DUNCAN

I guess you can prove that you didn't say the words recorded on that dictaphone, too; and you can prove—

(Helen and her father rush in.)

HELEN

Where is Reggie? I thought I heard him hollering.
(She sees him and goes over and starts taking the gag from his mouth.)

MR. ROSS

What is going on in here?

DUNCAN

(Giving him the handcuffs.)

I'll explain later. Snap those handcuffs on them.

SAM

(Pleading).

Don't take me, Boss. I ain't done nothing. I jes' did whut dey told me.

DUNCAN

Shut up your noise. They'll straighten you all out at headquarters.

(Mr. Ross snaps on all the handcuffs.)

You were about to pull a slick one, weren't you, Wentworth? I have been on the trail of the good Dr. Watkins, head of the state insane asylum, for months; but when I tapped his wires this morning, I didn't know I'd find such big game as you. You want the Kelley property, don't you?

HELEN

Are you hurt, Reggie?

REGGIE

I don't know.

HELEN

(Half crying.)

I always thought something was back of your step-father. He was too nice. I told you so all along.

DUNCAN

(Waving his gun.)

Hustle along to the wagon.

(To Sam.)

I'm going to untie you and make you drive us to the station house.

SAM

Yes, sah!

DUNCAN

I am going to leave you two here to take care of things. I'll come back in a little while to get the dictaphone and the statements from everybody.

MR. ROSS

All right. We'll look after things.

HELEN

(After they've gone.)

You really had a close call, Reggie. I am glad Mr. Duncan did what he did, aren't you?

REGGIE

(Weakly.)

It was nice of him.

HELEN

Help me take this off, father.

(They take off the straight jacket. Reggie starts to stand up but falls down in a dead faint.)

MR. ROSS

Get some water quick! He's fainted!

(Helen runs through the French doors and soon comes back with a pitcher of water.)

HELEN

Here it is.

MR. ROSS

Bathe his temples with it.

(Helen takes her handkerchief and starts to bathe his temples as Ross props him up.)

All he'll need will be sunshine, rest, and a good nurse, and all of his morbid thoughts will go away.

(Reggie shows a little sign of life. Helen stops bathing his temples and kisses him tenderly, then starts bathing again.)

CURTAIN

EVERYMAN'S LAND

*And they die
An equal death,—the idler and the man
Of mighty deeds.*

HOMER,
"Iliad."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SOUL OF THE FIRST SOLDIER
SOUL OF THE SECOND SOLDIER
MARS, THE GOD OF WAR

EVERYMAN'S LAND

The long weary hours in no man's land in northern France have dragged on towards early morning. Black clouds, fanned by a light wind, have been gradually crawling up the heavens until now they have covered all the stars. The rumbling of distant thunder shows the approach of a thunder storm. Soon it breaks upon the land. The vast curve overhead becomes alive with crackling thunder. Each shaft of lightning is followed by a deafening roar, as if heaven itself is being jarred loose. The reservoir of the sky then opens and lets down its surplus in great splashes of rain which are highlighted here and there by red and green army signals.

All night long there has been silence in this region of potential death. The American and the German army have awaited with dread and fear the signal to attack. It comes at four o'clock. Instantly lurid flames break upon the air with terrible detonations; and the silent stretch of water-soaked earth becomes alive with swarming men. Crack! Zip! Boom! Boom! The guns crackle and roll in a never-ending series of rolling thunder, ripping and tearing the earth into gullies and holes.

Zip! Bang! The soul of a soldier leaves its mangled body and outlines itself in faint blue in a wilderness of darkness.

Crack! Boom! The soul of a second soldier flees its bleeding body and likewise outlines itself in that region of Stygian darkness.

THE SOUL OF THE FIRST SOLDIER

Oh God! Where am I?

THE SOUL OF THE SECOND SOLDIER

Oh God! Show me a light. It is dark, dark out here.

FIRST SOUL

(Groping about in the darkness of death.)

I thought I heard a voice.

SECOND SOUL

(Straining to hear through the gloom.)

Is somebody talking?

FIRST SOUL

(Shouting with nervous terror.)

Who are you, friend or enemy?

SECOND SOUL

I am what is left of an American soldier.

FIRST SOUL

I am also. Where are you, friend?

(They grope through the gloom trying to find each other. There is no sound save the dull thud of something far away.)

SECOND SOUL

I heard your voice awhile ago, but I can't find you. It is dark, dark out here.

FIRST SOUL

Come this way, friend. Did you ever see such blackness? It hangs like an inky fog between us.

SECOND SOUL

(Groping towards the First Soul.)

If only we had a light. Even if we had the moon or stars, we could see better; but there is neither.

FIRST SOUL

I see you. You look like a silhouette just visible against a dark background.

SECOND SOUL

I see you, too. My eyes must be failing me, for you look like a shadow just visible in the shade.

FIRST SOUL

Do you know where we are?

SECOND SOUL

No I don't; but it is dark, dark out here.

FIRST SOUL

I do. It occurred to me while I was trying to find you. We are in the region beyond the grave.

SECOND SOUL

(Becoming terrified at the implication.)

We can't be. We can't be. I don't see the angels or pearly gates.

FIRST SOUL

Yes we are, too. Awhile ago we were in no man's land; but now we are in every man's land—the land of death.

SECOND SOUL

(Still terrified.)

What are we going to do?

FIRST SOUL

We will have to travel through the inky blackness until we come to a place of light.

SECOND SOUL

But where will we find it? I don't see any place of light.

FIRST SOUL

Since we were American soldiers, let us be friends and travel through this place of darkness together. Give me your hand.

SECOND SOUL

(Giving his hand.)

Americans should always stick together—even in the land of death.

FIRST SOUL

You know I consider it a privilege in having died for America. I was leading my men when a piece of shrapnel hit me in the chest. It tore my whole body to pieces, but if I had my life to live over again, I'd do the same thing.

SECOND SOUL

America is a great country. In spite of her many faults, if I had twelve lives, I'd give them all for her.

FIRST SOUL

We are losing time. Let us get on, for this blackness is oppressive. We must find the light.

SECOND SOUL

(Gripping his hand.)

Lead on, I'll follow.

(Blind with the blindness of death they grope through darkness. There is no wind, no motion, no noise save the muffled sound of other souls coming faintly through the oppressive fog of blackness. For ages, it seems, they wander on; but there is no way, no course, no direction in the land of death, so in a little while they wander back to the place from which they started.)

FIRST SOUL

We have come a long way, friend; but we don't seem to get anywhere. I am weary of this searching for the light.

SECOND SOUL

(Taking his hand from the hand of the first soul, and sighing with the sigh of despair.)

I am weary, too. We shall pause here awhile.

FIRST SOUL

We are two weary souls groping our way through a wilderness of night.

SECOND SOUL

And it is dark, dark out here.

FIRST SOUL

We have travelled far together, friend, and we know so little of each other. I was from Georgia. I was a Captain, and I was leading my company in the Ninety-Second division when a bullet ripped my heart, and I found myself in this awful land of the shadow.

SECOND SOUL

I was a first lieutenant. I was in the fighting Fifteenth regiment.

FIRST SOUL

I never heard of the Fifteenth. Where did it come from?

SECOND SOUL

It came from New York. It was one of the few all colored regiments.

FIRST SOUL

You fought in a colored regiment—then you must be colored.

SECOND SOUL

I was colored until a grenade exploded in my face, now I am where no light shineth, where no beacon guides me, but everywhere there is perpetual darkness.

FIRST SOUL

I didn't know you were colored. I couldn't see your skin in this awful blackness.

SECOND SOUL

In the darkness of night everything is the same color.

FIRST SOUL

I must leave you. It is impossible for us to ever find the light together.

SECOND SOUL

But we started out as friends.

(The soul of the white soldier flees from the soul of the black soldier, but always the soul of the black soldier is immediately behind. They flit here and there in the infinite void, but always they come back to the same place. Finally the soul of the white soldier stops, exhausted, immediately the soul of the black soldier pauses with weariness.)

FIRST SOUL

I thought I had escaped you.

SECOND SOUL

It is dark, dark out here. I must have company.

FIRST SOUL

(Excited.)

What is that noise?

(They strain their ears in the inky blackness. There is no sound save the muffled noise of countless souls groping their way about in the infinite void.)

SECOND SOUL

I do not know, but I hear a faint sound like the dull tread of footsteps coming faintly through the air.

FIRST SOUL

I thought I heard a rumbling sound, I must have been mistaken.

SECOND SOUL

(Very excitedly.)

See! The light! The light!

(Far, far out in the curtain of night a small circle of red light appears. It grows larger and larger as they watch and soon pushes back the wall of blackness in long, finger-like streams. Finally four white horses appear drawing a flaming chariot which dyes them pink. In the chariot is a huge giant of a man. His face is maroon, and he holds in one hand the reins of the horses, and in the other a huge war club. He drives lightly over the shell holes filled with the bodies of many departed souls. At length he reins his horses to a stop.)

MARS

I am Mars, the God of war. You both fought bravely, and I have come to take you to the heaven of soldiers.

SECOND SOUL

I'll get right in. I am so thankful to get out of this darkness.

FIRST SOUL

(Noticing that there is no room save that beside the colored soul.)

But where shall I sit?

MARS

(Bellowing like a mad bull.)

You'll sit beside your brother or stay here and wander forever in this land of darkness. Everyone who dies on the battle-field is a brother, and all are one in the heaven of war.

FIRST SOUL

(Springing into the chariot, the soul of the white

soldier takes the hand of the soul of the colored soldier.)

Forgive me, brother!

(Mars brandishes his war club, and tightens the reins of his steeds. The chariot starts off over the rotting bodies of countless soldiers who had given their life in the great carnage. Soon they leave the earth. The huge steeds of the War God paw the air into great volumes of flame as they wing their way to the mysterious land where none but soldiers may go.)

THE TRIBAL CHIEF

*Oh God, show compassion on the wicked.
The virtuous have already been blessed by Thee in
being virtuous.*

Prayer of a PERSIAN DERVISH.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE TRIBAL CHIEF
THE HIGH PRIEST
ASSISTANT PRIESTS
THE TEMPLE DANCER
THE WOMAN
THE MAN
THE MULTITUDE
THE VOICE
THE IDOL

THE TRIBAL CHIEF

Somewhere in the mystic land of Tibet, a weather-worn mosque of a strange religious sect rears its dilapidated form against the towering Himalaya mountains.

The scene before us is the sanctuary in this mosque—a dark, filthy-looking room, with a stone floor that shines with a sickly pallor under the torchlights which here and there stud the tall, black sides. There is no other wall decoration save small patches of cobweb in the ceiling which have grown black with soot from the smoking torches.

At the left is a large opening which leads into the sanctuary; and at the back is a flight of dirty steps which leads to a crude platform. In the middle of this platform is a life-like statue of a pagan God, grinning in its grotesqueness. On the left side is a chair highly decorated which serves as the throne of the tribal chief. On the right is another for the high priest.

Soon after this scene is flashed upon us, two loud blasts on the trumpets—weird and haunting in their suggestiveness—announce the beginning of a barbaric ceremony. The multitude files in. Some of them have prayer wheels in their hands, and others have tom-toms. They are robed in dirty black robes which come down to their ankles. Their dark faces, peeping from under a kind of hood, glisten with high lights.

After everyone else is seated on the floor in a kind of semi-circle, the tribal chief comes in followed by his attendants. He is robed in a leopard's skin with the paw of a lion hanging from a belt. There is a cold, hard look in his eyes. The set of his jaw is firm, and

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ASSISTANT PRIESTS
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After everyone else is seated on the floor in a kind of semi-circle, the tribal chief comes in followed by his attendants. He is robed in a leopard's skin with the paw of a lion hanging from a belt. There is a cold, hard look in his eyes. The set of his jaw is firm, and

his greying moustache, twisted at the ends, stands out in bold relief against his shiny face. He advances toward the platform, followed by the high priest and his assistants. The high priest is dressed in a gaudy robe with many different colors and trimmings.

The tribal chief sits in the chair on the left of the God, and the high priest in the chair on the right.

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Rising. His face is as unyielding and flinty as a rock, so utterly devoid of emotion is it.)

Once more, my worthy followers and worshippers of the one true God, we have met to mete out justice to those who have broken the law and desecrated our temple. Let the ceremony begin.

HIGH PRIEST

(Rising.)

Let us pray.

(He makes a few weird gesticulations and kneels before the idol god. The tom toms begin to beat soft and low, and the prayer wheels begin to hum musically like the faint hum of gnats on a twilight summer eve.)

HIGH PRIEST

(Kneeling before the idol.)

O God of the Degotah tribe, once more we bow down before thee and ask thy guidance. We know, O God, that thou loveth justice and mercy and peace, and we ask thee to give us strength to carry out thy laws as handed down to us by the great prophets. If we do this, we know thou will give us victory over our enemies, and everlasting peace and prosperity to our tribe. Amen!

(The slow beating of the tom toms ceases, as well as the musical whir of the prayer wheels. The high priest rises and speaks to two

of the assistant priests who have been kneeling before the platform.)

Go and bring in our sacred dancer.

ASSISTANT PRIESTS

(Rising.)

It is the will of God.

(They bow low and go out of the room, followed by four helpers. The multitude straightens up and stares at the entrance with a curious expectancy. Soon the priests appear.)

THE MULTITUDE

(Ringing out with such gusto that the torchlights flicker on the tall, black sides of the room.)

Praise be to God! Praise be to God!

(The priests advance with great dignity, followed by the four helpers who bring in a huge basket and place it upon the floor.)

HIGH PRIEST

Praise be to God!

THE MULTITUDE

(Once more in a thunderous voice.)

Praise be to God!

(The assistant priests lift the top from the basket, and the sacred dancer leaps nimbly out. A long, bright robe adorns her figure. Her hair is fuzzed out in a kind of circle, and she wears a white mask with two circled red streaks on the cheeks, and out of the corners of her mouth two huge tusks protrude and circle downward. She runs upon the platform and kneels at the feet of the high priest, kissing his feet.)

HIGH PRIEST

Wilt thou, O dancer of the temple, swear by all that is holy and sacred that thy mind is as pure as the lilies

that grow in the valleys of Tibet, and thy body as pure as the snow that caps the mountains of Himalaya?

DANCER

I swear, O most worshipful priest, I swear.

HIGH PRIEST

And wilt thou, O dancer, dedicate thy pure body and thy sense of rhythm to the God of Degotahs?

DANCER

I will, O most worthy priest, in the name of God, I will.

HIGH PRIEST

From now on, then, thou art the sacred dancer of our temple, and in the name of the God that we worship I unmask thee.

(The dancer stands up, and the priest takes the mask from off her face, and the robe from around her shoulders. The dancer has a perfect feminine form, with a beautiful face that has the spiritual look of a madonna. The high priest falls down before the idol, and the dancer stands with bowed head.)

HIGH PRIEST

We thank thee, O God, for the virgin dancer. We sing and give praises to Thy name.

THE MULTITUDE

We sing praises to Thee, O God.

HIGH PRIEST

O Lord, help us to drive the devils from Thy temple.

THE MULTITUDE

(Breaking forth in a mighty volume.)

O most worthy God, help us to drive the devils from Thy temple.

(The high priest rises and takes his seat in the chair on the right. To the dancer,)

HIGH PRIEST

Go, and by thy magic art drive the devils from the temple.

(The dancer walks majestically down the steps to the stone floor. Once more the tom toms begin to beat, and the prayer wheels begin to drone like a swarm of house flies. A soft wailing chant rises from the multitude. The dancer pauses, the white of her eyes begins to show as she goes into a trance. Her lithe body begins to sway gently. As she gets more and more into the spell, she runs around in a circle and bends forward and backwards. She executes every movement that can be made by the human form. Sometimes her movements are as calm as the level sea, and at others they are violent and tempestuous as a tornado as she works herself into a frenzy. At all times she is as graceful and rhythmic as a serpent. Finally she stops almost exhausted.)

HIGH PRIEST

The Lord is satisfied. The devils have gone from the temple.

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Rising.)

Bring in the guilty ones.

(The assistant priests arise and go out of the temple followed by the four helpers. Instantly the buzzing sound of the prayer wheels ceases, and the wailing chant of the multitude dies down. A dread and expectancy settle like gloom over them all. Two of the assistant priests drag in a woman and the other two a man. In spite

of the disheveled hair and the tear-swollen eyes of the woman, it is evident that she was once very beautiful. She is erect and dignified, however. On the face of the man is written—coward. He cringes and slinks as if to hide his guilty face behind the helpers. They are dragged to the altar before the tribal chief.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

Do you know the charge against you?

THE WOMAN

I do, O most worthy ruler. Have mercy!

TRIBAL CHIEF

(In a voice devoid of feeling, and a look as hard as pig iron.)

Our God has demanded, and the law has ever been held before you, that the servants in the temple must be spotless. The sacred dancers must be pure in mind and body, and the assistant priests must think continually of spiritual things instead of the lust of the flesh. You have been found guilty of violating the sacred customs of our people. Have you anything to say?

THE WOMAN

(Through her tears is a kind of dignified strength.)

O most worthy ruler, I know full well the customs of my people. For years I have been as pure as the God of Degotah demands. I have lived a life that, as far as outward appearances go, has been ideal and above reproach, but in my soul, I have been in hell. I fought off the call of the flesh for ages and ages it seemed to me, but when I went to bed a strange longing and loneliness would haunt me in my dreams. I knew it was wrong, and I wore out many prayer wheels to atone for my sins. At last the flesh would not be

denied. I had to yield. Have mercy on me, O most merciful of priests.

(The multitude is touched by the sincere plea of the former dancer. The high priest drops his head in sympathy. But nothing in this plea for mercy touches the heart of the fanatic ruler. He turns brusquely to the man. The craven heart of the one-time assistant priest gives way. He sinks into a nervous, fidgety state. There is no real element of manhood in his makeup.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

Have you anything to say before sentence is passed upon you?

(The mentioning of sentence strikes terror to the man's heart. By playing the baby he hopes to gain sympathy for his acts. There is no justification in his words for the woman who gave her all. He does not try to shield her, but blurts out his words in short, staccato sentences.)

THE MAN

It is the woman's fault, O mighty ruler. As I went prayerfully about my work in the temple, this woman would stand in my path and seduce me with all of her devilish wiles. I tried my best to fight her off, but she would not let me go. One day she caught me in my weak moments. I have not slept a wink since, but have worn out two prayer wheels asking God for his forgiveness.

TRIBAL CHIEF

(There is no emotion in his voice as he utters the awful words of doom.)

The law states that the penalty for violating the custom of our temple is to bury the guilty ones alive.

THE MAN

(When he hears the awful doom he tears his hair and shouts frantically.)

It is the woman's fault! It is the woman's fault! She alone should pay.

(The prayer wheels begin to spin softly like the droning of bees. The tom toms strike up a slow, dismal beat as the death chant commences softly. Above it all can be heard the solemn voice of the tribal chief.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

Open the grave!

(The helpers spring to the middle of the room. There is a large iron ring in one of the blocks. They seize this and pull with all of their might. The huge block groans and swings back, revealing a yawning cavern from whence cometh the odor of decaying flesh with all of its sickening nausea.)

THE WOMAN

(Throwing herself at the feet of the chief.)

Have mercy, O merciful ruler! Have mercy, and don't bury thy sinful servant alive!

(Above the whirling of the prayer wheels can be heard the clear bass voice of the tribal chief. There is no sympathy nor pity in his attitude.)

THE CHIEF

It is the price of your sin. To the grave! To the grave!

(Several helpers seize her rudely and drag her towards the yawning hole of oblivion. Others are propelling the man in the same way towards the blackness. The droning of the prayer wheels has now swelled to the sound of a thousand buzzing electric fans. The high priest is visibly agitated. He wrings and twists in his

excitement. The man and the woman struggle to tear away from the inevitable.)

THE MAN

It is the woman's fault! It is the woman's fault!

THE WOMAN

Have mercy! Have mercy!

HIGH PRIEST

(Unable to stand the scene longer, he checks the helpers on the brink of the gaping void.)

Stop! Stop! We cannot do this thing!

(The buzz of the prayer wheels ceases. The multitude leans forward, some with annoyance at the interruption of the ceremony, and others with a sigh of relief.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Years of hatred for the high priest welling up in his breast, he speaks with unusual harshness.)

We cannot do what?

HIGH PRIEST

We must show mercy to the woman.

TRIBAL CHIEF

We shall carry out the laws as handed down to us by our forefathers.

HIGH PRIEST

We must change our laws to permit mercy.

TRIBAL CHIEF

No. We must change our priest if he cannot carry out the laws. To the grave with the sinners!

HIGH PRIEST

Wait I say! Let us consider.

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Glad of the opportunity to put the priest out of the way, he pulls a long knife from his belt and buries it to the hilt in the breast of the priest. The multitude gasps. The priest falls at the foot of the idol.)

Our laws must be obeyed.

HIGH PRIEST

(Pulling himself up.)

This isn't the first time the innocent have been slain. If there is a way of coming back, I am going to do so. Yes, coming back from the grave!

(He rolls over and dies.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

To the grave!

THE WOMAN

If you won't save me save him. It was my fault.

THE MAN

It was her fault!

(He starts to say more, but his words are cut short by a mighty push. With the agonizing cry of a hell-tortured soul he drops like a plummet into the yawning circle of oblivion. The multitude groans. One woman faints. But nothing can check the procedure of tribal justice. The woman is propelled towards the same brink of doom by four strong arms. She pulls and pleads. White fear chalks her face. But she, too, is given the last mighty push, and falls with a cry of terror into the fathomless gulf of graves.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Kicking the body of the murdered priest.)

Throw this carrion in, also. We shall have no more priest who cannot obey the laws of our forefathers.

(The assistant priests spring quickly upon the platform and seize the body. One mighty swing, and it, too, drops head downward into the nauseous hole of doom. A wave of despair passes over the multitude as the block of stone drops into place. The tribal chief turns to one of the assistant priests.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

Pray for us.

ASSISTANT PRIEST

(Bowing before the idol.)

O God, we thank thee for thy laws as handed down to us by Thy prophets. We beseech Thee to always give us strength to carry out Thy wishes, and punish with death those who desecrate Thy words and Thy temple.

THE MULTITUDE

(With weak ecstasy.)

Amen! Amen!

(Again the soft beat of the tom toms commences, and the faint musical whir of the prayer wheels. A slow barbaric chant rises and swells into a hymn of thanksgiving. The sacred dancer comes into the middle of the floor—stops, poises, and goes into a semi-trance. Once more she begins the serpentine rhythm of the sacred dance. She whirls and whirls until she drops from exhaustion, and is carried out by the helpers. The multitude files out one by one, sad and quiet, leaving the tribal chief alone.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Pleased with the day's work. He speaks aloud in triumph.)

At last I have my way. We shall have no more high priests. There shall be no ruler over the tribe of Degotahs but me.

(From somewhere in the shadows comes a hollow voice.)

VOICE

And me.

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Annoyed at what he believes to be a prank.)

Who dares to jest with the tribal chief? Who spoke?

VOICE

I.

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Beginning to become afraid, yet trying to keep his bravery.)

Who are you? Speak, I say!

VOICE

(A hollow sound that seems to come from nowhere, yet everywhere.)

I am Death, the ruler of everything.

TRIBAL CHIEF

(Trembling with terror.)

And what do you want with me?

VOICE

The time has come. Your minutes are numbered. Prepare! Prepare!

TRIBAL CHIEF

I am not ready. Let me stay a little while to rule. I am the only one who can do it.

VOICE

When man tries to get too great, I cut him down like a flower, or the grass that grows in the valley of Tibet.

(Terrified, the tribal chief flees towards the entrance; but before he gets half-way to it, the torchlights are blown out with a gust of wind)

that rattles the teeth in the mouth of the idol god. A grinning skeleton outlines itself in the doorway with a scythe in his bony fingers. The tribal chief stops with terror before the grinning apparition.)

VOICE

(Slowly and with emphasis.)

Your minutes are numbered. Prepare! Prepare!
(The tribal chief turns and flees to the back of the temple, but is followed by the slow tread of death. He runs hither and thither—into the corners, behind the pillars, and everywhere; but is always followed by the grim and ghastly spectre. It is a game of hide and seek with death, and the end of life is the penalty. After a long period of dodging, he falls exhausted at the foot of the idol.)

TRIBAL CHIEF

O God, I have long worshipped Thee. Save me! Save me and let me live a little while longer to rule over my people!

(From the dark depth of the idol comes a deep voice that rolls out upon the air with the detonation of crackling thunder.)

IDOL

THEY THAT SHOW NO MERCY SHOULD EXPECT NO MERCY. THEY SHALL BE CUT DOWN IN THE HOUR OF THEIR TRIUMPH.

(The awful spectre of death creeps upon the exhausted form of the tribal chief. As a charmed sparrow gazes with hypnotic fascination into the beaded eyes of a crawling snake, the chief looks upon the hideous figure advancing towards him. When he is close enough so that his icy breath is felt, the chief throws up his hands as if to ward him off; but it is of no

avail, for grinning with hideous repugnancy, the ghastly skeleton crawls upon the body of the one time ruler and breathes cold air into his nostrils. Suddenly the arm of grey bone rises in the blackness, and the blade of the scythe sings through the air into the heart of the chief. There is an unearthly groan, and great globs of blood dampen the feet of the idol god. In a spasm of agony the soul of the evil chief tears itself from the body, and is instantly caught by the bony fingers of the grim figure. Clutching its prey securely in its talons, the spectre disappears in a cloud of flame through the stone block—down, down, down past the graves of the sinners, always and forever, down, down.)

CURTAIN

THE PHANTOM TREASURE

*We nothing know, but what is marvellous;
Yet what is marvellous, we can't believe.*

THOMAS YOUNG,
"Night Thoughts."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PAUL
JERRY

TIME: *The present.*
PLACE: *Adson, Georgia.*

THE PHANTOM TREASURE

SCENE ONE

The curtain crawls slowly back, revealing a small but well-kept bedroom in Adson, Georgia. A square center table, on which are scattered some newspapers and cheap magazines, is in the middle of the room. A tall oil lamp rises above this clutter and sends long, finger-like shadows into the corners of the room. A small bed, covered with a quilt of many colors, stretches along the back of the room. The rest of the furnishings comprise a wash stand, some chairs and an oil stove. A window is in the back and on the right, while a closed door is on the right, also.

Paul Wright, a young man of twenty-five, sits before the fire reading a book with the words "Ghost Stories" flared across the jacket on the front. He is dressed in a pair of overalls and a blue work shirt. Small patches of cotton lint cling here and there to his clothing, showing that he works in a cotton factory.

It is eleven o'clock on a stormy night. The elements can be heard raging with fury without. The wind howls, peppering the windows with a volley of rain-drops, then dies down into a long moaning wail.

Several times this happens, and each time Paul looks towards the window with a shudder, but soon returns to the reading of his magazine. Finally he throws the book on the table, and starts to undress for bed; but just as he gets his left shoe off, a loud clumping is heard as someone ascends the stairs.

Paul draws up, half frightened. He jumps when a

CAST OF CHARACTERS

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loud knock is sounded on the door, but mutters in a feeble voice,

PAUL

Come in.

(He breathes a sigh of relief as Jerry Smith comes into the room. Jerry is about Paul's age. He doesn't return the greeting, but takes off his dripping raincoat and throws it on the floor. He is dressed about like Paul, only he has on a black shirt. He rolls the top of his boots down his leg. He then draws up a chair beside the oil stove, and sits with his elbows propped up on his knees, with his chin resting in a cup formed by his two hands. From his whole demeanor, there is evidently something racing through his mind that is crying for a solution. Outside, the rain is falling eternally, ceaselessly.)

PAUL

(Trying to cheer him up.)

What is the matter, old man? Are you in love, or seriously thinking for the first time?

(Jerry does not answer, so Paul continues.)

Is it melancholia? hydrophobia? Come now, what is it that is eating you?

(Jerry waits a long time, then draws a deep breath and says wearily,)

JERRY

It's no use, Paul. I won't bother you with my troubles. It is too fantastic a thing for you to believe anyhow.

(Jerry rises and starts to go. Paul grabs him by the shoulders and forces him back into a chair.)

PAUL

Sit down! You will not leave this room until you tell me what's the matter with you.

JERRY

(Struggling.)

It's no use, I tell you.

PAUL

I'm your friend, and if there is anything wrong with you, I've a right to know it.

JERRY

(In a naïve manner.)

Are you really my friend?

PAUL

You know I am.

JERRY

(Lapsing into silence again. Suddenly he snaps together like a complex machine.)

You have always known me to be truthful, haven't you?

PAUL

Certainly.

(Outside the wind howls, and the rain falls eternally, ceaselessly.)

JERRY

I believe you are my friend. One more question I would like to ask you, though: do you believe in spirits?

PAUL

(Laughingly.)

No, certainly not. What made you ask such a foolish question?

(A gust of wind peppers the window with raindrops, and blows the flame down in the burner. Both appear startled for a second.)

PAUL

(Collecting himself.)

I knew it was no use. It is no use for me to tell you.

PAUL

Come, come, old man, something is the matter with you, and you might as well spill it.

JERRY

But it is such a weird thing, Paul.

PAUL

But what difference does that make?

(Jerry pulls himself together. Paul listens with rapt attention. All through his story can be heard the ever downpour of rain punctured here and there by the sharp whistling of the wind.)

JERRY

Well, if you are determined to know, I'll tell you: You know my grandfather was a slave of old man Ben Coleman's, the father of Rodney Coleman, who owns the big farm about two miles from town. As a slave my grandfather worked his way from a common hand in the field to coachman, and finally to butler. He held this position at the beginning of the Civil War. When old man Ben joined the Confederate army under Stonewall Jackson, my grandfather, because of his intimate knowledge of things, virtually directed the affairs of the house.

(Paul lights a cigarette and continues to listen in silence.)

Then came the year of Sherman's march to the sea. You know that Adson lay in the heart of that path of destruction, and you can imagine the scene around here when the news came that Sherman was coming. Everything and everyone was in a panic. The Colemans were supposed to be the richest people in Geor-

gia then, but today they are almost paupers. It was generally known that they kept a large supply of gold and jewelry in the house, for banks in those days weren't trustworthy.

(He pauses. There is no sound save the rattling of the windows from the wind and the rain.)

JERRY

Many people have tried to account for the disappearance of the Coleman treasure. Some say the Yankees took it; others, a guerilla band. The truth is, no one knows where it is.

PAUL

I suppose not, at this late date.

JERRY

(Not noticing the interruption.)

My own father was quite small at the time, but he remembers that another slave died at that time, and my grandfather took unusual pains in burying him. Soon afterwards Sherman's army passed and took everything it could find. My grandfather's mistress was so shocked that she soon died of grief, leaving behind Rodney, who was quite a small chap.

(He is interrupted here by the scratching of huge limbs against the house, blown by a terrific gust of wind.)

A few days afterwards my grandfather got into some quarrel with the overseer about some detail of management. The overseer shot him. My father was standing close by, and ran to him. Grandfather tried in vain to tell father something, but all he could do was to move his lips. He died a few seconds afterwards.

PAUL

(Growing restless from the long narrative.)

But what has all that to do with your trouble?

JERRY

(Not noticing his restlessness.)

I'm coming to that. Father grew up and worked for the Colemans until he died a few years ago. Then mother and I moved to town.

(He shifts his position. Paul, having smoked up the one cigarette, lights another.)

Father used to tell us about a series of strange dreams he had when he was twenty-five years old. He said that he dreamed one night on the 13th of August that grandfather came back, and looking very sorrowful told him to go to the cemetery. He remembered the date because something happened which called his attention to it. On the 13th of September he had virtually the same dream. This struck him as being unusual, but he soon dismissed it from his mind. But when the 13th of October came around, and he had the same dream, he became so nervous that he was sick in bed for a week. We thought he would die, but he finally became well again. He never had that dream again, however.

PAUL

That was very strange. I never heard anything like it before.

JERRY

I never would have thought about it again, but I became twenty-five this year; and month before last, on the 13th of August, I had the same dream.

(Paul becomes very excited. This excitement is intensified by the whistling wind which drives a barrage of raindrops against the house.)

PAUL

You did?

JERRY

I did. I thought I was walking by the stable of the Coleman's when grandfather came out of the feed-room. He looked as father had often described him.

He was of medium height, dark and slender, with a matted mass of grey hair and a flowing white beard. He looked at me wistfully and said in a low voice, "Son, come go to the cemetery with me." Just as I started to go, I woke up. The 13th of last month I had the same dream. But last night—

PAUL

(Unable to restrain himself.)

What happened?

JERRY

I was able to go with him to the cemetery.

PAUL

(Excited.)

What did you see?

JERRY

He took me back of the old slave burying-ground behind the orchard. He led me to a big cedar tree and told me to dig. He was about to say something else when I woke up.

(Turning to Paul.)

What do you make of the story?

PAUL

(Thinking for awhile.)

Nothing, except that it is a very strange story. Do you think you will get sick as your father did?

JERRY

Not that so much. I thought you would see something else.

PAUL

What else is there to see?

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PAUL

What else is there to see?

JERRY

(Almost savagely.)

Man, can't you see that under that tree is the hiding-place of the Coleman treasure?

PAUL

(Laughing in his face.)

You have certainly spun a strange tale; but you lack two things. You should have the mysterious formula and a goat. You would then have had the story of Captain Kidd's treasure in all its details.

JERRY

(Somewhat hurt at Paul's jesting.)

That is the only solution that I can come to. When grandfather buried that slave, he must have buried the treasure with it.

PAUL

Well, as long as you don't get sick, I won't worry about the treasure.

JERRY

(Shaking his head sadly.)

I knew it was no use to tell you. I don't blame you, though, for not believing it.

(Conviction grips him. He turns around and looks Paul squarely in the eye.)

I am dead certain I am right. I know, also, that you are not afraid of the devil himself. Now on the strength of our friendship, will you go with me?

PAUL

Where?

JERRY

I am going to dig for that treasure.

PAUL

(Listening to the rain. It seems to be falling with a steady, monotonous rhythm.)

Well, I can't go out on a night like this.

JERRY

(Half pleading.)

Tonight is the best night. No one will be moving around, so we are sure of not being bothered.

PAUL

(With an air of finality.)

I can't go tonight.

JERRY

But just look what you could do with the money. You could finish your education, buy yourself a home, set up a business, and many other things that you can't do now. It is certain that neither of us would have to work in a dirty cotton mill to earn money enough to finish college.

PAUL

(Trying to humor his whim.)

Well, if you will go get the picks and shovels, I'll go with you.

(Jerry leaves the room. Paul looks after him and shakes his head in sympathy. He pulls off his clothes and blows out the light. Soon he is in bed asleep. There is a grey light flickering in through the window, accompanied by the patter of the rain and the whistling of the wind.

Paul commences to snore, but is soon awakened by the clumping sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. He sits up in his bed for a second, then lies back again and feigns sleep.

Jerry walks in. When he sees that Paul is in the bed, turns and starts out. Suddenly he turns around with a fierce resolve. He lights the lamp

and shakes Paul gently. Seeing that this won't work, he shakes more roughly until Paul sits up in the bed.)

What do you want?

JERRY

(In a pleading tone.)

You said you would go if I got the picks and shovels. They are downstairs on the porch. Now I expect you to keep your word with me.

PAUL

All right, I'll go.

(Seeing there was no denying his crazed friend, Paul gets up and puts on his clothes. Soon he is completely dressed; raincoat, gum-boots and all. Jerry goes out first. Paul speaks as he is closing the door behind him.)

Darn this crazy loon!

SCENE TWO

(The light from the rusty lantern in Jerry's hands seems to push back the darkness by sheer force of might, and reveals a dark outline of woods in the background. At the right a tall cedar tree, a pyramid of inky blackness, stands out prominently, while in the front of the whole is growing a thick mass of green vegetation. The wind has settled, but the rain is still falling in torrents. The raincoats and boots of Paul and Jerry are covered with mud splashed up from the long journey through muck and mire. Whenever they move, the close proximity of the lanterns throws great, wobbly shadows into the darkened labyrinth, giving the whole scene a kind of eerie appearance.)

JERRY *waves* with a *su-*

(Waving the lantern toward.

There is the place.

PAUL

Is that the cedar tree?

JERRY

Yes, that is the one grandfather pointed out to me in my dream.

(Waving the lantern towards the whole gloomy stretch of woods.)

This used to be the burying ground of the slaves, but in recent years it has been allowed to grow up.

(Jerry moves on towards the cedar. Paul follows with a sudden sinking of the heart. Previously he had followed with a kind of rebellious resistance against what he considered a foolish whim. Now he is brought face to face with stern reality, and experiences a strange feeling of fear at the vague, unknown terrors that might be contained in that gloomy void.)

JERRY

I guess I'll tie this lantern to a limb.

(Saying this, he bends down a limb of the cedar tree and ties the lantern to it. Paul's fear has somewhat subsided. He watches Jerry with a kind of curious expectancy.)

PAUL

(Holding out his hand in the dripping rain.)

I guess you are right. Nobody will bother us. Anyone would be a fool to walk around in such a night.

JERRY

We couldn't have picked a better night.

(Jerry looks around the tree and then clears a spot. He raises his pick preparatory to striking the first blow.)

PAUL

is is the right spot?

*t of wind rocks the trees and
the lantern out. Jerry's pick slips
sides and drops with a dull thud upon
oggy ground. He clutches the lapels of
Paul's coat in his excitement.)*

JERRY

Good God, man, don't talk! Grandfather especially warned me not to say a word after we started to dig, or all would be lost.

PAUL

I didn't know. You didn't tell me.

JERRY

I know I didn't. It was my fault, but you scared me just the same.

PAUL

It was lucky I found out before you struck the first blow.

JERRY

It certainly is.

(They pull up their hip boots and begin to dig. The ground being soft from the rain, they have no trouble in sinking their shovels into it. When they have gone down a little ways, Jerry's pick strikes something. A little later he throws up a skull. Paul starts to say something, but Jerry's muddy hands clamp upon his mouth, cutting off the sound. He shakes a warning head at Paul.)

They commence to dig again. The ground gets firmer as they go down. At last there is a metallic ring from Paul's shovel. Soon they uncover a metal box. They dig the mud from around its sides and try to lift it out. They strain and

strain. At last it gives way with a sucking sound.)

PAUL

WE'VE GOT IT! WE'VE GOT IT!

(When he utters these words there is a titanic burst of nature's elements. A forked tongue of lightning splits the leaden arch of heaven, followed by a reverberating roll of deep thunder. The wind blows, the earth shakes. The treasure box slips from their hands and sinks with a sucking sound into the mire. In dread and terror they flee from the place.)

END