

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1950

Cover by Boris Dolgov

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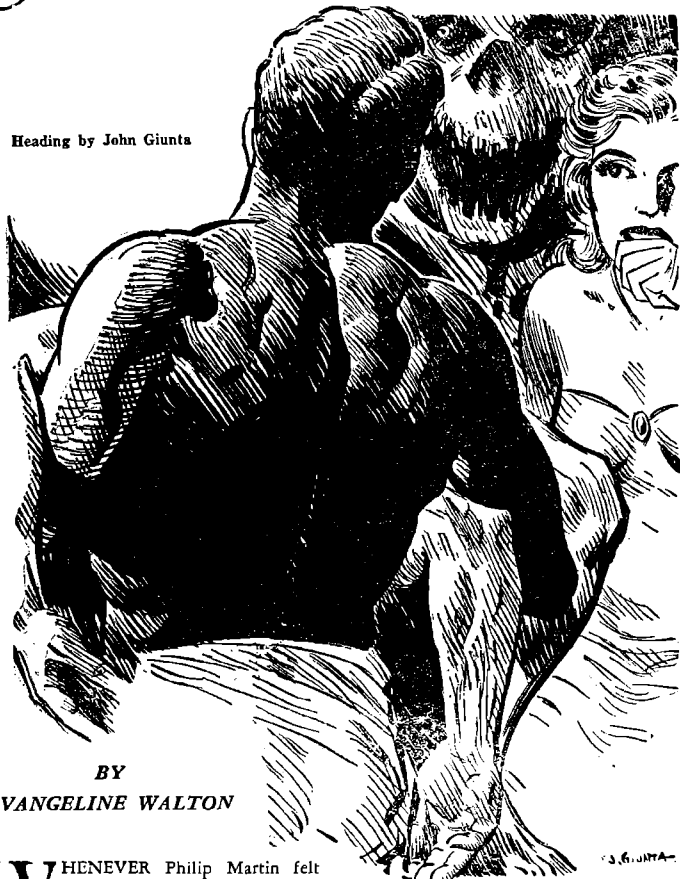
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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

At the End of the Corridor

Heading by John Giunta



BY
EVANGELINE WALTON

WHENEVER Philip Martin felt like being funny he would say that he was a professional grave-rober. If people looked properly shocked

"Some day you may rob one grave too many."

he would add, "I began with a king's grave," and then grin. A mild joke, not in the best of taste perhaps, but then everything about Philip was mild; his nearsighted brown eyes, his tall, shuffling frame, his face that never had been quite young. Even his shy way of showing off, of hoping, a little wistfully, that he could shock people or make them laugh.

As a matter of fact, His Majesty the King had been dead about 3,000 years when Philip and his father, the late and distinguished James K. Martin, Ph.D., had dug him up. It is generally considered respectable to rob a man's grave if he has been dead long enough. The Martins, father and son, had always made a most correct and respectable thing of grave-robbing, just as they had of everything else they turned their well-kept, somewhat dry Bostonian hands to. That anything could ever change this (or indeed his own prim, proper personal life) Philip never dreamed when he set out for Greece to carry on the work of the late Dr. Kimon Dragoumis. He was contemptuously amused when, at a farewell dinner, a slightly tipsy Parisian savant said to him:

"Some day you may rob one grave too many, my friend."

Philip grinned. "You mean curses? That old tripe about ancient tombs having invisible guardians?"

M. de Lesseps smiled. "You think me a foolish old man, *hein*? Not all ancient things are toothless. Yet you may be wise, my young friend. Perhaps it is safer to rob the tombs of the ancient dead, of those who have had time to forget their wrongs. When I was young I too went to Greece, to Maina where the old blood is purest, to write a book. But I saw what I dared not write. There are dead there who need no curses—they can *act*!" He shuddered and crossed himself.

Philip said indulgently, "If dead men could walk because they had reason for revenge, a lot of them would have done it these last few years. The men who died in concentration camps, for instance."

The savant said seriously, "That depends on the man, my friend. On what he studied

while he was alive, what he knew and believed. On what his background was. Among simple yet ancient peoples, who are still near the source of things, there are survivals—" He rambled on, learnedly yet drunkenly, about primeval man, about vision and gifts that his modern descendants had lost. Until Philip got very bored, and took too many drinks.

He had a headache next morning, when he boarded the plane for Athens. But it was only the beginning of his headaches. For when he reached the little seaside village that had been the site of Dragoumis' work he found—nothing. Only the few *tholoi* that the great Greek had first found and explored were still visible. The bulk of that underground collection of mysterious Mycenaean tomb-chambers had vanished as if the hills out of whose sides they had been carved had swallowed them up again.

It seemed strange, in spite of the disaster that had come upon Dr. Dragoumis and his co-workers; the guerrilla warfare that had raged for years afterward through this grim land of sea and mountains, and was still uncomfortably near. So near, in fact, that it had taken Philip years to get his own permit to dig.

A landslide had covered the excavations; that was all he could learn. Though some of the villagers must have known the approximate location of the buried sites they would tell him nothing. They acted either sullen or blandly ignorant—too ignorant. He had a queer and unreasonable feeling that they were afraid.

Sophoulis, the local school-teacher, advised him to go to Mme. Dragoumis, "She may still have some of her husband's papers, *kyrie*."

"You mean she still lives here?" Philip asked in surprise. He had heard of Mme. Dragoumis as one of the famous beauties of the Balkans, a very gay and fashionable woman, much younger than her husband. "In that island villa of theirs?"

"She will not leave it, *kyrie*. Not for an hour. Not once since that night the doctor died has she set foot on the mainland. She says that her husband is still alive—that she must be there to greet him if he returns."

"She dares not leave it," Mrs. Sophoulis said with a hard little smile. "Her family has been worried about her, and once they even sent doctors to take her away, but she locked herself in her room and said she would kill herself if they broke the doors down—that it would be better to die that way than to go ashore."

Philip felt a little apprehensive. The lady might not be sane enough to be of any help to him.

"I thought the Nazis shot Dr. Dragoumis," he said.

"So it is said. None knows," Sophoulis said heavily. "They suspected him of hiding arms, arms smuggled in from British submarines; and perhaps he was. Or perhaps he had found tombs in which there were precious things—treasures that he feared the Nazis might carry off to Germany. Certainly he was doing something that he wished to keep secret. He was a giant who could outdig any of his men, and toward the last he dug oftenest by moonlight—and alone."

"It must have been the tombs themselves that he wished to protect," Philip said stiffly. "No true scientist would risk such monuments of the past by storing arms in them."

"Who knows, *kyrie*? A true patriot will risk anything. At least there was talk. Too much talk. Perhaps even someone who wished to talk too much. So the Nazis waited for him, that night at the villa. *Kyria Dragoumis* says that they shot him as he was escaping through the French windows, but that so great was his strength that he ran on, with their bullets in him. And later, when they searched the *tholoi* where they thought he might be hiding, the mountain itself slid forward and covered them—yes, the very mountains seemed angry that the invaders should dare go poking about among their bowels. It took them two days to dig out the bodies of their Gestapo men, *kyrie*."

MRS. SOPHOULIS cut in excitedly, her dark eyes bright, "But they never found the doctor, *kyrie*! And some of our people say that they have seen him since,

by moonlight, pacing the cliffs above the sea, and looking out toward his home across the waters."

Her husband laughed a little uneasily. "Our peasants hereabouts are still very superstitious, *kyrie*. They can see anything."

"So it seems," said Philip dryly. "You think that Mme. Dragoumis might be able to help me then?"

"She would not!" Mrs. Sophoulis snorted. "She never knew anything about it; she took no interest in it. Or in anything but parties and young men. She stays on the island now only because she is afraid—not for love of her dear dead husband, poof! Keep away from her, *kyrie*; she is bad luck, that one."

Sophoulis' fist pounded the table. "Be still, woman! None has any right to speak against *Kyria Dragoumis*; I have told you that I will have no idiotic women's gossip in my house."

There was evidently some local feeling against Mme. Dragoumis, Philip thought as he left. Possibly only among the women; Sophoulis was clearly either too fair-minded or too cautious to lend himself to it. Yet what fear could they possible think kept Mme. Dragoumis on the island—surely government guards could have kept her safe from any guerrilla ambush? The whole business was a puzzle. Why should Dragoumis have been fool enough, that night, to attempt escape? He could not have hidden anything incriminating in the tombs. "Attempted escape" was an age-old, trite pretext to cover murder; but why should anybody have wanted to murder Dragoumis, a scientist who had surely had too much sense to take any interest in anything but his work?

Well, it was none of his business. What concerned him was to find a way into those lost Mycenaean vaults without blasting holes in their sides while he was at it. He took a boat and had himself rowed out to the island. To the little landing-stage from which broad steps led up to a white villa above the sea; a villa set like a pearl upon a terrace made green and silver by the foliage of orange and olive trees.

Or so he thought until he saw Anthi

Dragoumis and knew the difference between pearl and setting. Between life and mere existence.

She was a beauty. She was delight, and wonder, and youth—the youth that Philip had never had. She set fire to the dry man as flame fires tinder.

And she was gracious to him, she was kind. Yes, she still had some of her husband's papers, she would show them to him, and search for more. He could help her search if he liked. He did. He went again and again to that villa on the island. He filled his eyes and ears with her; with the soft music of her voice, with the curves of her body, that made softer music whenever she moved. With the warm red of her lips, and the depths of her shining eyes.

And then one day she let him fill his arms . . .

He tried, after that, to get her to marry him and go away with him. "Your husband is dead, Anthi. He has been dead these five years. It cannot hurt you to accept that now. You do not love him any more."

But she shook her head. "He was not too badly hurt that night; he rowed himself back to the mainland. He was a peasant, born in a hut in Maina—not civilized, like you and me, for all his learning. He was very strong, Philip; strong like the men of an earlier world. It would be hard for him to die."

JEALOUSY leapt in him. So that was it—Dragoumis' brute strength had dazzled her, his hard peasant heritage! That was what she liked in a man. He said roughly, "If he's alive, why hasn't he come back to you? What could he have been afraid of, after the Nazis left? Afraid enough to make him stay away from a wife like you?" He kissed her, hard and savagely. He strained her close, trying to hurt her, to prove that he too was strong.

She laughed up into his face and stroked his cheek. "You would not stay away from me, would you, my Philip? Don't worry; I love you more than I ever loved him. You are much younger than he was. Though he loved me very much; as much as you could ever do."

"Then why would he stay away from you?" Philip muttered.

She looked up at him very seriously then, her eyes gone grave. "Because, that last night, he accused me of betraying him to the Nazis. Because the officer who came to arrest him was young and very handsome—a man I had danced with several times in Athens." She shivered. "But he was not handsome when they dug him out from under the mountain, after he had tried to follow my husband into the ancient tombs."

Philip stared at her in horror. "You don't mean that Dragoumis did have explosives in there and deliberately set them off—that he'd have destroyed *tholoi* just to kill a few men?"

She laughed. "Not a few men, no. One man—the man he thought had taken me from him. You would not do that, would you, my archaeologist, my ruin-lover? After all, it was Kimon, my poor, aging Kimon, who loved me best."

Suspicion stabbed him suddenly, like a knife twisting in his flesh. He shook her. "Did you love the German then, Anthi? He was younger than your husband, too—and so handsome!"

But that insulted her. She stormed at him, she raged and wept until he practically had to go down on his knees and apologize to her. Until suspicion faded, became a shameful outrage that he dared not even remember.

When she was quiet again he tried once more to persuade her that her husband must be dead. "No living man could have stayed away from you so long. Whatever he was fool or mad enough to believe for the moment he could not—you are so beautiful, Anthi!" But she only wept again and shivered.

"You did not know Kimon, my Philip. I did." She peered nervously over her shoulder, at the shadows that seemed to have grown, blacker, over the bed. "He was so strong, Philip. He was like the giant who could not die so long as he could touch his mother, the earth. Nothing could ever kill him completely, here in his own hills. I think that he is still waiting somewhere, inside the mountain, in his *tholoi*—waiting,

watching for me. That is why I never dare set foot on the mainland. Why I never can unless he is found—and laid."

Philip stared at her blankly. "But even if he were there, Anthi—a madman, in hiding, getting food somehow—he'd have stolen a boat and come out here long ago. You must see that."

She looked very straight at him then. Her eyes were pits of blackness, blacker than the shadows. Her voice was hushed, almost a whisper: "*There are those who cannot cross water.*"

For a minute he did not understand. Then his face went whiter than hers. With an incredulous, yet comprehending horror. For now at last he knew. Evil things could not cross water—the unalive yet undead could not, the terrible *vrykolakes* of Greek belief.

All these years she had been lying, all these years she had believed her husband dead! A man no longer, but a thing of supernatural evil, an avenger who was seeking her.

Why? *About what else had she lied?*

But she had risen, she was coming toward him. Her eyes held his. Their warm brightness was all around him, and her arms were round his neck.

"You will do that for me, my Philip? You will find him and lay him, so that we can go away together and be married? So that we can forget him and love each other, always?" She pressed her cheek against his. "You will set me free from fear. You will do that for your Anthi, Philip? For me?" Her lips moved along his cheek softly, touched his ear.

He stood quite still in her arms. He said hoarsely, "How could I find him, even if he were there?"

She said softly, almost crooning, "You will find him. You will lay him. For your Anthi. For me."

He did not answer. He stood there horrified, trying to think. In England and in Poland they used to bury the unquiet dead with stakes through their hearts. To keep them down, to keep them from walking. What had been done to such dead men in Greece? He could not remember. Some-

thing not so simple as a stake, he thought—something horrible—

She pressed herself closer against him. She whispered, "It will not be so hard. I can tell you where to find the last tomb he found—the greatest, the royal *tholos*, the one he said he kept secret for fear the Nazis would loot it."

"You think he would have gone there, knowing that you knew the place?" Philip laughed harshly.

"He would have, to save what he could. He loved it more than anything, even me. Night after night he used to tell me of it, to describe his precious day's work when I wanted to sleep. But now at last that will be useful. It will help you to find him, and then you will cut off his arms and legs—so that he will have no feet to follow us, no hands to strike us!"

Philip said bitterly, "Do you want to tie them under his armpits, as murderers used to do in Solon's time? Are you mad, Anthi? I am, to listen to you."

She flung back her head, her eyes hard with suspicion. "No, I do not want them tied under his armpits. I want them brought here to me, tonight! There are signs by which I shall know them—do not think that you can deceive me. If I do not get them I will never marry you—you shall never touch me again!"

NIGHT found Philip on the mountain-side; high above the lights of the village. He had one man with him, a big fellow with the brawn of an ox and almost as few brains. He came from another village, and if by any unlucky chance he should see Dr. Dragoumis' body he would not recognize it. He had said nothing, only looked scared and crossed himself when Philip had explained the need for this secret digging by night.

"There may be treasures in this tomb, Costa, golden things that it would be risky to let the guerrillas hear of. Though there is probably nothing but pottery and old stones. And perhaps fragments of some old king's body—if it is not well-preserved I may bring them up."

Costa would not be surprised, now, if

he saw pieces of a corpse. Philip gagged at the thought. It would hardly look human now, after so many years in the musty dark. Or would it? Philip did not know. He shuddered. How could Anthi be afraid of such a thing, lying there helpless, horrible in its rottenness and decay; pitiful because of the very hideousness that cancelled its onetime humanity?

She was waiting for him now, below, in a boat about a hundred yards offshore. She had to come so far to show him which particular crag covered the buried entrance to the *dromos*, to that great passageway leading into the mountain's heart. He had expected her to go back after that, but she was still there, her boat a tiny dark speck upon the moonlit waters. Waiting vulture-like, eager for her prey.

She was grimly thorough, he thought. Ancient murderers were supposed to have been satisfied with cutting off their victims' hands and feet, but she could imagine the corpse running after her fleetly on the stumps of footless legs, catching and crushing her in handless arms, in an embrace that would break the bones—

He shuddered again, mopped his forehead. Easy for a man to have fancies here, amid all this bleak wilderness of rock.

"What is it? Are you tired, *kyrie*?" asked Costa hopefully. "We have been digging almost four hours now. You could go down to the boat, to the lady. Did she bring wine for us, *kyrie*?"

Philip hesitated. He was tired, and the light was very bad. He had expected the moon to be bright tonight, to make the mountain almost as light as day. But instead, though it shone clear and bright upon the sea, some trick of cloud-shadows cut it off from the slopes, shrouded them in pitch. He and Costa had to work by lantern-light, and they kept the lantern muffled, for fear it might be seen from the village below. The shadows all around them were dancing, dancing, like immense black cats playing with two trapped mice.

What if he were to assert himself, to go down to Anthi and tell her that he would do her work another night, when the light was better—?

But then she would laugh at his weakness. And she would be right. Was it not weakness?

He answered Costa's proposition shortly: "No." He set his teeth and plunged his spade into the earth. Hard, with renewed vigor. And suddenly the spade struck hollowness; sank into the earth as if hands had reached up from below and seized it. A dislodged pebble went rattling on down inside the hole, down, down, into gulf-like space.

Costa crossed himself again and gasped, "May the Panagia—may the Virgin and all the blessed saints preserve us!"

Earth and massive stones fell together with a great thud. A pit opened, almost beneath their feet. The Greek cried out and jumped back. But Philip laughed. His eyes were shining. He forgot Anthi; he forgot Dragoumis. This was what he had come to Greece to find; the discovery he had dreamed for years of making; this was triumph and fulfilment!

He dug feverishly; he urged Costa on with both praise and curses. Until the hole lay like a wide-open mouth at their feet, a mouth blacker, more thickly solid, than the blackness of the night.

Philip tied a rope to the lantern. He lowered it into the pit and leaned over, watching course after course of great stone blocks appear and disappear as its golden eye sank deeper, farther into the dark. At last it came to rest upon a rock floor many feet below, making a tiny brilliant island there.

Philip took an axe, a flashlight, and some cloths, set another rope around his waist and prepared to follow the lantern.

"Wait here, Costa. When I jerk the rope raise me."

He wondered fleetingly why he had said that. Surely it would have been simpler to say that he would shout up from the depths? Then he forgot it as he swung downward into space.

HE LOOKED about him eagerly as he landed. To his right, within a few feet of his descent, the passageway was blocked by rough masses of earth and rock.

Probably these covered the real entrance to the *dromos*, that which had been hidden for tens of centuries until Dragoumis pierced its age-old seals; on that fatal night it must have been crushed by the landslide that had buried his pursuers. But to the left the passage stretched on, seemingly endless, into the mountain's heart. For a little way *only the lantern's light pierced it, breaking the darkness into pieces, into dancing shadows.*

Did one of those shadows dart back as he looked, one a little thicker, a little blacker, than its fellows?

He did not heed it. His heart felt light, exultant, as he levelled his flashlight and walked on, toward the blackness that looked solid as a wall. He no longer even felt horror of the axe beneath his arm. If Dragoumis could have chosen, surely he would have had his dead body dismembered a thousand times rather than let his great discovery be lost again, hidden from mankind, perhaps for more centuries. For on no other terms would Anthi ever have disclosed the secret. Poor girl! Later, when her hysterical, superstitious obsession was over, she would regret this, she would be kind and gentle and fastidious again, as a woman should be. Now he must do whatever was necessary to bring her peace.

He went on into the shadows, and they retreated before him slowly, steadily. He followed them down that stone corridor that led through the earth's bowels.

Once or twice it seemed to him that he heard a faint curious rustling among those dark, wavering shapes that recoiled before his flashlight. As if someone were walking ahead of him, stealthily. He decided that it must be some trick of echoes, reverberating oddly in that subterranean place. It could not be bats, for there was never anything where the light came; throw his flashlight where he would, its beams found only great, bare blocks of stone.

Then he came at last to the black rectangle of the inner portal, the opening into that great, circular chamber Anthi had told him of. There Dragoumis had found golden vessels and golden filigree-work, and images of gods that no man had worshipped

for ages. There he had found bones, and there, perhaps, he had left his own.

And there, at last, fear took Philip. It closed round his throat like an icy hand. In his inner ears a far-off voice seemed to cry: "*Do not disturb the dead! Do not disturb the dead!*"

He shrugged. That voice came out of his childhood, out of superstitions and conventional moralities engraved upon the young mind as a phonograph record is engraved upon wax. He thought, "I am being foolish as Anthi. I have handled many mummies, I have felt their dry, withered flesh slough off my hands. What difference is there, what real difference? A man can be as dead in three minutes as he will be in three thousand years."

He swung the flashlight forward, toward the inner chamber.

He saw the gleam of gold, he saw strange, grotesque shapes of stone. He saw carved stone *larnaki*, and, in the far corner, a table of red marble. Its legs gleamed under the light, like blood.

Was there something on top of the table, among the shadows? Something long and dark and still, like the outstretched form of a man?

Once again fear took him. He could not bear to throw the flashlight upon the tabletop, to see. He edged slowly into the chamber, moving cautiously, laboriously, as if through invisible barriers. There were no more echoes. In the deathly silence he heard nothing but the fierce, hard pounding of his heart.

Suddenly he stopped. He could not bear to go farther, to come within touching distance of that thing that might be lying there.

He set his teeth and his will. Slowly, as if it were a rock too heavy for him to move, the flashlight came up. Its beams touched something; something upon the tabletop.

A man's hand that lay, lax and brown and leathery, upon red marble. A large hand, larger than most men's. Firm and sleek as leather it looked; and yet, in some curious and subtle way, as lifeless. None could have mistaken it for the hand of a living man. Philip's brain reeled; through it

ran dizzily words he had heard among the Greek peasants and never heeded; the bodies of the walking dead—of those whom the earth had not loosed—were incorruptible; undecaying!

And as he looked the hand changed. The fingers tensed, the long tendons on the back of it rose and stiffened, as if that dark recumbent form were bracing itself to rise!

With a strangled cry of horror Philip hurled himself forward, the axe gleaming above his head.

COSTA shivered. The night wind was cold, and once a cry had seemed to drift up from the depths below. He had listened closely after that, but he had not been able to tell whether the cry was repeated, whether a faint horrible screaming, muffled by distance, had come up from the earth.

The rope at his feet jerked suddenly, convulsively, like a great snake. He cried out and jumped back, then remembered and gasped with relief.

The signal!

Gladly he hauled his master up. "The saints be thanked, kyrie! You are safe! I thought I heard something—"

The tall man did not answer. He turned and strode off down the mountainside, with long, swift strides. "He goes very fast," Costa thought, "as if there were something before—or behind him—for which he could not bear to wait. He does not even stop to give me any of the bundles he carries." He followed with the lantern, looking curiously at those bundles. They were long and narrow, they looked like human arms and legs. When he saw a limp hand dangling from one of them he crossed himself.

"The old king must have come all to pieces. Who would have thought he would still have looked so human?"

He gained a little on his master. The lantern rays fell on those packages, and Costa's eyes grew large and round. After that he walked more slowly, and let the distance widen between himself and the tall figure ahead. For through the cloth

wrappings something dark was seeping, something that stained the white linen.

He dropped farther behind, when they came within sight of the shore and his master spurted suddenly, running out with daemonic speed onto the white sands. The clouds had left the moon; the beach was almost as bright as day.

A cry came from the boat. The waiting woman tugged at the oars and swung it in, closer. She leaped out upon the sands. Her voice pealed out, a song of gladness:

"You have them, Philip! You have them—"

She ran forward, her arms outstretched, her face bright with triumph. The man waited for her. He had stopped and stood very still; he made no move, either to meet or welcome her. And when she reached him she did not even look at him. She only clutched, with hands as terribly eager as her eyes, at those packages he carried.

Silently, he let her take them. Silently, he stood over her as she unwrapped them. As their ugly, stained contents fell from her paralyzed hands to the earth—

And then she screamed. Terribly and horribly she screamed. For the first time she looked up into his face, and saw it. He took off his hat, Philip Martin's hat, and moved toward her, and in that clear moonlight, for all the distance, Costa saw that his head was not Philip Martin's head.

After that Costa's eyes closed and he knelt and prayed. He did not see what made the lady scream again. Her cries kept on for quite a long time, but at last the beach was silent. There was no sound on it, even the sound of a retreating footstep. And then, and only then, did Costa find the strength to run away.

Later, the Athenian newspapers carried feature headlines: FRESH GUERRILLA OUTRAGES! MUTILATED BODY OF AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGIST FOUND IN MYCENEAN TOMB! On a nearby beach had been found the bodies of Kyria Anthi Dragoumis and of a man who must have been one of the guerrilla murderers. A giant of a man, whose body, unaccountably, crumbled and fell apart when it was touched.