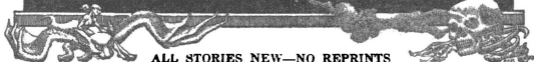


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

SEPTEMBER, 1942

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Death Has Red Hair



By GREYE LA SPINA

WE THREE men were hugging the open fire closely. The raw chill of that November night had closed in around us and the blazing logs yielded grateful warmth.

Peter Murray was leaning forward in his chair, looking absent-mindedly into the leaping flames that sent flickering shadows to dancing on the walls behind us. Hank Walters was staring at Peter and I was

==== *There was something absolutely extraordinary about her hair. It was as if—as if it were alive . . . as though every strand was the darting flame of a glowing torch!* =====

watching both my guests with curious speculation that had risen in me since that afternoon's encounter.

I could have sworn that Hank's black eyes held an expression at once envious and inimical as he bent his gaze dourly on Peter's handsome, perplexed young face. I was both dismayed and sorry, for the older man possessed a weapon that might cut the brightness out of Peter's life; Magda Farrar was his foster-daughter and his ward, and to young Peter she symbolized and embodied everything desirable in life.

"Come out of it, you two," growled I, irritated and uneasy at their silence. "This is a shooting party, not a wake."

Peter's bright blue eyes turned from the fire. He met my gaze and chuckled.

Hank's lowering face followed the younger man's movement, then suddenly shifted uneasily. He must have noticed that I was observing his unguarded expression for his mouth compressed tightly for a moment before he spoke.

"Hell of a party," said Hank distinctly, "when a man can't chuck a pretty girl under the chin without having a fool youngster butt into his fun."

It was out now. I regarded him with hidden dismay. The underlying currents of hidden emotion had forced their way to the surface and could no longer be tacitly ignored. I was furious at Hank for his lack of restraint.

More than that, I had been—still was—just as disgusted at his behavior that afternoon as had been Peter. Being older than either of my two guests, I had, possibly, learned to be diplomatic; sufficiently so, at least, not to have thrust myself unnecessarily into a situation *à deux* where my tactful absence would have been better appreciated than my presence. I had seen nothing, after all, but Peter's restraining hand on Hank's restive shoulder, and the disappearing swirl of a girl's abbreviated

skirts and long cloak into a part of the woods where the low undergrowth was not yet entirely denuded of foliage. All I had heard had been Hank's exclamation, coming almost directly upon the girl's scream. Peter must have been quick in his reaction.

"Take your hand off me, you damned young cub!" had shouted Hank, with uncontrolled passion for which I did not at the moment entirely blame him. No man relishes the admonishing restraint of a youngster, in front of a woman particularly, no matter how much he may have deserved it.

Knowing Hank's proclivities, I could reconstruct the scene fairly well. He must have come upon the girl before she realized his proximity, and mischievously pulled off her pointed cap with the tassel that hung to her shoulder, confidently relying upon his vaunted masculine charm to smooth over the situation if it should unexpectedly tend toward the unpleasant.

The girl had sprung to her feet, snatched for her cap, which Hank had thrust tormentingly behind him. Whereupon she had let out that eldritch scream. And the scream brought Knight-Errant Peter tearing out of the woods behind them, to remonstrate with Hank, who had naturally resented the interference. The girl had taken advantage of Hank's momentary unguardedness to snatch, vainly, for her pointed cap, then had fled inconspicuously without it.

With dismayed astonishment I had heard her scream, for it was not a scream of surprise; it was a cry of pure anger, of such depth and intensity that it started shivers running up and down my backbone. It was almost un-human in its expression of thwarted fury; arousing in me a powerful curiosity to see this girl who was so capable of such a strength of emotion. At the same time, I felt a dread of seeing her, as if she might prove to be

more than my old eyes would care to take in.

PETER told me, as we walked some distance behind Hank on our way back to my little shooting-lodge (Hank strode ahead of us with a thunderous, black countenance, a pointed, tasselled stockinette cap dangling from one hand) that the girl was—

"Well, Judge, extraordinary, if you get what I mean."

"Can't say that I do, Peter. Now, if you were telling me that Magda Farrar was extraordinary," I suggested, smiling, but Peter shook his blond head impatiently.

"Magda is—well, Magda," he explained carefully but unconvincingly. "Now, this girl was—well—say, Judge, do you remember that Hans Christian Anderson story about the erl-king's daughters, who were beautiful before, but hollow, seen from behind?"

"That girl's scream didn't ring hollow, Peter," I bantered.

His blue eyes blazed with earnest fire.

"Judge Holley, she made me remember those elf-princesses. There was a—a something," he tried to tell me lamely, "about her eyes, and her whole expression—elfish, unearthly — that wasn't — well, that wasn't—"

"I can see that this wood nymph has made a strong impression upon *you*, my boy. As for a hollow back, Peter—?"

"Her long cloak completely enveloped her, Judge. As for any impression, what I got wasn't pleasant. You see, she was absolutely white with fury at Walters and when she let out that scream—" Peter actually shuddered at the mere remembrance of it, "—I felt sick."

"H-m-m, I confess it struck me that way, too, Peter," I conceded. "Very strong personality, that young woman's," I mused thoughtfully.

"Walters had no business to snatch off a strange girl's cap," Peter criticized as he swung along beside me.

"Walters has a weakness toward all femininity, Peter," I murmured deprecatorily. (Who could know my own law-partner as well as I?) "He means no harm. Just his little failing, my boy."

"Just his failing?" repeated Peter sharply. "It was his little failing that tortured and killed Magda's mother."

I could not deny that; everybody knew that Hank's peccadillos on the primrose path had disillusioned and, yes, had broken Edith Farrar-Walter's heart. She had literally died of a broken heart, induced by the crash of her house of dreams. Her own physician had told me—but that is another story.

"Still you had no business interfering, Peter," I said gravely. "Hank is an older man than you. Also, he is Magda's guardian."

That last touched Peter, who started as if this thought with its attendant inferences came to him for the first time.

After a moment's silence he declared stubbornly, "Just the same he had no right to pull off that girl's cap and keep it from her. A perfect stranger. . . . Judge, I have a feeling that she won't let the matter drop; she'll get back at him."

"Poppycock!" laughed I. "Then I suppose that's her cap he's swinging at us like a red rag at a bull?" quoth I, amused.

Peter nodded.

"Judge, that girl had the most marvelous red hair I've ever seen in all my life. It almost wasn't real. Why, it was like a mass of curling flames that tumbled, blazing, upon her shoulders when Walters pulled her pointed cap off. And do you know, it struck me that what made her furious was because he'd uncovered her wonderful hair and she couldn't tuck it out of sight again."

"Perhaps she was mortified at wearing it

long when everybody else has shingled theirs?" I suggested, too smartly perhaps, for Peter bestowed upon me a long look of acute scorn.

"There was something absolutely extraordinary about that girl's hair," he repeated inanely.

"You've said that before, Peter," I reminded him dryly.

"Extraordinary. You know, not—not quite normal," Peter seemed to be analyzing his sensations. "As if—as if it was all alive in every strand. Why, when he pulled off her cap it was like uncovering the darting flame of a glowing torch."

"Very poetic, Peter. I wonder how Magda would relish such absorbed interest in this strange young woman's Titian locks?"

"Magda's human," retorted Peter strangely. "Now, this girl—"

And he began going over it again, as if he couldn't let the subject rest. And in that fashion we had tramped along behind Hank, who strode blackly ahead of us, actually, in his preoccupation, slamming the lodge door shut in our faces when he'd entered.

And now, after a couple of hours' stewing and simmering of their emotions, Hank—the older man, who should have been the one to control himself—burst out incontinently.

"Hell of a fine party," said he again, and shot at Peter such a look—

That look made me feel a bit sickish with apprehension, for I knew Hank capable of meannesses when he'd lost control of himself. It was only his unusual intuitions along legal lines that had constrained me to continue in partnership with him after Edith's sad death, Edith whom Peter and I both loved.

"Sorry, Walters," Peter began to apologize manfully. "But the girl—"

"To hell with the girl!" snarled Hank, tensing his crouched figure with the sug-

gestiveness of a huge wild beast about to make its spring.

That Peter saw this movement and interpreted it clearly I realized when the boy got to his feet with a lithe, guarded movement, and stood in a position of vantage, looking down upon us both as we sat before the smoldering logs on the rude stone hearth.

"I said I was sorry," repeated the boy with gravity. "I was taken off my guard by the girl's scream. I rather thought she—"

"You'd no business thinking anything about her," growled Hank, and his nostrils dilated, then pinched whitely.

I KNOW the signs. I'd seen him once, when in a cold fury of anger against an unfortunate stenographer at whom he had not dared bluster in my presence, he thrust his black countenance down into hers until she had shrunk back speechless, every drop of blood fled from her pallid and terrified face; there had been something infinitely worse about that silent thrust of his thunderous gaze into her intimate nearness than a dozen bellowed curses. So now he looked up at Peter, and I knew that back of that concentrated fury Hank's mind was working with the alert subtlety of a writhing cobra insinuating itself into the right position to strike. I began to tell myself that it was better to lose money than continue our law partnership much longer; Hank's faults had increased enormously since Edith's death.

Peter disregarded the signs, not knowing Hank as I did. He knew, of course, that Hank was boiling over with repressed emotion, with hate and fury, but Peter could not believe even what he knew, for to his ingenuous nature there had been no sound reason for such an ebullition of uncontrolled frenzy.

"She didn't like it when you uncovered her hair," Peter explained, with that

straightforward simplicity that sometimes makes me despair, while simultaneously admiring him.

"Who says she didn't like it? You damned young meddling cub, what do *you* know about women?" It was a shout by this time, and Hank now stood beside his chair.

"You don't know anything about women!" he bellowed, thrusting that face, dark with fury, at Peter, who involuntarily took a step backward, astonished. It was, obviously, Peter's first experience with Hank in a full-grown rage. "To prove what I say, I warn you now that when we get back to town Magda, who you think is in love with your yellow hair and blue eyes, will drop you like hot cakes, you young fool."

Peter's face wore the hurt look of a dumb animal which suffers your blows but refrains from striking back in its own way, because it is, after all, constituted along some lines of finer stuff than revengeful human nature can always boast. I saw that he blinked hard once or twice. When he spoke it was in such a gentle voice that I, in turn, blinked rapidly, for it did not sound like the healthily self-confident voice of youth.

"I don't think it's just—well—fair to Magda, to bring her into this, Walters," said Peter in that low, almost ingratiating voice. "Really, we were discussing—"

"I'm telling you that you think you know women, and imagine her in love with you. You don't know a damn about any woman, least of all my ward. I can twist her around my finger, I tell you, and when we get back to the city I'll see to it that you get your *cong e* so swiftly—" Walters left off, chuckling saturninely to himself, but his loose lips curled with cruelty and his narrowed black eyes never left off that fixed stare at Peter's young blond manliness.

Peter, however, slowly turned his

stricken gaze to me. I know then that this young blond Apollo was so lacking in the usual masculine conceit that he actually could not believe himself sufficiently attractive, sufficiently worth-while, to hold the beloved woman's loyalty. And no allowance was being made, apparently, for Magda's personal ideas on the subject. It was so astonishing, and to my keen sense of humor so absurd, that I must have failed to demonstrate in my expression the sympathy or the encouragement that Peter had been expecting from me.

Hank blustered on, triumphantly.

"That girl, you young fool, would have been in my arms in another minute if you hadn't come butting into what was none of your business. I know how to handle women, I tell you. They like to be treated rough," shouted he, and burst into a guffaw that had a content of insult for Peter.

I saw that the boy colored. I knew how tenderly reverent were his thoughts about his sweetheart, for once in awhile he had dropped a chance remark that made me love him for his fineness. Hank had dug in, deeply, when he made that final observation.

"That girl—" all at once cried out Peter, as if he could not contain himself, "that girl would have killed you if she'd had a knife or pistol handy, when you tore away her cap and tumbled her glorious hair down over her shoulders. Didn't you see how she tried to push it together and cover it with her hands?"

For a moment my partner's dark mood lightened. A reminiscent smile flickered about his loose lips, drawing them into an expression of complacent irony.

"Kill me, would she? Perhaps—but with kisses, fool."

"Lord!" Peter jerked out, in the throes of such sick disgust that he actually drew up his shoulders, nauseated at that revelation of Hank's character.

His fury turned aside momentarily,

Hank uttered an immoderate laugh, apparently at his own thoughts. Then he said to Peter, sudden chill descending into his words and manner: "At all events, young man, don't come hanging around my ward any more. I won't have it. Just don't like you, that's all."

AT THE look of sly triumph on his face I began to consider again that clause in our articles of partnership which might be utilized in dissolving the business tie that bound us together, for down underneath I knew lay the direct will to hurt Peter Murray, and I feared that Magda—so slight and gentle and timid—would be wax in those cruelly clever hands, for Hank would stop at nothing.

Peter's face, puzzled for a moment at this direct attack, grew slowly white.

"You're rather unreasonable, Walters," said he, disturbed. "Miss Farrar and I are engaged, and I asked you not to bring her name into this disgustedly silly affair. Whatever your opinion of me, I wish you would honor that request, at least."

"Somebody ought to teach you your manners toward your betters," snarled Hank. His hands were shutting and opening, and shutting again.

"Not my betters," disputed Peter quietly but with a spirit. "My elders, perhaps."

"I'd like to hide you for your insolence," roared my partner, and suddenly swung across in front of me with that heavy fist of his, which I caught just in the nick of time by flinging up my hand against his arm, so that the blow he had aimed at Peter went harmlessly into space. He recovered his balance with an effort, and wheeled about upon me, where I sat quietly alert.

"You may be my senior in the firm, Judge Wilcox," he cried out at me with pointed formality, "but that gives you no right to interfere in my personal affairs, any more than that young cub."

Peter exclaimed sharply, so that we both looked at him in astonishment.

"That girl!"

"Where?" whispered Hank, in a hoarse undertone.

"At that window. She was staring in at us—at you," Peter replied, his voice also sinking to a low murmur. "Lord, how her hair blazes, in the light from our file!"

"Didn't I tell you you knew nothing about women, you fool?" whipped out my partner, and smiled sneeringly at the younger man.

Peter looked at him, his brows a straight line above his narrowed eyes.

"She's followed me here," whispered Hank. His low, triumphant laugh trembled as if with suddenly aroused emotion. "Excuse me, gentlemen, if I meet the lady outside. I have a faint idea that she would prefer to see me alone," and he smirked at us, licking his thick, loose lips with unctuous anticipation.

I exchanged a quick look with Peter. The boy was very pale. Then he strode across the room and stood before the door.

"Don't go," said he, barring the way. "Don't, Walters. I tell you, that girl's got it in for you. That girl *hates* you..."

A great laugh. Hank's head flung back as it issued thunderously from his pulsing throat.

"Hates me? *Me?* You young whippersnapper, I give you my permission to follow us and find out for yourself how much she hates me."

With that, he plunged at a heavy sweater on a peg by the door, pushed Peter out of his way, and flung out into the chill November night, leaving us silent, staring, half sick, behind him.

"Shut that door, my boy. The night air is penetrating."

Peter obeyed, slowly. Then he came to the fireplace and stood looking down at me, his blue eyes veiled with some secret, disturbing thought.

"What's up, boy?"

"Judge, I'm—afraid."

Husky, fearless, Peter is, to use such a word.

"Of what, lad?"

"That strange girl," whispered Peter, and over the pallor of his perplexed young face a grayness stole. "I tell you, her hair—"

"Oh, it is the *girl* who troubles you? Nothing strange in that," I laughed. "And as for her hair, Peter?"

"I tell you, she isn't—she isn't—one of us," said Peter with that distaste for the unusual that most normal men display. "She isn't—well, *right*. The *cr* King's daughters," he muttered irrelevantly.

"Why should that disturb you, my boy? If she isn't, we'll have our deeply disappointed friend back again in a short time, and I think, perhaps, you'd better arrange to be asleep in bed when he comes in, to avoid any further quarreling."

He shook his blond head slowly. Then with a sudden ejaculation he snatched for his cap and thrust it down upon his head. He pulled down a lumber jacket and began hurriedly pushing his arms through the sleeves.

"Why, Peter! You're not going out?" I asked inanely. "See here, Peter, he's right when he says it's none of your business. And the girl followed him here."

"That girl means to hurt him if she can," whispered Peter, his blue eyes looking wild in the fire's smoldering flicker.

"Poppycock!" I retorted tartly, for I saw where Peter's mood was leading us both, and the fire looked and felt good to me, that cold night.

"Just the same, I'm going to follow him. He said I might, didn't he?"

"You know perfectly well he didn't mean it," I objected lamely.

"Are you coming or not?" demanded Peter. "I'd like to have you along, Judge,"

and in his anxiety he began helping me into my sheepskin coat with unnecessary enthusiasm.

IT CERTAINLY looked as if I were in for it, so I shrugged my shoulders, knocked out my pipe and tucked it into my pocket, got my cap from a peg and followed that frantic boy. He led me a chase for a few minutes, for of course there was no way to locate Hank or the girl as long as they kept quiet. They might have been lurking about the cabin. If they had gone, in which direction had they disappeared?

There was no sound of voices to guide me, but all at once Peter uttered a smothered cry, and his hand closed about my arm like an iron band. He jerked me right-about-face, and then I saw what he'd seen, a kind of flickering, glowing light, off in the woods ahead of us.

"That's her," said Peter ungrammatically, and his voice was actually trembling with some emotion I had neither time nor inclination to analyze at that moment.

"What do you mean, That's her?" I echoed.

"Judge, don't you understand? I mean, it's her *hair*."

At that, I did give way to laughter that surged upward, shaking my diaphragm uncontrollably.

"Peter," I choked, when I could at least get out a word, "the lady's Titian hair has certainly turned your head. It must be luminous, if that's it. Boy, boy, you are absurd."

"God!" groaned Peter. His hand closed tighter than ever about my arm. "Judge, it's so horrible that I can hardly believe it myself. "I—I daren't say it—now. Look! Look!"

That reddish luminosity was bobbing unevenly up and down, as if it came from a lamp borne upon the head of a person walking rapidly, swimmingly, across un-

even ground. It was apparent to me that the girl carried a lantern only half opened. Quite natural, for a young person wandering around the woods at night. Could it be possible, after all, that Hank Walters had good foundations for his belief in his attraction for women? It looked that way, for this strange young woman had evidently forgotten her momentary anger at his rudeness of the afternoon, and had actually come, like Diogenes, hunting for him with her lantern. It was ridiculous, and I really didn't like to believe that a girl could fall so easily for a man like Hank. Surely she wouldn't have gone to such lengths merely to retrieve her cap?

"God!" ejaculated Peter Murray again. And then: "Listen!" he warned me.

I stood motionless, hardly breathing, and then I heard Hank's voice, and the crashing of his heavy body pushing its way through tangled undergrowth and over dry, crackling, fallen limbs and sere autumn leaves.

"Yes—that's Hank," I whispered.

"I know. Listen!"

Like the modulated voice that speaks behind the wings at the theater, purporting to be momentarily speeding away, came these broken, breathless outbursts of speech:

"Wait, you little devil!"

A crash into the undergrowth.

"I'm coming right along, you red-headed beauty. Want your cap, don't you? Well, I'll give it to you—maybe—for a kiss."

Another crash.

"Where's that lantern of yours, girl? Hold it this way. I can't see a thing."

Much tumbling and noise. Puffing. Blowing.

"Struck a tree that time . . . a-a-a-r-r-r-r-gh."

A mighty impact it must have been to have jerked that grunt out of Hank's heavy body.

"I'll catch up with you yet! Where's that light? Turn it this way, you she-devil!"

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the dreary, ominous whistle of a wind that came leaping down from the northwest, bearing on its sweeping pinions a biting foretaste of winter. And then such a scream as I hope never again to hear in all my life, so freighted was it with horror and—something more—. Followed, while I was still numbed, a laugh as sharply tinkling as silver bells shaken together in a crystal globe.

"She's done it! I knew she would!" cried out Peter frantically, and that gripping hand of his began to draw me forward through the woods recklessly.

I was colliding as I went with trees and bushes that seemed to spring out of the ground to form obstacles to our mad onrush. Once I fell over a huge rock that almost appeared to have reared itself against us directly out of the bosom of Mother Earth.

"Are you mad?" I gasped, trying in vain to pull my arm from Peter's frenzied grip. "We'll both be killed, running like this in the dark among these trees and rocks."

"Idiot that I am!" shouted Peter in reply. "I forgot the flashlight. It's right here in my pocket."

He pulled it out, let go my arm and then turned it on. Blessed light! It was time we had it. I knew my face was bleeding where a dry branch had neatly skinned one cheek as we flashed past it, and I'd barked both shins; I rather imagined they were bleeding, too. Peter ran ahead after that, throwing the light of the torch here and there.

We had been going uphill gradually, and it dawned upon me all at once what had happened, for a ghastly kind of silence reigned, broken only by the wind's sullen whine and our own trampling feet among dried leaves and broken twigs.

Hank had been following the girl blindly, and her lantern had not been powerful enough to discover to them their peril. They had gone running, directly to the verge of the old quarry.

"Here! Here!" shouted Peter.

THE light from his torch shot across a wide space, all black below that brilliant beam.

It was a warning I received none too soon to save me from the fate that had befallen the two who had been running ahead of us. I caught desperately with one arm at a tree trunk and swung about it, just barely checking my momentum. As I swung, my eyes followed the beam of Peter's light, down—down—piercing the darkness below.

There was a huddled, motionless heap at the bottom of the quarry. I knew that would be Hank. Or what was left of Hank.

I knew, too, that Hank would never bellow curses again. How? I *knew*. Above him bent another figure that pulled at him now, turning him this way and that.

Glowing, shining, dulling the very light of the electric torch that was bent in a brilliant stream of radiance upon it, was another light that seemed a very flame, leaping with such fervency of life that it hurt the eyes to see. Believe me or not, I know what I saw, and it was the pulsing, living flame of the red hair piling about the head of that strange girl that put the electric light to shame. I cried out in amazement and, I confess, with a sudden access of shuddering dislike and fear. What hair!

"I told you!" cried out Peter, beside me, and where he had been fearful before, he became reckless now.

He pushed the torch into my free hand, for I was still clinging to the tree that had served to break my dashing momentum.

"Play it on him," he directed. "She—

she won't like that. I'll manage to climb down somehow."

I could hear the scraping of his feet and the crumbling fall of pebbles as he climbed down into the quarry toward that gruesome two. Once I heard his exclamation as he slipped. In an access of anxiety for him, I swerved the torch to light his perilous way, and when I saw he needed it, held it upon him, but my eyes were drawn from him by the sudden spring upward into vivid, astounding brilliance, of that strange girl's leaping flames of red hair, as if they showed off more in the darkness than in the torch's light. It took me a moment to realize what that meant, and the torch trembled so in my hand that I almost let it slip into the quarry.

Who was this creature, whose flaming locks carried the leaping light of living fire? I found myself shuddering. . . .

And then Peter shouted from below, and I turned the light in the direction of his voice. He was leaning over Hank's body. Then he straightened up.

The girl had moved away and stood a little distance, silent. She, it would appear, had not been injured, and I stupidly wondered why not, and how she had managed to escape Hank's untimely fate. A moment later I was to know.

"He's dead," I heard Peter declare. He was not speaking to me, for there was stern accusation in his voice. "You did it. Why?"

Her finger pointed downward.

I played the torch light where she was pointing, and saw Peter stoop. He drew a long, sinuous thing from Hank's dead fingers, and not easily at that. The girl swooped upon him, snatched at it, and then all at once the quarry went black except for the light of the torch, centered there on Peter standing by the dead man.

It was as if somebody had put an extinguisher over a torch!

I heard a tinkling, penetrating ripple of

cool, hard laughter. Where the girl had been standing I discerned a faint glow as of a shaded lantern. This light suddenly rose upward like thistledown on the wind, but in a swift, straight movement. It was as if that shaded lantern had been fastened at the end of a rope and had been drawn steadily upward. It paused in mid-air, hanging motionless over the middle of the quarry. I felt a most uncomfortable qualm at that sight, and mentally refused to give entrance to the surmises that crowded upon my troubled mind.

Peter was shouting at me from below, a quaver in his voice that he managed to restrain just above the point where it might have sounded craven. My sympathy was with him, for I *felt* the way his voice sounded.

"For God's sake, Judge, don't drop that torch!" he was crying at me. "I'm coming up. We couldn't get him out of here in the dark." The torch shook in my trembling hand. It could not have been of much assistance to Peter in his climb up the side of the quarry.

The girl—had no lantern. She had come floating up out of that quarry as if she were lighter than thistledown on the night wind—and through the long pointed cap that enveloped her hair glowed the light from those uncanny locks of flaming red. I mean that. The light came from her hair. It burned and glowed from under the edges of her long tasselled cap, and blazed where it had escaped in occasional locks as if it were living flame. It was unearthly. I was thankful when Peter had scrambled to my side.

"She's gone?" he asked rather than stated.

I touched him and he looked and saw what I was seeing. I could feel his sturdy frame shuddering. And as we stared, she must have drawn the cap closer over her brows and tucked in those fiery, straying locks, for it was as if someone had pushed

an extinguisher down upon a flaming torch. Only a faint glow remained, like decaying wood; even that drifted away from us at last, like sea spume in moonlight, driven by a summer zephyr. But I had seen her face in one flashing moment; distinctly. It was unlike the face of any mortal woman I had ever looked upon. Something unearthly—elfish!

Peter was right when he said: "Extraordinary!"

"I don't believe she means us any harm," he whispered as if he feared to be overheard. "I gave her back her cap, didn't I?" he murmured uncertainly. "But I say, Judge, let's light out of here!"

It may have seemed cowardly to go away, leaving the body of my dead partner at the bottom of the black quarry, but perhaps if you had seen what Peter and I saw, you would have run for comparative shelter just as fast as we ran through the wood to my cabin.

The November wind howled and tore at us as we fled, the electric torch lighting our way precariously. Yet we were glad enough that no other light showed itself in our path. All that was ever said between us about that girl, Peter said when we had reached our goal.

"Will-o'-the-wisp," he muttered thickly, breathing hard as he slammed the bolts of the cabin door firmly into place.

And then he went to work nailing blankets over both the windows, nor did I question his action.

Of course, we couldn't tell all our story to the coroner next day. We said that Hank Walters had followed a girl that night and had inadvertently fallen into the quarry in the dark and that we could not locate the girl. The coroner said it was clear enough. He even suggested that the girl might have pushed Hank. Peter and I—well, we knew there was no need to push Hank when he was following the Ignis Fatuus.