

# SPICY MYSTERY STORIES

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# Death is a



*The Goat God had whispered, "Go back! Death waits ahead!" But Beauchamp and the girl went on to their destination, and to an adventure that chilled their blood*

THE sun went down leaving only a gray ghost of light that thickened toward darkness. To right and left of the shell road was swamp: black water choked with lilypads, occasional muddy hillocks, oak and cypress

that clawed the gray sky with leafless arms; and everywhere the dank gray curtain of Spanish moss.

"You can feel it," Charlie Beauchamp said to the girl who rode beside him on the front seat of the automobile. "It's the

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By WILLIAM B. RAINY

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# Treasure



him. He leaned his head close to her ink-black hair, whispered, "Darling!" and looking downward saw that she had pulled her skirt above her knees because of the heat and the white flesh of her legs glowed softly in the gloom. He let his hand slide from the steering wheel around her waist, and felt the responding quiver run through her. She was wearing a man's shirt, open at the throat, and he could glimpse the soft swelling of her breasts and the shadowed valley between them.

She asked, "How much farther is it, Charlie?" There was a throbbing promise in her voice.

"A few miles."

THE change came over her suddenly and without warning. She was abruptly tense at Beauchamp's side and in her face there was something unnameable, something almost psychic as though she were looking beyond the

The faceless girl carried two chickens in her hand, a hen and a rooster.

bayou at twilight. It's a world of its own. It's the Congo transplanted. It's the ancient, the eternal. And sometimes I think it's the home of evil."

"You get quite poetic over it," Marda said.

He glanced to see if she were making fun of him. She wasn't. Her eyes were dark and serious as she stared out into the swamp. Her lips, full and softly curved and damp, were parted. She had never seemed so furiously beautiful to Beauchamp as she did now. A hot-and-cold wave of excitement shot through



gloom and the swamp and into some ineluctable horror that lay ahead of them. "I'm afraid," she whispered.

Beauchamp looked at her, incredulous. "Afraid? Of what?" The three persons on the back seat of the car had heard her and stopped their conversation to listen.

"I—I don't know," Marda said. "But there's something—out here, something gruesome and deadly."

"That's just the way the swamp makes you feel," Julian Rivers said from the rear. "A lot of this country remains exactly as it was when only the Indians had seen it."

"Julian probably knows how many Indians there were," June Borden said. "For breakfast he eats a History of Louisiana."

"That's why I'm crashing your party," Rivers said good-naturedly. "I need some more information for an article I'm doing and Charlie's got a collection of manuscripts, letters, and old books out here that a collector would pay a fortune for."

Beauchamp was not listening. His mind had turned back to the time two weeks before when Tom Delaney and Marda had opened at the Crescent Theater in New Orleans. They were billed as brother and sister, though Marda had told Beauchamp they were not related. The act was part frank trickery, and part a revelation of the girl's amazing psychic abilities. Beauchamp had seen the first performance and afterwards met Marda backstage. He would never forget that meeting, or the hours, and days and nights which followed.

She had been sitting at her dressing table, her back to the door when Delaney brought Charlie in. A silk scarlet robe draped free over her shoulders. His gaze met the reflection of hers in the mirror and it was like an electric shock, jerking him stiff and taut.

He didn't remember Delaney introducing them, then leaving the room. He was staring at the dark, hypnotic face in the mirror. Then she turned, still sitting, and looked full at him. The scarlet wrap hung loose and he could see that she was wearing little beneath it. The full, breath-taking bosom was half visible, firm and

quivering with her breath. The long, beautifully shaped legs were stretched in front of her and there was a glimpse of sleek white thighs.

He tried to tell her that he'd enjoyed the act. The words stuck in his throat. Then he was asking her if he could see her after the show.

**H**OW it happened he never knew. She had stood up and all at once his arms were around her, her lithe body was flat against him from knees to shoulders, her mouth damp and hungry burned into his. He could feel her breasts flattening upon his chest, feel them throb with the emotion that ran through her.

Then she was away from him, the scarlet gown held tight around her, hair, so black it was almost blue, framing her face. Her eyes were wide with that look of seeing through him into the future. "I knew when you came in the door," she whispered. "I knew we could never keep away from one another." And then the look on her face changed and she said, "I'm afraid! I'm afraid!" and she was clinging to him again, madly, despairingly . . .

After that night Beauchamp was scarcely conscious of anything except Marda. He met her after each show. He was with her most of his waking hours, and a good part of those when he slept. More than once she had suddenly said that she was afraid, that she felt some horrible doom waiting for them. But she couldn't explain the feeling, and Beauchamp had enjoyed it—because she was one of these women on whom fear and danger acted as a stimulant, sending wild, almost inhuman fires storming through her.

He had noticed that her psychic fears came more often when he talked of the ancient, bayou-surrounded home of his ancestors and had offered to bring her

out for a weekend's fishing and cure her. Delaney had insisted on coming, bringing June Borden with him. Beauchamp had consented, though without much pleasure. Several times in the past two weeks he had noticed Delaney watching him and Marda. He believed the man was jealous, but Marda said there had never been any relation between them except professional partnership. And after Delaney and June Borden, Rivers also had asked to come along.

**N**OW Beauchamp let his gaze shift once more from the road to the girl beside him. She was staring at the swamp again, and in her face was that look which had troubled him since their first meeting.

Abruptly she said, "It's the swamp. Death is here. I feel it."

"This is a hell of a cheerful talk," June Borden said. She was a girl with the face of a cherub and the body of Diana. She could knock over three quail with four shots and drink a pint of corn whiskey without showing it, but to look at her you'd think she slept with a teddybear cradled in each arm.

Rivers said, "With you along . . ." The last word was hurled from his mouth as the car went into a lurching skid. Shells machine-gunned against the fenders. Marda's cry was sudden and sharp, drowned in the deafening roar that merged with a dark streak crashing down before the automobile.

The car jerked to a halt. Beauchamp held the steering wheel with hands bloodless from pressure. Sweat had abruptly thick around his mouth. He stared at the dead tree which lay across the road.

He had seen that tree falling in the last second that gave him time enough to stop. And the tree had not leaned slowly, gathering speed for its fall. There was no wind blowing to crash it down.

Yet without warning it had slashed at them.

And in that moment of shocked, immobile silence the voice sounded. "Go back!" it said. It was scarcely a whisper and yet it shook the murky gloom like a cannonade. "Go back! Death waits ahead of you!"

**I**T SEEMED to Beauchamp that he had been staring at the figure for seconds before he saw it, that it was formed of gray and ghastly twilight and nothing else, that he could see through it as through a mist. It was the satyr of mythology, a creature neither human nor animal but with the goat-haired body of a man and above that the head of a goat, and all made of a substance no thicker than smoke.

"Go back," its voice whispered in rolling thunder. "*Beyond this tree there is death*—for some of you."

A hideous, Pan-like expression twisted the goat head and Beauchamp was thinking suddenly, "The Goat-God, the God of all animal evil!"

"Death for some!" the thing whispered again. "And love for others!" It was looking straight at Marda then, and there was unspeakable wickedness in its voice.

Beauchamp didn't know that he had moved, but he was outside the car, rounding the front fenders. And then he stopped. His mouth was wide open now and the sweat stood slimy upon his face.

For the figure had left the road, wavering like blown fog out upon the dark water of the bayou—water that Beauchamp knew was twelve feet deep in places! It scudded over the water and beyond brush that did not quiver as it passed. Then twilight swallowed the figure into itself.

June Borden stepped out beside Beauchamp, a shot gun in her hands. "Damn

these gun cases," she said. "I couldn't get the thing off to save my life." But beneath her makeup she was pale.

"It was the goat-headed voodoo God," Rivers said. "I've read about him." His voice shook slightly as she spoke. Against the gloom his face was a shocked white.

"It was Death," Marda said. "And we can't escape it! We can't!" She ran to Beauchamp and clung tight to his hand. She was panting, her eyes dilated. Through the open V of her shirt he could see the high swelling of her exquisite breasts and see them move with each gasping breath.

For a moment Beauchamp stood motionless, tall and lean, wide-shouldered, the angles of his face increased by the tight set of his mouth. He said, "It was some trick. It must have been. But I didn't know there was any voodoo left out here."

"If the Negroes are having a ceremony and want us to go back, we'd better do it," Rivers said. "I don't know much about those rites, but they get pretty wild at times."

"Phooey! If there's a ceremony I want to see it," June said. "And I'm damn sure not going to let anything keep me from fishing tomorrow."

The final decision was to go ahead. June and Delaney insisted on it and the others were rather ashamed to argue. But even as they dragged the tree aside, Beauchamp kept remembering how the figure had formed out of nothing, how it had blown like smoke across the water.

**D**ARKNESS came as they drove. It crowded in upon them, a suffocating blackness through which the car lights cut sharply. And with the darkness chill, almost supernatural quiet came upon the swamp. There was no chorus of frogs and crickets, no night birds chirping: only the faint purr of the motor, the grind

of tires on shells. And then from far off there was another sound.

Marda huddled so close to Beauchamp he could feel her breast warm against his arm. "What's that?"

"Dogs," Beauchamp said. "In the Negro quarters I imagine, I never heard them howling so loudly before."

The trees ended, leaving them at the edge of a large clearing that tilted gradually upward. At the top was the house, a huge and shapeless mass against the night. Then the car had topped the knoll, turned into a U shaped drive before the house, and stopped. "Here we are," Beauchamp said. When he cut off the motor, the howling of the dogs came clearly from somewhere beyond the house.

What had once been magnificent lawns were rank with weeds and bushes. Shrubs pressed thick and dank against the walls. One of the tall columns across the front tilted crazily. The place stood dark and ominous.

"I wonder where the overseer is," Beauchamp said. "I wrote him we were coming." He tooted the horn and yelled, "Hello! Crass! Where are you?"

A light showed at the far end of the hall which bisected the house. Yellow and shoulder high it wavered toward them, growing larger until it came through the front door and Beauchamp could see the thin, dark, hightoned face of Sam Crass, his overseer.

"Hello," Beauchamp said. "You got my note I was coming out?"

Crass nodded, his head throwing distorted shadows across the floor.

"Well, let's go in," Beauchamp said. "Some of the help will get our bags." He took Marda's elbow. The planking of the steps was soft and rotting. Beyond the house the dogs continued to howl.

Marda held to Beauchamp. "You go

Three huge bucks carried Marda to the place of sacrifice.



to my room with me," she whispered. "This house—it's so strange—and those dogs . . ."

**H**E WENT gladly enough. There were no electric lights. Candlelight showed a high-walled room opening on a small balcony, heavy mahogany furniture, a huge fourposter bed over which

a mosquito net hung ghostly in the gloom. Marda turned swiftly to him as the door closed behind them, flung her arms around his neck, her body hard against his. Fear had made her eyes wide and luminous, and as always it set conflicting emotions running like wildfire through her veins. "Charlie," she whispered. "Hold me. Hold me hard. I'm afraid—

terribly afraid!" And she clung to him as if she'd never let go.

He held her. They stood in the center of the room, swaying, bodies close together, mouths avid on one another. She was wearing little beside the shirt and a thin skirt. Through the cloth he could feel the warmth of her pulsing flesh, feel the sweet flowering of her hips.

His heart was hammering painfully and he could scarcely breathe. His muscles felt watery. His knees trembled. with a sudden surge of new-found strength, he gathered the girl in his arms and cradled her against his chest. The movement loosened her shirt at the neckline, slid it off one white shoulder, and a snowy breast gleamed momentarily in the candle light. His mouth sought and found the soft, intimate hollow of her throat. Through eager, parted lips her hot breath fluttered in his ear.

"Charlie," she gasped. "Charlie . . ."

IT WAS long moments later that the girl suddenly stiffened in his arms. A scream jarred in her throat. Her arm was skeleton-white as she stabbed a finger toward the open balcony. "Look! Look!"

For an instant Beauchamp thought he was dreaming. The thing he saw was impossible! Horror squeezed his heart and sent pain lashing through his body. He tried to breathe and couldn't.

There was a woman on the balcony, barely visible in the moon-tinted light. To all appearances she was totally, gorgeously naked. Slim, curving legs rose rhythmically to swell into rounded hips. Above a flat, sleek waist, her upper body was majestic. In the moonlight her flesh was the color of saffron, swaying, undulating, gyrating with an unholy motion. There was something horrible, something furiously and irresistibly evil about her movements. Beauchamp

wanted to scream, to run howling away from her—and he found that he was in the center of the floor, going forward like a man hypnotized, unable to resist.

She half turned in her dancing and the moonlight fell pale across her face. Then Beauchamp heard his own voice torn terribly from his throat. He reeled backward, his hands over his eyes.

For the girl on the balcony had no face! There was only a skull over which drooled slimy tatters of flesh. The eyes were blank, glaring sockets, the mouth lipless with white froth dripping between broken teeth.

Somewhere in the night a voice whispered tremendously, "Leave! Leave this house of the damned or your women shall be as the one you see before you!" It was the voice of the Goat-God!

Marda's scream helped jerk Beauchamp back to his senses. He fought his nerves, conquered them. His muscles were stiff and aching as he flung himself toward the balcony. And then he stopped, wild-eyed.

The place was empty except for pale moonlight!

He stood motionless for a long moment, feeling disbelief and terror crawl through him. His body was sleek with sweat; but his mouth felt as though it had been stuffed with dry cotton and, trying to dampen his lips with his tongue, did no good.

He turned back into the candle-lighted room. Marda was crouched at the side of the bed, forgetting to pull her shirt back over her semi-nakedness. "It's Death," she whispered. "We can't escape. I knew . . ."

"I'm going to find out," Beauchamp said. He heeled and went out of the room.

CRASS the overseer was on the back porch, gaunt head held to one side,

a nasty grin twisting his mouth. "Listen at them dogs," he said. "They howl that way down in the quarters most every night now."

Beauchamp gripped his shoulder, spun him around. "What the hell's going on around here? What's happened?"

Crass laughed. "How'd I know? Been some talk 'bout hoodoo. Four or five blacks that used to be round here ain't here no more." He shrugged.

"Who's behind it?" Beauchamp said. "Who's the headman down there now?"

"Nigger calls hisself Seymore. A high yellow. He come here 'bout a month ago. Right after that all this stuff started."

"I think I'll see him," Beauchamp said.

The grin faded from Crass's senile face. "I wouldn't bother down there if I was you. They go crazy over that hoodoo stuff. Besides . . ." There was sudden terror in his eyes. "You can't mess around with that stuff. It ain't all human . . ."

"I'm going to see him," Beauchamp said. But first he went back into the house. He found Delaney and Rivers, told them to take the girls back to New Orleans, to leave right away. They objected, and when they found Beauchamp refused to let them stay, they tried to persuade him to go with them.

"Listen," Rivers said. "You'll only get yourself killed out here alone. Let's take the girls in and then all come back together, bring the sheriff. Or else just leave the Negroes alone until they get over this spell."

"I'm going to stay," Beauchamp said. And he did. June Borden swore she wanted to stay with him; Marda tried to make him come back to New Orleans with them. He looked down at the full curves of her body and she pressed close against him, begging him to come with her. Ecstatic memories throbbed hauntingly within his brain. But he shook his

head, and presently he stood alone on the porch, watching the red tail-light of the car sweep out of the drive, then fade downward into darkness. Far off in the Negro quarters the dogs kept howling.

SEYMORE, the hoodoo man, was not in his cabin when Beauchamp got there. Nearly all the Negroes were gone from the quarters and those that remained shook their heads in terror when he questioned them. There was a meeting somewhere tonight. They swore they didn't know where. But Beauchamp didn't give up the search. As a child he'd heard vague whispering about the place where the two-headed doctors did their work. It had always been somewhere in the swamp beyond Crescent Bayou.

Ten minutes later he was in a small pirogue. Across the guwhales lay a repeating shotgun. In the right pocket of his hunting jacket he carried a .38 automatic. In the left pocket was a flashlight.

There was no way to know where to begin his search. The bayou coiled for miles, losing itself in innumerable others, twisting down through swamp-land and islands all the way to the gulf. But Beauchamp went straight across the narrow tongue of water toward the heart of the swamp. It was somewhere in this section that most of the child-heard stories had located the place.

He pushed the pirogue onto a mud-flat, left it, and plunged into the utter darkness beneath the cypress and moss-hung oak. The white cone of his flash lashed the darkness. A bird stirred in bushes to his left, making a little rustling sound among the leaves.

As he went ahead, the swamp tightened around him. Muck and water sucked at his shoes. At times he was forced to balance carefully on a water-surrounded hillock, search with his light until he found the next one, jump for it over

quicksand that would have sucked him under in brief seconds. Now and then he saw the dark sleek coil of a moccasin or from the darkness heard one slither through marsh grass and water. To right and left vines writhed downward like the dangling ropes of some huge and forgotten stage scenery.

### IT HAPPENED without warning.

There was a sound that might have been wind in the brush. He glanced toward it casually.

A hoarse cry belched in his throat. He tried to swing the shotgun, get the butt under his elbow. But his muscles were stiff with fear. He could feel his eyes bulging, seeming to explode from their sockets.

Before him stood the goat-headed figure—less than two feet away!

The instant seemed to last for hours. He kept trying to swing the gun, seeming to move with the drifting slowness of a man underwater.

And then the light went out of his hand, spinning through the darkness. Thunder crashed against his skull, the very force of the impact bending his knees. He began to fall, slowly, turning over and over in darkness that wrapped itself around his brain.

**S**OUND boomed with slow rolling monotony. It was the throb of pain within his head, he thought. His brain seemed to contract, then flow outward to strike hard against his skull, but gradually the pain cleared until he was able to see and think.

He was lying in thick sawgrass that separated a big clearing from the dark waters of a bayou. Firelight washed over the sawgrass, and between the blades he could see the clearing.

Huge trees formed a kind of ampi-

theatre some fifty feet in diameter. In the center was a fire, and on the other side of the fire were three tom-toms over which naked Negro bucks crouched, beating out steady time with the heels of their hands. Circling them and the fire were other Negroes, men and women, perhaps fifty in all. Some of them had on scraps of clothing, others were entirely nude.

Firelight gleamed on sweat-sleek bodies, on breasts, huge and ponderous, small and conical, erect or flabby. They crouched or knelt, swaying with ceaseless rhythm of the tom-toms. And from them, low and agonized, came a moaning chant. Their faces were rapt, insensible to all except the gruesome ceremony about to begin, eager to have it over with so they would be released on a wild unlimited orgy.

The beating of the tom-toms increased. It rolled into one long crescendoing fury. And stopped. On the sharp silence a woman screamed, "Heah he come!"

Every person in the clearing turned to stare past where Beauchamp lay hidden toward the bayou.

Beauchamp tried to move and realized for the first time that his hands and feet were tied. He doubled his legs under him and rolled. As he did, his trousers were pulled up over his ankles. He stared at them, unbelieving.

His legs had been painted black!

For a moment he did not understand the significance of what he saw. And then, slowly, it came to him. There was no way to know what the reaction of these Negroes would be if they found a white man watching their ceremony. They might kill him. They might break and run. But if they found Beauchamp now they would never realize he had been painted. Shouting at them would

make no difference. They were beyond the point of understanding words.

He remembered suddenly the words of Crass, his overseer. "Four of five blacks that used to be round here ain't here no more." What had happened to them? He had only the dreadful memories of stories heard as a child—*stories of human sacrifice!*

THE moon had climbed high now, flooding down over the dark bayou. And through this ghostly moonlight came the goat-headed figure, blowing like smoke across water. Transparent and yet visible it floated to the bayou's edge not twenty feet from where Beauchamp lay. It glided through the grass and into the clearing.

The drums had taken up their beating again. From out of the dark beyond the circle came an almost naked girl and now Beauchamp wanted to shout in horror—for it was the faceless woman he had seen on the balcony. In the waver-

ing light of the fire she was more dreadful than ever, the shards of flesh drooling blood across the skull-like face.

She danced forward with that vile, animal motion that was more than a human being could watch without feeling re-



vulsion storm through him. The fire glinted on her thighs and flat stomach, on the proud, heavy splendor of her breasts. Her whole writhing body glistened as though it had been oiled. The negroes swayed and screamed, held back from one another only by some unheard and superhuman command.

The faceless girl carried two chickens in her hands, a hen and rooster. She went down on her knees as she approached the Goat-God, writhing her body, holding the chickens toward him. But he shook his head and the Negroes groaned in terror as she turned from him toward an old man who lifted a razor and cut the throats of the chickens. Holding the bloody carcasses high, she let the crimson stream over her body, then glided out of the circle again.

Almost immediately she came back leading two white goats, male and female, dancing between them with that horrible writhing motion. But again the God's head shook from side to side.

A fearful wail went up. The Negroes were crouching, contorting, held by terror and even grimmer emotions. But as the old man cut the throat of the goats, the God turned and pointed toward the sawgrass some twenty yards from where Beauchamp lay. Three huge bucks went to the spot, stooped, and lifted into the light the form of a woman—the woman who would be used as a human sacrifice.

Beauchamp went half mad. He screamed and stormed at his ropes. For although the girl's body was bronze-colored, he knew her. It was Marda!

**H**E SCARCELY knew when the men came and lifted him, dragging him through the sawgrass into the clearing. His bulging eyes were fixed on Marda's body bound upright to a post near the fire. The light wavered over the slim,

swelling legs, the high firm bosom. Her mouth hung slack. Her eyes were glazed with terror.

The grass had cut Beauchamp's face and hands and legs in a dozen places, but he felt no pain. The blood ran sleek over his painted skin. The crowd's screams were cataclysmic now as they begged the God to end the sacrifice which would satisfy him, and release them to their own crazed devices.

Then men half carried, half dragged Charlie Beauchamp across the clearing. He felt the heat of the fire increase against his face, felt it burn at his eyeballs as the Negroes thrust him ahead of them toward the tall pole at the edge of the fire. He fought with them as an animal does, insanely, using feet and shoulders and teeth. But even while he struggled, they untied his hands and ankles, pushed him against the pole, pulled his arms and legs around it.

The old man who had killed the chickens and goat was erect now. The light played in red and running flashes upon the razor in his hand.

And then Beauchamp's voice joined with the screaming. "Oh Lawd!" His knees buckled, every muscle in his body went limp.

The Negroes who had been holding him changed their grips to support him. There was a split instant in which the hands held him laxly. And in that instant Beauchamp acted.

His knees straightened, catapulting him away from the pole and out of the Negroes' grasp. Headlong he dived at the old man who had killed the goat and chickens. There was no chance for the fellow to move. Beauchamp's swinging left fist landed on his jaw, smashed him down. The razor fell, glittering in the firelight. Then Beauchamp had caught it up. He plunged at the Goat God. He felt

the swinging razor strike, the blunt side jar back against his knuckles.

His shoulder plunged into the Goat God and pain jolted through him. Then they were on the ground, rolling. And all at once the creature under Beauchamp ceased to struggle.

It stiffened and began to scream!

Beauchamp wriggled to his knees. He caught the goat-head and jerked. In the red firelight he stared down into the convulsed face of Julian Rivers.

The cry gurgled off. The mouth bent in a contorted and furious grin. "That damn mulatto double-crossed me," he said. "But all I needed was tonight. I . . ." He died, the hideous grin still twisting his face that was red and purple in the fire-light.

Beauchamp stood up and turned. He and the corpse and Marda were alone in the clearing.

SEVERAL days later Beauchamp was able to explain the whole thing to Marda. "Julian was a history student," he said. "He had come on some old papers that he believed indicated where La Fitte, the famous pirate, had buried treasure on my property. But a vast amount of digging was necessary, more than he could do alone. Besides, he might have been seen by the Negroes. So he started up that voodoo religion, using it to make them do the work and to frighten them into keeping quiet.

"He needed help, and he got this mulatto Seymore to go out and live on the place and be the head hoodoo man. Seymore figured he'd finally found the treasure and needed only one more day to get it up. He planned to double-cross Julian and tried to kill him and all of us with that log."

"Seymore tried to kill Julian again when Julian was driving us back to New Orleans," Marda said. "He blew up the

car, and June and Tom were killed. But Julian wasn't hurt and he got out and fought with Seymore, killed him. Before then I'd heard so much he thought it best to do away with me."

"He had to get me out of the way too," Beauchamp said, "and planned to have the Negroes do it, so that no matter what happened, he couldn't be blamed. I was lucky that I happened to kill him with that razor despite his costume. He had big, air-filled tin shoes like boats. When he stood on them, they sank under the surface of the water, but supported him. He had tiny mirrors hung all over his costume so that looking at him you saw a reflection of the ground and bushes in front of him which were just about the same as the ground and bushes behind him, so it looked as though you were seeing through him.

"But that razor got between two of the mirrors and almost did go through him. And that girl we saw on the balcony—her skull-face was made up too. She was a sort of half-witted mulatto who lived out there—probably Crass's daughter."

"And the treasure?" Marda said. "You said they had located it. Did you find it?"

"Yes. And the papers were genuinely La Fitte's too. But the treasure wasn't what Julian had expected it to be."

"What was it?"

"The body of a man La Fitte had buried without wanting his followers to know he was dead. Death had been the only treasure there from the very first."

"Out there," Marda said, "not here." She was sitting on the long sofa in her living room and he saw that her eyes were starry. She caught his hand and leaned back pulling Beauchamp down beside her. "Oh Charlie!" she murmured. "I'm afraid." And again he felt her warm breath flutter past his ear . . .