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FEBRUARY

DEATH IS AN ELEPHANT

a thrill tale of the circus

By NATHAN HINDIN

THE HOUSE WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

a fascinating Jules de Grandin story

By SEABURY QUINN

DONALD WANDREI

THOMAS P. KELLEY

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

MANLY WADE WELLMAN



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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"The gigantic beast stood like some silver statue; impassive, inscrutable."

Death is an Elephant

By NATHAN HINDIN

A fascinating story of a circus, a sacred white elephant, and the series of dreadful deaths that haunted the dreams of the rajah of Jadhore

"Death is an elephant
Torch-eyed and horrible
Foam-flanked and terrible."

—Vachel Lindsay: *The Congo*.

and equally temperamental newspaper men to deal with. There are a thousand angles to every story, and a thousand tricks to play in order to get that story printed.

IT'S not the easiest job in the world, this being press agent for a circus. The ordinary routine is bad enough, what with temperamental stars

But the very devil of it is, the best stories are those which can never be printed: fascinating, mysterious, in-

credible stories set against the background of circus glamor—stories which I can never write—that's the worst side of this business.

Of course, there's a way out, and I'm taking it. The queer business about the animal trainer, Captain Zaroff, has already seen publication; with radical changes in the names of the principals involved.

I have an itch to see the yarns in print; there's ink in my blood, as the boys say. Particularly when the tales are true; then there comes a time when I can no longer suppress the urge to reveal them to the world.

Such a story and such a time is here again. Hence this document, with names, dates, and slight details altered—but with a strange story, to the truth of which my eyes can testify; for I was there to see it all. I saw the horror when first it crept from its lair in the jungle hills; I saw it stalk and stride. Sometimes I wish I could forget that striking, but still I dream. I dream of an elephant with blazing eyes, and feet that are blood-red. Blood-red. . . . But this is the tale.

IN THE fall of '36, Stellar Brothers Circus went into winter quarters and plans were begun for the following year, and a new show. The old man and I knew what we wanted and what the public always wants—novelty. But where to find that novelty? It's the perennial question which drives the entertainment world mad. Clowns, animals, acrobats—these are the eternal backbone of the circus's attraction; but novelty is the drawing-card.

Two weeks of planning, pondering, and bickering got us no place. The question of a novel star feature remained unsettled. To add to the confusion, the old man was in bad shape

physically. As a result he left the whole situation in the balance, threw up the work, and sailed for a six-weeks' trip abroad.

Naturally, I accompanied him. I managed to see that the papers played it up in the right way; the boss was traveling to secure a mysterious foreign attraction for next year's show—an attraction so important that he personally would handle the affair.

This sounded pretty good, but it left us in a spot. We had to come back with something that lived up to expectations, and I swear neither of us had the faintest idea as to what it could be. It was up to Fate to deal the aces.

A Pacific crossing took us to Honolulu; thence to the Philippines. Gradually the old man's temper improved, and my own spirits were raised. After all, we were heading for the Orient, and there's plenty of circus material there. The best jugglers, acrobats, tumblers and freaks are found in the East, and as for animals and natural oddities, the woods are full of them.

Acting on a hunch, I cabled George Gervis in Singapore. Gervis is an animal man; a trapper and collector of circus beasts who knows the tropics like a book. I felt confident that he'd have something new for us, and arranged to meet him.

And that's how we got the Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore.

Gervis explained the situation carefully that first afternoon as we sat in his hotel room. I've known George for a number of years, and never have I seen him so excited. He tried hard to speak casually of the matter, and emphasize the fact that we had only an outside chance, but enthusiasm fairly oozed from him.

Briefly, the situation as he outlined it was this. Jadhore is one of the smaller

principalities of the Malay States, under British protectorate. The natives are ruled by their own hereditary rajah; for unlike the majority of the Straits Settlements, the inhabitants are more Hindoo than Moslem. They have their own priesthood, their own government—under British jurisdiction. For years it had been the custom of the English government to pay the rajah an annuity; this, in turn, maintained the dignity and splendor of his court.

At this time, however, the annuity had for some reason been discontinued, and the present rajah was in sore straits for money. If his splendor as a potentate diminished, he would lose face before the eyes of his own people and neighboring kingdoms. And this rajah, in accordance with the tenets of his faith, had a Sacred White Elephant. Now if we could tactfully broach the matter in such a way as not to offend the religious scruples of the rajah or his priests; well—there was our attraction!

It sounded like a natural to me. Evidently the old man felt the same way, for he immediately gave Gervis *carte blanche* in the matter and sent him off to Jadhore to negotiate the transaction.

It was nearly a week later that he returned—a very anxious and fretful week for the old man and myself, for we were fighting against time.

GERVIS had not brought the Sacred Elephant with him, but he had come to terms. These he now outlined for us.

The rajah definitely refused to sell the animal. His religious principles absolutely forbade the sacrilege. After consultation with the priests, however, he offered to rent the beast to the show

for one season, provided that certain stipulations be made.

The animal must not be trained nor molested in any way. It must not be decorated, nor allowed to mingle with common pachyderms. It could, however, be placed on exhibition, and take part in any parades or processions that were a feature of the performance. Special food and quarters would have to be provided as a matter of course. In addition, the rajah himself must be allowed to travel with the show, as guarantor of the Sacred Elephant's safety to the priests. Native attendants would be provided by the rajah as well, and certain religious ceremonials must not be interfered with.

Such were the terms Gervis had agreed to. He had inspected the animal, and pronounced it to be a splendid specimen of its kind—abnormally large for the Indian elephant, and quite handsome.

At the conclusion of this report the old man blew up.

"Animal be damned!" he shouted. "I can't buy it, I can't train it, can't use it in the regular show. Can't even handle it myself—got to let a two-bit rajah and a gang of nigger priests feed it and burn incense in front of its trunk! What's the use? Special quarters, too—a gold freight car, I suppose. How much did you say?—seventeen hundred a week rental and expenses? Of all the——"

Here the boss demonstrated his restored health by going off into one of the profane tirades for which he is justly famous. I waited for him to cool a bit before I stuck my oar in.

Then I quietly pointed out certain obvious facts. These terms—they sounded difficult, but really were just what we wanted. Novelty—we'd play

up the restrictions ourselves. "The Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore— Accompanied by the Priests of Worshipping Millions! See the Sacred Rites of the Jungle Temples! Personally Accompanied by the Illustrious Char Dzang, Rajah of Jadhore!" And so on.

I recalled for his benefit the success of the old white elephant importation of other days, which resulted in the famous Barnum-Forepaugh feud. Barnum's white elephant was a great success, and Adam Forepaugh, a rival circus-owner, thereupon took an ordinary beast and whitewashed its hide. The subsequent exposure of this hoax and the resultant publicity attendant had made fortunes for both men.

I showed the old man how the religious angle would pack them in. We'd play up the sanctity, the restrictions, the priests and attendants. And imagine a circus with a real rajah! Why, this was an attraction that would sell itself—no other build-up was needed.

When I had finished I knew from the look on the old man's face that my case was won.

"How soon can you arrange to get the animal down here?"

"Within two days," the animal-man promptly replied.

"Get going," said the old man, lighting a fresh cigar. Then to me, "Come on. We're heading for the steamship office."

2

TRUE to his promise, Gervis returned on the third morning. We were already on the dock, waiting, for the boat sailed at noon. Passage had been arranged, quarters for the beast made ready; cables had been sent ahead to winter quarters. And I had just released a story that met with instant suc-

cess. It was therefore with an air of pleased anticipation that we greeted the arrival of our prize and regal guests.

Nor was our first glimpse disappointing. Today, in view of the sinister aftermath of the whole affair, it seems almost incredible that we so blithely accepted our acquisitions; that we did not realize even then the curious and disturbing features of the itinerary. But that morning, as the procession came down the dock, I felt quite proudly satisfied with our work.

Two swarthy Hindoos led the way—little, turbaned, bearded men, clad in robes of purple and gold. Their hands held silvered chains, for they were leading the Sacred Elephant.

The mighty beast lumbered into view—I gasped a bit, I confess. Never had I seen an elephant like this! Fully ten feet tall was the White Elephant of Jadhore; a giant among the East Indian pachyderms. It had long, gleaming white tusks that swept outward from its massive jaws like twin sabers. Its trunk and hooves were enameled in gold, and on its back rested a howdah of hammered brass. But the color!

I had expected, from what I'd read, that a white elephant was a sort of sickly gray-skinned creature. This beast was almost silver; a leprous silver. From its oiled body glistened little shafts of scintillating light. It looked unreal, unearthly, yet magnificent.

At a word of command the beast halted and surveyed us with smoldering little eyes that rested like red rubies in a silver skull.

The occupants of the howdah dismounted and came forward, and again I was astonished. The rajah of Jadhore wore an ordinary business suit, and his face was clean-shaven in contrast to the bushy beards of the attendants. He wore a green turban that

seemed utterly incongruous in comparison to his modern attire. It seemed even more incongruous when he greeted us in perfect English.

"Are we ready, gentlemen?" he inquired. "Have arrangements been made to take this—er—sacred tub aboard ship? My men want to handle it, of course; there are certain religious restrictions against crossing water, y'know."

I stared at him, and I saw the old man's eyebrows rise in surprise as the rajah lit a cigarette and calmly tossed the match beneath the Sacred Elephant's gilded feet. He took charge of the situation.

"It was stipulated in the agreement, gentlemen, that the beast was to have a permanent religious attendant. Allow me to present her—the High Priestess of the Temple of Ganesha."

He beckoned the figure in the background to come forward. Out of the shadow cast by the elephant's body stepped a girl. And for the third time that morning I uttered a low murmur of surprise.

Now I understood the meaning of that beauty of which Oriental poets sing. For this woman was lovely past all understanding or describing. She was dressed in a robe of white, but the lissome curves of her perfectly molded body shone through her garments and caused all memory of them to be forgotten. Her hair was ebon as the jungle night, but it was coiled like a crown above a face of such bewitching perfection as to render powerless even a press-agent's powers of portrayal.

Was it the ripe scarlet blossom of her mouth, the gem-like facets of her high bronze cheeks, the creamy marble of her sweeping brow that so blended into a blaze of indescribable beauty?

Or was it her eyes—those great green jewels with tawny flecks glittering in a serpent stare? There was icy wisdom here as well as loveliness; the woman had the look of Lilith about her. Woman, girl, priestess; she was all three as she gazed at us, acknowledging all introductions in calm silence.

"Leela speaks no English," the rajah explained.

Leela! Lilith! Green eyes—priestess of mystery. For the first time I was aware of an inner disturbance. I sensed now the reality of what we were doing; we were dabbling in sacred spheres. And I knew that this woman did not like us; that she scorned and hated this prostitution of her religion. We had made a dangerous opponent, I mused.

The truth of my surmise was soon to be horribly revealed.

In due time the elephant was hoisted aboard the ship and deposited in special quarters within the hold. The attendants and Leela accompanied the animal; the rajah joined us. At noon, we sailed from Singapore.

THE old man and I found the rajah a likable fellow. He was, as I suspected, educated in England; his present life frankly bored him. We found it easy to converse with him about our plans for the circus, and told him how we intended to use the elephant in the procession and build quarters in the menagerie tent. I even proposed that the High Priestess be a member of the Grand Entry number, riding in the howdah on the beast's back.

Here the rajah looked grave. No, he declared, the idea was out of the question. Leela was sacred; she would never consent. Besides, she had opposed the entire venture, and the priests had upheld her. It was best not to cross her, for she had mystic powers.

"Well," I interjected. "Surely you don't believe all that Oriental bosh."

For the first time the rajah of Jadhore lost his carefully-acquired British aplomb.

"I do," he said slowly. "If you were not ignorant of my people and their ways, you would also know that there are many things in my religion which you of the West cannot explain. Let me tell you, my friend, what the High-Priestess means to our faith.

"For thousands of years there has been a temple of Ganesha, the Elephant-God in our land. The Sacred White Elephant holds His Divine Spirit, bred through generations of the animals. The White Elephant is not like others, my friends. You noticed that.

"The God of my peoples is more ancient than your Christian one, and master of darker forces which only the jungle peoples know and can invoke. Nature-demons and beast-men are recognized today by your scientists; but priests of my simple people have controlled such strange forces before ever Christ or Buddha trod the earth. Ganesha is not a benevolent god, my friend. He has always been worshipped under many names—as Chaugnar Faugn, in the old places of Tibet; and as Lord Tsathoggua aforetime. And He is evil—that is why we treat His incarnation in the White Elephant as sacred. That is why there have always been High Priestesses in his temple; they are the holy brides and consorts of the Elephant One. And they are wise; bred from childhood in the black arts of worship, they commune with the beasts of the forest and serve to avert the wrath of the evil ones from their people."

"You believe that?" laughed the old man.

"Yes," said the rajah, and he was no longer smiling. "I believe. And I must warn you. This trip, as you must have heard, is against the wishes of my priesthood. Never has a Sacred Elephant crossed the great waters to be gaped at by unbelievers for a show. The priests feel that it is an insult to the Lord Ganesha. Leela was sent with the elephant by the priests for a purpose—she alone can guard it. And she hates you for what you're doing; hates me, too. I—I don't like to speak of what she can do. There are still human sacrifices in our temples at certain times, of which the Government knows nothing. And human sacrifices are made with a purpose—the old dark powers I spoke of can be invoked by blood. Leela has officiated at such rites, and she has learned much. I don't want to frighten you—it's really my fault for consenting to this—but you should be warned. Something may happen."

The old man hastened to reassure the rajah. He was smugly certain that the man was nothing but a savage beneath his veneer of superficial culture, and he spoke accordingly.

As for me, I wondered. I thought again of Leela's eery eyes, and imagined easily enough that they could gaze on bloody sacrifice without flinching. Leela could know evil, and she could hate. I remembered the rajah's final words, "Something may happen."

I went out on deck, entered the hold. The elephant stood in his stall, placidly munching hay. Leela stood stolidly beside him as I inspected the animal's chains. But I felt her eyes bore into my back when I turned away, and noticed that the Hindoo attendants carefully avoided me.

Other passengers had got wind of our prize, and they filed into the hold

in a steady stream. As I left, a fellow named Canrobert strolled up. We chatted for several minutes, and when I went up on deck he was still standing there before the beast. I promised to meet him in the bar that evening for a chat.

At dinner a steward whispered to me the story. Canrobert had come up from the hold late in the afternoon, walked to the rail in plain view of several passengers, and jumped overboard. His body was not recovered.

I took part in the investigation which followed. During the course of it we ventured down into the hold. The elephant still stood there, and Leela was still keeping watch beside him. But now she was smiling.

3

I NEVER did learn about the death of a man named Phelps on the third day out. But it was a hoodoo voyage for certain, and I was glad when we disembarked at last and headed for winter quarters.

I am a practical man, but I get occasional "hunches." That is why I avoided the rajah during the rest of our homeward journey. I fled when he approached, because I felt that he would have an explanation for the deaths of the two men—an explanation I did not care to hear. I didn't go near Leela nor the elephant either, and spent most of my time doping out the show with the old man.

It was good to see winter quarters again. A handsome stall had been built for the Sacred Elephant, and Ganesha (for so we had christened the beast) was quartered therein.

No greater compliment could have been paid to my advance publicity than the attention shown the beast by our

hardened circus folk. Stars and supers alike, they crowded around the stall, eyed the mighty animal, gazed at the silent bearded attendants, and stared in speechless admiration at Leela. The rajah struck up an immediate acquaintance with Captain Dence, our regular elephant-keeper.

I immediately plunged into work with the old man, for the show opened shortly.

Therefore it wasn't until several weeks later that I began to hear the disquieting rumors that floated around the lot concerning our star attraction.

The restlessness of the other elephants, for example—how, in rehearsal for the Grand Entry, they shied away from the Sacred Ganesha, and trumpeted nightly in their picket line. The queer story of how the foreign woman *lived* in the stall with the animal; ate and slept there in stolid silence. The way in which one of the clowns had been frightened while passing through the animal barn one evening; how he had seen the two Hindoos and the girl bowing in worship before the silver beast, who stood amidst a circle of incense fires.

Even the old man mentioned a visit from the rajah and Captain Dence during which both men pleaded to break the contract and allow the animal and its attendants to return to Jadhore before the show opened. They spoke wildly of "trouble" to come. The proposal was of course rejected as being out of the question; our publicity was released, and both men were evidently under the influence of liquor at the time.

Two days later Captain Dence was found hanging from a beam behind the elephant-line. It was a case of suicide beyond question, and there was no in-

vestigation. We had a show funeral, and for a while a gloomy shadow overcast our lot. Everyone remarked about the shocking look of horror on poor Dence's death-distorted face.

About this time I began to wake up. I determined to find out a few things for myself. The rajah was almost always intoxicated now, and he seemed to avoid me purposely; staying in town and seldom visiting the lot. I know for a fact that he never again entered the menagerie barn.

But I learned that others did. Perhaps it was morbid curiosity; but the show-folk, even after their first trips of inspection, seemed to spend much of their time around the elephant lines. Shaw, our new keeper, told me that they were continually before the stall of the Sacred Elephant. In his own opinion many of the men performers were stuck on that "pretty foreign dame." They stared at her and at the elephant for hours on end; even the big stars came.

Corbot, the trapeze artist, was a frequent visitor. So was Jim Dolan, the acrobatic clown, and Rizzio, our equestrian director.

Another was Captain Blade, our knife-thrower in the side-show. What they found in the woman he couldn't say, for she never spoke and they were silent.

I could make nothing of this report. But I determined to watch the beautiful High Priestess for myself.

I got into the habit of sauntering through the menagerie at odd hours and glancing at the Sacred Elephant. Whatever the time of day, there was Leela, her emerald eyes burning into my back. Once or twice I saw some of the performers gazing raptly at the stall. I noticed that they came singly at all times. Also I saw something

which proved the keeper's theory to be wrong.

They were not infatuated with the woman, for they looked only at the elephant! The gigantic beast stood like some silver statue; impassive, inscrutable. Only its glistening oiled trunk moved to and fro; that, and its fiery eyes. It seemed to stare mockingly in return, as though contemptuous of attentions from the puny creatures before it.

Once, when the place was deserted, I saw Leela caressing its great body. She was whispering to it in some low and outlandish tongue, but her voice was ineffably sweet and her hands infinitely tender. I was struck by a curious and somewhat weird thought—this woman was acting toward the beast as a woman in love acts toward her lover! I remembered how the rajah spoke of her as the bride of Ganesha, and winced. When the animal's serpentine trunk embraced the lovely girl she purred in almost blissful satisfaction, and for the first time I heard the beast rumble in its massive throat. I left, quickly so as to be unobserved.

OPENING day loomed, and once again I was forced to turn my mind to other things. The cars were loaded for Savannah; the dress rehearsal was performed; I sent the advance men on the night before we left, and the regular routine got under way.

The old man was pleased with the show, and I must admit that it was the best we'd ever turned out. Corbot, the trapeze artist, was a good drawing-card; we got him from the big show through sheer good fortune. Jim Dolan, the chief clown, was always a draw. We had some fine animal acts, and many novelty features as well. And the Sacred Elephant of Jadhore was bid-

ding fair to becoming a household name before the public had ever seen it.

We had a private car for the animal and its three attendants; the two Hindoos smiled happily when they saw it, and even Leela was slightly taken aback with its splendor. On our arrival under canvas the beast was installed in a superb new station atop a platform in the center, and with its hide newly oiled and decorated it looked superb.

The menagerie crowd on the opening day was highly impressed. They stared at the impassive Hindoos and positively gaped at Leela in her white ceremonial gown. The rajah they did not see—he was shaking drunk in his own quarters, behind locked doors.

I didn't even have time to think of the superstitious coward. I'm like a kid when a new show opens each year, and the old man is no different. We sat in our box and positively beamed with joyous excitement as the trumpet blasts announced the Grand Entry.

Our procession was Oriental—Arabian riders, Egyptian seers on camels, harem beauties on elephants, califs and sultans in jeweled litters. At the very last came the Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore; the mightiest of them all. The great silver beast moved with a sort of monstrous beauty; in regal dignity Ganesha padded on to the beat of thundering drums. The two Hindoos led the way, but Leela was not present. The great spotlight followed every step; so did the eyes of the crowd. I can't explain it, but there was *something* about that animal which "clicked." It had beauty—and that unearthly majesty I had noticed. It was the Sacred Elephant indeed.

The procession vanished. The show was on. Sleek black ponies galloped into the rings, and whips cracked in merry rhythm with their hooves. The

music altered its tempo; the clowns strutted in to do the first of their walk-arounds. Applause, laughter, and the ever-beating rhythm of the band. Excitement, as the jugglers vied with a troupe of seals in dextrous competition.

The star acts were coming up, and I nudged the old man to attract his special attention.

With a flurry of drums the big spot in the center ring blazed forth as the other lights dimmed. Alonzo Corbot, the trapeze star, raced in. His white body bounded across the ring to the ropes beneath the main pole where his partner waited.

The snare-drums snarled as the two performers mounted up—up—up—sixty feet in the air to the platform and the trapeze rings.

Out they swung now, silver bodies on silver rings; out into the cold clear light that bathed the utter emptiness of the tent-top. Swing—swoop—soar; rhythmically rise, unflinching fall. Tempo in every movement of the clutching hands; timing even in the feet that danced on empty air.

Corbot was a marvel; I'd seen him work in rehearsal many times and was never tired of watching the perfection of motion he displayed. He trained rigorously, I knew; and he never slipped. He caught his partner by the hand, the wrist, the elbow, the shoulder, the neck, the ankle. Feet suspended from the rings, he shot to and fro like a human pendulum while his partner somersaulted through space into his waiting hands. At precisely the exact fraction of a second they met in midair; an error in timing meant certain death. There were no nets—that was Corbot's boast.

I watched, the old man watched, the audience watched, as two men fluttered

like tiny birds so far above. Birds? They were demons with invisible wings now in the red light that flashed on for the climax of the act. Now came the time when Corbot and his partner would both leave the rings, leap out into that dizzying space and turn a complete somersault in midair, then grasp the rings on the opposite side of their present position.

The drums went mad. The red light glared on that little hell of high space where two men waited, their nerves and muscles tense.

I could almost feel it myself—that moment of dread expectancy. My eyes strained through the crimson haze, seeking Corbot's face so far above. He would be smiling now; he was preparing to leap. . . .

DRUMS, cymbals crashed. The waiting figures sprang. Corbot's arms were ready to grasp his partner in whirling space—or were they? Good God, no—*they were stiff at his side!*

There was a streaking blur crossing that empty scarlet expanse of light, and then it was gone. Something struck the center ring with a heavy thud. Somebody screamed, the band blared a desperate march, and the lights went up. I saw that Corbot's partner Victoire had saved himself by catching a ring just in time, but my eyes did not linger above. They centered themselves on the ground; on the center ring where something lay in a pool of crimson that came from no light.

Then the old man and I were out of our box and running across the tent with attendants at our side. And we stared for a sickening second at that boneless pulpy red thing that had once been Alonzo Corbot the trapeze star. They took him away; fresh sawdust covered the spot where he had fallen,

and the band, the lights, the music covered the audience's panic until their fears were forgotten. The clowns were out again as the old man and I left, and the crowd was laughing—a bit weakly, perhaps, but laughing nevertheless. Corbot's hail and farewell was typical; the show went on.

Victoire, the partner, staggered in as we gathered by the body in the dressing-room. Pale, limp, badly shaken, he wept convulsively when he saw—it—lying there.

"I knew it!" he gasped. "When he stood on the other platform just before he leaped, I saw his eyes. They were dead and far away. Dead. . . . No, I don't know how it happened. Of course he was all right before the show. I hadn't seen him much lately; between rehearsals he spent a lot of time some place. . . . His eyes were dead. . . ."

We never learned anything more from Victoire. The boss and I hurried through the menagerie to the main office. As we passed the big platform where the Sacred Elephant was quartered, I noticed with a shock that it was empty of attendants. Something brushed against me in the dark as I hurried on. It was Leela, the High-Priestess, and she was smiling. I had never seen her smile before.

That night I dreamed of Leela's smile, and Corbot's redly ruined face. . . .

4

THERE'S only a little more to tell. For that I'm thankful, because the rest is even now a nightmare I would rather forget. We learned nothing of Corbot's death from anyone. It created a flurry, of course, and the performers' nerves were shattered. After all, an opening-day tragedy like that is disquieting.

The old man raved, but there was nothing to do. The show went on; the morbid public swarmed in that second day, for despite my efforts publicity was released.

Nor was the morbid public disappointed. For on the second night, our fourth show—Jim Dolan died.

Jim was our acrobatic clown, and a star in his own right. He'd been with us twelve seasons, always doing his regular routine of juggling and pantomime.

We all knew Jim and liked him as a friend. He was a great kidder; nothing of the pagliaccio about Dolan. But on that second evening he stopped for a moment in his routine before the center ring, put down his juggling-clubs, pulled out a razor, and calmly slit his throat.

How we got through that night is still a mystery to me. "Jinx" and "hoodoo" were the only two words I heard. The show went on, the boss raved, and the police quietly investigated.

The following afternoon Rizzio, our equestrian director, walked into the line of the bareback routine, and a horse's hoof broke his spine.

I'll never forget that twilight session after the show, in the old man's tent. Neither of us had slept for two days; we'd talked ourselves out, and our souls were sick with fear and nameless apprehension. I've never believed in "curses," but I did then. And so I looked at the official reports and the headlines in the papers, glanced at the old man's gray face, and buried my own in my arms. There was a curse on the show.

Death! I'd walked with it for weeks now. Those two chaps on the boat, then Captain Dence, the elephant man, then Corbot, Dolan, Rizzio.

Death—ever since we had taken the Sacred White—

The rajah's words! His story about curses and queer rites; the vengeance of the god and his priests! The Priestess Leela, who smiled now! Hadn't I heard stories about the performers visiting the elephant's stall?—why, all three of the men who died here in the show had done that! The rajah knew—and I had thought him a drunken coward.

I sent a man off to find him. The old man, utterly collapsed, slept. I spent an anxious hour waiting.

The rajah entered. A glance at my face told him the story.

"You know now?" he said. "I thought you would never come to your senses. I could do nothing without your belief, for *she* knows I understand, and she hates me. I have tried very hard to forget; but now men die and this thing must be stopped. Ganesha may send me to a thousand hells for this, but it is better so. It is magic, my friend."

"How do you know?" I whispered.

"I know." He smiled wearily, but there was black despair in his eyes. "I watched from the beginning. She is cunning, that Leela, so very cunning. And she knows *arts*."

"What arts?"

"You of the West call it hypnotism. It is more than that. It is transference of will. Leela is an adept; she can do it easily with the elephant as medium."

I tried vainly to understand. Was the rajah crazed? No—his eyes burned not with derangement but with bitter hatred.

"Post-hypnotic suggestion," he breathed. "When fools came to watch the Sacred Elephant, she was always there. Her eyes did it; and when they watched the gleaming trunk of the

beast it acted as a focal point. They came back again and again, not knowing why. And all the while she was willing them to act; not then, but later. That is how the two men died on the boat. She experimented there, told them to drown themselves. One went immediately, the other waited several days. All that was needed was for them to see her once at the time she willed for them to die. Thus it was. And here, in the menagerie, it has been the same way. They stare at the silver elephant. She willed them to die during the performance. At the proper time she stood in the entrance-way; I have seen her there. And the men died—you saw that.

"She hates the show, and will ruin it. To her the worship of Ganesha is sacred, and she is wreaking vengeance. The old priests that sent her must have instructed this, and there must be an end. That is why I dare not face her."

"What's to be done?" I found myself asking. "If your story is true, we can't touch her. And we can't give up the show."

"I will stop her," said the rajah slowly. "I must."

Suddenly, he was gone. And I realized with a start that the show was almost ready to begin. Quickly I roused the old man from his slumber. Then I dashed out. Collaring a roustabout, I ordered him to find the rajah at once. There would be a showdown tonight; there must be.

I HAD two guards with guns secretly posted at the side entrance to the tent, where the performers came in. They had orders to stop anyone who loitered there during the show. There must be no Leela watching and commanding that night.

I dared not incarcerate her at once

for fear of a row while the show was on. The woman was evidently capable of anything, and she must not suspect. Still, I wanted to see her for myself. A half-hour before the menagerie opened I hurried in. The elephant's stall was again untended!

I ran around to the side entrance. There was no one there. Out on the midway I raced, mingling with the crowd. Then it was that I noticed the excited throng before the side show. Elbowing through, I came upon two men and the Barker as they emerged from the tent carrying a limp form in their arms. It was the girl assistant of Captain Blade, the knife-thrower. He had missed.

Leela passed me in the crowd, smiling. Her face was beautiful as Death.

When I rushed back to the boss tent, I found the roustabout and the rajah. The latter was trembling in every limb.

Hastily I collared the potentate and dragged him through the crowd toward the main tent.

"I believe you now," I whispered. "But you're not going to do anything rash. Give me your knife."

I'd guessed correctly. He slipped a dirk out of his sleeve and passed it to me unobserved.

"No more bloodshed," I muttered. "I have two men at the side entrance. She'll not watch *this* show and cast any spells. When the performance is over, I'll have her behind the bars on your testimony. But no disturbance before the crowd."

I shouldered my way into my regular box and he followed after me.

The big tent was crowded. There was an air of grim waiting, as if the spectators were *expecting* something. I knew what they expected; hadn't the papers been full of "the Hoodoo Circus" for the past three days? There

was a low murmur as of massed whispering voices. I thought of a Roman amphitheater and shuddered.

The big drums rolled. The parade swept into view, and I cast an anxious glance at the side entrance when it cleared. There were my two guards, armed with efficient-looking guns. No trouble tonight! And the rajah was safe, with me.

The Sacred Elephant swept into view; serene, majestic, lumbering gigantically on ivory hoofs. There was only one Hindoo leading him tonight and—the howdah was on his back!

In it sat—Leela, the High Priestess of Ganesha.

"She knows," breathed the rajah, his brown face suddenly animal-like with convulsed terror.

Leela was smiling. . . .

Then horror came.

The lights flickered, failed, blinked out. The vast tent plunged into nighted darkness and the band ceased. There was a rising wail of sound, and I rose in my seat with a scream on my lips.

There in the darkness glowed the silver elephant—the Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore. Like a leprous monster, its body gleamed with phosphorescent fire. And in the darkness I saw Leela's eyes.

The elephant had turned now, and left the parade. As shrieks rose in a thousand throats it thundered forward—straight for our box.

The rajah broke from my grasp and vaulted over the railing to the ground. My hand flew to my pocket and I cursed in dismay. The knife he had given me was gone. Then my eyes returned to the hideous tableau before me.

The elephant charged with lifted trunk, tusks glistening before it. There was a shrill trumpeting from its silver

throat as it bore down on the slight figure of the man who raced toward it.

He ran to death, but his head was high. He was seeking that black figure in the howdah on the beast's back.

In a moment everything was over. A gleaming arc in the air as something long and thin and silver whizzed up to the elephant's back. A woman's shrill scream and gurgling sob. A mighty bellowing of brutish, berserk rage. A thud of massive feet as the silver giant trampled on. The crunching . . . the screams, the shots, and the great shock as the great body turned and fell.

And then the audience rose and fled. When the lights went on once more, there was nobody in the tent but the performers and the roustabouts.

In the center of the areaway lay the gigantic Ganesha, silver sides streaked with scarlet in death. The crumpled howdah held all that remained of Leela the High Priestess. The rajah's knife had struck home, and her torn throat was not a pretty sight.

As for the rajah himself, there was only a slashed red horror dangling on the end of those ivory tusks; a mashed and pulpy thing.

THUS ended the affair of the Sacred White Elephant. The police accepted our story of the animal's running *amok* during the show when the lights failed.

They never learned of the Hindoo who had so horribly short-circuited the connection with his own body, and we buried his seared remains in secret.

The show closed for two weeks and we re-routed it for the rest of the year. Gradually, the papers let the story die and we went on.

I never told the truth to the old man. They're all dead anyway, and I'd like

to forget it myself. But I have never liked novelty acts since, nor visited the Orient; because I know the rajah's story was true, and Leela had killed those performers as he had explained it. Those priests and priestesses have secret powers, I am convinced.

I've figured it all out—Leela found out that the rajah had told me the facts; knew she'd be exposed, and acted accordingly.

She sent the Hindoo to fix the lights, then arranged to have Ganesha the elephant charge our box and kill the rajah as she'd planned.

I have it all figured out, but I'd never tell the old man. There's one

other fact I know which I must not reveal.

The rajah's knife did not kill Leela as she rode on the elephant's back. It could not, for she was already dead; dead before she entered the tent.

One of the two guards I stationed had shot her two minutes before at the side entrance as she rode past in the howdah of Ganesha, the Sacred White Elephant.

It seems that she must have hypnotized the beast, too—or did she? The Soul of Ganesha inhabits the body of the Sacred Elephant, the rajah said. And Ganesha wreaks a vengeance of his own.