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# IN KASHLA'S GARDEN

A TALE OF  
HYPNOTISM  
by  
Oscar Schisgall



"Black eyes! Terrible eyes!  
They blazed—they stung—they  
made him sway dizzily."

**I**N AMAZEMENT that verged on downright consternation, old Mr. Currie, the attorney, sank back in his chair and gaped at the agitated man opposite him.

"You—you mean to say," he demanded incredulously, "that your wife exerts a power as strong as that over you?"

"As strong as *that*? It's stronger! Oh, a thousand times stronger than you can possibly imagine!"

Trembling with the despair that filled him, Roger Byrd almost sobbed the words. His fists were fiercely clenched on the lawyer's desk, one of them continuously pounding as if to release compressed energy. Deep in his haggard eyes lurked the flames of unutterable anguish. He looked, in truth, as though he were battling to crush down explosive hysteria.

Uneasily Mr. Currie swallowed and wet his lips. He grumbled something

indistinguishable; then, scowling, he muttered, "I—I never heard of anything so—uncanny——"

At that, Byrd leaned forward, while those brilliant eyes of his burned into the attorney's.

"You never heard of hypnotism?" he challenged, and his tones raced up the scale to a shrill, defiant pitch.

"Well, yes, of course; but not to such an astonishing extent. I thought—— Why, really, Byrd, this is quite beyond me!"

Profoundly bewildered, Mr. Currie brushed an unsteady hand up over his moist forehead and allowed it to sweep back across his pompadour of silken, unflecked whiteness. Staring at the man who had come to him with so extraordinary a problem, he encountered only an expression of impotent wretchedness.

He scratched his chin, nervously tapped the edge of the desk.

"Suppose," he suggested, "you tell me how you became the victim—ah—that is, how you were subjected to such an influence. I confess I'm totally confounded. If you want advice, you will have to explain more clearly——"

Roger Byrd rose—not as another man might rise for a recital, but with a sudden spring that caused his chair to fly back, tottering. His right fist delivered a final blow upon the desk. Then, glowering at the floor, he began striding about the lawyer's study.

He was still a young man, just venturing into his thirties; yet the lines which had of late been carved in his dark skin added at least a decade to his appearance. A quivering tenseness had beset his tall figure, so that under his gray suit every muscle seemed vibrant as he paced the room. He was troubled, moreover, by the disheveled condition of his black hair; time after time he was constrained to throw it back with an impatient jerk of his head—a gesture that merely emphasized the strain upon him.

"It started two years ago—in Calcutta——" he began.

"H'm, where you met your wife," murmured Mr. Currie, nodding.

"Yes. You know I was making a trip through India——"

"You had gone there, I remember," interrupted the lawyer, somewhat coldly, "to escape the scandal of that affair with the Royler woman."

Byrd whirled around to glare across the desk. A flood of scarlet rushed into the cheeks that had been pallid. He raised one hand impetuously but let it fall again after an instant of silence.

"Mr. Currie," he said, a strange harshness creeping into his tones, "I'll ask you to forget my past troubles—at this moment. I have enough to worry me without being reminded of—of other things!"

"I beg your pardon," said the at-

torney, but his shrug belied the earnestness of his apologetic inflection.

Byrd frowned. He looked down at the carpet, as though to recall the narrative he had momentarily abandoned. And then, resuming his nervous pacing, he continued without glancing at the lawyer.

"In Calcutta I met a friend—an American—who told me about the wonderful powers of Kashla. Mystic powers, he called them. She had a booth in the market place, where she entertained tourists by demonstrating her hypnotic ability—for a price, of course.

"I went to her. I went with that air of superior cynicism all travelers affect, ready to scoff at her trickery. I thought I should find an old hag, dirty and fawning.

"Well, my first surprize came when I saw Kashla. She was young and in a way beautiful. We chatted pleasantly; we laughed. You know how—how two young people can be. Naturally, I still disbelieved in her mystic power. And so she—she offered to prove to me what she could do."

Byrd paused. His fingers moved across his lips, shaking. For an instant he shut his eyes—although whether it was to conjure up or blot out some awful memory, the lawyer could not guess.

But the silence passed, and Roger Byrd proceeded, rather unsteadily and in staccato syllables:

"She made me sustain the gaze of her eyes. Black eyes, Mr. Currie! Terrible eyes! They blazed—they stung—they made me sway dizzily. I don't know what happened. All I know is that I regained consciousness two hours later—and *I was lying on my bed in my hotel!*"

The two men regarded each other across the desk, one gaping blankly, the other peering with savage intensity. Mr. Currie once more smoothed his white hair. Again he wet his lips.

When he spoke, it was in a queerly hushed way.

"You mean you were in a trance all that time?"

"Yes! I walked home in a trance! She controlled me from her booth—controlled me implicitly! Of course, I rushed back to her. I was filled with wonder and astonishment. But Kashla only laughed at my excitement. And do you know what she said?"

Mechanically Mr. Currie shook his head, his eyes wide, marveling.

"I remember her words distinctly—I shall *always* remember them!" whispered Roger Byrd. He had come to lean over the desk. Now his flushed features hovered directly over Mr. Currie's round face. He dropped word after word as though each were a stunning blow. "She said this: 'I have subjugated your mind and your will; henceforth, if I desire it, you are mine!'"

The attorney uttered an exclamation that dwindled into a grunt. "But that was nonsense!" he protested.

"Oh, was it?" cried Byrd, sneering. "Well, listen. I thought so, too. I ridiculed her. She told me that a mind once conquered remained hers—and offered to prove this new contention. She assured me that at 7 o'clock the following evening, regardless of what other plans I had made, I should be in her booth.

"It chanced that I had an engagement to dine with friends at that hour. I was not at all afraid of Kashla. In fact, I almost forgot her the next evening, and at 6:30 I arrived at the home of my dinner host. I distinctly recall hearing a servant announce the meal. I even recall starting toward the dining room while I chatted with an eminent Hindoo. Then——"

A puzzled expression leapt into Byrd's eyes.

"Then something happened. My mind suddenly went blank. What I

did, or how, I can not say. But when my senses returned to me, it was precisely 7. And—there I stood, in Kashla's booth, blinking down at her while she laughed!"

Stirred, visibly affected, Mr. Currie reached for a cigar. He lit a match, thoughtfully held it until its flame scorched his fingertips, and cast it away without having puffed once. Keenly squinting up at Kashla's victim, he asked, "And she has never lost this power over you?"

"Never!" declared Byrd. "When she learned I was rich, that I had a fortune in America, she decided to marry me. *She* decided—you understand? I tried to run away from her. Indeed, I went as far as Bombay—when one day, while purchasing a steamship ticket, I suddenly lost consciousness. The next thing of which I was aware was being back in Calcutta, beside the laughing Kashla!"

Evidently the recital was plucking as severely upon Mr. Currie's nerves as upon his credulity. He rose, a thickset, stocky man with a loose double chin. Again he indulged in his habitual gesture of brushing back his white pompadour. Looking at Byrd sternly, he demanded, "Are you trying to tell me that you traveled from Bombay to Calcutta in a trance?"

Roger Byrd emitted a short laugh, a bitter, wrathful laugh.

"You don't believe it?" he snarled sardonically. "All right, let me go on. I did go to her in a trance. In that condition, I move as rationally, as safely, as though I were myself. The only difference is that I am controlled by *her* will, *her* mind, instead of by my own."

"But despite that, you married her——"

"What else could I do? She *willed* me to marry her!"

"Eh? She *willed*——?"

"Certainly!" snapped Byrd, relaunching his quick paces and com-

muning now with the floor rather than with the staring lawyer. "She compelled me to marry her—made me *want* to do it! Do you think that under normal circumstances I, Roger Byrd, who could marry any one of a dozen rich American girls, would have selected an Indian mystic from a Calcutta market place? Pah! Think, Mr. Currie, think!"

**T**HROUGHOUT Byrd's agitated talk the attorney had been striving to compose himself, that he might consider this extraordinary situation sensibly, unemotionally. Now, eyeing his client, he saw matters more clearly. Roger Byrd had always been an impulsive creature of a sensitive and high-strung nature. That a hypnotist could dominate him was not so strange, after all, for his own will had been lamentably weak; since childhood it had been merely a weather-vane pointing the direction of other people's desires.

Yet Byrd was ostensibly suffering, and the old attorney could not help scowling in concern.

"I understand," he said slowly, "that you wish me to find a way of obtaining a divorce for you or—or an annulment, if possible——"

"Yes! I'm—I'm sick of being mastered! She made me install her here in my home—and half my servants quit. So she imported servants from India. She redecorated many of the rooms so that I live in an Oriental museum rather than in a house. I'm tired of it, I tell you! Whatever she wishes, I am forced to do—*anything* at all. If I don't do it voluntarily, I do it under the spell of her will. I tell you, Mr. Currie, if I can't get rid of that woman, I may as well kill myself!"

"Oh, now—now," soothingly mumbled the lawyer, though he was frowning down at his desk in a manner far from reassuring. "I wouldn't talk like that, Byrd——"

"Because you haven't lived as I have for the past two years—an absolute mental slave! Why, I—I can't even run away! She makes me come back! Distance is no barrier——"

Of a sudden Roger Byrd sank into a chair. He bent far forward, sent his fingers writhing through his disheveled black hair. And in utter wretchedness he moaned, "I'd rather be dead than go on like this—without a will of my own!"

For a long time absolute stillness gripped the room. Mr. Currie moved to a window where, his hands clasped behind his back, he stood gazing out over a Westchester panorama of rolling fields sprinkled with colorful rooftops—the whole scene drenched in golden morning sunshine. Beneath his window his blue automobile waited to hasten him to his New York office.

Looking to the left, he could discern the white residence of Roger Byrd—an imposing house visible through a screen of poplars alined in military precision. It was less than a quarter of a mile away, a fact which had facilitated this early call.

But Mr. Currie was not pondering upon the things he saw. Instead, his thoughts were focused on the character of his despairing client.

The friendship he manifested toward Byrd was based upon an ancient family intimacy rather than on any personal esteem or respect. For Roger Byrd was scarcely the type to inspire admiration. In the past ten years he had been involved in half a dozen deplorable escapades with women—affairs that had cost him amazing sums; the last of them had sent him scurrying off to India, that he might escape the presence of an irate lady named Edwina Royler. That his flight had resulted in this tragic situation was perhaps unfortunate, yet it was possessed of a certain poetic justice which Mr. Currie was compelled to appreciate.

Suddenly his reverie was shattered by Byrd's exclamation, "Well, what's to be done?"

The lawyer turned, fingering his heavy watch chain. Quietly he answered, "I—I don't know. This case is new in my experience, I must confess. I should like time to think—to consider——"

"Then, in heaven's name," cried Byrd, jumping up, "think fast! I've been suffering two years, and they've seemed to me two centuries!"

## 2

WHEN, at a few minutes before 10, Roger Byrd returned to his home, he found his wife seated in her garden and smiling pleasantly at his approach.

It was a magnificent spot, this garden Kashla had caused to be planted in accordance with her Oriental taste. Fronting the white, pillared house of the Byrds, it was thronged with all manner of exquisite flowers, so that the senses not only reeled with the sweetness of its perfume but marveled at the splendor of a thousand brilliant hues.

An artificial brook crawled here and there, crossed at points by small, arched bridges that were canopied with vines. It had, indeed, become a show-place; and automobilists frequently stopped to stare at the glories Kashla had contrived to bring into her garden. Butterflies fluttered about incessantly, intoxicating themselves on the exotic wines the flowers yielded. In the surrounding trees birds of vivid plumage sang and chirped and pecked, as though they had agreed to select this point of beauty for their own domain.

Kashla sat in a wicker chair under a bower of rambling red roses, a neglected book lying open in the grass beside her. She was attired completely in flimsy white, and even Byrd could not deny her entrancing loveliness.

For Kashla was beautiful—beautiful in the maddening way only women of the East can achieve. Her hair, which was as lustrously black as the plumes of the crows that sometimes circled over her garden, was drawn down tightly over her ears and coiled in an immense bun on the back of her neck—so that she resembled, in her white dress, some ancient Grecian goddess.

She never availed herself of cosmetics; and her smooth skin, though tinted to an olive complexion, was always pale. But it was a queer pallor—an unhealthy, unnatural pallor. Often it made Byrd think of death——

In truth, Kashla was not a healthy woman. Frail, supple, small in stature; her mental strength had been developed at a lamentable sacrifice of her physical hardihood. So it was that she never indulged in anything which required exertion, her most taxing exercise being occasional walks about the garden. And she moved there with the ease and the languor of a phantom.

Like other frail women, she was addicted to tonics and medicines, many of which were compounded on Oriental prescriptions. But these in no manner affected her mental strength, and she governed her husband with all the energy of her fierce, fantastic power.

When he entered the garden, she summoned him with a slow wave of her white hand. Byrd went to her, frowning.

"You have been out on your morning walk?" she inquired amiably. Her voice, though throaty, contained all the flexible music of a clarinet. He nodded.

"And today?" she pressed on. "You have not forgotten, Roger, what you must do today?" In the past two years she had learned to speak English with astounding proficiency, though she still retained a

melodious accent that evoked delight from everyone save Byrd himself.

He glared down at his toe.

"Today," he said stiffly, "you want me to buy you the new town car."

"Ah, you remember! And you will leave soon?"

"Immediately."

He had not wished to purchase the new car that Kashla desired. Yet he comprehended the folly of protesting. If he did not comply with her requests willingly, he knew he would obey in a different way; and voluntary acquiescence was invariably preferable to being subjected to her weird influence.

"Then—go now, Roger," said Kashla, smiling at him and gesturing toward the house. Her flaming black eyes laughed up at him, as though mocking his helplessness. He bit his lip—bit until he felt a sharp pain. Then he muttered something and went into his house, preparatory to the unavoidable trip to the city.

So eager had he been to interview Mr. Currie at his home, that he had not paused to shave. And now Roger Byrd, passing through a corridor that reeked of Oriental incense and mounting a staircase whose wall was tapestried with the figures of snakes and dragons, entered the bathroom.

As thoughtfully, resentfully, he loosened his collar and drew off his shirt, he stared through the open window. The rattle of a lawn-mower rose through the warm stillness of the summer morning. Byrd looked down; there was Ozul, the Indian gardener Kashla had brought to tend her flowers. A bent, swarthy little man who seemed engrossed in no other worldly interest save his botanical duties. He was pushing the lawn-mower to and fro, to and fro—Ozul the silent, the queer! The man who appeared sometimes to see and know everything and who seldom spoke of anything but flowers—

"What a crowd she's drawn me into!" actually rasped Byrd as he turned for his shaving brush.

Before him, just above the wash-bowl, was a marble shelf loaded with Kashla's medicines and tonics. He sneered at it; he hated those bottles as he hated everything symbolic of his wife.

One of the bottles was almost empty; it contained a brown fluid in which Kashla had been accustomed to place absolute faith. What it was, Byrd did not know. Some queer concoction brought out of India—one she took twice a day, at 9 in the morning and at 4 in the afternoon.

Peculiar stuff, he told himself while shaving. There was but a mouthful left in that bottle—only a single dose. Had she the prescription for another supply? But of course! Kashla had all her prescriptions. Her life depended on them, she had once confided to him.

What could be so potent in this tonic? He had never seen any of it in this country. It looked like iodine. Yes, iodine—iodine—iodi—

Of a sudden Roger Byrd stopped shaving. He stood rigid, his wide eyes gaping at his lathered reflection in the mirror.

*It looked like iodine!*

It has been said that men conceive a thousand vagrant fancies while shaving. How this particular idea ever struck Roger Byrd, he could not explain. It simply came to him, as if it were an inspiration.

A horrible thought it was. It stiffened every muscle in his tall body. Iodine—!

He began to think. Frantically, desperately, wildly, he considered the idea from every possible angle.

What if Mr. Currie *could* somehow have the marriage annulled? What if he *could* secure a divorce on some grounds? Would that terminate Kashla's power? No! She had promised to be the mistress of Byrd's mind



forever. And forever meant until death.

Until death! Death was the only thing that could sever the bond that linked his subjugated mind to her hypnotic power. Death——

Rivulets of perspiration oozed out of his forehead to stream down into the lather. Death—the tonic looked like iodine—there was iodine in the medicine chest—death—iodine——

Round and round, in a furious cycle, the thoughts whirled in his brain. People would say she had taken iodine by mistake; others had died by drinking from the wrong bottle. It was nothing novel. And so easy now! He could pour out that tonic and substitute an equal amount of iodine. Kashla would gulp it down in one swallow, as usual. And then——

The end of mental tyranny! The end of slavery, of torture! Freedom! Oh, great God, what an idea!

**T**HE lather was still on his face, but Roger Byrd had forgotten it. He was breathing rapidly, heavily, as he worked over those bottles. Whatever horror he may have experienced was overwhelmed by the mad exultation he derived from a vision of freedom. This was the only way, the only certainty, by which his mental shackles could be destroyed. And he leapt at it eagerly, unthinkingly.

When the tonic had been spilled into the wash-bowl, he allowed water from the faucet to gush out forcefully, that it might wash away all stains. Then he carefully—oh, so carefully—poured iodine into the medicine bottle——

It was done!

Roger Byrd stood quaking, yet oddly ecstatic. His eyes blazed. Perspiration coursed freely down his entire body. While he was in New York, purchasing a new town car, the thing would happen——

Consequences? He did not care about them or worry as to what might be his eventual explanation. Anything was better than a continuance of this fearful life.

The coroner would declare she had taken poison by mistake. What else could he say?

Oh, but yes, there *was* a danger! It occurred to Roger Byrd quite abruptly and left him frowning in bewilderment. Would not any investigator know that iodine had been poured into that tonic bottle? Would not any detective demand to know who had poured it, and why?

For several minutes Byrd contemplated this hitherto neglected peril. In his agitation, he had viewed only the ultimate escape from Kashla's power; now other things occurred to him.

But his mind was functioning with furious rapidity; in a moment he had developed a scheme which brought a shrewd smile to his lathered face.

He broke off the neck of the iodine bottle against the edge of the marble shelf.

Spilling the rest of its contents into the wash-bowl, he threw the remnants of the bottle into a metallic basket in a corner.

And now he had assured himself of a plausible alibi—one which would prevent anyone's accusing him of wilful or premeditated murder. For he could say to an inquirer: "Yes, I poured the iodine into that medicine bottle. Why? Well, when I reached for my razor, I inadvertently upset it. The bottle fell and broke at the neck. But a little iodine remained in its bottom. I saw that empty medicine bottle and poured it into that. Empty? Of course, the medicine bottle was empty!"

And who could oppose him in that contention, with Kashla dead? Who, indeed, would doubt him?

Roger Byrd actually grinned with the prospect of freedom from his

wife's power. Oh, he might be held for homicide; but with a clever, influential attorney like Mr. Currie, with so plausible an explanation of his unintentional act, with his family name, with the aura of an accidental catastrophe hovering over the whole business——

"Freedom!" muttered Roger Byrd.

And then, suddenly glancing through the window, he saw Ozul the gardener.

Ozul was still pushing the clattering lawn-mower, steeped in his task with bovine complacency. Yet Ozul *might* have been looking up through that open window——

"Nonsense!" Byrd assured himself. "He's been busy. He doesn't even know I'm here. There's nothing for me to worry about. Why, by tonight I'll—I'll be *free!* Free from her!"

And he shaved joyfully, confident that his apprehensions concerning Ozul were unfounded and insignificant.

### 3

**J**UBILANT in an unholy, demoniacal way, Roger Byrd motored into New York in his own yellow roadster. On the journey, he gloated. What splendid dreams were approaching realization! The death of tyranny!

He decided to follow his preconceived plans in passing the day, lest any deviation from his normal habits be construed as worthy of suspicion. Accordingly, he lunched at one of his clubs and tarried in a merry conversation with one of the other members. Over cigars and jolly anecdotes he sat until half-past 2. And he laughed often and heartily, though his merriment occasionally sounded queerly shrill, strained.

Then he occupied himself in the selection of a town car—a task that consumed most of the afternoon. It was 6 o'clock when finally he started

homeward; and a flat tire delayed him another half-hour.

Finally, however, at almost 8 o'clock, Roger Byrd drove within sight of his imposing white residence.

As he neared it, his heart thundered, his whole being shook. How would he be greeted? By news of Kashla's death, of course. The servants would chatter in confusion, informing him that they had tried to telephone his clubs, but all attempts at locating him had been futile. Oh, he could visualize the calamitous scene, and it filled him with palpitant delight.

Twilight had settled on the country—a grayish, purplish twilight, strangely hazy. In the western skies flamed a few streaks of orange and yellow; their glow permeated the vagueness of oncoming night.

Byrd drove on, already conscious of the heavy perfumes emanating from Kashla's wondrous garden. He turned the car into the driveway, while every beat of his heart seemed a violent explosion. He was, he knew, on the very brink of—freedom! More than that, by this time he was *free*.

Toward the garage he directed the roadster. Perhaps twenty feet he rode into the grounds. And then, with an impulsive motion, he jammed on his brakes.

The car stopped with a jerk that sent him lurching forward. Very still he sat, gasping, aghast, dumfounded. He was staring toward that bower canopied with rambling red roses, where Kashla had been seated in the morning.

And as he stared, his forehead became dripping wet and every trace of color ebbed from his cheeks. A sense of abject hopelessness more insufferable than pain swept through him. It was the crash of dreams, the bursting of the bubbles he had blown.

For there, under the roses, smiling at him sweetly, sat the white-clad Kashla!

In the hazy light he saw her hand languidly rise to beckon him; and he went to her—dazedly.

"Have you bought the town car?" she asked when he stood before her. Mutely he nodded, his eyes round and stupefied.

"That is good," murmured Kashla, her fingers straying to wind about the stem of a dangling rose. "I see, my dear, dear husband, that you are surprised—no, shocked—because you find me still alive, eh?"

The taunt in her low tones tortured him. The perfume of the flowers made his senses ache with their load of sweetness. He was perspiring copiously now, and his hand unsteadily brushed across his moist forehead.

"Wh-what do you mean?" he demanded defiantly, his voice hoarse.

"Oh, why should we play innocent with each other, Roger?" Not once did her smile vanish. Over her fragile figure the purple twilight settled, like a mantle of unreality. She shrugged. "Ozul saw through the bathroom window."

"Ozul saw—!" gasped Byrd, terrified.

"Of course. He saw you toying with the bottles, so I was wise, my dear, and I did not take my tonic today. Ozul is very loyal to me, you know."

In his devastating chagrin, Roger Byrd could have shrieked. Instead of freedom he had encountered failure! But somehow he managed to restrain his wild impulses and stood motionless.

Kashla — the slender, ethereal Kashla—lavished her smile upon him.

"I can not altogether blame you, my good husband," she said, every word mocking him in that subtle, melodious way. "I have been very severe with you. But—when one tries to murder, one must suffer some punishment."

Trembling, Byrd attempted to exonerate himself by blurting, "It was an accident! I broke the bottle——"

"It was no accident," calmly answered Kashla. "And you will be punished. I shall tell you how, Roger. Mr. Currie, your lawyer, is waiting for you in the house."

"Mr. Currie——?" he repeated mechanically.

"Yes. Oh, he has already told me you wish to be rid of me."

Mentally Byrd cursed; what an idiot the attorney was for babbling things!

With all her mellifluous placidity, the slim Kashla went on, "I do not want to send you to prison. What use is a husband in prison? But I want your friend, Mr. Currie, to know what you have tried to do today. After that, I think he will not be so anxious to help you."

Byrd recoiled, stricken by fear. His eyes were round and ablaze.

"I can't tell him!" he cried.

"Oh, yes, you can—and you shall. Do not be afraid. He will not send you to prison. He thinks too much of your family. But—I want him to know what you did!"

"I can't tell him!" groaned Byrd.

"You shall."

"I can't! I—I——"

And then he encountered Kashla's suddenly narrowed eyes, twin specks of fire that burned their way into his very brain. He felt a dizziness surge over him. He swayed. He knew his will was under her dominion! and now she was exerting her fantastic power—sending him to confess to the lawyer——

Roger Byrd went.

He could not help going. He was completely governed by Kashla's will. His very thoughts were dictated by her desire. Like a creature in a dream he walked, entranced and impotent. And Kashla remained under the roses in her favorite bower, looking after him.

IN THE Orientally adorned drawing room Byrd found Mr. Currie and two other men. Who these were, he did not know; nor did he dare speak in their presence.

Yet words somehow gushed to his tongue—words he could not suppress—words sent there by Kashla.

He turned to Mr. Currie. It occurred to him that the attorney sat strangely pale and grave. Byrd bowed. In low tones that poured from him in a monody, he said, "Mr. Currie, today I tried to murder my wife. I substituted poison—iodine—for her tonic."

And as soon as he had uttered those words, Roger Byrd sensed a change well through him. The power that had been clutching his mind released its hold. He remained suddenly his own master, thinking clearly. But he quivered as he gaped at Mr. Currie; and he opened his mouth to a circle of astonishment.

For Mr. Currie, as well as the two other men, had sprung toward him. Now the lawyer was grasping his arm, shaking it violently. And in a

choking voice he cried, "You—you did that, Byrd?"

Momentarily Byrd was frightened by the tremulous vehemence. Then, while a wan, helpless smile twisted his lips, he mumbled: "Ozul, the gardener, would have told you, anyway. She'd make him."

"But the gardener swore he knew nothing!" ejaculated Mr. Currie.

The confident assertion caused Byrd to frown. Had Kashla lied to him? He sucked in a sharp breath. What did Mr. Currie mean?

"My wife," he replied stiffly, "told me he knew *everything*."

Mr. Currie stepped backward and looked blankly at the other two men. Then he peered more intently at Byrd.

"Your wife said that?" he demanded. "When did she tell you that?"

"Why, just a moment ago, in the garden."

Mr. Currie gulped, wet his lips. Slowly his two hands were lifted to grasp and shake Roger Byrd's shoulders.

"Are you crazy?" the lawyer whispered. "Your wife drank poison and died at half-past 4 this afternoon!"

