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W. T.—1

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In Slumber

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

The stench of stagnant waters broke my dream,
Wherethrough had run, with living murmur and gleam;
The Rivers four of the Earthly Paradise:
From the azured flame of those effulgent skies,
And valleys lifting censers of vast bloom,
I was drawn down into a deathlier gloom
Than lies on Styx's fountain. By such light
As shows the newly damned their dolorous plight,
I trod the shivering soil of that demesne,
Whence larvæ swarmed, malignant and obscene,
Like writhen mists from some Maremma reeking:
Through the gross air, fell incubi went seeking
Their prey that slumbered helpless; at my knee
There clung the python-bodied succubi;
I heard the wail of them that walked apart,
Each with a suckling vampire at his heart;
And, as I stumbled loathly on, the ground
Was rent with noiseless thunder all around
To pits that teemed with direr prodigies:
Gray, headless coils, and worm-shaped infamies
Unmeasured, rose above the moon that rotted
Black as a corpse in heavens thick and clotted;
The rusty clang and shaken soot of wings
Deafened and stifled me; from pestilent springs
Slime-mantled horrors boiled with fume and hiss
To pour in frothing fury down the abyss.
Then, from an outmost circle of that hell,
The tumbling Harpies came, detestable,
With beaks that in long tatters tore my breast—
And wove from these their crimson, wattled nest!