

# Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

July, 1944

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# John Thunstone's Inheritance

By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

Heading by **ELTON FAX**

**I**T WAS not a first-rate hotel, not even for that section of Manhattan, but Sabine Loel's drawing room on the seventh floor was handsomely kept and softly lighted. Sabine Loel herself was worth looking at twice, a tall, mature woman of a figure both opulent and graceful. She had splendid black eyes and slim white hands that half-concealed themselves in the wide sleeves of her black gown. Her dark hair, brindled with one lock of white, she wore combed well back from her almost Grecian face, and her mouth, though sullen, was curved and warm.

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*They say I want to practice evil enchantments, for  
I called him twice and the third time . . . !*

"Mr. Thunstone," she greeted her caller, with a formality that half sneered. "Won't you sit down? I hope this is going to be a friendly visit—last time we met you were downright unpleasant about my approach to occultism. You did say, however," and she smiled slightly, "that I was attractive."

Thunstone sat down across the writing desk from her. He was larger for a man than she for a woman, with a thoughtful rectangular face and a short, neat moustache black enough for an Arab. His deep-set bright eyes did not flicker under her searching gaze.

"You're entirely too attractive," he assented deeply, "especially as you have potentialities for danger, in your unusual attitudes toward, and studies of, the supernatural. However, I'm here on business."

"Business?" she echoed, and her eyes glowed as his big left hand thrust itself into the inside pocket of his jacket, where his wallet would be.

But he brought out a document instead, something legal-looking in a blue folder, so creased and doubled as to exhibit one typewritten paragraph. He passed it to Sabine Loel, who leaned back to let light fall upon it:

... and to John Thunstone, the character and success of whose investigations into psychical matters I have observed with interest, I do hereby bequeath my house known as Bertram Dower, situated one mile north of the town of Darrington, county of ...

"I know about Bertram Dower House," said Sabine Loel. "What student of the occult hasn't heard of it? Conan Doyle said the atmosphere alone proved the existence of spirit forces; and John Mulholland isn't all skeptic when he talks about it. The house belonged to old James Garrett, who wouldn't let anyone enter. And there's that story of hidden treasure—" She broke off, and licked her full, curved lips with a tiny pointed tongue. "What's this on the margin? The bit, written in ink?"

"Apparently it's for me," said Thunstone, "but it's cryptic. Something to the effect of 'Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.' Read on."

STRETCHING his long arm across the desk, he turned the folded will and showed another passage:

... with the understanding that the said John Thunstone shall institute a serious and complete study of the phenomena which have excited so much discussion. ...

When Sabine Loel had finished, Thunstone took the document back and restored it to his pocket.

"I'm in honor bound to study the place, even if I weren't eager to do so. But Garrett was deceived in one particular—I'm not psychic, not a medium. You are. I want you to come with me."

She did not reply at once. Finally: "I didn't know you knew James Garrett, Mr. Thunstone."

"I didn't. I knew only about his place, and the strange stories. He seems to know me only by my flattering reputation. But that's beside the point. Will you come?"

She smiled, with a great deal of maddening mystery. "Why not ask your friend the Frenchman—Jules de Grandin? You and he are very close. Are you surprised to learn that I keep some watch on your movements?"

He answered her questions in order. "I invited de Grandin, but he and Dr. Trowbridge have all they can do in that line just now. No, I'm not so much surprised as warned."

Still she temporized. "Once you suggested, in public, that I was dishonest in claiming to communicate with the spirit world."

"Yet you have the power to communicate, and to do honest business when you wish. If a broker sells spurious stock, can't he change and sell honest shares? I've kept track of you, too. I venture to say that you need money now, this minute."

Again he put his hand into his inside pocket.

This time he brought forth a note-case, from which he took several bills. She accepted them gravely but readily, folded them, small between her slender, white fingers.

"When do we start?" she asked.

"Let's have an early tea, then I'll fetch my car around. There's a storm threatening,

but we can reach Darrington before it breaks."

"I'll get my wraps," she said.

IT WAS twilight when they passed through the little town of Darrington. Thunstone, who had a marked bit of road map to guide him drove up a steep, winding stretch of concrete where he had to put his car into second gear. Trees, their winter-stripped branches making strange traceries against the last pallor of light in the sky, crowded thickly at each brink of the pavement. Almost at the top of the slope, he turned off upon a very rough and narrow dirt road, which brought them at last to Bertiam Dower. The house was a tall, sturdy-looking structure, almost like a fort. As they rolled into the yard, sleet began to fall.

"I trust," said Sabine Loel in a murmuring, mocking voice, "that you came prepared with wolfbane and holy water."

"Wolfbane's out of season," replied Thunstone, and made the car creep into a tumbledown shed at the rear of the house. "And I'm no priest, so I bring no holy things. Aren't there other ways of confronting the supernatural?" Shutting off the engine, he turned on the inner lights. Sabine Loel's face, a frosty white oval among dark furs, turned sidewise to him.

"This inheritance of yours—" she began, and then broke off. "Shall I help you with your packages?"

"If you like." He handed her two wrapped bottles. He himself took a much larger parcel, slid out of the car and held the door open for her. Then he snapped off the lights. In unfamiliar gloom they walked slowly around the big house to the roofless porch. Thunstone produced a key, and the lock whined protestingly at its turning. They entered thick darkness.

"What's that white thing?" gasped Sabine Loel, suddenly cowering back.

"A chair in a muslin cover." Thunstone reassured her, and groped his way to a table where he set down his package. Peering about, he made out a fireplace almost directly opposite. Crossing to it, he felt for and discovered logs and kindling. Rapidly he made a fire. It burned small for a moment, then strong and bright. The sleet began to rattle at the windows like hard, in-

sistent little fingertips demanding admittance.

The fire showed them a spacious room, occupying the whole width of the house's front. A door stood open at the rear, and to one side mounted a staircase. All was panelled in dark wood, and bookcases loomed bare, while the furniture was swaddled against dust.

To Thunstone's mind came, all unbidden, the lines of the ancient *Lyke-Wake Song*:

This ae nighte, this ae nighte,  
Every nighte and alle,  
Fire and sleete. . . .

The fire was doing well now, shedding its first cheerful heat. Sabine Loel moved gratefully toward it. The redness made her pallor seem more healthy. "I wonder where the treasure is," she ventured.

"Nobody seems to know about it, not even whether it exists or not," returned Thunstone. "The story is that some Revolutionary War looter hid it—a bad character, to judge from the implication of ghosts around it." From his parcel he dug a fat coach-candle and held a match to it. He set it in its own wax at the edge of the table.

. . . Fire and sleete and candle-lighte,  
And Christe receive thy saule.

He had no desire to give up his soul this night, or for many nights to come; but the memory of the quaint old lines might be a good omen. Bishop Peter Binfel's witch-history, he reflected, points out that holy names are protection against ill magic.

"This is going to be cozy," said Sabine Loel, and dropped into the muslin-covered chair that had startled her. "Are you worrying? Remember old beliefs and stories?" And she laughed, as if in triumph that she had half-read his mind.

He smiled back at her, without any pique, and opened his package further. There were more candles, some paper napkins, sandwiches in oiled paper, fruit, and two glasses. Unwrapping one of the bottles, he skilfully forced its cork and poured out red wine.

"Supper?" he suggested, and Sabine Loel made a gay gesture of applause. He uncov-

ered two straight chairs and held one for her as she came to the table.

But she paused, in the very act of sitting down, paused with her knees half bent and her head lifted. It was as though she had frozen in mid-motion.

"Th-*there!*" she wailed. "At the door!"

**T**HUNSTONE could not see what she was talking about, for the candle glared in his eyes. He moved, lightning swift for all his size, around the table and to the door beyond—the inner door, that stood open to the rear of the house. All was black there, save for the wash of light that beat dimly past him.

"Don't leave me here alone," Sabine Loel was pleading, and he strode quickly back to the table, but only to seize and light another candle. Holding it high, he pushed into the rearward room. It was huge, musty, full of furniture. He saw another door, closed. As he touched the knob, he started. Something was moving softly up behind him.

"I was afraid to stay there by myself," Sabine Loel breathed in his ear. "Can't I come along?"

"Come," he granted shortly. He peered through the door he had opened. "Here's the kitchen, evidently. And there, to the right, a pantry. Now, then, for upstairs. Are you game?"

"I haven't told you yet," she half-chattered, "what it was I saw."

"No, I've not given you much time. Was it something human?"

"Yes. That is, it stood erect, as tall as a man, with a head and a long body." They had walked back into the front room together. "But it wasn't flesh. It was all misty, and I didn't see any limbs or features." She gulped and shivered.

"Well, it wasn't in the back of the house. Not downstairs, anyway. You want to come up?" And Thunstone started for the staircase.

She almost ran to keep up with him. "What if you meet it?"

"Come along and see." His feet were heavy but confident on the stairs. He held aloft the candle to illuminate a little cell of an upper hallway, from which opened several rooms.

"This," he pronounced, gazing into the

first, "is a bedroom. Look at that fine old walnut bureau. This next one is a bathroom. Fixtures archaic, but serviceable. Another bedroom here—and another. That's all. No phenomena to greet us. At least none that shows itself.

Sleet bombarded the slopes of the roof as they turned back down the stairs.

"You didn't pry too closely," observed Sabine Loel, and her voice was steady enough now. "Afraid of finding something?"

He shook his dark head. "If anything is afraid, it's whatever you saw. If you saw it."

**I**N SILENCE they descended. Thunstone poked the fire-logs with a long, heavy poker of wrought iron, and up sprang sparks and banners of flame. Again they went to the table, and this time there was no interruption. Sabine Loel took her seat facing the inner door, and Thunstone's broad back turned toward that dark rectangle, almost within clutching distance of it. He could not deny a feeling of apprehension, but his big hand was steady as he lifted his wine glass.

"A toast," said Sabine Loel, lifting hers in turn, and at least she spilled none. "I drink to—realities!"

"To realities," repeated Thunstone. "Sometimes they are stranger than fancies."

They drank, and Sabine Loel laughed quietly over the rim of her glass. But her shining eyes were fixed on the darkness behind her companion. He pretended not to notice.

When they had finished eating, and had emptied one of the bottles of wine, both returned to the fireplace. "It seems to be smoking," pointed out Sabine Loel.

"Perhaps the chimney's clogged," Thunstone again took the iron poker, and probed exploringly upward. A shower of soot descended, and he jumped quickly back to keep from being soiled. Not so Sabine Loel, who cried out in excitement, and snatched up something else that had fallen down, from a ledge within the fireplace.

"A little box—the treasure!" she exulted. "No, it's a book. A ledger, tied shut with cord, and dirty."

With a quick pull she broke the cord and opened the book. "Look, here on the first

page. The name of James Garrett, and some sort of warning: 'This book is for my eyes alone.'" She turned a page. "Don't tell me that he was a psychical investigator, too!"

"Give it to me, please," said John Thunstone.

"I want to look through it," she demurred.

"Give it to me," he repeated. "I'm owner of this house, and it's best that I examine documents." He took it from her hand, not roughly, but without waiting for her to offer it. She stared, with a sort of bright hardness, and wiped her sooty fingers on a paper napkin.

"Will you pardon me?" asked Thunstone. He drew an armchair close to the fire. By its light he began to read the slovenly handwriting. What James Garrett had written began very ponderously:

I had best enter my thoughts and findings on paper. If this is not a record to impress others, it will at least give me calmness in the writing, perhaps strengthen me against follies of imagination.

They do me wrong who say I want to practice evil enchantments. It is only that I bought this old house, with its weird reputation; haunted, the countryside calls it, and haunted I believe it to be. It is also true that there is a hidden treasure in the cellar—a treasure that I will never let my kinsmen hunt for in their turn.

Thunstone's eyes widened a trifle. "That's why he left the place to me," he said aloud.

"May I take more wine," asked Sabine Loel, at the table. He nodded, and read on:

I have dug deep and its guard must know that I am close at hand. The least touch of my pick or spade brings him to drive me away. For I called him twice out of curiosity, and the third time . . .

Sabine Loel screamed loudly and wildly, and dropped her wine glass to shatter on the floor.

Thunstone had been leaning back in his chair, as relaxed and comfortable in seeming as a cat. But, like a cat, he was up and

out of the chair before one could well follow his movement. The book spun out of his lap and fell on the hearth. His hand caught up the heavy poker and brought it along.

SABINE LOEL faced toward the staircase. She did not turn toward him as he came to her side, but kept her eyes fixed on the darkness at the top. "It started to come down," she whispered hoarsely, and choked on the rest.

Thunstone seized one of the candles and went up the stairs again, two and three at a time. Sabine Loel remained by the table, leaning upon it with one slim, pale hand, her face a mask of expectant terror.

As Thunstone mounted into the upper hall he lifted his candle high, but for the moment it was as if the darkness muffled and enclosed that quivering little blade of light. He had to strain his eyes to see, though he had seen well enough the first time up. In spite of his steady native courage, he hesitated for ever so little. He forced himself to enter the nearest bedroom.

As he crossed the threshold, he thought that something crept to face him; but it was only a shadow, jumping as his candle-flame moved. All else was quiet in the close, cold air. He thought of a creepy witicism in a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "If there's a ghost in the room, it's nearly always under the bed." That was the sense, if not the actual wording Thunstone wished that all men were here who joked about supernatural dangers. Stooping, he thrust his poker under the bed. Something stirred—a cloud of dust.

Sneezing, he went to the other rooms in turn. Nothing moved in them but shadows, nothing spoke but the sleet on windows and roof. Yet, as he descended the steps once more, he felt weary.

Sabine Loel stood exactly as he had left her. She questioned him with her midnight eyes, and he shook his head. "I found nothing," he told her.

She smiled back, ruefully. "You must forgive me, Mr. Thunstone. I came here expecting things, I'm not sure just what. I may be mistaken in what I seem to see. But you did say that you believe in my psychic powers."

"I do believe in them," he assured her. "You haven't always used them wisely or honorably, but you have them."

He laid the poker on the table and stuck his candle beside its fellow. Then he went back to the fire. As he came close to the hearth, he stifled an exclamation.

The book in which James Garrett had written his secrets of treasure and terror was ablaze in the fire.

"How did that happen?" he cried, and quickly dragged it out with the toe of his shoe. Too late, he saw at once. The thing was consumed beyond restoration.

"What's the matter?" he heard Sabine Loel asking, but he was too busy to reply. Kneeling, he slapped out the fire in the book. Only a few bits of the inner leaves remained uncharred. He put together two of them, then a third, like bits of a puzzle. Part of a sentence became legible:

... terialized, it can do harm; but materialized, it can also be harmed itself. . . ."

He turned toward the hearth to look for more remains. As he did so, something seemed to explode in his head, and lightning and thunder filled the room. He collapsed forward, and did not see, hear or feel.

**H**IS wits returned slowly and cautiously, as to a place both dangerous and unfamiliar. The back of his head housed a red-hot throbbing, and his nose pressed against the warm stone of the hearth. He knew that he lay on the floor, face down, but for the moment he could not move, not even for the sense of peril hovering over him.

"Who hit me?" he mumbled thickly.

Sabine Loel did not answer, and he made shift to rise to his hands and one knee, shaking his head to clear it, like a groggy boxer. The dim room, distorted to his vision, was empty of her. As he straightened his body, something slid along it and fell with a startling clang—the stout iron poker, that had been lying across his back. Getting shakily to his feet, he shook his head again. It still hurt, but his strength was flowing back into him.

Sabine Loel's fur coat still hung draped across the back of the chair in which she had sat to eat and drink. One of the candles was gone from where it had stuck in its own wax. Thunstone tottered to the table, clutched it, and bent and gazed at the floor. A blob of candle-grease stuck to the planks, midway to the open door that led to the silent back of the house.

Thunstone shakily put out his big hand for the other candle, then thought better of it. The weakness was leaving his knees. After a moment he moved again, and this time with the strange, wise silence that his big but capable body could achieve. There was little light in the room to the rear, but enough for him to see that the kitchen door now stood open. He groped his way through it.

A great section of the kitchen floor had been lifted up and back, like a trapdoor. From beneath beat up a feeble, pale radiance. Thunstone settled on one knee at the edge of the open hole and peered down.

The cellar of Bertram Dower House was simply a great squared hole in the hard earth, walled by uncemented banks of rough soil. Crude, solid stairs, almost as steep as a ladder, led downward fully twelve feet. Thunstone lowered his still aching head until he could see well below the level of the floor, and gazed downward, in the direction of the front of the house.

From that direction blazed the light, the big candle that had been taken from the table. It was now stuck upon a rock or clod of earth on the cellar floor, and shed its yellow light into a cavelike hole in the frontward bank. Here stooped a human figure in a dark gown, toiling with a spade. Thunstone caught a momentary glimpse of the pale face, stamped with an almost murderous determination—the digger was Sabine Loel.

She knelt as he watched, and thrust one hand into the loosened soil. For the space of a breath she groped, then voiced a little cry of triumph. She lifted a palmful of gleaming stuff, yellower and brighter than the candle-light. It was gold.

Again she took up the spade and began delving, swiftly but shakily. Her head and shoulders pushed themselves deeply into the little cavern, just below a pair of gray

lumps on the lips of the bank. Thunstone, straining his eyes, could not decide what those lumps were.

But he saw them stir.

He bent lower, lying at full length on the floor. The candlewick in the cellar sent up a momentary flare of strong bluish light. It showed him that whole part of the cellar in brief radiance, and he identified the grayish objects.

They were a head and a hand, strangely shaped and indistinct but unmistakable. And they were moving, slowly and stealthily.

Thunstone's lips opened, but no sound came out. The smaller lump, the hand, crawled deliberately over the lip of the bank and down the face of earth, above Sabine Loel's stooped, straining shoulders. It was somehow only half-formed, a rounded cobble of some foggy substance, and its arm was reed-thin and jointless. The effect was of a strange gray spider with thick, short legs, descending on a preternaturally stout strand of web. The hand opened, the fingers quivered, like the spider-limbs clutching for prey.

They touched Sabine Loel's neck. And she looked up, and shrieked with a wild, trapped terror.

John Thunstone rolled himself into the opening, his hands holding the brink to break his fall. He spun in the air, dropped several feet and landed upright on soggy earth.

His nostrils suddenly filled with a damp mouldy smell, and the shock of his heavy descent made the blue candle-flame quiver. All these little details he noted, even as he rushed.

The rest of what had been on the dark bank above Sabine was coming down. It flowed swiftly and unsubstantially, like a heavy cloud of greasy-gray vapor settling through lighter atmosphere. Beneath it, Sabine Loel was collapsing, but whether in a faint or under the weight of the thing Thunstone could not take time to decide. Three plunging leaps took him across the earthy floor.

The creature faced him, rising to his own height, and higher.

It was like a grotesque body moulded of thick, opaque steam or smoke, its

substance churning and whirling within strange, sharp confines. Its head, set on top without benefit of neck or shoulders, looked to be without a cranium as well—it had great, gross lips and jaws, and pointed ears jutted from it, but there were no eyes or brow that he could see. Hands, at the ends of scrawny, jointless arms, lifted toward him, as though they were trying to fumble at his throat. Thunstone had a sense as at the presence of an unthinkable, revolting foulness; but he did not retreat or falter. His big right fist sped straight at the head-blob.

No impact, only a swirling and sucking inward of the vapors. The whole body-form drifted backward, like smoke before the swing of a fan. It hung like a smudge against the bank, and there he saw that it thickened, immediately and considerably, to a slimy wetness. It was no more like moulded vapor, but like a dank daub upon the earthen face, a foul stagnant pool set upon an end. And it moved back toward him.

Its hands came up gropingly as before, to the level of his face.

HE felt a moist flick, as if wind had blown a bit of stinking spray upon his cheek. Despite all his determination, he broke ground before the advancing filthiness. As he did so, he almost stumbled backward over the crumpled form of Sabine Loel. Stooping quickly, he scooped her up under one arm and dragged her back with him toward the ladderlike stairs. His eyes did not falter from the presence that slowly pursued.

It had changed yet again. Now it was no longer liquid, but solid.

Still it presented the ungainly gargoyle outline it had first shown, degenerate head upon misshapen body, with gross hands upon reed-like arms. But it had gained substance, as much substance as John Thunstone's own big frame had. Details were now sickeningly clear. Its loose slab lips twitched and gaped open, showing a toothless mouth full of the blackest shadow. Its big hands hooked their fingers like grappels. They bore claws at their tips, claws as black as crystallized vegetable decay.

To his wire-tense mind came a sudden blessed memory, the memory of that sur-



viving scrap of James Garrett's burned ledger:

"... materialized, it can do harm, but, materialized, it can also be harmed itself. . . ."

He let go of the slack form of Sabine Loel, and as she sank to the earthen floor, still swooning, he stepped in front of her. Had her eyes been open, she would have seen Thunstone's face grow suddenly bright and purposeful, his lips drawn taut beneath his dark moustache. His wide shoulders hunched themselves, as if power greatened within him. For a third time he set himself in the way of the entity's advance.

Yet again the hands stole toward him. His left arm was extended, pugilist fashion, and the hands found it and closed upon it. He felt those claws of hard rock as they pierced his coat-sleeve, but he did not try to pull or struggle loose. Shifting his stance, he drove his right arm with all the strength he could put back of it, powerfully and scientifically, at that working, grimacing mouth.

His knuckles pulped the blub lips over something hard—the thing must have teeth after all, chalk-textured rather than bony. The witless-looking head snapped back from his blow like a batted ball, carrying with it the body, the arms, the hands. Cloth ripped as the talons tore from their hold on Thunstone's sleeve, and with his freed left fist Thunstone sped a long, clean jab. From somewhere a moan drifted up, the thing could feel pain. Thunstone stepped in, crouching low. The talons, missing a grab at his neck, scabbled clumsily in his disordered dark hair. He dug his right fist, then his left, into the spongy-seeming middle of the body. Then his right fist cut upward to where normal beings have a chin.

There was a sudden floundering fall before him, and there rose at him two flourishing, kicking extremities that he could not call feet.

HE LAUNCHED a kick himself, and wondered half-foolishly if the torso he struck had ribs to break. Again he kicked and shoved, and the misshapen form tried to roll clear, to get up. He kept after it,

hooking a toe behind a hand on which it was rising and dragging it into another sprawl. A third kick hefted its slack, squirming weight bodily into the hallowed-out cavern where Sabine Loel had toiled.

There his enemy seemed to recover itself. Shrinking clear of him, it struggled to rise. But Thunstone had caught up the fallen spade and poised it for a downward sweep.

Though there were no eyes or excuses for eyes in that gray face, the creature knew danger and covered back. Candlelight, strongest here, showed it suddenly wet like filthy snow in the sun—it was dissolving into flowing liquid again, hoping to trickle away to escape, reorganization, new attack.

Thunstone struck with his shovel, not into the hole but above it.

A shower of clods fell from the walls and roof of the depression, momentarily overwhelming the form inside. It was already half-melted into dampness, and into that dampness fell earth and muck, mingling and disorganizing. Thunstone struck again and again at the earth above and around it, piling shovelfuls of clods as into a grave.

"What—what—"

It was the voice of Sabine Loel. The noise of the struggle must have roused her. She was on her feet, moving close. Her pale, handsome face showed no terror, only mystification and some embarrassment. Plainly she only half remembered what had frightened her, literally, out of her wits.

Thunstone paid no attention, but hurled still more earth into the cave, and more. Some black dampness seeped through for a moment, and he flung a fresh spadeful upon it. Then he paused.

"Let it finish its change now," he said, when he caught his breath. "Even if it's vapor again, this dirt will confine it tonight. Tomorrow I'll be back with workmen and cement mixers. This cellar shall be filled to the brim with concrete—marked with protecting symbols—"

Sabine Loel was at his side. Now she was remembering. Her eyes flickered in horror. She held out a trembling right hand, in which she still clutched half a dozen broad pieces of gold.

"I found these—" she began.

Roughly, Thunstone snatched them from her and flung them into the pit. He shoveled

more dirt upon them. She cried out in protest, a hand at her brow from which sprouted the waving gray lock of hair.

"You can testify now to the meaning of tainted money," Thunstone told her flatly. "The treasure and its guardian seem to go together. It threatened James Garrett, it threatens us. Some would be trite and call the gold accursed. I call it unprofitable." Once again he threw in earth. "Let the thing stay shut up here, and its gold with it."

"But there's a fortune," protested Sabine Loel frantically. "I'd touched only the top. There's enough to—"

"It was left to me, by the will of James Garrett," Thunstone toiled on without easing. "I half-guessed that something like this would happen. You, with your power and your deceit, were exactly what was needed to tempt the thing forth, so that it could be defeated and hereafter kept out of reckoning. As I construct it, you read James Garrett's ledger while I was upstairs alone."

"Why," she stammered in confusion, "why—"

He smiled as he dug his spade into fresh earth. "I'll hazard a guess. I'd paid you to hunt spirits, so you began by pretending—only pretending—to see something as we sat down to eat."

SHE did not deny it, but lowered her head. "That was only mischief on your part," he went on. "Then, when I found the book in the chimney, you pretended again to see something on the stairs. That was to start me on another chase, so that you'd have a chance to read. You quickly skimmed through what Garrett had written about where the treasure was to be dug for. To keep me from seeing it too, you threw the book into the fire. Isn't that true?"

Still she kept guilty silence. Thunstone smiled more broadly, completely without malice.

"And you hit me on the head with the poker, eh? Thought to get the money while I lay unconscious. But I woke up sooner than you thought, just in time to save you from what you had summoned."

"I!" she cried, finding her voice at last. "I summoned it!"

"You were too greedy to remember what James Garrett wrote in his book, and on the margin of the copy of the will sent to me. 'Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.' That's exactly what you did. Twice you pretended to see something terrible, to deceive me. The third time, there was no deception. The guardian of the treasure rose to deal with you."

Sabine Loel's face was white, but calm. "Listen," she pleaded. "Be sensible. There is too much money here to let lie."

"No," he replied, "there is not too much money here to let lie." Stooping, he gazed at his heap of earth. Above it hung a swirl of grayish vapor, no larger than the upward waft of a cigarette's smoke. He patted the place with the bottom of the spade, and the vapor vanished.

"We could both be rich," Sabine Loel persisted. "We can come and dig tomorrow, by daylight. We could bring crucifixes, priests, any protection you want."

"We'll never dig for it," he said.

"We must," she fairly sobbed. Her white hand caught his sleeve, the same sleeve that had been torn by filthy talons. "Listen, I say. You admit I'm attractive—well, I'll be yours. I'll spend my life making you happy beyond any dream. I can do that. You'll have both the gold and me."

He did not answer, did not even look at her.

She brought her beautiful white mask of a face close to his, fixing his eyes with hers. "Am I so easy for a man to refuse?" she murmured softly.

"No," said John Thunstone honestly. "You are by no means easy for a man to refuse. But I refuse you. I'll fill this hole tonight. Tomorrow it'll be sealed so that only dynamite will ever open it. Of course, if you feel that you can't live without the treasure, I'll go away now. You may remain alone, with the spade and the candle, and dig up everything I've buried."

Sabine Loel drew back, and bowed her head again. This time she was accepting defeat.

John Thunstone resumed his shoveling.