

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 8, No. 2

FEBRUARY

The Climbing Wave (short novel)	by MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY	3
Blood	by FREDRIC BROWN	56
Birds Can't Count	by MILDRED CLINGERMAN	57
The Royal Historian of Oz (article: second of two parts)	by MARTIN GARDNER	64
The Tweener	by LEIGH BRACKETT	75
The Tidings	by ARTHUR FORGES	90
Recommended Reading (a department)	by THE EDITOR	96
Shiver in the Pines	by MANLY WADE WELLMAN	99
Botany Bay	by P. M. HUBBARD	114
The Midway	by BRYCE WALTON	117

Cover painting by Kelly Freas
(from *The Climbing Wave*, by Marion Zimmer Bradley)

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 8, No. 2, Whole No. 45, February, 1955. Published monthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, \$4.00 in U. S. and Possessions; \$5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. Copyright, 1954, by Fantasy House Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

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Very often your letters ask why Manly Wade Wellman doesn't publish a book of the adventures of the roving ballad-singer name of John, and point out that such a book would be a valuable contribution, not only to fantasy, but to American folklore. Well, the only reason that there isn't an entire book of John is that not quite enough of his strange experiences have been recorded as yet; but I can assure you that there are more on the way to round out a full-sized volume very soon — and the line of eager and percipient publishers will please form on the right. Meanwhile here is John again — artist, wanderer, sometimes a detective, sometimes a sort of magician, and always a friend — learning the secret of the gold mined by the Ancients in the southern mountains . . . and of what manner of thing the Ancients set to guard it.

Shiver in the Pines

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

WE SAT ALONG THE EDGE OF MR. Hoje Cowand's porch, up the high hills of the Rebel Creek country. Mr. Hoje himself, and his neighbor Mr. Eddy Herron who was a widower like Mr. Hoje, and Mr. Eddy's son Clay who was a long tall fellow like his daddy, and Mr. Hoje's pretty-cheeked daughter Sarah Ann, who was courting with Clay. And me. I'd stopped off to hand-help Mr. Hoje build him a new pole fence, and nothing would do him but I'd stay two-three days. Supper had been pork and fried apples and pone and snap beans. The sun made to set, and they all asked me to sing.

So I picked the silver strings on

my guitar and began the old tuneful one:

*Choose your partner as you go,
Choose your partner as you go.*

"Yippeehool!" hollered old Mr. Eddy. "You sure enough can play that, John! Come on, choose partners and dance!"

Up hopped Clay and Sarah Ann, on the level-stamped front yard, and I played it up loud and sang, and Mr. Eddy called figures for them to step to:

"Honor your partner! . . . Swing your partner! . . . Do-si-do! . . . Allemand right!" Till I got to one last chorus and I sang out loudly:

*Fare thee well, my charming gal,
Fare thee well, I'm gone!
Fare thee well, my charming gal,
With golden slippers on!*

"Kiss your partner and turn her loose!" whooped out Mr. Eddy as I stopped. Clay kissed Sarah Ann the way you'd think it was his whole business in life, and Sarah Ann, up on her little toes, kissed him back.

"Won't be no better singing and dancing the day these young ones marry up," said Mr. Hoje. "And no fare thee wells then."

"And I purely wish I could buy you golden slippers, Sarah Ann," said Clay as the two sat down together again.

"Gold's where you find it," quoted Mr. Eddy from the Book. "Clay, you might ransack round them old lost mines the Ancients dug, that nobody knows about. John, you remember the song about them?"

I remembered, for Mr. Eddy and Mr. Hoje talked a right much about the Ancients and their mines. I sang it:

*Where were they, where were they,
On that gone and vanished day
When they shoveled for their treasure
of gold?
In the pines, in the pines,
Where the sun never shines,
And I shiver when the wind blows
cold. . . .*

As I stopped, a throat rasped, loud. "Odd," said somebody, walk-

ing into the yard, "to hear that song just now."

We didn't know the somebody. He was blocky-made, not young nor either old, with a store suit and a black hat, like a man running for district judge. His square face looked flat and white, like a face drawn on paper.

"Might I sit for a minute?" he asked, mannerly. "I've come a long, long way."

"Take the door-log, and welcome," Mr. Hoje bade him. "My name's Hoje Cowand, and this is my daughter Sarah Ann, and these are the Herrons, and this here's John, who's a-visiting me. Come a long way, you said? Where from, sir?"

"From going to and fro in the world," said the stranger, lifting the hat from his smoke-gray hair, "and from walking up and down in it."

Another quotation from the Book; and if you've read Job's first chapter, you know who's supposed to have said it. The man saw how we gopped, for he smiled as he sat down and stuck out his dusty shoes.

"My name's Reed Barnitt," he said. "Odd, to hear talk of the Ancients and their mines. For I've roved around after talk of them."

"Why," said Mr. Hoje, "folks say the Ancients came into these mountains before the settlers. Close to four hundred years back."

"That long, Mr. Hoje?" asked young Clay.

"Well, a tree was cut that growed in the mouth of an Ancients' mine, near Horse Stomp," Mr. Hoje allowed. "Schooled folks counted the rings in the wood, and there was full three hundred. It was before the Yankee war they done that, so the tree seeded itself in the mine-hole four hundred years back, or near about."

"The time of the Spaniards," nodded Reed Barnitt. "Maybe about when de Soto and his Spanish soldiers crossed these mountains."

"I've heard tell the Ancients was here around that time," put in Mr. Eddy, "but I've likewise heard tell they wasn't Spanish folks, nor either Indians."

"Did they get what they sought?" wondered Reed Barnitt.

"My daddy went into that Horse Stomp heading once," said Mr. Eddy. "He said it run back about seven hundred foot as he stepped it, and a deep shaft went down at the end. Well, he figured no mortal soul would dig so far, saving he found what he was after." He had hold of Mr. Hoje's jug, and now he pushed it toward Mr. Barnitt. "Have a drink?"

"Thank you kindly, I don't use it. What did the Ancients want?"

"I've seen only one of their mines, over the ridge yonder," and Mr. Hoje nodded through the dusk. "Where they call it Black Pine Hollow —"

"Where the sun never shines," put in Mr. Barnitt, "and I shiver

when the wind blows cold." His smile at me was tight.

"I was there three-four times when I was a chap, but not lately, for folks allows there's haunts there. I saw a right much quartz laying around, and I hear tell gold comes from quartz rock."

"Gold," nodded Reed Barnitt. He put his hand inside his coat.

"You folks are treating me clever," he said, "and I hope you let me make a gift. Miss Sarah Ann, I myself don't have use for these, so if you'd accept —"

What he held out was golden slippers, that shone in the down-going sun's last suspensions.

Gentlemen, you should have heard Sarah Ann cry out her pleasure, you should have seen the gold shine in her eyes. But she drew back the hand she put out.

"I couldn't," she said. "Wouldn't be fitting to."

"Then I'll give them to this young man." Reed Barnitt set the slippers in Clay's lap. "Young sir, I misdoubt if Miss Sarah Ann would refuse a gift at your hands."

The slippers had high heels and pointy toes, and they shone like glory. Clay smiled at Sarah Ann and gave them to her. To see her smile back, you'd think it was Clay, and not Reed Barnitt, had taken them from nowhere for her.

"I do thank you kindly," said Sarah Ann. She shucked off her scuffy old shoes, and the golden slippers fitted her like slippers made

to the measure of her feet. "John," she said, "was just singing about things like this."

"Heard him as I came up trail from Rebel Creek," said Reed Barnitt. "And likewise heard him sing of the Ancients in Black Pine Hollow." His square face looked at us around. "Gentlemen," he said, "I wonder if there's heart in you all to go there with me."

We gopped again. Finally Clay said, "For gold?"

"For what else?" said Reed Barnitt. "Nobody's found it there, because nobody had the special way to look for it."

Nary one of us was really surprised to hear what the man said. There'd been such a story as long as anybody had lived around Rebel Creek. Mr. Hoje drank from the jug. Finally he said, "In what respect a special way, Mr. Barnitt?"

"I said I'd roved a far piece. I went to fetch a spell that would show the treasure. But I can't do it alone." Again the white face traveled its look over us. "It takes five folks — men, because a woman mustn't go into a mine."

We knew about that. If lady-folks go down a mine, there'll be something bad befall, maybe a miner killed.

"You've been kindly to me," said Reed Barnitt. "I feel like asking you, will you all come help me? Mr. Cowand, and Mr. Herron, and you his son, and you, John. Five we'd seek the treasure of the Ancients and five ways we'd divide it."

Sarah Ann had her manners with her. "I'll just go do the dishes," she said to us. "No, Clay, don't come help. Stay and talk here."

Reed Barnitt watched her go into the house. She left the door open, and the shine from the hearth gave us red light after sundown.

"You're a lucky young rooster," Reed Barnitt said to Clay. "A fifth chunk of the Ancients' treasure would sure enough pleasure that girl."

"Mr. Barnitt, I'm with you," Clay told him quick.

"So am I," said Mr. Eddy, because his son had spoken.

"I don't lag back when others go forward," I added on.

"Count on me," finished Mr. Hoje for us. "That makes five, like you want it, sir. But you studied the thing out and got the spell. You should have more than a fifth of whatever we find."

But the white square face shook sideways. "No. Part of the business is that each of the five takes his equal part, of the doing and of the sharing. That's how it must be. Now — we begin."

"Right this instant?" asked Clay.

"Yes," said Reed Barnitt. "Stand round, you all."

He got up from the door-log and stepped into the yard, and the rest of us with him. "The first part of the spell," he said. "To learn if the Ancients truly left a treasure."

Where the hearth's red glimmer showed on the ground in front of

the door, he knelt down. He picked up a stick. He marked in the dirt.

"Five-pointed star," he said. It was maybe four feet across. "Stand at the points, gentlemen. Yes, like that."

Rising, he took his place at the fifth point. He flung away the stick, and put a white hand into the side pocket of his coat. "Silence," he warned us, though he didn't need to.

He stooped and flung something down at the star's center. Maybe it was powder, though I'm not sure, for it broke out into fire quick, and shone like pure white heat yanked in a chunk from the heart of a furnace. I saw it shine sickly on the hairy faces of Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy, and Clay's young jaws and cheeks seemed dull and drawn. Reed Barnitt needed no special light to be pale.

He began to speak. "Moloch, Lucifer," he said in a voice like praying. "Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not, awake. The strong hero Holoba, the powerful Ischiros, the mighty Manus Erohye — show us the truth! Amen."

Again his hand in his pocket, and he brought out a slip of paper the size of a postcard, whiter than white in the glow. He handed it to Clay, who was nearest him. "Breathe on it," said Reed Barnitt, "and the others do likewise."

Clay breathed on it, and passed it to Mr. Hoje. Then it came to me, and to Mr. Eddy, and back to

Reed Barnitt. He stooped again, and held it above that sick-white heat. Back he jumped, quick, and yelled out loud, "Earth on the fire! Smother it before we lose the true word!"

Clay and his father flung on dirt. Mr. Hoje and Reed Barnitt walked side by side to the porch, whispering together. Then Mr. Hoje called in to Sarah Ann, "Fetch out the lamp, honey."

She did so. We gathered round to look at the paper. Writing was on it, spidery-looking and rough, the way you'd think it was written in mud instead of ink. Reed Barnitt gave it to Sarah Ann.

"Your heart is good," he said. "Read out what it says for us."

She held the lamp in one hand, the paper in the other.

"Do right, and prosper," she read, soft and shaky, "and what you seek is yours. Great treasure. Obey orders. To open the way, burn the light —"

"We put out the light," said Clay, but Reed Barnitt waved him quiet.

"Turn the paper over, Miss Sarah Ann," said Reed Barnitt. "Looks like more to read on the other side."

She looked at more muddy-looking scrawl on the back. She went on:

"Aram Harnam has the light. Buy it from him, but don't tell him why. He is wicked. Pay what he asks. The power is dear and scarce."

She looked up. "That's all it

says," she told us, and gave the paper back to Reed Barnitt.

We all sat down, the lamp on the porch floor among us. "Anybody know that man, what's-his-name?" asked Reed Barnitt.

"Yes," answered Mr. Hoje. "We know Aram Harnam."

At least, I'd heard what others along Rebel Creek said about Aram Harnam, and it wasn't good.

Seems he'd gone to a college to be a preacher. But that college sent him to be tried, with a sermon to some folks in another county. His teachers went to hear. When he had done, as I heard it told, those teachers told Aram Harnam that from what he'd said under name of a sermon they wanted him to pack his things and leave the college before ever another sun rose.

So he came back to Rebel Creek. One night he went up on a bald hill most folks stayed away from, and put his hand on his head and said that all beneath his hand could be Satan's property. After that, he did witch-doctoring. Nobody liked him but ary man, woman and child in the Rebel Creek county feared him.

"I take it that Aram Harnam's a bad man," Reed Barnitt suggested.

"You take it right, sir," allowed Mr. Eddy. "So does whoever wrote on that paper."

"Wrote on the paper?" Reed Barnitt said after him, and held it out to the light. It was white and

empty; so was the other side when he turned that up.

"The writing's been taken back," he said, nodding his pale face above it. "But we all remember what it said. We must buy the light, and not let Aram Harnam know why we want it."

"When do we go see him?" asked Mr. Hoje.

"Why not now?" said Reed Barnitt, but Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy spoke against that. Neither of them wanted to be trucking round Aram Harnam's place in the dark of night. We made it up to meet tomorrow morning for breakfast at Mr. Eddy's, then go.

Mr. Eddy and Clay left. Mr. Hoje and Sarah Ann made up pallets for Reed Barnitt and me just inside the front door. Reed Barnitt slept right off quick, but I lay awake a good spell. There was a sight of hoot owls hooting in the trees round the cabin, and a sight of thoughts in my head.

Way I've told it so far, you might wonder why we came in so quick on Reed Barnitt's spell and scheme. Lying there, I was wondering the same thing. It came to mind that Clay had first said he'd join. That was for Sarah Ann, and Clay without land or money, wanting to marry her and have enough to make her happy. After Clay spoke, Mr. Eddy and Mr. Hoje felt bound to do the same, for with them the kingdom and the power and the glory tied up to their young ones,

and they wanted to see them wed and happy. Mr. Hoje special. He worked hard on a little place, with corn patches on terraces up slope you had to hang on with one hand while you chopped weeds with the other, and just one cow and two hogs in his pens.

I reckoned it was hope, more than belief, that caused them to say yes to Reed Barnitt. And me — well, I'd gone a many miles and seen a right much more things than any of my friends, and some of the things not what you'd call everyday things. I reckon I was hoping, too, for a good piece of luck for Clay and Sarah Ann. Never having had anything myself, or expecting to, I could anyhow see how he and she wanted something. So why not help out? Maybe, one or two things I'd watched happen, I could know to help out more than either of their fathers.

Figuring like that, I slept at last, and at the dawn gray we up to meet at Mr. Eddy's.

My first look at Aram Harnam, sitting in front of his low-built little shanty, I reckoned I'd never seen a hairier man, and mighty few hairier creatures. He had a juniper-bark basket betwixt his patched knees, and he was picking over a mess of narrow-leafed plants in it. His hands crawled in the basket like black-furred spiders. Out between his shaggy hair and his shaggy beard looked only his bright eyes

and his thin brown nose, and if he smiled or frowned at us, none could say. He spoke up with a boom, and I recollected how once he'd studied to preach.

"Hoje Cowand," he said, "you're welcome, and your friends, too. I knew you all was coming."

"Who done told you that?" asked Mr. Hoje.

"Little bird done told me," said Aram Harnam. "Little black bird with green eyes, that tells me a many things."

It minded me of the Ugly Bird, that once I killed and freed a whole district of folks from the scare of it.

"Maybe your little bird told you what we want," said Mr. Eddy, standing close to Clay, but Aram Harnam shook his head.

"No sir, didn't say that." He set down the basket. "I'm a-waiting to hear."

Mr. Hoje introduced Reed Barnitt and me, and neither of us nor yet Aram Harnam made offer to shake hands.

"It's a light we want of you, Aram Harnam," said Mr. Hoje then. "A special kind of light."

"Oh." Aram Harnam leaned back against the logs of his shanty. "The light that shows you what you'd miss else? I can fix you such a light."

"How much?" asked Clay.

Aram Harnam's furry hand fiddled in his beard. "It's a scarce thing, that light. Cost you five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred dollars!" whooped out Mr. Eddy.

The eyes among all Aram Harnam's hair came to me. "Hear that echo, son?" he asked me. "Right clear today—these hills and mountains sure enough give you back echoes." Then, to Mr. Eddy. "Yes, sir. Five hundred dollars."

Mr. Hoje gulped. "We ain't got that kind of money."

"Got to have that kind of money for that kind of light," said Aram Harnam.

"Step aside with me, gentlemen," said Reed Barnitt, and Aram Harnam sat and watched us pull back a dozen or twenty steps to talk with our heads together.

"He knows something," Reed Barnitt whispered, "but not everything, or I judge he'd put his price higher still. Anyway, our spell last night told us there's treasure, and we need the light to find it."

"I ain't got but forty dollars," said Mr. Eddy. "Anybody else got enough to put with my forty dollars to make five hundred?"

"Twenty's all I have," Reed Barnitt told us, and breathed long and worried. "That's sixty so far. John?"

"Maybe the change in my pockets would add up to a dollar," I said. "I'm not right sure."

Aram Harnam laughed, or coughed, one. "You all make a big thing out of five hundred dollars," he called to us.

Mr. Hoje faced around and walked back toward him. "We don't have it."

"Cash," said Aram Harnam after him. "I might credit you, Hoje Cowand."

"Five hundred dollars' worth?" asked Mr. Hoje. "What on?"

"We-ell . . ." The word came slow out of the hair and whiskers. "You've got a piece of land, and a house, and a cow and a pig or two . . ."

"I can't give you those," Mr. Hoje put in.

"You could put them up. And Mr. Eddy could put up his place, too."

"The two places are worth plenty more than five hundred dollars," Mr. Eddy started to argue.

"Not on the tax bills, the way I hear from my little green-eyed black bird."

Reed Barnitt beckoned us round him again. "Isn't there any way to raise the money?" he whispered. "We're just before finding a fortune."

Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy shook their heads.

"Gentlemen, we've as good as got that Ancients' treasure," Reed Barnitt said, and rummaged money from his pocket—a wadded ten, a five and some ones. "I'll risk my last cent, and take it back from off the top of whatever find. You others can do the same."

"Wait," said Mr. Hoje.

He put his arm around Mr.

Eddy's neck, and the two of them mumbled together a while, and we others watched. Then they turned, both of them, and went back to Aram Harnam.

"We'd want a guarantee," said Mr. Hoje.

"Guarantee?" repeated Aram Harnam. "Oh, I'll guarantee the light. Put it in writing that it'll show you what you seek."

"Draw us up some loan papers," said Mr. Eddy. "Two hundred and fifty dollars credit to each of us, against our places, and a guarantee the light will work, and sixty days of time."

Mr. Eddy spoke sharp and deeply. Aram Harnam looked at him, then went into the shanty. He brought out a tablet of paper and an ink bottle and an old stump of a pen. He wrote two pages, and when Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy read them over they signed their names.

Then Aram Harnam bade us wait. He carried the papers back inside. What he did in there took time, and I watched part of it through the open door. He mixed stuff in a pot — I thought I smelled burning sulphur, and once something sweet and spicy, like what incense must smell like. There was other stuff. He heated it so it smoked, then worked it with those furry hands. After while he fetched out what he'd made. It was a big rough candle, as big around as your wrist and as long as your arm to the elbow. Its wick looked like

gray yarn, and the candle wax was dirty black.

"Light it at midnight," he said, "and carry it forward. It'll go out at the place where you'll find your wish. Understand?"

We said we understood.

"Then good day to you all," said Aram Harnam.

Nobody felt the need of sleep that night. At eleven o'clock by Mr. Hoje's big silver turnip watch, we started out to cross the ridge to Black Pine Hollow. Clay went first, with a lantern. Reed Barnitt followed, with the candle. Then me, with my guitar slung on my back because I had a notion to carry it along, and a grubbing hoe in my hand. Then Mr. Hoje with a spade, and Mr. Eddy last of all with a crowbar. Sarah Ann watched us from the door, until we got out of her sight.

Not much of a trail led to Black Pine Hollow, for folks don't go there much. Last night's hoot owls were at it again, and once or twice we heard rattlings to right and left, like things keeping pace with us among the bushes. Down into the hollow we went, while a breeze blew down on us, chill for that time of year. I thought, but didn't sing out loud:

*In the pines, in the pines,
Where the sun never shines,
And I shiver when the wind blows
cold . . .*

"Where's this mine?" asked Reed Barnitt.

"I can find it better than Clay," called Mr. Hoje. He pushed ahead and took the lantern. The light showed duller and duller, the deeper we went into the hollow; it showed a sort of dim brown, the way you'd think that moonless night was trying to smother it. Around us crowded the black pines the hollow was named after. For my own comfort I reached back and tweaked a silver guitar-string, and it rang so loud we all jumped.

"Now," said Mr. Hoje, after a long, long while, "I think this must be it."

He turned off among a thick bunch of the blackest-looking pines, and held the lantern high. Hidden there behind the trees rose a rock face like a wall, and in the rock was a hole the size of a door, but uneven. Vines hung down around it, but they looked dead and burnt out. As we stood still and looked, there was a little timid foot-patter inside.

"Let's pray that's no rat," said Clay. "Rats in mines are plumb bad luck."

"Shoo," said his daddy, "let's hope it's nothing worse than just a rat."

Reed Barnitt shoved forward. "I'm going in," he said through his teeth, "and I sure enough don't want to go in alone."

We went in together. Gentlemen, it was so black in that mine, you'd

think a hunk of coal would show white. Maybe the lantern was smoking; it made just a pool of dim glow for us. Reed Barnitt struck a match on the seat of his pants and set it to the yarny wick of that five hundred dollar candle. It blazed up clean and strong, like the light Reed Barnitt had made in the middle of the star when it cast the spell. We saw where we were.

Seemed as if once there'd been a long hallway cut in the brown rock, but rocks had fallen down. They lay one on top of the other before us, shutting us away from the hall, so that we stood in a little space not much bigger than Mr. Hoje's front room. To either side the walls were of brown stone, marked by cutting tools — those Ancients had made their way through solid rock — and underfoot were pebbles. Some were quartz, like Mr. Hoje had said. Everything was quiet as the inside of a coffin the night before judgment.

"The flame's pointing," Reed Barnitt called to us. It did point, like a burning finger, straight into the place. He stepped toward those piled rocks, that made something like steps to go up, and we moved with him. I don't think anybody wanted to go over the rocks and beyond. The blackness there made you feel that not only nobody had ever been in there, but likewise nobody could ever go; the blackness would shove him back like a hand.

I moved behind Reed Barnitt with the others. The light of the candle shone past his blocky body and wide hat, making him look like something cut out of black cloth. Two-three steps, and he stopped, so quick we almost bumped him. "The light flutters," he said.

It did flutter, and it didn't point to the piled rocks, but to the wall at their right. When Reed Barnitt made a pace that way, it winked out. We all stood close together in the dim lantern light.

Reed Barnitt put his hand on the rock wall. It showed ghost white on the brown. His finger crawled along a seamy crack.

"Dig there," he said to us.

By what light the lantern showed, I shoved the pick end of the grubbing hoe into the crack and gouged. Seemed to me the whole wall fought me, but I heaved hard and the crack widened. It made a heavy spiteful noise somewhere. Mr. Eddy drove in the point of his bar and pulled down.

"Come help me, Clay," he called. "Put your man on this."

The two pulled down with their long tall bodies, then together they pushed up. My heart jumped inside me, for a piece of rock the size of a table top was moving. I shoved on the hoe handle. Reed Barnitt grabbed the free edge of the moving piece, and we laid into it — then jumped back just in time.

The big loose chunk dropped like the lid of a box. Underneath

was dark dirt. Mr. Eddy drove the bar point into it.

"Light that candle thing again," he asked Reed Barnitt.

Reed Barnitt struck another match and tried. "Won't light," he said. "We've got our hand right on the treasure."

I reckon that's the moment we all believed we had it. So far we'd worried and bothered, but now we stopped, and just worked. Clay took the spade from Mr. Hoje, and I swung my hoe. He scooped out the dirt I loosened. We breathed hard, watching or working. Suddenly:

"John," said Clay, "didn't I hear that hoe-blade hit metal?"

I slammed it into the dirt again, hard as I could. Clay scooped out a big spadeful. Bright yellow glimmered up out of the dark dirt. Clay grabbed into it, and so did his daddy. I had my mouth open to yell, but Reed Barnitt yelled first.

"God in the bushes! Look up there!"

We looked. Reed Barnitt had turned away from our work, and he pointed up those step-piled rocks. On the top rock of them stood something against the choking blackness.

It stood up the height of a man, that thing, but you couldn't make sure of its shape. Because it was strung and swaddled over with webby rags. They stirred and fluttered around it like gray smoke.

And it had a hand, and the hand held a skull, with white grinning teeth and eyes that shone.

"It's an Ancient!" Reed Barnitt yelled, and the thing growled, deep and hungry and ugly.

Clay dropped his spade. I heard the clink and jangle of metal pieces on the floor pebbles. He gave back, and Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy gave back with him. I stood where I was, putting down my hoe. Reed Barnitt was the only one that moved forward.

"Stay away from us," he sort of breathed out at the ragged-gray thing.

It just pushed out the skull at him, and the skull's eye-lights blinked and glared. Reed Barnitt backed up.

"Let's get out of here," he choked, "before that Ancient —"

He didn't know we'd found the treasure, his eyes had been on whatever the thing was. He was for running, but I wasn't.

In my mind I saw the peculiar things I'd faced before this. The Ugly Bird . . . One Other . . . Mr. Loden who might have lived three hundred years but for me . . . Forney Meechum whose dead ghost had fled from me. I'd even seen the Behinder that nobody's ever reckoned to see, and I'd come back to tell of it. I wouldn't run from that gray-raggedy thing that held a skull like a lantern.

I shrugged my guitar in front of me. My left hand grabbed its neck and my right spread on the silver

strings, the silver that's sure sudden death to witch-stuff. I dragged a chord of music from them, and it echoed in there like a whole household of guitar-men helping me. And I thought the thing up there above shuddered, and the skull it held wobbled from side to side, trying maybe to say no to me.

"You don't like my music?" I said to it, and swept out another chord and got my foot on the bottom step-stone.

"John!" came Reed Barnitt's sick voice. "Take care —"

"Let that thing take care!" I told him and moved up on the rocks.

The gray thing flung the skull at me. I dodged, and felt the wind of the skull as it sailed grinning past, and I heard it smash like a bottle on the floor behind me. For a moment that flinging hand stuck out of the gray rags.

I knew whose hand it was, black-furry like a spider.

"Aram Harnam!" I yelled out, and let my guitar fall to hang by its string, and I charged up those stairs of stones.

Reed Barnitt was after me as I got to the top.

"It's a put-up show!" I was shouting, and grabbed my hands full of rags. Reed Barnitt clamped onto my arm and flung me down the step-stones so I almost fell flat on the floor. But rags had torn away in my grip, and you could see Aram Harnam's face, all a thicket

of hair and beard, with hooked nose and shining eyes.

"What's up?" hooted out Mr. Eddy.

"Aram Harnam's up!" I yelled to him and the others. "Sold us that candle-thing, then came here to scare us out!" I pointed. "And Reed Barnitt's in it with him!"

Reed Barnitt, on the top stone beside Aram Harnam, turned around, his eyes big in his white face. I got my feet under me to charge back up at those two.

But then I stopped, the way you'd think roots had sprung from my toes into the rock. There were three up there, not two.

That third one looked at first glimpse like a big, big man wearing a fur coat; until you saw the fur was on his skin, with warty muscles bunching through. His head was more like a frog's than anything else, wide in the mouth and big in the eye and no nose. He spread his arms and put them quiet-like round the shoulders of Reed Barnitt and Aram Harnam, and took hold with his hands that had both webs and claws.

The two men he touched screamed out like animals in a snap-trap. I sort of reckon they tried to pull free, but those two big shaggy arms just hugged them close and hiked them off their feet. And what had come to fetch them, it fetched them away, all in a blink of time, back into that darkness no sensible soul would dare.

That's when we four others up and ran like rabbits, dropping the lantern.

We got back to Mr. Hoje's, and lighted a lamp there, and looked at those two handfuls of metal pieces Clay and Mr. Eddy had grabbed and never turned loose.

"I reckon they're money," said Mr. Hoje, "but I never seen the like."

None of us had. They weren't even round. Just limpy-edged and flattened out. You could figure how they'd been made, a lump of soft gold put between two jaws of a die and stamped out. The smallest was bigger and thicker than a four-bit piece. They had figures, like men with horned heads and snaky tails, and there were what might be letters or numbers, but nothing any of us could name in any language we'd ever heard tell of.

We put all those coins into an old salt-bag, and sat up the rest of the night, not talking much but pure down glad of each other's company. We had breakfast together, cooked by Sarah Ann, who had the good sense not to question. And after that, came up a young man who was sheriff's deputy.

"Gentlemen," he said to us, "has ary one of you seen a fellow with a white face and a broad build?"

"What's up with such a one?" asked Mr. Hoje.

"Why, Mr. Hoje," said the sheriff's deputy, "they want him bad

at the state prison. He was a show-fellow, doing play-magic tricks, but he took to swindling folks and got in jail and then got out again, and the law's after him."

"We've seen such a man," allowed Mr. Eddy, "but he's gone from here now."

When we were left alone again, we told each other we could see how it was. Reed Barnitt did his false magic tricks, like setting the light on the star and making words show on the white paper by heating it. And he'd planned it with Aram Harnam to furnish us that black candle, to get hold of the property of Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy — scaring them afterward, so bad they'd never dare look again, and forfeit their home places.

Only: There *was* treasure there, the way those two swindlers never guessed. And there was something left to watch and see it wasn't robbed away.

I don't call to mind which of us said that all we could do was take back the gold pieces, because such things could never do anybody good. We went back that noon to Black Pine Hollow, where the sun sure enough didn't shine. We shivered without ary wind blowing.

Inside the mine-mouth, we picked up the lantern and lighted it. Clay had the nerve to pick up the broken skull Aram Harnam had flung, and we saw why the eyes had shone — pieces of tin in them. We found our spade and hoe. Into the hole we

flung the gold pieces, on top of what seemed a heap more lying there. Then we put back the dirt, tamped it down hard, and we all heaved and sweated till we put the piece of rock in place again.

"There, the Ancients got their treasure back," said Mr. Hoje, breathing hard.

Then, noise up on those step-stones. I held up the lantern.

Huddled and bent they stood up there, Reed Barnitt and Aram Harnam.

They sort of leaned together, like tired horses in plow harness, not quite touching shoulders. Their hands — Reed Barnitt's white ones, Aram Harnam's shaggy ones — hung with the fingers bent and limp. They looked down at us with tired eyes and mouths drooped open, the way you'd think they had some hope about us, but not much.

"Look," said Clay, just behind my neck. "We gave back the gold. They're giving back those two that they dragged away last night."

But they looked as if they'd been gone more than a night.

The hair on Reed Barnitt's hatless head was as white as his face. And Aram Harnam's beard, and the fur on his hands — black no more, but a dirty, steamy gray. Maybe it had changed from fear, the way folks say can happen. Or maybe there'd been *time* for it to change, where they were.

"Go fetch them, John," Mr. Hoje asked me. "And we'll get a

doctor for them when we get them to my house.”

I started up over the stones with the lantern.

Their eyes picked up the lantern light and shone green, like the eyes of dogs. One of them, I don't know which, made a little whimpering cry with no words in it. They ran from me into the dark, and I saw their backs, bent more than I'd thought possible.

I ran up to the top stone, holding out the lantern.

As I watched they sort of fell forward and ran on hands and feet. Like animals. Not quite sure of how to run that way on all fours; but something told me, mighty positive, that they'd learn better as time went by. I backed down again, without watching any more.

“They won't come out,” I said.

Mr. Hoje spit on the pebbles. “From what I saw, maybe it's just as well. They can live in there with the Ancients.”

“Live?” repeated Clay. “The Ancients are dead. Way I figure, what's in there isn't Ancients—just something Ancients left behind. I don't want any part of it.”

From Black Pine Hollow we went to Aram Harnam's empty shanty and there we found the papers he'd tricked Mr. Hoje and Mr.

Eddy into signing, and we burned them up. On the way back, the two old men made it up between themselves to spare Clay and Sarah Ann a few acres from both places. As to the cabin, neighbors would be proud to help build it.

“One thing wonders me,” said Clay. “John, you didn't have any notion night before last of singing about the girl with golden slippers?”

“Not till I struck the strings and piped up,” I told him.

“Then how did Reed Barnitt just happen to take them from under his coat for Sarah Ann?” Clay asked us. “Stage-show magician or not, how did he just happen to do that?”

None of us could guess.

But Sarah Ann kept the golden slippers, and nobody could see any reason why not. She wore them to marry up with Clay, and danced in them while I played song after song—“Pretty Fair Maid,” and “Willie From the Western States,” and “I Dreamed Last Night of My True Love, All In My Arms I Had Her.” Preacher Miller said the service, what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. I kissed the pretty-cheeked bride, and so did many a kind friend, but the only man of us she kissed back was long tall Clay Herron.
