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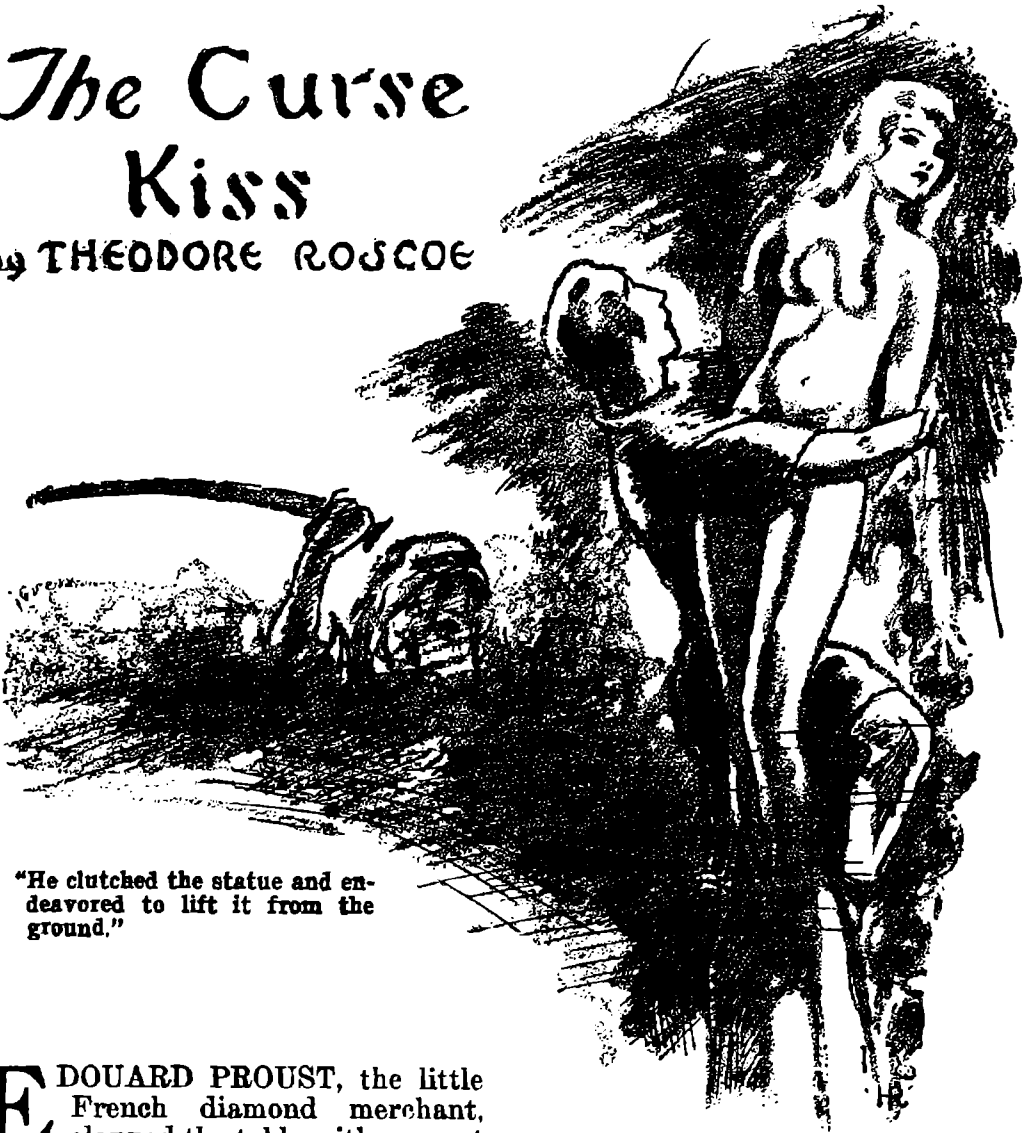
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The Curse Kiss

by THEODORE ROSCOE



"He clutched the statue and endeavored to lift it from the ground."

EDOUARD PROUST, the little French diamond merchant, slapped the table with a grunt of anger, and spat through the jet of snowy whisker on his lips.

"Bah!" he snarled, and he stared at Lars Issracket, and through him, and straight through the wall of the beer parlor. And he stared right out across the Red Sea, over the munching waters of Bab el Mandeb to Aden. Edouard Proust was like that.

After Proust had stared for about five minutes even Lars Issracket began to feel uncomfortable. It was much too hot for a man to slap a table and strain and stare like a spirit medium just because the re-

mark was passed that voodooisms were the bunk.

"Come out of it!" snapped Lars. "What in the world you throwin' a fit over? Drink your peg, Proust, and let's get out of here before the flies eat us up. What's the idea of all the play?"

"Issracket," announced the Frenchman, glaring clean down to Cape Town, "you are sixteen kinds of a Dutch fool. You stroll into the Orient with the arm of an ox, morals of a Sphinx, nerves of a brass mon-

key. You sit and swizzle gin. You knock over the natives. You scramble in and out of street brawls, chuckling with joy. *Mort de Dieu!* You curse God! You laugh at my story! Ho! You are one who believes only in that which he can see and drink. Your God is your forearm. As for powers of darkness and the supernatural—pah! you say, and blow your nose. Listen! Things dwell here of which you have no slightest notion. Powers that could reach out and throttle that tan throat of yours with ghostly fingers. Spirits! Ah, you laugh. Laugh, then. But, my so phlegmatic friend, perhaps you will see. Do not evils spawn in the East? *Parbleu!* The night stinks with mystery! The day is bright with a spell—that's it, Issracket—what your American fiction writer calls the spell of the East! It oppresses me like a humid day on the Dekkan. *Dieu*, it does that. But you—you walk the lanes with a grin and a knotted fist. Pah! I will give you a year in this devil's land. Your eyes will drop their twinkle; your cheeks glow with different hue! You comprehend a knife, a gun, five knuckles, nautch girls, rum, but you must comprehend more than that to survive the Orient. *Oui!* You must! Did you ever see a vermin-tortured *yogi* throw a rope five leagues in the air and climb it before your eyes? I have! In the Punjab! Or a snake-charmer call his wriggling fiends with a wailing lute? Or a sun-fried beggar grow a mango in five minutes before your very nose, from a tiny seed? I have! Or the eyes of a Turkoman woman; or the glance of a *hadji* who has drunk the waters of the Zen? Or twilight in a temple where incense floats and priests skip? I have! And I perspired, I tell you. Bah! Issracket, you have seen nothing!"

Issracket yawned in the immense heat, and idly scratched a red jowl.

"Hell," was his terse comment.

"Lay off the dream medicines, *mon enfant*. The East is getting you. You'll be believin' in fairies——"

"I believe in them!"

"Sure; and in phantoms, Irish banshees, witches an' gnomes, I'll wager——"

"*Oui!* All of them," muttered the little Frenchman, draining his glass.

Issracket shrugged indifferently.

"Bring 'em on, if you care to.

Bring on your three-card-monte men from India, your devil-workers from Persia, an' throw in a handful of Arabian werewolves an' Javanese charm doctors. I'll stack a good six-shooter against the whole kaboodle an' their evil eye—damn me if I won't!"

Edouard Proust growled, and looked as if he saw the entire Orient twinkling in a spot of beer on the wall behind the Dutchman's head.

"Lars, you do not know. You do not see below the surface. Eyes to you are eyes—things to be blackened. You would shake a curse as a dog shakes water from its spine. But I will show you! By the bones of Saint Stephen, I will! You laughed at my tale about the whispering rubies of Jehan Ji—a tale I can not prove, because the rubies are long gone. Here, then, is one I can show. Have you ever in all your travelings heard the legend of Lot's Wife? Perhaps you know your Scripture? Ho! You are a babe to the East. I will show you Lot's Wife! You will grow old in an hour. Wisdom will sigh in your ear. After meeting with Lot's Wife you, Lars, may become a man!"

Now Lars Issracket resented any inference that he was not a man, for Lars was a man to know. Six feet he stood, from his heels to the stack of hay-colored hair on his crown, and built like a catamount. Tan was his skin, and his eyes were blue, and as his French friend had stated, nerves and morals troubled him not. Dutch parents had taken him to America, and early he had left the land of

the free, cracking the walls of a county jail to do so. A *peon* had cheated him in Mexico City; and Lars quit the city, and so did the *peon*, only the *peon* rode in a hearse. Mexico to Norway, Hawaii, France (where he first met Proust), Congo, Peru and back to France again, where for three years he joyed to the spunk of machine-guns and the skush of the driven bayonet. The man was one of those characters simply untroubled by a soul. People had crossed Lars Issracket, and they were gone. But Lars was genial. Yes. Genial, stubborn, afraid of no man, and, of course, no God.

He resented the little diamond merchant's words.

"Say!" He gestured a brown fist under Proust's chin. "If you wasn't once in the trenches with me, I'd lam you for hinting I wasn't a man. But I'm game! Bring on this here Lot's Wife. Let her open her bag o' tricks. Maybe I can tie th' strings for her!"

Proust had sailed seven seas from marge to marge, and many strange things he knew. But Lars Issracket thought him mad, when he said:

"Be, then, at that little wharf gin palace that reeks so of rum at nine tonight. At nine. *Oui? Bien.* And be ready for the strangest, maddest experience of your whole stupid existence—for an adventure blown by the breath of the yellow-eyed East—for your first lesson in Orientation, shall I call it? Ha! Lot's Wife! She is a woman to meet! Seventeen years have I wandered these lands of the rising sun, and in all that time, she is, I say, the most amazing sight I have ever seen! Oh ho! Don't laugh! *Sopristi!* Your eyes, when they see her, will pop from your head like little corks from green bottles in the Café de la Paix!"

"At nine, then," Issracket agreed; and superb in nonchalance, began to

pick his teeth with the dirk that always waited in his belt.

2

ISSRACKET located Proust at a corner table in Islam Ike's Sanatorium of the Lifted Veil—that little twelve-cylinder hell from the region of which the Assab police steered clear. It was nine o'clock, and in a greasy vapor of smoke and fumes the Sanatorium odorously simmered with a milling cram of decayed humanity. Issracket shoved his way through a stewing sea of faces—brown, black, gray, red and speckled. Medley of a dozen nations. Dregs.

But the strangest figure in the room was the man sitting with Edouard Proust. Issracket damned himself with surprise. The French diamond merchant's companion was an Abyssinian nobleman. Serenely he sat in his chair, a colorful touch to the drab in his beaded velvet mantle, ruby-red sash, breastplate of beaten silver, headpiece and collar of lion's mane. At his feet leaned a wrought shield of rhinoceros hide. Under his ebony hand lay a fusil that might have seen service with the musketeers of Cardinal Richelieu. Lars Issracket's mouth sagged open.

Edouard Proust looked up with a smile. "Permit me to present Yessu," he announced, delighted at the Dutch adventurer's surprise. "He is to be our guide. He's a Moslim, so he won't drink with us; but pour yourself a peg. Ready for the trip, *mon brave?*"

Issracket spilled his whisky carefully, and staring at the Abyssinian, smiled faintly. "Where we bound?" he finally demanded.

"Land of the Queen of Sheba," Proust told him. "We can leave Somaliland tonight, and if fortunate, grab the iron steam-demon tomorrow at Jibuti. Were you ever in Addis Ababa? It is as far as the railroad goes, and truly, no one would wish

to go farther. It is a ride to try the patience of the patient Saint Francis, but it will be worth it to see Lot's Wife. Jesus will lead us to her, for I could not locate her to save my soul. Not I. Last season I caravanned by mistake almost to the Blue Nile. That was a desolate, devastating journey. This season I am setting out prepared. You shall come along. Jesus can find her easily, knowing the region as if he made it, instead of our friend the devil. We quit the thrice curst steamvomiter at Modjo, and push south for Lake Twai."

All of which meant little to the Dutchman, who was beginning to think the whole affair a fantasy from a deranged mind. Lot's Wife? Abyssinia? Eastern mystery? What was it all about? He had a strong inclination to snap fingers at the idea, and duck from the room; to proceed to Aden as had been his original intent. But it would never do for his French friend to think him a quitter. Moreover, his curiosity had been fanned. From some stagnant corner of his brain he dug out faint memory of a Bible story about a woman who looked back on a burning city or something, and thereby turned to a pillar of salt. Could it be that Proust had located this salt pillar? Lot's Wife—that was it all right. Suddenly Lars Issracket decided he wanted like anything to see Lot's Wife. He spat thoughtfully and accurately at a *chipkilli*. He tugged the hair in his right ear. He laughed, and said he was game. Anyway this voodooism business was the bunk. . . .

3

THE journey from Assab, across French Somaliland to Jibuti (a rubbish pile if there ever was one) was uneventful. Proust unearthed a Bible—a true miracle for him—and read Issracket the story of Lot and his recalcitrant spouse:

Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire. . . .

And he overthrew these cities and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

But Lot's wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

"*Mais oui*," concluded Proust. "Here, my friend, is the amazing thing. I am no student of the Testaments, but I am sure all this happened in Syria somewhere. How, then, comes this salt pillar to be in the hills south of Modjo? It was a shock, Issracket, to see her there. Those who know of her, Mohammedan and Coptic faith, swear by their gods it is she. An old monk with a voice that came from yesterday, and a white beard like a waterfall, showed her to me. Swearing most devoutly by his patron Saint George, he vowed that Lalibela, a mythical Abyssinian king, brought Lot's Wife to the country when the desert was a child and he first cut churches in the solid rock."

Lars Issracket had been swigging *tej*, and staring foolishly at their Abyssinian guide, while the French diamond merchant talked. Now he turned with a sour grimace.

"That's the junk I don't swallow!" he snapped testily. "All this balderdash fried up in the brains of a hooting gang of half-wits who spend their lives howling lies, and whistling to their gods for a wind!"

"As the Yankee drink-mixer in Penang used to say," returned Proust, "you ain't heard nothing, yet. Lend ear now, and listen well. That old monk told me that he who kissed the salt pillar on the lips would bring it to life! Now try to comprehend. That statue exudes life! You long to kiss that salt-pillar, I swear by Saint Julian! *Oui*! You do! It is so real! It is a pillar of salt in the desert, but *Dieu!* doesn't it pulsate with life! Magnetism! It was all I could do to resist the witchery! But the old monk screamed *non!* Do you know what he said?"

Do not kiss her! He said an evil spirit dwelt in her; that she was an evil and accursed woman. *Comprenez?* So the Lord destroyed her. And he who kissed her would bring her to life, but he, himself, turned into a pillar of salt!"

Taut, weltering silence tumbled over the room after the click of the Frenchman's words. A waiting silence. Proust wiped his wet face. Yes, the guide, a somber, silent figure, stared unblinking at the candle. It was Issracket who splintered the quiet to tingling atoms; burst into thunderous laughter; pounded the table till the jugs jumped.

"Turn into salt!" he roared. "Funniest damn yarn I ever heard! Kiss her! She comes to life! I turn into a pillar of salt! Cook me, Proust, if it ain't balmy! An' you believe it!"

Laughter is a maddening thing. Issracket's drummed in the grass-roofed hut, and flung into the lane that snaked before the door. The Dutchman's sides shook. His face crimsoned. His body rocked with mirth.

And Edouard Proust got angry. Sparks glinted in his eye, his beard quivered, as he cackled suddenly:

"*Pardieu!* You laugh, eh? Here, then! You are a great infant, Lars Issracket; for only infants, knowing nothing, believe nothing!" He fumbled in his shirt. "*Voilà!* I lay you that, saying you will not dare kiss her!"

Issracket eyed the gold pieces the Frenchman had slapped on the table. He snorted angrily, then grinned.

"It's a go!" he chuckled. "Take you double, I do! Say! I'll smack that statue good! Yeah! What's more, I'll grab her up, an' carry her off! You bet I will! Let her evil eye do what it can! I'll sell her to a museum, or a salt comp'ny! See?" he roared cheerfully. "I'll kiss her an' cop her!"

4

THE train to Modjo was one of those cindery, rattly toy affairs that inched its way along, wheezing over endless miles of arid wasteland. Hot cars were jammed with steamy, therefore smelly, natives, and Issracket vowed he could run along behind with greater comfort. Nomads attacked the train the second evening of its journey, and in the ensuing battle the huge Dutchman exercised joyously, scattering the dusky fiends with a fusillade of bullets and lusty yells that terrified even the passengers. It was the one rift in a monotonously dismal journey of heat and cinders and stench.

Proust and Yesus did not seem to mind, but Issracket was rubbed raw by the trip, and profanely glad when the train gasped into Modjo. On horseback they abandoned the town, heading south. Pushing over boundless reaches of desert under cold, night sky, they gained a country of low hills just as dawn was firing the horizon.

Strange land, here. In the chill of daybreak, Issracket felt depressed. Desolation closed in on the riders. Ancient hills, gray-tinted in the dawn, whispered their eternal loneliness. Lars Issracket was not nervous, but something of dejection crept into his blood. He was glad of the knife in his belt, the rifle hanging from his saddle. Yesus had provided carbines as protection from the brigandry that lurked in the deserts. Issracket almost wished the brigandry would appear. No soul, however, seemed to inhabit the land. No tree picketed the horizon. Just sterile, bitterly barren hills. Ragged, lifeless landscape.

The Dutch adventurer sniffed. "Looks like hell!" he said.

Proust tilted his helmet and nodded sagely. "Perhaps you believe in spells, then," he noted. "Ho!

This country casts one. It is a land that sings a poison song in my ear, bitters my tongue, and suffocates my soul. It is a land drenched with—how can I say it?—you know. One begins to peer, look over one's shoulder, and startle at one's own voice."

For the first time on their journey, the guide spoke more than a sentence. Pointing to a jagged ridge of cliffs that clutched into maroon sky ahead, he chattered in Amharic. Proust nodded; turned to Issracket.

"Jesus tells me just before us lies the forbidden spot. He further adds the country is charmed and he will ride on not a pace. He says we shall find the monk at the shrine, and he warns you a thousand times, Lars, not to go near Lot's Wife. I, myself, am uneasy. So do not keep this silly wager! Stay away! Just stare, and stay away. For your life, I beg you!"

Issracket clucked softly.

"*Allons!* She stands, then, beyond the first ridge, in an amphitheater. I recall now. Like a spirit. Surrounded by a grove of trees. The monk lives in a cave on the hillside. He will come out winking like a mole. It is uncanny. Lars, forget the wager!"

But Lars Issracket never forgot a wager.

5

CANTERING forward together, Issracket and Proust left Jesus alone behind them. Issracket did not enjoy the ride to the ridge. The French diamond merchant was enough to make anyone ill at ease; he seemed like a cat waiting for its nerves to fly into smithereens. The blond Dutchman tried to whistle, succeeding only in shrilling a mournful note unhappy as the moaning call of a conch shell.

"My God," he admitted to himself, "this dump is a bit creepy. What is it, anyway? I feel almost like I did when them Boche shells ripped by overhead."

A blazing sun swam over the red

horizon and killed the last cool breath. White light flamed over the sands. Heat waves shimmered. The adventurers found themselves panting, and mopping their necks.

"Scorchin' day," ventured Issracket at last.

Proust made no reply. The horses plodded on. The sky burned to a hot brass bowl. Issracket drew his helmet over his eyes. Silence. Throbbing silence. Then—

"There you are!" exclaimed Proust, as the horses mounted a sandstone hillock. "There lies the gully, Lars. *Sapristi!* And there is Lot's Wife!"

Issracket stared into a shallow wash sloping before him. At the foot of the wash an amphitheater had been scooped in the sand. About the amphitheater grew a circle of trees, standing constant vigil over the charge in their midst. And there, surrounded by the sentinel trees, stood Lot's Wife!

What witchery, what illusion was this! Lot's Wife! A master sculptor had wrought her form, a divine sculptor had molded her features. She posed, a figure of peerless contours, tall, lissom, graceful as a deer; a slender hand at her shoulder, lending her serene poise; head turned, eyes glancing back. A masterpiece in rock salt, fine as marble, that sparkled like snow in the intense sunlight. A glistening, twinkling sylph.

"Look at her eyes," croaked Proust wildly. "They live!"

Issracket found voice. "I see 'em! More appeal than a Port Said dancin' girl! Color her a bit, an' she'd live! God! Just look at her!"

Never in all his days had Issracket seen a sight so strange. Fascinated, he slid from his saddle.

"Lars!" Proust flung warning. "Don't go near! Stay!"

Without replying, the Dutchman scrambled into the gully; strode toward the salt pillar, determination in

his tread. He did not hear Proust's protest. He was thinking, "Them eyes is too real to be carved of salt. Funny business here. Nor I ain't forgot my bet. I'll kiss her, an' cop her. I wo——"

Came a cry from Proust. "The monk!"

Issracket whirled around. Along the ridge bordering the amphitheater loped a ghost—a curious ghost of a creature, who had appeared as mysteriously as if the desert had sprouted him from red sand. Like an evil thought he streaked with long strides down the hill, spectral in a flutter of white robes and beard that blew about his knees. Behind the beard hid a wizened old face, dried as a stale orange, black as soot, cleft with a labyrinth of wrinkles, skin drawn drum-tight over bone. Issracket stifled a yell of surprize, and greeted this ancient with a grin.

"Hello, Noah. How's the Ark?"

He was not prepared for the reply which came in sonorous funereal tones that seemed to echo up from a very deep well.

"Blaspheme not, ye who trespass here. Aye, and stay thy step, lest the evil of Lot's Wife feed on thy soul and destroy thee. Approach her not, for he who enters the forbidden grove shall be charmed, and he who toucheth the Wife of Lot shall turn a salt pillar himself even as she is freed from the bondage of three thousand years. Three thousand years——"

Feeling as if he had been slapped across the chest, Issracket glared in amazement at the hoary old creature, and was so stricken with surprize he wondered if he was already turning to salt. Looking back, he saw Proust waiting in his saddle, and the Frenchman's cry, "Come away!" spurred him forward.

"Out of the way, Sandy Claus!" he growled. "I ain't got time to fool!"

And brushing past the monk, he hurried for the grove. Watching, mute with fearful suspense, Proust saw Issracket rush up to the statue, clutch it in his embrace, then endeavor to lift it from the ground. But the Dutchman's design was interrupted. Racing like a greyhound, the old monk darted into the amphitheater and launched himself through the trees at the startled adventurer. Startled indeed! From beneath his beard and robes that monk had found a three-foot knife that glinted like a hot wire in the sun—a yard-long needle, sharp as a razor, the very sight of which froze Issracket where he stood. Giving the Dutchman no time to draw gun or dirk, the old fiend vaulted toward him spitting hate.

Issracket screeched. Came a pop from the hillside, but Proust's bullet missed the monk by yards. That old monk was fast, too. Terrified, the Dutchman fled from the grove, the monk after him with blade raised; and like arrows they sped up the red sand slope. Proust spurred his horse toward the grove in an effort to overtake the raging fanatic.

Along the ridge they dashed: Issracket legging it for all he was worth, sending sand and gravel showering from his heels; the monk sprinting like a genius. The old demon very nearly caught him, and Issracket was sickened by that slim blade that zipped so maddeningly close beside his ear. But that monk did not catch him. Not quite. With a sudden spurt of speed he cut the razor-knife a stroke that swept by the Dutchman's cheek like a bolt of white lightning. Issracket threw a yell that echoed against the hot horizon; hurled himself aside. Losing balance, the old monk buckled to his knees with a wild squawk! Flying from his fingers, his blade crooned past Issracket's chin and dug quivering into the sand.

The Dutchman gave a savage

shout, yanked out the weapon, and pounced upon the monk. The old monk hopped to his feet in a hurry. A mighty big hurry. Squealing, he fled like a phantom back for the grove of trees behind the ridge. But he never got there. Both hands on the knife hilt, Issrocket bounded after that monk. He gained—caught up with him. And with a furious thrust, he stabbed the blade like a driven bolt, poking the knife clean through the old monk's skinny back, sweeping him from his feet, and nailing him fast to the sand, where he lay squirming on his face and squeaking like a legion of mice!

Issrocket plopped to his knees and brushed sweat from his eyes. Suddenly he wondered where Proust was. Proust had disappeared. His horse stood riderless on the ridge. The grove lay just out of sight beyond the rise. Perhaps Proust had stopped at the desert shrine; but Issrocket could not imagine his French friend abandoning him to the old monk and his blade. He staggered to his feet, drew his dirk and drove it into the writhing creature at his boots. With that he hurried up the slope to find Proust. To his dismay, he discovered the Frenchman lying in the wash below his horse, revolver in limp hand. The Dutchman ran to catch up his companion, and as he did so, the diamond merchant opened his eyes.

"Good!" panted Issrocket. "You ain't dead. I thought maybe this rotten heat had got you."

"*Sapristi!*" Proust blew the exclamation from his lungs. "What happened? *Dieu!* I was riding down the ridge to get a shot at the monk—is he dead? I spurred by the grove. *Dieu!* I must have fainted! From the shock! See! Lot's Wife! Gone!"

Profanity banged from Issrocket's lips. He glared through the shimmering haze. The shrine was there. The trees were there. The pillar of

salt that had been Lot's Wife had vanished.

And as he stared, Lars Issrocket's eyes almost popped from his head like little corks from green bottles in the Café de la Paix! His lips puckered! His tongue writhed in his mouth!

"God!" he screamed. "All I can taste is salt! Help! She's come to life—gone! An' I'm turning to salt!"

And his voice echoed over the red desert: ". . . turning to salt . . . to salt . . . salt . . ."

6

A TERRIFIED Proust and a scared Jesus dragged the unconscious Dutch adventurer all the weary, calcined miles to the railroad. And the story might end here, but it does not. It certainly does not!

Sunken in a fog of mental depression, Issrocket soddenly allowed himself to be taken to Addis Ababa. As the train he was on crawled to a halt at the station, its load of choking passengers were attracted by a great clamor dinning in the street. Converts of some mystic order, holding a religious revival before the station.

Supporting his sick friend, Proust pushed through the crowd. In the middle of the street stood the evangelist, surrounded by a raving gang of fanatics who tore the burning air with fervent petitions for their gods to save their rusty souls. That gang could pray! The town rattled with prayer. Spiritual power from the evangelist electrified that mob. Skinny black arms shot skyward. Woolly heads bobbed. Glistening bodies rocked in mad excitement. Wails, sighs, moans, groans and prayer ritual rang to the heavens with intensity of feeling thick as thunder; and under the wizardry of that all-compelling evangelist who

toiled with them, they writhed and wrenched and flung their tortured spirits high in the blistering afternoon.

Suddenly a shout clarioned out from the center of the crowd.

"Lot's Wife!"

That evangelist had been carved by a master, her face molded by divinity. Her eyes flashed magnetism deep as time; her skin gleamed white as salt! It was as if the pillar of salt from the shrine in the desert south of Modjo had been transplanted, with life breathed into it, to that scribbly street in Addis Ababa.

"Lot's Wife!"

A giant Dutchman with a stack of yellow hair that tossed over mad eyes stormed through the mob like a tornado. The converts scattered like leaves in wind. Shouts. Howls. Screams. Tangle of twisting arms and ducking heads. The mad Dutchman hurled aside a shrieking negro, kicked at a scrambling Arab, and swung a sledge-hammer fist. The fist, crimson now, whipped out and crashed the beautiful evangelist a ripping blow to the forehead that felled her like the sweep of an ax. Then those converts did yell! In half a second a hundred fanatics were screaming like maniacs and clawing like tigers at the frenzied Dutchman. Knives glinted in the sun. Fist-beats smacked loud. Dust clouds hung over roaring battle.

Shots! A little Frenchman with snowy beard bobbing fought his way into the riot and spread the uproar with a hot revolver. Shots! A foolish corps of police chased around the corner and scrambled the tumult with generous application of sword and musket.

The red dust settled on a downed giant Dutchman who bled from a hundred wounds, and who was carried away by direction of a sobbing

Frenchman. The felled evangelist had been spirited from the scene by mysterious hands.

And Abyssinia is a strange country. Did not Fejewel el-Hatim, the Moslim ivory-trader who spoke a dozen tongues, swear by the Beard of the Prophet that he heard the cause of the riot mumbling he was turning to salt?

7

FOUR long, malodorous months Proust, aided by the thin, fumbling doctor from Addis Ababa (and a beery devil he was!), fought at the bedside of Lars Issracket, dragged him from a tropical fever resembling typhus, plucked him from the horrors of leprosy, and clutched him to sanity again.

Then Edouard Proust, an aged little French diamond merchant, made his way up to Suez for a real whisky peg and a hair-cut. He bid good-bye to a trembly Dutchman with gaunt cheeks and great purple clouds painted under sunken eyes—eyes that had lost their twinkle—cheeks that had lost their glow—a Dutchman who had taken his lesson in Orientation.

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They noticed nothing peculiar about the man named Issracket when, seated at mess on the wind-jammer he had grabbed out of Aden, he grimaced at the menu of salted fish. But the little one-eyed sailor who sat next to him swore that night to his mates in the forecandle that:

"This 'ere pop-eyed Dutch bloke wot come aboard is looney, dippy, lost 'is bearin's! W'y blarst me now, I like to o' split! Sittin' at mess we were, an' so 'elp me if 'e didn't burst out a-cryin'! Bawlin' 'e was. An' just because I passed 'im th' shaker full o' salt!"