

Weird Tales

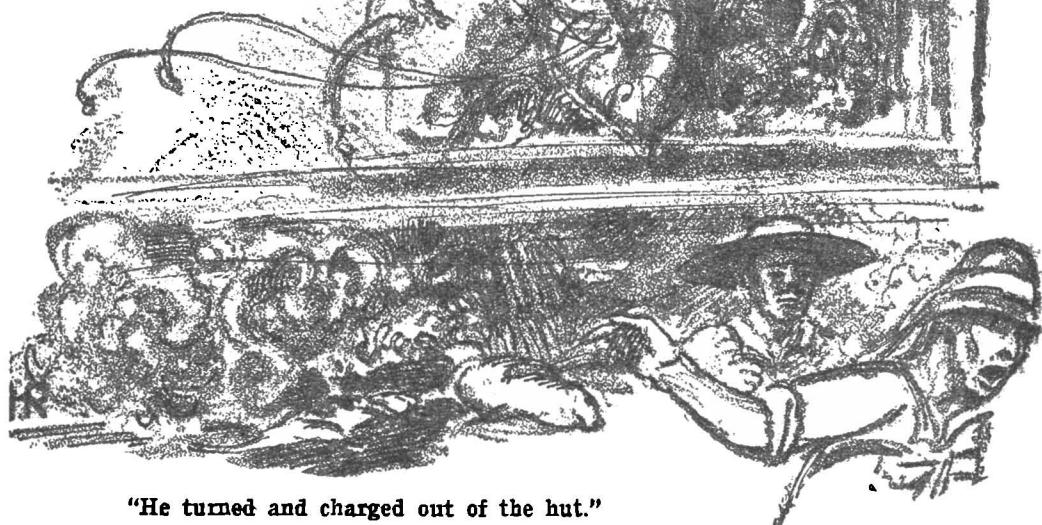
The Unique Magazine



Edmond Hamilton — Arthur J. Burks — Arlton Eadie
Seabury Quinn — Nictzin Dyalhis — Everil Worrell

The DEVIL- PLANT

JOHN MURRAY
REYNOLDS.



"He turned and charged out of the hut."

THE public will recall the disappearance of Jonathan Darrowby, about four years ago. A noted explorer, he went alone into the jungles of Brazil and never returned. Nothing was known of him until the so-called "Darrowby Manuscript" was found, a little less than a year ago.

At first that strange document, "The Darrowby Manuscript," was believed to be a hoax. What it related was so weird, so horribly unbelievable, that it was thought to be a practical joke or the product of a diseased imagination. But now that the handwriting has been definitely established as that of Jonathan Darrowby, and Professor Briggs has located the site of Palaos, there is no longer any

doubt of the authenticity of the papers.

The manuscript, or rather diary, is written in a small, leather-covered note-book. It was found on a shelf in a junk store in Para, still wrapped in the oiled silk that had protected it when found floating down the river three years before, tied to a piece of wood. The first part contained valuable but technical and rather dull notes on the author's explorations, but the last few pages are here reproduced exactly as written.

J. M. R.

FEBRUARY 18. Arrived at Palaos today. Came here just after noon, a little mud flat at the junction of the Orinoco with a smaller stream. Desolate little place. Dark jungle

walls crowding close on each hand, the muddy river flowing by, and then the delta—with half a dozen miserable hovels raised on shaky piles above the mud and a larger house (this one) standing alone behind. One of these inexplicable little settlements, fungus growths that spring up in out-of-the-way places and drag out monotonous existences. It's damp and unhealthful and fever-ridden, but it is like heaven after weeks of the jungle alone.

Natives had told me that a white man lived here, but I hadn't really believed it till I saw this house. Then I knew it was true; you could tell at first glance no native had built it. I wanted to shout aloud at the prospect of someone to talk to after weeks of lonely silence.

As I stood there on the river bank a moment, just before splashing through the shallows of the smaller stream and crossing to the village, there came a faint breeze. It was blowing *from* Palaos, and it brought a mixed odor of garbage and wet bamboo and unclean humanity. Then a new smell came down on the strengthening breeze. The odor was faint and undefinable, but it was definitely unclean—evil. A phrase once used by an old river boatman recurred to mind: "The Devil breathes behind Palaos, *Senhor!*!" The Devil's Breath! The thing is well named, whatever it is. Then the breeze died and the smell was no longer perceptible. With a shrug I waded through the shallows and came to Palaos.

When near enough to this house I shouted, and the owner walked out on the porch and waved his hand.

"Hello, friend," he called cheerfully in English. "Come on in. Glad to see you."

He is a queer little man, my host, this dweller in the heart of the jungle. He is fat and rotund, but he can not be over five feet two or three inches in height and his frame is so small that his actual bulk is not great in spite of his stoutness. The lower half

of his face is hidden by a bushy and unkempt black beard, and he wears the thickest spectacles I have ever seen. The heavy lenses give his eyes a distorted look. At least, I think it's the lenses. Sometimes I'm inclined to believe there is something a little queer about the eyeballs themselves.

In such far-flung sentry posts as this there is little that is artificial. The man with the beard did not even invite me to stay: it was a foregone conclusion that I would share his house. As I slipped the pack from my shoulders he took it from me. He carried it in here and laid it on the floor beside one of the two cots in the bedroom.

The little room has a floor of rough boards covered with a coarse matting, and the walls are of smooth poles. Beyond the netting-filled window this afternoon was a world of sunlight with the river a brown smear across the green of the jungle; now it is a patch of warm blackness with insects buzzing ineffectually against the netting.

"Make yourself comfortable, friend," my host told me. "There is water, and you will find a towel hanging on the nail. You will wish to change your clothes, no? Somewhere I have a suit that is for me a little big; perhaps you can wear it. I will search."

WHAT a relief to wash up and shed my travel-stained clothing! The white duck provided by my host is tight across the shoulders and very short in the arms and legs, but it can be worn. When finished, I found him out on the wide porch, sitting in a long chair with a palm-leaf fan in one hand and a long-stemmed amber and meerschaum pipe in the other. He was reading a French scientific book.

"Well, friend," he said when I appeared, "how do you feel now?"

I started to thank him, but he only made spluttering noises and refused

to let me. Seems to be one of those people who are embarrassed by gratitude. Incidentally, I can't quite place his accent. It seems predominantly German, but at times it holds certain peculiar undertones I have noticed in the speech of Russians. He has not told me his origin and I have not asked. It is always better not to.

"Well, friend"—he inevitably addresses me that way—"my name is Wanless. You have not heard of me, no?"

I had to admit that I hadn't, and he laid down his pipe and slapped his plump thigh and laughed uproariously. Seemed to consider it a huge joke. At last he subsided into quiet chuckles, then added:

"No, friend, not yet. But you will. A time will come when the whole world will know the name of Wanless. I have patience. I can wait, and it will not be long now."

We sat talking all afternoon. Not for many dragging weeks have I seen a white man, and it must be years since the last one visited Palaos. Wanless tells me he has not been over a hundred miles down the river in more than ten years.

A girl came at his call and brought us drinks—necessarily warm and without ice, but refreshing for all that. I was rather surprised to see the girl. Wanless hadn't struck me as a man who would go in for that sort of thing. She is some kind of a mixed breed, part Portuguese and part Indian. Tall and slender and rather good-looking. She wore a shapeless dress of very dirty white cotton and had a square of scarlet silk tied over her head and knotted at the side. Her hair is black and straight, quite fine and silky, evidently a heritage from her Portuguese blood. Wanless calls her Lucia.

The relationship between the two is rather puzzling. Wanless tells me he bought the girl from a passing trader,

a man who abducted her from some down-river settlement and then tired of her unsubdued hatred. He also says he keeps her because she seems contented and is useful around the house, but the instinctive and unthinking consideration he shows the girl convinces me that his feeling really goes deeper. As for Lucia, it is evident that she worships him.

Wanless has gone to bed and is snoring loudly; I stayed up to get these notes in shape. God! What a relief it will be to sleep in a bed again, even a little iron cot, after weeks of the jungle!

FEBRUARY 19. Loafed around and rested up most of the day. It is pleasant to sit in a chair on the porch and do nothing at all. In a day or so, after a little rest, I will move on.

Wanless and the girl puzzle me more all the time. There is another factor in their relationship, one more difficult to understand. It is fear. That Wanless is unaffected by the fear is evident; that he is not the immediate cause of it is equally so. But I hadn't seen Lucia half a dozen times before I was convinced that the girl lives in mortal terror of—what? Something. It shows in her eyes; there is a latent horror in their depths that is never entirely absent.

In the middle of the afternoon Wanless joined me on the porch and we yawned till twilight began to dim the outlines of the mud flats before us and the jungle behind. We spoke of the jungle and its ways, of the million unanswered mysteries of South America's dark interior, and of the fascination and repugnance of this Orinoco country. But mostly we talked of the varied life that teems in these muddy waters and throughout the fever-ridden thickets behind. I know a good deal about them myself, but Wanless' knowledge is extraor-

dinary. He has a keen faculty of observation, and an immense fund of scientific knowledge. It was just before sunset that he showed me his garden.

That man is a botanist! I firmly believe he knows more about flowers and plants and their ways than any man who has ever lived. And his garden is superb. He has a wonderful assortment of growing things, ranging all the way from giant orchids that would set any flower show crazy to miniature *nyctoginaceæ* that are marvels of delicacy. I begin to realize that the man is a genius. Such of his chubby face as showed above the black beard beamed with delight at my enthusiasm.

Not all the plants in that garden are beautiful, however. Some are a little too queer for that. They are crosses. There is a whole section full of new varieties which Wanless has obtained by crossing and recrossing existing species. It is evidently the branch of his work in which he is most keenly interested, but I can't share his enthusiasm. It might be different with someone else, but I have never liked the idea of trying to set aside nature's laws in that manner. It is dangerous.

Somehow I don't think I shall ever forget that moment—the two of us standing there in that misplaced garden, with a red sun setting behind the jungle and the old Orinoco slipping muddily by. On one side the beautiful flowers with the giant orchids above them, and on the other those queer, perverted plants.

Then there came the faint stirring of a breeze. The underbrush swayed slightly, a few ripples ran across the stagnant ponds in the hollows of the mud flats, and an occasional palm frond rustled softly. Then the breeze quickened, and with it came the smell. Vile, unclean, revolting, it was the same that had greeted me when first I looked on Palaos.

The words of the old river-man again came back to me: "The Devil breathes behind Palaos, *Senhor!*" Hastily I turned to Wanless.

"What is that?" I asked.

"What is what, friend?"

"The breeze, that unholy smell!" I said impatiently.

Wanless looked at me for a long moment. Almost he spoke, then he seemed to change his mind and it was as though the shutters of his brain had closed. He shrugged.

"Who knows? The jungle has many smells, none of them pleasant!"

"Isn't that what they call 'The Devil's Breath'?" I persisted.

"Who knows?" he repeated. "I listen to no legends. Shall we go into the house?"

Whatever he knows, and I am certain he knows something, he is evidently determined to say no more at the time.

FEBRUARY 22. There is something strangely vivid about this place. The raw colors, the varied smells, the steaming noonday, the chill mists of dawn, all leave strong and not too pleasant impressions.

Nothing particular has happened, but Palaos is getting on my nerves very badly. I just get comfortable in a chair on the porch, when all at once the palms along the jungle edge begin to quiver with moving airs and the Devil's Breath comes down on the wind. Then I jump to my feet and restlessly pace the long porch, sucking on an empty pipe, till the breeze dies.

Today Wanless showed me his laboratory. I don't know the source of his income, but it must be quite substantial. That laboratory is a marvel of completeness—all the more remarkable because it is way up the Orinoco and back of nowhere. Everything in it has been transported for thousands of miles. My eye happened to be caught by half a dozen glass

domes that stood against one wall. They were about the shape of the old helmets policemen used to wear, but two or three times the size.

"What are those used for?" I asked.

Wanless smiled. "Well, friend, I do not use them at all in my work any more. Some day I will show you what I did with them, but not now."

FEBRUARY 23. Have definitely determined to leave and move on in a day or so. Wanless can spare enough supplies to fit me out again. I may even turn down river. The decision to go is a great relief, lifts a great weight from my mind. Yet I don't quite know why.

Wanless is busy in his lab or garden most of the day, but several times I noticed him walk back and disappear into the jungle behind the house. On these occasions Lucia always stands by the window without moving till he returns, stands staring at the dark wall of vegetation with the fear strong in her eyes and her face pale. Once I asked her:

"What do you fear, Lucia?"

"I fear the *thing*, *Senhor*."

"What *thing*?"

"The *thing* in the hut, *Senhor*," she replied, and refused to say more.

"The Devil's Breath?" I hazarded.

She threw me a frightened glance, but did not reply.

FEBRUARY 24. Wanless took me into his confidence tonight. He had been on the verge of telling me that first evening in the garden. Whether he held back because he was afraid I might be spying on him, or just what his reason was, I don't know. Probably it was only natural caution. At any rate, he told me all about it tonight as we sat in his laboratory. It was stifling hot, but the hordes of insects had driven us inside and we sat there in the little room with a single oil lamp for light and

the long rows of bottles and jars looking down at us from the shadowy shelves.

Lucia sat unobtrusively on the floor in the corner. Now that I'm no longer a novelty she has abandoned the dress donned in my honor and reverted to her favorite household costume—a red waist-cloth and several strings of beads.

"Friend," Wanless started off with his usual form of address, "did you ever hear of the *Zoophyte giganticus wanlessi*?"

Lucia started suddenly and I heard her beads rattle, then she bent her head and began to play with an anklet.

"No," I replied, "I never did."

Wanless chuckled as at a huge joke.

"No, friend, not yet. The world does not yet know of my great work. You are the first I have told, and I only tell you because my work is almost completed. Tomorrow I will show you."

That is what he calls the thing: *Zoophyte giganticus*. Almost anyone scholarly enough to understand the implications of the name could understand from that what Wanless has been doing. For myself I became distinctly uncomfortable. Never have I liked taking liberties with nature. There was a long moment of silence, while Wanless leaned across the table with his eyes seeming to bulge more than ever behind his glasses. It was so still that I could hear Lucia's quick, nervous breathing, and a cougar crying somewhere far off in the jungle, and a rustling under the floor of the house where a pig was rooting in the refuse. After a minute Wanless went on:

"You are not a botanist, friend, but you know much of such matters and can understand what I am about to tell you. As you know, the animal kingdom is one form of life and that of the plants is another. Along dif-

ferent lines have they developed, but their basic principles are the same. And in the lower forms it is often difficult to tell them apart. There are plants which move about, and there are animals which are fixed in one place. There are plants which feed on bugs and insects, and there is an animal which contains chlorophyl. It is simply that these are two divergent lines of development. Do you see what I mean, friend?"

Of course I saw what he meant. I had not forgotten those perverted plants growing in the garden. Also, I began to understand something of Lucia's fear. But I only nodded.

"For years I have been doing this thing," Wanless continued, "doing it experimentally, here in my laboratory. Trying to cross an animal with a plant. Under those glass domes against the wall did I see my first zoophytes survive and grow. That was five years ago. Since then I have experimented with generation after generation of my plants. And I have succeeded, friend, I have succeeded! Out there, in a hut on the edge of the jungle, is a full-grown specimen of my giant animal-plant. Tomorrow I will show you."

When he finished I glanced at Lucia: the girl's face was positively haggard. She did not know much English, but she had understood enough to know what we were talking about. I have now this explanation of the latent terror that never leaves her eyes. Not that I feel any too comfortable myself. Somehow I don't think I shall sleep very well tonight.

FEBRUARY 25. Wanless was true to his word. This morning early we started off to a little clearing that lies about a quarter-mile back in the jungle. He explained that he had been afraid the natives might idly interfere with his experiments, but has found they never go near the place. I am not surprised. We per-

ceived the odor known as the Devil's Breath before we had left the mud flats, and by the time we were within a hundred yards of the clearing the air was poisoned by the vilest, most horrible smell I have ever known.

In the center of the open space stood a hut about ten feet square. It is an ordinary thatch and mud cabin, but windowless and with a door supported on leather hinged. Wanless tells me he built it alone and unassisted.

As we neared the place the stench became almost overpowering. God, that odor! Will I ever forget the taint of it? I can't compare it with any other; it beggars description. Primarily it's a stench of rottenness and decay, of putrefaction and death. The odor of long-dead carrion, the smell of a slaughter-house, the vile gasses of stagnant marshes, all are mild compared to what emanates from that unholy place. It was almost more than I could bear. Made the senses reel, and I think it could easily drive a man mad.

"Ah yes, the odor!" said Wanless with a chuckle when he saw me gasping. "It is unpleasant, no? But I have become used to it. Not that I enjoy, but I no longer notice."

"But what in God's name does it come from?" I asked him.

"From within the hut, friend. The zoophyte feeds entirely on carrion. Come."

He opened the door and we entered. Only half the hut was roofed over, the rest being open to the sun. The shadows in the covered part were deep and disturbing, but the other half was light enough.

Growing in the hut was—well, a plant. It can be called that for lack of a better name. The central mass was about eight feet high, grotesque, shapeless, and evil. It seemed tortured, distorted, and the many short, thick branches were twisted as though in pain. The thing looked as if its

first ancestor had been a Venus fly-trap, one of those carnivorous flowers that feed on insects, but it was greatly changed. There was one central cavity, lined with stiff hairs to entrap anything within reach—a cavity of death with a ghastly, dead-white, silky lining, like the skin of a corpse. I can see it yet! Crimson and white and brown, with that silky cavity yawning below and the yellow pollen sticks above, it was like a figment of madness.

As I said, we entered the hut. And I swear to God that the damnable plant turned and *looked* at us! Looked isn't quite the word, for of course it has no eyes. Perceived is better. In some way it indefinitely sensed our entrance and seemed to inspect us, and I felt the hair bristling all across my scalp.

I have heard before of giant plants of the fly-catcher species, but this is far worse. The *thing* has—well, it has personality. It is menacing. There was no breeze within the walls of that hut, yet the misshapen branches were continually in motion. The opening of the central cavity suddenly closed; it was like a huge, malevolent mouth.

On the floor of the hut was the vilest imaginable collection of rotting, loathsome carrion. Portions of the torn carcasses of various small animals lay about in all stages of decay. Around the foot of the *thing* these fragments formed a solid carpet of filth. The air was rank and foul, and a faint miasmatic mist seemed to be rising from that revolting mass of rotting flesh. The very sunlight that came through the hole in the roof was different and somehow unhealthy. This was the *thing* that for years had poisoned the wind behind Palaos, and had given rise to the legend of the Devil's Breath.

We stood there a while, Wanless beaming with a childlike pride and I simply staring. The *thing* has a

ghastly fascination. Then one of the lower branches reached down, seized on half a young pig, and tossed it into the suddenly opened cavity. The jaws closed again with a snap, and I had seen enough. I turned and charged out of the hut, and Wanless followed more slowly.

Not till I was back on the river bank did I pause. The fever-filled air of this Orinoco jungle is like the breath of heaven after what I had just been breathing.

"What was it?" I asked when Wanless had caught up with me.

"My zoophyte, friend, my giant animal-plant. Born of my years of experiment, developed from a Venus fly-trap, and sired by half the animal kingdom!"

"But good God, man," I almost shouted at him, "why did you have to choose a plant of *that* sort to start with?"

"Because I wanted one as nearly animal at the beginning as I could get it. By that much did I make my task easier."

After we came back to the house Wanless gave me the details of his experiments. Some of them are pretty horrible. Most things sprout almost at once in this climate, and by intensive fertilization he has speeded up growth so that he has raised as many plant generations in the last five years as would normally grow in thirty or forty. Gradually he has trained the *thing* to feed on carrion. The rest of his methods are better forgotten; they are not pleasant.

As we came back I noticed that Lucia had, as usual, been keeping her vigil at the window.

FEBRUARY 26. By now I am thoroughly convinced that, like so many geniuses, Wanless is slightly mad. No ordinary man could have done what he has done. The most normal thing about him is his treatment of Lucia. It seems remarkable

that the cold-blooded sponsor of the zoophyte could be so kind and considerate toward a mixed-blood native girl. I believe that in his own queer way he really loves her.

Tomorrow I move on. Thank God for that!

MARCH 3. Move on? Not for a week yet—if then. The fever has me. An hour after I wrote the last entry above I was flat on my back with the local variety of malaria. And have been ever since.

Somehow I think the foul air I breathed in the hut of the zoophyte may have something to do with this. That may not be medically possible; I'm not much of a medico. Whatever the cause, here I am, and almost too weak even to write.

MARCH 5. A little better now. Lucia takes care of me, administering suitable doses of quinine and keeping me supplied with water from the big canvas cooler that always hangs from the porch roof. I've grown quite fond of the girl. She is a primitive creature in many ways, but she's kind-hearted and means well. She sits cross-legged on the floor beside my cot for hours, with a water jug between her knees and her eyes fixed on vacancy. Perhaps she thinks; perhaps not. One never knows.

MARCH 7. Am convalescing now. Wanless is seldom in evidence, but he did have a talk with me today and I learned the reason for his absence. He is quite jubilant.

"Progress, friend, progress!" he said, and beamed till his beard quivered. "I have again tried feeding my zoophyte on living flesh instead of on carrion. This time it is greatly a success—the plant becomes almost human. Now I range the jungle and trap small game for it. Soon it may hunt for itself—who knows? The roots are shallow, and it moves them. What do you think?"

I guess the fever must have soured me, for I snarled at him: "Since you ask me, I think you ought to let the damn thing starve to death."

"No, no, friend," he laughed; "to science it would be too great a loss. But you speak of hunger. Always is it hungry now; since it has tasted living flesh it will not touch carrion. And I can not seem to trap food fast enough. You should see how it snatches at anything I bring it! And it is strong, too; today I held out a stout stick I was carrying, and it snapped it like kindling. When you are well I will show you."

"Like hell you will!" I answered, and turned over to try to sleep. It seemed impossible to make the man angry.

MARCH 9. God! What a day of horror this has been! But to go back to the beginning:

I was quite a bit better this morning and sat propped up in a chair on the porch. Wanless had disappeared before I awoke, but Lucia was busy about the house. It struck me that she was even more silent than usual, and when she looked out the door for a minute I received a distinct shock. The girl was terrified! If ever I saw stark, primitive fear on a face it was then. I called to her, but she turned away without answering. The sense of menace that has been with me ever since I arrived in Palaos increased, and I grew restless and irritable.

It was sometime after noon that Lucia finally came out on the porch, walking with a slow, mechanical tread. There was an air of fatality about her, of resignation. In one hand she carried a chicken, its legs tied together with a cord.

"What is the trouble, Lucia?" I asked her in the bastard Portuguese she used.

"It is that I must go to the *thing* in the hut, *Senhor*," she told me, and I noticed that little beads of perspi-

(Continued on page 430)

The Devil-Plant

(Continued from page 302)

ration were standing out all over her tawny hide. "The Master is hunting, and he told me to feed this chicken to the *thing* at noon."

I tried to dissuade her, but she shook her head. She was terribly afraid, but Wanless had said something must be done and there was no stopping her. Finally I let her go. God forgive me for it! At that I don't know just what I could have done to stop her, for the fever hasn't left me much strength. Down the path she went, winding back across the mud flats toward the jungle, walking with a slow and lagging tread. Then the first bushes swallowed her, and she was gone.

For perhaps twenty minutes I was not particularly worried. I did not exactly forget about the girl, but I did manage to dismiss her from my mind. And then suddenly came the realization that half an hour had passed without her return. I felt cold all over, and my hands began to shake. I remembered what I had seen in the hut, and I remembered what Wanless had told me of the new hunger of the *thing*. At the end of forty-five minutes I could no longer sit still.

Throwing aside the thin robe that covered me, I swung to my feet and started to cross the wide porch to the open door of the house. The fever has weakened me even more than I realized, for my knees were unsteady and tremulous and I fell prone on the floor before I had taken half a dozen steps. Slowly and laboriously I pulled myself to my feet and tried again. The result was the same. I was still lying full length on the splintery boards of the porch floor when Wanless appeared, making his way back between the native huts. When he saw me he threw down the small game he had

been carrying, and came running up to the house.

Wanless was strong, for all his small frame. With scarcely an effort he gathered me up in his arms and dumped me back on the chair where I had been sitting. In my haste I choked on the words, but finally I gasped out what had happened. His face darkened, and without a word he turned on his heel and hurried away down the path to the jungle. As he went there came a faint puff of wind that bore with it a trace of that never-to-be-forgotten stench. It was almost as though the *thing* knew of his coming, and mocked him.

For a while nothing happened. It seemed that the sun paused, that the earth ceased its movement, and that time slumbered; and then at last Wanless came running back. He ran at full speed, looking at nothing, his face set in grim and terrible lines. Most of his clothing was ripped from his body; strange red welts covered his arms and shoulders; and one side of his head was crimson with blood where his ear had been nearly torn off and hung dangling from a single flap of skin.

I called to him, but Wanless never noticed me. He was past all thought or reason, and intent on only one idea. Across the porch and into the house he charged like a maddened boar, and I heard him throwing things around in the store-room. An instant later he reappeared, ran out with a long-bladed machete gleaming in each hand. Leaping down the steps in one bound, he ran back toward the jungle. His torn clothes fluttered behind him and the blood from his wound left a scarlet trail across the bushes.

This time he did not return. Time passed, with nothing disturbing the sultry calm, and when I could bear

it no longer I again tried to stand up. This time I seemed a little stronger. Holding to the chairs and then to the walls themselves for support, I managed to enter the house. From a bottle on the table I poured out half a tumbler of brandy. The fiery spirits seemed to give new strength to my weakened legs.

With an energy born of desperation I commenced to dress. I slipped on my trousers, and a pair of high boots. My Colt lay on a chair, but I did not even take it—how can one shoot at a thing without vitals? Instead I went to the store-room and found another machete. With this, and a heavy staff to keep me upright, I started toward that ill-omened jungle clearing.

IT TOOK a long time to make that journey of about a third of a mile. God knows it seemed like ages! It was as though I struggled against unseen currents, and every movement was sluggish. Fever is a weakening thing, and I fell frequently in spite of my staff. When this happened I would lie still for a moment, fighting for breath, then once again stagger to my feet and start forward. At last there came that ghastly stench of decay, and I knew I was approaching the clearing.

The place was silent and still under the glare of the afternoon sun. An ominous silence. The grass seemed to undulate and quiver in the heat, and even the trees around the edge of the clearing drooped listlessly. The door of the hut was open and a severed branch lay athwart the entrance. It had been cut off by a stroke of a machete and was covered by a slimy yellow liquid, a sort of blood. And then I looked inside the hut. . . .

I will not attempt to write what lay therein. God knows it will be long before I sleep well at night, for the memory of it. The girl had nursed me, and Wanless had been my friend. Yet the culminating horror was not their fate but the fact that the *thing*

was gone. Even now, right at this minute, it must be somewhere at large.

For minutes on end I stood staring, unable to move my eyes. At last I uttered a strangled cry and staggered out into the clearing. Many dry bushes and shrubs lay near by, and I piled them high around the walls of the hut and set the whole thing afire. I think I was slightly mad just then —and I am none too sure of my sanity even now. A great column of greasy black smoke mounted up into the air as I began my painful journey back here to the house.

It is now evening, with the last light fading, and I am feverishly working to finish up these notes. I have ready a large square of oiled silk and a block of wood, and if anything happens I will wrap the book in the silk and throw the whole thing out the window into the river.

Later. Something is coming! I can hear a slow splashing in the puddles out on the mud flats. A moment ago a dog was howling furiously; he ended with one ghastly scream and has since been silent.

I have a machete, and the door *may* hold. If not——? The porch is creaking as though under a weight, I think I will . . .

[The manuscript ends abruptly at this point, and the above may be regarded as Jonathan Darrowby's last words. Professor Briggs located the site of Palaos after some difficulty, and found that the few natives had moved away and the jungle had reclaimed the place. The big house had evidently been destroyed by fire, perhaps from an overturned lamp. There was nothing to be gained by staying, and Professor Briggs left that same night.]

