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CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1933

Number 6

- Cover Design ----- M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "Black Colossus"
- Black Colossus ----- Robert E. Howard 675
A mighty story of a barbarian mercenary who saved a nation from shuddery evil
- Golden Blood (part 3) ----- Jack Williamson 700
A powerful novel of weird adventures in the hidden golden land of Arabia
- The Iron Man ----- Paul Ernst 719
A powerful weird-scientific story of a robot that ran amuck in the city streets
- The Crawling Curse ----- Hugh B. Cave 733
A tale of the East Indies, and the ghastly retribution that drove a murderer to his doom
- Genius Loci ----- Clark Ashton Smith 747
The story of a deathly horror that lurked in the scummy pool where old Chapman was found dead
- The Dwellers in the House ----- Sophie Wenzel Ellis 759
A sensational tale of an evil Arab who changed bodies at will to perpetuate himself through the ages
- A Sprig of Rosemary ----- H. Warner Munn 773
A tender story about a skinflint whose stony heart was softened after his death
- The Last Drive ----- Carl Jacobi 778
A brief story of a grisly ride through a blizzard with a corpse
- Nellie Foster ----- August W. Derleth 782
A ten-minute tale about a woman who would not stay quiet in her grave
- The Eyrie ----- 786
A chat with the readers
- Weird Story Reprint:
The Floor Above ----- M. L. Humphreys 789
One of the most popular stories from WEIRD TALES of ten years ago

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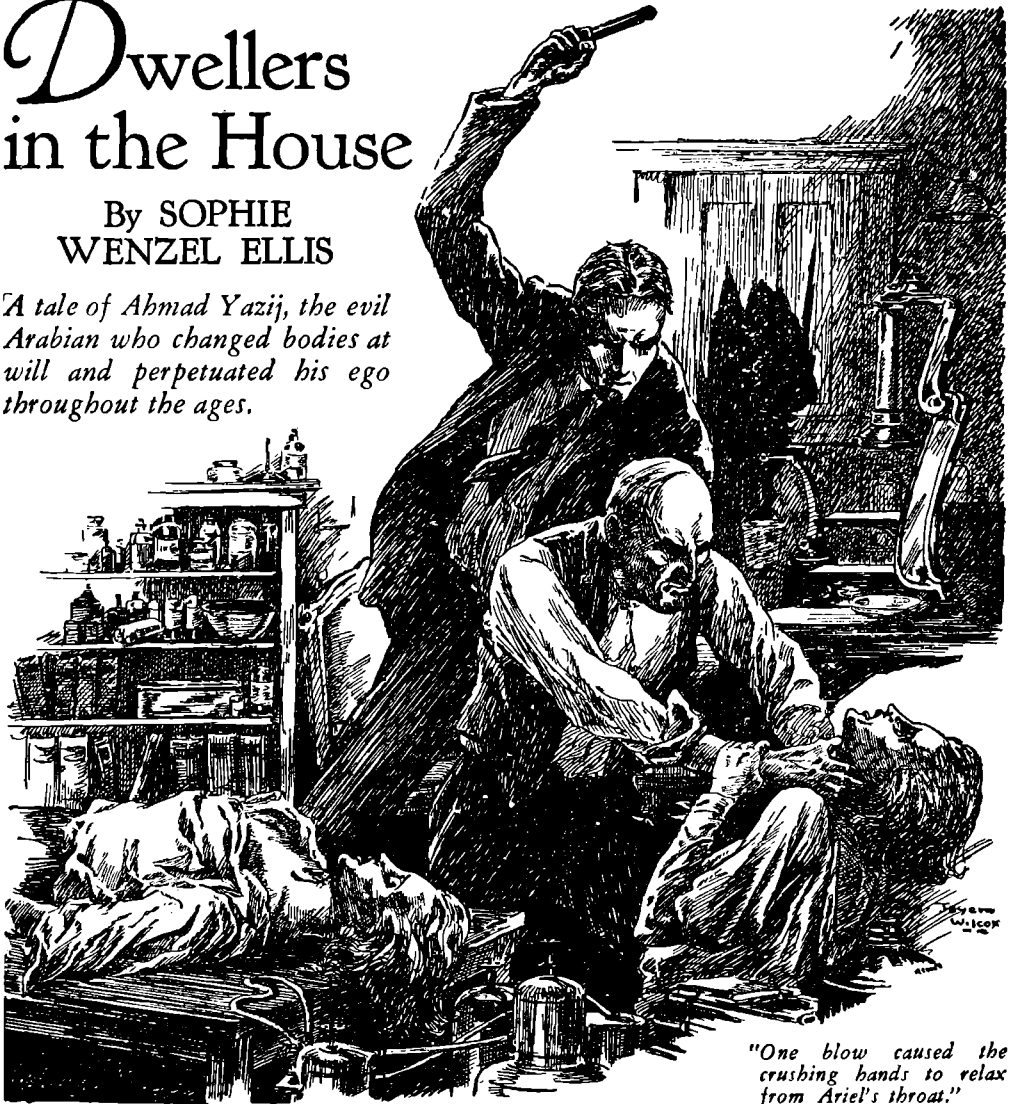
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The Dwellers in the House

By SOPHIE
WENZEL ELLIS

A tale of Ahmad Yazij, the evil Arabian who changed bodies at will and perpetuated his ego throughout the ages.



"One blow caused the crushing hands to relax from Ariel's throat."

"AND may God have mercy on your soul."

The closing words of the death sentence rolled out solemnly in Judge Farrington's cavernous voice.

"And may Allah have mercy on yours!"

Ahmad Yazij, the convicted murderer, who throughout the trial had sat in an indifferent heap, leaped up and pointed a shriveled brown finger at the judge.

The sudden quiet in the crowded courtroom was more dramatic than any outcry of horror could have been; every one knew that the Arabian spoke with the venom of a sorcerer pronouncing a curse.

Judge Farrington, white and visibly disturbed, pounded his gavel.

"Remove the prisoner!"

Two officers seized Yazij roughly and

hurried him away. The strange man's shoulders shook with laughter, as though he enjoyed a gruesome joke. At the door he turned his brown, wizened face and shot a parting look of hate at the judge.

"We shall meet again, *yah abu 'l jood!*"

Throughout the trial it had been thus, hate flashing between the benevolent judge beloved for his mercy and the prisoner at the bar who had not cared whether or not he was convicted of murdering the young man who had assisted him in the evil hideout Yazij had called his laboratory. Frequently, to the thwarted curiosity of the audience, the judge and Yazij had exchanged heated Arabic. Judge Farrington was a rather profound scholar.

From the first, it seemed that the judge had wanted to convict Yazij, who had not employed an attorney to defend himself. The judge had appointed young Rodney Sterrick as attorney for the defense, who was so deeply in love with beautiful Ariel Farrington that he dared not risk his prospects by objecting to the impassioned vituperation that her learned father had hurled at Yazij, and to some of the damning questions he had asked in his judicial cross-examination. That was the whisper that often went around the courtroom.

Now, after the prisoner had been taken away, Rod said to the judge, "Why were you so hard on the poor devil?"

Healthy color flamed angrily in the other's broad face.

"Poor devil! Leave off the poor. Execution is too good for him. My God, Rod!" He mopped at his brow with a moist handkerchief. "Didn't you feel it, too—the damnable excreta of—of inhumanity that fouls the very atmosphere he breathes?"

"He's only a very dirty old man, a little mad, perhaps——"

"Do you know anything of Eastern occultism? No, you don't. You didn't see what I saw in him, a creature whose least crime would be the killing of the man whose mutilated body was found buried in that pestilential yard behind Yazij's den. You remember the strange evidence of the coroner, that Vaynce's body, although little decayed, weighed only forty-five pounds. Think of it! A man fairly well-fleshed weighing so little! Is that natural?"

"But the coroner said he might have had some unknown disease which wasted the tissues mysteriously."

The judge laughed. "Of course, you had to have some kind of defense for your client, Rod."

At that moment a deputy approached and told Rod that Yazij wished to see him immediately, before being taken to the penitentiary.

A FEW minutes later Rod went to the jail, where the prisoner was temporarily confined. Now, as always, he squirmed as he approached Yazij's cell, for about it hung a foul stench. He had thought it resulted from the Arab's unwashed flesh and clothes, but his talk with the judge made him shiver with dread.

"Yazij!" he called to the heap on the cot beyond the bars.

The Arab lifted his head, revealing a face the color of rotten leather. As he came forward, his over-large clothes seemed to bring the foul odor closer. Through the bars he poked a shrunken hand holding a folded paper.

"Meester lawyer, you have ask for no fee—*Allah badik!* But I give you fee, eh? Here, take."

Rod took the paper, odorous with the stench. In good English, written evi-

dently by the jailer for Yazij's signature, he read:

I, Ahmad Yazij, do give to Rodney Sterrick all my possessions and belongings, including my most precious books, my furniture, and my equipment, all contained in my rooms at number 4 St. Louis Court. May he select a worthy buyer who will continue where I have ceased. I would suggest showing the lot to the honorable Judge Farrington, who has knowledge of things forgotten.

AHMAD YAZIJ.

A wave of pity for the condemned man swept over Rod.

"Thanks, Yazij," he said. "But I did not ask for a fee."

"No. I give you fee. The honorable judge, learning about Ahmad Yazij's books—and secrets—will want to buy. *Aywah!*"

Rod looked uncomfortable. "I did my best for you, Yazij."

"Your best. Death, it is not bad; only a moving from an old house fallen to ruins. I move from old house before. I move again."

His matted eyebrows lifted enough to let Rod see his rheumy old eyes; old, old eyes that looked too ancient to be quite human.

"Allah yeseelim!"

The leathery face sank among the clothes that bundled him from neck to feet. Without sound he turned and moved back to the cot. Rod was dismissed.

He sought Judge Farrington again immediately, who read Yazij's note.

"Hmmm! Have you seen the stuff yet, Rod?"

"Only casually, when I went to his rooms while I was getting up the defense. It is a damp, musty, unpleasant place, full of terribly old books."

"The books—ah!" The judge's eyes leaped. "You know what a bookworm I am, Rod, especially over old Eastern books. Have dinner with us tonight, and then you and I shall inspect Yazij's stuff."

And so it was arranged. After dinner

at the Farrington home and an hour of delight with lovely Ariel Farrington, Rod and the judge drove to the semi-slum section where Ahmad Yazij had made his home above a questionable second-hand shop.

Up dark, creaking steps that hugged the building's moldy side they mounted to the door that gave on a landing. Rod unlocked the door and plunged his hand cautiously into the darkness to reach for the light switch. The stale air seemed thick and slimy against his flesh.

THE room came alive suddenly under the dim light; a room hung with archaic maps, strewn with braziers, bunches of dried herbs, pieces of metal, and broken furniture. Dangling from the ceiling and laced thickly in corners, black cobwebs seemed trying to hide the time-festered books that made crooked rows against the walls.

"My God, Rod! What books!"

Judge Farrington went to one of the disordered shelves and removed a volume, a thick, misshapen mass of crumbling leaves between yellowed parchment covers. As he read here and there, all the healthy color faded from his face; but still he continued to turn the pages with avid eagerness.

Rod looked over his shoulder. It was written in Arabic.

"Can you really read it, Judge?"

Judge Farrington gulped hard, as though something stuck in his throat.

"It is an ancient work on Eastern occultism. But the strangest thing about it is the name of the author. Ahmad Yazij, Rod!"

"An ancestor of the Yazij we know?"

"I hope so. Listen."

He paused to read a certain passage, and then translated it slowly:

Each time I do move into a new House I grow stronger and more able to conquer the other

dwellers in the House, who make war with each other and disturb the flesh. For a thousand—nay, ten thousand years—will I work to acquire a House to my liking, and then will I have the power to cast out the other dwellers and have eternal life with the one Self.

"What a lot of gibberish!" Rod scoffed.

"Nothing that these ancient Arabs wrote is gibberish, Rod. Until I have studied the entire book, of course, I can not understand what he means, although I have an idea." He shivered visibly.

While the judge continued to examine the crumbling books, Rod puzzled himself over the only modern-looking thing in the room, an appliance that slightly resembled a spectroscope, yet much larger than the common prism spectroscope. Instead of being fitted with a flint prism, it carried in its middle a giant vacuum tube.

"Look here, Judge! What an anachronism! This modern instrument placed among objects of incalculable age!"

Judge Farrington left the books and came toward the colossal spectroscope. But it was not the strange appliance that claimed his attention; he paused over a recently written manuscript lying on a table close by. As he read, his face seemed to grow thinner.

"Rod!" he exclaimed. "I am not sure that I ought to dare do this, for I may be courting destruction. But I'm going to buy the whole lot from you, just as Yazij suggested. There's a strange mystery here, and I'm going to discover it."

"What do you suspect?"

"Nothing. My mind refuses to accept the evidence. Rod! What would you think if you knew that half of this library is written by Ahmad Yazij, and that some of the books bearing his name are hundreds of years older than others?"

"Why, I'd say that there was a long line of Ahmad Yazis."

The other's smile was sickly. "You'd have to say that—for your sanity's sake. And now, you'll sell me the stuff, won't you?"

And thus Judge Farrington came into possession of all the effects of Ahmad Yazij. He had them moved to his home the next day, where he established an attic den which he always kept locked.

FROM the moment that he became a confessed disciple of the seer, or the long line of seers who had written the books he had bought, a subtle change came over Judge Farrington. Rod and every one else who came in contact with him in the courtroom saw his kindness and joviality change into harshness and ill-temper, until, before a month had passed, there was talk among the lawyers of trying to get him impeached.

Some even whispered that his great mind was decaying, for his favorite topic of conversation was Ahmad Yazij. He seemed to take an unhealthy interest in the execution, which the governor had set for an unusually early date after the conviction. Ariel Farrington complained to Rod that every moment of her father's spare time was spent in his den, where, far into the night, his light burned, and where muttering and mumbling could be heard, as though her father were holding conversation with some one who was certainly not in the room with him.

And now came the day for Ahmad Yazij to die. At dawn he went indifferently to the electric chair. Rod, sleeping after an uneasy night, was awakened before six o'clock by the ringing of his telephone. Ariel was on the line.

"Can you run over immediately, Rod? Some kind of attack has seized Father. Just at daybreak I heard a terrible scream from the attic. When we got the door broken in, we found Father lying on the

floor unconscious, with a frightful look on his face. I've called a doctor, but can't you come over and be with me until he comes? Father is still unconscious."

"Coming!" Rod assured her. But as he turned from the telephone, his face was pasty-white. Why had Judge Farrington received his stroke at the very moment when Ahmad Yazij had gone to his death?

At the Farrington home he found the judge still unconscious, jabbering almost constantly in broken Arabic.

Ariel, her beautiful face showing traces of tears, seemed reluctant to be alone a moment with the father she adored.

"I'm afraid of him, Rod!" she confessed. "He almost doesn't seem like Father."

"The doctor will bring him around when he gets here," Rod said cheerfully.

But the doctor's efforts did not seem rapidly successful. The judge still remained unconscious. He remained thus until the sudden tense excitement of newsboys screaming "Extry!" broke in the street below.

"Extry paper! Stowall Vaynce alive! Stowall Vaynce——"

"Vaynce!" shrieked Judge Farrington. He sat up in bed and looked around him almost calmly. "That was the man Ahmad Yazij killed. Get me a paper."

Rod, feeling the nearness of some hidden horror, rushed out for a paper. The headlines glared at him.

STOWALL VAYNCE

RETURNS ALIVE

HIS ALLEGED SLAYER EXECUTED THIS MORNING

A few minutes after Ahmad Yazij had died early this morning in the electric chair for the murder of Stowall Vaynce, a man calling himself Vaynce appeared at police headquarters, saying he had just returned from a western trip. Vaynce

is being held until the body of the murdered man has been exhumed.

ROD did not finish reading, but took the paper to Judge Farrington, who almost snatched it from his hands.

"Ah!" the completely recovered man said a few minutes later. "Then I was not wrong in what I thought I knew. What a mystery for them to crack their brains over!"

The chuckle he gave was so unlike the kind, dignified man he had been a few weeks ago that each one in the room sought the others' eyes uncomfortably. It was plain that Judge Farrington did not seem to regret even now that he had helped to bring Ahmad Yazij to his death.

Suddenly Rod stiffened and put a horrified hand to his nose. A foul odor, more horrible because of its subtle vagueness, began to grow in the room. It seemed to have had immediate conception and to gain strength with each passing second. Instantly he recognized that ancient putrescence, which brought terrible recollection of a leathery-faced Arab waiting stoically for death. Judge Farrington swung himself out of bed, and the odor stirred with him, filling the room with horror.

"I'm going to my den," he announced calmly. "I'm all right now."

Even the doctor could not detain him, and as he brushed by Rod, the young man gasped over the cloud of stench that seemed to flow from the very pores of his body.

In passing, Judge Farrington gave Rod a long, deep glance, with a whisper that caused his scalp to stir.

"Don't be alarmed, my lawyer. *Mek-toob!*"

Accent for accent, it was as though Ahmad Yazij had spoken.

Ariel cried out in consternation: "What is it, Rod? You are pale as a ghost!"

And then it was plain to Rod that only he had caught that hellish stench, and that he alone was aware of a beginning horror that hovered beyond the borderland of sanity.

He let Ariel bring him the drink he needed badly, cautioned her to keep close watch on her father, and then he went to police headquarters to wait for the first information on the Stowall Vaynce case.

He was present at the grave when the body was exhumed. The living Stowall Vaynce was also present. That young man, with frightened levity, declared he wanted to make sure that he was really alive. Vaynce said that he had been the only employee of Yazij, who had hired him as a subject for experiment with an instrument which Yazij had called a "soul spectroscope." Vaynce, a dull-witted fellow, could throw no light on what the experiments were. He only knew that he sometimes suffered pain in Yazij's laboratory, which had led him to run away from his master and hide in another city.

The mystery assumed new terror at the second examination of the body. Mark for mark, it was exactly like the live Vaynce. Scars; hair; Bertillon measurements; finger prints; all were perfect mates. The only difference between the two was weight. The body weighed only forty-five pounds, which was surprising, while Vaynce weighed a little over one hundred, which also was surprising, because he seemed rather well-fleshed.

Puzzled medical men claimed the body for a complete autopsy. Newspapers reporting their findings stated, in the language of the layman, that nothing abnormal had been discovered, although one scientist had declared that if the body

had been in a better state of preservation he could probably have proved his opinion that almost two-thirds of its mass was made up of air cells instead of solid protoplasmic cells, a condition rare but not completely unknown in a less exaggerated degree.

And thus the strange matter remained a mystery, soon forgotten. For hadn't Ahmad Yazij been punished for whom-ever he had killed?

SCARCELY a week after the newspapers had stopped carrying Stowall Vaynce news, Judge Farrington astounded the bench and bar by resigning. He issued a statement to the press that he wished to retire for study and rest. Even Rod, who called at the Farrington home almost daily, could not learn his real reason for forsaking the career he loved. But a few days after the resignation, Ariel told Rod that her father had bought a secluded estate in an undeveloped part of the state, where he would go into retirement with his library.

"I'll have to go with him Rod," she said, with a touch of unhappiness. "You know, I've been daughter, mother and wife to him since Mother died. I can't forsake him now that this queer hobby is consuming his life."

Rod looked down hungrily into her exquisite face; sweet little Ariel, the sort of girl every young man dreams of knowing and loving. But it would be several years before he had built a practise to support a wife comfortably.

Now, when he longed to take her into his arms and tell her that he loved her, he only seized her hands and said miserably:

"I wish you did not have to go, Ariel. But will you promise to write to me every day and let me know everything that happens—everything?"

Ariel promised, and her blue eyes shyly promised something else, something that he had no right to accept now. But from the moment he saw her climb into her father's car to begin the journey to their new home, terror began to shadow him. For this restless-eyed John Farrington was certainly not the wholesome Judge Farrington he had known with respect and admiration. He did not even look the same. He had lost flesh and grown hollow of eye and jaw. Rod had to force himself *not* to think that his old friend looked a very little like the filthy Arab whose body now lay in a criminal's grave.

Ariel kept her promise to write every day. Her letters seemed cheerful enough; for she spoke of a beautiful countryside, of the comfort of the picturesque old pioneer homestead they occupied, and of her father's deep content with their new life. But through it all Rod thought he detected a subtle undertone of loneliness and uneasiness.

Several troublesome cases kept Rod so busy that three weeks passed before he could break away to see Ariel. His going then was not of his own choosing. A note from Ariel, written in nervous fright, urged him to come immediately. An hour later, he was driving to the remote hills which hid the Farrington retreat.

Long before he approached the little mountain town where the Farringtons received their mail, modern roads swept away into more densely settled regions and left only deeply rutted clay roads whose very impassability seemed a warning to strangers to keep away. Elemental nature was here, sullen, defiant, stupendously old in bare rock cliffs and narrow streams that had eaten deep into the hills. Life other than human was here in abundance. Crows especially were numerous.

They followed Rod's car constantly, unnerving him with their sad hunger call. It was a lonely, desolate country for a young girl to live in with a father who might be a little mad.

WHEN he passed through the last settlement, the long summer afternoon was waning. For several miles he saw no houses, not even the time-rotted shacks that poked the countryside behind. Soon he began to go down—down into a valley that cupped a broad, shallow lake. The water had a black, unwholesome look, except where a stinking green scum laid a gangrenous carpet along the edges.

So close to the brink of this lake that it must have received flood waters was the Farrington house, a rambling structure of thick, ancient logs backed by giant evergreen trees. He no sooner saw the house than he saw Ariel, too. She was standing knee-deep in the water, snatching at something that darted between the lily pads. She did not seem aware of him until he called to her.

"Rod!" she cried out gladly, and leaped toward the car.

In the instant before she threw herself into his arms, he saw that her dress was torn and soiled. That was completely unlike dainty Ariel. He was surprised, too, at the offer of her pouting red lips. He kissed them hungrily, his first kiss. Often he had dreamed of that kiss, but now, in a subtle way, it was disappointing.

"So glad to see you, Roddy!" she said lightly.

Rod held her off and looked hard at her, the pointed, cleft-chinned face, the blue eyes behind long curling brown lashes. He sensed a change in her, yet could not understand what it was.

"You don't seem so worried," he told her. "By your note asking me to hurry

here, I thought you were frightened about something."

"My note? Foolish!" She rubbed her cheek against his. It felt chilly and moist against his skin. "I didn't write you a note telling you to come."

"You did. What's the matter, Ariel?"

She laughed impishly, ignoring his question. "Look what I caught in the lake, Rod."

Reaching into the torn bosom of her dress, she drew forth a tiny green water-snake, languidly alive.

Again Rod felt vague horror, as though an unnatural effluvium of evil had laid a spell upon this whole strange country.

"What's the matter with you, Ariel? You'd put that thing in your bosom, you who used to be afraid of a worm? You're—you're a different girl."

"Silly! I'm not. I'm the same girl that topped your root beer with soap-suds last April Fool's day. The same one who stuck a pin in a rose and had you smell it."

Rod nodded, remembering. He also remembered her sudden remorse over both childish pranks. Dear little Ariel of a dozen moods! There was a streak of earth across one pink cheek, and a bit of water-weed was caught between her bare, perfect toes. Looking, Rod again felt that prickling of his scalp. Never had he seen this strange mood in her. It was as though all that was elfin and prankish in her were concentrated in the ragged little urchin laughing up at him, laughing from shallow, soulless eyes and lips that were not quite warm enough for a creature of warm human blood.

She was leading him to the house, her bare feet flying over the ground in happy, skipping steps. Her skirt was so torn that he could see her round white thigh as she moved.

"Isn't it lonesome for you, Ariel?" he asked.

"Not a bit. I'm helping Daddy in some mighty interesting work. And then I have the lake and the woods to play about in."

She turned to look back at him, and he saw that the green things about had reflected their own forest tint in the eyes that should be blue.

With an effort he pulled himself together. He was imagining things. That would never do. He needed all his common sense now.

As they entered the house, he saw that it was even older and cruder than it had seemed from the road. In an enormous living-room, furnished comfortably enough with many of the appointments that had been in the old city home, he waited while she went for her father.

IT WAS many minutes before John Farrington appeared, and then he stood in the door and called out rudely and sullenly: "Well?"

The change in the man was shocking. He had grown so thin he was almost lost in the clothes of former days.

"How are you, Judge?" Rod cried heartily, coming toward his old friend with outstretched hand, which the other ignored.

"I'm well enough, especially when I'm not interrupted. I'm busy now, Rod. I can't give you any time until after supper." He gestured to Ariel. "Get him something to eat, and then hurry and join me. I need you for an hour or two."

Turning, he left the room abruptly, while Ariel danced away with a promise of supper in a few minutes.

Rod felt a moment of anger. He was half tempted to leave immediately, but again his consciousness of latent mystery enveloped him. He would have to remain, for Ariel's sake.

In a few minutes the girl was back again, wheeling a tea-wagon bearing a cold supper. She had not changed her ragged clothes, and in this disheveled condition joined Rod in the meal.

Rod could not shake off his overpowering sense of unreality. He felt almost as though he were wandering in a dream. The pixy-faced ragamuffin facing him over the table could not be the Ariel he had wanted to marry. She scarcely stirred his pulses now, this pretty child-girl with the soulless eyes.

"What is your father doing now, Ariel?" he asked her. "Still poring over Ahmad Yazij's books, I suppose?"

"That—and other things."

"For instance?"

"Mind your business, Roddy. If you stay here long enough, *you'll* find out." She laughed teasingly, cocking her head birdwise and looking at him. "I suspect he'd like to work on you, at that—gentleman, cave-man, warm-hearted boy, cold-hearted lawyer. Oh! you'd be a case."

Rod found the meal singularly unpleasant. Each moment he was more convinced that Ariel was changed in a way that made him vaguely frantic with apprehension. Something he had loved in her, some primary characteristic which used to reach out to him and claim his very soul, seemed to have disappeared. It was almost as though the Ariel he had loved were dead, and this girl before him was only a laughing shadow that mocked him.

His final bewilderment came when Ariel threw herself on his knee. It was not her conduct that surprised him, but her *lack of weight*. He scarcely felt the pressure of her body. Suddenly he swooped her into his arms and lifted her, and the experiment brought a cry from him. She seemed no heavier than a baby,

Was he facing another Stowall Vayne mystery?

"Ariel!" he cried, putting her down hastily. "Tell me what your father does to you in his laboratory. Tell me!"

"Not now, old curiosity!" she teased, patting his cheek. "You'll find out, though. He's already told me that your turn was next. Now, run and play on the lake for an hour or two until he is through with me for the day."

She skipped away.

The house was suddenly repellent to Rod. He went outside, to walk along the lake edge. There was enough moonlight to make the going easy, and in a few minutes he was enjoying the scent of the water-lilies.

Gradually another odor began to impinge itself upon his sensibilities, a stench so unpleasant that his nostrils quivered. Closer to the brink he crept, to determine whether the smell came from the night-black waters which slapped among the lily pads.

And then, as the odor gained strength, terrific understanding came to him. His horrified nostrils drank in great breaths of the putrescence, for he had to be sure. He could not be mistaken. Aloud he groaned the name of the one being who could produce that evil stench.

"Ahmad Yazij!"

God! Could he ever forget that stench that reeked of disease and unspeakable corruption which sullied everything the Arab had touched? Mad fear almost sent him shrieking back to the house, but he controlled himself and forced his lagging steps onward. He had to go on. He felt that he was trailing something which he must see and know.

HE LEFT the trail along the bank's edge and went down to the slimy mud, to stumble over sprawling cypress knees and step into crayfish holes.

As he progressed, the foul odor became an effluvium so violently repellent that it seemed to well up from the cancerous depths of an elder world. In his hunger for more light, he used his cigarette-lighter. The feeble flame at least guided his footsteps in the immediate vicinity. A minute later, he was hysterically glad that he had this tiny spot of light, which saved his feet from abomination. For directly in his path, half buried in mud and water, was a human body.

For a moment, Rod paused, revolted. Here lay a woman. Her white dress and arms were coated so thickly with dried lake silt and scum that she seemed, in the moonlight, almost like a figure of clay. He swept his light over the still form. When it reached the face, his scream echoed through the giant cedar trees.

The woman was Ariel.

There could be no mistake, for only her face and her golden hair were undefiled by the mud. From the discolored hue of the flesh, the body must have been here several days. *It must have been here when he had talked to Ariel today!* It probably had been here when the note summoning him had been written.

He did not rush away immediately, a human revolted against a loved thing because it had ceased to be human; he stood there half paralyzed with the realization that he faced evil blacker than the down-pressing night. Now that he was close to the poor, lifeless shell to which that compelling odor had led him, he was conscious that the odor was gone. Only the natural smell of the lake ooze tainted the air, which after the foulness of the other, seemed cleaner than the breath of flowers.

Rod must have turned a little mad in that shocking moment before he could

find his courage again, for he babbled foolishly.

"Ariel alive, Ariel dead! Stowall Vaynce alive, Stowall Vaynce dead! Ahmad Yazij dead, Ahmad Yazij——"

His voice caught in his throat. *Was Ahmad Yazij alive?* Ahmad Yazij, who had been writing books for hundreds of years?

With such insane thoughts upsetting his reason, he could not feel real grief over the girl's body at his feet. He was not viewing dead Ariel, but some sinister mystery which had no place on the earth. He tried to bring himself to touch the body to ascertain whether or not it was only visionary, but his shrinking hand was not capable of the revolting act. Drawing off his coat, he laid it over the muddy form, and was relieved to see that the coat really lay over something.

Then he ran back to the house. Darkness and stillness lay over the ancient wooden pile. Rod entered, passed through the great living-room, and on to the lean-to in the rear, where he saw a crack of light coming from under the door. This was John Farrington's study.

He was about to knock on the door when he heard a sound that sent quivering terror through him.

It was Ariel's voice, raised in a wild protest. "I won't! I won't!"

"Come now!" shouted her father, "I'll have no stubbornness. Get over there under the focus."

"For God's sake, Daddy, don't you see—can't you see that you've destroyed the last one? It is I now. Don't make me——"

Her words ended in a scream of despair.

Rod turned the door-knob frantically; the door was locked. With Ariel's voice begging for mercy spurring him to desperation, he flung himself against the an-

cient wood, and almost instantly a panel broke in.

Father and daughter were struggling, and just as Rod fell into the room, the father won. His hands found the white throat that strained away from him.

But Rod, instead of rushing in to the assistance of the girl he loved, stood paralyzed, every sense revolted against the insane sight that abominated his eyes.

There was one Ariel struggling with her father, and another stretched out on a table, apparently lifeless. The body on the table was the tattered ragamuffin he had met earlier in the evening, the stranger in Ariel's form who had puzzled and distressed him. The other Ariel, fighting for her life with the shrunken-faced creature who shrieked Arabic curses, was the well-groomed girl he hoped to marry.

In that dreadful moment of revelation, Rod knew that he did not face the real John Farrington, but the withered shell of his body housing a fiend. He seized the first object that his hands touched, a heavy metal tube. One blow from this caused the crushing hands to relax instantly from Ariel's throat. With a gentle sigh, the man who looked like a strange blending of John Farrington and Ahmad Yazij fell to the floor.

Rod gave all his attention to Ariel. She was not seriously injured, and after a thirsty draft of water which tortured her bruised throat, she was able to speak.

"Is he unconscious, Rod? Really unconscious?"

"Yes."

"Then hurry! I have a dreadful task to perform, and you must help."

Without stopping to explain, she busied herself with the giant spectroscopelike appliance that Rod recognized as being the one which had come from Ahmad Yazij. After Ariel had made certain adjustments, she called to Rod.

W. T.—7

"Will you lift him, Rod, to that high chair in front of the soul spectroscope?"

She was white-faced and so excited that her blue eyes were nearly black. Working under her directions, Rod placed the inert body in the chair, and rolled the chair into the exact center of a pentacle marked upon the floor with a reddish-brown substance suspiciously like dried blood.

"Don't step into the symbol," she warned, her voice high-pitched with ill-concealed dread.

As Rod observed her, he discovered that something in her voice, some half-perceived expression in her blue eyes, were proof that here was the old Ariel and not the soulless girl of the afternoon, who apparently lay lifeless in this very room.

At last everything was in readiness to Ariel's liking. She walked over to Rod and slipped her hand into his with almost child-like trust and simplicity.

"I'm sorry I had to force you to view what you're going to see, Rod. I asked you to come only because I need you so."

And this was the girl in the image of her who that afternoon had denied writing him to come!

ROD pressed the hand in his. "I'm with you to the last drop of my blood, Ariel. And I'm ready for anything that is to take place, for I know that we're both experiencing what was never intended for normal human beings to see."

"You'll not be harmed," she promised, "if you keep hold of your nerves and your reason."

She swung into place the long tube which somewhat resembled the collimator on the ordinary spectroscope. Instead of the usual lens in the end, the tube was fitted with an arrangement of silvery wires twisted into a geometrical pattern

so singular that Rod felt a creeping of his scalp when he looked at it. Only a moment of gazing gave him the sensation that those insanely angled wires were cutting through his flesh, through his very mind, until, tearing his eyes away, he realized that he had had a glimpse of forms stolen from some elder world, perhaps from another dimension of space and time.

"Go to the other end of the room, Rod, and watch."

Rod obeyed, his eyes again seeking the silver-wired tube that was focused on John Farrington's body, which now was animated with returning consciousness.

Ariel did something to the soul spectroscope which caused a blinding white light to pour from the silver wires. The radiance, in long pale beams, was interlaced in the same dreadful pattern that the wires made. Reaching out to the convulsed body of John Farrington, the rays seemed to slash through him like knives of steel.

Suddenly from the man's open mouth poured a stream of black smoke so foul that both Rod and Ariel clapped their hands to their mouths. The stench of Ahmad Yazij; instantly Rod recognized it, sensing it issuing from a foul source rotten with age and corruption. The smoke began to shape itself into a form, a man; a black wraith with features and eyes that were readily recognizable. Rod and Ariel clung together, for Ahmad Yazij's shade hovered before them, still attached to John Farrington's mouth. The features grew plainer, until the hate they revealed seemed to have deadly force.

With an enormous effort, Ariel recovered herself. Close to the pentacle marked on the floor she went, chanting in bad Arabic. As she approached, the hate on the wraith's face changed to fear. With one last burst of courage, Ariel

reached out a finger and touched the living shadow. Instantly it detached itself from John Farrington's mouth, floated up for another foot or two, and burst like a bubble.

Ariel fainted, and the two men rushed to her aid.

"Ariel! Daughter!" groaned John Farrington, completely recovered. "My brave little girl." He gathered her into his arms.

Ariel did not remain unconscious more than a moment. Strength returned to her almost immediately. She sat up and gasped.

"Quick, Father! Let's burn the room and everything in it."

Leaping to her feet, she began tumbling the books from the shelves, tearing out leaves and scattering them in heaps.

"Wait, Daughter." John Farrington hesitated, and his worn face paled to a ghastlier hue. "There is something not in this room which—must be destroyed. Rod?"

The eyes of the two men met and clung in horrible, unspoken understanding.

"Get me some sheets, Ariel," the older man went on.

In a few moments, bearing a broad board taken from the broken door, the two men were plunging into the night, following the lake path that led to the thing in the mud.

John Farrington would not let Rod touch the poor, befouled body.

"I'll take my just share of punishment, Rod. Hand me the sheets—and don't look."

Rod turned his head and tried to close his ears to the sucking sounds made by a body leaving its muddy bed. His nostrils quivered with the odor of death; the odor that hung between the two men throughout that dreadful return walk.

Not once did the young man glance at the sheeted thing bound to the board. Even after they had entered the house and deposited their burden on the laboratory floor, he refused to look. Near the broken door he stood while John Farrington and Ariel broke bottles of chemicals and scattered their contents. He heard the scratch of a match.

"Get out—quick!" shouted John Farrington.

THEY were no sooner outside than explosions began shaking the house. At a safe distance they watched the flames lick the sky, roaring higher after each explosion.

"Thank God for fire!" John Farrington said grimly. "Those half-real bodies will be consumed like paper, and there will not be a trace left to tell the world that I tampered with what should have remained secret."

Not until the three had entered Rod's car parked far from the house did John Farrington allay Rod's curiosity. While the house burned, the high-reaching flames painting the night with quivering red, the two men talked.

"I am prepared to understand anything you tell me, Judge. I saw the two Stowall Vaynces. I saw three Ariels. They were as real as my own flesh. And, God help me, Judge! I—I saw Ahmad Yazij look out of your eyes."

The other placed a comforting hand on his knee.

"It's all right now, boy. I'm your old friend again." After a pause, he went on, in a brisker tone of voice. "Rod, have you ever been surprized at your own actions and decisions, which made you feel almost as though a stranger inside you were directing your mind?"

"We're all like that, Judge, aren't we? We've got to fight ourselves, beat our-

selves, make ourselves think, act, and live decently."

"But are you sure we are fighting ourselves? Has it ever occurred to you that your body might be like a house sheltering a large, quarrelsome family?"

Rod laughed. "I've felt like that at times."

"And that's what I—what Ahmad Yazij proved. He started his work nearly two thousand years ago, and could never have completed it had he not possessed enough occult power to pass himself on to younger, stronger bodies, which he forced to carry on the work of his will.

"The human body is only a house, Rod, equipped with various natural devices called senses which give the dweller or the dwellers contacts with consciousness. There is one master of the house, which is your true self, but there are many interlopers, tramps that come from outside; wandering, bodiless souls seeking a home. Sometimes one, sometimes the other, takes ascendancy over all the rest, and we call the phenomenon 'changing mood.'

"At least three hundred years ago, Ahmad Yazij started out to find a way to cast out all the other dwellers of a body except himself, but not until modern science began to be developed did he make much headway."

Rod broke in nervously. "Terrible thought, that: his coming up to the present time through all the other ages of ignorance and dawning knowledge."

"I think it rather sublime, Rod; that is, if he hadn't misused his power. But he was inherently evil. To go on, though: he did not discover the soul spectroscopy until he was in the incarnation that we knew, the shriveled, hideous Arab." He paused and breathed audibly for several moments. "The soul spectroscopy, Rod. It's a devilish mongrel, spawned from

modern science wedded to occultism, for separating souls as the prism spectroscope separates the different radiations from a luminous source. It shows up the tramps that have stolen into a body, and, at the operator's will, casts them out."

"But, Judge," Rod interrupted, "I can't forget that the—the extra bodies I saw were of flesh and blood. There was Stowall Vaynce and—and Ariel——"

"Yes, they were real, half-real; creatures made up of matter of a sort. But do we know so very much about matter, after all? Matter and energy are the same in the last analysis. Ahmad Yazij, in the form of the Arab we knew, having acquired a knowledge of modern science to add to his ancient lore of occultism and magic, discovered that it was possible, when separating souls, to split off material atoms from the living body to clothe the tramp with flesh. Don't be too shocked. Your own living body is doing that constantly, casting off its own atoms, renewing itself at least every seven years. What Ahmad Yazij did was to steal only enough living atoms to make a second body of similar mass, but of less density."

"And that is why the dead thing called Stowall Vaynce weighed only forty-five pounds?"

"Yes; and it was the reason why he was dead. For he was the original Vaynce, you know, who had been forced to give up too much of his living substance. The one that came back was one of the poor devil's harmless body interlopers. Not until Yazij got into my body, younger and more vigorous than his, and with a mind perhaps more carefully educated, did he discover how to materialize souls without destroying the parent-body. Using me, he separated two interlopers from Ariel. And when I succeeded in beating him back and getting ascendancy, I

killed both. It was all too dreadful; please comprehend. To retaliate, he tried to kill the real Ariel. Many times. You saw one occasion. But it's all right now; he's gone."

Rod looked back at the burning house and shuddered. "Gone? Are you sure?"

"I am sure. Ariel cast him out without giving him flesh; cast him unfleshed from a living body. Had he passed out of a dead body, as he did when he was executed, he could seize another home. But now he is a homeless wanderer in space and time."

"But have you any assurance that he can never come back—that he can never seize another home, as you call it?"

John Farrington paused long before answering.

"I can't be sure—too sure," he said. "I only know that he can never take my body again. I know how to guard against him now."

A LONG silence fell, for the three of them were now watching the final spectacle of the burning house, nearly consumed by the flames. The old building had crashed in, half smothering the fire, so that black smoke belched up in vast clouds.

"Look!" screamed Ariel. "Look!"

Her pointing finger picked out the topmost peak of the smoke cloud, swaying against the red-lighted sky. It had formed a colossal man, his feet planted in the fire, his head high above the tree tops. The features were plainly visible, sculptured from fire-painted smoke.

"Is it smoke?" Ariel quavered. "No, no! Daddy, it's looking at us, looking——"

But John Farrington, not heeding her, got out of the car quietly, holding his arms wide, while he chanted in Arabic.

Suddenly the black form writhed high into the air and sailed out over the lake, still intact, until a sudden gust of wind caught it, tore it to fragments, and sent the fragments scattering, to be swallowed by the black night.