

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 32

CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER, 1938

Number 4

Cover Design	M. Brundage
<i>Illustrating a scene in "Beyond the Phoenix"</i>	
The Horns of Elfland	opposite this page
<i>Pictorial interpretation by Virgil Finlay of a poem by Lord Tennyson</i>	
Beyond the Phoenix	Henry Kuttner 386
<i>A glamorous tale of eld, of an intrepid warrior hero, and the dark cults of Baal-Yagoth</i>	
Black Moon	Seabury Quinn 400
<i>A goose-flesh story of African voodoo transplanted in the United States</i>	
Death	William Shakespeare 424
<i>Verse, from "Measure for Measure"</i>	
The Isle of Abominations	Kadra Maysi 425
<i>A gripping story about a strange, carnivorous forest—a tale of many thrills</i>	
Jekal's Lesson	David Bernard 442
<i>The ghastly experience of a physician—a tale of stark horror</i>	
The Fire Princess (end)	Edmond Hamilton 455
<i>An intriguing story about a tremendous doom threatening the world from Central Asia</i>	
The Maze of Maal Dweh	Clark Ashton Smith 475
<i>What strange fate awaited the hunter and the girl in the fearsome labyrinth of the enchanter?</i>	
The Black Monk	G. G. Pendarves 484
<i>Dire woe waits for the luckless man who encounters the Black Monk of Chuard Island</i>	
The Other Gods	H. P. Lovecraft 489
<i>A posthumous weird fantasy by a late great master of bizarre fiction</i>	
Witches on the Heath	Leah Bodine Drake 492
<i>Verse</i>	
Up Under the Roof	Manly Wade Wellman 493
<i>A short tale of fear</i>	
Weird Story Reprint:	
The Oldest Story in the World	Murray Leinster 496
<i>An Oriental torture-tale, reprinted from an early issue of WEIRD TALES</i>	
The Eyrie	507
<i>The readers exchange opinions</i>	

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Copyright 1938, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company.
COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Isle of Abominations

By KADRA MAYSI

A gripping story about the strange, carnivorous forest planted by old Mr. Chalcedyne on an island in the swamps, and the shocking aftermath of an attempt to cut the forest down

FOR two hours the put-put boat had been running south with the tidal river. The barrier islands lay to east, opalescent in the evening light. Behind their dunes was tangled growth of palmetto palm, oak, muscadine, scrub pine, cassena, and myrtle thickets. Westward, long miles of marshes stretched toward the Carolina mainland. The setting sun was kindling them, slowly, into a sea of flame: fiery eyots and red marsh-grass and creeks where molten lava ran.

Dicon Croyce sat in the bow upon a coil of dirty rope and watched the sunset from beneath the down-turned brim of his soft hat. They were a land unto themselves, these dark and ancient sea islands. In his childhood he had lived upon them. He knew them: their people and their ways. . . . He felt himself both butcher and traitor because of what he had come to do. He drew deep on his old black pipe and spoke to his fellow forester.

"This is one job, Harvey, that I don't relish. It seems cruelty—almost sacrilege."

Harvey spoke curtly.

"In these lean years, there's no job that I don't relish. Besides, it's in our line. Aren't we foresters?"

"That's exactly it, Harvey. We're foresters, not butchers. We've been trained to cure and save trees as an M. D. is trained to save human beings."

"We've had to cut trees by the thousand. I've watched you saw and lop and chop."

"Granted—but, just so does a surgeon amputate. It is necessary for tree surgeons to amputate limbs and, frequently, to remove an entire tree for the good of other trees. But to raze a miniature forest—and a forest such as this! I've visited Mr. Chalcedyne and walked with him in his woods. He knew every tree and loved each one. He fed and tended and cared for them."

"I know—and he was a blamed old crank. He had some crazy theories. He fed them bone-meal by the ton, and he went farther than that. He bought all dead animals for fifty miles around and buried them on that island for fertilizer. They say the negroes used to bring carcasses of horses and mules and cows on little flatboats. It was even hinted that he bought two-legged stiffs—"

Dicon Croyce threw back his head and laughed aloud.

"Hard-Boiled Harvey, don't you, of all men, tell me ghost stories. If he bought any two-legged stiffs, they were merely chickens and ducks. He experimented, and I must confess that the things he grew used a lot of—that stuff."

There came an unearthly, goblin cry, high-pitched, then quavering into silence. The creek ran narrow now, between banks of quivering, rustling blackness. Something cold and wet and fleshy materialized from the night and swept clammy fingers across Harvey's face. He started up with an exclamation. Croyce said:



"A long tendril flung out and attempted to coil around him. They ran as men run for their lives."

"It was only a trailing vine. Chalcedyne has some rather queer vines. He brought them, and his trees and shrubs, from almost every cuntry of the world. That God-awful screech was a loon's cry. The sea islands get on some men's nerves."

"I believe you," Harvey said, glancing

nervously into the darkness. The mast lantern cast a pallid and green-white glow over all three faces. That tiny, green-white glow like a Jack-o'-Lantern's flame, was the only spark of light in total, immeasurable night. He asked, anxiously:

"Are we near the island?"

"This is the island," Croyce said—and

a torch flared, suddenly, on the shore.

The negro boatman swung the launch gently alongside of the little wooden pier, and from it a nasal and yet drawling voice spoke:

"You the two wood-cuttin' men I been expectin'? Well, w'y don't one of you throw me a rope?"

The disembodied drawl caught the thrown hawser and made them fast, fore and aft. Then Croyce and Harvey clambered up a swaying palmetto pile and shook hands with Gideon White, superintendent of the late Mr. Chalcedyne. He was the tallest, thinnest, most leathery-looking man whom Harvey had ever seen. He welcomed them in his sorrowful drawl and led the way ashore; but, from his first words, the newcomers sensed hostility.

"Camp's just a quarter-mile inshore, and some of your sawyers got in today. I got room for you in the lodge with me, if you want to stay there. Seems like Mr. Chalcedyne would turn in his grave if he knew you were goin' to cut the whole island. But come on! Jason will bring your things. Might as well get goin', since you've come to do it."

CROYCE slept at the lodge, but his sleep was uneasy and troubled. Even in slumber, he was aware of the presence of the living forest—the lush, moist, vital, sentient forest, pulsing with warmth and fecundity—the forest which Chalcedyne had loved and tended, but which he and Harvey had been hired to destroy. The sea wind wandered across the pines as fingers across the strings of a harp. All night its haunting, minor chords accompanied his broken dreams. Just at dawn he was awakened by voices whispering outside; but, straining his ears, he could only hear the whisper of palmetto fronds.

He and White had almost finished breakfast when Harvey appeared. He

looked haggard, and in reply to Croyce's question as to how he had slept, replied briefly:

"Like hell."

White seemed decidedly pleased to hear it. He smiled gloomily and suggested that they take a look around together:

"The trees are grouped," he told them. "Mr. Chalcedyne planted the ones that were alike in what he called the same 'communities.' He treated them same as human beings. He said they were pretty near human."

Harvey said, irritably:

"Everybody groups trees. I group them in landscape gardening; but I'm not fool enough to think them human."

White removed his slouch hat and scratched his grizzled head.

"Maybe, if you lived with 'em long enough—I mean that some queer things have happened over here. Well, as I was sayin', Mr. Chalcedyne was always tryin' experiments. You see that grove of magnolias right there?"

They grew in a ring in a swampy spot between the pine ridge and the palms—nine of the largest, sturdiest specimens of the tree Croyce had ever seen. Their leaves were glossily, darkly green; and, although it was late June, a number of huge, creamy blossoms drooped from their stems and scented the air.

"Well, what?" asked Harvey impatiently. "I've seen the laurel magnolia before."

White said deliberately, "Maybe. But you never saw one bear blood-red flowers."

"That species bears only white," answered Harvey. "But I've seen other kinds with colored blooms."

"I'm talkin' about those same trees," insisted the superintendent. "This time last year, Mr. Chalcedyne had 'em bearin' red flowers instead of white ones."

"As a schoolboy," said Croyce, "I used to pick one and put it in red ink instead of water. Through its stem, it drew up a faint, pinkish coloring."

"It drew up this colorin'," said White, "from a long way farther down than its stem. And—I tell you it wasn't faint. It was just as red as blood."

"Do you mean that Mr. Chalcedyne put coloring-matter at the roots?"

But the superintendent retreated, suspiciously, into a shell of ignorance. He was afraid he had gone too far and that these "city men" would laugh at him. What did they know of hot, thick nights when strange scents and sounds blew out of the jungle? If they ever heard a rabbit scream—if they knew why he did not keep a dog . . .

Ignorance was his only retreat, and he took it. Even his grammar forsook him, as did all other knowledge.

"I don't mean nothin' and I don't know nothin', Mr. Chalcedyne never said what he used."

"Everybody knows that he used dead animals as fertilizer. I never understood why he needed so much of that matter, but I know that he had here a lot of queer, tropical stuff."

"Some of it's worse than queer," said White. "I hate to see the island cut, but I've got another job, and I'll be glad to quit this one."

Harvey said, "I don't see exactly what you two are driving at. Let's get on with our look-see and know the layout. We start tomorrow."

ALL forenoon they tramped through the wood, shuttling from ocean beach to marsh. The island was only four miles long and approximately a half-mile wide. They were starting upon its northern end. White reported that it lay north-east to southwest, with the coast, and that its lower end was somewhat protected

and, consequently, planted far more thickly.

"That's why Mr. Chalcedyne had all his buildings up on this end. Nobody could live down there with some of those plants. They stink!"

"Probably insectivorous," said Harvey. "The *Dionæa* are peculiar to the Carolinas."

"*Dionæa* ain't nothin' but fly-traps," said the caretaker, rather surprisingly. "Things I'm talkin' about are big—wicked, stunted-looking trees, and vines as thick as your arm and as soft as flesh but as strong as cable."

"He must have brought in some carnivorous plants since I was here last," said Croyce. "Hello! What are those drums? Do you bring gasoline over here?"

The big steel hogsheads were stacked in a hollow square, as if for removal. But it was easy to see that they had remained in the same spot for some time. The quick growth of a semi-tropical region was in and about them. Plumy fennel and coarse swamp-cane pushed between and close against them. Running oak, blackberry, and wild bignonia vines were weaving a shroud for them. Myrtle and gum and small pine sprouted where seed and mast had been wind-sown.

The three men walked closer to them, White appearing to hang back. Most of the drums appeared to have had holes chiseled in just one place; but, from a few, the entire heads had been removed and they stood wide open. Sides and bottoms were discolored with a stain that might have been reddish rust. Croyce and Harvey peered into them, but White still hung back. He stood fully twenty feet away. Harvey asked:

"Did they bring gasoline?"

"No," said the man. "We never needed gasoline over here."

"Then what came in them? The ones

with the holes must have brought liquid."

"Mr. Chalcedyne used to buy stuff from the abattoir. I don't know nothin' about it—and we better be gettin' back for dinner."

THAT next day they started cutting. Sawyers and axmen were all in camp. The two foresters in charge of the work had not yet seen all of the island; but directions were clear, and all they needed was men and machinery for the work.

The heirs of the eccentric horticulturist had been unable to agree upon disposal of the place, so had accepted the first offer made them for the wood upon it. Croyce and Harvey had been engaged, as experts, by the purchasing timber company, to oversee a general cutting and then select, for that company, all logs of value to them. After removal of this large timber, a pulp factory would send men to figure upon and bid in the small wood.

Such plan entailed total destruction of the beautiful and valuable international forest started, as an experiment, by its owner. However, few people were interested in experimental horticulture, and from a monetary standpoint the grove was worth no more than its timber. So reasoned the five people who had inherited it; and, so reasoning, they decided to sell its timber rights and, later, to sell the cut-over land for sea-island farms.

Croyce was thinking about it all and about a queer event of the night. He had not mentioned it to Harvey or White, but he thought about it all day. When they had returned to the lodge and were eating fried ham, eggs, and hominy for supper, he decided to speak.

"The underbrush and vines grow pretty fast here, don't they, Mr. White?"

The superintendent looked at him, off guard and plainly startled.

"I'll say they grow fast. And I ought to know."

"What kind of vine is that which comes through my window?"

The man pushed back his chair with a sudden, scraping sound.

"You say—that vine—that vine came through your window?"

"No. I asked you *what* vine. I don't know what vine it was."

"Ain't no vine on this house except the one on the kitchen chimney. I begged Mr. Chalcedyne not to put it there, but he said it came from an African jungle and the chimney warmth might make it grow."

"He must have known his vine," said Croyce. "It's grown a long way from home. My window is at least thirty feet from that brick chimney."

"And you say it came—came through the window—into the room?"

There was a strange pallor underneath the leathery tan of the man's face. Harvey had laid down knife and fork and was listening. Croyce said:

"I suppose there's nothing so strange about it. Tropical flora grows fast, and it rained a little during the night. I thought it was raining again, for I heard a little rustling sound. I kept hearing it between naps, and, although faint, it was oddly disturbing. Finally I fell asleep, assuring myself it was rain on the leaves, and suddenly I was awakened by a distinct touch on my foot. I lay still, and it was repeated, this time upon my ankle. Something seemed rubbing against my leg, trying to crawl around it. I thought of a mouse, then a snake, for the thing felt clammy and cold through the trouser of my pajamas. So I reached out, without moving my body, and turned my flashlight on the foot of the bed. There was a long, reddish-brown tendril waving about my feet. It must have been sensitive to light, for it stopped all movement at once and hung, limply, against the foot-board."

Harvey asked intently, "Aren't your windows screened? Mine are."

"Yes; both of my windows are screened. But wire rusts fast in this salt air. Mine was either already broken or else rotted weak by rust; for the tendril had pushed its way between wire screening and frame, spanned the two feet between the sill and the footboard of my bed, and managed to coil itself around the iron rods of the footboard."

White rose, without a word, strode to the door and left the room. Harvey glanced after him, then looked back at Croyce.

"You call it a 'tendril.' How big around was the creeper?"

"About as big as my thumb, I should guess. But you can see for yourself. I purposely left it to see how much more it would grow during the day."

THEY left the combination living-room and dining-room and walked through the hall to Croyce's bedroom, which was at the back. It was half past six o'clock and still broad daylight. Everything in the small, sparsely furnished sleeping-room was plainly visible to a casual glance.

Both men looked first at the narrow iron bedstead which stood alongside the wall with its foot two feet from a big window. Croyce had drawn it up himself, in the fashion of men accustomed to camps. His lightweight khaki blanket covered it like a quilt and was neatly and tightly tucked under the mattress upon all sides. Its drab color was broken only by a flat white pillow at the head.

But along the slender iron rods of the low footboard, both saw a distinct, shuddering thread of movement run. It was as though the rods, themselves, trembled and writhed under some stress.

Together they stepped forward, curi-

ous, yet oddly reluctant. Croyce exclaimed:

"It's grown, but something must have happened to it. It looks injured, shriveled, lifeless. By George, Harve, something must have killed it!"

Under their eyes the coiled tendrils tightened their grip on the small rods. It was as though they contracted in a sudden spasm of pain. Then they loosened and hung utterly limp and still.

Harvey was gazing intently from the window to the bed. He put out a hand and lifted the creeper's loose-hanging end.

"It's tropical, of course—jungular—and succulent. Feel it, Croyce. It's just like touching cold, bloodless, shriveled flesh."

"It's clammy. I noticed that. But it wasn't shriveled last night. It looked succulent, and full of life. It must be mainly a night-grower. It was about that business last night, and it looked almost alive. It gave me a funny feeling to see it swaying, like a snake, when I took it by surprize and turned the light on it. I couldn't help wondering whether, if I hadn't awakened, it would have taken a coil around my leg—or even my body."

Harvey did not smile. He said gravely: "What time last night was it when you turned the light on?"

"It must have been about four o'clock. I did not go to sleep again. I lay there awhile, with my flashlight burning, hoping to see the thing grow. But it hung, dead still, and did not move again. By that time I was wide awake and looked at my watch. It was four-thirty. I turned off my flash and lay there watching the day break and listening for the five o'clock whistle at the camp."

"Then you never slept again—after you once saw the thing?"

"No; it was too near daybreak and the blamed thing had waked me up. But,

why call it 'the thing?' It's nothing more than a tropical vine which was probably growing on the window-sill last night. Tropical vines grow by feet instead of inches."

Harvey still looked intent and curiously grave.

"No; I happened to notice it and examine it yesterday. I spotted it, at once, as one of the carnivora. I've hardly studied them, but I've read a lot about insectivora. I followed this vine from the chimney bricks along one side of the kitchen. I can swear that its nearest tendril was fully twenty feet from your window at noon yesterday."

Croyce whistled softly.

"Some growing! I didn't think it was possible."

"Neither did I," said Harvey.

"Suppose we go and ask White about it," Croyce suggested. "The old Poker-Face must have had something else to do. He left the table so quickly that I had no time for questions."

They found White at the foot of the chimney where the vine had grown. He had cut it down from the root and was hacking, with his ax, for that. Croyce exclaimed:

"So, that's the reason why the tendril died on my bed! God—but it was almost human! It shuddered, and then lay still."

Harvey looked at him queerly, then stooped and gathered a section of root. As they bent their heads over it, he and Croyce detected a faint, sickening stench, an odor like that of decaying meat.

IT RAINED next day, delaying work. The wood seemed to grow before Croyce's eyes. The whole island breathed deeply, as though it had drunk its fill. There was, underfoot, indefinite and yet primal movement: a swelling, gentle but immense, primordial, protoplasmic. Earth and air were faintly disturbed by the

throb and stretch of some vague increase.

Impatient to get on, Croyce decided to leave Harvey to overseeing all cutting—which was, necessarily, slow under the driving, stormy gusts—and to make a complete trip around the water edge, riding the beaches and inspecting, from them, the growth as a whole. For mount he procured a mule which belonged to the cook, Bones, and which was the only living domestic animal upon the place. So old and gaunt was the quadruped that its master's name would have suited it; yet it appeared to attract one of the Irish foremen. As Croyce was mounting, that one left his saw gang and approached. His words to Bones were a mixture of that familiarity and rudeness with which the low white treats the negro.

"Ould nagur, I'd like to ride the cray-ture meself, I would."

And Bones answered him as the negro answers the white whom he does not respect.

"Ah ain't lendin' my mule to nubuddy cep'n my boss-man. Ah ain't gwine let no po' w'ite trash git neah 'nuff my mule tuh tech um!"

Mulcahy cursed and advanced threateningly toward the old man, but Croyce spoke sharply:

"You're fired if you touch Bones, Mulcahy. It's your own fault that he was rude to you. Get back to your gang and stay there. You have nothing to do with him or his mule."

The Irishman turned slowly away, muttering to himself as he did. Croyce said to Harvey, who had come up:

"Better keep an eye on that man. He's a chiseler and a bully, and I think he's drinking, too."

Then he rode slowly away on his stiff and ancient charger, and, coming through the dunes to the beach, began his tour of inspection.

Between rain squalls he managed to

get a good view and a good idea of what lay within the elongated circle he was making. From the ocean beach he saw, first, the palms, and behind them, a higher and darker wall of pines and the larger oaks. Upon the northern half of the island, the woods were comparatively free of underbrush, but as he went farther south they thickened visibly. Palmetto palms still followed the beach, but, one mile from the southern end, pines and oaks appeared to have ceased and been replaced by a jungle. He was riding slowly, both because of the old mule and of his observations; but, even so, his forester's eyes could not classify these trees and shrubs. Except for an occasional, towering, dark-green crown, they were lower than the growth upon the island's other end; and they appeared knit together, in an almost impenetrable mass, by gigantic vines which climbed and coiled and swayed in the wind.

The rain had ceased, and as he rounded the southernmost point, he could see in detail. Here, where the islet met the marsh, its undergrowth was most tropical, and, even from the last outpost of its poisonous-looking maze, it seemed to have thrown, toward the water, interwoven mats of green. The old mule shied away when Croyce tried to ride into these; so he was obliged to dismount, leave the patient creature standing, and walk up to them. As he approached, they seemed to be heaving slightly, but sinuously. He told himself that it must be this movement, occasioned possibly by the wind, which had alarmed his charger and made it refuse to approach.

Standing over them, he found the living mats of unusual interest. They were formed of a thousand vines, of every size and stage of development. The stems of some were as large as his arm and were studded with greenish suction cups. Some of these were open, and their

thread-like petals waved with rhythmic, reaching movement. Some were folded. They reminded him of repulsive marine animals on rocks. He reached down, and with his heavy working-gloves unfolded the tight and strangely muscular petals of one of the largest flowers. Within it was a bloody mass of half-digested feathers and bones.

Croyce released it, dusting his hands, and it snapped shut, greedily. He whistled softly. So Chalcedyne had his carnivora after all. He, Croyce, was a horticulturist and knew little about vines and plants. But he could see with half an eye that these meat-eaters were large enough to feed upon rats, rabbits, and other small animals, as well as upon butterflies, moths and birds. Doubtless, intensive cultivation and almost forced feeding had developed unusually large and powerful specimens. It was rather a horrid thought. How far could such a plan be carried? Blood and bone-meal at the roots of a plant which could digest a rabbit might develop—sooner or later—a plant which would devour a man!

HE MOUNTED the old mule and rode on, pulling his poncho over his knees. Although it was hot, he was shivering. He told himself that he was wet, in spite of the equestrian raincoat. But even the rain was warm. The wind was warm. It came in hot gusts. He was now on the landward beach and it blew across the jungle to him. It was moist and hot, and it brought a distinctly unpleasant smell to his nostrils. The mule seemed nervous and hobbled along in a sort of running walk.

Suddenly Croyce spied a heap of the steel drums which he had noted before. They lay, carelessly thrown, around the roots of a tree. His eyes went from drums and roots up to heavy, sturdy trunk. Bark and leaves were unlike anything he had

seen before. The tree began branching at about ten feet from the ground, and its branches had a curious, unfinished appearance. Some of them looked as though they were a half instead of a whole branch; as though, grafted together, two might be complete and symmetrical.

Kicking the old mule in the ribs, he persuaded it underneath the tree. It blew violently, through its nose, as though terrified, and Croyce said to it:

"You darned old bag-of-bones, you! I was almost ashamed to ride you. I felt as though I should carry you instead of letting you carry me. Then you forget you're a hundred years old and pretend you're a skittish, nervous colt."

The animal stood, quieted by his voice, but its ears were alert and he felt its sides heave. He stood in his stirrups and, reaching far up, touched the sleek side of a forking limb.

A shuddering rustle ran through the whole tree. It seemed, in a second, to come alive. To his horror, the forking limb which his fingers had barely touched, closed, scissors-like, with and upon the limb from which it forked.

The mule, with a scream of terror, reared and leapt forward, almost unseating him. In spite of its age, it carried him, at full gallop, along the path. Not until they had come again to the grassy road of the back beach did it slow its pace, for all its rider's pulling.

Croyce took a khaki handkerchief and wiped cold sweat from his face. Cold tremors ran from the back of his neck along his spine and down his legs. He finally pulled the frightened mule to a halt, but he could not turn it around. He had to look back, over his shoulder, to see the spot he had just left.

Against the jungle wall the tree had a curiously contracted look. It seemed to have shrunk and folded in upon itself. He told himself that it must be some un-

usual kind of sensitive plant—something like the mimosa, which closed its leaves at any touch.

But, as he rode on, Croyce wiped cold sweat from his face.

IMMEDIATELY after supper Croyce told Harvey about the tree. He tried to be casual as he suggested that they go into his room and talk matters over, but he could not hide the uneasiness in his voice and in his eyes. Long afterward, he was to remember that scene in the monkishly bare, small room—Harvey seated in the one straight chair and he seated on the narrow bed—and to thank his God that he had, at least, told his companion all he knew.

When he had finished, Harvey still smoked, without comment, staring at the floor, and Croyce heard himself repeating aimlessly, foolishly:

"It must have been some gigantic sensitive plant—something like the mimosa; which closes at human touch. It must have been only that. It could not have been anything else."

Harvey stared at the floor and smoked.

"Unquestionably," he said, at last. "I have heard tales of trees which closed, somewhat in the way which you describe. But I don't see how it links up with—the rest of this business."

"Then you acknowledge," asked Croyce directly, "that there is—something?"

Harvey retreated into the cynical, hard-boiled pose which he usually took.

"*Something?* Of course there's something. Any fool can see that. But it is nothing more than result of hasty organization, bad management, adverse weather conditions, and other unfortunate circumstances. We were forced to start this job in such a hurry that we were unable to organize properly. We have the poorest kind of labor. That showed with the

first swing of an ax. The negroes are of the laziest, most ignorant, superstitious type. The sawyers are Black Irish—the kind that will cut your throat for a shilling. I told them today that I didn't believe they had ever thrown trees before. Every one fell a different way, and several times there were near-accidents. Mulcahy tried to talk back to me and said there was something wrong with the place. One more crack out of him and I'm going to throw him into the creek!"

Harvey's voice was so discouraged that Croyce tried to cheer him.

"Perhaps it's the rain, and this close, damp heat. It makes me feel queer. I think, as soon as the rain stops, we can lick them into shape and go faster."

"Let's hope so, at any rate. And grousing about it won't help us. We've had a hard day and we'd better turn in and get a night's sleep. Cheerio!"

CROYCE was weary and he slept well. Through his dreams, he heard the rain on the roof. But, when the camp whistle waked him at five, rain had ceased and day was breaking clear.

He found Harvey at the breakfast table, engaged with coffee and corn cakes. White, usually first of the three, was absent. Bones said he had been called out. Before they finished eating, he came in, hungry and angry.

"That dirty Mick you have in charge of the saw gang stole Bones' mule. I don't want to slow up your work, but I'm going to have him arrested. I'll ask the sheriff to wait and grab him when you're through and he's leaving the island."

"What did he want with it?" asked Croyce. "What can he do with it over here?"

"Nothing, of course. He's crazy drunk. He was drinking all yesterday. Instead of going to bed last night, six of them got together and drank. The other five are

so stewed that they don't know anything; but the sober ones say that, just about midnight, Mulcahy went around the camp shaking them awake and inviting them to go fox-hunting with him. They cursed him and tried to quiet him down, but he finally went away, yelling out a hunting-song and swearing that he would ride the mule."

"He'll kill the poor devil," interpolated Croyce. "It could hardly carry me, although I rode slowly, yesterday."

"Pity it wouldn't kill him," said Harvey.

White said: "If he runs it, it will. It falls down, even in the road. If he pretends he's fox-hunting and goes busting through these woods, he'll wind up with a broken neck—and you'll wind up with a better fo'man."

Croyce had a swift vision of the old mule, emaciated, terrified, bracing its stiff forelegs in fear and snorting as Mulcahy urged it on. A shiver of fear ran down his spine at the picture of man and beast going alone, in the night, into that wet, hot, evil wood. What would it do to one who rode, in the darkness, deep and far into it? He shook his head, as though to clear eyes and brain of fantasy, and he spoke, scoffingly, to the two others.

"You'll find Mulcahy somewhere on the beach sleeping off his binge. Whether or not you'll find the poor devil of a mule alive, I don't know. But I do know that I'm going to fire that scoundrel just as soon as I find him. So you needn't delay sending word to your sheriff to come for him."

White said: "I've already sent out several darkies who know the island to try to locate him and Bones's mule. I told Bones to go after them, as soon as he gave us breakfast, but he got down on his knees and howled and said his mule was dead already. They have all sorts of

queer ideas about this place. I hardly blame them."

Harvey picked up his hat.

"What we need is a whipping overseer. Jungles—ghosts—voodoo—Black Irish! It's enough to make a man see things. Mulcahy deserves whatever he's got. Let's get on to work. The negroes can find him."

THEY promoted a sober Irishman to the deserter's place; and, in the mother-of-pearl daybreak, the giant saws began to whine. The sawyers had progressed, now, for about a half-mile on the ridge of pine. The axmen followed and flanked them, cutting the smaller trees and the underbrush. At nine o'clock one of the negroes came in to say that they had covered beaches, sand dunes, and marshes, without trace of Mulcahy. White said:

"Then divide up and go over all the roads and paths you can find. If there's no trace of him by noon, come back, and we'll go in with you."

Croyce saw a startled expression flash over the brown face. The man pulled his forelock and muttered, respectfully:

"Tank yuh, Boss. Ah sure glad ef you-all go 'long wid me."

As he went away, White spoke to Croyce:

"If you and Mr. Harvey can leave, I'll take you directly south on that trail I was telling you about. From it you can judge more of the growth than from anywhere else on the island. But better bring a couple of axmen, because it's likely to have grown up in spots."

Croyce called to Harvey, who gave directions to his new foreman, and then joined them.

"That fellow is anxious to make good," he said. "He seems glad of the promotion. None of the gang liked Mulcahy—except his five fellow drunks—so

I hope that our troubles are over and the work will go better."

Croyce had told off a couple of powerful darkies from his axmen.

"You boys just follow us, now. We'll need you, later, to cut a path."

Glad as children of any change from the routine of steady work, they swung axes over muscular shoulders and followed after the three white men. The superintendent was leading them on a narrow footpath, directly south. He said:

"Mr. Chalcedyne had this cut and, during his life, he kept it cleared. It used to run from one end of the island to the other. He called it Longitude Alley. Bones used to ride his mule on it."

"For heaven's sake," Harvey asked, "how did the mule get on the island?"

White laughed.

"It was brought as a carcass, on a flat-boat, for fertilizer. They rolled it from the barge to the wharf and were just going to haul it inland when it switched its tail gently and gave a little coughing moan. Bones said it had been 'in a trance.' I think the poor thing was just starved to death. Mr. Chalcedyne, who was very humane, had everybody running around getting soft, hot gruel in place of bran mash. When they revived it and got it on its feet, Bones was so crazy about it that Mr. Chalcedyne gave it to him. He plants corn and oats for it, and it grazes for its hay. He really loves the old bag-of-bones, and he's upset about it today. But he's not enough upset to go out and hunt for it. He howled like a dog and told me the mule was already dead and he was scared."

Croyce, who loved all animals, remarked: "I'd enjoy beating up Mulcahy."

White went on: "Taking this way, we are really searching for them. The negroes I sent out would never dare to come this path by themselves. If Mulcahy

and the mule really got into the jungle, we'll have to turn in and lead the hunt ourselves. It gets thicker as we go on. The vines begin in about two miles. Mr. Chalcedyne kept them to the southern end of the island. They grow exceedingly fast; so they may be a quarter-mile nearer than that."

For several minutes, Croyce had had his eye fixed on a towering pine. Its trunk and branches seemed to be twined in some kind of foreign growth, but as they drew nearer he saw that its branches were all dead. So high was it that he could see it above the rest of the trees. As they approached, the growth upon it took on a strangely familiar look. He said to White:

"The vines on that dead pine look like the vines you are talking about."

The superintendent shaded his keen gray eyes with a hand. He whistled sharply:

"By Godfrey! If they are, they've grown a mile in six months."

WHEN they reached the pine, it was easy to see that the vines were those of which Croyce spoke. The huge trunk was repulsively twined with enormous, fleshy tendrils and, set at intervals upon these, wide-open flower cups beckoned and gaped. The whole effect was unspeakably horrid, in spite of a strange, savage beauty. It was as though the evil blossoms were alive and soliciting. Shamelessly, they flaunted themselves, beckoning, writhing voluptuously, trying, in every way, to attract the attention of their prey. A number of butterflies hovered, in small colored clouds, around the tree; and, every now and then, Croyce saw one flutter up against it. Watching closely, he never saw the small flutterer emerge. He was aware that the atmosphere was tainted faintly, unpleasantly.

Harvey interrupted his thoughts, which were running away from him.

"You'd better not stand so close to the damn thing. It's dead and dried. It's liable to fall any minute—and you seem to be hypnotized."

Coming back to reality, he heard faint crackings from the tree. It was swaying in the wind and its long festoons swayed with it. White said:

"Those infernal vines kill everything that they touch. Mr. Chalcedyne planned to keep them confined to the lower end, entirely. I haven't been on this path for six months; and, of course, since his death, we haven't kept trimming. Still, I don't see—I can't see—how the things could come a mile—a whole mile in six months."

Harvey said sharply, resentfully:

"It's been a rainy season. In this country, we have no idea of how fast tropical flora grows. I suppose any carnivora would kill a tree upon which they climbed. Roosting turkey buzzards eventually kill the tree in which they roost. Such plants must bring myriads of small bugs and flies and worms, which get under the bark and bore into the bole. What I'm thinking about, however, is how we'll take this tree down. Nothing on earth, except those vines, is balancing it and holding it up. Conversely, they can throw it, in a second, by tightening on one side or the other."

They stood, staring at the tall tree, and it swayed, gently, under their gaze. There was something rhythmic and seductive in its movements and in the play of the closing and unclosing of the beautiful, foul flowers. Croyce was thinking that a contraction of those muscular, enwrapping arms could pull the whole structure one way or another—one way or another—as the vines chose. . . .

He was interrupted by a startled shout

from one of the axmen behind them. Turning, the three white men saw a negro running, full speed, toward them. It was Cuffee, leader of the group which had been sent to seek Mulcahy. When he reached them, he staggered against and clutched a sapling to steady himself. His black face was gray with fear, his mouth worked and slobbered as he tried to speak. White said sharply, knowing the race, and hoping to snap him out of his terrors:

"Talk, you fool! Talk! Have you found Mulcahy?"

Cuffee nodded—or, rather, his chin dropped loosely from his lower jaw.

"Yes, Boss—we fine um—fine um—an' de mule."

"Go on, you fool! What scared you? Tell me, or I'll shake it out of you!"

"Boss—we fine um. But—Jedus!—dem wine done et um up!"

THE horror of it almost unseated Croyce's reason as he gazed down. In the midst of that luxuriant, glossily-healthy foliage, lay what was left of a man and a mule—which is to say, what the plants did not want. What they could ingest, they had taken. They were gorged—replete—heavy with food. They were more still than Croyce had ever seen them before. All their cup-like blossoms were closed and they barely stirred in the breeze. They slept—like a python which has fed—heaving gently, as though they breathed. Their green was more vivid, their stems more juicy, because of what lay in their midst.

It was easy to reconstruct what had happened. The mule had fallen over a log. Mulcahy had been riding it fast, drunkenly, crazily. The narrow print of its donkey-like hooves were deeply set in the wet ground. It had approached at full gallop, stumbled, fallen headlong on its rider. He had been unable to

escape and had been pinned underneath it. His skeleton showed no broken bones. They would never know whether or not he was conscious.

The mule had broken one of its forelegs and so been unable to rise again. Fantastically, awfully, it had taken its revenge. Croyce thought of its patient, frightened eyes; and he seemed to hear the dumb brute speak: "*Judge between us, oh, man, my master! I did not mean him any harm. All I asked was a little food and to work for those who were kind to me. I knew that Horror lived in the swamp and I refused to carry you there. He jerked my mouth—he lashed and kicked me—he tortured me until I obeyed him. So, when he brought me to death by the Horror, could I be sorry that he died with me? Although he was more brute than I, his presence was all the comfort I had!*"

Through a reddish haze, Croyce looked down at the torn rags of dark brown pelt. He lifted the broken foreleg and felt that both greater and smaller bone had snapped. The legs were intact—too hard for digestion—but curiously light, as though sucked dry. Upon them, at intervals, he saw raw spots about the size of a quarter-dollar. The barrel-like formation of ribs, with ragged fur clinging here and there, rose above the green carpet which came well above a man's ankle. As Croyce looked, a thick green tendril, swayed and came to rest upon it, moving, almost caressingly, across the bare bones.

With a yell of rage, Croyce went berserk. He snatched an ax from the nearest negro and began slashing about him, making a swath of destruction. To his surprise he saw White at his side, chopping away. They worked in grim silence, except for the rip and thud of the blades, until a circle had been made around that gruesome charnel-house. The cut vines seemed to writhe, and Croyce noted it

with joy. He noted that, where they ceased chopping, the tendrils beyond drew back from them, half as if in fear and half with the movement of snakes about to strike. He was avenging, as well as he could, the Irishman and the negro's mule. He was battling against a foe more hateful because unnatural. Was it vegetable or animal?

Harvey's voice recalled him to himself. Harvey was shouting, his voice hoarse, his face pinched and as pallid as clay:

"You damned fools, cut it out! You've frightened all the darkies away. Now we'll have to carry—them—back to the lodge, ourselves."

Croyce suggested getting Jason's cart and four strong laborers to pull it, but White advised keeping the men away.

"The darkies will tell, of course, but the Irish will think they exaggerate. Being superstitious themselves, they have no belief in other people's superstitions. If you want to keep any labor over here, you'll have to tell them, when they ask, that possums and buzzards might have done this."

They decided, at last, to tell only the foreman who had taken Mulcahy's place. In the noon hour, White brought him back, the two of them pulling Bones's cart. Flannigan was a bold man, but he went white to the lips when he saw.

CROYCE and Harvey returned to the lodge, to find trouble awaiting them. The negro hands had left in a body as soon as their comrades had told them the news. They had signaled a passing potato boat and gone without waiting for any wages. Old Bones's wrinkled face was the only black one on the island.

They had been axmen, the Irish the sawyers. The two gangs had disliked each other and their foremen, to prevent fights, had kept them away from each other. So Croyce and Harvey had reason

to hope that the negroes might have told them nothing. Harvey, who was handling the sawyers, went to their camp to investigate.

They knew of Mulcahy's death and knew, besides, that something was wrong. They were surly and suspicious, and he did not know what to tell them. He consulted Flannigan—who was making a better foreman, by far, than Mulcahy had made—and Flannigan advised him to tell, only, that the negroes were frightened away.

It was good psychology. In laughing at the negroes and boasting about themselves, the sawyers lost the edge of alarm and showed no wish to stop work. Harvey offered them extra wages to cut as long as daylight lasted and to double on the jobs and release some of their number for axmen. They accepted, apparently satisfied; but, walking back to the lodge, Harvey said to Flannigan:

"I feel that I ought to have told those men all."

Flannigan shook his red head.

"Would you wish to lose them—to a man? Besides which, what—in the name of God—can you tell them, Mистер Harvey?"

"Everything. I'd tell them that Chalcedyne had carnivora—I mean meat-eating plants—and that he fed and developed them until they became large and strong. I'd tell them—for I am sure of this—that his death cut off their meat supply and left them, by their own efforts, to satisfy their appetite. Being unnaturally strong and large, they did not die. They learned to forage for themselves and grew stronger and more savage——"

Flannigan's expression stopped him short.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir; but—for the love of God—don't tell them! What do they know—such as they—about meat-eating plants? They'll think you're drunk,

and laugh in your face, and we'll get no more work out of them."

Harvey told Croyce of it before the afternoon was over. The latter stood, gazing moodily toward the sea-oats on the dunes. Several acres of it swept inland, up to the very edge of the wood where cut trees and chopped brush were drying rapidly.

"I suppose he's right, at that," said Croyce. "Unless a man saw, he couldn't believe. I'll start the ax gang south tomorrow on the trail that White was showing us today."

He intended to have an ax in his own hand as he led them. From now on, it would be a pleasure to slash at those succulent stems. Both he and Harvey were secretly glad that it was now expedient, because of the scarcity of men, for them to work with the gangs. Working helped one not to remember that macabre procession on the beach, that two-wheel cart pushed and pulled by four men sick until they staggered.

He walked over to the deserted camp which had housed the negro axmen, and he chose a keen blade with a long hickory handle. As he whirled it over his head, he looked toward the dunes, toward that field of dry oats and grass shimmering in the evening light.

CROYCE took a savage pleasure in his long, razor-sharp ax. It had troubled him to destroy the jungle. It did not trouble him any more. At the head of his small crew—for Harvey had given him eight of the sawyers—he pushed, by way of Longitude Alley, deeper and deeper into the wood. Vines and underbrush grew there as they did not grow on the northern side. They made headway overnight, as though fighting back at the invaders. In the dewy wetness of early day, the axmen would arrive at a clearing,

which they had left bare the night before, and find its chopped brush laced and bound with withes of muscular, living vine. It began to be a game with them, a game which was also a war. They were making headway and pushing a wide road fast through the enemy's country; but, in other places, where they were not on guard, the vines were advancing every hour.

Croyce was certain now that he heard them whispering as they grew in the night. He slept poorly in spite of hard labor, and he lost his appetite. When the wind changed to southwest, it was almost unbearable for the rank, unclean fetid odor that it brought. The men in the saw camp noticed it and were restless and quarrelsome. When one of Croyce's gang found a rabbit caught and half digested, it was all that Croyce could do to keep them from quitting on the spot.

Harvey's sawyers made slower headway but moved forward on a wider front. They were now approaching the tall, dead pine anchored, on every side, by vines. To saw it was, of course, out of the question: it was a job for the axmen to do. The wind was blowing on the morning that Croyce had planned to take it down. He watched it sway and dip and wished that he had done the job on a stiller day. But the saws were almost upon their heels and it had to be removed before them. He called to two of his best men and walked forward, ax on his shoulder.

He was so close that he did not see the danger as soon as those farther saw it. He heard a creak, and a rending split, just as he heard the men's shout of warning. With a yell to his two men to follow him, he looked swiftly up and then sprinted.

Burke ran with him, but Corley did not. Corley lost his head and stood still.

Then, like a stampeded steer, he dashed in the wrong direction.

It was hard to find him, at first, for the giant tree had smashed and crumbled as it fell. The other six axmen had seen it more clearly than either Croyce or Burke, and all eight of them were at the spot in fifteen seconds after it struck. So swiftly had they come that there was still movement along the torn trunk. Croyce told himself that the tree had not settled from its impact with the earth. Then he saw.

He saw that the tree was lying, a mass of dead, broken timber, but that the vines were reaching, struggling, fighting for something underneath.

Shouting curses, he stamped them down, for he had dropped his ax as he ran. He cursed and trampled and pushed them aside and broke them with his bare hands. And, as he did, he called to his men to do likewise—to find Corley—to get his body out and prevent abomination from being accomplished.

In a few minutes they drew it out—whole, but marked for the obscene feast. Its shirt was shredded and the exposed flesh was pocked by foul mouths and dribbling blood. A gigantic axman turned away, retching, and began to vomit.

They carried it back, a man holding each limb; for they dared not leave it, even for seconds. They tried to avoid passing the sawyers, and Croyce ordered his axmen to hold their tongues. His only desire was to find Harvey and to get everyone off the island. As he walked last of the short cortège, his eyes sought out the dry grass fields to east.

He had them lay Corley upon his own bed, and again he told them to hold their tongues. But he knew, as he watched them hurry away, that they were going to tell their comrades.

BONES, shivering as if with ague, followed him onto the veranda. He had trouble in understanding what the old man was trying to say:

"Ah jes' wish fuh tell yuh, Boss, dat Ah got muh trus'-me-Gawd hid. Ah got muh trus'-me-Gawd hid behin' dat big pa'm tree on de front beach."

Croyce said "Yes, yes;" but it did not register. He wanted to find Harvey, and Harvey was not with the saw gang. They had told him that Harvey and White had gone to see about a tree. As he stood on the step, looking dazedly out, he saw the gang emerge from the wood and go, at a run, across the island, toward the back beach. He exclaimed, half to Bones and half to himself:

"Where in the world are they trying to go? They can't get off the island."

Bones began to mumble again.

"Yessuh. Dat wat Ah try fuh tell yuh. Jason came in wid de la'nch less'n t'ree hours ago. Dem mens know dat an' dey gwine gittum an' mek Jason carry um 'way. But, Ah got muh trus'-me-Gawd hid on de beach way nobody fin' um."

The trust-me-Gawd—the frail, home-made boat in which the sea-island negroes dare the ocean—would be the only thing to save the three whites and Bones now. Croyce visioned the scene on the little pier when the Irish rushed the small put-put boat. Unless they stood back and made four or five trips, they would sink her before she left the dock. Even had there been room for Croyce, he would not have left without Harvey and White. The faithful negro was saving them by the offer of his bateau. He shook his head as though to clear it from awful phantasmagoria. First of all, he must find Harvey. He and Bones must stick together. He could not be alone now, and he must protect the old man. Over the whisper of the wind, he heard the whisper of tendrils growing.

They started together, along the back beach, for Bones had seen Harvey and White start that way. The vines had encoached upon the beach and almost covered the grassy road. Some stimulus—possibly rain—was causing this terrific growth. For years they had been quiescent, normal. Now they awakened, like long-dormant beasts. He told himself that it was the rain. The rainy spell must have caused it. It could not possibly be the scent of flesh and blood that had madened them. . . .

Brain reeling, he hurried along the road, with the old black cook stumbling after him. He had gone thus for nearly a mile when he saw White at the jungle's edge. White was standing, harmlessly, underneath a large tree. Croyce slowed his pace and breathed deep with relief as the superintendent waved in greeting. His eyes went from the tall, thin figure standing beneath the tree up the smooth trunk which ran, without branches, for about fifteen feet. The forked, unfinished limbs had a vaguely familiar look. Somewhere, on a smaller scale, he had seen a tree like that.

Suddenly he saw that a rope was dangling from a limb, and that a second figure was going, hand over hand, up into the tree.

Harvey?

Croyce's heart stood still. Harvey was swinging himself up. He was going up, gripping with hands and feet as the trained foresters go. For some reason—to examine—or to limb the tree—*he was going up!*

Croyce heard himself screaming wildly, insanely, to his friend to stop. He was running again, not trotting now, but sprinting with every ounce in him. White was staring at him agape, but Harvey was still going up. As Croyce came within a few hundred feet of the tree, Harvey

grasped the limb, near its fork, and swung himself astride of it.

To Croyce it seemed to snap shut as the slaving mouth of a wild beast snaps. Harvey cried once and then was silent. The only sound, above the wind, was the shuddering, rustling, closing sound of the leaves and boughs above their heads.

WHITE had brought an ax, and Croyce whirled and seized it. He was insane. With a madman's strength, he swung and hacked at the sleek, thick trunk until White and Bones dragged him away. White said:

"If you throw it, it will kill us all. You've cut it half through. Let it suffer—die slowly. Bones says that the others have gone. We must go. We must hurry and leave in his bateau."

As they ran down the path through the jungle, they heard, on all sides, the rustle and hiss of life. Several times, a long tendril flung out and attempted to coil about one of the three. They ran as men run for their lives, and they took turns at helping the old cook along. They ran past the deserted camps, past the dead pine writhing with growth. They ran past a circle of stumps where the nine magnolia trees had stood. They had been recently sawn. As he passed them, Croyce saw, in the dark, gleaming leaves, one perfect, wide-open flower, with its petals as red as blood.

When they came out on the dunes and saw the clean ocean in front of them, they were panting like animals and barely staggering along. The clean sea wind blew in their faces—blew directly from the east. It rippled the long, dry fields of pale yellow oats and swamp-cane which ran, from the beach, to the cut wood and brush where the forest had been.

Croyce staggered up a dune and stood, swaying, upon its crest. He breathed deep

of the stiff east wind and his eyes ran over the long grass fields. Then he began to laugh aloud—wildly, exultantly.

Bones fell on his knees and began to pray:

"Oh, Chris', my boss-man gone crazy! Oh, Gawd, please fuh tek off de spell 'dem t'ing in de woods put on my boss!"

But Croyce shouted aloud, exultantly:

"Thank God for an east wind—and 'dry grass—and a match!"

He lighted it and it flared like tinder, and he lighted it in another place. Long stripes of red, like gashes of blood, ran through it, always toward the jungle. White and Bones, without his help, had

dragged the boat to the water's edge. They had to come back and drag him away—down the beach—and into the boat.

The hand-made oars carried it out, beyond the surf, and they steered northward. They would round the island's upper end and take the creek to the nearest mainland. White said:

"Croyce, this old man musn't row, Snap out of it and take his oar!"

And Dicon Croyce took one last look at the fire, now shooting above the jungle; choked back his dreadful laughter and took the oar from the tired old black hand.