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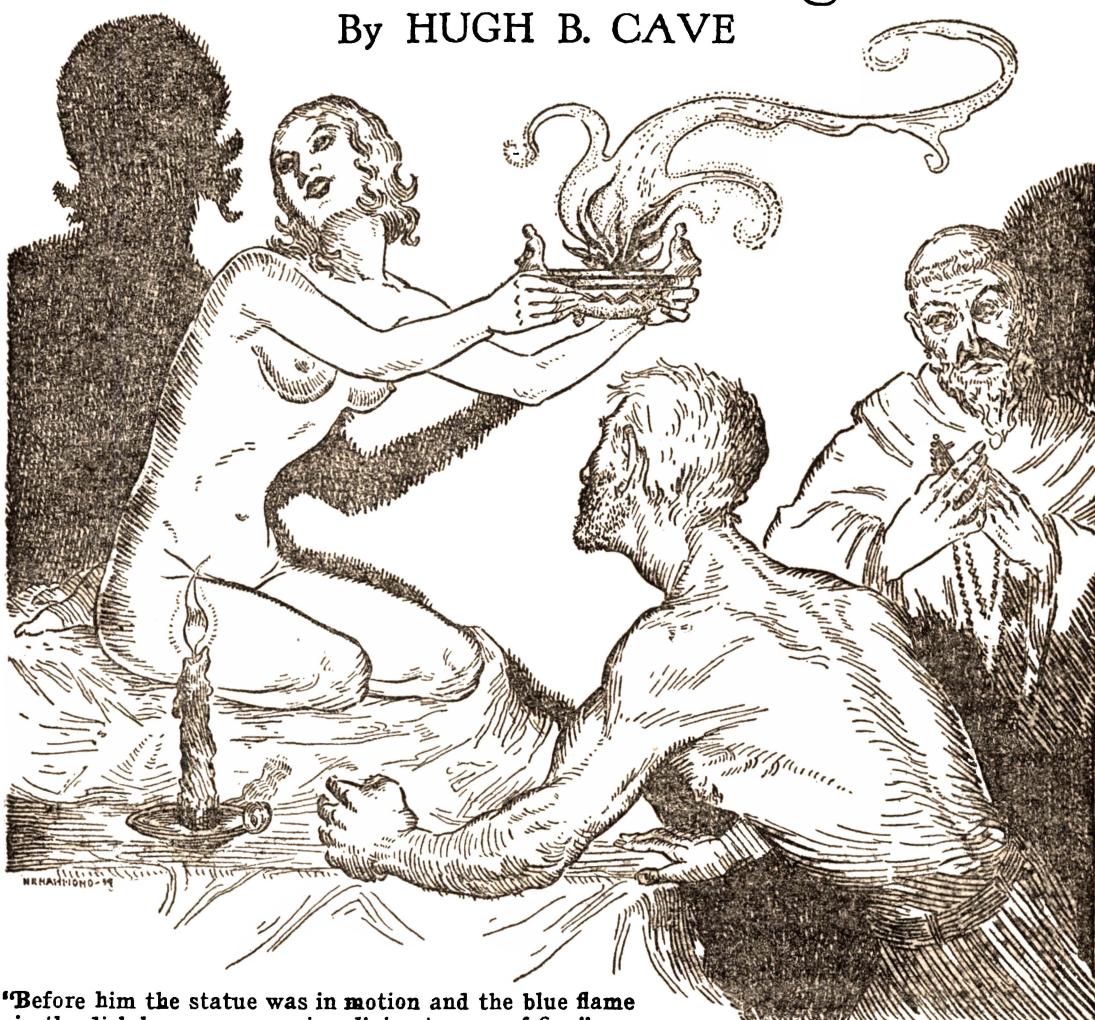
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The Isle of Dark Magic

By HUGH B. CAVE



"Before him the statue was in motion and the blue flame in the dish became a weaving, living tongue of fire."

An utterly different story is this—about a corpse-woman, and a man who hid himself away from the world

CAPTAIN BRUK, master of the *Bella Gale*, was the man who brought Peter Mace to Faikana; and since I did not meet the boy until his arrival, I must tell the first part of this tale as it was seen through Captain Bruk's eyes. So, then, I must go back a little.

Bruk was "on the beach," as the saying is, when the Jornsen Trading Company, in Papeete, offered him the *Bella Gale*. The Jornsen Company, like most of Pa-

peete's smaller concerns, operated a fleet of second-rate tramps which were schooner-rigged and sailed under their own spread. No captain of repute would have accepted command of even the best of them. But Bruk was desperate.

His orders were to touch Faaite, sail north to Fakarava and Taou, and wind up at Rarioa, bartering for as much copra as the schooner would hold. He was to be back in Papeete inside the month, if

possible. And he was to carry one passenger, a white man, as far as Rarioa.

The white man was Peter Mace, and, given his choice, Bruk would have picked more promising company or none at all. Peter Mace was a thin, worried-looking youth possessed of a pair of eyes which missed nothing. He could not have been more than twenty-five, and he had been in Papeete, so he said, only three weeks.

He came aboard an hour before the schooner sailed, and he brought with him a large wooden packing-case which he insisted on storing in his own cabin. And for two days he kept entirely to himself, offering not a word of explanation to any one.

Later, however, he found time and the desire to ask questions. Before the *Bella Gale* reached Faaite, he had demanded the name of every atoll in Paumotu. He had questioned Bruk concerning the habits of the islanders, how they treated white men, what atolls were the least populated, and whether Bruk knew any small motu off the schooner routes where a man might be entirely alone. A thousand things he insisted on knowing, but not one word did he speak of himself or of his work or of his reason for going to Rarioa. And not once did he mention the meaning of the packing-case in his cabin..

Then one day, out of a clear sky, he said:

"If I give you five hundred dollars, Captain, will you go out of your way to put me ashore at Faikana?"

"Five hundred dollars!" Bruk echoed.

"Is that too little?"

"In the name of all that's holy," Bruk demanded, "what do you want with Faikana? If I put you down there, you'll wait half your life for a tub to take you off!"

"If five hundred dollars is too little," Peter Mace smiled, "we'll double it."

And that was all Bruk got out of him. Five hundred dollars, doubled, and Faikana. Faikana, the end of all creation, a forgotten island inhabited by a mere handful of Marquesan natives and a missionary with queer ideas!

So Peter Mace came to Faikana. And I, Father Jason, the "missionary with queer ideas," met him for the first time and wondered about that strange wooden packing-case which he brought with him.

WITHIN a week, the boy had established himself. He first found an abandoned native shack and moved into it, taking his belongings with him. Then, with a methodical lack of haste which brought amazing results, he obtained native assistance and began building for himself a permanent residence, more than three miles from the little settlement of which my house was the center. Apparently he preferred to be alone with whatever business had brought him to our island. Yet he came several times to visit me, and politely invited me to spend the first evening with him in his new home, when it was completed.

This I did, and was mildly surprised. Though I had heard whispers from the natives, I had discreetly remained away from the scene of the boy's operations until implicitly invited there by him. I found the house to be practically isolated in a natural clearing in the midst of that belt of desolation which covers the northernmost tip of Faikana. Its only means of communication with the village was a narrow, perilous trail through dense jungle, which entailed more than an hour of the hardest kind of walking. Surely Peter Mace had no desire for casual visitors!

The house itself, however, was com-

plete in every detail—an elaborate two-roomed native dwelling with an additional small chamber upstairs. We sat there that evening, he and I, sipping native brandy and playing chess. Our conversation never once touched on personalities. Neither he nor I asked questions, nor did he offer to show me what lay in the upstairs room. When the time came for me to go, he wished me a pleasant good-night and instructed his newly acquired native boy, Menegai, to accompany me back to the village. And for two weeks, that was all I saw of him!

But native curiosity, you know, is a thing easily aroused; and I heard many strange stories during those two weeks. "Peteme," the Marquesans called the boy, and Peteme, so they said, was a devil incarnate. During the daytime they heard him working in the upstairs room of his house, and when he was not working he was striding about like a caged animal, muttering and grumbling to himself. Several times, when they had crept close to the downstairs window and peered in, they had seen him sitting at the table, hunched over a pile of books, with whisky bottles stacked in front of him. He was drunk, they said. His eyes were distended and bloodshot, and his hands shook as they held the books. But what he had in that upstairs chamber they did not know, for it was impossible to peer in the window and find out.

All these stories I knew to be greatly exaggerated, because my people were superstitious children at best. But I knew, too, that there must be some truth in them, for natives are not deliberate liars unless they can, by lying, gain material things for themselves. And so, thinking to invite the boy to my home and there talk to him about himself, I went one afternoon to his house.

He was not there when I arrived. I

knocked, and received no answer, and, on opening the door, found no one within. It was strange, I thought, that he should go away and leave the door open, for I saw that he had fitted it with a patent lock. I called his name aloud, and then, bewildered, looked about me.

The table was piled high with books, and with cardboard-covered manuscripts. Curiously I looked at these, and then intently I studied them. I shuddered, then, and felt suddenly as if I were in an unhallowed place. If a fire had been burning, I should have thrown those books into it, despite the boy's certain anger on discovering my act. For the books were forbidden books, each and every one of them; and I say forbidden, not because I come of a religious calling, but because such volumes have been condemned by truth and science alike. One of them was the *Black Cults* of Von Heller. Another, in manuscript form, inscribed in Latin, was the unexpurgated edition of what is now *The Veil Unseen*. A third I believed to be—and I now know that my belief was correct—the missing portion of that perilous treatise, *Le Culte des Morts*, of whose missing portion only four copies are reputed to exist! Merciful God, these were no books for the soul of a twenty-five-year-old boy who lived alone with his thoughts!

Utterly confounded, I turned from the table and sat for some time in a chair near the open door, waiting impatiently for Peter Mace to return. When he did not come, I rose and paced the floor, and suddenly recalled what the natives had whispered about the room above me. Was it possible, I thought, that the books on the table beside me had some connection with the contents of the chamber above? Could it be that Peter Mace had gone deeper into these matters than the mere study of them?

I hesitated. This was not my home; I had no right to climb the narrow ladder which hung so invitingly in the shadowed corner of the room where I stood. Yet I had a right, as a religious adviser, to know what sins the boy was guilty of, so that I might instruct him accordingly. Deliberately, therefore, I strode across the floor.

THE ladder was a flimsy one, solid enough, perhaps, to bear the weight of the boy's lean body, but not so solid that I felt comfortable in ascending it. I groped upward slowly and cautiously, testing each rung before trusting my weight upon it. Then I reached above me and pushed aside the atap mat which covered the aperture in the ceiling; and with a sigh of relief I thrust my arms through the hole. And then two things happened. Behind and below me, the door of the house clattered back against the wall, as Peter Mace came over the threshold. And before me, on a level with my eyes, I saw a thing sitting Buddha-fashion on the floor of that upstairs room.

I saw the thing only for an instant, before the boy's drunken hands clawed at my legs and dragged me down. I saw it, too, in semi-darkness, which accounts for the mistake of my first impression — which impression I carried with me for weeks afterward, believing it to be truth. For the thing I saw was a woman, naked and staring at me. A young and lovely girl, sitting utterly without motion on a pedestal made of boards covered with cloth. Beside her stood the packing-case in which she had been transported to Faikana. In her hands, extended toward me, was a large metal bowl in which some chemical, or combination of chemicals, burned with an odor as sweet as the smell of ether.

That was all I saw. The rung of the

ladder broke under me as Peter Mace hurled himself upon me. I fell sideways against the wail. The fall stunned me. The next thing I knew, Peter Mace was standing wide-legged before me, and my back was against the table, and my hands were rigidly outflung to keep the boy's contorted face from thrusting itself into mine.

At that moment Peter Mace did not know me. He was insane with rage. His face was drained of all color, and the veins on his forehead protruded like ancient scars. Animal hate was in his eyes. Guttural words, uncouth and terrible, snarled from his lips. He would have battered me to unconsciousness, perhaps to death, if I had not stumbled backward and groped my way to the door.

Then I ran, knowing better than to remain and try to reason with a man so fiendishly angry. I had no desire to fight him; nor could I, at that time, explain the reason for my investigation of that forbidden room. I ran, as fast as my legs would take me; and when I looked back, after plowing blindly through the deep cogon grass to the edge of the small clearing, I saw him standing rigid in the doorway of the house, his hands clutching the door-frame and his legs spread wide beneath him.

And with that picture engraved in my mind, I turned and plunged down the trail to the village.

THAT was the beginning of what I may rightly call a reign of terror — not for me, but for the natives. From that day on they were not safe in going near Peter Macc's house, and yet, despite the danger, their curiosity continued to take them there. More than one tale reached me of the boy's insane fury — of how, on discovering some luckless native inside the forbidden boundary, he had

rushed out like a man gone mad, pursuing the native even into the jungle. True, these tales reached me after many recounts, and were certainly magnified for my benefit; but they were nevertheless significant. I did not go again to Peter Mace's domain.

And then one day he came to me! Alone he came, in the heat of noonday, bare-headed and bare-footed. Gazing at him, no man could ever have guessed that this dishevelled degenerate had been, less than three weeks ago, a young and well-to-do adventurer. He faced me unsteadily. His eyes were black-rimmed, blood-streaked. His breath was foul with liquor fumes. And yet he came triumphantly. He glared at me! His wet lips, set in a facial mask which had not felt the touch of a razor for days, curled upward at the corners and grinned at me viciously.

"Well," he sneered, "are you still curious?"

I stood on the veranda of my house and stared at him, half afraid of him and half pitying him. But he wanted no pity. His filthy hands gripped the railing, and his bare feet were planted firmly on the steps. He returned my stare.

"Well, can't you speak?" he said. "Am I so drunk I can't be spoken to?"

"You are," I answered coldly. "You're too drunk to know what you're doing."

"That's what you think," he said, thrusting his face forward. "But I'm not doing anything, see? It's done. If you want to satisfy your damned curiosity, you can come back with me and *satisfy* it! And don't worry; I won't kick you out this time. I won't need to!"

Why I went with him, after such an outburst, I am not sure. Curiosity? Certainly, to a limited extent. But it was more than that. The boy was ill. He was mentally ill, morally ill. He needed help. It was my duty to go with him.

And I went. Assailed by doubts and by no little physical fear, I followed him into the jungle. Had he wished to murder me in safety and secrecy, he could have done so easily, in that labyrinth of gloom. The trail underfoot was slimy and uncertain after a night's rain. Not once did the sun beat down upon us through the ceiling of interlaced branches and drooling aroidinæ which hung above us at every step. On all sides the eternal drip, drip, drip of moisture accompanied our slow progress. No word passed between us.

He could have murdered me, I say; but he did nothing but trudge along like an automaton, slopping through pools of black mud and staring straight ahead of him. The physical effort of that unpleasant journey was doing something to him. When we reached the clearing where his house stood, he turned to look at me with bewildered eyes, as if he had forgotten why I had accompanied him. And, in truth, he had forgotten!

"What do you want?" he demanded sullenly.

I hesitated. I tried desperately to read what lay behind his challenging stare. I told myself that his bewilderment was genuine; that the knowledge of what he had done while in the grip of liquor and near-madness had, in reality, gone from him. So I said, very quietly, as we stood there on the steps of his house:

"You asked me to help you."

"Help me?" he frowned. "How?"

"You had something to tell me, to show me. Some trouble that was hurting you. You came to me because it is my duty to hear other men's troubles and show them, if I can, a way out."

For quite some time he studied me, as if he were studying some printed puzzle in a book and wondering if the given solution were the correct one. He raised

one hand to push the mop of hair out of his eyes, and then he chewed on the knuckles of that hand, gazing at me all the while like a small child trying very hard to recall certain things which had been forgotten. Finally he smiled and led the way into the house.

From that moment on, he was not the same. He turned to Menegai, his houseboy, who was standing near us, and told the native to go away and leave us alone. Then he motioned me silently to a chair, and drew up another chair facing me. He leaned forward, peered steadily at me, and finally said:

"Do you know who I am, Father?"

"Truthfully," I replied, "I do not."

"No, no, I don't mean that. Peter Mace is my real name. I mean, do you know *who* I am? *What* I am?"

"I should like to," I told him. "Then I might be able to help you."

"Yes, you might. But I'm not religious, Father. I don't believe in a God, that way. I know too much that is different."

"Tell me," I suggested softly.

And he told me.

His name was Peter Mace. Had I ever heard that name? Did I know what it meant in New York, Philadelphia? No? Well, names did not mean much in the South Seas, anyway—and he smiled wearily as he said that. What did it matter? *His* part of the name was unimportant, after all. He had been only a student at a well-known New York medical school—an honor student, until his fourth year, when he had been expelled in disgrace for certain lectures and experiments which were better left undescribed.

There had been a girl. A lovely girl, but a creature of the streets. Mureen Kennedy was her name. She had loved him.

"She was clean, pure," he told me. "We loved each other the way your God meant a boy and a girl to love. Nothing else in the world was worth thinking about. And—your God took her from me."

He, Peter Mace, had been living a life of secrecy at the time, reluctant to face his family after being expelled from the university. He had cast his lot with a likable young fellow who kept small and unpretentious rooms in the Village. This fellow, Jean Lanier, studied art. No! Created art!

"They laughed at him, Father, just as they laughed at everything beyond their understanding."

But *she* had died. Death had stalked those shadowed rooms, leering and screaming in derision, until—

"I went mad, Father. Sometimes I am still mad, when I think of it, of her. There she lay, in my arms, *dead*. A woman of the streets, they said. An unclean woman. But she was not! She was beautiful! For two days I sat beside her dead body, caressing her, staring at her, until my eyes could cry no more and I had no voice left for sobbing. All that while Jean Lanier kept silence, bringing me food and drink, respecting my anguish, never once condemning me. And then, in my madness, I conceived the idea of keeping her with me for ever!"

For ever? Peter Mace must have seen the horror that came into my eyes as I stared at him. He smiled and leaned forward to place his hand gently on my arm.

"Not that way, Father," he said, shaking his head. "You misunderstand. Jean Lanier, he was an artist, a sculptor. We stole money, he and I, and for a week he worked day and night, without sleeping, to make for me what I wanted. When it was finished, we covered her poor dead body and took it far from the

city, where every single thing was quiet and peaceful. There, at night, we buried her. No one missed her; no one asked questions. She was only a woman of the streets; and who cares when a woman of the streets disappears?"

He stared at me, and at the floor, and for a long time he did not speak again. Then he said heavily:

"I should never have done it, Father. I should never have made Jean Lanier do what he did. It drove me insane. It filled my mind with hate for Almighty God. And because I had studied these"—he pointed bitterly to the pile of forbidden books on the table beside us—"there was only one way for me to turn. I studied more and more. I *learned* things. Jean Lanier turned me out and would have no more of me. Wherever I went, with the thing Jean had made for me, people whispered and called me mad."

"And so," I said, "you came here to Faikana."

He nodded. "That, too, was part of the madness," he confessed. "It was no separate insanity in itself; it was a part of the whole. I had to get away from every living person. I had to be alone, with her. Do you understand?—I had to be alone with *her*! I had to finish what I had started! And I have! *I have!*"

All at once he was on his feet before me, laughing shrilly. I shrank from him, realizing the horror of the transformation that had taken place in him. I knew, then, the condition of his mind. When he had come for me, at my house, his mind had been full of this strange triumph which was burning within him, and he had been at least partly mad. Then, on that long, silent journey through the jungle, the fires within him had burned low; he had even forgotten the cause of his madness. And now he had slowly,

terribly, talked himself into being once more a savage beast with but one idea. Certainly it was no sane man that I cringed from.

"I'll show her to you!" he bellowed, beating the air in front of my face with his clenched fists. "You sneaked upstairs once, damn you, and all you saw was a chunk of dead marble! Come up with me, *now!* I'll show you something your religion-stuffed brain won't dare believe!"

He gripped my arms and hauled me out of my chair. His wide eyes were close to my face, finding fiendish satisfaction in every expression that twisted my features. He shook me as a grown man shakes a terrified child.

"You think your idiotic religion is the answer to everything in life; don't you?" he flung out. "You think you know all there is to know! Well, I'll show you! I'll teach you something!"

He pushed me past the table, where those obscene volumes were piled. Savagely he held my arm and forced me toward the ladder which led to that shadowed chamber above. Had I been able to get past him, to reach the door, I should have fled from that place without hesitation, just as I have fled once before. But escape was not possible. He would have followed me—I am sure of it—and dragged me back. God alone knows what might have happened then.

The ladder swayed perilously as I climbed it. I had no time to ascend cautiously. Had I paused, he might have thrust me forcibly up those slender rungs, precipitating both of us to the floor below. Strange that I should have feared physical harm, when I should have been dreading a thousand times more intently the probable mental horror into which I was stumbling! But I did not see that horror at first, even after clambering through the

aperture in the ceiling and groping to my feet on the floor of the room beyond. That room was a domain of shadow, and the sudden flare of a match in Peter Mace's uplifted hand did not at first reveal the thing that faced me.

Then I saw, and stepped backward with such violence that my rigid body was lashed by the nipa uprights in the wall behind me. Peter Mace had paced forward to a small table and ignited a candle which sat there; and the candle—a crude, home-made thing which burned with ghastly brilliance—sputtered and hissed as it flooded the chamber with illumination.

That room was a garret, small and bare and uninviting. Standing erect in it, a man of ordinary height could have reached up, without effort, and touched the ceiling. Walls and floor were of the crudest construction, fashioned of hulu wood and overlaid with coarsely woven atap mats. Only one window was in evidence, and that masked by a strip of unclean cotton cloth. And there, against the far wall, staring straight at me, sat the thing which I had once before dared to look at. There, in the restless glare of the candle, the thing confronted me—and this time I saw every separate, single detail of it.

I have said before that the thing was a woman. It was. Now, as I advanced fearfully toward it, fascinated by the almost life-like manner in which it studied me, I could not repress amazement at the uncanny perfection of it. If Jean Lanier had made this, then Jean Lanier had been truly an artist! For the woman was a creature of marble, so delicately and expertly sculptured that every portion of her exquisite form could have been mistaken, even at close range, for living reality. Naked she was, and sitting in an attitude of meditation, with her extended hands

holding the metal dish which I had seen before. And I knew intuitively, even as I wondered at the uncanny loveliness of her, that there was something terrible, something wrong, in the way she was sitting there.

"This," I said slowly to Peter Mace, "is the woman you loved? This is Maureen Kennedy?"

He laughed—not wildly or triumphantly, but so softly that I turned abruptly to peer at him, and found him smiling at me as a man smiles who knows more, much more, than his victim.

"She *will* be the woman I love, when I am finished," he replied; and he walked to the marble figure and put his hands on her shoulders, and looked down into her face as if she could understand him.

And then I made a mistake. I believed him to be less mad than when he had forced me up the ladder a moment ago. I put my hand on his arm and said quietly:

"My boy, this is not good. Your friend should never have made such an idol for you to worship. The commandment tells us: Thou shalt have none other God but me."

He flung my hand away. Savagely he whirled on me, glared at me. I thought his clenched fist would crash into my face. Then he stepped back, smiling. Deliberately he walked past me to the opening in the floor, and stooped, and dragged a heavy wooden square over the aperture, securing the square in place with thongs which were attached to it. With equal deliberation he paced to the opposite wall, grasped a chair which leaned there, and set the chair down in the center of the room. Standing behind it, he said evenly:

"Come here and sit down."

"I have no wish to remain in this room," I retorted.

"Come here and sit down."

"Why?"

"Because I say so! And if your idiotic God were here, he would sit beside you. If either of you refused, I would kill you both."

I hesitated, and he stood motionless, waiting. Slowly, then, I obeyed him, and my hands trembled on my knees as I lowered myself into the chair.

"Now you will sit here and watch," he ordered, "and you will say nothing. I have work to do. I must not be interrupted. And if your foolish God does not strike you down for looking at forbidden things, you will soon know why I asked Jean Lanier to make this woman for me!"

AND now I must recount truths which were perhaps better left untold. Probably I shall be condemned severely for the words which I here set down. Perhaps I shall be more than condemned—and you, also, for reading them. But these things *must* be told, for the salvation of those who may some day be mad enough to walk in Peter Mace's footsteps!

There I sat, in a small chamber filled with leaping shadows. There, facing me, sat that marble image of a too-lovely woman. The exit was closed, the single window shut and masked. We were alone, Peter Mace, the woman, and I, in a room cursed with sinister thoughts and evil machinations. And, disregarding my presence entirely, the boy proceeded with his unhallowed labors.

He went first to a small compartment in the wall and took therefrom a number of bound volumes, one of which he carried to the table. Poring over this, and deliberately turning its pages, he found what he sought and began to read silently to himself. I saw his lips move with the words. I saw the terrible eagerness in his

eyes as they stared unblinkingly at the page. Rigid and motionless he stood there, full in the candle's glare, his shoulders hunched forward, his head down-thrust, his hands clenched white on the table-top. Then he straightened, turned slowly, and walked toward the woman.

From a soft leather pouch which lay there at the woman's feet, he took something small and black and touched it to the woman's marble lips. I thought at first that it was a crucifix; then I saw my error and shuddered, for it was an *inverted* crucifix and the face upon it was the face of a leering demon. Carefully he placed it in the metal dish which the woman's lifeless hands extended toward him. With the same deliberate care he took a small phial in his hands, and poured into the dish a viscous dark liquid which gleamed dully in the dim light. Then I saw a match blaze brightly, and the dish was suddenly alive with pale blue flame.

Slowly, then, the boy sank to his knees. He did not turn to look at me. I doubt if he even realized my presence. He knelt, and stared into the woman's face, and raised his arms in supplication. From his lips came an almost inaudible low monotone, as if he were praying.

In truth, I thought he was praying, and my heart was filled with pity for him. I respected his torment; I understood his loneliness. Then I heard the *words* he was muttering—I knew them for what they were—and it was I who prayed to a merciful God to forgive us both!

You have heard of the Black Mass? You are aware of its hideous significance? Then you know the extent of the madness in Peter Mace's soul, and you know to whom he was muttering his maledictions.

But it was more than that. Dimly I realized the enormity of his intent, and slowly but surely, as I listened, I became prey to utter terror. A thousand times

since that day I have reviled myself for not finding courage enough to stop him. Had I leaped out of my chair and flung myself upon him, he might have thanked me for it later. Even had I been forced to seize the very chair in which I sat, and strike him with it, I could not have been condemned for such violence. For the boy was mad. He was inviting annihilation.

Yet I sat there, staring at him. I sat rigid, eyes wide and blood pounding in my temples. I was terrified and fascinated, and, God help me, I let him have his way.

Those words, I can hear them yet, whenever I sit alone in a shadowed room. They mutter at me in the same singsong chant. They are in my brain:

"This is the night, O Bethmoora. This is the night, though it be day and the sun be shining without our sanctuary. Hear me, while I walk by the black lake of Hali, O Nyarlathotep. Hear me what I say . . . word for word . . . as the earth-born must say to command the presence of the Black King. Hear me . . . heaven in art . . . heaven in art . . . and the Yellow Sign is burning on the altar of my desire, that She may open her eyes and be mine again. Who father our name, thy be hallowed! Words for you, O Yuggoth, O Yian, O Hastur, O Prince of Evil! Give her to me, I say, and command your price. And in the name of the Great One who must not be named . . . through the wells of night where the crawling ones lurk unseen, waiting for wings to raise them . . . and in the name of the headless ones born in the red foulness of the limitless pit . . . give her to me in life, O Hastur. Give her to my arms, O Yuggoth! Hear me, O Lord of Lords, Nyarlathotep!"

These words, born of madmen's minds and filled with hideous suggestions of

horrors forbidden to men, tumbled from the lips of the boy who knelt in that vile room with me! These words and more; but the others I did not hear, for I had become like a man impaled, sitting as straight and stiff as a marble statue. No, no—not as a marble statue! *That* statue was no longer straight and stiff! Into the chamber with us had come darkness—a living, evil darkness which threatened to smother the ocher glare of the candle. And before me the pale statue of the woman was in motion, swaying slowly, awfully, from side to side, while its outstretched hands carried the metal dish to and fro like a pendulum and the blue flame in that dish became a weaving, living tongue of fire.

Peter Mace had stopped muttering. *Other* voices had become audible, low and vibrant and speaking words which had no beginning or end. As if uttered through long, deep tubes, those syllables droned into being. As if moaned aloud by some dark-robed priest of an uncouth cult, they singsonged into every niche of that foul room.

We were no longer alone. The darkness all about us was peopled with shadows, with nameless things which had no shape, no form, no substance, and yet were there! It was a time for prayer and supplication; yet I knew no prayer mighty enough to afford protection. We had forfeited the right to pray! Peter Mace, with his evil machinations, had summoned elements from the deeper pits of darkness. His blasphemies had established communion with entities more powerful than any who might listen to prayers from human lips. And it is I, Father Jason, a missionary, who say that!

I WENT to my knees with my hands up—lifted before me. But no words came from my lips. I spoke them, but they

died unborn. On all sides of me that hell-dark was in motion, those hell-shapes were gathering closer. Before me the boy had risen unsteadily to his feet and stood like a man drunk, as if stunned by the enormity of his sin. But what I saw most of all, and what I remembered with awful clarity for nights afterward, was the transformation which was taking place in the marble woman!

God help me for ever looking into that face! The eyes, which had been open only to natural dimensions, had widened in agony. The lips were shapeless, the face a gray-white mask twisted beyond recognition. Every inch of the woman's body was in motion, struggling hideously, pitifully, to be free of its marble bonds. She was no longer dead! She was no longer a thing of stone! Life had been poured into her rigid body. And she was fighting now, in a hell of physical torment, to assimilate that cursed power and become *all* alive!

You have seen a victim of epilepsy suddenly seized by that dread disease? This woman was like that. She strove to rise. She fought to free her hands from the metal dish to which they clung, so that she might embrace the boy who stood before her. Slowly, horribly, with a paroxysmal jerking of her hips and breasts, she turned toward him. In agony she stared into his face, begging his assistance. She was trying to speak, but could not!

And the boy returned her stare. He had become like a man standing erect in sleep. He seemed not to realize her agony, or to be aware of the hideous darkness which hung all about him like a winding-sheet. Slowly, mechanically, as if obeying orders over which he had no command, he advanced toward her. Mutely he peered into her face. Then I heard him say quietly, evenly, as if he were reciting the words:

"It is not yet. No, it is not yet. This is the fifth time, O Hastur. Only the fifth time, O Lord of Lords. Each time the agony is greater and the life is stronger. You have promised that on the seventh time the agony will destroy the death and the life will be complete. I am patient. I am content to wait. All things come to him who waits."

Deliberately he extended his arms. His hands came together and pressed downward upon the metal dish. I saw his eyes close and his lips whiten as the blue flame ate into his palms. But no sound came from him as he stood there; and in a moment, when he stepped back, the blue fire was a living thing no longer. Then, as if performing a ritual, the boy sank slowly to his knees and placed his hands upon the body of the living-dead woman before him. The agony went out of her face; her struggles ceased. She became as before, a creature of stone, inanimate and lifeless. He—he knelt with bowed head at the feet of his shrine. Knelt and prayed, not to the God of men, but to the obscene gods who possessed his soul. While he knelt there in supplication, the room emptied itself of shadow and sound, and he and I and the woman were alone together, as we had been. And I, knowing only that my heart was black with horror and my eyes blinded by the forbidden things they had looked upon, crept quietly to the aperture in the floor, and drew aside the square of wood which covered it, and lowered myself slowly, cautiously, down the ladder to the room below.

No sound was audible in that chamber of mystery above me as I paced noiselessly to the door. No sound accompanied my escape from Peter Mace's house. When I reached the rim of the jungle, and looked back, I saw only a glow of yellow light behind the masked window

of that upstairs room; and I knew that Peter Mace was still there, still kneeling in prayer, while the crude candle on the table cast its innocent light over the chamber's unholy contents.

Slowly, and with my heart heavy within me, I went away.

FROM that day until the day of the final accounting, I did not see Peter Mace. In truth, I did not want to. Hours passed before the color crept back into my face and my hands stopped shaking. After reaching my home that night, sick and weary from tramping through the jungle, I closed and barred my door and sat like a dead man, staring at the floor. My mind was full of the monstrous things I had participated in. I dreaded the penalty. Worse—I knew that those horrors were not yet complete. Over and over in my brain rang the boy's words: "On the seventh time the agony will destroy the death and the life will be complete. I am patient. All things come to him who waits."

No, I did not return to Peter Mace's house in the jungle. I feared to. I feared *him*, and the denizens of darkness who inhabited that horror-house with him. And this time, when the natives came to me with stories of the boy's madness, I knew better than to condemn those stories as exaggerations.

Menegai came, finally. Wide-eyed and terrified he hammered on my door and begged to be admitted. It was the evening of the ninth day, and the sight of the Marquesan's face brought to the surface all the fears which had lain dormant within me. I opened the door to him, and closed it quickly, and then listened to the shrill words which chattered from his betel-stained mouth.

"*I teienei!*" he wailed. "God almighty!" And then, in his own tongue, he screamed

and muttered and whispered his story, with such genuine fear in his eyes that I knew his words to be truth.

Less than an hour ago, he, Menegai, had been sitting on an atap mat on the floor of his master's house. Peteme (Peter Mace) had been studying books, as usual, with his elbows on the table and his head bent over the printed pages. Then, suddenly, without a word, Peteme had pushed back his chair, risen to his feet, and paced toward the ladder which led to the upstairs room.

Menegai had begun to be afraid, then. Always when his master retired to that secret attic, strange things happened. Peteme was never the same after returning from that chamber. He became *beva*—wrong in the head. He became like a man drunk with tuak, or like a man who had watched the *titii e te epo*, the dance of love, so long that his mind went mad with desire.

And this time was no exception. Soon, from the room overhead, came sounds without meaning. Voices muttered, and other voices chanted in unison. Louder and louder the sounds grew, until, after an eternity, they were climaxed in a woman's scream—a horrible scream, as if some poor girl were being torn apart while yet alive. And then had come Peteme's shrill voice, bellowing in triumph, shouting over and over:

"The seventh time draws near! The sixth ordeal is finished! Hear me, O Hastur! The sixth ordeal is finished!"

Menegai had crouched near the door, trembling and afraid. Never before had his master thundered in a voice so full of triumph. Never before had the woman in that dread room screamed in such agony. Never before had she screamed at all. How could she? He, Menegai, had seen her with his own eyes, one afternoon when he had dared to look into his

master's secret, forbidden chamber. She was a stone woman. *How could a stone woman scream?*

Terrified, Menegai had waited for his master to come down the ladder; and after a while Peteme had come, reeling and staggering and muttering to himself. Menegai had backed away from him and stared at him. Peteme had stood rigid, returning that stare with eyes full of red madness. Then, all at once, the white man had become like a devil crazed with *atao*—like a monster in the grip of *rea moeruru*, the drug which makes men commit murder. Snarling horribly, he had flung himself forward.

"Damn you!" he had roared. "You're like every one else on this blasted island! You think I'm mad! You came to spy on me, to laugh at me! By God, I'll show you what happens to curiosity-seekers! I'll show them all!"

Only by a miracle had Menegai escaped. The edge of the atap mat, curling under Peteme's feet, had caused the white man to stumble. Menegai had flung the door open and raced over the threshold, screaming. Peteme had lurched after him. But Menegai had reached the jungle first; and in the jungle the Marquesan had fled to hiding-places where the white man dared not follow.

And now Menegai was here in my house, begging protection, and in my heart I knew that before another twenty-four hours had passed, the whole hideous affair of Peter Mace and the stone woman would reach its awful conclusion. And I was right—but before the twenty-four hours were up, something else occurred.

I was standing on the veranda of my house, and it was morning again, and the sun was a crimson ball of blood ascending from the blue waters of the lagoon. Menegai, the Marquesan, had crept away to his hut in the village. I was alone.

At first the thing I saw was merely a gray speck on the far horizon, so small that it might have been no speck at all, but merely my imagination. I put both hands to my eyes and peered out from under them; but my eyes were blinded from staring into the red sun, and presently I could see nothing but a glare of crimson. Yet that speck was there, and I knew it for what it was—a ship.

Later I saw it again, and while I stood staring at it, Menegai came running up the path, pointing and gesticulating excitedly.

"A schooner, Tavana!" he cried. "A schooner come here!"

Yes, a schooner was coming. But why? What could any tramp trader want with Faikana? In four years only one ship had visited our secluded island, and that ship had brought Peter Mace. It had brought unhappiness and horror, a madman and a woman of stone. Could this one be bringing a similar cargo?

I said nothing in answer to Menegai's eager questions. In my heart I dreaded the coming of this new messenger from the outside. Menegai, peering up into my face, read my thoughts and ceased his chatter. Bewildered, he left me and hurried down to the beach. Long after he had gone, I stood staring, hoping against hope that the approaching vessel would somehow, at the last moment, change its course and depart again, leaving us to ourselves.

Two hours later the schooner dropped anchor outside the reef, close enough to shore so that we on the beach were able to discern its name. It was the *Bella Gale*—the same *Bella Gale* which had brought Peter Mace to Faikana. Even while we stared, a small boat swept through the reef's opening and came slowly toward us; and a moment later I

was peering into the bearded face of Captain Bruk and shaking the grimy hand which he thrust into mine. And I was wondering, even then, what terrible event or chain of events had happened to put that haunted, desperate glare in Captain Bruk's eyes.

I soon learned. Without preamble Bruk said bluntly: "I want to talk with you, Father. Alone."

Together we went to my house, and closed the door upon the inquisitive natives who gathered outside. There, with the table between us, Bruk told his story.

"I've got a woman on board, Father," he scowled. "Go on, tell me I'm crazy. I know it. Tell *her* she's crazy! Any woman fool enough to trust herself to a roach-infested scow like the *Bella Gale* ought to be put in an asylum. This one ought to be there anyway. She's queer."

He pulled a bottle from his pocket, offered it to me, and then drank from it. Choking, he rammed the cork back viciously and leaned forward, resting both elbows on the table.

"She was waiting in Papeete when I got back after marooning the boy here," he grumbled. "Harlan—that's the Papeete manager—brought her aboard soon as we dropped anchor. He introduced me and gave me a good looking-over to make sure I was sober; then he said: 'All right, Bruk. You're going back to Rarioa. This woman wants to find the young fellow you put ashore there.'

"Well, I took her. I had to. But, by heaven, she was an odd one. You'll see for yourself, when I go back after her. She dresses like a funeral; wears black every damned minute of the day, and a black veil to boot. What does she look like? Don't ask me! I've been on board the same rotten schooner with her for almost ten days, coming straight here from Papeete, and I don't know yet what

kind of a face she has! She don't speak unless she has to, and then she don't say more than three words at a time, so help me! And she's queer. She's uncanny. I tell you——"

Bruk put his hand on my arm and leaned even farther over the table, speaking in a whisper as if he were afraid of being overheard. I looked into his eyes and saw fear in them. Real fear, which had been there a long time.

"It's about this Rarioa business, Father," he mumbled. "Harlan thought I took the boy there, and told me to take the woman there, too. He didn't know I marooned the boy on Faikana. I didn't tell him that. If I had, he'd have claimed the money the boy paid me; and I wanted that money for myself. So when I left Papeete this last time, I headed for Rarioa. That's what he told me, wasn't it? Take the woman to Rarioa. But we hadn't been out more than three days when she came to me and said: 'You're not taking me to Peter.' Just like that, Father! How in the name of all that's holy did *she* know where Peter was?"

I stared at him. Some of the fear in his eyes must have found its way into my eyes as well. He returned my stare triumphantly.

"She's not human, I tell you!" he blurted. "She's not human even to look at! She walks around like she was asleep. She talks in the same tone of voice all the time, like she was tired. By heaven, I won't have any more to do with her, Father! I brought her here, and I'm leaving her here! It's up to you, now. You know more about this kind of business than I do."

"You brought her here," I said slowly, "because you were afraid not to?"

"Afraid?" he bellowed. "I tell you, when she looked at me with those eyes of hers and said, 'You're not taking me to

Peter,' I knew better than to double-cross her! I *brought* her to Peter!"

That was all. Bruk heaved himself up and stood swaying, while he drank again from the bottle of whisky. He glared at me, then laughed drunkenly as he pulled open the door.

"You can have her," he said. "I'll put her ashore like I was told to. You're welcome to her."

Then he went out.

IT WAS with mingled feelings of fear and apprehension that I awaited his return. Somehow I could not bring myself to go down to the beach. I chose to remain behind the closed door of my house, alone with my thoughts, though I might better have taken myself out of that shadowed room, into sunshine and open air, where my mind would have created visions less morbid.

Who could she be, this woman? A sister, perhaps, of the boy who had established himself in that house of sin in the jungle? A relative, perhaps, of the dead sweetheart whom he had left behind him? I wondered; and wondering, found myself drawing mental pictures of her. Subconsciously, Bruk's descriptions influenced those pictures. The woman of my imagination was a black-robed nun, uncouth and ungainly, eccentric of speech and action, not at all like the woman who confronted me less than ten minutes later.

Bruk's throaty hullo startled me out of my reverie, and I drew the door open with a nervous jerk. And there she was—tall and graceful and utterly lovely, in direct contrast to my mental image of her. Quietly she followed him up the steps. Without embarrassment she stood facing me, while Bruk said curtly:

"This is Father Jason, ma'am. He runs the place here."

The woman nodded. Her eyes, behind

an opaque veil which entirely concealed her features, regarded me intently. She was perhaps twenty-five years old, certainly not more. Deliberately she stared about the room. Almost mechanically she stepped past me and sank into a chair. In a peculiarly dull voice she said:

"I am tired. I have come a long way."

She was tired. Though her face was hidden from me, I could sense the exhaustion in it. She seemed suddenly to have lost the power of movement—almost the power of life itself. She sat perfectly still, staring straight before her. I thought, strangely, that she was on the verge of death.

"You—you wish to go to Peter?" I said gently.

"Peter?" she whispered, and raised her head slowly to look at me. "Peter? Yes. In a little while."

I studied her. Surely this woman loved Peter Mace, or she would not have gone to such trouble to find him. If so, she could help him. He needed help. He needed some one near and dear to him, to talk to him, to convince him that his horrible research was wicked. If this woman could do that, her coming would not be in vain.

"When you are rested," I said quietly, "I will take you to him. You had better sleep first. It is a long way."

She smiled, as if she were pitying me for not knowing something I ought to know.

"Yes," she said. "It is a long way, through the jungle. I know."

Then she slept.

DARKNESS had fallen when we began that journey to Peter Mace's house. We were alone. Captain Bruk had departed more than an hour ago, vowing that he wanted no more of her, and that so far as he was concerned he didn't care

if he "never set foot on Faikana's blasted beach again." The natives, tired of hanging about the house in hopes of satisfying their childish curiosities, had returned to the village. No one saw us begin that journey which was to have such a terrible end.

But I had no premonition of the end, then. I thought of Peter Mace, living alone in his isolated abode in the jungle, and I thanked God for sending the woman to aid him. Mysterious she was, to be sure—and not once had she given herself a name—but my hopes were high, and a queer confidence possessed me as I led her along the jungle trail. Even the jungle itself, black as death and full of sinister shapes and sounds, could not kill the song in my heart. I refused to consider the possible peril on all sides of us. I refused to be afraid. A merciful God had sent this woman to Faikana, and the same merciful God would conduct her safely to the end of her quest.

She, too, was unafraid. She followed boldly, deliberately, in my steps. She did not speak. Several times, when I turned to assist her through stretches of black morass, or over huge fallen stumps of *aoa* trees, she merely smiled and accepted my hand without comment.

So, finally, we reached the end of the trail and entered the clearing where Peter Mace's house loomed high before us. And for the first time, doubt assailed me.

Only one light burned in that grim structure—one light, pale and yellow behind the masked window of the upstairs room. Slowly we walked toward it, and even more slowly we ascended the veranda steps. I knocked hesitantly, and there was no answer. My hand trembled on the latch. The door swung open, and silently we entered.

There in the dark we stood side by side, the woman and I, and neither of us spoke.

In the far corner of the room a feeble shaft of light descended from the ceiling, revealing the top rungs of the ladder and the uneven surface of the wall beside it. The aperture was closed. From the chamber above us came the deep, singsong voice of Peter Mace, uttering words which brought sudden terror to my heart.

There is no need to repeat those words here. Already I have described in detail the ritual for which that room of horror was designed. Enough to say that the horror, this time, was nearing its climax—that *other* voices, born of lips which had no human form, were slowly and terribly rising in a shrill crescendo, smothering the blasphemies which poured from the boy's throat. Even while the veiled woman and I stood motionless, those sounds rose to a mighty roar, screaming their triumph. And with them came the shrill, awful outcry of a woman in mortal anguish.

I wish now that I had yielded to the fear in my soul and fled from that evil place. I wish I had seized my companion's arm and dragged her back across the threshold. Instead, I remained rooted to the floor. I stood rigid, listening to the medley of mad voices that bellowed above me.

The whole house echoed those wild vibrations. Words of terrible significance, of frightful suggestiveness, were flung out of monstrous throats, to wail and scream into the deepest depths of my consciousness. Again and again I heard names hurled out which bore sufficient significance to spike my soul with nameless and uncontrollable dread. And above them all, *within* them all, shrilled that wild screech of physical agony which tocsined from a woman's lips!

The awful din reached its climax while I stood there. For a long moment the walls around me, the ceiling above, the

floor below, trembled as if in the grip of a great wind. Then, slowly, the sounds subsided. Slowly they died to a sinister whispering and muttering in which I could distinguish no individual words. And finally only one audible sound remained — the low, passionate voice of Peter Mace, speaking in triumphant tones which were, in themselves, all too significant.

Then I moved. Mechanically I turned from the woman beside me and paced toward the ladder in the corner. Fearfully I ascended the wooden rungs, holding myself erect with hands that shook violently as they groped upward at a snail's pace. From the chamber above me, the boy's voice came in fitful exclamations, uttering words of triumph, of endearment. Wildly he was saying:

"It is finished! Beloved, it is finished! The agony has destroyed the death; the life is complete! They promised me it would be so, and they have fulfilled their promise. Oh, my beloved, come to me!"

I shuddered, and for a long time clung motionless to my perch, fearing to ascend higher. Had I been aware of the scene which would meet my gaze when I reached up to drag the wooden covering from the aperture above me, I would have flung myself back down the ladder and left that evil chamber for ever undisturbed. But I did not know. I slid aside the barrier. I heaved myself to the floor above. And I saw.

THE room was a well of darkness, illuminated only by the sputtering candle on the table. Before me stood Peter Mace, disheveled and ragged, his head flung back and his bare feet planted on the crude atap mat which covered the floor. In his arms, pressed close against his emaciated body, clung a naked woman — a woman whose skin was as white and

as smooth as fine-grained gypsum. Lovely she was. Too lovely. And then I realized the truth.

Abruptly I turned and stared at the cloth-covered pedestal in the corner—the pedestal where the marble woman had sat. Then, in horror, I stared again at the creature in Peter Mace's embrace. And she was the same woman. God help me, she was the same! Those horrors of outer darkness had given her the power of life! The woman in Peter Mace's arms, clinging to him, was a woman of living stone!

I stared, unable to believe what I knew to be true. The very frightfulness of it prevented me from assimilating its whole significance. I merely stared, and heard words issuing from her lips, and heard him answering them. Then, after an eternity, I stood erect and said aloud:

"A woman is here to see you, Peter."

Peter Mace turned, very slowly, releasing the naked thing in his arms. He looked at me steadily, as if bewildered by my presence. He peered all around him, as if puzzled even by the room in which he stood. Then he said quietly:

"A woman? To see me?"

"Yes," I nodded. "She's waiting."

He came toward me. He did not understand. His forehead was creased and his lips frowning. Leaving his companion where she was, he stepped past me and slowly descended the ladder. The stone woman said nothing; she stood very still, watching him. Silently I followed him down the creaking rungs to the room below, where the other woman was waiting. And then it was my turn to be bewildered.

Peter Mace and the woman in black stared at each other. Neither moved. For a full moment, neither spoke. The very intensity of their stares — the very completeness of their silence—indicated a

climactic something which I did not fully comprehend. I felt that when the woman did speak, she would scream. But she did not. She said calmly:

"You sent for me, Peter. I'm here."

He moved toward her. Behind and above him a muffled creaking sound came from the wooden ladder, but none of us turned. The boy was still gazing with horribly wide eyes. He said falteringly:

"You—you are not dead? You're here? How can that be?"

"I was dead, Peter."

"What do you mean?" he whispered.

"I was dead, but you gave me life. I came to you."

The boy seemed not to understand. Not until she raised her hands and drew the veil from her face—not until then did he realize the hideous results of the sins he had committed. And I realized them, too. The woman before me was Peter Mace's loved one. She was walking in death! She had been raised from the grave by the hellish rituals performed by him! This—this woman before me—was the flesh and blood reality from whom he and his artist companion had designed that stone creature in the room above us! The likeness was unmistakable!

But there was a difference. The face of this corpse-woman was lovely only because she had *made* it lovely. Beneath the mask of powder which covered it, death had written with an indelible pencil, leaving certain signs which could never be erased. Little wonder she had worn a veil! Little wonder she had refused to reveal herself to me, or to Captain Bruk, or to any of the people who had come in contact with her! Yet Peter Mace, her lover, failed to see what the grave had done. He was blinded to all but her loveliness. He reached out his arms and stepped toward her, and with terrible eagerness he crushed her against him.

I stood close to them, unable to move away. Again I heard the creaking of the ladder behind me, but still I did not turn. Nothing mattered but the pitiful thing which was occurring before me. I saw only this wild-eyed, sobbing boy, holding in his arms the woman who had been returned to him—the woman who, resurrected from her distant grave by the far-reaching powers of his unholy rites, had found her way across half the earth to reach his arms. Again and again he cried her name aloud. Over and over he sobbed words of endearment. All his loneliness and longing poured through his lips, and his soul was bare for her to look at.

And then some sixth sense made me turn—or perhaps it was the thud of heavy feet striking the floor behind me. I swung slowly about, and stood transfixed. There, at the foot of the ladder, stood the stone woman whom Peter Mace had created.

As long as I live, the expression of her face will haunt me. Her eyes were as dark and deep as midnight pits. Her lips were drawn back over parted teeth, in a snarl of animal hate. She had heard the boy's every word. She had witnessed his every act. And now her once-beautiful face was contorted. She was a savage beast whose mate had deserted her. She meant murder.

Slowly, with awful deliberation, she advanced across the floor. She did not see me, did not consider my presence. She had eyes only for Peter Mace and the woman who clung to him. Straight past me she walked, so close that I might have reached out and touched her. And I—God help me!—I stood like a graven image, utterly unable to move or to shriek a warning.

I did not see all of what happened. Her back was toward me, and she was

between me and her victims. But I saw and heard enough to blast my soul.

Peter Mace was whispering to his loved one, uttering low words of love and happiness. His voice suddenly ceased, then screamed aloud in terror. He leaped backward, then flung himself forward again. He might have escaped, had he not hurled himself upon that relentless stone figure in a futile attempt to protect his beloved. Those hideous fingers had already gripped the other woman's throat. Peter Mace tore at them madly, in an effort to dislodge them.

He might better have thought of his own safety. Slowly and surely those stone fingers committed murder. The corpse-woman sank backward to the floor, staring with dead eyes at the ceiling. The fingers released their grip.

Not until then did the boy realize the futility of resistance. Not until then did he seek to escape. Then it was too late. Those infernal hands buried themselves in the flesh of his neck. His lips opened to release a prolonged shriek of agony. The shriek became a bloody gurgle. He hung suspended, his feet beating a terrible tattoo on the floor. When she released him, he fell across the body of the woman beneath him; and he, like her, was dead.

The room, then, was filled with the silence of death. The stone woman stood

over her victims, gazing down at them. An eternity passed. Slowly, and still without speaking, the woman turned and paced to the door. Her groping hand raised the latch; the door creaked inward. Staring straight ahead of her, she walked across the veranda and descended the steps. Stiffly, and with that same hideous deliberation, she paced toward the jungle. The darkness of the outer night claimed her, and she was gone.

THAT is all. That is why I, Father Jason, went away from Faikana the next day, taking my native people with me. Risking death in clumsy pahis, we paddled for two days and a night on the open sea, to reach the sparsely inhabited atoll of Mehu, where we might begin life over again. That is why, in the clearing on Faikana where Peter Mace's horror-house stands, you will find a crude slab of tou wood planted for men to look upon; and you will read the words: "*Inei Teavi o te mata epoa o Faikana*"—which mean, literally: "Here lie the bodies of the lovers of Faikana."

But Faikana is inhabited by one living person only—a woman created for love, out of sin. And she is a stone woman who may not die, who may not find peace, until those unnamable horrors of the world of darkness take pity on her and relieve her of the life they gave her.

